

Rise and Fall of Nations

By

G.A.Parwez

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Title: Rise and Fall of Nations

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Idara Tolu-e-Islam

25-B, Gulberg 2, Lahore—54660, Pakistan.

Tel: 92 42 571 4546

Email: idara@toluislam.com

Website: www.toluislam.com

Publication funded by:

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Translator's Note

Allama G. A. Parwez says in the Introduction to the book *Saleem Ke Nam* (Letters to Saleem): Destinies of nations are not decided in political arenas or on battlefields. They are decided in their schools and places of training. A nation is not defeated by its enemy; rather it is defeated by the wrong education and corruption of its youth. This is the reason Allama Parwez made Muslim youth the focus of attention in this book.

Today's Muslim youth are curious to learn about Islam but are frustrated with the explanations given by traditional Islamic scholars. Saleem symbolizes such youth, and through him, Allama Parwez addresses all Muslims. The book uses a logical and rational approach throughout and covers a wide range of topics.

Allama G.A. Parwez not only had a deep knowledge of the Qur'an, but he also had an ability to communicate it in a way that is probably unmatched in the annals of Urdu literature. His style was unique and his delivery finely tuned and highly resonant. Therefore, a literal translation of his Urdu is impossible. The Urdu words have connotations whose resonances are rarely caught with lexicon equivalents, and many Urdu idioms would be unintelligible if translated literally.

Translations of the Qur'anic verses appearing in the original Urdu and given in this rendition (of letter no. 37 dated January 1957 in *Saleem Ke Nam*) are taken from Allama Parwez's Exposition of the Holy Qur'an, Vol.1 and with minor adaptation from the Tolu-e-Islam website: www.tolueislam.com. The Qur'anic references are given as Sura number followed by the verse number: e.g., (4:123)

means Sura 4 verse 123. Allama Iqbal's poems appearing in the original Urdu letter have been done by me.

I have strived for the most accurate possible English rendition of the Urdu. In spite of the wide gulf between modern English and classical Urdu, this humble effort on my part offers a reliable translation that can be studied by non-Urdu readers. If you think I have been successful in this aim then it is due to the Grace of Allah. If not, then I implore the reader to consider this as my limitation. Also, any discrepancy in this rendering of the original Urdu text is my responsibility.

Finally, I am thankful to my son, Suhail, for editing this translation and to my wife, Sajida, for her constant encouragement in my Qur'anic journey.

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Rise and Fall of Nations

Dear Saleem! History is not merely a record of past events and facts. It holds a much broader and deeper meaning than that; it is about why some nations succeed and thrive while others fail and vanish. In other words, studying history, apart from telling us the details of past events and facts, tells us the *underlying* causes of the success or failure of nations. This is called the science or the philosophy of history.

Science of history

My dear Saleem! You may be surprised to know that it was the Qur'an, that for the first time, presented history as a science or philosophy. The Qur'an states that it is not an accident of chance or a random event that nations live or die, rather their fate is subject to precise laws and rational principles.

It is true that sometimes a certain nation or a society may temporarily acquire power and wealth while ignorant of these laws and principles, but this is like a flash fire of weeds that quickly burns into a pile of ash. What we are considering as the rise or fall of nations goes beyond short-term events. Rather, we are considering the long-term process that slowly works its way towards a nation's ultimate rise or fall. Studying history allows us to see that this occurs according to a set pattern or law.

One should understand at this point that when we say that a certain nation dies, it does not mean that the people belonging to that nation disappear from the face of the earth (though sometimes this happens as well). Rather, what we

mean by the death of a nation is that, although the people remain alive physically and even maintain their future generations, they lose their power and glory, and do not count for much in the world.

It is true that every nation has a certain ideology and a particular concept of life. This is known as *Kalima* in Qur'anic terminology or *culture* in modern terminology. But what do we mean by life or death of nations?

Death of nations

Every nation has its own culture that it tries to preserve and promulgate through time. When it cannot, it suffers a cultural death. If a nation is going through a decline then it means: 1) either it is not able to withstand the challenge of its time, and thus is overtaken by another culture, or 2) it left its culture (thinking it would not be able to withstand the challenge) and voluntarily adopted a new culture that was on the rise. In short, a culture experiencing downfall did not withstand the test of time.

This implies that an unending clash goes on between cultures and the demands of time. A culture that is able to withstand and overcome the demands of time remains alive, while a culture that is not is left behind and is overtaken by another culture. In the terminology of the Qur'an this is called *the law of substitution and succession of nations*.

It is obvious that, like an individual, a nation does not want to die. It wants to live and prosper, and wants to be powerful. But, just as an individual cannot live merely on wishes, a nation likewise cannot live merely on the basis of lofty wishes. It must follow the above law if it wants to live and prosper. So much so that in the early period of Islam, when Muslims faced opposition from those (whom the

Qur'an calls *Ahl-ul-Kit'ab*, the people of the Book) who professed a culture that had lost its ability for forward movement against the forces of the time, the Qur'an stated in clear terms that though every party wishes to succeed or prevail, one must remember that success is not based on the mere wishes of one over that of the other. It is based on the immutable law, that if a society or nation practices injustice, sooner or later, it is bound to face the destructive consequences of its actions.

Mark it that paradise-like life cannot be achieved through wishful thinking – be it yours or that of *Ahl-ul-Kit'ab*. Whoever does wrong shall reap the consequence thereof and shall not find anyone to protect and help him except *Allah*. (4:123)

Rule of Law

A culture based on exploitation and usurpation is bound to fail and nothing can save it from this destruction except the shield provided by the immutable law of Allah. This is so because there is no lawlessness in this Universe. In other words, the decision regarding a nation's life or death happens rationally, according to set pattern or law. Those that succeed and survive do so according to the logical and rational application of this law, and those which fail and vanish do so while in violation of this law.

This was necessary in order that it might become manifest that those who have the capacity to live should survive, whilst those who lack this capacity may perish after clear demonstration. *Allah* is the Hearer and the Knowing. (8:42)

In the dominion of this law, therefore, neither does anyone receive undeserved favors the way kings bestow on their admirers, nor is anyone punished simply because of a sudden burst of royal anger. Here, everything happens according to the unbiased, eternal and universal rule of law without exception.

The philosophy of Hegel

Dear Saleem! Let us proceed further after this rather long introduction. Hegel has presented a philosophy of history according to which, first a certain *idea* is born; then it grows, develops, and matures. Then from within it an *opposite idea* takes root that slowly develops and matures and overwhelms the previous one which ultimately dies. According to Hegel this process repeats itself in an endless cycle.

The philosophy of Marx

After Hegel came Marx who followed essentially the same line of reasoning except he said that this struggle is not between ideas but between *systems*. A period may be dominated by a certain system (say Capitalism) but after some time from within it emerges another system which is the opposite of the previous one, and takes its place. Once again, this continues in an endless cycle according to Marx.

The above philosophy of Hegel or Marx is called dialectical progression.

But whether this perpetual clash is between ideas or between systems, one thing is common between both. According to this philosophy an idea or a system is neither good nor bad in itself; nor is one idea or system objectively superior to another. Also, according to this philosophy, an idea or a system does not have the ability to stay forever nor does it have the ability to dominate its opposite for long; every idea or system contains within itself the elements of its own destruction. Both Hegel and Marx think that this is the way the rise or fall of nations occurs. They feel it is a cyclic process by which cultures come and go, irrespective of its merits or ills. A culture cannot remain alive forever nor can another remain dead forever. In other

words, this philosophy says that every culture has a final day that cannot be changed by any means.

The philosophy of the Qur'an

Saleem! The Qur'an also gives a philosophy of the rise and fall of nations or cultures. It says though it is true that a clash occurs between contradicting ideas, it is not true that all ideas are equal in this clash. According to the Qur'an, certain ideas have the inherent ability to dominate and prosper as opposed to others. The Qur'an terms the former *Haq* or Truth and the latter *Baatil* or Falsehood. The Qur'an says that *Haq* strikes at *Baatil* and this struggle continues until *Haq* overwhelms *Baatil* which is eventually defeated.

We have made it such that there is constant clash between Truth and Falsehood. The (constructive force of) Truth continues to overcome the (negative and destructive force of) Falsehood until such time that the latter has been crushed and withers away. (21:18)

This is so because Falsehood has the elements of its destruction within its very foundation.

O Messenger! Announce to the world that Truth has manifested itself and that Falsehood has vanished; for Falsehood by its very nature must perish eventually. (17:81)

Therefore, a nation which professes a culture based on Truth will dominate a nation whose culture is based on Falsehood, and the former will continue to do so as long as its culture remains based on Truth. It would never be the case that a nation based on Falsehood (i.e., nation of unbelievers in the Qur'anic sense) could ever dominate a nation based on Truth (i.e., nation of true believers in the Qur'anic sense).

Never will *Allah* allow the unbelievers an upper hand over the believers. (4:141)

So, what is the significance and meaning of the Qura'nic terms *Haq* or *Baatil*?

Haq is the name of the ideology that represents universal permanent values of humankind. It is based on *reality* and therefore its results are constructive. Whatever is against this ideology is called *Baatil*. With *Haq* as its ideology a culture is bound to develop and grow and reach higher and higher levels. On the other hand, a culture based on *Baatil* produces destructive results and is bound to fail eventually, even though there may be some short term gains.

Did you notice Saleem, how the philosophy presented by the Qur'an regarding the clash of ideas, systems, or cultures is different from the philosophy of Hegel and Marx? It is according to this Qur'anic philosophy that fate of nations is really decided. It is this objective standard or law by which the survival or death of a nation occurs. The history the Qur'an has presented of past nations is not idle storytelling; it is to demonstrate the working of this immutable law with actual and concrete examples.

Therefore, we should not simply move forward after reading the stories of the rise and fall of past nations but reflect on its deeper aspects to figure why they rose in power and achieved greatness only to then vanish into the bowels of history. Our own collective life or death is also governed by the same immutable law of the Qur'an that applied to them. It is only from this deeper perspective that we will be able to figure out why our own Islamic culture suffered its downfall and how we can escape from this abyss.

Life at the animal level

The Qur'an says that cultures keeping human life at the animal level will never last because they are based on falsehood. According to the Qur'an, the difference between humans and animals is not just that humans are more advanced beings, but that when life reached the human level it acquired a unique and distinct characteristic that is not present at the animal level. It is this distinct characteristic that defines human qualities, and it is the development of these human qualities that is the real goal of human existence. The ideology that says that human life is only an extension of animal life in higher form is referred to as the materialistic concept of life. The Qur'an says that nations professing this concept of life, no matter how much wealth and power they might accumulate, will never succeed nor prosper in the long-term. It says in Sura Muhammad about these people: have not they seen the result of nations which passed before them? (47:10)

Have you seen Saleem, how the Qur'an emphasizes the study of history? It presents this history of past nations as evidence of Allah's immutable laws? It demonstrates that it is *Allah's* immutable laws that destroyed those nations.

Haven't these people travelled the earth and seen the results of nations which came before them. The law of *Allah* destroyed them utterly. And any nation which will follow in their footsteps will meet the same end. (47:10)

Allah is the Protector of those who follow His Laws. His Laws support and back them up. Those who reject His laws shall have no such support and backing. (47:11)

Those who have unwavering conviction in the laws of Allah and do righteous deeds, Allah will grant them a blissful paradise-like life the synergy of which will never fade. However, as for those who deny these laws and lead life only at the physical level in which the aim of life is limited to eating, drinking, and material enjoyment, there is no difference between their lives and that of

animals. The result of this kind of life is nothing but death and destruction. (47:12)

There were many such nations which We destroyed; and no power in the world could save them from destruction. (O *Messenger!*) They were far stronger than those who have driven you out from your home. (So, if they were destroyed then how can these people who deny the laws of Allah and who have driven you out of your home remain?) (47:13)

We should not therefore take the history of past nations as mere stories that are being rehearsed to us in the pages of the Qur'an and assume that these have nothing to do with us. Rather, we should take them as data in support of the Qur'anic claim that behind these stories is an underlying principle that applied to past nations and caused their destruction when they embarked on a path of Falsehood, and that the very same principle will apply now to any nation that embarks on a similar path, and it *will* produce the same result. There is no favoritism in this universe, Saleem. A society that follows the laws laid down by Allah has their backing, and the one which does not, well Saleem, nothing can save it! The universal principles that governed the past will continue to govern the success of today and the future. This law operates over all places and all ages without exception.

By examining the pages of history, Saleem, we know that a concept of life or culture in which the aims are limited to satisfaction of only material needs without other higher aims cannot hope to last long. People living in a society established on such lines can never lead a life of peace and tranquility. They can only achieve that by creating a society that is based on living in accordance with the ultimate permanent values established by its Creator. Because these values actually bring success in all its forms, their realization becomes those peoples' lifelong goal. In fact, these are the values which enable human beings to achieve immortality.

Enjoying life without working

Salcem! Let us proceed further. The second principle which the Qur'an has mentioned is that a society in which people at its lower wrung do all the hard work while the people at the top enjoy and indulge at their expense will never succeed. In a society based on truth, this will never happen. In Sura *Anbiya* the Qur'an says that many past nations were destroyed because of their indulgences and extravagant life styles, and other nations took their places that were not like them.

The Qur'an also says that when these nations saw their forthcoming destruction, they tried to flee. You may wonder why those people did not recognize the ill effects of their policies and change their ways. The important point here is that though the destruction had started much earlier, it basically remained invisible to them. Though every action starts taking shape the moment the action is done, it may have distant effects that remain latent, giving human beings a false impression that their bad actions are not producing bad consequences. They realize the truth only when the results become perceptible to them, when it is too late.

Thus there is a period between the act and the appearance of its consequence in concrete form which the Qur'an calls it *Ajal* or respite. Nations pursuing a false system of life use their intellect and their political acumen to plug any holes in their system through which they think destruction could come. When a destruction does not come their way for a while they feel satisfied that all their defenses are fortified and all their plans foolproof. But Allah's *law of requital* (or *the law of sowing and reaping*) keeps working. Although imperceptible but nevertheless always present, it slowly moves towards their ultimate destruction because of their

wrong actions, and becomes visible to them suddenly through ways they could not have perceived:

Those who disregard *Allah's* laws, chastisement does not come upon them immediately but they are led towards it gradually through ways which they do not perceive. This is the respite given to them: otherwise the grip of Our law of *requitat* is inescapable (7:182-183)

People will be questioned

Saleem! This, then, is the meaning of the earlier Qur'anic statement: they started to flee when they saw the forthcoming destruction. But the above law tenaciously follows them saying: Do not flee. Stop. Return to the place where you had amassed your wealth and built your palaces (using the blood, sweat, and tears of the poor) so that you may be questioned.

Dear Saleem! Have you ever pondered why *do* these people at the top think that no one can question them no matter what they do? First, they think that they are beyond the reach of the law. They keep manipulating the system so that they could avoid being caught. If that is not possible then they enact such laws which make whatever they want to do legal:

These people are those who try to keep as much as possible for themselves. They bid others to do likewise and try to keep hidden whatever bounty *Allah* has given them. For such ungrateful people *Allah* has prepared a humiliating life. (4:37)

This is what happens in a capitalistic system. The people at the top enact laws that allow unlimited private ownership over the means of production. Often, they co-opt the services of the priesthood which gives sanctity to such laws by passing fatwa (religious edict) against any one who advocates limits on such ownership charging him with interfering in matters of religion. Thus these laws gain the

legal as well as the *religious* stamp of approval, which no one is allowed to question. But the Qur'an says that these usurpers of religious and temporal powers cannot escape the law of requital with such machinations and deceptions. This law is beyond these ploys and *will* hold these people accountable to what they have been doing. Finally, they will see Hell with their own eyes and they *will* be asked about their wealth and power as to how did they acquire them and where did they spend?

Now, after the Qur'an called on these people to stop and told them not to flee the scene of the forthcoming destruction, it goes on to mention that they accepted their responsibility by saying: Yes! We did manipulate and exploit others and usurped their rights, and this destruction in which we are engulfed did indeed come about precisely because of that. But the Qur'an says that they would gain nothing from this late acknowledgement. They would be the losers. Following verses (21:11-15) sketch this picture:

(If you shape your lifestyle in accordance with this code, you will attain heights of dignity, elegance and greatness.) But if you turn away you too will be destroyed like nations We destroyed (before you) because of their iniquities Thereafter we raised other nations in their stead. (21-11)

(The effects of their wrong behavior were being recorded without them realizing it.) Although they were warned, they did not pay any heed to this warning. Thus the imperceptible effects accumulated slowly and finally confronted them. Then they tried to flee. (21-12)

(But at that time they could not escape. Our Law of Requital called them and said) "Where can you run away now? Do not try to flee. Return to all that which gave you so much intoxicating pleasure. Come back to your palaces (where you considered yourselves to be so safe) so that you may be asked to account for the labor that made all this about, and also to question you as to what right *you* had over it. (21-13)

At that time they could not but accept that they were wrongdoers. They were sorry and ashamed of themselves. (21-14)

(But then feeling sorry is of no use. When one is confronted with the outcome of one's deeds, it can not be reversed.) Thus they continued crying, lamented the wrongs they had done, and were extremely ashamed. However, Our Law of Requitul turned them into a mowed-down field in which nothing could grow (like an extinguished flame devoid of any life). (21-15)

After this Saleem, the Qur'an says something that contains an entire universe of thought in its scope. It says that this type of destruction does not happen on an emergency basis but that it happens according to Allah's law of requital, and that the entire universe is ceaselessly working to make it happen. Allah says:

(They thought that) We have created this heaven and earth and all that is in between (i.e., the universe) just for fun: an idle play. No, not at all! We have created all this for a great purpose. And the purpose is that no action should remain without result, whether it involves a person or a nation. All actions produce results. (21:16)

This universe is working so that in the struggle between Truth and Falsehood the Truth overpowers the Falsehood and nothing can stop it.

We have made it such that there is constant clash between forces of Truth (*Haq*) and forces of Falsehood (*Baatil*). The constructive forces of Truth continue overcoming the negative and destructive forces of Falsehood, until such time that the latter has been crushed and withers away. (21:18)

Capitalists

Saleem! Did you notice something important here? The second principle the Qur'an has given for the destruction of nations is that a nation in which one group rides in luxury on the back of the hard labor of another group will never

last. This is precisely the reason a capitalist system can never last. As Allama Iqbal Says:

*Intellectual deception can't sustain for long
The culture whose basis is capitalism*

In this system one group controls the means of production and the resources of the Earth and blocks it from the reach of the rest of the humanity. The Qur'an calls this *Bukhl* (usually translated as niggardliness). The Qur'an says that a nation practicing *Bukhl* is doomed and a new nation takes its place:

These people are those who try to keep as much as possible for themselves. They bid others to do likewise and try to keep hidden whatever bounty *Allah* has given them. For such ungrateful people *Allah* has prepared a humiliating life. (4:37)

These people are those who try to keep as much as possible for themselves. They should know that the one who behaves like this harms none but oneself for *Allah* is indeed free of all want (*Allah* does not need anything from you.) It is you who is in need. Should you turn back from your commitment. He will replace you with another nation which will not be like you. (47:38)

Did you see Saleem how the Qur'an has brought out a very important point in the last part of the above verse: that substitution of one nation for another nation does not happen according to Marx or Hegel's dialectical progression but according to Allah's law of requital and the struggle between *Truth* and *Falsehood*?

Those engaged only in talk

Saleem! At this time let us bring out another point. A program has two phases: planning, and execution. In the first phase, thinking and pondering, comparing the pros and cons of the plan, making different blueprints for its

execution etc. are carried out. It is clear that though this phase consists only of words and charts, it is, nevertheless, extremely important. When this phase is complete, the next phase should begin. But if a nation only keeps planning and talking and does not take steps to implement those plans, it is bound to fail no matter how lofty its thinking may be. In other words, nations cannot survive by mere ideas alone. This is akin to a traveler having a torch in his hand but not walking. In nations devoid of action, philosophers engage in discussing metaphysical problems and leaders busy themselves in designing grand schemes and giving speeches, and both think they are doing great work. But their thoughts and words can hardly save these nations. A nation that turns away from the real problems of the world and only remains engaged in abstract and theoretical discussions is bound to taste death. The Qur'an has termed this behavior as *Khaudhun* which means being engaged in fruitless (abstract or meaningless) discussions.

Entertainment

Now let us take the other side of this coin. We know that most problems concerning human life have utilitarian value. But, apart from this, human beings also have psychological and emotional needs. Fine arts and entertainment are developed to attend to those needs. But they have their own place on human scale if they are to be useful. If a nation ignores proper action, and instead becomes absorbed in the development and promotion of entertainment, then it will never be able to compete with other nations. The Qur'an has a term for this kind of behavior as well: it calls it *La'ab*, which means play and fun.

The Qur'an states that a nation engaged in *Khaudh* and *La'ab* is not going to last very long and will be replaced by another nation, and no one can stop this from happening.

The system of Divine Nourishment that is spread from east to west, testifies to the fact that We are fully capable of replacing those engaged in idle talks and only interested in fun and play with better nations. They cannot escape Our laws, nor can they thwart Our schemes. Therefore do not worry. Leave them to indulge in their useless planning, unnecessary discussions and amusements until such time that they would be confronted by the Day of Judgment (i.e., the forthcoming revolution that is sure to come and) about which they have been amply warned. They consider life to be a joke, and humanity to be without any goal. What else but destruction can be the result of such a mentality? (70:40-42)

Of this we have the glaring example of the Greek civilization from the pages of history. They had reached such heights of wisdom and philosophy that until today they are considered among the topmost philosophers of the world. Along with that they also had reached such heights in the fine arts (painting, sculpture, music, and poetry) that, overall, we do not find any such example anywhere in history. In spite of all this, their practical and utilitarian aspects of life were such that they could not manufacture even simple things. The result was that the Greek civilization fell in such a manner that it never rose again. Their highly advanced philosophy and their exceptional fine arts could not save them. They were replaced by nations that were better than them. This is yet another law that the Qur'an has presented concerning substitution and succession of nations.

Shying away from struggle

But among all of its laws of substitution and succession of nations, the Qur'an has presented one that could be considered as the apex of all, and which, surprisingly, can be described in just one word: *struggle*. The Qur'an says that life means struggle – persistent struggle, continuous exertion, perpetual action, ceaseless trial and endurance, untiring effort – *this* is life. According to Poet Philosopher Iqbal:

*Persistent struggle gives maturity to the elixir of life
O ignorant ones! This is the secret of immortal life*

We should know that a nation's doom starts the moment it shies away from struggle. A nation's death, in reality, is its desertion from struggle.

*It is but death when laziness prevents one tasting struggle
Because the hunter always waylays where the wings fold*

The Qur'an has vividly demonstrated that a nation that shies away from struggle is ultimately destroyed. It says:

O Believers! Sometimes it happens that when you are asked to march forth in the cause of *Allah* some weak-minded amongst you act as though they are stuck to the earth. They prefer worldly gains to the blessings of the life of the Hereafter although the gains offered by the life of this world are insignificant compared to that offered by the life of the Hereafter. Remember! If you do not march forth, *Allah* will certainly inflict you with a serious chastisement – and that He will replace you by another people (47:38, 70:41). You can do no harm to *Allah* since He has control over everything. (21:10)

From the discussion we have had so far it is clearly obvious Saleem that the Qur'an has given many laws and principles in whose light there is no difficulty for anyone to see why nations' rise and fall or how they go through life and death. The Qur'an exhorts us to think deeply into human history and see for ourselves how every nation's history offers the evidence of the truth of these laws. And then it asks us a simple question: If that was the fate of those nations then how could we avoid the same fate if we behave the same way as they did?

Human abilities—a precondition for success

The Qur'an says that real inheritance of the land cannot come from ancestors or as a free gift but that there is an

immutable law for this to happen. Only those people will inherit the land who possess the necessary abilities for this:

We had laid down in every revealed Book and in the historical details of past nations this basic and fundamental law: the rightful heirs of the earth (the state, its governance and resources) shall only be those nations who possess the required abilities and who live according to Our Laws. This basic law of life is absolute and universal, and any nation that wants to live according to Our Laws will bear witness to its far reaching reality. (This reality is that the inheritance in the earth is conditional on the development of required abilities as well as obedience to the Divine Law. Without these two qualities a nation may attain temporary superiority but will not have it as a rightful inheritance.) (21:105-106)

Even Muslims were told that they are not an exception to the above golden rule. They have to acquire their place in earth through their abilities. In other words, they have to earn it.

God-given inheritance in earth

Allah has promised authority in this world only to those who have conviction in the truthfulness of the Divine Laws *and* who do the righteous deeds (33:27) (in accordance with these laws). He will establish them in the land, and they, in turn, will turn their land into *Paradise* (39:74).

This is Our Eternal Law according to which We caused previous generations to establish their authority on this earth (28:6). As a result of their *conviction* in this law and due to their righteous deeds, We will grant them authority over the land and strengthen the system of life which We have chosen for them. The result will be that it will replace their erstwhile state of fear by one of security and peace so that they may *obey* Our Laws (do our *ibadat*) in peace and harmony. Also, there will be no pressure on them to obey anyone else; thus they will be free of becoming guilty of *Shirk*. (No worldly power or authority will force them to obey man-made or other laws instead of those given by *Allah*.) (24:55)

From the above verse it is also clear that '*Ibaadat* means obedience and not worship as it is usually translated. If by '*Ibaadat* we mean the fulfillment of religious rituals such as prayer and fast then we do not need our own established authority in the land to do that. This can be done anywhere under any circumstances, even under slavery. The above verse continues:

(But keep in mind that the above Order will last as long as they continue obeying Our Laws.) After this system has been established, if they do not work according to it (and, instead, start enforcing their own laws), then this will amount to going astray and abandoning the straight path which, in turn, will take them away from the right destination. (24:55)

They will thus be deprived of the bounties of a blissful life which are the result of *conviction* in Allah's law and doing righteous deeds. When the Allah-prescribed foundation is ignored how could it produce its promised results?

O Prophet! Convey Our message to them: Only those who go astray from the right path will perish. Those who don't will not face destruction. Therefore if they want to save themselves they should follow the path suggested by Allah. (46:35)

It is clear from the Qur'an then that there exists an immutable law for life and death of nations. Those nations that lead their lives according to this law ride the life affirming waves resulting in their overall rise in prestige and acclaim. Those who go against this law suffer indignation and eventual death. Allah has established this law and has given freedom of will to human beings to either accept it or reject it.

Saleem! Could there be any better explanation than what the Qur'an has given above about the rise and fall of nations? You may be surprised to know that the nation that is supposed to be the bearer of this Qur'anic message has far drifted away from it. The Muslim nation now believes

that the question of freedom of will does not arise in this matter; that human fate is already predetermined by Allah; that the time of death of nations is fixed just like individuals and there will be no change in it even for one second; and that no nation can extend its life by doing righteous deeds, or for that matter, shorten it by sinful behavior. How ironic and amazing then that the authority for this non-Qur'anic belief is presented from the Qur'an itself by those who follow this non-Qur'anic ideology? No wonder, many go astray and many receive guidance from the same Qur'an! According to Iqbal:

*In this same Qur'an now, the message is found to renounce
the world*

*That once made believers the masters of the moons, stars
and the world*

*Their life today has been made passive by the belief in
predestined human Will*

*When once they used to be deeply moved to act and shape
their life by God's Will*

*What was once good and virtuous has now become non-
virtuous*

*This is because slavery degrades a nation's heart and
conscience*

Every nation has its *Ajal* – a period of respite

To support their claim that there is a predetermined fixed time for death, whether of individuals or of nations, its proponents present the verse (7:34) of the Qur'an and translate the word "*Ajal*" in this verse as "fixed time". As we have mentioned before, between every action and the appearance of its result there is a period, and the length or the age of that period is called *Ajal*. However, before the appearance of the result i.e., before its *Ajal*, if a nation

changes its course then it would be possible for it to avert the destructive consequences of its prior wrong course. But, if that period has reached a stage where the results of its bad actions have started to appear then no one can change it. This *Ajal*, however, is different for different actions. (For example, the period between planting the seeds and appearance of the fruits is different for different seeds. Or, for example, a small amount of a poison takes long time to cause death whereas a large amount will bring about death in a short time. Although the result actually starts taking shape much earlier but its appearance occurs at a particular time which is called *Ajal*.)

This, then, is the law for *Ajal*; and different actions have different *Ajal*. The Qur'an has beautifully explained this *Ajal*. It says: "*Li kulli ummatin Ajalun*" (7:34) – There is *Ajal* for every nation. And, "*Li kulli Ajalin kitaab*" (13:38) – For every *Ajal* there is a law (*Kitaab* in Arabic means book but it also means law.) "*Yamhullahu maa yashaa-u wa yushbitu*" (13:39) – This is Allah's law (*mashiyya*) according to which nations' fates are decided: whether they should stay or disappear. This is Allah's universal law, the essence of which is with Allah Himself: "*Wa 'indahu ummul kitaab*" (13:39). Therefore, no one can change it. This is beyond the reach of humans. What is that law according to which the rise and fall of nations is decided? It is: "*Yamhullahul baatila wa yuhiqqul haqqa bikalimaatihi*" (42:24) – Allah with His law wipes out *Baatil* and establishes *Haq*, i.e., a culture that is based on Falsehood (evil) disappears and the one based on Truth (good) remains.

Fundamental principle of survival

By now, we have seen which cultures have the ability to survive and which have the potential to disappear; and we have seen which fundamental principles determine the fates

of those nations. The Qur'an has also provided concrete examples so that there is no difficulty in understanding them, and that no doubt remains as to their working in real life. See how Sura 13 verse 17 illustrates this principle with a concrete example:

(Some may argue that if *Allah* has created everything why is it that there is evil along with good. The conflict between evil and good is necessary for the evolution of the universe. This may be understood by means of the following examples.) *Allah* sends down rain from the heavens and this causes streams to flow and the deluge which follows sweeps away all the dirt in the soil (leaving clear soil behind). Similarly, when metals are used for making ornaments or other articles of use, they are purified by being put into the fire which separates the impurities (and the pure remains). As a result of the conflict between truth and falsehood the negative forces pass away like scum but that which is beneficial for the humanity endures. This is how *Allah* explains His laws by means of analogies. (13:17)

Did you notice Saleem the unmistakable nature of this principle? A culture or system has the ability to stay only if its existence benefits humanity, and not any particular group, party, organization, or nation. I think Saleem that this principle should be written in golden letters and displayed prominently everywhere in the world.

Is *our* revival possible?

Saleem! Now comes the important question: Is *our* revival possible? Is it possible for us to pull ourselves out of this humiliating life that we have been leading for centuries? Or, are we doomed forever? The Qur'an says that there is no need to feel hopeless. Indeed, it is possible for us to come out of our abyss, and it is possible for us to rise to the glory which we once had. But...Saleem! You will have to wait a while. Right now, we need to provide some backdrop for that.

You have seen that the resulting clash of different cultures means a nation's ultimate life or death. The Qur'an has divided different cultures into two different categories: 1) in which a nation follows the laws of Allah, and, which the Qur'an has described it by the comprehensive term *Salaat* and 2) in which human beings follow their own aims and ambitions. The Qur'an says that the Prophets (PBUH) and those who followed in their footsteps were bearers of the culture of *Salaat* the result of which was sublime happiness and success. But their descendents turned out to be ungrateful and left that culture (of *Salaat*) and adopted another culture (based on their own desires). And so, they were destroyed. In Sura *Maraym* while describing the exalted life stories of different Prophets the Qur'an says:

They were exalted people on whom Allah had bestowed all kinds of comfort and happiness but after them came their ungrateful and unworthy descendents who destroyed the system of *Salaat* and, instead, went after their own desires. Those who do so ultimately face the result of their transgression. (19:59)

It is clear from this that the result of the establishment of the system of *Salaat* is the achievement of life's bounties and eminence and its desertion results in being deprived of them.

After enunciating this principle let us come back to the Muslims now. In Sura *Faatir* it is stated that Allah gave His final Book to the Prophet (PBUH). After the Prophet (PBUH), his nation was to be the inheritor of this Book and the system that the Prophet (PBUH) had established. This nation in its early period remained in the forefront to continue to establish this system. But after that, it became less enthusiastic about its establishment. Then, after that, it went out of its original track completely.

(All that was important or necessary has been revealed and preserved in this Qur'an, because after this, the institution of *Wahi* is being closed. The only thing required now is to

establish a system according to these Laws, and for human society to follow this guidance.) For this purpose a nation (an *Ummah*) is required. This *Ummah* has been chosen (2:143; 3:109); and the Book has been entrusted to it. But the condition of this *Ummah* will be such that some of its members will commit transgression by abandoning it; some will stay on the fence; and some will be foremost in establishing a system according to the Divine Laws. They will be the ones who deserve high ranks. (35:32)

We are in the category that abandoned the chosen path and went awry. This has been explained in clearer terms in Sura 3 of the Qur'an. We are told first what the path of Islam is, and how all the previous Prophets (PBUH) adopted it, and then the proclamation of the truth that this is *the* path to attain success and well-being is made:

If a people have professed *Ei'man* (conviction) and their *Nabi* (Prophet) has established the Divine System which testifies to its truth, and thereafter they turn away towards *Kufr* (non-belief), who is there who can guide them? And *Allah's* Law is that the *z'almeen* (transgressors) cannot be the recipients of His Guidance. These people will be deprived of *Allah's* Blessings as well as the support of *Malaika* (forces of nature) and righteous persons. They will remain in this state without respite unless they give up the wrong path and amend their actions. And if they do so then certainly *Allah* will protect them and provide them with the sources of nourishment. If they continue to follow the wrong path and their repentance is merely verbal, they will not reach the right goal. (3:85-89)

So, Saleem! There you have it. There is definitely a way to get out of our abyss, but we have to return to the point from where we took the wrong turn, and then after reaching there we will have to take the path to which the Qur'an guides us. Only then will Allah's law lift us from our current abyss and protect us from any disasters while providing us necessary nourishment for our development. This is the only process by which we can start our revival.

Dear Saleem! The Qur'an has told us in very clear terms that the glory that was initially achieved by this *Ummah* was the result of following the laws of Allah enshrined in His Book, the Qur'an. But when this *Ummah* left the Qur'an they were deprived of that glory. There is only one way to rescue ourselves from our present abyss: establish our system of life according to the Qur'an. There is *no* other way for our renaissance no matter what we may try.

My dear Saleem! I hope you now understand what the immutable law of the rise and fall of nations is; why some nations live, prosper and rise to great heights while others die and disappear into history; and what a nation can do to avoid death.

Fi Amaanillah! Wassalaam

*Parwez
January, 1957*

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