149636 - Why has the civilisation of the Muslims fallen behind others?

the question

In these times we notice that the West has advanced far ahead of us in many things but Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): “O Children of Israel! Remember My Favour which I bestowed upon you and that I preferred you to the Alameen (mankind and jinns)” [al-Baqarah 2:47]. Have these many blessings that Allah bestowed upon the descendants of Ya‘qoob ceased in our time, or will they continue until the Day of Resurrection? If they have ceased, then why are they advanced so far ahead of us in this world and at this time in so many things? What are we Arabs lacking or what is hindering us from being better than them in our thinking, inventions and manufacturing?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

It is not fair for anyone who wants to examine the causes of any nation’s decline to focus only on some outward aspects of its decline that everyone can see, because achieving cultural advancement is a huge process in which innumerable interrelated factors play a role; these factors are accumulated throughout the years and penetrate deeply in all aspects of life, which leads to raising the level of communities little by little. Humans can hardly feel this progress because it is like the light of dawn; it keeps coming out until its light spreads over the horizon.

The Holy Qur’an tells us some of the aspects of material advancement that were – and still are – a means of trials and tests, of which no one understands the great wisdom behind it and the great impact it has on historical dynamics except Allah, may He be glorified and exalted.

Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“On the Day when those who disbelieve (in the Oneness of Allah Islamic Monotheism) will be exposed to the Fire (it will be said): "You received your good things in the life of the world, and you

took your pleasure therein. Now this Day you shall be recompensed with a torment of humiliation, because you were arrogant in the land without a right, and because you used to rebel and disobey (Allah)"

[al-Ahqaaf 46:20]

"Do they not travel in the land, and see what was the end of those before them? They were superior to them in strength, and they tilled the earth and populated it in greater numbers than these (pagans) have done, and there came to them their Messengers with clear proofs. Surely, Allah wronged them not, but they used to wrong themselves.

Then evil was the end of those who did evil, because they belied the Ayat (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, Messengers, etc.) of Allah and made mock of them."

[ar-Room 30:9-10].

Al-'Allaamah Muhammad Rasheed Rida (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The first Muslims' belief in the Oneness of Allah (Tawheed), their knowledge of Him, their love for Him and their reliance on Him are what purified their souls, honed their ambitions and gave them a sense of pride and power; that enabled them to establish truth and justice, and motivated them to conquer lands, rule nations, ransom them from spiritual and intellectual slavery to soothsayers, rabbis, monks and clergy, liberate them from the injustice and tyranny of kings, establish the foundations of civilisation, and revive and develop different branches of science and technology. They were able to achieve all of that in an unprecedented manner that no other nation on earth had ever achieved or even come close. Gustave le Bon, the famous sociologist, said: Mastery of different branches of science and technology was not possible for any rising nation in less than three generations: the first generation clings to the past; the second generation started the process of freeing themselves from blind following; and the third generation is the generation of independence and hard work. (He said that this applies to all nations) except the Arabs; they are the only ones who were able to lay the foundation of science and technology in the first generation.

I say: The cause of that was the teachings of the Qur’an, which taught them to be independent in thinking and to avoid blind imitation. It taught them to be prepared to lead mankind in spiritual and worldly matters alike. But all of that disappeared for subsequent generations, after the demise of the Islamic caliphate and after Arabic civilisation ceased to flourish, when power shifted to the non-Arabs who had nothing of Islam except superficial traditions and were not strongly connected to the guidance of the Qur’an.

Tafseer al-Manaar, 11/173

We cannot ignore the impact of conspiracies, both internal and external, against our ummah throughout the ages, which led to its enemies getting ahead of it in material matters. But our thought and the thought of our ummah is far above feelings of defeatism, relying on others in order to achieve revival, and feeling overwhelmed in the face of great responsibility, the responsibility of being in a leading position in relation to other nations. As for our enemies among the Israelites, they excelled at making the most of every opportunity and they strove hard in engineering events that had a global impact. They strove persistently for decades until they achieved what they wanted and reached a position of power in our times. But that has nothing to do with the verse (interpretation of the meaning): “O Children of Israel! Remember My Favour which I bestowed upon you and that I preferred you to the Alameen (mankind and jinns)” [al-Baqarah 2:47], because this verse speaks of previous blessings that Allah had granted to the Children of Israel throughout history, and is meant to remind them of that. Among these blessings are what is mentioned in the Holy Qur’an, where Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): “And (remember) when Moosa (Moses) said to his people: ‘O my people! Remember the Favour of Allah to you, when He made Prophets among you, made you kings, and gave you what He had not given to any other among the Alameen (mankind and jinns, in the past)’” [al-Maa’idah 5:20].

Al-Haafiz Ibn Katheer (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Here Allah, may He be exalted, reminds them of previous blessings that He bestowed upon their fathers and forebears, and the favour He bestowed upon them by sending the Messengers from

among them, revealing the Books to them and favouring them above all other nations at that time. End quote.

Tafseer al-Qur’an al-‘Azeem, 1/255

However, we regard our current situation with optimism that motivates us to advance further and succeed by striving harder to use all possible means, both spiritual and worldly. The foundation of that is the righteous individual who always remembers that Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, is watching him in all situations. Such individuals are a constructive factor in the reform of communities and families; they do not wait for the revival to be presented to them on a golden platter or hope that programs will be set up for them to achieve that. Rather they hasten to take the initiative and strive hard to do all that is good and beneficial, putting their trust in Allah in the hope that He will bless their deeds, no matter how small, and reward those who do good for their good deeds. Allah, may He be exalted, knows who is trying to spread mischief and who is striving to do good, and the followers of His Messengers will prevail and be victorious if they take the measures that lead to victory and advancement. Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Indeed, they planned their plot, and their plot was with Allah, though their plot was a great (one, still) it would never be able to remove the mountains (real mountains or the Islamic law) from their places (as it is of no importance).

So think not that Allah will fail to keep His Promise to His Messengers. Certainly, Allah is All-Mighty, - All-Able of Retribution”

[Ibraaheem 14:46-47].

And Allah knows best.