

SUICIDES: SIGN OF ROT IN SOCIETY

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PROF. KHURSHID AHMAD



## SUICIDES: SIGN OF ROT IN SOCIETY

By Professor Khurshid Ahmad

There are many aspects of the Holy Quran, which make it miraculous and unique. One of these is that it is meant for all peoples of all times and, therefore, scholars have been studying it from different angles to seek guidance for various disciplines of life and spheres of activity. Here, we take an axiomatic principle expounded in the Quran that is matchless in all religious, legal and anthropological literature of the entire human history:

"...if anyone killed a person - unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land - it would be as if he killed the whole people, and if anyone saved a person, it would be as if he saved the whole people."  
**(Al-Ma'ida: 32)**

Man is Allah's vicegerent on earth. His very life is Allah's trust with him. Everyone, therefore, has to act as a guard and trustee of one's own life and property as well as those of others. His use and appropriation has to be strictly according to Shariah - the divine law. Along with safeguarding Faith, protection of life, property, honor and reason is the basic objective of Shariah. Islamic penal code ensures the achievement of this objective.

Islam accords great sanctity to human life. This makes the central core of its moral, civilizational and legal systems. Among the human rights (huqua-ul ibad), protection of life enjoys high priority. Allah says:

"...and take not life which Allah has made sacred, except by way of justice and law..."  
**(Al-An'am: 151)**

As to the protection of one's own as well as others' lives, Allah enjoins:

"And, kill (or destroy) not yourselves; verily, Allah is Most Merciful to you."  
**(Al-Nisa: 29)**

The verse forbids from taking other person's life - except by way of justice and law - and also stresses upon the sanctity of one's own life. This fact is further elaborated in Hadith of the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) as well wherein he tells that Hell will be the abode of one who commits suicide:

"One who killed himself with iron (i.e. some sharp instrument) would hold that instrument in his hands in the Hell and continue striking himself with it. And who killed himself by poisoning, would have that poison in his hands and would kill him with it repeatedly."

Muslim jurists hold suicide an unlawful (haram) death. In the light of the verse from al-Nisa, Abu Bakr Jassas in Ahkam al-Quran opines that suicide is a crime of the highest degree and amounts to the negation of Faith in Allah (iman). Almost all schools hold that committing suicide is forbidden and a person who attempts suicide but stays alive will be punished; only his consequent death can save him from any penalty (because death pre-empts all punishments). However, according to some other jurists (Imam Shaf'i and Imam Ahmad) a cash penalty is binding even in case of death. Moreover, the person who helps or accomplices in the crime is also liable to punishment, no matter whether his help is in the form of temptation or a support by consenting.

**(Al-Tashri al-Jana'i al-Islami by Abdul Qadir Audah)**

The unlawfulness of suicide conforms to the nature and temperament of Islam and is a necessary element of one's faith in Allah and the Hereafter. Once one accepts Allah as the Creator, the Sustainer and the Master of destiny, then life, property and time all become a trust, a respite and a test. Sanctity of life, property and honor are basic Islamic values. Prosperity and adversity, riches and indigence, favorable and unfavorable conditions, health and ailment, strength and weakness and triumph and defeat are but various tests which determine one's success or failure in this world as well as in the Hereafter. Differences in capability, opportunities and resources are according to the law of nature and one is tested in one's own conditions:

"...It is we who portion out between them their livelihood in the life of this world: and We raise some of them above others in ranks, so that some may command work from others: but the Mercy of your Lord is better than (all) which they amass."

**(Al-Zukhruf: 32)**

"It is He Who has made you (His) agents, inheritors of the earth: He has raised you in ranks, some above others, that He may try you in the gifts He has given you..."

**(Al-An'am: 165)**

"Be sure we shall test you with something of fear and hunger, some loss in goods and lives or the fruits (of your toil), but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere, who say, when afflicted with calamity: "To Allah we belong, and to Him is our return."

**(Al-Baqarah: 155-156)**

"...and (We) test you by evil and by good by way of trial: to us must you return."

**(Al-Anbiya': 35)**

The message of belief in Allah, faith in the Hereafter and the concept of Islam's being the complete code of life is that life is a test where good, evil, wealth, poverty and deprivation are but various forms of the trial. Continuous struggle according to one's own capacity and submission before the results with contentment and gratitude is the distinct feature of Islamic life.

Suicide negates faith in Allah and the concept that life is a trust of Allah. It is the opposite of the Islamic concept that attaches great sanctity to human life. Instead of seeking and expecting Allah's favors, it clashes with the Divine commands for the observance of patience, fortitude and perseverance. It is the product of despair and loss of spirit, which the Quran declares sign of kufr (disbelief). That is why even aspiring for death is forbidden in Islam, let alone committing suicide. The Holy Prophet (pbuh) says:

"The case of the believer is amazing. Whatever happens proves good in his favor. None but the believer enjoys this: If he receives comfort and happiness, he thanks (God). This is good for him. And if he faces hardships, he observes patience. This, again, is good for him." (Muslim)

"A believer is subjected to grief and sufferings regarding his children and relatives until he meets his Master in a state purged of all sins." (Muata Imam Malik)

"None of you should ever long for death in the face of sufferings and hardships." (Bukhari, Muslim)

The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) said:

"Allah says 'O son of Adam! if you stayed patient during adversity from its beginning and looked for my favors and rewards, then I shall not be content unless you are rewarded nothing less than the paradise.'"

Owing to these teachings, suicidal attempts rarely occur in Muslim societies. Throughout the ages, the rate of suicide has been negligible among Muslim peoples. In History of the Arabs, Philip K. Hitti expresses with astonishment that the Muslim society has no tradition of suicidal killings. Even today the researches carried out in this respect indicate that incidence of suicide is minimal in Muslim societies and countries in spite of many faults and the external cultural influences. In a statistical report published in the Social Forces of June 1989, Mills Simps and George Kinclon admit:

"Percentage of Muslims in a given population is inversely proportional to the rate of suicide in it. This fact does not change with the change and modernization of the economic, social and demographic factors" **(vol. 64, No. 4, pp. 945-964)**

This is in conformity with the nature of Islam and its historical and civilizational character. Based on the belief of Oneness of God and in the Day of Judgment, Islam on the one hand shaped the individual and social behavior on the concept of test in life. On the other, it established such a social system where individuals help one another while the institutions of family, society and state create such conditions which may help the individual face hardships with fortitude.

Seen in this background, the incidences of suicides and self-immolations currently occurring in Pakistan warrant more than mere expressing resentful displeasure and concern. What is needed is to study and analyze the situation, find out its causes and take effective remedial steps. This trend is in clash with our faith, ideology and history and, therefore, poses a serious challenge. Overlooking it with an easygoing mood or indifference will be a criminal negligence which Allah and the history will never forgive.

On Feb. 4, daily Jang, London, splashed the news of two sisters who committed suicide in Muzaffargarh. They could not wait for their aged father to return home with some food and, therefore, hanged themselves with their own scarves. On February 7, there was news from Mustafa Abad of the suicide of a married but unemployed young man. A few days back, a youngster had self-immolated in Gujranwala. Jan. 16 saw the suicide of a father of nine children in Aarif Wala. A few days earlier, in Hyderabad, two employees of the public transport service had set themselves ablaze for not being paid for several months. Then, the horrible scene of self-immolation of Chan Zeb took place during an open Kacheri of the Prime Minister in Lahore.

The survey report of Sindh Human Rights Society provides figures for only a few months and only in a few big cities. Yet, according to it, 260 persons committed suicide because of poverty, unemployment and hunger. City-wise figures were: Hyderabad 22, Faisalabad 9, Multan 79, Lahore 75, Rawalpindi 64, Peshawar 11, Islamabad 5, and Quetta 3.

Though these statistics do not make a complete picture, they do present a sample and a model and indicate to the acuteness, intensity and dreadful proportions of the ailment. Every sensible being, rather the whole nation, feels ashamed and deeply disgusted.

The situation reflects a moral decay of highly dangerous proportions. It needs an urgent and sincere consideration. We should not be mistaken or complacent with the sight of mosques swarming with people, large numbers in milad processions and performing Hajj and Umra more than once. The deficiency in religious knowledge, poor understanding of Islamic injunctions and lack of practice have led to the situation of an epidemic and a tumult. The deplorable and evil practice of suicide is now being taken as a normal incidence. Immolation is presented as an acceptable norm of protest, and those who so die are projected as heroes. No matter how disappointing and worst the conditions may be - and they are certainly very bad - there are certain limits for protest in a Muslim society, which if trampled can only add to the rot instead of correcting it. The first thing needed, therefore, is to propagate and observe Islamic injunctions and modes of reform with respect to suicide and other evil practices, at both individual and collective levels.

It is the duty of the State, media, religious scholars, teachers, social workers and political leadership to think of protecting basic values in the Muslim society, popularize Islamic teachings and arrange for moral and spiritual training of the public. They should cover all fronts and places:

home, community, mosque, school and place of business. The values and traditions that remained so endeared and protected for fourteen hundred years - the distinct features of our religion and civilization - merit great attention. What is needed is that we establish contact with Allah, inculcate sense of accountability in the Hereafter and persuade our fellow brethren to be upholders of truth and to endure patiently in the way of truth. This is the responsibility of every Muslim man and woman. Angels will not come down to do that for us.

Besides the moral aspect, we need to consider why after all a situation has emerged that people feel compelled to commit suicide and self-immolation, knowing well that this is highly deplorable act which destroys life both here and Hereafter. In addition to making efforts for the revival of religious understanding and building and fomenting moral strength, it is highly imperative to rectify country's social order so that oppression and exploitation are eliminated from the society, indifference towards the problems of the poor is removed, the responsible are taken to task for their misdeeds and for their apathy towards the plight of the masses, and the government is held accountable for its wrongs and criminal policies.

While Islam teaches to keep faith and observe virtue and use them as tools against the forces that spread evil and deterioration, it also calls for such structural and revolutionary reforms in the social life which can pave way for a healthy life of both the individual and the society by removing injustices, social and economic imbalances and disparities that lead to evil acts like suicide and self-immolation.

Oppression, depriving the deserving of his due rights, not arranging for basic human needs with honor, concentration of wealth in a few hands, unemployment and sky-rocketing costs of living, extravagance of the ruling elite and apathy towards the public plight... cause disorder, chaos and deterioration of large-scale. Without their remedy, mere moral preaching is of little use. Working on both fronts is essential. This is the Islamic approach. Only this can ensure healthy change.

In Pakistan, more than 40 million people are living in a condition of abject poverty: 70 million have no access to clean drinking water and 75 million are deprived of health facilities. At the time of Independence, the world was looking towards Pakistan, but today ours is 134th position among 174 nations with respect to poverty and human resource development. That means Pakistan is one of the 40 least developed and poorest countries. Our indebtedness is more than 91 percent of the GDP. Repayment of interest on loans alone consumes 45 percent of the budget and our loans have reached the tune of Rs. 245 billion. The resources that we need for the elimination of poverty, for education of our people and for the provision of health facilities and sanitation, go to the pockets of local and international money-lenders. Development expenditure is continuously decreasing. Unemployment is rising. Conservative estimates put that five to six million people are unemployed while about ten to twelve million are under-employed. What adds fuel to fire is the fact that current economic policies are not providing any relief. The employed force is rather rendered jobless through down-sizing!

In sharp contrast to this gloomy situation, sixty percent of the cultivated land is owned by only six thousand big land-owner families which enjoy exemption from all income and wealth taxes. The whole national wealth is concentrated in the hands of recently emerged two thousand capitalist families. This group is defaulter of billions of rupees. These burglars owe this amount to banks and have also siphoned some \$60 to 100 billion out of the country. There is no check on government's extravagant spending. All its activities are aimed at getting new loans and doing some window-dressing. There is neither any concern for self-reliance nor any serious attempt is being made to do away with the system of exploitation and oppression. Plan to fight poverty and deprivation, to remove imbalances and to design a system of social security - that ensures basic needs to all citizens and make them able to join the national development efforts - figures nowhere in the government's priority list. Pakistan's solidarity and integrity rests on the change of the worn-out and decayed system and on the elimination of the causes which give rise to frustration, lack of confidence and negative thinking.

A distinct characteristic of Islam is its teaching to provide justice even before a person calls for it. The political leadership is not to 'rule' but to 'serve' the people. The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) said:

"One who assumed a position of responsibility for the collective affairs of Muslims but did not perform his duties for their well-being or did not toil and take pain for them as he toiled for himself, Allah will throw him face-down in the Hell."

The rotten social order has added to the problem. The social security system that Islam envisages is based on Muslim man and woman, Muslim family, Muslim society and collective khilafah. These are the four pillars on which the building of Islamic life rests but, unfortunately, which are in a miserable state today.

The scheme which Qur'an has drawn for successful and unsuccessful person as well as life makes it obligatory to pay what is Allah's due and what is peoples' due. In a way, the human rights are accorded priority. In His own case Allah, the Merciful, may forgive sins and transgressions, but one's excesses to the fellow beings can be forgiven only by the affectees. Allah, who is the supreme upholder of justice (adl) and equity (qist), will not forgive such excesses by Himself. The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) said:

"The indigent of my Ummah is who will be presented in the Hereafter with a handsome load of prayers, fasting, alms and other deeds of virtue; yet he would also have insulted someone, put false blame on others, usurped someone's money or right, killed somebody, and teased people. To recompense, his virtues will be distributed among the wronged. And when there will be left no more virtues with him, their sins will be loaded upon this wrong-doer. At last he will be thrown into the Hell."

Poverty, deprivation, cruelty and oppression cannot flourish in a society in which peoples' rights are duly paid. The poor do not get poorer and the rich cannot become richer. Such a society does not allow affluence and its display while the problems of poverty, hunger and illiteracy remain unabated. Islam has raised its social order on the foundations of charitable spending, fraternity, justice, mutual help and cooperation. Muslim family provides a system of social security. Muslim dwelling and township has certain rights and obligations which make them part of the Muslim society. Then, there are rights and obligations of the State and government as well. Unless these obligations are fulfilled, no family, society or government can be regarded 'Islamic'. This is quite amplified in the Qur'an:

"It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards East or West; but it is righteousness to believe in Allah, and the Last Day, and the Angles, 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 prayers and practice regular charity; to fulfill the contracts which you have made; and to be firm and patient, in pain and adversity, and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth and God-fearing."

**(Al-Baqara: 177)**

Qur'an also describes those who deny the Day of Judgment:

"Do you see the one who denies the Judgment (to come)? The (man) who repulses the orphan (with harshness); and encourages not the feeding of the indigent."

**(Al-Ma'un: 1-3)**

"(In the Gardens) they will ask each other, and (ask) of the sinners: 'What led you into Hell-fire?' They will say: 'We were not of those who prayed; nor we were of those who fed the indigent; but we used to talk vanities with vain-talkers; and we used to deny the Day of Judgment.'"

**(Al-Mudathir: 40-46)**

Failed is the one who amasses wealth and does not pay to the deserving his due. What good this wealth is for him:

"O ye who believe! There are indeed many among the priests and anchorites, who in falsehood devour the substance of men and hinder (people) from the Way of Allah. And there are those who bury (hoard) gold and silver and spent it not in the Way of Allah: announce unto them a most grievous penalty on the Day when heat will be produced out of that (wealth) in the fire of Hell, and with it will be branded their foreheads, their flanks, and their backs... This is the (treasure) which you buried for yourselves; taste then, the (treasures) you buried."



**(Al-Tauba: 34-35)**

The very foundation of the Muslim society is on charitable spending (infaq) and fulfillment of obligations towards the kin, the neighbored and the needy:

"And render to the kindred their due rights, as also to those in want, and to the wayfarer: But squander not (your wealth) in the manner of spendthrift. Verily spendthrifts are the brothers of the Evil ones; and the Evil one is ungrateful to his Lord."  
**(Al-Asra: 26-27)**

"And do not eat up your property among yourselves for vanities, nor use it as bait for the judges, with intent that you may eat up wrongfully and knowingly a part of (other) people's property."  
**(Al-Baqara: 188)**

Islam enjoins that every household and every community should become a unit of social support. People should live as well-wishers of and regardful to others so that no one is deprived of the basic needs of life. Also, no one should be (permanently) relying on others. Only that society will get rid of hunger, oppression, imbalances and a state of dependence and need, which organizes itself on the principles set by the Qur'an:

"Serve Allah, and join not any partners with Him: and do good to parents, kinfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbors who are near, neighbors who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (you meet), and what your right hands possess (captives): for Allah loves not the arrogant, the vainglorious; (nor) those who are niggardly or enjoin niggardliness on others, or hide the bounties which Allah has bestowed on them; for We have prepared for those who resist Faith, a Punishment that steeps them in contempt."  
**(Al-Nisa: 36-37)**

The Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) said:

"A person who spends his night fully fed, while his neighbored is hungry (and he knows it), he is not faithful."

The sensitivity of Islam in this regard can be judged from yet another saying of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.):

"Do not tease your neighborer with the aroma of food (cooking in your kitchen), when you cannot offer them something out of it. Also, when you purchase fruit, gift some to your neighborer. If you do not wish to send some, and then at least keep it covered in house. Do not let your child to take it out; this will hurt the feelings of the neighborer's child."

In the light of Hadith and traditions of the Companions of the Holy Prophet, neighborhood does not mean only the adjacent house, it rather extends to 40 houses; and according to some, it means 40 houses on all the four sides. The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) said: "If in a township a person goes to bed without his meals, Allah the Exalted lifts His protection from that community."

Hazrat Ali (r.a.) said: "If a person sleeps (at night) hungry, it is certainly because someone has usurped his right". According to Muslim jurists (Fuqaha) if a person dies in a community because of hunger (and the village knew the cause of his death but did not care for it), then that village will be made to pay ransom for it.

This is what a Muslim society should be like. But what is happening in our society? While affluent persons indulge in wasteful spending, in their neighborhood people commit suicide for not being able to meet even the basic needs. There is no system of either social security or of accountability.

Country's leadership and ruling junta is most blamable for this situation because it is they who are protecting the exploitative and oppressive system. This junta is not spending country's resources for the welfare of the deserving masses. The wealth is rather spent extravagantly for the rulers' own pomp and show. In Islam, arranging for the basic needs of all citizens is the primary responsibility of the State and the government. The first right on the national wealth is that of the poor, the have-not, the orphan and the indigent. This is their 'right' not 'favor' to them. Qur'an says:

"And in their wealth is a recognized right: For the (needy) who asks, and he who is deprived."  
**(Al-Ma'arj: 24-25)**

There should be wider circulation of wealth in the society; it should not remain concentrated in the hands of a few:

"What Allah has bestowed on His Prophet (and taken away) from the people of the townships, belongs to Allah, to His Apostle and to the kindred and orphans, the needy and the wayfarer; in order that it may not make a circuit between the wealthy among you."  
**(Al-Hashr: 7)**

In Islam, very purpose of state revenues is to ensure judicious distribution of resources. The Holy Prophet (pbuh) has said:

"Taxes to be levied on the rich, and returned to the poor."  
**(Bukhari)**

The Khilafat-e Rashidah provides us with the practical example. Hazrat Umar (RA) had established a system of collective sustenance (takaful), wherein no one - child, aged, man, woman, Muslim or non-Muslim - was to remain hungry or needy. Even the infants received daily allowance. A non-

Muslim who was unable to meet his needs was supported from Bait al-Mal. Hazrat Umar used to say: "Even if a goat dies (of hunger) on the bank of Farat (Euphrates), I am afraid, Allah shall hold me accountable for that."

Mawardi in "al-Ahkam al-Sultania" states:

"The Ombudsman (muhtasib) should ask for an explanation from masters if their men and women servants are put to hardship, and order them (the masters) to refrain from over-loading their workers. Similarly, if the masters do not properly feed their animals or make them work beyond their capacity then they be called to account for that."

Only the establishment of such a judicious system can ensure real prosperity and human welfare and human dignity. But, if people ignore the path of Allah and go astray, then they are caught by the divine wrath and face nothing but total loss:

"If the people of the towns had feared Allah, We should indeed have opened out to them (all kinds of) blessings from heaven and earth; but they rejected (the truth), and we brought them to book for their misdeeds" **(Al-A'raf: 96)**

Pakistani society today is suffering a torment and the trend of suicides proves this. For the first time in our history we are witnessing the horrible spectacles of 'forbidden' death with such intensity and frequency. No doubt, it is the outcome of forsaking the path of Allah and the result of assigning the reins of government to those who attach least importance to the commandments of Allah and are least concerned for the sufferings of the people.

These conditions have not emerged out of the blue but are the consequences of continuous deterioration over the past 50 years. There have been forces actively working for good, but those bent upon vices and disfiguring have remained dominant. Ill-conceived policies, wrong-doings and people's lethargy and submissive mood have all contributed to bringing the situation to the present state of ignominy. People are now openly talking of radical change and revolt because it has simply become suffocating.

There is only one solution: return to Allah, seeking His favor to remove our sins. Compromise with the vice and cruelty will not do. Everybody has to stand up and face the situation with courage. While there is dire need for self-correction and for strengthening moral force, simultaneously a collective struggle is required to uproot this rotten-to-the-core system and eliminate its proponents and supporters to be replaced by a virtuous order and a faithful leadership. The holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.) has clearly said: "If people see an oppressor and do not stop him, then there is every possibility that Allah sends His curse upon that community".

If disorder and deterioration in a society assume the proportions of general anarchy and turmoil but the virtuous do not get up and try to bring about a change and rid the society from the clutches of the oppressors and tyrants, and do not strive to reconstruct the whole system based on justice and truth, then Allah's wrath descends on that society. But, then the divine calamity does not remain confined only to the wrong-doers, others (silent spectators) also become its victims:

"And fear tumult or oppression, which affected not in particular (only) those of you who do wrong; and know that Allah is strict in punishment" **(Al-Anfal: 25)**

Pakistani nation is at a decisive phase as it faces a critical situation. The problem is growing out of control. If all the forces of virtue do not join and face the forces of vice and destruction, then nothing can be forecast about the future. Mass awareness; Ulema's rising above sectarian prejudices for the sake of their real mission - establishment of the Islamic Order - and their guiding the people for upholding justice; political workers' approaching each and every body to build mass support for the right and just cause, their facing bravely and untidily the oppression; and mobilization of people through a country-wide movement for the realization of true freedom, honor and rights is the cry of the hour. We need not bother how much time it will take. More important is the fact that the movement follows correct direction and strives for correct objectives. The lava beneath the surface should not abruptly erupt and flow all over, but be harnessed and used for bringing about a true and lasting Islamic revolution.

All we are required is to struggle hard using all available means. The results are with Allah. He, however, has promised that given the sincerity, faith and sense of accountability, efforts made to achieve correct objectives and targets, He helps by removing constraints and hurdles on the way. The weaknesses of those who are sincere are turned into strengths. Allah sends His angels to help His servants and bestows them with success both in this world and in the Hereafter: "And those who strive in our way, surely we shall guide them to our path."

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