



Al-Risala 1997

January-February

Prospects for a Brighter Future

Indian Muslims, comprising so large a segment of the population that they can top the polls in any one of a hundred constituencies, are in a position to tip the political balance of the entire country.

Yet, paradoxically, it is the Muslim community, more than any other, which is suffering from political deprivation. Individually certain Muslims have managed, as a matter of chance, to secure an insignificant number of political posts, but the Muslim community as a whole enjoys no political pre-eminence on the national scene. Nor does it, at the international level, have any share in establishing political relations with Muslim countries. Even in so relatively small a country as Sri Lanka, the Muslim minority has greater political standing than its Indian counterpart.

It is common for Muslim writers and speakers to lay the blame for this at the door of the Hindus. But this view is entirely without foundation. In this world, by the very law laid down by God, gain and loss are not external but internal in their origins. Any explanation seeking to hold others responsible for our deprivation must be rejected *prima facie*, since it in no way accords with the law of nature.

If the truth be told, it is the incompetence of Muslim leaders, which has given rise to this unfortunate situation. And Muslims, in actual fact, are now being made to pay for the crass ineptitude of leaders who launched movements based on shallow politics instead of creating among their followers a balanced political awareness – something for which there was a crying need.

If you go around any Indian city during the elections, you will find greater fervour for the elections in Muslim localities than in Hindu conclaves. This is a symbolic indication of the error which has led Muslims into their present state of political neglect. Misguided by incompetent leaders, they have come to feel that in simply empathizing with the national election fever, they are making an adequate contribution to the political scenario. They have stopped short of understanding that taking a real part in politics means full participation in the political processes of the country.

Muslims may display great zeal for *sehri* (food taken before dawn during the fasting of Ramadan) and *iftar* (the breaking of a fast in the evening after fasting all day during Ramadan), and for sermonizing on loudspeakers during the month of Ramadan, but they cannot be credited with *taqwa* (piety) if throughout the year they have not lead pious lives. Similarly, the mere display of enthusiasm for election activities on a few specified days will not bring them any significant political position in the country. They must realize that, for this, they must engage themselves fully and unremittingly in constructive national activity.

From 1947 till today, I have attended innumerable meetings without coming across any notable Muslim gathering which had been convened specifically to discuss the problems of the Indian nation. National issues simply do not figure on Muslim agendas. At Muslim meetings, communal issues, or more often,

communal grudges are the favourite subjects of discussion. It would seem that national issues are of no concern to Muslims. I have often found, moreover, that Muslim speakers, invited to Hindu gatherings, give vent even there to the grudges of the Muslim community against the Hindus. This makes it abundantly obvious that Muslims have in no way identified themselves with the political mainstream of the country.

Muslims need seriously to consider the necessity to make their community an integral factor in the political system. For a start, their mode of entry into it could be an indirect one. For instance, Muslims could launch the publication of such newspapers as would be read throughout the country; they could play an effective role in trade unions and other such institutions which have a considerable influence on politics. But there is no significant Muslim presence in these organizations. And Muslim newspapers, if they are worth the name, are little better than communal complaint bulletins, bearing no relation to national journalism. So far as trade unionism is concerned, Muslims are barely aware of it as a concept. And so on.

Over the last fifty years, under the guidance of self-styled Muslim leaders, what Muslims have largely done in the name of political activity is vote Congress. Yet, throughout this period they have never felt the need to become part of the administrative structure of the Congress Party. Now, frustrated with the Congress, they tread the path of negative voting. At present, any party claiming to oppose Congress policies can have the Muslim vote for the asking.

To my way of thinking, if Muslims want to have what is politically their due, they should first of all establish their own viability vis-à-vis mainstream politics. Only then will they be in a position to chalk out any real election programme and secure benefits which at the moment seem beyond their reach.

For this to become a reality, Muslims must develop a strong journalistic network which is decidedly national in character. This will establish the bona fides of their patriotism and provide an acceptable base from which to project a positive Muslim identity with a wholesome political stance. However, a brand of Muslim journalism which is genuinely national in character cannot come into existence simply by calling some publication a 'national newspaper' and placing it on the news stands. In order to launch and sustain such a venture, Muslims will be obliged to enter the field of industry. For, in the world of today, industry is the institution which 'feeds' the national press. So long as Muslims have no appreciable share in large scale industry, they will not bring into existence any journalism worth the name.

But it is not just the lack of their own nationwide press that helps to perpetuate the Muslims' political under-representation. Even journalistic opportunities in the existing national press are not availed of by them because of their own backwardness. Major national issues may be regularly thrashed out in the national dailies, but whenever there is a Muslim contribution, it may be taken for granted that it is about some narrow communal issue and takes the form of a demand or a protest. Letters and articles by Muslims (and I have seen this in several major national dailies), far from urging Muslim participation in national political processes, are mere expressions of Muslim reactions against others in restricted local sphere.

Muslims need to be roused to a proper political awareness. They must be led to understand that politics, far from being just another name for reaction or negative voting, is actually the science and art of government. They must realize that inflicting defeat on one party in order to make another party victorious is only one aspect of politics. And it is nothing more than a kind of political somersault. If such somersaults have not improved the Muslims' situation in the past, they are even less likely to do so in the future.

Muslims will have to make their presence felt – in a positive sense – in the political environment of the country; they will have to participate actively in the ongoing political processes. And they will have to prove at the national level that such participation on their part is of vital significance. For instance they can provide an important link in establishing good relations between India and West Asian Muslim countries, and they can play a useful role in securing different kinds of contributions from Muslim countries to the Indian State, etc.

It is regrettable that present circumstances and current attitudes rule out hopes of any such activity. For instance, whenever our Muslim leaders, both religious and secular, visit Muslim or Arab countries, they present a negative picture of India, projecting it as an anti-Muslim country. Due to this unwise approach, it is not possible to secure the kind of contribution from Muslim countries which would significantly enhance the status of Indian Muslims. If Muslims, on the other hand, were to play a positive international role – which is certainly possible – they would see a sudden and radical improvement in their image throughout the country. No longer would they be regarded as liabilities, but as national and political assets. The day this happens will mark the beginning of a brighter future for Muslims all over India.

There is no doubt that India offers every possibility for the construction of a great political future for Muslims. But the secret of securing such a future lies not in the ability to make or break political parties at election time, but in the reform of the community at the political level and in an increased political awareness. The secret, in fact, is not external to the Muslims but within them.

At present, everywhere among the educated classes of Muslims, discussions of the national Muslim agenda are going on. Meetings are being held. A whole spate of articles is appearing in the Hindi and English press. Books on the subject are being published. But nowhere do Muslims figure in their activities. They are almost entirely isolated from the whole issue.

The Muslim role in politics is the subject of much oratory and features regularly in the press. But the founding of a political party on the basis of a single community is more likely than not to exacerbate Muslim problems. The need of the hour is for Muslims to join national political parties and, by becoming part of their organizational structure, make themselves effective at the stage where political decisions are taken.

At present, Muslims in this country are viewed as a group with a grievance. Nowhere do they assume the stature of political entities, either in intellectual discussions or in practical activities. The best way for Muslims to resolve this identity crisis would be to throw themselves wholeheartedly into the political processes of the country. I am certain that, in filling this great vacuum, they would become a political asset to the country – to the point where, one day, one of their numbers might ultimately become the nation's prime minister.

Superior Solutions

Thinking is an incomprehensibly strange art of our world. A number of books have appeared on this subject which, as well as adding to human knowledge, have increased our sense of wonder. Here are the titles of some of these books: *Towards a Theory of Thinking*, Dr. Rapaport (1951) *The Psychology of Thinking*, W.E. Vinacke, (1952) *Thinking*, F.C. Bartlett, (1958) *Productive Thinking*, Max Wertheimer (1959)

The research on which these books are based has brought to light much new information on the brain. One fact which has emerged is that a very important process takes place within the human mind which the psychologist call 'brain-storming'.

A process called brainstorming has been offered as a method of facilitating the production of new solutions to problems. These unrestricted suggestions increase the probability that at least some superior solutions will emerge. (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 19/357)

Researchers tell us that when a human being is facing a crisis situation, latent capabilities are aroused which enable him to engage in this process of brainstorming. This in turn enables him to discover a superior solution to the problem facing him. Success then follows as surely as night follows day.

This is one of God's great mysteries – how he has made our difficulties the ladders to our success.

(224:5)

Cooling the Fire

At a seminar on 'Religion and Humanitarianism' held under the auspices of the Zakir Husain Institute of Islamic Studies, at the Jamia Millia Islamia, in New Delhi in 1993, one of the speakers, Dr. Bishambhar Nath Pandey, recalled how a Hindu procession, led by Swami Satya Dev through Bala Ghat in M.P. in 1926, had been planned to provoke Muslims into rioting. The procession with beating drums and slogan shouting was deliberately organized on a Friday. Ten thousand strong, it arrived in front of a mosque, exactly at prayer time, where it started to create an uproar.

Now Mr. Karamat Husain, a reputed political activist of the city, had gained prior knowledge of this plan. Before the arrival of the procession, he reached the mosque along with one hundred of his colleagues, each of whom he had provided with a garland. When the procession came to a halt in front of the mosque, he asked the other Muslims who had come there to pray to remain silent. Then, initiating a pre-planned move, he came out of the mosque with his colleagues and walked towards the procession. He neither told the procession to go by another route nor demanded that they stop shouting slogans. Instead, he said—"We welcome you!" And then he and his colleagues began garlanding the Hindus one by one. Now the entire atmosphere underwent a sea change. The processionists stopped forthwith. Those who had gathered there to cause a riot began embracing the Muslims. The atmosphere of enmity had been dispelled and had changed all at once into an atmosphere of amity.

Every man is a human being. He becomes an enemy – only temporarily – when he is provoked. When, with wise handling, his temper cools, he returns to the real nature he was born with. That same person, who had appeared in the guise of an enemy, will now become your friend.

9-10 January-February 1997

(223:11)

After a period of eighty two years

In the science of light there is a law of nature called refraction. Today this is known as Snell's law, having been discovered initially by Willebrord Van Roijen Snell. He made his discovery in 1617, but this discovery remained unknown to people, lying unpublished, until a Dutch scientist, Christian Huygens, came to know of it and mentioned it in his research paper in 1703. Only then did the world come to know of Snell's discovery.

That is, Snell's scientific discovery remained hidden from the eyes of the world for a period of 82 years. It was only after this long period, when Christian Huygens highlighted it, that the world came to know of its importance.

The matter of the Hereafter too is somewhat similar. How many of God's servants are there who are sincerely engaged in virtuous activities, away from the limelight, unknown to people, unheralded in the press? How many God-fearing people are there whose inner selves are shaken with the fear of God, but whose undemonstrative expressions fail to show this inner tempest. There are God-fearing people who keep their mouths closed for fear of God, yet no other human being is aware of this virtuous act on the part of the true believer. How many pious souls are there who have had every opportunity to display their ego and torment others, but who have been halted in their tracks by the fear of God's chastisement.

There are many true believers whose good actions have been lost in the wilderness, recognized neither by near ones nor by more distant people. But this state of affairs will not last forever. On Doomsday God will unravel all veils. Then all things hidden from view will appear as clear as daylight. This will be the Day of Judgement when no action done in the world will remain hidden. Even a tiny good deed done in the world will appear as plain as daylight, and all virtuous men will be rewarded for their good deeds, whatsoever they may have been.

10 January-February 1997

(223:10)

Means of Communication

The telephone is one of the many wondrous blessings of God. This wondrous invention converts spoken words into electrical waves, transmits them along a line and reconverts them into sound so true that there is often no need to ask who is at the other end.

Through the telephone it has become possible to contact people living in any part of the world. For instance, if you are in India and you want to speak to the President of the United States in Washington or the Queen of Britain in London, you have only to press the buttons of the following digits:

00-1- 202-456-1414 00-44-1-930-4832

and you will immediately be connected with the office of the person concerned.

The first telephone was installed, in the office of Charles Williams in Massachusetts on April 4, 1877. Today such telephones are installed in millions of homes all over the world. John Brooks in his book, 'Telephone: The First Hundred Years,' writes: "Man, instead of making himself heard a few hundred yards away with a shout, can make himself heard around the world with a whisper."

Telephones and all other such means of communication are blessings of God. They are there to be used for the communication of His message. But such blessings are used to the maximum for all purposes other than the communication of the divine message. What a strange example of the misuse of God's blessings!

(223:20)

Waste of Opportunities

After India had been divided on the basis of the two-nation theory, a Muslim majority dominated the newly created Pakistan, majorityism becoming the rule in all the important spheres of Pakistani life.

This created problems for the Hindu minority, for it became almost impossible for them to live there if they wanted to maintain a high Hindu profile. But the Pakistani Hindus did not opt for the way of reaction. Instead, they made themselves completely inconspicuous, restricting their Hinduism entirely to their homes, and concentrating on the fields of commerce and education. In this way they silently engaged themselves in positive pursuits for a period of thirty years. Consequently, they have achieved a satisfactory social equilibrium in Pakistan. There, majorityism poses no real threat to them.

But the Indian scene is totally different. The Indian leaders, Gandhi and Nehru and others, did not attempt to emulate Pakistan on the score of majorityism. Instead, they established a secular system in the divided India. This system offered to Muslims those very opportunities which were not available to the Hindus in Pakistan. Where majorityism in Pakistan had separated the Hindus from the mainstream, the secular system in India afforded Muslims every opportunity to join the national life as equal members with the same status as the majority.

The introduction of the secular system did not, of course, mean that life in India was necessarily ideal. As part of a world which is a, testing ground for everything and everyone, no system will be found flawless. Realising this, Muslim leaders played a very foolish part. Instead of emphasizing the favourable aspects of secularism and playing down its unfavourable aspects, they chose to highlight whatever they found of a negative nature. They laid stress, not on opportunities, but on drawbacks. In this way, they seriously hindered the assimilation of Muslims into the Indian mainstream.

As a result, the Indian Muslims have fallen prey to frustration and irritation. Fifty years have been wasted. Had Muslims lived here as they live abroad, all their problems would have been satisfactorily solved by now.

12 January-February 1997

(223:15)

Dare to Take Risks

Walter Wriston, former chairman of Citicorp, once observed, "Failure is not a crime. Failure to learn from failure is." When Jim Burke became the head of a new products division at Johnson & Johnson, one of his first projects was the development of a children's chest rub. The product failed miserably, and Burke expected that he would be fired. When he was called in to see the chairman of the board, however, he had a surprising reception. "Are you the one who just cost us all that money?" asked Robert Wood Johnson. "Well, I just want to congratulate you. If you are making mistakes, that means you are taking risks, and we won't grow unless you take risks."

One of the ever-present features of our present world is that no one knows for certain what factors will be conducive to the success of any venture. Given our human limitations, the only possible course is to take the initiative in spite of being unable to forecast the result. This is the risk factor.

No doubt there are apprehensions about taking risks. But in the present world nothing can be achieved without a certain amount of daring. As the proverb says, no risk no gain.

Devotion to the Qur'an

Imam Shafi'i (150-204 A.H.), founder of one of the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence, enjoys a superior position not only in religious scholarship, but also as a pious and God-fearing man. According to Imam Ahmad ibn Hambal, founder of the Hambali school of jurisprudence, there was "no other person whose bond with Islam was as strong as that of Imam Shafi'i."

He was hardly ten years old when he committed the whole of the Qur'an to memory. A full recitation would take him three days. So steeped was he in the Qur'an that he could invariably trace all matters of religious import to the relevant verses.

All the jurists of his day were in agreement that the consensus of the *ummah* (community) must be regarded as *hujjat* (the final authority). Anxious to establish consensus as an absolute source of Islamic law, Imam Shafi'i began reciting the Qur'an over and over again in order to identify a verse which would support this argument.

It is said that in his scrupulousness, he recited the entire Qur'an 301 times. Ultimately he was successful in discovering the portion of the scriptures which upheld consensus as *hujjah* (final authority). This happened one day when he was reciting the Qur'an. When he reached verse no. 115 in the fourth chapter, it was suddenly revealed to him that this verse sanctioned the *ijmah* (the unanimous consent of learned doctors) as a basic source of Islamic law. The verse reads:

He that disobeys the Apostle after Our guidance has been revealed to him and follows a path other than that of the faithful, shall be given what he has chosen. We will cast him into Hell, a dismal end (4: 115).

Imam Shafi'i concluded that the phrase 'path of the faithful' in this verse corresponded with the *ijmah* of the believers. The believers of the first phase attempted to find in the Qur'an the answer to every problem that arose, even if they had to go through it a hundred times. They did not rest content until they had discovered the relevant Qur'anic injunction. But, nowadays, the Qur'an is resorted to only for recitation and blessings.

A Page of History

Muslim rule in Spain lasted for about eight hundred years, ending in 1492. Even at the time of their political decline, the Muslims were in all respects far ahead of their Spanish Christian subjects. Yet the Christians ultimately gained the upper hand. The main reason for this was Muslim disunity in the face of Christian unity. While the Christians had greatly increased their strength by uniting themselves, the Muslims had allowed themselves to be considerably weakened by ever increasing differences.

Even during the heyday of Muslim rule, a comparatively small area of Spain remained in the political possession of the Christians. Using this territory as their political center, the Christians continued to engage in activities against Muslim rule by taking advantage of Muslims' internal differences. During the latter days of Muslim rule, the Christians considerably expanded their territory, and the Muslims were left with only Granada.

Abul Hasan, one of the leading Muslims of the last days, received a demand from Ferdinand II that he pay tribute to him. Abul Hasan being a brave king, wrote back to Ferdinand: "These days the mint of Granada is turning out not gold coins but iron swords to sever the necks of Christians." Afterwards many armed clashes took place between the two forces. Finally at Losha, in 887, Ferdinand's army was routed in a heavy encounter with the army of Sultan Abul Hasan.

Ferdinand then began to re-deploy his forces. At that time, there were two Christian kingdoms in Spain, one at Aragon under Ferdinand, and another at Castile ruled by Queen Isabella I. Ferdinand showed great foresight in persuading Isabella to marry him. Through this marriage in 1469, a greater Christian kingdom came into being.

While on the one hand, this event of alliance took place in the Christian world, on the other, in Muslim Spain, Sultan Abul Hasan's own son, Abu Abdullah Mohammad, revolted against him capturing a part of Granada. Sultan Abul Hasan was now left to rule a territory of just four thousand square meters, whereas, by means of a marital alliance, Ferdinand had expanded his empire to 1,25,000 square meters. All these events proved so shocking to Sultan Abul Hasan, that he had an attack of paralysis after which he lost his sight.

After this series of tragic incidents, Sultan Abul Hasan abdicated the throne, appointing his brother Abu Abdullah Zughal in his place. However, a plot was soon hatched to remove him from the throne. With his removal Abu Abdullah Mohammad came to be the sole ruler of Granada. But he was not the equal of his father in wisdom and, in just a few encounters, he was defeated by the Christian forces.

In the last stage, the Christian forces surrounded the fort of Granada. Abdullah, who was 'bold enough in his encounters with' his father and uncle, proved a coward in encounters with Christian forces. Finally,

he signed the papers of his abdication from Granada and its fort on January 3, 1492. These were countersigned by the victor, Ferdinand.

Recording this happening in Spain a historian writes: "The last ruler of Granada, Sultan Abul Hasan, defeated Ferdinand II (1492-1516) and Queen Isabella, but his own son, Abu Abdullah led a coup against his father which resulted in the downfall of his father."

Internal unity is the greatest strength in this world, just as the disunity is the greatest weakness. Undoubtedly, this is the greatest lesson of history.

(224:6)

The Necessity to Observing Silence

The Prophet of Islam once observed "One who believes in God and the Last Day should either speak words of goodness or keep quiet."

It is true that failure to speak up and tell the truth when the occasion calls for it can (according to a hadith) earn one the name of 'dumb Satan.' But, there are many occasions when observing silence is more proper and more important.

One example of how essential it is to observe silence is provided by an incident at the battle of Uhud in which the Prophet injured in battle, had fallen down in a cave, away from the eyes of the people. His enemies proclaimed that he had been killed, and confusion prevailed among the Companions.

In the meantime, a companion of the Prophet caught sight of him and exclaimed, 'Here is the Prophet.' At that moment the Prophet motioned to him to keep quiet (so that the enemy would remain ignorant of his being alive).

Another instance is the hadith which says that asking the assembly to keep quiet while the Imam is giving a sermon is an absurd act. (That would amount to making noise.)

Observing silence at individual meetings too is a good principle to follow, but when the matter pertains to the whole community it assumes an even greater importance. At a delicate moment the observance of silence by a leader can check a riot from taking place. While an ill-timed speech by a leader can lead to a full scale riot, leaving in its wake the loss of hundreds of innocent lives and property worth crores of rupees burnt to ashes. It is in this sense that sister Consolata has observed:

"The greatest number of failings in a community comes from breaking the rule of silence."

Action, Not Reaction

Several years ago, IBM, the famous American Computer Company, was already so far ahead in the field of computers that its officers, making fun of Japanese computer companies, had quipped: 'When IBM sneezes, Japanese computer makers are blown away.'

Japanese industrialists, however, did not express any anger at this provocative assessment of their worth. They rather devoted themselves to upgrading the standard of their computers, until a time came when Japan had achieved the topmost rank in the world in computer industry. Today Fujitsu, a Japanese computer company, said its largest new computer could perform up to 600 million instructions per second (MIPS), compared with as many as 210 MIPS for IBM's best. (*Time Magazine*, September 17, 1990)

Reacting to provocation brings nothing but negative results, whereas ignoring provocation leaves the way clear to embark on planned construction and consolidation. It is the law of this world that those who *act* make progress, while those who *react* are doomed to failure. This applies particularly to the behaviour of Muslims at the present time. For example, if a Hindu says anything against Muslims, all our so-called Muslim leaders and journalists will start protesting that Muslims' sentiments are being hurt and that the administration, being unconcerned, has failed to discharge its duties. The Muslim public will then allow itself to be provoked into launching an agitation. What else can this result in but communal rioting? There is nothing more calculated to do a disservice to the Muslim community than this, for the final outcome will simply be that Muslims are left further behind than ever.

Breaking the Tradition

Describing the evil of murder, the Qur'an has this to say: "Whoever killed one human being,... should be looked upon as though he had killed all mankind; and whoever saved a human life should be regarded as though he had saved all mankind." (5:32) This has been expressly stated in the scripture because, when a man commits a crime of this nature, he breaks the tradition of respect for life. This tradition in society serves as a kind of psychological check against one man making a murderous assault on another. Once this check is removed, there is no barrier left in the way of indulging in such criminal activities. People become emboldened when such a precedent is set by a wrongdoer. That is how the murder of one man opens the door to more murders.

In order to understand the full implications of this point, let us take some examples from Muslim Spain. Towards the end of the Muslim rule in Spain, the Muslims, weakened by infighting, had divided themselves into different states, which fell, one after another. Later they established a kingdom in Granada under the rule of Sultan Naser bin Yousuf, better known as Ibn al-Ahmar (It was this king who built the famous palace known as Al-Hamra palace in Granada). Now the most dreadful part of this history is that the third ruler of Granada was put to death by his brother, Naser bin Muhammad in AH 710, as a matter of political rivalry. This killing broke the tradition of respect for life in the royal palace, throwing open the floodgates of murder in high places. Sultan Abdul Walid was subsequently killed by his own nephew in 725 Hijrah. Sultan Ahmad followed him to the throne, but was killed by a relative in AH 733. His successor, Sultan Yousuf, the ruler of Granada, was speared to death in AH 755. The next ruler, Sultan Ismail was killed by his own brother in AH 761.

In short, this chain of killing continued till 1492 AD when the state of Granada itself was eliminated. Safeguarding tradition is safeguarding humanity. The breaking of tradition could mean the end of humanity.

(187:4)

The Blessings of Paradise

Ukaydar ibn Abdul Malik Al-Kindi (d. 12 AH) was a Christian ruler of Daumat-ul Jandal. During Tabuk campaign, when the Prophet was camping near his State, this ruler visited him and embraced Islam. However, after the death of the Prophet he recanted. Later he was killed in a battle led by Khalid ibn Walid during the reign of the first Caliph, Abu Bakr.

It is recorded in history books that when Ukaydar came to see the Prophet, he was dressed in royal apparel. Anas ibn Malik, a companion of the Prophet, says: "I saw Ukaydar's long gown when he came to the Prophet. Muslims began to touch his *qaba* in wonder." Then the Prophet said: "Are you wonderstruck at his apparel? By God, there is no doubt about it that even the handkerchiefs of Saad Ibn Muadh will be of better quality than these clothes." (*Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah*, Vol. 17/5)

Just as the Prophethood of the Prophet of Islam is for all time, so are his words. These words of his do not refer just to that particular ruler belonging to the first century of Hijrah, but to all the worldly things whose apparent glitter makes people envy them.

The truth is that all the worldly things which appear very pleasing and attractive to people cannot compare with splendours of paradise, which will give them far greater pleasure and comfort. Only in paradise will man understand that what he had failed to find in the world he left behind was of no significance. And that what he has found in paradise is far superior to all the mere things of this world.

God's Guarantee

Whenever any prophet has endeavoured to propagate God's religion, he has had to suffer attempts by his own people to harm him. This happened even to the Prophet of Islam. When he invited his people to believe in the one God, they turned on him and became his enemies. In Mecca he suffered at their hands along with his companions, and, even in Medina, stiff opposition continued. However, God gave him His reassurance in the following verse of the Qur'an: "Apostle, proclaim what is revealed to you by your Lord, if you do not, you will not have conveyed His message. God will protect you from all men. He does not guide the unbelievers." (5:67)

Calling people to Islam is a divine mission, and is carried out to fulfil the divine scheme. (4: 165) It is, therefore, natural that God should assist in this endeavour. It is such a difficult task that not receiving divine help would be more surprising than receiving it.

The responsibility for carrying on the work of *dawah* after the Prophet rests with the Muslims. It is as his followers that they shall have to carry on what he accomplished in his lifetime. (22:78) With this extension of responsibility, it is only proper that there should be an extension of their rights also. God has, therefore, said in the Qur'an that all those who follow the Prophet in this regard will be protected by Him from their enemies.

"O Prophet, God is sufficient for you and the faithful who follow you." (8:64) Two interpretations have been placed on this verse. The second is that God is sufficient for you and for those who have obeyed you. (*Al-Tafsir Al-Mazhari*, 4: 110) Such support for the faithful has been variously described in different parts of the Qur'an.

The Fear of God

Plato (428-348 BC) is regarded as one of the three great philosophers of ancient Greece, the other two being Socrates and Aristotle. The book for which Plato is best remembered, titled the *Republic* and written in the form of a dialogue, is on the subject of the Ideal State. In Plato's view, "Unless philosophers bear kingly rule... or those who are now called kings and princes become genuine and adequate philosophers, there will be no respite from evil"

Throughout the ages, many individuals, who have come to be known as philosopher-kings (or queens) have assumed power, e.g. the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius, the Russian Queen Catherine II, King Frederick II of Prussia, the Macedonian King Demetrius and the contemporary ruler of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yen. But none has measured up to the standard of the good ruler as presented by Plato.

There were certain pupils of the Greek philosophers who attained to kingship. For example, Alexander the Great was taught by Aristotle, and Demetrius was trained in Aristotle's school of thought. Yet these philosopher-rulers were no better than others. As Peter Green puts it: "What happened was, nothing happened ... Power, it appeared, could corrupt even philosophers." (*Times Magazine*, May 13, 1991)

According to Karl Marx's theory, the root of all evil was the economic system based on ownership, according to which those who were owners exploited those who were not, in very much the same way as a despot would oppress his subjects. It was thought that if the system of individual ownership were to be replaced by that of collective ownership, all kinds of oppression and exploitation could be uprooted. There would then be neither the owner nor the owned, and no group or individual would be able to exploit any other group or individual.

These ideas led to the marxist revolution in Russia in 1917, whereupon the system of state-ownership was introduced by force. However, as events unfolded, it became apparent that in the guise of the no-ownership system, this had become most tyrannical regime in modern history, the rulers proving to be the most oppressive and dictatorial ever witnessed. Instead of collective ownership improving the lot of the underprivileged, it only encouraged further oppression and coerciveness on the part of the rulers.

Similarly, in the second half of the twentieth century, colonialism was branded as an evil, and independence movements were launched against it on a massive scale. The moving spirits behind these movements held that foreign rule was the cause of all evils, not the least being oppression, and that if it could be replaced by home rule, oppression would die a natural death. These movements for national freedom eventually proved a resounding success and in all the newly freed former colonies, Government posts were promptly secured by the sons of the soil. But oppression and evil did not disappear. Hence rulers continued to be tyrants. Power had only changed hands.

God's religion, Islam, tells us that all such claims made for improved temporal systems are without

foundation; the only factor that can effect true reform is the fear of God. Nothing else can hold a man in power to the observance of proper standards of truth and justice.

The best historical illustration of this theory is the conduct of the Prophet's companions. They wielded power, but they remained untarnished by the corruption rampant among the rulers who came before and after them. Their probity was unparalleled; as such it was a living proof of the Islamic claim that only the fear of God will right the wrongs of this world.

Looking to the Future

In the early stages of modern civilization the Arabs made a considerable contribution to practical science. For instance, as early as the seventh century, the Arabs made usable watches. In his *Discovery of India*, Jawaharlal Nehru mentions that 'Damascus had a famous clock and so did the Baghdad of Harun alRashid's day' (p.261).

Although the manufacture of watches was first engaged in by Muslims, the progress and development of this industry took place entirely in Europe. Ironically, millions of dollars are being sent today by Muslims to the western world for the purchase of watches.

The same is the case with many other modern industrial enterprises. They were given their first impetus by the Muslims, but were subsequently developed by the West, because the Muslims had become so embroiled in internecine strife that they could not give their full attention to industrial progress. The West thus came to dominate the industrial scene throughout the world.

There are many Muslims who take a pride in their past. But there is no one to encourage them to engage themselves in the tasks in which they formerly excelled. Simply taking pride in the past can never be a substitute for taking effective action in the present.

Before the invention of the steamship, Muslims were masters of navigation. In the words of a historian, they had converted the Mediterranean into an Arab lake. But today, in the age of the steamship, the Muslims have no shipping company. For them, this has become an age of decline and decadence, the reason being that Muslims have lost the ability to learn new things or to embark on original investigation.

Remaining sedulously attached to what is old has come to be regarded by Muslims as religiosity, while associating with anything modern is tantamount to apostasy. So far as matters of religious beliefs, forms of worship, moral values are concerned, we have undoubtedly to look back. But so far as the affairs of the world are concerned, we have to look forward. Muslims have never been able to understand how essential this is and that is why they have become a backward community in this modern age.

24-25 January-February 1997

(187:9)

Glad Tidings

Ibn Ishaq, the Prophet's biographer, writes that when the Prophet began to communicate the message of Islam to Meccans publicly, he had to face stiff opposition and hardship.

His wife, Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, converted to the new faith without a moment's hesitation. Thus for the partner of his life, she now became a partner in his suffering, for the prophet's adversaries found many ways of torturing them, not the least of which was to assemble before their house and create an uproar.

It was under these circumstances that one day the Angel Gabriel came to their house and asked the Messenger of God to convey to Khadijah greetings from her Lord. Then Gabriel told the Prophet that he had been ordained by God to give glad tidings to Khadijah about a house made of pearls (in heaven) where there was neither din nor suffering.

These were glad tidings for Khadijah in particular and a lesson for the believers in general. It was news of success for the believers.

In this world the faithful have to suffer at the hands of the arrogant. They have to live under great provocation. In a situation like this the faithful are ill-advised to quarrel with them. They should ignore the provocation, and turn their attention towards the Hereafter. They should pray. 'O Lord grant us the patience to face the unpleasantness. Build us a house in Paradise where there is neither clamour nor suffering.'

When a believer calls upon worshippers of heroes and religious personalities to stop revering mere mortals and, instead, to give their love and worship to God and God alone-for only He is deserving of such love and worship-they become enraged with him and oppose him with all their might. When he calls upon his fellow-men to act purely to please God, they become antagonised and start harassing him. Yet, in the face of such hostility, he remains patient, for he has God's promise of a heavenly abode in the Hereafter, which will be completely free from tumult and affliction. It will be a place where he can live in spiritual bliss for ever after.

26 January-February 1997

Forgetting the Differences

When Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985 in the USSR, he began to reorganize the structure of the communist party in order to bring in people of his own persuasion. Gorbachev was particularly afraid of the imposing personality of Boris Yeltsin, a member of the Politburo. However, the latter finally resigned in 1987 from the top party post after a row with Gorbachev and other Politburo colleagues.

It was against this backdrop that, when Yeltsin stood for the presidentship of Russia in 1989, Gorbachev opposed him by proposing another candidate for the post. However, despite his opposition, Yeltsin won the elections, becoming the president of Russia.

Encouraged by the differences between the two leaders, the extremist group in the Russian communist party revolted against Gorbachev, managing to overthrow the government at the Kremlin on August 19, 1991. They believed that they could put an end to Gorbachev by exploiting the differences between the two leaders. But the very reverse happened as subsequent events showed. Yeltsin, having put aside all his differences with Gorbachev, exercised all his power and all his capabilities to organise the public against the coup leaders, putting even his own life at grave danger. Under his leadership, the Russian public gathered in such huge numbers in Moscow that the coup leaders were forced to flee. Gorbachev was brought back from Crimea and reinstated as President. It is generally recognised that the credit for Gorbachev remaining alive and returning to the office of president again goes to Yeltsin.

The greatest mark of a lofty nature is the ability to set aside the grievances and differences in order to support another, whereas a man of baser metal would do the very opposite.

The Wise Men

But let those rejoice who keep off from idol-worship and turn to God in repentance. Give good news to My servants, who listen to My Word and follow what is best in it. These are they whom God has guided: These are they who are endowed with understanding. (39: 17-18)

The above verse advises us to put the best interpretation upon any saying which is meant for our guidance, and not always to be on the lookout for errors or loopholes. All such sayings, whether spoken or written – even those revealed by God – have to be expressed in words. Now human language has certain limitations. It is not always as unambiguous as we would like it to be. That inevitably leaves room for misinterpretation, particularly if one does not give one's full attention to what is being said. It is only the man who really fears God who gives his full concentration to such sayings and who therefore construes them in their best sense. This serious, cautious approach is a direct result of reverence for the Almighty.

Those who give only half their attention to such sayings and then try to discover bad connotations in them are surely the followers of Satan; they will be punished by God in the Hereafter. On the contrary, those who pay full attention when good advice is addressed to them, and who put the best construction on it, are genuine seekers after truth. Such people will be amply rewarded by God.

One who places the worst interpretation on another's words is severely limited in understanding. One who places the best interpretation on another's words is blessed with a fine understanding, and, in the Hereafter, will inhabit the gardens of Paradise.

28 January-February 1997

War, Peace

The May issue of *Al-Risala* (Urdu) was published in the form of the 'Gulf Diary.' What I wrote on February 2, 1991, in my diary was as follows: No matter which side earns the laurels of victory, the misery of the common man will only increase immeasurably. The impact will be felt even by the victor.

A month after writing this, this did become a reality after the end of the war. The war ended but the problems remained. *Time* magazine (April 15, 1991), giving a detailed report, tells us that after the victory in the Gulf war, the USA and its allies are confronting a new dilemma. (p.18)

Time magazine has published a few readers' letters in response to this article in its May 6, 1991 publication. An American reader writes: 'It looks like Bush has won the battle and lost the war in the Gulf.' (Lloyd Ringuist, Marshfield, Wisconsin)

War can only bring about destruction. It cannot produce construction. War can be won on the battlefield, but it cannot bring happiness in real life outside the battlefield. In spite of this fact, people rush into waging war because it appears to be such a great thing, whereas, in reality, peace is the great thing, and war is an abomination. If people were to realize this truth, they would rush towards peaceful construction. The battlefield would be devoid of fighters. War is always bracketed with heroism. Yet war does not yield any positive results. Peace appears to be *zeroism*, but all the best achievements are inevitably arrived at by peaceful means.

28 January-February 1997

Do not regard knowledge as a means to personal prestige

Ubayy ibn Ka'b said: "Acquire knowledge and use it. Do not acquire it in order thereby to enhance yourselves. Otherwise a time will come when learning will be used as an adornment in the manner of clothes."

A Sunnah

For the Muslims, the tradition laid down by the Prophet is the perfect example to follow, for it covers every aspect of life, be it a trivial, personal matter, or a larger issue, like *jihad*, which could affect the whole community, whether at that time or a thousand years later.

There are two broad divisions of Sunnah. One of these pertains to the form that a practice should take. For instance, the Prophet said, "Say your prayers in the manner that you see me pray." (*MishkatAl-Masabih*, 1/215) This tradition relates to the form that *Salat* was to take. The companions observed the Prophet performing *Salat* and did likewise. Those who saw the companions praying offered their prayers in the same fashion and this example was followed meticulously from generation to generation. The form our prayers take today is identical to that practised by the Prophet.

The same is true of the rites of Hajj. On the occasion of *Hajjat al-wida*, (The Last Pilgrimage) the Prophet mounted his camel and performed the rites of Hajj so that others could observe their correct enactment. He said, "O people, observe my performance of Hajj and perform your rites accordingly."

Traditions of this nature refer to the form of an act. The creation of this form ensured that an act would be performed exactly in accordance with the example set by the Prophet. These may be called the traditions of form. There is another set of traditions which concern themselves with the spirit of an act. According to this tradition, the outer manifestation is relative, while the spirit is the reality. And in this, it is the spirit which is the more important.

The Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet over a period of 23 years. As and when a portion of the Qur'an was revealed, the Prophet would summon a scribe to whom he would dictate the verses. A *katib* (scribe) was in constant attendance. In all, there were over 40 such persons. The Prophet was so particular about this that even on such a perilous journey as his emigration from Mecca to Medina, he kept pen and paper with him and had a scribe (Abu Bakr) accompany him.

The entire Qur'an was written on paper and other materials used for the purpose during the lifetime of the Prophet. Many of the companions, such as Zaid bin Thabit Ansari, committed the whole of the Qur'an to memory. Towards the end of his life, the Prophet recited the whole of the Qur'an in its proper sequence in the presence of a large number of the companions. This has been called the Last Recitation in the books of tradition.

At the time of the Prophet's death, the Qur'an was safe either in the hearts of the people, or written on separate pages and tablets. However, there was no compilation of all the verses of the Qur'an in book form.

The Prophet was certainly aware of the fact that doubts would later arise over the compilation of the Book of God. Orientalists have tried to sow the seeds of doubt on this issue, and the *Encyclopedia of*

Islam compiled by them, have offered different explanations. One theory is that the Prophet of Islam, feeling that the Day of Judgement was near, and that the world would soon come to an end, never entertained the idea of compiling the Qur'an in book form.

The non-compilation of the Qur'an by the Prophet was not an act of omission. With the mission of the Prophet being to make the faith complete, there was no question of his leaving a religious task incomplete in any way. This was something which, in spite of the obvious risks, he purposely left undone, because of the inherent religious advantages in so doing.

If the Prophet had the Qur'an compiled in book form and copies of it placed in the different mosques, it could easily have become neglected in essence, while Muslims busied themselves with the purely ritual matters pertaining to its physical presence. By leaving the work of compilation to his followers, the Prophet ensured that they gave their full attention to the spirit of the Qur'an.

The annals of history show that during the rule of Abu Bakr, in 12 Hijra, a battle was fought at Yamamah in Arab, in which 70 Hafiz (Muslims who know the entire Qur'an by heart) were martyred. This caused great concern to Umar, who thought that if the Hafiz were to be martyred in such great numbers, the content of the Qur'an would soon be lost to posterity. He expressed his fears to Abu Bakr, who then had the work of compilation carried out.

This was not an easy task. First of all, the Caliph was worried about the propriety of his doing something which the Prophet had never himself undertaken. He agreed only after a great deal of deliberation. This generated unprecedented activity, with Umar and Zaid sitting at the entrance to the mosque and asking everyone who came there to hand over any written portion of the Qur'an which they had in their possession.

Zaid Bin Thabit Ansari, who was placed in charge of this great operation on account of his talents and general ability, read all of the collected material and cross-checked it with his memory. This was the first time in history that a book had been subjected to such thorough double-checking. This was understandably a very difficult task for Zaid Bin Thabit, who said: "By God, if Abu Bakr had ordered me to move a mountain from its place, that would not have been more difficult than the task he has given me of compiling the Qur'an."

The tradition which I call the sunnah of spirit – that of creating better understanding – is one of the traditions of the Prophet. Like the other traditions of the Prophet, its continuance as a permanent feature of the Islamic life is highly desirable. It is a tradition of prime importance because it has an inspiring effect on the followers of Muhammad. (may peace be upon him) It is a powerful tool to keep them alive and active.

This can be illustrated by another example. The Qur'an says that God made His revelations therein in order to warn the people (25: 1) As is well known, the Qur'an was originally written in Arabic, whereas thousands of languages are currently being used. How then is it possible to warn all the different communities through the Arabic of the Qur'an?

If God had desired all communities to be directly instructed by means of the Qur'an, He would have revealed it in some international language. But this did not happen. This in itself indicates that God desired the faithful to undertake the work of translation so that other communities would be able to understand the Holy Scriptures.

This is clearly one of the 'traditions of spirit' of the Prophet. Now, the need of the hour is to put this tradition into practice. One way of doing this would be to utilize the modern press and other media to disseminate translations of the message of the Qur'an in simple language. If our leaders had revived this tradition and inspired Muslims to become engaged in translating the Qur'an into different languages, the entire community could already have been fruitfully occupied in this venture. In this way, Muslims would have rediscovered Islam all over again, albeit in the light of modern circumstances. The Qur'an would have caused a religious revolution in their lives. On the contrary, however, in the absence of timely leadership, the whole community is foundering on the rock of politics, thus depriving themselves of both religion and the world.

The cure for anger is silence

'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas records the Prophet as saying: "When any one of you becomes angry, he should remain silent." This the Prophet repeated three times. (Ahmad, *Musnad*)