



Al-Risala 1986

October

Avoidance: The Sole Solution

One of the most serious problems facing India today is communal rioting. A baneful legacy from pre-independence days, it is assuming even severer and more alarming proportions everyday.

In essence, it is a law and order problem, and, as such, is the prime responsibility of the administration. Any failure on the part of the powers that be to control the situation is inexcusable. But the fact remains that the administration has proved itself inadequate to the task time and time again, and the reasons for this – inefficiency and corruption – are as such to be deplored as their hideous consequences. Despite the fact that the administration is constantly under critical fire, its failure on every front is again and again made manifest.

The other great stumbling block is the fact that by nature, man is a fighter. He hits back when he is struck and retaliates in kind for even lesser provocations. Yet people may remain angry with each other over long periods without ever coming to blows, remaining for the greater part of the time engrossed in practical affairs and worldly commitments. But the moment they come face to face and any kind of overt provocation is offered, there is bound to be a flare-up. All it takes is a slighting word, a sarcastic curl of the lip or a demeaning gesture to bring long-dormant grudges to the surface. What may have started as a minor difference of opinion can then escalate into a major, deadly conflict. It has aptly been said that “when one’s ego is touched, it turns into superego, and the result is breakdown”.

Can there be no hope that matters will ever improve? The situation being as it is in this country, it would, at first sight, seem not.

But then, if we are to find a solution to this problem, we must turn away from the administration, and towards the rioters themselves and their victims. Who are the people involved? And what are their grievances? It is common knowledge that rioting stems from quarrels between the majority and minority communities.

It has to be avowed that it is invariably the minority community which is the oppressed and the majority community which is the oppressor. But since it is seldom that those in the majority are ever willing to listen to moral overtures, far less respond to them, it is futile to hope that this approach will produce a solution to the problem. Making any kind of breach in the armour of complacency and corruption is an extremely difficult thing to do.

What then are the practical options? Keeping in view the actual state of affairs, it is up to the minority community to take the lead. Since no amount of reasoning or persuasion is going to have the slightest effect on the majority community. The minority community must set an example by steadfastly exhibiting moderation and restraint in the face of provocation, no matter how severe, and must under no

circumstance act provocatively. There has to be a unilateral decision that this is the only course to be followed, and it must be backed up by determination and followed out with endurance.

History shows us innumerable instances of riots having been averted by the elders of various communities having prevailed upon their younger and more hot-headed members to eschew the ways of violence, even when severely provoked. Whenever such wisdom has prevailed, amicable solutions have been found and life has returned to normal. What has been done in the past can certainly be done in the present, and there should be no lack of confidence that success can be achieved in this field.

This may appear to be an extraordinary solution to the problem of rioting, but considering that the minority community is in no position to compel the majority to behave with compunction and to refrain from persecution, there is little else that can be done. This should not, however, be viewed as negative passivity. In attitudes and conduct, the policy of restraint should be considered a positive principle. Once such a mentality develops, it will be seen quite clearly that it is one hundred per cent possible to achieve results through restraint.

3 October 1986

Placing necessity before formality

When the Prophet emigrated from Mecca to Medina, he stayed in the house of Abu Ayub Ansari. There was an upper storey to his house. The Prophet stayed downstairs and Abu Ayub, along with his family, upstairs, but soon Abu Auyb felt that it was not appropriate for him to be living above the Prophet. So he asked God's Messenger to stay upstairs, and they would move down. "Don't worry about that." the Prophet said. "It's better for me to stay downstairs. It makes things easier for people who come to visit me."

(Seerat Ibn Kathir)

The Making and Breaking of History

According to B. Tuchman, "history is the unfolding of miscalculation:" In other words, history usually develops in a manner quite contrary to people's expectations. While events are unfolding, observers may pass judgement on the course they are taking; but the course of history defies all prediction, and in the end things turn out quite differently from what people had initially expected.

To make an example from Islamic history, in the year 6AH the Treaty of Hdaybiyah was signed between the Prophet Mohammad and the Quraysh of Mecca. At that time the Quraysh were one in thinking that the Muslims had signed their own writ of destruction, for they accepted peace on terms which were clearly favourable to the Quraysh. Yet afterwards it transpired that this apparent defeat contained the seeds of a great victory for the Muslims. The same thing has happened time and time again throughout history. In 1945, when atom bombs were dropped on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan, it seemed to the Americans as if Japan would lie in ruins for several decades to go, yet this was not to be: now, just forty years after the event, Japan stands at the pinnacle of her economic strength, the leading industrial power in the world.

This goes to show that it is not man who fashions his own history; in truth, it is God who fashions human history in accordance with His own will. It is not people or events who control history, it is God. History may take place before our eyes, in the material world, but the course it takes is determined from the supernatural world which lies beyond our vision and perception.

Those who have been written off as spent forces can take solace from this fact of history. Experience shows that sparks erupt from volcanoes that have lain inactive for years. In this world the very annihilation and destruction of something means that it is ready to arise and take its place as a new power on earth; a force which is spent turns into a living force.

One should never lose hope because of the dismal course events appear to be taking. When the pages of history turn, events may turn out to have been leading in a direction quite contrary to all our expectations.

Education

Knowledge is of two distinct kinds: that which we have been blessed with in the Quran and the Hadith and that which we acquire as a result of our own research and endeavour. The first kind acquaints us with our Lord, and makes plain the issues to be faced in the everlasting world which awaits us after death. More important, it shows us how, in the course of our present life, we may prepare ourselves to meet those issues. The second kind of knowledge provides solution to the social and economic problems which we encounter in everyday life.

It is imperative that Muslims should seek both forms of knowledge, but they should never lose sight of the fact that they vary considerably in importance. Their primary aim in life should be a knowledge of the Quran and Hadith, while the acquisition of a knowledge of the other sciences should come about as a matter of worldly necessity. Without a knowledge of religion, what must be done in this world to earn an everlasting reward, will constantly elude one's understanding and it, goes without saying that one can never consider oneself a Muslim in the true sense of the word.

The secular sciences guide us only in worldly matters, giving us instruction in the agricultural, industrial and civic practicalities of life, But it is the Quran and Hadith which set our feet on the path to eternal development. Clearly, it is just as important for Muslims as it is for anyone else to study various branches of knowledge, but they must distinguish between ultimate objectives and adventitious necessity. Muslims must not only study the Quran and the Hadith, but must be keenly aware that the real reasons for studying them are very different from those which prompt them to seek worldly knowledge: they must constantly bear in mind also that they take moral priority over all other forms of knowledge.

Kindness to animals

Abdullah ibn Mas'ood recalls how, when they were with the Prophet on a journey, they pitched camp in a place where there was a bird's nest, with a mother and two baby birds in it. They caught the baby birds, as a result of which the mother started squawking and fluttering its wings. When the Prophet learnt of this, he told whoever had wronged the bird to return its babies. Once the Prophet saw that an ants' nest had been incinerated, He asked who had done this. When the people responsible owned up, he told them that no one save the Lord was entitled to punish by fire,

The Highest Form of Respect

Once, during the Caliphate of Umar Faruq, Amr ibn Al-As, the governor of Egypt, arranged a horse race in which his own son's horse was to participate. It was expected that this horse would win, but much to the son's chagrin, his horse was left far behind and, what made matters worse, the race was won by a horse owned by an Egyptian – the Egyptian at that time being regarded as a vanquished people. This Egyptian, ecstatic at his victory, uttered some words of jubilation and was promptly set upon by the enraged son, Mohammad ibn Amr, who lashed him violently with a whip. "Take that!" he exclaimed, "This will teach you to beat the son of a nobleman!"

According to a companion of the prophet, Anas ibn Malik, the Egyptian left for Medina to complain to the Caliph Umar of the treatment he had received at the hand of the governor's son. Umar asked the Egyptian to stay, then immediately sent one of his messengers to Egypt to have the governor and his son brought to him forthwith.

When they arrived, Umar asked for the Egyptian to be brought before him whereupon he handed him a whip and told him to flog the governor's son, just as he himself had been flogged.

The Egyptian did as he was bade, and throughout the flogging, Caliph Umar kept on urging him not to spare this nobleman's son. The Egyptian stopped only when he was satisfied that the punishment had been severe enough. This score settled, the Caliph asked the Egyptian – non-Muslim as he was – to give the father a whipping as well, as it had been because of his high office that the son had dared to conduct himself so obnoxiously.

The Egyptian's response was: "O, Leader of the believers. I have beaten the one who beat me. I wish nothing more." Umar replied, "By God, if you had started beating his father, I would have done nothing to prevent you. The beating would have stopped only when you yourself stopped it." Then he addressed himself to the governor: "O, Amr, since when have you enslaved people who were born free?"

This event, which had demonstrated the highest regard for human equality and the highest degree of human respect, ended, in effect, all kinds of differences between one man and another, and between Muslims and non-Muslims, between the conquerors and the conquered. It was the ultimate in justice and fair play and as an example, stood out like a shining light in the affairs of men.

A Happy Ending to the Tragedy of Life

The capital of British India was initially Calcutta, but in 1911, King George V announced the transfer of the capital to Delhi. The British architect, Sir Edward Lutyens (1864-1944) was then commissioned to design the new capital and construction work commenced in 1913. Eventually the city of New Delhi which came into existence was one of great magnificence.

This was a time when the whole world was being swept by a new political wave: nationalism. Progressive trends in political thought had rendered the colonial system of government untenable. The freedom movement in India was fast gaining momentum, and it became apparent that British rule in India would not survive for long. The completion of New Delhi thus, ironically, coincided with the decline of the British Raj.

After the construction of New Delhi, a French political leader paid a visit to India. When he saw the glittering palaces and spacious mansions of the new capital of British India, he summed up his impressions in these words: "What a magnificent world they built to leave."

This is not only true of the British India: it is true of all of us in this world. We come into this world full of desires and aspirations. We do our utmost to construct a "magnificent world" for ourselves on earth. Then, just as our dream world begins to take shape, the angel of death visits us and takes us away from the world we have worked so hard to construct. We are then taken to what Arthur Koestler called an "unknown country."

Life is a tragic story indeed if that is all there is to it. But this world like everything else in the universe, can only be considered complete when taken along with its counterpart. The counterpart of this world is the hereafter. For those who have forgotten the next world, this life is nothing but a tragedy; but those who look forward to the life to come, and build for the hereafter in the present life, this world will become an invaluable step towards a new, more successful existence in the next world.

The happy ending which all of us long for will be a reality if we never lose sight of the fact that there is a life after death.

On Death's Doorstep

Of all the stages through which man shall have to pass, death is the most certain. It is possible for one not to be endowed with life at all, but one who is alive is sure, also, to die. Everyone who is alive now will be dead some time in the future. One day the eyes of those who see will fade and their tongues will freeze into silence. Every human being will one day find himself standing at death's doorstep, with this world behind him, and ahead of him the eternal world of the hereafter. He will be leaving this world, never to return, and entering a world which he will never leave. In the world which he is entering, there will be no opportunity for action; there will be only salvation or damnation in accordance with one's actions on earth.

While life is indefinite, death is absolutely definite. We are only alive because we have not yet died, and there is no fixed time for death. We are forever advancing towards it; death is closer to us than life itself; People consider themselves alive, but it would be truer to say that they are dead. No one can be sure when death will come; it might strike at any instant. Death, then, is not some future event; we are already as good as dead. For this reason the Prophet Mohammad has told us to think of ourselves as lying in the grave.

Death obliterates all in its wake. It is the most tremendous event of our lives. But the prospect would not be so formidable if death were just the end of life. If all that death meant was the end of man - the moving, seeing, hearing being who lives on earth - then it would still be an event of frightful proportions; but it would be a temporary calamity not a permanent one.

The gravity of the situation lies in death not being the end of life, but rather the beginning of a new, eternal life, a world of everlasting reward or retribution.

Everyone is on a journey from life unto death. Some have set their sights on the world, others on the hereafter. Some dwell on what meets the eye, others on what lies beyond the superficiality of human vision. Some strive to satisfy their own desires and egos, while others bestir themselves in love and fear of God. Both types of people appear the same in this world: they both take rest when night comes, and in the morning once again pursue their chosen paths in life. But in relation to the life after death, there is a world of difference between the two: those who live in God and the hereafter are redeeming themselves, while those who live in worldly pleasures and selfish desires are condemning themselves to eternal punishment.

Narrow-Mindedness

According to La Rochefoucauld: "Mediocre spirits generally condemn everything that exceeds their small stature." Perceiving this common human failing, a modern poet implores people: "Don't criticize what you can't understand."

The trouble is, people tend to judge matters on how they effect their own selves. They are quick to support anything which improves their own position, or at least does not downgrade them in any way. But when something appears threatening to their own position, they oppose it, regardless of its intrinsic worth.

Take, for example, the case of our Arabic madrasahs (schools) functioning in the Indian sub-continent. Generally, they include a course in ancient Aristotelean logic in their syllabus. We say "logic", for that is the name by which this science is known, but it would be more accurate to call it "illogic". What is taught in the name of logic has nothing to do with true logic. It is not conducive to the logical presentation of Islam vis a vis modern education.

The administrative authorities of one such Arabic school decided unanimously to withdraw all text-books on classical logic from their syllabus. A new course in philosophy was to be prepared, conforming to modern academic standards. Unfortunately, however, they were unable to implement this decision. Why? Because the professor of logic in their institution opposed it tooth and nail. As he was a senior teacher in the school, the administrators were unable to go against his wishes.

One does not have to look far to see the reason for this opposition. This professor only had a knowledge of classical logic; he had no knowledge of modern philosophy. He feared that if classical logic were taken out of the syllabus, he himself would lose his status in the institution. He would be left like a teacher who knew only French, trying to get his point across in a school where the medium of instruction was Arabic. In this case, it was very small-minded of him to allow his own feelings of professional insecurity to stand in the way of modernization.

Abu Qulaba was asked who the richest person was "The one who is content with what God has given him," was Abu Qulaba's reply. And who is the most knowledgeable? "The one who benefits from the knowledge of others."

Getting off to a Good Start

“Here are my entire life’s savings.” So saying an elderly scholar, who had spent his whole life reading and writing, in the utmost simplicity, placed a cheque for Rs. 10,000/- in the hands of his newly-wed daughter and son-in-law. He explained that he had been able to save this amount out of his meagre income by living frugally and never wasting anything. “I could have spent all this on lavish wedding celebrations,” he added, “but I preferred to hand it over to you young people so that you could make a good beginning in life.”

The young couple were extremely grateful for this decision and lost no time in investing the money in a small business. To begin with they had to work very hard to make a success of it, and passed through various difficult stages. But they never lost courage, and a time eventually came when they had considerably increased their profits and were able to live a happy, comfortable life. Knowing, too, that their children’s future was assured. But without the scholar’s initial providence, foresight and courage in resisting public opinion, they might never have had the wherewithal to make a start in life at all and might well have ended their days in penury.

One’s wedding is a very serious event in life, not just an occasion for senseless showing off. It is rather a day to shoulder life’s responsibilities as mature, grown-up people and future parents. It is a day for a man and a woman to enter into a ‘firm contract’ (Quran 4:21), not just an opportunity to impress friends, neighbours and relatives with one’s spending ability. It is at all events advisable that the marriage ceremony should be simple and straightforward, thereby avoiding pointless expenditure. Before anyone spends his entire life’s savings, on gaudy displays – for money, after all is hard earned and difficult to accumulate – he should reflect seriously on the abovementioned incident. All things considered, would it not be better to avoid ostentation altogether and to think of how best one can help the young couple concerned? If this practice were to become widely adopted, it would not only benefit young people in general, but would actually make a positive contribution to national construction. The millions of rupees which are habitually lavished on short-lived magnificence could then be channelized into areas of the national economy which are at present unfairly neglected, thus creating favourable conditions for general economic uplift.

Bearing Fruit

The business of planting an orchard does not begin with the holding of an orchard conference. No indeed. It begins by obtaining seedlings and providing each single one with such favourable conditions as will enable it to develop its potential and grow into a fully developed tree. When one has done this with innumerable seedlings, one can then expect to have an orchard.

In this respect, a nation is somewhat like an orchard. Build the individual and you build the nation. If hidden potential is to be developed, it takes education, encouragement, and the provision of a proper environment at an individual level very early on in the whole process, just as a sapling be put into well prepared ground and given the right type and quantity of nutrients, water, sunlight, etc. If people are properly instructed, while they are still young and receptive and by people who adopt a caring, positive attitude, they develop a healthy awareness of what their commitments to society should be and what it means to be part of a nation. If callow youths are to be turned into real men, they have to have the feeling inculcated in them that to achieve positive ends they must continually keep up a peaceful and ameliorative, struggle, one which will create harmony and eschew conflict, one which will solve, and not create problems for their fellow men.

Although we must accept the fact that this is a highly competitive world, there is nothing to prevent us from endeavouring to co-operate with and encourage co-operation from others. We stand shoulder to shoulder with our fellow men in the face of the most heartless rivalries, there is no obstacle that we cannot overcome, no peril that we cannot face. But if we do not see to it that such ideas are propagated and accepted among people in their formative years, we cannot expect to find many who will be willing to co-operate. No matter how basically good the fruit trees in our orchard are, they will not blossom and bear fruit unless they are consistently well tended.

11 October 1986

The Prophet did not allow his hand to be kissed

The Prophet bought some cloth from a shopkeeper. The transaction completed, the Prophet got up to leave. The shopkeeper made as if to kiss the Prophet's hand, but the Prophet immediately put his hand behind his back and said: 'This is what Asian people do with their kings. I am not a king; I am just one of you.'

Working Together

One particular quality of true believers has been pinpointed in the Quran. It is that when the Prophet – or in other words the person responsible for Muslims' affairs – “on a matter requiring collective action, they do not depart until they have asked for his leave ...” (Quran, 24:62). Here collective action means any activity involving a group of people working together. And the “asking of leave” is indicative of the wider spirit in which the work is done – a spirit of deep commitment, like the commitment one feels to some personal work.

A high degree of motivation is required for a person to become so deeply involved in a task that he will not leave it until the work in hand has been accomplished. Such motivation is inherent in work involving personal profit: it is in one's own interest to see the work through to the bitter end, and so one does so. One is moved by a sense of personal responsibility: if one does not accomplish the task oneself, who will do it for one? With work involving a group of people, on the other hand, one tends to lay the onus on other people. If I don't carry on, one thinks, there are plenty of others who will continue in my place. Seeing that there is no personal profit to be gained from the work in hand, one tends to see it as a burden best laid on other's shoulders. Only when one has come to think of the common good as one's own good, as the profit of society as one's own profit, will one become fully committed to collective work. Such commitment requires, above all, a deep sense of social consciousness; it requires one to be oriented towards the needs of the community, as normally anyone would be oriented to cater for his own needs.

A Muslim is required to possess just such a sense of social consciousness, moving him to throw himself heart and soul into collective Islamic work, whenever such work is required of him. Then, when he has involved himself in it, he will see it through to the final gasp. When he takes leave from the authority under whose direction he is working he does not do so in order to desert the cause for which he is working; rather, he has some valid reason for going away, and will return as soon as circumstances allow. For this reason the Quran says that, if possible, such requests should be granted. But both the request, and the granting of it, should be made in the correct spirit, with both parties praying for the other even as they part.

Lost in the World

The Prophet said: "I have never seen anything more strange than people sleeping, while they should have been running away as fast as they could from hell fire. I have never seen anything more strange than people asleep while they should have been running as fast as possible towards heaven – the objects of their desire."

How dreadful the punishment of hell and how ignorant man is of this reality! How wonderful are the delights of heaven and how strange not to be eager to attain them. Surely this is the strangest thing in the whole world.

These people who are asleep will be awakened only by the flames of hell. They will then suffer destitution and debasement; then there will be no escape.

Today people are lost in the world, leading their lives as if there were no superior power above themselves, although every day death comes to announce that man is confronted with a reality which is beyond his control. How helpless is man, yet how powerful he imagines himself to be.

Man breaks his promises; he does not pay people their due; he does not bow to the truth; he accuses others but fails to admit his own mistakes; he turns away from the weak and hails the strong; he bases his life on his desires rather than on principles; he persecutes the downtrodden and cowers before the mighty; he concentrates on himself rather than on God. Fear of hell and the desire for heaven do not dominate his life; he is guided by worldly apprehensions and desires alone.

Man continues in his evil ways and forgets that, in so doing, he is removing himself further from paradise and drawing closer to hell. This is the tragedy of man; he does not care for that which he should most desire and does not fear that which should strike terror in his heart.

13 October 1986

To think nothing of the world is true wisdom

“If a person makes a will that his wealth should be given to the most intelligent of people, then it should be given to the one who has most renounced worldly pleasure.” Thus spoke Imam Shafi’.

The Order of Nature

If one closes one's room and goes away for a while, to return after several weeks, on one's return one will find that a layer of dust has settled all over the room. Until the room has been dusted, one will not feel like sitting in it, so displeasing does one find the dust. Just as unpleasant is the dust that blows in one's face with a strong wind. It makes one long for the air to be still once again, so that one may be relieved of the irritation.

But what is this dust that we find so annoying? It is in fact a surface layer of fertile soil, the very substance which enables the growth of all forms of vegetables, fruits and cereals. If this soil did not lie on the face of the earth it would be impossible for us to live on earth at all.

It is this same dust that makes the earth's atmosphere dense enough for water to vapourize, forming clouds which issue forth torrents of water to revive and replenish the earth. Without rain, there would be no life on earth, and rain is only possible because of the dust in the earth's atmosphere.

The redness of the sky which we see at sunrise and sunset is also due to the presence of dust in the atmosphere. In this way dust, besides possessing multiple practical benefits, also contributes to the beauty of the world.

From this straightforward example we can see how God has placed unpleasant things alongside the pleasant things of life. Just as the rose bush, along with its exquisite flowers, also holds piercing thorns, so life also contains an amalgamation of both pleasing and displeasing objects. This is the way God has created the world. There is nothing for us to do but to fit in with this order of nature that He has laid down. Much as we may try, it is impossible for us to have things any other way.

To complain about things, then, is a fruitless exercise. If one wants to complain, one is sure to find plenty to complain about in life. The intelligent thing to do is forget the unpleasant things which are a part and parcel of life, bury grudges, and carry on seeking to fulfill one's true purpose in life.

God Gives and God Takes Away

Gifted with unusual capabilities, Professor Mujeeb (1902-1985) ranked among the top intellectuals of Indian Muslims. Having received his education in Europe he was equally well-versed in English, German and French, besides Urdu. Just one of his innumerable accomplishments was his recitation of great stretches of Shakespeare by heart.

He held the post of Vice Chancellor of Jamia Millia Islamia for a record period of 25 years, from 1948 to 1973. But fate was against him. In December 1972, he had to undergo a brain operation. This was a success in that it saved his life, but one result was that he lost his exceptional memory altogether. A master of five languages, he could not retain even the alphabets – not even that of Urdu. A man of cheerful disposition, who, when he had found someone in a dejected mood, would say, “Smile please, and look ahead,” was now himself reduced almost to a vegetable state.

He passed the rest of his life in this piteous state of near insanity in his residence in Okhla, New Delhi. On 20th January 1985, at the age of 82, he breathed his last.

In the Quran man is addressed thus:

“God created you, and He will cause you to die. Some of you shall have your lives prolonged to abject old age, when all that you once knew you shall know no more. Allah is knowing, Mighty” (16:70).

Old age following youth serves as a reminder to man that he should be conscious of this reality. It is to make man learn that he has no knowledge of his own, and that everything in his possession is a gift from God. He can give or take away as He pleases. If man’s knowledge or power were innate they could never be taken away. But the process of finding and losing indicates that man is only a recipient: nothing belongs to him.

We frequently come across such incidents. But we seldom take heed. Neither do the old people, who live through them learn any lesson from them, nor do the young who witness them.

15 October 1986

People are losing just what they want to find

The Prophet said: "How wonderful paradise is. Yet those who seek it have fallen asleep. And how terrible the Fire of Hell is. Yet those who dread it are also asleep."

Sacrificing Oneself for Humanity

It was the fourth of November, 1847. The servant entered the room of his master, a Scottish doctor, to find him lying face-down on the floor alongside two of his colleagues. They appeared to have rolled down from their chairs. The servant thought that perhaps they had drunk too heavily, so he covered them up and quietly went away. But the facts were quite different. For the men lying unconscious on the floor were Sir James Simpson (1811-1870) and his two assistants who had inhaled chloroform for the first time ever in order to experience its effects on the human body.

Simpson was the youngest son of a poor baker. At the age of four, he began his education at a village school. As time went on he became so greatly interested in his studies that his father and six brothers agreed that the sacrifices must be made for him, so they cut down on their expenses and sent the boy to the city for higher education. So he came to Edinburgh University, where he acquired an M.D. Degree, the highest degree in medicine in those days, thus making himself worthy of his family's self-denial.

During his studies Dr. Simpson had learnt that chloroform possessed certain properties which temporarily benumbed the senses, so he began to conduct research into it, finally coming to the conclusion that if the patients were rendered unconscious by means of chloroform they could be relieved of severe pain in the course of operations. He continued his research and, by experimenting upon himself, he proved that chloroform could successfully induce harmless anesthesia. This son of a poor baker was thus able to give to humanity, in the words of Dr. Brown, "one of God's best gifts to his suffering children."

The secret of the western nations' leadership of the world can be explained by the existence of such people who have the courage to risk their own lives so that others may be saved from risk – who have the courage in other words to sacrifice themselves for humanity.

16 October 1986

Rejoicing in the Muslims' prosperity

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

(Tabrani)

Face Value and Fact

One of the fiercest battles in Islamic history was waged against the Iranians in 14 A.H., during the Caliphate of Umar Faruq. The Iranian emperor's greatness has so impressed itself upon the peoples of the neighbouring countries that the Caliph Umar himself had been ready to lead this military campaign. He was advised against this, however, by his companions, and another companion of the Prophet, Sad ibn Abi Waqqas, was appointed instead as the commander of the Muslim forces.

It was an extremely difficult undertaking and the final encounter took place in a field near Qadisiya. There being an ancient royal building near the battlefield, Sad climbed up to an upper storey and sat there, reclining against a wall. He showed no signs of personally taking part in the battle. Instead, he appointed Khalid ibn Arfata to lead his men into the fray. Sad then kept watching the battle from high up on the building and sent instructions whenever necessary to his proxy.

The Arabs were baffled at first by the enormous array of elephants which the Iranians had brought, for they had never had any experience of fighting against such huge beasts. At one point the Muslims were forced to retreat by this horde of animals, otherwise they would have been crushed to death. Sad became anguished at the spectacle of their defeat and began to toss himself from side to side. Sad's wife, who had accompanied him cried out, "If only Musanna (a certain warrior) were here!" Sad was angry at this and exclaimed hotly, "What could Musanna have done? Salma retorted, "What a fine thing that your cowardice should be accompanied by anger and not shame!" She spoke in this sarcastic way because her husband was not participating in the battle.

The Muslims nevertheless won the battle finally, and the details of how they did so have been recorded in history.

At the time, the Muslim army took strong exception to Sad's not having physically participated in the hostilities. After the fall of the Iranians, a Muslim soldier composed a short poem which went:

I fought till God sent down His succour

And Sad clung to the door of the Qadisiya.

Then we returned and many women had been widowed,

Yet not one of Sad's wives was widowed,

Sad ibn Abi Waqqas had been one of the early converts, and was with the Prophet in all his battles. He was, in fact, reckoned to be one of the greatest and bravest companions of the Prophet. But when we think of him holding himself aloof from the battle, we receive the impression that he must indeed have been a coward, allowing other women to be widowed while he himself preferred to remain in safety at the fort with his wife.

We feel that he cuts a sorry figure so long as the story so far is all that we have to judge him by. But when we have the complete picture, we realise that there were extenuating circumstances. It seems that he suffered from sciatica (a disease of the nerve, causing severe pain above the knee) and succumbed periodically to long bouts which almost totally incapacitated him. At the beginning of the campaign he had been in perfect health and had participated in the initial skirmishes, but at the outset of the final decisive encounter at Qadsiya, he again fell a prey to this recurring malady. Unable even to move, he found it impossible to launch himself into the fray. But thanks to his military experience and superior intellect, he was not relieved of his post by Caliph Umar, and it is an undeniable fact that if the battle was finally won it was because of his masterly planning and direction.

One obvious proof of his military acumen is that he found the solution to the menace of the elephants before the entire Muslim army was crushed. When everyone else was at his wits' end to find a means of averting this catastrophe, Sad sent for two Iranian convert, Zakhm and Salm, and found out from them that the only way to arrest the onslaught was to aim at the eyes and trunks of the elephants. Once injured in these places, the elephants would become uncontrollable.

Sad then sent for a group of young stalwarts and entrusted them with this difficult and hazardous task. They then picked out the two largest and strongest elephants, who were the leaders, Abyaz (The White) and Ajrab, and, at the risk of their own lives, injured their eyes and slashed off their trunks. Crazy and in agony, the two elephants turned back upon their own army and the other elephants followed suit. It was now the turn of the Iranians to be crushed by their own elephants.

There are two great lessons to be learned from this event. One is that whenever something malevolent is said about other, it should not necessarily be believed without further investigation. Often, after enquiries have been made, the true state of affairs emerges as being quite other than one at first imagined. Believing in something which denigrates others without taking the trouble to ascertain the validity of the allegation runs counter to the spirit of Islam.

Another lesson is that of the obedience demonstrated by the Arab warriors at Qadsiya. In spite of the fact that they felt that their leader was very far from perfect, they did not turn against him or refuse to do their utmost to win the battle. They had major grudges against him but they still fought as dauntlessly as ever.

Such are the people who make history. Those who are lacking in this spirit will inevitably turn success into failure, victory into defeat. It is only magnanimity, loyalty and obedience which can shore up the prospects of life's major initiatives.

19 October 1986

Good Egg

Look at an egg from the outside. It appears to be wholesome and good. This may be so, but it is not until we break the shell that we find out whether it is really good or bad.

The same is true of many human beings today. It is not until their outer shell is pierced that we come to know the truth about them. Their bodies swaddled in elegant clothes, their ideas couched in eloquent words, they strike us as being fine creatures indeed. But under the finest veneer there can lurk an ugly, repulsive character. It is not until one gets close and has dealings with such a person that one discovers – particularly when there is a clash of interest – how uninspiring is the reality. Behind the gentlemanly facade lies a bundle of selfishness, cheapness, affectation, pride, prejudice, exploitativeness and arrogance. Challenge such a person's interests, and we see him in his true colours. No good egg he!

In the vast morass of conflict which exists in the world today, it often seems that it is the hypocrite who remains supreme, the one who manages to project himself as the "good egg" to the rest of the world.

But this state of affairs can never last. The time is fast approaching when man will be ushered into another world where all hypocrisy will fall away, and all power will rest, not in the hand of man, but of God.

The Great Happening

The Prophet Mohammad once asked his companion, Abdullah ibn Masood, to read him a part of the Quran. "I – read the Quran to you, when unto you it has been revealed?" Ibn Masood asked. "Yes," the Prophet answered; I like to hear it read by someone else." So Abdullah ibn Masood started Surah An-Nisa. When he reached this verse, the Prophet asked him to stop:

How will it be when we produce a witness from every nation and call upon you to testify against them? (4: 41)

Abdullah ibn Masood looked at the Prophet and saw that tears were flowing from his eyes.

What an awesome event the setting up of God's court of justice will be. There will be no occasion for contumacy or denial. Those whom people disregarded in the world, will be the ones to be brought forward as God's witnesses; for they were God's witnesses on earth, warning mankind of the doom to come. They may have been thought of as most insignificant people on earth, but theirs will be the testimony that will decide people's eternal fate.

Think of the state of those who were loquacious in the world, but find themselves wordless on that day; and of those who wielded power and prestige, only to be divested of all traces of might. Superficial veils will be rent asunder, and those who feigned false piety will be exposed for the hypocrites they were. The tables will indeed be turned on that day, when many who are last in the world will be first in the sight of God, and the filth and pollution of what had seemed pure and attractive will be revealed before the eyes of man. Much that man looks upon with relish now, will send him reeling back in horror then. In this world people's real natures are concealed. For some, it is attractive words which have hidden their inner states while for others it is material splendour. But in the next world these things will be taken away from man; he will be brought forward in his real state. What a calamitous day that will be. If one were to gauge the severity of that day, one would cease to talk so pugnaciously, or be so allured by worldly things; worldly honour would seem quite meaningless.

20 October 1986

It is in giving that we receive

The Prophet said that the Lord says: "Mankind, spend and you will be spent upon,"

(Bukhari and Muslim)

A Shaft of Light

The owner of a transport business once found himself in weak and vulnerable position because, for technical reasons, he had once had one of his vehicles registered in the name of another person several years before, and that person still held its license. The holder-holder decided one fine day that he would take possession of the vehicle himself, and that its real owner would have to make do with a paltry sum of money in exchange. The owner naturally felt that the most dreadful injustice was being done to him and, greatly incensed, he was determined to have his revenge. Night and day he lived in a frenzy, thinking of ways and means to eliminate his enemy. Truly he wished to crush him like an insect. For six long months he lived in this state of morbid preoccupation, losing all interest in his home and his business, and becoming, finally, like the ghost of his former self. Then, one day, he had an experience which changed the course of his life. As he was pacing up and down one of the streets of the town where he lived, lost in black vengeful fantasies, he heard the unmistakable sounds of someone making a speech before a large gathering. Curious, and for once drawn out of himself, he approached the gathering of people and began to listen to the speaker. He was suddenly struck by what he was saying: "Think well before taking revenge, for you too shall suffer the vengeance of others." It was as if a shaft of bright light had suddenly penetrated his mind and with each example that the speaker gave to drive home his point, he felt himself turn into a new person. He decided there and then to give up his negative way of thinking, in fact, to forget the whole sorry episode, and to devote his time and energy to his family and his business. The full realization had come to him that it was on himself that he had inflicted suffering and not on his enemy, and that it was best to leave such matters to God. In beginning to think in this way, he found that; bit by bit, he was once again able to make a constructive approach to things and it was not long before he became more successful than he had ever been. In pursuing positive ends he had also attained peace of mind, and that, for him, had been the most important thing of all.

Engineering Not Enough

Dr. Fazlur Rahman Khan was a world-famous architectural engineer. Born in Dhaka, he obtained his degree in architectural engineering from Calcutta, then went to the United States to gain his doctorate in the same subject, he started his practice by taking on a contract to design a 43-storey building in Chicago. His extraordinary brilliance enabled him to make great innovations in his field, and the 110-storey Sears Tower in Chicago earned him worldwide fame as a master of modern construction. This highest building in the world was the outcome of his own unconventional concept, now known as tubular design.

Despite his extraordinary success, Dr. Fazlur Rahman was never inwardly satisfied. Mr. K.M. Amladi of the *Hindustan Times* met him in 1982 in his Chicago office, and as he felicitated him on his success, Dr. Fazlur Rahman listened with an expressionless face. During his conversation he said to Mr. Amladi: "There is more to life than engineering."

Dr. Fazlur Rahman died on 27 March 1982 at the early age of 52, leaving behind him a new concept in the field of architectural engineering. By developing this concept, the German engineer, Robert Gabriel, has made plans for a 365-storey building, which will stand one mile above the ground. During their conversation, Mr. Amladi asked Dr. Fazlur Rahman whether such a building could be constructed. Dr. Fazlur Rahman replied in the affirmative. Citing this incident Mr. Amladi concludes his article by writing that Europe and America will have such buildings in future, but "the man who laid the foundation for making them possible, alas, will no longer be there to witness them" (*Hindustan Times*, May 9, 1982).

22 October 1986

Earning more money does not make one into a better person

Anas told of two brothers who lived in the Prophet's time. One of them used to come and sit in the Prophet's company, while the other used to earn a living for his household. The latter came to the Prophet and complained about his brother not doing any work, and leaving it to him to do all the earning. "Perhaps it is because of him that you are provided with sustenance," the Prophet told him.

(Riadh al Saliheen)

A Revolution Within

When the Battle of Badr took place, Jubayr ibn Muti'm had not yet accepted Islam. After the battle, he travelled from Mecca to Medina in order to negotiate the release of those taken captive at Badr. It was during his stay in Medina, that, although still an idolater, he attended the Muslims' evening prayer. The sound of the Prophet's voice, as he recited the Surah (chapter) known as 'Tur' did more than just impinge upon his hearing. It truly captured his imagination and he began listening intently to every single word. The recitation continued until the Prophet reached the verses:

"Have they been created from nothing or are they themselves the creators? Have they created the heavens and the earth? No, but they have no faith. Do they own the treasures of your Lord's mercy, or are they able to withhold it?"

(Quran : 52:35-37)

It was then that Jubayr experienced a revolution in consciousness – an inward awakening. This experience turned his mind towards the worship of One God.' He took to pondering over monotheism and polytheism and weighing up the differences between them. It was not long before the truth became clear to him: he then forsook idolatry and announced his belief in One God, thus taking his place among that elect group – the companions of the Prophet. These were people whose faith had stemmed from a profound revolution of consciousness. It was only with successive generations that allegiance to Islam resulted from an accident of birth. The first Muslims were so, because of an inner conviction, the later Muslims because they were born into the fold. It is in those who have undergone a revolution from within that we find the true Islamic character. Clearly, such a faith far surpasses any which derives from external circumstances.

23 October 1986

The best charity is that which is given to the weakest person

Suraqah ibn Malik says that the Prophet once asked him: "Shall I tell you what the greatest charity is?" "Please do," Suraqah replied. Then the Prophet said: "It is to spend upon a daughter who – after being widowed or divorced – is returned to you, and has no other source of support but yourself."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

READER APPEALS

I am getting the '*Al-Risala*' monthly regularly, thanks to the kind gift of Mrs. T.R. Sherwani. It is a wonderful publication, bringing before us the universal truths in simple easily understandable language. It opens windows of inspiration. I request each reader to gift this publication to at least one friend, so that the message in '*Al-Risala*' can spread yet further. I therefore, enclose Rs. 36/- by draft and request you to enroll Shri A. Singh, Kashipur House, Ayarpata, Nainital 263001 as a subscriber. Thanks.

Dr. (Mrs.) KANAK BHARGAVA MBBS,
Ellesmere, Nainital

I receive *Al-Risala* every month and it goes without saying that I am deeply impressed by what you write and the approach that you have adopted to propagate the essence of Islam.

TAHIR HASAN
28, South Road,
Allahabad.

Just a line to thank you for sending me '*Al-Risala*' so regularly. For one reason or the other I am the recipient of a large number of publications; and cannot really digest them along with my general reading. So I have not been able to pay much attention to '*Al-Risala*' so far; but I had some time today, and read your July No 30 issue through. I was impressed by its tone and contents and its clear and unostentatious style of writing. Thank you. With kind regards,

BADRUDDIN TAYABJI
1/23, Shantiniketan
New Delhi 110021

Thank you for the August issue of '*Al-Risala*.' I am very much impressed by the selected articles on Islam by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan who has done a remarkable job by bringing out such a good religions magazine. Its message is really a need of the hour.

MAJID HASSAN CHOGLA
Special Executive Magistrate
Govt. of Maharashtra,
Bombay 400003.