

A Happy Ending is All That Matters

Life is fraught with endless challenges, dangers and opportunities. It signifies a perpetual struggle between many protagonists and forces, at the center of which stands man as an honorable and capable creation.

Man's involvements in life's proceedings vary. At times, he is actively involved in their unfolding, influencing them, and at other times, he remains passive and submissive, being influenced by them.

Life is a roller-coaster of emotions and experiences. We never know what is going to happen next. Virtually nothing is predictable. Nothing is controllable either, including the feelings, thoughts and insinuations that resonate in the deepest and dimmest recesses of our selves.

Since man is created weak, of haste, endowed with little knowledge, and with a great many other physical, intellectual and spiritual inadequacies -- as revealed by his Creator, Almighty God - he, especially if detached from a divine help and guidance, will typically feel indecisive, doubtful, insecure and vulnerable, while grappling with life's multi-tiered physical and metaphysical realities, and while trying to cope with life's challenges and innate anxieties. He will find the world as cold and unforgiving, and as overwhelmingly perilous and unfair.

Man will always feel that life should be more meaningful and purposeful. It should be fairer and friendlier, especially towards him as its microcosm and the epicenter of its vicissitudes.

Man will constantly dream of happy endings to his affairs, working towards their realization, for he knows that such a thing will offset the adversities he had to face along the way. He will dream that as one of life's main protagonists, he will eventually become capable of overcoming

all the perils and successfully complete his existential purpose and mission. Man's enduring feeling of happiness and satisfaction will thereby be sought, making it man's *raison d'être*.

However, it is a spiritual principle that man on his own cannot fulfil his ontological purpose; nor can he achieve that which he incessantly craves for: happiness. Man is a creation, so, for him there is no way forward towards happiness except under the guardianship and guidance of his Creator and Master. Man should come to know with certainty "that there is no fleeing from Allah and no refuge but to Himself" (al-Tawbah, 118). That is why God to man is his best Ally, Protector and Sustainer. He alone is Sufficient for man, and He is the best Disposer of affairs for him.

In other words, man will not attain happiness, nor will his life-story have a happy ending, unless certain premises are fulfilled. Some of those premises, or propositions, are as follows.

Man must live his life, not according to his own will, but according to the will of his Creator and the Creator of the whole universe. He needs to love life and give to it abundantly, if he wanted to be loved by life and be given in abundance. He needs to go all out, making others happy, if he wanted to be made happy. He needs to be patient, grateful, pragmatic and creative. He needs to find his calling and purpose in life. He needs to "find" himself and, as such, forge caring and responsible relationships with others whom he also had to "find".

That is, a happy process, or a life course, leads to a happy ending. He who truly wants a happy ending, and works for it, will inevitably get it. How a person lives, that is how he dies (ends). If he lives by the sword, he dies by the sword. The Holy Qur'an repeatedly reminds us of that code. It tells us, for instance, that such people as adopt falsehood, deception, mischief and oppression as a way of life, will not be in the end

successful, neither in this world nor in the Hereafter. The two patterns of existence are incompatible.

The only ones who will be successful are those who adopt a life of heavenly goodness, virtue and devotion. As a rule, a person reaps what he sows.

A sage is said to have advised his apprentice to transform both his life and his personality into a "flower", which, in turn, will attract only such beautiful creatures as butterflies and bees. "Do not become "filth", or "junk", for it attracts only flies, cockroaches and other harmful bugs", warned the sage.

The ultimate destiny of the two above-mentioned types of lifestyle and their proponents is easily perceptible. As a "flower", the former will be admitted into and will become part of the Garden of Paradise (Jannah), where he will live happily ever after, while the latter will be admitted into and will become part of the "filth" of Hellfire (Jahannam), whose fuel will be (evil) men and stones (al-Baqarah, 24), where he will live unhappily and dejectedly ever after.

That said, a rebellious man who rejects God, as the embodiment and source of all truth, is torn between the corollaries of his actions and his insatiable quest for ultimate happiness that entails happy endings to his life affairs. Thus, in nearly all of his creative productions in various cultural and civilizational aspects, explicit or implicit happy ending components feature prominently.

The absence of such components would denote the hollowness, incongruity and even absurdity of those aspects of culture and civilization. Such men try to compensate in this world for that which they are set to miss in both worlds.

For that reason - for example -- do virtually all movies, dramas, novels, storybooks, songs, art themes, educational programs, media exploits, and other general development designs and schemes contain the spirit of the happy ending proclivity. Such is only a sensible, likable and acceptable way for things and occurrences to be. The reverse is unacceptable and unreasonable a proposition.

If there is no true happiness in the real life, no problem, it will be concocted and made up aplenty in a virtual world. If people are not really happy, no problem, they will be asked, and taught, to pretend to feel that way. Happiness is on everyone's lips, but a very few truly experience and know it.

The life of a modern man, by and large, is about false happiness fueled by chasing false and embroidered dreams. The life in its entirety is paradoxical and makes no sense; but who cares? What matters is that fiction and people's illusory "lives" make perfect sense.

It is not an issue at all that ignorant, corrupt and outright evil persons rule today's world. Nobody loses sleep over it. However, if such a type of people start ruling our fictional and fantasy worlds, only then will that become an issue.

Nor is it a problem that good and innocent guys suffer most in the world today. But if they fail and suffer defeat in our illusory and make-believe worlds, only then will that become a problem. Who cares about reality, so long as fiction makes sense, entertains us, and gives us a dose of gratification!

For example, no movie, or a storybook, will be regarded as good, nor will it be accepted by the general audience and readership, if it does not feature a happy ending for its main protagonists. Tragic, sorrowful and unjust endings will not be accepted. Commonly, the best movies, dramas,

storybooks, art themes, etc., are those which are most imaginary, dreamlike and hyperbolic, promoting the strongest, but false, feel-good factor.

It comes as no surprise -- as an illustration -- that "Harry Potter", a series of fantasy novels that chronicles the life of a young wizard, Harry Potter, and his friends, is among the top bestselling books of all time. Millions, including university professors and students, pride themselves on reading the books.

Also, "The Lord of the Ring", a film series consisting of three high fantasy adventure films set in the fictional world of Middle-earth, is considered by many as Hollywood's greatest achievement. It was one of the biggest and most ambitious film projects ever undertaken. There is perhaps only a small group of people who did not watch the series, or some of it.

In passing, there is more money in the global entertainment industry today -- where people's imaginations and reveries are nurtured -- than what is needed to end most of the world's hunger and homelessness. Obviously, satisfying people's basic needs and giving them their basic human rights, making them thus genuinely happy, takes a back seat to doing so ostensibly through some false and imaginary means.

Similarly, everyone knows all too well that, practically, nobody in the all-pervading advertising industry, from public relation, marketing companies and media services, to advertising agencies, could be completely trusted. They will stop at nothing, bending the truth, in order to advertise products to customers and hence, get their genuine attention. It is interesting that nobody lies in the traditional sense of the word. But other indirect ways of lying, such as lies of omission, commission, exaggeration, denial, minimization and reinvention, are rampant and omnipresent.

What features most in today's commercials and advertisings are misleading elements of a happy and good life, with carefully selected actors who sport fake smiles and utter meticulously composed scripts. Although everyone knows that they are either plain lies, or bent truths, however, no mass complaints have ever be lodged for openly endorsing, practicing and espousing cheating and dishonesty. So customary and ubiquitous has the advertising industry's misbehavior become, that even governmental agencies, outlets and institutions are employed for the purpose. People seem to be fine with the trend because to them, it serves as a transitional point from the gloomy and depressed reality to a "better" and subscribed-to fictional realm. It is the threshold of a utopia.

So immune to what is going on have many people become that, increasingly, lies and manipulations of the highest order are becoming norms, and the truth, as well as integrity, anomalies. There is much confusion in certain situations as to which exactly is which. Every so often, in particular fields, such as politics, economics, media and entertainment, the truth is not welcomed at all. Sometimes, its advocates are even prosecuted and punished.

The same goes to promoting and campaigning for various educational programs and other general development designs and schemes put forth either by governments or private sectors. They guarantee every good of this world to their clients. They only stop short of promising Heaven in the Hereafter.

As another illustration of how serious the matter of hankering after happy endings is, "King Lear", a famous tragedy written by William Shakespeare, where all main protagonists suffered tragic ends, was modified and "improved" by the Irish author Nahum Tate in his own version of the same tale, but according to which the main protagonists experienced much happier endings. "Tate's version dominated

performances for a century and a half, Shakespeare's original nearly forgotten."

Happy endings have also been fastened to perhaps some of the greatest tragedies, "Romeo and Juliet" and "The Tragedy of Othello", both written also by William Shakespeare.

Moreover, the craving of the human instinct for happy endings -- time and again subjectively presented and interpreted -- has led many to alter and deliberately misconstrue histories, rendering unnecessarily the academic subject of History extremely difficult and convoluted in all learning institutions. Records show that this can easily morph into a strong aversion within students to one of the most important educational subjects.

It is maybe due to this verity that it is rightly observed that winners write history, whoever they may be: good or bad guys. Except in some extreme and rare cases, writing history is not about documenting the total truth, as it manifested itself and unfolded, by the truthful and authentic persons who are not only intellectually and professionally, but also morally, qualified to do so.

Be that as it may, when death, the destroyer of all happiness, pleasure and dreams, inevitably arrives, everything comes to a crashing halt. Every single person knows about this impending scenario, which only compounds people's anxieties and wretchedness. It also encourages them to try to forget and escape from the gloomy reality as much as possible, making unrealism and fiction ever more appealing.

That confirms people's greatest fear that the earthly life itself is the mother of all tragedies. In it, when all is said and done, there can be no true happy endings, and nothing can be done about it. So overwhelming

is the notion of death that it easily eclipses all the supposed happy endings that precede it.

Man feels powerless in the face of death. Knowing exactly what is going on, he simply tries to ignore it, so as not to spoil his feigned happiness, nor frustrate his march towards the realization of his fantasy dreams.

However, it is an act of cowardice to try to ignore and avoid the inevitable. Brave individuals face head-on the certain and unavoidable whenever and in whatever form the latter may present itself. But bravery is never the trait of the sceptic, ignorant, confused and vulnerable.

Besides, death confirms man's utmost life paradox. As a being that intrinsically pines for immortality, as well as absolute happiness, beauty and worth, man managed to render his own life, and the life phenomenon as a whole, pointless, despondent and ugly.

While he tries to give some sense to things and proceedings in life, man fails to give sense to life itself. While he tries to fasten some value and meaning to things and proceedings in life, man fails to attach any substantial meaning and value to life itself. While pursuing the secondary meanings and purposes, man abandons the primary and ontological one. While pursuing the secondary happy endings, man turns his back on the supreme and heavenly one.

On the other hand - as a final point -- Islam furnishes man with a total guidance, encompassing this world and the Hereafter, as well as all the dimensions of life and man himself. Everything is geared towards the perennial needs and cravings of man, and towards the attainment of his existential purpose and mission. Everything leads to Paradise (Jannah), which signifies the end of all ends, the happy ending of all happy endings, and the end of all man's longings and desires. In Paradise, no craving or

desire will be unsatisfied, no expectation unrealized, no reverie unfulfilled and no query unanswered.

As the Creator and Master, Who knows man and his strong and weak aspects best, Almighty God often speaks about the ultimate victory of the righteous in Paradise, satisfying thereby their inborn longings for the complete, conclusive and everlasting triumph and bliss.

Thus, the happiest ending state of the dwellers of Paradise is often described as "wherein they will abide forever" (al-Bayyinah, 8), "no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve" (al-Baqarah, 62), "therein is whatever the souls desire and what delights the eyes" (al-Zukhruf, 71), "they will not desire from it any transfer" (al-Kahf, 108), "they will not hear therein ill speech or commission of sin" (al-Waqi'ah, 25).

The above, and many other, descriptions bring close to human understanding the indescribable, the unseen and the inconceivable, for Paradise is that which the human eye is yet to see, the human ear yet to hear, and the human mind and heart yet to envisage and comprehend.

Nonetheless, the given words are sufficient to project the gravity and actual meaning of the true and only happy ending, against the backdrop of which man can evaluate other terrestrial happy endings, proportionately committing himself to pursuing and experiencing them.

Another message entailed in the Qur'anic exposition of Paradise as the happiest ending and abode of the faithful, is that those metaphysical truths are so real, and man's struggle to attain them so dynamic and demanding, that no time could be spared for chasing meaningless, nonsensical and imaginary things or goals. Indeed, the only antidote for fiction and people's obsession with it, is the reality and truth and people's fulltime engagement in them.

"Does man, then, think that he is to be left to himself to go about at will?" (al-Qiyamah, 36).

"Did you think that We had created you without any purpose and that you would never return to Us (for accountability)?" (al-Mu'minun, 115).