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THE PROPHETS MOSQUE AT MEDINA: - The Normative Mosque of Islam

The importance of the mosque in Islam is underlined by the fact that the very first act of the prophet when he was invited to migrate to Medina from his ancestral town of Mecca was to set up the first Mosque in the Islamic world around the year 622A.D.

It was a simple structure (quite unlike the stately gold plated works of today) build of date palm trees adjacent to which were built the living quarters of the prophets family, which today stand incorporated in the vastly expanded Mosque.

Despite its simplicity and unpretentiousness the fates of the worlds two super powers of the day, the Persian Sassanid Empire and the Byzantine Roman Empire and the history of the world for centuries to come, were to be decided in this humble structure over the next twenty years or so.

What took place in the Prophets Mosque:

- * Collective Community Worship, at least five times a day
- * Teaching and Education of the new faith
- * Scribes to immediately note down any revelations dictated by the Prophet, as and when received.
- * Community Governance/Consultation
- * Act as focal point of Community (Reception of Ambassadors and delegations)

It was a Church, Houses of Parliament, Secretariat, Courts rolled in one.

Companions considered the Bell/Gong/Jewish Conch? but opted at the end for the Azan, a loud call for prayer

Prophet's living quarters were adjacent to the Mosque and he could walk in through a curtain

Subsequently with Monarchical kingships the mosques role became limited to Worship, Teaching and Education, often with adjacent residential facilities for students(The famous Mosque/ Madrassah's of Al Azhar and Qairovan in Tunisia grew up this way.)

Exactly what is the purpose of a mosque?

I would answer,

- * to act as the centre/ axis of the society both at the Individual as well as the collective level
- * To learn the purpose of life!
- * To learn our relationship with the Divine!
- * How to live positively as a Social Unit.
- * How to balance one's emotions and desires.

Question arises, just how are we to do that?

I would submit that final answers to this cannot come from any thought of Humans via science, philosophy or even meditation. It just is not a bottoms up activity and has to come through top down Revelation from the Creator.

To locate this authentic revelation objectively, to understand, and to act on the same, based on reason and evidence is the challenge facing mankind in this increasingly globalizing world of today.

Response to the challenges of today

1. The recent onslaught of the Atheists is to be welcomed. Why?
2. Because they have drawn our attention towards the core issue facing humanity, which is our relationship with the Creator.
3. They have cleared the table of the false Gods. Now we can think more clearly about the One True God. In the language of the Qur'an "La Ilaha Illa Allah". They have prepared the ground for the first part i.e that there is no God. It is now upto us, basing our case on reason and evidence, to demonstrate that there is indeed One True and Unique CREATOR.
4. The relationship between science and religion has been characterized in four different ways i.e. Confrontation, Coexistence, Dialogue and Integration. While all of these facets can be recognized the fact is that there is a basic commonality about the enterprise of Science and Religion - which is "THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH". Though each may go about it in its own way. Science looks at the Work of God i.e. the Universe and Revelation is the Word of God. Ultimately there cannot be conflict amongst them - by definition. Conflict appears only when the "Word" we look at is Man's and not God's. How do we differentiate between the authentic and the corrupted, is the challenge facing us.

Conclusion

- The best course is to follow the path of prophet ABRAHAM (pbuh)- by applying our God given faculty of Reason, to our search.
- Use the time tried methods of Science - Go the route of Reason and Evidence. And interestingly, here we are on common grounds with the Atheists i.e. to use the yard sticks of Reason and Evidence.
- Bottoms up knowledge via the magnificent edifice of science will give us knowledge of and control over nature but it cannot answer the fundamental Big questions which really matter i.e. the purpose of Life, What are we doing here? Is there an afterlife? etc etc. That knowledge can come only from Revelation i.e. Top down Guidance from the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe.

This is the very theme of my search and my book.

May the Almighty keep us on the straight path, the path of those who earned His blessings and not the path of those who went astray.