

MORAL AND SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION OF ISLAMIC CULTURE AND CIVILISATION

The following verse of the Holy Quran (2:177) lays down in unambiguous language the moral and spiritual foundation of Islamic culture and civilisation. These principles hold good for the individual, the community, the nation and also for the world at large, for the purpose of the Quranic message is to mould the individual as well as the world community into a God-fearing one. In other words, each person must dye himself in the colours of the Almighty as demonstrated by the various prophets who were sent to all nations on earth.

The greater part of the explanation of this verse is taken from Naseer Ahmad Faruqui's excellent collection of Quranic lessons compiled in the book entitled *Ma'ariful Quran*. Contributions from Maulana Muhammad Ali and Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad also serve to elucidate the concepts in the verse under discussion.

“It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West, but righteous is the one who believes in Allah, and the Last Day, and the angels and the Book, and the Prophets, and gives away out of love for Him, to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask and to set slaves free and keeps up prayer and pays the poor-rate; and the performers of their promise when they make a promise, and the patient in distress and affliction and in time of conflict. These are they who are truthful; and these are they who keep their duty” (2:177) – Maulana Muhammad Ali's translation.

Mian Naseer Ahmad Faruqui has given us an original explanation of *East* and *West* as used in the verse above, and in his usual endearing and compelling style, he has also presented an explanation of the moral and spiritual foundation of Islamic civilisation and culture as given in the verse under discussion.

In addition, there is supplementary material which, one hopes, will be of benefit to students and general readers alike.

To appreciate the originality of Mian Faruqui's explanation of *East* and *West* in the verse (2:177), let us first take a look at the commentaries of five translators of the Holy Quran on the same verse.

Maulana Muhammad Ali

"While discussing the subject of minor details of the law, a warning is given to the Muslims that they should not fall into the error into which the previous people fell, who sacrificed the spirit of religion for the outward ceremonial. The essence of religion we are here told is faith in God and benevolence towards men. The turning of the face to the East and the West refers to the outward act of facing a certain direction when saying prayers. This, though necessary, should not be taken as the real object of prayer, which is in fact meant to enable one to hold communion with the Divine Being and to imbue oneself with divine morals as explained further on. But the words may also have another significance. The Muslims were told again and again that all opposition to the Truth would ultimately fail and they would be masters of the land. But temporal greatness was not their real object. They may conquer Eastern and Western lands but their real aim was to attain righteousness and bring others to righteousness" (p. 71, Note 213a).

The Holy Quran with English Translation, Vol. 1 (Rabwah Jama'at)

"Every commandment must have an outward form as well as an underlying spirit. What, however, is really meant is the underlying spirit and not the outward form which mostly serves as an outer shell for preserving the inner kernel. To illustrate this principle, the verse refers to the commandment in relation to the turning of the faces to a particular direction while offering prayers. The verse points out that Islam has not directed the Faithful to face a particular direction during prayers because it considers such an act to be of any intrinsic virtue. The fixing of a special direction is merely meant to bring about uniformity, whereas what really counts is the purpose underlying it, which is perfection of faith and deeds. The Quran, accordingly, proceeds to give in a nutshell the Islamic teachings about these two subjects" (p. 227).

The Holy Quran, Text, Translation and Commentary by Allama Abdullah Yusuf Ali

"As if to emphasise again a warning against deadening formalism, we are given a beautiful description of the righteous and God-fearing man. He should obey salutary regulations, but he should fix his gaze on the love of God and the love of his fellow-men. We are given four heads: (i) Our faith should be true and sincere; (ii) We must be prepared to show it in deeds of charity to our fellowmen; (iii) We must be good citizens, supporting social organisation; and (iv) Our own individual soul must be firm and unshaken in all circumstances. They are interconnected, and yet can be viewed separately" (p. 70, note 177).

The Message of the Quran, Translated and Explained by Maulana Muhammad Asad

"Thus the Quran stresses the principle that mere compliance with outward forms does not fulfil the requirements of piety. The reference to the turning of one's face in prayer in this or that direction flows with the passages which dealt, a short while ago, with the question of the *Oiblah*" (p. 36, note 143).

The Running Commentary of the Holy Quran by Dr. Allamah Khadim Rahmani Nuri (Explanations given in brackets.) 2:177: "(Whilst the Jews, the strictest of all formalists, and the Christians are making much ado about the question of the *qiblah*, and who are strangling themselves with the outward ceremonials while sacrificing the spirit of religion, you Muslims are warned that it is not virtue that you (simply) turn your faces to the East and West (sacrificing the real spirit of *Salat*, because virtue dwell not in the tongue but in the heart)" (p. 40).

Before going into Mian Faruqi's *dars-ul-Quran* (explanation of the Quran) in depth, we must ponder over the meaning of *laisal birra an tuwallu wujuhakum qiblal mashriqi wal maghrib* (it is no big act of righteousness if you turn your faces to the East or the West) as he understands it. He says:

"Most, or rather all, the commentators of the Holy Quran interpret this as referring to the changing of the *Oiblah*. The first *qiblah* of the Muslims was the *Bait-ul-Muqaddas* (the Holy House) at Jerusalem, but when they migrated to Madinah it was changed and Makkah Mu'azzamah was ordained as the new *qiblah*. So the commentators lent the following meaning to the above sentence: that by itself there was no great virtue in this (change), but of great merit were the things mentioned later (in the verse). But this meaning is defective for the following reasons:

1. To connect this subject with the reference to the *Qiblah*, the commentators had to go four or five sections back, although in the intervening sections many other topics were dealt with and as I will show, between this section and the previous sections there is a very important connection as regards subject matter.
2. Wherever the change of the *Qiblah* is referred to (in the Holy Quran), so much importance was attributed to it that the Holy Prophet was individually and the Muslims were collectively ordered five times in succession to turn their faces to the Kab'ah at the time of *salah*, wherever they found themselves. So important is the *Qiblah* that in the *Hadith* the Holy Prophet (pbuh) referred to the Muslims as *Ahl-e Qiblah* (People of the *Qiblah*) and he gave the order: *La tuhaffir ahl-e qiblataka* (Do not call the people who face your *qiblah* *kafirs*). As turning one's face towards the *Qiblah* when reading *salah* is a distinctive mark of Muslims and certain proof of a person being a Muslim, then in light of the *Qiblah* being so important, to refer to it as *not of great merit* cannot be right.
3. If one were to accept the same meaning that the commentators give, then from a geographical standpoint, that interpretation, too, would be incorrect. The verse in question was revealed at Madinah Munawwarah. The first *qiblah*, that is, the *Bait-ul-Muqaddas*, is situated to the north of Madinah and the next *qiblah*, that is, the Holy Ka'bah, to the south. So to apply the verse: '*It is of no great merit whether you turn your faces to the East or the West,*' even to the Muslims of Madinah is not correct, neither is it correct to apply it to all Muslims who lived all around the Ka'bah and still do, whether they reside inside Arabia or in other countries.

In fact, East and West are two well-known names into which the world is divided. In English, also, the words East and West are used to refer respectively to Eastern and Western peoples and countries. If we delve into the history of the human race, we shall see that civilisation and culture originated in the East, and not only because all religions were born in Eastern countries, and the foundation of civilisation and culture is built on religion which is the medium for teaching high morals, but from the dawn of mankind, great empires flourished in the East. Knowledge and Science, however they were, existed in the East – fine apparel, a good standard of life, poetry, art (that is, literature), fine social graces, were all part and parcel of the East. In those days, Europe and America were in a barbarous or semi-barbarous condition. In the nineteenth century AD however, there was a reversal of fortunes in the West. Not only did the Western peoples spread over the whole world politically and militarily, but also in knowledge and expertise, especially in the sciences, they made such stupendous advances that the eyes of the whole world, and especially of the Eastern peoples, were dazzled.

The nineteenth century AD was the age when not only did the Eastern empires fall into decadence but the religious foundation upon which stood the edifice of civilisation and culture also became hollow. Other religions had already become polytheistic and their Books had been lost or been corrupted and had long ago become soul-less, that is, lacking meaning and substance, but in Islam, not only was *tauhid* (the concept of the Oneness of God) alive, but the Holy Quran still existed in

its full splendour and magnificence. But in the nineteenth century AD, the picture of Muslim religious leaders was such, with few exceptions, as has been delineated in the celebrated *Musaddas* of Maulana Altaf Hali. Abandoning the Holy Quran and the *Hadith*, Muslim religious leaders, except for a few, found themselves entangled in matters of jurisprudence and this naturally instilled in them an attitude of unbending conservatism and consequently an aversion to change. Short-sightedness replaced the broad-mindedness and illuminating ideas of the Holy Prophet (pbuh) and Muslims were divided in seventy-two sects, and for petty and insignificant questions, severe differences arose, and they even fell into fights and quarrels. The result of this was that Muslims became averse to seeking Islamic religious knowledge and either they became Christians or they became enamoured of the Western way of life.

Now, when we look at the words of the Holy Quran, we see that it says: '*It is not a great act of righteousness to turn your faces to the East or the West.*' Man can see only in the direction in which he points his face and not in the opposite direction. Whither he goes, thither he pays attention. It is from there he learns and whatever affair arises there, he hears and learns from that ambience. In the early ages, when the East was the cradle of civilisation and culture, the whole world directed its attention to that direction. But in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries AD the faces of people were turned to the West not only because the seat of power was now centred there and the Western nations were bent on spreading their civilisation and culture to the rest of the world, but also because the marvellous advances of Western people in knowledge and science were dazzling the eyes of the whole world.

Even in the Indian Sub-continent itself, people were divided into two parties. There were those people who claimed that the Eastern way of life was good, and that there was nothing good in Western civilisation and culture. On the other hand, there were some who fell so much in love with the Western way, that whatever came from the West, whatever work the Western people were engaged in, they considered good and worthy of imitation. They had already become disillusioned with religion because of the sorry state of affairs mentioned above, but more so, because wherever the amazing progress in Science had fascinated the hearts of people, there, in most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it had strongly drawn the Western man of science towards atheism and irreligion. But in spite of being distant from religion, the desire to reform and beautify himself is embedded in the nature of man. If not with religious education, then Western atheism and irreligion had to suffice.

The Holy Quran's love for justice is perfect. Where the lovers of the Eastern way could see no merit in Western civilisation and culture and Western people considered the Eastern style as obsolete and impracticable, the Holy Quran avers that both civilisations (whether Eastern or Western) certainly contained, or still contain, small points of merit, but these are not lofty virtues. For example, in Western culture, to say 'Thank you' on every occasion or such kinds of minor matters of etiquette certainly exist, but these are not exalted virtues. Because these were not sterling virtues, the gold-plating, that is, the superficial glitter of Western civilisation was quickly destroyed and so today in Europe and America all kinds of evil – unnatural acts, nakedness, alcohol and other kinds of intoxicants – are rampant. Crime is rising; family life has already been destroyed; the young generation has become rebellious. It was in this way that the various Eastern civilisations had finally succumbed to all kinds of evils. So, exalted virtues do not exist in worldly

civilisations or man-made societies. Instead, they are derived from those principles which the Holy Quran has mentioned in this verse already under discussion (2:177).”

Mian Faruqi now explains in detail the divine universal tenets of Islamic civilisation and culture enshrined in the verse under discussion (2:177):

“The first of these, and indeed the most fundamental concept, is *man amana bil-Lahi* (whoever believes in Allah). Belief in Allah, Most High, is not mere confession or acknowledgement that Allah exists, but since He did not create this entire universe in vain, but for higher purposes, therefore man, who is the masterpiece of this universe and the *khalifa* (vicegerent) of Allah on earth was certainly created for the highest purpose of all. And what is that purpose? It is to know Allah, Most High, and to achieve closeness to Him. It is obvious that only he who has dyed himself in Allah's colours will be able to find Him and achieve union with Him. This is why the Holy Quran says in another place:

‘Take Allah's colours. And who is better than Allah in colouring? And we are His humble and obedient servants’ (2:138).

In the same vein, the Holy Prophet (pbuh) commanded thus:

‘(Inculcate the attributes of Allah, Most High, within you).’

How can we do so? By being humbly obedient to His commands which we find in the Holy Quran just as it is mentioned: *Nahnu lahu 'abiduna*. Allah's colours are manifested by His attributes and those are the most sublime morals.

In my commentary of *Suratul Fatihah*, when explaining the expression *al hamdulil-Lahi* (all praise is due to Allah), I said that the concept of noble attributes and praiseworthy virtues entered the brain of man from his knowledge of the attributes of Allah, Most High, for man's brain by itself is just like that of the animals and of the same material substance. On his own, it was impossible for him to devise such sublime moral and spiritual beauties unless Allah, Most High, had not given him knowledge of His attributes by means of revelation. Since this revelation started from the time of Prophet Adam, in this way, after a period of thousands of years, it is only Allah's attributes which fashioned in the human mind moral beauties or values. The knowledge of the attributes of Allah given in the Holy Quran does not exist today in any other revealed Book, either because these Books have been lost, or they exist only in translations which have been done over the course of centuries, or they have been corrupted through interpolation. The Holy Quran is the only revealed Book that was put into writing right at the point of revelation and it is the only one that is still preserved today in its pristine purity.

So, if man is to be a worthy *khalifa* (vicegerent) of Allah in this world, it is clear that Allah will require of him as vicegerent such high morals and spiritual powers of which He, Allah Himself, is Possessor. If man desires to draw closer to Allah and to achieve union with Him in the Hereafter, then it is also obvious that man will get nearer to Allah only to the extent that he has coloured himself in the colours of Allah, Most High. That is, to the extent that he has inculcated the attributes of Allah within

himself.

Vested in Allah's attributes are such magnificent moral and spiritual beauties that it is impossible to conceive of any civilisation and culture that can surpass one that is founded on those virtues.

The true rewards and benefits of good deeds will be seen in the Hereafter, and so the first principle (after belief in Allah, Most High) that the Holy Quran commands is that we should have faith in the next life. As I had said in the explanation of *yaumiddin* in *Suratul Fatihah*, the word *yaum* has very extensive meanings; that is, it can signify the whole of the future life in which man will receive the fruits and rewards of goodness. But *yaum* can also mean from morning to evening; that is, a single day, or also, a particular period of time. So belief in the Last Day, if we are to choose from these meanings, will signify the Day of Accountability. The Holy Quran has repeatedly informed man that there will come a day when he will have to give an account of all his actions, words and even the innermost thoughts of his heart, and his secrets, too. So, by Allah! How powerful is this belief in the Hereafter that if this conviction should find root in the heart of man, then all his deeds and words, nay, all the inner passions and desires of his heart will be purified! Then from this will emanate goodness and nobler morals and that is true culture – not a superficial and gold-plated one that soon loses its sheen.

What a great benefactor to man is Allah and how full of knowledge and gnosis is this Book, the Holy Quran. It says that in order to assist man to acquire the higher morals, three kinds of arrangements have been made.

Firstly, there are the angels. Angels are the intermediaries between Allah and man – a means by which Allah, Most High, inspires good thoughts in the heart of man. So, belief in angels, which this blessed verse mentions as the third principle of faith, was ordained so that man may know that there is an inspirer of good thoughts in his heart. Therefore man's mind should always be on the alert so that whenever an impulse towards good arises in his heart he will recognise it as an angelic inspiration and knowing it to come from Allah, he should immediately act on it and should never squander this invitation to goodness, for there is no greater misfortune than this. To lose a good opportunity is to do harm to oneself for if the chance or the time is lost, it never returns.

The second provision that Allah, the Most High, has made for the guidance and benefit of man is the sending of a heavenly Book. The greatest angel, whose name is Gabriel, has brought this Book. Remember that angels were placed in the heart of man to inspire him to goodness, but since this inspiration is secret, there was every likelihood that this might escape his attention. In order to prevent this, Allah, Most High, conferred this blessed favour on man that He always sent His revealed Word (Book) to the different nations in order to explain what things constituted righteousness that they should acquire, and what constituted evil that they should avoid. These were placed in man's hand in black and white. But because different nations had either lost their Books, or they suffered from interpolations, or because of misunderstandings they fell prey to abrogation, Allah, Most High, bestowed this supreme bounty that whatever teachings in those Books were worthy of being saved, He not only collected them together in the Holy Quran but He also perfected

and preserved them forever This is why it is said: '*Fiha kutubun qayyimah*' (98:4); that is, all those teachings from the previous Books that deserved to be made permanent have been collected in this Quran.

Again, it is said: '*Wa anzalna ilaikal kitaba bilhaqqi musaddiqal-lima baina yadaihi minal kitabi wa muhaiyyiman 'alaihi*' (And We have revealed to thee the Book with truth, verifying that which is before it of the Book and a guardian over it). Here, the word *kitab* (book) is used in the generic sense, that is, it verifies all the former revealed Books and whatever teachings should be saved from among them have been preserved in this Book; that is, whatever truth was lost because of the destruction of former revealed Scriptures or because of interpolation in them, has been sent down again through this Quran and whatever teachings in those Books were fit to be preserved, have been kept well-guarded by Allah in this Quran. In addition to this, Allah has '*perfected His religion and completed His favours to man*' (5:3) in this Book and the guardianship of this Book now rests solely on Allah, the Most High:

'Surely We have revealed the Reminder, and surely We are its Guardian'
(15:9).

For all these reasons, in the verse under scrutiny here, the word *Book* has been used in the singular to show that now there is only one Book in which we need to believe and which we should accept as our guide and that is the Holy Quran. Those who accept this Book also accept the true teachings of the former revealed Scriptures. In any case, this is the only Book that is guarded and perfected, too!

So, in order to lead man to higher morals, not only were angels appointed to inspire his heart, but revealed Books were publicly given to him, and in these, lofty ideals of righteousness were placed before him in black and white. How to acquire goodness and avoid evil were also presented to man in a written form. But words are without life, and human example is a living thing.

Therefore, the third provision that Allah, Most High, has made to show man the way to higher morals is the example of the Prophets. Every nation considered its Prophet to be endowed with the highest virtues. A little of their example is met with in other books and stories. But it is only the Holy Quran that has collected the virtues of the other Prophets and mentioned them. Indeed, the most sublime example of the Holy Prophet (pbuh) has been mentioned in the Holy Quran, but the *Hadith* and other books on his life are so detailed that from the beginning to the end of the Prophet's life, his words and deeds are so well preserved that if he is referred to as the *Living Prophet*, there is no exaggeration in that.

The Holy Prophet (pbuh) put into practice all the teachings of his revealed Book and proved that they were capable of being imitated. Regarding the Holy Prophet (pbuh), his own wife, Lady Ayesha, the Truthful, gave the following verdict: 'If you want to know what his morals were, then read the Holy Quran. All his virtues were those that were taught and inspired by the Holy Quran.'

The stamp of approval of Allah, Most High, Himself, is recorded in the Holy Quran:

'Indeed, thou dost possess the most sublime morals' (68:4).

And also:

'Whoever obeys the Messenger, he indeed obeys Allah. And whoever turns away. We have not sent thee as a keeper over them' (4:80).

That is, the Holy Prophet (pbuh) followed all the commands of Allah with such perfection and with such devout submission that obedience to the Holy Prophet constitutes obedience to Allah, the Most High, Himself.

To acquire noble virtues, one should have faith in Allah, in the Hereafter, in the Angels, in the Holy Quran and in the Prophets. By these means, man can acquire all kinds of lofty morals and in a perfected form, too.

The foundation of Islamic civilisation and culture as mentioned before rests on intrinsic and spiritual principles. Now let us examine our attitude to the provisions of this world's life.

Other religions considered this life and its appendages as opposed to moral and spiritual values and encouraged people to renounce the world and to become monks, nuns, *sadhus* (Hindu ascetics) or mendicants. But by following this way, there can be no worldly progress and the human race will become extinct if everyone should eschew marriage as demanded by this policy of world abandonment.

Allah, Most High, has taught us by means of the Holy Quran that He did not create this world and its provisions in vain. Take the matter of wealth, for example. In acquiring it, the whole world labours not only from morning to evening but people even keep awake during the night in pursuit of it. The foundation of worldly civilisation is based on the acquisition of wealth. Both are based on the idea of acquiring wealth for one's own sake, and this promotes greed, covetousness, evil ambition, lust, selfishness, stealing, dishonesty, and all kinds of other evils and crimes. On the contrary, wherever the Holy Quran has emphasised the earning of wealth from lawful sources, it has stressed the spending of wealth on others after, of course, fulfilling the necessary expenditure on self, wife and children. It is thus that man can rise above the level of the animals, for keeping everything for self, wife and children is a peculiarity of the animals. So, whether it is in Capitalism or Communism, what we are witnessing today is the triumph of the animal instinct.

In the verse under consideration, it is said: *'Wa atal mala 'ala hubbihi'* (and give away wealth out of love for Him), the meaning of which can be construed in two ways. Firstly, if *hi* in *hubbihi* is understood to refer to Allah, Most High, then the meaning would be that in order to acquire the love of Allah, man gives away his wealth to those in need; that is, just as Allah keeps on giving wealth and riches to His bondsmen, they, too, do the same to His creatures thereby impressing in themselves Allah's attributes and thus making themselves qualified to receive His love.

However, the other meaning that can be deduced from *hubbihi* (out of love for it) is that *hi* refers not to Allah but to wealth. In my humble opinion, this meaning is more suited to the context, for, in spite of the fact that Allah has instilled great love for riches in the heart of man (if not, why would man engage himself in so much worldly labour and striving?), yet despite this great attraction to wealth, people still

spend on others. That is, they put the knife to their own hearts or to their own animal desires and share their riches with others.

The Government, especially in Communist countries, also takes people's wealth, but giving wealth in this way does not create those high virtues that Islamic civilisation and culture engender.

Mutual sympathy and compassion are extremely praiseworthy virtues, and as man has a blood relationship with his family, therefore, to show sympathy and mercy to them is not only a natural expression, but to refrain from doing so is hard-heartedness and selfishness and cruelty of the highest order.

For this reason, spending wealth on family members takes precedence over all others. In another place, it is commanded: '*And give to the near of kin his due*' (17:26), which increases in proportion to the proximity of the relation or the degree of need. Lovers of this world's life or those enamoured of wealth, that is, those who consider their wealth to be restricted to their wives and children, (this is on par with the animals), always try to excuse themselves by saying that the Government should provide for others. No government can adequately fulfil this task. If it were to do so, then it would only be taking away people's wealth. In this way, sympathy cannot originate in the heart of man nor can the higher sentiment of mercy develop, neither is there blessing in it. Islam instructs us that we ourselves should also look after our relatives and other needy people, for we are in a position to know their condition better than any government official and it is our duty to create in our hearts human sympathy, higher feelings of mercy and exalted virtues. In this way, mutual love, too, will increase.

Besides family, those for whom mercy and compassion arise are the orphans and the needy. The meaning of *yatama* (the plural of *yatim*) is used in the Holy Quran to refer to widows also, for they are cut off from their husbands. Orphanhood and widowhood, besides occasioning great grief because of the death (of loved ones), are also harbingers of financial difficulties. Every pure-hearted man is moved to compassion by the plight of orphans and widows and sympathy for them rises in his heart. It is said that a practical demonstration of mercy is to compensate them for the means of income that was cut off from them. This can even extend to a long period of time but to share in the sorrows of others is a virtue of extremely high rank.

The *miskin* (needy) are those unfortunate ones like the handicapped, the lame, the blind, the invalid or the poverty-stricken, who, because of their condition, are unable to work in order to support themselves, or *miskin* may refer to those who are in great need of assistance. For example, to buy a machine for a tailor who is so poor that he cannot purchase one himself, or to give a scholarship to a poor student to pursue his studies, are instances of giving help to the needy – and this engenders in the heart of man the noble virtues of sympathy and compassion.

We are asked to spend on wayfarers also. How can this be done? People think that in olden times this was possible, but I shall submit that the necessity for this nowadays is greater than it was at any other time. The reason is that in this age the need for travelling not only locally but between countries, that is, international travel, is more

pressing than it ever was before. In addition to this, hotel rates are so exorbitant now that besides millionaires or those whose travelling expenses are paid for by their companies or by the Government, for the common man to stay in hotels entails burdensome expenses which are beyond the power of ordinary people to shoulder. Therefore, to put up a traveller in one's home, today, is more a symbol of human sympathy and goodness than it was previously. Further, to procure foreign exchange is a troublesome affair. Again, sometimes on the journey a traveller's money may be lost or stolen. In helping him financially there is the fear of whether the traveller will repay this debt or not when he returns home. It is recommended that, notwithstanding this possibility, we should still assist him. If he does not return the sum then it will be considered charity on one's part. In this way, sometimes travelling becomes a matter of emergency and a person may not have the requisite sum in his possession at the time. Therefore, if help is given to him in this predicament, then that is an act of great righteousness.

Again, it is said that we should give also to those who ask. Many times when someone makes a request of us it provokes anger in us and the common objection is: "How do we know whether he is truly in need?" Well, if he does not truly deserve assistance then we should remember that Allah, Most High, gives to us when we are in good personal circumstances and even then He continues giving us more. Bear in mind that whatever commands the Holy Prophet (pbuh) has given to us in order to teach us the qualities of Allah, Most High, or whatever guidance the Holy Quran has shown us in order to teach us how to colour ourselves in Allah's colours, we can acquire those attributes only if we give to him who asks even though we may be in doubt whether he is a needy case or not. In the noble Traditions, it is said that we should give assistance to a person even if he approaches us riding a horse. It is indeed true that, in any event, he is forbidden to ask, but then that is a matter between Allah and that person.

Finally, we are instructed to spend our wealth for the release of captives. People take this to mean procuring the freedom of slaves. Today, there are no slaves. True, if there should be prisoners of war, then paying their ransom and getting them released is a very meritorious deed. But there is one kind of captivity that is very prevalent, and that is to be overburdened by debt. To fulfil the obligations of the one oppressed by debt, thereby freeing his neck, is an act of outstanding goodness. To seek a return of the sum is to devalue the deed.

It is said that to read *salah* (prayer) and pay the *zakah* (poor-rate) are meritorious deeds. If *salah* is read properly and is not mere sitting and standing, not only does it generate a living faith in Allah, Most High, but it cleanses the heart of man and purifies his deeds, as the Holy Quran says: '*Innas-salata tanha 'anil fahsha'i wal munkar*' (29:45). That is, if *salah* is read as it ought to be, with deep concentration and is not mere standing and sitting, then it would prevent us from committing indecent acts and evil deeds, because it creates the conviction that Allah is always with us and He sees us all the time, and He knows the innermost thoughts in our hearts, so we have to purify our hearts and actions by means of *salah*. We are also instructed that through *zakah* we must purify our wealth. The love of wealth gives birth to the biggest pollution in the heart of man. The paying of *zakah*, which is compulsory and is just a small amount, helps man to expunge the love of wealth from his heart and banishes this idol from it.

The next noble act mentioned is the fulfilling of covenants, and there are different kinds of covenants – between husband and wife, master and servant, in trade and industry or in other business transactions, intergovernmental agreements, etc. Nowadays, husbands, labourers and others make agreements and never fulfil them. They give their word that they will come on the next day but they never do. As far as government agreements go, governments never fulfil them until they are forced to. Rather, they seize every opportunity to break them. This lesson will become too lengthy else I would have told you of the losses our Holy Prophet (pbuh) suffered and all the difficulties he endured in fulfilling his trusts and covenants. But you must read his life story yourself.

Finally, the *sabirin* are mentioned – those who display the example of patience in the conditions mentioned above. Those virtues that I am going to mention now are special and very meritorious ones."

(Translated from *Ma'ariful Quran*.)

Three kinds of patience explained

In the verse above, patience under differing circumstances is enjoined upon us in order to make us truly righteous. However, the English translation of the Arabic expressions cannot convey the full meaning of the original so Mian Faruqi has given us a further explanation of the subtle differences in these expressions.

“*Fil ba'sa'i* (in distress) – To show patience in straitened circumstances, poverty or hunger. This does not mean that man should make no attempt to remove the hardship or hunger, but it means that if, in spite of efforts to overcome poverty and hardship, man fails, he should still maintain fortitude and refrain from choosing the path of thievery, highway robbery, bribery or dishonesty. Today, the majority of people in the world live in poverty and straitened circumstances. Look how rich a country America is yet thirty percent of its population live in poverty and day by day the cost of living is rising. In these conditions, if man does not stoop to bribery, dishonesty, theft, etc. and holds on steadfastly to righteousness, then this is not only an endeavour of great resolution but also one that is worthy of great merit. On the Last Day, the Day of Accountability, which will be a severe one for the wealthy as both the Holy Quran and the *Hadith* have repeatedly reminded us, such a person will achieve salvation. In times of hunger, poverty and hardship, whatever example of honesty and God-fearingness such a man exhibits, is counted as a most sublime act of righteousness. *Sabr* (patience) itself, as I have mentioned, is one of Allah's outstanding attributes, which such a man acquires.

***Wad-darra'i* (in affliction)** – Patience in illness and sorrows. Through Divine decree man must suffer sickness and sorrow. If they do not go away despite attempts to get a healing remedy or supplications do not avail, then to endure them with steadfastness is indeed a very commendable example.

***Hinal ba's* (in conflict)** – Patience in times of conflict. People take this to mean a confrontation with the enemy. This interpretation is also correct but conflicts come to man in many different colours. The Holy Prophet (pbuh) instructed us: ‘Fight against your low desires as you struggle against your enemy.’ The fight against

falsehood is a continuous imperative so that man may remain firm in the path of truth as he strains against falsehood. Satan's insinuations are also ever-present as he unceasingly tries to seduce man. When temptations arise, man must overcome them rather than succumb to them. These people are called *the truthful ones*; their actions and their hearts are in consonance and that is an extremely high level of truth. Further, their verbal professions of faith are verified by exemplary actions. Finally, they are designated *muttaqis*, that is, these are people who protect themselves from all evils and from satanic impulses and not only are their actions clean, but their souls, too, are pure. A rank higher than this is impossible.”

Some key words

For greater appreciation, the following explanations of a few key words used in the verse 2:177 serve to furnish a greater insight into the depth and extensiveness of the concepts discussed

Barra (infinitive noun: *birrun*) – He was pious towards his father or his parents and towards God. He was kind, good, affectionate and gentle in behaviour towards his kindred or good in his dealings with strangers. He was just, good, righteous, virtuous, honest, or he was amply, largely or extensively good or beneficent

Birrun – Besides containing the above meanings, also signifies: obedience to God and every incumbent duty, hence the pilgrimage to Makkah; regard for the circumstances of another; a gratuitous gift, or favour or bounty, or benefit (Lane)

Ba'isa (One of those anomalous verbs in Arabic that connote praise and dispraise or one that has opposite meanings. The context will determine which meaning is applicable.) – He was or became mighty, strong in war or fight or very mighty or very strong in fight; hence:

Ba'sa'u – Might, strength, war, fight (or conflict). In the verse (2:177), *ba'isa* means: he was or became in a state of distress; straitened in his means of subsistence or in the conveniences of life; or in a state of poverty or in a state of pressing want

Ba'sau – being in the above state

Darra – to hurt, harm, injure, do evil to

Darra'u – a hurtful state or condition; hardship, distress, straitness of condition or of the means of subsistence or of the conveniences of life. (A subtle nuance – *darra'u* is that evil which relates to the person as *disease*, whereas *ba'sa'u* is that which relates to property, as *poverty*.)

Raqaba – he looked, watched, waited for; he guarded, kept, preserved, took care of; he was mindful or regardful of

Raqabatun (plural *riqabun*: neck) by synecdoche it is applied to the whole person e.g. *dhanbuhu fi raqabatih*: his sin, crime, etc. be upon his own neck; or also by synecdoche: a slave, or a captive, e.g. *a'taqa raqabatan*: he emancipated a slave, male or female. (In note 217 of his English Translation of the Holy Quran, Maulana Muhammad Ali explains: *Riqab* is the plural of *raqabah*, which literally signifies *a neck*, and then comes to signify by synecdoche, *a slave*, or *a captive*. Hence, *fil-riqab* means *ransoming of slaves*. The basis was thus laid down for

the abolition of slavery.)

Ibn-us-sabil from:

Sabalun – a thing that one has let loose, let down; fall, made to hang down and to drag, or rain, especially rain issuing from the clouds and not yet having reached the earth

Sabilun – a way, road, path and what is open, or conspicuous thereof (and Raghīb adds: wherein is easiness)

Ibn-us-sabil – the son of the road; he whom the road has brought (or as it arises) brought forth; the wayfarer or traveller; he who travels much or often; the traveller who is far from his place of abode; the person to whom the way has been cut short (so that he is unable to continue his journey) who desires to return to his country or town, and finds not what will suffice him; the traveller who is cut off from his property; the person who desires to go to a country, or town, other than his own for a necessary affair; the guest who has become disabled from proceeding on his journey, his means having failed him

Sakana – it was or became still, motionless, stationary, in a state of rest, quiet, calm, or unruffled

Miskinun – comes from *as-sukunu* (peace, tranquillity, etc.) according to some, because the person to whom it is applied trusts to, or relies upon others, so as to be, or become easy or quiet in mind; lowly, humble, submissive; poor, destitute, i.e. *possessing nothing*.

As can be gleaned from the above verse (2:177) and the extensive commentary on it, besides belief in Allah, charity (*sadaqah*), in all its manifestation is the other important element in the endeavour to colour ourselves with the Divine attributes. As a result, this section gives additional information not only concerning the place of charity in moulding the Islamic personality but also the wide nature of its application.

In discussing 2: 3-5 of the Holy Quran (*Who believe in the Unseen and keep up prayer and spend out of what We have given them, and who believe in that which has been revealed to thee and that which was revealed before thee, and of the Hereafter they are sure. These are on a right course from their Lord and these it is that are successful*), Maulana Muhammad Ali says:

"The main principles of Islam as laid down here are five: three theoretical and two practical. The three theoretical essentials are belief in God, in Divine Revelation and in the Hereafter; and the two practical are keeping up of prayer and spending out of what God has given to man.... Prayer is the means of the realisation of the divine in man... while spending out of whatever has been given to man stands for charity in a broad sense, that is, for all acts of benevolence and doing good to humanity in general. For what God has given to man is not only the wealth he possesses but all the faculties and powers with which he has been gifted" (*Religion of Islam*, p. 376).

The following are some *ahadith* (taken from Robson's *Mishkat Al-Masabih*, vol. 1) that illustrate the importance in Islam of spending freely on all God's creation starting with one's immediate relatives.

1. "The best *sadaqa* is that which leaves competence; and begin with those for whom you are responsible."
2. "Of a *dinar* you spend as a contribution in God's path, or to set free a slave, or as

- sadaqa* given to a poor man, or in support of your family, the one spent in support of your family produces the greatest reward."
3. "*Sadaqa* given to a poor man is just *sadaqa*, but when given to a relative it serves a double purpose, being both *sadaqa* and a connecting link."
 4. "The most excellent *sadaqa* consists in your satisfying a hungry stomach."
 5. Abu Huraira reported that a man said: "Messenger of God, who is most deserving of friendly care from me?" He replied: "Your mother." He asked who came next and he replied: "Your mother." He asked who came next and he replied: "Your mother." He asked who came next and he replied: "Your father."
 6. "The family of so and so are not my friends, my friends being only God and the good ones among the believers; but they have ties of relationship which I shall refresh by kindness."
 7. "One of the finest acts of kindness is for a man to treat his father's friends in a kindly way after he has departed."
 8. "He who wishes to have his provision enlarged and his term of life prolonged should treat his relatives well."
 9. A man came to God's messenger and said: "Messenger of God, is there any kindness left that I can do to my parents after their death?" He replied: "Yes, you can invoke blessings on them, ask forgiveness for them, carry out their final instructions after their death, join ties of relationship which are dependent on them, and honour their friends."
 10. "God will not show mercy to him who does not show mercy to others."
 11. "He who strives on behalf of a widow and a poor person is like one who strives in God's path."
 12. "I and the one who takes responsibility for an orphan, whether of his own kin or of others, will be in paradise thus" (and he pointed his forefinger and middle finger with a slight space between them).
 13. "Gabriel kept on commending the neighbour to me so that I thought he would make him an heir."
 14. "All creatures are God's children, and those dearest to God are the ones who treat His children kindly."
 15. "If I had gold to the extent of Uhud I would not like to keep any of it more than three days, except what I put aside to pay a debt."
 16. "If you spend, son of Adam, I shall spend on you."
 17. "The generous man is near God, near Paradise, near men and far from Hell, but the miserly man is far from God, far from Paradise, far from men and near Hell. Indeed, an ignorant man who is generous is dearer to God than a worshipper who is miserly."
 18. Aisha said that when some of the Prophet's wives asked him which of them would join him soonest, he replied that it would be the one with the longest arm. So they took a rod and measured, and Sauda was the one among them who had the longest arm. They later came to know that *sadaqa* was the meaning of the length of the arm, for Zainab was the one who joined him soonest and she was fond of giving *sadaqa*.

The following *ahadith* are taken from *A Manual of Hadith* by Maulana Muhammad Ali.

1. The Prophet said: "*Sadaqa* is incumbent on every Muslim." His companions said: "O Prophet of Allah! And what about him who has not got anything to give?" He said: "He should work with his hand and profit himself and give in charity." They said: "If he has nothing in spite of this?" He said: "He should do good deeds and refrain from doing evil – this is charity on his part"

2. On every bone of the fingers charity is incumbent every day: one assists a man in riding his beast or in lifting his provisions to the back of the animal, this is charity; and a good word and every step which one takes in walking over to prayer is charity; and showing the way to another is charity.
3. The Messenger of Allah said: "A prostitute was forgiven – she passed by a dog, panting with its tongue out, on the top of a well containing water, almost dying with thirst; so she took off her boot and tied it to her head-covering and drew forth water for it; she was forgiven on account of this." It was asked: "Is there a reward for us in doing good to the beasts?" He said: "In every animal having a liver fresh with life there is a reward."

Allah, Most High, desires that man should do good naturally or spontaneously. The Holy Quran tells us in 2:184: *Fa man tatawwa'a khairan fa huwa khairul-lahu* (So whoever does good spontaneously, it is better for him).

Ta'a – he was or he became submissive, obedient; he obeyed *tatawwa'a* – he did a thing without its being incumbent or obliging on him; he did good beyond what was obligatory *tatawwa'un* - a thing that one does spontaneously, not made obligatory on him by an ordinance of God (Lane)

To do so, we have to rise above considerations of self, family, friend, foe, revenge, profit, etc. and do good as effortlessly, smoothly and as uncalculatingly as we breathe, eat, drink, sleep; that is, just as naturally as we answer the call of physical nature. The latter comes automatically, of course, but altruistic deeds demand a strong desire, a clear goal, a well-defined method and an iron motivation and discipline complemented by the mercy and grace of the Almighty without which nothing is possible, notwithstanding even our superhuman efforts. *"It is naught but a Reminder for the nations, for him among you who will go straight. And you will not, except Allah please, the Lord of the worlds"* (81:27-29).

Insights by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad

The Holy Quran and the *Hadith* provide guidance for Muslims and so in the following explanations of the Holy Quran, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the *Mujaddid* of the fourteenth century, gives us his unparalleled insights, elucidation and exhortations towards attaining the desired goal of doing good spontaneously as we strive to become vicegerents of Allah. He writes:

"Allah, Most High, has imposed on man two kinds of obligations – firstly, the duties we owe to Allah, and secondly, those we owe to His servants, and these have been explained at great length in the Holy Quran. In a particular verse, Allah, Most High, commands us: *'Laud (or remember) Allah as you lauded your fathers, rather a more hearty lauding'* (2:200). Here, there are two subtle points: the remembrance of Allah is compared with the remembrance of one's ancestors. The secret is this – love for one's forefathers is an intrinsic and innate one. For example, even when a mother beats her child, he still continues calling lovingly to her: "Ma! Ma!" Thus Allah is teaching man in this verse to create in his heart a relationship with Allah based on natural love for Him. If we develop a love like that, then obedience to His commands will become automatic. This is the true station of divine knowledge to which a man ought to aspire; that is, in order for us to develop a natural and intrinsic love for Allah, it is said in another place: *'Surely Allah enjoins justice and the doing of good (to others) and the giving to the kindred'* (16:90). To this verse, Allah, Most High, mentions three stages which man ought to acquire" (*Malufat*, Book 8, p. 248).

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad then gives a short description of the three conditions of man and shows how these are mirrored by the three stages of goodness that the Holy Quran

exhorts us to obtain.

To make the comparison easier, clearer and more useful, we give a summary from *The Teachings of Islam* of the three conditions of man followed by a description of the three stages of goodness:

“The three conditions of man

The first question relates to the physical, moral and spiritual conditions of man. The Holy Quran observes this division by fixing three respective sources for this threefold condition of man. In other words, it mentions three springs out of which these three conditions flow. The first of these in which the physical conditions of man take their birth is termed the *nafs al-ammara*, which signifies *the uncontrollable spirit*, or *the spirit prone to evil*. Thus it says: ‘*Most surely (man’s) self is wont to command (him to do) evil*’ (12:53). It is the characteristic of the *nafs al-ammara* that it inclines man to evil, tends to lead him into iniquitous and immoral paths and stands in the way of his attainment of perfection and moral excellence. In short, man’s nature is prone to evil and transgression at a certain stage in his development, and so long as he is devoid of high moral qualities, the evil nature is predominant in him. He is subject to this state so long as he does not walk in the light of true wisdom and knowledge, but acts in obedience to the natural inclinations of eating, drinking, sleeping, becoming enraged or excited, etc. like the lower animals.

However, as soon as he frees himself from the control of animal passions and, guided by wisdom and knowledge, holds the reins of his natural desires and governs them instead of being governed by them; in short, when a transformation is worked in his soul from grossness to virtue, he then passes the physical stage and is a moral being in the strict sense of the word. The source of the moral conditions of man is called the *nafs al-lawwama*, or the *self-accusing spirit* (conscience), in the terminology of the Holy Quran. In the chapter entitled *The Resurrection*, we have: ‘*And nay! I call to witness the self-accusing spirit*’ (75:2) on every dereliction of duty or on the slightest act of disobedience, being conscious of having offended. This is the spring from which flows a highly moral life and, on reaching this stage, man is freed from bestiality. The swearing by the self-accusing soul indicates the regard in which it is held. For the change from the disobedient to the self-accusing soul, being a sure sign of its improvement and purification, makes it deserving of approbation in the sight of God. *Lawwama* literally means *one who reproves severely*, and the *nafs al-lawwama*, or the self-accusing soul, has been so called because it upbraids a man for the doing of an evil deed and strongly hates unbridled passions and bestial appetites. Its tendency, on the other hand, is to generate noble qualities and a virtuous disposition, to transform life so as to bring the whole course and conduct of it to moderation, and to restrain the carnal passions and sensual desires so as to keep them within due bounds. Although, as we have said above, the self-accusing soul upbraids itself for its faults and frailties, yet it is not the master of its passions, nor is it powerful enough to practise virtue exclusively. The weakness of the flesh has the upper hand sometimes and then it stumbles and falls down. Its weakness then resembles that of a child who does not like to fall but whose infirm legs are sometimes unable to support him. But it does not persist in its fault, every failure bringing only fresh reproach to the mind. In short, at this stage, the soul is anxious to attain moral excellence which is the characteristic of the first, or the animal stage, but does, notwithstanding its yearning for virtue, sometimes deviate from the line of duty.

The third or the last stage in the onward movement of the soul is reached on attaining to the source of all spiritual qualities. The soul at this stage is, in the words of the Holy Quran, the *nafs al-mutma'innah* or *the soul at rest*. Thus it says: '*O soul that art at rest (and rests fully contented with thy Lord), return to thy Lord, well pleased (with Him), well pleasing (Him); so enter among My servants and enter into My garden*' (84:27-30). At this stage, the soul is freed from all weaknesses and frailties and is braced with spiritual strength. It is perfectly united with God and cannot live without Him. As water flows with great force down a slope and, on account of its great mass and the total absence of all obstacles, dashes down with an irresistible force, so does the soul at this stage, casting off all trammels, flow unrestrained towards its Maker. It is to this that the words of the verse quoted above refer. It is further clear from the words: '*O soul that hast found rest in thy Lord, return to Him,*' that it is in this life and not after death that this great transformation is worked and that it is in this world and not elsewhere that an access to paradise is granted to it. Again, as the soul has been commanded to return to its Lord (Supporter), it is clear that such a soul finds its support only in its Lord. The love of God is its food and it drinks deep at this fountain of life and is, therefore, delivered from death. The same idea is expressed elsewhere in the Holy Quran in the following words: '*He will indeed be successful who purifies it and he will indeed fail who corrupts it*' (91:9-10).

In short, these three states of the soul may be called the physical, the moral and the spiritual states of man. Of these, the physical state, that is, that in which man seeks to satisfy the passions of the flesh, is most dangerous when the passions run riot, for it is then that they deal a deathblow to the moral and spiritual states of man, and hence this state has been termed *the disobedient spirit* in the Holy Word of God" (pp. 3-7).

Let us now make the comparison between the three conditions of man and the three stages of goodness open to him:

“The three stages of goodness

1. Halat 'Adl (State of Justice). "The stage of *'adl* (justice) can be compared with that of the *muttaqi* (the God-fearing servant) when he is at the stage of the *nafs-ul-ammarah*, that is, the spirit that is wont to command evil (or the animal stage). To reform this condition, the principle of justice has been instituted. Here, opposition from his inner passions is bound to arise in a man. For example, a person has to repay a debt but his *nafs* or *inviter to evil* makes the suggestion that he should renege on his payment and it so happens that the stipulated date of payment passes. What happens now is that the evil whisperer becomes bolder and more daring, inciting the defaulter with the suggestion that he cannot be legally called to account. But that is not correct behaviour. Justice demands that the debt obligation be duly fulfilled and no stratagem nor excuse be made to evade it.

It is sad, but I am forced to confess that many people do not pay much regard to these matters and there are even members of my *jama'at* who pay scant attention to the repaying of their debts. This is contrary to justice. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) did not read the *janaza* prayer of such people (who failed to honour their debts). So every one of you should always remember that you should not be recalcitrant in paying your debts and you should steer far from all kinds of treachery and dishonesty for this is against the Divine command which Allah has revealed in the verse (16:90)" (*Malfuzat*, Book 8, pp. 312-313).

(Referring to this verse in another place, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad also explains 'adl (justice) as doing good in return for good and nothing more; also, doing good only to those who do good to you and to no one else and he says that this is the lowest rung of the ladder of righteousness.)

2. Halat Ihsan (State of Goodness). "The second stage is that of *ihsan* or goodness. That person who has respect for justice and does not exceed the limits of propriety is given guidance and power from Allah and he makes greater progress in the doing of good, so much so that he does not only give as much as he receives, but for a little favour he receives, he gives a very great amount in return. But even at this higher level of goodness there is a hidden weakness, and that is that at some time or the other he may reproach someone for favours rendered. For example, a person may be feeding another for ten years, and the recipient may disobey him in a certain matter and he may reproach him thus: 'I have been feeding you for ten years and yet you are ungrateful.' He thus makes his deed null and void. In truth, in the hearts of the doers of good, there is a hidden desire for ostentation.

However, the third rank is exempt from all kinds of film and pollution and that is the *ita'i dhil qurba* stage, that is, the giving to the kindred" (*Malfuzat*, Book 8, p. 313).

(Elsewhere he explains *ihsan* as doing good even to those who have not done any good to you. He also points out that: (i) at this stage there is still a struggle within us between the inviter to good and the inciter to evil and that sometimes good triumphs and at other times evil overcomes us, just as it happens in the second or moral condition of man, and (ii) sometimes, too, the reproach is suppressed for a long time but there is the ever-present danger that one day it will involuntarily escape and invalidate our good actions.)

3. Ita'i dhil Qurba ki Halat (Giving to the Kindred). "The stage of giving to the kindred is a natural condition; that is, when goodness flows from a man as if it were an inherent demand of his nature. For example, look at how a mother nurses and fosters her child. She does not entertain the thought that when the child gets older he will provide for her. In fact, she will rear him so sedulously that even if some king or the other should command her to refrain from suckling him and promise that if the child dies she would not be called to account, she cannot cease nursing her child and not only will she disobey the order but she may very well give the king a few choice words. And that is because fostering her child is a natural obligation and is not based on hope or fear.

In this way, when a man continues making steady progress in righteousness and he reaches the stage where goodness emanates from him as if it were a natural function, then that condition is called *the nafs-ul-mutma'innah* (the soul at peace).

In short, the meaning of *yuqimunas-salata* (they establish prayer) is that until the soul is not at rest, it will be susceptible to pulling and tugging. Sometimes the lower passions will have the upper hand and sometimes the good impulses will triumph. For example, a person may get up early in the morning and he sees that the water is cold but at the same time he is under an obligation to bathe (before performing prayer). If he listens to his lower self he will forego the prayer, but if he is courageous he will overcome his base passion" (*Malfuzat*, book 8, pp. 313-314).

May Allah help each one of us to attain the third condition of man as well as the third stage of goodness. In this manner we can all help in our own peculiar way to establish the moral and

spiritual foundation of Islamic culture and civilisation on earth.