

Islamic Awakening

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Abstract

Prevailing crises of the Muslim world are consequence of gruesome acts of atrocities terrorism and relentless extremism. These have smudged the holy name of Islam. The catastrophic occurrence of 9/11 aggravated the Muslims' malaise. It miserably added to their frustration and despondency. It misled a minority group among the Muslims and turned them rebellious and revengeful. Unfortunately, this group has a blurred vision and lack of veritable knowledge of the Islamic injunctions. They fail to realize that peace and security cannot be attained through militancy and terrorism. The western countries as well as Islamic countries have condemned their inhuman behavioral pattern. Unlikely, the people in the west have developed an acute sense of hatred against the Muslims at large. In this specific perspective, Minhaj-ul-Quran, one of the laeget NGOs in the world under the selfless leadership of Shaykh-ul-Islam, Prof. Dr. Muhammad Tahir-ul-qadri, has been striving to the utmost for more than three decades to spread enlightenment and revival of real Islamic teachings so as to encounter the multiple grave challenges confronting the Muslim community.

Introduction

Looking at the Islamic world from East to West across continents, it emerges as a house divided against itself. The Islamic landscape is dreary, dull and drab. The bouts of spring have been replaced by long and never ending spell of autumn. The world of Islam is engulfed by deep-rooted crises. As if grappling with the issues of identity, sectarian fissures, pro-elitist power structures and internal violence was not enough, the catastrophic events of 9/11 only served to expand the Muslims' 'area of concern' by enhancing their insecurity, accentuating divides and injecting 'external' threat to their culture, religious values, pluralistic traditions and even political sovereignty. The more the

Muslims were exposed to challenges at foreign policy level in particular geo-strategic world after 9/11, the more cracks appeared in their internal body politic igniting feelings of revenge, defeatism, extremism and at times self-destruction. The Muslim world is devoid of peace both from within and without.

“The contemporary Islamic conscience is in deep crisis. Everywhere, Muslim individuals and societies ask themselves the burning questions. The crisis drags on; no answer seems in sight. How to be faithful to one’s principles while remaining open to the world? How can Muslims deal with their diversity and overcome their multiple divisions? How can Muslim societies create new models of development, education, and social justice? Can the 1,000-year-old Islamic civilization make an original contribution to the concept of cultures and civilizations? The light at the end of the tunnel seems nothing but an illusion.”

Couple this with increasing instances of Islam phobia being witnessed in West and elsewhere as the Muslims are being increasingly subjected to racial and religious profiling and tarred with the brush of terrorism. At the same time, holy personages and symbols of the Muslims including the blessed person of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) have periodically been attacked provoking them into violent reactions. Interestingly, this dark period in the Islamic history is also characterized by the fact that Islam remains the fastest growing religion on the planet. According to one assessment, the Muslims have outnumbered Catholics as the world’s biggest community.¹

What Ails Muslim World?

At societal and individual levels, the Muslim societies appear confused and rudderless. Their intense feeling for their faith and desire to preserve its

¹ Aijaz Z. S. (April 26, 2013). Muslims Need a New Roadmap. *The News*

traditions, values and teaching is matched by an increasing number of cultural attacks from outside. The deepening and widening divide between the modernists or reformists and fundamentalist or conservative sections of Muslim opinion has bewildered the Muslim youth. The situation assumes the dangerous proportions when the Muslim youth living in the western, liberal and democratic societies are confronted with questions on Islam's relevance to the present-day world, its resistance to integration into the western societies and its penchant for dictatorship and unrepresentative modes of governance. These and many similar questions are indeed perplexing for those whose understanding of Islam remains limited arising out of their dependence on their parents' and elders' opinions.

Extremism and terrorism over the last decades has torn apart communities, stoked enmities, put up barriers between people and split humanity apart. How many families; men, women and children have been decimated by these mass killings? How many women have been widowed? How many children have been orphaned? How many children have become destitute and homeless without hope and living without means? To these people, I mean the extremists, terrorists and killers of mankind, human life is expendable and of no value. They see it as their God-given right to kill and exterminate people.

The same human life, which was the most sacred value, has become the least valued. Terrorism has removed smiles from the faces of millions of innocent people of the world. Where once we used to see happiness, there is now only pain and sorrow and nothing else. Hearts have become full of hatred and bodies are burning under the fire of hatred. The hyenas of cruelty have slaughtered the doves of peace. Terrorism has driven human beings apart from each other in order to

create an atmosphere of suspicion, distrust and confusion and to create hatred among them so that they can never get united.”²

The above nicely sums up the Muslims’ response to the contemporary challenges. A look at the Muslim landscape makes one believe that they have run short of innovative and creative ideas to deal with the malaise. The developments happening in a couple of decades in particular have deepened the crises within the Muslim societies. A minority of fringe elements has taken up the banner of rebellion against their own governments as well as others whom they believe to be responsible for what the Muslims are going through. By all accounts and purposes, the Muslim response to the challenges is revenge-driven. It can at best be described as violent and reactive born out of despondency, frustration and hopelessness. The small minority that misinterprets the religious teachings to justify their points of view has in fact tried to hijack the mainstream Muslim narrative. They somehow regard the values of tolerance, moderation, inclusion, pluralism, interfaith dialogue & harmony and peaceful coexistence as mainly the western concepts and alien to their version of Islam.

One defining characteristic of internal violence within the Muslim societies is their total hatred for the Muslim ruling elites whose bad governance, dynastic mode of politics, corruption, loot and plunder have further rendered their societies hollow. The phenomenon commonly known as ‘Arab Spring’ can be interpreted as a strong reaction against the despotism, authoritarianism and bad governance demonstrated by the majority of the Muslim governments. It can be described as ‘change of weather’ and not spring as some western analysts would like to name it.

² Muhammad T.Q. (2011). Keynote Speech Interfaith Moot Titled ‘Peace for Humanity Conference held at Wembley Arena, London

The question arises here: Is militancy and employment of violence an effective way to inspire Islamic awakening? Can revenge-driven response be sufficient to cater to ever-increasing challenges in political, intellectual, cultural, social, economic and civilizational domains?

“At the heart of Muslims’ decay and decline is the limited nature of their vision and inability to adapt themselves to the demands of a fast evolving world. There was a time, for a thousand years, when Arabs and Muslims led the global march of progress and ideas. Who can ignore the west’s immense intellectual debt to Muslim philosophers and scholars in every sphere of knowledge? If Muslims had restricted themselves to a narrow vision of their faith and what it expects of them, they would not have conquered the distant frontiers of the known world. There was a time when seekers of knowledge from around the world came to the Muslim lands to universities and springs of wisdom like Dar Al-Haikma in Baghdad. Where are such centers of knowledge today? How many universities from across the Muslim world figure in the world’s 50 or 100 best”³

As the Muslims look towards their leaders and scholars for answers to contemporary questions, unluckily there are no easy and readily available responses. That leaves them more baffled, as they grow further unable to comprehend the place of modernity in Islam and make sense of a world, which is undergoing dynamic changes dictated, by globalization and western concepts of liberalism, democracy, and socio-economic empowerment. For a common Muslim, the problem does not merely relate to his or her personal beliefs or creed, it is more systematic as Islam’s capacity to offer solution to economic and political challenges is questioned in a world where capitalism remains unrivalled

³ Aijaz Z. S. Op.cit

as an integrating economic order and forces of free market economy get stronger in free democracies.

At the heart of the Muslims' growing predicaments is their narrow, conservative and literalist interpretation of religion. The preoccupation with the form has often ended up destroying the essence of the message. Larger and overriding goal of what Islam stands for has been lost due to sectarian constructions of religious teachings and injunctions. Scholar has rightly noted:

“The most visible and most serious signs of the crisis of the contemporary Islamic conscience can be found in the inversion of means and ends. The obsession with norms transforms them into an ultimate goal; they are no longer a means to an end, but the end itself. The essence is forgotten”⁴

The accentuation of sectarian tendencies in the Islamic world can be explained by their internal turf wars to extend their areas of influence as well as inability to restructure religious education along modern lines. For example, in the Pakistani context, sectarian violence has been directly or indirectly linked to religious seminaries and sectarian ideology they have been built along.

In order to settle the issue wherein a difference of opinion is not legal and where it is allowed, two points need to be kept in mind:

(1)- A difference of opinion should not penetrate into the fundamental and definitive issues of religion.

(2)- If a difference of opinion finds its way to the secondary and speculative matters of religion, there is no harm. It is also because in the history of the Muslim community, a difference of opinion never resulted in hostility,

⁴ Tariq R. Opinion-Editorial Published in Gulf News (Y.N)

antagonism and ill will. Today, unfortunately, the state of affairs among the Muslims is too pitiable to be mentioned.⁵

The bifurcation of education into religious and worldly education has served to deepen divide in Islamic societies as those having secular education have little understanding of religion and those equipped with religious sciences are not able to adapt themselves to demands of modern-day life. It explains why interpretation of religious injunctions has been narrow-minded without recourse to broader issues of life dealing merely with rituals.

Minhaj-ul-Quran International & Islamic Awakening

Minhaj-ul-Quran International, one of the largest NGOs in the world, has been engaged in efforts to promote peace, interfaith dialogue, tolerance and moderation in the world for last more than three decades under the leadership of Shaykh-ul-Islam Dr Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri.⁶ The organization was founded by Dr Qadri to spread enlightenment and revive real Islamic teachings in the society. It has so far established hundreds of schools, colleges and a university in Pakistan that are engaged in imparting both religious and secular education together, something our mainstream education system has been devoid of. These institutions focus on character building of their students instilling in them the sense of critical inquiry.

Shaykh-ul-Islam has authored hundreds of books and delivered thousands of lectures on various aspects of Islam including modern-day issues. Some of his writings such as “Fatwa on terrorism and Suicide Bombings, Islam on Mercy and Compassion, Muhammad (PBUH): The Merciful, Muhammad (PBUH): The

⁵ Hussain. M. Q. (2013). Pakistani Youth’s Role in Preventing Dissemination of Pro-Violence Ideology Based on Religion, Retrieved From <http://www.youth.com.pk/en.php?tid=22187>
Retrieved on 30 April 2013

⁶ www.minhaj.org

Peacemaker, Peace, Integration and Human Rights, Islam & the People of the Book, Jihad and World Abodes, Human Rights in Islam, Non-Muslims' Rights, Women Rights, Children's Rights, Old Citizens' Rights, Collection of Prophetic Traditions on Divine Mercy, Philosophy of Human Rights and Properties, Jihad: Perception & Reality; Islam on Cohesion & Integration; Islam on Women's Rights; Islam: A Religion of Moderation; Islam on Counter Extremism; Islam on Interfaith Harmony; Islam on Peaceful Co-existence; Islam on Non-Coercion; The Harmonious Way of Calling to Islam's Peace Programme; The Three Grades of Islamic Faith: Islam, Iman and Ihsan; The Sanctity of Muslim Blood, The Excellency of Morality, The Reality of Spiritualism, How to End Sectarianism; Quranic Philosophy of Benevolence; Teachings of Islam Series: Peace and Submission; Teaching of Islam Series: Faith; Teachings of Islam Series: Spiritual & Moral Excellence" are ground-breaking works of lofty intellectual standards that awaken among the Muslims a consciousness to reconnect to original teachings of Islam. They seek to bring about the paradigm shift in them changing their view on and of life and its issues.

Besides the written work, MQI has organized hundreds of workshops, seminars and de-radicalization programs aimed at sensitizing the Muslims including women and youth to the real teachings of Islam. 'Peace for Humanity Conference' and a series of Al-Hydaya Camps held under the banner of MQI in UK and other parts of the world and addressed by Dr Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri have been termed as effective contributions to peace and interfaith dialogue. These events attracted thousands of the Muslim youths living in Europe and elsewhere.

A grand Peace Education Program being run by the MQI is aimed at production of peace activists, peace preachers, peace leaders, peace makers and

ultimately peace ambassadors who advocate the Islamic teachings of integration, pluralism, harmony, and peace in a world being driven apart by inter-societal and intra-societal rifts. Conflict resolution is a special area of work done by Minhaj Reconciliation Council, a subsidiary of MQI working in Europe and other parts of the world.⁷

What is Needed for True Awakening?

The Muslim world is in a serious crisis. It lacks both the vision and leadership to steer it out of uncharted waters on to safe shores. The crises we talked of in the preceding lines are multi-faceted. The challenges cannot be and should not be approached from a defeatist mindset. This is not going to work simply. The tendency of attributing blames to others for faults of your own should end now. There has to be dispassionate analysis of the Muslims' strength and weaknesses. A SWOT analysis can come in handy here.

“The crisis is acute. To resolve it, there must be an awakening, a renewal and a revolution in our way of thinking.”⁸

Revenge driven response, which has been on offer here, only reflects the Muslims' inability to adjust with the reality and have a long hard look at what ails the Ummah. Militancy, terrorism and extremism are bound to work against them.

Ten Years' Programme of Action devised by the OIC's Commission of Eminent Persons to meet the challenges facing the Muslim Ummah has rightly identified the problems facing the Muslim world:

“The Muslim World is faced with grave political, socio-economic, cultural and scientific challenges with implications for its unity, peace, security and development. OIC Member States would need to cooperate decisively in order to

⁷ www.minhaj.org

⁸ Tariq R. Op.cit.

face these challenges and to take necessary initiatives to overcome them. It has therefore become imperative for them to take joint actions within the framework of the OIC, based on common values and ideals so as to revive the Muslim Ummah's pioneering role as a fine example of tolerance and enlightened moderation, and a force for international peace and harmony.”⁹

Concept of Islamic Gradualism: A Way Out of Multiple Challenges

The best way to deal with the current crises is to invoke the original teachings of Islam and apply them to real life situations. That is how the Islamic world can deal with the scourge of sectarianism, extremism, terrorism and all other serious issues which have been infecting it for quite some time.

Islam is a *Din* (religion) of ease and moderation. Imam Bukhari has narrated the following hadith under the chapter, ‘Religion is ease’:

الدِّينُ يُسْرٌ وَقَوْلُ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ: أَحَبُّ الدِّينِ إِلَى اللَّهِ الْحَنِيفِيَّةُ السَّمْحَةُ.

Din is ease and the Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) said: The most beloved religion to Allah is the true and tolerant (religion of Islam).

The Holy Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) said:

إِنَّ الدِّينَ يُسْرٌ، وَلَنْ يُشَادَّ الدِّينَ أَحَدٌ إِلَّا غَلَبَهُ، فَسَدِّدُوا وَقَارِبُوا، وَأَبْشِرُوا.

Surely this *Din* is ease; no one makes it difficult except that it will overwhelm him. So be balanced, be together, and bear glad tidings.

This is the message of moderation (*wasatiyya*) given to us by the Holy Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him). So being the religion of nature, Islam does not negate the philosophy of human beings. That is why Islam enforces commandments and injunctions gradually because one cannot get the required

⁹ <http://www.oic-oci.org/home.asp>

results without mind making process and training of human beings. This process of gradualism is well established by a Hadith reported by Sayyida Aisha:

إِنَّمَا نَزَلَ أَوَّلَ مَا نَزَلَ مِنْهُ سُورَةٌ مِنَ الْمُفَصَّلِ فِيهَا ذِكْرُ الْجَنَّةِ وَالنَّارِ حَتَّى إِذَا ثَابَ
النَّاسُ إِلَى الْإِسْلَامِ نَزَلَ الْحَلَالُ وَالْحَرَامُ. وَلَوْ نَزَلَ أَوَّلَ شَيْءٍ لَا تَشْرَبُوا الْخَمْرَ لَقَالُوا لَا نَدْعُ
الْخَمْرَ أَبَدًا، وَلَوْ نَزَلَ لَا تَزْنُوا لَقَالُوا لَا نَدْعُ الزَّنا أَبَدًا. لَفُذُ نَزَلَ بِمَكَّةَ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ
وَسَلَّمَ وَإِنِّي لَجَارِيَةٌ أَلْعَبُ: (بِئْسَ السَّاعَةَ مَوْعِدُهُمْ وَالسَّاعَةَ أَذْهَى وَأَمْرٌ). وَمَا نَزَلَتْ سُورَةُ الْبَقَرَةِ
وَالنِّسَاءِ إِلَّا وَأَنَا عِنْدَهُ.

The first thing that was revealed thereof was a Sura from *al-Mufasssal*, and in it was mentioned Paradise and the Fire. When the people embraced Islam, the Verses regarding legal and illegal things were revealed. If the first thing to be revealed was: 'Do not drink alcoholic drinks.' people would have said, 'We will never leave alcoholic drinks,' and if there had been revealed, 'Do not commit illegal sexual intercourse,' they would have said, 'We will never give up illegal sexual intercourse.' While I was a young girl of playing age, the following Verse was revealed in Mecca to Muhammad: 'Nay! But the Hour is their appointed time (for their full recompense), and the Hour will be more grievous and more bitter.' [Q.54:46] Sura Al-Baqara (The Cow) and Sura al-Nisa (The Women) were revealed while I was with him."

Gradualism is one of the laws of nature that Almighty Allah has created. It is also needed in applying the rulings of the Sharia to make a change in people's life. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) stayed in Mecca for thirteen years struggling to shake the false beliefs the Meccan people had adopted. Then, for other ten years, Almighty Allah revealed to him (peace and blessings be upon him) the laws that the Muslims would live by. Gradualism played an effective role

in that regard. That was shown, for example, in prohibiting alcohol, *riba* (interest), and other vices.

Here we give some examples to establish the Islamic principle of gradualism.

Economic Aspect of Gradualism

The Holy Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) did not impose the penal system or other injunctions after migration to Medina. He preferred to fulfil the economic needs of those people who had left their whole in Mecca and empty-handedly migrated to Medina. So he established mukhawwat and every Meccan Emigrant for half share in his Medinan Helper. This was a matchless example of religious brotherhood that Islam presented.

Political Aspect of Gradualism

Similarly, the Holy Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) focused on the political stability after migration to Medina. After resolving the economic issues of the Emigrants, he then concentrated on political situation of Medina. There were different tribes in Medina but they were in a situation of confrontation with each other. So the Holy Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) very wisely combined all of them in the Pact of Medina, which also became the first written constitution of the history of mankind. All Medinan tribes became allies and abandoned war and confrontation. Peace is the first requirement of any state to become a welfare state. Medina became peaceful after this pact amongst different tribes.

Second example of political gradualism is the Pact of Hudaibiyya. The Holy Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) felt that Islam could not reach other tribes and countries unless Meccans became peaceful with Islam. So he signed the Pact of Hudaibiyya with them and the Meccans entered in a peace

treaty with the Muslims of Medina. Then the Holy Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) spread the message of Islam towards other cities and countries.

Forbiddance of Alcohol

Gradualism in applying the Sharia is a wise requirement to follow. Thus we follow Allah's Laws with regard to physical nature and teachings of Islam. Gradualism was observed in enjoining the obligations of Islam such as prayer, fasting, etc., and in forbidding the prohibitions as well.

An important example in that regard is the prohibition of alcohol; the stages taken in that respect are well known by anyone studying the Sharia. Islam did not prohibit alcohol unless the followers of Islam were introduced to a high intoxication, i.e., spirituality and love of Allah and devotion to Islam. First of all, the Companions were mentally prepared about the injurious aspect of alcohol. Almighty Allah said:

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْخَمْرِ وَالْمَيْسِرِ قُلْ فِيهِمَا إِثْمٌ كَبِيرٌ وَمَنَافِعُ لِلنَّاسِ وَإِثْمُهُمَا أَكْبَرُ
مِن نَّفْعِهِمَا.

They ask you about alcohol (i.e., intoxicants) and gambling. Say: 'Major sin lies in both of them and also some (worldly) profit for the people, but their sin is greater than their profit.' [Q.2:219]

Thus Islam introduced the Companions to the sin of intoxicants. Then Almighty Allah said:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَقْرَبُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَنتُمْ سُكَارَى.

O believers! Do not go near Prayer in a drunken state until you are able to understand what you say. [Q.4:43]

It was very difficult for addicted drunken to avoid alcohol, but the intoxication of prayer was so much powerful that they abandoned all worldly intoxicants. At third stage, alcohol was declared forbidden. Almighty Allah said:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّمَا الْخَمْرُ وَالْمَيْسِرُ وَالْأَنْصَابُ وَالْأَزْلَامُ رَجْسٌ مِّنْ عَمَلِ الشَّيْطَانِ
فاجْتَنِبُوهُ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ.

O believers! Wine and gambling and idols mounted (for worship) and divining arrows (for seeking luck—all) are filthy works of Satan. So turn away from them (completely) so that you may prosper. [Q.5:90]

Abolishment of Slavery

Islam also took into account the effectiveness of gradualism when it did not suddenly abolish slavery, which was prevalent in the whole world on the advent of Islam.

First of all, Islam abolished the mental slavery and gave the people open-mindedness. Then Islam established the relationships with slaves and negated the difference between lord and slave. The Holy Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) himself arranged the marriage of his cousin Zaynab with his freed-slave Zayd. Islam awarded such a status, which was fixed with the leaders of the tribes.

After migration to Medina, the Holy Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) made brotherhood amongst slaves and other famous personages. Thus slaves were awarded the brotherly relation with their lords.

The Holy Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) nominated slaves for different political and military responsibilities. Once he appointed the freed-slave Zayd as the head of Islamic army and after the death of Zayd, his son Usama was appointed as the chief of army staff. Abu Bakr and Umar like personalities fought

under the command of these slaves. Once Umar said, 'If Salim, the freed-slave of Huzayfa, had been alive, I would have appointed him as the caliph of Muslims.

Islam gave many rights to slaves like free human beings. And above all, Islam suggested freeing one's slaves as the atonement in many sins and crimes. So this was also an important step to abolish the slavery from the society. Islam did not order to free all slaves at once because the social and financial structure of Arab society was built on the department of slavery. So this was necessary to sustain these structures along with the gradual abolishment of slavery. This was the reason, the Holy Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) stressed in his Last Sermon:

أَرْقَاءَكُمْ أَرْقَاءَكُمْ، أَطْعِمُوهُمْ مِمَّا تَأْكُلُونَ، وَاكْسُوهُمْ مِمَّا تَلْبَسُونَ.

Beware about your slaves! Beware about your slaves! Feed them same what you take yourselves and dress them the same what you dress yourselves.

Abolishing slavery then would have led to economic and social uprising, so, it was wise then to deal with such a problem in an indirect way (by, for instance, regarding setting a slave free as a good deed and making it an expiation for some sins). This implied a gradual abolishing of slavery.

Forbiddance of Riba

Riba was an essential part of Arab society. Islam did not forbid it all of a sudden. Almighty Allah revealed many verses to condemn *riba*. For example,

الَّذِينَ يَأْكُلُونَ الرِّبَا لَا يَقُومُونَ إِلَّا كَمَا يَقُومُ الَّذِي يَتَخَبَّطُهُ الشَّيْطَانُ مِنَ الْمَسِّ ذَلِكَ
بِأَنَّهُمْ قَالُوا إِنَّمَا الْبَيْعُ مِثْلُ الرِّبَا وَأَحَلَّ اللَّهُ الْبَيْعَ وَحَرَّمَ الرِّبَا فَمَنْ جَاءَهُ مَوْعِظَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِ فَانْتَهَى
فَلَهُ مَا سَلَفَ وَأَمْرُهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَمَنْ عَادَ فَأُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ. يَمْحَقُ اللَّهُ الرِّبَا
وَيُرِي الصَّدَقَاتِ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ كَفَّارٍ أَثِيمٍ.

Those who live on usury will not be able to stand (on the Day of Judgment), but like the one whom Satan has made insane with his touch (i.e., damnation). This is because they used to say that trade (i.e., buying and selling) is similar to usury, whereas Allah has declared trade (i.e., buying and selling) lawful and usury unlawful. So, if someone refrains (from usury) on receiving admonition from his Lord, then he can keep whatever he took in the past and his case is with Allah. But those who continued with usury (despite the admonition) would be the inmates of Hell. They will abide there permanently. Allah eliminates usury (i.e., deprives usurious profits of prosperous growth) and multiplies alms gifts (i.e., increases blessings of clean wealth manifold through charity donations). And Allah does not like anyone who is ungrateful and disobedient. [Q.2:275–276]

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَذَرُوا مَا بَقِيَ مِنَ الرِّبَا إِن كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ.

O believers! Fear Allah and write off whatever balance remains of usury if you are believers (true to the core of your hearts). [Q.2:278]

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَأْكُلُوا الرِّبَا أَضْعَافًا مُضَاعَفَةً وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ.

O believers! Do not live on usury doubled and redoubled, and keep fearing Allah so that you may prosper. [Q.3:130]

وَأَخَذِهِمُ الرِّبَا وَقَدْ نُهُوا عَنْهُ وَأَكْلِهِمْ أَمْوَالِ النَّاسِ بِالْبَاطِلِ وَأَعْتَدْنَا لِلْكَافِرِينَ مِنْهُمْ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا.

And (also) because of their taking usury, despite that they were forbidden to do it, and because of their usurping others' wealth wrongfully (they were punished). And we have prepared a torturous torment for those of them who disbelieve. [Q.4:161]

Thus Islam gradually forbade riba and eliminated it from Arab society. The Holy Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) himself declared in his Last Sermon:

وَرِبَا الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ مَوْضُوعٌ، وَأَوَّلُ رَبِّا أَضَعُ رَبَانَا رَبِّا عَبَّاسُ بْنُ عَبْدِ الْمُطَّلِبِ، فَإِنَّهُ
مَوْضُوعٌ كُلُّهُ.

And the *riba* of the age of ignorance is null and void. And the first *riba* which is null and void is the *riba* of Abbas b. Abd al-Muttalib. It is all null and void and forbidden.

Being a divine law, the Muslim world must follow gradualism to get rid of various crises. That is to say, gradualism is to be observed when it comes to applying the rulings of the Sharia in today's life when Muslims have been socially, legislatively, and culturally invaded. If we want to establish a real Muslim society, we should not imagine that such an end could be achieved by a mere decisions issued to that effect by a king or a president or a council of leaders or a parliament.

Gradualism is the means through which such an end can be fulfilled. Gradualism here refers to preparing people ideologically, psychologically, morally, and socially to accept and adopt the application of the Sharia in all aspects of life, and to finding lawful alternatives for the forbidden principles upon which many associations have been founded for so long.

Towards Participatory Model of Governance

The Muslim states need to focus on improving their internal governance. The old methods of running the states have become obsolete. As the Arab Spring showed, people have come to the end of tether and cannot put up with exclusivist governance. The information revolution that swept across the world landscape and transformed the world into global village has served to increase people's awareness. It calls for drastic reforms in the governance structures aimed at including people in the decision-making processes. Unless participatory

democracies do not take root, internal stability of the Muslim world will remain prone to threats.

The Muslim states must renew their commitment to establishing the values of moderation and tolerance, combating extremism, violence and terrorism, countering Islamophobia, and achieving solidarity and cooperation among themselves.

Economic Cooperation

Economic development is the second most important area that needs to be taken care of both at intra-state and inter-state level. There has to be an unwavering resolve to eliminate illiteracy, backwardness, economic disparity and poverty and disease. Economic integration within the Muslim world is not a matter of choice but of compulsion now to accelerate the process of socio-economic growth for collective benefit. As I argued in one of my articles:

“The pace of economic globalization has reportedly been particularly rapid during the past half century. There are three fundamental factors that currently affecting the process of economic globalization and are predicted to continue driving it in the future.

“First, improvements in the technology of transportation and communication have reduced the costs of transporting goods, services, and factors of production and of communicating economically useful knowledge and technology. Second, the tastes of individuals and societies have generally, but not universally, favored taking advantage of the opportunities provided by declining costs of transportation and communication through increasing economic integration.

“Third, public policies have significantly influenced the character and pace of economic integration, although not always in the direction of increasing

economic integration. The previous three fundamental factors, which influenced the pattern and pace of economic integration in important dimensions, include the three significant dimensions of economic integration: human migration, trade in goods and services and movements of capital and integration of financial markets.

“The term economic integration may be interpreted in two senses. The more usual sense is that economic integration constitutes the process by which member states gradually eliminate economic frontiers between themselves, eg, abolishing national discrimination between integration partners, with the previously disconnected national economic entities progressively merging into a larger whole. "In a static sense, it is the situation, in which national components of a larger economic zone function together as one entity."

“The economic frontiers between independent states result in the economies of these states ultimately functioning as one entity, albeit economic integration does not serve as an objective by itself. Instead, it aims to serve higher objective; both economically and politically.”¹⁰

An economic union of the Muslim countries is dire need of the hour. Given the structure of world’s economic relations, the member countries will stand to benefit from such a union. It would also serve as the basis to further concretize the political relations. They will be in a better position of addressing the issues related to globalization, and economic liberalization. The Muslim world sits on one of the vast natural resources in the world. They can optimally use these resources to achieve higher level of development and prosperity. Economic independence so achieved will enable them to withstand political pressures from external sources.

¹⁰ Hussain M.Q. (July 17, 2010). Understanding Economic Integration. *Business Recorder*

Focus on Education

“Effectively improve and reform educational institutions and curricula in all levels, link postgraduate studies to the comprehensive development plans of the Islamic World. At the same time, priority should be given to science and technology and facilitating academic interaction and exchange of knowledge among the academic institutions of Member States, and urge the Member States to strive for quality education that promotes creativity, innovation, and research and development.

“Assimilate highly-qualified Muslims within the Muslim World, develop a comprehensive strategy in order to utilize their expertise and prevent brain migration phenomenon.”¹¹

Knowledge has become a factor of production and an engine of socio-economic growth. The world is increasingly establishing knowledge societies. The Muslim states need to focus on promotion of education as a permanent way of their predicaments. They need to increase their GDP allocations for education.

¹¹ <http://www.oic-oci.org/home.asp>