



# Al-Risala 1987

April

## Editorial

When scientific theories clash, the ensuing dialogue is of a very different nature from that following upon a clash of religious theories. For instance, a dialogue which seeks to evaluate the Big Bang theory vis a vis the Steady State theory, or geocentrism versus heliocentrism, will attempt to sift evidence and find support for the different theories so that it can be established which is closer to the known facts or, at least, which fits best into the academic framework.

But where religious theories are at loggerheads, the aims and procedures of the resulting dialogue are entirely different. It is felt that the objective of the discussions is really to bring the two proponents closer together and that in any argument due respect should be accorded to the opponent; that in essence both contentions should be considered aspects of the truth and not labelled as right or wrong. This has led to the psychology of "double think" which would be anathema to the scientific mind, for in the world of science, a dialogue sets out clearly to distinguish the true from the false.

It is surely time to dispense with such a set of double standards. In the field of religion, a dialogue should carry the same might and have the same force and meaning as it does in the field of science. That is, when two or more religions come together to decide upon which satisfies academic standards and which in consequence deserves to be the religion of mankind, there should be no shying away from the facts, no mystic obscurantism, and no weak-kneed acceptance of patent falsities in the name of harmonious relations.

While this may appear to be a very difficult, if not dangerous, thing to do, it should be realized that it is actually quite easy providing that discussions are carried out in a purely academic and un-polemic manner. In short, the same principles which are applied to the determining of scientific truths should be applied in like manner to the discovery of religious truths.

Academic truth and religious truth are simply two aspects of the one eternal truth. To adopt separate criteria for them is to erect a false and unnatural barrier between them.

## Faith as a Discovery

In present times, so-called maps of the solar system have been prepared with great expertise and printed in atlases. No cartographer, however, can prepare a map of this kind which is actually to scale, for if it were to be quite accurate, it should have to be spread out over a page so vast as to be barely imaginable. Consider that the sun is 1,200,000 times bigger than the earth. If the earth were then shown the size of a football, the sun would have to be magnified to the size of 1,200,000 footballs. The same applies to the distance between the sun and its furthest-flung planet. All this is quite beyond the capacity of the cartographer and, at best, an artist could only give his impressions of what these dimensions ought to look like.

Imagine now that you are located at a point in space from which you can see the entire solar system. Before you lies an extraordinary, astounding spectacle: a huge ball of fire—the sun—blazing relentlessly, with about a dozen tiny, dark balls revolving around it in egg-shaped orbits. One would imagine this spectacle to be quite unique, but there are countless spectacles of this nature scattered throughout the universe. And they have but one purpose: to enable man to see the face of his Master reflected in them. Through them, man can come to know his Lord. It is this knowledge of God which, in religious terms, is known as faith.

Faith is a discovery. It is to witness something which lies beyond the veil of the Unseen. Truth is not self-evident. Faith is to feel Truth as though it were so. Such a discovery is a soul-rending experience which causes the seeker to undergo a tremendous upheaval, turning his mind in a new direction, and instilling fresh passion into his heart.

Even a minor discovery can cause great stirrings of the intellect and emotions. Imagine then how much more intense are the feelings attendant upon the discovery of God. The impact of such a discovery is, in effect, too great to be put into words.

3 April 1987

The day of death will be the day when man comes to life

"People are asleep; when they die they will awaken," the Prophet said.

## God, Prophethood and Life After Death

The world we live in is a material one in which symbols, richly representative of life's realities, have been given a concrete forms. Those who are sincere in their search for truth, and who look deeply into things, will recognize their significance, thus finding for themselves such a great diversity of proofs of God's existence as will fully satisfy their intellectual curiosity and silence their scepticism. What started out as tentative beliefs will thus be given the solid grounding of unshakable conviction.

### A Likeness of God

A Likeness of God is to be found in man, for is not the existence of man a proof of the existence of God? What is the nature of God? He is a live, self-sufficient Being, with a mind that is all-knowing, eyes that are all-seeing and ears that are all-hearing. His power is of such infinitude that it reaches to the furthest corners of the universe, and no object of His will is too great or too small to escape its force. And quite independent of all objects of creation, God has His ego.

Man may not, like God, be omniscient and omnipotent, but he certainly thinks, sees, hears, has a will, acts of his own volition and understands quite precisely what is meant by the 'ego – the 'I'. To believe in God is to have faith in a higher form of the 'I'. Man's experience of himself, his attributes, his characteristics, make it possible for him to apprehend the eternal Being who possesses these very attributes and characteristics, but to a superlative degree. This is the Being whom we call God, or Allah.

If one is sure of one's own existence, why should one not be sure of the existence of God? Here am 'I', sitting in one place, observing the universe. Why, then, should there not be a Being greater than I am, situated elsewhere in the universe, watching over it? We ourselves direct the movements of machines in outer space by means of remote control, so why should we have any difficulty in accepting that there is a God who controls the universe by His own invisible system? Man metes out punishments and gives rewards according to his own concept of justice, so why should there not be an all-powerful God who administers reward and retribution according to his own, unique concept of justice?

Indeed, believing in God is no different from believing in one's own self. It is no more difficult for man to accept the existence of God than it is for him to accept his own existence. Belief in God is doubtless an extraordinary feat of the imagination, but it is no more extraordinary than believing in man. Once one has accepted one such extraordinary phenomenon, what is there to prevent one from accepting another?

## A Likeness of Prophethood

"This is London, Here is the latest news." These words are uttered by a newsreader sitting far away from us in London. We cannot hear him directly, but the moment we switch on our radio sets, his voice comes over so loud and clear that the distance between the broadcasting station and our home seems to have shrunk to nothing.

This purely physical phenomenon gives us an idea of what prophethood is like. In the way of the radio set, the prophet provides a link between us and God's 'broadcasting station'. Just as a radio or transistor picks up news and programmes from the broadcasting station, the prophet 'picks up' words coming from God Himself and relays them to us in exactly the form that they left God's lips, without addition, subtraction or changes of any kind.

But for the prophets – the living radio sets between man and God – we should not be able to hear the words of God, just as we should not be able to hear programmes from far-off radio stations, without the aid of the radio. So prized are radios and transistors for the information and entertainment that they bring to people that there is hardly a home throughout the entire world which is without one or the other. How wonderful it would be then if people were to realize the importance of divine 'broadcasts', and were to listen to the prophets with the same rapt attention that they give to their radios. They would then begin to be influenced by them and would follow them heart and soul. The functioning of prophethood is not any more difficult to understand than the workings of a radio. While the latter is powered by electricity, prophethood functions on the basis of sheer divine inspiration.

## A Likeness of Life After Death

People sit in a room conversing with each other. They are conscious of what is visible, audible, tangible. The world is before them, to be apprehended through the senses. They feel that they know everything about it that is humanly possible to know, and do not suspect that another world might exist in their midst – of which they know nothing.

Just then, someone switches on the television, suddenly a different and hitherto unseen 'world' appears on its screen. Darting figures, a hubbub of voices, rows of houses, mountain scenery – all kinds of visual and auditory phenomena make their impact upon the senses of the viewers.

The experience of television is an earthly analogy of the concept of life after death – a world beyond our world, just as complete in every detail as the one before us. It shows how another world can exist within the present world, yet remain outwith the range of normal human sensitivity unless we are attuned to it. The world shown on television is already present before us, but it only becomes visible when the set is switched on. In like manner, the world of the hereafter is already omnipresent, but it will only impinge on the senses when it is 'switched on' for us by God.

In the realm of science, concepts are very often demonstrated and understood by means of models. Our present world is like a natural model, by means of which we can understand supernatural realities. Our world is, in a way, a reflection of them. If one seriously contemplates the world around one, one will find in it the answer to everything.

God, divine revelation and life after death are concepts which man cannot grasp with his present limited vision. They lie in the unseen world. But, it should be remembered that there are many things in this very world, which cannot be seen with the naked eye. In fact, all higher realities are of this nature, and these are accepted solely on the basis of scientific 'clues'. The same applies to God divine revelation and life after death. True, these things cannot be seen with our present sight, but there are clear indications throughout the universe which provide convincing proof of their actuality. There can be no doubt about their existence. If we think seriously about them, we have no choice but to accept them.

6 April 1987

People are losing just what they want to find

The Prophet said: "How wonderful paradise is. Yet those who seek it have fallen asleep. And how terrible the Fire of Hell is. Yet those who dread it are also asleep."



## Such is Man

In the present age, man is at once extremely keen-sighted and almost totally blind. How are we to explain such a paradox? It is a quite simple. When attention has to be focussed on the faults of others, his keen-sightedness is very much in evidence. But when he has to look at his own shortcomings, his blindness is more than apparent.

The most common enigma in the world of today is man's readiness to take others to task while refusing to take stock of his own shortcomings. It would appear to make no difference that some are religious and some are not; that some bear aloft the standard of Islam and some that of anti-Islam, for their common denominator remains the same: all have a better insight than is called for into the failings of others, while lacking any basic perception of their own.

Why is it that people are so fond of alluding to others' mistakes? It is because, in so doing, they give a boost to their own egos, and lull themselves into a state of complacency. They feel that their 'goodness' is thrown into sharp relief by the badness of others, and once having dubbed others blameworthy, in some strange way, they feel themselves entirely blameless.

People fail to realize that their own inadequacies should be their prime concern – not those of others. The only time they feel concerned with themselves is of their comforts, convenience, safety, etc, are threatened. Then they make strenuous efforts to see that these aspects of their lives should never be prejudiced in any way. But just as a hungry man thinks first and foremost of his own hunger, so should a moral, social being think first and foremost of his own conduct, and not of his own convenience, or of the faults of others. It will only be when the Day of Judgement is upon us and the Truth made plain, that this realization will come to man.

Today, Hell-fire seems remote and that is why man feels that he can vent his fury upon others with impunity. But on the Day of Judgement this fury will be turned back upon himself, and he will find himself standing before a blazing inferno. All that will matter to him then will be how to gain redemption for his sins – how to be saved from the Fire of Hell. It is only the truly moral man who sees that day coming now and, before it actually arrives, begins to make a thorough self-appraisal.

## Here's an Idea

It happened once that in the time of the Prophet a group of people came from Medina to Mecca in order to enter into some agreement with the Quraysh. The group included the Chieftain of Medina, Abu al Haytham, and one Ayub ibn Muadh. On hearing of their arrival, the Prophet lost no time in approaching them and inviting them to accept Islam. Ayaz ibn Muadh was so impressed by the teachings of Islam that he exclaimed, "My people, this is indeed much better than what we came for!"

Nowadays, people who are seeking better livelihoods for themselves are flocking in their thousands to the Arab world. What better opportunity could there be than this for their Muslim hosts to do as the Prophet and his companions did communicate the message of Islam. No matter what worldly openings these expatriates may be seeking for themselves, they cannot remain forever deaf to the exhortations of those around them to accept the tenets of the Muslim faith. The point is that Muslims should recognize this as a golden opportunity and avail of it without delay.

Quiet, solid, organized efforts should be made in this direction in the Arab world today on lines which have already been laid down by the Prophet. Foreigners flocking to Arab shores should be told, "You know, we have something better here than what you came for – the spiritual wealth of Islam which will ensure your well-being in the life after death. The petro-dollars which you have come for may improve your standard of living in today's world, but the Islam which you could take away with you would make you successful for all time."

People like Ayaz Ibn Mu'adh would then surely appear on the scene to pass on the message of Islam to their own people; and those people would in turn realize that the spiritual wealth of Islam is indeed much more valuable and worthwhile than the material wealth for which they had come. Even now, many westerners living in the Arab world are accepting Islam. The usual pattern they follow is to begin by learning the Arabic language and acquainting themselves with Arab customs and religion in order to be better qualified to work there. Then a certain inquisitiveness begins to grow and they ask their Arab hosts about Islam.

Some of them like what they hear and feel inclined, on their own initiative, to enter the fold of Islam. Without any urging on part of the Muslims around them. But just think of the greatly increased numbers of converts there could be if Muslims were to make all-out, energetic but tactful efforts to communicate to their visitors the message of Islam.

9 April 1987

## Death and the Beginning of a New Life

Of all moments that lie within the realm of human imagination and beyond, death is the most savage. All the other calamities that cause man distress are nothing compared to that which he will encounter in the form of death.

With death we enter the most difficult stage of our lives. We become totally powerless, destitute and helpless. All worldly suffering has a limit, but, in the world that we shall enter after death, suffering and torment will be unlimited.

In reality, this is the state of man in the present world. So inherently weak is man that he cannot bear even the slightest inconvenience. Just the prick of a needle, a day's hunger and thirst, or a few nights' insomnia, are enough to rock his entire being. In this world, however, he has everything he needs. That is why he forgets his indigence, and remains blind to his own true nature.

In this world man has food and water, air and light; he is able to tame the forces of nature and bring civilization into existence. But if this world were taken away from him, he would not be able to fashion another world of this kind anywhere in the universe. It would be his lot to wander around in darkness.

The worldly affliction which causes man distress on earth is trivial compared to the affliction of the hereafter. Worldly honour and ease make him proud and complacent, but they are of no consequence if they do not remain with him in the next, eternal life. If man were conscious of what was to become of him after death, he would forget about his worldly state, and concentrate on consolidating his position in a world where both repose and torment are infinite.

Death is not the end of life: it is the beginning of a new stage of life. It will lead some into a den of unmitigated hardship, and others to a World of infinite happiness.

## Islam: In Harmony with Human Nature

What are the things that people live for? Money? Power? Fame? The goals vary with the individual, some being immediate, frivolous, easily interchangeable, while others appear as remote possibilities, difficult of attainment and to be struggled towards over a long period of time, with an unvarying sense of urgency and commitments. In the latter case, whatever the actual goal, and no matter whether it is striven towards in a spirit of egoism or altruism, the whole-hearted dedication of oneself to its attainment is almost like undertaking a religious mission. The man who derives immense satisfaction from the simple fact of having grown a very beautiful rose is no less dedicated than his neighbour who strains every fibre of his being towards becoming a millionaire. The opportunists and profiteers of this world are no less dedicated than the philanthropists who uplift the downtrodden and give generously to the poor. A man's whole life is conditioned by the goal he sets himself. It becomes the pivot of his ideas and emotions, his actions and preoccupations, his dealings with friends, family and the rest of society. No aspect of a man's life remains unaffected by it, and he clings fast to his 'religion' all the twenty-four hours of the day, be he conscious of this or not.

The point which is missed by so many people nowadays is that whatever our goals in life, whether noble or ignoble, whether selfless or selfish, and whatever the zeal with which we pursue them, our ultimate goal should be to prostrate ourselves before God. No goal should ever be so placed above and beyond religion that the godhead becomes eclipsed. And no matter what kind of religion we choose for ourselves – God-centered, pantheistic or Godless – we should never lose sight of the fact that in this world we are all on trial. There is a common, but erroneous belief that a Godless religion coupled with material success should be the be-all and end-all of existence. But success achieved without God being an all-pervasive factor is a trivial, ephemeral matter, relative only to life on earth, and will not support one into the Life Hereafter. When death finally overtakes a man, all his material possessions and all his worldly successes fall away from him, and he is left, alone, and empty handed, to stand before God, who will arise before him in all His might and majesty. Then will come the moment of trial. And it will avail him little to talk of his worldly prowess at that awesome moment, for honour and success are hollow, worthless concepts when achieved outwith the framework of a God-centered religion. Success gained in this way will condemn one in the life-after-death to eternal failure.

Only God-centered religion is real and in harmony with man's nature. But this truth does not occur to him until the hour of crisis and peril is upon him. A man may have any religion or any material props he chooses, but, in moments of real crisis, it is to God that he called out for help. Such an experience, which we all go through at one time or another in our lives, is a clear indication that the God-centered religion is the only true one. As such, it should pervade man's entire existence. Any religion other than

this will fail him in his hour of need, in the Hereafter, just as the ordinary everyday means of support so often do in moments of crisis in this world.

Man's experience of today is a pointer to the fate he will encounter in the everlasting world of the Hereafter. Only those who heed the message now" and shape their lives accordingly, will prosper in the world to come.

11 April 1987

## Their longing for people to believe

'Abdullah Ibn' Abbas had great knowledge of the Qur'an. He possessed unusual ability to penetrate to the very depths of Qur'anic teachings. One day, when he was explaining the Qur'an in his own Inimitable style, one of his audience exclaimed: "Even if the pagans of Daylum heard this they would accept Islam."

11 April 1987

## Man Proposes, God Disposes.

When Abdullah ibn Masood had built himself a house, he asked Ammar ibn Yasir to come and have a look at what he had built. Ammar Went and saw the house. "You are planning a long way ahead, but soon you will die," was his only comment.

(Hilyatul Auliya)

## The Sign of a True Believer

People, looking at objects, become entangled in mere things and so stop right there. The true believer, however, is one who passes beyond things and reaches God.

A fruit falling from a tree is an event that everyone has witnessed. But one who has seen in this phenomenon the force of gravity is an Issac Newton. Matter has been observed by everyone, but one who has seen in matter the motion of electrons is a Michael Faraday. Particles are everywhere and can be seen by everyone, but one who has seen nuclear energy within them is an Albert Einstein. In like manner, everyone has seen the world, but the one who sees God in it – he is the true believer.

A parallel example is to be found in the New Testament: “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, we have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented” (Matthew 11: 15-17).

The ‘piping’ of God in this world, which perennially goes on, is for man to listen to and become thrilled, to begin dancing to and become happy. But the very sound of God’s piping leaves man unmoved and ignorant. God makes things manifest in this world such as man should gaze on and tremble; on beholding them, his eyes should fill with tears. Yet so great is the contumacy of man that matters of earth-shattering import do not make him shudder; events of the greatest poignancy do not serve to bring tears to his eyes.

What is required of man is that he should acknowledge the divinity of God. But man is not ready to do this. Today, man can extricate himself from the worst of dilemmas by the mere uttering of a word, but there will come a day when he will not be able to escape, even if he offers the whole world as ransom. Consider the difference between man’s condition today and the state in which he will find himself tomorrow. And tomorrow is nearer than we think.



12 April 1987

### One who will be saved from Doom on the Day of Judgement

“On the Day of Resurrection, God will save from Hell-fire one who has saved his brother from humiliation in this world;” these words were spoken by the Prophet Mohammad.

## Reason or Deception

The Quran makes it clear that a prophet invariably adopts the standpoint of *Bayyinah*, that is, reason. By contrast, his opponents have nothing on which to base their arguments save blind opposition and deception. While a prophet's words are based on facts, his opponents utterances are founded on egoism and contumacy.

In the present world, a distinction must be made between the upholders of truth and the perpetrators of falsehood. A prophet is unequivocally a representative of divine truth, and we can take it that every single word he utters is based on this truth. All of his statements are based on the knowledge he has received from God, and that is why the entire universe confirms their truth. His opponents' statements, on the other hand, stem solely from self-oriented desire and self-interest. It is for this reason that neither learning nor intellect will support what they have to say.

The present world, being God's testing-ground for humanity, every man on earth is free to act as he pleases. If an individual wishes to speak the truth, the words come to him with ease. Even if he wishes to tell lies, he has no difficulty in finding the words to do so. In neither case will he be impeded by grammar or vocabulary.

This ease and freedom, however, are limited solely to the present world and in the next world they will be non-existent. Deprived of his glibness and volubility, the deceiver will be unable to find even the smallest syllable with which to utter a lie. There will be no way whatsoever that he will be able to pass off deceit as sincerity, or cruel behaviour as justice.

In today's world, it pays to lie. Deceit and intrigue can place one in the highest of positions. This state of affairs is wholly transitory, and when death takes its toll, all such machinations will be exposed from top to bottom for the false actions that they are. After death, when man enters the Hereafter, he will suddenly find himself utterly helpless. The ground on which he had previously stood will have vanished from beneath his feet, and, finding himself with nothing on which to stand, he will fall headlong through Today's world is a world which stands upon lies. The world of the hereafter will be a world which stands upon truth.

## The Secret of Success

Eighty per cent of the information received by a human being from the outside world comes to him through his eyes – *provided he keeps his eyes open*. There is an abundance of oxygen in the air, but if it is to do him any good, *he must assiduously breathe it in*. If, however we are to benefit from our environment, it means rather more than just depending upon our own spontaneous biological functioning. It means that we must have the will and ability to seize the opportunities given to us by God and to learn to grapple with whatever their built-in conditions may be. We cannot expect the world – of its own – to lay its gifts at our feet.

This concept is of the greatest importance in the sphere of *Dawah* work. The spreading of the Islamic message is not something which is going to happen automatically, and, if it is to come about, it will depend upon our grasping whatever opportunities come our way. In modern times the greatest opportunity that has presented itself is the widespread freedom of belief enjoyed all over the world. (Only in a few communist countries are curbs placed upon religious activities). This freedom, however, carries with it a tacit proviso, i.e. that propagation of the faith must not take place by coercion, but by gentle persuasion. One reason for this is that so long as one does not use force, there will be no serious opposition to such activity. Perhaps a more important reason is that everyone should enjoy the same freedom of belief; the forcing of beliefs upon others is tantamount to encroaching upon that freedom, nay, destroying it. Failure to respect this condition means misusing the opportunity which presents itself; *Dawah* activity carried on in this way would eventually prove counterproductive. After such an abuse of another's privilege, there would be nothing to stand between us and God's punishment, for it is He who has provided us with this unique opportunity to bring other people within the fold. It is an opportunity to be seized, not wasted.

Missed opportunities spell ruin. That is the way of the world. And that is the will of God.

## The Plight of Man

The foundations of western civilization were laid in the unrestricted freedom of permissiveness. This so-called civilization spread its tentacles throughout the world until there was no one, neither rich nor poor, literate or illiterate, who was not affected by it. Today, this situation has reached its moral nadir, leaving human beings all over the world bereft of any vestige of humanity. Man today is bent upon just two things – the satisfaction of his own desires and the settlement of all affairs to his own advantage. What he wants and what will benefit him are of paramount importance, and there is nothing that he will stop short of to gain them.

The taint of modern civilization has been more in evidence in those countries collectively known as the sub-continent of India than anywhere else – to the point, in fact, where the nations of this geographical grouping have been transformed into a jungle of insensitive beasts. For a serious-minded human being, living in these countries is like living 'in Hell.

Today, we perforce live among people who thrive on evil and take pleasure in injustice. They do not hesitate to act unscrupulously, and then rejoice in their successes. People are no longer satisfied with living off their legitimate earnings. It is only when they have plundered others, seizing their wealth and property that they feel satisfied.

People today have reached a stage where they take no pleasure in speaking the truth; rather it is the making of false accusations which leaves a sweet taste upon their tongues. Far from obtaining gratification by acknowledging the status of others, they delight in refusing others the respect due to them. Dishonouring the honourable and disgracing those who have been graced by. God – that is what affords them satisfaction. The world of today is inhabited by people whose lives are based on a fabric of lies, but it is only those whose lives are based on truth who will find a niche in the everlasting world of the hereafter. Those who have gained their successes on the basis of false statements will find, at the crucial hour, that there will be nothing whatsoever, and no one whatsoever to come to their rescue.

## Islam: the Touchstone of Virtue

While the Prophet was living in Mecca, he went to the Banu Amir bin Sasa'a to call them to God and to ask them to assist him in his preaching of the True Word. One of them, whose name was Bayharah bin Faras, got up and asked: "If we assist you in this, and then God grants you victory over your opponents, shall we have a share in power?" The Prophet answered: "Power belongs to God. He gives it unto whom He wills." The questioner then asked: "Should we, in support of you, make our chests a target for the whole of Arabia, only for power to be in the hands of others when God makes you victorious? We have no need of your religion?" Hearing this, the rest of the tribe rejected the Prophet's appeal.

But not everyone the Prophet approached showed such a lack of sympathy for his cause. In fact, those who showed such an aversion for the Islamic ideal were in the minority. An incident which took place during the latter days of the Prophet in Mecca clearly shows how positive an element was always at hand to respond favourably to the Prophet's appeals. The incident in question concerns the acceptance of Islam by some people from Medina – a conversion promptly challenged by Abbas bin Ebadap bin Nadhlal Ansari, one of a group of people who had gathered around the Prophet. He arose and declared that the tribe of Khazraj had no idea of the terms on which they were swearing allegiance to this man. They retorted that they did know to what they were committing themselves, and why. "Well," he carried on, "You are committing yourselves to war against the red and the white i.e. Arabs and non-Arabs. Your wealth will be destroyed and your best people will be killed." Their reply to this was: "We accept him regardless of the destruction of our wealth and the slaughter of our best men." Then turning to the Prophet, they asked, "And what can we expect to gain, Messenger of God, if we are faithful?" "Paradise," replied the Prophet. "Extend your hand," they said. The Prophet did so and accepted their allegiance.

16 April 1987

To think nothing of the world is true wisdom

"If a person makes a will that his wealth should be given to the most intelligent of people, then it should be given to the one who has most renounced worldly pleasure." Thus spoke Imam Shafi'.

## From Heart to Heart

It has been said that when words come from the heart, they go straight to the heart; and that when they come from the tongue, they go no further than the ears.

It is quite true that there are two types of utterance. One is when one says whatever comes into one's head, on the spur of the moment or to get by. This is an utterance which comes from the tongue. It emanates from the surface of the speaker. That is why it does not penetrate further than the surface of the listener.

The other type of utterance is one which springs from serious thought. A person has really and truly discovered something and in all earnestness he puts it in words. Such words come from the depths of the speaker's heart and that is where they find their way in the listener – right to the depths of his heart.

To say something from the heart means that one is really saying something which comes from nature. Human nature is not different in each separate human being. All humans have basically the same nature. When one human being utters something which reflects this nature, it finds a place in the heart of others, for it is an expression of their nature too.

Everything experienced on a profound level of human nature is an experience shared by all humankind. Whenever one speaks while submerged in nature, then one is not only speaking for oneself; one is expressing the thoughts of others too. In a wider sense, one is leaping into the hearts of men and then talking. One is not only representing oneself, one is representing others too. When an utterance of this nature comes out of one, it is bound to cast its stamp on others besides oneself.

Just as no one can remain insensitive to his own feelings, so no one can fail to be moved by a tune played on the harp of human nature, for it strikes a chord in his own heart. It is not possible to be disconnected from one's own self, nor is it possible to ignore a voice which is the voice of one's own self, even if it comes from another.

17 April 1987

## Man will find himself standing on the verge of Hell

This was the first sermon the Prophet delivered on reaching Medina: "People, send forth for the future; you will surely reap the fruits of your actions,"



## Adding Insult to Injury

On January 12, 1987, a mob of students from *deeni madarsas* (religious schools) in Peshawar, Pakistan, attacked the offices of the *Frontier Post*, a local newspaper, causing extensive damage to them. Their action was in protest against the reproduction of a painting of Adam and Eve by the German artist, Lucas Cranach in the news paper's Friday magazine of January 9, 1987. The raid was carried out at the instigation of their leaders, who had taken it upon themselves to make fiery speeches on the subject. After congregational prayers the following Friday, they also held a rally in which they described the attack on the newspaper's offices as "correct and timely", and "congratulated those who performed their religious duty by attacking the newspaper's offices."

Justification of such action and congratulation of its perpetrators only adds insult to injury, for neither the action itself, nor the teachers' approbation of it is inspired by true Islamic principles. In such matters, there is one hard and fast rule, which the Quran sets forth thus: "Let evil be rewarded with like evil" (42:40). In another chapter, it is written: "If you punish, let your punishment be commensurate with the wrong that has been done you" (16:126).

With such guidelines as are laid down in the *Shariah*, the maximum these Muslim youngsters were entitled to do was write letters to or articles for the newspaper in order to express their disapproval. Using proofs from the Quran and Hadith to back up their arguments, they should have simply pointed out why the picture was objectionable in terms of the *Shariah*. After all, burning offices and holding protest rallies are hardly in consonance with true Islamic practice.

Let us go back to the time of the Prophet and see how he and his Companions reacted to the anti-Islamic slogans raised by his opponents. Never once did they adopt the tactics of arson and vandalism. Rather, they countered attacks on Islam with reasoned arguments. On this point, an eminent Companion, Hisan bin Thabit, is especially noteworthy. He was a poet, and in ancient Arabia, poetry occupied much the same position as the newspapers of today. Poetry was, so to speak, the ancient equivalent of journalism. What Hisan bin Thabit did was to write poems to rebut the opponents of Islam. People then learnt these poems from one another and, in this way, their message spread far and wide. Many such poems, written during the life of the Prophet have been recorded by Ibn Hisham.

If the Muslim students had sincerely wished to perform their religious duty, they should have written articles expressing their disapproval of the publication of such a picture, just as Hisan bin Thabit composed poems in the time of the Prophet (may peace be upon him) to counter the adversaries of Islam. In burning office equipment and premises, the students were not so much doing their religious duty as demonstrating their *inability* to do so. Incapable of writing a scathing article in the newspapers, they resorted instead to arson and vandalism. Where the situation called for a constructive attitude,

theirs was destructive. This is little better than heaping the blame on others for one's own incompetence. Such a reaction is essentially unislamic in that it is vicious in the extreme.

When one looks at such incidents solely from the point of view of the *Shariah*, one has first to determine whether an offence has actually been committed. Even supposing that one has been committed, the public is not entitled to take the law into its own hands. It is the courts and law-enforcing agencies which must mete out punishment as a matter of duty; it is not the responsibility of the public at large. Even if the judicial authorities decided that punishment were in order, it would not be the building and equipment which would be singled out for punishment, but the individual who was the actual culprit.

Whether we look at the matter from the everyday, commonsense standpoint, or whether we see it in terms of the *Shariah*, we have to condemn the students' action as unislamic. If, to their way of thinking, they were performing their "religious" duty, their so-called religion must be something very far removed from what we now understand by Islam.

19 April 1987

### Acting 'to be seen of men'

Abu Hurayrah reported the Prophet exhorting his followers to seek refuge from the Pit of Grief. He was asked what this Pit of Grief was, and he said it was a gorge in Hell which Hell itself sought refuge from four hundred times a day. The Prophet was then asked who would enter that Pit. "Those scholars who act to be seen of men," he replied.

(Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah)

## Message of the Quran

“The foolish among people will say: ‘What has made them turn away from their *qiblah* \* Say: ‘The east and west are God’s. He guides whom He wills to the right path.’ And thus we have appointed you a *middle nation*, so that you may be witnesses over mankind, and that your own Apostle may be a witness over you. We decreed your former *qiblah* only in order that We might know the Apostle’s true adherents and those who were to disown him. It was indeed a hard test, but not to those whom God guided. And never would God make your faith fruitless. He is Compassionate and Merciful to men” (2:142-143),

The *qiblah* is the direction Muslims face when they pray. This direction has to do with the form, rather than the reality, of worship. A *qiblah* is appointed so that prayer may assume an organized pattern. God can change it as He pleases, for every direction faces Him. The direction that He lays down is the one that we should face in our prayer, whatever direction it may be. Before the coming of Islam people had prayed towards Jerusalem. This old *qiblah* had come to be thought of as sacred and inviolable. In the second year after the Prophet’s emigration to Medina, he was commanded to change the direction of prayer, and face Mecca instead of Jerusalem. Some people found this switch difficult to accept. How, they thought, could another place be the *qiblah* when Jerusalem had held this position since time immemorial? The Jews used the change of the *qiblah* as an excuse for spreading all sorts of rumours about the Prophet. Previous prophets have always faced Jerusalem in their prayer, they said. How is it that this prophet has gone against them? This goes to show that the only purpose of his mission is to spite the Jews. Some poured scorn on Mohammad’s claim to prophethood. He seems to be in two minds about his own mission, they said. Sometimes he faces Jerusalem, sometimes Mecca. Others said: “Well, if the *Kabah* in Mecca is the, real *qiblah* then all the prayers which Muslims have made towards Jerusalem have been wasted.”

These were the sort of objections that Jews and hypocrites made. True believers, those who were not caught up in the externals of religion, did not let such things discountenance them. They realized that it is not the direction of prayer that really matters, it is God’s Commandment. God can lay down any *qiblah*, whenever He likes. Whatever He prescribes should be followed. The commandment regarding the change of *qiblah* was revealed seventeen months after the Prophet’s emigration to Medina. The Prophet was praying along with a group of his companions at the time. As soon as God’s commandment became clear, all of them turned, as they were praying, from Jerusalem to Mecca – a 160° turn from north-west to south.

\*The direction in which all Muslims must pray, whether in their public or private devotions, namely, towards Kabah.

The change of *qiblah* was a sign indicating that God had removed the Children of Israel from their position of spiritual leadership, and appointed the followers of Mohammad in their place. Now the Kabah would remain, until the end of time, a rallying-point for the call to divine religion, a centre for all true believers in God. The word *Wast*, translated above as "middle" also holds connotations of intermediation. The word signifies that Muslims are intermediaries between God and man. It is for them to communicate the word of God to their fellow human beings, just as the Prophet of God communicated it to them. This is a responsibility that is always incumbent upon the Muslim community. Their success, both in this world and the next, depends upon how they discharge this responsibility.

"Indeed, We see you look repeatedly towards heaven. We will make you turn towards a qibla that will please you. So turn your face towards the Sacred Mosque; wherever you are, turn your faces to it. Those to whom the (Bible) Book was given know this to be the truth from their Lord. God is not unmindful of what they do. But even if you gave those to whom the Book has been given every proof, they would not accept your qibla nor are you going to follow their qibla nor Would any of them accept the qibla of the other. If, after all the knowledge you have been given you yield to their desires, then you will surely become an evil-doer. Those to whom we gave the Book know him as they know their own sons. But some of them deliberately conceal the truth. The truth is from your Lord: therefore never doubt it (2:144-147)."

Not until the Prophet of Islam received divine revelation on a certain matter, did he change the pattern of previous prophets. Faithful to this principle, he initially made Jerusalem his *qiblah*, for prophets since the time of Solomon had prayed in that direction. The coming of Islam signalled the removal of the Jews from their position as torchbearers of the true faith. The true faith had also to be separated and made distinct from Jewish tradition, so that it could appear in a new and unmistakably pure form. For this reason the Prophet was eagerly awaiting instructions to change the *qiblah*. In the second year after his emigration to Medina he received the commandment. The Prophets who had come among the Jewish people had been informed that one day God would alter the *qiblah*, and they had passed the knowledge On to the Jews. It was something, therefore, that Jewish theologians should have been expecting. Yet only a few of them, such as Abdullah ibn Salam and Mukhaireeq, confirmed the authenticity of this Commandment and acknowledged that God had revealed the truth through the Prophet Muhammad. The reason for the majority's refusal to follow the prophet Mohammad was the fact that they were used to behaving to as they saw fit. They had certain romantic notions about the special position occupied by their own people, and they had made these the bedrock of their life and creed. Those who give free rein to their own desires will never follow the path of reason. By denying God's signs, they aspire, in their perversity, to the satisfactions that God wishes man to derive from their acceptance.

Whenever God reveals some truth to the world, he makes it absolutely clear that *it is the truth*. There can be no valid reason for people refusing to accept it. Those who do not make the truth their own, show that they have never come to know God, for, if they had, they would have recognized His word when they heard it. They summarily reject the truth, and think that these few words that they have deigned to utter are proof that they are standing on firm intellectual ground. But sooner or later they will see the weakness of their arguments and it will be borne in upon them that, all along, they had been labouring under a false sense of security.

22 April 1987

## How to tell between good and bad

“When should I think of myself as pious?” someone asked Aishah. “When you start thinking of yourself as impious,” she replied. “And when should I think of myself as impious?” the person asked once again. “When you start thinking of yourself as pious,” came Aishah’s reply.

## Gerard of Cremona

Gerard, who was born in Cremona, Lombardy, in 1114, was a mediaeval scholar who translated the works of many major Greek and Arabic writers into Latin, there being a great body of scientific and philosophical literature in those languages which were well worth making available to all the known world at that time. In this sense, he performed the same service for his countrymen that Hunain Ibn Ishaq had done for eastern Arabia. He went specially to Toledo, in Spain, to learn Arabic so that he could read the *Almagest* by Ptolemy, the Greek astronomer, geographer and mathematician who lived in the second century A.D. The *Almagest* was a vast computation of the astronomical knowledge of the ancients, and was accepted as authoritative up to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. As such, this was one of Gerard's most significant translations. He was assisted in his task by two other scholars, one Christian and one Jewish. With this, and other such books, the gates of Greek and Arabic sciences were opened for the first time to the west. In the field of medicine, he translated books by Buqrat and Galen, almost all of the books by Hunain and Al-Kindi, Abul Qasim Zuhra's book on surgery and many other books on the physical sciences, including the pamphlet on fossils which is attributed to Aristotle. Besides these, he rendered into Latin Avicenna's massive volume on law and many other books by Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, Ishaq and Sabit, etc.

In 1187, in Toledo, Gerard fell ill, and felt himself that his end was near. He wondered to himself what would happen when he was gone. "These books in Arabic are so precious," he thought, "and who is going to translate them into western languages?" His reflections moved him profoundly and he was fired with new zeal and energy. In spite of his rapidly failing health, he then succeeded in translating the remainder of his valuable collection of books. Legend has it that in the space of one month before his death, he had completed the translations of no less than 80 books.

When one feels sufficiently inspired to perform a task, one undertakes it at all costs, even on one's death bed, and even when one's external circumstances are totally adverse. It is one's will and one's motivation to work which are of prime importance. Health and strength are secondary.

## Remembering God

Qays ibn Abu Hazim tells the story of how a leading companion of the Prophet, Abdullah ibn Rawahah, fell sick towards the end of his life and lay with his head in the lap of his wife, weeping. When his wife saw his tears, she began to weep too. "Why are you crying?" he asked her. "I saw you crying, and I felt like crying too," she replied. Then he explained to her why he was crying. "I remembered the words of Almighty God: "There is not one of you but shall approach the fire" (Quran, 19:71). I do not know if I will be saved from it or not" (*Tafsir ibn Kathir*, Vol III p. 132)

This touching episode clearly shows what in Islamic terminology is meant by "Dhikr" – remembrance of God. A mere repetition of words does not constitute "Dhikr". Rather it is a feeling that wells up from the very depths of a man's soul, a spontaneous expression, of the joy and anguish that are kindled in his heart when he remembers his Lord.

When a person of true faith remembers God, he is overawed by the greatness of the Lord; he trembles at the thought of coming before Him in all His majesty. His emotion at this point involuntarily takes the form of words. Such is the nature of remembrance of God: It is the reaction that sets in with tremendous force from within a man's heart when God enters therein. Dhikr – remembrance of God – is the result of discovering God Himself; It can never come from the mindless parroting of a few words learned by rote.



24 April 1987

## Power is a liability, not something to be relished

Someone said to Abu Bakr: "O successor of the Prophet, why do you not promote veterans of Badr to positions of authority?" "I am aware of their status," replied Abu Bakr, "but I do not wish to stain them with the world." (Abu Nuaim in *Hilyat al-Auliya*)

24 April 1987

Connection with God nourishment for the soul:

The Prophet said: "When I pass vigil, I am given food and drink by a Gracious Bestower."

## Problems in the Path of Islamists

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, Prime Minister of Pakistan from 1973 to 1977, had a movement launched against him by Maulana Sayyid Abul Ala Maudoodi and other Islamists. They called it "Nizam-e-Mustafa." There is nothing easier, in fact, than to instigate a popular uprising against the authorities, and the fiery speeches of these leaders were enough to set the public of Pakistan ablaze, eventually putting an end to Bhutto's government. In their writings and speeches, Maulana Maudoodi and other leaders of the Islamic alliance had given the impression that the departure of Bhutto would mean the arrival of Islam, but, after the departure of Bhutto, what we had in Pakistan was not the arrival of Islam in any positive sense, but open dissension among Islamists.

An event similar to this in many ways has taken place time and time again, in one form or another, in a number of countries in recent times, the reason being that before the "revolution," everyone's attention is focused on one common enemy. But when the time comes for construction after the removal of this common enemy, it transpires that each one has a separate plan in mind for its implementation. Is one plan to take precedence over another? Are some or all to be welded together? It is at this point that the controversy begins. Those who have been united on a negative platform, fail to unite on a positive platform.

On what kind of issues do these disagreements occur? Perhaps an example will clarify this for us. A weekly magazine, *Deed Shoneed*, published in Pakistan, held an interview with Dr. Israr Ahmed, head of Pakistan's Tanzeem-e-Islami, during which he was asked: "Well, if Your government became established in the country, and you then had complete power, what would your attitude be towards the participation of women in the life of the nation? To what extent would you give Your permission?"

The Amir of Tanzeem-e-Islami made a number of statements in answer to this question, one of which went as follows: "We will put Primary education entirely in the hands of women. We will lay down that no male should be a primary school teacher, because it is a woman Who can properly look after children. Only a woman can provide motherly compassion."

*(Monthly Meesaq, Lahore, September, 1986, p. 66)*

Now let us examine the thoughts of another Islamist on this subject. Ahmad Mohammad Jamal, a famous Islamic thinker of Saudi Arabia and considered to be an Ikhwani in his thinking, authored an impassioned article in the Arabic weekly, *Al-dawah*, published in Riyadh, the title of which was: "The *fitna* (evil) is sleeping ... may God curse one who awakens it." Its title notwithstanding, this article was written on the very same subject as that mentioned above.

At the present time, the entire system of education in Saudi Arabia – primary education as well as advanced education – is in the hands of males. Recently, certain Saudi Arabian intellectuals have launched a movement to have the first three years of primary education handed over to women. The reason they give for this is exactly that mentioned in the above-quoted excerpt – the necessity for motherly compassion. They say that children need a feeling of security, love and compassion, and that this can be best provided by female teachers because of their natural, motherly instincts.

In his article, Ahmad Mohammad Jamal reacted strongly to this point of view. The severity of his opposition can be gauged from the title he gave it, calling the appointment of female teachers for children a *'fitna'* (*evil*). So great is the corruption brought about by this practice, he contends, that one who introduces it is deserving of the curse of God. Not only does he reject the notion of women in charge of primary education from the Islamic viewpoint, but also says that he considers “males better than females for teaching at this level.”

From this example, we can see how different Islamists are able to join hands when faced by a common enemy. But the moment the enemy retreats, they become the enemies of each other and start to fight amongst themselves.

26 April 1987

## Surrendering to God, and wishing others well

Jarir came to embrace Islam. The Prophet asked him to extend his hand for the oath of allegiance. "Allegiance on what?" Jarir asked. "That you will surrender to God, and wish every Muslim well." He then swore allegiance to the prophet. He was a very clever man. When swearing allegiance, he said to the Prophet that he would do what he could. Afterwards, this clause was included in everybody's oath.

## The Need of the Hour

When Maulana Shibli Nomani (1857-1914) started a movement for modern Islamic education – an idea which was hailed on all sides with an enthusiasm matching his own – only a modernist Muslim group dissented, arguing that Islamic education would lead Muslim youth into backwardness. For according to them Islam was against learning. The example cited in support of this view was an incident which allegedly took place in the time of the second Caliph, Umar Farooq, after the Egyptian city of Alexandria had been conquered. Shibli's detractors maintained that at that time there still stood in Alexandria a vast Greek library, dating from the time of Ptolemy, and that so great was the contempt of these Muslim victors for learning that they burnt this library to the ground, thus depriving the world of the intellectual inheritance of their forefathers.

Realizing that this allegation would harm his cause, Maulana Shibli began intensive research into the entire subject and finally published a well-documented article, in which he proved, drawing on historical sources, that this library had been destroyed long before the Islamic conquest. In the time of Umar Farooq, not the slightest trace of it had remained. Citing established facts, Maulana Shibli proved that the library of Alexandria had been destroyed by Christians during their own period. Later, in the sixth century of the Islamic calendar, a Christian historian, by the name of Abul-Farah Malti, had wrongly attributed this action in order to shift the blame for this act from the Christians to the Muslims. Maulana Shibli's findings were so well substantiated that they were later supported by European scholars.

Considering the course of action which he considered it necessary to pursue, it is clear that Maulana Shibli was more than competent to launch his campaign for modern Islamic education. He did not just make appeals for his cause: he effectively silenced the opposition from contemporary forces with highly scholarly and intelligent counter-arguments. Present-day exponents of the movement to preserve the *Shariat*, however, have not so demonstrated their competence. Indeed, they present quite a different picture. Far from arguing the case for Islamic law on a high scholarly level, they appear to have confined themselves to raising innumerable slogans, castigating what they term 'interference' in religion. In no way does this meet the intellectual imperatives of the present day.

For Indian Muslims, the year 1985-86 was crucial in the history of Islamic law. In the now well-known Mohammad Ahmad-Shah Bano case, the Supreme Court delivered a verdict that Mohammad Ahmad should pay his divorced wife a monthly sum of Rs. 180 – a decision which ran contrary to Islamic law, thus causing the religious sect among Indian Muslims to rise against it. On all sides, slogans were raised against interference in religion and the politics of rallies and demonstrations reached such a peak that beside them, the Khilafat movement seemed to pale into insignificance. Finally, the Indian Muslims had their victory. In May 1986, the Indian parliament passed a law which, from the Muslim point of view, satisfactorily dealt with divorced Muslim women.

A fact not grasped by the victors, however, was that a victory won in this way was little better than a defeat. In conducting their movement, the Muslims had made a great deal of noise about interference in religion and the preservation of the *Shariah*, but no one from their ranks – neither from the leaders nor the followers – had come forward with solid evidence to prove that Islamic law was the correct and most advantageous legal system. The man of today weighs up everything according to reason. Now, since Muslims had shown themselves incapable of measuring up to the highest standards of present-day rationalism, the greatness of Islamic law, notwithstanding this ostensible victory, has failed to make its impact upon the minds of the populace.

As a result of this agitation on the part of Muslims, the law of Islam regarding marriage and divorce came under discussion throughout the country with every newspaper and magazine expressing its views on the subject. On the one side, were our theologians who insisted that according to the *Shariah*, an allowance cannot be granted to a divorced woman. On the other side were the modernist Muslims and non-Muslim brethren who supported Clause 125 of the Indian Criminal Procedure Code, under which divorced women have been granted the right to receive up to Rs. 500 per month as an allowance from their former husbands.

The Islamic law is, without doubt, an extremely rational and fine law, but our theologians proved unable to establish its rationality with up-to-date proofs. All they did was assemble crowds of people on the grounds of wrongful interference in religion, with the result that those who looked at the matter from the outside saw the law of Islam as inferior and modern law as superior. As presented by the theologians, Islamic law laid down that a man could divorce his wife whenever he felt so inclined, and could expel her from his house, after which no responsibility for her upkeep devolved upon him. Modern law, on the other hand, was presented as providing some support for the woman after she was divorced. It compensated for any excesses the husband may have committed in that it bound him legally to the payment of a monthly allowance to his divorced wife. Whatever our religious leaders did, they did for the sake of preserving the *Shariah*: in actual fact, their efforts culminated in a degradation of Islam.

The lesson we have learned from this is that we should undertake such tasks only if we are fully competent to perform them, failing which it would be better to remain silent than “to launch a nation-wide campaign. Efforts which are ineffectual, because uninstructed, can never bring about improvements; they are more likely, in fact, to bring about a further deterioration of the situation.

On May 4, 1986, a Dialogue was held in the India International Centre, to which highly educated Muslims and Hindus from the Capital were invited. A well-known Muslim leader duly delivered a detailed speech in which he said that the *Shariah* was dearer to Muslims than life itself. Whatever the cost, they could not put up with interference in the *Shariah*, he said. According to the Quran, no maintenance was to be granted to divorced woman. For this reason, they would not permit any Muslim woman to take her case to a civil court to obtain an order under civil law granting her an allowance from her former husband.

In spite of having made an impassioned speech on the subject, this leader could not explain the principles of the *Shariah* in a way that would have appealed to the audience's powers of reasoning, thus losing a valuable opportunity to convince them of its superiority. It is hardly surprising then that at the conclusion of his speech an eminent Hindu pointed out that, nowadays, such statements were simply not acceptable. "One will have to show the sense behind one's laws. Rhetorical statements in themselves are not enough. Tomorrow one might say that it is written in one's scripture that petrol may be thrown on daughters-in-law and that they may be burnt. In that case, should one be allowed to burn one's daughters-in-law with impunity? And would the upholders of Civil Law be expected not to interfere?"

There stood the Muslim speaker publicly confronted by the Hindu's rebuttal of his argument, and, sad to say, he was unable to bring forward any well-substantiated argument of his own to counter this opposition.

We must realize that the present age is one of rationalism. In this day and age everything is weighed against reason and whatever is under dispute becomes acceptable only when it comes up to rational standards. This being so, when we want to make an Islamic issue public and feel that the launching of a political campaign is essential, we should be prescient enough to realize that nowadays people will demand rational proof of our arguments. Before they are even deemed worthy of consideration, they shall have to be put forward in a reasonable and sensible light. If we are not able to do so, we shall be presenting Islam to the public in an inferior and degrading light, no matter if, by our own reckoning, we have raised the flag of Islam over the walls of parliament.

Without doubt, Islamic law is the most rational of laws, but in the present day its rationality has become clouded. The real need of the day is that the veils should be removed so that the rationality of Islamic teachings may once again reign supreme.

It is only when it has been fully appreciated that Islamic thought is of a high intellectual calibre, that Islam itself will be accorded the status it deserves in every sphere of the national life.



30 April 1987

## Lust for fame the worst single danger for man

When Shidad ibn Aus was near death, he said to those around him: "What I fear most for this community is ostentation and secret desires." Sufyan Thauri explained the meaning of "secret desires". "It is to like being praised for one's good deeds," he said. The Prophet himself was asked about secret desires, and he attributed them to one who seeks knowledge because he likes the idea of people coming to sit at his feet.

(Jame Bayan al-Ilm wa fadhlihi)

30 April 1987

## The day of death will be the day when man will come to life

The Prophet said: "People are asleep. They will wake up when they die." What he meant was that they are so preoccupied with the world that they have become oblivious to the hereafter. As far as this world is concerned, they are as awake, but as far as the next world is concerned, they are fast asleep. It is as though there is a veil over their eyes which obscures their vision of reality. Death will destroy that veil, and they will wake up to the world of reality.

## The Nature of Belief

When the Prophet, may peace be upon him, and God's blessings, brought the message of Islam to the people of Mecca (the Quraysh), they did not find it acceptable. They could not understand how the religion of Muhammad could be true and that which they had inherited from their forebears false. Fired with the pride of their own religion, they said to the Prophet:

"O Mohammad! Pray on our behalf to the Lord, who has revealed unto you whatever he has revealed, that He should send to us those forefathers of ours who have passed away. One of those whom He sends to us should be Qusayy bin Kilab, for he was a man of truth. We shall ask him whether what you say is true or false. If he confirms your truthfulness, we shall believe in you and shall thereby recognize your position before Almighty God; we shall then know that He has, indeed, made you a Prophet, as you say". (*Seerat Ibn Hisham*)

How was it that the Quraysh understood the greatness of Qusayy bin Kilab, but not that of Muhammad bin Abdullah? For no better reason than that Qusayy bin Kilab belonged to their past, while Mohammad bin Abdullah was a man of their own times.

Right from early childhood they had been hearing about the greatness of Qusayy bin Kilab and it had thus become so fixed in their minds, that it seemed an incontrovertible fact. Muhammad bin Abdullah, however had come to them just as an ordinary man, with no legendary attainments, and it was this sole difference which, in their view, made the former great and the latter of no importance.

It is a very common phenomenon for people to accept, without hesitation, those already acknowledged as great before they themselves reached the age of discretion, and to reject those they have seen attaining greatness with their own eyes.

One factor which contributes to such a mentality is jealousy. It is the great men of today who become the objects of jealousy, never those of the past.

The Quran lists one of the qualities of people of faith as being their capacity to "believe in the unseen". This verse is concerned directly with faith in God, but, indirectly, it also concerns belief in the Prophet. When a prophet comes to humanity, he is manifestly, a mortal human being. The fact that he assumes a physical form, walks around, eats food, enjoys victories, suffers defeats, and is periodically overwhelmed by adverse circumstances, would indeed appear to testify, to his being an ordinary human being. But there is a prophetic aspect of his life which is hidden from normal view; his being a recipient of God's grace is not something which is immediately apparent. Anyone can appreciate him in mortal guise, but it is only those who have the capacity to recognize his unique, inner essence, who are able to grasp the fact that he is a prophet.

When a prophet says that he has seen Heaven and Hell, and claims that whoever follows him will be successful and that those who do not will be doomed to failure, he becomes to the ordinary man as 'invisible' as God Himself. In order to see a prophet as such, one must have the vision to see into the unseen, to recognize things from their inner truth. It is only those who can do so, who will pass the divine test,—who will believe in the Prophet and follow him.

## Tolerance in Islam

Commenting on the 'History of Science' in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1984, the editor acknowledges that when Islamic culture was at its zenith, West European culture was at its lowest ebb.

The conquests made by the Prophet's followers began in the 7th century A.D. and by the 10th century, Arabic was the literary language of nations stretching from Persia to Spain. Arab conquerors generally brought peace and prosperity to the countries they settled in. One manifestation of this was the way the library of Cordoba in Spain began to flourish. It had 500,000 books at a time when scarcely 5,000 existed north of the Pyrenees.

The Muslims, moreover, were tolerant of the other monotheistic faiths, making it possible for Jews to rise to high positions in Islamic lands at a time when they were scarcely permitted to survive in Europe (16/368).

Musa Ibn Maimun (1135-1204), one of the great Jewish scholars, and well versed in Greek, Hebrew, Chaldaic (now a dead language) and Arabic, was so highly regarded amongst the Jews that they compared him to the prophet Moses. They claimed that from Moses to Musa no equal of the latter had been born.

Born in Cordoba he later went to Spain where he was appointed special physician to Salahuddin Ayyubi, the ruler of Egypt. In spite of Musa being a Jew, Salahudin Ayyubi spared no effort to raise him to an exalted position in the land.