

# Time Will Tell

'Time will tell' is an idiom that references the fact that the truth, or correctness, of something will become best known, or be revealed, in the course of time, or after time has passed.

The idiom contains an inherent truth which man has discovered and lived out since time immemorial while grappling with infinite life challenges. It signifies an important segment in the accumulated cultural legacies of humankind. On the basis of its widely intrinsic merit, it is regarded as an axiom of wisdom.

That is so because life in itself is a truth. It is at once a mirror of, and an avenue to, the ultimate ontological truth. Every aspect of the multi-tiered phenomenon of life, conceptual or physical, stands for an aspect or feature of the essence of the absolute truth. The two are indivisible, needing one another for their full actualization and function.

Furthermore, the Holy Qur'an reveals that every single animate and inanimate entity across a wide spectrum of physical and metaphysical creation ceaselessly worships Almighty God, and in unison glorifies and sings praises to Him. They also function as the signs of God's presence, greatness and mercy. The truth is manifested as much in small and simple objects and events as in the greatest and grandest. The whole universe thus represents a macro-mosque, so to speak, for mosques as institutions function as microcosms of the truth, places of worship and inclusive community development centers.

That said, all sorts of falsehood and deceit, and their protagonists, are alien to the spiritual disposition of life. Since the two are incompatible, they are neither desired nor welcomed. All existential entities and forces - except for a community of misguided and

rebellious people and jinns - are inclined to delight in the triumph of the truth and in the failure of falsehood, yet some wish, and others even make direct contributions, for such a scenario to materialize.

One of the most critical aspects of man's vicegerency mission on earth, therefore, is to uphold and spread the truth, restoring thereby the order and affirming the primordial purpose of existence. Indeed, this ought to be the truest and most fundamental meaning of sustainability and sustainable development, which is on everyone's lips today. The buzz, however - as a small digression -- did not come about because the modern man is in love with the earth, but because he fears that his selfish and greedy devouring of its limited resources might soon be seriously hampered. He fears that his constant raping of the earth will soon come to a grinding halt, following which he will have to put up with some dreadful aftermaths. Haranguing thus on sustainability is not an act of veracity and bravery, but an act of desperation and cowardice.

To this end, for example, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said that when an infidel or an evil servant of God passes away, human beings, land, animals and trees get a moment of respite from them and their actions (Sahih al-Bukhari). In other words, the whole earth, with all its key elements, is aware of a wicked and disobedient person's death, which makes it 'glad' as his death spells an end to his evil acts which had an effect on the earth and everything on it.

About this the Qur'an also mentions: "And they say: 'The most Merciful has taken (for Himself) a son.' You have done an atrocious thing. The heavens almost rupture therefrom and the earth splits open and the mountains collapse in devastation; that they attribute to the most Merciful a son" (Maryam, 88-91).

The Prophet (pbuh) is also reported to have said that for every servant of God there are two doors in the heavens: a door from which his sustenance comes out and a door through which his deeds and words enter. When a pious and obedient servant of God dies, these

two doors grieve for him and cry. However, in the case of an infidel or an evil servant of God, neither the heavens nor the earth sheds a tear over him when he dies, as no good deeds or words were coming from him. As such, no worthy traces or effects could such people possibly leave behind on earth, and no good deeds were going through their personal gates in the heavens.

For a good and believing person, on the other hand, both the heavens and earth cry for him when he dies because he used to inhabit the earth with prayers, prostration, remembering God, reading the Qur'an, and performing all other types of goodness, while the heavens used to resound with their prayers and declaration of praises and glory of Almighty God. According to some early commentators of the Qur'an, the heavens and earth cry for believers forty days following their departure from this world (Tafsir Ibn Kathir).

As a result of this spiritual paradigm of life, no evil scheme permanently succeeds on earth, and no evil individuals enduringly taste victories and secure accolades. By virtue of being what it is, every evil enterprise, with all components of its often multifaceted world, is bound to come down crashing. Its continuous existence in the guise of innocence, expediency and even decency is simply impossible, as it goes against some basic ontological laws and principles. A life normally ends as it is lived.

In the spiritual kingdom, nothing works in favor of evil on earth. On the contrary, everything works against it. Nothing escapes, nor silences, time and its clutches. Nothing evades God's justice. The Prophet (pbuh) said: "Allah gives respite to the oppressor, but when He seizes him, He does not let him escape" (Sahih al-Bukhari).

Hence, the righteousness of the righteous and the goodness of the good, on the one hand, and the wickedness of the wicked and the corruption of the corrupt, on the other, will all be established and become known at some time in the future. The underlining rules and principles of life - as instituted by Almighty God as its Creator and

Master and the Creator and Master of everything in it - are supreme and cannot be undone. Whatever man concocts and accomplishes is no match for them.

And surely, no sooner does a person die, than that partially becomes the case, turning out to be more and more evident and convincing as time passes. Apart from him perishing, parting with everything he lived for and hoarded, and returning to his Creator to face the consequences of his actions, the way a person dies, how people react to his death and what they say about him, his life and now his death, how many people and who exactly attends his funeral, the extent and longevity of his legacy and how often and how sincerely he is remembered and by whom, etc., connote the beginning of a process of the truth's self-establishment.

It is no coincidence that death in Arabic is sometimes called 'yaqin', which at the same time means 'certainty'. The Qur'an also asserts that the agony, or stupor, of death will bring the truth, or certainty, before every person's eyes (Qaf, 19). Especially an evil person will then gain a full insight into the phenomenon of life as well as his own self. He "will realize how the things which he neglected or looked upon as remote are the intimate realities, and the things which seemed to loom large in his eyes in this world were shadows that have fled. The things he wanted to avoid are the things that have really come to pass. Both good and evil will realize the truth now in its intensity" (Abdullah Yusuf Ali).

By observing what happens to others in life and death, a person should learn and apply the lessons to his own life journey. The word 'tells' in the expression 'time will tell', in actual fact, means 'warns' and 'teaches'. A person should not learn a lesson when he himself comes to the end of the road and departs this life. It will then be a case of too little too late. Thus, it is rightly said that the wise man learns from the mistakes of others; only a fool learns from his own mistakes.

The whole process of ultimately establishing the truth will culminate in the advent of the Day of Judgment, which, as the Day of witnessing and witnesses when endless witnesses will come forth, and when the earth will relate its chronicles reporting whatever had happened on it, is the embodiment of the truth and of the process of its realization.

Time 'speaks' both as a quintessence and instrument of the truth, but do people listen and learn? Do they peruse and comprehend the truth deposited in the contents of the 'book' of time that span an infinite number of ages, milieus and generations? Do they intend to become active and enlightened participants in the realization of life's noble purpose and mission, or remain passive observers without knowing what is going on, and why?

### **Proving the authenticity of Islam and Muhammad's (pbuh) prophet-hood**

Without a doubt, this principle is one of the strongest proofs that Islam and Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) are the truth. For some people, it was difficult to distinguish between the truth and falsehood during the Prophet's prophet-hood mission and his continuous struggles with various manifestations of falsehood. Every side claimed to be in the right, wielding the torch of the truth and treading the right path.

The Prophet (pbuh) was preaching and inviting people to the path of the plain truth, as well as certainty, by means of equally truthful and certain ways, media and proofs. His opponents, in contrast, preached and invited people to vague untruths and superstitions by means of equally untruthful and deceptive methods, media and proofs. The latter's efforts were meant more to weaken and render unclear the voice of Islam, than to make their own voice clear and heard.

However, as time passed, the truth was becoming increasingly louder and clearer on account of its truthfulness, coherence, value and proven benefits for humankind. Its proven track record was becoming one of its greatest assets. Its civilizational output became among

those most cherished, not only among Muslims, but also certain non-Muslims. Calls for return to its magnificent civilization-building paradigm kept reverberating in every corner of the Muslim world ever since it was lost and substituted with some sham alternatives. Needless to say that such calls keep increasing by the day, and will not dwindle until the absolute truth and justice are finally restored.

At the same time, the voices of the Prophet's and Islam's opponents were growing quieter, less potent and indistinct due to their historically demonstrated falseness, incoherence and proven little, or no long-term value and benefit at all, for humankind. Their bad track record, in terms of sustainable civilizational significance and worth, became one of their greatest disadvantages. The civilizational output of the protagonists of such voices became among those least cherished and desired. No calls for return to such models and life systems could ever be heard.

This principle could be applied to the modern era as well, because what happened to the opponents of the Prophet (pbuh) and Islam in the past will also unavoidably happen to those in every other era till the end of time. As time witnessed and recorded the failures of all sorts of falsehood in the past, so it will with those of the future as well. As a distinguisher between the truth and untruth, time in due course will reveal the expected and obvious. Some people might expedite, or decelerate, the process, but the inevitable will happen sooner or later.

Hence, to a question what the best proof of Islam's truthfulness and authenticity is, the answer would be: its miraculous history and civilizational legacy, initiated in a cave and by an orphan who was and remained unlettered. The best proof is Islam's more than fourteen centuries of existence, following which its heavenly message remained as fresh, inspiring and powerful, and as needed and wanted as ever.

Similarly, to a question what the best proof of other systems' fallaciousness and inadequacy is, the answer would be: their short-

lived and problematic histories, along with their shallow civilizational legacies.

It follows that while Islam's existence works in its own favor, the existence of other alternatives works against them. While Islam incessantly keeps proving itself both in theory and practice, those alternatives in like manner keep undermining and destroying themselves.

The following question could be further asked: what comprehensive, universal and lasting did those systems offer to humankind as a whole? The answer is: very little. Often in the name of civilization, butchers, criminals, mediocre individuals with mediocre ideas and achievements, narrow and one-dimensional visions, outright flawed life systems and civilizational programs, prolonged periods of darkness, ignorance and tyranny, are celebrated at all levels of human cultural consciousness and intellectual finesse. One wonders why, but the answer is obvious and straightforward: that is all that is available; there is no much to choose from; that is all that falsehood and untruth can offer to its followers. And the trends continue to unfold today when new dark chapters for humankind's dark civilizational heritage are continuously written, of course in the name of progress and development. Unquestionably, a great many aspects of modern civilization, driven by the Western model and its irreligious values and materialistic worldviews, are based on some seriously questionable foundations.

When I was recently in Makkah, while sitting in its al-Masjid al-Haram and watching millions from all over the world performing most sincerely and most enthusiastically their rituals - occasionally thinking of hundreds of millions of other Muslims whose greatest craving is to be there as well, as soon as possible and as many times as possible - I felt as though I wanted to cry out loud in exuberance: "This is Islam! This is Muhammad (pbuh) and his mission! This is the truth! This is the actual worth of life! This is what good living is all about! Whoever wants a proof, let him come, witness and be part of this (if he/she is non-Muslim, let him/her study the spectacle honestly and impartially)!"

On the contrary, where are Abu Lahab, Abu Jahl, Umayyah bin Khalaf and other polytheistic leaders of Makkah? Where are the hypocrites of Madinah and their leaders, as well as Jewish allies? Where are mighty Romans and Persians? Where are Genghis Khan, Hulagu Khan, Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile? Where are the spiritual and military leaders of the Crusades? Where are the masters of colonization and imperialism, and all those who waged endless physical, psychological, economic and cultural wars against Muslims and their lands? Where are the countless life systems that man has invented, but which have long disappeared -- or are on the verge of doing so -- like slavery, feudalism, communism, socialism, caste system, capitalism, diverse forms of atheism and skepticism, etc.?

While they all lie buried under the rubble of the past, effectively forgotten, ignored and often derided and severely criticized, the names of Muhammad (pbuh) and Islam, the names of all those who followed them in every place and time, and all the values, life principles and teachings associated with them, as well as their invaluable contributions to the wellbeing of humankind, are constantly evoked and celebrated by hundreds of millions, not only from among the residents of the earth, but also the residents of the seven heavens.

The Qur'an declared in the midst of the Makkah hostilities: "Indeed, we have granted you (Muhammad) good in abundance (countless blessings)... Surely your enemy is the one who will be cut off (from the root, from all that is good, and from future hope)" (al-Kawthar, 1, 3).

In one of the earlier Qur'anic chapters revealed in Makkah, the Prophet (pbuh) has been assured that Almighty God had exalted his fame and had raised high the esteem in which he was held (al-Inshirah, 4). Accordingly, Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) name always stood highest among the exemplary leaders of humankind, and his legacy head and shoulders above the rest.

The same holds true as regards all confrontations between good and evil, before, now and in the future. The Qur'an is replete with such



examples, like, for example, the confrontations between Prophet Isa (Jesus) and his enemies, Prophet Musa (Moses) and Pharaoh, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and Nimrod, and all the other prophets and their rebellious and mischievous peoples. It is always that in the end the truth wins and falsehood fails, and is defeated, regardless of the circumstances and timeframe needed for the victories to occur and become manifest. The victories and their main characters are permanently inscribed on the pages of time, and, in turn, on the consciousness of people.

Indeed, if whatever genuine goodness the modern man enjoys is stripped off the elements inherited and adopted, one way or another, from the legacies of such outstanding religious personalities and reformers of humanity as Muhammad, Isa (Jesus), Musa (Moses), Ibrahim (Abraham) - peace be upon them all - and some others, especially such as walked in the footsteps of the former, there would remain only a fragile skeleton containing a little meaning, value and hope.

Almighty God guarantees that oppressors, non-believers and the evil ones will not succeed, and that the party of Satan will be the losers and will perish (al-Mujadalah, 19). Those who will succeed are the believers, the pious and the righteous ones (al-Mu'minun, 1; al-Naba', 31). Life and the truth are virtually synonymous. As such, they belong to God Who takes care of what is His. Thus, there can be no peaceful stay, nor enduring victories, in life for the deniers of the truth and mischief-mongers on earth. They can win battles, but will lose the war. They are set to perish and their traces wiped out, in a myriad of instances, forever.

That is why the Holy Qur'an is the greatest source of motivation, strength and glad tidings to Muslims. There is nothing in it that is disheartening, or demoralizing. Every account, or narrative, has a happy ending. Good persons always ultimately win. To Muslims, the Qur'an is also the best source of direction, enlightenment and clear signs for guidance and judgment between right and wrong.

Illustrating further the cases of the truth and falsehood and how the former abides on earth and the latter gradually disappears with time - as all dross and scum do -- the Qur'an says: "(Whenever) He sends down water from the sky, and (once-dry) river-beds are running high according to their measure, the stream carries scum on its surface; and, likewise, from that (metal) which they smelt in the fire in order to make ornaments or utensils, (there rises) scum. In this way does God set forth the parable of truth and falsehood: for, as far as the scum is concerned, it passes away as (does all) dross; but that which is of benefit to man abides on earth. In this way does God set forth the parables" (al-Ra'd, 17).

"Are you not aware how God sets forth the parable of a good (pure) word? (It is) like a good tree, firmly rooted, (reaching out) with its branches towards the sky, yielding its fruit at all times by its Sustainer's leave. And (thus it is that) God propounds parables unto men, so that they might bethink themselves (of the truth). And the parable of a corrupt (evil) word is that of a corrupt (evil) tree, torn up (from its roots) onto the face of the earth, wholly unable to endure. (Thus,) God grants firmness unto those who have attained to faith through the word that is unshakably true in the life of this world as well as in the life to come; but the wrongdoers He lets go astray: for God does whatever He wills" (Ibrahim, 24-27).

According to al-Maududi in his *Tafhim al-Qur'an* (The Meaning of the Qur'an), the 'pure word' in the above verses means 'truthful saying and righteous creed' which is so fruitful that every person (or community) who bases his system of life on it, gets benefit from it every moment.

"'Evil word' is the opposite of 'pure word'. It may be applied to everything that is unreal and wrong but here it stands for any false creed that one might adopt as a basis of one's system of life, irrespective of whether it be atheism or heresy or disbelief or *shirk* or idol-worship or any other "ism" that has not been brought by a Messenger."

Al-Maududi continues that 'evil word' (false creed) "has no stability because it is against the Law of nature. Therefore, everything in the universe opposes it and refutes it, as if the earth hates it and is ready to spit out its seeds every time they are sown in it, and if some need succeeds in growing an evil tree, heaven suppresses down its branches. In fact, false creed could never have been allowed to develop, if man had not been given the freedom of choice and respite for work for the sake of his trial. That is why when some foolish people exert to establish a system of life on it, it is allowed to grow to a certain extent, but it produces nothing but harmful results as long as it lasts. And no sooner does it encounter with adverse circumstances than it is thoroughly uprooted from the earth."

"The distinction between the 'pure word' and the 'evil word' is so apparent that anyone who makes a critical study of the religious, moral, intellectual and cultural history of the world can perceive it easily. For the 'pure word' has always been the one and same during the whole history of mankind and has never been uprooted. On the contrary, there have been innumerable 'evil words' but each and every one has been so uprooted that there has remained hardly anything of it except its name in the pages of history. Nay, some of these had proved to be so absurd that if these are mentioned today one wonders how one could have followed such nonsensical things" (al-Maududi, *Tafhim al-Qur'an*).