

LESSONS FROM EARTHQUAKE IN
TURKEY

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In the wee hours of the morning of Aug. 17, a powerful tremor shook Turkey, once the center of gravity of the mighty Ottoman Empire, when the people were fast asleep. It jolted not only Turkey, but also the entire world in general and the Muslim world in particular. This four-second jolt of the catastrophic earthquake instantly razed thousands of sky-scrapers to the ground and the largest oil refinery of Turkey got ablaze and reduced to ashes. The naval base of Golcuk with all its defense grandeur turned into a debris. As many as 20,000 houses were gutted and another 40,000 were damaged. The death toll rose to 45,000 and about one million people were rendered homeless. The preliminary assessment of financial losses is reckoned at about \$25 billion - twice of Pakistan's GNP. This biggest earthquake of the 20th century has shaken the whole Turkish nation, rather the whole humanity. We all belong to Allah and to Him are our return.

While the entire European and American technology could rescue only a few hundred from the debris scattered over an area of miles, those whom Allah willed to be saved survived even after having remained buried under the debris for six or seven and even 10 days and included babies of four months, 12-year young boys and old men of 80 years! Nay, this surely is an admonition; let any who will, keep it in remembrance **(Al-Muddaththir; 74: 54-5)**.

History and Qur'an both stand witness to the fact that deterioration and decadence in individual as well as collective life does not come merely by infidelity, sedition and hypocrisy but in fact it is remissness and negligence that open gateways for mischief and disturbance, oppression and tyranny, usurpation and loot, deflation and plunder, fraud and dishonesty, exploitation and obscenity. Thus, mischief pervades everywhere.

Negligence and remissness is such an ailment which debilitates not only the infidel and the rebel of Allah, but sometimes it afflicts the heart and soul of even those who recite on rosary the names of Allah and His last messenger (pbuh). They get to a situation where though they have eyes but they can't see, ears have but they can't hear, have hearts which are bereft of thought and understanding. They behave like animals, or even worse. They are the people who are overtaken by laxity and carelessness. They have hearts wherewith they understand not, eyes wherewith they see not, and ears wherewith they hear not. They are like cattle, nay more misguided: for they are heedless of warning. **(Al-A'raf 7:179)**

The Creator of the cosmos, of stars and planets has provided everywhere in the universe and even in the human body His signs to save man from becoming remiss and oblivious of reality (On the earth are signs for those of faith, as also in your own selves; will ye not then see?

(Al-Zariat 51:20 -21)

Also, Allah asks the faithful to meditate and contemplate on the signs of Allah and the purpose of creation. (Men who celebrate the praises of God, standing, sitting and lying down on their sides, and contemplate the (wonders of) His creation. **(Al-i Imran 3:191)**)

Such contemplation prevents man from falling prey to remissness and laxity. In addition, to wake man up from slumber such events occur both in individual and collective life which make the man feel his helplessness and weakness on the one hand, and on the other draw his attention towards the power that commands everything. It is this power who created this universe for the trial of man and who provides opportunities to man from time to time through such jerks and jolts so that he may give up negligence, turn to the path of righteousness and rectitude and seek Allah's pleasure.

This system of fate and discretion is of immeasurable value for the purpose of educating man and his admonition; it also provides motivation and opportunities for man to turn to the path of virtue, righteousness and truth. Those who remain unmoved, whose minds and hearts are sealed, are turned into such dreadful symbols as to serve as warnings to others and learn lesson from. They remain persistent in disobedience, and despite repeated warnings take strides to the abyss of destruction.

It is a rule of Islamic system of thought and action that man's whole life is a period of test and trial, and everyone is responsible and answerable for one's doings. Any adversity or ordeal that befalls during this worldly life serve as an eye-opener and a whipping for waking up. Whatever misfortune happens to you is because of the things your hands have wrought and for many (of them) He grants forgiveness. Nor can ye frustrate (ought), (fleeing) through the earth; nor have ye, besides God, any one to protect or to help. **(Al-Shura 42:30-31)**

The real objective of trial is to show to man the right path that leads to his Master. Every soul shall have a taste of death, and we test you by evil and by good by way of trial. To us must ye return. **(Al-Anbiya 21:35)**

Allah has made it very clear that His grip is swift and stern, and what is the objective of this. Did the people of the towns feel secure against the coming of our wrath by night while they were asleep? Or else did they feel secure against its coming in broad daylight while they played about (care-free)? Did they then feel secure against the Plan of God? But no one can feel secure from the Plan of God, except those (doomed) to ruin! **(Al-A'raf 7:97-99)**

Though the real questioning would be held on the Day of Judgment, in this world too small jolts and jerks occur to warn against wrongdoings, to wake up man from slumber and to provide opportunity to the God-fearing to revert to Him. And indeed we will make them taste of the penalty of this (life) prior to the supreme penalty, in order that they may (repent and) return.

(Al-Sajdah 32:21)

Such jolts that serve as warning can come frequently or after long intervals with loosening of the noose. Do they not see that they are tried once or twice every year? Yet they turn not in repentance, and they take no heed. **(Al-Taubah 9:126)**

If one ponders the Quranic system of thought and action, one comes to the conclusion that this wide expanse of cosmos and its whole working pattern is based not only on physical laws but also a grand moral law under which a process of retribution continues to operate in this very world too. A glimpse of some of the results is shown here but the whole result in its entirety cannot be announced. The final judgment and the consummate result shall be displayed only in the hereafter.

An aspect of this system is that all circumstances and situations whether good or bad, comfort and sorrow, poverty and affluence, health and illness, progress and decline, abundance and famine exist in this life for man's trial so that the Creator may ascertain as to who in the heyday treads the path of thankfulness during his and who turns into a tyrant, ignores Allah and follows his own urges. Similarly, when faced with adverse circumstances, who takes recourse to endurance and who displays lack of courage and resorts to mean, abominable and unlawful ways.

The Holy Prophet (pbuh) has said, "A believer's case is strange! Every situation goes in his favor and none else than a believer can avail this because during his times of happiness he is thankful to Allah, which act is rewarding for him. When faced with misery and trouble, he endures it and this again goes in his favor. Tirmidhi narrates like this:

"There arise times of tribulation for Muslim men and women. Sometimes a misfortune befalls upon him/herself, sometimes on his young ones and sometimes on his belongings (and he sustains it with patience and thus his heart is cleansed) till he meets Allah in a state that he carries no sin with him."

While discussing the moral aspect of tribulations in this world, Maulana Syed Abul A'la Maududi in his explanation of verse 30 of Al-Shura writes:

"It should be noted that here the cause of all human afflictions is not being stated but the address is directed to the people who were clung to disbelief and disobedience in Makkah. They are being told: "Had Allah seized you for all your sins and crimes, He would not have even let you live any longer, but the calamities (probably the allusion is to the famine of Makkah) that have descended on you, are only a warning so that you may take heed and examine your deeds, to see the attitude and conduct you have adopted as against your Lord, and try to understand how helpless you actually are against God against Whom you are rebelling, and know that those whom you have taken as your patrons and supporters, or the

powers that you have relied upon, cannot avail you anything against the punishment of Allah."

For further explanation it is necessary to state that as regards the sincere believer, Allah's law for him is different. All the calamities and hardships that befall him go on becoming atonement for his sins, errors and deficiencies. There is an authentic Hadith to the effect:

"Whatever sorrow and suffering, distress and grief, and affliction and worry that a Muslim experiences, even if it be a thorn-prick, it is made an atonement by Allah for one or the other of his errors."
(Bukhari, Muslim)

As for the hardships that a believer faces in the way of raising Allah's Word, they do not merely become atonement for his deficiencies but also a means of the exaltation of ranks with Allah. In this connection, it cannot even be imagined that they descend as punishment for sins.

Similarly, while explaining verse 21 of Al-Sajdah, he writes:

"The 'greater torment' is the torment in the hereafter, which will be imposed on the guilty ones in consequence of disbelief and disobedience. The 'lesser torment', in contrast, implies those calamities which afflict man even in this world, e.g. diseases, deaths of the near and dear ones, serious accidents, losses and failures etc. in the life of individuals and storms, earthquakes, floods, epidemics, famines, riots, wars and many other disasters in collective life which affect hundreds of thousands of the people simultaneously. The reason given for sending these calamities is that the people should take heed even before they are met with the 'greater torment' and give up the attitude and way of life in consequence of which they will have to suffer the greater torment ultimately. In other words, it means that Allah has not kept man in perfect security and comfort in the world so that he may live in full peace and entertains a misunderstanding that there is no power above him which can cause him any harm. But Allah has so arranged things that He sends disasters and calamities on individuals as well as on nations and countries from time to time, which give man the feeling that he is helpless and that there is above him an All-Powerful Sovereign Who is ruling the whole universe. These calamities remind each individual and group and nation that there is another Power above them in whose control are their destinies. Everything has not been placed at man's disposal. The real Power is in the hands of the Sovereign. When a calamity from Him descends on man, he can neither avert it by any artifice, nor can escape from it by invoking a jin, or a spirit, a god or a goddess, a prophet or a saint. Seen in this light, these calamities are not mere calamities but warnings of God, which are sent to make man conscious of the reality and to remove his misunderstandings. If man learns a lesson

from these and corrects his belief and conduct here in the world, he will not have to face the greater torment of God in the hereafter."

If we view the earthquake in Turkey, the most disastrous in the 20th century, through a Muslim's mind and vision, it provides a great lesson and warning not only for the Turks but for the Ummah as a whole. At this juncture all of us should take stock of the moral, social, economic and political aspects of our lives and our individual and collective matters. It is time to revert to our Creator by tearing off the veil of negligence, hypocrisy, and evil that has debilitated our mind and vision, our heart and soul. We should be Allah's pardon for our mistakes, short-comings and perjury and return with all sincerity to the path outlined by the Holy Prophet (pbuh).

The reaction of the Muslims of Turkey is healthy and welcome. Their believe in their Creator has been strengthened afresh. While the importance of geographic realities, underground distances and fault lines etc. cannot be denied - and a Muslim does not ignore natural factors - it remains a fact that these causes and elements always existed and shall exist forever. The point worth pondering is that it was in 1894 that the greatest earthquake of Turkish history occurred and at that time Ottoman Empire was on its last legs. The Western powers were attacking the Muslim Turkey like vultures. While the dragons of secularism and nationalism were dominating it in the garb of peace and progress, the Turkish leadership was engrossed in negligence and merry making. It was drawing loans from the Western nations on the one hand and imploring for peace on the other. The nation that had been the standard bearer of Islam for four centuries in one fourth of the world was retreating. The retributive whipping at the end of the 19th century failed to wake them up and ultimately the Ottoman Empire was reduced and restricted to Anatolia only. The Turk nation that had carried the message of Islam and served as a protector of the dignity and pride of the Muslim Ummah became the abode for secularism and western licentiousness. Yet, the Islamic forces worked ceaselessly throughout this period which has given rise to the wave of Islamic resurgence in every sphere of life during the last fifty years. While Islamic forces are nearing their target of achieving a dominant position with the support of people, the guardians of the Western system are bent upon crushing every movement for Islamic revival through repression and oppression and even a Muslim woman is not free to don an apparel of her own liking and to take over Hijab (headscarf) for herself.

This earthquake in the last months of twentieth century has not only jolted the buildings and towns but has shaken the heart and mind, as well. All the sane Muslims belonging to all sections of life are reckoning this calamity as Allah's wrath and a whipping for the presently dominating system of life. They are openly expressing this view. The only exception being the army and small segment of the ruling establishment. The President and the Prime Minister could not help say that this was an 'Act of God' and kept mum, but the youth are openly expressing their anxiety and their renunciation of the oppressive secular system. The daily Financial Times, London writes:

Last week's earthquake has revealed the dearth of independent civil organizations in Turkey and many are now questioning what price the state has paid for the clamp down on Islamists and other groups? In many places, frustration has translated into an almost revolutionary desire to start afresh.

Columnists in the English-language Daily News last week called for an end to discrimination against Islamic-backed companies and civil organizations. Their sentiments found an echo in a Adapazari cafe. "We are going to return to unity, to brotherhood", said one man. The cafe's owner, a Moslem, said: "I can't practice my religious beliefs as I wish. There are restrictions on me." Down the road, the young man from Ihlas Finans (Ikhlas Finance - an Islamic grass-root banking organization) went even further: "The government will never change its approach to us", he said.

"My belief is that this earthquake is a result of this government's maltreatment of Islamic people."
(August 23, 1999)

The correspondent of this paper mentioned the relief activities of Turkish Islamic organizations and Muslim volunteers - how the young ones converged from all directions to provide help and service to the afflicted families.

Mr. Chris Morris, correspondent of another daily The Guardian London, wrote from Istanbul:

"As pious Muslims across north-western Turkey went to Friday prayers yesterday, some of them wondered whether last week's destructive earthquake which took thousands of lives, was a sign from God."

"There is prostitution, there is bribery," said one man standing in a queue for food in the Istanbul suburb. "We were being punished and we should take note.

(August 28, 1999)

According to this correspondent in many areas of Istanbul people smashed the glass panes of wine shops. Throughout the country the young workers of Virtue Party are providing succor to the ruined families in every house and in every tent and arranging to provide a shelter to them.

After a visit to the affected areas of Avcilar, the correspondent of The Guardian writes:

"Avcilar is perhaps not a natural Islamist stronghold, but even here it is not hard to find people who resent official restrictions on some religious activity. Critics point to the closer of religious schools and the ban on Islamic style headscarf's in public buildings and concluded that God is displeased."

Despite all this, the correspondent writes, government attitude is aggressive. Islamic organizations and workers are being denied the opportunity to serve. Their deposits in banks are being confiscated and the truckloads of relief goods are being returned.

Dr. Necmettin Erbakan, who is banned to speak on politics, has prayed:

"May God Almighty pardon our errors and wrongdoings? May He make us to walk on the right path and grant us guidance."
(The Guardian, Aug. 28, 1999)

A senior judge has dared to criticize the entire system severely. Justin Huggler, the correspondent of The Independent, London in one of his articles titled "Hands across the Rubble of Earthquakes", mentioned the express feelings of non-confidence of the people on army and political leadership. He writes:

Days after Mr. Papandreou's EU bombshell, a senior Turkish Judge dropped his own, calling for Turkey's entire constitution to be re-written. "This is a diseased, clumsy state which does not trust its people, and argues with them at court houses on laws which it adopted as state policies , said Sami Selouk, denouncing restrictions on freedom of speech. Mr. Selouk's words were widely applauded. **(Sept. 11, 1999)**

This is a glimpse of feelings and the spirit that is being expressed openly by the people of different walks of life in Turkey, despite all the restrictions. While the secular leadership is indulged in conceit and vanity, the common Muslim's recourse to Allah and affinity with religion (Deen) is fast increasing. They are desirous of deliverance from the oppressive system that has deprived them of their faith, their historical traditions and their peace of mind. The West is so fearful of this upsurge that Lezleh Boulton, the correspondent of The Financial Times, in its issues of Sept. 11 and 12 expresses her apprehensions under the title "Why the Turkish Empire may strike back?" She holds the view that the spirit for the revival of the lost dignity of Ottoman Empire is rejuvenating. Turk people feel that they have no control over their own affairs, but are under the influence of others. A common westernized woman wails that "But the problem is that we are not in control", and writes:

Most Turks prefer to dwell on the glorious part of their imperial past at the height of which Ottoman armies marched to the gates of Venice and Moslem sultans ruled an empire that was unusually tolerant of different nationalities and religions. "The Ottoman Empire was the boss of the world like the U.S. is today," says Tureu Eksi, a truck driver. **(The Financial Times, Sept. 11-12, 1999)**

Along with moral, religious and ideological aspects, there is a need for a review and evaluation from the materialistic point of view as well as from the angle of perceptive planning. Turkish nation is too much disturbed with the present situation and is engaged in analyzing it.

The concept of divine decree in Islam is revolutionary like all its other concepts. Undoubtedly even a petal does not drop without Allah's consent. Allah's will is supreme and dominates everything. No doubt, there exist moral and ideological aspects of physical matters, but the study of physical aspects and the endeavor to influence them is an integral part of Islamic concept. The holy Prophet (pbuh) advised that while one should repose trust in Allah, one must first fasten the camel. Neither fastening of camel negates one's trust in Allah nor trust in Allah obviates the need of fastening the camel. Victory or defeat, all depends on Allah's will but preparation for war and attaining of the utmost level of strength, availability of horses ready for any combat form part of this overall strategy.

Ailment and death both are from Allah, but He has provided a cure for every ailment. The search for the cure of ailment and then making use of it form part of the divine decree. For instance, when plague epidemic broke out in a Muslim area during the era of Hazrat Umar (RA), he directed the residents of the area not to desert their homes out of fear, and no outsider should enter into the affected area. Also, Abu Khazama narrates via his father a tradition of the Prophet. He had asked about man's fate and discretion, "there is a practice amongst us to use charm or incarnation, medicines are administered and treatment is provided. In the case of any onslaught from enemies, shield is used for protection. Can all these things change the destiny already ordained by Allah?" The Holy Prophet (pbuh) replied: "It is also a part of destiny."

Certain questions arise after studying the details about the destruction of earthquake. What was the reason that newly built modern buildings came down like houses of cards while old buildings survived the jolts or sustained minor fractures. This gives rise to several important questions:

Earthquake zones are well known in some parts of the world, particularly fault lines in Turkey, Greece, Central Asia and Iran are known. Why such constructions were permitted in these areas which did not have the strength to withstand the expected jolts? Further, why such precautionary measures were not kept in view in their architecture which could minimize the damage? In these very zones, old structures constructed three or four centuries ago withstood the jolts of the earthquake, but those sky-high buildings constructed after World War II and even during the last twenty years crumbled to the ground. Why doubtful and faulty areas were not avoided while building up new settlements and particularly in setting up important industries and refineries? What type of Town Planning was it that did not take into account ground realities?

In the light of historical data there existed the possibility of earthquakes of 100 on the Richter scale in this entire zone. The technology for bearing the effects of earthquakes of scale 100 already exists and practiced in other countries. The same situation persists in California in America and in many areas of Japan and the construction technology has been used since the last fifty to sixty years. Such construction rules and regulations have been devised that can withstand the earthquakes of this scale or can minimize the damage. That was why the San Francisco earthquake of 1989, with its intensity of 7.10 on the Richter scale, although caused huge financial losses yet

the death toll was only 629. But with Turkey's recent earthquake of 7.40 Richter Scale the death toll rose to 40,000-45,000. The way large buildings came down, particularly newly constructed ones, clearly indicates that building rules and regulations were not adhered to and correct quality of building material was not used for the reasons of corruption.

The government and its agencies committed criminal negligence in respect of timely information about earthquake. Even the President of the country was informed about after four hours of its occurrence. Meteorological department came to know about the earthquake after it had actually occurred. There was no warning system. There was no preparation and no training to meet such an emergency. Whereas 'disaster management' system is a well-known everywhere. Greece and Israel were well prepared in this regard and their rescue teams reached the scene within hours but Turkey had no system of its own. They slacked even in employing foreign rescue workers. The communication system was so bad that even 24 hours after the earthquake the Prime Minister had to make use of TV and Radio for giving directions. Army could only move to the scene on the fifth day. This caused uproar throughout the country.

The factors responsible for the large scale destruction included poor administration in town planning, avarice of contractors, inefficiency of government officials, corruption, use of sub-standard building material etc. All these responsible should be taken to task. Newsweek in its edition of August 30 has correctly stated:

The difference from California, many Turkish authorities suspect, is that some Turkish contractors apparently prefer to erect sub-standard buildings, and there is no inspection process to stop them. It is a simple matter to add more sand and less cement to a batch of concrete, or to use a thinner grade of steel-reinforcing bar without any one noting the difference.

The Economist, London in its recent editorial has summed up the situation: As the ghastly scale of the death toll in Turkey's earth-quake became apparent in the days after the tremor, so did the tardiness of the official rescue and relief effort. After the shock and grief of last week, the predominant sentiment in Turkey this week was anger. Anger at the government for not reacting swiftly enough to rescue and help survivors. Anger at the army for not pulling into action sooner. And anger at the country's bureaucrats for allowing the poorly constructed buildings, which crumbled like sandcastles, to have been put up in the first place. Much of this anger is properly directed. It seems incredible that Turkey, which sits on a geological fault-line, had no dedicated rescue team. Not only did the government fail to train and equip such a force, it also failed to mobilize the one institution whose strength and discipline are legendary: the army. As skilled foreign technicians bored, chiseled and hacked their way into the mounds of compacted debris, and as Turkish volunteers ferried in food and dug desperately with their own machinery, tools and hands, their government froze. It was not until Saturday, fully four days after the quake, that the army - admittedly reeling from casualties of its own - went into action. For these two failures, the blame lies squarely with the government.

The Economist also depicts the state of mind of the people in clear terms:

"This week's outburst of popular Turkish anger at their state for failing them has been starting. Could it become a force for change? Possible, if it prompts more of the humility shown by at least one member of the government this week - and if this translates into a willingness to allow greater openness and freedom in Turkey, even in ways that challenge the secular creed bequeathed by Kamal Atatürk in 1923."

If the earthquake of August, 1999 proves an eye-opener for the nation, exposes the floundering base of the secular system, opens the way for the nation to give vent to its Islamic sentiments, paves way for a system based on justice, honesty and fear of Allah -if this system is allowed to function in the country - then it shall alleviate to some extent the effects of destruction and damages sustained by the Turkish nation. And Turkey shall again be on its way to grandeur and sublimity a glimpse of which is seen in the history of the Ottoman Empire and even today in the form of Sulamania mosque, Sultan Ahmad mosque, and the Topkapi Palace.

The questions arising out of the earthquake relate not only to Turkey but concern the whole Muslim Ummah. The buildings in Karachi, Cairo, Cano and Morocco, together with their inhabitants stand the very risks that gripped Izmet, Ankara and Istanbul. Moral as well as spiritual state of affairs in the rest of the Muslim world is in no way better than Turkey. Nor their system of governance, honesty in construction, system of monitoring and accountability, together with political and personal liberalism, are in no way different from those in Turkey. There is little difference in terms of the grip of external forces and their interventions in national internal affairs. All suffer from the same malaise!

Turkish earthquake is a warning not only for the Turkish people, but it is a clarion call for the Muslim Ummah to wake up from the deep slumber it is in. Even after acquiring political freedom, the state of mental, moral, cultural and economical slavery has not changed. Today, Muslims are deprived of their right to decide on their destiny in their own lands according to their own faith and values. Dishonesty and corruption is rampant as the way of life. The resources of Ummah are siphoned away to provide for luxury life-style to a few families instead of their being utilized for the well-being of general public. Not only Turkey, no Muslim country possesses disaster management system.

If Khums is levied on oil wealth alone, it would suffice to eliminate poverty, hunger, illiteracy and diseases besides allowing achieving high standards of economic and social progress. The amount Muslim countries are doling out to the Western countries in the name of defense expenditure is so huge that one-fourth of it is enough to turn the Muslim world into a formidable force. Only a portion of the enormous wealth of the rulers, kings and tycoons of Muslim countries deposited in the Western banks is enough to relieve the afflicted and destitute people of the Muslim world

from their miseries. But the nation and particularly the leadership is steeped in negligence and remissness.

What is needed is that Muslim Ummah sets its own house in order. Dependence on others should be done away with. It should utilize its own resources and adopt living according to its own ideology and values. A doctor accompanying a rescue team from Israel that reached Turkey after the earthquake saved the life of an eleven year old girl and devoted 17 hours in this struggle. According to the Newsweek: During the long hours while we rescued her, we managed to teach her a few words in Hebrew, and we built a lot of trust.

It is an eye-opening lesson for us to learn that our foe is so busy while Muslims are in deep slumber. Earthquake in Turkey and the events occurring in its wake must open the eyes of Muslims all over the world. We possess all the resources with which we can set right our affairs but we lack the spirit, the motivation and leadership that may respond to the dictates of the time in conformity with Islam and in the interest of the Ummah. Islamic Development Bank and the Organization of Islamic Countries do exist, but they have failed in providing true leadership to the Muslims and in evolving an action plan matching its needs. Has not the time come that Muslims wield their own resources and put them to proper use? All of them may join hands and save Ummah from alien dominance. Only in this way they can build a new world of their own and can reach the goal of real freedom and eminence.
