

ABSTRACT

Conceptual View of Islamic Teachings on Natural Disasters, Earthquake and Safety

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This paper by presenting the guiding principle of disaster risk reduction, the key concepts of Islamic teaching, and the views of Islam on disaster and earthquake in particular; intends to correlate between them with the objective of developing an effective disaster risk awareness and preparedness, especially among a religious community, toward risk reduction and safety. The paper also tries to clear the existing misconception of assuming that disasters are due to God's anger, etc. in order to increase people's understanding of and knowledge about disaster-related issues; as a necessary step in the process of disaster risk reduction and improving safety and development.

In ancient times when science was in its infancy, people believed that disasters, especially earthquakes, represented the power of Mother Nature and humans' vulnerability and were dominated by the need to survive amid the ferocity of nature. Today, a new approach is needed in order to change the mentality of traditional communities regarding the concepts that disasters are God's will or expressions of His wrath. It is necessary to clarify misconceptions such as those relating to fatalism and God's will about whether individuals will be saved or sacrificed to disaster, and that mosques and holy places are immune to damage, as was believed during the past earthquakes.

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) is defined as a combination of hazard, vulnerability of the built environment, and human socio-economic and cultural impacts, as well as in terms of a country's level of governance, capacity, preparedness and response to catastrophic events when they occur. The "guiding principles" of DRR can be outlined as: 1) Belief in the facts of nature and existence of natural hazard of the earth; Comprehensiveness; 2) Expert leadership and good governance is essential to the success of DRR programs; 3) Risk reduction should have the objective of sustainable development, but this can only be achieved effectively through collaborative efforts devoted to promoting good management; and 4) Risk reduction requires long-term actions based on consistent policies and backed by tolerance of the slow pace of the implementation.

Key Concepts of Islam which relate to the principles of risk reduction can be outlined as: 1) Submission to the will and guidance of Allah (God) based on cognition, wisdom, belief, faith and revelation, resulting in "good deeds", vitality and happiness; 2) Human deeds and behavior should be based on belief, and belief should be complemented with good deeds; 3) Leadership of wise, elite, and intellect; 4) High value is attributed to group work, social activities, social responsibilities, co-operation and consultation in various aspects of life; 5) God's will (Taghdir and Sonnat Elahi) is based on human deeds and behavior; 6) Human beings do not have any right to harm themselves or others and highest importance is given to respecting and observing the "Human Rights"; 7) Public Supervision (Amr-bil-Maruf); and 8) Sin means violating God's guidance by ignoring facts and knowledge, being negligent or failing to use knowledge; etc. It can easily be seen that many of the key concepts in Islam support the guiding principles of DRR. These concepts are among the best guidance for Muslims towards good quality and safe construction and developments and as a means of stopping negligence in order to avoid seismic losses and earthquake disasters.

The Holy Qur'an as the principal source of religious thought in Islam with its multi-dimensional meanings, is also the principal source of guidance on all aspects of life and can comprehensively be adapted to all times and matters. The term "Earthquake" is mentioned directly in Chapter 99 of the Qur'an; and indirectly in various verses

such as: [7:78](#), [7:91](#), [7:155](#), [7:171](#), [16:26](#), [17:37](#), [17:68](#), [29:37](#), [34:9](#), [67:16](#), [69:5](#), etc. Chapter 101, “Asr” (The Time) has special address to *Belief and Good Deeds*, an action required if people desire to reach success and be rewarded by being safe during natural events.

It should be noted that no statement by the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) ever mentioned that earthquakes or other disasters are expressions of the wrath of God or the result of disobedience or infidelity. Instead, there are many statements that show the need to prepare for disasters and prevent them from happening.

Correlation between Islamic teaching and risk reduction principles: The Papers shows that people by following God’s guidance, can realize themselves and in religious terms, as an ultimate goal, reach heaven. In this world, 'heaven' can be interpreted a productive, safe, healthy, happy and peaceful life. According to this, “belief” and “doing good deeds” can be interpreted in most as follows: 1) *Belief*: believing that our Creator’s guidance is for the best of human performance and better living. People are encouraged by being given free will, awareness and knowledge to follow God’s guidance, which is comprehensive and covers all aspects of life. Believing in wisdom, facts and expertise; as well as accepting, respecting and following spiritual, individual, social and technical laws, rules and regulations. Thus, Islam and Abrahamic religion in general, encourages people to believe in earthquakes as natural phenomena and facts of the Earth and, based on this belief, encourages them to do good deeds; 2) *Doing good deeds*: doing the best acts possible, based on the most correct beliefs and best knowledge. In relation to earthquakes and safety, this means planning and development that are compatible with hazards; obedience to building codes and regulations; following the leadership of experts; using seismically safe construction; and, finally, using knowledge and wisdom to make the most correct use of God’s bounty and nature.

In the case that people perform bad deeds and do not follow the path their punishment is destruction and loss of life, which will result in disaster. In other words, bad deeds that are carried out on the basis of ignorance or negligence and without using appropriate logic, in theological language are called 'Sin'. Thus, losses and disasters mainly result from people's bad, incorrect and inappropriate deeds. This is the simple explanation on the concepts and statements that disasters are resulted from sin. Hell, which is the result of sin, refers to a life with misery, destruction, lack of community development, and so on. Thus, disaster is not God’s wrath or his anger with regard to humanity; it is simply the result of people's bad deeds and failure to follow God’s guidance in all aspects of our lives.

The discussion of the paper can be summarized as: 1) Risk communication and knowledge dissemination should be compatible with people's beliefs and cultures. I believe that the use of religious teaching and knowledge of disaster and development can be an effective way of promoting safety; and 2) Sustainable development and “Vitality” can be achieved through faith, knowledge and the conduct of good deeds. If we reject or ignore wisdom and refuse to use the know-how that God has given us as his bounty, we will do sin and face “disaster”.

Keywords: Islam; Quran; Earthquake; Natural Disasters; Safety; Risk Management; Sustainable Development; Progress