

ULTIMATE PURPOSE OF MAN'S EXISTENCE ON EARTH

By Tariq Mustafa

A question is often asked as to what is the purpose of Man's life on earth. The atheists' answer of course is that there is no real purpose behind existence. Life arose on earth through a random process of growth and one day it will end without leaving much trace behind. According to this viewpoint death is the end and there is no such thing as the hereafter or the Creator. There is no future for any of us, no accountability. One's conduct on earth is merely determined by your own choice or predisposition. The better amongst the atheists may subscribe to a moral philosophy out of cultural factors or they may feel that by living according to a set of rules and laws, humanity can be better off than without such rules, etc. For many others it is survival of the fittest or devil takes the hindmost, approach, which is not much different from animal behavior.

Qur'anic viewpoint is different. It points out that this entire universe along with life and appearance of mankind is part of the Creator's design and has a definite purpose. (Whether life arose via a process of gradual evolution or through direct creation is a separate issue, which is important, but does not affect the point under discussion here.) In support of this viewpoint the Qur'an marshals evidence and arguments from three distinctly different areas of human experience. The **first** is the material Universe consisting of nebulas, galaxies, black holes, myriads of stars, the solar system and its planets and finally the earth itself. Qur'an urges us to study this universe, its vastness, its structure, its governing laws and rules, and its balance and order therein. **Secondly**, Qur'an invites us to look within ourselves, examine our psyche. What drives us? What is the nature of Man? What makes us tick? our ambitions, desires and fears, and the Qur'an maintains that as human knowledge of the Universe and his own self advances, mankind will be better able to find therein signs of His design and His purpose.

"In time we shall make them fully understand our messages (through what they perceive) in the utmost horizons (of the universe) and within themselves so that it will become clear to them that this (revelation) is indeed the truth. ... (Still) is it not enough (for them to know) that thy sustainer is witness unto everything"

Al- Quran, 41:53, as translated by Muhammad Asad.

Thirdly, the Qur'an draws our attention to the history of the nations and people of old, and reviews the causes of their rise and fall in which it says there are lessons for us all. Those nations, which followed the Qur'anic principles, achieved success and those, which defied these principles, met with failures. It also graphically points to the disasters and the terrible end of nations, which went to the extremes of rebelliousness and open defiance of God given principles.

"Have they, then, never journeyed about the earth and beheld what happened in the end to those (deniers of truth) who lived before their time? More numerous were they, and greater in power than they are, and in the impact which they left on earth: but all that they ever achieved was of no avail to them" Al- Quran 40:82

Interestingly the Qur'an clearly states that while lot of evidence, argument and suggestions have been outlined in these three areas to convince people of the existence of the Creator and His purposes it has deliberately not closed the question of the Creator's existence and left it purposely

open for us to either believe in Him or to deny His existence. While it is well within His capabilities to throw up signs that all of mankind will be compelled to believe in Him and to bow their heads (like the rest of nature obeys the laws of the Creator), Man has been ultimately left free to choose.

“ There shall be no coercion in matters of faith.” Al-Quran 2:256

This is the distinguishing feature of Mankind from the rest of Creation that they have been given the “freedom to choose”, albeit with accountability, for the path they choose and their actions. This stage of mankind’s development ends with death and on the Day of Judgment we will know the consequences of our beliefs and our conduct, but the doors of any review would have been closed by that time.

The purpose of life on earth, according to the Qur’an has been very well summed up, in my opinion, by the following passages in Jeffery Lang’s book *Even Angels Ask* (Amana Publications). On page 42 he states:

“The Qur’an claims that man’s earthly life is not a punishment and it does not satisfy some whim of his Creator. Rather it is a stage in god’s creative plan. Mankind has been endowed with a uniquely complex nature with contrary inclinations. Through the use of his /her faculties (intellectual, volitional, spiritual, moral, etc) and the trials he or she is guaranteed to face, an individual would either grow in his or her relationship with God – or as the Qur’an says ‘ in nearness to God’ - or squander himself or herself in misdirected pursuits. The Qur’an asserts that this earthly life will indeed produce a segment of humanity --- called *Muslimun* i.e. those who surrender’ for they strive to submit themselves – heart, mind, body and soul – to this relationship. They are those who find peace, security and trust in God and who do good and strive to set things right.”

“Behold. God has bought of the believers their lives and their possessions, promising them paradise in return”. Al- Quran (9:11)

On page 46, Prof. Lang further elaborates that:

When the Qur’an speaks of God’s love, it is pointing to a very special relationship, willfully entered into by God and man, a relationship that the Quran says most of humanity will reject.

“Now verily thy sustainer is indeed limitless in his bounty unto men – but most of them are bereft of gratitude” (27:73) (See also 17:89; 25:50).

Although God’s mercy, compassion and care shine on all mankind, only those who turn to Him and strive through their lives to surrender themselves to Him will attain a bond of love with Him. This love signifies a love shared – a love received and given – and a mutual involvement---- While a loving relationship with God is available to everyone, most will not enter into one.”

On page 48 Lang adds that:

“Every soul must taste of death; then to us you will be returned. (29:57).

This truth reverberates throughout the Quran. It reminds the reader that the end and purpose of all earthly endeavor is this reunion. **ULTIMATELY, IT IS OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THAT MATTERS.** However it would be wrong to say that it is all that matters, for our relationship with God is bound intimately to our responses to our fellow man. Rituals, inspiration, contemplation, and remembrance (3:19; 4:103) all play integral parts in bringing us nearer to God, but so does our growth in virtue and good deeds. The more a believer grows in the attributes that originate in God, the closer and more intense is his/her bond with Him and the greater is his/her capacity to receive and experience His infinite beauty and power, both in this life, and incomparably more so in the next life, where earthly distractions and masks are removed.”

Prof. Lang correctly states that (such a relationship) involves a kind of intimacy and knowing that cannot ever be shared by two human beings.

In the light of the foregoing, all of us need to look into our hearts to see just where do we stand in our relationship with God. Are we even conscious of such a relationship? Is it getting the importance, priority and attention that it deserves? If not, then let us do something about it pretty soon, before it is too late, and the hour of reckoning overtakes us.

Let us end by praying that may the Almighty make it easy for us to follow the *Siraat-al-Mustaqeem* (the straight path), and may He grace us by including us amongst the *Swaleheen* (good) and the *Muttaqeen* (pious).

“O our Sustainer! Take us not to task if we forget or unwittingly do wrong!

“O our Sustainer! Lay not upon us a burden such as Thou didst lay upon those who lived before us! O our Sustainer! Make us not bear burdens, which we have no strength to bear!

“ And efface thou our sins, and grant us forgiveness, and bestow Thy mercy upon us! Thou art our Lord Supreme: succor us, then, against people who deny the truth!” Al- Quran 2:286

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