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Superior Actions

BOTH Muslim kings and Muslim sufis came to India in the Middle Ages, but whereas the non-Muslim masses of the sub-continent considered the kings their enemies, they looked up to the sufis with respect. They fought against the kings, but took the sufis to their hearts. The number of people who accepted Islam at the hands of sufis runs into millions. Even today Indians in general remember the sufis with veneration. Many non-Muslims join Muslims in visiting the shrines of sufi saints. Muslim kings, on the other hand, are remembered with hostility rather than devotion.

The reason for these differing attitudes is that Muslim kings appear on the same level as everybody else, whereas Muslim sufis appear on a higher level. People cannot fail to notice that, as is normal with human beings, Muslim monarchs showed greed for wealth and power. They followed the dictates of their desires rather than their consciences. They plundered others in order to fill their own coffers. In everything they appear no different from, but rather worse than anybody else. Not being superior to others in their actions, why should they be looked up to with respect?

With the sufis, however, things were different. They were content to be poor; they had no greed for wealth. Far from striving for power, they used to stay as far away from it as possible. Far from allowing themselves to become the slaves of their desires, they went through exacting spiritual disciplines in order to make themselves masters of their carnal selves. One of their best aspects was that they did not harbour rancour against anybody; love for their fellow men was all they knew.

The sufis who came to India did not even exclude enemies from their universal aura of benevolence. They did not seek to avenge the wrongs done to them; rather they prayed for their transgressors. The story goes that once a sufi was hurt by a stone thrown at him. He did not become angry, but went to his attacker and embraced him as if he were a dear friend. The latter asked him why he was showing such warmth towards one who had just thrown a stone at him. "Because you are not perfect." the sufi answered, "you deserve more affection than anybody." The man was so impressed by this forgiveness that he repented and became the sufi's disciple.

There is nothing more effective than forgiveness and humility in overcoming one's enemies. The sufis who came to India made friends out of enemies because they treated everyone with universal love and respect. They showed that the only way to win others' respect is by raising oneself above them in one's actions. This is as true today as it was in their times.

Lip service is not proof of real attachment

Jubair ibn Nufair relates how, as his father was sitting with Miqdad ibn Aswad one day, a passerby; on seeing a Companion of the Prophet said: "How fortunate are those two eyes that have seen the Prophet! By God, if only we could have seen what you saw and shared in your experiences!" Nufair said that he was impressed by the man's words; he seemed to have spoken well. But Miqdad – may God be pleased with him – looked towards the man and said: "No one whom God has saved from being present at those hours should desire to have been there. Who knows how they would have acted in those circumstances? By God, many of whom God cast into Hell came to see the Prophet, such as did not accept what he said, or believe in his mission."

Oppressors Never Prosper

NIZAM al-Mulk Tusi was the name of a famous vizier, prime minister, to two Seljuk kings – Alp Arslan (1063-72) and Malik Shah (1073-92). He is remembered for his highly effective handling of the reigns of government, his control over affairs of state having been so complete that the king, it is said, was left with only two functions – sitting on the throne and going out hunting. Finally he fell victim to enemies of the Seljuk dynasty. An assassin, dressed in Sufi garb, slew him in the year 1092. His death signalled the beginning of the end for the Seljuks.

Christian and Muslim historians are unanimous in their praise of Nizam al-Mulk's enlightened method of government. Professor P.K. Hitti, in his *History of the Arabs*, calls his period in power "one of the ornaments of the political history of Islam." Among his most outstanding achievements was the establishment of the college of Nizamiyya, named after Nizam al-Mulk in 1067. It was from this college that Nizam al-Mulk used to draw educated people to operate the state's executive and judiciary institutions. Nizam al-Mulk wrote a book on political theory, the Persian name of which is *Siyasat-Nama*. The book has been translated into English under the title *The Book of Government Rules for Kings* (tr. H. Drake, London, 1960). In this book Nizam al-Mulk wrote:

"An un-Islamic government may last a while, but tyranny cannot endure."

This is a rule that applies, not only to kings, but to every single human being. Every individual has a certain area of influence and power. In a ruler's case, this area is large, whereas in the case of an ordinary person, it is comparatively small. If one wishes to prosper on earth it is imperative that one refrain from oppression within one's own domain. One who oppresses those over whom he wields power cannot himself escape punishment for his actions. In the case of most sins, God will punish their perpetrators in the next life. In the case of tyranny and oppression, the punishment for them starts in this very world. There is no way out for the tyrant. God will certainly redress the wrongs that he has done others. Sooner or later, he is sure to be visited by the wrath of God.

People usually oppress others with a view to consolidating their own position, and that of their offspring. But it is the very people they seek to protect who eventually fall victim to their oppression. If oppression and cruelty become permanent features of an individual's policy, the savage after-effects of his own actions will cause suffering to his own kith and kin for generations to come.

Of all actions, the most sublime is remembrance of God

Abu Darda reports the Prophet as asking his companions:

“Should I not tell you of the action that is best and most pure in the presence of your Lord; the action which will raise you up in the sight of God, and is better for you than great expenditure of gold and silver; better too than that you should meet your enemies in battle, striking their necks and they striking yours?” “Do tell us,” the Companions replied, “It is remembrance of God,” said the Prophet.

(Al-Tirmidhi, Shama'il)

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Knowing the world, but not the Hereafter

Abu Darda asked certain individuals, "How is it that I behold you full of food, but starved of knowledge?"

(Jami' Bayan al-Ilm)

In Everything There is a Sign

THE Indian writer Khwajah Hasan Nizami (1878-1955) once wrote an article in Urdu entitled "Story of a Fly." In it he complained to a fly about the bother it caused people. "Why don't you let us sleep in peace?" he remonstrated. "The time for sleep and eternal repose has not yet come" the fly replied. "When it does, then you can sleep in peace." Now it is better for you to remain alert and active." This little exchange shows that if one remains open to admonition, one will find a lesson for one's life even in such mundane events as the buzz of a fly. If one's mind is closed, on the other hand, then not even the roar of bombshells and artillery fire will be able to break through its barriers. Only the tempest of the Last Day will bring such people to their senses, but that will not be the time to take heed: that will be a time for retribution, not constructive action.

The Qur'an tells us of one who is admitted to paradise bringing before God "a sound heart" (26:89). There is a saying of the Prophet to much the same effect. "Whomsoever God wishes good for," he said, "He instructs in religion." Looked at together, these statements show that God's greatest blessing to a person is an open mind and a sound, receptive intellect that sees truth for what it is. Such a mind is free of complexes: it is able to form opinions in a free and unprejudiced spirit. A sound mind does not take long to absorb any truth, or take in any lesson contained in the world at large. The universe is like spiritual sustenance for such a mind, which develops and thrives by deriving nourishment from what it sees, feels and hears in the world around it.

Signs of God are spread all over the universe. In some places it is rocks and inanimate matter that provide a pointer to some profound reality, in others it is "flies"—menial objects — that sound out a message for man. Sometimes God enables one of His servants to call his fellow men to truth in plain, spoken language. In all such instances it is one who has opened his mind to truth who will find it. If one is not receptive to instruction one will gain nothing from all the signs that are scattered throughout the world. An open mind derives instruction even from a "fly", while not even divine revelation and prophetic teachings can break down the barriers of a closed mind.

There is nothing that can take the place of a receptive intellect. One who remains open to instruction will look on the whole world as living proof of divine realities. One who goes through life with a closed mind, however, is like a beast who hears and sees all, but understands nothing.

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Have trust in God right up till the end

When the Prophet left Makkah on his emigration to Madinah, he spent the first three days in the Cave of Thur. The Quraysh, who were searching for him, eventually arrived at this cave. Abu Bakr, who was in hiding with the Prophet, said, "Prophet of God, look how close the enemy has come. If they were just to look at their feet, they would see us beneath them." "Abu Bakr," the Prophet replied, "What do you think of those two who have God as a third?"

(Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah)

7 May-June 1997

Remaining steadfast in the face of persecution

During the Abbasid Caliphate the emergence of the Mutazilite creed stirred up controversy among Muslims, as a result of which Imam Ahmad ibn Hambal had severe punishments inflicted upon him. Yet he refused to alter the position he had adopted. Hafiz ibn Hajar tells us that he was beaten so severely as to make “even an elephant flee.”

The Unfathomable Mercy of God

ACCORDING to a saying of the Prophet, related in the *Sahih* of Imam Muslim: “God has a hundred mercies, and one of them He has sent down amongst jinn and men and cattle and beasts of prey. Thereby they are kind and merciful unto one another, and thereby the wild creature inclines to tenderness unto her offspring. And ninety-nine mercies has God reserved unto Himself, that therewith He may show mercy unto His servants on the Day of Resurrection.

The mercy of a mother manifests itself in multiple ways. Should her infant baby strike her on the face, the mother will not take offence. She will not react by striking her child back. She will hold her child close to her, turning his apparent act of aggression into an act of love, rewarding him for what was a punishable deed. Incidents of this nature occur in every home. They provide us with a tiny glimpse of the mercy of God. Mothers are not the masters, or the makers, of their own mercy. It is a small fraction of God’s own mercy, which He has bequeathed to them – along with other living creatures – so that they may show compassion to one another.

Human beings do not have knowledge of the unseen, so they have to suffer all sorts of setbacks in life. They lack will power, so tend to give way to base impulses and commit grave mistakes. The resources at their disposal are insufficient for them to deal with external factors working against them, so they crash to defeat. Predicaments such as these have combined to turn man into an afflicted soul, constantly tormented by thoughts of having been a failure in life, of not having achieved what he set out to do. Rich and poor, powerful and weak, all human beings are a prey to such despair.

Can man hope for any improvement of his lot? Can our failures in life become successes at the end of the road? Is it possible that our faults will be counted as good deeds, that – despite our digressions – we will safely reach our destination? The glimpse of God’s mercy that we gain from a mother shows us that this can indeed come to pass. God’s mercy to us is many times more than that of a mother to her child; by His grace He will make up to us what we lack, but on one condition-that we make Him our everything, as a mother means everything to her child.

Qualities of leadership

In the context of his relationship with the Caliph Umar, Abdullah ibn Abbas says that he served him better even than the members of his own household, and that “he used to seat me next to him and showed me great respect.” He relates how one day when he was alone with him in his home, he suddenly heaved such a deep sigh that it was as if he was about to surrender his soul. Abdullah enquired. “Is it because of some apprehension that you heave this sigh?” “It is, indeed,” he replied, and asking Abdullah to come nearer, he told him that he did not know of anyone capable of taking on ‘this work’ – by which he meant the Caliphate. Abdullah ibn Abbas then mentioned six names, and asked the Caliph if he did not know them. Umar commented on each one of them in turn and then said: “One who is firm but not overbearing, soft but not weak, generous but not extravagant, thrifty but not miserly – only such a person is fit for this task.” According to Abdullah ibn Abbas, only Umar ibn al-Khattab himself possessed all these qualities.

(Kanz al-Ummal)

Remembering God

DHIKR is an Arabic word; it means remembrance. *Dhikrullah*, then, means simply to remember God. It is not a formal act, but rather a spontaneous one, which comes as naturally to one who has come to know God as singing does to a bird.

A spiritual upheaval of the utmost intensity occurs in one who discover God in all His power and glory. Suddenly, God is for ever in one's heart and thoughts. One's constant remembrance of God expresses itself in multifarious forms. Sometimes it is an inward experience – a tingle of joy, a shiver of fear that creeps down one's body as thoughts of God fill one's mind. Sometimes one enters into a spontaneous outpouring of thanksgiving and adoration. It is this state of mind that constitutes remembrance of God, whether it is expressed in the form of words of praise or silent thoughts.

Sometimes one looks at outer space in all its infinite vastness, and ponders on the stars and constellations spread out there. "How great must be the Lord who has arranged this marvellous display, and runs it with such superb finesse;" such is one's reaction to the sight spread out before one. Sometimes one gazes at rivers, trees and mountains, and one's heart is touched by their beauty, by the very meaningfulness of their existence. If one has discovered God, everything around one reminds one of Him, sparking off a never-ending litany of remembrance in one's mind and heart.

Then one will look critically at oneself, and realize one's own errors and shortcomings. Moved to seek the Lord's forgiveness, one will pray to Him for salvation from eternal punishment: "Lord, admit me into the shade of Your mercy on that Day when there will be no other place to take refuge." And in one's own helplessness and impotence, one will see the power and majesty of God. "Lord, assuage my fears with Your Almighty power!" one will cry out.

When feelings of the Lord's presence enter one's heart, and one puts these feelings into words, that is when one is remembering God; that is when one is engaged in *Dhikr*. *Dhikr* is to remember God, the greatest of all realities. Remembrance of such a being is bound to be the greatest of all human experiences; there are no words that fully express the profundity of that feeling.

What those who sit with leaders should be like

Abdullah ibn Abbas tells of how his father once said to him: "My boy, I see how the Commander of the Faithful, Umar ibn al-Khattab, invites you to his meetings and takes you into his confidence. He also turns to you as well as to the other Companions for advice. I am going to give you three pieces of advice which are worth remembering: firstly, fear God, and never let it be said of you by Umar that you told a lie; secondly, keep his secrets well, and thirdly, never speak ill of anyone in his presence." Amir says that each one of those pieces of advice was better than a thousand. "Better than ten thousand," rejoined Abbas.

(Al- Tabarani)

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Whatever happens is the will of God

When certain people offered to guard Ali (The fourth Caliph), the son of Abu Talib, the latter replied, "Destiny is man's guardian" According to another tradition, he said, "No. man will taste the joy of faith until he realizes that he could never have escaped what has befallen him, nor enjoyed what escaped him."

(Abu Dawud, Sunan)

Prophethood in Islam

HUMAN destiny, by Islamic lights, is a matter of man having been placed on this earth by God, so that he may be put to the test – the test being of his capacity to make correct moral choices. It is for this purpose that man has been given complete freedom, for without such freedom, the divine test would have no meaning, no validity.

It is required of man that he should lead his life on earth following a regimen of strict self-discipline. Wherein should he find the guiding principles for such a course? The answer, according to Islam, is in prophethood. Throughout the history of mankind, God appointed certain human beings – prophets – who would be the recipients and conveyors of His guidance as sent through His angels. The last in the series was the Prophet Muhammad.

The concept of prophethood is totally different from that of incarnation. According to the latter concept, God Himself is reborn in human shape on earth in order to give succour to humanity. Propethood, according to Islam, is of quite another order of being. A prophet in the Islamic sense is a man, just like any other human being: his uniqueness resides solely in his also being a messenger of God.

A messenger is not an 'inspired' person in the simple sense of the word. By Islamic tenets, prophethood is dependent not on inspiration, but on divine revelation. Inspiration is a common psychological phenomenon, of the kind experienced by a poet, whereas revelation is a true and direct divine communication. It was consciously sent and also consciously received by the Prophet. The Qur'an is a collection of these divine revelations, which the Prophet received over a period of 23 years.

According to Islam, prophethood is not acquired but God-given. That is, it is not possible to engage in spiritual exercises and then, as a result, be elevated to prophethood. Not even the Prophet had any say in this matter of selection. The choice depends upon God alone.

The Prophet's responsibility was to communicate the divine message to humanity. In doing so, if he received a negative response from the people, or even in extreme cases was persecuted, he had nevertheless to follow a strict policy of avoidance of confrontation, and had unilaterally to adopt the path of patience and forbearance. He was responsible only in so far as the conveying of the message was concerned. As for the response to, or acceptance of the message, that entirely depended on the addressees. But clearly, the greater the number who accepted the message, the greater the sphere in which a practical system of guidance sent by God became established.

The Qur'an testifies to the fact that God's messengers came in every age and in every region. According to a hadith, more than one lakh messengers were sent to guide the people. However, the prophets mentioned by name in the Qur'an are two dozen in number, the Prophet Muhammad being the last of

them. In the past, the need for new prophets had always arisen because God's religion, suffering from the vagaries of time, had frequently been distorted from its original form. New prophets had to come to the world time and time again in order to revivify the true spirit of religion, which had been lost when nations in ancient times, entrusted with the guardianship of the divine scriptures, had repeatedly betrayed their trust, allowing the book of God to be laid waste. They had to right the wrongs done by human interpolations in the books they brought with them. But after the Prophet Muhammad, the world will see no further prophets, for the Book which the Prophet gave to the world – the Qur'an – is still perfectly preserved in its original state. In the divine scheme of things, no further prophets are then required.

It is not only the Prophet Muhammad's (may peace be upon him) Scripture which is preserved in its pristine state, but his very spirit, for his utterances, the events of his life, the struggle of his prophetic mission, have all been fully recorded and have remained intact.

The Qur'an tells us that when the Prophet Muhammad proclaimed his prophethood, people found it difficult to believe in him. They asked, "What kind of messenger is this? He eats and drinks and moves about in the markets. If God had to send a prophet, why didn't He send an angel?"

In reply the Qur'an had this to say: 'If the earth had been inhabited by angels, We would have sent an angel as a prophet, but since it is human beings who live on earth, a man has been selected as God's Messenger.'

The Prophet then, as the bearer of God's message, had to project himself as a model for other human beings. The Qur'an, indeed, describes the Prophet as a model character. It was on this consideration that a messenger was selected from amongst human beings. He experienced all that was experienced by others: grief and solace, advantages and disadvantages, pain and pleasure, etc. Yet he never wavered from the truth, thus setting an example of how others must abide by the truth on all occasions. This deprived wrongdoers of the excuse that they had no role model to show them the path which God desired them to follow.

The messenger of God was born just like any other human being. He led his life just as others did. In this way, he clearly demonstrated that the way of life which he exhorted others to lead was entirely practicable. His words and deeds thus became a realistic example of how God's servants should conduct themselves on earth and what path they must opt for to avert God's displeasure and earn God's blessings.

Models for Humanity

IN a reply to a letter Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) wrote: My experience is that if ever any religion approached to this equality in an appreciable manner, it is Islam and Islam alone. Therefore I am firmly persuaded that without the help of practical Islam, theories of Vedantism, however fine and wonderful they may be, are entirely valueless to the vast mass of mankind. For our own motherland, a junction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam – Vedanta brain and Islam body – is the only hope. I see in my mind's eye the future perfect India rising out of this chaos and strife, glorious and invincible, with Vedanta brain and Islam body (*Letters of Swami Vivekananda* (1986), pp. 379-80).

Mahatma Gandhi used to advise Congressmen to follow the example of Abu Bakr and Umar. Once Gandhiji wrote in his journal 'Harijan':

Simplicity is not the monopoly of Congressites. I am not going to mention the names of Rama and Krishna because they were not historic personalities. I am compelled to mention the names of Abu Bakr and Umar. Though they were masters of a vast empire, yet they lived the life of paupers (*Harzjan*, July 27, 1937).

It is a fact that the influence wrought on history by Islamic figures in their pursuance of Islamic ideals has been a source of inspiration for all humanity. The finest examples of human qualities have been demonstrated by Islam. Anyone may base a code of ethics on stories which are mere fictions but if real characters are to serve as models, these are no better examples than those set by personalities from the world of Islam. Such individuals are the common moral asset of all mankind. The relevant aspects of their lives being a matter of historical record. I shall now narrate a number of incidents, which will serve to illustrate their moral excellence.

Trust and Confidence

The first twelve years of his prophethood were spent by the Prophet in the city of Mecca, his hometown. In those days Mecca was completely under the domination of the idolaters, who inflicted all kinds of torments on him. Finally, they decided to rid themselves of his presence altogether by assassinating him. When the matter had deteriorated to this point, the Prophet left Mecca for Madina.

Those were hard times and the journey from Mecca to Madina by the normal routes was fraught with danger. Therefore, after leaving Mecca, the Prophet had to hide for three days alongwith his companion, Abu Bakr, in a cave called *Thawr*. This cave was situated at a narrow point on a hill which was difficult to traverse. Yet his enemies, managed to reach this point in their search. They stood so near the cave mouth, wielding their swords, that the Prophet could see their footprints. Everything pointed to the Prophet having reached the end of his journey. Abu Bakr was greatly disturbed at this turn of events. He

said to the Prophet, "They have come even to this place." The Prophet, calm and composed replied, "Abu Bakr, what do you think of the two who have God as their third." These words are a perfect example of the Prophet's trust and confidence in God - the highest point of this human quality.

Being Patient in the Face of unpleasantness

Once, in order to help a famine-stricken people, the Prophet of Islam borrowed some money from a Jewish merchant, by the name of Zayd ibn Sa'ana. A date was fixed for its repayment, which was to take the form of dates (80 *misqal*). Then, three days before the stipulated date, Zayd ibn Sa'ana suddenly appeared and harshly demanded that the debt be honoured. Catching hold of a sheet which the Prophet had draped around his shoulders, he gave it a sharp tug and said: 'Oh Muhammad! Why don't you pay your debt? By God, the descendants of Abdul Muttalib keep putting off paying their debts.'

Also with the Prophet at that time was Umar ibn al-Khattab, who became enraged and said, 'O, enemy of God, what are you saying? Aren't you afraid of having your head chopped off?' At that time the Prophet of Islam was the ruler of Arabia and had full authority to take any strong measure he pleased against ibn Sa'ana. Even so, he tolerated Zayd's insolence, showing no sign of anger and keeping his composure in the face of provocation. He did not even ask why the man was demanding that the debt be discharged before the stipulated time. Instead, he reprimanded Umar, saying that what he (the Prophet) and Zayd were in need of was not an outburst from him, but a simple request for the better fulfilment of dues on his (the Prophet's part) and better behaviour on the part of Zayd when demanding repayment. Then he commanded that Zayd ibn Sa'ana should be given the dates according to the agreement, in addition to which he should be given an extra twenty kilos of dates for having been subjected to the scolding of Umar. On seeing this exemplary behaviour, Zaid ibn Saana entered into the fold of Islam.

A Matter not of Honour, but of Responsibility

Abu Bakr ibn Abi Qahafa, the first Caliph of Islam, ruled from 632 to 634. When after the death of the Prophet, he was selected for the Caliphate, he did not regard this as an office, but as a matter of responsibility. Instead of being happy over his elevation to the highest of positions, he was plunged into the deepest anxiety. After the *bay'a* (oath of allegiance), when he stood at the pulpit, he was so overwhelmed at this great burden of responsibility that he was in tears. He addressed the gathering in these words: "O People, I have been appointed your administrator, although I am not better than you. If the steps which I take are good, give me your cooperation. If I go wrong, set me right. Truth is a public trust (*amanah*) and falsehood is breach of trust. Your weak to me are powerful, unless I have given them their rights. Your strong are weak to me, unless I have received from them what is due from them."

Ibn Sad narrates that after Abu Bakr had been elected Caliph, he was to be seen the next day, going about his business as usual, with a sheet around his shoulders. When Umar Faruq asked him where he was going. He said, "To the market." Umar Faruq asked him if he did know he was the leader of Muslims. Abu Bakr replied that if he did not earn anything, what he would feed his family. Umar then suggested that they go to Abu Ubaydah, who would determine what "allowance" he should have. And

so Abu Bakr had an allowance fixed for him by Abu Ubaydah just as if he was an ordinary person. This included two suits of clothing, one for summer and one for winter. When the time came for him to depart from this world, he had no money at home. In his will, he stated that the one piece of land which he owned should be sold so that all of the allowance he had taken as Caliph from *Bait al-Mal* (Treasury) could be returned to it.

For Abu Bakr, a high government position was not a matter of honour but a matter of responsibility. The same example was set by other Caliphs as well. This is an example which all rulers should follow. It tells them that they too must consider government posts as a matter not of pride and popularity but of strict personal duty. It is only if rulers adopt such an attitude that their governance becomes a source of goodness and well-being for the people.

Simple living

During the period of pious Caliphs, a kingdom had become an empire, and there had been tremendous increases in wealth and power, yet the Caliphs still led extremely simple lives—a fact that has been generally acknowledged by historians. Montgomery Watt writes: “The ruler of what was now a vast empire still lived a very simple life in Medina, and had not so much as a body guard.” (*The Majesty that was Islam, 1984*).

The second Caliph, Umar Faruq, ruled over a large part of Asia and Africa, but continued to wear very ordinary clothes which often had patches. He would carry water bags over his shoulders. He would sleep on the ground with a stone as a pillow. He ate simple food and lived in an ordinary house.

Once Ahnaf ibn Qays came to see him in Medina. He found him walking hither and thither clad in ordinary clothes. When Ahnaf asked Umar what was the matter, he replied, that a camel belonging to *Bait al-Mal* (public Treasury) had gone astray and that he was looking for it. Ahnaf said, “You are leader of the believers (*Amirul-Muminin*) why are you taking all this trouble? You should have asked a Servant to do this for you.” Caliph Umar replied, “Who is a greater Servant than I am?”

Considering oneself a common man, while in actuality being the ruler of an empire, gave a practical example of the humility expected of a ruler who obeyed the Islamic code of ethics. Instead, nowhere, except in Islam, does there exist such a code of ethics for rulers.

The Caliphate of Umar Faruq lasted from 634 to 644. It was during his rule that Palestine was conquered. On the occasion of this conquest, Christian priests of Palestine demanded that Caliph Umar come in person to negotiate the treaty. This journey, undertaken by the ruler of a vast empire, was marked by a simplicity so spartan as to be almost unimaginable.

Umar’s entry into Palestine in this way is testified to by a manuscript written in Greek by a Christian during Umar’s lifetime. This was found in a Church in Palestine by Abdullah Uttal (a veteran of the Palestine war of 1948) who published a book containing an Arabic translation of it in 1964 from Dar al-Qalam (Cairo) in 1964. The following is a summary of the manuscript’s contents:

When the Muslims tightened their siege around Bait al-Maqdis (The Holy House) in 636, the Patriarch climbed up the city wall of the city of al-Quds (Jerusalem) and addressed the Muslim army. He told them that they wanted to enter into a peace settlement with them on the condition that it would be personally drawn up by their Caliph. Therefore, a letter was sent to the Caliph explaining this proviso and requesting him to come to Palestine.

On receiving this letter, Umar Faruq left Madina for Bait al-Maqdis with only one slave and one mount. As he left the city, he said to his servant, "We are two and the mount is one. If I ride and you go on foot, I shall be doing you an injustice. And if we both ride, we shall break the camel's back. So we had better take it in turns to ride. So they alternately rode and went on foot, then they would both go on foot for some time to give the camel some respite. They went on in this way until they were approaching al-Quds, when, by chance, it was the servant's turn to ride. The servant declined to sit on the camel's back so that the Caliph may be on the mount while entering the city. But Umar Faruq did not agree to this. And so the Caliph reached the gates of al-Quds with the servant on the camel's back and himself on foot. Witnessing this sight, the priests opened the gates and directly made peace with Umar Faruq.

After the completion of the peace treaty, Caliph Umar made a short speech in which he said: 'O People of Palestine, what is for us is for you. What is not for us is not for you either.'

Caliph Umar's journey indubitably serves as the most perfect example for all the rulers of the world.

Respect for Humanity

Amr ibn al-As was the governor of Egypt during the Caliphate of Umar Faruq. One day the governor organized a horse race in which his own son Muhammad ibn Amr ibn al-As, also took part. But in the race, the horse of the governor's son was beaten by the horse of a Copt, a non-Muslim. The Copt expressed his jubilation and this hurt the governor's son. He lashed the Copt with his whip, saying, "Take that! I am the son of a nobleman!"

As narrated by Anas ibn Malik, the Copt came from Egypt to Medina and complained to Umar Faruq that the governor's son had whipped him. Umar asked him to stay in Medina and immediately sent a special emissary to Egypt to bring Amr ibn al-As and his son without delay to Medina, the capital. When they arrived, they were both brought before the Caliph. Then the latter sent for the young Copt and asked him if this was the man who had beaten him. When the Copt replied in the affirmative, the Caliph handed him a whip and asked him to flog this 'son of a nobleman.' The Copt did so, and went on flogging him till he felt that justice had been done. Then the Caliph asked him also to flog Amr ibn al-As, the father of the young wrongdoer, as it had been his high status – as Umar explained – which had encouraged the son to take his whip to him. But then the Copt said, "No, I have whipped the person who whipped me, and I wish no more than that."

Umar Faruq said to the Copt: 'By God! if you had beaten him (the governor) we would not have intervened, until you yourself had stopped beating him. Then Umar Faruq turned to Amr ibn al-As and said: 'O Amr, since when have you enslaved people who were born free?' (Ibn Jauzi, *Seerah Umar ibn al-Khattab*)

This incident serves as the highest example of respect for the ideal of equality. It had the practical effect of ending all kinds of differences between one man and another. It set such an example in human justice as is to date unparalleled.

Selflessness

As narrated by Abdullah ibn Abbas, when a famine struck Arabia during Abu Bakr's caliphate, the people were in great distress. Abu Bakr asked them not to become overwrought and told them that God would soon come to their assistance. Sometime later, Usman's caravan, consisting of one thousand camels all laden with cereals and other foods, came to Medina, whereupon the merchants came knocking at Usman's door. He came out with a shawl on his shoulders.

Usman (later elected to be the third caliph) asked them: "Why have you come here and what do you want from me." The merchants said, "It has come to our knowledge that one thousand of your camels have arrived here laden with wheat and other foods. We want to buy the goods. If you sell them to us, we shall be able to help the people of Medina who are in dire need of foodstuffs. Usman told them to come inside his home to talk about it. When they entered, they saw that one thousand bags full of foodstuffs were stacked in his house.

Now the negotiations began. Usman asked, 'How much profit will you give me on my merchandise from Syria?' They said, "Twelve dirhams on ten dirhams. (That is, if you have bought goods for ten dirhams, we shall pay twelve dirhams). Usman said, "I am getting more profit than this." Then the merchants said, "We will pay fourteen dirhams on ten dirhams. Usman again said that he was getting a higher price than that. They said, "Well, we shall pay fifteen dirhams on ten dirhams." Usman again replied that he was getting more profit than that. The merchants became curious and asked Usman, who it was that was giving him more than this since all the merchants of Medina had already gathered there. Then Usman said to them, "I am getting ten dirhams for one dirham, so can you give me more than this?" They replied in the negative. Then Usman said to them that God had promised in His Book that "he that does a good deed shall be repaid tenfold" (6:160).

"So, O merchants of Medina," said Usman, "be witness to it that I have given my entire merchandise in charity to the needy people of Medina for the sake of God. (*Al-Abqariat Islamia*, p. 572).

This incident serves as an example of total faith in the promises made by God. Belief in God produces in man this kind of conviction and trust. And when such confidence and conviction is born within a person, he rises above all worldly interests and considerations. His ambitions become so high that even the greatest of sacrifice is not difficult for him.

Legal equality between the ruler and the ruled

Hazrat Ali ibn Abi Talib, the fourth pious Caliph, wielded great power, being the ruler of a vast empire. But he lived among the people like a common man. Neither was his standard of living different from that of other people nor had he any special legal rights.

According to Tirmidhi, Hakim and Abu Nuaym narrated this incident in these words: Hazrat Ali had a *zira* (coat of armour) which he had lost. One day he went to the market in Kufa, where he found that a non-Muslim was selling a coat of armour. On closer inspection it turned out to be the same coat of armour which he had lost.

Hazrat Ali was at that time ruler of the Muslim empire. If he had so desired, he could have taken possession of that coat of armour right there and then. But he did not consider himself above the law, and merely said to the person concerned that the coat of armour belonged to him and then asked him to come to the Qazi (judge), who would decide between them. At that time Shuraih was the Qazi for Muslims. So both of them went to him.

Shuraih in the capacity of Qazi addressed Hazrat Ali, "O leader of the believers, what you have to say? Hazrat Ali replied, "This coat of armour is mine. So this should be returned to me. Shuraih then asked the non-Muslim what he had to say. He said that the leader of the believers (Amirul-Muminin) was not telling the truth for the coat of armour was his. Qazi Shuraih then said to Hazrat Ali, "I cannot order the coat of armour to be given to you just because of your claim. You must fetch two witnesses in support of your claim.

Hazrat Ali said that Qazi Shuraih's demand was proper. Then he presented two witnesses, one his slave Qambar and the other, his son, Hasan. Qazi Shuraih said that he would accept the testimony of Qambar, but that he would not accept that of Hasan. Hazrat Ali asked, 'How is it that you will not accept Hasan as a witness, although according to a hadith the Prophet said, "Hasan and Husain are leaders of the youths of paradise." Qazi Shuraih said: "That is a different thing. In worldly matters the principle of Islam is that evidence given by children in favour of their fathers is not reliable."

Hazrat Ali being the Caliph had the power to dismiss the Qazi. But he surrendered before the judgement of the Qazi and withdrew his demand with regard to the coat of armour. On seeing this, the Christian was astonished. He exclaimed and made the following declaration: "I bear witness it is by God's commandments that the leader of the believers (Caliph) comes to the court like a common man and the Qazi may give a verdict against him. I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship save Him and that Muhammad is the messenger of the Lord. Then he said that the coat of armour really belonged to Ali and that once when it had fallen off Ali's camel, he had picked it up. Having heard his admission, Ali gave the coat of armour back to him and also gave him seven hundred dirhams. After embracing Islam, the man remained with Ali until at the battle of Siffin he was martyred (*Hayat as-Sahaba*, part I, p. 234-35).

This incident is a telling illustration of the principle that the ruler and the ruled are equal in the eyes of the law. In a court of law both must appear on an equal footing and the legal verdict must be equally binding on them.

Realism

Hazrat Hasan (son of Ali) was appointed Caliph after Ali was martyred. Hasan was the fifth caliph of Islamic history. He had all the ethical, moral and Shariah right to remain on the seat of the Caliphate. But as soon as he was appointed, Amir Muawiya, the governor of Syria, revolted against him. On the plea of seeking compensation for the blood of Usman, he managed to rally a large group of Muslims around him.

When Hasan made a review of the situation, he found that he had forty thousand Muslims at his command ready to do battle with Muawiya. But Amir Muawiya also had similar number of Muslims ready to fight to the finish. Hasan then concluded that both sides being Muslims, an outbreak of war meant Muslims fighting Muslims. That is, those precious souls who had gathered under the banner of Islam in order to extirpate idolatry from the face of the world, were on the contrary, bent on extirpating themselves along with the history of Islam as well.

Hasan's position was that of a rightful caliph of Islam, while Muawiya's was one of rebellion, but Hasan aptly surmised that Amir Muawiya was not willing to surrender at any cost. He would continue to do battle even if it resulted in the large-scale slaughter of Muslim soldiers. Therefore, Hasan himself surrendered in order to save the Muslims from a general massacre. Taking a unilateral decision, he abdicated the caliphate in favour of Muawiya.

This is the highest example of realism. Here we find a man on the highest pedestal of realism, a level from where he can think dispassionately, in the real sense of the word. Hasan took this decision objectively, rising above his own self. That is why he was able to take such a momentous decision, which has perhaps no parallel in history. Due to his abdication, Muslims who were at war with one another, gathered under one flag once again under Muawiya and made progress in many ways which greatly contributed to human advancement.

Justice

Umar ibn Abdul Aziz (62-101 AH) is the fifth pious caliph. His servant, Abu Umayya once remarked to the Caliph's wife that he was tired of eating *masur* (pulse) daily. She answered: Your caliph too eats the same pulse daily.

There used to be one hundred security guards placed at the service of the Caliphs preceding Umar ibn Abdul Aziz. But Umar ibn Abdul Aziz sent them off on various other official assignments and remarked: 'Destiny will suffice for my security.' This was the style of living of one whose empire extended from Sindh in India to France in Europe.

Once during his caliphate a delegation came to him from Samarqand. They complained of a military general, Qutaybah ibn Muslim al-Bahili, who in total disregard of Islamic principle, and without giving any prior warning, had marched his armies into their city. They had therefore come to seek justice from him. Although the conquest of Samarqand had taken place seven years before, long before he had become caliph, he still considered it necessary to meet the demands of justice.

Umar ibn Abdul Aziz wrote to the governor of Iraq to appoint a special Qazi (judge) to hear the case of the people of Samarqand. The governor carried out his orders without delay and appointed Jami ibn Hazir al-Bahili as Qazi. The case was brought to his court. Both the parties freely presented their arguments. After hearing them, the Qazi discovered that the people of Samarqand were justified in their complaints. He therefore gave the verdict that the Muslim army must leave Samarqand, and the fort and all other things must be returned to the local people. Afterwards, following the Islamic principle, the army general would lay before them all the conditions, and only on their refusal to accept these conditions, would the Muslims be allowed to do battle with them.

At that time the Muslim army enjoyed a victorious position. It had even brought the king of China to the point of surrender. But when the Qazi gave his verdict, the Muslim army general accepted it without any argument. He immediately ordered the entire army to leave Samarqand. When the people of Samarqand saw how principled and just the Muslims were, they were taken aback for they had never experienced such fair and impartial justice. They felt that the coming of the Muslim army was akin to a divine blessing. And so, before this order could be carried out, they accepted Muslim rule of their own free will and of their own pleasure. They exclaimed: "Welcome, we are your obedient and loyal servants" (*Futuhul Buldan* by Belazuri).

This incident presents an example of the Islamic reverence for justice and fair play – the highest of human values – the equal of which is hard to find in the entire annals of human history.

The preacher of God's word wishes people well, no matter how they treat him

The Prophet besieged Taif for more than twenty days. When it became difficult for the Muslims to continue with the siege, he ordered them to withdraw. It was then suggested that the Prophet bring down a curse upon the heads of the Thaqeef tribe, but the Prophet merely raised both hands and prayed: "Lord, guide the Thaqeef, and bring them into the fold of Islam." The Prophet was likewise told of the contumacy and disbelief the Daus tribe, and again it was suggested that he should invoke a curse upon them, but the Prophet's response was again to pray. "Lord, guide the Daus," he begged, "and bring them into the fold of the faithful."

The Concept of Tawheed

FUNDAMENTAL to the religious structure of Islam is the concept of tawheed, or monotheism. As the seed is to tree, so is tawheed to Islam. Just as the tree is a wonderfully developed extension of the seed, so is the religious system of Islam a multi-faceted expression of a single basic concept. For monotheism in Islam does not mean simply belief in one God, but in God's oneness in all respects. No one shares in this oneness of God.

Anthropologists would have us believe that the concept of God in religion began with polytheism; that polytheism gradually developed with monotheism. That is, the concept of tawheed was an evolutionary feature of religion which emerged at a later stage. But, according to Islamic belief, the concept of tawheed has existed since the beginning of human life on this earth. The first man – Adam – was the first messenger of God. It was this first messenger who taught human beings the religion of tawheed.

It was in later generations that this religious system began to change. This happened principally because people began to make the assumption that divinity was inherent in natural phenomena. They wondered at the loftiness of the mountains, the unceasing flow of the rivers, and the extraordinary brilliance of the sun and moon, and took it that thing possessed of such awesome attributes must necessarily share in God's divinity. Men gifted with special talents likewise came to be included in the category of the divine; they were supposed to be incarnations of God Himself. It was in this manner that the concept of polytheism crept into the religious system.

In consonance with the view that human religions began with tawheed – with polytheism as a later development – the basic mission of all the Prophets who made their appearance at intervals in this world was to lead people away from the worship of many gods and back to the worship of the One God. In other words, to turn them away from the adulation of creatures and towards reverence for the Creator.

As a proof of the Creator's existence, the Qur'an advances the very fact of the existence of the universe. All studies of the universe show that it cannot be sui genesis: some other agent is essential for the universe to have come into existence. This means that the choice for us is not between a universe with God, or a universe without God. It is rather between a universe with God, or no universe at all. Since a non-existent universe is utterly inconceivable. We are forced to accept the option of a universe with God – a necessary condition also for the existence of human beings.

God created man and settled him on the earth. After installing him here, He has kept an unceasing watch over him. Life and death are equally in His hands. Whatever man gains or loses, it is all a matter of the will of God. As the Qur'an expresses it: "God; there is no God but He – the Living, the Eternal One. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. His is what the heavens and the earth contain. Who can intercede with Him, unless by His leave? He is cognizant of men's affairs, now and in the future. Men

can grasp only that part of His Knowledge which He wills. His throne is as vast as the heavens and the earth, and the preservation of both does not weary Him. He is the Exalted, the Immense One.” (2:255)

While tawheed means the oneness of God, it must be stressed that this concept differs radically from pantheistic or animist notions that all the forms of existence are diverse manifestations of one and the same reality. On the contrary, the oneness of God as defined in Islam means that there is only one Being of the nature of God. All other things of the universe, be they physical or non-physical, are the creations of this One God: they are in no respect constituents of, or partners in the divine godhead.

However, in Islamic theology, tawheed does have two aspects to it: tawheed fi az-Zat and tawheed fi as-Sifat, that is, oneness of being and oneness of attributes. This means that in addition to the fact of there being only one Being who enjoys the status of divinity and possesses divine powers, there is also the fact that no-one else can have a share in, or lay claim to God’s attributes. These include the power of creating and sustaining the universe with all its countless bodies in motion, of sustaining and nourishing our world, in short, of governing all the happenings in the heavens and on earth; all of these are directly managed by God. No representative or deputy of God has any power – either independent or delegated – over the events of the universe: “He throws the veil of night over the day. Swiftly they follow one another. It was He who created the sun, the moon and the stars and made them subservient to His will. His is the creation, His the command. Blessed be God, the Lord of all creatures.” (7:54)

The divisibility of the divine attributes is totally alien to Islam. Just as God is alone in His being, so is He alone in His attributes. In recognition of His uniqueness, the Qur’an opens with the following invocation: “Praise be to God, Lord of the universe, the Compassionate, the Merciful, Sovereign of the Day of Judgement. You alone we worship, and to You alone we turn for help. Guide us to the straight path, the path of those whom You have favoured, not of those who have incurred Your wrath, nor of those who have gone astray.” (1: 1-7)

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It is wrong even to hint a partnership with God

“That which God wishes, and you wish, will come to pass,” said a certain individual to the Prophet. The latter showed his intense displeasure at this remark. “Have you set me up as a compeer with God?” he asked. “Say, rather, that which God alone wishes will come to pass.”

Faith and fanaticism

THE worst enemy of every religion is the fanatic who professes to follow it and tries to impose views of his faith on others. All religions have had, and have today bigots who give founders of their religion and their teachings a bad name. People do not judge religion by what their prophets were like or what they preached but by the way their followers put them in practice. Christians had their inquisitors who burnt innocent men and women at the stake as heretics. Muslims have their Islamic fraternities whose leaders pronounce *fatwabs* condemning people to death, ordering women to shroud themselves in veils and imposing draconian rules of behaviour on the community. Sikhs had their Bhindranwale who forbade men to dye or roll up their beards, women to wear saris or jeans, put *bindis* on their foreheads and said nasty things about *dhotian-topian waaley* – those who wear dhotis and caps i.e. Hindus. At one time the presence of a Sikh in a bus or a rail compartment inspired confidence among the passengers; today, thanks to Bhindranwale's legacy, the presence of a Sikh creates nervousness among non-Sikhs. Not to be outdone Hindus produced their own fanatics who condemn Christianity and Islam as alien religions and while mouthing platitudes about being the most tolerant religion on earth, hound Christian missionaries and target Muslim places of worship for destruction. In the name of Shri Ram, they demolished the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya.

Of all the world's religions the most misunderstood and maligned is Islam. Since it challenged Christian hegemony over other religions. Christians were disposed to find fault with everything it stood for. Resurgent Muslim fundamentalism gave them all ammunition they needed to castigate it. Retrograde laws imposing purdah on women, interpreting the *Shariah* to behead murderers, maim and stone to death women caught in adultery. Today Islam is judged not by the teachings of the Qur' an or the sayings of Prophet Muhammad but by the doings of the Taliban in Afghanistan and Muslim fundamentalists in other countries.

At the same time there are good people and good scholars in all religious communities who wage a losing battle to inform people of the true nature of their faiths. In India, the outstanding example of one who is doing his best to restore the prestige of Islam is Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, editor of *Al-Risala* published by Islamic Centre in New Delhi. He is assisted by his son Saniyasnain Khan. They have recently produced five beautiful small books on different aspects of their faith. These are – *The Life of the Prophet Muhammad* by Pickthall, *The Wonderful Universe of Allah: Inspiring Thoughts from the Qur'an on Nature* compiled by Saniyasnain Khan, *A Treasury of the Qur'an* compiled by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan and *The Sayings of Muhammad* compiled by Sir Abdullah Suhrawardy with a foreword by Mahatma Gandhi. They are compact little publications all available from the Islamic Centre, 1, Nizamuddin West Market, New Delhi-13.

These books are easy to read and will go a long way in dispelling anti-Muslim prejudices created in the minds of non-Muslims by the doings of Muslim fanatics. Unfortunately, whatever Maulana Wahiduddin or his son tell us about true Islam, Muslims will continue to be judged by the acts of groups like the Taliban and Mujahideens who wage unending wars against the non-Muslims – the same as Hinduism will be judged by the utterances of women like Uma Bharati and Sadhvi Rithambara and the doings of Bal Thackeray's Shiv Sainiks, Vishwa Hindu Parishad's and Bajrang Dal's followers. It is a great pity that fanaticism always wins the battle against true faith.

(KHUSHWANT SINGH)

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