69747 - Reconciling Between Striving for the Hereafter and for Worldly Purposes

the question

In this world if the Muslims dedicate all their time and actions for the benefit in the hereafter (aakhirah) while not doing any worldly matters, then how can the Muslims contribute to the benefits of civilisation and humanity such as in technology, science and inventions?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Islam is the final religion, and one of the most important characteristics of this religion is that it is a religion that regulates all aspects of life. Islam is the religion of this world and the Hereafter. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Say (O Muhammad): Verily, my Salah (prayer), my sacrifice, my living, and my dying are for Allah, the Lord of the ‘Aalameen (mankind, jinn and all that exists)” [al-An’aam 6:162]

In their du’aa’s the Muslims frequently say, “Our Lord, give us in this world that which is good and in the Hereafter that which is good, and save us from the torment of the Fire” (al-Baqarah 2:201). This is the complete, perfect and comprehensive religion of Allah, which combines the rights of Allah and the rights of people, and explains matters of this world and matters of the Hereafter.

Those who claim that Islam brought a kind of monasticism are making a false claim, because monasticism is a part of the deviant Christian religion, from whom some innovators among the Muslims adopted it, such as the Sufis. But Ahl al-Sunnah wa’l-Jamaa’ah (adherents to the Prophetic way)take their religion from its pure source, and they understand it correctly. They believe that this world is the passageway to the Hereafter and that no one should be attached to this world at the expense of the Hereafter. They regard the Hereafter as their focal point because it is eternal

life, so we should strive for that aim and not for a life that is short and transient. This does not mean that they should not strive for worldly aims too or develop the earth, rather the Muslims achieved great things in theoretical and practical spheres of knowledge, and other civilizations followed the Muslims in their progress and knowledge. Some prominent western universities still acknowledge this and teach it as part of their curricula.

The French philosopher Gustave le Bon stated in his book The Civilization of the Arabs:

We must bear in mind that the Arabs – and the Arabs alone – are the ones who guided us to the ancient world of the Greeks and Romans. European universities, including the University of Paris, based their curricula on translations of their books for six hundred years and used their methods of research. The Islamic civilization was one of the most amazing that history has ever known. End quote.

The Muslims are not like anyone else. When they adhere to their religion, they are at the forefront in worldly affairs too, but when they forsake their religion and neglect it, they end up tailing behind others. When the Christians adhered to their deviant religion, they were backward in worldly affairs, but when they burned their churches, killed their monks and separated church from state, they advanced in worldly affairs and in science. The Muslims' religion motivates them to advance, and they fall behind when they fall away from their religion. The Christians became backward when they adhered to their deviant religion, because a religion that has been distorted by people cannot lead to advancement. They advanced when they left their religion behind. Which method calls for development of this world and strives to make scientific progress and help people in this world and in the Hereafter?

There are many verses and ahadith (Prophetic narrations) which urge the Muslim to develop the earth by means of agriculture and manufacturing. The Muslims understood that and hastened to strive to develop the earth without that affecting their worship and obedience to Allah, and without thinking that there was any conflict between religious and worldly interests. The only thing to avoid in this endeavour is anything that distracts the Muslim from his religious duties and obedience to his Lord.

It was narrated that Anas ibn Maalik (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “There is no Muslim who plants something and birds or people or animals eat from it, but he will have the reward of charity for it.” Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 2195; Muslim, 1553

Al-Haafiz ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

This hadeeth points to the virtue of planting and farming, and encourages us to develop the earth. From it we may understand that farming and agriculture are encouraged. This is a refutation of those ascetics who rejected this idea. The reports which may be understood as discouraging farming and agriculture should be interpreted as referring to cases where that distracts Muslims from religious affairs, such as the marfoo’ hadeeth (report) of Ibn Mas’ood which says: “Do not acquire land (for farming) lest you become too attached to worldly matters.” al-Qurtubi said: This hadeeth may be reconciled with other ahadith on this issue (which encourage farming) by noting that this refers to being too preoccupied with land and farming and being distracted by them from religious matters, and the other ahadith are to be understood as encouraging people to acquire land so that they may become independent of means or so that the Muslims may benefit from it and earn the reward for that.

Fath al-Baari, 5/4

The hadeeth mentioned by al-Haafiz Ibn Hajar, “Do not acquire land (for farming) lest you become too attached to worldly matters” was narrated and classed as hasan (sound) by al-Tirmidhi (2328).

Al-Mubaarakfoori (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

What is meant is a prohibition on becoming preoccupied with this and similar things which then prevent one from worshipping Allah and focusing as one should on matters of the Hereafter.

Al-Teebi said: what is meant is that you should not be preoccupied with farming and let that distract you from remembrance of Allah. “Men whom neither trade nor sale (business) diverts from

the remembrance of Allah” [al-Noor 24:37].

Tuhfat al-Ahwadhi, 6/511

We have seen how some western researchers have been fair towards the Muslims and their religion, and have acknowledged that the Muslims were pioneers in various fields of worldly science. There follow some of their comments so that the questioner and others may see the position of Islam in relation to other civilizations, and understand how Islam urges its followers to look, ponder, strive and invent. We will quote comments from thinkers of different backgrounds.

1 – The French thinker Gustave le Bon says in his famous book The Civilization of the Arabs (translated into Arabic by ‘Aadil Zu’aytar):

If the Arabs had taken over France, then Paris would have become like Cordova in Spain, a centre of civilization and knowledge, where the man in the street was able to read and write, and even compose poetry, at a time when the kings of Europe did not even know how to write their names!

2 – The German Orientalist Sigrid Hoeneker said, in her famous book The Sun of Allah is Rising in the West, concerning the spread of libraries in the Arab and Muslim world:

The libraries grew in every place like plants in good soil. In 891 CE a traveller put the number of public libraries in Baghdad as more than one hundred. Every city had a library where any ordinary man could borrow whatever he wanted, or sit in its halls to study and read whatever he wanted. Translators and writers also gathered in halls that were set aside especially for them, discussing and debating as happens nowadays at academic conferences of the highest level.

The title of this book, which was originally written in German, means, “The light of Islam illuminates western civilization. This book is filled with the names of Muslim inventors, both Arabs and non-Arabs.

3 – Read these words by a Russian intellectual who explains that this religion served humanity and led to advancement and civilization.

Tolstoy said:

There can be no doubt that the Prophet Muhammad was one of the greatest reformers who have rendered great services to human society. It is sufficient to say that he guided an entire nation to the light of truth, and made it incline towards tranquility and peace, and preferred a life of asceticism, and prevented bloodshed and human sacrifice; he showed them the way to advancement and civilization. This is a great achievement that can only be made by one who is given strength; such a man is deserving of respect and honour.

4 – The Austrian doctor Shabrak said:

Mankind should be proud to have a man such as Muhammad as a member, for despite being illiterate he was able, ten-plus centuries ago, to bring laws that we and other Europeans would be very happy if we could reach the same level.

5 – In the field of medicine and surgery, the Muslims played an undeniable role.

The British writer H. G. Wells says in his book Milestones in Human History:

They advanced in medicine far beyond the Greeks, they studied science and the functions of various parts of the body, and preventative medicine. Many of the treatment methods that they used are still used by us until today. They used anaesthetics for their operations and they used to perform some of the most difficult surgeries that are known. At a time when the church used to forbid the practice of medicine in the expectation that a full recovery could be achieved through religious rituals performed by the bishops, the Arabs had a true knowledge of medicine. End quote.

He also said:

Every religion that is not suited to civilization should be rejected. I have not found any religion that is suited to civilization except Islam. End quote.

The testimonies are innumerable. We wanted to quote a few of them to show that non-Muslims

have said the same as we say. We chose people who cannot be suspected of agreeing to tell the same lie; they come from different countries and different cultures, and even from different religions and civilizations. All of those whom we have quoted pointed to the progress and success achieved by Muslims in material sciences, and leading mankind to advancement in many fields. Whilst the Muslims achieved distinction in these fields, they also achieved great things in the fields of religious sciences, worship and obedience to their Lord. The history of this religion bears witness to the great achievements in the field of writing books of shar'i (religious) knowledge, which is based on the Qur'aan and Sunnah (prophetic teachings). History also tells us of prominent figures whose worship and asceticism did not prevent them from being scholars in the religious or worldly sciences.

There are names of numerous Muslim scholars in many fields whose knowledge and progress cannot be denied except by one who is ignorant or arrogant, such as Ibn al-Nafees and al-Zahraawi in the field of medicine, Ibn al-Haytham in the field of vision and light, al-Khawaarizmi in the field of mathematics, and many, many others.

Finally we would like to recommend that you read this article which is entitled 'Aml al-dunya la yunaafi 'aml al-Aakhirah (Striving for worldly purposes does not contradict striving for the Hereafter), where you will find more information. It can be accessed by clicking on this link:

We ask Allah to guide the Muslims to their religion, and to help them to do that which is enjoined upon them, and to guide every seeker of truth.

And Allah is the Source of strength.