

The Quran is a guide — for whom?

Friday Khutba by Dr Zahid Aziz, for Lahore Ahmadiyya UK, 5 February 2021

ذٰلِكَ الْكِتٰبُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيْهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِيْنَ ۝ الَّذِيْنَ يُؤْمِنُوْنَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُوْنَ الصَّلٰوةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنٰهُمْ يُنْفِقُوْنَ ۝ وَالَّذِيْنَ يُؤْمِنُوْنَ بِمَا اُنزِلَ اِلَيْكَ وَمَا اُنزِلَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ ۝ وَبِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ يُوقِنُوْنَ ۝

“This Book, in which there is no doubt, is a guide to those who keep their duty, who believe in the Unseen and keep up prayer and spend (on good works) out of what We have given them, and who believe in what has been revealed to you (O Prophet) and what was revealed before you, and of the Hereafter they are sure.” (The Quran, 2:2–4)

I am continuing here from last Friday’s *khutba*, in which I had made some detailed comments about the mention of books, reading and writing in the Quran. It says here that this Book “is a guide to those who keep their duty”, those who are *muttaqi*, who adhere to what is called *taqwa*. People generally take *muttaqi* to mean a very religious person who strictly observes all the commandments of the religion, and even goes above and beyond the obligatory duties prescribed by Islam. We certainly cannot imagine a *muttaqi* as violating any prohibition of Islam. So the question arises: Is the Quran only a guide for those who are already so highly and carefully observant of Islam? The Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, has referred to this question which is asked by people. He writes:

“The puzzle remains to be resolved that if there are already such *muttaqi* persons who believe in the hidden God, perform their prayers, keep fasts, spend in the way of Allah from their wealth, and believe in the Quran and the earlier scriptures, then what does it mean that this Book will be a guide for them? They are already rightly-guided. It is futile to give guidance to those who already possess it.”

One solution to this question is that the Quran will continue to be a guidance to

any so-called already guided person because there is no end or limit to the stage of guidance. In fact, the more rightly-guided a person is, the more he or she will be concerned not to slip back but would wish to progress further.

As regards those who are not at the stage of being *muttaqi*, does this verse say that the Quran cannot guide them because it is only a guide for the righteous ones? Before answering this, we note that the Quran tells us that people are invited to accept Allah's message so that He may forgive their sins. It says that the messengers of Allah said to their people:

“Is there doubt about Allah, the Maker of the heavens and the earth? He invites you in order to forgive you your faults...” (14:10)

It is related in the Quran that a group from a tribe listened to the Quran and went back to their people and told them: “Our people, accept the Inviter to Allah and believe in Him. He will forgive you some of your sins and protect you from a painful punishment.” (46:31) Now if Allah is inviting people so that He may forgive their sins, it shows that those for whom the Quran will be a guide includes people who are sinners at the time when they start pondering over Allah's messages. They are not *muttaqi* in the sense in which we think of a *muttaqi* or a very devout person.

Moreover, the Quran calls itself “a Reminder for the nations” several times (6:90, 38:87, 68:52 etc.). Also, God says in it four times: “We have made clear for mankind in this Quran every kind of example”, or “We have set forth for mankind in this Quran every kind of example” (17:89, 18:54, 30:58, 39:27). How can the Quran then say that it is only a guide for the very highly righteous and the strictly observant people?

This question, that does the Quran say that you need to be a fully righteous person before it can guide you, arises because of our misconception about who is a *muttaqi*. We must remember that a learner, who is seeking guidance, has some responsibility for his learning. It is not just that the teacher has responsibility for teaching. The learner must have the desire and the aspiration to learn and must be serious about it. This is the least level of *taqwa* required by the Quran from someone who wishes to

benefit from its guidance. The learners must not be arrogant and stubborn, and must be willing to be corrected where they are wrong; otherwise, their ego will be the barrier to their learning. This attitude of mind is required in order to benefit from the guidance of the Quran. The very fact that a person is sincerely seeking guidance, even though he is a sinner, means that the grain of being a *muttaqi* is already within him. And that grain, according to the Quran, has been placed within every human being at its very creation. We read in the Quran:

“So set yourself for religion, being upright, the nature made by Allah in which He has created mankind.” (30:30)

It also says that, at the creation of human beings, God has made them bear witness by asking them: “Am I not your Lord?”, to which they replied: “Yes, we bear witness” (7:172). So, by their very nature, human beings will seek guidance towards the true religion and God. They are thus eligible candidates for being guided by the Quran.

A question still remains to be answered. While we can say that we can categorise those whom I have mentioned above, who have a sincere desire to learn about Islam, as being *muttaqis* for whom the Quran calls itself a guide, yet the fact remains that in this verse the Quran has described *muttaqis* as those “who believe in the Unseen and keep up prayer and spend (on good works) out of what We have given them, and who believe in what has been revealed to you (O Prophet) and what was revealed before you, and of the Hereafter they are sure”. How can this description apply to those who have little knowledge of Islam or who are not Muslims? The answer is that they do fulfil this description *in a broad and general sense*. Let us consider people of other religions. In their own way, they do believe in God, prayer, charity, revelation and the hereafter. These are the basis of all religions. It is said that Buddhism does not teach the existence of God. But note that the Quran here speaks of belief in the Unseen, which is wider than belief in God. Buddhism may not mention a Supreme God but it does mention beings called Devas. It is stated in an article on Buddhism: “Devas are invisible to the human eye. The presence of a deva can be detected by those humans who have opened the ‘Divine eye’.” So they do believe in the unseen.

What the Quran guides everyone to is a perfect concept of the same fundamentals that are already accepted in all religions. So if people of another religion sincerely wish to learn about Islam, the Quran is a guide for them because they fulfil, in their own way and in a general sense, the requirements of a *muttaqi*.

But someone may further ask: How does this apply to someone of no religion at all or someone who does not believe in God? In what way does that person believe in the Unseen, keep up prayer, believe in revelation and the last day? Now on a scientific basis, people do understand that unseen things exist which play an important role in the existence of this universe. Atoms and nuclear particles cannot be seen because of being too small for the human eye or any instrument but their existence is established. In space there are bodies so distant that what we see is how they were in the past, and not how they are now. When we see the sun, we see it as it was eight minutes ago because light from it takes eight minutes to reach us. What it is like at the time when we look at it, we cannot know. Light from many stars takes millions of years to reach us. We can't see what they are like now. As to keeping up prayer, everyone knows that when you don't know how to do something, you ask someone who has the knowledge or the power to either do it for you or let you know how to do it. That is the concept behind prayer. Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad writes that "our thinking, our pondering, our directing our thoughts" to solve a problem are all included in the act of praying. As to spending out of what we have been given, that is a practice universally recognised as good, whether by people who follow a religion or anyone else. Then we have belief in revelation. Everyone is aware that new knowledge is being discovered all the time, and it is often called a revelation.

Lastly, the verse of the Quran under discussion says: "and of the Hereafter they are sure". The hereafter is where, according to the Quran, full justice will be done to people in rewarding them for good deeds and punishing them for evil deeds. People in this world, in civilized countries, are always trying to create an ideal system in which every good deed has a good result and every bad deed is caught and punished. We often hear experts and planners projecting into the future and predicting that if the right course of action is followed then by the year such-and-such there will be so

much benefit, and if we persist in a wrong course of action then by the year such-and-such so much damage will have been caused. They are concerned with what will be the consequences of our actions, especially in the long term. That is like belief in the hereafter.

Therefore the Quran says that, starting from these points which are accepted and practised by everyone at some level or other, it will guide people to a higher concept of the same points — existence of the Unseen, seeking help for one's development, using one's resources to help others, believing in revelation of new knowledge, and the belief that our actions are bound to have consequences, good or bad. That higher concept is required by human beings for their advancement to achieve the full potential of what they have been created for. And no matter how far a person advances by following the Quran's guidance, he will continue to find more and more guidance.

I mentioned above that the Quran will guide that learner who, putting aside his ego and preconceptions, is willing to learn. But the Quran also says that, even for those who are biased against it, who study it in order to find fault with it and to mock and ridicule it, it has the power to break down their animosity towards it. It mentions a people whose hearts became as hard as rocks against the accepting truth, in fact it says even harder than that. Then it adds this note: "And surely there are some rocks from which streams burst forth; and there are some of them which split apart so water flows from them; and there are some of them which fall down for the fear of Allah." (2:74) The harder-than-rock hearts can even become streams of knowledge and truth which go on to water the world, or at least they can break apart and produce just enough water for their own spiritual needs.

بَارِكْ اللَّهُ لَنَا وَكُمُ فِي الْقُرْآنِ الْعَظِيمِ، وَنَفَعْنَا وَإِيَّاكُمْ بِالآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ، إِنَّهُ تَعَالَى جَوَادٌ كَرِيمٌ
مَلِكٌ بَرٌّ رَوْفٌ رَحِيمٌ-