



Al-Risala 1986

April

Editorial

It was during the caliphate of Umar Faruq, the second caliph, that Palestine was conquered in 16 AH (638 AD). It was then that, at the request of the Christians, Umar Faruq travelled to Palestine in order to finalize the agreements between them and the Muslims. It is recorded in history that during his visit the following event took place:

“Umar was sitting in the courtyard of the Church of Qiyama in Jerusalem when the time came for prayer. Umar then turned to the Patriarch and asked where he should say his prayers. The priest replied that he could pray right where he was seated. Umar, however, said, “No, it is not proper for Umar to pray inside the Church, because any Muslim who come here subsequently, will maintain that since Umar has said his prayers here, a mosque should be built on that very spot. Umar, therefore, moved a stone’s throw away, and said his prayers. Muslims did come to the city later on and, as he had foreseen, built their mosque at the exact point where he had said his prayers. This mosque exists to this day – short, but discreet distance away from the Church.

Such was the enlightened attitude of our predecessors, who were the makers of the magnificent history of Islam. If a mosque had to be built, they did so, but away from any place which was likely to become controversial. But his successors, without any kind of mature deliberation, have insisted upon saying their prayers at places which are the subject of controversy and have built their mosques right there on those very spots, without, it should be emphasized, adding one single brick to the bastions of Islam. Rather the existing Islamic edifice has, through their unwise and ill-considered actions been placed in considerable jeopardy. Such actions, rather than strengthening the fortress of Islam, are more likely to raze it to the ground.

2 April 1986

Fearing God in one's dealings with men

The Prophet once came across Abu Mas'ood Ansari beating his slave. "You should know, Abu Mas'ood," he said, "that God has more power over you than you have over this slave." Abu Mas'ood trembled on hearing these words of the Prophet. "Messenger of God," he said, "I am freeing this slave for God's sake." "If you had not acted thus, the flames of Hell would have engulfed you," the Prophet told him.

(Abu Dawood)

3 April 1986

The Beginning of a New Era

With the end of the 14th century Hijrah, a whole era of Islam has come to an end. With the beginning of the 15th century we are now on the threshold of a new era – and one of great promise, for we are fortunate in having around us all the circumstances most conducive to the creation of a new and great era of Islam.

When the darkness of the night gives way to the light of the sun, it is nature's silent way of announcing that one revolution of night and day is over and that with a fresh day, a fresh life is beginning, and that with the light of day, the wayfarer may take courage and hope to reach his destination. The morning sun sheds light on two views of life. One backward, one forward. One is of the opportunities left behind, while the other is of the opportunities still before him, waiting to be seized. He who uses his opportunities well will surely be successful in life. In this world of trial and competition, however opportunities appear as such only to those who are capable of availing them. Fail to grasp them and you will find that opportunity seldom knocks twice. Success, in other words, means the immediate exploitation of existing opportunities.

No one can make his start from yesterday. If a start is to be made, it must be from now, today. Those who choose to live in the past can expect little other than a steady deterioration of their circumstances and final annihilation.

Forget lost opportunities and learn to make full use of the chances of today. Just remember that the day once gone is gone never to return, and you may expect no quarter to be given you by the relentless march of time. Strike while the iron is hot, and success will surely come your way.

3 April 1986

Lust for fame the worst single danger for man

When Shidad ibn Aus was near death, he said to those around him: "What I fear most for this community is ostentation and secret desires." Sufyan Thauri explained the meaning of "secret desires". "It is to like being praised for one's good deeds," he said. The Prophet himself was asked about secret desires, and he attributed them to one who seeks knowledge because he likes the idea of people coming to sit at his feet.

4 April 1986

The Flight of the Bee

The bees make their hives at one place, but often have to travel many miles to other places to suck the nectar from the flowers. Sometimes they have to keep flying the whole day in order to do so, and observation of the bees has shown that when they leave home in the early morning, it is still dark, but that when they set off home in the evening, the sun has not yet set and it is still light. To leave in the morning darkness and return in the evening light is a very practical thing to do, because travelling in the morning means moving from dark to light while travelling in the evening means moving from light to dark. The bee takes into account the time-span between its arrival and departure and makes its journeys accordingly. It knows that it can travel to distant parts without losing its way provided it does so in the daylight, but it can start its journey in darkness because it knows that daylight is not far away. Similarly, it avoids the possibility of going astray in the dark by being as close as possible to its hive in the evening when darkness is about to fall, so it sets off on its last journey home while it is still light.

Nature teaches us a lesson through the bees. It shows us that each of our steps should be based on realities and not on wishful thinking or vague suppositions. The future will, of necessity, have its moments of darkness as well as its moments of light. If we fail to note the significance of this difference and begin our journeys in ignorance and without forethought, the future will hold little that is bright for us. Moments of light and dark will come according to their own set course and not as a result of our wishful thinking. If we do not pay heed to the realities of existence and plan our lives accordingly, we shall have the illusion that we are heading towards a bright future and splendid results, whereas, when the next moment of darkness arrives, we shall discover that, all along, we had been heading towards darkness.

4 April 1986

Attachment to the world makes one lose sight of eternity

“There will come a day when you will be as insignificant as the flotsam carried by a flood,” the Prophet once said to his Companions, who asked him why that would be. The Prophet told them that something he termed “Wahn” would develop within them, and the Companions once again asked what “Wahan” was. “It is to love worldly things, and be reluctant to face death,” the Prophet explained.

The Message of Islam

The basic, most important fact of life is that we are in this world to be tested. This fact should always be in the back of one's mind as one goes about life's work. It should dominate one's life. Our basic purpose in life is to succeed in the test of life. Only if we remember our purpose will we be able to make good both in our ephemeral and eternal destinies.

So we are in this world to be tested. What does this mean with regard to our eternal destiny? It means that whatever we have been granted in this world has been given us by God. He is the Owner of all things. We own nothing, we have no right to anything, we are just being tested in all that we possess. We should think of God as the true owner of our possessions, and realize that they will only be with us as long as our trial of life has not run its course. When it is over, everything will be taken away from us. All we will be left with will be our actions on earth. There will be no trace of the power and wealth which surround us today.

And what of this world? What are the implications of life's trial with regard to our existence on earth? It means that just as we are free in this world, so are others free. The freedom of every individual has made this world a place of competition. With every person and every nation free to pursue their own ends, rivalry between people and nations is inevitable.

The Quran exhorts us to "race against one another in good deeds" (2:147). This shows that there is competition between humans in eternal matters just as there is in worldly affairs. Just as people set their minds on winning the race of life, so should their efforts be directed even more towards outdoing others in the good deeds which will earn them success in the next world. Those who make this world their end in life, who seek to outdo others in this world, but are blind to the hereafter and its demands, will be deemed worthless in the everlasting world of God.

All things will eventually return to God, their true and rightful owner. Those who were supported by other things besides God will have nothing left to support them when that time comes. They will be the ones who failed in the trial of life, for the simple reason that they failed to see that they were being tried on earth. They will be as worthless in the sight of God as those who are guided by intolerance and prejudice are worthless in the eyes of men. The former fail to see their life in true perspective with regard to God and eternity. The latter fail to see their life as a trial with regard to the world, and their dealings with other men.

Making the Extra Effort

Lee Iacocca was born in 1924 to a poor family who had left their home-town in Italy for America in search of a livelihood. Iacocca worked hard at his studies and secured a master's degree in engineering, after which he took a job in the Ford Motor Company, where he continued to rise until he became its President. Later, following some disagreement with Henry Ford II, he was asked to leave the Ford Company in 1978.

Iacocca then got a job in another motor company, the Chrysler Corporation, as its President. This company had gone bankrupt at the time he joined it, running at a loss of almost \$ 160 million. He made a proper assessment of the situation then began to work really hard at improving matters. Within three years he had not only paid back all loans, but was running the company at profit. Now he takes pride in saying, "I'm the company."

Iacocca subsequently wrote his biography which contains many valuable suggestions, based on his experiences, such as "The key to success is not information. It's people. And the kind of people I look for to fill top management posts are the eager beavers. These are the guys who try to do more than they are expected to."

Doing more than is expected of one is the way of sincere and active people. Those who work in this way will surely have greater success in life than they ever expected.

6 April 1986

When knowledge is reduced to an avenue towards personal prestige

'Ubayy ibn Ka'ab said: "Acquire knowledge, and practice it. Do not acquire it in order to beautify yourselves thereby, for there will come a time when learning will be used as an adornment, as people adorn themselves with clothes."

Ease Always Comes After Hardship

Anyone who has experienced a dust or sand storm in desert regions will know what traumatic experience they are. There does not appear to be anything good about the scorching, blinding winds. But Soviet meteorologists have – in the Karakoram desert – made investigations into the properties of dust storms and found that they are nature’s way of controlling extreme climates. The strong winds raise the dust up to form a screen in the atmosphere, guarding the earth from the intensity of the sun’s heat. The surface of the desert, scalded by the summer sun, is considerably cooled when it erupts in a dust storm. Sometimes the resultant change of temperature can be felt, say, in America and the Arctic as far afield as from Arabia, and Central Asia.

Such is the order of nature. In this world just as ease always follows hardship, so fruitful results come only from arduous, painstaking processes. This is the way nature works, and from it we can see how we should live on earth. We should be prepared for a period of hard struggle before we can expect to reap the results we desire. This is a law established by the Maker of the universe, and it is only by complying with it that we can advance towards our goal in life. If we wanted to accomplish things an easier way, we should have to create another world, one in which cooling clouds – for instance – are not preceded by scorching winds.

There is no doubting the fact that failure in life usually results from the quest for immediate success. The word “short-cut” may be applicable to the world of roads and footpaths, but there are no short-cuts in the struggles of life. This fact frequently evinces itself in untoward ways.

Take the instance of a young man in the town of Surat, in Gujarat, who entered a jeweller’s shop, stole a piece of jewellery, then tried to make a quick exit. His line of retreat to the staircase being cut off by suspicious shopkeepers he made a dash for the nearest window and crashed his way – as he thought – to freedom. But this bold attempt ended disastrously. His leap from the second floor window resulted in his instant death (*The Times of India*, January 21, 1980).

This might appear to be just an isolated incident involving a foolhardy youth, but one finds people generally considered to be intelligent committing the same mistake in their lives. When an individual tries to accomplish instantly what should be worked for over a long period – like the youth who sought to reach ground level by jumping instead of walking down the stairs – he is condemning himself to destruction. When the leaders of a nation do likewise, they are spelling doom for all those who follow their lead.

8 April 1986

Why be Arrogant?

We learn from the sayings of the Prophet that what he warned Muslims against more than anything else was disagreement amongst themselves. Yet, we must face the fact that Muslims the world over fight more amongst themselves than any other nation.

Why should this be so? What is it in the Muslim psychology which produces rifts in personal and social relations? This can be explained in part by the sense of superiority which goes hand in hand with the notion that the Muslim is the sole repository of truth. This is a dangerous thing to feel if it is not counterbalanced by the creed that God is Almighty and that none besides Him has any power. When religious observances are neglected, or only lip-service is paid to them, in other words, when they have become a hollow sham, the fear of God dwindles to nothing in people's hearts. It is then that moral decay sets in and the sense of superiority comes uppermost, because the Muslim no longer, in any real sense of the word, prostrates himself before God in humility. When the feeling "I am in the right" is not weighed in the balance with "I have no power", the resulting sense of superiority will breed nothing but cruelty, injustice and unending discords.

8 April 1986

Hardness of heart comes from using religion for worldly ends

“The punishment of a learned man is for his heart to die,” said Hasan al-Basri. He was asked what was meant by the death of the heart, and he answered that it came from seeking the world by means of actions which should be gauged towards eternity.

(Jami' bayan al-'ilm wa fadhlihi)

Keeping Calm in the Face of Adversity

When Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) escaped from the Island of Elba after his first term of imprisonment, he was accompanied only by a small group of loyal soldiers. Once dethroned, he now again aspired to the throne of France. But in the very first encounter, he found himself face to face with 20,000 French soldiers.

Napoleon, although considered one of the most courageous leaders the world has known avoided a direct confrontation with his opponents. He did not make the mistake of foolishly, ignoring his own military weakness. At the crucial moment, when he and his little band of men stood face to face with this enormous army, he stepped forward, completely unarmed and stood calmly before his enemies. Then with great composure he unbuttoned his coat and bared his chest. In a voice now charged with emotion he addressed the great throng of soldiers – many of whom had served under him in the past: “Which one of you is willing to fire at the naked chest of his father?” The battlefield rang with shouts of ‘No one!’ Almost all of the soldiers belonging to the enemy camp rushed to Napoleon’s side. So that despite his initial lack of military resources, Napoleon emerged victorious and once more ascended the throne of France. If, in the destitute state he was in at that time, he had attempted to do battle with the French army, he would surely have been slaughtered on that very battlefield.

Whatever a man’s resources, if he has to deal effectively with a situation, he must be able to make a proper assessment of it. And this he will not be able to do if he panics in the face of danger. It is only if he does not lose his nerve and keeps his mind open to what is practical that he will be able to overcome the obstacles in his path. Inevitably, his success depends upon his being able to make a well-considered choice of whatever material and mental resources are available to him and then putting them to proper use. History abounds in instances of the weak overcoming the strong, simply by strategic deployments of resources. The reason for such success is not far to seek: often the enemy is not as strong as he appears to be. Everyone has his Achilles heel. It is just a question of finding it and then ruthlessly exploiting it. Just as Napoleon exploited the French troops’ old and sentimental loyalty to himself – that being his only mainstay– so can ordinary individuals take advantage of their enemies’ vulnerability in order to gain their point without the kind of confrontation which could be disastrous to both sides.

Not Half Measures

A noted western writer once, after studying the lives of great men, attempted to pinpoint the special qualities that were common to all of them. He came to the conclusion that all of the men he had studied had been filled with curiosity and discontent. Curiosity had kept them in hot pursuit of things, ideas and ideals which had at first eluded them, and discontent had never allowed them to indulge in the thought that they had reached the final peak of achievement. These qualities had proved to be the mainspring of their inspiration.

A similar comment is made by Mrs. Anita Straker, a mathematics adviser from Wiltshire, in a 108-page educational report she had compiled for the school's council. Evaluating certain traits in talented children, she says, "Pupils who are impatient with anything that is second best are probably gifted." (*Hindustan Times*, 2 February 1983).

A demanding temperament of this kind compels one to go on seeking absolute truth. It prevents one from being content with half-truths and paltry successes and one is continually spurred on to higher and greater things. Such a temperament demands that duties should be carried out in an ideal way and, indeed, anyone so inclined can never know happiness unless and until things have been done in the best possible way. A man endowed with such a temperament will never stop until the highest good has been achieved. There can be no half measures for him and he will never be content with things of lesser value.

10 April 1986

Man will find himself standing on the verge of Hell

This was the first sermon the Prophet delivered on reaching Medina: "People, send forth for the future; you will surely reap the fruits of your actions."

An Episode from the Life of the Companions

The Battle of Jamal took place in 36AH. On one side were the forces of Ali, son of Abu Talib, numbering about 20,000. Ranged against them was the army of Zubair ibn al-Awam, some 30,000 strong. Before the battle started, Ali and Zubair both came out of their ranks. So close did they approach one another that the noses of their horses were touching.

“Do you remember the day,” Ali addressed Zubair, “when God’s Messenger prophesied that you would one day fight against a person, and you would be the oppressor?”

“Yes, I remember it,” Zubair replied. “Why did you not remind me before I set out? I would never have left Medina. By God, I cannot fight you now.”

Having said this, Zubair returned to his troops. When his son, Abdullah ibn Zubair, heard about the matter, he was displeased that his father should have retreated from the field of battle. “You were the one who caused these two armies together,” he reminded his father, “and aroused in them enmity towards one another. Are you now going to quit the field of battle? It looks as if you have been struck with fear at the sight of ‘Ali’s army. You look like a coward.”

The exchange continued, but still Zubair did not remain in the field of battle. Quietly he rode off, only to be pursued by a malevolent creature by the name of Amr ibn al-Jarmooz. While Zubair was praying on the road, ‘Amr struck him down, just as his victim was in the act of prostration before God.

Zubair ibn al Awam was a companion of the Prophet, without doubt a brave and sincere person. Still, he was accused of being a “coward”. His conduct on this day, his adherence to the dictates of his conscience and the Prophet’s command in the face of open hostility from his own troops, even from his own son, was an act of supreme bravery. For this, he was accused of cowardice and weak resolve. Often it is the bravest people – those who do what is right no matter what people may say – who are accused of cowardice.

12 April 1986

Constructive Temperament

Dr. Abdul Jalil of New Delhi, once had the opportunity to visit Japan in 1970, where he stayed for six months. He later recounted an incident to me which cast a significant light on the Japanese character. It seems that during his stay in Tokyo; he would often take a 15 minute ride on a suburban train to a place just outside the city. One day, when the fifteen minutes had passed and there was no sign of his station, he began to feel uneasy. Sure enough, when the train stopped, it was at some other station, and he realized that somehow or the other he had boarded the wrong train at Tokyo. In sure agitation he tried to get help from the Japanese who was sitting next to him, but since neither could speak the others language, conversation was impossible. Dr. Jalil then thought of writing down the name of his station in block capitals and showing it to his travelling companion. The Japanese could apparently read that much and promptly pulled the communication cord to stop the train, which had just begun to move out of the station. He hurried Dr. Jalil off the train and took him to another platform which was for trains going in the opposite direction. There he put Dr. Jalil on the right train, and, in spite of the fact that no conversation was possible, insisted on accompanying him to his destination. Only then did he take his leave and go off to board another train which would take him on his way.

Another incident he recounted was that of a car accident which he witnessed himself as he walked along the pavements of Tokyo. Two cars had collided, both driven by Japanese. The two drivers immediately got out of their cars and stood facing each other with heads bowed. Both said: "It's my fault. Please, forgive me."

Only people with a constructive temperament could behave in such a self-abnegating way. A temperament such as this is a major guarantee of a nation's success. By contrast, individuals who care for nothing but their own selfish interests can neither achieve personal success, nor can they make any contribution to the building of their nation.

12 April 1986

One who will be saved from Doom on the Day of Judgement

“On the Day of Resurrection, God will save from Hell-fire one who has saved his brother from humiliation in this world;” these words were spoken by the Prophet Mohammad.

Wishful Thinking

Abdullah Ibn Salam was a Jewish scholar of the Bani Qaynuqa tribe. When he heard of the coming of Mohammad, may peace be upon him, he recognized him as the messenger of God who had been prophesied in the Judaic scriptures, and whom the Jewish people had been awaiting. Abdullah Ibn Salam said nothing while the Prophet remained in Mecca, but came to Medina to meet him after the Muslim emigration to that town. The Prophet sat Abdullah Ibn Salam down in a separate room and called some Jews. When they came the Prophet asked them what sort of a person Abdullah Ibn Salam was, without their knowing that the same Abdullah Ibn Salam was sitting next door. They replied that he was their leader and the son of their leader, the most saintly and knowledgeable person among them. Abdullah Ibn Salam then came before them and urged them to accept the message of Mohammad. "Surely you know he is God's prophet. You have seen mention of him in the Torah. I bear witness that he is God's messenger and proclaim my belief in him. I have recognized him for what he is, and reaffirm the truth of his teachings."

Once Abdullah ibn Salam had proclaimed his acceptance of Islam, the Jews' attitude to him underwent a drastic change. Whereas before they had been lavish in their praise of him, now they called him a liar; they even made to set upon him. Nevertheless a number of Jews became Muslim, following the example set by Abdullah ibn Salam. According to the Prophet's biographer, Ibn Ishaq, other Jews used to call them the dregs of their community. If these people had any worth in them, the Jews used to say, they would never have forsaken their forefather's religion; they would never have accepted another faith.

There are many who profess to be religious. To all appearances, their claim appears to be well-founded. But at the moment of truth, it turns out that they were following convention, not God's commandments; they were worshipping their own system rather than the Lord on High. Some people are only ready to accept as true that which comes from their own familiar group. Whatever emanates from another source they condemn as false, regardless of its true worth. Such people are not religious in the true sense of the word. The religion that they practice is communal religion. In the sight of God, they are not people of truth, for they do not follow truth for the sake of truth. Truth and falsehood are immaterial to them; what they follow are the dictates of their own community. True worshippers of God are those who raise themselves above all else besides Him; they do not put anything before God; they focus their devotion and attachment upon Him alone. To fail to fulfill these conditions, and yet to expect to be counted

Indifference to power

Two Arab chieftains—'Uyaynah ibn Hisn and Aqra ibn Habis – came before Abu Bakr during his reign as Caliph. After the conquest of Hawazin, towards the end of the Prophet's life, both these men had been given 100 camels each. Now they sought a piece of land from Abu Bakr. To satisfy them, Abu Bakr presented them with a letter of authority for taking possession of the land. 'Uyaynah and Aqra wanted other leading Companions to ratify Abu Bakr's decision, and for this purpose they went to see 'Umer. 'Umer's response was to tear up Abu Bakr's letter of authority. "This was something that the Prophet did in order to reconcile people's hearts to Islam," 'Umer said. "Now God has strengthened Islam. It now has no need of the likes of you."

The two men went back to Abu Bakr. "Are you Caliph, or is 'Umer?" they asked. "'Umer, if he wants," Abu Bakr replied, and he went along with 'Umer's decision.

From this incident we can see how true Islam cultivates an indifference to power; as displayed on this occasion by Abu Bakr. Abu Bakr had been appointed first successor to the Prophet by a consensus of Muslims, including 'Umer. But now that 'Umer defied Abu Bakr's decision, Abu Bakr did not respond in a proud, self-centered manner. He gracefully accepted 'Umer's criticism, and went along with his opinion, even to the extent of offering to abdicate in favour of 'Umer, should the latter so desire.

14 April 1986

Rejoicing in the Muslims' prosperity

'Abdullah Ibn' Abbas once said: "Whenever I hear that rain has fallen on a Muslim town I am happy; even though I myself have no cattle grazing there."

(Tabrani)

Ducking Below the Waves

Two young friends, both good swimmers, once went swimming off the coast of Madras. The day was pleasant, the sea calm, and sometimes skimming along the surface, sometimes plunging below, they had soon left the shore far behind. Then, quite without warning, they found themselves struggling against enormous waves which bore down on them with tremendous force. One of the young men struck out strongly against the waves, battling his way to the shore. But try as he might, he could not make the distance to the beach and he was drowned. The waves had proved stronger than he. His friend also struck out in the same way, but soon realized his efforts would be futile. Luckily he remembered that the force of the waves was felt more on the surface and much less underneath, so he immediately plunged, kicking and struggling, to a depth where he was no longer buffeted about. Now he began literally to swim for his life, his lungs bursting and his muscles aching. By straining every fibre of his being, he managed to reach the shallows, where he was picked up unconscious by some sailors. They brought him safely to dry land, where he was taken to hospital. He was given emergency treatment and soon recovered. It had certainly been lucky for him that there had been a boat in the vicinity to haul him out, and that he could have immediate medical attention. But what had really saved his life was his change of tactics when he realized that the waves were going to be too powerful for him.

Both the young men had struggled valiantly to survive, but it was the one who had not depended only on physical strength but also on his intelligence who lived to tell the tale. He had understood almost immediately that a confrontation of his own human strength with the enormous powers of nature would be inane and futile.

This is a principle which might well be applied to the whole spectrum of human activity, for confrontation seldom brings us anything positive. When a typhoon approaches, even the fishes dive deep.

15 April 1986

Sincerity is to avoid what is forbidden

Zayd ibn Arqam reports this saying of the Prophet: “Whoever says with sincerity that there is no god save God, shall enter Paradise.” He was asked the meaning of this sincerity, and he replied: “It is for his testimony to keep him away from what God has forbidden.”

Perseverance Pays

Wakening up in the morning to the noisy chirruping of the birds, the man noticed a broken egg lying on the ground. It had obviously fallen from a nest built by sparrows just under the ceiling of his modest dwelling. Warily he removed the broken egg, then, noting with disgust the straws which were eternally littering his floor, he stood up on a piece of furniture, and swiped the nest out of its niche. Then he spent quite some time and effort cleaning up the whole place.

The very next day, he found more straws dirtying his newly cleaned floor and, looking up, he saw that the birds were again building their nest under his roof. He felt he was going mad with their chirruping and the perpetual mess they made, so he destroyed the new nest before it was even half-completed. That way he thought he could drive them away forever.

But the tragedy of the devastated home only spurred the birds on to greater efforts, and showing great daring, they worked faster than ever. They did not waste a single moment on lamenting their loss. Nor did they go away to collect a whole flock of birds to come and make a united attack on the house owner. They simply flew to and from the home, quietly and incessantly picking up fresh straws and fixing them in position. They did not waste a single moment.

This self-same story was repeated from day to day for over a month. The house owner would angrily destroy their home and moments later the sparrows would reappear with straws in their beaks to begin their labour all over again. Their efforts seemed fruitless. Their incessant gathering of straws was apparently futile. But regardless of consequences, they went on steadily with their work. It was the birds' answer to the unmitigated hatred of the man. Yet although he was the stronger, they always seemed somehow to foil him. And, finally their silent endeavours gained the upper hand. The man realized that his resistance was futile and he stopped destroying the nests. Now they have completed their nest and have successfully laid and hatched their eggs. Their chirruping no longer incenses the man. He has simply ceased to mind them, for they have taught him a priceless lesson – never hate your enemy. In all circumstances persevere steadfastly in constructive activities. In the end you will emerge victorious.

Proceeding with Caution

When rivers have to be crossed, small animals can swim across and larger lightweight animals can swiftly walk across. But watch an elephant who is about to make the crossing. He does not step out briskly like other creatures. First he tests the riverbed for hardness or softness, making sure not to put his whole weight on his forefoot, then, when he is sure of his ground, he sets forth. Even once launched, his progress is slow for he is still afraid of becoming irremediably stuck in soft mud. He proceeds with caution, testing the riverbed at every step.

Who taught the elephant to do this? Surely it must have been God who gave him his instinct for survival, thus setting upon him His seal of divine approval. God has given us this example to show us that when there are signs of danger on our path, we should not advance carelessly, but should move with similar caution gauging the nature of the “ground ahead”.

Man is endowed with far greater brain power than the elephant. No one lights a fire near reserves of gun powder. No engine driver is careless in shunting petrol bogies. But most of us tend to forget that this is a principle to be followed in social life. Every society is comprised of a variety of people who create different types of environment. In every society there are ‘marshy places’, there is ‘petrol’ there are ‘thorns’ and there are ‘pits’. The wise are those who try to avoid such difficult, even explosive situations thus saving themselves from the trammels of confrontation.

Those who have some goal or the other before them never allow themselves to become enmeshed in such things because that would mean being diverted from their objective. A purposeful man always looks ahead to the future,—straight forward and not towards right or left. He always thinks of long-lasting consequences rather than momentary considerations. He looks at things not from the point of view of personal desires and whims, but from the point of view of reality.

17 April 1986

Not denying a person his rightful due just because one is on bad terms with him

A person once told 'Umer Ibn Khattab, the second Caliph of Islam, that he did not like him very much. "Will you deny me my rights in any way?" he asked. 'Umer said that he would not. "Now only women will revel in love," the man said,

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 there with 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 willpower, 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.

Remembering God

Dhikr is an Arabic word; it means remembrance. Dhikr'ullah, 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 discovers 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.

Beware of Negative Thinking

The greatest weakness of present-day Muslims is their negative psychology. They feel that all the nations of the world are inimical to them, and so many of their activities are seen as acts of hostility against the Muslims. This negative psychology has resulted in all their thinking becoming unrealistic. Suppose you are hit on the head by a ripe piece of fruit which has fallen down from a tree. If you persist in thinking that the tree has maliciously thrown it down at you, you will never succeed in either identifying the problem or in solving it.

The U.S.A., for instance, takes the side of the Israeli Jews against the Palestinian Muslims. All over the world, Muslims see this as an expression of enmity towards themselves. But nothing could be farther from the truth. In this world of vested interests, America sides with Israel, because its own interests are at stake there. It has nothing to do with being an enemy of the Muslims.

By helping Israel, America makes a two-fold gain. Firstly, it can in this way keep the oil-producing countries under continuous pressure so that they are left with no choice but to come to terms with American conditions at the negotiating table. Secondly, benefits definitely accrue to America in the realm of finance. The most lucrative business of the developed countries is the granting of "aid" to the weaker and the developing countries, and the receiving of interest on the amounts loaned. The actual amount to be repaid is in easy installments, but the payment of interest has to be made in full each year. Such loans are granted for various kinds of development work, but the major share of it goes towards buying modern military equipment, which is a highly profitable affair for the U.S.A., it being the chief supplier. The perpetual state of war between the Arabs and Israel is excellent for American business they can then sell costly weapons to Israel against loans, and receive in return huge amounts of interest. According to a recent report, the amount of loan interest that Israel repays to America is of the order of 910 million dollars a year. And the costly weapons that Arabs buy from America are over and above what Israel pays the U.S.A.

Before indulging in negative thinking, Muslims should consider that, in diplomacy, there are no real friends or enemies. There are only economic interests.

A Sad Revelation

The Saudi ruler, Shah Faisal, was assassinated by Prince Faisal ibn Musaid, one of his nephews, on March 25, 1975. Mr. Alan Hart, in his book on Yasser Arafat has disclosed that the plot for the Shah's murder was hatched by Israeli agents and that Faisal ibn Musaid had been exploited as a mere tool. Referring to the chairman of the External Affairs Committee of the PLO, Mr. Khalid Hasan, the writer says that it was implanted in Faisal ibn Musaid's mind that Shah Faisal had been responsible for the death of his father and that the royal family was discriminating against him. Feelings of revenge and retaliation having already welled up inside the king's nephew, the Israeli agents had only to fuel them in order to achieve their ends. They found the much-awaited opportunity during his stay in the U.S. where he had gone to further his education. A scheme was chalked out according to which a Jewish girl, who was a member of a secret Israeli agency, developed a friendship with him. She first turned him into a drug addict by helping him to consume large quantities of intoxicants so that he became enslaved, body and soul. Then came the time for her to execute her plot, as Mr. Faisal, having lost the ability to judge for himself, had come to depend entirely upon her judgement in all matters. Posing as one of his great sympathizers, she incited him to avenge his father's murder by killing the king himself.

According to Mr. Khalid Hasan, the Jews had plotted the murder of Shah Faisal because they feared that his successful initiatives towards Arab unity would eventually compel the U.S. to bring pressure to bear upon Israel to go back to its former frontiers of 1967.

This sorry incident reveals the nature of such plots against Muslims. They may be the plots of the enemies of Islam, but they are, in fact, only an exploitation of Muslim's own weaknesses.

21 April 1986

Weighing up one's actions before they are weighed up on the divine scales of justice

"Reckon with yourselves," 'Umer said, "before You are reckoned with in the next world; and weigh your own actions before they are weighed on the divine scales of justice; and prepare yourselves for the great appearance (before God)."

Teaching the Teachers

For about twenty years, between 1950 and 1970, Japan used to import superior industrial technology from the west, at times by outright purchase, but more often by borrowing or on a credit basis. As a result Japan today stands on its own feet economically and is in a position to export not only its goods but also its know-how to other countries.

Thanks to its advanced technical expertise, it now has the opportunities to help other countries, enter into friendly relations with them and draw up contracts to do business with them. Some of their feats include working on the latest irrigation projects in Thailand, giving instruction in computer programming in Singapore, constructing iron and steel factories in South Korea and China and setting up petro-chemical industries in the Middle East etc. The Japanese learnt iron and steel making from the Americans and have now developed it so extensively that they are at present exporting their skills to the Americans themselves. Japan, once the learner, is now so well placed in so many fields-particularly in communication and electronics that America is seeking its technical assistance in many of its important military departments. The students are now teaching their teachers. A newspaper correspondent reports: "Now the flow is out instead of in." (*The Hindustan Times*, 11 June, 1981)

Japan willingly submitted to industrial tutelage for 20 years and, as a result, has attained the position of industrial dominance that it occupies today. If it had chosen not to recognize the supremacy of others at that crucial point in its development, and had felt too proud to go to them for help, it could never have had such resounding successes.

All too often, we have to lose in order to gain. We have to resign ourselves to our lowly position until we can work ourselves up to more satisfactory heights. Those who recognize this necessity as one of the facts of life will have a better chance of succeeding in this world than those who expect to be able to climb straight to the top without first having accepted a position of humility, or who persist in blaming others for their failures. Patience, fortitude and tenacity are the virtues which will see us through to success, provided they are always leavened by humility.

In Giving We Receive

Mr. Surjit Singh Lamba (b. 1931) who works in the Law Ministry and lives in Kirti Nagar, New Delhi, has been gifted by nature with a photographic memory. This means that just by reading anything a few times, be it prose or poetry, he can remember all of its details. He demonstrated this skill when he visited our office in June, 1983 by reproducing whole articles of *Al-Risala* from memory.

Being a great admirer of Iqbal, he has learnt hundreds and thousands of his verses by heart, thus becoming a specialist on his life and works. In 1983, Mr. Lamba went to Pakistan where he was hailed as an authority on Iqbal. "one Mr. Amir Husain of Lahore, who is also renowned as an expert on Iqbal, challenged Mr. Lamba to recite more verses by heart than he could himself. So convinced was Amir Husain Lahori of his superiority that he offered to hand over Rs. 5000/- in cash to Mr. Lamba if he could beat him. Mr. Lamba accepted the challenge, and it was agreed that, turn about, each would recite any verse from any part of any poem by Iqbal and that the other should have to recite whatever followed. Mr. Lamba was able to recite faultlessly whatever followed on from Amir Husain's cues. But Amir Husain was ultimately unable to match his performance, and so lost the contest. Explaining his prowess, Mr. Lamba remarked, "I have been hovering around the candle of Iqbal like a moth for the past ten years. It is only if you have hovered around it more than I have that you will be able to outdo me in recitation."

It is only such utter devotion – no matter what the field of activity which can lead to success. There are few things in life which cannot be likened to the candle. Only those who have hovered around it more than others in this world of struggle and competition can aspire to advance in life, for life is very much a matter of give and take. It is by putting everything we have – brains, efforts, talent, money, energy – into whatever we are doing, that we can hope to derive some benefit from it. To receive, we must give. The more we give, the more we receive. And never can we hope to receive more than we have actually given.

23 April 1986

The day of death will be the day when man comes to life

“People are asleep; when they die they will awaken,” the Prophet said.

The Losers

In the chapter of the Quran entitled The Cave, there is a verse which reads like this:

“Say: ‘Shall we tell you who will lose most through their labours? Those whose endeavours in this world are misguided and who yet think that what they do is right; who disbelieve the revelations of their Lord and deny that they will ever meet Him.’ Vain are their works. On the Day of Resurrection, we shall not give any weight to them” (18:103-105).

What greater disappointment can there be than working, but no reward for one’s labours; struggling on and on, yet failing to reach one’s destination; investing everything one possesses, yet making no profit; building a dream home for oneself, but, not being able to live in it.

When such calamities overtake one in this world, one is benumbed by shock. Imagine the situation then, in the next world, when one sees all one’s efforts crumble to nothing. This world is limited; there is a limit to the profit and loss that one can make here. The next world, however, is infinite: loss there will be total and for all time.

One may labour all one’s life, but what good does that do when one sees all one’s efforts go unrewarded? When reality comes into its own, the fanciful illusions with which one’s existence has been bolstered up will vanish into thin air.

If one puts everything into this ephemeral world, one can expect nothing in the next, eternal world of God. What a gruelling experience it will be for man to see himself with absolutely nothing to his credit. One who had held his head high in the world will have his head bowed in shame. One who was considered eminent in the eyes of the world will be cast into the furthest depths of ignominy and objection. It will be as though he had never held any position, had never had any worth attached to him.

24 April 1986

How to tell between good and bad

“When should I think of myself as pious?” someone asked Aishah. “When you start thinking of yourself as impious,” she replied. “And when should I think of myself as impious?” the person asked once again. “When you start thinking of yourself as pious,” came Aishah’s reply.