



Al-Risala 1989

June

Seeking Laurels and Losing God's Love

People who pose as servants of Islam and the Muslim community, do so in places where they expect to be publicly honoured for their activities. Where there is no hope of worldly recompense, they remain insensitive and impassive. Such people may continue to impress others, even only if temporarily, as champions of the Islamic cause. But they cannot deceive God Almighty.

The former Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, raised slogan '*gharibi hatao*' (eradicate poverty) and, touring by plane, made fiery speeches on the subject all over the country. But Indira Gandhi had no genuine interest in doing anything of a practical nature for the poor of the country, for while the '*gharibi hatao*' slogan did wonders for her image as the prime minister, the actual eradication of poverty would have done the opposite. She would then have lost not only the prime ministership but also all the honour and glory that go along with it.

The same is true of Muslim leaders of the present day. To all intents and purposes, they seem to be very enthusiastic about serving Islam and Muslims. But they are interested in that service only so long as it brings them laurels. Any service to Islam and Muslims which, rather than bringing them honour and glory, makes them appear insignificant in the eyes of the community, does not engage their attention. The Quran says of such people that they set out to deceive God and the believers, but that in actual fact, it is they themselves who are deceived, without their being aware of it (2:9). Of all forms of self-deception, this is the worst.

People who pose as servants of Islam and the Muslim community, do so in places where they expect to be publicly honoured for their activities. Where there is no hope of worldly recompense, they remain insensitive and impassive. Such people may continue to impress others, even only if temporarily, as champions of the Islamic cause. But they cannot deceive God Almighty. Not even for one minute. They must sooner or later realize that God will judge them, not on the basis of appearances, but on the genuine inner reality.

The Ever-present Past

Mr. Tony Benn, a British Labour MP, was once dissatisfied with the way an interview for a BBC radio programme was developing and, determined that no part of the dialogue between himself and the reporter should be broadcast, he took steps to erase it from the tape which had been recording it. To the reporter's astonishment, he reached into a cupboard, and produced a powerful electro-magnet which he duly plugged in and waved over the tape, thereby completely removing all traces of the conversation which had just taken place.

When one is caught in a difficult situation in this world, there is generally some way or other which allows one to escape from it. One can, for example, have 'a clean record' simply by erasing embarrassing or incriminating statements from a tape. It is just as if, originally, one had never uttered a word. Similarly, one can find loopholes in the law which permit one to escape justice, and to proceed in life as if one had never erred in any material or moral sense. All kinds of evasive tactics can, indeed, be practised so that a life of sin, immorality and crime can be completely whitewashed; that all the ugliness of corruption is thus effectively hidden from the public eye.

In the next world, however, there is no question of erasures, evasion, whitewashing and all the other tactics resorted to by wrongdoers. No new hi-tech gadgetry will be available to assist in the concealment of the truth. Neither technology, nor a clever lawyer nor the intervention of friends and relatives will be of any avail in the world of the after life where it is impossible either to practice deception or to wipe out the events of the past. Everything that has happened is already there on God's cosmic tape recorder. Search as one may, one will never find any instrument which will erase what is indelibly recorded on God's tape.

Because, in many cases, our evasive tactics are successful in this world, we tend to imagine that the same will hold true of the next world. But the next world is one which is concerned only with realities.

Translate, Publish, Propagate

Muslims seem to have forgotten that of all the peoples of the world, they are the bearers of the true religion. The greatest task before them is to communicate God's religion to the whole of mankind. But it is this very task that present day Muslims seem least inclined to perform.

When the Quran was translated into Czech a few years ago, it was sold out within just a few weeks of its publication. From this one may imagine what great opportunities there are for propagating Islam all over the world today. But Muslims have shown very little interest in this task. There is special need for the Quran to be translated into every minor and major language of the world and then published and distributed in every corner of the globe. Other books which would help in the study of Islam are also in short supply.

A south Indian Muslim once told me the tale of a Christian friend of his who had wanted to buy a translation of the Quran and who had only found one with great difficulty and then had had to pay a very high price for it. When they met later his friend had remarked that the Muslims could not match the efforts of the Christians to spread the message of their faith. "I obtained a translation of the Quran with difficulty and it was very expensive, but if I had phoned up any Christian agency and told them that I required Bibles for distribution, 5000 copies would have been brought to my office within a matter of a few hours."

Saudi Arabia and a few other Muslim countries have recently been making efforts in this direction, but their overall performance is still very short of the mark.

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Disturbed Souls and Agitated Minds

Blair Fowler (b. 1921) is one of those highly qualified rocket engineers who worked in the United States on the first liquid propulsion rocket that ultimately became the, Saturn rocket with a thrust of several million pounds.

On a brief holiday in India, Mr. Fowler told a correspondent at the Taj Palace, New Delhi, that his life had now undergone a total change. At the peak of his career ten years ago, he and his wife, who also had a prosperous medical practice, simply gave up their job and money, and retired to a Californian ranch "to work with our bare hands".

Mr. Fowler holds out his hands, now rough and also toughened by physical work like wood cutting, carpentry, blacksmithy, etc. "When I was in the rocket propulsion group, my hands had become soft through constant paper work, designing and redesigning."

At 65, Mr. Fowler looks quite young and strong. "We do a lot of wood cutting for firewood in our home which is heated by a log fire". There is a furnace and forge also on his ranch, where he hammers iron into shape in the way the blacksmiths used to do in days gone by.

They have left the mechanical world behind and are very happy about their simple life in the lap of nature. One reason for their adopting this way of life, in the words of Mr. Fowler, is that "as our knowledge grows, the more one gets convinced that one is ignorant."

They had begun their journey, as they thought, in the world of knowledge, but finally they learned that with every succeeding step they were advancing towards ignorance. Human knowledge does not lead man to the reality.

Further more because of the difficulties he encountered in the development of rocketry he had no peace of mind. He and his colleagues had to work behind three foot concrete wall and lived in constant fear of explosion, as they had been working on developing the liquid hydrogen and oxygen burning rocket motor. This state of affairs was a constant source of mental tension.

They had begun their journey – as they thought – in the world of knowledge, but, finally, they learned that with every succeeding step, they were advancing towards ignorance, for human knowledge does not lead man to the ultimate reality.

Fowler, in particular, had no peace of mind because of the difficulties he encountered in rocketry development. One major source of mental tension was the nature of the hazards he and his colleagues faced. Living in constant fear of explosions, they had to work behind three-foot concrete walls, on the development of the liquid hydrogen and oxygen burning rocket motor.

The truth is that nothing and no one can bring peace of mind to mankind in the way that our Maker can. No matter how sophisticated a level of scientific or technological progress has been reached, it is still God and God alone who can bring both truth and tranquility to disturbed souls and agitated minds.

6 June 1989

God can hear even the smallest whisper

Certain individuals once asked the Prophet whether God was close enough for them to make whispered supplications to Him, or whether he was so far away that they should call His name out loud. This verse of the Quran was revealed in reply to their question: "When my servants question you concerning Me, tell them that I am near. I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he calls Me... (2:186)."

Abu Moosa Al-Ashari relates how on certain journeys there were a few people who raised their voices in prayer. "Do not strain yourselves," the Prophet told them. "You are not calling upon a Being who is deaf or absent. You are calling upon One who hears and is close to you, closer to any one of you than the neck of his mount."

(Al-Bukhari, Muslim)

Paradise – for Whom?

For over a hundred years now, Muslims have been beseeching God to bring down destruction upon their oppression. This is rather like sending for the fire brigade and then asking them to fan the flames rather than pour water on them. They will not comply with such a request, for the request does not fit the situation. Similarly, God ignores entreaties to annihilate Muslim oppressors, for while He is always disposed to listen to prayers for assistance and to give His divine succour where it is merited. He is not prepared to give help where it involves the ruination of others. Such a prayer does not fit the situation. Nor is He interested in furthering nationalistic aspirations. The only aspirations which are of value in His eyes are those which are pious in intention.

A man may aspire to God's favour, but he may not aspire to the destruction of his enemies: God will turn a deaf ear to prayers which are all about sending enemies to hell, with no mention of their salvation. He will listen to people's prayers only if, *on behalf of their adversaries*, they seek His divine guidance.

People all too frequently invoke divine wrath upon others. If they were just to stop and think for a moment that they themselves could easily become the objects of that wrath, they would soon give up consigning their enemies to hellfire and damnation. If they truly feared God themselves, they would realize that the only ones to escape God's punishment on Day of Judgement will be those who have sought to rescue others from that fate. A little introspection on this subject would do them a world of good, for it is time that Muslims gave up their erroneous belief that the gardens of Paradise are reserved exclusively for them.

7 June 1989

God's generosity to the generous

These words are attributed to Almighty God in one of the Prophet's sayings: "Mankind, spend in God's cause; it shall be you who shall receive."

(Al-Bukhari, Muslim)

8 June 1989

That Strange Planet – The Earth

When we see a piece of machinery which is quite wonderful in its complexity and absolutely perfect in its functioning, we immediately give the credit for its creation and its excellence to the initiative and skills of the manufacturer. It is ironic that we hasten to give credit where it is due in the case of a material fabrication, but that we look around us at the wonders of the world and barely give a thought to how they came into being and how they continue to perpetuate themselves.

We need to imagine ourselves in the position of Colonel James Irwin, one of the three astronauts who travelled in the American Apollo 15 spacecraft which landed on the moon in August, 1972. When he later described the magic moment of stepping on to the moon he said it was like the ecstasy one felt in the presence of God. He said he felt extremely close to the Almighty, as if his greatness had manifested itself before his very eyes. Colonel Irwin did not consider this voyage one of mere scientific discovery, he looked upon it as an experience which had given him new spiritual life. Like Colonel Irwin stepping on to the moon, we need to look upon our own earth as the strange and wonderful orb which was created by God for the benefit of mankind. It is not that the countenance of our Maker does not shine continually in the perfection of His creation; it is simply that from a very early age we have become so accustomed to the world around us that we tend to take it for granted. We never question the rising and the setting of the sun, never fear a lack of oxygen to breathe, never imagine that the waters of the ocean might recede beyond our view or that the trees and plants might cease one day to grow and perpetuate themselves. It is because of the very regularity and perfection of natural phenomena that, as we begin to grow up, we pay less and less heed to them. We are too familiar with them to realize how extraordinary they are. It is only in unfamiliar circumstances, or if we have had a brush with death, that we suddenly wake up to the wonders of the world. The wind and the water, the trees and the birds all then strike us as being reflections of the beauty of the Lord.

If we were to look on the world with the same sense of wonder and awe as Colonel Irwin experienced as he gazed on the moon, we should begin to live on earth as if we were in God's presence. We would continually see Him and feel Him all around us, and we should then begin to lead our lives in the full consciousness of being watched over by our Creator and Sustainer.

9 June 1989

Always Someone Else's Fault

I always remember one of my former acquaintances as having a fine personality and a good brain, but as being a total failure. There was no service or business in which he met with success, and after this had become an established pattern, he eventually lost his mental balance. One day, in a state of distraction, he met with an accident on the road, and was killed outright.

The simple reason for his downfall was that while he wanted very much to be successful, he did not use his natural abilities towards that end. Then, when he failed in anything, he always held others responsible. But there was really no one to blame except himself.

He had started off well enough in school, but the year he had to pass his matriculation, he entered into politics, as a result of which he failed in his examinations. After this, he discontinued his studies. Then he tried his hand at running a shop, but since there was no fixed time for its opening and even remained closed all day whenever he was not in the mood to work, there was no question of its being a success. Finally, he was forced to close it. Then he took up a job. But the type of work was so far below his expectations that he was constantly in a state of tension and would often quarrel with his boss. So one fine day, he was given notice to quit.

In this way, he went on taking up different jobs, all of which ended in failure. When this happened, he would always complain about others, saying that one person was biased, another hostile and yet another obstructive. According to him, nobody wanted to see him progressing, and he was always ready to lay the blame for his failure upon others. In fact, he seemed to spend the whole of his life showing how others were at fault, without ever thinking of how he could mend his own ways. The result was that his actual shortcomings soon became quite apparent to everyone concerned.

Holding others responsible for one's failure often seems a good way out of one's difficulties. The great drawback is that this does not wipe out the failure. It only very temporarily diverts the attention of others from the real state of affairs. Final ruination is the only possible consequence.

Be Fair to the Customer

In a certain locality of Delhi which I have been passing through for the last ten years, there are several hotels owned by Muslims. But out of this entire number there is only one which has made continuous progress during this period, the others having suffered a decline in clientele. One day, I asked the proprietor of the successful hotel the secret of his success. "Very simple," he replied. "What other hotels buy by the kilo, we buy by the quintal. For any purchase we make, we explore the entire market and buy only where we find the prices are the most reasonable. By buying in bulk and paying cash, we acquire things quite cheaply." Then he smiled and said "If you want to make a profit, make it from the market and not from the customer."

Usually, shopkeepers make their profits by selling their goods at inflated prices. But this is not good business. This is exploitation of the customer. When it becomes known that a shopkeeper exploits his customers, people start boycotting his shop. That is why such shopkeepers are ultimately unsuccessful. A better way of doing business is for the retailer to avail of the lowest possible wholesale prices so that after selling his goods at a fair price, he is still able to make his profit.

This principle holds true for all branches of commerce. In most businesses, whatever the businessman sells to his customers has been previously received from elsewhere. Often, shopkeepers opt for the easy way out, and buy goods from some nearby place for the sake of convenience, but if they were to devote a little more time and energy to this task, and go somewhat further afield in search of merchandise, they would be able to purchase the same goods at more favourable prices.

Usually, shopkeepers try to compensate for their own laziness by charging the customers more, but that is a way of doing business which is hardly calculated to lead to success. The immediate returns on money invested in this way may be high, but they cannot continue to be so, and in the long term are bound to dwindle. Steps should then at once be taken to ensure greater profit margins, not from the customer, but from the wholesale market.

Passing by Creation

To believe in God is to see the invisible force behind visible objects. It is to see through superficial irrelevancies to the ultimate reality that lies hidden in all things. It is to acknowledge that all things come from God. It is to see God as the Supreme Being that He truly is.

A true believer is never enamoured of the external splendour of worldly things. He is not overawed by material grandeur, for he knows that it, like himself, is the creation of God. He does not look to other human beings for the fulfillment of his needs, for he knows that they are helpless before their Maker. So absorbed does he become in God's glory that he never loses the smallest opportunity to sing hymns of praise to his greatness.

Man has an innate need to have someone or something to look up to and depend upon in life. This is a strong and instinctive urge. But if, in order to satisfy it, man chooses as the object of his veneration some thing or person other than the Almighty, then he is worshipping something which is false, and debasing himself in the process. In ancient times, the awe inspired by natural phenomena, such as the sun and the moon permeated every aspect of human life. In more recent times, however, man has become more materialistic and has chosen to worship wealth and the greatness of other human beings. But whether man worships some aspect of nature, or the purely material in life, he is going sadly astray, for the only Being deserving of his obeisance is the Lord God Almighty. In one's search for the truth one must be prepared to pass by the whole of creation until one reaches the Creator and Sustainer Himself.

11 June 1989

Honest partners have a third partner in God

The Prophet said: "So long as two partners working together do not deceive each other, they have a third partner in God, but when one deceives the other, God departs from them and the devil comes between them."

Other Prophets in Another Age

The prophets saw all non-Muslims as being in dire need of having the word of God conveyed to them. Seeing it as their mission to satisfy that need, they taught us to love other nations. Muslims, as moral heirs to that prophetic mission, should have taught the lessons of moral rectitude and spiritual elevation through their love of and compassion for others. But this is exactly what Muslims have failed to do.

Hatred of western nations has always been the most damaging trait of Muslim leaders of this age, and in expressing that hatred, they have acted against all that is most sacred in their, own religion. They would have done well to follow the example of Mahatma Gandhi, who was a living example of brotherly love towards all nations. Albert Einstein said of him that future generations would find it hard to Credit that a man like Gandhi had actually walked on this earth. When asked by his biographer, Abraham Pais, to elaborate on this, he said it was quite simply because “Gandhi hated nobody, not even the British.”

A commentator on Pais’ book on Einstein (*Subtle is the Lord: The Science and Life of Albert Einstein*, Clarendon Press, Oxford) has observed that “it helps us to grasp the special quality of mind and heart that Gandhi possessed and which Einstein admired so profoundly. In comparing his personality, we learn something about the morphology of human genius at its highest level – that of prophethood (*Times of India*, November 13, 1983).”

Although not a prophet in the sense that Muhammad (May peace be upon him) was, Gandhi has been recognized almost as a saint – or ethical prophet – throughout the entire world. Many great Muslim leaders were contemporaries of Mahatma Gandhi, but Einstein’s evaluation of Gandhi could not be applied to a single one of them.

When the Prophet’s successors fail to demonstrate the true prophetic character, raising barriers of hatred, instead of cementing bonds of love, ordinary people are hardly to be blamed if they are prepared to accept others as their prophets.

A Character Built on Faith

The faithful had gathered in the Prophet's mosque for congregational prayers, but, at the appointed hour, there was no one to lead them. The Prophet himself lay dying in an adjacent chamber, attended by his wife, Aisha, and her father, Abu Bakr, who would normally have taken the Prophet's place, was elsewhere. This was a critical moment, for whoever lead the prayers would have a better chance of becoming the Prophet's successor. At first no one came forward but then, on the insistence of Abdullah ibn Zamaah and certain others from amongst the Prophet's Companions, Umar al-Farooq agreed to lead the prayers. He began with the incantation *Allahu akbar* and his voice, being very loud, became audible to the Prophet in his chamber. "Where is Abu Bakr?" The Prophet asked, and he added: "This will not be acceptable either to God or the Muslims."

When Umar came to know of the Prophet's sentiments and of his being in Aisha's apartment when he expressed them, he might have been assailed by the thought that Aisha had staged some kind of drama to ensure that her father, Abu Bakr, would be chosen as the Prophet's successor in preference to himself. He might have felt himself the victim of a conspiracy which was meant to ease him out of contending for the Caliphate. But Umar's fear of God did not permit him to harbour any such suspicions and, as Ibn Hisham has written in his biography of the Prophet: "Umar did not lay any blame upon Abu Bakr."

It is essential for the unity and solidarity of any community that its members should be free of suspicion towards one another. In the building of a strong society, an atmosphere of mutual trust is as important as cement is to the setting up of a solid construction. So long as early Muslims displayed such trust, their society remained a model of unity and solidarity. Today, Muslims have forfeited their unity, for that vital element of mutual trust has disappeared from their daily living.

True Contentment

The millionaire was tired, weary and bored, He called for his Lincoln continental limousine, got in, and said to the chauffeur: "James, drive full speed over the cliff. I've decided to commit suicide (*Times of India*, February 26, 1985)."

This news item was entitled "Bored to Death." Usually, we associate the wish to commit suicide with dire poverty or some kind of financial failure, but seldom do we realize that millionaires too can be miserable. If poverty creates terrible problems for people, so also does affluence. There are just as many rich people as there are poor who cannot sleep peacefully throughout the night.

The secret of a peaceful life in this world is what is known in religious terminology as contentment. This means being satisfied with what one has and remaining thankful to God for His mercies. Those who go through life feeling that they have been unfairly treated by society and neglected by God are bound to pay the psychological price of ever-deepening discontent. They expect external factors to remove their feelings of dissatisfaction, little realizing that a feeling of contentment can only come from within.

The greatest mistake is to think that the one and only purpose in life is to make money. But if wealth were all, a wealthy man should never find himself beset by problems of emotional stress. The truth is that the greatest acquisition is not money, but the knowledge of life. When a man has this within his grasp, he will know how to live in peace in all circumstances, whether he is millionaire or a beggar.

14 June 1989

Religion is worthless if its end is material gain

Abu Hurayrah records the Prophet as saying: "A person who, for the sake of worldly aggrandizement, seeks that knowledge which should be sought with the sole aim of seeking God's good pleasure, will not savour the fragrance of Paradise on the day of Judgement."

(Abu Da'ud, *Sunan*)

Present Day Opportunities

Every Hardship, we are told by the Quran, is followed by ease (94:5-6). Our Creator has made this world in such a way that life is not just one long series of difficulties, but has its definite elements of respite. For every disadvantage, there is an advantage. While the old adage has it that “there is no rose without a thorn” we should look at the obverse proposition, that the thorniest of bushes are crowned by the most luxuriant of blossoms. And when we run into failure, we should look to see if it does not contain the seeds of future success. However unfortunate our circumstances may be, we should never lose heart for in even the darkest hours of ruin, there is always a ray of hope, there is always some opportunity to make a fresh start and to rebuild things in an even better manner than before.

What we do with our opportunities is a matter of how intelligently we perceive them, and with what determination we exploit them. The ostensible “hardships” which we face in life are devised by the Almighty to test us, so that we must be ready to make the best of every situation and to turn our disadvantages to good account.

Commenting on this aspect of life, the Prophet Muhammad said, “Beware of the insight of a believer, for he sees by the light of God.” This means that the true believer is possessed of foresight and is able to view matters from every angle. He is possessed, in a word, of divine vision. There is no limit to the strength of one so endowed.

One who has never known what it is to have divine vision will soon give way to despair in the face of adversity, for, unless favoured by divine grace, man’s vision cannot rise above the human level; it will remain forever narrow and restricted; it will become preoccupied with whatever is superficial in life. No one with such limited vision can ever have the same staying power as one who is blessed with divine vision, who is not deceived by appearances, who forms his judgments on the basis of profound understanding. Seeing things only on the surface, and never trying to penetrate any deeper will never enable a man to rise above adverse circumstances.

The severest problem besetting the Muslims of today is the loss of their divine vision. In consequence they see nothing but the darkest side of human affairs. When everything should be bathed in a divine light, they continue to flounder and grope in obscurity. The very fact that Muslims can find nothing better to do than bear grudges and lodge an endless list of complaints is a sure indication that they have lost that precious insight which should illumine the vision of the believer.

Take, for instance, the petition filed in the Calcutta High Court in 1985 seeking an injunction banning the Quran. All orators and writers belonging to the Muslim community in India offered their opinions on this case. Without exception, none of them saw anything but the most unfavourable side of the matter.

To them, this was a case of discrimination and they were united in raising their voices in protest against what they saw as a cruel act of prejudice. So far as I know, not a single Muslim of note saw the bright side of the affair – i.e. that, in its judgement, the High Court formally re-emphasized the legal right of everyone in India to practise the religion of his or her choice. One did not have to look very far to see the bright side, but the Muslims were bent on seeing the affair, not as one of religious freedom, but as one of religious prejudice.

The situation in Spain offers a parallel instance. Abd ar-Rahman ad-Dakhil has been restored to his rightful place in Spanish history. Muslims are once again taking up residence in Spain. Yet when I mentioned these facts to certain educated Muslims, their reaction was: “This sounds like some new plot on the part of the Christians.” How extraordinary that the bright side of these events, which is plain for all to see, should strike them as resulting from dark, ulterior motives.

This clearly shows that the Muslims of this day and age are afflicted by a deep-rooted intellectual bankruptcy, which prevents them from making an in-depth analysis of current affairs. Before arriving at their final judgments, they should consider matters carefully, from every angle. They should have regard for those aspects which are not immediately apparent, and should guard against being taken in by superficial elements. Instead of allowing themselves to be blown off course by the gusty winds of life, they should set their sails in such a way that these winds carry them forward to their destination. This means being fully alert to the way the winds of change are blowing and being able to turn these winds to good advantage. It is knowledge and ability which are lacking in the Muslims of the present day.

Instead of seeing events in a positive light, today’s writers and speakers of the Muslim world have taken it upon themselves to raise their voices in protest against others. Take a look at any Muslim newspaper, visit any Muslim country, take part in any Muslim conference, and you will see examples of this negative mentality. The Muslim world is today obsessed with the idea that their religion is beset by oppression at the hands of its enemies. Whatever happens; it appears to Muslims as an example of some sinister plotting or cruel oppression on the part of other nations. They are unable to see events in any other than this negative light.

Fifty years ago, Amir Shakeeb Arsalan wrote a book entitled *Limadha Ta’akhhara al-Muslimun wa Taqaddama Ghayruhum* (Why have Muslims lagged behind other nations?). During the fifty years which have elapsed since Arsalan wrote this book, Muslim leaders have been able to offer just one answer to this question. They have laid all the blame for their own problem at the door of others, and have embarked on an endless campaign of protest and complaint. Muslims of the present age have become expert at seeing the dark side of every issue; the bright side just does not appear to them at all.

However, the truth of the situation is far removed from the way Muslims see it. In fact, the woeful situation confronting Muslims today is not a result of oppression from outside, but a result of intellectual bankruptcy of the Muslim community itself. Due to their misguided, negative mentality, the Muslims have been unable to derive food for thought from the events going on around them. Though they stand

on the threshold of great opportunities, it appears to them as though they are barred from advancement in all walks of life. They are conscious of their current predicament but oblivious to their possibilities. So entangled are they in the sorry state in which they find themselves, that they have become blind to the areas of opportunity which are available to them for improving their situation in life.

Relating the story of Moses and Pharaoh, the Quran tells of how the latter had gathered together the magicians of Egypt in a large arena. The conjurors cast their ropes and wands into the arena, whereupon they took the form of snakes writhing upon the ground. When Moses saw this, he felt afraid. It was only natural that, as an ordinary mortal, he should feel apprehensive about competing with this vast array of snakes. But God Almighty told him not to be afraid, for he would win through. "Cast your staff; it will devour all their snakes and victory will be yours." Moses acted according to God's command. He threw his staff on the ground and it turned into a serpent far larger than those which the magicians had contrived to produce. When Moses' serpent entered the arena, it brought all the magicians' snakes to nothing (*Surah Ta Ha*, vv. 66-69).

The state of Muslims in the present age can be compared to that of Moses. They have God's divine law on their side, they have been endowed with miraculous powers by God so that they need not fear the powers of magic, they have, as it were, the staff of Moses in their hands, yet still paltry human tricks scare them out of their wits.

Great Changes

In the period following the crusades, the Christian theologians of Europe were wont to present the teachings and history of Islam in a corrupted form. In the nineteenth century, however, science, which attaches great importance to accuracy in all fields of study, ushered in a new era. Under its influence the advanced nations of the world developed much greater precision in their thinking, as a result of which the spirit of realism was widely cultivated.

This exactitude in thinking exerted its influence on all departments of learning, including that of Islamic studies. A trend then emerged in favour of interpreting Islamic teachings and history in their true light. This led to a new age of Orientalism, in which the study and presentation of Islamic matters were carried out with much greater objectivity than would hitherto have been possible.

Following the Communist revolutions in Russia and China, there was a period in which religion underwent severe suppression. Nowadays, however, under the influence of international pressure, the authorities in these countries are becoming more moderate in their outlook to the extent of granting a greater degree of freedom in matters of religion. In ancient times, the only discussions which took place between followers of various religions were conducted in the form of debates, with each side fiercely defending the tenets of its own religion. Nowadays such discussions are held in a cordial atmosphere, with people of different religious denominations presenting their own point of view and listening attentively and dispassionately to what people of other religions have to say. I myself have had the

opportunity to take part in several such conference. Furthermore, universities all over the world have opened large departments devoted to Arabic and Islamic studies, in which a purely academic and historical approach has been adopted in the study of Islam. A great number of non-Muslim scholars in the western world, who have acquired a good knowledge of Arabic, perform such essential tasks as the translation of Islamic scriptures into their own languages. They also edit classical Islamic books, after which these are published in a most impressive format. Besides this, they have produced books of their own in which they have presented the results of their research into Islamic history and other Islam-related topics.

In modern times, massive changes have occurred in every department of life, particularly in transport and communications, and in industrial and agricultural methods. But what is perhaps more important is that people's thoughts and attitudes have also undergone a very great change. In other words, the intellectual revolution that has taken place in this day and age has produced conditions which are now highly favourable to the dissemination of Islam. Work which was previously undertaken in the face of great obstacles can now be accomplished in a comparatively relaxed and, therefore, propitious atmosphere. In ancient times, people were not ready even to acknowledge any creed which differed from their own, whereas in modern times, people are ready even to give their approval to such faiths. Prejudice and bigotry were the order of the day in times gone by, in the age in which we live, such sentiments have given way to the spirit of rationalism. There is no doubting the fact that the present age is one of great new opportunities for spreading the message of Islam. Nowadays, this task can be carried out without any obstacles being placed in the way. Besides, access can now be had to all kinds of modern means of communication which make it possible to convey God's message, in a more palatable fashion, and to a greater number of people than ever before.

Allover the world, Muslims complain of cruelty and discrimination at the hands of other nations. They have developed a persecution complex which has blinded them to the other side of the situation in which they find themselves. Were Muslims to see things from the correct angle, they would realize that conditions in the world are such that they have no cause for despair, and plenty of grounds for optimism. To take one outstanding example, there is the fact that thousands of people from non-Muslim nations are daily entering the fold of Islam. In the African country of Rwanda for instance, 25,000 people have accepted Islam over the last five years. In France, Islam has become the second largest religion, after Roman Catholicism, and a large number of people are accepting Islam in America, Britain, Japan and other nations of the industrial world. Imposing Islamic centres have been set up in all the major cities of the world. Notable amongst these is the Islamic centre in Rome – once a centre of anti-Islamic activity – which has been built in the very centre of the city. As for Spain, the situation there has improved to such an extent that the Muslim converts living in Granada have started bringing out a newspaper, to which they have given the name *Pais Islamico*.

Dr. Umar Farooq Abd Allah, a convert to Islam who lives in Spain, performed Hajj in 1984 on which occasion he gave an interview to the Karachi based journal, *Yaqeen International* (May 22, 1985). In this

interview, he pointed out that conditions in Spain had changed considerably since the death of General Franco (1892-1975). A large Islamic centre had been opened in Granada and Muslims could be found in every town of Spain. During the period since the death of General Franco, at least five hundred Spaniards had accepted Islam. "The present Spanish authorities are open-minded and tolerant in their attitude," he said.

This applies not only to Spain. Allover the world, Islam is a focus of continuous publicity. This means that, even today, when Muslims consider themselves downtrodden, theoretically they are in a position to take the initiative, for everywhere Islam is winning over people's hearts. If only Muslim could see the positive side of the contemporary trends with regard to Islam, they would realize that the present-day conditions which they bewail in fact constitute an open invitation to them to launch a programme of action which would yield tremendous results.

While on a foreign tour, I happened to meet a Japanese convert to Islam. He remarked that there were great opportunities in Japan for the propagation of Islam. Till now, however, full use had not been made of these opportunities. What is needed, he said, is for Islam to be presented before the Japanese in a simple manner. Then most of them will accept Islam. As he put it: "The Japanese people are potentially Muslims."

While taking part in an international seminar, I made the acquaintance of a Muslim professor who teaches in a Canadian university. He said that in Canada there are tremendous opportunities for communicating the message of Islam. One can even avail of government funds in order to conduct this work on a grand scale. The Canadian government is ready to assist its citizens in the launching of any peaceful scheme. Furthermore, government assistance does not have any strings attached. It does not involve unnecessary government interference. Followers of other religions, he said, are making full use of these opportunities while the Muslims have as yet failed to do so, being more concerned with raising political slogans. It is this, unfortunately, which they have to regard as their vocation in life.

The Message of the Hudaybiyah Peace:

The Prophet Mohammad was so sorely persecuted by the people of Mecca that he was forced to leave his home town and emigrate to Medina. This move failed to placate the Meccans, who declared a war aimed at the obliteration of Islam. Battle after battle was waged between the Muslims and the idolators. A state of war existed on all sides. While such an atmosphere prevailed, it was almost impossible to communicate the message of Islam, and next to no progress was made in this field.

In the sixth year after the Prophet's emigration, it appeared as though the Arabs would have nothing but aversion and prejudice to offer in response to the message of Islam. Constant wars had put a virtual end to the spread of Islam. The road ahead for the Prophet's religion appeared bleak indeed.

With the gift of special divine grace, the Prophet realized that the state of affairs as it appeared did not represent the true reality of the situation. Outwardly, the situation appeared grim, but beneath the dark exterior there lay a number of bright opportunities which were waiting to be tapped. On the outside, Islam appeared to be faced with unending violent hostility, but beneath this front of antagonism lay great potentialities. With his divinely-endowed vision, the Prophet saw that if an end were put to the state of war, these hidden potentialities would be allowed to flourish. Islamic history would receive a new impetus in the very land where its development had been stunted since birth. The Prophet's analysis of events led to the Peace of Hudaibiyah. This Peace-treaty was in fact, a ten-year truce between the Muslims and the idolators. To put an end to the state of war, the Prophet unilaterally accepted all the demands of the other side. There was no other way that peace could be achieved, for when the opposite party is obdurate, refusing to yield so much as an inch, then there is only one way to normalize the situation – by concurring with the position taken up by the other side.

Today, Islamic history has reached the same stage as prior to the Peace of Hudaibiyah. All over the world, Muslims have been beset with antagonism and violence. Since the Muslims have reacted to this violence with violence, the result has been the eruption of futile and senseless conflicts throughout the Muslim world. In some places Muslims are left to protest verbally against their position, while in other cases they have adopted the path of armed insurrection. It seems as if other nations have nothing besides hate and aversion to offer in response to Islam.

But if one takes a searching look at the situation, one can see that the real state of affairs is quite different from that which meets the eye. Islam is in the same position today as it was in at the time of the Peace of Hudaibiyah. One clear indication of this is the great number of people who are accepting Islam. On the outside, condition appear unfavourable to Islam, but, in fact, there are great opportunities for Islam in the world of today. What is needed is for the Muslims to make use of these opportunities. If we can show the same practical wisdom as was displayed by the Prophet and his companions on the occasion of the Peace of Hudaibiyah, then there is not a shadow of a doubt that the results will be just as favourable now for Islam as they were on that occasion, at the outset of Islamic history.

In order to make the best use of any situation, there is always a sacrifice that has to be made. This is no less true of the situation facing Muslims today. If they are to make the same order of sacrifice as the Prophet and his companions did on the occasion of the Peace of Hudaibiyah. They shall have to put an end to all their quarrels with other nations, bringing about a normalization of relations through unilateral action on their part.

All over the world, the Muslims have adopted the habit of meeting force with force. As a result of this retaliatory mentality, they have become embroiled in nationalistic and materialistic conflicts with nations to whom they would do better to addressing the message of Islam. It is these conflicts which pose the greatest obstacle to progress in the field of introducing or spreading Islam, for preaching-work requires

a peaceful atmosphere, in which people are ready to listen to what others have to say and weigh their words in a spirit of objectivity.

On the one hand, we live in an age of immense opportunities for Islam. These have come about owing to the changes that have taken place in the modern world. On the other hand, however; there is the distrust and antagonism which mark relations between Muslims and other nations of the world. At this juncture, the Muslims should adopt the path taken by their Prophet in the sixth year after his emigration to Medina. By taking unilateral action, the Prophet put an end to the atmosphere of confrontation which existed between Muslims and those who had not accepted the Faith. He put up with all the hardships imposed upon him by the enemies of Islam and refrained from violent reaction to violence on their part. This required great sacrifice on the part of the Prophet. If the Muslims can make a similar sacrifice today, then the atmosphere of antagonism which marks the Muslims' relations with other nations will automatically come to an end, the recent opportunities which exist for preaching the message of Islam will be allowed to flourish. Such a development will usher in a new age of Islamic history. There will then be no stopping the progress of Islam in the world, for God has decreed that His religion will prevail over all others.

A New Age

The Peace of Hudaibiyah amounted to a ten-year cessation of hostilities. By dint of this truce, the Prophet was able to put the sword aside and make use of the intellectual power of Islam. For the first time in human history, a conflict was taken out of the military arena, leaving the two sides to wage an intellectual contest. Up to that point, when any dispute had arisen between two parties, people had not known any way of settling it except on the field of battle. The Prophet Mohammad proved, that, in practice, there is another way of settling disputes, namely by the force of ideas. Furthermore, a victory of ideas carries more weight than that gained on the field of battle.

The peace-treaty of Hudaibiyah should not be seen as an isolated policy aimed at ridding the Muslims in those days of the menace of the Quraysh. It was much more than that, for it amounted to the opening of a new avenue of opportunity for mankind. On the one hand, this peace enabled the Prophet to illustrate the unassailable intellectual ascendancy of Islam, while on the other hand it ushered in a new age for mankind, an era whose virtues are becoming fully evident in present times.

In ancient times, there was thought to be nothing wrong in one ruler indulging in armed aggression against someone else's territory and taking that territory over at the cost of immense bloodshed and loss of life. Only in recent times has aggression become a crime according to international law. Nowadays, the acceptable procedure is for disputes to be settled through negotiation.

The world owes this transition from exchanging blows to exchanging ideas to the Prophet of Islam. What has today become a universal norm is, in fact, the completion of a revolutionary wave, set in motion fourteen hundred years ago at the Treaty of Hudaibiyah. The Prophet Mohammad was the first to

introduce this approach. Furthermore, he showed on a practical level how disputes could be settled through negotiation. This trend developed over the centuries until finally it revolutionized people's attitudes the world over.

This transformation which has taken place in human thought holds immense advantages for the Muslims. At the time of Hudaibiyah, the cause of Islam greatly benefited from this temporary cessation of hostilities. Now, the spirit of Hudaibiyah has become the spirit of the age in which we live. This has made it possible for us to perform on a much greater scale than ever before the task of communicating the message of Islam in a peaceful and propitious atmosphere. By making use of the intellectual force of Islam, we are in a position to make Islam once again the dominant religion of the world.