



Al-Risala 1988

April

“God Will Protect You From All Men”

Apostle, proclaim what has been revealed to you by your Lord. If you do not, you will surely fail to convey His message. God will protect you from all men. (Quran, 5:67)

“In the hours of its political degradation, Islam has achieved some of its most brilliant spiritual conquests: on two great historical occasions, infidel barbarians have set their feet on the necks of the followers of the Prophet—the Saljuq Turks in the eleventh and the Mongols in the thirteenth century and, in each case, the conquerors have accepted the religion of the conquered.” (T.W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam*, p.2)

How does one explain the paradox of the conquerors having “accepted the religion of the conquered” particularly when the arrival the Mongol hordes of Genghis Khan and Hulagu were so cataclysmic in their effect? A contemporary historian, Ibn Athir observed: “If one were to say that such a calamity had not occurred since the creation of Adam until the present day, it would not be an exaggeration.” Philip Hitti in his *History of the Arabs* tells the same incredible tale:

“Hard pressed between the mounted archers of the wild Mongols in the East and the mailed knights of the Crusaders on the west, Islam in the early part of the 13th century seemed forever lost. How different was the situation in the last part of the same century. The last crusader had by that time been driven into the sea. The seventh of the Khans, many of whom had been flirting with Christianity, had finally recognized Islam as the state religion – a dazzling victory for the faith of Mohammad. Just as in the case of the Seljuks, the religion of the Muslims had conquered where their arms had failed. Less than half a century after Hulagu’s merciless attempt at the destruction of Islamic culture, his great-grandson Ghazan, as a devout Muslim, was consecrating much time and energy to the revivification of that same culture” (p.488).

The Muslims had indeed been helpless before the savage might of these merciless warriors, and it was clearly the power of the spiritual message they carried that finally saved Islam from extinction. History had proved over and over again the compelling truth of the verses of the Quran revealed when the Prophet of Islam was in Medina:

“Apostle, proclaim what has been revealed to you by your Lord. If you do not, you will surely fail to convey His message. God will protect you from all men (5:67).

When the early Muslims had to communicate the divine message, the future for them lay behind an impenetrable veil. When they sacrificed their property and even their lives, they had no means of knowing whether their sacrifices were all in vain, or whether they would bear fruit in the near or remote

future. All they had to carry them through was their unshakeable faith in God and His Prophet. In comparison to what they underwent, the task before us is an easy one. We have only to conduct ourselves according to a principle whose worth has already been established by history. Where our predecessors succeeded in the face of great difficulties, cannot we too take up the burden of divine mission, with the same courage and zeal?

3 April 1988

Justice knows neither love nor hate:

According to Abdullah ibn Umar, Abdullah ibn Rawaha used to go to Khaiber every year for the purpose of collecting taxes. The levy, according to his own calculation, was one half of the total date crop. But the Jews of Khaibar complained that the date crop was not as much as he made it out to be, and even offered him a bribe to show them some leniency. "Enemies of God!" exclaimed Abdullah ibn Rawaha. "So you have a mind to make me dabble in what is unlawful? By God, I have been sent here by one who is dearer to me than the entire world, while my dislike for you is greater than for a similar number of swine and monkeys. But neither my dislike for you, nor my love for him, would ever prevent me from being just towards you." "It is justice such as this on which rest the heavens and the earth!" exclaimed the Jews.

(Baihiqi)

Islam and Science: A Correct Appraisal

Ancient man was of the view that the events taking place around him were mysterious in origin, and could not be explained in any rational way. But modern man knows that there is a definite cause for whatever happens in the world. This change in thinking is reflected in a typical Indian family's discussion of space flight, which was reported in The Times of India of April 20, 1984.

"Dad," the youngest daughter asked, "Can I become the first spacewoman," Her grandmother promptly assured her that she could, and that she would consult Pandit Girdhar Vyas to see what it said in her *Kundali* (horoscope). "Granny," interjected the girl's brother, "you should consult the Russian leaders, not an astrologer!"

In ancient time, 'knowledge' was simply a set of analogies compiled by astrologers, soothsayers and others of that ilk. In modern times, however, it is only those realities which are discovered and explained by observation and experiment which can be properly said to constitute knowledge. The educated youth of today appreciates that it is scientists who have a specialized knowledge of space travel, and not fortune tellers, and that it is to them that he must turn if he wishes to have an accurate grasp of the subject.

Man's entire way of thinking has been transformed in modern times and, in conveying the message of Islam in the modern world, this transformation must be taken fully into account. It would be extremely regrettable if Islam,— a completely scientific religion— were presented to the world in unscientific terms by preachers who were not themselves abreast of the latest developments in modern thinking. Their efforts to convince their more scientifically-minded contemporaries would be wasted, and any shortcomings in their method of presentation would be attributed to Islam itself. This kind of failure is some thing which must be sedulously guarded against by any would be Dayee.

Weighing Up Our Actions

"We have sent down iron, with its mighty strength and diverse uses for mankind, so that God may know those who support Him, though unseen, and support His Apostles. Powerful is God, and Mighty."

(Quran, 57:25)

In the material world which God has created, we find concrete symbols of the attributes which God desires man to possess. Iron is one such substance as epitomizes the qualities of strength, staunchness and the ability to bind and give support.

"We have sent down iron, with its mighty strength and diverse uses for mankind, so that God may know those who support Him, though unseen, and support His Apostles. Powerful is God, and Mighty." (Quran, 57:25)

In this same chapter, which is entitled "Iron," mention is made also of the role of the scriptures and the scales of justice. "We have sent our apostles with clear signs and brought down with them scriptures and scales of justice, so that men might deal with fairness." In our everyday lives, when we want to know how heavy something is, we weigh it up on a pair of scales. In this way we can also tell whether something is overweight or underweight. Similarly, by weighing our actions on the divine scales of justice, we can ascertain their true moral value, and be certain of whether they are right or wrong. Just as giving short weight in our day-to-day dealings is unpardonable, so is the giving of deficient moral value in our actions a great sin in the eyes of God.

It is by weighing our actions against what is written in the scriptures that we fully understand the nature and extent of our wrong-doing, or, alternatively, if we have done our best to lead upright, moral lives, but are in doubt as to the success of our efforts from the ethical standpoint, we may find welcome confirmation of the rightness of our course, by constant reference to the holy scriptures.

Unique in the Vastness of the Universe

Heaven is for those who can sing the praises of their Lord – just like the warbling birds all around us – even when He never assumes a material form which would serve as a reminder of His actual existence.

If our gaze could encompass the entire universe, we should feel amazed and awed at the vastness of its expanse, and at the myriads of stars and asteroids which go hurtling through it at incredible speeds. All of these celestial bodies are either dry rocks or blazing stars with surface conditions (extremes of temperatures, too high or too low a gravitational pull, constant hurricanes, an absence of oxygen, etc.) which could never support life as we know it. The sole exception is our planet earth, which is blessed with air and water, plant and animal life. In such a sterile universe, our earth is indeed a rare phenomenon, with its lush greenery, its multitudes of living creatures and, above all, man, with his ability to think, reason and plan.

God has created man in an environment which, in affording him so many benefits ranging far and beyond his needs for mere survival, is unique in the entire universe. Is this not a sign that he intended man for a higher existence? The world in which He created man is not only an exceptional gift from the Almighty, but is also a model for the heavenly world which he has fashioned for the spiritually elect, that is, for those who, fully conscious of, and filled with gratitude for God's beneficence, have patterned their lives on the divine example he has set them.

The paradise which He has planned for them, in being free of all disadvantages, all limitations, in short, of all negative factors, will be an everlasting manifestation of God's own perfection. It is a world which will be inhabited by those who are blissfully untarnished by worldly considerations, giving of what they possess with no thought of reward, just like the tree which gives its shade and its fruit to friend and foe alike.

Heaven is for those who can sing the praises of their Lord – just like the warbling birds all around us – even when He never assumes a material form which would serve as a reminder of His actual existence. Paradise is for those who know how to derive their spiritual sustenance from the manifestations of their Lord all around them in nature. Such souls alone are fit to preach the word of God, taking their inspiration as they do from His silent message which is unceasingly relayed throughout the universe; the true preacher of His message has his mind and heart ever attuned to such divine communication. As a recipient of God's message, he can joyfully mingle his words of praise with the chorus of birds and trees who never cease to chant hymns of praise to the Almighty.

A true preacher must rise above the trivial issues of this mundane world if he is to convey the exalted message of his Lord. He must unfailingly maintain a higher moral standard than his listeners. If he cannot do so, he is no longer in consonance with the divine pattern of God's universe, and, as such, he is not worthy to receive or communicate the holy commandments of God.

7 April 1988

On hearing the Hereafter mentioned, he waived his claim:

Umm Salamah tells of how two of the Helpers brought a dispute before the Prophet about a long-standing issue of inheritance for which neither party could produce a witness. "You bring me your disputes," the Prophet said to them, "and, when no proper evidence is brought forward, I judge them according to my own way of thinking. I might, on the basis of partial evidence, make a settlement in favour of one of the parties, but in so doing, it may be that I take away from the other what is his rightful due. In that case, the one in whose favour I pass judgement should not accept what has been apportioned to him, for that would be like his accepting a firebrand which, on the Day of Resurrection, would stick to his neck." At these words, both the Helpers broke down and wept. "Prophet of God!" they both cried out, "he can have my rightful share!" "The Prophet then told them that in view of their changed attitude they should go and, seeking to do what was just and right, should divide the inheritance into two parts. Then they should draw lots as to who should have which part. In this way, each would have the other's approval of the share he received.

(Kanzul Ummal)

8 April 1988

The Inheritors of Paradise

The next world will be one of eternal honour and bliss, for Paradise is an ideal domain which has been specially designed by God for those who have evinced divine qualities in the course of their earthly lives. Whereas for mankind the present world is one of unmitigated toil and struggle, the next world will be one of unalloyed happiness and joy.

What people often fail to understand is that this present world is simply a testing-ground for the selection of those who are truly fit to inherit the life everlasting. It will be those whose minds and hearts are found to be as noble as the highest mountain peaks and as deep as the fathomless oceans who shall be deemed truly deserving of admission to Paradise. Only they shall pass through its heavenly portals who cause no harm or obstruction to others, moving through their midst with as little disturbance as the gentle breezes passing through a forest; who pursue a silent course through life, never colliding with anything or anyone, just like the stars moving across the firmament in the immutable fixity of their orbits; who show no prejudice towards others, but shine like the sun on friend and foe alike; who are indifferent to worldly fame and prestige, blossoming selflessly like the flowers; who are unfailingly kind and thoughtful towards others, like a river coursing through the land, giving freely of its blessings to those on either bank; who take their spiritual nourishment from the world around them, just as the trees sustain themselves by partaking of the divine gifts of earth, water and air; who are unblemished by pride and arrogance, lasting themselves upon the ground before their Lord like so many voiceless shadows.

God has patterned the functioning of the universe upon the perfection of His own attributes. It is those who measure up to those same flawless ideals who will be adjudged fit to inhabit the perfect world of the Hereafter.

8 April 1988

Those who show mercy will be dealt with mercifully

“The Merciful One shows mercy to the merciful,” said the Prophet. “Be merciful with those on earth. The One in Heaven will be merciful with you.”

(Ahmad, Abu Dawood, Tirmidhi)

9 April 1988

A Dwarf in the Universe

God in His wisdom has given us minds with which to observe and reason. Therefore, when we view ourselves in the context of the vastness of the universe, we at once realize how small a part we play in it. With God's universe extending itself before us in all its grandeur, we cannot but be imbued with an all-pervading sense of humility – the greatest quality that a man can have.

On April 8, 1984 the first Indian spaceman, squadron leader Rakesh Sharma, was privileged to view the universe from space itself – an impression more awesome than ever we could have from the earth's surface. An interview with him, while he was actually in space, was relayed from the mission control centre in Moscow and telecast live on the Indian National TV Network. Here is a significant excerpt:

Interviewer: How do you pass your time when there is no work?

Sharma: I just peep through the window and watch the timeless space.

Interviewer: Don't you feel like a tiny human being up there, dwarfed by the endless space?

Sharma: Certainly, its mind-boggling.

Humility of this sort is the greatest virtue that a man can have, while the worst streak in a man's character is unbridled arrogance. Humility is a characteristic which develops through coming to terms with reality over and over again, whereas arrogance springs from shallow thinking and from constantly turning a blind eye to what one's actual role in the universe is.

9 April 1988

A good deed is of no value if it makes one proud

Ibn Ataullah As Sikandari wrote in his book, Al-Hikam: "A sin which makes one meek and humble is better than a good deed which makes one proud and arrogant."

10 April 1988

The Illusion of Freedom

“For years I had gone from my air-conditioned villa in my air-conditioned car to my air-conditioned office. I never realized how hot it really is here.”

In December 1983, a severe drought brought the Ivory Coast’s hydro-electric stations to a standstill. Since they had supplied ninety-two percent of the country’s electricity, this meant that sometimes there was no power for as many as 18 hours a day. Computers, electric typewriters, refrigerators and other gadgets ceased to operate. Diners in luxury hotels were forced to eat by candle light, while houses, shops and offices were lit by lanterns. For fear of being caught in lifts, many businessmen simply gave up going to their offices. One commuter bewailed his lot to a *New York Times* correspondent:

“For years I had gone from my air-conditioned villa in my air-conditioned car to my air-conditioned office. I never realized how hot it really is here.”

All this in a country which at one time had been called the “Showcase of Africa” because of its glittering array of residential and commercial centres. It was only when there was an unprecedented drought that people realized what an artificial world they had been living in. It was only then that they realized how disagreeable the reality was.

The same is true of life in general. Just as the inhabitants of the Ivory Coast took for granted their electricity supply and all the comforts it gave them, so do the denizens of this world take their freedom as a right—and as a right that can never be terminated. But when they pass beyond the grave, their composure will suddenly be shattered by the discovery that their so-called freedom was just an illusion. They will find that their freedom of action had been given to them as a test of their worthiness to enter the gates of Paradise. They will learn, too late, that throughout their lives, God had held them responsible for every thought, word and deed, and that on the Final Day they shall have to give an account of themselves.

On coming to grips with this reality, they will suffer mental discomfort a million times more acute than any physical discomfort suffered on the Ivory Coast due to a power failure.

Controlling Crime

It is only if we concentrate on the fact that we shall have to account for our misdeeds in this world in the divine court of the Hereafter, and that we shall have to suffer the everlasting agonies of God's retribution in the after-life, that we shall set our feet upon the right path.

It is a commonly-held belief that poverty breeds crime, and that once we banish poverty, crime will automatically disappear. But this theory is belied by the constantly rising crime rate in the affluent world of the west. The U.S. Justice Department conducted a survey on crime during 1983 which produced frightening statistics: one in three families were victims of a crime, and a U.S. citizen was murdered every half hour. This was despite the economic upswing which America had experienced during that period.

We must face the fact, however unpalatable, that crime is not the result of poverty. It is the result of man's feeling that he is free to do as he pleases in this world. This is a feeling which is growing, and will continue to grow, the further away we move from God. It permeates all walks of life, vitiating the conduct not only of the deprived and under-educated but of the highly educated and the socially prominent. A case in point is the High Court Judge in Japan, a Mr. Tsuyosni Matsunaga, who, in August 1984, was caught shoplifting two books worth 15 dollars. He could easily have paid for the books, but, as he later told Supreme Court officials, he had acted "on impulse." He was duly punished and had to resign, but how many crimes go undetected, and how many criminals go unpunished? Certainly, there are many such instances, for neither the police nor the judiciary are fully equipped to deal with the growing volume and complexity of crime in modern times. No matter how just a legal system may be, and no matter how sophisticated the methods of criminal detection, there will always be individuals who think that crime pays, and that honesty does not. And there will always be individuals who indulge in crime for the sheer excitement of it.

How can such perverted thinking be made sane and decent again? How can crime— whatever its causes— be finally eradicated? We have seen the inadequacy of law enforcement systems in the most advanced countries in the world and, if we are not to turn to them, where are we to turn? It is only if we re-enter the fold of religion and make ourselves accountable to our Maker, that justice will become a self-enforcing and self-perpetuating principle in our lives. It is only if we concentrate on the fact that we shall have to account for our misdeeds in this world in the divine court of the Hereafter, and that we shall have to suffer the everlasting agonies of God's retribution in the after-life, that we shall set our feet upon the right path. If man resorts to crime, it is not because he is deprived of material wealth, but because he has deliberately shunned the spiritual wealth which lies in God's power to give him.

12 April 1988

They will be of good cheer on meeting God

While still a young man, Talha Ibn Bara' came to the Prophet to swear allegiance to him and to accept Islam. "I am at your behest," he vowed to the Prophet. "I will do exactly as you command." "Even if I tell you to sever your relations with your parents?" the Prophet asked. (Talha used to look after his mother with great affection). Talha ibn Bara' at once prepared himself to carry out the Prophet's command. "Talha," the Prophet said to him, "Our religion does not teach one to sever ties. I just wanted you to be absolutely certain of your faith."

Talha ibn Bara' came within the fold of Islam and remained a fine Muslim till the day he died. When he was suffering his final illness, the Prophet came to visit him and found him in a state of unconsciousness. "I think that Talha's soul will be taken up tonight," he said. He departed then, asking to be informed when Talha regained consciousness. It was midnight before he did so, and he said that the Prophet should not be disturbed at that late hour. "He might be bitten by some harmful creature or some Jewish enemy might do him an injury if he comes out at night," he protested. Talha passed away that very night and the Prophet was not informed until after the morning prayer. "Lord, may be of good cheer on meeting you and you on meeting Him," the Prophet prayed.

(Tabarani)

A True Conception of Islam

It is horrifying to see how many people there are in this world today who are ready to hate others in the name of Islam, and how few there are who are ready to love others for the sake of their religion.

Many “revolutionary changes” have marked the Iranian scene since the theocratic coup of 1979. One of the less obvious, but nevertheless heavily symbolic innovations is the inter-weaving of the flags of the U.S.S.R., the U.S.A. and Israel into the carpeting on the staircases leading up to the National Assembly and other buildings of public importance. The object of this exercise is to ensure that the flags of the “enemies of Islam” are trodden underfoot by all the multitudes who enter and leave these various buildings. The modern upholders of Islam would appear to feel that it is their religious duty to desecrate the symbols of pride and glory of non-Muslim nations. But isn’t this a philosophy of unmitigated hatred? And, as such, what does it have to do with genuine, Islamic principles?

The ignoble perpetrators of this macabre witlessness would do well to turn their sick minds to the study of the lives of the Prophet of Islam and his companions. They would find that these men of God were so intent upon saving *everyone* from eternal perdition that they would include even their enemies in their incessant prayers for God’s guidance. They would generously return love for hate in the hopes that their ill-wishers would have a change of heart, and allow themselves to be brought closer to Islam. They never humiliated those who made them the target of their spite, for they considered that this would have the effect of driving their adversaries even further away from Islam and into irremediable bigotry. They even treated degraded and degenerate individuals with respect in the hopes that, by ignoring the obliteration of their true natures, they could bring about their moral regeneration. They particularly avoided treating the fallen as if Islam could never be theirs. On the contrary, they always made a point of teaching them that it was well within their reach. This was the idealistic example set by the Prophet and his companions, but, today, it is regularly ignored and flouted by contemporary Muslim leaders.

It is horrifying to see how many people there are in this world today who are ready to hate others in the name of Islam, and how few there are who are ready to love others for the sake of their religion. Similarly, there are innumerable ‘devotees’ who take pride in their so called Islamic beliefs, but where is the man who is willing to bury his pride as is taught by true religion? There is great eagerness to trample the “enemies of Islam” underfoot, but where is the zeal there ought to be for bringing people closer to God? This is what *Al-Risala* aims to do: its message is directed not only to unbelievers and wrongdoers, but also to self-styled believers who have a warped and erroneous conception of Islam. We invite those who truly wish to serve Islam to join us in our sacred mission.

14 April 1988

Resistance to Provocation

The renowned Indian philosopher, Mr. J. Krishnamurti, spent more than fifty years travelling around in the west and in India, never relaxing in his efforts to bring people round to his way of thinking. Although his talks were attended by thousands of people year after year, he always felt unhappy at the failure of his audiences to move along with him. When he was in Madras in February, 1984, he ended one of his discussions by asking the audience: "Will you change, Sirs?" and then declaring, "you'll all go back and continue doing what you have been doing." A man in the audience angrily retorted: "Year after year you say we are not going along with you; then why do you keep talking to us?" Mr. Krishnamurti, without losing his composure for so much as a second, replied, "Sir, have you ever asked a rose why it blooms?" remaining unperturbed and speaking with great politeness, he effectively silenced his would-be critics. There are many speakers today who could very well take a lesson from this.

14 April 1988

What really matters is the man within

A complaint was made to the Prophet about the behavior of Abdullah ibn Hudhaifah. It was said that he joked and played the fool too much. "Let him be," said the Prophet, "for, deep down, he has great love for God and His Prophet."

(Ibn Asakir)

Turning an Impediment to Good Account

“My hesitancy in speech, which was once an annoyance, is now a pleasure. Its greatest benefit has been that it has taught me the economy of words. I have naturally formed the habit of restraining my thoughts. And I can now give myself a certificate that a thoughtless word hardly ever escaped my tongue or pen.”

Many people are so shy by nature that they shrink from even trying to play an effective role in private and public life. Even when they do make the attempt, hesitancy in speaking proves such a great obstacle to put across their ideas, that they can seldom make any significant impact upon their listeners.

Those so afflicted should take courage from the example of Mahatma Gandhi, who was so crippled by shyness that no one could ever have imagined in the early part of his life that, one day, he would be a great and idolized leader, able to influence millions and to sway the great and small alike.

There were many important occasions when, as a young man, he quite dismally failed to make his mark. In his book, *My Experiments with Truth*, he tells of how, as a young student in London, he joined a vegetarian society and was asked to make a speech at one of its meetings. When he stood up, he was so nervous that he could scarcely utter a word. In his confusion, he finally muttered a few words of thanks, then sat down. On another occasion, when invited to speak on vegetarian food, he took the precaution of writing down what he had to say. But again, his shyness overwhelmed him and he was unable even to read out what he had written. His discourse had finally to be read out by someone else.

After qualifying as lawyer in London, he started his practice in Bombay, but when he appeared in court to plead his first case, he was so nervous that he was unable to speak, and had to ask his client to find himself another lawyer.

However, as time went on, this disadvantage began to turn itself to good account. Gandhiji writes:

“My hesitancy in speech, which was once an annoyance, is now a pleasure. Its greatest benefit has been that it has taught me the economy of words. I have naturally formed the habit of restraining my thoughts. And I can now give myself a certificate that a thoughtless word hardly ever escaped my tongue or pen.”

Mahatma Gandhi was indeed well-known for his sparing, but expressive use of words. But it is not generally known that this skill grew out of what would normally be considered a negative trait. Whereas initially his shyness had prevented him from speaking altogether, later on in life it turned him into a thoughtful speaker of rare distinction.

16 April 1988

Sycophantic subordinates pretend disaster

Aishah reports the prophet as saying: When God desires the good of someone in a position of power, he assigns to him an honest counsellor, one who reminds him of God's word when he forgets it, and who assists him when he remembers it. And when he desires the opposite for anyone, he gives him an evil counsellor, one who does not remind him when he forgets and does not assist him when he remembers."

(Abu Dawood)

16 April 1988

Lip service is not proof of real attachment:

Jubair ibn Nufair relates how, as his father was sitting with Miqdad ibn Aswad one day, a passerby, on seeing a Companion of the Prophet said: "How fortunate are those two eyes that have seen the Prophet! By God, if only we could have seen what you saw and shared in your experiences!" Nufair said that he was impressed by the man's words; he seemed to have spoken well. But Miqdad – may God be pleased with him – looked towards the man and said: "No one whom God has saved from being present at those hours should desire to have been there. Who knows how they would have acted in those circumstances? By God, many whom God cast into Hell came to see the Prophet, such as did not accept what he said, or believe in his mission."

The story of all mankind

They feel, once the reins of power are in their hands, that they are in complete control of their own and other's destinies. But, sooner or later, God's will is made manifest, and if He does not will that they should remain in that position, they are removed from the scene like so many straws blown away by the wind

Fiji, a small country made up of a number of Islands in the South Pacific Ocean, has a population which is only half Fijian, the other half being made up of settlers of Indian origin, who took up their abode there during British rule. When, after the elections on April 11, 1987, a new government was formed under the Prime Ministership of Timoci-Bavadra, with an Indian majority, the Fijian half of the population protested against it on the grounds that this was tantamount to setting up a 'little India' in Fiji. Fully confident of his position the new Prime Minister retorted: "I am in control. I will remain in control." (*The Times of India*, May 15, 1987). But within just a few days of his saying this, there was a military coup on May 14, 1987. Entering parliament house along with ten armed soldiers, Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka arrested the newly elected Prime Minister and twenty-seven of his colleagues, then, forcing them to board a truck, he sent them off to some unknown destination. Colonel Rabuka's next step was to revoke the 17-year old constitution, and announce that his rule over Fiji would be according to a constitution of his own devising.

The story of this ousted Prime Minister is the story of all mankind. Those who have been quick to benefit from the opportunities which have come their way, and have risen to eminence, begin to feel that whatever position they hold is totally unassailable. They feel, once the reins of power are in their hands, that they are in complete control of their own and others' destinies. But, sooner or later, God's will is made manifest, and if He does not will that they should remain in that position, they are removed from the scene like so many straws blown away by the wind. Such events take place with amazing regularity, but all men think, in their heart of hearts, that they can only happen to others - never to themselves. Everyone imagines that he will remain unscathed even when it is God's will that he should be cast down.

Missing Zeal

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

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

It is related in biographies of the Prophet, that the Muslims who went from Mecca to Medina were so unflagging in their efforts to propagate Islam, that “there was not a house belonging to the Ansar (the inhabitants of Medina) in which there were not Muslim men and women.”

18 April 1988

What those who sit with leaders should be like:

Abdullah ibn Abbas tells how his father once said to him: "My boy, I see how the Commander of the Faithful, Umer ibn Khattab, invites you to his meetings and takes you into his confidence. He also turns to you as well as to the other Companions for advice. I am going to give you three pieces of advice which are worth remembering: firstly, fear God, and never let it be said of you by Umer that you told a lie; secondly, keep his secrets well and thirdly, never speak ill of anyone in his presence." Amir says that each one of those pieces of advice was better than a thousand." "Better than ten thousand," rejoined Ibn Abbas.

(Tabarani)

The Outer Shell

When a military coup was attempted on August 28, 1987, in the Philippines, the *Time* office in Seoul immediately received the information by telephone, whereupon a three-man team of *Time* photographers were flown to Manila, the capital of the Philippines. There they took up-to-the-minute pictures to illustrate the *Time* cover on the abortive coup against the government of President Corazon Aquino. Even while shooting was still going on in the streets of Manila, batches of film were being flown back to Seoul.

A selection was first made of the photographs that most dramatically illustrated what was happening in the Philippine capital. Then in a photographic laboratory in Seoul, a team of technicians began the high-tech wizardry of transmitting the colour pictures to New York City. Each picture was first converted into millions of computer digits, and that information was stored on tape. Then it was beamed via satellite to the Time Impact (for Image Processing and Colour Transmission) Centre in New York City. The manager there received the data on tape and entered the information in *Time's* computer system. Finally a high-resolution picture was printed, and the photograph that had been selected could be seen within an hour of its having left Seoul. Within a few days, the unsuccessful coup, along with all the pictures, was before the readers of *Time*. *Time* ends its report (7 September 1987) on the coverage of this incident with these words:

'The best photo in the world is no good if it is still in somebody's camera' (p. 3).

Recent advances in Science and Technology have made it possible to publish pictures of important events with great rapidity. But the very best pictures that this human invention, the camera, can take will show us only external appearances. What the best pictures in the world ought to show us are man's quest for truth, the soul's trembling at the remembrance of God, the killing of the ego in order to accept the truth. If we are not destined to see 'such pictures, it is not because they are "still in somebody's camera," but because no such camera has yet been devised which will portray for us these galvanizing inner realities. We must always remember that, no matter how faithfully – from the visual point of view – personalities and events are depicted by photography, what we see is only the outer shell.

We Ignore the Greatest Certainty

When a man leaves this life, it matters little whether he makes his exit from a tiny hovel or a spacious mansion, a humble office or the seat of government. It matters not at all whether he was in sorrow or in bliss.

Dick Shawn, an American stage and film comedian, was entertaining an audience of 600 in a theatre in Jajolla, California, when he suddenly fell face down-wards on the stage. The audience, who had been laughing uproariously at his witty monologues, thought that this was part of the act. But then, when he had lain there immobile for quite some time, his son Adam, fearing the worst, sent for a doctor. After making a thorough examination, the doctor advised that he should be taken to a hospital. He was promptly taken away in an ambulance, but was declared dead on arrival. The doctors at the hospital said that he had probably died of a heart attack.

Death strikes the miserable, the happy, the poor, the rich, the helpless, the powerful. It is no respecter of persons. When a man leaves this life, it matters little whether he makes his exit from a tiny hovel or a spacious mansion, a humble office or the seat of government. It matters not at all whether he was in sorrow or in bliss. At that final moment when he makes his departure from this world, he is in exactly the same state as all the other departing souls – bereft of all worldly considerations, because he is on his way to face his Maker. If those who think only of today, could think a little more of tomorrow and what is to be our ultimate fate, the poor and miserable would soon forget their resentment, and the rich and powerful would find their complacency shattered.

“That which God wishes, and you wish, will come to pass,” said a certain individual to Prophet. The latter showed his intense displeasure at this remark. “Have you set me as a compeer with God?” he asked. “Say, rather, that which God alone wishes will come to pass.”

The Capacity to Benefit

God's guidance may be available to all men in equal measure at all times, but the extent to which individuals can benefit from it will vary according to their differing degrees of receptiveness.

There is a saying of the Prophet, that "the best thing in your religion is True Understanding." On one occasion the Prophet was moved to pray for Abd Allah Ibn Abbas: "O God, give him True Understanding in religion and teach him its correct interpretation."

The following Tradition is related in Bukhari and Muslim:

That guidance and knowledge with which God has sent me to the world is like the rain falling on land which in separate areas is fertile, barren or sloping. The fertile part absorbs the rain water and produces an abundance of grass and foliage. The barren part holds the water and its inhabitants benefit from it, because they can drink it, water their flocks and irrigate their land with it. But the sloping part neither holds the water nor produces any greenery. No one benefits from it. The first examples are like those who are blessed with true understanding in God's religion and who benefit thereby, learning from it and teaching it to others. The latter example is like one who is bereft of his share in it for he does not accept the guidance with which I have been sent.

Clearly, rain can benefit the land only in so far as the land is capable of absorbing it. The same is true of God's guidance. People can benefit from it only if their hearts and minds are open to receive it, their wills are strong enough to take hold of it. It should not just slip away from them like water running down a slope. God's guidance may be available to all men in equal measure at all times, but the extent to which individuals can benefit from it will vary according to their differing degrees of receptiveness. When a man receives true guidance in full measure and, in consequence, comes to know his Maker, that is the greatest gift that such guidance can bestow upon him.

The Test Papers of Life

Only those who have made the correct moral decisions, and consistently followed them through, will find favour in the eyes of the Almighty. Those who have taken the wrong course, or who have simply run away from difficult situations, will fall from Divine Favour into eternal perdition.

We are judged not only by how well or how badly we answer our test papers at school and college, but by how we acquit ourselves in our day-to-day experiences. Some of these require no exercise of our sense of right and wrong, make no appeal to our consciences and involve no moral choices. They are simply routine matters which require a physical or mechanical response. But there are many occasions on which we must consider what is good and right, and having made our decisions, we must act accordingly. Other types of experience are not so clear-cut, in that they place us in the dilemma of not being able to tell which is the right course, or of feeling that no matter which course we take, the outcome is likely to be harmful or disagreeable. It is simply a choice of the lesser of two evils. It is such experiences which are the real 'test papers' in life. For it is upon our making the correct responses and upon our unshakeable will to abide by them that our ultimate fate will depend. On the Day of Reckoning, all our correct answers will be measured against all our wrong answers. Only those who have made the correct moral decisions, and consistently followed them through, will find favour in the eyes of the Almighty. Those who have taken the wrong course, or who have simply run away from difficult situations, will fall from Divine Favour into eternal perdition.

But in situations in which the human mind and will seem too frail to be able to deal with overwhelming moral complexities, we should never lose sight of the fact that man does not stand alone: God is forever there, at his side. Man has only to turn to Him to receive Divine Succour. Once a man has put his trust in God, he finds that all his problems can be appropriately solved and that, in order to do what is right, he no longer feels any hesitation in embarking on courses which had previously struck him as too difficult, unpleasant or even dangerous. He is then armed with the knowledge that engaging in right action gives one strength, and that adopting the wrong course can only bring about one's downfall. Right action will take him closer to God and wrong action further away from Him. One who deliberately turns away from his Saviour will find himself in the hands of the devil, whereas one who turns to God will be given shelter and support, and guidance as to the correct response to give in any situation calling for principled behaviour. Those who turn to Satan seldom realize that they are launching themselves on the downward path to self-destruction.

Often, the experiences which we have in life are the result of the circumstances which we find ourselves. Pain and deprivation may be our lot, because we are forced to live in poverty. All the more reason then

to curb our impatience and indignation, and to show gratitude to God for whatever small mercies He has chosen to bestow upon us. One may, on the contrary, find oneself in a position of rank and affluence, in which case it is arrogance, overweening pride and miserliness which have to be guarded against. Then one should go out of one's way to be unfailingly humble and to be consistently generous in spending for God's cause to the point of leaving oneself with nothing more to spend. Perpetual counting and accumulating of wealth must be avoided at all costs, for its glitter has such a mesmerizing effect that it begins to take the place of faith and religion. The lust for power must likewise be tamed and extirpated and one's energies devoted instead to furthering the interests of others.

How many Muslims, who are ostensibly imbued with religious fervour, suffer a moral collapse the moment they have to go through an exacting phase in life. How many give way to scepticism and despair the moment they have the merest whiff of adversity. It is at such junctures in life that they should prostrate themselves before the Almighty and beg for forgiveness, mercy and guidance. God will be there. He will not fail them.

23 April 1988

Even self-sacrifice is of no value without total sincerity:

A certain Muslim participated in the Battle of Uhud (3AH) and died fighting. When his mother learnt of the death, she cried out for her “martyred” son. “Hold your peace,” the Prophet told her. How do you know that he has been martyred? He used to indulge in vain talk and was miserly with things that it would have done him no harm to give away.

A Greater Significance

It is only by listening to the prophets that we are able to grasp the deeper significance of the natural phenomena which we are so eager to apprehend and analyse. In so doing, we become alive to the more profound meaning of the beauty of snow-capped mountains, joyous bird song, luxuriant blossoms, a radiant sunset. It is only by imbibing the prophets' words of enlightenment that we can become attuned to the Divine Voice and feel ourselves to be in the presence of Angels. It is only then that we can understand that what we had always thought of as our destination is really a thoroughfare – a passage from this world to the Hereafter.

The ascendancy which the natural sciences have assumed over other branches of learning is due more to their broad-ranging applications than to any new and great truth which they bring to mankind. Many of the discoveries in this field have no doubt been spectacular, but they relate to only a small, external part of the ultimate reality. They bring us no inner revelations, throw no new light on our reason for existence, or on the final destiny of mankind. Just as the countless astral bodies spinning throughout the vastness of space are only peripherally representative of a far greater universe than our telescopes can penetrate, so are our scientific discoveries indicative of a physical, finite reality whose magnitude and complexity are understandable to us only within the limits of what the human mind can conceive of – albeit aided by the most sophisticated technology.

The riddle of man and the universe is something which has tantalized the minds of men from time immemorial. If we are to unravel this mystery, there are two avenues along which we may travel. One is that of the slow accretion of human knowledge; the other is that of divine revelation. Many of us are still travelling along that first avenue, and although the speed at which we are moving is increasing exponentially, we are still very far from even a glimpse of the ultimate truth. The second avenue is the one along which we are guided by the prophets – the divine messengers who came to this world to tell us that we, the world, the universe were created by an invisible all-powerful God, who continues to sustain us and everything around us. They came to tell us that this world is mortal and imperfect, but that it will come to an end and be followed by another world which is perfect and everlasting. It is only by listening to the prophets that we are able to grasp the deeper significance of the natural phenomena which we are so eager to apprehend and analyse. In so doing, we become alive to the more profound meaning of the beauty of snow-capped mountains, joyous bird song, luxuriant blossoms, a radiant sunset. It is only by imbibing the prophets' words of enlightenment that we can become attuned to the Divine Voice and feel ourselves to be in the presence of Angels. It is only then that we can understand that what we had always thought of as our destination is really a thoroughfare – a passage from this world to the Hereafter.

Human science and technology can no doubt provide man with material resources, but these are 'purely ephemeral; it is only prophetic knowledge which will truly sustain him in this world and the next. Worldly knowledge aids man in his relationship with his environment: prophetic knowledge unites him with his Creator.

The greatest favour to seek from God is forgiveness:

According to Anas ibn Malik, the Helpers (Medinan Muslims) suffered from not having enough camels to irrigate their land. They came, therefore, to the Prophet, hoping that he would be able to provide them with camels, or arrange for a canal to be dug which bring them an abundant supply of water. The Prophet looked towards the Helpers and greeted them thrice. "Whatever I ask of God on your behalf, He will surely grant." At these words, the Helpers experienced a change of heart. "The greatest thing we can ask for is the Hereafter," they thought. "Why waste such a precious Opportunity by asking for the world?" Then they said to one another, "Let us take advantage of this opportunity and ask for forgiveness." Addressing the Prophet they said, "Ask the Lord to forgive us." "Lord, forgive the helpers," was the Prophet's immediate response. "Forgive their children; forgive their wives."

When Islam Becomes A Source of Pride

What the Muslims of this age have inherited is not religion, but pride in religion. They are conscious of their history but are not conscious of their Maker. Islam, as they see it, is something which bolsters pride but does not teach humility.

“I am a Muslim, and I am proud to be a Muslim.” This assertion, made by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad in a discourse, aptly sums up the mentality of the present-day Muslims. It conveys the sorry, distorted picture of what the Islamic follower has become, and certainly ought not to be.

Let us take a closer look at the Maulana’s statement. In it, the word “Muslim” could be taken to mean an individual whose life is ruled by the Quran. Now, in the Quran, a Muslim is defined as one who fears God. Suppose we were to substitute this definition for the word “Muslim” in the Maulana’s sentence it would then read: “I am one who fears God, and I am proud to be one who fears God.” The incompatibility between the notions of pride and the fear of God immediately becomes obvious, for no one who truly feared God could ever associate his fear with pride. He would instinctively associate it with humility. It is clear then that Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was not using the word “Muslim” in its Quranic sense, but in the nationalistic and historical sense. Used in this way, it conjures up a picture of the forefathers of this ‘Muslim’ conquering vast territories, constructing formidable pieces of architecture, creating a splendid civilization and, in political and material terms, making their mark on the world. When the word ‘Muslim’ is used in this way, the above-quoted sentence loses the incongruity of the Quranic interpretation, and merely projects the image of the latter-day Muslim as he actually is.

With this analysis, the reality of modern Muslims stands exposed: they are not a product of the Quran, but of their own history. The mainspring of their existence is not the inspiration of the Quran, but their sense of nationhood, for Muslims – unaware of the nature of their error – regard themselves as a nation, like any other nation in the world. They have forgotten that they were once a community which had sprung from the spiritual and intellectual revolution which God and His Prophet had brought about in the world. It is regrettable that this ‘Muslim’ mentality is now a world-wide phenomenon. Whether of the educated elite or of the uneducated masses, they all share this selfsame attitude.

It is not a matter to be made light of, for herein lies the root-cause of all the woes of present-day Muslims: what the Muslims of this age have inherited is not religion, but pride in religion. They are conscious of their history but are not conscious of their Maker. Islam, as they see it, is something which bolsters pride but does not teach humility. It is for this reason that they have been unable to cultivate those sterling qualities which only grow in one who is so close to God that he lives with Him in his thoughts night and day.

As a result of this mentality, the Muslims adopt a nationalistic attitude in all matters. Instead of seeing their Prophet as a leader to be followed and obeyed, they view him as a source of pride and self-esteem. Their 'Islam', instead of teaching them patience and avoidance, teaches them to clash and fight with others. They are quick to learn the lesson of 'an eye for an eye' from the Quran and the Traditions of the Prophet, but they ignore the lessons of forgiveness and avoidance on which so much proper emphasis is laid. To them, Jihad means setting themselves up as the enemy of other nations, and then waging interminable wars against them. They fail to appreciate that the principal objective of Jihad is not to wage an all-out war to bring an enemy to his knees, but to win that 'enemy' over to one's side in order to set his feet on the path of truth, thus making him eligible for the everlasting grace of God. Jihad is not meant to be a means of battering their foes out of existence, it is simply the first step taken to ensure the ultimate conversion of their opponents.

There are certain qualities which are essential for success in life. Of these, perhaps the most important are a readiness to acknowledge the truth, the adoption of a conciliatory attitude, patience with others' faults and the willingness to avoid those who are bent on being obstructive or aggressive. In order to develop and give full rein to these qualities, one has, of necessity, to be imbued with the spirit of humility. But the Muslims of today have pride so ingrained in them, that they scoff at the very idea that there could be any value in such virtues.

This is partly due to the fact that in the recent decades of their decline, Muslims had it thoroughly impressed upon them by orators such as Iqbal and Azad that Islam was something in which to take pride. This dose of pride administered to the ailing Islamic body was lapped up with such relish by the masses that nowadays a form of Islam has been adopted which actually teaches Muslims to take a pride in their religion. Far from bringing about their uplift, this mentality has been the cause of their further degeneration.

The destructive effect of this Muslim pride became apparent when the slogan: "Proclaim with pride that you are a Muslim" was put up in bold lettering on the walls of Hyderabad. Indignant at this display of self-assertion by the Muslims, the Hindus countered with "Proclaim with pride that you are a Hindu" – in even bolder lettering. As a result of these slogans and counter-slogans, tension built up between the Hindus and Muslims, and the situation so deteriorated that, finally, rioting broke out. Could the Muslims simply have written, "Go in fear of God," there would have been no call for a counter-slogan, no tension, no clash, no rioting. This makes it quite clear that it is this self-made brand of Islam which has caused Muslims everywhere to become disgraced and downtrodden. Had they held fast to the Islam of the Quran and the Traditions of the Prophet, they would not have found themselves in their present dilemma.

It is noteworthy that the Prophet said (as recorded in the Hadith): "God raises one who is humble." Here we have the secret of progress and prosperity: humility. But obviously, a community which has been reared on a diet of ill-conceived pride will be pathologically incapable of humility.

28 April 1988

Fearing God's punishment, even when one is dealing with the lowly:

Once when the Prophet was at home with his wife, Umm Salamah, he summoned the maidservant for some errand, but she seemed to take a long time in coming. Seeing signs of anger on the Prophet's face, Umm Salamah got up to see what had happened to the girl. She opened the curtain and saw her playing outside with the goats' kids. She called to her once again, and this time she came. The Prophet was holding a tooth-stick at the time, "If I had not feared the retribution of Judgment Day, he said to the girl, "I would have hit you with this tooth-stick."

(Al Adab al-Mufrad)

An Objective View of Islam

When a man is of a truly scientific temperament, he cannot but adopt an authentic religion, one that has been preserved in its original pristine form. An objective survey of the religions of the world reveals that Islam is the only such religion, other faiths having been corrupted by scriptural alternations and interpolations.

At an international Islamic conference held in Tripoli in December, 1982, a Japanese convert— a civil servant from Tokyo— voiced the opinion that “the Japanese are potentially Muslims.” He said so because he felt that the Japanese were straight-forward, realistic, clear-thinking people who would appreciate the simplicity and spontaneity of Islam. He felt that what would finally incline them to convert to Islam was their undoubtedly scientific attitude.

This characteristic is not the prerogative of the Japanese; it is to be found in most nations where the effects of the scientific revolution have made themselves felt. It would be quite true to say that all “scientific” societies of the modern age consist of “potential Muslims,” for Islam need only be presented to them in its true light for them to realize its genuineness and, as a corollary, their own Islamic potential.

The scientific revolution has, therefore, created an intellectual ambience which affords great opportunities for the spread of Islam, for it has given millions of potential converts the objectivity to see Islam as the only authentic religion.

29 April 1988

Extending unstinted support:

Abu Bakr called together the Companions and told them of his intention to send an expedition to Syria. "God will surely grant the Muslims, His succour," he told them, "and exalt His word." In the consultations that followed, some of the Companions opposed certain of Abu Bakr's ideas. Even so, after brief discussions, all of them – without a single voice of dissent – urged Abu Bakr to do as he thought fit. "We shall neither oppose nor blame you," they assured him.

(Ibn Asakir)

30 April 1988

Translating God's Word

I learned from Dr. J. Oacek of the Oriental Department of Charles University in Prague that a distinguished Czech orientalist had translated the Quran into Czech. It was an excellent translation, according to Dr. Oacek and, within a few weeks of publication, was completely sold out.

This shows how great are the opportunities for propagating Islam at the present time. There are evidently vast numbers of people in the world today who would like to study Islam from its original sources, but who just cannot do so because of the non-availability of the requisite books in languages which they know. There is obviously a crying need for the Quran to be translated into all languages, and to be published and distributed in every corner of the globe. But, surprisingly, Muslims have shown little or no interest in this way of propagating Islam.

A Muslim from South India once told me how a Christian friend of his had had to go to great trouble and expense to acquire a translation of the Quran. This friend told him that the Muslims were no match for the Christians when it came to propagating their faith, for, as he said, he only needed to make one phone call to say that he needed Bibles for distribution and, within a few hours, 5000 copies would be brought to his office.

Of late, efforts to have the Quran translated, published and distributed, have been made by Saudi Arabia and a few other Muslim countries, but the numbers of copies produced fall very far short of the actual demand.

Considering that the Muslims are bearers of the true religion, and that their greatest task is to communicate God's religion to the whole of mankind, it is unconscionable that they appear to take so few practical steps towards its effective propagation.

30 April 1988

In between two possibilities:

The Prophet often used to pray: “O, turner of hearts, keep our hearts firm in faith.” Having heard him repeat this prayer on many occasions, Prophet’s wife, Aishah, once asked him, “Prophet of God, why is it that you offer this prayer so often?” The Prophet then explained to her, “Everyone’s heart is in between two of God’s fingers. When He wishes to set a man’s heart straight, He does so, and when he wishes to set it awry, He does so.”