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February

Guidance for the Misguided

It is unfortunate that the majority of the Muslims fall into the category of the misguided. In multitudes, they are following in the footsteps of slogan-mongering leaders and are moving further and further away from the path of God and His Prophet.

Describing the plight of humanity on the Day of Judgment, the *Quran* says:

'On the day when their faces are turned over in the Fire, they shall say: 'Would that we had obeyed God and the Apostle!' And they shall say : 'Lord, We obeyed our masters and our eminent ones, but they led us away from the right path. Lord, let their punishment be doubled: lay on them a mighty curse' (33:66-67).

These verses of the *Quran* make the distinction between those who, having read the Book of God and the Sunnah of the Prophet, have accepted their guidance and consistently followed their precepts, and those whose course of action has always been determined by worldly leaders and contemporary religious guides. The former are deserving of God's mercy, but the latter are not, as they have gone completely astray. Try as they may to justify their following of the great ones of this world by bending the terms of the *Quran* and *Hadith* to fit their actions they will incur only the wrath of God, for He cannot be deceived by fine words. If they have allowed themselves become misguided, they have only themselves to blame for this, and can never know the blessings of their Creator's mercy.

Today, it is unfortunate that the majority of the Muslims fall into the category of the misguided. In multitudes, they are following in the footsteps of slogan-mongering leaders and are moving further further away from the path of God and His Prophet. They are deaf to recitations from the *Quran* which would prove to them the error of their ways, and are frequently to be heard asserting that they have no intention of changing those ways no matter how impressive these *Quran* and *Hadith*-based arguments happen to be.

The Talent for Survival

One of God's Greatest Gifts

Even when threatened with total annihilation, man has shown over and over again that he has the capacity to build his life anew and is always able to summon up the determination and energy to overcome whatever difficulties stand in his way.

Studies carried out on over 100 major human disasters by the Disaster Research Centre of Ohio State University (set up in 1963) reveal that conditions of extreme adversity call forth extraordinary strength in human beings, which prevents them from being totally overwhelmed when catastrophe strikes. One astonishing example is the behaviour of the inhabitants of a coastal area in Texas which was ravaged by storm floods in 1961. The danger warning had been received four whole days before the tempest hit the coast, but over fifty per cent of the population elected to remain in their homes. No less amazing is the fact that out of a population of 70,000, only 7 percent decided to leave their homes when, in 1971 a huge dam in California, which had been seriously affected by an earthquake posed a grave threat to their lives.

These studies have also revealed that the majority of the disaster victims, left undaunted by their experiences, had few qualms about the future; feelings of acute anxiety were displayed by less than 10% of the people in the flood-affected areas of Texas. The report issued by the Disaster Research Centre concludes: ". . . the reality of events suggests that human beings are amazingly controlled and resilient in the face of adversity. Perhaps heroism – not panic or shock – is the right word to describe their most common behaviour in time of disaster."

Even when threatened with total annihilation, man has shown over and over again that he has the capacity to build his life anew and is always able to summon up the determination and energy to overcome whatever difficulties stand in his way.

How does he come to have these remarkable qualities? The answer is simply that of all the blessings showered upon him by his Creator, one of the very greatest is this hidden potential which manifests itself in times of extreme crisis. The very knowledge that this potential exists in all human beings should serve to imbue us with such optimism that we never waste so much as a moment in fruitless lamentations, but plunge straight into whatever action is essential to the reparation of our losses. This God-given capacity for reconstruction should never be allowed to languish, for it is that very quality which can lead us into a new and brighter phase of existence.

A System of Conversion

The believer does not retaliate. He does not return evil for evil. It is quite human to become angry at the wrongs done to one, but the believer does not return anger for anger: he returns forgiveness.

Two of the attributes of the believer, as described in the Quran, are firstly, his avoidance of gross sins and indecencies and secondly, his willingness to forgive when angered, (42:37). This means, in other words, that the believer does not retaliate. He does not return evil for evil. It is quite human to become angry at the wrongs done to one, but the believer does not return anger for anger: he returns forgiveness.

It is exactly this law on which God has based the entire system of the world. Here, everything is conceived according to such a pattern that whatever is received from the environment is not returned as it is; but undergoes a conversion, depending upon the internal system of the receiving plant or creature. Such conversion is invariably from the inferior to the superior.

The tree, for instance, receives nutrients from the soil which it converts into foliage, fruits and flowers. It takes in carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, but absorbs it only in order to give the outside world the gift of oxygen. The cow, similarly, is a living factory which converts non-milk substances into milk.

The truly God-fearing man has likewise to abide by those very principles of nature on which the entire cosmos turns. That is, when mistreatment by others sparks off feelings of anger, hatred and revenge, he must convert these negative reactions into positive impulses. For bad treatment he must return good.

(133:2)

5 February 1988

True Strength

“My guarantor is none other than God. If you can put your trust in His guarantee, then I shall present Him as my guarantor.

Power is generally associated either with wealth, or muscularity, or both. But the greatest aspect of power has nothing to do with either material things or physical prowess. Its real secret lies in strength of character – something which can be possessed by the poorest and weakest amongst us.

Maulana Mohammad Qasim Qasmi, a 30-year old teacher at the Hussain Bakhsh School in Delhi and also the Imam of a mosque, recently decided to open a watch repair shop for which he needed a full time skilled worker. No one seemed to be immediately available, but there came one day to his mosque a middle-aged man called Mohammad Deen Kashmiri, who turned out to be a watch repairer. It appeared that he had actually come to Delhi to look for work and expressed great confidence in his own skill. Maulana Qasim, however, asked him if there was anyone in Delhi who would stand guarantee for him. Mohammad Deen then said. “My guarantor is none other than God. If you can put your trust in His guarantee, then I shall present Him as my guarantor.”

Maulana Qasim was so impressed by Mohammad Din Kashmiri’s way of expressing himself that he hired him to work at his shop. Several months have passed since then, and now both employer and employee are satisfied with the successful running of the shop by the grace of God. But if Mohammad Din Kashmiri had not been able to press Maulana Qasim with his strength of character, the enterprise would have come to nothing. It was the aura of trustworthiness and determination produced by this innate quality in this humble man which carried the day.

A Refusal to Suffer

Whenever we analyse suffering, we find that there are two main features to it. One is the thing which causes the suffering and the other is our own reaction to it. We should take courage from Thelma Thomson's example, and so control our reaction that suffering is finally eliminated.

The Mojave Desert in California is a place of dust, fierce winds and unbearable heat. The Mexican Indians who inhabit this area lead a life apart and speak no English. Into this situation came Thelma Thompson, a young American soldier's wife. She had decided to start living in a village at the edge of the desert to be near her husband who was stationed during World War II at an army training camp in the vicinity. Within a very short time she began to feel that the environment was too hostile, particularly because of the climate and the impossibility of making contact with the local people, thanks to the language barrier. And it did not help to have her husband away most of the time on manoeuvres. Finally, she wrote to tell her parents that she would be coming back home. The reply she received from her father consisted of just two lines:

Two men looked out from prison bars,

One saw mud, the other saw stars.

She read the couplet over and over again, then, feeling ashamed of her decision to leave, she made up her mind to see "the stars" in her situation, rather than the "mud." It was a decision which was to alter her entire life.

Making friends with the natives, she learned their languages and culture, and began to see desert life in a new light. She watched the magnificent desert sunsets, and studied the Cactus, the Yuccas and the Joshua trees in all their fascinating variety. She even hunted for sea-shells that had been left there millions of years ago when the sands of the desert had been an ocean floor.

Gradually the region began to exercise such a fascination over her mind that both she and her husband decided to stay on after he had retired from military service. She later wrote a novel, "Bright Ramparts" which expressed all the excitement she had felt over her new experiences and discoveries. Her book proved very popular and ran to several editions.

A wretched had been transformed into an exciting adventure. But how exactly had this transformation taken place? Neither the desert, nor the natives, nor any other element in the situation had changed. Whatever change had taken place was inside the mind and heart of Thelma Thompson. Her own change of attitude had given her a new life.

Whenever we analyse suffering, we find that there are two main features to it. One is the thing which causes the suffering and the other is our own reaction to it. We should take courage from Thelma Thomson's example, and so control our reaction that suffering is finally eliminated.

7 February 1988

Every Cloud has a Silver Lining

Long before Sir Winston Churchill became Prime Minister of Great Britain, he went to South Africa to act as the *Morning Post's* military correspondent during the Boer war. In the course of his duties there, he was arrested by the Boers along with a group of British soldiers, and, since the Boers made no distinction between military personnel and war correspondents, he found himself locked up in prison. Churchill promptly sent a message to the then South African Prime Minister, John Christian Smuts, urging his immediate release on the strength of the international agreement that newspaper correspondents on wartime missions were not to be jailed. Subsequently, at a dinner party at the White House in Washington, at which both Smuts and Churchill were present, Smuts wryly recounted how he had taken note of Churchill's representation but had only just started to go into his case when he was informed that Churchill had already managed to escape.

Years later, when Churchill had become a member of the British Cabinet, Smuts reminded him of this incident, and was surprised to be told that Churchill had had no regrets over the delay in processing his case. He explained to Smuts that if he had been released immediately, "he would have been the loser by £9,000. "You see, I sold the story of my thrilling escape from jail to a magazine for nine thousand pounds!"

New Keys for New Locks

Applying outworn tactics to present evils and then expecting that in consequence all the good things of life will automatically fall into the laps is little better than struggling senselessly to open new locks with old keys.

Have you ever watched Person A struggle to open a lock, passing through every emotional stage from mild impatience to blazing anger, then finally throwing away the key and picking up a large stone to smash the lock? At that moment, Person B arrives and says, "Try my key. That's a new lock, you know. Your old key won't fit." Person A is by this time so over-wrought that he cannot bring himself to do anything but stand back and watch Person B insert the key in the lock. It opens, of course, in an instant.

Person A is like all those people who do not care to keep pace with the fast-changing world of the present day. They find themselves in altered situations, but persist in applying outdated formulae to them and never fail to become bewildered and irate when their old keys refuse to budge the new locks. They then proceed to waste their time and energy in venting their anger on these changed sets of circumstances which are not obligingly going to change back just to please them. They even allow their anger to reach such a pitch of intensity that they are prepared to smash whatever it is that no longer responds to their old keys. It is unfortunate that there is seldom "Person B" standing by who will produce just the right key at the right moment.

People normally have to find such keys for themselves. But then it is not everyone who can find them, for their acquisition requires such strenuous efforts as few are willing to undertake. And before embarking on such a course, people have first of all to recognize this as a prerequisite of modern living.

But what do we still see all around us? Rabble-rousers on platforms making fiery speeches demanding reservations and exclusive treatment, with mountains of printed matter everywhere to echo their words.

They continue to inveigh against social prejudice and discriminatory practices, resorting to public demonstrations to reinforce their view point. But applying outworn tactics to present evils and then expecting that in consequence all the good things of life will automatically fall into the laps is little better than struggling senselessly to open new locks with old keys. What they should be devoting their energies to is serious efforts at all levels to bring about social uplift, an improvement in creativity and the setting of examples in individual diligence.

9 February 1988

Sizing Up Our Standards

Every second-rate journalist, author or poet receives accolades, and is hailed as an Islamic authority, and what is worse, the raisers of provocative slogans are carried shoulder-high as the saviours of the nation.

Thanks to the setting of high standards in Western countries, anything which falls even slightly below par is summarily rejected. Quite the reverse is true of India and other developing countries where, in the absence of generally acceptable standards, there is much in the sphere of culture which receives undeserved recognition.

This state of affairs is perhaps worst in Muslim countries. There, every second-rate journalist, author or poet receives accolades, and is hailed as an Islamic authority, and what is worse, the raisers of provocative slogans are carried shoulder-high as the saviours of the nation.

Symptomatic of this easy-come easy-go attitude is the admission made by Tom Alter, a young Urdu-speaking American actor, in an interview with an Indian national daily. He said, quite frankly, that he preferred India to America as a place to work. Asked for his reasons, he said that American cinematic standards were so exacting that it was quite common for films to flop and lose money, whereas in India, even quite bad films could be successes at the box office.

Solidarity

For every highly desirable thing in this world, a price has to be paid. For unity, the price that has to be paid is not only the avoidance of contentiousness, but the frequent sacrifice of our own special interests.

Solidarity – that unity which emerges from common feelings and interests – is the most precious element in national harmony. But it is also something rare and fragile which has to be carefully preserved from dissension and divisiveness. It is only when all concerned agree to disagree, and then leave their bones of contention to be chewed by others, that solidarity can remain intact. The human quality most necessary to the cause of solidarity is tolerance. This is not necessarily something with which we are born. But it is something which can definitely be taught to the uninitiated, inculcated as a matter of moral discipline, and practised by public-spirited individuals as an example to the people at large. Patience, it should be stressed, is of the greatest importance if we are to learn to be tolerant. In fact, all of our actions must be marked by patience if we ourselves are not to elicit anger and intolerance from others.

Amongst Muslims today, there is a distressing lack of solidarity. This is because arguments are frequent, tempers easily run high and little value is attached to the virtues of patience and tolerance. Who is to blame for this sorry state of affairs? We need look no further than those very Muslim leaders who are loud in their preaching of Islamic solidarity. In one breath they advocate patience, tolerance, restraint, and in the next breath they are shouting against any criticism of themselves. Worse, they retaliate against anyone even with a different viewpoint from their own, instead of preserving a dignified silence, or waiting for the opportune moment to reason quietly with an opponent who may be just ignorant or misguided. In so doing they set the example of intolerance. It is tantamount to saying to the people: "If you disagree with something, don't stand for it. Rise against it". There are many different kinds of intolerance shown in public life. One example is the demand that the processions of other religions be banned. Leaders who make such a demand are taking their followers in a very wrong direction. They are in effect saying to their adherents, it is only we who are right, it is only our desires which are worthy of consideration – all others and their wishes are beneath contempt. When such attitudes are taken to extremes they can result in violence and even killing.

This negative tendency on the part of our leaders is what does the greatest damage to the ideal of solidarity. They do not understand that for every highly desirable thing in this world, a price has to be paid. For unity, the price that has to be paid is not only the avoidance of contentiousness, but the frequent sacrifice of our own special interests.

A Mere Ten Words

Ten words a night may seem very few, but spread over a period of eight years, they were sufficient to turn him into a writer of the English language who could elicit praise from native writers and critics of the English language.

Maulvi Lutfullah, whose autobiography, written in English and published in London by Smith, Aldeia and Company in 1857, had never set foot in an English school. Born in 1806 in Dharanagar, an old town of Malwa, he lived the life of an ordinary tutor, teaching Hindi, Persian and Marathi to British employees of the East India Company. He had over a hundred students, and contact with them over a period of time kindled an interest in him to learn their language. He soon began on a course of intensive self-instruction and, in a matter of eight years, gained a mastery of the English language.

In his book, he writes that in the course of these eight years, never a night went past without his learning at least ten new words and studying a few pages of Goldcrest's books before finally going to sleep.

Ten words a night may seem very few, but spread over a period of eight years, they were sufficient to turn him into a writer of the English language who could elicit praise from native writers and critics of the English language. Alaister Welk, the Englishman who wrote the foreword to his book, expressed a sense of wonder at the expressiveness with which an Indian could write such a lengthy book in a tongue completely alien to him. How did Maulvi Lutfullah develop the talent to write such a book? The answer lies simply in his sheer determination and unstinting hard work.

The Evils of Jealousy

But the nobles of the court, ignoring his uprightness and the progress he had brought to the country, could think of nothing but the position of prestige and authority which he held. Consumed with envy, they resolved to oust him.

Of all the independent Muslim Kingdoms that arose on the ruins of the Delhi Sultanate, the most powerful was the Bahmani Kingdom of the Deccan, which was established in 1347 after a revolt against Sultan Mohammed Bin Tughlaq. The first ruler, Nasiruddin Shah, ageing and ease-loving as he was, soon made way for one better fitted to govern, Hasan Gangu, who traced his ancestry back to the ancient King Bahman of Iran. Hasan established his capital at Gulbarga and set about extending the boundaries of his kingdom, on his death in 1359, he was succeeded by Ahmed Shah Bahman, who established the new city of Bidar, to which he shifted his capital.

During the 180 years of its existence, the Bahman Sultanate saw its most successful and prosperous period between 1463 and 1481, when Mahmud Gawan was minister. Given the power to act for the King, he not only extended the empire, but also gave it great stability, through the wisdom of his policies. Making due acknowledgement of his abilities, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* calls him "the most notable personality of the period, a leading administrator" (9/372).

Though the entire reins of the administration fell into the hands of Mahmud Gawan thanks to the lazy, comfort loving temperament of the reigning monarch, Mohammad Shah III, he never misused his powers. Indeed, he lived his life with the utmost simplicity and devotion to duty, eating out of earthen vessels, sleeping on a mat, working with great industry and never wasting a moment of his time. That his objectives were worthy may be judged from his having donated over three thousand books from his personal library to a school which he had set up in Bidar. (The ruins of this school are still in existence.) But the nobles of the court, ignoring his uprightness and the progress he had brought to the country, could think of nothing but the position of prestige and authority which he held. Consumed with envy, they resolved to oust him. By devious methods, they obtained possession of his official seal and used it on a forged letter, purportedly from Gawan to Rajah Rainer Singh, the then ruler of Vijaynagar, which they then showed to Mohammad Shah III, to prove to him that his minister was about to enter into a conspiracy to overthrow him. Convinced that Gawan was a traitor, the King had him put to death on the 5th of April, 1481. He later realized what a grave mistake he had made, and, grief stricken and filled with remorse, he himself died less than a year later on the 22th of March, 1482.

The main culprit in this plot was Malick Nayeb who, a mere five years after the death of his victim, was himself brutally murdered by his opponents. After the death of Gawan, the Shama Sultanate could not recover its stability, and it came to an end in 1564 with the death of its last king. After numerous rebellions, this one sultanate was split up into five separate kingdoms.

Single-Mindedness

No worthwhile goal can be achieved in life without the kind of single-minded devotion to its pursuance which cuts out all other trivial interests.

In an interview published in *The Times Offspring* * (March 26, 1987) the well-known writer and journalist, Khushwant Singh, was asked how it was that he, a media man, was so against television. He replied, "well, I am against my viewing it. I had a set in Bombay at my residence and, as a result, I could not concentrate on anything else. I would simply switch on the T.V and see the programme being transmitted, whatever nonsense it might be. So I told the television company to take it back, since I prefer to read and write."

Mr. Khushwant Singh, in doing so, displayed a strong sense of priority. Any man with a purpose in life has to develop this awareness of priorities if his efforts are to be crowned with success. No-worthwhile goal can be achieved in life without the kind of single-minded devotion to its pursuance which cuts out all other trivial interests.

First, one must clearly identify one's objectives, place them in the correct perspective and then focus one's entire attention on them. These are the indispensable preconditions for ultimate success.

* A supplement to *The Times of India*

Think Before You Speak

While we give careful consideration to what we say to or about our superiors or those who please us, we do not stop to think of what we say to or about our inferiors or those who displease us.

The Prophet has been * recorded as saying: "A man sometimes says something to which he has not given due consideration and, because of this, he falls into the Fire – a distance further than that between east and west."

How easily people make remarks of the utmost gravity for others, without considering what they say. How easily they hurt others, damage their reputations and cause all manner of strife because they do not care to make sure that what they say is true, or trouble their imaginations with what the impact of their words is likely to be. The evil of what they say may be staring them in the face, but they choose to ignore it. This is what will send them hurtling – could they but realize it – into the Fire.

Another aspect of this disregard for others is that while we give careful consideration to what we say to or about our superiors or those who please us, we do not stop to think of what we say to or about our inferiors or those who displease us. We make accusations, besmirch, another's good name, all without proof, and just on the basis of hearsay or our own idle, ill-judged suppositions.

*By Abu Hurayrah,

15 February 1988

Keeping to One's Own Seat

Today, few are content to remain in their own 'seats' but wish to usurp those of others. In the constant lusting after power and material advantage, people stop only when forced to by circumstances.

An old Mea woman with a bundle on her head once boarded a bus passing through Mewat, only to find that there were no seats available. Another passenger, aiming to have a bit of fun, pointed out the driver's seat to her, and told her to go and sit there. Not realizing the difference between the driver's seat and the other seats, she promptly went forward and settled down on it with her bundle. When the driver got on a little later, he asked her why on earth she was sitting there when he had to drive the bus from that seat. The old Mea woman adjusted her luggage and said with composure, "Now that I've made myself comfortable here, why don't you go and drive your bus from some other seat!"

When seen in the setting of the bus, this is simply the story of an error made out of ignorance. But how often do we find people trying to occupy others' 'seats' in the broader material setting of today's world. It is the story not of ignorance or illiteracy, but of greed, envy and the craving for power. Today, few are content to remain in their own 'seats' but wish to usurp those of others. In the constant lusting after power and material advantage, people stop only when forced to by circumstances.

In this world of God, each and every thing has its own sphere, the outer limits of which must be respected. In this way, the heavenly bodies revolve in their own orbits and nowhere else. The animals of the jungle too stay in their own territory, transgressions being few and far between, and then only because of natural disasters or the depredations of man. In this world of God, there is only one creature—man—who does not accept that there must be boundaries to his own personal world. Planning to take possession of that which rightfully belongs to others, he frequently goes beyond all limits.

In the case of the old Mea woman, it was her foolishness which was to blame. But in the case of the power-hungry, it is rebellion against God's will. According to the law laid down by the Almighty, foolishness is a pardonable weakness, whereas rebelliousness is an offence against His divine will and as such, is unpardonable.

Banish Despair

Adverse circumstances can arouse latent potential and act as a spur to greater and more determined action. That great souls are the product not of ease but of adversity is borne out by history.

One of Einstein's biographers writes : "We can take heart that it is not necessary to be a good student to become Einstein." Considering that Professor Albert Einstein (1879-1955) brought about a veritable revolution in twentieth-century science, this statement would seem to be something of a paradox. But it is quite true. One of his teachers summed him up as a "lazy dog" and he was even once expelled from school, so inept was he in his studies. He was not even able to gain admission to the Zurich Polytechnic at the first try, because his marks were not high enough. It took a whole further year of hard work to get him his admission.

No signs of his extraordinary genius appeared until he was twenty years of age. But then he began to work really hard, and ended by outstripping all other contemporary scientists. With the passage of time, his fame, if anything has continued to grow.

It is remarkable that a child of ordinary parents in humble circumstances should have been so successful. But history abounds in instances of men starting with nothing, yet scaling phenomenal heights of success. The thing which they have in common is their dedication to a goal. Einstein certainly falls into this category, for he lived a very simple life, remaining engrossed in his work until late at night. Offered the presidency of Israel, he refused, saying that politics was the 'cancer of humanity'. When he left Germany in 1933, Hitler's government put a 20,000 mark price on his head. That was a very large sum of money in those days, but such was the awe and reverence which Einstein commanded that no one dared come forward to make a bid for this prize.

When we consider the drawbacks in Einstein's early life – the lack of financial resources, his inability to speak at all until he was three, the hostility of his school environment – we must marvel at his late attainments. We must also see in this the lesson that adverse circumstances can arouse latent potential and act as a spur to greater and more determined action. That great souls are the product not of ease but of adversity is borne out by history. This being so, no one who is financially or culturally disadvantaged should feel himself irrevocably the prisoner of his circumstances. He should banish despair, for there is no end to possibilities in this world. It is simply a question of his being determined to make the best use of them.

Preserving A Discreet Silence

Obviously, there are moments in life when 'silence is golden'. And although speech, according to the old adage, may be 'silver', there are frequent occasions when the only discreet thing to do is remain silent.

During the Battle of Uhud, at a point when the Prophet and his companions were under the greatest pressure from the enemy, the Prophet was badly wounded by one of the Quraysh who threw a stone at him with such force that it drove the links of his helmet into his cheek, cut his lip and broke a tooth. Bleeding and in a semi-fainting condition, the Prophet fell into a shallow pit. No longer visible on the field of battle, he was proclaimed dead by the enemy. But just then, one of the companions caught sight of him and exclaimed. "Here is the Prophet!" He had spoken out without thinking that he was placing the Prophet's life in jeopardy. However, the Prophet, without making a sound himself, signalled him to keep quiet. Later, at an opportune moment, he made his escape from the scene of combat.

Obviously, there are moments in life when 'silence is golden'. And although speech, according to the old adage, may be 'silver', there are frequent occasions when the only discreet thing to do is remain silent. The Prophet's view was that "one" who believes in God and the Last Day should utter words of goodness, or else keep quiet." The Prophet also taught his followers that sometimes silence was better than speech, giving as an example the man who breaks the silence himself to tell his neighbour to keep quiet while the Imam is delivering his sermon.

If silence, as a matter of discretion, is important in private gatherings, where whole nations are concerned it becomes ultra-important. In a delicate situation, a massive confrontation may be averted, if only leaders have the strength of character to remain silent. It is easy to indulge in spectacular outbursts, particularly since that is what fires the imagination of the general public, but much more difficult to exercise caution and restraint, and certainly a less attractive course for a leader to follow since a strategic silence is unlikely to impress one's followers. Leaders need to be less occupied with the histrionics of the political platform and more attentive to the wisdom of Sister Consolata who once said: "The greatest number of failings in a community come from breaking the rule of silence.

18 February 1988

A New Kind of Slavery

When it cost us so much to free ourselves from colonial slavery, how is it that this kind of slavery we call 'brain drain' passes unchallenged, and we take no action against it?

On a recent visit of India, Nobel prize-winner Sir Andrew Huxley, who is currently President of the Royal Society in London, delivered a lecture at the Indian National Science Academy –" Science and Politics" –in which he stressed the fact that at present it was only the U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. who had the resources to do really advanced research in Science, and that although Britain was doing good work in various fields, this had to be with the collaboration of several Western European Countries. He pointed out how ironical it was that though the developing countries were still so far behind the rest of the world in scientific research, their much-needed talent was rapidly being drained off by the industrialized countries.

The elder generation sacrificed a great deal to be able to oust Western usurpers from their country and it is now with grief and incredulity that they see the brightest members of the present generation flock to the West, ostensibly to do well for themselves, but stubbornly refusing to face up to the fact that by allowing their talents to be exploited, they enable the West to retain its world leadership.

The best way to surmount this difficulty would be to adopt Britain's solution: arrange to pool resources with a number of other countries and then forge ahead with advanced scientific research. This would create a viable outlet for indigenous talent, so that it need not be lost to other countries. But the sad reality is that in the Third World, there are no two countries who are willing to enter into a whole-hearted cooperation with each other. They find it easy to unite in order to destroy, but not in order to construct. When it cost us so much to free ourselves from colonial slavery, how is it that this kind of slavery we call 'brain drain' passes unchallenged, and we take no action against it?

19 February 1988

Bringing Order out of Chaos

Consideration for others must always be one's first response in any given situation, particularly when it concerns the keeping confidences, for the disclosure of others' faults or secrets shows a mindless callousness which breeds nothing but ill-will.

The world of nature is a world of order. How different is the world of man, where human affairs so often descend into chaos, because members of society flout those very principles which should bring order into their lives. Social living, if it is to be successful, should be regulated by laws which are as inexorable as the laws of nature. These laws can be effective, however, only if man fully grasps the necessity to adhere to them. He must realize that society without order, is like a factory without electricity. It simply will not work.

It should also be realized that the prevalence of certain virtues over their opposing vices is a great contributing factor in maintaining order. Generosity, broadmindedness, forgivingness and gentlemanly behaviour must respectively override miserliness, narrow-mindedness, vengefulness and meanness. Consideration for others must always be one's first response in any given situation, particularly when it concerns the keeping confidences, for the disclosure of others' faults secrets shows a mindless callousness which breeds nothing but ill-will. Above all, promises must always be kept.

Certain traits of character are naturally supportive of social order. Knowing what a situation requires of one, whether it is a matter of conscience or discretion, is always conducive to harmonious living. Just knowing what to say, and when to speak and when to remain silent is one of the greatest social virtues. Knowing whether to adopt a hard or a soft attitude, whether to be firm or whether to be pliant is equally important.

People who understand these niceties of social coexistence, and put them into practice, are vital to the solidarity of a community, without them, order would degenerate into anarchy.

Travelogue

Some are traveling beckoned by joy, others by tragedy. Some are heading towards material gain, others towards serious losses. At first glance, it would appear that every wayfarer is bent on reaching a different destination, but when we think of our ultimate lot in life, there is but a single destination – the grave. Death is the one certain goal in life, but it is the one of which we have the least awareness.

In February 1986, I made my tenth trip to Hyderabad. (The details of my first 6 visits were published in the October 1983 issue. My seventh visit, in connection with the inauguration of the branch of our centre at Hyderabad, which was graced by the presence of Mr. Mukassar Shah and Mr. Syed Hashim Ali, was reported at length in the local papers: *Siyasat*, *Munsif* and *Rehnuma-e-Deccan* of the 12th February, 1984. details of my 8th trip in July, 1984 were published in November, 1985. My 9th trip, in January 1986, was of a mere organizational nature, and a programme to meet the general public could not be arranged on that occasion.)

The present account of my tenth trip starts with my reaching Delhi Airport at 6 a. m. on the 13th of February, 1987. There I found the usual hectic activity. In the general mass of people, there were faces which shone with tranquility, but there were many others which bore the stamp of misery. I thought to myself, that's life. Some are travelling beckoned by joy, others by tragedy. Some are heading towards material gain, others towards serious losses. At first glance, it would appear that every wayfarer is bent on reaching a different destination, but when we think of our ultimate lot in life, there is but a single destination – the grave. Death is the one certain goal in life, but it is the one of which we have the least awareness.

Once on the plane, I picked up the airline monthly, *Swagat*, in which there was an article on the Christian Church with numerous photographs of church interiors. One of them depicted the piteous, helpless figure of Jesus Christ nailed to the cross. This reminded me of a European Christian once having remarked to me that the decline in Christianity was due not to the faith itself but to the Church. On the one hand, the Church proclaims Jesus to be the son of God, while on the other hand, it depicts him alone, forlorn and helpless on the cross.

When the educated youth of today observe the universe in all its vastness and complexity, they fail to comprehend how the son of its Creator and Sustainer could have been so brutally slain by mere mortals.

Today, the name, Hyderabad, denotes a town, whereas it was once a State the size of Italy, with a Nawab who was reckoned to be the richest man in the world. The founder of this State was Sultan Quli Qutub Shah, an officer of the Behmani Sultanate. Leading a rebellion in 1512, he established his own

independent kingdom, which later came to be known as the Qutub Shahi Sultanate. This Sultanate came to an end when it was annexed by Aurangzeb to the Mughal Empire in 1685, and placed under the rule of a Mughal Governor. A later governor, Nizam ul mulk Asif Jah, who was appointed in 1713, cut himself off from the Mughal Empire in 1764 to found an independent Sultanate. In undivided India, it was the largest state.

It is also significant that all communal riots to date have taken place in the old city, and never in Secunderabad or the new city. This can be explained in terms of the high level of literacy in the newer areas, as opposed to the general illiteracy of the masses in the older areas.

When India gained its independence, the Nawab at that time wanted to preserve the independent status of his realm, and he did succeed in obtaining a "Stand Still Agreement" from the new Indian government, signed on 29 November, 1947, which would have guaranteed Hyderabad a semi-independent statehood but "his plan miscarried, largely because a local populist Muslim leader launched a militant movement (the Razakars) that provided a motive for Indian military forces to intervene and restore order, in September, 1948. Hyderabad accepted the same conditions as other former princely states and was later partitioned and disappeared from the map." (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 9/423).

Whatever the concomitant factors were, this is an oft repeated tale in the history of Muslim sovereignty – the rebellion against central authority, followed by a temporary autonomy, which comes to a disastrous end, thanks to the folly and short-sightedness of local rule. The birth and death of Hyderabad are both tragic aspects of this turbulence in Muslim history.

Hyderabad has a 30-lakh population, 45% of which is Muslim. But more than 80% of that number reside in the old city, with only a handful in the new city. The pattern is similar in most of the cities in India, and is symptomatic of Muslims having been outdistanced by others, whereas in former times theirs had been the most advanced community. It is also significant that all communal riots to date have taken place in the old city, and never in Secunderabad or the new city. This can be explained in terms of the high level of literacy in the newer areas, as opposed to the general illiteracy of the masses in the older areas.

Experience having shown us that education acts as a buffer against communal riots, well wishers who genuinely wish to put a stop to them should work towards educating the community.

One of old Hyderabad's more acute problems is the narrowness of the roads and the increase in traffic. Sometimes the streets are so jammed with vehicles that you almost feel you could reach your destination faster on foot. There is a standing joke that if you offer a pedestrian a lift, he will refuse, because he's in too much of a hurry to travel by car.

Experience having shown us that education acts as a buffer against communal riots, well wishers who genuinely wish to put a stop to them should work towards educating the community.

There are several places of historical interest in Hyderabad, which are a great attraction for tourists. The most prominent of these is the Salar Jung Museum, where a wonderful assortment of 40,000 beautiful and exotic items are on display. Built by the former Prime Minister of Hyderabad, it is believed to be the only one of its kind in the East. The collection includes a marble statue of a woman wrapped in a wet cloth, emerging from her bath. The depiction in stone is so realistic that she appears to be a living creature. Seeing such great artistry, I felt that perhaps God had endowed man with this creative genius so that he would be eternally reminded of his Maker's superior creativity.

When Hyderabad State was in its heyday, one of the great luminaries was Nawab Imadul Mulk Maulvi Sayed Hussain Bilgiri. Highly educated, he was fluent in English, French, Persian and Arabic, besides his mother tongue, Urdu. He served in various capacities and later became the Head of the Education Department. In the course of his 30 years of service, various honours and titles were bestowed upon him. In 1910, he began working on an English translation of the *Quran*, but it was left unfinished.

Nawab Imadul Mulk was renowned for his candour. In his book, *Some Contemporaries*, Maulvi Abdul Haq writes that once when the former Nizam of the Deccan, Mir Mehboob Ali Khan, enquired of his nobles what his subjects thought of him, they responded with exaggerated praise. Only Imadul Mulk remained silent. When pointedly asked to give an answer, he said that people regarded him as a drunkard who paid no attention to the administration of the state or to the welfare of his subjects. The Nizam, impressed, by such plain speaking, presented him with a priceless diamond ring as a reward.

The Nizam's successor, *Mir Osman Ali Khan, was less tolerant of Imadul Mulk. Maulvi Abdul Haq relates how once when Osman Ali Khan was discussing marriage, he said that Islam showed great leniency in the number of wives it allowed a man to have. Imadul Mulk at once corrected him, pointing out that Islam, on the contrary had laid down such strict conditions (i.e. a man must be certain that he is in a position to give equal treatment to all of his wives. Otherwise he should not contract further marriages), that no one would dare to have more than one wife. The Shah was upset at such forthrightness and had him removed from the dinner table, where the conversation had taken place. Had Mir Osman Ali Khan but known that he himself would soon be removed from his throne, he might have shown greater tolerance towards his subordinate.

The pages of Hyderabad history have more than one vital lesson to teach us. During the regime the Prime Minister's post was usually held by a Hindu nobleman, For example, in 1940, Maharaja Sir Khishan Parshad held this post, one of his assets being his fluency in Arabic, Persian and English.

Ignorance of one's destiny is often responsible for many acts of arrogance. A foretaste of the future would surely cure one of this failing.

The pages of Hyderabad history have more than one vital lesson to teach us. During the regime the Prime Minister's post was usually held by a Hindu nobleman. For example, in 1940, Maharaja Sir Kishan Parshad held this post, one of his assets being his fluency in Arabic, Persian and English. The lower

echelons were usually composed of Muslims, for whom such posts were reserved, as it was a major source of income for them in those days. This placed the Hindu majority at a disadvantage, but it turned out to be a blessing in disguise for it forced them to turn their attention elsewhere. In this way, they began exploring the avenues of commerce. They proved so successful in business that they ultimately gained a monopoly of this sphere. This would appear to bear out the old saying that in every cloud, there's a silver lining. A loss can always be turned to good account, provided one is sufficiently determined about it.

The strangest incident of my trip took place on the eve of the 15th of February, just as I was coming out of the Public Gardens after delivering a speech. A young man suddenly forced his way through the group of people who had collected around me to shake hands with me. He asked me what I thought my best piece of writing was. I replied that the young man standing before me was my best work to date. At this he was silent for a moment, then vowed to live up to my high expectations of him. I was greatly moved by his ardour, and beseeched the Almighty to fulfill this youth's desire and to create many more such enthusiasts who would undertake my mission after me, and carry it even further along the road of progress.

The readership of *Al-Risala* is now quite high in Hyderabad. It is interesting that they have started a new venture called 'Bookstall' which involves the setting up of at least two bookstalls, one on a Friday in front of the Jama-Masjid and another on Sunday at the weekly function at the Public Gardens. This method of propagating the Islamic message has proved really effective, and I feel that in other towns this would be a good example to follow.

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Someone asked me if a travelogue written by him would be published in *Al-Risala*. I told him that the travelogues which appeared in our magazine were usually of the kind that taught a lesson, and that if the work he submitted was along these lines, it would, God willing, appear in print.

An industrialist whom I met there, a Mr. Prem Murarka, had received a copy of the English edition of *Al-Risala* from a Muslim friend of his. It seems that he had been so impressed by two lines written on the front page, that he could not help but read on. He had liked what he read so much that he became a regular reader. He told me that many others in his community liked *Al-Risala* and wanted to subscribe to it. It is, in fact, thanks to him that *Al-Risala's* circulation has increased in the Hindu community there.

*The Nizam's son, who ascended the throne in 1911 and remained in power till the end of the regime in 1948.

Another regular reader of *Al-Risala* was Mr. Mahadevan Reddy of Himayat Nagar, a retired government officer who is fluent in Urdu. He told me that he had read *Tazkirul-Quran*, volume I, five times and was in the process of reading it a sixth time. He said he was extremely keen to have the second volume.

A gathering held at the residence of an advocate, a Mr. Aziz Ahmed Khan, was attended by Muslim scholars and other luminaries. In the course of the conversation, one of the facts that I learnt was that when the Nizam's rule came to an end, local Muslims had been extremely worried, for, without the patronage of their old ruler, their government jobs, their sole source of livelihood, had suddenly ceased to exist. Their miseries were only temporary, however, for, finding all familiar doors closed, they turned of necessity to business, and now, after 40 years in this line, Muslims have a considerable share in the Hyderabad business community. From playing no part at all in the business world during the Nizam's rule, they managed to project themselves into the highest echelons of the successful.

Personal failure can always be converted into success, and there are many who show great acumen in doing so, but sadly there are very few who can apply such personal experiences to community affairs.

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In the January 1987 issue of *Al-Risala*, an article entitled, 'This is not Islam' makes a critical appraisal of Muslims' over-reaction to any overt criticism of Islam. The case in point was the misdirected attack by Muslims on an editor who had published what they considered a literary jibe at Islam. Quoting the *Quran* in support of restraint in such matters, the article castigates those who, on the basis of insufficient evidence, go on a rampage, burning and destroying property. One reader raised objections to the view presented in this article, but did not support his argument by referring to the *Quran* or the *Hadith*. I, therefore, explained to him that if there were to be any debate on points which already had the backing of the Scriptures, he should have to cite passages from those same scriptures in order to support his viewpoint, for the truth of the *Quran* and *Hadith* could not be disparaged by personally concocted arguments. This is a common error made by the Muslims of today, that is whenever any debatable point has to be defended, they pass over quotations from the Scriptures in favour of their own home-made reasoning, and this in spite of the fact that it is sheer heresy to do so. A Muslim must present the *Quran* and *Hadith* in answer to questions relating to the *Quran* and *Hadith*.

A person I met for the first time in Nanded in July 1975, a Mr. Kishan Jewant Rao Patil, had come to Hyderabad with some companions. I learnt that he had been reading *Al-Risala* in Urdu right from the beginning and that he had maintained a complete file of all the issues. The surprising thing in all this is that his mother tongue is Marathi, and that before our first meeting, he had not known a single word of Urdu. It seems that when I told him I would be bringing out a monthly magazine in Urdu, he was so impressed by our talks, that he promptly engaged an Urdu tutor so that he would be able to read the magazine as soon as it came out. And he has been faithfully reading *Al-Risala* in Urdu from that time to

the present. A friend of his who had come along with him, a Mr. Ganga Dhar, did not understand Urdu at all, but liked to have *Al-Risala* read out to him and explained in Marathi by Mr. Kishan Patil. When I asked the latter what benefit he derived from *Al-Risala*, he claimed that his whole way of thinking had undergone a tremendous change for the better. He said that formerly he had been just like an animal, thinking of nothing but earning in order to fill his belly. But *Al-Risala* had changed all that by giving him proper objectives in life. Impressed by the pains he had taken to learn Urdu and Marathi being quite dissimilar and by the obvious maturity of his thinking, I spent quite some time in conversation with him.

A Muslim must present the Quran and Hadith in answer to questions relating to the Quran and Hadith.

Habib Bhai, the Proprietor of Pioneer Dying and Printing Works, related an experience which I feel is worth reproducing here. He had gone to an office, where a picture of a beautiful natural scene hung upon the wall. It bore the caption, "If you don't understand my silence, you will never understand my words." What profundity! How true it is that very little of an inner reality can be expressed in words. It is only a man of acute perceptiveness who can go beyond words to the essential truth.

Habib Bhai's grandfather used to advise him to learn at least one new thing every day, even if it were only a new way to tie a knot. This was a great piece of sagacity, for life is of such dynamism that one must always be on the alert to keep pace with it. It is possible, with effort, for a man to rise high in life, but it is all too easy to fall far behind. The only way, therefore, to keep on progressing is to remain in perpetual intellectual pursuit of whatever is new in the world around us.

The speeches at Hyderabad were usually on specific topics, such as the awakening of the spirit of Islam, (all the lessons from the *Quran & Hadith* were conducted along these lines), Islam and the present age, (attempts were made to show that Islam is an eternal religion, a truth which is upheld by scientific discoveries) and the building up of society. Under this last heading, it was shown that the doors of progress contrary to what is generally believed are wide open to Muslims in this country. It is simply that the particular time and circumstances demand a judicious approach. The fourth topic was the all important mission of introducing Islam to others. In this, special emphasis was laid on the relationship between Muslims and other communities, that of *Dayee* and *Madoo* (caller and called) rather than that of rivals, or opponents. The point was stressed that one must be eager to show non-Muslims the path of true guidance, rather than pray for their downfall, or curse them. Such curses eg., praying to God to destroy them could never be acceptable to God, even if they were repeated for a hundred years.

The doors of progress contrary to what is generally believed are wide open to Muslims in this country. It is simply that the particular time and circumstances demand a judicious approach.

At a press conference on the 14th February, I began by touching upon the conditions in the country, and specifying the aims of the Islamic Centre. This was followed by a question and answer session of considerable duration, in the course of which I took the opportunity to point out that the image of the Indian Muslim projected by the national press was one-sided. For example, *The Times of India* calls

Indian Muslims a 'clamorous group', (3 January, 1987). This is not entirely wrong, because there are a certain number of noisy trouble makers among the Muslims. But the press should refrain from giving them undue prominence, and give more coverage to other members of the community who remain busily engaged in some work or the other of a constructive nature. The style of journalism nowadays is largely to blame for this bad news being known to sell more newspapers than good news! And then what is news? A safe landing is not news, but a hijacking is!

On this issue, I informed members of the press of the broad range of constructive work carried out by our Arabic and Islamic schools. Literally lakhs of our young people are awakened by them to a sense of moral responsibility. They in turn become a source of inspiration to so many others and, in this way, standards of moral discipline are kept high throughout the country. But if we were to accept the picture of Muslims drawn by the press, we would imagine that the very reverse was taking place. Have newspaper readers ever been informed by the press of the way in which Tablighi Jamaat has diverted lakhs of people from external confrontation to internal reformation? The answer is 'no', because such constructive work does not make headlines.

The style of journalism nowadays is largely to blame for this. Bad news being known to sell more newspapers than good news! And then what is news? A safe landing is not news, but a hijacking is!

Over and above the meetings at Hyderabad, some were also held at Mehboobnagar. By the grace of God, all these assemblies were quite successful, especially since they were well attended by the educated elite. I was informed that the people who attended these gatherings were usually never seen at other Muslim assemblies. This gave the impression that the intelligentsia had been giving serious thought to the message and mission of the Islamic Centre and *Al-Risala*. Detailed reports of each day's speeches and assemblies appeared in local newspapers such as *Rehnumai Deccan*, *Siyasat* and *Munsif*. A reader of *Siyasat* told me that the headlines which appeared on 15 February 1987. 'The need for Constructive Thinking Among Indian Muslims' was entirely due to our centre's efforts for, otherwise, no such positive headlines on Muslim topics ever appeared in print.

On the 16th of February, the programme at Mehboob Nagar Madrasa-e-Siraj-ul-Uloom included a speech on Islam and Asre-Hazir (contemporary age). This too was very well attended by educated and prominent citizens, and I was informed later that, the degree to which the audience had been influenced by this speech was quite unusual.

One of the places of interest we visited near Mehboobnagar was what appeared to be a small forest of trees, but was actually a cluster of off-shoots from a single Bargad tree, which is said to be 400 years old. Its old name was Pir Laman, but now it is known as 'Pillalamarri'.

This being a development area, the collector offered land to Hindus, Christians and Muslims on which to build their places of worship. The Hindus and Christians were prompt in accepting this offer and in fact, a modern church is already under construction there. But the Muslims have still not availed of this

opportunity. I feel that this is an area of great potential in which land will be rapidly bought up. This will, of course, have the effect of raising land prices considerably, so that when the Muslims finally decide that they would like to put up a mosque, it will be extremely difficult for them to do so. They should not lose sight of the fact that a mosque would greatly benefit the Muslim workers of that area, not to speak of the steady stream of tourists.

A Muslim businessman of Mehboobnagar took me along to see his rice mill, where he had had modern machinery installed. He explained that there were no less than seven stages in the process of producing polished rice from unhusked grain. I told him that this was nature's lesson to man – the lesson of gradualism, of doing things in a properly phased manner. Many are those who fall by the wayside because, failing to appreciate this, they try to achieve success in one gigantic leap.

Have newspaper readers ever been informed by the press of the way in which Tablighi Jamat has diverted lakhs of people from external confrontation to internal reformation? The answer is no, because such constructive work does not make headlines.

Another businessman of Mehboobnagar, being by profession of a practical turn of mind, expressed the view that one certain solution to the communal problem would be to establish better relations with our fellow-countrymen. He felt that instead of making speeches against the government, and approaching the administration for solutions, it would be better to improve and increase our channels of communication. He gave many instances in support of this view. It is, of course, a fact, that if Muslims had exerted themselves to improve their relations with their neighbours, instead of squandering their time and energy in anti-government activities, all our problems could have been solved long ago. In the course of the conversation, I laid emphasis on introducing Islam to non-Muslims. This sparked off the argument that when Muslims themselves are far from being truly Islamic in thought, word and deed, it is unlikely that they will encourage others to do so. I put forward the idea that this was the work of Satan. It was Satan who had engraved this misconception upon the modern Muslim mind, for Islam is not accepted on the strength of Muslim behaviour, but by virtue of its own essential truth. In support of this, I cited the example of a certain Yousuf Islam, an Englishman, and several other notable converts, who had embraced Islam, knowing full well that the moral status of contemporary Muslims was seriously in decline.

Returning to Delhi on February 17, by flight number 539, I found myself seated next to Mr. D. P. Gupta, the General Manager of BHEL. From our conversation I gathered that he was a competent, hardworking officer and an able administrator. Further questions on my part brought to light the fact that this was due to his religious background. His father, a highly qualified person, fluent in English, Hindi, Persian and Arabic, had learnt many verses of the *Quran* by heart, and often recited them. Mr. Gupta himself was fluent in Urdu. This conversation led me to conclude that a major cause of inefficiency in today's administration is the ever-increasing association of modern employees from the moral and spiritual values of the past. The only way of curing today's workers of their sluggish inefficiency is to re-

inculcate the religious and spiritual values which were formerly enshrined in our time honoured traditions. There appears to be no other solution to this problem.

Another noteworthy fact which emerged from our conversation was excellence of Hindu-Muslim relations fifty years ago. This relationship was so good that Hindus learnt Arabic and Persian, and even memorised verses from the Quran. It is true that there was occasional friction between the two communities, giving rise to untoward incidents, but such things happened no oftener than in any other composite society during any period in world history. Mostly there were incidents affecting individuals at a purely personal level, they should have been kept at that level – not blown up out of all proportion to the communal or national level as they were by ill-advised leaders. This is what destroyed the mutual trust between the two communities and set up barriers between them.