

# UNTIL THEY CHANGE WHAT IS IN THEIR SOULS

A Study in Changing What Is in the Souls

By: JAWDAT SAID

Translated into English by:

Dr. Abdullatif Al-Khaiat

Praise be to God.

Peace be to God's servants, those chosen by Him.

Accept our work, O God – for You are the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing.

In the Name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

"Never will God change the conditions of a people until they change what is in their own souls;" (the Qur'an, 13:11).

"God will never change the Grace which He has bestowed on a people until they change what is in their own souls;" (8:53).

## **Foreword by Translator**

In the Name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. It is a blessing from God that He has enabled me to present in English another book by Jawdat Said who, I take to be, the foremost Muslim thinker of our time. That not enough of his work has been translated into English in more than half a century since he started writing is a shame – it is actually another proof of how little we Muslims know what avails us and forwards our cause. When I do my humble bit, I hope that God in His Bounty will reward me, and that Muslims – and non-Muslims, too – will give Said's work the attention it deserves.

Abdullatif al-Khaiat

5 Dhu al-Qa'dah, 1440 A.H. 7 July, 2019 C.E.

## PREFACE

Praise be to God. Peace be to His servants whom He has chosen for His Message.

I have often been asked after the first edition of this book [in 1972] came out the following question:

Why should you mention the laws ("*sunan*" in the Qur'an) of change, without giving details of those *sunan*, and without detailing how change may come about?

One good thing about this question is that it concedes there being laws of changing the content of the soul, or mind. Granting that this is an important step – I must declare that I am not sure with what depth the inquirers say it; nor am I sure how important a step the current book represents in causing the principle of the crucial '*sunan*' to be accepted as a basis for bringing about change.

So, it may be true that the main focus of this book is just to achieve this acceptance of there being laws: after all, one will not endeavor to attain something unless he/she admits that it could be attained.

And when we take up the issue of change, in the sense of bringing about change, that involves several aspects:

1. Is change possible? If yes, does it come about according to laws, or '*sunan*'?
2. How can we bring about change? Or how does change take place?
3. What to change?

The first topic is a direct objective of discussion of the current book; the second is a necessary and evident consequence of the first;

and the third is only so by implication. It may be noted that there is no definite separation between the first and second topics – it is so since one will not concede the possibility of change until they can notice examples exhibiting that change is within humans' reach.

If an individual does notice that change is taking place in life, without realizing any of the laws of change, nor how it comes to happen – it is possible in this case that the observer will end up believing in determinism – that things must undergo change of their own accord, without the human having any part in bringing about change.

So, taking up the first question, we need to review the human experience to see change. People really never cease to speak about change: change in people's financial ability, change in technology, the moral change across generations. All such changes are commonplace topics of conversation.

And yet, it is not at all commonplace knowledge to be aware of this change being controlled by laws, and further, that the human being has a part in controlling those laws. To know this does not come without effort. Ibn Khaldun has been highly acclaimed for discovering and revealing that change in human history is subject to laws – he for instance spoke of the four generations that it takes for states to come into being, to rise, and then collapse. But Ibn Khaldun was unable to go from there to the ability of humans to have control over those laws. This step had to wait for the more advanced communities in the modern age.

In writing this book, all my focus has been to point out that the task of changing what is inside the human soul, or the mind, is a human concern, that it is up to human beings to bring about such change. As the reader may notice from the title, I take a verse of the Qur'an concerned with change, and keep developing an interpretation of that verse.

As for the second question: it is true that the details of how change may be achieved have not been the direct topic of this book. However, the reader can notice the examples in the chapter on the link between a human's behavior and what is settled in his/her soul. This may be said to be the crux of our problem: how far we acquire the necessary knowledge, how actively we use our sensations, our vision and hearing, to acquire enough objective information about the causes

of events and changes. It is in other words how we observe God's signs in the world around us and in our own selves – by getting acquainted with the deeper aspects of events, our attitudes are bound to change.

No experience a human goes through, and no idea he/she learns, but brings about some change in their attitude. This means that no image our eyes see, and no piece of information that reaches our hearing, but will have its effect on changing our attitude, potentially or actually, and in a positive or negative direction. People can be more and more skillful in designing what signals are to reach their or others' perception for the best outcome.

As for the third question, it is similar to someone's asking: "What shall I do with iron after I have mastered the iron industry?" A Muslim has always dreamed of bringing about change to the Muslim world. They know, or claim to know, the answer to the third question. Muslims do know what they wish to do, but are ignorant of how to do it. Our task is then to learn this skill, and hence the need for the reader to know more about these questions.

Let us then get along our discussion. In the meantime, let us give praise to God, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the World.

Jawdat Said

25 Shawwal, 1389 A.H. 27 September, 1978 C.E.

# CONTENTS

Foreword by Translator .....	3
Preface .....	4
Foreword by Malek Bennabi .....	9
Introduction .....	12
A Law That Applies to All Humans .....	27
A <i>Sunnah</i> (Law) for Society not for Individuals ...	32
A <i>Sunnah</i> of This World Not of the Hereafter .....	35
The Verse Mentions Two Types of Change: That of God and That of People .....	36
The Two Changes Are Based on Inconvertible Order .....	37
The Sphere of God's Change and the Sphere of People's Change .....	38
The Basic Change Is The People's .....	45
How to Understand ' <i>Al-Fitrah</i> ' .....	48
People's Condition Reflects What Is in Their Minds .....	49
For Change to Take Place, Both Changes Are Necessary .....	54
The Others' Idea of Change .....	61

Psychology – Individual and Societal .....	65
The Relationship Between A Human's Behavior and What is in His/Her Soul .....	69
What Is in the Self Leads to Results Even When It Is False .....	76
What Is in the Soul Varies in Depth .....	81
How to Ensure That Muslims Accept Laws .....	99
The Mind and the Sunan in the Qur'an .....	128
On Organization and Planning .....	135
Action and Reaction .....	149
Method and Application .....	155



**FOREWORD**  
**BY**  
**MALIK BENNABI**

For an observer of the affairs of the Muslim world, it will be clear that such reformation movements as took place since the age of Sheikh-ul-Islam Ibn Taimiyah (died: 1328 C.E.), or perhaps since the age of al-Ghazali (died: 1111 C.E.), until our own time, have not achieved more than some political changes – such as the establishment of al-Muwahhidin State (1146-1269 C.E.), within its borders in North Africa and al-Andalus. It at least had the merit of halting the disintegration process, which would eventually lead to the fall of Granada.

As for the reformation movements of the medieval times, which rose on the basis of individual efforts, such as Ibn Taimiyah's, their long-term effect was confined to the Muslim heritage: they compose the intellectual arsenal upon which the standard reformation movements have been drawing ever after, and up to the present day.

Nor have the modern reformation movements proved to be more fortunate than their predecessors, both those who set out as an individual effort, such as the movement launched by Jamal-u-Ddin al-Afghani, or on the basis of organized, or semi-organized effort, such as the Salafi movement of Algeria prior to the Second World War.

One explanation of the humble accomplishments of these reformation movements is that they rose in a society that, in the case of earlier attempts, there was nothing left to be reformed; and in the case of later and current movements, there is nothing yet ripe enough to be reformed. This explanation might be convincing enough to those who believe in history's going through stages, i.e. in cycles of civilization – one of whom is the author of this book.

And yet, Jawdat Said does not bring the reader to adopt his personal view about the cycle of civilization – it maybe the other way around, that he tries to help the reader break free from the determinism implied in such a principle.

It is so since every law imposes on the mind a kind of inevitability, which compels it to only function within the limits of the law.

Gravity is for instance a law that had prevented people for millennia not to consider travelling except by sea or land, and the human did not get rid of this inevitability by eliminating the law, but by dealing with eternal facts through new means that enable people to travel by air, and they do that as a matter of routine by now.

What we may learn from this experience is that the natural law is not there to set up before the humans an absolute impossibility – instead, it sets before them a kind of challenge, which they must meet with new efforts to get rid of the rigid rule of cause and effect.

What Jawdat Said is doing here, however, is to try to transfer this getting over the restrictions from the sphere of nature to the sphere of history.

It would be hard for a person like Jawdat Said who believes in the stages of history, to bring history within the principle of change. But, even so, he tries to disentangle the conception of social change from the restrictions of rigid cause-effect relations, as is reflected in the common approach of historians, such as Arnold Toynbee, who hold on to the principle of stages in the development of history.

And it is true that things proceed like that as long as they are left to their natural progress.

But Jawdat Said, a Muslim who has absorbed whatever there is to absorb of Islamic culture, believes that change, that is history, is subject to the law of the human soul.

To solve this contradiction is exactly what Jawdat Said is trying to do in this book. To do that, he chooses to set out from the Qur'anic verse: "Never will God change the conditions of a people until they

change what is in their own souls;" (13:11), and uses part of the verse as the title to his book.

Viewing things in this way changes the perspective of historical development – the distinction disappears between things that are naturally responsive to change and those irresponsive to change: for the finality attached to things is no longer a finality: Things are subject to change through changing what is in minds souls and souls.

The previous reforming movements in the Muslim world did uphold the above verse, but they did that no more than to draw the blessing of the word of the Almighty: they did not really grasp any means of change; you may say that when they quoted that verse of the Qur'an, they only held up its metaphysical sense – in a way that its social function was inactivated.

Let us hope that starting the current book with the above verse, and emphasizing it by using part of it as title to the book, will have, under the present circumstances, and with the rise of a new generation, a tangible effect that the Muslim world is waiting to see translated into visible change.

Tripoli, Lebanon. 18 Rabia Al-Awwal, 1392 A.H. 2 March, 1972 C.E.

Malek Bennabi

## INTRODUCTION

You will come, in the Muslim world, across young men and women who are willing to sacrifice their life and their money for the cause of Islam; but you will hardly come across a young person who devotes years of his/her life to taking up and probing some of the burning problems of the Muslim world, or to revealing some facts – such as the discrepancy between a Muslim's faith and behavior. The questions that require to be answered are numerous, and very little exists in the way of answers to those questions. No change is possible from our conditions to other conditions without some objective answers to certain questions, and answers will not come about without a lot of effort and without the required investigation.

To go a step further, the scarcity of such studies may be accounted for by the lack of the Muslim's confidence in research and investigation. The Muslim world has long believed that the sword is the best support in solving problems, not the pen and thought.

A lot of confusion ensued from the lack of clear vision: darkness upon darkness have weighed down the Muslim mind. The forces of society have been unable to see the right relation between things, the proper order of activity.

Another way of viewing this situation is to notice how there has been no investigation in the Muslim world of the terms of faith – not in the sense of the 'fundamentals of faith and the fundamentals of Islam' as listed in the Prophet's Tradition, but we mean here the mental sense, what needs to be changed through faith in the minds and souls, for faith to be fruitful: the terms by which conduct correlates with faith, and the impediments for faith to produce its expected consequences.

What is still given precedence is the offering of money and life – this is counted as the peak of serving the faith; not the conditions by which the offering of money and life will result in the desired outcomes.

To offer is not enough in itself; for it will not lead to its right consequences without realizing the right conditions.

One reason for the readiness of young people to offer both money and life is that this can happen in a moment of enthusiasm and tension. On the other hand, acquiring the necessary knowledge will not be the result of a moment of a transitory impulse: it requires a long-lasting effort, and some kind of awareness that acts as fuel – in this way the acquisition of knowledge can be sustained.

We do of course see some young person start, in a moment of enthusiasm, some intellectual project or study, on whatever topic; and he/she may sustain this for some time, so short or; but then, like a lamp in which oil depletes, the impulse for reading or study subsides, and the scholar is no longer a scholar.

Again, we need to explore what is going on in the above case: why the sudden impulse, and what takes it away. Here also, we should fathom things to their bottom in order to understand the deeper causes; this is because things do not happen out of the blue, and without giving them due consideration one cannot determine their origins.

An example of the long process of developing sound knowledge is reflecting on the reason behind some modern thinkers' occupying the place they occupy: what, for instance, makes the intellectual leaders in the Muslim world recommend reading the works of writers like al-Maududi, Sayyid Qutb, Iqbal, and other modern writers. There must be something about these writers that makes reading them recommended for a fresh comprehension of Islam: it is worth our while to wonder why. These thinkers must have had access to sources of knowledge unknown to the ancestors; and they must have devoted time to absorbing material beyond that of the conventional sources, in addition to their seeing more of the world; for their comprehension cannot have happened without getting acquainted with much about the current world. What these writers wrote was evidently not some new book on Islamic law or jurisprudence, nor expanding an older *sharia* book. It is the novel nature of their writing that must have attracted the modern reader: something modern not just in style, but also in the issues they undertook to tackle. Their topics seemed relevant enough for the current anxieties; they must have witnessed enough of the signs of the world and human life to

corroborate the signs of the Scripture. It is by how far they went beyond the common kind of knowledge that they won this distinction.

The implication here is not that these and other similar writers have done all that is there to do – we need to recognize their creativity, and the reading and the experience they had gone through before they could write what they wrote. And then to go beyond their contribution.

Some will notice, and some will not notice, how the above writers and similar writers were sure to maintain the link with the Islamic heritage, in a way that they were accepted as genuine believers – they did succeed in satisfying the reader as to the soundness of their faith. Truth is however, not the privilege of any particular writer or reformer.

Further observations can be noted. One most relevant thing to notice here is how we so much wish the present condition of our society without our reflecting that no change can come about without a change taking place first in what is inside our minds and souls. We seem quite satisfied with the content of our minds, not realizing that much of what is inside them is the ground on which the visible situation rests, no matter how badly we wish that situation to vanish. No matter how ponderous that situation seems, we have not examined how, by what we bear inside our minds or souls give permanence to that situation.

We may learn this much from the Qur'an, when it insists on discussing what happens to people; it reiterates that the problems that people complain about emanate from what exists inside their souls '*al-anfus* in Qur'anic terms' – it keeps drawing people's attention to the facts inside: not to hasten to attributing their troubles to forces outside themselves; that the injustice that people complain about is inflicted by themselves. This is the kernel of history, and this is the rule by which societies work. It is this truth which the Qur'an affirms – and to ignore that fact, life will be a complete mystery; and nothing will work right for us. People will then come up with submissive, defeated philosophies; or they may end up with deterministic lawless philosophies.

The gravest mischief that a human can cause to himself/herself is when they fail to perceive the controlling role of the human in both the world out there and the community 'in the 'furthest horizons' and in

'their souls', as the Qur'an puts it, (41:53): this is when the human underestimates his/her own position, by failing to recognize this potential to subdue the phenomena of world and human life, on the basis of the laws by which they function. Let us sum up our conclusion so far:

A human mind can take one of two attitudes towards problems: It can assume that problems are subject to laws, and hence that a problem is within control once we have discovered the laws which it is subject to; or it can assume that things happen without being controlled by laws, or, which comes to the same result, that the laws that control things are beyond the reach of a human. Of course, the two positions are the two ends of a curve, for there will be a whole range of positions between the one and the other extreme.

And each of the two positions will have its visible aspect in people's attitudes and behaviors – it will be visible in behavior in proportion to the extent the principle has permeated the individual's mind.

It takes no effort on anybody's part to demonstrate from Muslims' behavior how poorly their behavior reflects their Islamic faith. But once it is admitted that the problem is there, the next question would be: which of the above two positions do Muslims take towards this problem: Do they take the first position – by admitting that there are laws which control the above problem, laws that may be studied and employed in controlling and managing the problem? Or do they take the other position? Assuming that a problem is not controlled by laws, laws that are within the comprehension and manipulation of the human? In the latter case, it would not avail us at all to investigate and search for those laws, for, though it is admitted human affairs are governed by laws, it is as a Muslim writer put it: "those laws work, Muslims assume, in the life of humankind in a mysterious, enigmatic way, that is inaccessible to the human intellect."

When I decide to present this topic and put it in a shape that appeals to the Muslims' consciousness, my hope is to help them choose with open eyes their attitude to dealing with the current problems; to rid them of the often vague attitude they take. It often happens that a Muslim has both the first and the second attitude, in a way that they cancel each other.

Let us not deal lightly with the soundness of theory – for indeed the soundness of theory and the degree of its clarity will determine the success or failure of the solution.

It must be obvious by now that I uphold the first position, that problems are controlled by laws, and laws may be examined and put to use for solving the problems; and this is what I undertake to tackle in the present work – having no delusions in the meanwhile about the little that I can do in that direction.

You see the Muslim ask, and is never tired of asking, at the beginning and end of every discussion: What should we do?

The urgency of the question implies an ambivalent attitude of the mind, this oscillating between viewing problems as amenable to solution, on the basis of laws, and viewing problems as either without solution, or else that the laws are not within the control of humans or of us Muslims.

Our main audience are not those who see nor room for human effort – though it must be admitted that they are not only existent, but constitute the majority of the Muslim world. They are waiting for *al-Mahdi* and the signs of approach of the Day of Judgement. For this majority: no human effort is but folly, for it is only Divine intervention that brings things to a head.

No, it is not these who we are addressing, but those who have gone beyond this state; but have not firmly settled at any alternative ground. They never seem to hold on to a principle of upholding laws.

The fact is, however, that for those who do not believe in laws cannot stop the law from operating. To fail to recognize the laws and to act mindful of them, which is true of other parts of the world, only gives the chance to others to be more alert to laws and to use them for their own good, which is not true of the idle and ignorant.

For further elaboration of this topic, and especially of the role of the law in controlling things, let us discuss some points in two spheres:

We may THINK FIRST of **the sphere of the human being as a physical organism**, and the laws that control his/her health, and observe the attitude of those who are acquainted with these laws and act



upon them, whenever there is something wrong with the body. We all hear and observe a lot about how far medicine has gone in revealing the laws of health and the physical diseases of the human organism: the physician employs those laws, which is vividly indicated by the fact that he/she often works successfully in curing the sick person. By doing various examinations, tests and analyses he/she tries to reach the correct diagnosis: physicians examine their patient armed with a sphygmomanometer, thermometer, and all kinds of devices; they measure the heart pulse, listen to breathing; they order the required analyses: whatever it takes to detect the disturbance, any deviation from normalcy. They very often can regain the body to its normal condition. A doctor can determine what should be done at once, or after certain tests; and he/she will give their orders concerning food, medicine, and whatever is needed for restoring good health. They can do that to the extent they know about the laws of the body and medicine; and their skills contrasts sharply with the patient or relative who has not studied the necessary sciences: this latter may just stare at the sick, and may be very sympathetic to him/her; they may notice how hard it is for the sick to behave as they did when they enjoyed good health. And yet, not knowing the laws behind good health and what heals the sick they can do nothing to help the dear one. This much we see in life, and frequently see it happening to our dears and nears.

The above sphere is within the notice of everybody. THE SECOND, which is the subject of our concern in this book, is **the problem of a society that suffers from certain social ailments**: such as disintegration, strife, conflict, inability to do common social tasks, and the like. It has been mentioned above that the body social, the ummah as a body, functions in accordance with laws that may be discovered and controlled for the good of society. As mentioned above, nobody would dispute that the Muslim Ummah seems unable to live in accordance with its faith; in fact, everybody is agreed that the Muslim world is afflicted with social ailments. There are symptoms of the woes that nobody misses. But when it comes to the laws that govern this, and any other society – that knowledge is confined to the experts.

Most people keep complaining about the dissolution of the social ties, the society's inability to fulfil its tasks. An observer notices this in the same way as you know a person's being sick from their pale

skin, the spasms of pain, and the like. But one difference between the two kinds of disease is that people hasten in the case of physical sickness to the specialist doctors; but, in the case of social ailments, they do not find social doctors who they can resort to for healing society. Indeed, even if one does find such doctors, they are like the physicians prior to the scientific discovery of the laws that control diseases: those physicians were of little help to the sick.

What this book maintains is that when the Muslim world fails to find cures for its social diseases, it is not because those diseases are incurable; it is rather that those who engage in treating the diseases are incompetent, that they do not know the laws that control the wholeness of society ... Hence their turning to destiny to blame it for any failing of their society: they speak of destiny being an invincible power that ordains something for an individual or society, and, therefore, we can do nothing about it. Yes, of course, destiny does govern everything in life, but that is so whether we knew the way something happened or no, and hence it is no excuse to get rid of working on something by attributing its cause to destiny.

You would see those who have been unfortunate in financial matters complain that, for no apparent reason, some people are given all they need and more, and others are deprived. Our great poet-philosopher, al-Ma'arri, said, long ago: "Do you not see how a scholar, overflowing with scholarly knowledge, with very little to spend; and another who is so ignorant, a dullard in fact, but rolling in fortune ... It is for such observations that many people are bewildered, and some very well-read persons turn heretical."

But indeed, the composition of society, and the affluence of certain classes in contrast with the poverty of other classes are not haphazard: they really are controlled by laws; nothing in society but is subject to exact laws. It is when the individual fails to notice those laws that he/she is baffled and confused. Things seem to be a mess to such a person – as if the world is a chaos, without discipline; and they will find no justice in the world. They would wonder: Is it really a Wise and All-knowing God who manages all this – hence al-Ma'arri's mentioning that a well-read scholar often becomes a heretic: It is because of such considerations.

But things do not seem so to a scientist who is acquainted with the laws that govern the conditions of a society. He/she has at their disposal various tools and ways of testing the solidity of the society, the soundness of the network of its relationship. They will have access to the necessary analyses of how the particular society views and describes events: and from there the expert will have his/her verdict of what is wrong with that society. The expert in social laws can fathom what lies behind the society's views and attitudes; he/she can put forth ways of altering these views and attitudes, and can give the necessary instructions as to what influences should be perpetuated and what should be blocked; they will tell the concerned party what among the signals that impact the society's consciousness act as intellectual bacteria that impede its progress or weaken its solidarity. They will decide when a quarantine must be imposed to prevent certain contagious social diseases from spreading in the particular society. They will tell you that certain vaccines and immunizations can be employed to block the spread of particular intellectual disturbances.

When you notice the hostilities rampant in a society, its inability to cooperate, even under the hardest circumstances, the sharp charges exchanged among its individuals; the search by the high-standing characters in the society for a scapegoat to charge with their ineptitude, their lack of qualms when they fail to act up to their duty; when you see languor flagrant among all classes, holding them back from feeling the urge to broaden their horizon and acquire new knowledge, their turning their back to learning from the events of history ... all these are social diseases that are not less potent than the physical ones. They are real diseases that afflict people's minds, so that they are inactivated; they are real diseases that weaken people's morale, until they are too apathetic to rise to crises. As for the sources of the diseases, it is a culture contaminated with various intellectual ailments, both chronic and acute.

It is good to turn our attention to the Qur'an, for we find how it brings up the 'disease of the heart' in several locations. But the heart's disease in the Qur'an is not the physical disease that many people suffer from. It is rather the social disease that the Qur'an is concerned with. When it mentions the heart's disease, it is of course not to the heart's being afflicted with rheumatism, or tachycardia, or clogging of the coronary artery: not a disease that may lead to sudden, and maybe fatal

heart attack. In the Qur'an, the heart's disease (as, for instance, in 2:10) is an 'intellectual' disease; it is when the human does not have the healthy relation with his/her ideal. In the same way that those suffering from physical diseases of the heart are unable to do any activity that requires exertion, when the intellectual centers of society suffer from intellectual diseases, the society is incapable of any activity that requires much effort and endurance and intellectual fitness.

What is required, then, is that in the same way we comprehend the laws controlling the body, and resort to them for restoring physical health – we attach equal confidence to the existence of laws of thought and values of society when working on restoring society to a healthy state.

Malek Bennabi, the Algerian author, uses in this connection the analogy to a big machine; he says: "It is a familiar observation on the material level to notice how a sophisticated machine can stop working because of a single nut that is missing. But we still have not noticed this on the level of human activity, although it is a very useful affinity in certain situations. You see a human who has a small thing missing, like a nut, and his/her whole activity is brought to a stop on account of this lack; they fail to work with others." (*Algerian Horizons*, p. 153, Algerian Edition, 1964).

What Malek Bennabi is doing here is using an analogy to drive home the lesson that the human activity is controlled by laws, though of course the laws for the material machine are different from those that apply to society. This is in the same spirit as when I discussed earlier how there are laws for the social welfare and disturbance as there are laws for the physical good health and disease.

And this reminds one of something greater than both analogies. The Prophet, peace be upon him, had huge love and caring for the Muslim Ummah. And he kept finding parallel between inanimate things, living things, and society – in that they all are subject to binding laws: the laws that preserve the solidity of solid things, the laws which preserve the living organism in the normal state, and the laws that protect society from dissolution. He drew the affinity to bring to attention the similarity and the common fact of things' being controlled by laws.

In one analogy, the Prophet, peace be upon him, says: “A believer is to a believer like bricks in the same wall: they strengthen each other,” and he here clasped his hands to illustrate,” (reported by al-Bukhari).

In another analogy, he says: “When you observe believers, in their having mercy for one another, and their affection and compassion for one another – you find them akin to one body, in which if one organ is sick, the whole body will respond with sleeplessness and fever.” (also reported by al-Bukhari)

We commission an engineer when we wish to have a house built solidly and reliably. He/she knows the laws of the cohesion and solidity of materials; it is they also who determine how much weight the structure endures and what forces are operative on it. They will even tell you for how long you may trust the structure to keep standing under the various circumstances. The same is true when constructing bridges, tunnels, towers, etc. We are wary of asking one who is ignorant of the laws of construction to design and execute structures. It is so since no good structure can be designed and constructed by those who are ignorant of the laws of a solid structure, the forces on the structure, the strength of the materials to be used, and the structure's resistance to collapse. If a structure begins to have cracks or to be deformed in some way, the engineer will have his/her diagnosis of the defect, and he/she gives some well-informed orders as to overcoming the problem. When we have the right kind of engineers of society, they will observe the society, determine how well and cohesive the social structure stands, what defects it suffers from, and what is to be predicted about the particular society, unless measures are taken to counteract the decay.

The affinity between society and the individual is pointed out by the Qur'an when it says: “to every people is a term appointed: when their term is reached, not an hour can they delay, nor an hour can they advance;” (10:49).

This is quite frequent in the Qur'an and the Prophet's traditions, to use a situation that is familiar to help people realize the affinity with the point of interest. The Qur'an alerts us to this when it says: “And such are the Parables We set forth for mankind, but only those understand them who have knowledge;” (29:43).

The is another analogy of importance to us, an analogy given by the Messenger, peace be upon him, when he compares a society to the travelers on a ship and how they are all responsible for its safety. Here the material and society laws are combined. The tradition is used to remind people that a society lives by a law that is at the essence of safeguarding it from sinking.

It would be easy for anyone to notice the danger that is posed by a hole in the ship; but it is not as easy to notice the ‘hole’ that happens to a society, and what danger it poses. This is really eye-opening knowledge; it offers excellent enlightenment. But have we risen to this scientific level: unfortunately, we have not gone beyond groping and guessing.

Iqbal did his share in awakening Muslims to the universality of laws that govern everything; this is when he says in a couplet of his poetry:

For everything there is a law by which it operates;

Are we still in doubt about that?

It is true that no more miracles happen, that their time has passed, but we do have science to come forward and wield its miracles. Is it not more advantageous for us, instead of extolling Islam as the religion of science, to be scientifically competent, and put science to our use? For at present, our behavior shows that we have little confidence in science, that we even condemn it.

Had we been familiar with science, we would realize that it can help us achieve what we are keen to see achieved, in a more effective way; it will be a vast advance over the childish praise we give to Islam. The effusion of grief over Islam as we see it today is like the stricken family who are in agony over their sick beloved, who is in severe pain, but they know nothing about helping him/her. We know from the Prophet’s *hadith* that no disease is sent to earth but God sends a cure for it. And when this is true of the body’s diseases, it is equally true of the mental and social diseases.

We must learn enough about science until it becomes clear to our minds what is scientific and what is not: this is better for us than

simply saying that science is unreliable. We find it unpalatable to investigate and search, and we therefore desist from sorting out what is science and what is not – yes, it is easier to give up, but at what price! It will be clear after a moment's reflection that that which seems difficult pays better, and that which is easier will have dire consequences.

Observe a person who believes that problems are controlled by laws, laws that may be revealed and dealt with by the employment of other laws: a person of this type deals with things in a positive way; he/she will go forward and act and tackle issues with all seriousness; unlike the other who is ignorant of laws or denies them, for the latter will hesitate and waver in a state of loss. And even if he/she starts some attempt, you cannot be sure that their endeavor will be sustained for long – any minor distraction can distract them; and they may not even feel guilty at their termination of effort, for they had not embarked upon the enterprise with the confidence that they were engaged in solving the problem: they indeed had not got the habit of seeing problems solved; they see them as chronic and unsolvable. The more one has dealt with laws, or *sunan*, the more confidence and assurance they gain.

A person who encounters a problem, believing it to be solvable, is a person who believes in change. What is meant by change here is transferring from an unacceptable condition to an accepted, or at least a better, one. This transfer must refer to a law that controls the relation between objectives and means and how a human's ability fits in this relation. A certain equilibrium must exist among these elements. It is worth our while to apply this relation to the Muslim community – taking in consideration the objective, which is in this case realizing the Islamic principles in the community; the means in this case must cover any and all forces and factors that the Muslim can have access to.

And when we examine the above elements, we find that various forces and factors control them, and these forces and factors render the realization of objective more or less feasible. All this must come under the investigation of those concerned. Indeed, the above law covers all human activities, from the most modest targets concerned with the daily life of the individual to the most far-reaching objectives like the establishing of a good universal community that spreads over the whole world.

One error that mars this relation is assuming that success in realizing an objective is controlled by laws that “act in the life of humans in a mysterious, miraculous, magical way,” as expressed by Sayyid Qutb in his book *This Religion*. No effective dealing with the above elements can take place if the relation between them is not right.

And when the human views the above factors in a wrong way, then he/she will have a negative attitude to what they can accomplish. At a simpler level, you may observe the often erroneous way the Muslim understands the process of transferring from the here and now to the required condition. For various reasons, you see the Muslim quite bewildered as to how we may achieve this transformation, like one in a wilderness. He/she does not seem to see the chain of links between what is there at the moment and the required state – and, consequently, they despise the existing ‘given’ and find it too unworthy of attention; at the same time, they think of such means they crave and look up to as too hard to attain (In his *Vocation of the Muslim World*, p. 108, Malik Bennabi says, in distinguishing ‘politics’ from ‘pseudo-politics’: “The difference between the two terms is huge: it is a difference between, on the one hand, a definite progress based on human experience across history and, on the other, haphazard progress guided by whatever sentiment leads one. What we see at the moment (Bennabi adds) is pseudo-politics, in which the leaders confound the possible with the impossible, disregarding objectives that may be realized in a straightforward ways, preferring those objective which are impossible to attain, no matter how tortuous ways we follow in trying to reach them.”) What exists is useless in the Muslim’s eyes, and what is useful is inaccessible – and, hence, such a person thinks of himself/herself as enjoying an open vacation – until those mysterious forces intervene with their miraculous means.

This sharply contrasts with the enlightened mind which does not take things to be mysterious and vague – even at the level of the descent of angels for giving support, for they descend on the basis of reasonable causes. They descend by a law: it is when one accepts the Lord as the One God, and adheres to the straight path as the path; is not this what we find in the following verse of the Qur’an: “In the case of those who say, ‘Our Lord is God’, and, further, stand straight and steadfast, the angels descend on them (from time to time): ‘You do not fear!’ they



suggest, 'Nor grieve! But receive the Glad Tidings of the Garden of Bliss;'" (41:30).

It is right to notice that the mistakes that obstruct a community's progress are not huge; we are indeed impeded by little mistakes that are not noticed on account of their seeming insignificance and trivial. And this is something true of many situations: that the gross is given all the importance, and the fine is underrated. From such small mistakes, the march of history is halted; this is what Muhammad Iqbal meant when he said:

To be distracted for a moment, my friend,  
Pushes home a thousand miles farther away.

In a person's excitement and keenness to reach the target, he/she overlooks the tiny mistakes. And then they are shocked when no victory is realized. Even the elite may say in that case, as the Qur'an tells us: "Whence is this?" (3:165).

Not only do people disregard the fine points and obstructions, before they hit; not only are such small problems both evident and hidden at the same time – people very often fail to notice them even after suffering the catastrophe. They usually do not notice that those finer points missed at the beginning have resulted in the grave consequences at the end: the collapse of the project, or, at the very least, the destination growing much farther.

What you notice about those who have received blow after blow, for not acting in the light of laws, is a behavior characterized by apprehension and oscillation, a lack of confidence, and pouring malice on this or that. How vastly this attitude contrasts with the behavior of those who act in the light of laws, or *sunan*: for the latter have well-reasoned steps, are little exposed to unpleasant and overpowering surprises. A person acting on the basis of laws avoids having illusions about themselves, and when they slip, they admit their mistake; and they proceed diligently and in earnest to put right things right.

I have shed some light on what I am about to discuss: and it all revolves around the endeavor of change, in the light of the Qur'anic verse:

“Verily never will God change the condition of a people until they change what is in their consciousness;” (13:11).

I write with a firm conviction that, once the Muslim understands these issues, he/she will proceed diligently, making the best of the potentials in their hands, and having all the patience, exerting themselves, and showing all the perseverance it takes to attain their objectives. Knowing what it takes and what it costs to achieve things, a Muslim will be deflected by no one from his/her way that they pursue. They know what they are about; what to draw on for their resources, and where to direct their efforts. And for those open-eyed persons, once they have achieved something, they are more confident and contented, and less bewildered about their mission. They look back with a wiser eye at the old way of jumping from mirage to mirage, the time when they wasted their life and energy in futile movement, when they were in brisk movements, like one touched with madness; and when they also spent long times standing still out of despair. This is to show how different the person who proceeds on the basis of law from that who works without this enlightenment. The latter are usually oblivious of the fact that the small achievements of enlightened progress pave the way for more achievements. In his *The Birth of A Society* (Cairo Edition, 1962, p. 134), Malek Bennabi says: “You see some Muslims who do feel the enormity of the tragic situation, but do not have the patience and endurance for investigating it, express their agony in the words: ‘We are no longer Muslims, except for what appears on our ID.’ They are telling the truth here, but they would have done something much more constructive, if they started from some little observations about our life.”

So, I feel content that if a Muslim is awakened to the laws that govern our problems, he/she will turn from this bewildered and undecided behavior to serious and enlightened effort.

## A LAW THAT APPLIES TO ALL HUMANS

One thing to notice about the main verse of our search: i.e. “Verily never will God change the condition of a people until they change what is in their consciousness;” (13:11) is that it applies to all groups and communities, believing or unbelieving, Muslim or non-Muslim.

I guess that a Muslim does not like that: he clings, consciously or unconsciously, and to various degrees of clarity, to the attitude that we Muslims must have some special place in the cosmos.

I say from experience that, when I discussed the Muslim crisis, I often had someone say: “Do you seem to imply that the way you are advocating applies equally to non-Muslims?” And I say, “Yes.”

Therefore, and with the above experience in mind, I feel the need to make it clear that the principle laid down by the verse is true of all human communities; do you not notice how the word ‘a people’ in the verse does not single out any specific people? The indefinite article shows that it is about any people and every people.

It means that the law applies to all people, in their different faiths, colors, and ethnicities.

But let us not leave it there. It must be added that when a Muslim comments: “Your approach seems to apply to non-Muslims,” it is not without significance – this comment on the part of the Muslim. It is indicative that a Muslim does notice something new, that a law can be applicable to all humans, the Muslims being equal to others in that.

Recognizing such facts has not always been like that for the Muslim. He/she usually viewed the Muslim problems as governed by laws that are not common to all humans. They took the Muslim affairs to be unique and distinct from the affairs of the rest of humankind: this is done in a spirit of idealization; for the Muslims are taken to be elevated above the rest of humanity.

Let us humor the Muslim and discuss these matters amicably, and also convincingly. I may not develop this issue to the desired

degree, and to the exactness it merits, but let me try: for we do the Muslim a lot of good if we drive this idea home. For once the Muslim perceives that our problems are not so unique and different from those of the rest of humankind, the lessons of history will soon come to be relevant: what happened to earlier communities and to the contemporary world becomes relevant and basic for solving our own problems.

It will be helpful in this connection to refer to the Qur'anic verse, in which the Almighty addresses the Prophet, peace be upon him, in the words: "Say: 'I am no bringer of new-fangled doctrine among the Messengers;'" (46:9).

Also helpful is a tradition of the Messenger's, peace be upon him, (reported by al-Bukhari), when he predicts the future of the Muslim Ummah like this, and note how he stresses the common law that is equally true of other communities and of the Muslim community: "You will mimic the nations who had existed before you, as a step mimics a step;" and in the same tradition he mentions that, had the preceding groups entered the hole of a gecko, the Muslim community would follow them there. You see how compelling, and even humiliating the affinity is.

We evidently need to acquire this perspective of the common nature of laws – how can we otherwise benefit from the Qur'an's frequent exhortation that we look into history and learn lessons from it?

The experiences of past centuries, the behavior of the many communities before us, have been recorded; one can see what change came over the various peoples, and as a consequence of what behavior on their part. The Muslims, like any other nation, behaved in good and bad ways, and met the consequences of their behaviors.

It will be noticed, by reviewing the Qur'an, how it strips the human from all extraneous associations, and presents the basic human who is subject to the control of *sunan*, or laws.

By getting like this to the essential reality of the problem, this will divest it of all its vagueness and surmise; for we can view it then in its right perspective: the problem will come to be seen as one of the human nature of the Muslim and the Muslim society – it is not a problem of doctrines. In other words, this is a call to approach the problem as a

social problem, not the problem of a faith and creed. More definitely, the Muslims' problem at this time is the problem of Muslims as humans, not the problem of Islam in itself. This calls for elaboration, too.

When I say: it is a social problem, not a problem of religion, I am not bypassing religion; indeed, I am as keen, perhaps keener even, to see the Muslim holding on to his/her religion all the way. What I am trying to do is distinguish the laws that cause the Muslim to be helpless and those which cause the Muslim to be efficient and productive.

I am not proposing to bring Islam under dissection: for this faith is not for inspection; it is as true as the sun and the moon in the physical world.

So, let us now not stop at Islam as an absolutely true fact, and move on to the Muslim: the Muslim who, like any other human, can be ignorant and vain, arrogant and conceited; and, on the other hand, peaceful and affable, naïve and foolhardy. This is the way we need to approach matters. The problem is not in Islam – in the same way as the problem was not in the sun and moon when people held all kinds of deluded assumptions about the sun and moon. The system of the universe did not care for people's holding erroneous concepts about the sun and moon: the sun and moon went their way, not caring for people's mythological ideas. What was needed then was not trying to put right the system of the sun and moon, but for humans to investigate more: it is the human who needs to explore and search; for it is he/she that had borne scores of deluded assumptions and superstitions; and it did them no good that they bestowed on those assumptions and concepts and delusions sacredness – in a way that many humans were prepared to eliminate those who held concepts other than their own.

This must be a helpful affinity when we think of the Muslim and his/her perspective about Islam, as a system, and Islam as a way of solving problems: it is often not unlike the assumptions of those who held erroneous assumptions about the sun and the moon – in their failure to see truth. You may notice how the Qur'an, when it takes up the problems of progress and backwardness in a material sense, it presents these matters as general phenomena, as related in a general way to all nations: it is a problem not of faith itself, but how a community relates to faith.

Let me add two points before we move on to another issue:

One is about my asserting that the problem I am tackling is a general one.

Yes, in fact, it is a general problem – for, when you think of it, a law, i.e. *sunnah*, must be general. At the same time, let us not deny that the Muslims do have special features unique to them, and any researcher must be alert to that. What I am concerned to emphasize here is the circumstances which are common to peoples and communities, for these are often neglected by the Muslim when he/she tackles the Muslim problem. For example, you notice how the Muslims are often deluded by illusions in a way that block their perceiving the truth – and this is a common phenomenon that you may notice about humans. At the same time, the specific illusions of Muslim are sometimes different from those of other nations, and the illusions can be numerous. What concerns us in this book is that the fact of letting illusions take hold is a human failing, not a problem confined to Muslims.

The other point is that when we say that the problem this book discusses is a human one, not a problem of just one faith, this calls for elaboration. The doctrine that the Qur'an propounds is true, and we have no doubt about its truthfulness. But what Muslims hold in their minds concerning this doctrine, in all its aspects, is not the original and pure faith – it in fact happens that Muslims take something to be what Islam teaches, when it is in fact the opposite of what it teaches. It is for this reason that there is the need to change what Muslims take to be true about Islam when it is not. Especially as we know that the Muslim world has gone through a long period of lethargy, that so many illusions and superstitions have crept into the Muslim's mind. To remove those illusions and superstitions is especially hard because the superfluous stuff has in this case acquired in the Muslims' mind perhaps the same sacredness as Islam itself. It is held to by the Muslims as not less sacred than the Qur'an itself.

This last notion is specific to Muslims: that they cling to illusions that they take to be from the Qur'an when they have nothing to do with the Qur'an. This has always been a main hurdle in the way of reformation: for here is the Ummah of the Qur'an, but with ponderous impediments to their progress, like mill-stones round their necks, which

hamper their rise and moving forward; or you may think of the illusions and superstitions as scales over the eyes; or even like padlocks over the minds that block the Ummah from seeing truth. This makes progress harder for Muslims than it is for others.

Let us not make the mistake here of assuming that the Muslim does not hold the Qur'an with great reverence: indeed, Muslims hold more tightly to their Book than do any followers of the other *Ahlul-kitab* (People of the Book, i.e. the Jew and the Christians). Hence the extra difficulty of ridding the Muslims of their illusions: those who work for the reformation of Muslims need to have special skill to change what needs to be changed, without doing offence to the Muslims' basic belief in their faith.

This inability to accept and respond to change must be accounted for in large part by the Muslim's not perceiving the laws of changing what is in the souls; especially when the change happens over long stretches of time. And that is why this book focuses on these laws, whether the change happens slowly, or very fast: and anyone may notice how fast the change happens at present.

It must become quite clear to our minds how the change happened in the past, and how change happens now: we need all the clarity that we are capable of to intervene in the natural course of change. We especially need:

1. To know the laws of bringing change to what is in the souls;
2. To be acquainted with the things that need to be changed: the illusions that must be eliminated, and the facts that should take their place;
3. To know the people we need to work on to bring about that change: It is true that they vary widely as to their personal traits and particular milieus, but, at a deeper level, they have much in common.

Such detailed knowledge is essential for getting started with any serious process of change.

## A *SUNNAH* (LAW) FOR SOCIETY NOT FOR INDIVIDUALS

One thing to notice is that, in the verse's stating of the law, or *sunnah*, it applies it to communities, not to individuals; the word '*qaum*, i.e. a people' is specific enough, for it refers to a group, a collectivity. At a later stage, I will have the chance to elaborate this term 'community'.

It is not any particular individual in society that the verse singles out as needing to change: You may notice how the verse does not say, for instance: "Verily never will God change the condition of a person until he/she changes what is in their souls (or minds);" it rather says: "Verily never will God change the condition of a people until they change what is in their souls (or minds);" (13:11). Not any single person is singled out, no man or woman, not a believer or unbeliever: it is rather a community, with the qualities that are true of a community, with all its diversity in gender, ages, and components.

The above should lead one to notice that, should an individual change the concepts, values, etc. in their mind, or self, it does not necessarily follow that his/her conditions change; nor is it implied that should he/she change what is in their self then God will not change their condition. What is indicated is that change in one's self, in attitudes, concepts, etc. will change his/her tangible condition in some respects and not in others. The point here is that there are certain things that need to take place at the level of the community for the individual to receive his/her share of the change. So, again to refer to our basic verse: "Verily never will God change the condition of a people until they change what is in their souls (or minds);" (13:11). This must be remembered to refer to a community, to a group. To have this distinction will be basic to our later discussion. And it will be essential for accepting later conclusions.

We may refer to the Qur'an for more elaboration. We find therein the verses: "If there are twenty of you, patient and persevering,



they will vanquish two hundred; if a hundred, they will vanquish a thousand of the Unbelievers: for those are a people without understanding. For the present, God has lightened your task, for He knows that there is a weak spot in you: but (even so), if there are a hundred of you, patient and persevering, they will vanquish two hundred, and if a thousand, they will vanquish two thousand, with the leave of God: for God is with those who patiently persevere;" (8:65-66).

As you see in the above verses, there are limits to the number of believers that merit being given victory. For instance, for ten believers, armed with patience, to encounter a thousand enemies, they are not guaranteed to win victory. There is in the last verses a certain balance of quality and quantity; and a certain minimum is set. Someone might say that the number mentioned is not meant literally, but it remains certain that the Qur'an emphasizes the importance of maintaining the required quality-quantity balance for realizing victory: when higher quality exists, a lower number can achieve victory; and when the quality decreases, it must be compensated for with higher quantity. This can be clear after contemplating the second of the above verses: "For the present, God has lightened your task, for He knows that there is a weak spot in you: but (even so), if there are a hundred of you, patient and persevering, they will vanquish two hundred;" while a hundred were asserted in the first verse to engage and defeat a thousand.

It must be clear from the above discussion that the point here pertains to a people, to a group – hence the Arabic pronoun for plural '*minkum*' is crucial: It indicates that a specific individual may be ready to stand his ground and never retreat, but he is not guaranteed to win triumph over the enemy. We must learn to transfer this logic to the social sphere: the clashes are everywhere, and the community must always encounter and defeat challenges. The balance stands in civil life, for there also the higher the quality of the leading forces, the less number is needed.

Indeed, the same rule of more or less focus and lucidity determining how much quantity is needed goes for the individual's effort in understanding the problems of society and devoting himself/herself to help in overcoming the crises.

Let us remember that we are dealing with laws, *sunan*, that can benefit any community. This can be supported by reflecting at the end of the first of the two verses: “for those are a people without understanding;” (8:65): So the Lord is here including in the elements of who is to win victory the level of understanding of the unbelievers: again we must apply the balance of quality-quantity – in both military clashes and the clashes of civil life. Hence the Qur’an states, in a general rule that applies to believers and unbelievers: “Of the bounties of your Lord We bestow freely on all – these as well as those: the bounties of your Lord are not closed to anyone;” (17:20).

When we follow this logic, it will be clear how dangerous it will be to have a number of persons, even if small in number, who are ignorant of the social facts; and, of course, not to have the sufficient number of persons capable of approaching and grappling with the problems of the *Ummah* with the required insight and scientific basics. If we recall the Prophet’s (authentic) Tradition about the passengers on a ship and making a hole in its bottom, it will alert us to the danger of having even a small percentage of those who know nothing about preserving the ship (and, in parallel way, the ship of life) afloat.

The critical balance of a community, the need for a certain degree of enlightenment among all its individuals – that need is so critical to the preservation of society that, if we imagine the example of the ship, should a fly alight on the side of it, it will result in some disequilibrium, no matter how little. The same may be said of the factors of health and disease – these are so delicate that, for instance, the secretions of glands must not fall from or exceed a certain amount. The difference is also important between the activities of the organs of the body and the factors that determine the welfare of a society: for there is in the community no automatic process, as in the case of glands’ secretion: What it needs, instead, is a thinking force that acts for organizing society and providing its citizens with the necessary awareness. The responsibility for that falls on all individuals, but, of course, the more chance an individual is capable of doing their share, the greater the responsibility.

This must make it clear that, while the body’s processes are biological and need no intervention on the part of the conscious power, the destiny of a society depends on intellectual factors.

Once one has reached this point, he/she must shudder at envisioning the Hour of Reckoning on the Day of Judgment: for one question then, as a Tradition of the Prophet's asserts, will be about the way one had spent his/her life – and you see how most people waste their life. The Lord has given us abundant abilities, but those abilities are often left inactivated, or very little utilized. An example would drive this home: a human is created with the ability to read and write; but that ability remains latent until it is translated into a real ability through the long process and effort an individual puts in to bring this ability to an active state; and then he/she has the actual skill of reading and writing. This goes for all the abilities of the human, all having a potential stage and a realization stage.

## A *SUNNAH* OF THIS WORLD NOT OF THE HEREAFTER

It may be clear by now that we are dealing with a law, *sunnah*, that pertains to life here in this world, and not to life in the Hereafter: the responsibility is huge indeed, but it is relevant to communities not individuals, and in this life not the next.

This aspect of the issue is basic and crucial. There is no attempt of raising this world above the Last Day, nor to ignore the importance of being winners on that Day. But the point under discussion here is being alert to the laws related to the position of a community or ummah, and that is about this world: the verse under discussion is related to this world.

The rule might be clear by now: that in tackling the responsibility of communities and individuals we must remember that, as far as the community is concerned, it is accountable for its merits and defects in this world; and as concerning the individual, he/she will have recompense for their good deeds and bad deeds in the Hereafter. One

can cite many verses from the Qur'an to support this proposition; here are some:

“To Us shall return all that he talks of, and he shall appear before Us bare and alone;” (19:81); “that the fruit of his striving will soon come in sight;” (53:40).

As for the community's responsibility and its collective nature, we may quote:

“And fear tumult or oppression, which affects not in particular only those of you who do wrong: and know that God is strict in punishment;” (8:25).

When a community is deemed as falling short of its duty, and some disaster befalls it, this will include some individuals who had done their share quite satisfactorily. One may add here that, in the case of a community which is doing well, fulfilling what must be fulfilled, there will enjoy its blessings some individuals who had done nothing to earn the benefits.

This also might be supported by a Tradition of the Prophet's. He was once asked: “Will it happen that we are destroyed including the good among us?” “Yes,” he replied, “if the bad predominates.” This is a very clear text in denoting that accountability will be realized in this world when dealing with communities: this works whether you are thinking of blessings or of disasters: desirable things reach all members of society, and so do disagreeable things.

## THE VERSE MENTIONS TWO TYPES OF CHANGE: THAT OF GOD AND THAT OF PEOPLE

This can be observed by just referring to grammar: for we have here two verbs and two subjects; the subject of the first verb is the Almighty, and the subject of the second is the people or the community.

It is true that even this latter ability to change was granted by God, but it is in their hands, as the verse teaches us. Now this relation is vital: we may not overlook the change delegated to the community: to confuse things here will strip the human of his/her merit and positive part.

To hope, or to assume, that God will do the change that He kept as His prerogative without people doing their part – such an assumption will completely deactivate the law; for it is firm enough and quite delicate. To ignore its arrangement will lead to missing the positive outcome.

## THE TWO CHANGES ARE BASED ON INCONVERTIBLE ORDER

Let it be quite clear that the change assigned to the people comes first: it is their task and their share – though it was like this by God's granting them that. Any confusion of the order of the changes will stop the verse's operation. Many Muslims would hope that all change should proceed from God alone, without waiting for the human share: this not only contradicts the purport of the verse – it devaluates the human, stripping them of their position, responsibility, duty; and of the place God has chosen for the human as a viceroy on earth. It is in this task assigned to the human, in the exact sequence of change, that humans are put fact to face with their responsibility in shaping the historical events. This must exactly determine the humans' part in shaping the historical events.

I know it might seem that I am overdoing things; but the above rules bear much repetition until they have settled firmly in the minds – for at present they are mostly and commonly unnoticed; and even when noticed, they are not appreciated. So, let me urge those concerned to give the above rules the utmost attention. Once awareness is raised to the desired level, it can filter out the kind of words and notions that keep

seeping and infiltrating into our minds: especially the notion about interpreting history's events as proceeding from God, without giving attention to the first side of the equation, that which is the responsibility of the community, and its priority. There will be more about that later in the book.

So much effort is required to stop this trend: the trend of misreading the events of history that spreads among all the society's strata: for at present so much contradiction exists in interpreting historical events – at present one cannot see how, if all history is preordained by God, there can be any responsibility of the humans. Let us shed some more light on this with the following verse from the Qur'an:

“But God did not wrong them: nay, they wronged their own souls;” (16:33).

So, if we keep asserting that truth proceeds from God, let us learn this rule from Him.

## THE SPHERE OF GOD'S CHANGE AND THE SPHERE OF PEOPLE'S CHANGE

The main verse we are working on at teaches us that the change reserved for God is the condition of the people; and the change reserved for the people is what is in their souls or minds.

So, what does the expression: “the condition of a people” (13:11) cover? It covers such a wide range of things. First among that is the visible features of a community: richness and poverty; dignity and humiliation; good health and bad health. Let us remember that the conditions listed here are not those of any particular individual, but the community as a whole: when a community is rich, this does not mean that no poor person is left in that community; conversely, a community

can be poor, but that does not imply that no rich person is to be found in it. And when you speak of an unhealthy community, it means the community in general, not that no healthy individuals will be found in it; and that is the general rule: the law under discussion is one of large groups: nations, civilizations, large communities. You must think of a society as one body, as one unit. Is not that what one understands from verses of the Qur'an like:

“To every people is term appointed;” (7:34) and “No people can hasten their term, nor can they delay it;” (23:43)?

When in the above verses the Lord mentions a ‘term’, is not the ‘term’, or lifespan, of any particular individual; it is rather a ‘term’ of a ‘people’, a collectivity: a people or a community is in many ways a living body, and it will come to its demise: but this does not mean that its individuals will die out; it rather means that the community as a distinct entity will disappear. To illustrate, the Pharaohs as a group disappeared and their dynasties are completely extinct, not that each of their individuals died out. It was in such terms that Muhammad Iqbal was thinking when he said, in a couplet of his:

The Muslim Ummah will never go extinct,

For they hail from the Covenant of ‘Yes, we do testify’;

In which he is referring to the Qur'anic verse: “When your Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam – from their loins – their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves, saying: 'Am I not your Lord?' – they said: 'Yes! We do testify!'” (7:172).

It helps a lot to think of the community as having a life similar to an individual's, and as undergoing change similar to an individual's.

If, for instance, we have in a certain community 50% of its citizens enjoying good health, then this community enjoys less good health than another community in which 90% of its citizens enjoy good health. There is no doubt that, if given the choice, an individual would prefer to live in the latter community. It is true that we would be thinking here of the life of this world, and that is so for the verse does discuss prosperous and unprosperous life in this world. And this is so when you discuss richness and poverty.

The issue bears more detail in fact. Let us look further at the sphere of change, I mean the change that God will cause to happen to people. We have discussed it in the light of the main verse of our discussion. But we have more in the Qur'an to show that the change in the condition of a people, as created by God, refers to things like richness and poverty, health and disease, and dignity and humiliation. We may look at the following verse from another *Sura*:

“Because God will never change the Grace which He has bestowed on a people until they change what is in their own souls;” (8:53); where, instead of the general term ‘what’ in our main verse we have ‘a Grace, i.e. a blessing, a boon;’; which is to say that while the former verse includes good fortune and bad fortune, the latter is confined to blessings, all kinds of worldly blessings.

It first of all includes good health, one of the biggest blessings from the Lord; sustenance is another blessing, so is wealth; so are the soundness of the organs of the body, the brightness of children, the cleanliness of the neighborhood, affection and love and brotherly relations. The Qur'an refers to this last blessing in the verse: “so that by His Grace, you became brethren;” (3:103).

Compassion and selflessness, kindness to people, are also pointed out in the Qur'an: “It is part of the Mercy of God that you deal gently with them;” (3:159). But, well, the list is too long to exhaust here: the Qur'an itself reminds us: “But if you count the favors of God, never will you be able to number them;” (14:34).

Some of the favors are mentioned in the Qur'an and some are not; on the other hand we have the opposites of the favors: the adversities; and both categories come under the same main verse of the book: “Verily never will God change the condition of a people until they change what is in their souls (or minds);” (13:11).

So far, I have been trying to point out the many changes that God causes to happen to a people or community.

But what about the other kind of changes, the changes that the community itself must realize? – We have seen that God stipulates that before the changes that He causes to happen will come true, the community or group itself must do their share of change. So, what kind



of change are people required to realize? In the main verse of our discussion these changes are summed up in the expression 'what is in their souls'.

What is in the souls, or minds, includes things like: thoughts, concepts, surmises, at both the conscious and unconscious levels. To notice the link between the two changes. I hope it is clear how excellent a change it would be for us to understand our part in having control of history, in shaping and directing it, just by perceiving the human part in the occurrence of events, as the verse expresses it.

Ibn Khaldun did notice this power put in the hand of humans. He did know that what his mind perceived was quite huge, and that nobody before him had seen the evidence for this empowering of the human. Ibn Khaldun was a rare genius, and that appeared in his shedding light on the issue that we are trying to tackle here. The problem was that, in the same way as he had no predecessors, he had no disciples: no one in the Muslim world took it from where Ibn Khaldun left it; his idea just stalled after him.

It may be added, as a negative remark about Ibn Khaldun's work, that he noticed the law as a rigid, predetermined law that may not be controlled. But let us not go far in stressing the negative side, for Ibn Khaldun's achievement is genuinely remarkable.

Ibn Khaldun won the testimony of the greatest historian of the twentieth century, Toynbee, for he said about Ibn Khaldun's *al-Muqaddimah*: "It is the greatest work of its kind, achieved by any mind, in any age, anywhere in the world." (quoted in the Preface to *al-Muqaddimah*, Kitab al-Tahrir Edition, p. 8)

When Muhammad Iqbal speaks of "conceiving existence as a continuous movement in time," one is reminded that maybe no one brought out this movement in real terms better than Ibn Khaldun. His singular achievement was recognized by others, too: Flint, for instance, says: "Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, are no match for Ibn Khaldun; as for others – well, they should not be even mentioned next to him." (Quoted in Iqbal's: *Reconstruction of the Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 162; Cairo edition, 1955).

Let us then quote a few lines from Ibn Khaldun's *al-Muqaddimah*: "Nothing have I ignored – nothing related to the genesis of generations and states, their changes and alterations; whatever takes place in connection with culture, whether at the level of a state or faith, a town or a city, whether connected with ascendancy or subjugation; being of big numbers or small in number; including a community's science and technology; the urbans and the nomads; their current condition and their speculated one – none of the above have I left unexplored, with abundant proofs and causes. It is a unique product, with all the esoteric branches of knowledge I refer to and shed light on; and therein you may notice the illuminating of things that go unnoticed though quite at hand – and yet, I do admit my limitation, and my incompetence; and I do urge scholarly persons to look critically into this work and declare their negative remarks; rather than utter words of compliment. To admit the imperfections of my work should spare me blame, and I look forward to hearing from friends whatever comment they might have." (*Muqaddimah of Ibn Khaldun*, p. 12; Dar al-Tahrir Edition, Cairo, 1966).

It will be noticed that what Ibn Khaldun notices are the visible conditions of nations and cultures; such aspects as ascendancy or subjugation, being in big numbers or small numbers; their enjoying affluence or suffering scarcity; their enjoying good health, or suffering from disease.

The above are the changes that God causes to happen to a community. But how to account for the diversity in people's fortune is something that attracted Ibn Khaldun's attention, too: here is some of his reasoning:

"When you think of the visible aspect of history, it will appear to the casual observation as nothing more than relating the events of people and states ... but if you fathom it, you find it to involve much analysis and investigation; it requires exploring how and why species have come to be the way they are, and how they started to come into being the way they are ... this science requires much probing of events and how they take place. In a word, it is a science of great wisdom, and it merits giving all the effort and time the scholar could dedicate to it."

You may notice that what we are attempting in this book, investigating the part of change which is the responsibility of communities, is in a way the same thing that to Ibn Khaldun is the inner side of history. It may be admitted that Ibn Khaldun does notice the importance of establishing this connection, the relation of causality between the first and second types of changes. But he does not go far beyond that. He does not bring out clearly enough humans' responsibility in realizing their part of the equation. However, let us not be hard on Ibn Khaldun, for he did achieve something great. It may be that most people do not exactly realize how huge Ibn Khaldun's achievement is, for only the initiated can appreciate these things. Only those who have done some effort in exploring 'how God originated creation' [ref. to the Qur'an, 29:20] would appreciate the great value of what Ibn Khaldun had done. Most people just do not give the necessary effort and time to investigating how branches of knowledge and sciences came into being, how to trace their earliest stages and their more sophisticated one. For the inexperienced knowledge just comes into being out of nothing – no wonder then that the majority do not realize the real value of Ibn Khaldun's discovery. Let us notice how Ibn Khaldun did notice that the kind of knowledge he was dealing with was both 'close at hand but concealed from people's vision'. One perceptive statement of Ibn Khaldun's is his saying of the historian – his way of collecting information and conveying it as he received it: "They [the historians] have had the merit of obtaining pieces of information, and then conveying them as they had received them. And yet, they have been unable to fathom the causes of events and states; they just passed them by. To explore and analyze is indeed a rare thing among humans, for they are essentially copiers and imitators; and many would wade into domains that they know little about, and speak or write as specialists ... Now as for social life, it does not happen without causes; there are traits and habits that cause things to happen the way they do, and any event or report must be accounted for with those inner facts of humans ... You see how those who relate historical events speak of the appearance of a state, they seem to have some ready-made causes for its appearance: they really do not even try to explore its origins and earliest stages. Nor do they look into the causes that brought it to its visible state. In all that, the reader would be wondering at all the concealed causes that lie behind

the states' genesis and development, staring in vain for convincing accounting for the variation or correlation." (p. 11).

It is such exploratory spirit that the young men and women of the Muslim world would like to see, to perceive a little of the development of states and conditions: as it is, they only wonder and feel discontented.

It may be added about Ibn Khaldun that his investigation focused on the state; but if had decided to consider the development of civilization, the logic would be the same. I say that since the Muslim world needs some investigation at the level of culture and civilization, certainly not just a state – for a state is one component of a civilization, and a product thereof.

So badly is the Muslim world, and even the whole world, in need of a fathoming of the issues I am trying to bring to attention in this book. Let us follow in the steps of Ibn Khaldun – though of course our effort must not be confined to his limits. It is the spirit and effort that one admires in Ibn Khaldun; for he paved the way to all latter investigation. Despite the limitations, which are understandable enough, one cannot but admire a text of his like the following:

“Having looked into the books of previous historians, and investigated all that I needed to investigate about the past and present, I awakened to certain facts. I decided to write this book on history, in which I remove the veils of the origins of creation; I studied in detail stage after stage, with all the necessary causation of events. I made a point of revealing the earliest stages of states and social life, and the causes behind the concrete events. Then I was careful to bring it within the comprehension of scholars and brighter minds – though I know how unusual it must all be: in both content and style it must seem novel; for I elaborate here the diversity of social life and civil societies, and the innate factors that determine the fortune of human societies – in a way that you will just love, for you will see how the builders of states came to found their states. My hope is that you will no longer just copy others; and will start to fathom what is behind the behavior of those preceding you, contemporary to you, and coming after you.” (p. 11)

## THE BASIC CHANGE IS THE PEOPLE'S

What falls to our lot, and that requires our effort and attention, as a people or community, is the change that has been left to us by God: I mean the change that takes place in the souls. When we view things in that way, we come to face the problem of the human being, in all its complexity, and with all its associations: we stand face to face with the humans' history and future, their backwardness and progress. For the verse does no less than declare that God has empowered the human being to move from one state to another. And it is the man's/woman's task to move from a lower level to a higher one; this, for instance, is what the following verse from the Qur'an teaches us:

“We did indeed offer the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains: but they refused to undertake it, being afraid thereof: but man undertook it – he was indeed unjust and foolish (or ignorant);” (33:72).

‘Unjust’ if he/she understands but fails to act upon what they have understood, and ‘ignorant’ if he/she just sits content with their ignorance, not trying hard to overcome their ignorance.

We need to think of the community as a being with its own distinctive entity, its intelligence and effort – that is because its destiny and future as a society are linked to its ability to fulfill this responsibility of changing what is in the souls, or the minds.

From this it will transpire that, for anyone concerned with changing the state of a society, all their effort must focus on the souls, or minds.

### **But what is ‘*alanfus*, or the souls’?**

It may be noticed that the Qur'an does not give attention to defining the 'souls' or 'minds': and that seems to imply that it is not significant to explore that aspect. What the Qur'an does stress is dealing with the souls, and the way to bringing change to them.

Another thing one may wonder about is: Is there something in the soul to begin with? Or are all of its contents received from others? How is something in the soul eliminated? And how is it replaced? What are the difficulties that one may encounter in attempting to bring about these changes?

The Almighty says in the Qur'an that a human is enabled to 'purify' the soul or to 'corrupts' the soul; as we see in the following verses:

“Truly he succeeds that purifies it [the soul]; and he fails that corrupts it;” (91:9-10).

But then, what are the basic rules of 'purifying' the 'soul' so that it wins success? And what are the factors of corrupting the soul which lead to its failure?

It seems that there is nothing inborn in the soul except the ability for going wrong or acting in fear of God; it is an amazing creation, this being capable of choosing between right and wrong. We have the following verses to help us understand this point:

“By the soul, and the proportion and order given to it. And its enlightenment as to its wrong and its right;” (91:7-8).

How amazing this creation of the soul, this extraordinary ability to choose doing wrong or right! It is the Almighty God who made the soul like that! And the Qur'an goes another step by saying:

“Truly he succeeds that purifies it [the soul]; and he fails that corrupts it;” (91:9-10).

This verse focuses on the part assigned to the human. And when we say it is for the human to choose wrong or right – this ability is granted by the Almighty, Who willed to honor of this creature.

And when we reconsider the main verse of the book, we find it say:

“until they change what is in their souls (or minds);” (13:11):

That some notions may be placed into the soul, or mind, without their displacing others; and some notions may be implanted into the

mind by displacing others. This latter process is more important as far as the process of change is concerned. And this process has been left in the hands of humans.

We need to keep investigating and probing to understand this process, the task of bringing change to the notions in the soul. We are urged to keep exploring the soul in the following verse:

“And also in your own souls: will you not then see?” (51:21).

It is a grave mistake to neglect this issue when it lies at the heart of Muslims’ and indeed humanity’s crisis. To cleanse the soul and start building it up from zero is not accessible, for humans will not return to their initial and original state, *al-fitrah* as it is called in the Qur’an. Our current task will involve both elimination and implanting. Humans have inherited so many ‘heavy burdens and yokes that impede their progress’ [ref. to the Qur’an, 7:157] from all the past ages, that the souls labor under quite a heavy weight: in a way that it will take a lot of work to eliminate all that and replace it with better stuff. It is as if the soul gets overlaid with rust, which is referred to in the Qur’an: “On their hearts is the stain of the ill which they do;” (83:14); and we need to rub the rust away and bring back the soul's brightness.

For as it is, the soul, or mind, is incapable of undertaking its tasks; it really defeats all efforts at rising.

When you take the soul in its original or innate state (*al-fitrah* in Arabic), it was free from any influences: the only faculty it had was receptiveness; it had both instincts, to seek one's wrong or one's right. But some notions do enter the soul at a very early stage, when the human is a little child; and these impressions do settle deeply in the soul, and have their part in shaping his/her behavior.

We may understand this point better by reflecting on the following Tradition of the Messenger, peace be upon him: “Every newborn is born in a state of pure innate nature; it is its parents who cause it to be a Jew, a Magus, or a Christian;” and the three faiths mentioned in the Tradition must not be taken to be exclusive; they are examples, for the parents and immediate environment can implant in the child any faith; any influence can have its part in making the individual embrace some faith.

## HOW TO UNDERSTAND ‘AL-FITRAH’

An individual’s being born with nothing but *al-fitrah* must be understood in the light of the following verses of the Qur’an:

“By the soul, and the proportion and order given to it; and its enlightenment as to its wrong and its right – truly he succeeds that purifies it, and he fails who corrupts it;” (91:7-10).

This does not mean that an individual is born as Muslim; Yes, he/she is born with the potential to be Muslim; the actual process of making him actually a Muslim happens through 'purifying the soul' as the above verses teach. If left to himself/herself, the individual will not be a Muslim; he/she needs the influence of parents and the immediate environment to bring him/her to behave as Muslim; and that is what we actually observe in real life.

The meaning of *al-fitrah* more accurately is 'an innate inclination towards truth'; if left to himself/herself, without any adverse influence, an individual would choose truth. But this happens only if no negative influences are exercised.

If an individual is given the choice between two things, and he/she had not been influenced in any way before the two things were presented for choice, then he/she would, by their *fitrah*, or innate nature, choose the truth. This is a true result of the individual’s being offered two faiths, one being Islam: if that individual had no previous falsehoods to distort his/her vision, then, by *fitrah*, he/she would choose Islam. And this situation has often been observed in certain individuals’ and communities’ choosing Islam. But it must be added that the mind's being free from former influences is a delicate matter. Most souls have already borne burdens of adverse influences quite early in life, so that they would not act purely by *fitrah*. We have a Tradition of the Prophet’s, peace be upon him, to shed light on this: “the Lord says,” it



states, "I created My servants as believers in the true faith, all of them; but the devils whispered to them and deflected them from their right faith." Ibn Taymiah did discuss *al-fitrah*; and he says the following about it: "A human does possess the essential sense of truth, as long as his/her *fitrah* remains intact; but there does come over *fitrah* adverse influences, so that its vision is distorted, and the human would then see truth as false." (*Tariq al-Wusul ila l-Ilmi l-Ma'mul: A Selection from the Books of Ibn Taymiah; collected by Abdul-Rahman bin Naser al-Sa'di al-Najdi, p. 61; al-Imam Press, Egypt.*)

Elsewhere, Ibn Taymiah says: "When people dispute over issues that refer to intellectual basis, then no group should be held as having the truth on its side rather than another; they must all refer to pure *fitrah* which has not been deflected by some particular faith or the human's desires." (Ibid, p. 51)

We have also from Ibn Taymiah: "God created His creatures with *fitrah* to lead them; He sent to them His Messengers and revealed His Scriptures. For God's servants to be upon the upright way and to live a proper life, they need this *fitrah* integrated with the revealed law. It is the philosophers who did havoc to God-granted *fitrah* and His revealed faith: His creation and his commands." (Ibid, p. 41)

Al-Zamakhshari says in his book *al-Asas*: "God created His creation; and it is He Who originated the heavens and the earth; and each newborn human is born upon *fitrah* – and that means an inborn readiness to accept the true faith."

## PEOPLE'S CONDITION REFLECTS WHAT IS IN THEIR MINDS

There should be no doubt in our minds that God will definitely change the condition of a community or nation once they have changed

what is in their souls; we must accept this for it is the law laid down by God, and the Qur'an teaches us:

“But no change will you find in God's law (*sunnah*): no turning off will you find in God's law;” (35:43).

It is right to think of this change of the condition of a people in the same way as the change that God causes to happen when you set fire to something and it burns; it is God who effected the burning, and it was you who started the fire and brought something in contact with it. It is also true that the change to the condition of a people is in the same category of a heavy thing sinking when you throw it into water. You are in all these cases using God's law to bring about an effect.

It might be right to insert here a small diversion: that the Muslim scholars have had a long debate inquiring for instance: is the fire producing the burning (through its own nature created by God), or is it God who creates the burning when fire touches a piece of wood or paper? Is the knife producing the cutting of meat (by its nature created by God), or is it God who creates the cutting once the knife is pressed with some force against the meat? Many examples like this are discussed by the various Muslim scholars and they disputed long about that.

But let us not enter into this dispute. It suffices us to note that God's law causes a combustible thing to burn once it comes into contact with fire; and the eating of food to produce fulness; and the suitable medicine to produce healing; and the seed to grow plant when the conditions are right for that.

The characteristics of any material are created by the Almighty, from the tiniest particles of atoms and all the way up. All the characteristics and laws, or *sunan*, were created by God – and that goes for the inanimate and the animate worlds. Those characteristics and laws are fixed and invariable.

Why so, some might ask?

A whole world is concealed from us humans: the 'why'. For science and intellectual activity are not given the power to get at the

'why', why things are as we perceive them to be: why for instance does water consist of oxygen and hydrogen and nothing else?

It seems that to know that part of creation avails humans nothing; and it might be to this and similar questions that the Qur'an alludes in the following verse:

“Your Lord creates and chooses as He pleases: no choice humans have in creation;” (28:68).

This has been noticed by some researchers. In a book on experimental medicine we read: “A researcher who followed up a certain phenomenon to its inevitable causes can definitely notice that he/she does not know the first cause behind the phenomenon: that, however, does not prevent their having dominance over the phenomenon. He/she is ignorant of the power behind the perceived phenomenon, and yet can put it to use;” (p. 85).

It is useless then to take this direction of 'why' in research.

But it is otherwise when asking 'how?'

It is not in vain at all to inquire 'how?' and to devote time to examining 'how?'. To ask 'how' to obtain water? How to build a fire? How to bring up a human, with certain moral principles? How to establish a good society?

These last questions are certainly important and useful: indeed, it is with reference to these questions and by knowing the laws that govern the workings of things that the human is more and more in a position of controlling things in the universe. You may notice that it is to this question that the Qur'an directs humans: to know how things came to be as they are; here is a verse about that:

“Say: 'Travel through the earth and see how God originated creation;” (29:20).

A third question (apart from the questions on 'why?' or 'how?') might be: What is the purpose?

We should not say about this question it is pointless, and people will vary widely in divining the purpose behind things; many cannot penetrate beyond the visible and tangible; hence the verse of the Qur'an:

“He grants wisdom to whom He pleases; and he to whom wisdom is granted received indeed a benefit;” (2:269).

Humans are not in a position to bring laws, *sunan*, into being: this is not granted to humans. But they are granted the ability to discover the laws; to work as hard as they can to know more about the laws and to do all the research they can muster for that purpose; and then to put those laws to their use – in all this, they should acknowledge that the ability to dominate and have control is a blessing from God, and so they should turn to Him and praise Him.

It must be clearer by now that God does grant humans the ability to change what is in their souls and minds, and the souls and minds of others. Let me stress again that this excellent ability was granted to the human by God. And once we have placed certain notions in the mind, i.e. in the soul, that will be sure to lead to new conditions, new characteristics of the particular people: conditions like richness or poverty, dominance or subjugation ... and these qualities and states also proceed from God.

It is a marvel, this ability of controlling what is in the soul; it is something without match in the whole of creation. Hence the Qur'an's saying about it:

“By the soul, and the proportion and order given to it; and its enlightenment as to its wrong and its right – truly he succeeds that purifies it, and he fails that corrupts it;” (91:7-10).

Let it then be clear that it is God who gave the human soul the ability to choose the way of loss or the way of good guidance; but it is the human who chooses the right path 'purifies the soul', and so he is successful; or chooses the wrong path 'corrupts the soul', and so is unsuccessful. Let us think of the analogy with atoms and materials: when atoms are constructed in a particular way, and are combined in a certain way, the different combinations result in different materials; and, in the same way, the combination of ideas, in particular rates, will give to the individual, and society, the distinctive observed behavior.

It may be noticed that God has given the human an ability to control the contents of souls: this is the domain granted to the human,

in proportion to the effort he/she puts in. I hope to prove with sufficient evidence that this domain has been given to the human.

Those who have not been awakened to this fact, or have accepted some vague and inexact conception of this fact, must suffer from laziness and apathy, helplessness and fear. This reminds one that the Messenger, peace be upon him, used to seek refuge in God like this: “I seek refuge in You, O God, from care and sorrow, helplessness and indolence;”. And every time one recalls this Tradition, he/she must simultaneously recall the need to shun the ideas which lead to indolence and apathy – for, to pray like this without putting away the ideas that lead to such defects, it will be like the person described by the Prophet, peace be upon him, who raises his hands to the sky in prayer, and shouts: “O God, O God!” though he does not care to keep away from eating what is prohibited and drinking what is prohibited; who helps himself/herself to what is prohibited all the time.” We may say, in light of the above Tradition, that, for a person whose mind is nourished on corrupted notions, on superstitions and false concepts – on things that deny the importance of human action – they must think the worst about God: by assuming that God had made the human responsible, without granting him/her the necessary potential!

The traits we have mentioned, like indolence and lethargy, are, by God’s will, the natural result of superstitious and false ideas; the alternative is of course put in the hands of humans, by God’s Generosity and Compassion, if they endeavor to attain positive and fruitful ideas – in the same way as He honored humankind by giving them dominance over iron and fire.

Let this link between a people’s condition and what is in their souls be present in our minds in all endeavors and situations; for as soon as this link is blurred from vision, we shall be deterministic, whether we like it or not. This is because we shall have denied the human his/her role and contribution. Denial of this kind does not always seem explicit: it is not enough that we say in general, ‘Yes, the human has an active and vital part,’ and leave it there. We need instead to go on with this all the way; for this is a boon, an ability, from God that we may not disregard.

As long as this link remains obscure to our eyes, we not only would be deterministic, no matter how we deny it; we shall also not have shown our gratitude to God for His granting the ability He has granted.

## FOR CHANGE TO TAKE PLACE, BOTH CHANGES ARE NECESSARY

From our reasoning so far, it transpires that for change to take place, both changes must happen, the change brought about by the people, and the change caused to happen by God.

Of the two changes, the one which is people's responsibility must come first, as already pointed out; but what must here be affirmed is that there is a link between the two changes – by seeing merely the change done by God, you must infer that there has been a change brought about by the people. There must be no doubt that it is so, for it was God who made this order.

At the same time, if we notice the change realized by people, we must be sure that there must inevitably follow the change created by God: we know that since God has promised that, and God's promise must be fulfilled, for God never breaks a promise; and because of His law, his *sunnah*, as the above-quoted verse states: "But no change will you find in God's law (*sunnah*): no turning off will you find in God's law;" (35:43).

Again, it must be emphasized that this promise pertains to a people, a nation, a community, and not to an individual. Besides, it is in connection with this world not the Last Day. Should an individual change that which is in the soul, it does not necessarily follow that his/her condition will change – although in some aspects it does follow

that personal behavior follows upon a change in values and concepts. But our focus is here on the link established by the verse of the book – the social change and not an individual's change.

Once the general basis is clear, one may go on to say that any change that you may notice about the condition or state of a community: in awareness, health, economy, politics, supremacy, dignity – any kind of positive or negative change in people's fortune, must inevitably involve not one but two changes: that realized by the community, and that created by God.

I hope the law is clear enough by now: the inevitable and immediate succession of the two changes, the natural laws which organize change, and the fact that when the human is empowered to have his/her share in effecting change – that ability is only so because God willed to grant it to the human. We have a verse of the Qur'an to help us understand this:

“It is We Who have placed you with authority on earth;” (7:10).

As for the results, they have not been given to the human. What the human's effort must focus on is making use of the laws, laid down by God.

Some examples from the Qur'an will drive the idea home:

“Do you then see? – the human seed that you throw out – Is it you who create it, or are We the Creators? We have decreed death to be your common lot, and We are not to be frustrated. From changing your forms and creating you again in forms that you do not know. And you certainly know already the first form of creation: Why then do you not celebrate His praises? Do you see that the seed that you sow in the ground? Is it you that cause it to grow, or are We the Cause?” (56:58-64).

You see here both acts: the human has a part to do, and the creation follows from God. No matter how tiny you feel the human part to be, it is noted and made essential.

“Do you then see? – the human seed that you throw out?” It is the human who does this part, but it is not he/she who creates, nor is it they who had laid down the laws. You see how tiny the human part is,

and how amazing the result created by the Almighty is! This result is described elsewhere as:

“So blessed be God, the Best to create!” (23:14).

This example must help in seeing the distinction between the human act and God’s creation. In the growth of plant, the same order may be observed. It is the human who sows the seeds and irrigates them; but the law of growing comes from God: you see how minimal the human part is compared with the splendid fruit. It is the most evident of examples the Qur’an presents, in a way that the simplest of humans can appreciate them, for they are of the experience of the simplest of humans. These examples must bring satisfaction to the believer’s heart that we are dealing with a sound principle, and also an extremely vital one, when we are dealing with the society’s place in the world, and the individual’s place in the Hereafter.

And now, we may proceed one more step and say that the Qur’an does not on every occasion mention both sides of the change – it often mentions the social change and expects us to understand its link with the other change. It often does mention both changes, as in:

“Verily never will God change the condition of a people until they change what is in their souls (or minds);” (13:11).

And that is so in many other locations of the Qur’an, as:

“But because of their breach of their Covenant, We cursed them, and made their hearts grow hard;” (5:13). You see here how they are responsible for letting their souls accept this making light of the Covenant, and, as a result, God made their hearts hard.

In the same way, the Qur’an says:

“Then when they went wrong, God let their hearts go wrong;” (61:5).

In the above verses, both parts to the action are mentioned: the particular community does something, and the sure result comes from God. But it is not always that the Qur’an mentions both sides: often, one side is mentioned, and it is implied that both changes exist, for the link is clear. When, for instance, you look at the Lord’s saying:



“Nor does God give guidance to a people unjust;” (2:258) you have both sides to the change: for the change that God creates – not guiding those people – is the result of their taking light the committing of injustice; and this implies the converse rule, that God will not change a people’s condition of losing guidance to guidance, until they change their exercising injustice, or changing the illusions and ideas in their souls which make it possible for them to commit injustice.

To have the main verse and this rule of ‘the part to be realized by the humans’ and the ‘part God will create’, be consistent in one’s consideration all the time – this duality, the two parts, must be present in their minds all the time: this must be firmly remembered whenever we are dealing with what happens to communities and nations. This is the way to avoid falling into the illusion of one side happening without the other.

When for instance you find a verse tell you that God has blessed some group, supporting them, honoring them, that He provided them with plenty of the good things of life, you must at once link it to those people’s having achieved a change in their own perceptions, values, ideas, to merit God’s blessing. And conversely, when you see some verse telling of some disaster befalling a particular group, you must at once call to mind that they had committed, at the level of their souls, what brought upon them the disasters. With God, what He does to people is invariably "because of that the hands of men have earned;" (the Qur’an, 30:41).

This linking is all that I am endeavoring to drive into the minds of people in this book. And I am not the first to do it. In the course of his commentary of the verse of the Qur’an:

“God has set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing, and on their eyes is a veil;” (2:7) the renowned commentator Ibn Kathir reported, on the authority of Ibn Jarir al-Tabari the latter’s objection to some people’s assuming that God ‘seals the mind’ of certain people, so that they are too ignorant to listen to the call of truth. It cannot be that God singles out somebody to condemn them to this without their having committed the justifying sin to begin with. When another commentator, al-Zamakhshary dwells long on why God would seal the hearts of certain people so that they are unable to heed God’s guidance, Ibn Kathir

comments that the latter was only writing in light of his being a Mu'tazilite. Being a Mu'tazilite, it is incompatible with God's loftiness, in his view, that He seals hearts, for it is unpleasant behavior. But – Ibn Kathir goes on to say – had he, al-Zamakhshari, understood such verses of the Qur'an like: "then when they went wrong, God let their hearts go wrong;" (61:5) and "We shall turn to confusion their hearts and their eyes, even as they refused to believe in the first instance: We shall leave them in their trespasses, to wander in distraction;" (6:110) he would not have said what he did say – as verses like these would have told him that when God 'seals their hearts' and when He 'blocks their way to good guidance'; it was no more than the fair retribution for their wading into the false way and abandoning truth; he would have seen that what the Lord did here, as always, was just and right, not unpleasant. So, what al-Zamakhshari said was because of his failing to reflect on the above verses.

In the same spirit, al-Qurtubi says: "It is unanimously agreed by Muslim scholars that when the Almighty asserts that He sealed the hearts of unbelievers – that is no more than just retribution for their disbelief."

What Ibn Kathir is saying in his refutation of the Mu'tazila stand is no more than stating in clear terms the same principle I have tried to establish here, that when God seals the hearts of a people, it is only the right outcome of their own choosing to stray and to opt for disbelief. The law is sound here, as ever.

Ibn Kathir noticed how, while the Qur'an often mentions both the acts of the Lord and of people, distinctly and succinctly, it does not always mention both – at times, the Qur'an mentions one side, with the understanding that the other side is implied. Ibn Kathir understands this, and so he discussed the verse which mentioned just one side, and used the two other verses clearly and in detail to complete the picture.

One verse which has caused a lot of doubt, when the Muslim fails to link the two sides, is this:

"Say: 'O God! Lord of Power and Rule, You give power to whom You please, and You strip off power from whom You please; You endure with honor whom You please, and You bring low whom

You please: in Your hand is all good. Verily, over all things You have power;” (3: 26).

This verse mentions only one side: when God gives rule and denies kingship; gives honor and withdraws it. And God here cites His Will as the sufficient cause for His granting or denying something – not mentioning here the part of the people: it is the Almighty Who decides, and nobody else.

Also, we have in the Qur’an: “But you will not, except as God wills; for God is full of Knowledge and Wisdom;” (76:31) God is here admitting to His mercy whomever He chooses; and as we are further told in the next verse: “the wrong-doers – for them He has prepared a grievous penalty;”.

Each will choose to interpret this ‘as God wills’ the way they like, but no, they have no right to do so; for God has determined, by this Will of His to deal with human communities according to definite rules. And the formula for God’s dealing with human societies is expressed in the main verse of the book: “Verily never will God change the condition of a people until they change what is in their souls;” (13:11). No progress and no change can take place unless this rule is well remembered in the Muslims’ minds.

Another useful thing to mention here is a principle that Ibn Taymiah has repeated many times: that when you mention Allah’s Will ‘*mashi’ah* in Arabic’, this *mashi’ah* is used in one of two senses:

1. A creative *mashi’ah*; and
2. A legislative *mashi’ah*.

To suffer from a disease is a creative Will, or *mashi’ah*, and this can be countered and changed by knowing its cause and the ways to curing it.

Paying *zakat* is a legislative Will, or *mashi’ah*, which may not be disobeyed, nor is a Muslim to play tricks to avoid paying it, but God does not force the human to do it.

It is a gross mistake to assume that God will give dominance or kingship to a people who have not taken the suitable steps for dominance being bestowed on them; the same with honoring or

subjugation: none of these states are given haphazardly. It seems that the origin of this mistake is confusing God with the tyrannical humans, not even the just ones.

Nothing is further from truth, to think of God like this – for we know that God is the Fairest of the fair, the Most Just of the just – it is incumbent on those who have been bound by the Covenant, when they were taught the Book, to announce the facts of the Book to people and not to suppress them.

It may be said that, just as Ibn Kathir took al-Zamakhshari to task, for he failed to remember a verse like “then when they went wrong, God let their hearts go wrong;” (61:5) and so messed things up, Muslims have failed to see the whole picture: if they look at the law in its entirety, they will not say that wrong thing about God. It is the confusion in their minds that makes them stand bewildered before things.

We may say then: it is God’s *mashi’ah* that He enables a human to purify their soul or to corrupt it: it is not His *mashi’ah* to enable them of one and not the other. Let us not deny, however, that the time might come when the human loses this ability; that a human may let himself/herself drift and drift along the way of corruption and misguidance, until God seals his/her heart, and then they are unable to go back to the way of guidance: it is then true of them what the following verse of the Qur’an states: “he whom God leave to stray – for him you will find no protector to lead him to the Right Way;” (18:17)

And this is what the latter part of our main verse asserts: “But when God wills a people's punishment, there can be no turning it back, nor will they find, beside Him, any to protect;” (13:11).

We have more clarification in a Tradition of the Prophet’s, peace be upon him, a well-known Tradition about the crises that a believer is exposed to; in that Tradition the Prophet, peace be upon him, compares the trials that hearts are exposed to to the stalks of straw used for making a mat: each is examined, and some sticks are accepted while some are rejected. So, the individual is at the beginning free to accept or reject; but if he/she let themselves go with the flow of perversion, and their *fitrah*, i.e. innate sense of what is right, is corrupted, he/she may reach a point when the freedom, the ability to choose, which he/she had originally had, is lost. But that is again something that the human has

brought upon himself/herself. It is a mistake to think that God creates the human like that or imposes perversion on them.

Let us elaborate a little the topic of God's creating the properties of action: The Almighty God creates actions with thought as their basis – in this way weak and confused thoughts produce dissatisfactory and incomplete actions. For one to see an application of this, let him/her just watch the modern Muslim society – after its consciousness being exposed to all sorts of change and forgetfulness.

By knowing the properties created by God of the diverse materials, one can have control of them. In the same way, by knowing the contents of souls, or minds, those interested in hegemony can dominate the society. This idea is really one of the prominent ideas taught by the prophets. Books were revealed from heaven for that purpose; and the believers were ordered to learn about what happens on the earth, and to investigate the world inside the souls. Muslims need this science, and without reviving it, and without active understanding of these domains, we have no alternative but to witness more chaos and disunity; besides the anxiety and indecision.

## THE OTHERS' IDEA OF CHANGE

This book has, over its chapters, discussed the idea of change, in the light of the Qur'anic verse:

“Verily never will God change the condition of a people until they change what is in their souls;” (13:11).

We have discussed the change created by God as the outcome, and the change that humans realize, as the cause which is sure to lead to the change in their situation; how it is on this aspect that the humans' effort needs to focus. I have tried to cite quite a few examples to support

this pairing of the two aspects of action: from the creation of the humans and the growing of plant: how the human part is tiny, but essential. We have focused on the human behavior as the occupying a pivotal place in this principle – hence our elaboration of this aspect. We have seen how a human’s behavior will change in response and in proportion to the components in his/her own soul. We stressed the possibility of changing what is in the soul – which is a task enjoined on the humans themselves. We showed that the change as presented in the Qur’an is true of all communities, a law that applies to all nations and groups, and I made it clear that this law is essentially for communities and not individuals. There will be more side issues to this main issue: like the fact that what exists in the mind, or soul, varies widely in depth, and the consequences of this must be discussed; there will also be some discussion of the effect of subconscious thought on behavior; and more secondary points must be handled.

But of that later. At this juncture, let us think of another related topic. The issue of change has lately attracted a great deal of interest in the world. The communists in particular consider themselves as the real bearers of the torch of change. That is why they claim to be modernist, while everyone else according to them is metaphysical, backward, and utopian; they dismiss the approach of anyone other than them as denying themselves the ability to control history.

In their preface to the dialectic process, as Marx and Angeles pointed out, they consider the other philosophers as having explained the world, while the real task is how to change it.

In one of their books, for instance, *People, Science, and Society*, written by six Russian scholars, the authors address the following question: “What part do people have in shaping history? Is history an inevitable process, something like the destiny of gods? If so, why try? Does any of us strive to see summer and spring come? The law of history is different from nature’s; the former proceeds through human activity; history’s laws do not act automatically. It is humans who shape their history, through human effort; and people are varied as to the degree they comprehend the needs of the long-term social development;” (p. 69) and the same book has, on p. 87: “In its revelation of the laws of social development, and by putting forward a scientific

view of the world, Marxism has become a spiritual arsenal in the hand of the proletariat.”

In *The Dialectic*, one reads: “The third merit of the Marxist philosophy: In the same way as the laws of the development of nature have been discovered, the laws of the development of society can be discovered: these, too, are objectively significant. And hence, despite the complexity and intricacy of the events of social life, it is possible to turn that into an exact science, enjoying the exactness of biology. When this is realized, we can use the laws of social development in scientific applications: it is then that socialism will become a science.”<sup>1</sup>

This merit they claim to have over other groups is justification enough, according to them, to reject any degree of belief in revealed religion; and that is why they say in the same *The Dialectic*: “When nature is alone our source of drawing the objective reality, then one must completely reject any theory based on faith.”

But we think otherwise, and that is what I keep bringing out and stressing: that when we have learned to perceive God’s signs in the world around us ‘in the furthest regions of the earth and in their own souls,’ as the Qur’an puts it (41:53) we find in them a confirmation of God’s Signs, or verses, of the Scripture – this is so since we have been taught by the Qur’an itself: “Soon will We show them Our Signs in the furthest regions of the earth and in their own souls, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the Truth;” (41:53).

At the same time, we have been taught by the Qur’an not to deny people what is due to them, and that a wise thing might come from a person we do not personally favor: but there is no harm in not approving of somebody as a person, but learning from his insights. So, when we consider the Marxist theory, we do not mind admitting the right things in it: we do not reject the good things in their writing together with our rejection of their disbelief.

---

<sup>1</sup> It is true that they have affirmed the existence of the laws of society. However, they do not go beyond the existence of laws; their reading of those laws has proved to be extremely limited, for they confine it to the means of production; while the means of production play a tiny part in changing what is in the souls. It must be admitted, however, that their recent writings have proved that they are moving out of that limitedness, at least partially.

When a Marxist says: ‘The study of social history has become a scientific enterprise,’ we must not say: ‘Wrong!’ We say he/she is right there. We similarly consent to their asserting that nature has the potential to give us objective facts: in fact we go further by saying not only nature, but the world of souls and minds can provide us with objective facts.

We do contradict them, however, when they declare: “then one must completely reject any theory based on faith;” for there is nothing in the premise to lead one to that conclusion: it is this claim which is utopian, for it emanates from negative attitudes, not from objective study.

It is indeed as al-‘Aqqad said of the two camps of Christians and atheists of the seventeenth century, that both parties set out from the same premise and arrived at the same conclusion: that if the earth is proved to be going round itself, then there is no need for God.

So, it appears that for the Marxists it works in the same way, when they jump from affirming the social laws of development to denying faith. But how is that? Why should they, when they come to notice the laws of society’s development, in the same way as scientists before them noticed the laws of the movement of stars and planets, conclude that there is no need for faith?

Al-Ghazali would not be deflected like that. He said in his book: *The Savior from Aberration*:

“When I know that ten is more than three; and then someone says: ‘No, three is more than ten, and, for a proof, I can now transfigure this rod into a serpent,’ and if he actually does it, and I see it with my own eyes, that would not shake my confidence in my knowledge. I would just wonder how he managed it. But that would not make me skeptical about what I know to be true.”

We have a similar situation at our time. When proofs are brought to our notice that it is possible to bring change to society using scientific methods, and when those who do it use that as a justification for rejecting faith, we must not feel put out ... let us rather reflect and try to understand the laws that they had relied on for their own purposes. If



we follow this approach, it will safeguard us from being subdued by them.

But we have come full circle to the same point: nothing comes before learning to deal with God's laws in the world around us and in the world of the souls.

## PSYCHOLOGY – INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETAL

We hear of psychology and sociology as two sciences, independent one from the other; in dealing with the actual reality, however, we find that the limits between the two sciences are not easy to establish decisively; the boundaries are often blurred.

There is no psychology that deals with the individual as independent from the rest of existence; such an individual is inexistent, and even if he/she were to be found, they would be more of a brute than a human. What transfers the human from the animality to humanity is his/her acquiring experiences from early childhood and later life. A society also started as a savage aggregate of people, who did not have the sense of covering their private parts. But time passed, and the human community learned experiences, from generation to generation, in addition to the prophets' heritage. Any human after that earliest generation did not live in a vacuum: there is a heritage that keeps expanding and expanding. And any child who now grows in any community inherits what has accumulated over the numberless generations.

But when they treat psychology as an independent science, they will be investigating the individual's ability to receive concepts from

his/her environment and to adapt to it. None of these abilities are of use away from a community.

And there is no psychology of independent individuals, in the real sense, when the human species does not survive without the male and female living together. The social life of the living species progresses from species to species, which reflects the species' rank among the living things. The turtle for instance only lays its eggs and that is all: it does not sit on the eggs until they hatch. The birds are higher in rank, for the mother sits on the eggs until they hatch, and carefully cares for the little chicks, after they have come out. The mammals learn from their parents through association. As H. G. Wells has noticed: "This training which is exercised by the caring and affectionate parents has evoked in observers a new level of awareness – and this is new in people's experience, for they did not appreciate this idea in the past." (*Outline of Human History*, [Arabic translation], Vol. 1, p. 61; pub. in Cairo, 1956).

The essential instinct of caring and affection is found in the animals and the humans; this instinct rises in the human to the level of altruism, and that is the foundation of superior social life; as the Qur'an points out: "and give them preference over themselves, even though poverty was their own lot;" (59:9).

The human needs the longest period of nurturance, or childhood, longer than any species; for he/she absorbs during this long period the heritage of many generations. Hence the vital importance of the stage of childhood, for it is during this period that the individual adapts to the specific type of social life in which he/she grows – absorbing its values and traditions; the impact of the environment on the development of the human is huge; hence the Prophet's Tradition: "Each newborn is born with *fitrah* (free from bearing any faith); it is its parents who make of it a Jew, a Christian, or a Magus." It is society which gives to the individual who grows in it his/her values and ways of viewing things.

It is by discovering the laws, i.e. *sunan*, of socialization, i.e. the individual's merging into society that gives humans the power of molding society; and molding the individual through the molding of society. It is the mechanism through which the community gains the state of 'we', when the individual identifies himself/herself as part of

the social entity. It is true that communities vary widely, but the laws that apply to them are the same.

This was mentioned above, the general nature of the laws that govern communities and nations, and that despite the vast differences among the various peoples when we discuss details.

Levine said about that in 1943: “We need not be disheartened by the hardships that stand in our way. In my view, the social scientists are right in their confidence, and somewhat pride, about what has been realized in the last few years. For who would have dared a few years back to predict that we could one day gauge the social atmosphere, to determine the parameters of leaders and train them, to investigate the community’s constituents, and to plan for putting right the social activities – all of which is now possible.” (quoted in *The Psychological Bases of Social Integration*, [Arabic translation] by Mustafa Sweif, p. 300; Dar al-Ma’aref Press, Egypt, 1955.)

By perceiving the impact of congregational worship, the similarities of attire and the identical way of greeting on social cohesion – this brings such rituals under new light; for they acquire much more value, and it invigorates them with a new life.

The same thing happened during the development of sociology as happened in all sciences – astronomy, natural history, biology: that at its inception it appeared as an enemy of faith. Those who know the development of astronomy can tell you what happened at certain stages of its progress; and the same happened in psychology and sociology.

I myself have had to live this experience, in relation to psychology and sociology. In the mid-fifties we had to study this science at al-Azhar University, and our instructor was a specialist. I cannot express with how much indifference we received the material, and with what listlessness he imparted it; I felt even the mutual aversion that we exchanged with the professor. The reason is that he could not impart that science as God’s Signs in the regions of the world and souls (see the Qur'an: 41:53); nor link the facts to the Revealed Book, testifying to its truth. And it goes without saying that we were even less capable of establishing such link.

This is not the problem of that particular professor. Many sciences are being catered to the rising generation as incompatible with faith, or even hostile to faith – that has proved to be a barrier between Muslims and benefiting from those sciences.

And the abyss between Muslims and science, any science, will persist unless the knowledgeable come forward and work on removing this barrier of the assumed incompatibility between science and religion.

There is another problem, in relation with psychology in particular; for people associated it early on with the name of Freud, and his giving the sexual drive a dominant place in accounting for human behavior. More generally, psychology has been presented as unrelated to religion and faith, or even that it contradicts religion and faith. In all that, these vital topics remain out of reach, like wild beasts in the jungle; and they wait to be set free from that.

This is especially true in relation to the Muslim world, for Muslims still view this science as alien and untamed: we will need to put in a lot of effort to bring this and all vital sciences to be of advantage, to have science used for changing what is in Muslims' souls, and the first step will be revealing what there is to change.

Things are taking too long to be realized; for all the above things are long overdue. Truth is still confused with falsehood: too long confused to a point that one would wonder if the confusion is being preserved on purpose. Yes, this may be so in some cases, but not all. Every time I take up this situation I remember that the Messenger, peace be upon him, was prompt to dispel any confusion – we read in one Tradition that: “people heard one day a loud, unidentifiable noise in Medina, so the Prophet, peace be upon him, jumped to the back of the nearest horse, and rushed towards the noise, then people ran after him, but they met him on his way back, crying: ‘I find no cause of alarm,’” (al-Bukhari narrates this Tradition several times, with a different introductory statement every time, like: ‘The leader’s hurrying in case of alarm,’ ‘Going alone in case of alarm,’ ‘Hurry and running in case of alarm,’).

In the above Tradition, the danger was military, and you see how the Prophet lost no time in going out, exploring the situation, and coming back to put people at rest concerning the danger. But is there no

danger at our doors at this time, a cultural raid, a cultural alarm? Is it not the duty of all those who have knowledge to hurry and be the first to explore and bring back the news to their communities about the real situation? Indeed, the cultural attack will leave behind more casualties, and more loss of all that is dear, than any military attack; and it lasts much more.

I feel obliged, before I leave this point, and having mentioned the instructor who came with a confused mind about psychology and sociology, to mention a very different instructor, Sheikh Muhammad Arafah. This latter used to urge us in his lectures to study psychology – he said it was the message that he wanted to leave with the young men attending his classes. He used to stress, whenever he discussed the problem of Muslims’ backwardness, that there was no way of solving this dilemma but through a thorough study of the laws of souls and minds.

I also feel obliged to mention a chapter from Malek Bennabi’s *In the Thick of the Battle*, about the dead ideas and the lethal ideas; in which he wrote creatively about the negative factors a Muslim suffers from when in contact with the world of culture.

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A HUMAN’S BEHAVIOR AND WHAT IS IN HIS/HER SOUL

We have reached a point when it may be asserted that an individual’s behavior and whatever he/she does are really acts of God, created by God – but let this not be understood as supporting the passive attitude of those who misunderstand the verse of the Qur’an:

“But God has created you and your handiwork;” (37:96) as denying the human any part. Nor is it a revival of what used to be discussed by scholars of theology, who discussed at length whether the behaviors of humans were the creation of God. What concerns us here is that a human’s behavior is a response, an outcome; it is to stress that the outcome of causes is created by the Almighty God directly, and no one else has a hand in that. This is what the Qur’an states when it says:

“Your Lord creates and chooses as He pleases: no choice have they in the matter;” (28:68).

But it is equally important to remember that there is a part here that God made humans responsible for, and He asserted it: to change that which is in the soul. That part, which is the humans’ responsibility, will produce action.

It may be observed here that there is mentally no link between cause and effect: it may be noticed that it is only through observation that we ascertain the existence of such link. We see something happen as a result of something else, and we feel confident that there is this association. But why is it that a specific phenomenon results in another phenomenon? Why this and nothing else? This is more than humans can answer; it is beyond our limits – what is within our limits is to learn how a specific act or phenomenon results in another act or phenomenon, to observe how a specific event resulted from a specific cause – to learn about causes and effects and turn that to our benefit. To know that wards off harmful surprises and, through it, we gain good results.

It is right to recall here the examples mentioned in the Qur’an, those of the creation of the human and the growing of plant, etc. In these situations, the human does something, and the Lord creates the result – a human, fruit, etc. (as in verses 58 through 74 of Sura 56). In the same way, when we have ideas that the minds, or souls, acquire or admit, they will result in actions, and that by the creation of God. In the same way as we are enabled to sow seeds of grapes, olives, and pomegranates, then to reap the grown fruits, we are enabled to sow ideas in the soul, and each idea or group of ideas will result in definite acts. In the same way as we are not enabled to have the palm tree produce water melons, the ideas must result in certain actions and not different ones. This part belongs to God and not to the human.

An example is that God created certain materials as conductors of electricity, and some as insulators. The right approach to this is not in asking why a certain material was created as conductor or insulator, but to check how to turn that property to control electricity and use it to our benefit.

The same may be said in dealing with the human – the useful question is not: why a certain act resulted from a particular idea? The useful question is to ask: how may we get rid of that and that idea which result in that action, and how to implant that idea which results in that behavior. This is what God has enabled us to do, and it is in this way that the human is responsible for his/her behavior.

When we say that a human's behavior results from his/her ideas, or, more accurately, from the content of their soul, the ideas may be brought into the soul through the effort of the individual himself/herself or by others' intervention. This change is inevitable, and it may seem amazing how different the new behavior is from the old – it can be its opposite: boldness can change into withdrawal; or happiness into grief; or resolution into lethargy.

From the above we must say, when we notice that Muslims' behavior is incompatible with their own interests, that they hold in their souls wrong conceptions of their crisis; that what is in their souls must undergo change in order for their behavior to change. You may probe this to ascertain how they think and find that they do not believe in the usefulness of their undertaking any deed, or that what they seek is inaccessible. Here are two examples about what is in the mind and its relation with one's behavior:

#### FIRST EXAMPLE:

They say that a giant was so powerful that his fame spread everywhere, and he felt to be the most powerful giant in the world. Another giant, bigger and stronger than the former one, and living in a neighboring country, learnt of this first giant, and wished to be acquainted with the other giant, and so he sent him a courteous letter offering that they get acquainted and be friends. But the reply that he

received was quite rough, for the other giant wrote to him with despise, telling him to know his limits and not to rise above his level.

Now the bigger giant was furious, and he decided to take revenge on the conceited giant; so he took his cudgel and went in the direction of the other giant's land. When he approached, the first giant felt the land shake under the bigger giant's tread, so he lost nerve and he was pale. His wife understood his feeling, and so told him to lie in bed, then she covered him. When the other giant entered, boiling over with rage, he asked where the insolent and conceited giant was, to just make him know his real worth, and how to address people. But the wife ordered him to lower his voice, for if he woke up the sleeping child, (and she pointed to the protruding feet from under the sheet) her husband would be quite nasty.

"His child?" The other giant said to himself. "If his child is as huge as that, what size will the father be?" And this giant, who had known no fear in the past, felt scared now, and retreated towards his home in a hurry.

Despite its being a myth, we do experience some interaction with this story, for its events reflect the psychological laws of life. Its author does reflect the values he/she had absorbed from culture, whether we find these values superior or inferior. If the above fable stresses the human succumbing to superior strength, we have in the Qur'an Pharaoh's magicians who, having embraced the true faith, they showed a completely different attitude. Just a few hours ago, they showed complete submission to Pharaoh, saying: "By the might of Pharaoh, it is we who will certainly win!" (26:44). But now, after discovering the truth, they raise their head above the most tyrannical of tyrants, and said:

"Never shall we regard you as more than the Clear Signs that have come to us, nor than Him Who created us! So decree whatever you desire to decree: for you can only decree touching the life of this world;" (20:72).

So, the first story, though mythical, shows how, for the haughty and arrogant, he will keep holding to his arrogance as long as he has the power, but loses heart once he loses it; but for the magicians after they discovered the way of faith, their determination sustained the cruelest and mightiest test, for their determination derived from their faith, not



from muscular strength. A believer must neither be haughty when he/she is in a strong position, nor lose heart when he/she is in a weak position.

We have in Joseph's story an excellent example of the young man showing firmness before the call of desire; one may contrast this with the stories that spread in the world, and in which one is expected to admire individuals who succumb to their desires and animal drive.

But, to return to our main discussion, we find, in the mythical fable, how a human will definitely act in accordance with what he/she has in their mind, no matter how superior or inferior the contents might be: Having courage or cowardice, boldness or diffidence – all such attitudes are in the soul. Once that which is in the soul changes, an individual's behavior will follow suit without delay, and the change can be to the better or to the worse. If you wish to have control of people, then look for ways to changing what they have in their souls.

The woman in the myth understood this, and she had the smartness to change the giant's behavior with a small trick on what he had inside his self. It is not different from discovering the button which you push to have the fan start to turn. Is not this what is happening to the Muslim world?

## A SECOND EXAMPLE

Our second example will this time be drawn from the Prophet's biography, and particularly from the Battle of *Khandaq*. I refer to Ibn Qayyem's *Zad al-Ma'ad* for the details; he says:

“Then the Almighty showed kindness to the believers, to weaken the enemies' lines. A man from the tribe of Ghatafan, named Nu'aim bin Mas'ud bin 'Amer, came to the Messenger, peace be upon him, and said: 'O, Messenger of God, I have embraced Islam, so command me what I may do.' 'Well!' the Messenger, peace be upon him said; 'You are just one man, so find ways of breaking the lines around us; for nothing wins a battle like a trick.'” So, Nu'aim went at once to the Quraizah tribe (a Jewish tribe), with which he had been on intimate terms before Islam, and said, without their being aware of his conversion: “Look here,

Quraizah! So you have engaged in fighting Muhammad; and as soon as Quraish feels fit, and unless they win immediate victory, they will withdraw to their town and leave you to your fate, when Muhammad will take revenge on you.” “So what do advise us to do, Nu’aim?” they said. “Get some men from them, to be your guarantee,” he said; “and if they refuse, announce that you will no longer fight with them.” “You speak sense,” they said. Then he forestalled them and went to Quraish, and said: “Do you doubt my good intentions and intimacy for you?” “Never,” they said. “I happen to know that the Jews are repentant for their part in this war, for they have by engaging in it broken their covenant with Muhammad and the Muslims; and they have done some correspondence with Muhammad and promised to take some men from you as hostages, then pass them to him; and then to be on his side against you. So, beware of passing any men to them if they ask for that.” Next, Nu’aim went to Ghatafan tribe (the third force against the Muslims), and said the same to them. Now it was the first Saturday of the month of Shawwal, and Quraish and Ghatafan sent emissaries to Quraizah, saying: “You know we are far from home, and so we are losing our transport animals rapidly, having not enough fodder, so let us all rise and engage Muhammad without more ado.” The Jews’ reply was: “You know today is Saturday, a day when we engage in no fighting, especially when you know what happened to Jews before us when they desecrated this day; but more than that, we shall not fight with you unless you send us some men as hostages.” When the Quraishi emissaries returned with this reply, the Quraishis said to each other: “Is that not what Nu’aim warned you against? By God he told us the truth.” And soon the two teams broke up.” It was as God described it in the Qur’an:

“And God turned back the Unbelievers for all their fury: no advantage did they gain;” (33:25).

What we have here is changing what is in people’s souls in an effective way; Nu’aim is here successfully carrying out his plan, for he hoped for, and achieved, a change in the combatants’ attitudes and hence their behavior. Of course, he knew enough about all the parties, and leaned well on his previous relations with the particular groups; and he correctly predicted how the Quraizah and Quraish tribes would be reacting – all this indicated for him the right approach, exactly tailored to suit the specific situation: he actually did a great job.

As for our purpose, we see here a very clear example of making the best of intervention at the level of the contents of the minds with a view to changing attitudes and behaviors.

### A THIRD EXAMPLE

Some persons are in the present age quite alert to this method, since, with not much effort at the souls' level, and with sufficient knowledge of the targeted people's psychology and history, and after ascertaining what they would most readily accept, the concerned party can manipulate all that for bringing about the desired change.

It is true that those who scramble to have the first place in dominating the world, and to steer it as they desire, do now act upon this principle of effecting change inside to see the desired change outside take place.

We read in the book Methods of Foreign Policy:

“Diplomacy, any diplomacy including the American, can do nothing beyond manipulating the intention of the statesmen of foreign countries in order to realize our own objectives. For this target of subjugating the intention, America will have to exploit all the available means of foreign policy, including the political, military, economic, and psychological ones.”

In the same book, we have this about the foreign policy in the domain of culture and ideology:

“America tries to realize its objectives in foreign parts through psychological means. Such means seem less relevant to politics than the economic and military means, but they are not different from them when you come to the desired objective. America puts to use all the diverse means, including the social, cultural, and ideological relations to expand the area of mutual understanding ... and this includes influencing the attitudes of both friends and foes, and the neutral, each in a way that suits their state. The above means rarely accomplish the objective attached to them – for they lead mostly to reactive positions that are opposite to the required objective, and they achieve less unless they are used together with other approaches. That Americans are so keen to

resort to such means reflects their desire to reach an alternative for the pure political means, and their anxiety to penetrate the thick official curtains ... To use the psychological tool for modifying the attitudes of individuals and groups in foreign lands is one of the functions of the American diplomatic representatives abroad, and also the persons concerned with foreign policy at home. This, by the way, is the most important function of CIA which supervise the VOA, and other media and cultural programs, that address foreign nations.

“It is in view of the importance of the above means, known collectively as the ‘psychological warfare’, that Truman launched a supreme council for psychological strategy, whose task is to recommend programs of this kind and to coordinate efforts.

“Eisenhower realized that the psychological methods would be most efficient if they were employed in coordination with the general policy – hence his transforming the “Council of Psychological Strategy” into “Council of Coordinating Operations”.

## WHAT IS IN THE SELF LEADS TO RESULTS EVEN WHEN IT IS FALSE

A human’s behavior will inevitably follow upon what is in his/her self, no matter whether what in the self is true or false. It so often happens that a human believes in a certain illusion, and holds on to it as if it were the absolute truth. This imagined thing will then dominate the particular person’s behavior and attitudes towards events. This means that those who hold on to illusions concerning anything will behave in line with this illusion: it is something that is registered inside their self, and they will act in accordance with it. We have seen examples about how this works: we have seen how the giant behaved at seeing the feet, for it seemed to him that the father of a child who had such feet must be

quite massive. His immediate withdrawal from the scene came as a result of the misinformation that he believed. His behavior seems silly to us, only because we know the reality of the situation. To the giant himself, it was not funny at all. At his flight, the situation seemed most serious.

But what concerns us here is to transfer this rule to nations and groups: for here, too, people may hold on to an untenable concept about an adversary or friend. That may happen spontaneously, as when the giant set out to do mischief to the other, on the basis of the image he bore in mind about the other giant; so that he was impatient to subdue that other giant. And then, the same giant withdrew with great consternation. Such swinging between attitudes and behaviors may happen time after time, as long as the individual draws his/her representation of the subject not from facts, but from illusions and subjective estimation of the situation. There is, however, the other situation, in which a well-seasoned expert will implant the false image. However, in any case, what is needed to get rid of the illusion is understanding the issue well. And the only way to correct a mistaken comprehension is through having alert vision and hearing, in order to perceive things for what they are.

But how will a Muslim have the alert vision and hearing, when he/she thinks that just to have active vision and hearing is more dangerous than any other danger? It may be hard to count the many imagined barriers the Muslim world has erected and which turned into stumbling blocks. It may suffice for example to remember how huge the feet of the Wahhabi movement seemed to the Muslim world, and how great its terror at it was, when its essence was no more than a call to not accept a ruling as Islamic without proof.

We find some good lines on this issue in Al-Ghazali's *al-Mustasfa*, where he discussed the debate concerning the 'good' and the 'bad'; he says: "A third mistake is caused by the mind's jumping to the opposite as the true thing ... One example of this is the bitten person's scare at seeing a spotted rope ... Indeed, minds are created to behave like this: to tend to accept illusions, even when they are definitely erroneous. It is in the human's disposition to be averse towards a pretty woman if she bears a Jewish name. Also that people tend to feel hostile towards doctrines that are reported to have been put forward by persons

we think the worst about – this is indeed not confined to the commoners: you find it common among the well-educated and those assumed to be scholarly; the only exclusion is scholars with a sound basis of knowledge – for these have been guided by God to perceive the truth, and supported by Him to follow it. The majority, on the other hand, have in their soul an inclination to follow false illusions ... in fact most of what people go ahead in doing or hold back from is dictated by these illusions. An illusion has a most tight hold on the self; that is why it is quite natural for the human to dread sleeping at a place where there is a corpse. So, beware of these illusions.”

This topic is a huge thing, like a sea with all its violent waves; it is good to remember how many stages humans have had to go through until they reached some degree of clarity about many phenomena, and then for their manipulation. It is one thing to have a simple, intuitive knowledge of something and it is a quite different thing to have it developed into scientific knowledge that may be put at the disposal of those who are interested in using the idea for putting right the humans’ problems.

We need to put in the necessary effort to rid people of illusions, and to protect society. It is true that al-Ghazali gives us only a few lines about it, but the light he directs is quite powerful. The next step that we need to work on is to take all the leads from the past and develop this topic into the scientific arena, in order to reveal the law, or *sunnah* in Qur’anic terms, that may put this idea in the service of protecting the ummah from other illusions. I mean it is not sufficient that an idea remains the bright observation of the intelligent minds of a handful of experts: for the idea to be disseminated and applied, it must be translated into a real discipline that may bring out its many applications in human life.

To bring this idea closer to mind, we may think of the electric current: think of the vast difference between the smart idea that occurred to somebody to have electricity run in a wire, and the thousand upon thousand of specialized engineers who put this current to use in numberless human needs.

Let us think in the same way when dealing with the illusions that come to dominate the human minds of people and block their perceiving a problem for what it is.

Bertrand Russel mentions (in his *Is There A Future for Man?* (Arabic translation published by Addar al-Qawmiyah, Cairo. P. 33) how a dominant illusion can paralyze any movement of a living being, even when it is an animal. He gives the example of a beast that happened to be in a closed place and fire broke out in the confined space. Those who had come to put the fire out exerted great effort just to save the beast and pull it out of where it was trapped. The only difficulty was in the beast's great terror, which resulted from its illusions. In Russel's ironical style he does not let this real incident pass before he generalizes from the beast which fiercely resisted the efforts of those who had come to rescue it. "The terror that originates from illusions that have their grip over the politicians who run our world," he says, "is not less than the terror gripping the beast I mentioned. For their illusions that paralyze their minds prevents them from getting over the imagined problems – their illusions really expose them to more and more problems over time."

Not many people have seen a situation of a trapped beast as Russel had seen; but more familiar is something we often saw, a donkey that is pulled from front and pushed at its rear just to have it walk across a shallow brook, or to cross a bridge or to enter a certain place. It would be most resistant to moving forward; for it would be in deadly panic that those who lead it would bring it to a deadly danger.

A whole society can be prey to such illusions; it was an ingenious observation of al-Ghazali's when he said: "in fact most of what people go ahead in doing or hold back from is dictated by these illusions. An illusion has a most tight hold on the soul."

We shall have to exert a lot of effort to express the principle in comprehensible terms; but more challenging, and the way will be more rugged, when we try to apply the principle to the individual cases which belong under the principle.

Ibn Taymiah has this to say about the principle and the applications: "It is not hard to see people concede the principle as a general rule; but once the rule touches at things that are dear to them,

they change attitude and no longer accept the details of what they had accepted as a general rule.” We do need to possess a lot of skill to bring to light the illusions which impede the progress of the Muslim world, once it has reached certain pathways, to have it go beyond what it takes to be dangers: and yet the danger exists only in imagination; it exists in the minds and not in the world around it. This will be appreciated by those who have acquainted themselves with the efforts of reformers: how hard the progress had been, and how slow it was, until people rose to a point of tolerating and perhaps digesting the ideas of the reformer.

I cannot say, however, that I have put in your hand a map and a compass, to help us get out of the illusions that we suffer from, and to help us move ahead through this jungle, which we take to be full of ghouls, while they are no more than our not having the enlightenment that will light our way.

To have light enough for going forward in life is such a high stake that we seem to cling to the tiniest straw to find in it an alternative. We do not seem to even perceive that it is the light of knowledge which is the rescue ship. Why is it, one wonders, that we take the acquiring of the needed light of knowledge as a dreadful venture. One answer is when we hear some scholars of religion declare that to acquire the sciences of the world is conducive to being secular. How can we then cross that bridge, with all the pushing from the rear and the pulling from front? The educators of the Muslim world have a lot of imagined risks that scare them and prevent their progress. You see how they inspire their disciples with the same terror that they had borne from earlier educators. Here is an example from Dr. Sa’id Ramadan, editor of *Al-Muslimun Magazine*, in an article of his which he published, under the title: “Whispers ... in the ears of the leaders of opinion and thought in the Muslim World.” (Vol. 7, p. 770, 1962). Here are some lines from his article:

“A social revolution is imminent in the whole Muslim world. I have no doubt of that. Indeed, it is to me as clear as the bright sun. The motto this revolution will raise is ‘the freedom of thought and conscience’. Unless you [Muslim leaders of thought] are the first to bear the banners of this revolution – and who is more entitled to do so? – there will be others who lead the multitudes ... Do not, gentlemen, take light these words, for the Islamic nations are bound to follow this road,



and that will be their destination, and nothing can deflect them from this progress ... so take heed ... take heed before others forestall you in grabbing the banners.”

That is how it is, then. Just 'whispers in the ears of the leaders of thought and opinion' in the Muslim world. This must reveal to those interested how humble our achievement has been so far. Just whispers, and addressing only some individuals, and in oratory style.

But let us not be hard, for it is true that things have not gone beyond the stage of whispering. The ice of rigidity of thought and the restriction on conscience are still predominant, and the ice has not thawed with the light of enlightenment; but will the reader reflect on this verse of the Quran: “Take warning, then, O you with eyes to see!” (59:2).

## WHAT IS IN THE SOUL VARIES IN DEPTH

I have said that the change which we humans must work at is the change in the souls/minds: that is the change which is the community's responsibility. Being so, and since it is what is in the souls that should be the focus of our effort, then we need to learn all we can about this part. One aspect I would like to look at now is that what is in the soul varies in its depth and solidity; and, evidently, this means that its effect on the community's behavior must vary proportionately.

For the contents of the mind to increase in depth and solidity, several ways play a part – two of which being repeated discussion and elaboration, and application in actual life.

It would be helpful to think of this in comparison with the human body. The human body consists of many organs that function autonomously: the heart, the lungs, the stomach, the secretion of glands. Had these organs required conscious operation by the individual, they would have taken up a huge amount of effort of the conscious function of the mind; consequently, the mind would not have been able to direct its effort to other domains related to the human intellectual development. It has been the Almighty's mercy to relieve the mental force of the human from such tasks, when He willed that most of the organs function autonomously.

After reflecting on the above example, we may go on to say that something similar takes place at the level of the soul. Some notions do their work autonomously, once they had taken root and reached a certain depth. Their function does not burden the thinking power of the human with the need for incessant care to maintain the continuity of these activities. With no effort at all, an individual recognizes the meanings of the common words and expressions from their own tongue. There is of course in our use of our language both autonomous action and conscious action, but the recall of words comes without effort; that happens without exerting the mind at all in most cases; and the more deeply rooted the words are, the less effort they demand. This again varies a great deal.

Certain sciences focus now on the conscious and subconscious; and a whole group of scientists work on this aspect of the mind, the part that acts as if it were entirely independent of the conscious mind: how this happens, how varied the autonomous element is, what plays a part in solidifying concepts. What is learned during childhood is of special importance here, the ideas and notions that are inscribed on the mind during this period – even the common people say that 'knowledge acquired during early age is like engraving on a stone'; this derives of course from accumulated observation. To be mindful of such concepts paves the way for having a part in changing what is in the soul. Those who have given time and effort to observe human experience know what others do not know. One may remember here the comparison made by the Messenger, peace be upon him, to elucidate how an idea may be deeply fixed in the mind or not; and how that may be reflected and

observed in the individual's and the community's behavior. Here is the Tradition:

“Huthaifah bin al-Yaman narrates that the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said: ‘The hearts of people receive the sinful notions one after one, the same way you make a mat by looking at stalks of straw, picking one after one, accepting some, and throwing others away. Whenever a heart accepts a guilty notion, that will leave on the heart a black spot, and whenever a heart renounces a sinful notion, there will be on it a white spot. This goes on until hearts end up being in two types: some are as white as milk, and a heart of this type will not be harmed by any trial to the end of life; and some are as black stones, or as a cup turned with bottom upmost, so that it no longer has room for a good deed, nor can it tell when an act is sinful.’ (Reported by Muslim). Ibn Jarir says in his comment on this Tradition: “The Messenger, peace be upon him, is saying here that when sins bombard the heart, one after another, and are accepted by the heart, there will come a time when such a heart is completely shut down. And when this happens there will come from the Almighty a sealing of the heart, in a way that such hearts are not receptive to faith at all; nor can they ward off disbelief: and this is the sealing and stamping that is mentioned in the Qur’an (as in 2:7).

“When we buy something with a seal, we need to break it before using the contents. In the same way there are hearts which are completely unreceptive to faith, of people who are described as having their hearts and ears sealed; and they will be so until the seal is broken.” (see Ibn Kathir’s commentary on Verse 7 of Sura 2).

The above Tradition of the Messenger’s, peace be upon him, focuses on the evil, sinful notions, when they get hold of the heart more and more, and he drives the idea home by drawing examples from the tangible world: the mat and its straws. It helps one get to comprehend abstract aspects by comparing them to tangible ones. The soul takes shape over time, and notions reach it piecemeal. A heart that admits an evil or sinful notion will have a black spot; in contrast a heart that does not admit such sinful notions will remain white, resistant to evil and not hurt by it. What is absorbed in the soul reaches a depth when the individual is unmindful of the corrupting influence; but that one is unmindful or unaware of what is in the soul by no means renders those notions inactive: it will not safeguard him/her from the influence on

their mindset and behavior: a notion inside will keep operative even when it is subconscious.

That a notion gets fixed and operative does not mean that it is true and sound; maybe most of what an individual bears in his/her is untrue. It is not beyond the human ability and accessibility to unearth the subconscious notions: they really may be brought into the conscious sector, and then dealt with, with the proper process of alterations. What this book is trying to bring to notice is that this part, the controlling of ideas and concepts in the soul, is within human control: it has been made by God the responsibility of humans: not as individuals, but as communities and nations.

It is our responsibility to examine the content of the soul, especially the subconscious elements, and bring them to the sphere of consciousness, and even when the content has become so solid and calcified: to deal with it and work on changing it have been made as a human endeavor. The more we know about unearthing the hidden contents of the soul the more is the human capable of effecting change. This must indicate how vital is a science of changing the content of the souls is.

Let us recall here the Messenger's, peace be upon him, Tradition concerning what happens during early childhood when faith, some kind of faith, is implanted in the child's soul: "Each newborn has been born with its *fitrah* 'innate nature, inclination to accept truth'; it is its parents who make of it a Jew, .." There has been some discussion of *fitrah* above; let it be added here that parents do the task of establishing the faith: it is so for the child absorbs the habits, values and traditions; a child will indeed absorb a lot that is not articulated by the parents and the immediate environment. At this stage, the child comes to conclude a lot about tastes, likes and dislikes, for a variety of things – and in perhaps most cases the child does not even perceive how the values and attitudes creep into his/her subconscious; many of the values and principles are just inspired, not declared. His/her later behavior will be conditioned by those values and concepts without his/her being aware of how this happens. This happens especially when the conscious mind is not in control, and at critical moments when an individual will have to make a decision or choose something. At such moments, the decisive factor is the individual's past experience, past attitudes and established

norms: these will take sway. The part of the will is minimal or even nonexistent at such moments. This will help us understand the meaning of ‘sealing the heart’ in the Verse quoted above, for this expression describes a situation when the thinking power of the individual is under a spell, paralyzed and unable to direct the individual’s behavior. It is in such circumstances that the subconscious takes over; it is what we call feelings in the heart and emotions as visible behaviors. It is vital to note that when an individual does something, he/she is not impelled just by conscious thought; there is also the subconscious thought, existing at a deep level, very much existent though unnoticed, maybe more than any other way of thinking.

Ibn Khaldun did notice some aspects of this, as when he discussed the talent of eloquence and composing poetry. He said: “As for those who have no store of memorized verse, or very little of it, and then try to compose their own poetry – these will not compose poetry of any value; they had better not compose at all. The only way is to memorize a lot of poetry, in a way that one’s talent gets sharper and sharper, and something like a latent measure is ready in mind; it is then that the individual might compose and keep composing until their talent is really mature and they reach their best.” This is however not the main point in Ibn Khaldun, but a preface to it, for he goes on to say: “It might be said that for one to compose their genuine poetry, they need to forget that of others, at least not have the memorized stuff visualized, for the actual words of others impede the spontaneity of one’s flow. Once one has forgotten the poetry of others, though it is alive as permeating the soul, the pattern internalized is for them like a loom for spinning at, and can get to producing genuine stuff that follows the digested pattern, though in necessarily different words.” (*al-Muqaddimah*; p. 507)

These rules, indicated by Ibn Khaldun, must not be confined to poetry alone; they must be thought of as the method in any discipline one wishes to master.

Bearing this in mind, if we think again of early childhood, we find that the child acquires the skill of communicating in his native language very early in life, as you may contrast that with acquiring a second language for a grown-up. All such observations are relevant when discussing the laws, or *sunan*, of changing what is in the mind. When you think of the speakers of a certain language, this may enable

you to think of those who adopt a certain culture and a certain method of thinking: those who have received this culture and mode of thinking have much in common, in a way that is quite distinctive from that of other people's. This also applies to their tastes, their likes and dislikes, what appeals to them and what they care nothing for. In the same way as we notice the individual differences, we may think of the groups' and societies' differences. It must be put in here that the source of difference is not the same here and there: much of the difference between individuals is genetic, while the differences between communities is entirely from experience: to confuse this and this is at the root of racist attitudes and pride in one's own ethnic group – racism has no basis in real facts, and therefore it was called 'rotten' by the Messenger, peace be upon him.

It is true that individuals are genetically endowed with diverse degrees of intelligence; and the diversity in intelligence will be met with in any society you observe. Even among average siblings you notice this diversity in intelligence. But while this is genetically true of individuals, it is not true of societies: diversity here is not genetic. Any amount of difference you notice is acquired through experience; it is a cultural fact, but not a genetic one. This is important to notice, for communities can raise their level: you notice the difference between those who grew up in rural areas and those who grew up in urban areas, and you notice how one's socio-economic class has a lot to do with his/her intellectual level – but nothing is final and fixed about that, for the modern educational systems and media are being a great 'equalizer' for they melt away the socio-economic differences, at least partially. The general rule is then that intelligence rate in any particular society follows a bell-like curve, with few near the top, many who are average, and some who are less endowed: all genetically so. And then, when a certain society succeeds in raising its intellectual level, we may be sure that any other society can do the same.

And when we say that any society can change its intellectual level, that intelligence and intellectual power are not a 'given' endowment, this works both ways: a society can rise with conscious or unconscious effort, but can deteriorate through neglect. There can be even advance in one sector or aspect of society, and deterioration in

another. It is good to notice that when considering what to change and where to direct effort.

One thing is certain: that this has not developed into a science in the Muslim world; that whatever is put forth about these topics in our part is still observations of some individuals; individuals who have not done enough, and cannot do enough as scattered persons to fulfil what our older scholars termed '*fard al-kifayah*, or communal obligation', the required number of experts who have acquired a competent level of expertise to meet the need of the *Ummah*. The required change must be achieved without any waste of time or energy: that is the required thing we need.

Am I dreaming? Speaking of the required number and the required level when the idea is not ripe, even in its theoretical form; but I keep insisting that the idea must grow and spread for changing what is in the soul, and, must subsequently be applied to bring change to the main bulk of the *Ummah*. There must be institutions which take up the task of change, and to monitor how change advances in accordance with the scientific method. When such effort gets underway, it will overcome the deep-rooted negative ideas in our deepest mind, ideas related with the supremacy of destiny in a way that it plays down the role of the human and his/her ability to effect change.

An example will help drive this idea home. We may think of the skill of reading and writing. Should we leave the task of teaching this skill to the population, i.e. to individual effort, each citizen being responsible for teaching his/her children under their care – the result in this case will be most uncertain, and of course most unsatisfactory. It is organizations that see to it that efficient teaching of the whole generation is performed. And so it is with the change of what is in the souls. It is left for chance in our societies; it is not developing into a science with its distinct methodology. Consequently, there is the unevenness that we witness in our societies; their slow development – even in relation with problems that are treated quite scientifically in other societies. This must be accounted for in that our *Ummah* no longer takes this task of changing what is in the souls as a human responsibility. This skill of changing what is in the souls is not unlike what we said about the skill of composing poetry or writing in excellent style – none of these skills can be achieved without practicing it. And the way to this is in

examining the experience of past peoples, the change that came over older nations, both sudden and gradual, across history. It is quite clear that, despite the exhortation, often repeated in the Qur'an, to study such experiences, we have not taken up this task with any enthusiasm.

And the neglect of this indispensable study the experiences of nations is common and true of the various classes of the Muslim nation. It is of those diseases that permeate all the various groups, not that of a certain category or class. On the other hand, when the attitude of adopting a wide-scale view of history takes root, its benefit will reach all the members and groups of society, not only those who explore and discover.

The absence of historical study has consequences that any observer may notice, though he/she may not be able to account for: That even those who are closest to each other in viewpoint are, in backward societies, often intolerant of and most hostile to each other: the same ideology and mutual aim seem to avail nothing in uniting them. You may contrast this with societies which have the faculty of directing and controlling change – you find there that though there will arise conflicts among the intellectuals, that is not allowed to reach the point of confrontation: less bitter than among those who are supposed to be of the same view in backward parts – in parts which are called, euphemistically, 'developing' countries.

Ibn Khaldun understands well the stages of the 'life' or 'cycle' of states – though he seems to take the stages to be a predetermined, an imposed, thing. But it is not true that things are imposed, especially now when we know a lot about methods of shaping behavior, in a way that much is in human hands about the molding of people's behavior.

This is not to take issue with Ibn Khaldun, considering the age he lived in. He accounted for the collapse of states with the fact of deep-seated habits – which we now take to be the result of what is in the minds. He said in the chapter on: "States have natural spans of age, the same as individuals;": "a state would rarely survive longer than three generations, a generation being the average age of a human, that is, about forty years. I say that on the basis that the first generation will have the whole of the life-style of a rural life: I mean its rough habits ... The second generation will have been transformed in life-style as a



result of the luxury of being in a dominant position, and they will have shifted from a rustic, rough life-style to one of civil life-style. By the third generation, people will have forgotten the roughness and unpolished nature of rural life: they will come to be dependent on the state. In three generations as you see there will be the decline and collapse of the state.

“According to this process, there will happen in the lifetime of the fourth generation a decay of the kind we see in the reputation of great families. We have described above that the glory and reputation of a family will survive for four generations, and I have listed in support of my claim ample and sufficient evidence drawn from real life, which links to the premises I put forth earlier in the book. If you examine this with a fair mind, you will not fail to accept the soundness of my reasoning.

“This period, I mean the life-span of three generations, or a hundred and twenty years, is, generally the life-span of a state, though this estimate must necessarily be an approximation – I say this as circumstances may change this rule, when for instance no power happens to be there to attack the state when its time of collapse is ripe. In this case, decay will have hit the state, and should the enemy attack, they will find no defending force; there will be realized the verse of the Qur’an: “To every People is a term appointed: when their term is reached, not an hour can they cause delay, nor an hour can they advance;” (7:34).” (*al-Muqaddimah*, p. 148. Pub. Dar al-Tahrir, Cairo, 1966).

Ibn Khaldun elaborates upon this topic. But whatever we say about his method and style, he is still discussing the way souls change; he does realize the connection with the inside contents of the souls. About that he writes: “If it is clear that decay comes over the state, then let us go on to say that it happens as the natural changes come over an organism ... it may happen that some statesmen, politically mature, do take the alarm and do what they can in their immediate surroundings to stem the decline ... They may assume that the mischief has come over the state as result of the neglect of their predecessors; but that is not true: what is happening happens in accordance with the natural progress of the lifespan of a state, the habits that are rooted and one can do nothing to stem them.” It is true, indeed what Ibn Khaldun is saying, in the final

analysis – what is to be noticed, besides, is that any such failing or decline are governed by laws, and the laws are responsive to those who learn about them and control them (and it remains true that a change to the better is possible before hearts are encased in a shroud of evil). When Ibn Khaldun attributes the determination of the lifespan of a state to the habits, and habits are rigid and fixed – this is not quite true, for habits are amenable to change, naturally or deliberately. This was not possible for Ibn Khaldun to notice, and hence his rather deterministic view.

Let us quote a little more from Ibn Khaldun, to see how he views habits: “Habits,” he writes, “are a natural feature of life. For instance, should one find his parents and most of his family wear silk, and have their arms and transport equipment coated in gold, and finds them put a barrier between themselves and the rest of people in prayer and councils – he will feel bound to adopt their habits. It is inconceivable that he chooses rather roughness and rustic attire, and will not go among people like any ordinary one of them. The habits of his people must make this detestable and avoidable in his vision. Indeed, should one dissent and insist on habits contrary to his people, he/she will be charged with being mad, that they must be wrong in the head to choose to contradict the tradition in which they grew up. Such a person will presumably fall into bad days as a result of his/her 'erroneous' ways. This must remind one of the prophets and their peoples – how the prophets’ challenge of habits and contradicting them put them face to face with dire consequences, and were not rescued in the end but with support from God.

“There does happen late in the state’s lifetime a kind of glow and temporary regain of strength that gives the illusive impression that it was no longer trailing towards its end; this is quite similar to a candle or oil lamp which rises in surprising glow before it finally goes out.

“Reflect then on this; be not in disregard of the Almighty’s Wisdom when He has the world act by an established system; a universe in which “Every age has its own book;” (the Qur’an, 13:38).” (*al-Muqaddimah*, p. 251)

Ibn Khaldun does observe how it is not possible to evade the consequences of habits, how they are a deep-seated fact of life, deep enough in a way that those who dissent from them are charged with madness and mental abnormality. His example is the habitual use of

gold and silk ... Well, all that is fine and true: but what about the ways of thinking and worldview and the perspective concerning life, society and the world? All such ways turn into fixed habits. If they receive less attention, and if they are harder to observe, their relevance and effect are far more, as they are more wide-spread. One may see this in the development of Islamic thought, how it fell in more and more rigidity across generations, how each generation just followed in the way of its predecessor, and how people charged anyone who dissented from the mainstream ways of being a heretic, or something like that.

Ibn Khaldun confines his subject-matter to a state or the reputation of a family, how they last for no more than three generations. It must be a much harder task to think of the progression of a world religion, a religion that has been at the basis of a great array of states – how greater in scale would it seem when viewed from Ibn Khaldun’s perspective of the effect of habits, how sweeping would the transformations be as they happen over the passage of time, unnoticed by those involved in the transformation, and as scores of generations just copy the ways of the generations before them.

If Ibn Khaldun states that the ‘third generation will have forgotten the rough ways and the hardships of rural life, for these vanish from its existence without a trace,’ so what about the evaporating from memory of open-minded ways of thinking. Think for example of just one legislator who thinks with the openness and creativity of Umar bin al-Khattab – He will certainly not be tolerated: this is not that life does not require more *ijtihad*, i.e. fresh reflection on required rulings, not that there is no need for *ijtihad*.

This slow change is usually not detected by people; they indeed take things to be unchanging, but the consequences are bound to occur, and this seems a perplexing fact, for they cannot see how this can come to happen.

At the root of this perplexity is the assumption that people’s ways of thinking do not change, from the days of the Prophet’s Companions until today; people do not fathom the depth of change in the way minds handle things. And when they fail to see this, they expect the ashes to hide a fire, that the quiet surface does hide movement beneath. When they do not realize the changes in reflection and

thinking, they compare themselves to the Companions, though subconsciously: and this comparison is a massive hurdle to a realistic handling of things. Without getting over this and without fathoming the failings that come over societies, it is not possible to deal successfully with society's problems.

This is not the proper place to elaborate on the last points, but it must be held in mind. Ibn Khaldun has something interesting to say here; he says: “There takes place in history some imperceptible change, that goes mostly unobserved, in people’s and generations’ ways and habits, and this is an incessant movement that is sure to keep happening over time. This is so pervasive a change, though most subtle. Since the outward result of change does not come to notice except after many generations, only a handful observant individuals take notice. Nonetheless, the condition of nations, people’s beliefs and ways never stay as they are, but keep changing. People can merely speak in vague terms about the change of times and the difference of one generation and the other.

“In the same way as this incessant change comes over individuals, it is equally true of large-scale periods, nations, and states; it is indeed what may be inferred from a verse of the Qur’an as: “Such has been God's way of dealing with His servants;” (40:85).” (*al-Muqaddimah*:34).

We have more than one Tradition of the Messenger’s, peace be upon him, that shed light on this change. One is the Tradition I often quote in which the Prophet, peace be upon him, told his companions of a future time when knowledge ebbs and dwindles – this seemed puzzling to the companions. In the same way they were puzzled when he told them of a time in the future when nations call each other to partake of the treasures of the Muslim *Ummah*, in the same way as those round a food table invite each other to help themselves to the food. We happen to live now at a time when our mental set-up is contrary to the Companions – for we find it inconceivable that we acquire a respectable level of knowledge, nor is it conceivable to us how to save ourselves from a situation when we are like a dish of food to which invaders invite each other.

Is it not a marvel how that the companions of the Prophet, peace be upon him, could not comprehend how knowledge could be wiped out of minds, while we exert ourselves just to bring it within the comprehension of Muslims that knowledge that helps us rise is in existence!

You will notice in the other Tradition, too, how the companions were unable to imagine how it was possible for Muslims to reach an abyss when they would become a prey to any party who wished to help themselves to some of the Muslim world's plenty. Indeed, the companions wondered like this: "Are you saying, Messenger of Allah, that we would be small in number?" But the Messenger told them no; it would not be so, for there would be lots of Muslims at that time. There would be some other reason which would make Muslims like the froth on the surface of flood. The Messenger, peace be upon him, saw the future as governed by laws, but some of his companions were unable to have this perception.

There is no one who views society problems as governed by *sunan*, or laws, like the Messenger, peace be upon him. It was as Malek Bennabi said, that the Messenger of God saw history before it happened; and he warned people of the pit-holes on their way: that was so since he understood that catastrophes do not happen but in accordance with laws – and the laws are equally operative during the phase of falling into the abyss of ignorance and being like the free-for-all bowl of food, or the phase of getting out of that situation.

It is this law-based approach which the young men and women of the Muslim world need: In the absence of such criterion, dissimilar things are jammed together, while things that should belong together are treated as having nothing in common. You see how even the Prophet's Companions needed the Messenger's alerting to the operative laws in particular situations, and unless our youth have some guidance in this regard, they will keep groping in the dark – this is so since they do not realize what exactly the differences between us and the Companions are; what has made us backward.

Malek Bennabi discussed this by distinguishing human as a civilized individual, the human as pre-civilized, and the human as post-civilization individual; he elaborates by showing what makes the

problem of post-civilization individual more complex than the human in other phases.

We may notice how Ibn Khaldun did perceive the importance of this topic when he wrote: “Inattention to the change in human condition happens because such change is such a subtle affair that very few individuals ever take note of it.” No wonder, then, that we fail to see the link between our visible situation and the change inside our souls.

I write all this with a burning pain: how mysterious these things remain and how absent they still are from our attention! How long will it be before such topics are admitted into the circle of research and investigation? No progress or rise will be possible as long as such links remain outside our scope of vision, as long as we do not have our map of how to proceed in changing what is in the soul, as long as we do not proceed with some confidence to deal with the law, or *sunnah*, of change, unless we have some indications to distinguish what to be eliminated and what to be added. It will not do to go like this, to move without light, to be led with our instincts alone, to cling with all our might to concepts and values that are really hampering our progress, and to adamantly refuse to adopt other concepts that we can do nothing without. When I say this, I have in mind this neglected domain of changing what is in the minds, and our neglect of the lessons of history, for it is in history that we may find what to change. It is both sciences that we need: a science of changing what is in the self, and a science of detecting what to eliminate and what not to eliminate. Muslims’ progress at present is so slow on account of this lack of effort devoted to mastering the above two domains: they are pulled down by the shackles and burdens which impede their perceiving the future with light derived from the past. All the murky vision that blocks the clarity of vision results from the pre-scientific stage we live in at present.

For the human to move ahead efficiently and purposefully, he/she needs to have a settled conviction that whatever problems may arise on their way are amenable to solution. I hope this helps us see that Muslims have no way of moving in earnest to change their circumstances without first realizing that their problem is governed by laws, *sunan*.

We will certainly not come closer to the solution if we still believe that it is the inspired envoy from heaven, the *Mehdi* some Muslims speak of, who will come forth to solve all problems at one blow. Nor will there be a solution if Muslims insist that as the world is coming to an end, there is no point in trying to solve problems. Attitudes of this kind will really increase not decrease the complexity of our situation.

Does this hard analysis annoy some readers? Do some say: 'We are not as you take us to be, for we do not wait for the *Mehdi* to solve our problems, nor do we wait idly for the world to come to an end.' I have good reason to know that many Muslims would say that such representation is not true of the educated and cultured, but true of the ignorant common masses. Well, let me show all the due respect to the cultured readers, but what plan can they display for changing the contents of the souls of those common masses? What is their way to have them rise from the level of ignorance to the level of those who know that any effort they put in will not be in vain?

It is no use denying that we are waiting for the *Mehdi* unless we learn how to bring change to what is in the mind, what should be changed, and to what degree. The failure and passivity of our behavior reflects the distortions in our mindset.

Let us remember that we are in the midst of discussing the diversity in the depth and solidity of the contents of the soul. Let me rehash: The soul has a number of ideas, but the individual is not aware of every idea he/she has in mind. One's ideas are not present to the conscious mind at every moment: some may be recalled as a result of association, some as a result of recalling; but some are not consciously perceived at all, no matter how hard the individual tries. These unremembered ideas, however, would not be less active than the other ideas in shaping behavior and attitudes. All this must be quite clear by now.

It may be added that though the idea passes through stages of permeating the soul and sinking to its depths, this does not mean that the idea itself is changing – it is only to the extent that it goes into the soul, and to the extent it descends into the depths of the soul, that its effect on behavior increases. Let us think of the descent of the idea into the soul

like a human going through stage after stage of growth: at one stage it is just an embryo, then it is born and it goes through the successive stages of childhood; then we have a youth, then an adult.

Though the human has a distinct designation at each stage, he/she develops from that same embryo. In the same way, an idea is no more than a surmise and an assumption at the beginning; then it is perceived and it becomes a known fact to the individual; later it is absorbed in the form of behavior, a trait, etc.

An idea may be suggested in subtle ways, so that it is a source for morality without its passing through the conscious mind – this may be noticed in the case of children and the common people. It is good to comprehend how this happens, to be as clear as possible about the forces that bring the idea into being. By learning the factors that bring this on and off, we can protect the morality; science can put in our hand the possibility of controlling morality. Morality is an observable behavior, and it reflects the motives that have settled in the human's mind, though what is in the mind is sometimes accessible to consciousness and sometimes not. We cannot say that this has turned in our hands into scientific knowledge until we can speak of these forces in coherent language. As for those who speak of morality as not within the domain of scientific knowledge, that science has no way of controlling it; they are denying the possibility of safeguarding morality – when you do not expect them to safeguard morality, it is even more unlikely that they can inculcate desirable ethics: these persons have not even noticed the link between science and morality.

Let us elaborate a little further about the absorption of ideas: an idea can be held by the individual in its incipient shape. Take the phenomenon of the fall of any thing dropped from above: the idea of the fall of things is clear to each and every body. It is indeed such an evident fact that people may not even think of it, and it might be strange how anyone would remind them of this fact. But this is one thing and what the physicist thinks about the fall of objects is quite a different thing. A scientific discussion of the fall of things will notice the velocity, the mass, the exact duration; and the scientist would be alert to the exact location and time; he/she would calculate the velocity from the given facts, and so on. Many amazing and ingenious activities are brought into existence on the basis of what we know about the laws of gravity and



the fall of bodies: such as the construction of bridges, the manufacture of planes and projectiles, and so on. Let us think of the laws connected with the fall of bodies as comparable to the laws that govern every individual's behavior, and where they originate; let us think of how things change as more and more individuals learn the finer points about the laws of behavior. It does us a lot of good if the knowledge about the origin of morality are commonly known among people: it is true that everybody speaks about morality, but there is a huge difference between that and what the expert can say about the laws, *sunan*, of the genesis of morality and what controls moral behavior. What, for instance Hadfield wrote in his book *Psychology and Morals* is not common knowledge that the lay person can handle; he does explore aspects of morality that reveal some interesting laws of that domain. Let us not confuse this with the solid moral behavior that you may notice in the character of the lay person – what I mean is not that at all; it is rather having the skill to safeguard morality on scientific bases. This is not accessible to those who have not exerted themselves and worked hard over the required period to acquire the necessary theoretical and applied expertise. We naturally consult the specialist for such knowledge, and it is hoped that more knowledge is acquired by more people. It is true that most people somehow know that “say [to those who wonder how they were defeated]: 'It is from yourselves,'” (3:165); but what they know about this concept remains vague and shallow; and this is reflected in the contradictions in their behavior.

Let me remind the reader of the Tradition of the Prophet related by Ziad bin Labid, so that no one would say: ‘Did the Messenger, peace be upon him, discuss things in this way?’ Reflecting on Ziad bin Labid's Tradition, and the other Tradition about the nations and the great bowl must give us some light concerning the importance of knowing the law of what is in the soul and the visible behavior. A scholar of the Prophet's companions' lives would clearly perceive that there were vast differences among them concerning such topics. When the caliphate as exercised by the Upright Caliphs was transformed to the monarchy system of the Umayyads and later dynasties, this could not happen without a corresponding erosion of awareness of the relevant laws: knowledge deteriorated into some common and inexact notions, held by the common people, instead of scientific concepts as usually held and enunciated by people of sound scientific knowledge. When the

Messenger, peace be upon him, said: “That will be at the time when knowledge will have ebbed from the chests of people,” he was laying a foundation for later scholars to take up and develop; for we see the situation depicted by the Tradition everywhere in life. Hence my need to refer to this Tradition again and again.

Before we wind up on this topic, let me refer again to what Ibn Khaldun said about habits: that they are outside human control. I must assert that this is not precise, for the habits operate in the life of individuals and groups on the basis of laws, *sunan*, that are not beyond the human’s access: We can both discover those laws and manipulate them for our good.

It is a mistake to think of habits in the same way as we think of old age that comes over the individual. The Messenger, peace be upon him, did say that there is no remedy to rid a human of old age; but this is true of the individual, not societies. The decay of societies is curable, once it takes place, and it is preventable before it happens. This is the great thing about having control of the laws of change, of developing sound knowledge of that domain.

All effort has been exerted in the current book to demonstrate that the task of changing what is in the self is a human task.

Let me also draw the readers’ attention to the honored status the Qur’an bestows on knowledge. When I entitle the present chapter “The depth of what is in the soul is varied,” I really derive this from the verse of the Qur’an: “But no one knows its hidden meaning except Allah. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge ....” (3:7).

The soundness of knowledge is distinguished from having any amount of knowledge; for it is with this degree of knowledge that a human has power that is not possible to the less firm in knowledge. Once we know with some certainty that knowledge can be more and more solid and deep, our dread of knowledge will disappear. We may then see the end of the delusion that has great dominance over Muslims: that scientific knowledge is not the way to getting to the truth, nor is it the way to solving the Muslims’ problem. When we hear the doubts about the changing conceptions of knowledge and culture and morality, this is only true in so far as knowledge is sound. The confusion is really there when behavior does not correlate with the bits and pieces of knowledge,

not until knowledge has taken firm root. A human must endeavor to deepen and expand his/her knowledge, as we learn from the following verse of the Qur'an:

“Say: 'O my Lord! Advance me in knowledge;” (20:114).

When ancient Muslim scholars discussed belief and Islam, and whether belief included both assertion and action – this topic is closely related to our present discussion: the relation between behavior and knowledge, and the difference in behavior as reflecting differences in the soundness in knowledge. One may acquire some light on this from a verse of the Qur'an as:

“Say: 'You have no faith; but you only say: 'We have submitted our wills to God,' for faith has not yet entered your hearts;” (49:14).

It is when we do not notice this diversity in the soundness of knowledge and the increase in knowledge that we hear some talk of 'outward' and 'inward' knowledge, or a 'common' and 'gnostic' knowledge. But distinctions like these boil down to knowledge being shallow or sound. For this is what we learn from the Qur'an when it says:

“Say: 'O my Lord! Advance me in knowledge;” (20:114).

## HOW TO ENSURE THAT MUSLIMS ACCEPT LAW, *SUNAN*

When dealing with Muslims, those concerned must bear in mind the necessity of linking laws and application to the Qur'an; for this is the way to ensuring that laws, *sunan*, are viewed positively by Muslims.

When we think of changing the contents of the Muslims' souls, and when we are dealing with the laws and their applications, then it is most urgent that those who are working on effecting change among Muslims do not forget, not for a moment, the establishing of a close link between the laws, *sunan*, and the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* (the Prophet's Traditions); and to add, whenever possible, incidents from the life of the upright ancestors. The reformer must be skillful in linking the discussed topics with these sources most tightly: He/she must never tire of reminding their audience, on every occasion, of the support for the laws governing the life of communities in the verses of the Qur'an and the authentic Traditions of the Prophet, in addition to the positive attitudes of our great ancestors towards those laws, *sunan*. An interested person will find much to draw upon in these sources: more really that he/she can exhaust. The orientalist who wrote *The Muslim World Today* did notice this.

I say it is essential to establish this link, especially in the early stages, in view of the psychological condition of the Muslims today, for they pass through a stage when they fail to appreciate the facts of God's laws and how they act in the life of humankind.

Without such linkage with the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*, confusion and reactivity are sure to take place, consciously or unconsciously.

One reason that acts to dissuade Muslims from acting on the laws, *sunan*, of change and their application, is that those Muslims who claim to actually adopt those laws and act on them, fail to link the laws with their support in the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* – this is so out of their ignorance of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*; or for assuming that these texts do not support the *sunan*. Some ill-wishers exploit the laws to deflect Muslims from their faith, either from their ignorance of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, or from deliberately ignoring them. But, leaving apart those ill-wishers, what ails those who hold on to the Qur'an and *Sunnah* with all their might, with the faith that they have inherited for long centuries? The problem with these is the opposite of the problem of the above group: for these latter attach no importance to research in changing

communities. And that is not on account of their failing to admit that change does take place in their surroundings, but because they fail to perceive the causal connection between the visible change and the change at the level of the soul – that the real work must be at the level of the mind, whether what is desired is bringing change to a halt, slowing it down, or channeling it into an entirely different direction. When the link is not perceived, it is no wonder that it does not even occur to them to put in effort to enhance research in this domain – let alone tracing the supporting text of such linkage in the Qur’an and the *Sunnah*.

Nothing stands out in the exhortation of the Qur’an, and for which God had revealed His Books and sent His Messengers, as the objective of changing societies. Hence the Qur’an’s insistence that people walk around in the earth and review the *sunan*, laws, which applied to those before us. It is in accordance with laws that communities rise and fall, and in accordance with laws that God rewards and punishes. And so, it is humans’ task to learn all there is to learn about those laws – for it is by this knowledge that they may gain God’s mercy and evade His revenge. About this we may read in the Qur’an: “but if they persist, the punishment of those before them is already a matter of warning for them,” (8:38); which is asserting that if a certain people revert to their perverse behavior – which takes place as a result of their mistaken concepts and wrong beliefs – then God’s law is bound to operate, bringing down penalties on such community.

In another location of the Qur’an, the Lord says: “We sent Messengers before you amongst the religious sects of old: but never came a Messenger to them but they mocked him. Even so do We let it creep into the hearts of the sinners – that they should not believe in the Message; but the ways of the ancients have passed away. Even if We opened out to them a gate from heaven, and they were to continue all day ascending therein, they would say: ‘Our eyes have been intoxicated: nay, we have been bewitched by sorcery;’” (15:10-15).

We have in the above verses a representation of a certain people whose concepts have calcified into a rigid and fixed mass; their scope is so narrow, in a way that they seem not to imagine the likelihood of there being a way of life better than their own.

This rigidity of view, accepting and rejecting ideas without proof, guidance or any revealed Book from the Lord, gets harder and harder the more an individual is ignorant of the experience of older peoples: the way of the ancients, in Qur'anic terms (8:38).

Had these people known the circumstances of the older people, and the kind of ideas they held, and how their outcome came to pass over time, they would not have been so limited and rigid; their conceit would not have been so complacent; they would have had some ability to reflect on what the messengers conveyed to them. But their ignorance was so dominant that it blocked their recognizing that there could be a situation better than theirs, a better way of thinking and acting, better objectives and ways.

According to the Qur'an, the ways '*sunnah*, in Qur'anic terms' of a past people provides support for people; it helps them be spared committing an error that they had already been committed before. No experience of humanity, no matter how ancient, and at any spot of the world, but is human heritage that is a source of providing a lesson for any humans that decide to inspect them. On the other hand, any people who fail to recall the errors of past peoples are liable to pay once more a price for their ignorance, a price in their social life, in the life of this world (a price that should not have been paid again, for a previous people had paid the same price before); and they are liable to be losers on the Day of Judgment, which is affirmed in the Qur'an:

“They will further say: 'Had we but listened or used our intelligence, we should not now be among the companions of the Blazing Fire!’” (66:10).

It may be noted about the 'way of past peoples' in the verse quoted above (8:38), that the lesson is not confined to past peoples relevant to the Prophet's time – it includes all those who preceded us, even those who appeared after the above verses were revealed; it includes us, for there will come a day when we are an example for future generations and peoples; and our behavior will be the 'way of past peoples'.

As you see, the examples of people's experiences keep accumulating: the further one goes, the greater the mass of experiences available for them to examine and take lessons from. And when you

examine the past experiences of the various nations and groups to draw lessons from them, that goes from before the Qur'an, to the period separating us from the revelation of the Qur'an, including believers, the People of the Book (the Jews and Christians), pagans, and so on. H. G. Wells must have been thinking of this, and how it bears on the causal relation between the condition of nations and the contents of their minds when he wrote:

“The disasters of the world wars, and all the devastation and destruction that people had to suffer, is no more than fair recompense for the erroneous ideas they bear;” (*Outline of World History*, (Arabic translation), 1150-1160).

The Qur'an itself described the Medina community, and reminded Muslims of the ways of those who preceded them when it said:

“Truly, if the Hypocrites and those in whose hearts is a disease, and those who stir up sedition in Al-Medina, desist not, We shall certainly stir you up against them: then will they not be able to stay in it as your neighbors for any length of time: They shall have a curse on them: wherever they are found, they shall be seized and slain. Such was the practice approved of God among those who lived aforetime: no change you will find in the practice approved of God,” (33:60-62).

A society that can get rid of the mischief-mongers, the depraved whose hearts are not content with the ideals of the community, and those who disseminate the spirit of defeat in society – it is such society that can be said to have the elements of survival. When the Qur'an says in the above verse, "then will they not be able to stay in it as your neighbors for any length of time," it is saying that these persons will be expelled, that they will not be allowed to impede the progress of the community, that their 'stirring up mischief' will not impede the general march ... Indeed, the society will exile them and send them away.

There are *sunan*, laws, which govern the struggle within society, and not to take consideration of those laws will result in one's collapse on the way: this is indeed what the above text reminds the Medina community of when it says: “Such was the practice approved of God among those who lived aforetime: no change you will find in the practice approved of God;” it is juxtaposing the present community of

Medina with old societies, and on this basis it lays down the general law: that both come under God' law, for "no change you will find in the practice approved of God,."

It is vital to note that the Qur'an does not represent the Medina community as a special case, as a unique body that has not laws governing it; hence the Qur'an's reminding us that that community is an example of a general pattern, that "no change you will find in the practice approved of God,.". Once people comprehend this lesson, they must be quite clear that for anyone to establish a society, any kind of society, and whatever its ideal might be, it will not be possible for them to proceed to realizing that ideal without being aware of the relevant laws, without being conscious of the factors of enhancement and factors of decay.

It may shed more light on the current point to quote from Carlyle – though he used his argument for a different purpose – when he said, in the course of his description of Muhammad, peace be upon him:

“It is a shame, quite a shame, for any one who claims to be civilized at present, to heed the claim that the religion of Islam is false, that Muhammad is an impostor ... Alas that we hear such claims.

“Let him who aspires to rise to any level in sciences of the world never believe a word of this kind uttered by some fools ... It may not be an exaggeration to say that no worse word of disbelief and no expression of malice has been uttered – Can you imagine, friends, have you ever seen, that an imposter can put forward a religion and have it disseminated? What a preposterous thing to say: for indeed an imposter cannot build a house of bricks!” (*Heroes and Hero-Worship*. Pp 49-50 (Arabic translation).

We witness in our own time a number of societies recently established, but they go ahead in disregard of their ideals. But these societies cannot fulfil their construction without realizing the necessary conception and action, in such a way that is adequate for protecting themselves and purifying their system of any harmful matter. We say this in view of the Qur'anic verse: “Such was the practice of God among those who lived aforetime: no change you will find in the practice of God,” (33:62)



When one has gained the confidence to deal with the laws, *sunan*, he/she will be able to benefit not just from reviewing the correct and faulty behavior of believers, but even that of the non-believers: this is so for a mature person like that will have acquired the habit of dealing with the law directly, not being attracted to behaviors by affection and dispelled by hostility.

Not many have attained this level of awareness; it is only those who have the channels of their minds open for more understanding and gaining more access to what is right – for they would not let the inherited traditions stand in their way to acquiring such understanding. We see that much in the Qur’an, where the Almighty exhorts us to be among ‘those endued with understanding’, as in the verse: “so announce the Good News to My servants, – those who listen to the Word, and follow the best meaning in it: those are the ones whom God has guided, and those are the ones endued with understanding,” (39: 17-18).

You may notice how the Qur’an lists the examples from the past, the actual details of lived existence, together with the *sunan*, laws; here is an example:

“They swore their strongest oaths by God that if a warner came to them, they would follow his guidance better than any other of the peoples: but when a warner came to them, it has only increased their flight from righteousness, – on account of their arrogance in the land and their plotting of Evil. But the plotting of Evil will hem in only the authors thereof. Now are they but looking for the way the ancients were dealt with? But no change will you find in God's way of dealing: nor turning off will you find in God's way of dealing. Do they not travel through the earth and see what was the End of those before them?” (35:42-44).

We have in the above verses:

1. Claim: A certain people who assert that, if a warner comes to them, they would prove to heed the voice of guidance more than others; but, though a warner does come to them, they prove not be true to their word.
2. Cause of their breaking promise: arrogance in the land and their plotting of Evil.

3. Extent of this phenomenon: one may ascertain how far this condition is linked to its causes by reviewing the history of older peoples; one may expand this cause-effect relation by viewing more of the events of history, through actual moving about in the earth.

4. The permanence of *sunnah*, law: the Qur'an affirms in the quoted text the importance of the historical examples, so that the history of specific events turns into a law: history keeps changing, while the *sunnah*, law, is not subject to change. To thoroughly understand this point safeguards the law, *sunnah*, from being lost.

5. The source for learning history and the laws, *sunnahs*, behind them is the earth; by moving around in the earth, one may learn about history and the law; it is by studying the visible facts in the world and drawing lessons; by examining the outcome of behaviors. By developing a habit of examining the events of history and drawing their lessons by observing the outcome of behaviors, one may be said to have learned the lessons of history, and learned the laws, *sunan*, of life. To just read is not enough; one needs to actually move about and detect the hidden facts.

It must be seen here how, for some commands of the Lord's, it is not enough to just gaze at the Qur'an; one will need to actually move and examine things outside the Qur'an: and this would be one aspect of complying with the Qur'an.

Let us go to another example from the Qur'an, another social situation in which the claims are big, but the actual behavior is miserably inept:

“Have you not turned your vision to the Chiefs of the Children of Israel after the time of Moses? They said to a Prophet that was among them: 'Appoint for us a King, that we may fight in the Cause of God.' He said: 'Is it not possible, if you were commanded to fight, that you will not fight?' They said: 'How could we refuse to fight in the cause of God, seeing that we were turned out of our homes and our families?' But when they were commanded to fight, they turned back, except a small band among them. But God has full knowledge of those who do wrong. Their Prophet said to them: 'God has appointed Talut as king over you.'

They said: 'How can he exercise authority over us when we are better fitted than he to exercise authority, and he is not even gifted, with wealth in abundance?' He said: 'God has chosen him above you, and has gifted him abundantly with knowledge and bodily prowess: God grants His authority to whom He pleases. God cares for all, and He knows all things.' ” (2:246-247).

The above verses may be better appreciated by looking at another verse, where Moses says to his people: “ 'Pray for help from God, and wait in patience and constancy: for the earth is God's, to give as a heritage to such of His servants as He pleases; and the end is best for the righteous.' They said: 'We have had nothing but trouble, both before and after you came to us.' He said: 'It may be that your Lord will destroy your enemy and make you inheritors in the earth; that so He may try you by your deeds.' ” (7:128-129).

What Moses' people are virtually saying is: your coming has proved to bring us no salvation; for we suffered before you came, and we still suffer after you came. And Moses' reply was that they should be thinking of something more important than the destruction of their enemy and even their having the upper hand in the earth: it is how they will fare once they have been given the upper hand. They do not give this the consideration that is due to it, but they must encounter it later. We have another verse in the same spirit:

“Do they not then earnestly seek to understand the Qur'an, or are their hearts locked up by them?” (47:24).

How can those who are not aware of these social defects prevent their happening before they happen? This is not possible without realizing the causes and laws, *sunan*, of social crises. Nothing can be stronger in representing this failure than the above verse when it says: “Do they not then earnestly seek to understand the Qur'an, or are their hearts locked up by them?” (47:24).

When the above verse mentions 'arrogance in the land' as the cause for 'plotting of Evil', and assert that the plotting of Evil ' will hem in only the authors thereof ,' (35:43), arrogance in the land is not unconnected with blindness and dumbness and the locks over the hearts that are mentioned as cause in the verse; for arrogance is a psychological condition, an erroneous concept in the soul, which results in the person's

being arrogant: a person whose claims are in disproportion to his/her action, who brags something that they are incapable of doing. This happens from misunderstanding reality and the laws, a limited and narrow perspective of things. You will not find a person who understands and realizes properly the events of history but is arrogant – for arrogance is tightly connected to lack of understanding, with failing to realize the truth.

It is natural that an arrogant person is very low on objective viewing of things (where objective viewing of things is viewing things for what they are; in contrast with subjective viewing, in which you see things as you wish them to be, which may or may not correspond with their actual reality in the world out there; it is to imagine things without firm basis, as for example the way people imagined the sun to be revolving around the earth.) And this failure, as discussed in the Qur'an, emanates from arrogance, and this is no more than erroneous content in the minds.

Arrogance is given much attention in the Qur'an: this is so for a person who lacks an understanding of truth will be arrogant when he/she is in control, and is abject when he/she has lost control. This is unlike the condition of a believer, for this latter will not be arrogant when he/she has control, nor abject when he/she undergoes a catastrophe. This will not happen without objective understanding and knowledge – it is not enough for one to be called a believer; for this must be paired with knowledge: faith must result in understanding and knowledge. Hence the Prophet's asserting that a believer may not be stung twice from the same hole.

Learning about the *sunan*, laws, and developing the habit of observing examples and events, are sure to provide people with vision and knowledge, and a practical way of dealing with things – this is because people who keep alert to indications will not fall in the pits that those before them had fallen; and when they do fall, their sharp vision shows them the way out. It will at least provide them with the robustness of those who perceive the law – there is without doubt a definite difference between one who has the *sunan*, laws, in consideration and sees how they act on life, and one who cannot determine wherefrom events originate. When a person is ignorant of things is in doubt or has reason to be frightened, he/she reacts quite differently from one who

knows: the former is content when he/she must be anxious, and is anxious when he/she should be content. He/she is bewildered with the crises that he/she goes through: for they cannot decide wherefrom they happen; they can only surmise and guess. Unlike them, the one who knows may not be able to do all that must be done at one blow, but he/she knows when to be anxious, and when to feel satisfied: they do not suffer from confusion. They go ahead doing what is right to do at the present moment, what advances their cause, without feeling the little additions to be worthless: they neither dream of removing mountains in one hour, nor do they undervalue the little accomplishments that they realize towards securing the objective. This is the kind of human who is described in the Qur'an verse: "Is then one who walks headlong, with his eyes groveling, better guided, – or one who walks evenly on a Straight Way?" (67:22).

Think of those, a certain community mentioned in the Qur'an, and described as, even if a gate were opened for them "they would only say: 'Our eyes have been intoxicated: nay, we have been bewitched by sorcery,'" (15:15); and reflect how limited their minds were, how rigidly they adhered to their own ways; how incapable they proved to be of just considering that another way to rising could be in existence.

Does this remind you of the condition of the Muslims of the present? They are in a state of great rigidity and conceit; they are quite limited in thought, taking their own conceptions to be the absolute truth – how can it be otherwise, when they are the followers of the true faith, and when they hold on to the 'absolute truth' of the Scripture and the Sunnah.

So, there we are now! Face to face with the crisis in all its weight and the confusion associated with it!

But let us not focus on the weight of the crisis here. Let us stress that this social situation emerges from specific concepts and values, which Muslims, being humans, adopt.

Therefore, when you find that there is much in common between the contemporary Muslims and the people of past times, people who suffered as a result of certain failings, then you must deduce that the same 'way of those before' mentioned in the Qur'an (8:38) that hit previous peoples may hit the Muslims. That we are self-satisfied is no

protection, no matter how it blinds us from realizing that the same rules that apply to other communities apply to us.

If we find that we mimic the ways of other nations, following them, even if they enter a gecko's hole (as the Prophet's Tradition puts it), if we behave the same as older societies behaved, then let us not raise cries of protest – for God's *sunan*, laws, do not undergo change to humor any supposedly favorite people, which is aptly put in the following verse: “Not your desires, nor those of the People of the Book, can prevail: whoever works evil, will be requited accordingly,” (4:123).

Arrogance had blocked the older people's coming to terms with reality; so, what about us? We are indeed both arrogant and abject– and let us not be too amazed that the two antithetical traits are true of us, for we have in *Sahih Muslim* a Tradition listing types of people who the Lord will not look at, and one type is the 'arrogant pauper', for this human is both in need and is arrogant. This is very apt in describing us today, for we are in dire need, and yet are too arrogant to learn. We do not admit that others might have knowledge that we badly need, that all the truth is not in our hands. And at the same time, we have no way of hiding our humiliation and backwardness. Well, this last fact, that we suffer having such a low place among nations, may be our only hope of setting out, of stimulating the Muslim to take heed. When we admit, fully and clearly, our utter defeat and humiliation, that can be the starting point for an advance towards healing; for we cannot hope to proceed without agreeing on a point that is granted by all. And the Muslim can at least concede this defeat – or will it be even hard for us to admit this and be blinded by arrogance to the facts of our low condition?

Let us take up again the point of the full weight of our problem: how serious the problem is specifically summed up in one's losing the ability to perceive things. People do come to a stage when, though they have all the light in their hands, their minds fail to access it, though they did respond to it well before. By way of affinity, let us think of this situation as similar to the time when Solomon died, with his stick in hand and his dead body still leaning to it; the jinn had to continue their hard labor, and a wood-worm was eating up the stick on which he leaned. This lasted for years until, when the stick had been eaten up, and so he fell over. Likewise, the Muslim world had lost its spirit of

understanding, but stayed in place with its sick propping it up. Then it was the colonization that did the job of the wood-worm, and when too much of the supporting stick was eaten up, the Muslim world fell over, not even believing that that could happen to it.

It is a ponderous crisis that we have, and the difficulty lies in driving it into the Muslim's consciousness that he/she had lost the Book (the Qur'an) and *Sunnah*, that they no longer hold in their hand the knowledge of truth and the 'absolute certainty' (ref. to the Qur'an, 102:5), by which they are no longer qualified to receive God's support in any confrontation, as the Qur'an and *Sunnah* affirm. Imagine what layers of darkness and confusion have amassed in the Muslim mind, when the Muslim seems to receive contradictory messages: seeing in real life how blows keep hitting them on the head, while they imagine that they still qualify to receive God's support: it is a great ill-assorted mass of arrogance and degradation and many defeats.

All this is relevant when we are demonstrating that for laws, *sunan*, to find acceptance in the Muslim's conscience, that will in no way happen except through support from the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. So, let me now refer to a Tradition of the Messenger's that has a vital bearing on our discussion.

It is a Tradition that may be quoted as a most vital fundamental of this elusive law which I am trying to develop throughout this book. One only wonders how it eluded both old and modern Muslims to reflect on this Tradition, although it is first an authentic hadith, and second that it represents the present dilemma glaringly enough. Here is the Tradition. Ziad bin Labid reports that the Prophet, peace be upon him, was in the course of discussing some future events when he said: "That will be when knowledge will have gone." "We said," Ziad goes on to report, "How is it possible for knowledge to vanish when we recite the Qur'an; then we will teach it to our children; and our children will teach it to their children?" "Shame on you, Ziad bin Labid," the Prophet said; "I took you to be one of the most perceptive men of Medina! Do you not see how the Jews and Christians read their Torah and Injil (the sacred Books reveal to Moses and Jesus) and yet benefit nothing from what is in them?" (Ibn Kathir mentioned this Tradition in the course of commenting on Verse 5:66, and he attested to its being an authentic Tradition.)

The truthful and honest Prophet, peace be upon him, proves again in the above Tradition that he understands the laws in their deepest sense. Indeed, nothing that this Ummah needs to be taught for proper life but he said it. He perceived the future with the eye of *sunan*, laws. You see how he refers to two well-known religions with huge following, the Jews and Christians ('People of the Book' in Qur'anic terminology), to indicate that what proved to be true of them could certainly be true of Muslims. No vagueness or ambiguity need blur one's understanding of the Prophet's example. He refers to a law, an example of it that has its history and its believers were still existent, to extrapolate to the future: all past, present, and future, are included in the Prophet's perspective. And this should be no wonder, for a law is not a law if does not have this wide application: Here for example, any nation that had acquired traits like those true of the Jews and Christians will have to suffer similar conditions: This mental similarity is what is termed in the Qur'an as 'their hearts are alike', as in the verse: "Those without knowledge say: 'Why doesn't God speak to us? Or why doesn't a Sign come to us?' So said the people before them words of similar import. Their hearts are alike. We have indeed made clear the Signs to any people who hold firmly to Faith," (2:118).

That people go in impunity to commit sins, claiming that they would only receive a little torture and then go to Paradise, this is something that the Jews and Christians did, as pointed out in the verse of the Qur'an: "And they say: 'The Fire shall not touch us bur for a few numbered days,'. Say: 'Have you taken a promise from God, for He never breaks His promise? Or is it that you say of God what you do not know?'" (2:80). And in another location: "Have you not turned your vision to those who have been given a portion of the Book? They are invited to the Book of God, to settle their dispute, but a party of them turn back and decline the arbitration. This because they say: 'The Fire shall not touch us but for a few numbered days': for their forgeries deceive them as to their own religion;" (3:24). But this did not prevent some Muslims from behaving in the same way and employing the same justification.

It is often like this – that nations and peoples claim some kind of prestige for themselves, a claim that what is true of others cannot be true of them. But the Lord denies this, as you see in the Qur'an when it says:



“Not your desires, nor those of the People of the Book can prevail: whoever works evil, will be requited accordingly,” (4:123).

To take up the above Tradition again, the Companions cannot imagine how some event can happen ‘at that time when knowledge has gone.’ Is it conceivable that they would lose knowledge when they have the source of knowledge, the Qur’an? To bring that situation within the comprehension of Muslims, the Messenger, peace be upon him, demonstrates how this is possible and probable by referring to actual examples drawn from life around them, the real situation of nations that were contemporary to them: how the two mentioned nations had revealed Books, but they benefited nothing by them.

By listing the above *hadith*, Tradition, my objective is to illustrate how it is quite likely for Muslims to have the same fate that earlier nations had suffered, and this is what happened in fact. Muslim do read the Qur’an and Sunnah (the corpus of hadiths) but benefit nothing by them: this is what happens as a result of knowledge having receded to almost naught among them. Is not the above *hadith* saying that? We are in this acting in accordance with the word and spirit of the *hadith*. The only thing we may need to argue about is: What is that knowledge that the *hadith* is referring to, and have we actually lost it completely or not?

We do know from the above Tradition that knowledge ‘*ilm* in Arabic’ is asserted to vanish from among Muslims one day. And viewing the actual state of Muslims, one can see more bitterly than any argument down what abyss the Muslims have fallen.

We have all the very loud indications to show that Muslims have lost this knowledge ‘*ilm*’, as mentioned by the Messenger, peace be upon him; that the Qur’an raises knowledge to a very high place falls on deaf ears: Muslims do not seem to remember when the Qur’an asserts that God ranks people according to the amount of knowledge they have acquired; or its denying that those who lack knowledge may occupy a place equal to those who have it.

It may be noticed that the word ‘*ilm*, knowledge’ has lost any clear definition among Muslims; they do not have the criteria by which

they may distinguish what is *ilm*<sup>2</sup> and what is not; hence the confusion of knowledge and conjecture. Knowledge is often confused with fancies and delusion. No wonder that the Prophet should speak of a time when *ilm*, knowledge, should shrink until it is nearly nonexistent. You see how Muslims are proud of their religion's being the religion of enlightenment and knowledge; but it will be seen upon a little examination that our boasting is not so different from some silly people's parading their fashionable appearance. You may notice that when there arises any serious discussion of our conditions on a scientific basis how most Muslims show impatience and vexation; how they cannot distinguish what is knowledge from what is conjecture – they cling instead to subjective impressions that Muslims have inherited generation after generation.

I know it is not our main concern here to discuss this misapprehended knowledge, '*ilm*', but it does bear on our main topic to reflect on the Muslims' having lost the spirit of exploration and scrutiny; for without the power of *ilm*, knowledge, the Muslims will never deal in any useful way with the Qur'an and the Prophet's Traditions. They will stay as they are at present, pawns in the hands of players: it will avail them nothing to keep bragging that they are the camp of truth, that they are the people of Qur'an, and the holders of 'knowledge of certainty'.

One main problem with the Muslim's clinging to the Qur'an and Prophet's Traditions '*Kitab* and *Sunnah*' is that he/she confuses this firm attachment to these sources with the assumption that once you hold tightly to the revealed text you no longer need any other knowledge. It is on account of this assumption that the Muslim cannot imagine how the Holy Scripture together with the Prophet's *Sunnah* have not worked their wonder by lifting the state of degradation among the believers!

It is a mistake to expect from the revealed text what is not its part to achieve. For no, it is not the task of the *Kitab* and *Sunnah* to lift the state of degradation, from among those who fail to have active minds and perception. This is then the crux of the problem. When we speak of

---

<sup>2</sup> The initial sound in the word *ilm* is hard to pronounce for non-Arabic speakers. They simply pronounce it as beginning with a glottal stop, but it is the sound of the 18<sup>th</sup> letter of the Arabic alphabet.

the Qur'an and *Sunnah* as the source of guiding people to the right path, they are indeed so, but they will not automatically guide everyone. You may notice this in the verses of the Qur'an itself, as for instance when it says:

“By it [the Qur'an] He causes many to stray, and many He leads into the right path,” (2:26); “You can but admonish such as fear their Lord,” (35:18); “You can but admonish such a one as follows the Message,” (36:11) and “That it may give admonition to any who are alive, and that the charge may be proved against those who reject Truth,” (36:70).

It is no fault of the *Kitab* and *Sunnah* that they do not guarantee high status for those who announce their loyalty to them. This fact bears a lot of repeating and emphasizing. For people first make the assumption that this is the task of the two sources of revelation, and then wonder why they have not done their part. It becomes a mystery and a cause of tribulation. But then, this is all our doing, and the *Kitab* and *Sunnah* are not to blame for it. It is no solace here that the assumption stems from glorifying the *Kitab* and *Sunnah*, for the folly is nonetheless there, and our assumptions are not equal to the truth of the matter. Allah's Book is in its place, as Sacred and Holy as ever, but it will not just raise those who do not know how to raise their heads with the light given by *Kitab* and *Sunnah*.

If all the above is quite clear, we may next turn again to the Muslim, for there the whole problem lies. He/she will benefit nothing from the *Kitab* and *Sunnah* unless they acquire the necessary *ilm*, knowledge.

The problem with the Muslim as we have been discussing so far is compounded with another problem, another hurdle: Will the Muslim ever confess that he/she has fallen to a level that they can benefit nothing by what is in the *Kitab* and *Sunnah*? Do not imagine that a confession like this is an easy thing. Indeed, to perceive this, and to have it as a settled fact, is a most vital condition for progress. For one needs to realize that they have committed a sin before they repent; and without even realizing their defect, how can they repent?

Comprehension comes before repentance: it is the condition prior to changing what is in the soul: a repentant person is one who has changed what is in their soul.

Not only the *Kitab* and *Sunnah* remain inactive in Muslims' hands, but all the laws of God in the universe must remain inactive as long as people pass them by without coming to terms with those laws. Of course, the laws are operative and remain operative with or without people's awakening to them: for example, the law of gravity does not wait for people's attention to operate. But what is meant here is that the Muslim is still unable to study those laws and use them to advantage. So, the problem is the same here and here: the problem is not in the *Kitab* and *Sunnah*, nor in the laws of the world, but in the Muslim who has so far failed to examine and study.

It is relevant to remember that the word '*Sunnah*' has two meanings: One meaning is the corpus of the Prophet's hadiths and life, and '*sunnah*' is also used in the sense of the laws of the world, which is frequently the way the Qur'an uses the word.

We may say that by now we have come closer to locating where the problem lies: it is not in the *Kitab* or in the *Sunnah* (*Sunnah* in both senses); it lies in the mind that has lost its function in the Muslim world. It must be telling in this connection that some centuries back it was announced in the Muslim world that 'the door to *ijtihad* 'striving to come up with Sharia rulings as the ever-changing circumstances required' is closed'. It is not the Qur'an nor the Prophet who commanded this closure: if anything, the Qur'an and *sunnah* keep urging Muslims to do more and more *ijtihad*. What really happened in the Muslim world is that the closing of 'the door to *ijtihad*' reflects the closing of the mind. It will no longer admit the *Kitab* and *Sunnah* to enter it, and to do their task of directing the human's progress. It is true that the intention was good, that the closure of the way for the mind to function was good: to protect the *Kitab* and *Sunnah* from any mishandling or misapprehending; but the result was detrimental: for a closed mind can never be a guardian of the *Kitab* and *Sunnah*.

It may be noted that those who are at present genuinely upholding the *Kitab* and *Sunnah* in the Muslim world, all the godly persons who have appeared in this Ummah, are never those who have

sealed their minds against *ijtihad*, against striving to fathom the real sense of texts: it is such persons who do their best to have their minds function properly, to regain the vital function of the mind in the Muslim world, a mind that had been lame for many centuries, if not paralyzed.

The point at which the Muslim seems to stumble is his/her assuming that once you hold the *Kitab* and *Sunnah* in your hand you will not lose your way: this is a mistake in fact, for those who have no knowledge, those who have deactivated their vision and hearing and therefore their minds, will have lost the ability to benefit by the *Kitab* and *Sunnah*.

This is to say that, unless the Muslim world regains the activity of its minds, unless its vision and hearing are used for the purpose they were created to fulfil – then the treasures of the *Kitab* and *Sunnah* will remain beyond their reach; they will remain behind locked doors. Let us remember the comparison used by the Lord when He mentioned those who had been entrusted with bearing the Torah but failed to do so.

When minds are idle, when scales cover the eyes, and when the ears are blocked with blockers – then how can they we interact with truth?

One reason which prevents Muslims from going ahead with reactivating their minds is that they ask: If what you say is true, how could this have gone unnoticed by millions of Muslims across many generations? And this is a really hard hurdle.

Let us take this as a legitimate objection, for it may be raised at any stage of the road. And unless we take such questions in earnest, there may be no progress towards a solution for our problem. Let us remember the 'shackles and heavy burdens' mentioned in the Qur'an (7:157), for they stand as a stumbling block in the mind of the Muslim, and that stumbling block is enough to make a Muslim come to a standstill. The essence of this problem lies in this: that to admit the rightness of our new approach is a kind of condemnation of millions of previous Muslims; and to renounce the new approach means persisting in our wilderness and accepting no way out of it. Therefore, I see nothing but honest inquiry on the part of those who are wary of the unprecedented way of dealing with our dilemmas. To succeed in solving this inquiry will send peace into the heart of the Muslims: they will feel

they are not deviating from the right path. A solution is necessary. I imagine that many would rather avoid all such complication, but it is necessary that we do take up our problems and remove any impediments from the way of the Muslim. And let us be patient, for even with all the help, the Muslim mind will at this stage keep progressing most tentatively and cautiously.

That a Muslim is outraged at finding millions of older Muslims at fault is not unjustified. It is somehow justified, but it involves certain mistakes in analysis. Let us remember that a little hair sometimes blocks sight: a problem might seem colossal when its solution is at hand.

Let me then address the dear Muslim, my brother and sister: I do realize your anxiety; I do imagine you looking to the right and left, seeking for a way out. Indeed, your concern is not different from my concern, for I have spent long years upon this same road. I only urge you to join me in a search in which neither I nor you feel vexed at each other's company – for we do need to probe this and see the road of light. The poet Iqbal describe a rather identical situation when he composed the following couplets:

A veteran of the road like me will not have it concealed from him,

Any thought that flits across the youth's mind, whether uttered or not.

Yes, I do have experience of all your ups and downs,

For along this same road I have walked quite long.

Indeed, it is in the Qur'an and *Sunnah* 'the *Kitab* and *Sunnah*' that we find the solution to this anxiety in the mind of the Muslim: on only one condition, that we approach them with an open mind. If we do, then nothing will lead us astray.

One principle that the Lord teaches us in His Glorious Scripture is that falsehood will never gain the strength of truth, no matter how many uphold its case, or how long it survives. Let us read one of the relevant verses:

“Say: 'Not equal are things that are bad and things that are good, even though the abundance of the bad may dazzle you;’” (5:100).

Another relevant rule is that the Qur’an condemns those who hold blindly to the ways of their ancestors; it says:

“When it is said to them: 'Follow what God has revealed,' they say: 'Nay! We shall follow the ways of our fathers.' What! Even though their fathers were void of wisdom and guidance?;” (2:170).

To follow this up, one will come upon so many verses that develop the same idea; here is another verse: “Truly they found their fathers on the wrong Path, so they too were rushed down on their footsteps!” (37:69-70).

You will especially find such attitude ascribed to the ignorant people when the Qur’an relates the disputes between the prophets and their peoples: “Pharaoh said: 'What is the condition of previous generations?’” (20:51) Do we not hear the same question at present? And the proper reply today is the same reply that Moses gave, and the Lord endorses in the Qur’an when He says:

“He replied: 'The knowledge of that is with my Lord, duly recorded: my Lord never errs, nor forgets;’” (20:52).

What is relevant in Moses and Pharaoh’s story as recounted on the above occasion is that the latter is virtually saying: “What about the generations before, Moses? Are you, and you alone, who can understand this, when many generations before this went by uttering nothing like it! Why could they not see things the way you see them?”

So, we often hear the same kind of argument in our own days. And we hear another objection, too. Some will say: “You compare Muslims to unbelievers, to Pharaoh and the pagan peoples.” So, we need to have patience, to train Muslims to accept new ways of viewing Muslims – I did assert, early on, that the verse of change "Verily never will God change the condition of a people until they change what is in their souls;" (13:11) applies to Muslims and non-Muslims. Any two nations or peoples that bear the same ideas and values, will have the same outcome.

We do see that the biological rules apply to Muslim and non-Muslim alike; and we must realize that the psychological principles are like this, for they apply to people of whatever background and creed they might have. Let us have the ability to accept a true principle and its outcome regardless of those who utter it. The Qur'an handles this most emphatically, as in:

“Not your desires, nor those of the People of Book can prevail: whoever works evil, will be requited accordingly;” (4:123).

It is also important to note that, by finding the ancestors at fault on a certain issue is not at all to condemn them to Hell or to charge them with disbelief. It helps us in this regard to remember the Muslim archers, who disobeyed the Prophet, peace be upon him, in the Battle of Uhud, by leaving their posts. Those who died among those archers had their souls borne by green birds in Paradise on the same evening, though their mistake had been announced. People will have their excuse or justification even when they are in the wrong.

Let us quote a rather long statement by Ibn Taymiah, for it says something good about the issue in hand, this psychological barrier that blocks Muslims' correcting mistakes; he says:

“From the above principle we may go on to say that a man, great in knowledge and piety, among the Companions or later generations, and until the Day of Judgment, can behave or utter things on the basis of *ijtihad* (i.e. striving to come upon the right ruling), and from surmise, together with some subconscious desire, in a way that is not proper to be mimicked, though he might be among God's best allies. Such erroneous behavior or statement, by such a person, will prove to be misleading in two different ways: one group of people hold that person in high status, and they insist on deeming right his behavior, and copy the same behavior; while another group find fault with the man for his behavior and denigrate him, taking that erroneous behavior to be grounds enough for finding the man lacking in righteousness and piety; if not going further by finding the man straying from the straight path, and not meriting to enter Paradise: they may label him as an apostate. Both of these attitudes are wrong: to be reasonable in judgment requires a Muslim to hold high a person who is actually superior; to love such a person and accept him as brother; he should hold truth as the basis, and



support it. He will have mercy for others. A man, the same man, will have good deeds and bad deeds, so he may be complimented for the first and blamed for the latter; he may be rewarded for the first and punished for the latter; he must be loved in a way, and disliked in a way. This is the way of those who adhere to *Sunnah*; unlike those who have their unwarranted ways.” (*Mukhtarat al-Sa’di*, p. 72). With this in mind, we may say then that Moses’ reply was perfect, quite exact and scientific, taking in consideration the psychological impediments – that is in his saying: “The knowledge of that is with my Lord,” (20:52). He did not condemn the preceding peoples to Hell or justify their way. The problem was clear to him: it is not to condemn or justify older peoples, but to help the living people find the right path.

Let us learn this lesson, then. For the ancestors might be enjoying God’s blessing and pleasure – however, that must not prevent us from going beyond any slip of theirs, for we are not excused to hold on to what is wrong. There are two contrasting situations depicted in the Qur’an, with only one page separating them. In the first, the context is about good people and the text reads: “Were you witnesses when Death appeared before Jacob? Behold, he said to his sons: 'What will you worship after me?' They said: 'We shall worship your God and the God of your fathers – of Abraham, Ismael, and Isaac – the One True God: to Him we bow in Islam,' That was a People who have passed away. They shall reap the fruit of what they did, and you of what you do! Of their merits there is no question in your case!” (2:133-134); and in the second, the conclusion is about perverted people, and the text says, “Or do you say that Abraham, Ismael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes were Jews or Christians? Say: 'Do you know better that God? Ah! Who is more unjust than those who conceal the testimony they have from God? But God is not unmindful of what you do!' That was a people who have passed away. They shall reap the fruit of what they did, and you of what you do! Of their merits there is no question in your case;” (2:140-141).

It will do us good also to notice another law of the Qur’an’s, and to implement it. It will be noticed that, when the Qur’an condemns some past nation for their delusion, it does not condemn them en masse: it rather speaks of the majority, or it excludes some individuals. You find expressions like: “very few of them would have done it;” (4:66); “but only a few believed with him;” (11:40); “But few of My servants are

grateful;" (34:13); "not so do those who believe and work deeds of righteousness, and how few are they?" (38:24); "Then you turned back, except a few among you, and you backslide even now;" (2:83) "nor will you cease to find them – except barring a few – ever bent on new deceits;" (5:13); "Why were there not, among the generations before you persons possessed of balanced good sense, prohibiting men from mischief in the earth – except a few among them whom We saved from harm?" (11:116). This is when speaking of a community, most of whom are in the wrong, but some are excluded from condemnation, not having been guilty of the delusion or sin in which the majority fell. The Qur'an very succinctly does not condemn the whole, except in situations like speaking of Iblis and all his soldiers. Another thing to notice is connected not to a community's, but to the individual's behavior: there also we have this exactness of judgment. Here are some examples:

"little it is they believe;" (2:88); "Little it is you remember;" (7:3); "Nay, but little do they understand;" (48:15).

But let us go back to our main topic, about the psychological barrier, some people's inquiring: "What about the older generations? Have not people lived and believed like this for centuries? Were they all like this?"

And the answer is no, not every individual was like that, following the erroneous ways. Admittedly, however, few individuals across history proved capable of rising above the common situation, the situation represented in verses like:

"When it is said to them: 'Follow what God has revealed;' they say: 'Nay! We shall follow the ways of our fathers.' What! Even though their fathers were void of wisdom and guidance?" (2:170).

Also, we may find characters in history like Ibn Taymiah, who has been the butt of attack by many of those who hold tight to what is inherited from the ancestors (and in the modern world, you find al-Afghani, Muhammad Abdoh, and Rashid Rida, fiercely attacked, even by some of the more enlightened). But to have a scattered few here and there does not lead to a change of society, until the better-thinking individuals can attract the attention of a critical number that is influential enough to create impact on the community. For many centuries even the writings of such bright figures are vehemently attacked, and Ibn

Taymiah himself died in the prison of Kal'ah, in Damascus, without access to writing material.

It must be added that this group of ingenious persons are not themselves free from error. They can and do slip, and they are sometimes wrong in their reasoning. But they have done something exceptional by being beacons of enlightenment; and it is to them that we turn to inspire us with good guidance. It is true, however, that, no matter how somebody rises in knowledge, history will overtake them and pass them by; but that does not prevent the better informed from recognizing the good part of those luminaries. It may be noted that, whether one takes a hostile or favorable attitude towards a specific reformer, and even when some condemn their intentions, we refer to them for our progress.

You will find that, for anyone who wants to better understand God's Signs in the world around us, and in human life, they will turn to the pioneers before them: he/she will draw strength from their strength and light from their light. It is really at their table that we have our nourishment. And let me say that for those who know the stages of history, they do not find any exaggeration in what we say here. One of our worst problems is that we do not examine history and how things came into their present shape: how the good things came into evolving to be what they are today, and how bad things came to be as they are today. Is not such examination the way to judging things, by following their development?

We may now go back to our main discussion, linking the signs of the world and human life with the verses of the Qur'an, to keep them tightly tied up – and this to help the Muslim perceive the close links between the former and the latter, that such linkage is not at all arbitrary. One will of course need a lot of skill to help the Muslim perceive this, to be well-versed in the way to the mind of the pious Muslim. When we here attempt to restore to the mind its proper function, we need not contradict any of Qur'an's injunctions. On the contrary, this Great Book sets out to restore to the human being his/her role as a human being: for without behaving like mature human beings, they cannot act upon exhortations like “have you no understanding?” (3:65, and elsewhere) in the Qur'an. And responding to such exhortation is really the way to a happy life. The Qur'an takes the human by hand, from the moment it

calls to him/her “O, People;” through “They will further say: 'Had we listened or used our intelligence, we should not now be among the companions of the Blazing Fire,'” (67:10) and right till it says: “Had it not been for the Grace of my Lord, I should certainly have been among those brought (to Hell);” (37:57).

My purpose in all this is to give those concerned a suitable lever, to always find, when bringing laws to the notice of Muslims, this link with the Qur'an: this is the way to invigorate a law, and turn it into a real force in the hands of Muslims. For we are endeavoring to have the *sunan*, laws, have their efficiency in the life of the Muslim world. And when we speak of social efficiency, we mean that the mind deals directly with God's laws in its striving to win God's pleasure. I cannot represent how superior will a society like this be among the nations of the world, I mean in dealing properly with the laws. So bountiful will be the boons that pour on such society directly from God, both noticed and recognized and unnoticed and unrecognized, some related to this world and some to the Hereafter. But it might not prove enough that the command is traced back to the Qur'an to be accepted by Muslims: we have seen how they do not allow any command to work until it filters through the ancestors. How often does the Qur'an condemn the attitude of “Never did we hear such a thing as he says, among our ancestors of old,” (23:24); and yet, it remains so dominant in the Muslim's mind. I hope this shows that we are not dealing with a simple problem. Having said that, I add that by seeing the problem for what it is, and fathoming its various aspects, show that it is within human ability to deal with it and solve it. The problem will boil down to enabling the Muslim to deal with facts, to divest facts of any extraneous circumstance; it is simply to act in according with the *sunnah*, the law, as we find it in this verse of the Qur'an: “It was the law approved of God among those of old that have passed away. And the command of God is a decree determined;” (33:38).

I need to distinguish here between what people had accepted on the basis of trust, and what they had accepted on the basis of dealing with the law, *sunnah*. For those who know how to deal with the law do not care if the carrier of the facts is reliable or not: it is the facts themselves that have all the weight, as long as they are seen to draw from verifiable laws. Therefore, for a person who has developed skill in

dealing with the laws directly, he/she will not be misled by the well-intended delusions of a friend or the ill-intended claims of a foe. Intentions in this case do not count. It is, on the other hand, those who have not developed this skill of dealing with the law, those who only take things on the basis of trust, that will very often be led to accept untrue or baseless things. This especially happens in dealing with interpretations of the Prophet's Traditions – for while the Prophet, peace be upon him, never said something wrong, the interpretations can be right or wrong. And when one accepts interpretations without examining them one of two opposite problems can happen:

By accepting an erroneous reading, on the basis of trusting somebody who we take to be trustworthy; or

By rejecting a correct reading, when we mistrust the person who put forth his/her interpretation.

Muslims still rely mostly on trust when they accept or reject claims, and that appears in the human and social spheres. They have not developed this ability of dealing with the facts of law directly.

It is true of course that we need to check when we hear someone put forth any claim concerning matters of the world or human life. Science has its own domain, and that concerns matters of this world; so whenever we come across what is assumed to be scientifically true we need to check; and when we deal with historical facts, the facts of what happened and now happen in the world, we choose how to study them and we choose to apply what proves to have the best results, the most beneficial in outcome. We may be guided in all this by a verse of the Qur'an which says: "so announce the Good News to My servants – those who listen to the Word, and follow the best meaning in it: those are the ones whom God has guided, and those are the ones endued with understanding;" (39:17-18).

This means, for instance, that when someone reports something to be an astronomical fact, we do not hasten to say he/she is just an astrological liar. If what he/she says has its scientific proof, we do not need to renounce their statement. Several centuries back Ibn Taymiah said something to that effect; he said: "About the eclipse of the sun or the moon, knowing that can be ascertained from physical observation; but when a particular person makes a claim about eclipse, he/she can

speak from reliable knowledge or not ... when, however, all the scholars in that domain affirm a fact in their domain, they can rarely be in the wrong ... It would be right for one to act on the assertion of a scholar in that domain, if he/she feels that that scholar is most likely telling the truth, and if one performs the prayer connected with eclipse, he/she would be behaving rightly, and to pray then would be being prompt to serve Allah and worship Him.” (*Al-Fatawa*, Vol. I, p. 322; ed. Cairo, 1326 A.H.)

When the claimed piece of information is in the domain of history, individual or community life, then we need not take the speaker’s intention and piety to be the sole criterion; but our concern should be to ascertain how well the claimed fact stands examination and testing against reality. Ibn Khaldun did notice this, in the course of his examination of the laws and norms of social life. He says about the causes of a piece of news being false: “One feature that causes a report to be false, a feature that is more important than all the features I mentioned before is this: It is the reporter’s being ignorant of the norms and features of social and human life. Any incident, or any state of things, does have its distinct nature, and its particular development. If one who happens to take note of the incident has sufficient cognizance of the norms and general nature of existence, and their implications, this will help him/her to scrutinize the report, to assess how true or untrue it is. This assessment takes place prior to any investigation of the various reporters, how reliable and truthful they might be. In this first assessment of the report, a scholar will feel inclined to reject the report as impossible or not – for if it is impossible, then there is no reason to examine the truthfulness or untruthfulness of reporters. Experts did mention that one reason for rejecting a report is the impossibility of its purport, or interpreting it in a way that common sense would not approve. It is true that examining the condition of reporters and how reliable they are (which is a full science in Islamic tradition – the science of ‘who is reliable and who is not’) is the criterion in matters of Islamic *shariah*, but that is only so since most of the statements conveyed are expositions made by the Legislator, and so we accept them as long as their line of reporters seems to be free from any cause for rejecting a particular narration: it is in this case the line of reporters and nothing else that we need to rely on.

“But when the report concerns historical events, then one needs, for pronouncing a report to be true and factual, to consider its being acceptable when examined against the general trends and norms of history: this is really the most basic of the criteria of accepting or rejecting a piece of information. It is otherwise in statements establishing commands to be followed, as in the case of *shariah* texts, for in this latter case, the statement is true in itself, without reference to something outside itself... This is then a law in distinguishing the true from the false. It is the law to follow in dealing with reports, and the proof will in this case be final and decisive, and there is no doubt about a researcher’s findings. Indeed, this has been the main cause of my composing the current work... It seems that I am attempting a science that is unlike any other, an independent discipline; a discipline that has its distinctive topic: human culture and social life. And then you find that this independent science has its various subdivisions and related topics – which is of course true of any domain of knowledge, whether revealed or man-made.” (*Al-Muqaddimah*, p. 37).

Those who know the laws of societies and individuals in connection with advertisement for a particular business can carry out particular activities that convince people to part with their money of their own volition, and buy the particular commodity or service which is being advertised. Of course, many people acquire this knowledge through intuitive experience, or they have this skill without even learning it from others – one can often notice this even in the case of peddlers. But the work of such persons is not the same as the work of the specialized organizations, commissioned at the highest level to study things from all possible angles, and they are given tasks that seem quite imaginary, but they are often carried out successfully. People specializing in the sociology and psychology of propaganda and advertisement can tell you a lot about such activities. Similarly, specialists in propaganda during wars, and specialists in ideological propaganda can accomplish similar feats. It can be ascertained, in scientific ways, what makes it possible to influence a certain society with the particular propaganda but not another.

And, in the same way as specialized sciences may be used to manipulate societies, they can be used to protect a society from propaganda in war, in the ideological conflict, and from economic

manipulation. Safeguarding societies need not be conducted by intuitive ways: for as things do happen according to laws, and never without governing laws, then we need not have the laws controlling us without taking the right measures to be in the controlling seat. Laws are everywhere, and science can and does recognize them and people go ahead in turning those laws to account; and they keep working on better application of rules and overcoming the errors; and they keep developing faster ways to forestall any surprises.

But, of course, only people who have discovered the way to dealing directly with the laws can reap such fruit – definitely not the nations that wait in apprehension for the next blow and the next and the next; fathoming nothing of the events of the world, and having no idea where the catastrophes come from. Such communities are quite helpless in defending themselves, nor do their elite know how to give the masses some immunity against manipulation and intellectual assault – let alone having the surveillance centers that keep up with the errors and take the measures to correct ways, on the best available methods and information concerned with the conditions of societies.

## THE MIND AND THE *SUNAN*, LAWS, IN THE QUR'AN

Any researcher can ascertain how prominent a place the mind and the *sunan*, laws, occupy in the Qur'an, and that prominence is accorded to them on purpose, not by the way. You will find mention of the mind and the *sunan*, laws, distributed over the whole of the Qur'an: in association with observing the natural phenomena, in surveying the fortunes of past peoples: the Qur'an gives special attention to the problem of the human as may be noticed in past communities. More particularly, the Qur'an focuses on the phenomenon of guidance and misguidance in human life.



As for the law, the *sunnah*, as discussed in the Qur'an – we have so far had many occasions to mention quite a few relevant texts, especially in connection with the laws of social life. Let us remember the following verse focusing on the signs of the world out there and the human souls – how the Qur'an asserts how they would come to be under human notice in the future:

“Soon will We show them Our Signs in the farthest regions of the earth and in their own souls, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the Truth;” (41:53). As you see, the Qur'an is asserting that the coming of the mentioned signs, in both the world in general and in human and social life in particular, into being, will compel the minds to concede that the revealed Scripture was really revealed by God; as you see in the other verse: “And those to whom knowledge has come see that the Revelation sent down to you from your Lord – that is the Truth, and that it guides to the Path of the Exalted in Might, Worthy of all praise;” (34:6). It seems that this latter issue of the law, the *sunnah*, may be conceded without much resistance by the Muslims; but it is much more difficult to see the Muslim mind get over its inertia; it is such a major achievement to have it relate directly to the laws of the world, which is of course the way to turning the powers of existence to account ‘subjecting them in Qur'anic terms,’ (as in 45:13).

The Qur'an takes this issue most seriously: it focuses in all ways on stirring people's interest in putting the mind to its right function, to keep it active and alert to the events in the world and bringing out lessons from them: it keeps urging people to examine the destiny of past societies; for many behaved no better than beasts in failing to put their intellects to use.

Inactivity of the mind happens mainly because of one cause, although other secondary causes have their part.

The main cause of the inactivity of the mind is upholding a belief of purposelessness in existence, taking creation as having no purpose. That is why the Lord asserts in the Qur'an: “We did not create the heavens, the earth, and all between them, merely in idle sport;” (44:38); and “Did you think that We created you in jest;” (23:115).

When one believes in the purposelessness of creation, he/she would not recognize the existing system, the laws, *sunan*, that control

the world: there is no reason for such a person to recognize the relation of the thinking power of humans with the laws of the universe. For one who holds to this philosophy, there is no reason to admit the social and individual responsibility of the individual; i.e. the responsibility in this world and responsibility in the Last Day.

It is unfortunate that we, Muslims, though we may deny it, do believe in the purposelessness of creation. We do not like to admit it as an explicit philosophy, but the essence of it is true of us; it is true as indicated in behavior rather than in words. It is what paralyses our thinking and action in the Muslim world. This paralysis of thinking is manifest in the above discussion of the ‘closing of the door to *ijtihad*’; although this blockage is only a result of the deeper ailment of inactivating the thinking power of humans – and we see now that is tightly connected to a belief in a chaotic existence, an existence that is not controlled by *sunan*, laws.

It may be seen that no effort towards reactivating the mind and research may take place as long as this defect of the absence of purpose and system continues to paralyze the minds.

How this defect seeped into the Islamic mind is not always easy to trace: not always did it seep under an identifiable designation; sometimes in the name of glorifying the ancestors; sometimes in the name of glorifying the dominance of the Lord Creator, which left no room for human part in determining the events of history. But once this ailment came into being, it had its own seed, which grew and proliferated, and again had more progeny, more and more generations. In all this the fact remains one: as long as people believe that the world is not controlled by identifiable laws, laws that may be brought to serve human purposes, it will be in vain to work and toil to understand how things work, nor will there hope for having a hand in directing what happens.

The Qur’an does identify the secondary defects that result from a belief in the purposelessness of creation; here are five of them:

1. Failing to heed,
2. Turning the faces away,
3. Rejecting the signs,
4. The desires of the heart,

5. Following in the steps of the fathers.

Let us elaborate about these five items:

1. The Problem of failing to heed.

The Lord says in the Qur'an: "Those who do not rest their hope on their meeting with Us, but are pleased and satisfied with the life of the Present, and those who do not heed Our Signs – their abode is the Fire, because of the evil they earned;" (10:7-8).

He says: "Those who reject Our Signs and Meeting in the Hereafter – vain are their deeds: can they expect to be rewarded except as they wrought?" (7:147).

And He says: "they have hearts wherewith they understand not, eyes wherewith they see not, and ears wherewith they hear not. They are like cattle – nay more misguided: for they are heedless;" (7:179).

2. Problem of turning away the faces from God's Signs and *Sunan*, laws.

We have on this these verses of the Qur'an: "And how many Signs in the heavens and the earth do they pass by? Yet they turn their faces away from them!" (12:105).

We have: "And We have made the heavens as a canopy well-guarded: yet do they turn away from the Signs which these things point to!" (21:32)

"Nay, We have sent them their admonition, but they turn away from their admonition;" (23:71).

This turning away results from failing to recognize the relation between the thinking force and the *sunan* of the universe, a relation which the Qur'an calls 'subjecting' the phenomena.

3. The Problem of rejecting God's Signs, and lying:

About that, the Lord says in the Qur'an: "Who does more wrong than he who invents a lie against God or rejects His Signs?" (6:21)

"And if they reject you, so did their predecessors;" (35:25)

"But indeed men before them rejected My warning, then how terrible was My rejection of them?" (67:18)

"Nay, but there came to you My Signs, and you rejected them: you were haughty;" (39:59)

"Nay, they charge with falsehood that whose knowledge they cannot compass, even before the elucidation thereof has reached them: thus did those before them make charges of falsehood: but see what was the end of those who did wrong;" (10:39)

"But they tell a lie against God, and well they know it;" (Al 3:75)

"Behold! How they invent a lie against God! But that by itself is a manifest sin;" (4:50)

"But who does more wrong than one who invents a lie against God, to lead astray men without knowledge?" (6:144)

"But God does not guide such as are false and ungrateful;" (39:3).

In the above verses, the Almighty asserts:

1. That to reject truth is doing wrong ..
2. That it was a practice of previous peoples, too;
3. That the outcome will sure follow from rejecting truth;
4. That it is connected to being haughty;
5. That it happens in connection with things that people had no previous knowledge;
6. That it happens sometime on purpose, and knowingly;
7. That inventing a lie may sometimes happen for misleading others, without having knowledge;
8. That a liar, one who invents lies to reject God's Truth, will not find the way of truth.

Like haughtiness, turning the face, and not taking heed, rejecting the truth results from what one bears in their soul; it is a condition of a people, concepts and values in the soul. If explored, there will be discovered, at its back, certain values, thoughts, and beliefs in the soul, and inventing a lie to reject truth results from these. For rejecting the truth, and for a liar to desist from this and give up their wrongful ways, the motives, settled in the soul, must undergo the suitable change.

Therefore, those who are concerned with overcoming this defect of lying against God by rejecting the Truth, they will need to approach it as emanating on the basis of laws, *sunan*, of the soul; that anyone who bears certain identifiable concepts and perspectives, will behave in this way. It is a delicate point: that the problem we are discussing is not confined to any particular group; it is on the contrary a general human problem, discernible in any people who bear certain ideas. Rejecting the truth will be parallel to what ideas exist in the soul, increasing or decreasing in proportion to those ideas; and it will be more or less visible in accordance with them.

This calls for a calm approach in dealing with such defects; a call not to feel exasperated that if this is a symptom the unbelievers have, then how can it be true of Muslims?

Indeed, the right way to dealing with rejecting the truth is to be worried not about this behavior, but about the concepts behind it – to be worried about rejecting the truth does not stop our committing these errors, as long as we bear in our soul concepts and values that naturally lead to rejecting the truth. If you observe the disasters that Muslims suffer, you will find how they result from their rejecting many of Allah’s signs; and from their turning their backs to them. They simply have no inkling how these disasters are the outcome of erroneous ideas in their soul. And when we speak of Allah’s signs, these signs are to be found in the Scripture of God, in the world around us, and in human experience. It will help nobody to be so keen on not denying the Signs of God as revealed in His Scripture, as long as they do not get the gist of those signs. It may be helpful in this regard to reflect on a verse of the Qur’an: “Nay, they charge with falsehood that whose knowledge they cannot compass;” (10:39). Let us also remember the *hadith* (Tradition of the Prophet) mentioned above about the vanishing of knowledge: In that *hadith*, the Prophet, peace be upon him, is affirming

that the verses of the Qur'an will not avail Muslims, though they read them all the time, if they fail to acknowledge the Signs. The same may be said about the other kind of signs, the signs in the world in general and in the world of humans in particular: these, too, often cannot produce the appropriate outcome, when those who deal with them lack the necessary knowledge. Muslims very easily deny and express their outrage at many of the signs in the world and human life, since they do not fathom them: they actually take their denial as a manifestation of their faith in the Almighty and a safeguarding of their religion.

The truth is that, for those who have experienced dealing with Allah's Signs in the world and human life, and know how to deal with them, these signs have the same strength as the Signs of the revealed Book, for they both point to what is true. Muhammad Iqbal was among the first to notice that, when he said: "Those signs in the world and in human life testify to the truth of the Signs 'or Verses' of the Revealed Book." We have in the Qur'an orders to seek knowledge outside the Qur'an itself: and such knowledge may be gained through moving around and observing the facts in the real world: which is expressed in the Qur'an by indicating the signs of the world and the signs of human life 'Signs of the world out there and Signs of their own souls' (See 42:53). So, what we have here is a command in the Qur'an, and, for responding to this command, one needs to seek knowledge outside the Qur'an: knowledge that may be gained from the real world. But for those who have no base of knowledge, the verses of the Qur'an lose their significance, even when they are manifest. Do you not see how urgently and repeatedly the Qur'an commands Muslims to have active minds, while Muslims have 'closed the door to *ijtihad*'? I am aware of course of what those who hold on to the principle of closing the door of *ijtihad* speak of the nonexistence of persons who qualify to do *ijtihad*, but my worry is more general: how the Muslim *Ummah* has laid it down as principle that we lack the ability to think, that we may only mimic others.

The way to dealing with the past is to stop seeing it through a halo of sacredness, for such halo conceals any drawbacks that exist in people's behaviors and characters. Some of our brighter minds were alert to the need for seeing the past without sanctification: Muhammad

Iqbal denied granting trust to the Muslims' heritage during their decline; another bright mind who we shall have occasion to cite is Sayyed Qutb.

We are now dealing with this huge wilderness in which the Muslims all over the Muslim world are groping.

And the crisis is general. Wherever you go in the Muslim world, you find this panic at attempting any activation of the intellect: to engage in thinking is treated as a terrible ordeal: just for the individual to start thinking a little independently – they should reflect that no good can come about without regaining the function of the thinking power; to activate it even in contradiction with any renowned figure from the past – as long as long one is true to God's verbal signs, i.e. verses of the Qur'an, and the signs of the world around us and in our own life. Nothing may be gained without overcoming that paralyzing dread of engaging in active thinking. Indeed, the Qur'an teaches us the opposite, as we may notice in the word '*basirah*, or seeing with one's eyes' – for instance in this verse: "You say: 'This is my way: I do invite to God – on evidence clear as the seeing with one's eyes – I and whoever follows me. Glory to God! And never will I join gods with God;" (12: 108).

## ON ORGANIZATION AND PLANNING

That Muslims fail in progressing is not because of the lack of organizations and plans – it is the result of their inability to put their intellect to active thinking, their dreading the engaging in intellectual action. So, when some take planning and setting up organizations as the basis for getting ahead, then let the planning and setting up of organizations aim to lift these chains and shackles on thought. I say this since planning and formulating organizations are not targets in themselves; they are rather instruments that could, if used for the right purpose, help in ridding the Muslim world of its chains and shackles. The setting up of such organizations may, on the other hand, lead to consolidating, even amplifying the chains and shackles; or it may

replace the old chains and shackles with some worse ones. All this must be clear to our minds, for, otherwise, we shall go around and around in our wilderness; we may only succeed in our present efforts in overcoming some consequences and symptoms of our real malaise: which is that the human is being alienated from the objective for which they were created. As long as we are dealing solely with the symptoms, the basic problems will stay as they are, secure and in control. At the moment, those who announced that the problem is really in the direction of making a change in the way of thinking are suspected or even attacked, for they are charged with tampering with the foundation of faith.

I see in this denial of the pivotal place of regaining the task of active thinking a serious denial of Allah's Signs; it is a malaise that lurks in the soul; and we may not blame the Lord for it, for, as we find in the Qur'an: "God did not wrong them: nay, they wronged their own souls;" (16:33). This dread of the intellect and engaging in active thinking, this assault on those who seek to enlighten themselves and others, do the job of incapacitating a community that is already not used to use the mind effectively. Even our writers are in dread of engaging in any active thinking: they wish to say something, but are in great terror of being condemned and assaulted by the worshippers of the ancestry.

This is so because if people live in darkness for a long time, they cannot tolerate light; it hurts their eyes. So we must put our hope in those who have awakened to God's Light and laws, *sunan*, those who have enough skill in linking facts one to another, in bringing out the long-neglected facts of the Scripture: For it is such persons who are honored with announcing the dawn, of proclaiming an end to the overdrawn night – we must have no doubt that truth will come and falsehood will vanish; this much is taught in the Qur'an.

Let me say it again that there was not such a time when the Muslim world was without any bright persons who called for, and engaged in, active thinking. But such individuals have not been sufficient in number to eliminate the many layers of darkness, to remove the stagnation of intellectual activity, to revive the bold thinking initiated by the Qur'an – and some elements of which are being upheld in the modern world.



I have tried to represent how the thinking persons have been treated and are still being treated in the Muslim world: all the mocking and derision, all the suspicion and condemnation, gentle or violent, implicit or explicit. To digest their writings is not tantamount to having mastered knowledge and attained the core of understanding – but it would help one go some steps in ridding themselves of aping and imitating, to a less rigid imitation – though it would hardly be a guarantee of having acquired the scientific approach.

This dread of thought can for a while protect those who hide behind it, but is never a permanent protection. One day the deluge will come to sweep away all in its way.

#### 4. THE PROBLEM OF FOLLOWING THE DESIRES OF THE HEART

This is the fourth of the five problems we promised to elaborate – it is really an offshoot of the major problem, the problem of the dearth of knowledge: once scientific thought is absent, following desires takes over the leader's seat. We may get some illumination from the following verses of the Qur'an:

"who is more astray than one who follows his own desires, devoid of guidance from God?" (28: 50).

"Nay, the wrong-doers merely follow their own desires, being devoid of knowledge;" (30:29) "Such are men whose hearts God has sealed, and who follow their own desires;" (47:16); "But many do mislead men by their wishes unchecked by knowledge;" (6:119) "Is then one who is on a clear path from his Lord like the one to whom the evil of their conduct seems pleasing, and such as follow their wishes?" (47:14).

If the human fails to be guided by God's laws, *sunan*, to learn the lessons of science and knowledge, which really are signals from God, the alternative is to follow the dictates of their desires and wishes: it is so since they have lost the criterion; it is natural for them to follow their wishes for they do not perceive the weight of laws and science: they are oblivious to that which they cannot perceive ... they cannot

appreciate the part of science in revealing the laws of life, in dispelling falsehood. They live with their narrow view, limited perception: and hence they feel no qualms when they follow the dictates of surmises, wherever they drive or direct them.

## 5. THE PROBLEM OF FOLLOWING IN THE STEPS OF THE FATHERS

Those who have lost touch with laws, *sunan*, in dealing with the events of the world, and human life, will replace laws of the world with the heritage from their ancestors. It is a definitely overwhelming dominance, that of the traditions of the fathers. We are not concerned here with eliminating the authority of the fathers, but unless limits are put to that authority, it will have disastrous effects.

The idea here is that the heritage of the fathers is vital and most important – if we know how to benefit from it. By taking it into account, we can spare ourselves a lot of slips and errors; we can refer to the experiences, positive and negative, which keep accumulating over the centuries. It would be a grave mistake to turn our backs to it: for we would have to pay the same price they had paid for acquiring their experience – has not the Prophet taught us that a believer must not be stung from the same hole twice?

The mistake happens only when the fathers are accorded a status that goes beyond the knowledge that they had left behind – when they themselves become the law, *sunnah*; when they are held as God's law which is not subject to alteration or change: for the fathers become in this case a millstone round the neck; a dead weight that hampers progress and proves to be fatiguing to both the spirit and the body; it has become shackles and fetters. And this is the situation which the Almighty is describing in the Qur'an when He says: "Truly they found their fathers on the wrong path; so they too were rushed down on their footsteps;" (37:69-70).

The first impression that jumps to mind at one's browsing through the Qur'an is a condemnation of following in the steps of the father as a general rule; it is rarely that following the ancestors is praised – it is mostly condemned: for there is in the human a great inclination

to replace the law with the legacy of the fathers – hence the Qur'an's warning of following the fathers.

To benefit from what the fathers had left behind one needs to examine how compatible their legacy is with science and sound knowledge; their legacy must be tested for correction, and it will prove that it often needs alteration and correction.

At the same time, we should never tire of reminding people that, in the same way as old generations were being reminded of the need not to hold on rigidly to the legacy of their ancestors, the modern generation must follow this rule, too. Why should the Qur'an stress the fact that the fathers are often treated as an embodiment of the truth and absolute knowledge unless this warning is of use to us? Had Muslims been immune to slipping and committing mistakes, there would be no need for the Qur'an's relating how the preceding nations used to glorify their fathers and follow blindly in their steps: Muslims, like the preceding peoples, are prone to having their fathers as an impediment to acting on God's laws, *sunan*. It is because Muslims, like all the nations before them, may have the fathers as an impediment between them and truth: this is true enough to have the Qur'an devote much space to stressing this fact.

The truth is, of course, that both fathers and children are prone, like all humans, to slipping and committing mistakes. Like all humans, the older generations, as well as the latter ones, are sometimes acting in accordance with truth, and sometimes deviating from it. To ascertain when the fathers' behavior is mistaken, and to correct it, there must be a ceaseless review of what they did and said: to be selective in preserving what should be preserved: to test their behavior against the relevant laws and principles.

The Muslim needs to take heed of this, like any sensible human being. Neither recent nor old ancestors must be considered as the criterion of laws, *sunan*. No matter how highly we hold the ancestors, they are never above the laws: they must be judged and examined against knowledge, science, laws and *sunan*.

But Muslims denied themselves this right when they announced, most frankly, the closure of the 'door of *ijtihad*', which is a declaration that they have lost the ability to think, and that they do not have the

knowledge they need for exercising *ijtihad*. At least we may take this as grounds for declining to follow the later generations of fathers.

It is curious to notice that those who feel some confidence that they are equipped for thought and those who have knowledge are appalled at this disturbing confidence, for they see in it an insult to the 'earliest and greatest generations of Islam': it is unthinkable for the progeny to imagine that God has created among them some who understand and comprehend God's laws in the Scripture or in relation to the world around us. And these persons quickly return to their humble and petty place as mere followers of the great generations: this is, to many Muslims, the way to showing deference and veneration to the ancestors. You see how, to the minds of these Muslims, the good old fathers may not be preserved in their distinguished place without the later generations being dwarfed and denied any ability. Is it, one wonders, that Allah's mercy and bounty to the humans has come to an end? Or is it that God's Signs in the world around us and the world of human life no longer work?

Indeed, the shortcomings in our mental set up are deadly – there is no chance with them for us to live properly. Nor do I feel that with this effort I have made things plain enough: for the pressure of the past centuries is so heavy that it is similar to a drawn sword that keeps us in fear. It is possible to overcome the nightmare, but such a tremendous effort is needed for that: so much hard work of reading and enlightening the minds and searching for more knowledge; a great deal of moving around in the earth, to observe God's creation, and to follow up the creation to its beginnings. All this is something that runs contrary to our habits – indeed, our situation indicates that we do not attach much importance to efforts of this kind, notwithstanding the Qur'an's repeated exhortation in many locations to take up this task in earnest, and to direct all efforts to realizing this.

Is it not time that we throw off this conceit of taking ourselves to have already acquired all the knowledge of the ancients and the moderns, that nothing drives us to move around in search of knowledge, that our minds are already possessed of all that needs to be acquired, so that we need no more thinking or mental work? Do we not think that there may be any people or individuals in the world capable of revealing some of God's laws and systems, none to fathom any of God's Signs in

the world out there or in the sphere of human life, none of the *Ahli-l-Kitab* (i.e. the Jews and Christians) or any other people? Is it that we have fallen in the trap of many *Ahli-l-Kitab* before us who, as the Qur'an records, had taken themselves to be 'sons of God, and His beloved;' but the Qur'an retorts: "Say: 'Why then does He punish you for your sins? Nay, you are but men – of the men He has created;'" (5:18).

As you see, the Qur'an had warned us of all the mistakes of earlier peoples, the close-minded among the *Ahli-l-Kitab*, but we still drifted along, falling in the same pits as they had fallen in – you see how, when someone lives for a long time in a bending position, then his/her muscles are contracted until it is not easy for him/her to relax their muscles; and when they had lived for a long time with their eyes closed, they would suffer in opening their eyes to the light of sound thinking. And we are still capable of asserting that we are 'God's select' and 'His beloved' who are the closest to Him. The fact is that we do not view the human history as based on laws, *sunan*, but we view it as based on privileges and favoritism; that it is possible to secure 'gain without pain'.

All such failings refer to our failure to open our eyes – indeed, we do not even feel the need to open them; we still do not take it as a fact that the retribution that befalls other peoples will not spare us – we persist even when the Qur'an warned us: "Not your desires, nor those of the People of the Book can prevail: whoever works evil, will be requited accordingly. Nor will he find, beside God, any protector or helper; " (3:123).

Even after all my insistence, I do not feel that the idea has settled in minds; I do not feel that I have succeeded into shaming the Muslim to the point of overcoming his/her apathy. The fact is that even when he/she admits their drawbacks, there is no indication that their admission reflects a real readiness to make any change. The Qur'an really reminds us that a claim of faith does not necessarily reflect a genuine faith settled in the heart. And when we hear the poet Iqbal berating us, we take his words lightly; we take him to be just writing in a playful mood. I am referring here to his saying:

"Our Ka'ba is crowded with idols; disbelief makes fun of our faith. Our sheikh bets away his Islam for the love of idols; he is girdled

with the Christian girdle. You see him incessantly on the move together with his followers, impervious to the needs of his people. The preachers and Sufis idolize their master's status, forfeiting in the meanwhile the sacredness of the 'pure faith'. Our preacher has his eye on the temple of idols, and our mufti is too ready to sell his fatwa for a pittance." (Abdul-Wahhab 'Azzam, *Iqbal*, p. 124).

And Iqbal says elsewhere: "You, poor Muslim, still cling to the individuals who wear the mantle of the faith, persons who monopolize the Islamic scholarship – instead of drawing for your guidance on the wisdom of the Qur'an without mediator. And the result is that the Book which was revealed to provide you with life and resolution is not summoned except when somebody recites the Sura of Yasin, at the hour of your death, so that your death is a smooth affair. And so, the Book which was revealed to provide you with the essence of life and strength is recited to help you die as easily and smoothly as possible;" (*Al-Da'wah Magazine*, Issue 215. Sha'ban, 26, 1374 A.H.)

It may be that Muslims have shown this rigidity in holding on to the legacy of fathers more than any other nation because the fathers had taken the place of God's Signs: both the verses of the Qur'an and God's Signs in the world around us and the world of human life.

To account for that, we may go a step backwards and say that Muslims take their religion perhaps more seriously than any other followers of other faiths: that they view it with an amazing degree of veneration and idealism. Well, Islam does merit that degree of devotion. But when that same devotion is accorded to the fathers, the latter are viewed with a degree of idolization that should not be accorded but to the revealed faith: when Muslims accept the ways of their fathers, and take them to be as infallible as the word of God, they become less likely than other peoples to detect any mistakes of their glorified fathers. I find this to be a major source of the Muslims' falling behind nations: they do not seem to be among the rivals in the chase of civilization. When you think of the Japanese, for instance, who are only pagans, not even bearing any of the revealed books, you find them more capable of winning respect and showing their ability to compete with the first lines of progress. It seems that they are not so tightly held to the heritage of their forefathers; not like the Muslims – whatever the fathers had done, does not bear the sanctity that Muslims attach to the heritage from their

fathers. This enables the Japanese to be more open to any modern findings in education and culture, and they can in this way overcome any difficulty in adapting to new situations. It may be that they hold on to certain old aims, but the means they have recourse to are new.

One would have thought that Muslims should have done better than other nations – considering the amount of attack in the Qur'an on upholding a rigid stance concerning the inherited legacy of older generations. But, indeed, they take any such attack as meant merely for others; they fail to see it as a human problem, that it can hit Muslims and ruin their life. This is failing to realize what a human law is. When Muslims are sure that what other peoples may fail to do, Muslims cannot likewise fail to do, the verses of the Qur'an and the signs of life will be passed by without Muslims' drawing any benefit from them. This is a glaring example to illustrate how the Qur'an can lose its reformatory value when people have lost the ability to deal with it as they should. This must alert us to the importance of having this firm relation between the laws of the human mind and the verses of the Qur'an (both featuring in the Qur'an as '*Ayat*, or Signs').

You see the paradox here: for we do raise the verses of the Qur'an to the highest possible position, but we fail to see how the characteristics of the human may change and may be changed: this contradiction confuses us, and we fail to see that the real problem is not in the faith but in the human; and we hear some ascribing the problem to Islam, that Muslims' backwardness is due to Islam itself, and this causes great disturbance to some Muslims, in a way that some begin to falter. At the same time, some good believers rise to defend Islam: but both camps seem to fail to realize that the problem is in the human. And when we hold certain individuals to embody the faith, we do not help at all in solving the problem.

To come to determine the nature of the problem would take us a long way towards the solution; we shall have first to know that the problem is in what is in the soul, as in our oft-quoted verse 'what is in their souls'; and to identify what needs to be changed ... this is the critical point, the point which we need to direct our efforts to – otherwise we shall keep walking in darkness, when we do not believe in the soul's being subject to laws and *sunan*, and so leave it to chance to bring over any change.

Hence my insistence, on every occasion, to bring to the notice of my audience the process of the human's losing the ability to benefit by the verses of the Revealed Writ: what I am emphasizing here is that the laws which are true of other human beings are equally true of Muslims.

And I do realize that many will think, though they may or may not declare what occurs to them: that what a person like me is declaring cannot be true when many a generation have come and gone without realizing it.

And I have to repeat my reply to such doubt, by asserting that the problem is not about bygone generations and the way they perceived things – the problem under discussion here is the sense of loss among the present generation; their apathy and inaction. We may draw some enlightenment from a situation related in the Qur'an: it relates how some non-believers would say: "What then is the condition of previous generations?" (20:52) and the answer to this question comes at once: "The knowledge of that is with my Lord, duly recorded: my Lord never errs, nor forgets;" (20:52). Also, we have in another location: "That was a People who have passed away. They shall reap the fruit of what they did, and you of what you do! Of their merits there is no question in your case;" (2:134). That older generation failed to perceive the current situation can be forgiven by the Lord, and this is a point that I have discussed above. On the other hand, not all the individuals of the past were oblivious to the points we are raising here; but we just hold to the statements of those who were erroneous, rather than those who perceived the truth.

The Qur'an makes it clear that to follow the fathers can be a good thing, once it is shown that they had enough justification for what they did; we read in the Qur'an what Joseph said about following his fathers: "And I follow the ways of my fathers – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and never could we attribute any partners whatever to God; that comes of the Grace of God to us and to mankind: yet most of them are not grateful;" (12:38).

While the Qur'an says of those who give the ways of the fathers precedence over the Qur'an, when they speak of the fathers' having had knowledge which we do not have: "When it is said to them: 'Follow



what God has revealed;' they say: 'Nay! We shall follow the ways of our fathers.' What! Even though their fathers were void of wisdom and guidance?" (2:170). It is when one fails to distinguish the principle from the persons that he/she will have allowed wilderness to have control of their life. And the way out of this is of course by having the fathers' ways and statements examined in the light of reason and principles: only in this way may one be sure that the fathers' legacy would be beneficial without the negative effects of blind copying. We find in the Qur'an enough warning about such pitfalls, as for instance:

"When it is said to them: 'Come to what Allah has revealed; come to the Messenger,' they say: 'Enough for us are the ways we found our fathers following.' What! Even though their fathers were void of knowledge and guidance?" (5:104).

It is not a minor problem according to the Qur'an; hence the care it gives to the exact statements of the father-worshippers: "When they do something that is shameful, they say: 'We found our fathers doing so';" (7:28) "They said: 'Have you come to us to turn us away from the ways we found our fathers following?'" (10:78); "They said: 'Do you come to us, that we may worship God alone, and give up the cult of our fathers?'" (7:70).

We need when reviewing the above verses to realize their applicability to more than the particular incidents which occasioned their revelation: When a people behave in such ways, the consequences will follow: it is a universal phenomenon, and not confined to any particular people or time. We may notice the situation at a very popular level: we often witness the ignorant men and women when they are enslaved by traditions, old or new, in a way that the mind subsides to zero functioning; you may notice this in people's saying: "everybody does it;" – a statement that strongly echoes the ancients' saying, as the Qur'an reports, "Nay, but we found our fathers doing thus (what we do);" (26:74) – let not the difference in expression distract us from the universality of the laws that govern human behavior.

So far, I have been discussing the hurdles that block the way of the mind towards coming to terms with the *sunan*, the laws; I mentioned turning away, rejecting the truth, being heedless, acting in obedience to desires. One more factor in blinding people to benefiting from laws is

their being vain for some of their achievements: any of the above factors can impede a human's perceiving the truth; any of them can lead them to be blind to truth in a way that they ignore it.

All the above negative factors will boil down to a basic one: assuming that God has not laid down laws by which the universe functions – and through which a human may secure God's mercy, but which, if ignored, a human will not be spared: the penalty is sure to follow.

To disregard the system established by the Lord for this world, a human will have forfeited his/her merit as a human; they will not be equipped to be entrusted with the trust humans are required to bear: without the power humans have been given access to, they are unable to subdue and subjugate what had been created to serve them. They will fall from their distinguished status of 'honoring' to being 'lowest of the low' (see the Qur'an, 17:70; and 95:5). It is quite possible, and we witness it, that a human may be himself subjugated by those who have succeeded in dealing with God's laws, *sunan*.

Without realizing the system by which the world runs, by failing to perceive the power of the mind, a human will live a life of chaos: crises will come one after another, without the human's perceiving their causes; they are unaware of the fact that they suffer such afflictions as a result of disregarding the powers given them by God; it is true of them what the following verse of the Qur'an says: "But God did not wrong them: nay, they wronged their own souls;" (16:33).

It may be observed how intent the Muslim is to elude the true causes of events: he/she may cite some astrological sign to account for events; or they may assert the imminent end of time on earth; or he/she may most readily refer to God's will as the real cause of all events: whenever things do not go the way a Muslim likes, they would most emphatically affirm that it is God's will, and no one may contradict God's Will! No doubt Muslims find it most consoling to find some cause outside their own souls, to release themselves from any responsibility for what happens to them. It is tempting to think how great God is, and to find in that a consolation for yielding to any adverse affliction. This attitude however would mean that God does the most unjustifiable things; as if He accepts to see a world where no system and no law

exist. At the same time, Muslims seem to deny the humans the power bestowed on them by their Lord.

It is a most puzzling situation Muslims live in: By affirming God's great dominance, they seem to imagine that they must deny humans any power in controlling and directing their life – as if there is no area for humans to show the power provided them by their Lord; the implication is that God is not absolute in His power unless we deny humans their power in the sphere of bringing change to their circumstances. Sometimes it seems that, for the Muslim, it is not possible to affirm God's greatness without diminishing a human's value: it is as if the helplessness of humans is required for proving God's Greatness. Hence the Muslims' dreading the scopes that open up to the human, and the powers that appear to show the humans' authority. Had the Muslim reflected a little, it would become manifest to him/her that when the human's power increases, this will be a further proof of God's Greatness and Power.

Such erroneous approaches to faith are indeed no so new: We have seen the determinists, the *murji'ites* (believing that no sin is punishable so long as faith is sound) , the *qadariyahs* (believing that a human creates his/her own deeds), besides the *aqtab* (saints who are supposed to acquire knowledge directly from God) and *abdal* (superior saints), and the list is long. Some sects appeared even before all the above: there has always been some idol to resort to, especially in duress and when crises loom big; and it is to persons of some perverse dogma that the Muslims usually resorted.

When you see on the surface of the Muslim life as a most chaotic sight, on both the intellectual and tangible levels, you may say without hesitation that at the bottom of this there are rotten ways of thinking, a great mess of contradictory trends and perversions. Not long ago, I met with a number of young men, all enthusiastic about reviving Islam, and all in pain about the problems of the Muslim *Ummah*. They often turned to me, with a desire to hear from me about any solutions for this dilemma. I said I did feel I had something to put forward, although I did not feel competent enough to express what I think with the supporting justifications. One of the clever young men, who perhaps knew more about my general trends, seemed to get to the point better than his companions, so he said: "Am I right in guessing that you wish to say

that the problem of Muslims may be approached scientifically?" I said, not without some amount of disappointment and shyness, that yes, it was as he said. By just a slight change of his position, and by some soft murmur, he expressed his denial, and also his despair of any good coming from my view of the situation.

It is no exaggeration to say that I often feel how difficult it is to make young men and young women realize that a scientific examination of our dilemma will help us a lot. I admit, at the same time, that much of the failure is in me – my inability to put things in a way that others can access and appreciate. I now realize that the better grasp we have of our subject, and the more experience we earn, the better will be our competence in making things plain. It must be clear to us that the entire consciousness of any one of us consists of the individual instances of absorbing knowledge, whether he/she is conscious or unconscious of this process of acquiring knowledge.

What I am endeavoring here is to transfer this process of understanding to the conscious mind – for if we can realize that, that will be a major step towards changing our attitude. And when you notice how little we seem to care for increasing our knowledge, you should trace that to the lack of perceiving the laws, the *sunan*, operative in the universe, and of course the cause-and-effect relation between the human mind's understanding of those laws and its ability to turn those laws to count in serving human purposes.

It is worth long and intensive reflection this impatience in the Muslim world to examine and analyze things; why we are quick to label serious research as obtuse and complicated: this is simply the result of our minds' not having been nourished on nutritious intellectual stuff. It has been a long time since we got the habit of feeding our minds with the least nutritious of intellectual stuff. As Iqbal wrote in one of his couplets:

The substance of lions turned into clay

As a result of feeding on grass and hay.

This is a couplet from a poem of his, in which Iqbal elaborates the kind of preaching a Muslim receives; as a result of which the Muslim has given up giving any effort to control things in any way: just to exist

is all that he/she acts for, no matter how meaningless that existence might be. In his metaphorical narrative, the ram claims to be sent by God to bring the lions to live a decent life: the ram here represents, as Iqbal makes it clear in the title of the poem, the vanquished nations, who look for a way of bringing the dominant power to give up their dominance of situations and desist from their control of the forces of the world to serve the cause of the Lord. The defeated nations' ruse does work, and the conquering powers (standing for the Muslim at their zenith) submit to the restful life of humble creatures.

## ACTION AND REACTION

Let us recall the discussion, mentioned earlier in this book, of how the body's organs and systems have been designed to work autonomously: they do not need the intervention of the conscious mind. I said that to point out that at a certain degree of depth, ideas work without the intervention of consciousness.

Many of our concepts, which have settled at a deep level, most often work without the need for intervention from the conscious mind. When the human loses control of his/her behavior, they will act impulsively, i.e. it is those deeply-settled concepts that take over; it can be that at that time the conscious mind is completely inactive, or has reached its lowest level of activity. From this one understands why a judge is ordered by the Prophet not to pronounce judgment when angry.

That much is fully accepted. It is when we come to application, and to the many ways the above mechanism is displayed that we need to keep mindful of the above notion. We sometimes see in the street a feeble-minded person being pestered by children – they have discovered his weakness, and they call him names to provoke him. This is just an

example to see what happens when people discover a loophole in the character, how the ill-intended can, in that case, exploit the weakness to make the victim lose control: it is like discovering a button in a machine that enables anyone who discovers it to control the machine in the way they like. We do sympathize with the poor feeble-minded people.

But what about the rest of us? Do we have certain weaknesses, something like buttons that anyone can discover and press to make us lose control? The reality is that not everyone knows about the mechanism of our buttons, and how to press the right button to have control of our impulses. We do see how it happens in our societies that someone or some persons may go to somebody and mock a certain opinion which he holds as inviolable: they may do it deliberately, and with the intention of provoking him, and maybe driving him crazy – how often we see the disputes turn into screaming and exchanging abusive language, if not into hand fights.

Let us imagine that, before the ill-intended person/persons came up to enrage the victimized person, he/she was alerted to their intentions – is it not most likely that their exploits would be foiled in that case: at least the victimized person would be careful not to lose control during their provocation, and would be careful to send them back disappointed?

One can indeed reach, with his/her own effort, a degree of maturity and wisdom about life, that no one would be able to exploit his/her feeling and nerves.

With the above in mind, let us now turn our attention to the level of societies, for each society must have inherited a certain world-view, and a certain conception of life.

Indeed, the principles of provoking societies and driving them to lose control are not different from the principles of exploiting naïve individuals. It is quite a common thing to see certain individuals trained by the dominant powers to manipulate societies and drive them to react thoughtlessly to certain provocations: they would in that case be acting as pieces in a game of chess, and at the right time. This can happen to societies which have not reached the stage of maturity. It is like igniting some fireworks among pedestrians to drive them to panic: the intention would be to mock people and make them seem silly. It is funny for some mischief-loving persons to see the others in silly situations. Legislations

are issued also to have somebody appointed as guardian of a person who is counted immature, or perhaps a moron that may not have control of their affairs. But we are dealing here with situations when the disabled are meant to stay disabled, or maybe to make them more mentally deprived. By alerting a society to this, it will not be exploited by the mischief-mongers who have been trained to manipulate nations and societies. Our most prominent example is Laurence of Arabia, the most well-trained individual to provoke impulses and emotions at will, and to direct society the way he liked, and in a way to serve the powers that had employed him.

We have a relevant comment of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani's in his *Memoirs*, when he wrote, commenting on the contemporary events of Sudan: "Britain has just taken out of her bag, like any juggler, the doll of 'Gordon's Siege': and on the basis of that pretext, it ordered manufacturers to start laying a railway from Sawakin to Barbar ... claiming that her only motive was to rescue Gordon, in case he were in danger ..

"Well, if he were to perish – which is the most likely alternative – or his rescue could be effected – will the state of England dismantle the railway? Or will it show her generosity by leaving it to Egypt? No, by God, she will do neither! It was no more than her way of occupying Sudan."

Al-Makhzumi, al-Afghani's friend and biographer says: "I once came to see Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and declared to him what I thought: 'That statement,' I said, 'I did add it to your *Memoirs*, as desired. But,' then I stopped short. Then added: 'I felt that to give the details of events that took place at some point, and were nearly forgotten, that it was a mistake to bring them back to the attention of people, for it seemed not worth our while to do.'"

"He listened to me attentively, but after I concluded he said: 'By God, al-Makhzumi, what you see today, and what you think to be immaterial, as the particulars are no longer there... But no, the same situation will crop up again, though under different names and details – Britain will never cease to effect ruptures in the countries it enters: widening the narrowest rifts, inflating the tiniest accident; it will never cease to sow discord among the components of the one nation, dividing

them into factions and groups; it will keep on driving apart already hostile groups: for this has always been the way with Britain, as a state and as members.'" (The *Memoirs*, p. 278. Pub. Dar al-Fikr. 1965)

For al-Afghani, the individual events were not what needed to be examined; it was rather the routine followed by Britain in dealing with nations. He reproved al-Makhzumi for not focusing on the intention and purpose. He himself was conscious of the fact: that if the particular accident was over and done with, it did not mean that some parallel event would not follow, something quite similar to earlier events. It was only twenty years later, indeed, that England brought out of her bag another event, another act of sorcery; this was described by Malek Bennabi; he wrote: "The Europeans knew what policy suited the particular hour – for it was second nature with him to manipulate situations. Laurence, for instance, was prompt enough, at the exact time that Von Armine threatened to attack the Suez Canal, in 1915 C.E. to set up the famous Arab Revolution; for that purpose, he humored the ancient man, Sherif Hussein, and flattered a handful of young leaders, intoxicated with the idea of an Arab kingdom." (*The Afro-Asian Idea*. [in Arabic], P. 18. Printed in Cairo, 1975).

One finds in Laurence's The Seven Pillars of Wisdom minute details: how Laurence accomplished his mission most satisfactorily; how he used, apart from those men mentioned by Malek, the desert's Bedouins who are not usually given any importance: It was from among them that he chose his bodyguards: a hundred robust young men, most of whom died in defending Laurence ... Although he entered more than thirty wars, all for the good of Britain, not one drop of British blood was spilled.

But it is no use going on listing events, unless they serve to immune us from falling into similar situations.

And to be immune from adverse situations, the only way is to learn how the laws, *sunan*, work in the service of humans – for, unless we learn that, we must be subdued by those who know. And to be acquainted with laws, one needs to earn it the hard way: by extensive study of events with a view to developing the lesson, not just to skim through history.



And the lesson that at this moment is topmost is that, to leave a society as it is, without raising its consciousness to the required level, it will live at the same level of the mentally deficient people we mentioned above. That some individuals are demented is natural, and, with due effort, their number can be diminished to the bare minimum. But it is not natural that a community is demented; it is the result of the community's not putting in the right effort; it is here that we find the following verse applicable: "But God did not wrong them: nay, they wronged their own souls;" (16:33).

It is worth our while to work for bringing these issues within the consciousness of people; to alert the human to the workings of these psychological processes, to do all that must be done to have these habits of mind replace the present ways: when I say that, I am convinced that it is possible to drive these notions to the desired depth in the mind, and to keep working on that until they are a second nature with people.

It is now possible to bring changes to the conscious and the subconscious. It is true that the particular individual may not be able to change his/her consciousness, or that their capacity is limited. But as for the community, it is possible for it to change the mindset of its individuals: both the superficial conception and the deepest conception: this is subject to science. And, indeed, it is for fathoming this science that the current book is being written.

For instance, we have this statement by a Chinese leader: "Indeed, to bring within the consciousness of our people the danger that may hit them is something that has not been accomplished by us; it is our enemy who has awakened people to their danger, and that is by the bombs it has been bombarding us – and it may be that those who have not been hit so far are not yet aware of the danger."

Now, this leader feels that those responsible for alerting the nation to the danger threatening it have not done enough to raise people's alertness to the required level: it was the bombs that fulfilled this task, and the leader feels the lack of effort on the part of those responsible. It is such consciousness that saves that nation from being subdued by the dominant powers of the world: the Americans, the Russians, and the Japanese can no longer invite each other to take part in feasting on the

Chinese body. And you see how those great powers think now of ways to win the favor of the Chinese people.

It is a science, instructing the public to take heed of the possible dangers that they may be exposed to; and you need experts who specialize in this if you believe in a world where things are under control.

Once the principle is well digested, one moves on to other sectors: one may think of the simple peasant, who is often careless about cleanliness: it is a failing that can be the cause of epidemics, and so it must be dealt with in a scientific way. Those who address this failing must not only know about the value and details of cleanliness; they must be cognizant of the ways of addressing the consciousness of the public; how to bring change to their deepest soul.

This is about cleanliness; but what about a human's carelessness about his/her position in the world, and his/her position in the Hereafter?

But if manipulating whole communities' minds is taking place; if nations are being led by more knowledgeable parties; if such practices are developed into a science, with its own specialists and centers and administrations, and when books like *The Grabbing of the Public's Consciousness* are being published and made available for all interested – when all such things are taking place, is it not high time for the communities manipulated in this way to develop their own scientific effort to protect themselves and really immune themselves from all sinister assaults?

As long as the human mind remains idle and helpless, as long as people do not see God's laws, *sunan*, in the world around them and in human life, then people can never avoid more catastrophes; the danger must be all the time present over their heads. And this problem will keep procreating more sinister and pernicious seeds. Nothing is more dangerous than this failure to see the laws.

And this is true of us: it is by now such a long time since we disabled our mental power. It is a long time since we bore around our necks the mill-stone that weighs down our heads, and it will for some time stay there.

To succeed in issuing from this wilderness, all we need is to acquire the science of changing what is in the soul, and to ascertain what should be changed, to be aware of the time that will be needed, of course in case we put in all the available efforts, to put to use every bit of ability we can harness: this is what we mean by the science that can help us get over the sense of loss which pulls us down.

If this proves too hard for our minds to grasp, if we are not blessed with those who can offer us the convincing evidence to move us to act for serving that purpose: unless that takes place, then we cannot escape feeling that we live in a world which seems to our eyes uncontrolled by laws, *sunan*: we shall go on suffering this inertia which paralyzes us and prevents our coming up with any effort.

## METHOD AND APPLICATION

What I turn to at this point is to stress two aspects in the light of the verse of the title, "Verily never will God change the condition of a people until they change what is in their souls;" (13:11). These two aspects seem to my mind to play a major part, and to be important enough to claim our attention – a reader of my earlier book, *The Way of Adam's Better Son*, may be aware of these two points. Let me admit, however, that I am not, by discussing these two issues, bringing to notice issues that nobody else had attempted. No, the average Muslim does hear of these issues; the problem is that he/she does not give them the importance they deserve. And it is quite likely that this time, too, the Muslim may just cast a careless look at these issues and pass on to other preoccupations. But let me do what I can to stress these issues, which

have really been raised by others before me. Let me hope that some readers will give these issues the reflection that they deserve.

And before I go to the two important points, I may add that some of those I have discussed these issues with were really amazed when they heard that some highly respected authors had adopted a similar notion. They seem to imply that they did see the indicated text, but did not suspect that it had that notion.

Let me, then go to the two points:

1. Separating a principle from its application;
2. Generalizing the principle.

### **1. Separating the Principle from its Application;**

How closely people apply a certain principle must necessarily be so varied: it can range from the most thorough and exact application of the principle to the least thorough and exact. If true, the principle itself has the strength of a law, and a law, a *sunnah*, has a tremendous force, the Qur'an itself asserts: "no change you will find to the *sunan*, of God;" (33:62) As for application, they will be vastly varied, as we are arguing here. And when we discuss this in connection with this book's issues, we may say: the theory is one thing, and history is another: A theory is the principle, and history is the application.

In still a third way, it may be said that Islam is not the Muslims: Islam is principles and the bases, and Muslims are an application, a history. They may be seen as an example of the doctrine; but they are not immune from slipping – and hence they may not be considered as an epitome of the doctrine. This is an essential principle, this distinguishing between the doctrine and the followers of the doctrine: this rule must be borne in mind whenever we try to tackle the problem of the backward state of the Muslims. I am not saying that the example or the application are not of value – on the contrary, a principle may often be deduced from examining examples; but it may happen that the principle must be mentioned early on in one's discussion of the situation, even before many examples have been listed. But what I am trying to elucidate is that the rule or the principle has such potential power that

innumerable examples may be cited as applications of it, and that is why I emphasize here that Muslims should not be taken to be synonymous with Islam: what we have here is Islam as a revealed faith, and Muslims' applying of Islam over the ages and centuries. One may study the conduct of Muslims, and that will be a historical work, but their behavior is not immune: only Islam is immune and faultless, for it comes from the Lord, the Almighty.

I have endeavored over many pages to refer the Muslim to the revealed base, and not to take Islam to be what Muslims, in all their millions, have been doing over the centuries.

And what I am stressing here is that this approach was not concealed from the eyes of the first-line thinkers, nor did they bypass it without taking it into consideration. It is true that no one has so far singled it out in a special piece of writing – you may say that they did not have the Muslim laid down to drop the medication in his/her eye. I say this for it is true that the Muslim takes so long before he/she conceives complex issue: therefore, the author feels compelled to raise the eye-lid and drop the medicine right inside the eye.

It may be right to quote here Sayyid Qutb, since he occupies a very prestigious place in the eyes of the young people, a position that is rarely matched by other writers. In his last comment on the Battle of Uhud, part of his comment on the *Sura of Al Imran*, he said: "... One last point that we may learn from the Qur'anic analysis of the attitudes of the contemporary Muslim community, the group which accompanied the Messenger, peace be upon him, and was really composed of the noblest souls on earth: it is a lesson which is of great benefit to us in our endeavor to resume the march of the Islamic way of life.

"It is that Allah's doctrine is steady; and His criteria are steady – while those who apply the doctrine can come close to or be far from the appropriate observation of the doctrine; they can be right or wrong in comprehending the principles of the faith and the rules of application and conduct – all that, however, is not a fault of the doctrine, nor does it in any way tarnish its values or steady criteria.

"Whenever people get it wrong, or fall short from applying the rules, then the text clearly asserts their having been wrong; whenever they deviate from the right path; it will point out their deviation: it will

not connive at their mistakes, no matter how highly distinguished or revered they might be; it will not deviate to be in line with their deviation.

"We learn from this that to exonerate persons is nothing compared to distorting the doctrine; that it is far better for the Muslim *Ummah* to preserve its values and principles pure and free from foreign matter, while the sinners or the erroneous may be described in the way they deserve to be described, no matter who they may be: it is a grave mistake to take their slips as an excuse for accepting any tainting of the doctrine or to introduce any alteration to its values and principles: any alteration or distortion to the principle is far more detrimental to Islam than declaring the most distinguished figures of Islam to have fallen in a diversion or fault ... It is the doctrine that is stable and permanent, while individuals are ephemeral. To speak of the historical application of Islam is not what is recorded of any deed or state of the Muslims throughout their history: it is rather any state or behavior that they achieve and is exactly in accordance with the faith, in all its values and steady principles ...

"Otherwise, what people have done, anything that clashes with this doctrine is a mistake or diversion; it may not be and could not be counted as part of Islam and the history of Islam: it is solely the responsibility of its perpetrators, and it must be manifest that it is not synonymous with the faith itself. The term 'History of Islam' is really a misnomer: for Islam is solid principles that are characterized with permanence: we can speak of only a history of the Muslim communities, and in that sense we can speak of behaviors that are a genuine application of Islam, and of concepts of people that are identical with the Islamic concepts or not – and so on about people's behaviors and states. What we have in all these conditions is a solid axis, around which people's life must revolve: As long as they adhere to Islam, then they are a reflection of it; but at the moment they fail to observe the commandments of this faith – what right have they to be an embodiment of Islam? Why should religion be not more than what so-called Muslims do and say – even when they choose to act in disobedience of its teachings? Is it enough that they bear Muslim names or that they claim to be Muslims that we take them to be a visible image of Islam?

"Hence it is that the Lord is teaching the Muslim *Ummah*, by exposing the slips of the first Muslim generation, to put on record their shortcomings and weaknesses – asserting that though He has forgiven them, overlooked their slips, when it comes to the Day of Judgment, it is not so in this world of testing – their slips must be demonstrated." (Vol. 4 of *Fi Thilal al-Qur'an*, pp. 168-169).

As we see, Sayyid Qutb has succeeded in affirming the distinction of the doctrine from its application: it is a most definite and well-expressed review. But it is most likely that, for most Muslims, what may be learned is the supremacy and exaltation of the Islamic faith.

And this is not Qutb's fault. It is that, for the Muslim, it is still a very hard process to accept this distinction between the Islamic doctrine and the way Muslims behaved when they applied it in their lives: As long as this distinction is not accomplished, the errors of people are held to be part of the religion we are bound to uphold; as long as we sanctify figures and personalities, we will fail to appreciate the Islamic faith.

May God bless Sayyid Qutb: he did prepare the way for us to solve this problem; he did pave the way, and he did lay down a landmark for those who wish to go ahead. But will those who are interested in solving the Muslim problem take advantage of such lights, any insights that Qutb and others have made to take it up from where things have been left and move ahead? It is not an easy task, and only a very experienced person can accomplish it.

And this calls for stressing a law: It is that to assert the correctness of a *sunnah*, a law, and even to acknowledge it, in theory, is much easier than being able to apply this law and to recognize its applicability to many situations. We have earlier quoted what Ibn Taymiah had to say about this point.

And this is the basis of what Sayyid Qutb has said, as quoted above. One may say, as Sayyid Qutb has said: " We learn from this that to exonerate persons is nothing compared to distorting the doctrine; that it is far better for the Muslim *Ummah* to preserve its values and principles pure and free from foreign matter, while the sinners or the erroneous may be described in the way they deserve to be described, no matter who they may be .." and it may be possible, and even readily conceded by many people to endorse the above rule, in theory. But can

we move a step further and mention some of the names of those great figures of the Muslim Ummah who Qutb may have meant? Once you mention some of those 'slippers' you will see how people will be glowering with rage and outrage.

You may condemn Abdul-Rahman bin Muljem (Ali's assassin) whether you happen to be Sunni or Shiite, and you may condemn Mu'awiyah, only if you are a Shiite; but, it is not safe to go farther: our sanctification of persons is all sentiment and nothing is rational about it. And if the sentiments have the upper hand how can you go to finding fault with sanctified figures? Unless we succeed in drawing a distinction between Islam, the faith, and its adherents, no amount of reform can succeed in distinguishing the faith from the slips of its adherents. And Qutb's attempt is no exception.

Unless the system, the doctrine, is accepted as the reference by which people's behaviors are measured, rather than the other way around, history will not do its task. To accomplish such a difficult task, to have people put principles before persons, the principles of science must take firm ground, and this is what we learn from Islam. No human, apart from the Messenger himself, is to be counted infallible, but it appears that we Muslims are quick to bestow this status on many figures. That the great person can slip is to so hard for us to admit.

Our attitude shows that we can deal with great figures on only one of two rules: to accept them wholesale, or to reject them wholesale.

And this attitude still challenges all theoretical principles, principles that all Muslims do know by heart. How many Muslims do remember what the Imam Malek said, pointing to the Prophet's, peace be upon him, grave: "No man but can be deemed sometimes wrong and sometimes right – except for the dweller of this grave?" But, like Sayyid Qutb's statement quoted above, people just repeat this as a wise aphorism, but how far they are from putting it to practice!

This is not to say that we do not find any reformers who dare to raise this issue, but the weight of the culture resists any such efforts, and we cannot hope to get over this confusion of the principle and history until we have the principle settled in our minds, and the right relation between individuals and the system they follow: an individual is not synonymous with the principle: He/she must adhere to the principle, and



he/she must look for the law, reveal it, and act on it. No matter how great a human being might be, he/she will not exceed the limits of humanity. We can digest this once we are mindful of the fact that somebody's slips do not detract from his/her value, for 'to err is human;' no one but will have their slips. But, then, even after the slips, one does not lose his/her place; nor is it a detraction from a person's real worth that they cannot claim to encompass all the knowledge: Let it suffice that one contributes something, even when it is tiny what he/she contributes; when you add something, that little must be credited and remembered, and one has ensured their place along the way which is to be followed and developed by others. This is the right attitude in dealing with humans: it is not to raise them above their place as humans, nor is it to assume that they are faultless: Neither God, nor His Messenger, nor the best figures in Islamic history, would grant individuals more than their place as human beings.

It is only when we genuinely appreciate knowledge, after we have really acquired enough knowledge, that we have the right scale in respecting people of knowledge: this is the way to appreciating such addition to knowledge that a certain scholar or scientist contributes; and it is in the same way a guarantee that we overlook their mistakes; their mistakes must not be obstacles that hamper our progress. The right attitude is to adopt that which our predecessors did right, and to bypass their slips – and their slips are not at all a cause for despising them, nor are their achievements a cause to sanctify or idolize them: our great men and women must never become idols.

When we keep affirming notions like this, this must never be taken to aim at belittling the Islamic history, nor is it to find fault with the figures of this history: nor is Sayyid Qutb's aim to shake the trust of the rising youth in the notable figures of Islam, or to throw doubt at the Islamic history. It is his aim, however, to bring history under examination, to determine where it agrees with the doctrine and where it contradicts it: for it is in this way that we learn our lesson from history, and keep wary of its pitfalls – for history has both sides.

But present-day Muslims do not take the right attitude to history: they are unable to learn from it how to avoid errors and benefit from the proper behaviors. We can train ourselves to distinguish the persons in the right from those in the wrong, and the proper and improper

behaviors: it is in this way that history will act for our good; it will smooth our way for efficient progress. While if we fail to learn its lesson, it will be a mill-stone round our necks that imposes limitations on the intellect and impedes our forward march. Sayyid Qutb did perceive this: the crucial lesson of taking the right attitude to persons and to history. If anyone needs a further evidence to see how far Qutb can go, it may help to see what he says of the Uthman, the third Upright Caliph – it is definitely not the kind of evaluation Muslims are used to hear; he says: "It is hard to understand how Islam acts in Uthman's soul; but it is equally hard to wink at the unfortunate measures he took during his term as Caliph – things that he did at a quite advanced age, when he was no longer lucid in his mind, and was surrounded by the Umayyads, who still bore their unhealthy spirit of pre-Islam ... to view things from an Islamic perspective, and weigh things with an Islamic scale, one would not feel the tumultuous situation which was soon to reign had the Islamic spirit at its root: to some degree in Uthman's conduct but more especially in Marwan's and the Umayyads around him, who never had absorbed the Islamic spirit." (*Social Justice*, p. 191 and ff. Fourth Edition. Pub. Eisa al-Babi al-Halabi)

Sayyid adds that, had Ali been the one who acceded to the caliphate after the two first Caliphs, and before the Umayyad seeds had sprouted, the Islamic history would have taken a hugely different aspect.

The crux of the problem is to modify our view of history through a surer grasp of its laws, *sunan*, not to take history as a substitute for laws. Once we have this concept established deeply enough in our consciousness, once we have this criterion as our reference whenever we assess things and persons, we shall no longer keep wrangling about one person or one dynasty: never are our catastrophes accountable for by one person or one family – the issue is just wider than that.

And in the same way as it is a mistake to account for misfortunes of the past by attributing them to one person or one dynasty, we should be wary of attaching our crises to any single party. No one person or one group are responsible for the whole state of things.

The problem is in our view of history, of the human condition, and the motivation that lies behind this condition.

Once we acquire the right perspective to history, and once we know how to refer to it, no slip or error must annoy us: we will be sure of our steps when we never make the mistake of taking the person as a substitute for laws, *sunan*. This will not only save us from falling into the same mistake that fathers had fallen in, but it will enable us to do the most of their good side: this is because the particular model or personage will not be held as sufficient in himself/herself – for putting our efforts to a stop, but a station for pausing to learn their insight and resume our progress. This must apply to Sayyid Qutb himself, as to others. For him to sometimes stumble does not detract from his worth – it is a mistake, however not to go all the way with learning what he has to offer. And this should be the right attitude to other thinkers: from Ibn Taimiyah, to Ibn Khaldun, to al-Afghani and all the thinkers and scholars.

And I hope my thought will be treated with the same open spirit.

Once we have acquired this attitude to history, we can appreciate the correct aspects of any person's endeavor: pious or non-pious, righteous or so-so; even a non-believer must be treated according to this formula: let not somebody's disbelief get mixed up with their correct findings: we have already suffered much by not perceiving this rule. We do not win people's respect, neither in our attitude to those we like, nor in our attitude to those we dislike, without this balanced attitude to the person and their behavior and utterances. It is a very grave mistake that we inadvertently reject many scientific facts on account of our likes and dislikes.

But by having the right attitude to history, we are set free from two complexes: the complex of being scared of the pitfalls in the Islamic history, and the complex of being scared of admitting what is right in the others' endeavors.

Does not the Qur'an teach us its great principle of not denying others their things? Are we not commanded in a Qur'anic principle to be just to people? We find this principle in the verse: "O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even as against yourselves, our your parents, or your kin;" (4:135) It is definitely not our naïve siding with our own people or ourselves that the Qur'an enjoins on us: it is rather the ideal which ennobles the human and raises him/her to this admirable position of appreciating both friends and foes,

accepting no less than justice rather than the dictates of desires and whims, which latter scale is based on short-sighted considerations.

Let me stress at the end that the purpose is here not to find fault with personalities or to glorify them – it is rather developing this appropriate attitude that enables us to distinguish between principles and human beings: truth is truth, and man is man. Truth is nothing but truth, but man can be in the right, but can be in the wrong, and anything between: this is why humans are to be measured against truth, and not the opposite.

It is not enough to tell someone: establish the distinction between principles and men, and it is done! It actually requires training and persistent practice.

## **2. Generalizing the Principle or Law**

This is the second of the two principles mentioned above; it teaches us that the social laws which are true of humans are true of Muslims, as Muslims are part of humanity. Sayyid Qutb is again relevant here, when he says in his book *This Religion*:

"There is a simple fact, a basic fact ... a fact which, despite its simplicity, is often forgotten or not well conceived – to dire consequences concerning the conception of this religion, concerning its essence and concerning its history, both its present state and its future state. The error is this: Some expect that this religion, being the true religion of God, to show its effect in the life of humans in a miraculous and magical way, with no visible relations to the laws of cause and effect, and without any consideration to human nature, to people's given abilities and concrete condition – without any part to be played by the stage of development they happen to be in, or to the environment they must act in. When they see that religion does not act in this mysterious way, and when they find that the limited human ability and the material condition of the human life do react to this religion, and do, at certain times respond well to it – when they witness all that, they are satisfied and contented. But they are quite shaken when they find that people behave in ways that are quite contrary to the injunctions of religion – when their desires, greed and weakness impede their living up to the

expectation of this religion, and, in this case, they fail to get along with the call of religion ...

"When those observers see that they undergo a disappointment they never imagined to suffer: Is that possible, they wonder, when this religion is revealed from heaven! Some actually are violently shaken, and they lose much of their trust in the applicability of the religious doctrine to real life; some may lose their trust in religion as a whole.

"All such errors and complexes proceed from one basic error:

"Failing to perceive or recall the simple fact about this religion ..." (pp. 3-4).

To my mind, this point is one of the best Sayyid Qutb had written, and I am keen to see it noticed and given the prominence it merits. I know that some good Muslims do not share this position of mine: they may apprehend the risk that such an idea may involve: it is no wonder after the many centuries of warding off and really dreading any unfamiliar idea. So, let me look again at the above-quoted page from Qutb, and let us bring out its ideas about the way this religion acts in people's life in a list:

1. A simple and basic fact,
2. That despite its simplicity it is often unnoticed and ignored,
3. And ignoring it results in grave consequences.

And, even when people are reminded of this fact, Qutb adds they:

1. Are disappointed and shocked,
2. Or they may have a setback, doubting the suitability of the religious doctrine for life,
3. Or, worse, they may even have doubts about the truth of religion itself.

He concludes by asserting that this series of errors boil down to one error: not realizing, or bypassing the nature of this religion.

Indeed, should somebody dedicate all his/her life to fathoming these points and probing their historical genesis, their psychological

motivations, and social consequences; should such a person do all he/she can do to bring all such details quite within the general reader's grasp: then it will be a life put to good use.

By the way, one would reflect on how many a basic fact, brought out in the Qur'an, and heard and reviewed by every Muslim, but without their appreciating them! How many of the catastrophes that seem to suffocate us and block our way are the result of such inattention and ignorance! How many thousands of young men and women are disappointed, or even receive great jolts in their minds about the seriousness of this faith, on account of failing to perceive simple facts like these! Or even doubting the very truth of religion, then going out in diverse outfits: as you see now in the curious ways they assume in hair and clothes. It all comes from the fact that one's cocooning in his/her folly are failing to examine things with some perseverance ... Their problem is really the problem of a society, a whole generation that has been fed on illusions, with almost nothing of the facts of life.