**March 2, 1917**

**Islam Does Not Prescribe Monasticism; But Participation and Practice of Religion with Effort**

I bear witness that none deserves to be served besides Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is the servant and messenger of Allah.

After this, I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.



And certainly We sent Noah and Abraham, and We gave prophethood and the Book to their offspring; so among them is he who goes aright, but most of them are transgressors. (57:26)



Then We made Our messengers to follow in their footsteps, and We made Jesus son of Mary to follow, and We gave him the Gospel. And We put compassion and mercy in the hearts of those who followed him. And (as for) monkery, they innovated it — We did not prescribe it to them — only to seek Allah’s pleasure, but they did not observe it with its due observance. So We gave those of them who believed their reward, but most of them are transgressors. (57:27)



O you who believe, keep your duty to Allah and believe in His Messenger — He will give you two portions of His mercy, and give you a light in which you shall walk, and forgive you. And Allah is Forgiving, Merciful — (57:28)



That the People of the Book may know that they control naught of the grace of Allah, and that grace is in Allah’s hand. He gives it to whom He pleases. And Allah is the Lord of mighty grace. (57:29)

Allah the Most High states that He sent Prophet Noah and Prophet Abraham for guiding people towards righteousness. He blessed their progeny with prophethood and the book. Some from amongst them chose to be guided while many rejected the Divine guidance and transgressed.

This distinction was not limited to just Noah and Abraham, in fact it is stated:

Then We made Our messengers to follow in their footsteps, and We made Jesus son of Mary to follow, and We gave him the Gospel.

**The Followers of Jesus and their Practice of Monasticism**

Regarding the followers of Jesus, it is stated:

And We put compassion and mercy in the hearts of those who followed him. And (as for) monkery, they innovated it.

Allah states that He imbued the hearts of those that followed Jesus with mercy and compassion. They however created certain forms of practice not prescribed by God. This was not with the intent to disobey God but to seek His pleasure. They were, however, unable to:

Observe it with its due observance.

So We gave those of them who believed their reward, but most of them are transgressors.

**Muslims were Promised two Portions from Allah’s Mercy**

After relating how previous prophets were followed by Jesus son of Mary, it is stated:

O you who believe, keep your duty to Allah and believe in His Messenger — He will give you two portions of His mercy.

And give you a light in which you shall walk, and forgive you.

What is the meaning of the statement He will give you two portions of His mercy?

A particular nation is not just handed over the Grace of Allah, it remains under His command and control. Why then the statement about being given two portions of Allah’s Mercy? There are many other lessons in these verses but this one in particular demands special attention:

Believe in His Messenger — He will give you two portions of His Mercy.

Is this a special favor for the Muslims? Unlike other nations they did not even have any claim. Why are they then promised two portions? Is God being partial towards one nation?

**What are the two Portions?**

In fact the mention of compassion, mercy and monkery tell us what those two portions are. The teachings of prophets before the Holy Prophet Muhammad were confined to one specific portion of human faculties. There are two types of character traits that are found in man. These are either related to strength and firmness of resolve or to humility and flexibility. The first is the source of traits like courage and bravery. It also includes anger which cannot be excluded from the category of morals. Morality has several branches that include courage, valor, anger, vengeance and fearlessness in the face of danger. On the other hand are qualities like humility, flexibility, fortitude, mildness and submissiveness. From the historical record of humanity we learn the lesson that war is unavoidable. It is not possible to be a part of this world and advance without confronting warfare. The first stage in making progress is such confrontation. This struggle can be sometimes with one’s own kith and kin.

**Jesus in Comparison with other Prophets**

Most prophets including those of the Children of Israel have generally emphasized the development of faculties that generate strength and firmness of resolve. They have called attention to warfare and seeking revenge. Jesus, the last prophet of the Mosaic dispensation however laid emphasis upon humility and submissiveness. This shows that the faculties dealing with strength building are those appearing initially, followed in the end by stress being laid upon the development of qualities like humbleness and meekness through the teachings of Jesus. This is alluded to in the words:

And We put compassion and mercy in the hearts of those who followed him.

Mention of this is also made in another passage of the Holy Quran

And thou wilt find the nearest in friendship to the believers to be those who say, we are Christians. That is because there are priests and monks among them and because they are not proud. (5:82)

Their qualities of humility and friendship have also been emphasized here. These two categories of moral qualities therefore exist amongst different prophets. Initial emphasis in human development has been laid upon the qualities related with strength building and firmness of resolve. We see this even in the narratives of the Avatars and the noble saints of India in the early stages. The Vedas are full of prayers that call for the destruction of the enemy. Take for example Ramachandra and Krishna. Both of them had to engage in battle. The Gita has given great importance to fight against the enemy and does not consider war to be an act of cruelty. Thus here in the Indian subcontinent also, emphasis was initially laid upon such stringent measures and the same pattern is observed all over the world. Later on however an individual like Gautama Buddha instead of laying stress upon the qualities of strength building draws our attention towards mildness of character and invites people towards spirituality. The precedent in India and the rest of the world is therefore similar to what we find in the Mosaic dispensation where initial emphasis is laid upon qualities of strengthening and eventually Jesus comes with his teachings of gentleness.

**The Two Characteristics of the Holy Prophet’s Life**

In Holy Prophet Muhammad’s life both of these qualities have been manifested. In the Makkan portion of his life one characteristic of his life is prominent while at Madinah a different quality is manifested. That is the reason for the statement:

O you who believe, keep your duty to Allah and believe in His Messenger — He will give you two portions of His mercy.

When we study the life of the Holy Prophet we observe both of these characteristics. He manifested both of these at the appropriate time.

What is the reason for mentioning monkery? It is to show that when a person leans towards one side and perceives it to be right, it is difficult for him to maintain a moderate stance. Islam has brought about a balance between the various manifestations of character and maintained both sides of it. Stress upon just one aspect leads to gradual diminution and demise of the other. If a nation just remains involved in warfare, gentleness eventually disappears from its morality. Islam has struck a balance between the appropriate manifestation of strength on one hand and compassion on the other. Elements that strengthen the resolve such as courage are on one side and those that encourage humility on the other to maintain a just balance. Both of these characteristics were manifested at their very best by the Muslims in particular,r the companions of the Holy Prophet.

**Excellence of Character amongst the Companions of the Holy Prophet**

That is the reason the Holy Quran describes the character of the Holy Prophet’s companions in these words:

Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and those with him are firm of heart against the disbelievers, compassionate among themselves. (48:29)

Disbelief is equivalent of evil, therefore the meaning is that that the believers are firmly opposed to wrongdoing and extremely docile in the acquisition of righteousness. The type of meekness that had developed amongst the followers of the Messiah is not found in the life of the Holy Prophet and his followers. In the accounts of the Holy Prophet’s companions we do not observe manifestations of extreme behavior. We do not find those so consumed in the acquisition of strength that they had nothing else to do but engage in fighting. Nor do we observe those who became so tender hearted that they resorted to a monastic lifestyle spending their lives in cloisters and monastic practices. We observe their excellence thus: while manifesting the highest degree of morals related to strength they also manifest the greatest capability to be forgiving and tenderhearted. For example, their supplications and keeping up of prayer in the battlefield and forgiving their worst enemies at the time of complete victory over them. Similarly at the time of manifesting the excellent example of strength they also display incredible valor. We read accounts of their bowing down and prostrating in submission and remembrance of Allah and if the call came for fighting the enemy they readily prepared their arms to meet him. To see a perfect example of display of moderation when circumstances call for harshness or gentle behavior you need to observe the lives of the Holy Prophet’s companions. You see no companion of the Holy Prophet performing devotional exercises similar to what the *sufis* have invented so that they neglected their other duties for worship and supplication. If rarely the Holy Prophet observed such behavior amongst them he immediately prohibited it.

**Piety is Moderation**

Righteousness implies moderation in behavior. This is the lesson imparted by the words of *Al-Fatiha*:

Guide us on the right path, the path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed favors not those upon whom wrath is brought down nor those who went astray.

For example our fathers have certain rights upon us. We can choose the path of excess or deficiency in fulfilling these duties. Similarly in worship of God we might follow the path of extremism by worshipping in ways that have not been prescribed. Some poet expressed it well in a Persian couplet:

Definitely make great progress in piety and make a full effort,

But do so by following the path the Holy Prophet has taught.

Why did the followers of Christianity choose monasticism? It is because they thought that they could in this way have time for more devotion. This was however at the cost of stifling the development of other character traits. Real righteousness is that a proper balance should be struck by following the course of moderation.

**The Condition of the Advocates of Monasticism**

In order to make progress in the world monkery cannot be helpful. Observe the condition of Christianity when for years they followed the path of extreme monasticism in their religious practices. They evolved in these practices but as a consequence their development in other branches of knowledge was extremely lacking. Whenever anybody came up with some discovery in the field of knowledge, they immediately put out religious edicts declaring them subject to punishment. As a result progress did not occur in any field of knowledge and ignorance prevailed. This condition was subsequently followed by move in the opposite direction and full attention was focused towards material progress while discarding religion altogether in this process. No contact remained with it and religious practices were totally eliminated.

**Moderation in Islam**

Look at Islam in comparison. At any particular time its followers can completely immerse themselves in worldly affairs and accomplish their worldly chores but as soon as the call to prayer is heard, all else is put aside for prayer. In Christianity one day a week is the day reserved for Sabbath when work is prohibited. In Islam this is not so. You can certainly continue your work before the Friday services but leave it at the time of the call for Friday prayer and hasten to participate. The rest of the day is not to be spent in worship and the command is:

But when the prayer is ended, disperse abroad in the land and seek of Allah’s Grace. (62:10)

Islam has not enjoined monasticism. It encourages practices that are compatible with human temporal existence. Man by his own choice took to seclusion for the sake of religion. Islam did not sanction such cut off from worldly pursuits.

**The Holy Prophet’s Activities**

The tasks that we see the Holy Prophet doing, all of them contribute towards perfection of man. He is the King, a General and also in charge of the security at the same time. He has to give religious education to the people, teach them morality and lead the prayer services. In addition he has to do his household chores and fulfill the rights of his wives. He also looks after the poor and the needy and helps old women in buying their groceries. All these tasks are accomplished along with abundant supplication and worship. The companions once asked him, “O Prophet of Allah, you do not commit any sin, why is it that you supplicate and worship?” His reply was, “Should I not be a thankful servant of Allah the Most High? What does being thankful to Allah mean? It is the usage of our God given faculties at the appropriate moment. The Holy Prophet explained that if he did not use the faculties he had been given to supplicate before Allah the Most High, it meant he had not acknowledged their importance. A person should certainly carry out his worldly occupations but should not be so immersed in them to forget his his religious duties. It is essential to fulfill our religious duties besides our temporal commitments. Similarly one should not neglect his worldly commitments and waste the character traits he has been given for this purpose, while attending to religious duties and devotion. This is in reality what Islam is and wants from us!