Introduction

To live "in the shade of the Qur'an" is a great blessing which can only be fully appreciated by those who experience it. It is a rich experience that gives meaning to life and makes it worth living. I am deeply thankful to God Almighty for blessing me with this uplifting experience fora considerable time, which was the happiest and most fruitful period of my life - a privilege for which I am eternally grateful.

It is a great honour to feel that God Almighty should be addressing me, a humble and insignificant human being, with the blessed and inspiring words of the Qur'an. They lifted my spirits, and I was raised to a unique vantage point from where I could observe the tumult of human life. I was able to gain a new perspective into man's endless quest for the trivial and the mundane, and the clamour for ephemeral and childish pursuits. I was astounded by the extent of our ignorance and our neglect of the Qur'an's sublime and Divine Message which has the power to uplift and entirely transform human perception, experience and history on this Earth.

I had the opportunity to study the Qur'an at length and ponder over its clear and full conception of creation and existence, and their purpose. I could compare the impact of those ideas with that of others put forward by men throughout history. And I wondered: How has life been allowed to degenerate into such darkness and despair, while this rich treasure of guidance and enlightenment is readily available?

I lived in the shade of the Qur'an, filled with appreciation of that perfect harmony and balance inherent in God's creation, between man's actions and the movement of the Universe around him. I was able to see clearly the dire consequences of the conflict between the two. I could see the folly, indeed the catastrophe, to which humanity is being driven by wicked and ungodly miscreants. Pity the human race, indeed!

In the shade of the Qur'an I saw this world of ours expanding far outside what we can see or define. Beyond the visible world lies an unseen dimension which encompasses this life and the life Hereafter. Man's origins extend back into the dim and distant past, and death is not the end of our perennial journey but a passing phase of a long journey that stretches to infinity. 'What we earn in the temporal world is but a small portion of what is our due; the rewards or punishments we miss or escape here we shall duly meet in the life to come, and justice shall be done. Nevertheless, our brief life on this Earth is real. The world we live in is essentially friendly and hospitable, and its spirit interacts fully with ours. It, like us, turns to the One Creator in total submission and reverence.

*''All that is in the heavens and the earth, and their own shadows, prostrate themselves before God, willingly and unwillingly, morning and evening''(al-Ra'*d 13:15).

"The seven Heavens, the Earth, and all that is in them, glorify Him; there is nothing but celebrates His praises" (al-Isra' 17:44).

Such a powerful, outward-looking, all- embracing and optimistic vision inspires utter confidence within the human heart and fills the soul with total inner peace and security.

I lived in the shade of the Qur'an to see man being given the respect and reverence never accorded him by any other philosophy or ideology before or since. Man's raison d'etre emanates

from the Divine spirit God breathed into him. The Qur'än tells us that during the creation of man, God said to the angels,

"When I have fashioned him [man} and breathed into him of My spirit, prostrate yourselves before him" (al- Hijr 15:29; Sad 38:72).

By virtue of this Divine breath, man was destined and commissioned to be God's representative on Earth, where he was given access to, and authority and control over, everything. As a consequence of the high esteem in which man is held, God has ordained that ties of belief and faith are the only worthy and legitimate ties that can bring men together. They override all other incidental ties of nationality, race or ancestry. The Qur'an has also taught me that the believer in the One God is the descendant of a long and noble line of faithful ancestors that include great figures such as Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, peace and God's blessings be upon them all. The Qur'an tells God's Messengers,

"This community of yours is one single community and I am your Lord; therefore fear Me alone" (al-Mu'minun 23:52; see also al-Anbiya' 21:92).

The Qur'an makes it clear that in this long procession which began at the very moment man appeared on Earth, all believers have had to face similar challenges and ordeals: oppression, persecution and threats of annihilation and dispersion. Nevertheless, the procession continues along its well-defined path with a steady step and a calm heart, ever confident that God's will shall prevail and His promise be fulfilled.

"The unbelievers said to their Messengers, 'Return to our religion, or we will banish you from our land.' But their Lord revealed His will to them [the Messengers}, saying, 'We shall destroy the transgressors and let you settle in the land after they had gone. This is for those who stand in awe of My presence and dread My warning' "(Ibrahim 14:14).

Throughout human history believers have upheld similar convictions and ideals, faced similar enemies and threats, undergone similar experiences and enjoyed similar triumphs and rewards.

In the shade of the Qur'an I learned that in this existence there is no room for blind coincidence or haphazard events:

"We have created everything according to a measure" (al-Qamar 54:49).

"He has created all things and assigned everything its appropriate measure" (al-Furqan 25:2).

Everything is there for a purpose, but the true and deep wisdom underlying our existence may not always be apparent to the limited human mind. The Qur'an says:

'It may well be that you hate something in which God may yet make a source of abundant good"(al-Nisa' 4:19). *"It may well be that you hate something although it is good for you or love something although it is bad for you. God knows, whereas you do* not"(al-Baqarah 2:216).

Causes, as known to man, may or may not lead to their usual "logical" effects. Assumptions perceived as essentially inevitable may or may not lead to their conventionally expected consequences. This is so because causes and assumptions do not, in or by themselves, determine actions and events, since cause and effect are both determined by God's absolute will. The Qur'an says:

"You never know; it may be that God will after that brings something new to pass" (al-Taläq 65:1).

"Yet you cannot will except by the will of God" (al-Insan 76:30).

In performing any deed, the believer must prepare and carry out his actions, and leave God to determine the results and consequences of those actions. To trust in God's mercy, justice, wisdom and knowledge is the only safeguard against uncertainty and fear of the future. The Qur'an says:

"Satan promises you poverty and bids you to commit indecency, whereas God promises you His forgiveness and bounty. God is Munificent, All-Knowing" (al-Baqarah 2:268).

In the shade of the Qur'an I have, therefore, felt totally contented and reassured. I could see God's hand in every event and everything. I lived in God's care and custody and His attributes, as given in the Qur'an, came alive before my eyes.

"Who else would answer the constrained when he cries out to Him and alleviates affliction?" (al-Naml 27: 62).

"He is omnipotent over His servants. He alone is Wise and All-Knowing" (al-An'am 6:18).

"God prevails in His purpose, though most people do not know it" (Yusuf 12: 21).

"Know well that God stands between a man and his heart and that unto Him you shall all be gathered" (al-Anfal 8: 24).

"[God} is the doer of what He wills" (al-Buruj 85: 16).

"Whoever fears God, He will find a way out for him, and He will provide for him in a way he had never reckoned on. He who puts his trust in God, God will suffice for him. God is sure to bring about whatever He decrees" (al-Talaq 65: 2).

"There is no living creature which He does not hold by its forelock" (Hud 11: 56).

"Is God not enough for His servant [Muhammad}? Yet they [the unbelievers} would frighten you with those [they worship} instead of Him!" (al-Zumar 39: 36).

"He who God wishes to disgrace will have none else to honour him" (al-Hajj 22: 18).

"Whoever God lets go astray shall have none else to guide him" (al-Ra'd 13: 33).

The destiny of the universe is not left to the mercy of same blind laws. Behind the physical laws there is an active will, the absolute power of God that creates and decides.

I also learned that God's hand acts in all things in a manner that is unique to Him. We humans have no power to either force God's hand or rush His actions or anticipate His will.

The Divine scheme, as outlined in the Qur'an, is designed to operate equally well under all circumstances and at all stages of human development, on the macrocosmic as well as the microcosmic scale. It makes full allowance for man's own abilities and potential for improvement, and gives careful consideration to his strengths and weaknesses. It neither devalues man's role on Earth nor denigrates his status as an individual or as a member of society.

In its view of man, God's scheme is neither idealistic, raising man far above his deserved position, nor does it describe man as worthless or dispensable.

Man is a unique creature, who can, through his natural talents and innate abilities adapt himself to the Divine order of life and so rise to the highest levels of progress and achievement. The Divine

order is a universal plan for the long term. It is neither oppressive nor arbitrary. Its perspectives and prospects are broad and not restricted to the life or interests of one individual: it looks far into the future. Human ideologies, on the other hand, are usually limited to the lifespan of their proponents, who are bent on achieving all their ambitions and settling all their scores within a single generation. This inevitably comes into conflict with human nature, resulting in oppression, conflict, bloodshed, and the destruction of human values and civilization.

Islam adopts a very gentle approach towards human nature, encouraging, prodding, pampering, cajoling, reprimanding and, where necessary, disciplining and restraining. It prefers the patient, caring attitude, confident of the eventual outcome. It is a continuous process of growth and development that can only get better as time goes on. Islam, like the oak tree, starts slowly and grows gradually, steadily overcoming all difficulties, vicissitudes and adversities. There is no need for compromises, half-hearted solutions, or arbitrary or foolish measures. In God's scheme, things must be allowed to take their natural course.

"No change will you ever find in God's way" (Fatir 35:43).

Another feature of the universal Divine order is that it is inherently built on a universal Truth *(al-haqq).* This, again, has not come about by pure chance or as a result of coincidence. God Himself is *al-haqq,* and from Him, as the Qur'an affirms, emanates all existence:

''It is because God is the Truth and all that they [the unbelievers} evoke beside Him is false. He is most High, Supreme" (al-Hajj 22:62).

The Universe was created in Truth: "God has not created all this [the world} save with the Truth" (Yunus 10:5).

Believers confirm this, saying: "Our Lord, You have not created all this in vain. Glory be to You" (al-'Imran 3:191).

Truth is the mainstay of all existence and should the world deviate from the Truch, it would decay and fall apart:

"Had God (al-haqq) followed their (the unbelievers) caprice, the heavens, the earth, and all that lives in them would have surely been corrupted" (al-Mu'minun 23:71).

Hence, regardless of how things may seem, Truth will eventually become manifest. The Qur'an asserts:

"We hurl the Truth against falsehood and it crushes it, and falsehood withers away" (al-Anbiya' 21:18).

Likewise, goodness and righteousness are inherent and permanent in the cosmic superstructure. The Qur'an alludes to this fact in saying:

"He sends down water from the sky and riverbeds flow, each according to its measure, and the torrent bears swelling foam. Likewise from what people melt in the fire to make ornaments and utensils rise similar foam. Thus does God illustrate truth and falsehood. The scum is cast away, while that which is of benefit to mankind remains behind on earth. Thus God does set forth His parables" (al-Ra'd 13:17).

It also says: *"Do you not see how God compares a good word to a good tree? Its roots are firm and its branches reach to the sky; it yields its fruit at all times by its Lord's leave. Thus does God set parables for people so that they may reflect. And an evil word is like a bad tree, uprooted .from the face of the earth. It cannot have a stable position. God will strengthen the believers through the true unshakeable word in both*

this life and the life to come. God lets the wrongdoers go astray. God does whatever He wills" (Ibrahim 14:24-7).

This clear and forceful belief brings infinite reassurance and fills the human heart and soul with peace and tranquility. It reinforces man's trust in Truth, Goodness and Righteousness, and gives the human conscience the dignity and the confidence to transcend the limits of its environment.

My study of the Qur'an has led me to the firm conviction that humanity will see no tranquility or accord, nor can peace, progress or material and spiritual advances be made, without total recourse to God. This, from the Qur'anic point of view, can mean only one thing: the organization of all aspects of human life in accordance with the precepts and directions of the Divine Order as outlined in the Qur'an. The alternative would be corruption, regression and misery. The Qur'an puts it thus:

"If they do not respond to you [Muhammad], know that they only follow their vain desires. And who is in greater error than he who follows his own vain desires and has no guidance .from God? God does not guide the transgressors" (al-Qaas 28: 50).

Adopting the Divine Order is an inevitable obligation on man, without which he would have no faith. The Qur'an says:

'It is not for any believer, male or female, to have any choice in a matter once God and His Messenger pass judgment on it" (al-Alhzab 33:36).

"Now We have set you [Muhammad] on a path which you should follow and do not yield to the desires of the ignorant ones. They can avail you nothing against God. Transgressors are patrons one to another, while the believers have God for a patron" (al-Jathiyah 45:18-19).

It is, then, an extremely serious matter that concerns the very foundations of faith in God and the happiness and well-being of mankind.

The secrets of man's talent and potential can only be unlocked by God, his Creator, and He alone can prescribe the cure for man's ills. The key to man's happiness is in God's hands. God says:

And We reveal of the Qur'an that which is a panacea and a mercy for the believers" (al-Israä' 17:82).

"This Qur'an leads to what is most upright" (al-Isra' 17:9).

However, man tends not to follow the logical and sensible course of action, which is to refer matters concerning his guidance and direction to God, who knows the secrets and the limitations of man's being.

This fundamental error of judgment on man's part is the cause of all the misery and confusion humanity has seen. The isolation of Islam from the active leadership of mankind has been a watershed in human history, and by far the worst setback humanity has suffered.

Islam assumed the leadership of humanity at a time of grave decline, when corruption and decadence were rife and injustice rampant. The revelation of the Qur'an and the advent of lslam, which was based on it, marked a rebirth of man far more significant than even his first one. gained that leadership by virtue of the original concepts and laws outlined in the Qur'an, which introduced

a fresh understanding of life and its values, and of the whole world order. These concepts brought about new and exciting realities hitherto unknown in human society, characterized by purity and beauty, and a healthy and positive attitude towards life and the world.

Then came the tragedy that removed Islam from its position of leadership, which then fell into the hands of various man-made ideologies, dominated in the main by materialism.

There have always been cynics who claim that humanity has to choose between the adoption of either a God-given system which negates all the material achievements of man, or a system based entirely on man's own intellectual abilities and accomplishments which have no room for Divine intervention whatsoever.

This is a most vile and cynical view. The choice is never as stark or as cruel as that. The Divine order *(Minhaj* or *Shari'ah)* is not antagonistic to human innovation and achievement. It is, in fact, the progenitor and patron of the very spirit of that creativity which is the driving force behind man's fulfillment of his role as God's representative on Earth. God has endowed man with all the necessary faculties, talent and skills to carry out that most noble role, and He has harnessed for his benefit all the natural laws and forces that can help him in fulfilling that task. God has ensured a certain harmony and coordination between man and his environment that can enhance man's performance and creativity and raise the quality of his life. Man's own achievement, material or otherwise, thus becomes itself an expression of gratitude to God, and a spur to further constructive activity.

The argument that a God-given way of life and man's ability to advance and improve are mutually exclusive, stems from evil motives and bad faith. It can only add to man's confusion, bewilderment and m1sery.

However, the argument is sometimes advanced in response to people's fascination with the astonishing achievements made by man, especially in the fields of science and material progress, rather than as a consequence of ignorance or bad faith. Being so much in awe of man's achievement, some are easily tempted to separate natural forces and religious values, claiming that they are mutually exclusive and operate in totally separate spheres. This basically flawed argument leads to the distorted concept that material progress can be achieved without the need for religious values, and that the consequences of the interaction of natural laws are inevitable regardless of whether people believe in God or not, and whether they have adopted the imperatives of a God- given system or a man-made one.

This is what we may call the "Grand Illusion". Religious values and natural laws are, in fact, inseparable. They interact all the time and coalesce at several points, and they are both ultimately controlled by the power of God. There is, therefore, no justification for separating these two sets of forces in man's consciousness. This is the rational and intelligent understanding that the Qur'an tries to instill in man's mind when it says:

"Had the People of the Book believed and been God-fearing, We would have pardoned them and admitted them to gardens of bliss. Had they truly observed the Torah and the Gospel and what was revealed to them from their Lord, they would have enjoyed abundance from above and from beneath them" (al-Ma'idah 5:66).

'I [Noah] said, 'Seek forgiveness of your Lord; He is ever ready to forgive. He will send abundant water from the sky for you and bestow upon you wealth and offspring. He will provide you with gardens and flowing rivers"(Nuh}: 71:10-12).

"God does not change a people's lot unless they change what is in their hearts"(al-Ra'd 13:11).

To believe in God, and to worship Him with full sincerity, and to implement His prescribed order in society, are all manifestations of submission to God's universal order. The laws governing this order have a positive effect on human life and relate back to the same origin of all the natural, human and physical laws that we observe and experience every day.

It is true that at times we are confused by certain paradoxes we observe in nature as well as in society. Sometimes it seems that discarding religious values and relying solely on materialistic laws leads to success. But this is a very short-sighted view, because the outcome in the long term is quite the opposite. That is true in the case of Muslim civilization itself. It grew and prospered when religious values and materialistic principles were brought together, while its decline began exactly at the moment when they began to diverge. Muslim civilization has yet to recover from that catastrophic reversal in its history.

In contrast, we have today's materialistic civilization which is like an albatross flying with only one wing; the huge advances it registers on the material scale are undermined by its reverses on the humanitarian, psychological and spiritual one.

God's *Shari'ah* forms only part of His overall universal order and the implementation of the Divine law in society acts as a catalyst in bringing harmony and balance into man's relationship with the world around. But the *Shari'ah* must be built on faith in God. It is designed for application within an Islamic society, to whose building and progress it in turn contributes.

Islamic law is totally complementary to Islam's overall view of man, nature and the world. This view is based on a comprehensive and integrated concept that unites such elements as fear of God, conscientiousness, purity of feeling, broadness of concern, high moral standards and upright behavior. Within such a view compatibility is easily achieved between the so-called "natural laws" and "human values", which are perceived as different aspects of a single universal structure. Man is seen as another active force in this structure. His will and his actions, his faith and his well-being, his submission to God and his contribution are all forces that exercise a positive influence on life and the world. They also are influenced and controlled by the principles and precepts of God's universal scheme. These forces produce results and multiply when they act in harmony, but they can result in suffering, corruption and strife when they do not:

"God will not withdraw a grace He has bestowed on people unless they change what is in their hearts" (al-Anfal 8:53).

The link between man's actions and his feelings on the one hand, and God's universal order on the other, is real and constant. No one would wish for this relationship to be broken or undermined, unless they wish ill for man and his future.

These are but a few general observations that living "in the shade of the Qur'an" has inspired within me. I humbly pray to God that they may be of benefit to the reader.

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