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QUR’ANIC MORAL VALUES FOR INDIVIDUALS AND SOCIETY THE ONLY KEYS TO ETERNAL BLISS

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Abstract: When the Qur’an says: “He it is Who created death and life with a view to testing you all to ensure which of you emerge excellent in his/her behavior” (67:2), it signifies that worldly life is to be governed by absolute moral tenets prescribed by Allah, the Origin of the Qur’an, the Last Revelation. Human behavior which refers to five dimensional interactions-with the Creator, with the self, with society, with other creatures like animals, and with ecology-needs to be regulated by a well-defined set of ethical principles, leading to excellence in life. The Qur’an specifies the absolute moral codes, including sincerity, submission to the Creator alone, repentance, generosity, and justice. The excellent behavior (Ahsanu ‘Amalan) as the Qur’an spells it implies application of heavenly approved moral standards for human life and activities in both individual and social dimensions. This paper represents an attempt to identify and elaborate salient moral values as reiterated in the Qur’an. The methodology of discussion herein is composed of descriptive cum analytical.

Keywords:

The Qur’an, Moral Values, Excellent Human Behavior, Five-Dimensional Human Interactions, Eternal Success



INTRODUCTION

Human beings without any exceptions, old, young, male, female, educated, illiterate, trader, customer, teacher, student, physician, patient, ruler, public, master, subordinate, urban, and rural, seriously long for success. Different individuals and groups believe in varied mode of success. Some find success in the renunciation of the world and its connection, some consider amassing of wealth as the sign of success, some view domination over others, political or otherwise as real success. These differences are consequent upon different worldviews, most of them man-made and subjectively constructed. Success must be absolute in nature, which none but the Creator, the Sustainer, the Cherisher, the Provider, the Controller of the universe i.e., Allah the Almighty has the prerogative to define. It is for sure this divine concept of success as explained in the Qur'an, the Word of Allah. That Qur'anic idea of success is possible to be secured only by application of Qur'anic moral values, which indeed advance human behavioral pattern. When the Qur'an announces in unequivocal terms the very objective of human life on the surface of the earth-“ He it is Who created death and life with a view to testing you all to ensure which of you emerge excellent in his/her behavior” (67:2), it declares that excellent human behavior could be ensured only by patterning it on absolute moral principles as prescribed by the Qur'an. This paper is to explore and elaborate the Qur'anic moral tenets.

DEFINING THE QUR'AN

The definition of the Qur'an as being circulated and memorized by Muslims as recorded in scholarly compendia may hardly be considered comprehensive. Most of the scholars, Muslims and non-Muslims, claim that as per Muslims' belief the Qur'an is revelation from Allah. It is entirely apologetic approach. Whether Muslims believe or not, the Qur'an is without an iota of doubt revelation of Allah to the Last Prophet (s.a.w.). We must coin the most valid and strongest definition of the Qur'an: “The Qur'an is the Word of Allah, revealed to Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah, the Last Prophet in gradual manner; comprising 114 chapters, with definite beginning, definite end, definite words and messages in between, with definite order of words, sentences, and chapters, and comprehensive protection from any corruption or changes therein guaranteed until the Last Hour of the present natural phenomena, serving as the exclusive source of ethical principles leading to eternal success”.

DEFINING SUCCESS

The Qur'anic view of success is entirely different from other philosophies and religions. One particular verse in the Qur'an surely suffices to understand the essence of success: “Every human self is bound to taste death and you shall receive your full reward on the Day of Resurrection. Then, whoever is saved from the Fire and is made to enter Paradise has indeed achieved success. The life of this world is merely a transient provision” (3:185). This verse very clearly sheds light on the very nature of this worldly life; on the

undeniable fact that human beings are all bound to disappear from this present worldly phenomenon; compensation for all the deeds either fire or paradise will be ensured in the hereafter; and promulgates the real meaning of success. It is this promulgation which surely defines success: "Whoever is saved from the Fire and is made to enter Paradise has indeed achieved success" (3:185). So, success does not lie in obtaining luxurious glittering lifestyle. It is also not in cutting off relationships with the world and its affairs. Likewise, sovereignty or oligarchy over a people whosoever and enjoyment of people's submission do in no way ensure success. It is mainly because the so called achievements obtained in the world before death is certainly transient.

Whatever success is temporary or for a short period can never be viewed as success.

DEFINING MORAL VALUES

Generally, moral values are believed to be controlling factor for human behavior at both individual and social levels and guiding it concerning right and wrong. It is a matter of major concern that people have developed various concepts of right and wrong. In some societies what may be right may not necessarily be always right. Aside from that, it is also believed that the moral codes may vary from time to time. In today's world which is very much influenced by the hedonistic philosophies, societies and nations find and practice some moral tenets exigently. It means moral values in the modern age keep changing as to its meaning, purpose, and direction with the change of person, place, and point of time. In other words, moral values in today's scenario have assumed the position of relative as opposed to absolute. It is because people today view moral values from the criteria of pleasure and pain. If an action brings extraordinary pleasure and removes pain, it is considered right; and if the same action causes at some other time unbearable pain and makes pleasure disappear, it is believed to be wrong. The criteria of immediate pleasure and quick pain do not deserve appreciation. It is because right and wrong both become confused with each other. Clearly, relative values do not deserve to be called moral values.

The Qur'an is the exclusive source of knowledge and wisdom: (1) "Alif Lam Ra! These are the messages of the Wise Book" (10:1); (2) "By the Wise Qur'an" (36:2). And the Wise Book can in no way subscribe to the idea of moral values being relative. The wisdom of the Qur'an demands that the moral principles for human individuals and society must be absolute. All the moral tenets as enunciated in the Qur'an are of absolute in nature as the very objective of implementing moral values in life is to seek Allah's forgiveness and mighty reward in the hereafter (33:35). In this referred verse (33:35) the Qur'an enumerates ten moral values/good deeds and ends with the assurance that those who display these ten qualities in their character deserve Allah's great favor. In Surah al-Layl the verses 19-20 read: "None has any good deed for which he/she should be rewarded, except the seeking of the Pleasure of his/her Cherisher, the Only One Most High" (92:19-20). In general, the translation of these two verses(92:19-20) are confusing. Here the

message is that mere good deeds do not constitute a criterion for the reward but these must be espoused with sincerity of commitment to Allah. Good deeds are but moral values which need to be evolved on sincerity of commitment to Allah. This sincerity of commitment to Allah must be absolute, not relative. An example from the Qur'an may suffice to coin the most appropriate definition of moral values: "Allah indeed commands execution of justice and excellence, and financial succor to the next of kin; and prohibits indecency, abomination, and rebellion; He admonishes you all that you may be mindful" (16:90). It is quite obvious from here that moral values constitute command of Allah—and command of Allah is but absolute. Keeping all the above deliberations in view, the definition of moral values may be coined in these words: "Moral values are absolute behavioral principles in individual and social life with a view to making human interactions source of boon which ultimately can earn pleasure of Allah".

IDENTIFYING AND ELABORATING QUR'ANIC MORAL VALUES

It may hardly be feasible to cover all the Qur'anic moral values in such a short paper. Some of the most significant ethical principles will be discussed below, such as sincerity of commitment to Allah, justice, excellence, repentance, financial succor, and altruism.

SINCERITY OF COMMITMENT TO ALLAH

The Qur'an invites humans to submit to Allah: "O people, submit to your Cherisher Who created you as well as those before you so that you may remain protected from all that is evil" (2:21). In this verse (2:21) the original message is that humans are required to do 'ibadah (u'budu), which literally denotes slavery i.e., total and unconditional submission. In Surah al-Bayyinah (98) one can see a clear message of Allah: "And they are not commanded but to make a total submission to Allah, with sincerity of commitment to Him alone, and to establish solah and to pay the poor-due. That is the most upright way of life" (98:5). Sincerity of commitment to Allah is essentially different from lip-service.

One may claim here that sincerity of commitment to Allah can hardly be viewed as a moral view as it appears a spiritual act, instead. There is hardly any doubt that Greek and Vedantic idea of spirituality has made its way into human psyche and utterances. But even in the Greek or Hindu Philosophies there is rarely any valid definition of spirituality. Whatever is claimed concerning spirituality is quite vague because it has originated from human minds who love to renounce worldly comforts. There is not even a single authoritative statement on spirituality. Muslim clerics and scholars who subscribe to spirituality do not have at all any evidence in favor of their stand. Neither the Qur'an nor Prophetic traditions make any reference to it. The only statement in the Qur'an (15:29; 32:9) which may be advanced as an evidence favoring spirituality has been misconstrued. The first verse (15:29) reads: "When I proportioned the human structure and breathed into it of My Spirit (ruhi), they (angels) fell into prostration". And the second verse (32:9)

reads: “Then He proportioned the first man and breathed into him of His Spirit”. In these two places there is a clear mention of two quintessential elements used in the creation of human-soil and Divine Spirit. The mention of Spirit here led minds to derive an idea that human is composed of two dimensions, material and spiritual. It is seemingly a strong argument. But Muslim clerics who are more often than not inclined to use the Qur’anic statements to support their misconceptions, forget to read the verse 32:9 in full. It reads: “Then He proportioned the first man and breathed into him of His Spirit; and made for you power of hearing, seeing, and thinking; seldom you are grateful”. Here Allah says that human being who is the result of fusion of two elements (soil and Spirit) did no longer remain material or spiritual and it rather became intellectual. The three powers endowed with man constitute intellectual faculty.

Obviously, intellectual faculty of man helps him/her differentiate between right and wrong. It is now proven beyond any doubt that it is intellectual power of man which makes him moral being.

Sincerity of commitment to Allah is an intellectual act because sincerity to Allah calls for concentration on full devotion to the Creator, the Sustainer, the Provider, the Cherisher, the Controller of the universe (2:238). It is this sincerity to Allah which ensures sincere implementation of moral behavioral principles in day to day life and activities.

Sincerity of commitment to Allah saves one from falling prey to undesirable motives i.e., seeking human recognition, obtaining material gains, and maintaining his/her vainglory.

The Qur’an uses one more term for human sincerity towards Allah i.e., love for Allah: “(O Messenger!) Tell people: 'If you indeed love Allah, follow me, and Allah will love you and will forgive you your sins. Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate” (3:31). It flows from here that love for Allah or sincerity of commitment to Allah calls for unconditional obedience to the Last Prophet (s.a.w.). And the Last Prophet of Allah was paragon of virtues (moral values): “And you (O Messenger!) are indeed on an exalted standard of character” (98:4). The original Qur’anic word used in the verse is khluq ‘Azim (highest morality). So, when mankind is invited to obey the Last Prophet (s.a.w.), it means the human life must reflect the highest moral principles as displayed by the Last Prophet (s.a.w.).

An intrinsic dimension of sincerity of commitment to Allah is remembering Allah as He deserves to be remembered all the time. Remembering Allah includes recognizing Him with all his attributes and powers. The Qur’an describes His attributes time and again. One example may suffice to recognize Allah as He is: “He is Allah: there is no god but He; the Knower of the unseen and the manifest, He is the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate. He is Allah: there is no god but He: the King, the Holy, the All-

Peace, the Giver of security, the Overseer, the Most Mighty, the Overpowering, the All- Great. Exalted be He from whatever they associate with Him. He is Allah, the Planner, Executer and Fashioner of creation. His are the names most beautiful. Whatever is in the heavens and the earth extols His Glory. He is the Most Mighty, the Most Wise” (59:22-24). The above seventeen (17) attributes of Allah are surely enough to create unambiguous perception of Allah in human minds.

Those who remember Allah all the time, everywhere, and in all situations are indeed intellectuals (ulu al-albab). Intellectuals are well-known for their reflection on natural phenomena and continuous remembrance of Allah. The Qur'an eulogizes intellectuals in these words: “Surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day, there are signs for intellectuals who remember Allah while standing, sitting or reclining on their backs, and reflect in the creation of the heavens and the earth: 'Our Lord! You have not created this in vain. Glory to You! Save us, then, from the chastisement of the Fire” (3:190-191). It is certainly because intellectuals always remain sincerely committed to Allah. Due to their sincerity of commitment to Allah, the intellectuals believe in the reward and punishment in the hereafter. This unflinching belief of intellectuals make their commitment to Allah stronger and stronger.

Human life is bound to face one or the other problem whatsoever which compels men and women to resort to some sources for solution. Some may have recourse to some human beings. Some may prefer to seek refuge with humanly built transcendental powers, some may be stricken by depression which may finally lead to suicide. It is sincerity of commitment to Allah which can for sure protect humans from falling victim to depression and suicide. The Qur'an advances solace to people in their afflictions: “When My servants ask you about Me, tell them I am quite near; I hear and answer the invocation of the supplicant whenever he invokes Me. Let them listen to My call and believe in Me; perhaps they will be guided aright” (2:186).

Sincerity of commitment to Allah saves people from hypocrisy. “He it is Who enables you to traverse through land and sea; so that you even board ships;- they sail with them with a favorable wind, and they rejoice thereat; then comes a stormy wind and the waves come to them from all sides, and they think they are being overwhelmed: they cry unto Allah, with sincerity of commitment to Him saying, "If You deliver us from this, we shall truly show our gratitude!” (10:22).

JUSTICE

The Qur'an informs the mankind that all the very mission of all the Prophets of Allah (peace be upon all of them) has been implementation of justice and equity in human life: “Indeed We raised Our Messengers with Clear Signs, and sent down with them the Book and the Balance that people may enjoy justice” (57:25). The Qur'an has used two words signifying justice, ‘adl (16:90) and qist (57:25). ‘Adl means concept of justice as

opposed to injustice (zulm) in general, whereas qist refers to concrete form of doing justice. For example, the Qur'an commands justice in all matters, including property distribution among both male and female heirs. This is 'adl. And specific allocation of property portion to heirs qist (4:11-12). So called liberal Muslims raise eyebrows over the Qur'anic provision of property distribution. They consider this portion of the property distribution law (4:11)—“Allah enjoins you concerning your children: let the male inherit twice as much as the female”—unjust simply because female heir is to receive half of the male heir. To them, the portion of the distributed property must be equal among both male and female. They need to take into consideration the concept of the society the Qur'an seeks to set up on the earth. The Qur'an places economic responsibility on the shoulders of the male member of a family (4:34) hence he deserves more share than his sister/s.

The Qur'an makes it explicitly clear that in a matter of justice it is not to be looked at who is who: “O you who believe! Be upholders of justice as witnesses for Allah, even though it goes against yourselves or against your parents and kinsmen, or the rich or the poor: for Allah is more concerned with their well-being than you are. Do not, then, follow your own desires lest you keep away from justice. If you twist or turn away, know that Allah is well aware of all that you do” (4:135). It will not be out of place to mention here a real story of justice related to a great mufassir of the Qur'an in India, 'Abd al-Hamid al-Farahi (1863-1930). His father was a landlord in his village who as a landlord managed to annex some non-Muslim's land to his own land. Consequently, the non-Muslim took the case to court of justice during British rule in India. He nominated landlord's son, 'Abd al-Hamid (mufassir) as his witness. The judge was surprised with this gesture of the adversary. The witness, 'Abd al-Hamid witnessed in the court that his father has unlawfully usurped the non-Muslim's land. And the court gave verdict in favor of the victim (it was narrated to me by my grandfather who was a relative of al-Farahi).

And the Qur'an further elaborates the significance and form of justice: “O you who believe! Be steadfast witnesses for Allah in equity, and let not hatred of any people seduce you that ye deal not justly. Deal justly, that is nearer to your piety. Be conscious of Allah. Lo! Allah is well-informed of what you do” (5:8). This verse does not allow those involved in cases of justice to prefer their personal interest over the demand of justice.

The Qur'an clearly advises the Last Prophet (s.a.w.) to uphold justice even concerning non-Muslim inmates of Madinah, the capital of nascent Islamic state: “They are listeners of falsehood and greedy devourers of unlawful earnings. If they come to you, you may either judge between them or turn away from them. And were you to turn away from them they shall not be able to harm you; and were you to judge between them judge with justice. Surely Allah loves the just” (5:42). Non-Muslims in Madinah enjoyed freedom to settle their cases justice among themselves. Yet, they at times loved to bring their disputes to the Last Prophet (s.a.w.) for decision. Allah granted him freedom to take

their case or ignore it. But Allah vehemently advised the Prophet (s.a.w.) to maintain justice in case he accept the disputed matter for decision. This Qur'anic advice to the Prophet (s.a.w.) equally applies to judges in general. They must remain unbiased towards any party involved in disputes.

The Qur'an puts forward highest standard of justice in all situations whatsoever: "Do not handle the property of the orphans except with a good reason until they become mature and strong. And give full measure and full weight with justice. No soul is responsible for what is beyond its scope. Be just in your words, even if the party involved is one of your relatives and keep your promise with Allah. Thus does He guide you so that you may take heed" (6:152). As per this verse, justice and equity are to maintained at any cost whether in private matters or social ones. It also flows from here that commercial matters are also to be dealt with full justice. The Qur'an commands its followers to be strict in social matters from the angle of justice. It is experienced in societies that people deal with orphans and weak section of the society non-seriously and wrongly. This verse (6:152) warns individuals in society to deal justly even with the unfortunate in society.

Upholding justice is one of the commands of Allah hence it is an obligation on the part of the believers: "Say: "My Cherisher has commanded me to maintain justice. And set your faces to every time and place of prayer. Pray to Him sincerely and be devoted in your religion. Just as He gave you life, He will bring you back to life again" (7:29). It is evident from this verse that justice is also to be looked at and maintained even in devotional matters. In prayers the devotees are required to do full justice with their intention, direction, actions, and conditions set by Allah and the Last Prophet (s.a.w.).

Quranic laws, whether social, political, economic, cultural, intellectual, or devotional, are all rooted in full justice and definite equity. A spectacular example of social justice is the rule concerning divorce. The chapter al-Talaq (the Divorce) promulgates various aspects divorce between wife and husband: (1) period of divorce, (2) waiting period for the divorced wife, (3) spousal support for maintenance, (4) testimony by trustworthy witnesses, and (5) total prohibition on meting out any injustice in the interaction after divorce. It is noteworthy that the Qur'an declares divorce-related rules as Allah's regulations (hudud Allah) and warns those who infringe upon these regulations (hudud) that they commit injustice (zulm): "These are Allah's regulations, and whoever breaks these regulations of Allah, he/she commits injustice to himself/herself" (65:1).

Likewise, the two witnesses required on both occasions, marriage and divorce need to be trustworthy: "And when they reach the end of their term (of waiting), then either honorably retain them or honorably part with them, and call two trustworthy persons as witnesses from among yourselves, and let them give upright testimony for the sake of Allah. That is to what all those that believe in Allah and the Last Day are exhorted. Allah will find a way out for him who fears Allah" (65:2).

The Qur'anic standard of justice in all cases is absolute which can in no way be altered: "The Word of your Sustainer is perfect from the angle of truth and justice; no one can change His words. He is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing" (6:115). This verse refers to the absolute nature of Allah's commands, laws, regulations, and moral principles. It says that the Words of Allah (laws and values) are based on truth and justice which none is allowed to change His Words. It is because changes effected in Allah's Words will be mere travesty of justice.

In the scheme of Allah, justice can never flourish in an environment characterized by indecency, abominable acts, and attitude of total liberty leading to rebellion. The Qur'an says: "Verily, Allah commands justice, excellence, and financial succor to next of kin; and prohibits flagrant indecency, outrageous practices, and boundless liberality. He admonishes you so that you may heed" (16:90). Here, in this verse three acts are commanded and three things are prohibited. In the presence of the former the latter can never exist; and when society is dominated by the latter, justice and other pious deeds will surely disappear from the life of individuals. It seems quite pertinent that the three prohibited phenomena, flagrant indecency (al-fahsha'), outrageous practices (al-munkar), and boundless liberality (al-baghy) should be elaborated as to acts that fall under these categories. Al-Fahsha' literally means obscene acts like adultery, fornication, backbiting, and false testimony. Al-Munkar refers to all those habits and practices than run counter to the normal human reason, such as incest, exchange of wives, and pornography. Al-Baghy denotes those sinful acts that goes beyond natural disposition, such as homosexuality, lesbianism, sex with animals, robbery, and unjust killing.

The Qur'an is crystal clear over Allah's love for justice. Three verses repeat one and the same statement: "Allah indeed loves those who uphold justice" (5:42; 49:9; 60:8). And also it has been above that very mission of Allah's Messengers was to establish justice in society (57:25). But one finds oneself disturbed to see the dominance of injustice everywhere in the world. Human mind needs reasonable explanation of this scenario. He/she asks as to why Allah allows wrongdoing to be prevalent on earth. The Qur'an has replied at several places to this query. One such verse is advanced to satisfy the curious minds: "Do not think Allah is unaware of what the perpetrators of injustice are engaged in. He is merely granting them respite until a Day when their eyes shall stare in horror" (14:42). This worldly life is the duration of test: "He it is Who created death and life to see which of you does excellent deed" (67:2). And "We have placed all that is on the earth as an ornament thereof that We may test them: which of them is best in conduct" (18:7). In the hereafter the worldly phenomena will no longer remain in place. There will be only justice: just will be rewarded and unjust will be thrown into hellfire.

EXCELLENCE

The Qur'anic word for excellence is *ihsan*: "Allah indeed commands justice and excellence" (16:90). Most of scholars translate "*ihsan*" as "doing good", "kindness", and "generosity". There is nothing objectionable in these versions, but these words hardly represent in full the idea inherent in "*ihsan*", a verbal noun of Arabic word "*ahsan*" which means the best. That is why, translation of *ihsan* into English as excellence seems to be more appropriate. There are other words in the Qur'an, such as *birr* and *khayr* which may be translated into English as good and generosity. To be precise, *ihsan* may be read in English "interaction in the best way possible". The Qur'an uses the word *ihsan* and its derivatives around 67 times. Some of them must be deliberated over.

The verse 4:36 reads: "Submit totally to Allah and ascribe no partner to Him. Treat with excellence your parents, near of kin, orphans, the needy, the neighbor who is of kin and the neighbor who is a stranger, the companion by your side, the vagabond, and those whom your right hands possess. Allah does not love the arrogant and the boastful" (4:36). This verse names nine sections in the society, parents, near of kin, orphans, the needy, the relative neighbor, the strange neighbor, the companion by the side, the vagabond, and slaves, with whom excellent treatment is obligatory. Social interactions with these nine sections in society may be good, better, or best. The Qur'an exhorts for the best hence the usage of the word *ihsan*. An analogical elaboration may shed ample light on what *ihsan* from methodological and practical angle is. Parents do their best in raising their children, physically, intellectually, educationally, and religiously. When the parents reach their old age, their children may and may not be taking care of them. It is because children consider them burden. That is why, the Qur'an invites children when they are grown up to treat their parents excellently. As regards West, there is no concept of society at all. But in Muslim societies the world over generally the plight of old parents is seriously deplorable. The married sons hardly pay attention to their old parents as they do to their spouses and children. This indifference on the part of the grown-up sons is without any doubt consequent upon total indifference to the Qur'anic principle of *ihsan* on the part of Muslim individuals.

There is another verse in the Qur'an which describes some of the practical dimension of *ihsan*: "Your Sustainer has decreed: (i) Do not worship any but Him; (ii) Treat with excellence your parents; and should both or any one of them attain old age with you, do

not say to them even "fie" neither chide them, but speak to them with respect, and be humble and tender to them and say: "O Sustainer, show mercy to them as they nurtured me when I was small" (17:23-24). Muslims are commanded here to treat their parents with excellence, to lower their voice before parents, never to raise eyebrows at parents' stand

and words, to totally avoid words of condemnation, to talk to parents softly and sweetly, embrace parents with love and affection, and invoke Allah's Mercy for the parents.

The provision of *ihsan* as commanded by Allah was available in previous people i.e., children of Israel. The Qur'an reminds humanity of significance of *ihsan*: "And recall when We made a covenant with the Children of Israel: "You shall serve none but Allah and treat parents with excellence, kinsmen, orphans and the needy; you shall speak kindly to people, and establish Prayer and give Zakah. And yet, except for a few of you, you turned back on this covenant, and you are refusing" (2:83). It seems *ihsan* to parents and other members of society must have been the prescription from Allah even long before Moses and Jesus, as relationship between parents and children is as old as the history of humanity on earth.

Application of excellence (*ihsan*) to all walks of life is also a highly recommended approach in the Qur'an: "Seek the gains of the life to come through your wealth without ignoring your share of this life. And opt for excellence as Allah has meted out excellence to you. Do not create mischief in the land for Allah does not love the mischief mongers" (28:77). The Qur'an seeks to create an environment on earth where peace and tranquility is order of the day. This peaceful environment is consequent upon practice of excellence. In the absence of excellence neither individuals nor society will remain safe from onslaught of chaos, disorder, corruption, and mischief.

Surah al-Rahman (55) is devoted to the description of Allah's infinite powers manifested in natural phenomena, on the one hand, and in the hereafter, on the other. So many verses (55:49-77) mention lofty and beautiful rewards for the sincere devotees of Allah. Its verse 55:60 advances the logic for such great rewards in the hereafter. The verse reads: "Is the reward of excellence except excellence?" One can see here that sincere devotion to Allah and the ensuing good deeds in the present life constitute an extraordinarily phenomena which the Qur'an terms as *ihsan* (excellence); and the resultant honorarium in the hereafter in the form of paradises full of all kinds of comforts is also termed in the Qur'an as *ihsan* (excellence). The general logic here in this statement is that excellence begets excellence. This logic needs to be applied even in the life before hereafter. Here is a clear invitation to implement *ihsan* (excellence) in social, political, and economic interaction among people will certainly result in a peace and harmony in human relations, which is in fact *ihsan* (excellence).

FINANCIAL SUCCOR

Human beings can never survive without securing life resources i.e., oxygen, food, drink, clothes, and shelter. Some of these basic needs are available free in the nature, but most of them require for their availability wherewithal. Some people are well able to earn wherewithal to easily access to life resources, and some others find it hard to buy life resources. The Qur'an itself recognizes people classified into rich (*aghniya'*) and poor

(fuqara'/masakin). The Qur'an says: "As for man, when his Sustainer tests him by exalting him and bestowing His bounties upon him, he says: "My Sustainer has exalted me." But when He tests him by straitening his sustenance, he says: "My Sustainer has humiliated me" (89:15-16). These verses are very categorical that people are tested in this life through riches or poverty. That is why, the Qur'an exhorts the rich to help the poor.

It is noteworthy that the Qur'an, while laying out most desirable and praiseworthy principles and actions for all men and women, lay emphasis on infaq (charity). In the beginning of the 2nd Surah al-Baqarah the Qur'an promulgates six basic principles for the ultimate success in life: "Those who believe in the Unseen, observe prayers with consistency, and spend out of what We have given them, and those who believe in what has been revealed to you (O Muhammad), and believe in the revelations before, and have strong conviction in the occurrence of the Hereafter" (2:3-4). Here the 3rd most important praiseworthy act is spending in the way of Allah.

The Qur'an prescribes charity work for the rich in an unequivocal terms: "Alms are for the poor and the needy, and those employed to administer the (funds); for those whose hearts have been (recently) reconciled (to Truth); for those in bondage and in debt; in the cause of Allah; and for the vagabond: (thus is it) ordained by Allah, and Allah is full of knowledge and wisdom" (9:60). The Qur'an mentions charity work as a source of success in the life hereafter: "And spend of what Allah has granted you by way of sustenance before death should come to any of you and he should say: "O my Sustainer, why did You not defer my return for a while so that I might give alms and be among the righteous?" (63:10).

The Qur'an makes financial succor to the needy relatives obligatory: "Verily, Allah commands justice, excellence, and financial succor to next of kin" (16:90). Most of the Muslim scholars consider financial succor to the needy next of kin mere as generosity. It needs not to be ignored that the verse begins with the statement "Verily, Allah commands". Three obligations have been mentioned thereafter: (1) justice, (2) excellence, and (3) financial succor to next of kin. This Qur'anic prescription is so significant that if each and every single individual takes care of his/her needy relatives financially, there will be none to beg for sustenance. Such society will surely become ideal one.

REPENTANCE

Man by nature is forgetful and ambitious. He/she easily falls victim to acts below standard, and commits knowingly or unknowingly errors in his/her daily transactions. These errors are generally categorized into two major categories: (1) major errors, and

(2) minor errors. Major errors include sexual offences, property embezzlement, unjust killing, and damaging someone's reputation falsely. Hadith compendia record a statement of the Last Prophet (s.a.w.) on seven fatal/major sins: "Protect yourselves from seven fatal/major errors: (1) assigning partner/s to Allah, (2) sorcery, (3) unjust killing of

human being, (4) riba-based financial transaction, (5) devouring orphan's property, (6) desertion from the battlefield, and (7) slander against chaste and unsuspecting Muslim ladies (Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith N. 2766; Sahih Muslim, Hadith No, 89). The basic symptom of major sin is Qur'anic and Prophetic declaration of humiliating punishment either in this world or in the hereafter or in both the phases of life. As for minor sin, it is hard to define it and concretely identify it. Logically, minor sins if committed repeatedly and brazenly might enter the category of major sins. The entire humanity is aware that none can ever remain pure of errors, whether minor or major. The Qur'an warns both men and women of hefty reward for good deeds and grievous punishment for evil doings. The Qur'an informs us about this: "Most surely, the righteous will be in blissful place and the wicked will be in hellfire; they shall enter it on the Day of Judgment; and by no means, they shall be absent therefrom" (82:13-16).

The Qur'an guides the sinner how to save oneself from the punishment: "Allah's acceptance of repentance is only for those who commit evil out of ignorance and then soon repent. It is towards such persons that Allah turns graciously. Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise. But of no avail is repentance of those who do evil until death approaches any one of them and then he says: 'Now I repent.' Nor is the repentance of those who die in the state of unbelief of any avail to them. For them We have kept in readiness a painful chastisement" (4:17-18). The Qur'anic term for repentance is *tawbah* which literally denotes return. If one commits sin and realizes its gravity, he/she needs to ameliorate his/her situation without further delay. The Qur'an assures Allah's acceptance of repentance on the part of the sinner: "He it is Who accepts repentance from His servants and forgives sins and knows all what you do" (42:25).

The Qur'an calls on believers to return to Allah through sincere *tawbah*: "O you who believe, turn to Allah in sincere repentance; maybe your Lord will expunge your evil deeds and admit you to the Gardens beneath which rivers flow. This will be on the Day when Allah will not disgrace the Prophet and those who have embraced faith and are with him; their light will be running before them and on their right hands, and they will say: "Our Sustainer, perfect for us our light and forgive us. Surely, You have power over everything" (66:8). The Qur'an consoles sinners that they need not to feel despaired: "Tell them, (O Prophet): "My servants who have committed excesses against themselves, do not despair of Allah's Mercy. Surely Allah forgives all sins. He is Most Forgiving, Most Merciful" (39:53). As to the question about how to make repentance, the Last Prophet (s.a.w.) has guided believers. Sources of Prophetic traditions on this issue abound. One may consult these sources for how to make *tawbah*. A particular verse in the Qur'an sheds light on two acts which constitute *tawbah* and earn Allah's pleasure and His acceptance: "Do they not know that it is Allah who accepts repentance from His servants and receives charities and that it is Allah who is the Accepting of repentance, the Merciful?" Here in

this verse there is sufficient reference to two acts required to be performed by the sinner: (1) Sincere appeal to Allah for acceptance of his/ her tawbah; (2) Charity work. Another verse in the Qur'an places four conditions for repentance to be valid: "But, without doubt, I forgive again and again, to those who (1) repent, (2) believe, (3) do righteous deeds, and (4) continue to follow guidance" (20:82).

CONCLUSION

The Qur'an seeks to build individuals and develop them into advocates of peace and harmony on the surface of the earth by inculcating absolute moral principles, such as sincerity to Allah, justice, excellence, financial succor, and repentance. These values are absolute in nature; these are not like hedonistic principle of good and bad, which subscribe to relative values. Islamic centers of higher learning the world over are required to produce graduates who are message bearers of the Qur'anic values. But unfortunately, these Islamic centers are totally crippled to do that because its syllabi do not include the Qur'an in its entirety.