

Media and the word of God

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Friday feature

IT is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards East or West: But it is righteousness — to believe in God and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy for the wayfarer, for those who ask and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and practise regular charity (Zakat); to fulfil the contracts which ye have made; and to be firm and patient, in pain (or suffering) and adversity, and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the God-fearing. (Ayat 177 - Sura Al-Baqar).

This is comparatively speaking a long *Ayat* but it is also unique in that it summarises the heart and soul, the innermost essence of the guidance provided by the Holy Quran. In spite of its very great importance and wide-ranging significance, it remains a matter of conjecture how many of us who have Muslim names are even aware of the existence of this *Ayat*, much less having absorbed its guidance, moulded their lives in accordance with its directives. Apart from other things this *Ayat*, in a way puts in proper perspective the entire teaching of Islam.

While all the points touched upon in this *Ayat* are important, some of them need to be highlighted, because it seems that over the course of centuries the Muslims have lost sight of them or forgotten how crucial these forms are for observance by those who claim to be Muslims. First there is belief in the Last Day, a concept very much central to the idea of being a Muslim. And yet one wonders that if the Muslims of today had a firm faith in the Hereafter, how could they have indulged in such flagrant violations of Islam's moral code as bribery, nepotism, exploitation and injustice without batting an eyelid. Then there is the vital importance of fulfilment of contracts which has been considered so important that it is given a prominent place in the list of acts which constitute real righteousness.

The regrettable fact however is that many non-Muslims act upon this directive more scrupulously than we Muslims and this is partly the reason for their success and our failure in this world. Lastly we are told about the importance of firmness and patience in the face of pain, adversity, suffering and panic. This sort of firmness and patience can come only through a sincere belief in and total commitment to all the things mentioned in this *Ayat*. Owing to this lack of commitment, the

Muslim world today is unable to show either firmness or patience in facing the crises which confront it on all sides.

The striking juxtaposition in this *Ayat* of "deadening formalism" and faith without any mental reservations in the crucial things listed in this *Ayat*, should if we Muslims would only pause and ponder over it, make clear to us the real nature of the religion of Islam which unfortunately for us has during the course of centuries been obscured by the dust of confu-

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sion and controversy. Having examined the significance of this important *Ayat* we come to the crucial question which constitutes the theme of this article.

Why is such a weighty and significant *Ayat* not heard on Radio Pakistan, nor viewed on Pakistan TV and not seen either in newspapers or on hoarding some of which do display Quranic *Ayat*. It is that with the passage of time we have reversed the priorities fixed in the Quran and for us now the detailed formalism of religious rituals is more important than faith and the love of God and the love of humanity. Is it that for one reason or the other the publicising of the words of individual human beings is considered more essential than publicising the

words of God which is what the Holy Quran is? Do we realise or not that nothing can take the place of the words of God when it comes to true and clear-cut guidance on all aspects of our life in this world?

It is well known that publicising Quranic guidance or Tabligh is one of the important responsibility placed on every Muslim. Of Course Tabligh can take many forms but here in this article we are considering only one aspect of it, the use of modern media facilities for propagating the word of God.

There was a time when the message of the Quran could only be publicised through word of mouth, because no other facilities were available for this purpose. Today, through God's grace the powerful facilities of electronic media are available to all mankind. Not to make full use of them to propagate God's message to the whole world is not only a failure to do our duty but is also tantamount to blatant ungratefulness to God. To make effective use of these facilities it is necessary to evolve a clear-cut policy regarding what, how and when we should publicise the word of God. As is well-known the Quran consists of both *Ayats* which fell in the category of *Muhkamats* and those which fell in the category of *Mutashabihat*. Obviously it will be appropriate to focus on the first category of *Ayats*.

It should be possible to select about a hundred *Ayats* from the Quran which provide a bird's eye view of the basic and essential elements in the message of Islam. Just to give some examples of the *Ayats* which it would be most appropriate to publicise under this policy, attention is invited to the following *Ayats* (a) Wealth and sons are allurements of the life of this world: But the things that endure, Good Deeds are best in the sight of thy Lord (Ayat 46- Sura Kahaf) (b) That Day will Man be told all that he put forward, and all that he put back. Nay man will be evidence against himself. Even though he were to put up excuses (Ayat 13-15 Sura Qiyamat). (c) So fear God as much as ye can: listen and obey: and spend in charity for the benefit of your own souls. And those saved from the covetousness of their own souls - they are the ones that achieve prosperity (Ayat 16 - Sura Taghabun) (d) By the token of Time (through the Ages) verily man is in loss, except such as have faith and do righteous deeds, and (joint together) in the mutual teaching of Truth and of patience and constancy (Ayats 1-3 Sura Asr).

It may be contended that there are already many programmes on TV and Radio focused on the message of Islam. However it should not be forgotten that such programmes are seen only by the already converted, while the display of selected *Ayaat* at prime time may well produce an impact on those who are Muslims only in name, even though many of them do not seem to realise it.