



Al-Risala 1986

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Editorial

In November 1985, I had the memorable experience of attending the Assembly of World's Religions. The paper I wrote for the conference was entitled "The Concept of Morality in Islam" (The travelogue has been published at length in the Urdu edition of the magazine).

This assembly held in New Jersey, U.S.A., was attended by 600 delegates representing the various religions of the world, the organizers having endeavoured to cover all the living religions of the entire world, ranging from the tribal religions of Africa to the developed religions of the civilized world.

What struck me most forcibly was the harmonious atmosphere in which the work of the conference proceeded. Although the beliefs and practices of certain religions were poles apart from the others, their proponents presented their ideas in a remarkably peaceable and un-provocative way. No restrictions were placed on the ideas to be put forward, nor was there any sign of boredom or of any other unbecoming reaction among the audience on their being exposed to vastly different sets of ideas and cultures.

This is a remarkable phenomenon of our modern world. Formerly, it would have been impossible to attain such calm objectivity. Indeed, in ancient times, adherents of different creeds confronted one another either on the battlefield or in the arena of polemics. They came together only to clash with one another, and not to achieve mutual understanding by means of serious exchanges.

This free discussion of religion is a very precious innovation of the modern world, and it is to be hoped that it will become a hallowed tradition, for it has opened up new vistas for the propagation of the message of Islam. If Muslims refrain from engaging in useless polemics, if they separate their national quarrels from the true message of Islam, they will find the hearts of many wide open to receive their message.

In modern times, those Muslims who project Islam usually present it as a matter of national pride. Their manner of expression also suggests that Islam as a religion is more developed than and, therefore, superior to other world religions. This is a very wrong way of representing Islam. If you present Islam as a creed which has national boundaries, how can you arouse the interest of others, and how can others feel attracted to something which is the object of pride of another nations, as if it were of geographical and political, rather than of ethical importance.

To represent Islam as a superior religion is not a correct approach either. Islam is in no way an advanced religion as compared to other religions. The real uniqueness of Islam lies in its having been preserved in its pristine form. Other religions have lost their original force as a result of faulty interpretation, distortion and interpolation, whereas Islam, enshrined as it is in the pages of the Quran, has remained intact throughout the ages.

Preachers of Islam must present it as a natural religion appealing to the hearts of the people rather than as a national and political issue. They must emphasize the distinction which it possesses in terms of historical credibility, an asset which no other religion enjoys today.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

3 February 1986

Seek the Cause Within

Professor Friedrich Von Hayek (B. 1899), a prominent British economist of Austrian origin, is famous for his studies of cyclical crises, and received the Nobel Prize for Economic Science in 1974. In his book, *"The Road of Serfdom"*, published in London in 1944, dwells on the failure of western civilization. He writes:

"We are ready to accept almost any explanation of the present crisis of our civilization except one: that is, the present state of the world may be the result of genuine error on our part, and that the pursuit of some of our most cherished ideals has apparently produced results different from those which we expected."

The weakness he points out is one found the world over in every nation. And it is certainly no less a failing of the Muslim world. In present times, Muslims have lead movements with lakhs of followers for the revival of Islam. Despite their huge following and vast material resources, all these movements without exception have failed in achieving their objectives. But whenever their leaders are confronted with the question of their failure, they invariably hold their enemies or other external factors responsible for it. They altogether rule out the possibility that their own wrong analysis, bad planning or weak judgement could be the reason, When the cause lies within and you persist in seeking it elsewhere, it is just like having migraine and seeking its cause up somewhere in the air.

Repetition in the Quran

Reading the Quran, one finds that it repeats itself on some themes. The Quran is the Book of God. If God had wished He could have made every verse deal with a separate theme; but instead certain topics have been stressed over and over again. This has been done in order to engrave the message of the Quran in the minds of its readers. Its opponents, however, have seen this in a different light and made this repetition a basis for derisive propaganda against the revealed word of God:

“And they say: ‘Fables of the ancients he has written: they are dictated to him (again and again) morning and evening.’”

(Quran, 25:5)

As Maulana Shabbir Ahmad Uthmani has noted in his Urdu commentary of the Quran, opponents of Islam used to say: “Mohammad has just noted down some stories from the People of the Book, or some people of the sort: these same stories are recited to him again and again, morning and evening, and then reproduced in a different style. That is all there is to the Quran.”

It is only people who are insincere in the search for truth who say such things. Those who are sincere realize that this “repetition” is in fact fulfilling an instinctive need of man.

There is no one who does not repeat something or the other in this world. Look at cigarette-smokers or tea-drinkers. Do they not repeat the same action time and time again. Does a mother not repeatedly kiss her beloved child? Or a music lover – does he not listen to the same song over and over? If a person is attached to something he repeats it time and time again, without even being aware of the repetitiveness of his action. It is only natural that one should repeat something one loves or enjoys. If, however, one is not attracted to something then repetition of it will bore one; one will be averse to hearing it even once, let alone many times.

The Quran wants people to reach this state of attachment with the word of God. It repeats themes so that people may be drawn to the source of the Quran; so that they should become unaware of the fact that things are being repeated and be aware only that what is being said comes from God. This is the type of individual that the Quran is seeking to mould – one who is as attracted to the divine world as people normally are to this world; one who finds that the word of God grows on him the more he hears it; one for whom the Quran becomes food for the soul, more welcome than any food with which man nourishes the body. Such people will not be averse to repetition of the words of the Quran, for every repeated word will bear for them a new meaning.

Three things to Remember

Abu Huraira reported that the Prophet Mohammad, may peace be upon him, listed three saving graces for man, and three things which could destroy him. "The three saving graces," the Prophet said, "are fear of God in public and private; truthfulness, in times of both calm and anger; and moderation, whether one is poor or wealthy. And as for the things which bring about self-destruction, they are following one's desires, being motivated by greed, and thinking a lot of oneself, the last being the worst of all." (Baihaqi)

These six points are the gauge of true faith. When a person truly comes to know God, he always feels that God is watching over him. For him, there is no difference between being in public or being in private, for God is the predominant factor in his life, and God is always there. What is most important to him is that he should follow God's commandments. So, whether he is in a state of anger or calm, he strictly confines himself to the limits that God has defined. There is no real difference for him between wealth and poverty, for his relationship with the Lord is basically the same in either case.

Such a person is always conscious of the fact that finally he will have to face God. This realization takes away any feeling of freedom that he may have cherished; it prevents him from running after everything he desires; it contains his greed. To have delusions of grandeur is, to him, like an ant crawling in front of a mountain taking pride in his size. To believe in God is to realize that in truth God is the Greatest: one who has discovered this fact can never entertain thoughts of his own greatness.

Doing one's Bit

There was once a man who stubbornly refused to believe that it is God who provides for and nourishes his creatures. His friends did the best to make him understand this, but with no success. Finally, he decided to silence them by putting this notion to the test. Leaving his home early one morning, he went off to a jungle where he perched himself up in a tree. "It is God who nourishes His servants, He will send me my food here too," he thought.

He sat in the tree the whole day, but there was no sign of any food. After going without breakfast, lunch and dinner, he was all the more convinced that such ideas were all nonsense. He was about to go home when he saw some wayfarers searching for a tree they could pass the night under. They finally chose the very tree in which he was perched. He decided not to reveal his presence and just watched what was going on at the base of the tree. After setting up their camp, they took themselves off to collect fire wood, and having done this they opened their bags and took out rice and pulses to cook a meal. When it was nearly ready, they threw a handful of chillies into the hot oil to season it. Such a spicy aroma rose up into the air that the man in the tree sneezed. Only then did the travellers learn of his presence whereupon they invited him to share what they had cooked.

The man happily went back home and said to his friends the next morning, "What you said was quite true. But you hadn't told me the whole story. Of course, God does provide you with food. It's just that you have to sneeze and come down a tree to get it!"

Although humorous in tone, this little anecdote is serious in intent. It is, in fact, a parable which underscores the notion that God helps those who help themselves. And although man's role is a very minor one, it is nevertheless a very necessary one. A man must prove his worth to have his due share of God's gifts. We must never, therefore, neglect to make ourselves deserving of God's nourishment.

Umar wrote to one of his governors, "Never inflict undue punishment on a criminal, for if you do, it will be you who will be the criminal and not he."
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The Importance of Religion

It is said that modern civilization has proved religion to be outmoded and unnecessary.

What has western civilization contributed to humanity? New modes of travel, new architectural designs, new means of communication, new styles of clothes. In short, living commodities are more luxurious, more glamorous and more effective than before. The question that must be asked is what the existence of such amenities has to do with belief in God and religion.

Does possession of a modern house and luxury car make belief in God meaningless? Have telegraphic and telephonic means of communication left no room for belief in inspirational forms of *wahi*-transmission? Does the ability to fly in the atmosphere preclude the possibility of any afterworld in the cosmos? Does the existence of delicious food, fancy clothes and high-quality furniture make belief in the Garden and the Fire a thing of the past? Does the fact that women are able to move their fingers daintily over the typewriter abrogate the verse of the Quran in which it is written "Men are in command over women"? Does the legislative capacity of certain individuals seated in grand parliament-buildings invalidate the credibility of *Shariah*? While acknowledging the importance and utility of modern amenities and techniques we fail to comprehend, what way they verify or negate religious truths.

The relevance of religion is concerned with fundamental values rather than social manifestations. Social phenomena are continuously changing, whereas the values of life never alter. True, fast, modern forms of transport have indeed replaced the older, slower means, but the ethical values to be observed in the manufacture and usage of vehicles are as valid as ever. Modern means of communication have rendered the old methods defunct, but the question as to whether these facilities should be utilized for conveying the truth or lies is as pertinent as ever.

Whether M.P.'s go to work on foot or by helicopter does not change the fact that they are bound to fashion laws in accordance with the Divine Order according to which the whole cosmos operates. Whether they are housed in huts or magnificent buildings, judicial bodies are still bound to maintain the same standard of justice by ensuring that none is deprived of his right or allowed to escape punishment for his crime.

The Gathering Storm

On August the 11th, 1979, a flash flood struck Maurvi in Gujarat, leaving total devastation in its wake. Due to heavy rain the water level rose so high in a huge dam on the bank of the settlement that the dam broke. In the words of one who witnessed it, "About 20 feet high walls of water entered the settlement with such high velocity that no one could escape from their onslaught. In a few hours time, this flood water having destroyed all animate and inanimate objects, receded as suddenly as it came." It is estimated that, out of a total population of about 40,000, as many as 25,000 died in this flash flood. The extent of the destruction can be gauged from the fact that, besides public contributions, the central government immediately released 5 crore rupees as aid to the government of Gujarat.

Arun Kumar, a reporter of the Hindustan Times, published an eye-witness report in which he said that the survivors had a woeful tale to tell. Still in the grip of the shock and suffering that the flood had inflicted upon them, "Some have lost their speech and look absolutely dazed and blank." (19 August, 1979). Another report (20 August, 1979) recounts how overjoyed a ruined landlord was when he was handed over Rs. 18,000 in cash and gold ornaments weighing 225 grams which had been restored to him from his house by government officials.

Such events occur frequently on earth to remind man of the day of judgment. The great flood to herald the end of the world will overtake us suddenly. The destruction will be such that people's tongues will fail them. They will be absolutely dazed. There will be those who, realizing their eternal doom, will be struck dumb. But there will also be those who will be given the good tidings that the encompassing flood of death and destruction will leave them unscathed. Not only will God restore to them what is theirs, but will shower them with even greater blessings. The flash flood of that Day will condemn some to hell fire while it will usher others to the gates of eternal happiness. Before the "flood", man could easily find eloquent excuses to justify his cruel ways. But, on seeing the "flood of destruction", all his strength will desert him and he will have no words to justify the unjust actions that he perpetrated in the world he has left behind him.

The First Emigration

By the fifth year of the Prophet Mohammad's mission, conditions in Mecca had become intolerable for many of the Muslims, as persecution from the Quraysh intensified. At this time the Prophet advised his companions to emigrate to Abyssinia. This is called the first emigration of Islam; it preceded by some eight years the mass emigration of Muslims to Medina.

This was part of the advice which the Prophet imparted to his followers on the occasion of the emigration to Abyssinia.

"Disperse in the land; surely God will gather you once again."

How meaningful these words of the Prophet are! What they amount to is an exhortation by the Prophet to his followers that they should avoid confronting the enemy for the present, but rather remove themselves from the line of fire. God would then provide them with the means to vanquish the enemy; He would gather them together in their own land once again.

Emigration is indeed a great test of patience. It is those who pass this test who will receive the reward of God. As the Prophet said: "You should know that succour comes with patience; there is ease with hardship."

Patience, then, is the ladder by which one ascends to the Lord's favour and succour. It is with patience that we should react to the difficulties of life, for it is on the field of human patience that divine succour descends. Our ability to face hardship with patience is a great portent, for it means that we are leaving our cause to God. That is a signal for the swift ending of our plight, and the conversion of our hardship into ease.

Real paradise lies on the other side of the divide of patience. Any paradise that one finds without crossing that divide can only be an illusion.

9 February 1986

Not showing disapproval of food

When the Prophet was given anything to eat, he never showed his disapproval of it. Abu Huraira says that the Prophet never ever found fault with any food given to him. If he liked it, he ate it; if he did not like it, he left it alone.

Always on the Brink

P. V. Venkateshwaran who was chief marketing engineer in a government firm, attended a meeting held on the eighth floor of the Gopala Tower in New Delhi on May 29, 1982. When the meeting was over, he walked towards the lift along with some of his colleagues. As the door was open, he thought that the lift had arrived, but it was actually still on the ninth floor. In an excited state of mind, at the success of the decisions taken at the meeting, he paid no attention to where he was walking, and stepped into the empty lift shaft. He fell straight to the ground from the eighth floor. His personal doctor, who had been with him at the time, could do nothing for him. He could only declare him dead. He was 51 years old at the time of his death. (*The Hindustan Times*, 30 May, 1982)

Venkateshwaran was an extremely successful officer. These are the words in which he was described in an official journal: "A thoroughbred professional and a dashing, innovative manager with fire in his belly and ideas in his mind, an astute general."

So far as this world is concerned, the case of Venkateshwaran is unique. But, from the point of view of the life hereafter, there is little about it that is uncommon. Everyone, confident of his wisdom and the worldly success it brings, fearlessly walks straight ahead, heedless of the fact that at any moment he can plunge headlong into the pit of doom. To utter insulting words against others, to oppress the weak and the innocent, to take revenge, to be unjust to others, to ridicule others' failures, to argue without reason – all such evils are like stepping into the empty lift shaft on the eighth floor. Every such step can plunge man headlong into the pit of destruction. It is then that neither his friends nor his wishful thinking will save him – everyone is on the brink of that lift shaft, while convinced that he is holding fast to a firm rock which will never fail him.

10 February 1986

Refraining from mockery

When the Prophet reached Tabuk, and found the Ka'ab ibn Malik was not among the Muslim force, he said: "What has become of Ka'ab?" A member of the Banu Salma tribe said that Ka'ab was too busy admiring his shawls and his shoulders. Mu'az ibn Jabal said in response, "That is a very nasty thing to say," and then addressing the Prophet he said: "Truly, we know nothing but good of Ka'ab."

11 February 1986

Rising to the Challenge

In the jungle, one set of animals perpetually goes in fear of another set. That is why they are always on the alert, this being necessary for their very survival. In this way their natural potential is developed and there is no danger of their faculties atrophying or going into a decline. It is because of this that the great parks meant as animal sanctuaries provide artificially for danger. For example, a cat will be kept in the rabbit park or in the deer park a tiger or a wolf will be allowed to enter, so that the deer retain the alertness they need for survival. In this way they are always kept active and lively, and retain their natural vivacity.

The same is true of man. Man has infinite potential, but it remains hidden under normal circumstances, and is awakened only in the face of challenge. This phenomenon is observable everywhere. Families who have access to every comfort and luxury become dull and lifeless. On the other hand, those families who are beset with difficulties are more geared to making use of their potential.

Present day Muslims have a feeling of insecurity in their environment. But they forget the fact that, in the initial period of Islam, the Muslims of Mecca and Medina had a far greater sense of insecurity in comparison. Had this been an evil, the Prophet of God and his companions were certainly more deserving than anyone of being shielded from this. But God did not protect them. They were continuously kept in insecure circumstances. Throughout their lives they were unable to live in peace. It is in the hard school of life that man receives the best of training and learns perseverance. Often fighting against oppression results in gain for him. The alertness which emerges from insecure conditions is one of the most valuable qualities of the human personality.

History shows that those who have achieved the heights of success are the ones who have really had to face the pressure of circumstances. This law of nature applies equally to individuals as well as to nations.

No two things are more appropriately linked than gentleness with learning, and forgiveness with prayer.

Cosmic Unity

One of the major discoveries of cosmic research has been that the whole universe revolves around one central point. The atom, for instance, has its nucleus, which provides the focal point around which the entire atomic structure revolves. As for the solar system, it has its centre in the sun; all the stars and planets revolve around that centre. The same is true of the constellation in which our solar system lies; its million of stars revolve around one centre, as does the entire universe of which our constellation is just a tiny part.

Scientists hold that there will come a time when the cosmic centre will start drawing to itself all the things that revolve around it. The universe in all its vastness will start returning to its centre, until finally all the objects from every far-flung corner of space will be contained in the tiny confines of the central mass. In the same way as scattered nails attach themselves to a magnet, so the entire universe will be attached to its centre. It will be just as the Quran says: "As We produced the first creation, so will We reproduce it" (21: 104).

In this way the crux of monotheistic religion is displayed in practical form by the cosmos. The universe is manifestly telling us that we should lead our lives in such a way that everything in it revolves around a central, focal point, which can only be God. Our thoughts and emotions, our struggles in life, should all revolve around Him.

If one directs one's life towards some focal point other than God, whether it be one's own self or something in the outside world, the universe in all its meaningfulness refutes one's stance. The very structure of the universe shows that only one Being can be the pivot of man's existence, and that Being is God. By itself being oriented towards a single centre, the universe is telling us something: it is telling us that this is the way that our lives should be oriented.

A man who had incurred the displeasure of Caliph Umar was brought before him. The Caliph said to him, "I am angry with you, but because I go in fear of God, I shall not strike you."

The Will to Unite

If an engine driver is to set his locomotive in motion, he has to stand before the fire and endure its fierce heat. Thus huge and complex machine built up of so many parts will remain immobile unless he is prepared to do so. The same goes for society. It will not function unless the individuals who have to make all its parts work are prepared to sacrifice something of their own and are ready to endure difficulties, if not actual hardship. And just as all the moving parts of a locomotive have to be kept regularly oiled if they are not to be worn out with friction, thus bringing the machinery to a standstill, so tolerance must be a feature of society if it is to function as a harmonious whole. Tolerance is the oil which will let the wheels go round. There can be no teamwork without it.

When people work together in groups, it is inevitable that there should be disagreements and that complaints should be voiced. However, well-intentioned the individuals concerned may be, such negative feelings are bound to surface sooner or later. How is it possible then to work together in harmony? There is only one way, and that is to make a considered decision to remain united in the face of disagreement. It is a question of individuals being conscious of the necessity for harmony, and willing themselves to take complaints in their stride if they are unjustified, and to start the process of self-examination if the grounds for complaint are in the smallest measure profitable. This is not asking for the impossible. Who does not do exactly this in his family life as a matter of good sense and practicality? When family members are living in close proximity, grievances do arise and tempers often flare up. But family cohesion is not destroyed because of this, for blood relationships prevent such feelings from getting out of hand. Grievances are swept away by mutual love, and tempers are cooled by words of regard and affection. And so the unity of the family remains intact. The home, indeed, is a microcosm of social existence. It provides a day-to-day working model of social harmony unflawed by grievance or disagreement. The feelings of love which cement family life can be brought into being in social life through conscious deliberation. Unity can spring from a human awakening to its ultimate necessity.

Where family life is governed by the heart, social life is governed by the will. There is nothing that cannot be endured for the sake of unity, provided there is the will to achieve it.

14 February 1986

Wonder of Wonders

Looking at the human body from a purely physical point of view, one finds that it is just made up of water, carbon, oxygen and some other chemical elements. One can even work out, as scientist Robert Pattison has done, the price of material constituents of the human body. According to his calculations their market value is about six and a half US dollars, about seventy Indian rupees.

Yet out of this seventy rupees worth of matter, God has created a human being so wonderful that no price can be set upon him. Not even seventy billion rupees can buy the priceless masterpiece that God has fashioned within the human frame.

One can appreciate the pricelessness of the human body when some part of it is lost. If one loses a hand, for instance, millions of dollars will not buy a new one like it. If one loses one's sight, all the wealth in the world will not win it back. If one's power of speech fails one, there will be no tongue in the shops of the world which will put one's thoughts into words.

How wonderful that God should fashion something so wonderful out of things of no value. It is only He who can bring the dead to life; only He who has the power to convert insensate matter into conscious life, to make something out of nothing.

If a magician were to cast a spell on a stone, making it break into speech, everyone would be spellbound at his feat. The feat which God has performed is one of much greater complexity. He has made the inanimate matter that constitutes man's body into a moving, talking, thinking human being. Yet God's feat does not cause people to wonder. How blind are those who can see the skill of a conjurer's magical feats, but not the infinitely greater feats of God's creation! How ignorant are those who rush to become devoted disciples of anyone able to perform false tricks, without feeling any adoration for or attachment to the One who performs truly wondrous acts of creative genius.

If only man were to truly discover God, he would become totally absorbed in the Lord's wondrous feats of creation. Everything in the world would appear to him as a remarkable sign of God's power and perfection. While dwelling in an earthly abode, he would see and feel nothing but the Lord on high.

The Same Applies to the Muslims

The idolators of Mecca claimed allegiance to their forefather Abraham. Yet when the Quran came into existence many of them remained disbelievers. This despite the fact that the message taught in the Quran was the very message taught by Abraham. Why, then, the Meccans disbelief? The reason was that they did not have a true picture of Abraham. All they had was the distorted picture left them in their national heritage. The Quran did not fit into that picture, so they failed to grasp the importance of its spiritual message.

So it was with the Jews and the Christians. The Jews prided themselves on being followers of Moses, the Christians one being followers of Jesus. Yet both groups remained adverse to the Quran, despite the fact that the Quran taught the very message which Jesus, and Moses before him, had delivered. Here again the same factor was at work. The Jews and the Christians had a picture of their prophets which was different from that painted in the Quran. It was a picture painted more by national traditions than divine revelation. Having to choose between the two, they stuck to their traditional picture and turned away from the Quran.

The same thing that happened to the Meccans, that happened to the Jews and Christians, can also happen to the Muslims. The religion of Mohammad is perfectly preserved in the Quran and traditions of the Prophet. This does not mean, however, that there is no chance of the Muslims' picture of their religion becoming distorted amidst a maze of national traditions. If this happens, people may not be able to distinguish true Islam from the distorted version which has developed in their own traditions. Attachment to traditional Islam may prevent them from accepting true Islam when they are presented with a choice between the two.

If it is the outward aspect of worship that is stressed in Muslim tradition, there is bound to be a lack of emphasis on the inner realities of worship. When people's attention is then directed towards the latter, they are likely to become disorientated by the shift of emphasis, and will cling to their traditional attitudes. Similarly, if all their attention is directed towards the greatness of saints, they are likely to be lacking in awareness of the greatness of God. And if for Muslims religion becomes something inherited from their forefathers, it is sure to lose touch with its divine source. When called to true Islam, as taught in the Quran and by the Prophet, the Muslims will not then be able to recognize original from traditional Islam.

Taking on God's own Dye

Baptism is the first sacrament of the Catholic Church. When a baby is still in infancy, he or she is taken to a priest, sprinkled in "holy water" and baptized "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." The child thus becomes a full-fledged member of the Church. This sacrament is derived from an ancient Jewish and Christian custom, according to which the baby was dipped into a special sort of yellow dye. To be dyed in this colour was in their view a sign of godliness and entitled one to salvation. The Quran tells us that outward dye serves no useful purpose. One must make an effort to dye one's inner soul.

We take on God's dye. And who has better dye than God?

(The Quran 2 : 138)

Religion, then, does not consist of dyeing oneself physically; it is to dye oneself spiritually. Religion which consists of taking on external dye is confined to the limbs of one's body; it consists of mechanical repetition of devotions; it involves one in polemical discussions on superficial topics; it entitles one to demonstrate and protest against others; raises one to the rostrum and puts one's name into the newspapers; in short, it makes one into a public figure. One can cover oneself in a coating of "yellow dye", but one's real colour still remains the same.

True religion creates an upheaval within one's soul; it strikes a light in one's mind and heart; it dyes one's inner being in God's dye. The first type of religion remains on the outside, whereas true religion becomes a part of one's very substance. If one can perform weird spells, or practice some devotions, one can be a holy figure according to the first category of religion, but true religion is manifest in the whole of one's being – from one's inner senses to one's tongue, hands and feet. False religion remains apart from one's inner being, whereas true religion mingles with it. The two cannot be separated from one another.

True religion is that which mingles with a person's being like dye with water. Any religion that offers salvation on the basis of external actions alone is false, whether these actions consist of political activity or spiritual devotions.

Psychologists study a person's subconscious mind during times of stress. In the same way, one can tell if a person's faith has dyed his inner soul or just his outer form, when crisis strikes. If he is true in his religion, he will become humble, for humility is the essence of godliness. But if, at times of personal disaster, he becomes full of hate, pride and egoism, it shows that his religion was purely superficial.

A Practical Solution

“When one’s ego is touched,” an eminent psychologist once observed, “it turns into super-ego, and the result is breakdown.” Much the same thing was said some thirteen hundred years back by ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab. During his last days this Companion of the Prophet Muhammad gave some advice to his grandson, Abu Ja’afar al-Khatmi, part of which was about patience. “One who does not bear with small harm from a foolish person will have to bear with great harm,” was what he said.

The gist of both these remarks is the same, namely that the only way to avoid being harmed by others is to keep out of their firing line as much as possible, to keep as far away as one can from those who show themselves to be potentially harmful.

Every human being is born with an “ego”. More often than not, that ego is dormant. It is better to leave it sleeping for the ego can be like a snake which, when aroused, will harm all within its reach.

It is a commonplace in any society for one to be put out, and even aggrieved, as a result of someone else’s foolishness or willful malice. Usually the best way of avoiding great harm from mischief-makers is to put up with initial hurt, for, if one does not, one will set off a chain reaction in which things will go from bad to worse. Instead of having to bear a relatively small hurt, one will be subjected to much greater suffering. And if one has not been able to bear a pelting with stones, how will one fare when great rocks descend upon one’s head?

17 February 1986

Ignoring vain talk

After the conquest of Mecca, Hind, the wife of Abu Sufyan came to swear allegiance to the Prophet. Part of the oath that the Prophet used to administer was a clause prohibiting the murder of infants. When Hind came to this part of the oath, she said to the Prophet "You have killed them on the day of Badr." According to another account she said: "Have you left us any children to slay?" The Prophet made no response to this taunt and simply accepted her allegiance.

Muslim Personal Law

“Childless couples tend to have higher divorce rates than couples with children.” So says last year’s *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (7/163-64) on the basis of data collected in western countries. A western divorce court judge confirms that “every little youngster born to a couple is an added assurance that their marriage will never be dissolved in a divorce court.”

In spite of these apparently favourable psychological factors and natural, traditional attachments of parents and children, the rising incidence of divorce is a new and observable phenomenon of the modern world. One of the most important contributing factors is the ease with which women can now make a living. On this the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* says: “Industrialization has made it easier for women to support themselves, whether they are single, married, divorced, or widowed. In this connection, it is interesting to note that the Great Depression of the 1930s stopped the rise in the number of divorces in the United States for a time” (7/163, 1984).

While marriage is the rule of life, and divorce only an exception, the latter must also be accepted as a reality. Indeed there already exist commandments to deal, accordingly, with such cases in both divine and human laws.

The only true, authentic representation of divine law now exists in the form of the Quran, it having been preserved in its entirety by God, and free, therefore, from all human interpolations. In the Quran, and in the Hadith (the sayings of the Prophet) there are various commandments regarding divorce, the main point being that divorce should be sought only under unavoidable circumstances. The Prophet spoke of it as being the most unpleasant of all the lawful things in the eyes of God, and said that when it does take place, it should be done in an atmosphere of good will. In no way should one harbour ill-will against the other.

The Meaning of Provision

In Islamic jurisprudence, the material arrangements which a man makes for his divorced spouse is termed ‘divorce provision’. There is a consensus among Muslim scholars that this provision in no way means life-long maintenance, there being absolutely no basis for this in the divine scriptures. The concept of maintenance for life is, in fact, a product of modern civilization. It was never at any time enshrined in divine laws, either in Islam, Judaism or Christianity. In material terms ‘provision’ simply takes the form of a gift handed over by the man on parting, so that the woman’s immediate needs may be catered for, and in all cases, this is quite commensurate with his means.

But the Quran makes it explicit that the parting must above all be humane and that justice must be done: "Provide for them with fairness; the rich man according to his. This is binding on righteous man. Do not forget to show kindness to each otherreasonable provision should also be made for divorced women. That is incumbent on righteous man. (The Quran 2:236-241)

When divorce takes place before the settling of the dowry and the consummation of the marriage, even then the man must give the woman money or goods as a gesture of goodwill. In this instance the question of his repaying dowry money does not arise. The Quran is also quite explicit on this; "Believers, if you marry believing women and divorce them before the marriage is consummated, you have no right to require them to observe a waiting period. Provide well for them and release them honourably."

(The Quran 33.49)

This "waiting period" actually applies to a woman who has been married for some time and who may, subsequent to the divorce, discover that she is pregnant. This statutory waiting period of three months makes her position clear and then the man is required to pay her additional compensation if she is expecting his child. But again there is no question of maintenance for life, for the Quran seeks a natural solution to all human problems. It would, therefore, be wholly against the spirit of the Quran for a woman to be entitled to life maintenance from the very man with whom she could not co-exist. Such a ruling would surely have created a negative mentality in society. The Quran again has the answer: "If they separate, God will compensate each of them out of His own abundance: He is Munificent, Wise (4:130).

The munificence of God refers to the vast provision which God has made for his servants in this world.

In various ways God helps such distressed people. For example, when a woman is divorced, it is but natural that the sympathy of all her blood relations should be aroused. And, as a result, without any pressure being put on them, they are willing to help and look after her. Besides, a new will-power is awakened in such a woman and she sets about exploiting her hidden potentialities, thus solving her problems independently. Furthermore, previous experiences having left her wiser and more careful, she feels better equipped to enter into another marital relationship with more success.

After Divorce

The question that arises immediately after divorce is of ways and means to meet one's necessary expenses. One's answer is to resort to the Islamic law of inheritance. If women were to be given their due share according to Islamic law, there would be no question of woman becoming destitute. But, sad to say, the majority of Muslim women fail to get their due share of inheritance from their deceased fathers and husbands as stipulated by Islamic Law. If they could do so, this would be more than enough to meet such emergencies.

However, Islam has not just left women's financial problems to the vagaries of inheritance, because parents are not invariably in possession of property which can be divided among their children. Further arrangements have been made under the maintenance law, but this has no connection with the law of divorce. The answer to this question must be sought therefore in the Islamic law of maintenance. Here we shall briefly describe some of its aspects:

1. In case the divorced woman is childless or the children are not earning, according to Islamic law, the responsibility for her maintenance falls on her father. That is, her situation will be the same as it was before marriage.

To quote from *Fathul Qadir*: * "The Father is responsible for bearing the expenses of his daughter till her marriage, in the event of her having no money. The father has no right to force her to earn, even if she is able to. When the girl is divorced and the period of confinement is over, her father shall again have to bear her expenses.

2. If the divorced woman has a son who is an earning member of the family, the responsibility for her maintenance falls entirely upon him. "All that rightfully belongs to a wife, will be the duty of the son to provide, that is, food, drink, clothes, house and even servants, if possible (*Radd Al-Mohtar* Vol. 2, p. 933).

3. In the case of father being deceased, and where even her children are unable to earn, her nearest relatives such as brothers or uncles are responsible for her upkeep. In the absence of even this third form, the Islamic Shariah holds the State Treasury (Baitul Mal) responsible for bearing her expenses. She will be entitled to receive the money for her necessities.

Because of the number of provisions made under Islamic law for women it has never been the case in Islamic history that Muslim divorced women have been cast adrift, helpless, with no one to look after them.

Khushwant Singh has remarked that we do not hear of Muslim women committing suicide or being tortured like Hindu women, which is a proof that Islam has already given them adequate liberty and has made enough provision for them to be supported in times of emergencies.

A new dimension has been added to the issue since the women of this day and age can leave their homes to work, and are therefore not entirely dependent on men as they used to be in the past; there is no need then to make law which provide for them at the expense of their menfolk. When they are earning like men, what is the point in making such a law? Only in exceptional cases, surely do they need to be looked after, and ways and means of doing so can generally be worked out quite satisfactorily on a personal level.

* A standard book on Islamic law

The Problem of Modern Civilization

In the modern age, western civilization has been beset by many problems, many of which are more artificial than real. In many things western civilization has adopted unnatural ways, thus giving rise to unnatural problems. The matter has further been worsened by attempts to solve them unnaturally. Problems have thus gone on increasing instead of decreasing. The problem of divorce is one of them. The initial stimulus of the women's lib movement in the west was not wrong, but its leaders did not care to define its limits. In a bid to make a free society, their efforts culminated in the creation of a permissive society. Affairs between men and women knew no limits and this had the effect of weakening the marriage bond. Men and women were no more husbands and wives. In the words of the Prophet, they became sensual, pleasure-seeking people. This, state of affairs was given a boost by industrialization, as a woman could easily procure an independent livelihood for herself. This had never before been possible. Because of this, she has frequently refused to live under the guardianship of men which, in consequence has created a large number of social problems leading to greatly increased rates of divorce.

The western philosophers who wanted to check divorce advocated legal curbs upon men, which would legally bind them to provide maintenance to the wife after the divorce. This maintenance sum was fixed according to western living standards, so that, in most cases, divorce meant that the man had to part with a fair amount of his hard earned money for the whole of the rest of his life.

A victim of this unnatural state of affairs was Lord Bertrand Russell, one of the most intelligent and outstanding intellectuals of his time. Soon after his marriage, he discovered that his wife no longer inspired any feelings of love in him. Although realizing this incompatibility, he did not seek an immediate separation. In spite of severe mental torture he tried to bear with this situation for ten years. He refers to this period as one of "darkest despair". Finally he had to separate and remarry, but he was not satisfied even with the second match and he married for the third time. Two divorces were a costly bargain. According to English law, the amount of alimony and maintenance he had to pay his wives upset him greatly. He writes in his Autobiography:

" ... the financial burden was heavy and rather disturbing: I had given £ 10,000/- of my Nobel Prize cheque for a little more than £ 11,000/- to my third wife, and I was now paying alimony to her and to my second wife as well as paying for the education of my younger son. Added to this, there were heavy expenses in connection with my elder son's illness; and the income taxes which for many years he had neglected to pay now fell to me to pay." Bertrand Russell, *Autobiography*, Unwin Paperbacks (London) 1978, pp. 563-64.

Such a law had been passed in order to ensure justice for women who had to resort to divorce. But when people began to realize that divorce inevitably led one into financial straits, the marriage bond began to be dispensed with altogether. Men and women simply started to live together without going

through the formality of the marriage ceremony. Now more than fifty percent of the younger generation prefer to live in the unmarried state.

It was only natural that a reaction should have set in against a law which so patently disfavoured men and brought corruption, perversion and all kinds of misery in its wake. Children – even newborn babies – were the greatest sufferers.

Now take the situation prevailing in Hindu society in which the extreme difficulty of divorce acts as a deterrent. Obviously this was a bid to reform, but this has served only to aggravate the matter. The ancient Indian religious reformers had held separation as being illegal. They even prohibited women from remarrying so that they would be left with no incentive to seek divorce. The laws were made in such a way that once marriage ceremonies were finalized, neither could a man divorce his wife, nor was it possible for a woman to remarry after leaving her former husband.

But such reformations were unnatural, and have been generally detrimental to individuals in Hindu society. When a man and a woman are unable to satisfy one another, the whole of their lives is passed in great bitterness because of there being no provision for remarriage. They are doomed to continue to live a tormented life alongside partners with whom they have nothing in common. I shall cite here only one of the hundreds and thousands of such instances which are reported in newspapers almost everyday, leaving aside those cases which go unreported. Manu, 25, was a cousin of Mr. Khushwant Singh. He has written in detail about her tragedy in his "Malice" column (12 October 1985). Manu had a flourishing business selling ready-made garments in Los Angeles. As she did not want to marry a foreigner, she decided to come to India to find a husband and return with him to the States. She found her own husband in a tall handsome, powerfully built Hindu boy who was anxious to go abroad. The marriage took place with all pomp and splendour in a five-star hotel. It took her some months to arrange for her husband's visa, during which time she maintained him and paid for his passage. The marriage was a disaster. The boy turned out to be an alcoholic, prone to violence and averse to doing any work. Manu sought her parent's consent to wind up her business, divorce her husband and return to India. Her parents travelled to America and tried to persuade her not to be hasty. A few days after her mother returned to Delhi, Manu's husband strangled her and dumped her body in a deserted spot. He collected all he could in the house and was planning to flee the United States when the police caught up with him. He is now in jail on a charge of murder.

It is obvious that Manu was not careless in selecting her partner. She traveled from America to find a suitable match in her birth place. But all that glitters is not gold. Our human limitations make it impossible for us to understand every facet of a person's character before entering into a relationship with him. The question arises if, after such revelations, one should feel forced to respect a marriage bond even at the cost of one's life? When society considers separation taboo, or the laws on this show no human leniency, the only alternatives left for such incompatible couples are either to commit suicide, or waste away the whole of their lives in the "darkest despair". Even when one dares to surmount the hurdle of

divorce, it is very difficult to get remarried in societies where divorcees are looked down upon. One can at best marry someone beneath one's social status. But in Islam remarriage is not a taboo: the Prophet himself married a widow. The provisions of Islam are thus a great blessing to couples who realize only too late that they have erred in making their choice of a partner. Islam provides for them to separate amicably, in a spirit of goodwill.

Just think of the couples wasting away the whole of their lives in mental torment only because the conditions of separation and its consequences are hard to meet. It is as unnatural as anything can be.

Islam is a natural religion. That is why such a situation has not developed in Muslim communities because Islamic law on marriage and divorce provides for all, or almost all, eventualities. For example, when a woman wishes to divorce her husband, she has to put her case before a religious scholar, or a body of religious scholars. This facility is available to her in all the great Arabic schools in India. They then give consideration to her circumstances in the light of the Quran and the Hadith, and, if they find that there are reasonable grounds for separation, they decide in her favour. The reason that the woman must have scholars to act on her behalf is that women are more emotional than men – as has been proved by scientific research – and it is to prevent hasty and ill-considered divorces taking place that she is thus advised. If we seldom hear of Muslim women committing suicide, or being murdered by their in-laws, it is because they have the alternative – separation.

Separation, of course, is strongly advised against in the case of minor provocations. Are we not commanded by God to be tolerant and forgiving? It is meant only as a last resort, when it has become truly unavoidable.

Islamic law is thus fair to both husband and wife, unlike occidental law, which places an undue burden on the man, while Hindu Society forces the woman into familial rejection, destitution and social ostracism.