

**SPEECH BY THE HON TUN DR MAHATHIR BIN MOHAMAD
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“Al-Quran: The Guide to Civilisation”

I would like to thank Kolej Universiti Islam Malaysia for this invitation to speak on “Al-Quran, The Guide to Civilisation”.

2. In the present day situation in which the Muslims have been split up into thousands of sects and groups, a return to the Al-Quran for guidance is urgently needed.

3. There is a game that children often play, where they, ten or twenty of them, sit in a circle. One of them whispers to his neighbour a piece of information. The neighbour then whispers the information to the next; who then passes it on to the next and the next.

4. Invariably when the last to receive the information whispers it to the initiator, the first person to give the piece of information, he will find that it is totally different from the information that he had originally given.

5. The Prophet of Islam, Muhammad s.a.w. brought to us one religion of Islam, only one. But today we have maybe a thousand religions which all claim to be Islam. The learned ones who studied the Quran and the interpretations of the previous learned ones, the ulamas, understand the teachings quite differently even from the immediate past ulama who was his teacher. And because of these different understanding and interpretations, all the religions, which claim to be Islam, differ from each other.

6. The schism between the Shiah and the Sunni is deep, so deep that the followers often condemn each other as apostates, kafir and some fight and kill because of this belief that the other religion is not Islam and the followers are not Muslim.

7. But even within the Sunnis and Shiahs there are divisions. The Sunnis have four imams and the Shiahs, twelve, and their teachings all differ. Then there are others, the Druzes, the Alawais, the Wahabis. Then there are the sub-groups, the Tarikats. Then the deviants – all claiming to be Islam.

8. We are also taught by our own ulamas that their teachings must not be questioned. Islam is a faith. It has to be believed in. Logic and reason does not

have any place in religion. If you are a Muslim then you must just believe everything that you are told by the ulamas.

9. But what is it that we must believe? If we belong to the Shiah and a sub-division of it then what we are not allowed to question is the interpretation of Islam by the particular Shiah school that we belong to.

10. But the Sunnis believe differently and they too may not question the teachings of their school i.e. the particular teachings of the imam they follow. The Sunnis say the teachings of the Shiah are wrong and the Shiah say the same of the Sunnis – that they are not following the teachings of Islam.

11. What they are really saying is that the other is wrong because they are not following the understanding and interpretations of Islam as understood and interpreted for them by their imams. If they are so different from each other then it cannot be that both are right. It is possible for only one to be right and the other wrong or it is possible that both are equally wrong.

12. We are told that if we think we are wrong, if we think that we may be wrong we should refer back to the Quran. That is the true source of Islam, our religion. And there is only one Quran, not two or three or more.

13. The Quran as we all know contains two different kinds of verses. There are the specific verses, which lend only to one understanding and interpretation. For example “All Muslims are Brothers”. There can be no misunderstanding about this. “All Muslims are Brothers”.

14. But then we can claim that the others, although they claim to be Muslims but actually they are not Muslims. The Shiah can say this of the Sunnis and vice versa. And therefore Shiah Muslim cannot regard Sunnis as Muslims and the other way round. And so it is legitimate for them to fight and kill each other.

15. But the Quran does not mention Shiah or Sunni. According to the Quran, he is a Muslim who bears witness that “there is no God (Allah) but Allah, and that Muhammad is his Rasul”. If you don’t add other qualifications then those who subscribe to the two “Kalimah Shahadah” must be regarded as Muslims and must be treated as brothers.

16. It is because we like to add other qualifications that are often not from the Quran that we break up the religion of Islam into many religions.

17. There are other injunctions in the Quran that we must follow. Some are compulsory; some are optional. Failure to abide by these injunctions would make a person a sinner. But he would still be a Muslim. We may punish him or Allah will punish him in the Akhirat. But he may not be declared an unbeliever, a kafir simply because he does not do what is enjoined by Islam or simply because

he does not subscribe to the particular interpretation of Islam by the sect or school that he belongs to.

18. Truly if we follow the Quran, Islam becomes a very positive and simple guide to life and the hereafter. It is also important to remember that the Quran states that Islam is “Ad-din” a way of life. Some would have us believe that Islam is only about the akhirat, the afterlife. This life is for the others. Again this is contrary to the teachings contained in the Quran.

19. Admittedly if everyone were to interpret the Quran himself, there will likely be more differences than when the different ulamas interpret. Indeed there is likelihood that Islam and the Quran would be rejected completely. The Muslim person might choose to be an atheist.

20. For this reason the learned ones must be tasked with reverting back to the Quran without being fanatical over the interpretations of their particular sects or schools.

21. The need for this is clear. We live in the age of science where we can see around corners, hear and see things happening thousands of miles away; see pictures and human robots which move and speak, and now the clones of animals and men. All these things tend to contradict our belief in the Quran.

22. If the interpretation of the Quran is left to those who are learned only in the religion, in its laws and practices then they will not be able to explain the so-called miracles of science. Then the fatwas that they make may be so unreasonable that they may not be accepted even by laymen, and certainly by those learned in science.

23. Thus a learned religious teacher refused to believe that a man had landed on the moon. Others assert that the world was created by Allah 2000, years ago. The age of the universe, its size measured in light years, and the myriads of stars, each as big or bigger than our sun – these are things that the purely religious-trained would not know and cannot even comprehend. Some would of course. But it would be good that others with scientific and other expertise also participate in attempting to understand the Quran and to interpret it.

24. It is said that those who do not understand the language of the Quran, i.e. Arabic, have no right to interpret the Quran. But from the very many different interpretations of the Quran by those who understand Arabic, and even by those whose mother tongue is Arabic, it is clear that simply because of understanding the language does not ensure total understanding. If it does then there should be only one interpretation.

25. In any case if Islam is spread and taught exclusively in Arabic, non-Arab speakers would not understand it and would not accept Islam. The Islam that non-Arab speaking Muslims believe in is the Islam as interpreted in their own language. It is entirely possible that the interpretation in their language is wrong. On the other hand it is likely to be right, especially with regard to the clear and unambiguous verses.

26. If it is right then even if they don't understand Arabic they should be allowed to discuss and give their views on Islam.

27. It would be a pity if only those who understand Arabic are allowed to discuss and interpret Islam. Islam does not belong only to Arab speakers. It is the religion of more people who do not speak Arabic.

28. I would like to call your attention to the sad plight of the Muslim Ummah today. They are being hounded from country to country. They are being arrested, detained indefinitely, tortured and humiliated. The Quran is being deliberately desecrated. And they are being shot and killed with impunity. When one Brazilian Christian was shot the whole world rages and condemn the killers, the British police. Yet when hundreds of thousands of Muslims are killed, when daily they are being deliberately murdered, these are not reported. We know precisely that 1,700 U.S soldiers died. But we have no figures regarding how many Iraqis, Afghans and Palestinians have been killed. They are just collaterals. Their guilt, according to a U.S General is that they live there; they live where the British and the Americans want to drop their bombs.

29. Palestinian, Iraqis and Saudis killing civilians are called terrorists and the whole world is asked to hunt and kill them. But when Israelis, Americans and British kill enormous numbers of innocent civilians including babies, children, old people, sick people and ordinary citizens, they, the killers with their stealth bombers, their helicopter gun-ships, their bombs and rockets, they are not called terrorists. That the peoples of Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan are terrified of being bombed, rocketed and shot at with depleted uranium bullets, does not make the people who terrify these innocent people terrorists. Yet in the English language terrorists are people who cause terror, who terrify, who instil fear in their victims. More non-combatants, civilians, innocent people are killed and will be killed in Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan. And the peoples of Syria and Iran now live in fear because they have been labelled as the Axis of Evil by the warmongers, and may be invaded soon.

30. And all these, the oppression, the killing and the humiliation of the Muslims will go on and on, without let up. They will go on because the Muslims are weak, unlike the Muslims of the past.

31. We can condemn the people who today oppress Muslims with impunity. But that will not stop them. But let us look at ourselves. Are we or have we been following the teachings of the Quran. It is important to find out whether we are in the wrong or not because we can correct ourselves for our own good. We cannot ask our detractors to correct themselves so that we will benefit.

32. The Muslims were strong before because they were the most learned and the most advanced people. The ethnic Europeans were wallowing in the primitiveness of their Dark Ages; superstitious, ignorant and given to warring among themselves.

33. The early Muslims took "Iqraq" literally to heart. "Read" say the first message to Muhammad s.a.w. And the early Muslims read. Reading results in acquisition of knowledge. The injunction was to read. It does not say what to read. At the time of the message being received by the Prophet there was no literature on Islam. To read meant reading whatever was available.

34. The early Muslim scholars obviously read the works of the great Greek scientists, mathematicians and philosophers. They must have learnt the Greek language to be able to translate the work of these non-Muslims scholars. They also studied the works of the Persians, the Indians and the Chinese.

35. The result was a flowering of the sciences and mathematics among the early Muslim scholars. They added to the body of knowledge and developed new disciplines like astronomy, geography and new branches of mathematics, including algebra and algorithms.

36. They introduced the numerals, which enable calculations to be made more simple and limitless.

37. During the time of these great Muslim scientists, physicians, mathematicians, geographers and astronomers the Muslim Ummah built the most advanced civilisation in the world.

38. But around the 15th century the learned in Islam began to curb the study of science, mathematics etc. They interpreted "Iqraq" to mean the study of religion alone. They insisted that only those who study religion, in particular Islamic jurisprudence, would gain merit in the afterlife.

39. The result was intellectual regression of the Muslim Ummah. At that very moment the ethnic Europeans of the Dark Ages decided to acquire the scientific and mathematical knowledge that the Muslims had accumulated.

40. And so just as the Muslims were intellectually regressing, the ethnic Europeans began their renaissance, their rebirth. With the knowledge they

acquired from the Muslims they were able to develop improved ways of producing their needs, in particular the manufacture of weapons.

41. Now the Quran is clear regarding the duty of the Muslims to provide for the defence of the Ummah. The thrust of this verse is obviously the “defence of the Ummah”. But the interpreters stress warhorses and the weapons used during the time of the Prophet. Because of this interpretation Muslims have not made any effort to develop modern weapons comparable with those of their enemies and oppressors. They cannot develop them because they had for centuries neglected or even rejected the study of science and mathematics as being secular and giving no merit for the afterlife. Only religious studies will. Only those who study the religion may be regarded as good Muslims worthy of honour and respect among the community, the Ummah.

42. The Muslims can buy the weapons but their detractors will not sell them those, which can help the Muslims defend themselves against their enemies. That is why today the Muslims are oppressed. They are oppressed because they have not been guided by the Quran due to misinterpretations of its injunction.

43. Many Muslims condemn Mustafa Kamal because he was not a good Muslim. But would there be Muslim Turkey today without Mustafa Kamal. Turkey would be a part of Greece. It is paradoxical that Mustafa Kamal should be the man who saved Islam in Turkey and saved Turkey for Islam.

44. If we think, we must conclude that it is the failure to understand and interpret the true and fundamental message of the Al Quran that has brought on the misfortunes for the Muslim and destroyed the Islamic civilisation.

45. When we are enjoined to read (and acquire knowledge) we limit reading to religious subjects only. When we are enjoined to defend the Ummah we interpret it as keeping warhorses and swords, the weapons of the Prophet.

46. When the definition of the Muslim is simple i.e. “he who bears witness to the oneness of Allah, and to Muhammad as his Prophet”, we attach a huge number of other qualification, thus making all Muslims kafir in the eyes of other Muslims. And because they are kafir then they are not our brothers, and we can fight and kill them, even help their enemies to kill them.

47. When we are told in the Quran that “Allah will not change our unfortunate situation unless we ourselves make the effort to change it” we totally ignore this and instead we merely pray and appeal to Allah to save us, to bring back our glory.

48. If we read the Al Quran in the language we understand and not just recite it without understanding in the belief that reading it would earn us merit in the afterlife, then we will be guided by the Quran in this life and the akhirat. Islam is a way of life. It is not just about sins and punishment. It is about how we should live in order to achieve the good life, to be free from oppression, the humiliation and desecration of our religion, to regain the glory and the acceptance of Islam as the one and only religion and the Ummah as the best of people.

49. It is no good cheating ourselves by saying that although we are suffering and being humiliated but actually we are better off than our oppressors. It is no good saying that we will have a better life in the akhirat. Can we be sure we will be given a place in heaven when we have allowed our religion to be desecrated and the Ummah to be oppressed? Can we be sure of our place in the akhirat when we have clearly disregarded the injunctions of Islam to defend the Ummah and the religion, to create a good life for the believers.

50. We must read and understand the Quran, the basic and fundamental truth and advice contained in it. The Quran is not a talisman to be hanged around the neck for protection against evil, against bad luck. Its verses are not for repeating without understanding. The verses cannot be recited over the water that we drink, or written on leaves to be immersed in the drinking water so we may not contract diseases. The people who sell water over which they had repeated some Quranic verses or immersed some written verses are charlatans, deceivers and nothing more.

51. If we want to save ourselves we must go back to the Quran, to its basic and fundamental teachings, to the substance and not the forms. The Quran is our guide. It really has all the answers to the conduct of our life in this world and for the hereafter, but only, only if we regard it as a guide and not as a magical talisman to be read without understanding, to be a physical protection for us, to overcome our inadequacies and our misfortunes.
