



Al-Risala 1984

December

Editorial

Any conflict has two perpetrators, and there are invariably faults on each side which cause and exacerbate it. It takes two to make a fight. If one party withdraws itself from the region of conflict then the other will remain alone there: it will have none to fight against and the conflict will disappear.

But, on the other hand, if each party waits for peace initiatives to come from the other side before undertaking conciliatory moves of its own, then the mistrust between the two sides will continue to grow. The inevitable result will be escalation of the conflict between them.

Hindu-Muslim communal riots, which have become a regular feature, of Indian life, are an example of such conflict, which can only be ended by unilateral action from one side. There are examples in the life of the Prophet of Islam which show that it is the Muslims who should take this initiative. Worldly rivalry and conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims-means that the latter see Islam, not in its true light, but through the tainted vision of their own prejudice: Muslims are their 'enemies' so they adopt an antagonistic posture towards Islam as well. This is a situation which should be intolerable to Muslims, whose overriding concern should be for the true message of Islam to reach other peoples in all its purity, and in an atmosphere conducive to objective and dispassionate consideration. Seeing that such an atmosphere cannot be generated where there is conflict and mistrust, they should ensure an end to conflicts with other peoples; they should take unilateral steps for peace, without waiting for the initiative to come from the other side.

This is exactly what the Prophet of Islam did at Hudaibiya (6 AH). By refusing to be provoked in the face of harassment from Quraish, and accepting all their demands, he put an end to a conflict which had been raging for twenty years. In doing so he defused the tension which had marked relations between Muslims and their non-Muslim neighbours. The result of his seemingly capitulatory action, as the Qur'an tells us and history verifies, was a 'clear victory' for the Muslims.

If the Muslims are to detonate the ticking bomb of communal riots, as is their duty they can only do so by following the example of the Prophet, and refusing to be provoked, even in the face of provocation from the other side. Failure to do this can only result in further escalation in a conflict which serves only to distort Islam in the eyes of others, especially our adversaries.

THE WORLD HEREAFTER

A fateful leap into the unknown

The time was eight minutes and 27 seconds past 9 o'clock on October 31. All the activities in the palatial residence of the Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, in New Delhi were as usual in full swing.

Peter Ustinov, world renowned actor, director and writer, was sitting on the spacious lawns of Mrs. Indira Gandhi's residence. He was making a film on Mrs. Gandhi, and, along with his entire film unit, he was waiting there to interview her.

The Prime Minister stepped out of her house at No 1, Safdarjang Road. No sooner did she step on the lawn three gunshots were heard. Then came a volley of shots from a sten gun. Two of the Sikh security guards had shot her. She could not utter even a last word. She was immediately taken to AIIMS in a state of unconsciousness and one and a half hours later she was declared dead by the senior doctors attending her.

Peter Ustinov, commenting on this sad occasion, said. "I wanted to ask her how, as a single child, she came to terms with her loneliness."

This was indeed the most pertinent question that could be put to her at that critical moment in her life. But now the question we have to ask is how she, the Prime Minister of a country of 700 million people, is going to face the situation when she finds herself all alone in another world.

Since man finds himself safe and sound amidst family and friends, he blissfully ignores that, at any moment, death can separate him from the props of this mortal world. Then he will be left to wander alone. He will have no one to assist him. How awful that day will be and how ignorant man is of this grave reality which must inevitably come.

Faith in Secularism

Two Sikh security guards, Satwant Singh, and Beant Singh, shot Mrs. Indira Gandhi dead on October 31st, 1984. Both were removed from guard duties at the prime Minister's house, New Delhi, sometime ago. It was Mrs. Indira Gandhi herself who ordered them back on duty only a few days before her assassination. While ordering them back to duty, she said, what would happen to the secular concept of our country if they were removed from duty only because they were Sikhs.

The Times of India, November 1, 1984

Who Will Take Away Man's License to Kill?

Throughout 1984, Iraq has stepped up its attempt to ruin the Iranian economy by cutting off export of oil through the Kharg Island terminal. Hoping to force Iran to negotiate an end to the four-year-old Gulf War, the Iraqi authorities have conducted systematic attacks on international shipping using the Iranian oil terminal. In this they have been considerably assisted by their acquirement of sophisticated Exocet missiles from France. So successful have these missiles been that Aerospatiale – the French manufacturers of the Exocet – considered fit to bring out an advertisement in the London *Economist*, announcing that their product had hit 103 vessels in the Gulf War and disabled at least 47 up to 10 July, 1984.

Dozens of crewmen on these foreign vessels have been killed or injured. The Exocet, as the advertisement omits to say, has disabled and wrecked human life as well as ships.

The reason that Aerospatiale, like the manufactures and distributors of so many other weapons of destruction, consider it fit to advertise the devastating qualities kills of their products, is that they feel there is none to bring them to account for their actions. Everyone knows that killing innocent people, and giving others weapons to kill them is a crime against God and humanity. Yet those who wield political and economic power in this world continue to kill, and even take pride in their action, when it serves their interests. They think that their power gives them a licence to kill.

The human conscience demands that such people be brought to justice; it cries out, "Who is going to take away their licence to kill?" Yet in this world they are never brought to justice. Those who perpetrate these crimes against humanity are given state funerals and buried as 'heroes'. They are condemned and punished only if they happen to be on the losing side.

In a world where the human conscience, and the order of the whole universe, demands justice, it is inconceivable and unacceptable to think that some people should indulge in game of death and destruction and allowed to go without paying for their crimes. There must come a day when the powerful are made powerless, and made to answer for their actions; when those who innocently died at their hands are invited to bear witness against their persecutors. That will be the Day of Judgement, the day when the Owner of all true power, brings justice to the world, and punishes those to whom He gave power as a test, and who mercilessly misused it.

Increasing in Faith

“Observing nature is my religion,” a scientist once reflected. “If any day I don’t discover something new in nature, I feel that the day has been wasted.” If this is the state of one who is absorbed in God’s creation, then how can the state of one who is absorbed in the Creator Himself be any different? Just as the scientist discovers something new in the world of creation every day, so a believer should always be making new discoveries about his Creator – discoveries that increase him in faith. Any day that he does not find something new is like a day that has been wasted; it is as if he has not established contact with God on that day.

Faith is another word for discovery of God. God is a never-ending reality; He has no limit. So discovery of Him is also a never-ending event. Faith that does not grow is not really faith at all; it is just a manner of neglecting God.

If one’s mind is constantly directed towards God, then one will repeatedly experience new manifestations of His glory; time and time again a new divine light will shine on him. Just as God’s virtues are interminable, so a believer’s search for knowledge of God is a journey that never comes to an end.

This fresh knowledge is sometimes expressed in the form of divine states with which one was hitherto unacquainted. Sometimes it surges to one’s lips in the form of words of supplication which one had never conceived before. Sometimes a previously concealed secret of God’s wisdom becomes apparent to one. Sometimes one attains hitherto unknown degrees of proximity to God. Sometimes profound new understanding of truths is inspired within one, which all the words one knows are inadequate to express.

Progress in the Long Haul

In 1782, an Englishman arrived in Glasgow with a wooden printing press. With such paltry resources he began to publish a newspaper entitled the Glasgow Advertiser. The newspaper was later renamed the Glasgow Herald. Two centuries later its daily circulation had risen to 200,000 copies.

What saved John Mennons, the founder of this newspaper, from succumbing to unfavourable and adverse circumstances was his limitless enthusiasm. It more than compensated for his lack of resources. The newspaper is still going strong after a period of two centuries, in spite of serious differences between partners which arose from time to time. It was fortunate that these could always be settled amicably without the work being disrupted.

The newspaper, which was started on a wooden press, is now being printed entirely on automatic machines. The letters are neither composed nor do they undergo the process of metal infusion: they are projected on the plates by laser beam. It is printed and folded automatically. Then it is wrapped in polythene and taken to the despatch department. The whole process is computerized.

It was only because of its continued publication that it could benefit from all the new improved techniques which were developed at different stages. If it had ceased publication after a period of time, all the techniques would have existed, but it would have failed to utilize them.

It shows how the accomplishment of any great work requires two things in particular: limitless enthusiasm and perseverance. Obviously great works can be brought to fruition only with the help of boundless energy, enthusiasm and perseverance. Without the long, and arduous labour which is essential in any such enterprise, the survival of this paper would have been impossible.

Make the most of your experience.

Don't impose suffering on yourself

but when it comes make the most of it.

"What about suffering?" Someone asked Bernard Malamud. "I'm against it," he replied, "but when it occurs why waste the experience?"

Greater than Ka'ba

The prophet of Islam said: "The honour of the believer is greater than that of the Ka'ba."

The value of an action is determined by the amount of sacrifice involved in performing it. The greater the sacrifice, the greater the reward from God.

The Ka'ba is the House of God, hence it has to be revered by all the believers. In the same way every Muslim is required to respect other Muslims. But there lies a great difference between these two actions because of their very nature.

The Ka'ba is made of lifeless stones. It bears no grudge against anyone, it harbours no ill-will towards others, because it has to deal with no one, hence no one has any cause for complaint against it. One does not face any challenge in revering the Ka'ba as no emotions of anger, jealousy or prejudice stop one from showing respect to it, whereas the situation is altered when one comes to dealing with someone like oneself. One is repeatedly faced with so many causes for complaint against others which result in ill-will towards them. Therefore, showing respect to men like oneself demands greater sacrifice. One has to overcome all bad feelings, to bear the losses incurred by others ungrudgingly, to overcome all prejudices voluntarily, to forgive and forget and to move ahead.

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Cooperating with one's rivals is the best way to advance

The British aero engine manufacturers Rolls Royce and the American firm General Electric were until recently keen rivals for the international airplane engine market. In February 1984 these two rivals decided to cooperate with one another and amalgamate their interests. Both companies are expected to reap far-reaching benefits from this move. Rather than compete for every potential client separately, each one will now be able to concentrate on a single important engine market for future sales. Large engines, which both companies were unable to afford on their own, will now lie within their reach. They will also have access to one another's market. By combining their skill and know-how both manufacturers expect to be able to develop a new engine in future.

A Known Provision

The joys which God's true servants will experience in Paradise will be a materialization of the joys they experienced in their worship in the world. In this world God does not come out into the open; the joy that comes from realization of His existence and faith in Him is, accordingly, an abstract one. But in the next world God will manifest Himself in all His glory; the joy that will come from beholding Him will become apparent for all to see.

It is this realization that is the true aim of the Islamic life. All the actions of Islam are just a means towards conscious discovery of God; they are only ways of establishing contact with the Creator. There is more to our relationship with God than us performing some good deeds and God in heaven being pleased with us in return. It is not a superficial and hypothetical relationship of this nature; it is a deep and direct one. The actions of God's servant are, in their outward form, obedience to His commandments; but in reality they are a means of conveyance to a place of communion with the Lord. There, one calls upon Him in secret; one implores and beseeches Him for help; one attaches oneself to Him with arduous devotion; one really feels as if one has cast oneself at God's feet. Discovery of God in this manner is the supreme reality of religion, and all its commandments and injunctions are aimed at achieving this discovery. Whoever discovers God in this world will discover Him in the next world also; but whoever fails to discover God in this world will also fail to discover Him in the next world.

This wealth is God's provision to His believing servants (Qur'an, 20:131). Outwardly, one's fulfillment of God's commandments is in one's own power; one can do so or not as one feels inclined. But the inner states that one experiences when doing the will of God are not in one's own power; one cannot create them. Where, then, do they come from? They are the provision of God without which one's believing personality cannot survive. When the Prophet Zakaria saw this provision in the person of Virgin Mary, enabling her to know God and do His will, he exclaimed: "Where is this from?" "It is from God," she answered (Qur'an, 3:37).

One's actions are the result of one's own effort, and these states are God's reward for good deeds. God does not keep His supreme blessings in reserve; he grants them to us here and now. They descend upon us as soon as we show ourselves to be worthy of them. The sublime spiritual experiences which one feels when God accepts some action are an introduction to the heaven that God has promised those who believe in Him, and do good deeds. They are a fragrance of the garden of paradise which one scents in this world.

Though they cause one to tremble, they are the greatest joy that one can feel. No worldly enjoyment can be compared to them. This in itself is intuitive proof of the fact that these states are a reflection of that supreme divine gift known as paradise. That is why the Qur'an says that the paradise which believers will

enter in the next world will be for them a “known provision” (Qur’an, 37:41). It will not be strange to them; it will be something familiar with which they had become acquainted in the world. “God will admit them to the paradise He has made known to them,” or, as the Prophet put it: “The people of paradise will know their dwellings even better than anyone of you knows his dwelling in the world.”

More engrossed in the Qur'an than anything else

Whenever Umer sent officials on their duties, he would make them promise that they would not ride on horseback, would not eat white bread, would not wear fine clothes, and would not close their door to the needy. If they disputed any of these points, they were liable to be punished. When he had taken this promise, he would despatch them. He would say to any official he was relieving of his duties: "I did not authorize you to take Muslims' blood; nor did I give you license to persecute them, attack their honour and appropriate their property. I appointed you to establish prayer and distribute wealth and revenues among them. You were sent to do justice." Umer also used to tell his officials to remain engrossed in the Qur'an as much as possible, and be sparing in relating traditions of the Prophet (in case a statement should be attributed to the Prophet which he had not made). "And I am with you," he would assure them.

Enter Into Islam 'in Its Totality'

During his recent visit to Malaysia, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan addressed a meeting organized by the National Institute of Public Administration in Kuala Lumpur on July 31, 1984. Following is the text of his speech:

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It is a pleasure to be with you here in Malaysia. I would like to say a few words about Islam, which I have studied for over thirty years.

What is Islam? Quite simply, Islam is the way to become a good person. When one becomes good, in the real sense of the word, then one is good to oneself, to one's family, to one's society, and to all mankind.

The world around us is a perfect world. From tiny atoms to huge galaxies, everything acts so perfectly that we can predict its behaviour. This is because everything in nature obeys the law of God. Likewise, when man obeys the law of God he becomes as perfect as he ought to be. He develops a predictable nature, like everything else in the world.

Islam means submission to God. The Quran tells us that submission to God is the only religion for both man and the universe:

"Are they seeking a religion other than God's, when all creatures in heaven and on earth have submitted to Him, willingly or by compulsion? To Him they shall all return" (3:83)

So Islam means living in harmony with nature, as one ought to, face to face with reality. Man has not created himself, he has been created by God. To live in accordance with reality, then, is to acknowledge the greatness of God and show appreciation of His favours. The emotions of love and fear are inherent in man. He wants something to depend upon, something on which to focus his efforts. If he leads his life in accordance with reality he will focus all his attention on God alone for besides Him, all things are creatures; nothing besides Him has any real power.

Adam is the father of all past, present and future men. A life in accordance with reality, then will be one of kindness to others, as if one were dealing with one's own brothers and sisters.

Everyone has been endowed with a conscience, which favours justice and despises injustice and cruelty. Life in accordance with reality, then, is one of kindness and justice.

Death is bound to come one day. It will deprive everyone of his worldly possessions, so one who lives in accordance with reality will look at the ups and downs of life as transitory and insignificant; he will regard everybody as God's servant, irrespective of worldly status.

When one comes upon the truth one might be disposed to reject it. But one should remember that one day everyone will have to accept truth and falsehood for what they are. One should willingly accept today what one will be forced to accept tomorrow.

The position that Islam occupies in relation to our lives should be an integral, not a supplementary one:

“Take on God’s own dye. And who has better dye than God’s?”

(Quran, 2:138)

Here is an example to illustrate this point. When a stone is dropped in water it descends to the bottom and settles there. It is in the water but separate from it. On the other hand, if dye is put into the same glass, the dye and water combine. The water is not separate from the dye. Both have intermingled in such a way that no one can detect any difference between the two.

The relationship between Islam and a true believer should be like that of dye and water, not of stone and water. Islam should not be just an accessory to a Muslim’s life; it should merge with his whole being; as the Quran says, Islam should be entered into ‘in its totality’ (2:208).

When a person adopts Islam in this manner, it becomes the throb of his heart as it permeates his emotions. It enters his thoughts, moulding his intellect in its own fashion. It becomes the eye with which he sees, the tongue with which he speaks, the hands and feet with which he performs his day to day functions. It takes possession of a person, to the exclusion of everything else. His every statement bears the stamp of Islam and his every action becomes dyed in Islamic colours.

If Islam is like a stone in water then it is not Islam at all. Faith should be absorbed in a person like dye is dissolved in water. Just as the emotions of love and hate are felt by the whole body so, when one adopts Islam in the real sense of the word, it becomes an issue affecting one’s whole existence. The Muslim and Islam become inseparably attached to one another.

By way of introduction to the Islamic way of life, I would like to put some sayings of the Prophet Mohammad before you:

“Let him who believes in God and the Last Day either speak good or keep silent; and let him who believes in God and the Last Day honour his neighbour; and let him who believes in God and the Last Day be generous to his guest.”

“Fear God wherever you are, and follow up a bad deed with a good one and it will wipe it out, and behave well towards people.”

“Righteousness is good-naturedness, and evil is what wavers in your soul, and you would not like people to find out about.”

“None of you truly believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself.”

A man came to the Prophet and said: “Messenger of God, tell me something which, if I do it, will win me the love of both God and men.” The Prophet said: “If you renounce the world God will love you, and if you renounce what people possess they will love you.”

Failing in exams is no reason of fail in life

In 1881 A.E. Houseman failed disastrously in his classical honours exam at Oxford University. He did not even manage to answer many of the questions. The reason for his failure was his dislike of Oxford's approach to the classics, with its emphasis on ancient philosophy. After leaving university he started intense research, according to his own taste and interest, into Latin and Greek – the very subjects in which he had failed at Oxford. He spent all his free time at the British Museum Library, researching manuscript minutiae and carefully correcting errors in the texts of classical authors Ovid and Propertius. He published about twenty five articles in scholarly journals. Just eleven years after his dismal failure at Oxford, he applied for the professorship of Latin at University College, London. His application was accompanied by 17 testimonials – from classicists all over the world – confirming his brilliance as a Latin and Greek scholar. He was granted the post and went on – before his death in 1936 – to assume the professorship of Latin at Cambridge and be recognized as one of the greatest critics of classical texts of all time.

Norman Page A.E. *Houseman: a critical biography* (Schocken, 1984).

Why the Shari'ahs of the Prophets Differ from one Another

Usually people explain the differences between the religions of successive prophets in evolutionary terms. God's religion, they say, was first revealed in a simple, incomplete form and it gradually developed until it took on a complete form. But there are no grounds for such an explanation. It is quite clear from the Quran that the reason for the different forms which God's religion has taken over the ages is the trial of man. No evolutionary process is involved. This can be seen from the following verses:

We have ordained a law and assigned a path for each of you. Had God pleased, He could have made you one nation: but it is His wish to prove you by that which He has bestowed on you, so vie with each other in good deeds. (5:48).

The same thing has been said with regard to the change of the direction of prayer (qiblah) from Jerusalem to Mecca.

We decreed your former qiblah only in order that We might know the Prophet's true adherents and those who were to disown him. It was indeed a hard test, but not to those whom God guided. Each one has a goal towards which he turns. Emulate one another in good works. (2:143,148).

In reality, *shari'ah* – or the form of religion – is a living expression of true faith in God. But when a certain form of religion has been followed by successive generations, it loses its soul. It becomes a conventional system of rituals without any deep connection with the human psyche. When this happens God alters the form of religion; He abrogates the old system so that people can forsake conventional belief for faith which is based on a true awareness and a conscious decision. When God reveals a new religion, it becomes clear who was worshipping God consciously, and who was not. Those who follow convention remain set in their ways; those who follow reality bow to God's will.

When living faith in God degenerates into stagnant ritual, it cannot earn God's pleasure. That is why God has sent successive Prophets to the world, and made the paths that they have ordained for man different. In reality, the religions of all the Prophets were one and the same faith. There is no other reason for the different forms that they have taken except that man be put to the test.

The Only Man in History

“There is no more astonishing career in history than that of the founder of this religion (Islam) and scarcely any man has more profoundly influenced the destinies of the world. He was, of course, favoured by circumstances, but he knew how to turn them to his purposes, and he faced adversity with the determination to wring success out of failure. While he could not have succeeded in another place or at another time, it is tolerably certain that no one could have succeeded at all.”

E.E. Kellet, *A Short History of Religions* (London, 1933) p. 333

“He was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels.”

Dr. Michael H. Hart, *The 100*, New York, 1978

All irreligious forces joined together to defeat the Prophet of Islam. In spite of this fact, his success has no equivalent in human history. This extraordinary victory was achieved by him through special divine help.

God has thus provided a historical example to show people that, finally, only those will succeed who follow the true, divine path: those who tread other paths, shall be left in a state of despair and dejection in the world of God in the life to come.

It is self-destruction not to give one's life and property for the cause of God

The expedition to Constantinople was led by Abdul Rahman, the son of Khalid Ibn Walid. Abu Imran was one of the soldiers. A huge Roman army came out to meet us,' he says. 'A Muhajir broke out from our force and attacked them, causing chaos in their ranks. On seeing this, some of us said that he had, with his own hands, cast himself to destruction. Abu Ayub Ansari was in our army. "We Ansari know more about that verse," he said: "it was revealed concerning us. When God helped His Prophet, and Islam became supreme, some of us Ansar suggested that we take out properties back from the Muhajirs of Mecca. That was when this verse of Qur'an was revealed: 'Give for the cause of God and do not with your own hands cast yourselves to destruction.' Self-destruction, then, is to consolidate one's wealth, and to cease struggling for the faith.

False Rumours and Wishful Thinking

The American astronaut Neil Armstrong on July 21, 1969, became the first man to set foot on the moon. Armstrong continued working for the North American Space Agency until recently, when he took up a job as a university professor.

At the beginning of last year a story about Armstrong was printed in the Malaysian newspaper *Star* (January 10, 1983), and the *Sri Lankan Daily News* (January 29, 1983). The story spread like wildfire throughout the Muslim world. "The world-famous astronaut Neil Armstrong," read the *Star* caption, "was the FIRST MAN to set foot on the moon. He has since become a Muslim and the reason given was that when he first stepped on the moon he heard a sound which was very clear to him and his companions. At that time, he thought his ears were playing tricks on him as he was rather excited and over-awed by his first experience on the moon. When he was sent on a lecture tour to various countries, one of the first places he visited was Cairo, Egypt, and he heard the same sound again. So he asked the Egyptian companion nearest to him what the sound was. He was told that it was Azan, the call to prayer and the glorification of God. He was astounded for that was the same sound and the same words to the best of his memory that he heard on the moon. It was then that he decided to learn something about the religion and finally embraced Islam. As a result of that, he lost his coveted job. But, according to him, he had found God, and nothing else mattered."

On reading these reports, the President of the Islamic Centre, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, wrote a letter to Mr. Armstrong, seeking his verification. In his reply, dated May 5, 1983, Mr. Armstrong categorically denied the truth of the reports. "Dear Mr. Khan," he wrote. "Thank you for the courtesy of your letter. The reports of my conversion to Islam, of hearing the voice of Azan on the moon, and later in Cairo (I have never been in Egypt) are all untrue. Several magazines and newspapers in Malaysia, Indonesia and elsewhere have published these reports without verification. I apologize for any inconvenience that this incompetent journalism may have caused you. Sincerely, Neil A. Armstrong."

The report had also implicated the American government, for it had been stated that on accepting Islam, Armstrong was promptly fired by the U.S. Space Agency. Extensive measures were taken to counter the report. American posts all over the world were told that there was nothing in the story. On May 12, 1983, a televised press conference was held in the American Centre, New Delhi, in which journalists were linked up by telephone directly to Neil Armstrong's office in Ohio so that they could hear his direct denial that he was a Muslim or had been sacked. He further made clear, according to the *Hindustan Times* report (May 13, 1983) that "he had never been exposed to Islamic teachings, nor had he read the Qur'an."

How strange it is that Muslims have not discharged their responsibility to communicate the message of Islam to Armstrong and others like him. Yet they are only too willing to concoct stories about their great religion having conquered, not only the world, but the moon as well. Explaining the extra efforts made to ensure that the rumour was quashed, an official of the U.S. Information ministry said: "A story like this is self-generating. It is intriguing to a Muslim. It can have a long shelf life."

The reason that Muslims are so "intrigued" by stories of this nature is that they make them feel happy in the thought that Islam has conquered the world, and relieve them of any responsibility of achieving that end. What will a people, who have nothing but wishful thinking and shunned responsibilities to offer, say when they come before God?

A commander should keep a watch on his officials

Umer once asked people if he had fulfilled his duty if he appointed to some post a capable man – one whom he considered fit for the task – and then enjoined him to be just. Everyone said that he had. “No,” Umer said, “not until I have gauged his actions to see whether he has done what I told him to do. Whenever Umer appointed a governor in some territory, he would ask delegations that came from there how their ruler was. “Does he care for slaves?” he would ask. “Does he follow funeral processions? Is he kind and understanding towards those who come to his door?” If people said that he showed kindness and consideration towards those who came to his door, and looked after slaves well, then Umer would say nothing. Otherwise he would immediately send someone to relieve the governor of his duties.

Reflections in Ajmer

Ajmer is situated 500 kms south-west of Delhi in the state of Rajasthan. The site of the grave of Sheikh Moinuddin Chishti, it has for centuries been a famous place of ziyarat for Muslims.

Sheikh Moinuddin Chishti was born in the village of Sangar, in the area of Iraq known as Chisht. At the close of the 11th century he, along with Sheikh Fakhruddin Gurdezi, was ordered by his Sheikh, Uthman Haruni, to proceed to India to spread the message of Islam. They left home and family and started off on the long, weary trail to the subcontinent. By the time they reached India, they had gathered forty followers. They settled in the town of Ajmer, where the graves of both Sheikhs are now situated. Hundreds of thousands of people accepted Islam at the hand of Sheikh Moinuddin Chishti during his forty year stay in Ajmer. There is no doubt that his name ranks high among the architects of Islam in India.

It is estimated that over 1 million pilgrims visit the Sheikh's grave every year. During the annual festival (*Urs*), marking the death anniversary of the Sheikh, at least 200,000 people come from all over the world to show their veneration for the saint.

Sheikh Moinuddin Chishti's whole life was one of devotion and dedication to the Islamic cause. Yet those who claim to be his followers do not follow the path set by him. In his death, the saint has come to be known as 'Gharib Nawaz', the Carer of the Poor.

In his life Sheikh Moinuddin Chishti showed what one man, moved by a divine spirit, can achieve for the faith. The failure of his millions of followers to emulate that achievement shows that when the true spirit of religion becomes ritualised, it loses all dynamism and drive; it becomes a means of obtaining the world rather than the Hereafter. Rather than being a discovery of the most profound and compelling nature, which one will sacrifice one's life and property to serve, it becomes a stagnant hereditary doctrine which is a source of self-aggrandisement and complacency rather than self-denial and inspiration in the world.

17 December 1984

Greatest punishment: a heart of stone

Malik Ibn Dinar said that hardness of heart is the worst punishment a human being can suffer.

Responsibility, Not Pride

A renowned Muslim leader delivered a speech in an international conference. In his own words, he was speaking on behalf of the 900 million Muslims living in the world today. Here is an excerpt of his speech:

As they enter the 15th Century Hijra, the Islamic peoples, who have rediscovered their pride in their religion, their great culture and their unique social and economic institutions, are confident that the advent of this century would mark the beginning of a new epoch, when their high ideals of peace, justice, equality of man, and their unique understanding of the universe, would once again enable them to make a worthy contribution to the betterment of mankind.

This is a clear example which shows that more than anything else, Muslims seek to derive pride from their religion. It is this attitude that has nullified all their efforts in the present day and age. Tremendous efforts are being made in the name of Islam in the world today, but all these efforts are being conducted in a proud rather than a responsible manner. It is clear from the Quran that only worldly activities can emanate from a feeling of pride (57:20). Activities which are focused on the life after death emanate from a feeling of servitude towards God (51:56). From pride comes egoism and selfishness, whereas a feeling of servitude results in humility and responsibility. A truly Islamic movement is one which seeks to warn man of God's punishment. But the aim of present-day Islamic movements is worldly supremacy. They have come into being as a result of a feeling of national superiority. Islam is something in which Muslims today take pride; it has ceased for them to be the true path to eternal success. This in itself is proof enough that these movements are nationalistic rather than truly Islamic. The Islam that Muslims are striving for today is a national version of Islam, not the true religion of God. For a feeling of pride is the foundation of national religion, whereas divine religion can only be based on a sense of responsibility.

To talk to a stranger, begin with a remark that penetrates to the core of his interest No one has ever yet discovered a keener happiness than giving pleasure to others.

With Footwear Made of Palm Leaves

Present-day Afghanistan used to be called Sijistan. It had its capital at Kabul, and was ruled by a Turk Raja. He was Buddhist by faith and his family title was Rutbail. In the time of caliph Muawiya, the territory was assimilated into the Islamic empire. At first, Rutbail offered resistance, but eventually he agreed to pay an annual tax of 100,000 dirhams and was granted immunity. For a while he paid his tax regularly: Then he stopped paying. Forces were repeatedly sent to his country, but he refused to capitulate.

During the reign of Yazid Ibn Abdul Malik some representatives of the Caliph went to Rutbail to demand payment of the tax. Rutbail addressed them in the following manner:

“Where are the people who used to come here? They were thin, as if from hunger. They had black marks on their foreheads, and foot wears made of palm leaves on their feet”.

He then refused to pay up, and lived independent of the Islamic empire for a quarter of a century.

The simplicity of the Companions impressed Rutbail more than the grandeur of the Umayyads. The reason for this was that the secret of a person’s ‘strength is inward capability rather than outward appearance. Formerly, people had possessed much more of this inward capability, though they appeared ordinary on the outside.

Strong is the one who has few needs; whose desires are limited; who does not seek fame and luxury; who finds pleasure in being humble, rather than in pretending to be big. Such a person is free of mental complexes, so nothing prevents him from taking the right decision. He is never obstructed by self-interest. He is ready to undergo any sacrifice in order to achieve his goal.

But those who are entrapped in artificial pleasures live bereft of true realization. The unnecessary encumbrances in which they have surrounded themselves prevent them from seeing anything as it is, or associating themselves with it as they should. They live for themselves and forget their goal in life.

Give Nature its Due

Huge stores of water lie under the surface of the earth. Our stay on it can be likened to a small boat floating on the surface of the sea. Just as a sailor's life is all too often at the mercy of the waves, so does the life of land dwellers depend, to a very great extent on subsoil water. One such abuse of nature has recently come to light, in the gradual sinking of Mexico City. The Mexican capital, gigantic and overcrowded and situated 2,000 meters above sea level, is sinking by 9.5 cm per year.

This was detected in 1925, when engineer Robert Gayol, building the flood gates which regulate the city sewage, observed that his work was sinking.

His conclusion broadened: not only were his gates sinking but so was the whole city. The phenomenon had begun long before, probably in the middle of the last century.

The main reason for the sinking is a hitherto unsuspected factor: the over-exploitation of the water layer of Mexico City's subsoil something which is also damaging the whole Mexican valley.

Blissfully unaware of the extent of his dependence, man frequently squanders natural resources to the point of abuse.

How dependent is man's existence on nature, and yet, how reckless he is in his neglect of it!

Recantation at the time of Death

About fifty years ago when European nations dominated the whole world a Christian missionary in Cairo, a Mr. Watson, was asked, "for how long have you been working in this field." "For fifty years," he replied, "How many Muslims have converted so far?, he was asked again. The priest replied, "About one hundred and fifty", he further said, "However, one had to be on guard." The questioner was taken aback. "What do you mean by that." he said. Then the priest replied in these words:

"They are apt to become Christians for material motives. Then at their death they recant."

Stanwood Cobb, *Security for a Failing World*, Bahai Publishing Trust New Delhi, 1971, p. 91.

Too Great a Price

The well-known Indian thinker, Mr. Jayparkash Narain (1902-1979) had turned down the proposal of his candidature for presidentship of India in 1967 because he did not consider it 'a very honourable situation to read speeches prepared by somebody else.

"Please keep me off this. I am not interested even in the highest office. Somebody else would prepare my speech and I would have to deliver it as my own or my government's. I do not consider this a very honourable situation. So please excuse me," he said to his socialist colleague, Mr. Surindernath Dwivedi. No doubt he could not bear to contemplate such limitations of his mental and moral freedom.

Mr. Surindernath Dwivedi has mentioned this interesting reaction of Mr. Jayparkash Narain in his recently published book *"Quest for Socialism."*

Similar was the reaction of the former vice-president of India, Mr. Hedayatullah. After having resigned from vice-presidentship, he remarked:

"I am feeling as free as a bird."

High positions of power have always been objects of envy for the people. However, these coveted seats lose their charm as soon as they come within our grasp. The price we pay for them is our freedom – mental, moral, emotional and physical – and surely renunciation of such freedoms are too great a price to pay for anything so purely material.

21 December 1984

They were obsessed with thoughts of the next world

Hasan Basri saw many of the Companions of the Prophet. This is how he described them in a lecture to his contemporaries: "I met seventy of those who fought at Badr. They usually wore wool. If you were to see them, you would think they were mad. If they were to see the best of you, they would think that these people have nothing to do with religion. If they were to see the worst of you, they would say that these people have no faith in the Day of Judgement. I have seen people to whom the world has less meaning than the dust beneath their feet."

Skin Speech

Man's skin, according to the Qur'an, will testify against him on the Day of Judgement:

“On the Day when God's opponents are gathered together they will be driven into the Fire. So that when they reach it, their ears, their eyes and their very skins will testify to their deeds. ‘Why did you speak against us?’ they will say to their skins, and their skins will reply: ‘God, who gives speech to all things, has made us speak. It was He who in the beginning created you, and to Him you shall all return. You did not hide yourselves, so that your eyes and ears and skins could not observe you. Yet you thought that God did not know much of what you did. It is this illusion concerning your Lord that has ruined you, so that you are now among the lost” (41:19-23).

Until recently the idea of skin being capable of ‘speaking’ was very difficult for man to understand. Recent progress in scientific research, however, has made it much easier to see how this will happen. A UPI news.’ release, printed in *The Times of India* (May 30, 1984), disclosed this startling discovery:

“‘Skin speech’ – communicating through vibrations on the skin offers promise as a future alternative to hearing aids or surgical implants for those with impaired hearing, a speech and hearing scientist has said. Dr Arlene Carney, audiologist at the University of Illinois, said on Monday (May 28, 1984) that ‘skin speech’ involves the use of tactile devices that electronically create speech patterns in vibrations on the skin. Patients receiving the experimental therapy learn to interpret the vibrations and sort them into speech patterns, said Dr. Carney.”

It is well-known that words emitted through the mouth are preserved in the atmosphere in the form of sound waves. This sound actually originates in vibrations, much the same as the vibrations that cause skin speech, which are transmitted in the form of wave motions through a material medium such as air. These waves remain in the atmosphere. Though they cannot be seen, they do not disappear. They are there, and, were the apparatus available, could be played back like a tape on which sounds have been recorded.

If this is the case with vibrations that cause sound speech, then it is clearly true of the vibrations that cause skin speech also. The vibrations are also preserved in the atmosphere. Man, even in this world possesses the ability to play back sounds recorded on a disc or tape, should have no difficulty in understanding this power being extended by God in the next world to cover all vibrations, whether of sound or skin speech, which have been imprinted in the atmosphere in the form of waves.

Man is being tested in this world. No scientific discovery reveals the exact nature of divine truth for, were it to do so, man would have no choice but to accept it: there would be no test involved. However, advances in the field of science do make it easier for us to understand certain concepts, such as skin speech, which was difficult to fathom in the past. If the fast-accumulating evidence in support of truths expounded in the Qur'an is not sufficient to make man take heed, then he will have to wait for actual occurrences before he will come to his senses. But then it will be too late; for then there will be no choice but to listen to the evidence of everything – even our skins – and accept the fate to which it condemns us.

No paradise without giving up self and possessions

Bashir Ibn Khasasiya came to the Prophet to swear allegiance. "To what am I swearing allegiance?" he asked the Prophet. The Prophet stretched out his hand and said: "Bear witness that there is no other god with Allah, and that Mohammad is His servant and Prophet. Pray the five prayers, at their proper times. Pay the poor-due. Fast in Ramadhan, and perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, and struggle for the cause of God." "I will do all this, Messenger of God," Bashir replied, "but two things are beyond me. Zakat is one. To tell you the truth, I only have ten she-camels. My family lives *off* them. They provide us with milk, bear our burdens and carry us. Secondly jihad. I am a nervous person. People say that he who retreats from the battle-field earns the rage of God. I am afraid that if I have to engage in battle, I will panic and flee, thus deserving the rage of God." The Prophet said: Bashir, without charity and jihad, how will you enter paradise?"

The Root Cause of Riots

What is the reason of the senseless manner of Muslims' reaction in the face of provocations? Perhaps we can trace it to their pride psychology. It comes into being when religion is no longer treated as a matter of responsibility, but as a matter of pride. Such an attitude towards religion plays a fair share in contributing to the degradation of the Ummat, the community of believers.

The Qur'an says: "The faithful servants of God are they who walk upon the earth modestly and, when the foolish ones address them, answer: peace." (25:63) However, the attitude is reversed when religious teachings cease to inspire people to do good deeds and a moral decline sets in. People then become proud and haughty. Whether or not they act upon the teachings of their religion, they believe that they continue to be the chosen people of God. Their attachment to their religion is reduced to lip service: it exists in theory but not in practice; in the outward form but not in spirit. When religion serves only to show one's superiority over others, a high degree of moral perversion has been reached.

People hold their heads high and declare that they are the upholders of a religion which has retained the pure and original form of monotheism. However, they contradict themselves by manifesting such reverence for personalities both alive and dead as should be accorded only to the Lord, their God. They take pride in saying that Islam teaches one complete equality but they continue to discriminate between man and man. They are the first to pronounce in public that Islam exhorts one to do good and shun bad in all circumstances, but in private they disregard this. If their attention is drawn to this contradiction in their words and deeds, they will turn hostile to anyone daring to criticize them.

They take immense pride in describing the sublime character of the Prophet, for instance, his resistance to provocation; yet they themselves become annoyed about quite trivial matters and even justify their negative attitude by asking why they should not react in the face of provocations.

A man has done us a wrong. Are we to wait for him to ask our forgiveness? No. He may never ask pardon and then we shall never forgive, which is evil. Let us simply say: "It does not exist."