

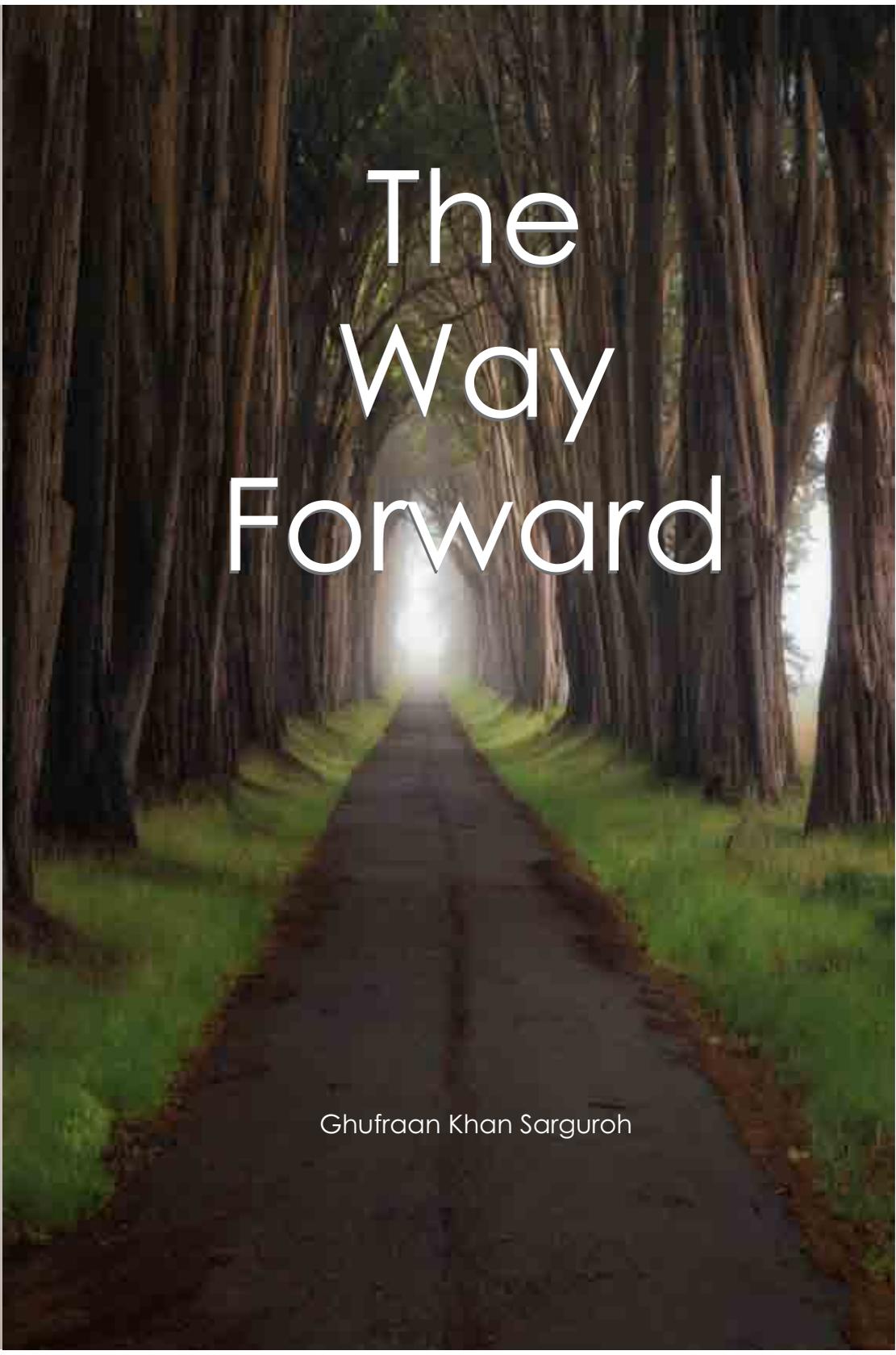
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The Way Forward

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

Introduction

The myriad multi-faceted problems faced by the *Ummah* and humanity at large has inspired many a concerned and thoughtful members of our society to reflect upon the genesis of these problems and attempt to provide possible solutions. This most certainly is a distinct sign that the environment of our milieu today, is permeating with a palpable anticipation of a profound and far-reaching positive transformation. Somewhere deep within our hearts, we feel that we are at the edge, on the cusp of tremendous change.

The world today is certainly on the threshold of far-reaching transformations in every aspect of life. It is waiting for socially conscious & concerned citizens to stand up and take the responsibility for alleviating the existential predicaments of the marginalized sections of the society as well as of constructive reform, on behalf of the distressed humanity which is plagued with problems of every conceivable kind.

Throughout the flow of History, every now and then, the collective conscience of the *Ummah* becomes rife with a definite disposition to awaken the *Ummah* for constructive reform so as to enable it to undertake its deserved role of the leadership of the world. Reverberating with just such a spirit, I have attempted to share some of my thoughts with my fellow brethren, regarding the problems that besiege our community in particular and the humanity at large and strive to find feasible, implementable roadmaps to alleviate the same.

But before I delve into the positive prospects that the future holds for the followers of the Prophet of mercy (s.a.w.) as well as for the entire world, let me briefly touch upon the enormous and multi-pronged problems that we are grappling with. Any serious reflective analysis of finding and implementing practical solutions for our myriad spiritual, moral, economic, educational & social challenges should begin with frankly reviewing our deficiencies & having the courage to rectify them.

If we do not identify & treat the core issues then we shall keep on having seminars & conferences religiously conducted every year without much productive positive change on the ground. Einstein had once famously remarked that the definition of insanity is, to keep doing the same thing over and over again and expect a different result. It just perpetuates more of the same.

The Bleak Present

In this contemporary stressful age of unprecedented technological advancement & unbridled materialism, we have lost the essence of fellow feeling and caring for others in the march towards selfish ends. We have embraced technology but at the same time have compromised our values, our traditional ethos & our rich eastern culture. Even a cursory glance at the state of the world today, paints a despairing picture for any conscientious person.

Ecologically speaking, we are witnessing lop-sided development that leads to global warming, jeopardizing the lives of millions of coastal dwellers throughout the planet due to melting ice-caps & rising levels of oceans, unbearable levels of pollution of all kinds, noise pollution that is making the people impaired of hearing the subtle sounds of nature, soil & water pollution due to untreated toxic industrial waste being spread in them, millions of fatalities due to diseases caused by air pollution, deforestation & desertification due to unrestrained urbanization. Every single day many endangered species are becoming extinct and even aquatic life is getting endangered. As if depletion of the ozone layer due to the effect of greenhouse gasses was not enough, competing nations are testing nuclear weapons under water which causes unbelievable amounts of radiation. Even the animals are not free from man's insatiable consumerism & exploitation. For an example, injecting the cattle with hormonal injections to get more milk is very common. We live in an age of adulterated & genetically modified food. Our rivers & lakes are full of toxic non-biodegradable waste. We have hitherto unheard of phenomena like acid rains & global warming. Such so called unbridled & imbalanced development leads to much *fasad* on the *ard*.

Spiritually, we are suffering from sick, hardened souls epitomized by moral decadence due to the diseases of consumerism, materialistic attachment, impatience, intolerance, cowardice, self-aggrandizement, egocentricity, pride, arrogance, desire for recognition, jealousy, malice, *schadenfreude*, back-biting, gossiping, anger, ungratefulness, dishonesty, selfishness, regionalism, racism, sectarianism, artificiality, insincerity, manipulative behavior, fake humility, hypocrisy, aggressiveness, nepotism, lethargy, carelessness, indiscretion, profligacy, jingoism, emotional instability, drug addiction, alcoholism, stress, family feuds, juvenile delinquency, corruption, inability to introspect, incapability to accept even justified correction, incapacity to earnestly weep in front of our lord, superficial belief in the attributes of Allah, forgetfulness of death, forgetfulness of the day of judgment, shallow & spiritless *ibadaat*, inability to respect and abide by the wisdom & guidance of our insightful & wise elders and the true men of knowledge & a sense of helplessness to control our sight in the face of the all-encompassing bombardment of the temptations on display.

The socio-political landscape paints a distinctly disheartening picture of pervasive moral turpitude, ethical decadence, economic slavery, socio-political servitude often propagated through mind control techniques & media management, the uncalled for wars, unbridled violence and conflicts, social & political discriminations, class wars, tyrannical & despotic rulers, state sponsored genocides, riots and terrorist incidents often engineered by local or global elites, the concentration of the world's wealth and resources with a few etc. has turned the world into a veritable powder keg.

At one end of the socio-economic spectrum we have debilitating poverty & acute hunger having reached alarming proportions in many developing countries. Poor information of basic healthcare, lack of sanitation & severe starvation are the major contributing factors for the prevalence of diseases & high child mortality rates. Today, millions of men, women and children are living below the poverty line with malnutrition being rampant in poor countries. Innumerable unfortunate farmers are committing suicides. Millions across the globe suffer from fatal diseases because they do not have access to clean drinking water & basic sanitation. Countless widows, divorced women, and orphans are left without any patron. Numerous handicapped and elderly people are rendered helpless. Thousands of poor patients with critical ailments are deprived of essential medical treatment. Many poor women have to barter their modesty just to survive. Widows in our society live in dire conditions with hardly any means of sustenance, with no monetary or emotional support for them or their children.

Physical illnesses & depression significantly impact the economic, social and spiritual growth of any society, perpetuating a cycle of hunger and poverty. Those who are educationally and economically challenged often don't have the resources to get to the hospital or to a doctor to seek even basic treatment. The mind boggling statistics of deprivation & afflictions in the contemporary world are heart rendering indeed.

- More than 140 million children are orphans across the globe.
- More than 1 billion people around the world are living in hunger.
- More than 1 billion people around the world do not have access to clean drinking water.

- More than 2 billion people worldwide do not have basic sanitation or medical facilities.

At the other end of the socio-economic spectrum, we are witnessing a culture of intemperate wastage and profligate materialism, widespread alcoholism & drug addiction, perverted artificial gratification of carnal desires - be in cyberspace or with even robots in the technologically advanced countries. The modern man is increasingly being marooned in the disease of lust of every hue – be it monetary, material, physical or that of authority. This is an age where gender roles have altered to objectify and enslave women under the guise of feminist movement & women's liberation. We live in a sick world of moral relativism. A world where there are no ethical absolutes, exemplified by the ever increasing cases of molestation, human trafficking and pedophiles along with the wretched phenomenon of incestuous relationships, gay marriages & LGBT movements promoted by sick souls in the media.

People are suffering from ever newer diseases due to sedentary lifestyles & inorganic junk food. The new generation is increasingly living on anti-inflammatory and anti-depressant tablets. We have become consumers of hollow and cheap entertainment. A generation who indulges in frivolous usage of social media, but has no time to physically socialize with relatives and neighbors. A generation who seeks pointless thrills to satisfy their inner emptiness. A generation who idolizes the most wretched and debased people from the world of glamour as role models.

The westernized largely irreligious civilization is already in decline. Their family structures have broken down, where the majority of the children are born out of

wedlock, where the elderly parents are left in the lurch because they are considered as a liability. The supposedly advanced countries like the Scandinavian nations & Japan have the highest suicide rates. These are societies where every year thousands die marooned in their flats without anyone knowing. Such collapsing social structures are indicative of a failing civilization.

Educationally speaking, we are creating selfish monsters out of a distinctly commercialized education system controlled by market forces. A scholastic system which is bereft of God and traditional moral values. We are living in an era in which the youth are desensitized towards violence & indecent physical exposure through the bombardment of filth through multi-media. Consequently, disobedience, deceit, arrogance, aggressiveness, egocentricity, jingoism & jealousy are traits that are increasingly becoming the norm in our societies. Culturally and morally we have digressed as never before. Our hardened souls even find justifications for narrow-minded regionalism, racism & sectarianism.

Even schools run by Muslim managements often lack the right orientation as well as are bereft of professional excellence. Besides, the traditional *Madaris* do not teach contemporary subjects thereby essentially making the graduates from such Islamic seminaries incapable of integrating with the mainstream society and unable to provide functional solutions based on divine guidance to the practical problems of the society. Moreover, the *Maktabs* in *Masajids* which train the school going students in the evenings, limit their curriculum to teaching them how to recite the Quran and the memorization of a few supplications only.

Intellectually, our society is rife with a proliferation of dramatized, spurious, superficial & ostensibly plausible logic based on blinkered, lop-sided research and half-baked/doctored information disseminated to hoodwink today's so called 'instant noodles' supposedly educated strata. Moreover, the not so sophisticated sections of the society are still inundated by prejudiced dogmatic rhetoric propagated by wily or deluded religious and community leaders.

The contemporary chaotic era of Google researchers & YouTube scholars perpetuated by the easily accessible audio-visual medium has spawned a distinctly egotistical generation devoid of the spiritual essence of religion. In an age that is on the threshold of impending global transformation, the spread of deviancy of every hue from unfounded literalism to tenuous interpretations has reached a crescendo. The perilous cocktail of specious doctrines promoting sectarian bigotry, a collective amnesia of our intellectual & spiritual heritage, a paralyzing inertia towards constructive societal contribution, uninhibited verbalism & arm-chair vilification is hurtling the gullible masses towards social discord & disintegration.

Moreover, the Muslim youth & professionals are today forced to live in practically two different worlds - the fast fading customary Muslim atmosphere at home and a contrasting environment outside which is culturally & ethically challenging. They are often unable to connect the ideals of their faith in the real world where they are exposed to the pressures of western indoctrination, consumerism, multiculturalism, assimilation and peer-pressure. The result is that they suffer from Identity Crisis. Identity is critically important for self-esteem as well as spiritual, mental, emotional and overall personality development.

Young professionals in today's society are faced with several challenges like stress, competition, rage, lack of self-esteem, substance abuse & immorality. Their beliefs, values, traditions, customs, worldviews have undergone a sea change. The influence of traditional social institutions of family & religion has been challenged and undermined by the internet, television & the modern lifestyle. The values emphasized today are Godlessness, irreligiousness, materialism, individualism, reputation, high income and social mobility. The young professionals today are essentially followers, imitators, and conformists instead of being trend-setters, critical thinkers, innovators or problem solvers like our remarkable predecessors.

Economically, we know that communism as a viable concept has been roundly defeated. Even China is only partially communist. Capitalism is also manifestly in the throes of death. The sub-prime crisis and the ensuing global recession was probably just a trailer of the impending financial catastrophe. USA, the supposed leader of the free world, is indebted to the Banking cartels to the tune of trillions of dollars. A *Riba* based fraudulent petro dollar monetary system without any intrinsic value is being kept alive with the help of financial ventilators. With continuous deficit spending coupled with uncontrolled spiraling inflation due to the continuously rising currency supply propelled by fractional reserve banking has led to the American dollar having lost 96% of its value in the last century. The unending debt servicing is guzzling the taxes of the unsuspecting, toiling middle and lower classes at the expense of the few ultra-rich.

This fraudulent monetary system which is a form of legalized global theft by the money cartels controlled by the miniscule elites is nothing but a grand ponzi scheme, a complex financial sleight of hand, which is unsustainable in the long run and is bound to collapse. This speculative & usury based tapeworm economic system with orchestrated inflation & deflation is designed to ultimately whither away. Eventually, the debt ceiling is destined to breakdown under its own weight. Consequently, the ripple effect on the entwined economies of the all the nations will ensure a cascading economic disaster that will evaporate all fiat currencies of the world. Those who suffer from 'normalcy bias' and turn a blind eye to the clearly mounting evidence right in front of our face, will pay a heavy price for their complacency.

One can kick the can down the road only so far. It is only a matter of time. It is not a question of if, but a question of when. The history of the world bears testimony to the fact that whenever oppression reaches its zenith, when the aristocrats & the affluent oppress the lower classes, when moral turpitude reigns supreme, something has to give. Oppression & immorality always has a shelf life. It cannot be forever.

The Genesis of the Problem

The beleaguered humanity is seeking solutions. It is craving for deliverance. The question is, are the followers of the Prophet of mercy (s.a.w.) ready to provide alternatives? I take the liberty to tweak what John F Kennedy said about America, 'Ask not what Islam can do for you, but what you can do for the cause of Islam.' The irony is that, although sinful, we still remain those with Iman.

We do not bow down in front of anyone but Him. But yet we are tamed & oppressed, while those who are atheists, agnostics, idol worshippers are in power. Why? Is Allah unjust? Is Allah no longer merciful? It is Allah's *Sunnah* that He rewards efforts. We have been deposed from the positions of global authority simply because we reneged from our pledge that we shall abide by the commandments of Allah and follow the example of His beloved Prophet (s.a.w.) in letter & spirit. We dishonored our position as the *Khalifat ul Ardh* and defaulted on our obligation of earnestly striving for individual & collective salvation, both, in this world and in the hereafter. We got naively sucked into the supposedly representative quagmire of counting people instead of weighing them.

When we performed our responsibilities as *Khalifat ul Ardh*, we were unmatched and unconquered in every walk of life. But in the last few centuries we deserted the Quran, we lost our mojo, we got drowned in the fleeting luxuries of this transitory world. Allah then exiled us from the seats of power and respect in the comity of nations and replaced us with those who were more hardworking and enterprising. This is a natural process. As Albert Einstein said, 'Nature abhors vacuum'.

Today, Muslims in general just have a token or superficial belief in the Quran. We devote the better part of our lives only in acquiring temporal knowledge & furthering our careers. But struggle to find time for reciting & contemplating on the Quran. Most of us are cut off from our history, our culture & the language of the Quran. As a result, we simply drift along in life without any conscious sense of ultimate purpose or an eventual destination.

Our lives have become devoid of meaning, a muddle of conflict, reactions, anxiety, aimlessness, desires and spiritual emptiness. We lack the ability to think critically about the circumstances of our own lives as well as that of the world at large.

For the last 2-3 centuries our *Ummah* is reeling under a collective amnesia of the traits represented by the luminaries of our glorious past as well as a passive reluctance to take up the responsibility that Allah has conferred upon as the best people ever raised up for mankind. It is a grave misfortune of the human civilization that we have come a long way from our glorious past. We have lost the spirit of rational enquiry which illuminated the world as well as abandoned the spiritual essence of our faith which for several centuries enlightened all of humanity. The *Ummah* today is facing an onslaught of confusion, misrepresentation, sectarian indoctrination, all pervasive materialism and widespread moral turpitude.

We have in a sense, invited all of these calamities on to us due to our sins, our crimes against our souls and against humanity. Allah says that corruption in land spreads due to what our hands have earned. If we consider this as a wake-up call and truly repent and seek forgiveness, the doors of divine mercy are always open.

For us, the age of the companions of the Prophets (r.a.m.) inspite of their meagre means and modest technology were the most highly progressed and advanced, not technologically, but as a balanced & humane civilization, because their understanding of Islam was not just theoretical. They lived Islam. They were perseverant & resolute men of constructive action and not of transitory bombastic oratory.

Admittedly we, in comparison are fallible and weak, yet we must never despair, not even in the most difficult & trying times. Yes, we as a community in particular and the humanity as a whole is still bogged down with puppet dictators and corrupt governments. Yes, we are being singled out as a community of barbaric and uncivilized people. Yes, all the other communities are being brain washed to harbor mistrust and misgivings about us. Yes, we are being unjustly victimized. Yes, our organizations are being unfairly & selectively targeted and our innocent youth are being unjustly imprisoned often without concrete proof or fair trial.

Yes, many of our youth have languished in jails for decades, for no fault of theirs whatsoever. Yes, we are being oppressed and discriminated against. Yes, our youth struggle to get jobs due to prejudice and bigotry. Yes, we are being martyred from Burma to Syria to Iraq and Afghanistan. Yes, it seems that in keeping with the prophesy of our Prophet (s.a.w.), the nations of the world are ganging up against us. Yes, we often find that the media, the governments, the military force, the corporate houses, the stock exchanges, the money cartels are all owned and controlled by those who are not particularly friendly towards Islam, but still, we have on our side, the owner of the universe, our all-powerful Lord.

Hope & The Promised Salvation

Muslims should never be cynical or pessimistic. Allah has promised us eventual success. His promise is bound to occur. He never defaults on His commitment. Yes, there are myriad problems afflicting the *Ummah*. But these socio-political & economic challenges are opportunities for us to strive for divinely ordained reform. It is a matter of looking at the glass as being half full or half empty. The faithful knows that any trying times, he finds himself in, are a God-sent test. He takes things in his stride, recalling what Allah Almighty has advised him: *'..it may be that you hate something when it is good for you and it may be that you love something when it is bad for you. Allah knows and you do not know.'* (Surah Baqarah, 2:216).

The people of *Tafa'ul* (optimism) are those who, when they see the sun, they do not dwell on its scorching heat, but they ponder over the light which it provides. They are those who, when they see the sea, they do not think of those whom it drowned, but they ponder over the amount of people who have traded and benefited by sailing its waters. The Palestinians for an example, are being victimized today. But the same suffering has brought them a long way from being a people who were generally far removed from Islam, to becoming those who have come closer to their Rabb, in these tumultuous times.

Gold has to go through extreme heat before it becomes beautiful jewelry. Raw iron gets heated in red-hot crucibles, before it becomes useful. So is it with our community, they have to go through these trials. These tribulations are a precursor for the impending bright future. There invariably is light, at the end of the tunnel. The darkest part of the night heralds a new dawn.

Even if it might get even darker still in the immediate future, the universal truth and true divine guidance shall eventually prevail. These trials are like the pangs of a mother who gives birth to a fresh beautiful new life. Similarly, a beautiful future beckons the *Ummah* of Muhammad (s.a.w.). The glowing torch of Islam shall once again arise from the ashes.

The *Ummah* has gone through difficult times & challenges before. The systematic pogroms inflicted by the Mongol hordes was a form of oppression probably worse than the genocides in the current times. They conquered the Muslims, but Islam conquered them. So much so, that even the baton of Islamic *Khilafah* passed on to the offshoots of these very same people who had massacred millions of Muslims. The women who were captured and enslaved by the Mongols were the ones who inspired their children and planted the seeds of revival in the hearts of the next generation. The motley group of the *Sahaba* overcame incredible odds to defeat the mighty Persian Empire and brought the Romans to their knees, in spite of the overwhelming numbers of the opponents & their far superior weapons.

Staged false flag events have become a tool in the hands of the Islamophobic media to malign Islam, deride it as a barbaric civilization & tarnish it as an outdated belief out of sync with the 21st century. Such orchestrated happenings often provides the powers that be, the *casus belli* to unjustly oppress millions of innocent people. Yet, ironically, for many people, instead of getting distanced from the religion of Islam, the curiosity about the 'Arabian religion' increased and many more embraced Islam than before. Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world.

Every year thousands enter into the fold of Islam especially in the western countries. Those accepting Islam are often Caucasian white women. The more they bash Islam as a misogynist and chauvinistic religion, the more people who are sick of all the moral turpitude around them, are flocking to it. Our beloved Nabi (s.a.w.) has foretold the ultimate victory of truth and universal values enshrined in the religion of peace, prosperity and harmony.

Our beloved Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.), the greatest man to have walked on planet earth, was the living embodiment of the excellent trait of optimism. He was known to approach each and every matter with a positive outlook that sprouted from his utmost faith in Allah. Whether he was at home or on a journey, during times of ease or hardship, amidst moments of safety or trauma, whilst being in a state of anger or happiness, he was known to espouse an exceptional degree of optimism. Such an attitude was based on a sense of contentment with the decree of Allah and an unwavering expectation of the ultimate good from the Almighty.

The life of the Prophet (s.a.w.) is a radiant example of resoluteness in face of difficulties. His father died before he could meet him, his mother expired in front of him when he was six, his grandfather passed away two years later, he witnessed the death of all of his children with the exception of one, he witnessed the death of his beloved wife Khadija (r.a.), he saw the corpses of his companions having carpeted the battle field, he was hit with iron across his radiant face in *Uhud*, his ankles hemorrhaged after stones were hurled at him in *Taif*, he was subjected to black magic, he was poisoned, he and his companions

were starved and confined within a valley for three years, he was accused with regards to his mind, his honor, his wife, his intellect, the intestines of animals were placed on his neck as he prostrated, before he died he prayed sitting down due to the years of hardships that his exhausted body had undergone. And yet, despite all of this, the Prophet (s.a.w.) would say, "I love optimism."

Amazingly enough, the Prophet (s.a.w.) would even go as far as changing the names for the purpose of upholding optimism! Upon immigrating to Madinah he changed its name for it was previously known as 'Yathrib', a term related to 'At Tathreeb' which means to reprimand or to blame. He changed it to *Tayba* meaning 'that which is good'.

In fact, the Prophet (s.a.w.) changed many names for the purpose of demonstrating the positivity of this beautiful religion of ours. He changed 'Harb' (war) into 'Silma' (peace), 'Ghaafil' (heedless) into 'Aaqil' (intellectual), 'Nakira' (unknown) into 'Ma'roof' (well-known), 'Al-Muddaji' (he who reclines) into 'Al-Munba'ith' (full of energy). He would also change the names of tribes & places. He changed 'Banu Mughwiya' (the tribe of erring) into 'Banu Rishda' (the tribe of reason). He once came across a land and asked about its name, they said: 'Afrāh' (the color of dirt) he said, "It is 'Khadira' (green). He even once walked through a valley and was told it was called 'Shi'b Ad-Dalaala' (the valley of misguidance). He changed its name into 'Shi'bul Huda' (the valley of guidance)

We learn from history, lessons of utmost faith in Allah. When Palestine was still under the authority of the Christian crusaders, the great Muslim commander, Nuruddin Zangi (rh.), requested that a huge pulpit be built

upon which the first sermon will be delivered in Jerusalem when Palestine is reclaimed! His action demonstrates amazing optimism, a planning for victory in advance and a great hope in Allah! The pulpit was thus built in Aleppo, but Palestine was reclaimed years later, during the reign of Salahudin Al Ayyubi (rh.) who ordered that the pulpit be carried from Syria to Palestine until it was erected in Al-Aqsa Masjid where its remnants stand today.

We see optimism and hope in the lives of the Prophets (a.s.m.) of Allah. Yunus (a.s.) didn't lose hope even in the belly of the whale. Ibrahim (a.s.) didn't lose hope even when he was thrown in the fire. The whale did not consume the body of Prophet Yunus (a.s.). The knife which passed over Ismail's (a.s.) neck, did not harm him. The fire which Ibrahim (a.s.) was thrown in, did not burn him. The sea which Musa (a.s.) crossed, did not drown him. The jail that Yusuf (a.s.) was thrown in, only built him as a man of wisdom and determination. Trials are tests that differentiate between the steadfast and the weak-willed, the resolute and the feeble & vacillating ones. It separates the wheat from the chaff. It differentiates between those who have *Iman* and those who have *nifaq* or those with weak *Iman*.

When Musa (a.s.) was, quite literally, caught between the devil and the deep blue sea, we can imagine him to be saying to himself, 'I disbelieve my eyes, when I see the sea in front of me and Firawn behind me. I disbelieve my ears, when I hear these words from Bani Israel that I lied to them. I only believe in my *Iman*. Allah promised me, and He will fulfil His promise.'

Although he could not even imagine any possible logical solution, he knew and believed in Allah the most high and expected help from Him! Then what transpired is one of the turning points of history. The story of Musa is a story of perseverance and absolute faith in Allah in face of tremendous odds.

During the *Hijrah*, our beloved Nabi (s.a.w.) exhibited incredible composure and tranquility that stemmed from a firm belief that Allah will never forsake him. When Abu Bakr (r.a.) was worried in the cave, our beloved Prophet (s.a.w.) assured him that Allah is with them. Allah declares, *'Be not sad, surely Allah is with us.'* (Surah At Tauba, 9:40).

Allah says, *'So verily, with hardship, there is relief; (Surah Ash Sharh, 94:5).* He further assures, *'Your Lord (O Muhammad) has neither forsaken you nor hated you.'* (Surah Ad Dhuha, 93:3). In another place in the Quran, Allah declares, *'And whosoever fears Allah, He will make a way for him to get out (from every difficulty). And He will provide him from (sources) he never could imagine. (Surah At Talaaq, 65:2-3).* The *Sahaba* experienced suffering and adversity and were so shaken in spirit that even the Prophet (s.a.w.) and the faithful who were with him cried, *'When will Allah's help come?'* Allah replied, *'Ah, verily the help of Allah is near.'* (Surah Baqarah, 2:214). The Prophet Yaqoob (a.s.) proclaimed, *'No one despairs of Allah's Mercy, except the people who disbelieve.'* (Surah Yusuf, 12:87). Allah says "...Bear with patience whatever befalls you...." (Surah Luqman, 31:17). The same theme is repeated several times in the Book of Allah.

Allah repeatedly commands us not to be of those who are despairing. We should have an unwavering sense of optimism. We have to try hard to embrace the struggles of life and trust in Allah. There's no development without pain. Problems are to the mind what exercise is to the muscles; they toughen and make us strong. A community's hardships are often difficulties that are necessary for its own development, so when they come along, accept them, embrace them and never ever lose hope and always place complete reliance and trust in Allah.

The Quran declares the treaty of *Hudaibiya* to be *Fath-e-Mubeena*, a great victory. Apparently, the treaty was lop sided with many concessions given. But an environment of peace enabled the spread of Islam. It was not the battles with weapons that won the Arabian Peninsula. It was the battle of the minds and hearts. Even though the environment was inimical to Islam, soon the tables were turned. The victory of Islam over the hearts & minds of the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula during the life of the Prophet (s.a.w.) was built upon the sacrifices of Sumaiyya (r.a.) and Yasir (r.a.) as well as the will power of Bilal (r.a.) and Khabbab (r.a.) in face of extreme torture, pain & suffering.

The lamp always burns that much more furiously before it is extinguished. Although we find that western moral values are getting increasingly globalized, yet, we also find the spirit of Islamic revivalism gaining strength across the length and breadth of the world. The Muslim youth is increasingly becoming aware that they have their own culture, their own systems of education, economics and administration. For every ban on the head scarf, we have young Muslim women peacefully fighting against such

draconian curtailment of freedom in the various courts of law. The unease which some western leaders are feeling is because they realize that significant sections within their countries are pregnant with Islam.

The heroic incident of the 15th of July 2015 when the common masses in their thousands, thwarted the attempted military coup in Turkey is indicative of the fact that the collective spirit of the *Ummah* is still alive. The young & old, men & women alike, marched on the streets against tanks and machine guns to save their country and their leadership. When we see the young children in Palestine having the wherewithal to stone marauding tanks of the illegal occupiers of their lands, it stirs up the loins of every honorable warm-hearted human let alone Muslims.

The Muslims lands are blessed with natural resources of all kinds, rubber in Malaysia, the fertile lands of the subcontinent, oil in the Gulf region, natural gas in the central Asian countries, etc. More importantly, we haven't yet fully deserted the family structure, the *haya*, the values that define us as a distinct community. This cultural capital far outweighs the technological and military might of the west. The strength of will power of the youth shall eventually overcome all odds and the glowing sun of Islam will once again rise on the horizons of humanity.

The amber covered with ashes still possesses the fire within. It is just the matter of dusting of the layer of ash and allowing the amber of the dormant constructive spirit to be unleashed. The lava of productive endeavor is most certainly simmering underneath the apparent lack of conviction, stupor and lassitude. We are a religion of hope. Hopelessness is a kind of *kufr*.

Hopefulness is an essential part of *Iman*. The Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.) is reported to have said: 'Verily, if Allah loves a people, He makes them go through trials. Whoever is satisfied, for him is contentment, and whoever is angry, upon him is wrath.'

Those who have to leave their lands due to oppression and strife, do so with hope in their hearts and the glint of optimism in their eyes. For them, the example of Abdur Rahman ibn Awf who came to Madina penniless and soon established a very prosperous business is a distinct source of motivation to unleash their positive energy and the spirit of industrious enterprise.

Every winter is the harbinger of the approaching spring. There is no scarcity of resources in the treasure cove of divine bounties. It is abundant and limitless. Allah has provided solutions for every problem and a cure for every disease. There is no dearth of mercy in the domain of the Almighty. He is the most merciful. Even if all men and women, all humans and *jinnns*, together at the same time asked for everything that they may imagine or desire, and if Allah grants them everything they wished for, Allah's bounties shall not diminish any more than the water on a needle when dipped in the ocean. And even that is just a symbolic representation, because Allah's kingdom is infinite.

True Muslims don't whine. They don't wail or complain. They are positive, resilient people who earn the pleasure of Allah by enduring difficulties with *sabr*, which is one of the most valued form of *ibaadah*. True Muslims can never ever be depressed or hopeless. The Prophet (s.a.w.) said, "Strange is the affair of the *Mu'min* (the believer), verily all his affairs are good for him. If something pleasing befalls him, he (*Shakir*) thanks Allah and it becomes better for him.

And if something harmful befalls him, he is patient (*Sabir*) and it becomes better for him."

Hardships are a call from Allah to come close to Him. The Prophet (s.a.w.) said that even a thorn that pricks a person is a blessing because it purifies a sin with this little momentary hardship. Suffering is a difficult pill which paves the way to come close to Allah & shun our heedlessness. If we remember Allah, obey His commandments & love Him, He will take care of our problems and will grant us freedom from the subjugation of the oppressors.

The *Sahaba* were the best of generations. Then, why were they tested so severely? The beloved Prophet (s.a.w.) was the most beloved to Allah then, why did He make him suffer in *Taif* and why were the Prophets (a.s.) invariably prosecuted? This is so because this world is a place of tests and trials and Allah tests those whom He loves. The harder the hardship, the greater shall be the reward. The reward that Allah gives to the people who do *sabr*, will be limitless. Allah quite obviously is never unjust. He will surely compensate for all the trials in this world and most certainly incomparably more in the hereafter. When the *Sahaba* were digging the trench to safe guard Madina in the battle of the *Ahzab*, the Prophet was giving them the glad tidings of conquering Persia, Syria & Constantinople as a triumph in this material world. He promised them paradise as the ultimate triumph in the hereafter. This is a remarkable example of buoyant determination & positive thinking.

We should learn lessons from history. Geo-political events are often harbingers of opportunity. Why was the day of *Buath* considered as a gift for Rasullulah (s.a.w.)? Because, it wiped off the political, social leadership of the *Aws* & the *Khazraj*. This paved the way for Islam in Madinah.

When the entrenched powers of the world curb or even at times annihilate each other, it invariably enables other systems to fill the vacuum that is inevitably created. This is something that has played out across the pages of history over and over again. The political & economic tug of war between the powers that be, in the contemporary world, could very well lead towards just such an eventuality.

Whenever men are physically, economically, socially enslaved by other men, when powerful nations exploit weaker ones, when influential communities abuse the feeble ones, the tide eventually changes and humanity gets freed from the encumbrance of slavery and from the malevolence of the oppressors. Remember, that water starts boiling only when all the molecules reach the temperature of 100 degrees centigrade. When the circumstances are ripe, change is bound to occur. We, as concerned citizens, should endeavor to become the vehicles of that change. We have to ourselves pick up the cudgels to deliver humanity from slavery.

This concept was so confidently declared by the companion of the Prophet (s.a.w.), Rabi' ibn 'Amr (r.a.) when he went to the leader of the Persians. Rustom asked him, "Why are you coming to our lands? If you are coming for money, then we will pay every one of you a salary, so leave us alone." But Rabi' ibn 'Amr (r.a.) replied, "That is not why we are here. We are sent to free the creation from being slaves of one another to being slaves of Allah the Creator of the creation and from oppression to the justice of Islam and we want to deliver people from the narrowness of this world to the vastness of this world and the afterlife."

Allah has promised us in His book that after fear and prosecution will be peace and security. That is the promise of our Lord; and He never promises, but unflinchingly fulfills the promises. The Prophet of Allah (s.a.w.) has prophesied that, after the era of biting oppression will be the splendid era of peace & abundance – a regime of spiritual tranquility and material productivity which will rewind the glorious days of the *Khulafa e Rashideen*. He informed us that the dominion of *haq* shall encompass the east and the west and all that lies in-between. The Prophetic prophecies shall surely come to pass.

Our beloved Nabi (s.a.w.) has promised that this world won't end until truth prevails over falsehood in the entire world. Ultimate victory of the universal truth is inevitable. The winter of ignorance, corruption, oppression and injustice will eventually give way to the glowing spring of justice. Allah promises us that, eventually, the earth shall be inherited by the *muttaqeen*. The question we should ask ourselves is – are we striving to be enlisted as *muttaqeen* in the eyes of Allah? We must candidly ask ourselves as to how much are we going to contribute towards that eventuality. May our efforts be one of the bricks in the building of that eventual peaceful and glorious world.

We are not a community who lives with a defeatist, pacifist mindset. But rather, we are a community of essentially non-violent constructivism. We are not supposed to be those who remain mired in a narrative of victimization. We have to think positive and look to unleash our creative potential. In a sense, we are lucky to be living in these tumultuous times, because we have the opportunity to positively rebuild the edifice of Islamic civilization and strive to erase the blots from the face of Islam which we have attracted due to our own follies & foibles.

The Prophet (s.a.w.) informed us that there will be a generation of people at the end of time and the *ajr* of one of them will be equal to the *ajr* of fifty! So the *Sahaba* asked, "Fifty of us or fifty of them?" Rasoolullah (s.a.w.) said, "Fifty of you." Shouldn't such glad tidings warm the kernels of our hearts? In times when things are easy then the *ajr* is certainly not equal to the times when things are difficult.

In times when maintaining ones *Iman* is akin to holding burning coal in our hands, we need our connection with Allah to be strengthened. We need to step up to seek and strive to obtain Allah's mercy & help. The doors of repentance and *astaghfar* are always open. So let us put our hearts in place and our hands together and beseech Allah for His mercy & His benevolence and let us sincerely commit to live our lives according to his commandments so as to deserve his mercy. The example of the man from Bani Israel who had committed 100 murders and yet was forgiven, the example of the man who was banished from the community and Allah accepted his *tauba* so much so that he told Musa (a.s.) that he would forgive all the sins of anyone who offered his *janaza* – should be an inspiration for us to turn a new leaf. Allah says that he is ready to forgive a tearful repent heart even if the amount of sins have reached the skies. If we strengthen our connection with Allah then we shall surely attract the mercy of Allah.

The forces of nature were made subservient to the *Sahaba*. Hazrat Umar's words directing the Muslim army towards the mountain were heard by Sariya (r.a.) hundreds of kilometers away. The river Nile started flowing when a letter was addressed to it by the *Khalifah*. A *Sahabi* commanded the fire in Madina to go back and it obeyed.

A group of the *Sahaba* rode their horses on the water. How come they were blessed with these miracles? Why did Allah alter the laws of physics and biology for them? Allah invariably helped the *Sahaba* because they had a live connection with Him. They were weighty people, with depth & genuineness. They were not light weight, frivolous people. They were not imprisoned by circumstances. They directed and molded the circumstances.

Even if the journey is difficult, even though there are turbulent seas and the *Ummah* is engulfed in storms all around, even if the shore in the distance is hazy, the Islamic sailor chugs along resolutely, facing the choppy waters and inclement weather from all sides and in all respects. This stormy weather is but a transitory phase. It is destined to pass. The courage & forbearance is bound to be blessed with glory and the lofty goals are bound to be achieved.

Winston Churchill once aptly said, "A pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees opportunity in every difficulty." We need to focus on solutions, not just the problems. We need to look for opportunities, not excuses. A results-driven, positive attitude is the mark of a proactive community.

The Methodology of Reform

We must ask ourselves, as to how have we gotten to this juncture & ponder on how we can improve our lot. Harboring positive vibes and optimism without any sincere effort is akin to harboring an unattainable utopia. Allah helps only those who are willing to toil in His path and willing to even sacrifice their personal well-being for the greater human welfare. If our hearts truly throb for the grieving humanity, then we shall readily leave our comfort zones, think beyond our self-serving fiefdoms and be able to overcome our dissensions and sectarianism to work collaboratively for the larger good, inspite of our disagreements.

Are we ready then, to fill the human pond with enough clean water to ultimately ensure that the infested murky water eventually gets diluted? It will certainly be a gradual and calibrated process. As always, lasting change materializes from a painstaking bottom up approach. History bears testimony to the fact that grandiloquent top down approach invariably fails. The story of Prophethood of Rasulullah (s.a.w.) is the best precedent for us to follow. He initially struggled & nurtured a generation of individuals of upright character, incredible courage and profound wisdom. Individuals who eventually became the intellectual, political and spiritual pillars of the world.

As the representatives of the Prophet of mercy & the torch bearers of an outstanding heritage of an egalitarian & prosperous civilization of justice, equality, educational excellence & balanced social welfare, we must consider ourselves to be morally duty-bound to gradually convert formidable social challenges into

opportunities for sustainable and universal reforms. It is most certainly the obligation of every believer to contribute to the upliftment of the marginalized & deprived members of our society, irrespective of caste, creed, region or religion.

Upliftment of the Marginalized

Islam is a universal message of compassion and solidarity. Every Muslim is morally obliged to earnestly respond to the heart rendering calls of the poor & the needy. Caring for the needy is a pre-requisite for our ultimate salvation in the hereafter. Allah says, 'The likeness of those who spend their wealth in Allah's way is as the likeness of a grain which grows seven ears, in every ear a hundred grains. Allah gives increase manifold to whom He wills. Allah is All-Embracing, All-Knowing.' (Surah Baqarah, 2:264). Allah further declares, 'Have you seen the one who denies the Recompense? For that is the one who drives away the orphan. And does not encourage the feeding of the poor. So woe to those who pray. (But) who are heedless of their prayer. Those who make a show (of their deeds) and withhold (simple) assistance.' (Surah Ma'un, 107:1-7)

Therefore, supporting the underprivileged, the widows & the orphans is a religious duty binding on all Muslims. Rehabilitation of widows & orphans is considered to be repayment of society's debt & an expression of gratitude towards our Almighty Creator. Whether it is providing economic aid & assistance in rescue efforts in emergency situations by mobilizing resources to provide for their elementary needs as well as to sponsor sustainable & viable economic solutions to mitigate the impact of calamities or to extend relief to victims of violent conflicts and natural disasters or financial support for deserving students or spiritual succor to the psychologically distressed or helping alleviate the suffering of the elderly or setting up safe, sheltered & sustainable vocational avenues to enable poor or widowed women to meet the elementary needs of their families – it is all a moral and religious obligation upon all Muslims.

Furthermore, protection & preservation of life as well as healthcare for all, are among the fundamental principles of the prophetic tradition. All patients irrespective of their faith should be treated with human dignity, respect & loving care, as if they are members of our own family. Hence, access to basic medication and the provision of healthcare clinics & therapeutic centers to treat the poor people of common ailments is their undeniable and fundamental right.

Civilizational Reconstruction

However, if a community only invests in ameliorating post-calamity crisis and doesn't invest in building critical skills in the next generation, then we are effectively nurturing a perennially aid-reliant lower strata of our community. As much as aid for the poor is needed, developmental investment of the community's resources is also of paramount importance, especially when Governments in politically polarized Non-Muslim countries rarely if ever, support projects for the socio-educational upliftment & empowerment of the Muslims.

Socio-politically palliative musings and human rights' crisis management endeavors must be matched by simultaneous measures aimed at empowerment and building influential communities and institutions that will become the engines of the impending constructive transformation. We need to holistically participate in the bandwagon of technological progress of mankind by promoting a spirit of research, discovery & innovation in our community.

There is always a silver lining even in the darkest of clouds. The world today is moving towards greener forms of energy, ecologically complaint technology is bound to replace fossil fuel based machines thereby reducing the emission of greenhouse gases, the newer forms of bio-technology is making complex surgeries much safer, vaccines are eradicating diseases that were considered fatal earlier, life spans are increasing across the world, better means of transportation and communications have provided access to the remotest places on earth. These are positive signs. Many such developments hold hope for the future of humanity.

Our Glorious Past

As torch-bearers of the Prophet of mercy (s.a.w.), our young minds should be inspired by the splendid civilizational accomplishments of our ancestors in diverse fields – from hydraulic technology to mechanical automation, from rocket technology to ship building, from observatories/astrolabs to architectural/acoustic expertise, from farming manuals & agricultural revolutions to cartography & climatology. We are the inheritors of a spectacular educational heritage - from the crucibles of innovation in the universities of Toledo to the vast & varied libraries of Baghdad. We are the successors of a rich scholastic legacy of scholars, theorists & philosophers like Imam Gazzali, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Hazm, Ibn Khaldun and the like. We are the inheritors of a glorious past which produced researchers, professionals, intellectuals & scientist like Ibn Al-Haytham, Taqi Al-Din, Al-Kindi, Al-Bairuni, Al-Muqaddisi, Al-Jazari, Al-Khawarizmi, Al-Bitruji, Mimar Sinan, Al-Dimashqi, Al-Razi, Ibn Al-Nafis, Ibn Batuta, Al-Idrisi & many more. We are the heirs of an enlightening legacy of brilliant administrators, economists, physicists, astronomers, mathematicians, geologists, mineralogists, alchemists, pharmacologists, botanists, surgeons, physicians, ophthalmologists, dermatologists, etc.

We are the inheritors of a remarkable legacy in which the world witnessed the unprecedented epitome of civilization itself – A legacy in which Hazrat Umar (r.a.) whose dominion extended from the periphery of the known west to the subcontinent of the east - roamed the streets in the nights to ensure that all the citizens are at ease, himself ate unpalatable coarse food & yet carried sacks of food-grain on his own back to feed a starving family, flogged his own son to uphold justice, travelled on

a journey of hundreds of miles taking turns to ride the only camel with his servant, wished he was a tree or a bird out of extreme fear of ultimate accountability & considered the starvation of even a dog in the territory under his administration as a dereliction of his duty. Not only that, he also displayed such remarkable tolerance towards other faiths that he did not offer his prayer in a church in Syria out of utmost respect for that faith and its place of worship. No wonder that when Mahatma Gandhi was asked as to how should India be governed after independence, he said, that it should be governed like Hazrat Abu Bakr (r.a.) & Hazrat Umar (r.a.) used to govern.

We are the upholders of an astonishing legacy of sacrifice of luminaries like Hazrat Abu Bakr (r.a.) who donated absolutely everything that he possessed to promote the cause of truth and left only the teachings of the Prophet (s.a.w.) and Allah (s.w.t.) for his family. A legacy that produced personalities like Hazrat Ali (r.a.) who used to tremble with the thought of rendering an account to the Almighty & even become unconscious due to weeping profusely during prayers, inspite of being given the glad tidings of paradise in this world itself. We are the followers of that Prophet (s.a.w.) whose remarkable companions showed exemplary courage to overcome extreme odds at *Badr* to defend the message of truth.

A legacy of bravery of companions like Bilal (r.a.) & Sumaiyya (r.a.) & scholars of the early generations like Ahmad ibn Hanbal (r.h.) who remained steadfast to their commitment to the truth in face of brutal torture. A remarkable legacy of luminaries like Hazrat Usman Ghani (r.a.) who used most of his wealth in the path of Allah. An astounding legacy of judicial acumen and wisdom represented by Hazrat Ali (r.a.).

An incredible tradition of austerity displayed by Abu Dhar Ghiffari (r.a.). The incredible legacy of valour and strategic acumen demonstrated by Khalid bin Waleed (r.a.), one of the greatest military geniuses that mankind has ever seen.

We are the flag bearers of such an incredible civilization in which a ruler sent an army thousands of miles away to establish justice and apprehend the culprits when he learnt that a solitary woman's modesty was defiled; a legacy wherein a teenaged companion of the prophet subjected himself to weeks of weeping in the wilderness before breathing his last simply because his sight momentarily lingered on something that a morally upright Muslim shouldn't set his eyes upon.

We are the inheritors of such a wonderful civilization of justice, equality & balanced social welfare wherein the rightly guided governors were very much duty conscious and mindful of their responsibility towards the poor and the orphans and facilitated the rise of even slaves to positions of prominence in the state as well as become eminent scholars of their era. So much so that for probably the only time in history the world saw a society in which people were willing to give charity but struggled to find any deserving takers. Such an egalitarian civilization which represents the pinnacle of the art of living, naturally spread to distant lands at a startling pace; be it through businessmen landing on the shores of Malabar and the far eastern countries or scholars & saints who displayed remarkable nobility & integrity of character.

Such a remarkable legacy in which the world witnessed the pinnacle of civilization itself was built on the bedrock of faith and absolute values.

Values which were so remarkably epitomized by Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.). Infact, many historians today consider the revolution brought about by our beloved Prophet (s.a.w.) to be the critical axis of Historical periodization. Some of the traits he showed for the world to follow were, that:

1. He had the milk of human kindness. He could not see anyone suffering in any way, even though he himself use to tie stones on his stomach to thwart the pangs of hunger. Whenever the prophet received gifts and provision for the future he gave it to the poor and the needy and never kept it back for himself.

2. He was far from being a person who wanted power, status, leadership and glory & wore expensive clothes & lived in big mansions with several guards etc. Our beloved Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) on the contrary milked his own goat, mended his own clothes, repaired his own shoes & even cleaned his own home with a broom. He was an amazing model of simplicity and humbleness. He sat on the floor & dined with the poor.

3. He eradicated all differences of class, race and colour & taught us the value of piety. He said, "Nearest and dearest to me are those who possess the virtue of piety no matter what race or nationality they belong to or which country they live in."

4. He taught us that, "He is not of us who is not affectionate to those who are younger than himself and respect those who are older." He said, "In the pleasure of parents lies the pleasure of God, and in their displeasure, the displeasure of God." Thus there is no need for old age homes in Islam.

5. Our beloved prophet said, "The signs of a hypocrite are three: when he speaks, he is untrue; when he promises, he fails; and when he is trusted, he breaks the trust." Islam is against all corrupt means of making money, such as, dishonest trading, embezzlement, gambling, speculation, deceit, usury, hoarding, wrongful litigation and bribery. Muhammad (s.a.w.) warned that, "He who obtains the property of another by swearing a false oath will appear as a leper before God (on the Day of Judgment).

6. He taught us to be courteous in our behaviour towards our neighbour. He said, "He is not a Muslim who eats his fill and lets his neighbour go hungry." He also said, "He shall not go to Heaven from whose mischief his neighbour does not feel secure."

7. It is narrated that once the Prophet (s.a.w.) joined two of his fingers and showing them to the Companions said, "He who supports an orphan shall be as close to me in Heaven as are these fingers to each-other."

8. He also declared that, "He who endeavours to relieve the widow, the depressed and the needy is as one who strives in the service of God, and, in Divine reward, he is like the one who permanently fasts during the day and spends his nights in prayers."

9. He said, "Feed the hungry, visit the sick and free the captives." No distinction has been drawn in this tradition of the Prophet (s.a.w.) between a Muslim and a non-Muslim.

10. To feel pity on a fellow human being in distress, to be compassionately drawn towards him, to support him, to pardon the guilty and the defaulter are virtues which are valued very highly in Islam.

The Prophet said, "Show kindness, and kindness will be shown to you; forgive, and you will be forgiven." He said, "God will hold back His punishment from him who will hold back his anger." He even declared that speaking politely & even smiling is a kind of charity.

11. The Prophet (s.a.w.) even taught us that, "The Earth is green and beautiful, and Allah has appointed you as stewards over it". He said that even if it is the last day of the world one should continue with plantation. He also said, "Cleanliness is half of faith."

12. He taught us to repent & feel genuinely sorry and ashamed of the sins that one might have committed and resolve sincerely not to do so again, and seek forgiveness from Allah with all his heart.

13. Humility is a virtue Islam wants its followers to practice as a distinguishing feature of their moral and spiritual behaviour. The Prophet (s.a.w.) said, "Whoever has pride in his heart even to the weight of a mustard seed, shall not enter Paradise." He epitomised the very pinnacle of humility when he entered the city of Makkah unopposed, but with his head bowed down in utmost humbleness and gratitude towards his Lord instead of triumphantly marching in as a victorious King.

14. He said, "Do not bear a grudge or enmity against each other, do not be jealous of each-other, and do not indulge in backbiting." The Prophet (s.a.w.) said, "If a near relative treats you indifferently and ignores the bond of relationship do not turn your back on him but keep on discharging, on your part, the obligations of relationship towards him."

15. He taught us forgiveness by forgiving the man who killed his beloved uncle, he even forgave the woman whose hatred towards Muhammad (s.a.w.) was so severe that she desecrated the body of his beloved uncle Hamza (r.a.). Infact when the Muslims entered Makkah victorious he declared that no man or woman shall be harmed this day.

16. No wonder Michael Hart in his book - The 100 most influential people of the world declares him to be the most complete individual ever & the most influential. He was the best husband, a wonderful father, the most reliable friend, the most honest businessman, the greatest teacher, the finest statesman, the most balanced judge, an astute military strategist & general and the wisest spiritual master, all rolled into one.

Reforming the Youth

It is critically important that the youth are taught the Seerah of Rasoolullah (s.a.w.) and are religiously well-equipped to prudently handle themselves in the contemporary challenging circumstances without lapsing into extremes of isolation or confrontation. Only then, will the world be able to witness the balanced art of living exhibited by our beloved Prophet (s.a.w.) in every walk of life. It is of paramount importance therefore, to groom youth in such a manner that they shall be motivated to strive for excellence, have a sense of mission, conduct a balanced life, live in peace with themselves and their environment, and are equipped with the necessary knowledge, understanding, and skills to make a difference in the society by taking an active role, both individually and collectively, in the reform process that seeks the betterment of our community, country and the whole world.

The youth need to be weaned from the narrative of an authoritative, coercive, obscurantist, confrontational or isolationist doctrine that is certainly not tenable nor is it Islamic. The way forward is an inclusive, pluralistic, tolerant approach that has space for all positive strains of research & enterprise. The vast majority of our population is young. We need to take advantage of this huge demographic dividend that Allah has blessed this Ummah with. We need a paradigm that can potentially unleash the latent resourcefulness, dynamic potential & industrious creative spirit of the youth, thereby facilitating the imminent constructive transformation. We need to encourage our next generation to establish vocational and professional enterprises thereby harnessing the hitherto suppressed or underutilized ingenuity and imagination.

The study of the Quran and life of the Prophet reminds us of numerous examples of exemplary youth. History attests to the fact that our Prophet (s.a.w.) was primarily supported by the young & the poor. There is a need therefore, for workshops of short durations that should be periodically conducted for young professionals from different fields so as to revive such Islamic spirit and instill a sense of steadfastness to uphold & promote the Islamic ideals and the essence of *Iman* in their respective areas of work. These workshops will aim to train ideal youth who would be stable individuals exhibiting highly spiritual lives, governed by Islamic moral values & demonstrating qualities such as righteousness, honesty, humility, empathy and conscientiousness in everything they do. They will live Islam in letter & spirit as well as logically, scientifically & wisely propagate it in every sphere of life. They will then represent Islam as the fountainhead of spirituality, morality, rationality and tranquility for the whole of mankind. They will promote such a comprehensive system of belief that guides humanity in all aspects of life - be it spiritual, ethical, religious, social, political, economic, administrative or educational.

Educational Renaissance

Let us then invest in our next generation in not only developing their skills but also inculcate the right traits in them. Acquiring knowledge is an integral part of our faith. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) said: "Acquire knowledge, for he who acquires it in the way of Allah performs an act of piety; he who speaks of it, praises the Lord; he who seeks it, adores Allah; he who dispenses instruction in it, bestows alms; and he who imparts it to others, performs an act of devotion to Allah".

Young minds are like clay to be molded into balanced personalities who not only have the right skills for employment or entrepreneurship but also have well developed traits to be contributors towards social welfare & the upliftment of millions of impoverished fellow brethren. The answer to all social ills lies in developing a morally sound next generation. The vehicle to achieve the same is formal and informal education. The onus of informal education which inculcates values and a sense of social responsibility lies primarily on the family as well as the society at large. Whereas, formal education includes establishment of schools, *Madaris* and *Maktabas* that are imbued with the ideals of value based education which instills in the students a sense of social responsibility & accountability.

We need to inculcate in them that the yardstick of success for a student is not the marks he/she secures but rather the effort he/she puts in to improve himself/herself academically as well as morally.

Unfortunately, the pressure of scoring the highest marks has led to a rat race to prove one's intelligence and out-do each other which ultimately develops a self-seeking generation and a sick society. We have to teach

them that the divinely ordained parameters of success are not wealth, power, beauty etc. but piety, worship, generosity and fellow feeling. We must derive the paradigms of success from the Quran. According to the Book of Allah, those who are immersed only in the pursuit of the *duniya* are losers. Firaun, Qarun, Hamman, were all unsuccessful. Whereas, Ibrahim (a.s.) & Musa (a.s.), inspite of their modest material assets were successful. Material progress certainly cannot be the sole indicator of progress in our system of belief.

Educational institutions as microcosms of the wider society, are essentially, the crucibles of social reform. It is therefore our duty to inculcate in the children universal values & sound ethics. We have to inculcate in the young minds of our society, the spirit of co-operation so that tomorrow they become responsible and tolerant citizens. We need to encourage them to participate in constructive activities of general welfare so that tomorrow they become active contributors in the process of social development. We have to strive to imbibe in them the trait of not littering, for an example, which will contribute in developing a generation with sound civic sense. We must strive to instil in them the traits of compassion and concern for others so that tomorrow they show empathy towards their physically challenged fellow citizens or those who are underprivileged. We have to teach them that all poor and needy people have a claim on us no matter to what race or religion they belong.

Such an educational paradigm seeks to develop conscientious & benevolent doctors who will not indulge in illicit organ trading, honest civil engineers who will not use substandard materials in construction, morally upright

graphic designers who will develop gaming apps and multi-media content that will promote positive traits like helping others and respecting parents etc. instead of racing, shooting et al, conscientious statesmen/ politicians will not be involved in scams, accountants who will not indulge in money laundering, officials who will not take bribes or commissions, defense personnel who will not compromise on the safety and security of their people, nuclear scientists who will utilize their skills in producing electricity for civil consumption rather than developing weapons of mass destruction, journalists who will have a constructive, productive & inspirational approach and present news boldly and fairly along with highlighting the positive spirit of human endeavor instead of overtly dwelling on negative incidents as a stark alternative to the inane sensationalism, misrepresentation & partisan yellow journalism that reigns supreme today and above all, train committed educators who will seek to nurture accomplished, profound, perspicacious, rational, righteous, compassionate & enterprising scholars & professionals who will seek to prudently & competently develop and implement balanced, sustainable & functional solutions for divinely ordained social reform, for the beleaguered humanity.

To look forward we must begin by looking backwards. Anytime and anywhere in the history of mankind where ever there has been any genuine progress it has been by exploring or establishing better alternatives to the status quo. The Prophet (s.a.w.) & his companions as well as the great scientists like Galileo did not acquiesce to the socio-educational norms of their era, they constructively & peacefully challenged them. We must honestly ask ourselves whether we have the gumption to do the same or not?

We can impart holistic education only if we manage to rescue education from the market forces and de-commercialize it. The goal of education is not just to generate industry ready assembly line of professionals & laborers, but to instill the capacity for critical thinking, courage and most importantly, profundity & wisdom. Our idea of education is much deeper than mere copy pasting of western concepts of education. Yes, we have a lot to learn from Benjamin Bloom, John Dewey & Paulo Freire and such western intellectuals. But their research and conclusions are bereft of the most fundamental components of education – that is the Almighty Creator and divine guidance. Fundamentally, we have to structure our own unique solutions, otherwise we shall always remain followers of an essentially Godless system.

It is imperative that we nurture the *Ulama* & Muslim professionals equipped to face the 21st century with the ability to cogently expound the true Islamic beliefs in institutions of education & to professionals of every hue. Therefore, it is essential to re-ignite the dormant potential of the true inheritors of the intellectual & spiritual legacy of our beloved Prophet (s.a.w.) by training the *Ulama* in the contemporary subjects & apprising them about the current circumstances. They will then be able to clear the misconceptions about Islam, spread, due to relentless concerted efforts by some of the unscrupulous people of the society, as well as, due to the general ignorance prevalent in the masses.

It is the need of the hour to develop such *Ulama* & professionals from an impressionable age as well, so that they can effectively turn back the pages of history and reclaim their position as guides in every sphere of life and genuine leaders of our community and the society at large.

They should not only be able to extend an invitation to the true path ordained by Allah by a theoretical & logical discourse to all our human brothers and sisters but also win their hearts with exemplary behavior thereby presenting the society with living models of Islamic values. Such dynamic and well-grounded Islamic scholars, *insh Allah* will be cognizant of the circumstances and will be able to beautifully, wisely, effectively & comprehensively deliver the message in the international language of our age while efficiently utilizing the modern technological means of mass communication.

We have hope for the future only if we are able to nurture such a generation of dynamic, erudite & conscientious individuals who will display exemplary behavior, shed the bogey of an alien value system & productively counter the nefarious designs & concerted efforts of a few global mercenary elites. They would then be the torch bearers of the future, men of constructive action imbued with a spirit of collective welfare, ushering a new dawn that will free mankind from economic, intellectual & cultural slavery.

To achieve such a lofty goal we need an integrated, instead of a juxtaposed model of education, which considers value education as an integral part of the scholastic process instead of being just an ancillary subject of cosmetic worth. The recognition of the glory & attributes of our almighty God and imbibing universal ethics & values should be a part of every activity that takes place in the school eco-system.

Whether it be the teaching of various subjects OR the various co-curricular & extra-curricular activities OR the various natural, man-made, social & thematic avenues of excursion OR the various kinds of physical exercises, games

& sporting activities OR the various competitions, campaigns & activities of personality development OR the various students' clubs OR the various awards highlighting the different traits and skills – value education should naturally permeate through each of them.

Furthermore, the revival of the remarkable scholastic acumen, moral rectitude, spiritual equanimity & civilizational heritage of our glorious past, demands a pursuit of pedagogical synthesis along with scholastic acuity. Such a profound educational enlightenment that seeks to resolve the educational duality, entails a seamless integration of empirical material knowledge obtained from sense perceptions & analysis, with the revealed knowledge obtained from divine revelation & Prophetic traditions expounded by the wisdom & insight of our pious predecessors. It requires the development of an integrated, compatible and complementary paradigm of education. A scholastic methodology that would maintain the sanctity of traditional learning of divinely revealed scripture while being in sync with contemporary subjects.

A socio-educational approach that will holistically harmonize the body, heart, mind & soul of the students for temporal as well as spiritual success. A methodology, which has at its core, individual & collective salvation, both in this world and in the hereafter. Furthermore, a truly effective educational system should necessarily entail a hands-on approach which will promote a spirit of research, discovery & innovation.

Such an all-round education shall potentially provide practical cures for the various administrative, economic, educational, environmental, social, medical, technological, spiritual & physical challenges that besiege the world. This kind of dynamic scholastic pedagogy shall be a precursor to the promotion of an equitable, egalitarian, prosperous, tolerant society based on divinely ordained principles of spirituality, morality & justice.

Empowering the Women Folk

According to Islamic traditions, the education of a woman is equivalent to the education of the entire locality. Infact, even a cursory glance of History shows that Muslim women while giving due regards to their natural & divinely ordained constraints as well as their peculiar roles and duties in the upbringing of their families, also obtained distinguished positions in the fields of theological sciences, jurisprudence, medical science, poetry and calligraphy.

The psychological, physical & emotional gifts of a woman along with their specific purposes and her well-defined roles & responsibilities should necessarily be reflected in the curriculum and educational system designed for the women-folk. The contemporary schools and Islamic seminaries have not yet been able to appropriately fulfill the critical need of honing the latent skills of one half of our society. Providing appropriate avenues for women's education is a collective responsibility of the whole community.

Safeguarding of Natural Resources

As Allah's trustees on earth, human beings are even responsible for protecting & maintaining the purity of the Earth's vast oceans, forests, mountains as well as its flora & fauna, its wildlife and the fragile equilibrium in the environment. It is our duty to preserve the biodiversity in nature & tackle the ecological problems that besiege our planet.

There are hundreds of verses in the Quran that exhort believers to reflect on nature & orders us to pay heed to them as a sign and a warning - the sky, the stars, the moon, the sun, the seed, the rain, the oceans and the mountains are all mentioned repeatedly and we are asked to understand the signs that are in them. But how can we appreciate these signs if we are carelessly defiling our own surroundings? Along with acknowledging the signs in nature, Islam also considers appropriate sanitation to be one of the fundamentals of belief.

The whole earth has been created a place of worship, pure and clean. Hence, civic sanitation & conservation is a commandment from Allah. Throughout the ages cleanliness was one of the most striking characteristics of the Islamic Civilization. Islam's care & respect for the environment and fellow living beings is amply borne out by the fact that even clearing an obstacle from people's path is also considered charity. As representatives/stewards of Allah on earth, Muslims are instructed to look after the environment instead of presiding over its destruction. It is the religious responsibility of Muslims to have proper civic sense, be hygienic & care for all forms of life created by the Almighty.

Moreover Islam also forbids us to waste water, food or spend of our wealth on unnecessary things. The Quran says, *'But waste not by excess: for Allah loveth not the wasters.'* (Surah Al Anam, 6:141). Each one of us will be responsible for wasteful behavior and will be held accountable for it. The Prophet (s.a.w.) directed us not to waste while performing ablution even if we are using water from a flowing river. Therefore, Islam's aversion to waste & concern for the depletion of natural resources is not simply instrumental, but fundamental.

Reconnecting with the Quran

The Quran is the final, absolute & immutable word of Allah revealed to mankind which will be valid & relevant till the end of time. It has an essence and spirit which when understood & implemented properly, has the potential to positively change the world. This is precisely what happened with the companions of the Prophet (s.a.w.) and the early Muslims. They were devoted men of constructive action who lived the Quran, considering it to be a direct guidance from their creator in every aspect of life. They perceived the Quran as a real & applicable message from Allah and molded their lives according to its principles. The result was remarkable spiritual & civilizational achievements which the world never witnessed before or after.

The Quran is food for our soul, a healing for us, the best medicine for our diseased hearts and wandering minds. The Quran provides the solutions for our individual as well as collective predicaments. It is an instruction manual of checks and balances, for the formation of an equitable society & a prescription for the internal diseases of human beings. The Quran coaxes us to see, to hear, to ponder, to explore, to understand innumerable times. We are repeatedly encouraged to reflect on its *ayahs*, absorb its meaning & purify our thoughts and mold our conduct according to the divine commandments. The Quran proclaims, *“O mankind! There hath come to you a direction from your lord and a healing for the (diseases) in your hearts, and for those who believe - guidance and a mercy.”* (Surah Yunus, 10:57)

It is a book of profound essence which should continuously illuminate our life & inspire us in all situations

& for all people – a mother, a father, a child, a teacher, a scholar, an engineer, a doctor, a laborer, a policy-maker or an administrator, irrespective of whether we are poor or rich, young or old and black, white or brown. It is the means through which we can recognize Allah and establish a living and continuous relationship with Him and beseech Him to shower His guidance, mercy & forgiveness on us. It is an expression of the love & mercy of Almighty Allah for the whole of mankind. Reciting the Quran & reflecting on its message, is a cure for our ailing hearts struggling under the onslaught of trials, calamities & our base desires.

Allah declares, "Verily, he who has purified the heart is successful and he who has despoiled it has lost." Purification of our hearts is the bedrock on which the entire edifice of an equitable, just and morally sound society stands. Allah also says, 'So remember Me; I will remember you' (Surah Baqarah, 2:152). Allah is inviting us to remember Him and in return He will remember us. That's his promise. So let's immerse ourselves in the Zikr of Allah & diligently and religiously recite the Book of Allah and abide by its guidance.

Resolute Commitment

If we shed our lassitude, our ego, our internal conflicts and invest our time, skills and resources in productive endeavors, then we can surely turn back the clock of History. We can surely recreate the magic of the Islamic civilization during the times of the Khulafa e Rashideen. The remarkable & assimilative civilization of Andalus can once again be restored.

But, only if we are ready to follow the Quranic morals and examples set by the living embodiment of the Book of Allah, our beloved Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.). If we are willing to once again relive the traits exhibited by our pious predecessors, then the future certainly holds much promise.

To formulate & implement such socio-educational reforms, thereby re-igniting our exemplary educational & social legacy, requires fervent passion, unwavering perseverance, requisite skills and above all, sincere, collective effort from all the stakeholders of the society. All of us therefore should collectively strive to build a world which will be like a beautiful garden with several different flowers of different colors and different fragrances instead of a standardized field of crops. We must all harbor the ardent desire to positively, peacefully and constructively reinvigorate our spiritually, educationally, economically, politically & socially demoralized & hibernating Ummah, which for far too long has only been content in laying the blame for all our ills at the altar of the fascist forces of every hue.

The efforts of different individuals, groups & institutions constructively striving to establish productive paradigms & universal values shall eventually bear fruits. Eventually, these disparate & disjointed efforts shall cumulatively achieve a new dawn of prosperity and universal brotherhood. We must also establish working relationships and human bonding not just amongst the Muslims but also with other like-minded and honest individuals and societies who are championing the cause of peace and human welfare in the world.

Pledge & Supplication

So, let us make a sincere pledge to our Almighty creator, as well as a vow unto ourselves, to turn a new page in our lives from this very moment, and live the rest of our lives fully aware of our ultimate recompense & our eventual destiny. I hope that all of us shall conscientiously do our bit for the spiritual and civilizational progress of our community in particular and the world in general, thereby once again transforming the planet earth into a haven of peace and prosperity.

Along with efforts we must also sincerely & persistently supplicate to our Lord with the firm belief that what is asked for, or even better, will surely be granted. May Allah bless us with the ability to cope with our difficulties. May Allah give us *taufeeq* to be grateful to Him, inspite of our trials & value the gifts that He has blessed us with. We must fervently beseech Allah's acceptance, mercy & help to contribute in the reconstruction of the socio-educational & moral fabric of our civilization. Our beloved Prophet (s.a.w.) said: "Allah says: If he thinks good of me, he will have it. And if he thinks evil of me, he will have it." We must have good expectations (*husn al-z'ann*) that Allah the Exalted will eventually answer our pleas.

May Allah save us from the disease of desiring to be heard & seen among people. May Allah save us from the desire to regard our opinions & understanding as profound & always correct. May all of us recognize that it is normal to make mistakes & learn from them. May Allah make our hearts open enough to accept our errors of judgment. May Allah save us from our own unrecognized hypocrisy. May Allah save us from the various subtle forms of *kibr* & *riya*. May Allah save us from the myriad tricks upon tricks of *Shaitan*.

May Allah also grant us the company of those who are far more scrupulous, knowledgeable & insightful than us. May Allah bless us all with a deep rooted desire to contribute for the sake of Allah in whatever way possible, and grant us the will, the patience, the means for the same and protect us from all evil, make it easy for us, and save us from the satanic whispers of anxiety & a fear of failure. We ardently beseech Allah's acceptance, mercy & help to contribute in the reconstruction of the educational & moral fabric of our civilization. Aameen.

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