

the whole human being to a form of existence in which both his spiritual desires and social urges can find a maximum of fulfilment without offending against the rights of others. We are not merely allowed to make the fullest possible use of our God-given life on earth, but we are duty-bound to strive for it. The Quran explicitly rejects every form of self-mortification and exaggerated ascetism. The Prophet (p) said: “There is no world-denial ‘monkishness’ in Islam.”

In the Islamic world-view the ascetic saint is **not** regarded as the ideal type of human. But the person in whom all their inborn intellectual and spiritual qualities – side by side with worldly energies and abilities – achieve their fullest expression not only in saintly thoughts and feelings but also in social, outward deeds. This is the concept of the “well-rounded personality.”

Muhammad (p) was such a personality. Intense God-consciousness was the undercurrent of all that he said & did. He participated fully in worldly events within, or touching upon, his environment. He spent many days in fasting and whole nights in solitary prayer. Nonetheless he was endowed with a gentle sense of humour which invariably caused his followers’ hearts to open to him. He was a sublime thinker, always able to convey deep mystical ideas to those who had the ability to grasp them. At the same time he was able to enjoy, as husband and father, the simple pleasures of family life. He was a practical statesman, an incomparable, incontestable leader of his community in peace and war. Nonetheless he lived humbly and in self-imposed poverty. He was conscious of the fact that the real, literal meaning of Islam is our self-surrender to Allah.

In the teachings of Islam the spiritual and the worldly spheres are fully interwoven so that a neglect of one will unavoidably lead to a decay of the other. Current “religious leaders” have failed to attend to the principal task of guiding the community in the practical affairs of life. They have confined themselves to considerations of mere ritual and eschatology. By such narrow thinking the Muslims have lost their erstwhile ideological impetus and thus all cultural and social creativity.

The cause of the intellectual and spiritual decadence in the Muslim world is **not** to be found in a supposedly overwhelming “worldliness” of the Muslim peoples but, on the contrary, in the

insufficient worldliness – or rather, in the absence of all worldliness – on the part of religious leadership. This failure has resulted in the alienation of the Muslim faith from the Muslim reality.

It is because of our lack of spiritual integrity that we have fallen low. At a time like this, nursery methods are out of place. By “nursery methods” is meant the flattering, cajoling approach of most of our imams, moulanas and platform speakers. They tell us sweet lies about ourselves, assuring us that we are the most superior of all people. False complacency. This is a crime. We should not be flattered at this tragic period of our history. **We need hard blows, hard words and hard truths to make us worthy of Islam.**

We have fallen low. To plead “external circumstances” for all our shortcomings is too cheap an excuse. It is not, however, an excuse but a subtle method of self-flattery – that same self-flattery, false self-satisfaction and laziness of heart which has continuously been our undoing. Is it external circumstances that cause us to utter lies, deceive, to break promises? To break every moral command of Islam? Do you need a quote from the Quran?

Islam is not confined to problems of individual faith and individual morality but affects all aspects of social life. The Prophet (p) said : “Actions are an integral element of faith.” Unless faith is reflected in righteous actions, *especially social actions*, it cannot possibly have any real value.

A spiritual, cultural and socio-political revival of the Muslim world is most intimately connected with and depends upon the possibility of the Muslims’ gaining a new direct insight – a creative insight – into the pristine teachings of Islam. The possibility of such an intellectual and spiritual re-birth of the Muslim community could have a great, positive significance not only for the world of Islam but also for the Christian and other worlds. The mutual relations & interchanges between individual peoples and groups, whether positive or otherwise, are significantly growing. This is true of religious influences as well.

One could indeed maintain that a strengthening or weakening of spiritual convictions within one great religious community exerts invariably, in a thousand imperceptible ways, a corresponding influence on all other – and particularly the more closely-related – religious communities. This influence is not just confined to the area of theology but, rather, touches upon the problem of the continued existence or non-existence of all ethical valuation as such.

Spiritual Convictions

Islam

has more to offer than mere

Spiritual Consolation

A living, dynamic conception of the teachings of Islam offers a real alternative to the crude materialism which threatens to inundate the world. The spirituality of Islam transcends the dualism of spirit & matter. It is the nucleus of an integrated & unified concept of life.

Muslims must come to the realization that the innermost goal of the Islamic faith consists in enabling ourselves to live in spiritual & social security as well as in intellectual & physical dignity. This can only be reached through social cooperation. **Body & soul are not mutually antagonistic.**

THERE ARE TWO QUALITIES THAT HASTEN A PERSON’S SPIRITUAL GROWTH MORE THAN ANY OTHERS: BENEVOLENCE & HUMILITY. AND TWO THAT IMPEDE IT MORE THAN ANY OTHERS: ARROGANCE & GREED.

The idea which has influenced most the climate of philosophical & religious thought is that body & soul are mutually antagonistic, and can develop only at each other's expense. For the soul, the body is a prison and the activities of daily life are the shackles which keep it in bondage & arrest its growth. This has inevitably led to the universe being divided into the spiritual & the secular. Those who chose the secular path were convinced that they could not meet the demands of spirituality, and thus they led highly material & hedonistic lives. All spheres of worldly activity, whether social, political, economic or cultural, were **deprived of the light of spirituality**; injustice & tyranny were the result.

Conversely, those who wanted to tread the path of spiritual excellence came to see themselves as 'noble outcasts' from the world. They believed that it was impossible for spiritual growth to be compatible with a 'normal' life. In their view physical self-denial and mortification of the flesh were necessary for the development & perfection of the spirit. They invented spiritual exercises and ascetic practices which killed physical desires & dulled the body's senses. They regarded forests, mountains and other solitary places as ideal for spiritual development because the hustle and bustle of life would interfere with their meditations. They could **not** conceive of spiritual development except through withdrawal from the world.

It can hardly be denied that what may be described as the "spirit of our times" is more or less antagonistic to all truly religious thinking – with the result that in all religious communities and the world people's faith is perceptibly losing its erstwhile power to shape human society & to give real meaning to ethical goals & valuations.

This general retreat of religious faith & convictions cannot be simply "refuted" by a reference to the fact that in all countries of the so-called "free world" more & more churches & mosques are being built every year. Or that the number of participants in public religious services tend to increase rather than decrease. Such statistical

arguments are **not** very convincing. They prove nothing more than that the people of our time are becoming increasingly conscious of their moral and social perplexity and are longing for new spiritual directives.

This phenomenon cannot by any means be regarded as a sign that the traditional religions as such are growing in strength. The reason is that only a tiny majority of those regular visitors to churches and mosques are really willing to allow their religious convictions to exert a decisive influence over their private and public actions. Or even on their views as to how human society should be arranged. Or what ethical goals humans ought to pursue in their practical endeavours. Anyone who approaches the questions of the present-day role of religion with a modicum of intellectual honesty must admit that less & less people are prepared to concede to traditional religious teachings their one-time right to give direction and shape to social life as well as to guide individual thought. This phenomenon is ultimately responsible for the moral, political & economic confusion of our times. Islam offers a new spiritual orientation within the chaos that threatens to devour so many of the ethical ideas to which we have been accustomed. Islam represents a valid truth and offers the best formulation of this truth.

Let's see how Islam judges the development or decay of the soul. In his capacity as the vicegerent (Khalifah) of God, man is answerable to Him for all his activities. It is his duty to use all the powers which he has been given in accordance with the Divine will. He should utilize to the fullest extent all the faculties and potentialities bestowed upon him for seeking Allah's approval. In his dealings with other people he should behave in such a way as to try to please Allah. All his energies should be directed towards regulating the affairs of this world in the way in which Allah wants them to be regulated. The better a person does this, with a sense of responsibility, obedience & humility, and with the object of seeking the pleasure of the Lord, the nearer will they be to Allah. In Islam, spiritual development is synonymous with nearness to Allah. Similarly, they will **not** be able to get near to Allah if they are **lazy & disobedient, arrogant & irrational**. Distance from Allah signifies the spiritual fall & decay of man.

The decay of religious feeling in our time has no

inner connection whatever with the progress of modern science. It is an undisputable fact that the natural sciences have not been able to disprove the existence of a Conscious, Creative Will behind and above the observable or calculable phenomena of the universe. Outstanding physicists have admitted that the weight of their own scientific findings forces them to conclude that, as the British astronomer James Jeans has so succinctly expressed it, "**the existence of God is a mathematical necessity.**"

The Failure of Religious Leaders: The decay then has another cause. The failure on the part of the religious leaders of all communities & persuasions to show persons how to arrange their practical lives in a manner which might be conducive to their society's material welfare and at the same time remain in full accord with the moral and spiritual postulates of their faith.

The intellectual paucity of these "leaders" (just listen to their asinine speeches) has resulted in a divorce of so many religious tenets from the acute problems and controversial issues and their banishment into a realm lacking all reality.

Islam starts with the premise that all life is God-willed and therefore, positive. Islam implicitly refuses to draw a dividing-line between a person's "soul" and their "body." There is no inherent conflict between their physical, emotional and spiritual requirements. It teaches us that we need **not** despise our sensual urges in order to achieve spiritual fulfillment. **By virtue of our nature, body and soul are to be regarded as mutually complementary, equally valid elements of the entity described as the "human personality."** The fact of their coexistence and inseparability is conceived as the natural basis of human life.

Islam enables us to participate in all manner of worldly activities and to go through the whole range of bodily needs & urges but at the same time to remain conscious of the moral imperatives to which that worldly life & all those urges and emotions must be subordinated. The innermost purpose of the Islamic message consists in guiding

There is no

World-denial in Islam

Prophet Muhammad (peace)

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