

One Worthwhile and Trustworthy Path

In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful

“By the Token of Time, through the ages, surely people are in loss, except the ones who have believed and done deeds of righteousness and enjoin one another to the Truth, and enjoin one another to patience”.
(Surah: Al-Asr: 103:1-3)

This very short surah outlines a complete system for human life based on the Islamic fundamental principles. It defines, in the clearest and most concise form, the basic concept of faith in the context of its comprehensive reality.

In a few words, the whole Islamic constitution is covered and, as such, the Muslim community is described in its essential qualities and message in one single verse — the last in the surah. Such is the clear and most expressive style of which only Allah is capable. The great fact affirmed by this surah is simply that throughout the history of humankind, there has been one worthwhile and trustworthy path. This path is, specifically, the one described in the surah. All other ways lead only to loss and ruin.

As the surah says in the outline, this right path means the adoption of faith first, followed by good deeds and exhortation to follow the truth, and to persevere in the face of adversity. What does the adoption of faith then mean? And what is nature and importance in human life?

Faith is the characteristic by which a human being, a small creature with a short lifespan in a limited world, attains closeness to the Absolute and Everlasting Originator of the universe and all that exists therein. The human being, thus, establishes a link with the whole universe, which springs from that One Origin, with the laws governing it and the powers and potentialities it provides.

As a result, he breaks away from the narrow boundaries of his trivial self to the broadness of the universe, from his limited power to the great unknown energies existing in the universe, and from the fleetingness of his life to the eternity that Allah alone comprehends. This bond with Almighty Allah grants people assured power, limitless scope, and freedom. It endows them with real enjoyment of this beautiful life and enriches their life with a mutual friendship with other creatures.

In this way, life becomes a pleasant journey for people everywhere and at all times. From this, an everlasting happiness and intimate understanding of life and creation are derived. This is the invaluable gain, whose lack is an immeasurable loss. Moreover, the qualities of faith are those of sublime and dignified humanity, such as the worship of one God, which elevates people above servitude to all others and establishes within them the fact that all human beings are equal.

Having absorbed this fact that there is only one true God Who possesses infinite power, a believing person neither yields nor bows down his or her head to anyone other than Almighty Allah. Consequently, such a believer enjoys true liberty that spontaneously radiates from within his or her conscience as a result of faith and awareness.

Godliness is the second quality of dignified humanity. This quality determines for human beings the source from which they derive their concepts, values, criteria, considerations, doctrines, laws, and whatever brings them into relation with their Creator, the world at large and with their fellow human beings. Thus, equity and justice replace personal desires and self-interest.

This is also true even when believers find themselves alone, with no one else of their kind to relate to, since they are equipped with values derived directly from their Lord. Those values are indeed the most sound and most deserving of devotion and esteem.

Another quality of faith and dignified humanity is the clarity of the relationship between the Creator and His creatures. Thus, human beings, who are creatures restricted by their own world, are connected with the Everlasting Truth and Infinite Power without any mediator. Such relationship supplies their hearts and souls with light and contentment, and it gives them confidence and purpose. Furthermore, it eliminates from their minds perplexity, fear, and anxiety, as well as any inclination toward arrogance and tyranny over others.

Following the path ordained by Almighty Allah with steadfastness and clarity of vision is the next quality of the community of believers. This must be maintained so that goodness does not come about casually, incidentally or without deliberation, but rather springs from definite motives and heads towards certain aims.

People united for Allah's cause, collaborate. Thus, with a single definite purpose and a single distinguished banner, the Muslim community is united and elevated. Indeed, this is true for all generations that are similarly welded together.

Another quality is belief in the dignity of human beings in Allah's sight. This belief heightens their regard for themselves and restrains them from aspiring to a position higher than that which the Creator has defined for them.

For a person to feel that he is dignified in the sight of His Creator is the loftiest concept one may attain of oneself. Any ideology or philosophy that abases this valuation and ascribes a dishonorable origin to humankind, separating it from Almighty Allah is, in effect, nothing but a position of ignominy and degradation, even though it may not declare so openly.

Purity of motivation is yet another quality of the dignified humanity established by faith. This directly follows the realization of people's dignity in the sight of Allah, His supervision over human conscience, and His knowledge of what people harbor in their innermost souls. Believers feel the awesome presence of God in their innermost consciousness and their awareness makes them tremble with fear, awe, and respect. They, therefore, resort to self-purification and spiritual cleansing.

A refined moral sense is the natural fruit of faith in Almighty Allah Who is just, kind, compassionate, generous, and forbearing, and Who abhors evil, loves goodness, and knows every secret thought. From this stems the believers' responsibility, which is the direct result of their freewill and the fact that Almighty Allah is ever-aware of all that they do and feel. It stimulates within them healthy awareness, sensitivity, serenity, and foresight. Theirs is a communal, rather than individual, responsibility. What is more is that it is a responsibility toward all humanity, pure and simple.

NO COMPULSION IN Islam

There is no compulsion where the religion is concerned. Right guidance has become clearly distinct from error. Anyone who rejects false deities and believes in Allah has grasped the Firmest Handhold, which will never give way. Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. (Surat al-Baqara, 256)

Islam is a religion of love and beauty. Since people who live by Islam see the essence and beauty of this beautiful faith and have a profound belief in Allah, they live in a state of great excitement and enthusiasm. This is an opening of the heart. The source of devotion to Islam is love of Allah. A Muslim prays because of his love of Allah. He performs his religious obligations and lives by the Qur'an because of his love of Allah.

In the Qur'an, Allah describes Muslims in that regard as "those whose hearts turn to Allah" and "those who are unreservedly devoted."

A Muslim comprehends Islam and the might of Allah with his mind and confirms them with his heart. As set out in a definitive pronouncement in the Qur'an, nobody can impose the religion on anyone else by the use of force or compulsion. If attempts are made to force anyone to convert to Islam, that may make him a hypocrite rather than a Muslim. The result is the kind of person who is totally opposed to Islam. Under pressure, the hypocrite will say that he is a Muslim, though in his heart he harbors a conception that is a far cry from the moral values of the Qur'an and is a fraud who harbors hatred for and is inimical to Islam and Muslims.

Every Muslim has an obligation to preach the word of Islam and tell people of its pronouncements and excellent moral values. But this, the Qur'an states, can never be done through compulsion.

The Qur'an may be communicated to Christians and Jews, but if these people insist of living by their own faiths, then there can be no question of forcing them to do otherwise.

For that reason, Allah says, "There is no compulsion in the religion" and speaks of the need for voluntary love. Compelling people to be Muslims is prohibited in Islam!