

ISLAMIC CONCEPT OF HUMAN NEEDS*

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Introduction:

If we look at a human being's life, we find that the most basic needs that he has are food, clothes, shelter, health, recreation including sex, safety from injury, and pleasant human company, especially children. Along with these needs, there is another need and that is the need to know what happens when he dies and to ensure that preventive measures be taken if possible, to ensure comfort after death.

Obstructions in Attaining Human Needs:

If every human need were satisfied to everyone's heart's desire, there would be no problem for anyone. As we know, however, this is hardly likely to happen either now or in the future. If it would, we would all be living in paradise; we are far from that idealism. The question is, what prevents us from attaining all these things for ourselves? The facts are, that firstly, there are not enough resources or the needed things to go around for each one, as much as he or she desires. Thus, there is a relative scarcity of resources. So if one person takes too much food or clothes, or builds too many houses or too big a house, or utilizes things for recreation out of proportion, then to that extent he is denying another person or persons of their legitimate share.

Since resources are limited, then they must be shared in a certain proportion and one who appropriates more than that portion, deprives others to that extent. This can be viewed from the international point of view among the communities of nations where some countries have more natural resources and deny them to people from other countries. It can also be seen from the perspective of a single country where a section of the population is more provided for than the other sections.

The difference in provisions of life can be minor, moderate, or severe. If it is severe, it is possible that some people waste away due to disease or malnutrition or die due to inadequate shelter, clothing, or food, while some others enjoy an excess of all the good things of life including good health and recreation. As we all know, this situation exists in the world today between various countries as well as within each country to a greater or lesser extent. Aside from the moral aspect, this has many other disadvantages. People denied the adequate amounts of the basic necessities of life cannot contribute effectively to the development and prosperity of their own nation and of humanity at large. Moreover, these people can only be deprived by force of some kind. Thus, the stronger deprive the weaker. However, this creates conflict, enmity, and hatred among the two groups, and this is what leads to most wars and destruction. The result is more ill-will as well as further scarcity in resources; especially as much of the available resources are used up in war or in preparation for war.

The second factor obstructing the fulfillment of our needs is the conflicting nature of some of our desires. For instance, many kinds of recreation may not be compatible with good health. The drinking of alcohol or the playing of sports such as boxing, etc. are examples. We need human company, but if we deprive others by taking more ourselves, then we cannot keep them as friends. Thus, in life we are often confronted with conflicting desires. We cannot have our cake and eat it too, no matter how much we would like to do that.

The third factor which hinders our happiness is lack of knowledge. If we do not know that fire will burn us we are more likely to be burnt by fire. Knowledge is essential to avoid the dangers we come across in our

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life and to utilize the resources available to us. Finding the correct location of mines of gold, silver, and other metals in the days of old, and discovering oil fields and nuclear energy in the modern world are examples of successes due to knowledge. This also applies to personal lives in making correct decisions as to type of food, clothes and house and the choice of career, wife, and friends, etc.

Knowledge is also an important factor in deciding what happens after death. Do we just finish at that time or is there some kind of existence after that? Can our life before death have any bearing on the quality of life after death? If it does, have we a bearing on that? How can we ensure maximum comfort for that time? Many concepts are presented to us in this sphere and it takes knowledge to make the correct decisions. If adequate knowledge is lacking, then it is possible to do a lot of damage to oneself. However, besides lack of knowledge, a conflict of desires also operates. For instance, if to enjoy this life you would have to have more than your share of the good things and you have power enough to obtain them, and your knowledge, on the other hand, tells you that this very act will get you in serious trouble in the life after death, then one is in a fix. One may enjoy drinking alcohol or unlimited sexual activity, but this may be a damning factor in the other life. One may enjoy food and drink, good clothes, and a palatial house and neglect others who suffer from the lack of the basic necessities of life; but a good after-life may require that you share your fortune with the less fortunate. A good life here may persuade a person to stay in America or some other affluent country so that he and his family may have the best of food, drink, clothes, house, car, air conditioner, education, and recreation, but this may endanger the future life of the children so that they grow up with drinking, gambling, adultery, irreligiousness, spoiling, not only in their worldly life, but also their life after death.

The Islamic Concept of Human Needs:

Out of the many philosophies of life, only the message of Islam has established (beyond a doubt) its truthfulness and usefulness for life on earth as well as life after death. Its truthfulness is established due to the proved truthfulness of its presenter, namely prophet Mohammad (p.b.u.h.). If Mohammad (p.b.u.h.) (Naauzobilla), was a liar, then Islam is a lie and should not be believed or followed. If we know that Mohammad never lied, and spoke the truth, no matter how much he suffered, then his message must be taken as true also. We do not have another person in recorded history about whom this can be said without a grain of doubt.

Other people before him, known as prophets, have also been known to have such characters, and

Mohammad (p.b.u.h.) corroborated all the principle teachings of these people. Further corroborating evidence comes from the fact that Mohammad (p.b.u.h.), contrary to getting any material benefits from his activities, sacrificed all his wealth and he and his family suffered deprivations of even the basic needs of life. Moreover, this way of life continued even after he was the ruler of the entire Arabian Peninsula. His food, clothes, and house were akin to the poorest person in the country which is quite a contrast to the lavish living style of the present rulers of many modern-day countries. Although he was illiterate, the message he delivered from Allah (s.w.t.) as the Qur'an, had such great gems of wisdom that no book or collection of books has ever equaled them. Lastly, within a span of twenty-three years, he so transformed his wild and ignorant nation, that they became a nation of heroes, the likes of whom the world has never seen. His followers spread his message of Allah (s.w.t.) over the whole of the earth and became vastly superior to all other nations of the world, not only as a nation, but also in all the fields of learning and technology. Finally, his teachings seemed to be in accordance with the basic needs and aspirations of humanity at large.

Basic Teachings of Islam:

In the beginning was Allah (s.w.t.) and He will always be. He created the planets including the earth and all living things. He created angels, jin, and other such creatures, whom we do not see. Finally, he created man giving him a free will and the faculty of observation, deduction, reason and logic. He was given knowledge of right and wrong and good and bad. Those that consciously accepted Allah (s.w.t.) as their guide and tried to follow that guidance are assured a life of eternal happiness after this life on earth. However, sacrifices are often necessary in order to properly follow the guidance. If you want eternal happiness, make a contract with Allah (s.w.t.). "Your whole wealth and your whole life in exchange for eternal happiness."

Even the prophets made this contract and fulfilled it. Anyone who follows their example is assured salvation; if one deviates, there is eternal agony or hell. So, those who make a contract with Allah (s.w.t.) to spend their lives and their wealth according to Allah's (s.w.t.) will be called Muslim. How does Allah (s.w.t.) want a Muslim to spend his life and his wealth? That is what the Holy Qur'an and the Hadith really teach us and thus it is incumbent upon every Muslim to read these, understand them, and follow them.

Basically these actions can be divided into individual actions and collective activities and both are equally important. Individual actions consist of

the daily prayers, fasting in the month of Ramazan, paying Zakart: i.e., a certain percentage of the values of your savings and assets paid for helping the poor, visiting the Kaaba in Mecca at a fixed time in the year at least once in a lifetime. Most important is, that one should conceive of Allah (s.w.t.) as The Only God-Supreme Power — able to see and do everything and not think of anyone as related to God or partner of God.

Besides this, one should know and follow the teachings of Islam in every activity of life; e.g., marriage, family, sex, eating, drinking, business, working, recreation, etc., and especially when dealing with other human beings whether they be Muslims or non-Muslims, relatives, neighbors, countrymen, or foreigners.

Collective action consists of joining hands to care for community affairs and for organizing a proper government at all levels. The law of the land should incorporate the social, political and economic program of Islam. All this is as important if not more, than the individual and personal worship and other acts mentioned above. The government formed should be according to the wishes of the people. Dictatorship of every sort is forbidden where the personal whim of the ruler is the law of the land and the treasury is treated as personal property. Whether this kind of dictator is called King, President, Chairman, Secretary General, Prime Minister, Amir, or Khalifa, something else is irrelevant. Besides electing a ruler, the Muslims should also elect another body of intelligent Muslims to advise the ruler. This body can be called a Senate, Congress, House of Commons, Majlis-e-Shura, or something else. The ruler cannot flaunt the will of the house thus established; however, he must rule according to the directions of Islam.

The treasury is public property and must be fully accounted for. All citizens must have full freedom of expression. There should be freedom to have honest business. Educational and other socially useful institutions should be encouraged. The government should collect Zakart which is from 2½% to 10% of the assets and wealth, depending on their nature. Cash, gold, agricultural produce, and the ready goods of trade and manufacture are some of the items which are taxed. This huge amount of money is then used by the government to rehabilitate and help those human beings who are deprived, irrespective of whether they are Muslims or non-Muslims.

It is the responsibility of an Islamic government to provide all the necessities of life to all its inhabitants including food, clothing, shelter, health care, education, and safety as well a recreation. It is also the duty of the Islamic government to see that a similar government is provided for all human beings in every country. Towards this end, all kinds of efforts should

be used. Persuasion and peaceful methods should be tried first. If they fail, force could be used towards achieving equality and justice for all human beings. This is known as Jihad and is also considered a form of worship.

Muslim Doctors in Their Own Countries:

We should be Muslims first and doctors subsequently. We should not neglect to participate in the required activities under the excuse that treating patients is enough of a good deed. Certainly it is a good deed, but priorities in good deeds should also be kept in mind. Most assuredly you would not continue to examine a patient of bronchitis even though you were informed that a bomb is about to go off in the building. In the same way you would not continue treating sore throats if the safety of the whole nation were at stake. So when Jihad calls, forget your profession. Moreover, in our daily lives we should try to use our relationship with the community for better ends. Certainly this cannot be done without having personal lives according to Islam.

We should also get involved in the professional organizations and the health programs for the country. It is also necessary to adapt your training in the U.S.A. to the cultural and financial conditions in the home country. Do not expect the same facilities and use your genius to improvise as you go along. Moreover, do not follow the race for a higher standard of living; rather try to live in as simple a manner as possible. This will require less money and you will have to spend less time and energy to earn a living so that you can devote more time to recreation, social welfare, and Islamic politics.

Muslim Doctors in the U.S.A. and Other Western Countries:

Presently, we need good doctors and especially good Muslim doctors in our own countries for medical as well as political purposes. Moreover, I think Muslims feel isolated in this society. Ladies and children are especially lonely. The children are exposed to the prevailing social customs and often succumb to their influences. Boys and girls start dating, go to drink, and get sexually involved. Some even get married to local boys and girls and abandon their parents. This happens to the best of Muslim families. The problem is very acute; so much so that hardly anyone has escaped the consequences. However, the parents have an ostrich-like attitude and like a pigeon, hope the cat will go away.

They know all previous examples are of failure, but they desperately cling to the hope and belief that their own children will be spared this dreadful end. They think community life and Islamic centers may make

the difference. Some desperately ask their children to memorize passages from the Qur'an. Will it work? I think there is little chance. I may be wrong! Let us hope I am, but already the vast majority of our boys and girls have become targets and many more are in immediate danger. I feel this should be considered and dealt with us as a burning problem. Arrange frank discussions on this topic, often if necessary, locally in cities as well as on the level of states and the whole country. Define the extent of the problem, and the exact nature of the problem. Discuss and compare various ways of dealing with the problem. Then try to solve them in that way. If no solution is possible, go home rather than subject yourself and your children to this torture. Those that have become political exiles from their countries could go to other Muslim countries.

Whatever you do, please keep your objective quite clear. If you have come here for a luxurious life, do not confuse yourself by thinking you can perform tableegh here and start converting the Americans. You have to decide on one or the other. For tableegh or conversion, you need to renounce all the luxuries, adopt a simple life, and pass on these to the poor Americans living here. Along with that, if you lead a spotless and helpful life, only then can you have an effect on the local population or anybody else.

Importance of I.M.A.:

The Islamic Medical Association and other Muslim

organizations are a great blessing for all of you. These organizations can help you lead the kind of life you want to live. If these organizations did not exist, others would take their place, as human beings do not live in a vacuum and these organizations may hinder your task of living as a successful Muslim and as a successful human being.

On the positive side, we need mutual consultation and discussion on how to make the practice of medicine Islamic. We need to eliminate un-Islamic practices like the use of alcohol in tinctures, spirits, and other medicines. We need to make common plans for the establishment of our doctors when they go back home. We should study the health needs of our countries and provide adequate remedies. We need to develop friendly relationships within the doctors of various Muslim countries. We need to use our financial resources and expert knowledge to encourage the best medical students and doctors out there.

International Islamic Medical Congress:

It is very heartening that I.M.A. of North America has provided a nucleus for forming an international organization of Muslim doctors. We hope that this will help to accomplish our desire for closer friendship and cooperation among the Muslim doctors of various countries and provide a larger platform for medical, social, and political work of an Islamic nature.