

INNER VOICE

By

MAULANA SEYYID

SAEED AKHTER RIZVI

THE moon-race is now on in full swing. Who knows how many billions of dollars and roublels have already been used in this "lofty" ambition. The billions which, if spent on developing nations, could have turned this earth into a paradise.

It is really bewildering to see the biggest two nations spending so much, ostensibly just for the sake of prestige. I wonder what prestige human beings would gain by contaminating the environment of the moon by their foul and beastly conduct.

Woman has been selling her body since time immemorial. But never before was shamelessness given the glittering tangle of "art." Never before was immorality the accepted norm of life. It is in this age that a woman has lost her sense of self-respect. There was a time when she was a coveted prize, to be pursued by a man. Now she has put herself in show window. No more is she a hidden treasure to be discovered by her rightful husband. She is now a piece of beauty to be seen, selected and admired at every shop.

And this hoax has been given a blinding name: "Freedom of woman." But, as I see, it is man, not woman, who has made himself.

Macca has no tourists' attraction. There are no beautiful sceneries. A place surrounded by barren rocks and hills! According to Imam Ali bin Abi Talib, it would have been as easy for Allah to select a beautiful place for His house. But he selected the barren rocks and stone walls, so that people should come here without any worldly motive. They should be attracted by pleasures because there is none; they cannot think about business, because Macca has nothing to produce. Therefore, anybody coming to Macca, must come, by virtue of necessity, with pure intention and untinted purpose. He must come for pilgrimage — and pilgrimage only.

FAST like living things, has a body and a soul. The required abstinence from food, water, sexual relations etc. is the body of the fast: "piety" is its soul. If we are not striving to refine our character by fast, our fast will be a body without soul. Fast cleans our body from impurities. Likewise, it must purify our hearts and minds from all impure thoughts, improper desires and undisciplined sensations.

The majority Muslims, all over the Islamic world have just been busy commemorating the tragedy of Karbala, in which Imam Husain, (A.S.) grandson of the Prophet, (S.A.) was martyred 1325 years ago to save Islam from the disastrous clutches of Yazid. He did as a result of his rejecting Yazid. He did not after worldly power or material gain which could be abandoned in the face of danger. He was following the policy laid down by Islam in the way of Allah. He and his children were denied water for three days; his companions and relatives were killed; his six months old child was put to death. At last his own head was severed and put on a spear; his women-folk were imprisoned and all kinds of tyrannies were aimed against them. But their never determination, like that of Imam Husain, (A.S.) was never weakened.

Some people think that the life, mentioned in this verse of Qur'an, means that the life, mentioned in this bereaved for ever. If it is so, then it is very appropriate to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Husain and his companions. Their memory has been, and will be, kept alive by the grace of Allah, in whose name they sacrificed their lives.

We take oath to adhere to the principles of religion; then issue permits to drinking clubs and brothels. We decry, that youth are becoming unruly, that juvenile delinquency is increasing day by day; then we give them crime fiction to acquire criminal know-how, take them to cinemas to see the demonstrations of murder and safe-breaking. We complain that the number of unmarried mothers is no increase; then we provide chances for young boys and girls to meet in clubs, cinemas, educational institutions and youth hostels. We want our girls to remain chaste, but enjoy ruining the chastity of others' daughters. We do not want any scandal in our life, but feast on others' indiscretions. We want cleanliness in our town — external cleanliness; but endeavour to establish night-clubs in it — internal leprosy.

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PREFACE

OF THE FIRST EDITION

Character building is as vital and essential in our present day society as it has been in the past. It is of even greater importance today to acquire more content with the teachings of the Prophet of Islam and His Ahlul-Bayt in view of our decadent society with its ever increasing temptations all around us; since Islam is not a dogmatic religion, but a complete code of life and a guide in all aspects of our day to day activities and behaviour.

Maulana Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi, the Chief Missionary of the Bilal Muslim Mission of Tanzania, has been publishing small thought provoking articles in the "Sunday News", Dar-es-salaam, on general Islamic Teachings and its role in our character building. This column has proved very popular among Muslims and Non-Muslims alike; and, now, its Swahili translation appears in the weekly "BARAZA" (Nairobi). Also, the "East African Standard" (Nairobi) has published many of these articles in its Muslim Column.

I am, indeed grateful to Maulana for compiling these articles in this booklet and I hope they will serve the useful purpose as they were meant for.

The Mission commends the elders to give this boklet its widest possible circulation.

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PREFACE

OF THE SECOND EDITION

This book was published in March 1969. Some time later, the column “Thought For the Week” of the “Sunday News” was discontinued. By that time, more articles were published, which has been added in this edition.

12th April 1975

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INTRODUCTION

Man has been created with an aim; he has been blessed with the power to act freely; and he has also been shown the way which leads to eternal prosperity and bliss, and the way which ends in eternal wrath and fire. Life on this earth is the period in which man, whether he likes or not, has to follow one of these two paths.

A Muslim is required to follow the right path and to be very careful from being misled to a wrong direction. For this, he has to be aware of the pitfalls, dangers and misleading elements which lie in his way. One of the effective methods to get this awareness is by studying the socio-ethical problems from Islamic point of view. In studying these problems he will come to know that pride, envy, jealousy, greed, extravagance, being indifferent to others' behaviours, forgetting Allah, idleness, alcohol, gambling, lying and back-biting are the factors which can change the direction of his path and lead him to the eternal fire of Hell. Whereas love and remembrance of Allah, hard-working with trust in God, self-criticism, righteousness, justice, generosity, modesty, being kind to others, acquiring knowledge, trustworthiness and sincerity are the deeds which will help him in keeping on the right way. Only then will he be able to follow this path successfully and live a prosperous and happy life.

'Inner Voice' is a collection of small articles mostly on socio-ethical problems from the Islamic point of view. These articles were written by the renowned Muslim scholar, Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi, the Chief Missionary of Bilal Muslim Mission of Tanzania. Maulana Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi had written the articles for a column "Thought for the Week" in the 'Sunday News' of Dar es Salaam (Tanzania). As we found these articles interesting in which the writer has been able to explain the Islamic socio-aspects in a short, attractive and simple manner, we decided to reprint it for wider circulation....

Dar Rah-e-Huq

Qum-Iran

Sha'ban 1400 A.H.

June 1980 A.D.

Note ص and ع are abbreviations of the eulogy and blessing used after the names of the Holy Prophet, his daughter Fatimah az-Zahra' and the twelve Imams respectively.

صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم = ص Salla'llahu 'alaihi wa Alihi was Sallam

May Allah bestow mercy and grant peace to him (i.e. the Holy Prophet) and his family

عليه / عليها السلام = ع Alaihi / 'Alaiha' sa-salam Peace be upon him/her.

KNOW THE SOUL

*“Soon will We show them our signs in the
(furthest) regions and in their own souls.....”*
(Qur’ān, 41:53).

THERE is one tested method of knowing Allah; and that is “through His creation” – the Worlds and the Man. Let us begin with ourself.

We do not know the nature of soul. Still we have to admit that there is something which is the source of “life”. In the same way, though we cannot ‘know’ the Creator, we have to admit that there is a God who has created the universe.

We know that the soul is the ruler of our body. If any limb of ours refuses to obey the commands of the soul, it is not a reflection on the strength of the soul. It is considered the defect of the limb itself. Likewise, the God is the master and ruler of the universe; and if anybody refuses to obey the commandments of Allah, the authority of Allah can never be doubted. It will be a sign that the disobedient person is sick spiritually.

We know that soul is connected with our body; but we do not know where it is. The life is everywhere in our body; but if a limb of a man is amputated, we cannot say that so much portion of the soul also has been cut off. Thus, we see, the life everywhere and still we cannot say that it is here or is there. In the same manner, we know that Allah is everywhere; but we cannot say. “He is here” or “He is there”. We cannot point towards Him; we cannot correlate Him with any place.

Whenever we want to do any work, our limbs simply obey the unspoken command of the soul, without any need to tell them in so many words. In the same way whenever God wants anything to happen it just happens, without any need on the part of God to say “Be this” or “Be that”. Therefore, we understand that the words used in scriptures that “God says and the thing happens” is just a way of expressing the idea that as soon as Allah wishes something, it happens immediately.

We do not see the soul; still we believe in it. Man believes in such creation which are beyond his senses. Strangely enough, there are some people who do not believe in the Creator, just because He is beyond their senses!

God has shown His signs in ourself. Perhaps these points were in the mind of Amir-ul-Mumeneen Ali when he said: “Whoever knew his soul, knew his Lord”.

IS GOD DEAD?

“Creation of God, the pattern on which He has made mankind; there is no change in the work of God. That is the standard religion, but most among mankind do not understand”.
(Qur’ān, 30:30)

THEY CLAIM that ‘God’ is dead. They should have said that ‘gods’ are dead. The confusion arises when false ‘gods’ are identified as ‘God’.

An atheist astronaut once glee fully joked that he went high above in the space but could not see the god. So, here is the confusion: the poor soul did not know that God is not ‘body’ to be seen or found in a ‘place’. His joke just confirmed the belief of those who had emphasized from the very beginning that God could not be seen.

Belief in a God is as much natural as any natural instinct can be. This eternal truth has been explained in the verse of the Holy Qur’ān mentioned above. An atheist asked Imam Ja’far-e-Sadiq how could he convince him about the existence of God. Coming to know that the man had gone several times on sea voyages, Imam asked him: “Have you ever been caught in a fierce storm in middle of nowhere, your rudder gone, your sails torn away, trying desperately to keep your boat afloat”. The answer was ‘Yes’. Then Imam asked: “And sometimes, perhaps, even that leaking boat went down leaving you exhausted and helpless on the mercy of raging waves?” The answer was again ‘Yes’. Then Imam asked:

“Was not there, in all that black despair, a faint glimmer of hope in your heart that some unnamed and unknown power could still save you”. When he agreed, Imam said: “That power is God”.

That atheist was intelligent. He knew the truth when he saw it. Today’s atheists give that place to ‘Nature’. The only snag is that poor ‘Nature’ is senseless and lifeless. How a senseless and lifeless ‘idea’ (because nature is no more than an abstract idea) could create an universe of such magnitude with such a systematic perfection, uniting millions and millions of galaxies in a well-knit system? How could nature give life and sense to creatures when itself it has none?

UNITY OF GOD

“Say: He is Allah, the One and Only; Allah, the Eternal. Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten, and there is none like unto Him”. (Qur’ān. Sura 112)

THIS SHORT Sura of the Holy Qur’ān is the most significant of all writings dealing with the one-ness of God. As Allama Abdullah Yousuf Ali has commented in his translation of the Holy Book, the nature of God has been indicated here in a few words, such as we can understand.

He writes: Here we are specially taught to avoid the pitfalls into which man and nations have fallen at various times in trying to understand God.

“The first thing we have to note is that His nature is so sublime, so far beyond our limited conceptions, that the best way in which we can realize him is to feel that He is a personality. ‘He,’ and not a mere abstract conception of philosophy.

“Secondly, He is the One and Only God, the only one to Whom worship is due, all other things or beings that we can think of are His creatures and in no way comparable to Him.

“Thirdly, He is Eternal, without beginning or end: Absolute, not limited by time or place or circumstance, the reality before which all other things or places are mere shadows or reflections.

“Fourthly, we must not think of Him as having a son or a father, for that would be to import animal qualities into our conception of Him.

“Fifthly, He is not like any other person or thing that we know or can imagine: His qualities and nature are unique”.

Infact this short Sura is a declaration of war against all ideas of paganism, and anthropomorphism. Men from the beginning have had a tendency to imagine God in their own image. Some thought of Him as having body, like animals or human-beings. Others thought that He was incarnated in the forces of nature, like rain, lightning, mountain and river. Still others thought that He was a father and had child or children. But this Sura warns us against this tendency to conceive God after our own pattern.

CAN 'NATURE' REPLACE GOD?

“Nature designed this”; Nature adapted that’. These are the phrases frequently seen nowadays in the text-books and articles.

What is this ‘Nature,’ anyway? It is nothing but an abstract idea formed in human brain after careful study of the behaviour of the things. It may be found (if it is ‘found’ at all) within the things; it has no independent existence. And, in any case, there is no record of any conference of the ‘natures’ of various things, held to decide how to co-ordinate their functions. Flowers never conferred with the bees to seek the bees’ co-operation in their pollination, offering them, in exchange, their nectar. But we know that bees could not live a single day without flowers; and thousands of flowers would long have been extinct but for the bees.

More puzzling are those phenomena which can not be explained by ‘nature’s planning’. When Moses fled from Pharaoh, the Red Sea parted, allowing him and his followers to cross to the promised land. Scientists nowadays try to explain it by natural causes; an earthquake must have made the water shift at that time. All right. But why did that supposed earthquake occur at a time when Moses and his followers desperately wanted to cross the Sea, and why it remained parted till Pharaoh entered into it? And why the movement of water was reversed at that very moment when the enemy of God with his people was in midst of the Sea? Was it all a coincidence?

And was it a coincidence which prompted a spider to weave its cobweb at the mouth of the cave in which the Holy Prophet Muhammad was hiding from the pagans of Mecca who wanted to murder him? And more than that, was it also a coincidence which brought a pair of pigeons to build their nest at the mouth of that very cave at thick of night and lay the eggs before morning? It was that cobweb and nest with eggs which led the blood-thirsty enemies to believe that Muhammad could not be in that cave, otherwise the cobweb would have been destroyed and the nest and the eggs broken!

Can that speed and timing of the pigeons and spider be explained by ‘natural causes’?

LOVE AND FEAR OF ALLAH

*“All praise is only for God, the Lord of Universe,
the Beneficent, the Merciful, Master of the Day of Judgement”*
(Qur’ān, Chapter 1; Verses 2-4)

THESE are the very first verses of the Qur’ān. They present in clear terms the concept of God in Islam: God is Merciful and Just. According to Islam, the Divine Justice is not separate from His Mercy.

The Divine Justice cannot be compared with the justice meted out by the judges in the courts. These judges are only the executors of the law, given to them by others, with little or no authority to condone the culprits. They are bound by the law. They are helpless against the strict implications of law when it demands punishment. They cannot dispense mercy even if the culprit is repenting, even if the circumstances demand mercy. Petitions for mercy are addressed to the head of state, who is the supreme promulgator of law.

But God is not a mere judge. He is the Law-giver and the supreme Authority. Hence an offender can be sure of His merciful pardon if his repentance be genuine.

Islam puts the Mercy of God before His Justice. The very first verse of the Qur’ān is “In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful”. Islam believes that “His Mercy is before His wrath”.

Thus the Muslims have a finely balanced faith, which is inclined neither to this side nor to that. It does not teach us that God is a high handed avenger who does not forgive a single sin or mistake; but it does not present God in the shape of a feeble person who will not punish even the tyrannies and brutalities of head-hunters. The essence of Islamic faith is in the above-mentioned verses, where the Mercy of God has been mentioned side by side with His Justice.

Here we find a real divine religion which encourages man to go nearer to Allah, attracted by His Mercy and Grace; and warns him against trespassing the limits of moral and religious laws, by reminding him that God is just, the Master of the Day of Judgement.

Thus, the two most important instincts of man, i.e., love and fear, are simultaneously utilized to make man a perfect being, a whole being, not wanting in any respect.

SINLESSNESS OF PROPHETS

“And We sent not an apostle but to be obeyed according to the will of God”. (Qur’an, 4:64)

GOD SENT so many prophets and apostles to lead their people on right path. Some of them were sent to a small group; others to large communities or countries. In the end the Prophet of Islam was sent to the whole mankind.

The prophets were to be obeyed; their examples were to be followed. It required a very high degree of respect and prestige in the eyes of the would be followers. But could a prophet command a genuine respect if his own character was not without blemish? How could his community believe that his claim of prophethood was based on truth? After all, a man who had committed sins in past, could again commit another sin – that of false pretension. So, to carry on the work of God, the prophets must have been sinless, and free from mistakes.

This capability to refrain from sins is called ‘Ismat’ in Islam. And the Muslims accept that all the prophets were sinless.

Of course, some stories are told about some of the prophets which are not edifying, to say the least. But we know how the passage of time starts legends about historical personalities; and how human mind works out the details; and how every generation wants to justify its own morality (perverted or otherwise) by pretending that it is what was done by more wise men (in this case, the prophets). As a result of this mental exercise, the followers succeed in creating a not-very-lovely picture of their prophets – just to satisfy their own troubled conscience.

For example, this week a certain ‘man of religion’ (who lives in a country which has just now legalized a perverted sexual act) did suggest that his prophet also might have indulged in that kind of perversion. He did not mind tarnishing the name of his prophet if this could ease the burden of shame and guilt from his conscience!

So, be careful when you are told stories of sins of other prophets. Human nature does not change. People, even the followers, have been attributing nasty behaviours to the prophets of God since a very very long time.

UNIQUE ACHIEVEMENT

One of the unique achievement of Islam is the fact that Muslims never upgraded the Holy Prophet of Islam to godhood. It speaks eloquently of the humility and selflessness of Muhammad (s.a.w.), who easily could have been acknowledged (had he only wished so) as a diety in those days when people were used to worship human beings; and especially so when people were so much impressed by his matchless character and unparalleled conduct that a mere hint would have been enough to make him a god.

He did not want the people to take him as other than a man. He never gave any room in any of his utterances which would in the least mislead the people to raise him to godhood.

We know how easily a 'son of man' can be construed to be a god if he is metaphorically spoken of as a 'son of God'. Muhammad avoided all such metaphorical references about himself. He always proclaimed all power, knowledge and glory for the true God. He always presented himself as a servant of Allah who did nothing but the will of his Lord. The frankness with which he always presented himself to the world entitled him to the title 'The Plain Preacher', as he has been addressed by Allah in the Holy Qur'ān. He presented the truth in its pristine purity and originality without any misleading ambiguity.

AIM OF LIFE

“And did you think that we created you aimlessly.....?”
(Qur’ān 23:15).

NO man likes to be accused of working aimlessly. Acting without purpose is against the accepted norms of sanity. Therefore, we are confident that God never does any work without aim and purpose.

And what is the purpose of our creation, our life?

A group thinks that material well-being is the sole purpose of the human life. Their creed: “Every man should work according to his ability; and he should get according to his need”. It is the ultimate goal of their life. They see no other purpose beyond it. Alas! These people do not know the difference between means of life and aim of life.

Let me explain it. A farmer grows maize. He cultivates the land; mixes fertilizer in the earth; sows the seed; irrigates the shamba when necessary. Go and ask him: What is the purpose of cultivation? He will never say: The purpose of the cultivation is to sprinkle fertilizer and irrigate the land. He has sense enough to know that these are the means of cultivation, not its aim. Its aim is to produce maize for human consumption.

A dairy-man keeps cows. He feeds them, looks after them and protects them from harm. Ask him and he will explain that these are the means of keeping the cows alive. But is it the purpose of keeping the cows in the farm? No.! The purpose is something else – milk.

So we see that even in the worlds of maize and cows the difference between the means of life and purpose of life is fully recognized. Is it not strange to forget it when it comes to the human life? When a philosophy teaches us that bread and butter are the aim of life it ceases to be a philosophy. It becomes a fallacy.

In fact, we are alive for a higher purpose and nobler aim. The Creator himself has made it clear: “And I did not create Jin and human beings, but so that they may know and obey me” (Qur’ān 51:56). Forget this basic purpose of your creation and you have degraded yourself to a level far below than that of cow and maize.

PURPOSE OF CREATION

“And I did not create Jin and human beings but so that they may worship Me”.
(Qur’ān, 51:56)

GOD created us and sent us in this world just to obtain spiritual perfection and piety, as explained in the above-mentioned Ayat of the Holy Qur’ān. Most of the commentators take the word ‘worship’ to mean ‘worship with faith in Him’.

A child is sent to school to study and acquire knowledge. Likewise, we are sent here to acquire spiritual qualities which could not be obtained otherwise. You see, unless you are faced with such a situation which puts some strain upon your integrity, your integrity has no real strength. Unless you are facing a situation in which the majority of people lose their temper, your forbearance has no meaning. Therefore, to bring out the full qualities which are spiritual, it was necessary for the man to come into this world and prove his worth by behaving nobly in adverse atmosphere and surroundings.

After spending some time here and showing the strength or weakness of his spirit he goes back – i.e., dies – just as a child returns to his home from the school. In this background, hardships, turmoil, difficulties and disasters seem essential to complete the picture. These are the methods which help in bringing out our spiritual perfection. Fire melts gold and makes it pure; Tragedy and distress soften the heart and brightens the spirit.

GOD – MINDEDNESS

“In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful”.
(Holy Qur’ān)

THIS phrase occurs at the beginning of every Chapter of the Qur’ān, except one. It is used by Muslims before starting every work – before reading, before eating, before starting their work, before sleeping. Islam teaches man to start every good effort with the Holy name of God Who is beneficent and merciful, invoking His mercy to bless his efforts with success.

The goal of Islam is to make a man “God-minded”; It wants him to realize that he, himself, is nothing, that all his efforts are fruitless unless rewarded by God with success. And that realization is combined with the satisfaction that God is beneficent and merciful, who will not disappoint him in his hope and belief.

It is very amusing to note that the common image of Islam, in the eyes of non-Muslims, is that of a religion whose god is wroathful one, like the god of the Old Testament, inflicting punishment on the spur of the moment. Do a mistake and you get a jolly good bang on your head!

They fail to realize that the very first sentence of the Qur’ān describes God as beneficent and merciful. And that formula is used by every Muslim hundreds of times every day. And the Muslims believe that by invoking the mercy of God they get limitless blessings of God, in this world as in the world here-after.

Once, the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.w.) while passing a graveyard, ordered his companions to get out of it in haste. On the return journey, he asked them to walk slowly. On being asked the reason of his first order and then of its change next time, the Prophet informed them that there was a man being chastised in one of those graves, on account of his wickedness. “I did not like to remain in a place where a human-being was being punished, though he was a wrongdoer” Fortunately, at the moment the child of that dead person was taken to a teacher to start his education. The teacher told him to recite “In the name of Allah, the beneficent, the merciful” As soon as the innocent child invoked the Mercy of Allah, the command came to the angels to change the punishment into the blessing of God. Reason: “It is not becoming to my mercy to punish the parent while his son calls me the beneficent and merciful”. So in the return

journey the Prophet walked in that grave-yard with comfort, glorifying the mercy and benevolence of the Almighty God.

Let us turn towards God every time we begin a work. The word “Bismillah” (“In the name of God”) may mean also “For the sake of God” and “To the service of God”. Thus this formula, if comprehended fully, will serve also to save us from wrong action and misdeed. Certainly, it will be illogical to commit a mischief “for the sake of god” and “to His service”. Let us remember God; and we will become free of sins and errors.

TRUST IN GOD

“And put thy trust in God; and enough is God as a disposer of affairs”. (Qur’ān; iv :81)

The word used in Qur’ān is “Tawakkal”, which is derived from “Tawakkul”. This is not an excuse for idleness. “Tawakkul means that you should bind the camel with its rope, then say that you have trust in God that He will protect your camel. You should not have confidence in the rope only, because many a camel has been stolen together with its rope; and, likewise, you should not neglect the rope, because binding with the rope is a part of Tawakkul”.

So this is the spirit of Tawakkul. We are to try our best; and then we should have trust in the God that He will make our work succeed.

It is a sheer nonsense to sit idle and say that Allah will do all our work for us. He says in Qur’ān: “And that man can have nothing but what he strives for” (Qur’ān, 80:39).

A high standard of Tawakkul was set when Amir-ul-mumeneen Ali (A.S.) asked some idle persons who they were. “We are those who have confidence in Allah”, came the answer. Ali asked: “How is your confidence in Allah?” They said; “We eat when we get food; and we have patience when we do not get it”. Ali retorted: “Yes! That was the very nature of a dog”. Stunned they asked him to explain the true meaning of Tawakkul in contrast to their own belief. Ali said; “When we get, we give to others; when we do not get, we thank Allah.”

It means that you are to try your best to improve your condition; but you should not trust your own power and wisdom. Have confidence in Allah that he will make your efforts fruitful. Then, if you succeed, try to help your fellow brethren with the fruits of your labour; and if you fail, then also be thankful to Allah.

But why should you thank Allah even when you do not succeed? Because success or failure is not your responsibility. You were expected to do your best – and you DID it. Be thankful to Allah that you were able to perform what was expected from you. It is your efforts which matter. Success or failure is not your province.

THANKFULNESS TO ALLAH

“And be thankful to Me; and do not be ungrateful”.
(Qur’ān: 2:152)

THANKFULNESS to God is one of the highest virtues which a man could aspire for. It is easy to be thankful when one has got an easy life, a prospering business, a respectful job and a happy family. It is a different story when things are not going as desired. Most of us, in such situations, remain obsessed with sorrow, forgetting countless bounties of God which we are bestowed with, even at the time of that tragedy. Perhaps it is this tendency which is mentioned in the Qur’ān in these words: *“And few amongst my servants are grateful”* (Qur’ān: 34:13).

It is even more difficult to be grateful in such heart-breaking situations which a man of God has to face in his struggle to lead his people on right path (like the condition which our Holy Prophet, Muhammad, had to contend with). He faced abuse of the community, wrath of big tribal heads. Children used to throw stones on him, women scattered thorny bushes in his path. And he remained cheerful and thankful to God.

When a man asked him why did he pray whole nights and fasted almost continuously, when he had so much work to do every day, the Prophet simply asked: “should I not be a thankful servant to Allah?” Many examples can be found of men of God bearing the burdens of almost inevitable persecutions with great patience; Muhammad faced them with cheerfulness and thankfulness. The difference between two attitudes is clear enough.

Not only this. His closest people also thought of these hardships as a sign of the grace of God. Had not God chosen them to bear such heavy burden in His cause? Was it not a sign of His pleasure with them? It was this thought which made them face cheerfully all this kind of persecutions inflicted by the enemies of God. It was this feeling which made Hazrat Ali not only “patient” but “thankful” when he was asked by the Holy Prophet to sleep in this (Prophet’s) bed, so that the Prophet could leave Mecca while his would-be killers (who ringed his house) thought that he was sleeping in his bed. His only question was: “Will your life be saved if I sleep in his bed?” When assured that it was the promise of God, he prostrated to God, thanking Him that He made his (Ali’s) life a ransom for the life of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.w.)

BE WITH GOD

“And God is with you wheresoever you may be:”
(Qurʾān: Chapter 57: Verse 4)

GOD is everywhere. No space or time is without Him; yet He is independent of time and space. He is Omnipresent; and His love protects us from harm in this world as in the life hereafter.

But this relationship with God should not be one-sided. No doubt, God is with us. The vital question is: “Are we with God?” If a grown up son misbehaves and still demands the same parental affection which is enjoyed by his courteous and obedient brother, he is just deceiving himself. Likewise, some people fail to realize that there is no such thing as “one-sided companionship”. And if we want to be sure that God is with us, we must be sure that we are with God. It means that we have to prove our love towards God, if we want to be worthy of love of God. In other words, we must know also our responsibilities towards God and His creatures, and try to fulfill them.

As a first step to reach this goal, we must realize that we are too much entangled in our worldly affairs to spare a moment to remember God. We are not preparing ourselves to meet God at all. Sheikh Saduq, one of the greatest Muslim scholars, has given a very good parable to throw light on this facet of our life.

A man slipped down from the brink of a deep well. Fortunately, a plant had grown in the wall of the well, and while falling down his hands clutched a branch of that plant. After the initial shock, he began looking up and down. What he saw, was enough to make him scared. A huge serpent, in the depth of well, was waiting for him to fall down. Desperately, he decided to remain where he was; and then saw, to his horror, that two mice – one black, another white – were busy cutting the root of that plant. He lost his hope. Then he looked up, and his heart was full of hope. He was not very far from the rim of the well and, by a little judicious effort could reach the safety very easily. Then he saw a beehive in that plant. And forgetting his tragic position, he began eating the honey. Of course, the bees did not like it and began stinging him, but he remained oblivious of all the troubles. A short time after, the mice succeeded in cutting the plant down and he fell in the mouth of the serpent.

We are that man; this world is that well; the plant in midway is our life; which is being

eroded away by every passing night and day – the black and white mice; death is the serpent waiting for us. The honey represents the pleasantries of this world, for which we quarrel with other people – the bees – and are bitten by them. What makes our plight more tragic is the fact that rescue is never very far. It just requires a little effort on our part to reach the safety and security provided by the loving care of Allah.

We may easily reach to God and be safe forever. Or, on the other hand, we may be destroyed by death. The choice is ours.

LIVE & DIE FOR ALLAH

*“Say: Truly my prayer, and my actions, and my life,
and my death are all for God, the Cherisher of the Universe”.*
(Qur’an, Chapter 6; Verse 162)

THIS IS THE ideal Islam. A true Muslim surrenders to the love of Allah. All his action are motivated by one thought only: God would be pleased by this work, so it must be done. Not only the external rituals and rites, but also his emotions and thoughts are submerged by love of God. He lives for Allah, and he dies for Allah.

This week, Muslims all over the world are commemorating the great martyrdom of Imam Husain and his companions. That tragedy is the perfect example of the way a Muslim should keep the love of Allah and His religion above all things.

To begin with, Imam Husain had not refused to submit to Yazid for any worldly reason. He made it perfectly clear in his will which he wrote at the time of departure from Medina. He writes:

“I am not leaving Medina for any worldly motive: I am leaving it so that I may establish the way of my grandfather (the Prophet) and my father (Ali); and so that I may exhort people to become righteous; and may dissuade hem from evil”.

This will explain in prose what Imam said in poem while he was proceeding to Iraq. He was frequently heard reciting these lines: “If the religion of Muhammad cannot be saved except by the sacrifice of my head, Then, O swords, come and take it”.

And to save the religion of Islam, Imam Husain sacrificed not one, but 72 heads. These sacrifices were made without any remorse, without any sorrow. On 10th Muharram, when every passing moment brought a new hardship for this small caravan, Imam’s face was radiating more and more content and pleasure. He was happy that his offerings were accepted by Allah.

It was this unblemished love of Allah which prompted Imam to say in the last moments of his earthy life: “I left and forgot everything in Thy Love: Allah! And I made my children orphan, so that I may see Thee, They have minced my body by their swords. But my heart is oblivious of these tortures; it is not inclined but towards thee. O Allah”

Thus Imam Husain showed how can a man live for Allah; how can he die for Allah. This death is not death; it is eternal life, as God has said:

“Think not of those who are martyred in the way of Allah as dead. Nay! They are living, finding their sustenance in the presence of their Lord.” (Qur’ān 3:169)

“And call not those who are slain in the way of Allah "dead." Nay, they are living, only ye perceive not.” (Qur’ān 2:154)

ALLAHO AKBAR

“*Allaho Akbar*” (Allah is great).

FIVE times in 24 hours the call comes from the minarets of the mosques: Allaho Akbar. It is Azan, meant to announce the time of prayers. Right at the call of Azan, Muslims are expected to gather in the mosque.

It is a matter of pride that we are called by God to his audience. It shows his love towards His creatures that He has provided us with an opportunity to communicate with Him. He has opened His house for us, let us not be late or absent from His presence.

Azan begins with the phrase – Allaho Akbar – (Allah is great);

It ends with the phrase – La Illaha Illallah – (None is to be worshipped but Allah). It begins with the name of Allah; it ends on the name of Allah. We are reminded that Allah is the beginning; Allah is the end. Between these two phrases the Muazzin bears witness to the unity of God; and to the apostleship of Muhammad, the Holy Prophet. Then he exhorts the believers: Come for prayer; Come for the prosperity (in this world and in life hereafter); and thus it goes on till the end.

Azan is not just a symbol. It is a sermon in clear words. It not only calls a man for prayer; it also explains why should he pray, and to whom should he pray. It reminds the hearers about God; and about man’s obligation towards Him. And after these explanations, it exhorts the believers to offer their humble prayers, with full knowledge and understanding, in the presence of God.

Allah is great! Nothing else matters. Allah is calling you. Leave aside your worldly affairs. Forget your business arrangements. Do not miss this golden opportunity. Go and pray in the presence of God. He is great! Our problems, our worries, our difficulties – all will be solved in the best way, if we ask our loving Allah to solve them for us. Not only that. Our joy, our achievement, our success – nothing actually matters. Allah only is great. Let us communicate with him. Only his benevolent love and care can bring us to prosperity in this world and in life-hereafter.

REAL FAST

“O ye who believe” Fasting is prescribed to you.....that ye may (learn) self-restraint.....” (Qur’ān; chapter 2: verse 183)

THE COMMAND for fasting in Ramadhan came in the first year of the Hijra. The Holy Prophet delivered a lecture on the last Friday of the preceding month, Sha’ban, in which he said:-

“O people! You are now under the shadow of the month which has a night (Night of Qadr) which is better than thousand months. It is the month of Ramadhan in which fasting has been made compulsory by God. It is the month of patience; and the reward of patience is paradise. It is the month of mutual sympathy.

“Whoever feeds a fasting brother at the time of breaking the fast God will be as much pleased with him as though he would have emancipated a slave, and it means that his sins of past would be forgiven”.

Somebody pleaded that not everybody was affluent enough to feed others. The Holy Prophet said: “Allah is generous enough to be pleased with you even if you break the fast of Muslim brother with a morsel of date or a cup of water if it is the only thing which you can offer”. God does not see the wealth offered but it is the feeling of the heart only which counts. Then the Holy Prophet proceeded to say: “Anybody who makes the burden of his servants lighter in this month Allah will make his sins lighter for him on the Day of Judgment”.

The word ‘Ramadhan’ is derived from the root ‘R-M-Dh’, which indicate ‘Heat’ and ‘Restlessness’. It is said that the name of the month indicates the hardships which accompany a fast like thirst and a comparative restlessness.

But the best explanation was given by the Holy Prophet himself, who was the final authority on every thing. He said: “Ramadhan burns the sins and faults as fire burns the wood”.

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir told one of his companions: “O Jabir! Whoever, during Ramadhan, fasts in days, stands for prayers in parts of nights, controls his sexual desires and emotions, puts rein on his tongue, keeps his eyes down, and does not injure the feelings of others, will become as free from sin as he was the day he was born”. Jabir said: “How tough are these conditions!”

Have you courage enough to try to fulfill these ‘tough’ conditions in this Ramadhan and be freed from the chain of past sins?

FRUIT OF FASTING

*“The month of Ramadhan is the month of God,
(bringing) His blessing, mercy and forgiveness”.*
(Holy Prophet).

THE month of Ramadhan gives us a chance to start life afresh. Muslims should make resolutions during this month, to act upon during the year. This is the month when emotions remain under the control of reason. Thoughts, in this month are not wild, feelings not hard. Forgiveness, generosity and love of God through the love of His creatures are infused in our soul. Naturally, it is the best time to decide how are we going to live in the coming year. We should know what do we want to achieve and how.

Why not start making your programme just now? And when you have completed the list of your ambitions, here is a simple test to see how much have you benefited from fasts of Ramadhan.

Do your resolutions include such items as helping the needy (not by just handing out a few shillings, but by helping him to stand on his own Legs)? Have you thought of showing more respect to the elders, loving more tenderly those who are younger? Is there anything concerning your neighbours and friends? Have you any inclination to forgive your enemies? Have you resolved to live more honestly and more sincerely? And above all, is there any room for God and His Prophet in your thoughts and programmes?

If the answer is ‘Yes,’ accept my congratulations; you are a real Muslim; you know the meaning of the fast of Ramadhan.

If on the other hand, the answer is in negative, there is some need of improvement in your faith. And if you really want your faith to be more perfect time is never lost. Though the month of Ramadhan is coming to its end very soon, you may still take its advantage. There is no need to feel sorry for yourself. If you really want the love of God it is yours for asking. It is the easiest goal to reach and the most difficult. It all depends, not so much on the path, as on the traveler. If your heart is pure, it is the easiest thing in the world, if you want to put the love of God in a corrupted heart, it is just impossible.

As is clear from the tradition of the Holy Prophet quoted above, this month is the

month of blessing, month of mercy and month of forgiveness. If anybody wants these benefits, he should strive for it, with more zeal and more sincerity in the remaining few days of this holy month. If we spend our time in remembering God, praying for His love, repenting for our sins, we can be sure that God will bless us with His love and His mercy.

SPIRIT OF FAST

*“O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you.....
that ye may (learn) self-restraint.....(Qur’ān, 2:183).*

FAST like living things, has a body and a soul. The required abstinence from food, water, sexual relations etc. is the body of the fast: “piety” is its soul. If we are not striving to refine our character by fast, our will be a body without soul. Fast cleans our body from impurities. Likewise, it must purify our hearts and minds from all impure thoughts improper desires and undisciplined sensations.

The Holy Prophet saw a woman, who was fasting on that day (not in Ramadhan), abusing her girl-servant. The Prophet admonished her and told her to break her fast. The woman protested: “But I am fasting today”. The Holy Prophet said: “But was not your fast broken by the abuses you were hurling upon that poor girl?”

Imam Ja’far-e-Sadiq has said: “Your fast day should not be like other ordinary days. When you fast, all your sense – eyes, ears, tongue, hands and feet – must fast with you.”
How?

Eyes: Keep your eyes off unlawful things and objects; spend this most precious gift of God in good cause and pious acts and read Qur’ān and Du’as.

Ears: Abstain from hearing unlawful gossip, lies, false statements, music and obscene topics. Pay your attention towards sermons and topics of learning etc.

Tongue: Do not tell lies or useless tales; do not spread rumours or, damaging gossips about other persons; keep aloof from falsity. Use the power of speech in spreading the word of God; in creating goodwill in the society.

Hand: Do not inflict injury upon others by your actions; instead strive to help them as far as you can.

Feet: Do not go towards forbidden places, like bars and cinemas. Do not run between people creating a strife. Go towards those places, where God is remembered; and your movements should be to bring people together.

And above all, your heart and mind must be with you in fasting. Because fast in its real sense, will not be complete unless your thoughts, your emotions, your actions – in short, all aspects of our life – become pure, clean and free from blemish.

PURPOSE OF FASTING

“(The month of Ramadhan) is the month of repentance, month of forgiveness, month of reward”. (Holy Prophet)

The month of Ramadhan is called the “month of God”. It strengthens the relation between a man and his Creator. Think of a person abstaining from necessities of life, like food and water (to say nothing of other pleasures) 16 hours a day, for one month at a stretch; think again that he does so not because of any external pressure, but by his own free will; and remember that he expects no worldly reward and that his only wish in fasting is to be nearer to Allah – and then you may appreciate how strong is the relation between a Muslim and his Lord.

By fasting, a Muslim subjugates his worldly desires and strengthens his spiritual powers. He learns a lesson most relevant to his spiritual well-being; he comes to realize that nothing (not even his body and soul) is his own. After this realization, he can appreciate the freedom given to him by God in almost all walks of life during the past eleven months.

He will know that he can never claim of that freedom of action as a matter of right. It is just a grace of God for which he should ever remain thankful to Him.

That appreciation will lead to gratitude, and that gratitude will show itself in his behaviour and deeds all his life, making him a trustworthy friend and a lovable companion.

As the month of Ramadhan prepares a Muslim to become a perfect man, it is called “the shield against the Hell”. Also, the Holy Prophet said: “God says that fast is for me only and I Myself will give its reward”.

SINCERE REPENTANCE

“O ye who believe, turn to Allah with sincere repentance, in the hope that your Lord will remove from you your sins and admit you to the Heavens” (Qur’ān, 66 : 8).

THIS HOLY month of Ramadhan is generally referred to as the month of ‘Tauba’ (repentance). Repentance is the best way to the Grace of Allah for a person who has sinned. Allah is His infinite grace, forgives sins if the sinner repents sincerely. The operative word is ‘sincerely’.

To describe ‘sincere repentance’, Imam Ja’far-e-Sadiq (A.S.) said: “Repenting and never committing that sin again”.

According to the Islamic belief, repentance uttered by tongue, without a change of heart, is no repentance at all. Repentance must produce change in habit, honesty in dealings, fear and Love of Allah in prayers, improvement in character, generosity in behaviour and humility in nature.

Amir-ul-Mumeneen Ali (A.S.) described the characteristics of repentance in the following word: “Repentance has six elements: A repentant must be really sorry for what he had done: he must have firm determination not to do it again; he must make amends for whatever wrongs he did to others; he must fulfill all the obligations of religion which he had neglected previously; he should fast long enough to melt away the flesh grown from unclean and unlawful food; and he should feel the taste of obedience to God, as he was previously enjoying the taste of sin”.

When a man repents sincerely Allah makes him as clean as he was on the day he was born. The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.w.) has said: “One who repents from sin is like the one who never committed any sin”.

ON PILGRIMAGE

“And for God, the pilgrimage of the house (of Allah) is obligatory upon the people who have strength to go their”. (Qur’ān 3:97).

Pilgrimage to the house of Allah, in Mecca, is one of the pillars of Islam. Every Muslim fulfilling certain conditions is obliged to go for Haj, at least once in life. What are the lessons of Haj?

The first thing to attract the eyes is the simple uniformity of tens of thousands of people, wearing white unsewn cotton robes. Their purpose is one and their appearance is one. Here you will find the unity and brotherhood of Islam demonstrated in its brightest colour – angelic white.

Then, pondering upon this point, you will realize that to acquire this uniformity, every person had to discard every mark of distinction, every sign of his worldly position – political, social, financial or otherwise. May be a man whom you are talking with, is the president of a country; and, on the other hand, he may be an obscure labourer in a lonely place. There is nothing to distinguish between them in this house of God. The temporal distinctions have no value in the eyes of God. Here all human-beings have one – only one – rank.

Here they are the believed servants of Allah, coming to offer their sincere prayers in His house. We are His servants; He is our Master. It is the only relationship which counts here. All other distinctions and ranks are artificial.

Mecca has no tourists’ attraction. There are no beautiful sceneries. A place surrounded by barren rocks and hills! According to Imam Ali bin Abi Talib, it would have been as easy for Allah to select a beautiful place for His house. But he selected the barren rocks and stone walls, so that people should come here without any worldly motive. They cannot be attracted by pleasures because there is none; they cannot think about business, because Mecca has nothing to produce. Therefore, anybody coming to Mecca, must come, by virtue of necessity, with pure intention and untinted purpose. He must come for pilgrimage – and pilgrimage only.

How can a poor man be arrogant? Wealthy people are the ones who suffer most from this spiritual disease. It is, perhaps, for this reason that Haj is obligatory for those only

who are rich enough to afford the journey to Mecca. They are more exposed to the killing germs of “pride” and “ego”; they have been asked to go to pilgrimage, so that they may be cured of these maladies.

PHILOSOPHY OF PILGRIMAGE

“Haj is (in) the months well-known; if anyone undertakes to perform that duty therein, let there be no obscenity, nor wickedness, nor wrangling in the Haj; and whatever good you do, God knows it”. (Qur’ān, Chapter 2, Verse 197).

THIS IS the week of Haj, the pilgrimage to Mecca. About 1,500,000 Muslims will spend the week in Arafat, Musdalifa, Mina and Mecca under the most strict discipline of Haj.

But self-restraint and discipline is not the only benefit of this pilgrimage, (And it can be achieved by fast of Ramadhan also). The most endearing feature of Haj is that it serves to crush the pride and destroy the egoistic tendencies of the individual. It creates humility and humbleness.

It is just impossible to show your individuality and identity in Haj. Are you a scholar? Or an illiterate? Are you a king? Or an ordinary man? A military strong man? A revered man of religious world? It does not matter what was your rank or designation in your own world; this is the domain of religion and God, and here you are simply one more servant of Allah – nothing more, nothing else.

You have to wear simple cotton dress – unsewn sheets wrapped around the body. You cannot distinguish yourself even by inventing your own style of wearing. You have to wear it in the same way as the other 1,500,000 pilgrims are doing. Do you want to wear some medals or other distinguishing decorations? No chance, it is not allowed. Or at least some enchanting hairstyle? But heads are shaved, and you are to do accordingly.

Could you imagine a hard-headed executive of a firm, or an arrogant dictator of a country, wearing two white sheets, trotting between two hills seven times, forgetting all his pomp and show? Could you image an usually reserved aristocrat hitting a pillar with stones day after day oblivious of the fact that 3,000,000 eyes are upon him? Could you think of a millionaire living in hardship just like less-fortunate human-beings, but without any complaint or murmuring? Here is your chance to see these imponderables turn into accomplished facts. Arrogance, pride, high-headedness, wealth, honour, academic qualifications, political achievements, military victories – everything is worthless here. Nothing can be admired here. The only thing which has any value ‘you’, as a servant of God.

ETERNAL LIFE

“And do not think those who are martyred, in the path of Allah are dead. Nay! They are alive, in the presence of God”.....(Qur’ān 3:169).

VALUE of a sacrifice depends upon the purpose for which that sacrifice has been offered. If the purpose of the sacrifice is, for instance, wealth or political power, it is just a waste of life and nothing more. How can a life be immortal if it is worthless enough to be bartered for some precious stones or glittering minerals. Gold and Silver are not immortal; they cannot make a life immortal. A life spent in their pursuit cannot be eternal; it is just one more tragic death.

But if the purpose of the sacrifice is to please God; the man becomes immortal. When a person is martyred, witnessing the Glory of God, His Mercy, His Power and His Unity; when he accepts death to spread the name of God, then the sacrifice is worthy of its name. It is not death; death cannot conquer such soul. Here the flame of life cannot be extinguished.

Why is it so? Because, in this case, the ultimate aim of sacrificing the life was God, God Himself is immortal and Eternal. Thus a life which is spent in His way, acquires immortality from Him and the martyr becomes immortal.

A great majority of Muslims, all over the Islamic world have just been busy commemorating the tragedy of Karbala, in which Imam Husain, (a.s.) grandson of the Prophet, was martyred 1325 years ago to save Islam from the disastrous clutch of Yazid. He did know very well that he would have to suffer a good deal as a result of his rejecting Yazid. But he was not after worldly power or material gain which could be abandoned in the face of danger. He was following the policy laid down by Islam in the way of Allah. He and his children were denied water for three days; his companions and relatives were killed; his six month old child was put to death. At last his own head was severed and put on a spear; his women-folk were imprisoned and all kinds of tyrannies were aimed against them. But their determination, like that of Imam Husain (a.s.) was never weakened.

Some people think that the life, mentioned in this verse of Qur’ān, means that the martyrs will be remembered for ever. If it is so, then it is very appropriate to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Husain (a.s.) and his companions. Their memory has been, and will be, kept alive by the grace of Allah, in whose name they sacrificed their lives.

MIRACLE OF QUR'ĀN

“Do they not then earnestly seek to understand the Qur’ān, or are their hearts locked up by them?”
(Qur’ān, Chapter-47; verse 24).

THE Qur’ān is a miracle given by God to the Holy Prophet of Islam. It is miracle, both of the style and of the deep knowledge and pure truth which is being unfolded every day.

The difference between all other miracles and the Qur’ān is that the former were only for those who witnessed them. For us, they are news which may be believed or suspected according to the trend of mind. But the Qur’ān is in our hands, a book complete in itself; it claims that it is revealed, and brings the proof within itself.

Arabs in the time of the Prophet were proud of their language. The Qur’ān silenced them with its sublime literature, challenging them to bring ‘like’ of even one ‘Sura’ (chapter). The Arabs, who called other nations ‘Ālam’ (dumb), became dumb themselves when the Qur’ān put its challenge before them. They resorted to sword; they waged war after war; they inflicted sufferings and suffered themselves. Had it been within their power to bring a chapter like the Qur’ān, all this trouble would have been unnecessary. No sane man will choose a difficult way in preference to the easier one. It was the highest quality of the Qur’ānic language which baffled them and is still baffling its antagonists. History records that many people tried to meet the challenge of the Qur’ān but had to admit that it is right when it says that nobody can bring its ‘like’. Also, on the side of knowledge and truth, its miracles are not exhausted yet. There are many examples that a verse remained a puzzle for the commentators until the advent of scientific discoveries which made its meaning clear.

To give a tangible example: In the sura ‘Al-Mumin’, it says: “And Pharaoh said, ‘O Haman! Build for me a tower that I may reach the avenues, the avenues of the heavens, and may mount to God Moses’” As it is, there was no mention of Haman in the previous books. People used to wonder who was that Haman! They may be forgiven, because nobody knew before recent discoveries that ‘Amon’ was the name of the great Egyptain deity, the ‘King of gods’, patron of the most powerful Pharaohs, and pre-eminently the national god. Its high-priest also was called ‘Amon’ and was responsible for all the religious buildings and temples. What could have been more

natural for Pharaoh, when intending to build a tower to see God of Moses, than to ask the Amon's priest, himself known as 'Amon', to arrange it?

These scientific miracles of today are sufficient to make a man believe that this book is a book of God, containing the eternal truth.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF ISLAM

“It is he who has sent among the unlettered an Apostle from among themselves, to recite to them His signs and verses, to purify them, and to instruct them in the scripture and wisdom”
(Chapter 62; Verse 2).

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THIS WEEK Muslims all over the world, are celebrating the birthday of the Holy Prophet. This year has a special significance; it is the 1400th year of the declaration of the prophethood and the revelation of the Holy Book, i.e. the Qur'an.

The achievements of the Holy Prophet, in a short period of 23 years, are too numerous and far-reaching in their impact to be described here. To give a glimpse of some of the aspects of Islam, I would like to mention that it was Islam that re-established the belief in One and Universal God. It was Islam that recognized the prophets, who had appeared in other nations before Muhammad, as true Prophets. It was Islam which freed mankind from the supposed stigma of inherent evil and sin, and thus bestowed an everlasting dignity to humanity. It was Islam that said that “no bearer of burdens bears the burden of another” – that is the children of Adam cannot be condemned for Adam's supposed sin. It was Islam that laid no special rituals to accept a man in its fold, declaring that “every child is born a Muslim; it is his parents who take him away from Islam and convert him to Judaism, Christianity or other religion” – that is, he does not need any permit to come back to his original home, Islam.

It was Islam that created a direct relationship between God and individual man. If he abstains from sins, or if, after committing a sin, repents sincerely, there would be no need of any intercessor. God Himself will forgive him. Muslim preachers have no privilege of forgiving sin on behalf of God, or of granting paradise quarters to their followers. Thus Islam has made each and every person responsible for his own actions.

Islam treated man as man, not as God; it recognized the shortcoming of human beings; and gave them a code of conduct which combines the lofty ideals of Love with the practical aspects of Justice. It has laid down clear rules for every aspect of life, which are based on justice and cannot be violated and after a man has achieved that minimum degree of piety, he is exhorted and encouraged to reach the higher and

higher goal of moral and spiritual perfection. This combination of minimum requirements of justice with maximum aspiration of lofty morals is the most unique aspect of the religion of God which is Islam.

HOW ISLAM WAS SPREAD ?

*“And the leaders among them (i.e. the unbelievers) go (saying)
‘Walk ye away and remain constant to your gods; for this
(Islam) is truly a thing designed (against you)’” (Qur’ān 38:6)*

Islam, in its infancy, was a secret mission. After 3 years the Holy Prophet announced openly his message to the people of Mecca. The news of new religion traveled far and wide, and the hurling of open denunciation at the ancestral idols of Arabs by the Holy Prophet set all Arabia ablaze.

The resentment, at first, led them to approach his uncle and guardian, Abu Talib, to persuade him to silence his nephew. Abu Talib conveyed their message to Muhammad. Muhammad replied; “Uncle dear, even if they place the Sun in my right hand and the Moon in my left hand in order to turn me away from the work which I have been entrusted by Allah to do, I will not listen to them”. Saying this he burst into tears. Abu Talib said “Go in peace, my son! And do what thou wilt, for, by God! I will not abandon thee”. This decision of Abu-Talib infuriated the Meccans.

As a last attempt they approached Muhammad himself. They told him: “If your ambition is to acquire wealth, we will amass wealth for you as much as you may ever desire, and if you are aspiring for power and honour, we are prepared to accept you as our king and overlord; and if you have any fancy for beauty, you shall have the hand of the fairest maiden in the land”. Muhammad’s reply was short and clear: “Neither I want wealth nor do I want power or beauty. I have been commissioned by Allah as a warner to the mankind, I am communicating His message to you. If you accept it, you shall have facility in this life and the life hereafter, and should you reject it, verily, God will decide between you and me”.

And God decided in favour of his own religion. In spite of the bitterest persecution suffered by the Muslims at the hand of the Meccans, Islam made steady progress. And, in the end, even its erstwhile enemies were attracted to its fold.

MERCY FOR ALL WORLDS

“AND We did not send thee (Muhammad) but for the whole mankind”.
(Qur’ān, 34:28)

Look at the major religions of the world minutely and you will find that it is only Islam which claimed from the beginning to be the religion for the whole mankind.

God sent, before Muhammad, thousands of prophets and apostles to different places and nations to guide their people to the right path. It should be mentioned here that the word ‘Prophet’, when used by a Muslim, does not mean ‘one who foretells the events’. Foretelling the events is not a very important function of a ‘Prophet’. A Prophet, according to Islam, is sent by God to call people to His path. He is the link between Allah and His creatures, and by following his foot-prints the followers can be sure of receiving the glory of God.

Anyhow, when as a result of the efforts of those Prophets mankind reached the stage of maturity, the Holy Prophet of Islam was sent by God for the whole mankind. He re-affirmed, revived, consolidated and perfected the teachings of the earlier prophets (which by passage of time had become distorted and disfigured).

Muhammad come in the world, announcing that, “I have been sent to all people - red and black and yellow”. Among his early followers were people from Ethopia, Iran, Rome and India.

According to the Qur’ān, Allah is not a tribal god but the ‘Lord of Universe’; and the Holy Prophet is ‘The Mercy for the universe’.

By sending his messengers to Asia Minor, Iran, Egypt, Ethopia, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, Umman and many other places, calling those people to come within the fold of Islam, Muhammad left an undeniable proof that his was the universal religion, unfettered with the shackles of tribe, religion, colour or race.

EQUALITY OF MAN

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

“O PEOPLE, verily we created you of a male and a female; and We made you in clans and tribes so that you may recognize Each other: but the most honoured of you with God is the one Who is the most pious of you”, (Qur’ān, Chapter 49, Verse 13).

GO deep into the history of last 1400 years and you will find the imprint of Islam on every right chapter. Take, for example, the idea of human brotherhood and equality of man with man. This wide-spread belief of today is the gift of Islam.

Before Islam, people generally believed in tribal gods. In some quarters there was an idea of a supreme being; but that supreme being was almost always the god of one’s own tribe; the gods of other tribes were inferior ones. One was bound to despise those other gods, but the interesting point is that, anyhow, the other gods were recognized to exist!

That multitude of gods and semi-gods, was bound to cause conflicts and disharmonies amongst mankind, and it did cause divisions to an unbelievable extent. Theories were advanced to legalise the division of mankind into separate classes – some privileged, other persecuted and oppressed. Beliefs were fostered condemning certain branches of humanity, not because they were of bad character but just because they happened to belong to a certain tribe or clan. Different legal and social codes were invented for different classes. As there was no feeling of a Universal God, man did not have a feeling of kinship with other human beings.

The advent of Islam was the beginning of the end of such tendencies. Islam, with its emphasis on the Oneness of God, created a belief in the oneness of His creatures. Gradually the belief influenced the thought of mankind. Now the principle of equality and human brotherhood is recognized in the whole world – with certain sad exceptions. When I hear the leaders of world opinion proclaiming that racial or tribal discrimination is a sin against God, I feel proud to being to Islam which proclaimed that principle for the first time in the history of mankind. Not only proclaimed it, but made it an integral part of the Muslims’ daily life.

It was Islam which explained in most realistic terms the cause of the existence of different tribes and clans and asked man to look into the qualities of soul, not on the colour skin.

ON AKHLAQUE

ONCE A man asked the Holy Prophet: “What is the best of all actions”?
The Holy Prophet replied: “Akhlaque”.

Akhlaque is an Arabic word meaning behaviour or character or, more accurately, “moral character”. The Holy Prophet himself was praised by Allah because he possessed all the virtues and qualities of highest moral character. God said: “Indeed thou art at the highest peak of good manners”.

The Holy Prophet has also said; “You should create within yourselves the Akhlaque (behaviour) of Allah”. For example, Allah is merciful: we should be merciful to others. Allah is forgiving; we also should forgive others when they are at fault. Allah treats even his enemies with love and magnanimity, we also should do likewise.

And herein lies the basic difference between an “Akhlaque” based on love of God and the modern “Akhlaque”, based on self-interest. Today nations have progressed materially to level which was undreamed of even 50 years ago. Contacts between man and man, and nation and nation, have increased due to trade, industry and commerce. There is exchange of students, scholars and technicians. The size of the earth has been reduced by modern aircrafts.

Now, motivated by the instinct of self-preservation, nations are trying to evolve international moral codes. But these codes are observed more by violation than by adherence. Why?

The answer in simple words is one and only one. We have built these codes on a wrong foundation. We have tried to build our moral behaviour (which requires some “sacrifices”) on self-interest (which allows for no sacrifice). The only way to emancipate mankind from moral bankruptcy is to restore our faith in Allah, and believe in the life hereafter.

CODE OF CONDUCT

“Verily, the religion before God is Islam” (Qur’ān, 3:19).

ISLAM HAS given mankind a perfect code of conduct. Man from every walk of life have been clearly instructed how to perform their duties, how to behave. Islamic law is based on Justice; Islamic ethics, on love and grace.

The most strict rules have been laid down for those who enter the public life, like judges, governors etc. The Holy Prophet once sent a man as a Qadhi to Southern Arabia. When he came back, he brought many gifts given to him during his stay there. When the Holy Prophet came to know about it, he demanded that all the gifts be brought to him to be distributed among poor. The ex-judge protested that it was his personal property, as it was given as gifts. The Prophet said: “Had you gone there in your private capacity without any official credential, these gifts would have been your private property. But as long as you were my Qadhi, the things presented to you were not ‘gifts’; it was ‘bribe’ to please you so that they might benefit from you.” The man had to return all his “gifts”.

This clear cut rule is worth following by all public leaders. Then they would not have to worry how much a Member of Parliament may accept from his “clients”; or how much “expenses” can be spent on pleasure trips.

Hazrat Ali (a.s.) was informed of a dinner attended by the Governor of Basra. He at once wrote him a long letter, some sentences of which are sufficient to show how Islam expects its officers to behave.

“I have been told that a young man of Basra invited you to a dinner and you hurried to it. Fine dishes were brought out for you; luxurious plates were served. I never thought that you would accept a dinner to which only rich were invited, and from which poor were excluded.....See that I, your Imam, am satisfied from this world with two old clothes and two daily bread. I know that you cannot do as I am doing, but at least you should try to help me with your efforts, your fear of God and your behaviour; because, by God, I did not collect from this world of yours any gold, nor did I amass any riches.....

“Should I remain content that people call me ‘Amir-ul-Mumeneen’ (leader of the faithful) without sharing with them their hardships, without setting for them a model

to be followed.....”

Many of his letters to governors and officers show this trend when he exhorts them to live as ordinary men, without erecting barriers between them and the people; to behave in such a way “that big people cannot use you to oppress poor ones, and poor are not discouraged from obtaining justice even against the richest and biggest man”.

SELF – CRITICISM

IN ISLAMIC terminology, one aspect of human soul is called ‘Lawwamah’ (self-reproaching spirit). It is one of the surest means of perfecting one’s character and behaviour. As Hadhrat Ali (a.s.) said: “Check your account (of deeds) before you are called to render it (after death, in presence of God)”. We must check our account and make up the shortcoming before it is too late.

Realistic self-evaluation and self-criticism are essential for the development of the soul. Only in this way can we save ourselves from being a prey of conceit and pride. Before we go to sleep we must relive the whole day, seeing whether our behaviour was upto the required standard of spiritual perfection. If we detect any slip, any wrong or any impurity, we must firmly resolve to amend it at once and repent sincerely.

If we cultivate this habit of continuous self-criticism, we will progress, in no time at all, towards that stage of spiritual perfection which is called in Islam ‘Motmainnah’ when a soul feels rest and satisfaction by grace of Allah. But this self-criticism must begin before our vision has blurred, before evil makes a slave of our soul. Otherwise, we will fail to recognise the evil when we see it.

When a murderer justifies (nay, really feels justified in) his crime; when a robber thinks that, by his action, he is rectifying the imbalance of the society, then only a special grace of God can save him from plunging into the lowest Hell of disgrace.

Unfortunately, modern society is heading blindly towards that same degradation. Social thinkers spend their whole energy in inventing new excuses for law-breakers. Stealing is white-washed by the impressive name of ‘kleptomania’; sex-perversion and dirty habits are explained away as “just a protest against society”. Criminals are afforded more protection in law than their helpless victims, under the disguise of ‘liberty of the individual’. And the real tragedy is that all of it is done in the name of ‘progress’.

Is the ‘conscience’ of modern nations merely stunned? Or, really dead?

ON RIGHTEOUSNESS

“Righteousness is not just to turn your faces towards the East or the West (in prayers). But the true righteous is he who believes in Allah and the Last Day and the angels and the Book (Qur’ān) and the prophets; and gives his wealth, for love of Allah, to the kindred and the orphan and the poor and the traveler and to those who ask (for help), and for ransoming the captives;(Qur’ān 2: 178).

JUST to observe some external rites is not Islam. True faith and good actions are the primary requisite of a Muslim. Faith is the seed which gives birth to good deeds; and if the faith does not create an urge in us to perform noble deeds, our faith is dormant, and we must try to awaken it by conscious efforts.

If a Muslim does not help needy persons, if he does not bestow love and kindness upon the orphans, if he turns out the people who are in need of assistance, then his claim of righteousness is just a claim and nothing more.

Often we have seen our kith and kin in distress; several times we have been approached by stranded travelers seeking shelter and food; daily we hear the cries of starving persons in famine-stricken areas; so many times we have looked upon a child whose very countenance was a monument of affliction and hardship. What has been our usual reaction in these circumstances? Have we parted with some of the wealth to help the poor fellows. And have we done it with kindness and a sense of gratitude? And above all, have we done it “For love of Allah”? Let us search our soul!

The above-mentioned Ayat of Qur’ān exhorts us to have faith, and to support that faith by charity and good deeds, based upon ‘Love of Allah’: We should realize that the fellow human-beings are in the eyes of Islam, ‘dependents of Allah’, and that our wealth is, in fact, a property of Allah, given to us in trust. When we help our fellow brethren, we should remember that we are giving the property of God to the dependents of God. It should be based upon love of Allah, without any shade of worldly motives. A secret desire to enhance our social prestige by a charity destroys the fibre of that charity. A help given with a motive to gain political advantage is a body without soul.

Alas, how many good actions are ruined by unworthy motives!

Have faith, bestow charity; and bestow it ‘For Love of Allah’, That is the basic teaching of Islam.

JUSTICE & GENEROSITY

“Verily, God commands (you) to do justice and be generous.....” (Qur’ān Chapter 16, Verse 90).

ISLAMIC code of conduct is based on justice and love in every sphere of life. For example, it commands the trade to “give full measure and weight”. It is justice. Then it exhorts him to give more than the agreed quantity while, side by side, the buyer is encouraged to try to take less than that. It is love. In this atmosphere, friction and litigation are things unimaginable.

Another example: Islam prohibits hoarding food grain when there is a shortage in the market. It is justice, and it rules out that possibility of artificial famine and black market which are the cause of our present day society. But our religious leaders have gone further, setting the example of Islamic love and sympathy.

Imam Ja’far-e-Sadiq (a.s.) used to purchase his one year’s requirement of food grains at the beginning of the year. Once there was a danger of famine in Madina. He asked his men how much grain was left in his store. They assured him that there was enough to suffice for long time. Hearing it, he ordered them to take out all that grain and sell it at once at a much cheaper price. They protested that his family would have to suffer from the famine if the grain was sold out. Imam replied: “Let us alleviate the present calamity as much as we can. Afterwards, we will be just one of the public, sharing with them the hardships of the famine. We shall eat when they will eat; we will be hungry when they will be hungry”. This was the love. And what is our behaviour these days? Famine conditions are created artificially to raise the prices. Such people literally feast on the dead-bodies of the poor. The present day economy of the world, which is based on un-Islamic principles, encourages human greed instead of suppressing it. Islamic love and sympathy have no room in the structure of today’s commerce and industry.

The people are taught from the childhood the God-less theory of the struggle for self-preservation and the survival of the fittest. Everybody is made to believe that his survival depends, not on co-operation with others, but on killing the weaklings. In this background, the strifes and conflicts are inevitable.

This way of life, which denies the authority of God in our daily life, offers no solution to the sufferings of our times. The only refuge is in the precincts of Islam which accepts the authority of God in every Sphere of our life, be it material or spiritual.

ESSENCE OF ETHICS

“Verily, God commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin; and He forbids all shameful deeds and injustice and rebellion”. (Qur’ān: 16: 90).

THIS ‘Ayat’ of the Holy Qur’ān has been truly acclaimed by the commentators as the ‘essence of ethics’. The basic requirement of human character is “justice”. It is a comprehensive term which includes all virtues of philosophy. But to raise himself higher than this lowest rung of the ladder, a man needs something warmer and more humane – doing of good deeds even where they are not demanded by justice, returning good for evil, being kind to those who (in worldly language) have no claim on him.

After exhorting to be generous to all, special mention has been made of those whose claims are recognized in social life: your kith and kin. This includes all moral and ethical, as well as legal and obligatory; duties of a man towards his family and relatives. It ensures a good society by ensuring a good family.

And the opposites, the evils, are to be avoided, because a cup of honey becomes poisonous if a few drops of poison are mixed with it. A man is to refrain from “shameful deeds”, and injustice. In Islam, end does not justify the means. A just and good end must be reached through just and good means. Therefore, it was necessary to warn mankind of all shameful acts, unjust means.

And last, but not least, man is to guard himself against rebellion – rebellion against God, rebellion against good conscience. Some people say: “It is a very high standard; a very distant goal”. And then they decide that distance is a good excuse to abandon the path.

This attitude is the result of the weakness of their spirit. Ironically, the spirit can be strengthened by pursuing the right path only. If you want to go from Dar-es-Salaam to London you have to make a start, otherwise you will never reach there. So, if you are to achieve perfection of character, you have to start the spiritual journey – in right direction. Distance of goals is not an excuse to sit idle on the road-side: rather, it is a challenge.

ON PRIDE

“He (Satan) refused (to obey God) and was proud.....” (Qur’ān, Chapter 2, verse 34):

PRIDE, greed and envy are the three basic evils which are the foundation of all sins and crimes in this world. All three were clearly demonstrated in the very beginning of mankind when Satan refused to bow down before Adam and arrogantly declared that he was better than Adam. It was ‘pride’ which led to disobedience of God. Eve, owing to her greed, was persuaded by Satan that eating from the ‘forbidden tree’ would be in her benefit. That also led to the disobedience of God. Cain became envious of his brother Abel and killed him. Envy led to the capital sin and crime. It is for the sake of these moral lessons that this story has been repeated several times in the Qur’ān.

Pride is one of the most condemned sins in Islam. Four verses of the Qur’ān clearly state that Hell is the abode of proud persons. The Holy Prophet has said: “Allah says, greatness is My prerogative, and whoever tries to share it with me (becomes proud) I will put him in Hell”.

Islam has framed its code of life in such a way that pride is crushed continuously. Take for example the rules of salutation. It has been stressed that you should be the first in saying ‘Salamu alaikum’. Do not wait for others to salute you. And it makes no difference whether the other party is older or younger than you or equal to you in age. Not only this code, but the reason given for it also is a sure remedy of pride. It has been explained in this way. If the other party is older than you, you must salute him, because owing to his longer stay in this world, he has got more chances of good deed than you have; if he is younger than you, you must salute him, because owing to his shorter stay in this world, he has got less chances of evil-deed and sins than you have; if he is your contemporary, remember that you know your own, but not his, vices and sins: therefore you must be the first to begin Salaam to everyone without any distinction of age or rank.

Prayers in the mosques are another example of crushing the pride. There are no reserved seats. Whoever comes first, sits nearer to the priest. A pauper stands in the first line, a millionaire stands behind him: and in prostration the feet of the pauper touch the head of the millionaire, reminding him that in the presence of God it is piety which counts, not the coins.

Pilgrimage to Mecca is another reminder of this lesson. Poor and rich, great and small, ruler and ruled, all are dressed alike, with shaven heads and nearly bare feet, and perform all the functions of Haj side by side.

Thus minds are deansed constantly of ‘pride’, one of the fundamental evils.

ON GREED

“And when they are told, ‘Spend ye of (the bounties) with which God has provided you, the unbelievers say to those who believe: ‘Shall we then feed those whom, God would have fed Himself if He had so willed? You are in nothing but manifest Error:” (Qur’ān, 36:47).

GREED is the rather fundamental evil. All these litigation, all these disputes, all these conflicts, are nothing but a manifestation of greed. Greed, basically a personal evil, has gradually been extended to national, and then international, affairs. These wars, whether hot or cold; these races of armament; these international intrigues; these power blocks, what is their real reason? An uncontrollable greed to dominate the world!

Islam trains a man to subdue his greed to the greater benefit of mankind. It has forbidden “interest” and thus abolished the system of earning money from money. Islamic society cannot tolerate an economic system based upon taking and giving interest. If you have money to spare, give it without any worldly motive, just for the sake of pleasing Allah by helping his creatures. Do not follow those unbelievers who refused to help poor on the pre text that God could have given them wealth, had He wanted so. They have been condemned in the verse quoted above. Do not take a share in that condemnation by acting like them!

Alms and Zakaat are another method of subduing the undesirable greed. Ameer-ul-Momeneen Ali bin Abi Talib has said: “O son of Adam. Whatever thou earneth above thy needs, thou art just its treasurer for others”. The world will become a paradise, if mankind heeds to this ethical code and changes its attitude accordingly. Also he has said: “Whatever poverty and distress in this world, is owing to the greed of rich men who do not comply with the rules laid down by Islam about their financial obligations”.

Division of inheritance is another method by which Islam compels Muslims to distribute the wealth accumulated during a lifetime. The Qur’ān lays down the detailed rules of its distribution among heirs. But it does not become silent after this. It says that if any poor person is present, give something to him also.

The Holy Prophet has said: “Allah says, ‘The poor are my dependants, the rich my agents; if my agents will not give to my dependents their due I shall put them in Hell and I shall not care for them”.

Let us root out the ‘greed’ from our hearts. Only then this world will be a place to live upon.

ON ENVY

“Do they envy people for what God hath given them of His bounty”? (Qur’ān Chapter 4: verse 54).

ENVY is the third basic evil; and itself is a product of pride, greed and anger. It is the most foolish of all evils. Every evil has some attraction to catch the eyes of mankind, except envy. It has no immediate or long-term benefit, no comfort, no sweetness. On the contrary, an envious man burns his own heart, wastes his own time thinking why God has given such bounties to my neighbour, and keeps awake the whole night imagining that neighbour as ruined. But all this wishful thinking affects nobody but his own psychology and health. It is a fire which burns the fire-maker only.

The inner layers of envy are worth studying. Why a man indulges in this most futile exercise? Does he think that God should consult him before bestowing His grace upon someone else? Does he imagine that he is a partner of God, and that nothing, especially no good, should happen on the Earth without his consent? If not so, then why so much heart-burning on the decisions of God? On the other hand, does he think that God’s grace is a limited quantity which must be taken away from one to give to another. If not so, then why envy your relatives or friends? Why not ask God to bestow His grace upon you also as He has done with them?

Envy ruined Satan when he began burning his heart on the status of Adam. It destroyed Cain when he became envious of his own brother Abel. Therefore, the Holy Prophet has said: “Envy eats away the good deeds as fire eats away the wood”.

Islam has prescribed a medicine for this spiritual sickness: love. It shows the way towards the Love of God through the love of His creatures. The best person in the eyes of God is that who is the best for the creatures of God.

It also emphasizes that the real grace and bounty is not that of this world. The bounty and grace in the life-hereafter is the real one. Therefore, you should not make the comforts of this world ultimate goal of your life. Your aim must be the ‘Eternal Grace of God’. That grace cannot be obtained by envy; it may be obtained by love. Love of God, love of His Prophet, love of the family of the prophet, love of your parents and your relatives, love of your neighbours, love of your brothers in religion, love of your fellow human beings – these are some aspects of love which are stressed by Islam, to make a man free from envy and spite. Let the ‘love’ conquer ‘envy’, and be a real Muslim.

MOST DANGEROUS DISEASE

Satisfaction with one's spiritual performance is one of the most dangerous diseases of soul. What are the symptoms of this disease? The patient has a feeling that he has got the monopoly of the spiritual perfection and no one else is worthy of the mercy of God. According to his thinking, whatever is done by him is always correct and justified; and whatever is done by others is always based on wrong motive and, therefore, wrong.

For example: if he remains aloof from public, it is because he likes to avoid the chances of sin and mistake. If other are aloof, it is because they are proud. If he mixes with the people, it is because he loves the children of God. If others mix with the masses, it is because they want to ensure their political future. If he berates a man, it is because it is his divine duty to point out that man's mistakes to him. If others do the same, it is because they are prejudiced against that man. If he commits a mistake, it is because to err is human. If others commit the same sin, it is because they are ignorant and irreligious. If he sleeps, it is because the body needs some rest. If others sleep, it is because they are lazy.

When a soul is caught in this invisible snare of Satan, only the Mercy of Allah can save it from eternal disgrace.

ON EXTRAVAGANCY

“Verily, God is not pleased with the extravagants”.
(Qur’ān 7:31).

THERE is a marriage in the neighbourhood. The parties belong to middle class. They cannot afford a big feast; they cannot afford the pomp and show. But oh, the strange twists of “inferiority complex”! They want to appear more prosperous than they are. Their trend of thought “What will ‘the people’ say if we did not do this, or did not do that? The ‘name of the family’ should not be allowed to be tarnished by our poverty”. And so, to ‘save the name of the family’, the poor people spend more than they can afford reasonably.

It is just one example. This evil is not limited to the special functions only. In fact, it has become the accepted norm of life in these days. Cars are purchased – on hire-purchase, of course – where a cycle would serve the same purpose. Nylon and silk is used when the cotton clothes may prove more comfortable. Watches are worn by people who have all the time in the world at their disposal. Typewriters are considered a necessity for a man who writes no more than two letters in a week. These examples are not imaginary.

And what is the result of this spending beyond limit? The first thing is that God is displeased. And his displeasure manifests itself in many ways. Usually there is no money when it is needed most: rent of the house becomes overdue, prompting the landlord to serve notice of eviction; family grocer grumbles that his bills are not paid in time, so he will not give any thing except by cash; the doctor gently reminds that his accounts must be settled without delay. And so on. But there is no money to meet these demands. It has already been over-spent on ‘face-saving items’.

There is only one remedy: Think twice before spending money. There is a test to decide, whether the thing you intend to purchase is actually a ‘necessity’. Is your work suffering without it? Are you experiencing actual difficulty without it? If so, go ahead and take it. If not, forget it.

GENEROSITY AND MISERLINESS

“And spend in the way of Allah and put not yourselves into destruction by your own hands”. (Qur’ān, 2:192).

Not spending in the way of Allah, i.e., being miser is, according to the Qur’ān, tantamount to self-destruction. There are four types of people so far as generosity is concerned:-

1. First come those who ignore their own needs and comforts and spend whatever they have to help others. This is the highest stage of human generosity, which reflects the divine virtue: God needs nothing and sustains every creature.
2. Then are those who spend to satisfy their own needs as well as to help others. They are ‘beloved of Allah’, and may be sure of His Grace in both worlds.

A Muslim is exhorted to reach at least this standard, if not the first one.

3. Now we leave the boundary of generosity and come to those whose only ambition is to satisfy their own desires without caring about the plight of others. They are ‘enemies of God’; they feel no compassion for others, how can they expect any mercy on the Day of Judgement!
4. But the worst kind of niggards are those who do not spend even for their own necessities. Such people neither deserve nor get any love from anyone. As Imam Ja’fer-e-Sadiq explained, “such persons practise misery as a safeguard against some imagined future adversity. It is ironic to see them inflicting upon themselves by their own hands the same hardships which they are guarding against. What a fool he is! He collects the money by hook or crook, lives in a wretched condition, earns the displeasure of God, is despised by his fellows; and when he dies, the heirs spend that ill-gotten money extravagantly in pursuit of their sinful ambitions. The miser does not get any benefit from his wealth and earns the condemnation of God for his miserliness....and, as if that was not enough, gets his share in the punishment of the heirs also”.

ISLAMIC GENEROSITY

“Be generous as Allah is generous to thee”
(Qur’ān:Chapter 28 Verse 77)

IT is the foundation of Islamic generosity. Allah gave us every thing, right from our very existence up to the highest place of honour in His presence in the life hereafter. Our natural instinct demands that we should express our gratitude towards Him – in words as well as in actions. Prayers prescribed by religion serve the purpose of saying ‘Thank you’ to Him. The verse of Qur’ān quoted above shows us the way. It is by services of humanity that we can show our gratitude towards Allah.

Naturally, it follows that, when we help any person, we should not do it in expectation of any return or any thanks from the beneficiary. On the contrary, we must be thankful to him that by accepting our help, he gave us a chance to demonstrate our gratitude to our Creator. Virtue is its own reward because it satisfies our natural urge to manifest our thankfulness towards Allah.

This, according to Islam, must be our attitude when we are helping others. But what is our obligation when we are on the receiving end of the aid? Islam teaches us that we must be thankful, in the first place, to Allah; because He is the actual source of help. And then we should be thankful to that man whom Allah made His agent in that help. Thus all persons who were instrumental in that help must be thanked sincerely. The Holy Prophet has said: “He who did not thank people, did not thank Allah.”

A recent incident has reminded me how far the world is vet from real religion tenets. In last few days, there was much hue and cry about National Service. Had our society been based upon above mentioned mutual respect and co-operation, as taught by religion, such things would have been impossible. The nation would have helped the students without any expectation of repayment in any form. But the students, on the other hand, would have insisted that they should be given a chance to prove their appreciation of, and gratitude towards, nation for the help given in time of need. How inspiring would have it been to see the nation, poor as it is, giving education to its youth, without feeling the necessity of reminding him of his obligations; and then to see that youth, not shouting against the representatives of nation, but insisting that he, on his own accord, would serve the nation on a nominal pay and donate the balance to nation, not for two years only but so long as the full expenses incurred during his

education are not reimbursed.

Let us pray a time comes when this vision remains a vision no longer; when not the conflict of interests, as taught by materialism, but sincere co-operation, as taught by religion, becomes the basis of society.

TRUE CHARITY

“And whatever you give, verify God knows it well”.
(Qur’ān: 3:92).

CHARITY is no just doling out some cash or material to a needy person. It involves far deeper feeling and far more subtle psychological attitude. Sincerity of purpose is the soul of charity. Unfortunately charity has become one of the most misunderstood virtues in our time. Industrial progress and commercial environment of modern society has degraded charity into a medium of business propaganda. How many times do we see an advertisement for a charitable cause which ends with line “space kindly donated by M/s. xyz”?

According to Islam, a charity must be only for the sake of God, without any shade of worldly motive. Islam condemns “those who spend their wealth to show to the people” (Qur’ān)! Such baseless charity has been described to be “like a hard barren rook on which is a little soil; on it falls heavy rain and leaves it just a bare stone” (Qur’ān).

The second condition to remember is that a charity must be of such a thing which we have earned lawfully. Qur’ān says: “Give of the good things which you have honourably earned”. Mass psychology may have an awe for the tactics of Robin Hood: but religion cannot glorify or endorse such methods. It follows that only such charity is real charity in Islamic language. A handful of rice given with our own free will for God is more valuable in Islam than a shipload given under compulsion or for worldly motives.

And what can be given in charity. Qur’ān says: “Never shall you attain righteousness unless you give freely of that which you love”. So this is the test of the real charity: Do you give something that you value greatly? If you give you life for a cause, that is the greatest gift you can offer. Next in degree are your personal efforts, your talents, your skill, and your learning. Then come the charities involving your earnings, your property and your possessions. There are other aspects of charity in which you sacrifice the well-being of your near and dear ones, or your near and dear ones, or your position, or reputation.

Whatever the form of your charity, it is the unselfishness which God demands; and whatever you give verily God knows it well.

BOTH WORLDS

“Our Lord! Give us good in this world, and good in the hereafter, and protect us from the torment of the fire”. (Qur’an 11:20).

OUR life in this world has a direct bearing upon our life hereafter (Akherat). The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.w.) has said: “This world is the farmfield of the life hereafter”. The ultimate purpose of farming is the harvest. And nobody can expect any harvest if he has neglected the farming. Like-wise the main aim of our life in this world is to be prepared for the blessings, in the life hereafter. There may be toils and hard times during the period when a farmer is engaged in cultivation. But, the joyful expectation of the golden harvest overcomes every sorrow. Likewise, there may be afflictions and hardships in our life in this world; but the pleasant waiting for the life hereafter helps a Muslim to bear all difficulties with content.

We are not encouraged to put aside the responsibilities of this world if we are to obtain the benefits of the life hereafter. It will be just like neglecting the farm and hoping that the harvests will be good. In fact, our worth cannot be put to test if we leave this world and its complications. The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.w.) has said: “He is not from me who leaves this world for Akherat, nor he who leaves Akherat for this world”. Both should be given due attention. That is why Allah commands those who seek the blessings of Allah in this world as well as in the life here after.

Good neighbours, faithful family, obedient children, just livelihood – these are some examples of the blessings of the God in this world. These blessings help us to perform our duties towards Allah, towards His creatures, and towards ourselves. Thus these blessing become instrumental in seeking the blessing of Allah in Akherat (life hereafter). Paradise is just one of the blessing of Akherat. The most important thing, in the eyes of Islam, is ‘the pleasure of God’. Qur’an says: “And the pleasure of Allah is the greatest (bliss)” (Qur’an 9:72).

LOVE OF THIS WORLD

“It has been made to seem attractively fair in the eyes of men the love of desire for women, and sons and the hoarded treasures of gold and silver, and horses branded (for blood and excellence) and (wealth of) cattle and well-tilled land; such are the possession of this world’s life; while in nearness to God is the best of the goals”. (Qur’an, 3:14).

The word, used in this verse are to be carefully noted. Mark the words ‘love of desire’, which refers to the mad passion to own things for the sake of owning them.

Things necessary for life must be owned, and it has never been condemned in Islam. As another verse of the Qur’an says: “Say, Who hath forbidden the beautiful (gifts) of God which He hath produced for His servants, and the things clean and pure for sustenance?”

In fact what is undesirable is the mad attachment of human beings to the material things which makes them slaves of luxury and which makes parting with them painful. When a man reaches that stage, his whole being revolves around materialism and he forgets God and His love. Islam does not demand total annihilation of emotions in man; it demands that the man should keep the emotions duly subjugated to the higher aims of the moral and ethical perfection.

Actually it is far more difficult to control passion rather than annihilate it. One has to own the good things which are necessary and comforting for his life; but at the same time, he should be free from unnecessary attachment to them; so that when a demand is made to part with them in, the higher causes of religion or human compassion, he parts with them without any hesitation.

As a Muslim saint said to one of his disciple, “Son, if you want to be a fly, be a fly which sits on sugar; but, for God’s sake, don’t be a fly which sits on honey. Because, a fly sitting on sugar leaves it the moment it wants; but a fly which sits on honey becomes imprisoned in it, unable to leave it and dies miserably”.

HUMILITY

“And the servants of Most Gracious God are those who walk on the earth in humility, and when the ignorant people address them, they say: ‘Peace’. (Qur’ān; 25:63).

This verse of the Holy Book shows the best way to deal with such stubborn fools who thrive on their ignorance. The true believers are to ignore them.

The same idea has been stressed upon in another verse: “And when they hear vain talk, they turn away therefrom and say ‘To us our deeds, and to you your deeds; peace be to you, we seek not the ignorants” (28:55).

The men of low society can never forgive any slight – real or imaginary. But a really big man can afford to ignore his detractors. In fact, it is not weakness; it is the sign of great strength.

And as the true faith is the greatest power, the believer can easily ignore the invectives of unbelievers.

The ignorant unbelievers want to involve the believers in their illogical arguments; the believers should refuse to be dragged in such vain talks, saying that we do not want to have any connection with ignorant persons. After all, it is not possible to rectify each and every absurdity in this vast world.

The ideal discussion is that which is held with an intention to reach at the truth, without prejudice and without conceit. Such a dialogue is welcome in Islam. But if a stubborn ignorant tries to drag a believer in baseless arguments, not to seek the truth, but to show how wise he is, the Qur’ān advises to ignore him completely.

AMR-BIL-MAAROOF

“And from among you there should be a group who invite good and enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong; and they only shall be successful. (Qur’ān; 3:103).

Exhorting others to be virtuous is one of the most important duties of a Muslim. A society can progress in right direction so long as there are people in it who know the right path and who are willing to show it to others. Otherwise, the whole caravan may perish in a beastly jungle of anarchy and infidelity.

But before enjoining others to do good and resist from evil, one should himself adhere to the tenets of religion faithfully. Otherwise, the Qur’ān will ask: “Why do you speak of a thing which you yourself do it not”. So this duty of inviting others to righteousness compels a man to be righteous himself.

And how that exhortation is to be carried out Allah says in the Qur’ān: “Call unto the way of the Lord with wisdom and kind preaching; and argue with them in the best manner”. (16:25).

This was the method used by the Holy Prophet of Islam and his true followers to spread the message of Islam and to teach people the real significance of religion.

An interesting story is told of an old man in Medina who was engaged in ablution (Wudhu) for his prayer. Imam Hasan and Imam Husain (a.s.) (the grandsons of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.w.) and of tender age at that time) realized that the man does not know the correct method of ablution. They wanted to correct him; but at the same time did not like to offend his feelings. So they approached him and told: “We are two brothers and we want you to be the judge between us as whose ablution is correct”. When the old man agreed, the children proceeded to perform their ablution, in the most perfect way. The old man was watching them intently. He had to: he was to judge. Soon it dawned upon him that the children, in their kind and gentle manner, were teaching him. He exclaimed: “You both are correct. It was I who was wrong”.

The old man learnt his lesson. But this episode will continue to show the preachers also how to preach.

THE BEST 'JIHAD'

“The best ‘Jihad’ (religious war) is to say the truth in the presence of a tyrant ruler”. (The Holy Prophet)

The condition of a society can easily be judged by the attitude of its members towards each other. If the members care enough for each other to exhort each other to act righteously, the society is healthy. When the attitude changes to that of “Why should I bother?” the society begins its funeral march. As the society shuts its eyes from the individual’s behaviour, the bad elements gradually become bold. Then comes a time when they start glorifying their evil action.

For this purpose, high-sounding phrases are coined. Nakedness is called ‘natural condition’. Lie becomes ‘political talk’, brothels are labeled ‘night dubs’, gambling dens are named, ‘recreation centers’, fornication becomes ‘indiscretion’, and hijacking and kidnapping political necessities.

War is waged to ‘stop the wars’, bombs are dropped on civilians to ‘save their lives’. Countries are attacked to ‘save their freedom’, hateful methods are used to ‘create a harmonious society’.

It was to avoid this type of situation that “enjoining what is good and forbidding what is wrong” has been emphasized in Islam. It is the corner stone of Sheriat which strengthens the whole structure of religion.

CHAOS IN WORLD

“Chaos has appeared on land and sea because of what the hands of men have earned; that God may give them a taste of some of their deeds: in order that they may turn back (from evil): (Qur’ān: Chapter 30, verse 41).

CHAOS in social system, chaos in political life, chaos in law and order, chaos in the moral and ethical values – in short, there is chaos everywhere; and God says that it has appeared as a result of man’s own misbehaviour.

This world of ours is full of contradictions. Our actions contradict our words; our aims are believed by our ways and means; our language says we are Muslims, our deed shows us to be pagan. We spend countless months and years in disarmament conferences; and spend countless millions and billions on armament race. We invent more effective medicines to prolong the life of man; and then invent more effective bombs to end his life immediately. We could not make this Earth place worth living in, but we want to reach to moon to make it inhabitable. We send good-will missions to other countries, for the purpose of spying on them.

We declare that liquor is the cause of a large proportion of the motor accidents, yet we have done nothing to confiscate the licences of the drinking people. We say that drunkenness is the enemy of nation, it is a cause of the wastage of so much money and so much man-power, that it ruins the health and family life of so many people; therefore, we appeal to them to refrain from this bad habit; then we allow beverage companies to function in our land and propagate the so-called ‘virtues’ of their wine among the ignorant people.

Our hypocrisy has brought chaos on this earth; we have been left by God to taste the fruit of some of our deeds. This chaos is not going to be removed unless we change our behaviour, unless we abide fully with the code of conduct sent by God for us through his Prophet.

DECAYING SOCIETY

*“(The hypocrites) enjoin evil and forbid what is good;...
They have forgotten God; so God is punishing them of
this forgetfulness”.* (Qur’ān, 9:67).

TODAY, at the risk of being branded as ‘out-of-date’, I want to comment upon this materially developed and spiritually decayed civilization of our time. A civilization in course of time reaches its highest peak; and then its glory turns into vain glory; it becomes drunk of its power and achievements. And then it goes down the path of decay; and, finally, to death.

The modern civilization which is continuously ‘enjoining evil’ has, according to my thinking, long served its usefulness and now it is heading towards self-destruction – with rocket-speed.

Today the scientists are steadily pushing mankind towards its extinction. Their energies are enslaved by their bosses to invent more and more lethal weapons. They are trying to preserve wild-life – and kill human-beings.

And there is tendency on the part of the ignorant minds to accept every trash as a God-sent revelation – provided it comes from a man who has a string of letters after his name.

Result? Every kind of vice has been glorified and accepted into that society. Adultery is preached to be a healthy thing for a marriage; persons of same sex enter into ‘matrimony’ with an encouraging nod from the ‘priest’; pre-marital sexual relation have been accepted as the norm of the day; gambling is practiced in places of worship; people are led to believe that drinking liquor is a pre-requisite of ‘being civilized’. And religion has ceased to lead the people; it is being led by the masses. All these symptoms point to the advanced stage of deterioration of our civilization.

ON MODESTY

“Islam is naked; modesty is its garment”. (Holy Prophet s.a.w.w.)

MODESTY is a virtue for men and women both, though it is more commendable in women. But in our days, thanks to the modern civilization, man appears to be more modest than the woman.

This industrial age has turned woman into a piece of merchandise. No advertisement is eye-catching unless it has a woman's body in it exposed to the various degrees of nudity. Films and television are a flop unless they have sex-appeal, and plenty of it. Magazine and books flourish on the lustful desire of man, by providing a lot of erotic material in written words and painted photos. Hotels and restaurants, in gone-by days, used to boast of their excellent food and superb service. Now they arrange dances and strip-tease performances to satisfy the customers. Commercial firms expressly say that their receptionists must have a “presentable appearance”. Even in political life a modest wife is considered a liability!

Woman has been selling her body since time immemorial. But never before was shamelessness given the glittering table of “art”. Never before was immodesty the accepted norm of life. It is in this age that woman has lost her sense of self-respect. There was a time when she was a coveted prize, to be pursued by man. Now she has put herself in show window. No more is she a hidden treasure to be discovered by her rightful husband. She is now a piece of beauty to be seen, selected and admired at every shop.

And this hoax has been given a blinding name: “Freedom of woman”. But, as I see, it is man, not woman, who has made himself free to exploit the woman in every conceivable manner. Now in the name of freedom, she has been persuaded to discard all “Superfluous cloth” and appear in public in bikini only, thus providing the man a chance to feast his eyes.

In the last century, when the Westerners penetrated in the heart of Africa they found some tribes who were roaming naked. Those pioneers of “civilization” forced the tribes to wear clothes. Now those advocates of “civilization” are themselves discarding the clothes. One often wonders if the “primitive tribes” of last century were not more civilized than the rest of the world. After all, it is rest of the world which is now imitating the ways of that “so-called primitive society”.

ON POLYGAMY

The Government's proposals for an uniform law of marriage have started a debate which is likely to continue for some time. Prominent among the subjects of debate, is "polygamy vs. monogamy". Without going into detail, I want to give here two quotations from two Westerners who have put the whole question in its perspective.

J. E. Glare McFarlane says: "Whether the question is considered socially, ethically or religiously, it can be demonstrated that polygamy is not contrary to the highest standards of civilization The suggestion offers a practical remedy for the problem of the destitute and unwanted female; the alternative is continual and increased prostitution, concubinage and distressing spinsterhood". (The Case For Polygamy, Longdon, P.30).

Mrs. Annie Besant wrote in 'The Life And Teachings of Muhammad':- "You can find others stating that the religion (Islam) is evil because it sanctions a limited polygamy. But you do not hear as a rule the criticism which I spoke out one day in a London hall I pointed out to them that monogamy with a blended mass of prostitution was a hypocrisy and more degrading than a limited polygamy. Naturally a statement like that gives offence, but it has to be made, because it must be remembered that the law of Islam in relation to women was until lately, when parts of it have been imitated in England, the most just law, as far as women are concerned, to be found in the world. Dealing with property, dealing with rights of succession and so on, dealing with cases of divorce, it was far beyond the law of the West in the respect which was paid to the rights of women. Those things are forgotten while people are hypnotized by the words monogamy and polygamy and do not look at what lies behind it in the West - the frightful degradation of women who are thrown into the street when their first protectors, weary of them, no longer give them any assistance".

These remarks are worth remembering in Tanzania where only 95 men are available for every 100 women. What will be the position of those five per cent 'extra' women (it comes to more than three hundred thousand souls) if the society decides to discourage polygamy?

DIGNITY OF LABOUR

Note: This article was published on 30.4.1967.

TOMORROW all nations will be observing Labour Day, to remind themselves that a labourer deserves to be respected because he earns his bread by his sweat. The example set by the religious leaders of Islam have established the dignity of labour beyond any doubt.

Holy Prophet (s.a.w.w.) himself worked for Khadija for years. When the Prophet's mosque at Madina was being built, the Holy Prophet participated fully in every work. He carried the stones, mixed the mortar, built the walls. In journeys, the Holy Prophet insisted to share in all the works involved in camping: He pitched the tent, picked wood for fire, carried water etc. In short he never considered any lawful work as beneath his dignity.

People often came to Hazrat Ali (a.s.) to solve their religious problems and found him working as a labourer in farms of other people. He never felt any embarrassment, because dignity of labour was an established way of Muslim life.

And here are two episodes from the life of Fatima, (a.s.) the daughter of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.w.). Once she was given some wool to spin and some barley as its wages. The work was to be completed in three days; so she divided the wool and the barley in three parts each. First, she spun one-third of the wool, and only then used one-third of the barley for her bread. The same routine was repeated the second and the third days.

The lesson to be learnt here is this Fatima (a.s.) could have reversed the procedure, using barley first, and spinning the wool afterwards, because there was no condition attached; but she did not use the wages before finishing the work of the day. In simple words, looking forward to the unearned wages is not liked in Islam.

This was Fatima's (a.s.) way of life as a worker. Now let me describe her attitude as an employer. Fizza was her servant. When she came to work for Fatima (a.s.) the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.w.) told his daughter: "Fatima, (a.s.) one day Fizza shall do all the domestic work while you would rest; next day you will do all the work, while Fizza would rest; because she is as much a human being as you are".

This mutual regard between an employer and his employee is a beacon to guide this troubled world where the employer and the workers both want to exploit and deceive one another.

LAWFUL EARNING

“Eat of what is on earth lawful and good, and do not follow the footsteps of Satan”. (Qur’ān 2:168).

USING only what is lawful and good, and abstaining from unlawful (Haram) and bad things, are among the basic principles of Islamic code of life.

In Islam, even a lawful thing becomes unlawful if it is obtained by unlawful or foul means. There is no denying that lawful methods, seem sometimes, to be slow; and people, who want to be rich overnight, resort to unlawful means. But, when all is said and done, such tactics do not benefit the offender very much.

Sometime ago a test was held in which one motorist was asked to reach a certain place as soon as possible without any regard to the traffic rules, while another was to reach there after obeying all road signs and traffic signals. The first driver violated red lights twice, nearly knocked down a pedestrian, entered a one-way road from wrong direction, just managing to avoid a serious accident, and reached the destination – 30 seconds before the second motorist. What a gain after all those dangers.

More to the point is the following episode. Hazrat Ali (a.s.) once came to a mosque where he wanted to pray. He asked a man standing nearby to guard his horse. When he came out, he had a dirham in his hand which he wanted to give that man as a reward. But he was nowhere to be seen. Hazrat Ali (a.s.) came to the horse and found that its rein was missing. He gave someone the same dirham to buy another rein.

The man went to the market, saw a man selling a used rein, and bought it for one dirham. When Hazrat Ali (a.s.) looked at it he found that it was his own rein which the supposed “guard” had stolen. He said that he had intended to give the “guard” the same dirham as a reward, which would have been perfectly lawful for him; but his impatience turned him into a thief, and he got nothing except the same dirham. His dishonesty did not increase his wealth at all, and made him a criminal into the bargain.

ON OBLIGATIONS

“O ye who believe! Fulfill all obligations”, (Qur’ān, Chapter 5; Verse 1).

THE VERSE is admirable for its comprehensiveness and clarity. The word used here is ‘Uqud’. Its literal meaning: ‘Bondages’. This word is used in the Islamic language, for every kind of obligation. And by using it God has reminded mankind that every promise, agreement and undertaking is a kind of bondage from which man cannot free himself except by its fulfillment. That is why we find in the Islamic traditions that “Man is a slave of his promise”.

Obligations can be of various kinds. There are some involuntary obligations: Obligation towards God: obligations towards our fellow human beings, towards our family, towards our neighbours, towards our friends and our enemies. We have no option but to fulfil them. There are other obligations which we impose upon ourselves – between employer and employee, ruler and ruled. There are obligations between trading partners. A nation concludes a treaty with another nation. All such obligations are self-imposed.

Islam had laid down, in clear words, all the obligations and responsibilities which a man has to face with in his life. And it has put, real emphasis on the spoken word. It knows that written documents are nothing but a symbol to convey the message of the spoken words. If a man cannot be trusted about his spoken agreement, he cannot be trusted at all. It is a sign of decay in our society that the real thing (spoken word) has ceased to have any importance. Everybody insists on writing. And once man reaches this stage, even the written documents and agreements become worthless. In our present society agreements are made to be broken; treaties are concluded with an eye on the loopholes which may provide escape in future.

The first victim is not the party wronged; it is the morality of mankind which suffers the mortal blow.

BE KIND TO PARENTS

“The Lord has commanded that ye worship none but Him, and that ye show kindness unto your parents” (Qur’ān, 17:23).

The spiritual and moral duties are laid down side by side here. We are to worship none but Allah, because none is worthy of being worshipped but Allah. Then we are told to be kind to the parents. The ‘ayat’ goes on to say: whether any or both of them attain old age with thee, wherefore, say not unto them ‘Oh’; neither reproach them; and lower unto them the wing of humility out of compassion, and say thou: “O my Lord, Have mercy on them as they cherished me in my childhood”.

The metaphor brings to our mind the picture of a high flying bird which lowers her wing out of tenderness to her off-spring. There is a double aptness:-

When the parents were strong and the child helpless, parental affection was showered on the child: now that the parents are weak and helpless and the child has grown up to a strong man, can he do less than bestow similar tender care to the parents?

But more to the point are the words ‘humility’ and ‘compassion’. The child must approach the parents with gentleness, humility and love: for, does not parental love remind him of the great love with which cherishes His creatures? There is something here more than simple human gratitude. It goes up into the highest spiritual regions.

Note that we are asked to honour our father and mother upon so high and lofty grounds. In the first place, not merely respect, but cherishing kindness and humility to parents are recommended. In the second place, this command is bracketed with the command to worship the only True God; parental love should be a mirror to the divine love. Nothing that we can do will ever really compensate for that which we have received from them.

DUTY TOWARDS PARENTS

“And be thankful to Me and to thy parents” (Qur’ān 31:14).

OBEDIENCE, kindness and thankfulness to the parents are amongst the most important commandments of Islam. Allah is the Creator; He is the Helper; He provides us with the sustenance. But He has made the parents the means of that creation, help and sustenance. No wonder, in three places in Qur’ān, the commandment of obedience and thankfulness to the parents has been mentioned next to the commandment of worshipping Allah alone.

Obedience to the parents is not in conflict with obedience to God, because it is based upon the command of God. The help obtained from the parents is not against asking help from God alone, because God has made them his agents. Thanking the parents is not against thanking God, because God has ordered us to thank them; and, now, if we refuse to thank them, it will be a revolt against God. That is why Imam Ali al-Raza (a.s.) said: “God has joined the orders of thanking him and thanking one’s parents in one ayat. If a man thanks God, but does not thank his parents, his thanks to God also will not be accepted”.

The Holy Prophet was preparing to meet an enemy of Islam in a war. A young man came and asked permission to join in the militia. The Prophet (s.a.w.w.) allowed. Then during the conversation, the young man said: ‘I have old-aged parents who think that my presence gives them satisfaction and content, and, they do not like this journey of mine.’ The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.w.) at once told him to stay at home with his parents, saying: “The satisfaction which your parents derive from your presence one day and night is better for you than the fighting in the way of God for one whole year”.

DUTY TOWARDS NEIGHBOURS

“And (be good) to the neighbour who is your relative and to the neighbour who is not a relative” (Qur’ān 4:36).

ISLAM has great respect for the mutual rights and duties of the neighbours. The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.w.) has said: “Gabriel always used to advise me to be generous with the neighbours, till I thought that Allah was going to include the neighbours among the heirs of Muslim”.

The rights of neighbourhood are not meant for Muslim neighbours only. Of course, a Muslim neighbour has one more claim upon us – that of Islamic brotherhood; but so far as the rights of neighbourship and concerned, all are equal. Explaining it, the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.w.) said: “Neighbours are of three kinds: (1) that one who has one right upon you; (2) that who has got two rights upon you; and (3) that one who has got three rights upon you.

“The neighbour having three rights upon you is the one who is also a Muslim and a relative. The neighbour having two rights is the one who is either a non-Muslim relative or a non-relative Muslim.

“The neighbour having one right is the one who is neither a Muslim nor a relative. Still he has got all the claims of neighbourhood-rights upon you”.

Here are some more traditions which show the Islamic love towards the neighbours:-

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.w.) has said: “That man is not from me who sleeps contentedly while his neighbour sleeps hungry”

Imam Zainul-Abedeem (a.s.) (son of Imam Husain (a.s.)) has said: “These are your duties towards your neighbour: Protect his interests when he is absent; show him respect when he is present; help him when he is inflicted with any injustice. Do not remain on look-out to detect his faults; and if, by any chance, you happen to know any undesirable thing about him, hide it from others; and, at the same time, try to desist him from improper habits, if there is any chance that he will listen to you. Never leave him alone in any calamity. Forgive him, if he has done any wrong. In short live with him a noble life, based on the highest Islamic ethical code”.

Now, let us ask ourself a very significant question; “Are we a good neighbour”.

CHANGE OF HEART

“O people, there has come to you a direction from your Lord, and a healing for the (diseases) in your hearts”.

(Qur’ān: 10:57)

PEOPLE have started changing their hearts – literally. Still it is not easy for them to change their hearts – idiomatically.

Transplantation of an organ of a human body reflects the progress of science within the past few decades. But it also reminds us of the vast gap between our material progress and spiritual poverty. Nothing shows this more vividly than the fact that the first successful transplantation of heart was accomplished in the ‘Republic’ of South Africa – the standard-bearer of racialism.

Now is the time to reflect upon the healing power of a heavenly book like the Holy Qur’ān. The above-quoted verse describes it as a “healing for the diseases in your hearts”. Nobody can guess how much change of heart has this book effected in how many people in all these long centuries.

I think the best explanation was given by one of my non-Muslim friends when he glanced through a few pages of a translation of the Holy Qur’ān and said: “The key-word in this book is ‘Allah.’”

He was right. This book creates a confidence in Allah which subdues every other feeling. A Muslim should not long for anything but the love of Allah; he should not fear anything but the displeasure of Allah.

Once an enemy of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.w.) found him asleep under a tree. He drew his sword; then thought it un-manly to kill a sleeping man. He awakened the Prophet, (s.a.w.w.) advanced towards him with sword in hand and asked contemptuously: “Tell me, who can save you now from me?” Calmly, the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.w.) replied: “My Allah.”

This calm confidence in Allah unnerved the pagan, and the sword fell from his hand. Deliberately, the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) picked the sword up, and now it was his turn to ask: “And who can save you from me now?” The pagan said: “Nobody”.

The Prophet (s.a.w.w.) threw the sword away and said: “No, you are wrong. The same Allah who is my protector is also your protector: He would save you too”.

The enemy of a few minutes ago was now a faithful follower of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.w.). This is the change of heart which really matters.

TO ACQUIRE KNOWLEDGE

“And say, O’ My Lord, Increase my knowledge”.
(Qur’ān, 20:114).

RECENTLY two functions were held in Tanzania. The Holy Prophet’s birthday and the Literacy Week. It was a very appropriate coincidence as the following paragraphs will show.

Day in and day out, the Holy Prophet urged his followers to strive to create divine attributes in themselves to the maximum extent possible; and over all the attributes he gave precedence to knowledge. He made its acquisition as a duty of every Muslim man and woman.

The Qur’ān repeatedly and emphatically asks man to exercise his intellect to acquire knowledge by study of nature and history; to travel through the land and observe things; to ponder and reflect over the laws of Universe; and to seek the help of God in acquiring knowledge by praying to Him. O’My Lord, Increase my knowledge.

The main purpose of the Qur’ān, according to Dr. Iqbal, is to awaken in man the higher consciousness of the manifold relations with God and Universe. It was in view of this essential aspect of the Qur’ānic teaching that Goethe, while making a general review of Islam as an educational force, said to Eckermann; “You see, this teaching never fails. With all our systems, we can not go, and generally speaking no man can go, farther than that”.

The emphasis of the Holy Prophet of Islam on acquisition of knowledge was directly responsible for the fact that, in the words of George Sarton, “When the West was sufficiently mature to feel the need of deeper knowledge it turned its attention first of all, not to Greek sources, but to the Arabic (i.e. Muslim) ones”. (Introduction to the History of the Sciences).

Brifault says in “Making of Humanity”: “The debt of our science to that of Arabs does not consist only in starting discoveries or revolutionary theories: science owes a great deal more to Arab culture; It owes its very existence. Science is the most momentous contribution of Arab (i.e. Muslim) civilization to the modern world”.

THE GREAT FELLOWSHIP

“All who obey Allah and the Apostles, are with those on whom is the Grace of Allah – the Prophets and the sincere ones and the witnesses and the righteous; and what a beautiful companions they are!” (Qur’ān, 4:69).

It is an ayat of the deepest spiritual meaning. Even the humblest man who accepts Islam and obeys Allah and His Prophet, by doing good, becomes at once an accepted member of a great and beautiful spiritual fellowship. It is a company which lives perpetually in the sunshine of Allah’s Grace. It is the glorious hierarchy of which four grades are specified:

1. The highest is that of the prophets or apostles, who got direct inspiration from Allah and taught mankind by providing perfect examples from their own lives. The highest position of that highest rank is held by the Prophet of Islam.
2. The next are those whose badge is sincerity and truth, they love and support the truth with their person, their means, their influence and all that is theirs. That rank, in Islam, was held by the special companions of the Holy Prophet.
3. The next come the noble army of witnesses, who testify to the truth. The testimony may be by martyrdom, or it may be by the tongue of the true preacher or the pen of a devoted scholar.
4. Lastly, there is the large company of the righteous people, the common folk who do their ordinary business, but always in a righteous way.

This is the beautiful fellowship in which each has his place; but at the same time derives glory from the common association.

OBLIGATIONS OF A BELIEVER

“Those who establish prayers, and hand over ‘zakat’ and believe in the life hereafter”. (Qur’ān, 48:3).

These attributes of the believers refer to the three main aspects of religious obligation in Islam. A Muslim must fulfil his obligations towards God, toward fellow human beings and towards himself.

In this ‘ayat’, prayer is the symbol of the obligations towards God. It is considered so important that “if a man’s prayers would be worthy of acceptance by God, his all other virtuous performances would be accepted; but if his prayers are rejected (because of his base intentions), all other acts would be rejected”.

The right of the fellow human beings is symbolized by giving the religious monetary dues. It should be enough to say that, in more than 80 places in the Qur’ān, the exhortation to establish prayers is followed by that of paying the ‘zakat’.

Last, but not the least, is a man’s responsibility towards himself. I do not mean his right to the worldly enjoyments, though it may be considered a part of the over-all picture, within the limits of the religious laws. What I mean, and Islam means, by this phrase is that a man owes it to himself to save his soul from disgrace when all will be assembled together on the day of reckoning. Hence the mention of that belief in the above-quoted verse.

According to Islam, if a man commits a sin which does no harm to any other person in any way, he fails in his duty towards God (by disobeying Him) and towards himself (by putting himself liable to the displeasure of God). Yet, such a man has more hope of being forgiven by God than the one who has committed a sin against another person. The latter has failed in all three aspects of his duty: he has displeased God, has harmed another person and has disgraced himself. Such a person will not be forgiven by Allah unless he is pardoned by the person whom he had wronged.

ON 'TRUST'

“Verily, Allah commands you to return the ‘Amanat’ to their owners”.
(Qur’ān, 4:58)

‘Amanat’ (the word used in the ayat mentioned above) means keeping the trust faithfully and returning it without any change or alteration whenever demanded by the person who gave it to you. It is one of the highly emphasized virtues in Islam. The Holy Prophet himself was the embodiment of ‘Amanat’. Long before he received the call from Allah to declare his Prophethood, he was popularly known as ‘As-Sadiq-ul-Amin’ (The Truthful and Trustworthy) among the people of Arabia.

It is very revealing to see that after the declaration of his Prophethood (at the age of 40) his opponents accused him of everything from being a poet or sorcerer to being possessed by a genie; but never once, in this long period of conflict, did they accuse him of being untruthful or untrustworthy.

On the contrary, those very person, who were conspiring to silence the voice of God by killing him, continued to deposit their valuables with him – the very man whose destruction was the only aim of their life.

When the Holy Prophet had to leave Mecca because of the said plots, he left his cousin, Ali bin Abi Talib, behind, instructing him to return all those things to their rightful owners before joining the Holy Prophet at Medina.

Imam Zainul Abedeen, son of Imam Husain, used to say: “If the murderer of my father gives me in trust the sword which he used in killing my father (martyred at Karbala), I will return it to him whenever he comes back demanding its return”.

ON LIQUOR

*“O Ye who believe, intoxicants and gambling and dedication of stones and divination of arrows are abominations of Satan’s handiwork: keep away from such abominations”,
(Qur’ān, 5:90).*

The most precious gift of Allah to mankind is the intellect. It is because of his reasoning power that man is called the best creation of God.

Intellect has two very strong enemies: Desire and Anger. These two rivals of intellect get reinforcement by alcoholic liquor. When alcoholic liquor enters the human body, the first victim is the highest cerebral centers which control such factors as judgement, sense of responsibility and moral integrity. When these higher factors are depressed, the lower instincts are released from captivity. Moral and social inhibitions become a dead thing. It is now that the intoxicated person becomes talkative, excited or even violent and aggressive. On lookers think that he is stimulated. In fact, it is not stimulation. What is often referred as alcoholic stimulation is the first sign of alcoholic depression. No amount of alcohol can stimulate intellectual functions.

Some people think that a small amount of alcohol can do no harm. But it is one of the myths which the scientific analysis has already exploded. Even such a tiny concentration of alcohol in blood as 0.15% (i.e. one-seventh of one percent) impairs the faculties so much that driving becomes extremely dangerous. Also, it requires a strong will-power to restrict a drinking person’s intake of alcohol. As the alcohol destroys the power of judgement, as it frees man from every inhibition, it is foolish to believe that once started a man can control his drinking habits. When the will-power is weakened by the effect of alcohol, drinking leads to drunkenness and finally to alcoholism. Islam does not want to tempt a man into this trap. It was for this reason that the Holy Prophet declared: “Anything which intoxicates when taken excessively, even a drop of it is forbidden to take”.

LIQUOR AND 'NATION-BUILDING'

Liquor is one of the greatest enemies of nation. Every now and then the leaders appeal to the public to give up this bad habit because it interferes with the nation-building activities. This week the president of Kenya threatened to close the bars of a certain area if the people of that locality did not give up drinking.

The poisonous effects of liquor on the health and family life of an individual are too obvious to need any description. Also, it is common knowledge that liquor is one of the main causes of absenteeism in the factories and offices, resulting in thousands and thousands of lost man-days. Further, it is admitted that drunk drivers are responsible for an unbelievable ratio of road accidents, resulting in loss of limbs and lives. And every social worker and priest knows that this abominable habit is the direct cause of great many cases of broken-up families, frustrated children and poverty-ridden homes.

Liquor, thus, has these disturbing effects on the public's health, productivity, prosperity and happiness. Yet, one is amazed to see in the nation's newspapers advertisements urging people to drink liquor "to help in the nation-building". But I can not see any connection between drinking and nation-building.

If 'nation' means 'brewery', then of course drinking will help it. But I have not seen 'nation' defined as 'brewery' in any dictionary. If 'nation-building' means 'being absent on Monday because of Sunday's hangover', then the advertisers are right. But is this definition correct? If a man 'builds the nation' by reaching home after mid-night, by beating his wife and children, by keeping them hungry, then the drunkards would be regarded as the great nation-builders, no doubt. But neither society nor the government would accept this meaning.

Such advertisements and statements grossly mislead the nation. It is high time that people were protected from such misleading advertisement.

ON GAMBLING

Gambling is, perhaps, the most wide-spread evil of our times. It has countless forms and names. Chess, cards, bridge, pool, sweepstake, raffle, lottery, roulette and various other plays are just plain gambling – by whatever civilized name they may be called. And these are the standard entertainment of our times.

Gambling, however mild, has been forbidden in Islam. Some people play such games to ‘kill time.’ They fail to understand that the ‘life’ given to them is just a span of ‘time’ – so many hours or days or years. ‘To kill time’ means, in more clear language, ‘to kill life’ and life was not given us to be destroyed.

Others indulge in such activities in expectation of some monetary gain. It is true that the urge to get something for nothing is very old; but Islam does not encourage it. After all, forgery, robbery and fraud also are the manifestations of the same urge; but nobody ever thought of legalizing such practices on the plea that they are the result of a ‘natural urge.’ So why tolerate gambling?

ON FUTURE – READING

“(God alone is) the knower of the unseen; He does not reveal His secrets unto anyone, except unto that of the Apostles whom He chooses” (Qur’ān, 72:26-27).

EAST AFRICA is teeming with “wise men” who claim to know the destiny of every person (except their own, of course). People talk about African or pagan superstitions; but, in fact, this is a field which has no racial or religious bar. Muslims, Christians and pagans; Indians, Africans and Europeans: all are victim of this hoax. There is complete “integration” of races and tenets in this area.

According to the Qur’ān, only God knows the future; and He informs His chosen apostles of the coming events when and if He wishes. But in East Africa almost every book-shop (specially so, if it is owned by a Muslim) has one or more books purporting to reveal the future of anybody who can afford a few shillings. The operative words is “shillings”.

There was a time when primitive people believed that their lives were governed by sun, moon and other natural phenomena. They started worshipping the sun and/or moon. That superstition gave birth to astrology, which claimed that the destiny of every person was governed by seven “stars” which rotate around 12 ‘houses’. Thus the destinies of the whole mankind (numbering more than 3,000,000,000 persons, at present) is listed under 12 groups.

Man, thy name is naivety. Many people believe in such forecasts, though all must be aware that the destiny of one man is as different from all the world as his thumb-impression.

These “wise men” know the weakness of human nature. They know that if they forecast 100 events, at least a certain percentage will come out to be true. (And this can be done by any shrewd person without any help from astrology). Then they bank their propaganda on the small percentage which comes to pass, conveniently forgetting what proved false.

Their forecasts, for the most part, are vague and capable of meaning whatever the astrologer would like them to mean in any future eventuality. There is a story of a “wise man” who informed his client that his wife (who was pregnant) would give birth to “son not daughter”. Thus he made sure that he would prove right in any event. If she gave birth to son, he would say: “I had already forecasted “son: not daughter”. Otherwise, the prophecy would be interpreted as “son not; daughter”.

ON WITCHCRAFT

Witchcraft, uchawi or uramali, call it whatever you like, is the most believed-in and most-feared in East Africa. But it has no power, except the power of suggestion. All its power depends upon creating a psychological impression of fear etc., in the mind of the victim. So, ultimately, the victim himself accomplishes his own undoing. Such an impressionable person is his own enemy.

Be it sickness of a child, or discord between husband and wife, or failure in the business – everything here is attributed to some kind of witchcraft. Even if you point out that the parties concerned are themselves responsible for, say, the discord in marriage, they would still say that their objectionable behaviour towards each other was the result of their ‘being be-witched’.

I have seen people of every colour and creed shifting the responsibility of their trouble to some imaginary ‘enemy who is be-witching me’. And so deep-rooted is this superstition that when you tell them that they were mistaken in that belief, they will go out to find “someone who has real ‘elimu.’” Such people are happiest when they are exploited by some unscrupulous ‘wise-man’. When they provide him with goat of a particular colour and pieces or clothes of specific designs to counter-act the supposed witchcraft, they think they would now be relieved of their worries. Actually, they are relieved of their money only.

ON BACKBITING

“O ye who believe nor backbite each other. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother; Ye lothe it!”

(Qur’ān, 49:12).

Backbiting, in Muslim language, means to mention or allude to the actual defects (physical, moral or otherwise) of a person in his absentia (provided the victim of that backbiting prefers to hide that defect). If the alleged defect is not found in him actually but was the invention of the imagination of the backbiter, then it is false accusation and its sin is far graver than the backbiting.

Personal bitterness and enmity is caused by backbiting, false reports and baseless accusations which are the stock-in-trade of the flatterers. The analogy given in the Qur’ān is very apt. It is an act similar to eating one’s dead brother’s flesh. He is like a dead body because he is not present and the tale-bearer is feasting on his flesh because he is nibbling at his prestige.

But the flesh of dead man is a source of physical harm for the partaker himself. Likewise the backbiting creates spiritual disease to the tale-bearer. It is the worst bane of human life and makes a man enemy of his brothers. It is the backbiter who sows the seed to bitterness, hatred, intrigue and enmity. It is he who causes disruption in the homes, disloyalty in the office, disintegration in the social, and religious institutions; it is he who spells the downfall of the society and tears apart the fabric of social harmony.

A backbiter becomes the worst type of hypocrite. In order to save his own prestige, he poses as a friend of very man whom he actually tries to destroy. When he is suspected of evil designs, he takes refuge behind false oaths. Thus he damages his own spirit and, more often than not, when he falls, nobody comes there to lift him up.

PURITY OF INTENTION

“Thee alone we worship and of Thee only we seek help”.
(Qurʿān, 1:5)

All creatures, from the highest order to the lowest one, are alike in their subservience to Allah’s will, and in their dependence upon His Help. When a Muslim declares that he will worship his Creator only, he makes the great commitment to remain faithful to him not only in words and deeds but in thoughts also.

There is no danger of any Muslim falling into the pitfall of polytheism. But there are some impurities of thoughts which are called ‘hidden polytheism’ against which he must vigilantly guard himself. When a man worships the only God, but at the same time likes the people to know that he is worshipping God; when he wishes his fellows to appreciate how pious he is, then he is committing the sin of hidden polytheism. Such a worship, such a piety, such a generosity is called polytheism, because the worshipper’s intention is not pure, he wants to please two masters with one act of worship; God and ‘the people’.

In Islam, purity of intention (Ikhlas) is the first and basic requirement of every act of worship and every good deed.

The Holy Prophet of Islam said: “Verily, the deeds are by intentions”. It means that the value of good deed depends upon the intention with which it was done. If it is purely for God, it is priceless; if it is to show the world, it is worthless.

Not only the prayers, but the social service also should be based upon the love of God. While helping our less fortunate brethren, we must remember that we are passing on the property of God to the dependents of God. It should be done without any shade of worldly motivate. A help given with a motive of gaining worldly advantage is a body without soul. A charity done with a secret desire to enhance one’s social standing destroys the fibre of that charity.

Have faith in Allah; and do every good work for love of Allah. That is the basic reaching of Islam.

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