

The Holy Qur'an brings a message of guidance and social justice

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The Qur'an is a revelation sent by God (the All-Mighty) to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family). Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the last revelation to mankind. Allah (the All-Praiseworthy) says via Qur'an (3:4-5), "He has sent down to you the Book with the truth confirming what was [revealed] before it, and He had sent down the Torah and the Evangel before as guidance for mankind, and He has sent down the Criterion."

The Qur'an brings a message of guidance and social justice. With no discrimination based on gender, race, nationality, age, etc., Allah (the All-Wise) says via Qur'an (5:15-16), "Certainly there has come to you a light from Allah, and a manifest Book. With it Allah guides those who follow [the course of] His pleasure to the ways of peace, and brings them out from darkness into light by His will, and guides them to a straight path."

Now, the Qur'an, like the Old Testament, includes several verses of law. When I was younger, I had a hard time understanding how the Qur'an can have verses of peace, forgiveness, mercy, and brotherhood and, at the same time, have verses of harsh punishment, such as flogging and cutting of the hand (fingers). My first reaction was that the scholars are misinterpreting the verses and such "cruel" punishment is not possible in Islam.

However, as I grew and read more, it became clear that the verses did relate to severe punishments. I did not truly appreciate the significance of such verses until I studied American criminal law. Every society that wants to progress must enforce criminal laws to keep the society safe from danger and corruption. For example, India may have many laws, but a lot of times those laws are not enforced or are circumvented, and because of this, India is still experiencing a lot of corruption and bribery on many levels (which prevents the growth and good health of the society).

Now, truly understanding the conditions required for the respective punishments[16] the ways or means of enforcing Islamic laws of punishment, and when to apply such laws (if at all during the Major Occultation) is beyond me, but I do understand why the Qur'an includes them. They are practical in maintaining social justice (which is a mercy for the society). Also, the existence of the laws or enforcement thereof is a strong deterrent and may also help in rehabilitating criminals (e.g., through tough punishment, they may see and adhere to the right path). The truth is that the revelation of the Qur'an has changed humanity. Whether you are a Muslim or

not, you cannot deny the impact of Islam. For example, of all the communities as a whole (not certain individuals) that converted to Islam, how many of those communities have reverted back to their old ways? Societies are adhering to Islam and the Qur'an, and this is a sign of the existence of truth. The Qur'an (17:88) states, "Say, „Should all humans and jinn rally to bring the like of this Qur'an, they will not bring the like of it, even if they assisted one another.”"

This is a tremendous claim. I thought about this a lot, and with no disrespect to the Qur'an, I challenged my faith with some straight forward questions. I first asked, what is so special about the Qur'an in terms of language and expression? One can look at the Qur'an as a mere book. In light of such questions, Sayyid Khu'i gives a beautiful explanation of the miraculous quality of the Qur'an.

For example, at the time the Qur'an was revealed, the expert poets and masters of language were shocked and at awe by the beauty, symmetry, and language of the Qur'an. This shows that there is something extraordinary about the Qur'an and it must have come from a Special Source. Ok, but what about now? Why is it not possible for someone to make verses similar to the Qur'an? One can change some words around or paraphrase the Qur'an using modern language techniques. However, this is just imitation, not creation or bringing the like of the Qur'an. If someone plagiarizes a paper and just changes some words, then that product is not truly an original work, it is just a copy.

Also, every word of the Qur'an has a special and deep importance, and so even changing a word would make the imitated work an inferior product. Furthermore, the Qur'an has many levels (such as outer and inner levels). One may try to imitate the external language, but the deeper and hidden truths will still be beyond him or her. Our knowledge is dependent on what Allah (the All-Knowing) allows us to know. If Allah does not allow us to know the deeper and higher levels of knowledge, it is not possible for us to even try to express such knowledge. Also, the Qur'an contains truths that may be beyond our comprehension, and so how can we ever bring the like of it.

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) said that whoever searches for salvation without the Qur'an is astray. The right path is the Qur'an. For example, we recite so many times daily, Qur'an (1:6-7), "Guide us on the straight path, the path of those whom You have blessed – such as have not incurred Your wrath, nor are astray."

This is universal and applies to everyone. You can break down every action in life into the three categories: 1) the straight path, 2) the path of those who go astray, and 3) the path of those that incur the Lord's wrath. For example, if I wanted to make money to support my family, I can find Islamically permissible work (a straight path), or I can find work that involves bad acts or is

harmful (going astray), or I can avoid work and just steal for the rest of my life (incurring wrath). In every little action, one must find the straight path and take it (i.e., knowledge and action). As Muslims, we should read the Qur'an every day. But, how should we read? Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (peace be upon him and his family) said that I do not like someone who reads the Qur'an in less than one month. (Jalali, page 453). Why? One can answer the question with another hadith (tradition) from Imam Sadiq (peace be upon him and his family). He said that the Qur'an should not be read fast but, rather, should be read with pondering and meditation. It is important to not just move our tongues to make the sounds but to also comprehend and think.

When I was younger, I memorized some of the shorter chapters of the Qur'an so that I can recite them during salah (Islamic ritual prayer). Arabic not being a native language for me, I was just happy to be able to pronounce the chapters in a halfway decent manner. One day I thought to myself that I should really know what I am saying. Standing before the Lord (all praise is due to Him) and reciting without understanding did not seem right. Accordingly, I forced myself to understand the meanings of the chapters I memorized via English translations.

Truthfully, when I started praying with the understanding of the words, my prayer felt more sincere and I felt more content. If we believe that the Qur'an is truth and guidance, then we must ponder and attempt to comprehend it for our own benefit. Furthermore, there are some etiquettes and recommendations when reading the Qur'an. (Jalali, page 454). For example, 1) be pure (in heart and body), 2) recite ista'adhah (seeking Allah's protection from Satan) before reading, 3) recite basmalah ("In the Name of Allah, the All-Beneficent, the All-Merciful") before reading, 4) ponder while reading, 5) do du'a (supplication or call to God (the All-Merciful)) after you finish reading, and 6) read with a good voice

Looking at the concepts of bir and ihsan

Looking at the concepts of bir and ihsan, one can conclude that both relate to obeying God (the All-Mighty). Piety or righteousness are usually used to define bir, but one can associate bir with dealing with people in a good manner. Also, ihsan means virtue or to do beautiful things which includes not retaliating if someone does something wrong to you (e.g., if someone is mean to you, be kind to him). Dealing with people in a good manner and not retaliating helps to establish happiness in life. The wise Qur'an (5:2) states, inter alia, "Cooperate in piety and Godwariness, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression." Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (peace be upon him and his family) said that bir and ihsan cause

prosperity. (Jalali, pages 454-455). For example, when I was a child and became angry at my parents for not buying me a toy while shopping, I would run and go hide somewhere in the store. My parents would fervently look for me, and I would cause them great heartache. I would make their life miserable at that moment. Now just imagine if adults acted like that towards each other. Meaning, they do not deal with each other nicely and they treat each other with aggression. They would be so stressed and not at ease. From a physical point of view, people may get high blood pressure and other health problems, which would lead to the shortening of one's life. This is not prosperity. Accordingly, bir and ihsan can make one's life longer (by the grace of Allah, the All-Merciful) because one may not get as irritated or nervous throughout life. Now, this does not apply only to the home or family life. If you are just and good with your neighbors, they are more likely to be just and good with you. If a first community is just and good with a second community, the second community will probably be just and good with the first community. If nation A is just and good with nation B, then nation B will probably be just and good with nation A. This is only natural. Do good for yourself in this life (and the hereafter) by being good to others. The Qur'an (17:7) states, inter alia, "If you do good, you will do good to your [own] souls, and if you do evil, it will be [evil] for them."

Furthermore, the Qur'an (28:77) states, inter alia, "Be good [to others] just as Allah has been good to you."

The Qur'an (31:22) also states, inter alia, "Whoever surrenders his heart to Allah and is virtuous, has certainly held fast to the firmest handle."

The Qur'an 77 (27:89) states, "Whoever brings virtue shall receive [a reward] better than it; and they shall be secure from terror on that day."

Additionally, the Qur'an (6:160) states, inter alia, "Whoever brings virtue shall receive ten times its like."

The Qur'an (3:92) also states, inter alia, "You will never attain piety until you spend out of what you hold dear."

So be good with others and give real charity. We may give away things that we no longer want or like (such as old clothes), but how many times do we give, in charity, things we hold to be more valuable (such as brand new clothes)? I knew a man that attended a celebratory meeting. In this meeting the man received some food, which was his favorite food. He could not stop talking about this food; he really loved it. He decided to take it home to enjoy it with his family. On his way home he met a beggar on the street. Now, this beggar was always on this particular corner and the man could have just given him some money (as he sometimes did).

No, this man gave him all the food (not just a little bit). This man who loved this certain food (which he received as a celebratory gift) truly showed charity because I know he really wanted to take that food home (he talked about it all day before he ran into the beggar). Additionally, there are six points to act on to help achieve prosperity. (Jalali, page 456). The points are 1) believe in Allah (the All-Mighty), 2) give money in His cause, 3) pray, 4) pay zakat, 5) if you promise, keep it, and 6) be patient.

In regards to promises, you do not have to make a promise, but if you make one, make sure you follow through. This applies to everything and everyone. For example, if your child is not behaving and you promise her some chocolate to calm down, make sure you give her chocolate if she calms down. Someone I know told me that when he was a child, he would call his own mother a liar if she forgot to fulfill her promise. Children know a lot, and we should encourage good behavior and set examples by fulfilling our promises.

Furthermore, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) said that helping a Muslim is more important than fasting one month. He also said that all people are the children of Allah, and if you want to be close to Allah, help the children of Allah. Imam Musa (peace be upon him and his family) said whoever helps a believer really is helping the Prophet and the Ahlul Bayt (People of the House).

Sometimes we focus on ritual acts of worship (which are good), but we then forget about helping others. We should engage in helpful acts, large and small. When I was young, I saw Muslims praying and saw some of those same Muslims trying to get ahead in a line and not opening or holding doors for others (and this really bothered me).

Since I was a child, I think simple acts of help (like holding the door open for someone) are very important and need to be stressed more in our community. When I see anyone (not just a Muslim) performing acts of kindness and help, I truly feel something warm within. By doing small acts of help, we can build up a strong nature of helping, in general, within ourselves. We cannot live in a society and be isolated. We must be part of a brotherhood and sisterhood. Imam Sadiq (peace be upon him and his family) names seven points as a base for any relationship.

They are 1) love for him (your brother or sister) what you love for yourself and hate for him what you hate for yourself (meaning, be fair and considerate), 2) do not make him angry, 3) help him (however, do not interfere where you should not), 4) you should be a mirror for him (meaning, if he is doing something wrong or harmful, let him know in a kind way. Be a true brother and friend), 5) you should not be full while he is hungry (or thirsty or needy), 6) if you have a helper, let your helper help him, and 7) if he asks you for help, be there to help him (you

do not have to burden yourself to a great degree, but help as much as you can. For example, if he needs help, you can tell him that you have work but you will stop by after work.).
.If we can act on these points, it will be good for us, individually and as a community