



Al-Risala 1984

October

Editorial

There is a substantial body of opinion in support of the view that crime results from poverty – once poverty is eliminated, crime will also disappear. But this theory is belied by the continually ascending crime figures reported from the affluent western world. In the U.S., for instance, one in three families were victims of a crime and a U.S. citizen was murdered every half hour during 1983, according to a survey conducted by the Justice Department. This is despite the fact that America was, during that time, experiencing renewed economic growth. If crime was the result of poverty then we would be seeing the crime rate going down in wealthy countries like America; whereas in fact quite the opposite is the case.

The truth of the matter is that crime is not the result of poverty; it is the result of man's freedom in this world. We had a good illustration of this in the resignation, at the beginning of August 1984, of a High Court judge in Japan, Mr. Tsuyosni Matsunaga, who had been caught shoplifting two books worth 15 dollars. Undoubtedly Mr. Matsunaga could have paid for the books had he so desired; but he decided to steal them, acting, as he told Supreme Court officials who questioned him, "on impulse".

Like Mr. Matsunaga, everyone is free to act "on impulse" in this world. If people let their impulses draw them in the wrong direction, then the inevitable result is crime. Crime can only be eliminated, then, by man adopting a belief which curtails his freedom of action and compels him to lead a disciplined life.

Human laws cannot perform this function, because there is no way of ensuring that they are fully enforced. However just a legal system may be, and however stringently its laws are applied the criminal option will still remain open; it will still be "worth a try" for one who deems crime worthwhile in the first place.

Only if people make themselves accountable to God rather than man can crime come to an end. God's justice is both complete in form and total in application. If one becomes conscious of the fact that there is no escaping reward or retribution for one's deeds, then one will use one's freedom, not to act as one likes, but to choose right and relinquish wrong. Man resorts to crime, not because he is deprived of material wealth, but because he is deprived of the spiritual wealth of knowing God. Only if he regains this wealth can the upward trend in crime be reversed.

The Message of the Qur'an

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

"Enter this city," We said, "and eat where you will to your heart's content. Make your way reverently through the gates saying: "Forgive us." We shall forgive you your sins and bestow abundance on the righteous.' But the wrongdoers perverted our words and we let loose on them a scourge from heaven as a punishment for their misdeeds. When Moses prayed for water for his people, We said to him: 'Strike the rock with your staff.' Thereupon twelve springs gushed from it, and each tribe knew their drinking-place. We said: 'Eat and drink of that which God has provided and do not corrupt the land with evil.' 'Moses,' you said, 'we will no longer put up with this monotonous diet. Call on your Lord to give us some of varied produce of the earth, green herbs and cucumbers, wheat and lentils and onions.' 'What?' he answered, 'Would you exchange that which is good for that which is worse? Go back to one of the cities. There you shall find all that you have asked for.' Shame and misery were stamped upon them and they incurred the wrath of God; because they disbelieved His signs and slayed His Prophets unjustly; because they were rebels and transgressors. (2: 58-61)

God bestowed special blessings upon the Jewish people. They should have shown their gratitude by remaining obedient to Him, but they did quite the opposite. They were given possession of a great city and told to enter it – not in a vainglorious manner – but in humility and repentance; but instead they started rejoicing in their victory. Divine provision was given to them in the form of manna and quails so that, free from the struggle for a livelihood, they would be able to devote themselves entirely to carrying out God's commandments; but they took to demanding spicy, cooked foods instead. Beyond the basic necessities of life, they sought to indulge in worldly luxury. So insensitive did they become that even clear signs of God could not melt their hearts. They opposed and even killed those servants of God who rose to admonish them. The reason for the Jews' heedlessness was that they thought salvation was their national right, whereas God will not judge anyone on an ethnic or hereditary basis. Jews will be judged according to the same divine law as Gentiles. Heaven is for those who prove themselves worthy of it by their actions; it is not the monopoly of any clan or community. Man's harmony with nature comes from his leading a life of thanksgiving, humility and continence; by remaining steadfast in the face of adversity. Ingratitude, hot-headedness, pride and greed spread only evil in the land, and are a deviation from the natural order established by God.

Believers, Jews, Christians and Sabeans – whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does what is right – shall be rewarded by their Lord; they shall have nothing to fear or to regret. (2: 62)

Four communities are mentioned in this verse: Muslims, who are followers of the Prophet Mohammad; who follow the Prophet Moses; Christians, who maintain their allegiance to the Prophet Jesus; and

Sabeans, who claim to adhere to the teachings of John the Baptist, the Prophet Yahaya. The last-mentioned sect resided in Iraq in ancient times, but is now extinct. They were people of book, and offered their prayers facing the Ka'aba in Mecca.

Here the Muslims have not been mentioned separately, but alongside other communities associated with prophets. This means that as ethnic groups all are equal in the sight of God, no community is inherently superior to any other. Only true belief and righteous actions can earn a person salvation. This is a rule that applies consistently to every community. No one, whether he calls himself Muslim, Jew, Christian or Sabean, is exempt from this rule. There is no special status with God on the basis of belonging to a particular community. The only ones whom God elevates to a high rank are those who have sought to mould their own lives according to the scheme of God.

The lives of those who associate with a prophet during his lifetime are always based on true belief and righteous actions. At that time certain people hear the Prophet's call. Their spirits are moved by message. An intellectual revolution takes place within them, filling them with new resolve. Their whole pattern of life changes. Whereas previously they had been guided by personal desires, they now base their lives on the teachings of God. These are the ones who can truly call themselves followers of the prophets, and these are the ones to whom the prophets give good tidings of eternal blessings in the next world.

The situation changes, however, as time goes on. For the generations that follow, religion becomes a kind of national heritage. Tidings which had been given on the basis of faith and righteous actions come to be considered the result of ethnic affiliations. People reckon that they have a special relationship with God that others do not enjoy: one who belongs to a particular community is sure to be saved, notwithstanding the standard of his faith and deeds; paradise is for "us", hell for "them".

But God does not have a special relationship with any particular community. He has regard solely for man's thoughts and deeds. In his presence people will be judged according to the manner in which they themselves have acted, and not on the basis of the group of which they belonged.

And when We made a covenant with you, and raised the Mount above you, saying: 'Hold on to that which We have given you firmly and bear in mind its precepts, that you may guard yourselves against evil.' Yet after that you turned away, and but for God's grace and mercy you would have surely been among the lost. You have surely heard of those of you who violated the Sabbath. We said to them: 'You shall be changed into detested apes.' We made them an example to their own generation and to those who followed them, and a lesson to the God fearing. (2: 63-66)

A covenant was made with Moses' people that they would faithfully carry out the Ten Commandments. The Talmud tells how, at this time, God turned the Mount upside down on top of them and told them either to accept the teachings of the Torah, or be destroyed there and then. The same is the case with everyone who embraces true faith. To have faith is to make a contract with God that one will live and die in accordance with His will. What a grave contract this is. On the one hand there is man – a tiny,

helpless speck in God's world – and on the other, God, whose might upholds the universe. If man fulfills his contract he will be granted God's eternal blessings. But if he turns away from the contract he has made, he is in grave danger of being cast into hell-fire, never to emerge again.

Everyone who believes in God should go through the same experience as Moses' people. Everyone who ties himself to the contract of faith should live in trepidation of breaking his contract, and bringing catastrophe down on himself as a result.

Sometimes those entrusted with the law of God go astray by contradicting it in practice, while finding words to prove that they are following it to the letter. The Jews, for instance, were commanded to keep holy the Sabbath day, and refrain from worldly pursuits on that day. But they violated it and went about their work on the Sabbath as on any other day. Furthermore, they sought to justify their actions and make out that what they were doing conformed to the will of God. This audacity incurred God's displeasure and they were turned into apes. Whenever one turns against the law of God one is putting oneself on a par with animals who follow no code of ethics. Those who play games with divine law, then should fear being deprived of their human dignity, and being debased to the level of animals as was the case with Jews.

Everything is Wonderful

The umbrella as we know it today was first manufactured in London in 1749. This is how one person described the new invention at the time: “When opened it was like a small tent, and when shut it was all curiously jointed and would fold up to the length of a man’s hand.”

At the beginning of the 20th century, a hand pump was installed for the first time in one Indian village. When it was operated, and water started gushing out from beneath the ground, a village woman exclaimed: “Only death has defeated man.” What she meant was that man can do anything, only he cannot control death.

Two hundred years ago, umbrellas and hand pumps appeared extraordinary. Not, however, to the modern man. He does not view such things as out of the ordinary, the reason for this is that now they have become familiar objects. Man has been looking at them for ages and they have lost their novelty. However, extraordinary a thing may be, when it becomes familiar then it is taken for granted; it no longer arouses any astonishment.

So it is with the objects of God’s creation. Everything that exists in this world – be it a vast ocean or a tiny leaf, a dark particle or a radiant sun – is wonderful beyond words. But, from the time of his birth into the world, man sees these things, day in and day out. From continuous exposure, they cease to arouse any astonishment. But these very things, which man looks on without wonderment, would cause him unbounded amazement if he was to see them suddenly, for the first time.

This is man’s test in the world – to see a tree and look on it as the first tree: to see the sun shining, and look at it as if he is seeing it for the first time; to hear a bird as if it was the first bird that ever raised its voice in song.

Observing the Universe

The Quran is a book of cosmic knowledge, a dictionary which defines the true meaning of what we see in the world around us. The Quran says that “He (God) ordains all things. He makes plain His revelations.” (13:2) He ordains all things in that He manages the universe; He makes plain His revelations in that He explains its relevance in the Quran.

One may look at the universe and think that it is born of chance. Not so, the Quran corrects one: it is the conscious work of a conscious being; it has not been created in vain. (3:191).

One looks at the system of cause and effect which functions in the world. It appears like an automatic machine, a self-made system with no need of an operator. But the Quran tells one that it is operated by God, who sends His angels to maintain and sustain the world. (13:11)

One sees certain similarities between successive forms of life, and thinks that all species are the result of an evolutionary process. But the Quran puts one right. The universe has a creator, it says, and all things have come into being through His creation. (2:29, 6:73)

Observing the universe, one cannot fail to be struck by the wonderful works of art, the ingenious displays of consummate skill, which lie before one. There are atoms, dancing around within matter. Two particles – without life – come together to mould a third object – a new life. Stars revolve in space, without the slightest deviation from their set speed. Tiny seeds are transformed into luxuriant trees. Life in all its multiple forms seems like a torrent surging all around us, all these events, and many more, are happening in the universe, but they are happening silently. No cosmic event defines itself. Nothing speaks to man, revealing to him its inner significance.

Seeing this, man thinks that perhaps the universe is a collection of dumb masterpieces. Once again, the Quran comes to his rescue, telling him that the world, in all its manifold vitality, is not without purpose. There will come a time when everything will be revealed in all its meaning, when a needle will be lodged on the record of the universe, and music will emerge from its hitherto silent groves. For every vision there is a horizon in this world, but when the truth comes to light it will illuminate all things. All man's questions will be answered. He will take up the place which, in relation to reality, is rightfully his.

We Deserted God so He Deserted us

If there is one thing that whole Muslim world is united on, it is the Palestinian issue. This has been true since the partition of Palestine in 1947. There were 40 billion Muslims in the world then. Newspapers and posters the world over proclaimed the readiness of each and everyone of them to wrest the prize of the Holy Land from Israel. Today there are at least 90 billion Muslims the world over. Ask anyone of them what is the most crucial issue facing the Muslims. Almost invariably the reply will be: "the Palestinian question."

And the Muslims' anguish over this issue is not limited to words: many have actually laid down their lives in the attempt to free Palestine; millions of petro-dollars have poured into the machinery of the PLO. But what has the result of all this been? In short, the borders of Israel, instead of being reduced, have expanded on every front; the influence of Jewish state extends well beyond these borders; the PLO has been banished from the territory surrounding Israel, thus losing any power to influence events.

It is time for us to ask one all-important question: Why is it that in spite of all this financial and human support, the Muslims remain unsuccessful in their objective of freeing the Holy Land? There is one reason alone for this: The Muslims have not performed the task that God delegated to them. God had promised that He will help the Muslims in this world and the next, but only on one condition: they perform the duty to God that is required of them as Muslims. If they desert this duty, then surely God will desert them; they will be worthy of His anger, not His succour.

What, then, is the task? It is that Muslims should communicate the message of God to all nations of the world. This is not a task that has to be performed on a national level; it is one that must spring from the depths of every individual's consciousness. It is not a function that is enacted for political or economic ends; it is one that must be done for the sake of God and reward in the hereafter alone. God has created man to put him to the test. We have only one chance to prove ourselves. After this life on earth, God will bring all mankind before Him in the next world. There, He will reward us according to our actions. Some will be admitted to heaven and others will be condemned to hell punishment.

Though God knows well what His servants do, He has laid down a certain method for the distribution of divine justice; He has laid down that people in every age should arise from among mankind itself to awaken others to the coming of the Day of Judgement. Those who communicate the message of God to other nations of the world will be appointed as witness over them in the next world. They will testify before God as to who accepted His message and who rejected it. God will judge man according to their testimony.

The Muslims, as bearers of the true, authentic divine scripture, are God's witnesses on earth. It is their duty to convey the word of God to other nations. Their real crime has been to forget their true status in life, and fail to present themselves before others as God's witnesses on earth. The method that God has appointed for delivering justice to the world necessitates that Muslims bear witness to the truth. If they do not fulfill this role, then they have not fitted in with God's scheme. Thus they have been relegated to the position of offenders in God's sight. How, then, can they hope for His succour?

The Palestinian question, as well as other problems affecting the Muslim community, can be solved if the Muslims' take up once again their duty as a community. Only if they help the cause of God will God help them. (Quran, 47:7). If they desert His cause, then they can only expect to be deserted by Him in return.

Spending of what one has earned with one's own labour

Someone said to Uthman that rich people like him were able to perform more good deeds than others. They could give charity, perform pilgrimage and spend their wealth for the cause of God. "Are you jealous of us?" Uthman asked him. "I am indeed," he replied. "By God," Uthman said to him, "the one dirham that a person spends from his own earnings is better than a thousand dirhams extracted from a great stock of capital."

Once in a Century

On an early summer's morning, in late July 1984, an earthquake shook large portions of Britain. Measuring 5.5 on the Richter scale, it was the most powerful tremor felt in Britain for a century: the last comparable earthquake rocked the eastern country of Essex in 1884.

The latest earthquake affected the western part of the land. Its epicentre was in the little inhabited mountain region of Snowdonia in North Wales, but it was felt across a wide area from North Ireland to Leicestershire, and from North Lancashire to Bristol.

Earthquakes are a very rare occurrence in the British Isles. Usually the ground rests firm beneath people's feet. But sometimes, once in a while, it is shaken. Thus God shows mankind His power. Under what miraculous conditions he has set the ground in place! Resting on molten rock, and whirling around space at a phenomenal speed, it is nevertheless firm. God, who is responsible for this marvellous feat of creation, is quite able to shake the very foundations of the earth.

When man remembers this, he humbles himself before the Lord; he sees his true position in the world – that of God's humble servant. But one who feels the earth shake, and is not moved into submission to God, will need to feel the final earthquake that heralds the Day of Judgement, to be shaken to his senses.

People who are alive to God's silent but poignant message in nature, humble themselves before Him when signs like earthquakes manifest themselves. It is such people who will respond positively to the call of Islam. For when man's inner nature yearn for submission to the Lord, Islam is there to put it into faith and action; when man hears God's call in nature, the Quran is there to decode that message, to put it into words.

There are many people in the world who are yearning for Islam in this way. Relating the incident on BBC Radio, Tim Richards had this to say on the weekly programme, "The Week in Wales":

"I think we are all much humbler as a result (of the tremor), and more respectful of nature."

If the message of Islam is addressed to such people in its purity, then they will surely react to it as they react to the message of nature. For the two messages are the same. Islam, the religion of submission to God, will make them humbler; it will increase them in respect for God, as well as nature.

Updating the Hotline

Enmity between Russia and the U.S. has grown unabated since the Second World War. Except for a short spell of detente in the 1970's the cold war between the two countries has become more and more chilly. Between them, they have amassed a stockpile of nuclear weapons amounting to about 15,000 megatons. In a matter of minutes, missiles positioned to strike key targets in the adversary's land, can reach their targets. A slight misunderstanding, then, between the two super powers, could land them in a conflict which would raze their cities to the ground before anyone knew what had happened.

So, while America and Russia increase their stockpile of nuclear weapons at a rate of the equivalent of one Hiroshima bomb (12.5 kilotons) every 30 seconds, at the same time a hot line has operated between the two countries for the last twenty years. This hotline is used in emergencies, to convey important information that could prevent any possibility of an accidental nuclear war between the two super powers.

Now, with the addition of medium range Cruise and Pershing missiles by the Americans in Europe, and SS-20's on the Soviet side, able to carry warheads to their targets in as little as 5 minutes, a need has been felt to modernize the hot line. In July 1984 a Soviet delegation visited Washington to negotiate a settlement on this modernization. The present system consists of telex machines with a speed of over 60 words a minute it is now proposed to introduce the latest high speed equipment, which will be able to send, according to a U.S. state department source, "pictures, graphics and a whole page of prepared text in just one second."

Distrust between the U.S. and Russia has reached almost paranoic levels, with each side unwilling to even slow their obsessive accumulation of weapons, already present in sufficient quantities to destroy the world several times over. Yet, at the same time, the two countries go to meticulous levels to avoid the outbreak of war. For they know that war would mean the destruction of all the prosperity they have worked for, all the progress they have achieved. This is sign of maturity in a people – to go to the utmost ends to avoid hostilities, even with their enemies. It is nations who have not learned this secret of life fight on the slightest pretext, and then find no way out of the conflict in which they have embroiled themselves.

Overcoming Handicaps

A dancer from South India, Sudha Chandran, was only sixteen years old when she broke her right leg in an accident on May 2, 1981.

She was immediately taken to a local hospital. Without taking necessary preliminary precautions, such as cleaning her wound and administering anti-tetanus injections, the doctors put her leg in plaster from thigh to toe. As the pain increased, her parents shifted her to a hospital in Madras. When the plaster was stripped off, it transpired that her leg had begun to blacken: a clear indication of infection had reached the bone and gangrene had set in. The doctors did all that they could, but her leg could not be saved. On June 6, 1981, it was amputated three inches below the knee. .

Sudha's unbounded love for dancing had not abated. "I want to dance," she used to cry in anguish. "Will I ever dance again?"

She was fitted with a modern artificial leg, known as the "Jaipur foot". The inventor of this foot, Dr P.K. Sethi, happened to meet Sudha's teacher, who told the doctor of his pupil's ardent and undying passion for dancing. The doctor replied: "Sudha would be able to dance like anyone with normal limbs. Only one would have to be tough to put in the extra effort and bear initial pain."

When Sudha learnt of this, she immediately readied herself for the initial pain. She resumed her pursuit in earnest, and by putting in extra effort, she once again perfected her act. Her first post-accident performance was in Bombay on April 1, 1984. Dance critics, who had seen her perform before the amputation, said that she was dancing better now than before, and that it was difficult to tell which leg was artificial.

One may be beset by most grievous handicaps in life, but it is always possible to rise above one's handicap, as Sudha Chandran did, and emulate or even surpass the success of others. One must be ready, however, to endure some "initial pain"; one must be willing to put in some "extra effort" to achieve one's goal.

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.

– Hadith

The Greatest News

An old acquaintance of mine, with a master's degree in science, is now a civil servant in Delhi. Once, I was out for the whole day. On returning home, I was told that this gentleman had called to see me several times during the day. Just at that moment the doorbell rang. I opened the door and there he was again, with a smile on his face. "I have come to give you some good news," he said: "I have been promoted, and my salary has been increased by one hundred rupees a month."

It struck me that if one has some important news to tell, then one cannot hide it. Tell it one must, even if it involves searching for a listener. If one buys a new house or a new car, then one instinctively wants it to be a focus of attention. If it is not brought up in conversation, then one will somehow bring the topic round to the cars or houses, just so that one's new purchase may receive a mention. This is true of everyone, without exception. It is only human nature that one should seek to tell one's important news to others.

What a mass of information there is clogging the atmosphere nowadays. Everyone has some message to convey to others. But in all this confusion, there is no one seeking to convey the message of eternal life; there is no one anxious to break the news of salvation and damnation in the world to come. All people have to talk about are worldly matters; no one has time for matters pertaining to eternal life. This means that no one knows the meaning of eternal life – no one has that news to tell – for if they did they would never be able to keep it to themselves. Indeed, so critical is the importance of this matter that no other news would seem worth telling. They would expend all their time and energy in telling people about the world to come. They would make it their prime task in life to inform others of the dangers of hell-fire, and the joys of paradise. If one knows there is going to be an earthquake in a few moments, or a volcano is about to erupt, then one can think of nothing else; one leaves all other matters aside and talks only of the dreadful fate about to descend. Yet speakers make their speeches, and writers write their lines, but their words do not contain mention of man's coming before the Lord to be judged. It appears that they do not even know of the coming of that fearful day.

People's minds are occupied by matters – political, social and economic – of individual and national concern. They experience these things in the world about them; the effect of these matters is there to be felt. That is why they consider them important and worth talking about. But the greatest issue facing man is the Day of Judgement. One cannot actually see it, but no future event exceeds it in importance. It is the matter most worth talking about, the greatest news that anyone can hear.

The Law of Nature

Harry Emerson Fosdick has explained one fact of life in these words:

“No steam or gas ever drives anything until it is confined. No Niagara is ever turned into light and power until it is tunnel-led. No life ever grows until it is focused, dedicated, disciplined.”

(Living Under Tension, by Harry Emerson Fosdick.)

There is but one law of nature, which applies to both animate and inanimate objects. It is that there is a price to be paid for every end in life: without paying that price, nothing can be achieved.

In this world one has to sink before one can rise; one has to resign oneself to loss before one can gain, to backwardness before one can advance; one has to be able to accept defeat before one can claim victory.

The world in which man lives has been created by God, not by man himself. This may appear to be a simple fact, but it is one that man usually forgets in his everyday life. Since, we are living in God's world, we have no alternative but to understand His laws, and follow them. There is no other way we can make a place for ourselves in the world.

Those who wish to advance and be successful in life without passing through the necessary stages, will have to build another world for themselves – one which satisfies their own requirements; for in the world that God has created their dreams can never come true.

The Example of the Prophet

At the time of the Prophet Mohammad there was a certain Musailma Ibn Hubaib who hailed from Yamama and falsely claimed to be a prophet of God. In the year 10 AH he sent two emissaries to the Prophet bearing a letter from him, with the following message:

From Musailma, the prophet of God, to Mohammad, the Prophet of God. Peace be upon you. I have been made your partner in prophethood. Half of the country of Arabia belongs to us, and half of its belong to the Quraish; but the Quraish tend to encroach on our territory.”

When Musailma’s envoys came before the Prophet, and the letter was read out, the Prophet asked them what they had to say. They replied that all they wanted to say was contained in Musailma’s letter. “If it weren’t for the fact that envoys must not be harmed,” the Prophet told them, “I would have had you both killed.” He then dictated the following letter to Musailma:

In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful. From the Prophet of God to Musailma, the liar, may peace be upon him, who follows divine guidance. The earth is God’s; He gives it to those whom he chooses of His servants. Happy shall be the lot of the righteous.

There are two lessons to be learnt from this episode. For one, it provides a comparison between a true and a false prophet. Musailma’s letter is quite clearly that of a false prophet, for it makes nothing but material claims, whereas the Prophet’s letter is quite clearly that of a true one, because it speaks only of the realms of God.

The other thing we can learn from the example set by the Prophet is that envoys of other nations should not be killed or harmed, even if they have committed the most heinous crimes. They should simply be sent back to their homelands. The Islamic procedure in this matter is the same as the internationally accepted one.

Among the words people obtained from the First Prophecy are: If you feel no shame, then do as you wish.

– Hadith

The Final Curtain

Richard Burton was born in a small village in south Wales, the son of a coal-miner. From these humble beginnings he rose to the highest pinnacles of fame. In a career spanning just over thirty years he conquered all the main centres of the theatre and cinema world – the Old Vic in London, Stratford upon Avon, Hollywood and Broadway. After his performances in the Shakespearian dramas Henry V and Othello in the mid 1950's there had never been any doubt, as Kenneth Hurren wrote in The Guardian, "that Burton was potentially the greatest actor of his generation." His brilliant career was cut short on August 5, 1984, when he died of a cerebral haemorrhage in a Geneva hospital at the relatively early age of 58.

He died with one cherished ambition unfulfilled. It had been his intention to play King Lear, a major Shakespearian role, in New York. As he said in a BBC radio interview, he felt that this was a duty that he owed to Wales, his native land:

"I have to play Lear as a kind of obligation. I am, after all, the kind of authentic dark voice of my tortured part of the world, Wales, and I have to play Lear because Lear is the only Welshman of any interest that Shakespeare wrote about. Lear, when he lets off steam, when he really lets go, is utterly Welsh. Hamlet is not. Hamlet is English but Lear is a Welshman."

But, as Kenneth Hurren writes:

"He had left it too late. Perhaps, given his state of health, even had he lived to play it, it would still have been too late."

(The Guardian Weekly, August 12, 1984)

This is true, not only of Richard Burton, but of all of us in this world. We enter the world from the most humble of beginnings. During our lives, we rise to varying stages of power, wealth and fame. But, however much we achieve, there is always some cherished ambition that remains unfulfilled. The words of the Prophet Mohammad, may peace be upon him, ring entirely true in this regard:

"If a person has two pits full of treasure, he will desire a third. The only thing that can ever fill him is earth. But God relents towards those who turn to him."

(Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim)

Only if we focus our ambitions on the world after death can our ambitions find fulfillment.

The Last Leg of the Journey

At 29,028 feet (8848 metres) Mount Everest is the highest peak in the world. The first serious attempt to conquer Everest was made by an Englishman, Maurice Wilson, in 1934. But his assault on the mighty mountain ended in failure: what he considered to be the climax of his life turned out to be an anti-climax.

A veteran of the First World War, Maurice Wilson was so eager to stand on “the roof of the world” that he forsook his successful family business in pursuit of this aim. He expended all his capital on a secondhand aeroplane in which he made the six thousand mile journey from England to India, finally landing in Purnea, on the Nepalese border. Refused permission to proceed any further in his aircraft, he sold it and continued his journey towards Everest by way of Darjeeling and Tibet.

As he approached the last leg of his journey, all he had with him was a small tent, some rice, an automatic camera and a few other minor items. But he kept on climbing until he reached the height of 19,500 feet. April 21, 1934 was to be his 36th birthday. He planned to make the day even more memorable by standing on the summit of Everest on that day. With a few days remaining, he wrote these words in his diary: “Only 13,000 feet more to go. I have the distinct feeling that I’ll reach the summit on April 21”.

Soon after writing these confident words, a violent storm overtook him; the savage Himalayan weather conditions prevented him from climbing any further. He was forced to descend to his previous base. He was never to continue his climb. No one knows what happened to him next, but when the Sherpa guide Tenzing Norgay was climbing on the mountain one year later, he found Maurice Wilson's body and next to it his diary. The words that he had written a few days prior to his birthday were the final words he ever wrote. Maurice Wilson wanted to take his own picture on the summit of Everest. The eye of his automatic camera, he hoped, would capture his moment of triumph. But on April 21, there was no Maurice Wilson to rejoice in his own triumph, and no camera to witness it.

The saga of Maurice Wilson is, in altered form, the saga of everyone in this world. Everyone considers himself to be ascending towards the peak of good fortune; but in reality he is proceeding towards a destination where only death awaits him.

Some live only to cherish ambitions of success in this world, and die without seeing their dreams reach fruition. Sometimes the very objects of one's desires elude one in this world. And if one finds what one seeks, it is the opportunity to derive full satisfaction from one's finding that eludes one. Finders, then, are no better off than losers. Anyone who seeks the world is bound to lose out in the end. This is an undeniable fact of life, but few are those who realize it.

How bankrupt man is, but how wealthy he considers himself to be. How uncertain life is, but what trust man invests in it. Man is proceeding inexorably towards the unknown country that lies beyond death, but he reckons that he can build success for himself in this world. How ignorant are those who consider themselves wise in the ways of the world. What failures are those who consider themselves among the highly successful.

18 October 1984

The setbacks of life can be a blessing in disguise

On August 9, 1984, an Iranian airbus was hijacked to Rome. One of the 294 passengers was a baby, Nasifem Porham, from Tehran. On release, all the passengers were given a routine medical checkup. When Nasifem's turn came, it was found that she suffered from a serious heart malformation needing an immediate operation. An Italian doctor said that the hijacking of the aircraft had probably saved the baby's life, for her ailment had been unknown before she was released from the plane. The operation was expected to be performed in Rome by Italian doctors.

18 October 1984

The most powerful man in the world powerless before the weakest creature

On the night of Sunday, August 30, 1984, a chirping cricket invaded the bedroom of Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Reagan. Both the First Man and Lady were awoken by its sound, but though Mr. Reagan went back to sleep, his wife Nancy could not. Thinking that the cricket must be hiding in some plants, White House custodians removed them from the room, but at 4 a.m. on Tuesday night, the cricket once again raised its chirping sound, and again Nancy Reagan could not get back to sleep. Only when the radiator vents were taken apart and sprayed with insecticide did the cricket fail to reappear, but it had left its mark: expecting to hear the cricket again, the First Lady stayed wide awake.

Our Efforts that Backfired

In 1982 Arthur Scargill was elected president of the National Union of Mineworkers, Britain's oldest and most illustrious industrial union. A revolutionary left-wing socialist, his overriding aim since assuming office has been to use his union as a tool for destabilising the conservative government of Margaret Thatcher. He has made repeated attempts to organize a national strike of the mineworkers which would succeed in bringing down the government, as happened with Edward Heath's government in 1974. But he has never been able to gain the 55% support of his union required for strike action. Unable to achieve his aims by democratic means he then resorted to letting areas which support his policy – like Yorkshire and Scotland – picket other areas, thus forcing them to strike whether they like it or not. Though a ballot showed that a massive majority of miners opposed a national coal strike, strike action was imposed on them, in March 1984, by the leadership and militant minority that supports its policies.

The first victim of Mr. Scargill's strategy has been his own union. Bitter antagonism has developed between those who resisted the strike, and those who supported it and forced others to join in. As Keith Harper writes in *The Guardian* it is going to be a hard job "to restore the unity and end the divisions which the leadership's tactics have so far produced ... In the end, Mr. Scargill may say he pointed the way and nobody cared to follow, but at what cost to the structure and stability of the greatest union this country has produced?"

Exactly the same fate as has befallen Mr. Scargill's union has befallen Muslim movements in modern times. These movements have all made it their aim to destabilize and unseat governments and rulers. All their efforts have centred around this central objective. First of all their struggle was directed against foreign colonial powers. Then, when the age of colonialism came to an end, they diverted their anger to those Muslim leaders and monarchs whom they considered to be practicing tyrannical and unislamic methods.

This policy has had serious repercussions within the Muslim community itself. Some have supported the rulers whom these movements have risen up against; others have thrown their weight behind those attempting to overthrow the present government, and sought to replace it with an "upright Islamic" one. The Muslims have thus been beset by seemingly irreparable internal strife and conflict.

The supreme irony of this situation is that the verse of the Quran which the leaders of these movements use to justify their action is in fact warning the Muslims against the very disunity which has sprung from their disruptive policies. The verse is as follows:

He has ordained for you the faith which He enjoined on Noah and which We have revealed to you, and which We enjoined on Abraham, Moses and Jesus, saying: 'Observe this faith and be not divided therein.' (42:13)

These Muslim revolutionaries take the words "observe this faith" to indicate the establishment of an Islamic state. But they do not see that the opposite of observance of faith is cited as being "divided therein", and this division is exactly what their efforts to establish an "Islamic state" are causing. Neither do they see that it is the observance of the religion of all the prophets the basic tenets of faith that all of them taught – that is being enjoined in this verse not, quite clearly, the establishment of an "Islamic state", which is certainly not a mission common to all the prophets.

The Quran goes on to say (42:14) that "they became divided only after knowledge had reached them, out of envy among themselves." Indeed it would seem that those who sow the seeds of disunity among their own ranks after both human experience and divine revelation have warned them of the dire consequences of their actions, can only do so for one reason alone: because they are envious of the power that is in others' hands and seek to obtain it for themselves. They should know that power in the next, eternal world of God is for those who relinquish all pretence to it in this ephemeral world, and acknowledge the power of one God alone.

Fleeing from fame

In his later years, Saad Ibn Abi Waqqas used to take goats to graze. One day he was grazing his goats in a pasture far from Medina when his son, Umer Ibn Saad, rode up. "What, have you turned into a shepherd with his flock while everyone in Medina is caught up in affairs of government and politics?" he protested. "Quiet son," Saad replied, striking his son's chest. "I heard the Prophet say that God loves his God-fearing, self-sufficient and retiring servant."

Nightly Preparation for a Mighty Task

The chapter of the Quran entitled “Al-Muzammil” (The Mantled One) commences with these verses:

“You who are wrapped up in your mantle, keep vigil all night, save for a few hours: half the night, or a little less or a little more: and with measured tone recite the Quran. We are about to lay a weighty message upon you. It is in the watches of the night that impressions are strongest and words most certain; in the day-time you are hard-pressed with work. Remember the name of your Lord and dedicate yourself to Him utterly.” (73:1-8)

From these verses it is clear that God requires His servants to be so devoted to divine service that they rise at night in order to perform their duties to the Lord. To forsake one’s sleep and spend the night hours in pursuit of a cause indicates the highest level of dedication; it shows that one has associated oneself utterly with the object of one’s dedication, and will soon be in a position to represent it in the world.

This applies to worldly pursuits also. Almost all the individuals who have reached great heights in any field have been those who were willing to stay awake at nights in order to gain proficiency in it.

The case of Severiano Ballesteros, the Spanish golfer, provides apt illustration of this point. Ballesteros is now indisputably one of the two greatest golfers in the world and has won millions of dollars in numerous victories in tournaments on both sides of the Atlantic. There was a time, however, when he was just a poor caddy at Pedereda in Spain. He once told Frank Keating of the Guardian newspaper how he used to get up at night to hit a 100 or so balls “at the moon.,” He could not see them – “but I can tell how good and straight I hit them by the feel in hands and the sand.”

To become a true Muslim is to become a personification of Islam in the eyes of the world; it is to become so associated with Islam that one is fit to carry its message to far corners of the globe. This requires intense preparation, which must be conducted in a spirit keen enough to fuel one for work through the night hours. Success does not come in mundane fields without such dedication. How, then, can it come in the field of divine service, for there is no task more difficult, and more strewn with obstacles – both within and without – than that of carrying the flame of true faith in God before the world.

In the Heart of the Christian World

After a decade – long struggle and numerous false starts, the Muslim community in Italy has finally succeeded in laying the foundation of a mosque in the heart of the Roman Catholic world.

The mosque is being built on Mont Antenna in the fashionable Parioli section of Rome. The construction – which may cost \$30m – begins this summer, and is likely to be completed in three years. Rome has 917 Roman Catholic churches, several Protestant, Greek and Russian Orthodox churches and eight synagogues. At present the only mosque in Italy is in Catania, Sicily. Muslims in Italy number around 200,000, while in Rome alone there are at least 35,000. The majority of Muslims in Italy are transient labourers.

In 1973 the application for development of the Islamic Cultural Centre was referred to the Vatican, which announced in 1974 that Pope Paul VI had no objections to a mosque in Rome. Muslims were offered one of the two dozen churches in Rome that have been closed due to population shifts.

Abolghassam Amini, an Iranian and the secretary general of the Islamic Cultural Centre, said that the project then ran into problems with the ministry of fine arts, which objected to making any changes to historic buildings. Rome's administration thereupon provided a 7.4 acre undeveloped piece of land to be used for the mosque, and Muslim countries donated \$12m for the construction.

However, the project still could not start because of objections from local residents. Approval was given by the authorities when the Centre made it known that two-thirds of the land would be used for a park open to the public, that 120 trees would be planted, and that a lighted access road would be built to route mosque traffic away from heavily populated areas to reduce traffic noise.

The mosque will accommodate 2,000 people and will have one of the largest Muslim libraries in the West and a 500-seat auditorium.

Courtesy *ARABIA*. August, 1984

Looking at the World from on High

In April 1984, Squadron Leader Rakesh Sharma became the first Indian to travel into space. The Indo-Soviet spacecraft in which he was traveling, Salyut II, was orbiting the earth when, on April 7, he was interviewed from the earth by an Indian journalist.

Asked what the earth looked like from up there, Squadron Leader Sharma replied that looking at the earth from space was a beautiful experience and it was difficult to understand why there should be so much tension on the planet. From above no borders could be seen: the whole world looked like one, peaceful, harmonious unit.

Looking at the world from an aeroplane one has much the same experience: towns blend into their surrounding countryside as if they are a part of it; there appears to be no clash between the world of man and the world of nature; the tensions that divide man from man are not apparent. When one comes down to earth, however, the picture changes drastically. One comes down to a world in which men are separated into self-made nations, with conflict and mistrust marking relationships between one nation and another. One encounters a world in which man plunders his environment. In short, one finds a world in which man is at odds with both his fellow-men, and the world around him.

The difference is very apparent if one looks at a map showing physical features. The former shows rivers flowing across continents, with no respect for national frontiers; it shows seas lapping the shores of every continent alike; it displays mighty mountain ranges, spanning the borders of many lands. On a political map, however, the picture is quite different; what had been one unit becomes a set of divided sections; what had been a harmonious hue of brown mountains, green plains and blue seas, blending into one another, now becomes an accumulation of starkly contrasting colours, illustrating the difference between one nation and another.

From space one sees only nature when one gazes at the world; that is why it appears as one harmonious unit. But when one comes down to earth one enters the deficient world of human beings. It is here that true belief in God comes to man's rescue, placing him on a higher plane mentally, enabling him to remain aloof from the meanness and pettiness of everyday life and detached in the face of temptation and adversity. If one's life is dominated by belief in God, then He will be the source of one's thinking. One will live in the world, but not be of it. Despite the fact that one is dwelling on the planet Earth, one will look at the world from an elevated position. One will dwell in a natural world, despite one's imprisonment in the unnatural world of man.

A commander should keep a watch on his subordinates' work

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.