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Editorial

Pornography, one of the social problems confronting man in modern times, has for the last several years been the subject of heated controversy, it being maintained by the upholders of morality – in the face of stiff opposition – that pornography tended to corrupt the morals of young people and adults alike and that it was one of the causes of sexual crimes.

In 1970, a U.S. Presidential Commission was set up to investigate this matter, but, surprisingly found no link between pornography and violence or any other social misbehaviour.

Again, in 1985, a U.S. Justice Department Commission was set up to carry out further investigations, and this time it concluded, in its 1986 report, that most pornography sold in the United States is potentially harmful, and can lead to violence. The eleven-members commission, formed by Attorney General Edwin Meese a year ago, said most pornography in the U.S. would be classified as “degrading”, particularly to women.

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The dictum coming to the world in the light of American experience, is significant of the deteriorated state of the man-woman equilibrium in all walks of contemporary westernized life.

Islam, more realistically, has assigned different roles to men and women, the latter having been entrusted with the affairs of the home, while the former had to come to grips with the outer world. Modern civilization claimed that this principle was unjust and degrading to women in that it ran counter to the idea of equality between the sexes. A campaign to bring women out of the home was enthusiastically launched, but over 200 years have passed since this movement started without there having been any significant success. Despite the vigour of this campaign, women have lagged far behind men in all fields. A great deal of research carried out over a long period has ultimately proved that male domination in the outside world, far from being due to alleged bias in favour of males, is actually due to the biological difference between the two sexes. That is what has been the real deciding factor all along.

The bid to bring women out of the home has in no way given them their earnestly sought-after equal status with men in external activities. Rather it has had a harmful effect: women have been reduced to mere playthings for men. They could not be really in control in the way that men were, regardless of the sphere of activities. A price had to be paid for this unnatural state of affairs, one of its uglier manifestations being pornography.

Woman in the home is its mistress. There the husband looks to her for gentleness, kindness and love. She thus becomes an object of reverence, love and respect. But when she comes out of her natural

setting, she reduces herself to the level of a temporary object of entertainment. Pornography is an expression of, and aid to this degradation.

It is this state of affairs which has been termed degrading to woman by the American Justice Department Commission.

When woman is in the home, she rules. When she comes out of it, she fails to be a match for man, and thus degrades herself. Woman has thus been the loser on both counts. The tragedy is that it is without achieving anything of any value that she has ruined her domestic harmony.

It is clear that the blame which modern civilization has attempted to lay at the door of religion must ultimately be borne by itself.

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The Call of Paradise

Bashir says that when the Muslims of Mecca first emigrated to Medina, the water of their adopted home did not agree with them. A man from the Bani Ghaffar tribe owned a well known as Beyr Rumah. The emigrants took a liking to the water of this well, and the owner used to sell them a flask in exchange for one Mudd of grain. The Prophet said to the owner of the well: "Sell it to me in exchange for a spring in Paradise." "I and my household have no other source of livelihood," the man explained. "I can't just give it away to you like that." Uthman ibn Affan, having heard about this incident, bought the well of Rumah from its owner for 35,000 dirhams, then came to the Prophet. "Will I also have a spring in Paradise in exchange for this Well?" he asked. "Indeed you will!" said the Prophet. And Uthman donated the well to the Muslims. (Tabarani)

The Message of Pilgrimage

Imam Abu Hanifah, founder of one of the four schools of Sunni Muslim thought, was at first not sure which was the supreme act of Islamic worship – prayer, fasting, alms-giving or pilgrimage. But after he had performed Hajj, (Pilgrimage) he returned convinced that this form of devotion held pride of place among all Islamic acts of worship.

One particular reason for the pre-eminence of Hajj is that it commemorates the divine scheme, first made manifest in so momentous a fashion in Abraham's day, and finally reaching fulfillment during the time of Mohammad, the Final Prophet of God.

The diverse rites of pilgrimage represent diverse stages of this divine scheme. Abraham left his native land, Iraq, for Hijaz; in like manner a pilgrim leaves his home and sets off for the Holy Land. Nearing Mecca, he exchanges his tailored clothes for two unstitched sheets reminiscent of the simple attire worn in the days of Abraham and Ishmael. He reaches Mecca. There he walks around the House of God, recalling Abraham and Ishmael, who walked around the same House in solemnification of the covenant they had made, with its Master. Then the pilgrim performs Sae'e, which entails walking seven times between the hills of Safa and Marwa in memory of Abraham's wife, Hajira, who walked between those very hills in search of water. In Mina the pilgrim performs sacrifice, obeying God's command as Abraham did by being ready first of all to sacrifice his own son, then completing the sacrifice with the slaughter of a ram as God had commanded him. At Jamarat he stones the devil. This is what Abraham did when they made to divert him from the carrying out of God's will. Throughout the pilgrimage, the words: "Here I am at your service, Lord," are on every pilgrim's lips.

The assembly of pilgrims on the plain of Arafat is the culmination of this spirit of divine service. Here all the pilgrims gather before God, pledging to live their lives in the spirit of Hajj and in accordance with the example set by those who are commemorated by it.

In the Quran, the rites of pilgrimage have been called Sha'air – symbolic objects. They are symbolic in that they represent events in the life of Abraham and his progeny. Different stages of their enactment of God's scheme are repeated symbolically in the rites of pilgrimage, making pilgrims feel at one with the tradition of Abraham and his descendants.

The pilgrim, in effect, is making a promise to God. He promises to base his life on truth, putting aside worldly interests. Should the need arise, he will forsake life's comforts and pleasures, and will remain content with the bare necessities as he struggles on in the path of God. He will run towards God, his life will revolve around the Lord. When the forces of evil seek to pull him off course he will chase them away and carry on towards his goal. He will go wherever the call of God lies, and give whatever is required of

him in the divine cause. The actions of the pilgrim proclaim that he is ready to go to any lengths in the service of his Lord. If it be God's will, he will not stop short of sacrificing his own son, but under no circumstances will he neglect his duty to God.

The fulfillment of God's scheme, which started with Abraham's travelling from Iraq to Mecca, came two and a half thousand years later with the coming of Mohammad. The purpose of this scheme was the eradication of polytheism. Five thousand years ago, when Abraham came to the world, people were locked in the grip of polytheism, which had extended its tentacles to every walk of human life. Polytheism and idolatry were passed on from generation to generation, creating a climate in which monotheistic religion, as taught by the prophets, 'held little popular appeal'. A community was needed who would rally to the call of monotheism. Such a community could only come into being in an environment free of the polytheistic influences that had for so long pervaded human civilization. An area uninhabited by man, the uncultivable valley of Mecca, was chosen for this purpose.

But first an individual was required to initiate the process of bringing such community into existence: someone who would be prepared to live in a place where life itself had to be snatched from the claws of death. Abraham was God's choice and he was put to the proof, to see whether he was up to the task. He saw himself then in a vision, sacrificing his own son. This is what it would amount to, taking his family to Hijaz. There was nothing to live on in Arabia. Only vast expanses of scorching desert and inhospitable ranges of ragged mountains awaited Abraham there. Was he willing to settle his family in such a place, in order to set in motion God's purpose for humankind?

Ancient Arabia presented a quasi-lunar landscape. Devoid of water and vegetation, there were no means to support human life. For this reason the Arabian peninsula had remained free of the insidious influences of polytheism. Polytheism comes with people, and there were no people settled in Hijaz. Where better to prepare a group dedicated to the worship of One God? Abraham placed a knife on his young son's throat, thus indicating his readiness to make this supreme sacrifice. So father and son were chosen to live in the wilderness of the desert, there laying the foundations of a new community untouched by polytheism.

Abraham prayed for a prophet to come among the progeny of Ishmael. In answer to this prayer, God brought the Prophet Mohammad into the world. But it took two and a half thousand years for this to happen. During this time a community free of the yoke of hereditary polytheism was being nurtured. The desert dwellers of Arabia had qualities inbred in them which would enable them to assist the final prophet in his mighty task. For this reason the community which developed in Arabia from the progeny of Abraham was called in the Quran "the best community" (3:110). They were exceptional in their readiness to rally to the support of the Prophet Mohammad. True, some of them opposed him at the outset, but once they had understood the truth of his message, they followed him without reserve.

During the millennia between Abraham and Mohammad, Arabia did not remain untainted by the widespread tendency to fashion false gods. But there always remained a group which was totally

dedicated to the monotheism of Abraham. These people were called Hunafa – the upright, those who adhered to the natural way. The initial opposition of others, who over the years had fallen prey to polytheistic influences, was due to lack of comprehension more than anything else. As soon as they realized that Mohammad was truly a prophet of God sent to convey the truth to them they dedicated themselves to him with all the fervour that they had formerly shown in opposing him.

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Conceit: the most evil trait

The Prophet mentioned three saving graces and three destructive traits. The three saving graces, he said, were “fear of God in public and in private; speaking the truth, at times of both calm and anger; and moderation, whether one is affluent or poor,” And the destructive traits he mentioned were following one’s desires, miserliness and conceit. “And the last one, that is the worst of all,” he said.

(Baihaqi)

The Reality of Hajj

It is incumbent upon Muslims to perform Hajj, at least once in a lifetime, as long as they possess the means. As is clear from the following excerpts from Quran and Hadith, Hajj is one important pillar among the five foundation pillars of Islam:

“Pilgrimage to the House is a duty to Allah for all who can make the Journey.” (Quran, 3:97)

“The first House ever to be built for man was that at Mecca, a blessed place, a beacon for the nations.” (Quran, 3:96)

“There are five basic pillars of Islam,” said the Prophet Mohammad: “To bear testimony that there is no god save Allah, and that Mohammad is His Prophet; to establish prayer and pay the poor-due; to make pilgrimage to the House, and fast during Ramadhan.”

The root meaning of the word “Hajj” is “to set out” or “to make pilgrimage”. Canonically, it has come to refer to a Muslim act of worship, performed annually, in which the worshipper circumambulates the House of God in Mecca, stays awhile in the plain of Arafat and performs other rites which together constitute Hajj – the act of pilgrimage.

Hajj is a comprehensive act of worship, involving both financial outlay and physical exertion. Both remembrance of God and sacrifice for His sake are part and parcel of Hajj. Hajj is an act of worship in which the spirit of all acts of worship has, in some way or another, been brought into play.

The sacred duties of Hajj revolve around the House of God in Mecca. What does the House of God represent to a believer? It brings to life a whole prophetic tradition, stretching from Abraham to Mohammad. The House of God stands as a model of true faith in God, and submission to the Master of the House. “The Prophets gave up everything and followed the Lord,” is the message that rings out from the Lord’s House; leave all and follow Him. They were obedient to His will; be you so also. They served His cause on earth; serve Him until you die, and you will prosper forever.”

The journey to Hajj is a journey to God. It represents the ultimate closeness one can achieve to God while living in this world. Other acts of worship are ways of remembering God; Hajj is a way of reaching Him. Generally we worship Him on an unseen level; in Hajj we worship Him as if we saw Him face to face. When a pilgrim stands before the House of God it seems to him that he is standing before God Himself. He is then moved to revolve around the Lord’s House, like a butterfly encircling a flower, clinging to His doorstep as a slave begging for his master’s mercy.

The uniqueness of Hajj lies in the unique nature of the place in which it is performed. Throughout the ages, Mecca has remained a venue for the manifestation of God’s signs. It was here that the great communicator of the divine message, the Prophet Abraham, made a memorial to man’s life of belief and submission. And it was here, following in the same tradition, that the foundation of Islamic history was

laid: fourteen hundred years ago the Prophet Mohammad changed the spiritual face of Arabia, from one littered by many godheads, to one illuminated by the countenance of the One God.

Much history lies behind the rich and noble tradition existing in Hijaz. It is a land that has received God's special grace. The spiritual wealth it has on offer is enough to enrich any poor traveller, enough to revive any languid heart. A sea of divine mercy flows where only sand and sky meet the eye, in the environs of Mecca and Medina. There the pilgrim washes and is cleansed.

Among all Muslim acts of worship, Hajj holds a prominent position. In one Hadith, the Prophet called it the supreme act of worship. But it is not just the rites of pilgrimage that constitute this importance, it is the spirit in which Hajj is performed. Let us put this in another way and say that it is not merely a matter of going to Mecca and returning. There is much more to Hajj than that. Hajj has been prescribed so that it may inspire us with new religious fervour. To return from Hajj with one's faith in God strengthened and rekindled - that is the hallmark of a true pilgrim. Hajj only takes its place as a supreme act of worship when it is undertaken in its true spirit, and performed in the proper manner. It will then be the greatest act in a pilgrim's life: he will never be the same again.

To make Hajj is to meet God. When the pilgrim reaches Meeqat, the border of the Sacred Territory, he is filled with awe of God: he feels that he is leaving his own world, and entering God's. Now he is touching the Lord, revolving around Him, running towards Him, journeying on His behalf, making sacrifice in His name, smiting His enemies, praying to the Lord and seeing his prayer answered.

The House of God in Mecca is one of God's signs on earth. There, souls which have strayed from the Lord take comfort in Him once again; hearts which have become hard as stone are brought low before Almighty God; eyes which have lost their vision are filled with divine radiance. But these blessings of Hajj are available only to those who come prepared for them. Otherwise Hajj will be just a tour, a visit which leaves no lasting impression upon its perpetrator.

"Hajj is to stand in the plain of Arafat." These words of the Prophet Mohammad illustrate the importance of sojourning in that place. The plain of Arafat, in which pilgrims spend one day, presents a picture of the arena of Judgement-day. Host upon host of God's servants flock in from all sides to witness the spectacle. And what a spectacle! All are dressed in similar, simple attire. There is nothing to single any person out. All are reciting the same words: "Here we are at your service, Lord." How can one who witnesses this spectacle but call to mind the like of this verse of the Quran:

"When the Trumpet is blown, and behold, from the graves they rush forth to their Lord"
(36:51).

The pilgrims gather on the plain of Arafat in order to recall the time when they will gather on the plain of the last day. What they will experience in practice in the next world, they conjure up visions of in this world.

For all these reasons, Hajj reigns supreme among all acts of devotion. Like the Sacred Mosque in Mecca has a station above all other mosques, so the worship that is performed there – as part of the pilgrimage – stands head and shoulders above all other acts of devotion.

9 August 1986

The Joy of a pious household

Miqdad, explaining the state of affairs in the Prophet's time, told how in a single household there would be some who accepted Islam and some who did not. A believer would see his own father, son or brother in a state of unbelief and this would cause him tremendous distress. Faith in God having opened his heart, he would realize that were his kith and kin to remain in a state of unbelief, they would be doomed to Hell-fire. For this reason believers derived no joy from seeing those of their relatives who did not believe. Believers caught in such a predicament were taught in the Quran to pray in these words: "Lord, give us joy in our wives and children and make us examples to those who fear You." (Hilyatul Auliya)

Staying Cool

The most delicate and dangerous part of space journeys is the point at which the spacecraft returns to the earth's atmosphere. Take the case of the Apollo-8 spacecraft, for instance. Before the capsule touched down on December 27, 1968, it had to negotiate a precipitous turn to the earth's atmosphere. Because of the earth's gravity – seven times that of outer space – the speed of the spacecraft soared, reaching an astronomical 39,000 kilometres per hour. Because of its extraordinary speed, the heat of the spacecraft rose to terrifying proportions, for air friction had started heating up the space vessel as soon as it entered the earth's atmosphere. Soon it became literally red hot, reaching a temperature of 3,300 degrees celsius.

No animal can survive at such a temperature. How was it, then, that the three American astronauts aboard the craft were able to remain unaffected by the blazing inferno that had built up around them and return safely to earth? The reason that they were able to do so was that the spacecraft in which they were travelling had been so constructed that its interior would not be affected by the severity of external conditions. In spite of the incredible heat on the outside, the temperature inside of the craft was just 21 degrees celsius. Imagine – 3,300 degrees on the outside; 21 degrees on the inside.

This event from the realm of space travel has an important lesson to teach us in our lives on earth. Time and time again we run into highly charged situations in life: it seems impossible to go on. There is only one way to survive under such conditions, and that is by not letting oneself be inwardly affected by one's outward situation; by suppressing one's emotions and keeping one's feelings under control. Only then will one be able to maintain one's composure. One will not be able to survive crises in life if one lets one's inward condition become as highly charged as one's outward situation. If one remains inwardly calm and composed, at all times, one will be able to survive the heat of any external circumstances, and will safely reach one's destination. If there is hate and anger directed against one, one must not let such feelings get under one's skin instead one should try to feel forgiveness in one's heart of hearts. Even if the whole world wishes one evil, one should still have only good feelings for others. There is no other way of succeeding in life. If one adopts the same feelings as prevail in one's outside environment, the challenges of life are sure to be more than one can bear.

How to Put one's Message Across

“Go both of you to Pharaoh, for he has transgressed all bounds. Speak to him with gentle words; he may yet heed and fear (God).”

(Quran, 20:43-44)

God's injunction to Moses and his brother Aaron to go and preach to Egypt's reigning monarch is aptly commented upon by Ibn Kathir: “There is a great lesson to be learnt from this verse. Though Pharaoh's pride and contumacy had reached the ultimate level, Moses, although chosen by God from all His creation, was still commanded to speak to Pharaoh gently and with restraint.”

From this one can judge how the message of Islam should be put across: no matter what the circumstances, it should be delivered with politeness, restraint and tact. Even if the people addressed are far gone in the denial of truth, and have reached the ultimate extremes of contumacy; even if it is clear that they will never mend their ways: still one is not allowed to be severe to them in one's speech; Irrespective of the treatment meted out to him by the other party, the preacher of Islam should always adhere to a civil and polite mode of expression. No harsh words should ever pass his lips.

One must command great reserves of patience if one is to go out and preach the message of Islam. One who does not have such resources should not even attempt to travel along this long and testing path.

11 August 1986

A blessing for one, a liability for another

After the Battle of Hunayn, the Prophet presented Hakim ibn Hezam with a gift. It seemed inadequate to Hakim, so the Prophet presented him with something more. "Which of your presents was better?" Hakim asked. "The first," the Prophet replied. "You know, Hakim, this property is a fair green pasture. Whoever receives something given out of generosity shall be blessed therein; but whoever takes something out of greed shall not be blessed therein; and he shall be as one that eats and is not filled. The hand which gives is better than the hand which receives." "Even from you, Prophet of God?" asked Hakim. "Yes, even from me," was the Prophet's reply. (Kanzul Ummal)

Helpers of God

Ubadah ibn Samit, one of the Prophet's helpers in Medina, says that he and other members of the Ansar promised, while swearing allegiance to the Prophet that, whether it was to their liking or not, whether circumstances were favourable or not they would both hear and obey. Others might be given precedence over them, but they would not argue with those in authority, except, of course, if the latter were openly defiant of God's laws in the commands they gave, in which case there would be good grounds for argument. And wherever they were, they would speak up fearlessly for the truth, no matter if they were censured for this by tormentors;

The Arabic word "Bay'ah", translated above as "allegiance", literally means "to sell". Bay'ah, then, is a contract, entered into by an individual with those responsible for running the affairs of a community. By virtue of this contract, the individual is incorporated into the community. The very fact that the word "bay'ah" is used for this oath of allegiance testifies to the binding nature of the contract: when an individual takes this oath, it is as if he has sold himself to the community of which he has become a part. His being ceases to be his own; it belongs to his community.

Such was the oath of allegiance sworn by the Muslims of Medina, who were known as the Ansar – Helpers of God. The ship of Islam was in such a sorry state when the Muslims emigrated from Mecca to Medina, that it would have foundered but for the unconditional and total support offered by the faithful of Medina. They promised to do all that they could to aid Islam, and kept their promise all their lives. So exemplary was the help they extended to the faith that they became known simply as "The Helpers".

Now let us have a look at the terms under which the Muslims of Medina bound themselves to come to the aid of God's faith. Among them, we find mention of all those matters which normally lead to the severance of contracts – the excuses that people offer in breaking away from their community. Yet even under such constraints as these, the Ansar promised to "hear and obey". They would remain faithful even under the most adverse of circumstances: they would stay with the ship of Islam even when it was in dire straits, when dashed hither and thither by the storms of life and the weak-hearted took to abandoning ship; they would bury their grudges and forget petty complaints, being of a mind to sacrifice these in the interests of greater unity.

As for those who come to the aid of a cause when the going is easy, but desert it when the road becomes rough; who are steady enough when things work to their advantage, but go to pieces when faced with adversity; who, not satisfied with taking a rear seat, always seek to occupy a position of prominence; who scorn menial tasks, deeming only high office fit for ones of their lofty disposition: such people are too caught up in serving themselves to serve the divine cause. They may forge a future for themselves on earth, but they have no future in the everlasting world of God.

We come to the final clause of the oath, where it is said that one would only be entitled to disobey one's leader when the latter acted in open defiance of the law of God. It was to the Prophet that the Ansar were swearing allegiance, and the Prophet, clearly never acted in such a manner. So what they were saying in effect was they would never disobey their leader.

A community only truly comes to life when the individuals that make it up bury their separate identities; that is to say, they sacrifice their own opinions for the sake of the community as a whole. Only when such people emerge, as are willing to put others before themselves, can any community life worthy of the name come into existence.

An "Islamic revival" can only be achieved by people such as these. Those who wish to give new birth to Islam in the world, without cultivating the qualities essential in themselves, will surely fail in their efforts.

13 August 1986

Lost to the World

“I have seen people among the Prophet’s companions to whom the world meant less than the dust under their feet.” Thus spoke Hasan Basri, the great 8th century religious scholar, to his awed contemporaries. He was well qualified to judge, for he had met a large number of them, seventy of whom had fought at Badr. He told them of how they wore simple, homespun camel hair garments, and were so preoccupied with righteous living that they seemed lost to the world. “Were they to see the best among you, they would think: ‘These people have no connection with Islam.’ And if they saw the worst among you, they would say, ‘These people do not believe in the Day of Judgement.’”

No Second Chances

A senior college teacher once commented to me with considerable bitterness, "There are no second chances in life. Wonderful opportunities to advance myself are coming my way at the moment, but I can't take advantage of them." I was rather surprised at this outburst and asked him the reason. "It's all because I rushed into taking up a job immediately after I had done my B. Sc. You see, I never did my M.Sc. Of course, I always meant to at later stage, but somehow the circumstances were never just right for me to leave work and start studying again." I had to agree with him that without higher qualifications one cannot aspire to higher things in life.

This is unfortunately true of about 99 percent of our society. The early part of one's life should be devoted to intensive preparation for adult responsibilities, but most people fritter away their energies in fruitless activities, more intent on enjoying life than on giving any thought to the future. Having failed in their youth, through ignorance or negligence, to develop their potential to the full, they can seldom make a decent start in life, and even if they do, they find it almost impossible to make any progress. More often than not, they find themselves at an impasse. All doors are closed to them.

When you enter the field of life inadequately prepared for it, you cannot expect to reap a harvest if the seeds for it have, never been sown. When the time has come for harvesting, you cannot then rush to sow seeds. Time once lost can never be brought back again, and once opportunities have slipped from your hands they can never again be recaptured. Fortune only knocks once, it does not knock again.

There are few useful tasks which can be performed without preparation, for preparation equips one, gives one the tools for the job. If you try to break a stone with your bare hands you will surely fail. But if you take a pickaxe to it, and have learned how to wield it, it will only be a matter of minutes before you have swashed the stone into small pieces. Being well-equipped and having the technical knowhow are indispensable to personal progress.

Only if you enter life with the requisite competence will you receive your rightful place in it. Bemoaning your losses and protesting against imagined enemies will be of no avail. It is pointless counting upon the environment to provide the necessities of life, and complaints against it are usually an expression of one's own incapacity. They convey the desire to possess, to reach heights of honour and glory without having put in the necessary groundwork.

Sticks and Stones

There is a saying in Hindi : “One who can bear the blows of words is my guru, and I am a slave to him.” In other words, a man of this mettle is fit to be a great leader.

There is an English saying which runs:

“Sticks and stones may break my bones,
But names can never hurt me.”

Although words do not actually break one’s bones, the blows they deliver are the hardest of all to bear.

Mr. J. Krishnamurti (1895-1986), a well-known Indian thinker, who died recently at the age of 91, spoke fluent English and attracted large numbers of the English-speaking public to his lectures. Abroad too, his speeches were listened to with great interest. Even so, Krishnamurti often bewailed the fact that his words fell on deaf ears and that no one was actually willing to put them into practice. In a speech at Madras, he said that for fifty years he had been travelling the world over, putting his thoughts across to people, but that no one paid any heed to them. “Will you now change yourselves?” he asked the gathering, then, answering for them, he said, “After having heard me, you will go back and continue to live as you have been living up till now.” At this, an infuriated member of the audience stood up and said, “You keep on saying this, year after year, that we do not follow you! Then why on earth do you keep on repeating yourself?” Very softly, Krishnamurti replied, “Sir, have you ever asked a rose why it blooms?”

On being criticized, one often becomes incensed, but one never gains anything by letting oneself get into such a state. This is because, in anger, one is not able to control oneself, and will express one’s negative feelings in terms which ill-befit the occasion. Conversely, when one’s emotions are kept well under control, one’s answers will be so tellingly appropriate as to silence all harangues.

Overcoming one's Limitations

Opticians usually have arrangements for eye-testing on the premises so that customers can have their eyes tested and buy their spectacles all in the same shop. One of my acquaintances once opened a spectacle shop. It was rather small, certainly not big enough to permit eye-tests to be carried out, for a distance-vision chart has to be 18 feet away from the client. And this little shop was only 9 feet in length. My friend was quite unperturbed by this. When asked how he proposed to do eye-testing in such a confined space, he said, "Simple! We just fix a mirror on the wall, and there you are! The distance is doubled!" The clients could then be asked to read the chart through the mirror because the reflection would have the effect of doubling the distance. Undaunted by the acute shortage of space, this shopkeeper had shown great ingenuity in solving his problem.

This principle is applicable in most of life's arenas. When you have limited opportunities, when your horizons seem narrow, there is no need to become defeatist. It is simply a question of racking your brains and you will be able to "convert" your "9-foot shop" into an "18-foot shop".

When your home is only a small one, you can always add upper storeys to it to enlarge it. When you do not have enough resources to make investments your basic honesty is your best guarantee of success. When you do not possess university degrees or other high qualifications, your courtesy and hard work will in large measure compensate for this. When there are no chances of overcoming your enemy by waging war against him, your wisest policy is to win his heart. When your share in political powers is a diminished one, you can still score in the economic field and achieve a different, but equally important set of objectives. When you feel you are in a weak position because your sympathisers are few in number, you can make up for this by encouraging unifying forces and striving towards efficient organization of whatever human resources are available.

Every 'small shop' can be converted into a 'big shop'. A shop is small only so long as you do not use your brains to expand it. All of your limitations can be quickly overcome provided you put to good use the natural gifts bestowed upon you by Almighty God.

Have no Regrets

An American psychologist once observed that the activity on which man wastes more times than on anything else is having regrets. People's energies are dissipated in recalling and mulling over bitter memories of the past and in bewailing the fact that they acted in one way and not another, or that friends, neighbours and relatives had been remiss in their actions and attitudes towards them. The businessman thinks, "If I had invested in project B instead of project A, I would not have incurred these losses." The young woman sighs, "If I had married X instead of Y, I'd be a much happier person today." The elderly couple think, "If we had started paying up installments on a house instead of just renting one, we would now be the owners of a house." And so on, ad infinitum.

To entertain such thoughts is a sheer waste of time and energy. The moment we have such thoughts, we should consider whether any remedy is possible at this stage, if something constructive can still be done, – relations improved, an entirely new situation contemplated, etc., and if the answer to these questions is "No, things are now beyond repair," then one should simply dismiss these distressing ideas from one's mind and turn to new avenues of thought. It is better to say, "I'll do better next time," or "I'll consider things in greater depth before taking my decision in future," or "I shall myself see to it that relations are never allowed to deteriorate." This is a more positive approach to take where there is some possibility of similar opportunities or situations recurring and it certainly keeps one more emotionally stable and mentally healthy to tackle things in this way. In Situations where there is no possibilities of second chances, it is better to resign oneself to things as they are and to view things in as detached a way as possible.

The material gain from such an approach is the saving of time and energy which would otherwise be wasted by wallowing in self-pity. Bitter memories can be conveyed, by positive thinking, into useful experiences – precious lessons for the future.

It should be appreciated too, that remaining constantly apprehensive about the future is just as bad as lamenting over the past, and no sound future can be built by adopting such a fearful and negative attitude.

National Character

An Indian industrialist once had the occasion to go to West Germany in 1965. While there, he visited a factory and, going around it to see how it functioned, he stopped beside a worker and started to put a few questions to him. To his surprise, inspite of his repeating the questions several times, the man paid no attention to him and went on with his work.

After some time a bell rang for the lunch break and the workers filed off to the dining hall. It was only then that the apparently mute and unapproachable worker came up to the Indian visitor, shook hands with him cordially and asked him – a faint element of incredulity in his voice – “Do you talk to the workers in your country while they are on duty?” Without waiting for an answer, he went on, “If I had taken a break to answer your questions, I would have wasted several minutes of my work time, and this would have been a loss to the company. In the long run it would have been a loss to the nation. We are here to benefit the country and not to make it incur losses.”

It is sterling character of this sort which accounts for the success of western nations. In 1945, the Allied Powers had almost completely destroyed Germany, but in a mere matter of 25 years, Germany became more powerful than it had even been before. The reason for this astonishing progress was that each and every individual considered it incumbent upon him to carry out his duties to the best of his ability. To him, the individual self was subordinate to the nation. It is true, of course, that everyone was working for himself, but it was not at the cost of the nation, but through his own personal efforts. Whenever there was any clash between personal and national interests, he made a point of sacrificing his personal interests in favour of the greater good of the nation.

The state of a nation depends invariably upon the state of the rank and file of the people who are its mainstay. A nation prospers or declines according to whether its inhabitants are pulling their weight or just mindlessly frittering away their time.

A nation is comparable to a machine which works only so long as all its parts are of high quality, well-oiled, properly assembled and in working order. Similarly, a successful nation will be made up of individuals of sound character, well-integrated in society and with a thorough-going sense of cooperation. The building of a nation means, basically, the building of character. For without character, the utterly selfless dedication which is a pre-requisite for national success will never manifest itself. Without reforming individuals, the reform of a nation will remain the stuff of dreams – illusory and without substance.

19 August 1986

The Helplessness of Man

The first field Marshall of India was General Manekshaw. His successor, General K.M. Cariappa, was conferred this prestigious title in January 1986.

K.M. Cariappa who had retired thirty five years ago, had a distinguished term of service. His services were acknowledged by the newspapers as an illustrious military career, and he is regarded as one of the national heroes.

On the occasion of the ceremony, many military celebrations were held in New Delhi, in which Mr. Cariappa participated. On January 15, 1986, he was inspecting Indian Army, the military youths marched past him in grand style. At this point, a newspaper reporter asked the 86-year old Field Marshall, what his impression was. He immediately replied:

“I envy them, I am not young to march with them.”

(The Times of India, 16 January, 1986)

How strange is life's experience. Man accomplishes great military achievements and he comes to be reckoned amongst the national heroes. But when the time comes for his greatness to be acknowledged by placing laurels at him, by conferring on him the title of Field Marshall, He has grown too weak to hold even the prized trophy in his hands. He cannot march with the military with whom he had once won great victories.

Man is a helpless creature. His helplessness is shown to us in the form of old age and death. But no one is willing to learn a lesson. Blissfully unaware of this greatest reality, man is awakened only on the day when he is brought before his Lord to be judged. But such an awakening is of no value.

Dust unto Dust

Although Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) started his career as a military officer, he so distinguished himself whenever opportunities came his way that he finally succeeded in ascending the French throne, having himself proclaimed Emperor of France in 1804. He then set out to conquer the world. In a remarkably short time he had dominated the whole of Europe except for England. In 1796, he married a charming French lady, Josephine, but divorced her in 1809 as she had failed to bear a successor to the Emperor of Europe.

One year later Napoleon married Marie-Louise, daughter of the King of Austria, who, greatly to the satisfaction of Napoleon, bore him a son and heir, Francois Joseph Charles, who would continue the monarchy. Before long, however, his excessive greed for territorial power led him to clash with Russia. Although the latter's armies failed to repulse him, the Russian climate came to their rescue. When the snow started falling, and temperatures went far below zero, Napoleon's armies, unaccustomed to such severe winter cold, were unable to advance any further. Napoleon was compelled to retreat in such a state of disarray that the major part of his army perished on the way. With his army so greatly reduced, he was defeated by Germany at Leipzig in 1813 and abdicated in 1814. He was then exiled to the Island of Elba. He did, however, manage to escape, but returned to power only to suffer a crushing defeat at the hands of the British at Waterloo in 1815. He was taken captive and sent off to the Island of *St. Helena*. There the man who had been the idol of his countrymen – “the greatest adventurer the world has seen” – died in imprisonment in the year 1821, in a state of utter despair.

Man dreams of glory and splendour not only for himself but also as a priceless treasure to be passed on to his children; he remains blissfully unaware that before long he himself is to be divested of all his glory, shorn of his titles, and reduced to a heap of dust. Each day, in this world, one ‘Napoleon’ or the other disappears from life's stage, but scant attention is paid to this fact.

In the present world, man is given opportunities which are strictly defined in their scope and time-span in the context of the divine scheme of things. In terms of human life they have their limitations. But man's ambition knows no bounds and he lives out his life in the most incautious and unrestrained manner. And at the end of it all, what happens to the personal glory on which he was wont to pride himself? It is simply buried in the dust.

The desire of so many great men takes place, but, no lesson is learnt from their passing. Everyone sets out to blaze the same trails, write the same books, climb the same mountains as his predecessors. No one considers that the end will be the same, no matter how illustrious the life, and that not the smallest trace of former glory can pass with one into the life hereafter.

Persecution Complex

Almost the entire Muslim world is suffering, in one way or the other from a persecution complex. They have the feeling that they are the oppressed, that others have robbed them of their pride.

What are these things that other communities have allegedly taken away from them? Muslims consider that political power, government services, economic resources, social institutions, material gains, etc., have been taken away from them by non-Muslims.

This “Loss”, or deprivation, is wholly the result of Muslims’ negligence. Muslims have not been robbed: they have simply let things slip away from them. This has resulted from their own inability and is not because of others’ oppression. What should be more important to them is that even although, they have lost the ‘world’ they still have their religion intact. God’s final book is still with them, preserved in its pristine purity. They are the inheritors of the living traditions of a sublime Prophet – traditions which will die out only if Muslims allow them to. Their religion is the greatest thing they have. Why is it then that they bewail the loss of trivial things, yet care nothing for the greater things that they still possess?

We do not hold the view that the doors of worldly advancement have been closed to Muslims, but even if we were to concede that this is so – that being what the majority of Muslims think, the doors of the life hereafter are still open to them, something far superior and moreover, eternal. How ironic it is that the loss of ephemeral things cause them so much grief, while the possession of greater things gives them no inspiration.

The Causes Lies Within

When the President of India, Mr. Giani Zail Singh, went to the U.S.A. for an eye operation, he was admitted to the same Texas hospital where his predecessor, Sanjivva Reddy, had been previously treated. In Delhi, rumour had it that when Mr. Zail Singh was due to be taken to the operation theatre, the Chief Surgeon came to him and asked, "Are you ready?" Promptly came Giani Zail Singh's reply, "No, I am not Reddy, I am Zail Singh?" (*Hindustan Times*, 4 December, 1982).

This anecdote may well have been concocted, but the question remains, how was it that anyone could dare to make such a joke at the President's expense? One very simple reason is that Mr. Giani Zail Singh is not good at English. This is common knowledge. But had Dr. Radha Krishnan or Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru been in his place, there would have been no attempts at such humours.

The outside world knows you as you have introduced yourself to it. It sends back its reflex responses according to the picture you have given it. This being so, when you find others mistreating you, do not seek the fault in them. Seek rather the fault within yourself. By recognizing your own shortcomings and doing your best to remove them. You can better safeguard yourself against the mistreatment of others.

A Greek artist is said once to have sculpted a statue of a man holding a bunch of grapes in such a realistic 'fashion that when he placed this statue at a crossroads, birds flew up to it and began to peck at the grapes. His friends congratulated him on having made the grapes appear so real that even the birds had been deluded. The artist was pleased with their felicitations, but he was not pleased with himself. He said, "I have actually failed in carving the likeness of the man, otherwise the birds would never have dared to come near him." The artist then made another attempt. The grapes were again so realistic that they attracted the birds. But this time they hovered at a distance from the statue, because the eyes of the man were so lifelike that they did not dare approach him.

Had the artist been content to bask in the praise of his friends he would never have produced his ultimate masterpiece. It was his innate sense of his own shortcomings that spurred him on to absolute perfection.

Good Will

A publisher, who had just dispatched 10,000 copies of a book specially printed for a big institution, was, suddenly summoned to meet its manager. No sooner had he set foot in his office than the manager began to heap abuse on him for having sent him spoiled copies of the book. "Look at these edges!" he shouted. "Look at how badly cut they are!" While the manager continued to vent his anger on him, the publisher picked up several copies and examined them. They were, indeed, defective. When the manager's fury had abated somewhat, the publisher very quietly asked him why he was so upset. "It is our loss and it is, therefore, for us to feel bad about it." This stopped the manager short in his tirade. "What on earth do you mean?" he asked. "How is it your loss?" Then the printer said, "Obviously I cannot expect you to accept this whole consignment in the condition it is in. I shall, of course, take every copy back and have fresh consignment printed at my own expense. It is my responsibility to make good the defect." When the manager heard this, he immediately softened. All his harshness vanished. The printer's admission of his mistake and his willingness to compensate had wrought a kind of miracle. This offer went completely beyond his expectations and it was quite natural that he should be impressed by the magnanimity of the gesture. "No," he said, "Why should you bear such heavy expenses?" Hearing the kindness of his tone, the publisher ventured to make another suggestion "I have an idea of how I can rectify this," he said. "Let me have a few copies of the book, and, if it works, there will be no need to reprint them." The manager agreed, the printer took ten copies, re-cut them with great care, then brought them back and showed them to the manager. The latter was quite satisfied that they were now in excellent shape and requested him to have all of the defective books similarly re-cut.

"I am ready to admit to a one-foot fault even when it is only an inch in the eyes of the customer," said the printer. "It is very important to make such concessions if one is to be successful in business. A satisfied customer creates no problems and the moment a fault comes to my notice, I invariably inform the customer before he has even suspected that anything is wrong. Then I leave it to the customer to suggest how matters should be rectified. As a rule, this elicits the customer's sympathy and the matter ends with absolutely no ill-will on either side."

24 August 1986

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Thank you so much for the subscription to *Al-Risala*. The 2 issues that I have received so far have already been so much help to me, both in specific content as well as serving as an instrument of remembrance and a spring of strength and faith. May Allah continue to bless you in this work, this work which has very real effects in this world and thus in the next.

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Thank you for the May issue of *Al-Risala*. As usual its contents have been learnt, enjoyed and appreciated.

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AUSTRALIA

I am reading *Al-Risala* regularly. I have found that in propagating the message of Allah and the Teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, it is of a very high standard. This is an outstanding effort on the part of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan Saheb. Your monthly covers topics on the Islamic Message in a brief way, including some new scientific subjects as well as ethics.

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As a humble reader of your esteemed monthly *Al-Risala* for the past two years, I express my gratefulness in acknowledging the vital role played by your magazine in giving me the proper insight in moulding my life according to the true tenets of our Islamic faith.

DR. MOHAMMED MAQBOOLAHMED President

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For the last one year I have been reading *Al-Risala* in Urdu and English. I like it very much and many of my friends and friends of theirs have started reading it also. I find your writings very similar to Napoleon Hill's *The Law of Success*, that is, they advocate struggle and positive thinking if success is to be achieved.

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