



Al-Risala 1986

December

Editorial

The 10th Asian Games were held in Seoul in Korea in September 1986. In this 16-day competition South Korea bagged the highest tally of medals on the whole.

The details are given below:-

	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
China	94	82	46	222
S. Korea	93	55	76	224
Japan	58	76	77	211
Iran	6	6	10	22
India	5	9	23	37
Philippines	4	5	9	18
Thailand	3	10	13	26
Pakistan	2	3	4	9

So between them China, Korea and Japan bagged the lion's share of the total. India is a far bigger and more, populous country than South Korea, yet this chart shows that India lagged very far behind Korea. Commenting on this, the *Indian Express* (New Delhi) of the 6th of October, 1986, writes:

'The Koreans used a computer to select their athletes and spent \$ a million to train them for each discipline for two years. India used familiar hit-or-miss methods in which the old malady of parochialism and nepotism may not have been at a total discount'.

To cut a long story short, the Koreans selected their competitors on the basis of talent whereas India only selected people who were well-connected. How different the final outcome could have been if India had done as Korea did, and had simply fed the necessary data about the potential participants into a computer and allowed the selection to be made with the total disinterestedness, and mechanical impartiality that only a computer is capable of.

2 December 1986

Reckoning with oneself before one is reckoned with

Umer ibn Khattab once said: "Reckon with yourselves before you are reckoned with; weigh up your own actions before they are weighed up; and prepare for the great summons."

The Devil Finds Work for Idle Hands

On October 2, 1986, the 117th anniversary of the birth of Mahatma Gandhi, the Prime Minister. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, went along with other VIPs to Raj Ghat in the morning so that he could pay homage to the memory of 'Bapuji'. At precisely 7.15 a.m., when everyone was occupied with this ceremony, a gunshot was heard, which was later followed by two more shots. A 25-year-old man, whose name is believed to be Karamjit Singh, had made an attempt on the life of the Prime Minister, failing only because the weapon he had used proved inadequate for the task.

Why did Karamjit Singh take such an extreme step? During his interrogation he said that a friend of his had been killed during the riots in November 1984, and that he had wanted to avenge his murder. It was to this end that he had acquired a country-made revolver and fired it at Mr. Gandhi.

According to CBI sources, the culprit had wanted to become an engineer after completing his schooling in Sangrur, but having failed to gain admission to any of the engineering colleges, he had failed also to find employment, and had just become a drifter. Having no work to occupy him physically or mentally, he fell a prey to morbid brooding on the death of his friend, and finally his own unending frustration found a much-needed outlet in the revenge he planned.

We might well imagine that had this young man gained admission to an engineering college, he might never have lost his emotional balance, and would not then have perpetrated this crime. Had he had regular employment, he might have been able to keep his feelings in check simply by having to give his attention to his day-to-day responsibilities.

It is undeniable that most of the evils of present day society stem from illiteracy and unemployment. And the best way to eradicate these evils is to ensure the spread of education and to organize the economy in such a way that there is employment for all.

It is surely not too late to learn a lesson from the fate of this drifter and would-be avenger.

3 December 1986

When people make religion a means of personal advancement

Ubayye ibn Ka'ab once said: "Acquire knowledge, and practice what you learn. Do not make learning a means of self-adornment, for there is coming a time when people will adorn themselves with knowledge as one adorns oneself with clothes."

The Message of the Quran

“And when Abraham and Ishmael raised the foundations of the House (with this prayer): ‘Accept this from us, Lord. You are the Hearing, the Knowing. Lord, make us submissive to You; make of our descendants a nation that will submit to You. Teach us our rites of worship and turn to us mercifully; You are the Forgiving, the Merciful. Lord, send forth to them an apostle of their own people who shall declare to them your signs and instruct them in the Book and in wisdom and purify them. You are the Mighty, the Wise One (2:127-129).’”

God ordained that the focal point of the worldwide Islamic mission should be in Hijaz: Mecca was to be the axis on which the struggle for truth on earth would rest. Almighty God chose Abraham and his family to establish this centre and make provision for its functioning. The words which Abraham and Ishmael (may peace be upon him) uttered when they were building the house of God in Mecca were, in addition to being supplications to God, an indication of their unhesitating fidelity to God’s scheme of things. It is prayer of this kind that is most pleasing to God, so He accepted their prayer and a permanent fountain of spiritual life for the whole world, gushed forth from the barren desert of Arabia. The name of this fountain was Islam. As for the people who inhabited this desert, the offspring of Ishmael, God made them enthusiastic proponents of the Islamic cause: He enabled them to propagate His word far and wide. Through them, he informed mankind how they could please their Lord, so that He might turn to them in mercy; It was among the Children of Ishmael that the final prophet was sent, and for the first time in history the entire prophetic pattern was recorded in history for posterity, so that future generations could follow it.

A prophet’s first task is to make known to mankind the signs of God. God’s signs are those things which enable people to come to know God. These signs are to be found both within man and in the outside world; but without guidance man is blind to them. What prophets do is throw light upon these signs, showing them for what they are: indications of the power and glory of God placed by Him in the world for the edification of mankind. Secondly, prophets are a medium through which God communicates His message to the world.

Thirdly, prophets pass on the insight, they are endowed with to those who mould their lives in accordance with the word of God as taught by the prophets. Their vision becomes clear and they are able to interpret God’s signs correctly. They can experience God’s presence, His manifestation in His creation. This wisdom of the prophets is another word for enlightenment – that sublime level of consciousness in which truth and falsehood are seen for what they are, in which one is only pleased with what is pleasing to God. Their wisdom is equalled only by their purity, a state in which all incompatible elements have been eliminated so that, in a compatible atmosphere, they may reach their natural

perfection. The end aim of the prophets is to fashion souls that are absorbed in the love of God; who serve no other besides Him; individuals whose minds are untarnished, free of all complexes and prejudices; who derive spiritual nourishment from the world around them – something which God Himself has made available to all without prejudice.

Avoiding retaliation for the sake of God

While the Muslims were returning from the Bani Mustalaq campaign, A'ishah was detained by the loss of a necklace. She found the necklace and, losing trace of the Muslim party, went to sleep at the place where they had put up camp the night before. There she was spotted by a Companion. He sat her on his camel and, himself holding the reins, set off for Medina. When they reached home, the hypocrites used this episode as an opportunity to spread false scandals about A'ishah. One of those engaged in this scandal-mongering was Mistah, a relative of Abu Bakr, who received a monthly stipend from his comparatively wealthy kinsman. When Abu Bakr discovered Mistah's role in the slander against his daughter A'ishah, he swore an oath that he would not give Mistah any money in future. Then this verse of the Quran was revealed: "Let not the honourable and rich among you swear not to give to their kindred, the poor, and those who have emigrated for the cause of God. Rather, let them pardon and forgive. Do you not wish God to forgive you? He is Forgiving, Merciful." (24:22) "Surely, I would like God to forgive me," said Abu Bakr, on hearing of the revelation of this verse.

(Seerat ibn Hisham)

Per Ardua ad Astra

According to an English scholar, Ian Nash, who spent eleven years in Japan making a detailed study* of the language and nation, what shook the Japanese most profoundly was not upheavals in the politics, but the great Kanto earthquake, which devastated the whole of the most populated eastern part of Japan on the first of September, 1923. Another terrible blow was the reduction of two of the great cities of Japan to smouldering mounds of waste by the dropping of atomic bombs. This led to the ultimate defeat of Japan in the Second World War in 1945.

One might imagine that any country which has been dealt such shattering blows would never be able to rise again from its ashes. But this is far from being true, for Japan has not only rehabilitated itself, but now figures most prominently of all on the world commercial and industrial scene. Japan has become a great hive of technological activity in spite of having launched itself on an industrial course long after Britain, Europe and America. This is all the more remarkable considering that Japan has none of the natural resources that the older established industrial nations have, buried right there in their own soil just waiting to be extracted.

In man's life the most important thing is the will to act. Had the Japanese succumbed to a sense of loss and frustration and frittered their energies away in futile political protest, their country would have been doomed to decline and ruination. But as it was, they conquered any sense of victimization they might have had and set about reconstructing their national life with a will and a way. Although earthquakes had brought them death and destruction, they had also galvanized them into building their lives afresh.

In such situations of grim affliction, provided one has the will, all one's hidden potential and talent faculties are brought into play. One can think better, plan more successfully and make the greater efforts needed to bring one's plans to fruition. One who lacks the will to improve his life is just like an idling motor which is going nowhere.

Experience has shown also that complacency and a sense of comfort can be even greater vitiating factors in man's progress through life than devastation and despair. This does not mean that adversity by itself is beneficial. No. It is simply the spark which ignites the fuel of man's soul and drives him on to greater things. It is the mainspring of his initiative and the force which propels him relentlessly forward. In the face of adversity his hidden capacities come to the fore and it is possible for him to reach undreamt of heights. But first and foremost there has to be the *will* to do so. There has to be the *will* to stop wallowing in self-pity and to get up and take action.

It is not ease, but effort, not facility, but difficulty which makes a man what he is.

*The book is entitled "*The Story of Japan.*"

The Psychology of Success

The World champions often possess equal physical strength and capabilities and receive training of an almost equal standard. Then why does one win and another lose? This question has been a topic of research in America for the past three years. The report of the group of scientists working on this has recently been published. They chose the top international wrestlers and made comparisons of their physical strength and psychological reserves. They found out that there is one marked difference between the winners and the losers in the world competitions, this being not physical but psychological. It is, in actual fact, their state of mind which plays the most crucial role in winning or losing a competition. The experts found that the winners were found to be more conscientious and in control of themselves than the losers. The report is summed up with these words:

“Losers tended to be more depressed and confused before competing, while the winners were positive and relaxed” (*The Times of India* 26 July 1981)”.

This applies equally to the broader field of life. In life when two individuals or two groups confront one another, their victory or defeat does not depend so much on material resources as on intellectual and psychological reserves.

The conviction that one's goals are worthwhile, the observation of discipline with no contradiction between words and thoughts, cool thinking even in times of crisis – all these are qualities of mind and heart which determine success, and obviate failure in the wider field of life.

The King Began to Tremble

The Islamic Caliphate had seen in its first phase, a vast expansion. Yet, up till the reign of the Umayyads there was only one centre, Damascus – of this expanding empire. In the wake of the Abbasid revolution, a separate state came to be established in Andalusia, thus dividing Islamic State into two, with two separate centres. Soon afterwards a third, independent, political centre emerged in Morocco. Some time later Egypt too founded an independent state. Thus the Islamic State continued to split into independent Muslim States one after the other. A great Muslim empire was divided into many smaller kingdoms.

The Sasanid Kingdom was one these independent states. This emerged in what is now Iran and lasted for 150 years.

One ruler of this Sasanid empire was Nasir ibn Ahmed (301-331 A.H.). It is related that after annexing the Nishapur State to his Kingdom, he came to Nishapur to hold his court. After taking his seat on the throne, he asked for the inaugural ceremony to be started with the recitation of some verses from the Quran. A religious scholar began to recite the Quran from a chapter entitled Al-Mumin. When he reached this part:

“The day when they shall rise up (from their graves) with nothing hidden from God. And to whom is the sovereignty on that day? To Allah, the one, the Mighty” (40 : 16)., the king began to tremble with fear, and awe, and he came down from the throne, horror-stricken. He took off his crown and fell in prostration before His God, saying. “O, my Lord, certainly the sovereignty belongs to you and not to me.” What was it that compelled the king to step down from his throne? It was his sense of realism. This is the greatest quality a man can possess for such a man does not hesitate to accept the truth, and, in doing so, can achieve the greatest of successes in life.

8 December 1986

The more one attaches oneself to this world, the more one is removed from the next world

The Prophet said: "There is coming a time when you will be more insignificant than twigs carried on a flood." People asked what the reason for this would be, and the Prophet said: "Love of the world and fear of death."

The Power of Knowledge

The battle of the Trench (SAH), which is also known as the battle of the Armies, took place when Medina was attacked by various tribes, including the Quraysh and Ghatfan, and some Jewish tribes. One can gauge the ferocity of the onslaught from these words of the Quran:

“They attacked you from above and from below, so that your eyes were blurred, and your hearts leapt to your throats, and your faith in God was shaken. There the faithful were put to the proof, there they were severely afflicted” (33: 10-11).

This fully-equipped army included 4,500 camels and 300 horses. They besieged Medina, cutting the city off from the outside world. So short were supplies that people began to starve. It was at this time that a companion of the Prophet complained of hunger to the Prophet: pulling up his shirt, he exposed a stone, tied to his belly. In reply, the Prophet pulled up his shirt: there were two stones tied to it. Another said that Muhammad used to promise them the treasures of Rome and Persia, but that today they could not even relieve themselves for fear of the enemies that surrounded them.

In both war and peace the Prophet kept the activities of the enemies under close surveillance, so that the news of the impending attack by the Meccans reached him in advance. He held consultations with his companions as to how the enemy should be combated.

Since Medina was enclosed on three sides by mountains, forests and walls, there was only the problem of defending it on the northwest front, which was completely open. Salman Farsi, a new convert, suggested the digging of a trench on this side of the city. The prophet agreed with him and, after six days of continuous labour in which the Prophet himself participated, the trench was completed. It proved so successful in holding the enemy back that it gave its name to the battle, the battle of the Trench. This trench was six kilometres long, two and a half metres deep, and about three metres wide.

The historian Ibn Kathir writes on the authority of Tabari and Suhaili that the first person to employ this technique was the Persian King, Manu Chehr ibn Faridun, who was a contemporary of the Prophet Moses.

The word Kandak is a Persian expression, whose origin can be traced to the verb Kanda, meaning to dig. The substantive form is Kandak – a trench. This word was later arabicized as Khandaq.

Up till the impending attack of the Meccans on Medina, it had not occurred to the Arab combatants that a trench could be dug as part of their battle strategy. That is why when the Meccans saw it they exclaimed. “By God, this is a strategy such as Arabs have never known!” The remarkable thing is that all of the combatants, both Medinans and Meccans were of the same Arab stock, but where the Prophet

and his followers had been able to find out this technique, no one had appeared in the same manner as Salman Farsi to instruct their enemies in the new techniques being used in other parts of the world.

The Muslims learning the technique of the trench and then digging it, and the Meccan unbelievers remaining quite unaware of it are facts which are separately recorded in history. When studied separately, they teach us nothing. But when linked, they give us the great lesson that the missionary activity means adding the strengths of others to our own; for a society which does not do so is like stagnant or a soulless rock which does not grow. Preaching means stimulating and enriching society in the way that fresh running water takes the form of a stream which is always on the increase until it becomes a mighty torrent bringing the treasure of its waters to the aridity of the world.

10 December 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)

Putting oneself in others' shoes and not entertaining suspicions

The Prophet's wife, Aishah was once slanderously accused of misconduct. While the rumours were at their height, Abu Ayub Ansari's wife mentioned to her husband what people were saying about Aishah. Abu Ayub refused on principle to believe it and replied that those who said such things were liars. "Can you imagine yourself doing such a thing?" he asked his wife. "Certainly not," she replied. "Well, how much more chaste and pure Aishah is than you. Why should such actions be attributed unto her?" said Abu Ayub to his wife.

Planting the Tree of the Nation

The former U.S. President, John F. Kennedy, referring to Lyautey, once remarked:

“I once asked my gardener to plant a tree. The gardener objected that the tree was slow growing and would not reach maturity for a hundred years. I replied, “In that case there is no time to loose, plant it in the afternoon ...”

Chartered Accountant Supplement, New Delhi, 79.

The growth and development of a nation is likewise a lengthy affair, and there has to be a tremendous input at both the individual and national levels before it finally bursts into blossom and finds the position of honour and glory that it merits in world affairs. But whenever any such Proposition is put to the people, they are quick to point out that no one can wait for a national policy to mature if it is going to take a hundred Years. The only answer to this is: “In that case, we cannot afford to loose even a single moment. We must plant our ‘tree’ this very minute”.

If it takes a mighty tree one hundred years to reach its full stature, whoever wishes to possess such a tree has no option but to tend it for that period. If instead of nurturing it with care and skill, people come out on to the streets and launch a strike campaign in the name of trees, or gather in some open place or march through the streets shouting slogans about it, they will never possess a single tree, far less own an orchard.

Similarly, you cannot own a house by making eloquent speeches about the need for one. It would be the crassest stupidity to do so. Neither can a nation fortify itself by working miracles only in the field of politics. In the rarefied world of poetry, revolutions can occur as a result of a mere play on words. A demagogue can make impassioned speeches and attract great crowds. But real results can be achieved only by long-term planning and continuing and dedicated effort. Needless to say, the two great virtues which are indispensable in the struggle are patience and fortitude.

11 December 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.

Our 'Turnkey' Civilization

In the modern, industrial world, the term 'Turnkey Project' has come to be widely used. Ready-made houses and factories are made today in which everything is provided by the seller. The buyer has only to turn the key in order to use it. The behaviour of certain Muslims of the present day suggests that they think the world is theirs for taking, that God has handed it over to them ready-made and that all they have to do is 'turn the key' and everything and everyone will be ready to do their bidding.

Little do they realize how far this is from being the true state of affairs. This world, in reality, is one of vigorous action and keen competition, and no worthwhile position can be attained without working hard on every aspect of the project in hand, and no job is well done unless carried out with scrupulous care from beginning to end. Our very right to live has to be proved by competing with others. Only when we plunge wholeheartedly into the fray, can we hope to attain the place we desire in this world of cause and effect. There is no question of just 'turning the key'.

Muslims of the present day must learn before all else that they are at the beginning of history, and not the end. Everyone knows that this is January, 1986 and that for it to be December, 1986, we shall have to 'Wait twelve months. The earth shall have to revolve on its axis 365 times and only then shall we come to the end of one year. This is common knowledge. But Muslims tend to overlook such obvious facts when it comes to the building of their nation. They have only just entered the first month, but they want to leap straight into the twelfth. They make no effort to lay the foundations of the homes they keep imagining, but they want to stand already on their rooftops. The very phrasing of their speeches and writings gives the impression that they have actually attained their objectives.

We should remember, first and foremost, that we can create a nation only if its inhabitants are imbued with a sense of purpose and, to that end, we must educate our people: they must have full knowledge of both the past and the present if they are to progress towards an ideal future. We have to inculcate in them the will to work unitedly inspite of their disagreements. We have to instill in them the courage to sacrifice their personal feelings and their short-term interests for long-term ones. Only then will it be possible to fashion history anew.

Some Make Themselves others Make History

There are two types of people in this world – the self-making type and the history-making type. The aim of those who are self-making is to serve themselves, whereas history-making people seek to serve humanity as a whole.

The attention of a self-making person revolves around himself. He hovers around those areas where his own self-interest is likely to be served; where there is no profit to be gained for himself, he does not care to venture. His heart flutters with excitement when he is set to make some gain, but if there is nothing to be gained, no excitement is aroused within him. Personal gain is uppermost in his mind; he will sacrifice everything in order to achieve it. He abides neither by promise nor by principle. Free of the influence of both moral exigencies and the needs of humanity, he can't put everything aside in pursuit of his own ends. All other considerations fade into insignificance as he relentlessly seeks to fulfill his selfish desires.

A history-making person is quite different. Emerging from his own shell, he lives not for himself but for a higher purpose. What matters to him is principle, not profit. He cares not whether he himself wins or loses; what is of importance to him is that his ideal should be served. It is as if he has detached himself from his own person and pinned his flag to the needs of humanity as a whole.

In order to become a history-making person there is one thing that has to be done: one has to stop being self-making. As soon as a person effaces himself, he becomes capable of building for the future of humanity. Such a person lays personal grievances to one side. As his own self-interest and ambitions evaporate before his eyes, he shows no reaction, as if all this were not happening to him at all.

It is people such as these who are destined to forge human history. They are the ones who, of their own free will, sacrifice all thoughts of self-advancement. As far as they are concerned, they have no rights to be safeguarded; they have only responsibilities, which they discharge whatever the cost to themselves.

Having the Courage to Err

Two friends, Ahmed and Iqbal, both lived in the same city. Ahmed was a graduate while Iqbal's education had not gone beyond the eighth standard. It happened once that Iqbal had to go to an office on business and was accompanied by his friend, Ahmed. When the business had been transacted, and they were both coming out of the office, Ahmed said to Iqbal, "you were speaking such horrible English!" With such bad English, I would never have dared to open my mouth!" Iqbal was not the slightest bit disconcerted at being so roundly criticised. Exuding confidence, he said, "Speak wrong so that you can speak right!" Then he added, "Although you are a graduate and I have not got any degrees, you will soon find that I will start speaking in English and you will never be able to do so."

That was twenty years ago. Now Iqbal's words have come true. Ahmed is still at the stage he was at twenty years ago, but, Iqbal, astonishingly, has made great progress. He now speaks English quite fluently and no one can fault him on grammar and pronunciation.

This daring attitude on the part of Iqbal certainly proved to be of great advantage to him for, at the outset of his career, he just owned a small shop in the city, whereas today, he runs a big factory. The motto: "Speak wrong so that you can speak correct," has obviously in his case been the key to success. This principle on which Iqbal operated has a bearing not only on language but on all practical concerns in life. In the present world, the potentially successful are those who are possessed with courage, who advance fearlessly and take the initiative in the face of risks. Only those who have the courage to err will accomplish anything worthwhile in life. Those who are afraid of making mistakes will be left behind in the race of life, and their ultimate goals will recede further and further into the distance.

14 December 1986

How to speak in a gathering

Ali says that when the Prophet was addressing a gathering, people would bow their heads as if there were birds sitting on top of them. Only when he had finished speaking would others say anything. People would not dispute with one another in his presence. When one person was speaking, the others would keep quiet until he had finished. Everyone was given an equal hearing in his gathering.

The Essence of Religion

A seed – a tiny grain – is put into the ground. From it a mighty tree develops. A seed is just a minute particle, and a tree a massive structure. But would it be true to say that the seed is a limited manifestation, and the tree a complete one? No, that is not the nature of the relationship between a seed and a tree. Rather, the seed is the essence and the tree its offshoot. And it is the same with thought and action. Thought is a seed inside a human being. From it stems countless forms of actions. Thought is the essence, actions are its offshoots. Again, it would be wrong to think of action as the completion of thought, just as it would be wrong to think of a tree as the completion of a seed.

So it is with God's true religion. It too has an essence, just as it has offshoots. The essence of true religion is the belief that God is One. Then there are the multiple injunctions of religion; they constitute the offshoots of this selfsame essence. It would be wrong to say that belief in One God is religion in an incomplete form, and that with all its injunctions and commandments religion becomes complete. Monotheism is the essence of true religion. We would underestimate its importance were we to think of it as incomplete, with injunctions and edicts presenting a complete picture of religion.

There are only a couple of hundred verses in the Quran which deal with the injunctions of religion. Yet in Islamic jurisprudence we find hundreds of thousands of religious injunctions. Does this mean that the Quran is incomplete, and jurisprudence is religion in complete form? Not so; the relationship between the Quran and jurisprudence is the same as that between a seed and a tree: the Quran is the essence, jurisprudence its offshoot.

Indeed, Islam has been likened to a tree in the Quran. This is because true Islamic belief first takes root in the heart; from there it spreads to a person's outward actions. It is the same with the individual and society. First, Islam blossoms in the individual; only then, can it spread to society. Religion on an individual level is the essence, religion on a mass, social scale the offshoot of that essence.

Such is the nature of the relationship between one thing and another in this world of God: one is the essence of a thing, the other is its offshoot. To bring a thing into existence we have to start with the essence. Only then will the offshoot appear. If we want to see a tree growing before us, we have to plant a seed into the ground, for only then will a tree blossom and grow. And if we want to see religion flourish in society, it has to first find root in the individual, for it is there that the essence of true religion lies.

What a Loss

“Tell them the story of a person to whom We gave Our signs but he evaded them; Satan followed after him and made him of the transgressors. If We had wished We should have elevated him thereby but, with his propensity for earthly things, he followed his desires” (Quran, 7: 175-176).

This verse of the Quran shows what it is to follow guidance. It is to set oneself in search of a higher purpose. But, rather than commit themselves to such a path, people tend to seek baser goals. For the sake of temporal profit, they incur eternal loss.

Through the Prophet Mohammed, Almighty God was to open a new age. His mission was to end the age of polytheism and make monotheistic thought predominant for all time. Involvement in this divine scheme entailed a good deal of self sacrifice, and many people were not ready to make this sacrifice. It presented an obstacle to them in following the Prophet. Other involved themselves in God's scheme initially, but when the time came for them to sacrifice their own desires and suppress their egoistic urges, they were unable to do so. To save themselves, they abandoned the divine cause. This is what happened in the Prophet's day, and the same thing happens in every day and age.

What a perverse creature man is. God brings clear signs before him, but he does not acknowledge them. God opens to him an avenue to high stations, but he is unable to travel beyond the restricted world of his own interests. God wishes him to serve a great cause, but all he does is serve his own paltry self.

16 December 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."

Thus the Bible Speaks

For thus hath the Lord of hosts said, Hew ye down trees, and cast a mount against Jerusalem: this is the city to be visited; she is wholly oppression in the midst of her.

As a fountain casteth out her waters, so she casteth out her wickedness: violence and spoil is heard in her; before me continually is grief and wounds.

Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee; lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited.

Thus said the Lord of hosts, to whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? Behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it.

Therefore I am full of the fury of the Lord; and I am weary with holding in: I will pour it out upon the children abroad, and upon the assembly of young men together: for even the husband with the wife shall be taken, the aged with him that is full of days.

And their houses shall be turned unto others, with their fields and wives together: for I will stretch out my hands upon the inhabitants of the land, saith the Lord.

Far from the least of them even unto the greatest of them everyone is given to covetousness and from the prophet even unto the priest everyone dealeth falsely. They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, peace, Peace; and there is no peace.

Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls, but they said, we will not walk therein.

To what purpose cometh there to me incense from Sheba, and the sweet cane from a far country? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices sweet unto me, therefore thus saith the Lord, behold, I will lay the stumbling blocks before these people, and the fathers and the sons together shall fall upon them; the neighbour and his friend shall perish.

Go not forth into the field, nor walk by the way; for the sword of the enemy and fear is on every side.

They are all grievous revolters walking with slanders; they are brass and iron; they are all corruptors.

The bellows are burnt, the lead is consumed of the fire; reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them.

(Jeremiah, Chapter 6)

Try, Try, Try Again

A person who was employed as an ordinary worker in a Bidi factory soon learnt the entire art of the business and set up his own factory. He initially invested only Rs. 5000/- in his business but then by dint of fifteen years' hard work, his business progressively increased until it expanded into a big factory. One day, narrating his life story to his friends, he said: "Just as a young child grows into boyhood after fifteen years, so does a business. I have not reached this stage in one day. It has been a fifteen-year struggle.

In truth every piece of work is accomplished in "fifteen" years, be it of an individual or a nation, be it a business or a social service. Those who long for a recipe for instant success are, in fact, living in a fool's paradise. It is all very well to say that a hop, step and jump can take you right to your destination. But as soon as one comes face to face with reality, one realises that this is just an illusion. Gleun Cunningham, a sportsman who became champion of the one-mile race, saw the school in which he was studying go up in flames. His own experience was terrible. His feet were so badly burnt that he could not even move his legs. The doctors lost all hope of his ever walking or running. They said that only a miracle could, save him. Surprisingly Gleun Cunningham's incapacity excited in him a new zeal and eagerness to walk and run. All his mental faculties concentrated on his decision to walk. So he began to experiment with different kinds of exercises till he hit upon a novel idea. It was to drag himself along by holding on to the handle of a moving plough. When his feet could even so much as rest on the ground, he felt encouraged, and intensified his efforts. Finally, the miracle of which the doctors had so despaired, took place. The new technique was a tremendous success and, ultimately, he could not only walk, but could also run. Later he entered for a race. He set up a new record and became a champion of the one-mile race. But this grand success was not achieved in a few days. He had to spend "fifteen years" realizing his goal. Only after a fifteen year stint had it been possible for him to become a flat racing champion.

In truth, no success is possible in this world without working for "fifteen years". It is God alone who has the power to achieve instant success. But God has not created this world on the basis of instant success. Man must learn his lesson and should not fritter away his time in futile efforts. In this world of God, innumerable events are taking place, all of which are based on eternal, immutable laws. Not even a blade of grass grows here on the ground as a result of wishful thinking, not even an ant can manage to live by ignoring the realities of life. How is it possible then for man to change the divine laws? The only condition of success is continuous effort, that is, to make such unflagging efforts, as are essential to achieve the desired objectives in the world of God according to the law of God. By following the same principle we can achieve success in this world; it is the same principle which will bring us success in the next world.

Education – the Science of Life

Education is not by any means just an employment certificate. The real purpose it is meant to serve is to bring consciousness to individuals. Education is the first step towards the construction of a nation. Whenever the journey of a nation begins, it will certainly be from here; there is no other point from which to start.

What does making people conscious mean? it means enabling people to link the past and the present, to draw proper conclusions, to be able to put life's issues in the context of eternal planning. They must learn to judge their weaknesses as well as their strengths. They must learn to know how to make their will correspond to the will of God, this being the only way they can ever hope to achieve success in this world of God. Only a man of understanding is fit to be called man, in the real sense of the word. Such a man alone is able to judge himself and others properly, by arriving at proper conclusions. It is only after learning which of his opinions are objective and which are not, that he is able to recognize which of his actions were simply negative reactions and which were actually positive actions. He can then separate the evil from the good and the false from the true. All of us possess eyes, but it is education which gives man the intellectual eye, the eye of discernment. Common eyes enable one to see only appearances; education makes it possible for one to go deeper into the realities of life.

Just as a farmer grows a seed into a tree, so do educational institutions help in ones' intellectual journey to fruition. Education does of course, help one to get a job, but that is a matter of secondary importance. The real virtue of education is that it reveals to man the science of life thus making him a man in the real sense of the word.

The Five Pillars of Islam

In the words of the Prophet, Islam is founded upon five things:

1. Declaration of Faith
2. Prayer
3. Fasting
4. Zakat (The Poor Due)
5. Hajj (Pilgrimage to Mecca)

These are called the five pillars of Islam.

Declaration of Faith

One enters the faith with this acknowledgement:

There is none worthy of being worshipped save God, and Mohammad is God's Prophet.

That is, one accepts two things: the oneness of God and the prophethood of Mohammad (may peace be upon him). This means that all qualities of divinity are vested in God alone; and it means that Mohammad has been sent by God, and has been given knowledge of truth and the Will of God. These are more than just words: they are the declaration of a serious decision; the proclamation of one who has discovered both his Lord (God), and the one who will show him the true path (the Prophet); they are a contract which one calls on God to bear witness to. For belief to be acceptable to God, then, it must come straight from a person's heart:

The Arabs of the desert declare: "We believe." Say: "You do not. Rather say: 'We profess Islam,' for faith has not yet found its way into your hearts."

(Quran,50:14)

It is not enough, then, just to "profess" faith; one must live it as well. That is why the Prophet called many things "faith", which appear to be actions rather than a declaration of belief. Once, for instance, he said:

In truth I say unto you that one whose neighbour is not safe from one's evil-doing, is not a believer.

(Bukhari, Muslim)

If the declaration of faith represents a serious decision, it will become an essential part of one's whole life. Otherwise it will be just a verbal supplement, with no real relevance to life.

Prayer

One's first obligation, as a Muslim, is prayer. Prayer is the most important Islamic worship. God has commanded man to pray to Him five times a day. Ablution, which consists of washing the face, arms and feet, is performed before every prayer. Prayer consists of certain words and certain ritual actions. In them, the worshipper bows before his Lord. Placing his forehead on the ground, he testifies to his own lowliness as opposed to God's exalted nature. He presents himself as God's servant. He stands before God, bows down to Him, and prostrates himself before Him, in a practical demonstration of submission to God. It is when one humbles oneself before the Lord, that one is in a position to meet Him; for one discovers God on a level of humility, not on a level of pride and egotism.

Fasting

Fasting is prescribed once a year, in the month of Ramadhan. One fasts every day of the month, from the first light of dawn until sundown. During that time one abstains completely from food and drink. According to the Quran, there are two purposes of fasting:

1. To make one cautious in life
2. To make one thankful to God

(Quran, 2:183,185)

Food and drink is man's most basic necessity. When he is consumed by hunger and thirst, he sees how weak he really is; he realizes how much he is in need of the succour of God. This experience makes him aware of his duties as God's humble servant. This feeling leads to caution in life. Then in the evening, when he eats and drinks, he sees how God has made complete provision for his needs. His heart is filled with gratitude. He praises God, and offers thanks to Him.

Zakat

Zakat (the Poor Due) is God's due portion of what we own and what we produce. There are many ways of making a living in this world: one can work on the land, in a factory, or a shop; one can sweat and toil or remain seated in an office. But what part do we actually play in all this? Our role is, in fact, minimal. Multiple forces are at work in the universe and within ourselves, which accord to our needs. All these forces come together to enable us to earn a livelihood. All this has been ordained by the Lord of the Universe. That is why, once a year, one should calculate one's earnings, and put aside a portion for God. In so doing, one acknowledges the fact that it is all from God; without His help, one could earn nothing. To spend for the cause of God is to express a sublime attachment to the Lord; it shows a yearning to empty oneself before him. One should feel as one gives that one is offering everything to God and seeking nothing for oneself. This is the spirit in which a Muslim should help others:

We feed you for God's sake only; we seek of you neither recompense nor thanks.

(Quran, 76:9)

Hajj

The rites of Hajj (Pilgrimage to Mecca) are performed once a year. It is obligatory, once in a lifetime, for those who have the means to travel to and from Hijaz, and the opportunity to do so. Otherwise, there is no compulsion to perform this pilgrimage. The places a pilgrim visits during Hajj are the birthplaces of Islamic history. These are the places where the Prophets prayed to God. Here stand memorials to the sacrifices they made for the cause of God. The land of Hijaz has been forever purified of polytheism and idolatry. It was here that the forces of irreligion were vanquished, and the supremacy of religion established until the Last Day. This is what makes the land of Hijaz unique. It is a land replete with the signs of God. That is why God has chosen it as the venue for Muslims from all over the world to gather once a year, and worship Him together. Hajj teaches the Muslims to live together as one. Pilgrims should return to their homes kindled with new religious fervour; they should be filled with fresh enthusiasm to serve the cause of God. Hajj teaches us how all men should gather around God.

22 December 1986

To guard others' honour is to guard one's own

Abu Ayub Ansari had heard a saying of the Prophet, the wording of which he forgot in later years. Uqbah ibn Amir, who at that time was living in Egypt, had been present at the time. So Abu Ayub took a camel and set off from Madina to Egypt. He arrived at Uqbah's house, greeted him, and asked him about the statement which the Prophet had made about guarding the honour of the Muslims: "We are the only two people left who heard that saying of the Prophet." Uqbah went over the Prophet's words with Abu Ayub. They were: "Whoever guards the honour of a Muslim in this world, will be guarded by God on the Day of Resurrection."

(Al-Adab'ul-Mufrad)

Motion and Direction

A western thinker once commented, “you have removed most of the road blocks to success when you have learnt the difference between motion and direction.”

One intrinsic quality of activity is movement. When you are walking, driving, riding a bicycle, galloping along on horseback or roaring along on a motorcycle, you are moving. But in what direction? Are you moving towards your destination, Or away from it? The actual motion in both cases seems to be no different in quality. The great difference between the two is that the former brings you ever nearer to your destination, while the latter takes you further and further away from it – leaving you where? Nowhere. At least nowhere that it is worth your while going. It is direction that is all-important. Even if we only get on to the slow-moving bullock cart or a cycle rickshaw, we shall do better than a jet plane which has no sense of direction.

Whether it is a consideration of private lives or social existence, it is imperative that we take stock of our means and resources and then set off in the right direction, if, sooner or later, we are to reach our destination.

Often people launch themselves on careers plunging headlong into them, without giving due thought to their actual capacities and to whether they have any real potential which can be developed. At times they are led astray by trivial considerations, ill-founded opinions and over-whelming emotions, and rush heedless into whatever first comes their way. When the result is not what they had anticipated, they fall to complaining against others, lamenting their losses and failures and claiming that it was due to prejudices of others that they had had to suffer frustrations and that their careers had come to naught. Had they given more profound thought to the matter, they would have realised that the fault lay in their own ill-judged planning or even total aimlessness. Had they started out in the right direction others would not then have had the opportunity to place obstacles in their path and turn their successes into failures. Aimlessness is a great weakness and should be eschewed at all costs. In actual fact, no activity is truly of value unless it is characterized by its direction and not just its motion.

23 December 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 myself have no cattle grazing there."

(Tabrani)

Procession of Death

A coffin is being carried aloft towards the grave. It seems like a journey, not just from one point to another, but from man's beginning to his end.

When man is born into this world, he immediately has recourse to a mother's compassion and a father's protection. He grows up among friends and relatives. Then he reaches adulthood and forges ahead on his chosen path through life.

His journey continues until finally death comes. Those relatives who had supported him through life now carry him to his final resting place. They lay him under a mound of earth where he is alone; where there is just him and his Lord.

Up till that point, he had been confronted with humans like himself; now he is face to face with a God infinitely greater than himself. Up till then he had been in a world he had power of his own, but now he finds himself absolutely powerless. Man, the most helpless of creatures, will come before God the All-Powerful – a meeting so awesome that it is almost beyond imagining.

People are continually dying here on earth. Not a day goes by without our seeing or hearing of the death of someone or the other. Yet we fail to realize the implications of death. This is because in our minds we lack a living picture of Heaven and Hell. We are preoccupied with other, totally unrelated, matters. We are too busy making homes for ourselves in this world to look to our eternal home. We are too concerned with worldly profit-making to care whether we have done enough to earn life everlasting. We are too involved with improving our position in society to consolidate our relation with God. We think of every human being in the same worldly terms, so when a person dies, we feel only a sense of loss that one who gave so much to the world has been taken away from it. We see man in relation to this ephemeral world, but fail to see him in relation to the next eternal world. How then can we realize the implications of death? How can we see that, as one is laid to "rest", one is, in fact, being led to one's meeting with the Lord and one's eternal fate?