



Al-Risala 1988

January

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THE GREATER FEAR

The cause of man's failure often lies in his failure to recognize major threats and his determination to concentrate all his efforts on minor dangers.

Dr. Dennis Breo has published a book entitled, *Extraordinary Care*, based on interviews with medical specialists who attended on various famous personalities. Many and strange are the revelations he has to make.

He writes that celebrities often prove to be 'impossible patients'. Hitler, for instance, suffered from a skin disease, but considered it beneath his dignity to undress before a doctor. As a result, he could never be given the correct treatment.

The famous American millionaire, Howard Hughes, had a dental ailment, but rather than open his mouth to a doctor, he killed his pain with alcohol.

The most extreme example is that of the Shah of Iran who suffered from leukemia, but refused to have it treated because he felt that it would weaken him politically. (*The Times of India*, March 19, 1987, p.7)

What ultimately brought his power to an end was not this disease of the blood, but the chronic political malaise of his regime. Ignoring the greater danger, he gave all his attention to saving himself from the smaller problems. In consequence, his empire came to an end at the very time when he had done everything in his power to save it.

The cause of man's failure often lies in his failure to recognize major threats and his determination to concentrate all his efforts on minor dangers. This is as true of the great as it is of obscure and ordinary individuals.

Death is not the end of our existence. It is merely the doorway leading from one life to the next. It ushers us into a period in which we reap the results of our trial on earth.

2 January 1988

Care in what one says

Umer Ibn Abdul Aziz was asked what he thought about the Muslims who had been slain in the Battle of Siffeen. "Thank God that He kept my hand from spilling any blood on that day," he replied. "I do not want to pollute my tongue with it either."

THE PATH TO SUCCESS

While taking up the best traditions of the past, we are to build upon them for the future with solid hard work of our own. This method may require years of toil, and temporary disappointment but it is sure to be successful in the end.

When the Indian freedom fighter, Raja Mohendera Pratap, (1886-1979) met Vladimir Lenin in Moscow in 1919, the first thing that the leader of the Russian Socialist Revolution said to his Indian guest was: "In which language should I speak: English, German, French or Russian?" Lenin had learnt all these languages. On this occasion, it was decided that the conversation should be conducted in English.

How had Lenin become so well-acquainted with so many languages? The answer is: by following the example of his elders and then building upon it with solid hard work. Lenin's father died when Vladimir was only sixteen, and he was reared for the most part by his mother, Maria Alexandrova. Her household, writes Lenin's biographer David Shub, "was run along Spartan lines and the children were largely self-educated. Maria Alexandrova taught herself German, French, English and the piano."

The manner in which Lenin followed in the footsteps of his mother is illustrated by his learning of the English language. While banished to Siberia by the Czarist regime (1897-1900), Lenin and his wife, Krupskaya, spent mornings translating Sidney and Beatrice Webb's *Theory and Practice of Trade Unionism*. Not only did they translate the book from English into their native Russian, but Lenin also used to translate it back into English, without referring to the original text. In a letter to his sister Anna, he wrote: "I have concluded from my experience that this is the most rational method of learning a language."

When Lenin and Krupskaya went to England in April 1902, they found that though they had translated Sidney and Beatrice Webb, "their knowledge of English bore only a remote resemblance to the native product. With his usual zest, Lenin set to work learning the language. He went wherever he could hear English spoken, to pubs, to Hyde Park, to all sorts of meetings. Crowding up front, he listened carefully to every word and watched the lip movements of the speakers. In addition, he hired two English teachers whom he taught Russian in exchange for English lessons. With these efforts his English soon became fairly proficient, if not fluent." (*Lenin: A Biography*, by David Shub, Pelican Books, p. 70).

The method that Lenin adopted in learning English shows us the way to success in life. While taking up the best traditions of the past, we are to build upon them for the future with solid hard work of our own. This method may require years of toil, and temporary disappointment, but it is sure to be successful in the end.

4 January 1988

Keeping quiet and letting those who are in position to speak, do so

After the death of the Prophet, hypocrisy took root in Medina, and apostasy set in many parts of Arabia and Persia. The renegades made a plot in Nihevand, Iran. "The Prophet has died," they said, "and it was because of him that God used to help the Muslims. "The successor of the Prophet, Abu Bakr, gathered the Muhajirs and Ansar together, and told them that these Arabs had ceased to pay what was due to the poor on their camels and goats. "They have renegaded on their faith," he said, "and are now plotting in Nihavand to attack you. They think that you have lost the one who used to entitle you to God's succour. Tell me what I should do now. I am just a common man, like anyone of you. In fact, I am the least able to bear the burden of the caliphate." Abdullah Ibn Umer says that the companions sat in silence with their heads bowed for a long while after Abu Bakr had spoken. Only then did Umer Ibn Al-Khattab rise and begin to speak.....

4 January 1988

Fearing God in one's dealings with men

The Prophet once saw Abu Masood Ansari beating his slave. "Be in no doubt, Abu Masood," he said, "God has more power over you than you have over this slave." Abu Masood was filled with trepidation when he heard the Prophet's words. "Messenger of God," he said, "I am freeing this slave for the sake of God." "If you had not acted thus," the Prophet told him, the fire of hell would have enveloped you" (Abu Dawood).

5 January 1988

STABILITY

Building one's life is not just like building a child's play house, which can be put up in a matter of hours. It is a matter of putting down roots, and tolling patiently ever upwards.

Man is in constant need of guidance, and God's ways of guiding him are manifold. Everywhere in the world of nature around us, He has set His signs for us to read.

There is the creeper, which, in a mere matter of months, grows, spreads, bears its flowers and its fruits and then dies. It is a thing of beauty, a source of nourishment and, as such, is a joy to man. But it does not last forever and when it dies, it so withers away that it might never have existed. There is no sign of it even underfoot.

Man cannot help comparing it with the tall fruit tree, slow of growth, slow to blossom and bear fruit but living on for many years, sometimes even centuries, and never failing to provide man with its shade, its flowers, its luscious fruits. These two examples in nature are God's silent messages to us; they are His way of guiding us towards the right course of action in life, and steering us away from what will ultimately lead us to failure.

When it comes to the building of a whole nation, we should not attempt to spread fast like the creeper in the hopes of quick results, but should instead emulate the tree which may take years of anxious waiting to grow to maturity, but which sends down its roots deep into the soil (there is as much of the tree below as above the ground) and which endures the ravages of the seasons and the passage of the years. Even before it is fully grown it is of a rock-like stability, causing no harm to anyone, creating no problems, and bringing only benefits to mankind. A nation, therefore, should grow with this same steadfastness and stability, for expansion without these qualities is like building a house without foundations.

What applies to the tree applies equally to individual human lives. If their structure is to be solid and long lasting, the course of patience and hard work must be adhered to.

Building one's life is not just like building a child's play house, which can be put up in a matter of hours, and which can also collapse in a matter of minutes. It is a matter of putting down roots, and toiling patiently ever upwards.

DETERMINATION PLUS DILIGENCE

Even without money, other kinds of resources or guidance, a man can achieve success, provided his desire to do so is keen enough and his diligence matches his determination.

The desire is all that matters

A competition was once held to see who could write the largest and most beautifully formed letters of the Urdu alphabet in the sand along the banks of the Jamuna. Among the many calligraphers who had gathered to compete was Ustad Yousuf Dehlavi (d. 1977), who was renowned for the extraordinary command he had over his art. Writing in the sand with a bamboo shoot, he covered a distance of one entire furlong with the first 17 letters of the alphabet (from *Alif* to *Shin*) at which point he was requested to stop, as this was quite enough to demonstrate the superiority of his skill. He then asked for the letters to be coloured and photographed from a plane, so that they could be viewed all together on a reduced scale. He claimed that the letters in the photograph would look exactly the same as his own handwriting done on a normal scale. After this, none of the other competitors even dared to demonstrate their art.

After Partition, he left for Pakistan, where he continued to earn distinctions. On one occasion he was asked to write words of welcome on an arch through which Shah Saud, the King of Saudi Arabia was to pass, while on a visit to the country. The Governor General himself came to supervise the welcome arrangements, and during his inspection was amazed to see the truly majestic writing on the welcome arch. He sent for Ustad Yousuf, lavished great praise on his work and asked him how long it had taken him to complete it. Seven days, was the answer. The Governor General then instructed his secretary to give Rs. 7,000 to Ustad Yousuf as a token of his appreciation. A cheque for this amount was immediately handed over to him.

Once asked from whom he had learnt the art of calligraphy, he said that he had not learnt it from anyone-not even from his own father, who had also in his time been famous as a calligrapher. He explained that he had learned simply by copying from examples of the work of the great calligraphers of the Mughal period which are preserved on tablets in the museum at the Red Fort in Delhi. For a period of ten years, Ustad Yousuf used to visit the Red Fort daily to study these masterpieces. Each day, he would memorize one couplet and then try writing it in an identical style when he came back home. The next day, he would take his work to the Red Fort, compare it with the original and then, if necessary, correct his mistakes. In this way, his work was refined and perfected, without a teacher and without money having to change hands.

There is a lesson in this for anyone who aspires to perfection in any chosen field. Even without money, other kinds of resources or guidance, a man can achieve success, provided his desire to do so is keen enough, and his diligence matches his determination.

7 January 1988

Answering criticism without getting angry

A woman of the Banu Asad, whose name was Umm-e-Yaqub, came to Abdullah Ibn Masood. "I hear that you curse the tattooer, and the one who is tattooed," she said. "But I have read the Quran from beginning to end, and have found no mention of this matter. And I bet that even in your household this is being done." "Go to my house and have a look for yourself." Ibn Masood replied. She did so, and could find no sign of any tattoo marks. When she came back, Abdullah Ibn Masood said to her. "Have you not read in the Quran to take what the Prophet gives, and keep away from that which he forbids?" The woman replied that she had. "Well," Ibn Masood said, "this is something that he Prophet forbade."

7 January 1988

Not mentioning anyone with scorn

The Prophet was with Aisha in her chamber. In the course of conversation, she made fun of her co-wife. Safia, and ridiculed her dwarfishness. On hearing this, the Prophet's countenance altered. "You have uttered something which would pollute the colour of the sea were it to be mixed in its waters," he said to her.

OPPOSITE KINDS OF PEOPLE

Allah is the Protector of those who believe. He brings them out of darkness into the light. As for those who disbelieve, their protectors are the devils, who take them out of the light into darkness. They are the inmates of Hell; therein they shall abide for ever.” (Quran, 2: 257)

In this world, people almost invariably fall into two opposing categories: Those who trust in God, and those who trust in others besides God. In the first category are those who accept the truth of the revealed word of God, and duly pattern their lives upon it. In the second category are those who regulate their lives not in accordance with the word of God, but in accordance with a whole range of secular considerations.

The minds of those who accept God as their Patron and Protector are ever turned towards Him. Whenever they have to concern themselves with any serious moral issue, their thoughts on the subject are, therefore; cast in a divine mould. Although they think constructively when planning is required, they still recognize the ultimate necessity of depending on God's help. In this way, their emotions centre upon God instead of on human beings, and in situations which would normally arouse anger and the urge for vengeance, they are sublimely capable of showing forbearance and forgiveness. It is such people who journey out of darkness and into the light.

Those who reject God as their Patron in favour of the devil pursue the reverse course. Most often in a destructive frame of mind, their time and energies are spent in plotting against others, wrecking vengeance on them and generally approaching moral issues in the most negative of terms. They set great store by their own scheming and strategies, never suspecting that there is another path which would lead them out of the darkness in which they grope and struggle. If they cannot or will not recognise this path, it is because the devil has lead them away from the divine light into darkness.

While the first group are destined to prosper both in this world and the next, the latter group are doomed to failure in both worlds. (UA/129:2)

9 January 1988

Too Late in the Day

Born in 1921, Jean Bedal Bokassa rose to the rank of General in the Central African army. Although so high in rank, he felt his ambitions were still not satisfied, and in January 1966, he organised a military coup, overthrew the government of President David Dacko and installed himself, as President of Central Africa. But General Bokassa was not satisfied even with becoming President Bokassa, for he feared losing the presidency in the coming elections, so, in 1976, he dissolved parliament and proclaimed himself Emperor, even going through a coronation ceremony.

All was not plain sailing, however, for Emperor Bokassa had now to grapple with the realities of French economic control. With valuable Central African mines still in its grasp, France perceived a threat to its economic interests under the new regime. With French help, therefore, another military coup was staged in 1980 and Mr. David Dacko was re-installed as the Central African President. Bokassa fled the country, took refuge in France, but returned in October 1986 to Africa where he was arrested upon entering the country. He was thereupon charged with a whole series of crimes including the murder of forty people and the handing out of millions of dollars in bribes from the Government Treasury. Addressing the Criminal Court of Bangui, State Prosecutor Gabriel Mboundou said that in view of the crimes committed by Bokassa during his fourteen years in office, the death penalty was a must. On June 8, 1987, when Bokassa was produced before the court, he made a statement to the effect that he only wanted "to live in peace as a simple citizen."

Finally, Jean Bedel Bokassa had come to realize, although a little late in the day, that the way to find peace in life is to be satisfied with what one has. An earlier realization of this would have prevented him from falling from his position of honour into total disgrace.

God will deal with men on the Day of Resurrection as they have dealt with others in the world

The Prophet said: "Whoever protects the honour of his fellow-man, will be protected by God from the fire of hell on the Day of Resurrection."

FROM SUICIDE TO PERDITION

Death is not the end of our existence. It is merely the doorway leading from one life to the next. It ushers us into a period in which we reap the results of our trial on earth.

The New Delhi edition of Indian Express (28 January, 1987) carried the following account (along with three pictures) of the suicide of a criminal offender:

Escape Through Death

The Pennsylvania State Treasurer, Mr. R. Budd Dwyer, who was convicted by a federal court of conspiracy for bribery, points a pistol into his mouth (top), pulls the trigger (centre) and slumps on the floor (bottom) during a news conference in his office in Harrisburg. U.S.A., before he could be sentenced last Thursday. (AP).

The newspaper headline called it an 'Escape Through Death' but a more accurate headline would have been 'Escape from a Minor to a Major Punishment'.

Death is not the end of our existence. It is merely the doorway leading from one life to the next. It ushers us into a period in which we reap the results of our trial on earth. An individual may reduce the duration of this testing period, but it is not within his power to save himself from entering the world of retribution after death. If only man were fully to comprehend this, his entire way of living would undergo a drastic change. He would immediately forsake the path of license for that of discipline. Instead of committing suicide, he would engage in the most thorough self-appraisal. Then, instead of fearing the wrath of his fellow men, he would fear the wrath of the Almighty.

Meeting in good grace and speaking gently

Ibn Umer said that righteousness was something easy. It consisted of maintaining a gracious expression, and being gentle in one's speech.

11-13 January 1988

Humanity Stands in Wait

For our own motherland a junction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam—Vedanta brain and Islam body – is the only hope. I see in my mind's eye the future perfect India arising out of this chaos and strife, glorious and invincible, with Vedanta brain and Islam body

- Vivekananda

Writing in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the renowned Hindu scholar, Swami Vivekananda, had this to say about Islam:

“The Hindus may get the credit of arriving at it earlier than other races, yet practical Advaitism, which looks upon and behaves to all mankind as one's own soul, was never developed among the Hindus.

“On the other hand, my experience is that if ever any religion approached to this equality in an appreciable manner, it is Islam and Islam alone. I am firmly persuaded, therefore, that without the help of practical Islam, theories of Vedantism, however fine and wonderful they may be, are entirely valueless to the vast mass of mankind.

“For our own motherland a junction of the great two systems, Hinduism and Islam – Vedanta brain and Islam body – is the only hope. I see in my mind's eye the future perfect India arising out of this chaos and strife, glorious and invincible, with Vedanta brain and Islam body.”

– *Letters of Swami Vivekananda*, p. 463

And here is a more recent impression of Islam, that of Mr. Shailendranath Ghosh:

“As one who, early in his youth, was attracted to the Islamic message of social equality and universal sharing of resources and lived, as a peasant organizer, among the Muslim masses for many years in pre-partition Bengal's countryside sharing their ethos; and as one who, in 1947-48, witnessed the depth of their remorse over their earlier separatist craze, I direct this appeal to our Muslim brothers and sisters.

The true interests of the Muslims can be served much better by defining their goal in harmoniously constructive term rather than in a spirit of separatist negativism. To be better Muslims and more prosperous would be a laudable goal. My Muslim brethren need to know that I, a Hindu, am interested in the affairs of the Muslims for many reasons. I had hoped that the Indian Muslims, after their chastening experience of 1947, could turn to another road – to find a separate identity for themselves by being ahead of others in creativity and thus be the harbinger of a new Indian Renaissance. It has happened many times in history that a creative minority has sparked the rebirth of a whole nation.”

The Hindustan Times, April 4, 1986

The patient of this world are those destined according to the law of God, to become leaders of nations. As the Quran puts it: "And we appointed from among them leaders, giving guidance at your command, so long as they persevered with patience" (32:24)

There is a sizeable proportion, indeed, a majority of Hindus in India who have a positive and favourable impression of Muslims, two notable examples of which have been cited above. Those so impressed by the sublime teachings of Islam—particularly the Islamic concept of the oneness of God and the equality of man – sincerely wish that these Islamic values could be more widely disseminated in the land, for, without them, there can be no progress in the true sense of the word. What they await is a Muslim upsurge to fulfill this creative role in society, for they know full well that Muslims have in generous measure the potential to live up to such expectations. Indeed, no other community is in a position to play such a positive role, for it is the Muslims who possess the sole authentic, unaltered edition of God's teachings and the universal message they contain.

Were the Muslims to perform this historic role, they would indubitably establish for themselves a place of honour in modern society. But for this to happen, one all-important condition should have to be fulfilled: they should have to raise themselves above the unfavourable – albeit temporary – circumstances in which they find themselves. This would entail the burying of their grudges and the overlooking of all kinds of injustices. They should have to leave behind them all remorse over what has been lost and dismiss from their minds all thoughts of bitterness and disappointment. The moment they do so, they will be in a position to play the positive role both in India and throughout the world that history has awaited across the centuries.

This will mean sacrifice on their part – what the Quran calls *Sabr*, or patience. The patient of this world are those destined, according to the law of God, to become leaders of nations.

As the *Quran* puts it:

"And we appointed from among them Leaders, giving guidance at our Command, so long as they persevered with patience..." (32: 24).

Giving everything but wanting no worldly return

When the Muslims of Mecca emigrated to Medina, the Prophet told the Ansar of Medina that these Muhajirs were their brothers and sisters; they had left their own properties and families and come to live with them in Medina. "We will give them half of our date groves," the Ansar replied, "and leave half for ourselves. "There is something else you can give them," the Prophet said. "What is that, Prophet of God?" The Ansar asked. "The people of Mecca know nothing of farming and horticulture. "the Prophet told them." You do the work on their behalf and then divide the produce." The Ansar said that they had understood what the Prophet said and would obey him. Jabir says that when the Ansar used to weigh their date crop, they would divide the dates into two portions, one larger and the other smaller. They would put the branches in with portions, one larger and the other smaller. They would give the larger portion to the Muhajirs, and keep the smaller one themselves. This system continued until the Conquest of Khyber. When Bahrain was conquered, the prophet wanted to give the land to the Ansar, but they declined the offer saying that the Muhajirs should receive an equal amount first. "That is not possible," the Prophet told them. "In that case you will have to be patient until you meet in the next world, for after I have gone others will be given priority over you."

13 January 1988

Humility at all times

Abdullah Ibn Masood told how, during the Badr campaign, there was one camel to every three men. People used to ride in turns. It was the same with the Prophet: he was sharing a camel with Abu Lababa and Ali. They both asked the Prophet to ride on the camel: they would walk in his place. "You are no stronger than me," the Prophet told them. "Nor do I have any less need of reward from God than you.

(Al-Badaya wa'n-Nahaya)

Islamic Teachings

Anger

Of all the human emotions, the most destructive is anger. It tears apart human relationships, shatters the harmony of the environment and can destabilize whole communities. As such, it must be recognised as one of the greatest negative forces in society and be kept under strict control.

Alas, it is an emotion which affects all human beings at some time or another, and keeping it under tight rein is often a matter of the greatest difficulty. Fury can be so blinding that it causes a man to forget all norms of human decency - to the point of wishing to humiliate, injure or even kill an opponent. He descends to using vile, harsh language, even comes to blows, all in the attempt to beat his opponent either verbally or physically. His anger does not allow him to see that in so doing he degrades himself as much as the object of his rage. And it is not just the weak, the egoistic, or the ill-natured who fall a prey to such baneful impulses, but even the most morally upright and socially irreproachable members of the community.

Anger gives a momentary illusion of strength, but in actual fact it weakens, degrades and destroys. An otherwise excellent character is seriously marred by fits of rage, for that is what causes a man to forget all his moral precepts and throw his principles to the winds. It was not without good reason that the Prophet said, "A strong man is not one who overwhelms his opponent. A strong man is one who controls himself when he becomes angry."

The advice which the Prophet gave to his companions is advice which we need to follow today: "When one of you becomes angry, he should keep quiet."

But, truly, there is only one thing in this world which can prevent an irate person from going beyond the bounds of decency, and that is the *fear of God*. When an awareness of God's greatness is truly lodged in an individual's heart, this enables him to rein himself in so that he does not stray beyond the limits laid down for him by Almighty. His consciousness of the fact that God will call him to account for each and every one of his actions exercises a powerful restraint upon the anger surging within him. Such is the character of one who fears God, that when he is made angry by a human being, it is God who looms up before him, effectively quelling his anger.

The Quran makes it clear that any such strong, adverse, emotional reaction such as anger does not befit the true believer, and instead cites as a mark of excellence the quality of forgiveness: "When they become angry, they are forgiving" (42:37). The true believer must cultivate the capacity to rise above negative sentiments in his dealings with people so that his relationships with them remain on a positive basis. When anger and bitterness well up inside him, he should not give vent to these feelings but

should, instead, contain and suppress them within his own self. He should live in the world in the way that the flowers do – giving off a sweet fragrance even to those who give nothing but abuse and remaining unruffled even in the face of violent attack.

After making a mistake

However upright one may be, one cannot help but err from time to time in one's dealings with one's fellow-men. There are bound to be occasions when one fails to give another his due or neglects some responsibility towards him. The Quran tells us that at such times we should right the wrongs we have done by immediately doing good. If we lose no time in doing so, we can effectively cancel out any harmful consequences of our wrong-doing. To this end the Prophet counselled: "Fear God wherever you are, and follow up a bad deed with a good deed. In so doing, you will right whatever wrong you have done." This can take various forms. It can mean asking for forgiveness, praying for the one who has been wronged, giving him a present by way of making amends, speaking well of him to others or generally acting as his well-wisher.

The people of Paradise

According to the Quran, Paradise will be free of idle talk and sinful speech. There shall be no lying, no false accusations, and no denigration of others. There will be the most sublime feeling of peace and goodwill, for there will be no ridicule, no abuse, in short, no remarks which are even to the slightest degree inappropriate. For this to be a reality, it will be only those who are truly superior in character who will be ushered through its portals. Paradise is no place for the low in character. It is a place where only the noble shall reside.

It is of the greatest importance then to build up a good character while still in this world, for it is only those who are possessed of the highest qualities of character who will be eligible to take up their abode in Paradise. Those who fall below this high standard will be discarded like so much rubbish and cast into the pit of Hell, there to suffer eternal punishment for the wickedness of their ways.

Organization

Within even the tiniest of seeds, God has concealed the beginnings of a verdant plant: from one tiny kernel can spring forth the loftiest of trees. But this potentiality can be realized only when all of the conditions for its growth are just right – the season, the soil, the temperatures, the sunshine, the rainfall, all must be exactly what the plant needs and only then will our seed sprout and produce the most wonderful of foliage, blossoms and fruits. Suppose we just dropped our seed on a table top and left it to its own resources, there would be no question of its producing a plant, green or otherwise.

Why should this be so? It is because God has created the correct combination of conditions for growth to take place and has laid down a definite pattern for the functioning of every single thing and every single living creature on this earth. This divine pattern has been ordained for all time, and there is nothing which can exist without conforming to it. The slightest deviation from this pattern produces bad results, or no results at all, whereas acting in accordance with it causes all of God's creations to thrive and flourish.

The same is true of our human communities. Once they are entrusted with the divine code of life, as enshrined in the Book of God, they need only adhere strictly to it, never deviating from the "right path", as it is termed in the Quran, to be able to take root and flourish both in this world and the Hereafter.

The right path is that of adherence to a certain discipline in life according to which human beings should live as though bound by a contract made with God. The right path, in fact, will lead man straight to God.

It is written in the Quran:

"God made a covenant with the Children of Israel and raised among them twelve chieftains. He said: "I shall be with you. If you attend to your prayers and pay the poor-due; if you believe in My apostles and assist them and give God a goodly loan, I shall forgive you your sins and admit you to gardens watered by running streams. But he that hereafter denies Me shall stray from the right path" (5:12).

This contract – or covenant – stipulates several religious duties the first of which is prayer, a way of bowing to God and seeking to be close to Him. Next is *Zakat*, which obliges one to be good in giving to others, to behave, in fact, as if they had a basic right to a share in one's earnings. Then there is the duty to spread the word of God. When one hears the call of truth, one is obliged to commit oneself unstintingly to its support and furtherance, and to give one's whole-hearted assistance to those who call mankind to the truth. All of these religious duties taken together are what make up the contract according to which a Muslim must pattern his life. Those who live their lives in such a manner find themselves close to God, and become worthy of His divine assistance.

In order to preserve this God-fearing aspect of life in its true form, Muslims have been called upon to organize themselves, i.e. to set up a system in their society based upon what the Quran calls "hearing and obeying." For this system to function effectively, it must be supervised by community leaders who, once appointed, have to be obeyed irrespective of personal likes or dislikes. Religious duties, such as regular attendance at prayers, broad-scale collection and distribution of *Zakat*, the systematic propagation of the message of true religion, can all be the more effectively carried out once a social order has been established in each Muslim Community, for it provides a framework within which devotees consider it their bounden duty to follow the lead of those appointed to its upkeep.

The task of organizing Muslim brethren need not fall to a governmental body, for this is a duty which ought to be undertaken by the people themselves. Irrespective of whether Muslims are in political power

or not, and regardless of general circumstances. Such organization is, in itself an act of worship, but its aims will be fulfilled only if it is carried out without any external pressure being exerted on the individuals concerned: it will bear fruit only if people engage in it of their own free will.

From the Islamic viewpoint, the organization of society is symbolic of man's submission to the word of God. Adherence to Islamic social order demonstrates not only man's obedience to God, but his having passed the most crucial test in life. Those who refrain from subjecting themselves to such an order live in defiance of God's commandments, thus failing in life's greatest trial.

Political power, it should be emphasized, does not in itself ensure the effective organization of Islamic society. During the respective caliphates of Uthman and Ali, the Muslims wielded political power, yet their organization had become disoriented. Later-day Islamic history abounds in comparable examples. A social order, to be truly Islamic must evince itself in a spontaneous system of organization, such as we see in a mosque, with an *Imam* leading the faithful in the offering of their daily congregational prayers. Although this entails the restriction of personal freedom for the sake of God, one's submission to such a system must be purely voluntary.

Indeed, an individual who subjects himself to an Islamic social order will be deemed worthy of divine reward only if he does so of his own free will. Organization which has been imposed upon people may yield certain worldly gains but it cannot in any religious sense benefit those who have undergone coercion. Nor will such organization itself receive God's blessings, for that is reserved for such systems as have been established in a truly Islamic spirit.

A good example of such organization is to be found in the time of the Prophet, prior to the Muslims' emigration to Medina, and, of course before an Islamic government had been established there. When seventy three men came from Medina to Mecca to swear their allegiance to the Prophet, the latter introduced a system of organization into their ranks by instructing them to elect twelve people from amongst themselves, who would then be responsible for conducting their affairs.

When the Muslims left Arabia, spreading out to various other lands, they formed organizations of this nature wherever they went and lived ordered lives within this framework. So long as this lasted, they lived in the shade of divine protection. It was only when they deliberately rejected such organization and the discipline it entails that they found themselves bereft of God's protection. Despite their continuing to hold political power, they were eventually subjugated by other nations.

Those who enter this Islamic form of organization quite voluntarily – as required by Islam – give definite proof in doing so of their total selflessness. In this way, they show their capacity to suppress their own egos for the greater glory of God. And, indeed, there is no greater act of piety that one can perform. Those who show themselves ready to make such a sacrifice will have multiple blessings bestowed on them by the Almighty, and in this world, they will be granted honour and supremacy. In the hereafter their status will be far above that of the egoists and self-seekers.

When those who have been completely sub-servient of God – to the point of becoming selfless souls – are confronted with the truth, they never hesitate to acknowledge it to be so. Nor do they ever launch themselves on any course of action which might prove ruinous to themselves or to others, either in this world or in the next, for they are prevented from doing so by that very selflessness which makes them bow to God. Never indeed, would they be found to forsake the path of justice.

In truth, all goodness, both in this life and in the Hereafter, lies in selflessness; an individual's self-lessness, or his lack of it, can be seen in his response to organization. The binding of oneself to an organized life can be achieved only by those who have raised themselves above the level of selfish motivation. One who has attained this superior moral status becomes indifferent to praise or blame, and, conversely, his opinion of others does not depend upon whether they agree or disagree with him. Personal likes or dislikes are in no way permitted to mould his behaviour. And whether he has been given his due or not, makes not the slightest difference to him, for, ethically, he is a self-sufficient being.

In the course of a religiously organized life, one has continual opportunities of proving one's mettle in these aspects. But if mundane concerns have come in the way of accepting the discipline of such an organized life, one will remain perpetually enslaved by the dictates of one's own ego, and will lose the opportunity to develop one's moral potential. Those who believe in God, and subject themselves to Islamic discipline, can expect to have countless blessing bestowed upon them. Two of these stand out from the others in importance. The first enables a man to become deserving of divine succour, thus placing him in a position to overcome his opponents with the help of the Almighty, while the second saves him from hell-fire in the Afterlife, thus clearing the way for him to be admitted to the Gardens of Paradise. These blessings are reserved for those and those alone who have suppressed the 'self' for the sake of God, having bound themselves to a social order according to which all their religious and ethical activities are properly organized.

The greatest strength of any society is its unity, and what is most damaging to that unity is the relentless pursuit of personal ambition on the part of its members. It is only when people surrender their individuality to God – to the point of becoming totally absorbed in His Being – that they put an end to this pursuit. It is the society made up of such individuals that speaks with one voice and acts as one body. Where such unity exists, there can be no question of defeat.

Before the advent of Islam, tribalism prevailed in Arabia, each tribe living separately from the other. Barbaric customs were practised and the tribes were usually at war with one another. However, when the Prophet brought God's message to them, they entered the fold of Islam, thus effectively terminating internecine warfare. From then onwards, they lived together as brothers. How could such a change have come about? The answer is to be found in the change of attitude engendered by their acceptance of Islam. Without Islam, a man owes allegiance to no one but himself, whereas, with Islam, a man forgets himself and owes allegiance to none but the Almighty. A whole society made up of truly Islamic individuals is consequently able to banish the confusion and disunity arising out of divided loyalties.

It is in owing allegiance to God alone that a people is blessed with unity. It is in bowing to him that they are imbued with a true sense of direction and purpose, and that their society will advance as if all its members were bound by one and the same rope. From such a society the causes of controversy and disunity will automatically vanish.

The lives of those who adopt religion on the level of individual sacrifice become truly oriented towards God. They proceed unswervingly along a path which will bring them close to the Almighty and to everlasting life with Him. They can never lose their way, and will never let themselves slip from that straight and narrow path, for it is their deepest conviction that it will take them straight to God, and to the Garden which he has prepared for them.

Doing everything, but feeling one has done nothing

Mughaira Ibn Shu'aba's fire-worshipping slave, Abu Lulu, had made his murderous attack on Umer, the second Caliph of Islam. When Umer drank some milk, its whiteness flowed from his wounds, "If I had the earth full of gold." he said, swearing a solemn oath, "then I would give it in order to free myself of the Lord's punishment before it descends on me." "When the Muslims were oppressed," Abdullah Ibn Abbas said to Umer, "the Prophet prayed that God may strengthen both Islam and the Muslims through you. You became Muslim and Islam was the stronger for your conversion. Muslims held their heads high with you at their said. You emigrated to Medina and joined in every campaign with the Prophet. When the latter died, he was well pleased with you. You then became the first Caliph's advisor and assistant; he too was well pleased with you when he left this world. Then you were elected Commander of the Faithful. Through you God gave the Muslims prosperity and progress. His enemies capitulated before you. Now he has given you a martyr's death. Blessed are you."

"The one who believes the like of you will be deceived," Umer said, and then asked. "Abdullah, will you bear witness on my behalf on the Day of Resurrection?" Ibn Abbas said that he would. Umer then asked his own son, also named Abdullah, to place his face on the ground. Abdullah Ibn Umer raised his father's head and rested it on his own ankle. "No, on the ground," Umer said. Abdullah obeyed. "Woe betide you, Umer," the second Caliph said to himself. "Woe betide the one who gave birth to you, if God does not forgive you," He then surrendered his soul. May God be pleased with him. (*Tabrani*)

COMMUNITY AND COMMITMENT

When we look for the solution to communal problems, we find that it really lies with the individuals who make up each community. For their part, it is a change of attitude that is required. Each individual must begin to think of his own and to others' communities as if they were actually brothers and sisters belonging to the same family.

What is it that makes a community what it is?

What is it that draws its members together in close-knit unity, so that they live, at least for the greater part of the time, in mutual peace and harmony? Some of the reasons are to be found in the history of a people and in the geography of their environment – elements shared in common by every member. But mostly, it is common ideals which are the great cementing factor, being derived, consciously or unconsciously from religion. In their daily living, the members of the different communities are motivated, albeit in varying degrees, by the fundamental tenets of their own faith. Granted that the standards set before them by their respective religions are all very much concerned with honesty and decency, it may seem surprising to denizens of countries where there are no serious communal issues that different communities, living side by side in the one country (as they do in India) cannot live in peace with each other.

They have been likened to the members of one big family who dwell together under one roof, with strong bonds of affection for parents and grandparents, and a good living and working arrangement with each other, instances of friction and quarrelling being only occasional. But this analogy is only partially correct. True, the different communities owe allegiance to the head of state (as it were, to the head of the family) and they inhabit one country, just as the family members live under one roof, but as to having good living and working arrangement with each other that is quite a different matter. That is not to say that some such arrangement does not exist, but it is a very tenuous affair, ruptured at the slightest untoward incident and not always adhered to, even at the instance of the state authorities. Bouts of quarrelling are not just occasional, but increasingly frequent and communities, unlike family members, rarely make spontaneous efforts at reconciliation.

They are also apt to administer correctives in a way calculated to offend rather than instruct. The kindness of the family is sadly missing. The genuine desire to help, love, tolerate is just not there. When we are all members of the same human race, all imbued with time-honoured ideals, why is it that when we attach different communal labels to each other, we forget that we belong to the Family of Man?

When we look for the solution to communal problems, we find that it really lies with the individuals who make up each community. For their part, it is a change of attitude that is required. Each individual must

begin to think of his own and to others' communities as if they were actually brothers and sisters belonging to the same family. It would then be found that the solution to communal problems would be as easy as the solution to family problems. Whenever friction arises in a family, its members are constantly alert as to how divisive a force this is and, regardless of the irritation or discomfiture they may be suffering, they eventually control their feelings in order to bind themselves together again, and, even more important, they prevail upon the younger and more hot-headed members to do likewise. The family as an entity is put first, and the individuals second.

Never, even in a moment of forgetfulness, should you treat anyone in a manner by which you yourself, if treated in this way, would feel affronted.

Similarly, living in harmony as a nation should be put first and the projection of individual identities of communities put second. And if pride in members of a family must be kept under tight rein, so must communal pride be held in check. Just as individuals who are unwilling to submit to parental authority must leave the family nest and make lives for themselves elsewhere, so must a community bow to national imperatives or find itself beyond the pale.

Family unity is based on mutual consideration and respect. This happy state of affairs could easily be extended to the communal scene if enough individuals simply put their minds to carrying it into effect. If the kind of harmony which is achieved by families through patience, affection and general tolerance were set up as a definite aim by all communities, there is no reason why it should not be attained in the very near future. It is a question of wishing it to be so, making positive efforts towards it and forgetting all the old scores to be settled, all the old grievances which are like so many running sores on the face of national unity.

From my childhood days, I remember a friend who used to recite:

Kabhi bhul kar kisi se na karo suluk aisa

ke jo tum se koi karta tumhen nagawar hota

(never, even in a moment of forgetfulness, should you treat anyone in a manner by which you yourself, treated in this way, would feel affronted.)

This *Hadith* in couplet form was the remedy he prescribed for all family ailments. Indeed, it is the most vital principle of social life. If we could only call it to mind at crucial moments, both inside and outside the home, all friction would simply disappear.

This formula is particularly important when a dispute has a certain measure of right and wrong on both sides. Consider the case of A's son angering B's son and being beaten by him. The original mischief was the doing of A's son, but B's son appeared the greater offender because he became violent. But what has to be looked at really critically is the behaviour of Mr. A. He came rushing out of his house and proceeded to deliver Mr. B's family a lecture on the subject of civilized behaviour, without, however,

uttering a single word of remonstrance to his own son. He may have had a point about B's son having turned physically aggressive, but his failure to reprimand his own son taught him nothing about being civilized and could have been interpreted as tacit encouragement to further mischief. And it certainly did not improve relations between the two families.

Every incident can be viewed from different standpoints, and it is a mistake to think that one's own is always the correct one. If we were all to stop and think that there might just be some aspect of the other man's argument which is worthy of consideration, instead of exaggerating the virtues of one's own cause and the vices of the other's, there would be much less ill-feeling, and the causes of quarrels when viewed coolly and in a spirit of tolerance would often be seen just to disappear.

Recently, I met a resident of Jeddah in Saudi Arabia, who has been a highly successful businessman for the last 30 years. Since he was widely travelled and experienced in the ways of life, I asked him the secret of his success in dealing with people. He smiled and said that this 'secret' was the one mentioned in the *Quran-Iraz*, or avoidance. This means overlooking unpleasantness rather than doing battle over it with words or fists. He said he himself was always ready to withdraw from unpleasant situations rather than tackle them head-on. That was why, he said, he never found himself faced with insuperable difficulties.

He related various instances to bear out this theory, one of which was particularly to the point. "Once," he said, someone who imagined I had given him cause for offence came to me and began to hurl abuse and threats at me. I made no reply. When I judged that he had given full vent to his ire, I told him that he might do whatever he wanted, but that I too had a weapon. Infuriated, he asked me what this weapon was, to which I replied that the more he abused me, the more I would pray for him. And the more he tried to pressurize me, the more I would bend. At these words all his anger evaporated. He quietly walked away, and never spoke offensively to me again." He added that this policy not only saved him being placed, quite unnecessarily, at a disadvantage, but also infused him with courage. His explanation was that hatred of others makes a man into a coward, whereas love for others makes one bold. What he said was patently the truth.

In the Indian context, the factor which most undermines communal harmony is the prevailing atmosphere of doubt and suspicion which has grown out of the complex and unhappy history of the sub-continent. If only this barrier could be crossed, we should find that all communal problems died a natural death. It no doubt requires great self-control and mental effort to rise above suspicion to do so, the results are wonderful to behold. It is rather like the airliner which takes off in dense fog, but which slowly climbs above it to an altitude where all is brightness and sunshine.

In public affairs, particularly those which reach the streets, an open act of trust can have the most salutary effect. I am reminded of a certain city where, every year, the procession of one community passed the place of worship of another community, and without fail was held up at the spot for six to 8 hours because the local worshippers objected to its passing that way and wanted it to take another

route. There was much obstinacy on both sides, often leading to rioting. But the cure for this came in 1986, when the local people decided not to hold up the procession, and with none of them there on the spot to hinder it, it filed peacefully past their place of worship in a mere matter of half an hour. No untoward incident marred the event. So where before, obstinacy had bred obstinacy, an act of trust swept it away.

Another instance, concerning the control of a large and a small mosque, illustrates the value of trust and mutual esteem. These two mosques had both been under the guardianship of the department of archeology in a certain city. The large mosque is now under Muslim control, while the small one is still under dispute. This dispute has arisen because certain opportunistic leaders have chosen to turn the control of the smaller mosque into a street issue, which has meant leading processions and organizing demonstrations. In this way, it has become a prestige issue for the two communities involved. Once prestige enters into a conflict, the chances of finding a solution are slim.

“The issue of the large mosque on the other hand never reached the leaders. It remained in the hands of unknown local Muslims who made every effort to find a solution by interacting with the individuals concerned at their own personal level. Non-political in their style of operating, they even managed to have the cooperation of the other community in question. It was purely by such efforts that the mosque and its surrounding land finally came under direct Muslim control. I have personally visited this mosque and felt satisfied as to its functioning. It now has a school equipped with electricity and telephone, and religious and educational work is being peacefully carried out.

Resorting to processions and demonstrations to settle differences only creates more serious problems. But if matters are quietly and reasonably discussed, a satisfactory solution can always be arrived at.

Tolerance is one of the greatest factors in stabilizing human relationships. There is one particular instance of the building of a mosque and a madrasa, where its absence almost wrecked the construction plans. The Muslims in charge of the building operations were at the stage of laying the foundations when they were told by the members of another community that they would not allow any walls to be raised there. They were asked to withdraw a distance of two yards and then to raise their wall. The school management at once agreed to this and stopped all work on the building. However, the next day, some senior members of the community came to the school authorities and expressed their regret at the manner in which some ignorant youths of their community had tried to be unreasonably obstructive. They said they had explained matters to them and that the Muslims were now free to build their wall in the place originally intended. They assured them that they had no objections whatsoever to the project. Tolerance, therefore, countered ignorance and wisdom prevailed.

In reality, many of the problems of this world arise from sheer ignorance, and it takes real wisdom to solve them. This is particularly true of communal problems, in which the element of ignorance on the part of miscreants so often sparks off disputes. If this could be properly understood, and the situation treated with wisdom and forbearance, all dispute would cease at the very outset.

A JOURNEY

One extraordinary thing about a believer is that everything turns out well for him. If everything goes according to plan, a feeling of thanksgiving is aroused in him, but should his plans go awry, he realizes that man can only propose; it is God who disposes. In this way he comes closer to the Lord.

In March 1986, the President of the Islamic Centre visited the central Indian city of Poona. This was his fourth journey to Poona, his previous visits having taken place respectively in 1971, 1983 and 1984. Poona is a city of about one and a half million peoples, of who 100,000 are Muslims. The size of the congregations which gathered this time to attend Maulana Wahiduddin Khan's talks was indicative of a substantial increase in the number of *Al-Risala* readers in that town. A full account of the Journey was published in the Urdu version of *AIRisala*, (June 1986) and here we give an abridged version in translation.

Making up lost time

On the evening of March 19, 1986, I was due to travel from Delhi to Poona. I arrived at the airport at the correct reporting time and initially we were informed at the Indian Airlines desk that the flight would be on time. At the last moment, however, we were told that the plane was one hour late. We are up against an extraordinary state of affairs in this country. Travelling by bus, one has to contend with choc-a-bloc conditions; travel by car and there is the danger of having an accident, while if you choose to travel by train, there is the possibility that someone will pull the emergency-chain for the fun of it, leaving the train standing in one place for hours. Even air-travel is hunted by the danger of one's plane being delayed due to some technical fault. This all involves a considerable waste of time and constitutes a substantial loss to the nation. Yet it is at times such as these that one realizes what a great blessing faith is, for it compensates for every loss. There is a saying of the Prophet Mohammad to the effect that one extraordinary thing about a believer is that everything turns out well for him. If everything goes according to plan, a feeling of thanksgiving is aroused in him, but should his-plans go awry, he realizes that man can only propose; it is God who disposes. In this way he comes closer to the Lord.

Easier said than done

After an hour-long wait, we boarded the plane. After taking my seat, I picked up the Indian Airlines in-flight magazine (*Swagat*, March 1986) and began to read about how Indian Airlines is one of most widely ranging airline companies, possessing a big fleet, consisting of a variety of aircrafts. It provides a daily service of 240 flights, landing at 73 airports all over the country, besides which its planes also fly

to Nepal, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Bangkok and Bangladesh. It has agreements with various international airline companies, “so wherever you are Indian Airlines is within reach.”

The aircraft I had boarded was still standing on the runway, and I was reading all these impressive things in the in-flight magazine, when, all of a sudden, we heard an announcement over the loudspeaker that we should all alight from this plane. It seemed that we were to make the journey to Poona in another aircraft. So all the passengers disembarked and boarded another aircraft. Clearly, more time elapsed in this process and the plane was eventually two hours late. The words, “We wish you a comfortable journey,” were written in bold letters in the in-flight magazine, which made me think how easy it is to say things, but how difficult to convert one’s words into actions.

Situation of Muslims in Poona

Muslims in Poona number one lakh (100,000) a sufficient number to accomplish any constructive work, should they set their minds to it. But, unfortunately, the state of Muslims in Poona is much the same as that of Muslims in other cities. Instead of applying themselves to constructive work, they waste their time and energy quarrelling among themselves and making futile demonstrations. Christians in Poona are fewer in number than the Muslims, but they far exceed their Muslim counterparts in the amount of constructive work they perform.

Examples of a negative approach on the part of Muslims

A Hindu building-contractor in Poona constructed a multi-storey apartment building. Immediately Muslims were alarmed that their houses were being exposed and their *purdah* violated, so they began a campaign against the contractor. He pointed out that there was a Muslim-girls’ school nearby, next to which the very Muslims whose children attended the school had built a multi-storey building similar to the one constructed by himself. The apartments in that building had then been rented out to the public. Did this not amount to a violation of their *purdah*? Why did they not launch a similar agitation in that case too? That was the end of the Muslims’ agitation and the building remained in its place.

A similar situation arose in connection with a mosque in Poona named *Masjid Munshian*. It is situated on one side of a road. On the other side of the same road and a little further down, a hotel by the name of Silver Inn has been built. This hotel includes amongst its facilities a Permit Room, or, in other words, a licensed bar. The Muslims, fearing that the sancrosanctity of their mosque was being violated by the consumption of liquor near at hand, decided to observe January 26, 1985 as a “black day”. Posters, were fixed on walls, slogan raised, and on January 26th, a number of Muslims put up a shed outside the hotel, vowing to observe a hunger strike until this liquor-dispensing tavern had been closed down.

A delegation of the Muslims went to the office of a local Marathi newspaper, *Taran Bharat*, in order to register their Islamic protest. The editor pointed out to them that the owners had built their hotel at a

considerable distance from the mosque, and that the bar in the hotel had been opened with Government permission. “Besides, he said, “in the other direction from your mosque, there is another mosque situated quite nearby. Right beneath the walls of that mosque, Muslims are engaged in the illegal sale of liquor. Why not launch a campaign; against them to end their illicit trade. “So, once again, what happened, was that the Permit Room remained untouched, while the protest campaign of the Muslims fizzled out after just one day of noise and commotion.

A look at Hindu organizations in Poona

The Last time I was in Poona, I went round D. Noble College, a large education institute, belonging to the Christians of Poona, while this time I had the opportunity of inspecting the building of a Hindu organization by the name of Giyan Parbudhni. Despite the large scale of its activities, this organization does not accept any help from the Government. Part of its programme is financed by fund-raising, while the remainder comes from its own industrial and agricultural projects. Giyan Parbudhni is engaged in a wide range of activities. One of its functions, for example, is to select talented individuals from Hindu youth and prepare them for the I.A.S. examination. These people later take over key Government positions, thus ensuring that a degree of influence is maintained in administrative circles.

There is another Hindu organization in Poona, called Sadhu Aswani Mission, which is engaged in a wide range of academic activities. One of its schemes has been given the name: Life-beyond Project. This project can be described as a systematic effort to rationally and scientifically prove the validity of the doctrine of reincarnation. Research on this topic is being conducted on a worldwide scale. There is yet another institute here, Besant Wakhyan Mala, in which lectures are held every year in the month of May—the holiday season – on a wide range of religious and historical topics. Highly qualified people are invited for these lectures from all over the country. To attend these lectures one has to obtain a ticket, which is bought at a price. Even so the spacious auditorium is packed to capacity.

The Muslims are easily incited to destructive activities but, when called upon to perform constructive work, they remain impassive, as if they have not even heard the call.

One special quality of the Hindu community is the diversity of their activities. Take, for instance, Gandhiji's boycott of foreign cloth (1921). Muslims were as much a part of this campaign as Hindus, but there was one important difference between the approaches adopted by the two communities. If Hindu, on the one hand, burnt cloth from the mills of Lancashire, and Manchester, then they also established hundreds of cotton mills in their own country, whereas Muslims kept on burning foreign cloth, but did not establish any mills of their own. Such has been Muslims' approach to every issue in modern times. They are easily incited to destructive activities but, when called upon to perform constructive work, they remain impassive, as if they have not even heard the call. When anyone wishes to gain popularity among the Muslims, what he does is raise some negative slogan in their midst. To present a positive programme before Muslims is tantamount to sacrificing one's own position, but it ought to be accepted that

encouragement is the only way to breathe new life into the Muslim community as a whole. Since no Muslim leader of modern times has shown himself willing to make this self-sacrifice, the Muslims are caught in a rut of constant negativity.

Programme in Poona

While I was in Poona, from March 19 to March 22, a total of nine meetings were held, in which I addressed audiences consisting of both Muslims and non-Muslims. Particularly noteworthy was a public meeting held in the hall of the Tilak Samarak Mandir, the largest and most famous Hindu temple in Poona. This meeting which took place on the evening of March 20, was attended by the Mayor of Poona, along with a considerable number of highly-educated non-Muslims, with Muslims also in attendance. The topic of this address, laid down by the organizers of the meeting, was: The Prophet of Islam – Founder of the Modern Age.

I gave a one-and-a-half hour talk on this subject and the audience listened attentively from beginning to end. Some Hindu brethren afterwards offered comments such as these: “We have not seen a Maulvi like this before. We had no idea that this was the meaning of Islam.” Many bought books published in English by the Islamic Centre from a bookstall set up outside the hall, among these being” *Mohammed: The Prophet of Revolution*. Specially for the occasion, the organizers had printed some pamphlets consisting of articles from *Al-Risala* translated into Marathi. These were distributed free among the audience.

Progress of *Al-Risala* mission in Poona

Al-Risala, and the cause it represents, are by the grace of God receiving wider and wider dissemination in Poona. One of the programme organizers told me that, in comparison to previous trips, this time they had laid on less publicity, yet the attendance for my talks was much larger than on previous occasions. On Friday, 21st March, a meeting was arranged in the Mecca Masjid of Poona prior to the congregational prayers. On reaching there I saw this sentence above the door of the mosque: “High station in life comes from raising oneself, not from raising slogans and banners.” There were at least twice as many people in the mosque as compared with the number who normally attend Friday prayers. In spite of this mosque being so large, it was filled to capacity. Similar audiences assembled for every meeting which was held.

One gentleman put forward a suggestion that *Al-Risala* be published in regional languages. He said that about three-quarters of Gujarati-and Marathi-speaking Muslims, for example, were able to read only Gujarati and Marathi script. They were not able to read Urdu. *Al-Risala* would not have to be translated into these languages. A transliteration would be sufficient, with the original Urdu rendered into Gujarati and Marathi script. He said that this would not only be beneficial to Muslims, but also to non-Muslims who were able to understand Urdu, but could not read it.

Another member of the audience said that nowadays only those newspapers and journals which had the backing of some major organization were able to last. Whichever publication you looked at, he said, appeared as if the person behind it were someone else. “*Al-Risala* has been coming out regularly for the last ten years, and with such an impressive format,” he remarked. “Who is its sponsor?” I told him that the sponsor of *Al-Risala* was God, and no one else. “Then this is no less than a miracle,” was his reply.

In order to obtain something, it is enough for one to desire it. There is a price for everything in life and until one has paid the required price, one will not be able to achieve the object of one's desire.

Advice to youth

Some youngsters asked me for my autograph. This is what I wrote for one of them:

“In order to obtain something, it is not enough for one to desire it. There is a price for everything in life and until one has paid the required price, one will not be able to achieve the object of one's desire.”

When one person asked me to give him some advice, I told him:

Hardships are the price paid for living a principled life.”

Addressing some young people, I said: “Whatever is in your hearts, that is what you should utter with your tongues; whatever you wish for yourselves, you should wish the same for others too; when you are dealing with mortal men, imagine that your dealings are with Almighty God.”

One gentleman told me this quotable quote:

“In everything look before you leap;

But in charity leap before you look.”

Return from Poona

On the evening of March 22, 1986, I returned from Poona to Delhi. On the plane I was given the Madras edition of *The Indian Express* to read. On page three, there was a report of the March 21 proceedings in the Tamil Nadu Assembly. The Budget was being debated. A Congress-I member, A. Arumogam, rose and made a speech in which he laid emphasis on the need to promote Hindi in the State. Since he was speaking in English, Finance Minister Nedunchezhiyan asked the member if he had any knowledge of Hindi, and he replied: “Chhota chhota mallom hai.” (I know a little).

The honourable gentleman had in his mind the English word “little” which he translated literally into Hindi as “chhota”, whereas in fact the right Hindi word to express the meaning which he wished to convey would have been “thora”, not “chhota”. This is a very common failing. A person speaks, expressing what is in his mind, and he mistakenly thinks that he is expressing some reality of the outside world.

All are equal before the law

An Egyptian came to Umer Ibn Khattab. "Commander of the Faithful," he said, "I have come to you to seek shelter from oppression." Umer told him that his request was granted.

"I had a race against Mohammad Ibn Amr Ibn Al-Aas, the son of the governor of Egypt," the man protested. "I overtook him and he got angry. He started whipping me, felling me at the same time: Take that I come from a noble family. "When Umer heard this, he immediately wrote to Amr Ibn Aas, telling him to bring his son to Medina at once. When they arrived, Umer called the Egyptian, gave him a whip and told him to whip the young man. Umar kept on saying: "Take that, member of a noble family," as he did so. When he had finished whipping Mohammad Ibn Amr Ibn Al-Aas, Umer told him to whip the boy's father as well, for the son had only acted because of his father's authority. "I have whipped the one who whipped me", the Egyptian replied. "Now I don't need to whip anybody else". "If you had whipped him, then we would not have stopped you," Umer told him. "But if you let him go yourself, then that is another matter." Then, addressing Amr Ibn Al-Aas, he said. "Since when have you enslaved people who were born free?"

32 January 1988

In order to enter the eternal abode of peace, one must live peacefully on earth

Abu Hurayra asked the Prophet to tell him what he could do to be sure of entering heaven. "Spread the word of peace, extend hospitality, cultivate close relationship and stay up at night, when others are asleep; you will enter heaven in peace," the Prophet told him.