Man's Place in the Universe

Science, revelation and the purpose of human life

Science tells us that we are literally children of the stars. We would not be here without the supernovae where the trans-iron heavy elements were formed. Revelation tells us that humans have been given a special status and an honored place in the universe by being declared vicegerents of the Creator. The author maintains that both are correct. We need to recognize our potential worth in order to value others. This was the theme of this invited talk to the Muslim Education Forum in the UK.

Note: 'MAN' in this presentation has been used as a generic term for humankind.

Abstract

The author argues that modern MAN, while making breathtaking progress in studying nature, has failed to pay adequate attention to the central question of his existence viz what is his place in the universe? What is he doing here? And more importantly what happens to him after death? Because of the scintillating successes of modern science he has fallen into the trap of thinking that the scientific method is all-powerful and by neglecting to notice and respect its limits, is finding himself lost in many ways. The author argues that alongside the powerful scientific method using MAN's intellectual abilities there is another valid source of knowledge which has been given to MAN viz knowledge through divine revelation. These two sources rather than conflicting, as is commonly believed, positively reinforce, supplement and complement each other. Use of both together only can give MAN the guidance and information he needs in this information-dominated age of today that can save him from the pitfalls of earlier brilliant civilizations and bring out the potential in him to usher in a golden age

of living at peace with himself, with his fellow beings and with his environment.

The author maintains that just as there are physical laws governing the working of the universe there are moral laws governing man's activities, which are far more important for the well-being of man and society. Both sources, on deep reflection, lead to an evolutionary outlook about the development of man from inanimate to animate matter finally culminating in a unique being. The underlying principle of evolution has been increasing degrees of freedom and this will not end with death. Rather our essence i.e., the soul will be freed from the constraints of the material body to continue its onward march.

MAN thus possesses a much-honored place in the universe. We must learn to value ourselves, which should then lead us to value others.

Only by harnessing the intellect within the overall guidance of revelation can mankind develop its full potential and meet the increasing challenges of tomorrow and ensure the survival and full growth of the human civilization.

Introduction

Through the effective use of reason acting through the scientific method, modern man has learnt to overcome superstition and develop a much better understanding of the universe and to exploit natural resources for his comfort.

However, through excessive reliance on science by ignoring its limitations, he has tied himself in knots and even his survival is now at stake.

Revelation, the second source of information and guidance, has gone out of fashion because its latest proponents, we Muslims, have failed to demonstrate the relevance of its contents to guide mankind in modern times. Revelation is in fact incorrectly considered to be in conflict with science, which it certainly is not.

The challenge lying before Muslims is to bring out afresh that mankind needs both these valid sources of information and guidance to bring out man's full potential of development.

We need to demonstrate that instead of being in conflict the two sources complement and supplement each other. They have their own spheres of influence. Reason working within the ambit of divine revelation, free from human injections - as in Al Qur'an – is the best recipe not only for mankind's survival but also for its further development not just in this life but also beyond death.

This should be the focal point of education of the young: To develop in them the capabilities to think for themselves, to make rational choices, and to learn how to educate themselves on a continuing basis in this age of extremely rapid advancement of knowledge. It is also necessary to help them realize that while we have the freedom to choose, we have to bear the consequences of our choices, and we will all be accountable for our choice and deeds to the Almighty the Designer, Creator and Sustainer of the universe in which He has given mankind a place of honor.

Exactly What Is Man's Place in the Universe?

This question has been posed time and again by thinkers across the ages, but without an adequate and satisfying response.

Is man a product of chance mutations and natural selection with no visible purpose or goal, as is maintained by the atheists and secular humanists? Or is man something special, which may well have developed over the ages and in gradual stages while possibly evolving through the stages of inorganic – organic – plant – animal – culminating in Man himself. But all the time this evolutionary growth had a purpose, a goal, and a direction.

This approach has been dubbed as Theistic Evolution and a typical representative of this viewpoint would be John Haught, a Professor at Georgetown University in Washington. In the eyes of the author, this

view is close to the guidance given by the Qur'an, which will be elaborated upon in the material which follows and was used for the talk given to the Muslim Education Forum, UK in 1998.

But the Qur'an differs significantly from the stand of Materialist Evolution in that it talks of direction and purpose in the development of life and rise of the human. It talks of the body having developed through regular evolutionary development but at some stage God endowed it with a "Ruh" (commonly translated as soul or consciousness) which was a special act, conferring upon the humans a special relationship with the Creator.

Let me say this upfront that this is not the view of the Creation/Evolution debate which would be expressed by a big majority of Muslims, as the author found out at the end of the talk. But in the author's view, Qur'an offers a unique perspective which has not been adequately brought out in relevant literature.

Qur'an carries ayahs (verses) which touch on both sides of the debate. But in the author's view, it clearly comes out on the side of Evolution, as will become evident from what follows.

Qur'an indeed talks of the creation of Adam from dust.

Why Are We Here?

Most modern management courses begin by asking employees:

- The objective of the organization
- How they fit into the organization i.e., what is expected from them, whom they report to and who reports to them
- How their performance will be measured, i.e. how they will be rewarded or punished in future

How strange that modern man often spends his entire lifetime without ever asking:

- How he fits into the universe? What is his place?
- Where is he heading? What is expected of him?

- What does the future hold for him?

Is it any wonder that we stand confused and uncertain!

The Role of Science and Religion in Life

As science tells us through:

- Cosmology, physics and biology - evolutionary development
- Universe - stars & galaxies - solar system – earth
- Inorganic matter › organic › plants › animals › man

Similarly, wahhy (authentic revelation) also tells us again about evolutionary development but with a definite purpose and not chance. In fact this development continues even after death. What characterizes this development is increasing degrees of freedom. Death frees the soul (which is what really counts) from the constraints of the body (which does not really matter) and increases its degree of freedom in Akhirat (the afterlife).

However while MAN is free to choose, he cannot escape the consequences of his choices. He is fully accountable and the choices exercised by him in this life will determine the course of his future development after death.

Thus, MAN has a purpose and an honored place in the universe. Science tells us that immense amounts of energy and time have been spent in the evolutionary development of MAN. He is truly a child of the stars since the heavy elements beyond iron could only be created in supernova explosions and MAN could only be formed in the second-generation stars & not the earlier ones.

Wahhy (authentic revelation) tells us that in addition he was endowed with a soul.

This honored place should put us well above the petty differences of race, color or creed and convince us that all Mankind is one brotherhood and differences between white and black, man & woman, and rich & poor pale into insignificance.

Reason & wahhy must go together, like eyes & light, respectively to show MAN the right path, which is the only answer to the problems facing humanity today.

Valid Sources of Information

- In this age of informatics, we must start by asking, what are the valid sources of information for MAN?
- First is clearly the methodology of science:
- It has established its validity through its brilliant successes over the last few centuries
- It has freed MAN from lots of superstitions and given him seeming control over nature
- It has brought Western Civilization, its prime practitioner, total domination over all others
- The second claimant is divine revelation received by MAN through a succession of prophets
- This is considered by many as outdated, old-fashioned and invalid
- More importantly the two sources are considered to be at odds and in conflict
- It is high time that this matter be examined definitively since our life and future depend upon it

Methodology of Science

- Starts by collecting all available evidence and applicable facts
- Develops a hypothesis/model to fit/explain the evidence/ facts as best as one can
- Tries to set up controlled experiments, to check veracity, self-consistency, etc. of the hypothesis/model and make predictions/extrapolations
- Checks how well the facts fit the model, gathers more facts to check out the predictions
- Repeats procedure by different observers under differing conditions to rule out coincidences, frauds, mistakes

- If experiments are successful, model's validity becomes increasingly acceptable. The hypothesis can gradually become a theory and finally even a law.
- However, even a law is not absolute. It is open to changes/ amendments. It can even be overturned, but only by following the above process.
- Science is based on the systematic use of the intellect. It has proven its power, for some it is the only valid source of knowledge and is all-powerful, i.e., can find answers to all our problems.
- Recently however, major questions have been raised about the boundaries of the domain of sciences

Revelation and Reason

- Revelation is much older than science or even philosophy. Through the ages it helped man find many answers.
- Became suspect and increasingly ignored when men managed to use it for nefarious purposes by distorting its contents
- Revelation got a body-blow when its proponents took a position against the use of intellect and reason and staked their case on blind faith
- Qur'an, the last of the divine revelations, did not suffer the fate of addition/distortion of contents, but has not escaped from neglect
- This has happened despite the fact that Qur'an gives pride of place to the use of the intellect. So much so that over 700 verses of the Qur'an have the following endings, which urge man to use his intellect:
- Ponder ...
- Think ...
- Use their mind
- Use their ears
- Use their eyes
- Qur'an considers intellect to be the acme of evolution
- A tool which gives man the potential to tame and exploit nature

- Most powerful instrument
- Something without which even revelation cannot be properly understood

Limitations of the Intellect

- Having given such a primary and powerful role to the intellect, the Qur'an pointedly adds a warning, stating that intellect is most powerful, but beware it is not all-powerful
- Herein lies the beneficence of the Creator. He provides man with a very powerful tool and at the same time He informs him of its inherent limitations.
- Following this general warning, Qur'an specifically identifies three areas which epitomize the limitations of the intellect/ scientific method:
- The first covers the general area of reality of the Creator. Who is the Creator? The form and location of His existence? His authority, His relation with MAN.
- The second area concerns life after death, and heaven & hell

Qur'an clearly informs man that despite the power of the intellect, these two areas lie totally out of its reach. In fact it is futile for the intellect to even try to probe into these two areas. The reason given is that man's intellect simply has not been given the means to even try to unlock the multidimensional facets of these two areas.

- The third area is more grayish and pertains generally to the social sciences, i.e., brotherhood of mankind, man/woman relations, economic structures, etc. The intellect/scientific method does have the potential to work here, but in so doing, it can bring about unnecessary misery and suffering.

The reason given is that controlled experiments are either not really possible or the results will take generations to appear; hence they are not fit for study by the scientific method.

Man's Status in the Universe

- Mankind is one brotherhood on this spaceship Earth
- Man has an honored place. He is capable of rising above the angels but also of falling below the animals.
- Man has evolved along a designated path:

Inorganic › organic › plant › animal › MAN › beyond.

- Increasing degrees of freedom characterizes the upward march of evolution
- Man is free to choose, but cannot escape the consequences of his choice - he will be held accountable
- MAN's development will not end with death but continue into the hereafter which is the real life
- What we do here will affect and determine how our development continues in the next life
- Man consists of a body and a soul
- Man is literally a child of the stars

Evolution of the Universe – View of Science

- Evolutionary development of the universe leading to the rise of MAN has been the accepted view of science despite the recent outcries of creationists
- Starting with the famous Big Bang around 12-15 billion years ago, galaxies and stars were formed and the universe is still expanding at an enormous rate
- Our sun, which is a typical yellow star, was formed about 5 billion years ago along with its string of planets of which the earth alone has the right conditions for the rise of life
- Starting with inanimate matter, evolution proceeded progressively through development of complex organic molecules, then plants, animals and finally MAN himself
- According to science, life has evolved through random processes with no direction or design. On the presence of intelligent life elsewhere in the universe, science is still searching

- Man, with his superior intellect and almost total dominance over the earth and reaching out for the moon and the planets, is still, in the eyes of most scientists, merely a superior animal destined one day to die with nothing left to develop further
- Qur'an states otherwise

Evolution of the Universe – Views of the Qur'an

- Although the Old and New Testaments talk of the rise of man through creationism, and the Qur'an too at a number of places apparently refers to the creation of Adam and his partner, the fact remains that the dominant theme of Qur'an concerning development of the universe and rise of man therein, is clearly evolutionary and surprisingly in line with the modern scientific findings
- Qur'an also refers to the gradual development of the heavens and the earth in six stages lasting aeons of time. It talks of spheres of gases, rise of life from inanimate matter and its origins from water (in different stages)
- Most interestingly Qur'an talks of relativity of time where one day or a stage in Arabic would last 1000, 10,000 or 50,000 years of our time
- While the similarities between the Qur'anic statements and scientific findings on evolution are amazing, the more significant are the differences. The Qur'an tells us that:
- Evolution is not random but directed
- Life has a purpose as part of a design
- A divine spark was put into man (consciousness?)
- More important part of evolution is yet to come, i.e. life after death

Creation of the Universe

- Allah is the Creator, Nourisher and Sustainer of this Universe which was created for a purpose. It did not happen by chance.
- The Universe is governed by universal laws, while matter is governed by physical laws which can best be discovered by the human intellect using the scientific method

- Man on the other hand is governed by moral laws. They are not easily amenable to discovery by "scientific and philosophic enquiry" and have been revealed to man through a series of prophets culminating in the Qur'an
- Reason is very powerful; the Qur'an repeatedly enjoins use of it. However, reason has its limitations.
- Sovereignty belongs to the Creator who is the Absolute, All-Knowing, All-Powerful, the Omnipresent, the Omniscient
- Everything has a purpose - even if we cannot understand it at this stage

Environmental Challenge – Man and Nature

- During much of history, the population of mankind was relatively small and his control over natural phenomena was limited
- Under these conditions Mother Nature could in time heal any imbalance and damage caused by human activities and save man from the unintended causes of his own follies
- With the spectacular developments of modern science and technology and the exponential rise in human population across the globe, this safety valve is weakening rapidly
- Consequences of human actions can now no longer be taken care of by Mother Nature and we are now increasingly vulnerable to our own mistakes
- By gaining increasing power over nature, man has increased his vulnerabilities
- It is becoming imperative that we now chart our future course of action with greater care to ensure not only the survival of the human race, but the optimal development of its full latent potential

Current Dominance of Western Civilization and Its Future

- The dominance achieved by Western Civilization in the last few centuries and particularly the 20th century, has been unique
- While a number of other civilizations, e.g., the Egyptian and the Chinese existed for millennia (much longer than Western Civilization

has done to date), the fact is incontestable that the West's dominance has been far greater and almost total in various spheres, i.e., economic, social, cultural and most of all military

- The one area which has been the exception is religion
- To understand the reasons underlying this phenomenon, an effort has been made to list out the strengths and the weaknesses of the Western civilization in the next slides

Western Civilization – Strengths

- Supremacy of law, Magna Carta - Human Rights
- Conduct of affairs through consultation - Democracy
- Efficient management of their resources - Market Economy
- Human Resource Development
- Widespread Education/Training
- Dignity of Labor
- Development of intellect, science and technology
- Military strength, desire for exploration and enquiry
- Establishment of a welfare system
- Increasing respect for the environment
- Ability and flexibility to analyze their experiences and to learn from them

Western Civilization - Weaknesses

- Excessive reliance on human intellect (treating it as all-powerful), even denying the Creator
- Breakdown of the family system
- Materialism, licentiousness, hedonism
- Drugs, alcoholism and preoccupation with sex and lately deviant sex
- Alienation leading to wanton violence against society and self (suicide)
- Denial of equal rights to others - Indians, Aborigines, and Blacks
- Weak belief/disbelief in the Creator and the Hereafter

- Advocacy of unbridled capitalism - riba (usury)

Western Civilization – Possible Future

A very instructive phase during the 20th century has been the meteoric rise and even more sudden fall of the communist-led Soviet Empire (which many historians consider a part of Western Civilization). Now that the Soviet empire has collapsed and the market economy and democracy, the two pillars of western society, have apparently triumphed, strangely, instead of gloating over this success, there are sounds of apprehension and doubts being expressed about the future of western civilization from within its influential ranks.

No, the reference here is not to the thesis of Prof. Huntington on the possible clash of the West with the Islamic Civilization, but rather to the historical analysis propounded by Western pundits like Prof. Arnold Toynbee in his monumental study of history and more so the essay on the crash of western civilization by Jacques Attali, a former Advisor to the President of the Republic of France and subsequently President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

Mr. Attali maintains that the two pillars, i.e., democracy and the market economy, suffer from fundamental shortcomings. They often contradict each other and carry within themselves the seeds of their own destruction. Mr. Attali fears that such cracks in the facade of western civilization are only just beginning to show and reveal fundamental weaknesses which could lead to the total collapse of the Western civilization, (see also writings of Alexis de Tocqueville, George Soros, Kenneth Arrow, Joseph Schumpeter, and Robert Kaplan).

This is not being said by a fundamentalist Muslim gleefully awaiting the fall of the West, but by one who is an admirer of much good in Western civilization, and whose list of strengths given earlier is longer than its weaknesses. It also must be recognized and remembered that the veneer of civilization is neither very thick nor strong. Anarchy is not a desirable alternative. Every effort must be made to recover and retain what is good in each of our systems. This was just to show that masterpieces of intellect will not last unless their limitations are

respected.

With the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet empire, the market economy and democracy appear to have triumphed.

But, warns Jacques Attali, former special adviser to the president of the Republic of France and President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development:

> *Despite the prevalent belief that the market economy and democracy combine to form a perpetual motion machine that propels human progress, these two values on their own are in fact incapable of sustaining any civilization. Both are riddled with weaknesses and are increasingly likely to break down. Unless the west, and increasingly its self-appointed leader, the United States, begins to recognize the shortcomings of the market economy and democracy, western civilization will gradually disintegrate and eventually self-destruct.*

Attali further goes on to say:

> *The fact that the West may disagree with some aspects of Islam as applied in some countries - the status of women, for example - does not mean that there is nothing to learn from Islamic societies.*

The Threat Of Unbridled Capitalism

One very successful GURU of capitalism, George Soros, has the following to say:

> *I now fear that laissez-faire capitalism is endangering our open and democratic society.*
>
> *In social sciences, as distinct from natural sciences, perceptions help to determine reality and facts do not necessarily constitute reliable criteria for judging the truth of statements.*
>
> *I contend that open society may be threatened by excessive individualism.*
>
> *Market values served to undermine traditional values.*
>
> *Unsure of what they stand for, people increasingly rely on money as the*

criterion of value.

The cult of success has replaced a belief in principles. Society has lost its anchor.

Laissez-faire ideology has effectively banished income or wealth redistribution - the inequities can become intolerable.

Social Darwinism – survival of the fittest - is one of the misconceptions in human affairs. Cooperation is as much a part of the system as competition.

With the end of the cold war - which was an extremely stable arrangement - no new world order has taken its place. We have entered a period of disorder.

As things stand the global open society that prevails at present is likely to prove a temporary phenomenon.

Laissez-faire capitalism would lead to great instability and eventual breakdown.

We now have 200 years of experience with the Age of Reason and as reasonable people we ought to recognize that Reason has its limitations.

Qur'an – What It Says About Itself

- A book of guidance in which there is no doubt
- Tells man what he knows not. A guidance for all times and all peoples
- Comes straight from the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe – His literal word
- Challenges jinn and men to produce even a part like it – they will not be able to do so
- Relation of revelation with reason. Revelation is like light while reason is the eye – one needs both to be able to see
- Discerning men cried for help (Sura Fatiha). The Qur'an is the Creator's response as the culmination of guidance through a long line of Prophets
- The Qur'an is free from discrepancy. It is divine - consistent

- The Creator Himself is the guardian of this Book
- While providing abundant evidence of the Creator's existence it still leaves man with the final choice - in order not to take away man's freedom
- It says look especially in the following three areas:

a) Orderliness in the Universe

b) History of people of old

c) Look within yourselves - study of human nature

Qur'an's Relevance to Modern Life

Challenges:

- Preservation of the family unit
- Control of war—when weapons of mass destruction exist
- Control of environmental pollution and destruction
- Alienation from society: loneliness in New York (salaat)
- Excesses of free sex, alcoholism, drugs, AIDS, etc.
- Exploitation of the weak, women, poor and downtrodden
- Racism, meaning of chosen peoples
- Economic disparities, steep differentials
- Capitalism vs. Communism. Islam offers the middle way
- Private property, YES, but as trustee and not as unbridled owner
- Need for rule of law

Thus, mankind's place in the universe is one of honor. We may seem insignificant when seen in terms of size, power, age compared to planets, stars and galaxies, but man has been endowed with faculties such as intelligence and understanding, freedom to act and the potential to exploit and perhaps control the sun.

Mankind needs to recognize this, accept this and let it drive our actions and behavior.

We should rise above the petty squabbles and differences between nations and races, men and women, rich and poor. We have passed through the same process of creation, we are literally children of the stars, made from the valuable debris of heavy atoms. We share a glorious future which is yet to come, provided we survive our own follies.

Qur'anic Guidance for the Modern World

The Muslim World has yet to show the intellectual resourcefulness, the objectivity, the creativity, hard work and commitment required to handle a project of this size and complexity.

This will call for putting together a multidisciplinary taskforce under leaders of proven research ability, capable of working together in an integrative manner to bring out the synergies of collective effort. The team will need in-depth knowledge of classical Arabic, Qur'an and intimate knowledge of philosophy, social sciences and in particular modern sciences. The approach will have to be creative and innovative.

Innovative must not be taken to mean new for the sake of new. It is of utmost importance that the effort be undertaken with the right approach and attitude of mind, i.e., by people who accept from the heart that there is a Creator, Almighty, of infinite authority and reach who has bestowed upon mankind this guidance through a series of revealed books and prophets. That MAN has been endowed with intellect of great power such that by use of his intellect alone man can conquer the forces of nature and use them to his advantage. Man is reaching out for the stars and is wresting from nature its secrets, yet it would be a grave mistake to assume that human intellect is "All Powerful" and has no need of guidance from his Creator.

> *The powers of 'Reason & Intellect' must be used within the framework of 'Divine Guidance' to meet the ever-increasing challenges of modern life.*

If this can be accomplished then it can lead to heaven on Earth as well as providing man with the wherewithal to continue his development after his soul has been freed from the shackles and constraints of his

material body.

What We Need

- We need peace, we need a truce of the type that Prophet Muhammad bargained for at Hudaibiya
- The need of the day is not confrontation, à la Professor Huntington's thesis of the "Clash of Civilizations"
- The challenge is to create an atmosphere where the divine guidance embodied in the Qur'an can be brought out of the veils and cobwebs which have been allowed to grow around it, to free it from the weight of tradition, and to bring out its positive form before mankind
- To show how society can benefit from this guidance (not by trying to bring back the glories of Islam of the old days in a parochial fashion)
- Life should not be treated as a zero-sum game, rather looked upon to maximize integrated potential of mankind, bring out human synergies. Go for win-win situations
- Yardstick of success - which side of the scales is heavier

Tips on Study of the Qur'an

- It is not a textbook dealing with a specialized subject
- Neither is it easy to read like a textbook
- Remember, it was revealed in stages in bits and pieces, spread over a period of 23 years
- Its subject is vast - man and his place in this Universe
- What is he doing on this Earth? Where is he heading?
- Apparently, not easy to understand on first reading, seems disjointed, repetitive, flits from one subject to another
- Consider the example of seven blind men describing an elephant
- Consider all relevant ayahs (verses) relating to a subject
- Apparent/slight contradiction gives it stereoscopic quality
- Apparent small differences in verses, on deeper reflection, actually lead to better understanding – almost give a three-dimensional view

- Establish proper/wider meaning of the words used in the Qur'an through analysis of root words, pre-Islamic Arabic usage and usage within the Qur'an itself

Note:

Please consider the above as views of a student of the Qur'an and not those of a scholar.

Rule of Law

- Essential if society is to develop
- Laws must be just - but must be obeyed nevertheless (if unjust, try to change them legally)
- Legal force to be accompanied by Ihsan (compassion for the underprivileged)
- Eye for an eye is allowed - but forgiveness is better (aim being to do what will improve the person)
- Be witnesses against yourself, if that be the case. It is better for you in the long run
- Do not let your anger or dislike of a person affect your judgment
- Rule of law applies even to war (contrast this with "all is fair in love and war")

Muamlat (Dealings)

- Write down your deals, have them witnessed to avoid misunderstandings
- How to handle conflicts - appoint sympathetic counselors from each side
- Fitna & Fasad is worse than killing. Fight until persecution is no more
- No rumor-mongering, check your facts, inform only those who are responsible in society
- Why say that which you do not do?

In Order to Manage Others, Man Must Know How to Manage Himself

- Man's relation with the rest of creation
- Still carries the baggage of his earlier existence
- Must learn to tame and ride his desires
- Man is a Trustee of his possessions and not an absolute owner

Both an Individual and a Member of Society

- Apparent conflict between the two
- Why should man tell the truth?
- Man is essentially a social animal, cannot get very far alone
- Family is the basic unit of society, hence the importance of relations between MEN & WOMEN and later between parents and children
- No man should rule another, even if he be a prophet
- Sovereignty belongs only to Allah
- No laden one shall bear another's load

Need for Leadership

- Choose one amongst you to lead who should deal through a process of consultation (rather different from democracy because sovereignty does not reside in people but belongs to the Creator)
- Piety should be the sole criterion of choice of a leader
- Do unto others what you would like them to do to you
- Genius vs. collective approach

Status and Role of Men and Women

- They are equal in the important areas of soul and life after death and in terms of legal entities (there was a time in Europe when women were considered neither to have a soul nor could own property or exercise a vote)
- They are certainly not equal in biological and physical terms, neither

in the eyes of deen (religion) nor of biology. Athletically speaking man is clearly stronger and physically dominant. Look at the difference in weight, height, strength and speed. If the fairer and gentler sex insists on physical equality, she will be the loser.

- From the beginning man has often been exploiting women and she needs protection, both legal as well as moral which Qur'an provides and women need to be more aware of that
- Qur'an enjoins modesty, not just for women but also men. It specifically asks men to "lower their gazes". It talks of both being wheels of a cart and raiment for each other (protection, support and beauty).
- Both are essential members of a family which is the basic social unit and cannot be split into two identical persons which they are not

Attitude Towards Sex

- Sex is an essential biological need required for continuation of the species
- Nothing furtive or dirty about the activity
- Being required for perpetuation of the human race, nature has made it wholesome (within wedlock) and highly attractive
- Consequently, it needs no stimulation, rather needs to be kept in check like a strong horse
- Nature achieves control in animals through seasonal control on desires (heat). Humans, being free, are expected to exercise control voluntarily.
- Thus Qur'an enjoins modesty for both females and males:
- Females to cover their attractive parts
- Males to lower their gazes (no ogling)
- Unnecessary sexual stimulation can lead to imbalance in society, breakup of family, often to deviant sex, i.e., homosexuality, etc.

Khumr (Intoxicants) and Maisir (Gambling)

- By common understanding Qur'an forbids alcohol and gambling which it indeed does

- However the words used i.e., khumr and maisir have far more comprehensive meaning:
- Khumr not only covers all intoxicants including alcohol, drugs and the like, but also other agents and activities which interfere with the proper use of one's intellect and reason. These include:
- Undue pride
- Anger
- Even blind faith (taqlid), where one gives up use of one's reason, falls in this category
- This is the status given by Qur'an to the proper use of our intellect and reason which are the crowning glory of evolution
- Similarly, maisir really means in Arabic anything that one gets with the left hand, i.e., without due effort
- Maisir includes gambling, illegal commissions, kickbacks, most of what economists call 'rental income', i.e., something which one gets without contributing anything useful to society. In fact such activities, though very profitable to the individual in the short term, are distortive and harmful to the society; hence they are forbidden

Did Islam Indeed Spread by the Sword?

Here is what H.G. WELLS has to say in The Outline of History:

It is not within our scope here to describe the wars by which in a hundred and twenty-five years Islam spread itself from the Indus to the Atlantic and Spain, and from Kashgar, on the borders of China, to Upper Egypt. The vigorous impulse of the new faith carried the Arab idea and the Arabic scriptures to most parts of the known world, before worldliness, the old trading and plundering spirit, and the glamour of the silk robe had completely recovered their paralyzing sway over the Arab intelligence and will. The reader will note how the great tide swept over the footsteps of Yuan Chwang, and how easily in Africa the easy conquests of the Vandals were repeated in the reverse direction. And if the reader entertains any delusions about a fine civilization, either Persian, Roman, Hellenic, or Egyptian, being submerged by this flood, the sooner he dismisses such ideas the better. Islam prevailed because

it was the best social and political order the times could offer. It prevailed because everywhere it found politically apathetic peoples robbed, oppressed, bullied, uneducated, and unorganized, and it found selfish and unsound governments out of touch with any people at all. It was the broadest, freshest, and cleanest political idea that had yet come into actual activity in the world, and it offered better terms than any other to the mass of mankind. The capitalistic and slaveholding system of the Roman Empire and the literature and culture and social tradition of Europe had altogether decayed and broken down before Islam arose. It was only when mankind lost faith in the sincerity of its representatives that Islam, too, began to decay.

But critics would say that may have been so for the 7th century A.D. Surely Islam cannot cope with modernity and does not have much to contribute to today's world. Think again and see what a noted western anthropologist, Prof. Ernest Gellner says in his book, The Muslim Society:

> *By various obvious criteria – universalism, scripturalism, spiritual egalitarianism, the extension of full participation in the sacred community not to one, or some, but to all, and the rational systematization of social life – Islam is, of the three great Western monotheisms, the one closest to modernity.*

Ernest Gellner, Muslim Society

As quoted on the lead page of FAITHLINES – Muslim Conceptions of Islam and Society by Prof. Riaz Hassan, Oxford University Press, 2002.

Comparison of man and computer

ITEM — MAN — COMPUTER

Average Life — Over 60 yrs — 5-10 yrs

Learning Capability — Self learning — Needs Programming

Flexibility — Versatile, capable of parallel processing — Quicker in specialised areas and

Parentage — Self replicating (cheaper)
enjoyable — Repetitive acts. Needs extensive fabricating facilities

Repair Capability — Mostly Self repairing — Needs trained technicians

Capacity per unit size — Large — Moderate

Energy needs — Low — Moderate

Others — Mobile — Static

Sensing ability mani-pulation capability Compassion Feelings — Obedient

Conditions Prevailing in the Country

- Utter lack of confidence in authorities › lack of enthusiasm
- Legislature, police › sectarianism
- Feeling of helplessness
- The black sides are becoming prominent
- Corruption is rife and getting worse
- Result is that exploiters are thriving and it is becoming difficult for better values even to survive
- Looks as if we are rushing headlong into chaos. Remember that the veneer of civilization is not very deep
- Exploiters are having a field day and the straight are feeling helpless. One feels like sheep being led to slaughter or like the feeling of being in a traffic jam. Nothing moves. Is that what we want?
- Even a person like Edhi feels compelled to flee the country temporarily

International Scene Also Glum

- Industrial revolution has made the West prosperous and dominant; however, doubts are appearing (see Crash of Western Civilization by Attali and Soros)
- They are controlling resources. Are well organized but showing signs of decay
- Rampant materialism and Hedonism
- By concentrating on HOW, the WHY has been swept under the rug
- Result is they too, while still in control over the short term, have lost their longer-term moorings:

- Younger generation is adrift
- New order is deteriorating into an Islam bashing crusade
- Collective action essential, drops form rivers and oceans, links form a chain
- Need to organize like-minded people in a network
- Mobilize the young
- Provide constructive program of action
- Need to achieve criticality

[Work of the prophet has to be carried on by the Ummah now]

Three-Pronged Action Program

The best example for us is undoubtedly the Prophet Muhammad (SAWS). Makki and Madani life (life in the cities of Mecca and Medina)

I. Ideological Foundation

- Can only be wahhy-al-Qur'an: study, understand, and act. Aim not at bringing back the glory of our past but rather to demonstrate how Qur'an can provide guidance to solve mankind's problems of today

II. Improvement Plan for Each Individual

- Need to de-rust, wash, overhaul and rebuild
- Instead of drifting gradually downhill we should start climbing up the moral plane
- To stress obligations to society rather than rights

III. Start a Social Action Program

- To develop a network of like-minded, action-oriented organizations.
- To attract and gain confidence of the masses – mass movement
- To bring back confidence, involvement of masses is a must

Conclusion

Stop feeling helpless and start taking charge of our destinies

Recommendation

Organize collective action on above lines

Education of the Young

Abstract

The principal guidelines of educating the young should thus be:

- To make them aware of their "honored place in the universe" and the immense potential of their intellect alongside the existence and needs of their souls. Only by recognizing that each of us is unique and priceless will we understand the value and rights of our fellow beings and treat them accordingly.
- The world should be run on win-win lines. Recent developments in knowledge have forced this realization and the world has become increasingly interdependent and human survival and development today demands a universal outlook. The leadership of the world tomorrow will automatically gravitate to the group that shares these values and act accordingly.
- Man's distinguishing characteristic is to have been endowed with freedom of choice. But at the same time he must recognize that he will have to face the consequences of his choice and be held accountable for his actions both in this world as well as the hereafter. Education must be focused on giving him this awareness of the two complementary sources of guidance and to endow him with intellectual resources of making his choices by weighing the evidence.
- Knowledge is advancing rapidly, almost exponentially at a breathtaking pace. Doubling time in many areas is now less than 5 years. The need of the day is for continuing education and the ability to educate oneself throughout life. This puts a premium not so much on accumulating facts but on acquiring the tools of analysis and their usage.

Education of the Young

What can one say to this audience of illustrious and distinguished educators?

First, to recognize that you have been given charge of "beings" which are valuable beyond the wildest imagination. None of us has the slightest idea of the value of raw materials, time and energy that nature has spent in fashioning the physical body of man, and then endowing it with intelligence and providing it with a soul. Regardless of the fact that billions of such "beings" have undergone creation, each is unique and really priceless.

Second, the Creator, Designer and Sustainer has given each of these beings freedom of choice. That right should never be tampered with. Your job is to assist each being in exercising this freedom sensibly and optimally, because each of your charges is accountable for their choice and must face its consequences. Show them the sources of assistance and guidance that they can draw upon, i.e., their brains and the revelation. They need to be taught and made aware of their own value and recognize their potential so that they can place value on others and deal with them on that basis as equals - to be honored without any discrimination and treated like brothers and sisters.

Revelation - Evaluation Criteria

Having established that revelation, i.e., guidance from the Creator is a valid source of knowledge for meeting the problems faced by mankind and in developing our responses, one faces a number of associated issues:

How to choose which message is genuine and relevant?

Over the history of mankind a large number of claims have been made of divine guidance and inspiration etc. Not only have there been a large number of claimants regarded by contemporaries as bona fide or bogus, even fraudulent, but the more valid question is that even in the case of the bona fide claims, what assurance is there that the 'message'

is available today in its original form? If that is not the case, then it really becomes of academic interest from the viewpoint of providing guidance to modern man whether the original message was 'bona fide' or not.

In other words, it is of crucial significance, to the debate in hand that the message not only should have originated from the Creator, it should be free from any human inputs whether:

i. as additions/supplements by the 'receiver' of the message

ii. as errors/amendments in the original transcription, i.e., the integrity of the form/language in which the message was revealed

iii. its transmission to the audience at the time of its revelation or later from the recipient to his initial followers who heard it firsthand and its subsequent preservation/transmission down the line

iv. The state of development of the language in which the original message was received. Had the language developed enough to be used as an effective vehicle for conveying the guidance to the recipient community or for mankind at large and for different periods/stages of development of societies?

In order to make any meaningful headway in sorting out/sifting of the large amount of material available under this head with multifarious levels of claims, it is important to develop some rules/yardsticks by which to grade/judge the value of the material available.

The following criteria could be helpful:

i. How well historically do we know the recipient of the guidance, his life before and after prophethood, the conditions prevailing in the society of his birth, his upbringing and maturity?

ii. What claims/introduction/explanation were made by the recipients, if any? Are any close witnesses and their views recorded in history/available to posterity? What light does this shed on the 'message', its integrity and content?

iii. Was the recipient actively seeking such enlightenment?

iv. Format of the revelation, language of the revelation? Could the language be written down? How developed was the language, to act as a bearer of 'complex' ideas and concepts?

v. Contents of the revelation itself - any inconsistencies, contradictions, and obvious flaws, conflict with the existing wisdom/history as known to the receiving audience or as perceived by the modern historian/anthropologist, etc.

vi. How have the contents stood the test of time? How understandable were they to the original audience? How understandable are they to 'modern man'?

vii. Were any predictions made which could be verified?

Apparent Conflict Between Religion and Science

- No doubt there is conflict if we compare views of science about the universe and its creation as well as the rise of man via evolution with Biblical verses especially regarding the age of the world
- But there is no conflict between the views of science and Qur'an (which is deen, i.e., divine revelation as distinct from religion which has been tampered with, although based on Bible and Torah.) However, these unfortunately are not available to us in their original form who claim that there is absolutely no conflict found. In fact, Qur'an states many facts, which were simply not known at the time of its revelation. The spirit of the Qur'an is wholly evolutionary.
- Universe was created in six yaums – not days but epochs or periods (Allah did not get tired or need rest on the 7th day, as per the Bible)
- One yaum is described as equal to 1000, 10,000 or even 50,000 years, i.e., a long time period. It also points towards the modern notion of relativity and time not being invariant. The old view of past-present-future being distinct is no longer acceptable. Relativity says what is past for one observer may be future for another observer.
- The Qur'an says that for the Creator there is no past, present or

future; even man, on the Day of Judgment, will see this as one continuum.

- Qur'an refers to Qurras (spheres) when talking of the sun and planets, saying that they are moving/sun going towards an appointed destination
- Qur'an talks of creation of Man from:
- Dust or mud i.e., inorganic stage
- All life developed from water – life did evolve from the sea
- Man created from a clot of blood
- All this appears contradictory on the surface, but if one accepts that all these are applicable to man's rise at different periods or stages of his development, then the apparent contradiction disappears and the broad view of evolution and the Qur'anic view come very close.

Inorganic › organic › plant › animal › man

- Let us ponder as to what is the common theme/thread in this evolutionary development:
- It is increasing degrees of freedom

Qur'an goes further than science; it says that the march of evolution continues even after death. The soul, which is the essence of life, gets freed from our body, which acts as a kind of container in this life, and the soul becomes free after death to continue its march.

- Qur'an attaches tremendous importance to freedom. Man is free to choose, while the earlier forms are not. Man can even deny his Creator – No calamity will befall him. There is no compulsion in faith (Qur'an)
- However, man, while free to choose, cannot escape the consequences of his choices. He is fully answerable and accountable for his deeds
- Differences from Science
- Life has a purpose. It is part of a design
- Evolution is not random, but directed
- A divine spark was put into man (consciousness)

- Qur'an is the only divine guidance available to mankind in its original and pristine form. If this were not so then Muhammad (PBUH) could not be the last messenger
- Allah Himself is the Guardian of this Book
- Qur'an exhorts man to use his intellect to make full use of this book
- Qur'an challenges men & jinns to produce even a part like it adding that they will not be able to do so
- Qur'an maintains that it contains no absolute proof of the Creator's existence because that would take away man's freedom - the very thing that distinguishes man from the rest of creation
- However, Qur'an provides abundant evidence of the Creator. It says, look especially in the following three areas:

1. Orderliness in the universe

2. History of the people of old

3. Look within yourselves - study of human nature – psychology

- There is enough evidence cited to convince every thinking person, except those who do not want to believe. The underlying idea clearly appears to be that through progressive evolution, mankind was endowed with a reasoning ability, i.e., mind, through proper exercise of which (the scientific method), man has the ability to understand nature and to use it for his purposes.
- Whilst this is a most powerful capability, it has distinct limitations, which have been duly identified in the Qur'an:
- Reality of the Creator
- Life after death and
- The area covered broadly by social sciences. In these three areas, man is in dire need of divine guidance; in fact he will be lost without this
- Thus, to develop his inherent potential, man needs to use his reasoning ability to the full but remaining within the bounds of revelation. The relationship of reason and revelation appears to be that of eye and light: one needs both to see clearly; alone, neither is enough.