

At the Threshold of a New Millennium

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As every dawn, every sunrise, and every upcoming spring signifies a new beginning and hope, so does every new century and every new millennium. In this respect, within the wheels of time over which we have no control, humanity has always sought a new spark of life, a breath as fresh as the wind of dawn, and has hoped and desired to step into light from darkness as easily as crossing a threshold.

We can only speculate as to when the original man and woman appeared on Earth, which is equated with the Heavens in the Qur'an due to the divine art it exhibits, its ontological meaning, and its value largely coming from its chief inhabitant, that is humanity. According to the calendar we use today, we are at the threshold of the third millennium after the birth of Jesus, upon him be peace. However, since time revolves and advances in a helicoidal relativity, there are different measures of time in the world. For example, according to the measure of time that currently enjoys worldwide acceptance, the world has just entered a new thousand-year period. While according to the Jewish calendar, we are already in the second half of the sixth millennium. Within the Hindu timeframe, we are living in the Kali Yuga era, and according to the Muslim calendar, we are approaching the end of the first half of the second millennium.

People live in perpetual hope, and thus are children of hope. At the instant they lose their hope, they also lose their "fire" of life, no matter if their physical existence continues. Hope is directly proportional to having faith. Just as winter constitutes one-fourth of a year, so the periods in a person's or a society's life corresponding to winter are also small. The gears of Divine acts revolve around such comprehensive wisdom and merciful purposes that just as the circulation of night and day builds one's hope and revivifies one's spirit and every new year comes in expectations of spring, and summer, so too the disastrous periods are short and followed by happy times in both an individual's life and a nation's history.

This circulation of the "Days of God," which is centered in Divine Wisdom, is neither a fear nor pessimism for those with faith, insight, and genuine perceptive faculties. Rather, it is a source of continuous reflection, remembrance, and thanksgiving for those having an apprehensive heart, inner perception, and the ability to hear. Just as a day develops in the heart of night, and just as winter furnishes the womb in which spring grows, so one's life is purified, matures, and bears its expected fruits within this circulation. Also in this circulation, God-given human abilities become aptitudes and talents, sciences blossom like roses and weave technology in the workbench of time, and humanity gradually approaches its predestined end.

Having stated this general view of ours, which is neither personal nor subjective but rather an objective fact of human history, it should not be thought that we welcome either winter or winter-like events that correspond to sorrow, disease, and disaster. Despite the general fact that disease eventually increases the body's resistance, strengthens the immune system, and drives medical progress, it is pathological and harmful. It is the same with terrestrial and celestial disasters. From a theological and moral point of view, they result from our sins and oppression, which are enough to shake the Earth and the Heavens, and from engaging in deeds that have been declared forbidden and despised by law and ethics (whether religious or secular). Even though they awaken people to their mistakes and negligence, provoke developments in geology, architecture, engineering, and related safety measures; even though they elevate the demolished belongings of believers to the level of charity, and the believers themselves to the level of martyrdom, these disasters cause much destruction and harm humanity.

Basic nature of humanity

After presenting the issues that constitute the basis of this subject as an introduction, we can switch to our considerations regarding the third millennium.

Human history began with two people who constituted the essence of humanity and complemented each other. People lived a tranquil life during this time of the original mother and father and the families that descended from them. They were a united society that had the same views and shared the same environment and lives. From that day on, the essence of humanity has remained unchanged, and it will remain so. The realities surrounding their lives, their physical structure, main characteristics, basic needs, place and time of birth and death, selection of parents and physique, innate characteristics, as well as the surrounding natural environment, surrounding him have not changed. All of these require some essential and vital invariable realities and values. Thus, the development and alteration of life's secondary realities should be based on the axis of these primary realities and values, so that life will continue as a worldly paradise under the shadow of Heaven.

We mentioned above some issues that seem to be harmful and unpleasant. Similarly, there are human traits that seem to be evil at first glance, such as hatred, jealousy, enmity, the desire to dominate others, greed, rage, and egoism. A human being has also other innate drives and needs that allow the continuation of his or her worldly life, such as the need to eat and drink and the drives of lust and anger. All human drives, needs and desires should be guided and trained in the direction of the eternal, universal, and invariable values that address the fundamental aspects of humanity. In this respect, the need to eat and drink, and the desire associated with lust and rage, can be tamed and transformed into means of absolute or relative good. Likewise, egoism and hatred can become sources of fine attributes and goodness. Jealousy and rivalry can be transformed into competition in charitable and good deeds. The feeling of enmity can be transformed into enmity against Satan, the greatest enemy of mankind, and against the feeling of enmity itself and hatred. Greed and rage into a drive which will force one to perform good deeds without tiredness. Egoism can point out the evil aspects of the carnal soul (*nafs*), thereby seeking to train and purify the soul by not excusing its evil actions.

As it is seen, all negative feelings can be transformed into sources of good by training and struggle. This is how one reaches the level of "the best of Creation," by traveling the way of transformation from a potential human being to a real and perfected human being, to becoming the best symbol, model, and personal representative of creation and existence.

Despite this fact, the realities of human life do not always follow these guidelines. The negative feelings and attributes often defeat people, pulling them under their domination to such an extent that even the religions that guide people to goodness and kindness are abused, as well as the feelings and attributes that are sources of absolute good. Human life, at the level of the individual and of humanity as a whole, is merely the summation of internal, personal struggles and their external manifestations. These tides make the personal world of the individual, society, and history an arena of battle, struggle, war, oppression, and tyranny. As a result, it is usually human beings themselves who suffer the consequences.

Men and women always receive the fruits of their deeds. In the first period of its history, humanity lived a happy life as a single society whose members shared their joys and sorrows. But, later on they bound their necks and feet with a rusty yoke composed of chains of oppression as a result of jealousy, greed, and coveting other's rights and properties. The consequence was Cain's murder of Abel. As a result of this, humanity entered the path of disunity. Despite the millenniums coming one after the other like days, seasons and years, this "cycle" still continues.

The second millennium

The second millennium started with the Crusades and then the Mongol invasions of the Muslim world, which was like the heart of the Earth and history at that time. Despite the wars and destruction, and despite the crimes committed sometimes in the name of religion and sometimes in the name of economic, political and military supremacy, this millennium has seen the apex of the East's civilizations, based on spirituality, metaphysical, universal and eternal values, and the West's civilizations, based on the physical sciences. Many significant geographical discoveries and scientific inventions have occurred.

However, the East's and West's civilizations existed separated from each other. This separation, which should not have occurred, was based on the former's retiring from the intellect and science, while the latter retired from spirituality, metaphysics, and eternal and invariable values. As a result, the last centuries of this millennium have witnessed disasters that are hard to believe. Due to humanity's growing arrogance and egoism, arising from its accomplishments, men and women have had to live through colonialism, immense massacres, revolutions that cost millions of lives, unimaginably bloody and destructive wars, racial discrimination, social and economic injustice, and iron curtains built by regimes whose ideology and philosophy sought to deny the essence, freedom, merit, and honor of humanity. It is partly because of this and partly because of some auguries from the Bible that many people in the West fear that the world will again be soaked by floods of blood, pus, and destruction. They are quite pessimistic and worried about the new millennium.

Our expectations with respect to the new millennium

Modern means of communication and transportation have transformed the world into a large, global village. So, those who expect that any radical changes in a country will be determined by that country alone and remain limited to it, are unaware of current realities. This time is a period of interactive relations. Nations and peoples are more in need of and dependent on each other, which causes closeness in mutual relations.

This network of relations, which exists or are expected to exist, on the basis of mutual interest, provides some benefits to the weaker side. Moreover, owing to the advances in technology, especially digital electronic technology, the acquisition and exchange of information grows gradually. As a result, the individual comes to the fore, making it inevitable that democratic governments that respect personal rights will replace oppressive regimes.

As each individual is like a species with respect to other species, individual rights cannot be sacrificed for society, and social rights should depend on individual rights. This is why the basic human rights and freedoms found in the revealed religions, came to be considered by a war-weary West. They will enjoy priority in all relations. At the head of these rights is the right to life, which is granted and can solely be taken by God. To accentuate the importance of this right in Islam, a basic Qur'anic principle is that: "If one person kills another unjustly, it is the same as if he or she had killed all of humanity; if one saves another, it is the same as if he or she has saved all of humanity."

Other rights are the freedom of religion and belief, thought and expression; the right to own property and the sanctity of one's home; to marry and have children; to communication and travel; and the right to and freedom of education. The principles of Islamic jurisprudence are based on these and other rights, all of which are accepted by modern legal systems, such as the protection of life, religion, property, reproduction, and intellect, as well as equality of people based on the fact that all people are human beings, and the rejection of all racial, color, and linguistic discriminations. All of these will be—and should be—indispensable essentials in the new millennium.

I believe and hope that the world of the new millennium will be a happier, more just, and more compassionate place, contrary to the fears of some people. The inter-faith dialogue will develop as a necessary process, and the followers of all religions will find ways to get closer and assist each other.

Previous generations witnessed a bitter struggle that should never have taken place: science versus religion. This conflict gave rise to materialism which influenced Christianity more than other religions. Whereas, science cannot contradict religion, for its purpose is to understand nature and humanity, which are each a composition of the manifestations of God's Attributes of Will and Power. Religion has its source in the Divine Attribute of Speech, that was manifested in the course of human history as Divine Scriptures such as the Qur'an, the Gospels, the Torah and others. Thanks to the efforts of both Christian and Muslim theologians and scientists, it seems that the few-century long religion-science conflict will come to an end, or at least its absurdity will be acknowledged.

The end of this conflict and a new style of education that will fuse religious and scientific knowledge together with morality and spirituality, produce genuinely enlightened people with hearts illumined by religious sciences and spirituality, minds illuminated with positive sciences, characterized by all kinds of humane merits and morale values, and cognizant of the socio-economic and political conditions of their time. Our old world will experience an excellent "spring-time" before its demise. This spring-time will see the gap between rich and poor narrow; the world's riches distributed most justly according to one's work, capital, and needs; the absence of discrimination based on race, color, language, and world-view; and basic human rights and freedoms are protected. Individuals will come to the fore and, learning how to realize their potential, will ascend on the way to becoming "the most elevated human" with the wings of love, knowledge, and belief.

In this new "spring-time," when scientific and technological progress is taken into consideration, people will understand that the current level of science and technology resembles the stage when an infant is learning how to crawl. Humanity will organize trips into space as if traveling to another country. Travelers on the way to God, those self-immolators of love who have no time for hostility, will carry the inspirations in their spirits to other worlds. Yes, this spring-time will rise on the foundations of love, compassion, mercy, dialogue, acceptance of others, mutual respect, justice, and rights. It will be a time in which humanity will discover its real essence. Goodness and kindness, righteousness and virtue will form the basic essence of the world. No matter what happens, the world will come to this track sooner or later. Nobody can prevent this.

We pray and beg the Infinitely Compassionate One not to let our hopes and expectations come to nothing.