



Al-Risala 1987

June

Editorial

Any conflict has two perpetrators, and there are invariably faults on each side which cause and exacerbate it. It takes two to make a fight. If one party withdraws itself from the region of conflict then the other will remain alone there: it will have none to fight against and the conflict will disappear.

If, on the other hand, each party waits for peace initiatives to come from the other side before undertaking conciliatory moves of its own, then the mistrust between the two sides will continue to grow. The inevitable result will be escalation of the conflict between them.

Hindu-Muslim communal riots, which have become a regular feature of Indian life, are example of such conflict, which can only be ended by unilateral action from one side. There are examples in the life of the Prophet of Islam which show that it is the Muslims who should take this initiative. Worldly rivalry and conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims means that the latter see Islam, not in its true light, but through the tainted vision of their own prejudice: Muslims are their enemies so they adopt an antagonistic posture towards Islam as well. This is a situation which should be intolerable to Muslims, whose overriding concern should be for the true message of Islam to reach other peoples in all its purity, and in an atmosphere conducive to objective and dispassionate consideration. Seeing that such an atmosphere cannot be generated where there is conflict and mistrust, they should ensure an end to conflicts with other peoples; they should take unilateral steps for peace, without waiting for the initiative to come from the other side.

This is exactly what the Prophet of Islam did at Hudaibiyyah (6AH), by refusing to be provoked in the face of harassment from the Quraysh, and accepting all their demands, he put an end to a conflict, which had been raging for twenty years. In doing so he defused the tension which had marked relations between Muslims and their non-Muslim compatriots. The result of his seemingly capitulatory action, as the Quran tells us and history verifies, was a "clear victory" for the Muslims.

If the Muslims are to detonate the sitting bomb of communal riots, as it is their duty to do, they can only do so by following the example of the Prophet, and refusing to be provoked, even in the face of provocation from the other side. Failure to do this can only result in further escalation in a conflict which serves only to distort Islam in the eyes of other, especially their adversaries.

Ego and Conscience

From the Quran we learn that man is born with two distinct and often opposing faculties: *Nafs Ammara* (12:53) and *Nafs Lawwama* (75:2). In today's terminology they are more familiar to us as 'ego' and 'conscience'.

In normal circumstances, one's ego lies dormant, but when provoked, the egoistic temperament being one of rebelliousness, it leads us into all manner of evils. It has very aptly been said that "when one's ego is touched, it turns into superego, and the result is breakdown."

But the side of one's nature which is ruled by conscience – *Nafs Lawwama* – is the very opposite because of its inherited function of distinguishing between right and wrong. One whose conscience is truly alive experiences pleasure in doing what is correct, and shame in doing what is wrong.

It is a wise man who avoids wounding the ego of a potential rival. The ego should be allowed to slumber peacefully. It is his conscience which must be aroused, for it is that God-given part of his mentality which, in distinguishing between right and wrong, will never allow the ego to assert itself. When one probes more deeply into the conflicts of modern times, one finds invariably that it is the ego which has been aroused and has run amuck.

According to the Quran, the conscience is the creation of God and, as such, is changeless. We must learn to look upon it, therefore, as a Master Key. If we succeed in finding it, and using it judiciously, all the doors which seem at the moment to be so irrevocably closed to friendship and cooperation will at once be thrown open to mutual understanding and harmonious social living.

3 June1987

It is through humility that man becomes noble

In the course of his sermon after the conquest of Mecca, the Prophet Mohammad said: "whoever desires to become the most noble of men should fear God."

(Safwat at- Tafaseer, Vol.III p.337)

Conversion

In one of nature's greatest laboratories – the sun – atomic reaction converts into light. The humble cow – a living laboratory – converts grass into milk. The very trees are nature's laboratories, taking in water, minerals and gases and converting them into flowers and fruits.

This process of conversion taking place all around us automatically and unceasingly, and with the utmost perfection of result, is something which we tend to take for granted. But God requires that we too undergo a process of conversion, not in the unthinking, instinctive ways of nature, but in a conscious, willing way. And this conversion has to take place, not on a material, but on a spiritual plane.

In the normal course of events, we merely observe the external world. But we should do much more than just observe, for the creator of the universe requires us to see Him reflected in the mirror of His creation. The facts which enter our minds as so many pieces of ordinary information must be converted into knowledge of God, just as a seed falling on fertile soil will convert itself into a tree. But if the base metal of everyday experience is to be thus transmuted into the gold of divine understanding, a certain inner mechanism has to be activated. One who can awaken his inner mechanism in this way is a true believer; one who cannot is a disbeliever, and his ultimate fate will be hellfire and damnation. It is the true believer who knows how to convert resentment into forgiveness, jealousy into equanimity, and meanness into magnanimity. In short, he has the capacity to convert the mundane into the sublime. It is he then who will, at the last, have heaven's gates thrown open to him when he comes before his Maker.

4 June1987

God's treatment of individuals will be commensurate with their treatment of others.

The Prophet is recorded as having said: "On the day of Resurrection, the most severe punishment will be reserved for the one who, in all the world, has been most *severe* in his punishment of others" (Bukhari).

Criticism and Denigration

The Quran states that God instructed His Prophet to say to his opponents: "I have received veritable proofs from my Lord, yet you deny Him" (6:57). This shows that a Prophet in this world stands on the bedrock of reason. His is not an idle claim: he is supported by clear evidence.

The disbelievers, on the other hand, are recorded by the Quran as saying, "Give no heed to this Quran. Interrupt its reading with booing and laughter, so that you may gain the upper hand" (41:26).

Those who wish to reject a statement but who cannot counter it with sound arguments, not infrequently fall back on derision or ad hominem. That is to say that they attempt to discredit the statement by shouting it down and raising false or irrelevant objections to it. In every age, this is what the Prophets have had to suffer at the hands of their opponents.

The way to deal with a statement of which one is critical is not to make personal attacks upon the speaker, or add to, subtract from, or distort the original statement, but to counter it with some rational argument supported by an array of facts. This is sound and correct criticism, and as such is not only permissible but desirable. On the other hand, rejecting a statement outright without referring to it in its original form, and without presenting any cogent argument against it, is an unfair and reprehensible practice.

When the exponent of a fact, or facts expresses himself in a cool and reasoned way while his opponents adopt a derogatory or even defamatory tone, this difference in approach is a sure indication that the former is in the right and his opponents are in the wrong. The Quran tells us that the language of the prophets is the language of Reason, while it is the men of no faith who mouth the language of disparagement.

5 June 1987

Sincere intention is as good as action.

While on the expedition of Badr, the Prophet once remarked: "In Medina, there are people who are with you whenever you set out on a journey or cross some valley." The Prophet's companions asked how this could be so, when they had never left Medina." They have been detained for some very good reason," explained the Prophet.

(Safwat at-Tafasser, Val I, p. 297)

Who will Tell the Truth?

Mr. Natwar Singh, former Indian Ambassador to China and Pakistan, mentions the celebrated Chinese author, Han Suyin in his book, *Curtain Raisers* which was published in 1983. It seems that she had become of a friend of his, and one chapter of his book is devoted to certain letters she had written to him. In one letter, dated June 14, 1980, she expressed a great desire to learn about Islam: "I do intend to have a very long talk with you on Islam."

No further details of her quest for truth are given either in the letter or elsewhere, and we can perhaps assume that Han Suyin had not up to that point found a Muslim from whom she could have the kind of information that she needed. Possibly she felt that because Mr. Natwar Singh came from India, where the Muslim population is second only to that of Indonesia, and also perhaps because he had been India's ambassador to Pakistan, he might be in a position to enlighten her.

How many people there are in this world who are in quest of the Truth, but who are fated to be disappointed because they can find no one to give them the information they desire.

Should anyone in this day and age set himself up as a prophet, all Muslims would unite to put him down. But the irony of it is that in their daily existence they are so oblivious of the Final Prophet's mission that they appear to be waiting for the arrival of a new 'Prophet' who will discharge this duty on their behalf! This is the state of affairs today when there are no less than 100 crores of Muslims spread all over the world. What has happened to the old quest for truth? And who will tell the truth to its seekers?

6 June 1987

If we uncover the faults of others, our own faults will be uncovered by God.

Addressing those who pay lip-service to religion without faith having entered their hearts, the Prophet said: "Do not slander the Muslims, nor pry into their private affairs, for one who does so, will have his own private life laid bare by God, and he will be humiliated even in his own hearth and home."

(Safwat at-Tafaseer, Val III p. 335)

Skin Speech

Man's skin, according to the Qur'an will testify against him on the Day of Judgement:

"On the Day when God's opponents are gathered together they will be driven into the Fire. So that when they reach it, their ears, their eyes and their very skins will testify to their deeds. Why did you speak against us?' they will say to their skins, and their skins will reply; 'God, who gives speech to all things, has made us speak. It was He who in the beginning created you, and to Him you shall all return. You did not hide yourselves, so that your eyes and ears and skins could not observe you. Yet you thought that God did not know much of what you did. It is this illusion concerning your Lord that has ruined you, so that you are now among the lost" (41:19-23).

Until recently the idea of skin being capable of 'speaking' was very difficult for man to understand. Recent progress in scientific research, however, has made it much easier to see how this will happen. A UPI news release, printed in *The Times of India* (May 30, 1984), disclosed this startling discovery:

'Skin speech' – communicating through vibrations on the skin – offers promise as a future alternative to hearing aids or surgical implants for those with impaired hearing, a speech and hearing scientist has said. Dr. Arlene Carney, audiologist at the University of Illinois, said on Monday (May 28, 1984) that 'skin speech' involves the use of tactile devices that electronically create speech patterns in vibrations on the skin. Patients receiving the experimental therapy learn to interpret the vibrations and sort them into speech patterns, said Dr. Carney.

It is well-known that words emitted through the mouth are preserved in the atmosphere in the form of sound waves. This sound actually originates in vibrations, much the same as the vibrations that cause skin speech, which are transmitted in the form of wave motions through a material medium such as air. These waves remain in the atmosphere. Though they cannot be seen, they do not disappear. They are there, and, were the apparatus available, can be played back like a tape on which sounds have been recorded.

If this is the case with vibrations that cause sound speech, then it is clearly true of the vibrations that cause skin speech also. These vibrations are also preserved in the atmosphere. Man, who even in this world possesses the ability to play back sounds recorded on a disc or tape, should have no difficulty in understanding this power being extended by God in the next world to cover all vibrations, whether of sound or skin speech, which have been imprinted in the atmosphere in the form of waves.

Man is being tested in this world. No scientific discovery reveals the exact nature of divine truth for, were it to do so, man would have no choice but to accept it: there would be no test involved. However,

advances in the field of science do make it easier for us to understand certain concepts, such as skin speech, which was difficult to fathom in the past. If the fast-accumulating evidence in support of truths expounded in the Quran is not sufficient to make man take heed, then he shall have to wait for actual occurrences before he will come to his senses. But then it will be too late; for then there will be no choice but to listen to the evidence of everything – even our skins – and accept the fate to which it condemns us.

8 June 1987

How a believer should treat others

Ali said of the Prophet: "He himself shunned three things: quarrels, pride and idleness. And three things he refrained from inflicting upon others: he did not belittle anyone, did not lay blame on anyone; nor did he dwell on anybody's weaknesses."

(Tirmidhi)

8 June 1987

Worship, unity and benevolence

According to Abu Hurayra, the Prophet mentioned three actions, which were especially pleasing to God. "That you should worship God, not associating any partners with Him; that you should cling to His rope, and not be divided among yourselves; and that you should be well-wishing towards those who are responsible for your affairs."

(Muslim)

Religion and Reason

Advanced study has shown that there is more
to life than meets the eye; all the great
realities of life lie beyond our comprehension

In ancient times, water was just water. Then with the 19th century came the invention of the microscope. When water was placed under it, the startling discovery was made that it contained countless live bacteria. Similarly, the stars that could be seen with the naked eye were supposed to be all the heavenly bodies that existed. Now the skies have been scanned with powerful telescopes and information has been sent back from space probes, with the result that the true immensity of the universe is at last being understood.

These two examples show the difference in thinking in ancient and modern times which has been brought about by modern technology. Other types of research in different fields have shown with certainty that there are many more realities than had ever been imagined by man when he was limited to the sphere of simple, unaided observation. But these new discoveries so excited the discoverers that they felt justified in claiming that reality was definable as that which could be directly observed, and that what we could not experience or observe was mere hypothesis and did not, therefore, exist.

In the nineteenth century, this claim, made with great enthusiasm, was most damaging to religion. The fact that religious creeds are based on a belief in the unseen, that their truths are neither observable nor demonstrable led many people to the conclusion that religious dogma was hypothetical and, therefore, untrue.

Twentieth century research, however, has completely reversed this position, advanced study having shown that there is certainly more to life than meets the eye: in fact, all the great realities of life lie beyond our comprehension.

According to Bertrand Russell there are two forms of knowledge: knowledge of things and knowledge of truths. Only "things" can be directly observed: "truths" can only be understood by indirect observation. Or, in other words, inference. The existence of light, gravity, magnetism and nuclear energy in the universe is an undisputed fact, but man cannot directly observe these things. He knows them only by their effects. Man discovers certain "things" from which he infers the existence of "truths".

This change in the concept of knowledge which occurred in the twentieth century changed the whole situation so radically, that man was forced to accept the existence of things which he could not directly see, but only indirectly experience. With this intellectual revolution the difference between seen and

unseen reality disappeared. Invisible objects became as important as visible objects. Man was compelled to accept that indirect, or inferential argument, was academically as sound as direct argument.

In our own times, divine reasoning has become truly scientific. For instance, the greatest argument for religion is what philosophers call the argument from design. Nineteenth century scholars, in their zeal, did not accept this reasoning. To them it was an inferential argument and not therefore, academically tenable. But in the present age, this objection has been invalidated. Nowadays man is compelled to infer the existence of a designer of the universe from the existence of a design in the universe, just as he accepts the theory of the flow of electrons from the movement of a wheel.

A statement made by Bertrand Russell throws some light on this matter. In the preface to his book, *Why I am not a Christian*, he writes:

“I think all the great religions of the world – Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Communism – both untrue and harmful. It is evident as a matter of logic that, since they disagree, not more than one of them can be true. With very few exceptions, the religion which a man accepts is that of the community in which he lives, which makes it obvious that the influence of environment is what has led him to accept the religion in question. It is true that Scholastics invented what professed to be logical arguments proving the existence of God, and that these arguments, or others of a similar tenor, have been accepted by many eminent philosophers, but the logic to which these traditional arguments appealed is of an antiquated Aristotelian sort which is now rejected by practically all logicians except such as are Catholics. There is one argument that is not purely logical. I mean the argument from design. This argument, however, was destroyed by Darwin; and, in any case, could only be made logically acceptable at the cost of abandoning God’s omnipotence.”

Arguing the existence of a designer from design is, as Russell admits, a Scientific argument in itself. It is the very argument which science itself uses to prove anything. Russell then proceeds to reject this argument by citing Darwin’s theory of evolution. This rejection would be acceptable only if Darwin’s theory had itself been scientifically established. But scientific research has proved Darwinism to be mere hypothesis, rather than established scientific fact. It is Russell’s first statement, therefore, concerning the validity of the argument from design, that must prevail. His rejection of that argument on the basis of Darwinism is groundless.

The Brashness of Ignorance

Nadira Begum Quraishi of Bilaspur, Maharashtra, who was divorced by her husband after the birth of a daughter, is now suing her ex-husband for maintenance. According to *The Times of India* of May 1, 1986, when she was asked why, when it was against Islamic teachings, she had followed the lead of Shah Bano of Indore in demanding maintenance under article 125 of the Indian criminal law, she burst out with: "What has Islam done for me that I should follow its tenets?" Neither the judge nor the lawyers were able to persuade Mrs. Quraishi to withdraw her case. Moreover, she rejected Mr. Quraishi's offer to take her and her daughter back. She then called upon the court to order her ex-husband to give her a monthly allowance of Rs. 500. Unlike Mrs. Shah Bano, she is young – just thirty years of age – and is a graduate.

Although she is supposed to be an educated person, her utterances are those of an ignorant, illiterate woman, for she is clearly unaware of the fact that whatever women have nowadays is the gift of Islam. She does not realize that even being able to question Islam in public with impunity is a great freedom given to her by Islam. Before the advent of Islam, no woman who valued her life would have dared question religious authority, and certainly not in the terms used by Begum Quraishi.

Rigidity or Rectitude?

In the course of an article called, "Who Will Bell the Hindu Cat?" (*The Hindustan Times*, 6 April, 1987) Mr. Mohan Guru Swami has made an uncalled for remark about Islam on its imperviousness to change, "when he feels that it should be open to popular opinion." The bone which he has chosen to pick is "the payment of alimony and the rigid attitude displayed by most Islamic leaders in this country."

Mr. Swami does not appear to appreciate that "change" just for the sake of change is not anybody's idea of good sense. It is only when a change is for the better that it is welcome. Let us consider what would happen if the Islamic laws pertaining to the payment of alimony were altered in favour of the divorced wife. Women might then find themselves clamped in the fetters of a ruined marriage, subjected to neglect, degradation and even physical abuse, for, a husband, unable, or unwilling to enter into the financial commitment of alimony would become psychologically incapable of meting out just treatment to an unwanted wife who had already been mentally (if not physically) discarded by him. This would hardly be a change for the better, would it? And we already have the example of all the Hindu wives who have committed suicide in order to avoid such treatment, for it is only recently that Hindu women have begun to surmount the legal hurdles to divorce. Even those few who have managed to do so can seldom hope to remarry. It is significant that in 1985, there were no fewer than 837 dowry deaths in this country, (quoted by Shanoo Bijlani in the *Reader's Digest*, March, 1987, p. 137) and one can imagine what battering and harassment led to this toll of women's lives.

Another baneful consequence of changing the laws on maintenance in favour of ex-wives could be that men might begin to look upon the bonds of marriage as little better than shackles. They might even, as has happened on a large scale for the same reasons in Western countries, begin to indulge in illegal cohabitation. The time-honoured institution of marriage might finally crumble away for want of support, and women would then find themselves in the unenviable and insecure positions of mistresses and concubines. They could not then claim even temporary maintenance if their paramours chose to turn them out. They might even have to suffer the ultimate distress and humiliation of having to support themselves during the period of cohabitation! It is clear that change of this sort could lead only to social evils, and to contemplate it would imply a shallowness of thought and lack of foresight of the worst order.

It should be borne in mind that divorce in Islam is the exception, not the rule, and that it is incumbent upon a married man to discharge the responsibility of proper maintenance of his spouse throughout his married life. When, in exceptional cases, a divorce takes place, Islamic law has deemed it practical that he should be required to make only temporary provision for his ex-wife's maintenance.

It should be clear from the matrimonial debacles in the West and the sate of cruel impasse in Hindu society, that Islam has shown the greatest of wisdom in recognizing that, although distasteful, divorce must be legal and separation must be easy.

13 June 1987

Attachment to the world makes one lose sight of eternity

"There will come a day when you will be as insignificant as the flotsam carried by a flood," the Prophet once said to his Companions, who asked him why that would be. The Prophet told them that something he termed "Wahn" would develop within them, and the Companions once again asked what "Wahan" was. "It is to love worldly things, and be reluctant to face death," the Prophet explained.

13 June 1987

Speaking little, and not holding grudges against anyone

A companion of the Prophet lay dying. People saw that his face was shining, and asked why. "I had two habits which stood me in good stead," the man explained: "for one, I did not indulge in idle talk, and, secondly, my heart was free of malice towards any Muslim."

Perseverance

The following story, written by Mao Tse Tung, former Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party is one which should set us all thinking.

In olden times, there was once an old man from the northern part of China who lived on the side of a mountain range which always lay in shadow. The problem was that there were two high mountains in front of his door which prevented the sun from entering his house. One day, the old man called to his young sons and said to them, "Let us go and remove these mountains by digging, so that the sun's rays may fall upon our house unhindered." A neighbour of the old man's, hearing of this plan, made fun of it. He said to the old man, "I knew that you were foolish, but I never realized that there was just no limit to your foolishness. How on earth is it possible to remove these high mountains just by digging them?"

The old man replied in all seriousness, "Yes, you are right. But when I die, my sons will dig, and after their death, their sons will dig. The digging process will thus continue for generations. The mountains, as you know, will not go on increasing in size, whereas each digging is bound to reduce them in size and, in this way, there will come a time when we shall have finally succeeded in removing these obstacles."

It is true that the power of solution is greater than the power of problem. While the problems are invariably limited, their solutions are always unlimited. This story is a beautiful illustration of how a major feat necessitates not only long-term planning, but the willingness and determination to carry that planning into effect.

For a people who have the fortitude, to carry on their schemes from one generation to the next, working consistently and steadfastly, there is no mountain or river on earth which they will not be able to conquer.

The Saddest of Spectacles

The Prophet Muhammad is recorded by Abu Hurairah as stating that in worldly matters you should look, not at those above you, but at those below you. Only in this way will you be able to appreciate God's bounty.

In the distribution of worldly benefits, there is no uniformity; some have less and some have more. And this is a state of affairs which has perennially aroused envy and created friction in society. Now, if an individual compares himself to one who is apparently less well-endowed than himself, he will be filled with a sense of gratitude. But if he always has an eye on those who seem better placed in life, his soul will become corroded with ingratitude.

A simple way of guarding oneself from this emotional evil is to compare oneself to those who have less than oneself and not with those who have more. Sheikh Saadi (1213-1292) one of the greatest figures in classical Persian literature, writes that he had no shoes and walked barefoot. Seeing people wearing shoes, he wondered why he had been denied such things. No sooner had this thought entered his head than he came upon a man with no feet. He was at once full of gratitude, and thanked God for showing him the greater munificence of granting him the use of two healthy feet.

God desires that each and everyone of His servants should be thankful to Him, but, for this to become a reality, we must all subject ourselves to a constant process of self-appraisal. This means assessing the truly positive aspects of our lives in relation to others, and an unceasing scrutiny of our thoughts so that we should not unwittingly allow ourselves to slip into negativism. The sight of a man consumed with envy is the saddest of spectacles.

15 June1987

When knowledge is reduced to an avenue towards personal prestige

'Ubayy ibn Ka'ab said: "Acquire knowledge, and practice it. Do not acquire it in order to beautify yourselves thereby, for there will come a time when learning will be used as an adornment, as people adorn themselves with clothes."

Suicide

General Atiqur Rahman, now Chairman of the Pakistan Federal Service Commission, came to Delhi on an official visit in February 1984. An emigrant to Pakistan, he had worked before partition during the second world war with Field Marshal Manekshaw in Burma. At a meeting with journalists, he told of how, during his stay in Burma, Manekshaw had once been badly wounded, and the pain having become unbearable, he decided to put an end to his life by shooting himself. He asked Rahman to give him a pistol for this purpose, but Rahman refused. The General added, laughing, "Had I known at that time what General Manekshaw was going to do to us during the 1971 war, I would certainly have given him my pistol!

(The Times of India, 20 February 1984).

Manekshaw's state of despair was such, during the second world war, that he wanted to commit suicide, quite unaware of the fact that 25 years later, he was to emerge the victor in the 1971 war.

If Islam holds suicide to be unlawful, it is because committing suicide means having despaired totally of any succour from God. What is equally bad is that it also signifies a refusal of the world hereafter. But if a man is convinced that he will not face extinction upon the death of the body, and that he will experience a rebirth in the world hereafter, he will never commit suicide. For one who is fully aware of the seriousness of life after life, the anguish of this life will pale into insignificance.

Beside this, there is another aspect to holding suicide unlawful – it conveys a message to man not to be forgetful of the future because of temporary hardships. The present world is one in which every man, woman and child has his or her moments of pain and grief. But these should be recognised as transient phases, and borne with stoicism and courage. Just think of Manekshaw who wished to annihilate himself, little realising that his name was to be emblazoned in the pages of history as a latter-day conqueror.

16 June 1987

The least one can do is not harm others

Yahya Ibn Mu'adh Al-Razi once said that if one cannot benefit one's brother, at least one should not harm him.

Across three Continents

In December 1985, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, the President of the Islamic Centre, Delhi, represented India in an Islamic Conference held in Bamako, a town in Mali. Setting out from Delhi Palam Airport on December 4, 1985, he travelled to Bamako via Rome and the Senegalese capital, Dakar. The return journey was undertaken by way of Paris, London, Kuwait and Dubai. Here are some excerpts from Maulana's account of his impressions and experiences of his one-week journey across three continents.

Public relations for profit: why not for spiritual uplift?

When it was time for breakfast, the Air India hostess brought round the menu-card. On it was written: "Indian hospitality across five continents." This is no exaggeration, for whichever continent a passenger flies to, he or she will find Air India an excellent host. After breakfast, I got up to go to the toilet, and was met in the aisle by a smiling steward who enquired, "Did you enjoy your breakfast, sir?" This was only one of the instances of good public relations which I encountered on my flight. Whatever the concern, the good businessman, or his representatives, will find pleasant words and gestures with which to further his commercial interests – in other words, his trade. The preaching of the word of God has also been termed a 'trade' in the Quran (61:10), yet those who claim to propagate the word of God in the present age have not been able to find pleasant words with which to address their 'clients'. The words they have thought fit to use have rather had the effect of putting others off, because they are so ill-suited to winning people over to their cause.

Rome: ancient and modern

When the city of Rome was first established around the 8th century BC, it consisted of only a few houses, but it grew with the status of its inhabitants, who soon came to call it the Eternal City. For well over a millenium Rome controlled the destiny of all civilization known to European man, then fell into dissolution and disrepair.

One's first impressions of Rome are rather splendid because of the spaciousness and modernity of the airport. But these are quickly dispelled by the sight of the buildings on the approach roads to the built-up areas, which stamp Rome as a second rate city. Everywhere are signs of neglect and disrepair. Rome, in fact, is a city in decline. The system of education, the water supply, health care and the postal services are all quite sub-standard. Getting through to New York from Delhi takes only a matter of minutes, but when I tried to make a phone call to New York from Rome, I was unable to get through even after repeated tries. While in Rome, I read a joke about its power supply which had it that in Rome, electricity is "neither AC nor DC. It is MC – Malfunctioning Current". There was also the story of the

Roman citizen who received a bill for 976 telephone calls, despite his never having had a telephone installed.

The crime level in Rome is also high. In one locality a French tourist parked his car and, as he was getting out, was cautioned by the police to lock up his car properly. This he did, but when he got back to his car, he found that a suitcase has disappeared from inside it. He immediately went to a nearby police station to lodge a report. When he got back this time, the car had gone too.

A tourist that I chanced to meet told me that he had also had certain problems, but that a local resident had offered him this advice: "Don't get upset. Rome is Rome. The key word, my friend is PAZIENZA (Patience)."

Remaining within one's domain and maintaining self-soverignty:

One place of particular interest in Rome is the Vatican City, the seat of the Supreme Head of the Catholic Church. With an area of less than one square mile, the Vatican is the smallest state in the world. It is said that despite its small size, the Vatican is more powerful than Italy itself. Although it lies inside Italy, it enjoys full independence. But it has had to pay a price for this independence, namely the restriction of its powers to an apolitical arena.

Yet in the Middle Ages the Pope was effectively the Supreme Ruler of the whole of Europe. Having the right to depose any sovereign to whom he took a dislike. Later, however, kings rebelled against this state of affairs until finally the separation of Church and State became a necessity. Temporal authority was placed in the hands of kings, while the Pope was accepted as Spiritual Head. The political power of the Pope officially came to an end in 1870.

Acceptance of a supreme authority

Out of the total population of India, the proportion of Christians is a mere 2%, but scattered over the world at large, there were approximately one billion Catholics, all Catholic churches around the world being directly subordinate to the Vatican. All their affairs, such as the appointment of priests to parishes, the defraying of their expenses, their promotion and demotion, are attended to directly by the Vatican. In India alone there are eleven thousand Catholic priests, all of whom function under the supervision of this same foreign spiritual leadership.

Despite the vastness and ramifications of its religious domain, the Vatican continues to function as a highly organized world body. Were the Muslims to have such a body, its functioning would eventually be weakened and disrupted because of the tendency on the part of individuals to defy authority and to seek autonomy in those branches of which they take charge. Seizure of power at different levels – by fair means or foul – would sooner or latter be the undoing of such an organization. In present times it is this disunity, brought about by selfish interests, which is the greatest weakness of Muslims.

A meeting in Dakar.

In Dakar, I met two American Muslims, Saleem ibn Ghanim and Hasan Ajram. Originally from Lebanon, their fathers had settled in America, with the result that they can now speak and understand only English, having retained only a nominal grasp of their mother tongue, Arabic.

I gave them copies of the English version of *Al-Risala*, and they were quite overjoyed to be able to read about Islamic themes in English. As they went through its articles, they kept exclaiming, "Good! Good!" and were full of praise for the style in which it was written. They pointed out that there was an urgent need for Islamic literature written in English, if Islam were to be effectively introduced to America. At present, whatever books are available in English are for the greater part written by those who wish to present Islam in a political light. This is a method of presentation which cannot have much appeal for Americans. As these two young American Muslims put it, "we need books in which Islam is presented in its natural and external form". I mentioned to them the Islamic Centre's *Introduction to Islam* series, and they expressed a great deal of interest in it. A set has since been sent to them.

The price of backwardness:

I met a number of non-Muslim Europeans at Dakar airport who were on their way to Bamako, one of them being a geologist from Italy. He told me that he was on his way to Bamako, in the capacity of an expert to assist the Malians with a project. Thinking about why it was necessary for African countries – mostly Muslim – to seek foreign expertise, I had to conclude that it was due to what is euphemistically termed underdevelopment, but, looked at frankly, is sheer backwardness. The price which such countries have to pay for this is perpetual interference in their internal affairs by western countries. In bygone centuries, western nations held political sway in Africa, but then, when the time for independence came, they took advantage of African disunity to split the continent up into diminutive states. Now, through technical experts and Christian missionaries they still seek to retain their hegemony. Our leaders may call this oppression, but, in fact, it is the toll exacted from Africa for its own failure to progress.

God perpetuates His religion

A number of large projects are being undertaken in Mali with the help of various Arab countries. In Bamako, for instance, a mosque – the largest in Mali – has been built with Saudi Arabian help. On the 6th of December, we offered our Friday prayers in it. The mosque, which is in the form of a large hall whose interior is supported by 80 lofty pillars, has been constructed in an ultra-modern style. Generally, in mosques, a separate pulpit for the Friday Sermon occupies a prominent position in the front section of the hall. Here, the pulpit has been placed in an alcove in the upper portion of the wall itself. It has the appearance of a broad ledge recessed within the wall, with a protruding balcony and balustrade, on which a man may stand with ease.

Numerous works of this nature are being executed all over the world with the aid of Arab countries. This clearly demonstrates God's instrumentality in keeping Islam alive in the present age.

Despite the fervent utterances and glowing encomiums of Muslim leaders on the subject of Islamic prowess, it is an indisputable fact that, in the world of today, Muslims find themselves far behind the times; were it not for the God-given might of the petro-dollar, Muslims would have occupied the lowermost rung of the international ladder. As it is, with such assistance as they have, they can hold on high the banner of their religion.

Some impressions of *Al-Risala*.

In Bamako, I met a gentleman from Canada who is a regular recipient of the English version of *Al-Risala*. When I asked him what he thought of it, he admitted to having been impressed by its articles. "very simple, very effective," was his comment. There was also a gentleman from Kenya who received *Al-Risala* regularly. He told me that where he lived, there were at least ten people who were regular readers of *Al-Risala*; after reading one issue, they eagerly anticipate the next. These were all highly educated people who were well-versed in English.

A Swiss participant in the Islamic conference, who also received *Al-Risala* regularly, remarked that there were also several people where he came from who made a point of reading it. It seems that one of the regular readers in Switzerland had such a high opinion of *Al-Risala* that he taped several of its articles and broadcast them from the local radio station.

I did not take many books with me – only a few copies of an Arabic work *Aldeen Fi Muwajahat Al'Ilm* and certain issues of *Al-Risala* in English. Whenever there was any mention of my books or of *Al-Risala*, these were commented upon with great enthusiasm and respect, and people frequently expressed a desire to receive the entire set. This can perhaps be explained by the desire on the part of many people nowadays to read about Islam in a style which is at once contemporary, simple and direct. It would seem moreover that there is no organization other than the Islamic Centre which employs this method of bringing Islam to the general public. Islam is all too often projected in a political style, under the mistaken impression that this places religious matters within a modern context. A truly contemporary style, however, would derive its inspiration less from the world of politics than from the world of science.

Another gentleman I met at the conference was from the West Indies. His mother tongue was English and he had been educated up to the doctorate level in America. Since he was not familiar with *Al-Risala*, I gave him a copy of the November 1985 issue. He promptly read the whole magazine in one night before going to sleep, and later repeatedly expressed a desire to read *Al-Risala*, on a regular basis. He made me promise him time and time again that our magazine would be sent to him. When I asked him to give me his impressions of it, he said, "It is a very impressive and relevant piece of literature on Islamic realities."

A visit to the Islamic Centre, Bamako

On December 9th, 1985, I visited the Bamako Islamic Centre on the Said ibn Sultan Road. It is laid out over an area of 35,000 square metres, the five million dollar bill for its construction having been footed by Arab countries. I was happy to have had the opportunity of offering two rakaats of prayers in the mosque there.

All the participants in the conference went together to visit the Centre which has just been completed, but is not yet functional. They went the rounds, gazing at different parts of this splendid construction, expressing their enthusiasm amongst themselves. I walked with them in silence, lost in my own thoughts. Just then, an African scholar, Ostaz Ahmad Darami, came up to me and said, smiling: "People are taken by outward forms, whilst you, Sheikh, are taken by true inner meanings."

In the present day, large Islamic Centres of this type have been set up in every corner of the globe, but they have one disadvantage in that, directly or indirectly, they are built with the help of government grants. Now the present state of affairs is such that a large percentage of Islamists are influenced by a political interpretation of Islam. From place to place, they have raised the banner of revolution against Muslim governments, and have become, as a result, blameworthy, or at least suspect in the eyes of the authorities. Were these people to refrain from their erroneous politicking, all these centres could very well be in their own hands, which would enable them to be really effective in spreading the message of Islam. It is because they are so inclined towards politics that they are denied a foothold in these centres. Even in the few instances where such centres have come under their control, they have been unable to make the best of them because of the misguided nature of their political mentality.

Mali languages.

Different areas of Mali having come under British and French colonial rule, English and French are still spoken by the elite, although many years have elapsed since the withdrawal of the two powers in question. While the masses speak their regional languages, French has been retained as the official language.

In ancient times Arabic held much the same position in foreign lands as French and English do nowadays. At the outset of the Islamic era, after the conquest of North Africa, the Muslims crossed the Mediterranean and invaded Spain and Sicily. Here, they not only ruled, but also laid the foundations of a glorious civilization which was far ahead of the Christian civilization of the day. This resulted in a large number of Christians in these areas starting to speak and write in Arabic. The expertise which non-Muslims of this period had acquired in Arabic and Arab sciences can be gauged from the fact that during the Muslim period an English Christian by the name of Thomas Brown was appointed as a Judge in Sicily.

Later, when Muslim political power had declined in Spain and Sicily, although the languages of the masses were Hebrew and Latin, Arabic remained in use in the courts and offices, and was regularly spoken by the upper classes. Stressing the domination of Arabic languages and culture even after the end of Muslim rule, Bertrand Russell writes, "Greek and Arabic were still living languages in Sicily. Frederick II learnt to speak six languages fluently (including Arabic). He was at home in Arabian philosophy and had friendly relations with Mohammedans." (*A History of Western Philosophy*, p. 436).

(To be continued)

Thinking nothing of one's actions

Someone said to 'Umer that he had rendered great services to religion. He would surely have a great position with God. "If there is nothing for me or against me, that will be enough," 'Umer replied.

24 June 1987

LETTERS

I came across the Al-Risala in September 86, and have been a regular reader since then. It is intelligible. I can understand all that is being said. The language is excellent. I have read several books on Islam but I found them badly written and unintelligible.

Ms. ALEXANDRA
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'Some books are, to quote Bacon, 'to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested.' Your magnum opus 'Muhammad: The Prophet of Revolution' and other thought-provoking publications belong to the last category. I relish to read regularly your prestigious periodical (AL-Risala) which is like a lodestar on the otherwise murky horizon of intellectual bankruptcy.

TARIQ A. SHAH
35, New Colony
Sopore 193 201

I am regular reader of Al-Risala of English publication since Dec. '86 onwards. No doubt, it is a good magazine in which all religious knowledge is imparted it gives more information at a low cost in beautiful booklet shape so that it can be kept for reference purposes.

AYYUB M SHAIKH
'Razak Manzil'
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Since I became a regular subscriber of your esteemed monthly journal Al-Risala, I am studying it regularly and finding it very absorbing, thought-provoking, analytical and enlightening. Your effort is highly praiseworthy and deserves the support from every nook and corner of our society.

SYED SHAFIUDDIN
E-64, Foch Square
New Delhi - 110 001

I have been a regular reader of Al-Risala in English Edition from the past one year. I thoroughly enjoy reading its contents, and the comparisons it puts forth essentially requires commendable appreciation. It upholds the true tenets of Islam. In fact, no month is ever complete for me, without an issue of Al-Risala monthly Magazine.

MOHAMED RAZICK SAIT
s/o. G.M. Moosa Sait
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The magazine is short and sweet and pertinent to the present age. I admire its scientific approach, which can kindle good light in the hearts of so called modern civilized man.

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