

IS ISLAM A FAILURE?

1. Introduction

This question should worry every student of the rise and fall of the Muslim people. At their dawn they rose high and reached the far ends of the then known world with a speed unknown in history. Equally steep has been their fall, too steep for a recovery. Hard facts of history lead a group of students to the conclusion that while Islam undoubtedly infused a new spirit among the Arabs, enabling them to overthrow the Persian and the Roman empires and become masters of the world, it did not have the capacity to keep pace with the times. Islam lagged behind and the steep rise of the Muslims took a precipitous downward trend for good. The experiment has failed and it would, according to M. Abul-Kalam Azad, be stupid to give it another trial [see his book, *India Wins Freedom* (page 227)]. There is another group of students, which though not so outspoken, finds it hard to reconcile the fact that if Islam sponsors eternal truth and is capable of keeping abreast of the times, why it should have, after only a while, come to a dead stop. Scepticism born out of the irreconcilable shakes the very foundation of their faith in the eternal truth of Islam. The question is important and deserves to be seriously considered and satisfactorily answered.

2. What Is Islam?

Everything in this wonderful universe is, on the face of it, bound firstly by Allah's (swt) permanent and inviolable laws. The laws of Nature have never failed, nor have they ever ceased to operate. They work non-stop without let or hindrance: "you will see no imperfection in Allah's (swt) creation" (67/3). On the same pattern there are inviolable principles and permanent values for mankind, made known to man through Revelation, which enable him, individually as well as collectively, to grow and develop in life and taste all the good that can be afforded here and in the hereafter. Unlike things in Nature, however, which must observe God's laws, man is free to adopt or reject them and to follow whatever his desires might dictate. But whereas observance of God's laws assures a rich and fruitful life, adoption of manmade laws offers no such guarantee and might, on the other hand, lead life to decay and destruction.

3. Struggle Between Right and Wrong

The way of life revealed by God and called *Ad-Deen* or *Al-Islam* insists that whatever gifts this beautiful earth of ours has in store or can produce should be made available to the whole of mankind in an equitable manner. There is a section of people, however, who reject this view and would, on the basis of might, assume control of the means of production, so that they might withhold God's gifts from His creatures and avail of them personally according to their will. This group, opposed as it is to God's way of life (*Al-Islam*), places all sorts of hindrances in its establishment among mankind, bringing about, what The Qur'an describes as a struggle between Right and Wrong. Whereas Islam has

unquestioned sway in nature, it has to contend with stiff opposition in human society. Consider the example of a seed sown in the earth. Given the requisite means of growth a healthy and vigorous seed will sprout, the shoot will rise high slowly and a day will come for the tiny little seed to swing as a full fledged and robust tree. The seed has the capacity to grow and attain its destiny. Likewise the eternal laws and the permanent values which, as already stated, constitute *Al-Islam*, have the capacity to overcome impediments in the way of their materialisation and to attain their goals. In the words of The Qur'an, the "healthy concept of life, *Kalema-e-Tayyib*, has the capacity to go up to Him" (35/10), that is, to attain the heights which God has destined for it. In other words, Right has the capacity and power to grapple with and overcome wrong and pursue its own course. Happenings in human society, past and present seem, however, to belie this conclusion. There is untruth everywhere, having full sway and giving no quarter to truth. Tyranny, exploitation, dishonesty, fraud are rampant. Appearances may, however, be deceptive. Let us clear the misunderstanding underlying the confusion.

4. Slow Speed

According to The Qur'an, the concepts of life revealed by God have the capacity and inherent strength to clear impediments and prevail but they do so at a slow speed as judged by man's reckoning. "He directs the affair from heaven to earth" (32/5), that is, at His will, He formulates a plan in the high heavens, but initiates it practically at the lowest level, even as the live seed is buried under the earth to become a hung tree later on, "then it goes up to Him in a day whose measure is a thousand years of your counting" (32/5). God's plans, based always on truth, must materialise. Impediments cannot hold them up. But they progress at a speed too slow to be visible. Abstract truths apart, even in the case of material things, the pace of evolution remains imperceptible. Scientists say that, in organic evolution, the smallest change in a species takes thousands of years to take effect. During this long period the change goes on taking shape gradually but unnoticed and becomes visible only at the end of a millennium. This should give an idea of the speed at which God's plans materialise, whose day measures a thousand or even fifty thousand years (70/4) of our counting. One might sit by a plant day and night, for weeks or months or even years, but although it will be growing all the time, he will not perceive the change as it is occurring slowly, very slowly. Or consider the example of a clock. When the minute-hand drops and the hour hand moves on from one hour-mark to the next, the movement remains invisible to the naked eye.

5. Truth Prevails

In its struggle with untruth, truth must prevail ultimately although it may take a long time to do so. The Qur'an states: "We hurl truth against untruth and it crushes its brain and untruth vanishes away" (21/18), leaving the way clear for truth to pursue its normal course. It would

be incorrect to expect a result of the struggle within decades; it needs centuries to determine the outcome of the struggle. The fact, however, is that a conflict between a divine principle and a manmade system has always ended in the victory for the former and a rout of the latter. Some examples will be given a little later.

6. Reiteration

The ground covered so far might be reiterated briefly:

1. Islam is a collection of inviolable principles revealed by God for the guidance of man to enable him to attain his destiny in life.
2. Those who would exploit fellow men oppose the divine code and give rise to the struggle between Right and Wrong.
3. Right has an inherent capacity to overcome Wrong and pursue its own course.
4. The process is a slow one, so slow that one of its days equals a thousand years of man's reckoning.

7. Pace Can Be Accelerated

The process can, however, be quickened. The verse (35/10) already quoted, viz. "healthy concept of life, *Kalema-e-Tayyib*, has the capacity to go up to Him", goes on to say, "and healthy action (of man) gives it a push upward". That is, divine laws left to themselves, operate at their normal slow speed, but if at times people adopt them in giving shape to their social structure, their speed is accelerated and the results that would have normally taken thousands of years to produce, are achieved within a few days. Normally divine laws operate by *evolution*; man's co-operation makes them work by *revolution* or, to use the scientific term, by *emergent evolution*. The process of normal evolution affords the human mind time to develop gradually and appreciate divine laws. The onset of emergent evolution brought on by man's co-operation is, however, too fast for the human mind to keep pace with. The co-operating community itself is undoubtedly equipped to appreciate divine laws and assimilate their spirit, but those outside it lack the mental development needed for the purpose, and in consequence experience difficulty in taking ownership of them. A student brought up and educated normally to the final stage of his or her study will tackle difficult problems with ease; but such problems will baffle one who is in the middle of the course. To enable the latter to grapple with them, his or her education must be improved and special arrangements made for quicker mental development.

8. How Human Intellect Works

The *modus operandi* of human intellect consists in the method of trial and error. It formulates a theory puts it into practice and takes decades or even centuries to discover its weaknesses. It then devises another theory and repeats the process. In this way, it might take hundreds of years to arrive at the correct solution. The solution thus reached is then welcome, since during the intervening centuries the requisite mental development has already taken place.

9. What Revelation Does

Divine Revelation does away with the method of trial and error. It gives outright solutions without waiting for the normal mental development of mankind to take place. Special effort has consequently to be made to familiarise man's mind with the principles revealed much in advance of the times. The introduction among mankind of eternal divine laws (*Al-Islam*) proceeded at the normal pace *apropos* man's mental development - man accepted what was within his ken and remained a stranger to the rest. All of a sudden, *Rasoolullah (as)* appeared on the scene in Arabia with a complete code of the laws revealed to him by Allah (*swt*). Portions of the code that happened to be beyond the mental capacity of his audience aroused opposition. By his inimitable teaching and practice *Rasoolullah (as)* tried hard to explain to them how the code guaranteed human dignity and welfare. Some of those who shed their prejudices and cared to understand, appreciated *Rasoolullah's (as)* message and co-operated with him. He gathered around him a concourse of believers and their healthy deeds greatly accelerated the normal pace of divine laws and in a short while produced most surprising results unparalleled in history. There was nothing extraordinary and supernatural about the achievement. It followed the eternal divine law that "healthy concept of life has the capacity to go up to Him and healthy action (of man) gives it a push upward" (35/10). Their deeds accelerated the pace of divine laws and achieved in the matter of days what would normally have taken thousands of years to materialise. Had the co-operation between divine laws and human activity been maintained, quicker achievements under the laws would have also maintained their pace, and who can guess what heights man would have attained by now! The co-operation ceased, however, after a while and the laws resumed their original speed. The short span of time during which quicker results were achieved, according to man's reckoning of time, is the period during which, in the view of thinkers and historians, Islam was a success and hereafter it proved a failure. The bare fact, however, is that while moving at its normal pace of a day equal to a thousand years, Islam got extra help from man which accelerated its speed, but that later on the extra help was withdrawn leaving Islam to get along at its original normal pace. The process has been very much like the running of a stream of water, which as a result of a fall on the way, flows faster for a while and then, on the exhaustion of the impetus provided by the fall, resumes flowing at its original speed. To say that the stream flowed only while the movement of currents was visible as a result of the fall's impetus and then it turned into a standing pool would be very short sighted indeed.

10. Four Questions

The foregoing gives rise to four questions, namely:

1. What was it that created in that particular period a body of people whose healthy deeds gave such a momentum to the operation of divine laws?
2. Why did that thing not prove lasting?
3. If the thing disappeared, why did the divine truth escape man's mind as it had developed at the time?

4. What proof is there that the divine laws resumed their normal speed and continue to operate at that speed? That is, does the stream of divine laws continue to flow and has not turned into a standing pool deprived of all chances of resuming its flow?

First Question

11. Rasoolullah's (as) Training

As regards the first question, the programme which, in the words of The Qur'an, *Rasoolullah (as)* followed, was: "To recite His verses to them, to help their development and to teach them the Book and the why thereof", (62/2). The programme was threefold. Firstly, *Rasoolullah (as)* presented to his listeners The Qur'an, pure and simple, without allowing it to be mixed with man's own thoughts, concepts, theories or beliefs. He offered them pure what he received by Revelation. His appeal was based on reason: "I call to God with sure knowledge, I and whoever follows me" (12/108). The presentation of the Qur'anic message was rational and based on true knowledge; there was no compulsion involved, neither mental through miracles, nor physical by the sword. Secondly, those who accepted the message after due thought and conviction and without mental reservation were initiated into mastering it as best as they could. *Rasoolullah (as)* explained to them the provisions of divine laws together with the purpose underlying them. He taught them how they should, in the light of the inviolable principles of *Al-Islam*, think out a solution to the problems which might confront them. Thirdly, an atmosphere of true freedom was created in which human personality (*nafs*) might 'grow' and man's inborn capacities of head and heart develop. The shackles of man-made restrictions and conventions gripping them broke one by one and they felt that they were neither another man's dependent nor his slave. True freedom prevailing in the Qur'anic Social Order provides the base for the development of human Personality.

This was the simple and straight-forward programme which enabled *Rasoolullah (as)* to create a community of people whose healthy deeds gave a miraculous acceleration to the pace of divine laws and established a social order in no time to bear witness to the glorious achievements of Islam.

12. Difference in Training

Those who embraced Islam during the lifetime of *Rasoolullah (as)*, technically called his companions, did not all of them have equal opportunity of benefiting from his training. There were the Bedouins, who became converts towards the end of *Rasoolullah's (as)* life after seeing the rising power and prowess of the Islamic State. About them The Qur'an says, "The Bedouins say: 'we believe', Say you do not believe, rather say: 'we surrender (to the Islamic State)' for belief has not yet entered your hearts." (49/14). Then there were The Qur'aish, who joined the Islamic fold after the armistice of Hodaibiyya or the fall of Mecca. About them The Qur'an says, "Not equal is he among you who spent and fought before the victory; those are mightier in rank than they who spent and fought afterwards; although God has promised all of them the good that follows from Islam"

(57/10). The 'mightier in rank' are the 'true believers': "and those who believed and have emigrated and struggled in the way of God, those who have given refuge (to the 'emigrants') and help (the establishment of the new order), those are the true believers. For them there is protection against impairment and respectful/provision" (8/14). And the ones "who spent and fought afterwards" have been described as "they belong to you" (8/75). The former are pioneers who have been called as "those who are with Muhammad (as), the messenger of God", (48/29), and whose astounding effort in establishing the Islamic Social Order has been praised in the verse so lavishly. The foregoing is not a negation of the great worth of the believers who, though rather late in the day, joined the pioneers all the same. The Qur'an says about them: "God will be well pleased with them and they are well-pleased with Him." (9/100)

13. Real Conversion

The foregoing would show clearly that among the later adherents of Islam there were people whose conversion differed from that of the first pioneers and who had lesser opportunity of receiving training from *Rasoolullah (as)*. His first converts joined him after long and serious thought and after appreciating his message fully, at a time when conversion meant planting oneself against the concerted opposition of the whole of society and offering one to their unlimited torture and tyranny. Later on when the Islamic state got well established and extended its control far and wide, conversion became an easy affair and meant, to use the Qur'anic expression, just surrendering to the state. Besides this difference in the urge for conversion, the later adherents were also handicapped in the matter of receiving training directly from *Rasoolullah (as)*.

Second Question

14. Rasoolullah's (as) Personality

The second question is: Why was the programme adopted by *Rasoolullah (as)* not pursued? An oft-repeated explanation is that it was the unique personality of *Rasoolullah (as)* who brought about with his great 'Spiritual' power the tremendous revolution and it was not within the competence of ordinary mortals to carry on the great work he had initiated.

This explanation is based on a misunderstanding, which it is very necessary to remove. While it might provide an answer to the question, its logical and inescapable conclusion is that howsoever we might wish it we cannot revive the Islamic way of life. The answer leads to complete and continuous frustration leaving little hope for regeneration. The idea of a *mujaddid* (or 'renewer') coming after every century or of a *mehdi* (or 'guided one') appearing at the end of so many messengers following one after another is the direct product of this frustration. The concept that a revival is impossible without the guidance of a messenger is unwarranted and must be removed. There is no mention in The Qur'an of any promised one coming after *Rasoolullah (as)*.

15. What *Rasoolullah (as)* Did Could Be Repeated

Rasoolullah (as) was the last recipient of Revelation from God and in this respect he was unique among men. Revelation afforded him a 'supernatural' position. On the foundation of revealed guidance he raised the superstructure of the Islamic Social Order, not with the help of any supernatural power but as a man. The Qur'an makes no secret of the fact that apart from the Book he was not given any miracle. After his passing away, the process of Revelation stopped, but what he did as a mortal to give practical shape to the revealed message was carried on as before through the institution of *Khilafat* or succession, the sole purpose of which was to perpetuate his programme of advancing and extending the Islamic Social Order. The Qur'an states: "Muhammad is naught but a messenger; messengers have passed away before him. Why, if he should die or is slain, will you turn about on your heels (thinking that the message was for his lifetime only)?" (3/143). The programme did not end with his demise; it had to continue despite his demise and could be carried on without him. When he said (12/108) "I call to God with sure knowledge", he added, "I do so and so also those who follow me". The Qur'an says that "He (*Rasoolullah*) enforces the recognised (lawful) and forbids the unrecognised (unlawful)" and the same duty has been assigned to his followers: "You are a dynamic society brought forth for the good of humanity. You enforce the recognised (lawful) and forbid the unrecognised (unlawful)" (3/109). Hence, it is wrong to assume that the three fold programme of *Rasoolullah (as)* of "reciting God's verses to the people, helping their development and teaching them the Book and the why thereof" was confined to him and was not to be pursued after him. It was, as a matter of fact, pursued and the fruits that the Islamic social Order had begun to bear during the lifetime of *Rasoolullah (as)*, continued to be harvested. Thereafter, the programme halted due to various reasons.

16. Why The Programme Halted

Rasoolullah (as) began propagating his message among the *Makkans* and those around about them and subsequently among the people of *Madina* and its surroundings. Due to direct contact with *Rasoolullah (as)*, his immediate listeners understood and appreciated the divine message and Islamic conceptions gripped them and went deep into their hearts and souls. Later on, when the whole of Arabia became Muslim, the fresh converts to quote The Qur'an merely 'surrendered' to the Islamic State, without being subjected to any mental or moral change. The earlier Muslims were real converts, the later ones merely in name. The latter had little share of *Rasoolullah's (as)* personal contact and training because they were scattered far and wide, their number was very large, and *Rasoolullah's (as)* early demise had cut short the opportunity. After his passing away, during the *khilafat* of Abu Bakr (*ra*) and 'Umar (*ra*), the Islamic State extended far and wide and covered an area of almost two and a half million square miles, embracing practically the whole of the Persian Empire and the greater part of the Roman Empire. The people inhabiting these vast areas could stick to their religion by making treaties with the Islamic State, but they preferred

to become Muslims. As converts to a new social order, they were in an even less fortunate position than the Arabian converts referred to previously. The Arabian converts had the advantage of seeing Muslims round about them and of hearing about Islamic concepts and principles. The new converts had none of this facility. Their number was legion, the area they inhabited was immense, and the means of communication were extremely limited. All these factors made it well nigh impossible that their education and training in the new dispensation could be on lines approaching those on which the earliest adherents of Islam were brought up. The problem greatly worried *Khalif 'Umar (ra)* and he gave continued and very serious thought to it throughout his time in office. The situation answered very well the description in The Qur'an: "When the help of God and victory come and you see men joining His social order in throngs, let not complacency overcome you that your purpose has been achieved and your programme is over, but instead you should get determined to prosecute the programme with greater vigour and proclaim the praises of your Nourisher (by executing programme even more vigorously) and seek His protection for He turns to men (and brings them means of development)" (110/1-3). It was this feeling which, according to Ibn-Hazm, made *Khalif 'Umar (ra)* distribute a hundred thousand copies of The Qur'an throughout the length and breadth of the state. He had thought out further plans for the training of the new converts, but he before he could execute them he was unexpectedly assassinated, leaving the *ummah* (community), as well as mankind at large, so much poorer and the new converts an uncouth mass of humanity. A mass conversion of the type that had occurred could be no more than political surrender to the new state, without any real mental change affecting old beliefs and conceptions. Education and training alone can bring about real change. Social influence might change external behaviour, but superficial change alone is a dangerous thing. The surrender of the masses was calm and quiet but it cut to the quick the wielders of authority and the intelligentsia. They were sore at defeat by the Arabs, whom they never took for more than wild brutes, which broke to pieces their extensive empire and destroyed their ancient culture and civilisation. No doubt, defeat forced them to surrender to the Islamic State, but they were never reconciled to it and feelings of revenge against the conquering Arabs raged furiously in their hearts.

The defeated elite took revenge, not on the battlefield, but through political intrigue and religious disruption. They realised that the secret of the overwhelming power of the Arabs lay in their adoption of the Islamic principles. When the Persian governor and military commander, Harmuzan, was brought in chains before 'Umar (*as*), he asked him how is it that the Arabs who until recently dare not come near the Persian frontiers were now inflicting heavy defeat on them on all fronts? The answer Harmuzan gave was: "Before it was force pitched against force, of which we had more. Then God was neither with you nor with us. Now in our encounters there is God with you and no God with us". Harmuzan's answer repeats in other words what The Qur'an has stated: "That is because Allah is the protector of the believers and that the unbelievers have no protector"

(47/11). The thinkers among the conquered knew full well that it was the eternal principles of Allah (swt) whose adoption had brought such a tremendous change among the Arabs and therefore they based their scheme of revenge on a plan designed to wean them from those principles. The plan consisted in introducing gradually in the body politic of Islam un-Islamic beliefs and concepts under an Islamic covering so that in the end the eternal divine principles would lose place to manmade laws and concepts. What we have now is, mostly composed of the 'pseudo-Islam' that was introduced under the 'Ajami (alien) scheme of revenge. The Egyptian historian Muhammad Husain Haikal has described the situation aptly in his book, *The Great 'Umar*. He has first quoted from the *Historians' History of the World* and then made his own comments. The quotation is as follows:

"The reaction went still further, and the principles of political theology which had ruled ancient Persia returned to affirm their empire almost the day after the national ruin. According to Persian theory the power belonged to the King, the son of God, invested with divine glory by his super-terrestrial origin. Owing to political revolutions, Persia united on the head of Muhammad's legitimate successor, the Arabian Ali, who had been excluded from the caliphate, all the splendour and sanctity of the old national royalty. The one she, had once called in her protocols, "the divine King, son of heaven", and in her sacred books, the "lord and guide" - lord in the worldly sense, guide in an intellectual - she now called by the Arabic word Imam, "the Chief". This was the simplest title imaginable and at the same time the most august, for in it was included all the sovereignty of the world and of the mind. In regard to the Caliphs, who were raised to power by the blind clamour of the masses, by crime and intrigues, she upheld the hereditary rights of the Imam Ali, the infallible and sacred of God."

"At his death she gathered about his two sons, Hassan and Hussein, and afterwards about their descendants. Hussein had married a daughter of the last sassanid king, so that the imamate was fixed in his blood by a doubly divine right; and union of ancient Persia and Islam was sealed in the blood of Hussein on the plains of Karbala."

"The revolution which overturned the Omayyad usurpers in favour of the Abbasides, nephews of the Prophet, was the Work of Persia. If she did not bring into power the favourite family for which she thought she was fighting, she at least caused her principle to triumph." (pp.489-90, Vol. 24, 1907 edition).

Haikal then comments on the quotation as follows:

"The events recorded by the Historians' History of the world, which are corroborated by all other historians, occurred after 'Umar (ra). We have referred to them with a view to draw the attention of the reader to the fact that the Iranians never reconciled themselves to Arab domination and in fact resisted it from the very beginning. At first they revolted openly; but failure in the attempt turned their efforts to arrest power by other means. They succeeded here and obtained considerable power in the various spheres of life's

activities. They were so sore against Muslim domination that they decided to kill 'Umar (ra). It has been said that the assassination of 'Umar (ra) coming soon after the conquest of Khorasan was the result of Iranian conspiracy." (p.420)

I hold no brief for Shias or Sunnis and am, therefore, unconcerned with sectarian beliefs. The criterion with me is that beliefs and conceptions opposed to The Qur'an can never be right and I am averse to looking at the point in issue from the sectarian angle. What I wish to stress is that the inhabitants of the conquered territories after becoming Muslim stuck to their old beliefs and after giving them an Islamic appearance, spread them in Islamic society, thereby weaning it gradually from Allah (swt) and His book, who helped Muslims in overcoming non-Muslims. Or, in the words of the *Historians History of the world*, "The Islam of Persia is not at all Islam; it is the old religion of Persia framed in Moslem formulas." (p.489). It was the victory of mental swords over steel swords. The process got an unfortunate impetus from the fact that during the reign of the Abbasides, who had gained supremacy through alien ('ajami) help, they could influence the whole of society. The Persians were a literary people and took good care to popularise the 'New Islam' through the written word. It is the books compiled during this period that today we teach in the name of religion. Islamic history, political as well as religious, is in fact the variegated story of alien ('ajami) intrigue. The above facts explain clearly how the type of instruction and training begun by Rasoolullah (as) and followed during the earlier days of the *Khilafat*, not only came to a stop but gave place to the teaching of a 'New Islam'.

17. Doubtful Strategy

Some say that had Abu Bakr and 'Umar (ra) not fought these wars, Islam would have been saved the disfigurement which it had to suffer at the hands of the new converts. This opinion overlooks an important aspect of the situation, namely that the wars were fought not for grabbing land but in circumstances which might be summarised briefly as follows:

1. Islam is a way of life that can take practical shape only in a free Islamic State. This was the foundation on which Rasoolullah (as) built a state, the preservation of which became the sole object of the *Khilafat*.
2. The Persian and the Roman Empires did not, could not, accept the new Islamic State since it was a rival and a danger and had better be removed from the scene. It became incumbent that the *Khilafat* should take note of their evil designs and forestall them by advancing its armies for purposes of self-preservation. Their conquests would have produced no untoward results had the conquered territories entered into treaties with the conquerors and not become converts to Islam overnight. The situation was worsened by the untimely assassination of 'Umar (ra) who would have undoubtedly taken steps for initiating the new converts into the Islamic social order on a sound and firm basis.
3. It is important to note that in addition to following a defensive strategy, an Islamic State has, at times, to

adopt an offensive strategy also. If the subjects of a State are helpless against the tyranny and torture of their rulers it is the duty of an Islamic State to take whatever steps are feasible to succour them, even though they may be non-Muslims. At times armed intervention might become unavoidable in situations to meet which the U.N.O. is now being urged to have a force of its own which could move into territories when there is no other way to preserve law and order. Armed intervention by the *Khilafat* was in some cases resorted to with this motive. The foregoing would show that the view that 'the *Khilafat* should not have engaged in wars is ill informed.

Third Question

18. Why Did The Human Mind Fail To Assimilate Islamic Truths?

Now we come to the third question, namely that if the process of instruction and training introduced by *Rasoolullah (as)* fell into disuse, why did human mind of its own, fail to adopt the Islamic truths which had been lucidly presented before it and instead adopt man-made laws? We have already seen that when eternal truths unfold themselves with their normal speed, the human mind gradually accepts them; however, the sudden appearance of such truths leaves the human mind perplexed unless by special training it is enabled to appreciate them. In other words, it is in the very nature of all revolutionary messages to arrive before their time. A 'Revolutionary voice' is an appeal to mankind to give practical shape to some eternal law of Allah (*swt*); it is 'before-time' in the sense that in its present stage of development, the human mind is unprepared to receive it. If it were so prepared, the voice would not be revolutionary, but would be product of the prevailing environment. A revolutionary voice seems always out of tune since its listeners have not yet developed the ear that could appreciate it. They find it hard to harmonise with it. To them the voice is strange and they oppose it. Leaving aside the appeal of a messenger of Allah (*swt*) which is always centuries ahead of time, the appeal of any genius falls on deaf ears and he passes away full of regret over the indifference of his audience. The poet Ghalib said "The world will appreciate my verse after me". The philosopher Iqbal said "After me they will recite my verse, appreciate it and say a self-knowing soul gave a new shape to the world". Ghalib and Iqbal are not solitary instances. All over the world and throughout history, the luminaries suffered the same fate at the hands of their respective people. They had nothing to support them in life and most of them had to spend their days behind bars and in misery. They lived unknown and died unwept and unsung. But when they were no more, later generations unearthed the remnants and rags in which they had passed a miserable existence, adored with them museums and galleries, wrote every word of theirs in gold and weighed it against jewels.

19. High Level Of Qur'anic Revolution

A casual assessment of the plane of thought and the social, economic and cultural level attained in the age in which the revolutionising message of The Qur'an came

would show that the message was much beyond and ahead of the times.

1. *Man and God.* In an age in which the people from the thoughtful down to the common man were overwhelmed with superstition surrounding places of worship, sacrificial forums and monasteries, and their minds were helpless captives in the hands of hermits, priests and soothsayers, who were believed to be the sole and accredited agents for enforcing the driving purpose, the Qur'anic voice proclaiming that between man and his God no third power intervened must have been a cry in the wilderness.
2. *Co-operation not Subjugation.* In an age in which the whole world believed and worshipped Raja as an incarnation of God, Caesar as the possessor of Divine Rights, and king as God's shadow on earth, the Qur'anic call that no one has the right to thrust his will on another and that human affairs should be settled by mutual consultation must have sounded very odd indeed.
3. *Relative Superiority.* In an age in which racial superiority determined respectability, family and tribal connections formed the basis for greatness, heredity was accepted as the standard for leadership and political ascendancy, and in which every individual, every tribe and every country felt the greatest pride in preserving such distinctions, even though the process might involve wide spread destruction, the Qur'anic message that by birth all persons are alike and the criterion for respectability and greatness is one's personal attainments and not hereditary connections must have appeared very unnatural.
4. *Ideology.* In an age in which geographical boundaries and racial characteristics assessed distinction and in which laying down of one's life for country and nation was considered to be a sacred duty, for The Qur'an to say that nationality should be based not on country, colour, race, language, etc. but on common ideology must have been altogether incomprehensible.
5. *Cause and Effect.* In an age in which man had a separate god for every natural phenomenon whose pleasure or displeasure determined whether coming events would bring happiness or sorrow, how could one believe that things in nature are controlled by a fixed law, that there is a chain of cause and effect in all happenings, and that there is an unchanging procedure governing them which admits of no exception? The Qur'anic conception must have been an extremely strange one and an altogether unacceptable proposition.
6. *All Men Are Equal.* In an age marked with paucity of knowledge in which a villager who could count beyond ten was believed to be superhuman, how could the human mind concede that a messenger of Allah (*swt*), who was the repository of the highest knowledge, could be a man like any other man?

7. *Miracles*. In an age in which piety was associated with doing astonishing things, how could anyone accept that a messenger of Allah (swt) did not perform miracles and that the yardstick for judging truth or falsehood was the verdict of knowledge and its concrete results? The proposition could hardly appeal to the then prevailing intellect which would spurn the idea that a prophet could perform no miracle, that religion was based on reason and that religious actions should be judged by their results.
8. *Serfdom*. In an age in which capitalism, and even serfdom, were accepted as normal features of society, the clarion call of The Qur'an that no man has the right to usurp another's earnings must have sounded sheer lunacy.
9. *Private Ownership*. Finally, in an age in which a Qaroon's wealth was appreciated as god's bounty, land-lordship as nature's gift, and in which the placing of any limits on personal belongings was viewed as anti-religious, the Qur'anic proclamation must have sounded very strange indeed, that hoarding of wealth is a serious crime, that sources of production cannot belong to any individual, that the means of sustenance should remain open to all in an equitable manner and that it is the basic duty of the State to see that every one is provided with the necessities of life and whatever is required for the development of one's latent potentialities.

20. Sixth Century Thought

The level of human thought in the sixth century of the Christian era, had not yet attained the height required to assimilate the conceptions underlying the new dispensation and the way of life it advocated. The conceptions being of a revolutionary character were far ahead of the times and the world was still unprepared for receiving them. The sixth century belonged to what are called the 'dark ages'; even the twentieth century, the age of science and reason and civilisation and culture, finds it difficult to catch up with Qur'anic conceptions. Their great height makes it impossible to hazard a guess about the time when human thought would approach them. Therefore, there should be nothing surprising about the fact that the Qur'anic Social Order did not last; the real surprise is how some people got together who could assimilate conceptions far ahead of their time and give them a practical shape.

21. Rasoolullah's (as) Personality

It sends my soul into ecstasy when I think of the wonderful training which the great personality of *Rasoolullah (as)* imparted to produce in that age a people who could bring about the establishment of the Qur'anic Social Order. *Rasoolullah's (as)* greatest miracle, in my view, is that in circumstances in which any genius would pass away regretting an indifferent environment and calling himself the man of the Future, he - *Rasoolullah (as)* - should proclaim his environment to be 'the best of all' since it gave practical shape to a social order far above the mental level of the times. *Rasoolullah (as)* occupies a unique position among the revolutionary leaders of the world standing far ahead of,

and much higher than, anyone else. His miraculous achievement consists in placing before and bringing home to his people, ideas that are not fully appreciated even after the lapse of thirteen centuries. A teacher possessing his breadth of vision and sympathy could alone give a rational exposition of Allah's (swt) book and achieve an unimaginable development of man's potentialities. It was this marvellous performance of *Rasoolullah (as)* which made Allah (swt) and His constructive forces ('angels') acclaim him with cheers and applause (33/56). They acclaimed his associates also (33/47), who cut themselves off from the rest of the world and, rising poles high above their contemporaries, helped the establishment in Madina of a social order far beyond the imagination of the times in which:

1. The big *sardars* (leaders) of the Qur'aish, a plebeian from Persia (Salman), a labourer from Rome (Shoaib), and a slave from Abyssinia (Bilal) not only ate from the same table but had matrimonial relations also;
2. Even when such a personality as *Rasoolullah (as)* asked a slave boy or a slave girl to do something, he or she had the courage to question him whether his suggestion was based on Revelation or on his personal opinion and if it was the latter, to ask his pardon and to be allowed to do as he or she thought fit;
3. Affairs of State were determined by mutual counsel and the view of the head of the State - *Rasoolullah (as)* himself - was at times ruled out by the view of someone else;
4. At *Rasoolullah's (as)* demise, Abu Bakr (*ra*) proclaimed before a huge crowd that he who worshipped Muhammad (may we glorify and obey his call) should know that his god is dead, but he who served Allah (swt) should know that his god is Living and Everlasting, that Muhammad (*as*) was merely his messenger, who lived his time and then passed away, making little difference to the order he had established;
5. After *Rasoolullah's (as)* demise, people collected and chose their head on merit, discarding completely tribal or ancestral considerations;
6. At his death bed *Rasoolullah (as)* declared that he had not a pie at home and that whatever odds and ends he was leaving would pass on to the people and not to any individual relation;
7. Abu Bakr (*ra*), as head of State, fixed his remuneration at an equivalent of the daily wages of a labourer and returned to the Exchequer even that pittance, fearing he might not have done full work for the sum;
8. 'Umar (*ra*) told his wife that the precious stones which Caesar's wife sent her in return for presents of scents were sent to her in her capacity as the wife of the head of the State and not in her personal capacity and that therefore the stones should be made over to the Central Exchequer;

9. 'Umar (*ra*) decided that the conquered lands shall not be divided among the fighting forces but shall remain under the joint control of the *ummah* (community), so that the present as well as the future generations should be able to avail of them;
10. An old hag could tell the head of the State that if he could not evolve machinery for keeping himself informed of what was happening to the individual citizens, he should abdicate on grounds of inefficiency; and
11. 'Umar (*ra*) would eat wheat bread only if he was assured that it was available to every citizen of the state, otherwise he would continue eating oats.

The creation of a society in which decisions of the nature indicated above could be taken normally and without special effort, was, on the face of it, an event far in advance of the age. Even after the lapse of thirteen centuries, the human mind still finds it difficult to assimilate the principles propounded by The Qur'an.

22. Human Mind Can Develop

When I say that revolutionary messages are ahead of their times, it does not mean that the messages are beyond the reach of the human mind. It can follow and appreciate them but with effort. Unfortunately, effort is what the human mind shirks. Following blindly (*taqleed*) requires no thought - in fact, thought is forbidden in *taqleed* - is automatic, and hence, is a practice that is readily adopted. The early history of Islam gives, however, an idea of the great extent to which man's effort can develop the human mind.

23. Why Emergent Evolution

What is the good of sudden revolutionary changes? What does mankind gain by accelerating the working of eternal laws for a time and securing their extraordinary results if after a while the human mind and those results are to revert to their old level? In a concrete form the question might be "what contribution did early Islam make to the betterment of mankind?" The true answer is "an immense contribution". Firstly, Islam gave the world Allah's (*swt*) eternal laws in the form of a book - The Qur'an - so that one who so wishes might give them practical shape and obtain their happy results.

Secondly, Islam showed the world that the laws are *workable*, that they are not mere utopia but a practicable code of life which was given a trial in a particular period of history and produced positive results. Emergent evolutions help mankind to advance. As explained previously, human intellect works by experimentation. It evolves a plan, executes it and then finds after centuries that the plan was defective and hence, a failure. Then it begins experimenting with some other plan. If, however, it can have the benefit of seeing the results achieved by a revolution, the precedent will help it in assessing the results of its own planning. A comparative study of pre- and post-Islamic history will show at once that the progress man has made during post-Islamic period is unparalleled. The progress would appear much more

marked had the history of early Islam been available in its unalloyed form. A revolution gives the ever-moving vehicle of time a push forward which accelerates its speed and enables it to cover a lot of distance with the momentum gained. It was the momentum generated by the short-lived Islamic Social Order that enabled the Muslims to maintain for centuries their world leadership in the arts and sciences. At least some Western thinkers and historians admit the truth of this statement. In his book *The Making of Humanity*, Robert Briffault has devoted a whole chapter to this theme under the caption '*Dar Al-Hikmat*' and says,

"It was under the influence of the Arabian and Moorish revival of culture, and not in the fifteenth century, that the real Renaissance took place. Spain, not Italy, was the cradle of the rebirth of Europe. After steadily sinking lower and lower into barbarism it had reached the darkest depths of ignorance and degradation when the cities of the Saracenic world - Baghdad, Cairo, Cordoba, Toledo - were growing centres of civilisation and intellectual activity. It was there that the new life arose which was to grow into a new phase of human evolution. From the time when the influence of their culture made itself felt, began the stirring of a new life." (p.188-189).

"It is highly probable that, but for the Arabs, modern European civilisation would never have arisen at all; it is absolutely certain that, but for them, it would not have assumed that character which has enabled it to transcend all previous phases of evolution." (p.190)

The above extracts sum up nicely the benefits that accrued to humanity from the push given by the Islamic revolution.

Fourth Question

24. Islam Has Been Advancing

We may now take up the fourth and final question, namely, how do we know that the eternal principles of Islam have indeed been functioning at their normal speed and have not come to a halt. It is a question of history, the history of the times when The Qur'an was revealed and the history of mankind during the subsequent thirteen centuries. The study will settle the point whether in these thirteen centuries man has, after due experimentation, been adopting Qur'anic concepts or reverting to pre-Qur'anic concepts.

1. In the pre-Qur'anic period, the institution of kingship was believed to be an institution most suited to human 'nature'. The Qur'an rejected it and advanced the method of mutual consultation for settling affairs because no one had the right to thrust his will on another. The new concept had little appeal at the time, but since then, the trend has been in which direction, towards monarchy or towards Islam?
2. Slavery was then believed to be an essential feature of society, and one that was perfectly in accord with the 'natural' division of mankind into classes. The Qur'an declared that by birth all men are equally deserving of respect and that therefore no one has the right to enslave another. The Qur'anic concept

was then unacceptable, but since then, which has prevailed, the old slavish concept or the new Islamic concept of human freedom?

3. Human mind then thought that personalities help nations to glory and believed in hero-worship as something very natural. The Qur'an declared that the idea was archaic and primitive and that henceforth, common ideology would cement nations which would progress on the strength and efficiency of their social order. No-one agreed with it then; but do not present trends favour entirely the Qur'anic principle?
4. Against the then prevailing belief that ownership of land, feudalism and, capitalism were natural institutions, The Qur'an proclaimed that it is the duty of every individual to help the development of all, that, therefore, the means and sources of production must not belong to individuals and that individual control over land produce and hoarding of gold and silver were the most heinous crimes before the Supreme Court of Humanity. The Qur'anic idea was spurned initially but what about now? Is the world not restlessly yearning to assimilate and own the idea originally rejected with contempt?
5. The human mind then recognised families, tribes and nations, but could not conceive a universal brotherhood of man. The Qur'an declared that humanity is one and that the oneness can be brought about by having one law for all. The idea of oneness of humanity was not appreciated then, but since then what has been the position? Has appreciation grown for a compact mankind or for its divisions into smaller groups? That the world has grown sick of nationalism is the theme of a chapter on politics in my book *What Man Has Thought*.

Western thinkers then passed on to internationalism, but felt very soon that it could not achieve human destiny. They are now for *universalism* and wish to establish one world government without knowing exactly the base on which to raise the superstructure. When will they realise that the true basis for establishing a world government is provided by the Permanent Values of The Qur'an?

25. Islam Continues To Advance

I have cited the foregoing instances by way of illustration, otherwise there is no walk of life in which man has not after unsuccessful experimentation, followed the path indicated by The Qur'an for the achievement of man's destiny, or is still busy discovering it. Of the truths revealed by The Qur'an, the world has adopted some, is impatiently anxious to adopt others, and the rest appear to be beyond the reach of man with his present mental development. The Qur'an is the final and complete code of life for mankind. As man advances he will appreciate more and more of the provisions of the code that fits with the freshly evolving features of life.

Says The Qur'an, "We shall show them our signs in the (changing) horizons and in themselves until it is clear to them that it is the truth" (41/53). The world witnesses the signs in the changing horizons, appreciates the Qur'anic

eternal truths and is thus gradually becoming a convert to Islam.

26. Recapitulation

The ground already covered might be recapitulated as follows:

1. Islam is a collection of eternal truths, inviolable laws and Permanent Values revealed from time to time for the guidance of man and finally preserved in The Qur'an.
2. 'Islam' forged its way into human society at its own evolutionary slow speed, very slow indeed by our reckoning, until *Rasoolullah (as)* appeared on the scene.
3. By persistent effort over a number of years, *Rasoolullah (as)* brought together a body of men whose practical programme helped Islam's normal speed accelerate and produce results quickly, that is, by our own reckoning. This is the period in history that is recognised as the epoch of Islam's glory.
4. After a time, the *modus operandi* of *Rasoolullah (as)* - calling people to Allah rationally and instructing them in the revealed book - fell into disuse, resulting in the withdrawal of the acceleration induced by him and his associates and leaving Islam to proceed at its normal, slow speed.

27. Islam and Muslims

Superficial vision sees in the phenomenon short-lived success and subsequent failure of Islam, confusing Islam with Muslims although the two are quite distinct from each other. The state of Muslims, good, bad or indifferent is one thing and success or failure of Islam quite another. But to avoid confusion the position needs to be clarified.

28. Islamic Truths

The truths represented by the term Islam are as old as creation itself. They began forging their way ahead gradually and on their onward march different people at different periods of history owned them and reaped a happy and hefty harvest. When they gave up the truths, the gains disappeared and they became subject to sundry hardships. Fourteen hundred years ago a people in Arabia who adopted the truths attained the greatest heights of glory, but when they turned their backs on the truths, they went into decline. However, their decline did not halt Islam from proceeding ahead unscathed and unaffected. The picture of how Islam went on and on and how different people caught up to it at different stages is painted on the background, not of Muslim history, but of the history of mankind. A study of mankind's history will show clearly how man-made social orders have had a short-lived success whereas Islamic principles have continued to thrive.

29. Evidence of Man's History

In the streets of France, when cremated kingship gave birth to democracy, it was a link in Islam's history. In America, when battles were fought and blood was shed to put an end to slavery, it was a glorious chapter in Islam's history. In India, when the movement to call 'untouchables' by the name of *Harijan* (one bestowed with God's energy) was launched, it was a manifestation of Islam's eternal truth. And now, in America, the struggle to do away with the discrimination between white and black is similarly a step towards Islam. When the United Nations Organisation (UNO) decided that conflicts between nations should be resolved by mutual counsel, it was nothing but the adoption of an Islamic precept. The current turmoil in man's mind somehow to banish armament from society, follows strictly the provision in the Islamic programme framed fourteen centuries ago that wars are allowed only for so long as they (wars) do not "lay down their burdens", that is, the reasons for their being fought. In short, any movement launched anywhere during the past fourteen centuries for the liberation and advancement of humanity, was no more than a ray from Islam's shining sun; and conversely, whenever and wherever man-made schemes have failed, the situation has provided fresh proof of the truth of Islamic fundamentals. The history of mankind coupled with its struggle and search for knowledge proclaim aloud, to quote Iqbal:

"Wherever you come across a region full of colour and perfume, Out of whose soil spring urges of 'desire', It owes its worth to the teaching of Muhammad, Or it is still seeking after his guidance."

30. Only Islam Advances

A study of human history from this angle should convince anyone that Islam did not fail at any stage, that systems that were not Islamic, without exception, did fail at one stage or another, and that after their failure, Islam always took their place. It was bare truth when The Qur'an stated, "He will make the Islamic way of life prevail over all other ways" (48/28). The Book tells us that man's future is bright. In connection with the creation of man, the 'angels' (that is, the forces of nature) are said to have said to Allah (swt), "What, will you settle herein (on earth) one who will upset things and shed blood" (2/30), and received the reply, "Assuredly, I know what you know not" (2/31). This means that the ultimate destiny of man will be achieved when the stage of disruption and spilling of blood is over and when "there shall be no fear on them, neither shall they sorrow" (2/38). Islam is leading man to his destiny and will not rest until his destination is reached. It is a programme designed by The One who is the Nourisher of all being, and a Nourisher (*Rabb*) is one who takes care of a thing from its initial stage of coming into existence to its final stage of development. If a programme fails it could not have been designed by The Nourisher of all being.

31. Partial Adoption of Islam

The world has been adopting the Islamic system, bit by bit, but partial adoption cannot produce the promised

result. A system is an indivisible unit and produces results only when adopted as a whole. It is very much like a medical prescription that will restore health only if it is carefully prepared with all its necessary ingredients. The people who adopt the Islamic System as a whole are called *Momineen*. They are the people who have "no fear on them, neither shall they sorrow". Man has to reach that stage in any case. He may do so by the method of trial and error or by following revealed guidance. That guidance will help him traverse in seconds ground that experimentation might take centuries to cover.

32. Decline Of Muslims

A question arises as to why Muslims as a people should lag behind other nations? A detailed answer to this question has been furnished in my book '*Asbaab-e-Zawal-e-Ummat*'. Briefly, the reason for their lagging behind is that while the other nations have been adopting Qur'anic truths after due consideration of "signs in the changing horizons and in themselves", the Muslims are clinging to an alien (*'ajami*) pseudo-Islam which forbids thought and understanding outright. The day Muslims revive the programme of reading, understanding and adopting in life Qur'anic truths, they are bound to regain the leadership of the world. Goethe, the German poet, has likened Islam to a clear and transparent stream flowing smoothly towards its goal; nations that avail of its water for irrigating their fields will have a bumper crop. In an earlier epoch of history, the Arabs did it and "gathered a hundred grains for every one sowed". But when they gave up drawing water from the stream their crops dried up. Did the stream dry up? No. It flows on and on and those who so wish may still avail of its water. "Each we succour, these and those, from your Sustainer's gift and your Sustainer's gift is not confined (to a particular people)" (17/20). The standing crop of the Muslims dried up because they would not water it from the ever-flowing heavenly stream. Allah's (swt) 'broadcasting station' is busy and will remain so "till it is the rising of dawn"; if one's radio set has become silent, the fault lies with the set itself.

33. Islamic Way Illustrated

The Qur'an has made use of an illustration for explaining the Islamic way of life. "Have you not seen how God has struck a similitude? A good word (healthy concept of life) is as a good tree whose roots are firm and whose branches are spread high all over" (14/24). The tree is fully capable of withstanding the worst storm and has its branches spread far and wide in all the four directions without being confined to any one country, "neither of the East nor of the West", (24/3). "It gives its produce every season according to the laws of its Nourisher" (14/25). The Islamic way of life is confined neither by space nor by time. The same thing has been illustrated elsewhere by another example: "The likeness of paradise that is promised to those who guard against breaches of law, is that of a garden beneath which flow streams of water, whose produce is eternal and so is its shade" (13/35).

When Allah (swt) says that the tree of Islam will bear fruit forever, it would be wrong to suggest that the tree

bore fruit at a particular period of history and then dried up. What actually happened at the time was that by their healthy tending of the tree, the believers helped it blossom quicker. This effort of Muhammad (as) - may we glorify and obey his call - the messenger of Allah (swt), assisted by his companions has been described by The Qur'an again in terms of a young sapling growing in a grain field, "as a seed that puts forth its shoot and strengthens it and it grows stout and rises straight upon its stalk, pleasing the sowers, that through them He may enrage the, unbelievers" (48/29). In other words, a tree which should have taken long to bear fruit was helped by this particular people to blossom earlier, but when their co-operation was withdrawn, they lost the fruit, although the tree continues to this day to grow, blossom and bear fruit in its normal sustained way.

34. Islamic Way and Gains Inter-Linked

The co-operating people gathered a rich harvest because of their attachment to the particular system. The moment they detached themselves from the system the gains simultaneously began to disappear. In continuation of the verse (14/25) already quoted, The Qur'an goes on to say that Allah (swt) confirms those who believe with the firm word, that is, with the firm way of life. So long as they follow it they remain firm; the moment they separate from it, they scatter and are reduced to a non-entity. Their glory and their fall are both determined by Allah's (swt) Law, and not by anyone's whim. It is the way that a people adopt which determines their fate. When they give it up, it is not the way (Islam) which fails; it is the people who fail. History shows that ways other than Islam have ultimately proved a failure. Chapter 103, Verses 1-3 of The Qur'an declare that history testifies to the fact that, by following ways of

his own making, "man has surely been in the way of loss, save those who believe in Allah's (swt) way of life and by their healthy deeds help the way" to produce its healthy results more quickly. But it is not an ad hoc programme such that you follow it and thereby ensure happiness and success for all time to come, even though the programme might have been deserted on the way. The programme requires that the process of "counselling each other unto its truth and to be steadfast" should continue ceaselessly. So long as Muslims followed the programme, they received all the good that accrues from following Allah's (swt) Laws; when they gave up the programme, they deprived themselves of the fruit of those laws. The laws, however, continue operating as before.

Here ends my broadly stated answer to the question "Is Islam a failure?" After going through it the reader will, I hope, agree that Islam has never been a failure but that it has succeeded and will continue to succeed, evergreen in its pristine glory and ready to shower its blessing without discrimination on mankind, badly torn and tortured at its own hands.

G A Parwez

Edited by Syed Mustafa Ali

swt *subhaanahu wa ta'aala* (May He be Glorified and Exalted)
as *'alayhi salaam* (On him be peace)
ra *radi'Allahu 'anhu* (May Allah be pleased with him)

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