



# Al-Risala 1988

June

## Principles and Conduct

### ISLAM SPEAKS FOR ITSELF

In a travelogue published in a widely circulated Indian magazine, Mr. Khushwant Singh asserts that on his last visit to Kenya and Uganda, he “checked on the activities of Christian and Muslim missionaries working amongst the Negro tribes. Christians conceded that despite the unpleasant memories of Muslim Arab slavers, Islam was claiming more converts amongst African blacks than Christianity. “(*Illustrated Weekly of India*, July, 7 1974, p.27).

This shows how wrong it is to say that Muslims who fall below Islamic standards, because they themselves do not follow Islamic teachings, are incapable of introducing Islam to non-believers. Their own dereliction is no obstacle to their being able to bring others to the faith. This is because those who accept Islam do so because its principles have found favour with them and not because, necessarily, they have been impressed with Muslim conduct.

The converse is also true. Even where Muslim conduct is strictly patterned on Islamic ideals, there is not necessarily 100 per cent acceptance of the faith. If this had been so, would not Islam have been embraced by every single member of the communities addressed by the prophets. It is on record that this never actually happened. Throughout the ages, the prophets have evinced the utmost perfection of character and behaviour – but their hearers have not immediately thronged, as might have been expected, to pledge themselves to God’s cause. Had proper Islamic behaviour been enough, no member of the community to which the prophets belonged, would have remained a non-believer.

Ibn ‘Umar reported that the Messengers of God said: “A man should not enter into bargaining in opposition to his brother and should not give proposal of marriage in opposition to the proposal of his brother except with his consent.

Sahih Muslim

## The Message of the Quran

*“These are the revelations of God which we recite unto you with truth; and most surely you are one of the Prophets. Of these Prophets, we have exalted some over others; some of them are those to whom God spoke, while others He raised to a lofty status. We gave Jesus, the Son of Mary, clear signs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit. Had God pleased, those who succeeded them would not have fought against one another after clear commands had come to them, but they disagreed among themselves, then some of them believed and some of them disbelieved. Yet had God pleased, they would not have fought against one another, but God does what He wills” (2:252-253).*

When God sends one of His Messengers to bring the truth to mankind, He marks this event with His unmistakable signs, so that the bearer of His message should be recognized immediately as His legitimate emissary. Yet, in spite of this, there are always some who give no credence to his words.

Primarily, those who have refused to believe in latter-day Prophets are individuals who entertain the fixed notion that none can surpass the Prophets of old. They consequently see no reason to make a re-appraisal of their current beliefs, and feel under no obligation to believe in any subsequent Messenger sent to the world by the Almighty. They cling to the personal excellence of Prophets whose names have been hallowed by tradition, seeing it as an absolute virtue, instead of as a special, God-given endowment designed to meet the varying exigencies of the different historical periods in which they lived. This very way of thinking has made it difficult – sometimes impossible – to appreciate the qualities of new Prophets on their successive missions. For instance, believers in Moses rejected Jesus. Followers of the latter disbelieved in Muhammad, on all of whom be peace and God’s blessings. In the case of Moses, his followers held him to be greater than all other Prophets because he had the distinction of being addressed directly by God. Believers in Jesus considered him peerless because he had been born to a Virgin Mother.

Since the passing of the Final Prophet, those who have come to reform and revitalize the Muslim community have fared no better than the successive Prophets at the outset of their separate missions. That is, they have been treated with a complete lack of respect, as creatures of no account whatsoever, for the simple reason that their contemporaries remain preoccupied with whatever has been accepted as piety in the past, and feel in no need of further religious counselling.

When communities begin to go into a decline, it is largely as a result of their preoccupations having become exclusively worldly in nature. Yet they do not wish to forfeit their ‘right’ to salvation, and attach themselves mentally to hallowed religious personalities as a form of psychological defence. They fondly

imagine that the lofty status of their saintly patrons will ensure their redemption in the next world, no matter how unethical their conduct has been in this world.

It is this false sense of security which gives such people the audacity to oppose those who call them to God. It is imaginable that God might have arranged human destiny in such a way that man, having no freedom to demur, was obliged invariably to bow to His will. But this was not part of God's scheme for mankind. God gave man freedom of action in order to put him to the divine test: He wished to see if man could find his way to his Maker, without ever coming face to face with Him. For this reason, man is required to be able to recognize the word of God, albeit uttered by the human tongue. It is, therefore, only with correct religious guidance that man will ever be able to penetrate the veil of outward forms in order to reach the hidden, inner truth.

'My Creatures have fulfilled their duty and are on their way to the congregation ground for prayers.

'I pledge by my Glory,

'I pledge by my Honour,

'I pledge by my Forgiveness,

'I pledge by my Sublimity,

that I shall answer the prayer of everyone of them.

They shall return to their homes purged of every sin.'

–Hadees-e-Qudis

## Success through Hard Work

*“He made his name as a stylist in English, although he was unable to speak a word of the language before he was nineteen.”*

Joseph Conrad, born in 1857 in the Polish town of Berdiczew, was orphaned in infancy, and since he had neither a formal education nor the backing of relatives, he had to support himself by working as a seaman. He travelled to various countries, at last reaching England in 1886, where he became a British citizen.

During his stay in Britain, (Conrad died there in 1924) he worked extremely hard to learn English, and his progress was such that he succeeded in becoming a novelist. His books, acclaimed as works of great literary merit, were eventually accepted as English classics, and, amongst the living writers of his time, he was ranked second only to Thomas Hardy.

An Englishman once told me that his English teacher in college had instructed him to “read Joseph Conrad, because he writes beautiful English.” Yet, according to the publisher of his book, *Lord Jim*, “he made his name as a stylist in English, although he was unable to speak a word of the language before he was nineteen.” The critical seal of approval has been set all the more firmly on his books by their having become permanent additions to the curricula of British universities.

Conrad’s career as a writer is a clear indication that anything can be achieved by hard work. One may be born poor, but that does not mean that one cannot educate oneself, or – as in Conrad’s case – master a foreign language as if it were one’s own. In spite of being insignificant in the eyes of the world, it is quite possible, by dint of hard work to write something so great that the best minds of our civilization feel compelled to read it.

6 June 1988

## A Treat Turns To Tragedy

Three-year old Nitin Walia, who lives in Shahadrah, New Delhi, with his parents, Vijay Pal and Sunita Walia, was very keen to visit the Delhi zoo, so his parents took him there one day as a treat. He was having a wonderful time, roaming around, looking at all the animals, and enjoying the various spectacles that the zoo had to offer, when he suddenly caught sight of the white tiger. In a trice he had ducked under the railing and pushed his hand through the bars of the cage. The tigress sprang at him, then opening her jaws wide, she managed to get the whole of the child's right arm into her mouth. The parents and some other visitors wrestled with the tigress, and finally succeeded in pulling the child away. But all that remained of his arm was the stump. The child is mercifully alive today, but is fated to go through his entire life without his right arm.

According to the news reports of March 21, 1988, the child's parents say the zoo officials are to blame for this tragedy, because there were no guards on duty at the time.

It is a commonly observed phenomenon that when any such preventable tragedy takes place, the victims, ignoring their own personal responsibility hasten to seek out others on whom to heap the blame. But in a world where, in the normal course of events, human beings are regularly beset by difficulties of greater or lesser magnitude, with or without warning, and sometimes with unnerving frequency, it is up to individuals themselves to do their utmost to avoid danger, overcome obstacles and avert tragedy. If they fail to take positive action, they must blame themselves, or if they encounter factors which are beyond human control, they must simply bow to their fate. It is pointless to bewail one's lot in life and then to blame others for it. The most blameworthy are actually those who see the warning signals, but who nevertheless press on to inevitable disaster.

Just as there is a railing four feet away from every wild beast's cage at the zoo, which is meant to keep visitors at a safe distance, so is there a 'railing' at every turning in life. Those who recognize this 'railing' as an outer limit will not attempt to go beyond it and will, therefore, remain unharmed. But those who forge ahead, ignoring what the railing stands for, will head straight for calamity, be it a zoo, or anywhere else in this world.

## Our Homage to the Past

George Bernard Shaw once said of Shakespeare, “He was much taller than me, but I stand on his shoulders” – fitting tribute from a “great modern writer and philosopher to his most illustrious forerunner. Almost two and a half centuries before this, Shakespeare had refined and enriched the English language through poetic form in which he cast it, and his literary successors strove to continue his good work. It was this ongoing process of refinement and enrichment which made it possible for Shaw to scale the literary peaks for which he is now renowned. Yet, if Shaw’s predecessors had not provided this ‘shoulder’ for him to stand on, he could never – despite his best efforts – have reached such an outstanding level of excellence.

This dependence on the achievements of our forebears is an essential feature of all creative, constructive processes. Without our ancestors having made their contribution, it would be impossible for us to attain our objectives, no matter in what field. In many cases, we might not even understand what our objectives ought to be.

All our journeys have to commence from the point at which we stand, and we must go through all of the intermediary stages before reaching our ultimate destination. We cannot just make one gigantic leap into the future, ignoring everything which ought to take place between the beginning and end of our journey. But before we can even begin, we have to receive that essential, initial impetus from the past, just as we cannot build the upper storey of a house until the lower walls have been completed.

The people who are most likely to lose sight of these basic truths are those whose minds have been so clouded by romantic poetry and so overheated by provocative oratory that they have lost all sense of reality. Their thinking is made irrational by giving way to excessively emotional outbursts and their energies are simultaneously so drained by this that they fail to see that there could be anything wrong with the ‘protest and demand’ approach to life. They tend to rush into politics without first having a sound education, or at least the valuable experience to be gained from a solid commitment to commerce or industry. They are people who are barely aware of their backwardness and who, in consequence, do little or nothing to improve upon their own conditions of living. They are quick to make claims upon society without giving a thought to the contribution which they themselves ought to be making. It is lamentable to think how probable it is that such people will spawn a whole generation which is even more inward looking and un-self-sustaining. If so many of the present generation are swept off their feet by mere demagogy, what hope will there be for succeeding generations who are likely to be even more deficient in mental resources? They need to grasp the fact now, and for always, that mere words cannot yield a crop of deeds.

When nature sets out to grow a tree, it begins by nurturing a seed in its bosom. This is a lesson tacitly given by nature to men: if you want a tree, start with the seed; you will achieve nothing by trying to start with a tree.

8 June 1988

## The Conquest of Hate and Fear

Sir Winston Churchill (1874-1965), Britain's Prime Minister from 1940 to 1954, was one of that country's most famous politicians. Historians have credited him with "leading Britain from near defeat to victory in World War II." But Churchill was the leader for war, not for peace, and when the general elections were held at the end of the Second World War, the British public showed great political astuteness in not re-electing their war hero. They clearly deemed him unsuitable for the post-war reconstruction of the country.

Indians too had no great love for him, because for them, he was the leader who had announced that he had "not become His Majesty's First Minister to preside over the liquidation of His Majesty's Empire." Nevertheless, Churchill did have certain unusual qualities, one of which – has been touched upon by Mrs. Vijay Lakshmi Pandit in her autobiography. Writing of the point in history when India stood on the brink of independence, she notes that "what was surprising was that when he finally met my brother (Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru) after the formation of the interim government, they liked each other and were able to talk freely. When they parted, Sir Winston paid Bhai a handsome tribute: 'I want to say that you have conquered two of man's greatest enemies – hate and fear.'"

The compliment could, with equal justice, have been paid to Churchill himself.



## Kill the Dispute, Not the Disputant

*The Prophet Mohammad asked us to keep death ever in mind, as this would raze to the ground the edifice of our ill-conceived pleasures. In this way, one who expected to derive great pleasure from the downfall of an adversary would cease to gloat over his possible destruction the very moment the thought of his own demise entered his head. His feelings of vengefulness would disappear and he would even forget that he had an enemy whom he had been planning to ruin.*

It is not uncommon for feelings to run so high over minor differences that what starts out as a tepid argument soon develops into a raging conflict. Two people, who at the outset had only been slightly at odds with each other, turn into fiery-tempered opponents and it is but a short step from there to becoming deadly enemies. They descend to the level of hurting and humiliating each other and, in extreme cases, do everything in their power to silence their antagonists forever. Both engage in equally destructive activities, but never come to realize the heinousness of their behaviour until the dire moment when death comes, at the appointed hour, to claim one or the other at the behest of the Almighty. It is only then that the conflict ends, by which time it is too late to have regrets or to attempt to make reparations. Each longed for the premature death of his adversary, but the lives of both could have remained untainted by strife if even one of them had given some prior thought *to his own inevitable end*.

If each were to pause at some point – well before such extremes had been reached – just to ponder upon the inevitability of death, not only for others, but more particularly for himself, all quarrelling would at once be seen as sheer madness. Further argument would be accepted as futile, and all wrangling and dastardly manoeuvring would cease. Death is a daily occurrence, but because we think of death as something which happens to other people – never to ourselves, we earn no lesson from it. Could we even for one brief moment, think of death as an eventuality which could overtake us at any point in time we should find that this very thought put an end to disputes and the ensuing fatal enmity. If death puts an end to man's existence, the thought of death ought surely to put an end to man's wickedness. But no one thinks of death in this realistic way and, in consequence, the death of another does nothing to root out the evil in the human beings who survive.

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A man who is perpetually aware of being a target for death, will harbour no inclinations to harm anyone else. The man, on the other hand, who stands on the brink of the grave, without reminding himself constantly of this grim reality, will continue to be preoccupied with the destruction of others. What arrant foolishness this is when God may will, at any point in time, that he be forthwith obliterated.

10 June 1988

## NOT BEING DECEIVED BY PRAISE

Dhiba Ibn Mahsan, a follower of the Companions, says that he once said to Umer that he was better than Abu Bakr. On hearing this, Umer started weeping. "By God," he said, "one night and one day of Abu Bakr's are better than the whole life of Umer. Shall I tell you which night and day they were?" Dhiba asked him to do so. "It was the night the Prophet fled from the people of Mecca, along with Abu Bakr, and the day the Prophet died and Arab tribes apostatized, saying that they would pray but would not pay the poor due. I went to Abu Bakr and asked him, as successor of the Prophet, to be lenient with them. He told me that I had been brave in the time of ignorance, but had become a coward in the time of Islam. He swore a solemn oath, if they refused to pay even one piece of rope that was due from them, then he would fight against them as long as he had the power to hold a sword in his hand.

## Making the Best of Things

*Adverse circumstances should be seen for what they are – stepping stones to newer and better horizons.*

When a certain young Mullaji was appointed the Imam of a mosque, he was expected, as a matter of duty, not only to lead the congregation in prayer, but also to give daily lessons from the Quran. For this his remuneration was a mere Rs. 25 per month, but because he was also given a room to live in and two meals a day, he tried to make the best of it. Having a roof over his head gave him a much-needed sense of security, and he also hoped that his situation in the mosque would eventually, provide better opportunities for his son's education.

However, the treatment meted out to this young Imam by the *Namazis* (devotees at prayer) was very far from being cordial, for they tended to regard him as their servant. For very minor things, he was taken to task and humiliated. Why was there no *lota* (pot for water) to be seen, where had the broom gone, and why could the place not be kept cleaner, etc.? The young Imam could put up with financial constraints but when it came to suffering continual humiliation, that was another matter. He finally decided that in order, both, to keep his mental balance, and to improve his situation, he must find some additional occupation which was not associated with his work at the mosque. He knew that he could not immediately relinquish his duties there, for that would have meant having nowhere to stay. He therefore enrolled in the Tibbiya (Medical) College, and, side by side with his tasks at the mosque, he launched himself on a course of study. It took him five years to complete his medical studies, during which time he would console himself, in the face of disrespectful treatment, with the thought that he was striving to provide himself with a happier alternative, that he was fitting himself for a worthy career. A time would come, he told himself, when he would never again have to hang his head before any member of the congregation.

Finally the day dawned when he received his medical degree. His success had taken great patience, fortitude and single-mindedness. So that his energies should never flag, he had to keep his attention firmly focused on his ultimate objective of extricating himself from a life of constant mortification. Now with the degree in his possession, he was ready to start his practice. After thanking the people of the mosque, he submitted his resignation and went off to hire a small clinic in the city. He went with a certain quiet confidence, and firmness of purpose for the bitter experiences of his life and his struggle for betterment had taught him many a useful lesson.

In the running of his clinic, his hard work and intelligence soon enabled him to earn enough to buy a house for his family. A year later, he was offered a lectureship in the local college. This was an event which changed his entire life. Yesterday's 'Mullaji' was now the honoured and respected 'Doctor Sahib,'

and what was equally important was that he now had no financial worries. If, in his early years, he had responded to the adversity of his circumstances with mere bitterness and complaints, and had taken no positive action to overcome his difficulties, he could never have had anything better to look forward to in his future life.

Adverse circumstances should be seen for what they are – stepping stones to new and better horizons.

## Failure: an Analysis

*In a world where everyone is jockeying for position, one has to be fully prepared for whatever venture is to be embarked upon. If one is caught unprepared, the outcome is inevitable – failure!*

When India's 62 Olympic participants returned to New Delhi at the end of the Los Angeles Olympic Games (July-August, 1984) there was a complete absence of any fanfare at the airport for the home coming of the athletes. The reason was obvious. They had not won a single medal, neither gold, silver nor bronze.

A sportsman who was about to retire from the field of athletics expressed his views to the *Times of India* (17 August, 1985) on the reasons for this abysmal failure:

"A lack of scientific and systematic training was the main reason for India's poor showing. We did our best, but that, unfortunately, was not good enough. The training of Indian teams should 'start well before an event and not just three months beforehand."

This statement is applicable not only to sports, but to all competitive spheres of existence.

In a world where everyone is jockeying for position, one has to be fully prepared for whatever venture is to be embarked upon. If one is caught unprepared, the outcome is inevitable – failure!

Whatever preparation we make should be thorough, and completely in accord with the demands of the times we live in. If we fail to keep pace with modernity, we can never hope for success in a society which is so preoccupied with innovation. We must at all times keep a finger on the throbbing pulse of life so that we may remain attuned to the imperatives of the day. It is only in this way that we shall understand exactly in what ways we need to be prepared, and can take the appropriate steps while the time is ripe.

## Rising Above Personal Grievances

*“Some say there’s a new Nixon. And they wonder if there’s a new Freeman. I would like to think that that’s all behind us. After all, he is the new diplomat and I am the new statesman, trying to do our best for peace in the world.”*

A few months before Richard Nixon was elected U.S. President in 1969, he was scathingly criticized in public by an English diplomat, John Freeman, who called him “a man of no principle whatsoever except a willingness to sacrifice everything in the cause of Dick Nixon.” The former U.S. Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger records this incident, and its sequel, in his book, *The White House Years*. After Nixon had become President, John Freeman, by some strange play of fate, was appointed British Ambassador to America. Nixon, presumably foreseeing a great deal of unpleasantness arising from this situation, immediately sent a request to the then British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, to appoint some other diplomat who would be more acceptable to the new American government. Wilson, however, did not accede to his proposal. Things went from bad to worse when Nixon made an official visit to Britain as U.S. President, and found that Freeman’s name was on the guest list of dinner arranged in his honour at No. 10 Downing Street. Nixon did everything in his power to have Freeman’s name deleted from the list, but the British Prime Minister did not see fit to oblige him. It was a situation of the utmost delicacy. However, when Nixon stood up to propose an after-dinner toast, quite contrary to all expectations, he looked directly at Freeman and said, “Some say there’s a new Nixon. And they wonder if there’s a new Freeman. I would like to think that that’s all behind us. After all, he is the new diplomat and I am the new statesman, trying to do our best for peace in the world.” According to Kissinger, “The usually imperturbable Freeman was close to tears.”

By changing himself, Richard Nixon had managed to change Freeman too. From then onwards, both Freeman and Nixon were different men for each other.

## The Importance of Religion

The expression, 'Islam in modern times,' has the same inapposite ring to it as 'the sun in modern times.' It invites us to suppose that a religion, which is actually ageless and eternal, can be of increasing or diminishing relevance to particular historical periods, even suggesting, insidiously, that the significance of Islam is a changing and changeable commodity, to be appraised and re-appraised and then discarded if it does not fit into some neat, contemporary slot. It has even been asserted that modern civilization has proved religion to be superfluous.

But let us ask ourselves what actual contribution western civilization has made to the uplift of humanity in general. Certainly, it has laid great emphasis on comfort and convenience, the beautification of people, places and things, and has made abundant provision of the material props on which all these features of life depend. But, more pertinently, has it given us an internationally viable moral code? And even if, in certain parts of the world, a moral code is in existence which ought to produce a humanitarian and cohesive society, do we, in fact, witness its widespread effects? If we consider the multitudes of disadvantaged peoples all over our globe, the evidence of oppression everywhere, and the alarming rise in the rate of crime in the so-called advanced countries of the world, we are left wondering in what way the material advantages of western civilization are supposed to have benefited humanity – for spiritual advantages there are none.

On the one hand, we have all the concrete manifestations of civilization – imposing architecture, increasingly rapid transport and communications, high fashion clothes, gourmet food, dazzling forms of entertainment and all the artefacts of luxurious living; while, on the other hand, we have the whole range of all that is most ignoble in the human psyche blatantly on display – greed, envy, vengefulness and the all-consuming lust for power and glory. Material pandering to the basest of human desires has, therefore, become a major in this modern age. In all this welter of non-spiritual, hedonistic activity, religion has gradually become eroded and submerged.

It does not follow, however, that there is no need for religion. There is a greater need for it now than ever before. But if people are fully to comprehend this, it would take a complete change of heart on the part of individuals, and even of whole societies, who are at present hell-bent on pursuing materialistic goals. Only if they pause for a moment to give serious thought to whether the possession of amenities like cordless telephones and air-conditioned cars really makes belief in God meaningless, will they ever begin to see the true light of religion. We cannot surely believe that communication by satellite has negated the inspirational forms of *wahi* transmission, or that the ability to fly beyond the stratosphere precludes the possibility of a cosmic afterworld. Does the mere existence and availability of delectable food, elegant clothes and designer furnishings make belief in Heaven and Hell a thing of the past? Does



the capacity of more and more women to operate computers of increasing complexity belie the Quranic assertion that “men are in command over women?” Do the legislative powers of certain individuals seated in the grandeur of our Houses of Parliament invalidate, purely by their democratic origin, the traditional authority of the *Shariah*? While acknowledging the practical utility of modern technology, and the array of amenities it provides, we are at a loss to understand how, as a feature of modern living; it can be said either to verify or to negate the time-honoured truths of religion.

Religion has at all times been concerned less with social manifestations than with fundamental values; its relevance in this material age is, therefore, undiminished. We must never lose sight of the fact that where social phenomena are in a constant state of flux, the values of human life are divinely pre-ordained and, in consequence, immutable. It matters little, for example, that modern technology has given us increasingly rapid means of transport. What is really important is that the ethical standards to be observed in the manufacture and use of vehicles have lost none of their essential validity. Modern means of communication may have rendered the older forms obsolete, but the question as to whether these facilities should be used to convey the truth or falsehood is of the same immediacy as before.

M.P.s may now go to work by helicopter or jet plane, but they are nevertheless morally bound to fashion and enforce laws which are in accordance with the Divine Order which regulates the entire universe. Whether they are housed in opulent buildings or straw-thatched huts, judicial bodies must still uphold the innocent and punish the guilty, thereby maintaining the same high standards of justice as have traditionally prevailed.

When we speak of a moral code, of ethics, of standards of behaviour, we must inevitably realize that the values on which they are based are the very pillars of Islam. Islam, to be precise, is the true guidance of man by God. As such, it is an expression of eternal realities. Just as man is in constant need of the sun's light to construct his material life, so is he in perpetual need of the true guidance of God for the moral reconstruction of humanity.

Those who, knowing this, do not adopt Islam, display the same foolishness as one who attempts to construct his material life by first eliminating the sun from his list of top priorities. Without the sun, man's world would be plunged in darkness. Without divine guidance, man's after-life would be the blackest of abysses.

## Religion and Science

Those who conducted scientific research in the centuries immediately preceding our own were not in any way opposed to religion. When Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) discovered the laws governing the revolution of heavenly bodies, he wrote to a friend: "The continuous rotation of the planets is not only due to the law of gravity; there must also be a divine arm in it." When Darwin (1809-1882) wrote his book, *The Origin of Species*, he expressly acknowledged the existence of God. This is how he concluded the book: "How magnificent is the concept that the Creator first created some simple forms of life, and from them astonishingly simple and wonderful species of life came into existence."

Then why was it that science turned against religion? The real reason behind this was not, as Drapier (1811-1882) and others have realized, any conflict between science and religion; it was, in fact, a conflict between science and ancient theology, which had been founded on Greek and Egyptian philosophy rather than on divine religion. Exponents of religion mistakenly thought of it as a conflict between science and religion; they, therefore, opposed science. The result of this was that a contemporary force, which could have been put to the use of religion, became religion's rival from the very outset.

## The Inverted Pyramid

### Creativity from the Base Upwards

*If society is to be properly built, we cannot begin at the top floor. We must begin at the foundations and work our way painstakingly upwards.*

When Vikas Minar, the tallest modern building of Delhi was completed, the newspapers reported that “the city’s twenty-one-storey building is ready.” The attention of the reader was thus focused on the twenty-first storey, although it was only after years of foundation-laying, and floor-by-floor additions to the building that it was possible for the topmost storey to be built. This is the ‘inverted pyramid’ style of modern reporting, which offers the most eye-catching piece of information first, in order to rivet the attention of readers. It takes no account of the normal progress of work, which would have a clearly distinguishable beginning, middle and end.

This has become such a common journalistic technique, that often the reality of the situation is lost sight of. After all, it is always a certain degree of sensationalism which sells a newspaper, and who, on the editorial staff, cares if the public receives a lopsided view of what is actually happening, provided the circulation goes on increasing.

The ‘inverted pyramid’ is an accepted part of news presentation, but, because it is resorted to by the media, that does not mean that we should allow ourselves to slip into accepting it as a formula to be applied to the destiny of a whole people. If society is to be properly built, we cannot begin at the top floor. We must begin at the foundations and work our way painstakingly upwards. The makers of promises are wont to make fine speeches about the top floor, but can anyone put the roof on a building before even the first foundation stone has been laid? True creativity has to begin at the base. Solid construction must stand on solid foundations.

## Islam: The Voice of Human Nature

*Our present world, in comparison to the universe, is like one tiny grain of sand out of all the sand on all the shores of the greatest oceans on our globe. Why, when the universe is so incredibly vast and so rich in potentialities, has it revealed only a minuscule fraction of its scope upon this earth. The answer to this question can be found only in belief in the Afterlife.....It is only in the Hereafter that our finest dreams will become a reality.*

Suppose a heavy branch of a storm-struck tree broke off just as you were passing under it, and it fell down and injured you, would you pick a quarrel with the tree? Of course not. The tree had done nothing deliberately to harm you. Your first thought would simply be to get prompt medical attention. But suppose someone had picked up that same branch from the ground and beaten you about the head and shoulders with it. You would be so outraged at the deliberateness of his act that your first thoughts would be of revenge and punishment. You would have a great desire to rush, not to the hospital, but to the law courts so that this wrong doer might get his just deserts.

Let us again take the example of the tree, but this time, of one which does us a great deal of good – the mango tree. It showers us with the abundance of its delicious fruits and we eat our fill of them. But we do not feel any necessity either to thank or to reward the tree. The mangoes which we do not harvest either fall to the ground or are pecked away by the birds. Whatever the case, the tree is left with none of its own fruit. But we feel no sense of regret about this. No one is ever heard to remark, “What a pity the mango tree produced so much fruit, but could not eat any of it itself!” On the contrary, if a human being spent his entire life’s savings on building the house of his dreams only to die as soon as it was ready, everyone would say how sad it was that he had not lived long enough to enjoy the fruits of his labours. They would feel it regrettable that all his hard work had gone un-rewarded.

Let us reflect upon the difference between a tree and a man. When a tree is ‘guilty’ of a ‘misdeed’, we do not feel the necessity to punish it for its ‘wrongdoing.’ But in the case of a man, we feel that he must be rewarded for his good deeds and punished for his wickedness. It is our moral sense which tells us that this must be so. It is our moral sense which demands justice.

This is a demand which comes straight from human nature, and all disciplines of knowledge testify to its importance. Yet, of all human desires, it is one of the most difficult to satisfy. The most outrageous example of human inability to achieve justice was in the failure even to spell out a punishment which would fit the enormity of Adolf Hitler’s crimes. He waged a war, after all, in which five crore people were killed, yet it was quite beyond human imagination to conceive of a punishment which would be commensurate with the unspeakable bestiality of his actions. Even if Hitler could have been reborn five crore times, so that he might be executed an equal number of times, this punishment would have seemed

pitifully inadequate in the face of the evil he had perpetrated. The maximum, in reality, that could have been done to him under the circumstances, was to shoot him dead. (As it happened, Hitler evaded justice by committing suicide.) In the case of oppressors like Hitler and Stalin, the inadequacy of the punishment is glaringly obvious because of the magnitude of their crimes. Yet, even when a common man, a petty criminal, commits a crime, its effects are often so ramified that no worldly court is capable of investigating all its aspects, and a mere term of imprisonment, even with hard labour or solitary confinement, frequently falls short of being a true punishment. It happens on many occasions that criminals and other wrong doers retire from this world without ever having been satisfactorily punished. And this happens even when the whole of humanity is crying out for justice.

The same is true of rewards. What reward can there be for genuine altruism? Can we really reward a man who has attained a high position but has chosen to devote himself to serving the common people? In what way can we recompense him when he decides not to allow himself to become a 'Pharaoh', but to give all his wealth to the poor and needy? Is it possible to reward those who, having acquired great knowledge, devote themselves selflessly to the enlightenment of humanity? There is little in our experience of life to suggest that this is possible. It is difficult even to reward good deeds which are performed on a much smaller scale. Just as a bad deed can be a source of affliction with incalculable consequences, so does a good deed become a source of goodness and blessing in so many ways that its effects cannot be measured. Who is there really who can collect such exhaustive data on such acts that they may be adequately rewarded?

And what of the time factor? Consider that the true reward which a human being has is the feeling of happiness which results from his being rewarded. But happiness, as a state of being, is so short-lived that there would have to be repeated occasions on which it was experienced for it to add up to a reward in the real sense of the word. Even if we could reward the doers of good deeds with 'paradise' on earth, it would remain in their grasp for such a short period of time that the effect of being rewarded would soon wear off, and, in the absence of the accompanying euphoria, the reward itself would begin to seem inadequate. Even when a man lives on to a ripe old age, the time he spends on earth is not sufficient for him to enjoy the consequences of his rewards. It would take an everlasting paradise to recompense some of the great good deeds of this world, but that is the very thing which cannot be created on this earth. Life, evidently is too short, and the world deficient in too many ways for real justice to be done. This shows that another world – one of absolute, timeless perfection – has perforce to come into existence.

Our present world, in comparison to the universe, is like one tiny grain of sand out of all the sand on all the shores of the greatest oceans on our globe. Why, when the universe is so incredibly vast and so rich in potentialities, has it revealed only a minuscule fraction of its scope upon this earth. The answer to this question can be found only in belief in the Afterlife. To comprehend this, we must first have it clear in our minds that man's total range of activities is divided into two distinct periods. The first covers his life in this world, while the second spans his existence in the Hereafter which gives meaning to all the finest desires and ambitions cherished by man. They may, or may not be realized in this world, for it is not

given to everyone to be successful, but even if an individual overcomes all obstacles and ultimately shapes his life to his entire satisfaction, these seemingly positive factors are sooner or later rendered meaningless by old age and death. It is only in the Hereafter that the satisfaction of rewards may be savoured to the full. It is in focussing our attention single-mindedly upon the Hereafter that our efforts will find their true direction. It is only in the Hereafter that our finest dreams will become a reality.

## Historical Prophet

I have accepted Islam in all sincerity and earnestness, and the first reason that has moved me to do so is its solid historical groundwork. After wandering helplessly for several years in the marshy bogs of divergent creeds and conflicting systems of philosophy, my weary soul has at last found refuge and consolation in a religion based on a Revelation that has remained unaltered ever since its first compilation under the third Caliph, and in a Prophet whose historical personality is not only unquestionable but about whose youth, appearance, daily habits and even personal characteristics we know almost as much as we do about those of Oliver Cromwell or of Napoleon Bonaparte. You cannot throw even the last shadow of doubt on the historical basis of that immense personality that has stamped itself so deep on the roll of time as to make Christendom grow pale before that august and illustrious name even to this day.

In the Prophet of Islam there is nothing vague and shadowy, mythical or mysterious, as, for instance, in Zoroaster and Sri Krishna, or in Buddha and Christ. The very existence of those prophets has been seriously doubted and even totally denied; but nobody, as far as I am aware, has ever ventured to reduce the prophet of Islam either into a "solar myth" or into a "fairy tale" as some eminent savants of Europe have done with Buddha and Christ.

Oh! What a relief to find, after all, a truly historical prophet to believe in.

From "*Why Have I Accepted Islam?*" A lecture delivered on 26th August 1904, in Hyderabad, by Dr. Nishikanta Chattopadhaya (Muslim name: Muhammad Azizuddin).

## A Spur to Improvement

On board the Delhi-Hyderabad Indian Airlines flight no. 439 on January 20, 1987, the usual announcements were made, from which I gathered that the pilot in command was a Captain Mustafa. This name was new to me, although I was a regular passenger on Indian Airlines flights. It clearly indicated that Muslims were now being recruited to India's airlines as well as to other prestigious services of the country. This seemed to me to be a great step forward – the result of a major effort to overcome the general backwardness of their community.

This is highly significant in the context of Indian Muslim leaders' proclamations to the world at large, that young Muslims are regularly kept out of good jobs. It hardly seems fair to go on in this vein without presenting both sides of the picture. If, in certain instances, Muslim youths are denied good jobs, the other instances of their being recruited should also be brought to the attention of the public. Constantly making out that Muslims are necessarily at a disadvantage is certainly unjust, given the changing pattern of national opportunity.

I agree, of course, that for every 'Mustafa' who has been taken into service in this country, there is another, less fortunate 'Mustafa' who has been turned away. But I object to this being called discrimination. This is simply one of the realities of our highly competitive world. It is a matter of historical fact that for any human progress to take place, the competitive element is an essential ingredient in any social set-up. As a spur to improvement, competition must play its part between individuals and societies alike. After all, observation of animals confined in the safety of zoos, where all of their requirements are provided for them, has shown that they sink into indolence and lethargy, and only regain their zest and vigour when 'rival' animals are introduced into their cages. Human beings are no different in this respect, for it is only when they are confronted by rivals that they strive their utmost to fulfill their potential.

In many situations in life, there must be a winner and a loser. The moment such a situation is termed communal, however, an atmosphere of bitterness and protest is generated. If, on the other hand, we simply call it human rivalry, it will be seen as an instance of obedience to a law of nature. There will then be no grounds for ill-feeling and the destructiveness which this can engender.



## On Seeing Prayer

Henry de Castro was a French officer, who, during the French occupation of Algeria held a high Government post. One day he was riding out on a mission through the desert. Behind him were thirty Arab horsemen who served under him. During the journey the time came for the afternoon prayer. They told their officer that it was time for prayer, and without waiting for his permission, they dismounted. After giving the call to prayer aloud they stood in rows to pray. The French officer felt affronted at this arrogant behaviour on their part, but he kept silent. He stopped his horse and observed the Arabs in their prayer. The sight of praying in even rows had a profound effect on him. Afterwards when they had finished praying, he began to ask them questions about prayer, and listening attentively to their answers.

The boldness of the Arabs and the sight of prayer in such array made a deep impression on Henry de Castro. When he returned home he started to study Islam. First of all he read a French translation of the Quran. Then he travelled extensively in Arab countries to observe the Islamic way of life, his impressions became more and more profound. Eventually he accepted Islam.

Thereafter he wrote a book in French on how he had come to accept Islam. This book was translated into Arabic by the famous Egyptian writer, Fathi Zaghlul. It was published under the title of "*Al-Islam: Khawater wa Sawaneh*".

At first the French officer thought that the Arabs were being proud in their action, so he felt offended; but when he saw them dismount from their horses in order to bow down humbly before the Lord of the Universe, he realized that what they had done had been out of humility, not pride. His true nature awakened within him. The sight of God's servants bowing down before Him so inspired a feeling of submission to God within him, that eventually he entered the fold of the religion of God.