



Simple

WISDOM

A DAYBOOK OF
SPIRITUAL LIVING

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

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Foreword

The Prophet of Islam said that wisdom is the lost property of the believer. He should accept it wherever he finds it. (Sunan al-Tirmidhi, Hadith No. 2687) This hadith explains the universality of knowledge. It means that knowledge, wherever it may be belongs equally to all human beings. It is not the monopoly of a particular person or group. It can be likened to the sun. Everyone has the right to receive light from it. Without this concept of the universality of knowledge, the progress of knowledge would just not be possible.

Wisdom is the ability to judge or discern what is true or right. Wisdom, the greatest asset of all men and women, is likewise a common treasure house. The treasure house of wisdom is so vast that however much it is used, its reservoir will never be exhausted. Knowledge is a vast lake which satisfies the thirst of every seeker.

I have spent my entire life extracting wisdom from the Quran, the life of the Prophet of Islam, from human knowledge, from observing the universe and by interacting with others.

In this book I have collected more than three hundred and fifty short articles regarding God realization, piety, modes of divine worship and such spiritual knowledge as will help the reader become acquainted with God's Grace and Power and His Creation Plan. These have been arranged for easy reading on a daily basis.

As you turn over the pages day-by-day, your soul will touch new spiritual heights of wisdom, peace and understanding.

Wahiduddin Khan

January 1, 2002
New Delhi, India

God: The Light of the Universe

We have been told in the Quran that ‘God is the light of the heavens and the earth.’ (24:35) That is, all the light in the entire universe emanates from God’s Being. If the Almighty did not create light, it could not be derived from any other source.

If there were no sun, the earth would be surrounded in darkness. But our Lord has spread throughout His domain countless extremely bright moving bodies to shed light continuously on all parts of the universe. In the absence of this all-encompassing order, the universe would be reduced to a dreadful abyss.

Here we speak of material light. But the same is true of intellectual and spiritual light. All the inhabitants of this earth are in need of a guiding light to enable them to think rationally and to find the spiritual sustenance, which will fill their hearts with divine wisdom and inspiration. The source of this intellectual and spiritual light is God and God alone. It cannot be obtained from any other source.

When man truly and sincerely believes in one God, he establishes a link with Him on a spiritual level. His whole being is subsequently illumined by this spiritual attachment. He begins to find God in His remembrances. He begins to find God reflected in the tears that well up in his eyes. God is so instilled in his thoughts and feelings, it is as if he has come very close to Him, as if he is leading his life in the shadow of the Almighty’s blessing.

Idolatry has been described in the Quran as “an abominable sin” or *zulm* (31:13). *Zulm* means the placing of something in the wrong situation. That is, idolatry (associating something with God) is totally alien to the universe. In this world, believing in idolatry and practising idolatry are completely out of place.

Only one God is the Creator of this world. He alone is its Lord and Sustainer. He is possessed with all power. That being so, believing in something other than God, or associating anything with the godhead, amounts to according the status of an actual reality to a self-concocted supposition. This presupposes the existence of something, which has no existence at all.

The idolatrous way of thinking is the greatest of all evils. One whose mind thinks along idolatrous lines, in whose heart idolatrous thoughts are nurtured, has as it were, opted for something baseless and unreal. The universe with its whole existence refutes it.

Idolatrous beliefs and concepts can never provide intellectual nourishment to their adherents. They will not flood them with that spiritual light without which the whole of human existence is rendered meaningless.

JANUARY 2

Patience and Dawah

The moral character of the *da'i* must be marked by patience. It takes patience to wait for the right opportunities for *da'wah* work to arise, and it also takes patience for the right sets of conditions to be created. Those who are unwilling to remain patient in the face of ignorance, obduracy and unpleasantness can never fulfill the true calling of the *da'i*.

Sir James Jeans, the renowned English scientist, once stated in the foreword to a book he had written on physics and philosophy in 1941, that the scientific study of the universe had led us to the point where it seemed to suggest that “the door may be unlocked, only if we could find the handle.” (p. 16)

This notion was put into words by this English scientist at a time when Muslims the world over, provoked at the domination of English, were waging bloody war against them. When the Muslims

looked at the English, they saw in them only hateful enemies. Had they displayed patience—even only temporarily—at their political domination, they would very soon have discovered that the “handle” the English sought to the door of Reality, was already available to Muslims in the form of the Quran.

With this knowledge their entire attitude towards the English would have drastically changed. Soon they would have come to regard the English as their *madu* (congregation) and not as rivals. And then instead of praying for their doom they would have prayed for their guidance, and reformation. As their well-wishers they would have told them that what they (the English) required to reach the destination of reality had already been sent by God in the form of the Quran.

Patience is the necessary condition of *da'wah*—where there is no patience there can certainly be no *da'wah*.

JANUARY 3

Two Methods Aiming at Eternal Truth

There are two ways of launching a movement, one by demands and the other by revolution. The former, exemplified for all time by the life of the Prophet Muhammad, has regrettably had to yield pride of place to the latter which is the more favoured, not only by communists, but also by present-day Muslims. Today, it is not only those of communists' persuasions who rely on the revolutionary method, but also Muslims, who are everywhere to be found in armed encounters with their supposed rivals. Although many make their point by organising media protest campaigns, those who have access to bombs and bullets are quick to use them.

Why is it that Muslims are so enamoured of the revolutionary method, to the point of forgetting that there is such a thing as the

da'wa method? Why should they favour the ideology of Marx and Lenin when they have the *Sunnah* of the Final Prophet to show them the way?

The revolutionary path is that of reaction, and just explaining it in Islamic terms does not transform it into an Islamic method. Da'wa, on the other hand, calls for patience and avoidance of confrontation. This method, as opposed to that of reaction, is doubtless the more difficult of the two, but, in the long run, is the best calculated to bear fruit.

The revolutionary method is negative in that it has its roots in hatred and is guided by mere human desires; it calls for instant action, and it is always the others, the non-revolutionaries, who are pelted with stones. On the contrary, the da'wa method is positive in that it grows out of love. Where revolution calls for precipitateness, da'wa advises patience, caution. Where revolutionary acts earn one popularity, da'wa leads one into self-obliteration and the readiness to be the target of others' stones.

Revolution is material in that it centres on human wants. Da'wa is spiritual in that it is inspired by the Quran and the *hadith*. Revolution aims at an external target. Da'wa aims at eternal truth—a wholly internal matter.

JANUARY 4

The Reality of Monotheism

Monotheism means to believe in one God; to believe in the fact that all power lies in the hand of one God alone; that He alone deserves to be worshipped. No act in the nature of worship is lawful unless directed towards God. It is God alone who fulfills all our needs. It is God alone who is behind the functioning of the entire universe. Superiority is the prerogative of the one and only God. No one enjoys real superiority in this world. All such concepts are false as associate

anyone or anything with any of the aspects of God's sovereignty. The concept of God has been stated in the following verses of the Quran:

God, there is no god but Him, the Living, the Eternal one. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. His is what the heavens and the earth contain. No one can intercede with Him except by His permission.

He knows all about the affairs of men at present and in the future. They can grasp only that part of this knowledge, which He wills. His Throne is as vast as the heavens and the earth and the preservation of both does not weary Him. He is the Exalted, the Immense One. (2:255)

Worshipping God is to express reverence for one's God and Creator, a Being who truly deserves to be held in awe. On the contrary, when man bows his head before anyone else, he exalts one who is no better than himself—and as such, having no right to be worshipped. Adoration of God glorifies Him, while worship of anything other than God degrades the worshipper. Veneration of God makes man a realist, while prostrating himself before a non-God turns him into a creature of superstition. Bowing to God opens the door to the realization of the truth, while the worship of something other than God closes this very door in man's face.

The focus of a monotheist is only one, while idolatry has myriad objects of worship. That is why the centre of attention and worship of a monotheist is the one and only God. In all circumstances and throughout his entire life, he makes the one and the same God his all in all, but an idolator has no central point on which to focus. That is why *shirk*, that is, idolatry, is directed towards so many different things—the stars, the earth, man, the grave, the self, wealth, power, interests, children, etc. This entire practice, coming under the heading of worship of things other than God, has been openly condemned by the Quran.

A monotheist is one who accords the supreme status to the one and only God. He asks Him alone to meet his needs. He does obeisance before Him; he trusts Him implicitly and above all others, reserving for Him the supreme status in all respects. Worship is the

ultimate stage in any relationship: that is why, whatever its form, it must have God as its object. Any gesture in the nature of adulation is not permissible except when meant for God.

When an individual makes God the object of his worship, he bows before an entity, which really exists. On the contrary, one who makes a non-God the object of his worship, bows before something which has no actual existence, even although he may have set up before him some material image of his 'god.' While the former has found the true source of power, the latter has simply associated himself with crass superstitious notions, which have no basis in logic. God's worshippers are graced with eternal blessings; the worshippers of things other than God can expect nothing but eternal deprivation.

JANUARY 5

Mission of the Prophets

All the messengers of God sent in ancient times came only to admonish man not to commit idolatry and to teach him to worship the one God alone, so that he might accordingly reform his life in this world and share in God's blessings in the next. But throughout the centuries of human history, almost all the prophets were rejected by the majority of their contemporaries, particularly those highly placed in society, who never showed any willingness to follow these divine messengers. This recurrent event in history is thus described in the Quran: 'Alas for the servants! They laugh to scorn every apostle that comes to them'. (36:30).

The practice of ignoring God's prophets went to the extent of depriving these ancient messengers of their rightful place in the annals of human history. That is why we can find detailed stories of kings and generals in the chronicles of the ages, but we do not find any mention of these prophets. The Prophet of Islam is the only exception. And that is because he received special divine succour.

Therefore, for the first time in human history, the determination to repudiate *shirk* and affirm monotheism became a living movement and reached the stage of practical revolution, turning over a wonderful new page in human history. Now the question arises as to why this movement of rejection of *shirk* and acceptance of monotheism could not in ancient times culminate in revolution. There were two main reasons for this. One was that it was the age of kingship and the other was that superstitious thinking dominated. These were the two basic factors, which continued to be permanent stumbling blocks for the mission of the prophets.

The age prior to the advent of the Prophet of Islam was that of sacred kingship. Today is the age of democracy, in which political leaders gain the right to rule through the votes of the people. In ancient times, on the contrary, the king's interest lay in convincing people that they were God's representatives, even that they were God's offspring or that they were the children of the sun and moon. While today the basis of government is secular democracy, in the days of old governments used to thrive on some idolatrous belief or the other. This has been mentioned in the Quran with particular reference to Pharaoh. When Pharaoh confronted Moses he felt threatened by the spiritual powers of God's messenger. So he assembled his people and sought to reaffirm his position in these words. "I am your Lord, most High." (79:24).

Thus it was in the political interest of these kings that such superstitious beliefs should prevail throughout the world. Under their special patronage, right from the rituals of the birth of a baby to the funeral rites, the entire system of life was based on *shirk*.

This idolatrous system remained predominant all over the world for several thousand years. Due to royal patronage, this system had become so powerful that it acted as an effective check against spreading the monotheistic message of the prophets. It was as a result of this that in ancient times the Prophet's mission remained limited solely to the communication of the message; it could not enter upon the vaster stage of practical revolution.

Another obstacle to missionary activity was what may be called the superstitious thinking of the age. In ancient times when scientific discoveries of the modern kind had not yet been made, man was not able to understand the true essence of natural manifestations. He found an astonishing diversity in the objects of nature—sun, moon, stars, mountains, sea, earth, heavens, trees, animals, etc. Thanks to this diversity, the misunderstanding developed in man that there must also be many creators, or that these phenomena must be incarnations of different gods. The many-sidedness of nature thus produced the concept of a multiplicity of deities. Even the sun and the moon, because of their extraordinary character, began to be regarded as gods. It was unthinkable for man to conceive of one God in the face of the burgeoning plurality of nature.

It was to this reality that Prophet Abraham alluded:

“Lord, they (the phenomena of nature) have led many men astray.” (14:36)

That is, these outstanding manifestations of nature, the sun, the moon etc. led to man’s deception. People began to worship their greatness and hold them in reverence, though they ought to have considered them all to be creatures of God. On the contrary, they deified these creatures and began to worship them. The scientific thinking of the present age has shattered the myth of these objects of creation being gods. A major role has been played too by democratic thought, which ushered in a powerful political revolution throughout the entire world, giving a death blow to such kingship as was based on the idolatrous thinking of ancient times. Now, in the world of today, such kings as ruled in former times do not exist. They have been swept away like straw in the flood of modern democracy. As a consequence of this modern political revolution, idolatrous beliefs and systems have been deprived of effective patronage. It was this system which was the most powerful obstacle to the rejection of *shirk* and the establishment of monotheism in its place. Now, the possibilities of issuing the call of the prophets are unlimited. All obstacles in the path have been removed forever.

JANUARY 6

In the Age of Science

The emergence of modern science has meant the uprooting of *shirk* in all its aspects. In modern times, scientific discoveries have forever destroyed the myth that there is any inherent diversity in the manifestations of nature or that they have any greatness of their own.

Modern science, through observation and experimentation, has proved in the last analysis that all the phenomena of nature, despite their seeming diversity, were composed of atoms. And the atom is a component of electric waves. This discovery has dealt a death blow to the myth of diversity in nature.

Oneness has been proved to be a reality in all things, notwithstanding apparent differences. That is, a more advanced stage of knowledge having rejected idolatrous concepts has provided an established basis for the concept of monotheism. Furthermore an important point established by modern science is that all the things on the earth or in the vastness of space are equally helpless entities. All are bound together in an eternal, immutable law of nature. In no degree do they possess any power or will of their own.

Another scientific factor has been established which favours monotheism over idolatry. That is, the entire universe, with all its varied components, is functioning under one and the same law of nature, called by scientists the single string theory. In other words, according to the discoveries of human knowledge itself there is only one God of the universe. There is no other deity or any other being worth worshipping save God.

The root of *shirk* lies in superstitious thinking. In present times, scientific research and investigations have held the superstition of former times to be baseless. In this way, the roots of *shirk* in modern times have been deprived of any purely academic foundation. No

scientific mind is ready to believe in *shirk* as a reality. However *shirk* is still prevalent in certain parts of the world.

In ancient times, man held that so and so gods and goddesses were responsible for air, rains, crops and different human affairs. They thought of different gods and goddesses as being at work behind the diverse events in the world of nature and of human beings. But scientific investigation has proved that all these events, taking place in accordance with the laws of nature, are not the miracles of an array of gods and goddesses. In the face of these findings, the old type of *shirk* has, to a large extent, lost ground.

Once there was an illiterate person who, for the first time in his life, saw a car travelling along a road. In his ignorance, he thought it was a magician who was causing a room to move by the sheer power of his magic. But any educated person would consider such a supposition ludicrous, because it does not take a scientist or an engineer to know for sure that such magic does not in reality exist.

In this way idolatrous beliefs and concepts or the system of supposed deities have become utterly ridiculous to the educated mind. For now everyone knows that the coming of rains, the yield of crops and all other such seasonal events are based on the principles of nature.

In the old superstitious age, the creed of *shirk* might have been acceptable, but today, in the age of knowledge, the whole structure of *shirk*, from belief to practice, has been thoroughly discredited. In the age of modern science, the fate *shirk* has met can be compared to that of a darkened room, which was supposed to harbour a dangerous, long-horned demon, but which, when opened up and flooded with light, was seen to contain nothing of the sort.

Before the emergence of science the world was dominated by superstitious beliefs. Due to an inadequate fund of knowledge, people were deceived into believing in *shirk*. But now with the spread of the light of science, it has become impossible for *shirk* to find a place once again in the minds of the people.

However, the superstitions themselves have not been entirely laid to rest. In their personal lives people all over the world still hold beliefs of mysterious kinds. Although the majority of the educated

class do not believe in deities, they have not yet arrived at belief in one God. The only difference is that if the past generations were irrevocably devoted to gods and goddesses, nowadays people have set up another “deity”, called the law of nature, to which they accord the same importance as was formerly shown to pagan deities.

The course of human history has followed many pathways, but now a stage has come when all obstructions have been cleared away, so that a movement, based on the teachings of the prophets, could well be revived. Today, such a movement to reject *shirk* and affirm monotheism could freely and effectively be launched. In this modern age the political and international atmosphere is also entirely favourable, and all academic arguments are in support of it. It would not be an exaggeration to say that today any movement based on monotheism would be in a position of unopposed victory. No obstacle is now in its way. The need of the hour is for the monotheists to rise with all their will and determination and communicate with unstinted zeal and vigour the divine message—the life-giving reality of *tauhid*.

In ancient times a number of evils had crept into human society, with the result that man had been divested of his natural greatness. It was the movement of *tauhid*, launched by the Prophet of Islam and his companions, which led the world out of a pitiable age and caused humanity to enter upon an age of progress in the real sense. For the first time in human history, man received the blessings which had been destined for him, and of which he, had deprived himself on account of his self-styled superstitious beliefs. Humanity emerged from a prolonged age of darkness and entered the age of light. Now, despite all material progress, man is beset by insuperable problems. Trapped in the glitter of civilization, he is deprived of real peace and happiness. The greatness bestowed upon man by nature has again fallen into a new abyss of degradation.

Now the need of the hour is to revive the call of *tauhid* with renewed force and vigour. The task is twofold: *tauhid* has to be made more acceptable by means of new and forceful arguments and, by using modern means of communication, it has to be spread all over the world. As recorded in the historic prediction made by the Prophet,

the time will come when God's religion will spread all over the world, and not a 'home or a tent' will be saved from entering God's word of monotheism.

JANUARY 7

Inna Lillah

It often happens in this world that man loses something, or suffers some calamity. On such occasions, Islam teaches us to willingly resign ourselves to our misfortune, taking that to be God's decree. On all such occasions the sufferer should utter the words: 'We belong to God and we shall return to Him.'

God has made this world for the purpose of putting mankind to the test. Here, receiving and losing are both designed as a trial for man. Therefore, when man receives something, he should prove himself to be a thankful servant of God. And when he loses something he should adopt the attitude of patience. Only one who can do so will pass God's test.

In this world man cannot save himself from experiencing unpleasant things. Sometimes he will suffer from the pangs of hunger and thirst, at others, a life very dear to him will pass away or he will incur a loss of wealth. On all such occasions these words must come to his lips... 'We belong to God and we shall all return to Him.'

Through these words man acknowledges his status of servitude vis à vis God's all-powerfulness. He expresses himself in words such as these: O God, You are the giver. If You have taken something out of what You have given me, You had the right to do so.

Saying Inna Lillah is a form of worship. This is to adopt the attitude of surrendering to God's will instead of complaining against fate. It is to convert the loss into a new discovery.

This phrase, 'We are from God and to God we shall return' is, in short, an acknowledgment of God's godhead on the part of His servants.

JANUARY 8

The Awakening of Man

Just over a year ago when I was in Jabalpur, a town in India, I met a middle-aged gentleman by the name of Abdus Salam Akbani from the town of Nagpur. In the course of conversation, he told me an incident in his own life, which gives us a great lesson.

It seems that four year prior to an encounter, he had arranged to buy a piece of land in Nagpur from a Hindu landowner, one Prabhakar Hazare, for the sum of six lakhs of rupees. It was settled that Abdus Salam would pay two lakhs in advance. Then after a period of six months, the land would be registered in his name, at which time the remainder would be paid in full. But after just two months, the landowner asked for and received a further two lakhs, so that now four out of the agreed six lakhs had been paid to him. During this period, the price of the land went up, and the landowner could not resist the temptation of making more profit from that piece of land

When, after six month, Abdus Salam asked Prabhakar Hazare to arrange for the registration of the land, the latter kept postponing it on one pretext or the other. Hazare was a lawyer, and he thought if Abdus Salam went to court, he would so complicate matter for him that he would finally be compelled to meet his demands.

One day Abdus Salam went to see Mr. Hazare, and found the latter's father-in-law, Mr. Sawarkar, also present. Mr. Sawarkar who was a member of the RSS, was very provocative in his manner. Finally, he said, "What can you do after all? Go to court? If you do, we'll see to it that you wear out a lot of shoe leather!"

Abdus Salam replied that that would happen only if he went to court. And if he didn't go to court, how would they make him run back and forth. Mr. Sawarkar asked him what he actually proposed to do. Abdus Salam replied that he would appoint him (Mr. Sawarkar)

as his arbitrator. On the one side you have your son-in-law, and on the other your nephew (meaning Hazare and himself). “Now you can decide as it seems befitting to you.”

Mr. Sawarkar’s wife, who had overheard the conversation from an adjacent room, now beckoned to her husband to come and talk to her privately. When Mr. Sawarkar returned, he appeared to be a changed man. In the meanwhile, Mrs. Sawarkar brought tea for them. Mr. Sawarkar sipped his tea in silence. Then he asked Abdus Salam to come the next day, saying that the matter would then be settled.

The next day, when he reached there, he was taken by Mr. Sawarkar himself to the court in his car. Being a man of influence, he was able to get the land registry done the same day. Mr. Abdus Salam paid the same price as had been fixed earlier.

Mr. Sawarkar was so impressed by Abdus Salam that afterwards, whenever he saw him passing by anywhere, he would stop his car to greet him and inquire after his health. One day they met by chance at the Housing Finance Board where Abdus Salam had gone on business. When Mr. Sawarkar saw him, he introduced him to the Director of the Board and said, “I have met many Muslims, but I have seen only one young father of an old man. And this is he—Abdus Salam. He has given me an important lesson, namely, that if one does not go to the court, one’s shoes won’t get worn out!”

Although Mr. Sawarkar was associated with RSS, he was first and foremost a human being. The moment Mr. Abdus Salam had said, “I am your nephew and he is your son-in-law. Now you yourself become the arbitrator and decide for yourself,” the “man” in Mr. Sawarkar was awakened.

When the inner man is awakened, you can be sure that the person concerned will always give a just verdict in his dealings with others. It is no longer within his power to be cruel or unjust.

The Matter of Life

All the things in the market are available on the payment of a necessary price. The principle of the market, to be precise, is: you receive as much as you give neither more nor less. This principle is true for the entire human life as well. Someone has aptly said: 'give the world the best you have, and the best will come back to you.'

If you are a well-wisher of others, others will also respond the same way. If you talk to others gently, others too will return gentle words. If you honour others, others too will honour you.

This is a world of give and take. Here man finds only what he has given to others. In short others will behave with you just as you behave with them.

This means that in order to lead a life in this world, finding good atmosphere is in one's own power. You become friends of others and everyone will become your friend. You bear with the unpleasantness of others then you will find people around you who bear with the unpleasant thing from you. You benefit others and then you will find a world where everyone will be busy benefiting others.

If you want to live like a flower you will find your way to a bed of flowers. But if your existence is replete with thorns, you will find a world full of thorny shrubs.

JANUARY 10

The Difference Between Monotheism and Idolatry

Monotheism enables man to discover God in his passage through His creation, whereas idolatry causes him to become enslaved by the mere things of God's creation. Monotheism permits him to lead his life on the plane of reality, whereas idolatry shackles him at every step in his life with superstition. Where monotheism is the result of the discovery of one's own human nature, idolatry is the result of ignorance of that very nature. Monotheists are the truly desirable inhabitants of this world, as it is they who fulfill the word of God.

According to the Plan of the Creator of this world, monotheists fulfill the divine scheme of God for man on earth. They unflinchingly follow His plan. It is the monotheists therefore who are held to be desirable by God, for they are carrying out God's will on earth.

Idolatry and idolatrous people are totally different matters. Idolatry is an alien concept in this world of God. It is the monotheists who are the wanted people; the idolaters are, on the contrary, the unwanted people, for the Creator and Sustainer of this world has given no endorsement to idolatry either as a creed or as a way of life.

If we try to place a square object in a round compartment, it will not fit into it. The same is the case with monotheism and idolatry. By his very nature man has been created to be a monotheist. That is why the concept of monotheism and the monotheistic way of life are exactly in accordance with nature, while the very reverse is true of the concept of idolatry.

With the idolater, objects other than God become the centre of his attention. Hence his responses to various situations in life are also

determined in relation to the objects of his worship. He looks up to them in his successes as well as seeking refuge in them in his failures.

His heart and mind are absorbed in these non-godly things and beings at all times. Where the monotheist continues to draw the nourishment of monotheism from his day-to-day experiences, an idolator's day-to-day experiences provide him only with further food for idolatry (that is, he becomes more and more confirmed in his way of life).

More often than not, man's general condition is affected by different sets of circumstances, some favourable and some unfavourable. But whatever his state—that of happiness, grief, difficulty, success, failure, power, powerlessness, domination, subjugation—the essence of his response to those circumstances must be either monotheistic or idolatrous.

For a monotheist, who lives constantly in God's glory and majesty, every happening in his life continues to remind him of God. His response in all situations is in accordance with his monotheistic belief. In all circumstances, he proves to be a true monotheist, never losing his balance in the ups and downs of life. In whatever condition he is, he never breaks his association with God. With God as the centre of his attention, he never goes off the course.

A feeling of attachment of one human being for another is generally a source of deep satisfaction to the individuals involved. But there is no greater source of satisfaction and no greater elevation of the spirit than in man's strong attachment to God. This, in essence, is what monotheism is, both in principle and in practice. As such, it is of the highest value in the eyes of God. Any other kind of attachment of a worshipful nature is *shirk*, and as such, is valueless.

This deep attachment for God takes two forms—love and fear. The Quran tells us that it is in the monotheist (2:165) that the love of God is at its most profound, and that it is God alone that he fears (9:18).

Such extreme dread and extreme love should be inspired solely by that Being who has created man, who is his Lord and Sustainer. One who associates these special feelings with someone other than God is

guilty of committing *shirk*. It is to bestow on others the adoration that is due to God (2:165).

Human beings may feel strong attachments for many kinds of things,—for other people, for animals, for ideas and so on. When an individual is strongly attracted to something, it is normal for his thoughts to centre on the object of admiration. He can become so engrossed in it that his entire happiness seems to depend on his finding it and keeping it. When he succeeds in doing so, his enthusiasm knows no bounds, yet he is always beset by the fear that he may be deprived of this highly valued object. This fear makes him really sad, for he has high hopes that so long as he possesses it, it will yield untold blessings. Just thinking about what he has and what he may lose can fill his eyes with tears. But all such emotions pale into insignificance beside the feelings, which the true devotee has for the Supreme Being. What he feels for Him is an unbreakable bond of affection and a deep, unalterable veneration. It is to Him and Him alone that all his thoughts are directed, and it is to the Almighty alone that he surrenders himself.

God looks with extreme disfavor upon this feeling of profound reverence being focused upon anyone or any thing besides Himself, for it is the special prerogative of God to have human beings remain in awe of Him. No other being deserves this ultimate degree of reverence.

JANUARY 11

Hypochondriasis

Hypochondria is a psychological disease. One who suffers from this disease imagines that he has one or more physical complaints, although he is not actually ill. The hypochondriac becomes convinced that he is afflicted by disease, even although it is absent.

A resident of Pune, India, Mr. Farhat Haroon Khan, once told me of such an instance. He had become acquainted with a 20-year

old Arab student, who had come from Bahrain to Pune to pursue a course of higher studies. During his stay in India, the latter began to imagine that his health had been ruined by Indian food and that he was suffering from some fatal disease.

He asked Farhat Haroon to take him to a good doctor and Mr. Haroon obliged him by taking him to a Dr. S.M.H. Modi. Dr. Modi examined the student thoroughly and prescribed certain tests. Then after seeing all the reports, he asked Mr. Haroon to tell the Arab patient that he was 'as fit as a horse.'

After the doctor's thorough examination, the young Arab's worries immediately evaporated, and he began to live a normal life, just as if he had never taken ill.

This type of disease is not confined only to individuals. Sometimes an entire nation or community may suffer from it. This can be traced to wrong guidance by leaders who induce a fear psychosis in their followers by causing them to believe that they are surrounded by danger on all sides. The key to progress for such a nation is the ability to see such dangers for what they are—imaginary; and then to root out all fear from the national psyche. Then nothing can stand in the way of the country's success.

JANUARY 12

Training and Education

By August 1945, Japan had been totally ruined having lost its political freedom as well as its economic stability. What Japan did subsequently was to refrain from touching the problem of political freedom and give its full thrust to economic stability. This policy proved so successful that Japan is today reckoned as an industrial super power. By 1990 Japan had already given five billion dollars credit to the world. It is estimated that by 1995 the amount of this credit will have increased to ten billion dollars. While in 1945, Japan

was under the political subjugation of America, today America has been brought under the economic subjugation of Japan.

Mr. Abu Zar Ghefari, a Pakistani columnist, went to Kabul in May 1992, where he met a Japanese journalist. He asked him the reason for the breathtaking and incredible success of Japan, how it had actually happened that the impossible could be turned into the possible.

He replied that the secret of Japan's striking success lay in the sterling character of the Japanese nation. He explained, moreover, that since they were not rich in natural resources, they considered their children to be their greatest resource. Each Japanese house had been turned into a training ground for the children. The Japanese spent their best resources on the education of children. That is why their nation of today is wholly literate. Illiteracy just does not exist in their country. If it is the head count of scientists, which makes a nation scientific, then the Japanese nation can be truly called a scientific nation.

This training and education has produced high national character among the Japanese, for instance, the Japanese are truly a nationalist nation. If the nation suffers from a one-rupee loss, a Japanese will be willing to incur a 100-rupee loss to save the nation from loss, and he would be proud to do so. (*Nawai Waqt*, Lahore, July 12, 1992)

Japan completely shunned the path of confrontation with its opponent. Only then did it become possible for it to bring into existence a highly scientific society. This is the only way to success and progress in this world.

JANUARY 13

No End of Opportunities

Abdur Rahman ibn Muawiya ibn Hisham (113-172 A.H.), an Umayyad prince, having shown early signs of talent and intelligence, was given royal training and a superb education to groom him, right from early childhood, for his future role of Caliph.

But in 132 A.H. the Umayyad dynasty was dealt a fatal blow by the Abbasids. When the Abbasid army entered Damascus, the capital, they were given orders to exterminate the Umayyads. At this point, Abdur Rahman was fortunately absent from the city. He had gone to a village on the banks of Euphrates where he had his farms and orchards. At the time of the genocide, the young prince was just twenty years of age.

When Abdur Rahman learnt that the Umayyads had been the victims of a general massacre, he hid himself in a camp under the trees. One day when he was in his camp his four-year old son came running to him in a terrified state. The Abbasid soldiers had almost reached the orchard in their pursuit of him. He immediately picked up the child, ran to the river and swam across to the other side.

Although Abdur Rahman managed to flee from Damascus, the next few years proved very difficult for him. Always on the alert for his enemies, he would move, hungry and thirsty, from place to place, across rivers and through jungles. In this state of helplessness he came to Sabta, a place situated at the north coast of Africa. His future looked bleak. The prince had become a pauper and where, in his childhood, the crown of the Caliphate had awaited him, there was now not even a corner where he could take shelter in peace.

Yet, ultimately, into this state of utter frustration, there shone a ray of hope. It seemed that Andalusia, in the South of Spain, had become semi-independent. Damascus, the seat of the Caliphate, had lost its hold over it, thanks to communications taking months to cover the distance between Damascus and Andalusia. Now in the absence of a strong leadership, the Muslims had started fighting amongst themselves.

This state of affairs in Andalusia turned out to be a piece of good fortune for Abdur Rahman. Hearing that the Muslims were badly in need of a leader, he crossed the Straits of Gibraltar to reach Andalusia. His extraordinary capabilities and the fact of his being a crown prince immediately attracted attention. The people rallied to him and he was able to establish a firm rule in Andalusia. A man whose history had come to an end in Damascus now became the

founder of brilliant cultural and academic progress in Andalusia. If he built this most illustrious career for himself in Cordova the seat of the Andalusian emirate, it was entirely due to his own courage and determination.

It is a fact that there is no end to the opportunities in this world. When one opportunity ceases to exist, some other opportunity always arises elsewhere. When one stage in a man's career comes to an end, there will always be the opportunity to enter a new phase.

But new opportunities will bear no fruit if they are not at once seized and availed of. Nothing ever happens on its own. But it takes a man of courage to grasp the opportunities that present themselves. He must also have the endurance and the determination for the struggle, which necessarily ensues. And if he possesses those essential qualities, there is no question of his being a failure.

This world has been devised by God so that man may succeed—but with a struggle. One who is too faint-hearted, too lacking in determination, or too impatient will give up the struggle sooner or later, and that is what will ultimately spell failure. He shall have to pay the price of his own shortcomings.

“For men, opportunities will never cease.” This is just like saying the sun will never cease to rise. Just as morning is always followed by night, so does success inevitably follow failure. However, just as the earth must revolve unceasingly if morning is to follow night so must man be unremitting in his struggle to reach his final goal.

JANUARY 14

The News of an Earthquake

On June 21, 1990, the north-western part of Iran was hit by an earthquake so severe in its intensity that it left 80,000 dead and 200,000 injured in its wake. A comment frequently heard at that time was that this was God's chastisement on the Iranians.

Such remarks are absurd. Any tragedy befalling this world is designed to make God's servants tremble in fear of their Maker, and are not occasions for righteous chastigation of supposed wrongdoers. The truth is that this earthquake related neither to Iran's iniquity nor to God's chastisement. An earthquake is a geophysical event; it is meant as a lesson for everyone, and not just for the people of Iran, or any other country for that matter.

Every severe earthquake causes a similar amount of devastation. According to the Times of India of June 23, 1990, not a single house in the affected area had been left standing. In reality, an earthquake's true significance lies in its being a reminder of Qiamat (Doomsday). What happens before, during and after an earthquake is simply a miniature version of what will actually happen on a horrendous scale on the Day of Reckoning.

God has built this world as a temporary testing ground. When this period of trial is over, God will cause a severe earthquake to take place. Under its impact all structures will collapse, all bastions of human greatness will simply vanish from the face of the earth, and civilization as we know it will cease to exist. Then God, in His omnipotence, will create a new world in which He will reward each of His creatures according to his or her deeds.

The correct attitude to natural calamities is that one should learn a lesson from them. Attributing them to the misdeeds of others will only bring down God's wrath upon one's own head.

JANUARY 15

After Eating and Drinking

One of the teachings of Islam is to praise God, after satisfying one's hunger and thirst, in words such as these: All praise is due to God who provided me with food and water, and who made me one of the believers.

Man cannot survive without food and water. He requires these things continuously throughout his entire life. For man's requirements God has made perfect arrangements. On the one hand, He has provided water in abundance on the earth, on the other, He has provided ample nourishment which man can obtain with the minimum of effort.

When a believer is hungry and thirsty, and he eats and drinks, he is overwhelmed with the feeling of how great that God is who has made such splendid provision for him. If God had not done so, he would have suffered the pangs of hunger and thirst, having had to go without food and water. His whole body expresses his acknowledgment of God's bounties and he calls out: Praise be to God for all of His abundant provisions!

On receiving bodily sustenance the believer is reminded of the spiritual sustenance provided for him by God. Through revelation God gave man the knowledge of what He wants from him, thus enabling him to lead us life according to His will and ensuring his success in the next eternal world. Man then remembers God with even greater adoration.

Every moment of his life, man ought to keep praising God,— God, who has made the most superb provision for him, both physical as well as spiritual.

JANUARY 16

The Life After Death

The Prophet of Islam likened death to sleep and life to the state of wakefulness after sleep. When he awakened in the morning, he would say: "All praise and thanks are due to God who gave us life after death."

For the rest of mankind, waking and sleeping are likewise symbolic of life and death. Going to sleep is like dying and waking up in the

morning is like rising from the grave. Our inevitable awakening after sleeping foreshadows with certainty how we shall arise after death to give an account of our deeds on the Day of Judgement.

Man has to pass his life in this world in such a way that every happening becomes for him a reminder of the Day of Judgement. His sleeping and rising should also serve as reminders of life after death.

The most delicate aspect of man's life is that his existence does not come to an end after death. He has to be reborn in another world. The present world is the world of action, while the world to come will be one in which he reaps his reward. That will be the beginning of a new and eternal life—either eternal heaven or eternal hell.

Man is reminded daily of this most important reality when he goes to sleep and when he rises from sleep. In this way, actions of this world come to remind man of the hereafter.

The Prophet of Islam used to lead a very simple life and laid great stress on believers doing likewise. Once he said, "O people, don't you hear me, O people, don't you hear me, O people, don't you hear me, 'Simplicity is undoubtedly a part of faith.' 'Simplicity is undoubtedly a part of faith.'

When man has discovered the greatness of God, his own-existence in comparison appears quite insignificant. This feeling makes him into a truly modest person. His whole being is coloured in the hue of servitude. His manner ceases to be aggressive and his voice becomes gentle. Even his gait expresses his modesty. His whole attitude comes to reflect a new seriousness.

All this inevitably results in his preferring simplicity in everything, in food, drink, living arrangements, and so on. He avoids luxuries, pomp and show. His soul finds pleasure and contentment in leading a life of simplicity instead of indulgence.

True faith leads man away from artificial things to nature, where simplicity is the rule. He develops a liking for a simple way of life, which is more natural. This naturalness behoves the believer. Naturalness is in accordance with his modesty and humility, themselves great virtues in the eyes of God.

JANUARY 17

Nature's Teaching

Teak is a hard wood used in building and furniture making. It is produced mainly in Burma, but is also grown in India, Thailand, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. In India, it has been in use for over two thousand years.

The most important property of teak is its extraordinary durability. In ancient times boats and bridges were built of this wood and in buildings as old as a thousand years, teak beams are still found to be in excellent condition.

The main cause of the durability of teak wood is that, it is not eaten away by white ants. Wood serves as a food for white ants, and, once they have made inroads, it quickly disintegrates. Yet, foes as they are of wood in general, they pose no threat to teak.

What is the property, which keeps teak safe from the danger of white ants? The answer is quite simple. Teak has a bitter taste, which is not to the liking of the white ant.

This example of an inherent quality acting as a life-preserver shows us the way of nature. Nature wanted to preserve teak from the depredations of the white ant. To achieve this end, it did not formulate demands or utter protests. It simply endowed teak with such a property as would keep its insect attackers at bay.

Just as wood has an enemy in the white ant, so do men have their human enemies in this world. Now what should a man do to save himself from them? Taking a leaf out of nature's book, he should strive to produce in himself such qualities as will keep his enemies away from him, make them refrain from indulging in injurious courses of action.

JANUARY 18

The Pure in Heart

The Quran tells us that man's sole mainstay in the Hereafter will be the pureness of his heart (26:89). That is, only the pure in heart can gain entrance to paradise. Different commentators on the Quran have worded their explanations of this in a variety of ways, but the gist of what they say is largely the same. Here is what Ibn Kathir has written:

The sound heart is one, which knows no impurity or idolatry. According to Ibn Seerin, the sound heart is one which has fully realized that God is Truth and that Doomsday will certainly come—there is no doubt about it—and that God will certainly raise the dead from the grave. According to Ibn Abbas, a sound heart is one, which has borne witness that there is no god but God. According to Mujahid, Hasan and others, a sound heart is one to which idolatry is unknown. According to Sayeed ibn Musayyeb, a sound heart is an upright heart. It is the heart of the believer; the heart of an unbeliever and hypocrite is a diseased one. According to Abu Usman Nishapuri, it means a heart free from bid'a (inventions in religion) and content with the sunnah of the Prophet (3/339).

It is not just the aggregate of a man's good deeds, which provide the criterion for entrance into heaven, but rather his inward state. What will be of real value on Doomsday is the character a man has developed in this life. Those in possession of a divine (rabbani) personality, who are enlightened and aware, who are free of psychological complexities and negative attitudes, who have proved their ability to lead their lives on the level of divine nature, will find their entrance into heaven made easy.

JANUARY 19

A Lesson from History

The Abbasids wrested control of the Islamic Empire from the Umayyads in 750, and Baghdad replaced Damascus as the seat of the caliphate. Ill-equipped for this gigantic task, they had sought the support of Iranians, and it was through the latter's active military involvement that the Abbasids came to power. But the support given by the Iranians was neither short-lived nor without repercussion. It inevitably resulted in the Iranians making deep inroads into Muslim society and politics. While government policy under the Umayyads had focused on Arabization, with Islamization in its wake, now, under the Abbasids, it turned to Persianization as a result of the Iranian influence. This gave rise to a great number of problems, not the least of which the Caliphate's change of orientation.

In the words of a historian:

'Under the Abbasids the caliphate entered a new phase. Instead of focussing, as the Umayyads had done, on the West—on North Africa, the Mediterranean, and relations with southern Europe—the caliphate now turned eastward.'(1/7)

The seriousness of this situation will be realized if we think for a moment that had the Abbasids succeeded fully in their campaign, against Umayyads, the brilliant chapter of Islamic history known as 'Muslim Spain' would never have existed.

Not only did the Abbasid Caliphs give less attention to the western countries, but they also became the deadliest foes of those who were intent on the expansion of Islam. The Abbasids began killing each and every individual belonging to the Umayyad family. Had the conquest of Spain not been made under the Umayyads, and had the Umayyad prince, Abdur Rahman ad-Dakhil, not succeeded in saving his life and finding a refuge in Spain, the chapter of Islam's

entry into Europe and Muslim Spain would perhaps never have been written.

A somewhat similar situation developed in India when the Mughal King, Humayun, was defeated by Sher Shah Suri, and thus deprived of the throne of Delhi from 1540 to 1555. During this period he fled to Iran to seek help from the Iranian emperor Tahmasp. The ruler of Persia helped him with a force of 14,000 men, with the assistance of which he was able to recover the throne of Delhi and re-establish the Mughal empire after a lapse of fifteen years.

But again, this resulted in strong Persian political and cultural influences spreading throughout the Mughal empire. The Persians were not interested in sciences. That is why during the entire Mughal period no advancement in the field of science was made. They were not even aware of the great progress made in this field during Muslim rule in Spain. Enamoured of the fine arts, they brought large numbers of artists, painters, sculptors and poets to India. This influx of talent had a profound effect upon the Muslim society, which consequently took on many of the hues of Persian civilization.

These historical events teach us that whenever you succeed by seeking the help of another your success is no longer exclusively your own. The influence of the person or group from whom you sought assistance will certainly intrude, if not sooner, certainly later. In spite of your best efforts, you will not be able to distance yourself from this invasion.

To obviate such a situation, the proper way to proceed is to deal independently with one's undertakings, starting on a small scale and then endeavouring to advance in a gradual manner. That is the sole way to achieve true success.

Success must be attained slowly and steadily and not by leaps and bounds.

JANUARY 20

Internal Development

How does the Islamic way of life set off inner activities in man? In this, the mainspring is the concept of accountability. Islam brings man to the realization that God Almighty is omnipresent and omniscient so that he has the feeling that for all his words and deeds—even intentions, he is accountable before Him. And after death he will have to face the divine court of justice, where the whole record of his life will be examined. And then, according to its verdict, he will be sent either to eternal hell or eternal Heaven. This feeling surging within him is so powerful that it shakes the entire human personality. A *hadith* thus admonishes the individual: Reckon yourself before being reckoned with. Weigh yourself before being weighed. And prepare yourself for the Great Appearance on Doomsday (Al-Tirmidhi).

The consciousness of the presence of God activates all of the brain cells of the individual. A hunter once remarked: If you are walking through a jungle, and all of a sudden you notice a live tiger standing in a nearby glade, your blood stream will turn into a blood storm.

This is what happens when we stand in the presence of a tiger. At every moment Islam brings man to the realization not only of the Creator of the lion, but also of the Creator of the entire universe. One can judge when the thought of the presence of a tiger turns man's blood stream into a blood storm, how great a storm the thought of the presence of the Creator of the lion, that is, God Almighty, will be produced within a believer.

Therefore, by his own inner compulsion, the believer becomes a man of character and a staunch believer. For him it becomes impossible to be immoral or unjust or dishonest in his conduct to his fellow men.

This concept of the presence of God is no negative matter. This is a wholly positive reality. This is because God is not simply a source of power. He is also a source of mercy. The storm brought about by the awareness of the presence of God awakens not only the feeling of fear, but a strong feeling of hope as well. Similarly, the feeling of the presence of God becomes a perpetual incentive for the positive development of the human personality. This, in Islamic terms, is called a spiritual revolution. In short, belief in Islam makes accountability to God man's greatest permanent concern. The potential of spirituality latent within man is activated by his belief to the ultimate extent; this turns him into a spiritual superman. But the feeling of the presence of God Almighty also cuts man down to size. 'And man cut to size' is the ultimate phrase in the spiritual dictionary. Such a man succeeds to the utmost degree in finding all those things that he ought to experience at the spiritual level. He becomes a man of God through and through.

External Activities

The Islamic man is one who, in consonance with his spiritual development, experiences constant intellectual activity which results in the most intense brain storming. The intellectual awakening, or intellectual development of an Islamic man is so extensive that he becomes cerebrally activated to the highest possible extent. What is that external factor which stimulates this kind of intellectual activity in the Islamic man? It is *da'wah* work.

According to the Quran, Prophet of Islam is the final Prophet. Although no Prophet is going to come after him, the mission of the Prophet must continue. The Ummah of the Prophet, charged with carrying on this mission for posterity, is thus addressed in the Quran: And thus We made you an intermediary nation so that you might bear witness against the people and the Prophet might testify against you. (2:143)

A commentator of the Quran has interpreted this as follows: Muslims are intermediary between the Prophet and the nations of the world (Al-Tabari). In conformance with this, *da'wah* work is obligatory for the Muslim Ummah. It is their essential duty to receive the divine message of the Prophet and convey it to the rest of humanity. It is

not simply an act of annunciation. It is the most important struggle. Because of this the Quran says: Do with them the great *jihad* by the help of the Quran. (25:52)

The Quran is a book, not a weapon. “Great *jihad* with the Quran” means a great religious endeavour; *da’wah* work is thus a great ideological struggle. It is a supreme intellectual effort which stretches to the utmost the mental capacity of the human being.

JANUARY 21

Finders, not Losers

One can sum up the state of the Muslim community today by saying that they are afflicted by a *persecution complex*. Wherever one looks, one finds Muslims haunted by a feeling of having lost something. Everywhere they are complaining of persecution by other nations, of having had something taken away from them.

Closer scrutiny will tell one the nature of those things that Muslims complain of having lost. One will find that it is political power, government posts, economic resources, social influence and material gain that Muslims feel they have been deprived of. To their mind, they have been done out of these things by other nations of the world.

But, in fact, the Muslims have only themselves to blame for the losses they have incurred. It is their own neglectfulness that has taken them where they are. It is not a question of their having been deprived; it is a question of they themselves having failed to come up to the required mark. Still, what is even more important is that, even along with all these losses, there is still one thing that no one can take away from them. They may have lost worldly wealth, but they are still possessors of great spiritual wealth. The religion of Islam is still with them, fully intact. They still have the final divine scripture, preserved in its original state. They are heirs of a Prophet whose teachings

still retain the vitality of the days when he first imparted them to the world. What the Muslims have, then, is greater than what they have lost. How strange that they should feel their losses, mere trifles though they are, and be unaware of the much greater treasure that they still retain.

To say that the path to worldly progress is barred to the Muslims is a highly debatable point. But even if one goes along with the general consensus of Muslim opinion and admits that it is, then still they have the chance to excel in the next world, and success there is better and more lasting than worldly success. Why then should they be so concerned about worldly loss, when they still have access to the much greater gains available in the Hereafter?

Muslims may not be able to find what they seek from men, but they can still find it with God. If they concentrate on serving the divine cause, then they will find that God will provide them, in much greater measure than men could ever do, with all that they seek.

JANUARY 22

Intellectual Development

Da'wah is a strictly non-political mission. But it is an extremely difficult task to perform, because it invites challenges from virtually all sections of society. The *da'i* says: "Here is the truth with a capital T, and success in this world as well as in the world hereafter depends on the acceptance of this truth, so man has no choice but to accept it." This kind of claim is highly provocative, eliciting reactions from every ideological group—religious, materialist, secular, atheist, etc.

The man with a mission throws down a challenge which provokes a response. A challenge-response-mechanism becomes operative which stimulates continuous interaction, involving questions and answers, discussions and dialogues. It is during this interaction that the process of intellectual development begins.

As a mission, *da'wah* work by its very nature is divine. Because of this, people with a mission are bound by their code of ethics to respond in a positive manner to their audiences regardless of the latter's misconduct. At all costs, they must, as a matter of principle, avoid all friction. As the Quran says: "Certainly, we (the Prophets) would bear with patience your persecution of us." (14:12)

This positive behaviour on the part of people engaged in the *da'wah* mission prevents them from succumbing to hatred for and violence against the other party. That again ensures that their intellectual growth and development will go on uninterruptedly. No situation whatsoever will halt this process of peaceful *da'wah* and, subsequently, the inner progress of those involved in it will continue ceaselessly.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ once said: "Beware of the wisdom of mu'min (a believer), because he sees with the light of God." How is it that a mu'min becomes a man of wisdom, in such a superior sense? It is because his faith makes him pious and God-fearing. In his state of piety, he undergoes the inner experience which psychologists call brainstorming. This helps activate his potential to the full extent. The result is miraculous: if, before, he was a man, now after this brainstorming, he becomes a superman.

Then comes *da'wah*, that is, the call to Islam. According to the Quran, *da'wah* is the great *jihad*. Why is *da'wah* the great *jihad*, or great struggle? Because it is a universal mission. It is a most serious task. It engages one's entire capacities throughout one's whole life. Every time one is faced with intellectual challenges, one is bound to give a strong response.

Thus, *da'wah* becomes an extensive course of action through which one's personality develops day by day, until one reaches the highest level of intellectual and spiritual development.

Iman (faith) and *da'wah* are two basic levels of Islam. If iman is a superior ideology, *da'wah* is a superior course of action. Iman purifies one's mind and soul, while *da'wah* imbues one's personality with a sublime probity. One who adopts Islam as a universal mission, in both the ideological and practical sense, is morally activated to the maximum possible extent and this course, slowly but surely, leads him to reach the highest pinnacle of humanity.

Stating the relationship between man and true religion the Quran says:

So you set your face towards the true faith uprightly, the upright nature with which God has endowed man, and let there be no alteration in God's Creation. That is the right religion, although most men may not know it. (30:30)

This means that every human being is created by God to be capable—as a matter of his natural constitution—of accepting the religion of truth. The Unity of God is a truth, arrived at intuitively, and is plain to every man of common sense, unless he perverts himself by the different prejudices which he receives from his environment. Islam is thus the natural religion that a child left to itself would develop. A western writer, Lady Cobbold, has rightly described it in these words:

Islam is the religion of common sense.

When this potential is realized, it results in the emergence of a new man. What kind of character is possessed by this new man is made clear by the following *hadith*:

Nine things the Lord has commanded me:

Fear of God in private and in public;

Justness, whether in anger or in calmness;

Moderation in both poverty and affluence;

Joining hands with those who break away from me;

and giving to those who deprive me;

and forgiving those who wrong me;

and making of my silence meditation;

and my words remembrance of God;

and taking a lesson from my observation.

(Razin)

This *hadith* gives a complete picture of the man Islam wants to build.

JANUARY 23

Towards a New India

When an enraged mob of Hindus demolished the Babari Masjid of Ayodhya on December 6, 1992, and replaced it with a makeshift mandir, this act was both climactic and terminal. It was not the peaking of an upsurge, but its end. Every destructive activity has an outer limit, and when this limit is reached, no further destruction can take place.

Those gifted with farsightedness realized on December 6 itself that this destructive movement, in accordance with the laws of nature, would lose momentum and come to naught. However, there were many who failed to come to a timely appreciation of history's verdict. They continued to fear another "December 6." Now, when the actual state of affairs has become an open book, there is no room for anyone to doubt that as from now, this dark chapter is finally closed, making way for brighter and more hopeful prospects in the history of India.

When it comes to the crunch, no such movement can proceed successfully without an enthusiastic response from the public. Once the public becomes apathetic such a movement loses ground and simply peters out. Events have shown that this is a dead issue. Neither Hindus nor Muslims have any zeal left for further action, it is no longer possible for leaders to whip either community to a frenzy on this score. This being so, why should there be any residual element which still expects this movement to continue?

After the demolition of the Babari Masjid, the All India Muslim Personal Law Board held a meeting in November 93 in Bombay, at which a resolution was passed that all the Muslims of India must assemble in the mosques on December 6, 1993, to pray for the recovery of the Babari Masjid. However, opinions differed on the date to be fixed, as the majority of the members felt that the Muslims

would not, in fact, gather at the mosques on December 6. A via media was found by changing the date to December 3, three days in advance of the demolition date, because, December 3 being a Friday, the Muslims would, of their own accord, be gathering in the mosques to offer their Friday prayer. In this way, there would at least be the outward appearance of the Muslims having observed that day, as a day of prayer for the Babari Mosque at the behest of their leaders.

December 6, 1994, was the second anniversary of Babari Masjid demolition. However, this time the All India Muslim Personal Law Board did not attempt to make any such announcement, even to make a show of there having been a demonstration. They had learnt with their very first experiment that Muslims had very soon dismissed the Babari Masjid issue from their minds. It was just not possible to mobilize them.

However, certain other leaders, who were not shrewd enough to acknowledge this, proceeded to announce the second anniversary of the Babari Masjid's demolition in grand style. Having formed the All India Babari Masjid Rebuilding Committee—an organization which existed more on paper than in actuality—they announced that along with four thousand Muslims, they would march to Ayodhya on December 6, 1994, in order to say their Zuhr prayer in that mosque.

But the so-called Babari Masjid Rebuilding Committee failed miserably to arouse any fervour among Muslims on this issue. What in fact happened was that on December 5, 1994, a mere 50 Muslim zealots boarded a bus in Delhi, and when they were prevented by the police from going any further than Ghaziabad, they all quietly came back to Delhi without having clashed with the police. (Qaumi Awaz, December 6, 1994)

Certain Hindu leaders for their part announced that they would launch a campaign to assemble five lakh Hindus, who would celebrate the 'victory day' by entering into Ayodhya on December 6, 1994. But they too failed to rally their own people to the cause. All that happened was that just a few hundred Hindus reached Ayodhya and, after performing their routine pooja, they went back. The extremism of just a few Hindu leaders had had no appeal for the masses.

It is an undeniable fact that both the Hindu and Muslim public have already put the issue of Ayodhya behind them. It is high time now that both communities diverted their full attention to more constructive activities.

The editorial of the *Hindustan Times* of December 8, 1994, entitled 'Hope on Ayodhya' points out that it is to the credit of the nation that the second anniversary of the demolition of the Babari Masjid passed off without any untoward happenings in any part of the country. Time has been a great healer. The bitterness and bad blood generated two years ago in the wake of the Ayodhya tragedy seem to be disappearing. It is evident that the public are no longer willing to follow their leaders on this issue. They are not going to allow themselves to be led into excess in the name of religion. There seems also to be a parallel change in the attitude of the Sangh Parivar, if the very conspicuous absence of the V.H.P. supremo, Mr. Ashok Singhal, from Ayodhya on December 6, 1994, is anything to go by.

It would be wholly accurate to say that the reason for the present low-key approach of the leaders to this issue is the poor response from the people to their aggressive stance. Where the participation of the public had bloated the matter out of all proportion, its present non-cooperation will deal it a death blow. It is seldom that the public can be aroused more than once on issues of such intense emotionalism. With the passage of time, the pressure of the actual problems of life comes into play as a check on any such arousal. No nation can fail to see the error of attempting to make a non-issue into an issue over a long period of time.

It is human nature to look towards the future and consign the past into oblivion—a law of nature to which Indians would do well to bow. It should be appreciated that present circumstances—with all obstacles cleared from the path—are now fully ripe for non-partisan action of a positive and constructive nature.

The majority of people in India are either illiterate or semi-literate. Approximately half of the country's population is suffering from poverty and unemployment. Corruption of all kinds has led the country to the verge of ruination. Nowhere is justice obtainable in the courts. The goals of sterling character and national unity are yet to be attained. A number of problems of increasing gravity are still

facing our country. The plight of our nation simply cries out for new solutions and freshness of approach.

It is, therefore, the duty of all concerned persons to identify and grasp whatever opportunities present themselves for the construction of new India.

JANUARY 24

Sheer Hard Work

Ms Bapsi Sidhwa, a Parsi lady from Pakistan, is at present teaching at the University of Houston, Texas, in America. Her novels, written in English, are published by international publishing concerns.

The amazing thing is that Bapsi Sidhwa had no formal education. A polio victim at an early age, she was removed by her parents from the primary school she was attending in Lahore. For some time, she studied with the help of a tutor, but this was only for a very short period.

It was only her keenness which spurred her on to become proficient in her studies. She started to study books in English on her own, becoming, as she put it herself, a voracious reader. Ultimately, by dint of continuous effort, she was able to write in English. She submitted her work to various magazines, but got no response from them except rejection slips. The manuscript of her first book lay on her bookshelf for eight long years. She was reduced to a state of despair.

Finally, events took a turn for the better and her articles started to be welcomed by foreign magazines. Despite having no formal degree, she has become known at the international level as a writer in English, and teaches the subject of creative writing at an American University (*Times of India*, February 25, 1990).

All learning is acquired in the school of hard work; all progress is achieved at the price of unflinching effort. Perseverance is a virtue

which can be practised at all times, even by one who is crippled by a disease, and even by one who had failed to get a degree from a university. Hard work, in fact, is the brightest jewel in the crown of human virtues.

JANUARY 25

Success Out of Failure

The Prophet Joseph was thrown into a deserted, dried-up well by his enemies. This, apparently, was a disaster. But the Quran says that no sooner had he been cast down into this dark pit than God revealed to him that he would emerge from it to a new life, and that he would soon reach such heights that even his own brothers would fail to recognize him. It was as if, instead of judging Joseph's predicament from the outside, God saw its inner reality. Viewed from such a standpoint its whole complexion changed. That is why God revealed to Joseph at that crucial point in time the fact that his worst moments were about to become his best moments. Where antagonists had intended to put a sudden end to his life's history, a whole fresh chapter was about to unfold.

There is a *hadith* which says, "Beware of the believer's wisdom, for he sees things by the light of God." Seeing things "by the light of God" is tellingly illustrated by God's prediction about the future course of Joseph's life. It means looking not at things, but into things in order to find their hidden potential. Looked at from this angle, what at first appears to be the worst of fates soon takes on the aspect of a stepping stone to better things. One who sees things by the light of God can see advantage in disadvantage, bright prospects in murky situations. He can then plan for the future, with a greater guarantee that he will be able to surmount all obstacles in his path. The strength of this planning is such that it cannot be thwarted by those who, failing to see the reality, judge only by appearances.

In present times, Muslims have suffered, and are still suffering on many counts at the hands of other nations. This is undoubtedly a deplorable state of affairs. But if we look at this issue only on the surface, we shall have no option but to regard certain nations as oppressors and then waste a great deal of precious time in repeatedly registering protest against them. Sadly, most Muslims today are perpetually engaged in such activities; they have yet to see their own situation by the light of God. Had they ever perceived it in this way, they would have known that every cloud has a silver lining. They would have known that what appears to be the worst dilemma can bear the best of fruits.

Here, I should like to refer to an aspect of human history which has been particularly emphasized by Arnold Toynbee in his well-known book, *The Study of History*. In this book Toynbee has examined in depth twenty one civilizations of the old and new worlds. What has struck him as truly remarkable is that the creators of the great civilizations were mostly those nations which had suffered some major defeat, or which had had to face conditions of great adversity. This unexpected assessment would clearly indicate that favourable developments are born from the wounds inflicted by unpropitious circumstances. Indeed, the modern civilization produced by the western countries provides a clear example in support of Toynbee's theory.

Before the rise of the western nations, Muslims ruled over a large part of the globe. They had even conquered Syria and Palestine, which were holy places for the Christians. In order to recover them the Christian nations launched a united assault on the Muslim world. These wars are known in history as the Crusades and were waged intermittently for almost two hundred years from 1095 to 1271. But finally the western nations had a crushing defeat inflicted on them by the Muslims, after which they lost their military aspirations. With no further hope of challenging the Muslims on the battlefield, they began to aspire to better things in other spheres. This situation was marked by a new way of thinking which came to be called the spiritual Crusades. That is to say that they were now facing up to their opponents in non-military fields.

They set about learning Muslim sciences, and academic books began to be translated from Arabic into English. After the first stages of imbibing Muslim learning, they began to add to this body of knowledge, and persisted in their efforts for several hundred years to the point where human history entered into a new era: the traditional age was now replaced by the scientific age; handicrafts now gave way to the machine. From the wounds of a crushing defeat, modern civilization had begun its ever-accelerating evolution, leading its creators to eventual world dominance.

The tremendous success of the western nations emerged from an abysmal failure. It was the defeats they had suffered in crusades which led them to the victories of the modern age.

In this world of God, defeat is also the door to victory. The secret of success lies hidden in failure. It is for us to realize this and to avail of it.

JANUARY 26

Religion and Politics

With the independence of India in 1947, two countries—India and Pakistan—came into existence on the subcontinent. In both these countries there was a secular group and a religious group. The secular group held that the system of the country's governance should be run along purely secular lines, independently of religion, whereas the thinking of the religious group was quite the contrary. They insisted that the political system of the country should be governed in accordance with the dictates of religion.

This religion-based system was called Nizam-e-Mustafa in Pakistan, and Ram Rajya in India. Although in both of these countries political power fell into the hands of the secular group, in neither country did the religious group remain silent. Rather, they pursued the path of confrontation in order to attain their goal of establishing the system

of government on the basis of religion. To put it in another way, they opted for the path of force in order to replace the secular system with the system of government of their choice.

This struggle culminated in Pakistan in April 1979 with Bhutto's execution, which was termed judicial murder by Bhutto himself. Pakistan's religious class felt that Bhutto's existence presented the greatest obstacle to introducing Nizam-e-Mustafa. He had, therefore, to be eliminated. But the experiment revealed that Nizam-e-Mustafa could not find a place in the life of the nation even after the removal of Bhutto. The hold of the secular group persisted.

The Ram Rajya movement in India culminated in December 1992 with the demolition of the Babari Masjid at Ayodhya. Even after a period of two years, subsequent to the demolition, the Ram Rajya movement has not been able to move even one step ahead. The secular group continues to dominate the political arena.

Whether it be right or wrong, from the ideological point of view, to subordinate politics to religion, the experiment of the last fifty years tells us that our present course is certainly not the right one. It would be more true to say that the present course, in terms of non-achievement of goals, has been counter-productive. What has come into being, and what is going to be achieved in the effort to consolidate the position of religion is in no way a religious system, but is rather a course of destruction. This destructive element has only added to the general ruination of the country.

How did all these efforts on our part backfire? It can be traced quite simply to our violation of realities. Innumerable natural causes have to cooperate in this world in order to bring about a significant event. Someone has said very pertinently: 'Politics is the art of the possible.' That is, only when conducive factors are present is a leader able to realise a political event. It is not possible even for the greatest of leaders to bring about a political revolution simply by dint of his own efforts without the cooperation of external elements.

The Islamization of Pakistan and the Hinduization of India simply failed to take shape; despite a 50-year bloody struggle neither could Pakistan be Islamized nor India Hinduized.

As a result of the intellectual development of the last several hundred years, the world mindset is now entirely against a state based on religion. This world-wide intellectual revolution is known as secularism. While religion is founded on *faith*, secularism is based on reason. The majority of the educated classes in modern times has accepted that matters of state should be kept independent of sacred scriptures, and that they should be dealt with on the basis of reason. That is to say that world opinion is in favour of the secular rather than the religious state.

India presents no exception to this rule. As a result of the modernization of education over the last two hundred years, the new Indian generation thinks along the same lines as the rest of the world. Like all other countries, India too is a part of the global village.

Given this reality, if a state based on religion had to be established, a sea change in world thinking—on a purely ideological plane—should have to be effected. Without a universal, intellectual revolution, it would be impossible to found a religious state in the manner of a political island even at the level of one's own country.

The only practicable course to follow in this matter is to acknowledge the reality. Besides this, there is almost no other choice. Now the time has come for a true patriot ultimately to change himself in the interests of his country. Accepting his limitations, he should mould himself in accordance with the reality rather than waste time in pursuing the unattainable goal of a reality moulded to suit his own purposes.

Having given due consideration to all aspects of this issue, I have come to the conclusion that without going into the ideological discussion of what is right and what is wrong, all the concerned parties should come to agree in this matter on a practicable formula in the wider interests of the country.

What is most important in this connection is to set the election process in motion without any hindrance. Elections should be free and fair. Whichever group is subsequently elected to power should be given full freedom to complete its term.

During this period, the defeated group should never launch a campaign to oust the victor group. It should, on the contrary, direct

its efforts to impressing its ideology upon the public which is later to vote it to power. The five-year period should be devoted to bringing about changes in public opinion by peaceful methods. If the defeated group succeeds in influencing the voters, it will automatically be voted to power in the next elections. It will then find the opportunity to reconstruct the country's political and administrative systems along its own ideological lines.

Wholehearted acceptance of election results, followed by the adoption of a waiting policy, while one's own ideology continues to be propagated in a peaceful manner, is the only practicable course. This is the only way to influence the minds of the voters, without running counter to the genuine interests of the country.

JANUARY 27

Thoughts of an American Muslim

Three years ago David Miller embraced Islam and became Yousaf Omar. This transition had a great deal to do with his disillusionment from his society. Here he reflects on the nature of American culture through the worldview that has transformed him.

Whenever I think about myself living in the United States these days, two stories come to mind. The first is from Maulana Rumi and the other, although a joke, is very revealing of the viewpoint that prevails here.

In the first book of the Mathnawi, Rumi tells a story of a man who lived in a desert and who, urged on by his wife, agreed to take an offering to the King in the city. The offering was a pitcher of rain water, which the man and his wife had laboriously collected. They considered this water precious because it was sweet compared to the brackish water of their well, their only major source.

Meagre though the offering was, the King received it in the spirit in which it was offered and, emptying the pitcher, filled it with gold. The King also arranged for the man to return to his home on a boat. Seeing the vastness of the river on which he travelled, the man marvelled at all the water the King had at his command and at the way he took the poor man's meagre offering and rewarded him.

It is one of Rumi's renditions of the Islamic ethos. In fact, it is so rich in implications that Rumi himself narrated it with more than the usual splendid digressions which enrich his work. The King, Maulana makes clear, is God and His bounty is as boundless as all the water on earth.

What enchanted the story was the understanding that prevailed throughout, an understanding of an Islamic *umma*, of compassion, of knowledge of the world, of tolerance and of the recognition of the different kinds of people which constitute the Muslim world.

I must admit, however, to one question which continued to bother me until most recently. Was Rumi's society an ideal or did it really exist?

Then, a couple of weeks back, I read in a special travel supplement to *The New York Times* of an American author, Annie Dillard, giving a short description of her 'sojourn' in North Yemen. She was there during an earthquake and she described how people shared their possessions with the victims and gasoline station owners 'opened their tanks' so that the gasoline would be free and how wage earners contributed one month's wages.

A Yemeni told her of some of his people's responsibilities: 'If someone is sick, or old, or poor, well, we give our food; we get that person clothes; we build for a widow a new house if the old one is falling down.'

The remarkable thing about Dillard's description is how full of appreciation it is. Most American travellers, returning from Islamic countries, do not give positive reports of Muslims, even of those who have been hospitable to them. They were unable to see any women, these travellers complain, except those who were heavily veiled. They mention how exasperated they became because of the constant references to God and the frequent addition of *Insha' Allah*

to statements about the future. Even writers sympathetic to Islam often reveal a bias. They describe the tasbih as ‘worry beads,’ without any regard to what *dhikr* is and how serenity is achieved through the remembrance of Allah.

Rumi’s story presupposes a vital aspect of the Islamic ethos, the presence of a moral understanding among all the people. The trust the wife places in the King, the treatment of her husband at the palace gates, the ready acceptance of his meagre offering, the fact that those with the King also took this acceptance in stride, the way the husband was treated in the King’s city.

A world, in short, so conspicuous by its absence in this narcissistic country called the United States. There is a moral aridity here which parches the throat and lips and which also parches the soul. It is best summed up in a joke.

There was a rich girl in a class who was assigned to write on a poor family. ‘Once upon a time’ she wrote, ‘there was a poor family. The father was poor, the mother was poor, the children were poor, cook was poor, the maid was poor, the butler was poor and the chauffer was poor.’

The United States is that girl, unable to see beyond a very limited set of assumptions it holds dear. After all, its people insist that their country is the epitome of civilization by virtue of its abundance of wealth and weapons (their only criteria for judging whether a country is civilized). There is something drastically lacking and that is a commonly understood sense of either morals or ethics.

The United States today is, in short an amoral world. Not immoral, which presupposes the existence of morals, which in turn means that the people are fully aware that they are doing wrong when they do, but amoral. A ‘people’ as the Quran puts it, ‘without any awareness (of right or wrong)’ (11:29).

One might argue that there is a resurgence of religion here in the United States and point to the rising number of churchgoers. But figures are deceptive. Religion has become a ritual confined to the sabbath. What people do the rest of the week appears to have no connection with what is expressed in church. And yet national leaders insist on calling America a Christian country.

What people say and what people do are two completely different things. Reagan was, some months back, described as a great Christian, despite the fact that he doesn't attend church. Ironically, while this statement was being made, a former president, Jimmy Carter did not concern himself with labels. With his Christian service group, he came to New York, renovated an apartment complex to be used by the poor, and left without seeking any publicity.

Religion here is at best lopsided. One watches with fascination a fundamentalist Christian church service in a huge auditorium filled with impeccably dressed people listening to a group of teenagers singing a song relegating everyone else to hell.

More often than not the Americans appear to be a people who are as the Quran puts it, lost in darkness (zulmat) after their ephemeral light has disappeared. 'Whatever became of sin?' asks William F. Buckley, Jr., who shares with the fundamentalists much of the conservative ideology, in a recent issue of *The New York Times Magazine*. It is, not surprising, precisely the question Karl Meninger of the Meninger Clinic asked in his book published in 1973, *Whatever Became of Sin?*, a volume aimed at solving all kinds of social problems through 'an ethical system for today's world.' The book sold more than 125,000 copies in hardcover alone and about twice as many in paperback.

The question these authors should be asking is, 'Is anyone listening? Is anyone listening to those who remind the people of vital necessity of values to keep society together?'

The majority of Americans simply do not know that they are committing some wrong. And when the very few do, they do not know what to do about it.

A fine, recent example is a school's attempt to cut down and eventually eliminate promiscuity. It forbade the holding of hands within the school buildings. Evidently, educators still have to learn about the youngsters they have to deal with. The students reacted with the way they usually do, by overdoing what has been forbidden.

How did all this come about? The reasons should be of special interest to Muslims all over the world, especially to those attracted to the glamour of things American.

One of the chief reasons is not far to seek—Hollywood. It is difficult—to believe nowadays that at one time amorality was largely confined to cinema screen. People then had a moral ethical sense. One has only to compare crime figures to those of today. Nowadays, movies and television shows are so highly emulated that at times it is difficult to distinguish between what is happening on the screen and what is happening in real life. Show business dominates this country. Movie and television stars are worshipped.

Another important reason is one that created an enormous chasm between what happened before and what happened afterward World War Two. It was a war then, to quote Nietzsche ‘everything was permissible.’ It was, as everyone knows, the most brutal war ever fought.

It was during that period that compassion disappeared. Other countries might have recovered it, but not the United States. In addition, that brutality and that freedom to do anything one wanted without any restraint whatsoever did not disappear in this country with the end of the war. Both persisted and, worse, increased.

The Americans were basking in what then appeared to be a perpetual and luxurious sun. The United States had gone into the war a debtor nation and it emerged a creditor nation, with all the allies owing it millions upon millions of dollars. The war effort had also helped to enrich the country.

With affluence came an increase in the two other factors that helped sunder human relationships, the automobile and the telephone.

The automobile gave individuals a power they did not otherwise possess, a power that enabled them to do a number of things unabated. It enabled them to disappear from the scene where they had done wrong. If a person didn’t like a neighbour, he or she moved, to another part of town, to another town, to another part of the country almost a continent away.

The ensuing mobility became a habit, most often in its worst aspect. More and more Americans moved away from their parents and, equally significant, away from their roots.

The telephone further exacerbated what was rapidly becoming an American way of life, fragmentation. Personal visits became a thing

of the past. People talked with even the closest relatives only over the phone. This, too, became widely accepted. As a result, practically everyone overlooks the irony of a telephone company's television commercial, which asks people to use their long distance service to 'reach out and touch someone.'

If there is one person who typifies the direction the United States was heading for as far back as World War One, it is Hemingway. His life and his books parallel the road to amorality. In the beginning of his career he profited from those days when the dollar was king and Europe was the 'playground' for Americans.

In Hemingway's early stories and novels, the absence of morality was clear, depicted as a consequence of the brutality of war and concomitantly expressed in brutal terms.

But soon, Hemingway's name became synonymous with the playground and later with hedonism and eventually with amorality. His heroes indulged in sheer pleasure—bullfighting, big game hunting, big game fishing—all of them filled with violence of one kind or another.

Hemingway eventually became the most famous writer in the history of the United States and one of a very few who made the front pages of newspapers. He was therefore widely read, thus becoming an exceptional writer in one other respect. He, too, joined the very few authors whose books were avidly read both in the public world and academia.

One of the major reasons for his popularity in the university world was that his amorality—characteristic of almost all his later works—appealed to professors and students alike. Here was a world they aspired to, one without any restrictions whatsoever. As a result, without intending to, there was a tacit support for what was already taking place in society.

So that when American society achieved its peculiar kind of freedom—an amoral ethos—it did so because the upholders of the most vital part of culture sanctioned it. Without that underpinning, there might have been some hope for this country. Right now there isn't any hope and the most tragic thing about all of it is that the American people are not aware of it.

JANUARY 28

God-Given Hope

*If a misfortune befalls you, it is the fruit of your own labours.
He forgives much. (42:30)*

This verse of the Quran tells us that whenever a man is afflicted by some misfortune, it is necessarily the result of one or more of his own actions. Complaining against others in this world is meaningless. When everyone must suffer the consequences of his own actions, making protests and complaints against others is only a waste of time. It will in no way solve the problem.

This is a system devised by nature itself. It has good tidings, and great hope for us, in that it has placed our problems in our own hands. It has not left us to be dependent on the charity and compassion of others.

If the problems faced by us had been caused by others, then we should have been dependent upon others for their solution. We should have had to wait for others' kindness. But God has devised the system of world in such a way that He has made everyone's concerns his own personal affair. That is, everyone can construct his life by dint of his own efforts. Everyone's future is in his own hands.

Sometimes one has to incur a loss due to one's own foolishness; much harm can be avoided by adopting wise ways. Sometimes an initiative goes awry for lack of planning. But there will always be other chances to work in future in a planned way so that the mistake may be rectified. Sometimes by being hasty a man invites trouble, but then he always has the possibility of turning the situation to good account by adopting the ways of patience and fortitude. Sometimes people bring ruin upon themselves by being too emotional, but they too have the chance to reach their goal of success by remaining cool and rational in their approach on subsequent occasions.

JANUARY 29

Facing the Court

Mr. Manohar J. Pherwani, a government officer, rose in service to become Chairman of the Unit Trust of India and of the National Housing Bank, both highly rated posts in the Indian economic sphere. In 1991, the Reserve Bank of India issued a circular which stated that bank funds should not be transferred to the stock market. Disregarding this circular, Mr. Pherwani issued a cheque for Rs. 3,078.63 crores to a broker. He was later brought to book for flouting government regulations. He resigned from his post on May 9, 1992. This chain of events was reported in the *Hindustan Times* of May 22 and June 3, 1992.

His case was handed over to the C.B.I. for investigation, a development ultimately proved disastrous. He so feared being unable to exonerate himself of all blame in court, that only twelve days after resigning, he complained of severe chest pain around 2.25 a.m., and within five minutes he had collapsed. He was only 58 years of age.

The trauma of having to appear in a man-made court proved too overwhelming for Mr. Pherwani. But if he felt afraid of having to account for his actions in a court set up by human beings, how would he feel about appearing in a court set up by the Almighty? When having to face a human court proves so unnerving, what will a man's condition be when he finds himself standing trial in the divine court?

Death may spare a man from facing human judges, but it will immediately set him before his Maker, the greatest Divine Judge, which will be a much more terrifying experience. This is a matter of the utmost gravity. Were man to ponder upon it, he would be shaken to the very core.

JANUARY 30

The Construction of Life

Reviewing modern, scientific civilization, a commentator has made the very pertinent observation that it is not invested with ideological permanence. This seems quite true when we consider that Copernicus replaced Ptolemy, Newton replaced Copernicus, and Einstein replaced Newton.

The culture of the modern age has come to be called the 'culture of technology'. But this is a contradiction in terms. Culture, by its very nature, suggests permanence. But science and technology are sadly wanting in this quality. Ergo, any culture based on technology will always have the characteristics of impermanence. It can never meet the eternal requirements of human nature.

Technology is of material service to man. As such, it cannot be the total basis of human culture. It can certainly take us from the age of the plough to the age of the tractor or, from the bullock-cart to the aeroplane. But technology cannot give man a culture or a civilization in the real sense of those words. Technology can serve man but it cannot be expected to provide man with the spiritual mainspring of his life—a religion.

Technology, in short, is the servant of man, whereas culture is his life's religion. If technology is life's conveyance, it is culture which determines man's destination. The changes taking place in things like conveyances do no real harm. But when the very bases of culture begin to be shuffled human life will lose its meaningfulness.

The right way is to make technology life's servant, while adopting religion as the basis of culture. Now when we find that of all religions, Islam is the only one which has been properly preserved and established it goes without saying that the only basis for the construction of life

on a foundation of culture is that of Islam. Islam provides a stable base for the construction of human life in which there is no question of change.

JANUARY 31

The Importance of Time

Lord Chesterfield was born in London in 1694 and died there in 1773. His letters addressed to his son, which were later published, described the art of success. In one letter, for instance, he writes, 'I recommend you to take care of the minutes, for the hours will take care of themselves.'

That is to say that if you can save your minutes, your hours will of themselves be saved. Taking care of the parts is just as good as taking care of the whole. This is because the whole is made up of parts.

Mostly people tend to neglect the part in favour of the whole. This mentality ultimately results in failure at some later stage.

Never waste a moment of your available time. By availing of your moments you can be the possessor of your months and years. Wasting minutes will cause you to lose months if not years.

If you are wasting, daily, just five minutes of your hour, this will amount to wasting two hours in twenty four hours. This will eventually come to 60 hours in a month, and 720 hours in a year. This is how the majority of people have been wasting most of their available time. A man whose life span is eighty hardly makes full use of 40 years of his time.

Time is your greatest asset. Be meticulous about saving it.

All great success ultimately boils down to an accumulation of small success. Once you are ready to achieve a small success, a big success will of itself come your way. Here is a practical example of how this apparently trivial piece of advice can have great results.

Molvi Lutfullah, born in 1802 in Dharagar (an ancient city of Malwah) was an ordinary tutor. He had not received any of his education in an English school even for a single day, yet his autobiography was published in 1857 by Smith Aldara and Co., London. It was titled: 'Autobiography of Lutfullah: A Mohammedan Gentleman.' This book included a foreword by Mr. East Weck who in commending the excellence of the English written by Molvi Lutfullah, expressed his amazement at how an Indian could write such an exhaustive book in a foreign language.

How did Molvi Lutfullah come to be capable of writing a book which was not only published in London, but which was held praiseworthy for its language by the English publisher? The secret is expressed in this saying: "Little by little becomes great."

Molvi Lutfullah learnt English by his own efforts. He used to teach Hindustani, Persian and Marathi languages to the English employees of the East India Company. The number of his students is put at 100. It was this contact with the English that made him feel interested in learning the English language. He began studying English privately. By working hard continuously for eight years, he managed to have full command over it. He has written in his book that during those eight years, not even a single night passed without having committed to memory 10 words of the English language, or without having thoroughly learnt a few pages from Dr. Gilchrist's Grammar. A 'ten words' appear to be of no significance, but when multiplied over eight years this step can turn a man into a foreign language writer capable of claiming appreciation even from native speakers who are masters of the language.

FEBRUARY 1

Gratitude

According to Abu Hurayrah, the Prophet once said, “One who never expresses his gratitude to other human beings will never be thankful to God.”

Thankfulness is a state of mind which cannot be compartmentalised. If it manifests itself in one place, the chances are that it will do so in other places too. If a man shows gratitude to one person, he will surely show it to others likewise.

When a man does someone a good turn, it is something quite obvious—a tangible direct experience. On the contrary, God’s kindness, being an indirect experience, is not at all obvious. One has to be perceptive, and reflective to be able to realise what favours are granted to man by God. While the favours a man does are observable, God’s favours can be realized only by thinking about them.

One who fails to perceive an event which is directly observable cannot be expected to grasp something which can be apprehended only after a great deal of cogitation.

If the recipient of a favour fails to acknowledge it for fear of belittling himself in the eyes of his benefactor, he does himself nothing but harm. It is more a question of being belittled in the eyes of his own conscience than falling down in others’ eyes—a course by far the more injurious.

An even greater disadvantage of an ungrateful attitude is that it produces a mentality of non-acknowledgement. Failing at first to acknowledge the favours of one’s fellow men leads one to failure to give wholehearted credence to the Lord of the Universe. There is no greater loss in this world than one who has failed to acknowledge his Creator.

FEBRUARY 2

The Greatness of Humility

Once happened to meet a gentleman who had neither a proper education nor a sound economic position. His greatest asset as he saw it, was the fact that his grandfather, who lived in a palatial house, had been one of the Nawab's close associates and had had an honourable title bestowed upon him. He went on at some length, and with great pride, about his grandfather's exalted state.

I had the impression that the cause of his own destitution was his pride in his ancestry. The psychology which went with being one of a noble line had prevented him from either acquiring a good education or engaging himself in some profitable business. Out of sympathy for his down-at-heel condition, I tried to make him understand the importance of adopting a humble and realistic attitude, as opposed to that of continuing pride in his forefather's achievements. To support my arguments, I narrated many telling incidents, but it was all to no avail. He was beyond understanding. It was as if I were conversing with him in a totally alien language.

The same is true of present-day Muslims who draw their emotional sustenance from the religion of pride. If this is happening on an ever-expanding scale, it is because they fail to understand the religion of humility.

Islam, for the believers of the early stages, was just such a religion—a religion of humility. This psychology of humility, which marked their thoughts and deeds, was produced by their keen awareness of the greatness of God. For them God's law became a reality, for God elevates all those who adopt the posture of humility. From there, by the grace of God, they went on to emblazon their deeds and their virtues on the pages of human history for all time to come.

The Muslims of the present day are the successors of the Muslims of those early stages. It is unfortunate, however, that they have inherited from them not their humility, but only the recollection of the great heights to which their remote ancestors rose. Devoid of humility and its resultant virtues, they are carried through life on a flood of grandiloquence.

The need of the hour is to awaken in them the true spirit of their faith so that they may be brought closer to religion based on humility. God elevates the humble: the proud and the vain are cast by Him into oblivion.

FEBRUARY 3

Understanding

Once on a train journey I overheard a conversation between two gentlemen who were sitting opposite me, one a Hindu, the other a Muslim. The Hindu said, "It seems that Islam is an intolerant religion." The Muslim replied, "That is a complete misunderstanding. Islam, on the contrary, teaches tolerance." Both advanced arguments in favour of their separate viewpoints. The Hindu cited an instance of Muslims in his locality becoming provoked by the preparations being made by Hindus to take out a procession. There had been a clash and the procession was stopped. The Muslim passenger, however, simply recited verses from the Quran to prove his point.

It occurred to me that both of them, judging by appearances, were serious and sincere. Neither seemed biased. Then why was it that their views differed so widely? After considerable reflection, I came to the conclusion that it was traceable to the difference in their outlook. The Hindu formed his opinion of Islam by judging the behaviour of Muslims. The Muslims, on the other hand, quoted extensively from the Quran, presenting the content of the verses as if Muslims actually followed the code of ethics enshrined in the holy scriptures.

A more proper and more sincere approach would be to engage in thorough self-appraisal before sitting in judgement on others. Before attempting to correct other's faults, one should set about rectifying one's own. It is the gap between principle and practice that is the main reason for misunderstanding. Once this gap is eliminated, misunderstanding will of itself disappear. Moreover, if one wants to be certain of not being misunderstood, one must be ready to show restraint in the face of provocation. One must not react negatively, even if it means some initial sacrifice of one's self-esteem.

Imagine what happens if someone abuses you and you retaliate by throwing a stone at him. Later, while reporting this incident, the wrong doer will mention only the fact that you threw a stone at him. He will leave out all mention of his own bad behaviour. The misunderstanding truly created is then well-nigh impossible to set right. If you want to avoid having your behaviour misinterpreted by others, you must refrain from reacting altogether in negative situations, even if you feel that you would be completely justified in so doing. In that way, no one can make the kind of spiteful allegations against you from which misunderstandings can so quickly arise.

FEBRUARY 4

The Language of Hadith

Dr. Maurice Bucaille has brought out many books and articles on the subject of the veracity of the Quran. He has proved by scientific argument that the Quran is the Book of God.

He does not, however, place the *Hadith* on the same plane as the Quran. Expressing his doubts regarding the authenticity of the *hadith*, he holds that some traditions are authentic, but that others are either dubious, or should be rejected outright. (p. 243)

This comment is based on a misunderstanding. There is a *hadith*, for instance, which explains that the intense heat of summer is due to

blasts of wind from hell. He failed to understand the meaningfulness of this *hadith*, because he took it quite literally. Actually, this *hadith* is only one of the many that are couched in symbolic language.

Let us take just one instance for illustration. It was the custom among Arabs for people of rank to follow funeral processions on horseback or camelback. When the Prophet once saw some people riding on horses alongside a cortege he asked: “Are not you ashamed that the angels are walking on foot while you are riding on horses?” (Sunan ibn Majah)

This does not mean that the angels have feet like ours, and were literally walking on foot. The Prophet in fact wanted to stress the point in a symbolic way, that when a man has completed his term of trial, and is on his way to the Hereafter, it is a time for humility and modesty. In keeping with this spirit, it is only proper to walk on foot with the funeral. That is to say, it is a time for the humble servants of the Lord to walk on foot rather than indulge in the luxury of conveyance.

The simile in the *hadith* are all meant for illustration. They should be understood as figures of speech and not taken literally.

FEBRUARY 5

The Result of Reaction

Mr. G.D. Birla (1894-1983), besides being one of the topmost industrialist in India, was also a very close associate of Mahatma Gandhi in the freedom struggle.

How the idea of national freedom took shape in the mind of Mr. Birla, is reproduced here in his own words: “When I was 16 years old, I started my independent business as a broker in Calcutta. During this period, I came in contact with many Englishmen, who were either my customers or my superior officers. I also saw their organisational capability and other qualities. But one thing I could

not bear was their racial pride. I was not permitted to use the elevator to reach their offices. Neither was I allowed to sit on their benches, while waiting. This humiliation was very painful. As a result of this, I got interested in politics, which started in 1912 and continues till today.”

The editor of *The Hindustan Times* (12 June, 1983) comments on this event: “This was the beginning of his nationalism.” Mr. Birla’s nationalism was inspired by intense feelings of dislike. Similarly the Islamism of the present-day Muslim leaders is born out of hatred for an opponent or enemy, whether real or imaginary. Both these sentiments are the results of reactionary forces, even though they speak in different languages. Neither of them could be termed a positive case.

To act on the strength of a positive incentive is one thing. But to be spurred on by a negative incentive is quite another thing. The former is ‘action,’ the latter ‘reaction.’ A satisfactory result can flow only from right action. Reaction being negative in itself, no positive result can be expected from it.

FEBRUARY 6

Paying the Price

On the insertion of a one-rupee coin, an automatic weighing machine at the airport ejects a neatly printed card showing one’s weight.

Fascinated by this machine, a little boy stood on its footplate, reached up and dropped a one-rupee coin into the appropriate slot. The machine made a rattling noise, then the card, with the child’s weight printed on it, came out of another slot.

The little boy found this amusing. He demanded more coins from his parents and kept repeating the process, just as if it were a game. And the machine never failed to oblige him. Every time he

put in a coin, a card would come out. But, finally he ran out of one rupee coins. He only had a 50 paise coin left. So he just put that in the slot. The machine made the same rattling noise as before, but no printed card appeared. With no response from the machine, the little boy started to cry.

But this was the occasion not to cry but to learn a lesson. The machine's failure to oblige was a silent reproach to both the child and his parents. Its significance was that everything had its price, and that without paying in full, no one could receive what he wants.

This is a law which applies equally to our present world and to the Hereafter. It is only on payment of the full price that we can receive anything in either of the two worlds. One who is not prepared to pay should have no expectations of receiving anything. This law is immutable and eternal, and no amount of wishful thinking or voicing of protests will ever put an end to it.

FEBRUARY 7

The Antidote

In a statement made to the Indian Parliament in July 1991, Mr. M.M. Jacob, Minister of State for Home Affairs, put the number of suicides in Delhi alone during the three and a half year period from January 1988, to June 30, 1991, at 2,700. He said that the basic reason for taking this step was extreme frustration. (*Hindustan Times*, August 1, 1991)

It is only very rarely that a handicapped person kills himself. Most of the people who die by their own hands are physically quite healthy. There are many reasons, however, for their taking the extreme step of suicide: failure to gain admission to post-graduate courses, or to secure a good job after completing a university education, postponement of promotion, inability to marry the person of one's choice.

Most of these people had everything in their favour, including good health. They lacked none of the necessities of life. But because one thing, which seemed of great importance to them, eluded their grasp, they fell a prey to such an overwhelming sense of frustration that they decided to end it all.

One thing—the greatest thing in the world—was absent from all of their lives: hope. Man lives on hope. Where it evades him, life appears so meaningless that he sees no sense in continuing with it. That is when he takes his own life.

The mistake all suiciders make is to look only at the present and not at the future. Because the present has not been blessed with abundance, that does not mean that the future will not change for the better. If a man contemplating suicide were instead to turn his attention to exploiting his own capabilities and seizing whatever opportunities came his way, it is very likely that he would come to possess all those things, absence of which makes him so miserable today.

The man whose gaze is fixed on the present may find much to depress him. It is only when he looks to the future that he will find the courage to act.

FEBRUARY 8

Silence

Ernest Psiachari (1883-1914), a French writer, was in his youth a free-thinker and an atheist. But later he reverted to Christianity. Grandson of the famous historian, Ernest Rinan, Psiachari is ranked among those who made an effort to bring about a spiritual awakening in France at the turn of the twentieth century. One of his sayings has been rendered in English in these words:

Silence is a bit of heaven that comes down to earth.

Silence is the language of nature. When one observes silence one finds oneself at one with nature, and surely there is no higher plane on which the human soul may exist.

Man cannot, of course, remain silent in the absolute sense. When he appears to be silent, he is so for others, not for himself. Remaining silent as far the external world goes, he starts conversing with his internal world.

Observing silence is a great act. When one is silent one's attention is diverted more to 'heavenly' matters than to 'worldly' ones. One's ears are turned more to the whispers of angels than to those of men. Man's focus becomes his own self rather than extraneous matters. He eschews superficiality and engages himself with deeper realities.

When man speaks, he is in a limited domain, but when he is silent he finds himself in the unlimited vastness of the world.

FEBRUARY 9

Christianity and Islam

Despite recent improvements in global communications, there is still widespread ignorance and misinterpretation of different faiths, (vide recent articles in the *Wall Street Journal*) and this leads to religion being a divisive rather than a cohesive force. There is, therefore, an ever-increasing need to promote a better understanding of all major faiths, so that inter-religious harmony may prevail. Given our multi-religious world, we must—rather than denigrate others' faiths—cultivate the transcendent genius of spirituality, so that conflicting religious loyalties do not cause a disintegration of the socio-political framework of any nation or wrongly channelize national energies.

The basic truth about different religions needs to be emphasized, so that superficial interpretations of each other's scriptures may not be used, wittingly or unwittingly, to aggravate communal tensions. Scriptures should be read not to fault them, but to grasp their

underlying spirituality. Religious traditions must be understood in depth. They must be lived in order to be known.

Moreover, we must avoid judging any Holy Book by the conduct of its adherents. Rather than judge the Quran or the Bible by what Muslims or Christians do, we should go by what their scriptures prescribe. The same should strictly apply to all other faiths. Above all, we need to respond to each other's scriptures and communities with considerable tolerance.

The initial mutual goodwill and understanding which existed between Islam and Christianity has, most unfortunately, been eroded over the centuries. Perhaps a perusal of the accounts given below of early encounters between adherents of the two faiths will encourage a return to that enviable state.

Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, (570- 632A.D) was twelve years old when he accompanied his paternal uncle, Abu Talib, on a caravan journey to Syria. When they camped at Busra, he met a Christian monk known as Bahira, who was well-versed in Christian scriptures. One day, as the latter emerged from his cell, he saw Muhammad, in whom he recognized the signs of Prophethood, as recounted in Christian books. After some conversation with him, he advised Abu Talib to hasten back to his land with his nephew and to protect him against enemies, for a great future lay in store for him. Somewhat alarmed, Abu Talib took him back to Makkah soon after he had finished his trading in Syria. Much later, at the age of forty, when the Prophet was meditating in a cave called Hira, situated near Makkah, he was visited by the Angel Gabriel, who came to him with the first revelations contained in the Quran in chapter 96: "Read in the name of your Lord who created, created man from clots of congealed blood. Read! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful one, who taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know."

After this extraordinary experience, he rushed back home to his wife Khadijah, to whom he said, trembling, "Cover me with a cloak, cover me with a cloak." Then, having recovered a little, he told her of his experience and said: "I feel my life is in danger." She responded, "No, never! God will never bring you to grief." Then she took him to

her cousin, Waraqa ibn Naufal, who had become a Christian. Waraqa's comments were: "The One who came to you is the same Namus (the specially appointed Divine Messenger) who came to Moses. I wish I were a young man and could live till the time when your people will expel you." The Prophet asked, "Will my people expel me?" Waraqa replied: "Yes, no one has been before, who brought the same thing that you have brought, without the people turning hostile to him."

The third encounter took place a few years after Muhammad's attainment of prophethood. During this period Makkah was dominated by idolaters who, rejecting monotheism, set about persecuting the Prophet and his Companions. The Prophet therefore advised his followers to leave for Abyssinia (now known as Ethiopia), a justly ruled Christian kingdom, "until God leads us to a way out of our difficulty." About eighty Muslims then emigrated to Abyssinia, where they lived under the protection of the Negus, until after the Prophet's emigration to Madinah.

The Makkans, upset at this Muslim exodus, immediately sent a delegation to the Negus to ask for the emigrants' extradition to Makkah. But the Negus refused to yield to their appeal until he had heard the refugees plead their own case. This was ably done by Jafar ibn Abi Talib, who briefly described the teachings of Islam. At the request of the Negus, he recited certain divine revelations. When the patriarchs heard the first part of the chapter entitled 'Mary', confirming the Message of the Evangel, they were pleasantly surprised and said: "These words must have sprung from the same fountainhead from which the words of our Lord Jesus Christ have sprung." The Negus then said, "What you have just recited and that which was revealed to Moses must have both issued from the same source. Go forth into my kingdom; I shall not extradite you at all."

In the classical literature of Islam, there are many appreciative references to Christ and Christianity. The Quran calls Christ the 'Spirit of God' (4:171) and of Mary says: 'We breathed into her of Our spirit, and made her and her son a Sign to all men.' (21:91)

Of Christ and his followers the Quran says: 'We gave Christ the Gospel and put compassion and mercy in the hearts of his followers.' (57:27)

In another chapter the Quran states: 'The nearest in affection to the Muslims are those who say: "We are Christians." That is because there are priests and monks among them; and because they are free from pride.' (5:82-83).

In conclusion, here is a *hadith* of Sahih Muslim or saying of the Prophet Muhammad which demonstrates the Muslims' positive evaluation of Christians.

Mustaurid, a companion of the Prophet, reported that the Prophet said: "The Day of Judgement will not come until the Christians outnumber all other people." Amr ibn al A's, a senior companion of the Prophet, endorsed this:

"You are indeed right. The Christians have four characteristics. They are the most forbearing in times of adversity; they do not allow their spirits to be broken, but promptly recover from every setback; they are the first to charge again after retreat; and they are the best of all in caring for the deprived, downtrodden and the weak. Amr then added that there is a fifth feature, which is the best of all. It is that they restrain their kings from perpetrating injustice and oppression."

FEBRUARY 10

On Islam and Jihad

A perusal of the Quran followed by a study of latter-day Muslim history will reveal a blatant contradiction between the two—that of principle and practice. Where recent developments in some Muslim countries bespeak the culture of war, the Quran, on the contrary, is imbued with the spirit of tolerance. Its culture is not that of war, but of mercy.

At the very beginning of the Quran, the first invocation reads: "In the name of God, the most Merciful, the most Beneficent. Throughout the Quran, God's name is thus invoked no less than 113 times. Moreover, Quran states that the prophets were sent to the world *as a mercy to the people* (21:107).

The word '*jihad*' has nowhere been used in the Quran to mean war in the sense of launching an offensive. It is used rather to mean 'struggle'. The action most consistently called for in the Quran is the exercise of patience. Yet today, the 'Muslim Mujahideen' have equated "God is Great" with "War is Great."

In the light of on-going conflict, we must ask why so great a contradiction has arisen between the principles of Islam and the practices of Muslims. At least one root cause may be traced to historical exigency.

Since time immemorial, military commanders have been accorded positions of great eminence in the annals of history. It is a universal phenomenon that the hero is idolized even in peace time and becomes a model for the people. It is this placing of heroism in the militaristic context which has been the greatest underlying factor in the undue stress laid on war in the latter phase of Islam's history. With the automatic accord in Muslim society of a place of honour and importance to the heroes of the battlefield, annalists' subsequent compilations of Islamic history have tended to read like an uninterrupted series of wars and conquests.

These early chronicles having set the example, subsequent writings on Islamic history followed the same pattern of emphasis on militarism. The Prophet's biographies were called '*maghazi*', that is 'The Battles fought by the Prophet,' yet the Prophet of Islam in fact did battle only three times in his entire life, and the period of his involvement in these battles did not total more than one and half days. He fought, let it be said, in self-defense, when hemmed in by aggressors, and he simply had no option. But historians—flying in the face of fact—have converted his whole life into one of confrontation and war.

We must keep it in mind that the Prophet Muhammad was born at a time when an atmosphere for militancy prevailed in the Arab society. There being, in their view, no other path to justice. But the Prophet always opted for avoidance of conflict. For instance, in the campaign of Ahzab, the Prophet advised his Companions to dig a trench between them and the enemies, thus preventing a head-on clash.

Another well-known instance of the Prophet's dislike for hostilities is his cessation of the campaign of Hudaibiya with a treaty which made more concessions to the enemies than to his own people. In the case of the conquest of Makkah, he avoided a battle altogether by making a rapid entry into the city with ten thousand Muslims—a number large enough to awe his enemies into submission.

In this way, on all occasions, the Prophet endeavoured to achieve his objectives by peaceful rather than by war-like means. It is, therefore, unconscionable that in later biographical writing, all the events of his life have been arranged under the heading of 'battles' (*ghazawat*). How he managed to avert the cataclysms of war has not been dealt with in any of the works which purportedly depict his life.

Ibn Khaldun, the celebrated 14th century historian, was the first to lay down definite rules for the study and writing of history and sociology. He followed the revolutionary course of attempting to present history as a chronicle of events centering on the common man rather than on kings, their generals and the battles they fought. But since war heroes were already entrenched as the idols of society, the caravan of writers and historians continued to follow the same well-worn path as had been trodden prior to Ibn Khaldun. When people have come to regard war heroes as the greatest of men, it is but natural that it is the events of the battlefield which will be given the greatest prominence in works of history. All other events will either be relegated to the background or omitted altogether.

In the later phase of Islam, there came into existence a powerful group of Sufis—many of them great men, who exerted their influence on a multitude of people, their goal being to put an end to this contradiction between the tenets of Islam and Muslim conduct: they at least wanted to strike a balance between the two. But the Sufis failed in this, the principal reason being that they expressed themselves in terms of dreams and the realization of inspiration. The militant interpretation of Islam, on the contrary, was ostensibly based on history and knowledge. Dreams and personal realizations could, therefore, never adequately counter what had come to be regarded as hard facts. Objective reasoning cannot be bested by subjective

postulations, and so the Sufis failed to establish the equilibrium between precept and practice which they so ardently desired.

In the past when the sword was the only weapon of war, militancy did not lead to the mass-scale loss of life and property as modern warfare brings in its wake. In former times, fighting was confined to the battlefield; the only sufferers were those engaged in the battle. But today, the spear and sword have been replaced by megabombs and devastating long-range missiles, so that killing and destruction take place on a horrendous scale. It is the entire human settlement which has now become the global arena of war. Even the air we breathe and the water we drink are left polluted in war's aftermath.

Hence people in the West find Islam outdated and irrelevant precisely because of its militant interpretation. Demands for a reform in Islam are on the increase, as the 'old' version of Islam cannot apparently keep pace with the modern world.

But, in reality, it is not reformation which is urgent, but revival. What is needed is to discard as superficial and erroneous the militant and political interpretation of Islam, and to adopt the original, 'old' version of Islam based on peace, mercy and the love of mankind.

The so-called Muslim Mujahideen have been exhorting their co-religionists to do battle all over the world. But the Quran says: '...and God calls to the home of peace' (10:25). It is up to right-thinking people everywhere to disregard the Mujahideen call, and to start seeing and accepting Islam as it is truly represented by the Quran.

FEBRUARY 11

The Tragedy of Muslims

In the Delhi based Urdu daily *Qaumi Awaz* of November 15, 1994, a Muslim intellectual wrote that the Indian Muslims suffered from a persecution complex. Theirs was a psychology of deprivation which demoralized them, and rendered them unfit for any positive struggle.

Most of us would concede the truth of this statement. Just before reading this analysis, I had occasion to ask a student of the Aligarh Muslim University how his fellow students felt about this state of affairs. He replied that everyone was haunted by the fear of there being no scope for them in India. It was a fear which loomed large on everyone's horizon. During the previous two years, on extensive travels throughout the length and breadth of the country, I had heard the same tales. Everywhere Muslims were in the grip of fear and despondency.

Despondency is held unlawful in Islam. The Quran is explicit on this point: 'No one despairs of God's mercy except those who have no faith' (12:87). According to early commentators on the Quran, in particular, Qatada and Zahhak, despondency is counted among the major sins (*Tafsir-e-Qurtubi* 9/252). Yet, here, we have an entire community falling a prey to frustration. How do we explain a community, which has successfully distanced itself from major sins—even in the world of today—being caught up in this particular sin?

Having thoroughly mulled over this question, I have to conclude, ultimately, that it is, in fact, our incompetent Muslim leaders who are to blame for this uncalled for tragedy. These so called leaders have repeatedly led Muslims in the direction of goals which were unrealistic and unattainable. With such a goal placed before them, Muslims would rise with great zeal and fervour to the task. But they would finally discover that, despite their struggles and their sacrifices, they had achieved nothing. Continuous failures on every front pushed them to the extremes of despondency. Consciously or unconsciously, they came to feel that they had no future in this country. A close examination of the actual state of affairs will reveal, however, that it was in fact their own attitude and approach to problems which were out of place in God's world. If they lacked opportunities, they felt that they were being denied them because of discrimination and prejudice. They came to the conclusion that *there were no opportunities for them in this country*, without stopping to consider that this might only seem so as a result of their own misguided or ill-considered course of action.

A major contributor to this mindset was Iqbal, the poet. His were the flights of poetic imagination which encouraged Muslims to slip into unrealistic thinking. In thrall to his guidance, appreciative leaders and intellectuals began with great zeal to disseminate his poetic message. Thrilled by the eloquence of his words, a gullible public heard and accepted a ‘message which bore no relation to reality.

Iqbal’s message to the people was: “*Allah ke sheron ko aati nahin rubahi*” (God’s lions know no cowardice). Statements like this caught the imagination of the people, without their realizing that no such lions existed in the world of God. They did not pause to consider that the lions of the jungle created by God never spared even a thought for the heroic deed, for all their instincts led them along the path of avoidance—call it cowardice, or call it good sense. However, by setting up Iqbal’s imaginary lion as an ideal,—“Well said, Iqbal!”—Muslims have opted for the path of conflict and confrontation on the mistaken premise that this is what is meant by bravery, and that what they are doing amounts to a *jihad* (crusade).

For instance, when Hindus lead processions through the streets, there are generally certain aspects of them which are displeasing to Muslims. A sure solution to all this unpleasantness is the pursuance of the policy of avoidance as a wise strategy. But under the influence of Iqbal, Muslims feel that such a policy smacks of cowardice. So, holding up their imaginary lion as an ideal, they set themselves on a collision course with the processionists. The result is bloody, communal rioting.

Muslims adopt the way of the “lion” on the assumption that their action would boost the morale of the whole community. But such an action always proves to be counter-productive, because now we have a situation in which Muslims feel that their lives and property are no longer secure in their own country. And the degree of frustration they suffer on that score has been intensified.

The most notorious experiment along these lines was their demand—at the urging of their great leader Jinnah—for the division of the country in 1947, so that the separate state of Pakistan might come into existence. They were told that once a powerful Muslim state was

in position at the Indian border, it would act as a strong safeguard for all their rights in India.

At the cost of enormous sacrifices on the part of Indian Muslims, Pakistan came into being. Instead of decreasing, however, their problems only increased. This was because their lawyer Leader was blissfully unaware of the fact that the emergence of a strong Muslim state across the border after independence would necessarily be paralleled by the emergence of a strong Hindu state. It was this fatal miscalculation of the development of future events which brought Muslim expectations tumbling to the ground. Even then, incompetent Muslim leaders failed to learn their lesson from this tragic experiment, and continued to make mistakes of the same nature.

A whole horde of Muslim leaders, led by Dr Abdul Jalil Faridi, came on the scene in the wake of 1965-66 general elections. By making fiery speeches, they succeeded in rallying Muslims under the banner of the “politics of agreement.” Muslims thronged to join this political campaign, and after entering into electoral agreements with opposition parties, they gave them their vote. In this way, the Congress was ousted. But when these newly elected governments were formed, Muslims found to their horror that they were even worse off than they had been under Congress rule. This entire edifice of hope—barely erected—soon collapsed.

Similarly, when the Babari Mosque issue came into the limelight in 1986, Syed Shahabuddin conceived the far-fetched idea that it should be projected beyond its local significance and turned into an all-India issue. He thought that in this way the problem would be solved. Almost all of the religious and secular leaders extended their full support to Mr. Shahabuddin on this score. The entire country reverberated with public meetings and processions designed to achieve this goal.

What happened, in fact, was that once the entire Muslim minority had been aroused over the Ayodhya issue, the entire Hindu majority became united in their repudiation of Muslim demands. In the ensuing confrontation, the scales were bound to tilt in favour of this overwhelming Hindu majority. Forcing their entry into the Babari mosque, they razed it to the ground. No Muslim leader dared

enter Ayodhya to put a stop to the destruction, and if failing to emerge victorious, be martyred.

The tragic incident of December 6 has pushed Muslims back into the deep dungeon of despondency. What is worse is that this time their feelings of frustration are accompanied by a deep sense of humiliation.

Now a new group of the so-called Muslim intellectuals has emerged on the horizon of the Muslim community. Their gambit is to make an issue of reservation for Muslims in government services, as if that were some kind of master card which would solve all Muslim problems. Urdu dailies have been publishing their articles and statements to this effect couched in high flown language, and once again, Muslims are thronging to listen to their rabble-rousing speeches.

Muslims form fifteen per cent of the country's population. So they demand that Muslims should be given the same percentage of reservations in government services. I have no doubt that this is asking for the impossible. Even supposing, for the sake of argument, that the government, by legislation or presidential decree, ensured fifteen percent reservations in government jobs for the Muslim community, it would, in practice, be impossible for enough Muslims to come forward to fill these posts.

What is actually going to take place is the massive rallying of Muslims to the chant of high-sounding reservation slogans. There will be a demonstration of the rhetorical power of the leaders. Then, after a long period of hectic activity, it will ultimately dawn on these Muslims that they have given time, energy and money to support these feverish campaigns, but that they have in no way benefited from them.

To lead the community in pursuit of unattainable goals is a dastardly and inimical act: such hot pursuits lead not to the heights of success but to the depths of despair.

It is high time that Muslims understood the bitter truth. They should carve out their future on the basis of facts and reason, and not in a welter of emotion and sentiment. They should live like real lions created by God and not like the imaginary lions of poets' creation.

What solved their problems in the past is what will solve their problems as a community today. No alternative solution is forthcoming in the reality of today's world.

FEBRUARY 12

The Master Key

An article in an Arabic magazine headlined *Al-Miftahul Azim* (Master Key), citing *da'wah* power as the greatest of all Islamic strengths, says that if in the past, Islam achieved its universal victories through *da'wah*, today, it can turn its defeats into victories by the same method.

Da'wah is very much under discussion these days among Muslim writers and speakers. Its exponents, however, spend more time unraveling the plots and conspiracies hatched against them by non-Muslim nations than in practising what they preach. That is to say that, on the one hand, they exhort Muslims to assume the role of *da'is* while, on the other hand, they assure them with great vehemence that as far as the Muslims are concerned, all the nations of the world have turned into rapacious wolves and, as such, must be fought against and annihilated.

Both these utterances are made in the same breath, without any awareness of their contradictory nature, the one spelling peace and the other spelling war. And who are these nations who, day in and day out, are labelled oppressors and conspirators? They are those very non-Muslim nations who are the potential recipients of *da'wah*. They are our *mad'us*. The Muslims are the *da'is* and their neighbouring nations are the *mad'us*. Now, when *da'is* are constantly having it dinned into them that the *mad'u* is a cruel predator, there can be no arousal of any sincere missionary spirit as described in the Quran: the *da'i* is truly a well-wisher of his *mad'u*.

Da'wah is wholly an experience of love. The *da'i* must be fully committed to guiding his *mad'u*. Only then can the process of

da'wah be meaningful. The *da'is* must ignore the antagonism and combativeness of the *mad'u*; he must erase all adverse impressions of the *mad'u* from his heart, so that he may spontaneously begin praying for the *mad'u*'s guidance.

People talk of *da'wah* without ever realizing its prerequisites. They want the credit for being *da'is* without ever fulfilling its demands. They want the credit for communicating the divine message to man without paying the price for it.

This is true not only of the weak Muslim minority in non-Muslim countries, but also of the Muslim majority living in Muslim countries. The only difference between these two categories is that the former have endless grievances against the local non-Muslim authorities, while the latter blame their woes on international non-Muslim powers such as the Jews, Christians, Orientalists, and so on.

In Islam, the most important consideration of all is *da'wah*. All other considerations, no matter how serious and important they may be, can be legitimately passed over in its favour. The *Sunnah* of the Prophet gives such clear guidelines on this subject as leaves no doubt in the mind of a lover of Truth.

Shortly before his migration to Madinah, the Prophet visited Ta'if. There, scorned by the inhabitants, he was subjected to the worst kind of humiliations details of which can be had from *Sirah* books. The Prophet later told his wife, 'Aishah, that he had never had a harder day than the one in Ta'if. It was when the Prophet left Ta'if in great grief and sorrow that he was visited by the angel of the mountains at God's command. He said to the Prophet, "God has heard what your people had said to you. I am the angel of the mount. If you ask me I can crush their settlement by these mountains". The Prophet replied, "No, I am still hopeful that there will arise people among their following generations who will worship God without associating anything with Him." (*As-Sirah an-Nabawiyya* li Ibn Kathir vol. II, p. 153).

It is quite plain that *da'wah* is the master key. But it takes a great heart to make use of it. It takes a character of the utmost sublimity—*khuluqin azim*, as it is described in the Quran. Only those who possess

such qualities can recognize and utilize such opportunities as come their way.

God has made *da'wah* the master key for believers for all time. Whatever the Muslims gained in the first phase of Islamic history was through *da'wah*. Any future gains will likewise be through *da'wah*, for the revolution brought about by the Prophet and his companions in world history is still making its impact. It has facilitated the process of *da'wah* and invested them with great power. It is still the super key to meaningful achievement in the world of religion.

In modern times, the latest methods of communication have provided new avenues for the propagation of Islam. But even more important is the development of various branches of scientific research which have quite finally established the veracity of Islam. What was formerly achieved by our predecessors in circumstances fraught with great difficulty because of poor, or non-existent communications, and a lack of scientific proofs, can now be accomplished with comparative ease.

Da'wah is certainly the master key for believers. But it will prove to be so only when true Islamic prerequisites are kept in mind.

FEBRUARY 13

Suffer in Silence

“When one’s ego is hurt,” says a contemporary psychologist, “it turns into super-ego, and the result is breakdown.” Umair ibn Hubaib ibn Hamsha, in his final days, gave this piece of advice to his grandson, Abu Jafar Alhazmi:

“One who will not bear the minor evils of a foolish person shall have to bear greater evils from him.”

Both these quotations, although differently worded, imply that there is only one sure way to avoid the malice of others—keep out of the line of fire.

Every man is born with an 'ego' which is normally dormant. Our safety lies in our allowing it to remain so. But if through ill-considered action it is somehow dealt a blow, it will rear up like a serpent and wreak all kinds of havoc.

It is not uncommon in social living for suffering to be inflicted upon us by mischief-makers and fools. The best way to deal with such situations is to refrain from reacting to the initial hurt which frequently, at that stage is not particularly severe, for if we promptly retaliate, the troublemakers will be provoked in turn, and there will be no end to the dispute. The result will be that having refused to suffer in silence when the first pebble was cast, we shall have to endure being pelted with a whole shower of stones.

FEBRUARY 14

The Secret of Success

In a letter published in the *Daily Qaumi Awaz* (April 21, 1991), Mr. Mushtaq Ahmad, an advocate of the Supreme Court of India, comments on 'minority' attitudes: "In the days when I was a student at the Aligarh Muslim University, Mr. Iftikhar Ahmad Khan, Head of the Department of History, told me of an incident which had taken place in his student days at Cambridge University. It was at the time when the Jews, persecuted all over Europe, had been forced to flee from Germany. Iftikhar Ahmad noticed a group of students on the university campus who stood out from the others. They would always rush through their meals then immediately go back to their studies or other related matters. One day

Mr. Ahmad asked them why they were working at such a frenzied pace. One of the students replied, "You see, we are Jews. Our people are being exterminated in Germany. Here, we are in a minority, so that if our rivals are fair, we have to be good, and if they are good, we have to be excellent."

The secret of the Jews' success lies in their having made excellence their way of life and in working harder than their competitors. To have the peace and concentration which real, hard work requires, one has to stay away from all strife, whether serious or trifling, from all protest campaigns and slogan raising, and refrain from all attempts to blame others for one's own weaknesses. The Jews realised that, being in a minority, they had to shoulder a great social and historical responsibility. And that meant working twice as hard as the majority. (p. 3)

This is a world of competition. The secret of success lies solely in hard work and wisdom, whether one is a Jew or not, and no matter whether the community to which one belongs has any special features which make it stand out from other communities. Everyone has to go through the mill. There is no exception to this rule.

The Jews are so particular about this that they make no concessions to their young people, even in their own institutions, so that their incentive to work hard is never dampened.

I once asked an acquaintance of mine who was educated at an American university, and who is now working in an American academic institution, whether he had met any Jews there. He said he had. There were some Jews working in the same institution, and even its director was a Jew, I asked him the secret of the Jews' success in America, where they form a tiny minority. He said it was due to their notion of excellence. They made excellence their target, and once they had earned distinction in their work and qualified themselves for their careers in a superlative manner, no one could stand in the way of their success.

He said, moreover, that the academic institutions set up by the Jews in the U.S.A. observed what seems to us to be a very strange principle. That is, they awarded scholarships to non-Jewish applicants with even as few as 40 per cent marks, while making the criterion for Jewish applicants much more strict. To be eligible for a scholarship, Jews had to have 75 per cent marks. If they failed to come up to this high standard, their applications were simply not considered.

Why do Jews follow this principle in their institutions? This appears to be a very unjustified procedure but, in actual fact, it is of

the greatest benefit to their own young people, because it encourages them to work really hard, it inspires them to forge ahead, leaving all others behind.

Here, in this competitive world of today, those who want concessions will always find themselves in the back seat. It is only those who make every effort to earn excellent qualifications who will ever come to the fore.

FEBRUARY 15

Missing Zeal

The Holy Prophet commenced his mission in Makkah with the determination to convey the word of God to mankind at all costs. But there were many in Makkah who became antagonistic to him and his cause, and in the first twelve years of his Prophethood there, it appeared that the history of Islam would end at its starting-point in Makkah. Then, quite unlooked for opportunities were created for the Prophet and his followers to emigrate to Madinah and to carry on their mission there.

This new direction which his missionary activities took was the direct result of the efforts made by the Muslims to preach the word of God in Madinah. In this, the Prophet, aided by his companions, was zealous in following the injunction: "Apostle, proclaim what is revealed to you from your Lord" and in heeding the admonition: "... if you do not, you will surely fail to convey his message." It was their earnest belief in the last part of this injunction: "God will protect you from all men," which gave them the courage to carry on (5:67). This message to the Prophet, recorded in the Quran, was spread to the whole Muslim community, that is, that Muslims can only earn God's protection on earth if they communicate the word of God.

It is related in biographies of the Prophet, that the Muslims who went from Makkah to Madinah were so unflagging in their efforts to

propagate Islam, that “there was not a house belonging to the Ansar (the inhabitants of Madinah) in which there were no Muslim men and women.

FEBRUARY 16

Religious Harmony

What the world needs today—perhaps more than anything else—is an acceptable formula for the attainment of religious harmony. This being currently one of the most important topics under discussion, I shall attempt to present here, in brief, the Islamic viewpoint.

Let us begin with a verse of the Quran which reads:

He that chooses a religion other than Islam, it will not be accepted from him, and in the world to come he will be one of the lost (3:85).

In the opinion of certain interpreters, this verse implies that salvation according to Islam is destined exclusively for Muslims. Islam thus appears to uphold the superiority of the Muslim community. But this is an out-of-context interpretation and is certainly not correct.

Let us take another verse of the Quran which serves as an explanation of the above-quoted verse. It states that:

Believers, Jews, Christians, and Sabeans—whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does what is right—shall be rewarded by their Lord; they have nothing to fear or to regret (2:62).

This verse rules out the concept of community superiority for any given group: even Muslims have been bracketed here along with other religious groups. The content of this verse makes it very clear that salvation, by Islamic standards, depends upon the individual’s own actions, and that it is not the prerogative of any group. No man

or woman can earn his or her salvation by the mere fact of associating with a particular group. Salvation will be achievable only by a person who truly believes in God and the world hereafter, and who has given genuine proof in this life of having lived a life of right action.

Another important aspect of Islam is that it does not advocate belief in the manyness of reality; on the contrary, it stresses reality's oneness. That is, according to Islam, reality is one, not many. That is why, in describing monotheism, the Quran states:

Such is God, your rightful Lord. That which is not true must needs be false. How then can you turn away from Him?
(10:32)

This verse makes it clear that monotheism (i.e. one Lord being the Creator, Sustainer and object of worship) is the only truth. All other paths lead one away from, rather than towards the truth. The fact that certain religious thinkers believe in the manyness of reality is of no concern to Islam. With oneness as its ideal, it cannot accept manyness even as a hypothesis.

Both of the above points—(a) the oneness of Absolute Reality, and (b) Salvation as the prerogative of the true believer in this oneness—form a major part of Islamic ideal. Just being born into a certain group or community, or associating oneself with others of similar persuasions, does not entitle one to salvation, be one a Muslim or a non-Muslim.

Now let us deal with the fact that; in practice, different kinds of religious groups do exist. Then, given the various kinds of differences separating them, let us consider, how to bring about harmony between them.

Islam's approach to the entire problem is much more realistic in that it accepts ideological differences. Once having accepted these differences, it then advocates the policy of tolerance and respect for one another in everyday dealings. This is on a parallel with the principle expressed in the English saying. 'Let's agree to disagree.'

In this connection, one of the commands of the Quran is that, in principle, 'there shall be no compulsion in religion' (2:256). At another place it declares that 'you have your religion and I have

mine' (109:6). It was as a result of this commandment that, when the Prophet Muhammad migrated to Madinah, he issued a declaration reaffirming his acceptance of the religion of Muslims for the Muslims and the religion of Jews for the Jews.' In order to perpetuate the atmosphere of mutual harmony, the Quran commands the Muslims in their dealings with unbelievers not to 'revile (the idols) which they invoke besides Allah, lest in their ignorance they should spitefully revile Allah.'

This principle formulated by Islam is best described not as religious harmony, but as harmony among religious people. This is a principle whose utility is a matter of historical record. It is evident that in the past as well as in the present, wherever religious harmony has existed, it has been based on unity despite differences, rather than on unity without differences. It is not based on agreeing to agree, but on agreeing to disagree.

FEBRUARY 17

Man and Opportunity

Pubilius Syrus, a Roman writer of the first century B.C. who wrote in Latin is recorded as having said: "A good opportunity is seldom presented and is easily lost."—An observation which may well be taken out of the Roman context and universally applied. For it is a matter of common circumstance that chances to make progress in this world do not conveniently present themselves at every juncture. They are few and far between. But most people, unconvinced of how imperative it is to realize their special importance, fail to grasp them in time. Thus golden opportunities are lost forever, and all that remains is regret at having so foolishly missed them.

The same is true of the Hereafter, but on a scale barely appreciable by human beings. There are the wholly different dimensions of eternal bliss or eternal damnation to be taken into consideration.

Everyone, of course, has been given opportunities in the present world to act in the interests of his own salvation in the life after death. But these are opportunities which very seldom present themselves. And then death—the great cut-off point—comes and puts an end to opportunities for all time.

After death, when man's eyes are opened he receives a severe shock. Now he finds himself doomed to eternal regret at having squandered unparalleled opportunities, thanks to his own ignorance, foolishness and lack of any sense of timeliness.

Everyone in this world should behave as a morally responsible servant of God and everyone is given equal opportunities to do so. Yet, in the Hereafter, there will be some who will flounder on the question of missed opportunities, while there will be others who will pass the divine test because of opportunities seized and turned to good advantage. It will be quite obvious on that Day which of God's servants availed of opportunities to serve Him, and which of them did not.

This ultimate reckoning should make us examine our lives with greater earnestness. As we are sufficiently aware of the fact—considering that none of us are immortal—that we cannot go through life allowing one opportunity after another to slip through our fingers? We cannot surely expect to be offered unlimited chances for our own salvation. And once death intervenes, looking for alternative possibilities beyond the grave becomes meaningless. There we are ineluctably faced with an eternity of success or an eternity of failure.

FEBRUARY 18

The Making of the Indian Nation

Almost half a century has passed since India gained its independence, but it has yet to join the ranks of the developed countries. That is a dream still to be realized. And this is in spite of India being a large country with all kinds of potential.

One reason for this tragic failure is the Indian people's lack of national character. The majority of the deficiencies we find in the country today can be traced to this basic shortcoming. Bereft of this sterling quality, we have fallen short in taking the country towards progress and prosperity.

What is national character? It is, to put it simply, the capacity and the will to hold the interests of the nation supreme in every sphere. Whenever there is a clash between individual and national interests, it means individual concerns being subordinated to the greater good of the nation. Whenever a nation has made any progress, it has been due to this spirit of nationalism. Without such a spirit, no nation can advance itself either internally or externally.

Now the question arises as to why, during this period of just under 50 years, many countries have succeeded in fostering a strong, national spirit in their people, and now stand alongside developed countries like Singapore, Korea, Malaysia and Japan, etc., while India still lags far behind. There is one basic reason for this: attempting to achieve the possible by means which are impossible. Producing national spirit or character in India is certainly possible. It is just that we have set off on the wrong track, and once on it, it is difficult to retrace our steps and get on to the right track.

After independence, an "Indian nation" had come into existence in the political and geographical sense. But, at the psychological level, the level of feelings and emotions, our position was still that of a nation in the making. For the desired national reconstruction to take place, our leaders proposed a recipe based on the concept of a common heritage with three main parts: religious unity, historical unity and cultural unity.

Religious unity implied that all religions were essentially one. It was believed that if this concept could take root in people's minds, it would produce a sense of unity all over the country. Historically, of course, this assumption was wrong; there is a long, sorry record of co-religionists fighting fiercely among themselves. For instance, in the war of Mahabharat, the warriors on both sides were of the Hindu religion. In the first and second world wars, the combatants on both sides were of the Christian faith. Babar had armed confrontations

with his own co-religionists, finally inflicting decisive defeats on them. And so on.

The attempt to bring about religious unity in India has had active support right from the time of Akbar, who bolstered it politically, to present times, when intellectuals such as Dr. Bhagwan Das (a contemporary of Jawaharlal Nehru) attempted to solve the problem with their encyclopaedic knowledge of the subject. But this goal could never be achieved for the simple reason that the assumption that all religions are one and the same is incorrect; and no durable structure can be erected on false premises. It is an undeniable fact that there are differences between the various religions. Given these differences, it is difficult, if not impossible, for the adherents of one religion to reach the point of agreeing that the tenets and practices of another religion have an equal value. However, if the adherents of different religions see each other, first and foremost, as human beings, as members of the same human race, they can certainly accord each other equal respect. Through mutual respect, many social benefits can accrue which would be rendered impossible in the wake of futile attempts at mutual recognition of religious beliefs.

Let us now look at how history comes into the picture. It is assumed that even where there are people of different persuasions, a common sense of history will produce a common sense of nationhood. And where this is seen to be lacking, it is advocated that such a sense be inculcated. But this would again be an attempt to achieve the possible by means which are impossible. All countries, be they as small as Singapore, or as large as the U.S.A., are inhabited by varied races and ethnic groups. In this respect there are several different strands to their historical heritage. But in none of these countries has there been any attempt to bulldoze people into sharing a common sense of history. Instead, there has been an acknowledgment of each citizen's individuality. That is why, albeit imbued with different historical feelings, the various groups lead harmonious lives and are engaged in the common cause of nation building.

The third point concerns the acceptance of a common culture. This is wholly impracticable. Culture inevitably evolves a long historical process. It can never be imposed upon a group through any external agency.

After the second world war, a movement was launched in the USA to produce a common culture throughout the country by a process of Americanization. A similar movement was launched in Canada, but in both countries, these initiatives were a failure. Ultimately both had to abandon the idea of uniculture and come to terms with multi-culture. In India, as elsewhere, this is the only possible solution.

The truth is that the only practicable basis of nationhood is patriotism. That is, the feeling on the part of the individual or group that their future is linked with one country and one country alone; that individual success is inextricably linked with the progress of the country; that the interests of the country must be held supreme, and that if sacrifices are required for the safety or advancement of the country, they must be willingly made. Without such feelings of patriotism as are here defined, no country can be successfully run.

If the tasks of constructing the nation is to be successfully accomplished, we must rid ourselves of our obsession with such impracticable concepts as unity of religion, history and culture, and should forge ahead on the same lines as Singapore, Malaysia, Japan, Britain, France and America.

Our prime target should be the generation of patriotism in our country. And it should be a patriotism which is based not on the past, but on the present and the future. The only way to do this is to instill in each and every individual a deep-rooted love of his country. Instead of wasting time on the impossible, we should concentrate on building the kind of national character to be found in developed countries. If we set ourselves sedulously to such tasks as these, we should, within the span of one generation, be able to create for ourselves the ideal nation.

FEBRUARY 19

The Change of Strategy

The only way to arrive at a practicable solution to the problem of communal riot is to have a change of tactics, that is, there should be a change of the arena in which efforts are being made, that is migration of the field of effort. To date, all our writers and speakers have been attempting to solve the problem of riots by targetting others, that is, protesting against communal parties; demanding that the government and the administration check the riots. But these efforts, though on a large scale, have not resulted in even a one per cent improvement in riot control.

Now it is time for Muslims to become self-reliant on this issue, that is, to think and plan independently to find a solution by their own efforts.

A self-based solution does not in any way mean planning a defence-strategy, or giving a counter challenge. So-called defence would only escalate the matter. It would never solve it. By a self-based solution, I mean the adoption of a policy of patience and avoidance. This is the only sure solution, and it lies entirely in Muslim hands. In this, no one can obstruct or nullify our efforts.

According to a tradition recorded in Sahih Muslim, the Prophet said, "You will prevail over your enemies as long as you never swerve from my path. Once you stray from it, God will let others hold sway over you, who will neither fear you nor have mercy on you until you come back to my *sunnah* (path)."

The present state of Muslims is not, in fact, the result of an enemy plot but of abandoning the *Sunnah*. Against the backdrop of riots, the *Sunnah* which should have been followed by Muslims is that of patience and avoidance. If the present state of affairs is the result of rejecting this *Sunnah*, it is only by re-adopting it that the present

condition of Muslims be improved. No other strategy or policy can ever solve this problem.

It is incumbent upon Muslims to revert from impatience to patience; from the path of confrontation to that of avoidance. They must withstand provocation instead of giving in to it. This is the *Sunnah* of the Prophet of Islam, the sole path to success.

Muslims have today to go on a ‘migration.’ But not a physical migration. A migration from one field of strategy to another. In this lies the veritable secret of success.

FEBRUARY 20

Paradise and Its Inhabitants

What is Paradise? Paradise is the supreme reward which God gives to His special servants for their deserving actions. Paradise is a world of unique blessings, admission to which is reserved for the chosen few in the second stage of life, the Hereafter.

God’s special servants are those who have demonstrated in ample measure their ability to live on the plane of realities in this present stage of life—the stage of trial. They are the ones who have discovered God’s existence from His signs; who have found that the messenger of God is a human being just like themselves; who, without having seen God, have prostrated themselves before Him in all humility.

These are unique human beings who, having been created with an ego, have nevertheless divested themselves of it in the interests of truth; who, having been given complete freedom of word and deed have voluntarily placed constraints upon themselves; who, having apparently achieved everything by dint of their own hard labour, have nonetheless given complete credit for all of their achievements to God.

These are unique souls who, living amongst human beings, are constantly remembering God. They are the ones who have had power

over all others, but who now exercise it out of fear of God; it is they who have agitated to take revenge, but who have had the fire in their souls cooled by the fear of God's chastisement.

These are the worthy individuals who relish taking the back seats while others scramble for the front rows. These are the people who give their lives to lay solid foundations while others rush to find places right on tops of the domes.

These are the people of great spiritual refinement who rise above personal prejudices before sitting in judgement; who, in order to deal with others purely on the basis of principles, eliminate their own selves; who budge not one inch from the path of justice even at the most crucial of moments, when complaints and differences seem insurmountable. They do so by adopting a path for themselves which accords exactly with the path of truth and justice, and by overlooking all worldly considerations.

Paradise is God's garden. Only those human beings deserve it who can live in this world with the blameless innocence of flowers.

FEBRUARY 21

Nation Building

“**P**oliticians are to be blamed for all corruption.” “Politicians have failed in fulfilling the expectations of the people.” This is the gist of what is being said everywhere. The question is, who are these politicians? These are the very people who have been glorified as freedom fighters for the last fifty years. Before independence, these freedom fighters played a heroic role for this country, but after independence, they have plunged the nation into a morass of iniquity.

Directly or indirectly it is these freedom fighters who are in control of all important political offices, hence it is they who are responsible for all the attendant evils. This was destined to happen after the country began to slither down the wrong course in 1948. As

we know, Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation, peeping into the future, had suggested that the Congress as a political party should now, after gaining independence, be dissolved.

Why did Gandhiji have to make such a suggestion? Some commentators have pointed out that he was motivated by the fear that these freedom fighters, already waiting to be compensated for their sacrifices, might turn into exploiters in post-independence India. (*The Hindustan Times*, May 24, 1995)

As it happened, Gandhiji's worst apprehensions came horribly true. After assuming the rule of political leaders, the freedom fighters of the past began to recoup the price of their sacrifices with interest. Even their friends and relatives joined with them in their campaign to ensure for themselves a never-ending compensation. Consequently, the nation is now in a terrible pall of darkness, as is visible to all and sundry.

At the point we have reached today, no superficial reform can bring salvation to the country. It is possible to expend one hundred crores from the state treasury by holding to the condition of identity cards for elections, but such superficial plans can never ameliorate the body politic. We shall have to carve out a far more serious plan of action.

After independence we should have done exactly what the British people did. For them, Winston Churchill's position was one of a super freedom-fighter who had successfully saved Britain from being vanquished by Hitler. But in the 1945 elections, they voted this same Churchill out of power, and instead brought in Clement Attlee, a social reformer who as a member of the Fabian Society, had quite actively participated in the non-political field.

The same task needed to be performed after independence in India. The freedom fighters should have been awarded pensions and other facilities in acknowledgement of their services, but when it came to assigning political power, such persons should have been sought out who had already established their reputations in social service in the field of education, social reform, scientific research, etc.

Those who emerged as heroes in the age prior to independence had well-developed warlike qualities which were essential in a period

of clash and confrontation, whereas after independence we needed heroes possessing just the opposite qualities. At that time as now, it was necessary to have people who believed in love instead of hatred, in peace instead of confrontation; in short, in a constructive rather than a destructive approach. By making the team of freedom fighters into leaders of the second phase, the nation took the wrong turning at the very outset.

By reason of the psychology of their rise to power, the main concern of freedom fighters was to maintain the superior political position they had come to acquire. This mentality produced all sorts of abhorrent forms of evil, such as we have been experiencing today.

It was thanks to the extraordinary glorification of the freedom fighters that we were unable to see any of their acts in a critical light. For instance, the involvement in the Bangladesh war in 1971 was undoubtedly a wrong decision, but since this decision had been taken by a freedom fighter government, it came to be regarded as having been right without anyone having given the matter any real thought.

A similar, ill-considered involvement, stirred up the dormant problem of Kashmir and resulted in enormous economic losses. It is a fact that after a long period of time the Pakistanis had actually consigned the problem of Kashmir to oblivion. The issue of Kashmir was no longer, actively, on their political agenda. But when the involvement of India broke Pakistan into two, all Pakistanis were set to avenge this division of their country. In revenge, they re-opened the issue of the closed front of Kashmir. Sooner or later, nothing could have stopped Bangladesh from being separated from Pakistan. But our involvement caused this break to be wrongly attributed to us and thus a chapter which had already been closed was unnecessarily reopened.

What we required in New Delhi was a team imbued not with fighting spirit but with wisdom, who could run matters of state not on the basis of strength but with sagacity and understanding. True statesmanship means accomplishing 99 per cent of one's tasks with wisdom and one per cent with other factors. Today there is much talk of change and reform in the constitution. Articles are being published on this subject. Seminars are being held. But to me, this matter is

being examined at a superficial level. No one reflects upon why the constitution, which has set up a record in the history of constitutional documents had to be amended eighty times and why, despite this the problems, for which these changes were made, remain unresolved. It is apparent that after these repeated experiments the actual problem is now not one of change in the constitution, but of changes having failed to achieve the desired results. It is in record that Dr. Rajendra Prasad in his valedictory address to the constituent Assembly, said that everything cannot be written in the Constitution, and stressed the need for healthy political conventions. But again the enthusiastic “freedom fighters” failed to adhere to this advice and everything was written down in the constitution.

As a result, the constitution no longer remained a simple document; it became instead a bundle of fanciful, romantic wishes. The attempt to include everything in the constitution rendered it unrealistic. It became an aggregate of contradictory and unattainable goals. Instead of becoming a practicable document, it assumed the form of a legal monolith.

Many examples can be cited of how our present constitution overreaches itself. For instance, the article on our national language declares that “For a period of fifteen years the English language shall continue to be the official language of the Union. Thereafter the official language shall be Hindi in Devnagari script.”

To make such an announcement was simply wishful thinking, for matters of language are decided by historical factors rather than by legal articles. Since historical forces were not in favour of this article, it has remained totally ineffective. It amounted to dictating history, and no one is powerful enough to do so.

Similarly, article 44 relating to a uniform civil code, clashes with article 25 which establishes religious freedom. It is totally impracticable to have contradictory articles. If we wanted to enact article 44, we should have to delete article 25 from the constitution. And vice versa.

1. Such issues should tell us that attempt to make the constitution more comprehensive by making amendments to it must be abandoned. Instead, it needs to be reduced in size to make it

into a more condensed and practicable legal document, just like the constitutions of the developed countries.

2. Another point to ponder is what had been advised by Dr Rajendra Prasad in his capacity as Chairman of the Constitution Assembly, that is, instead of heaping article upon article, stress must be laid on establishing healthy traditions in political and national life.

3. By healthy political traditions I mean, establishing one's base on political work and not on political stunts; setting up a free and fair election process; accepting defeat after losing in the elections; keeping national interest above personal political interest; resigning from office after major blunders (scams, etc.); endeavouring to win elections on the basis of principles rather than on the basis of money; respecting the law at all times, even when it is against oneself. The opposition should be a vehicle of healthy criticism rather than an agency out to down the ruling party; it should show willingness to run a coalition government, avoiding differences, etc., in case where there is no majority of a single party in the Assembly.

4. At this moment there are two prominent parties on the political scene in the country, Congress and the BJP. But to my way of thinking, both have outlived their usefulness as regards the larger interests of the country.

Congress leaders must know that by remaining in power for a long period of time they have exhausted the public's patience. Lord Acton said: "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." It should be added that remaining in power over a long period of time renders a person or a party unfit to rule. Congress should admit this and voluntarily opt for retirement. Otherwise, future historians will record its role in dismal terms.

The elements composing the BJP from the very outset have demonstrated a negative mentality. These are the people who assassinated Mahatma Gandhi in 1948. In the words of one of my Hindu friends, next feat they performed was the demolition of Ayodhya's historic mosque. In this way, they have shown themselves up as being unsuitable for constructive work in the country.

The BJP leaders point out that the secularism of the Congress is pseudo-secularism and to replace it they have offered the concept

of Hindutva. Perhaps they do not know that Hindutva is not the alternative for pseudo-secularism. It is this error in thinking which has caused the BJP to fail as a party. No significant work of national construction may be expected from it.

In a large country like India only those who possess a universal outlook are capable of governing. Individuals who think along sectarian lines instead of being broad-minded, are not suitable for India's leadership.

5. Now the hour has come to form a fresh political party composed not of "freedom fighters" but of educational and social activists. It is only such people who can save India from ruination.

In the last three years I have travelled extensively all over the country. During my tours I have found that there are tens of thousands of individuals in our country who are capable of positive thinking, and are actively involved in the field of educational and social reform. They pine for the welfare of the country. All these people can be gathered at the platform of a new political party.

Today we stand at the most critical juncture of our history. To build a new and brighter future for our country, we have to work, on the one hand, for mass education, an outline for which I have already presented in *The Hindustan Times* of May 19, 1995. An equally important task is the formation of a new political party on the lines discussed above. To me the future of the country rests on the rigorous performance of these two tasks.

6. As a first step in the right direction I propose that a political meeting be convened at the All India level; this should not include those whose political records are marred in the eyes of the public. Only those should be invited to it whose records are clean and who are actively, practically involved in some field of national construction. This political convention can become the basis for a party with fresh vigour, capable of providing the right leadership to the country.

FEBRUARY 22

The Inner Reality of Fasting

“In the month of Ramadan the Quran was revealed, a book of guidance with proofs of guidance distinguishing right from wrong. Therefore, whoever of you is present in that month let him fast. But he who is ill or on a journey shall fast a similar number of days later on.

“God desires your well-being, not your discomfort. He desires you to fast the whole month so that you may magnify Him and render thanks to Him for giving you His guidance” (2:185).

The above verse explains not only the importance of the month of Ramadan as being the month in which the Quran was revealed, but also the significance of fasting during the month in terms of giving thanks to God. The Prophet is recorded as having said that God rewards good deeds from ten fold to 700 fold. His reward for fasting, which is undertaken especially for Him, will be infinite.

Food and drink are man’s most basic necessities. When he is consumed by hunger and thirst, he understands how weak he really is; he realizes how much he is in need of God’s succour. In the evenings, after a whole day of fasting, people eat and drink their fill: that is when their hearts are flooded with a sense of gratitude to God for His having made complete provision for their needs. That is when they praise God and offer up their thanks to Him. This feeling of dependence on God’s bounty also makes them adopt a properly cautious attitude to life. Verse 183, which states that “fasting is decreed for you as it was decreed for those before you,” goes on to say, “perchance you will guard yourselves against evil.”

But there is much more to fasting than the caution and gratitude induced by the purely outward, physical forms of abstention. Its greater significance lies in its symbolism of an inner, spiritual eagerness to

make all kinds of sacrifices. Obviously, one who refrains from taking food and water on specific days, but who goes throughout his life without any qualm about telling lies, persecuting his fellow men, thwarting justice, and so on, has missed the whole point of the fast of Ramadan. He has concerned himself all along with outward forms and not with inner realities. Such a man cannot expect to find favour in the eyes of his fellow men and will certainly incur the wrath of God, his Maker.

One who fasts in all sincerity takes care to cast his entire life in the one consistent mould. In all of his affairs, he applies the constraints laid down by God. He checks himself from abusing others, stays his hand from persecution and halts in his steps towards injustice. As the Prophet said, "Such a man can be likened to a tied-up horse which can go only as far as its rope permits: in that way, he cannot transgress."

FEBRUARY 23

All Praise is Due to God

One of the important teachings of Islam is that on receiving anything, we should be grateful to God in acknowledgment of His bounty, and utter these words 'All praise and thankfulness is due to God, the Lord of the Worlds.' Praise of God, in its true spirit, is the essence of the Quran. After having accepted Islam, a believer's inmost feelings find expression in these words of praise.

Man's existence is a blessing of God. Man's extremely balanced body is a blessing of God. The entire world created so favourably for man is a blessing of God.

When this reality dawns on man and he realizes God's immeasurable blessings upon him, his soul is filled with a feeling of gratefulness to God. His heart and mind are overawed by His greatness. At that moment words of acknowledgment of God—'Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds' spontaneously come to his lips.

God the Almighty is too great for man to give Him anything. The only thing man can offer in His presence is acknowledgment. The moment of man's greatest worship of God is when his soul is pervaded by God's glory and greatness; when he recognizes God's divinity as compared to man's servitude; when, in full awareness of his own helplessness, he comes to acknowledge God's bounties in the true sense of the word.

When man discovers God with all His attributes, his soul lies prostrate before Him. His whole being turns towards God. The feelings inspired in him by God's bounties surge within him like the waves of the ocean. When all these feelings find verbal form, they are called praise and gratefulness to God.

God is the greatest Being, yet in the universe, God remains invisible. But His supreme glory is visible in His creation. Therefore, the realisation of God can be attained through discovering His greatness in the signs visible everywhere. This realisation finds expression in words such as 'praise be to God' - Lord of the worlds.

FEBRUARY 24

The Return to Religion

The nineteenth century was the century of atheism. But with the arrival of the twentieth century, the whole course of history changed, with religion again becoming a major force in human life. Although more in potential than in reality. The obvious causes are discontent with science and the continuing existence of religion as an inherent part of human nature.

A hundred years ago even thinking against science was considered a sign of ignorance. At the end of the 19th century a well-known scientist said that he was not able to understand anything unless he could make a scientific model of it. But now, at least at the academic level, man's conviction of the usefulness of science has been shaken. The whole spate of books on this subject, which came out after the

second world war, was an indication of the extent of the human dilemma. The article on the history of science in the Encyclopaedia Britannica (1984) begins with these words:

‘Until recently, the history of science was a story of success. The triumphs of science represented a cumulative process of increasing knowledge and a sequence of victories over ignorance and superstition; and from science flowed a stream of inventions for the improvement of human life. The recent realization of deep moral problems within science of external forces and constraints on its development, and of dangers in uncontrolled technological change has challenged historians to a critical reassessment of this earlier simple faith.’ (16:366)

Modern science has offered man innumerable facilities, but along with this it has brought in its wake such great dangers as have rendered all its gifts meaningless. The greatest menace is that of a third world war. In the event of this happening, it will be a nuclear war, which will reduce most of the big cities to ruins in a matter of hours. Moreover, the whole atmosphere will be engulfed in thick smoke, which will prevent sunlight from reaching the earth. This will in turn produce a terrible nuclear winter, which will bring all human, animal and vegetable existence to the verge of the most tragic annihilation.

The progress of science has not only produced material problems, but has also created intellectual and spiritual problems of a very grave nature.

1. Science and scientific resources had vastly expanded human knowledge. It not only gave man microscopes and telescopes to observe things which had till then remained unseen, but it also opened up innumerable new ways and means of making it possible to add greatly to information in every field.

All this gave man the self-confidence to feel certain that he could arrive at the final reality through science alone. But the only thing that the increase in knowledge has told man is that he has now entered into a new phase of ignorance. In the words of a scientist: “We know more and more about less and less.”

By the end of the 19th century scientists believed that with the increase in knowledge they had been heading towards the final reality. But new research by the end of the first half of the 20th century proved that man cannot reach the ultimate reality unaided. His limitations are decisively obstacles in his path. It is now an accepted fact among the scientific community that science gives us but a partial knowledge of reality.

2. With the emergence of modern science it had become fashionable among intellectuals to hold that the universe could be explained without God. Therefore, every fact that came to light was explained in a way that would prove that there was no mind or consciousness behind the universe. But this bid to explain the universe atheistically failed.

The Indian scientist, Dr Subramaniam Chandra Shekhar, who won the Nobel prize in Physics (jointly) in 1983, is a self-avowed atheist. He has briefly stated the present position of science on this subject:

There are aspects, which are extremely difficult to understand. A famous remark of Einstein—and other people have said similar things, Schrodinger in particular—that the most incomprehensible thing about nature is that it is comprehensible. How is it that the human mind, extremely small compared to the universe and living over a time span microscopic in terms of astronomical time, comprehends reality in ideas, which spring from the human mind? This question has puzzled many people from Kepler on. Why should mathematical description be accurate? Mathematical description is something the human mind has evolved. Why should it fit external nature? We don't have answers to these questions. One is not saying the world is orderly and therefore must be ordered. But why should we understand the world in terms of the concepts we have developed? (The Hindustan Times, May 31, 1987)

T.S. Eliot has said:

*Where is the wisdom that we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge that we have lost in information?*

A book called (published in 1989) *Wisdom, Information and Wonder*, by Dr Mary Midgley, elaborates—as its title suggests—on the above rhetorical questions, and makes a significant contribution to the new thinking of the latter half of the 20th century.

In his book, *The Secular City*, Professor Harvey R. Cox (published in 1965 in the U.S.A.) showed that people had lost interest in religion. But the same writer in another book titled, *Religion in the Secular City*, published in 1984, has shown that religion in the U.S.A. has seen a revival. The same has been found to be true of the western countries.

God wants the message of His religion to be communicated to all human beings; Islam being the final religion, He has taken special care to safeguard it from all human additions and interpolations. Islam is thus the only totally preserved and genuinely historical of all the religions; as such, it deserves pride of place as the sole reliable guide to pious living.

This attribute of Islam has rendered its communication very easy. If believers in Islam do not, by their own foolishness, create problems unnecessarily, they can continue the work of Islamic *da'wah* without any hindrance. And then, no intellectual hurdles have to be surmounted to understand Islam. That is one of the qualities that has made Islam such an acceptable religion. The only task now is to introduce Islam to people in a purely positive way, so that on their own they will feel attracted to it, and will adopt it in response to their own desires.

The return to religion, in respect of its potential, is a return to Islam. Who will rise to convert this potential to reality? Who will join us in this Plan of God?

FEBRUARY 25

Social Aspect of Islamic Mysticism

Mysticism is generally called *tasawwuf* in India and *irfan* (realization) in Iran. To me *irfan* is the most appropriate word, for mysticism, in actual fact, is another name for the realization of inner reality.

The word mysticism has been variously defined in academic works. By way of a simple definition, it means to penetrate one's inner soul and to enable it, by developing it, to establish contact with God, the Greater Soul.

This process purifies the human personality, and the soul comes to realize itself. The latent natural potential of the soul is ultimately awakened; in the words of the Quran, it becomes the serene (89:27) or pure soul (87:14).

It is but natural that the personality developed by the mystic (or the Aarif) in this way does not remain enclosed within a boundary. His inner state also having its external manifestation, his personality finds expression in his social relations.

One who has realized himself will, at the same time, place a higher spiritual value on other human beings too. One whose heart is filled with God's love, will necessarily be filled with the love of human beings—the creatures of God. One who respects the Higher Reality will surely respect other human beings. It is this aspect of mysticism, which I have called its social aspect.

A Persian mystic poet has expressed the mystic code of behaviour in these most beautiful words:

“The stories of kings like Alexander and Dara hold no interest for us. Ask us only about love and faithfulness.”

Another mystic poet has this to say:

“The comforts of both the worlds are hidden in these two things: Being kind to friends and according better treatment to foes.”

When a sufi or mystic is engrossed in the love of God, he rises above the mundane world and discovers the higher realities. He becomes such a human being as has no ill-feelings for anyone. In fact, he cannot afford hatred, as hatred would nullify his very spirituality. He cannot divest himself of feelings of love as this would amount to divesting himself of all delicate feelings.

Islam is the answer to the demands of nature. It is in fact a counterpart of human nature. This is why Islam has been called a religion of nature in the Quran and *Hadith*.

A man once came to the Prophet Muhammad and asked him what he should do in a certain matter. The Prophet replied, ‘Consult your conscience (heart) about it.’ By the conscience the Prophet meant his finer feelings. That is, what one’s conscience tells one would likewise be what Islam would demand of one as a matter of common sense.

What does human nature desire more than anything? It desires, above all, peace and love. Every human being wants to live in peace and to receive love from the people around him. Peace and love are the religion of human nature as well as what Islam demands of us. The Quran tells us, “...and God calls you to the home of peace” (10:25).

One of the teachings of Islam is that when two or more people meet, they must greet one another with the words, *Assalamu-‘Alaikum* (Peace be upon you). Similarly, *Salat*, or prayer, said five times daily is the highest form of worship in Islam. At the close of each prayer all worshippers have to turn their faces to either side and utter the words *Assalamu-‘Alaikum wa rahmatullah* (May peace and God’s blessing be upon you). This is like a pledge given to people: ‘O people, you are safe from me. Your life, your property, your honour is secure with me.’

This sums up the spirit of true religion, the goal of which is spiritual uplift. It is the ultimate state of this spiritual uplift, which is referred to in the Quran as the “serene soul” (89:27).

Thus a true and perfect man, from the Islamic point of view, is one who has reached that level of spiritual development where peace and peace alone prevails. When a person has attained that peaceful state, others will receive from him nothing less than peace. He may be likened to a flower, which can send out only its fragrance to man, it being impossible for it to emit an unpleasant smell.

An incident relating to a Muslim saint very aptly illustrates the spirit of the mystic individual. The story goes that once a Muslim sufi was travelling along with his disciples. During the journey he encamped near a large grove of trees upon which doves used to perch.

During this halt one of the sufi's disciples aimed at one of the doves, killed it, cooked it, then ate it. Afterwards something strange happened. A flock of doves came to the tree under which the sufi was resting and began hovering over it and making a noise.

The Muslim sufi, communicating with the leader of the birds, asked them what was the matter with them and why they were protesting. The leader replied, 'We have a complaint to make against you, that is, one of your disciples has killed one of us.' Then the Muslim sufi called the disciple in question and asked him about it. He said that he had not done anything wrong, as the birds were their foodstuff. He was hungry, so he killed one for food. He thought that in so doing he had not done anything wrong. The sufi then conveyed this reply to the leader of the doves.

The leader replied: "Perhaps you have failed to understand our point. Actually what we are complaining about is that all of you came here in the garb of sufis, yet acted as hunters. Had you come here in hunter's garb, we would certainly have remained on the alert. When we saw you in the guise of sufis, we thought that we were safe with you and remained perched on the top of the tree without being properly vigilant."

This anecdote very aptly illustrates the reality of a true mystic or spiritual person. One who has reached an advanced stage of spiritual uplift, having found the true essence of religion, no longer has the will or the capacity to do harm. He gives life not death, to others. He benefits others, doing injury to no one. In short, he lives among the people like flowers and not like thorns. He has nothing but love in his heart to bestow upon others.

FEBRUARY 26

Tolerance! Its Significance Today

On January 1st, 1995, the newspaper flashed the news that “the United Nations has proclaimed 1995 as the “Year of Tolerance,” saying that the ability to be tolerant of the actions, beliefs and opinions of others is a major factor in promoting world peace. Amidst the resurgence of ethnic conflicts, discrimination against minorities and xenophobia directed against refugees and asylum-seekers, tolerance is the only way forward, said the statement of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, (UNESCO). It is said, racism and religious fanaticism in many countries had led to many forms of discrimination and the intimidation of those who held contrary views. Violence against and intimidation of authors, journalists and others who exercise their freedom of expression, were also on the increase along with political movements, which seek to make particular groups responsible for social ills such as crime and unemployment. Intolerance is one of the greatest challenges we face on the threshold to the 21st century said the UNESCO Statement. Intolerance is both an ethnic and political problem. It is a rejection of the differences between individuals and between cultures. When intolerance becomes organised or institutionalized, it destroys democratic principles and poses a threat to world peace. —*The Hindustan Times*, January 1, 1995.

This proclamation of the U.N. is most apt and timely. The prime need of the world today is indeed tolerance.

One of the stark realities of life is that divergence of views does exist between man and man, and that it impinges at all levels. Be it at the level of a family or a society, a community or a country, differences are bound to exist everywhere. Now the question is how best unity can be forged or harmony brought about in the face of human differences.

Some people hold that the removal of all differences is the sine qua-non for bringing about unity. But, this view is untenable, as it is not practicable. You may not like the thorns, which essentially accompany roses, but it is not possible for you to pluck out all the thorns and destroy them completely. For, if you pluck out one, another will grow in its place. Even if you run a bulldozer over all rosebushes, new plants will grow in their place, which will bear roses ineluctably accompanied by thorns. In the present scheme of things, roses can be had only by tolerating the existence of thorns. Similarly, a peaceful society can be created only by creating and fostering the spirit of tolerance towards diversities. In this world, unity is achievable only by learning to unite in spite of differences, rather than insisting on unity without differences. For total eradication of differences is an impossibility. The secret of attaining peace in life is tolerance of disturbance of the peace.

There is nothing wrong in diversity of opinions. In fact, this is a positive quality, which has many advantages. The beauty of the garden of life is enhanced if the flower of unity is accompanied by the thorn of diversity.

An advantage flowing from this attitude is that it builds character. If you are well-mannered towards those whose views are similar to yours, you may be said to exhibit fairly good character. But, if you behave properly with those holding divergent views from you or who criticise you, then you deserve to be credited with having an excellent character.

In the same way, a society whose members hold identical views and never have any controversial discussions, will soon find itself in the doldrums. The intellectual development of the members of this society will be frozen, because personal evolution takes place only where there is interaction of divergent thinking. So where there is no such interaction, how can there be intellectual development?

The adoption of a policy of tolerance in the face of controversy and opposition is not a negative step. It is undoubtedly a positive course of action.

Divergence of views plays an important role in the development of the human psyche. It is only after running the intellectual gauntlet that a developed personality emerges. If in a human society, this process ceases to operate, the development of character will come to a standstill.

Nobody in this world is perfect. If a man is endowed with some good qualities, he may be lacking others. This is one of the reasons why differences crop up among people. But, for life as a whole, these differences are actually a great blessing: the good points of one man may compensate for the shortcomings of another, just as one set of talents in one man may complement a different set in another. If people could only learn to tolerate others' differences, their very forbearance would become a great enabling factor in collective human development.

The habit of tolerance prevents a man from wasting his time and talent on unnecessary matters. When negatively affected by another's unpalatable behaviour, your mental equilibrium is upset. On the other hand, emotionally untouched by such behaviour, your mind will fully retain its equilibrium and, without wasting a single moment, you will continue to perform your work in the normal way. The policy of tolerance or forbearance enhances your efficacy, while intolerant behaviour reduces it.

Tolerance is not an act of compulsion. It is a positive principle of life, expressing the noble side of a man's character. The existence of tolerant human beings in a society is just like the blooming of flowers in a garden.

FEBRUARY 27

The News of the Last Day

A high-intensity earthquake lasting 45 seconds and epicentred at Almora, U.P., rocked northern India at a quarter to twelve,

midnight, on October 20, 1991. With the same jolts, which could be felt even as far away as Delhi, hundreds of houses collapsed, about a thousand people were killed and more than three thousand were injured.

Although so devastating in its effects, in comparison with that supreme, world-shaking event, the *Qiamah* (the Day of Resurrection) an earthquake is but a very minor affair. Nevertheless, it gives us an idea of what will happen on that day on a much vaster scale. *The Times of India* of October 21, 1991, reported an incident, which took place on that very night which provides a telling parallel. It seems that at 2.30 a.m. just ten minutes before the earthquake began, certain Punjab militants opened fire on the Sirsa (District Bareilly) police station with AK-47 rifles, where the few police personnel on duty at that time were ill-equipped for effective defence.

However, the militants had not reckoned with the forces of nature. Instead of just dealing with a small police post, they now found themselves battling with a vastly superior enemy. Like all the other people in the vicinity they fled in terror, no doubt thinking that the heavens were falling on them.

The helplessness experienced in the face of an earthquake is nothing compared to the state of desperation man will be reduced to on Doomsday. Then he will be confronted with the biggest imaginable earthquake, and will be powerless to control it.

When possessed with power, man tends to become haughty and over-confident. But when the earth is so shaken that the mountains come tumbling down and it is engulfed by the mighty waves of the ocean, he will flee in utter bewilderment, leaving all his possessions behind him. To his horror, he will find that there is no escape route whatsoever.

FEBRUARY 28

The Concept of God

We have the entire universe before us. We see it, we experience it, and so are forced to believe in its existence. Even when a man rejects the godhead, he still believes in the universe. But when and how did it come into being? Explaining its existence as the creation of God is no final answer—so it is generally held—since the very next question, which arises, is if God made the universe, then who made God?

Can we believe in a causeless universe and a causeless God? Belief in a causeless God as the Creator of all things has more logic to it, in this world of cause and effect, than belief in a causeless universe and a non-existent God. It is by believing in a causeless Creator that we save ourselves from believing in the impossibility of a causeless universe.

Belief in God seems to many to be a very strange thing. But disbelief is even stranger. Sometimes it is argued that belief must rest on proof. But, from the purely scientific standpoint, nothing in this world can be proved or disproved. So far as believing in anything is concerned, the option is not between the proved and the unproved, but between the workable and the non-workable.

For instance, scientists in general believe in the concept of gravity. They do so, not because of proof of its existence, but because of the demonstrable predictability of effects. They do not know why gravity has the effect it has, or how it came into existence. They simply accept its existence as a useful theory.

This is the case with all scientific concepts, and belief in them does not mean uncritical acceptance of established as opposed to unestablished ideas. It simply means believing in a working hypothesis as opposed to an unworkable theory. Exactly the same principle is applicable to the concept of God.

In the matter of gravity, the choice for us is not between matter with gravity and matter without gravity, but between matter with gravity and non-existent matter. Since the concept of non-existent matter is untenable, because unworkable, we have opted for matter with gravity. From the purely academic angle, the same is true of the concept of God.

The universe itself does not have the ability to create. It can neither increase nor decrease itself by so much as a particle. As with all other scientific concepts, we must choose not between the universe with God and the universe without God, but between God and a non-existent universe. Since a non-existent universe is inconceivable, we must perforce opt for the concept of the universe with God.

FEBRUARY 29

The Problem of Riots

A regular reader of Al-Risala, Mr. M. Sajid of Delhi, once told me in the course of conversation that he agreed with all of the viewpoints expressed in al-Risala, except for one, and that was holding the Muslims responsible for riots that took place from time to time. He balked at the idea that Muslims started riots. He felt that this ran counter to the facts.

I explained to him that he must have misconstrued my words. What I actually said was that *Muslims were responsible for not preventing riots from taking place*. In the context of dealing with opponents, the Quran says: “If you persevere and guard yourself against evil, their machinations will never harm you” (3:120).

That is, if you remain patient and adopt a God-fearing attitude, the plots of your opponents cannot harm you in any way. This verse tells us that the actual problem is not the existence of plots, but the absence of patience and piety: if riots occur, it is not because of hostile

conspiracies, but because of our inability to adopt the path of patience and piety in countering them.

I further explained to him that whether these problems pertained to India or to any other country, there would always be people who indulged in activities, which injured others' sentiments. The solution to this problem is not to stop others from indulging in such activities, but to control one's own feelings. Wherever Muslims have fallen a prey to provocation, their reaction has caused matters to escalate into full-scale riots. But where they have adopted the path of patience and avoidance, rioting has been nipped in the bud.

We must fully grasp the fact that the administration is unable to prevent the outbreak of rioting. If riots are to be prevented, it will only be by right action on the part of the Muslims. The only viable strategy for Muslims to adopt is to remain unruffled in the face of provocation, and to exercise patience in the face of unpleasantness. And there is nothing to prevent their seeking police assistance whenever a situation is about to take an ugly turn. This is something, which needs to be done at the very outset. If Muslims can accept that this should be their role, the phenomenon of rioting could be banished, once and for all, from this country.

MARCH 1

Human Tragedy

The reality of life is sadly reflected in one of the sayings of the Jewish leader, Abba Eban (b. 1915). “Men and nations do the sensible thing only after they have exhausted all other options.” (*Liberty’s Nation*)

It is true that no individual or group seems willing to act seriously or sensibly unless and until all irrational and superficial options have failed.

Our world is marred by injustice and dishonesty and all kinds of atrocities at both the individual as well as the communal level. This is because people feel free to do as they please quite unfettered by moral considerations. The wrongdoers renounce such ways only when there is no other option. The freedom—which they abuse—has been given to mankind, because our world is a testing place. And on Doomsday, all without exception will be called to account for how they have used the freedom. If they have ignored and denied the truth in this world, they shall be obliged to accept it on the Day of Reckoning, because all of their options will have run out and subterfuge and pleas for mercy will be of no avail; by that time it will be too late either to beg for forgiveness or to attempt to make amends.

Why do people wait until they are forced to submit to the truth? If one accepts the truth because one is forced to, one’s acceptance has no value. Why again do people wait until they are forced to treat others with justice? Being just to others because one is forced to is likewise an action bereft of honour or human kindness.

Why wait until we are on the brink of Doomsday before we act with human concern for individuals and a proper respect for society? Why wait until the Day of Judgement before we act as bidden in the Quran, as honest, upright, responsible individuals?

MARCH 2

Towards Reconstruction

In his book 'Victory without War', former American President Richard Nixon, commenting on the scene in India, made this observation: "Those who believe India is not governed well should remember how miraculous it is that India is governed at all."

Richard Nixon's remark on the Indian social set-up is no doubt harsh. We would be wise, however, to take this as a challenge rather than just simmer with resentment over it. Instead of venting our anger on Nixon as an unfair critic, we would be well-advised to devote our entire attention to the internal construction of our country. We must struggle to raise our country so high that never again will any Nixon dare pass such remarks against us. Japan could be our model in this matter. At the end of the second world war Japan had reduced itself to insignificance in the eyes of the world. But after a hard struggle lasting forty years it eventually raised itself to such heights that no one now dare cast aspersions on it.

The need of the hour is to give fresh thought to our national problems. Then, without the slightest delay, we must begin our journey in the right direction so that our future may be better and brighter as compared to our present.

A senior Indian journalist, S. Mulgaonkar, has made some very penetrating observations on the Indian situation in his article entitled 'Can systemic changes provide the entire answer?' (Published in two installments in the *Indian Express* of February 7 and 14, 1987).

He pointed out that forty years had passed since we gained our freedom. We had made progress too in many fields, but our problems were many and serious, and on balance, appeared to outweigh the progress we had made.

Mr. Mulgaonkar did not subscribe to the views of those who talked of a change in the system. To him, 'in the final analysis, a system is only as good as those who operate it.'

I entirely agree with Mr. Mulgaonkar on this point. I would like to add that it was Mahatma Gandhi who gave our country its political base. Later, when power came into the hands of Pandit Nehru, he gave the country its industrial base.

Now the third urgent task is to provide the country with a moral base. To me, this third base—the moral base—will be the decisive factor in the course, which our national life will take. This is a reality admitted by almost every right-thinking person.

MARCH 3

The Exploitation of Islam

A Time magazine report of February 15, 1993 carrying pictures of Indian Muslims, states that persecution of Indian Muslims by Hindus is due to the latter's hatred for the Muslims on religious grounds. It says:

Hindu hatred for Muslims dates back to the 10th century, when Muslim invaders first began looting the subcontinent and destroying Hindu temples (p. 25).

The Muslim invaders, the targets of blame over a long period of time, found a powerful defence in the superbly written works of Maulana Shibli Nomani (1857-1914). Popular in British India, his writings set the subsequent trend and Muslim writers and speakers followed in his footsteps. All, without exception, began to defend the Muslim kings.

This style of defence was greatly to the Muslims' liking, but did little to bring about a change in the Hindu mind. On the contrary, there was a hardening of Hindu attitudes, which, in terms of religious antipathy,

reached its culminating point in the twentieth century. Shibli's approach had clearly been counter-productive. That was because his writings, which should have aimed at putting an end to Hindu hatred, were more calculated to win applause from fellow Muslims.

Now, the need of the hour is for Muslims to change their entire attitude. Rather than defend the Muslim kings, they should admit their mistakes and distance themselves from their wrongdoing. That is, they should cease to associate themselves from any of their deeds, which were not carried out in the true spirit of Islam.

Along with our assertion that Islam is the religion of truth, we must also concede the Muslims are quite a different matter. Today, there are many Muslims who exploit their religion for their own personal interests—as indeed happened in the past. Right-thinking Muslims in general should now refuse—be they kings or commoners—to have anything to do with the un-Islamic acts of their forebears.

MARCH 4

Fasting and Quran

The Quran makes special mention of its revelation in the month of Ramadan, while making it obligatory upon the followers. This indicates that there is a close link between Ramadan and the Quran. In the words of the Quran:

In the month of Ramadan the Quran was revealed, a book of guidance with proofs of guidance distinguishing right from wrong. Therefore whoever of you is present in that month let him fast. But he who is ill or on a journey shall fast a similar number of days later on. (2:185)

The revelation of Quran started in 610 A.H., in the month of Ramadan according to the lunar calendar. The first revelation was made to the Prophet when he was in the cave of Hira, and it continued for the next 23 years, finally reaching completion in Madinah.

The guidance given in the Quran is the best blessing to the mankind from God, because it shows man the path to ultimate success. It tells man how to conduct himself so that in his eternal life he can gain entry into paradise. Paradise is the goal of man. Fasting is the path to it.

The month of Ramadan is the annual reminder of this blessing. The celebration of the revelation of the Quran is not observed in the usual way but by abstinence and being thankful to the Almighty. Fasting in this month is acknowledgment of the divine blessings. It is like saying, 'O Lord I have heard and I accept it.'

Also this is a month during which the Quran should be read and understood. The Quran is specially recited in this month. In the night the Quran is also recited during *Tarawih*. This month has been made special so that the blessings of God may be counted even more.

When the Quran is read during the month of its revelation, it reminds us of the time when the divine light from heaven fell upon the earth. Man remembers this and cries out, 'O Lord, fill my heart with your divine light!' He cries out, 'Make me among those who are near you!' When he reads about Hell and Paradise, his inner self cries out, 'O Lord, save me from Hell, and let me enter Paradise.'

In this way the Quran becomes a guiding force in man's life. He earns his livelihood according to its dictates. He bathes in the ocean of its life to cleanse his soul.

The Quran is a reward to His servants from God. And fasting is acknowledgment of the reward. Through fasting man makes himself worthy of being thankful to God. He obeys the command of God and thus revels in the supremacy of God. Having gone through a month's fasting, he creates an ability in himself to lead a life of piety as ordained in the Quran.

Fasting is a special deed. It makes a man kind-hearted, and enables him to awaken his finer feelings. He is then able to feel and experience what God desires of a man in this world.

Fasting, a form of training to create the capacity in a man to become the most devoted worshipper, makes him most grateful to God and creates a fear of Him, which makes him shiver. The very hardship of fasting carries a man from the material world to the plain of spirituality.

MARCH 5

The Construction of the Mind

One of the important points made in the UNESCO constitution is as follows:

Since war began in the minds of men it is in the mind that the defence of peace must be constructed.

This is an indisputable fact. Whether the quarrel is between two people on the street, or between groups or nations, the origin of all such incidents lies in the mind. It is in the mind that feelings of hatred, revenge and anger are produced, and when these spill over into provocation, the result is some measure of conflict, ranging from petty squabbling to full-scale war.

Largely speaking, negative thoughts arise in reaction to untoward behaviour on the part of others. Someone insults us and we become angry. An unpleasant situation is created by someone, and we are provoked by this. Someone damages our prestige and we therefore seek revenge. All these vengeful impulses take shape first of all in our minds and when they are externalized, they wreak havoc. If peace could be established at the level of the mind, before there is any physical escalation of strife, the world would be a much better place to live in.

The only effective way to prevent quarrels, whether at the individual or at the national or international level, is to train people's minds: patience should be emphasized as the greatest of all virtues.

Such a mentality can be developed only if negative thinking is replaced by positive thinking. This should be directed at resistance to provocation and the avoidance of all unpleasantness and consequent entanglements. It must provide the basis for cool and unemotional decision-making, and, above all, for return of love for hatred.

Such a reform of the mind would lead to the most positive reconstruction of human affairs ever witnessed in human history.

MARCH 6

A Purposeful Creation

Why was this world made? Why was man born into this world? Why, after a certain period of time, does he pass away? What will happen after death? These are the most important questions concerning the origins and fate of mankind, and they should never be far from people's minds. Finding the correct answers to these questions has always been one of man's most important quests.

Pondered over for thousands of years, these questions have been variously answered by different people. However, these answers can be placed in two broad categories: one, which holds the great array of wonders in this world to be purposeless, and the other, which asserts that man was created with a purpose and that he has a definite goal.

While the first view tends to be subscribed to by poets, philosophers and secular scholars, the second view is firmly upheld by that very special class of beings called prophets, or messengers of God. The most authentic testament to the second view has been provided by the Prophet Muhammad.

Many arguments can be put forward in support of the answers in both of these categories. It is very obvious, however, that the notion of purposelessness is not in keeping with the structure of life and universe. The idea, on the other hand, of purposeful creation, falls exactly into place, for the simple reason that it contains no inherent contradictions.

The world into which man is born is fraught with significance. There is nothing, which is of a meaningless or random nature. It is quite unthinkable that man, with his meaningful life, born into a meaningful universe, should find no purpose in creation. Where there is meaningfulness, there will, of necessity, be purposefulness. This aspect of the universe is a clear verification of the Prophet's answer.

MARCH 7

The Spiritual Goal of Islam

What is the spiritual goal of Islam? That is, what is that spiritual target which Islam sets before man? The answer in the words of the Quran is: 'A soul at rest' (89:27). Thus the spiritual goal of Islam is to attain this state of peace in the soul.

According to the Quran this is the ultimate stage in a man's spiritual development. When he reaches this stage of progress, he qualifies himself to be ushered into Paradise, the perfect and eternal world of the Hereafter. The Quran addresses such souls in these words: 'O serene soul! Return to your Lord joyful, and pleasing in His sight. Join My servants and enter My paradise' (89:27-30).

In this world man has to lead his life in circumstances in which he experiences various kinds of situations: there are times of gain, times of loss; times of happiness and times of grief. Sometimes he receives good treatment at the hands of others, at other times his fate is quite otherwise.

The ideal human being of the Quran is one who undergoes all these experiences without losing his integrity. Under no circumstances is his inner peace disturbed. However untoward the occasion, he can maintain his natural balance. Success does not make him proud. Power does not make him haughty. No bad treatment by others drives him to seek vengeance in anger. At all events, he remains serene. It is such a man who is called 'a peaceful soul' in the Quran. And it is this man who, according to the Quran, has achieved the highest spiritual state.

The realization of God joins man to his Maker. Such communion with the divine brings about a state of spiritual elevation. Having been thus raised to a higher plane of existence, man becomes a 'sublime character,' (68:4) as it is expressed in the Quran.

This can be illustrated by an example from the natural world: The process of conversion of a substance from the solid to the gaseous state, is called boiling. The boiling point of a liquid varies according to atmospheric pressure. At sea level, water boils at 100 degrees centigrade. At a higher altitude, as on a mountain, the atmospheric pressure is less, so the boiling point is lower. This shows that it is the altitude that makes the difference.

The law of nature governing this world accounts for the difference made by altitude. Islam's aim is to foster human beings whose altitude has changed. The superior qualities desired in him will come later, on their own.

Just as the Prophet of Islam was God's messenger, so also was he a perfect example of the peaceful soul. By studying his life, one can learn the nature of God's ideal man, that is, a peaceful soul. In the Quran the Prophet Muhammad is described as an example of "sublime character" (68:4).

When is it that a man's spiritual progress brings him to the state of peace? The best way to describe the soul being at complete rest is to give certain examples from the life of the Prophet of Islam.

The Prophet's name was Muhammad, meaning the praised one or the praiseworthy. But when the Makkans became his most dire opponents, they themselves coined a name for the Prophet, 'Muzammam,' on the pattern of 'Muhammad,' Muzammam meaning condemned. They used to heap abuses on him calling him by this epithet of Muzammam. But the Prophet was never enraged at this distorted version of his name. All he said in return was: "Aren't you surprised that God has turned away the abuses of the Quraysh from me. They abuse a person by the name of Muzammam. Whereas I am Muhammad (Ibn Hisham, 1/379).

This meant that abuses were being heaped on a person whose name was Muzammam. Since the Prophet's name was Muhammad, not Muzammam, their abuses did not apply to him. Such a reaction can come only from a person whose intellectual level is very high; who can rise above praise and criticism.

One day the Prophet was sitting with his companions in Madinah when a funeral procession passed by. The Prophet stood up. His

Companions pointed out that it was the funeral of a Jew, that is, a non-Muslim. The Prophet replied: 'Was he not a human being?' (*Fathul Bari*, 3/214).

This incident shows that the Prophet was looking at the matter by separating two different aspects of the Jew, that is, his being non-Muslim, and his being a human being. At that moment he overlooked his non-Muslim identity and saw him simply as a human being.

It is only a man who, in the words of the Quran has acquired a sublime character who can show such respect for every human being. It is only one whose spiritual progress has elevated his mental level who can do honour to one of another creed.

On another occasion the Prophet of Islam was in the Masjid al-Nabi in Madinah, the second most sacred mosque in Islam, when a Bedouin, that is, a desert Arab, entered the mosque and urinated inside it. It was obviously a very provocative matter. But the Prophet was not at all provoked. After the nomad had urinated, the Prophet simply asked his companions to bring a bucket of water and wash the place clean (*Fathul Bari*, 1/386).

This is a clear example of the kind of behaviour one may expect of a man with a peaceful soul. The Prophet's keeping cool at such obvious provocation was possible only because he had attained the highest state of spirituality. He had risen above all negative feelings.

These examples make it clear what a peaceful soul is. The peaceful soul is one which being on a higher spiritual plane, can live in tranquillity, regardless of the circumstances. It subsists within its own self. No external event can disturb its inner peace.

Nowadays people often tend to look at the history of kings in order to understand Islam. But this is not the proper way to study it. One needs only to study the careers of today's political leaders to be able to understand the nature of the Muslim kings of bygone days. Today's political leaders are, in reality, exploiters. In a similar way most of the Muslim kings of the later phase of Islam were also exploiters. To achieve their political ends, they exploited the name of Islam. As such, these Muslim kings were in no way the true representatives of Islam.

MARCH 8

Seeking the Pleasure of God

According to the Quran and the *Hadith*, a good deed is one, which is essentially intended to seek the pleasure of God (57:27). Devoid of this spirit, any deed will be as good as worthless when the final reckoning comes.

God does not go by appearances. He sees the inner motive called 'intent' in the Shariah. Looked at from this angle, deeds could be of two kinds, those that are committed to seek the pleasure of God, and those aimed at pleasing human beings.

The focal point of the man whose aim is to seek the pleasure of God will be his Creator. He seeks to find out whether or not his actions will meet with the approval of his Lord. His dealings are always determined by the principle of truth. His speech and movements are always directed by the will of God. Even if all other human beings have turned against him, or he is shunned by them, he is not deterred from following the path of truth.

On the contrary, the focus of attention of the man whose aim is to please human beings is man instead of God. He looks up to his group, his party and his human patrons in all matters. His language is couched in such terms as to please men, and his actions are calculated to win popularity among human beings.

However, the individual whose aim is to seek the pleasure of God becomes sensitive in the highest degree to all matters relating to God. He can ignore anything but divine dictates, whereas those who seek the pleasure of men become extremely sensitive in matters relating to men. They begin to show such consideration to men as only God deserves.

The former will find their abode in heaven, while the latter will be consigned to hellfire.

MARCH 9

Liberalism and Fundamentalism

I should like, first of all, to define the terms liberalism and fundamentalism. To arrive at a universally acceptable definition has never been an easy task, but I think that a good, workable definition of liberalism and fundamentalism should be, respectively, reason-based thinking, as opposed to scripture-based thinking.

Once we accept these definitions, we have a set of criteria by which to judge the actions of both liberals and fundamentalists. However, what we find, in the light of these criteria, is that neither group has truly adhered to its professed doctrines. Neither have the liberals been guided by reason, nor have the fundamentalists been by the scriptures.

In the Indian context, the Shah Bano case provides a telling example by which to judge the validity of the respective stands adopted by these two groups. During this case, such emphasis was laid on the fact that, according to the Islamic Shariah, a divorced wife was entitled only to temporary provision by her husband; she did not have the right to ask for permanent maintenance. This point was seized upon and highlighted by the liberals in order to prove that Islamic Law was in need of revision, without which it was not practicable in modern times.

To my way of thinking, in this case, the liberals neither thought nor acted reasonably. Had reason been appealed to, the liberals ought surely to have accepted the reality of the western world having already tried—and found wanting—the system of permanent maintenance for a divorced wife. Western laws, in obliging the ex-husband to pay permanent maintenance to his ex-wife, placed the man at an irreversible disadvantage. It is hardly surprising then that divorce having proved so costly a time and again, attitudes to marriage began

to change. As a result, more than fifty per cent of the young couples living together today are unwed, so that when they separate, the man does not have to pay for the maintenance of his former partner. Seen in the light of reason, the option, in reality, is not between permanent or temporary maintenance, but between any kind of provision and complete sexual anarchy. This being the reality, is it proper for liberals to ignore the experience of the west and blindly ridicule Islamic Law? The adoption of such a stance runs counter both to reason and to religion.

The position adopted by the fundamentalists in the Shah Bano case was flared in much the same manner as that of the liberals, in that it did not derive from or conform to the principles propounded by them. When the verdict in favour of maintenance was given, Muslim fundamentalists raised a great hue and cry against the Supreme Court's decision, completely ignoring the fact that to do so was quite against the teachings of the Quran.

Consider the almost parallel case, which took place in Madinah during the lifetime of the Prophet. A Muslim, called Basheer, who once had a dispute with a Jew, could have referred his case to the Prophet and been given a verdict based on the Shari'ah. But he chose, instead, to take his problems to a Jew by the name of Kaab Bin Ashraf, who used to settle any disputes referred to him. The Quran comments on this incident, but has nothing to say against Kaab Bin Ashraf. On the contrary, the Quran only condemned the Muslim for taking his case to this Jew instead of the Prophet. That is to say that the scriptures condemned the verdict-seeker rather than the verdict-giver.

Notwithstanding this Quranic example, the Muslim fundamentalists of India, without exception, kept silent on the subject of the verdict-seeker. Their entire animus was directed against the Supreme Court, in so doing, the Muslim fundamentalists were following, not their Scriptures, but personal whims.

According to the Quran (46:4), there are two sources of knowledge, one established, the other revealed. It would be correct to say that, in principle, the liberal group bases its judgement in established knowledge, while the fundamentalist group stands

by revealed knowledge. But if the fundamentalists had genuinely adhered to the Scriptures, they would have diverted their campaign against the verdict-seeker rather than against the verdict-giver (i.e., the Court). Similarly, if the liberals had been true to their own professed doctrines, they would, as a matter of principle, have admitted the veracity of Islamic Law in this particular instance, rather than get about discrediting Islam.

MARCH 10

Understanding India

1993 has been a year of meetings for me. During this period I have travelled extensively throughout the country in order to attend a number of conferences and seminars and in the process have met people from a broad cross-section of society. Most of the people I met seemed to have lost their optimism about the way this country is going to develop. But I differ from them. I am still full of hope for India's future.

It is my firm belief that despair runs counter to nature's overall system and that like any other kind of negativism it is unworthy of serious consideration. Have we forgotten, perhaps, that even the blackest of nights is followed by the sunrise? This sequence of events is so totally and perfectly predictable that an astronomer can tell with confidence the exact moment the sun will rise one thousand years from today. In a world, therefore, in which day will quite unfailingly follow night every twenty four hours ad infinitum, how is it possible that the darkness of despair will not be dispelled by the light of hope?

Here is an illustration of this point. On December 6, 1992, when the Babri Mosque was demolished, many newspapers made the assertion that this would turn out to be only the first of a long series of such incidents, anything from 300 to 3,000 mosques having been targetted by extremists for demolition. But my interpretation of the

situation was quite the reverse. I said that no other mosque was going to be demolished, for what we had witnessed was not the beginning of anti-masjid politics but the end.

This may appear strange today, but both communities very soon gave their tacit approval to the idea that Muslims should forget about their one mosque and Hindus should forget about the many mosques that, in the heat of the moment, they felt should be demolished. Though there is still some talk, on both sides, in the former antagonistic vein, passions are definitely cooling over what is, after all, an anachronism, which cannot continue indefinitely.

What underlay my own personal conviction about how this situation would develop was substantial historical evidence that destruction having run its course, must ultimately abate and come to an end. The entire history of mankind abounds in such instances.

However, a welcome panacea to cut short present ills would be the general acceptance of pluralism. But upholders of this principle have first to contend with the problem—nay, threat—of ‘cultural nationalism’. The proponents of this latter movement insist that India’s composite culture must be moulded into a uni-Indian culture, being of the view that it is only through such endeavour that social harmony can be produced.

Serious-minded people regard this movement as a genuine threat to the integrity of the country. This is because any attempt to replace the existing cultural set-up with an artificially formulated ‘culture’ would bring in its wake a fresh spate of strife and dissension. Such steps, disruptive as they are of the status quo, can never produce social harmony.

I do not, however, see any real danger in such a movement, for the simple reason that those who set themselves up against nature are bound to fall far short of their objectives. Their goals, could they but grasp this fact, are unrealizable.

Those who advocate changing the ‘composite’ culture of the country show their ignorance of the fact that culture is almost always of an inherently composite nature. Culture is not something, which can be formulated in some office, or in some meeting or conference: it is invariably the result of a long and natural process of social

action, reaction and interaction. Far from being the instant fallout of some political resolution, it is the culmination of a time-honoured, historical accretion. This being so, I regard cultural nationalism, or uni-culturalism as being against the laws of nature. Not even a super power can fly in the face of nature.

Besides, where uni-culture smacks of narrow-mindedness, multi-culture stands for broadmindedness. I cannot believe that my countrymen would be so foolish as to prefer to be narrow-minded. In July, 1993, a meeting was held in New Delhi in memory of Mr. Girilal Jain, the former editor of the *Times of India*. Speaking on this occasion, the present editor, Mr. Dilip Padgaonkar, made the point that because the human identity is composed of so many elements, it can never be thought of as being limited in form. According to influences which had shaped his own life, he mentioned being born into a particular family and growing up with a particular mother tongue and having the religion of his social background. When he went abroad to different countries, there were other influences, which went into the shaping of his identity. Many of these elements became inseparable parts of his psyche. Describing the vastness of the human personality, he said, "I am large enough to contain all these contradictions."

I think these words convey the spirit not only of India but also of humanity in its broadest sense. In terms of the sense of identity, which a language confers, there are still complaints about the non-fulfillment of promises made by Indian leaders prior to 1947, that 'Hindustani' written in both Persian and Devnagri scripts would be the national language of liberated India. The later decision to make Hindi the official language of post-independence India is still regarded as an affront and a deliberately limiting factor. But, in the context of the present day, I regard all this lamentation over Hindi's predominance as having little or no relevance.

Language may be an important part of a composite culture, but it is not minted by a handful of people. It comes into being after centuries of development. When Muslims came to India, they brought with them Arabic and Persian. At that time many languages were spoken in Delhi and the surrounding areas, such as Haryani, Punjabi, Khadi

Boli, Brijbhasha, Rajasthani, etc. With the interaction of Muslims and the local people, a new language began to develop. This language came to be known as Hindustani. It was a common language formed by deriving words from both foreign and local languages. Even today, it is the language of many people in India, although Muslims remain more Urdu-oriented, while Hindus, generally speaking, are more Hindi-oriented. It is significant that all the major Hindi dailies use Hindustani written in Devnagri script, that being the only really understandable language for the majority of the Indian people.

Muslims, however, still make a grievance of this use of Devnagri script. But they are wrong to do so. If they were simply to apply themselves to learning this script along with Urdu script they would find that they could have easy access not only to news and journalistic commentary but to a much wider field of literature and general information that is available to them at present. Devnagri script, being phonetic, is easy to learn, and its acquisition would bring it home to Muslims, once they began to make use of it, that the prevalent national language in actuality is Hindustani rather than Hindi, a language with which they have been familiar all their lives. They should learn a lesson from the many Hindu Punjabi officials who were schooled in Persian and Urdu, but who, after independence had suddenly to make the transition from Urdu to Hindi in their official work, without their ever having had any previous knowledge of Devnagri script. No one says that this changeover was easy, but the fact remains that it was successfully accomplished by dint of personal endeavour. Muslims must begin to see linguistic change as the need of the hour.

Whatever the concomitant pressures on the national identity, it should be borne in mind that the future of a nation, inevitably shaped as it is by historical forces, is never carved out by just a single individual, or a single group. And India is no exception to this rule.

MARCH 11

The Policy of Peace in Islam

According to the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, a believer is one with whom one can trust one's life and property. That is because Islam is a religion of peace. The Quran calls its way 'the paths of peace' (5:16). It describes reconciliation as the best policy, (4:128) and states quite plainly that God abhors disturbance of the peace (2:205).

Yet, in this world, for one reason or the other, peace remains elusive. Differences—political and apolitical—keep on arising between individuals and groups, Muslims and non-Muslims. Whenever people refuse to be tolerant of these differences, insisting that they be rooted out the moment they arise, there is bound to be strife. Peace, as a result, can never prevail in this world.

One recent example is the ever-recurring conflict over Jerusalem. Jerusalem is a very ancient, historic city with a unique value for all the millions of people of different religious persuasions who believe it to be their very own Sacred Place. Jerusalem is, indeed, a symbol and centre of inspiration for the three great Semitic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. For Jews, it is a living proof of their ancient grandeur, and the pivot of their national history. For Christians, it is the scene of their Saviour's agony and triumph. For Muslims, it is the first halting place on the Prophet's mystic journey, and also the site of one of Islam's most sacred Shrines. Thus, for all three faiths, it is a centre of pilgrimage, while for Muslims it is the third holiest place of worship.

Now the question arises as to how, when it is a place of worship for all three religions, it can be freely accessible to all. How can the adherents of all the three religions have the opportunity there to satisfy their religious feelings?

What is the solution to this problem? Its solution lies in a practice (*sunnah*) of the Prophet Muhammad: to separate the religious from the political aspect of the matter. This would enable men of religion to solve the problem by applying what is called ‘practical wisdom,’ that is, to avoid the present problems and grasp the available opportunities. By following this process, they would be able to fulfill their cherished religious desire of which they have been denied unnecessarily so far. In the process, they would be able to avoid confrontational situations. Here are some telling examples of this *sunnah* of the Prophet.

1. The Prophet Muhammad emigrated from Makkah to Madinah in July 622. For the first year and a half in Madinah (i.e. till the end of 623) he and his companions prayed in the direction of al-Bayt al-Maqdis in Jerusalem. At the beginning of 624, the faithful, were enjoined, by Quranic revelation, to face in the direction of the Sacred Ka‘ba at Makkah to say their prayers (2:144).

When this injunction regarding the Qiblah (direction of prayer) was revealed, 360 idols were still in position in the Ka‘bah, at that time a long-established centre of polytheism. The presence of these idols must certainly have made Muslims feel reluctant to face in the direction of the Ka‘bah at prayer time. How could believers in monotheism turn their faces towards what was, in effect, a structure strongly associated with polytheism? It is significant that along with the change of Qiblah came the injunction to treat this problem as a matter requiring patience, and not to hesitate in facing the Ka‘bah: “O believers, seek assistance in prayer. God is with those who are patient” (2:153).

As history tells us, this state of affairs continued for six long years, till the conquest of Makkah (630) when the Ka‘bah was cleared of idols. This establishes a very important principle of Islam, which may be termed as *Al-fasl bayn al-qaziyatayn*, that is, the separation of two different facets of a problem from each other. According to this principle, the Ka‘bah and the idols were given separate consideration. By remaining patient on the issue of the presence of the idols, believers were able to accept the Ka‘bah as the direction for prayer.

2. Another such example is the above mentioned heavenly journey (*Isra or Mi‘raj*) undertaken by the Prophet before the emigration in

622. At that juncture, Jerusalem was ruled by Iranians, that is to say, by non-Muslims. The Iranian ruler, Khusroe Parvez, attacked Jerusalem in 614, wresting it from the Romans, who had governed it since 63 B.C. This political dominance of the Iranian empire ended only when the Roman Emperor Heraclius defeated the Iranians and restored Roman rule over Jerusalem in 629.

This means that, before his emigration, the Prophet Muhammad entered Jerusalem on his Mi'raj journey to say his prayer at the Masjid al-Aqsa at a time when the city was under the rule of a non-Muslim king. From this we derive the very important *sunnah* of the Prophet that worship and politics practically belong to separate spheres, and, as such, should not be confused with one another.

3. The third example took place after the Hijrah in 629. At that time, Makkah was entirely under the domination of the idolatrous Quraysh. In spite of that, the Prophet and his companions came to Makkah from Madinah to spend three days there to perform Umrah (the minor pilgrimage) and the circumambulation of the Ka'bah. This was possible solely because the Prophet did not mix worship with politics. If the Prophet had thought that Umrah could be performed only when Makkah came under Muslim political rule, he would never have entered Makkah for worship along with his companions.

In the light of this *sunnah* of the Prophet, the solution to the present problem of Jerusalem lies in separating the issue of worship from that of political supremacy. Muslims belonging to Palestine, or any other country, should be able to go freely to Jerusalem in order to pray to God in the Aqsa Mosque. Worship should be totally disassociated from political issues.

To sum it up, the only practical solution to the problem of Jerusalem, in present circumstances, is to apply the above principle of *Al-fasl bayn al-qaziyatayn* to this matter, that is, to keep the two aspects of a controversial issue separate from one another. There is no other possible solution to the problem of Jerusalem. We ought to keep the political aspect apart from its religious aspect so that no ideological barrier comes in the way of worship by the people, and the faithful are able to go to Jerusalem freely in order to satisfy their religious feelings.

MARCH 12

Defining Secularism

The basis of the partition of the country in 1947, at least implicitly, was that India was to be declared a Hindu state, and Pakistan a Muslim state. And it did happen in Pakistan. It was declared a Muslim state. So the logical parallel was to declare India a Hindu state. But one thing in India, prevented such a declaration being made. That was that Hindus had gone sufficiently ahead in modern education for a majority of their educated class to think along non-religious lines, Pandit Nehru being at the apex. It was due to the pressure of these educated Hindus that India was declared a secular state instead of a Hindu state.

This state of affairs was indeed a boon for the Indian Muslims. Unfortunately though, due to the misguided leadership of certain Muslim leaders, they could never place secularism in its correct perspective. Their leaders had told them that secularism meant an anti-religious system. That is why they were never in a position to think about it with clear minds. They could never adjust to this idea.

The interpretation of secularism, quite simply, means 'a worldly or non-religious system.' As such, in a pluralistic society secularism entails a political settlement, whereby religious freedom is granted in private spheres, while the ordinary, everyday worldly spheres of life are dealt with on a non-religious basis. This obviates the kind of dissension, which can arise in a society where people of different persuasions exist side by side.

According to this interpretation, secularism cannot be called an anti-religious system. To put it more precisely in the Indian context, secularism can be termed a system of non-interference. That is, the State maintains a policy of non-interference in the religious affairs of various groups, while attending to practical matters of concern to all the groups, on a non-religious basis.

As a result of this misunderstanding by the Muslims, they failed to participate fully in secularism. Those Muslims who openly participated in the secular system were never respected, and never gained credibility among the Muslims. This is the basic reason for secularism not being a complete success in the country.

Although Muslims are numerically in a minority, due to their large numbers they are in the position of being next to the majority in the country. A community in this position has an extremely crucial role to play. It is because of this special position of Muslims that no system in India can be successfully established unless Muslims accept it and extend to it their full cooperation.

All the known records prove that Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru and his colleagues were secular in the best sense of the word. Had they received the full support of the Muslim community, they certainly would have succeeded in establishing a secular system in the country.

Whatever the system, secular or Islamic, it can never be perfect in this world of ours. It will always have some shortcoming or the other. India being such a vast country, something or the other will always fall short of the ideal, even if it were an Islamic state. Failing to understand this situation Muslims have repeatedly pinpointed the supposed or real shortcomings of the system and regularly make fiery speeches and write barbed articles, which denigrate the system. They accuse the Congress of functioning under the banner of secularism without actually practicing it. As a result, Muslims have continued to give a negative vote, thereby seriously undermining the stability of the Congress, the stability that was necessary to establish a secular system.

For instance, take the question of government service. Seeing that the Muslim ratio was much lower in government jobs, Muslims alleged that the government talked a great deal about secularism but that, in fact, most of the jobs were given to Hindus, not Muslims. This was not the case. The actual reason for the greater number of Hindus in government jobs was to be found elsewhere. When Muslims in Govt. jobs migrated to Pakistan in large numbers before partition the Hindus who had left their jobs to come to India were naturally given first preference. Automatically, they came to exceed the number of Muslims in government jobs.

Another reason for the smaller ratio was that Muslims were 100 years behind Hindus in modern education. There were, therefore, far fewer degree holders among Muslims than among Hindus.

For instance, at the Aligarh Muslim University, when the Muslims opened their own medical college, using their own funds, they were forced to employ Hindu professors. The reason being that the Muslims themselves had lagged too far behind in medical education in particular to apply for such positions.

This is traceable to Muslims' lack of awareness of modern imperatives. Their negative response to the opening of the first medical college in Calcutta in 1835 is a matter of history. While Muslims were taking out processions for its closure, Hindus were at the same time seeking admission to it. Muslims in fact could not separate the English from their sciences. Since they were launching movements against British rule, they thought that even their sciences had also to be discarded. It was for reasons such as these that Muslims have suffered in the past and are still suffering the consequences. However, they were quick to lay all the blame at the door of the government, even in places where the government had no hand.

No system can work efficiently without the cooperation of the public. The government can undertake only 50 percent of the task. The other 50 percent has to be undertaken by the people.

But instead of pulling their weight, which would have meant correcting their own attitude, they ranged themselves against secularism, of which they felt profoundly suspicious. Their failure to improve their own condition in terms of education only made them more rigid in this stance.

Now this state of affairs was exploited by the fundamentalist Hindus. They may not have been the creators of this state of affairs, but I would stress that they have exploited the situation.

Since secularism was upheld by the Congress, and favoured by educated classes everywhere, fundamentalist groups found themselves relegated to the background. The theocratic state was in the process everywhere of being rejected by the enlightened minds. But Muslims did not play their role. This is what is largely responsible for the erosion of secularism. There are certainly other factors, but Muslims'

failure to realize the actual meaning of secularism is the most decisive one.

Muslims failed to play their 50 percent part, thus encouraging the rise of Hindu fundamentalism. If the BJP seats in Parliament rose from 2 to 119 the direct responsibility for this must be attributed to the ill-advised leadership of Muslims.

Pandit Nehru had an excellent team of individuals, imbued with the spirit of secularism, in the best sense of the word, but Muslims failed to support them. There were certain Muslims both inside and outside the party who favoured secularism but since our leaders had implanted the wrong idea in people's minds that secularism was anti-Islam, these individuals were never respected in the community, hence they failed to gain the credibility among Muslims, which was necessary for them to play an effective role.

Now Muslims will have to change their thinking. They must realize that secularism is not anti-Islam or anti-religion, but that it is the best possible principle on which to run a pluralistic society.

MARCH 13

Discovery of God

When persecution at the hands of the Quraysh became insufferable, the Prophet asked some of his Muslim followers to emigrate from Makkah to Abyssinia. There, they were given refuge and found peace and security. When the Quraysh heard about this, they sent two envoys to the king of Abyssinia to demand that the Muslims be returned to them. Najashi, the Abyssinian king, refused to give up those who had sought his protection until they had been allowed to explain their case. Ja'far ibn Abu Talib came forward on behalf of the Muslims: This is what he said: "We used to be an ignorant people, worshipping idols, eating carrion-flesh, committing indecencies, cutting off relationships, and neglecting our neighbours.

The strong amongst us used to devour the weak. We remained in this state until God sent us a prophet from our own people: one whose lineage, truthfulness, integrity and chastity were known to us. He called us to One God, urging us to worship Him alone, and to forsake the stones and idols, which we and our forefathers had worshipped besides Him. He enjoined us to be truthful and trustworthy; to be kind to relatives and neighbours; to refrain from that which is forbidden to us, and not to spill the blood of others. He forbade indecency and all falsehood, the misappropriation of the property of orphans and the defamation of honourable women. He called on us to worship one God, and no other besides Him. He commanded us to pray, pay the poor-due and fast. (Ja'far then listed all the commandments of Islam). So we believe in him, and follow him in the religion that has come to him from God. We started worshipping One God alone, refraining from that which he forbade us, and considering lawful only that which he declared so. But our people turned against us, persecuting us and seeking to entice us away from our religion, and turn us back to worshipping idols instead of God Almighty. They attempted to make us indulge once again in impure things, as we used to. When this persecution and oppression became unbearable, and they came between us and our religion, we emigrated to your land. We preferred you above all others, noble king, and sought your refuge, in the hope that we would not be wronged in your presence.

Najashi then asked Ja'far to read to him some of the Book, which had been revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. Ja'far recited the beginning of the *Surah* entitled 'Mary'. When Najashi heard these verses, he wept. "This is the same word that Jesus brought to the world," he said; "it emanates from the same source." He then sent the envoys of the Quraysh away, saying that there was no question of his handing over the Muslims to them.

From Ja'far's words we can tell what a momentous impact the discovery of God had made on his life, and how his faith had permeated every corner of his being. When Najashi heard this faith expressed in Ja'far's words, he could not but accede under its impact.

The truth is that with the discovery of God, a new personality grows which is reflected in every action. Religion becomes inseparable

from the person it has entered. The full force of his faith is borne out by his every word and action. They are outward expression of the deep faith that has saturated his inner soul.

MARCH 14

Limits of Tolerance

According to Voltaire, “Tolerance is a law of nature stamped on the heart of all men.”

Nothing could be truer than this statement; tolerance is, indeed, a permanent law of nature. But it is not something, which has to be externally imposed, for the human desire for tolerance is limitless. Just as truth and honesty are virtues, so is tolerance a virtue. And just as no one ever needs to ask for how long one should remain truthful and honest, so does one think of tolerance as having an eternal value. The way of tolerance should be unquestioningly adopted at all times as possessing superior merit.

A man who is intolerant is not a human being in the full sense of the expression. To become enraged at antagonism is surely a sign of weakness. Of course, there are many who do not want to recognise the principle of tolerance as being eternal, for, in conditions of adversity, the temptation to retaliate becomes too strong. The feelings of anger, which accompany negative reaction, must somehow be vented, and those who think and act in this way are keen to retain the illusion that, in hitting back, they are not doing anything unlawful.

Such thinking is quite wrong. In reality, when a man is enraged at anything, which goes against his will, tolerance as a priority becomes paramount. Many men strive to become supermen. But the true superman is one who, in really trying situations, can demonstrate his super-tolerance. Just any act of antagonism does not give us the license to be intolerant. Rather, such occasions call for greater tolerance than in normal circumstances. In everyday matter, where there is none of

the stress and strain of opposition, no one has difficulty in being tolerant. It is only in extraordinary situations, fraught with conflict, that the truly tolerant man will prove his mettle.

One of the stark realities of life is that divergence of views does exist between man and man, and that it impinges at all levels. Be it at the level of a family or a society, a community or a country, differences are bound to exist everywhere. Now the question is how best unity can be forged or harmony brought about in the face of human differences.

Some people hold that the removal of all differences is the sine quanon for bringing about unity. But, this view is untenable, for the simple reason that, it is not practicable. You may not like the thorns, which essentially accompany roses, but it is not possible for you to pluck out all the thorns and destroy them completely. For, if you pluck out one, another will grow in its place. Even if you run a bulldozer over all rosebushes, new plants will grow in their place bearing roses, which are ineluctably accompanied by thorns. In the present scheme of things, roses can be had only by tolerating the existence of thorns. Similarly, a peaceful society can be created only by creating and fostering the spirit of tolerance towards diversities. In this world, unity is achievable only by learning to unite in *spite of differences*, rather than insisting on unity without differences. For total eradication of differences is an impossibility. The secret of attaining peace in life is tolerance of disturbance of the peace.

There is nothing wrong in diversity of opinions. In fact, this is a positive quality, which has many advantages. The beauty of the garden of life is actually enhanced if the flower of unity is accompanied by the thorn of diversity.

An advantage flowing from this attitude is that it builds character. If you are well-mannered towards those whose views are similar to yours, you may be said to exhibit a fairly good character. But, if you behave properly with those holding divergent views from you or who criticise you, then you deserve to be credited with having an excellent character.

In the same way, a society whose members hold identical views and never have any controversial discussions, will soon find itself in

the doldrums. The intellectual development of the members of this society will be frozen, because personal evolution takes place only where the interaction of divergent thinking provides the requisite mental stimuli.

The adoption of a policy of tolerance in the midst of controversy and in the face of opposition is not a negative step. It is undoubtedly a positive course of action.

Divergence of views plays an important role in the development of the human psyche. It is only after running the intellectual gauntlet that a developed personality emerges. If, in a human society, this process ceases to operate, the development of character will come to a standstill.

Nobody in this world is perfect. If a man is endowed with some good qualities, he may be lacking in others. This is one of the reasons for differences cropping up between people. But, for life as a whole, this disparateness is actually a great blessing: the good points of one man may compensate for the shortcomings of another, just as one set of talents in one man may complement a different set in another. If people could only learn to tolerate others' differences, their very forbearance would become a great enabling factor in collective human development.

The habit of tolerance prevents a man from wasting his time and talent on unnecessary matters. When negatively affected by another's unpalatable behaviour, your mental equilibrium is upset, whereas when emotionally untouched by such behaviour, your mind will fully retain its equilibrium and, without wasting a single moment, you will continue to carry out your duties in the normal way. The policy of tolerance or forbearance enhances your efficacy, while intolerant behaviour reduces it.

Tolerance is not an act of compulsion. It is a positive principle of life, expressing the noble side of a man's character. The existence of tolerant human beings in a society is just like the blooming of flowers in a garden.

MARCH 15

Towards a Glorious and Invincible India

In its editorial 'Neighbour's Neighbour', *The Times of India* (April 21, 95) wrote: "Though India is the second largest Islamic country in the world [recent estimates show that India's Muslim population is now the largest] it has been subjected to hostile propoganda in the Organization of the Islamic Countries. It is, therefore, necessary for India to cultivate leading Islamic countries and explain to them, the realities of the situation in the country. It is on record, for example, that although Mr. Fakhruddin Ali Ahmad was deputed by Mrs. Indira Gandhi to attend the first meeting of the Organisation of the Islamic Countries held in Morocco in 1969, this mission was not a success because of Pakistan's opposition to India."

It needs to be emphasized far beyond the borders of India, that in addition to constituting the largest Muslim population in the world, Indian Muslims have made extraordinary progress since 1947. Most Muslim families are now far better off than they were prior to that date. (For details, please refer to *Indian Muslims* by the author).

There can be no doubt that Muslims are a great asset to their country. When it comes to holding the banner of India high on the world Muslim map, they make a solid contribution. Our neighbour, Sri Lanka, having grasped this reality, has assigned its foreign ministry and many other important posts to Muslims. Sri Lanka is now benefiting greatly from the relations thus established with Muslim countries. I feel that India has yet to fully tap this precious opportunity.

Today the country is beset by serious problems to solve for which new blood is required. And this new blood, according to the

predictions of Swami Vivekananda, can be found among the Muslims. On June 19, 1898, he wrote:

I see in my mind's eye the future perfect India rising out of this chaos and strife, glorious and invincible, with Vedanta brain and Islam body.

(Letters of Swami Vivekananda, p. 380).

To put it quite plainly, this would mean having a Hindu president and a Muslim prime minister for our great democratic system. Today the formation of such a government has become an inescapable necessity. The Swami's dictum of one hundred years ago would appear to be an ideal proposal in terms of present circumstances. It is not just playing with ideas, it is rather making a cool assessment of the country's present condition. More than eighty percent of the problems faced by our country today relate directly or indirectly to Muslims. Would not an able and patriotic Muslim prime minister deal with them with greater insight and efficiency?

Let us look at what India's most serious problems are, given its central position in a huge chain of Muslim countries stretching to its east and west. The most difficult problem to be solved is that of Kashmir. Then there is the normalization of relations with the west Asian countries, with whom innumerable matters of national interest are at issue. Other problems include securing the support of the Muslim members in the United Nations; the normalization of relations with Pakistan, which for us is of prime importance, the establishment of a corridor through Bangladesh to join northern India with the rest of the country by road or rail, and the formation of a federation of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh as a permanent political solution to the problems of the subcontinent, besides the internal normalization of Hindu-Muslim relations, and so on.

Serious problems like these have become obstacles in the path of our progress. Our journey as a nation has reached a dead end. In such circumstances, an able Muslim prime minister may effectively lead the caravan of national progress out of its present state of impasse.

The number of Muslims in Malaysia is less than that of India (about 12 crores). Although the ratio of Muslims to adherents of other

faiths is greater than in India. Malaysian Muslims are still numerically in a minority. Even so, for almost the last twenty years, Malaysia has had a Muslim prime minister in Maathir Mohammed. And this is without there being a Muslim majority in parliament. The number of Muslim members of parliament is actually less than fifty per cent, so that it is not a Muslim parliament, which Maathir Mohammed heads, but a coalition government.

During a tour in Malaysia in July 1984, I had occasion to meet Maathir Mohammad and was able to form my own personal estimate of him. I came to the conclusion that the quality, which has enabled him to head a coalition government for the last twenty years, was the realism of his approach.

Unlike our Muslim leaders, he does not indulge in wishful thinking, but makes an in-depth study of circumstances and then makes plans of proven feasibility. It is this quality in him which is responsible for Malaysia's extraordinary progress. It is significant that even with a minority in the Assembly, he has been able to form a government for four successive terms.

Indian Muslims are generally regarded as the downtrodden objects of social and religious persecution. But to my way of thinking, if old attitudes could be shaken off, there should be nothing to prevent them playing the same role in this country as is played by Mr. Maathir Mohammad in Malaysia.

It would be ridiculous to suggest, of course, that a few articles published in the newspapers should suffice for a Muslim to be offered the post of prime minister. Prime ministership is not something to be conferred on demand. The aspirant should first have to prove his mettle, and then the post should be given to him on the basis of outstanding personal merit. Swami Vivekananda meant just this when he made the above-mentioned observation. If meritorious Muslims go forward at the national level where, by virtue of their excellent performance in the country's mainstream, they come into public's eye, and emerge as national figures, they can certainly reach the highest political offices in the country.

For this to happen, Muslim intellectuals and leaders shall have to adopt a totally non-communal approach. They must concentrate

on what is in the general interest of the nation and not just on the welfare of their own community. They shall have to develop national thinking instead of sectarian thinking and should have the guts to say: "I am proud to be an Indian Muslim." Their approach must be secular in the best sense of the word, and, without differentiating between Hindus and Muslims, they must show their love for all Indians in equal measure.

While in Kuala Lumpur, I said my prayers at the official residence of the Prime Minister. As a devout Muslim, Mr. Maathir Mohammad joined us. But when it comes to public life, he adopts an entirely secular approach, for, in a country with a diverse cultural and religious background, no system other than secularism is practically possible.

If a high-calibre secular, realistic, patriotic, nationally-minded Muslim were to appear on the Indian political scene, and, most important, if his character remained unaffected by malign pressures, there is no doubt about that he would make an excellent choice of becoming prime minister of India. Had Kashmiri Muslims not waged a senseless separatist war in 1989, thereby discrediting themselves in the eyes of our countrymen, I am certain that the first Muslim prime minister of India could very well have been a Kashmiri.

Even today if the Kashmiris, severing all connections with the separatist movement, joined the mainstream they would astonishingly find that the India which proposed them the post of the Prime Minister of Kashmir was willing with great pride to offer them the post of the Prime Minister of India.

MARCH 16

A Silent Revolution

To a cross-section of educated, socially conscious Kashmiri Muslims (with whom I have had recent contacts), it is a matter of gravest concern that the violent *jihad*, unleashed in Kashmir in the name of

freedom in 1989, not only failed in its objective, but caused the people of that country to suffer irreversible losses. More than fifty thousand people lost their lives, and all economic and educational institutions were destroyed. Peace seems to have vanished forever from Kashmir, and without peace, there can be no smooth functioning of day-to-day activities, nothing even approaching normality.

However, there is another aspect to this matter. Many Kashmiris have been forced by the pressure of circumstances to uproot their families and re-settle beyond the borders of their own land. At present, about fifty thousand Kashmiris are living in various Indian cities. These emigrant Kashmiris—hard workers, as emigrants tend to be—are fast becoming an affluent community, running prosperous businesses and owning big houses and Maruti cars. Their children, too, are receiving a proper education. For these Kashmiris, the change in their circumstances has turned out to be a blessing in disguise. It has revealed to them a reality, which had not been apparent to them in Kashmir, namely, that despite the supposed tyranny inflicted on them and other political problems, there was still the genuine possibility of their thriving in India. This is a discovery, which has brought about a total revolution in Kashmiri thinking. Now, deliberately detaching themselves from the so-called freedom struggle, they have successfully plunged into normal economic activity both in India and abroad.

Now—albeit at a late stage—they have realized that their progress had never depended upon the resolution of Kashmir's political problem, and that, as such, these problems have now become a secondary issue for them.

The same is true to a large extent and, of course, on a large scale, of Muslims in general. The fault lies with unwise Muslim leaders, who had enmeshed their followers in matters, which bore no relation to reality, tyrannising them into thinking that the solution to all their problems lay in Pakistan. This explains why they remained blind to the great opportunities elsewhere, which were open to all and sundry after 1947. Their blinkered vision caused them to persist in seeing India as a “problem country”; unrealistically, they looked beyond its borders for a solution to their problems. This rationale did, however, crumble when, in 1971, Pakistan itself was dismembered as the result

of a bloody war. Even this cataclysm brought about only a fifty percent shift in Muslim perspectives.

Since that time, it has taken repeated acts of violence in Karachi and other Pakistani cities—in the course of which emigrant Muslims were ruthlessly looted and murdered—to bring them to the realization that, except in India, there was no alternative place for them. It took all these years, all these dastardly events and all the dashing of their hopes to make them emerge from the state of ignorance into which they had been plunged by yellow journalism and the fulminations of unwise leaders. Only then, after all this, did they discover that by seizing the golden opportunities offered them by India, and by working hard, they could be as resoundingly successful there as in former times in Kashmir. That is why, wherever one goes, one finds them prospering in business and acquiring the material symbols of wealth.

The same is also true, but in greater measure, of the Hindus. For the last fifty years, ill-informed and unwise Hindu leaders have been impressing it upon members of their community that Muslims pose a threat to them, and that so long as they tolerate their presence, avenues of Hindu progress will remain blocked. They insist, moreover, that Hindus erase all traces of the Muslim period, and that all possible steps be taken to ensure that Muslims remain as backward as possible. These leaders have even gone so far as to argue that unless the Muslims are crushed, Hindus will never make progress in their own country.

However, the fifty years of baneful activity, which culminated in the demolition of the Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992, brought the Hindus a different kind of reward from what they had expected. After the Babri Masjid had been torn down, the riots that took place in different parts of the country caused losses amounting to ten thousand crore rupees— all these were losses which were borne by the Hindus. Where they had expected the automatic opening of doors to economic progress, they now found that this backlash had placed obstacles in their path.

These events, paradoxically, had the effect of causing both communities to arrive at the same conclusion. That is, both realized the futility of negativism, and, setting aside such thinking, re-engaged themselves in business and allied activities. The Hindus, too, found

that not only did the presence of Muslims in the country do them no harm, but it actually proved to be a positive advantage. For instance, today, millions of Muslim craftsmen and workers are engaged in the manufacture of a variety of goods in many Indian cities. Hindus, for their part, supply them with the raw materials, then market the finished products within the country and abroad. In this way, Muslims have become an indispensable part of the Hindu economic machine. The Muslim in making one lakh rupees, gives the Hindu the opportunity to make one crore rupees.

This has demonstrated to Hindus that, by adjusting themselves to the 'Muslim problem' (as they see it) they remove all bars to their own advancement, albeit sharing the same territory. This has resulted in former staunch supporters of the plan to demolish the Babri Masjid turning against extremist leaders when they wanted to have a repetition of this incident in Kashi, on March 27, 1994, and in Mathura, on August 22, 1995. Ultimately, fanatical Hindu leaders, deprived of the necessary support, were forced to beat a retreat, leaving unfulfilled their plans for further destruction.

The upshot is that a new India has emerged from the debris of the past, the common people having extricated themselves from the clutches of self-serving and incompetent leaders. They have learned that the secret of success in life lies not in groups clashing with each other, but rather in the avoidance of friction and in making full use of whatever opportunities present themselves for individual advancement.

This is a basic, intellectual volte face, which is clearly visible in the people. It is a transformation which has effectively altered the direction in which the country is moving. Now, the people, possibly more as a matter of instinct than of ratiocination, are forging ahead along positive lines. Once the country is well launched on this healthier course, such a revolution will necessarily produce two results: peace and prosperity—the prerequisites for progress. The country is now poised to achieve these goals. Now, not even a horde of wrong-headed leaders should be able to deflect the nation from this path.

In normal circumstances the guidance of nature is sufficient to set mankind on the right course. But this will take place only if the lesson the public has learned about ignoring yellow journalism and

the rantings of so-called leaders is a permanent one. At the moment, there are high hopes that the de-railing of the country over communal issues was only a temporary phase.

Again, the checks and balances lie in the system of nature itself. Each wrong course is righted by nature, because horrible consequences prove to be eye-openers to the people. In India, this eye-opening event has already taken place. Its reverberations had barely died down when our countrymen began to abandon the path chalked out by incompetent leaders in favour of the path of nature. This is a silent revolution—a revolution which holds out the greatest hope for the future of this country.

MARCH 17

Distinctive Quality

Islam, being a preserved religion, possesses the distinctive quality of being in perfect accord with human reason and human nature. No level of rational thinking and academic progress clashes with Islam. That is to say, at no stage do Islam and reason contradict one another. No believer is faced with the problem of accepting religious dogmas at the expense of science and reason.

Acknowledging this characteristics of Islam, George Bernard Shaw writes:

When the Mahommedan reformation took place, its followers with the enormous advantage of having the only established religion in the world, in whose articles of faith, any intelligent and educated person could believe.

It is due to this special characteristic of Islam that people have been regularly embracing Islam before as well as after the age of science. The modern educated mind finds no difficulty in accepting Islam. That is, the potential convert is not confronted with the difficult question of having to make a choice between Islam and reason. That

is, he will not have to divide his mind into the artificial compartment, one for religion and one for science.

What George Bernard Shaw has termed an enormous advantage for the Muslims of the first phase, exists equally for the believers of today. But it is not being availed of. The only obstacle to this path is the general ill-will existing at present between the *da'i* and the *mad'u*. Once this obstacle is removed, nothing can stop Islam from entering human settlements with the force of a mighty flood.

MARCH 18

Persian Influence on Indian Culture

Persian influence on Indian Culture is a vast subject with many sides to it. Here I should like to deal very briefly with just one aspect of it, that is, the role of Persian sayings and poetry on Indian society, and in particular their moral impact.

Last November on a return journey from Baroda to Delhi by a morning flight of Indian Airlines I happened to make the acquaintance of a fellow passenger, an elderly Hindu. He turned out to be Mr. Muchkund Dubey, formerly, of the Indian foreign service and now living in Delhi. As usual on such journeys, I had taken my pen out of my bag and had begun to write. Mr. Dubey asked, "Are you writing in Urdu or Persian?" I asked him whether he knew Persian. He replied in the affirmative and said that he had been to Iran. I asked him if he could quote some Persian saying from memory. He thereupon wrote down this saying of Shaikh Saadi: *Cheguna shukr nemat guzaram, ke mardum Azari nadaram*. (How can I ever thank God that I am bereft of all power to torment people.)

This small anecdote reminds us of a whole generation of literate Hindus and, Muslims who, in days gone by, were generally acquainted with Persian. Wise Persian sayings and couplets were always on people's lips, and were repeated in gatherings, just as happens today with English sayings.

Persian had been dominated in India for about 700 years before it was ousted by the English language, soon after the arrival of the British. This dominance was due to Persian being the language of all the Muslim conquerors who came to India, with the exception of Mohd. bin Qasim. Since, perforce, the public followed the example of the kings, Persian language and cultured flourished.

The influence of this historical process can still be seen even today in different forms. For instance the words of greetings, like 'Khush Amded' or the phrases used in parting like 'Khuda Hafiz' are direct legacies of Persian culture.

During this period, Persian culture became so popular that people memorized innumerable sayings and couplets, which had the effect of strengthening and perpetuating Persian influence. This was to have both a cultural and moral impact on Indian society.

At this point, I should like to present certain sayings and couplets which illustrate our indebtedness to the Persian influence in reinforcing high moral values in India. I think you will find that these are self-explanatory.

1. Follow the right path, even if it is longer.
2. Musk speaks for itself, not the salesman.
3. Opt for a path and stick to it.
4. Food is for the sake of life, not life for the sake of food.
5. Richness is in the heart, not in wealth.
6. One who digs wells for others, will find a well before him.
7. Sometimes the best answer is not to give any answer.
8. Kill the cat the very first day.
9. Better late than never.
10. Seeing is better than hearing.
11. Seek and you will find.
12. One quintal of knowledge requires ten quintals of wisdom.
13. An elder is one who is wise, not one who is older.
14. Patience is bitter, but its fruit is sweet.
15. Like for others what you like for yourself.
16. A hint suffices for a wise man.
17. Drops of water make the river.

MARCH 19

Woman's Role in Islam

The Quran calls Islam a religion of nature. This is because Islam is, in actual fact, based on the laws of nature. The commands of the Quran are a direct expression of those laws which have operated in the world of nature since its creation.

The teachings of Islam regarding women are based on the same laws of nature. Acceptance of these laws is not akin to the acceptance of general human laws, where both acceptance and refusal are possible. The rejection of Islamic laws as regards women is actually a rejection of the laws of nature and by doing so, man can never successfully construct his life in the present world.

Study of the Quran and *Hadith* tells us that one of the laws of nature is that all the things in the world have been created in the form of pairs. The Quran states:

And all things We have made in pairs, so that you may give thought. (51:49)

The scientific study of the universe has further corroborated this law of nature. As discovered by science the primary unit of the universe, the atom, is composed of negative and positive particles. In the absence of any one of the two, the atom cannot come into existence and even trees have male and female characteristics. Just as human beings are born in the form of males and females, animals are likewise male and female. The whole world is said to exist in pairs. In this way, nature's entire factory has functioned all along on this dual basis.

The duality of existence shows that if anything in this world is to function properly, it must first recognize its true position and adhere strictly to the limits set for it by nature itself.

For instance, if the negative particles of atoms tried to change themselves into positive particles, or vice versa, the entire structure of the atom would be shattered. In a similar way, if men, animals and trees wanted a change in their position—and particularly in the animal kingdom, if males and females opted for a change in their roles—the entire system of nature would be disrupted.

Islamic law regarding women is rooted in this system of nature. According to Islam, men and women are equal as regards honour and status, but physically and psychologically they are different. In order to maintain the system of nature between men and women socially, Islam advocates a division of labour, which entails separate workplaces. Islam stipulates that woman's workplace should basically be the home, vis-à-vis man's workplace in the outside world.

The system of the human world is divided into two departments of equal importance: one is represented by the 'home' and the other by the 'office.' Just as an office in this context is not confined by four walls but represents a centre of activity, similarly 'home' is not marked by a boundary, being also a complete practical centre of activity.

Under the division of Islam, man has been assigned to the 'office' so that he may successfully manage all departments external to the home. Similarly woman has been put in charge of the home so that she may successfully manage all domestic affairs. Both these tasks are of equal importance, neither being superior or inferior.

This system of nature has functioned successfully in the world for many thousands of years. With the emergence of western civilization in modern times, it happened, for the first time, that in the name of equality an intensive effort was made, by declaring male and female to be identical and interchangeable, to repudiate it. But the 200-year experiment showed that this self-styled equality could not be established in any part of the world.

Many reports and surveys have come out in the western press in this connection. Here I would like to refer to a recent report concerning the USA, the most developed part of the world. This report was published in the December 94 issue of *Span* under the heading "Feminism's Identity Crisis":

Polls suggest that a majority of women hesitate to associate themselves with the feminist movement, not wanting to identify

themselves as feminists... The polls also adumbrate unarticulated ambivalence about feminist ideals, particularly with respect to private life.”

Feminism is a non-issue, says Ellen Levine, the editor-in-chief of Redbook. Women don't think about it. They don't talk about it. And they seem not to be particularly interested in politics. Feminism, however, is popularly deemed to represent the belief that men and women are equally capable of raising children and equally capable of waging war. Thus feminism represents, in the popular view, a rejection of femininity. According to a survey by Redbook, feminism has made it 'harder' for women to balance work and family life.

However, I would admit that just as western woman has failed to find her real position, being caught in the lure of unnatural freedom, similarly a woman in the present Muslim society has been largely denied rights that Islam has given her, for instance, a woman becoming a victim of a man's maltreatment or her failing to receive her share in her parent's property, and so on.

Now the question arises as to the solution to this problem. In my view the only solution to it lies in education. It is a fact that present-day Muslims, both men and women, have been lagging far behind in education. There was a time when, during the Abbasid period, (751-1258 A.D.) the highest point in Muslim culture, literacy was almost one hundred percent. Not only men but all women received the education prevalent at that time. It is at this point—the point of education—that we should begin a new Islamic life. If Muslims were to concentrate on this, and strive towards the goal of one hundred percent literacy, that alone would suffice to bring about their overall reformation. Once that goal was attained, all other problems could be set right. Intellectually as well as practically, the Muslims would become a developed community. Ellen Levine believes that wage-earning mothers still tend to feel guilty about not being with their children and to worry that “the more women get ahead professionally, the more children will fall back.”

Women can play a great role in this campaign for education. For instance, educated women can coach their children at home. The literate woman's ability to read to her young children, and the example

she sets in her own quest for knowledge are the most powerful stimuli in their educational progress. Furthermore, women can be better teachers than men as far teaching children is concerned. For women this will not amount to a change of workplace, but will simply be an extension of the home, a broadening of the practical activity centred on child-rearing assigned to her by nature.

By playing this role effectively, Muslim women can prepare the next generation, which is the greatest need of the hour. In this way, they will hasten the time when an entire generation will be equipped with standard education. They would then have every opportunity to receive education in the higher institutions of their choice, and would be more certain of finding productive employment thereafter.

MARCH 20

World Religions and the Spirit of Tolerance

In its declaration the United Nations held the year 1995 as the year of tolerance. Now we have come close to the end of the year. Tolerance is a permanent human requirement.

All the great religions of the world can be broadly divided into two categories: Aryan religions and Semitic religions. So far as I have studied I have found that tolerance has been given equal importance in both these types of religions. Religion makes a man a spiritually developed human being. One who has elevated his spirituality can not afford intolerance. The behaviour of a truly religious person is always one of tolerance.

So far as I have studied the difference between the two types of religions is that of rationale of tolerance instead of tolerance itself. The philosophic ground of tolerance in the Aryan religions is derived from their belief that truth is an all-pervading reality. According to

this concept, the psychology of a religious person is that ‘If I am in the right, you too, according to your own tradition are in the right.’ That is to say, tolerance in Aryan religions is based on the concept of manyness of reality.

The philosophic base of tolerance in Semitic religions is different from this, as these religions believe in the principle of oneness of reality. However, so far as the question of human respect is concerned, Semitic religions lay equal emphasis on this value. That is to say, the difference in this respect in both the branches of religions is one of philosophy not of practice.

To put it differently the basis of tolerance in Aryan religions is on mutual recognition, while its basis in Semitic religions is on mutual respect. This difference is only one of philosophic explanation. So far as practical behaviour is concerned, there is no difference in either religions in this respect.

To sum it up, the spirit of tolerance is the essence of all religions. The man produced by religion can never be divested of the spirit of tolerance. Intolerance appears to be directed at others, but it is akin to killing man’s own religious personality. Then how can a sincere person be willing to kill himself by his own hands.

MARCH 21

Creating Harmony Amidst Cultural Conflict

There is no denying the fact that cultural conflict does exist in reality. However, this is a blessing in disguise. Conflict between different cultures has always existed in human history. The only thing new about this phenomena in our times is that the modern means of communication have greatly accelerated the pace of this process.

The second point I should like to make is that cultural conflict per se poses no danger. It rather denotes a healthy process. Arnold Toynbee's theory that challenges act as a spur to take the nations forward, applies to cultural conflict too. Challenges in fact are the only ladder to the ongoing progressive journey of human history.

In ancient time, the confrontation of Roman and non-Roman culture resulted in the emergence of Muslim nations, bringing history forward. Afterwards, Muslim and non-Muslim culture, came into conflict resulting in the emergence of renaissance in Europe. History further moved forward.

In the twentieth century European and non-European cultures faced challenges. As a result of which the USA emerged on the scene with the greatest of progress ever made in history.

However this is in no way the final phase in human history. Now the collision is taking place between American and non-American culture which would result in a better, more advanced culture, and it is quite possible that this might be Indian or Asian culture.

The actual task to be performed by India and other under-developed countries is not to engage themselves in protest against the so-called cultural invasions. What is more important for us is to devote our attention to educating our people. Increasing the percentage of literacy among the people amounts to making them an aware, enlightened people. Once we have managed to make them an enlightened people, it is quite possible that those who are lagging behind today may become pioneers of a new cultural age, as has often taken place in history.

MARCH 22

The Message of Pilgrimage

Prior to 1982, my knowledge of *haji* (pilgrimage to Makkah) had been limited to what I could gain from books, and so, when at last in that year I had the privilege of performing this religious duty

I felt myself singularly blessed. Although the rites of *hajj* are spread over only a few days, as symbolic guidelines they stand a man in good stead for the rest of his life. The message of *hajj*, as I now comprehend it from the study and performance of it, is that man should make the Almighty the very pivot of his existence, hastening at His call to do His every bidding.

When a man leaves his home and country to go on such a pilgrimage, he brims over with all the emotions aroused by the thought that he is embarking on a course which will lead him directly to God. He is, in effect, sloughing off his own world, leaving it behind him, and reaching out for the world of the Almighty. He is on his way to the House of God, a place where the great deeds of God's messengers and his followers have been preserved for all eternity; where we find the hallowed impressions of the lives of those who lived and died for the cause of God. The haji is then filled with the realization that he is bound for that very destination which God has specially chosen for His Last Revelation. Once launched on this course, the pilgrim is imbued with the awareness of God and His truths, as well as the feeling that it is imperative that he become God-oriented. If, up till then, he had been self-centred in his thinking, he now turns his thoughts to God, and his entire behaviour is moulded and transformed by these new thought processes.

Once the pilgrim's train of thought has become God-oriented, he begins to ponder over major issues: God's act of creation, particularly His creation of himself. His affording him diverse opportunities of bettering himself in this world, His very benevolence which makes it possible for him to set forth on this journey to the House of God. The pilgrim also gives his mind to the day when he will meet his death and be summoned to the court of God. This trend of thought turns the ostensible physical journey of the pilgrim into an intense, spiritual venture.

When the time nears for his entrance into the *haram* (sacred territory), every pilgrim divests of his clothing in order to don a new kind of 'uniform'—an unstitched, plain, white garment which serves to heighten his consciousness of entering a new world. The very act of shedding his normal clothes (and with them all signs of status and

ethnicity) signifies that he is separating himself from the way of life peculiar to his environment, and is now ready to become suffused with such emotions as are desired by God. In this way, thousands of men, in casting off their own hues, take on the hue of the Almighty. After clothing himself in *ihram* (godly raiment), the pilgrim finds his tongue of itself beginning to utter godly words—‘*Labbayk! Labbayk!*—and he continues, as if hastening to answer God’s call, to repeat the word ‘*labbayk*’—“Oh God, I am here, I have come!”

Labbayk (I am here) does not mean just that the pilgrim has come to stay in Makkah. It means that in leaving his normal abode, he has cast aside his whole way of life. It means, ‘I am here, at Your command, and, with all my heart and soul, I am ready to obey You.’ While on their pilgrimage, pilgrims simply give utterance to the word *labbayk*, but when they return to their own countries, they must put it into practice in their everyday lives.

On reaching Makkah, the pilgrim must perform *tawaf* (circumambulation). To do this, he enters the House of God (*Baitullah*), the great mosque in whose spacious central courtyard stands the *Ka’bah*, which was erected by the Prophet Abraham in ancient times. Then he goes round the *Ka’bah* seven times to demonstrate his willingness to make God the pivot of his whole existence.

After the *tawaf*, there comes the ritual of *sa’i*, which entails brisk walking from the hill of Safa to the hill of Marwa and back again. This procedure is repeated seven times in symbolic enactment of a promise, or covenant, to expend all of one’s energies in the path of God. The form which this ritual takes, can be traced back to the Prophet Abraham’s wife, Hajar, running from one hill to another in a frantic search for water for her young baby when they first arrived there.

The most important period of worship during *hajj* is the day-long sojourn on the plain of Arafat. It is, indeed, an awesome spectacle, with people from all over the world, clad in identical, simple, white garments, chanting, “Lord, I am present, Lord, I am present.” This serves to impress upon the mind of the pilgrim how great a gathering there will be in the presence of God on the Last Day of Reckoning. Once he becomes aware of its true significance, all his problems fall

into their true perspective, and his life cannot but take a turn for the better.

Another practice during *hajj* is the casting of stone at Jamrae-Uqba. This is a symbolic act through which the pilgrim renews his determination to drive Satan away from him. In this way, he makes it plain that his relationship with Satan is one of enmity and combat. The next step for the pilgrim is to turn his piece of symbolism into reality, so that he may be purged of all evils, for all the evils besetting man are there at the instigation of Satan.

After this, the pilgrim sacrifices an animal to God, an act symbolizing the sacrifice of the self. (This is referred to in the Quran as *sha'airullah*—signs of God). His faith is such that even if it comes to giving his life—the last thing that he would normally be ready to part with—he will not hesitate to do so in the service of God.

MARCH 23

Islam and Peace

Islam aims to build a peaceful society at all cost. It is because higher human objectives cannot be achieved in the absence of peaceful circumstances. The spiritual as well as moral progress of the individual is possible only in peaceful atmosphere. Hence the atmosphere of peace is essential for the building of good society. Academic research too is possible only in peaceful circumstances. The task of the propagation of truth too can be performed only in peaceful atmosphere.

That is why one of the teachings of Islam is 'reconciliation is the best' (4:128). In this regard Islam enjoins us to establish peace even at the cost of unilateral sacrifice and patience. An event of the first phase of Islamic history provides us with an example of this unilateralism. This is known as Sulh Hudaybiya (Hudaybiya Treaty). This was in actual fact a no-war pact which was secured by accepting all the demands of the rival group.

To bring about an atmosphere of peace within the society Islam has given a number of commandments. For instance, the Prophet of Islam observed 'A believer is one from whom people feel secure as regards their lives and property (At-Tirmizi). Another *hadith* has this to say: By God, he is not a believer from whose nuisance his neighbour is not safe. (Al-Bukhari)

Islam aims at making all individuals peace-loving to the ultimate extent. That is why we are enjoined to greet one another by saying 'Assalam-o-Alaikum' that is, peace be upon you. According to another saying of the Prophet, the best Islam is to greet everyone you come across, whether or not you are acquainted with the person. (Fathul-Bari 1/103).

The frequent reiteration of this phrase 'peace be upon you' is in actual fact an external manifestation of the desire for peace within. Islam wishes to inculcate this feeling within every individual that he should become a true lover of peace, to the point that this feeling starts welling up in his heart, finding expression whenever he meets a person.

Islam is a peace-loving religion from beginning to end. And it is but natural that it should be so, as all the best results it aims to achieve, can be achieved only when an atmosphere of peace is maintained at both national and international level.

This path of peace is followed by the entire universe. It is known in science as the law of nature, which is imposed upon it by God. Whereas man has to adopt this path of peace of his own free will. This has been expressed in the Quran in these words: "Are they seeking a religion other than God's, when every soul in heaven and earth has submitted to Him, willingly or by compulsion? To Him they shall all return" (3:83).

When peace is the religion of the entire universe, it should, therefore, be the religion of man too, so that, in the words of Jesus Christ, the will of the Lord may be done on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:10)

In a similar vein, the Quran tells us that: "The sun is not allowed to overtake the moon, nor does the night outpace the day. Each in its own orbit runs." (36:40)

When God created the heavens and the earth, He so ordered things that each part might perform its function peacefully without clashing with any other part. For billions of years, therefore, the entire universe has been fulfilling its function in total harmony with His divine plan.

Peace is no external commodity to be artificially imposed upon man. Peace is inherent in nature itself. The system of nature set up by God already rests on the basis of peace. If this system is not disrupted, it will continue to stay the course set for it by the Almighty. It is true that the only condition to maintain the human system on the path of peace is to keep it free from the elements of corruption. That is why the Quran states:

And do not corrupt the land after it has been set in order.
(7:85)

In order to preserve the peace, established by nature, from disruption, two important injunctions have been laid down by Islam. One at the individual level, stresses the exercise of patience, and the other, at the social level, forbids taking the offensive.

1. Negative reaction on the part of the individual is the greatest factor responsible for disrupting peace in daily life. It repeatedly happens that in social life one experiences bitterness on account of others. On such occasions, if one reacts negatively, the matter would escalate to the point of a head-on collision. That is why Islam repeatedly enjoins us to tread the path of patience. The Quran says: Surely the patient will be paid their wages in full without measure. (39:10)

The reason for the rewards for patience being so great is that patience is the key factor in maintaining the desired system of God. In the words of the Quran the patient man is the helper of God. (61:14)

2. The other injunction, designed to maintain peace in human society is to forbid the waging of an offensive war. No one in Islam enjoys the right to wage war against another. There are no grounds on which this could be considered justifiable. (2:190)

There is only one kind of war permitted in Islam and that is a defensive war. If a nation by deviating from the principles of nature wages war against another nation, then, a defensive war, with certain conditions, may be waged by the country under attack.

To sum up, Islam is a religion of peace. The Arabic root of Islam is 'silm' which means peace. The Quran states: '...and Gods calls to the home of peace' (10:25). It is thus God's will that men and women should jointly establish a society of peace in His world.

Peace is basic to all religions. Let us all strive then to establish peace in the world, for that is the bedrock on which all human progress rests.

MARCH 24

The Sir Syed Formula

Today, Sir Syed is highly acclaimed in all circles, be they religious or secular, as a pioneer of the Muslim nation. But, in his own times, he was branded as heretic, an enemy of the Muslim community and an enemy of Islam. When Maulana Altaf Husain Hali joined forces with Sir Syed, both were ridiculed by Akbar Allahabadi:

Syed ki dastan ko Hali se poochhiye

Ghazi Mian ka hal Dafali se poochhiye

What is the reason for the difference in past and present attitudes? It is simply that those who nowadays extol his virtues, do so in retrospect, having had the opportunity to see the results of his guidance, whereas his own contemporaries were so lacking in foresight that they could not imagine any good arising from his teachings. This has been the fate of every reformer. There is no revolutionary who has not suffered from the short-sightedness of his contemporaries and who has not, as a result, had to face stiff opposition. Even the prophets were not spared this fate. It is only when the reformer's efforts ultimately bear fruit that people begin to sing his praises.

Sir Syed lived in the days of British rule in India—a period looked upon to by all our senior religious leaders as an age of slavery. Maulana Mohd. Ali Jauhar, Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani, in short, all our leaders of that time hated the

British. In their view, British rule afforded no possibility of Muslim progress. Maulana Mohd. Ali was not ready even to die in an enslaved India. Iqbal went one step further when he said:

Ke ghulami mein badal jata hai qaumon ka zamir

(slavery even drastically affects the conscience of the nations)

However, Sir Syed's thinking was totally different. He discovered favourable aspects of those same British rulers who were regularly depicted as the enemies of Islam. In the 'slave nation,' as Muslim intellectuals would have it, he pointed out that certain freedoms did exist. In support of Sir Syed, Maulana Altaf Husain wrote in his Musaddas:

Hukumat ne azadiyan tum ko di hain

Taraqqi ki rahen sarasar khuli hain

(The government has given you full freedom.

All the roads of progress are open to you.)

What did his pointing out freedom in slavery really mean? It meant that even under the political subjugation of the British, Indians still had educational and economic freedom. Notwithstanding the political problem, the country still offered them the opportunity to carve out an honourable, affluent life by working in non-political fields.

The opponents of Sir Syed, on the other hand, concentrated on the problem of British usurpation to the exclusion of all else. In their eyes, no progress could be made unless British rule came to an end. But with his deeper insight, Sir Syed saw that if there were problems, there also existed opportunities, side by side with them. In very simple terms, he gave the people a viable formula:

*Ignore the problems, feed the opportunities, and, by availing
of opportunities, build your life.*

In Sir Syed's time, even those who had eyes failed to see the wisdom of this dictum. But now, after the experience of a hundred years, even sightless people can see that Sir Syed's way was the wisest and most appropriate.

In Sir Syed's own time, his approach had appeared to be one of cowardice and inaction. But its subsequent results showed its wisdom, and what its potential had been for positive action. In fact, it was the only possible strategy to adopt. Had his advice been heeded in the initial stages, the Muslim condition would certainly have been very different from what it is today.

But the inability to learn from the past is an ever-present human weakness. Hence the prevalence today of the same short-sightedness as existed in Sir Syed's time. People, of course, have now begun eulogizing the Sir Syed of the past, but if anyone speaks of applying Sir Syed's solutions in the present, they again turn hostile to him as his own contemporaries did.

The most pressing reality of this world is its competitiveness. In such a set-up, it is inevitable that one group or the other will be left behind. This state of affairs has existed since the days of Abel and Cain (the sons of Adam), and it will continue to exist till Doomsday. This system—created by God Himself—will never change.

What needs to be done in this world of competition is not to keep protesting against the prevailing circumstances, but to make a careful study of them. Instead of reacting against the way things are, some method of adjusting to realities must be sought. Sir Syed's formula is the key to such an adjustment.

This world, being one of competition, is bound to be problem-ridden. It has been so throughout the ages and it is still so today. But it must be borne in mind that problems stem from nature's own system and not from the oppression and prejudice of others. What is even more important to grasp is that according to this system devised by nature itself, problems in this world are always followed by opportunities. Given this state of affairs, both reason and wisdom make only one demand.'

Ignore the problems; avail of the opportunities.

This is the only way to succeed in this world. Whenever an individual or a group has achieved success in this life, it has been done by adhering to this principle. Those who attempt to fight problems are more likely to fail than succeed, while those who avail of opportunities have every chance of doing well for themselves. There is

no other path to self-improvement in this world, either in India or in any other country. And what holds true for the present, holds equally true for the future.

MARCH 25

Patience: The Superior Solution

Patience, the focus of about 200 verses of the Quran, and referred to indirectly in many others, may be termed the core subject of the scriptures.

The verses directly relating to patience are quite explicit in their content. For instance,

And seek (Allah's) help with patience and prayer. (2:45)

And endure patiently whatever may befall thee. (31:17)

And exhort one another to be patient. (103:3)

*And heed not their annoyance, but put thy trust in Allah.
(33:48)*

A very pronounced and direct instruction to behave with patience and endurance is apparent in these verses.

The majority of the other verses are also intensely concerned with patience. The very first verse of the Quran begins with "Praise belongs to Allah." (al-Fatihah) This shows that Allah expects mankind to express its gratitude and admiration to Him. But this is a very trying expectation! We know that this world is full of unpleasant experiences and nobody can be insulated from them. According to the Quran "Man is born in toil." Indeed, it is not possible for anyone to create a life of absolute bliss for himself.

How then a person can become grateful and appreciative of Allah's grace in the real sense? The only way to be so is through patience. It is only when a man patiently endures worldly problems

that it is possible for him to express his feeling of gratefulness to Allah. It is for this reason that the Quran associates gratefulness with patience. (31:31)

Patience makes a person capable of finding a positive and successful solution to any problem. When someone explodes with anger while facing his adversary, he loses the faculty to respond effectively or to think of well-planned action. But when he applies patience and tolerance, he finds himself competent to make a rational move instead of an impulsive reaction. History testifies that one who acts on impulses and emotional reactions, invariably fails; and one who responds rationally, always succeeds.

Patience is undoubtedly the superior solution to all problems. (5.SS/9.95)

MARCH 26

Islamic Culture

The Quran addresses God as “Lord of the Universe.” It does not mention Him as “Lord of the nation.” This shows that Islam believes in unbounded universality and not in limitation. It is the same Quran which hails the Prophet as a “Blessing for the World” and not as “trouble for the world.” This demonstrates that Islam is the religion not of hatred but of love. Again the Quran proclaims: “Peace is good.” It does not say, “War is good.” This means that Islam wishes to create an atmosphere of peace and conciliation and does not condone war and confrontation.

The Quran commands “Read!” It does not say “Shoot!” This reveals that Islam is the culture of knowledge and not the culture of the gun. The Quran stresses tolerance; it does not preach intolerance. This signifies that Islam implores us to endure the pains inflicted by others instead of reacting impulsively and entering conflict. The Quran praises a magnanimous outlook, not the attitude of tit-for-tat.

This implies that Islam expects a sublime disposition toward others, which overlooks and ignores their faults.

These few references give an idea of what Islam is and what Islamic culture stands for. Islam is the exposure of the divine existence of God. It is the religion of the whole universe. It represents an exalted humanity. A correct interpretation of Islam is that which agrees with these precepts: anything contradicting these values can never explain Islam.

The real Islam is that which inculcates the fear of God in the people, which diverts their attention from this world to the Hereafter, which fills the people's hearts with love for mankind, which generates the feeling of being well-disposed towards all without any discrimination and which, in its fold, teaches one to become more particular about his duties than his rights.

Those whose hearts are enlightened by Islam become the embodiment of compassion, seeking the welfare only of others. Hatred and hostility cannot be fused with Islam and Islamic culture. (7.SS/9.95)

MARCH 27

Adjustment in Marital Life

Under the directions for marital life, the Quran enjoins as follows:

Consort with them honourably; for even if you dislike them, it may well be that you dislike a thing which God has meant for your own abundant good. (4:19)

This Quranic teaching does not concern only husband and wife, but all human relations in general. In this world of God the only effective principle by which to lead a successful social life is for every man and woman to realize that if one does not appreciate some trait in the other, it is just possible that there may be some other quality

in the same person which would be to his or her liking or advantage. It is, therefore, prudent for everyone to scrupulously overlook the disagreeable feature of the concerned man or woman and accept him or her on the basis of appreciable qualities.

Realistically, nobody in this world is perfect. Everyone has some inherent shortcoming or the other. The man or woman who comes into direct contact with us gets exposed to us and has no means of concealing this shortcoming; whereas one who remains out of our practical life, is less vulnerable because he escapes this scrutiny. Thus we imagine and presume that all the others are good except the one associated with us, though on closer acquaintance with others, it becomes evident that the latter are not very different from our partners in marriage.

The attitude of leaving one and grabbing another is not correct, and, in any case the quest for perfection is unlikely to succeed. The right approach is to inculcate the mentality of adjustment, for it is this quality of adjustment which makes a person capable of surviving with all kinds of people, and permits him through a fruitful association with others to shape a successful life for himself.

MARCH 28

Political Realism

Prior to 1947, it was taken for granted that all that was needed to set India on the right path was the gaining of its independence, and that subsequently a socialist economy would be an automatic guarantee of national progress. That these were patently misguided and shortsighted views becomes more glaringly obvious as the country staggers from one debacle to the next. And now, in 1996, we are on the brink of a fresh set of elections. Do we have any guarantee that the results of these elections will even be relevant to the future progress of the country as a ground reality?

In this context a number of meetings are being held in the name of vital electoral and political reforms, and there is the inevitable spate of critical articles in newspapers and journals. I myself have participated in several of these meetings and have been reading the relevant journalistic commentaries.

After listening to fellow participants and duly taking stock of what the press has to say I have formed the impression that there is a nationwide acceptance of the existence of two distinct political entities—the clean and the corrupt. It is held that the corrupt community is entirely made up of politicians, while the clean community is composed of their critics. This premise, however, is basically flawed, even the most cursory appraisal of events is sufficient to demonstrate the error of this supposition.

After independence, our political team, which came to power in 1947, consisted of the members of Mahatma Gandhi's "clean community." But once these individuals were perched on the pedestals of power, their behaviour was such that Gandhiji felt constrained to ask, "Who is going to listen to me now?" there was even a book published on Gandhiji with the title "Ab meri kaun sunega?"

Many years later, in the 1966 elections, Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia made his entry into the political scene. With great fervour and enthusiasm he launched a movement which he called 'non-Congressism.' And in the field of election he did defeat the members of the "corrupt community," at least in the states, so that the members of the "clean community" came into power. However, it very soon became apparent that this had simply been a matter of replacement—the exchanging of one corrupt community for another.

After the general elections of March 1977, this scene was re-enacted, only on a larger scale. In this historic election the supposedly corrupt community had met with a stunning defeat. All those who now came into power belonged to the supposedly clean community. In the words of Lok Nayak Jaya Prakash Narayan, this was 'a total revolution.' But it very soon became evident that this entire supposition was quite wrong. The clean community, the Janata Party, soon fell a prey to corruption, a state of affairs which led to the collapse of the government in August 1979, even before the completion of its term.

The truth is that this notion of there being distinctly separate corrupt and clean communities is entirely baseless. Corruption, far from being a vice peculiar to one community or another, stems from the human weakness of individuals. As Lord Acton very aptly observed: “Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

In this world there are certain things which have to be tolerated as necessary evils. Imperfect government clearly falls into this category and, as such, should be borne with. This is a piece of realism which is inescapable if there is ever to be an end to the political unrest which threatens to place stability beyond our reach. Over and above this, we must also realize that a government cannot do absolutely everything for us. Even if it so desired, it could perform only in certain restricted spheres, for it has its limitations. It is thanks to our lack of political awareness that we vote governments into power and then, before they have even completed their terms in office, we set about toppling them. If we want political stability in our country, we shall have to curtail our expectations of the governments we elect. Without this, no progress will ever be made.

As a matter of history, our form of government is based on the British model. But if you go to Britain during the elections you will find no excessive furore among the people, as happens in our country, the reason being that the British consider their government to be just one of the many institutions in their society. They know that the government’s contribution to national construction can be only partial. We, on the contrary, have come to regard the task of national construction as something which falls entirely within the purview of the government. It is such misguided and inflated expectations which give rise to unnecessary excitement before the elections and the subsequent unnecessary despair.

During his term in office, in the course of the second world war (1939-45), Sir Winston Churchill inspired his people with the watchword: “Go to it!”

We, on the other hand, have adopted as our motto: “The government will do it!”

This realistic approach of the developed countries, which entertains only limited hopes of the government’s performance, is

what has enabled them to involve themselves in non-political fields in the full conviction that it is they themselves who must perform the necessary tasks. Unlike them, having come to regard every task as the government's responsibility, we have failed as a people to shoulder the burden of national reconstruction. This is a matter of the utmost importance, but we have allowed our attention to be diverted—in the political process—to matters of infinitely less importance. This shift in emphasis has resulted in our paying dearly for the many lacunae in the building of our nation.

Those of us who travel to Germany or Japan are amazed to see the progress that has been made in these countries. And we would do well to consider what the key is to such success. It is, in fact, that there the people are far less interested in elections and government than they are in non-governmental organizations for national construction—those, for instance, which are concerned with educating people, bringing awareness to them, particularly about consumerism, inculcating civic sense, organizing public sanitations, inducing respect for the law, checking adulteration of food and medicine, etc., and eliminating noise and air pollution. There are innumerable other social arenas in which the people of the developed countries engage themselves having set up efficient organizations and associations to this end.

The satisfactory performance of these tasks at the social level provides us with the foundation on which to build the system of a better government. Prior to 1947, we used to lay the blame for all evils at the door of the British. With this lingering tendency to fasten the blame on others, we began to expect all reforms and progress to stem from the post-independence government. This is the principal reason for the rot which has set in this country in the present day.

A study of developed countries' newspapers reveals much less coverage of political news and commentaries as compared to economic and scientific news. By contrast, in our country, political events are given the maximum coverage, our press having become almost totally politicized in its orientation. The need to correct this lopsidedness is something which cannot be over-emphasized.

As mentioned above, Gandhiji—after 1947—lamented: “who will listen to me now?” Mahatma Gandhi had concluded that there would

be no response to his admonitions, but that was because they were addressed to those leaders who had reached the seats of power after independence. If, however, his life would not have been cut short so ruthlessly and he could have the opportunity to address himself to the average citizens of India, the result would have been quite the opposite. Then he would have found people giving him their rapt attention.

The truth of the matter is that when the national movement was launched in India, our entire energy was channelized towards gaining political freedom, while the task of educating the people was almost totally ignored. After independence, the chief task which should have been taken in hand by the Mahatma's followers was the cultivation of this long-neglected field. They were in a position to launch a campaign of intellectual awakening through the media. They could have had statements and articles published in newspapers and journals throughout the country which would have inculcated awareness and reformed public thinking. Had such a concerted, continuous struggle been waged through the media, a whole new generation of socio-politically conscious people would have come into existence within the space of just a few years. A country possessed of such a well-informed population cannot fail to make progress.

But to return to present day government, regardless of what I have written above on the tolerance of its demerits I must emphasize that I am in no way advocating status quoism. We must proceed with our efforts towards the rectification of our political institutions, which will entail, inter alia, electoral reforms, because our democracy, as yet immature, is still far from perfect. Our democratic system must be at least brought to the standard prevailing in Japan, Korea, Singapore and Malaysia. However, we should not concentrate on the amelioration of political institutions to the exclusion of all else, for the total relegation of non-political issues to the background would cause the country to suffer in many other ways.

The need of the hour is to remedy former neglect. To this end, a team of competent persons should engage itself immediately in the task of mass education by exploiting whatever means are at the disposal of the media. This should continue until India turns into an 'aware nation', and our society comes to consist of individuals who

can think on the national scale and who have come to acquire what Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru called “the scientific temper.”

I am not, I repeat, in favour of status quoism. I write only to stress what our starting point should be if we want a real future for our country, and along what lines we must continue our efforts on the political front. In principle, we have opted for democracy as our political system. But our democracy is still in its infancy. It has yet to ripen and bear fruit. If this is to become a reality, we must launch our reform campaign on a long-term rather than a short-term basis.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India, once observed: “Freedom is in peril—defend it with all your might.” Seeing the political rot that has set in our country I would say: “Democracy is in peril—save it with all your might.”

On this note, I should like to make an appeal for freedom and fairness in the coming elections, freedom and fairness being necessary conditions of true democracy. After independence, we may have had freedom in our elections, but fairness is something which has been sadly lacking—the horrendous results of which are there for all to see. Now that the country is going to the polls, I appeal to the people to decide unanimously to do their utmost to give the country fair elections, so that it may be saved from further erosion and so that it may be taken forward on the path of progress as would be expected in any civilized country.

If an election is to be really fair, election campaigns must be launched on the basis of truly national issues and no attempts should be made to misguide voters. Moreover, while votes are being cast, vote rigging should be refrained from at all costs. And so on.

Another important point is that the winning party must place itself at the service of the nation, rather than use its success merely to ensure its victory at the next election.

By the same token, the defeated party must accept its defeat with equanimity, and wait until the next elections before attempting to come to power. It should refrain absolutely from launching negative campaigns directed at ousting the victorious party.

The progress of the country is your own progress. Make the country your concern. It is in your own hands.

MARCH 29

Fasting and Self-purification

Fasting is an exercise in self-discipline. During the month of Ramadan, the believer abstains in the daytime from food and drink of his own free will. It is only after sunset that he satisfies his hunger and quenches his thirst. In this way, he builds up his self-control. By practising restraint for one month in a year, he is able to lead a life of self-discipline in all matters for the rest of the year.

Apart from man, there are in the universe innumerable other things, all of which—having no free will of their own—adhere strictly to God’s law. Man, however, is not in the same category as these things, for God has given him the freedom to choose which path he will tread. Notwithstanding this divine gift of freedom of will, it is still the desire of the Almighty that man should, by his own choice, tread the path of obedience.

It is therefore to condition him to follow the path of restraint that the rule of fasting has been laid down. No mere annual ritual, fasting is a form of training undergone every ninth month of the Muslim year. It is not just a matter of temporarily enduring hunger and thirst; it is a lesson in the permanent practice of patience and tolerance throughout one’s entire life.

While on a fast, a man may have food and water before him but, despite his hunger and thirst, he will make no move to eat or drink. He exercises self-control. God desires that he should also exercise the same restraint whenever he has the opportunity to display his ego and his arrogance. He must not fall into unjust ways just because the bait is tempting and all doors have been opened for him. If man is to earn God’s favour, he must eschew the path forbidden by Him, and set his feet firmly on the path of modesty and humility.

The path followed perforce by the universe has to be adopted by man of his own free will. That is why it is desirable that he should lead a life of self-imposed curbs. The unflinching self-restraint, which prevents him from eating or drinking while on a fast, is the virtue which will guarantee moral behaviour throughout his life.

Moral Piety

In the *Hadith*, Ramadan is called “the month of patience” (Mishkat al-Masabih, 1/613). This month is meant to serve as a training course which will enable the individual to lead a successful life in this world by keeping his negative feelings under control. Negative feelings, it must be remembered, present the greatest obstacle to human progress. Fasting is the pious way to solve this biggest of human problems.

As the *Hadith* says: “There is a Zakat for all things, and the Zakat of the body is fasting. (Mishkat Al-Masabih, 1/639). Here, the expression Zakat is used in the sense of purification. There is, indeed, a way of purifying everything. Just as bathing purifies the body, so fasting purifies the soul.

According to a *Hadith*, the Prophet Muhammad observed: “Whenever one of you is invited to a meal while he is on a fast, he should inform his host that he is fasting.” (Mishkat, 1/651). According to another tradition the Prophet gave this very sound advice: “Whenever one of you is on a fast, he should be soft in his demeanour. In the event of being abused or provoked, he should simply say that he is on a fast.” (Mishkat, 1/611).

Leading a life of restraint for a whole month produces a transformation in one’s thinking. It enables one to offer a positive response even to another’s negative behaviour. Even strong abuse and other types of provocation will not goad the fasting believer into retaliating in the same coin. Rather than sink to that level, he will simply explain that he is on a fast. His own heart tells him that by observing a fast he has pledged himself to piety and that, in view of that, he cannot contemplate any evil action.

In this way, fasting inculcates in man the necessity to abstain at all costs from anti-social activities, and from all ungentlemanly words and deeds. He is thus brought to a life of moral restraint in this world.

A Month of Sympathy and Compassion

According to a tradition, the Prophet Muhammad observed: “The month of fasting is the month of compassion.” (Mishkat al-Masabih, 1/613). That is, it is a month in which people are helped and shown compassion. This is the human aspect of fasting. That is why the Prophet and his followers used to be generous in giving alms to the poor and needy during this period. No one who asked for anything was ever turned away without his needs being met. One *Hadith* is to this effect that whoever feeds the hungry in the month of Ramadan will be forgiven by God on the Last Day. According to another *Hadith*, one who feeds the fasting person at the time of breaking his fast will share his spiritual reward.

One very significant thing about the month of fasting is that it affords a personal experience of the nature of hunger and thirst. Rich and poor alike go through this trial. And it is not a temporary, one-day rigour; it amounts to a special training course which one has to go through, without a break, for a whole month.

In this way, through fasting, one experiences what it is like to be in need. One finds out what hunger and thirst are like. The well-off who, in normal circumstances, are never obliged to suffer the pangs of hunger and thirst undergo this experience personally in the month of Ramadan. In this way, fasting brings everyone to the same level. The rich, for a time, descend to the level of existence which is the normal lot of the poor. Ramadan, as a training course, awakens the sense of humanity in all human beings. People are then able to share their feelings and have the urge to do the utmost to assist their fellow-men in distress. In this way, fasting for the month of Ramadan produces a general awareness of the necessity to extend a helping hand to others. This consciousness lasts for many months until, on the completion of the year, another month of Ramadan is before us once again to renew and refresh our humane inclinations.

To sum up, fasting produces an atmosphere of generosity. Well-wishing and compassion—an atmosphere in which people’s needs in society may be happily fulfilled. It is a means by which society may be turned into a truly human brotherhood.

MARCH 30

An Islamic Principle

Huzayfah relates a tradition that the Prophet once advised, “It is not proper for any Muslim to disgrace himself.” People enquired as to how someone might disgrace himself? The Prophet replied, “By challenging an evil he is not competent to fight with.” (Musnad, Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal, 4/405)

This *Hadith* of the Prophet reveals an important principle of Islam, that whenever, in a composite society, an evil or unpleasant situation arises, it is not prudent for the law-abiding man to have an impulsive confrontation with wrong-doers. Instead, he should decide pragmatically as to which of two options would be appropriate.

One is that he should see whether he has enough strength to fight the miscreants and compel them to desist from their wrongdoing. If so, he must fight with great determination so that the trouble is eradicated and social uplift becomes possible.

The second option is to make a cool and realistic assessment of the comparative strength of the two sides and if it is found that the odds are too great for any favourable result to be achieved through confrontation or that a disadvantage which initially had been insignificant could turn into a major setback, it will become necessary to adopt the policy of patience and tolerance, and avoid any confrontation with the wicked.

The policy of avoidance does not mean cowardice. It simply means refraining from wasting time and energy in a futile conflict. By following this course, one gains the respite to prepare oneself adequately for future action. It provides the opportunity to become so strong and dominant that no one would dare do any harm to one. In the event of attempted injustice, there would be enough accumulated force to effectively repulse any wrong-doer.

The approach of patience, tolerance and avoidance is undoubtedly one of the most important principles of Islam. (8.SS/9.95)

MARCH 31

Gerard of Cremona

Gerard, who was born in Cremona, Lombardy, in 1114, was a medieval scholar who translated the works of many major Greek and Arabic writers into Latin, there being a great body of scientific and philosophical literature in these languages which were well worth making available to all the known world at that time. In this sense, he performed the same service for his countrymen that Hunain Ibn Ishaq had done for eastern Arabia. He went specially to Toledo, in Spain, to learn Arabic so that he could read the *Almagest* by Ptolemy, the Greek astronomer, geographer and mathematician who lived in the second century A.D. The *Almagest* was a vast computation of the astronomical knowledge of the ancients, and was accepted as authoritative up to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. As such, this was one of Gerard's most significant translations. He was assisted in his task by two other scholars, one Christian and one Jewish. With this, and other such books, the gates of Greek and Arabic sciences were opened for the first time to the west. In the field of medicine, he translated books by Buqrat and Galen, almost all of the books by Hunain and Al-Kindi, Abul Qasim Zuhravi's book on surgery and many other books on the physical sciences, including the pamphlet on fossils which is attributed to Aristotle. Besides these, he rendered into Latin Avicenna's massive volume on law and many other books by Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, Ishaq and Sabit, etc.

Many other purveyors of knowledge were later to follow in Gerard's footsteps. In the words of Dr Maz Mirhaf, 'He was the founder of Arabism in the western world.'

In 1187, in Toledo, Gerard fell ill, and felt that his end was near. He wondered what would happen when he was gone. "These books

in Arabic are so precious,” he thought, “and who is going to translate them into western languages?” His reflections moved him profoundly and he was fired with a new zeal and energy. In spite of his rapidly failing health, he then succeeded in translating the remainder of his valuable collection of books. Legend has it that in the space of one month before his death, he had completed the translations of no less than 80 books.

When one feels sufficiently inspired to perform a task, one undertakes it at all costs, even on one’s death bed, and even when one’s external circumstances are totally adverse. It is one’s will and one’s motivation to work which are of prime importance. Health and strength are secondary.

APRIL 1

Gratitude and Ingratitude

Right from a glass of water to political power, whatever we receive in this world is a gift from God. Everything is a direct blessing of the Almighty. Man receives everything in this world by His will. If God does not so desire, no one can succeed in anything, no matter hard he may try. This is a truth which is made very clear in the Quran and the *Hadith*.

We learn, moreover, from the Quran and the *Hadith* that there are two kinds of divine gifts, one a special gift and the other a general gift.

Political power falls into the first category, for as the Quran explains, political power is not given to everyone. Neither can it be received by launching a political movement or subscribing to a gun culture. It is, in fact, directly dependant upon the *Sunnah* of God. One such *sunnah* or law of God, according to the Quran, is His promise to believers and the doers of good works “to make them masters in the land as He had made their ancestors before them.” (24:55)

That is to say, even when our aim is political power, our task, rather than the launching of political movements, will be to strive to bring people back to the true Islamic faith and good actions.

The general gift of God, received by all the people to a greater or lesser degree consists, in principle, of two things—peaceful circumstances and plentiful supplies of food. By withholding such a gift, Allah could punish the wrongdoers:

“Allah has made an example of the city which was once safe and peaceful. Its provisions used to come in abundance from every quarter: but its people denied the favours of Allah. Therefore, He afflicted them with famine and fear as a punishment for what they did.” (16:112)

APRIL 2

Unlimited Reward

Say: ‘My servants who believe, fear your Lord. Those who do good works in this life shall receive a good reward. Allah’s earth is vast. Those that endure with fortitude shall be requited without measure’ (39:10).

It may seem extraordinary that God should give an unlimited reward for any action. But it is only one action—that is, patience, that is so singled out.

The root of Sabr, (that is, patience) means ‘to refrain from privation.’ There are two kinds of actions: in one, certain limits, are observed; in the other, no such restraint is shown. For instance, if someone is good to you, he receives good treatment from you in return. People of quite ordinary character behave in this way without feeling it necessary to exercise any patience or forbearance. Even the adherents of a religion which does not demand any personal sacrifice are unconscious of the need to practice restraint.

However, one inclined to embark on the second kind of action is required to adhere strictly to religious guidelines which enjoin

restraint, and he must do so whether the circumstances be favourable or unfavourable to him. This is the path of patience.

That is, even when someone is unkind to you, you are good to him. Even if he adopts a provocative stance, you remain moderate in your behaviour. Even if observance of the truth will be detrimental to your interests, you continue to adhere to the path of truth and justice. Even if the adoption of an unprincipled stand appears advantageous, you continue to be a man of principle. It is the practitioners of that aspect of religion which demands patience who will be 'requited without measure.'

APRIL 3

Fasting—A Means of Spiritual Purification

The month of fasting is a period of spiritual purification. A time of proximity to the Lord, it is a special month of training meant to engender all those qualities desirable in Islam. The Encyclopaedia Britannica has this to say in the chapter on fasting:

The month of Ramadan in Islam is observed as a period of penitence and total fasting from dawn to dusk. (IV/62)

Penitence, undoubtedly an important part of Islam, so permeates the entire Islamic system, that no Islamic act, including fasting, is devoid of this spirit.

However, while enjoining fasting, the Quran tells us that its special significance in the month of Ramadan is thanksgiving as well as penitence.

It was in the month of Ramadan that the first revelations of the Quranic verses came down to the Prophet. It was a great blessing of God that He revealed this guidance in the form of the Quran so that it might be a true guide for man. That is why this month came to be held as one of thanksgiving for the believers.

‘Taqwa’ (God-fearing life) means a cautious life. Success for man in both worlds lies in his invariably adopting the path of caution in all matters of life. It is taqwa, a guarded, disciplined life, that is the goal of fasting.

Fasting, an experience of powerlessness despite the possession of power is an annual exercise in self-discipline. And only that person has fasted, in the true sense of the word, who emerges from the experience not only a thankful and pious devotee of Allah but also a human being in complete control of his thoughts, words and deeds.

APRIL 4

A Congregational Prayer

According to Abdullah ibn Umar, the Prophet Muhammad observed: A prayer in congregation is 27 times superior to a prayer performed individually. (Muwatta Imam Malik)

The desired states of prayer are increased when the prayer is performed by a congregation of worshippers. That is why its reward is more than that of a prayer said individually.

For a congregational prayer the individual has to think of it ahead of the appointed hour, as he has to set out for the mosque in good time. In this way, his mind is already occupied with thoughts of worship. Then, on the way to the mosque, he is reminded at every step that he is heading towards the house of God. It is as if, even before the prayer starts, he is busy with prayer.

In the mosque, there is an unalloyed atmosphere of worship, and the devotee feels that he is not the only person at prayer: he has joined a vast brotherhood. If, at an individual prayer, he was a worshipper in the simple sense of the word, he now shares the status of a preserver of the ritual of namaz for succeeding generations.

Then the congregational prayer in itself is a source of great reward. In an individual prayer, the worshipper is like his own leader (Imam)

at prayer. But by saying his prayers in congregation he gives proof of greater modesty and reverence for Allah. In individual prayer he had renewed his consciousness of Islam individually. In congregational prayer he experiences this more intensely along with his fellow men.

In individual prayer he had received divine provision at the level of an individual. In congregational prayer he shares in God's provision descending on the entire congregation.

Another significant aspect of congregational prayer is that through it he imbibes with his brothers the sacred atmosphere of the mosque. He learns from them and they learn from him. He is both a giver and a taker. If formerly he has simply performed namaz in private, he now becomes in congregational prayer a standard bearer of Islam.

APRIL 5

An Exemplary Tale

Last summer I met Mr. Abdul Muhit (a retired Joint Director of Technical education, now living in Faizabad in U.P., India) who related some of the experiences he has had during his service tenure. The following is one which struck me as being of particular interest.

Mr. A.M. Khan did a B.E. degree in electrical engineering at Banaras Hindu University in 1955. Some years later, in 1963, a vacancy for a Senior Lecturer was advertised in the private polytechnic of Chandauli (Distt. Varanasi). The successful candidate was expected to function as the head of the department of electrical engineering.

The interview for this post was to be held at the official residence of J.B. Tandon, the Commissioner of Varanasi, who at that time was the President of the Managing Committee. In his capacity as President he was present at the interview.

Professors Ram Saran and Garula were the other members of the interview board. The latter had taught Mr. Khan at the Banaras Hindu University.

Prof. Ram Saran started by putting this question to Mr. Khan:
“Do you know what an instrument transformer is?”

Mr. Khan had not even begun to answer the question when Prof. Garula, addressing the commissioner Tandon said: “He is the best candidate. There is no question of interview.

Then he said to Mr. Khan:

‘Mr. Khan, you can go.’

Prof. Saran kept quiet. Mr. Khan took his papers and left the room. After one week he received his appointment letter, appointing him as the Senior Lecturer of the Chandauli Polytechnic and the Head of the Department of Electrical Engineering. Subsequently, he continued to receive promotions until he retired as Joint Director, Technical Education.

Often we come across youths who tell us that no employment is available. But the truth is that there is an absence of worthy candidates. Mr. Khan received such an unexpected response only because he had worked very hard at his studies, always securing good marks. His performance and character throughout his studies were highly commendable. Prof. Garula and others thus formed a good impression of him. This was why he had become the first choice.

Every institute and office wants good workers, because without competent persons offices cannot be run satisfactorily. No one is an enemy to his own self. That is why no one can ignore a good worker.

Good, dependable workers are generally in demand. If you fulfill the needs of others, you will be sought out by them.

This world runs on the principle of give and take. Here no value is placed on grievances, protests and demands. The simple rule observed by this world is receiving and giving in equal measure. If you want employment, you must make yourself useful. You must develop the skills needed by other people. Then you will have no complaints to make against them. And they will have no complaints to make against you.

Then you will see that you don’t need to pursue employment. Instead employment will pursue you.

APRIL 6

Losing One's Home

On the 28th of March, 1995, a Mrs. Indu Vahi committed suicide by jumping from the 8th floor of Asia House, a building situated on Kasturba Gandhi Marg, quite close to Connaught Place, in New Delhi. As the chief newsreader in the Hindi Department of All India Radio, she had been allotted a two-room residential flat on the first floor of Asia House, which is a government building. When she retired last year at the age of sixty, she was required to give up this flat where she had lived for the last twenty years. The last date for vacating was the 31st of March.

Mrs. Vahi, widowed in 1989, became very depressed after retirement, even although she had the company of her daughter Sonia and her son-in-law, Ashok Kumar. According to The Hindustan Times of 29 March, 1995, she had acquired a house in Radio Colony of the Trans-Yamuna area before her retirement, but somehow she had felt very dejected at having to move there. This was possibly because of the paucity of civic amenities there as compared with her government allotted home, which was very centrally situated and near the elegant shopping centre of Connaught Place. This feeling so obsessed her that she climbed up to the top floor of the Asia House and leaped to her death.

When I read this news item, I felt that it was indeed a tragic incident. Then I said to myself, "there was someone who could not bear the thought of shifting from a comfortable flat to a humble dwelling. But what of one's condition if one were to be totally deprived of shelter?"

Even if people do not commit suicide, they still have to die. After death, the realization will come to them that all their possessions have suddenly been snatched away. On that day, all houseowners

will become homeless. On that day, it will be only those upon whom Allah looks with favour, only those to whom He will grant an abode in Paradise, who will ever again be householders. (1.SS/9.95)

APRIL 7

Dawah Hotline

“Hello! Is there anyone to answer me? I am an American Jew, and I want to learn something about Islam. I rang several mosques in the USA, but failed to get a satisfactory answer. Please give me some information about Islam.”

It was a telephone call received at the office of the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) in Jamaica. The person present at the office answered the call, giving the caller the required information as best as he could. Later on it came to my knowledge that such calls are often received in American mosques. But with no competent person to attend to the telephone, the callers often fail to get proper and satisfying answers. At times even there is no one present in the office at all.

Ultimately this incident at the ICNA Islamic Centre resulted in the installation of a Hotline telephone in this centre. It is called the *Dawah* Hotline and its number is 1-800-662-ISLAM. A well informed person is always present in the office to provide the necessary information on Islam to the caller. For the time being, this centre has secured the services of two competent persons with a good command of English and a proper knowledge of Islam. The initial cost was one lakh dollars. (Dawat Daily, July 13, 1995)

In bygone times, the *da'i* had to travel long distances to communicate his message to the *mad'u*. Now modern times have seen such revolutionary changes, that the *mad'u* himself is coming to *da'i*. Clearly, the need of the hour is to arrange for such centres in all the cities in the world so that people may receive the desired information on Islam.

APRIL 8

The Study of Hadith

According to a *hadith*, Asma, daughter of Abu Bakr said: ‘My foster mother came to me in Madinah. She was still an idolater, and an ally of the Quraish (the dire enemy of Islam and Muslims). Then I told the Prophet that my idolatrous mother had come to me in need of assistance and asked if I should help her. The Prophet replied, “Yes, you must.”’

This *hadith* is set forth in the chapter which deals with the proper treatment of relatives, be they Muslims or non-Muslims. But to fully appreciate any given *hadith*, we must not only go deeper than the meaning apparent on a first reading, but must also look beyond the section under which it is classified to its broader historical context.

Besides laying stress on the rights of parents, the *hadith* tells us that this incident took place after the Quraysh and Muslims had signed a peace treaty, as a result of which the Makkan idolaters had started coming to Madinah and the Madinan Muslims had started going to Makkah.

Quite understandably, such inter-communication brought into focus not only the rights of relatives but also the issues of *shirk* (idolatry) and *tawhid* (monotheism). The religion of the Prophet began to be compared with that of his forefathers, and the difference between superstition and revealed religion started becoming apparent to the people.

In this way the Sulh-e-Hudaybia (peace treaty) as a matter of strategy turned the atmosphere of militancy into one of peaceful *dawah*. Makkah and Madinah, where the clash of swords had resounded now began reverberating with voices proclaiming the call of truth. With this, the victory of Islam became as certain as that of the sun after it has risen in the world of darkness.

The Way of Moderation

According to a *hadith*, the Prophet Muhammad observed: The moderate action is the best of all actions. Hazrat Ali advised the people: ‘Adopt the middle path.’ (Tafsir Qurtubi, 154/2)

The middle path means the path of moderation. One instance of it can be seen in the following verse of the Quran:

‘Be neither miserly nor prodigal, for then you should either be reproached or be reduced to penury.’ (17:29)

The same point, worded differently, has been made in another verse which characterizes “the true servants of the Merciful” as “those who, when they spend, are not extravagant and not niggardly, but maintain a just balance between those extremes” (25:67).

According to this verse, moderate spending means neither lavishness nor miserliness but rather a balanced expenditure which will make life much easier to lead. In the same way, as regards optional fasts, prayers, etc., a middle path is desirable for man, as this enables him to maintain such a pattern of behaviour over a long period of time.

This middle path—the best path to follow—relates to all spheres of life. Man must shun extreme paths in all matters, for this accords with both the spirit of religion as well as with worldly success.

The middle path, to put it differently, is the non-emotional way. If a man loses his mental balance when confronted with any difficult situation in life, he goes to one extreme or the other. But if he keeps his feelings under control, he will be able to determine the proper course of action by giving it ample thought. A well considered deed is always a moderate one; one who does not follow a moderate path will exceed all bounds both in friendship and in enmity. He will also be given to undue optimism and pessimism in respectively positive and

negative situations, and will unnecessarily regard some individuals as too bad and others as too good. However, it is the verdict of nature that in this world a moderate approach in life always succeeds, while taking the path of extremes inevitably leads to failure.

APRIL 10

A Better Human Being

According to Abu Hurayra the Prophet Muhammad made this observation before a gathering: 'Should I not tell you who among you is good and who is bad' (that is, how to differentiate good from bad). The people who were thus addressed kept quiet. Then the Prophet repeated the same words thrice. Afterwards someone spoke up: 'Tell us who among us is good and who is not.' The Prophet then replied: 'Good among you are those from whom people expect good to come and they are secure from them. (At-Tirmizi)

This *hadith* tells us clearly who are good and who are bad. A good person is one of whom one can be sure in advance that whenever one deals with him he will be expecting only good in return. Nothing will induce him to be unjust in his dealings.

Everyone, even the good man, receives his share of ego by birth. He too dislikes things which are not to his liking. He becomes angry when provoked. He has the urge to avenge himself. But despite all this, he adheres to his principled stand.

He bears all psychological shocks patiently. He does not, with a knee-jerk mentality, return the bitter pill to others. He instead returns good for evil, expecting God to compensate him for the injustice done to him. In this way his mental equilibrium is not disturbed and he is able to continue his struggle for the noble cause of Islam with total devotion.

APRIL 11

One's Own Responsibility

An elderly British citizen once told me that during the Second World War, Sir Winston Churchill, Britain's Prime Minister and popularly acclaimed military leader, gave to the people of Britain the motto: IT ALL DEPENDS ON ME.

This is an excellent motto and one that is just as relevant in time of peace as it is in war.

My brother, Abdul Muheet Khan, who is an engineer, once told me of an incident at a training camp he had attended in Chandigarh, which is a good illustration of this motto. This camp, which was to be inaugurated by an Indian minister, had been arranged for the principals of various polytechnics, and a British Professor had been invited to address them. When the minister was about to start his inaugural address, the power suddenly went off and the loudspeakers went dead. There was no battery on hand as an alternative arrangement. However, there was a battery available in the polytechnic's workshop.

The trainee principals started looking around for a peon or an attendant who could be sent to the workshop to fetch the battery. But as soon as the British Professor realized what had happened, he himself dashed to the workshop, picked up the heavy battery and came running back to connect it to the loudspeaker system. The microphone immediately started functioning again.

Such an attitude on the part of an individual, whatever his community, is the underlying cause of the collective progress of the society to which he belongs. Similarly, at the national level, progress and development are directly correlated with the prevalence of this spirit among the people.

It is normal practice, when some wrong is observed in society, for proposals to be made that new laws be enacted, or changes made in

the administration, so that the malady may be set right. But the legal system and the administration have their limits and, as such, are only partially effective. Genuine reform will come about only if the spirit of reform is generated among the people concerned. (2.SS/9.95)

APRIL 12

Proof of Prophethood

The month of Ramadan is one of fasting in Islam. In its injunctions for this period, the Quran has this to say:

O believers, fasting is decreed for you as it was decreed for those before you; perchance you will guard yourselves against evil. (2:83)

In modern times all the religions of the world have been subjected to a thorough study. This study shows that there is no major or minor religion of the world without the concept of fasting, of one type or another. A western sociologist has observed: 'It would be difficult to name any religious system of any description in which it is wholly unrecognized.' (X/193)

However, in the Arab tribes of ancient times there existed no practice of fasting. Philip Hitti, the author of History of the Arabs writes:

We have no evidence of any practice of fasting in pre-Islamic pagan Arabia. (p.133)

In view of this research, we learn that the pronouncements of the Quran on fasting are more than just an expression of religious obligation: they also carry the proof of prophethood. Fourteen hundred years ago, prior to the age of communication and information, it was not generally known that the practice of fasting was to be found, in one form or the other, in all the religions of

the world. This serves as a proof that the Prophet was a messenger of God, since none but God could tell him of this reality, till then existing only outside his society.

APRIL 13

Result-oriented Action

In 1917 a suit was filed in Egypt's religious court in Cairo against an Egyptian Muslim theologian who had stated that since the Quran did not describe Adam as an apostle or a prophet, it was Noah who should have the status of first prophet. This was an opinion which caused a great deal of agitation in certain circles. The complaint lodged in the court was that the theologian had denied an established religious reality and, therefore, separation should be effected between him and his wife and the penalty for apostasy be imposed on him. The court accepted the complaint and gave a judgement against the theologian. He was pronounced to be an apostate and divorced from his wife.

But subsequently the case came before the court of appeal, whereupon the previous judgement was declared void. However, the judge admonished the theologian by observing: "You have grossly disgraced us before the people! While the Europeans are occupied with things which are beneficial to them, you are busy in useless pursuits."

Eighty years have passed since this incident, but Muslims the world over are still striving—with even great vigour—towards profitless ends. This is in the face of the Prophet's dictum: "Besides the other qualities of Islam, one is man's renunciation of disadvantageous activities."

Wisdom and Islam both demand that action be invariably result-oriented. One must think only of what is beneficial; speak only of what is well-meaning; do only what will yield positive results; and strive only to bring about a better future. (3.SS/9.95)

APRIL 14

Dream and Success

Mr. Ram Ratan Kapila runs a refrigerator and air-conditioner business by the name of Kapsons, its offices being located in Asaf Ali Road in New Delhi. Needing a catchy name for his firm, he advertised for one in the newspapers, promising a handsome reward for the best slogan. In spite of repeatedly advertising, no apt slogan was forthcoming. He kept racking his brain day in and day out, but could not hit on anything that sounded just right.

Six whole years came and went, then one night Mr. Kapila dreamt he was in a beautiful garden, with birds chirruping and a perfect weather. Delighted with his surroundings, he exclaimed, "What wonderful weather!" It had taken him six years, but he had found the right catch phrase at last:

Kapsons: the weather masters.

The dream is an activity which goes on in the sleeping state inside the mind, often crystallising unformed thoughts and desires. Often what has been going on during the day appears in dreams at nights. History abounds in tales of discoveries which have been made through dreams, and problems, which had apparently been insoluble, being happily solved on waking from an illuminating dream sequence. An inventor's mind, when totally engrossed in his invention, continues to project the ins and outs of the problems even when he is asleep. It is not unusual for answers to seemingly impossible questions to appear in the course of dreams. But this only happens as a result of total intellectual association with any given subject. Success is the result of devotion and assiduity, and is never the result of some unasked for miracle.

APRIL 15

Indo-Pak Detente

Under the auspices of the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, an international meeting was held in New Delhi on February 5-6, 1996 to discuss the possibility of an Indo-Pak dialogue, which hopefully, would find ways and means to normalize relations between India and Pakistan. Although held at an unofficial level—it being more a function of ‘Third-track democracy’—it was attended by dignitaries from both countries.

As a participant on this occasion, I debated whether we could discover a practicable formula acceptable to both countries. I concluded that a *via media* could be arrived at, basing my judgement on the strategy adopted by the Prophet of Islam as a result of which he achieved the greatest success in human history.

This formula, in short, is *al-Fasl bain al-Qaziyatain*, or the de-linking of two issues. Pakistan, being an Islamic state, is bound to follow in the Prophet’s footsteps. India, on the other hand, is a secular state. Nevertheless, because of the reasonableness of the above proposal, I am convinced that if Pakistan were to adopt it, India would have no hesitation in following suit, particularly when it has already instituted the process of de-linking issues in its relations with China.

I must add that the acceptance of such a formula would be no sign of weakness on the part of either country, such policies having become the inevitable imperatives of modern circumstances. That is why the USA, albeit a superpower, is likewise following the identical policy of separating politics and economics in its dealings with China. It is a well-known fact that America’s separation of its economic interests from its political stand on human rights has resulted in its increased leverage in that country. India and Pakistan should also learn from this and profit from it wherever possible.

It should be borne in mind that this is a formula which accords both with Islam and with nature. What we should do, therefore,—if not in principle, then at least in practice—is put aside all political conflicts, in particular, the problem of Kashmir. Peaceful negotiations on this issue may continue but both countries shall have to make a resolve that under no circumstances will there be any transgression of the boundaries of peaceful dialogue.

This is the need of the hour if we are to save ourselves from unnecessary losses in vital fields due to present-day confrontational attitudes. This formula, which was adopted by the Prophet in state as well as in international matters, was a very reasonable one. I shall give here three examples of its application which have a direct bearing on the present situation.

1. As recorded by Sahih al-Bukhari, the Prophet of Islam was once seated by the wayside when a funeral procession passed by. On seeing it, the Prophet stood up. One of his companions remarked that it was the funeral of a Jew. The Prophet replied: “Was he not a human being?” The Jew in question had belonged to a faction which opposed Islam. But the view the Prophet took of him kept apart the two sides of his personality. From one point of view, he was a Jew and a dire opponent of Muslims and their religion, Islam, but, from another point of view, he was simply a human being. It was the wise separation of two distinct aspects of the deceased which made it possible for the Prophet to stand up to show him respect.

2. Another example of this principle as applied to national life is to be found in the history of Islam, namely, the Treaty of Hudaibiya. This was a no-war pact entered into by the Prophet with those very people who unjustly held Makkah and the House of God in their tyrannical grip. Prior to the beginning of this treaty, they had not allowed the Prophet and his companions to visit the House of God (Kaba), notwithstanding God’s declaration in the Quran that this holy shrine would remain open to visits from both townspeople and outsiders.

The negotiation of this peace treaty became possible only after the Prophet had separated religion from the political conflict in the Makkan context, thereby eliminating possible causes of friction. This

peace treaty, as finally drawn up, yielded innumerable benefits. One important consequence was that it made free movement possible between Makkah and Madinah, despite the existence of political differences. The road to mutual commerce was thereupon thrown open. People began travelling everywhere in an unrestricted manner for the purposes of education and commerce, and there eventually came a time when both warring groups started to live together as friends.

3. A signal example of the adoption of this principle in international affairs was the Prophet's decision in the case of Qibla of Bait al-Maqdis. After the emigration, when the Prophet had reached Madinah from Makkah, and had established the ritual of congregational prayer to be performed five times a day, he proclaimed Quds (Palestine) as the Qibla for worship. (This remained in force for about seventeen months.) But at that point in time, Quds was under the dominion of an idolatrous Persian King. The Prophet solved this seemingly insoluble problem by simply separating the spiritual from the temporal in this instance. Only then was it possible for him to make Quds the Qibla for worship. Had the Prophet not adopted this policy, such a decision would never have been possible.

Over the last fifty years, relations between India and Pakistan have been vitiated by political controversy. During this very long period each side has given its full attention to settling matters to its own advantage. But the result has been quite the reverse. And without there being any signs of these political controversies ever being resolved, precious resources have been, and are still being wasted in senseless confrontation.

Now, the wisest policy, from the respective standpoints of reason and religion, would be for both countries to base their foreign policy on the de-linking of political and economic issues. As far as the issue of political conflict is concerned, they would be well advised to adopt a wait-and-see policy, and to avoid taking any practical step save that of peaceful negotiation. This is what will ultimately open all doors to activity in non-political arenas.

Once Vinoba Bhave visited Kashmir, and when he arrived near the border, he was met by a number of army officers. Pointing to the

geographical division, one of them said, “up to this point we have our pickets. After that the pickets are those of our enemies.” Vinobaji replied: “Don’t say ‘enemies’: say ‘neighbours.’”

If the de-linking policy could only be adopted by both countries, they would start looking at each other not as enemies but as neighbours. Then destructive policies would soon yield to constructive activities on both sides of the border. Once this became a reality, it would only be a matter of a few years before both countries were transformed into flourishing areas of development, just like other countries of the same region, such as Singapore, Korea, Malaysia and Japan.

As a consequence of de-linking—despite the continuing existence of conflicts—people’s two-way movement across the border would greatly increase, resulting in interaction between Indians and Pakistanis on an ever-increasing scale. As we all know, interaction in itself—especially on a person-to-person basis—is an effective means of removing misunderstanding between disaffected parties, and is the first step towards paving the way to better relations between them.

Moreover, there are tremendous opportunities for commercial exchanges between the two countries. Could the de-linking process be set in motion, free trade would automatically ensue and international tourism would itself expand, resulting in extraordinary economic benefit to both countries. Similarly, in the fields of education, culture and politics, there exists great opportunities for interchange. The exchanging of cultural delegations would mean that young people could start visiting each other’s countries, and with educational activities becoming a means of interaction between the younger generations, innumerable benefits would accrue to both sides in the years to come.

It should be conceded that clash and confrontation between neighbouring countries is destructive to both, and that the pursuit of reconciliation is the key to progress and prosperity.

If India and Pakistan were to adopt this de-linking principle on a reciprocal basis, both would gain immensely in many spheres. Certainly no one would be the loser. It is a matter of common knowledge that confrontation between the two countries over political matters has become a way of life over the last half century. And now a heavy price

is being paid for this, both countries having wasted almost half of their respective incomes in pursuing this policy year in and year out, without any observable gain to either side. In fact, the state of affairs is exactly as it was in 1947.

Now if both these countries were to adopt the suggested formula, it would simply mean that the political state of affairs would remain unchanged, but that its remaining so would not be at the cost of ruined national economy. Political stalemate would no longer entail the wastage of precious material resources, once the impetus had been given—by de-linking—to a great upswing in commercial and cultural affairs. What the demands of reason are in such a situation are plain for all discerning persons to see.

APRIL 16

Success in Perseverance

It has been very aptly observed that success lies in perseverance. The entire gamut of human history testifies to the truth of this saying. Life's journey, frequently directed along uneven paths, is one in which one faces many unfavourable situations. Yet the wayfarer has to continue his journey whatever the odds. This is called perseverance. One who possesses this quality reaches the destination of success in this world. The greater the perseverance the greater the success.

This is a law of nature. Just open your eyes and you will find clear indications of this reality.

I am reminded of the man, standing by the side of a rock, who looked down and found that, due to the continuous lashing of the waves, the rock had worn away, remarked to me, "Look, the rock is a hard object, while water is so soft. But even if as soft a thing as water acts with perseverance, it can crush as hard an object as a rock into pieces. All the huge quantities of sand found on the sea shores have been produced by this lashing of water against the rocks."

The career of Dr. Subramaniam Chandrashekhar (1910-1995) provides a recent human parallel. From his childhood he showed keen interest in mathematics and astronomy. Later on he took up as the subject for his research the birth and death of the stars. In this connection, he presented his initial conclusion in the form of a research paper at a meeting of Astrophysical Society held on January 11, 1935. Scientists of repute, including Sir Arthur Eddington, were present at the meeting. Sir Arthur Eddington ridiculed Chandrashekhar and tore his papers to pieces.

Later on Chandrashekhar wanted this paper to be published in the *Astrophysical Journal* published from London. But his paper was rejected. Disheartened by this discouraging experience, he left Britain for India. Here he applied to different universities for a job but failed to find one. He was rejected both at home and abroad.

Yet this was not enough to dishearten Chandrashekhar. He now left India for Chicago, where he found the circumstances more favourable. He devoted himself once again to his research. Gradually his theory became so popular that his papers were regularly published in important scientific journals and magazines. Ultimately his theory came to be accepted as *Chandrashekhar Limit* in the world of science. At the age of 73, in 1983, he was awarded the Nobel prize for science.

Human history is replete with such exemplary lives. Anyone who has achieved any real success in this world has done so through continuous effort and perseverance. There is no other path to success in this world.

It has been observed that if you want to achieve success for yourself, you should cultivate the virtue of patience, for success is always dependent upon the exercise of patience. This is necessary because in a period of struggle such obstacles come in the way as apparently remove one further from one's destination. That is why man must never allow himself to become discouraged. Equipped with patience and perseverance, he should persist in his efforts.

This is so great a certainty that it leaves no choice as to our course of action. We have to abide by this verdict of nature, for we can survive only by living in accordance with it. It is not possible for us to change the system of nature.

Given this state of affairs, wisdom demands that we refrain from wasting our time in complaints and protests, and take steps to banish despair and discouragement. Adopting the path of realism, one must continue one's efforts. In that case success will become as certain as the setting of the sun in the evening and of its rising again the next morning. Unflagging effort inevitably leads one to one's desired goal.

Nature requires only a few months to grow a crop of cucumber. But this is not the case with the oak tree. Nature here requires a period of a hundred years. Then how can man be exempt from this universal principle?

If you are not willing to accept the reality of a long period of struggle, then you shall have to be content with very minor success: the necessary price of great success is long-term endeavour. One who is not willing to pay this price should not expect any great success.

APRIL 17

The Book of Guidance

Read in the name of your Lord who created—created man from clots of congealed blood.

Read! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One, Who by the pen, taught man what he did not know.

Indeed, man transgresses in thinking himself self-sufficient. For to your Lord all things return (96:1-8).

These verses of the Quran were the first to be revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. They tell us what God's purpose was in choosing this particular way of sending His revelations through His messengers, namely, to inform man of what would otherwise have been impossible for him to learn on his own.

For example, man leads his life in the present world for a fixed period of time, then passes away. During his life-span he appears to be free. This gives rise to two kinds of misunderstandings. One is that

man's life is nothing but what it appears to be from birth to death, and the other is that man is not going to be taken to task for his actions. It was to put an end to this ignorance that God arranged for a series of prophets to bring His revelations to mankind.

In every age and in every nation messengers of God have continued to come, the Prophet Muhammad being the last of the prophets in this chain. Now he is the only source of divine guidance, since no other prophet is going to come till Doomsday.

The message passed on by these prophets was that in this present world man is not free to follow his desires. In all moral issues he is bound to obey the divine commandments given to man by God through His messengers.

However, the presence of the Prophet in person is not necessary for man's guidance. What is necessary is access to the book of God which was brought by him to mankind. With God's Book, the Quran available in its preserved state in every corner of the globe and also the *sunnah* (traditions) of the Prophet enshrined in authentic collections, man has now no excuse for wrongdoing. For it must be remembered that God has not left man alone after sending His guidance. He is actually keeping a continuous watch over him and after death, he will be brought to the divine court where, according to worldly record, his guilt or innocence will be pronounced by God, and reward or punishment meted out accordingly. Man should, therefore, in building his life, seek continual guidance from the Quran and *sunnah*, so that he may become truly deserving of God's eternal blessings.

APRIL 18

There is Always a Way

You have probably seen manufacturers of glass frames scoring the surfaces of sheets of glass with a pen-like instrument, then neatly snapping them into two. The cutting edge of this tool is made

up of small razor-edged diamonds. Even the huge drills used for boring through hundreds of feet of rock strata in the search for oil are fitted with diamond cutting edges. It is the extreme hardness of the diamond which makes these tools so effective. The diamond is, in fact, the hardest known naturally-occurring substance. It cannot even be scratched. Put it in acid, and there will be no effect. But there is another aspect to this wonderful stone. If it is heated to a very high temperature it will disappear—it will simply sublime into carbon dioxide, and if struck a sharp blow at exactly the right point, it will break asunder. You have only to look at diamond gemstones to see what exquisite, multi-faceted forms they can be given by jewellers, because, by studying the inner structure of the diamond, they know exactly where and how to break them.

Similarly, when we find ourselves in difficult situations, we should study them carefully, in the way that the jeweller studies his diamond. We should not approach them, carelessly, from the strongest point, but with circumspection, from the weakest. We should not adopt methods which are likely to gain poor results like aggressiveness or violence, for these only engender bitterness and obstinacy in others. We should resort to politeness and diplomacy—eschew harsh language in favour of gentleness and tact.

We should consider also that there are certain human beings who are known as “rough diamonds.” That is, on the outside they appear to be unattractive and without merit, whereas on the inside they are of great worth. To bring out their worth, so that their true value is apparent to society, it is pointless scratching at the surface or using acid. If the upright human soul is to be revealed in all its beauty it must be given the same delicate handling and treated with the same expertise as the master craftsman lavishes on a superb but fragile piece of jewelry.

APRIL 19

God and Man

Abu Mas‘ud Ansari, a Madinan Muslim, once became angry at his slave and started beating him with a rod. Just at that moment the Prophet passed by his house. Seeing him beat his slave he warned him: ‘O, Abu Mas‘ud, you must know that God has more power over you than you have over this slave.’ At these words, the rod fell from his hand, and he declared that this slave would be set free that very day.

So far Abu Mas‘ud had regarded human relations in such a way that it appeared to him that he was the master and the other person was the slave. He thought himself on a higher plane and the slave on a lower plane. But after the Prophet’s warning, he found that all matter was one before God. Now he appeared to be on a par with his slave. Both were equally helpless before God. This was reason the rod fell from his hand.

The truth is that in social life all evils are traceable to the fact that man looks at matters from his own instead of God’s point of view. If a man comes to possess wealth, he starts thinking himself superior to those who lack it. But if he were to look at his condition from the angle of God he would find himself just as poor as anyone else. If someone comes to occupy a high post, he begins to regard himself as superior to others. But if he were to look at the matter in relation to God he would find himself just as humble as others were. One who castigates his supposed inferiors in derogatory terms should look at his own superiority and others’ inferiority in relation to God. He will then see that he is as powerless as the next man and that having innumerable wounding phrases at his command is of no avail.

Islam’s aim is to form such a man as will see all matters not as being between man and man, but between man and God,’ a man for

whom God will be the final arbiter. Once this attitude prevails all evil is nipped in the bud. Such thinking leaves no room for arrogance, jealousy, and injustice, or love of honour and power. The “rod” then falls from a man’s hand instead of hitting another on the head.

APRIL 20

A Witness

On a journey to the USA I learnt of an American lady who, after converting to Islam, got married to a Pakistani Muslim, one Naseer Ahmad Mirza. Her present name is Jeanine Aisha Mirza, and she lives in Utah. In the course of an interview she gave to an American journal, she made the following observation:

“While most Americans are under the impression that Muslim wives are oppressed. Mirza said, she has not found that to be true. “It’s just a different division. Outside the home, my husband’s the boss. But in my house, I’m the boss.”

A number of such incidents have come to my knowledge. Certain American women are wary of marrying whites, for fear of divorce taking place at any time. This is why serious women prefer marrying Muslims, preferably those who come to America for the purpose of education. In this way such marriages have become a means of propagating Islam. When the newspapers ask them about Islam, they defend their newly acquired faith in an excellent manner, as quoted above.

Islam does not degrade the status of woman as compared to that of men. Instead, on the principle of equality, the system of separate workplaces has been established. Islam has divided the affairs of life into two major parts, one outdoor and the other indoor. According to Islam, man is in charge of the outdoor departments of life while woman attends to indoor matters. So that Jeanine Aisha Mirza very aptly represented this principle of Islam in the light of her own experience.

This division is very appropriate for both. In this way the man is free to devote his maximum energy to one department while the woman is free to give her full attention to indoor affairs. This makes for greater efficiency in both spheres.

This division, while giving independent status respectively to the husband and the wife, makes them both cogs in the great wheel of the family machine. And unless the wheels all smoothly interlock with each other, the machine will come to a standstill. This means that for the family to function as an efficient unit, there has to be full cooperation between husband and wife. Otherwise, it would mean the end of family life and, ultimately, of all social relations. Humanity as a whole would suffer.

The division of labour relates not only to men and women but is also a general principle upon which the whole system of nature is based.

When you establish a business house where many people have to work, you have to keep some people in the office to look after the office work, while some people have to be sent out to look after the field work. This division of labour is necessary to run any business successfully. If the workers of any factory or organization are not willing to accept this arrangement, that enterprise will certainly fail.

The same is true of ordinary living. For God has planned things so that men and women together will make them work. Then He has created (men and women) with the special abilities necessary to perform the jobs assigned to his or her sphere.

Now both reason and the shari'ah demand that each sex should be willing to remain in his or her sphere and to perform the assigned tasks. Man should not try to imitate woman, and vice versa.

Those men and women who show their willingness to make this arrangement a success will, by the help of God, be rewarded in this life as well as in the next.

APRIL 21

International Custom

During the final days of the Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him) two Arabs, Musaylema ibn Hubayb of Yamama and Aswad ibn Kaab Ansi of Sana'a claimed Prophethood. Musaylema sent a letter to the Prophet in 10 A.H. which read: "From Musaylema, messenger of Allah to Muhammad, messenger of Allah, peace be upon you. Later on, there should be no doubt about it that I have been associated with you in the matter of prophethood. Hence half the land belongs to me and half to the Quraysh." Two messengers, called Ibn an-Nuwana and Ibn Usal, brought his letter to Madinah. The narrator of this incident has this to say:

"When the messengers of Musaylema Kazzab, brought this letter, I heard the Prophet ask: 'Do you also believe what Musaylema has to say?' They replied in the affirmative. Then the Prophet said, "By God, if it were not the custom that the messengers should not be killed, I would have had you beheaded."

The narrator, Abdullah ibn Mas'ud explained that after this incident a *sunnah* (custom) was established that messengers were not to be killed (*Al-Bidayah wa'n-Nihayah*, 5/51-52).

This *sunnah* of the Prophet tells us of a very important principle of Islam, namely, that international matters will be dealt with according to international customs. In every age certain traditions are observed in matters of international relations. In modern times too there are many such customs to which the United Nations has now given a more organized form. All such customs and traditions should be held in the same respect as in non-Muslim countries. However, if any prevalent custom is clearly illegal, in terms of Islam, for instance, the offering of alcoholic drinks at international meetings, then that part of the custom is not to be observed.

APRIL 22

Just Balance

It is the Merciful who has taught the Quran. He created man and taught him articulate speech. The sun and the moon pursue their ordered course. The plants and the trees bow down in adoration. He raised the heaven on high and set the balance of all things, that you might not transgress that balance. Give just weight and full measure (55:1-9).

Both the creation of man and the revelation of divine guidance are expressions of Allah's justice. By creating man, and in bestowing upon him the unique gift of speech—possessed by no other object in the universe—Allah has given him the opportunity to attain a high position on earth and in the heavens, so that he may find for himself an eternal state of happiness.

After the creation of man, the divine blessings culminated in the sending of the Prophet and the revelation of the divine Book. Man, in being provided with right guidance, has been given a supreme opportunity to set his feet on the straight path, and to continue upon it without deviating, so that he may reach his final destination in the knowledge that his life has been a testament to the greater Glory of the Almighty.

It is necessary for the Lord's servants to weigh their words and deeds in the divine scales of justice, for the entire world around man is established on this principle of justice by which he is required by his Creator to regulate his life. No man in the process of giving or receiving must ever fall into unjust ways. Each of his actions must conform to the standards of truth and justice. And his deeds must be in consonance with what he professes. While the Quran gives this verbal expression, the events of the universe are a practical demonstration of it. In this way, man can never be in doubt as to which principles to adopt in his life.

APRIL 23

Realism

If you happen to be in an open field when it starts to rain, you hasten to find shelter. This is not cowardice, this is realism. Similarly, when there is an earthquake, you immediately leave your home for an open space. This too is not defeatism, but an acknowledgement of the reality of nature. Where some difficulty arises between man and nature, the solution to the problem lies only in acknowledgment, not in confrontation.

The system of rains and earthquakes is part of the scheme of God. Man cannot change this. Man only has it in his power to devise strategies to save himself from harm. The only way to do so is to adopt the principle of avoidance and save himself from extinction. That is why in heavy rain you head for a sheltered place, while during an earthquake, you rush for the fields.

Patience and avoidance are not signs of cowardice or a defeatist mentality. They are simply realistic approaches. This is necessary because the Creator has given man freedom for the purpose of putting him to the test. Man sometimes makes the right use, sometimes the wrong use of his freedom. Even if you start fighting everyone, you cannot snatch away their freedom, as this freedom is given them by the very Creator of the universe. Efforts to deprive others of their freedom are futile and will result only in your own suffering.

In such a state of affairs there is only one possible attitude. And that is known as patience. That is, even when faced with bitterness and unpleasantness from others, you must continue your life's journey by avoidance.

You should never feel that it is only up to others to practice patience and avoid friction. Patience and avoidance of strife are the social duties of everyone without exception. It should never be

forgotten that while patience makes it possible to continue with life's journey, impatience will ultimately prevent you from reaching your chosen destination.

APRIL 24

The National Agenda

Former Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru once observed: 'Freedom is in peril, defend it with all your might.' Today one can rightly say: everything including freedom, is in peril. Save it with all your might.

Prior to 1947 we believed that there was only one obstacle in the path of a prosperous India, and that was political subjugation by the British. Once we gained political freedom, we were going to wipe the tears from all eyes.

Partition, no doubt, was an evil. In fact, I would call it one of the greatest blunders of the entire human history. However, I do not agree with those who say that partition is to blame for the state of affairs in the subcontinent.

The issue is somewhat different. As far as the present sad situation of our nation is concerned, there is absolutely no justification for our failures. It is our leadership alone which is responsible for this malady.

The reason I hold that the partition of the country cannot be responsible for the national tragedy, is because after second world war several countries (Germany, for instance) were partitioned, yet developed later into advanced countries. Similarly, India too, in spite of partition, could have secured a position at the top of the list of advanced nations. Why did this not happen? This requires serious thought.

After the second world war, India, just like other Asian countries, had every opportunity to reconstruct itself. In the ensuing fifty year period, many countries, notably Korea, Singapore and Japan, transformed themselves into up-to-date, highly developed countries.

Today, the citizens of these countries have access to all kinds of modern facilities, while Indians are still just dreaming about them. Given the very great reserves of human and physical resources possessed by India, isn't there something very strange about this?

But this failure to parallel development elsewhere is not as significant, or indeed as serious as the fact that after half a century of stormy politics, no acceptable concept of nationhood has evolved in our country. India still remains a nation in the making.

Men of vision predicted this state of affairs long ago. But the results of the general elections in April-May have made it even more apparent that India is, if anything, even further from the goal of nationhood than it has ever been, no party having gained the absolute majority essential to stability and longevity of governance.

Instability is, indeed, an alarming state of affairs. The question arises as to why the country, after so many years of independence, is now faced with this problem. This can be answered only in terms of the forces at work in the country. In this recent election, there were two big contenders, one upholding secularism, the other Hindutva. Both staked a claim to being the true representatives of the Indian public. But neither actually gained public support, because a third force—a combination of regionalism and casteism—swallowed up more than half of the votes.

Even after fifty years of freedom, regional and caste loyalties stand in the way of arriving at a consensus which would bind all our countrymen with the one cord. We are still very far from the land-based concept of nationality, the idea of a homeland for all, regardless of caste, creed or ethnicity.

Secularism and Hindutva, which, in different ways, identify with and support the concept of nationhood, were opined to be sufficiently all-encompassing in their separate theories and to have sufficient mass appeal to guarantee a thumping majority to their respective upholders. They were also seen as powerful, emotive binding forces among the mass of potential voters. But the election results soon gave the lie to such optimistic views.

As I see it, the reason for public neglect of parties whose envisaged sphere of influence and functioning is the nation as a whole is simply

intellectual backwardness. Whatever concepts an under-educated society is in possession of are derived from common daily experience of a very limited nature relating, for instance, to language, style of living, personal relations, immediate economic interests, racial bias, etc. Among these, one seldom, if ever, finds the concepts of oneness, cohesiveness or homogeneity as applicable to the entire nation. Local experience in such a society can bring into being human islands, but not oceans of humanity.

In any society where education is not widespread people's thinking tends to be narrow and immature, so that social cohesion remains a local matter, confined to small groups.

The well-known 19th century educator and reformer, Horace Mann, aptly observed: "A human being is not, in any proper sense, a human being till he is educated." Mann also observes: "Education is our only political safety. Outside of this ark, all is deluge."

There is no element of exaggeration in this. Man can become an aware person only through education. It enables him to come abreast of broader realities, to understand matters in depth and arrive at appropriate and realistic decisions. It pulls him out of his emotional shell so that he can see things in the light of pure reason. In short, the human creature becomes a man only with education. Without it he is nothing.

The great virtue of education—scientific education in particular—is that it acquaints the beneficiaries with higher, universal realities; it raises the general level of their awareness; it instills in them the importance of taking a global view of humanity. In an educated society, thinking is on a higher plane; people are encouraged to rise above their own limited spheres and to start thinking along more humane and rational lines. Instead of immediate concerns, all-embracing interests become the foci of their attention.

India, still obviously beset by backwardness and a lack of public awareness, must come to grips with the fact that it is largely educational shortcomings which are to blame for its failure to crystallize as a nation. Now the question arises as to what the solution should be. What plan of action will help us to emerge from this impasse? It is my firm belief that the time has come for concerted efforts to be

made by all parties at all levels to remedy this state of affairs. But this is not something which can happen overnight, so that we shall have to content ourselves with a preparatory stage of comparatively slow progress until long term, comprehensive plans can be drawn up and implemented throughout the length and breadth of the country. This may require two phases of organization, the first to cover the initial period of transition, and the second more highly geared, to establish an improved pattern of education at all levels.

In the present situation, it is almost certain that if another general election is precipitated by fissiparous elements, regional forces will once again come to the fore in the overall voting pattern. It would again be impossible for a single party to form a stable government. Therefore, for the time being, the greater interests of the nation will be served by giving continuing and unconditional support to the system of coalition government. If such a system can function successfully in European countries and also in Malaysia, why cannot it be equally effective in India? At all events, this is not the time to indulge in the kind of self-serving politicking which will undermine the powers that be.

If, up to the present, we have not given due emphasis to education, it is because we have a long history of failing to get our priorities right. Prior to 1947 we gave top priority to gaining our independence, whereas, even in that difficult period, we should have concentrated on making education accessible to people in all walks of life. Gaining our freedom before having attained the necessary level of maturity in our thinking has resulted in the present lack of cohesiveness and absence of national spirit which are plain for all to see. The price we have paid for this neglect is our still being—even after fifty years of independence—very far from our most cherished goals, while within half that time tiny countries such as Singapore and Korea have emerged as commercial and industrial giants.

Subsequent to 1947, we gave top priority to socialism. This was again ill-judged. The better course would have been to maintain, more or less, the existing economic structure of the country, and to direct all our attention to the educational front. It is unfortunate that nothing of the sort happened. And if we are suffering today, it is the direct result of our wrong sense of priority.

If we are facing instability as a nation today, it is because the common man thinks in terms neither of secularism, Hindutva, or any other national-spirited philosophy. He thinks purely in terms of his immediate relations, contacts and interests. This situation will be remedied only when we implement nationwide educational programmes which will broaden the intellectual horizons of the masses.

Whenever someone falls into error, he himself, by rights, should atone for it. No one else should be expected to stand in for him. By the same token, the primary condition for a beneficial change of national course should be our admission at the outset of error, and our prompt and willing atonement for it. We must first admit that all along we have been setting ourselves wrong targets. The next step should be to get our priorities straight. Having done so, we should not cease in our efforts until the literacy rate is one hundred per cent. If we fail in this most important arena at the present time, India will continue to have the rather dubious distinction of being a nation still in the making.

APRIL 25

Proceeding with Caution

When rivers have to be crossed, small animals can swim across and larger lightweight animals can swiftly walk across. But watch an elephant who is about to make the crossing. He does not step out briskly like other creatures. First he tests the riverbed for hardness or softness, making sure not to put his whole weight on his forefoot, then, when he is sure of his ground, he sets forth. Even once launched, his progress is slow for he is still afraid of becoming irremediably stuck in soft mud. He proceeds with caution, testing the riverbed at every step.

Who taught the elephant to do this? Surely it must have been God who gave him his instinct for survival, thus setting upon him His seal of divine approval. God has given us this example to show us that when there are signs of danger on our path, we should not advance carelessly, but should move with similar caution gauging the nature of the “ground ahead”.

Man is endowed with far greater brain power than the elephant. No one lights a fire near reserves of gun powder. No engine driver is careless in shunting petrol bogies. But most of us tend to forget that this is a principle to be followed in social life. Every society is comprised of a variety of people who create different types of environment. In every society there are ‘marshy places’, there is ‘petrol’ there are ‘thorns’ and there are ‘pits’. The wise are those who try to avoid such difficult, even explosive situations thus saving themselves from the trammels of confrontation.

Those who have some goal or the other before them never allow themselves to become enmeshed in such things because that would mean being diverted from their objective. A purposeful man always looks ahead to the future—straight forward and not towards right or left. He always thinks of long-lasting consequences rather than momentary considerations. He looks at things not from the point of view of personal desires and whims, but from the point of view of reality.

APRIL 26

Ease Always Comes After Hardship

Anyone who has experienced a dust or sand storm in desert regions will know what traumatic experience they are. There does not appear to be anything good about the scorching, blinding winds. But Soviet meteorologists have—in the Karakoram desert—made investigations into the properties of dust storms and found that they are Nature’s way of controlling extreme climates. The strong winds

raise the dust up to form a screen in the atmosphere, guarding the earth from the intensity of the sun's heat. The surface of the desert, scalded by the summer sun, is considerably cooled when it erupts in a dust storm. Sometimes the resultant change of temperature can be felt, say, in America and the Arctic as far afield as from Arabia, and Central Asia.

Such is the order of nature. In this world just as ease always follows hardship, so fruitful results come only from arduous, painstaking processes. This is the way nature works, and from it we can see how we should live on earth. We should be prepared for a period of hard struggle before we can expect to reap the results we desire. This is a law established by the Maker of the universe, and it is only by complying with it that we can advance towards our goal in life. If we wanted to accomplish things an easier way, we should have to create another world, one in which cooling clouds—for instance—are not preceded by scorching winds.

There is no doubting the fact that failure in life usually results from the quest for immediate success. The word "short-cut" may be applicable to the world of roads and footpaths, but there are no short-cuts in the struggles of life. This fact frequently evinces itself in untoward ways.

Take the instance of a young man in the town of Surat, in Gujarat, who entered a jeweller's shop, stole a piece of jewellery, then tried to make a quick exit. His line of retreat to the staircase being cut off by the suspicious shopkeeper he made a dash for the nearest window and crashed his way—as he thought—to freedom. But this bold attempt ended disastrously. His leap from the second floor window resulted in his instant death (*The Times of India*, January 21, 1980).

This might appear to be just an isolated incident involving a foolhardy youth, but one finds people generally considered to be intelligent committing the same mistake in their lives. When an individual tries to accomplish instantly what should be worked for over a long period—like the youth who sought to reach ground level by jumping instead of walking down the stairs—he is condemning himself to destruction. When the leaders of a nation do likewise, they are spelling doom for all those who follow their lead.

APRIL 27

Super Performers

A book published in America in 1986, entitled *Peak Performers*, makes a study of the lives of a number of individuals in modern America who have played a heroic role in life. One point which the writer specially emphasizes is that a great mission can trigger in a man the powerful urge to superior effort which ultimately leads him to exceptional achievement.

America sent its first manned spacecraft to land on the moon in 1967. The launching of the rocket had been the result of the combined effort of a large number of experts who had been engaged to work for this mission. One of this team, a computer programmer, said that something extraordinary began to happen as the work got under way. The thousands of ordinary men and women, who were working to make the space programme materialize, had all of a sudden been transformed into super-achievers. They had started performing with an efficiency that they had never in their whole lives been able to muster.

Within the short period of 18 months, all of the work had been accomplished with exceptional rapidity.

“Want to know why we’re doing so well?” our manager asked me. He pointed to the pale moon barely visible in the eastern sky. “People have been dreaming about going there for thousands of years. And we’re going to do it.

It is an undeniable truth that what inspires a man more than anything is to have a great mission before him. That is what arouses a man’s hidden potential and makes him capable of all manners of sacrifices. It makes him, in short, a peak performer.

A man who is satisfied no longer strives, doesn’t dream, doesn’t create. If we are possessed by fear we will achieve nothing.

APRIL 28

Reading the Signs

With the increase of traffic in modern times, the danger of accidents has also increased. To obviate this danger various forms of road signs have been erected, for the guidance of motorists. One such sign reads: "Lane driving is sane driving." Keeping to one's lane is an effective safeguard against accidents, averting the danger of colliding with other motor-cars, and ensuring that one's journey does not end in disaster.

An article in a British motoring magazine by an expert on driving gives some indispensable rules of thumb for drivers. If one is speeding down a main road, for example, and suddenly a ball appears from a side road, one must realize that there is probably a child not far behind it. If one sees the ball, but fails to see the child, one cannot count oneself a good driver. The really good driver stops, not on account of the ball, but on account of the child that he sees with his mind's eye running behind the ball. It is the quickness of his imagination which saves the child from being run over.

The principle we are required to keep in mind while driving are the same as those we should keep in mind on our journey through life. If one wishes, one can learn from the "highway code" the principle that one should follow in the vaster arena of life.

Always confine your activities to your own sphere; if you infringe on the sphere of others, you are sure to clash with them: your progress will come to an abrupt halt. When certain signs appear on the horizon of society, try to make out what these signs infer. Do not just go by outward signs; try to reach the meaning behind them. If one just goes by what one sees and fails to see what lurks in the background, one will not advance in one's journey through life. Others, more far-seeing than oneself, will forge ahead, while one

falls victim to dangers that could have been avoided if one had read the signs properly (116:4).

APRIL 29

In the Nick of Time

A medical college professor, putting a student through an oral examination, asked him, "How many of these pills would you give to a man who had suffered a heart attack?" "Four," replied the student. A minute later, he piped up, "Professor, can I change my answer?" "You can, by all means," said the professor, looking at his watch. "But, regrettably, your patient has already been dead for 40 seconds."

Certain matters in life are so critical that they require the appropriate step to be taken without a moment's hesitation. But an instant decision must also be a correct one, otherwise the consequences could be drastic, and could mean a lifetime of repentance.

Our moments of decision-making are often very similar to our attempts to board a train. Catching a train requires preparation. We have to pack up our luggage, making sure we take the right things with us, buy a ticket, arrange transport to take us to the station and we must, of course already be on the platform at the appointed time, otherwise we are surely going to be left behind. For the train is no respecter of persons. It arrives on time and departs on time, and pays no heed whatsoever to tardy passengers. If we are like the medical student who was caught on the wrong foot because of lack of preparation and who was much too late with the correct answer, the train of life will go on its scheduled course and we shall be left standing, wondering what to do next and how to avert the disastrous consequences of our failure to get on board. It is, therefore, necessary to be prepared for all eventualities in life. That means assiduously acquiring a good education and

losing no time in gaining useful experience relevant to our chosen occupations. It above all requires a mental and physical readiness to seize opportunities when they come our way, and to be firm of purpose, never permitting one's energy to be frittered away in pointless vacillation. (116:2)

APRIL 30

Road Block

When a road is under repair, a notice bearing the words “Road Closed” is put up to warn unwary travellers. But this does not mean that the path to one's destination is irrevocably barred. There are always other highways and by-ways—it is just a question of looking around for them. Sometimes one can reach one's destination just as well by zig-zagging through narrow lanes and alley-ways. The only difference is that this takes somewhat longer, and one has to keep one's wits about one to negotiate narrower roadways and sharper turnings. But arrive, one finally does.

Life's journey is very often like this. One would like to proceed by broad straight routes, moving fast and reaching one's goal in the most direct possible way. But, so often such roads are blocked, and achieving success begins to seem a very difficult matter. But for every major route which is blocked, there are always several minor roads which are open. It is just a question of having to go about things in a roundabout way. This is particularly true if you meet with an adversary and feel that you are unable to confront him head-on. It is then that you must find some indirect means of dealing with him. Often compromise or adjustment is the best solution.

When in one particular field there seems to be a discouraging lack of opportunities, one can certainly search for and find opportunities in some other field. When you fail to find a place for yourself in the front row, you can always make do with one in the rear until a place

up ahead finally falls vacant for you. When you cannot find people to extend a helping hand to you, press on fearlessly and strike out on your own. When you need things from people to help you on in life and no one seems ready to be generous, stop thinking of how deprived you are and try instead to earn God's blessings.

For every closed door, there is always another which is open—but only to those who have the eyes to see it, and the courage to march through it.

MAY 1

The Psychology of Success

The World champions often possess equal physical strength and capabilities and receive training of an almost equal standard. Then why does one win and another lose? This question has been a topic of research in America for the past three years. The report of the group of scientists working on this has recently been published.

They chose the top international wrestlers and made comparisons of their physical strength and psychological reserves. They found out that there is one marked difference between the winners and the losers in the world competitions, this being not physical but plays the most crucial role in winning or losing a competition. The experts found that the winners were found to be more conscientious and in control of themselves than the losers. The report is summed up with these words:

“Losers tended to be more depressed and confused before competing, while the winners were positive and relaxed” (The Times of India 26 July 1981)”. This applies equally to the broader field of life. In life when two individuals or two groups confront one another, their victory or defeat does not depend so much on material resources as on intellectual and psychological reserves.

The conviction that one’s goals are worthwhile, the observation of discipline with no contradiction between words and thoughts, cool thinking even in times of crisis—all these are qualities of mind and heart which determine success, and obviate failure in the wider field of life.

MAY 2

Perseverance

The following story, written by Mao Tse Tung, former Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party is one which should set us all thinking.

In olden times, there was once an old man from the northern part of China who lived on the side of a mountain range which always lay in shadow. The problem was that there were two high mountains in front of his door which prevented the sun from entering his house. One day, the old man called to his young sons and said to them, "Let us go and remove these mountains by digging, so that the sun's rays may fall upon our house unhindered." A neighbour of the old man's, hearing of this plan, made fun of it. He said to the old man, "I knew that you were foolish, but I never realized that there was just no limit to your foolishness. How on earth is it possible to remove these high mountains just by digging them?"

The old man replied in all seriousness, "Yes, you are right. But when I die, my sons will dig, and after their death, their sons will dig. The digging process will thus continue for generations. The mountains, as you know, will not go on increasing in size, whereas each digging is bound to reduce them in size and, in this way, there will come a time when we shall have finally succeeded in removing these obstacles." The power to solve problems is always more significant than the problems themselves, and while problems are invariably limited, their solution is unlimited, there always being a number of different approaches which naturally vary, in scale and complexity. This story is a beautiful illustration of how a major feat necessitates not only long-term planning, but the willingness and determination to carry that planning into effect.

For a people who have the fortitude, to carry on their schemes from one generation to the next, working consistently and steadfastly, there is no mountain or river on earth which they will not be able to conquer.

MAY 3

Today and Tomorrow

Resolution No. 3379 was passed by the United Nations in 1975 in which it held Zionism synonymous with racism.

For many years the Jewish lobby and the USA made constant efforts to have this resolution overturned in the United Nations. But the circumstances were not favourable for, thanks to the influence of the Soviet Union, the entire East Block continued to give its backing to this resolution.

But with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Jewish lobby and the USA managed to find a long sought-after opportunity. On December 17, 1991 the United Nations tabled the repeal of this resolution in the General Assembly of the United Nations. With the support of the entire East Block, this resolution was repealed by 111 votes as against only 25 in opposition. There were 166 members of the United Nations at the time, of whom the remaining number abstained from voting.

Lawrence Eagle Burger, the American representative observed: The era which produced resolution 3379 has passed into history.

From 1975 to 1991 the Soviet Union, enjoying the position of super power, had rallied the support of various countries against the United States. Now with America being the sole remaining super power, this resolution, passed sixteen years ago, was scrapped by it.

Whoever comes into power attempts to write the history of his own choice, in spite of the fact that no one in this world enjoys a

permanent position. Here, someone is granted sixteen years, while others are granted just sixteen days. Yet everyone, powerful or powerless, remains blissfully unaware of the ephemerality of his position.

MAY 4

Observing Silence is Necessary

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam observed: One who believes in God and the Last Day should either speak words of goodness or keep quiet.

It is true that keeping quiet is as important as speaking. Yet on certain occasions speaking becomes extremely important. That is why according to a *hadith*, one who does not tell the truth at the right moment is called a ‘dumb Satan’. However, there are many occasions when observing silence is more proper and more important.

One example of how essential it is to observe silence is provided by an incident at the battle of Uhud. The Prophet having been injured, fell down in a cave, out of sight of the people. His enemies proclaimed that he had been killed. The companions of the Prophet were in disarray. In the meantime one of the companions caught sight of the Prophet and exclaimed, ‘Here is the Prophet!’ At that moment the Prophet motioned him to keep quiet so that the enemy would remain ignorant of his being alive.

Another instance is cited in the *hadith* which says that asking the assembly to keep quiet while the Imam is giving a sermon is an absurd act, for that in itself would amount to making a noise.

This principle of keeping silence at meetings between individuals too is worth observing, but when the matter pertains to the whole community it assumes far greater importance. At a delicate moment the observance of silence by a leader prevents a riot from taking place, while an ill-timed speech by a leader can lead to a full scale riot,

leaving in its trail hundreds of innocents slaughtered and property worth crores of rupees being burnt to ashes. It is in this sense that Sister Consolata has observed:

The greatest number of failings in a community come from breaking the rule of silence.

MAY 5

Two Methods

As the legend goes, the wind and the sun once challenged one another as to which one was more powerful than the other. The argument went on and on indefinitely. Then both decided to demonstrate their respective powers on an object, and whoever won was to be acknowledged the more powerful.

It was early in the morning, and a person covered with a blanket was seen walking in a field. Both the sun and the wind said, “Let us test our strength on this person. The one who manages to remove his blanket from his body will be held the more powerful.” The wind, first in the field, blew harder and harder until a gale was let loose. But when the man saw the storm approaching, he became afraid of his blanket flying away in the wind so, as the wind started blowing harder and harder, he went on tightening his blanket more and more. Thus the wind failed to separate the blanket from the man’s body. Next, the sun came on the scene to show its strength. Instead of a rapid action, it opted for a slow and steady one. It gradually began spreading its rays in the atmosphere. The man started feeling somewhat hot, so he loosened his blanket. Then, when he became very hot with the sun’s rays, he removed the blanket from his body, folded it and hung it around his neck.

This allegory tells us the difference between gentle and harsh action. The way of gentleness in dealings leads us to success while the harsh way leads us to failure.

By gentleness one can win peoples' hearts. Harshness only drives people further away. By forgiving someone for his ill-treatment, one awakens in him a sense of shame. Whereas by returning evil for evil, a reaction of revenge and retaliation is produced. As the *hadith* tells us, God rewards gentleness and not harshness. That is, God's blessings come to one who behaves gently instead of harshly.

MAY 6

From Mosque to Mosque

An Arabic journal, Ad-Dirasat Al-Islamia (July-Sept 1955) published from Islamabad in a detailed report of Islam in France, tells of how a prominent French man, Le Cleck, now called Daniel Yousuf Le Cleck, accepted Islam. He subsequently, associated himself with the Tablighi Jamaat and later along with a group from this Jamaat, he performed Hajj on foot.

Starting from England he passed through various European countries, then passing through Turkey and Jordan, he reached Saudi Arabia. This long journey was undertaken from one mosque to another until he reached the Ka'bah, the holiest of the mosques.

This tells us of an important reality. One special secret of success of the Tablighi Jamaat lies in its utilizing the present structure existing in the community. Had they made it a condition that the existing political system should first be conducive to the acceptance of Islam before they started their religious mission, they would have failed to make a positive start for an indefinite period of time. But when they started their work making use of the existing structure of the mosque, there was no delay whatsoever as the mosques were already scattered all over the world in very large numbers.

There are two ways of working in this world, one through politics and the other by *da'wah*. The political method lays the most stress on changing the political system, as it holds that so long as the reins of political power are not in one's own hands, no positive work can be

accomplished. On the contrary, *da'wah* finds ways of working without the abolition of the present system. In this way, the starting point can be available from day one; and each step taken means definite progress in this field.

MAY 7

On the Brink of History

The American war of Independence was fought from 1775 to 1783. Having seen its consequences some of America's leaders subsequently began to advocate peaceful methods of gaining political ends instead of violence. One of these was the second American president, John Adams, who came to be known as a non-political politician.

When Britain under the Paris treaty gave the US its freedom in 1783, its history radically altered course. Now the maximum importance began to be given to education, scientific research, industry, city planning and character building of the new generations.

The same happened in the case of Japan. Up to the end of the second World War, Japan had followed the path of militancy. But its experiences during the war led it to change its priorities. Now militancy was totally abandoned. Instead, all attention was diverted to the field of education, with progress in science and technology as its target. As a result of adopting this reverse course, as they called it, the Japanese saw dramatic changes within a period of forty years.

This stage of taking the reverse course comes to every nation. In the event, it is those who show the ability to adapt themselves to changing sets of circumstances who are successful. Those who fail to adapt are doomed to failure. The U.S. and Japan both provide examples of the benefits of adopting this reverse course. India, on the contrary, sets the opposite example. After independence, Mahatma Gandhi wanted India to follow this reverse course, but it failed to do so, hence the delay in its emergence as a developed country.

For the Muslims too this hour has come. Because of continuing to bear grudges against others they had futilely adopted a policy of militancy over a long period. But now it is high time to abandon externally directed policy and focus instead on internal matters. That is, they must first admit their own shortcomings and then direct their full attention towards their own construction. This being the only solution to the problems faced by the Muslims, they ought wholeheartedly to adopt this policy.

MAY 8

Progress in Inter-religious Dialogue

Religious differences have always existed between people. That is why interreligious dialogue has been found in one form or the other since ancient times. Fourteen hundred years ago the Prophet of Islam held in Madinah a three-religion conference—in modern terminology, a triologue—to exchange views on religious issues.

Such attempts have repeatedly been made in history. The circumstances that unfolded following the second world war led the Christian Church, in particular, to pay great attention to this matter. Through its continuous efforts dialogues of this nature are regularly being held in various countries, between Muslims and Christians in particular. I too have had the occasion to participate in several of these dialogues.

These efforts have borne fruit, at least partially. For instance, it is as a result of these efforts that on the one hand, a Church has appeared once again in Ben Ghazi (Libya) while on the other, a mosque has been built in Rome for the first time in recent history.

If the Quran is consulted with this point in view, we find two main principles on which to hold dialogues. One is derived from this verse of the Quran:

Say: O People of Book, let us come to a word common to us and you that we will worship none but God (3:64).

The first and foremost principle for any dialogue held to discuss two or more religions is to strive to find a mutual basis for peaceful co-existence.

It is a fact that finding a common ground in secular matters is comparatively easy, for nothing is held as sacred in secularism. On the contrary everything acquires a sacred character in religion. That is why it becomes the most difficult task to find a basis for agreement in religious matters. However, despite all difficulties, we must continue our efforts, peacefully, irrespective of the results.

The second principle given by the Quran is purely a matter of pragmatism. That is, matters should be settled on practical grounds by avoiding their theoretical aspects. This principle is derived from this verse of the Quran:

To you your religion and to me mine (109:6).

This principle is generally referred to, in today's context as religious co-existence. This means that whenever common grounds for agreement between two or more parties can not be arrived at on an ideological basis, then the way of practical co-existence must be adopted.

The Community of Saint Egidio provides a good example of a continuing dialogue of this nature. This promotes interaction on a mass scale between adherents of different religions. In view of its vastness it may be rightly termed a super dialogue. The religious meet held under the auspices of the Community of Saint Egidio on a large scale each year makes a considerable contribution towards the achievement of the goal targetted by inter-religious dialogue.

Here I would like to add another point. We should not judge our efforts in this matter only by the results of meetings held in the name of formally arranged interreligious dialogue. The truth is that "interreligious dialogue" is not now limited to specific meetings held in the field of religion. It has rather assumed the form of a vast historical process—spontaneous, ongoing and perhaps never fully recorded. Negotiation in controversial matters is in tune with the spirit of the age. Today, it has permeated all walks of national as well as international life.

Modern industrial revolution and modern communication have added such vast dimensions to human relations that now the entire world has been converted into a global village. People of various persuasions are coming closer, on a universal scale. This interaction serves as an on-going dialogue of an informal nature. In this way with distances narrowed, the confrontational attitude now gives way to compromise.

Interaction in itself is an unproclaimed dialogue. When, as a result of circumstances, interaction between people of different persuasions increases, the purpose of the dialogue is served on its own.

Today, in educational institutions, offices, and factories, in travel, on playgrounds and in national and international activities, adherents of different religious traditions are meeting one another on a scale hitherto unwitnessed.

In the course of this continuous and vast interaction, for the first time in human history, people seem less like strangers to one another. A great gap has been bridged. People are learning one another's languages. They are becoming familiar with one another's culture. Making concessions to one another has become a need of the people themselves.

These factors have brought people closer right across the world. And it is a psychological truth that closeness and interaction in themselves serve the purpose of a practical dialogue. In this way, a natural dialogue has come into existence and has become an on-going process at all times and in all places.

Probably the most signal result of this historical process is that after a long intellectual struggle religious intolerance has been universally rejected. Religious intolerance has now been replaced with complete religious freedom. Today under auspices of the United Nations all the nations of the world have signed the universal declaration of human rights.

In accordance with this declaration religious freedom has been accepted as the natural birthright of all human beings. As opposed to practices in ancient times, no one now enjoys the right to persecute anyone on the basis of religion. This is the change which has confined the sphere of religious difference to peaceful negotiation.

The effects of this can be seen in all walks of life, whether religious or secular. Every one of us, consciously or unconsciously, plays a part in making religious co-existence a reality.

Interfaith dialogue becoming a part of the historical process holds great promise for us, as in this case its success is assured. This is how every great revolution of history has got under way. Whenever a movement goes beyond the stage of individual or group efforts and joins the historical process itself, then the continuity of that movement is ensured and ultimately nothing can stop it reaching its destination.

In short, inter-religious dialogue had its beginnings in individual interaction, paving the way for discussions held in religious gatherings. Ultimately the time came when it became a part of a world movement. Now, if the course of events is any indication, God willing, that day too will dawn when the world is no more ridden with religious disputes, and we are able to live in a peaceful and harmonious world.

MAY 9

Islam: The Ideological Super Power

Muslims number more than one billion today. If you go round the world to study the minds of Muslims inhabiting various regions you will probably come to the conclusion that Muslims all over the world share the feeling that the history of Islam had reached an impasse. Despite enormous sacrifices no way out is in sight.

It is our firm belief that Islam offers guidance at all times and in all situations. Therefore it must certainly be able to offer us a clear guidance as regards the present state of affairs. I must say that it does exist in a very clear form. The history of Islam provides us two very clear examples of bringing into play the *da'wah* power of Islam.

1. The first guiding example recorded in the early period of Islamic history is that of *Sulh-e-Hudaybiyya*. As we all know, the Prophet of Islam was compelled to migrate from Makkah to Madinah. The majority of Muslims followed him. Consequently Madinah became a

centre of Muslims. However, afterwards the event took a more serious turn. The opponent of Islam now started armed onslaughts against the Muslims. Yet after several full scale wars and so many minor armed conflicts the balance failed to tip on any side. Apparently the history of Islam reached an impasse.

At this critical juncture, according to the Quran, the Prophet of Islam was shown the straight path in this matter (48:3-4). This straight path was to create a conducive atmosphere for peaceful *da'wah* work by ceasing armed conflicts altogether. Accordingly the Prophet in the 19th year of his prophethood entered into a peace treaty with his Arab opponents. This step put an end to the state of war. This event is referred to in the history of Islam as *Sulh-e-Hudaybiyya*. This peace treaty diverted the field of encounter between Islam and its rivals from the battlefield to *Da'wah* field.

This peaceful activism brought incredibly revolutionary results. The power of peace proved itself far superior to the power of war. This treaty rendered a widespread interaction between Muslims and the opposing group possible in normal atmosphere. In this way the peace treaty cleared the path for the direct propagation of Islam to take place. The opponents came to accept Islam in great numbers, ultimately the numerical power alone sufficed for the victory of Islam.

According to Imam al-Zuhari, *Sulh-e-Hudaybiyya* was the greatest victory in the history of Islam. Prior to this whenever Muslims and their rivals encountered one another fighting ensued. But after the reconciliation the state of war ended and peace prevailed. Now they began meeting one another in normal, tension-free atmosphere. This interaction naturally led to an exchange of ideas. When someone heard anything of Islam and found it appealing, he would go in, without fail, to enter into the fold of Islam. That is why after a mere two years of *Sulh-e-Hudaybiyya* such large number of people entered the fold of Islam as had never happened before (Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah Vol. 4, p. 170).

This great increase in term of numbers resulted in making Islam a religion of majority in Arabia, this greatly facilitated its dominance throughout the land.

2. The second well known example of the caravan of Islam having reached an impasse concerns the first half of the thirteenth century with the emergence of the brute force of the Tartars. They were able to destroy the Muslim power almost completely. It seemed as though the journey of Islam has once again reached an impasse, finding no way out for its further advancement.

Exactly at the same point in time the ideological power of Islam appeared. Muslims being in no position to take up arms to encounter them, diverted their field of action by silently engaging themselves in peaceful *da'wah* work among the victorious Tartars. This act of *da'wah* verified the dictum of the Quran that through *da'wah* the opponents of Islam will become its supporters and friends (41:34).

The historians have acknowledged this event in quite clear terms. Philip K. Hitti, for instance, remarks, in his famous book *The History of the Arabs*:

“The religion of the Muslims had conquered where their arms had failed (p. 488)

3. Now in the twentieth century the history of Islam has once again apparently reached an impasse. Our enormous amount of sacrifices have yet to succeed in taking the caravan of Islam forward.

According to al-Imam Malik the state of affairs of Muslim Ummah will be reformed by following the same course of action as were followed by the Muslims of the first phase to rectify their matters. In the light of this remark it can be safely said that we must once again opt for this tested method of the past. We must take such steps as put an end to the hostile situation prevailing between Muslims and non-Muslims. This would result in peaceful interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims in a normal situation. Hudaybiyya symbolises the greatness of the power of peace as against the power of war. Today once again we need to follow this course of action.

Whenever this will happen, all of a sudden the ideological power of Islam will appear to its full force which is undoubtedly eternally invincible. Afterwards the virtues of Islam will begin reaching people automatically through exchange and interaction. Then it will also be possible to perform *da'wah* work properly. Under the influence of

their own nature people will start joining the ranks of Islam. And there is no doubt about it that the greatest strength for any group consists in its manpower.

Muslims can be weakened and subjugated at any point in time. But Islam is an ideological superpower forever. It has the capacity to conquer the greatest power on earth through *da'wah*. It is the need of the hour to produce conducive conditions, on a universal scale. It is necessary to bring into play the ideological power of Islam in order that *da'wah* work could be set in motion in the full sense of the word. And then certainly Islam will emerge as the dominant and conquering force, and Muslims of the world too will receive their place of honour and glory along with Islam.

MAY 10

Islam: A Tolerant Religion

So far as Islam is concerned, it is an entirely tolerant religion. Islam desires peace to prevail in the world. The Quran calls the way of Islam 'the paths of Peace' (5:16). The state of peace can never prevail in a society if a tolerant attitude is lacking in the people. Tolerance is the only basis for peace; in a society where tolerance is absent, peace likewise will be non-existent.

Peace is the religion of the universe. Peace should, therefore, be the religion of man too, so that, in the words of Bible, the will of the Lord may be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10).

In a similar vein, the Quran tells us that: "The sun is not allowed to overtake the moon, nor does the night outpace the day. Each in its own orbit runs" (36:40).

When God created heaven and the earth, He so ordered things that each part might perform its function peacefully without clashing with any other part. For billions of years, therefore, the entire universe has been fulfilling its function in total harmony with His divine plan.

The universe is following this path of peace—which is known in science as the law of nature as it is imposed upon it by God, whereas man has to adopt this path of peace of his own free will. This has been expressed in the Quran in these words: “Are they seeking a religion other than God’s, when every soul in heaven and earth has submitted to Him, willingly or by compulsion? To Him they shall all return” (3:83).

Peace is no external factor to be artificially imposed upon man. Peace is inherent in nature itself. The system of nature set up by God already rests on the basis of peace. If this system is not disrupted, it will continue to stay the course set for it by the Almighty. But the only way to keep humanity on the path of peace is to rid it of corruption. That is why the Quran enjoins: “And do not corrupt the land after it has been set in order” (7:85).

In order to preserve the peace, established by nature, from disruption, two important injunctions have been laid down by Islam. One, at the individual level, stresses the exercise of patience, and the other, at the social level, forbids taking the offensive.

1. Negative reaction on the part of the individual is the greatest factor responsible for disrupting peace in daily life. It repeatedly happens that in social life one experiences bitterness on account of others. On such occasions, if one reacts negatively, the matter will escalate to the point of a head-on collision. That is why Islam repeatedly enjoins us to tread the path of patience. The Quran says: Surely the patient will be paid their wages in full without measure (39:10).

The reason for the rewards for patience being so great is that patience is the key factor in maintaining the desired system of God. In the words of the Quran the patient man is the helper of God (61:14).

2. The other injunction, designed to maintain peace in human society, forbids the waging of an offensive war. No one in Islam enjoys the right to wage war against another. There are no grounds on which this could be considered justifiable.

There is only one kind of war permitted in Islam and that is a defensive war. If a nation, by deviating from the principles of nature,

wages war against another nation, defence in such circumstances, subject to certain conditions, is temporarily allowed.

To sum up, Islam is a religion of peace. The Arabic root of Islam, 'silm', means peace. The Quran says: '...and God calls to the home of peace' (10:25).

Peace is basic to all religions. Let us all strive then to establish peace in the world, for that is the bedrock on which all human progress rests.

MAY 11

Physical Cleanliness

Along with the purification of the heart and soul Islam lays equal stress on the cleansing of the body. The Prophet has even been recorded as having said: 'Purity is half the faith.' *Salat* (prayer) is the most important form of worship in Islam. According to a *hadith*, God does not accept any prayer without purification of the body. That is why performing wadu (ablution), which is almost a semi-bath, has been held compulsory.

So far as complete physical bathing is concerned, the chapters in the books of *hadith* dealing with purity show that the Prophet and his companions used to take a bath daily. In those days bathing before fajr (dawn) was prevalent.

One narration in the book of *Hadith*, *Musnad Ahmad* tells us that Usman, the third caliph used to take a bath every day. Taking bath in the morning is a natural human requirement. This natural requirement is certainly taken care of in Islam, which is a religion of nature in the real sense of the word.

One tradition in the *Sahih Bukhari* has actually led to doubt regarding the daily bath. Aisha narrates that on Fridays Muslims used to come to Madinah from far-off places covered with dust and perspiration. On seeing this the Prophet said to one of them: I wish you had purified yourself today (*Fathul Bari* 2/447).

This *hadith* is not related to daily or weekly bathing. It simply means that on a day when you are joining many people to pray in congregation, you should take extra care to cleanse yourself. In this way this *hadith*, far from assigning the time and the frequency of bathing, describes the special importance of bathing on such congregational occasions.

MAY 12

Khutbah

O believers, when the call to Friday prayer is announced, hasten to the remembrance of God and cease your trading. That would be best for you, if you but knew it. Then, when the prayers are ended, disperse and go your ways in quest of God's bounty. And remember God frequently, so that you may prosper. And whenever they see some business or some sport, they flock eagerly towards it and leave you standing all alone. Say: 'Whatever God has in store is far better than any sport or business. God is the best provider' (62:9-11).

These are the verses from the *Surah al-Jumu'ah* (Friday, or the Day of Congregation), chapter 62 of the Quran. This tells us in brief how to maintain a balance between the twin demand of *din* and our economic liabilities.

Economic activity is a natural requirement of human existence. That is why Islam gives full freedom in this matter. However, it is essential that economic activities be subordinated to religious duties. Therefore, although everyone is free to engage himself in economic activities, he must fulfill certain conditions.

1. Earnings from economic activities should be considered a blessing of God.

2. God should be constantly remembered during one's economic activities.

3. Economic activities should not be allowed to cross the limits imposed by God.

The way to strike a balance between economic activities and Islamic demands is for people to always remain prepared, so that whenever they receive a call of religion, they will give preference to the Islamic demand over the economic demand. After having fulfilled their Islamic duties, they will then have every right to return once again to economic activities.

MAY 13

Ambassadors of Islam

Umm Haram bint Milhan, a Sahabiya, (a companion of the Prophet) was married to Ubadah ibn as-Samit Ansari. Along with her husband she undertook several trips to foreign countries. Now her grave is in Cyprus, and is called the grave of the pious woman (*Hayat As-Sahaba* 1/592). The grave of Khalid ibn al-Walid, who was born in Makkah, is in Hims (Syria).

The same is the case with the majority of the Companions of the Prophet. At the time of the Prophet's demise, his companions numbered more than one lakh. However it is worth noting that if you go to Makkah and Madinah you will find only a small number of graves there. The reason for this is that these companions left Arabia and spread to various countries far and beyond its borders. The majority of them breathed their last in various Asian and African countries, where their graves still exist.

Why did this happen? It was because during his last days the Prophet gathered his companions together in the mosque in Madinah and addressed them in these words: God has sent me as his messenger for the entire world. So do not differ with one another. And spread in the land and communicate my message to people inhabiting other places besides Arabia. (*Seerat Ibn Hisham* 4/279).

It was this injunction of the Prophet that led to the Sahaba (companions of the Prophet) settling in foreign lands. In those countries, they either did business or earned their living by hard work, all the while communicating to their non-Muslim compatriots the message of monotheism which they had received from the Prophet. Every one of them thus became a virtual ambassador of Islam. This resulted in Islam spreading across the globe. Its evidence can still be seen in the inhabited world of that time.

I feel history is repeating itself in modern times. New circumstances, produced in the wake of industrial revolution, have resulted in Muslims leaving their homelands to spread all over the world. Today, whichever part of the globe you visit, you will find Muslims there. Mosques and Islamic institutions have come up everywhere. Muslims have settled in these countries either for work or for business. However, in respect of their religion, their actual position is that of Islam's representatives. It is as if each one of them is an ambassador of God. Now the need of the hour is to awaken the missionary spirit in these Muslims settled in foreign lands, so that they may effectively communicate the message of Islam—a task of universal magnitude made incumbent upon them by their new sets of circumstances.

MAY 14

Importance of Education

The field of education, covering ethics, religion, skills and general knowledge, is a very broad and very vital one. The importance of learning is enabling the individual to put his potential to optimal use is self-evident. Without education, the training of the human mind is incomplete. No individual is a human being in the proper sense until he has been educated.

Education makes man a right thinker and a correct decision-maker. It achieves this by bringing him knowledge from the external world, teaching him to reason, and acquainting him with past history, so that he may be a better judge of the present. Without education, man, as it were, is shut up in a windowless room. With education, he finds himself in a room with all its windows open to the outside world.

This is why Islam attaches such great importance to knowledge and education. The Quran, it should be noted repeatedly asks us to observe the earth and heavens. This instills in man the desire to learn natural science. When the Quran began to be revealed, the first word of its first verse was '*Iqra!*' that is, 'Read.' Education is thus the starting point of every successful human activity.

All the books of *hadith* have a chapter on knowledge (*ilm*). In Sahih Bukhari, there is a chapter entitled, "The virtue of one who acquires *ilm* (learning) and imparts it to others." In the *hadith*, the scholar is accorded great respect. According to one tradition, the ink of a scholar's pen is more precious than the blood of a martyr, the reason being that while a martyr is engaged in the task of defense, an *alim* (scholar) builds individuals and nations along positive lines. In this way, he bestows upon the world a real life treasure.

The very great importance attached to learning in Islam is illustrated by an event in the life of the Prophet. At the battle of Badr, in which the Prophet was victorious, seventy of his enemies were taken prisoner. Now these captives were all literate people. So, in order to benefit from their erudition, the Prophet declared that if each prisoner taught ten Madinan children how to read and write, that would serve as his ransom and he would be set free. This was the first school in the history of Islam, established by the Prophet himself. It was of no matter to him that all its teachers were non-Muslims, all were prisoners of war, and all were likely to create problems again for Islam and Muslims once they were released. This *Sunnah* of the Prophet showed that whatever the risk involved, education was paramount.

Islam not only stresses the importance of learning, but demonstrates how all the factors necessary to progress in learning

have been provided by God. An especially vital factor is the freedom to conduct research. Such freedom was encouraged right from the beginning, as is illustrated by an incident which took place after the Prophet had migrated from Makkah to Madinah. There he saw some people atop the date palms pollinating them. Since dates were not grown in Makkah the Prophet had to ask what these people were doing to the trees. He thereupon forbade them to do this, and the following year date crop was very poor as compared to previous year. When the Prophet asked the reason, he was told that the yield depended on pollination. He then told the date-growers to resume this practice, admitting that they knew more about “worldly matters” than he did.

In this way, the Prophet separated practical matters from religion, thus paving the way for the free conduct of research throughout the world of nature and the adoption of conclusions based thereon. This great emphasis placed on exact knowledge resulted in the awakening of a great desire for learning among the Muslims of the first phase. This process began in Makkah, then reached Madinah and Damascus, later centering on Baghdad. Ultimately it entered Spain. Spain flourished, with extraordinary progress made in various academic and scientific disciplines. This flood of scientific progress then entered Europe, ultimately ushering in the modern, scientific age.

MAY 15

Salat

Ibn Khaldun has recorded an incident regarding *Salat* in his *Muqaddama*. It was during the days of the second caliph, ‘Umar Faruq, that the army of Sahaba entered Persia. There were no mosques there at that time, so Muslims prayed in the open fields.

Rustam, the general of the Persian army often saw Muslims saying their prayers out in the open. He saw all the Muslims standing

in straight lines in rows, their leader standing in front, and amazingly, all the Muslims assuming the same postures as their leader. All the Muslims stood together, kneeled together and sat together as indicated by their prayer leader. On seeing this, Rustam once remarked. “Umar has eaten my liver (Umar has undone me completely). He is teaching the dogs the *adab* (discipline) of life.”

Discipline is the outward form of *namaz* (prayer). When a non-Muslim observes the *namaz* at prayer, he will arrive at the same conclusion—that they are taking lessons in discipline.

Discipline is the external aspect of *salat*. The internal aspect of *salat* is *khushu* and *taqwa*. Just observing the external aspect of *salat* gave Rustam a scare. Now you can understand, when the external aspect is combined with the internal aspect, how powerful *namaz* could become!

Namaz is the greatest form of worship for Muslims. It is moreover, the greatest power of Muslims. If we could tap this power fully, we should receive all the blessings of this world as well as the next.

MAY 16

What is Islam

Every religion or system has a set of terminology which is necessary to understand in order to have a proper appreciation of that particular religion or system. The religion of Islam too has its set of terminology. I would like here to present in brief certain basic terms.

1. **Iman (Faith)**

The literal meaning of Iman is to believe in or to have faith in something. That is, to accept Islam with conviction. This deep faith is attainable through realization alone. Hence it would be proper to say that faith is a discovery and that there is no discovery greater than the discovery of God.

2. Islam (Surrender to God)

Islam means to submit or to surrender with a full realization of God. Man abandons his ego, his freedom, and surrenders himself before God completely. In all matters of life he obeys God's commandments. He begins to lead a restrained life instead of a permissive one. This is what is called Islam.

3. Dhikr (Remembrance)

Dhikr means to remember—in Islamic terminology it means to remember God. When man discovers God, the Creator, the Almighty, Who will reward as well as punish for our good and bad deeds, it is inevitable that the thought of God comes to dominate one's mind. At all times and in all situations one remembers God. This remembrance is known as *dhikr*. When a person has reached this stage, this is a sure indication that he has found God with all His attributes.

4. Salat (Prayer)

Salat means prayer. It forms the most important part of Islamic worship. It is obligatory for a Muslim to offer prayer five times a day. Besides this, *Nafil* (voluntary prayer) may be said at other times. The spirit of *salah* is *khushu* which means submission. *Salat* is intended to inculcate a deep sense of submission in a believer, which is expressed externally by his physical bowing in the postures of *ruku* and *sajda*.

5. Sawm (Fasting)

The literal meaning of *sawm* is abstinence. *Sawm* is a form of worship which has to be observed annually, in the month of Ramadan. The outward form of *sawm* is abstinence from eating and drinking from morning till sunset. The inner state of *sawm* is renunciation of all things that God has forbidden, directly or indirectly. When a man fasts, observing all these aspects of fasting, spirituality is produced within him. He comes to experience closeness with God.

6. Zakat (alms-giving)

Zakat means purity. This means that a man purifies his earnings by giving away one part of them in the path of God. In this way, *zakat* awakens the sense in man not to consider his earnings as his own possession, but a gift of God. *Zakat* is, in essence, a practical

acknowledgement of God's bounties. And this admission is no doubt the greatest form of worship.

7. Hajj (Pilgrimage)

Hajj means pilgrimage. That is, visiting sacred places in Hijaz in the month of Zul Hijja in order to perform the annual worship of Hajj required of a believer once in a lifetime. Hajj is a symbol of Islamic unity. It is through Hajj that interaction takes place between Muslims on an international scale. Then it is also through Hajj that Muslims from all over the world are reminded of Abraham's sacrifice. On the pilgrimage they also witness the historical places associated with the Prophet of Islam. In this way they return with a long-lasting inspiration, which continues to activate them to adhere to the path of God throughout their lives.

8. Dawah (Invocation)

Dawah means to call, to invite. A Muslim who has received the message of God must do his utmost to communicate this message to other human beings. This *dawah* work in its nature is a prophetic task. The more one follows the way of the Prophet in the performance of this task, the greater the reward one will receive for it.

9. Jihad (Struggle)

The literal meaning of *jihad* is to strive or to struggle. In the present world, most of the time one has to work for Islam in adverse circumstances. In such circumstances, working for religion through struggle and sacrifice is called *jihad*. This *jihad* involves struggling with one's own self as well. Struggling to communicate the word of God to others is also *jihad*. In a similar way when any power commits aggression against Islam then, at that moment, rising in defense against that power too is *jihad*.

10. Sabr (Patience)

Sabr means patience, for example, restraining oneself from any adverse reaction when faced with an unpleasant situation. On all such occasions, one must be able to offer a positive response instead of a negative one. This is essential. For, in this present world, unpleasant events set in motion by others have to be faced time and again. If

one is invariably provoked on such occasions and reacts negatively, the desired personality will not develop in one. All the teachings of religion require a positive psychology. Therefore, one who loses patience will be able neither to imbibe religious instruction nor to pass it on to others.

MAY 17

Dawah Explosion

The battle of Cesmi is a significant event in the history of the Turkish caliphate. In this battle, fought in July 1770, the Ottoman naval establishment was destroyed by a Russian fleet at the harbour of Cesmi on the Aegean sea. (13/784)

A few years later, in May 1799, the British forces defeated and killed the Muslim ruler Tipu Sultan of South India. This was the beginning of the end. Subsequently, the European Christian nations conquered, directly or indirectly, all of the Muslim countries one after the other, thus establishing their own political supremacy.

Now, at this stage, the entire Muslim world reverberated with the call of *jihad* which was considered to be the only solution to its problems. It was felt that it was only by following this path that Muslims could regain their lost political power and glory. Therefore, the process of *jihad* (in the sense of militancy) was set in motion everywhere. It was a kind of explosion, the impact of which was felt all over the Muslim world. This militant *jihad* is still being pursued in different regions in one form or the other.

Now in the last quarter of the 20th century another revolution has occurred, but on a vaster scale. Over the last few years there has been a rapid spread of *Dawah* work. In any town or country, wherever you go you will witness *Dawah* activity. Its increase has been so great that it would not be an exaggeration to call it a *Dawah* explosion.

Now let us compare the *dawah* of the last twenty years to the *jihad* of 200 years. You will find a significant difference between the two so far as the result is concerned. During this prolonged and all-out war Muslims unilaterally brought down destruction upon themselves. Even after political defeat Muslims had had great resources at their disposal. But now they have lost all these in the process of continuing militancy.

On the other hand, Muslims have lost nothing in *Dawah* work. In fact, there have been positive gains, for every day and everywhere people are leaving their flawed, imperfectly preserved religions to enter the fold of Islam, which has been preserved in its pristine form. This is plain for all to see. A glance at the journal *Al-Alamul Islami* issued from Makkah, will suffice to prove this statement.

This *Dawah* explosion has been so sudden that it seems as though set in motion by God Himself. This is an all-encompassing movement in which both sincere as well as insincere people are taking part. Even non-Muslims are playing their part in carrying this mission forward at a great speed. Both Muslims as well as non-Muslims are publishing Islamic literature on a large scale, and Islamic conferences are being held by non-Muslims as well as by Muslims. Big institutions are being established for this purpose. This is a historical process in which even anti-Islamic elements such as Salman Rushdie have also had a hand. It is because this age is marked by the spirit of enquiry. This is why, when the opponents of Islam publish a book against Islam, they inadvertently awaken the desire in millions of people to make a thorough study of the subject.

The truth is that the *Dawah* explosion is no simple matter. It is a historical process which started at the proper time, as predicted by the Prophet, so that with the approach of Doomsday, the message of Islam would be brought by God to every home. It seems quite obvious that this process has been set in motion according to the prediction.

First of all, propitious circumstances have been produced towards this end. For instance, modern communications; the urge to study different religions; freedom of religious expression; commercial value in religion etc. By creating such a variety of favourable conditions, God has Himself arranged for the successful outcome of *Dawah* work.

This is a historical process which will keep advancing on its own. It will be our great good fortune to become a conscious part of it thus securing for ourselves the blessings of Allah. While others are working for it under the pressure of historical process, we must perform this noble task by our own conscious decision.

MAY 18

Freedom of Thought

A man called Mughees and his wife, Bareera, who were living in slavery in Madinah, decided to accept Islam. After some time the wife was set free. By winning her freedom she legally obtained the right either to live with her husband or to seek a separation from him. Bareera decided in favour of separation. But Mughees, who was greatly attached to her wanted her to change her decision and continue to live with him.

This is a long story recorded in books of *hadith* in detail. To put it briefly, the matter was finally brought before the Prophet. Both of them came to the Prophet, Bareera in front and Mughees, behind, following her. As recorded in the *hadith*, the Prophet said to Bareera: "It would be better for you to take back your decision." Bareera replied, "O Prophet of God, is this your command?" The Prophet said: "No, it is only a suggestion." Bareera replied, "Then I do not need it."

This is the highest and ultimate example of Islam granting such great freedom to men and women. This freedom does not mean anarchy. It is a concession to human nature. The development of human nature is possible only in an atmosphere of freedom. Just as a tree flourishes in an open environment similarly the human being develops to the full only in an atmosphere of total intellectual freedom.

MAY 19

Respect for Humanity

God tells us in the Quran: “We have indeed honoured the Children of Adam, and provided for them means of transportation on land and sea, and given them wholesome food and exalted them high above the greater part of Our creation” (17:70).

This shows that man by his very creation deserves regard and respect. This respect is man’s natural birthright, regardless of which community he belongs to.

According to a *hadith*: “That person is not one of us who is not merciful to our juniors and respectful to our elders.” According to another *hadith* the Prophet Muhammad said, “One who believes in Allah and the Last Day must honour his neighbours; one who believes in God and the Last Day must honour his guests.”

There are a number of such commands to the believers in the Quran and the *hadith* which lay great stress on showing due respect to the servants of God. For this is an important area in which we are actually being tested on our faith in God. Our love and devotion for God finds expression in this world in the form of our relations with other human beings. One who is a true lover of God has an inner urge to love God’s servants.

Respect for humankind is one of the basic teachings of Islam. Anyone, be he of one’s own religion or of any other religious tradition, whether he belongs to one community or another; whether he belongs to a friendly group or an enemy group, in all cases is worthy of respect. According to the teachings of Islam human beings are to be respected, despite their differences. Even where antagonism is displayed, we have to adopt the way of avoidance of conflict and continue to show respectful behaviour. In the eyes of Islam all human beings are equal and deserve our respect.

MAY 20

Question and Answer

During the Caliphate of Ali ibn Abi Talib, one group of Muslims revolted against him, causing great havoc. Consequently, two battles ensued in which about forty thousand Muslims were killed, later even Caliph Ali was martyred. During this uprising one of the rebel group came to see Caliph Ali and put a critical question to him. He asked how it was that there was such great disarray and dissension among Muslims during his Caliphate, whereas the respective Caliphates of Abu Bakr and Umar had not been marred by such devastating differences among Muslims. Caliph Ali replied: It is because Abu Bakr and Umar ruled over people like me, while I am ruling over people like you. (*Muqaddama ibn Khaldun*, p. 211)

One important reality emerges clearly from this question and answer that relates to the most important condition for the establishment of a true Islamic government. That is, the existence of favourable conditions in society. In the words of Caliph Ali, it would be appropriate to say that the condition for the establishment of a healthy political system is that, on the one hand, we should have individuals like Abu Bakr and Umar in the office of the head of state, while, on the other, society should be composed of people like the Companions of the Prophet. Or, to put it more pointedly, the Caliphate should be in the hands of people like Umar, and society should consist of people like Ali.

This incident shows how the first phase of Islam was marked by an atmosphere where a common man could put critical questions directly to the Caliph and the latter could answer them without losing his mental equilibrium. This also shows that when there is an open atmosphere in society, the confusion of minds is cleared, and the solution to great doubts can be offered by the concerned personalities themselves.

MAY 21

The Superiority of the Truth

Once an *'alim* (religious scholar) criticised his *Shaikh* (spiritual guide) and had difference of opinion with him. Someone pointed out to the *'alim* that it was not proper for him to differ with his mentor. The *'alim* replied 'The Shaikh is dear to me, but the truth is dearer to me than the Shaikh.'

This incident tells us what the proper attitude should be in matters of differences and criticism. That is, each person must be accorded the respect and honour due to him. The human and ethical rights of everyone should be duly honoured. But when it is a matter of the truth, the truth will be held superior to everything. That is to say, if the issue is man versus man, personalities will be considered more important, but when the issue is man versus truth, the truth is important, in the absolute sense, while man's importance is relative.

Human behaviour is subordinate to ethics. But when it comes to Truth, ethics itself will become subordinate to truth. It is because there is nothing greater in this world than truth. Morality is important because truth is God's representative on earth. The appearance of truth is like the appearance of God. When God appears before one what else will be more important in comparison?

This does not mean that one who claims to be the champion of truth will wield unlimited power over others. In this matter, the truth will be considered supreme, and not the person who claims to be the upholder of truth. In actual fact, the claimant of truth will be judged by the same standard as he employs for judging others. Anyone who does not come up to the standard of truth is to be condemned. The best way is for the deceitful person willingly to accept the decree of truth against himself. Truth represents God in this world. That individual is blessed before whom truth reveals itself, on recognizing it, he bows before it.

MAY 22

The System of Nature

Human history pre-dates the advent of Islam by about twenty five thousand years. During this long period man made little progress in knowledge and science. True scientific progress was made only when Islam broke with the ancient system of royal absolutism, thus heralding the age of intellectual freedom.

It is a well-known fact that while intellectual progress is best made through the exchange of views, the system of determinism stalls this process altogether. This has been very well expressed by an American writer: 'When all think alike, no one thinks very much.'

The fact is that the world of realities is unbounded in scope. But the mind of a single individual—particularly in isolation—has its limitations. It is only in a situation where there can be a frank exchange of views and free interaction without any official repression, that people can learn from one another and there can be a widespread increase in knowledge. Conversely, in an environment where people's thinking is confined to a single constricted sphere, general knowledge will remain limited.

When people have full freedom to think and speak, differences of opinion will inevitably result. Each will criticize the other's viewpoint. This process of criticism is an essential part of intellectual development. In this world the choice for us is not between uncritical acceptance. It is rather between criticism and mental stagnation. If curbs are placed on criticism, what results in reality is mental stagnation rather than a state of uncomplaining acceptance.

Where intellectual freedom contributes to the system of nature, intellectual constraints are an impediment.

MAY 23

The Harm of Greed

According to Sufyan, Umar ibn Khattab once asked Kaab who the people of enlightenment were. Ka'ab replied that they were men who practised their learning. When Umar asked what caused a diminution of enlightenment in the hearts of scholars, Ka'ab replied that greed was to blame for this. (Mishkat al-Masabih 1/88)

The common man's greed is confined solely to money – more and more money, primarily to meet all his requirements, but progressively to enable him to lead a luxurious life. Similarly, one who wields celebrity in his own home creates dreams of finding fame and fortune all over the world. The public figure who has thousands of followers will not rest content until his followers number in millions. And so on.

It is feeling of greed which makes a man of knowledge and learning into a pragmatist. In his heart, he may believe in the truth, but what he says in public bears little relation to it. Instead of upholding principles, he opts for expediency. He has one face in private and another face in public. He behaves in this way so that his image is not distorted, his popularity with the public remains undiminished, his interests are not damaged and he maintains his high position in the material world. By resorting to such duplicity, he ensures that his public image will grow constantly in stature. But all this is to be had only at the cost of constant inner erosion.

MAY 24

Islam in the Modern World

The Prophet of Islam made a number of notable predictions which have been recorded in the books of *hadith*. One of these being that, in the final phase of human life on earth, the word of Islam will reach all human beings inhabiting this world. In other words, future times will see the intellectual ascendancy of Islam.

However, if the word of God is to be brought into every home, conditions must exist which will favour the success of such a mission. Without such conditions no such goal can be reached. Fortunately, recent studies show that as a result of revolutions occurring over the last several years, conditions now prevail which are more conducive than ever to the communication of the Islamic message. That process having been set in motion, individuals from different communities have begun embracing Islam in countries all over the world. Now, the need of the hour is for servants of God to arise and, by fully availing of new opportunities, play a decisive role in the last and most significant chapter of Islamic *da'wah*.

Da'wah is the real strength of Islam. It is through *da'wah* that Islam makes continuous progress. That is why, in every age, believers have seen fit to engage themselves in this task. Today, there are greater opportunities than hitherto to make Islamic *da'wah* a success. The communication of the message of God has certainly been going on in every age. But now modern circumstances have made it possible for this task to be performed with a greater degree of efficacy than ever before, and on a truly universal scale.

This has made it possible for the first time to fulfill the prediction of the word of God being brought into each and every home. They point the way to Islam gaining the position of an ideological super power on a universal scale. But there is one necessary condition

which is indispensable to the achievement of this goal. We shall have to adopt the same strategy in modern times as that adopted by the Prophet of Islam in the 19th year of his prophethood.

This historical strategy has come to be called the Hudaibiyya principle. This entails putting an end to the kind of controversies which create tensions between the *da'i* and the *mad'u*. Without a normal atmosphere, free of friction, no *da'wah* action can be set in motion. Today the same controversial situation has come to exist between *da'i* and *mad'u* as was found between the Prophet and his hearers after the emigration. We must, therefore, follow the same Hudaibiyya principle as the Prophet did. This is the demand of the times, and in this lies the secret of all Muslim success.

MAY 25

New Decision

Moradabad, an industrial township of Western UP, has a sizeable Muslim population. Recently, during a two-day visit to the town, an incident was brought to my notice which has a great lesson for us when we compare it to a similar incident back in August 13, 1990. That day, the city became the scene of a communal riot. On August 13, the day of the Id festival, Muslims had gathered at the Idgah to say their prayer, for which purpose they had spread some sheets on the grounds. After the prayers were over, the sermon began. It was at that point that a pig entered the Idgah (since Moradabad's Idgah is situated on the bank of a stream, pigs are to be found in the vicinity.) Thanks to this pig, some of the sheets were soiled, which, of course, enraged the Muslims. This incident subsequently assumed the proportions of a full-scale, Hindu-Muslim riot, resulting in great loss of lives and property. The city remained under curfew for a period of four months, as a result of which its export business was completely destroyed (the market was captured by countries like Taiwan). It took five years to re-establish it.

Now sixteen years after this incident, the same city of Moradabad witnessed another such incident, but with an entirely different reaction. March 4, 1996, was the day of the Holi festival. In a market in a locality where there are shops of both communities, a Hindu threw a bucketful of coloured water into a Muslim shop.

By the logic of the old Muslim mentality, this was a provocative act. But Muslim shopkeepers remained unprovoked. What they did was simply to down their shutters and go home. Then the floor of the shop which had been spoiled by the colour was reconstructed. Going by past happenings such an incident ought to have been enough to spark off a communal riot. Yet it passed off peacefully. No one was harmed, nor were the activities of the market disrupted.

This is no solitary incident. Such incidents are taking place everywhere. They tell us the changed mood of the Muslims. The same incidents which used to be provocative to Muslims no longer agitate them. They have learned the art of avoidance on such occasions. And this is indeed an extremely beneficial sign for the country as a whole.

After independence, Muslims in this country failed to make the desired progress. The only reason for this was the prevailing atmosphere of insecurity in which they continually found themselves. Being misled by their incompetent leaders and intellectuals, they had come to regard the country's administration as being prejudiced as far as Muslims were concerned. Since the Muslims saw that the administration was fulfilling their worst expectations, they began protesting against it, and when their protests and demands did not work they fell a prey to frustration.

But this thinking was erroneous in itself. For just like any other sphere, those of the police and administration have their limitations. They can function only where individuals are concerned. In the case of public issues, the police and administration find it impossible to transgress their limits.

Owing to the two-nation theory, and for several other reasons, Muslims and Hindus in this country have been divided psychologically into two combatant groups. Our incompetent leaders, through their continuous misguidance, have highly increased their sensitivity in this respect. That is why, whenever any friction arises between a

Hindu and a Muslim, it immediately escalates into a communal issue. It is this imbalanced state of affairs which has rendered the police and administration helpless. When friction between individuals or families remains restricted as such, this poses no difficulty for the police or the administration. They can deal with such matters quite successfully. But in a sensitive atmosphere where any such friction is blown out of all proportion and becomes a communal issue, it goes beyond the control of the police or the administration. This is the principle reason, despite all protests and complaints on the part of Muslims, for the failure of the administration to be really effective.

The happening at Moradabad as well as other such happenings show us that now Muslims have discovered that the solution to this problem lies in their own hands. That is, by adopting the way of patience and avoidance in all such controversial matters, they should nip the matter in the bud to prevent it from becoming magnified into a communal issue.

Controversial matters surface in every society. This happens due to the system of nature itself rather than because of any plot or conspiracy. That is why such happenings cannot be altogether prevented. But what is perfectly possible is for Muslims to refrain from allowing themselves to be provoked. In this way, the flicker will be extinguished in the first stage itself and, as we find from the incident during Holi in Moradabad, will no longer turn into a devastating problem for both the communities.

Peace is essential to progress. Since Muslims had always reacted to provocation, the atmosphere of peace was repeatedly disrupted, resulting in communal riots. As a result, it was impossible to engage in any constructive work which would promote their progress. Now the changed situation, providing a normal atmosphere, an atmosphere of peace, has made it possible for Muslims to engage themselves in such tasks as education and commerce, business, leading to their progress and uplift. During the last few years, while travelling in various regions of the country, I have found distinct changes in the attitude of the Muslims. By adopting the principle of avoidance, they are actively engaging themselves—and very rapidly—in constructive fields.

In this way, a new start has definitely been made by Indian Muslims and, undoubtedly, a proper beginning must lead on to a proper conclusion. It is certain that the Muslims will make rapid progress in this country, and their progress will contribute to the advancement of the country as a whole. Then the day will dawn when it will be felt expressly that Muslims are no liability in this country, rather an asset, being a creative instead of a stagnant part of the total population.

MAY 26

Social Responsibility and Media

An attempt towards the rectification of the rot that has set in the social and national life of the country is being made, with great enthusiasm, through judicial activism.

However judicial activism alone does not suffice for the rectification of this all-pervading malaise. What is urgently needed is the support of other social agencies/institutions. A very important role in this matter can be played by media activism, the topic under discussion today.

It is undoubtedly true that the position of media or journalism is not that of a mission but of a commercial industry.

The truth of the matter, however, is that our present journalism is used to presenting only half side of the picture. This is the root cause of all our problems. In view of the present circumstances media activism would amount to present a balanced reporting of the situation abandoning the present policy of selective reporting.

The principle of modern journalism can be understood from this saying:

When a dog bites a man it is no news, but when a man bites a dog, it is news.

One practical example of this method is provided by our present journalism which is constantly engaged in giving maximum coverage to any hot news created by an unruly section of Muslims. If the percentage of hot news forms only one percent the percentage of soft news is not less than 99 percent. But the reader of the newspapers are totally in the dark about this 99 percent of the picture. Whereas the one percent is being repeated again and again. Similarly if an extremist Hindu creates a hot news, this will find a place in all the newspapers the next day. Whereas even in the Hindu world there is 99 per cent soft news while hot news forms not more than one percent.

As a result of this one sided study unreal opinion is formed by both the communities regarding one another. Taking extreme forms this unreal opinion at times turns into communal riots. The selective reporting of this nature remains a permanent obstacle to the path of national integration.

For the rectification of this state of affairs a powerful journalists organization—as we already have formed for our rights—based on the principles of social responsibilities is required for the rectification of this state of affairs. Media Relations Forum is an organization which aims at working for this goal.

Along with this I should like to put forward a proposal for bringing about an atmosphere of support and cooperation between the newspapers and social workers. Whenever a rumour spreads or a group indulges in any activity which may lead to disrupting peace, social workers should immediately engage themselves in a thorough investigation of the matter and then through the full support of the newspapers the actual version is published in the newspapers. This is the only way to maintain peace and harmony in society.

MAY 27

Ingratitude for God's Blessings

Right from a glass of water to political power, everything that people possess in this world is from God. Everything is a direct blessing of God. Whatever one finds in this world is there because of the will of God. If God does not will it, no one can have anything, no matter how hard he tries for it. This is an undeniable truth proved by the Quran and the *Hadith*.

Another thing that we learn from the Quran and the *hadith* is that there are two forms of divine blessing. One special and the other general. Political power is a special blessing of God. We learn from the Quran that political power is not given to everyone. Neither can it be received through political movements or the gun culture. It is directly related with the way of God. One of the *sunnah* of God is that if a group proves, in the real sense of the word, to have true faith and to be virtuous in action, then God grants that group political power:

Allah has promised those of you who believe and do good works to make them masters in the land (24:55).

That is, even when power is desirable, the movement will begin from the point of character building and individual reform instead of political action.

Then God's general gift is what is shared, more or less by everyone. In principle, it consists of two kinds of things—peaceful circumstances and the easy availability of the necessities of life. This we learn from the following verse of the Quran:

God has made an example of the city which was once safe and peaceful. Its provisions used to come in abundance from every quarter: but its people denied the favours of Allah. Therefore, He afflicted them with famine and fear as a punishment for what they did. (16:112)

Two things in this verse are called the blessings of God: peace and provision. It shows that from the worldly point of view these two things are essential for human beings. If a group comes to possess these two things, then it should not wage war for anything else, such as political power. Rather considering those blessings to be sufficient, believers should engage themselves in thanksgiving to God, until God himself paves the way for whatever else is to come.

What is thanksgiving to God? It is that whatever God has given us should be put to proper religious and constructive use. Remaining content with what one already has is thanksgiving, whereas regarding what one already possesses as unimportant and launching stormy movements for things not in our possession is ungratefulness.

Muslims in possession of both peace and provision ought to occupy themselves with spiritual matters rather than political activities. Now is the time to engage themselves in producing spiritual fervour in their people; in launching movements of moral reform; in educating their people; in planning the way to communicate God's message to other communities; in spending their time in their places of worship, in developing their academic institutions, in setting up their settlements as a model abode of godly people, etc.

This is true thanksgiving. This is to pay the due of God's blessings. A non-believer's eyes are on his rights while a believer's eyes are on his responsibilities. That is why an unbeliever is always running for what he has yet to possess, while a believer always engages himself in discharging his responsibilities within his own sphere.

Those who do not follow the path of thankfulness, launch heated movements towards political goals or revive the gun culture against their supposed enemies. Such people are undoubtedly anarchists. Their case is one of adding insult to injury, even if their movement has been launched in the name of Islam.

For such people it is the decree of God that they never reach their political goal, and whatever blessings of peace and worldly provision they have already enjoyed be denied to them. They will lose what they already possess. This is the way of God.

MAY 28

Aspects for a Brighter Future

Indian Muslims, comprising so large a segment of the population that they can top the polls in any one of a hundred constituencies, are in a position to tip the political balance of the entire country.

Yet, paradoxically, it is the Muslim community, more than any other, which is suffering from political deprivation. Individually certain Muslims have managed, as a matter of chance, to secure an insignificant number of political posts, but the Muslim community as a whole enjoys no political pre-eminence on the national scene. Nor does it, at the international level, have any share in establishing political relations with Muslim countries. Even in so relatively small a country as Sri Lanka, the Muslim minority has greater political standing than its Indian counterpart.

It is common for Muslim writers and speakers to lay the blame for this at the door of the Hindus. But this view is entirely without foundation. In this world, by the very law laid down by God, gain and loss are not external but internal in their origins. Any explanation seeking to hold other responsible for our deprivation must be rejected *prima facie*, since it in no way accords with the law of nature.

If the truth be told, it is the incompetence of Muslim leaders which has given rise to this unfortunate situation. And Muslims, in actual fact, are now being made to pay for the crass ineptitude of leaders who launched movements based on shallow politics instead of creating among their followers a balanced political awareness—something for which there was a crying need.

If you go around any Indian city during the elections, you will find greater fervour for the elections in Muslim localities than in Hindu conclaves. This is a symbolic indication of the error which has led Muslims into their present state of political neglect. Misguided

by incompetent leaders, they have come to feel that in simply empathizing with the national election fever, they are making an adequate contribution to the political scenario. They have stopped short of understanding that taking a real part in politics means full participation in the political processes of the country.

Muslims may display great zeal for *sehri* (food taken before dawn during the fasting of Ramadan) and *iftar* (the breaking of a fast in the evening after fasting all day during Ramadan), and for sermonizing on loudspeakers during the month of Ramadan, but they cannot be credited with *taqwa* (piety) if throughout the year they have not lead pious lives. Similarly, the mere display of enthusiasm for election activities on a few specified days will not bring them any significant political position in the country. They must realize that, for this, they must engage themselves fully and unremittingly in constructive national activity.

From 1947 till today, I have attended innumerable meetings without coming across any notable Muslim gathering which had been convened specifically to discuss the problems of the Indian nation. National issues simply do not figure on Muslim agendas. At Muslim meetings, communal issues, or more often, communal grudges are the favorite subjects of discussion. It would seem that national issues are of no concern to Muslims. I have often found, moreover, that Muslim speakers, invited to Hindu gatherings, give vent even there to the grudges of the Muslim community against the Hindus. This makes it abundantly obvious that Muslims have in no way identified themselves with the political mainstream of the country.

Muslims need seriously to consider the necessity to make their community an integral factor in the political system. For a start, their mode of entry into it could be an indirect one. For instance, Muslims could launch the publication of such newspapers as would be read throughout the country; they could play an effective role in trade unions and other such institutions which have a considerable influence on politics. But there is no significant Muslim presence in these organizations. And Muslim newspapers, if they are worth the name, are little better than communal complaint bulletins, bearing no relation to national

journalism. So far as trade unionism is concerned, Muslims are barely aware of it as a concept. And so on.

Over the last fifty years, under the guidance of self-styled Muslim leaders, what Muslims have largely done in the name of political activity is vote the Congress. Yet, throughout this period they have never felt the need to become part of the administrative structure of the Congress Party. Now, frustrated with the Congress, they tread the path of negative voting. At present, any party claiming to oppose Congress policies can have the Muslim vote for the asking.

To my way of thinking, if Muslims want to have what is politically their due, they should first of all establish their own viability vis-à-vis mainstream politics. Only then will they be in a position to chalk out any real election programme and secure benefits which at the moment seem beyond their reach.

For this to become a reality, Muslims must develop a strong journalistic network which is decidedly national in character. This will establish the bona fides of their patriotism and provide an acceptable base from which to project a positive Muslim identity with a wholesome political stance. However, a brand of Muslim journalism which is genuinely national in character cannot come into existence simply by calling some publication a 'national newspaper' and placing it on the news stands. In order to launch and sustain such a venture, Muslims will be obliged to enter the field of industry. For, in the world of today, industry is the institution which 'feeds' the national press. So long as Muslims have no appreciable share in large scale industry, they will not bring into existence any journalism worth the name.

But it is not just the lack of their own nationwide press that helps to perpetuate the Muslims' political under-representation. Even journalistic opportunities in the existing national press are not availed of by them because of their own backwardness. Major national issues may be regularly thrashed out in the national dailies, but whenever there is a Muslim contribution, it may be taken for granted that it is about some narrow communal issue and takes the form of a demand or a protest. Letters and articles by Muslims (and I have seen this in several major national dailies), far from urging Muslim participation

in national political processes, are mere expressions of Muslim reactions against others in restricted local spheres.

Muslims need to be roused to a proper political awareness. They must be led to understand that politics, far from being just another name for reaction or negative voting, is actually the science and art of government. They must realize that inflicting defeat on one party in order to make another party victorious is only one aspect of politics. And it is nothing more than a kind of political somersault. If such somersaults have not improved the Muslims' situation in the past, they are even less likely to do so in the future.

Muslims will have to make their presence felt—in a positive sense—in the political environment of the country, they will have to participate actively in the ongoing political processes. And they will have to prove at the national level that such participation on their part is of vital significance. For instance they can provide an important link in establishing good relations between India and West Asian Muslim countries, and they can play a useful role in securing different kinds of contributions from Muslim countries to the Indian State, etc.

It is regrettable that present circumstances and current attitudes rule out hopes of any such activity. For instance, whenever our Muslim leaders, both religious and secular, visit Muslim or Arab countries, they present a negative picture of India, projecting it as an anti-Muslim country. Due to this unwise approach, it is not possible to secure the kind of contribution from Muslim countries which would significantly enhance the status of Indian Muslims. If Muslims, on the other hand, were to play a positive international role—which is certainly possible—they would see a sudden and radical improvement in their image throughout the country. No longer would they be regarded as liabilities, but as national and political assets. The day this happens will mark the beginning of a brighter future for Muslims all over India.

There is no doubt that India offers every possibility for the construction of a great political future for Muslims. But the secret of securing such a future lies not in the ability to make or break political parties at election time, but in the reform of the community at the

political level and in an increased political awareness. The secret, in fact, is not external to the Muslims but within them.

At present, everywhere among the educated classes of Muslims, discussions of the national Muslim agenda are going on. Meetings are being held. A whole spate of articles is appearing in the Hindi and English press. Books on the subject are being published. But nowhere do Muslims figure in their activities. They are almost entirely isolated from the whole issue.

The Muslim role in politics is the subject of much discussion and features regularly in the press. But the founding of a political party on the basis of a single community is more likely than not to exacerbate Muslim problems. The need of the hour is for Muslims to join national political parties and, by becoming part of their organizational structure, make themselves effective at the stage where political decisions are taken.

At present, Muslims in this country are viewed as a group with a grievance. Nowhere do they assume the stature of political entities, either in intellectual discussions or in practical activities. The best way for Muslims to resolve this identity crises would be to throw themselves wholeheartedly into the political processes of the country. I am certain that, in filling this great vacuum, they would become a political asset to the country—to the point where, one day, one of their numbers might ultimately become the nation's prime minister.

MAY 29

Superior Solutions

Thinking is an incomprehensibly strange art of our world. A number of books have appeared on this subject which, as well as adding to human knowledge, have increased our sense of wonder. Here are the titles of some of these books: *Towards a Theory of Thinking*, Dr. Rapaport (1951) *The Psychology of Thinking*, W.E. Vinacke (1952),

Thinking, F.C. Bartlett (1958), *Productive Thinking*, Max Wertheimer (1959).

The research on which these books are based has brought to light much new information on the brain. One fact which has emerged is that a very important process takes place within the human mind which the psychologist call ‘brain-storming’.

A process called brainstorming has been offered as a method of facilitating the production of new solutions to problems... These unrestricted suggestions increase the probability that at least some superior solutions will emerge. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 19/357)

Researchers tell us that when a human being is facing a crisis situation, latent capabilities are aroused which enable him to engage in this process of brainstorming. This in turn enables him to discover a superior solution to the problem facing him. Success then follows as surely as night follows day.

This is one of God’s great mysteries—how he has made our difficulties the ladders to our success.

MAY 30

Cooling the Fire

At a seminar on ‘Religion and Humanitarianism’ held under the auspices of the Zakir Husain Institute of Islamic Studies, at the Jamia Millia Islamia, in New Delhi in 1993, one of the speakers, Dr Bishambhar Nath Pandey, recalled how a Hindu procession, led by Swami Satya Dev through Bala Ghat in the Indian state of Madhya Pradeh in 1926, had been planned to provoke Muslims into rioting. The procession with beating drums and slogan shouting, was deliberately organized on a Friday. Ten thousand strong, it arrived in front of a mosque, exactly at prayer time, where it started to create an uproar.

Now Mr. Karamat Husain, a reputed political activist of the city, had gained prior knowledge of this plan. Before the arrival of the procession, he reached the mosque along with one hundred of his colleagues, each of whom he had provided with a garland. When the procession came to a halt in front of the mosque, he asked the other Muslims who had come there to pray to remain silent. Then, initiating a pre-preplanned move, he came out of the mosque with his colleagues and walked towards the procession. He neither told the procession to go by another route nor demanded that they stop shouting slogans. Instead, he said—"We welcome you!" And then he and his colleagues began garlanding the Hindus one by one. Now the entire atmosphere underwent a sea change. The processionists stopped forthwith. Those who had gathered there to cause a riot began embracing the Muslims. The atmosphere of enmity had been dispelled and had changed all at once into an atmosphere of amity.

Every man is a human being. He becomes an enemy—only temporarily—when he is provoked. When, with wise handling, his temper cools, he returns to the real nature he was born with. That same person, who had appeared in the guise of an enemy, will now become your friend.

MAY 31

After a Period of Eighty Two Years

In the science of light there is a law of nature called refraction. Today this is known as Snell's law, having been discovered initially by Willebrord Van Roijen Snell. He made his discovery in 1617, but this discovery remained unknown to people, lying unpublished, until a Dutch scientist, Christian Huygens, came to know of it and mentioned it in his research paper in 1703. Only then did the world come to know of Snell's discovery.

That is, Snell's scientific discovery remained hidden from the eyes of the world for a period of 82 years. It was only after this long period, when Christian Huygens highlighted it, that the world came to know of its importance.

The matter of the Hereafter too is somewhat similar. How many of God's servants are there who are sincerely engaged in virtuous activities, away from the limelight, unknown to people, unheralded in the press? How many God-fearing people are there whose inner selves are shaken with the fear of God, but whose undemonstrative expressions fail to show this inner tempest. There are God-fearing people who keep their mouths closed for fear of God, yet no other human being is aware of this virtuous act on the part of the true believer. How many pious souls are there who have had every opportunity to display their ego and torment others, but who have been halted in their tracks by the fear of God's chastisement.

There are many true believers whose good actions have been lost in the wilderness, recognized neither by near ones nor by more distant people. But this state of affairs will not last forever. On Doomsday God will unravel all veils. Then all things hidden from view will appear as clear as daylight. This will be the Day of Judgement when no action done in the world will remain hidden. Even a tiny good deed done in the world will appear as plain as daylight, and all virtuous men will be rewarded for their good deeds, whatsoever they may have been.

JUNE 1

Means of Communication

The telephone is one of the wondrous blessings of God. This wondrous invention converts spoken words into electrical waves, transmits them along a line and reconverts them into sound so true that there is often no need to ask who is at the other end.

Through the telephone it has become possible to contact people living in any part of the world. For instance, if you are in India and you want to speak to the President of the United States in Washington or the Queen of Britain in London, you have only to press the buttons of the following digits:

00-1-202-456-1414

00-44-1-930-4832

and you will immediately be connected with the office of the person concerned.

The first telephone was installed in the office of Charles Williams in Massachusetts on April 4, 1877. Today such telephones are installed in millions of homes all over the world. John Brooks in his book, 'Telephone: The First Hundred Years,' writes: "Man, instead of making himself heard a few hundred yards away with a shout, can make himself heard around the world with a whisper."

Telephones and all other such means of communication are blessings of God. They are there to be used for the communication of His message. But such blessings are used to the maximum for all purposes other than the communication of the divine message. What a strange example of the misuse of God's blessings!

JUNE 2

Waste of Opportunities

After India had been divided on the basis of the two-nation theory, a Muslim majority dominated the newly created Pakistan, majoritism becoming the rule in all the important spheres of Pakistani life.

This created problems for the Hindu minority, for it became almost impossible for them to live there if they wanted to maintain a high Hindu profile. But the Pakistani Hindus did not opt for the way of reaction. Instead, they made themselves completely inconspicuous, restricting their Hinduism entirely to their homes, and concentrating on the fields of commerce and education. In this way they silently engaged themselves in positive pursuits for a period of thirty years. Consequently, they have achieved a satisfactory social equilibrium in Pakistan. There, majoritism poses no real threat to them.

But the Indian scene is totally different. The Indian leaders, Gandhi and Nehru and others, did not attempt to emulate Pakistan on the score of majoritism. Instead, they established a secular system in the divided India. This system offered to Muslims those very opportunities which were not available to the Hindus in Pakistan. Where majoritism in Pakistan had separated the Hindus from the mainstream, the secular system in India afforded Muslims every opportunity to join the national life as equal members with the same status as the majority.

The introduction of the secular system did not, of course, mean that life in India was necessarily ideal. As part of a world which is a testing ground for everything and everyone, no system will be found flawless. Realising this, Muslim leaders played a most foolish part. Instead of emphasizing the favourable aspects of secularism and playing down its unfavourable aspects, they chose to highlight

whatever they found of a negative nature. They laid stress, not on opportunities, but on drawbacks. In this way, they seriously hindered the assimilation of Muslims into the Indian mainstream.

As a result, the Indian Muslims have fallen prey to frustration and irritation. Fifty years have been wasted. Had Muslims lived here as they live abroad, all their problems would have been satisfactorily solved by now.

JUNE 3

Dare to Take Risks

Walter Wriston, former chairman of Citicorp, once observed, “Failure is not a crime. Failure to learn from failure is.” When Jim Burke became the head of a new products division at Johnson & Johnson, one of his first projects was the development of a children’s chest rub. The product failed miserably, and Burke expected that he would be fired. When he was called in to see the chairman of the board, however, he had a surprising reception. “Are you the one who just cost us all that money?” asked Robert Wood Johnson. “Well, I just want to congratulate you. If you are making mistakes, that means you are taking risks, and we won’t grow unless you take risks.”

One of the ever-present features of our present world is that no one knows for certain what factors will be conducive to the success of any venture. Given our human limitations, the only possible course is to take the initiative in spite of being unable to forecast the result. This is the risk factor.

No doubt there are apprehensions about taking risks. But in the present world nothing can be achieved without a certain amount of daring. As the proverb says, no risk no gain.

JUNE 4

Devotion to the Quran

Imam Shafi'i (150-204 A.H.), founder of one of the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence, enjoys a superior position not only in religious scholarship, but also as a pious and God-fearing man. According to Imam Ahmad ibn Hambal, founder of the Hambali school of jurisprudence, there was "no other person whose bond with Islam was as strong as that of Imam Shafi'i."

He was hardly ten years old when he committed the whole of the Quran to memory. A full recitation would take him three days. So steeped was he in the Quran that he could invariably trace all matters of religious import to the relevant verses.

All the jurists of his day were in agreement that the consensus of the ummah (community) must be regarded as *hujjat* (the final authority). Anxious to establish consensus as an absolute source of Islamic law, Imam Shafi'i began reciting the Quran over and over again in order to identify a verse which would support this argument.

It is said that in his scrupulousness, he recited the entire Quran 301 times. Ultimately he was successful in discovering the portion of the scriptures which upheld consensus as *hujjah* (final authority). This happened one day when he was reciting the Quran. When he reached verse no. 115 in the fourth chapter, it was suddenly revealed to him that this verse sanctioned the *ijmah* (the unanimous consent of learned doctors) as a basic source of Islamic law. The verse reads:

He that disobeys the Apostle after Our guidance has been revealed to him and follows a path other than that of the faithful, shall be given what he has chosen. We will cast him into Hell, a dismal end (4:115).

Imam Shafi'i concluded that the phrase 'path of the faithful' in this verse corresponded with the *ijmah* of the believers. The believers

of the first phase attempted to find in the Quran the answer to every problem that arose, even if they had to go through it a hundred times. They did not rest content until they had discovered the relevant Quranic injunction. But, nowadays, the Quran is resorted to only for recitation and blessings.

JUNE 5

A Page of History

Muslim rule in Spain lasted for about eight hundred years, ending in 1492. Even at the time of their political decline, the Muslims were in all respects far ahead of their Spanish Christian subjects. Yet the Christians ultimately gained the upper hand. The main reason for this was Muslim disunity in the face of Christian unity. While the Christians had greatly increased their strength by uniting themselves, the Muslims had allowed themselves to be considerably weakened by ever increasing differences.

Even during the heyday of Muslim rule, a comparatively small area of Spain remained in the political possession of the Christians. Using this territory as their political centre, the Christians continued to engage in activities against Muslim rule by taking advantage of Muslims' internal differences. During the latter days of Muslim rule, the Christians considerably expanded their territory, and the Muslims were left with only Granada.

Abul Hasan, one of the leading Muslims of the last days, received a demand from Ferdinand II that he pay tribute to him. Abul Hasan being a brave king, wrote back to Ferdinand: "These days the mint of Granada is turning out not gold coins but iron swords to sever the necks of Christians." Afterwards many armed clashes took place between the two forces. Finally at Losha, in 887, Ferdinand's army was routed in a heavy encounter with the army of Sultan Abul Hasan.

Ferdinand then began to re-deploy his forces. At that time, there were two Christian kingdoms in Spain, one at Aragon under Ferdinand, and another at Castile ruled by Queen Isabella I. Ferdinand showed great foresight in persuading Isabella to marry him. Through this marriage in 1469, a greater Christian kingdom came into being.

While on the one hand, this event of alliance took place in the Christian world, on the other, in Muslim Spain, Sultan Abul Hasan's own son, Abu Abdullah Mohammad, revolted against him capturing a part of Granada. Sultan Abul Hasan was now left to rule a territory of just four thousand square meters, whereas, by means of a marital alliance, Ferdinand had expanded his empire to 1,25,000 square meters. All these events proved so shocking to Sultan Abul Hasan, that he had an attack of paralysis after which he lost his sight.

After this series of tragic incidents, Sultan Abul Hasan abdicated the throne, appointing his brother Abu Abdullah Zughal in his place. However, a plot was soon hatched to remove him from the throne. With his removal Abu Abdullah Mohammad came to be the sole ruler of Granada. But he was not the equal of his father in wisdom and, in just a few encounters, he was defeated by the Christian forces.

In the last stage, the Christian forces surrounded the fort of Granada. Abdullah, who was bold enough in his encounters with his father and uncle, proved a coward in encounters with Christian forces. Finally, he signed the papers of his abdication from Granada and its fort on January 3, 1492. These were countersigned by the victor, Ferdinand.

Recording this happening in Spain a historian writes: "The last ruler of Granada, Sultan Abul Hasan, defeated Ferdinand II (1492-1516) and Queen Isabella, but his own son, Abu Abdullah led a coup against his father which resulted in the downfall of his father."

Internal unity is the greatest strength in this world, just as the disunity is the greatest weakness. Undoubtedly, this is the greatest lesson of history.

JUNE 6

Ducking Below the Waves

Two young friends, both good swimmers, once went swimming off the coast of Madras. The day was pleasant, the sea calm, and sometimes skimming along the surface, sometimes plunging below, they had soon left the shore far behind. Then, quite without warning, they found themselves struggling against enormous waves which bore down on them with tremendous force. One of the young men struck out strongly against the waves, battling his way to the shore. But try as he might, he could not make the distance to the beach and he was drowned. The waves had proved stronger than he. His friend also struck out in the same way, but soon realized his efforts would be futile. Luckily, he remembered that the force of the waves was felt more on the surface and much less underneath, so he immediately plunged, kicking and struggling, to a depth where he was no longer buffeted about. Now he began literally to swim for his life, his lungs bursting and his muscles aching. By straining every fibre of his being, he managed to reach the shallows, where he was picked up unconscious by some sailors. They brought him safely to dry land, where he was taken to hospital. He was given emergency treatment and soon recovered. It had certainly been lucky for him that there had been a boat in the vicinity to haul him out, and that he could have immediate medical attention. But what had really saved his life was his change of tactics when he realized that the waves were going to be too powerful for him.

Both the young men had struggled valiantly to survive, but it was the one who had not depended only on physical strength but also on his intelligence who lived to tell the tale. He had understood almost immediately that a confrontation of his own human strength with the enormous powers of nature would be inane and futile.

This is a principle which might well be applied to the whole spectrum of human activity, for confrontation seldom brings us anything positive. When a typhoon approaches, even the fishes dive deep.

JUNE 7

Action, Not Reaction

Several years ago, IBM, the famous American Computer Company, was already so far ahead in the field of computers that its officers, making fun of Japanese computer companies, had quipped: ‘When IBM sneezes, Japanese computer makers are blown away.’

Japanese industrialists, however, did not express any anger at this provocative assessment of their worth. They rather devoted themselves to upgrading the standard of their computers, until a time came when Japan had achieved the topmost rank in the world in computer industry. Today Fujitsu, a Japanese computer company, said its largest new computer could perform up to 600 million instructions per second (MIPS), compared with as many as 210 MIPS for IBM’s best. (Time Magazine, September 17, 1990)

Reacting to provocation brings nothing but negative results, whereas ignoring provocation leaves the way clear to embark on planned construction and consolidation. It is the law of this world that those who act make progress, while those who react are doomed to failure. This applies particularly to the behaviour of Muslims at the present time. For example, if a Hindu says anything against Muslims, all our so-called Muslim leaders and journalists will start protesting that Muslims’ sentiments are being hurt and that the administration, being unconcerned, has failed to discharge its duties. The Muslim public will then allow itself to be provoked into launching an agitation. What else can this result in but communal rioting? There is nothing more calculated and a disservice to the Muslim community than this,

for the final outcome will simply be that Muslims are left further behind than ever.

JUNE 8

Breaking the Tradition

Describing the evil of murder, the Quran has this to say: “Whoever killed one human being,... should be looked upon as though he had killed all mankind; and whoever saved a human life should be regarded as though he had saved all mankind.” (5:32) This has been expressly stated in the scripture because, when a man commits a crime of this nature, he breaks the tradition of respect for life. This tradition in society serves as a kind of psychological check against one man making a murderous assault on another. Once this check is removed, there is no barrier left in the way of indulging in such criminal activities. People become emboldened when such a precedent is set by a wrongdoer. That is how the murder of one man opens the door to more murders.

In order to understand the full implications of this point, let us take some examples from Muslim Spain. Towards the end of the Muslim rule in Spain, the Muslims, weakened by infighting, had divided themselves into different states, which fell, one after another. Later they established a kingdom in Granada under the rule of Sultan Naser bin Yousuf, better known as Ibn al-Ahmar (It was this king who built the famous palace known as Al-Hamra palace in Granada). Now the most dreadful part of this history is that the third ruler of Granada was put to death by his brother, Naser bin Muhammad in AH 710, as a matter of political rivalry. This killing broke the tradition of respect for life in the royal palace, throwing open the floodgates of murder in high places. Sultan Abdul Walid was subsequently killed by his own nephew in 725 Hijrah. Sultan Ahmad followed him to the throne, but was killed by a relative in AH 733. His successor, Sultan Yousuf,

the ruler of Granada, was speared to death in AH 755. The next ruler, Sultan Ismail was killed by his own brother in AH 761.

In short, this chain of killing continued till 1492 AD when the state of Granada itself was eliminated. Safeguarding tradition is safeguarding humanity. The breaking of tradition could mean the end of humanity.

JUNE 9

The Blessings of Paradise

Ukaydar ibn Abdul Malik Al-Kindi (d. 12 AH) was a Christian ruler of Daumat-ul Jandal. During Tabuk campaign, when the Prophet was camping near his State, this ruler visited him and embraced Islam. However, after the death of the Prophet he recanted. Later he was killed in a battle led by Khalid ibn Walid during the reign of the first Caliph, Abu Bakr.

It is recorded in history books that when Ukaydar came to see the Prophet, he was dressed in royal apparel. Anas ibn Malik, a companion of the Prophet, says: "I saw Ukaydar's long gown when he came to the Prophet. Muslims began to touch his qaba in wonder." Then the Prophet said: "Are you wonderstruck at his apparel? By God, there is no doubt about it that even the handkerchiefs of Saad Ibn Muadh will be of better quality than these clothes." (*Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah*, Vol. 17/5)

Just as the Prophethood of the Prophet of Islam is for all time, so are his words. These words of his do not refer just to that particular ruler belonging to the first century of Hijrah, but to all the worldly things whose apparent glitter makes people envy them.

The truth is that all the worldly things which appear very pleasing and attractive to people cannot compare with splendours of paradise, which will give them far greater pleasure and comfort. Only in paradise will man understand that what he had failed to find in

the world he left behind, was of no significance. And that what he has found in paradise is far superior to all the mere things of this world.

JUNE 10

God's Guarantee

Whenver any prophet has endeavoured to propagate God's religion, he has had to suffer attempts by his own people to harm him. This happened even to the Prophet of Islam. When he invited his people to believe in the one God, they turned on him and became his enemies. In Makkah he suffered at their hands along with his companions, and, even in Madinah, stiff opposition continued. However, God gave him His reassurance in the following verse of the Quran: "Apostle, proclaim what is revealed to you by your Lord, if you do not, you will not have conveyed His message. God will protect you from all men. He does not guide the unbelievers." (5:67)

Calling people to Islam is a divine mission, and is carried out to fulfill the divine scheme. (4:165) It is, therefore, natural that God should assist in this endeavour. It is such a difficult task that not receiving divine help would be more surprising than receiving it.

The responsibility for carrying on the work of *dawah* after the Prophet, rests with the Muslims. It is as his followers that they shall have to carry on what he accomplished in his lifetime (22:78). With this extension of responsibility, it is only proper that there should be an extension of their rights also. God has, therefore, said in the Quran that all those who follow the Prophet in this regard will be protected by Him from their enemies.

"O Prophet, God is sufficient for you and the faithful who follow you" (8:64). Two interpretations have been placed on this verse. The second is that God is sufficient for you and for those who have obeyed you (*Al-Tafsir Al-Mazhari*, 4:110). Such support for the faithful has been variously described in different parts of the Quran.

JUNE 11

The Fear of God

Plato (428-348 BC) is regarded as one of the three great philosophers of ancient Greece, the other two being Socrates and Aristotle. The book for which Plato is best remembered, titled the 'Republic' and written in the form of a dialogue, is on the subject of the Ideal State. In Plato's view, "Unless philosophers bear kingly rule... or those who are now called kings and princes become genuine and adequate philosophers, there will be no respite from evil."

Throughout the ages, many individuals, who have come to be known as philosopher-kings (or queens) have assumed power, e.g. the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius, the Russian Queen Catherine II, King Frederick II of Prussia, the Macedonian King Demetrius and the contemporary ruler of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew. But none has measured up to the standard of the good ruler as presented by Plato.

There were certain pupils of the Greek philosophers who attained to kingship. For example, Alexander the Great was taught by Aristotle, and Demetrius was trained in Aristotle's school of thought. Yet these philosopher-rulers were no better than others. As Peter Green puts it: "What happened was, nothing happened... Power, it appeared, could corrupt even philosophers." (*Times Magazine*, May 13, 1991)

According to Karl Marx's theory, the root of all evil was the economic system based on ownership, according to which those who were owners exploited those who were not, in very much the same way as a despot would oppress his subjects. It was thought that if the system of individual ownership were to be replaced by that of collective ownership, all kinds of oppression and exploitation could be uprooted. There would then be neither the owner or the owned, and no group or individual would be able to exploit any other group or individual.

These ideas led to the marxist revolution in Russia in 1917, whereupon the system of state-ownership was introduced by force. However, as events unfolded, it became apparent that in the guise of the no-ownership system, this had become the most tyrannical regime in modern history, the rulers proving to be the most oppressive and dictatorial ever witnessed. Instead of collective ownership improving the lot of the underprivileged, it only encouraged further oppression and coerciveness on the part of the rulers.

Similarly, in the second half of the twentieth century, colonialism was branded as an evil, and independence movements were launched against it on a massive scale. The moving spirits behind these movements held that foreign rule was the cause of all evils, not the least being oppression, and that if it could be replaced by home rule, oppression would die a natural death. These movements for national freedom eventually proved a resounding success and in all the newly freed former colonies, Government posts were promptly secured by the sons of the soil. But oppression and evil did not disappear. Hence rulers continued to be tyrants. Power had only changed hands.

God's religion, Islam, tells us that all such claims made for improved temporal systems are without foundation; the only factor that can effect true reform is the fear of God. Nothing else can hold a man in power to the observance of proper standards of truth and justice.

The best historical illustration of this theory is the conduct of the Prophet's companions. They wielded power, but they remained untarnished by the corruption rampant among the rulers who came before and after them. Their probity was unparalleled; as such it was a living proof of the Islamic claim that only the fear of God will right the wrongs of this world.

JUNE 12

Looking to the Future

In the early stages of modern civilization the Arabs made a considerable contribution to practical science. For instance, as early as the seventh century, the Arabs made usable watches. In his Discovery of India, Jawaharlal Nehru mentions that 'Damascus had a famous clock and so did the Baghdad of Harun al-Rashid's day' (p.261).

Although the manufacture of watches was first engaged in by Muslims, the progress and development of this industry took place entirely in Europe. Ironically, millions of dollars are being sent today by Muslims to the western world for the purchase of watches.

The same is the case with many other modern industrial enterprises. They were given their first impetus by the Muslims, but were subsequently developed by the West, because the Muslims had become so embroiled in internecine strife that they could not give their full attention to industrial progress. The West thus came to dominate the industrial scene throughout the entire world.

There are many Muslims who take a pride in their past. But there is no one to encourage them to engage themselves in the tasks in which they formerly excelled. Simply taking pride in the past can never be a substitute for taking effective action in the present.

Before the invention of the steamship, Muslims were masters of navigation. In the words of a historian, they had converted the Mediterranean into an Arab lake. But today, in the age of the steamship, the Muslims have no shipping company. For them, this has become an age of decline and decadence, the reason being that Muslims have lost the ability to learn new things or to embark on original investigation.

Remaining sedulously attached to what is old has come to be regarded by Muslims as religiosity, while associating with anything

modern is tantamount to apostasy. So far as matters of religious beliefs, forms of worship, moral values are concerned, we have undoubtedly to look back. But so far as the affairs of the world are concerned, we have to look forward. Muslims have never been able to understand how essential this is and that is why they have become a backward community in this modern age.

JUNE 13

Glad Tidings

Ibn Ishaq, the Prophet's biographer, writes that when the Prophet began to communicate the message of Islam to Makkans publicly, he had to face stiff opposition and hardship.

His wife, Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, converted to the new faith without a moment's hesitation. Thus apart from being the partner of his life, she now became a partner in his suffering, for the Prophet's adversaries found many ways of torturing them, not the least of which was to assemble before their house and create an uproar.

It was under these circumstances that one day the Angel Gabriel came to their house and asked the Messenger of God to convey to Khadijah greetings from her Lord. Then Gabriel told the Prophet that he had been ordained by God to give glad tidings to Khadijah about a house made of pearls (in heaven) where there was neither 'din' nor suffering.

These were glad tidings for Khadijah in particular and a lesson for the believers in general. It was news of success for the believers.

In this world the faithful have to suffer at the hands of the arrogant. They have to live under great provocation. In a situation like this the faithful are ill-advised to quarrel with them. They should ignore the provocation, and turn their attention towards the Hereafter. They should pray, 'O Lord, grant us the patience to face the unpleasantness. Build us a house in Paradise where there is neither clamour nor suffering.'

When a believer calls upon worshippers of heroes and religious personalities to stop revering mere mortals and, instead, to give their love and worship to God and God alone—for only He is deserving of such love and worship—they become enraged with him and oppose him with all their might. When he calls upon his fellow-men to act purely to please God, they become antagonized and start harassing him. Yet, in the face of such hostility, he remains patient, for he has God’s promise of a heavenly abode in the Hereafter, which will be completely free from tumult and affliction. It will be a place where he can live in spiritual bliss for ever after.

JUNE 14

Forgetting the Differences

When Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985 in the USSR, he began to reorganize the structure of the communist party in order to bring in people of his own persuasion. Gorbachev was particularly afraid of the imposing personality of Boris Yeltsin, a member of the Politburo. However, the latter finally resigned in 1987 from the top party post after a row with Gorbachev and other Politburo colleagues.

It was against this backdrop that, when Yeltsin stood for the presidency of Russia in 1989, Gorbachev opposed him by proposing another candidate for the post. However, despite his opposition, Yeltsin won the elections, becoming the president of Russia.

Encouraged by the differences between the two leaders, the extremist group in the Russian communist party revolted against Gorbachev, managing to overthrow the government at the Kremlin on August 19, 1991. They believed that they could put an end to Gorbachev by exploiting the differences between the two leaders. But the very reverse happened as subsequent events showed. Yeltsin, having put aside all his differences with Gorbachev, exercised all his power

and all his capabilities to organise the public against the coup leaders, putting even his own life at grave danger. Under his leadership, the Russian public gathered in such huge numbers in Moscow that the coup leaders were forced to flee. Gorbachev was brought back from Crimea and reinstated as President. It is generally recognised that the credit for Gorbachev remaining alive and returning to the office of president again goes to Yeltsin.

The greatest mark of a lofty nature is the ability to set aside the grievances and differences in order to support another, whereas a man of baser metal would do the very opposite.

JUNE 15

The Wise Men

But let those rejoice who keep off from idol-worship and turn to God in repentance. Give good news to My servants, who listen to My Word and follow what is best in it. These are they whom God has guided. These are they who are endowed with understanding. (39:17-18)

The above verse advises us to put the best interpretation upon any saying which is meant for our guidance, and not always to be on the lookout for errors or loopholes. All such sayings, whether spoken or written—even those revealed by God—have to be expressed in words. Now human language has certain limitations. It is not always as unambiguous as we would like it to be. That inevitably leaves room for misinterpretation, particularly if one does not give one's full attention to what is being said. It is only the man who really fears God who gives his full concentration to such sayings and who therefore construes them in their best sense. This serious, cautious approach is a direct result of reverence for the Almighty.

Those who give only half their attention to such sayings and then try to discover bad connotations in them are surely the followers of

Satan; they will be punished by God in the Hereafter. On the contrary, those who pay full attention when good advice is addressed to them, and who put the best construction on it, are genuine seekers after truth. Such people will be amply rewarded by God.

One who places the worst interpretation on another's words is severely limited in understanding. One who places the best interpretation on another's words is blessed with a fine understanding, and, in the Hereafter, will inhabit the gardens of Paradise.

JUNE 16

War, Peace

Writing about the Gulf war of 1991, I wrote in my diary on Feb. 2, 1991, as follows: No matter which side earns the laurels of victory, the misery of the common man will only increase immeasurably. The impact will be felt even by the victor.

A month after writing this, this did become a reality after the end of the war. The war ended but the problems remained. Time magazine (April 15, 1991), giving a detailed report, tells us that after the victory in the Gulf war, the USA and its allies are confronting a new dilemma. (p.18)

Time magazine has published a few readers' letters in response to this article in its May 6, 1991 publication. An American reader writes: 'It looks like Bush has won the battle and lost the war in the Gulf.' (Lloyd Ringuist, Marshfield, Wisconsin)

War can only bring about destruction. It cannot produce construction. War can be won on the battlefield, but it cannot bring happiness in real life outside the battlefield. In spite of this fact, people rush into waging war because it appears to be such a great thing, whereas, in reality, peace is the great thing, and war is an abomination. If people were to realize this truth, they would rush towards peaceful construction. The battlefield would be devoid of

fighters. War is always bracketed with heroism. Yet war does not yield any positive results. Peace appears to be zeroism, but all the best achievements are inevitably arrived at by peaceful means.

JUNE 17

The Quest for Knowledge

According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam once remarked: “The remedy for ignorance is asking questions.” If the ignorant man does not inquire, his ignorance will stay with him. But if he has a questioning mind, some knowledgeable person will answer him, and he will no longer remain ignorant.

There is a saying in Arabic to the same effect: To know that you do not know is half knowledge itself. If an ignorant person is not aware of his ignorance, he will continue to remain in the same state. But when he becomes aware of his ignorance, he sets about seeking for knowledge. He will try to turn his ignorance into knowledge. In this way his awareness of his ignorance will become the stepping stone leading towards full knowledge.

This is called, in present-day parlance, the spirit of inquiry, and is given great importance. It is this spirit of inquiry which has played the greatest role in bringing about the age of science. It is the zeal to discover which has led man to knowledge.

In ancient times the phenomena of nature were considered to be manifestations of God. The sight of the manifestations of nature, therefore, aroused in man the spirit of worship. It was only when these natural phenomena were divested of their divinity that the spirit of inquiry could be aroused in man. As a result, many of the mysteries of nature now lie unravelled.

An inquisitive mind is a sine qua non for the acquisition of knowledge. Only those who are possessed of this quality will achieve great success in intellectual and academic fields. Those devoid of this

spirit will remain static, and will fail to climb to the top of the ladder of success.

It is this spirit which is the foundation of all scientific progress.

JUNE 18

Humans, or Animals?

Gandhiji started his campaign of service to his countrymen in the city of Ahmedabad. It is one of history's great ironies that as this centenary was being celebrated all over the country in 1969, that very same city became the scene of communal riots.

Shree Bishambhar Nath Pandey, an MP and an eminent historian, commented on these shocking events in an article entitled, 'Traditions of National Integration in India' (published in the Journal of the Khuda Bakhsh Library, Patna, and read out in Lucknow on the occasion of the Fakhruddin Ali Ahmad Memorial Lecture in 1986):

In 1969 this state was not under central rule, but under the rule of the regional party. Miscreants went on the rampage, looting and burning shops and houses, killing innocent people. It seemed as if this city, long associated with Gandhi's selfless devotion, had bade good-bye to humanity. The then Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, said to me, "Many delegates have gone to the city to bring reports, but I am not satisfied with their report. I would like you to visit the city and see for yourself whether humanity still survives there in the midst of animality."

I left for Ahmedabad and stayed there for about one month. I visited hospitals to see the injured. I consoled people who told me heart-rending tales of destruction of their property. About six thousand houses had been burnt. According to the government report 350 people, (but according to the military intelligence about 2000 people) had lost their lives in this communal riot. The majority of the casualties belonged to the minority community. One day I

was patrolling past Memobai Chal, and about 150 people gathered around me as I reached there. All the houses of that locality had been burnt to ashes. From some of them smoke was still coming out. I asked them, "Brothers, did all the homes belong to Muslims?" A person aged about 40-45 said, "No, there were 35 Muslim houses and 120 Hindu houses in this Chal." Then I asked him his name. He told me that his name was Kalyan Singh. Then I asked again: "Does that mean that first a Muslim mob came here and burned all the Hindu houses and then a Hindu mob came here and burnt all the Muslim houses?" He said, "No, only a mob of Hindus had come here." Then I was all the more astonished, "Then does that mean the Hindus had burnt Hindu homes?" Kalyan Singh replied in the affirmative. Then I asked which was his house. He pointed to his house, which was still smouldering. He told me also that this was his shop as well as his house. "I used to make tyres for motors and cycles. That is why it is still smouldering." Then I asked him, "Kalyan Singh, what would have been its cost?" He replied, "The house was valued about one lakh and the shop too." My astonishment went on increasing. "Then why on earth did the Hindus burn the Hindu houses?"

Kalyan Singh said, "The mob came and asked us to tell them which houses belonged to Hindus and which belonged to Muslims, as they wanted to burn only Muslim houses. We refused to comply. They got enraged. They inquired from others. Others too refused to do so. Then they shouted, 'Then we will burn all the houses!' We replied, 'Do as you want.' Then they sprinkled petrol on the houses and set all of them on fire. Only when the fire had engulfed all the houses did they leave the place.'

I asked, "Kalyan Singh, why did you allow your two-lakh worth of property to be burnt to ashes? Perhaps it was your lifetime's savings? Why did you not tell them you were a Hindu."

Kalyan Singh introduced me to some Muslims standing there saying, "We are both from the same village in Sikar, Rajasthan. First we Hindus came here and settled and did good business. Then we invited our Muslim neighbours to follow us and earn their livelihood in the city. They trusted us and followed us. They were good craftsmen. Soon they succeeded in their business and established their shops and

houses. Now, those who have been our acquaintances for hundreds of years, who belong to the same village, who came here on trust, whom we call uncle, how could we allow their houses to be burnt? How could we have shown our faces to the Lord above?"

I was so moved, I could not control myself. I said, "Kalyan Singh so long as people like you survive in India, no one can shake the foundations of mutual love and unity in this country."

Human Nature

Whatever Kalyan Singh did was at the dictates of his own nature. Everyone is born with an upright nature, and everyone is initially under its influence. But when a man is provoked, the uprightness of his nature is then submerged and his animal instincts come to the surface. That is why all incidents of barbarism take place only when man has been constrained by provocation to deviate from his inborn nature.

So long as you avoid provoking the other person, he remains a human being. But no sooner do you provoke him than that very same person will descend to the level of animals. Now his nature has been derailed. A train that derails will not only destroy itself, but will cause destruction to others as well.

Awaken human nature in others. Let the animal nature remain dormant. This is the only certain formula for a harmonious social existence.

JUNE 19

A Matter of Wisdom

The Prophet Ayyub (Job) described in the Quran in brief, and in the Bible in detail, was born several hundred years before Jesus Christ in the plains stretching from Syria to Palestine. In the Bible, his place of birth is called Uz.

According to the Bible he possessed seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred she-asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east.

After some time, such misfortunes befell him as left him impoverished yet Job was the epitome of patience. In the words of the Bible, "...Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped. And said, 'Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return to thither: the Lord gave, and Lord hath taken; blessed be the name of the Lord'." (Job 1:20-21)

Then again the circumstances changed after some years. Job again came to possess all kinds of wealth and resources, even more than he had before. According to Bible, "The Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand she-asses." (Job 42:12)

The Quran ended the tale with "We restored to him his people and as many more with them: a blessing from Ourselves and an admonition to prudent men." (38:43)

Although given very brief mention in the Quran, this incident makes the very important and lesson-giving point that one should never despair when afflicted by misfortune or loss in life. God, being All-merciful, has devised the system of this world in such a way that here no loss or deprivation is final. Here, one can always overcome one's misfortunes and be the gainer once again, provided one remains patient and perseveres in one's struggles, never losing hope of God's succour.

JUNE 20

The Recognition of Truth

When the Prophet first brought God's message to the people, there were many who opposed him. He told them the truth, but they said, "It is witchcraft." They also asked, "Why was this Quran not revealed to some great man of the two towns?" (43:31) God answered them thus: Is it they who apportion your Lord's blessings? It is We Who apportion to them their livelihoods in this world, exalting some in rank above others, so that the one may take the other into his service. Better is your Lord's mercy than all their hoarded treasures. (43:31-32)

The "two towns," Makkah and Taif, were central cities in ancient Arabia, where certain citizens like Walid ibn Mughirah and Utbah ibn Rabia in Makkah and Urwah ibn Masood and Ibn Abd Yalayl in Taif, enjoyed the status of acknowledged leaders (*akabirs*). They were held in high esteem and were looked up to by the people for guidance. That is why when "Muhammad ibn Abdullah" claimed to be the Prophet, people failed to understand how that could be possible, when he was not one of the acknowledged leaders.

The truth is generally accepted when projected as such by some established and influential personality. But acknowledgement of the truth—and here is the greatest test for man—is valid only when the truth recommends itself by virtue of its own merit; when it is perceptible as such without the say-so of men of fame and status.

To be able to perceive the truth for what it is one of the most important tests set for man by his Maker. That is why this ever-recurring test will confront man till Judgement Day itself: Those who consistently measure up to it will succeed: Those who do not will fail.

To accept the truth on the basis of its visible grandeur is to judge by mere externals. Such an acknowledgement is valueless in the eyes

of God. The true believer is one who accepts God's reality before any visible signs appear to support it.

This world is a world of trial, in which God appears only to those who have the ability to penetrate the divine disguise.

JUNE 21

Savouring One's Faith

Imam Muslim bin Al-Hajjaj, the compiler of the collection of the Traditions known as the *Sahih Muslim* was born at Naishapur, AH 204 and died AH 261. His book of traditions ranks as second in authority to the *Sahih Bukhari*.

One tradition has been recorded by him in the chapter called, *Kitab al-Iman*. The *hadith* is as follows:

Abbas ibn Abd Al-Muttalib heard the messenger of God say: "The essence of faith is savoured by the man who has agreed to accept Allah as his Lord, Islam as his religion and Muhammad, may peace be upon him, as the Messenger of Allah."

Faith is not something which can be savoured by all, for it entails the sacrifice of the ego. And that is the most difficult thing for modern man to do, when egoism is the most powerful feeling he has. Humanism too, in changing the focus from God to man, has given the human ego a disturbing new dimension.

To become a true believer, the postulant must acknowledge inner and outer realities, and the only way to do this is to surrender his ego. He must agree to accept the role of creature for himself and that of Creator for his Lord. He must acknowledge the prophethood of God's Prophet and must accept a lesser position for himself. He must agree to give God's religion its rightful place and give up any ambition he may have had of fashioning his own religion.

This is possible only after a revolution in thinking. Only then does the seeker after truth have a full realization of God. If it were not so, he would not be prepared for so great a sacrifice.

JUNE 22

Starting from Scratch

“I have reached my present position by climbing a ladder and not by coming up to it in a lift.” This observation was made by a tailor who had started with nothing but his own two hands and the will to work, and who had become eminently successful in his line of business. “Making a good coat is not child’s play. The whole process is so complicated that without detailed information as to how to proceed, long experience and a high degree of skill, it is almost impossible to accomplish. It is only after a lifetime of hard work that I have succeeded in running a prosperous shop in the city.”

The tailor went on to explain how he had served his apprenticeship under the guidance of an expert tailor. Just learning the art of cutting and sewing had taken him five long years. When he opened his own little shop, he discovered that he had difficulty in giving his customers a good fitting. This was because during his apprenticeship he had never really grasped the fact that people could be of such different shapes and sizes. He therefore set himself to the task of studying human anatomy, but it was only after many years of effort that he could make a coat with an absolutely perfect fitting. He eventually became so expert in this that he could even give perfect fittings to those who unfortunately suffered from deformities—such as hunchbacks. “In any type of work, there are many things which one has to learn on one’s own. Often one cannot foresee these things at the outset, and each obstacle has to be overcome by hard work and ingenuity.”

The tailor talked of many things of this nature concerning his skills, and it seemed to me as though I were listening to a lecture on the building of the nation by some very experienced person.

In truth, the only way to solve our economic and social problems is to follow the example of the tailor. After this initial apprenticeship, he had gone ahead and done things on his own. He had gone up by the stairs and not by the lift. There are no buttons which you can just push and then automatically reach your goals. You can only make progress step by step. Progress can seldom be made by leaps and bounds. By means of the ladder you can progress even to the stage of owning the lift, but you cannot make a success of your life by starting with the lift and expecting it to do everything for you.

JUNE 23

What is Mysticism

The concept of spiritualism or mysticism has existed in the world for thousands of years. It has many schools of thought, which must be dealt here, albeit briefly, in order that the Islamic concept of spiritualism can come out clearly vis-à-vis other schools of spiritualism.

Three basic concepts are worth mentioning here. According to the first concept, spiritualism means to establish contact with one's own inner personality. To them man's inner existence is akin to a mysterious ocean, which remains, under normal circumstances, undiscovered for man. Like the iceberg in the oceans, a tiny part of his existence comes under the grip of his consciousness, while the greater part remains hidden under the subconscious. Now the goal of spiritualism is for man to be able to relate his conscious part to the unconscious. By accomplishing which man achieves the stage of mental or spiritual development. He perfects his mental existence at the conscious level.

There is partial truth in this concept. It is true that the potential of man's own existence are far more than that which comes under the perception of conscious in normal circumstances. However this is

not the answer to man's actual quest. Taking both the conscious and the unconscious, man is no doubt in a state of limited existence, and discovering something limited in nature can never be the answer man seeks to find.

Man's quest, from the respect of actual reality is a quest of his own completion, rather than simply one concerning his own discovery. Man by his very nature cannot remain content with limitations. Man from every respect is a limited being. Now he wants to find the limitless in order to compensate for his limitations.

According to the above concept what is possible is only that the limited succeeds in finding the limited. This can never be the answer to man's actual quest, that is why such an answer leaves him unsatisfied as before.

This issue is in principle a matter concerning the perception of reality, rather than simply a matter of discovering one's own self. If man were a perfect being he would never have the psychology of quest embedded within him. The psychology of quest is part of man's subconscious, so, if the subconscious is a perfect existence why should it always suffer from the psychology of quest. Such a psychology is indicative of imperfectness on the part of seeker.

It is a fact that had man been a perfect existence he would never have been born with the natural urge of quest. All human beings being born with this nature provide an internal proof that man in his nature is no perfect existence. This fact is enough to prove that the target of the spiritual quest of man can never be his own being.

The other concept of spiritualism is basically produced under the influence of the philosophy of monism. According to the concept of monism, leaving the details aside, all forms of existence are in actual fact manifestations of the same source. Man and everything besides man is one and the same thing in essence. The existing world is a manifestation of one and the same reality rather than of manniness of reality. A philosopher has explained this concept of oneness of reality in these words:

'The knower and the known are one. God and I, we are one in knowledge, and there is no distinction between us (12/787).

According to this concept of spiritualism, to put it in simple words, it is for the part to realize its whole in order that it may join it by discovering it.

This second concept of spiritualism is, academically, a baseless concept, yet in both, the philosophic and religious circles, this concept has remained popular. But no person or school of thought has provided real argument in favour of this concept.

Calling this quest of spiritualism the quest of the part for the whole is not worth consideration in present circumstances. What has to be proved first of all in this connection is the fact that man is really in his nature a part of the whole. As long as this first premise is not proved, how can a philosophic interpretation based on this concept be true.

All the points made in favour of oneness of reality are only a set of an exercise in words. All the arguments forwarded in this connection are symbolic in nature. For instance, it is said that, "all the things of this world are varied (in different forms) manifestations of one absolute reality." This is only a statement and no such set of words can be a substitute for an argument.

Another symbolic argument forwarded is that if one drop is taken away from the ocean, that drop in its essence will be a tiny ocean. Man is likewise a tiny drop of the vast sea of reality. This too is a simile and a simile never proves a reality. A simile may be employed to explain a reality already established. But offering similes towards proving a reality is entirely unacademic and illogical.

To prove the theory that the "essence of everything is the same," one of two arguments are essential. Either such a theory is proved by a scientific research or else an argument in the real sense exists in its favour in revealed religions. But this theory is neither established by science, nor any real argument is to be found in its favour in revealed religions.

In such circumstances a school of thought which explains the spiritual quest in terms of all is the same (*hama ust*) undoubtedly stands on a baseless ground as no testimony, either of science or revelation exists to support this theory.

The spiritual quest means from the Islamic point of view that the servant (of God) wants to contact God, his Creator.

Islamic spiritualism is in actual fact a realization of God. Whatever man gains at the level of his heart and mind through the realization of God is known as Islamic spiritualism.

Here again Islamic spiritualism has come to have two schools of thought, one may be called Quranic school of thought and the other is commonly known as *tasawwuf*.

There are several branches and forms of *tasawwuf*. These varied forms can not be described in the form of a single principle. However, *tasawwuf*, is basically another name for two things—the concept of *shaikh* (spiritual mentor) to guide to the path of spirituality, and *muraqabat* (specified time of day or night devoted to private worship in addition to the five prescribed prayers), divine contemplation, recitation of different words and phrases repeatedly.

Both these two practices are total innovations in Islam as neither of these existed during the times of the Prophet and his Companions.

Holding *shaikh* to be a means of spiritual progress certainly amounts to incorporating *gurudom* in Islam. Islam in fact had come to negate this concept of *gurudom*. Since ancient times all religions had accorded the religious *gurus* the status of intermediaries between God and man. Islam put an end to this middle link and proclaimed that man can establish contact with God directly. That there is no need for an intermediary. But after three hundred years of the emergence of Islam, the pre Islamic concept came to be held sacred once again and thus found their entry into Islam. Any such concept is an obstacle to the path of spiritual progress instead of being conducive to it.

Similarly the entire body of *aurad-o-wadhaif* is innovation (*bid'a*) adopted by *sufis* of later times. A method not taught by the Prophet can never be a means of the realization of God.

All such new methods place obstacles to the realization of God, these can never be stepping stones to it. This is a fact that the prevalent methods of additional devotions are not established from the traditions of the Prophet.

Furthermore, all these are physical exercises and such physical exercises can never lead to spiritual progress. Physical action can

produce physical results. It is impossible for a spiritual attribute to be produced from physical action.

From the Islamic viewpoint man's existence has two levels to it. One is man's visible body which is in need of a number of material things. Without providing the material things like food, water, clothes, home etc, physical body cannot survive. The other aspect of human personality is that in it there is an invisible being called soul. The soul too requires certain things, but these are not of material nature. These are entirely of non-material nature, hence its requirements too was to be fulfilled.

According to this division, since man possesses a double personality, two types of provision are to be constantly supplied for him to survive. One being physical provision, the other being spiritual provision. The centre of the acquisition of physical provision, according to the Quran, is this earth (14:32) and the centre of the acquisition of spiritual provision is the Being of God. That is why this provision is called 'Lord's sustenance' (20:131) or 'spiritual provision' is in actual fact, the result of a contact with the external source of sustenance (that is, God). This goal is achieved entirely through mental action. This mental activity is called *tazakkur* and *tafakkur* (remembrance of God, thoughts of God) in the Quran. When man takes his mind away from the external world to the internal world, when he diverts his attention from the material aspects of thing to their hidden reality then he is introduced to a whole new world. He experiences finer realities. This experience increases his realization and in this way provides him the sustenance to live a spiritual life.

Man is a creature who wants no boundaries, sticking to limits is akin to his intellectual death.

It is an indication of his deprivation from divine sustenance. It is because the intellectual journey of a recipient of spiritual sustenance will always continue is indicative of the fact that he has been deprived of spiritual sustenance. For when one continues to receive a share from spiritual sustenance, the journey of his intellectual development too will continue.

JUNE 24

No Thanks-giving

In his book, *The Cultural Side of Islam*, Mohammad Marmaduke Pickthall (1875-1936) writes of an argument which appeared many years ago in the British press on whether, in the case of fire engulfing a room, it would be more important to save a living child or to preserve a rare and beautiful masterpiece of Greek statuary, the assumption being that circumstances made it possible to save only the one or the other. "I still remember many well-known scholars, expressing the view that, given the circumstances, the statue should be saved at the cost of a human life. Their argument was that human children were born daily in tens of thousands, but that no one could reproduce that rare specimen of ancient Greek art." (pp. 3-4)

This scholarly option is an example of man's ingratitude for the blessings of the Almighty, the sole reason being that God showers His blessings on man in great abundance at all times. It is this very abundance which causes man to become blind to the uniqueness of God's bounty. If he is never truly thankful for it, it is because he has become insensible to it.

The debaters on this issue never stopped to consider what an extraordinarily rare miracle is the human child. They did not think how far more precious it was than all the specimens of art produced by man. Their sole consideration was that specimens of great art are extremely rare, whereas children are being born every minute all over the world. While the uniqueness of human art inspired their awe, the commonality of human children left them indifferent.

The greatest form of worship is the expression of human gratitude to God. Man's words of thanks should pour from within him like the gushing water of a mountain torrent, and should never be diverted by Satan, whose sole desire is to see man go astray. Satan should never be

allowed to come in the way of this superior form of worship. Those who want to live in this world as grateful servants of God must be ever on the alert to thwart the nefarious designs of Satan. If they do not see through Satan's plans in time, they will never truly be God's most grateful servants.

JUNE 25

Rising to the Occasion

The true Muslim does not need to be punished to make him refrain from misdeeds. Faith produces a positive response to the merest hint or reminder about defaulting.

While the Battle of Qadsia was raging, Abu Mehjan Thaqafi, one of the bravest soldiers in the Muslim army found himself chained up, a prisoner in his own tent, because his Commander, Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas had been constrained to punish him for his indulgence in liquor. The Muslims were having difficulty in resisting the determined attacks of the Persians. Abu Mehjan was beside himself when he discovered that Sa'd was wounded and heard him issuing instructions to the army from a vantage point near his tent. "Alas! That horses and spears should be doing battle, and I should be left out, tied up in chains." It was then that he conceived the idea of sending a message to Sa'd's wife to have his chains removed and to let him have Sa'd's horse and weapons. With the promise that if his life was spared, the moment the battle was over, he would immediately put on his chains again. She agreed to this and so Abu Mehjan was able to charge out into the battle, valiantly fighting enemy soldiers while Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas looked on in wonderment at the feats of this intrepid horseman. The Muslims finally emerged victorious, and Abu Mehjan, true to his promise, returned Sa'd's horse and sword and went back into the confinement of his tent. When Sa'd went home he remarked to his wife that it was a man—sent by God—riding on a spotted horse who had saved the day. 'If I hadn't trussed Abu

Mehjan up in chains, I would have thought it was he, for only he can charge in that way!

Sa'd's wife then told him the whole story, with the result that Abu Mehjan was promptly released from his chains and Sa'd made a pledge to him never again to punish him for drinking. For his part, Abu Mehjan Thaqafi promised never to drink again.

The true Muslim does not need to be punished to make him refrain from misdeeds. Faith produces a positive response to the merest hint or reminder about defaulting. Only one who is totally devoid of these qualities will be deaf to entreaties and insensitive to rebuke.

JUNE 26

Peace and Justice for All

A political revolution can have meaning only if it is preceded by, and consistently upheld by a moral revolution. No revolution is worth the name unless it brings in its wake peace and justice for all.

During the time of his imprisonment by the British in Ahmad Nagar Fort, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru wrote his famous book, *The Discovery of India*, between the months of April and September, 1944. It is significant that the postscript he added on the 29th of December, 1945 concludes with the words:

"We are on the eve of general elections in India and these elections absorb attention. But the elections will be over soon—and then? The coming year is likely to be one of storm and trouble, of conflict and turmoil. There is going to be no peace in India or elsewhere except on the basis of freedom" (pp. 693, 694).

Approximately one and a half years after these lines were written, India did gain its Independence, and Jawahar Lal Nehru had the opportunity to govern the country single-handed till the end of his life. Those who had been closely associated with him remained in

power even after his death. But that precious quality of life called 'peace' is further away today than ever it seemed in December, 1945. India has gained its freedom, but it has certainly not gained peace.

Changes of leadership have done little to amend this situation. Zealous leaders have too often equated a change in the status quo with betterment, progress, the weal of the common man, only to find that their aspirations have been illusory. Most often, such changes only bring new faces to the political scene, without there being any improvement, either qualitative or quantitative, in the existing state of affairs.

A political revolution can have meaning only if it is preceded by, and consistently upheld by a moral revolution. Its genuine fruits should be not changes in the wielders of power, but changes in attitudes and behaviour from the top of the bottom of the social and political hierarchy. No revolution is worth the name unless it brings in its wake peace and justice for all.

JUNE 27

The Religion of Islam

The major religions of the world can be divided into two broad categories—the Aryan and the Semitic, with Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism in the first and Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the second. So far as their theological aspects are concerned, there is a difference between these two kinds of religions. While the Aryan religions are basically philosophy based, the Semitic religions are revelation based. The former represent the culmination of the philosophical pursuit of truth by the great minds of the world. In the quest for reality, meditation and contemplation brought these saintly souls to the conclusions which gave rise to the principal, organised religions of the eastern hemisphere.

The creeds of the Semitic religions on the other hand, are based on divine revelation. That is, God chose a series of Semites to be His apostles and then imparted to them His commandments, frequently in the form of Scriptures, through His angels. These messengers were

not only the bearers of divine scriptures but also their interpreters. It was these revelations and their divinely inspired interpretations which provided the fundamentals of the Semitic religions as they exist today.

The basic difference in respect of beliefs of the Aryan and Semitic religions can be briefly described in terms of monism and monotheism respectively.

Although both traditions—monism and monotheism—have the idea of God in common, there are fundamental differences in their conceptualization of God. In the Aryan tradition, God is an all-pervasive force rather than an independent reality. Monism posits the totality of a single reality, with all the diverse phenomena of the natural world seen as different manifestations of the same reality, according to this concept, therefore, there is no real difference between the creator and the creature. Thus in monistic theorizing, the concept of an individual, personal God does not exist.

In Semitic religions, particularly in Islam, the concept of God is entirely based on monotheism. This concept can also be termed dualism, that is, the Creator and the creature, in their nature are completely different from one another. God has a real and eternal existence. As the Creator of all things, he is distinct as an entity from all that He has created. His creatures in their seemingly independent existence totally depend upon the will of God. The sole possessor of all power, God has created man to live for a specific period of time, during which he is sent into the world to be tested. It is this concept of the Creator as totally distinct from creature, which sets the Semitic religions apart from the Aryan.

The philosophy of Islam is explicitly that of monotheism. It is true that the Sufi system has, to a great extent, incorporated monistic concepts. This is in actual fact, a deviation from the original and real Islam. It is therefore held by the majority of Islamic scholars to be an incorrect interpretation, not truly representative of Islam.

Other presentations of Islam also figure in the books produced in the later period of Islam. But all of these, based as they are on personal interpretations, do not have the status of sacred books. In Islam, it is only the Quran and *Sunnah* (the Prophet's words and deeds) which enjoy the status of the only authentic sources, and it is to them that we must turn if we are to have a true appreciation of the essence of Islam.

The mainstay of Islam is its monotheism—tawhid—that is, belief in the oneness of God in the complete sense of the word. God is One. He has no partner. He created all things and has complete control over the universe. We should serve Him and submit to Him alone. In Him should we repose our hopes and to Him should we pray. Though He cannot be seen, He is so close to us that He hears and answers us when we call upon Him.

The distinctive aspect of this monotheism is that no intermediary link exists between the Creator and the creature. By remembering Him, any individual at any point in time may, quite independently, establish contact with God. There is no need for any go-between. Indeed belief in an intermediary link with God is alien to the Islamic religious system. Called *shirk* (associating others with God) it is deemed to be an unpardonable offence.

According to the Quran God in Islam is not a symbol, but a reality. God has not been conceived of as a kind of working hypothesis on which to found a religious system. On the contrary, God in Islam is a Personality. He has a real and independent existence. He is alive and self-sustaining, self-perpetuating. He is near us; He cares for us; He hears and sees. He has knowledge. He takes decisions. He rewards and punishes. He is the Controller and Sustainer of human history (1/97).

JUNE 28

Speaking with Sincerity

The Prophet Muhammad is reported by Abu Hurayrah as having said:

“One who sits in an excessively noisy meeting, then before leaving the meeting says: ‘Glory be to You, O Lord, and praise. I bear witness that there is no God save You. I seek Your forgiveness, and turn to you in repentance,’ will have all that passed in that meeting forgiven him by God” (Tirmidhi, Nasai).

But it is not just a mechanical recital of these words which will earn us God's forgiveness. That will be forthcoming only if we utter them in all earnestness and with a keen awareness of their meaning. The sentiments they convey must be endorsed by both heart and intellect. The Prophet in this instance was describing the action of a person who stands in fear of God. We have to imagine such an individual so forgetting himself in the course of a conversation that he raises his voice in anger, quarreling quite unnecessarily with his companions. But before matters have gone too far, his conscience comes into play and he realises that he has spoken out of turn. Ashamed of having gone to extremes and offended others, he turns to God for forgiveness.

One example of the form his supplication takes is that given in the saying of the Prophet quoted above. But, in order to be effective, the words of the prayer must be uttered in their true spirit; they must be spoken with full consciousness of their inherent meaning.

One should be moved in one's heart of hearts to offer this prayer. No mindless parroting of the words will ever earn the forgiveness of God.

JUNE 29

A Sunnah

For the Muslims, the tradition laid down by the Prophet is the perfect example to follow, for it covers every aspect of life, be it a trivial, personal matter, or a larger issue, like *jihad*, which could affect the whole community, whether at that time or a thousand years later.

There are two broad divisions of *Sunnah*. One of these pertains to the form that a practice should take. For instance, the Prophet said, "Say your prayers in the manner that you see me pray." (*Mishkat Al-Masabih*, 1/215) This tradition relates to the form that *Salat* was to take. The companions observed the Prophet performing *Salat* and did

likewise. Those who saw the companions praying offered their prayers in the same fashion and this example was followed meticulously from generation to generation. The form our prayers take today is identical to that practised by the Prophet.

The same is true of the rites of Hajj. On the occasion of *Hajjat al-wida* (The Last Pilgrimage), the Prophet mounted his camel and performed the rites of Hajj so that others could observe their correct enactment. He said, “O people, observe my performance of Hajj and perform your rites accordingly.”

Traditions of this nature refer to the form of an act. The creation of this form ensured that an act would be performed exactly in accordance with the example set by the Prophet. These may be called the traditions of form. There is another set of traditions which concern themselves with the spirit of an act. According to this tradition, the outer manifestation is relative, while the spirit is the reality. And in this, it is the spirit which is the more important.

The Quran was revealed to the Prophet over a period of 23 years. As and when a portion of the Quran was revealed, the Prophet would summon a scribe to whom he would dictate the verses. A *katib* (scribe) was in constant attendance. In all, there were over 40 such persons. The Prophet was so particular about this that even on such a perilous journey as his emigration from Makkah to Madinah, he kept pen and paper with him and had a scribe (Abu Bakr) accompany him.

The entire Quran was written on paper and other materials used for the purpose during the lifetime of the Prophet. Many of the companions, such as Zaid bin Thabit Ansari, committed the whole of the Quran to memory. Towards the end of his life, the Prophet recited the whole of the Quran in its proper sequence in the presence of a large number of the companions. This has been called the Last Recitation in the books of tradition.

At the time of the Prophet's death, the Quran was safe either in the hearts of the people, or written on separate pages and tablets. However, there was no compilation of all the verses of the Quran in book form.

The Prophet was certainly aware of the fact that doubts would later arise over the compilation of the Book of God. Orientalists have

tried to sow the seeds of doubt on this issue, and the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* compiled by them, have offered different explanations. One theory is that the Prophet of Islam, feeling that the Day of Judgement was near, and that the world would soon come to an end, never entertained the idea of compiling the Quran in book form.

The non-compilation of the Quran by the Prophet was not an act of omission. With the mission of the Prophet being to make the faith complete, there was no question of his leaving a religious task incomplete in any way. This was something which, in spite of the obvious risks, he purposely left undone, because of the inherent religious advantages in so doing.

If the Prophet had had the Quran compiled in book form and copies of it placed in the different mosques, it could easily have become neglected in essence, while Muslims busied themselves with the purely ritual matters pertaining to its physical presence. By leaving the work of compilation to his followers, the Prophet ensured that they gave their full attention to the spirit of the Quran.

The annals of history show that during the rule of Abu Bakr, in 12 Hijra, a battle was fought at Yamamah in Arab, in which 70 *Hafiz* (Muslims who know the entire Quran by heart) were martyred. This caused great concern to Umar, who thought that if the *Hafiz* were to be martyred in such great numbers, the content of the Quran would soon be lost to posterity. He expressed his fears to Abu Bakr, who then had the work of compilation carried out.

This was not an easy task. First of all, the Caliph was worried about the propriety of his doing something which the Prophet had never himself undertaken. He agreed only after a great deal of deliberation. This generated unprecedented activity, with Umar and Zaid sitting at the entrance to the mosque and asking everyone who came there to hand over any written portion of the Quran which they had in their possession.

Zaid Bin Thabit Ansari, who was placed in charge of this great operation on account of his talents and general ability, read all of the collected material and cross-checked it with his memory. This was the first time in history that a book had been subjected to such thorough double-checking. This was understandably a very difficult task for

Zaid Bin Thabit, who said: “By God, if Abu Bakr had ordered me to move a mountain from its place, that would not have been more difficult than the task he has given me of compiling the Quran.”

The tradition which I call the *sunnah* of spirit—that of creating better understanding—is one of the traditions of the Prophet. Like the other traditions of the Prophet, its continuance as a permanent feature of the Islamic life is highly desirable. It is a tradition of prime importance because it has an inspiring effect on the followers of Muhammad (may peace be upon him). It is a powerful tool to keep them alive and active. This can be illustrated by another example. The Quran says that God made His revelations therein in order to warn the people (25:1).

As is well known, the Quran was originally written in Arabic, whereas thousands of languages are currently being used. How then is it possible to warn all the different communities through the Arabic of the Quran?

If God had desired all communities to be directly instructed by means of the Quran, He would have revealed it in some international language. But this did not happen. This in itself indicates that God desired the faithful to undertake the work of translation so that other communities would be able to understand the Holy Scriptures.

This is clearly one of the ‘traditions of spirit’ of the Prophet. Now, the need of the hour is to put this tradition into practice. One way of doing this would be to utilize the modern press and other media to disseminate translations of the message of the Quran in simple language. If our leaders had revived this tradition and inspired Muslims to become engaged in translating the Quran into different languages, the entire community could already have been fruitfully occupied in this venture. In this way, Muslims would have rediscovered Islam all over again, albeit in the light of modern circumstances. The Quran would have caused a religious revolution in their lives. On the contrary, however, in the absence of timely leadership, the whole community is floundering on the rock of politics, thus depriving themselves of both religion and the world.

JUNE 30

Teacher Tree

The tree-trunk forms one half of a tree and the roots the other half. Botanists tell us that there is just as much of a tree spread under the ground as there is standing above the ground. The top half of a tree can only stand erect and verdant above the ground when it is prepared to bury its other half beneath the ground. This is an example which trees show to mankind; a philosopher puts it this way:

“Root downward, fruit upward, that is the divine protocol.”

The rose comes to a perfect combination of colour, line and aroma atop a tall stem. Its perfection is achieved, however, because first a root went down into the homely matrix of the common earth. Those who till the soil or garden understand the analogy. Our interests have so centred on gathering the fruit that it has been easy to forget the cultivation of the root.

A tree stands above the ground, fixing its roots firmly beneath the ground. It grows from beneath, upwards into the air; it does not start at the top and grow downwards. The tree is our teacher, imparting to us the lesson of nature that if we seek to progress outwardly, we must first strengthen ourselves inwardly; we must begin from the base of our own selves before we can hope to build society anew.

JULY 1

Superior Actions

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

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

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

The sufis who came to India did not even exclude enemies from their universal aura of benevolence. They did not seek to avenge the

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

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

JULY 2

Oppressors Never Prosper

Nizam al-Mulk Tusi was the name of a famous vizier, prime minister, to two Seljuk kings—Alp Arsalan (1063-72) and Malik Shah (1073-92). He is remembered for his highly effective handling of the reigns of government, his control over affairs of state having been so complete that the king, it is said, was left with only two functions—sitting on the throne and going out hunting. Finally he fell victim to enemies of the Seljuk dynasty. An assassin, dressed in Sufi garb, slew him in the year 1092. His death signalled the beginning of the end for the Seljuks.

Christian and Muslim historians are unanimous in their praise of Nizam al-Mulk's enlightened method of government. Professor P.K. Hitti, in his *History of the Arabs*, calls his period in power "one of the ornaments of the political history of Islam." Among his most outstanding achievements was the establishment of the college of

Nizamiyya, named after Nizam al-Mulk in 1067. It was from this college that Nizam al-Mulk used to draw educated people to operate the state's executive and judiciary institutions. Nizam al-Mulk wrote a book on political theory, the Persian name of which is *Siyasat-Nama*. The book has been translated into English under the title *The Book of Government Rules for Kings* (tr. H. Drake, London, 1960). In this book Nizam al-Mulk wrote:

“An un-Islamic government may last a while, But tyranny cannot endure.”

This is a rule that applies, not only to kings, but to every single human being. Every individual has a certain area of influence and power. In a ruler's case, this area is large, whereas in the case of an ordinary person, it is comparatively small. If one wishes to prosper on earth it is imperative that one refrain from oppression within one's own domain. One who oppresses those over whom he wields power cannot himself escape punishment for his actions. In the case of most sins, God will punish their perpetrators in the next life. In the case of tyranny and oppression, the punishment for them starts in this very world. There is no way out for the tyrant. God will certainly redress the wrongs that he has done others. Sooner or later, he is sure to be visited by the wrath of God.

People usually oppress others with a view to consolidating their own position, and that of their offspring. But it is the very people they seek to protect who eventually fall victim to their oppression. If oppression and cruelty become permanent features of an individual's policy, the savage after-effects of his own actions will cause suffering to his own kith and kin for generations to come.

JULY 3

In Everything There is a Sign

The Indian writer Khwajah Hasan Nizami (1878-1955) once wrote an article in Urdu entitled “Story of a Fly.” In it he complained to a fly about the bother it caused people. “Why don’t you let us sleep in peace?” he remonstrated. “The time for sleep and eternal repose has not yet come.” the fly replied. “When it does, then you can sleep in peace.” Now it is better for you to remain alert and active.” This little exchange shows that if one remains open to admonition, one will find a lesson for one’s life even in such mundane events as the buzz of a fly. If one’s mind is closed, on the other hand, then not even the roar of bombshells and artillery fire will be able to break through its barriers. Only the tempest of the Last Day will bring such people to their senses, but that will not be the time to take heed: that will be a time for retribution, not constructive action.

The Quran tells us of one who is admitted to paradise bringing before God “a sound heart” (26:89). There is a saying of the Prophet to much the same effect. “Whomsoever God wishes good for,” he said, “He instructs in religion.” Looked at together, these statements show that God’s greatest blessing to a person is an open mind and a sound, receptive intellect that sees truth for what it is. Such a mind is free of complexes: it is able to form opinions in a free and unprejudiced spirit. A sound mind does not take long to absorb any truth, or take in any lesson contained in the world at large. The universe is like spiritual sustenance for such a mind, which develops and thrives by deriving nourishment from what it sees, feels and hears in the world around it.

Signs of God are spread all over the universe. In some places it is rocks and inanimate matter that provide a pointer to some profound reality, in others it is “flies”—menial objects—that sound out a message

for man. Sometimes God enables one of His servants to call his fellow men to truth in plain, spoken language. In all such instances it is one who has opened his mind to truth who will find it. If one is not receptive to instruction one will gain nothing from all the signs that are scattered throughout the world. An open mind derives instruction even from a “fly”, while not even divine revelation and prophetic teachings can break down the barriers of a closed mind.

There is nothing that can take the place of a receptive intellect. One who remains open to instruction will look on the whole world as living proof of divine realities. One who goes through life with a closed mind, however, is like a beast who hears and sees all, but understands nothing.

JULY 4

The Unfathomable Mercy of God

According to a saying of the Prophet, related in the Sahih of Imam Muslim: “God has a hundred mercies, and one of them He has sent down amongst jinn and men and cattle and beasts of prey. Thereby they are kind and merciful unto one another, and thereby the wild creature inclines to tenderness unto her offspring. And ninety-nine mercies has God reserved unto Himself, that therewith He may show mercy unto His servants on the Day of Resurrection.

The mercy of a mother manifests itself in multiple ways. Should her infant baby strike her on the face, the mother will not take offence. She will not react by striking her child back. She will hold her child close to her, turning his apparent act of aggression into an act of love, rewarding him for what was a punishable deed. Incidents of this nature occur in every home. They provide us with a tiny glimpse of the mercy of God. Mothers are not the masters, or the makers, of their own mercy. It is a small fraction of God’s own mercy, which He has bequeathed to them—along with other living creatures—so that they may show compassion to one another.

Human beings do not have knowledge of the unseen, so they have to suffer all sorts of setbacks in life. They lack will power, so tend to give way to base impulses and commit grave mistakes. The resources at their disposal are insufficient for them to deal with external factors working against them, so they crash to defeat. Predicaments such as these have combined to turn man into an afflicted soul, constantly tormented by thoughts of having been a failure in life, of not having achieved what he set out to do. Rich and poor, powerful and weak, all human beings are a prey to such despair.

Can man hope for any improvement of his lot? Can our failures in life become successes at the end of the road? Is it possible that our faults will be counted as good deeds, that—despite our digressions—we will safely reach our destination? The glimpse of God’s mercy that we gain from a mother shows us that this can indeed come to pass. God’s mercy to us is many times more than that of a mother to her child; by His grace He will make up to us what we lack, but on one condition—that we make Him our everything, as a mother means everything to her child.

JULY 5

Remembering God

D*hikr* is an Arabic word; it means remembrance. *Dhikrullah*, then, means simply to remember God. It is not a formal act, but rather a spontaneous one, which comes as naturally to one who has come to know God as singing does to a bird.

A spiritual upheaval of the utmost intensity occurs in one who discover God in all His power and glory. Suddenly, God is for ever in one’s heart and thoughts. One’s constant remembrance of God expresses itself in multifarious forms. Sometimes it is an inward experience—a tingle of joy, a shiver of fear that creeps down one’s body as thoughts of God fill one’s mind. Sometimes one enters into a spontaneous outpouring of thanksgiving and adoration. It is this

state of mind that constitutes remembrance of God, whether it is expressed in the form of words of praise or silent thoughts.

Sometimes one looks at outer space in all its infinite vastness, and ponders on the stars and constellations spread out there. “How great must be the Lord who has arranged this marvellous display, and runs it with such superb finesse;” such is one’s reaction to the sight spread out before one. Sometimes one gazes at rivers, trees and mountains, and one’s heart is touched by their beauty, by the very meaningfulness of their existence. If one has discovered God, everything around one reminds one of Him, sparking off a never-ending litany of remembrance in one’s mind and heart.

Then one will look critically at oneself, and realize one’s own errors and shortcomings. Moved to seek the Lord’s forgiveness, one will pray to Him for salvation from eternal punishment: “Lord, admit me into the shade of Your mercy on that Day when there will be no other place to take refuge.” And in one’s own helplessness and impotence, one will see the power and majesty of God. “Lord, assuage my fears with Your Almighty power!” one will cry out.

When feelings of the Lord’s presence enter one’s heart, and one puts these feelings into words, that is when one is remembering God; that is when one is engaged in *Dhikr*. *Dhikr* is to remember God, the greatest of all realities. Remembrance of such a being is bound to be the greatest of all human experiences; there are no words that fully express the profundity of that feeling.

JULY 6

Prophethood in Islam

Human destiny, by Islamic lights, is a matter of man having been placed on this earth by God, so that he may be put to the test—the test being of his capacity to make correct moral choices. It is for this purpose that man has been given complete freedom, for without such freedom, the divine test would have no meaning, no validity.

It is required of man that he should lead his life on earth following a regimen of strict self-discipline. Wherein should he find the guiding principles for such a course? The answer, according to Islam, is in prophethood. Throughout the history of mankind, God appointed certain human beings—prophets—who would be the recipients and conveyors of His guidance as sent through His angels. The last in the series was the Prophet Muhammad.

The concept of prophethood is totally different from that of incarnation. According to the latter concept, God Himself is re-born in human shape on earth in order to give succour to humanity. Propethood, according to Islam, is of quite another order of being. A prophet in the Islamic sense is a man, just like any other human being: his uniqueness resides solely in his also being a messenger of God.

A messenger is not an ‘inspired’ person in the simple sense of the word. By Islamic tenets, prophethood is dependent not on inspiration, but on divine revelation. Inspiration is a common psychological phenomenon, of the kind experienced by a poet, whereas revelation is a true and direct divine communication. It was consciously sent and also consciously received by the Prophet. The Quran is a collection of these divine revelations, which the Prophet received over a period of 23 years.

According to Islam, prophethood is not acquired but God-given. That is, it is not possible to engage in spiritual exercises and then, as a result, be elevated to prophethood. Not even the Prophet had any say in this matter of selection. The choice depends upon God alone.

The Prophet’s responsibility was to communicate the divine message to humanity. In doing so, if he received a negative response from the people, or even in extreme cases was persecuted, he had nevertheless to follow a strict policy of avoidance of confrontation, and had unilaterally to adopt the path of patience and forbearance. He was responsible only in so far as the conveying of the message was concerned. As for the response to, or acceptance of the message, that entirely depended on the addressees. But clearly, the greater the number who accepted the message, the greater the sphere in which a practical system of guidance sent by God became established.

The Quran testifies to the fact that God's messengers came in every age and in every region. According to a *hadith*, more than one lakh messengers were sent to guide the people. However, the prophets mentioned by name in the Quran are two dozen in number, the Prophet Muhammad being the last of them. In the past, the need for new prophets had always arisen because God's religion, suffering from the vagaries of time, had frequently been distorted from its original form. New prophets had to come to the world time and time again in order to revivify the true spirit of religion, which had been lost when nations in ancient times, entrusted with the guardianship of the divine scriptures, had repeatedly betrayed their trust, allowing the book of God to be laid waste. They had to right the wrongs done by human interpolations in the books they brought with them. But after the Prophet Muhammad, the world will see no further prophets, for the Book which the Prophet gave to the world—the Quran—is still perfectly preserved in its original state. In the divine scheme of things, no further prophets are then required.

It is not only the Prophet Muhammad's (may peace be upon him) Scripture which is preserved in its pristine state, but his very spirit, for his utterances, the events of his life, the struggle of his prophetic mission, have all been fully recorded and have remained intact.

The Quran tells us that when the Prophet Muhammad proclaimed his prophethood, people found it difficult to believe in him. They asked, "What kind of messenger is this? He eats and drinks and moves about in the markets. If God had to send a prophet, why didn't He send an angel?"

In reply the Quran had this to say: 'If the earth had been inhabited by angels, We would have sent an angel as a prophet, but since it is human beings who live on earth, a man has been selected as God's Messenger.'

The Prophet then, as the bearer of God's message, had to project himself as a model for other human beings. The Quran, indeed, describes the Prophet as a model character. It was on this consideration that a messenger was selected from amongst human beings. He experienced all that was experienced by others: grief and solace, advantages and disadvantages, pain and pleasure, etc. Yet he

never wavered from the truth, thus setting an example of how others must abide by the truth on all occasions. This deprived wrongdoers of the excuse that they had no role model to show them the path which God desired them to follow.

The messenger of God was born just like any other human being. He led his life just as others did. In this way, he clearly demonstrated that the way of life which he exhorted others to lead was entirely practicable. His words and deeds thus became a realistic example of how God's servants should conduct themselves on earth and what path they must opt for to avert God's displeasure and earn God's blessings.

JULY 7

Negative Mentality

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

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

Lenin found the opportunity to study the ideas of Karl Marx during his studies at the university. Later on, during his stay in Geneva for further education, he discovered more literature on Socialism. It was natural that Lenin was greatly attracted to these

ideas. The philosophy developed by Marx not only proved his dreaded enemy wrong, but also justified the abolition of the whole system represented by the Czar. Thus Marxist Socialism provided Lenin with a philosophical basis for launching a mass movement against him, and he plunged himself heart and soul into following its dictates.

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

JULY 8

Quran—The Sacred Book of Islam

The Quran, according to Muslim belief, is a revealed book: it is not authored by a human being, but is the true word of God in human language. A medium-sized book so far as its volume is concerned, it comprises 114 chapters or *surahs* (77,439 words). Its revelation to the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, through the angel Gabriel, began in A.D. 610, while the Prophet was sitting in seclusion in the cave of Hera at the top of the Mountain of Light, two miles from Makkah. The scriptures were not revealed at one point of time. Their various parts were revealed as and when the occasion demanded. The entire process was completed over a period of 23 years, the last passage being revealed to the Prophet while he was addressing a gathering at Mount Arafat on the occasion of his last Hajj in A.D. 622. The entire volume was later compiled in Madinah during the last days of the Prophet.

Since the Quran came into existence long before the days of the printing press, there were only two ways of preserving it: either by committing the entire text to memory, or writing it down on paper or other materials. That is why there have always been a great number of *hafiz* (those who committed the entire Quran to memory) in every age, right from the Quran's first revelation. The earliest written copies are still available in different museums, one of these being in Tashkent.

The Quran, addressed directly to mankind, tells us of God's scheme for human existence: that man is placed on this earth for the purpose of being tested. The freedom he has here has not been given him as a matter of right, but as a means to allow him to prove his moral fibre. It is the outcome of this test which will ultimately decide man's eternal fate. It is asserted in the holy book that human beings are eternal creatures, yet only an infinitesimal part of their lifespan has been assigned to the present world, while the remainder has been ordained for the Hereafter.

As we learn from the scriptures, all the previously revealed books had been sent by God so that man might be informed of the nature of his life. The Quran, the last of the revealed books, endorses all the revealed books which preceded it. But this endorsement applies to them only in their original, pristine versions. The religious scriptures preceding the Quran were—as is claimed by their followers—divine in origin. But from the point of view of academic authenticity, they have lost their original credibility. This is due to alteration, deletion and interpolation. According to the Quran, the only authentic version of God's message to mankind is that revealed by Him to His final Prophet.

The study of the Quran tells us that it is individual-based rather than system-oriented. That is, the actual target of the holy book is to change the thinking of the individual. Changing the system is not the Quran's direct objective. For the system is subservient to the individual and not the individual to the system. That is why the utmost emphasis is placed on inculcating right thinking in man. Yet, it is not the method of the Quran to set out everything in advance, in detail. It rather encourages individuals to think for themselves along

the proper lines, so that they may discover for themselves the great truths of life. In educational terminology this is called the discovery method.

Islamic teachings can be summed up under two basic headings:

(1) believing in One God and worshipping Him alone; (2) regarding all human beings as equal and according equal rights to all. In brief, monotheism and justice for all. The Quran enshrines these basic teachings, dealing with them in their abstract and practical forms, but for a detailed application of their wisdom, one must go to the *hadith* (the sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad).

As far as social life is concerned, the essence of Islamic teaching is that God has granted freedom to everyone. This freedom in itself demands that people should lead their lives with proper restraint. For if freedom is exercised without restraint, it will inevitably result in friction, outright clashes and the descent of society into chaos. Social equilibrium can be maintained only if conscience (*nafs lawwama*) prevails over ego (*nafs ammara*). In social life, our actions elicit good or evil depending upon whether we have activated the ego or the conscience of the person or persons concerned.

Whenever one initiates any undertaking, the Quran states expressly that one should begin by uttering the name of God. One thus always reminds oneself at the outset of God's attributes of benevolence and compassion. It is also a way of determining that all projects will be launched not with personal but with divine intentions, and that all actions stemming therefrom will be merciful rather than exploitative in nature. The most frequently repeated invocation in the Quran is: "In the name of God, the most Beneficent, the most Merciful." The recurrence of this phrase no less than 114 times is in itself a clear indication of how important it is.

JULY 9

Realism is the Key to Peace

Pace is a must for the survival of our civilization. Peace is a must for all kinds of constructive work. As such, it is of the greatest concern to everyone. Everyone wants a peaceful society, a peaceful world. Yet, for the greater part of humanity, peace remains a distant dream. Why so? Why this sad state of affairs? Why this contradiction between ideal and practice? It is high time to go deeper into the matter. It is the duty of all sincere people to inquire into the real cause of this contradiction so that a viable peace formula may be evolved.

I have made an in-depth study of this problem from the historical as well as the Islamic viewpoints. I should like to make a brief presentation of my findings. According to my study, basically, there are two viewpoints in this matter: the concept of peace as defined by social scientists and the concept of peace as defined by the ideologists. The scientists' concept of peace is based on realities while the idealists' concept of peace is based on utopianism. In other words, on mere wishful thinking.

It is mainly the ideologists' concept of peace which has created the present crisis of peace throughout the world. The scientists' formula for peace is the only practicable one, for the idealists' formula is merely a formulation of people's own wishes.

Academics define peace as an absence of war. But the idealists differ with this notion saying that the mere absence of war is nothing. They hold that peace and justice should go hand in hand. To them the only acceptable formula is that which restores justice in its ideal sense. But the building of such a utopian world is simply impossible.

This concept of peace is seemingly beautiful. Because of this apparent beauty, it has gained general popularity. The masses everywhere are obsessed with the idealistic concept of peace. But one

has to differentiate between what is possible and what is impossible. There is no other alternative. One has to be practical rather than idealistic if one wants to achieve a positive result. The object of peace is only to normalize the situation between two warring sides.

Peace is not aimed at satisfying the concerned parties in terms of rights and justice. Rights and justice are totally different issues. Linking them with peace is unnatural as well as impractical. These are goals to be worked for separately and independently. Furthermore, in this world of competition, no one can receive peace and justice in terms of his own personal criteria. It is situations and circumstances which will dictate to what extent we can achieve these goals.

In fact, in this world of competition, it is not possible for anyone to receive perfect justice. So one has to be content with practical justice (pragmatic solutions). During my studies, I found that those people who seek peace with justice fail to achieve anything positive. Moreover, during this futile exercise they lose what they already had in their hand. Conversely, those who delink justice from peace are always successful in life. After making this study I have come to the conclusion that the scientific concept of peace is the only correct and practicable concept. Thus peace is not meant to establish justice. The purpose of peace is only to normalize the situation so that one may uninterruptedly avail of the opportunities present at that time.

To illustrate my point, I cite here two examples from history, one from the early period of Islam and one from the modern history of Japan. It is a well known fact that the Prophet of Islam was repeatedly challenged by his opponents in ancient Arabia. There were several instances of wars and violence. Then the Prophet managed to finalize a peace treaty between the Muslims and their opponents. It was known as Al-Hudaybiyyah Peace Treaty in Islamic history. Now how was this peace treaty finalized? If you examine historical records, you will find that, in terms of justice being done, several problems arose. The treaty could be concluded because the Prophet was able to delink the question of justice from the question of peace. This delinking of the two issues gave him the success which is described in the Quran as a clear victory. (48:1)

Now, why does the Quran describe this as a victory, when in fact, it was the acceptance of all the conditions imposed by his enemies. The Quran called this a victory because, although the peace treaty itself was devoid of justice, it instantly normalized the situation, thus enabling the Prophet to avail of the opportunities present at the time. What the Prophet lost in Hudaibiyyah, he gained on a far larger scale throughout the whole of Arabia.

Now let us look at the example of Japan. In World War II, Japan was defeated by the USA. Okinawa Island was occupied by the American army after the conclusion of a peace treaty, its terms were dictated by America. Japan, willingly or unwillingly, accepted a treaty in which justice was delinked from peace. But what was the result? Within a period of forty years the entire scenario had changed. Japan did lose the Okinawa Island, but it gained the entire USA (North American continent) as its industrial market. And now it enjoys the status of a world economic superpower.

Why is it that reason and religion both advocate the acceptance of reality or unilateral adjustment in times of conflict? It is because in every adverse situation a status quo exists between the two sides. If any party opts for a change in the status quo the result will be breakdown. Instead, by accepting the status quo it will find room for advancement towards its goal.

The Quran says that of all courses reconciliation is the best (4:128). That is, in matters of controversy, the best policy is peaceful settlement rather than confrontation. This is because conciliation or peaceful settlement gives one scope to make progress, whereas confrontation arrests the onward journey to success.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that peace is a must not only for our advancement, but for our very survival. But peace can be attained only by accepting two simple precepts. Make all efforts to change what we can, and learn to live with the things which we cannot change. In matters which we can change we should be dedicated activists. In matters which we cannot change we should become status quoists. Otherwise, peace for us will forever remain a distant dream.

JULY 10

The Concept of Jihad

Jihad is regularly misconstrued as war, with all its connotations of violence and bloodshed. However, in the Islamic context, and in literal sense, the word *jihad* simply means a struggle—doing one's utmost to further a worthy cause. This is an entirely peaceful struggle, with no overtones even of aggression. The actual Arabic equivalent of war, is *qital*, and even this is meant in a defensive sense.

According to Islamic teachings, *jihad* is of two kinds. One is with the self (*jihad bin nafs*), that is, making the maximum effort to keep control over negative feelings in one's self, for instance, arrogance, jealousy, greed, revenge, anger, etc. The psychological efforts to lead such a life of restraint is what *jihad bin nafs* is about. In social life, it happens time and again that all sorts of base, negative feelings well up within a man, causing him to lead his life succumbing to desires and temptations. The internal effort made in such a situation to overcome the temptations of the self and to continue to lead a life guided by principles is the truly Islamic *jihad bin nafs*.

According to the *hadith*, a believer is one who wages *jihad* with himself in the path of obedience to God. That is, at moments when the self (*nafs*), lured by some temptation, desires to deviate from the path of God, he keeps control over it and remains unswervingly on the divine path. This is his *jihad*—a permanent feature of the life of a believer, continuing day and night, and ending only with death.

The other form of *jihad* is that which is engaged in to propagate the constructive message of Islam. All those who embark upon such a course must first of all study the Quran and *sunnah* in a dispassionate and objective manner. No kind of conditioning should be allowed to come in the way of such a study. Only after passing through this intellectual *jihad* will the would-be proponent of Islam be in a position to make a true representation of his religion.

Two conditions have been laid down in the Quran for the communication of the teachings of Islam to others—*nasih*, well-wishing and *amin*, trustworthiness. The former appertains to God and the latter to man.

What is meant by *nasih* (well-wishing) is an earnest desire on the part of the teacher for the well-being not just of his immediate interlocutors, but the whole of humanity. This well-wishing should be so steadfast that it remains undiluted even in the face of injustice and oppression. Overlooking people's negative behaviour towards him, the teacher should continue to remain their well-wisher.

The element of trustworthiness (*amin*) is important in that it ensures that the Islam God has sent to the world will be presented to the people without deletion, addition or distortion. For instance, if the Islam sent by God is *akhirah* (Hereafter) oriented, it should not become world oriented; if it is spirituality based, it should not become politics based; if it confines *jihad* to peaceful struggle, it should not become violence based.

Islam asks us to perform *jihad* by means of the Quran, calling this 'greater' *jihad*. But it never asks its believers to do the 'greater' *jihad* by means of the gun.

This is a clear proof that *jihad* is, in actual fact, a wholly peaceful activity, carried out through peaceful methods. It has nothing to do with violent activities or violent threats.

Jihad through the Quran means striving to the utmost to present the teachings of the Quran before the people. That is, presenting the concept of One God as opposed to the concept of many gods; presenting *akhirah*-oriented life as superior to world-oriented life; principle-oriented life as against interest-oriented life; a humanitarian-oriented life as more elevated than a self-oriented life and a duty-oriented life as a categorical imperative taking moral precedence over a rights-oriented life.

Jihad, according to Islam, is not something about which there is any mystery. It is simply a natural requirement of daily living. It is vital both as a concept and as a practice because, while leading his life in this world, man is repeatedly confronted by such circumstances as are likely to derail him from the humanitarian path of the highest order.

These factors sometimes appear within man in the form of negative feelings. This is something to which everyone must remain intellectually alert, so that if for any reason there is some danger of a negative mindset gaining the upperhand, he may consciously and deliberately turn himself to positive thinking. Even if circumstances repeatedly place him in situations which are depressing and demoralising, he must never on such occasions lose courage or lose sight of noble goals. The re-assertion of his ethical sense is the real *jihad* which he has to wage.

From the Islamic standpoint, intention is all-important. Any undertaking carried out with good intentions will win God's approval, while anything done with bad intentions is bound to be disapproved of and rejected by God. In actual fact, intentions are the sole criteria of good or bad actions in the divine scheme of things.

This truth relates *jihad* to man's entire life and to all of his activities. Whatever man does in this world, be it at home, or in his professional capacity, in family or in social life, his prime imperative must be to carry it out with good intentions and not the reverse. This, however, is no simple matter. In all one's dealings, adhering strictly to the right path requires a continuous struggle. This is a great and unremitting lifelong struggle. And this is what is called *jihad*.

Even if one is engaged in good works, such as the establishment and running of institutions which cater for social welfare or academic needs, or if one is personally engaged in social work or performing some service in the political field, in all such works the element of personal glory has a way of creeping in. Therefore, in all such instances, it is essential that in the individuals concerned there should be a strong tendency to introspection, so that they may keep before them at all times the goal, not of personal glory but the greater glory of God.

It is one's intense inner struggle to make all activities God-oriented which is truly Islamic *jihad*.

JULY 11

Initiative and Result

The cover story of *Time* magazine of December 23, 1991, on the collapse of the Soviet Union, includes an interview of Gorbachev, the former President of the USSR, titled, 'A Man without a Country.'

Readers' impressions were published in letter form in the issue of January, 13, 1992. One reader writes:

The epitaph of history of Mikhail Gorbachev may some day read: Here lies a good man and an idealist who abolished repression and tyranny in the Soviet Union, not comprehending that they were the glue holding that empire together. (George Podzamsky, Verwyn, Illinois).

This is a very apt commentary. It teaches us that the result of any step we take is not necessarily in accord with our wishes, but is more often dependent upon external factors.

Leaving aside the nature of the step taken by Gorbachev, there is an important lesson in its consequences for both individuals and nations. Whenever anyone is on the point of taking a practical step, he must fully realise that the step itself lie within his power and, as such, are subordinate to his wishes. But the results of that step are not, because the moment it is taken, external factors come into play. Only if all of those factors are favourable can the result of the step be as one desires. This is a law as immutable as all other laws of nature. Not even a superpower can alter it.

JULY 12

In Quest of the Limitless

In the weekly column in the *Hindustan Times* of October 26, 1991, Mr. Khushwant Singh, a noted Indian journalist, wrote to the late Charnajit Singh, who was a prominent industrialist who bought over innumerable businesses ranging from soft drinks to furniture, as well as acquiring valuable properties within the country and abroad, including a large hotel in London. A whole fleet of the latest cars was always at his service.

However, he found it difficult to manage this vast business empire. Ultimately, the strain and tension proved too much for him, and he died before he was 51.

Man is never satisfied. That is because human nature is not one of contentment. By his very nature, man desires an unlimited world for himself. That being so, everyone continues in his own sphere to strive towards that end. But finally, when his capabilities fail him the realisation comes to him that his 'limitless world' cannot be constructed in this life. Craving for the limitless, he becomes the victim of his own limitations.

Has nature been cruel to man in casting him into a limited world and then leave him hankering after the limitless? The error is not that of nature but of man. The disposition he was endowed with was meant, on his finding this world inadequate for his purposes, to divert his yearning to the world of the Hereafter. Instead of striving towards selfish ends, he was meant to uncover the secret that what he longs for in the present world will be offered to him only in the Hereafter. But man's personality has become the victim of contradictions. On the verge of success, man has tumbled down into the pit of failure. Even after the realization of his limitations he fails to understand how to reach the limitless world of his fondest imaginings.

JULY 13

Staying Cool

The most delicate and dangerous part of space journeys is the point at which the spacecraft returns to the earth's atmosphere. Take the case of the Apollo-8 spacecraft, for instance. Before the capsule touched down on December 27, 1968, it had to negotiate a precipitous turn to the earth's atmosphere. Because of the earth's gravity—seven times that of outer space—the speed of the spacecraft soared, reaching an astronomical 39,000 kilometers per hour. Because of its extraordinary speed, the heat of the spacecraft rose to terrifying proportions; for air friction had started heating up the space vessel as soon as it entered the earth's atmosphere. Soon it became literally red hot, reaching a temperature of 3,300 degrees celsius.

No animal can survive at such a temperature. How was it, then, that the three American astronauts aboard the craft were able to remain unaffected by the blazing inferno that had built up around them and return safely to earth? The reason that they were able to do so was that the spacecraft in which they were travelling had been so constructed that its interior would not be affected by the severity of external conditions. In spite of the incredible heat on the outside, the temperature inside of the craft was just 21 degrees celsius. Imagine - 3,300 degrees on the outside; 21 degrees on the inside.

This event from the realm of space travel has an important lesson to teach us in our lives on earth. Time and time again we run into highly charged situations in life: it seems impossible to go on. There is only one way to survive under such conditions, and that is by not letting oneself be inwardly affected by one's outward situation; by suppressing one's emotions and keeping one's feelings under control. Only then will one be able to maintain one's composure. One will not be able to survive crises in life if one lets one's inward condition

become as highly charged as one's outward situation. If one remains inwardly calm and composed, at all times, one will be able to survive the heat of any external circumstances, and will safely reach one's destination. If there is hate and anger directed against one, one must not let such feelings get under one's skin instead one should try to feel forgiveness in one's heart of hearts. Even if the whole world wishes one evil, one should still have only good feelings for others. There is no other way of succeeding in life. If one adopts the same feelings as prevail in one's outside environment, the challenges of life are sure to be more than one can bear.

JULY 14

The Concept of *Tawheed*

Fundamental to the religious structure of Islam is the concept of *tawheed*, or monotheism. As the seed is to tree, so is *tawheed* to Islam. Just as the tree is a wonderfully developed extension of the seed, so is the religious system of Islam a multi-faceted expression of a single basic concept. For monotheism in Islam does not mean simply belief in one God, but in God's oneness in all respects. No one shares in this oneness of God.

Anthropologists would have us believe that the concept of God in religion began with polytheism; that polytheism gradually developed with monotheism. That is, the concept of *tawheed* was an evolutionary feature of religion which emerged at a later stage. But, according to Islamic belief, the concept of *tawheed* has existed since the beginning of human life on this earth. The first man—Adam—was the first messenger of God. It was this first messenger who taught human beings the religion of *tawheed*.

It was in later generations that this religious system began to change. This happened principally because people began to make the assumption that divinity was inherent in natural phenomena. They

wondered at the loftiness of the mountains, the unceasing flow of the rivers, and the extraordinary brilliance of the sun and moon, and took it that thing possessed of such awesome attributes must necessarily share in God's divinity. Men gifted with special talents likewise came to be included in the category of the divine; they were supposed to be incarnations of God Himself. It was in this manner that the concept of polytheism crept into the religious system.

In consonance with the view that human religions began with *tawheed*—with polytheism as a later development—the basic mission of all the Prophets who made their appearance at intervals in this world was to lead people away from the worship of many gods and back to the worship of the One God. In other words, to turn them away from the adulation of creatures and towards reverence for the Creator.

As a proof of the Creator's existence, the Quran advances the very fact of the existence of the universe. All studies of the universe show that it cannot be *sui genesis*: some other agent is essential for the universe to have come into existence. This means that the choice for us is not between a universe with God, or a universe without God. It is rather between a universe with God, or no universe at all. Since a non-existent universe is utterly inconceivable. We are forced to accept the option of a universe with God—a necessary condition also for the existence of human beings.

God created man and settled him on the earth. After installing him here, He has kept an unceasing watch over him. Life and death are equally in His hands. Whatever man gains or loses, it is all a matter of the will of God. As the Quran expresses it: "God; there is no god but He—the Living, the Eternal One. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. His is what the heavens and the earth contain. Who can intercede with Him, unless by His leave? He is cognizant of men's affairs, now and in the future. Men can grasp only that part of His Knowledge which He wills. His throne is as vast as the heavens and the earth, and the preservation of both does not weary Him. He is the Exalted, the Immense One." (2:255)

While *tawheed* means the oneness of God, it must be stressed that this concept differs radically from pantheistic or animist notions

that all the forms of existence are diverse manifestations of one and the same reality. On the contrary, the oneness of God as defined in Islam means that there is only one Being of the nature of God. All other things of the universe, be they physical or non-physical, are the creations of this One God: they are in no respect constituents of, or partners in the divine godhead.

However, in Islamic theology, *tawheed* does have two aspects to it: *tawheed fi az-Zat* and *tawheed fi as-Sifat*, that is, oneness of being and oneness of attributes. This means that in addition to the fact of there being only one Being who enjoys the status of divinity and possesses divine powers, there is also the fact that no-one else can have a share in, or lay claim to God's attributes. These include the power of creating and sustaining the universe with all its countless bodies in motion, of sustaining and nourishing our world, in short, of governing all the happenings in the heavens and on earth; all of these are directly managed by God. No representative or deputy of God has any power—either independent or delegated—over the events of the universe: “He throws the veil of night over the day. Swiftly they follow one another. It was He who created the sun, the moon and the stars and made them subservient to His will. His is the creation, His the command. Blessed be God, the Lord of all creatures.” (7:54)

The divisibility of the divine attributes is totally alien to Islam. Just as God is alone in His being, so is He alone in His attributes. In recognition of His uniqueness, the Quran opens with the following invocation: “Praise be to God, Lord of the universe, the Compassionate, the Merciful, Sovereign of the Day of Judgement. You alone we worship, and to You alone we turn for help. Guide us to the straight path, the path of those whom You have favoured, not of those who have incurred Your wrath, nor of those who have gone astray.” (1:1-7)

JULY 15

Islam and Fundamentalism

Fundamentalism literally means to stick to the fundamentals or to stick to the basic teachings of a religion. As religious terminology this term originated in the early period of the 20th century. In its initial stages it was mainly a Christian phenomenon. Modernist Christians attempted to give a liberal interpretation to some biblical teachings like the concept of the virgin birth; atonement and resurrection etc.

The conservative Christians refused to accept this kind of liberal interpretation. They maintained that the Bible was a sacred book and that they were bound to take all its teachings verbally. So the term fundamentalism was applied to the conservatives as against the liberals.

Later this term in its extended meaning began to be applied to other religions also, for instance, Islamic fundamentalism or Muslim fundamentalists.

The same story was repeated here also. Muslim modernists too started to give a liberal interpretation to the traditional teachings of Islam. Again the conservative Muslims opposed such a move. These Muslim conservatives came to be known as fundamentalists.

For instance, according to the traditional concept, the Quran was a book of God. The modernist Muslims attempted to give this concept a new interpretation. They said that the Quran came into being through divine inspiration received by the Prophet and that this inspiration was expressed by the Prophet in his own words. Thus although the Quran is a revelation of God, it is in the words of Muhammad (may peace be upon him). Now the conservatives among the Muslims refused to accept this interpretation. They insisted that the Quran was the book of God both in word and meaning. This resulted in a controversy between the two groups of Muslims.

One group came to be known as modernists and the other group as fundamentalists.

Nowadays fundamentalism has two meanings. To me one meaning is right, the other meaning is wrong.

One meaning of Islamic fundamentalism is to take it in the sense of sticking to the fundamentals, called *ittiba'*, adhering to them in both letter and spirit.

Present age is the age of religious freedom. If someone says that he will adhere to his religion literally, there is no reason to raise an objection. Such a person is only exercising his religious freedom. But if Islamic fundamentalism is taken in the second meaning of imposing it on others by force, for instance, if some Muslims hold that they will not compromise with others in the matter of their religion, and that they have to impose the teachings of their religion on others by force, then in such a case, Islamic fundamentalism will go against the spirit of Islam as well as reason.

This second concept of Islamic fundamentalism has produced what is known in modern times as Islamic extremism or Islamic terrorism. But the truth is that the terms Islamic extremism or Islamic terrorism are self contradictory. Islam is a religion of tolerance and peace. It is defamatory to attribute the words terrorism or extremism to Islam. In fact, there is no room for terrorism or extremism in Islam. The Prophet of Islam has observed: "The religion revealed to me is a religion of kindness and tolerance." There is no room for violence in Islam for any reason whatsoever. Thus Islamic fundamentalism in this second sense is not acceptable to Islam.

After the second world war, however, some Muslims opted terrorism or extremism in the name of Islam to achieve political ends. It was their personal act. But since they carried it out in the name of Islam it was attributed by the people to Islam. The truth is that this is a misuse of Islam. It has nothing to do with Islam. Those Muslims who are engaged in terrorism or extremism in the name of Islam are certainly misusing Islam.

Islam is a scheme of spiritual development. The goal of Islam is to establish direct communion between God and man in order that man may become the recipient of divine inspiration. In such a religion

it is moderation which is of the utmost importance, not extremism. It is peace which is of the utmost importance and not violence. From this we can understand what is and what is not included in Islamic fundamentalism.

JULY 16

The Concept of Social Service in Islam

All the teachings of Islam are based on two basic principles—worship of God and service of men. Without putting both of these principles into practice, there can be no true fulfillment of one's religious duties.

In its followers, Islam inculcates the spirit of love and respect for all human beings. By serving human beings on the one hand they please their God, and on the other they achieve spiritual progress for themselves.

According to a *hadith*, you should be merciful to people on earth and God on high will be merciful to you. In this way Islam links personal salvation to serving others. One can receive God's reward in the Hereafter only if one has done something to alleviate the sufferings of mankind.

According to a *hadith*, on Doomsday, God will say to a person, "I was ill, but you did not come to nurse Me." The man will reply, "God, You being the Lord of the universe how can You be ill?" God will answer, "Such and such servant of Mine was ill. Had you gone there, you would have found Me there with him." Then God will say to another person, "I was hungry, but you did not feed Me." The person will reply, "God, You are the Lord of the worlds, how could You go hungry?" God will say, "Such and such of my servants came to you, but you did not feed him. Had you done so, you would have found Me with him." Then God will say to yet another man, "I was thirsty, and you did not give Me water to drink." That person will

also say, “God, You are the Lord of the worlds, how could You be thirsty?” God will say, “Such and such servant of Mine came to you, but you did not give him water to drink. Had you offered him water, you would have found Me there with him.”

From this, we learn the Islamic principle that if someone wants to find God, he shall first have to make himself deserving of this by helping the poor and the needy. This act becomes a means of spiritual progress for him. And there is no doubt about it that it is only those people who have elevated themselves spiritually, who will find God.

This culture of mercy and compassion approved of by God is not limited to human beings, but extends also to the animal world. We must be equally sympathetic to animals. The *Hadith* gives us many guidelines on how to look after animals and treat them with fairness. There are duties laid down by God. One who is cruel to animals risks depriving himself of God’s mercy.

Two significant examples have been mentioned in a *hadith*. One of them concerns a devoutly religious woman, who spent most of her time in worship. But one day she became enraged at a cat and trussed it up with a rope, depriving it of food and water. The cat remained tied up in this state until it died of thirst and hunger. God so strongly disapproved of this that, despite the woman’s great devotions, He decreed that she be cast into hell.

The other incident concerns a woman who, a prostitute by profession, was generally despised by people. One day she was going along a path when she found a dog lying on the ground dying of thirst. This woman felt sympathy for it. She looked here and there, but there was no water to be seen anywhere. Then she noticed a well nearby with water deep within it. But there was nothing with which to draw water from it. Then she thought of her shawl to which she tied her shoe and by lowering this into the well she was able to bring up water which she poured into the mouth of the dying dog. She did this several times until the dog’s thirst was quenched. Then it revived and walked happily away. According to the *Hadith* God was so pleased with this human gesture that He decreed that she should enter paradise.

This comparative example shows that over and above we must be merciful even to animals. Those men and women who have no feelings of mercy and compassion for living things are valueless in the eyes of God. On the other hand, those men and women who do have mercy and compassion for living things will be adjudged God's favoured servants.

Islamic belief softens the hearts of its believers. That is why when Islamic belief penetrates into people's hearts they will of necessity become kind and compassionate to others. They will see everyone with eyes of 'love and compassion,' they will have this urge within them to serve others, and fulfill others' needs.

If even after adopting the beliefs of Islam, feelings of love and compassion do not well up in the heart of its adherent, he should rethink whether or not Islamic beliefs have truly found a place in his heart and mind, whether or not he is able to fully practice what he believes and whether or not he has succeeded in moulding himself entirely into the path of Islam.

When Umar Faruq, the second Caliph of Islam, travelled from Madinah to Palestine, he had taken only one camel alongwith him. He said that if he continued to ride the camel during the entire journey it would be cruelty to the animal, so it must be given rest. Therefore he rode and walked by turns so that the camel should have periods of rest, until he reached his destination.

This shows that if a true spirit of Islam is inculcated in a person, he becomes so compassionate to all living beings that even at the cost of his own comforts he extends a helping hand to others.

As it is put in a *hadith*, "By God, he is not a Muslim who eats his fill, while his neighbour goes hungry." This shows that a Muslim is one who is as concerned with others' hunger and thirst as he is with his own; who is concerned not only with his own person but with the whole of humanity.

According to another *hadith*, you should "extend greetings to people, feed them and earn your place in heaven." This shows that according to Islam that person is worthy of heaven whose heart is impatient for others' peace and good will, who is eager to share with everyone, whether it be food, clothes or medical help, etc. In short, one should share in people's pain and suffering.

Islam is a religion of humanity. Islam considers serving others as a great act of worship. According to the teachings of Islam, it is only in serving people that we shall have a share in God's mercy.

JULY 17

The Creative Plan of God

The system of guidance in this world is based on the principle of faith in the Unseen (2:3). That is, all realities are placed here in invisible state. Now it is man's job to bring into play his intellectual powers and discover these hidden realities and then lead his life in complete accordance with them.

Now what is required of man is to give all greatness to God, in spite of the fact that God's greatness is not visible to the naked eye. Similarly, it is required of man that he joins hands with the preachers of truth, however since the preachers always come in the form of common men, this recognition (of the preacher) is possible only for a person who has the ability to penetrate beyond appearances.

This is also the case with matters of the world. There were great potential in matter, but all of these lay hidden inside the earth. Discovering these material potential and developing them into the form of an advanced civilization was the job to be performed by man. It was this task which man has performed on a large scale in modern times.

It would be true to say, therefore, that the method of nature is exactly the same, as is termed 'the discovery method' in the science of education.

Man has been given a brain of high quality, having potentially all the necessary abilities in order to put this discovery method into practice. Man's mind had the capacity to arrive at the realities of things by thinking deeply. It was thus possible for him to recognize

his Creator on the one hand and discover hidden material blessings and put them into use for building his civilization, on the other.

The status of the Prophet in this process is one of a reliable guide. God's message gives man those basic principles in the light and guidance of which he may begin his journey of discovery and arrive ultimately at the destination of success. The reality arrived at in this way is man's personal discovery. It deeply influences his whole personality. It becomes for him an eternal asset of his life.

But when we see the history of the world we learn that soon after the beginning of humanity on earth, absolutism (system of coercion) was established in the form of monarchy. The entire populated world came under the rule of certain kings. To consolidate their power, these kings adopted the system of total absolutism. In this way, free thinking and freedom of expression was totally uprooted. What is called freedom of speech never existed in the ancient world.

It is this coercive system which was a permanent obstacle to the propagation of the message of the prophets. Then this same system of coercion remained a continuous obstacle to the path of scientific discoveries and advancement. For any idea requires free thinking, free discussion for its development. In the old system of coercion, people were denied freedom of speech, hence open intellectual exercise was not possible in those times.

Besides general prophethood, the Prophet of Islam was also entrusted the task of breaking this system of coercion established in the world. For this he was specially provided with all the necessary help needed to perform this great task. That is why within a space of less than one hundred years he along with his companions either broke the institutions of imperial absolutism all over the world or weakened them so considerably that they could not stand long. In this connection the *jihad* (military oppression conducted by the Prophet and his companions were, in reality, a kind of divine 'oppression' with a definite goal of demolishing the man-made system of coercion and replacing it with the system of nature based on freedom of speech, in order to throw open the floodgate of worldly as well as religious progress for humanity).

It is this system which is called fitna (mischief) in the Quran and the believers have been commanded to wage war with the upholders of this coercive system so that the matter of religion rests only with God (Al-Anfal 39). In this verse, religion is referred not to Shari'ah but to the religions of nature. That is, this verse asks believers to wage war with those oppressors who disturb the creative scheme of God. Only through their subjugation the unnatural system of suppression of speech established through dictatorial absolutism maybe brought to an end, bringing in its wake God's desired system on the basis of intellectual freedom. Only then the artificial situation may yield place to the natural state on earth. This work has now already been performed fully all over the world throwing open the gates of all kinds of blessings on man.

JULY 18

In Search of a Formula for Peace

Pace is a must for all kinds of constructive activities. No peace no progress, no peace no development. Because of this importance, every religion including Islam, has laid great emphasis on peace. That is why everyone is desirous of peace. All men and women want to live in a peaceful atmosphere. But it is also a fact that nowhere people are enjoying peace today. Peace is yet to be achieved. Peace remains a distant dream for all of us.

Now, what is the reason behind this failure? The reason is that peace is a bilateral issue. But everyone wants to secure peace on unilateral basis. Everyone wants to receive peace on his own terms without taking others into account. But this kind of approach is unrealistic and impractical. You know, our world is a world of diverse interests. And in such a world, unilateralism of this kind is simply not feasible. Now, let's have a look at history, which is mentioned in the Quran as the Days of God.

A study of history tells us that practically there are only two formulas available for peace. And that whenever peace has been achieved it was achieved by following one of the two formulas.

Now the first formula for peace is that of give and take. That is, gaining something by giving something to the other party. The second formula for securing peace is to accept the status quo. Refusal to accept the status quo results in war. And acceptance of the status quo results in peace.

Now, it is circumstances that determine which one of the two formulae is applicable to any given situation. This is the gist of what I have found after a long study of Islam as well as of human history.

In short, peace is the outcome of co-existence. And peaceful co-existence is the only way of existence on this planet. This is the lesson we learn from history. Either we co-exist or cease to exist. There is simply no other option.

Some practical examples

The early Islamic history provides an example of the first formula for peace. There is a well known incident which is recorded in seerah books as Sahifa al-Madina (Madinah Declaration). When the Prophet of Islam came to Madinah, after migration from Makkah, the city was inhabited at that time by both Muslims and non-Muslims. The Prophet secured peace by following the formula of give and take. The Prophet obtained some civic rights for Muslims by acknowledging some civic rights for non-Muslim community. In this way a peaceful society came into existence in Madinah.

The Sultanate of Oman gives us a recent example of this kind of peace. Land disputes at the border between Oman and Yemen had continued for a long period of time. It was in early 70's that the Sultan of Oman established peace on the principle of give and take. Consequently, all the gates of progress which had remained closed for so long were now opened for Oman.

The example of the second formula for peace is *Sulh al-Hudaybiya* (Hudaybiya Peace Treaty) in the early history of Islam. On this occasion the Prophet of Islam accepted the status quo and returned to Madinah. This enabled him to make a 10-year peace treaty with his

rival group. And then he engaged himself in the completion of his constructive projects.

In present times Japan presents an example of securing peace by following this formula. After the Second World War Japan accepted the status quo as against the United States. As a result, an atmosphere of peace immediately prevailed between the two nations. And Japan found the opportunity to devote itself to its plans for progress and development.

These are the only two possible and practicable formulas for securing peace. It will depend upon circumstances which formula has to be adopted.

It is essential to learn in the matter of peace that the objective of peace is not present gain, it is always future gain. The goal of peace essentially is to normalize the situation so that the process of progress and development may be set in motion. The criterion of peace is not what has been achieved at the time of peace settlement, but what opportunities are opened up in the wake of the settlement of peace.

An Incident

Now, I want to narrate an incident very relevant to the subject under discussion here. I visited Jerusalem for the first time in August 1995. As you know, Jerusalem is a well known place of conflict in the world. I was walking around the Arab Sector of the city. At one place I saw that some Palestinian children were singing this Arabic song in chorus:

هلم نقاتل هلم نقاتل فإن القتال سبيل الرشاد

Let's make war, let's make war. For war is the way to success.

I went up to them and told them that it would be much better for them to sing their song like this:

هلم نسالم هلم نسالم فإن السلام سبيل الرشاد

Let's make peace, let's make peace. For peace is the way to success.

The children smiled at this. One child about ten years of age got so excited that he rushed to offer me an olive branch which is considered to be a symbol of peace. Needless to say that I accepted that with thanks. It was indeed the response of nature represented by an innocent child. It is my firm belief that nature loves peace and that if we appeal to human nature the response no doubt will be greatly positive.

JULY 19

Jews and Muslims Between Conflict and Encounter

The Jews are called People of the Book in the Quran. The Quran has allowed Muslims to marry Jewish women. Above all the Quran tells us that Muslims and Jews have the common creed. The Quran addressing the Jews states: O People of the Scripture! Come to an agreement between us and you: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords besides God. (3:64)

This shows that Jews have been accorded special status in Islam. So Jews and Muslims, more than anyone else, must live together in amity and harmony. And history is a witness to it. With the exception of conflicts between Jews and Muslims during the early fifty years of Islam and the recent fifty years, both the communities have lived together harmoniously for more than one thousand years. The history of both Arab and non-Arab countries testifies to it.

If you travel to Egypt, Iraq, Morocco, etc. you will see even today that Jews and Muslims share a common culture. It is the result of this that for the last fourteen hundred years Jews have been coming closer to Islam. Abdullah ibn Salam, a well known Jewish scholar provides an example in the early phase of Islam, and Mohammad Asad is one such example in the recent history.

The truth is that the controversy between the Muslims and Jews is not religious but political. In the early period as well as today, political differences are the main reasons for this conflict.

To my view, if in this matter politics and religion are delinked, the intensity of the conflict will be lessened on its own. Then they will start living together in harmony as they had been living fifty years ago.

Some hold that the enmity between the Muslims and Jews is eternal as it is rooted in the Quran itself. For instance the Quran has this to say: You will find the most vehement of people in hostility to those who believe (to be) the Jews and the idolaters. (5:82)

This is a grave misunderstanding, something pertaining to a particular time has been generalised. In actual fact, this verse is related to some Jews who were Prophet's contemporary and not to all their generations till Doomsday. Owing to certain political reasons during the Madinan life of the Prophet some conflict ensued between the Jews and the Muslims. During this period of controversy it was but natural, that temporarily an atmosphere of enmity and rivalry was created. But it was not to last for ever. As we see soon after, during the Abbasid period, Jewish scholars were working along with Muslim scholars in an atmosphere of friendship and harmony in the Bait al-Hikmah and other fields. Similarly in Spain both Muslims and Jews worked together in academic pursuits. It will be worth mentioning here that one of the best translations of the Quran was done by a Jewish scholar, Professor N.J. Dawood. Thus Jews have lived peacefully along with the Muslims in Arab countries for centuries. It was in 1948 that once again political rivalry was created as we are witnessing today.

I must add that even today outside Palestine, Muslims and Jews live together as peaceful neighbours in both Muslim as well as non-Muslim countries. This clearly shows that the so-called Muslim-Jewish conflict is certainly political. Using the name of religion in this issue is only an exploitation of religion. It has nothing to do with the real religion—Islam.

To us the solution to this problem lies in delinking this issue with religion. The inclusion of religion in any controversy turns it into an emotional issue. And when an issue becomes emotional, its solution becomes well nigh impossible.

If I were to advise in this matter I would like to suggest to both the communities concerned to do a thorough rethinking over this matter. They should separate the real cause from the non-real cause of the controversy. Instead of adopting emotional approach they should adopt realistic approach. By doing so, the issue will be solved on its own.

Differences inevitably exist in any two communities of the world. A number of differences exist even within the community itself. Despite this we see that they lead their lives in a normal manner. This has become possible only by adopting realistic approach. This same formula should be adopted by Muslims and the Jews in their controversial matters.

The Quran gives us this guideline in controversial matters: Reconciliation is the best. (4:128)

This approach of reconciliation by avoiding confrontation is the only formula for a successful life in this world—for resolving controversies within as well as between the communities.

JULY 20

Freedom of Expression

Man has been granted total intellectual freedom in Islam. It was Islam which brought into existence the revolution in human history which granted freedom of expression to all human beings. Prior to Islam in all periods of human history the system of absolutism prevailed in the world. That is why man was denied of intellectual freedom. Intellectual freedom is no simple matter. The truth is that the secret of all human progress lies hidden in intellectual freedom.

The first benefit of this intellectual freedom is that man receives that highest good which is called fear of God in the Quran (5:94). It consists of man's recognition and realisation of God in full freedom and, of one's own freewill, without any external pressure from God. So long as there is no atmosphere of total freedom, none can experience the indescribable pleasure of spiritual experience which is called fear of God in the Unseen. Hence it is impossible (without freedom) to grant anyone credit for the highest of human actions.

Freedom of expression is the thing which saves one from hypocrisy. Man is a thinking creature. His mind necessarily thinks

and forms opinions. In such a situation if curbs are placed on freedom of expression, people's thinking will not cease; the only thing that will cease is the expression of their thoughts through their lips and pens. Any institution, nation, state which places curbs on freedom of expression will be ultimately *brimming* with hypocrites. In such an atmosphere sincere people can *never* be produced.

In this way intellectual freedom is directly related to creativity. A society having intellectual freedom breeds creative people whereas a society which curbs intellectual freedom will necessarily stagnate and as a result the produce of creative mind and its growth and development will for ever be stopped.

The proper stand in the matter of disagreement and criticism is that people shed off their unnecessary sensitivity in this matter, instead of attempting to put a stop to the act of criticism and disagreement itself. This is the demand of Islam as well as the demand of nature.

The attribute of a true believer described in the *hadith* is: 'whenever a truth is presented to them, they accept it.' (*Musnad Ahmad*) Here, by truth is meant a matter of truth. In other words a believer is one who has full capacity of accepting the truth. Whenever a truth is brought before him, whenever any error of his is pointed out to him, no complex comes in the way of his accepting the truth.

The highest point of this attribute is that man is always prepared rather he eagerly awaits for someone to point out to him any shortcoming of his so that he may immediately accept it. He is almost greedy of his own reform and rectification. It is this attribute of a believer which has been expressed by Umar Faruq in these words: May God bless the man who sends me the gift of my own shortcoming.

The truth is that the acceptance of the truth is the greatest act of worship. It is an act for which man has to make the greatest of sacrifice. This great sacrifice makes this act the greatest form of worship. This is the sacrifice of one's prestige; of losing one's greatness. To lose one's sense of greatness for the sake of truth is an occasion when man earns his entry into heaven by paying its price.

When one receives the blessing of having performed this great form of worship? This opportunity comes to man only when there is full freedom of speech. When one can criticize another without

any obstacle. When such atmosphere prevails in society as people can speak freely and frankly and the listeners listen to them without raising any objection.

Just as the mosque is a place to offer prayer in congregation, similarly the freedom of speech provides that conducive atmosphere in which great virtues flourish.

It is in atmosphere such as these that those situations are created when a person is given the credit of the pronouncement of truth and another rewarded for the acceptance of the truth.

JULY 21

“Sadullah, I need a man”

During his last days, there was an occasion once when Aurangzeb (1618-1707), the last great Mughal emperor, shed tears as, raising his hands in supplications, he said his prayers. He went on praying silently like this for a long time with his vizier (minister) standing by his side. When his prayers finally came to an end, the Vizier, Sadullah, addressed him thus: “Your Majesty, the flag of your empire can be seen flying everywhere, right from Kashmir to Deccan. Is there still some wish in your heart which has been left unfulfilled and because of which you are so grief-stricken?” Aurangzeb remained silent for a while, then, his voice charged with emotion, he replied: Sadullah *marde khwaham*. (Sadullah, I need a man.)

What kind of man was this that the emperor was so desperate to find? What was this great problem which was so tormenting him? It was simply his own awareness that his successors, who were to inherit the great Mughal empire, were all thoroughly self-centered people, who were incapable of foresight, objectivity or self-sacrifice, and who thought only of short-term gains. He sensed that they would fight amongst themselves for personal power and glory, thus fragmenting and destroying his vast, hard-won Mughal empire.

After having reigned for half a century, he passed away on the 20th of February, 1707, survived by three sons, Muazzam, Azam and Kam Bakhsh, who were governors respectively of Kabul, Gujarat and Bijapur. Aurangzeb had felt that the only practical solution to the problems of succession was to leave a will dividing the empire into three parts in order that each son might live in the separate sphere assigned to him, and would not, therefore, clash with either of his brothers.

But this idea met with no success. Soon after the death of Aurangzeb, all three princes claimed the throne of Delhi. They then proceeded to do battle with one another for two years until Prince Kam Bakhsh and Prince Azam had been killed, whereupon Prince Muazzam ascended the throne of Delhi in 1708, choosing for himself the title of "*Shah-e-Alam*" (King of the world).

Shah-e-Alam, however, did not realise at that time that he did not have long to live. Hardly four years had elapsed after his capture of the throne when he expired in 1712, leaving behind him four sons, Jahandar Shah, Azimushshan, Jahan Shah and Rafi-ush-Shan. Without exception, they took after their father, losing no time in entering into conflict with one another, each one, of course, aspiring to the throne, irrespective of the cost. Ultimately, in the ensuing battle, three of them were killed. Jahandar Shah, the victor, then seized the throne. But his rule, too, was short-lived—barely one year—for Farrukh Ser, the son of his murdered brother had set himself to avenging his father's death. His plot was successful and Jahandar Shah was dethroned and hanged in the Red Fort in 1713.

Although, having killed his uncle, Farrukh Ser came to possess the throne of Delhi; he retained it for barely six years, for his enemies finally succeeded in overpowering him. One day in the year 1719, he was dragged down from his throne, beaten cruelly, then thrown into prison where he was killed by strangulation. After this murder, Prince Rafiud Darajat ascended the throne of Delhi. But his reign was even shorter than that of his immediate predecessors, having come to the throne on the 28th of February 1719 only to be ousted on the 4th of June 1719. A few days later, he died of tuberculosis.

The domestic war between the Mughal princes considerably weakened the central government of Delhi, which lost its hold on the

provinces, thus sparking off a tendency among the different provinces to seek their independence. To quote from a standard history of India:

“On the decline of the central authority at Delhi, the inevitable centrifugal tendency was manifest in different parts of the Empire and the provincial viceroys made themselves independent of the titular Delhi emperor” (An Advanced History of India, 1978, p. 529).

Events had borne out Aurangzeb’s worst misgivings. The Deccan province became independent in 1724 under Qamruddin Khan (Nizamul-Mulk). Awadh province established independent rule in 1754 under Saadat Khan. Bengal saw its independence in 1739 under Sarfaraz Khan, who was known as the Nawab of Bengal. Similarly the Rajput States, Udaipur, Jodhpur, Jaipur, etc., abandoned their allegiance to Delhi and assumed independent status. The vast empire of Aurangzeb had thus torn into pieces.

After the death of Aurangzeb, the Mughal empire continued apparently to exist for a further 150 years, but this was a period frequently marred by internecine bloodshed. There was a constant struggle for personal power going on between the Mughal princes, nobles and ministers and the result was that the Mughal empire was being weakened and diminished day by day. The English were quick to exploit this situation, and made greater and greater inroads into the country until a stage was reached when they succeeded wresting control of the entire country. The Mughal emperor at the Red Fort was emperor only in name, and almost all power was vested in the hands of the English. Two of the phrases coined at that time aptly sum up the state of affairs:

“The government of Shah Alam stretches from Delhi to Palam.” And “Bahadur Shah sits on the throne, but the company gives the orders!” (i.e. the East India Company).

Finally, in the wake of the 1857 revolution this mere figurehead was removed from the scene for ever.

The story of the Mughal empire is the story of all Muslims, the greatest reasons for their downfall in later times being the same as they were in Mughal times—the pursuit of personal glory, the resulting internecine warfare and the sacrifice of higher and greater things.

Personal objectives may have been temporarily achieved, but no great social order has resulted.

It is only when the individual is willing to step down in favour of higher principles that society as a whole can benefit. The sacrifice of the individual is the price to be paid for the glory of the nation. No nation can ever hold up its head, far less take pride of place amongst the nations of the world, if the individuals of which it is comprised think of nothing but personal gain and self-glorification. This has never been so, and nowhere is this evident in the world of today.

JULY 22

Bowing Before the Commandments of God

There was a family of the Thaqif tribe of Ta'if, named Banu 'Amr ibn 'Umayr, and another from Banu Makhzum, named Banu Mughirah who, during the Period of Ignorance, (that is, before Islam) used to conduct usurious transactions amongst themselves. After the conquest of Makkah, both families accepted Islam. But at that time, the Banu Mughirah still owed a certain amount of money to the Banu 'Amr ibn 'Umayr, who demanded repayment of the debt. The Banu Mughirah conferred amongst themselves and decided that they would pay no interest (on any loans made to them) from the earnings they made after their acceptance of Islam. This naturally caused much dissension. Attab ibn Usayd as a representative of the Prophet in the area, informed the latter of the situation. In reply, the Prophet recited this verse of the Quran: "Believers, have fear of God and waive what is still due to you from usury, if your faith be true; or war shall be declared against you by God and His apostle" (2:278-279). The attitude of the Banu 'Amr ibn 'Umayr immediately changed when they heard this verse and they said, "We turn to God and waive the interest still due." (Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir*)

JULY 23

The Spirit of Hajj

It is incumbent upon Muslims to perform Hajj, at least once in a lifetime, as long as they possess the means. As is clear from the following excerpts from the Quran and *Hadith*, Hajj is one important pillar among the five foundation pillars of Islam:

“Pilgrimage to the House is a duty to Allah for all who can make the Journey.” (3:97)

“The first House ever to be built for man was that at Makkah, a blessed place, a beacon for the nations.” (3:96)

“There are five basic pillars of Islam,” said the Prophet Muhammad: “To bear testimony that there is no deity save Allah, and that Muhammad is His Prophet; to establish prayer and pay the poor-due; to make pilgrimage to the House, and fast during Ramadan.”

The root meaning of the word “Hajj” is “to set out” or “to make pilgrimage.” Canonically, it has come to refer to a Muslim act of worship, performed annually, in which the worshipper circumambulates the House of God in Makkah, stays awhile in the plains of Arafat and performs other rites which together constitute Hajj—the act of pilgrimage.

Hajj is a comprehensive act of worship, involving both financial outlay and physical exertion. Both remembrance of God and sacrifice for His sake are part and parcel of Hajj. Hajj is an act of worship in which the spirit of all acts of worship has, in some way or another, been brought into play.

The sacred duties of Hajj revolve around the House of God in Makkah. What does the House of God represent to a believer? It brings to life a whole prophetic tradition, stretching from Abraham to Muhammad. The House of God stands as a model of true faith in

God, and submission to the Master of the House. "The Prophets gave up everything and followed the Lord," is the message that rings out from the Lord's House; leave all and follow Him. They were obedient to His will; be you so also. They served His cause on earth; serve Him until you die, and you will prosper forever."

The journey to Hajj is a journey to God. It represents the ultimate closeness one can achieve to God while living in this world. Other acts of worship are ways of remembering God; Hajj is a way of reaching Him. Generally we worship Him on an unseen level; in Hajj we worship Him as if we saw Him face to face. When a pilgrim stands before the House of God it seems to him that he is standing before God Himself. He is then moved to revolve around the Lord's House, like a butterfly encircling a flower, clinging to His doorstep as a slave begging for his master's mercy.

The uniqueness of Hajj lies in the unique nature of the place in which it is performed. Throughout the ages, Makkah has remained a venue for the manifestation of God's signs. It was here that the great communicator of the divine message, the Prophet Abraham, made a memorial to man's life of belief and submission. And it was here, following in the same tradition, that the foundation of Islamic history was laid: fourteen hundred years ago the Prophet Muhammad changed the spiritual face of Arabia, from one littered by many godheads, to one illuminated by the countenance of the One God.

Much history lies behind the rich and noble tradition existing in Hijaz. It is a land that has received God's special grace. The spiritual wealth it has on offer is enough to enrich any poor traveller, enough to revive any languid heart. A sea of divine mercy flows where only sand and sky meet the eye, in the environs of Makkah and Madinah. There the pilgrim washes and is cleansed.

Among all Muslim acts of worship, Hajj holds a prominent position. In one *hadith*, the Prophet called it the supreme act of worship. But it is not just the rites of pilgrimage that constitute this importance, it is the spirit in which Hajj is performed. Let us put this another way and say that it is not merely a matter of going to Makkah and returning. There is much more to Hajj than that. Hajj has been prescribed so that it may inspire us with new religious

fervour. To return from Hajj with one's faith in God strengthened and rekindled—that is the hallmark of a true pilgrim. Hajj only takes its place as a supreme act of worship when it is undertaken in its true spirit, and performed in the proper manner. It will then be the greatest act in a pilgrim's life: he will never be the same again.

To make Hajj is to meet God. When the pilgrim reaches Meeqat, the border of the Sacred Territory, he is filled with awe of God: he feels that he is leaving his own world, and entering God's. Now he is touching the Lord, revolving around Him, running towards Him, journeying on His behalf, making sacrifice in His name, smiting His enemies, praying to the Lord and seeing his prayer answered.

The House of God in Makkah is one of God's signs on earth. There, souls which have strayed from the Lord take comfort in Him once again; hearts which have become hard as stone are brought low before Almighty God; eyes which have lost their vision are filled with divine radiance. But these blessings of Hajj are available only to those who come prepared for them. Otherwise Hajj will be just a tour, a visit which leaves no lasting impression upon its perpetrator.

“Hajj is to stand in the plains of Arafat.” These words of the Prophet Muhammad illustrate the importance of sojourning in that place. The plain of Arafat, in which pilgrims spend one day, presents a picture of the arena of the Judgement Day. Host upon host of God's servants flock in from all sides to witness the spectacle. And what a spectacle! All are dressed in similar, simple attire. There is nothing to single any person out. All are reciting the same words: “Here we are at Your service, Lord.” How can one who witnesses this spectacle but call to mind the like of this verse of the Quran:

“When the Trumpet is blown, and behold, from the graves they rush forth to their Lord.” (36:51)

The pilgrims gather on the plain of Arafat in order to recall the time when they will gather on the plain of the last day. What they will experience in practice in the next world, they conjure up visions of it in this world.

For all these reasons, Hajj reigns supreme among all acts of devotion. Like the Sacred Mosque in Makkah has a status above all

other mosques, so the worship that is performed there—as part of the pilgrimage—stands head and shoulders above all other acts of devotion.

JULY 24

Equality of Men and Women

The historical study of men and women not just as social entities, but as major parts of God's creation, shows them as having the right as such, to equal status and respect. Difference in their physique and capabilities reflects the degree of specialization in their biological make-up. If nature has decreed that man and woman should have different attributes and functions, it is so that, rather than duplicate each other, they should complement each other. And so long as they interact in this complementarity the dictates of both nature and society are satisfactorily fulfilled.

From this respect men and women can be likened to a cart running on two wheels. Each of the wheels contributes equally to the running of the cart. Even if only one of the wheels goes out of order, the cart will stop. The way a cart traverses its path with the help of the two wheels, exactly in the same way, with mutual cooperation of men and women, the system of life can be run efficiently.

Thus the biological division of human beings into male and female is the result of purposeful planning by the Creator.

In Islam, a woman enjoys the same status as that of a man. There is no difference between man and woman as regards status, rights and blessings, both in this world and in the hereafter. Both are considered equal participants in the carrying out of the functions of daily living.

Here are some further quotations from the Quran and *hadith* regarding the position of women in Islam.

Women shall with justice have rights similar to those exercised against them. (2:228)

Women shall have a share in what their parents and kinsmen leave; whether it be little or much, it is legally theirs. (4:7)

...Those that have faith and do good works, both men and women, shall enter the Gardens of Paradise and receive blessings without measure. (4:124)

JULY 25

Women in Islam

The following traditions of the Prophet indicate the elevated function of woman in Islam:

“Women are half of men.

Fear God in respect of women.

Heaven lies beneath the feet of mothers. (That is, those who serve their mothers well are deserving of Paradise.)

The best among you is he who is best for his family. For my family, I am the best of all of you.”

The most perfect man of religion is one who excels in character. The best among you is he who gives the best treatment to his womenfolk.

This makes it clear that, although males and females differ from one another biologically, they are equal in terms of human status. No distinction is made between women and men as regards their respective rights. This is all to the good if they are to be lifetime companions.

Man and woman in the eyes of Islam then are not the duplicates of one another, but the complements. This concept permits the shortcomings of one sex to be compensated for by the strengths of the other.

It is a fact that women in general are not physically as strong as men, but their physical weakness in no way implies their inferiority to

men. The eyes are the most delicate parts of our body, while the nails by comparison are extremely hard. That does not mean that the nails are superior to the eyes.

Just as two different kinds of fruits will differ in colour, taste, shape and texture, without one being superior or inferior to the other, so also do men and women have their different qualities which distinguish the male from the female without there being any question of superiority or inferiority. They are endowed by nature with different capacities so that they may play their respective roles in life with greater ease and effectiveness.

However, in respect of innate talents all individuals, be they men or women, differ from one another. Yet their need for each other is equal. All are of equal value. One is not more important or less important than the other. Similarly when it comes to the establishment of a home and raising of a family, men and women have their separate roles to play. But each is vital. Each is indispensable to the other. And for them to come together, function in unison and live in harmony, there must be mutual respect and a prevailing sense that a difference of biological function does not imply inequality. For the biological division of human beings into male and female is the result of the purposeful planning of our Creator.

In Islam, a woman enjoys the same status as that of a man. But in ancient times, women had come to be considered inferior and were deprived, among other things, of the right to inherit property. Islam for the first time in human history gave them their due legal rights over property. Neither did it distinguish between men and women as regards status, rights and blessings, both in this world and the Hereafter. Both were considered equal participants in the carrying out of the functions of daily living. As the Quran so aptly puts it: "You are members, one of another." (3:195)

Since the earliest ideal phase of Islam, Muslim women have successfully exploited their talents towards the field of education in particular. Homes had become centres of learning. As women performed their role without going outdoors, there is a general impression that Islam has restricted women's workplace to performing only domestic chores. But this is not the truth. First of all Islam

encouraged them to receive education, then enthused them with a new zeal. Subsequently, they went out to impart this learning to the next generation. Let's take the instance of the Prophet's wives, held up as role models for women in Islam. Preserving their femininity, they participated in all kinds of religious and worldly activities. For instance, the Prophet's wife Aisha, having gained full knowledge of Islam from the Prophet, was able, after the death of the Prophet, to perform the task of teacher and guide to the Muslim community for a period of about fifty years. Abdullah ibn Abbas, a Companion of great stature, and one of the best commentators of the Quran, was one of Aisha's pupils.

As modern day research tells us women are better with words than men. It is perhaps this reason why they are able to run educational institutions successfully. Besides this there may be many such workplaces where women are able to exploit their full potential. Since earliest days of Islam we find Muslim women working outdoors. Umm Dahdah, wife of a Companion of the Prophet worked in her orchard. Khadija, Prophet's wife conducted business, to cite only a few of such examples. However, Islam sets great value on the proper management of home. It is because home is the most important unit of any society. Home is the centre of preparing succeeding generations. Thus neglecting home front will amount to neglecting the next generation which in turn will result in a great national loss.

I would say that Islam grants even more respect to women than to men. According to one *hadith* a man once came to the Prophet and asked him who rightfully deserved the best treatment from him.

"Your mother," said the Prophet. "Who's next?" asked the man. "Your mother." "Who comes next?" the man asked again. The Prophet again replied, "Your mother." "Who is after that?" insisted the man. "Your father," said the Prophet.

Another example concerns Hajra, the Prophet Ibrahim's wife. Hajj, regarded as the greatest form of worship in Islam, entails the performance of Sai, one of the main rites of the Hajj. This is accomplished by running back and forth seven times between Safa and Marwah, two hillocks near the Kaba. This running, enjoined upon every pilgrim, be they rich or poor, literate or illiterate, kings or commoners, is in imitation of the desperate quest of Hajra,

Ibrahim's wife, for water to quench the thirst of her crying infant, four thousand years ago. The performance of this rite is a lesson in struggling for the cause of God. It is of the utmost significance that this was an act performed by a woman. Perhaps there could be no better demonstration of a woman's greatness than God's command to all men, literally to follow in her footsteps.

We can see that the principle implied by the expression 'ladies first' in modern times had already been established in Islam at the very outset.

JULY 26

Forgiveness—An Islamic Virtue

Islam attaches great importance to the concept of pardoning of sins by Allah so that one may be saved from Hellfire. On several occasions, the Quran gives such prayers as 'Pardon us, forgive us our sins, and have mercy upon us' (Quran 2:286). Allah assures us that no matter what our sin, if we truly repent and seek His forgiveness, and take steps to put right our wrongs, He will forgive us. The Prophet Muhammad said, "My heart is clouded until I have asked God's forgiveness seventy times during the day and night."

We are likewise asked to show mercy to our fellow men. (90:17) Since God is Himself forgiving, He desires that people should cultivate this attribute and show forgiveness to other human beings. (The Quran, 24:22; 64:14).

The Prophet Muhammad taught his followers that the individual who pardons his enemy, even while having the power to extract revenge, will be nearest to God in the Hereafter. Once the Prophet was asked, "How many times are we to forgive our servants' faults?" He remained silent. The questioner repeated his question. But the Prophet gave no answer. But when the person asked a third time, he said, "Forgive your servant seventy times a day."

The Quran makes it clear that a 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)

JULY 27

Nightly Preparation for a Mighty Task

The chapter of the Quran entitled “Al-Muzzammil” (The Mantled One) commences with these verses:

“You who are wrapped up in your mantle, keep vigil all night, save for a few hours: half the night, or a little less or a little more: and with measured tone recite the Quran. We are about to lay a weighty message upon you. It is in the hours of the night that impressions are strongest and words most certain; in the day-time you are hard-pressed with work. Remember the name of your Lord and dedicate yourself to Him utterly.” (73:1-8)

From these verses it is clear that God requires His servants to be so devoted to divine service that they rise at night in order to perform their duties to the Lord. To forsake one’s sleep and spend the night hours in pursuit of a cause indicates the highest level of dedication; it shows that one has associated oneself utterly with the object of one’s dedication, and will soon be in a position to represent it in the world.

This applies to worldly pursuits also. Almost all the individuals who have reached great heights in any field have been those who were willing to stay awake at nights in order to gain proficiency in it.

The case of Severiano Ballesteros, the Spanish golfer, provides apt illustration of this point. Ballesteros is not indisputably one of the two greatest golfers in the world and has won millions of dollars in numerous victories in tournaments on both sides of the Atlantic.

There was a time, however, when he was just a poor caddy at Pedereda in Spain. He once told Frank Keating of the Guardian newspaper how he used to get up at night to hit a 100 or so balls “at the moon.” He could not see them—“but I can tell how good and straight I hit them by the feel in hands and the sand.”

To become a true Muslim is to become a personification of Islam in the eyes of the world; it is to become so associated with Islam that one is fit to carry its message to far corners of the globe. This requires intense preparation, which must be conducted in a spirit keen enough to fuel one for work through the night hours. Success does not come in mundane fields without such dedication. How, then, can it come in the field of divine service, for there is no task more difficult, and more strewn with obstacles—both within and without—than that of carrying the flame of true faith in God before the world.

JULY 28

God Helps Those Who Have Lost All for His Sake

The Prophet Abraham was born in the Iraqi town of Ur. When his opponents made life impossible for him there, God commanded him to proceed to the Arab desert. There, in the uninhabited valley of Makkah, he built the House of God. One of the prayers that he uttered on this occasion was this:

*‘Lord, I have settled some of my offspring in a barren valley near Your Sacred House, so that they may observe the prayer. Put in the hearts of men kindness towards them, and provide them with the earth’s fruits, so that they may give thanks. Lord, You have knowledge of all that we hide and all that we reveal: nothing in heaven or earth is hidden from God.’
(14:37-38).*

There is great symbolic importance attached to this event in the life of Abraham. Here history speaks, telling us what happens to God's servant who arises to preach the message of truth in all its purity: he is rejected by the conventional order; religious institutions refuse to acknowledge him; he even becomes unappealing to friends and relatives. The cultivated valleys of the world, despite all their fertility, become dry for him. He is forced to take his wife and family to live in a barren land. There, he calls upon his Lord: "Lord," he says, 'they have no one to help them but You. The world of man has refused to support them; now You make springs gush forth beneath their feet.'

This is an extremely delicate moment in the history of man. The pulse of the universe stops beating at such a time. The earth, and all heavenly bodies, await new instructions before continuing their course. Man sees a new and unfamiliar happening. "Spring" gush forth in the desert. The blessings of God start descending from above. Winds scatter the words of the preacher among mankind. God, in all His might, comes to the assistance of His servants—the ones who were scorned and deprived of all assistance by people of the world. To preach the pure truth is the most difficult task beneath the heavens; but it is this task that draws God's succour more than any other. This succour only comes, however, when the preacher of God's word has fully communicated his message, and people's persecution of him as a result has reached its climax.

JULY 29

Law of Nature

William Penn was born in London in 1644 and died in 1718. A great advocate of religious tolerance he took part in both religion and politics. One of his sayings is as follows:

Let the people think they govern and they will be governed.

William Penn said this on the basis of his study of history. But this is not something related only to history, it is, in fact, a universal law of nature. It is established by God himself according to His own creation plan. This natural law set by the Almighty God has been described in these words in the Quran:

We alternate these days among mankind. (3:140)

By days here is meant the day of victory and defeat, of domination and subjugation. In this world just as everything else is for the purposes of test, so is political power. That is why it is granted to each group by turns, so that every group could be tested. In this world the state of domination and power is for test just as the state of subjugation and submission.

What is required from man is that when he is granted power he should not suffer from the psychology of pride and arrogance. And when man finds himself in a state of subjugation he should not fall prey to negative psychology. Either of the states should be acceptable to man as a matter of divine ordainment. In both the states man's eyes should be set on shouldering his own responsibilities rather than on the right or wrong attitude adopted by others.

This is a belief, of great reformative influence, which keeps people away from political activities of negative nature. It enables man to save their capabilities from being wasted, and always engage themselves in beneficial and result-oriented actions. The loss of power is from God. Protesting against it is to protest against God. And is there anyone who can succeed in his protest against God?

JULY 30

Prayer

Man has been advised in the Quran to be steadfast in his prayer, for prayer fends away indecency and evil. When the Prophet of Islam was asked about this verse he said: If a person's prayer does

not fend away indecency and evil then his prayer is not really prayer at all.

What is prayer? It is to remember the fact that man is living before a God who—though man cannot see Him—can see man. Whoever leaves the mosque with this fact firmly embedded in his mind cannot live forgetful of God. In prayer, man testifies to the fact that God is the greatest of all beings. If one is truthful in one's testimony, then one will not claim greatness for oneself when one has finished praying. Whatever one recites in prayer is a covenant before God that one will keep his commandments; then how is it possible that one should leave the mosque and treat people with arrogance and contumacy? The actions of prayer are a manifestation of the fact that one's heart is full of fear and love for God. How can one claim to be full of fear and love for God in the mosque, and then live as if one knows neither fear or love for Him when one goes outside?

If one prays in the true spirit of prayer, then one's prayer will surely fend away indecency and evil. But if one's prayer is devoid of spirit, then it will be no more than a perfunctory action which has no connection with one's real life. It will be prayer in form, but not in reality: for it will not fend away indecency and evil.

It is as if one were to say: a son who stays lying down while he sees his father standing does not respect his father; a brother who sees his sister hungry and does not give her something to eat is not really a brother at all; the friendship of a person who hears of his friend's death and does not stop laughing is not really friendship at all.

JULY 31

The Example of the Prophet

At the time of the Prophet Muhammad there was a certain Musailma Ibn Hubaib who hailed from Yamama and falsely claimed to be a prophet of God. In the year 10 AH he sent two emissaries to the

Prophet bearing a letter from him, with the following message:

“From Musailma, the prophet of God, to Muhammad, the Prophet of God. Peace be upon you. I have been made your partner in prophethood. Half of the country of Arabia belongs to us, and half of it belong to the Quraish; but the Quraish tend to encroach on our territory.”

When Musailma’s envoys came before the Prophet, and the letter was read out, the Prophet asked them what they had to say. They replied that all they wanted to say was contained in Musailma’s letter. “If it weren’t for the fact that envoys must not be harmed,” the Prophet told them, “I would have had you both killed.” He then dictated the following letter to Musailma:

“In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful. From the Prophet of God to Musailma, the liar. Peace be upon him who follows divine guidance. The earth is God’s; He gives it to those whom he chooses of His servants. Happy shall be the lot of the righteous.”

There are two lessons to be learnt from this episode. For one, it provides a comparison between a true and a false prophet. Musailma’s letter is quite clearly that of a false prophet, for it makes nothing but material claims, whereas the Prophet’s letter is quite clearly that of a true one, because it speaks only of the realms of God.

The other thing we can learn from the example set by the Prophet is that envoys of other nations should not be killed or harmed, even if they have committed the most heinous crimes. They should simply be sent back to their homelands. The Islamic procedure in this matter is the same as the internationally accepted one.

AUGUST 1

The Difference Between a Believer and an Unbeliever

The Quran says that on Judgement Day, when mankind is gathered before God, man will look upon his deeds. Those who denied God, and rebelled against Him, will behold the doom that awaits them. In anguish they will cry out: “Would that I were dust!” (78:40)

When Umar, the second caliph of Islam, lay on his death-bed, stricken by the dagger of Abu Lulu Firoz, his son, Abdullah Ibn Umar was resting his father’s head in his lap. “Rub my cheek in the dust, Abdullah,” Umar said to him. Abdullah Ibn Umar did so. Then, with his head resting on the ground, Umar addressed these words to himself:

“Woe betide you, Umar, and woe betide the one who gave birth to you, if God does not forgive you.” (Tabqat Ibn Saad)

If one compares both these events, one will find that the very words uttered by unbelievers in the next world, are those uttered by believers in this world. In the life after death, unbelievers will wish they were dust. But here we have a believer saying, before he dies, in this life on earth: “Join me with the dust.”

Who dare rebel against God when He appears before man? Everyone will submit to Him then. But the only creditable submission of God is that which comes before He makes Himself manifest. Unbelievers will bow to God when He reveals Himself before them. But a believer bows to Him while He is still invisible.

The only reason that people rebel against God is that He is not now present before them. But how can one rebel against Him when He manifests Himself in all His might? Man is cowed into submission before a lion. How then can he dare otherwise when he comes face to face with God, the creator of the lion?

The truth is that a believer experiences in this world what an unbeliever will experience in the next world. An unbeliever will humble himself on seeing God; a believer does so without seeing Him.

AUGUST 2

Islam—A Culture of Peace

The Model World according to Islam, is a world of peace. Islam in itself means a religion of peace. The Quran says: And God calls to the home of peace. This is the message of Islam to mankind. It means that ‘Build a world of peace on earth so that you may be granted a world of peace in your eternal life in the Hereafter.’

Now what are the basic elements of building a culture of peace? According to Islam, to be brief, these are three—compassion, forgiveness and respect for all.

Let’s take ‘compassion’ first. If you go through the Quran and *hadith*, you will find many verses in the Quran and *hadith* which lay great stress on compassion. For instance, the Prophet of Islam said: O people, be compassionate to others so that you may be granted compassion by God.

Thus Islam makes compassion a matter of self-interest for every man, as one’s own future depends on one’s compassionate behaviour to other fellowmen. In this way, Islam motivates us to be compassionate in our dealing with each other. If one wants to receive God’s grace one will have to show compassion to others.

Let’s take forgiveness. The Quran has to say this in this regard “when they are angered, they forgive.” There are a number of verses in the Quran which promote forgiveness.

Then there is a *hadith*. Once a person came to the Prophet and asked him, “O Prophet, give me a master advice by which I may be able to manage all the affairs of my life.” The Prophet replied: “Don’t

be angry.” It means that ‘forgive people even at provocation.’ That is, adopt forgiveness as your behaviour at all times.

Now let’s take the third principle—Respect for all. There is a very interesting story, recorded by

Al-Bukhari in this regard.

The Prophet of Islam once saw a funeral procession passing by a street in Madinah. The Prophet was seated at that time. On seeing the funeral the Prophet stood up in respect. At this one of his companions said: ‘O Prophet, it was the funeral of a Jew (not a Muslim). The Prophet replied: ‘Was he not a human being?’ What it meant was that every human being is worthy of respect. There may be differences among people regarding religion and culture, but everyone has to respect the other. For, according to Islam, all men and women are blood brothers and blood sisters. And all are creatures of one and the same God.

These three principles are the basic pillars to form a peaceful society. Wherever these three values are to be found the result no doubt will be a society of peace and harmony.

The above references are enough to show that Islam is a culture of peace. It is true that some Muslims are engaged in violence in the name of Islam. But you will have to differentiate between Islam and Muslims. You have to see Muslims in the light of Islam and not vice versa.

AUGUST 3

Facility versus Difficulty

One day the Prophet of Islam seated himself in a mosque in Madinah, along with some companions. Shortly thereafter, a Bedouin entered the mosque and began urinating. The Prophet’s Companions rose with the intention of beating the Bedouin. But the Prophet forbade them to do so, asking them to let him be. When the

man had finished urinating, the Prophet asked the Companions to fetch a bucket of water and wash the place clean.

Afterwards he explained to his Companions: You are sent to make things easy and not to make things difficult (*Fathul Bari*, 1/386).

This illustrates for us an unwavering principle of Islam, that is, in social life when any unpleasant incident takes place, the believers should concentrate on finding a solution to the problem and not just think in terms of what punishment to mete out to the problem-maker. On all such occasions the urge to reform should be engendered within the believers instead of a desire to exact revenge. Such methods should be adopted as alleviate rather than aggravate the problem. Just as when some building is set on fire, the most natural impulse is to immediately extinguish it, rather than fan the flames to make it flare up even more.

In most controversial matters there can be both easy and difficult ways of resolving the problem. Treading the path of facility usually eases matters, whereas treading the path of difficulty can cause matters to flare up with even greater intensity. In all situations, Islam gives preference to the former, rather than to the latter approach.

This is an eternal principle of Islam, relating to both personal and social life. It ought to be applied in all matters inside as well as outside the home. It is a perfect principle on which to base a perfect system of life.

AUGUST 4

Firm Utterance

The Quran enjoins believers to “fear God and speak the truth. He will bless your works and forgive you your sins. He who obeys God and His apostle shall win a greater victory” (33:70-71).

This Quranic verse commands mankind to say what is fair. *Qaul-e-Sadid* means saying the truth and exactly in accordance with the

facts. Just as the arrow reaches its target by being shot in precisely the right direction, similarly *qaul-e-sadid* hit the mark by making one's words correspond in every detail with reality.

According to a *hadith* the Prophet once prayed: 'O, my God, grant guidance to my heart and grant my language (word) *qaul-e-sadid*. This prayer shows how great is the importance given to *qaul-e-sadid* in Islam. The truth is that *qaul-e-sadid* is the mark of a person being a true believer.

There are two kinds of human utterance: realistic and unrealistic. Realistic or *sadid* utterances are those which tally exactly with reality; which are based on facts and events, and on firm arguments; which take stock of all matters under discussion; which do not make concessions to anything unfair; which are completely free from prejudice.

Conversely, unrealistic utterances are those which do not take the actual state of affairs into account, which are based on suppositions and conjecture, on mere opinion, rather than on fact. Only the former type of utterances are approved of by God.

It is the demand of humanity that whenever a believer speaks, he should say what is right and fair. *Qaul-e-sadid* is a proof of man's humanity and, utterances not in accordance with *qaul-e-sadid*, are a proof of his having strayed outside the fold of humanity, although he may still appear to be a human being.

AUGUST 5

The Culture of Mercy (Rahmat)

Islamic culture is one of mercy (*rahmat*). The aspect of mercy in Islam is so prominent that it engulfs the entire lives of those who have fully adopted the principles of Islam.

Islam teaches its followers that, when they meet one another, they should address one another with such words as "May peace and God's blessings be upon you." Even when one sneezes, he should say,

‘May God be praised’, and the others sitting with him will respond ‘May God bless you.’ When the believer enters the mosque, he should say: ‘May God open the gates of mercy to me.’ Similarly, when worshippers have concluded their prayer, they are to turn their faces sideways and say: ‘May God’s blessings and peace be upon you.’

In this way, on all occasions and at every stage, the phrases of peace and mercy come readily to the lips of the believer. Thinking and speaking in terms of mercy become the distinguishing features of the believers. Their whole life is moulded by the demands of mercy and compassion.

The Prophet often uttered such phrases as ‘May God bless the man, may God bless the woman.’ This goes to show what type of attitude Islam wants to develop in its adherents. This is the culture of Rahmat and Love. Islam demands that on all occasions human beings should be well intentioned towards one another; on all occasions man should offer the gifts of love and compassion to others. Even in moments of conflict, such words come to the lips of the believers: “May God have mercy on you, why did you say or do such and such a thing?”

God is All-Merciful. He desires his servants to live in this world as merciful creatures.

AUGUST 6

The No-problem Person

A believer is a no-problem person. In all situations and circumstances he stands out as Mr No Problem. His sensitivity towards others is so heightened that he does not like creating any problems whatsoever. The companions of the Prophet were very sensitive in this way—so much so that if a horse-rider’s whip fell to the ground, he would not ask a passerby to pick the whip for him. Instead, he would dismount and pick the whip himself (Abu Dawud, 2/124).

We learn from Islamic traditions that the best Muslim is one from whose evils people are safe. From one of these traditions we have the saying: A believer is one who fears God and keeps people safe from his evil (Al-Bukhari).

According to another tradition recorded in Al-Bukhari, the Prophet of Islam observed: “*Sadaqa* (voluntary alms) is incumbent upon every Muslim.” That is, every Muslim should be a giver. Asked what to do if one had nothing to give, he replied that one should earn and be a giver. When asked what the would-be giver should do if he were unable to earn, the Prophet replied: He should voice his good intentions towards others. Asked if he were unable to do even that, the Prophet replied that he should then refrain himself from causing harm to others, because this is also a gift. (*Fathul Bari*, 10/462).

According to another *hadith*, the Prophet observed: “A believer with perfect faith is one who struggles to spend his life and property in the cause of God. And the second in rank is one who is engaged in prayer in some corner and from whom people are safe (*Sunan Abi Dawud*, 3/5).

We have a large number of such traditions in books of *hadith*. These demonstrates a range of characters which can be taken as models for posterity. Of this selection, the individual—who ranks highest in character is one who benefits others. The honest, but still acceptable standard of character in Islam is that of the individual who, being entirely harmless, creates no problems for the rest of the society.

AUGUST 7

Purity and Cleanliness

Islam greatly approves cleanliness. According to the Quran: Allah loves those that turn to Him in repentance and purify themselves (2:222).

When man rues his mistakes and returns to the path of truth, this is called an act of repentance. As such, it purifies man's inner self. Just as by using water we can cleanse the dirt from the body, so by repentance we can purify the soul—the inner-self. That is why Islam lays great stress on both these things.

According to a *hadith*: “Purity is half of faith.” Similarly the Prophet of Islam once observed: “God is clean and loves cleanliness.” (Ibn Majah)

Man is a creature who has been specially granted the quality of sensitivity. That is why man naturally likes cleanliness, and since Islam is a religion of nature, it lays great stress on cleanliness. Man's body, his clothing and his home, should all be pictures of cleanliness.

It was due to the importance given to cleanliness that the companions of the Prophet used to bathe daily. According to Muwatta Imam Malik, Abdullah ibn Umar spoke of how his father used to take a bath before each prayer. In this way he used to bath five times a day. The third Caliph, Usman ibn Affan, used to bath daily (Musnad Ahmad).

The cleanliness of body and soul is one of the basic demands of Islam.

AUGUST 8

The Positive Way

We have been advised in the Quran that goodness and evil are not equal. Therefore we should return good for evil (41:34). This has been expressed repeatedly in the Quran in different wordings.

This means that believers should always react positively. At all events they should refrain from negative reaction. Their behaviour should be proper, not only in normal circumstances, but also in abnormal circumstances. That is, even when any group displays bad behaviour, it is still incumbent on the believers not to display a retaliatory mentality. At that moment, too, they should prove to be

men of principle. They should maintain their good behaviour, even in the face of bad behaviour from others.

Interpreting this verse, Abdullah ibn Abbas comments: ‘God has commanded Muslims in this verse, even when they are angered, to resort to patience and tolerance. Whenever anyone shows any signs of ignorance or a biased mentality, believers should adopt the path of tolerance and fortitude. And whenever anyone displays bad behavior, believers should forgive him.’

This Islamic course of action may be described as positive behaviour. That is, opting for moderation instead of retaliation. Whatever the attitude of others may be, believers should always remain true to the highest Islamic standards of human character.

A believer is one who begins to lead his life in accordance with the higher realities; the level of whose thinking is above that of ordinary human beings. Such a person comes to have a limitless capacity for tolerance. His inner-self is so deeply immersed that in peace, no outward event can disturb his emotional balance. He takes pity on those who are easily angered. Where ordinary people become provoked, he remains blissfully serene.

AUGUST 9

The Payment of Dues and the Recognition of Rights

According to al-Bukhari, God said: “I will become a claimant against three persons, one of these being a person who engaged a labourer, made him labour fully, but did not pay the wages” (*Mishkat al-Masabih*, 2/899).

Ibn Majah has narrated from Abdullah ibn Umar that the Prophet of Islam observed: “Pay the labourer his wages before his sweat dries up” (that is, do not delay payment) (*Mishkat Al-Masabih*, 2/900).

In this world, it repeatedly happens that one person employs another. In all such matters Islam enjoins the full payment of wages without any delay. After getting the work done, asking the labourer to come the next day for payment is extremely inconsiderate, and as such Islam forbids it.

Just as an employer needs the services of an employee, so also does the employee need compensation for his labour. This is a two-sided demand. When the worker has finished his work, it becomes incumbent on the employer to refrain from placing any obstacle in the way of payment of the sum he has promised.

In cases where wages or compensation have not been fixed in advance, Islam demands that for all services rendered, requital should be made in one form or another. If this cannot be done, for any reason, in material terms, the services should be fully acknowledged and publicly commended, and prayers said to God for the performer of the services.

Paying immediate recompense on completion of a task increases mutual trust in society. Any practice contrary to this will cause society as a whole to fall prey to misgivings about a lack of trustworthiness in their fellow men.

AUGUST 10

Predictable Character

Who is the best individual? To Islam the best individual is one who is predictable in character, about whom one can be sure in advance that, whenever one has any dealings with him, he will prove a true, dependable human being.

As recorded in traditions, once when the Prophet of Islam was standing along with some companions, he addressed them thus: "Should I not tell you of the good and bad people among you?" On hearing this, they remained silent. Then the Prophet repeated this

question three times. One of them ultimately said, “Why not, O Prophet of God, you should tell us about the good and bad people among us.” The Prophet said: “The good among you is one from whom only good is expected and from whose evil people are safe” (At-Tirmizi).

According to this *hadith*, the best person is one who, in his encounters with others, always has good things to say to them. He is beneficent to all, giving them gifts to bring them happiness. People may always expect justice from him, for, fundamentally, he is a man of principle and character.

This predictable character remains with him, even when he is hurt or oppressed by others. Even in such unfavourable circumstances, his truth-loving character never deserts him. He is able to answer provocative statements patiently and calmly. It may be taken for granted that even though he experiences bad behaviour from others, he will, in accordance with his principles, remain on the path of good behaviour. His character will always come up to the highest standard of human hopes and expectations.

AUGUST 11

Everything Created in Pairs

Nothing is complete without its pair.

So this world must also have a pair.

Many of the basic teachings of the Quran can be well understood in the light of modern knowledge. The Quran says, for example, that this world is not the final one; after it, will come another world. At present, that world is invisible to us, but it is present nonetheless; it exists in real and absolute form. Early theologians resorted to speculation in support of this claim. But the proof that the Quran has given is one that can be better understood when put to the test of scientific investigation.

The Quran says:

And all things We made in pairs, so that you may give thought. (51:49)

Everything is in accordance with this law of nature. Nothing is complete without its pair. So this world must also have a pair, for only then will it be complete. It is this pair of the present world that is called the hereafter.

It was known in ancient times that there were pairs in the human and animal worlds. Later on man learnt of pairs in trees and plants. In 1928, however, it was discovered that solid matter also had a pair. In that year the British physicist Paul Dirac demonstrated the possibility of other, invisible particles existing alongside those of matter. Then, in 1932, K. Anderson discovered, while studying cosmic rays, that with electrons there were other particles with an opposite electric charge. These particles were called anti-electrons. This research was pursued further and finally it was learnt that all particles in the universe existed in the form of pair-particles: particle and anti-particle, atom and anti-atom, matter and anti-matter; there was even, as Dirac showed in 1933, an anti-world.

Many present-day scientists are of the opinion that this anti-world is an entity apart from us, having a parallel existence of its own. This world is made up of matter; according to the law of opposites there should be another world made up of anti-matter. It is estimated that 20 million years ago, when the Big Bang explosion occurred, photon-matter and anti-matter came together in two separate forms. The two then started to form the world and the anti-world.

The first people to work on this theory were a Swedish pair, physicist Oskar Klein and astrophysicist Hannes Alven. The results of their research were published in 1963. The Soviet mathematician, Dr Gustav Naan, further consolidated the theory. According to him, the anti-world cannot be fully explained by known theories and laws of physics, yet he is convinced that the anti-world exists, even now. It is, however, independent of us, existing on its own, parallel to this world. In the present world all anti-particles are in an unstable condition; but in the anti-world they will all be stable, for the nuclei of atoms have a negative electric charge, while electrons are positively charged.

Since this world is ephemeral, it follows that the anti-world, or to use its religious term, the hereafter, must be an eternal world. The discoveries of modern science, then, have given us a picture of the next world which accords with that of the Quran.

AUGUST 12

On Trust and Obligation

One of the marks of true believers is, according to the Quran, that they “faithfully observe their trusts and their covenants” (23:8).

Maulana Shabbir Ahmad Usmani has briefly explained it in these words: “They do not commit breach of trust and do not break promises, neither in the matter of God nor in the matter of men” (p. 443).

Everything man has is given to him in trust by God or by man. In this way everyone is bound by certain promises and obligations. Some obligations are entered into by written or spoken agreement, while others are a matter of tacit understanding. Whatever the form of agreement, man has to fulfill all these trusts and obligations. If he fails to do so, he does not come up to the highest standards of humanity. He is proving himself guilty in the eyes of God.

Man’s body, heart and mind, are all like trusts from God. It is, therefore, incumbent upon man to make the best use of these endowments within the limits decreed by God. That is, his hands and feet should move only for the cause of justice, and not for tyranny. His mind should be full only of well-wishing and not of ill-will. Similarly all the trusts by which he is bound should be discharged to the trustees, whether these trusts are in written or in verbal form. He should never regard another’s possessions as his own.

Everyone is bound by obligations, in relation on the one hand to man and on the other to God. According to the Quran, trust of two kinds stems from God; one is the inherent sense of responsibility

man is born with; this form of trust is binding upon all human beings born on this earth. Another form of trust is that which arises from faith in God. Only those are bound by this sense of commitment who have embraced God's religion as brought to them by God's messenger; in this sense, these believers are consciously bound in trust. Let's now take the matter of trust as regards man. Some obligations are incurred from time to time as they arise in particular and are set down in contracts, while others automatically devolve upon individuals either as family members, or as citizens of the state, living in society. Discharging all these trusts and obligations is man's duty, in obedience both to his own nature and to the Shariah.

AUGUST 13

Trial

Man is free in this world. God has not placed any curbs on him. But this freedom is for the purpose of putting man to the test, and is not meant to encourage him to lead a life of permissiveness, like the animals and then just pass away one day. Rather its purpose is that man should lead a morally upright life *of his own free will*, thus demonstrating that he is of the highest moral character.

One who conducts himself in this matter should be reckoned as God's special servant who, without any apparent compulsion, chose to be a man of principle; who, without being subjected to any external force, did of his own free will, what his Lord would have desired. This liberty accorded to man gives him the opportunity to gain credit for being the most superior of all God's creatures.

All the things in this world are God's subjects. The stars and satellites rotate in space entirely at their Lord's bidding. Trees, rivers, mountains, and all other such natural phenomena function according to the unchangeable ways of God laid down by Him in advance. Similarly, the animals follow exactly those instincts instilled

in their species as a matter of Divine Will. Man is the only creature who has been given, exceptionally, the gift of power and freedom.

This freedom has opened doors of two kinds for man, one leading to success and the other to failure. If, on receiving freedom an individual becomes arrogant and insolent, it will mean that he has failed to pass the test.

But if on the other hand, he remains modest and humble, bowing to his Lord's will on all occasions, he will have made the right use of his God-given freedom: he will, without any compulsion, have bound himself by divine principles. One who chooses this course will succeed in the test of freedom. He will be handsomely rewarded by God as no other creature. Held to be the chosen servant of God, he will remain in an everlasting state of blissfulness and blessedness.

AUGUST 14

Intentions

Islam attaches the utmost importance to intentions (*niyyah*). No action is acceptable to God purely on the basis of its outer appearance. He accepts only such actions as are performed with proper intention, and rejects those performed with ill-intention. Right intention is the moral purposiveness which underlies all actions performed solely for God's pleasure. One who acts on such feelings will be rewarded by God in the Hereafter.

Ill-intention, on the other hand, is a negative spur to worldly attainment. Ostensibly religious acts, if performed for worldly gain or public commendation, are in this sense ill-intentioned. Any fame, honour or popularity which ensues from an ill-intentioned act is a hollow triumph and is looked upon by the Almighty with extreme disfavour.

Intention is rooted in man's inner thinking and feelings. A common man is unable to penetrate the inner recesses of a person's

mind but God knows full well what a man's thought processes and feelings are. People can be deluded by appearances, but God has complete knowledge of everything. He will deal with people according to His knowledge and will reward everyone exactly as he or she deserves.

Intention has to do with the inner reality. A thing which loses its reality or its meaningfulness is valueless. Similarly, an act which is performed with ill intention or with no good intention, has no value—neither in the eyes of man, nor of God.

Things are of value only when they are pure, without any adulteration. An act done with right intention is a pure act, and an act performed without right intention is an impure act.

AUGUST 15

Akhirat

Man is an eternal creature. However, his life-span has been divided by God into two parts. A very tiny part of it has been placed in this world, while all of the remainder has been placed in the Hereafter. The present world is the world of action, while the world of the Hereafter is the place for reaping the harvest of actions. The present world is imperfect, but the world of the Hereafter is perfect in every respect. The Hereafter is a limitless world where all things have been provided in their ideal state.

God has placed His heaven—full of all kinds of blessings—in that world of the Hereafter. Those who prove to be God-fearing and pious in this world will enter into that world to find the gates of heaven eternally open for them.

But those who are oblivious of God in this present world or who opt for the path of contumacy in regard to God's matters, are criminals in God's eyes. All such people will be deprived of the blessings of the Hereafter.

God is invisible in this present world, and will appear in all His power and majesty only in the world of the Hereafter. Then all human beings will bow low before Him. But at that time, surrendering will be of no avail. Self-abnegation and acceptance of God is desired only while God is still invisible. Surrendering before God after seeing Him in the Hereafter will not benefit anyone.

Death is not the end of a person's life. It is only the beginning of the next stage of life. Death is that interim stage when man leaves this temporary world of today for the eternal world of tomorrow. He goes out of the temporary accommodation of the world to enter the eternal resting place of the Hereafter. The coming of this stage in the Hereafter is the greatest certainty in one's life. No one can save himself from this fate in the Hereafter.

AUGUST 16

Angels

Of the many beings created by God, the angels are of special importance. They have been invested by God with the supernatural power to keep order in the functioning of the universe. They do not, however, deviate in the slightest from the path of God, for all their functioning is in complete obedience to His will.

Diverse and numerous events are taking place at every moment in the universe, for instance, the movement of the stars, the shining of the sun and moon, the falling of the rain, the alternation of the seasons, and so on. All of these, and many other continually recurring events are attended to by the angels. Working in the universe as extremely faithful and obedient servants of God, they ensure the continued existence of the human and animal species on earth.

As well as running the world's systems, these angels, a numerous band, take charge of all matters in heaven and hell.

The role of the angels can be understood by the example of a large factory. In any such factory, there are many big and complex

machines which produce the goods for which the factory has been established. But these machines do not run on their own. To facilitate their smooth running many human hands are required. Therefore, in every factory there are always a number of people whose duty it is to attend constantly to their proper and efficient functioning. Similarly, countless angels are appointed to ensure the proper functioning of the great factory of the universe.

The difference between the two factories is only that in the material one, the human hands are visible, while in the metaphorical one—the great mechanism of the universe—the angels remain invisible to the naked eye.

Man may not be able to see the angels, but the angels can certainly see man, and keep a watch on him on behalf of God. It is these very angels who take man's soul away after death.

AUGUST 17

God

God is One, Eternal and Absolute. He is everything, everything is from Him. God, the Creator of all things is the Sustainer of the universe.

Allah: there is no god but Him, the Living, the Eternal One. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. His is what the heavens and the earth contain. Who can intercede with Him except by His permission? He knows all about the affairs of men at present and in the future. They can grasp only that part of His knowledge which He wills. His throne is as vast as the heavens and the earth, and the preservation of both does not weary Him. He is the Exalted, the Immense One. (2:255)

Say: 'Allah is One, the Eternal God. He begot none, nor was He begotten. None is equal to Him.' (112: 1-4)

Chapter 112 of the Quran, entitled Ikhlas, gives us the essence of monotheism. Not only does it tell us of the oneness of God, but it also makes it clear what the oneness of God means. This chapter presents the concept of God, purified of all human interpolation, for, prior to the advent of Islam, tampering with the sacred text had caused this concept of God to be distorted for all would-be believers. God is not many. He is only one. All depend upon him. He depends on none. He, in his own being, is all powerful. He is above to 'beget' or 'begotten'. He is such a unique being who has no equal or compeer. All kind of oneness belongs to this Almighty Being. The concept of One God is the actual beginning point and also the only source of Islamic teachings.

AUGUST 18

Prophet

A prophet is a person chosen by God as His representative. When God appoints someone as His Messenger, He sends His angel to him to inform him of his new status. In that way, the individual can have no doubts about his appointment as God's apostle. Later, God reveals His message to him through His angels, so that he may communicate the divine teachings to all his fellow men.

God has given man a mind so that he may be endowed with understanding. But this mind can only grasp things that are apparent. It cannot go below the surface, and there are many things to be apprehended, for which a superficial knowledge is insufficient. The deeper realities of this world are beyond the scope of the human mind, and so far as God and the next world are concerned, they must remain forever invisible—beyond the reach of human perception.

What the prophet does is to enlighten people so that they may overcome this human inadequacy. He tells of the reality of things here and how, and also gives tidings of the next world. He thereby

enables the individual to formulate a plan for his entire existence in the full light of knowledge and awareness so that he may carve out a successful life for himself.

Since the settlement of human beings on earth, the prophets have been coming one after another. In every age they have been the conveyors of God's messages to human beings. However, whatever records of these ancient prophets have survived have been rendered historically unreliable by interpolations. The same is true of the books they brought to mankind. The sole exception was the case of the Prophet Muhammad, who had been chosen by God as His Final Messenger. The Prophet was born in an age when the history of the world was already being extensively chronicled. This in itself made circumstances conducive to authentic records being kept of God's messages and the Prophet's exemplary life. The relevant facts were passed on from one generation to the next by both oral and written tradition, and with the advent of the printing press came the modern guarantee that no changes would ever be made in the divine scriptures. This renders unassailable the position of the Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him) as God's Final Messenger and His sole representative on earth till Doomsday.

AUGUST 19

The Quran

The Quran, the Book of God, enshrines the teachings which were basically the same as were to be found in previous revealed scriptures. But these ancient scriptures are no longer preserved in their original state. Later additions and deletions have rendered them unreliable, whereas the Quran, preserved in its original state, is totally reliable.

The Quran has 114 chapters. Its contents in a nutshell are: belief in one God, and considering oneself answerable to Him; firm belief

that the guidance sent by God through the Prophet Muhammad is the truth and that man's eternal salvation rests thereon.

The position of the Quran is not just that it is one of the many revealed scriptures but that it is the only authentic heavenly book, as all other books, due to human additions and deletions, have been rendered historically unreliable. When a believer in the previous revealed scripture turns to the Quran, it does not mean that he is rejecting his own belief, but rather amounts to his having re-discovered his own faith in an authentic form.

The Quran is a sacred book sent by the Lord of all creation. It is a book for all human beings, because it has been sent by that Divine Being who is the God of all of us.

The Quran is no new heavenly scripture. It is only an authentic edition of the previous heavenly scriptures. In this respect, the Quran is a book for all human beings, of all nations. It is the expression of God's mercy for one and for all. It is a complete message sent by God for every one of us. The Quran is a light of guidance for all the world just as the sun is the source of light and heat for all the world.

Islam means submission. The religion of Islam is so named because it is based on obedience to God. A true believer in Islam is one who subordinates his thinking to God, who follows God's dictates in all aspects of his life.

Islam is the religion of the entire universe. For the entire universe and all its parts are functioning in accordance with the law laid down by God.

Such behaviour is also desired of man. Man should also lead his life as God's obedient servant just as the rest of the universe is fully subservient to God. The only difference is that the universe has submitted to God compulsorily, while man is required to submit to the will of God by his own choice.

When man adopts Islam, first of all it is his thinking which comes under Islam, then his desires, his feelings, his interests, his relations, his loves and his hatred. All are coloured by his obedience to God's will.

When man, in his daily life comes under God's command, his behaviour with people, his dealings all are molded by the demands of Islam. From inside to outside he becomes a person devoted to God.

Man is God's servant, and indeed, the only proper way for man in this world is to live as the servant of God. Islam, in fact, is another name for this life of servitude to God. Where the Islamic life is devoted to the service of God, the un-Islamic life unashamedly flouts the will of God. Islam teaches man to lead an obedient life and surrender himself completely to the will of God. It is people who do so who will share God's blessings in the next world.

AUGUST 20

Faith

The essence of faith is *ma'arifah*, (realization or discovery of God). When a man consciously seeks out and finds God, and thereby has access to divine realities, that is what constitutes faith.

This discovery is no simple matter. God is the Creator and Owner of all things. He will award or punish all, according to their deeds; none is free from His grip. The discovery of such a God shakes to the core of the whole life of man. His thinking is revolutionized, for God becomes the centre of all His emotions.

With God as the principal focus of his attention, man becomes God's servant in the fullest sense of the word. He becomes a man whose living and dying is all for God.

Such a faith ultimately results in all of man's behaviour and his dealings taking on the hue of God. When the believer speaks, he is conscious of the fact that God is listening to him. When he walks, he does so with modesty so that his gait may not be displeasing to God. When he deals with people, he is always worried lest he deal unjustly and be punished by God in the next life.

The impact of this degree of faith makes the entire life of man *akhirat*-oriented. In all matters his eyes are focused on the Hereafter. Instead of immediate gain he makes gain in the next life his goal. Whenever there are two aspects of any matter, one pertaining to this world and the other to the next world, he always prefers the latter.

Faith, another name for the recognition of the Supreme God, becomes for the believer a fountainhead of limitless confidence in his Creator. When this recognition takes root in an individual's heart and soul, his whole personality becomes regenerated. Knowing that in all circumstances he may depend upon God, he becomes a new man.

AUGUST 21

The Mosque in Islam

What is the role of the mosque in Islam? 'Masjid,' or mosque, literally means 'a place for self-prostration,' that is, a place formally designated for the saying of prayers. According to a *hadith*, the Prophet of Islam observed: "The masjid is a house of God-fearing people." This means, in effect, that it is a centre for the inculcation of reverence, where individuals learn what is meant by piety and are thus prepared for a life of devotion to the Almighty.

The Masjid is built so that people may visit it to read the Book of God, to remember their Creator, silently and in prayer, and to hear His commandments on how they should lead their lives, that is, how to conduct themselves according to His will.

The most important of all these activities is the saying of prayers, a ritual to be carried out five times a day as prescribed by Islam. This act of worship, the greatest means of instilling a sense of awe in the devotee, may be carried out at any place, but ideally, is performed in an organized manner, in congregation, within the mosque. There the worshippers range themselves in orderly rows behind a single prayer leader, the Imam. (The acceptance by the group of just one individual to lead the congregation avoids any dissension which might arise from there being more than one.) The number of the worshippers may be ten or ten thousand: all have to stand in rows behind the Imam. This teaches the lesson of unity. Nevertheless, *namaz*, in essence, is an

individual action. Everyone recites his own prayer and is rewarded on account of its innate rectitude and sincerity.

The prayer begins with ablution, that is, with the washing of the face, hands and feet. This bodily cleansing is a symbolic reminder that the Muslim should lead his life in this world in a state of purification of the feelings and the soul.

What is recited during prayer consists either of verses from the Quran or *dhikr*, remembrance of God, and *dua*, invocation and supplications. All of this is aimed at bringing about a spiritual awakening such as will induce the worshipper to renounce his life of ignorance and heedlessness in favour of a life inspired by Islamic moral values.

Throughout the prayer (*namaz*) the phrase, ‘Allah-o-Akbar’, ‘God is great,’ is repeated several times. Implicit in these words is the idea that the person uttering them is not great. Their frequent repetition is a lesson in modesty, designed to rid the worshipper of arrogance and egoism, and turn him into a humble servant of God.

The acts of kneeling down and self-prostration are also repeated several times in the course of the prayer, in symbolic submission before God. In this way, the worshipper is conditioned by *namaz* to surrender himself to his Maker in all humility.

The various postures in the *namaz* climax in the act of self-prostration—the ultimate demonstration of submission. Real proof of this submission to God will only become manifest, however, in subsequent dealings with other human beings, in which it is clear that self-glorification has been replaced by glorification of the Almighty, and that feelings of superiority have given way to profound humility.

The *namaz* ends with each worshipper turning his face sideways and uttering these words: “May God’s peace and blessings be upon you.” Every day, all around the globe, Muslims perform this rite. It is as if they were saying to their fellow men all over the world: “O people, we have no feelings for you but those of peace. Your lives, property and honour—all are safe.” It is this spirit with which worshippers are enthused before they return to society.

Besides the five daily obligatory prayers, there is a weekly Friday prayer which is necessarily offered in the mosque. In practice and

content it is just like any other prayer, but since a larger number of people gather on this occasion, a sermon (*khutba*), giving religious guidance, is also preached by the Imam before the prayers begin. In this, he reminds worshippers of their accountability to God, of the commandments pertaining to Islamic character and of the proper way to deal with others in society. In this way, the Friday sermon refreshes the memory on religious commitments.

The mosque, initially intended as a place of worship, has come to be built to serve other related purposes, such as housing the madrasa, library, lecture hall, guest house and dispensary. According to a *hadith* the Prophet advised the building of mosques in a simple style, so that there should be no dissipation or dilution of the true religious and spiritual atmosphere.

All mosques (with the exception of three) are of equal religious standing, whether large or small, plainly conceived or architecturally magnificent. The three mosques which have a greater degree of sanctity because of their historical and religious associations are the Masjid-e-Haram in Makkah, the Prophet's mosque in Madinah and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.

AUGUST 22

Best Caller to God's Way

About 1400 years ago the Prophet was forced by the Quraysh tribe to leave his native city of Makkah. He showed the utmost patience and restraint in the face of provocation by the Makkans but finally to avoid confrontation, left the city along with a handful of his followers. In Madinah the Prophet was welcomed by the Ansars, who treated the immigrants as their brothers and sisters, and even shared their possessions and properties with them.

In Madinah, the Prophet founded the mosque which is today known as the Mosque of the Prophet, himself taking part in its

construction. It became the centre of his activities, from which he would preach the message of Islam, sitting for hours on end in order to have the revelations written down and memorised by his companions.

The Prophet laid great emphasis on character building, excellence in moral and social conduct, good family ties and the dignity of labour. Charity was one of the main features of the new society. The Prophet said, "Give alms from your right hand, but your left hand should not come to know of it." But over and above giving alms and feeding the poor, the Prophet gave much wider meaning to the concept of charity, as he believed that every good act was a form of charity: smiling at a fellow human being; showing the road to a person who has lost his way; removing hindrances such as thorns and stones from the road; assisting the blind; helping a person to mount his beast; uttering pure, comforting words and replying to questions with mildness. All of these for the Prophet constituted charity.

The Prophet's kindness and merciful nature was unparalleled. Often, when he passed by a group of children, he would say, "Children are flowers of God," and pass his hand affectionately over their heads and sometimes even join in innocent games. He gave special honour and regard to parents: "Paradise lies at the feet of mothers" and "God's pleasure is in the father's pleasure; and God's displeasure is in the father's displeasure." Those, he believed, who served their parents well, were deserving of Paradise. A man once asked the Prophet, "Who rightfully deserves the best treatment from me?" "Your mother," said the Prophet. Then the man said, "Who comes next?" "Your mother," said the Prophet. "Who is after that?" asked the man, "Your mother," was the Prophet's answer. "Who comes next?" insisted the man again. "Your father," said the noble Prophet.

The Prophet gave great importance to family ties. He said, "The best man is he who is best to his wife." Likewise, the best woman is the one "whose husband feels pleased to see her, who obeys when her husband commands and who does not take a stand about herself or her wealth which is displeasing to her husband."

The Prophet always emphasised good relations with neighbours and visiting the sick. He said that on the Day of Resurrection, God

would say, "O son of man! I was sick, and you did not visit Me." The man would answer, "O my Lord! How could I visit You when You are the Lord of the world?" God would answer, "Did you not know that such and such of My servants was sick, and you did not visit him. Did you not know that if you had visited him, you would surely have found Me with him?"

In a society based on good moral values, evils such as gambling and drinking find no place. Thus the Prophet categorically prohibited gambling and the use of wine and would tell his followers that eating moderately is the best solution to avoid disease: "Do not kill your hearts with excess of eating and drinking." He told them to divide the stomach into three parts: one third for food, one third for water and one third absolutely empty. The Prophet also felt very strongly about oral hygiene. He said if he had not feared putting his followers to trouble, he would have made it compulsory for them to clean their teeth five times daily at every prayer, and emphasised that "cleanliness is half of faith."

Simple living and contentment were the key teachings in his life: "When you see a person," advised the Prophet, "who has been given more money and beauty than you, look then to those who have been given less." In so doing, we will thank God for His blessings, rather than feel deprived. The Prophet's emphasis on moral values was so high that he advised his followers never to say that if people treat us well, we will treat them well, and if people treat us badly then we too will treat them badly. Even if people treated them badly, they had to be well mannered towards them. He also taught them that under no circumstances should they become angry. "The strong man is not one who throws people down, but one who withholds himself from anger."

The Prophet encouraged his followers to earn their livelihood through trade and by their hands and to honour the dignity of labour. A famous saying of his goes: "Pay the labourer his wages even before his sweat dries up." He also said that a trader must be very honest, while selling his goods, he must inform the buyer of any possible defects in the merchandise.

The Prophet's life was marked by simple living and sublime character, prayer and devotion, compassion and humility. After his

death, people used to ask the Prophet's wife, Aishah, how he lived at home. "Like an ordinary man," she would answer. "He would sweep the house, stitch his own clothes, mend his own sandals, water the camels, milk the goats, help the servants at their work, and eat his meal with them; and he would go to fetch what we needed from the market."

AUGUST 23

The Theory of Revolution in Islam

We learn from the Quran that the state of a community is changed by God only when its members have themselves moved on to a higher spiritual plane. The Quran expresses this with telling simplicity: "God does not change people's lot unless they change what is in their hearts" (13:11)

The starting point of the Islamic revolution is, in fact, the individual. From the individual it gradually progresses on to the society or system, instead of starting from the system to the individual. Clearly, Islamic thinking on this subject is diametrically opposed to the communist ideology, which decrees that the individual can be reformed by a change of system. The Islamic view is that when the individual has reformed, society will of itself undergo a transformation.

The theory of Islamic revolution recognizes that the individual is the source of both corruption and reform. Therefore, if the rectification of any aspect of society is sought, the starting point must be the individual and his spiritual wholeness. There is a *hadith* which gives metaphorical expression to this: "Listen carefully. In the body there is a piece of flesh. If that is healthy, the whole body is healthy. But if that piece of flesh is not in proper shape, the whole body will become unfit. Listen, that piece of flesh is the heart" (Al-Bukhari).

If a social revolution is to be brought about, emphasis must be laid primarily on producing good character: the importance of the

good and the right—in thought, word and deed—should, ideally, be inculcated from the very outset. Goodness then becomes the principle upon which all healthy social interaction takes place. This has a generally pervasive effect also on social institutions, which take their moral hue from the individuals responsible for their functioning at all levels.

According to a *hadith* recorded in *Mishkat*, the Prophet of Islam said that the rulers would be of the same level as that of the ruled. That is, whether a system is good or bad for a society will depend upon the individuals who manage it, and also who are managed by it. In a society formed of good citizens, the system, whatever it may be, will run on just and equitable lines. Conversely, in a society formed of miscreants and moral backsliders, no system per se can conceivably engender social progress, while the system itself, because of the corruption of individuals, will appear to be riddled with iniquities.

The strength of a society and its ability to endure are dependent on the personal worthiness of its member. Each member contributes his individual strength like a brick in a tall building. If the bricks are badly made, so that they erode and crumble, it will only be a matter of time before the entire building crumbles and falls. Can society survive if its constituents are of an inferior moral fibre? They are like the passenger on a ship who bores a hole in the hull without considering that, as a result of his action, ship, crew and passengers will quickly flounder. Therefore each and every individual needs to be reformed for producing a good society. For even a single member of the society can wreak havoc by his acts of perversion.

Clearly, in a society which is entirely driven by corrupt and subversive forces, a revolution is called for. The most salient principle of Islamic revolution is that change must be brought about through peaceful efforts. A transformation can, of course, be effected by the use of violence, but it will in no sense be a positive one. For a revolution to be effective and beneficial, it is vital that it should be carried out peacefully. There is a *hadith* which says: “God grants to non-violence what He does not grant to violence.”

The Prophet Muhammad was eminently successful in bringing about major changes in both religious and secular beliefs and practices

throughout seventh century Arabia and the countries surrounding it. The fact that this was done in the most gradual and pacific way, with the minimum of bloodshed, is a matter of historical record. Indeed, the Prophet's life is replete with examples of how to bring about change in an ideally patient and tolerant manner, first of all on a very small scale, then gradually enlarging the scope of activities, and only in the final stages bringing about the thoroughgoing social revolution which, in effect, meant individuals on a large scale bowing to the will of the Almighty. It was only after a very long period of missionary work that the Prophet exhorted people, on the basis of divine revelations, for example, to give up drinking, gambling and adultery. Had he attempted to hasten matters by force or intimidation, people would have reacted negatively and might have decided never to comply with his requests (Al-Bukhari). It is a measure of the success of his persuasive methods that, despite the heavy addiction to liquor in Arab society, regular takers not only gave up the habit, but also destroyed all the pots in which they had liquor stored in their homes. Given the fifteen years of his painstaking work just to condition individuals' minds to the sublimity of surrendering to their Creator, one might say that his method was evolutionary rather than revolutionary.

The Prophet lived on in Makkah for thirteen years after receiving his prophethood. At the end of this period, he migrated to Madinah, where he lived for ten years till the time of his death. It is a well-documented fact that during his Makkan period, he was offered kingship, but that he declined it (Ibn Hisham). His reason for denial was that he knew full well that the mere crowning of a man as king would not transform society. Change in society comes about not with the wielding of enormous political power, but through education and awareness. The Prophet therefore continued with great patience and perseverance to educate the people, until the time came when the social and political system was Islamized on its own.

AUGUST 24

The Desire for Peace

A believer is necessarily a lover of peace. In his mind, faith and a desire for peace are so closely interlinked that, regardless of the circumstances, he will strive to the utmost for the maintenance of peace. He will bear the loss of anything else, but the loss of peace he will not endure.

The life that the true believer desires in this world can be lived only in the propitious atmosphere which flowers in conditions of peace. Conditions of unrest breed a negative atmosphere which to him is abhorrent.

But if peace is to be maintained, it calls for a certain kind of sacrifice. That is, when conditions become disturbed, the believer must overlook both the misdeeds leading up to this situation and the identity of the wrongdoers. He must suffer all the harm and injustice done to him without making any attempt either to retaliate, or to bring the miscreants to book, so that a state of peace should continue to prevail. The believer has to be willing to pay this price, so that his pursuance of constructive ends should proceed unhampered.

The believer is like a flower in the garden of nature. Just as a hot wind will shrivel up a bloom and cause it to die, so will constant friction distract the believer from achieving positive goals. And just as a cool breeze will enable the flower to retain its beauty for its natural life-span, so will a peaceful atmosphere enable the believer to fulfill the obligations of divine worship in a spirit of great serenity. Peace is thus central to the life of the believer.

Islam is a religion of peace. And peace is a universal law of nature. That is because God loves the condition of peace, and disapproves of any state of unrest. God's predilection for peace is quite enough

reason for the believer also to love peace. In no circumstances will the true believer ever tolerate the disruption of peace.

AUGUST 25

Jihad

Jihad means struggle. Any sincere effort for the cause of religion will be called *Jihad*. Man's self leads him to evil. So waging war with the self is *jihad*. Sometimes friends or acquaintances pressurize you into engaging in activities which are not right from the moral standpoint. At that time, refusing to yield such pressure and sticking firmly to an upright attitude are forms of *jihad*.

Exhorting people to goodness and making them refrain from indecency are tasks entailing a great struggle. Continuing the *dawah* campaign whilst bearing all hardship is also *jihad*.

If having been treated with bitterness by neighbours or acquaintances, or after suffering any other kind of provocation, one refrains from reaction and retaliation and maintains pleasant relations unilaterally, this will also be a form of *jihad*.

There is another kind of *jihad* which is called 'qital' that is, engaging in war at God's behest at the time of aggression on the part of the enemies. This *jihad* is purely in self-defense in order to counter aggression. The literal meaning of *jihad* is not war. But to fight in self-defense in accordance with God's commandments also involves a struggle; that is why it is also called *jihad*.

Jihad, meaning war, is however a temporary and circumstantial matter. If in the real sense any need for defense arises only then will armed *jihad* be launched. If no such severe urgency arises, no armed *jihad* will take place.

Just calling an action '*jihad*' will not morally validate it. The only true *jihad* is that which is carried out in accordance with Islam. Islamic *jihad* is, in actual fact, another name for peaceful struggle.

This peaceful struggle is sometimes an inward-looking thing, like waging *jihad* with the self when it takes place at the level of feeling; sometimes it is desired externally, and manifests itself at the physical level through gestures (like kneeling, prostrating oneself before God).

AUGUST 26

Patience (Sabr)

Patience is the exercise of restraint in trying situations. It is a virtue which enables the individual to proceed towards worthy goals, undeflected by adverse circumstances or repeated provocations. If he allows himself to become upset by opposition, taunts or other kinds of unpleasantness, he will never reach his goals. He will simply become enmeshed in irrelevancies.

The only way to deal with the irksome side of daily living is to exercise patience. Patience will ensure that whenever one has some bitter experience, he will opt for the way of tolerance rather than that of reaction to provocation. It will enable one to absorb shocks and to continue, undeterred, on one's onward journey.

Patience, as well as being a practical solution to the problems faced in the outside world, is also a means of positive character building. One who fails to exercise patience, gives free rein to negative thoughts and feelings, develops a personality which is likewise negative while one who remains patient is so morally bolstered by his own positive thoughts and feelings that he develops a positive personality.

Sabr is no retreat. *Sabr* only amounts to taking the initiative along the path of wisdom and reason as opposed to the path of the emotions. *Sabr* gives one the strength to restrain one's emotions in delicate situations and rather to use one's brains to find a course of action along result-oriented lines.

The present world is fashioned in such a way that everyone is necessarily confronted with unpleasant matters at one time or

another. Things which are unbearable have somehow to be borne; harrowing events have to be witnessed and all kinds of pain have to be suffered. In such situations, succumbing to impatience leads to the kind of unnecessary emotional involvement which is counter-productive, while a demonstration of patience has a healing, beneficial effect, allowing one to tread the path of discreet avoidance. Success in the present world is destined only for those who adopt the path of patience in adverse circumstances.

AUGUST 27

The Brotherhood of Man

According to Islam, all human beings have been created by one and the same God, and for this reason belong to one great brotherhood. So far as their earthly origin is concerned, they are all descendants of the first pair of human beings ever created by God—Adam and Eve. In their subsequent spread over different parts of the world, variations in geographical conditions produced a diversity of skin colourings, languages and other racial characteristics.

The teaching of Islam in this regard is that despite differences of colour, language, etc., people should harbour no ill-will towards those who are apparently unlike themselves, for differentiating between one man and another is not approved by God. They should rather promote fellow feeling towards others, even if at first glance they appear like total strangers to them. Bearing in mind that they are all traceable back to Adam and Eve, they should be each other's well-wishers and willingly come to one another's assistance, like members of the same large family.

Ideally, the relation between one man and another ought not to be one of strangeness but one of familiarity; not of distance but of nearness; not of hatred but of love.

When all human beings are descendants of the same progenitors, that means that all are equal: no one is superior or inferior. The

distinction between great and small is not between one human being and another, but between God and man. And before God, certainly, all human beings are equal; all are equally His creatures and His servants. For God does not discriminate between one or the other of His creations.

AUGUST 28

On the Occasion of Differences

Differences are a part of life. A divergence of views and behaviour arises between people for a variety of reasons. Just as differences occur among unbelievers and apostates similarly differences occur between sincere and pious people. But even if differences cannot be prevented, that is no reason, for any individual to indulge in negative behaviour. It should be borne in mind that despite differences, positive behaviour is both a possibility and a necessity.

Regarding a person as being wrong about everything just because he holds different opinions and calling him a hypocrite, bad intentioned and insincere are entirely un-Islamic reactions. The true believer looks at the issue of difference as a matter of intentions, and limits any ensuing dissension to the sphere of its origin. He never allows matters to escalate.

Severing relationships due to differences is not in accordance with the spirit of Islam. Mutual relationships should be maintained while continuing serious discussion of contentious issues. Not greeting the person with whom one has differences or refusing to meet such a person is highly improper.

In this present world everything is designed to put man to the test. Differences also serve this purpose. Man ought to be extremely cautious, particularly at moments of contention. He should continuously strive to be tolerant lest he show some improper reaction, which would be displeasing to God.

Remaining impartial in the face of differences is indeed a difficult task. But its reward too is great. Every right act is treated as an act of worship in Islam; it is therefore an act of superior worship when, in spite of controversies one keeps one's heart free of enmity and vengefulness and adheres strictly to the path of justice.

The emergence of difference is not in itself a bad thing. What is bad is that at the time of arising differences the individuals concerned do not rise to the occasion. They fail miserably in the divine test. Remaining within the confines of taqwa (fear of God) at times of conflict is a great Islamic act, and crossing the boundaries at such moments is an un-Islamic act of the worst degree.

AUGUST 29

Human Equality

According to Islamic tenets, all human beings are equal. In prayer, all members of the congregation stand in the same rows together, and on the Hajj pilgrimage, all the believers belonging to different countries don identical white seamless robes for the performance of the obligatory rites. On the occasion of the Final Pilgrimage, it is noteworthy that the Prophet of Islam declared that no Arab was superior to a non-Arab and that no white was superior to a black. All were equally servants of God. In Islamic society, everyone is accorded the same status, there being, ideally, no higher or lower social strata.

How then can we rationalize what are apparently very great differences in human beings in terms of colour and race, etc., considering that the concept of human equality ranks so high in the value system of Islam? We find the answer in the Quran, which makes it clear that such outward differences are meant to serve as means of identification and were never intended as indicators of superiority (or inferiority). People in different parts of the world may have a diversity of skin colourings and other distinctive racial characteristics, but that

is only so that they may be easily distinguished from each other. By Islamic standards, this is designed to facilitate social and national interaction.

The sole basis of superiority in Islam is *taqwa*—the earnestness with which one leads a God-fearing life; as such, it bears no relation to colour or race. Physical attributes certainly have their effect on the social interaction of this world, but in the Hereafter, no value is attached to them. There, the only things which count are inner qualities, for upon them depends the essential excellence of man's distinctive character. That is why, according to a *hadith*, God sees the heart and not the body. He reserves a place in Paradise only for those found deserving in terms of their inner worth.

According to Islam, all greatness belongs to God. God as the Supreme Being is ineffably superior to all men. While there is this infinitely great difference between God and man, there is no difference whatsoever between man and man.

AUGUST 30

Concerning Zakat

Zakat, or the alms-tax, is one of the five basic tenets of Islam. Its payment is obligatory, at the rate of 2.5%, on all wealth that is subject to growth. Eight categories of people, eligible to receive Zakat, have been specified in this verse of the Quran:

Alms shall be used only for the advancement of God's cause, for the ransom of captives and debtors, and for distribution among the poor, the destitute, wayfarers, those that are employed in collecting alms, and those that are converted to the faith. That is a duty enjoined by God. He is Wise and All-knowing. (9:60)

So, as is clear from this verse, one of the ways that Zakat can be spent is “for the cause of God.” Though the words of the Quran are

general, the consensus of Muslim theologians is that they refer to holy war: it is those who are voluntarily engaged in holy war, and have not been appointed any salary by the government, who should receive alms given “for the cause of God.” (*Fiqh-us-Sunnah*, Vol. I, p. 393)

If we accept this interpretation, then it means that the instruction to give Zakat “for the cause of God” may, to all intents and purposes, be misapplied. This form of voluntary participation in wars was only possible in ancient times; under modern conditions there is no question of it. In the present age war has become so complicated and technical that only those who have received regular training are able to take any real part in it: to allow untrained people to enter the field of battle is tantamount to inviting defeat. In other words, only those who are employed by the government can participate in war nowadays. According to this interpretation, the above injunction is really no longer applicable.

The words “for the cause of God” are general in their application. They include any task that is performed for God’s cause, being especially applicable to that work which the Quran calls “calling to the service of God.” The true objective of Islam is preaching, not fighting. Calling people to submit themselves to God is the Islamic point of departure; war is only resorted to when the other party starts hostilities, and forces the preachers of Islam to take up arms to defend themselves.

The Egyptian scholar, Rashid Raza, has noted in his commentary of the Quran that the words “for the cause of God” are equally applicable to those who strive to spread the word of God.

The best way to give alms “for the cause of God” in the present age, is to contribute to the training of preachers, and to their dispatch by Islamic organizations to non-Muslim lands, and to continue to give financial support to these preachers, just as non-Muslims do for the propagation of their religion. (*Tafseer al-Manar*)

AUGUST 31

Salvation

What is the greatest issue facing man in this world? It is how to secure salvation in the life after death so that he may find his true abode and have a share in God's eternal blessings.

Every man who is born in this present world has to enter another world after death. In this world man was granted life's opportunities as a matter of being tested by them. Whatever man receives in the next world will be purely on the basis of his deeds in this world. This means that in the world before death, man has been given a great number of things and opportunities, whether or not he deserved them. But after death, the criterion of receiving will only be a matter of his just deeds; nothing will be given to him to try him.

This means that those who are held to be deserving will be granted not out of God's blessings but more that they actually merited. But those who have done nothing to deserve God's blessings will have nothing whatsoever in store for them. They will be compelled to live in a state of utter deprivation.

This is man's greatest problem. To what should he give the greatest attention so that he may not be held undeserving in the life to come? Everyone has to himself exert to the utmost in the consciousness that in the next stage of his life he may by default be considered without merit. Then there would be no further scope for him to earn God's blessings, salvation would elude him completely.

The next world is the most perfect and eternal world. There, all kinds of pleasures and happiness have been stored up for mankind. It is that world which man should cherish most, and it should be the place to which he most earnestly aspires. But the time for action to secure a place in that blessing-filled world is not the world after

death, but the world before death. The present world is the place for action, while the next world is the place for reaping the reward for one's deeds.

Salvation in the life Hereafter is only for those who prove themselves deserving of it.

SEPTEMBER 1

Calling God

Dua (prayer) means a call. That is a servant of God invokes his Creator to express either his needs or his servitude to Him. This call in itself is a form of worship.

God is a living and permanent existence. He hears and sees and has the power to do as He desires and set the course of events in consonance with His will.

It is this firm conviction which gives rise to this urge within man to pray to God. When man receives inspiration from God, it comes to him naturally to call upon God for all his needs and to ask for God's blessings in this world as well as in the Hereafter. God is truly man's sustainer.

There is no time set for prayer, neither is there any prescribed method nor a separate language. Man, at any moment, in any form, and in any language can pray to God. If the prayer has come right from inside one's heart, it will certainly reach God. God will hear the call without delay and will answer the suppliant's prayers.

There are certain prayers which are repeated in different forms of worship. But most prayers are not linked to one form of worship or another. For instance, when a man goes to sleep at night some words of prayer come to his lips according to the time. Similarly, when he wakes up, he starts praying to God to help him to make a better start to the coming day. In the same way when he meets someone, or eats and drinks, or takes his seat in a conveyance or is travelling, or is engaged in his economic activities—whatever the occasion—such prayers come to his lips as mean, O God, in this matter you will decide what is best for us.

Dua means seeking from God and this seeking from God has no ending. It continues always. *Dua* is an expression of unceasing feelings

welling up inside the believer's heart for his Lord. No moment of a believer's life can be bereft of it.

SEPTEMBER 2

Rituals in Islam

All religions, by dint of ritual and ceremony, give a definite form to these acts of worship. Islam likewise has its specific rites, but lays special emphasis on the spirit in which these are carried out. Moreover, it does not conceive of divine worship as a dichotomous proposition, divided into two equal parts under the headings of form and spirit. Form, in one sense, is only an external manifestation of the spirit. That is to say that spirit dominates in being the vital and indispensable element of every sincere religious act—to which form is a mere ancillary.

A *hadith* pertaining to fasting shows how this act must be illumined by spirit: “One who did not forsake telling lies while on a fast, God has no need of such a person forsaking food and water.” Numerous statements of this kind, enshrined in the Quran and *Hadith* make it clear that, in Islam, ritual practices and spirit are not equal constituents of worship. As elements of religion, they stand in relation to each other as the crucial and the subordinate. Each religious act of worship may, or may not—depending upon its nature and circumstances—have an external form. But whatever the case, ritualized or formless, what is of overarching importance is the zeal which inspires it.

While, from the Islamic standpoint, rituals serve partly as palpable identifiers of religious acts or of worship, and partly as physical reinforcements of or prompters to religious ardour, the essence of Islam is its inner spirit. This is something eternal and unassailable, unlike its outer forms which have no lasting significance in being purely external signals of the spiritual inner core. Whenever

this reality becomes lodged in the innermost recesses of the individual psyche, its effects are outwardly reflected. Ceremonial acts, sincerely performed are but the material expressions of the incontrovertible inner truth.

When, towards the end of his life, the Prophet Muhammad went on his pilgrimage, he laid down specific ways of performing Hajj. More than one lakh of his Companions went along with him on this occasion. Subsequently, the Prophet seated himself in the courtyard of the Kabah, where his Companions came with their queries about the procedures to be followed in this very important part of Islamic worship. Most of these questions concerned the rites and their forms. One would say that he had carried out such and such a rite beforehand, while another would say that he had done so at a later stage, thus reversing the order of the proceedings. (Hajj involves the performance of a series of rites, and since this was the first proper Hajj, there was some uncertainty about their correct order.) The Prophet allayed their fears by saying: "There is no harm. There is no harm. Real harm lies in the dishonouring of a person." This saying of the Prophet throws light on how form relates to spirit in Islam. That is, the spirit is the essential factor, while the form, or ritual, is purely a matter of externals. If the believer is in no way found to be lacking in spirit, any deficiency in the form of his worship will be considered tolerable.

The converse of this is illustrated by a tradition set down in the books of *Hadith*. Once the Prophet of Islam was seated in the mosque in Madinah, when a Muslim worshipper came to meet him after duly performing his ablutions and saying his prayers with full observance of their ritual. The Prophet sent him back to say his prayers again, as he said that *he had not said his prayers*.

Here, a clear distinction had been made between form and spirit. In his divine wisdom, the Prophet sensed that this worshipper's performance of the rituals of prayer had been empty and mechanical, and in no sense imbued with any religious fervour. Indeed, the true spirit of *namaz* is modesty. But this individual's behaviour showed that while he was praying modesty was very far from his mind. And if the Prophet told him to go back and say his prayers, it was so that

he should concern himself with the inner kernel of prayer and not its outer shell. However punctilious worship may appear in its form, if the true spirit is absent, the performance of the ritual must be held invalid. The mere observance of form does not make worship acceptable in the eyes of God.

The word 'ritual', in fact, has the same connotation as 'form'. The only difference is that 'form' is a term of general application, whereas 'ritual' in respect of its usage, has in the main become a religious term.

There is a *hadith* which tells us that the value of an action depends upon the intention of the doer. That is, a practice must be evaluated on the basis of its motivation, for example, the Prophet's migration from Makkah to Madinah, which in Islamic history is called the Hijrah. This emigration for the sake of Islam was an act of great religious significance. It meant people abandoning their hearths and homes for the sake of God. However, one of these emigrants was not so pure in intention. He had left Makkah for Madinah with the ulterior motive of marrying a Madinan resident who had agreed to marry him only if he came to Madinah, as she could not come to Makkah. This was his true reason for coming to Madinah along with the other emigrants. The Prophet told his companions that since that individual had migrated, not for the sake of God, but for his own private benefit, he would not be rewarded for having migrated.

This makes it clear that rituals are of relative value in Islam. The true value of an act in Islam depends entirely upon the spirit in which it is carried out, and not upon the trappings of outward form.

SEPTEMBER 3

Simplicity

A believer is one who finds God. God's discoverer starts living by nature on the plane of higher realities. He rises above outward, superficial things and finds sources of interest in the world of piety.

Such a person by his very nature becomes a simplicity-loving person. His motto is: Simple living and high thinking.

One who has acquired the taste for the meaning of the divine reality can have no taste for outward and material things. Such a person relishes simplicity. In his eyes pretensions lose their attraction. His soul finds peace in natural things. Unnatural and artificial things appear to him as if they cause his inner world to disintegrate and create obstacles to the progress of his spiritual journey.

Simplicity is a support to the believer. It contributes to his strength. By opting for simplicity he is able to put his time to the best use by not wasting it on irrelevant matters. He does not let his attention be diverted to things which are inessential so far as his goal is concerned. And in this way he is able to devote himself wholeheartedly to the achievement of higher goals.

Simplicity is the food of the believer, and, having its own internal beauty, it serves as an apparel for his modesty. It is in an atmosphere of simplicity that his personality finds the scope for its growth. On the contrary, if the believer builds up an artificial glamour around himself, he will eventually feel as if he is imprisoned in a cell.

A believer considers himself God's servant in the ultimate sense of the word. His thoughts and feelings are all perfectly attuned to this servitude, to this condition of being God's servant. One who consistently thinks in this way inevitably finds his whole disposition veering towards simplicity. Since ostentation, artificiality and social pretensions are at variance with his disposition, he resolutely avoids them throughout his life, in his manner of living and in his daily dealings.

SEPTEMBER 4

Spirituality

What is spirituality? Spirituality—*rabbaniat*—means 'Giving in to God.' The spiritually inclined so elevate themselves in their thinking that they begin to live on a higher divine plane.

They remain undisturbed in the face of provocation, their mental balance is not upset by unpleasant experiences, and the distasteful behaviour of others does not arouse any feelings of anger or revenge in them. Living strictly by their principles, their mental level becomes so high that the stone cast by others cannot reach them. In spirituality they find such sublimity that all else pales into insignificance. Spirituality in itself is such a great virtue that the seeker after divine bliss need quest no further.

On the other hand, those who have no such spiritual inclinations allow themselves to be constantly influenced by their immediate surroundings and thus remain unhappily embroiled in human strife. They cannot, like spiritual people, smile when abused. Nor, in countless situations, can they adopt the attitude of 'forgive and forget.' They reach such a low ebb mentally and emotionally, that, spiritually, they become incapable of making progress.

Life's experiences for both the spiritual and the non-spiritual are like the grasping of a rosebush. On each branch are beautifully shaped and coloured blossoms whose scent refreshes from afar the weary in body and spirit. But also on each branch are the inevitable thorns. The spiritual individual will carefully avoid the thorns in order to take possession of the blossom, or if by accident, his hands are pricked by the thorns, he dismisses it as a trivial matter. But the unspiritual person, in his unseemly ways will rudely grasp both thorns and flowers, and will recoil in anger and dismay, baulked of his prize, and burning with resentment.

Where spirituality makes the best of life's experiences—although there is no rose without a thorn—the lack of spirituality makes the worst of them. Where spirituality implies elevation of the soul, the lack of it implies the baser instincts of jealousy, greed, selfishness and exploitativeness.

It will only be when great numbers of the spiritually inclined come together that a society will be formed which shines like the sun and flourishes like lush green gardens.

SEPTEMBER 5

Piety

Taqwa means piety, that is, leading a life of caution and restraint in this world.

Umar Farooq, the second Caliph once asked a companion of the Prophet what taqwa was. He replied, "O leader of the believers, have you ever crossed a path which has thorny shrubs on both sides?" But the companion instead of replying asked another question, "What did you do on such an occasion?" Umar Farooq replied, "I gathered my clothes close to me and moved ahead cautiously." The companion said, "This is the stuff of taqwa."

The present world is a testing ground. Here, various kinds of thorns have been scattered for the purpose of testing man, such as negativity, false issues raised by non-serious people, the lure of worldly things. Besides these, there are many unpleasant occurrences which disturb people's minds and lead them away from the path of virtue.

All these things are like thorny shrubs lining both sides of the path of life. At any moment it is feared that man may embroil himself in these thorns and then instead of going forward, remain entrapped in these snares of life.

In such a state of affairs the wise man is one who travels the paths of life by gathering up his clothes to avoid becoming entangled in these unpleasant snares. In this way, he is able to continue his journey unhampered. Yet at all times he must remain conscious of the fact that he must protect himself. He has to adopt the path of avoidance, not of entanglement.

Man has been created with an upright nature. If no hindrance comes in the way, then every man will, on his own, take the right

course. That is why, the utmost precaution must be taken against allowing unnatural obstacles to come in the way.

Then, guided by this upright nature, man will continue to walk along the right path until he meets his Lord.

SEPTEMBER 6

Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving for man is to acknowledge the blessings of God. This acknowledgement first arises in the heart then, taking the form of words, it comes to the lips of the grateful person.

From birth, man has been superbly endowed in body and mind by his Creator. All his requirements have been amply catered for, every object in the heavens and on earth having been pressed into his service. All the things necessary for his leading a good life on earth and the building of a civilization have been provided in abundance.

Man experiences these blessings at every moment. It is, therefore, incumbent on man to thank God for His blessings at all times. His heart should be eternally brimming with gratitude for these divine blessings.

Thanksgiving is the most comprehensive term of worship: gratefulness is the essence of the godly life. The best expression of that gratefulness is the expenditure of time and money in the way of God. It is God, after all who has given man the reason to worship Him and the means to do so.

SEPTEMBER 7

Remembrance of God

D*hikr*, meaning remembrance, that is, remembrance of God, is one of the basic teachings of Islam. The opposite state, that of forgetfulness of God, is unpardonable negligence.

Dhikr is a reality of nature. At every moment man experiences those things which are directly related with God. He sees the sun, the moon, the rivers, the mountains, the air and the water. All of these are God's creations. It is but natural that all the creations that come before man should be reminders of the Creator. Right from the earth to the heavens, all things are manifestation of God's Beauty and Perfection. With their whole existence they serve as harbingers of God's Being.

Similarly in the world, as man leads his life, day and night, his attention is drawn at all times to God. Being influenced by God's creation, his heart and mind produce divine feelings. *Dhikr* is nothing but the verbal expression of these feelings.

Throughout his life man experiences his attachment to God again and again, and when he ponders over his existence, his heart is filled with rejoicing that God created him in the most noble image and lavished upon him all the best qualities. These feelings well up in his heart in many ways. This is also a form of *dhikr*.

Man undergoes many kinds of ups and downs in his daily life; he has pleasant as well as unpleasant experiences of all kinds. As he goes through these experiences he repeatedly turns to God and remembers Him in different words, again and again.

Similarly, during his daily obeisance he repeats many prayers. These words of prayer are derived sometimes from the Quran and sometimes from the *hadith*. These words coming spontaneously to his lips are the stuff of *dhikr*, the remembrance of God.

SEPTEMBER 8

Divine Way

There are countless stars and asteroids in the universe. All of these are incessantly rotating in the vastness of space. Space is like a limitless runway for the movement at great speed of these countless orbiting bodies. But what is most amazing is that neither the planets nor the stars ever collide in their course.

What is the secret? The secret lies in their rotation within their own orbits with the utmost precision and without the slightest deviation. It is this law of motion which has prevented the heavenly bodies from colliding.

Exactly the same course is desirable for human beings. For the human course too God has set a fixed sphere within the limits of which every human being has to move. If everyone moves in his respective sphere, a state of peace is automatically established in society. But when people cross their limits, and break the barriers set for them, society will witness clashes and confrontations. Those who deliberately or even unthinkingly collide with other people will not only invite their own destruction but will also destroy others.

How must man live in social life? How should he deal with others? What should be his behaviour? What norms should he follow in his sayings and deeds? For all this God has given clear commands. He has explained what man should do and what he should not do. In life's daily affairs opting for the course permitted by God is like the stars moving in the orbits fixed for them. On the other hand, indulgence in forbidden things is like deviation from the fixed sphere. It is people who deviate in this way who cause all kinds of evil and corruption, and who, in their straying, destroy not only themselves but also the society in which they live.

The true believer is one who leads his life in the sphere appointed for him by God. It is those who unswervingly pursue the course set for them by their Creator, will share God's blessings in this world as well as His eternal blessings in the Hereafter.

SEPTEMBER 9

Wealth

Wealth is one of life's necessities. But it is not life's goal. If wealth is necessary to fulfill life's material requirements, then it must be acquired as the mainstay of human existence. But if wealth is projected as life's goal and its ever-increasing acquisition is considered the most important task, then it can become a source of great misery which will destroy its seekers not only in this world but also in the Hereafter.

Man has to live in this world for a certain period of time. For this, he requires some material facilities which may serve as a support in his life. The majority of these things must be purchased with money. So it is essential for everyone to provide himself with the means to do so. In this respect wealth is a precious asset for all of us.

But perhaps a more important acquisition is that of knowledge. Without knowledge man cannot strive for spiritual progress; he cannot play a positive role in the construction of humanity. He has to acquire knowledge so that he may live in society as a useful and beneficial part of it.

This indeed is a much more worthy goal than the simple acquisition of wealth. But the attainment of this goal is possible only when man devotes the greater part of his energies towards reaching it. The activities of earning money have to be kept within a certain limit and only then will he find time to attain this nobler goal.

Money may fulfill the physical or material needs of man. But it is not sufficient to fulfill his spiritual and intellectual needs. One who

makes the acquisition of wealth his life's goal, will of course, continue to receive bodily nourishment, but his soul will all the while have been starving. The intellectual part of his mind, remaining continuously in an under-nourished state, will finally cease to exist.

That is why wealth is called *fitna* (source of trial, that is, it is given to man as a test). The proper use of money leads man to all kind of progress, whereas the wrong use of it casts man headlong into the pit of destruction.

SEPTEMBER 10

Gaining or Losing

In this world man sometimes loses, sometimes gains. These vicissitudes are the common lot. No one is exempt from them.

Now the question is how man should react to them. Islam tells us that both these experiences are meant as tests. Here gaining is not in itself synonymous with success. Similarly, losing does not mean that an individual has failed for all time.

Losing and winning are not in themselves important. What is of actual importance is how people conduct themselves when facing these experiences.

So, when a man suffers a loss, he should not consider himself a failure and a deprived person; he should not lose hope and courage, and begin uttering endless complaints. He must rather prove his courage, and, bearing up under the burden of adversity, retain his mental balance. He must consciously regard both the "give" and the "take" as being from God. He has thus to accept God's decisions. For it is by his willingness to do so that he will entitle himself to a share in God's mercy.

Similarly, when he has the experience of gaining he should not become haughty and start regarding himself as superior to others.

On the contrary, success should only increase his modesty. He should become all the more particular regarding his duties in relation to God and humanity and perform them the more rigorously.

In this world, losing and gaining are both forms of testing. Neither is the loser a failure, nor is the gainer a success. The actual criterion of success and failure is how each has reacted to those situations.

The successful person is one who keeps his balance and composure whether gaining or losing. Neither experience should make him deviate from the path of moderation. Those who remain on this straight and narrow path are successful in the eyes of God. Nothing will hinder their progress towards success.

SEPTEMBER 11

Sacrifice

One of the qualities of the believers described in the Quran is the readiness to sacrifice one's interests for the sake of another; that is, holding the needs of others to be above one's own; taking the trouble to help others; giving preference to others, occupying a back seat oneself. This human quality is termed *eesar* (sacrifice) in the Quran.

After the emigration a number of Muslims came to Madinah from Makkah. These people were evidently going to become a burden upon the Madinan Muslims. Because at that time the emigrants were empty-handed; while the local inhabitants (*Ansar*) had houses, lands, orchards, etc. But the Madinan Muslims, gave a hearty welcome to these newcomers, who were apparently about to become a source of economic liability. Referring to this question, the Quran observed: "Those, before them, who had homes in the City (Madinah) and embraced the Faith before them, love those who have sought refuge with them; they entertain no desire in their hearts for what they are given, but rather prefer them above themselves, though they are in

want. Those that preserve themselves from their own greed shall surely prosper.” (59:9)

This willingness to sacrifice is a superior human quality. It is something which is experienced daily by the people. Almost every morning and evening such occasions arise when one feels the necessity for one kind of sacrifice or the other, the need to recede into the background and leave the path clear for others to go forward; to suffer oneself in order to give comfort to others; to cut down one’s own expenses to be able to help others; to suppress one’s own personality so that others may come to the fore, to remain silent to allow others to speak; to keep one’s conveyance to one side in order to give room for others to go ahead to their destinations. Such self-sacrifice is called *eesar*. It is a form of altruism. According to the Quran, it is those who possess this quality who will prosper.

SEPTEMBER 12

Compassionate Behaviour

God’s attribute in the Quran is said to be ‘The Compassionate’, ‘The Merciful’. That is, very kind and sympathetic. Similarly the Prophet of Islam, has been called ‘A Mercy to the Worlds’ (21:107). That is, the Prophet of Islam has been sent as a blessing to the whole world. The most prominent quality of the Prophet is his being the instrument of universal mercy.

The Quran, as a matter of divine guidance urges people to exercise patience and compassion in their dealings with one another. This means that everyone should treat others with sympathy and kindness. Even when one experiences unkindness from others one should not return unkindness for unkindness, but should continue to behave sympathetically. Alqurtubi has interpreted this verse ‘and they exhort one another to patience and compassion’ to mean that creatures of God (human beings) ought to be dealt with mercifully.

A number of traditions have been related in the books of *hadith*, which enshrine certain observations made on this subject by the Prophet of Islam. Here are three of them: “God will be merciful to those who are merciful (to His creatures).” “You should be merciful to people on earth, God on high will be merciful to you.”

This teaching of Islam spread so widely that it came to be included in Muslim literature all over the world. Every language reverberated with these ideas. An Indian Muslim poet composed this couplet:

Karo meherbani tum ahle-zameen par
(Be kind to people on earth)

Khuda meherban hoga arsh-e-barin par
(God on high will be merciful to you)

Of all matters which are of great personal importance, the virtue of mercy is ranked as the foremost. That is why the Prophet of Islam observes: God will not show mercy to one who does not show mercy to others. (Sahih al-Bukhari, Kitab al-Tawhid)

SEPTEMBER 13

Justice

One of the very important demands of humanity is that we should deal justly with others. In no circumstances should we follow the path of injustice or oppression. That is why Islam has laid great stress on adopting a just attitude.

The Quran states: ‘Allah enjoins justice and kindness’ (16:90). At another place the Quran has this to say: ‘My Lord enjoins justice’ (7:29). The material symbol of justice is a weighing scale. Just as a balance divides things in proper measure, so should man’s acts and deeds tip the scales in favour of justice. In any contentious situation man ought to act fairly, and when he speaks, his words should be weighed by the measure of reality.

The Quran has repeatedly commanded that social issues should always be resolved with justice. For instance, the Quran says: “Allah commands you to pass judgement upon men with fairness” (4:58). Similarly it says, “Give just weight and full measure... speak for justice, even if it affects your own kinsmen” (6:153). At another place it commands that in controversial matters peace should be made between antagonists in equity and justice.’ (49:9)

It is a general command. In the family and in society differences will always arise. On such occasions, it is the duty of all the concerned members to settle the matter in accordance with justice without tilting towards any party; the settlement should be made according to the demands of justice and truth.

Then the Quran enjoins: “O believers, be dutiful to Allah and bearers of just witness. Do not allow your hatred for other men to turn you away from justice. Deal justly; justice is nearer to true piety.” (5:8)

This shows the great importance of justice. That is, we have to stick to justice even when dealing with the enemy. The system of the earth and the heavens is established on perfect justice, so it is only right and proper that man’s code of conduct should likewise be based on justice. In this world of God, there is no place for the path of injustice.

SEPTEMBER 14

Profitability and Beneficence

The Quran tells us that this world has been made by God in such a way that here only “that which is of use to mankind remains on the earth. (13:17)

Everything on earth is made on this principle. A thing remains in this world only so long as it possesses the character of profitability. When it loses this character, it loses the right to survive as well. At this stage, the system of nature casts it away, holding it as unwanted.

This same system of nature has been approved of by God for man as well (3:83). The desired man of God is one who leads his life in this world as an exercise profitable to himself and beneficial to others. He is one who fills himself to become a giver person in the real sense of the word; from whom others receive things required for their existence and survival on earth. It is such a person who can rightly be called a human being. It is such a person who deserves to achieve success and progress in this world of God.

According to a *hadith*, the Prophet of Islam observed: Among you whoever may benefit his brethren ought to benefit them. (Sahih Muslim)

Great resources are not necessarily required for beneficence, which can take many forms and be practiced by anyone. For example, giving a piece of good advice; lending a helping hand to another; showing the right path to someone who has gone astray; if possible, giving monetary assistance; removing obstacles in the way—all of these acts come under the heading of beneficence. And supposing one is not able to help one's brother in any of these ways, one may pray for him. This would also count as an act designed to profit another.

SEPTEMBER 15

How to Behave with Neighbours

According to a *hadith*, “To God the best companion is one who is best for his companion and the best neighbour is one who is best for his neighbour.” (At-Tirmizi)

The Quran goes further with the more specific injunction to “show kindness to near and distant neighbours, to fellow travellers and to the wayfarers” (4:36).

This means that it is incumbent upon us to behave well towards all kinds of neighbours, whether they are permanent residents of the neighbourhood, or are only living there temporarily for the purposes

of education, business or travel, etc. Wherever one is living in close proximity to others, one must feel obliged to observe their rights as human being. No one should be the cause of trouble to his neighbour. On separate occasion, the Prophet observed, “One who believes in God should not give trouble to his neighbour” and “one who believes in God should accord due respect to his neighbours” (Al-Bukhari). As an individual, therefore, a Muslim must be a good neighbour, while, on the larger scale of the community, Muslims should prove to be good neighbours at the national level as well.

The Prophet, again on two separate occasions, thus defined the essence of good neighbourliness: “By God, a person cannot be a believer (that is, a Muslim) until and unless he likes for his neighbours and for his brother what he likes for himself.” “A person from whose evils his neighbour is not safe will not go to heaven.” (Sahih Muslim)

SEPTEMBER 16

Speaking the Truth

The Quran defines believers as men and women who speak the truth. The noblest quality in a man or woman is honesty and avoidance of falsehood at all times. Indeed, nothing less than absolute truthfulness befits the human character.

Many traditions have been related which show the importance of truth. For instance, according to one tradition, the Prophet of Islam observed: You should speak the truth, because speaking the truth leads man to a life of virtue. And you should keep your distance from someone who tells lies, because telling lies leads man to a life of evil.

This *hadith* commands us to speak the truth and it also tells us the wisdom of speaking the truth. When a man takes real care to speak the truth, a truth-loving personality is developed within him. The colour of truth dominates his temperament and thinking. Such a soul is nurtured within him as is free of all the evils of psychological

complexes. In this way there is nothing to prevent the basic quality of honesty from shining through on all occasions.

On the contrary, one who, whenever he speaks, utters falsehoods, is sullyng his inner personality. Purity of soul does not develop within him. He becomes more and more immersed in evil. This is why, according to a *hadith*, the Prophet observed: The best utterance to me is that of the truth. The trader who is truthful and trustworthy will be raised on Doomsday along with the Prophets. (Bukhari)

SEPTEMBER 17

Discharging Obligations

After the emigration, the Prophet of Islam gave his blessings to Salman and Abu Darda to become like brothers to one another. When they began to live together, Salman saw that Abu Darda fasted during the day and continued to pray for the greater part of the night. This left little room for discharging other responsibilities.

Therefore Salman asked Abu Darda not to keep praying all the time saying, that he had some duties towards other human beings as well, and that he should attend to them. When this incident came into the knowledge of the Prophet, he observed: Salman is right. According to another tradition, the Prophet said: Salman is a *faqih* (having insight into religion) and that he had been granted a share in religious knowledge by God. (*Fathul Bari*)

The fulfillment of obligations is so serious a matter in Islam that according to a *hadith*, the Prophet said: "If you have failed to pay what is due to your creditors, you will have to pay them what you owe on the day of Judgement. (*Sahih Muslim*) That is, one who fails in the payment of these dues in this world of trial, will have to make their payment in a far more rigorous manner in the Hereafter. There he shall have to make good debts with the currency of his good deeds, as on that day there will be nothing else with which to pay.

Discharging one's duties is not concerned with just one thing but with many things. For instance, as a householder, you should fulfill the responsibilities that fall on you as regards your wife and children. Neighbours have the right to expect that you will not create any problems for them. Then, even in walking along a path every one has an equal 'right of way', so that you should not obstruct any wayfarer in his journey. Society has the right to demand that your dealing with them be in a spirit of well-wishing. The nation likewise has the right to charge you with its welfare and to expect that you may never be oblivious of this responsibility.

The fulfilling of rights is a complete ideology. There is no realm of life to which it does not relate.

SEPTEMBER 18

Restraining Anger

Believers have been defined in the Quran as those who "when angered are willing to forgive." (42:37)

This means that when a believer is confronted with such a behaviour as makes him angry, he does not retaliate with anger, but rather returns forgiveness for anger. By adopting the path of avoidance, he nips the evil in the bud. Then, instead of becoming embroiled with his antagonist, he engages himself in his own constructive work.

Once a man came to the Prophet of Islam and said to him: "O Prophet of God, give me some advice which I may follow all my life. And let this advice be brief so that I do not forget it." The Prophet replied, "Do not be angry." (Muwatta Imam Malik)

Anger never surfaces without reason. It always bursts forth when some provocative thing happens, when someone ill treats you or when someone says something which hurts your ego. Anger is a reaction. It generally manifests itself when you are faced with some unpleasant experience.

On such occasions one way of dealing with the situation is that of reaction, that is, of returning tit for tat. But this is not the teaching of Islam. The teaching of Islam is that when someone says something to anger you, even then you do not become angry. Even when someone tries hard to provoke you, you remain undisturbed.

A believer has this conviction that, if he remains patient in the face of the trouble stirred up by others, he will be amply rewarded for it by God. This conviction generates an unfathomable peace of mind within him, so that he is no longer disturbed by any antagonism. This spirit of faith converts his anger into forgiveness. Provocation is slotted as something to be disregarded. He even derives food for modesty and humanity from the very things which are designed to destroy his peace of mind.

SEPTEMBER 19

The Concept of Man

Man is God's servant. Man has been created by God with a plan, that is, to place him temporarily on earth in order to test him. Then those who pass this test will be rewarded, while those who fail will be rejected.

For the purposes of this test, man has been granted freedom in this world. Whatever man receives in this world is not as a matter of right but only as a matter of trial. Every situation here is a test, and in all situations man must give a proper performance, as is required of him by God.

The proper attitude for man is not to take to the paths of his desires, but to try to understand the divine plan of creation and then after being convinced of its ineluctability, he should build his life accordingly.

Man may deviate from the divine plan by misusing the freedom given to him by God, but he cannot save himself from the consequences of this deviation.

In such a state of affairs, it is in the interest of man himself that he remain extremely cautious in determining the course of his life. Instead of being guided by his own will and desires, he should make God's will his guide. Instead of pursuing his own desires, he should lead a life in conformance with the commands of God.

Man may be a masterpiece of divine creation, but he must nevertheless remain subservient to the plan of God. Making a full acknowledgement of these two aspects of the existence of mankind is the key to human progress.

Man succeeded in building a modern industrial civilization by discovering and exploiting the laws of nature. Similarly in the next world man will achieve lasting success on a much vaster scale, but only after striving earnestly to comprehend the creation plan of God for humanity and then adhering unflinchingly to its edicts.

SEPTEMBER 20

Social Work

One of the noble feelings that a believer should possess is the urge or desire to come to the assistance of others. He should fulfill their needs without expecting any return.

Coming to the assistance of others is, in essence, an acknowledgement of the blessings which God has showered upon him. It is that person, who helps others who has something more than others. For example, one who has eyes comes to the assistance of one who has not been blessed with the precious gift of sight; an able bodied person will give physical help to the disabled; a wealthy person will give donations to the poor; the man with resources will come to the aid of one who lacks them, and so on.

On all such occasions when one man helps out another by virtue of those blessings which God has given him, he is in fact showing his gratitude to God for these favours. He is saying within himself,

O God, whatever I have is all given by You. Now I am spending it in Your path, I pray You for more blessings and mercy for both of us (the helper and the receiver).

By engaging oneself in social work, one is not only helping another but is actually raising his own moral status. Making use of one's possessions only for oneself is to live on the plane of animals, for the beasts share nothing with others.

Man, superior to all other creatures, lives on a far higher plane. The proper attitude in accordance with his status is not to keep himself to himself but to embrace the whole of humanity. He should lead his life as a well-wisher to all, ready to help everyone, accepting others' rights over his own possessions.

Social work is in other words, service to humanity. And after the worship of God, no task is nobler.

SEPTEMBER 21

Policy of Peace in Islam

Islam is a religion of peace. The Quran calls its (Quranic) way 'the paths of peace' (5:16). The Quran calls the policy of reconciliation as the best policy (4:128) and that God does not love the disturbance of peace (2:205).

According to the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, a believer is one from whom people feel secure as regards their life and wealth.

One practical question arises in this regard that in the present world, for one reason or another, differences, political as well as non-political, as always, arises among individuals as well as groups, Muslims as well as non-Muslims. Now if people refuse to tolerate differences, insisting on ending the differences as soon as they are born, this would result in fighting. With the result that peace could never be obtained in the world. How then in such a situation can peace be secured?

One recent example of this difference is that of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is a very ancient historical city. With an added speciality that billions of people believe it to be their sacred place. Jerusalem is a symbol and centre of inspiration for the three great semitic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. For Jews it is a living proof of their ancient grandeur and centre of national history. For Christians, it is the scene of their Saviour's agony and triumph. For Muslims, the first destination of the Prophet's mystic journey and the site of one of Islam's most sacred shrines. Thus for all three faiths it is a centre of pilgrimage and the third holiest place of worship.

Now the question arises that when it is a place of worship for all the three religions, how it can be freely accessible to all. How the adherents of all the three religions can have the opportunity to be able to satisfy their religious feelings.

Nowadays all around us we hear the slogan 'Jerusalem is ours'. This slogan has political connotations to it. The raising of this slogan by each party shows that it wants its own political supremacy over Quds or Jerusalem. All the three believe that so long as they are unable to hold their political dominance over this sacred city they cannot perform worship in the proper sense of the word.

If the condition of visiting this sacred place should be that only that person or group could visit Jerusalem who enjoys its political dominance there, this place then will be turned into a battlefield instead of being a place of peaceful worship. As political power can be wielded, only by one religious group at a time, the rest two religious groups who would not be enjoying political power will wage an ongoing war against the religious group in power. In this way this place will become a centre of clash and confrontation for eternity. As a result not even the group in power will have the opportunity to perform its worship peacefully.

So far as the question of Islam is concerned, two indirect references are available in the Quran and *Hadith* regarding Jerusalem. Chapter Al-Isra describes the ascension of the Prophet in these words:

'Glory be to Him who made His Servant go by night from the Sacred Mosque to the farthest Mosque whose precincts We have blessed, that We might show him (some) of Our Signs (17:1).

The traditions tell us that prior to the emigration in 622 (Early period of the year 622) the Prophet Muhammad experienced an extraordinary journey which is called *Mi'raj* (Ascension) in the history of Islam. In this journey through God's unseen arrangement the Prophet reached Jerusalem from Makkah. Here at the holy site he performed a prayer in congregation alongwith all the Prophets at the site of al-Masjid al-Aqsa (al-Bayt al-Maqdis).

Another indirect reference to Jerusalem is found in a *hadith* recorded in all the seven authentic books of *Hadith* with minor differences in wording. According to this tradition there are only three mosques for which it is lawful in Islam to undertake a journey for saying prayer—al-Masjid al-Haram, al-Masjid an-Nabawi and al-Masjid al-Aqsa. Certain traditions have used the word Masjid Ilia for al-Masjid al-Aqsa, that is, the Mosque at Palestine. Another tradition tells us that the reward for praying in these three mosques is far more than praying in other mosques.

On the one hand this special status is accorded to Jerusalem's Aqsa mosque that worship in it is considered far more superior to any other mosques except for that of Makkah and Madinah. On the other hand, we learn from the Quran that in no part of the world political power can always be wielded by the same nation or group.

It goes on changing from time to time between different communities. According to Quran: 'We bring these days to men by turns' (3:140).

Now the question arises that when according to the very law of nature the political power at Jerusalem can never eternally remain with one nation, what is the way to worship at al-Masjid al-Aqsa for the believers. Each Muslim naturally has the desire to enter this mosque and prostrate before God like the Prophet Muhammad and other Prophets did. Now if this prostration in worship is linked to the fact that a Muslim can be blessed with this greatest favour only when this land enjoys Muslim political rule, the millions of Muslims including the former Saudi King Faisal ibn Abdul Aziz (1906-1975) would have to leave this world with this cherished desire buried in their hearts, failing to experience such precious feelings of being able to prostrate for the Almighty God at a place where the Prophet Muhammad alongwith all the Prophets had prostrated before God.

What is the solution to this problem. Its solution lies in the very *Sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad. To sum it up, separation of the political aspect of the matter and the taking of its religious aspect—availing the possibilities by avoiding the problem. Here are certain examples of this *Sunnah* of the Prophet.

1. The Prophet Muhammad emigrated to Madinah from Makkah in July 622. In Madinah he alongwith his Companions used to pray for about one and a half years (till the end of 623) in the direction of al-Bayt al-Maqdis. In the beginning of 624 the injunction was revealed in the Quran to turn their face towards the Sacred Mosque at Makkah for saying prayers (2:144).

When this injunction regarding the change in Qiblah (Direction of prayer) was revealed, another injunction was revealed alongwith this in these words: “O believers, seek assistance in prayer. Allah is with those who are patient (2:153). Patience has a general connotation to it, but on this occasion it had a particular connotation that was, that at the time when the injunction of making Ka‘bah as Qiblah was revealed, 360 idols were placed in Ka‘bah. Ka‘bah at that point of time had practically become a centre of polytheism. In this way the believers could have felt reluctant to set the direction of their prayer, being believers in Monotheism, toward a structure which had practically turned into a centre of polytheism. They were asked to put this aspect in the slot of patience and be ready to carry out this injunction.

As history tells us, this state of affairs continued for a long period of six years till the conquest of Makkah. That is, for six years Muslims continued to say their prayers in the direction of Ka‘bah which housed hundreds of idols, it was in the full sense of the word an active centre of polytheism. This state of affairs ended only with the conquest of Makkah when the Ka‘bah was cleared from all the idols.

This tells us a very important principle of Islam called *Al-fasl bayn al-Qaxiyatayn*, that is to separate two matters from one another.

Under this principle Ka‘bah and the idols were separated from one another. Remaining patient on the presence of idols, Ka‘bah was accepted as the direction for prayer.

2. Another example in this connection is to be found in the event of Isra and *Mi'raj*. This heavenly journey took place before the emigration in 622. At that point in time, Jerusalem was ruled by non-Muslims. It was non-Muslim Iranians who wielded political power. History tells us that the Iranian ruler, Khusroe Parvez attacked Jerusalem in 614, wresting it from the Romans who had been governing it since 63 B.C. This political dominance of the Iranian empire ended only when the Roman emperor Heraclius defeated the Iranians, restoring their rule over Jerusalem.

This means that when the Prophet Muhammad entered Jerusalem before his emigration during his *Mi'raj* journey to say his prayers at al-Masjid al-Aqsa, Jerusalem at that time, was under the rule of a non-Muslim king, Khusroe Parvez. From this we derive a very important *sunnah* of the Prophet that worship and politics should not be confused with one another.

3. The third example is to be found after the Hijrah in 629. At that time Makkah was entirely under the possession of the idolatrous Quraysh. In spite of that the Prophet along with his companions entered Makkah for three days to perform 'Umrah (minor pilgrimage) and circumambulation of the Ka'bah. It was possible only because he did not mix up the worship aspect with the political aspect. If the Prophet had considered this condition necessary that 'Umrah could be performed only when Makkah comes under the Muslim political rule, he would never have entered Makkah alongwith his companions.

In the light of this *sunnah* of the Prophet the solution to the present problem of Jerusalem lies in separating the aspect of worship in al-Masjid al-Aqsa with the issue of political possession. Muslims belonging to Palestine or of other countries should come here freely in order to pray to God in the al-Aqsa Mosque. Worship should no longer be linked with the question of political power.

The Islamic principle of *Al-fasl bayn al-Qaziyatayn* (to separate two matters from one another) is not just for Jerusalem, it has to do with the entire world. The universal democratic revolution in modern times has given complete religious freedom to Muslims of all over the world. This is a great blessing of God, which they never had in any given period of history. Muslims must fully avail this blessing of

freedom. If the political institution is in the hands of non-Muslims or secular Muslims, they should not wage war against them. Accepting freedom of worship with gratefulness and contentment, they must put the political matter into the future slot (That is, to wait for the times to change in their favour by the grace of God).

Such response from Muslims would in itself be a great form of worship. According to a *hadith* ‘the Prophet said: “Waiting for an opening is a superior form of worship.”’

SEPTEMBER 22

In Giving We Receive

According to Time Magazine of October 17, 1986, her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II had long voiced a desire to visit the People’s Republic of China. But as long as Britain ruled a piece of Chinese territory, the crown colony of Hong Kong, such a journey was impossible. The 1984 Sino-British agreement returning Hong Kong to China in 1997 provided the price of admission.

Returning Hong Kong to the mainland was no easy task, for it amounted to losing a jewel from the British Crown, but it was clear that the British Monarch’s desire to visit China was not unconnected with Britain’s avidity for trade with that country and, obviously, the ensuing gains would be immense. Relations between Britain and China had been uneasy over the last hundred years, but with the Queen’s historic visit—the first ever made to China by a member of a British Royal family—the gates to trade were thrown open. A successful piece of diplomacy, it paved the way to an annual trade agreement of over one and a half billion dollars.

A jewel may have been lost from the crown, but the subsequent benefits will be enormous. Clearly, we have to give, in order to take. That is the way of the world.

SEPTEMBER 23

The Bounty of Food

Let man reflect on the food he eats: how We pour down the rain in torrents and cleave the earth asunder; how We bring forth the corn, the grapes, and the fresh vegetation; the olive and the palm, the thickets, the fruit-trees and the green pasture, for you and for your cattle to delight in.

But when the dread blast is sounded, on that day each man will forsake his brother, his mother and his father, his wife and his children: for each one of them will on that day have enough sorrow of his own.

On that day there shall be beaming faces, smiling and joyful. And on that day there shall be faces covered with dust and veiled with darkness. These shall (be the faces of) the wicked and the unbelieving (80:24-42).

Man is a creature who needs a continuous supply of food for survival. The arrangement for food which prevails on this earth on a large scale, has been done without any effort on our part. One part of this sustenance is directly derived from crop yields, such as cereals, fruits and nuts, and from the abundant provision of water everywhere. This produce of the earth is consumed by animals, who convert it into meat and milk, thus indirectly providing us with another source of sustenance.

This divine blessing demands that man live on earth as a worshipper of God. The true way to worship God is, in actual fact, to express gratitude for all His bounty. If man were to think of His creation and give thought to all the beneficent arrangements of nature around him, the feeling of gratefulness to his Lord would necessarily arise within him.

The leading of a life directed by divine guidance, a life of being grateful to God, of worshipping none other than God as a result of this sincere feeling of gratefulness is what is called a God-oriented life in the true sense. Honour and success in the Hereafter await those who lead such lives.

SEPTEMBER 24

Forging Cooperation in South Asia Problems and Prospects

South Asia is that part of the globe which is situated south of the Himalayas. There are seven independent countries in this region—India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Maldives and Bhutan. If you look at the map you will realize they are seven sisters of the same geographical entity.

Had there been an atmosphere of cooperation among these countries, they would have become a very strong group of nations. The benefit of this unity would certainly have been shared by each unit of this entity. However, an atmosphere of rivalry on one score or another has unfortunately become a permanent feature of this region. It is these very countries which pursue the developed countries of Europe and America to seek their help and cooperation, but are hardly willing to cooperate amongst themselves. This is the most important problem of this part of the world. That is why each part is paying a heavy price of one kind or the other.

Mutual cooperation would benefit all. For instance, Pakistan has natural gas which India is in need of, while India has coal which Pakistan is in need of. But neither is able to benefit from the other's resources. Similarly, Bangladesh is in need of Ganga water, while India requires a road or railway link passing through Bangladesh in order to join West Bengal to the eastern part of the country, but due to their inability to reach an agreement both suffer consequently.

As a permanent solution to this problem one suggestion comes to mind. It may appear a utopian suggestion, but no other solution appears to be in sight. That is, to form a confederation of all the seven South Asian states which are economically and geographically interdependent.

To realize this most beneficial suggestion, India would have to play the role of a partner instead of a big brother, while the other states would have to avoid minor differences for the sake of a greater cause.

If this system of confederation were to be established in South Asia, a new spirit would immediately be awakened in this region, which as a geographical entity, would come to assume great importance on the world map. Without losing anything, each of its parts would share the strength of the others, hence emerging strong and indomitable.

SEPTEMBER 25

A Human Failing

“Men, serve your Lord, Who has created you and those who have gone before you, so that you may guard yourselves against evil; Who has made the earth a bed for you and the sky a dome, and has sent down water from the sky to bring forth fruits for your sustenance. Do not knowingly set up other gods beside Him.” (2:21-22)

Man is a creature who cannot survive on his own. At all times he requires many support to maintain his existence in this world: an earth whose gravity keeps him upon its surface; an atmosphere to provide him with a constant supply of oxygen; a sun, which unflinching gives him heat and light; an abundance of water, without which no human life is possible; a variety of foods to give him continual nourishment. God, therefore, as the Creator of man, and of all the other things in the heavens and on earth, has made lavish provision of

all these innumerable other things for man's existence in this world.

Indeed, God has brought into existence the entire universe and everything is under His constant surveillance. That is why the only proper course for man is to accept God as his Creator, Sustainer and Lord, without associating anyone or any thing in His godhead. But since God is not visible, it sometimes happens that man comes to attach importance to something visible, and perhaps tangible and then accords to it the status of divinity. A creature, or a thing, comes, partly or wholly, to be regarded as the Creator's equal, and is sometimes even given the name of God.

This is where man falls into serious errors. For the Prophet's call to man is to accord the status of greatness to God alone. Any thing or creature seated on the pedestal of divinity must therefore be unseated and divested of this status of greatness. It is only fitting, and in the true nature of things, that man should worship God alone, without associating any other object with Him.

SEPTEMBER 26

Universe Bears Witness

"In the creation of the heavens and the earth; in the alternation of night and day; in the ships that sail the ocean with cargoes beneficial to man; in the water which Allah sends down from the sky and with which he revives the earth after its death, dispersing over it all manner of beasts; in the movements of the winds, and in the clouds driven between earth and sky: surely in these there are signs for people who understand (2:163-164)."

The universe, stretching out to infinity on all sides, is a sublime testament to God's immanence. The very existence of an incredibly vast universe is proof of there being a Creator. And that there is only one Creator and Sustainer is testified to by the complete

harmony and correspondence of all the objects in existence, despite their multiplicity.

So many of these things having been tamed to meet human requirements shows that man's Creator is a God of unbounded compassion; even before man came into existence, God had already provided for all his needs. Moreover, the usefulness inherent in so many of our earthly phenomena is a silent, but certain indicator of the universe having been consciously planned as a purposive entity. A sign of the limitless extent of God's power is the infinite variety of animal species all thriving on the same nutrients and water which He provided. Another sign of his power is the inevitability with which each death is succeeded by a life. Life and freshness come to lifeless things because that is how God causes nature to function. If death in the universe is only a temporary phase that is because God wills it to be so.

Man's God is only One God. He alone is worthy of becoming the centre of man's attention. Our existence and all the things we have been provided with on earth are attributable solely to God, the source of all divine blessings. Man must make Him his object of worship in the real sense and must eternally associate with Him all his hopes and feelings.

SEPTEMBER 27

Promise

In mutual dealings in social life, it often happens that a person gives his word to another. There is apparently no third person or group between the two, yet there is always a third present and that is God who is the supreme witness. That is why every promise becomes a divine promise.

A believer therefore is extremely sensitive about giving his word. His conviction is that every commitment made between two persons

is under the watchful eyes of God, and that he will be accountable for its fulfillment in the court of God. This compels him to be highly responsible as regards his promises. Whenever he gives his word to anyone he makes a point of keeping it.

People who invariably fulfill their promises are predictable characters in a society, and give their society that particular quality which exists on a vast scale throughout the universe. Every part of this universe is functioning with the most exact precision. For instance, we can learn in advance about any star's or planet's rotation and where it will be moving after a hundred or even a thousand years. Similarly, we know in advance what the boiling point of water will be. In this way the entire universe evinces a predictable character.

Many other virtues come in the wake of the regular fulfillment of promises. One of these is mutual trust. In a society where mutual trust exists, there is no discord and dissension between the people; there is an atmosphere of confidence and peaceability as there is no fear of promises being broken.

Readiness to fulfill promises is a commendable trait; it is iman (faith) that makes man the possessor of this highest of human virtues.

SEPTEMBER 28

The Test Paper

As for man, when his Lord tests him by exalting him and bestowing favours on him, he says: 'My Lord is bountiful to me.' But when He tests him by withdrawing His favours, he says: 'My Lord humiliates me.'

No! But you show no kindness to the orphan, nor do you urge one another to feed the poor. Greedily you lay your hands on the inheritance of the weak, and you love riches with all your hearts.

No! But when the earth is crushed to fine dust, and your Lord comes down with the angels, in their ranks, and Hell is brought near—on that day man will remember his deeds. But what will memory avail him?

He will say: ‘Would that I had done good works in my lifetime!’ But on that day none will punish as He will punish, nor will any bind like unto His binding.

O serene soul! Return to your Lord joyful, and pleasing in His sight. Join My servants and enter My Paradise (89:15-30).

Man is confronted in this world with two kinds of states, sometimes of gaining, sometimes of losing. Both these conditions are in the nature of tests. They are designed to judge man on the response he makes to these situations. If on gaining, a man becomes vain and proud, and on losing, he suffers from negative feelings, then he has failed in the test.

A very different kind of person is one who, on gaining, bows before God in thankfulness, and, on losing, bows again to express his humility. It is the second of these two who has been called a ‘serene soul.’

Whatever man receives in this world in the form of wealth, or in any other form, are all tests of one kind or another. These have no value in themselves; they are a means to another end. That is, man should make use of these things in such a way that, in the times to come in the eternal world, they may become the means of his salvation.

SEPTEMBER 29

Purity of Body and Soul

A believer is a clean person. First of all faith cleanses his soul. Consequently his appearance becomes pure as well. His religious thinking makes him a person who loves cleanliness.

A believer performs his ablutions before praying five times a day by washing his face, hands and feet. He takes a bath daily to purify his body. His clothes may be simple, but he always likes to wear well laundered clothes.

Along with this he likes to keep his home clean. Therefore, he cleans his home daily and keeps all his things in their proper places. All these duties become part of his daily life.

A believer does not rest content until he has set all things right, from his body to his home.

This taste for cleanliness is not limited only to his home and body. It also extends outside his home to his neighbours. He begins to want his whole environment to be clean, wherever he stays. So he takes special care to see that he and his family members do not defile their surroundings. This training he gives to others as well. Thus he is not satisfied until and unless he has succeeded in bringing into existence a clean atmosphere all around.

For a common person cleanliness is only cleanliness. But for a believer, cleanliness, besides being simply cleanliness is also an act of worship, for he knows that God likes clean and pure persons.

Furthermore, the faith of the believer is a guarantee that when he has cleaned his body his soul is likewise cleaned. That is why at the moment of washing himself clean, he utters these words in prayer: To God, purify my inner self along with my outer body. In this way, the earnest prayer makes his soul clean too, like his body.

Peace in Islam

Peace is the religion of the universe. Peace should, therefore, be the religion of man too, so that, in the words of Jesus Christ, the will of the Lord may be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10).

When God created heaven and the earth, He so ordered things that each part might perform its function peacefully without clashing with any other part. The Quran tells us that “the sun is not allowed to overtake the moon, nor does the night outpace the day. Each in its own orbit runs.” (36:40)

For billions of years, therefore, the entire universe has been fulfilling its function in total harmony with His divine plan.

While God has imposed upon the universe the law of nature, in submission to which all of the things making up the universe follow the path of peace, there remains just one exception—that of man. Man has been endowed by God with the free will to make moral choices. He may, or may not follow the path of peace which is so uniformly followed by the rest of the universe.

If human beings, with their freedom of choice, are to be kept on the path of peace, society must be kept free of corrupting elements. That is why the Quran enjoins men “not to corrupt the land after it has been set in order” (7:85). The system of nature devised by God already rests on the basis of peace; if this system is not disrupted, it will continue to stay the course set for it by the Almighty. Peace is actually inherent in nature and, as such, cannot be artificially imposed upon man as if it were an external factor.

In order to preserve the peace established by nature from disruption, two important injunctions have been laid down by Islam. One, at the individual level, stresses the exercise of patience, and the other, at the social level, forbids taking the offensive.

The greatest factor responsible for disrupting peace in daily living is negative reaction on the part of individuals. It repeatedly happens in social life that one experiences bitterness on account of others. On such occasions, display of resentment could cause matters to escalate to the point of a head-on collision. That is why Islam repeatedly enjoins us to tread the path of patience. The Quran says: "Surely the patient will be paid their wages in full without measure" (39:10). The reason for the rewards for patience being so great is that patience is the key factor in maintaining the desired system of God. In the words of the Quran, the patient man "is the helper of God" (61:14).

The other injunction, designed to maintain peace in human society, forbids the waging of an offensive war. No one, in Islam, enjoys the right to wage war against another. There are no grounds on which this could be considered justifiable.

There is only one kind of war permitted in Islam, and that is a defensive war. It is only if one nation, by deviating from the principles of nature, wages war against another, that a defensive war may be waged by the country under attack. Even then, it must be of temporary nature, and subject to humanitarian considerations.

To sum up, Islam is a religion of peace. The Arabic root of Islam is 'silm' which means peace. The Quran states: '... and God calls to the home of peace' (10:25).

Peace is the basic of all religions. Let us all then strive to establish peace in the world, for that is the bedrock on which all human progress rests.

OCTOBER 1

De-Islamizing Islam

When I visited Afghanistan during the last days of communist Russia's political domination, I found Kabul, Afghanistan's capital, entirely intact, but today, under the so-called Islamic regime of the Taliban, the greater part of Kabul has been destroyed. And now the people of Afghanistan are faced with such great hardship as they have never before faced in their entire history.

The Taliban hold Russian communism to be "*kufir*" while regarding themselves to be the representatives of Islam. How strange it is that "*kufir*" inflicted only minimal harm upon Afghanistan, while "Islam" has almost totally ruined the country—to such an extent that people are compelled to flee from their own homeland. Sadly, all this is being done in the name of Islam. Judging from the result, one can say that this is nothing more or less than the de-islamization of Islam.

Added to the long horrible list of depredations carried out in the name of the Afghan version of Islam, there is the extremely sad event of the demolitions which began on March 1, 2001. Following the order of their religious chief, the Taliban began blasting the statues of Gautam Buddha with dynamite and attacking them with bulldozers. They said that they were doing this in accordance with the teachings of Islam, for Islam did not permit idolatry.

This is a totally non-Islamic act. It is true that Islam is against idolatry, but there is certainly a clear difference between weaning people away from idol-worship and the destruction of idols. There are verses in the Quran which state: "Do not worship idols." But there is no verse in the Quran which says: "Destroy idols." The way of Islam is to purify the heart of idolatry: it is not to destroy statues made of stone.

Let us look at the history of Afghanistan in this connection. According to early tradition, Islam entered Afghanistan during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad himself. Later, the Prophet's close Companion, Khalid ibn Walid came here with other believers. At that time the majority of the population were Buddhist. Many of them converted to Islam. This process of the peaceful propagation of Islam continued and, by the end of the 10th century A.D., Islam had spread throughout Afghanistan.

It is worth noting here that the statues of Gautam Buddha had already been carved out of the mountainsides of Afghanistan 500 years before Islam's entry into the country during the time of the Prophet Muhammad. Just as these statues were safe prior to the advent of Islam, they continued to remain safe throughout the fourteen hundred years of the Islamic era. It is only in recent times, during Taliban rule, that these statues have been held to be un-Islamic and subjected to demolition.

Now the question arises as to whether the Taliban have a better knowledge of Islam than that of the Sahaba (the Prophet's companions), the Tabiun (the Companion's disciples) and other great Islamic scholars of the past.

The truth is that while the Taliban were ostensibly smashing idols, what in reality they are doing is demolishing Islam. Far from serving the interests of Islam, this initiative is doing it the greatest harm.

Islam believes in the principle of tolerance between different religions. This verse was revealed in the Quran during the Makkan period: "For you your religion, for me mine." (109:6). If this Islamic principle were formulated, it could be worded like this: "Follow one and respect all."

We find many practical examples of adherence to this principle in Islamic history. For instance, during the period of Umar Faruq, the Second Caliph of Islam, Palestine was conquered. At that time an agreement was reached between the Caliph and the Christian authorities. One of the clauses of this agreement, signed by the Caliph Umar, was that the Christian churches as well as the statues of Mary and Christ placed in the churches and the Cross would remain as

they were. This illustrates a principle of religious tolerance which has been observed by Muslims throughout the history of Islam. We do find instances of certain Muslim kings having broken idols. But these instances are exceptions and not the rule. Furthermore, such acts on the part of rulers were governed by their political interests and not by the teachings of Islam.

The statues of Gautam Buddha carved in the mountains may have been objects of worship in the past, but today they enjoy the position of historical monuments. They no longer belong to a particular religious group: their status is that of symbols of a historical heritage common to all mankind. The principle of Islam, applicable to this state of affairs, is to remove the issue from the private or the national sphere to the universal sphere.

One of the teachings of Islam is that Muslims ought not to take any such action as is likely to be counterproductive. For instance, the Quran enjoins:

*“Reville not those whom they invoke besides Allah,
Lest they may revile Allah
Spitefully without knowledge.”*

This shows that even if Muslims believe some act to be right, they may refrain from indulging in it, if the result is not going to be in their favour.

Looked at in the light of this principle, the present move of the Taliban is wholly against the teachings of Islam. For if such historical places and relics, which have profound and time-honoured associations for the believers of other religions, are destroyed in a Muslim country, those whose feelings are hurt would, as a result, feel justified, in starting to destroy places which are historically important to Muslims in their own respective countries. Such a move on the part of Muslims cannot but result in irretrievable losses to the Muslims themselves.

As soon as the Afghan government set about the task of demolishing the ancient statues, the seriousness of the matter was highlighted by the media on a world-wide basis. This prompt publicizing of the event brought immediate condemnation for the

Italian's actions from all right-thinking people, both Muslim and non-Muslim.

Had the Afghan Taliban engaged in this destruction in the name of their nation or tribe, it might conceivably have seemed acceptable within a very limited ethnic sphere. But they did not. They did it in the name of Islam and its Shariah, with the result that their actions began, *prima facie*, to be attributed to Islam. People began to express their disgust and indignation with Islam. They said that if this is Islam, it is nothing less than sheer barbarism, resulting from a medieval mindset which is totally unacceptable to the civilized society of today. Of course, the Taliban are ostensibly demolishing objects of idolatry, but when seen in the light of the result, they must stand charged with demolishing Islam itself.

It is unfortunate that, in spite of local and international protests, Afghanistan's Taliban government has decided to go ahead with the demolition of statues of historical and religious importance in the country. Historical monuments are the heritage of all mankind and do not belong to any government or area or people. Demolition of places of worship and statues of religious personalities is totally un-Islamic and unwarranted. Indeed, Islam orders us to respect the places of worship of other religions and certainly does not permit their destruction.

OCTOBER 2

Conquering Oneself

Edmund Hillary, born on July 2, 1919, in Auckland, New Zealand, showed an early interest in mountaineering. He started by climbing mountains in his own country and later, in 1951, attempted along with a team to scale the heights of Mount Everest, a 29,028 foot high peak in Nepal. This attempt was not successful. Then, for the second time in 1953 he again set out to climb it with a British team.

His guide in this venture was a Nepali, Tenzing Norgay. Reaching the summit of Mount Everest on May 29, 1953, he became the first person to set foot on the highest point of the globe. He immediately became famous all over the world, and received a knighthood on July 16 of the same year.

He subsequently wrote a book on this mountaineering exploit, published in 1955 under the title of *High Adventure*. One of the lessons of this book is that, “it is not the mountain we conquer but ourselves.”

This sounds very simple, but it is a remark of great profundity. It would be true to say that every victory in this world is the result of conquering one’s own self. Each conquest necessarily entails a hard struggle. But, first and foremost, the aspirant to success must prove himself equal to that initial struggle, then he must show his unflagging determination to reach his ultimate goal. Only then will the world acclaim him as a conqueror.

Be it mountaineering or any other exploit, man has first to pass the test of a hard struggle. He must then prove that he is capable of exercising patience and restraint. The day a man furnishes proof of this ability, is the day that he will stand victorious for all the world to see, on the highest pinnacle of success.

OCTOBER 3

Trust is Golden

With just a few hundred rupees capital, a man from Delhi started a business. He used to buy scraps of cloth which he would sell from door to door. When his business had grown somewhat, he obtained permission to sit on the pavement in front of a shop and sell his merchandise there.

This freelance cloth-merchant built up a good deal of trust with his wholesaler, whom he impressed with his honesty and fairdealing.

The wholesaler began to grant cloth on loan to the vendor, who always made an effort to settle his debt before the appointed date. This habit made him even more trustworthy in the eyes of the wholesaler, who granted him more and more cloth on loan. After just a few years, the wholesaler was giving this street-vendor Rs 150,000 worth of cloth on loan, an amount which he would not have given anybody else except on the basis of a considerable cash down-payment.

Clearly, such a large amount of cloth could not be accommodated on the street. The cloth-vendor now required a shop. He bought one, and continued to spiral, and before long he was among the leading cloth-merchants of the old city.

It is a mistake to think of money as the greatest asset in life. The greatest asset is trust. On the basis of trust one can buy anything. What one lacks in other departments he can make up for in trust. Trust is an invaluable asset which can buy even more than money.

But the way to establish trust is not by repeating how trustworthy one is. No, it is by acting in a trustworthy manner. The outside world is very severe in this regard. Unless one proves one's trustworthiness by impeccable actions, one cannot expect to receive the benefit of the doubt. Only if one consistently shows oneself worthy of trust over a long period, as the cloth vendor showed himself in his dealings with the wholesale merchant, will one be accorded trust in this world (117:7).

OCTOBER 4

Ideal Women

The Prophet once remarked that the best woman of the Jewish people was Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the best woman of his people, Khadija, the daughter of Khuwailid.

More light is thrown on the superiority of these two women by the following two statements of the Prophet:

Aisha says that the only other wife of the Prophet that she ever felt envious of was Khadija, even though she was not a contemporary

of hers. “Whenever the Prophet sacrificed a goat,” Aisha says, “he would tell me to send some meat to Khadija’s friends. One day I got annoyed. ‘Oh no, not Khadija again,’ I exclaimed. ‘Her love has been imbibed into my heart,’ the Prophet said.”

Aisha says that the Prophet would not leave home without praising Khadija. One day he mentioned Khadija and I got annoyed. ‘She was just an old woman,’ I said. ‘God has given you better than her instead.’ This angered the Prophet, who said: ‘God knows, he has given me no better than her. She believed when others disbelieved. She had faith in me when others denied me. She gave me financial support when others left me in the cold. And God gave me children by her, which He has not given me by my other wives.’

The special historical status that Mary and Khadija enjoy is due to the fact that they both gave themselves entirely up to God; they both attached their own will to that of the Almighty.

When the Judaic era was drawing to a close, a woman was required who would be fit to be the mother of a miraculous prophet of the nature of Jesus, may peace be upon him. God had ordained that the final prophet of the Jewish people should be born without a father. For this purpose, a woman was needed whose innocence and chastity were beyond question. The virgin Mary lived up to this standard. By living a life of extraordinary chastity, she showed herself fit to be selected as the mother of Jesus.

The circumstances of the final prophet, Muhammad, may peace be upon him, were such that he needed a woman who would put her life and her property entirely in his hands, and would never complain about anything. God selected Khadija for this work because of her superlative qualities. She gave up everything—her life, her property, her leisure and her comfort—for the sake of the Holy Prophet. She suffered tremendous affliction, but never complained. These qualities made her worthy in God’s sight to be the companion of His final prophet.

In every day and age, women and men are needed who will devote themselves to the mission of Islam; people who are willing to involve themselves in the scheme that God seeks to implement in the world. Such people are like a small cogwheel, which revolves only

according to the motion of a bigger cogwheel, in this case the will of God. This is undoubtedly a trying task; but it is also one that carries a vast reward.

To perform this task is, in the words of the Quran, “to help God” (Quran, 22:40). There can be no doubt about the excellence and superiority of those whom God deigns to make His helpers.

OCTOBER 5

Man’s True Purpose in Life

Man attains his highest distinction only when he leads a purposeful life. Such a life characterizes the most advanced stage of human development. This does not mean that by taking up just any task which is apparently significant, man’s life becomes truly purposeful. A really purposeful life is one in which man discovers his supreme status; a life in which his personality makes manifest its unique distinctive quality. An animal strives to obtain food; a bird flies in search of a better country when the seasons change; a wasp busies itself building up its own home from tiny particles of earth; a herd of deer takes measures to protect itself from wild beasts of prey. All of these appear to be purposeful actions. But when the phrase ‘a purposeful life’ is applied to man, then it does not refer to efforts of this nature. Without doubt arranging for one’s food, clothes and habitation are surely the tasks that man has to perform in this world; but this is a level of purposefulness in which men and animals, being concerned only with bare survival, are equal. Its true application in relation to man can only be one in which he appears in all his dignity. Man’s life becomes purposeful only when it goes beyond common animalism and takes the form of superior humanism.

God’s creations in this world fall into two categories: animate and inanimate. Obviously, animate objects enjoy a certain superiority over inanimate objects. The former can be divided into three

classes: the vegetable, the animal and the human. Modern scientific research has shown that plants also possess life, in that they nourish themselves, they grow and they have feelings.

But animals and men surely represent a higher form of life. In what way does man excel animals? Many theories have been advanced in answer to this question over the ages, and great minds are still studying it. But modern biologists have come to the conclusion that it is man's capacity for conceptual thought which distinguishes him from other life-forms. Animals lack this quality, whereas man is conscious of the fact that he is thinking. He consciously forms a plan of action in his mind; in his everyday life his actions are determined by himself. Whereas this is not the case with animals. Though many of their actions appear to be like those of men, they are not the result of thought; they all stem from pure instinct. Animals are simply led intuitively by their desires and their needs in certain direction. Their actions are governed by environmental stresses from without and physical pressures from within.

It is in this unique conceptual quality of man that we can conceive of what his higher purpose in life should be. The latter can only be one which does not result from the pressures of desire or of immediate exigencies. It must emanate from his own urge to worship God.

Man's true purpose in life can only be one which reflects the higher side of his personality; one which displays him as the superior being he is.

If one pauses at this stage to take note of what the Quran has to say, one will find that it gives us clear guidance in the matter. Man's purpose in life has been explained in the Quran in the following words:

I created mankind and the Jinn that they might worship me. I demand no livelihood of them, nor do I ask that they should feed me. God alone is the Munificent Giver, the Mighty One, the Invincible. (51:56-58)

These verses specify man's purpose in life as worship. This is a purpose which elicits from man his uniqueness in its ultimate form. It raises man to a much higher plane than that of animals. Not a

trace of animalism contributes to the achievement of such a goal. God does not demand of you a livelihood, the verse states, rather He himself is responsible of your livelihood. This means that worship of God is a purpose which is motivated neither by inward desires nor outward influences. Rather it comes into being through thought alone. Only when a person goes beyond his self and his environment can he understand that there is a higher purpose on which he should focus his life.

The motive force towards the fulfillment of this purpose is not the urge to satisfy one's needs or those of others. The worshipper seeks neither to gratify his own desires nor those of the Being he worships. It is a purpose which sets before man a goal far above all these things—a goal which does not follow internal needs or external pressures, but results purely from conceptual thought.

When a person works, makes money, builds a house, makes an effort to improve his standard of living, he appears to be engaged in efforts towards some worthy end. But a life of this nature cannot be called a purposeful life, for these activities do not demonstrate man's unique status. It might seem as if they are the result of deliberation, but if one looks at the matter in depth, one will see that in actual fact the motive force behind these actions is the same urge that motivates an animal in various ways, its concern for its own survival. It is the driving force of one's desires; the pressure of one's needs, and the wish to fulfill the demands of one's self that underlie such a life. These are the considerations which in fact, guide a person in his search for his livelihood.

When man grows up, he realizes that there are certain material necessities without which he cannot live. He requires food, clothes, a place to live; he requires a reliable source of income to sustain him throughout his life. He is forced by these considerations to obtain these things. Then he sees that those who have an abundance of these material things enjoy respect and apparently possess every form of happiness and luxury in this world. Thus he is driven on to do more than just seek a livelihood; he desires to earn to a degree greatly in excess of his actual requirements.

In bustling markets, grandiose offices, and opulent buildings, he is not really guided by deliberate thought. Rather, he is being guided by inflated ideas of his own needs, desires, longings and ambitions to achieve fame and high status in this world. For this reason these activities cannot be considered as being directed towards the purpose which sets man apart from the animal and lends him a higher distinction.

Man's greater dignity can be based only on a purpose which emanates from inner desires and pressures of environment. Man's true purpose in life can only be to seek the pleasure of God. When man seeks the pleasure of his Lord, his human qualities find full manifestation. This is a purpose loftier than the one towards which an animal directs its energies. It distinguishes man from animals. It is the ultimate station of human dignity.

To determine the purpose of life is, in short, the effort to make life meaningful. It must surely, therefore, be one which is in accordance with man's unique status; it must be one which leads man on the path to success and progress in terms of his true nature.

OCTOBER 6

Wise Men

In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day, there are signs for men of sense; those that remember Allah when standing, sitting, and lying down, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth (saying): 'Lord, You have not created these in vain. Glory be to You! Save us from the torment of the Fire. Lord, those whom You will cast into Hell shall be put to eternal shame: none will help the evil-doers (3:190-192).

The Universe in its entire existence is a silent proclamation, but it is only when man unstops his ears that he starts to hear it. He finds it impossible that in a universe where the stars and planets survive for millions of years, man with all his desires and ambitions is obliterated from the face of the earth in a very short period of time. In a world where there is the beauty of the trees, the delicacy of the flowers, where air, water, sun and innumerable such meaningful things have been provided, should there be no other fate for man but an endless chain of woe and agony?

Then he finds it impossible too that in a world of boundless opportunities, where tiny seeds sown in the earth have the potential to grow into a whole forest of lush green vegetation, man should reap no fruit after leading a life of piety and virtue. In a world where a bright day follows each dark night, centuries go by but justice does not make its appearance. And where earthquakes and tempests, reined in by nature, slumber in the lap of the earth, man continues to oppress people without anything ever staying in his hands.

Those who go deeply into the matter find it inconceivable that a meaningful universe should culminate in a meaningless end. Therefore they believe in the Caller of Truth with the conviction that his message, in the language of words, is a silent endorsement of the same truth as is being broadcast every moment in the entire universe.

OCTOBER 7

In the Hereafter

'Jinn and men! Did there not come to you apostles of your own who proclaimed to you My revelations and warned you of this day?' They will reply: 'We bear witness against our own souls.' Indeed, the life of this world beguiled them. They will testify to their own faithlessness. Your Lord will not destroy a nation without just cause and due warning (6:131-132).

By drawing man towards him through attractive temptations, Satan actually wants to prove the truth of the challenge which he gave to God at the beginning of man's creation, that he would overpower all but a few of his descendants (17:61). Those who are lured by Satan have clear material interests before them. There are some who engage themselves in the pursuit of magic in the name of genies, while others establish their superiority over the gullible public by linking their poetry or soothsaying to a genie patron, that is, they claim to have been inspired by a genie. In the Hereafter, it will be evident that those who went astray, or those who led people astray, did not do so due to any misunderstanding. Indeed, they knowingly ignored the truth; it was not a case of their remaining unaware of it but of their being unable to rise above worldly temptations. They could not bring themselves to sacrifice their temporary gains. It is patent that the guidance sent to them by God through His chosen servants was so clear that no one could have remained ignorant of the truth. But their love of this world was responsible for drawing a veil over their eyes. They did not follow the path of guidance, despite the fact that they were fully informed of it.

In the Hereafter all those artificial props which made people unmindful of reality will vanish. Then they will see clearly how it happened that truth came before them, but they rejected it outright, resorting to falsehoods as excuses. It will become obvious to them how their error was shown to them as plain as daylight, and how they managed to find beautiful words to refute the truth, thinking that they would succeed in proving that their stand was the right one.

God forgives lapses, but He will not forgive insolence.

OCTOBER 8

Man's Trial

We created you and gave you form. Then We said to the angels: 'Prostrate yourselves before Adam.' They all prostrated themselves except Satan, who did not.

'Why did you not prostrate yourself when I commanded you?' Allah asked.

'I am nobler than Adam,' he replied. 'You created me of fire but You created him of clay.'

He said: 'Begone from here! This is no place for your contemptuous pride. Away with you! Henceforth you shall be humble.'

Satan replied: 'Reprieve me till the Day of Resurrection.'

'You are reprieved,' said He.

'Because You have led me into sin,' said Satan, 'I will waylay Your servants as they walk on Your straight path, and spring upon them from the front and from the rear, from their right and from their left. Then You shall find the greater part of them ungrateful.'

'Begone!' said Allah. 'A despicable outcast you shall henceforth be. With those that follow you I shall fill the pit of Hell' (7:11-18).

In this world of trial it repeatedly happens that one person rises above another, attaining to a greater share in wealth and honour; sometimes it happens that giving one's lawful dues amounts to belittling oneself; sometimes God selects an individual to proclaim a

truth on behalf of God, whereupon he appears to be superior to those who failed to find the truth. On such occasions Satan arouses jealousy and haughtiness within the human breast. The feeling of 'I am better than he is' does not allow one man to give recognition to another. In the eyes of God, one who falls a prey to jealousy and arrogance on such occasions follows the path of Satan. One who crushes such negative feelings produced by Satan finds the straight path which will lead him directly to heaven.

OCTOBER 9

Robe of Piety

Children of Adam! We have given you clothing with which to cover your nakedness, and garments pleasing to the eye, but the finest of all of these is the robe of piety.

That is one of Allah's revelations. Perchance they will take heed.

Children of Adam! Let the devil not deceive you, as he deceived your parents out of Paradise. He stripped them of their garments to reveal to them their nakedness. He and his companions see you whence you cannot see them. We have made the devils supporters of unbelievers (7:26-27).

Man needs to be clothed, but not just externally. He needs inner raiment too—that of piety—fear of God, acceptance of truth, setting the same standard for oneself as for others, regarding oneself as God's servant, remaining modest and humble, concentrating on the thoughts of the Hereafter instead of being astray in the world. When a person adopts all these values, it is like a splendid dressing of his inner existence, and when he adopts an attitude opposite to this, he divests his inner existence of its entire moral apparel.

Satan tempts man. He makes people believe the 'forbidden tree' to be the source of all good. He comes to man from such seemingly innocent paths that man has no inkling that the way is paved with sinfulness. Satan attacks man at his weakest points. Sometimes an idea which has nothing to do with truth is described in beautiful words. Sometimes a partial truth is brought before people as total truth, sometimes trivial things are made out to be of vital importance. Sometimes a useless activity is depicted as the secret of all progress. Sometimes a destructive act is presented as a constructive act.

Satan succeeds with those people who do not ponder over the signs of God; who are not willing to understand what is rational in the language of argument; who prefer their personal prejudices to the demands of truth; who cannot see such truth as makes no concession to their personal gains and considerations.

OCTOBER 10

Avoidance

Avoidance of friction is one of the most important principles of Islam. Such avoidance means refraining from retaliation on occasions of complaint and dissension.

By temperament, all men and women differ from one another in many ways. Everyone has experienced the disagreeable situations, arising from such differences. In social life, be it inside or outside the home, it is but natural that unpleasantness should occur from time to time. This is unavoidable.

Now whenever any negative situation arises one way of dealing with it is a head-on clash, i.e. an attempt to solve the problem by direct confrontation. Such attempts are abortive as they only aggravate the problem. In no way will they improve matters.

Islam tells us that on such occasions we should adopt the policy of avoidance. That is, instead of behaving violently and fighting, we

should opt for the course of tolerance and forbearance; instead of combating violence with violence, we should adopt the policy of avoidance; remaining united in spite of differences.

According to Islam, it is not only a point of social behaviour but an act meriting great reward. Living with people, and observing their principles are acts which would deserve a reward in normal circumstances, but when one continues to be well-behaved in spite of differences and grudges, by curbing negative sentiments, then the reward is increased manifold. Those who sedulously avoid friction will be counted by God among the possessors of a superior character.

For the human character to retain its superiority there must be staunch and unceasing adherence to the principle of avoidance.

OCTOBER 11

Good Character

Good character is the sum of personal virtues which guarantees correct and agreeable behaviour in daily social interaction. A person of good character will invariably conform in his behaviour to a strict code of ethics.

What should be the underlying principle of this code of ethics? According to a *hadith* it is simply this—you should like for others what you like for yourself, that is, you should treat others just as you want to be treated by others.

Everyone likes to be addressed with good manners and pleasing words. So everyone should speak gently to others. Everyone wants his existence to be problem-free, so he should avoid creating problems for others.

Everyone wants others to deal with him in a sympathetic and cooperative manner. So what everyone ought to do while dealing with others is to give them his full sympathy and cooperation.

This standard of ethics is very simple and natural. It is so simple that anyone may easily learn it, be he literate or illiterate, able bodied

or disabled, and regardless of his likes and dislikes. This *hadith* has given such a criterion for human ethics that no one can find difficult to understand. In this way Islam has set forth, in the light of everyone's personal experience, what behaviour may be indulged in and what behaviour has to be refrained from.

According to another *hadith*, the best of us is one who is best in moral character. Accordingly, becoming a good human being has nothing ambiguous about it. Its simple formula is that of avoidance of double standards. One who lives his life by this formula is indubitably a person of the highest moral character.

OCTOBER 12

The Cause

It is a fact that Indian Muslims are lagging behind Hindus in education and economic advancement. In explaining this a Hindu intellectual wrote:

'Hindus have prospered in independent India because their religion adopted the road to modernity and progress, while Muslims remained backward because their religion turned its gaze towards the past'

(The Times of India, February 27, 1994).

It is true that Muslims are lagging behind Hindus, but this explanation is far from the truth. Islam never leads one to turn one's gaze towards the past and overlook matters of progress. The real cause of Muslims' backwardness in modern times is traceable to wrong guidance by incompetent leaders, not to Islam.

The truth of the matter is that in modern times along with the emergence of science and technology, Muslims were beginning to lose their political power and cultural superiority. The western nations who had brought progress and advancement to the world

were also those who had overpowered the Muslims all over the world and brought them under their own political and cultural domination.

Our leaders of this period, launched political movements all over the world against western nations. They hated the western nations and taught Muslims to hate them.

It was this hatred which came in the way of Muslims' advancement in the field of modern science and technology. The reason for Muslims' backwardness in modern times is not Islam, but that artificial hatred which our unwise leaders had fostered among Muslims. This hatred obstructed Muslims from looking at the western nations without prejudice, and prevented them from accepting the developments the west had given to the world.

OCTOBER 13

On the Basis of Falsehood

Pravda, (literally meaning: truth) a Russian daily newspaper with a circulation of eleven million was brought out by the Communist Party in 1912, a few years before the Russian revolution. With editors of the calibre of Stalin and Lenin on its editorial board in the initial stages, it came to be regarded as one of the most important newspapers of the former Soviet Union. Its correspondents numbered more than forty thousand.

Besides being in possession of large properties, *Pravda* was granted extraordinary aid by the government. After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, however, all aid stopped and its properties were confiscated in the same year by the newly formed government.

Consequently, the newspaper suffered from insurmountable monetary problems, and its publication ultimately ceased on March 14, 1992.

Pravda's entire importance was associated with the socialist regime. The communists had carved out an economic and political hell in the name of the Soviet Union, but through *Pravda* they contrived to present this system to the world as a kind of Paradise. Herein lay the value of the *Pravda* as it served their purpose only too well. When the spell of the socialistic 'heaven' was broken and the truth laid bare, *Pravda* was left with no chance to present falsehood as truth. It was this reality which dealt it the final death blow.

Under the heading 'Truth is Dead' (*Times of India*, March 19, 1992) a commentator wrote:

*No wonder it now finds it difficult to face up to the truth:
that it has no place in post-Communist Russia.'*

A somewhat similar happening will occur in the Hereafter. They will then learn, all of a sudden, that not to speak of eleven million, not even eleven people will be subscribers to their so-called truth.

OCTOBER 14

Inevitable Problem

The writings of Anne Brontë (1820-49), an English writer, reflect realism. 'One of her sayings is: 'There is always a 'but' in this imperfect world.'

This is a wise saying. The present world is devised for the purpose of human trial. That is why the ideal state is not achievable here. Different kinds of limitations mark this worldly existence. Here, man being free in his speech and actions, there are repeated clashes of interest. That is why no one is able to achieve a friction-free life. Here one is always faced with a 'but' in one's way. It is therefore essential for man to take ground realities into account in planning his activities. If he fails to do so, he will be a miserable failure.

You are free to drive your vehicle at top speed on the street. But you do not have it in your power to free the street of all the vehicles heading towards you from the opposite direction. You are free to make

a bid to stop an oncoming procession, but you do not have it in your power to keep the armed police from interfering. You can hold rallies and processions for any issue concerning your own community, but it is impossible for you to stop counter-reactions among the rival group. On the issue of denial of your rights, you can launch fiery movements in protest, but you do not have the means to change the law of the world that man can receive only that which is commensurate with his abilities.

There are barricades of 'buts' everywhere in this world. Acknowledge that such barricades exist and plan your actions accordingly. If you overlook this factor, then nothing but destruction will await you.

OCTOBER 15

Two Paths

Surely there came over man a period of time when his life was a blank? We have created man from sperm mixed (with ovum) so that We may put him to the proof. We have endowed him with sight and hearing. We have shown him the right path, whether he be grateful or ungrateful.

For the unbelievers We have prepared chains and fetters and a blazing Fire. But the righteous shall drink of a cup tempered with Camphor—a fountain from which the servants of Allah will refresh themselves: they who keep their vows and dread the far-spread terrors of the Day (of Judgement); who, though they hold it dear, give sustenance to the poor man, the orphan, and the captive, (saying): 'We feed you for Allah's sake only; we seek of you neither recompense nor thanks: for we fear from Him a day of anguish and of woe.'

Allah will deliver them from the evil of that day and make their faces shine with joy. He will reward them for their steadfastness with robes of silk and the delights of Paradise (76:1-11).

After being created with freedom in this world, man has been shown both the paths—the path of gratefulness and the path of ingratitude. Now which of the two paths he adopts is up to him. For one who opts for the path of ungratefulness there awaits the chastisement of hell. And for one who opts for the path of gratefulness there await the blessings of paradise.

One who realises God, realises all other realities as well. The knowledge of God opens the door to all other knowledge. If moreover the individual becomes a man who knows himself, he comes to know reality, i.e. everything as it is in the full sense. This realisation enables him to pay the dues of God as well as of man.

So far as reality is concerned, there is no difference between nature and the *shari'ah*.

OCTOBER 16

Everything is a Matter of Trial

Describing an incident in the life of the Prophet Moses, the Quran states:

The elders of Pharaoh's nation said: 'Will you allow Moses and his people to commit evil in the land and to forsake you and your gods?' He replied: 'We will put their sons to death and spare only their daughters. We shall yet triumph over them.'

Moses said to his people: 'Seek help in God and be patient. The earth is God's; He gives it to those of His servants whom He chooses. Happy shall be the lot of the righteous.'

They replied: 'We were oppressed before you came to us, and oppressed we still remain.' He said: 'Your Lord will perchance destroy your enemies and make you rulers in the land. Then He will see how you conduct yourselves.' (7:127-129)

We learn from these verses that the Israelites, subjected to too much cruelty and injustice, complained about it to Moses, the Prophet of their time. Yet the Prophet Moses did not tell them to solve their problems through protest and demand and confrontation. He told them rather that it was all God's doing and that they should, instead of complaining, turn to God in patience and prayer.

The Israelites reacted by asking what use it was his being a prophet. They had thought that with the emergence of a Prophet amongst them they would be blessed with power and honour. But this had not happened, and while the very reverse was happening to them, they were simply asked to remain patient; Moses then told them that the wielding of political power also demanded patience. This was because, by granting power to man, God intended to see how he would behave when invested with power.

The actual problem for human beings in this world does not relate to having or not having power. The actual crux of the matter is how good a performance man puts up in any given set of circumstances.

The present world is one of trial and the next world is that of reward. As such, man must focus always on maintaining the highest standards of behaviour regardless of the external circumstances.

OCTOBER 17

Man's Future

Gyani Zail Singh was born in Rajkot in Punjab in 1916. His father, a poor carpenter, could not give him a proper education. It was after joining politics that he acquired fame. Rising from the position of minister and chief minister, he ultimately came to hold the highest post in India—that of President. Having begun his life in a humble dwelling, he nevertheless managed to reach New Delhi's Rashtrapati Bhawan.

On November 29, 1994, he was badly injured in a car accident. He was immediately admitted to the Nehru Hospital at Chandigarh

but he never recovered. Having begun his life with none of the trappings of greatness, he returned to that same state with his death on December 25, 1994.

A cartoon was published in the same newspaper which brought the news of Gyani Zail Singh's demise. A fat man was shown perched on a chair, crippled with old age. These were his words:

I have worked hard. And finally amassed all the money I'll never need. But I'm too old to enjoy it.

The same is true of all men. After great expenditure of physical and mental resources, man is able to achieve material progress. But when he reaches the height of success, the painful realization dawns upon him that this material progress is of no use to him. In spite of possessing everything, he is as helpless as the next person. How strange is man's destiny. He is in possession only of his past and present: he has no power over his future.

Here in this world, wealth is as meaningless as poverty. Here, a royal life is as insignificant as a life in a lowly cottage.

OCTOBER 18

Without Prejudice

During the lifetime of the Prophet of Islam many of his fellow men opposed Islam and engaged in plotting against Islam and Muslims. The Quran has mentioned this at several places. But the counter strategy advocated by the Quran was not to unearth their plots and launch movements to defeat them, or even finally to wage war against them. On the contrary, the Prophet and his companions were enjoined to place their trust in God alone.

That is to say, ignoring the plots and antagonism, trusting only in God and rising above circumstances, they were to continue all activities which were of a positive nature.

This was an extremely important injunction. By giving this guidance, God set them on a course of positive thinking, which

left no room for negative thought. In short, this Quranic teaching encouraged the early Muslims to live in a self-sufficient way, free of baneful influence of their opponents.

If you have this obsession that others are plotting against you, and that everyone has turned your enemy, you will start suspecting everyone, to the extent that even if a member of your own community underscores the importance of tolerance and avoidance, you will take it in a negative light and dub him an agent of the enemy. In this way, you will weaken yourselves by turning your own people away from you.

One harmful aspect of such negative obsession is that one loses all objectivity in thinking. One's entire outlook becomes partisan and prejudiced. One is unable to see reality as it is. One becomes like the man who can see only the thorns in a garden of roses or the colour-blind person to whom a garden blossoming with flowers will appear in melancholy shades of grey.

OCTOBER 19

Religion of Humanity

Abu Dharr Ghafari was a well known companion of the Prophet. He died in Rabza in 32 A.H. in Madinah. A long *hadith* narrated by him is recorded in Tafsir ibn Kathir, a part of the *hadith* is as follows.

“When I entered the mosque, I saw that the Prophet was seated alone. I sat beside him. Then I asked, ‘O Messenger of God, who is most superior of the believers?’ The Prophet said: ‘One whose moral behaviour is best.’ Then I asked, ‘O Messenger of God, who is the best Muslim?’ The Prophet said, ‘From whose tongue and hands people are safe.’ Then I asked, ‘O Messenger of God, which is the best emigration?’ The Prophet said, ‘One whose emigration leads him to shun all evils.’ (1/586)

This tradition of the Prophet tells us which types of human beings are held up as models by Islam i.e. such individuals as prove to be of the best moral character in their dealings with others. It is those in whom the sense of responsibility is so awakened that their tongues do not hurt anyone, and their hands do not harm anyone. It is those who have abandoned all such habits and ways in which there is any trace of evil.

In truth, a good Muslim is one who is a good human being. Islam in actual fact is a religion of man-making. The goal of Islam is man's intellectual purification and practical reform. When Islam enters the heart of a person, he will become a good human being on his own.

A person whose life is devoid of goodness can make no claim to being a true Muslim.

OCTOBER 20

Duty to Parents

The Quran has this to say regarding parents:

At several places the Quran exhorts us to be on our best behaviour with parents, to pay their dues, and, even when scolded by them, to refrain from angry retorts; we should never be found lacking in loving them or in serving them. That is to say: we should at all times conduct ourselves with the utmost propriety, regardless of how our parents treat us.

According to a *hadith* a man approached the Prophet and asked, "O Prophet, who is more deserving of my good behaviour?" The Prophet said, "Your mother." The man then asked, "Who after that?" The Prophet again said, "Your mother". The man again repeated the question and the Prophet again said "Your mother". When the man asked the Prophet the fourth time, then he said "Your father" (Sahih Muslim 16/102).

There are many traditions which tell us that after God it is to parents that one has obligations more than to anyone else. One reason for this is that in this world individuals receive the maximum benefits from parents. As such it is incumbent upon a person when he grows up to serve his parents to the best of his ability. He should come to their assistance in their old age as they came to his assistance in his childhood.

Another reason is that serving parents enables a person to become a servant of humanity at large, to look at all human beings with love; to honour them and to pay them their dues.

OCTOBER 21

Comprehensive Principle

The simplest principle of the religion of humanity is to treat others just as one would like to be treated by them. The Prophet once observed: 'No one can be a believer until and unless he begins to like for his brother what he likes for himself' (*Fathul Bari*, 1/73).

With minor differences these words of the Prophet have been recorded in all the books of *hadith*. For instance, according to the tradition narrated by Muslim (the compiler of the second most authentic book of *hadith*) the wording is as follows: By the Being in Whose Hand is my soul, no one can be a believer as long as he does not like for his neighbour (or brother) what he likes for himself.

All individuals be they literate or illiterate, able-bodied or handicapped, whether of one class or another, are certain at all events of their own likes and dislikes. Now what is required is that they simply follow the principle that whatever behaviour they want from others, they should themselves accord to others. Conversely, whatever behaviour towards themselves they abhor in others should likewise be eschewed by them.

This is such a comprehensive principle that it is useful in relations between men and women, individuals and nations, in the homeland as well as in foreign lands. If people were to adhere to this principle, their family life as well as their social life would improve. National life as well as international life would run more smoothly. It is like a master key to human ethics, one single key which suffices to open all locked doors.

One who does not differentiate between his own people and others is a man of principle. His is a contradiction-free personality. And this trait, when properly developed, will turn him into a perfect person.

OCTOBER 22

The Teaching of Patience

A western commentator, William Paton, has observed: One of the fruits of Islam has been that stubborn durable patience which comes out of the submission to the absolute will of Allah.

This observation is indeed very apt. Islam attaches great importance to patience. Most of the verses of the Quran have a bearing, directly or indirectly, upon this virtue. In truth, patience is an attribute without which the very thought of Islam is unimaginable.

The present world is designed in such a way that here one has repeatedly to face unpleasant experiences, inside as well as outside the home. Now if people were to fall to wrangling on all such occasions, they would fail to advance along the path of human progress. That is why Islam has placed great emphasis on patience, so that by avoiding all unpleasantness, man may continue his onward journey towards the higher goal—God-realisation.

The Quran repeatedly stresses the need for patience. In chapter 31, we are enjoined to remain patient in these words, “Endure with fortitude whatever befalls you.” (17) In chapter 8, we are told to “have

patience. Allah is with those that are patient.” (46) Chapter 103 says, “Perdition shall be the lot of man except for those who believe and do good works and exhort one another to justice and to fortitude.

Similarly, the traditions have laid great emphasis on the importance of patience. The Prophet once said, ‘Listen and obey and be patient.’ On another occasion he observed: ‘God has commanded man to be patient and forgiving.’ A companion of the Prophet said: ‘The Prophet and his companions always remained patient in the face of persecution at the hands of enemies.’ It is true that patience provides the basic quality for Islamic activism. In this world no one can adhere to the path of Islamic virtue without remaining patient.

OCTOBER 23

Spiritual Progress

The actual target of Islam is spiritual progress. For this, man’s spirituality has to be awakened, and the divine feelings latent within him aroused. In the Quran, this (Islam’s actual goal) is called purification and cleansing (9:102).

In actual fact, every person is born with an upright nature. In this respect, everyone by his or her very birth is pure and clean. But during his stay in this world he becomes externally sullied. What is meant by purification is for man to rid himself of this outer shell of moral grime and revert to the upright nature he was born with.

This action of purification and cleansing has to be performed by the individual himself. A little child may be clean and pure on his own, but this state of purity is not due to some effort on his part, for he has been in this state from the very moment of his very creation. It is a different matter when he grows up. Then he must make himself clean and pure spiritually, by his own striving. It amounts to arriving consciously at the optimal stage of spiritual development by one’s own will and efforts. It is this self-attained spiritual progress which is

desirable in Islam. In the Quran it is called coming before one's Lord with a "pure heart" (26:89).

According to a *hadith*, the Prophet observed while praying "May God fill my heart with light." Similarly, the Prophet once uttered these words, while praying for someone, "O God, forgive his sins and purify his heart." In the Muatta of Imam Malik a saying of Luqman is recorded in these words: God revives the heart with the light of wisdom, just as he revives the dead earth with rains. (p. 707)

This is called spiritual progress. And it is this spiritual progress which is the actual goal of Islam. Those who fail to make spiritual progress will certainly never become truly Islamic in character.

OCTOBER 24

Superior Ethics

The morality that was taught to the Prophet by God and wholeheartedly adopted by the Prophet in his life, is alluded to in the Quran in these words: 'Surely you have a sublime character' (68:4).

This means that the Prophet of Islam was of such a high moral character, that his behaviour was a model of perfection for his followers. Having a high moral character means having the capacity to rise above the negativity of peoples' attitudes and behaviour. The way of the morally upright man is not that of treating badly those who treat him badly, and treating well those who treat him well. The perfect man treats everyone well irrespective of their treatment of and attitude towards him.

The Prophet of Islam kept unfailingly to this high standard of morality. In this way by becoming a model of this character in practice he demonstrated how a life of morality should be lived in the real sense. Evidence of such a character is a proof in itself that the person concerned is a man of principle. The personality of such an individual is not a product of circumstance but rather of his own high principles. Such a character is a truthful person who proves himself by adhering to the path of nature.

The traditions lay great emphasis on good behaviour. According to one *hadith*, the Prophet said, "I have been sent to perfect good moral character." Similarly, he observed that the most perfect faith is of one whose moral character is best. The Prophet further observed that on the Day of Judgement good moral character will be the supreme factor in tipping the scales of divine justice in our favour.

A believer is a person who lives at the divine level. So whatever the circumstances, he continues to remain a man of high moral character. His thinking never descends to a lower plane; no situation can prove too much for the sublimity of his character.

OCTOBER 25

Well-Wishing

Once suspicion fell upon certain people in Madinah. On this occasion the following command was revealed in the Quran: "When you heard it, why did the faithful, men and women, not think well of their own people, and say: "This is an evident falsehood?" " (24:12)

This shows that Islam desires an atmosphere in which the members of society think well of each other. If people hear of anything directed against someone, they should neither spread it to others, nor should they themselves give credence to it. They should always cherish good thoughts about others in their hearts.

In another verse of the Quran, we are addressed in these words: "Believers, avoid immoderate suspicion, for in some cases, suspicion is a crime." (49:12)

The evils of dissension and discord are invariably produced in a society which is vitiated by suspicion. If suspicion is nipped in the bud, mutual relationships will not deteriorate. And a pleasant atmosphere will continue to prevail.

According to a *hadith*, the Prophet of Islam observed: “You should save yourselves from suspicion, because suspicion is the worst of falsehoods” (*Sahih*, Muslim).

There are many traditions from which we learn the dictates of Islam on this subject as well as what conformance with them entails. That is, people should keep their hearts free of misgivings about others. If anything negative is said about others, they should not believe it just on the basis of hearsay. Either they should take no notice of it or, if it is necessary to form an opinion, they should first of all investigate the whole matter thoroughly and only then draw their conclusion.

The ideal person according to Islam is one who holds positive views about others; who has only good thoughts and feelings about them.

OCTOBER 26

Modesty

Modesty, the greatest adornment of humanity, is fundamental to the building of a good and just society, for all other human qualities stem therefrom. That is why modesty has had so much emphasis laid upon it in all Islamic teachings. In chapter 31 of the Quran we are addressed by God in these words: “Do not turn away from men with scorn, or walk proudly on the earth. Allah does not love the arrogant and the vainglorious. Rather let your gait be modest and your voice low: the harshest of voices is the braying of the ass” (31:18-19). The man who is deficient in the virtue of modesty may appear to be a human being, but in reality he falls very far short of being so.

Vanity ill becomes human beings, for the beauty of man lies not in haughtiness but in modesty. What best befits mankind is humility. Man’s perfection does not lie in the loud voice of arrogance but in

humble gentleness of speech. The modest man is true to his nature: the arrogant man deviates from it. But it takes a sense of realism to appreciate this, and the man devoid of modesty is likewise devoid of realism.

A lack of modesty frequently leads to high-handedness, an attitude which betrays a frivolous disregard of the social obligation to respect the rights and feelings of others. That is why Islam spares no effort in inculcating a serious attitude to social dues. When one becomes a Muslim, one perforce acquires the seriousness of the modest person. According to a *hadith*, the Prophet once observed that God had sent the revelation that “you (people) should adopt the attitude of modesty. No one should deal high-handedly with others, and no one should be so presumptuous as to display superiority over others” (*Sunan*, Abu Dawud).

According to Islam, greatness belongs to God alone, and all human beings are equally servants of God. When this concept—the acceptance of God as the greatest of all beings—is firmly implanted in people’s hearts, modesty becomes the natural condition.

OCTOBER 27

The Four Pillars

After belief in God and the Prophet, four practices enjoy the status of pillars of Islam - fasting, prayers, *zakat* (alms-giving) and *hajj* (pilgrimage to Makkah). In essence, these are the four parts which make up the whole that is called Islam.

Fasting means not just abstaining from food and drink, but also rising above the material world so that man may bring himself closer to God. Prayers, in spirit, is remembrance of God. *Zakat*, in reality, is a form of sacrifice meant to underline those ethical values which are known in Islam as *Huququl Ibad*, that is, fulfillment of one’s responsibilities towards others. *Hajj*, a re-enactment of the missionary

life of the greatest preacher of truth, the Prophet Abraham, also necessarily entails sacrifice in the cause of God. Understanding and acceptance of these four pillars, as symbols of the fundamental parts of Islam, prepare one to adopt Islam fully in one's life.

Each of these four acts of worship is imbued with a particular spirit, yet is so designed that its performance as well as fulfilling its basic purpose, may achieve other important ends. The pillars of Islam may, in this respect, be likened to human limbs, each having a separate function, but inseparably attached to the body.

1. One significant aspect of these acts of worship is that, even if their basic ends are not being served devotees are bound in some measure to benefit from them. For example, even if prayer and fasting do not bring one close to God (96:19), they may at least serve to keep worshippers away from indecency and evil (29:45). Fasting, in the words of the Prophet, will teach them to refrain from falsehood, promise-breaking and loud talk; it provides them with a shield against the onslaughts of the devil.

2. Each acts of worship has been so designed that, as well as fulfilling its own specific purpose, it is closely and meaningfully linked with other acts of worship. For example, the real aim of *hajj* is to prepare the pilgrim for a missionary life - that of calling people to God. But the form it takes in the process is that of visits to the holy places and the performance of the rites of *hajj*, as a result of which the pilgrim receives a special share in the love of God and a heightened awareness of the life hereafter. He returns purified after this act of worship, and is able to lead a fuller and better religious life.

3. Every act of worship is aimed, essentially, at bringing man into communion with God, in one way or another. But the different forms of worship have been so designed that they meet other requirements of life as well, or, at least, strengthen man's will to achieve other worthy goals. For example, prayer in congregation and the worldwide gathering for *hajj* serve as platform for Muslim unity, similarly, fasting is beneficial for physical health and *zakat* makes for a well-organised economic system.

The Coming Times

A space of time is fixed for every nation; when their hour is come, not for one moment shall they hold it back, nor can they go before it.

Children of Adam, when apostles of your own come to proclaim to you My revelations, those that take warning and mend their ways will have nothing to fear or to regret; but those that deny and scorn Our revelations shall be the people of the Fire, and there they shall remain forever.

Who is more wicked than the man who invents a falsehood about Allah or denies His revelations? Such men shall have their destined share, and when Our messengers (angels) come to carry off their souls, they shall say to them: 'Where now are your idols, those whom you invoked besides Allah?' 'They have forsaken us,' they will answer, and will admit that they were unbelievers. (7:34-37)

The verdict of hell or heaven for man is given on the basis of his reaction to the truth. When truth comes to a person supported by arguments, his mind testifies to God's truth having been laid clearly before him. Now he is left with no plea, no excuse that he had not been shown the right path. But, if even after being told the truth, he refutes it, it is certain that his response is the result of arrogance. A superiority complex has come in the way of according the true pride of place while he accepts a lower position himself. Nothing awaits such a person in the next world except hell.

When a man refutes the truth, he does so on the basis of some feeling of confidence or the other. Sometimes this confidence is based on wealth and power, sometimes on honour and popularity. The material things provided to him for the purposes of trial come to be considered by him as dependable supports, and he feels sure

that he will come to no harm as he stands on firm ground. But this is his greatest misconception. On the day of judgement, when these ephemeral supports have left him, it will become plain that he had rejected the truth all along due to haughtiness, using the many words at his disposal to justify his refusal of truth on false grounds of principle.

OCTOBER 29

Reformed Behaviour

Do not corrupt the earth after it has been purged of evil. Pray to Him with fear and hope. His mercy is within reach of the righteous. (7:56)

World reform means the re-establishment of order by God on this earth. Man has to lead his life in accordance with this God-established system. It is not lawful for him to adopt any path other than this.

Human activity was initially designed by God to create no excessive clamour. So now man should refrain from using modern contrivances which will create noise pollution. Here God has arranged for breathing in fresh air, so man must not indulge in activities which may pollute the atmosphere. The vegetables and animals flourish in their separate spheres, so man should remain in his own sphere, instead of encroaching on those of other creatures. Since everything is functioning in a planned way, man should, moreover, refrain from adopting any such emotional, hasty course as will lead to social disruption.

All the things of this world are functioning in complete coordination with one another, so man must also lead his life in harmony with others, wishing them well and seeking what is profitable for his brethren. The benefits of such a world are manifold.

There are only two possible kinds of behaviour for men on this earth created by God—reformed behaviour and corrupt behaviour. Reformed behaviour is the conscious following of the perfect order already established by God in the universe. As opposed to this, corrupt behaviour is deviation from that order and the adoption of a self-made system. But the latter course ill befits God's creatures, for the earth has already been reformed by God. This has not been left for man to do. Man has only to follow the path of nature and build his society on the same pattern. This reformed earth of God is not only the best place for human habitation, but it is also the best model for human conduct.

OCTOBER 30

God's Voice

When your Lord brought forth descendants from the loins of Adam's children, and made them testify against themselves, (He said): 'Am I not your Lord?' They replied: 'We bear witness that you are.' (This He did) lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection: 'We had no knowledge of that,' or: 'Our forefathers set up partners with Allah; but will You destroy us, their descendants, on account of what the followers of falsehood did?'

Thus We make plain Our revelations so that they may return to the right path. (7:172-174)

This explains how the Lord and Creator instilled conscience into human nature in such an indelible way that it became the prime indicator of man's humanity. Whenever a moral issue comes before an individual, it is his conscience which gives him a clear indication of what is right and what is wrong. (In our times, the experiences of the USSR in one respect and of Turkey in another are proofs that

even a totally adverse, anti-religious atmosphere has failed to change conscience-based human values.)

Unlike the animals who, in the absence of conscience, are destined to follow their instincts, man has the power to obey or to disregard the inner voice of his conscience. He is completely free to choose his course of action, to indulge in whatever activities he pleases. It is on this point that man is being tested—his correctness of choice. On this hinges the verdict of heaven for one, hell for another. One who pays heed to the voice of God—whether we call it conscience or the silent language of nature—has passed this test. The doors of heaven will be opened to him after death.

The voice of nature is God's directive to everyone. Neither can one have the pretext of being ignorant of the truth, nor can one put forward the plea that whatever one does is in continuance of the practices of one's forefathers. Since consciousness of God is inborn and an inseparable part of human nature, no one—whatever the circumstances—has any excuse for straying from the right path.

OCTOBER 31

The Blessings of God

It was Allah who made the heavens and the earth, and sends down water from the sky with which He brings forth fruits for your sustenance. He drives the ships which, by His leave, sail the ocean in your service. He has created rivers for your benefit, and the sun and the moon, which steadfastly pursue their courses. And He has subdued for you the night and the day. He grants you all that you ask of Him. If you reckoned up Allah's favours, you could not count them. Truly, man is wicked and thankless (14:32-34).

To an astonishing degree, the present world bears witness to the presence of God. His will is immanent in the abundant provision

to man of earthly resources and in His gift to man of the capacity to harness those resources to the purposes of his daily living. God has given man power over the earth and water, over the rivers, seas and mountains. He has caused him to profit by the changes of the seasons, the alternation of night and day. Nature responds to man's every need, providing in advance things of which we had no prior conception.

All these manifestations of God's beneficence are so incredibly wonderful that they should leave man trembling in awe of God and cause him to enter into lifelong servitude of his Creator. Yet this does not happen. What is the reason? Why is it that the concept of the Creator of the Universe does not make every hair on a man's body stand on end? The reason is that he has been observing the universe from his earliest childhood. Because it appears perpetual and unchanging, it strikes him as being a normal, familiar sight. He finds nothing unique or extraordinary in the universe, not even the motion of the stars and planets in the vast, outer reaches of space.

Moreover, when man finds or receives anything in this world, it comes to him shrouded in the veil of cause and effect. He therefore regards God's bounty as stemming from his own efforts and capacities. That is why expressions of thankfulness do not come gushing from his lips for the Giver—God. This on the part of man, is the gravest kind of neglect. It is injustice coupled with ingratitude.

NOVEMBER 1

God's Command

Allah enjoins justice, kindness and charity to one's kindred, and forbids indecency, wickedness and oppression. He admonishes you so that you may take heed.

Keep faith with Allah when you make a covenant with Him. Do not break your oaths after you have sworn them: for (by swearing in His name), you make Allah your surety. Allah has knowledge of all your actions. (16:90-91)

To God, man's first duty is to see that justice is done. For example, whenever there is an outstanding debt, it should be paid, fully and in time, irrespective of the person concerned—whether weak or strong, friend or foe. In the payment of dues, the sole consideration should be the fulfillment of the obligation.

Man's next duty is to be kind to his fellow men. This means that in the granting of rights and the payment of dues, an attitude of broad-mindedness should be adopted. Humanitarianism (*muruwah*) should go hand in hand with justice. In human dealings, generosity and compassion, going beyond the call of legality should be brought into play. Man should have the courage to be willing to receive less than the share due to him and to give others more than their share.

His third duty is to respect the rights of relatives. That is to say that a man should be as sensitive to his relatives' needs as he is to his own. No man of resources should think that his wealth is to be spent only on himself and his immediate family. To his list of responsibilities he should add the paying of dues to relatives.

Three vices prohibited in this verse are indecency, wickedness and oppression. Indecency means flouting the dictates of one's conscience in order to indulge in known moral evils. Wickedness

(*munkar*), the very opposite of virtue (*maroof*), consists of those practices disapproved of in every society as failing to measure up to moral standards. Oppression—the tyrannising and coercion of others, is a serious deviation from the path ordained by God.

NOVEMBER 2

Contentment

One of the important qualities of human beings is contentment. For the construction of a better society, it is necessary that its members should never foster discontent. For, a society bereft of contentment will also be bereft of the atmosphere of mutual love.

The Prophet of Islam once observed: ‘That person earned salvation, who accepted Islam and was given provision (*rizq*) according to his needs and he was content with what God bestowed upon him (*Sahih*, Muslim).

In the present world man’s greatest good fortune lies in his remaining a thankful servant of God. Only that person may become a thankful servant in the real sense who possesses this inner contentment. According to a *hadith*, (Ibn Majah) the Prophet said, ‘Become content and then you will become the most thankful servant of God.’

Contentment gives man the blessing of a heart at peace. Those who are not content are eventually consumed by greed. And when individuals succumb to greed, they cannot remain content, whatever the circumstances. They always keep complaining about one thing or another.

Contentment grants man mental peace, while greed produces mental confusion and disturbance. Contentment raises man to a high mental level while greed causes man to descend to a low mental level. Contentment makes one love others while greed makes one hate others. Contentment is a means to spiritual uplift while greed leads to spiritual degeneration.

A feeling of contentment enables a person to rise above trivialities and live in the higher realities. In short, he practices simple living and high thinking.

NOVEMBER 3

Divine Planning

Adam was the first man as well as the first prophet. The generations succeeding Adam (according to some traditions) adhered to the path of monotheism and true religion for about a millennium. Adam's people later came under the influence of polytheism (2:213). The Prophet Noah was then sent to reform the descendants of Adam who inhabited the green, luxuriant land lying between the Tigris and Euphrates.

Despite the Prophet Noah's prolonged efforts, Adam's progeny, with the exception of a very few, remained resistant to renouncing their polytheistic religion. Consequently, the Great Storm came and swept away all human existence from the earth. Now the human race made a fresh start with the followers of Noah. But again this new generation, with the passage of time, digressed from the path of monotheism to the path of polytheism. This went on, repeatedly, for many centuries. God continued to send prophets in succession (23:44), but far from showing any willingness to accept their message, people laughed His apostles to scorn. (36:30).

This process continued for thousands of years until polytheism came to be firmly rooted in human existence. Anyone born in the societies of those days came under the influence of polytheism from his surroundings. Religious rituals, social ceremonies, national affairs, governmental organizations, —all were founded on polytheistic beliefs. Ultimately, the situation deteriorated to the extent that any child born in this world opened his eyes in an atmosphere of idolatry and when he closed his eyes for the last time, it was in that same

atmosphere. The practice of idolatry, once having set in history, became ineradicable. It is this state of affairs which finds expression in this prayer of Noah: 'Lord, do not leave a single unbeliever in the land. If You spare them, they will mislead Your servants and beget none but sinners and unbelievers.' (71:27).

The Prophet Abraham, who lived between 1800 and 2000 B.C., attempted to reform society in ancient Iraq, but met the same fate as that of the prophets preceding him. Then God devised a new plan for the guidance of man. It meant preparing a human race by exclusive divine arrangement, totally detaching them from the sphere of polytheistic influence, so that they would find it easier to accept the message of monotheism. Then people so conditioned were to be used, as per the divine plan, to encounter and rout out the forces of polytheism in order to change the course of history.

Accordingly, Abraham was commanded to leave populated areas like Iraq, Egypt, Syria and Palestine for the desert land of ancient Makkah and settle his wife and little child Isma'il there. Being an uncultivable valley, this area was totally devoid of human population, hence completely free from ancient polytheistic culture. This is what is meant by Abraham's prayer: "Lord, I have settled some of my offspring in a barren valley near Your Sacred House, so that they may observe the prayer" (14:37). That is to say, Abraham consciously chose a place which was beyond the influence of polytheism, so that there might arise a generation, nurtured in an environment free from polytheistic influences, who would become true worshippers of the one God.

The effect of such detachment from a cultural continuity is illustrated by an example from the life of the writer who belongs to an Urdu-speaking area. My parents spoke Urdu, which is the mother tongue of my children. Now it happened that my eldest son took up residence in London in an area with a predominantly English speaking population. As a result, my grandsons knew only English and could not express themselves in Urdu. On my visit to London, I had to converse with them in English.

My grandsons were in this linguistically deprived state precisely because they had been brought up in an environment completely cut

off from the continuous traditions of Urdu. This would not have been possible had these children been brought up in Delhi.

This runs parallel with the story of Abraham, Ishmael and his mother Hajira. The dream shown to Abraham (37:102) was a symbolic one. Abraham, however, with his extreme sense of obedience, stood ready to execute his dream. In ancient Makkah there was neither water, nor vegetation nor any resources to sustain life. Settling his wife and child in such adverse circumstances appeared to invite their death. But the plan of giving birth to a generation detached from the polytheistic traditions could be carried out only at a place devoid of sustenance, because only then would it be devoid of human population. Abraham's dream ostensibly entailed the economic and social sacrifice of his children, but it was actually a way of realizing the divine plan to prepare the desired generation.

Since this plan had to materialize under the veil of cause and effect it was constantly being watched. Abraham himself stayed in Palestine, but would keep going at intervals to Makkah for the purpose of supervision.

Initially, Hajira and Ishmael were the only inhabitants in the valley. Later, with the appearance of Zamzam, some gypsies belonging to the Jurhum tribe settled there. When Ishmael grew up, he married a girl of that tribe. According to traditions, once when Abraham went to Makkah from Palestine, Ishmael was not at home. Abraham enquired of his wife how everything was going on. His wife told him that they were leading their lives in a very bad state. Life was full of hardship. As Abraham took his leave, he asked her to convey his regards to Ishmael and to ask him to change the door-sill of his home. When Ishmael returned and heard the message from his wife, he realized that the visitor must have been his father and that his message symbolically implied that he should divorce his present wife and marry another woman of the Jurhum tribe. To Abraham that woman was not worthy of mothering the generation under preparation.

After some time, the Prophet Abraham again visited Makkah. This time too Ishmael was away, but his wife was at home. When Abraham asked her how things were going on, she thanked God for everything and talked of contentment, saying that life fared well for

them. When he left, Abraham asked her to convey his regards to Ishmael and to give him the message that he should keep the door-sill of his house. On his return, Ishmael received the message of his father and rightly understood its symbolism: that this woman was capable of leading a life in accordance with the divine plan assigned to Abraham to prepare the generation desired by God. (*Tafsir Ibn-Kathir*)

In this way, in that hostile, aloof environment, a new generation began to be formed. What were the characteristics of this race? The two most prominent characteristics were their being in tune with nature and possessing the human quality of manliness.

The only thing to influence man in this rugged, hostile, Arabian desert was nature: vast wilderness, high mountains, starlit sky. These natural phenomena gave man the message of the unity of God. They were perpetual reminders to man of God's greatness and omniscience. These pure, divine surroundings nurtured a generation which, in the words of Abraham, had the real capacity to become an Islamic community, that is, one which could surrender itself completely to the Will of God. The nature of this community was preserved intact in its original state, hence it was fully capable of accepting the religion of nature.

It was then the most suitable environment for nurturing that characteristic which is called *al-Muruwah* (manliness) in Arabic. Life was full of hardships in the mountainous and rocky surroundings of ancient Hijaz, and in that setting innate human qualities had acquired the maximum importance, as external props were totally non-existent. There, man possessed only one thing, and that was his own existence. In such an environment, it was but natural that man's inner qualities should be cultivated to the maximum. In this way a nation, characterized by manliness to an amazing extent, came into being through a process spanning two thousand years. In the words of Philip K. Hitti, the whole of Arabia was converted into a nursery of heroes, the like of which had never been found before or after in history.

The hour had come with the dawn of the 6th century to bring to completion the plan of breaking the continuity of *shirk* (idolatry).

It was then that the Prophet Muhammad was born among the Ishmaelites. These are the words of the Quran:

It is He who has sent His Apostle with guidance and the Faith of Truth, so that he may exalt it above all religions, much as the pagans may dislike it (61:9).

This verse shows that the main mission of the Final Prophet was to remove the religion of polytheism from its place of domination and establish the religion of monotheism in its place, giving it a position of dominance in the world. This dominance was to be of an intellectual and ideological kind. That is, a dominance similar to that gained by scientific knowledge over traditional knowledge in modern times.

This was the most difficult plan ever conceived in history. In the 7th century, it was the hardest of tasks to stamp out polytheism and replace it with monotheism as the predominant ideology. It was just like uprooting a tree with all its roots and branches. It entailed severe difficulties and could be performed only with meticulous planning and strenuous effort.

To secure this goal the Final Prophet was provided by God with two special supporting factors. One was the divine proclamation:

You are the best nation that has ever been raised up for mankind (3:110)

As a result of a two thousand years long process, a most competent group was prepared for the purpose. As mentioned above, this group had retained its nature (i.e. that with which it had come into existence, preserved intact and free from all the corruptions of civilization) and also possessed in perfect form, a high moral character and manly attributes. It was the people selected from this group who, after their acceptance of Islam, came to be known in history as the companions of the Prophet.

The other special divine succour is hinted at in the early verses of chapter 30. Prior to the advent of the Prophet, there had existed two great polytheistic civilizations in the world, the Byzantine and the Sassanid. The major populated part of the globe at the time, was directly or indirectly, under these two empires. For monotheism

to prevail over a vaster world, a confrontation with the polytheistic empires was inevitable. God did bring this about during this period and the confrontation of these two empires continued for generations. First the Persians rose and, destroying the power of the Romans, occupied a large part of their empire. Then the Romans rose to avenge their defeat by destroying the might of the Persians. That is how, when the Companions rose unitedly under the guidance of the Prophet, they rapidly conquered most of the inhabited part of Asia and Africa, subjugating polytheism, and securing for monotheism its rightful place.

To quote professor Philip K. Hitti:

The enfeebled condition of the rival Byzantines and Sassanids who had conducted internecine warfare against each other for many generations, the heavy taxes consequent upon these wars, imposed on the citizens of both empires, and undermining their sense of loyalty,all these paved the way for the surprisingly rapid progress of Arabian arms.

(Philip K. Hitti, History of the Arabs, London, 1970, pp. 142-143)

Historians in referring to this turning point have generally represented the foregoing events as having taken place in the natural course. Whereas this extraordinary turn of events was the result of a divine plan specially conceived of by God for the support of the Final Prophet.

An article titled, 'Islam', penned by a Christian writer and published in an American encyclopaedia, has this to say:

Its advent changed the course of human history.

It is quite true that after the Islamic revolution of the first phase (of Islam), human history saw such tremendous changes as had never before been seen. The actual reason for all these changes was that the continuity of polytheism came to an end, yielding place to the continuity of monotheism. *Shirk* (polytheism) was and is the root cause of all evils, while monotheism was and is the source of all virtue. Hence the occurrence of this fundamental change opened for man the door of all virtue, which had hitherto remained locked.

Now the age of superstition gave way to the age of science. The foundation of human discrimination collapsed, giving place to human equality. Dynastic rule was replaced with democratic rule. Where natural phenomena all over the world had become objects of worship, now for the first time they were treated as subjects of research and investigation. This paved the way to the revelation of nature's secrets to man. It was indeed the monotheistic revolution which laid the foundation for bringing about the modern age of advancement. Abraham's prayer, "Lord, preserve me and my descendants from serving idols. Lord, they have led many men astray" (14:36), had been answered.

Now the question arises as to how people were misled by these idols. What qualities did these inanimate objects possess which helped them in this regard? We can understand this secret if we have a look at the idols prevalent during Abraham's time and referred to in Abraham's prayer.

The idols were of the sun, the moon and the stars. It has been proved historically that these bright, heavenly bodies were objects of worship everywhere in the civilized world of Abraham's time. This gives us a clue as to how and why these idols managed to lead the people astray.

Although God is the greatest reality, He is invisible to the eye. On the contrary, the sun, the moon and the stars, shining brightly, are visible to every eye. Due to their illuminative properties, people came under their spell and began worshipping them. These brilliant bodies captured human thought to such a degree and so dominated people's minds that even governments, nay, empires began to be founded on their basis. The emperors of that age ruled over people by declaring themselves to be the descendants of the sun and moon.

This age was brought to an end by monotheism gaining supremacy through the Final Prophet. This was carried out in two stages. The first stage is referred to in the Quran in these words:

And fight with them until there is no more persecution (fitnah) and religion should be only for God; but if they desist, then surely God sees what they do (8:39)

Fitnah in this verse means religious intolerance, which in ancient times had become a form of oppression. Polytheism had become aggressive because it was the bedrock of all governments and as such enjoyed full State patronage. In such a situation, whenever the call to monotheism was raised, it was but natural for the rulers to feel strongly that such a call, in holding their right to rule suspect, posed a challenge to their sovereignty. Therefore they wasted no time in crushing the *da'is* of monotheism. This was the actual cause of ideological aggression in ancient times.

The Prophet Muhammad and his companions were commanded by God to fight for the extirpation of polytheism to put an end to the *da'is* of monotheism being the targets of polytheistic aggression. That is to say, that *shirk* and politics were separated from one another. The Prophet and his companions launched this campaign with full force and devotion, and it was due to their unceasing efforts that the power of *shirk* was given a death blow. Subsequently, in most parts of the inhabited world of the time, the polytheistic system was subjugated, thus putting an end to the aggressive status of *shirk* forever. Now for all time polytheism and political power were thrust into separate arenas.

The second stage of the domination of monotheism over *shirk* is mentioned in this verse of the Quran:

*We will show them our signs in all the regions of the earth
and in their own souls, until they clearly see that this is the
truth (41:53).*

The first phase of this mission aimed at putting an end to the practice of deriving political theories from natural phenomena.

This goal was fully achieved in the seventh century. The second stage aimed at removing the veil of superstition from the phenomena of nature and casting upon them the light of knowledge. This second stage began with the era of prophethood (of the Prophet Muhammad) and later reached its zenith in the present scientific revolution.

The present world is a manifestation of the attributes of God. Here man finds his Creator in the mirror of His creation. By making

a profound study of creation, he witnesses God's power and greatness. The ancient idolatrous concepts had, on the contrary, rendered all material things of this world mysteriously sacred. The superstitious ideas which had come to surround them came in the way of research being carried out on the multitude of objects in this world. When the entire world came to be held as God's creation in the wake of the monotheistic revolution, this mentality of holding everything sacred vanished. Now everything began to be studied objectively.

As a result of this investigation, the truth about the hidden system of nature and its functioning in the world began to be revealed. Ultimately, in the form of the modern scientific revolution, the prophecy mentioned above in verse 53 of chapter 41 was quite finally fulfilled.

The facts unraveled about the universe through modern scientific studies have definitively brought to an end the age of superstition. These newly discovered realities have simultaneously benefited humanity in two ways, one being that religious beliefs are no longer just dogma but facts established through human knowledge itself.

The other benefit to mankind is that these scientific revelations about nature provide an immense source for increasing the faith of the believer.

Although partial in extent, whatever has been revealed by science regarding the universe is so amazing that, on learning it, the believer's hair stands on end. His mind receives the light of the realization of the Lord. His eyes become wet with tears from awe and fear of God. He is elevated to the plan of *ihsan*, a state of worship in which man feels as if he is seeing the Almighty. There is a *hadith* to this effect, asking the believers to worship God as if they were actually seeing Him.

NOVEMBER 4

Revival of Islam in the Modern Age

In modern times the history of human belief has once again reached almost the point that it was at fifteen hundred years ago. In ancient times *shirk* so dominated human thought that it became an inseparable part of the historical process, leading to a situation where every child born was an idolater. Now, by a process spanning the last several hundred years, atheistic thoughts have come to vitiate human thinking. In all intellectual activities atheistic thinking has so prevailed that once again in human history, atheism has set in as a historical process. Now every child born in any part of the world is under its influence. Atheism is the dominant “religion” of today. Hence the revival of Islam in modern times will not be possible so long as atheism continues to enjoy its ideological dominance.

To render the revival of Islam possible in modern times, it will be necessary to employ the same methods as were formerly adopted when *shirk* dominated world thought, i.e., the conditioning of individuals and the subjugation of the opponents of truth.

For the first task to be accomplished, our own human resources are sufficient. But for the other task, God has once again in modern times, just as in the first phase of Islam, taken appropriate measures on a very large scale. The need of the hour is to exploit these opportunities so abundantly created for us.

1. A workforce is a pre-requisite for the successful outcome of any Islamic revival campaign at the present time. The basics are the same as those needed to execute the mission entrusted to Abraham, although the training of the individuals may differ in view of the requirements of our age.

The individuals required for launching a campaign of Islamic revival in modern times are not just ordinary Muslims, but those for whom Islam has become the ultimate answer to a great exploratory quest. What activates a person more than anything is this event of discovery: all of a sudden a new personality is born within him, marked by conviction, courage, determination, manliness, generosity, the spirit of sacrifice and the desired unity—all qualities required for the performance of great tasks, and all part of the questing spirit.

All the best qualities found in western nations in modern times are linked with this urge to explore. The western nations may be said to have discovered the world in the scientific, as opposed to the traditional sense, and it is this urge to understand all aspects of truth which has produced individuals of such high calibre in western nations.

The same was true of the companions of the Prophet in the first phase of Islam. God's religion came to them as a discovery: Islam as against *jahiliyah* (period of ignorance); monotheism as against *shirk*; *Akhirah* (Hereafter) as against this present world. It was this which was responsible for producing those extraordinary qualities in them. If today the campaign of Islamic revival is to be effectively launched once again, such people will have to come forward as conceive of Islam as a fresh discovery rather than as an inheritance by birth.

2. Islam came to the world fourteen hundred years ago, setting in motion historical processes marked by cultural grandeur and political conquests. Those who call themselves Muslims today are the products of those processes. But any group of people which has such a brilliant past is invariably preoccupied with its recent history. It fails to go back through history to drink afresh from the original springs of inspiration.

This is true of Muslims today. The Muslims of present times, consciously or unconsciously, derive their religion from history instead of from the Quran and *sunnah*, the true sources of Islam.

This is why Islam has become for the Muslims of today a matter not of responsibility but of pride. This psychology so pervades their thoughts and actions that its effects are visible everywhere. Islam as set forth in the Quran and the *hadith* stands out as a religion of

responsibility and accountability, but if viewed in the mirror of its cultural and political history, it appears to be an object of pride and glory. All the great revolutionary movements of Muslims in modern times have been influenced by this sense of pride. That is why they all lost their original lustre after very brief periods of activity. This is because a sense of pride leads one to showy activities, while a sense of accountability leads one to genuinely serious action.

For any campaign of Islamic revival to be effectively managed, its promoters should have derived Islam from the original teachings in the Quran and the *hadith* rather than from the cultural and political history of later times. Only those who have derived their religion from the Quran and the *hadith* can sustain a true campaign in all seriousness and with a sense of responsibility.

Those who derive their religion from history will only glorify their own sense of pride, and no result-oriented action will follow from their activities.

Muslims in modern times have turned into a defeatist nation, thanks to the entire Muslim world suffering from a persecution complex. This is what ensues from deriving religion from history. Awed by the grandeur of the history of the “Red Fort” and “Granada”, they chose to derive their Islamic identity from these objects of historical significance, and since in present times these things have been taken over by other nations, they have never ceased in their lamentations. Yet, if they had considered divine guidance to be their religion, they would never have felt themselves the victims of deprivation. For divine guidance is something which can never be taken away by anyone.

Since we consider those things to be Islam, which may be taken away by others, we have become compulsive bewailers of our own fates. How strange it is that we are engaged in lamenting over a very small loss, and demanding reparations, while completely unaware of the far greater treasure of which we are still in possession.

Muslims consider Islam as an emblem of their national greatness, and as a result of this mentality, they are engaged in clash and confrontation with other nations all over the world. That is why, when they find people robbing them of their glory, they rise against them. This reaction can range from verbal castigation to armed

confrontation. This negative attitude continues to mar Muslim relations with others. Whereas, if they had received Islam as a matter of divine guidance, they would have felt that they had something to give to other nations. They would have considered themselves as the giver and the others as the taker. They would not then have become obsessed with recovering the irretrievable. The actual relationship between Muslims and other nations should be that of *da'i* and *mad'u*, not of depriver and deprived. But the result of holding the historical Islam to be the true Islam is that other nations are now seen simply as rivals. So long as this rivalry continues between Muslims and other nations, no real work of Islamic revival can be started.

It is not possible in the very first stage to cleanse all Muslims of this antagonistic psychology. Yet at least one such team should be assembled, the members of which have rid themselves of this mentality of rivalry. This transformation in thinking will help them to regard other nations as their *mad'u*, instead of as their material competitors and national adversaries. To establish the relation of *da'i* and *mad'u*, it is essential to forget all complaints and grudges, and to be willing to bear all kinds of material losses. This relation of *da'i* and *mad'u* can be founded only on the basis of unilateral sacrifice on the part of the *da'i*. There is no doubt about it that this is the most difficult of tasks, one for which one has to forfeit a great deal.

The willingness to make sacrifices and other such attributes must be possessed by those who come forward for the mission of Islamic revival. For the preparation of such individuals in modern times, again the same planning is required as was carried out in the first phase.

In modern times we are in need of a high standard training centre with all the latest facilities. Set up in the pure surroundings of nature, far from the corrupting centres of civilization, such a training centre would respond fully to this exhortation of the Quran:

...some should stay behind to instruct themselves in religion and admonish the others when they return, so that they may take heed (9:122).

The training of talented individuals in such an isolated location would be the equivalent of the setting of Haiar and Ismael in barren,

uncultivable terrain, so that their religiosity would grow and be strengthened.

For this proposed training centre to give the maximum benefit, parents like Abraham should be willing to sacrifice talented children, in the sense of taking them away from the lure of economic opportunities and putting them in surroundings where, even by giving of their best, they would have nothing in return save the concept of reward in the Hereafter. The successful running of such a training centre would be akin, in the words of Philip Hitti, to producing a nursery of heroes.

But unless a considerable number of such individuals are made available, no real steps can be taken towards the revival of Islam. That is to say, a group of intelligent, talented individuals of the nation should be brought to a different, special environment, set apart from mundane things, where they are given training and education specially to prepare them to successfully undertake the revival of Islam in modern times, thus becoming warners and givers of good tidings for the peoples of the world.

In order to facilitate the Islamic revolution in its the first phase, God made the special provision of setting the mighty Roman and Persian empires—the greatest opponents of monotheism—on a collision course, and consequently weakening them so considerably that it became easy for the Muslims to subjugate them.

This same succour of God for the believers has taken another form in modern times, i.e. the flow of such information about the universe as proves religious realities at the level of miracles. The superstitious way of thinking dominated the world in ancient times, as a result of which man had formed strange opinions about divine creation. The universe has been called the ‘miracle of God’ in the Quran. But this divine miracle lay hidden under the veil of superstition. One of the results of the Islamic revolution is that the phenomena of nature, which had been subjects of worship, now became subjects of research and investigation. In this way, for the first time in human history, the occurrences of nature began to be studied in a purely academic manner. This fresh approach went on gaining ground until it spread to Europe where it was given the great boost which helped it develop into the scientific revolution of modern times.

It is as if science, having removed the Veil of Superstition, has proved the miracle of the universe to be a miracle of God. By displacing the phenomena of nature from the status of objects of worship, man has ultimately been able to set his foot on this moon, which has been worshipped throughout human history from the time of ancient man, who considered it an object of divinity

If the new arguments furnished by science are properly employed, the call of monotheism can be presented to the world on the same, if not a greater scale, than that for which miracles had earlier been given to the prophets as a testament to the uniqueness of the Creator.

All things of the heavens and the earth are there to remind man of God. But man on his own began to deify those things. This was a major deviation from God's original intention.

In modern times we have witnessed another kind of deviation as regards scientific information. The facts that have come to light through scientific investigations are all proofs of the divinity of God. They are there to remind man of God. But the atheists of modern times have distorted those very revelations of science, which were proofs of the existence of God, to show that there is no God. By giving the wrong direction to these facts, it was held that the entire system functioned on its own through a mechanical process of action and reaction, cause and effect.

The universe discovered by science was, however, an extremely meaningful and purposeful universe, as modern discoveries have shown: it is not a haphazard assemblage of matter. Rather it is a highly organized and sophisticated factory of a very superior standard. All the things of the world inevitably move along the purpose-oriented course which will produce the best results. The discovery of organization and purposefulness in all things is certain proof that the hand of God, albeit invisible, is behind the working of the universe. But what the atheist thinkers did was divert the causes of scientific discovery towards atheism. They held that whatever has been proved is an end and not the cause. But what is the proof that it is an end? It is quite possible that it may simply be an effect. The atheists nevertheless maintain that, it is not necessary that there must be a mind which, through will, is guiding events deliberately towards a particular end

or conclusion; it may be possible that, through the blind, interplay of some physical and chemical forces, certain things on their own are being produced which may, by chance, be meaningful. When this meaningless explanation itself has been produced through the exercise of will (human will in this instance), how strange it would be to believe in the functioning of a meaningful universe without a will behind it.

After the emergence of science, atheist thinkers have, on a very large scale, attempted to point science in the direction of atheism. On the contrary, the attempts of religious thinkers to utilize scientific evidence to support the claims of religion have been extremely few and far between. Over the last one hundred years thousands of books of a high academic standard have come out which aim, quite wrongly of course, at producing atheism out of science, while few academic efforts worth mentioning have been made on the part of religious thinkers. One of these books, *The Mysterious Universe*, by Sir James Jeans, is notable for the impact it has had on both religious and scientific thinking. In this book the author has ably demolished through purely scientific arguments, the principle of causation as the acceptance of the mechanical substitute for God.

In the latter half of the present century innumerable new facts have come to the knowledge of man, which prove the truth of religious beliefs on an extremely elevated plane. But so far no religious thinker has come forward to harness, this scientific information in support of religious truths. If this work could be performed at a high intellectual level, it would amount to an academic miracle in support of the religion of monotheism.

As we learn from the Quran, the prophethood of all the prophets of the past was doubted by their contemporaries (11:62). Initially, the same fate befell the Prophet Muhammad, (38:10).

However, the Quran declared: 'Your Lord may exalt you to a position of praise and glory', (17:79). This divine proclamation meant that his prophethood would pass from the stage of doubt to the stage of full acceptance. The stage of *Mahmud* (worthy of praise) is the final stage of recognition and acknowledgement.

Whenever a Prophet is born, his good faith becomes a subject of doubt to his people. "Is he really a prophet, or does he just claim to be one?" To the end, such thoughts keep coming to people's minds. Prophethood, in its initial stage, is merely a claim. It has no such in-built proof as people will be forced to acknowledge.

That is why, whenever a prophet comes to any community, he becomes in their eyes a controversial personality, established historical proofs not having been gathered in his support. Supportive arguments do come into existence, but always only after a certain time has elapsed. Generally, the Prophets did not reach this second stage of full acceptance.

All other prophets came to the world and also left the world in what was a period of controversy. They were not, therefore, able to leave behind them a group of sincere and dedicated individuals who could preserve their traditions and prophetic sayings. If these prophets were never wholly acknowledged by their contemporaries, either at the outset or in the later stages of their careers, it was because their teachings were never fully borne out by advances in human knowledge.

Of all the prophets, the only exception in this respect is that of the Final Prophet, although, like the other prophets, he too began his prophethood amidst controversy. It was at a later stage that he achieved such extraordinary success, and along with his companions, came to hold sway over a major part of the globe. In a period of less than a century his religion, Islam, had subjugated the great empires of Asia and Africa.

The Prophet of Islam emerged successful in all the challenges he faced: all his predictions proved true and all the powers that confronted him were vanquished. These events during his lifetime established his reputation not just in the eyes of his contemporaries, but for all time to come. Throughout the history of the Prophets he alone secured such extraordinary success that his prophethood soon left all controversy behind, reaching the stage of firm establishment referred to in the Quran as mahmud. His sayings as well as his achievements remained so perfectly preserved that there could be no room for any doubt.

In the present world the *da'is* of the True Religion have an exclusive advantage such as no other *da'i* group had ever possessed in the earlier phases of Islam history. That is, we are in a position to present the call to monotheism before the world from the pre-eminent position of established prophethood.

We are the inheritors of the certainties of established prophethood, while the followers of other prophets are still floundering in controversy.

God has provided all kinds of favourable opportunities for presenting the divine message before the nations of the world. If, in spite of all such provisions, Muslims do not perform this task of bearing witness to the Truth, or if they engage in communal, political and worldly disputes with other nations, they will find themselves on the Day of Judgement in the serious predicament of being unable to justify this lapse before their Lord and Creator.

NOVEMBER 5

The Rights of Human Beings

A believer has important responsibilities towards both God and **A**man. His duty towards God means believing in Him with all His attributes, worshipping Him, regarding himself accountable to Him; and making himself ready to carry out wholeheartedly any such demands that God may make upon him.

Another responsibility of the believer is one which concerns the rights of human beings. This responsibility devolves upon him in his relations with others. Every man or woman, a relative or neighbour, a fellow townsman or compatriot or one with whom he has dealings in business—everyone has some rights over him. It is incumbent upon a believer to fulfill those rights, failing which he will not be deserving of God's succour.

What is meant by recognizing the rights of human beings (*Huquq al-Ibad*)? This means that whenever and wherever a believer meets another person, he should give him such treatment as is in accordance with Islamic teachings. He should refrain from such behaviour as does not come up to the standard of Islam.

Examples of proper Islamic behaviour are giving respect to others, never humiliating others while giving them help, acting for the good of others, and if unable to benefit them in any way, at least doing no one any harm, fulfilling trusts, never breaking them; never usurping the wealth and property of others; dealing justly with others regardless of the circumstances; giving the benefit of the doubt to others, not believing in allegations made against others without proper proofs; advising others in earnest etc.

Everyone has a duty to fulfill these responsibilities towards other human beings according to the Islamic Shariah. This is called *Huququl Ibad*, or human rights.

NOVEMBER 6

The Scientific Temper

At a Indian Television panel discussion on ‘The Scientific Temper’, (New Delhi, June 2, 1998,—which included, besides myself, a central Minister, a social activist, a professor, an English journalist and a lady educationist), I quoted Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s first Prime Minister, as having said as early as 1947, that what his country required more than anything else was just that—the scientific temper. I further made the point that we need to know exactly what is meant by this expression. Broadly interpreted, it means having a realistic attitude. In one of his prayers, the Prophet is recorded as having asked God to enable him to see things just as they are (*Allahuma arenal ashyyaa’ kama heya*). This clearly indicates that having the scientific temper, or pursuing a scientific line of thought, is the equivalent of coming to grips with reality.

We live in a world which has an existence of its own, functioning according to its own immutable principles. Scientific thinking is, therefore, extremely important for the successful development of both the individual and the nation. The secret of success is to see the world around us with an open mind and to acquire an understanding of the laws of nature. This approach will produce positive results, enabling one to form correct judgements about things as they actually are. This is what is meant by having the scientific temper. In this world, the real achievers are those who, by fostering this bent of mind, are able to confront the truth.

Scientific thinking, largely, is a question of ratiocination based on facts. This applies equally to the world of matter and to human affairs. For instance, if you have to build a bridge over a river, the science of engineering will tell you to build it from iron and not from clay. Similarly, if you want to harvest a particular crop, the science of horticulture will tell you not only that you must sow the seeds of that crop (and not for example plastic pellets!) but also how to irrigate and fertilize them.

Similar principles apply in the human world. Good results can be achieved only if full account is taken of all of the relevant facts. Failing this, the desired outcome will remain elusive. If, for example, you want someone to be your supporter, the science of psychology will tell you that you must activate his conscience and appeal to his better feelings. But if, on the contrary, you speak or act in such a way that his ego is hurt, you will turn him into an enemy. If you want to receive something from someone, you shall have to become in his eyes a giver, and not just a beneficiary, for it is a matter of common experience that most people are used to giving only to those from whom they receive. Then, if you aspire to a position of honour, you had best be unassuming in demeanour, because it is the modest man and not the egoist who makes the greatest impression on the better side of human nature. It is the unpretentious individual who is most likely, therefore, to attain to a position of honour and prestige.

NOVEMBER 7

Going Against Nature

Shri Guru Golwalker, a Hindu fundamentalist leader, had categorically opposed the concept of a uniform civil code. His opposition was based not on religion but on nature. His stand was that a uniform code is not at all practicable on account of its being unnatural. He expresses it thus: “Nature abhors uniformity.”

This applies not only to the uniform civil code but also to life in its entirety. The system of life is based wholly on the principles of nature—principles which stand on their own strength and will last for all eternity. An individual or a nation has no option but to conform to them. None can oppose them, whatever the circumstances. Flying in the face of nature is of as little use as attempting to combat an earthquake, or trying to halt an avalanche with an outflung arm.

It has repeatedly happened throughout the history of the world that individuals or groups, having come into power, have imagined—quite falsely—that they could do whatever they wanted, namely, break up the prevalent map of life and replace it with a map of their own choice and fabrication. To this end they have launched major initiatives which have been baneful for humanity as a whole. But history tells us that every such effort has met with ultimate failure, and that the system of nature has emerged unscathed. This law of nature has been in operation right from the time of Chengiz Khan to Nadir Khan, from the times of Hitler and Stalin down to present-day dictatorships. There is not a single exception throughout the entire span of human history, one of the principles of nature being that it is peace and not war which is sustainable in this world. Here it is justice and not injustice which endures. Here it is modesty and not arrogance which eventually finds a place in the sun. Running counter to this law is like beating one’s head against a brick wall.

NOVEMBER 8

The Expression of Truth

Addressing the Prophet and the believers, the Quran enjoins: “Stay firmly upon the right path as you are bidden, together with those who have repented with you, and do not transgress. He is aware of what you do. Put no trust in the wrong-doers, lest you should be touched by the Fire. None but God can protect or help you.” (11:112-13, 17:73-75)

A true *dayee* is the well-wisher of his people to the ultimate extent. He is also desirous to an extreme degree that people should adopt the religion of truth. But no matter how strong his urge to communicate the message of God, he very often finds that his listeners are provoked by it and, instead of coming closer to the divine truth, they are actually distanced from it. When the *dayee* describes the greatness of the One God, they show a strong antipathy for this, as if the message of God’s glory is bound to nullify the effulgence of their saints, who have wrongly come to be accorded the same status as that of God, which is His due by divine right. When he condemns the evils inherent in them, they turn against him.

With the negativism of his listeners in mind, the *dayee* tends at times to adopt a moderate approach in order to bring the madu closer to him. But God does not approve of this conciliatory attitude. What is of actual importance in the eyes of God is the pronouncement of truth, and not the making of concessions to the people. Besides, if the *dayee* takes a softer line in his communication of the divine message, he could be accused of attempting to enhance his personal popularity in order to derive some material benefit from the situation. But whatever profit he gained would necessarily be at the expense of the truth. It would mean that God’s word would become vague and unclear. In the eyes of God the actual crux of

the matter is the clarity of the message conveyed to the people. If the truth becomes obscured for the madu, the exercise of *dawah* is rendered futile.

NOVEMBER 9

Respect for All

On seeing a funeral procession pass along a street in Madinah, the Prophet of Islam is recorded by one of his companions, Jabir ibn Abdullah, to have stood up. When his companions saw the Prophet standing, they too stood up. Then one of the companions asked the Prophet if it was not the funeral of a Jew. The Prophet replied: “You should stand up on seeing any funeral pass by.” According to another tradition, Sahal ibn Hunayf and Qays ibn Sad were in Qadsiya when a funeral procession passed by. On seeing it, both of them stood up. When told that it was the funeral of a non-Muslim, they immediately pointed out that when the Prophet had stood up for the funeral procession of a Jew, and a similar remonstrance had been made to him, he had replied: “Was he not a human being?” (*Fathul Bari*, 3/214). This teaches us an extremely important principle of Islam, namely, that a human being is worthy of respect, regardless of his origins and traditions. This applies even if he belongs to an inimical community. Irrespective of his cultural and religious background, he will be looked upon as a human being and will be accorded all due honour. Man is a peerless creature of God. In the words of the Quran, man has been created in the noblest image: he is a masterpiece of creation. All human beings are specimens of God’s miracles. Therefore, in spite of the many ways in which they may differ from one’s own people, they are worthy of respect. All strangers deserve to be given due honour—simply in their capacity as human beings. The true believer sees divine light in everything. He sees in His own creation the miracle of the

Creator. By an extension of the awe he feels for God's handiwork, the believer is compelled to see all other human beings as creatures worthy of the greatest regard.

NOVEMBER 10

Islamic Character

In chapter 38 of the Quran, the prophet David is thus addressed by God: "Rule with justice among men and do not yield to lust (intense desire), lest it should turn you away from God's path." (38: 26)

God has laid down a straight path of virtue for man and then implanted the sense of this in human nature. If man were to trust his instincts and follow this silent guidance, he would never become a prey to deviation. He would unerringly follow this straight thoroughfare of life, until he reached his final destination.

There is only one thing which leads man astray from this path of divine guidance, and that is his own unquenchable desire. Lust causes man to waver at every turn in life; the wise man is one who does not allow himself to be swayed by its influence. One who succumbs to his own desires will necessarily fall by the wayside, his ultimate fate being abasement and destruction.

Human desires lead man astray in many ways. At times they lure him away from the deeper realities of life towards the false glitter of the world. At times momentary gain leads him far afield from the path of permanent gain. At times, man allows himself to be provoked by matters of sheer prejudice and, giving no forethought to the outcome, involves himself in such confrontations as lead to serious hostilities. In the end, it is he himself who suffers the maximum losses.

To lead a successful life, man must keep his negative urges under control, rather than be controlled by them, for his own insatiability is his greatest enemy. The better way of life, as opposed to one guided

by desire, is that based on a sound code of ethics. Far from falling a victim to his baser self, man should conform to a set of high human principles. He should be governed in thought, word and deed not by the mere urge to pursue selfish aims, but by a deep and innate scrupulosity.

NOVEMBER 11

Two Models

The Prophet of Islam once observed that whenever he presented Islam to anyone, he was always conscious of some hesitation or the other on the part of his hearer. But the case of Abu Bakr was an exception to this rule. When the message of Islam was conveyed to him, he accepted it without expressing any doubt or hesitation. (*Hayat As Sahaba*, 1/68). It was because of this attribute of Abu Bakr that he came to be called As Siddique, the true friend. The example he set during the early phase of Islam was a very fine one.

Another such example is found in the life of Umar Farooq, the second Caliph. It is generally known, that, in the beginning, Umar Farooq was an inveterate opponent of Islam. But then, purely as a matter of chance, he perused a part of the Quran. He thereupon took the firm decision to change his attitude and wholeheartedly accepted Islam.

These are two types of models which give us clear guidelines as to what our behaviour should be. In any such instance, an individual should be either of the first or of the second type. No third type is desirable when it comes to acceptance of the truth.

On the pattern of the first type, sober contemplation and profound thinking should make a man's mind so mature that he is able, quite independently, to grasp realities. Intellectually, he should be able to develop the capacity to penetrate any veil of doubts or misgivings and—without entangling himself in irrelevant

controversies—see things in their real shape, just as they are. This would demonstrate the highest degree of intellectual maturity, the ultimate example of this being Abu Bakr.

Inspired by the second example, the individual should be entirely free of prejudice. He should be free, too, of any complex which would prevent him from realizing his shortcomings when they are pointed out to him, or which would make him hesitate to admit his mistakes. In this, he should follow another example set by Umar Farooq. During his reign as Caliph, it happened several times that he made ill-considered decisions, but when his errors were pointed out to him, he admitted his mistakes without the slightest reluctance. So profound were his feelings about having made wrong judgements and so deep was his appreciation of having been corrected, that such words would come to his lips: “Had such and such a person not been here, Umar would have been destroyed.”

NOVEMBER 12

In the Light of Experience

It is your Lord who propels your ships across the sea so that you may seek His bounty. He is indeed Merciful towards you.

When at sea a misfortune befalls you, all but He of those to whom you pray forsake you; yet when He brings you safe to dry land, you turn your backs upon Him. Truly, man is ever thankless (17:66-67).

This world is functioning in consonance with particular laws set forth by God Himself. That is what makes it possible for man to travel over the water, in the air and on the earth. This was so ordained that man might recognize the blessings of God and be His thankful servant. Regrettably, whatever man sees happening to him

and around him, is considered by him to be all a matter of cause and effect. All the events that stem from the munificence of the Creator, are taken as happening on their own. These engender neither feelings of gratefulness to God nor the realisation of His might.

The realisation of God is deeply embedded within man's own nature, but rises to the surface only in times of great calamity, in the face of which he feels himself helpless. For instance, when a tempest overtakes his ships on some vast ocean, all artificial veils are removed from his vision. He recognizes the One God and starts invoking Him alone.

Man is made to undergo this temporary experience in order that he may mould his entire life accordingly, with momentary recognition turned to permanent faith. But how sad a reality it is that he is reminded of God only on such occasions as being engulfed in tempests. It is even sadder that he becomes oblivious of his Saviour as soon as he is delivered from the storm.

Accepting the uniqueness of God's divine nature is *tawheed* (monotheism); refusal to accept it is *shirk* (paganism, polytheism and idolatry). The reality respectively of *tawheed* and *shirk* are recognition and non-recognition of the oneness of the godhead.

NOVEMBER 13

Neighbours

Neighbours are our nearest companions. After family members, it is neighbours one comes in contact with. Developing good relations with neighbours is therefore an important aspect of a God-oriented life.

A neighbour, be he a co-religionist or an adherent of another religion, be he of one's own community or of another, must always be taken good care of. He must be given his dues at all events, according to the demands of the *shariah* and of humanity.

According to a *hadith*, the Prophet of Islam observed, “By God, anyone who is a threat to his neighbour is no believer.”

According to this *hadith*, if a Muslim becomes a source of trouble to his neighbours, his faith itself will become suspect.

The humanity of a person and the first criterion of his religiosity and spirituality are tested by the way he behaves towards his neighbours. The relationship with a neighbour serves as a test of whether a person has human feelings or not, and whether he is sensitive to Islamic teachings or not.

If a person’s neighbours are happy with him, that is a proof of his being a good man, but if his neighbours are unhappy with him, that is a proof that his behaviour leaves much to be desired.

The commands in the *shariah* regarding neighbours indicate that a believer must make concessions to his neighbours unilaterally. That is, by doing good to them even if they are ill-behaved towards him.

Being a good neighbour is the first step towards becoming a good human being. It is the good neighbour who will find a share in God’s blessings in the Hereafter.

NOVEMBER 14

The Way of Gentleness

After adopting the teachings of Islam, the attitude formed in the believer is that of gentleness. In Islam he discovers the reality that God is great (*Allahu Akbar*). This discovery brings to him the realisation that greatness belongs to God alone; it does not belong to him or to anyone else. As a result, modesty, humility and tolerance are engendered within him. Having a temperament marked by such virtues, in particular, tolerance to the maximum degree is a necessary condition for adherence to the path of gentle behaviour. In this present world we are repeatedly faced with unpleasant experiences as a result of the wrong thinking and misdeeds of others. Hence

only those can firmly tread the path of gentleness who are able to refrain from the psychology of reaction. That is why true believers are described in the Quran as “those who curb their anger and those who forgive their fellow men” (3:134).

According to a tradition recorded by Bukhari and Muslim, the Prophet once observed: “God is gentle and loves gentleness in every matter.” On another occasion, the Prophet expressed the same idea in these words: “God is gentle and loves gentleness. He grants to gentleness what he does not grant to harshness or to any other thing.” Similarly there is another *hadith* to this effect: “One who is bereft of gentleness will be bereft of all goodness” (*Sahih*, Muslim).

In a contentious situation, if you treat people with haughtiness, you will awaken their egos, which will only escalate matters. If earlier you were confronted with bitter words, you will now be compelled to bear the brunt of stones being hurled at you. If instead, you opt for gentle behaviour in your dealings, you will awaken peoples’ consciences. Now the result will be quite the opposite. If earlier the person concerned was your opponent, he will now lose all his antagonism and will become your closest friend. Gentleness is an attribute of successful people, while haughtiness signals imminent failure.

NOVEMBER 15

Need for Flexibility

A man came into a shop, intent on buying some cloth. Choosing a suitable piece was no problem, but fixing a price was, for in Eastern countries one usually has to bargain before buying anything. This time, the bargaining was tough. Neither the shopkeeper, nor the customer, was willing to budge from his original price. Finally, after holding out adamantly for half-an-hour, it was the shopkeeper who gave in, coming right down to the customer’s price, thus clinching the deal.

A friend of the shopkeeper's was in the shop at the time. After the customer had left he asked, "Why waste so much time over the price, when you were ready to give it at the customer's price all along?" "You missed the point," the shopkeeper replied. "That was my way of clinching the deal. Why, if I had agreed to the customer's price straightway, he would have thought—'Oh, I might be able to get the cloth even cheaper somewhere else'—and gone off. Anyway, I wanted to know how far he was willing to go. When I realized that he was not willing to budge even an inch I saw that I was the one who would have to budge. So I sold him the cloth at his price."

So it is with any contest in life. Quite naturally, each party wishes to settle the matter to his own satisfaction. It is only sensible, then, for him to press his demands. But, at the same time, common sense requires him to know what his limits are, i.e. how far he can go without losing anything himself—or sending his customer away dissatisfied. Here we have a basic principle of life. It can be put in one word—adjustment. Adjustability is the key to success in life, both for individuals and for nations.

We can define adjustability as taking into account the needs of others besides one's own. In this world, success comes the way of one who is able to see both sides of a picture, to look at matters from another's point of view as well as from his own. Those who only know what they want, and go all out to achieve it irrespective of others' needs, will find their path through life strewn with obstacles and pitfalls, and it will be little wonder if they come to grief.

NOVEMBER 16

Good Actions

We have enjoined man to show kindness to his parents. With much pain his mother bears him, and with much pain she brings him into the world. He is born and weaned in thirty months. When he grows to manhood and attains his fortieth year, let him say: 'Inspire me, Lord, to give thanks for the favours You have bestowed on me and on my parents, and to do good works that will please You. Grant me good descendants. To You I turn and to You I surrender myself.'

Such are those from whom We will accept their noblest works and whose misdeeds We shall overlook. (We shall include them) among the people of Paradise: true is the promise that has been given them (46:15-16).

A new human generation comes into existence with each child born of a man and a woman. This child, cared for and nourished by its parents, grows up to be a fully-rounded human being. This is a system devised by nature for the nurturing of human life. Its purpose is to inculcate in man a proper sense of rights and duties; to produce such feelings within man as will make him grateful to his benefactors and pay homage to them. This feeling tells man, on the one hand, to fulfill his obligations to those who have helped him to grow up and, on the other, to pay the far greater dues to his Creator and Sustainer.

Those who learn such lessons from nature as make them thoroughly aware of what is due to their parents and to God and act accordingly, are the people who will be deserving of God's eternal blessings in the life to come.

Home serves as the first training ground for man and this training, which starts with the parents, later extends to the whole of society. If man fully accepts such training from the outset, he will be morally equipped not only to give human beings their due, but also to render to God what he owes Him in the vaster sense.

NOVEMBER 17

Pillars of Islam

According to Abdullah Bin Umar, the Messenger of Allah said: **A**The foundation of Islam has been laid on five principles; to bear witness that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad ﷺ is His prophet; to offer prayer (*Namaz*); to give alms (*Zakat*); to perform Hajj and to keep fast during Ramzan.

According to this *Hadith*, these five principles form the pillars of Islam. As a mansion stands on pillars so does Islamic faith on these tenets. Outwardly these five principles are names given to certain practices, like, to express the words accepting the oneness of God and the prophethood of Muhammad ﷺ, to go through the rituals of the prayers (*Namaz*), to give the prescribed amount of alms (*Zakat*), to perform the Hajj and to observe the fast of Ramzan. But the manifestation of these rituals is not the sole aim, it is the spirit behind them which is the real aim. Outward manifestation is just one part of the truth, the best way to observe these rituals is in the real spirit in which they are to be observed.

The same principle applies to the other things in this world as well. Take the telephone for instance. As everyone knows, the telephone has a definite physical form. But the form itself is not what is expected of a telephone. Just the physical form is useless. Telephone is meant for establishing contact. When you say that you have a telephone it does not imply that you have the shell of a telephone. What it really means is that you have an instrument through which you can establish contact anywhere in the world and talk to distant people.

The same thing applies to the five principles of Islam. These principles are principles of Islam only as long as their manifestation and spirit are interwoven. Without the spirit, the form is as good as its not being there at all.

The spirit of Faith. This is the first pillar of Islam. For its manifestation one is required to utter his faith in oneness of God and the prophethood of Muhammad. But its spirit lies in its acceptance. Through this article of faith a man accepts God and all His attributes. He also accepts that God has sent Muhammad ﷺ to this world as the eternal guide for all the mankind. If this reality reaches one's heart, it becomes a part of his being. His heart opens to the truth and reality. He is transformed into a man who will overcome any obstacle to reach the truth.

The spirit of Salah. Its manifestation is the daily five times prayers but the spirit is humility. A man performing the salah bows before his Creator and thereby creates a sense of humility within himself. A man who is fired by this spirit, will be devoid of pride and ego. He will develop a quality of humility and will be far removed from false sense of pride and importance.

The spirit of Zakat. Its manifestation is giving a fixed amount in alms annually, but the spirit behind is the service of mankind. A man who gives alms will develop a zeal in himself to do good to the others. He would like to live a life which is most useful to the others.

The spirit of Hajj. Its manifestation is the annual pilgrimage. But its spirit is its unity and solidarity. A man, who performs the Hajj in its real spirit, will do away with the feelings of opposition. He will live in unity and harmony even in the face of provocation.

The spirit of Fasting. Its manifestation is fasting in the month of Ramzan. But the spirit is to endure. A man who keeps fast will soon learn to tolerate even unpleasant situations. He will ignore what may be objectionable and concentrate on positive aspects of the matter.

Those who adhere to these five pillars of Islam only to the extent of their manifestations, will find that their lives are devoid of the spirit of these pillars.

For example they will repeat the words accepting the oneness of God and the prophethood of Muhammad, but beyond these words

when they are confronted with truth, they will not accept it, because they have not understood the spirit of what they repeat. They will go through the ritual of prayer (Namaz) but once outside the mosque they will not be able to display the humility in their interaction with others. The reason for this is that they have not imbibed the spirit of Namaz.

Likewise those who take out a fixed amount as alms (Zakat), will not show any compassion while dealing with others, because the spirit of Zakat is missing. They will go for Hajj, perform the rituals and come back. But they will not be ready to ignore the complaints of the others and forge a unity because the true spirit of Hajj has not touched them. During the month of Ramzan, they will keep the ritual fast. But when they are required to show patience, they will be found lacking. They will be easily provoked. The reason for this is that they have not understood the spirit behind the fasting.

Anyone who has adhered to the five pillars of Islam is a Faithful and a Muslim. He has made himself entitled to God's bounty, in this world as well as in the world hereafter. But the five pillars of Islam have to be accepted in their manifestations and spirits. The rewards which have been promised are for their complete and not partial adherence.

NOVEMBER 18

After Rising from Sleep in the Morning

Islam teaches us that when a man rises from sleep early in the morning, he should first of all thank God for having given him sound sleep and making the sun rise so that he may perform his life's duties in the sunlight.

The next thing a believer must do in the morning is to perform his ablutions (*wudu*) or if possible take a bath in order to cleanse

himself, and then say the fajr prayer, the first prayer of the day. After this prayer he should engage himself in other daily activities, keeping the teaching's of Islam before him at all times. Instead of being led by his desires, he should follow God's commands.

Assalamu Alaikum

Islam teaches Muslims to greet their brothers when they meet them, by saying Assalamu alaikum that is, peace be upon you. According to the Islamic code of behaviour, when a Muslim meets another Muslim brother, he should greet him with these words 'may peace be upon him or you' and the other person must say in return, 'And peace be upon you too'.

This greeting is a form of prayer. A believer is the well-wisher of other believers. He has good feelings in his heart for others. He even keeps praying for them in his hours of privacy. As such, on meeting them, this inner feeling of well-wishing finds expression in the form of these words of greeting: Peace be upon you.

The phrase 'Assalamu Alaikum' is an expression of the kind of life that an individual ought to lead in society. Everyone must live in this world as the well-wisher of others, desiring peace and security for all. By greeting others with this phrase, one introduces oneself as a well-wisher, one from whom no harm may be expected. This greeting truly symbolizes an attitude of peace and goodwill towards all human beings.

The greeting 'Assalamu Alaikum' is not a mere ritual repetition of a salutation. It is, in fact, a sacred covenant by which one leads a principled life. Its utterance is an indication that the speaker would observe the spirit of this phrase—the spirit of peace and goodwill towards all.

Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem

Islam teaches us to begin all work in the name of God, the most merciful, the most beneficent. According to the Prophet of Islam, any task which has not been started by taking the name of God is not well founded.

This phrase reminds man that the world which is his centre of activity, was created by a God who is helpful to man by being all-

merciful and all-compassionate etc. Therefore, we must begin our work by remembering God and seeking His help.

When a man has found God, he becomes immersed in His greatness. He knows that all power belongs to God, and that it is God alone who can give and take away. Reciting the phrase, “In the name of God, the most merciful the most beneficent” is, in actual fact, an expression of this feeling of the believer. It is an acknowledgment of God’s godhead. It is remembrance of God in one’s inner most being. It is a way of seeking the help of God, the Almighty.

The man who starts work without taking the name of God acts safely on the basis of his own strength, whereas one who begins his work after taking the name of God has the support of the Almighty’s power. Where the former has no certainty of reaching his goal the latter is like a passenger travelling steadily along the right path and that one day he will definitely reach his destination.

God is the greatest reality of the universe. After having realized this reality, man gives expression to it in verbal form by using this phrase.

NOVEMBER 19

Cleanliness in Islam

Islam, as we learn from the Quran and *Hadith*, is a religion of nature. Islam and nature being indeed each other’s counterparts. Nature loves cleanliness and abhors pollution: that is why this highly desirable feature of human existence—cleanliness—is one of the basic tenets of the Islamic faith.

What is the nature of that faith? It is to lead a life in total consonance with the will of God. And such a life can have its beginnings only in a condition of exemplary personal hygiene. According to a *hadith*, the keeping of oneself clean is one half of faith; this indicates the amount of emphasis laid upon hygiene in Islamic practice. The cleanliness

factor is thus a major segment of the very essence of Islam.

This is clearly in evidence at the appointed times of worship—the most sublime form of worship being *salat* (namaz) which is engaged in five times a day. Each time the hour of prayer arrives the first thing the good Muslim must do is perform his ablution. Ablution (wudu) entails the washing of all the exposed parts of the body. As a cleansing process, wudu is the equivalent of a half bath. In this way, the devout Muslim takes a half bath five times daily.

In the first phase of Islam, it was common practice for Muslims to take a bath daily before the fajr (dawn) prayers. Bathing thus became a regular daily feature of every Muslim's life. The servant of Uthman, the third Caliph, tells of how the Caliph used unflinchingly to take a bath once or twice daily. If Muslims have always attached great importance to cleanliness, it is because of the explicit commands on this subject in the Quran. When the Quran began to be revealed, one of its signal injunctions was: "Cleanse your garments and keep away from all pollution," (74:4).

The cleanliness of clothes is a necessary concomitant of the purity of the body. Without that, the body is not one hundred per cent clean. Indeed, as much stress is laid on cleanliness as on the avoidance of wearing showy apparel. In Islam, the devotee is required, ideally to worship in clothes which are simple, and above all, clean.

In the realm of spiritual development, one of the principal elements is purification through penitence. As the Quran says; "God loves those who turn to Him in repentance and purify themselves" (2:222). Just as repentance frees body and soul of worldly moral dross, so does water remove impurities from body and clothing. Islam, accordingly, exhorts every Muslim, on the one hand, to keep his clothes and body clean with water and, on the other to turn in remembrance to God, thus purifying his soul.

The Mosque, the focal point of Islamic life, is called in a *hadith* the "home of the pious people." As the Quran puts it: "There you shall find men who would keep pure. God loves those who purify themselves" (9:108). We are asked, therefore, to clean the mosque, ridding it of noise and dust, just as Abraham and Ishmael have enjoined "to cleanse Our House (the Kabah) for those who

walk around it, who meditate in it, and who kneel and prostrate themselves,” (2:125).

Following the examples of the sanitizing of the mosque, Muslims are urged to keep their bodies pure by ablution and bathing, their clothes clean by regular washing and their houses and their surroundings spotless. These practices are incumbent upon every Muslim.

According to a *hadith*, the Prophet Muhammad said, “God is pure and loves purity,” which means that cleanliness and purity are on the highest scale of cardinal virtues. What God loves is undoubtedly of supreme value. Every Muslim must, in consequence, lead a life marked by its cleanliness and purity in order to earn the approval of his Creator.

NOVEMBER 20

Fight the Forces of Evil with Love

In situations of adversity, head-on confrontation, as a means of eliminating opposition, is frequently resorted to. As a negative reaction, it is almost always counterproductive. Experience shows, oftener than not, that the better way is to take positive action. That is, to return good for evil.

This argument is borne out by the history of the Indian minorities. Subsequent to 1947, for certain reasons, the majority community bore a grudge against the Muslim minority, which culminated in serious communal conflict. The first instance—in a residual climate of post-Partition agitation—occurred in a North Indian city. Members of the majority community, participants in a religious procession, began shouting, Mulla, jao Pakistan! (Muslims, go back to Pakistan!) as they approached a mosque in a Muslim locality. A group of Muslim

youths retaliated. The result? Bloody riots, the loss of precious lives and damage to crores worth of property.

Hordes of leaders then poured into the affected area, gathered Muslims together and made such fiery speeches against the majority community as convinced their hearers that they had been genuinely justified in their hot-headed reaction to the slogans. This conviction then launched them on a course which only triggered countless clashes between Hindus and Muslims. It was a chain reaction to which there seemed to be no end. Ironically, the Muslims themselves—being the weaker group—were the greatest losers. Perhaps the greater irony was that the leaders remained personally unaffected by the riots, and, wasted no time in making political capital out of them to form vote banks. Subsequently, they missed no opportunity to collect huge funds in the name of “relief.”

After making an in-depth study of this issue, I have concluded that the riots should be treated not as a communal evil, but as a human problem, and ways and means should be found to solve it peacefully. The Hindus should not, in fact, be regarded as adversaries, but as fellow countrymen. Once seen in this light, the problem ought then to be solvable in a well-reasoned and peaceable manner. Two rules, Muslims should observe is to refrain from interfering with Hindu processions and to stifle their reactions to provocative slogans.

In a similar situation, identical advice was given to Muslims in the Quran in Islam’s early stages: “Repel evil with good and he between whom and you was enmity will become your dearest friend.” (Quran, 41:35).

Through the media and at public meetings, I have continuously campaigned against unreason and violence and in favour of constructive action. Like any initiative of this sort, it took time to bear fruit. But, finally, by 1993, Muslim attitudes began to change, and now, by the grace of God, there has been a nation-wide adoption of a non-confrontational approach. The Muslims’ immediate gain is the almost total cessation of riots. Attitudes will no doubt change even further with their heightened awareness of the need for a better education and more concerted efforts to establish themselves in all constructive fields.

Example of Christian Community

By the end of 1998, albeit for different reasons, the Christian community were subjected to violence in several states. One of the most deplorable incidents was the burning alive by Hindu extremists of a Christian missionary, Graham Stewart Staines, and his sons in the village of Manoharpur in Orissa in January 99. His widow, Gladys Staines, evinced the true Christian spirit when, in response to this horrendous tragedy, she said. “May God forgive the killers. May God touch and liberate their hearts through love.”

But those who are advising the Christians to take the course of confrontation have nothing to do with the true Christian spirit. Urging the Christians to fight the forces of evil is, to my way of thinking, not only against reason, but also against the teachings of Christianity. It would be nothing short of telling them to commit suicide. Communities should lead, not mislead.

I would like to stress that the advice to enter into confrontation is reactionary and quite contrary to the message of Christ. Christ and his followers were faced with a far severer kind of persecution. Then what was the key to success given by Christ? According to the New Testament, Christ’s guidance took the shape of a three-point formula:

- Render to Caesar what is due to Caesar and render to God what is due to God—that is, follow the policy of avoidance of those who are in power instead of pursuing the policy of confrontation with them, and concentrate your efforts on non-political spheres.

- One who seeks your shirt, let him have your cloak also—that is, whenever faced with any form of conflict, do not insist on a bilateral solution. That is, put an end to the conflict unilaterally, at the very outset.

- Love your enemy— that is, take your enemy as your potential friend. The response of the believers should not be that of dividing people into two dichotomous groups—friends and enemies. They should not regard hostility to be a permanent state of affairs and then start on a collision course bred out of hatred. Rather by means of good, positive behaviour, all efforts should be made to turn the enemy into one’s friend. Thus Christ enjoined his followers to love the enemy, that is, to turn your enemy into your friend through the demonstration

of love. The two-thousand year old history of the Christians tells us that whenever they have found success, it was not achieved by fighting against evil, but by following the above teachings of Christ.

For instance, in its early days in Palestine, there was formidable opposition to Christianity by the Jewish community, leading to an exodus of Christians to surrounding countries. If Christianity then began spreading there, it was not because the Christians launched violent campaigns against the Jews, but because, in their new homelands, they practised love and service to the people.

Later, persecuted by Rome, they did not fight back, but bore with injustice patiently, while never ceasing to spread the message of love. The Roman emperor himself was led to embrace Christianity in 337 A.D. Thereafter, Christianity spread all over Europe. Formerly a local cult, it now became an international religion.

Conversely, when the Christians chose to diverge from their principles—in the 200 year long Crusades—their efforts came to naught with their ultimate defeat by the Muslims. However, with the end of the Crusades came a change of heart and a reversal of policy. Now groups of Christians devoted themselves to reviving the true spirit of Christianity. Other groups made forays into the peaceful field of scientific research. Books in Arabic and other languages were translated on a large scale into European languages, making a major contribution to the Renaissance. The Christian nations of Europe may have suffered defeat in war, but in the field of knowledge and spirituality they emerged victorious, ushering in a new era in history known as the age of scientific revolution.

In conclusion, my advice to both Christians and Muslims is to be creative and constructive, practising love rather than hatred. In that way, in the eyes of the nation, they will become assets rather than liabilities.

NOVEMBER 21

An Earthquake

When the earth is rocked in her last convulsion; when the earth shakes off its burdens and man asks ‘What may this mean?’—on that day it will proclaim its tidings, for your Lord will have inspired it.

On that day mankind will come in scattered groups to be shown their labours. Whoever does an atom’s weight of good shall see it, and whoever does an atom’s weight of evil shall see it also (99:1-8).

The earthquake on Doomsday will be a proclamation of the termination of the period of trial. This will mean that the freedom which people had been allotted for the purpose of their being tested has been taken away from them. Then the time will have come for people to receive their just deserts. Today the world of God appears to be silent. But when circumstances change, everything will be given the power of speech. Present-day inventions and discoveries have proved that even lifeless objects have the power of “speech.” Studio performances can be fully replayed by recording sets. Similarly, the present world is as if a huge divine studio. Whatever man does or says is being preserved at every moment. And when the time comes, the story of everyone will be repeated by this world in such a way that neither great nor small sayings and doings will escape God’s attention.

For the observance of proper behaviour in this world, man requires only one thing. It should be firmly embedded in his mind that he is under divine surveillance at every moment. The deeds of his entire life will be presented in the court of God. Be these great or small, done secretly or publicly, everything will be there on record.

If man is fully convinced of this reality, he will be shaken completely even before the shaking of the world. Before the all-encompassing

earthquake of Doomsday he will experience an earthquake in his own soul which will change him completely. As a result, he will become his own keeper. He will adopt a disciplined life instead of a life of license. He will use his powers as guided by the command of God instead of acting independently.

NOVEMBER 22

After Death

By the snorting war steeds, which strike fire with their hoofs, as they gallop to the raid at dawn, and with a trait of dust, split apart a massed army; man is ungrateful to his Lord! To this he himself shall bear witness.

And truly on account of his love of wealth he is niggardly. Is he not aware that when the dead are thrown out from their graves and men's hidden thoughts are laid open, their Lord will on that day have full knowledge of them all? (100:1-11).

The horse is an extremely faithful animal. It sacrifices itself to the uttermost for its master, even at the cost of its life.

It expresses symbolically what man should be like, i.e. that he should have faith in his Lord, just as the horse trusts its master. But in practice this does not happen.

In this world an animal is grateful to its master, but man is not grateful to his Lord. Here an animal recognizes its dues to its master, but man does not do so in regard to his Lord. Here an animal is engaged devotedly in serving its master. But this is not the case with man.

Man values only that animal which is faithful to him. Then how can he fail to understand that only those will have value and importance in the eyes of God (in the Hereafter) who have proved themselves His faithful servants? It is a sad fact that love of money turns people blind, so that they fail to understand a reality already experienced in their immediate surroundings.

This state of affairs is not going to last. Death must come, reminding man that he is totally in the grip of God. Death, in actual fact, is an entrance to the next world of reckoning. There man has to appear before a divine court, where no human act is hidden from the divine eye.

NOVEMBER 23

Man's Quest

Much as we long for a perfect world, we are compelled to live in an imperfect one. Our happiness is always short-lived and our every success is, in some way, eventually a failure. The aspirations that we cherish in the early days of our lives are shattered as we begin to age. Just as we begin to take root on earth, disaster, old age and death overtake us.

How enchanting the flowers are, but they blossom only to wither. How delicate the sun's radiance, but it shines for only a short while before being covered in darkness. Miraculous though man's existence is, no miracle can save him from death. Everything in this world shall perish. Although this world is inexpressibly beautiful and meaningful, all its virtues are bound to fade. All mundane things have a dark side to them. How, one may ask, could a God who is Himself perfect, be satisfied with the creation of an intrinsically imperfect world? The absolute cannot abide in the non-absolute. This world must be inconclusive. Another world must follow to compensate for the inadequacies of the present one.

There is no doubt about the transitory nature of this world. It came into existence at a specific time some twenty million years ago. Its Creator must have existed eternally, for only an infinite Creator could have fashioned a finite world. If God had not always existed, then this transitory world could never have come into being. The very existence of an ephemeral universe shows that there must be an

eternal Creator. If the Creator had not existed eternally, He could never have existed at all and, if there had been no Creator, there would have been no creation either.

If we assert that the world was created on a certain date, then this means that there must have been a Creator before that date. If we go on to assert that this Creator was Himself created on some previous date, however, then our claim can have no meaning. The Creator cannot himself have been created; He always was. In His infiniteness He has created a finite world. His existence, and that of all mortal creatures, is dependent upon His immortality.

Since God is immortal, He must also be absolute, for absoluteness is the greatest attribute of immortality. The one cannot be found without the other.

This world is a manifestation of God's attributes, but its shortcomings and limitations show the manifestation to be incomplete. A complete manifestation of a perfect and infinite God would itself be perfect and infinite. Another world must be awaiting us. This incomplete manifestation of God's attributes requires a sequel for its fulfillment.

Paradise is that eternal world of God in which His attributes will appear in all their perfection. It will be free of all the defects we experience in the world about us. Paradise is evidence of God's absolute power to make beauty perpetual and joy boundless in a world of everlasting peace and contentment.

Everyone is seeking some unseen fulfillment. Everyone seeks a perfect world, but this has always eluded man. Yet it is quite natural that he should continue to strive, for the universe in which he lives testifies to the existence of one, infinite God. The emergence of a world of infinite blessings is just as likely as the existence of the present transitional world. How can an inherently infinite Creator be satisfied with a finite manifestation of His attributes? God, Who created all things from naught, can surely endow creation with perpetuity. This second creation is no more difficult than the first.

Immortality is God's unique quality, in which He has no partner. Immortality signifies the highest possible perfection to which only God can attain. No one can today imagine the wonderful nature of

that paradise which is a manifestation of God's immortality: that beauty which will never fade; that joy which will never end; that life, the continuity of which will never be interrupted; that world where all our hopes and desires will be fulfilled. No one will wish to part for even a moment from this wondrously delightful paradise, no matter how many millions of years have passed.

Man is always searching for a world of everlasting content. This quest is quite correct and in accordance with human nature; but our dreams cannot come true in this world, for here, there cannot be an eternally perfect order. The resources needed for such a world are lacking. The Prophet taught that God has made this world one of trial and tribulation, not one of reward and retribution. The world is full of things which put man to the test, whereas the factors required for a life of everlasting delight and repose will be forthcoming only in the next world. Death divides these two worlds. Death marks the completion of the trial of man and his entrance into the world of eternity.

If one wishes one's dreams to come true, one should not try to construct a heaven on earth. One should rather try to succeed in the trial of life, accepting the role of God's true servant, adopting the life pattern of the Prophet and restricting one's freedom to the limits which God has laid down. The dreams of those who succeed in the trial of life will be fulfilled in the next world. Those who fail will find nothing but woe awaiting them there.

NOVEMBER 24

Working Together

One particular quality of true believers has been pinpointed in the Quran. It is that when they are with the Prophet—or in other words the person responsible for Muslims' affairs—"on a matter requiring collective action, they do not depart until they have asked

for his leave...” (Quran, 24:62). Here collective action means any activity involving a group of people working together. And the “asking of leave” is indicative of the wider spirit in which the work is done—a spirit of deep commitment, like the commitment one feels to some personal work.

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

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

NOVEMBER 25

Working on the Individual

A man was riding his bicycle one day when all of a sudden his brake jammed. Luckily there was a cycle repair-shop nearby, so he took his bike there to have it fixed. Thinking that the mechanic would fix the brake at the point where it was jammed, the cyclist was surprised to see him tap away with a small hammer at a completely different place. Before he was able to express his surprise, however, the mechanic handed the bike over. "That's fixed it. You can take it away now," he said. And off the cyclist rode, with his bike once again running smoothly.

What was true of this bicycle is true also of human society. When there is something wrong with society, people usually jump to the conclusion that where the malaise lies, there also lies the cure. But this is not case. Usually the root of the malaise lies in a different place, far away from the symptoms. Until the cause is removed, the malaise itself will not go away.

For instance, there might be a lack of solidarity in society, or one's people may be the victims of oppression. Maybe society is beset with an atmosphere of intrigue, with the result that its voice carries no weight in the world. Detecting these symptoms, one who determines to right the ills of society might well think that the cure lies in calling meeting and conventions in order to bring people together, feeding them emotional speeches and passing high-sounding resolutions, and so on.

But this is not the way to cure the actual ills of society. To do so, one has to work on the cause, not the symptoms, for usually one will find that while a problem seems to be afflicting one part of society, the cure lies elsewhere. If there is a lack of solidarity, for instance, the reason for this is the failure of individuals to stand together. It is the individual, then, who has to be worked on. Solidarity has to be achieved at an individual level before it can come about in society.

For it is a law of nature, which applies to human society as well, that for a tree to bear good fruit, it is the seed, not the fruit, that has to be improved.

NOVEMBER 26

Idleness

The second Caliph, Umer ibn Khattab, often used to express his sense of disillusionment about people he had come to like, when, on further acquaintance with them he discovered them to be idle. “On learning that he does not work, he appears to me of no value (he has debased himself in my eyes).”

Whichever way you look at idleness, there is no gainsaying the fact that it is a great evil, causing one to fritter away one’s best talents and leaving one unqualified to face life. A student who is too lazy to study cannot ever hope to acquire knowledge, or have his critical faculties sharpened in any way, and his failure in examinations will leave him without the ‘paper’ qualifications which is the ‘Open Sesame’ to good jobs. Without the necessary groundwork, he will find himself leading a vacant existence, simply drifting from pillar to post. Even people who have managed to qualify themselves suitably cannot afford to rest on their laurels. When the period of education is over, it is equally necessary to be consistently hard-working. Many make the excuse between the receipt of a degree and entry into a profession that they are waiting for the right job to come along. But one cannot go on waiting forever, simply idling away one’s time.

Sometimes one inadvertently slips into idle ways because there are no economic pressures in one’s life. Those who inherit legacies, or have property or investments which bring them some return are an easy prey to idleness. But this is no existence for a human being. Anyone who allows the poison of idleness to creep into his system might as well be dead.

Either one must opt for a regular job, which brings one a suitable income and keeps one mentally healthy, so that one never becomes a financial or emotional burden on anyone else, or, if one is financially independent, one should turn one's attention to higher things, pursue noble ends, serve worthy causes and keep oneself fruitfully occupied day in and day out. A person with no sense of commitment is only living on the fringes of existence. He is out of touch with reality and will soon lapse into utter degeneracy. No really superior being has ever been found among the ranks of the idle.

As the old saying goes, the Devil finds work for idle hands.

NOVEMBER 27

The Making and Breaking of History

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

To take an example from Islamic history, in the year 6AH the Treaty of Hudaibiyah was signed between the Prophet Muhammad and the Quraysh of Makkah. At that time the Quraysh were one in thinking that the Muslims had signed their own writ of destruction, for they accepted peace on terms which were clearly favourable to the Quraysh. Yet afterwards it transpired that this apparent defeat contained the seeds of a great victory for the Muslims. The same thing has happened time and time again throughout history. In 1945, when atom bombs were dropped on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan, it seemed to the Americans as if Japan would lie in ruins for several decades to come. Yet this was not to be: now, just forty

years after the event, Japan stands at the pinnacle of her economic strength, the leading industrial power in the world.

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

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

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

NOVEMBER 28

Some Make Themselves, Others Make History

There are two types of people in this world—the self-making type and the history-making type. The aim of those who are self-making is to serve themselves, whereas history-making people seek to serve humanity as a whole.

The attention of a self-making person revolves around himself. He hovers around those areas where his own self-interest is likely to be served; where there is no profit to be gained for himself, he does not care to venture. His heart flutters with excitement when he is set to make some gain, but if there is nothing to be gained, no excitement is aroused within him. Personal gain is uppermost in his

mind; he will sacrifice everything in order to achieve it. He abides neither by promise nor by principle. Free of the influence of both moral exigencies and the needs of humanity, he can put everything aside in pursuit of his own ends. All other considerations fade into insignificance as he relentlessly seeks to fulfill his selfish desires.

A history-making person is quite different. Emerging from his own shell, he lives not for himself but for a higher purpose. What matters to him is principle, not profit. He cares not whether he himself wins or loses; what is of importance to him is that his ideal should be served. It is as if he has detached himself from his own person and pinned his flag to the needs of humanity as a whole.

In order to become a history-making person there is one thing that has to be done: one has to stop being self-making. As soon as a person effaces himself, he becomes capable of building for the future of humanity. Such a person lays personal grievances to one side. As his own self-interest and ambitions evaporate before his eyes, he shows no reaction, as if all this were not happening to him at all.

It is people such as these who are destined to forge human history. They are the ones who, of their own free will, are concerned about the rest of humanity; they have no rights to be safeguarded; they have only responsibilities, which they discharge whatever the cost to themselves.

NOVEMBER 29

Education

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

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

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

NOVEMBER 30

Per Ardua ad Astra (*Through Hardship to the Stars*)

According to an English scholar, Ian Nash, who spent eleven years in Japan making a detailed study of the language and nation, what shook the Japanese most profoundly was not upheavals in politics, but the great Kanto earthquake, which devastated the whole of the most populated eastern part of Japan on the first of September, 1923. Another terrible blow was the reduction of two of the great cities of Japan to smouldering mounds of waste by the dropping of atomic bombs. This led to the ultimate defeat of Japan in the Second World War in 1945.

One might imagine that any country which has been dealt such shattering blows would never be able to rise again from its ashes. But this is far from being true, for Japan has not only rehabilitated itself, but now figures most prominently of all on the world commercial and industrial scene. Japan has become a great hive of technological activity in spite of having launched itself on an industrial course long after Britain, Europe and America. This is all the more remarkable, considering that Japan has none of the natural resources that the older established industrial nations have, buried right there in their own soil just waiting to be extracted.

In man's life the most important thing is the will to act. Had the Japanese succumbed to a sense of loss and frustration, and frittered their energies away in futile political protest, their country would have been doomed to decline and ruination. But, as it was, they conquered any sense of victimization they might have had and set about reconstructing their national life with a will and a way. Although earthquakes had brought them death and destruction, they had also galvanized them into building their lives afresh.

In such situations of grim affliction, provided one has the will, all one's hidden potential and latent faculties are brought into play. One can think better, plan more successfully and make the greater efforts needed to bring one's plans to fruition. One who lacks the will to improve his life is just like an idling motor which is going nowhere.

Experience has shown also that complacency and a sense of comfort can be even greater vitiating factors in man's progress through life than devastation and despair. This does not mean that adversity by itself is beneficial. No! It is simply the spark which ignites the fuel of man's soul and drives him on to greater things. It is the mainspring of his initiative and the force which propels him relentlessly forward. In the face of adversity his hidden capacities come to the fore and it is possible for him to reach undreamt of heights. But first and foremost there has to be the will to do so. There has to be the will to stop wallowing in self-pity and to get up and take action.

It is not ease, but effort, not facility, but difficulty which make a man what he is.

DECEMBER 1

Voluntary Submission

We offered Our trust to the heavens, to the earth, and to the mountains, but they refused the burden, and were afraid to receive it. Man undertook to bear it, but he has proved a sinner and a fool. Allah will surely punish the hypocrites and the unbelievers, both men and women, but Allah pardons believing men and believing women. Allah is Forgiving and Merciful (33:72-73).

Man and the universe are creations of God. It is required that both of them completely surrender themselves to God. However, there is a difference in the nature of each surrender. Whereas the universe has from the outset been subjected to God's will, man is required when he reaches the age of reason to submit himself to God of his own free will.

'Trust' here relates to free will. Free will is a matter of trust because it is a gift which God has given to man temporarily in order to test whether he will put it to the best use or not. Trust, in other words, is the tacit understanding that the subservience which God exacted from the stars and the planets will be offered to Him by man of his own volition.

In this universe it is only God who is Lord and Sovereign. All other things are His subjects. It was God's will that a creature should come into being which does what God wants him to do, without any compulsion, of his own free will. This voluntary submission is so subtle a test that even the heavens, the earth, and the mountains cannot bear it. However, man, despite great apprehensions of his failing to fulfill the responsibility, accepted it. Now man in this world is the repository of one of God's trusts. He has to impose on himself what God has imposed on other objects in the universe. He has to

rigorously apply the commands of God to himself. Man is in a state of trial and the present world serves as a vast trial ground for him.

This 'trust' is an extremely delicate responsibility, for the matter of reward and punishment is based on its fulfillment. Other creatures have no freedom, therefore, in their case, this question does not arise. Man enjoys freedom. That is why his actions must be subject to divine retribution.

DECEMBER 2

Try, Try, Try Again

A young man who was employed as an ordinary worker in a Bidi factory soon learnt the entire art of the business and set up his own factory. He initially invested only Rs. 5000 in his business, but then by dint of fifteen years' hard work, his business progressively increased until it expanded into a big factory. One day, narrating his life story to his friends, he said: "Just as a young child grows into boyhood after fifteen years, so does a business. I have not reached this stage in one day. It has been a fifteen-year struggle."

In truth every piece of work is accomplished in "fifteen" years, be it of an individual or a nation, be it a business or a social service. Those who long for a recipe for instant success are, in fact, living in a fool's paradise. It is all very well to say that a hop, step and jump can take you right to your destination. But as soon as one comes face to face with reality, one realises that this is just an illusion. Glenn Cunningham, a sportsman who became champion of the one-mile race, saw the school in which he was studying go up in flames. His own experience was terrible. His feet were so badly burnt that he could not even move his legs. The doctors lost all hope of his ever walking or running. They said that only a miracle could save him. Surprisingly Glenn Cunningham's incapacity excited in him a new zeal and eagerness to walk and run. All his mental faculties

concentrated on his decision to walk. So he began to experiment with different kinds of exercises till he hit upon a novel idea. It was to drag himself along by holding on to the handle of a moving plough. When his feet could even so much as rest on the ground, he felt encouraged, and intensified his efforts. Finally, the miracle of which the doctors had so despaired, took place. The new technique was a tremendous success and, ultimately, he could not only walk, but could also run. Later he entered for a race. He set up a new record and became a champion of the

one-mile race. But this grand success was not achieved in a few days. He had to spend “fifteen years” realizing his goal. Only after a fifteen year stint had it been possible for him to become a racing champion.

In truth, no success is possible in this world without working for “fifteen years.” It is God alone who has the power to achieve instant success. But God has not created this world on the basis of instant success. Man must learn his lesson and should not fritter away his time in futile efforts. In this world of God, innumerable events are taking place, all of which are based on eternal, immutable laws. Not even a blade of grass grows here on the ground as a result of wishful thinking, not even an ant can manage to live by ignoring the realities of life. How is it possible then for man to change the divine laws? The only condition of success is continuous effort, that is, to make such unflagging efforts, as are essential to achieve the desired objectives in the world of God according to the law of God. By following the same principle we can achieve success in this world; it is the same principle which will bring us success in the next world.

DECEMBER 3

Our 'Turnkey' Civilization

In the modern, industrial world, the term 'Turnkey Project' has come to be widely used. Ready-made houses and factories are made today in which everything is provided by the seller. The buyer has only to turn the key in order to use it. The behaviour of certain Muslims of the present day suggests that they think the world is theirs for taking, that God has handed it over to them ready-made and that all they have to do is 'turn the key' and everything and everyone will be ready to do their bidding.

Little do they realize how far this is from being the true state of affairs. This world, in reality, is one of vigorous action and keen competition, and no worthwhile position can be attained without working hard on every aspect of the project in hand, and no job is well done unless carried out with scrupulous care from beginning to end. Our very right to live has to be proved by competing with others. Only when we plunge wholeheartedly into the fray, can we hope to attain the place we desire in this world of cause and effect. There is no question of just 'turning the key'.

Muslims of the present day must learn before all else that they are at the beginning of history, and not the end. Everyone knows that this is January, 1986 and that for it to be December, 1986, we shall have to wait for twelve months. The earth shall have to revolve on its axis 365 times and only then shall we come to the end of one year. This is common knowledge. But Muslims tend to overlook such obvious facts when it comes to the building of their nation. They have only just entered the first month, but they want to leap straight into the twelfth. They make no effort to lay the foundations of the homes they keep imagining, but already they want to stand on their rooftops. The very phrasing of their

speeches and writings gives the impression that they have actually attained their objectives.

We should remember, first and foremost, that we can create a nation only if its inhabitants are imbued with a sense of purpose and, to that end, we must educate our people: they must have full knowledge of both the past and the present if they are to progress towards an ideal future. We have to inculcate in them the will to work unitedly in spite of their disagreements. We have to instill in them the courage to sacrifice their personal feelings and their short-term interests for long-term ones. Only then will it be possible to fashion history anew.

DECEMBER 4

Concentration

Charles Darwin (1809-1882) one of most famous thinkers of modern times, (although the writer does not agree with his views) played a major part in the intellectual formation of modern man.

Darwin achieved this position of eminence in the modern world by dint of exceptionally hard work. *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1984) says of him:

“All his mental energy was focussed on his subject and that was why poetry, pictures and music ceased in his mature life to afford him the pleasure that they had given him in his earlier days.” (5/495).

Such intellectual concentration is vital to peak achievement in any field, be it right or wrong. Man has to be so engrossed in his work that everything else pales into insignificance beside it. Unless everything else loses its interest for him, he cannot climb to any great heights of success. If we examine the lives of the truly great, we find that they all worked in the same dedicated way.

In any task of greater or lesser complexity, there are always aspects of it which present problems which appear at first sight to be insoluble. Sometimes innumerable facts have to be marshalled which can be interpreted only with the keenest of insight. Often a mysterious, elusive factor emerges just at a point when one thinks that all questions have been answered. Such difficulties can be overcome, and such secrets unveiled only when one's total intellectual capacity is directed towards the unraveling of the mystery. Without the utmost devotion and one hundred per cent concentration, success will remain forever beyond one's grasp (125:20).

DECEMBER 5

A Final Word

A city clock-tower informs people of the correct time. People set their watches according to it. Nobody bothers about who the engineers and mechanics who constructed the clock-tower were, or where the parts that they used were produced. The fact that it keeps good time is enough to attract everybody. God's religion is much the same sort of clock-tower, constructed for man's guidance; yet people fail to look at it and find their way by it.

There can only be one reason for this; people are serious in wanting to know the time, but not the word of God. God's religion is connected with the next life, while a clock-tower is a thing of this world. The clock has an important part to play in the realization of their worldly ambitions. They recognize its importance. But they have no ambitions for the future life, and no regard for the importance of something which guides man to eternal success.

True submission to God does not mean just acknowledging His existence. It involves total attachment to Him. It is an inward state with an outward form. Discovery of God is an event of incomparable

impact which can never remain hidden. If God's truth has been revealed to someone, it will always be apparent. One so favoured will desire those around him to bear witness to the fact that he has answered the call of God, set aside the idols of worldly gain and expediency, and devoted himself entirely to God. If one claims inner faith, but does not express it, one can only be looking at faith as a convenience. Anyone who puts worldly interests before God cannot ever discover Him. Preoccupation with worldly priorities and prejudices are the very opposite of true submission to God, and two such conflicting states can never merge in one soul.

DECEMBER 6

A Shaft of Light

The owner of a transport business once found himself in weak and vulnerable position because, for technical reasons, he had once had one of his vehicles registered in the name of another person several years before, and that person still held its license. The holder-holder decided one fine day that he would take possession of the vehicle himself, and that its real owner would have to make do with a paltry sum of money in exchange. The owner naturally felt that the most dreadful injustice was being done to him and, greatly incensed, he was determined to have his revenge. Night and day he lived in a frenzy, thinking of ways and means to eliminate his enemy. Truly he wished to crush him like an insect. For six long months he lived in this state of morbid preoccupation, losing all interest in his home and his business, and becoming, finally, like the ghost of his former self. Then, one day, he had an experience which changed the course of his life. As he was pacing up and down one of the streets of the town where he lived, lost in black, vengeful fantasies, he heard the unmistakable sounds of someone making a speech before a large gathering. Curious, and for once drawn out of

himself, he approached the gathering of people and began to listen to the speaker. He was suddenly struck by what he was saying: “Think well before taking revenge, for you too shall suffer the vengeance of others.” It was as if a shaft of bright light had suddenly penetrated his mind and with each example that the speaker gave to drive home his point, he felt himself turn into a new person. He decided there and then to give up his negative way of thinking, in fact, to forget the whole sorry episode, and to devote his time and energy to his family and his business. The full realization had come to him that it was on himself that he had inflicted suffering and not on his enemy, and that it was best to leave such matters to God. In beginning to think in this way, he found that; bit by bit, he was once again able to make a constructive approach to things and it was not long before he became more successful than he had ever been. In pursuing positive ends he had also attained peace of mind, and that, for him, had been the most important thing of all.

DECEMBER 7

Narrow-Mindedness

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

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

Take, for example, the case of our Arabic *madrasahs* (schools) functioning in the Indian

sub-continent. Generally, they include a course in ancient Aristotelian logic in their syllabus. We say “logic,” or that is the name

by which this science is known, but it would be more accurate to call it “illogic”. What is taught in the name of logic has nothing to do with true logic. It is not conducive to the logical presentation of Islam vis à vis modern education.

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

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

DECEMBER 8

The Human Personality

If from a vessel containing water a single drop is found to be brackish, it means that all of the liquid is undrinkable. We need sample only of one drop to know with certainty what the rest will be like. Much the same is true of the human personality. It is like an overbrimming vessel which keeps on shedding drops for other people to savour, to find sweet or brackish as the case may be. Small instances of an individual’s behaviour and quite short interludes in his company

are generally sufficient to tell us what his overall personality is like. A thoughtless remark, an unfair maneuver, a failure to give much-needed sympathy or support, a devious transaction—all these are the plain indicators, like those brackish drops of water from the larger vessel, which indicate the lack of integrity or callousness of the person you are dealing with.

The human personality has the same homogeneity as water. A single human weakness cannot therefore be considered in isolation, as if it were an exception. It has to be looked upon as being representative of the entire personality. If an individual proves unreliable in one matter, he is likely to evince the same unreliability in other matters; if he is guilty of untrustworthiness on one occasion, the chances are that this trait will show up time and time again.

There is only one kind of person who is an exception to that rule, and that is the one who subjects his own behaviour to constant re-appraisal, who is continually scrutinizing himself for weaknesses and faults and who, once having found such faults, wastes no time in rooting them out.

A man who has made a mistake can completely erase the marks of what is an unfortunate experience for others by admitting his mistake and begging forgiveness. Some people are pricked by their consciences, but do nothing to assuage the ruffled feelings of others, thinking that to do so would be sheer weakness and would mean a loss of face. Such people can never have healthy social relationships and can never win the respect of their fellow men. They do not realize that a man displays his true mettle when he sees his own wrong actions for what they are, and humbly asks forgiveness.

It is only he who has learned the art of moral introspection who will, in the long run, prove himself a person of inviolable integrity.

DECEMBER 9

The Call to God and Unity

The Muslims' unity is their greatest strength. The best means of achieving this unity is the call towards God. The Quran says that God has chosen Muslims to promote the cause of true religion. Furthermore, the religion brought to them by the Prophet is to be conveyed by them to other communities. In this context the Quran commands them to hold fast to the rope of God and be united around the one God:

*So that His messenger may be
A witness for you, and you
Be witness for mankind.
So, attend to your prayers,
Give zakat
And hold fast to Allah;
He is your Protector—
The Best to protect
And the Best to help! (22:78)*

The emphasis on unity, while entrusting Muslims with the task of inviting other peoples to the religion of God, indicates the close link between the call to God and unity. In fact, this call or invitation leads to harmony and unity, which in turn enables Muslims to effectively perform their task.

The traditions of the Prophet also testify to the interdependence of the call to God and unity. Miswar Bin Makhrama narrates that once the Prophet came to his companions and said to them, 'God has sent me as a blessing. Convey it to people on my behalf, and do

not enter into dispute with each other as did the disciples of Jesus with him.’

The companions of the Prophet responded to this by saying: ‘O Prophet of God, we shall not differ from you on any matter. Give us your commands and send us on our assigned missions.’

By virtue of their knowledge of true religion, the companions of the Prophet fully understood the responsibilities and implications of calling people to God. They were also aware of the character that they ought to possess for discharging such a responsibility.

History tells us that a mutual bond of brotherhood and unity existed among Muslims as long as they engaged themselves in the task of inviting people to the truth. But the moment they deviated from this path, they fell a prey to unending dispute and dissension. Subsequently, they were withdrawn from their designated duty of inviting people to God because of having lost their unity—the greatest strength of a community or group in this world.

DECEMBER 10

The Great Tidings

The chapter 78 of the Quran starts with these words: About what are they asking? About the fateful tidings—the theme of their disputes. But they shall know (the truth); before long they shall know it. (78: 1-5)

By News or the Great news in this verse is meant the news of Doomsday. That is when the trumpet will be blown and Doomsday will burst upon them without prior warning. Today people are busy in this world. Everyone has his own views different from others. But with the onset of the greatest news of Doomsday all kinds of differences will cease altogether. Everyone will speak alike. A big news does engulf all the lesser news.

One small instance of this matter came before us in May 13, 1998 when Indian Government conducted five nuclear explosions in Rajasthan. These explosions were far more stronger than the atom bombs dropped in 1945 on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The moment explosions occurred they assumed the position of the greatest news for the country. The world media in which India hardly figured, was dominated with this Indian news of explosion.

For a few days it seemed as if the big news had engulfed all the small news.

This incident is a prior intimation of the advent of the Doomsday. Today everyone has his own tale to tell; none is ready to remain silent or to listen to another. But when the big news of Doomsday will be heralded, the entire state of affairs will see a transformation, having forgotten everything else they would think of one thing alone—that is, how to save themselves from the horror of Doomsday. A big news overshadows all the small news as if they had never existed at all. This fact is true not only as regards this world, it is all the more valid as regards the Hereafter.

DECEMBER 11

The Standard of Leadership

The Quran states:

“Have no fear of them, fear Me.” (5:3)

This verse of the Quran tells us expressly that the actual problem Muslims face in this world is not one of fear of human beings rather it is one of fear of God. Even if the fear appears to be coming from human beings still they must rush towards God. For the source of all matters is in the hands of God and it is He who is going to decree in favour of or in disfavour of anybody.

The statement of the Quran tells us the criterion of leadership. It is this criterion which determines as to which leadership is Islamic and which is unIslamic. The leader who tells people to fear God, who speaks in the language of low profile is the Islamic leader. It is this type of a leader whose activities harbinger good, both for the religion as well as its adherents.

Conversely the leader who warns people of dangers from human beings, who unearths human plots and incites his followers to fight against them is a *jahili* (un-Islamic) leader, for his leadership is devoid of Islamic spirits. Such leadership will not produce any good for the believers.

The believers' response to such *jahili* leaders ought to be in accordance with the Quranic injunction cited above.

Jahili leaders are here for the purposes of test, that is why they can never be wiped out from the face of the earth. The successful are those who do not come under the influence of their enticing utterances and devote themselves in constructive activities on the basis of fear of God alone.

DECEMBER 12

Moon Mission

American Astronaut, Neil Armstrong, stepped on to the moon for the first time in July, 1969. The moment he set his foot on the moon, the control mission in America received these words uttered by him :

“That’s one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind.”

Armstrong and his two colleagues were selected from amongst the top 30 astronauts of the U.S.A. He possessed to a very high degree

all those qualities which were necessary for this difficult, historic mission—extraordinary skill in flying, intelligence, strength, ability to absorb information, mental and emotional balance and the courage to accept challenges unhesitatingly. Once selected, he had to undergo rigorous training, for instance, having to remain in deep water for long periods so that he would become used to weightlessness. So that he could deal with every possible emergency, he did elaborate courses in astronomy, space flight, rocket flight, the physics of the moon, etc.—all with the help of computerized space data.

The 3100 ton Apollo 11 seemed a giant. It was as high as a 36-storey building, having 8 million parts and 91 engines installed in it. On the top was the comparatively small machine, the Columbia, in which the astronauts were seated to set off on their historic journey.

The space machine was duly blasted off, circling the earth for two and a half hours. Then its speed increased to 403 miles per minute and on reaching an altitude of 3000 miles the Columbia separated from the rest of the machines. It was so equipped that the seating space for the astronauts was only as much as in an ordinary taxi. Finally they alighted on the moon from where they gathered 46 pounds of moon-earth, leaving equipment worth 5 lakh pounds behind them. They also left their foot prints on its surface which, hopefully will remain intact for half a million years.

It was only after such highly elaborate preparations that the “small step” could be taken which was going to result in such a “giant leap” for mankind.

DECEMBER 13

Our Potential is Our Wealth

Ppsychologists have estimated that man puts to use only ten percent of the abilities with which he is born. Professor William James of

Harvard University has very aptly observed, "What we ought to be, we are not ready to be." In spite of the inborn qualities nature has endowed us with, the successes which should have been ours in this world keep eluding us for the simple reason that we quite unthinkingly consent to lead inferior lives. Then, discontented, we put the blame on others for not giving us our due. But it is inside ourselves that we should look if we are to find the reasons for life's deficiencies. Constantly viewing others with envy and a sense of grievance will lead us nowhere, and can turn us into our own worst enemies. The fact should be faced fairly and squarely that it is only if we exploit our own potential to the full that we shall meet with success. Any other course will lead to failure.

It is essential, however, to determine at the outset whether our efforts are directed at worthwhile objectives. Without proper direction our potential will be wasted.

In ancient times and even up to mediaeval times, gold being greatly prized, one of the great preoccupations of the 'scientists' of those days was to convert base metals into gold. Dreams of instant wealth drove innumerable people over the centuries to superhuman efforts. But all this expenditure of time, money and energy was in vain, for death always overtook them before they could achieve anything. It never seemed to occur to any of them that these metals with which they worked had a different and greater potential than anyone could ever have imagined. Iron, for example, was convertible, not into gold, but into machinery, and could be used as a versatile building material of great strength. In the world of today, western nations, having learnt these secrets and directed their energies towards building up the relative technology, have succeeded in acquiring far greater wealth than mere silver and gold.

DECEMBER 14

Motion and Direction

A western thinker once commented, “You have removed most of the road blocks to success when you have learnt the difference between motion and direction.”

One intrinsic quality of activity is movement. When you are walking, driving, riding a bicycle, galloping along on horseback or roaring along on a motorcycle, you are moving. But in what direction? Are you moving towards your destination, or away from it? The actual motion in both cases seems to be no different in quality. The great difference between the two is that the former brings you ever nearer to your destination, while the latter takes you further and further away from it—leading you to nowhere. It is direction that is all-important. Even if we only get on to the slow-moving bullock cart or a cycle rickshaw, we shall do better than a jet plane which has no sense of direction.

Both in our private lives and social existence, it is imperative that we take stock of our means and resources and then set off in the right direction, if, sooner or later, we are to reach our destination.

Often people launch themselves on careers, plunging headlong into them, without giving due thought to their actual capacities and to whether they have any real potential which can be developed. At times they are led astray by trivial considerations, ill-founded opinions and overwhelming emotions, and rush heedlessly into whatever first comes their way. When the result is not what they had anticipated, they fall to complaining against others, lamenting their losses and failures and claiming that it was due to the prejudices of others that they had had to suffer frustrations and that their careers had come to naught. Had they given more profound thought to the matter, they would have realised that the fault lay in their own ill-judged planning or even total aimlessness. Had they started out in the right direction,

others would not then have had the opportunity to place obstacles in their path and turn their successes into failures.

DECEMBER 15

The Life Force

A creeper growing in a courtyard once had the misfortune to have its roots and branches buried under mounds of earth and rubble when the house was undergoing repairs. Later, when the courtyard was cleaned up, the owner of the house cut away the creeper, which had been badly damaged, and even pulled out its roots so that it would not grow again. The whole courtyard was then laid with bricks and cemented over.

A few weeks later, something stirred at the place where the creeper had been rooted out. The bricks heaved upwards at one point as though something were pushing them from below. This appeared very strange, but was dismissed as being the burrowings of rats or mice. The riddle was solved when some of the bricks were removed, and it was discovered that the creeper had started growing again, although in a sadly distorted form. As it happened, not all of its roots had been pulled out, and when the time of the year came around for them to grow, life began to stir within them and they pushed their way up through the cement to the sunlight. It is one of nature's miracles that these tender leaves and buds, which can be so easily crushed to a pulp between finger and thumb, can summon up such strength as to force their way through bricks and cement.

The owner of the house then regretted having attempted to take the creeper's life. He remarked, "It is just as if it were appealing to me for the right to grow. Now I certainly won't stand in its way." And so saying, he removed some more of the bricks so that it would grow unhindered. In less than a year's time, a fifteen-foot creeper was flourishing against the courtyard wall at the exact point from which it had been so unceremoniously 'uprooted.'

A mountain, despite its great height and girth, cannot remove so much as a pebble from its flanks. But these tiny, tender buds of the tree can crack a cemented floor and sprout up through it. Whence such power? The source of its energy is the mysterious phenomenon of our world called life. Life is an astonishing, ongoing process of this universe—a force which will claim its rights in this world, and, even when uprooted, it continues to exist, albeit dormant, at one place or the other and reappears the moment it finds the opportunity. Just when people have come to the conclusion that, because there is nothing visible on the surface, life must be at an end, that is just when it rears its head from the debris.

DECEMBER 16

Hasten Slowly

A young man once came to a venerable master and asked, ‘How long will it take to reach enlightenment?’ The master said, ‘Ten years.’ The young man blurted out, ‘So long!’ The master said, ‘No, I was mistaken. It will take you twenty years.’ The young man asked, ‘Why do you keep adding to it!’ The master answered, ‘Come to think of it, in your case it will probably be 30 years.’ (Philip Kapleau, *Readers Digest*, 1983)

A goal can be achieved in the course of ten years, but you want to attain it in just ten days. This means that you want to reach your destination in leaps and bounds. But there is an old saying: “The more hurry, the less speed.”

A traveller who wants to dash straight as an arrow, without allowing time for twists and turns, will collide with many obstacles in his headlong flight. Far from reaching his destination faster, he will surely come to grief and fall by the wayside. He shall then have to retrace his steps to the starting point, heal his wounds and only then set forth again. All of this will take time, precious time—time which

should have been spent on the onward journey. Had he proceeded in a normal, unhurried way, he would have reached his destination all in good time.

Just as it is wrong to delay, it is equally wrong to be in too much of a hurry. All work can be completed in due course. To delay work is idle and irresponsible, but to do it with unseemly and unwarrantable haste is a sign of crass impatience. In the world of God, where each event has its allotted time, both extremes are doomed to failure.

DECEMBER 17

Having the Courage to Err

Two friends, Ahmed and Iqbal, both lived in the same city. Ahmed was a graduate, while Iqbal's education had not gone beyond the eighth standard. It happened once that Iqbal had to go to an office on business and was accompanied by his friend, Ahmed. When the business had been transacted, and they were both coming out of the office, Ahmed said to Iqbal, "You were speaking such horrible English! With such bad English, I would never have dared to open my mouth!" Iqbal was not the slightest bit disconcerted at being so roundly criticized. Exuding confidence, he said, "Speak wrong so that you can speak right!" Then he added, "Although you are a graduate and I have not got any degrees, you will soon find that I will start speaking in English and you will never be able to do so."

That was twenty years ago. Now Iqbal's words have come true. Ahmed is still at the stage he was at twenty years ago, but Iqbal, astonishingly, has made great progress. He now speaks English quite fluently and no one can fault him on grammar and pronunciation.

This daring attitude on the part of Iqbal certainly proved to be of great advantage to him for, at the outset of his career, he just owned a small shop in the city, whereas today, he runs a big factory.

The motto: "Speak wrong so that you can speak correct," has obviously in his case been the key to success. This principle on which Iqbal operated has a bearing not only on language but on all practical concerns in life. In the present world, the potentially successful are those who are possessed of courage, who advance fearlessly and take the initiative in the face of risks. Only those who have the courage to err will accomplish anything worthwhile in life. Those who are afraid of making mistakes will be left behind in the race of life, and their ultimate goals will recede further and further into the distance.

DECEMBER 18

The Order of Nature

Try closing your room, going away, and returning after a few weeks. What do you find on your return? A thick layer of dust all over the room. This is so unpleasant that you don't feel like sitting in the room until it has been dusted. Equally unpleasant is the dust blown in your face by a high wind, you find yourself longing for the wind to drop, so that there should be no more irritating dust.

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

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

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

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

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

DECEMBER 19

Human Potential

In the Ohio University of the U.S.A. there is a department known as the Disaster Research Centre. It was established in 1963, and has so far studied over one hundred different calamities affecting human beings on a vast scale. It was discovered that at moments of crisis, an extraordinary new potential develops in people which saves them from succumbing to disasters and their aftermath. In 1961, for example, Texas was struck by a severe coastal tempest, but less than half of the inhabitants opted to vacate the area. Over 50 percent of them had the confidence to stay on in spite of the storm warnings issued to them four days in advance. Subsequently, in 1971, a big dam

was weakened considerably following an earthquake, which seriously endangered the lives of 70,000 people, but at that very critical time only 7 percent of the population chose to leave their hearths and homes.

Such research has also revealed that the victims of such disasters still maintain high hopes for the future. The citizens of the two affected areas of Texas, having witnessed the destruction caused by horrible floods, were interviewed about what they felt were their future prospects. Surprisingly, less than ten percent expressed apprehension and misgivings. The rest of them, irrespective of the large-scale destruction, were hopeful about their future. The above-mentioned institute concluded the report of the research it had conducted on disasters by saying, "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 times of disaster." The Creator has endowed His creature, man, with extraordinary capabilities, one of which is his capacity to plan his life anew with tremendous vigour, even when threatened with total annihilation. Man can do more than compensate for his losses. The discovery of this natural, hidden potential in man serves to teach a great lesson, that is, that no individual, whether singly or as part of a group, who suffers trials and tribulations, should ever waste a moment's time in lamenting and grieving over his losses. Instead, he should press God-given capabilities into service to reconstruct his life. It is quite possible that the very circumstances in which he seemed to be heading towards complete annihilation, could serve to unfold a new and brighter phase of his existence.

DECEMBER 20

An Admonition

Do you not see how Allah sends down water from the sky which penetrates the earth and gathers in springs beneath? with it He brings forth plants of various colours. They wither, they turn yellow, and then He turns them to chaff. Surely in this there is an admonition for men of understanding.

He whose heart Allah has opened to Islam, shall receive light from his Lord. But woe to those whose hearts are hardened against the remembrance of Allah! Truly, they are in the grossest error (39:21-22).

The breathtakingly astonishing system of rains on earth, then the growth of vegetation from it, then the bringing forth of crops—all these material happenings have innumerable lessons to teach. But only those who are capable of going deeper into the subject will learn anything from them.

God has planned the external world in such a fashion that everything in it serves as a sign of the Higher Reality. Man has, moreover, been endowed with such capabilities as help him to read those signs and understand them. Now those who keep their natural faculties alive and, by availing of them, ponder over the things of the world, will unlock the doors of realisation within themselves. While those who allow the intellect to become sluggish will be unable to learn lessons from anything. They will see, but this will not be the seeing of realisation; they will hear, but this will not be the hearing of realisation.

In this present world everything that begins is heading towards its pre-destined end. For instance, a seed, once sprouted, starts its life

as a tiny plant then gradually develops into a sapling, then into a fully grown tree. The same is true of the things of this world.

This happening serves as a divine lesson for man. In this way God tells man that he is also heading from beginning to end: childhood followed by youth and old age. Afterwards death will lead us to a new and eternal existence.

DECEMBER 21

Human Will

And We enjoined man (to show kindness) to his parents, for with much pain his mother bears him, and he is not weaned before he is two years of age. We said: 'Give thanks to Me and to your parents. To Me shall all things return. But if they press you to serve besides Me deities you know nothing of, do not obey them. Be kind to them in this world, and follow the path of those who turn to Me. To Me you shall all return, and I will declare to you all that you have done' (31:14-15).

After God, a man's parents are the ones to whom he is most indebted. But where there is a clash between what his parents desire from him and God's will, he must disregard the former in favour of the latter. However, even then it is incumbent on him to continue to serve his parents.

Man's responsibility to his parents is to pay their dues, to respect them, always to speak gently to them, to fulfill their needs and to be of service to them in the fullest sense of the word.

Man's obligation to God is to thank Him from the deepest recesses of his heart. He must acknowledge the godhead of God. All his feelings and emotions must be in acknowledgement of God's blessings until at every moment he comes to remember God, his

very existence becomes an expression of God Almighty and he is overwhelmed with thoughts of God.

DECEMBER 22

Man and His Mind

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) a French philosopher and scientist once said:

By space the universe encompasses and swallows me as an atom; by thought I encompass it.

Man has been created by God with two opposing yet complementary qualities: the spiritual and the physical. On the one hand is his mind, in respect of which he finds himself limitless. He can think anything he wishes; there are simply no boundaries to his thinking.

Yet, in his physical existence, man is extremely limited. He is bound by innumerable kinds of constraints. The greatest limiting factor which man faces is death. Death nullifies all greatness in man.

This is man's severest test. In all his apparent greatness, he must acknowledge how humble is his condition. Passing from a limitless to a limited environment he must acknowledge the confines within which he lives. He must accept restrictions in an atmosphere of freedom.

Man is constantly under trial in this world. To pass all tests, we must learn his practical limitations vis à vis his intellectual limitlessness. By so doing, he can save himself from all misapprehensions, and can exercise his free will in the sphere of reality.

So far as animals are concerned, their thinking capacity barely goes beyond the immediate needs of survival. They are, in this sense, like living machines. By contrast, the area of man's thinking is vast. The greatest test of humanity is to discover a balance between thinking and action.

DECEMBER 23

Spiritual Unity

Man's greatest need today is to be shown the path of spiritual unity. There is no other way to eliminate the disharmony existing in present day society which has resulted in so many intractable problems. It is generally said that in present times, the world has assumed the form of a global village. But this is only half the truth. Modern technology and communications have, of course, greatly reduced distances across the world. But the closeness thus produced is of a purely physical nature. Modern technology may have bridged certain gaps, bringing the external world closer together, but the task of bringing unity into the internal world has yet to be accomplished.

What is spiritual unity? Let us take a very simple example. When you live in a crowded settlement, the walls all around give you a sense of limitation. You experience the friction of living in close contact with others and you suffer from mental tension. Later, when you emerge from that dense human settlement into open, natural surroundings you immediately feel that your tension has evaporated and you have once again become serene. You feel that you have joined a limitless universality. The feeling of separateness is replaced by an all-pervasive feeling of unity. You immediately become part of a world where there are no boundaries. A sense of universality prevails.

We have all had this experience at one time or another. It shows us what spiritual unity is. It is, in fact, the raising of one's existence to a higher plane. The moment you achieve this, you feel you are emerging from a limited world to become a citizen of an unlimited world. Disunity now disappears, giving way to unity all around.

Although, physically, all human beings appear to be different, spiritually they are one. It is as if spiritual unity between human beings

already exists, it does not have to be externally imposed. We have only to make people aware of its existence. Once the outer, artificial veils are removed, what remains will be pure spirituality.

In reality, the various sets of circumstances that confront man in this world lead to drawing of different veils over man's natural propensities. For instance, the veil of material greed produces

self-centredness; the veil of jealousy causes him to see himself as being separate from others; the veil of prejudice causes him to discriminate between human beings, and so on.

These veils, in fact, tend to block man's natural urge towards spiritual unity. What is required is to remove these artificial veils in order that the true, inner reality be brought into focus.

The aim of all religions, basically, is to encourage this spiritual unity within man and between man and man. No religion is at variance with another so far as this goal is concerned. The language in which this is set forth may vary from one religion to another, but, without doubt, the main concern of all religions is to produce spiritual unity within and between all human beings. Without spiritual unity, there is little hope of creating peace and harmony throughout the world. And where there is no peace and harmony, the dream of human progress will for ever remain elusive.

Now, what is Islam's contribution to spiritual unity? The subject is too vast for more than just a few basic points to be briefly touched on.

The Unity of God

The most important factor in Islam's contribution is its concept of monotheism—of there being only one God (2:163). According to Islam, God, or the ultimate reality of this universe is only one—called Allah in Islam. It is implicit in the concept of the oneness of Godhead that differences and multiplicity would appear to exist in reality, yet there is an underlying unity.

In this way the concept of divine unity engenders spiritual unity. All human beings are one, because they are the servants of one God. All human beings are God's family. God is indeed the greatest reality of the universe. And when it is acknowledged that there is only one

greatest reality, it is but natural that all other creation should acquire the character of unity.

The Unity of Nature

The Quran states that “There is no changing in God’s creation.” (30:30) According to the Prophet of Islam ‘every child is born with an upright nature.’ (Al-Bukhari) We learn from this that unity is found among all human beings at the level of nature and creation. Nature forms the common constituent in the creation of human beings, just as the atom forms the common constituent in all the varied objects of nature in the physical world. That is to say that the same unity which exists in the external world at the physical level, has existed among human beings at the spiritual level from the outset.

But man tends at times to be oblivious of his own nature. This is no less true in the sphere of unity. Today people are unaware of their spiritual potential. In such a situation, the easiest way to bring about spiritual unity is to make men aware of that potential. The moment they became aware of it, spiritual unity will come into existence of its own accord.

The Unity of Mankind

The Quran says, “O Men, have fear of your Lord, who created you from a single soul. From that soul He created its mate, and through them, He scattered the earth with countless men and women.” (4:1)

This shows that men and women have been created from the same substance. Their being physically one, of necessity, demands their spiritual oneness.

Making a similar point, the Prophet Muhammad said that all human beings are brothers (Abu Dawud). This gives rise to the concept of a common brotherhood, and without doubt, it is this sense of brotherhood which generates the strongest feeling of oneness and togetherness among different people.

That is to say that when all human beings in this world are virtually blood brothers, they must, as this concept necessarily demands, live as brothers in spirit too. Any other way of living is a deviation from the reality.

I should like to refer here to an incident which illustrates this point. In 1893, Swami Vivekananda went to Chicago to participate in the Parliament of Religions. As the Encyclopaedia Britannica puts it, his was a 'Sensational appearance.' (15/623) On that occasion all the speakers at the conference followed the common practice of addressing the audience as "Ladies and gentlemen." But when Swami Vivekananda took the stage, he addressed his hearers as "Sisters and brothers of America." No sooner were the words out of his mouth than the hall resounded with a long burst of applause. Of all the delegates at the conference, Swamiji received the greatest ovation.

The reason for this was that the form of address, "Ladies and gentlemen" produces a sense of alienation and strangeness, whereas the phrase "Sisters and Brothers" introduces a note of closeness and familiarity. By using this phrase, Swami Vivekananda touched a cord in the hearts of those of different creeds and colours. Their natural feeling of unity was awakened, and then what ensued fulfilled the best of expectations. All of a sudden, the gaps between them were bridged. They all began to feel themselves what they really were, and for that moment, physical divisions disappeared and were replaced by a rare spiritual unity.

DECEMBER 24

Good Society

A good society is the cherished ideal of every human soul. But a consensus has yet to emerge on what constitutes a good society. This is undoubtedly one of the most complex questions facing us today.

It would be no exaggeration to say that three major initiatives, designed in their separate ways to offer a solution, have been utter failures. A hundred years ago it was generally assumed that the setting up of a national government would provide the answer. It was felt

that it was foreign rule which was responsible for the rot that had set in society, and that indigenous rule alone could set matters right. We did finally succeed in establishing a national government in 1947, but it failed to yield the desired result—a good society.

Similarly, the initiative which led up to home rule, i.e. the non-violent movement started seventy five years ago by Mahatma Gandhi, did not usher in any utopian ideal. It had come to be assumed that once the principle of non-violence become the mainstay of Indian politics, it would automatically be put into practice in society. But this transference of a principle from the political to the social sphere did not take place. We may have been successful in launching a political movement based on non-violence, but we were to find that it took more than earnest enunciation of the principle of non-violence to build a good society.

The third initiative, carried out after independence, was the attempt to bring about a good society by legislation. There are now scores of laws aimed at social reform, each social evil having several specially framed laws to itself. But this multitude of laws has done little to bring a good society into existence.

As I see it, our basic shortcoming is to think purely in terms of system. This has caused us to devote all our attention to overall social reform, at the expense of the more worthwhile reform of individuals. Over a period of a hundred years, all the major movements launched in our country have been system-based, rather than individual-based.

The individual is the primary unit of society. If individuals are reformed, society follows suit. And if individuals degenerate, society too goes into a decline. That is why our best efforts should centre around the individual, who is, after all, the basic building block of the society. The day we reform individuals in their thousands and tens of thousands, we shall have set ourselves well and truly on the path of successful social reform.

The solution to our problems lie in Muslim-Hindu meeting, instead of Muslim-ruler meeting. The most urgent need of today is to hold a Hindu-Muslim dialogue at an All India level. Serious minded and influential people from both the communities should participate

in this meeting. Its goal should be the securing of peace on the basis of purely non-political grounds.

The representatives of both communities should hold discussions with open hearts. They must strive to put an end to controversial situation on both sides and they should discover a common basis by adopting which, both the communities can live together as good neighbours.

A dialogue of this kind is exactly in accordance with the Islamic shariah. The Hudaibiya peace treaty in Islamic history is an instance of a successful dialogue of this nature. After the Prophet's emigration in 622 the relations between Muslims and non-Muslims had been considerably deteriorated in ancient Arabia. A number of battles and skirmishes ensued, walls of prejudice and hatred barred one another coming closer.

Finally the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had to stay for about two weeks at Hudaibiyya near Makkah in 628. Here began negotiations with non-Muslims Makkah leaders. And then according to most of their conditions a peace treaty was signed between Muslims and non-Muslims known as Hudaibiyya treat in the Islamic history.

If such a dialogue is held with full justice and sincerity, a new chapter will be opened in the history of India. It is this point of Hindu Muslim relationship where the history of India is standing still. Once this problem is solved and the relations between the two communities normalized, nothing else will come in the way of India's progress.

The dialogue, if it has to succeed, should not take the form of polemics. They should not become spokesmen of their respective communities during the discussion. What should be uppermost in their minds is the vaster national interest and the path of betterness for all the communities.

Both the parties will have to commit themselves for differentiating between issues and non-issues that they will not hold any matter as prestige issue; that they will not adopt the way of claim and counter claim; that they will say anything keeping the result before them; that their way will be one of impartiality; that while pressing their demands they will also be willing to concede that while taking from others they will also be willing to give.

Dialogue is not a meeting of rivalry but is a brotherly meeting. Such noble tasks are performed by rising above the defeat-victory psychology. Its aim is to solve the matter and not confound it. The feeling at work behind a dialogue is one of reconciliation and not one of rivalry.

Dialogue means an attempt to solve the controversial matter through negotiation rather than through confrontation. If a dialogue is started with this spirit, its success is certain. The door to the progress of our country is shut for about half a century. And a dialogue keeping this spirit in view can surely open the closed door provided it is conducted with true spirit. (211:7)

DECEMBER 25

Two Worlds

Sir Arthur Eddington, the well-known scientist, writes in his book, *The Nature of the Physical World*: “I have drawn up my chairs to my two tables. There are duplicates of every object. One of these tables is comparatively permanent. It is substantial. Table no 2 is my scientific table. My scientific table is mostly emptiness. Sparsely scattered in that emptiness are numerous electric charges rushing about with great speed.”

This description could be applied equally to the entire universe. It is especially true of our world, which has two aspects to it: appearance and reality.

What we see around us, we call the world. But there is also the other invisible world of the Hereafter. When death comes, it means leaving the visible, or apparent world to enter into the invisible, or concealed, but nevertheless real world of the Hereafter.

While the present world in which we live is visible to everyone, the next world lies behind a veil and is unobservable. That is why man makes the mistake of regarding only the present world as real and the

other world as imaginary. Even those who profess to believe in the Hereafter think of it as an abstract concept with no actual relevance to their present life. That is why, in spite of believing in it as an article of faith, they do not allow it to influence their material existence in any way.

This is man's greatest omission. Engrossed with this ephemeral world, he fails to realize that on the day he leaves this world for the next eternal world, it will be as if a veil has been removed. And on that day, he will regret his negligence. But regret will serve no useful purpose. He will have lost tomorrow for today.

Just as it is the true scientist who can see 'two tables' it is the true servant of God who can discover the 'two worlds.' And it is he and he alone who, by the grace of God, will enter victoriously into the divine Paradise of the Almighty.

DECEMBER 26

Losers Can Be Gainers

An elderly holy man living in a small town in northern India, once had the misfortune to witness the constant harassment of an outsider who had come there to take up residence. Just because he belonged to another community, he was subjected to all kinds of unfair treatment. When matters escalated, it became a point of communal prestige. Not wishing their untoward behaviours to be seen by others as such, the townspeople began to twist the story so that the whole blame would fall upon the outsider, while they themselves appeared entirely innocent.

However when the holy man was asked about what had really happened, he simply told the truth, that the townspeople were the wrongdoers and that the outsider was their victim.

At this, all the townspeople became enraged at the holy man, but he uttered no word of reproof, and carried on with his daily routine

as if nothing had happened. Finally, one of the townspeople came to him one day and asked him why he was maintaining such a strict silence when so much was being said against him. He wanted to know if he was not worried at the infamy that was being heaped upon him. The holy man replied that there was no just cause for worry. “If I am quite content, it is because these people are distributing my sins among themselves. They are, in fact, taking the burden of my sins upon their own selves. Thus enabling me to enter into the next world, free of all burdens. Later, he narrated a *hadith* in which—according to Abu Hurayrah—the Prophet once asked: ‘Do you know who is poor?’ His companions replied that the poor man amongst them was the one who had no money and no possessions. Then the Prophet said: “The poor man in my community (*ummah*) is one who comes on Doomsday with his prayers, fasts and *zakat*, but who, despite all his seeming piety, had abused people, made false accusations, appropriated other’s belongings, and acted like a tyrant. Then all his virtues will be given to those he had oppressed. And when all his virtues have been used up without his account having been cleared—there still being some of the oppressed who have to be compensated by his virtues,—then the sins of the oppressed will be transferred to him, whereupon he will be thrown into hellfire.”

This *hadith* is a stern warning to all those who treat others with cruelty, who commit acts of misappropriation and usurpation, and who indulge in calumny and defamation. Even the virtues of such individuals will not stand them in good stead on the Day of Judgement. And if, on that day, they can give no evidence of having performed good deeds, they will be fated to bear the burden of others’ sins along with their own.

Conversely, this *hadith* gives consolation to the oppressed. Those who have been treated unjustly may live in the expectation that their sins will be transferred to their oppressors, while they themselves, rid of all that burden, will be allowed to enter heaven. But it should be borne in mind that this blessing will await only those who remained patient under oppression for the sake of God.

DECEMBER 27

Inter-Religious Dialogue

In his book *The Destiny of Indian Muslims*, Dr. Syed Abid Hussain (1896-1978) pointed out that the revolution culminating in India after 1947 wrought certain basic changes in the social and political situation in India. But now that India is a democratic system, Indian Muslims are still living in the past dictatorial age. It is this backwardness of thought on their part which is the basic, underlying reason for all of their problems.

Prior to 1947 during the British period the Muslims were faced with a government which was not answerable to the public. It enjoyed the position of a supreme arbiter which was able to take any action whatsoever without taking the public's approval into consideration. But now that India is a democracy, the present rulers have to take public opinion into account. Under such circumstances Muslims must now try to solve their problems through the people, instead of the rulers. Abid Hussain says: "But Muslims still labour under the impression that the solution to their problems is in the hands of the Government. To the Government alone they take their troubles and from it alone they expect a remedy." (p. 295)

This review of the recent history of Indian Muslims is very apt. The movement launched in the name of Ayodhya's Babri Masjid serves as the worst example of it. The way the incompetent Muslim leaders led this movement after 1986 amounted to adopting a path of confrontation vis-à-vis their Hindu counterparts on this issue. And Muslims, very naively indeed, believed that the government would come to their assistance, as it was its responsibility to do so, and that, in its capacity as supreme arbiter, the government would give its verdict in favour of Muslims.

But the event of December 6, 1992, revealed that this supposition was totally baseless. In his speech on August 15, 1992, the Prime Minister of India had proclaimed that he would not allow the demolition of the Babri Masjid. In December he despatched a 20-thousand strong police force to the border of Ayodhya, besides making a number of other official arrangements. But, in reality, what happened was what the public wanted. On December 6 the Kar Sevaks forced their entry into the Babri Masjid and demolished it. Afterwards they removed the debris in order to build a makeshift Ram Mandir on exactly the same spot. Furthermore, they managed to secure permission from the Court of Law to place idols of Ram Lalla in this new mandir in order to start *darshan* and *puja*.

This incident is a clear indication of the public's supremacy over the government. It is a final proof of the fact that in this country it is the public which enjoys a superior position, and not the individuals who have been elected by the people to form ministries for a limited period of time. Now only a person totally bereft of sanity can believe that the central government, which could not save the historical structure of the Babri mosque from demolition, would be bold enough to demolish the newly erected makeshift mandir, remove the idols of Ram placed therein, and then rebuild a Babri Masjid on exactly the same site.

Most surprisingly indeed, even this incident, though it was as clear as daylight, could not puncture the unawareness of the incompetent Muslim leaders. As we learnt from the newspapers, on April

5, 1993, about twenty well-known members of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board arrived in New Delhi in order to draft a memorandum by consensus. This memorandum demanded that the government remove the present makeshift mandir of Ayodhya and the idols placed therein, and rebuild the Babri Masjid on the former site. Afterwards this delegation met Prime Minister, Mr. Narasimha Rao, to hand over the memorandum to him.

This is no doubt the worst example of anachronism. The greater lesson that Muslims should have learnt from the 6th December incident was to turn towards the Hindu Janata, that their efforts should all be directed to the Hindu Janata rather than to the rulers of

Delhi. But how strange it is that the unwise Muslim leaders are still engaged in circumambulating Delhi.

Given the state of affairs, the Muslim Personal Law Board's meeting with the Prime Minister to press the demand for rebuilding the mosque at the same site is incomprehensible. Only their supreme unawareness can account for it. They are still living and thinking in the India of fifty years ago. They have yet to grasp that India is at present being ruled by the Indian people and not by an absolute dictator.

Now it is high time that Muslims change their ways. Instead of looking up to the government or administration they should look up to the Hindu public. The Muslim leaders should meet the Hindu leaders. The Muslim people should develop contacts with the Hindu people. Opportunities for Hindu-Muslim meetings should be created at every level in order that misunderstandings against one another can be removed, mutual tensions eased and both communities can start living together harmoniously.

DECEMBER 28

A Period of Twenty-Five Years

Albert Sabin, an American scientist was born in 1906 in Poland. His parents migrated to America when he was only fifteen years old and it was here that he died on March, 93. After a long and hard struggle spanning over a period of twenty five years he succeeded in inventing a polio vaccine which could be used orally. Whereas hithertofore it was generally given by means of injections. It is estimated that about 500 million people have so far benefitted from this invention.

Yet Albert Sabin, a truly deserving candidate, was denied of the Nobel Prize. Still he did not fret himself to death. Instead he said: I only ask for a place of work.

During the course of his research he had to suffer from great frustrations, but without being affected from his failures he continued to engage himself devotedly to his research work, ultimately his research reached to its successful conclusion. He used to say: “No matter how good you are, you can not be a scientist unless you learn to live with frustrations.”

This is also a general principle of success in this world. Here any great success awaits only that courageous person who can devote himself to his work unceasingly for a period of twenty five years; who can continue his onward journey through frustrations; who can rise again after every fall; who can always remain active for the attainment of its goal whether or not he receives recognition and applause.

Those who complain of non-recognition and applause at unfavourable circumstances; whose eyes are set on problems rather than on opportunities can never attain their goal in life.

DECEMBER 29

Take Away the Justification

India's freedom movement can be divided into two stages: from 1857 to 1920, and from 1920 to 1947. It is a well known fact that, during the first period, the British government dealt ruthlessly with the freedom fighters and that, after 1920, that same British government ceased all violence. There is only one way to explain this. In the first phase, the freedom movement had been marked by violence. But after 1920, when Mahatma Gandhi came on the scene, he proclaimed that the freedom movement would be entirely non-violent.

When Mahatma Gandhi shunned violence, the British government perforce did likewise. This is because the use of violence inevitably requires some form of justification. The former freedom fighters, by resorting to violence, were only playing into the hands of the British who then had no scruples about retaliating with violence. When they refrained from violence, they left the British with no

grounds for brutal reprisals. Baffled by Mahatma Gandhi's strategy of non-violence, an English collector sent this telegram to the secretariat: Kindly wire instructions on how to kill a tiger non-violently.

There are certain groups in India who suggest that communal problems may be solved by resorting to active 'self-defense.' But that would only aggravate the situation. It is in no sense a solution. The only certain way of tackling such problems is to deprive the oppressor of any justification for his oppressive conduct. Provocation should be seen as a ruse to spur the victim on to that very retaliation which will be seized upon as a pretext for further attacks. As such, it should be ignored. There should be no reaction, no retaliation. In that way, no oppressor can continue to oppress. Even with a gun in his hand, he will lack the moral courage to pull the trigger.

DECEMBER 30

Your Skin Will Speak Out...

Man's skin, according to the Quran, will testify against him on the Day of Judgement: 'On the Day when Allah's opponents are gathered together they will be driven into the Fire. So that when they reach it, their ears, their eyes and their very skins will testify to their deeds. "Why did you speak against us?" they will say to their skins, and their skins will reply: "Allah, who gives speech to all things, has made us speak. It was He who in the beginning created you, and to Him you shall all return. You did not hide yourselves, so that your eyes and ears and skins could not observe you. Yet you thought that Allah did not know much of what you did. It is this illusion concerning your Lord that has ruined you, so that you are now among the lost"' (41:19-23).

Until recently the idea of skin being capable of 'speaking' was very difficult for man to understand. Recent progress in scientific research, however, has made it much easier to see how this will happen. A UPI

report published in *The Times of India* (May 30, 1984) disclosed this startling discovery: ‘Skin speech—communicating through vibrations on the skin’—offers promise as a future alternative to hearing aids or surgical implants for those with impaired hearing, a speech and hearing scientist has said. Dr. Arlene Carney, audiologist at the University of Illinois, said that ‘skin speech’ involves the use of tactile devices that electronically create speech patterns in vibrations on the skin. ‘Patients receiving the experimental therapy learn to interpret the vibrations and sort them into speech patterns,’ said Dr. Carney.

It is well-known that words emitted through the mouth are preserved in the atmosphere in the form of sound waves. This sound actually originates in vibrations, much the same as the vibrations that cause skin speech, which are transmitted in the form of wave motions through a material medium such as air. These waves remain in the atmosphere. Though they cannot be seen, they do not disappear. They are there, and, were the apparatus available, could be played back like a tape on which sounds have been recorded.

If this is true of vibrations that cause sound speech, then it is also clearly true of the vibrations that cause skin speech.

These vibrations are likewise preserved in the atmosphere. Man, who even in this world possesses the ability to play back sounds recorded on a disc or tape, should have no difficulty in understanding this power being extended by the Almighty in the next world to cover all vibrations, whether of sound or skin speech, which have been imprinted in the atmosphere in the form of waves.

Man is being tested in this world. No scientific discovery reveals the exact nature of divine truth for, were it to do so, man would have no choice but to accept it: there would be no test involved. However, advances in the field of science do make it easier for us to understand certain concepts, such as skin speech, which were difficult to fathom in the past. If the fast-accumulating evidence in support of truths expounded in the Quran is not sufficient to make man take heed, then he shall have to wait for actual occurrences before he will come to his senses. But then it will be too late; for then there will be no choice but listen to the evidence of everything—even our skins—and accept the fate to which it condemns us.

DECEMBER 31

Anger

Albetano, an ancient Roman philosopher, is recorded as having said: 'The angry man always thinks he can do more than he can.'

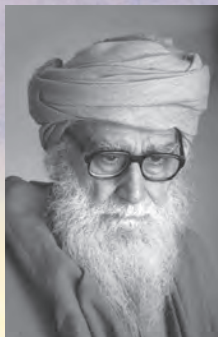
When a man is intoxicated with alcohol, he is not in control of himself. He may even go so far as to bang his head on a stone, unmindful of the fact that it may not be the stone that breaks but his own head. This is because, in his besotted state, he wrongly gauges his own abilities and proceeds to do things which can have unfavourable consequences.

The same is true of the angry man. In a towering rage, a man is not in control of himself. He overestimates his own capabilities, as a result of which he involves himself in activities which are beyond his powers of control. He realizes his foolishness only when his temper has cooled. But, by that time, the wrong step has been taken and destruction has followed in its wake. It is now too late for regrets: he is unable to save himself from his own wrong action.

In India, one very glaring example of such misjudgement becomes evident in the ongoing conflict between the Muslims and the police. It repeatedly happens that, for some reason or the other, Muslims became enraged with the police, and then they clash with them. This invariably results in the Muslims coming to grief. The reason that the clash takes place at all is that, because the Muslims became so irate, they do not stop to compare their own strength with that of the armed constabulary. If they were to think about the situation coolly, they would make a true estimate of their own strength, and that in itself would be enough to prevent them from clashing with the police. Anger blinds them to the reality of their own weakness, they start fighting with forces superior to their own, and the result is that they—the Muslims—are the sufferers.

The moral of this is that one should never do anything of any importance when in an angry mood. Steps to counter adversaries should be taken only after all anger has subsided. This will mean fewer setbacks and more successes in life.

The book collects, in one immensely rich compendium, more than three hundred and fifty short articles, which have been arranged for easy reading on a daily basis. In *Simple Wisdom*, the author shares piety, modes of divine worship and such spiritual knowledge as will help the reader become acquainted with the wisdom, grace and power of God. As you turn over the pages day by day, your soul will touch new spiritual heights of wisdom, peace and understanding.



Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (1925-2021) was an Islamic scholar, spiritual leader and peace activist. Having founded *Centre for Peace and Spirituality International*, he was internationally recognized for his contributions to world peace. He authored over 200 books dealing with Islam's spiritual wisdom, the Prophet's non-violent approach, religion's relation with modernity and other contemporary issues. His English translation of the Quran is popular because its language is simple, contemporary and easily understandable.

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