



# Interpretation of Human History

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan



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## FOREWORD

Human history has a beginning as well as an end.  
The end of human history will be followed by  
another world—a flawless one in the fullest sense.

**H**uman history began with a man and a woman and following a continuous birth and death process, countless people have come to this world. For thousands of years, this chain has been established from generation to generation. In the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the number of human beings on the entire planet has exceeded seven billion. Those who have died before then did not perish but are still alive. They will be raised in the Hereafter.

Human history has a beginning as well as an end. The end of human history will be followed by another world—a flawless one in the fullest sense. This world will be inhabited by the selected people from all over human history. In a similar vein, the Quran tells us that, “My righteous servants shall inherit the earth.” (21:105)

We find the same message in previous divine books revealed to the prophets. In the Bible, we find these words, “Depart from evil, and do good; then you will dwell in the land forever. For the Lord loves the just and will not forsake his faithful ones. Wrongdoers will be completely destroyed; the offspring of the wicked will perish. The righteous will inherit the land and dwell in it forever.” (*Psalms*, 37: 27-29)

This message has been preserved in the Quran. According to the creation plan, God created an ideal world which was perfect in all respects. He ordained that this ultimate world be inhabited by impeccable ideal human beings. To achieve this target of selecting deserving candidates for eternal Paradise, while rejecting the undeserving; God first settled man on Earth giving him complete freedom. The present world is, therefore, a selection ground for this grand project. Here, it is being observed as to who makes proper use of his freedom and who misuses it. At the end of human history, those individuals who have abused their freedom will be rejected, and those who may have exercised it judiciously will be selected and settled in eternal Paradise.

Historians view history as a whole, but the right way, according to the divine concept, is to look at history in terms of the individuals. Historians form their

judgement about history in terms of the groups of human beings, whereas the right method, according to the divine concept, is to form their judgement in terms of the individuals. Human history should be interpreted taking it into account that in this temporary world, ideal individuals are being selected by God from every generation to inhabit the world of Paradise in the eternal world of the Hereafter.

Wahiduddin Khan

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## WHAT IS HISTORY?

He has given full freedom to man and is simultaneously keeping watch over the human caravan so that it may not deviate too far from the straight path.

What is history? History is another name for chronicles of the past. Books written on the subject of history are usually a record of past events. However, there is an additional subject of history which is called the ‘philosophy of history’ or the ‘interpretation of history’. The purpose of this topic is to explain the different events of human history and discover an understandable link between them. There are myriad books available on historiography or the study of the writing of history but as far as interpretation is concerned, there is no book on the subject that can be considered a comprehensible explanation of history.

Dr Alexis Carrel has rightly stated in his book, *Man the Unknown*, that the subject of the interpretation of history is directly related to man’s freedom. Since man



is not predictable, any comprehensive explanation of his actions is not possible. Every human being is at liberty to do whatever good or bad he intends. Therefore, an overall interpretation of human history is a rather difficult task.

The fact is that human history moves between two antithetical demands: freedom and determinism. To the best of my knowledge, historians are yet to discover a principle to establish a link between these two contradictory requirements and, in the light of which, have only failed to offer a successful interpretation of human history.

I have thoroughly contemplated this subject and tried to find out the principle of interpretation of history. Finally, I came across this principle in a verse of the Quran, "The straight way leads to God and there are ways which deviate from the right course. If He so wished, He would guide you all". (16:9)

This means that God, according to His plan of creation, has been managing history while maintaining human freedom. He has given full freedom to man and is simultaneously keeping watch over the human caravan so that it may not deviate too far from the straight path. This divine principle about human history can be summed up as 'managing history while maintaining human freedom'.

## INTERPRETATION OF HUMAN HISTORY

The correct interpretation of history is that which is in accordance with the Creator's plan of creation about man.

**H**istory, in a simple sense, is a narration of events. Whereas the interpretation of history is related to the philosophy of history, that is, to discover those laws which are at work in the process of history. Various theories have been put forward in this regard, but all of them are based on human imagination. The correct interpretation of history is that which is in accordance with the Creator's plan of creation about man.

In ancient times, the king enjoyed the position of the central character. History practically was reduced to the history of kings. In the wake of the Renaissance in Europe, the era of democracy dawned in the world. Consequently, society came to occupy the central space in history instead of the individual king. Then history came to be written in the light of social ideas. One

of the prominent figures in this context is Karl Marx (d. 1883), the German thinker. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Marx introduced a new concept of history called 'historical materialism'. According to his idea, it was not human consciousness but material conditions that shape history. He writes, "The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual process of human life."

Another interpretation of history is nation-based. A record of various activities of a nation is considered its history, such as the history of the Indian nation, the history of the German nation and so on.

Arnold Toynbee, the British historian, has presented another historical theory. He has written a book on the subject in twelve volumes, entitled 'A Study of History.' Toynbee has introduced the idea that history progresses through evolutionary stages of civilization. Therefore, the architects of civilizations are, in fact, the architects of history.

Yet another concept of history is one which is known as 'religious history'. This concept of history has not been accepted, academically, as an authentic interpretation, rather it is not even considered worthy of being referred to in modern times. Patrick Lancaster Gardiner, an essayist in the Encyclopaedia Britannica, in his dissertation, Philosophy of History, writes,

“The age of religious and metaphysical conjectures concerning the destiny of human affairs had, in their opinion, come to a close.” (1974: *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 8, p. 962)

In other words, it means that for modern historians, the era of interpretation of human destiny, in the light of religion and metaphysics, is now over. This is undoubtedly baseless. It is as unscientific as saying, ‘the age of God is over’, or ‘the revelation of the Prophet was just a poetic experience’, or that ‘there is no basis for religion’, that it was only a social phenomenon and so on.

## CREATION PLAN OF GOD

The present world is a selection ground for this grand project. Here, it is being observed as to who makes proper use of his freedom and who misuses it.

God created an ideal world which was perfect in all respects. He ordained that this ultimate world be inhabited by impeccable ideal human beings. To achieve this target, God first settled man on Earth giving him complete freedom. The present world is a selection ground for this grand project. Here, it is being observed as to who makes proper use of his freedom and who misuses it. At the end of history, those who have abused their freedom will be rejected, and those who may have exercised it judiciously will be selected and settled in heaven. Contrary to atheist thinkers who term the concept of paradise a beautiful idealization of human wishes, it would be more accurate to call it a beautiful interpretation of human history.

God's creation plan is in fact a complex one. One part of it pertains to maintaining complete human

freedom, while the other is that of continuing to manage it according to His own knowledge till the completion of this plan. Thus, it is a matter of managing bilateral demands. Any comprehensive interpretation of history is possible only if it is viewed in the light of these bilateral requisites. This is the correct principle of interpretation of history. It is not possible for anyone to interpret history without taking this principle into account.

Although, it is man who performs the task of interpreting human history, the creator of man is God rather than man. Therefore, the only guiding principle for the interpretation of history for a historian could be for him to first discover the Creator's plan of creation. This is the key principle, and no one can interpret history correctly without keeping this in mind. In the following pages, I seek to find a coherent interpretation of history in the light of this principle.

## SELECTION OF DESIRED INDIVIDUALS

In the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the number of human beings on the entire planet has exceeded seven billion.

The creation plan of God is mentioned in the second chapter of the Quran. The translation of these verses is as follows: When your Lord said to the angels, 'I am putting a successor on earth,' they said, 'Will You place someone there who will cause corruption on it and shed blood, while we glorify You with Your praise and extol Your holiness?' [God] answered, 'Surely, I know that which you do not know.' He taught Adam all the names, then He set them before the angels and said, 'Tell Me the names of these, if what you say be true.' They said, 'Glory be to You; we have no knowledge except whatever You have taught us. You are the All Knowing, the All Wise.' (2:30-32)

The angels knew that all creatures were completely subject to God's command, while man was being given freedom and settled on the earth. In such a situation, people would misuse their freedom and cause chaos and bloodshed in the land. At that time, God demonstrated to the angels that although a large number of human beings would become corrupt by abusing their freedom, but among such people, the righteous and law-abiding ones will also emerge. By God's command, Adam introduced such virtuous and principled people to the angels whose minds were then put at rest.

The angels formed their opinion by looking at the whole of humanity and God made it clear, through a demonstration, that His objective of creation was the selection of individuals rather than the selection of a crowd. That is, although, there would be deterioration at the collective level, there would always be good people at the individual level. According to God's creation plan, the present world is a selection ground. That is, selection of the desired individuals out of the whole of humanity. Therefore, the purpose of creation is not to create an ideal system on this planet, but it is to select those individuals, from every age and every race, who despite enjoying complete freedom, would commit themselves to the commands of God.



## A FEW PAGES FROM HISTORY

Modern science has unfolded nature and revealed the divine signs which are called 'ayaat' in the Quran (41:53).

According to the Creator's idea of creation, the journey of human history can be divided into a few major periods. These periods or historical stages are as follows:

The first stage is the age of proclamations through the prophets. This age extends from Prophet Adam to Prophet Muhammad. Prophets came during this period, but their mission was confined to the stage of pronouncement, it did not reach the stage of revolution.

The second stage begins with Prophet Ishmael, son of Abraham. In this period, a community (ummah) was formed which could become the bearer of the divine Book.

The most important thing that happened after the creation of this community was the preservation of the Quran as the authentic text of God's guidance.

Freedom of thought was the most essential component

of the new era which came into existence through the companions of Prophet Muhammad. It began in the seventh century AD and thousands of years later, it reached the peak in the form of Western civilization.

Western civilization played a supportive role in this historical process. The status of this civilization is therefore that of a secular supporter in this historical journey.

The role of science is that of a supporting element in this historical journey in the modern age. Modern science has unfolded nature and revealed the divine signs which are called '*ayaat*' in the Quran (41:53).

The contemporary age is called the age of communication. For the first time in human history modern communication has made global dawah possible.

The people who would avail of this opportunity have been called the brothers of the Prophet (*Ikhwan-e-Rasool*) in a Hadith (*Sahih Muslim*, hadith 249). The title, the brothers of the Prophet, does not refer to any kind of superiority; rather it refers to a distinctive role which would be played by them. The companions of the Prophet made use of the possibilities of their time in the seventh century for the propagation of the word of God. Whereas the *Ikhwan-e-Rasool* are those who would make the best use of the possibilities available in the 21<sup>st</sup> century for the dissemination of the word of God.

## THE PURPOSE OF CREATION

The deeper meaningfulness of creation is tantamount to a deeper introduction to the Creator .

One of the most important questions under discussion among philosophers and thinkers is to find out the ultimate purpose or *raison d'être* of creation. Secular thinkers have tried to answer this question in different ways. For instance, they hold that the Creator has sought His own fulfilment through His creation. The Quran has this to say in this regard, “I created the jinn and mankind only so that they might worship Me.” (51:56)

Abdullah ibn Abbas, the Prophet's companion and commentator of the Quran has interpreted the word worship (*liyabudun*) as realization of God (*leyarifun*). Knowing or discovering the Creator is no simple matter. Man cannot see his Creator directly, but by studying the creation and the Book of the Creator—the Quran, man can certainly discover the greatness of the Creator. The deeper meaningfulness of creation

is tantamount to a deeper introduction to the Creator. This knowledge that man acquires from the study of creation can be called God realization.

Such a realization of the Creator becomes a thrilling experience for him. As a result, his personality undergoes a transformation, his thinking naturally becomes God-oriented. This divine culture finds reflection in his words and deeds. His whole life is centred entirely on a process described in the Quran as “taking on God’s own dye.”(2:138)

A strong desire of calling people to God, that is *dawah ilal’lah*, is a manifestation of man’s deep realization of God. Such a person feels a great urgency to share his realization with others. This God realization first takes root within the mind of an individual, rather than within a group. When a sizable number of people become God oriented, then a whole group or a large number of people could become God oriented.

That is why dawah work is based on the individual rather than on the group. The goal of dawah is not to establish a socio-political system, it is rather to bring God-realization to the individual. The events that follow are the indirect effects of the original goal, far from being the actual target.

## MEANINGFUL INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY

The real goal of God's creation plan is the development of divine personality within an individual—a "man created in God's image.

A large industry has many components as well as many functions. But the real goal of the industry is only one, that is to produce some specific product. That product would be the real part of the industry while the rest would be considered its additional components. This is the only principle to gauge the performance of the industry.

The same is true of human history. There are many seemingly working components of human history. The first prerequisite in this regard is to be fully aware of the plan of the Creator, and of the special product the Creator plans to produce from this great factory of human history. No other point of view save this can be useful so far as the correct interpretation of history is concerned.

A study of the Quran reveals that there is only one product desired by the Creator through various activities of history. This product is called a godly man (*rabbani insaan*) in the Quran (3:79). That is to say, that the real goal of God's creation plan is the development of divine personality within an individual—a “man created in God's image.” As long as such divine (*rabbani*) individuals continue to be born, the course of history will not come to a halt. Only when such people cease to exist, the present period of history would be brought to an end. Subsequently, its second period, the life hereafter, would commence in the next eternal world.

According to the goal set by the Creator, it is not right to examine human history in terms of a just social system. It is because the Creator's plan is to produce righteous people in this world—a testing ground—rather than an ideal system. These ideal people are the ones who would be selected to live forever in the ideal world of Paradise. A meaningful understanding of history is therefore possible only in the light of the above principle.

## INDIVIDUAL, NOT GROUP

The right method of the interpretation of history is to view the individuals rather than the humanity in totality.

The correct interpretation of human history, in reality, can be only one – one that is in accordance with the Creator’s scheme of things. The Quran enjoys the position of an authentic source on this subject. Its study tells us which interpretation of history is in accordance with God’s creation plan. A great number of historians, past as well as present, have compiled many books on history, but these books are no more than chronicles, for they fail to reveal the meaningfulness of human history. According to these books, history appears to be a jungle of meaningless events. The English historian, Edward Gibbon (d. 1794) has aptly put it as follows: “History, which is indeed, a little more than the register of crimes, follies and misfortunes of mankind.”

What is worth noting as regards the interpretation

of human history is that historians in general look at history in terms of the whole of humanity (collectively) to determine its beauty or ugliness. But according to the creation plan of God, the right method of the interpretation of history is to view the individuals rather than the humanity in totality. From a collective point of view, there does not exist any golden age of history but when we view it from the perspective of individuals or in terms of the individual, every age would appear as an age of golden individuals.



## SELECTION OF IDEAL INDIVIDUALS

The present world is in fact a selection ground of ideal individuals. Ideal individuals are being selected from every generation.

**T**he creator did not create the present world in order to establish an ideal system at the collective level. It has actually been created for the purpose of testing human beings. That is why God has given man complete freedom to everyone, to make proper use of his freedom or misuse it, to lead a life of righteousness or a life of wickedness. Therefore, an ideal system, at the collective level, at the level of whole humanity, cannot be established in this world. It is only in Paradise that an ideal system can come into being.

The present world is in fact a selection ground of ideal individuals. Ideal individuals are being selected from every generation. For instance, in the first generation, Adam's son Cain was rejected while his other son Abel was accepted. The same process has

been going on throughout history. In every age and in every generation, God has been selecting deserving candidates while rejecting the undeserving. It is described in the Quran thus: "...a large group of the earlier people and a large group of those of later times." (56:39-40)

Once this desired list of accepted and rejected individuals is complete, the Creator of the universe will replace this world with an ideal world, that is, Paradise. Then the individuals who had been selected would be settled in this Paradise to enjoy a life free from fear and sorrow forever, whereas those who had been rejected would be thrown into the universal dustbin to live a life full of intense regret and remorse for all eternity.

## THE STANDARD OF HISTORY

God, the Creator of man has instilled the concept of Paradise in human nature. That is why every man and woman is born with great desires and aspirations.

**T**his approach appears to be the most convincing way of judging history. By viewing history from this angle, we can see that there have existed noble and righteous people in every generation in the jungle of the corrupted and the perverted. In this human jungle, we find such noble characters as that of Abel, Adam's son, who said to Cain, his brother, who wanted to kill him, "If you raise your hand to kill me, I will not raise mine to kill you. I fear God, the Lord of the Universe." (5:28)

This was a statement of peace. Thus, he set the highest example of peace-making beyond which there is no level of pacifism.

In a similar way, Hajira, mother of Prophet Ishmael, was born in that same corrupt society. Two thousand five hundred years ago, according to God's plan, she made a supreme sacrifice by agreeing to settle in

the Arabian Desert with her young child in order to produce a new generation. When Abraham told her that he had arranged her stay in the desert by God's command, she uttered these historic words, "When it is in accordance with God's plan, he will not let us go to waste." (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, hadith 3364) This supreme sacrifice of Hajira produced the generation known as Children of Ishmael. They were invested with noble human qualities. Professor D.S Margoliouth (d. 1940) has acknowledged this by calling this Ishmaelite race 'a nation of heroes,' and echoing the words of the Bible, "I will make of thee-Ishmael-a great nation."

Similarly, it was in this jungle of history that individuals like Abu Bakr and Umar Faruq were born. In spite of being invested with political power, they saved themselves from corruption. Mahatma Gandhi, describing their superior character wrote, "Though they were masters of a vast empire, yet they lived the life of paupers." (*Harijan*, July 27, 1973)

God, the Creator of man has instilled the concept of Paradise in human nature. That is why every man and woman is born with great desires and aspirations. Every human being is endowed by birth with an ideal imaginary world which has made him a paradise seeking animal. Owing to this nature, everyone is engaged in building an ideal world for himself.

Everyone devotes all his energy and resources in the pursuit of a world of happiness where he can find total fulfilment. But it is also a fact that everyone who comes to this world fails to build his desired world and finally dies in a state of utter despair. No one is an exception to this rule. I once searched the internet about the final days of about 400 eminent people. I found that each one of them had died in a state of extreme despair.

It is actually paradise, the perfect or ideal world, which is cherished by everyone. What must be remembered is that the place to find this world is the Hereafter rather than the present world. According to God's creation plan, man must strive to earn a place in Paradise. Throughout human history, however, man has tried to build a paradise for himself in this present world. Since this goes against the divine scheme, every such effort on the part of human beings has been rendered fruitless.

The goal of some thinkers and reformers was to create an ideal world on this planet based on justice and human values. However, this never materialised as it went against God's Creation Plan. God's goal is to produce ideal people rather than an ideal system. These exemplary people, scattered throughout history, would be selected and settled in the ultimate world of Heaven in the Hereafter.

## EXAMPLES OF INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY

Man has been invested with free will, unlike matter which has no freedom, but is subjected to the laws of nature.

The interpretation of history is an independent subject in itself. However, to the best of my understanding, the many books written on the subject do not offer a comprehensible interpretation of human history.

The most prominent name on this subject is probably that of Karl Marx (d. 1883). By applying Newton's laws of nature to human history, Marx gave a material interpretation of history which we may call historical materialism. But this interpretation of history was rejected by scholars right away. Man has been invested with free will, unlike matter which has no freedom, but is subjected to the laws of nature. In such a case applying the law of one to the other is simply based on conjecture which has no locus standi.

The events of the First World War were a practical test for this Marxist ideology, and it failed at this very first experiment. Vladimir Lenin, the famous communist leader, founded the communist International (Comintern) in 1919. Based on the Marxist ideology, workers of the whole world were on one side while the capitalists of the world were on the other side. In 1939, when World War II broke out, all the heads of the countries involved in this war belonged to the bourgeoisie. As per the Marxist theory, it was assumed that the working class of those countries would not side with or support the bourgeoisie, rather they would side with the working class of the world, but this did not happen. In each country the working class sided with the ruling bourgeoisie of their respective countries, thus putting an end to the theory of historical materialism or dialectical materialism in this very first experiment.

Similarly, many other scholars have also attempted to present an interpretation of history but in practice they too succumbed to confusion. Professor H. Butterfield of Cambridge is a case in point in this regard. He has written a 146-page book on the subject titled “The Whig Interpretation of History”, published in 1931 in London. The book seeks to give a moral interpretation of the whole of history in the light of a universal moral

code. However, the author himself admits to the fact that such an interpretation was not possible in view of the practical situation prevailing in society.

We find another example in the writings of George Bernard Shaw, a renowned British writer. His drama 'Man and Superman' is an attempt to present an interpretation of history in the light of the supposed evolutionary theory.

The bottom line of Shaw's interpretation is that according to the law of compulsive evolution, man has been continually travelling from the human state to superhuman state. But this theory is just an imaginary story, having no scientific standing.



## NEGATIVE INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY

The truth of the matter is that the human world is far more beautiful than the rest of the world.

Scholars generally have a negative outlook of human history. For instance, Edward Gibbon, as we have seen, once observed that “the history of humanity is little more than a register of crimes, follies, and misfortunes”.

Similarly, the great novels produced in various languages of the world are mostly tragedies, rather than comedies. Why is there such a negative perception of human history? The reason is that these scholars did not follow the right method of studying history. The right method of studying history entails first discovering the creator’s map of history, followed by looking at and examining history in the light of that divine map.

Scholars want to understand history in the light of their own hypothetical map, so they develop negative

thinking about history when their view of history does not appear to be meaningful as per their assumptions. These words of one researcher, “In this world everything is beautiful except man,” also reflect the same negative view of history. This opinion is also the result of setting up a wrong standard. The truth of the matter is that the human world is far more beautiful than the rest of the world. Man constitutes the purpose of the creation of the universe, then how is it possible that he should not be beautiful?

The reason for this incongruous opinion is that while observing the material world, writers found beauty at the individual level yet failed to find the same beauty in the human world at a collective level.

According to the Creator’s plan, there is a difference between the human world and the material world. The reason being that the non-human world requires a collective discipline because it is not designed for the purpose of test, rather it is meant as a support to the human world. This goal cannot be achieved without maintaining a collective discipline.

On the contrary, man’s case is seen at the individual level. What is desired here is individual beauty, rather than total beauty. In the human world, each individual is being tested separately. He has been

given the opportunity to make proper use of his freedom in order to become a successful member of the heavenly society. On the basis of this plan of creation, it becomes clear that both the human and the non-human worlds will have a different standard of judgement. That is to say, man should be judged individually whereas the non-human world should be judged at the collective level. Both man and the rest of the universe are masterpieces of creation in themselves, but the standard of judgement is different in each case.

The common denominator of those who have a negative view of human history is that they form their opinion by looking at the whole human race. Their presumption that there is nothing but evil in the human world is based on their wish to find their desired ideal world at the collective level. Whereas they should rather say that although evil did exist at the collective level, there is an enormous goodness available at the individual level. The negative thinking has produced the concept of evil which has influenced the thinking of contemporary scholars.

The goal to build an ideal society, with all human beings practising the ideal at a collective level, entails cancellation of human freedom. The reason is that the root cause of all evil in human society is

traceable to the misuse of freedom granted to man by God. Revoking human freedom is tantamount to revoking the Creator's plan. That is why God has designed man's case to be individual-based rather than collective-based or to be at an individual level rather than a collective level. The Creator's concern is not to establish an ideal system at the level of the whole human society, which can happen only when human freedom is totally withdrawn, and this certainly does not fit in with the Creator's plan.

According to the plan of creation, it is impossible to achieve the ideal at a collective level. But it is quite possible that there will arise extraordinary individuals out of the multitude—such men as would discover the truth by their own efforts and mould themselves accordingly. These are the exceptional people desired by the Creator. This is what is meant by managing history according to His own plan while maintaining human freedom.

We can learn the scheme of the Creator of the universe from a study of the Quran. In chapter 4 of the Quran there is a verse as follows,

“Whoever obeys God and the Messenger will be among those He has blessed: the messengers, the truthful, the witnesses, and the righteous. What

excellent companions these are! That is God's favour. Sufficient is God's infinite knowledge." (4:69-70)

From this statement of the Quran, it becomes clear as to who would be the chosen people held deserving of Paradise. Four titles have been used here to describe these people. The word 'prophet' here refers to those who have received God's revelations for the guidance of humanity. The word 'siddiq', that is the truthful, refers to those who associated themselves with the truth to the extent of enjoying a complete temperamental compatibility with prophets. The shaheed (witness) are those whose lives are so moulded with the truth that they become a witness of the truth with their whole being. The pious (saleh) refer to those whose lives are an example of a perfect coordination between their thought and action. Their actions are in full accordance with their beliefs and ideology.

These are the four categories of people who will form the ideal society of Paradise. These people will not belong to any particular era or a particular society, rather, they will be selected from various imperfect societies. Keeping in view the Creator's scheme of things, it would be apt to say that here any kind of achievement would be possible only at the individual level. So far as the achievement of perfection at the

level of society is concerned, it is not at all possible in this world of test.

In this world, possessing a positive mindset is essential to keep to the right path. However, leading a life with such an outlook is not a simple matter, for one has to undergo a mandatory test of managing two opposite and conflicting tendencies.

Man is by nature an idealist. But he has to live practically in an imperfect world. It is important to be consciously aware of this fact, otherwise owing to the idealistic bent of mind he would negatively react to different experiences he encounters within the imperfect world. Being deprived of positive thinking, consequently, is akin to divesting oneself of all goodness. It is akin to losing everything.

Man must be consciously aware of the fact that he was gifted with an idealistic bent of mind so that he might become a seeker of Paradise, rather than fruitlessly pursuing a heavenly life in this world. The present world is designed to produce heavenly individuals rather than heavenly society.

## THE DIVINE ORGANISATION OF HISTORY

God has managed human history while fully maintaining human freedom.

According to the Quran, human history begins with Adam and Eve. God created them and settled them in paradise. The guidance given to them by God was as follows:

“O Adam! Live with your wife in Paradise and eat freely from it anywhere you may wish. Yet do not approach this tree lest you become wrongdoers.” (2:35)

The creation of Adam’s wife was an indication that God desired not just a human being but a human race. The only condition set for man to be entitled to heaven was his willingness to abide by a self-disciplined character without abusing his freedom. When Adam and Eve failed to fulfil this condition, God expelled them from heaven and settled them on Earth.

This means that initially, man was given the opportunity

to live in heaven. But when man transgressed the covenant, God decided that from then onwards, only the deserving people will be admitted to heaven. So, selection for paradise will be selective rather than general. In this way, God has managed human history while fully maintaining human freedom.

The present earth is a selection ground for this purpose of creation. The Quran states that on the Day of Resurrection, according to the record which the angels present based on our deeds, only selected men and women will find a place in the ideal world of Heaven (67:2).

The life support system on earth was created by God, but man was given complete freedom of speech and action. Man, once again, misused this freedom. The perversion of human beings went on increasing, and ultimately man became involved in polytheism and nature worship. If the first man had eaten only the fruit of the 'tree', now his progeny had started worshipping the 'tree' itself, holding it to be a deity.

According to the plan of creation, it was not possible to revoke human freedom. Therefore, God opted for the method of managing human history while maintaining human freedom. Towards this end, God selected individuals from amongst human beings and revealed to them His messages for humanity's guidance. These



messengers communicated to mankind that there is only one God worthy of being worshipped, and they should shun the worship of any other being.

However, since God was unseen, the majority did not pay any heed to these messengers. Veneration or worshipping God meant to worship a being which was unobservable. Man, who wanted to revere some visible object, made nature his god by virtue of its visibility. Polytheism is another name for worshipping nature.

Despite the coming of the prophets in succession, man failed to pay heed to their teachings. He chose to misuse his freedom. This practice persisted from one generation to the next until polytheism became the dominant culture: it came to be a continuum in human history.

Given the general dominance of polytheistic culture, polytheism came to enjoy the patronage of political power almost all over the world. It was accorded the position of a state religion. In its initial stages, polytheism was merely a doctrinal evil, but later, with the kings' patronage, it became so powerful that its eradication was next to impossible. The polytheism culture continued to grow breeding the evil described as "absolute imperialism" by Henri Pirenne, the well-known French historian. The phenomenon of political

patronage gave rise to the aggressive religiosity that has historically been called religious persecution. The rulers created an environment in which polytheism was the only option for the people to follow. Therefore, the believers of one God were forced to either adopt the religion of the State or be killed in punishment. It is this state of affairs prevailing in ancient times, which has been referred to in the Quran (85:4-8).

This situation made it clear that mere declaration and pronouncement of the creed of monotheism was not sufficient to effect any change in society. The first requirement was the separation of religion from political power in order that man may have the freedom to choose his faith.

## THE CREATION OF ADAM

God wanted to pick these divine flowers, and He, therefore, assigned the angles to prepare a record of every human being

God first created the physical universe over a long and gradual process. Finally, he created man and settled him on the planet earth as a free creature.

When God was going to create the first man, Adam, a dialogue took place between God and the angels. This finds mention in the Quran in these words:

“When your Lord said to the angels, ‘I am putting a successor on earth,’ they said, ‘Will You place someone there who will cause corruption on it and shed blood, while we glorify You with Your praise and extol Your holiness?’ [God] answered, ‘Surely, I know that which you do not know.’ He taught Adam all the names, then He set them before the angels and said, ‘Tell Me the names of these, if what you say be true.’ They said, ‘Glory be to You; we have no knowledge except whatever You have taught us. You are the All

Knowing, the All Wise.’ Then He said, ‘O Adam, tell them their names.’ When Adam had told them the names, God said to the angels, ‘Did I not say to you: I know the secrets of the heavens and of the earth, and I know what you reveal and what you conceal?’” (2:30-33)

The question arises as to why the Angels expressed doubt about Adam. Further, what was the thing that the angels were satisfied with after God’s explanatory answer? This reply is given indirectly in the Quran. By understanding this indirect indication, one can learn God’s planning for man’s creation and how it was to be carried out.

We find another such indication in this verse of the Quran:

We have indeed created man in the best of mould, then We cast him down as the lowest of the low, except for those who believe and do good deeds—theirs shall be an unending reward! (95:4-6)

This shows that God granted man a blessing which has been called honour (*takrim*) in the Quran (17:70). That is to say, God created man with great potential, gave him complete freedom and the opportunity to choose the right path for himself of his own free will. Moreover, in recognition of his noble deeds, God will

announce the reward in the form of eternal paradise. But the majority of human beings remained unaware and failed to understand this divine plan. By misusing their freedom, the majority lost their rights to find entry into paradise, except for a small number who understood the divine plan. By making proper use of their freedom, they proved themselves deserving of paradise.

In the light of this Quranic statement, we learn that by looking at the entire human race, the angels concluded that total freedom would certainly lead to corruption and perversion in the world which was set in perfect order by God. God responded to the angles through a demonstration showing that, although at the collective level people would take to evil ways; but besides the wicked and the corrupt, there would also be, at individual levels, among their number, great righteous and pious souls. They would use their freedom properly and thus would be entitled to the Lord's eternal paradise.

The above verse of the Quran states that God presented these exceptions of human history before the angels through a demonstration. The angles understood that their apprehension was not in accord with God's creation plan. They looked at the whole human race in totality, whereas God's planning was individual based.

In God's knowledge, although total freedom will result in a jungle of oppression and corruption in the human world, there would also be exceptions. In this wilderness of oppression and perversion, extraordinary individuals would appear like the divine flowers amidst thorns. God wanted to pick these divine flowers, and He, therefore, assigned the angles to prepare a record of every human being. Based on this record, the good will be separated from the evil to be settled in the eternal gardens of Paradise.

Paradise is not a 'luxury resort' in any simple sense. Paradise would be the finest society of chosen individuals from the whole human race. There, they will have the best infrastructure. These select individuals will bring into existence a super civilisation with the support of the angels. In the present world, the civilization has been produced by the partial discovery of the laws of nature. In contrast, in the Hereafter, the super civilization will be formed through the total unfolding of the words of God.

This matter is further explained in other verses of the Quran. One verse is as follows:

If all the trees on earth were pens, and the sea [were] ink, with seven [more] seas added to it, the words of God would not be exhausted: for, truly, God is Almighty and Wise. (31:27)

Such verses tell us that a time will come when these limitless words of God will be unfolded. This task will be performed in eternal heavenly environs of Paradise. All the select individuals out of the whole of human history would come together to engage in the unfolding of the words of the Lord. This work will go on for all eternity. This activity has been termed in the Quran as ‘enjoyable activities’ (36:55).

## INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY

In view of the Creator's plan, it is not possible for an ideal system to be established at the level of the whole society in the present world

The thinkers and reformers who have gone down in history were idealists. They wanted to establish a utopian system at the level of the whole of humanity. Creating an ideal society was also the dream of Plato and Aristotle, the renowned ancient Greek philosophers. Bertrand Russel, the British philosopher, desired to create an ideal society for a peaceful world to come into existence. The goal of Mahatma Gandhi was also to create a service-based society in India, after independence. These were all ideal concepts of human life. However, they serve as a testimony to the fact that all such thinkers and reformers have practically failed to create the ideal world of their dreams.

The reason is that their own thinking guided these thinkers and reformers. They did not make any



effort to understand the Creator's scheme of things in this matter. They failed because their plan did not conform to the plan of the Creator. The freedom of choice granted by the Creator will never be revoked before the Day of Judgement. Hence, it is not possible to establish an ideal system at the level of humanity. However, ideal individuals can certainly be produced.

Events in history also support the above view that no ideal system has ever existed at the level of the whole of humanity in this world. In view of the Creator's plan, it is not possible for an ideal system to be established at the level of the whole society in the present world. At the same time, ideal individuals have existed in every age.

These ideal people selected from the whole of human history will form the ideal society in the hereafter. It is this ultimate society which in religious terms, is known as Paradise.

## THE ROLE OF NOAH

It was God's intervention to stop humanity's headlong slide into evil.

Adam was the first man as well as the first prophet. He and his wife Eve probably settled in present-day Iraq, called Mesopotamia in ancient languages. The descendants of Adam and Eve adhered to the religion of Adam for many generations. Gradually corruption prevailed, and almost all his descendants became involved in polytheism. They made their elders, after their death, their deities. Some of them were called Vadd, Suwa, Yagooth, Yaoq, Nasr etc. Then God sent Prophet Noah to them. He communicated the message of monotheism to these people for a long time, almost 900 years. But only a few believed in him (11:40). According to some traditions, not more than eighty people believed in Prophet Noah, and the rest persisted in polytheism.

Prophet Noah adopted all the means of communication. The Quran refers to it as follows, "he spoke to them

in public and in private” (71:9). Finally, Prophet Noah realised that people’s conditioning had become so rooted that every child born to them would eventually adopt the same religion of polytheism.

When corruption reached that level, God decided to save the believers and destroy the corrupt. God commanded Prophet Noah to build a large ark for putting the believing men and women on board and to put a pair from every animal around him. When the Ark was ready, stormy winds started blowing at God’s behest. Torrents of water started gushing out of the ground, and there was continuous rainfall. So much so that there was water everywhere and all the people were drowned. The only survivors were a few human beings and some animals who had boarded Noah’s ark. When all the evil people were drowned, God commanded the storm to stop. The water drained into seas and rivers, and the earth again became habitable. Noah’s ark ran aground on Mount Judi (11:44). This event took place about five thousand years ago. According to modern discoveries, the current name of this mountain is Ararat, which is located in eastern Turkey.

God has punished people several times because of their unrighteousness and sinful ways. But the punishment through a great flood has taken place only once. It

was God's intervention to stop humanity's headlong slide into evil. But God's planning is superb, and He is the organiser of human history. He destroyed the evil people to provide the opportunity for good people to scatter in the world and start afresh with a new beginning and fulfil God's plan of creation. Through the ark having reached the top of the Mount Judi, it became possible for the believers to establish human settlements in different parts of the world. Until Noah's time, the human race inhabited only a limited area of Mesopotamia (Iraq). After the great flood, the human race spread to different parts of the earth.

## TWO STREAMS OF HISTORY

Man does not perform great feats in normal situations. Great deeds are performed in abnormal situations.

From the beginning of human history, as we learn from the Quran, there have been two streams of human life, one is the stream of the devil, and the other, the stream of the angels. There are always positive and negative aspects of life. Ignoring positive aspects of life in favour of negative aspects amounts to following Satan. Conversely, ignoring the negative side in favour of the positive side amounts to following the angels. The whole of human history boils down to these two types of people. In short, one category follows Satan's culture, while the other category comprises of those who follow the culture of the angels.

The Creator has given man complete freedom no matter how much he may misuse or abuse this freedom. The Quran has this to say: "Corruption has appeared on land and sea because of the evil which

men's hands have done" (30:41). Despite this, the Lord did not revoke human freedom. However, He made sure that this did not hinder the real purpose of creation. The Creator has given man freedom, at the same time He is managing history so that despite perversion taking place at the collective level, desired individuals continue to be born unhindered. If we understand this point, history appears meaningful.

We find very few examples of such people who have rightly exercised their freedom, whereas history is replete with examples of those who have abused their freedom. This appears to be a negative image of history, but it has positive aspects as well. This state of affairs is responsible for creating a challenging environment which is necessary for testing and the selection of human beings.

Further, this system is not evil in the absolute sense, for, there is also an element of goodness in it. People's engagement in different kinds of activities with full freedom, at times, goes against the interests of others. It is a challenging situation, causing great suffering to people. But suffering and challenges are the most powerful teachers of life. All such unpleasant experiences prove to be a kind of 'shock treatment' for individuals; leading them to undergo a great mental activity called 'brainstorming'. As per psychological

studies, brainstorming is the source of all kinds of intellectual development.

Man does not perform great feats in normal situations. Great deeds are performed in abnormal situations. These unfavourable and challenging conditions act as a spur to awaken in one a strong intellectual stimulus to strive strenuously to achieve one's goal.

For example, the Crusades created the challenging condition that led the Europeans to discover the forces of nature. For example, the development of aviation in the wake of the First World War and the development of communication in the wake of the Second World War resulted from great passion whipped up by both the Allied and Axis forces.

## NEW PLANNING

It aimed to make nature the object of investigation which had only been an object of worship until then.

Since according to the creation plan, human freedom could not be revoked; therefore, God indirectly intervened in human history. He planned a group which would separate religion from political power in order that human history may travel in the right direction without revoking human freedom. The purpose of this new plan was to provide opportunities to sincere individuals to adopt the true religion as per their own conscience. However, the majority choose to abuse the freedom granted by God.

This new plan came into effect four thousand years ago with the advent of Prophet Abraham. The sphere of action was ancient Iraq, where polytheistic culture was predominant. Abraham communicated to them monotheism for a long period of time. But owing to their hard conditioning, they could not accept the idea of monotheism. They turned against him to such



an extent that they planned to kill him. Therefore, Abraham changed his sphere of activity, bringing his wife, Hajra and his son, Ishmael to Makkah, a desert.

In this desert environment, a new chain of procreation and reproduction began, which produced the people of Banu Ishmael or the Children of Ishmael over a 2500 year-long process of ‘desert deconditioning’. A new nation of heroes was born, termed as “a nursery of heroes” by Philip K. Hitti. It was in this group of Banu Ishmael that the Prophet Muhammad bin Abdullah was born. Prophet Muhammad strived hard for 23 years during which a great number of truth seekers from the race of Banu Ishmael joined him. They are known as the Companions of the Prophet.

These Companions of the Prophet played a key role in the accomplishment of several divine tasks. For instance, the preservation of the sacred book, the Quran, and establishing a practical model of divine religion. This divine religion which was mostly limited to the intellectual and theoretical stage during the times of the previous prophets, for the first time, reached the stage of a revolution. These significant changes made the permanent sealing and termination of prophethood possible. The era of individual prophets reached its culmination, replacing it with the era of the collective nation, the Ummah.

The revolutionary work carried out by the companions of the Prophet, with special divine help, finds mention in this verse of the Quran, “Fight them until there is no more [religious] persecution, and religion belongs wholly to God (8.39)”. *Fitna* (religious persecution) here refers to the aggressive system established under the auspices of ancient imperialism. The imperial powers had established a system that was tantamount to abolishing God’s creation plan, that is to say, the abolition or cancellation of the freedom of thought. Therefore, God desired that this system of coercive imperialism has to be abolished so that the journey of the human caravan continues unhindered and unobstructed.

The Sassanian Empire and the Byzantine Empire were two representatives of this coercive imperialism in the seventh century. These two empires were so powerful that it was practically impossible for the Companions of the Prophet to defeat them. What happened was that at the exact same time, a devastating war broke out between the two empires. As a result, they exhausted their resources, facilitating the Muslim conquest. This historic event was predestined in God’s scheme. This has also been predicted in the Bible. “He looked and startled the nations. And the everlasting mountains were scattered” (Habakkuk 3:6)

Subsequent to this event of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the Muslims for the first time gained the political dominance which was enjoyed so far by the political systems that patronised the polytheistic culture. Under the political rule of the Muslims, a new process was set in history. It aimed to make nature the object of investigation which had only been an object of worship until then. By virtue of this revolution, man found full freedom which was essential for his intellectual development and unveiling of nature's hidden resources. All this was required to make global dawah work possible.

Since God has granted man freedom, all the events in this world are governed by the laws of cause and effect. The work of research and investigation began among the Muslims, especially during the Abbasid period. It was the heyday of Muslim empires having been established over large areas of Asia and Africa. Their energy was mostly devoted to political activities. Therefore, they could only partially engage themselves in such activities as scientific research.

The work of scientific research, being a gigantic task, necessarily entailed full concentration and involvement. However, political power became an obstacle to such serious intellectual and scientific engagement. That is why they failed to make a sufficient or substantial contribution in this field.

Conversely, political power did not become an obstacle to European Christian nations in their works of scientific research which began after the Crusades. Therefore, their minds devotedly engaged themselves in the field of science.

This was also a case of managing human history while maintaining human freedom. The Creator shifted the work of scientific research from the Muslim world to the Christian world when He saw that the Muslim world's conditions were not conducive to support such pursuits.

## FROM EAST TO WEST

Dedicating oneself to the discovery of the mysteries of nature was a daunting task that entailed intense motivation and a strong incentive.

Beginning in 610 AD, Islam expanded rapidly because of favourable circumstances. A great empire came into being in just a period of fifty years. God gave them political dominance to carry out the necessary task of conquering and subduing nature and bringing about the social revolution required for the fulfilment of God's plan. God has stated in the Quran that if Muslims would fail to fulfil God's plan, He will raise another nation for its fulfilment (47:38). This objective of replacement was achieved through Crusades.

During the rule of Caliph Umar, Muslims conquered Palestine which was under Christian rule. Palestine, being their holy land, Christians could never come to terms with this occupation by the Muslims. The European Christian rulers could not tolerate

this occupation. This dispute persisted. Finally, the Christian rulers planned to recapture Syria and Palestine through military intervention.

The Crusades were a series of religious wars between Christians and Muslims, started primarily to secure control of holy sites. In all, eight major Crusade expeditions occurred between 1096 and 1291 AD. During these two hundred years, about nine bloody battles took place between the two groups, but they failed miserably to recapture the holy land despite the Christian Empire's united efforts. This defeat brought them the realisation that it was not possible to defeat the Muslims through military warfare. Therefore, the Christian nations re-planned their strategy. They called it 'spiritual crusade' which actually meant 'intellectual crusade'.

Now the Christian nations turned their attention to the development of science. The writings of Greek and Muslim philosophers were widely translated into Latin. Educational and scientific activities continued on a large scale in Europe. To this spiritual crusade, Oxford University was established in the United Kingdom in 1096 as followed by another institution of excellence, the Cambridge University in 1209 and so on.

This spiritual crusade ushered in a great, far-reaching revolution in Europe, known as the Renaissance,

between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. This spiritual crusade was succeeded by a 'natural crusade' that took the form of the discovery of nature. Both spiritual crusades as well as the natural crusade, began with a negative mindset. Initially, the Western nations made a desperate attempt to defeat Muslims in the field of knowledge because they realised that they could not defeat them on the battlefield. God used their negative psyche as an incentive. God used the western people to discover the secrets hidden in nature to create a world that would prove to be a source of support for the Islamic mission. This event of support by the west was foretold in a verse of the Quran, "We shall show them Our signs in the universe and within themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is the truth." (41:53)

This role of the western nations has also been predicted in a tradition as follows, "God will support this religion even by a *fajir*" (*Sahih Bukhari*, Hadith No. 3062). The word '*fajir*' here means a secular person. The incidents tell us that the secular support refers to the people of the western world whose efforts have led to the emergence of modern civilisation and the discovery of the signs hidden in the universe, the physical world as well as within human beings. The psyche of vengeance that arose in the people of the

west was very intense in the wake of the Crusades, and God diverted this intensity towards the discovery of the secrets hidden in nature.

Dedicating oneself to the discovery of the mysteries of nature was a daunting task that entailed intense motivation and a strong incentive. The humiliating defeat of the Western nations in the Crusades produced this desired impetus in them. We find one such example in the early twentieth century when a British scientific team planned a dangerous expedition, to explore Antarctica. The head of the team published an advertisement in the London Times in 1914 in these words: "Men wanted for hazardous journey, small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant dangers, safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in case of success."

This advertisement in the Times received so many applications that a process of selection had to be adopted to select the best candidates. It was this spirit of madness which made it possible for the west to bring the modern age into existence.



## A LAW OF NATURE

The Muslims had enjoyed this leadership in the past, and after that, the Western people became their successors.

In actual fact, the Western people emerged as the supporters of the divine religion, but because of the psychology of reaction, contemporary Muslims failed to understand the divine plan. Unjustifiably and unnecessarily, they came to perceive the Western world as their enemies and adopted the path of violent confrontation with them. The two-hundred-year history of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century was lost in this futile confrontation. Leadership is a must to continue this evolutionary journey of history. The Muslims had enjoyed this leadership in the past, and after that, the Western people became their successors.

When the Prophet's companions entered Iran in the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD, Iran's people became frightened of them. They exclaimed, "The giants have come, the giants have come (*devan aamdand, devan aamdand*)".

The Iranians took the entry of the companions of the Prophet of Islam in a negative sense, despite the fact that they were harbingers of a new civilisation. Rabi Ibn Amir, one of the companions of the Prophet of Islam, while talking to Rustm, the Iranian general, expressed, “God has sent us so that we may bring, to whom He wills, out of the bondage of the people to the worship of God.” (7/46) (*Al Bidayah wa al-Nihaya* Vol. 7, p. 46)

In the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the companions of the Prophet of Islam were the harbingers of a new age. It is a principle of nature that the group that emerges as the harbinger of a new age enjoys leadership in the world. Such leadership comes into being as an essential prerequisite of nature, rather than the result or outcome of any conspiracy or enmity.

Similarly, the Western people were the harbingers of a new civilisation in modern times. Therefore, it was natural that they achieved the position of leadership over their contemporary nations. The Muslims should have accepted their leadership as a natural phenomenon, just as the non-Muslim nations had earlier accepted the Muslim’s leadership. But the Muslims failed to understand this secret. They viewed Western civilisations as a case of enmity and conspiracy. Hence, they hated them and fought against

them whenever they could muster enough strength. Although they waged this fight in the name of *jihad*, it was against the law of nature. This is the reason why they have completely failed despite making extraordinary sacrifices.

The onus of this failure is entirely on the Muslims themselves. The war which the Muslims waged against the West was, in fact, directed against the divine plan. That is why this war proved counterproductive, and the Muslims' devastation increased manifold.

## CALIPHATE OF ADAM

The most cherished hobby of the people of Paradise would be to unfold the rest of the infinite 'words of God' to produce a superior and divine civilization.

According to chapter 2 of the Quran, when God created Adam, the first man, there were two other creatures already in existence: the *jinn* and the angels. God commanded the *jinn* and the angels to bow down to Adam. In obedience to God's commands, the angels immediately bowed down. But Iblis (Satan), the leader of the *jinn*, refused to do so.

Why did this happen? In actual fact, when God created the Earth, He gave its charge to the *jinn* who were created from fire. But they caused mischief therein, shedding blood and killing one another. Therefore, God created man and gave the charge of the Earth to them. The *jinn* did not accept this change for they believed that they were superior to men, being made out of fire, while man was made out of clay. That is

why, Iblis, the chief of the *jinn*, refused to bow down to Adam.

Chapter 15 verse 27 of the Quran tells us that God created *jinn* before man. Man is, therefore, the successor (caliph) of the *jinn* on Earth. The literal meaning of '*khalifa*' or 'caliph' is 'one who takes another's place'-a successor. Some have interpreted this verse to mean that man is God's caliph on earth. However, this idea is, without doubt, unsubstantiated, having no basis in the Quran and Hadith.

From a study of the following verses, we can understand what is meant by placing a successor on earth. This is expressed in the Quran as such: "Tell them, 'If the ocean became ink for writing the words of my Lord, surely the ocean would be exhausted before the words of my Lord came to an end-even if We were to add another ocean to it.'" (18:109)

"If all the trees on earth were pens, and the sea [were] ink, with seven [more] seas added to it, the words of God would not be exhausted: for, truly, God is Almighty and Wise." (31:27)

The majesty of God is too great to be expressed in words. In spite of innumerable research, it has not become possible to obtain complete information about anything. This, in itself, is enough to prove that

if all the trees of the world are chiseled into pens and all the seas become ink, it will still not suffice to record the innumerable feats of God.

These verses show that God wants these facts hidden in the universe to be discovered, explored and written down so that man may understand the majesty of God, and devote himself entirely to God with a greater degree of knowledge and wisdom.

According to God's plan, the process of discovering and recording the words of God begins in the present world and continues endlessly in the Hereafter to scale new levels of its completion. The completion of this work at the initial level has produced the modern civilization which is another name for discovering the divine signs hidden in nature. This is the event which has been predicted in the Quran, "We shall show them Our signs in the universe and within themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth." (41:53)

We find a secular expression of the words of God in the works of God. This has been predicted in a tradition of the Prophet Muhammad, "God will provide support to this religion by secular people." (*Sahih, al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 3062)

They have produced the modern civilization through extraordinary hard work. The present civilization is

synonymous with the unfolding of the words of God. The words of God are infinite and unlimited. Therefore, only a partial unfolding of this is possible in this world beset by limitations. That is why another unlimited world is required for the absolute and complete unfolding of the words of God. This vaster and limitless world is the world of the Hereafter (*Akhirat*). The selected people from the entire human history will be gathered in this eternal world of Paradise. In the most favourable circumstances, they will accomplish the humongous task of the further unfolding of the words of God.

This process will continue forever in the Hereafter, ultimately resulting in a superior and divine civilization. This infinite unfolding of the words of God is thus described in the Quran, "The earth will shine with the light of its Lord." (39:69)

This first verse of the first chapter of the Quran reads, "All praise is due to God, the Lord of the Universe." This is the initial stage of praise of God which is to be performed during the partial unfolding of the signs of God in the present world. Exactly the same words, "Praise be to God, the Lord of the Universe," appears in chapter 39 verse 75 of the Quran.

The first chapter is a description of God's praise which the inhabitants of this Earth have to express

at the initial unfolding of God's words in this world. Whereas chapter 39 describes the inhabitants of Paradise, who will utter the words of praise of God in the Hereafter at the time of the ultimate unfolding of God's signs.

In the present world, man has been given all the things as per his needs (14:34). On the other hand, the inhabitants of Paradise will enjoy God's blessings in the ultimate sense. All their desires will be fulfilled there as they will enjoy divine hospitality (41:31). The most cherished hobby of the people of Paradise would be to unfold the rest of the infinite 'words of God' to produce a superior and divine civilization. This work will last all eternity, and hence the journey of happiness of the inhabitants of Paradise will also be everlasting.



## HISTORY OF ISLAM

The role of Prophet Muhammad (d. 632 AD) is a revolutionary one in the long history of religion. Human history entered a new era with him.

God has granted man complete freedom, yet at the same time, He is managing history in general as well as Muslim history in particular, so that the divine purpose of creation could be achieved. As per the divine tradition, this management is always accomplished through certain individuals.

There are four major forms of this divine management:

Institutional roles

Revolutionary roles

Academic roles

Individual roles

A historical example of the institutional role is that of Prophet Abraham, who built the Kabah in Makkah about four thousand years ago. The Kabah is like an institutional center of the religion of monotheism of

the whole world, and it will continue to be the same till the day of judgement.

The role of Prophet Muhammad (d. 632 AD) is a revolutionary one in the long history of religion. Human history entered a new era with him. The companions of the Prophet of Islam and their followers have played an important role in this evolutionary process. This revolution had a profound impact on the world.

The names of the compilers or narrators of the Prophetic traditions (*Muhadditheen*) figure prominently in the academic role. They played a pivotal role in preserving the Hadith which is another authentic reference of the divine religion. By this great effort, they succeeded in preserving, with complete authenticity, the tradition of the Prophet of Islam. These compilations are the most reliable sources for learning the guidance of the Messenger of God for later generations. The period of these early narrators of Hadith is the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD.

So far as the individual role is concerned, Umar ibn Abdul Aziz, the Umayyad caliph, is an important figure. He was elected caliph in 717 AD with Damascus being his capital. His caliphate lasted for two and a half years. Within this short period, he worked hard for the spiritual revival of his people, but his role practically ended with his death.

Of the four historical models, the first three pertain to a specific time. These models provide a source of guidance for later generations, but the repetition of these roles is no longer possible. However, the fourth model, that of the individual role, still continues. In later generations, it is possible for an individual to play the desired role depending on one's circumstances. Such a role will be limited to one's life, but its effect might continue even after his death.

It is true that if a revivalist forms an organization in his lifetime, then this organization will be synonymous with the continuation of his role. But in later times, for many such an organization, the emphasis is often on the form rather than the spirit.

## ROLE OF THE BROTHERS OF THE PROPHET

We can rather say that the first period refers to the traditional period while the second period refers to the scientific period.

A tradition recorded in different books of Hadith is as follows, “I wish we could see our brothers. The companions said, ‘O Messenger of God, are we not your Brothers?’ The Prophet of Islam replied, ‘You are my Companions; our Brothers have not yet come.’” (*Sahih Muslim*, hadith 249)

There were two important roles in the history of Islam: one, of the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad and the other, of the Brothers of the Prophet. The role of the Companions was to initiate a new process in human history—a process which ended the ancient era, replacing it by a new age, ushering in new opportunities and possibilities. We can rather say that the first period refers to the traditional period while the second period refers to the scientific period.

The goal of both, the Companions of the Prophet and the Brothers of the Prophet, was calling people to God or *dawah ilal'lah*. There are two major periods of this *dawah* work, that is, the pre-global and the post-global communication era. In principle, the Companions fully availed the opportunities for *dawah* work existing before the advent of global communication. In the same way, those who will make maximum use of the age of global communication are called Brothers of the Prophet (*Ikhwan-e-Rasool*) in the tradition. Thus, *Ikhwan-e-Rasool* is not a mysterious group.

## THE WORLD OF PARADISE

The dwellers of Paradise will receive the indescribable blessing of Eternal Paradise through the mercy of God.

Human history began with a man and a woman and following a continuous birth and death process, countless people have come to this world. For thousands of years, this chain has been established from generation to generation. In the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the number of human beings on the entire planet has exceeded seven billion. Those who have died before then did not perish but are still alive. They will be raised in the Hereafter.

Human history has a beginning as well as an end. The end of human history will be followed by another world—a flawless one in the fullest sense. This world will be inhabited by the selected people from all over human history. In a similar vein, the Quran tells us that, “My righteous servants shall inherit the earth.” (21:105)

We find the same message in previous divine books revealed to the prophets. In the Bible, we find these words, “Depart from evil, and do good; then you will dwell in the land forever. For the Lord loves the just and will not forsake his faithful ones. Wrongdoers will be completely destroyed; the offspring of the wicked will perish. The righteous will inherit the land and dwell in it forever.” (*Psalms*, 37: 27-29)

A number of verses in the Quran tell us about the ideal environment in Paradise and the availability of everything in very superior quality in abundance. For instance, the Quran says, “Wherever you look, you will see bliss and a great kingdom” (76:20). Extraordinary and most refined arrangements for the inhabitants of Paradise are mentioned in this verse, “The blessings, and the great kingdom”. ‘Blessings’ here refers to all kinds of blessings. Anything one would desire will be available there in the ultimate or most perfect form. ‘The great kingdom’ refers to complete freedom, that is, having all the opportunity to live a life free from all restrictions. This special privilege of absolute freedom will be bestowed, in the Hereafter, upon those who made proper use of their freedom in this world.

Chapter 3 of the Quran tells us about the vastness of Paradise: “And vie with one another for your Lord’s forgiveness and for a Paradise as vast as the heavens

and the earth, which has been prepared for the God-fearing” (3:133). There is another verse of the Quran in this regard, “Praise be to God who has fulfilled His promise to us and made us the inheritors of this land, letting us settle in the Garden wherever we want.’ How excellent is the reward of those who labour!” (39:74)

The concept of the vastness of Paradise has become quite understandable in present times. Observations by modern telescopes have revealed that habitable planets exist in large numbers in the infinite universe. In fact, there are billions and billions of such planets within our galaxy, the Milky Way, alone.

With this new discovery, emerges a unique kind of thrilling concept of Paradise. It seems that Paradise is probably a universal archipelago of numerous green planets. All the islands are complete worlds in themselves, and at the same time they would be connected with one another by a very high level of communication network. Every person in Paradise would have a permanent world to live in while at the same time he would be connected with other people of Paradise every moment. They would enjoy God’s abundant blessings and complete freedom in Paradise. Along with it, Paradise would be like a cosmic society



consisting of ideal human beings, who will have perfect fulfillment therein.

The dwellers of Paradise will receive the indescribable blessing of Eternal Paradise through the mercy of God. Although they would receive these blessings through God's mercy alone, God would announce, "This is the garden which you will inherit by virtue of your past deeds" (43:72) only to honour the people of Paradise.

## QURANIC PERCEPTION OF HISTORY

The Quran contains symbolic events about the past and predictions about the future covering the entire history of mankind until the Day of Judgement.

A part of a long tradition about the Quran is: “The Quran is the book of God, containing the news of those before you and the news of those after you” (*Tirmidhi*, Hadith 2906). Abdullah ibn Masud, a senior companion of the Prophet of Islam, has explained this tradition to mean that the Quran contains the knowledge of earlier people as well as the knowledge of the people who will come later in the future. (*Al Baihaqi*, *Shub al Iman*, Hadith 1808)

This does not mean that the Quran contains a detailed history of the human race. It simply means that the Quran presents events representing human history. That is to say, we find in the Quran such historical references by perusing which one can arrive at a complete picture of the entire human history.

Historians define history as a study of past events or a chronological account of past events. However, the Quranic concept of history is different from this. From this point of view historical events should be presented in such a way as may describe the creation plan of the creator. According to the former concept, history is a record of all the events of the past. Whereas the latter concept of history describes only the selective and representative components of history.

This latter method is in conformity with the Quranic concept of history. However, we should remember that the representative events of history are not presented in traditional historical style, but these are mentioned in the Quran only as brief references to important events. The reader is expected to do the detailing of the brief allusions to different events described in the Quran by collecting the necessary historical elements that exist outside of the Quran. This will add to his understanding of those verses.

We find one such example in the case of Adam. His descendants settled in Mesopotamia. They followed the teachings of Prophet Adam. But later when perversion set in among them, God sent to them Prophet Noah after about five thousand years in order to guide them to the right path. He invited people to the worship of one God alone, but very few

accepted his message. The majority refused to believe in him. In the end, the whole community, barring a few reformed individuals, was destroyed in a terrible flood. God saved the believers in the Ark. The Quran has this to say about the ark, “We saved him and those who were with him in the Ark and made the event a sign for mankind.” (29:15)

Chapter 54 of the Quran reads, “We (God) have left this as a sign.” (54:15)

The story of Prophet Noah relates to an entire era of history spanning about a thousand years after Prophet Adam. Noah’s Ark represents this era. As we learn from the Quran, the Ark has been saved by God to serve as a lesson. At the time of the revelation of the Quran in the seventh century AD, no one had any knowledge about this Ark. In recent times, global warming caused a mass melting of frozen ice in the mountains. Subsequently, an aerial survey revealed that the boat was buried under a thick layer of ice on Mount Ararat in eastern Turkey.

Similarly, Noah’s Ark was briefly mentioned in the Quran, but in the light of latest information, now it has become possible to compile this part of human history in detail. Thus, we can arrive at a deeper historical understanding of the Quran.

Another historical reference of this nature in the Quran relates to Prophet Moses. About 3000 years ago, Pharoah, a contemporary of Moses, drowned in the Red Sea. At the time of drowning God said, “We shall save your body this day, so that you may serve as a sign for those who come after you.” (10:92)

This incident of Pharoah also represents an entire era of history. However, in the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD, at the time of the revelation of the Quran, no one knew whether or not the Pharoah’s body was preserved. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, some European orientalist discovered that the body of Pharoah was safe and preserved in the pyramid of Egypt. The body has now been moved from the pyramid to a museum in Cairo. (For the details refer to the book *The Bible, the Quran and Science* by Dr. Maurice Bucaille.)

We find references to such symbolic events in the Quran that can be compiled from beginning to end by adding more information from known history. The Quran contains symbolic events about the past and predictions about the future covering the entire history of mankind until the Day of Judgement. In the light of these brief historical references, we can create a complete picture of human history with the help of available information which will be in accord with the Quranic concept of human history.

Historians have varied perceptions about history, such as compiling history in terms of a dynasty or in terms of the rise and fall of nations and civilizations etc. But the divine concept of history, being different, can be understood by a study of the Quran.

According to the divine concept of history, God created man, gave him the opportunity to increase his number through reproduction and inhabit different parts of the planet earth. He granted man absolute freedom as well as the opportunity to use it in the right or wrong way; to reform the earth or to cause mischief on it; to follow the ways of justice or injustice; he even enjoys the freedom to obey or disobey God. This state of total freedom, as per the divine dispensation, will continue till the Day of Judgement.

God wants this whole historical process to select righteous people. These are the people who make proper use of their freedom in spite of going through all the turmoil in their lives. They make the best use of their mental powers to seek guidance from the Prophet, discover God's greatness and lead their lives in accordance with the will of God. Under His special arrangement, God has been selecting such righteous people throughout human history.

Throughout the entire historical process, right from Prophet Adam to the Day of Judgement, God

has never removed human freedom. He has been managing human freedom in such a way that righteous individuals may continue to be born in every age.

Historians view history as a whole, but the right way, according to the divine concept, is to look at history in terms of the individuals. Historians form their judgement about history in terms of the groups of human beings, whereas the right method, according to the divine concept, is to form their judgement in terms of the individuals.

## CONCLUSION

The present world is in fact a selection ground of ideal individuals who will be found eligible to inhabit the ideal world of the Paradise in the Hereafter.

**H**istory, in a simple sense, is a narration of events. Whereas the interpretation of history is related to the philosophy of history, that is, to discover those laws which are at work in the process of history. Various theories have been put forward in this regard, but all of them are based on human imagination. The correct interpretation of history is that which is in accordance with the Creator's plan of creation about man.

According to the creation plan, the creator did not create the present world in order to establish an ideal system at the collective level. It has actually been created for the purpose of testing human beings. That is why, God has given man complete freedom to everyone. Man has the choice to make proper use of his freedom or misuse it, to lead a life of righteousness or

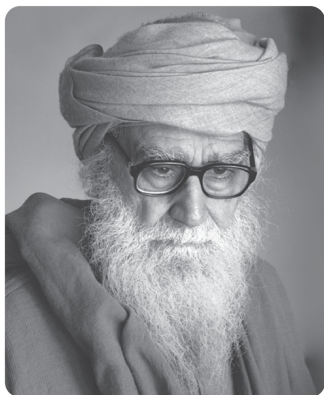


a life of wickedness. Therefore, an ideal system, at the collective level, at the level of whole humanity, cannot be established in this world. It is only in Paradise that an ideal system can come into being.

The present world is in fact a selection ground of ideal individuals who will be found eligible to inhabit the ideal world of the Paradise in the Hereafter. Ideal individuals are being selected from every generation. For instance, in the first generation, Adam's son Cain was rejected while his other son Abel was accepted. The same process has been going on throughout history. In every age and in every generation, God has been selecting deserving candidates while rejecting the undeserving. It is described in the Quran thus: "...a large group of the earlier people and a large group of those of later times." (56:39-40)

Once this desired list of accepted and rejected individuals is complete, the Creator of the universe will replace this world with an ideal world, that is, Paradise. Then the individuals who had been selected would be settled in this Paradise to enjoy a life free from fear and sorrow forever, whereas those who had been rejected would be thrown into the universal dustbin to live a life full of intense regret and remorse for all eternity.

In the book the author explains that thinkers throughout human history have tried to find out the ultimate purpose of creation. The Quran explains that God created an ideal world called Paradise. To select ideal human beings to inhabit Paradise, He created the present Earth as a selection ground and settled man here, giving him complete freedom. Here, it is being observed as to who makes proper use of his freedom and who misuses it. At the end of human history, those who have abused their freedom will be rejected, and those who may have exercised it judiciously will be selected by God to be lodged in eternal Paradise. The concept of Paradise is, therefore, a beautiful interpretation of human history.



Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (1925-2021) was an Islamic scholar, spiritual leader and peace activist. His work has received international recognition for his seminal contributions toward world peace. The Maulana authored over 200 books dealing with Islam's spiritual wisdom, the Prophet's non-violent approach, Islam's relation with modernity and other contemporary issues. His English translation of the Quran is widely appreciated as simple, clear and easily understandable. He founded *Centre for Peace and Spirituality International* in 2001 to popularize the culture of peace and share the spiritual message of Islam with people.

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