

The Promised Dawn and Expectation of Relief

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The Promised Dawn and Expectation of ReliefThe idea of the final victory of the forces of righteousness, peace and justice over those of evil, oppression and tyranny, of the world-wide spread of the Islamic faith, the complete and all-round establishment of high human values, the formation of a utopian and an ideal society and lastly the accomplishment of this ideal at the hands of a holy and eminent personality called, according to the Islamic traditions, Mahdi is a belief which, of course with variations in details, is shared by all the Muslim sects and schools of thought.

Basically this is a Qur'anic concept and it is the holy Qur'an which in very clear terms, predicts:

1. The final victory of Islam.

It is He who has sent His messenger with the guidance and the religion of truth to make it prevail over every other religion. However much the disbelievers may dislike it. (Surah al-Tawbah, 9:33 and Surah As-Saff, 61:9)

2. The absolute supremacy of the good and the pious.

Indeed We have written in the Psalms after the Torah had been revealed: The righteous among My slaves shall inherit the earth". (Surah al-Anbia. 21:105)

3. The final collapse of the oppressors and the tyrants.

We willed to show favour to those who were persecuted in the earth and to make them leaders and masters. It was also Our will to give them power in the earth and to show Pharaoh, Haman and their hosts to experience from their victims what they feared most. (Surah al-Qasas, 28:5-6)

4. A bright and happy future for humanity.

Moses told his people to seek help from Allah and exercise patience. The earth belongs to Him and He has made it the heritage of whichever of His servants He chooses. The Final Victory is for the pious. (Surah al-A'raf 7:128)

This idea is not an outcome of any wishful thinking, but it emanates from the total working of the system of nature, the evolutionary process of history, man's confidence in the future and the total rejection by him of pessimism about the destiny of mankind, which is extraordinarily bleak, according to certain theories.

Expectation of Solace

Aspiring for the realization of this human ideal has, in the Islamic traditions, been termed as 'Expectation of Solace'. Its underlying idea is substantiated by the Islamic and Qur'anic principle of the prohibition of despair of Allah's Mercy.

Those who believe in Allah's universal Kindness can never lose hope, whatever be the circumstances, and can never submit to despair and despondency. Anyhow, it must be borne in mind that the principles of the expectation of solace and non-despair of Allah's Mercy have no personal or group application. They simply refer to Allah's general Benevolence and Kindness to the entire man kind. As for the exact nature of solace, it is determined by certain other Islamic traditions and prophecies.

Expectation of solace or cherishing of a hope for the future is of two kinds. One is constructive and dynamic. It is an act of virtue. The other is destructive and paralysing. It is a sin and should be taken as a sort of licentiousness.

These two kinds of expectations are the direct result of the two divergent notions of the appearance of the promised Mahdi which in turn have emanated from two different approaches to historical changes and revolutions. Hence, it would not be out of place here to refer briefly to the subject of historical changes.

Let us examine whether the historical developments are a chain of accidental occurrences or a sequence of natural events. In nature there is nothing really accidental.

In other words, no phenomenon can come into existence casually and without a cause, though, relatively speaking, there are incidents which may be regarded as taking place accidentally and just by chance.

If, one morning, you leave your house and run into a friend whom you had not seen for years and who is passing by your house at that particular moment, such a meeting will be considered accidental. Why? Because there exists no natural law that your leaving your house will essentially be followed by such a meeting or else such a meeting would have taken place everyday. However, it is also true that such a meeting is an essential consequence of this particular departure at a particular moment in specific circumstances.

When we see that no binding and invariable sequence exists between a cause and its effect we

call the resulting event an accident. Accidental occurrences are not governed by any universal or general rule, nor do they come within the purview of any scientific law, for a scientific law is concerned only with an invariable sequence between specific conditions and a specific phenomenon.

One may say that the historical developments are nothing more than a series of accidental occurrences, not governed by any universal or general rule. To support his view, he may argue that a society is a mere collection of individuals. Everyone of them has his own personal traits and individual character. Personal whims and individual motives produce a set of incidents, which lead to a series of accidental occurrences and it is these happenings which constitute a historical development.

But that is not the real story. According to another point of view a society has its own personality, independent of the individuals, and it acts as demanded by its own nature. The personality of the society is not identical with that of the individuals. It comes into being through the combination of individuals and their cultural actions and reactions. Thus, the society has its own nature, its own character and its own rules. It acts according to its own genius and its actions and reactions can be explained through a set of universal and general laws.

We have to admit that a society has its own independent personality, because only then can we say that history has a philosophy and is governed by norms And rules. It is only then that history can be a subject worthy of deep study and a source for learning lessons. On the contrary, if it is assumed that history has no personality then only the life of the individuals can be studied and not the collective life of nations and peoples. In that case the scope of taking lessons and drawing morals will also become limited to the individual's life. As mentioned above, there are two contrary notions of history and historical developments, which, in fact, revolve around the main question whether a society has a personality or not.

The Qur'an and history

The expectation of solace, which forms the subject of the present study, is a question which is philosophical and social as well as religious and Islamic. As mentioned earlier, it has a Qur'anic basis. Hence, before an attempt is made to describe the nature of this expectation, it will be in the fitness of things to throw some light on the Qur'anic view regarding society and the ever-changing course of its life i.e. history.

It is undeniable that the holy Qur'an looks at history as a lesson, a precept, a source of knowledge and a subject worth contemplation and deep thinking. Now the big question is

whether the Qur'an looks at history from an individual angle or a collective one; whether it puts forth only the life of the individuals for persuading others to emulate the example of the good and to abstain from the ways of the wicked, or it has an eye only on the collective life, or at least on the collective life too. In the latter case, is it possible to infer from the Qur'an that the society, as distinct from the individuals, has a personality, a life and even consciousness and feelings? Similarly, is it possible to deduce that groups and nations are governed by definite rules which are equally applicable to all of them?

Due to lack of space it is not possible here to discuss these questions in detail, but it may be stated briefly that the answer to all three questions is in the affirmative.^[1]

The holy Qur'an, while relating the stories of the past for the purpose of reflection and instruction, puts forth the life of the past nations as an admonishing material for the benefit of other people:

That nation is gone. They have reaped what they sowed, and the same applies to you. You are not responsible for their deeds. You are responsible for your deeds only". (Surah al-Baqarah 2:134-141)

The holy Qur'an repeatedly refers to the subject of the existence of the nations and their duration. For example, Every nation can only live for an appointed time. When its term ends, it will not remain (alive) even for a single hour, nor will they die before the appointed time. (Surah al A'raf 7:34 and Surah al-Nahl 16:61)

It emphatically refutes the idea that destiny can in any way be affected by the blind forces of fate. It clearly states that the destiny of nations is subject to and governed only by the firm and consistent laws of nature. It says

Are they waiting for the punishment which has been the lot of the earlier people. You will not find any change in Allah's way (of dealing with such people). (Surah al Fatir 35:43)

It also draws attention to a point which is of vital importance. It points out that the people, by looking at their deeds and behaviour, can find out for themselves whether a good or a bad destiny awaits them, for the forces which determine the destiny are just a sequence of reactions set in motion by their own deeds. In other words, particular acts are always and invariably followed by particular reactions. Thus, though the course of history is ordained by the Divine Will, the role of man as a free agent is not eliminated. There are many passages in the Qur'an which refer to this subject. We quote just one verse here.

Surely Allah does not change the condition of a people unless and until they change their own conduct, behaviour, customs and manners. (Surah al-Rad 13:11).

Notes:

[1] See Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, *Tafsir al-Mizan* (vol. 4, p. 102 - vol. 7, (p. 333 - vol. 8, p. 85 - vol. 10, pp. 71 to 73 and vol. 18, p. 191