

Discourse Five: Is Islam Still Practicable Today?

Some ask if Islam can govern the human world and answer current needs in the light of modern circumstances and staggering advancements. They maintain that it is time for humankind, which delves into the deepest reaches of space and masters the stars, to throw aside antiquated religious ideas, select a new method for its glorious life, and focus its thought and will on expanding its praiseworthy triumphs.

Are all issues subject to change?

We must first note that even though we naturally like new things more than old ones, this is not true in all cases, and we cannot apply this method everywhere.

For instance, we cannot say that $2 \times 2 = 4$, which humans have used for thousands of years, is now old and must be thrown away. We cannot say that social life, which until now has been established among humans, is antiquated and a new plan must be designed where people live solitary lives.

We cannot say civil law, which greatly suppresses individual freedom, is passé and has exhausted the people's patience, or that, in an age that humanity has mastered space and sends out probes to explore the galaxy; we must open new paths and free ourselves of laws, lawmakers, and law-enforcers.

There is no need to explain how baseless and absurd these statements are. Fundamentally, oldness and newness only pertain to phenomena that are liable to change—things that have the capacity to transform and evolve. For instance, an individual that is one day happy and full of joy may encounter hardships the next day and become sad and dejected.

Therefore, in discussions associated with natural requirements that aim at realism and examine genuine world laws—one of which is whether Islam can direct the human world in the current run of affairs—one must not engage in such poetical thoughts spinning stories of old and new.

Every statement and every detail has its proper place

As to whether or not Islam can direct humanity in the current state of affairs, the question itself is not free of peculiarity. In fact, it is quite surprising upon bearing in mind the true nature of Islam upon which the Qur'anic call is based. "Islam" is the path that the system of humanity and the world's creation reveals.

"Islam" is the code and practice that harmonizes with the singular human nature. Because of its complete consonance with human spiritual and corporeal nature, it provides for and resolves the true needs of humans as opposed to their fancies or desires.

Obviously, the nature and make-up of humankind will remain the same as long as humans are human. Regardless of the time, place, and condition people live in, they will retain their nature. Nature sets its path before us, whether we chose to follow it or steer clear of it.

Hence in truth, the underlying meaning of this question is: if humanity follows the path shown by its nature, will it find happiness and attain its natural aspirations? For instance, if a tree keeps to its natural course—for which it is naturally equipped—will it reach the desired destination of its nature? Clearly such questions are self-evident and skepticism is meaningless in this regard.

Islam is the path of primordial nature, which is perpetually the true course of humankind. It does not vary in different conditions. The aspiration of nature—as opposed to sentimental and irrational desires—are the true desires of the human race and the final destination of human nature is the abode and journey's end of human happiness and beatitude.

In the Honorable Qur'an, God, the Almighty, declares:

﴿فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلّٰهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلٰيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللّٰهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيْمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ﴾

"So set thy face toward the pure religion; it is in accordance with the nature [fitrah] of God upon which He has formed the nature of humankind. There is no alteration in the creation of God. This is the enduring (and true) religion; however, most humans do not know."¹

Turn towards and accept the religion, which is the religion that is the special divine genesis upon which Allah has created people, with resolution and moderation. There is no change in the creation of Allah—it is immutable. This is the religion that can manage the lives of people.

A short explanation: As it is manifest and tangible to us, the various types of beings in the world of creation each have a specific life or existence and a definite course. In the course of their existence, they pursue a precise destination.

Their happiness and bliss is in attaining their journey's end without being blocked by corruptive and degenerative obstructions. In other words, in order to realize happiness, they must follow the course of their life or existence in accord with the provisions of their make-up, without interference, to its conclusion.

A grain of wheat has a specific course in its plant life. In its make-up it has specific apparatuses and mechanisms that activate in special circumstances. It absorbs and consumes substances which it needs to grow and thrive in determined amounts and ratios. Through a precise path, its primordial nature leads the grass of wheat to its goal.

A wheat plant never alters its path, chosen by internal and external factors, in the course of its growth. For example, it would be impossible for it to change its course to that of an apple tree, grow a trunk, branches, and leaves and start flowering.

It is also inconceivable that it might take up the course of a sparrow, grow a beak and wings and fly away. This law governs all types of phenomena in creation and humans are not exempted from this general rule.

Humans also possess a natural and compositional path and a journey's end, which is their perfection, happiness, and bliss. The human composition is equipped with faculties that show us our natural path and lead us towards our true benefit.

Regarding this general guidance that is in effect in all phenomena in existence, God, the Exalted, states:

﴿ قَالَ رَبُّنَا الَّذِي أَعْطَى كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلْقَهُ ثُمَّ هَدَى ﴾

“Moses replied, ‘Our Lord is He who gave each thing its special creation and then guided it towards its benefit.’”²

Also, regarding specific guidance in effect for humans, He declares:

﴿ وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا * فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا * قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا * وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا ﴾

“By the soul and That which shaped it, then inspired it with understanding of its wickedness and virtue. Surely, those who virtuously cultivate their souls are saved and those who keep their souls from virtuous development despair.”³

The difference between Islamic and human laws

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that the true life path of humankind which entails our happiness

and bliss is the course led by nature and fitrah; it is based upon our genuine interests and benefits according to the requisites of our creation and that of the world—regardless of whether or not it accords with our feelings and emotions.

Desires, feelings and emotions should adhere to the guidance of nature and fitrah. Nature and fitrah must not submit to unrestricted desires. The human society, with the feelings and emotions of its people, must found life upon realism not the unsteady foundations of superstitionism and the delusive ideals of feelings and emotions.

This is the difference between Islamic laws and other civil laws. Normal social laws adhere to the desires of the majority of the society (half plus one) whereas Islamic laws conform to the guidance of natural disposition [fitrah]—which reveals the will of the Almighty God. On this base, the Holy Qur'an affirms that lawmaking [tashri‘] and rule [hukm] belong uniquely to the Almighty God. Thus, it declares:

﴿...إِنَّ الْحُكْمَ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ ...﴾

“Rule belongs specifically to Allah...”⁴

﴿...وَمَنْ أَحْسَنَ مِنَ اللَّهِ حُكْمًا لِّقَوْمٍ يُوقِنُونَ ...﴾

“Who is better than Allah in terms of rule for the people of sure faith?”⁵

Moreover, that which rules in normal societies is the desires of the majority or a powerful dictator, regardless of whether or not these conform to truth and righteousness and secure the genuine interests of the society. On the other hand, in a truly Islamic society, righteousness and truth rule and the desires of the people must comply with it.

Here, an answer to another criticism becomes clear. That is, Islam does not agree with the unhealthy temperament of human societies, and those that enjoy unbridled freedom and realize every kind of desire will never tolerate the many restrictions in Islam.

Of course, if we envision humankind in its current condition—where moral corruption has pervaded into all corners of its life and it has become tainted with every kind of wickedness and oppression and is threatened with annihilation every moment—and compare it with Islam, we will not see any kind of congruity between luminous Islam and Stygian humankind.

With the continuation of current conditions as they are, we cannot expect the Islamic movement, which is merely a semblance of Islamic laws, to provide perfect human happiness. This expectation is exactly like us expecting the products and benefits of true democracy in a despotic environment that is democratic only in name, or like a sick person who expects to get well as soon as the doctor writes a prescription.

On the other hand, if we envision the God-given nature of the people and compare it with Islam, which is the religion of nature and fitrah, we will see perfect harmony. And, how would it be possible for fitrah to clash against the path it has determined itself, upon which it guides and knows not any other way?

The struggle against deviation

Certainly, due to the deviation and distortion—caused by unrestraint—that has currently afflicted fitrah, the identifying relationship between fitrah and the path it shows has, to some extent, been severed. Even so, in such unfavorable circumstances, the rational thing to do is to make every effort against the unfavorable situation and pave the way for the future, not to validate deviated nature and completely and forever despair of human happiness and beatitude.

History also testifies that at first every new system or government encounters strong opposition from the previous one and only after much strife, which is usually bloody, it is able to open up a place for itself in the society and gradually make the people forget about its bygone rival.

The democratic system, which is in the view of its adherents the most harmonious of methods, caused the bloody French revolution and similar incidents in other advanced countries before becoming established.

Also, when the communist system, which is according to its supporters a synthesis of advanced human movements and the greatest gift of history, first arose in Russia and subsequently in Asia, Europe, and America, it shed the blood of tens of millions of people before becoming established.

On the whole, the initial resistance and dissatisfaction of a society is not a logical rationale for the depravity and unfoundedness of a system. Thus, no matter what, Islam is alive and may be presented to any society.⁶

1. سُرَاطُ الرَّمَادِ 30:30.

2. سُرَاطُ تَهْرِيزٍ 20:50.

3. سُرَاطُ الْشَّمْسِ 91:7–10.

4. سُرَاطُ يُوسُفَ 12:40.

5. سُرَاطُ الْمَرْيَادِ 5:50.

6. From the annual journal, “*Ma‘rifat-e Ja‘far*”.

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