



# Al-Risala 1986

January

## Editorial

There are some who claim that religion is an individual matter, and others who take the opposite view, zealously putting forward their claim that religion is a complete social order. Outwardly, both views appear to be opposed to one another, but they do have one thing in common: both present religion as a system, the first as a system related to individual life, and the second as a system related to society as a whole.

In its true essence, however, religion is neither an individual nor a social system; it is divine path. The aim of religion, by which we mean Islam, is to come to know God. Religion is to believe in what is unseen as if it were before one's eyes; it is for thoughts of God and the life after death to dominate one's mind – so much so that one is always thinking about them and setting the course of one's life in accordance with their demands.

The true purpose of Islam is to bring what the Quran calls “devoted servants of God” (Rabbaniyun) into existence. Islam seeks to imbue every single individual with love and fear of the Lord. The type of person that Islam seeks to form is one who fears God above all else, whose focus of attention is the next eternal world; one who subordinates all his actions and dealings to the will of God; who does not follow the dictates of the devil and his own desires, but submits to one God alone.

Islamic faith is essentially a discovery – the discovery of God. Islam is for one to see beyond the superficial forms of things to the reality that lies beneath; it is for one to set one's gaze beyond creation and fix it on the Creator. This is to see something that others have not seen, to discover something that others have yet to discover. When true Islam enters a person's soul it is the most shattering of experiences. It brings one face to face with a reality, which changes the very nature of one's life. It is a rebirth, the making of a new man.

Islam addresses itself to the individual, not society as a whole, for only an individual can experience the psychological upheavals that Islam brings about. To seek to islamize society, without individuals having undergone the inward transformation essential to Islam, does not serve to strengthen and consolidate God's religion; it can only undermine it.

## The Spiritual versus the Material

An international technological exhibition was held in New Delhi in 1961, in which a large number of countries participated. The American pavilion became the centre of people's attention, drawing the crowds away from other pavilions because it had an air motor car on display.

The visitors, (myself included) gathered on a field to watch the spectacle. The driver first drove it on the ground like an ordinary car, then raised it about 4 feet above the ground, circled the field several times, then brought it down on to the ground again.

It was explained to us that such cars drew air from above and released it at high pressure below the car, thus building an air pad between the car and the ground over which it could glide like a boat sailing on water.

Among the visitors there was a young Sadhu. Clad in saffron clothes, his long, tangled hair falling into curls and knots, he kept gazing at the car with rapt attention for about 20 minutes. Seeing his state of absorption, a newspaper reporter approached him to ask what his impressions were of this air car. The Sadhu replied quite seriously "After watching this air motor car, I am faced with a new problem, that is, whether or not I should forsake the spiritual life for the material, and thus fulfill my ambitions by way of material achievements. This exhibition has caused me to have second thoughts about which of the worlds, spiritual or material, it is better to be attached to.

*(The Hindustan Times, 20 November, 1961)*

Such events as this seem to show a contradiction between scientific and spiritual development. It would appear that the one can be gained only at the cost of the other. But it entirely depends on what one's interpretation of spiritual is. If being spiritual means forsaking the world altogether and taking to jungles and mountains, renouncing all contact whatsoever with the world, the scientific and spiritual appear to contradict each other.

But we find no clash between the two, if we regard the spiritual life as one in which one purifies one's self, body and soul of base motives. In this way being spiritual means only to rectify one's relationship with other human beings and is far from meaning the renunciation of all contacts with the material world.

The spiritual is by no means the opposite of the scientific; it is actually the opposite of the material. Because a spiritual person is not materially minded, it does not mean that he cannot think scientifically. One who is spiritually inclined resorts constantly to his inner mental life – something which no one can take away from him. Such a man possesses inner contentment, and is far above all material gain and loss. Inner peace is something which he holds dearer than anything else, for he need look no further than his own inner resources for his satisfaction in life.

4 January 1986

## The Stepping Stone

At one point in the propagation of Islam, Meccan persecution of the Muslims so increased in intensity, many Muslims then becoming the victims of torture and murder, that the Prophet instructed them to disperse throughout the world until God saw fit to bring them together again. When they asked where they should go, he advised them to escape to Abyssinia, the Christian kingdom where “a king, Negus, rules without injustice, a land of truthfulness.”

These words of the Prophet are a very meaningful. One can put it another way and say, “Instead of combating the enemy, remove yourself from its aim. Do not stay in one place and remain a target”. Then, according to God’s law, such circumstances will be created as will vanquish the enemy, and the believers who would have increased in strength in the meantime because of their positive and constructive activities, shall be gathered together at one point.

The trials of emigration call for great patience and to be sure, God’s blessings are always given in exchange for it. In the words of the Prophet, “Surely victory follows patience, just as ease and felicity succeeds efforts and difficulty.”

This shows that the divine succour is always at the side of those who are patient. Patience, is, in fact, a stepping stone to the divine succour. Whenever man is faced with any difficulty, he should eschew impatience. Being blessed with patience is a sign that one is entitled to the help of God and that one’s difficulties will eventually be overcome.

Paradise lies beyond the wall of patience which people must seek and surmount.

## Superior Actions

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

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

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

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

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

## The Path of Prayer

It has been related that Abdul Malik ibn Marwan, (23-85AH), an Umayyad caliph, preached an eloquent sermon one day, then wept unrestrainedly. When he had calmed down, he said, "O, my Lord, I have undoubtedly sinned greatly, but Your forgiveness, however little, will far outweigh the greatness of my sin. O, my Lord, bless me with Your forgiveness, be it never so little." When Hasan Basri, the great contemporary religious scholar heard about this, he was moved and said, "If any words were worthy of being written in gold, it was surely them,"

Abdul Malik ibn Marwan, a Tabi'i (One of those who conversed with the companions of the Prophet) was a great and intelligent statesman. It was his governor, Hajjaj ibn Yousuf Thaqafi, who invaded Mecca and killed Abdullah ibn Zubair, the rival of Abdul Malik ibn Marwan.

It is evident from this that even the cruelest of rulers of that time were not totally bereft of the fear of God, and that their feelings were given expression on some occasion or the other. On the contrary, the religious people of today are devoid of all such fear of the Lord. Their prayers fail to soften their hearts, and their recital of the name of God does not move them. Their faith does not generate any such sense of accountability in them as would make them feel that they were standing before God, conscious of His presence. Because their words are empty their prayers do not lead them to the discovery of God.

The following verse of the Quran applies to the people of today "Yet after that your hearts became as hard as rock or even harder, for from some rocks rivers take their course: some break asunder and water gushes from them; and others tumble down through fear of God. God is not unaware of what you do."  
(2:74)

7 January 1986

## Negative Mentality

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870-1924) who was later known to the world by his revolutionary name Lenin was born into a family who tended to be political extremists. To make matters worse, Lenin's elder brother Alexander, made an abortive attempt to kill the Czar and was executed as a result in 1887. Consequently, the whole family had to bear the brunt of persistent persecution by the government.

Lenin resolved to avenge the execution of his dear brother. Hatred for the Czar became second nature to him. But the tragic end of his brother was there to remind him that an attempt by an individual on the life of the Emperor of Russia was futile. It was only united and collective effort that could bring the rule of his loathsome enemy to an end. The theory of Karl Marx supplied him with the much sought for answer.

Lenin found the opportunity to study the ideas of Karl Marx during his studies at the university. Later on, during his stay in Geneva for further education, he discovered more literature on Socialism. It was natural that Lenin was greatly attracted to these ideas. The philosophy developed by Marx not only proved his dreaded enemy wrong, but also justified the abolition of the whole system represented by the Czar. Thus Marxist Socialism provided Lenin with a philosophical basis for launching a mass movement against him, and he plunged himself heart and soul into following its dictates.

It often happens that a person's thoughts and actions are governed by his personal whims and fancies, but he pretends that they have been inspired by a love for humanity or that he is obeying a commandment of God. But his words and actions bear no relation to each other. While he is one person on the inside, he pretends to be something quite other on the outside. He gives the impression that his thoughts and ideologies have an objective, positive basis, but, in the last analysis, they are nothing but reflex actions.

(The information is based on: *100 Great Modern Lives*, by John Canning Century Books Ltd; London. 1972, P.349)

8 January 1986

## Lose in Order to Gain

The Prophet has been reported as saying that the noblest charity is that of imparting knowledge to one's brethren.

What is charity? It is the extension of goodwill and love towards one's fellow creatures. This feeling can find expression in the form of gifts of money, or simply in the giving of good advice. There are many forms in which it can be expressed. One of its outward manifestations takes the form of the gifting of knowledge.

Knowledge, that is, the realization of truth, is undoubtedly the greatest thing in the universe and this is why the charity of imparting knowledge is said to be the greatest of charities. It is the most sublime of passions to be moved to do good to others, to convey to others the light of truth that one has received from God.

It is only those who are sympathetic and considerate to others who can convey this knowledge to them. They must feel the pain of others in their hearts and sacrifice their own interests for the interests of others. They must understand others before their message can be understood. They must divest themselves completely of any such egoistic element as would hinder the creation of a receptive ambience. This is the only way to elicit a positive response from those to whom the message is conveyed.

The charity of imparting knowledge must often be made at the cost of a great sacrifice. It becomes possible only when man is willing to lose for the sake of others' gain. When man is not willing to lose, he misses the opportunity of giving to others.



8 January 1986

## Rectifying others and being ready to be rectified oneself

When Abu Bakr was elected to be the first Caliph of Islam he addressed the people. "I have been put in charge of your affairs," he said, "though I am no better than you. I will consider the weakest of you as the strongest, as long as I have not ensured that he receives his rightful due. And the strongest that he receives his rightful due. And the strongest among you will to me be the weakest, as long as I have not ensured that he pays what he owes. People, I am just like anyone of you. If you see that I am pursuing a proper course, then follow me; and if you see me err, then set me straight."

## The Strength of Truth

Ibn Hisham has related in his biography of the Prophet of Islam that the first person after the Prophet himself who recited the Quran aloud in Mecca was Abdullah ibn Masood. One day the Companions of the Prophet assembled. "The Quraysh have not heard the Quran recited out loud," they said to one another. "Is there anyone who can recite it to them?"

"I will do so," Ibn Masood said.

Abdullah ibn Masood was a thin, weakly person. He had no tribe of his own in Mecca to protect him. He was just a shepherd, and was known by the name 'Ibn Umm-e-Abd'. His friends feared for him. They said that someone who belonged to a tribe of Mecca who could protect him from the Quraysh should perform this task. But Abdullah ibn Masood was adamant.

"Let me go," he said. "God will help me."

So Abdullah ibn Masood set off and arrived at the place where the Quraysh were assembled. He stood up in the midst of them, took God's name and started to recite Surah Al-Rahman. The Quraysh asked one another what it was that Ibn Umm-e-Abd was reciting. Someone told them that it was a part of the Book that had been revealed to Mohammad. When they heard this they got up and started to beat Ibn Masood on the face. But he kept on reciting. When he returned to his companions, he had scars on his face where he had been hit.

"That is what we were afraid of," they said to him.

"You know," Ibn Masood said, "God's enemies have never seemed as weak to me as they seemed today. If you want, I will go back tomorrow and recite the Quran to them again."

Where did a weak and helpless person like Ibn Masood get the strength to go, without any material protection, to his enemies and recite to them what they least wanted to hear? The secret of this strength was belief in truth. Abdullah ibn Masood had total conviction that he was in the right and the Quraysh were in the wrong. When they started hitting him, his conviction was reinforced. It showed him that they could not answer him in a reasonable way. Their use of force only proved their lack of a rational argument. He had the power of truth with him, and there is no greater power than the power of truth.

This world is a place of affliction. To be brave in this world does not mean that one will not suffer; everyone is destined to suffer in this world. Bravery lies in having a conviction which makes suffering seem insignificant in comparison with one's purpose in life. In this world of pain, difficulties can be borne by one who has found something greater than them."

A believer possesses this strength in the most total form. He has a reality, which he does not doubt the greatness and truth of, to hold on to. Added to this he is certain that every sacrifice he makes in this path only serves to increase his success in the next world. This faith makes it a joy for him to proclaim the truth, for he knows that eternal happiness will emanate from his action. When his opponent use force against him, his conviction is increased, for it proves that he is absolutely in the right and his opponents absolutely in the wrong. To use force is to admit the falseness of one's case. The preacher of Islam knows when his opponents persecute him that they are defeated in terms of reason, for whoever has reason on his side will never resort to force.

Truth is a supreme discovery, that occurs in the depths of a person's soul. This means that the strength which is derived from truth comes from within. All other forces are external; they come from outside a person. They are, therefore, limited. Sooner or later they will come to an end. At times of crises these forces are too busy trying to save themselves to be able to protect man. Not so, however, with truth. It is the only strength which has unlimited resources. When one has found truth, it never deserts one; it remains attached to one's soul. One can always depend on the strength of truth, even when one outwardly appears to be helpless.

The truth which a believer has with him is God himself. A believer discovers God as the greatest reality. When he has found the greatest being, why should he fear trivialities. When one has discovered reality, there is nothing left to be found.

10 January 1986

## Framing admonition in general terms

According to 'Aisha, when the Prophet used to hear something displeasing about a person, then he would not take that person's name when administering admonishment. Rather he would say: "What's up with people who do or say such things." Thus he would discourage people in a general way from following suit, without directing criticism at anyone in particular.

## The Sign that is Palestine

*The place for showing the Muslims the signs of God continues to be Jerusalem, as it had been for the People of the Book before them.*

The expulsion of Palestinian Muslims from their native land in 1948 was followed by their removal from the neighbouring countries of Egypt, Syria and Jordan. They then made Lebanon their centre, but the 1982 Israeli invasion of that country forced them to forsake even that final stronghold. It is hard to find, in the entire annals of Islamic history, any Muslim group that has suffered such persecution.

The Palestinian diaspora, as it has come to be known, is far more than just a simple matter of merely local significance. It is an event of tremendous importance for all Muslims. The fate of Palestinian Muslims is a warning for Muslims the world over. What it indicates is that the Muslims of today have, as a community, brought down the wrath of God upon their heads. Their efforts have ceased to be blessed with divine favour, and this, despite the presence among them of leaders who stand up on the world stage and proudly proclaim that “the Arab people have rediscovered themselves”; and despite the presence among them of thinkers who have successfully moulded the modern age into an era of Islamic renaissance; and despite the activities of certain groups who claim to have conveyed the message of Islam to all four corners of the world.

Mohammad was the last of the Prophets. After his coming, he is the only Prophet to be followed. The Prophethood prior to his Prophetic mission no longer provide mankind with practical guidance. Now it is the Prophethood of Mohammad alone which has the stamp of divine approval. It is only by following his teachings that one can earn salvation. The decision of God to terminate Prophethood with Mohammad had to be shown to the world in plain form. Some event symbolic of Mohammad’s status as final Prophet had to be staged. So it was that, during the Prophet Mohammad’s Night Journey, all the Prophets were brought together in one place. Gabriel instructed the Prophet Mohammad to lead them in prayer, and all his predecessors prayed behind him.

The Prophet Mohammad’s leadership of all the Prophets in worship could have happened in the House of God in Mecca. But instead the Prophet’s ascent to heaven was chosen for this event. The Prophet was first taken to Jerusalem, and there he led the other Prophets in prayer. The reason for the Prophet being transported to Jerusalem for this highly significant event has been given in the Quran. It was “in order to show him some of our signs” (17:1). Jerusalem had traditionally been the place where God’s signs had been made manifest to the Jewish people. Now the Prophet Mohammad, during his Night Journey, was taken to the same place to be shown God’s signs. What this meant was that the followers of Mohammad were heirs to both the House of God in Mecca and the Sacred Mosque of Jerusalem. Along with the town of Jerusalem, they also inherited the spiritual and symbolic significance that had, over thousands of years, been attached to it.

One thing that emerges clearly from a study of biblical history is that at times when the Jewish People were in God's favour, they were allowed to live freely in the land of Palestine. At such times the sovereignty of that country was entrusted to them. Then, when God was displeased with them, he removed them from Palestine and tremendous affliction came upon them. Palestine, then, was a sign of the Jews' being in favour or disfavour of the Lord. The same is the case with the Muslims. Palestine shows the Muslims how they stand in the sight of God. When God is pleased with them, they are given possession of the Holy Land, and enabled to live there in peace. Their removal from Palestine, on the other hand, is a sign that God is not looking upon them with favour: they have earned God's displeasure, and are paying the price.

With the coming of the Prophet of the final era, control over both the great centres of worship – the House of God in Mecca and the Sacred Mosque in Jerusalem – passed to his community. Mecca, then, could also have been a suitable venue for the manifestation of God's signs to the Muslims. God's favour or disfavour towards them could have been made plain there. But Islam, being a religion preserved in its original form, had to have a centre preserved from destruction and strife. That centre is Mecca. Were it to come under threat, the security of Islam itself would be endangered. It had to be protected, as the religion it represents is protected. The place for showing the Muslims the signs of God, then, continued to be Jerusalem, as it had been for the People of the Book before them.

To think of what is happening in Palestine as the result of American and Israeli aggression is to miss the point; it is to close one's eyes to the way of God. Rather it is God's way of showing those whom He has chosen to spread the message of His Scripture that they have not fulfilled their responsibilities with regard to it. Before the Muslims, the Jews were the bearers of the divine message of the Scriptures. It was they who used to be shown in Palestine whether God was looking upon them with favour or displeasure. Now it is the Muslims who are the bearers of the divine message of the Scripture, and it is they, therefore, who are the target of God's wrath.

The great irony of the situation is that it is the Jews who have been chosen to deliver this rebuke to the Muslims. The Children of Israel, who had themselves been robbed of the Holy Land because of their failure to discharge their responsibilities as bearers of God's Scriptures, have been brought back there. It is they who are robbing their successors, the Muslims, of their place in Palestine.

There are two ways of looking at this event. From the Jews' point of view, it would appear that they are being gathered in one place, eventually to be afflicted there by some severe punishment on a mass scale. As for the Muslims, their being persecuted in the Holy Land by people who have themselves incurred the rage of God shows the intensity of the divine disfavour which the Muslims have brought down upon themselves. This disfavour will continue until the Muslims have rebuilt their own lives on the solid foundations of the Book of God.

Today the whole Muslim world is united in support of their Palestinian brethren. Perhaps there is no other issue affecting Muslims in which Muslims are so united. The whole Muslim world has adopted the

Palestinian cause. With one voice Muslims the world over have extended their support to the Palestinian people, while heaping blame upon America and Israel for precipitating their plight. And the Muslims' support for the Palestinians is not limited to words. The international Islamic community has also adopted the Palestinian cause on a practical level. The honour of the Palestinians is the honour of Muslims, young and old, the world over, while if Palestinians are disgraced the whole Muslim world shares a sense of shame.

Yet despite total support from the Muslim world, the Palestinian question is now no nearer solution than before. In fact, from day to day the problem becomes more and more intractable. The reason for this is simple: the problem has festered in one region, and Muslims are searching for a solution in another quite different site.

The question of Palestine is not to be looked at in terms of America and Israel, but in terms of the Muslims' relation to the Book of God. If America was causing the problem a solution would have been found by now, as Vietnam showed us ten years ago. But it is neglect of and injustice to the Book of God that lie at the root of the problem. The Muslims have betrayed God's trust, and only by restoring it will they be restored to the Holy Land.

The plight of Palestinian Muslims shows, furthermore, that the work being done in the name of Islam is not the work which God requires of Muslims. It does not constitute the real service of God's cause which the Book of God requires of us. There is no doubt that great Muslim leaders have emerged in modern times and Islamic work is being conducted on a huge scale, but if the nature of this work was in accordance with the will of God, the Muslims would not have suffered God's chastisement as they have. God's succour would certainly have been theirs, and they would certainly not have gone unrewarded. But sheer quantity can never make up for a lack of quality.

This is a question of the utmost importance, to which all Muslims should address their thoughts, for if they continue to be rejected by God, they will have no place either in this world or the next. Only if we set about performing the task that God requires of us will we be restored to His good favour; and that is the only way that Palestine can be restored to us.

14 January 1986

## Meeting out justice equally

Ali lost a coat of armour in the Battle of Jamal. One day he was walking in the market. He saw that a Christian was selling a coat of armour, and recognized it as his own. "That coat of armour is mine," Ali said. "A Muslim Qazi will judge between us." Ali was Commander of the Faithful at that time and Qazi Shuraih was Chief Justice. The case was brought before the Qazi. Ali asked him to judge between himself and the Christian. "What is your claim?" the Qazi asked him. "That this coat of armour is mine," Ali replied. "What do you have to say," the Qazi addressed the Christian. "The Commander of the Faithful is mistaken; it belongs to me," the Christian replied. The Qazi then asked Ali who his witnesses were, and Ali brought forward his son Hasan and slave Qanbar. The Qazi told him to bring another witness instead of Hasan. "Do you reject the evidence of Hasan?" Ali said to him. "That's not the point," the Qazi said, "but I have heard you yourself say that the evidence of a son in support of his father is not acceptable."



## Beyond Death

Louis XI (1423-1483), the king of France, ruled the country for a period of 23 years, from 1461 to 1483. His reign had been a long one but death was the last word that he would allow to be uttered in his presence. He did not want to die. During the last days of his life he went in seclusion in an enclosed fort where only selected people could enter. Around the fort was dug a deep trench so that no one could gain access to it. All of the twenty-four hours, forty archers remained on duty, over and above which forty horsemen patrolled the fort night and day. Whoever was seen making any unauthorized effort to enter the fort was arrested and executed on the spot. All kinds of luxuries were provided inside the fort so that the king never became melancholy.

Louis XI was so eager to live as long as possible that he had given orders that the word 'death' should never be uttered before him. An expert doctor attended him day and night. This doctor drew a monthly salary of 10,000 gold crowns. In those days in Europe no military officer earned such a salary even with forty years' experience to his credit.

However, none of these precautions saved the king from weakness and old age. During his final days, he became so weak that he could hardly pick up his food and put it in his mouth by himself. But his will to live was indomitable. When he was told that tortoises lived for 500 years due to their possessing some life-giving properties, he dispatched three ships to Germany and Italy to bring them for him in huge quantities. These tortoises were then kept in a big pond near him so that they might pass on the gift of life to him.

Finally, paralysis attacked him on 30 August 1483; death at last conquered him. The last words uttered by him were: "I am not as ill as you people suppose."

All his efforts went in vain. Finally the king of France had learnt that no one could conquer death.

15 January 1986

**The world is but a drop in the ocean of eternity**

Al-Mastaurid Ibn Shaddad heard the Prophet say: "The world, in comparison to eternity, is like one of you putting his finger in the ocean. What does he take with him when he brings his finger out?"

*(Muslim)*

16 January 1986

## Politician or Statesman?

“The bane of India is the plethora of politicians and the paucity of statesmen.”

Nani Palkhiwala in *We The People*

What makes for the difference between a politician and a statesman? In the words of the Vice-President of India, Mr. Venkata Raman:

“A politician thinks of the next election, while a statesman thinks of the next generation”.

*Times of India*, 17 Sept., 1984

We can put it another way and say, there are two kinds of leaders, true and false. The former thinks in terms of the interests of the nation and the latter in terms of the interests of his own leadership. The true leader is concerned with the future of his nation, while the false leader is concerned with his own future prospects.

The latter breaks with tradition without the slightest hesitation if it serves his end and then he exults in his personal victory. But a true leader will pause and think, ‘How easy it is to break a tradition and how difficult to create a good one’. Therefore, he prefers to preserve it even at the risk of personal loss.

When the false leader sees that he can win by shouting emotional slogans, he does not resist the idea. But a true leader would think twice about doing this. He would think that using emotional slogans to influence the people meant leading the nation along an emotional and unrealistic course, so he would prefer his own political death to plunging his nation headlong into the abyss. It is the sacrifice of a leader which gives life to a nation. Fortunate are those who have such farseeing men to lead them.

16 January 1986

## God will deal with us in the same manner as we have dealt with others

'Amr Ibn Murrah told Mu'awiyah that he had heard from the Prophet that if a ruler closed his door on the weak and needy, then God would close the doors of heaven on him at the hour of his greatest need and destitution.

*(Tirmidhi)*

17 January 1986

## Without an Identity Card

A village boy came to the city. As he was walking along the road, he passed by a school. It was anniversary day, and hundreds of schoolboys had formed a line outside one of the windows. As he approached closer, he was able to see that sweets were being distributed. Each boy was taking his share and going away. The village boy also joined the line, and waited for his turn, thinking that just as all the other boys were being given a packet of sweets each, so he would also be presented with one.

Finally he reached the window and stretched out his hand eagerly. A voice came from behind the window: "Where is your identity card?" The village boy, of course, was unable to show a card, and he was turned away empty handed. He realized that the sweets were not for anyone who turned up at the window; they were for those who had studied the whole year in the school.

It will be much the same on the Last Day. The Last Day is the day when God's judgement will come to pass. All mankind will be gathered before their Lord. People will find their rewards with Him. But the rewards of that day will only be for those who have qualified for them; they will only be for those who are able to show an "identity card" proving their eligibility for the favours that are being bestowed.

The time is fast approaching when all one will want to see, feel and adore will be the Lord of the World. Everyone will be vying to be amongst those brought close to Him. The most honourable position that one will be able to occupy will be to be counted among His humble servants. But this privilege will only be for those, who, before the coming of that day, have shown their selves deserving of divine approval. Those who neglected God in this world will be neglected by Him on that day. They will reach God's world, but will not be able to behold Him. That will be the day when all secrets are divulged; but even then they will find themselves left out in the cold, and not allowed to share in the wonders that will unfold.

17 January 1986

### Swallowing anger increases one in faith

The Prophet said: "God fills with peace and faith the heart of one who swallows his anger, even though he is in a position to give vent to it."

## Prerequisites

Pretreatment, a term associated with the textile industry, describes the process to which cloth is subjected before it can take further processing.

Types of pretreatment, such as desizing, scouring, and bleaching of cotton fabrics are carried out in order to remove any inherent or added matter present in cotton, thereby improving its absorbency and whiteness. Mercerization thus enhances the accessibility and reactivity of cotton cellulose.

These pretreatments, therefore, play a major role in subsequent dyeing, printing and finishing.

In fact, it has been reported that 70 percent of all the defects occurring in dyed-finished fabrics may be attributed to the imperfect preparation of the base fabric.

This principle of pretreatment is as important and necessary in human affairs as it is with clothes. If we want our efforts to bear fruit, it is essential that we should take the correct preliminary steps before plunging headlong into difficult situations. Without the necessary moral conditioning, all our steps will go awry, just like a cloth which is dyed without pretreatment.

For journalism of normally decent standards to come into existence, it is essential that there should be industries to feed it. In the main, it is industry which finances the newspapers. A nation destitute of industry will also remain destitute of journalism.

To concretize the power of our votes in elections, unity is the first prerequisite. Without that, our voting power will be divided and it will fail to become a genuine political power capable of serving true social ends.

Similarly, before taking steps of any social consequence, it is necessary to have a leader who is respected by the majority. Attempting to take initiatives without a central leadership is like leaping into an abyss.

18 January 1986

## Do as you would be done by

Abu Hurairah reported the Prophet as saying: "When your Muslim brother comes to you to excuse himself, accept his excuse, for otherwise you will not receive from me the water that I shall hand out at the Pond of Plenitude."



## Getting what one Deserves

The past of the Muslims, known as the golden period, has been an object of great pride. Writers and speakers are eloquent upon it. Here we must pause and give some thought to how it was that this splendid era came into existence.

To derive only food for vanity from events is wholly against the spirit of Islam. The Islamic way of studying events is to learn lessons from them. Doing so involves linking events with reality. In the process we come to a conclusion which really teaches us something. When events are not linked with reality, far from providing food for the soul, engenders only a false sense of pride.

By studying Muslim history of the past in the light of facts, we learn that this golden period did not emerge from launching campaigns demanding our rights, such as the Muslims of today have engaged themselves in the world over. It was rather our beneficence that had given birth to it. The success of this period can be defined in terms of our usefulness to others. It was by virtue of this quality that Muslims reached such heights of success.

Today, the USA, Britain and the USSR are known as the centres of modern civilization, but, as we all know, these were not its birthplaces. The revival of knowledge did not commence from these points. It was Spain, Sicily and Italy which saw the beginning of knowledge and civilization in Europe. It was in these coastal areas that the revival of knowledge initially began, and the seeds of modern civilization were sown to be disseminated later to other European countries.

What is the reason? It is because knowledge and civilization reached Europe through Muslims. Prior to the Muslim age, the continent of Europe was a continent of darkness, the period known in history as the Dark Ages. Muslims at first entered Europe from Africa by crossing the sea. They sailed the sea to Spain from Morocco. Similarly, they crossed the Mediterranean from Tunisia, and entered Sicily and Italy, and laid the foundation of knowledge and civilization in these European countries, whence it was passed on to Western Europe and later on to the USA. There is no denying the fact that it was Muslims who bore the torch of learning to Europe.

The age of the Muslims, in which they held a dominant position in the world, was one in which their capacity to spread enlightenment had grown to such a high degree that whatever part of the earth they set foot on, would gush forth fountains of knowledge, turning the dark ages of history into a brighter era of civilization. Whenever Muslims settled in a place it was like heaven-sent water reaching parched earth.

In the British Museum in London, there is a gold coin, minted in 774, during the rule of an ancient king of England, Offa Rex, who reigned from 757 to 796. This coin bears the name of Offa Rex on one side

and the article of faith of Muslims, on the other in Arabic. Prof. Philip K. Hitti has published the photograph of the coin in his book, *History of the Arabs* (1979) on page 316, under the caption:

“Anglo-Saxon Gold coin imitating an Arab dinar of the year 774.”

This shows that in the 8th century Muslims were so far ahead in science and technology that they had become an object of imitation in every field, even if it be in the matter of an article of faith.

Muslims had adopted the tenets of Greek medicine, but later, by dint of great effort and dedication on their part, they made great advances and finally became the leaders of the world in medicine in their own times. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1984) describes a book by the physician Avicenna in the following terms:

“The canon of medicine, which is among the most famous books in the history of medicine (1/681)”.

The king of Sicily, Roger II, (1095-1154) one of the outstanding European kings of his time, was interested in preparing a world map which could show the actual location (territory) of his kingdom. The most learned person to be found for this purpose was Al-Idrisi who was born in Morocco and educated in Muslim universities in Spain. Afterwards he travelled extensively through Asia, Africa and Europe. Of his time he was the most outstanding geographer of the civilized world. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* says of him:

“Al-Idrisi was a close friend and adviser to Roger II, the Norman King of Sicily, at whose court he served as Official Geographer. Roger II invited Al-Idrisi to Sicily to make a map of the world for him (9/198)”.

Such were our ancestors. Today the state affairs is quite the opposite. Muslims, throughout the world, have become a liability: they are no longer an asset. They lag behind in all fields of science and technology, in no department of life do they enjoy the dominant position they did in the past. Their leaders lull them to sleep, helping them to live in the fool's paradise they have created for themselves. In short, they are only takers, and not givers. If they never regain an honourable position in this world of competition and struggle, it will simply be what they deserve.

## Freedom and Constraint

On page 35 of the American *'Newsweek'* (21 January, 1985) there is a photograph of a procession of American women whose leader is holding aloft a placard bearing in bold lettering the legend:

“Keep your laws and your morality off my body.”

The accompanying article explains that on the issue of abortions, Americans have divided themselves into two opposing groups, the 'Pro-choice' group being in favour of abortion without any restrictions whatsoever, while the 'Pro-life' group are entirely against this. For the former group, freedom, individual liberty is what matters.

Modern Western thinkers believe freedom to be their greatest asset. But actual experience of limitless freedom has not in any way demonstrated that it is the highest goal. Had absolute freedom been so, it would not ever have been possible for people to go to such horrible extremes, the above incident being a case in point.

There is no disputing the fact that freedom as a quality of life, is something extremely precious. In certain circumstances, for example, when a nation is suffering the oppression of an invader, or a minority community is suffering from the insensitivity of the majority, or one class of society is abominably restricted by the classes above it in the social hierarchy, the most valued aspect of one's existence is obviously freedom. But in one's everyday life, when such states of affairs do not prevail and justice is available to everyone, freedom takes on a new dimension.

It is at the core of our existence, yet provides no guidelines for human conduct. It is something which affords limitless choices of our course of action. The good, the bad and the indifferent can all do as they please. Life then becomes an ethical jungle in which only the fittest – or most maleficent – will survive. What, then, is best for the normal human individual living in society? Experience has taught us that a state of limited freedom is the only viable condition in which humans can attempt to live together.

Restrictions which are benevolent in intention can of course, be devised by the human intellect on the basis of trial and error, but ideally, the true inspiration for just and equitable societal living comes from God. In the eyes of God, no man is free. Every single human creature is subservient to Him and must prostrate himself before Him. The feeling of constraint thus engendered silences his sense of freedom to an acceptable degree, so that his behaviour never becomes inconsiderate, oppressive or criminal. It then becomes clear that the desire for absolute freedom is something which should be suppressed or dismissed as being outrageous in terms of community living, and as being unworthy if anyone aspiring to be a servant of God. For it is only when freedom is limited that it can be put to a proper use.

22 January 1986

## Intellectual Imbalance

Prof. Raj Krishna (1925-1985), reckoned among the fifty top brains of India, was an acknowledged expert in agricultural economics and had specialized in the study of employment and conditions of poverty in the third world. Owing to his extraordinary expertise in his field, he was acclaimed internationally, and many high posts were conferred upon him in the country. During his final days he went to Rome on a three-month FAO project, but before he had completed his mission, he died of heart attack all of a sudden on the 21st of May 1985.

How ironic it is that experts on International problems are unaware of their own problems. Man, blissfully ignorant of his final destination, carries out research into the future of others. Unaware of his own intellectual poverty, he makes speeches on the economic poverty of others. Honoured for his expertise in the problems of the world, he learns all too soon that he has lived all along in ignorance of his own immediate problems. How inadequate is such knowledge in the face of such ignorance!

22 January 1986

## Leaving God to deal with any harm done to one

Imam Zain'ul-'Abidin (38-4AH) was the son of Imam Husain Ibn 'Ali. He was the only member of Husain's family to escape the slaughter of Karbala. Someone once told him of a person who spoke ill of him, and wanted to do him down. Imam Zain'ul-'Abidin asked to be taken to see this person. Meeting him, he first greeted him with "may peace be upon him". Then he said: "If what you say is true, then I pray that God should forgive me. And if it is false, I pray that he should forgive you."

## Discovering God

There is a verse of the Quran which says that “they have not justly estimated the might of God. But on the Day of Resurrection, He will hold the entire earth in His grasp and hold up the heavens in His right hand. Glory be to Him! Exalted be He above the partners they set up with Him” (39:67).

A tradition related to this verse has come down to us – with slight variation in wording – through various channels. Imam Ahmad’s version is on the authority of Abdullah ibn Umer. One day the Prophet recited this verse of Surah Al Zumer. He was moving his hand, backwards and forwards. “God will reveal His might,” he said. “He will say: ‘I am the All-Powerful, the Most High, the Sovereign Lord, the Mighty and Gracious One. Where are the kings of the earth?’” Then Abdullah ibn Umer went on: “The Prophet was trembling so much that we thought he might fall down, along with the pulpit he was standing on.”

This is what happens to a person who truly discovers God. The Prophet of God was not looking at his Lord face to face. But the picture that he had formed in his mind of God on High was such a vivid one that, as he explained the Lord’s might, it looked as if he would fall to the ground in awe and bewilderment.

Such is the nature of realization of God. To come to know God is to come to know the Lord of the Worlds, the Greatest and Most Powerful One. To discover such a being is no simple matter. It is a discovery which shatters one’s whole being, and creates a tumult within one’s soul. To come to know God is to see Him, though he has not yet come out into the open; it is to fall dumbfounded before Him, though as yet He has not revealed Himself from behind the veil of the universe.

23 January 1986

## Difficulty in putting sublime concepts into simple words

A journalist once asked Paul Dirac (1902-1984), the British scientist who first predicted the existence of anti-particles, if he could explain for the readers of a popular journal how he arrived at the idea of anti-matter. He thought for a moment and simply said "No". (*The Muslim*, Islamabad, November 23, 1984)

24 January 1986

## Our True Destination

Among the Mina community of Swai Madhopur, it has become a symbol of prosperity that the Barat (marriage procession) should arrive by helicopter, even if the distance between the house of bride and bridegroom is only 10 kilometers. In the old days there had always been pomp and splendour in terms of dowry and Tilak on the occasion of marriages, but now a much greater step has been taken in the direction of ostentation: helicopters are being hired out by a Bombay firm for this purpose. A Times of India reporter asked them the reason, and this was the reply:

“The parents of the bride expect the ‘barat’ to reach their village with adequate pomp and show.”

*(Times of India, 30 May, 1985)*

In this world elaborate arrangements are made for the conveyance which is to arrive at a bride's or bridegroom's house, If people were to realize that such conveyances were destined ultimately to be taken to the court of the Lord of the Universe, their attitudes would undergo a complete transformation.

No one proceeds on his way to the executioner with pomp and ceremony. No one goes in splendour to the court of a judge where the verdict is to be pronounced against him. Yet, at the start of the journey and all along the way, everyone commits the same folly of not recognizing the final destination.

The successful ones are those whose conveyances are less important to them than the welcome they are to receive in the next world, and the failures are those who caparison themselves in order to reach God, without ever having understood what their true destination is.



22 January 1986

## Better reckon with oneself than with others

Hamza Ibn Abdul Muttalib came to the Prophet and asked to be shown something on which he could base his life. The Prophet asked him whether he preferred to give life to a soul, or take life away from one. Hamza replied that he preferred the former. "You are accountable for your own self." the Prophet told him.