Why Cultural Decay?

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Introduction

"(We take) Allah's colour, and who is better than Allah at colouring, and we are His worshippers." Holy Qur'an (2:138)

Islam came to light man's path and provide him with a system of life that regulates his relationship with his Creator and his fellowman. It brought about a radical change in man's concepts, ideas, beliefs, and life. It built a grand 'ummah' and a remarkable culture and started a scientific revival that changed the course of history.

Islamic culture grew, developed an independent character, and found a definite identity; in a systematic and distinguished way.

Basing their efforts on monotheism, Muslim philosophers, 'fuqaha', intellectuals and researchers shared in the build-up of the 'ummah's' cultural character.

In the past, Islamic culture faced a series of military and ideological wars that dragged on for many centuries, but, in spite of all the tribulations and hardships, it emerged victorious. And today, Islamic culture, Islamic doctrine and the Muslim 'Ummah' are the target of a hostile, vicious and ignorant war launched by both the East and the West.

Our forefathers did their job, now it is the task of the Muslim intellectuals, researchers, and preachers (ulama) to face up to the present-day ignorant, cultural invasion, spearheaded by capitalism and helped by existentialism and the variety of modern, materialistic schools and philosophies.

Spilt construction Muslim 'ulama' and intellectuals challenged the ignorant cultures at the time of the first stage of cultural and ideological interaction, following the embracing of Islam by other nations, including the Persians, Indians and Chinese. Such non-Islamic beliefs also seeped into the Muslim world through the translation of Greek and Roman thought, and through the adherents of the distorted divine religions; Judaism, Christianity and the like.

Our 'ummah' is undoubtedly going through a bitter, culture struggle. Our war with our foes is cultural in the first place and it is the most dangerous of all wars staged against our Muslim 'ummah' even more dangerous than the ideological one.

The superpowers have lift no stone unturned to swerve the 'ummah's' political march. In the twentieth century, they have made efforts, laid. plans, built educational institutions, organized political parties, and innovated theories and schools of thought, such as Qadiyaniyah and Baha'ism, for this purpose.

They have mobilized the mass media; radio stations, television networks, cinema and theater, as well as the print media, in order to present a "cultural substitute" to the Muslim generations, in a bid to make them drop their Islamic beliefs and repudiate their great Islamic values. But Allah wills to keep His Word high and that of the idolaters low:

"... Then as for the scum, it passes away as a worthless thing; and as for that which does good to people, it tarries on the earth. Thus does Allah set forth parables."

Holy Qur'an (13:17)

Those Muslims who are working hard to revive Islam, and those who call for it to guide humanity must, once again, join hands, unify their ranks, and put aside their slight religious, racial and sectarian differences; clinging to the call of guidance and hoisting the flag of enlightenment to mankind.

As it presents this booklet to its readers, Al-Balagh Foundation prays, to Allah; the Exalted and All-Powerful, to make it useful to them. It is hoped that this modest effort will help in correcting wrong concepts by purifying our thoughts, and exhorting Muslims to hold on to Islam. Allah certainly hears our prayers.

Al-Balagh Foundation

Culture and Civilization

Concepts are the main pillar of the edifice of culture and knowledge. Thanks to these, a certain 'ummah's' cultural and ideological character, with its particular qualities, from others.

Our Islamic knowledge, in the fields of thought, literature, jurisprudence, law, politics, ethics, art, philosophy ... etc, has its own concepts and expressions. If our concepts, such as those of freedom, obedience, responsibility, 'ummah', homeland, politics, worship, asceticism, art, counsel 'shoora', culture, civilization, innate nature (fitrah), reason, realization, spirit, soul, hypocrisy, apostasy, ignorance (pre-Islamic era),

equality, justice, oppression ... are well defined, well-coined, and well-used in the light of Islam, expressing exactly their ideological, doctrinal and cultural meanings, then we can shape our separate, distinguished cultural character, and at the same time have a tenacious, cultural build-up. Should we do this we would no longer lack the ability to discern and sift out the concepts. Foreign ideas and concepts could hardly have a harmful on our message and beliefs.

Every expression has its won special, definite meaning, a certain ideological sense; and a well-defined cultural import, It is not right to use the word "freedom" the way capitalists and pornographers do, or understand it in the sphere of personal conduct, economics and polities the way they do. Nor, it is right to understand "homeland" and "nation" the way man-made theories and laws do. We should understand it as it is in Islam; our nation is the Muslim 'ummah'.

The concept of 'ummah', as we know it, is 'a human group bound to each other by the bonds of doctrine and principle; 'The Muslim 'ummah' is one; always open to new converts, but of a definite type and character.' So, the Muslim 'ummah' is never restricted to a certain community, people, land or language and it is capable of increasing in number. Any individual, or nation that embraces Islam joins this 'ummah' and becomes part of it.

'Culture' and 'civilization' are two words that are vaguely and wrongly understood by many people; some people even mix them up. As a result, a call to abolish the cultural character of the Muslim 'ummah' has emerged. Some called for subservience, first, to the Western materialistic culture, and then, to the Communist, Marxist one.

They also called for dissolving the 'ummah's' character, and obliterating its peculiarities by means of borrowing foreign concepts, and modifying certain expressions and slogans, without touching a borrowed thought; which is alien to Islam. Great effort was made, actually , by the 'ideological agents' and the collaborators of the 'cultural imperialism' to achieve this end.

It is a matter of great importance to properly define the meanings of 'culture' and 'civilization', and show the correct use of each of these two words. In order to explain the difference between them, let us define these expressions, and give some examples.

Culture is 'a set of ideas and concepts about the universe, existence, life and man'. Under this category fall beliefs, laws, regulations, morals, philosophy, art, and literature. Briefly, culture can be defined as 'a set of principles and values on which human character and social life are based,

and by which their relationship is defined'. The scope of culture is then, 'the human side of life'.

And, it is due to this that the concept of culture, and the way of developing it, varies from one culture to another; and, so, we have Islamic culture, Greek culture, Roman culture, Capitalist culture, Communist culture ... etc. Each one of these cultures has its own style and way of shaping human character, and building life.

The way Islam understands life and moulds man, with all his ideas, concepts, sentiments, behaviour, social organisation and human ties, differs for example, from the way capitalist or communist cultures do. This cultural style of shaping man's character leaves its impact on his life. It marks, with its colour, his behaviour and existence, his artistic, literary, cultural and behavioural activities, making his character and society distinctly particular among the individual characters and societies made by other culture.

The Holy Qur'an refers to this cultural colour, and the distinguishing marks of the Muslim individual and groups:

"So, if they believe as you believe, they are indeed on the right course; and if they turn back, then they are only in opposition. But Allah will suffice you against them; and He is All-Hearing, All- All-Knowing. (We take) Allah's colour, and who is better than Allah at colouring, and we are His worshippers."

Holy Qur'an (137-138)

So, the doctrine of monotheism and the values of the faith form the core of Islamic culture. They are a tenacious, close-knit body. Substituting cultural ideals and concepts such as laws, morals, philosophy, and theories of sociology and psychology ... etc, for other ideals leads to ruin; in fact, to the ideological and behavioural collapse of the 'ummah'.

Civilization, on the other hand, differs greatly in its meaning from culture. It is 'the modus vivendi to the way man's energies and the resources of nature are employed; which is done through science, natural experiments, discoveries and inventions, that enables man to harness natural resources, making use of them in his industries, construction materials, agriculture, and the type of wars he fights. He can produce whatever tools or equipment he needs; however inexpensive, primitive, or complicated and advanced they may be:

This is the scientific side of life. Man, in this case, discovers the laws of nature and life and employs them in industry ... etc.

The difference between culture and civilization, then, is that the former is related to the human side of man's life, while the latter is related to the materialistic side.

Culture shows man how 'he should behave in life' and draws for him 'his relationship with the Creator of the world and his fellowman', while civilization is defined as 'man's ability to discover laws of nature and life, and how he should employ them for his benefit'.

Civilization, then, is shared by men regardless of their social theories, beliefs and philosophies. It differs only slightly one culture to another, and the scope of difference depends on the cultural concepts and social values that govern the different cultures.

We should pay particular attention to an important point concerning 'culture' and 'civilization', because they are two expressions that have new meaning which is different from the original, literal one. In Arabic, 'hadharah' refers to the process of living in a village or the countryside and means a permanent, settled life; which is opposite to the wandering life of the bedouins.

As for 'madaniyyah' (civilization), it is taken from the verb 'madana' - (to settle in a certain place), therefore, both words are literally similar, denoting settlements, permanent life, and residence. The two words give this meaning idiomaticness, but each one of them covers a specific area which makes it impossible to use them interchangeably.

Relationship between Culture and Civilization

In spite of the fact that the area of 'culture' and its sphere of influence is the human side of man's life; including beliefs, behaviour, ideals, laws, arts, literatureetc, and the area of 'civilization' is the material means of life; such as transportation, machinery, petroleum-drilling the process of producing medicine, and curing the sick ..,etc, they are linked firmly together, and affected by each other.

What matters, here, is Islam's view of the relationship between culture and civilization, which gives culture precedence over civilization.

In the light of cultural values, centred around the doctrine of monotheism, man makes use of the achievements of civilization for his own benefit, Whatever culture allows him, he is free to produce and then use.

But whatever culture forbids, as being 'haram', he has no right to use, or, for that matter to make as a tool; which would ruin self-fulfillment, and human life, dor example, civilization presents us with medicine; manufactures planes, cars; produces cotton and woollen textiles; produces different materials from petroleum; develops agricultural production and improves breeds of animals; provides housing with furniture, as well as heating and cooling systems ... etc. thus, it provides resources for man; putting at his disposal whatever helps him lead a comfortable life.

Here, culture enters the scene, giving explanation for the way of using and benefitting from all these remarkable human achievements. However, when man manufactures tools and equipment of destruction, annihilation, and torture, and employs his talents to produce tools for entertainment, debauchery, and pornography; such as drugs, liquor, and tools of aberrant sex ... etc, culture, with its values and standards, blocks the way of deviation and the unwise use of man's energy, with that of resources of nature.

The Holy Qur'an mentions this relationship between culture and civilization and the grave danger of deviating from the straight cultural path. It talks about nations that misused their material achievements due to their misunderstanding of the role of their achievements, stemming from their lack of values and ideals. The Qur'an says:

"And Allah sets forth a parable; a town safe and secure, to which its means of subsistence came in abundance from every quarter , but it disbelieved in Allah's favours, so Allah made it taste a pall of hunger and fear because of what they wrought." Holy Qur'an (16:112)

"Do you build on every height a monument? You (only) sport. And you make fortresses that you may abide. And when you seize, you seize as tyrants. So, be in awe of Allah and obey me. And be in awe of Him Who aids you with that which you know- He aids you with cattle and children. And gardens and fountains. Surely I fear for you the chastisement of a grievous Day." Holy Qur'an (26:128-135)

And, it also emphasizes the leading role of culture in this verse:

"So, be in awe of Allah and obey me, and be in awe of Him Who aids you with that which you know." Holy Qur'an (131-132)

Prophet Hud (a.s.), as the aforementioned verses show, exhorted his people to be obedient and pious; to adhere to the religious beliefs he brought to them, which outlined the way they should use their material achievements

in the best, proper way. He warned them that their civilization might turn into a catastrophe that would devastate them; changing their life into total misery and suffering; a life of starvation, fear, repression ... etc.

How perfect the Qur'anic analysis of that situation is! How easily it can apply to our time! Anyone who would like to examine the similarity between pre-Islamic era (jahiliyyah) civilization would find no testimonies better than the concepts of our modern, ignorant, materialistic achievements and his civilized progress, into tools of oppression, exploitation, deviation, enslavement, and blood letting. Never has history witnessed such a large-scale, horrifying predicament that man has brought upon himself as is in the case of the present-day.

Since the hour of their birth, the contemporary, ignorant civilizations of Capitalism and Communism, among others, have been treading the same path as the old 'jahiliyyah' civilizations. Both ancient and modem civilizations, as expressed in the Qur'an exploit man's scientific advancement devastatingly, bringing down upon humanity deviation, misery, oppression and ruin.

Islam's Attitude towards Civilization and different Cultures

After studying the difference between culture and civilization we should now determine the attitude of Islam towards civilization and the various existing cultures on this planet. Islam displays a confident posture in that it refuses to subscribe to any culture forein to it which includes any concept, doctrine, legislation, moral value, life philosophy ... etc, that is not based on its beliefs, or has no common ground with it.

So, the imitation of the capitalist, communist, socialist, Roman, Greek ... etc. civilization; the free adoption of any of their doctrines, or the dissolution into their entities, is something firmly rejected by Islam. There is no way to reconcile these cultures with Islamic principles, objectives or system; whether on the level of beliefs and philosophy, or legislation, ethics, arts, literature, education ... etc.

Civilization, on the other hand, has no special affiliation (with..) or distinguished identity. Discoveries, inventions, and industries are all at the disposal of humanity. They are a means to serve man and provide him with comfort, with the exception, of course, of that which is detrimental to man's life or goes against his morals. Within the limits of his culture, the Muslim can react positively to the scientific movement, and cooperate with executives and groups worldwide; anytime and any where He can make use of scientific products and achievement, regardless of their origin.

Within the context of his cultural motives, he should do his utmost to be in the fore front, He has to be a cultural leader, for he is the one who can direct man's ability and natural resources in the right direction, so that they can be employed for the benefit of all humanity.

Collapse of Cultures

A community, exactly like the human body, is subject to feebleness, disease and decay. The first social fabric that may contract disease is often that of thought and belief, next, is the social conduct and morals, then, the social, political and economic apparatus and institutions; such as the family, slate, school, press, ... etc.

The moment the thought of a given group of people, which is, in fact, the soul of their culture, debilitates and frays, the fabric of the group disintegrates and decays. The more extensive the social deviation the worse the ruin. Thereafter, disease creeps slowly into the social units; the very social bodies and institutions that have been built by all individuals to symbolize the collective spirit of the group and represent its cultural progression. When the disease permeates all the cells of these institutions, they began to function reversely.

This time the disease travels from the institutions to the individuals. As a result, such morbid phenomena change into a social and behavioural tide that engulfs everyone. Sometimes human communities may contract cultural malaise while they are at the summit of their scientific progress.

The human community, though scientifically and industrially advanced, is suffering from the most fatal social plagues, namely the dangerous deviations which are threatening to annihilate, on this planet, all the scientific achievements and marvelous production of man's intellect.

Man's diseased, materialistic culture is tumbling down the slope of history. It is not only simply unhealthy, but also has entered the final phase of its morbid downfall.

The 'pre-Islamic era' 'formula' of life, adopted by man, inevitably ends in total destruction and annihilation. This is a fact recorded by history and stressed in the Qur'an.

It is a lesson drawn from the fate of numerous extinct cultures.

"How many a town We destroyed while it was iniquitous, so it is fallen down upon its roofs; and (how many) a deserted well and palace raised high! Have they not travelled in the land so that they should have hearts with which to understand, or ears with which to hear? For surely it is not the eyes that are blind, but blind are the hearts which are in the breasts." Holy Qur'an (22:45-46)

"Have they not travelled in the land and seen what was the end of those before them? Allah destroyed them. And for the infidels is the like thereof." Holy Qur'an (47:10)

"And how many a town which rebelled against the commandment of its Lord and His messengers, so We called it to severe account and We chastised it with a stern chastisement! So it tasted the evil consequences of its conduct, and the end of its affair was perdition." Holy Qur'an (65:8-9)

"We have certainly been promised this - we and our fathers before; these are nothing but stories of the ancients! Say: Travel in the land, then see what was the end of the guilty!." Holy Qur'an (27:68-69)

"And Allah sets forth a parable: A town safe and secure, to which its means of subsistence came in abundance from every quarter; but it

disbelieved in Allah's favours, so Allah made it taste a pall of hunger and fear because of what they wrought." Holy Qur'an (16:112)

In these Qur'anic texts, the Noble Qur'an draws man's attention to the progression of history, the growth and development of cultures; then, it describes their downfall shrinkage, and decay, explaining the reasons for their extinction. It calls on us to look for their traces, and examine their histories; to put our fingers on the points of weakness and the areas where diseases have struck, It is in our own interests to avoid the wrongs of past nations, and fully grasp the lessons of history.

When the Qur'an relates the story of a nation's rise and fall, it aims at developing our sense of awareness with regard to man's past experience, and enables us to make the best use of the lessons of history drawn from the stories of numerous nations and various cultures. The Qur'an focuses on the key reasons behind cultural downfall and summarizes the plagues of the human community by the following:

1. Spiritual Imbalance: The disruption of man's relationship with Allah which is represented by his repudiation of the Creator of the universe and life, as well as his abandonment of Allah's Shari'ah.

"Have they not travelled in the land and seen what was the end of those before them ? Allah destroyed them. And for the infidels is the like thereof." Holy Qur'an (47:10)

Disbelief, in the logic of the Qur'an, means denial of the right, and the split between man and the natural laws set for him. As a result disbelief leads eventually to ruin for it is actually the process of abolishing the laws governing man's existence, and falsifying the course of history. In other words, the disbeliever moves against the goals of life. These two phenomena surface as a direct outcome of the deeper cause of disbelief. When man abandons the natural laws which govern him, human civilization weakens and decays, and fades away.

In this case cultural collapse is inescapable, because life moves in the wrong direction. Man, left alone, can never define his own goals in this life, the goals that lead him to his Great Creator.

2. The second cause behind cultural downfall is "man's mischief", or "misuse of life and man's existence", or "unwise use of things", or "the use of man's existence for goals other than the ones set for him". Should such a thing arise, if man misuses Allah's favours and the resources of nature in the wrong way, for bad purposes, in the wrong place and time; not as Allah has ordered, man's own deviation, in this respect, serves as the green light that signals the start of the collapse of a certain culture:

"Then We made Our promise good to them; so We delivered them and whom We pleased, and We destroyed the extravagant." Holy Qur'an (21:9)

"Do you build on every height a monument? You (only) sport. And you make fortresses that you may abide. And when you seize, you seize as tyrants. So, be in awe of Allah and obey me. And be in awe of Him Who aids you with that which you know- He aids you with cattle and children. And gardens and fountains. Surely I fear for you the chastisement of a grievous Day. Thye said: It is the same to us whether you admonish, or are

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not one of the admonishers: This is nothing but stories of the ancients. And we will not be chastised." Holy Qur'an (26:128-139)

The Qur'an, as seen in these verses, describes the irresponsible, mischievous use of life as a devastating pickaxe, demolishing the edifice of culture, tearing it down unit after unit, until, finally, it collapses into ruin. The destroyed edifice expresses the story of man's mutiny against natural laws. The Qur'an depicts this important law in these verses:

"And Allah sets forth a par able: A town safe and secure, to which its means of subsistence came in abundance from every quarter; but it disbelieved in Allah's favours, so Allah made it taste a pall of hunger and fear because of what they wrought." Holy Qur'an (16:112)

"And you dwell in the abodes of those who wronged themselves, and it is clear to you how We dealt with them and We made (them) examples for you." Holy Qur'an (14:45)

With such clarity the Qur'an discloses the grave cause of man's down fall. It shows the role of the use of riches and the resources of nature, and the employment of science, as contributing to either man's peaceful, smooth life, or his downfall.

From one culture to another, and from one man to another, the manner in which things are used differ. And, so, wise use of the means of civilization and the potentials of life depends entirely on man's cultural awareness.

That is why the use of resources and endowments by ancient, materialistic cultures, as mentioned by the Qur'an, was marked by mischief and aimlessness.

" ... but it disbelieved in Allah's favours, so Allah made it taste a pall of hunger and fear because of what they wrought." Holy Qur'an (16:112)

We conclude from the Qur'anic analysis that the nature of this mischievous use of things leads man to starvation and fear, which reflects man's cultural misery, and pushes to the surface the factors of death and collapse, that are deeply embedded in an unstabile society. Misery and terror are the result of human oppression and economic and political illegal practices,

which end in Struggle and in destruction of resources. Being not entitled to receive Allah's blessings, man loses them and his social fabric and culture eventually fade away. All social phenomena, as we can see clearly in this vicious cycle, are, in fact, the product of man's misunderstanding, and his erratic, obscured perception of the goal and value of life.

3. Confusion in man's standards and the lack of clear goals: When human culture enters the stage of cloudiness and opaqueness, mixing the values of evil and good, man moves ground, aimlessly, with no direction; values vanish, and man's spirituality shrinks. At this point, man transgresses the limits of Sacredness and finds himself in the vortex of debauchery and rot.

When a set of ideological and behavioural phenomena comes to the forefront reflecting man's confusion with regard to human standards and his lack of noble and defined objectives, it means that man's culture has become old and frail; living out its last days. Truthful are Allah's words:

"How many populations have We destroyed, which were given to wrong-doing? They trumbled down on their roofs. And how many wells are lying idle and neglected, and castles lofty and well-built?

Do they not travel through the land, so that their hearts (and minds) may thus learn wisdom and their ears may thus learn to hear? Truly it is not the eyes that are blind, but the hearts which are in their breasts." Holy Qur'an (22:45-46)

"It is true we were promised this,- we and our fathers before (us): these are nothing but tales of the ancients. Say: Go you through the land and see what has been the end of those guilty (of sin)" Holy Qur'an (27:68-69)

"Curses were pronounced on those among the Children of Israel who rejected faith, by the tongue of David. And of Jesus the son of Mary: Because they disobeyed and persisted in Excesses. Nor did they forbid one another. The iniquities which they committed: evil indeed were the deeds which they did." Holy Qur'an (7:78-79)

When human values and standards decline in a particular, morbid society, social disorders and maladies spread; what the Holy Qur'an reveals. Oppression, crime, aggression, evil-doing, ignorance and lack of sound judgement are all the results of unprincipled, straying man, who has abandoned all ethical standards and even his own reason, and formed animal groups roaming the land, governed by a disintegrated, materialistic civilization.

"... They are as cattle; no, they are more astray. These are the heedless ones." Holy Qur'an (7:179)

These are the main morbid phenomena which herald the downfall of human culture; as seen by the Holy Qur'an, which is expounded on, elaborately, in many of its verses. Whenever we see such phenomena creeping into man's life, we know, positively, that both culture and society are moving toward destruction and ruin, and that man's culture is helpless and unable to accommodate his movement; unable to base his history on the serene logic of existence and the ultimate goal of life, especially when the Noble Qur'an has painted culture as a tenacious tissue made from man's awareness and understanding of the universe and life.

This cultural formula and cultural tissue may by shredded into pieces when the factors of man's downfall work on it. It appears, in the Qur'an, as a house erected by man to protect himself, but it collapses over his head when man toys with its foundation. The house buries man and terminates his existence. It remains a scene of ruin and debris;

which is testimony to man's ignorance and tragedy. If one examines history, from the perspective of the Qur'an, especially the ancient past, one will find civilizations that grew and prospered, then shrunk and breathed their last. Modern culture made by modem, ignorant man, is only a confluence of the ignorant cultures of past generations, referred to in the Qur'an, and a stagnant pool on whose floor all microbes of annihilation and destruction exist.

At this point, the observer of the drift of modern materialistic culture, which carries deep in it the seeds of its own destruction, cannot help

lamenting over this ignorant culture, while he witnesses its tragic end as it propels headlong at full speed to meet its inevitable fate.

"And warn people of a day when the chastisement will come to them, then the wrongdoers will say: Our lord, respite us to a near term, we will respond to Your call and follow the messengers. Did you not wear before that there will be no passing away for you? And you dwell in the abodes of those who wronged themselves, and it is clear to you how We dealt with them and We made (them) examples for you.

And they have indeed planned their plan, and their plan with Allah, though their plan is such that the mountains should be moved thereby. So think not that Allah will fail in His promise to His messengers. Surely Allah is Mighty, the Lord of retribution." Holy Qur'an (14:14-47)

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Phenomena and Obstacles

Muslim communities were inflicted, during a harsh phase of their lifetime, by cultural stagnation and decay. As a result, the diseases of ignorant and materialistic cultures slithered into their once-strong body. The maladies of western capitalist culture and the Eastern Communist one mingled with a set of morbid sediments and potent, deeply buried, long-standing factors of decadence. The character of the Muslims suffered from every kind of decay and ideological and behavioural breakdown.

Muslim society, meanwhile, was overcome by stagnation and disorder of awareness and conduct; understanding and mutual relationships; values and practices; thought and production; innovation suffered the tearing apart of the civilized and cultural fabric. It retraced its steps, regressed and fell into the pit of laziness, ignorance and cultural, political, scientific and social decomposition.

Gradually it began to lose the peculiarities of its character, the ingredients of its entity and its Islamic originality, which had always pushed it ahead of other nations. A reformer, who endeavours to rebuild and amend the cultural formula of the Islamic community has, first of all, to analyse its character and its constituents, and to examine the extent of depth of the disease and estimate how fatal a blow it deals to the community's reasoning for its existence and growth.

Naturally, he deals with these phenomena as obstacles; hindering factors, and a reverse, counter movement blocking the way of change and social reforms. So, he should channel all his efforts to fight these impairments and protect his own reforms and efforts, from their evils and destructive effects, to bring about social change.

By examining our Muslim communities, and studying the most common and harmful, morbid phenomena that are permeating them, one finds that they share common maladies. In addition, there are disgusting, local symptoms peculiar to each one of these societies. It is unwise to ignore these, for any attempt to reform society on solid Islamic bases without getting rid of the phenomena; uprooting them and obliterating their effects, is doomed. We must remember that these phenomena and symptoms are organically related to each other. They can be summarized as follows:

1. Ignorance of Islam.
2. Decline of Social Awareness.
3. Disorder of Human Character.
4. Weak Sense of Responsibility.
5. Regression and Lack of Self-confidence.
6. Despair of Change and Reform.

1. Ignorance of Islam:

"... I admonish you lest you be of the ignorant." Holy Qur'an (11:46)

"And these parables, We set them forth for people, and none understand them but the learned." Holy Qur'an (29:43)

Ignorance is a dangerous enemy of man, the blight of life; the source of corruption; and the force that leads to decay and extinction. That is why Allah, the Most Exalted, warns Noah, peace be upon him, not to be ignorant:

"... I admonish you lest you be of the ignorant."

Ignorance is the key cause of the downfall of nations and the dissolution and rotting of cultures. Present-day Muslims suffer greatly from ignorance and scientific and cultural decadence. They have only a trifling share of knowledge. They know nothing of their noble Islamic mission. They are unmindful of their goals and roles in life as Muslims. And so it is not an easy task to remind them of their Islamic ideology and their cultural position, correct their concepts and view of life and rebuild their ideological and behavioural structure.

They are still groping about blindly in ignorance, in the alleys of invading principles, and yielding to the influence of foreign ideological currents and imported doctrines and theories, including communism, racism, capitalism, socialism, existentialism ... etc. This is simply attributed to their unawareness of the grand Islamic thought and ideology. It is also the result of the campaigns of distortion and suppression of facts organized by Islam's enemies, the most effective of which are crusading missionaries spiteful orientalists, and the followers of Communism, materialistic Capitalism and vicious zionism, which act through a variety of political and cultural facades.

In order to be successful in their mission, Muslim reformers have to spread Islamic culture and awareness, and cleanse the Islamic mentality of all invading, foreign doctrines, by employing every scientific means available.

2. Decline of Social Awareness:

Not every individual is able to analyze events; realize how they take place; or detect their positive and negative sides and not every person has the ability to realise the causes of corruption, and to be alert to that which takes place around him and threatens his own existence, The majority of people move within their daily circle of activities, without giving a thought to the social and cultural corruption and injustice which is engulfing their life; simply stated, they are not aware of their surroundings,

only being accustomed to and obsessed by their daily lives. Man has become a part of this pitiful reality; a human drop in a vast ocean; not pausing for a moment to ask himself: In which direction is this aimless human current moving? Why is there all of this injustice and mischievous corruption? Where am I going? But, how can he ask these questions when he lacks sound reasoning for his backward, stagnant life? How can he simply do this while his barren mentality is unable to think of reforms, or envision a new image of the world; one different from his own? How can he peer out of the window of reason to the spacious horizons of progress and freedom?

Such a man can never be fertile ground for Islamic reforms. Nor can he accept, receive of accommodate an Islamic way of effecting change for the better. Simply he is shackled by his stupidity and unrestrained freedom.

There is a pressing need for extraordinary great acts of historical and conscientious explosions to wake and sober people up to face the bitter reality of their existence. Heroes can discharge huge, deafening bombs of truth to awaken man's sleeping will and stir his inept depths.

Intellectuals and true adherents of the faith are able to shred to pieces the screen that prevents people from seeing things as they really are; great leaders can awaken a feeling of seriousness in their torpid, inactive nations: and, so, the Muslim reformer, who calls for Islam, should paint, faithfully and accurately,

the tragic state of humanity if he wants to address this group of people. Then, he should make a comparison between man's painful reality and the other way of life which Islam wants man to lead. Thus, adequately enthused and urged, man may move, of his own accord, to criticize his life, judging it in the light of a lofty call for a better and enriched one.

The Muslim preacher must also sow in his community the seeds of awareness so that it can proceed smoothly, with the sublime aims of Islam etched in its mind. Without such awakening, the gap remains wide between the Muslim preacher and the masses he is addressing. This gap represents a serious problem,

for the reformer can make no progress in an environment of torpor and paralysis. He finds no one to understand his call, nor anyone to share with him the shouldering of his mission. The people the reformer addresses are low in their awareness to his call and they do not respond to something they do not fully or adequately understand.

3. Disorder of Human Character:

"The hypocrites seek to deceive Allah, and He will requite their deceit to them. And when they stand up for prayer, they stand up sluggishly - they do it only to be seen of men and remember Allah but little. Wavering between that (and this-) (belonging) neither to these nor to those. And whomsoever Allah leaves in error, you will not find a way for him." Holy Qur'an (4:142-143)

"And when they meet those who believe, they say: We believe; and when they are alone with their devils, they say: Surely we are with you, we were only mocking. Allah will pay them back their mockery, and He leaves them alone in their inordinacy, blindly wandering on. These are they who buy error for guidance, so their bargain brings no gain, nor are they guided." Holy Qur'an (2:14-16)

The Qur'an, by these verses and others which are concerned with analysing the characters of both the individual and the group, raised the social awareness of the vanguards of Islam in its early days, depicting the shaky and hypocritical character which lacks originality and soundness, and possesses no internal tenacity due to its weakness and shattered will.

This morbid phenomenon of hypocrisy and double-dealing is a dangerous plague that may strike human cultures. Hypocrisy and character disorders, in any given society, deprive it of stability and harmony, and make it suffer from restlessness, breakdown, and collapse because of disharmony and lack of morals. The hoes of Islam realized the danger of this phenomenon on the Muslim society.

They worked on demolishing the Muslim character by subjecting it to the influence of contradictory political, social, and ideological currents; and to pressure, fear, and terror. The Muslim began gradually to lose his distinguished, independent character. Without originality and enlightenment, he easily fell prey to those invading ideologies.

The Qur'an pays particular attention to this phenomenon and alerts Muslims to it; warning those who do not feel affiliated to Islam-those who have no self-esteem, who are ready, at every moment, to bow humiliatingly to others, kissing their feet, who can change their beliefs as they change of profits, or getting short-lived social or political positions - that they should be mindful of their responsibilities. The Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.) emphasized this phenomenon and laid great emphasis on the originality of the Islamic character. He said:

"Beware of being one who says: 'I am doing as other people do and if other people do good deeds so will I. If they do bad deeds then, so will I. Instead train yourselves to do good deeds when other people do, and avoid committing evil when other people do."

Imam Ali (a.s.) explained this point by saying:

"People are of three kinds: Spiritual scholars 'ulama' men who educate themselves as a means of salvation, and t he ignorant rabbles who follow every call, and move with every whim."

Islam calls on its followers to treat this last category of people with caution; to fight against this morbid condition fiercely and uproot its causes. It can only be done through deliberately and strictly building a solid Islamic

character which is impervious to hypocrisy, self-destruction and aimlessness. A series of ideological and ethical injections would make the Muslim feel to be affiliated to Islam, which he should be faithful to, without the slightest feeling of fear, hesitation or internal weakness.

Once he conquers his weakness and internal defeatism, he will become a human force, possessed of will, and the freedom of choice. Then he can assume his role in fulfilling the Islamic mission; putting humanity on the right track, and standing firm in the face of disbelief, corruption and cultural crumbling.

Today, Muslim are suffering greatly from this most dangerous blight, which stands as a serious hindrance in the way of committed instructors, who guided by the Qur'an, are trying to improve the Muslims' condition and rebuild Islamic society on Islamic culture. It is a disease that they cannot simply ignore and must take it seriously for it is a plight to be reckoned with.

4. Weak Sense of Responsibility:

The sense of responsibility is a positive behavioural outcome which can only be found in the strong-willed men who feel they have the ability to fill the vacancies of life. It is a distinguishing mark of those people who are ambitious, feeling they belong to their group, and that they should do everything within their power to lead it to a good, decent, sin-free life. The responsible man knows where he belongs in life. He possesses excellent ethical sense, and strong will power.

But when this quality fades, and the malaise of reliance on one another takes hold, we cannot find, a single person who consecrates his life to serve his 'ummah'; feeling the pain and suffering of his fellowmen.

It is heartrending that this moral disease has permeated Islamic societies where hardly a person is found who feels responsible to his 'ummah', and commits himself to serve his faith and mission, discarding any trace of egoism or self-centredness.

Wakening a sense of responsibility within the Muslim Community is an indispensable prerequisite for a successful social endeavor.

Islam in the faith of responsibility; the religion that urges its followers to work. Life without a sense of responsibility is, in fact, chaos and a loss. That is why the Noble Messenger (s.a.w.) has said:

"All of you are shepherds, and all of you are responsible for your flocks."

And he is also reported to have said:

"He who no longer cares for Muslims' affairs is no longer a Muslim."

So, Islam connects faith with one's care for one's Muslim community and is the best way to free the Muslim individual from selfishness and self-centredness, and the habit of thinking only of his own interests, without giving thought to his brothers. Individualism, egoism; the shrinkage of the collective sense, and the lack of the feeling of responsibility are the most dangerous factors of destruction and subversion and for this reason Islam unrelentingly fought them and worked to get rid of them.

5. Regression and Lack of Self-Confidence

Weak hearts get bored. Shaky wills collapse and break down. A disintegrated 'ummah' crumbles and falls before catastrophes and misfortunes. But alive, aware 'ummah', whose members feel strong and powerful, and whose wills are solid and firm, can turn defeat into victory, and downfall into uprising. It draws lessons from events, and makes the best use of the tragedies it under goes. Out of hard and unfavourable conditions it emerges rich in experience which lightens its path and shows it the right course of action.

The Qur'an addresses the Muslim 'ummah', saying:

"And be not weak-hearted, nor grieve, and you will have the upper hand if you are believers." Holy Qur'an (3:138)

The Qur'an tries to make the Muslim, who may yield in a moment of weakness and uncertainty, overcome the internal defeatism he suffers from. It instills in him a spirit of steadfastness and spiritual strength, and spreads out before him limitless horizons of victory.

Our 'ummah', the Muslim 'ummah', which prides itself on its glorious history, has unfortunately succumbed to extreme stagnation and deterioration; under the pressure of many centuries of backwardness, ignorance and decay. It has forgotten all about its glorious past, and lost its cultural and material capabilities which would have helped it continue its cultural march, that would have put it at the fore front of all nations.

It has awoken from its deep slumber at the shouts of the invading enemies; helpless, broken, unable to move having lost its fortitude and strength, abandoned its mission and principles, and buried under layers of ignorance its precious scientific and cultural legacy. Short of weapons to defend its existence and culture, it faced its foes.

With not enough knowledge and awareness, not ready, it was only natural that our 'ummah' would be defeated; dazzled by the trappings of the western invading civilization. It became submissive; receptive to the invading thought and culture. Having lost its leadership position, it soon yielded to the invading conquerors.

Its enemies, on the other had, doubled their subversive efforts to ingrain the feeling of backwardness, ineptitude, and the inability to catch up with the world in the fields of knowledge, civilization and technology. They placed all kinds of obstacles and hindrances before the 'ummah' and planted the spirit of defeatism in it. The 'ummah' surrendered and accepted the fait accompli, thus, the most important pillar of the character of the 'ummah' was pulled down.

Nothing but the Qur'an can cure our 'ummah' of this malaise. There is a great need to build a Qur'anic generation, that believes in the goals of the Qur'an, carries the spirit of the Qur'an, so that it can march forward without weakness or hesitation.

This vanguard should take the utmost advantage of the lessons of history, examine closely the experiences of past and present nations, and monitor the direction of events, so as to check the aimless movement Of mankind, to realize that nothing is impossible in the world of the possible and that its

position is in the forefront. It should lead humanity along the read of progress and peace.

"You (Muslims) are the best nation raised up for people: you enjoin good and forbid evil ..." Holy Qur'an (3:109)

"And thus We have made you an exalted nation that may be the bearers of witness to the people and (that) are the Messenger may be a bearer of witness to you ..." Holy Qur'an (2:143)

When this vanguard again exists in the world of Islam, this multitude of committed, strong-willed, Qur'anic- educated men, who know no despair, regression or inferiority; the whole 'ummah' of the Qur'an will be reborn. It means that life, once again will enter the torpid body of the 'ummah", the spirit of revival will creep into its awareness in much the same way that spring creeps into the trees. It will be the good news of the 'ummah's' departure from ineptitude and lethargy. Then the 'ummah' can reject the rotting focade to which it had been forced to cling for so long and can use its limbs again after their long paralyis.

6. Despair of Change and Reform

Despair is a morbid, dangerous condition that marks frail characters and hopeless souls, when images of failure are heaped before them, or when they are reminded of their ineptitude and failure to achieve all the goals they dreamt of This phenomenon grows more dangerous especially when it he comes a collective one, transcending the boundaries of the individuals in the group. Then, this disease begins to eat away at the wills and kill the spirit of bravery, and blocks man's movement. Even those who are lucky to be free from it find their way full of obstacles.

This morbid condition has sneaked into the Muslim individual and groups. Muslims despair of reforms and feel helpless in the face of waves of corruption. They are so burdened with the heavy years of oppression and evil Colonialism that they cannot deal with their pitiful backwardness in the fields of science, politics, economicsetc.

The majority of Muslims choose resignation to reality, keeping silent vis-a-vis corruption and decadence. Neglecting the divine order to enjoin good and forbid evil, they have left the arena to the enemies of Islam, and the preachers of ignorance and corruption.

An analytical look at the social fabric of Muslims and their psychology sums up the causes of despair and resignation to the current way of life, on the following points:

1. Some people feel despair due to an objective feeling that can be traced to the individual's psychological disorder. Some people are melancholy by nature. The root cause of this condition is private concerning the individual himself; but, then, it engulfs the whole society colouring its altitudes and positions.

2. People's ignorance of the course of history. This ignorance of, or misunderstanding of, human history which is subject to ebb and flow, advancement and regression, naturally yields a human attitude that is far from being real. Such people can think only within the boundaries of the present conditions and circumstances enveloping their communities. How can they know that what they are witnessing is only a fleeting, passing phenomenon, and a transitional case of history, that repeals itself now and then, like the bubbles that are born on the lake bottom, then rise to the surface and burst?

"Let not control in the land, of those who reject faith, deceive you. A brief enjoyment! Then their abode is hell. And evil is the resting-place." Holy Qur'an (3:195-196)

What we see today as an awe-inspiring, magnificent edifice will become, in years, decades or centuries to come, a dilapidated entity, a trace, or a story kept in the depths of history records or museums. If these people only know this fact, if they know that history is always in constant motion, that it repeats itself, their view of life will certainly change.

Truthful are Allah's words:

"Indeed there have been examples before you; so travel in the land and see what was the end of the deniers. This is a clear statement for people, and a guidance and an admonition to the pious. And be not weak-hearted, nor grieve, and you will have the upper hand if you are faithful. If a wound has

afflicted you, a wound like it has also afflicted the (disbelieving) people. And We bring these days to people by turns, that Allah may know those who believe and take witnesses from among you. And Allah loves not the wrongdoers. And that He may purge those who believe and deprive the infidels of blessings. Do you think that you will enter the Garden while Allah has not yet known those from among you who strive hard (not) known the steadfast." Holy Qur'an (3:136-140)

The Qur'an speaks, in a bid to stir up our sense of history, about Allah's laws, and the laws that govern the drift of human history which state that no political, or social ... situation remains as it is, that defeat is not insurmountable, and victory is not everlasting. All these historical phenomena are transitory. They have no fixed value or constant existence, except when they are grounded in right and justice.

"... Then as for the scum, it passe away as a worthless thing; and as for that which does good to people, it tarries on the land ..." Holy Qur'an (13:17)

How many nations were born and then perished! How many states rose and fell! How many groups and parties attained the pinnacle of triumph and glory, only to be beaten and become mere stories and narrations in the annals of history! How many a culture or a doctrine spread across this planet then fell and faded from the stage of history!

"... and We bring these days to people by turns, ..." Holy Qur'an (3:140)

The course of history is a school in which man learns from its events, and benefits from its facts and lessons. That is why the Qur'an reminds us of the past nations, instills in us the spirit of victory, exhorts us to overcome our despair and weakness, and urges us to sacrifice and fight for the cause of Allah.

3. The feeling of fear form the technological progress achieved by the foes of Islam. Muslims feel they are lagging behind in technology and this inferiority complex, which clutches at the Muslim heart, is for the despondent at least, a hard-to-overcome obstacle. None of the preachers of the faith or the reformers can match the advanced forces of the enemies of Islam, particularly in the arenas of politics and industry; this is what many despairing Muslims think. But the Qur'an, in its address to the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.), analyses this morbid phenomenon and opens the Muslims' eyes to the facts of history.

"None dispute concerning the messages of Allah but those who disbelieve, so let not their control in the land deceive you. Before them the people of Noah and the parties after them rejected (prophets), and every nation purposed against its messenger to destroy him, and disputed by means of falsehood to render null thereby the truth, so I seized them; how (terrible) was then My retribution!" Holy Qur'an (40:4-5)

"Let not control in the land" of those who reject faith, deceive you. A brief enjoyment! Then their abode is hell. And evil is the resting-place." Holy Qur'an (3:195-196)

4. Accumulation of Corruption. Corruption has spread across the despairing Muslims as overwhelming and hard to obliterate. But these people lose sight of the fact that the intensity of corruption hastens its death.

When corruption and deviation rule a certain society it rushes towards disintegration, and this, in itself, marks the birth of a new society and the beginning of a fresh historical phase.

The prophets were the best examples of diligent preachers who dealt with their own people most kindly, carefully and conscientiously. The prophets and messengers of Allah (a.s.) and their faithful adherents enriched the way to Allah with good experiences, wise attitudes and courses of action. The Noble Qur'an presents us with an example of the brave, unique actions of people who knew no despair or weakness, Allah addresses His Messenger Moses (a.s.), saying:

"Go you and your brother with My messages and be not remiss in remembering Me. Go both of you to Pharaoh, surely he is inordinate; then speak to him a gentle word, haply he may mind or fear." Holy Qur'an (20:42-44)

Pharaoh, as the Qur'an describes him, was well known as a haughty and arrogant tyrant. He was an evil man bent on spreading disbelief, and sustaining crime and corruption. But, in spite of this, Allah, the Most Exalted, ordered His prophet Moses to go to him, say the word of right to him, and establish the proof of Allah before him.

For the same reason, namely calling people to be true servants of Allah, the Qur'an gives the ideal attitude taken by a number of believers towards other despairing men, who asked the believers protestingly:

"... Why preach you to a people whom Allah would destroy ..." Holy Qur'an (7:164)

The Qur'an mentions the story as an example of the patience, forbearance and strength of the men who devoted themselves whole-heartedly to the faith. It says:

"... Why preach you to a people whom Allah would destroy or whom He would chastise with a severe chastisement? They said: To be free from blame before your Lord, and that haply they may guard (against evil)." Holy Qur'an (7:164)

These committed men do not want to let despair attack themselves, lest it stands as a high wall blocking the process of calling people to the right path, explaining the truths about the faith and establishing the proof of Allah for them. Having done this, the preacher and reformer can feel at peace with himself, living with a clear conscience because he has done what his Lord has ordered him to do.

5. The failure of many reformers and reformist movements is that they do not bring about the change they promised people earlier, and keep to the principles they called for before, This failure leaves a bad impression and a negative effect on the souls of many people. The result is the despair and pessimism that makes people the reformers. Such people see only the negative side of the reformer's efforts, and look only at the failure of the reformist movements. They will not even lock at the causes of the failure and decline to work with the same spirit and determination with which the true reformers work, after studying their experiences, evaluating them, and setting a sound course of action.

These people should realise that the failures of the committed reformers have given them good, in valuable lessons which they would never have experienced if it were not for the hardships and sufferings of these reformers, This encounter has blazed the trail for them, and enlightened the road therefore, they have to make use of this great experience and go on with the march of reforms and struggle. They should discard the factors of despair; setting out to work with fresh determination and spirit.

Epilogue

There are some factors and reasons that actively help to hasten the downfall of societies and cultures, if they are begotten in their atmospheres or have the chance to clutch at the ingredients of culture and civilization.

There looms on the horizon a number of morbid signs and evidences indicating the imminent breakdown of the present human culture; on that will totally disappear from the scene. The Qur'an makes mention of all fatal morbid reasons, obstacles and phenomena that stand between the Muslim and his duty of facing the elements of weakness and decadence. Before any of these factors arises, the Qur'an points it out, and warns people of it, lest the Muslim reformer forgets his duty of fighting corruption, or gives up in the face of obstacles and hindrances.

This Qur'anic attitude inspires us, we Muslims of today, to ponder over the conditions of our 'ummah', detect its points of strength and weakness, and those of the materialistic, ignorant culture; which is launching a war against us, and planning to tear down our culture and bring an end to our existence.

By contemplating on these conditions we can find the means to answer back, inspite of elements of weakness and decadence, making our way ahead more fruitful. This is the way we can resume our cultural triumphant and historical march; hoisting the banner of Islam, and leading the whole world on the road of guidance, prosperity and peace.