

Man is Created to be Productive

Spahic Omer

At a first glance, man seems to be a creation of contrasts.

Allmighty Allah created him as a weak, hasty and needy being, inclined to prejudice and foolishness.

At the same time, Allah made him His vicegerent on earth, endowing him with great spiritual and even cognitive abilities.

Allah also created the earth for man, placing him with authority on it and providing him with means for the fulfilment of his life therein.

Consequently, man has the capacity to rise to the highest, or sink to the lowest, point of existence. His spiritual destiny is in his own hands.

The Qur'an sums up this condition of man in this manner: "O mankind, you are those in need of Allah, while Allah is the Free of need, the Praiseworthy" (Fatir, 15).

Also: "We have indeed created man in the best of moulds, then do We abase him (to be) the lowest of the low" (al-Tin, 4-5).

"And We have certainly honoured the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them over much of what We have created, with (definite) preference" (al-Isra', 70).

A match made in heaven

Life is a stage set for man to embark on a journey of learning and discovery. It is also an opportunity for self-cognition and self-actualization, which signify a gateway to ultimate truth-realization.

Life is such a fascinating and inviting phenomenon, and man has what it takes to rise to the challenge. In addition, his own being lies at the heart of the whole thing.

Life and man are a match made in heaven.

However, for man to succeed in his existential mission, he must be heedful and sensible. He must be awake at all times and must be in control and accountable.

In other words, man must be a productive and creative force on earth. He should give and take while discharging his duties and enjoying his rights, and while building a legacy.

Man additionally ought to be life's asset. Turning himself into a liability is not an option. Such is an unnatural thing, which breeds unnatural and proportionally detrimental outcomes.

Man needs to be comprehensively keen and dynamic as well. He needs to work tirelessly in order to compensate for his inborn weaknesses, to satisfy his numerous needs, and to justify his heavenly purpose as well as fulfil his handed potentials.

Man, society and civilization

Man is a social being. It is only when large groups of people live and function in like manner that robust societies can be built and civilizations created.

Society is a network of individuals with their diverse positions and functions. Civilization nonetheless is a composition and fine alignment of people's various roles and outputs.

The former is about quantity, the latter about quality.

If a person becomes idle and lethargic, that signals his imminent end. He quickly becomes easy prey for Satan, and for all other secondary forces of evil.

And if a nation becomes uncreative and barren, that spells the instantaneous end of its cultural and civilizational proficiency. As a consequence, it becomes weak and susceptible to subjugation, physical or otherwise.

People's cultural and civilizational legacies are unmistakable testimonies whether they have succeeded or failed in their earthy vicegerency assignments.

The Qur'an condenses the whole idea into these words: "On earth will be your dwelling-place and your means of livelihood - for a time" (al-A'raf, 24).

The Old Testament does so in a dramatic fashion: "The ground is cursed because of you. You will eat from it by means of painful labour all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. You will eat bread by the sweat of your brow until you return to the ground, since you were taken from it. For you are dust, and you will return to dust" (Genesis, 3:17-19).

Life as a serious business

Life is a serious business and the only opportunity. Under no circumstances can it be subjected to the interests of mere pleasure and amusement. Man's eternal destiny in the hereafter depends on what transpires right now and right here.

Needless to say that hard work and efficiency in this world lead to handsome returns in the afterlife, while pleasure-seeking and entertainment guarantee nothing but everlasting hangovers and painful pangs of conscience.

Man is made of body and soul. His life likewise contains physical and metaphysical dimensions, involving the expanses of both worlds.

Hence, man's work and productivity must cater to the requirements of all of his and life's aspects.

Matter is a means, spirit the end. This world is a framework for the accomplishment of the spiritual purpose. It is also a prelude, or a precursor, to the condition of the hereafter.

Man's productivity is expected to target each and every dimension of life, giving all of them their due shares.

That is why when Allah speaks about man and his exploring of the earth and seeking from its bounties, so as to satisfy but his biological needs, Allah uses such unassertive expressions as, for example, "walk among its slopes (through its vast tracts) and eat of His provision" (al-

Mulk, 15), and “disperse within the land and seek from the bounty of Allah” (al-Jumu’ah, 10).

However, when Allah speaks about man’s relationship with the spiritual realm and how serious he should be while performing his responsibilities towards it, He employs such emphatic expressions as, for example, “hasten earnestly to the remembrance of Allah (Prayer)” (al-Jumu’ah, 9), and “(he who) strives for it (the hereafter) with all due striving” (al-Isra’, 19).

Physical and spiritual productivity

Indeed, man’s life is a combination of striving to get the better of the material ambit, and to get the most out of the spiritual one.

The effort is about striking a delicate and vibrant balance.

Any imbalance tilted towards the dominion of matter is bent on destroying man’s both worlds, corresponding to the extent of the imbalance. Man is thereby certain to lose his hereafter and to significantly damage this transitory world of his.

Whereas an imbalance slanted towards the dominion of spirit renders man’s life unnecessarily impractical, utopian and perfectionistic, again in proportion to the extent of the imbalance.

Attending only to matter, at the expense of spirit, causes man to be lethargic, uncreative, avaricious, hedonistic and sick. While attending only to spirit, at the expense of the necessary matter, renders man and his life reductionistic and even anticlimactic.

Either way, man becomes untrue to himself, the order of nature, and to the authority of the revealed guidance.

The purpose and noble objectives of man’s life, which the Qur’an equates with “utmost striving” and “making haste (racing)” towards the absolute truth, may then become unfulfilled. All work and production of man may simply come to naught.

It is true that man is created to work and be productive, and that he is intrinsically a creative force, however for that to work in the grand scheme of things, there are certain conditions which must be met.

Allah says, both in order to enlighten and warn: “Say, (O Muhammad): ‘Shall we inform you of the greatest losers as to their deeds (works)? (They are) those whose effort is lost in worldly life, while they think that they are doing well in work. Those are the ones who disbelieve in the verses of their Lord and in (their) meeting Him, so their deeds (works) have become worthless; and We will not assign to them on the Day of Resurrection any importance’” (al-Kahf, 103-105).

Islam as a total code of life is described as belief and performance of good deeds. Its trademark is excellence in submitting to and worshipping the Creator by means of thought, words and actions.

To be an exemplary Muslim, one must go to great lengths to make a contribution to turning the world into a “garden”, before being admitted into the gardens of Jannah (Paradise).

It is no surprise therefore that the Prophet (pbuh) sought Allah's protection against anxiety and sorrow, weakness and laziness, miserliness and cowardice, the burden of debts, and from being overpowered by men (al-Bukhari).

Thus the Prophet (pbuh) sought protection against unproductivity, mediocrity and failure as the siblings of falsehood.