

In Every Age There Existed an Ignorant Society

H A R U N Y A H Y A

From the time man was created, there have always been two distinct societies: the ignorant society and the community of believers. All those who fail to observe the limits set by the religion, constitute the ignorant society. Despite discrepancies in beliefs, thoughts and ways of living, one fundamental rationale lays the groundwork for the life of all ignorant societies: not to adhere to true religion. The members of the ignorant society, merely limited strictly in their outlook to the worldly life, are defined in the following verse:

**Those who entertain no hope of meeting Us, but desire the life of the world and feel secure therein, and those who are neglectful of Our revelations. (Surah Yunus: 7)
Those who love too well this fleeting life, and put behind them (the remembrance of) a grievous day. (Surah Al-Insan: 27)**

It is not in any way wrong to enjoy the favors of this world. God created these favors and gave them to the service of mankind. However, members of the ignorant society fall into an error at this point: they never take satisfaction in what they possess and always want to have more. In the words of the Qur'an, "they are deceived by this world." What is more important, they never feel grateful to their Creator, the only One who bestows these favors upon them.

This is exactly why throughout history, regardless of the differences in their lifestyles, prosperity, races, colors and languages, all ignorant societies have displayed an astonishing similarity in terms of their fundamental reasoning and mentality. Whether a community is the most primitive tribe in history or the most glorious civilization dating back to time immemorial, or a contemporary society, the goal for all societies maintaining an existence rooted in "ignorance" has always been one and the same: worldly gain.

THE MORALITY OF IGNORANCE IS A "SYSTEM OF BELIEFS" INHERITED FROM ONE GENERATION TO ANOTHER

Another trait of the ignorant societies is the way they acquire information regarding life. Rather than from the Divine books revealed by the Creator, members of the ignorant societies gather all their knowledge pertaining to life from their ancestors (parents, grandparents, etc...) Ancestors, the unchanging mentors of the members of the ignorant society, instruct their younger generations in the "religion of ignorance" and the moral values it encourages, and thus maintain the continuity of this primitive religion. These "mentors" themselves were likewise informed about the "fundamentals" of this corrupted religion by preceding generations.

Surprisingly, this system, inherited by one generation from another, is never questioned. Every item of information is accepted as a certain fact. All values of judgment, both right and wrong, are all passed on to the next generation, ready for their use. Such an attitude naturally never encourages the younger members to question the system or to find out anything about its reliability.

The Qur'an calls attention to the unquestioning support provided to this system and how ignorant people turn their faces away from the guidance of God without even feeling the need to ponder over it:

And when it is said to them: Follow that which God has revealed, they say: We follow that wherein we found our fathers. What! Even though their fathers were wholly unintelligent and had no guidance? (Surah Al-Baqarah: 170)

THE FACT THAT THEY MAKE UP THE MAJORITY OF THE SOCIETY DOES

NOT INDICATE THE RELIABILITY OF THEIR RATIONALE

The Qur'an provides another important fact about the ignorant societies: they always constitute the majority of the population as compared to the community of believers. The Qur'an informs us that the believers are always in the minority:

**Yet strive as you may, most men will not believe. (Surah Yusuf: 103)
But for a few of them, they have no faith. (Surah An-Nisa: 46)
And most of them believe in God only when they can attribute partners (to Him). (Surah Yusuf: 106)**

Surely this is not a coincidence but a special situation created deliberately by God for a certain cause. That believers are in the minority makes their virtuous conduct even more precious in this world. Furthermore, this is a factor enhancing their rewards in the Hereafter. This world surely has a lure as an essential part of the trial by God. Nevertheless, if concern for the Hereafter takes complete hold of one's mind and, in consequence, one's actions, one would surely be superior to the majority deceived by the attraction of worldly goods.

Besides, this is an important matter of trial for unbelievers. For the majority of the people it is customary to follow the general way of doing things in society. They simply take it for granted that the general attitude of the society is the righteous one. The same rationale further holds that the majority represents the absolute truth while the standpoint of the minority is to be approached with doubt and concern. Our point, put briefly, is: when summoned to the true path, by the guidance of God, people in a state of ignorance refuse to comply with this call on the flimsy pretext that it does not conform with the recognized social order. However, popular acceptance can by no means be an argument for truth.

This social criterion is surely nothing but an unsound judgment of the aforementioned crude understanding. Ignorant people make up the majority of the community merely because they all turn away in total ungratefulness from their Creator, simply preferring this world to the next. Surely those who adopt the attitude of such a society merely deceive themselves.

In the Qur'an God informs us about the reasons why these people in their state of ignorance make up the majority of the society and warn believers against taking this as a criterion for themselves:

**And if you obey most of those on the earth, they will lead you astray from God's way; they follow nothing but conjectures and they preach nothing but falsehoods. Surely your Lord- He best knows who goes astray from His way, and He best knows those who follow the right course. (Surah Al-Anaam: 116-117)
Most of them follow nothing but mere conjecture. Assuredly, conjecture can by no means take the place of truth. God is Aware of what they do. (Surah Yunus: 36)**

The attitude assumed by believers to find out the truth is explained in the Qur'an:

And there are among us some who have surrendered (to God) and there are among us some who are unjust. And whoever has surrendered to God has taken the right path purposefully. (Surah Al-Jinn: 14)

IGNORANT SOCIETIES HAVE ALWAYS BEEN WARNED THROUGHOUT HISTORY

**Whoever goes aright, does so for his own soul; and whoever goes astray, does so to its detriment; no soul shall bear the burden of another, nor do We chastise a nation until We have sent forth a messenger to warn it. (Surah Al-Isra: 15)
And never did your Lord destroy the nations, till He had sent to their capital cities a messenger reciting to them Our revelations. And never did We destroy any nations unless its people were evil-doers. (Surah Al-Qasas: 59)**

The above verses point to one single fact: to every ignorant society a messenger was sent to communicate the message of God. Out of His infinite mercy, God does not punish a society to whom His divine message has not been communicated. Through messengers, God informed man that there is no god other than Him and reminded them about the Day of Judgment.

And We sent to them a messenger from among themselves, (saying), "Worship God! You have no other

god but Him. Will you not fear (Him)?" (Surah Al-Mumenoon: 32)

Another point deserves mention here: members of the ignorant society deliberately insist on maintaining their primitive thinking. They display an incomprehensible persistence in adherence to the religion of ignorance, although messengers provide them with clear explanations of the existence of God and the Hereafter. In another verse, the common attitude of prominent people of the ignorant society to the Divine message is recounted:

Just in the same way, whenever We sent a Warner before you to any people, the wealthy ones among them said: "We found our fathers following a certain religion, and we will certainly follow in their footsteps." (Surah Al-Zukhruf: 23)

THEY SPEND THEIR LIVES IN TROUBLE AND ANGUISH

People in a state of ignorance invest all their hopes and dreams in this world alone and forget the Hereafter. However, the attachment they form for this life often turns into an unbridled ambition. At this point, fortune, fame or status cease to satisfy the individual's worldly whims and desires. Success and prosperity only engender further ambition and greed rather than induce a peaceful state of mind. Such ambition, however, is detrimental to man's physical well-being. Ambitions also make him lose his moral values. Self-interest finally isolates him. Though surrounded by a lot of people, people in a state of ignorance feel lonely and insecure, never finding a true companion. These factors together with other troubles (examined in the following sections) become a major source of disappointment. Under such circumstances, life becomes a burden rather than a source of joy and pleasure.

This is exactly what befalls the ignorant as a result of their own preferences. However, no matter what befalls them, they do not realize what is happening to their lives. Most of them only realize it after spending a whole life devoted to worldly pleasures, at the very time when they feel death is close. To their sorrow, however, it is too late. Even then, the grief does not stop there. God informs us that it is not only this life that they lose. Because of their adherence to primitive reasoning, these people will meet a grievous end in the Hereafter:

They indeed are losers who deny their meeting with God until, when the Hour comes on them suddenly, they cry: Alas for us, that we neglected it! They bear upon their backs their burdens. Ah, evil are the burdens which they bear! (Surah Al-Anaam: 31)

On the other hand, believers who spend their lives in the cause of God are rewarded with a beautiful life both in this world and the Hereafter:

So God gave them the reward of this world and the glorious reward of the Hereafter. God loves those whose deeds are good. (Surah Al-e Imran : 148)
Say: Who has forbidden the adornment of God which He has brought forth for His bondmen, and the good things of His providing? Say: Such, on the Day of Resurrection, will be only for those who believed during the life of this world. Thus do we make plain Our revelations for peoples who have knowledge. (Surah Al-Araf : 32)

This is the ayah starting with:

Those who believe and carry out their duty to God, theirs are good tidings in the life of the world and in the Hereafter. There is no changing the Words of God - that is the Supreme Triumph. (Surah Yunus: 63-64)