

ISLAM: AN OVERVIEW IN HISTORY AND CONTEMPORARY WOLRD¹

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Abstract

Artikel ini menghuraikan secara holistik asas pengajaran dan penghidupan yang dianjurkan oleh Islam, serta enam tahap operasi yang mencakupi seluruh hidup manusia secara individu, kelompok dan umat. Juga dihuraikan hasrat dan hakikat pembangunan dan kemajuan manusia serta tamadunnya yang dibawa oleh Islam, yang telah menjadi asas pembentukan tamadun Islam dan seterusnya menjadi pencetus dan pemankin pula kepada kebangkitan tamadun Eropah Barat sehingga pendominasiannya secara global kini. Juga dihuraikan dilema dan kecundangan tamadun dan masyarakat Islam sehingga kini dalam serba aspek penghidupan termasuk politik, ekonomi, budaya dan agama. Penyelesaian kepada dilema dan kemelesetan ini tidak lain daripada kembali menghayati Islam sepenuhnya dalam kesemua enam tahap dan bidang operasi yang dihuraikan ini, yang seluruhnya berpaksi kepada diri manusia itu sendiri.

1. Introduction: The Basic Teachings of Islam

Basically, the teachings of Islam from a holistic point of view, can

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be summarised as follows:

i) Firstly, Islam is conceived not as a religion in the ordinary sense of the word. It is not just a system of belief about a personal God, having a set of rituals that are restricted to certain activities and actions only, while in other activities of life e.g. politics, administration, economics, education and etc., one is free to follow and to do anything according to one's individual liking, manner or way of thinking, whether spontaneously or in codified form of law and order.

Islam is a way, a method or a procedure revealed by God, on how to live and lead our whole lives as an individual and as a group (a family, a community, a society and the whole humanity) in all spheres of living activities viz. social, economic, political, cultural, educational, recreational etc, and comprising the levels of the materials, physical, emotional, rational, intellectual, aesthetics and spiritual.

ii) Islam as a way of life (*al-Dīn*) has its most basic meaning of a complete submission to God; doing all things in a manner that is in accord with God's revealed rules and order (*sharī'atullāh*). Just like in the world of nature, where all systems and occurrences follow certain fixed law and order known as the law of nature which are actually the customary way of God's action in the realm of the natural world (*sunnatullāh*) so that they may all fulfill their functions and purposes of creation fully and orderly, so too in the realm of humanity. The complete submission of man's action according to the God's revealed rules and order, is of paramount importance to ensure the fulfillment of man's purpose of creation.

In the world of nature, nothing will defy the customary way of God's action which is the law of nature, because the very existence of the whole world depends wholly upon its observance and submission to that law, e.g. the fixed orbits and axis of the movements of the heavenly bodies, the formations of clouds and the falling rains that give life to the plants and animals, the flow of water from the mountains to the oceans, the digestion of food in the stomach, the excretion of wastes from the body, the flow of blood for bodily respiration, nutrition and defence, the conception, forma-

tion, growth and birth of babies, and etc. However this orderly existence and occurrences of the world of nature may be thrown out of balance and equilibrium resulting in destruction and extinction by two means, firstly by the process of atrophy and the coming of its appointed end which is death or *ajal* (death of any living thing or death of a star), or secondly by the actions and abuses of man.

Man's actions can interfere and disturb the operation of the law of nature if they are not in tandem with that law, and they will not be in tandem with that law if they are performed not according to the law of life as revealed by God the Creator of both the realm of nature and the realm of humanity. Whenever any system or parts thereof, goes out of order i.e. deviates from the fixed law of nature due to inequilibrium, abuses, injuries, diseases, accidents, atrophy and death, then there will be disorder, chaos, disaster and ultimately damage and destruction. Landslides, floods, earthquakes, storms, draught, forest fires and other "natural" disasters and also epidemics, death and extinctions are instances of disorder, inequilibrium, abuses, diseases, injuries and atrophy occurring in the world of nature, resulting from the two factors mentioned above.

The natural factor namely atrophy and death is as a result of the direct act of God which through His Divine Wisdom and Will beyond the comprehension of man, govern and administer the whole realm of creation in absolute totality and authority. However disasters and destruction due to the abuses resulting from man's actions which do not follow God's revealed law of life, are definitely engendered by man. When man abuses and destroys his natural environment through wanton destruction of land, forest, rivers and air, in building factories, houses, flats, condominium, roads, stadiums, offices, shops, supermarkets, skyscrapers, and etc. for unconstrained profits and gains motivated by greed, selfishness, unbridled pleasures, corrupt power and position, then disorder, inequilibrium, damage and destruction will occur in the forms of pollution, flood, landslides, storms, earthquakes, draught, fires, etc., as what is happening in rapid succession and frequencies now. On the other hand such developments and growth if guided by the

principles of justice, equity, balance, temperance, social responsibility and true motive and goal for the ultimate aim of salvation and pleasure of God which is the final destiny of man, as embodied in the revealed law of God, then balance, equilibrium, justice, law and order will ensue, and the world of nature will continue to serve and benefit mankind.

iii) The law of life, actions and interrelationship which is Islam was revealed by God to mankind through the agency of the Prophets of God numbering about 124,000 throughout human history, starting with Adam (peace be upon him) through to Prophets, among others, Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Issac, Moses, Haroon, Jacob, Joseph, Jesus 'a.s. (peace upon them all) and ending with the final Prophet, Muḥammad ṣ. 'a.w (peace and God's salutation be upon him). (cf. Al-Qur'ān, Āli 'Imrān: 84):

“Say (O Muḥammad), we believe in Allāh and what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Issac, Jacob, and the tribes, and in (the Books) given to Moses, Jesus and the Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between one and another among them, and to Allāh do we bow our will in Islām.”

Those laws of life revealed in sequence were increased in complexity, volumes and ambits in accordance with the development of man's intellectual growth, changes in physical environment and expansion of social institutions and interrelationship.

vi) The revelation of Islam by God were primarily in the forms of scriptures, the final form of which being the Qur'ān which was revealed to the last Prophet, Muḥammad ṣ. 'a.w. The Qur'ān provides vision, ultimate aim, motives and incentives, principles of human actions, interrelations and transactions which forms the “theoretical framework for the parameters of Islamic civilization.” It also reveals the description of reality of creation or cosmos (*makhḷūq*) and the Reality of the existence of God who is the creator (*Khāliq*) of the cosmos. This basic guidelines and principles are then translated into the operation of practical actions in all man's daily activities and interrelationship, individually and socially, by the Prophet through the means of his action, his word,

and his consent but still directly guided by God, which are collectively called the Tradition of the Prophet or *Hadīth*. This application of daily actions and operation of the Divine law within the Islamic society, was first encultured and nurtured by Prophet Muhammad s. 'a.w. into the lives of his companions (blessing of God upon them), which formed the first generation of Muslims; the generation that produced the best Muslims because they were directly trained and educated by the Prophet himself under direct guidance of God.

2. The Levels of Operations of God's Revealed Law of Life

The law of life revealed by God is translated into six levels of operations within the life of an individual and also society, namely:

i) The level of belief and faith which has the heart of man as the locus or target of operation. The heart is the "king" that controls the mind and body of man. Though the mind is the seat of knowledge and wisdom and also the organ that considers and formulates what is good, beneficial, truthful and necessary and what is bad, harmful, false and useless, but it is the heart that finally decides what line of action a man will take. For instance the mind of a man through the acquisition of information and knowledge, may know that abuse of drug, cigarette smoking and consumption of alcohol are injurious to the body, but if the heart is inclined and motivated towards them, he will indulge in them anyhow. So the all-powerful heart of a man must be the first to be implanted with faith and conviction of the existence of God the Creator (*Khāliq*) of the whole creation (*makhluqāt*). The heart of man must be convinced that God created this creation which includes the whole universe and man, for one sole purpose i.e. to know and acknowledge God the Creator, because by knowing Him, he will get benefit from the knowledge, as attested by the word of God in the Holy Tradition (*Hadīth al-Qudsiyy*):

*"I am a Hidden Treasure, and I desired to be known, so I created creation so that I might be known)"*²

² S. M. Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, K. Lumpur, 1978: 77, Uthman al-Muhammady, *Peradaban Islam*, Kota Bharu, Pustaka Aman Press, 1976: 48.

God is the source of all goodness and perfection. One aspect of His attributes is the Beauty aspect or *Jamāl*, that is the aspect of His attributes which He appears in the guise of Gentleness, Mercy, Beauty, Generosity, Love, Forgiveness, Bestowal and Beneficence. Because God possesses these attributes, the existence of every individual creature is a matter of His immediate concern; He never fails to look after the welfare of His creatures. Man's response to this relationship as one of the creatures of God is love, devotion and the desire to get closer to that light of His Goodness and Perfection. The more a man gets closer to God, (the closest station (*maqām*) was achieved by Prophet Muḥammad s.'a.w during his Night Journey and Ascension (*al-isrā' wa al-mi'rāj*) when he came into the presence of God Almighty), the more he is connected and thus benefiting from that Hidden Treasure of God in the aspect of His Beauty attribute, which will in turn bring to man sheer joy, happiness, peace and tranquility. An imperfect example of this experience is when a man is confronted with a beautiful and peaceful scenery, his inner self is in a way transported into that scenery, which causes him to experience that beauty, peace and happiness within himself as if he is part of that beautiful scenery. The truest example of this experience is when in the Hereafter God reveals Himself to man in His utmost form of Beauty and Perfection, man will be completely absorbed into that vision and he will experience the highest form of sheer joy, happiness, bliss, satisfaction and tranquility.

ii) The level of formalised ritual acts of devotion aims at man's body, mind and emotion. Man has a dual aspect but integrated into a unified self. He is both body and soul. He is at once physical and spiritual, possessing both a higher rational spiritual self which came directly from the Divine Spirit as mentioned in the Qur'ān (32:9): "After He (God) fashioned him (man) then He breathed into him of His Spirit." This is the self that inclines man towards goodness. Then there is another self; the lower bestial self which under the influence of forgetfulness and uncontrolled passion may incline him towards base animalistic nature of selfishness, egoism, greed, avarice, vengeance, vainglory, haughtiness and etc. In order to subdue and redirect these evil and destructive nature,

man must undergo through certain formalised physical, emotional and intellectual acts of devotion which are in a way exercises and habituation that aim to discipline and accustom man's body, mind and emotion into submitting to the law and order of God.

Such training and exercises are in the forms of:

- a) contemplation, meditation and remembrance of God's attributes, power, creation and deed or *dhikrullāh* (daily preferably after every prayer),
- b) prayers or *ṣolāt* (five times daily at fixed times),
- c) fasting or *ṣawm* (30 days annually in the month of *Ramaḍān*),
- d) payment of poor-due or *zakāt* (once yearly), and
- e) pilgrimage to Mekkah or *ḥajj* (once in a life time).

Remembrance of God and prayers (*dhikrullāh* and *ṣolāt*) have the strongest effect since they are performed five times daily at five strategically located times of the day. They are the dawn or *fajr* prayer to start off the day by asking God's blessing and guidance, the midday or *zuhr* prayer the much-needed rest and revitalization after the whole morning's labour, the mid-afternoon or '*aṣr* prayer, marking the end's of the day's labour and followed by rest and recreation, the sunset or *maghrib* prayer, marking the end of the day and the start of the night, and finally the starting of the deep night or '*ishā*' prayer, followed by the much-needed rest or for meditation of the night. Hence, prayers are like time table that sets man's daily routine and custom on a very well-structured system of activities and behaviour that form a kind of fortress safeguarding man from evilness from within and without.

iii) The level of social interaction and relationship or the *mu'āsharat* within the family, among the neighbours, the community, society, friends, acquaintances, guests, visitors and even strangers. All these relationships and interrelations are governed by rights, duties and responsibilities, and also by proper conduct and decorum. The most basic principle of social interactions is always to fulfill the right or *ḥaqq* of others to the best of one's ability, but never to demand one's right upon others. The idea behind it is that Islam teaches man always to be giving and never to be asking and

demanding. By this manner, the feeling and atmosphere of love, affection, care, friendliness, neighbourliness, gentleness, civility, graciousness, generosity and humbleness will be inculcated and nurtured within the family, the community and the society.

iv) The level of economic, administrative, legislative, judicial and political dealings, and in the transactions of business, contracts, agreements, loans, trust etc. or the *mu'āmalāt*. In this level of operation, very specific rules and regulation are used to govern and administer these dealings and transactions, so that goods, services and other amenities of life are made readily available to everyone in a proper, orderly and fair manner, without fraudulence, crookedness, oppression and injustice.

v) The level of ethics and morality or the *akhlāq*. This level forms the flowers and the fruits, i.e the end result of all the other previous levels of operations described above, because the test of success of all the other operations are actually in the making of a good man; a man with high ethical and moral values and with an upright and noble character that becomes the source of benefit and goodness to other fellow human beings and other creatures.

In Islam ethics and morality acquire both a social meaning as well as an ontological meaning, which are couched in three related terms from the same root word *khalāqa* "to create", viz.

- a) *akhlāq/khuluq* "the good moral conducts" to be imbued, practiced and actualised by man,
- b) *makhliūq* "the (fellow) creatures" which are the beneficiaries of the good moral conduct of man,
- c) *Khāliq* "the Creator/God" to whom all acts are devoted for His acceptance alone so that one may actualize all His beautiful and sublime moral and ethical attributes such as Merciful (*Rahmān*), Compassionate (*Rahīm*), Bountiful (*Karīm*), Clement ('*Afw*), Forgiving (*Ghafūr*), Loving (*Wadūd*), Forbearing (*Ḥalīm*), Provider (*Razzāq*), Just ('*Adl*), Grateful (*Shakūr*), Gracious/Refined (*Latīf*), Bestowal (*Wahhāb*), and etc.

Hence, when man inculcate within him the good moral conducts and noble ethical values, he is said to be assuming the beau-

tiful sublime moral and ethical attributes of God who possesses them in their totality. To the extent that man assumes as many beautiful moral attributes of God, he gets that closer to assume the image of the beautiful (*jamāl*) aspect of God's attributes. This is the meaning of the belief in Islam (basing on a *Hadīth* mentioned in Bukhārī), that Prophet Adam 'a.s and hence all his progeny, were created in the image of God ('*alā sūratihī*), not in the physical anthropomorphic sense which the Qur'an denied emphatically "There is none like unto Him (God)" (112:4), but in the sense as what the Prophet was reported to have said "Assume the [beautiful] moral character traits of God" (*takhallaqū bi akhlāqi Allāh*).³ It is in this aspect of beautiful sublime moral and ethical traits that man was created upon God's image and able to actualize the fullness of his theomorphic nature. When man actualizes his full potential reality, then he assumes the status of the absolute slave of God ('*abdullāh*), that is realizing the fullness of that beautiful (*jamāl*) aspect of God's attributes in himself, and at the same time he becomes the vicegerent (*khalīfatullāh*) dispensing love, care, generosity, kindness, charity, forgiveness, forbearance, justice, and etc. to all God's creatures with absolute sincerity only to please God. And in so doing he derives the fullest pleasure, joy and happiness of giving and serving, because he has actualized the reality of his true self. When the Prophet was asked "Which part of [religious] faith or *īmān* is most excellent?" He replied "A beautiful moral conduct." He also said that "The most perfect of the believers in faith is the most beautiful of them in moral conduct." He further said that "I was sent (as a Prophet) to perfect the beautiful character traits in man." And in the person of the Prophet the highest level of achievement of the actualization of the beautiful moral and character traits was found, as attested by the Qur'an (68:4) "And surely you have the sublimest moral character."

vi) The level of intention and sense of purpose or *niyyah* embedding in every good deed and action performed by man. If the

³ Chittick, W. C., *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, Albany: State University of New York, 1989:283; M. Uthman al-Muhammady, *Peradaban Dalam Islam*, 1976: 49).

level of moral and character traits can be considered as the flowers and the fruits of every good action and deed of man, then its intention, seen in a similar analogy, is "the aroma and taste" of those flowers and fruits. If the intention is sincerely for the sake of actualizing the potential reality of one's true self by assuming the beautiful sublime moral character traits of God and thus in actual fact seeking only to please God, then in every such deed and action there will emanate sweet fragrance, aroma and delicious taste. If on the other hand those good deeds and actions are done for the sake of personal vested interest e.g. for fame, praises and personal glory, for material benefit and profits, and the like, then their smell and taste will be indeed very foul and bitter and hence of no spiritual value in the upliftment of one's moral character and true inner self.

The six levels of operations of Islam described above, clearly cover every aspect of human life and activity, and a man or a society that practices them will naturally acquire a hue, a colouring or a characteristic (*ṣibghah*) which is distinctively Islamic i.e. God-awareness and God-submissiveness or *ṣibghatullāh*, as mentioned in the Qur'ān (2:138) "[Islam] takes its hue from Allāh (*ṣibghat-Allāh*). And who can give a better hue than Allāh. It is He whom we worship."

The four basic teachings of Islam seen holistically, and the six levels of operations discussed above, also form the basis of Islamic civilization; a civilization that has its essence based on ethical principle and moral code of conduct geared towards the flowering of positive human qualities; a civilization which is human-centred rather than material-centred i.e. the achievement of development and progress is measured in the level of upliftment of the human self rather than in volumes and values of material acquisition and production.

3. The Basis of Islamic Civilization

The contention of this article is that the basis of Islamic civilization that had triggered the golden age of Islam is really the human factor namely the character, attributes, attitude, moral and ethical val-

ues, sense of purpose and intention, the objective, vision and ultimate goal of life, the mind, learning and thought, behaviour and conducts of life of the Prophet s. 'a.w and of those who were directly or indirectly connected to him. The people who were connected to him were his companions r. 'a. comprising the first generation of Muslims who were directly educated and nurtured by the Prophet in Mekah for 13 years and in Madinah for 10 years, followed by the second generation of Muslims (*tābi'ūn*) who were educated by the companions of the Prophet, and the third generation of Muslims (*tābi' al-tābi'īn*) who were educated by those who were educated by the companions of the Prophet. Hence the fountain head of these noble human attributes and characters was really the Prophet himself who was moulded and educated directly by God as attested by his saying "My Lord educated me and so made my education most excellent)."⁴

This form of civilization has its essence based on human qualities rather than materials and technology, the latter acting only as augment and complement towards the development and perfection of that human self. This is in lieu with the assertion of Reverend Dr. Albert Schweitzer, winner of 1954 Noble Peace Prize:

"Civilization is the sum total of all progress made by mankind in every sphere of action and every point of view, in so far as this progress is serviceable for spiritual perfecting of individual and of the community."⁵

4. The Reality of Human Development, Progress and Happiness

Islam views real development and progress to occur within the reality of the human self which is the soul that originates directly from the Divine Spirit, as mentioned in the Qur'ān (17:29) described above. It is this part of him, though created, which is eter-

⁴ S. M. Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam*, Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1991: 26.

⁵ Schweitzer, A., *Ethics and Civilization*, London: Adam & Charles Black, 1923/55: vii.

nal that will journey on, after his physical body atrophies and dies, to move towards his final destiny to meet His Lord and render complete account of all his deeds, actions, motives and intention during his sojourn in this world.

The development and progress within the human self is the development and progress of his inner qualities constituting his soul or *nafs*, commencing from the lowest station of the self, progressing towards the highest and final level of achievement. The Qur'ān mentioned three stations (*maqām*) of man's inner qualities, viz.

i) The station of the self that incites him to evil or *nafs 'ammārah bi al-sū'* (Qur'ān, 12:53), which is the bestial nature that seeks to gratify only his self-centred, egoistic, greedy, avaricious, covetous and selfish desire without much sympathy or due care towards other parties (unless enforced by means of legal/violent sanctions, of which even then he constantly tries to outwit). This is actually the station of unethical inhuman nature of man in which if he persists, it will be the cause of his downfall, as mentioned in the Qur'ān (95:4-5), "Surely We created man in the best of form. Then We reduced him [by his evil and unethical actions] to the lowest of the low, save those who have faith and do good deeds; theirs is a reward unfailing." Hence the struggle to break out of this station, to tame and guide this bestial and inhuman nature, to move towards the next station, is, as alluded to by the Prophet, the greatest struggle of man (*al-jihād al-akbar*), because it is against the enemy within.

ii) The intermediate station i.e. the reproaching self or *nafs lawwāmah* (Qur'ān, 75:2); the self that recognizes what is right and what is wrong and what is good and what is bad. Through constant struggle and striving to overwhelm his bestial nature, by means of education and socialization which in Islam involves two concurrent processes viz. the imparting of knowledge or *ta'lim* and the inculcation of ethics and morality or *ta'dīb*, man progresses from the first station and arrived at this intermediate station. However, due to his inability to subdue completely his bestial inhuman nature, he is constantly in a state of vacillation between the posi-

tive and the negative aspects of his self; the good and the bad, the right and the wrong. And yet the knowledge of the true nature of his positive self acts as his conscience that reproaches him whenever he indulges in those bestial inhuman desires.

iii) The station of the tranquil sublime virtuous self or *nafs muṭma'innah* (Qur'ān, 82:27), the self that fully actualizes the beautiful aspects of God's attributes, that draws man nearest to the Sublime Presence of God (*ḥaḍarāt Allāh*), and that promulgates virtues and disseminates benefits and goodness to all fellow creatures. This station is achieved through constant struggle and utmost striving, by means of seeking knowledge and nurturing moral excellence through good deeds, by which processes, positive ethical principles are inculcated into him which leads him to the achievement of the pinnacle of his ultimate self, which is actually the reality of his self that traces its origin to the Divine Spirit.

This is the true meaning of change, development and progress in respect of man's life, history and destiny, whereby his inner self i.e. his soul develops, progresses and finally achieves the actualization of his ultimate reality eternally, in which form he shall finally return to his Creator or Originator completely pleased with God who is also reciprocally pleased with him, as attested by the Qur'ān (89:27-30) "O the tranquil and virtuous soul. Return to your Lord well-pleased (with Him) and well-pleasing unto Him. Enter you then among my devotees. Yes, enter you into my heaven."

Prof. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, a contemporary Malaysian Muslim scholar, has put it very aptly on the subject of human progress:

"Development consists not in 'activating and making visible and concrete what is latent in biological man', because man is not merely a biological entity: humanity is something much more than rationality and animality... The term 'progress' refers to a definite direction and it is aligned to a final purpose that is meant to be achieved in worldly life. If the direction sought is still vague, still coming into being, as it were, and the purpose aligned to it is not final, then

how can involvement in it truly mean progress?⁶

As described above the reality of man is his theomorphic nature, his selfhood that is created in the image of the beautiful aspect of God's attributes, and the forward progress to and the achievement of this ultimate, definite and final goal constitutes his final success, joy and happiness. Change and development in spatio-temporal, material and organizational aspects as a result of advancement in knowledge, science and technology are considered part and parcel of the overall human development when they augment and complement the inner development of that human selfhood to achieve his ultimate reality.

However, if the material and physical development impedes the development of man's inner selfhood, and instead enhances his unethical nature and negative moral conducts which give rise to inhumane attributes; physical development such as massive urbanization causing enforced large-scale human mobilization, displacement, isolation and disintegration of family, community and social relationships; extreme competitiveness for limited opportunities of resources and goals that induces selfishness, hatred, envy, hardness, vindictiveness and other inhumane characteristics; surely such phenomena as what we are seeing abundantly now, is no development at all. They are the causes of the deterioration and degradation of humanity! On the other hand competing to develop the human inner self so that he may actualize his reality, is a competition for opportunities that has no limited resources and goals; the resources and the goals are as many as human beings themselves, and the height of achievement is as high and noble as the most beautiful and sublime aspect of God's attributes.

The Qur'an says "... and compete with one another in goodness (*khayrāt*). Those are the righteous." (3:114). "And these competitions for doing good deeds, surely they will outshine others." (223:61). "Vie with one another for forgiveness from your Lord... Those who spend [their wealth] in ease and in adversity, those

⁶ S. M. Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1995: 38-39.

who control their wrath and are forgiving towards mankind, verily Allāh [the Lord] loves the righteous." (3:134-135).

This spirit of competition in goodness as inculcated by the Prophet s. 'a.w. among his companions has produced the best generation of the Muslims. The examples of their fine humane qualities may sound like myth and fables among our modern society besets by unethical values and negative character traits such as selfishness, egoism, cynicism, harshness, cruelty, vindictiveness, envy, hatred, greediness, haughtiness, pride, prejudices, and etc. Their love, care, compassion, sympathy and concern for others and their self-sacrifice, kindness and generosity towards their fellow creatures, are so rarely found now that they may seem to be ideals only fit to be labeled as wishful utopianism. A few examples of their fine ethical qualities can be illustrated in the following episodes:⁷

a) 'Umar al-Khaṭṭāb r. 'a., a close friend of the Prophet, has related that one day a man came to the Prophet requesting for some monetary help. The Prophet expressing his inability to give him anything at that moment, told the man that he can purchase something from the market in his (Prophet's) name and he (the Prophet) will pay off the credit as soon as some money come to him. This was possible because the Prophet was known for his trustworthiness who was called as the "trusted one" (*al-amin*) by his community.

b) In another episode the same 'Umar r. 'a. has related that once the Prophet asked his companions to give to charity for the purpose of striving in Islam, as much as they can afford. By chance 'Umar has quite a bit of wealth with him then and hence he thought he would surpass Abū Bakr (another close friend of the Prophet) who before this was always in the forefront in charity. He therefore brought to the Prophet half of his total wealth to be given as charity. However when Abū Bakr came, he brought with him all his wealth to be given as charity. The Prophet inquired what did

⁷ Khandhalawī, M. Yūsuf, *The Life of the Companions*, New Delhi: Idara Ishaat-e-Diniyat, 1985.

he leave behind for his wife (all his children by then had grown up). Abū Bakr's reply was "only the Lord and His Prophet (i.e. complete reliance on the Lord as the Supreme Provider and Sustainer, and His Prophet as the best guide and advisor in the matter).

c) Another episode related by Abū Hurairah r. 'a., another close friend of the Prophet, mentioned that a man came to the Prophet in dire need of sustenance. On discovering that he has nothing to offer to the man, the Prophet inquired among his companions whether any one of them was willing to take the man home as his guest for the night. Thereupon a man stood up and offered his service. On reaching home the man told his wife to prepare meal for the guest. However his wife told him that there was only sufficient food for the family. The man requested the wife to bring out everything for the guest and the children could have whatever left-over. Both the husband and the wife remained hungry for the night. It was further related that the next morning when the man called upon the Prophet s. 'a.w., he was told that God liked his act of charity so much that the following verse of the Qur'ān was revealed to describe his good deed "... and they prefer others above themselves though poverty was their lot. Hence whosoever is saved from his own avarice, such are they who are successful." (59:9).

The first generation of the Muslims has indeed followed faithfully what was exhorted by the Qur'an in numerous verses to inculcate noble ethical character traits and moral conducts which form the basis of Islamic civilization. Examples of such verses are: "It is righteousness... to spend of their wealth out of love for the Lord, for your kins, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarers and for those who ask..." (2:177), "Kind words and the covering (forgiving) of faults (of others), are better than charity..." (2:263), "Those who spend (freely) whether in prosperity or in adversity, who restrain anger and pardon men; verily God loves those who do good (deed)" (3:134), "O mankind, We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that you may know one another. Verily the noblest among you in the sight of God, is the best in conduct..." (49:13).

Dr. Schweitzer has asserted that there are three kinds of progress that come within the purview of civilization; progress in knowledge and power, progress in the social organization of mankind, and progress in spirituality.⁸ However, underlying and in fact reciprocally interacting with and directing those three forms of progress, to my mind is the progress of the human selfhood towards the actualization of his ultimate reality, which actually gives the full meaning and significance to civilization, because the very purpose of establishing such a civilization is to help each individual human being to strive and achieve this goal of self-actualization i.e. the station of the tranquil, peaceful and sublime self, the pinnacle of human development and progress. It is this meaning of development and progress that is completely lost and forsaken in the phenomena of Western Renaissance, Enlightenment and modernization, as lamented by Schweitzer and others mentioned above, (and through the hegemony of Western colonialism it then spread worldwide including into the Muslim world), which in the opinion of many people, became the root causes of the present world problematic. The manifestations of this symptom may take the forms of uncertainty, self doubt, withdrawal, fear, escapism, neurosis or hatred, pride and prejudices, suspicion, accusation, condemnation, conflicts, violence, wars, and etc., the common human condition occurring almost everywhere in the world now; a condition that was named variously by various scholars as the era of postmodernism, postcapitalism, postindustrialism, the end of history, the decline of nation states or the clashes of civilizations, either between different cultures (Huntington's) or between conflicting waves (Toffler's), and etc. But the basic fact still remains that the root cause of this retrogression and degradation is the human factor itself; the unethical, inhumane and immoral character traits and behaviour of man that have not changed, developed and progressed through the processes of modernization, industrialization and urbanization. In fact those unethical, inhumane and immoral characteristics were strengthened and enhanced by those processes and caused man to regress further.

Hence the effort and the struggle to revive the human factor as

⁸ A. Schweitzer, *Ethics and Civilization*, 265.

the basis of the flowering of human civilization which was achieved during the prestine period of Islamic civilization, is still valid now as it was then, and it will be valid at any point of time because the ultimate goal of human progress is the achievement of that reality of human selfhood; the tranquil sublime virtuous self, which is eternal, immutable and final. Of course the strategies, the methods, the implements, the technology, the organizations and the resources can and must change according to the time, the climates, the levels of intelligentia and the complexities of relationship and interaction.

5. Islamic Civilization, the Flowering of European Civilization and Global Problematique

Islam, as described above, is more than just a body of religious beliefs and rituals. "It is also a system of ethics and ideals encompassing all aspects of human life, the introduction of which has triggered the Islamic civilization".⁹ It is generally accepted that Islamic civilization in the past has contributed quite significantly to the flowering of the European Renaissance which helped Europe to emerge from the dark ages of the Medieval period into the dynamic modern European civilization, as attested by, among others, Phillip Hitti:

"Muslim Spain wrote one of the brightest chapters in the intellectual history of medieval Europe. Between the middle of eight and the beginning of the thirteenth centuries [500 years] the Arabs speaking people were the main bearers of the torch of culture and civilization throughout the world. They were the medium through which ancient sciences and philopsophy were recovered, supplemented and transmitted in such a way as to make possible the Renaissance of Western Europe".¹⁰

⁹ Kettani, M. A., "Science and Technology in Islam", in Ziauddin Sardar (ed.), *The Touch of Midas: Science, Values and Environment in Islam and the West*, Kuala Lumpur: Pelandok Publication, 1988: 66.

¹⁰ Hitti, Phillip K, *A History of the Arabs*, London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd. 1960.

A European (Western) civilization which was powered by its twin engines of growth namely industrialization and capitalism, termed by Alvin Toffler as the second wave civilization¹¹ marked by its smoke-stack industries that turned out consumer products and also machines and tools which resulted in an unprecedented dominion over nature, thus transforming the European nations as the centre of world power that dominated and overwhelmed practically the whole world including the Muslim countries.

The Muslim nation since then has descended from its high pedestal as the leading light of the world reaching its peak in the 8th Century during the Abbasid period when it dominated much of the world, to the present fragmented form that has lost all its dynamism. It has, moreover, been further weakened by internal strifes and differences. In their effort to correct and overcome this grave decline, various Muslim states have tried to emulate the West in science and technology and also in the acquisition of machines and tools. The magic phrase now is "transfer of technology" albeit western technology. "Political ideology, religious persuasion, cultural heritage and historical traditions are willingly sacrificed at the high altar of modernity (i.e. westernization)... Ironically, whereas the rest of the world (including the Muslim countries) are blinded by the dazzling display of Occidental might, the West itself is no longer sure of the fundamental moral forces that sustain the entire weight of the gigantic edifice of its civilization."¹²

This sense of forboding at the present plight of Western civilization was also felt by many Western thinkers themselves, as attested by the following quotations:

"The great expectation of science and technology has proved false. Western civilization has reached a point of crisis which has very clearly been shown in terms of the

¹¹ See Toffler, A., *The Third Wave*, New York: Bantan Book, 1980, and Toffler, A., *Creating A New Civilization: The Politics of the Third Wave*, Atlanta: Turner Publishing Inc., 1995.

¹² Manzoor, Parves S., "Environment and Values: the Islamic Perspective," in Z. Sardar (ed.) *The Touch of Midas*, 1988: 151.

ecological crisis which effects western man on the spiritual level, the emotional level and the level of his inner self."¹³

"Nazi Germany has taught us that the most refined science can be put at the service of the most ruthless cruelty. She showed us the most horrible creature of the evolution of homo sapien: the erudite barbarians he is the final product of science and scientific technology completely divorced from moral values."¹⁴

"Today at the end of this century, we look back through the century's lurid twilight and recall instead bitter years of war and revolution, of violence, atrocities and terror, of new and savage forms of political tyranny and human oppression - a century that abundantly illustrates the depravity of man, the cruelty of institutions, the impotence of reform, the power of irrationality; a century that, as it nears its end, even inspires the gravest forebodings about the survival of the human race itself."¹⁵

Rev. Dr. Albert Schweitzer writing in 1923 a few years after the terrible First War World, has already warned the Western countries:

"The disasterous feature of our civilization is that it is far more developed materially than spiritually... a civilization which develops only on its material side, and not in corresponding measure in the sphere of the spirit, is like a ship with defective steering gear which gets out of control at constantly accelerating pace, and thereby heads for catastrophe."¹⁶

¹³ Paul Kleer, "Challenging the Western Myth," in *Impact International* Fortnightly, vol. 2, n. 8 (8-21 Sept. 1972), pp. 4-5, See Z. Sardar, *The Future of Muslim Civilization*, London: Crom Helm, 1998: 226.

¹⁴ Stern, A., *The Search for Meaning: Philosophical Vistas*, Memphis: MSU Press, 1971: 119-120.

¹⁵ Schlesinger, A. Jr., "A Message to the 21st Century" in *Asahi Shinbun*, *A Message to the 21st Century*, Tokyo: Asahi Intel. Symposium, 1984: 11.

¹⁶ Schweitzer, A., *Ethics and Civilization*: 2.

Ziauddin Sardar,¹⁷ in asserting that the present world “problematic” is definitely the creation of the Occidental civilization, has listed 12 main trends that have given rise to global crisis, basing his argument on such reports as the Ecologist’s a Blueprint for Survival, the Club of Rome’s Limit to Growth and Mankind at the Turning Point, MIT’s study The Predicament of Mankind, J.W Forrester’s report World Dynamics, report of SPRU of Sussex University Thinking about the Future: A Critic of the Limit to Growth and World Futures: the Great Debate, Herman Kahn’s Towards the Year 2000: A Framework for Speculation, and etc., namely:

- a) the increasing negative environmental impact on human activity,
- b) the increasing rate of depletion of renewable resources,
- c) exponential increase in world population,
- d) problems of increasing agricultural production and meeting the food requirements of world’s population,
- e) increasing trends towards modernization and industrialization of practically all human activities,
- f) the increasing trend towards urbanization and growth of the megapolis,
- g) the increasing gap between the developed and developing countries,
- h) the increasing dependence on technology,
- i) increasing trend towards what Herman Kahn has called sensate cultures (i.e empirical, this-worldly, secular, humanistic, pragmatic, utilitarian, hedonistic),
- j) increasing unemployment and underemployment,
- k) innovation stimulated not by real needs but by growth and consumption inequalities,
- l) increasing isolation from nature, and alienation of man from nature, from other men and from himself.

6. The Muslim Predicament in Contemporary World

In the foregoing, the basic teaching, norms and ideal of Islam and

¹⁷ Sardar, Ziauddin, *The Future of Muslim Civilization*: 78.

its actualization in the prestine period has been described, which led to the flowering of a glorious Islamic civilization based on human qualities reaching its peak during the first three generations of Muslims. However, the unethical events, violence, cruelties and terror associated with the Muslims in history and contemporary world is indeed bewildering to the common man, more so to the ordinary Muslims themselves who firmly believed in the goodness and beauty of Islam. The overall image of the Muslims in the contemporary world is indeed a source of predicament and bewilderment to the Muslims themselves, and, undoubtedly, a source of anger, hatred and extreme animosity to the non-Muslims.

The predicament of the Muslims was succinctly expressed in the words of the late Islamic scholar Prof. Ismail al-Faruqi of Temple University, PA, writing in 1982, four years before he was violently murdered in his home together with his wife:

“The world-ummah (community) of Islam stands presently at the lowest rung of the ladder of nations. In this century, no other nation has been subjected to comparable defeat or humiliation. Muslims were defeated, massacred, robbed of their land and wealth, of their life and hope. They were double-crossed, colonized and exploited; proselitized and forcefully or bribefully converted to other faiths. And they were secularized, Westernized and de-islamized by internal and external agents of their enemies. All this happened in practically every country and corner of the Muslim World. Victims of injustice and aggression on every count, the Muslims were nonetheless vilified and denigrated in the representations of all nations. They enjoyed the worst possible image in the world today.”

In the mass media of the world, the “Muslim” is stereo-typed as aggressive, destructive, lawless, terrorist, uncivilized, fanatic, fundamentalist, archaic and anachronistic. He is the object of hatred and contempt on the part of all non-Muslims, whether developed or underdeveloped, capitalist or Marxist, Eastern or Western, civilized or savage. The Muslim World itself is known only for its inner strife and division, its turbulence and self-contradictions, its

wars and threat to world peace, its excessive wealth and excessive poverty, its famine and cholera epidemics. In the mind of people everywhere the Muslim World is the "sick man" of the world; and the whole world is led to think that at the root of all this evils stands the religion of Islam. The fact that the [Muslim] community counts over a billion, that its territories are the vastest and the richest, that its potential in human, material and geo-political resources is the greatest, and finally that its faith - Islam - is integral, beneficial, world-affirming and realistic religion, make the defeat, the humiliation and the misrepresentation of Muslims, all the more intolerable."¹⁸

There are many reasons and factors that contributed to this sad state of affair put foreward by various Muslim scholars. Ismail al-Faruqi has categorized those factors into 3 classes or fronts as described below (with some additional points given by the present writer):

1) Political Front

- a) Through Western colonization [Malacca by the Portuguese in 1511, Manila/Phillipines by the Spanish 1570, Jakarta/Indonesia by the Dutch 1619, Penang by the British 1791, Egypt by the French in 1798, Singapore by the British 1819, Mughal India by the British 1857, Malaya by the British 1874, Egypt by the British in 1882, Libya by the Italian in 1911, Ottoman Empire disintegrated in 1923, etc], Muslim community was divided into about 50 different and in many cases apposing states, with boundary friction and sometimes resulting in armed conflicts and external tension against each other,
- b) Internally, every Muslim nation state is in turn divided against itself, its population being hetrogenous, and one group being assigned hegemony over the other groups by the colonial masters, worsened further by the imports of alien workers or by converting the natives to Western

¹⁸ Al-Faruqi, Ismail Raji, *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Workplan*, Brentwood: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1982:1.

Christianity which necessarily resulted in their estrangement from their Muslim compatriots, which now, goaded by extremism and fanaticism, has taken a turn to the worse with violence and armed conflicts among themselves,

- c) Throughout the Muslim World, colonial administration has destroyed all political institutions in the land, when they withdrew they entrusted the power to the native elites who had already been subjugated and Westernized, thus creating strong waves of conflict and tension between themselves and the traditional Muslim intelligentsia as well as the general Muslim populace.

2) Economic Front

- a) The Muslim community is non-developed and backward. The overwhelming majority of its members everywhere are illiterate. Even in the strategic necessities of life, the staple foods, clothing, energy and hardware, no Muslim state is self-sufficient,
- b) Everywhere colonial [and industrial nations'] interests have been creating consumerist desires and demand for their products, while the needs of Muslims for productive hardware goes unheeded,
- c) When some industries is developed with the colonialists' [and industrial nations'] help, it turns out to be one dependent upon their raw materials or finished components, which they alone supply, thus subjecting the industry to function at their mercy,
- d) Everywhere, through false promise of better living in the cities, the lure of temporary jobs in speculative building-construction and consumer-goods industry, the exploitation of landlords and tax collectors, Muslim farmers were uprooted from their villages, abandoning their food-production farming, and migrating to the cities to live in shanty towns dependent upon imported staple foods, and in their frustration and dissatisfaction, are ready to answer call of any demagogue,
- e) The oil bonanza which God has bestowed upon some

Muslim countries has proven little of the blessing it was supposed to be. Found mostly in scarcely populated lands, the new wealth compelled the governments to follow racist lines, to dissipate the wealth in artificial, cosmetic development of their lands. Indeed the new wealth is so abundant that no such pursuits could exhaust it. Hence it is channeled for "easy and secure" investment in financial markets in the non-Muslim world where it helped them to become stronger instead, [whereas at home it only benefits the few who are in power politically and economically],

- f) Political instability in every corner of the Muslim World makes long term planning and investment too risky for any careful investor. Thus Muslim World areas endowed with potential for significant agricultural or industrial development remain devoid of funding capital; and the wealth which could develop these potentialities into actual prosperity for the Muslim community is channeled elsewhere.

2) **Religio-cultural Front**

- a) The centuries of Muslim decay have caused illiteracy, ignorance and superstition to spread among Muslims.
- b) These evils (illiteracy, ignorance, superstition) have caused the average Muslims to recoil in the bliss of blind faith, to lean toward literalism and legalism or to surrender his spirit to his "*Shaykh*" (spiritual teacher/leader). This has manifested in many cases into extremism and fanaticism, where interpretation of religion is carried to the extreme either in its literal form or its spiritual form, resulting in extreme, bigoted and fanatic behavior and practices in contradiction to the true Islamic teaching which propagates a balance, middle path tempered by moderation and equilibrium in all spheres of life,
- c) A secular system of education was built which taught Western values and methodology. Soon, it began to pour into society generations of graduates who were ignorant of their Islamic legacy. A gap began to develop within the

ranks of the Muslim community, dividing it into Westernizing secularizers on one side and the opponents of secularization on the other, creating internal tension and conflicts and sometimes fermented into violence and killing if goaded by extremist and fanatic groups, which tend to spread into other forms of conflicts as well, such as ethnic, racial, social class, religious, sects, and sometimes upon Westerners who happened to be around.

7. Conclusion

The panacea to this Muslim dilemma and predicament has been put forward by many Islamic scholars. But the basic fact and requirement remain the same, namely the Muslims has to imbue, internalize, actualize and operationalize the whole teaching of Islam at all the six levels of actions, described above. The level of faith and belief in God the Creator, Cherisher and Sustainer, and the belief in Prophets as His Messenger, and the belief in the terminal return and final accountability in the Hereafter, with the heart as the target of operation. The level of formalized ritual acts and devotion targetting the man's body, mind and emotion. The level of social interaction and relationship targetting all social groupings of man. The level of economic, administrative, legislative, judicial and political dealings targetting all cultural groupings of man. The level of ethics and morality targetting the man's behavior, conducts and character traits in relationship with others. And finally, the level of intention and motivation which aims at his sincerity of purpose and purity of intention in all his activites. And for the successful operation of these six levels of operations, as mentioned earlier, true Islamic education, socialization, enculturation and training are needed.