

القرآن الكريم الذي نزلنا على محمد صلى الله عليه وسلم



ALLAH HAS REVEALED
THE MOST BEAUTIFUL LANGUAGE
IN THE FORM OF A BOOK
(AL-QUR'AN 39:23)

North Star

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Hakim Mohammed Said

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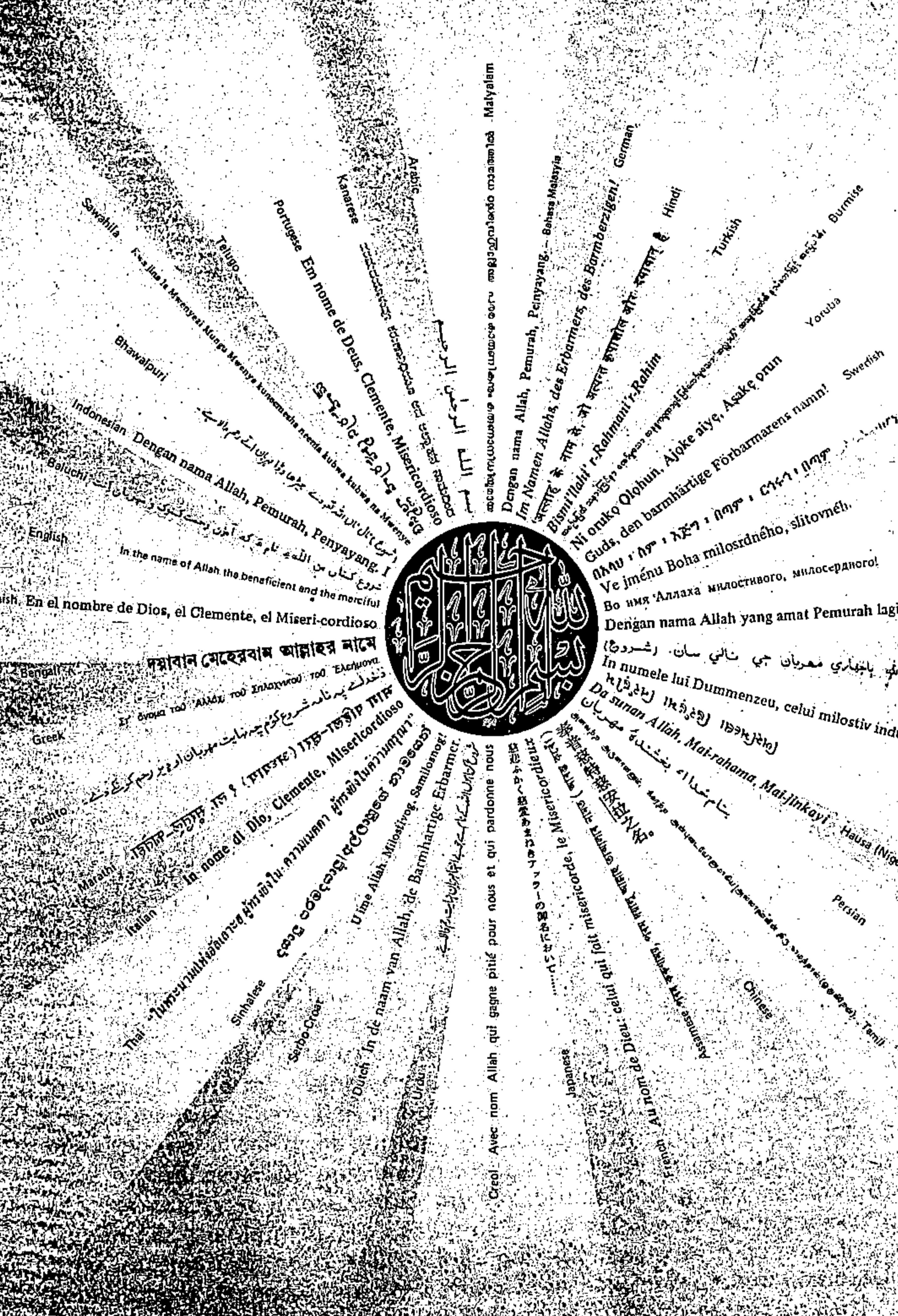
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PREFACE

I believe, with full faith and conviction, that a viable solution of all our problems is available in the Holy Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him). If the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* could so completely eliminate the pagan rites, the idol-worship, the superstition, arrogance, and social vices like gambling, drunkenness, promiscuity, exploitation and tyranny, tribal strife and animosity of the *Jahiliyyā*, and establish in their stead civilized behaviour, decency, erudition and high morality; if the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* could abolish the racist attitudes, false tribal pride, social discrimination on the basis of worldly wealth or the lack of it, class struggle, mutual contempt and hatred and the gloom of ignorance and usher in an era of universal human freedom and equality, self-awareness, fear of God, peace, contentment and real inner pleasure fifteen centuries ago, they can do it even today. They are absolutely capable of resolving all problems that scourge the contemporary human society.

All the speeches that I have delivered and all the articles that I have written during the last forty years and more, reflect this view-point. I have endeavoured throughout to discuss and analyse the problems that have continued to arise in our society and our contemporary environment in the perspective of the Holy Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him). Be they matters of prayer and worship or affairs of our mundane life, be they moral vices or acts of virtue, their touchstone, their true criterion of assessment, is and always ought to be the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*. The Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*, therefore, ought to be revered and loved with all one's heart.

I firmly believe that religion and morality are synonymous and have the same connotation. I take the Qur'ān as the code of supreme morality and the Holy Prophet, to me, is the perfect embodiment of its noble precepts. Hence my writings are subordinate to the noble precepts from which they draw inspiration. My thought and my vision are both the product of my ethical views and my total commitment to them. It is not possible to make humanity perfect without higher morality and sincerity of purpose. And unless mankind attains to its most perfect state, it can never be possible to make the dream of universal brotherhood and peace a reality. I know within my heart that it is man's destiny to make the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*, its leading light. Only thus can man endeavour with the total strength of heart and soul and all the beauty of high morality and moral commitment, to make himself a fountain-head of mercy and compassion for all beings and become worthy of his destiny as Allah's viceregent on earth.

Nūristān carries a collection of articles on various topics. They are based on my radio talks in Pakistan's national language, Urdu. I am deeply indebted to Mr. Hamid Naseem who while rendering them into English, preserved the spirit and essence of the original.

I am grateful to Mrs. Lily Anne D'Silva for all her endeavours in bringing out this book.

I would also like to express my sincere thanks to my other dear colleagues whose association with me has enriched my mind and strengthened my resolve to serve the cause of Truth and Righteousness as expounded in the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* of the last Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him).

I now commend Nūristān to the reader.



Hakim Mohammed Said

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Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth.

[Qur'ān, XXIV:35]

BELIEF IN THE ONE-NESS OF ALLAH

The first and fundamental belief in Islam is the One-ness of Allah. All other beliefs and acts revolve around it. If the belief in the One-ness of the Supreme Being is true and sincere, the belief in prophethood, revelation and the life Hereafter will be right too. And acts such as obligatory prayer, fasting, the obligatory Hajj and Zakat (expending in the way of Allah) will also be meaningful and consequential. The largest number of verses, on a single theme, was revealed relating to the theme of the One-ness of the Absolute Lord and Master. That was but natural, because the essence of all beliefs, concepts and precepts on which Islam aims to build its system of life is the concept of one Allah.

This concept of One-ness has had many philosophical and mystic interpretations. Let them be what they are. We can say in straight and simple language that the meaning of One-ness is to believe verbally as well as actually that Allah, the Most Exalted, is the one and the only Lord and Master of all existence, to worship only Him, to bow only before Him in total submission, to pray only to Him for succour, to beseech only Him in humility, to beg favour only of Him, to accept only Him as the sole Creator and Master, to recognise only His command as the Law, and to deem all profit and loss as coming from Him. Briefly stated, the belief in the One-ness of Allah means not to associate any other being, at any level, in any form whatsoever, as a partner in His power and supremacy, nor to worship any other being along with Him.

We should fully believe that godhead, with all the expanse of its meaning and scope, is the special characteristic of the pure and lofty being of Allah the Most Exalted:

"Your God is One God; there is no God save Him, the Beneficent, the Merciful."

[Qur'ān, II:163]

Emphasising the One-ness of Allah and putting the seal on the Absoluteness of the godhead of the one Allah, the Holy Qur'ān explains the purpose of the assignation of all prophets by Allah. The words of the Holy Qur'ān are:

"Warn mankind that there is no God save Me, so keep your duty unto me."

[Qur'ān, XVI:2]

Monotheism is the requirement of Nature and is a belief which is sound from the

point of view of every canon. The first man who lived on this earth, that is Adam, was a monotheist and he preached the One-ness of Allah. All subsequent prophets taught the same principle to their respective nations and stressed the imperative need of believing in Allah, the one and sole Lord and Master. And the final Prophet of Allah expounded all the aspects of this great truth before his *Ummah*, in full detail and he exhorted them to keep firm in this belief and to preach and bring home to other people of the world this universal concept of the One-ness of Allah.

The history of peoples and nations and faiths and religions tells us that monotheism is a universal concept. But followers of different religions sometimes forgot this basic teaching of the sacred founders of their religions and at other times distorted it. That is why the greatest emphasis the Holy Qur'an lays is on this fundamental belief, and the Holy Prophet stopped his *Ummah* from doing anything that could even remotely become the cause of the intrusion of paganism or polytheism in the individual or collective life of the Muslims.

When the Holy Prophet called the infidels to the true faith, the basic problem was not the question of accepting the existence of Allah, the Most Exalted, but of His One-ness, in other words to believe in His Absolute Self along with all His attributes as one, sole, supreme, peer-less Being. The Holy Qur'an bears testimony that the infidels of Mecca believed in Allah, the most Exalted. They also acknowledged that it is He who can rid people of their calamities, solve their problems, save them from despair and despondency. But the contradiction lay in the fact that their pagan social order was involved in polytheism and idolatry since countless centuries and consequently they were not prepared to accept that this whole universe is the result of the creative wisdom of one Creator. It is not difficult to know why they refused to accept this concept. The acceptance by them of this truth meant the negation and rejection of the traditions that had evolved over many centuries and it struck at the root of their idolatrous beliefs which had complete hold on their intellect as well as reason. That is why when the Holy Prophet announced, in clear and explicit terms, the concept of the singleness of godhead and said in unequivocal words that no one except Allah is worthy of worship and submission, they were totally astounded, because according to their traditional belief even their idols of wood and stone were worthy of being worshipped. How could they, they wondered within themselves, discard their dear old idol-gods and submit to one Allah and worship only Him. This their reaction is described in the Holy Qur'an in these words:

"Maketh he the gods One God?

Lo! that is an astounding thing."

[Qur'an, XXXVIII:5]

In reality, as the study of the Holy Qur'an informs us, this difficulty in calling people to the true belief of the One-ness of Allah, was not faced only by the Holy Prophet. Every prophet before him in his own time faced this grave problem.

The prophets of Allah (may peace be upon them all) attached basic importance to the question how to make confirmed idolaters who had broken their bond, of belief and humbleness, with Allah, to stop worshipping their false gods and to return to pure monotheism, i.e., belief in one Allah and how to abolish the evil of polytheism which had gone deep down within their beings and got ingrained there, had indeed become a part of their temperament, their nature. They brought to them the message of Allah and ultimately purified them of paganism and idol-worship.

The Holy Qur'ān too declares monotheism to be the fundamental question and has presented very explicit, convincing and satisfying arguments in support of its main thesis i.e., the One-ness of Allah:

"And they are ordained naught else than to serve Allah, keeping religion pure for Him."

[Qur'ān, XCVIII:5]

The Holy Qur'ān blocked all possible by-lanes to paganism by making the above declaration. It made it known that pure monotheism consists in single-minded belief in the One-ness of Allah and not to make anybody else a co-sharer in His attributes. This, because He is peerless, unique, absolutely pure, above all imperfections and completely without blemish. Neither there is lack in His knowledge, nor any shortcoming in His power, that He should need the help of someone else to fill the gap. He is eternal, He is beyond decay and extinction. His knowledge is All-embracing. Life and death are both in His dominion. He is the sole Creator and Lord of all existence, with none to share His sway. Every nook and corner of the heavens and earth is under the focus of His vision. Nothing is outside the compass of His Providence. Every atom, every particle that is, extols His magnificence and majesty in its own fashion, sanctifies His name, says His praises and offers its psalms to Him.

This One-ness of Allah, the purity and the sacredness of His Self and attributes was indeed a thing to wonder for the infidels. They said to the Holy Prophet, "You say there is One, Who is the sole Lord and Creator and is unique in every respect and you want us to acknowledge Him as the one and only Allah. Will you please tell us to which particular tribe he belongs and from whom did He inherit this entire universe? What is His genealogy?"

This clearly shows that they were completely unaware of the concept of the abstract attributes of Allah the Most Exalted. But this admission was polytheistic. They were guilty of the heinous crime of paganism, both with regard to the Absolute Being and His attributes. The human race owes a deep debt of gratitude to Islam that it presented a concept of godhead which is based on pure monotheism and bound us in submission to a pure and sacred Creator Who is not a father to any mortal, nor has He any son. He is unique and alone. He is not dependent on any being or thing. He has no equal, no peer. The *sura Ikhlas* was a reply to the question of those infidels who wanted to know His genealogy. In this brief but beautiful *sura* the One-ness of Allah the Most Exalted has been expounded in full detail along with the delineation of His Self and attributes.

Monotheism is a principle the basic importance of which received recognition in every age, and will continue to be the focus of human thought and consciousness for ever. All prophets have declared this as the basic purpose of their assignation. This is the name of a special purpose, and is indicative of a particular concept of life. It provides a special kind of intellectual and spiritual sustenance to the individual and the society. This concept and belief creates a revolution in intellect and volition. A unitarian has only Allah as his support. His trust in Allah gives him such strength that nothing in the world can intimidate or overawe him. Nor can any temptation bewitch him. By bowing his head in submission to one Lord and Master, he rejects and spurns all false gods. Occasionally he has to walk alone on his path of truth and righteousness but the conviction that his Lord is with him gives him strength and keeps him going. He does not recognise non-Allah as his true lord and does not stretch forward his hand before him in supplication. This safeguards his self-respect, gives him courage, and invigorates him. He believes that whatever comes to him, good, bad or indifferent, is from his true Lord. Hence he is an embodiment of patience and acceptance. He treats all human beings with love and affection and deals with them on the basis of respect for mankind, because he knows in his heart that the one and only Allah is the Creator of them all. All these moral excellences are due to the belief in the One-ness of Allah. Any system of life that is based on this true concept will be most sublime and exalted, will be a shelter of peace and well-being for everyone because this belief in the One-ness of Allah requires that the sovereignty of Allah and His authority be recognised and reflected in all spheres of life, i.e., civilization, culture, social organisation, economy, politics, law, justice, peace and war and His law should be the supreme law.

THE ISLAMIC CONCEPTION OF MONOTHEISM

The Islamic concept of the unity of the Godhead has been clearly enunciated in the Qur'an:

"Say: He is only One God. Lo! I am innocent of that which ye associate (with Him)."

[Qur'an, VI:19]

All prophets that preceded the final Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) had as the primary aim of their message the proclamation that there is one Allah and He alone is worthy of worship. The Prophet Joseph has been made to say to his fellow-prisoners:

*"Who hath commanded you
that ye worship none save Him.
This is the right religion,
but most men know not."*

[Qur'an, XII:40]

In another, *sūra* Allah has been described as asking the children of Adam:

"Am I not your Lord? They said: Yea, verily. We testify."

[Qur'an, VII:172]

Belief in one Allah is at the very basis of a Muslim's life and the Islamic social order. Belief in the unity of the god-head makes man what he is — the viceregent of Allah on earth. The best of men is he who is free from superstitions, free from pride, and god-fearing, because he realizes that he is accountable for his acts before the Sovereign of sovereigns. *Abdiyah* (worship of the Creator as His creature or creation) alone makes one a real man and he who is conscious of this fact achieves the pinnacle of human excellence.

The above discussion gives rise to the question: Whose creatures are we? Is it necessary that in order to attain perfection as a human being one should tie himself in submission to any one whom he considers superior to himself? Can he worship any other being or deity or a conglomeration of deities and feel that he will develop the ethical characteristics and attributes that would lead him to salvation in the Hereafter and ensure his prosperity and welfare in this world? The answer to this is definitely in the negative. A man can achieve perfection

only if he becomes a true servant of Allah, the Lord and Master of all existence. It is through the acceptance of Allah as the Creator and the Ultimate Sovereign that man can develop characteristics that would entitle him to be the finest of all beings.

I should like to emphasise a point that will enable us to appreciate the monotheistic concept of Islam. So far as the singularity of Allah is concerned, probably this point does not appear to carry much weight in as much as every thing in the universe is singular and carries features exclusive to itself that no other thing can ever possess. No two human beings are alike and each is different from the other in many different ways. What then, we might well ask, is so special in Allah being unique and how does the singularity of Allah affect our lives? If we ponder this question in depth the answer that we would get would be that the Islamic concept of monotheism alone provides the answer to our spiritual enquiry. The Qur'an has mentioned ninety-nine attributes of Allah, the most in any religion; and the distinction of the Islamic concept of monotheism is that we have to acknowledge Allah One with all His attributes. If we do this, our lives are bound to undergo a revolutionary change. The idolater confines himself to the worship of graven images that signify some particular attribute of Allah, believing that his worship of the manifestation of that particular attribute of Allah would lead him to salvation. This is what the pagans of Mecca also claimed. It was the final Messenger of Allah, who for the first time enunciated the concept of One Allah, with all His attributes as the integral part of His Being.

When we say *La Ilaha il lal-lah* (There is no god but Allah), what we mean is that there is no divinity except Allah. We must note that the only god is Allah, and the word Allah is unique. The Qur'an, as I have already stated has explained the nature of His attributes. In all other systems the concept of god-head does not include all attributes. The Qur'an also tells us plainly that only a Being Who is Eternal and Ineffable can be worthy of worship. He is *Qadir*, i.e. His Sovereignty and Power are beyond comprehension and infinite; He is not dependent upon anyone; and He is All-wise. He is the Absolute and Ultimate Lord. He is *Rabb*, Omniscient, Omnipresent, the Creator of all things and their Sustainer. No one can be an associate in His Lordship; He is *Kamil* (Perfect), *Adil* (Just). He is also the Judge deciding whom to reward and whom to punish. He is the Master to whom all of us have to return, and He has no partner or associate. And the attributes of Allah of which the overriding attribute is Compassion, have been beautifully summarized in what is known as *Ayat al-Kursi*.

While narrating the attributes of Allah, the Qur'an also tells us that there is no being, as the above verse has made clear, that can share His attributes. We can then well gauge what changes belief in the Islamic concept of monotheism can bring about in human life and society. One principal consequence of this concept is that man, having acknowledged the supreme Sovereignty of Allah, will automatically find himself accountable and eschew sin and impiety. He will watch every act of his to see whether it conforms to divine injunctions. When he acts in accordance with the dictates of Allah his acts are cast in a particular mould and he will then be safe from evil.

An individual who affirms his faith in Allah is never a victim to disappointment for he is sure that the door of compassion is always open and Allah is the Lord of all that is visible or hidden in the Universe. If Allah blesses him He shall want for nothing and He shall have all his wishes fulfilled. A true believer is always courageous and fearless, since he is only afraid of Allah and cannot afford to incur His displeasure. His unshakeable faith in Allah makes him shed his fear of all others. Furthermore, he never succumbs to pride: he is always humble, courteous, and considerate towards others. He is fully conscious of the fact that Allah is displeased with those who are arrogant and haughty. He regards all men as equals and believes that all men created by the Sovereign of sovereigns (*Ahkam al-Hākimīn*) are worthy of respect. If among human beings some are greater and worthier of respect, they will be so because they are more virtuous, God-fearing and learned. All other criteria of greatness save these are false and untenable: race, colour, wealth, family eminence or country constitute no criterion for personal worth or respect. It is this kind of belief that makes man impervious to worldly advantages and his eyes and mind remain focused on the Hereafter.

Once we ponder the implications of monotheism as brought out by Islam, we can better appreciate how profound and all-pervading its influence upon mankind is. Any society or culture that has the belief in Allah as its basis would be viable and dynamic and a real blessing for mankind: and it is this characteristic of Islam that distinguishes it from other cultures and religions.

UNITY OF GODHEAD AND CENTRALISM

Allah is One, the only One. He has no associate whatsoever — no peer. Islam is our *Dīn* (the complete way of life). And this *Dīn* has a system all its own. The basis of this *Dīn* is *Tauheed* i.e., belief in and acknowledgement of the truth that there is One God and that is Allah. *Tauheed* illumines the whole system of Islam. *Tauheed* is, in it, like the heart in the human body. We are well aware of the fact that if the heart grows weak and gets unwell, the whole human physique becomes riddled with diseases of all sorts and becomes disabled. On the contrary, if the heart is sound and healthy, the human body is also healthy. If you realize this simple fact, there should be no difficulty in understanding that if *Tauheed* is divorced from the Islamic system the latter will instantly fall to pieces.

The edifice of *Dīn* (the Islamic way of life) rests on three things, namely, *Tauheed*, the institution of Prophethood and the life Hereafter. But the fact is that the latter two follow from, and are subservient to, *Tauheed*. The belief in Prophethood is implicit in the belief in *Tauheed* which demands that Allah alone should be taken as the Law-giver. This conviction *ipso facto* leads to the corollary that Allah reveals His laws and injunctions through His prophets. It is thus abundantly clear that it is an integral part of *Tauheed* to believe in and to follow the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) as the last Messenger of Allah. Whosoever believes and says that Allah is One and then flouts the *Sunnah*, is definitely a pagan, having nothing to do with *Tauheed*. When we accept religious reality in this manner, it becomes clear as broad daylight that Prophethood is implied in *Tauheed*. Precisely the same is the case with the belief in the Hereafter, which is wholly a part of *Tauheed*. Its very spirit stems from *Tauheed*. In the Holy Qur'ān the two are often mentioned together, indicating their essential link. At any rate, it goes to establish that *Dīn*, the whole system of Islam, is dependent upon *Tauheed*. If *Dīn* is the body, *Tauheed* is its soul. If *Dīn* is taken for an eye, *Tauheed* is the focus of sight.

Allah is One, and the Absolute One, and He is absolutely beyond having any associate or peer at all.

The be-all and the end-all of the mission of all prophets, through the ages, was to proclaim and to propagate *Tauheed*. Their consistent call towards *Tauheed* always met with a storm of mass resistance. But these great and glorious servants of Allah never heeded even the most virulent opposition and making indescribable sacrifices, they showed unto mankind the Straight Path, which is the manifestation, pure and simple, of *Tauheed*.

We should feel convinced that the supreme right is the acceptance of the

right of Allah. The belief in *Tauheed* is a total acceptance of this right. It is the very basis of all justice and equity. Truly speaking, nobody who denies or disregards this right can do justice to any other right. As a matter of fact, whenever any person is deprived in any manner of the knowledge, of this supreme right, he becomes susceptible to injustice and tyranny to that extent. The atrocities perpetrated by the modern man on his fellow-beings are a clear proof of this fact.

Allah is One, the only One, and He is absolutely above and beyond having any associate whatsoever.

This is the foundation of the Muslim's belief and is the foundation of Islam. The *Dīn* starts here and ends here. It constitutes the whole sphere of Islam, the sphere within which alone the *Dīn* is secure and intact. To be sure, *Tauheed* is by no means just a part of the *Dīn*. As we have seen it embraces the whole of it. It needs to be reiterated, even at the risk of repetition, that all prophets of Allah made *Tauheed* the starting-point of their mission and that they also crowned their life-long effort with *Tauheed*.

The whole Qur'ān is imbued with the spirit and the teachings of *Tauheed* but some *sūras* are conspicuously enwrapped in *Tauheed*. The Qur'ān starts as well as finishes by declaring the glory of *Tauheed*.

Sūra al-Fātihah or "The Opening" is saturated with the sublimity of human submission to the Creator:

*"In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.
Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds;
The Beneficent, the Merciful;
Owner of the Day of Judgement;
Thee (alone) we worship; Thee (alone) we ask for help;
Show us the straight path;
The path of those whom Thou hast favoured;
Not (the path) of those who earn Thine anger nor
of those who go astray."*

[Qur'ān, I:1-7]

Towards the end of the Qur'ān, after the *sūra* "Help" (CX) which predicts the conquest of Mecca and the *sūra* "Perish" (CXI) which forewarns of the defeat of evil, there occurs the *sūra* "The Sincere Religion" (CXII) which is the quintessence of *Tauheed*:

*"Say: He is Allah, the One!
Allah, the eternally Besought of all! He begetteth
not nor was begotten.
And there is none comparable unto Him."*

[Qur'ān, CXII:1-4]

Here is that pivotal point of *Tauheed*, expressed so eloquently and indicating fully that the *Dīn* has attained its centre. Thereafter come the last two *sūras*:

“Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of Daybreak; From the evil of that which He created; From the evil of the darkness when it is intense, And from the evil of malignant withcraft, And from the evil of the envier when he envieth.”

[Qur’ān, CXIII:1–5]

and then the last *sūra*:

*“Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind,
The King of mankind,
The God of mankind,
From the evil of the sneaking whisperer,
Who whispereth in the hearts of mankind,
Of the jinn and of mankind.”*

[Qur’ān, CXIV:1–6]

The last quoted two *sūras* serve to safeguard the treasure of *Tauheed* from the promptings of the devil. As we know, it is the first and foremost endeavour of the devil to make man deviate from the point of *Tauheed*, to make him a pagan and to fetter him with servitude to his fellow-beings. By moving away from the centre and by indulging in escapism from *Tauheed* and Islam, man is compelled to bow to the power of even the most common kind.

On the contrary, the man who is a servant of Allah, whose belief in *Tauheed* is firm and unflinching, and whose goal is nothing but *Tauheed*, rejects all worldly power and owes his allegiance only to Allah.

Him alone does he take as the Creator of both the worlds. Him alone does he offer his submission. In Him alone does he repose his trust and from Him alone does he seek all help.

It is the height of submission that man should make total and unreserved surrender to Allah. To Him should he turn in distress and to Him should he look up in all circumstances. Man should mould his likes and dislikes in accordance with the injunctions of Allah and his love for Him should be above every other love, supreme in every sense indeed. The uniqueness of Allah in respect of His Self, His Attributes and His Rights should be acknowledged both in word and deed, scrupulously abstaining from paganism, be it in the form of worshipping an angel, a jinn, a prophet, a saint, a leader or self. Allah says:

“This is My Straight path, so follow it. Follow not other ways, lest ye be parted from His way.”

[Qur’ān, VI:153]

It would be pertinent to recall here that we are pledged to establish the rule of Allah in the world of Islam. He did grant us freedom from foreign yoke, but pause for a moment to ponder what law is being followed by us at present.

We should understand it, believe it and consider it the call of destiny, that if we go back upon our promise, divergence from the centre will be the result and such divergence is bound to spell disaster.

REVELATION OF THE WORD OF ALLAH

It is our firm belief that Allah, the Most Exalted, has been giving His dictates and His guidance to His prophets and messengers through revelation. He says in the Holy Qur'ān:

“Lo! We inspire thee as We inspired Noah and the prophets after him, as We inspired Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and Jesus and Job and Jonah and Aaron and Solomon, and as we imparted unto David the Psalms;”

[Qur'ān, IV:163]

In the same manner it is our belief — an essential element in our *Īmān* — that this continuous process of revelation culminated in that sacred person who has been called ‘the Seal of Prophets’. Usually it is thought that mere faith in the truth of revelation and in its being divine is enough for a man to be a true Muslim. But a little deliberation will show that the matter demands much greater thought and serious contemplation.

Before moving forward in the matter, one should make a careful note of the basic fact that in Islam every belief is directly linked with and related to human life and the realities of life. Islam attaches no importance to those ideas, beliefs and spiritual or metaphysical concepts which have no bearing on the life of man. How does one's acceptance of the truth of revelation affect his day-to-day practical life? An analogy may make this abstract matter easy to understand. Let us for a moment say that man's state in this universe is that of a new comer in a city who does not yet know its safe spots where he can pass his days; safe from lurking dangers. Nor does he know its main-street, its lanes and by-lanes or the areas from where he can obtain his food and other provisions. Such a stranger and new comer does have a few options to find his way about. Either he uses his own reason and common sense and draws a workable map of this alien city, fixes the layout of its high street and other streets and lanes, marks on it, its safe as well as dangerous spots and seeks out the various places of the city from where to obtain his victuals and other necessities. If the stranger in question depends entirely on his personal effort and his own common sense he will inevitably have to devote a major part of his life-span to this quest and it is quite likely that he may suddenly come across a major catastrophe or a dangerous hurdle during this personal quest. Thus this option is not a sure means of success. Now the other alternative open to him is to look for a guide. The question is whom to accept as the guide? And who rightfully deserves this status? Without going into detail I would like to say, at this juncture, that it is not just a matter of being a man

with right beliefs. The history of past centuries bears witness to the fact that Allah has appointed true leaders to guide mankind in every age, and every important phase of human history; leaders who were fully informed through revelation, of likely danger spots and fatal pitfalls, and the paths that would ensure not only a safe passage through life but would lead him, unfailingly, to lasting welfare and well-being. Faith in such a leader is in reality firm faith in the truth and correctness of the knowledge which Allah has imparted to his prophets through revelation. This means that *Īmān* in the fountain-head of knowledge, the Glorious and Exalted Being of Allah, full faith in the Word revealed by Him and in the truth of the trustee of this Word, His messenger, are two facets of the same reality and are inter-related and inseparable components of one supreme Truth.

When we actively move on in life, every one of us, at one time or the other is confronted with a situation or a problem where his need for guidance becomes compulsive. Those amongst us who prefer in such situations to depend on their own intelligence and wisdom and act accordingly are, I have no hesitation in making this statement, taking the road which inevitably leads to total failure and self-destruction. And about those amongst men, who do what they see others doing and who blindly and without proper enquiry accept to be led by others, this verse of the Holy Qur'ān has to say this:

“Our Lord! Lo! we obeyed our princes and great men, and they misled us from the Way. Our Lord! Oh, give them double torment and curse them with a mighty curse.”

[Qur'ān, XXXIII:67,68]

Besides these two alternate courses of action, there is a third way open to man — this path which is completely secure and is a guarantee against even the remotest chance of spiritual death is the safe path which one finds when he elects to follow the true guidance of the prophets of Allah. That path is, indeed, the path shown to man by divine revelation. In the Holy Qur'ān, Allah the Most Exalted has categorically affirmed that the Holy Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him) possessed these special attributes:

“He will enjoin on them that which is right and forbid them that which is wrong. He will make lawful for them all good things and prohibit for them only the foul; and he will relieve them of their burden and the fetters that they used to wear. Then those who believe in him, and honour him, and help him, and follow the light which is sent down with him: they are the successful.”

[Qur'ān, VII:157]

This verse makes it explicit that following the revealed Word and the Messenger to whom the Word is revealed is the only path that leads man to salvation.

In the contemporary world the Muslim *Ummah* is in the grip of dire adversity and we are completely encircled by a host of dangers. Our plight has

come to such a grave point that we are not safe even amongst our own people. And that distinctive feature is missing in our individual and collective life about which the Qur'an says "For then, there is no fear and no grief."

We are desperately dependent on others for our lives, for the safety of our nations and countries, indeed our very homes and despite our great numbers and vast natural and financial resources we have chosen for ourselves almost the lowliest place in the comity of nations. We have come down from the high position of the leadership of mankind and are now no more than beggarly dependents and camp-followers of others. Like puppets we dance to the tunes of our masters on whose dole of security assistance depends our continued existence. The reason for all this adversity, this abject wretchedness, is that we have hidden away the bright sun of revelation whose light would have been a source of well-being and a breath of life and have accepted the leadership of nations that have themselves lost the way.

What greater misfortune for us than the degradation that we look up to those nations for leadership who in reality stand in need of our guidance. If we give our hand in their hand, follow them and ignore that luminous hand which the Lord of the heavens and earth, has kept hidden under our sleeve, we will not only continue to suffer dire adversity and degradation in this world, but will be put to great shame and ignominy when we come up before Allah on the Day of Judgement. We will continue cursing our waywardness besides damning our self-appointed leaders. And Allah's curse will envelop us for ever and for ever.

It is just Allah's act of gracious kindness that despite our ignoble depravity and our corrupt state He has not yet decided to put the seal of damnation on our hearts to punish us for turning our faces away from the light of revelation. There is still some time left to us. If we as individuals – every one of us Muslims and the Muslim *Ummah* as a whole – resolve to avail of this respite and make Allah's revealed Word, our guide, and let its glorious light lead us, our situation will change in no time. We can regain the honour we have lost and the prestige and pre-eminence amongst nations that was once ours. But for that it is imperative that we renew our faith in the leadership of Allah's last Messenger, who brought His Word to us and to organise-ourselves as an *Ummah* under the banner of our true faith.

I pray that Allah, in His infinite Mercy, may give us the capability to avail of this period of grace and restore to us our days of glory. Amen!

THE CONCEPT OF THE HEREAFTER AND HUMAN CONDUCT

Three beliefs are of basic importance in Islam. These are: i) the unity of godhead, ii) finality of prophethood in the person of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him), and iii) accountability on the Day of Judgement. Of these three, accountability in the Hereafter deserves special consideration because if a person does not believe in it, he will be of the view that this worldly life is an end in itself. Such a view is totally erroneous and based upon complete ignorance and lack of true perception. The view that death is the end of every thing implies that there is no after-life and consequently no final accountability. Then why should one need to have faith in Allah and belief in the prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him)? Why should one not make the best of one's life and enjoy it to his heart's content rather than eschew indulging his whims and lusts which would be a necessary consequence of believing in Allah and His final Messenger?

It is for this reason that the Qur'ān regards belief in the Hereafter as the culminating point of true faith. How far a person's faith is firmly rooted in his heart and how far he is prepared to discipline and purify his person is determined by the extent of his fear of final accountability. Allah Himself says:

"And lo! those who believe not in the Hereafter are indeed astray from the path."

[Qur'ān, XXIII:74]

The pagans and the unbelievers made all types of foolish demands on the Holy Prophet and said that they would accept him as a Messenger if he showed them the signs they asked for. One of these demands has been specifically referred to in the Holy Qur'ān:

"Nay, but everyone of them desireth that he should be given open pages (from Allah)."

[Qur'ān, LXXIV:52]

The Qur'ān itself dismisses this demand as brazen-faced rejection of the Hereafter. Allah says in this context:

"Nay, verily. They fear not the Hereafter."

[Qur'ān, LXXIV:53]

The importance accorded to the concept of the Hereafter can well be judged from the fact that while succinctly recounting his major attributes in the first *sūra* entitled *The Opening*, Allah has made a specific mention of one i.e., the Master of the Day of Doom. In the *sūra* II:2, belief in the Qur'ān is made dependent upon belief in the Unseen, performing the obligatory prayer and expending of what Allah has provided man. Along with these requisites of true faith is mentioned the belief in the Hereafter. The Qur'ān lays the maximum emphasis on the fact that man's life in this world is transitory and for a very limited period:

"And ye will be brought back to the Knower of the invisible and the visible, and He will tell you what ye used to do."

[Qur'ān, IX:105]

And man is told in unequivocal words that on the Day of Judgement there will be total reckoning of man's doings in his worldly life:

*"Lo! unto Us is their return;
And Ours their reckoning."*

[Qur'ān, LXXXVIII:25,26]

This proclamation implies that man will be awarded what he has earned:

*"And that his effort will be seen,
And afterward he will be repaid for it
with fullest payment;"*

[Qur'ān, LIII:40,41]

On that day no intercession will succeed, nor will anyone be able to plead on behalf of another person:

"On the Day when a man fleeth from his brother; And his mother and his father And his wife and his children; Every man that day will have concern enough to make him heedless (of others)."

[Qur'ān, LXXX:34-37]

And, if anyone harbours the vain hope that he might escape punishment somehow or the other, he is suffering from delusion:

"As for those who disbelieve, lo! if all that is in the earth were theirs, and as much again therewith, to ransom them from the doom on the Day of Resurrection, it would not be accepted from them."

[Qur'ān, V:36]

And the verdict announced on that Day of Reckoning will be eternal. It will stand for ever and ever – never to be changed a whit:

“This is the day of Immortality.”

[Qur’ān, L:34]

The concept of the Hereafter, contained in the verses quoted here if sincerely and truthfully accepted and kept in view, is bound to have a positive impact on the life of the believer. He who believes in it will be completely transformed and his life-style, his thoughts and deeds, his behaviour, his social manners will clearly manifest that he sincerely believes that Allah is the Lord of the Universe, its sole Creator and Sustainer, and that His final Messenger is the eternal guide of mankind and also that after this earthly life he will have to appear before his Lord and Creator to give an account of his earthly life and get his recompense or retribution as a return for his deeds in life. Such a person will surely mould his life according to the teachings of Allah’s true faith.

It is not at all difficult to visualise the station of such a man in this life. He will be like a gem that glows in darkness – a man of high morality and personal excellence. A nation that adheres to this concept of life will be like a beacon of light in the stormy ocean of disbelief and vice.

We all know why the Muslim world is on the decline and why we have lost our position of honour in the comity of nations. The reason for our plight is that our life as an *Ummah* no longer conforms to the precepts of our religion. We do not act as people who believe in Allah and in the Day of Doom. We do not seem to fear the final reckoning either individually or as an *Ummah*.

There is still time for us to get out of our ignominy and achieve greatness. What we need is a total revolution in our individual and collective ethos. We have to return to the fold of our true faith. We have to reconstruct our lives on the basis of the three beliefs mentioned at the beginning of this discourse. Let us vow before Allah that we will, from today, make Qur’ān our supreme guide and tread along the path which has been laid before us by the Holy Prophet and will always keep the Day of Doom before our mind’s eye. We will act as true followers of Islam and our sole aim in this life will be to work for an honourable recompense in the Hereafter.

**BELIEF IS LIGHT:
DISBELIEF IS DARKNESS**

*(The aim of the Qur'ān is to convert the darkness of
disbelief into the light of belief)*

The words, *Īmān* and *Kufr*, are two words of the human vocabulary and both are entirely contrary to each other by virtue of meaning and implications. What these two words denote cannot co-exist in one human life at the same time. That is to say, it is not possible that one individual would be a man of *Īmān* or faith and a *Kāfir* (infidel) simultaneously. Nor is it possible that in the heart of an individual should dwell together the love of Allah and a zest for non-Allah. If we examine the history of the world in depth in the light of facts and events, we shall see that each moment of history has been characterized by a conflict between two forces, and the human history of the last one thousand four hundred and odd years etches out this conflict between the opposing forces of faith and ignorance or anti-faith. During the last fourteen hundred years Islam has given a very clear and comprehensive concept of faith and, by defining faith and anti-faith, brought about a great revolution in thought, introducing man to the light that is faith. Human life was given a meaning and purpose that was unknown before.

The moment man comes into this world he sees before him the vast panorama of the universe. Each particle of this universe tells man that everything he sees around himself has been tailor-made for his use. There are, moreover, two kinds of individuals in the world to whom all that exists in the world carries a totally different kind of appeal. The first category is of those who recognize that there is an ultimate meaning and purpose in all this becoming. The second category is of those who do not for a moment stop to consider who is the benefactor who has given us all this without our asking. Anyone who refuses to think about all these gifts and about the One who has given them to us would be incapable of requiting all that Allah has endowed man with. Such individuals as are oblivious of the gifts of Nature and are engrossed in their own selfish designs have been mentioned thus in the Qur'ān:

*"While those who disbelieve take their comfort in this life and eat even
as the cattle eat,"*

[Qur'ān, XLVII:12]

Such people, according to the Qur'ān, are *Kafirs* (those who do not believe).

These individuals who neither know nor recognise Allah nor offer their thanks to Him, and who in the words of the Qur'ān are farther gone than animals,

do not only disbelieve in Allah but are deprived through their callousness of the capacity ever to know the truth about themselves.

"Those who forgot Allah, therefore He caused them to forget their souls." [Qur'ān, LIX:19]

Let us consider the misfortune and ill-luck of the person who neither knows himself nor knows Allah, nor does he know what is the relationship between the universe and its Creator. His state of ignorance and unawareness is described in the Qur'ān as follows:

"Layer upon layer of darkness. When he holdeth out his hand," [Qur'ān, XXIV:40]

Contrasted to this unfortunate and misguided man who is self-destructive is the person who recognises his Lord and knows his Benefactor and avails of His countless bounties. He bows his head in deep gratitude. He appreciates the fact that all the divine munificences are for his survival and well-being. As a recompense of his thankfulness to his Lord, Allah, who is the Light of the heavens and earth fills his being with the holy light and bestows upon him true discernment — a seeing eye and an understanding heart. The light of true belief that is given to him enables him to see himself and realise the nature of his being. He also discovers who his benefactor is and who has created this universe and why. He becomes aware of his true station in the universe, and the task to which he has been assigned by his Creator.

This recognition of what man owes to Allah, his discovery of his own true self and recognition of truth is in fact the light which is known by the name of *Īmān* (belief). Addressing the Holy Prophet, Allah has said:

"Thou knewest not what the Scripture was, nor what the Faith. But We have made it a light whereby We guide whom We will of Our bondmen."

[Qur'ān, XLII:52]

Let us ponder belief (*Īmān*) once again. The Holy Prophet has said, *Īmān* means the fulfilment of some obligations, conformity to principles and precepts and acting according to some injunctions and teachings. He who has done all this has perfected his faith and he who fell short of them, remained imperfect in his *Īmān*.

The sum total of these obligations, principles, precepts and injunctions constitutes the *Shari'ah*. The Holy Prophet has said about his own *Shari'ah*:

"This radiant Shari'ah whose light is bright as the day".

Life is a gift of Allah and like all other gifts, it is also a test for man. The

religious life of man is a continuing test. On one side are arrayed comforts and luxuries and on the other trials and tribulations. In both instances man has to pass through severe trials. What enables man to face up to the challenges posed by both is the power of faith. A man devoid of true faith will not only fail to measure up to the challenge but also not be able to enjoy properly the comforts of life. The absence of *Īmān* is synonymous with purposelessness. A person devoid of *Īmān* is like a traveller who is suffering the hardship of a narrow and tenuous path but who, being unaware of his destination, cannot enjoy the pleasure of having attained his goal. In the hard paths of life, in the complexities of problems, in the face of lack of material resources what sustains a man and saves him from going astray and enables him to keep his head high is the light of faith. The light of faith is like the morning light which dispels the darkness and gloom of the night of despair.

The objective of the Book of Guidance – that is the Qur'ān – is to transform the darkness of non-faith into the light of faith. Allah has said about the Qur'ān:

“(This is) a Scripture which We have revealed unto thee (Muhammad) that thereby thou mayst bring forth mankind from darkness unto light.”

[Qur'ān, XIV:1]

The Holy Prophet has enumerated six basic components of the true faith:

1. Belief in Allah.
2. Belief in His Angels.
3. Belief in His Scriptures.
4. Belief in His Prophets.
5. Belief in the Day of Judgement.
6. Belief in Destiny.

According to all the exponents of the *Hadīth*, true belief according to *Shari'ah* comprises attestation by the heart (*tasdiq bi'l janan*), oral testification (*iqrar bi'l lisan*), and adherence in practice to the obligatory religious duties. In other words, true faith comprises firm and active belief in the final Messenger of Allah and the total message he has brought for mankind.

THE FIRM FAITH

The thing we have to understand about the mission of the prophets of Allah is that Allah wants full belief and unshakeable faith in the principles of truth and righteousness that the prophets of Allah presented to their respective peoples for their guidance. They called people to Allah because the fountain-head of all human deeds and actions is what man believes in and if man's faith is not firm and strong he is incapable of acting right. It is said in the Holy Qur'an:

"O ye who believe! Believe in Allah and His Messenger."

[Qur'an, IV: 136]

Here, in addition to the right belief which the believers obviously have, what they are being called to is complete and firm conviction in the truth of their belief. Good sense demands that before asking for strict adherence to a code or system of concepts its truth and the merit of having faith in it should be carefully assessed, because if we are not completely convinced of its superiority and excellence, it will not be possible for us to act on it with honesty and full self-confidence. A weak and uncertain idea or belief cannot leave any deep imprint on one's mind and conscience. And when the heart is not involved in a process of rectitude and purification, revolutionary changes in behaviour and conduct are hardly possible. The real purpose of faith is to reform the heart, which is the source of volition and action. It cannot be reformed without complete faith. Hence the prophetic invitation to mankind to obtain that knowledge and achieve that state of complete faith which can bring about the desired revolution in the world of thought and action. A special characteristic of true believers is that no doubt, whatever its nature or extent, can ever enter their hearts:

"The (true) believers are those only who believe in Allah and His Messenger and afterward doubt not."

[Qur'an, XLIX:15]

The doubt and uncertainty that has been mentioned in this verse, is that state of mind which is the opposite of firm belief. Ponder for a moment the belief in the One-ness of Allah which is the first and fundamental belief and tenet of Islam. If a man verbally professes to believe in this concept and claims to be committed to it, then his life should be completely without blemish in this respect and it should be completely above submission to any other power or

acceptance of its authority. Any other law except that of the One and Supreme Lord should be totally unacceptable to him. The whole pattern of his life should be in accord with the guidance He has sent through His chosen Messenger. He should refuse to accept that non-Allah can possess any of the attributes that are special to his true Lord and Master. One should keep going the process of self-examination to ensure that his desires or the priorities he has set for himself do not in any way negate or contravene his belief in the One-ness of Allah. If, despite our professions of true faith, we are afraid of non-Allah and consider somebody else to be capable of causing us profit or loss, our profession of faith in Allah obviously lacks genuineness. Such weak and infirm belief and such defective knowledge does not at all, deserve to be considered as firm and unwavering or above doubt. At best it may be called conventional belief. What Allah wants is not a belief which is a matter of mere formality but firm and irrevocable commitment to faith, and not a weak and shaky but a robust and firm-as-rock *Īmān*. That is why the Holy Prophet was commanded to:

"Say: Lo! the guidance of Allah (Himself) is Guidance."

[Qur'ān, II:120]

If our desires and our actions are not completely subordinate to the system of life that the Holy Prophet brought in the form of the Holy Qur'ān, we can never be blessed with the perfect faith and true belief. As the tree is judged by its fruit, in the same manner the firmness or the weakness of belief is assessed through deeds and actions. One special form of address Allah employs in the Holy Qur'ān is to talk of His blessings in such phrases as "If you are believers" — which means if you are true in your professions and possess true knowledge and faith. For instance:

"For ye will overcome them if ye are (indeed) believers."

[Qur'ān, III:139]

It means that supremacy and dominance are the fruits of perfect belief and true and firm faith, not of mere lack-lustre faith because as is obvious, Allah addressed the believers in this verse. So He wants to make perfect their faith and their will to obey Him. It is an obvious truth that it is a man's complete belief in the truth of a principle or canon that inspires him to decision and action, and endows him with courage and valour. When a man accepts the One-ness of Allah and the fact that the Holy Prophet was Allah's Messenger and enters the fold of Islam, he is not required only to adopt the Qur'ānic code of life in his individual capacity but it also becomes incumbent upon him to endeavour to enforce it in the social order of which he is a member. Now just ponder. How can a man who has not attained to that state of knowledge and belief which in Islamic terminology is called 'the firm faith' and has not as yet been able to accept its righteousness and truth from within his being and become totally committed to it—when still there are some nagging doubts which disturb his mind — be expected to honestly and devotedly call others to come and accept its code of life? Even if under the impact of the prevailing emotional

and intellectual environment he joins the band-wagon and becomes a fellow-traveller on the path of truth and righteousness, his manner will show that he lacks true motivation and his words will lack the ring of sincerity. The life of such a man can never be blessed with contentment or the sense of achievement, and his existence will be of no value to his fellow-Muslims.

We should always be conscious of the fact that the fountain-head of all individual and collective goodness and virtue is firm faith and perfect belief. The Holy Qur'ān describes the people who are endowed with the perfect belief in these words:

"The saying of (all true) believers when they appeal unto Allah and His Messenger to judge between them is only that they say: We hear and we obey. And such are the successful."

[Qur'ān, XXIV:51]

Obedience to Allah and His Messenger, which is without hesitation and is free of evasiveness, has no vacillation or neglect, no lethargy or lack of motivation, but is dynamic and active, is the sign of the perfect belief and a distinctive feature of the firm faith.

One important element of the true faith is acceptance of the world Hereafter. In fact it is the belief in the Day of Recompense and Retribution which brings about a change in our concept of life and we begin to realise that this world is not the end-all and that we will be required one day to give account of ourselves before Allah and that our being in its totality, exoteric as well as esoteric, is fully known to Him. And nothing we have ever done, big or small, can escape accountability. This realisation makes us conscious of our responsibility. We begin to feel that nothing, not even our life, belongs to us and that the real success is our success in the final accountability in the Hereafter, because this life is only a transient life and it is the life after death which will be eternal. But these moral qualities will not be achieved through a weak belief, but through the beneficence of a firm faith. That is why the Holy Qur'ān has described the attribute of the believers in relation to the Hereafter in these words:

"And are certain of the Hereafter."

[Qur'ān, II:4]

It means that Allah does not want a cursory or routine belief in the Hereafter or a casual concept of it but a firm, unshakeable, rock-solid, perfect belief, as if man is seeing the Day of Judgement and its spectacles with his own eyes. Without such complete belief, man can neither be truly God-fearing, nor will his moral character and his actions achieve the desired rectitude. That is why the word used in this context is (يُوقِنُونَ) instead of (يُؤْمِنُونَ) "have faith in the Hereafter" rather than "believe in the Hereafter".

Now if we act in a way which belies faith in the Hereafter we should conclude that our faith, for all practical purposes, has changed into vacillation and that we have failed to prove ourselves as having true faith in the Hereafter through our actions. This variance between word and deed is not the way of

true believers.

We don't have to go far in search of causes, when we see a flaw in our action or a shortcoming in our moral character. We should at once begin to take a stock of our faith and see whether any weakness has crept therein without our being aware of it. Let us make sure that we have not moved away from our position of firm faith in the One-ness of Allah, the divine assignation of the Holy Prophet and the Day of Judgement.

WHAT ISLAM EXPECTS OF ITS FOLLOWERS

The true and infallible guide, the Holy Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him) conveyed to mankind the message of Allah, and he himself practised it in letter and spirit. This message from Allah is the last to come from Him, which he has made to descend upon man in the Holy Qur'ān. Man has been informed in unequivocal terms that the Holy Prophet is the final Messenger and the Holy Qur'ān the last and most complete word of Allah. The Holy Prophet has been assigned to serve as the guide for all time and the Qur'ān will be Allah's eternal guidance to mankind. Allah has time and again enumerated the responsibilities that devolved upon the Holy Prophet in the Qur'ān. At one place it is said:

"A Messenger of their own, to recite unto them His revelations and to make them grow, and to teach them the Scripture and Wisdom,"

[Qur'ān, LXII:2]

The question here arises whether the purification of human beings and the teaching of the Book and the Wisdom was an end in itself or was it meant to prepare the believers for a higher objective. The Qur'ān has explained the purpose and significance of the assignation of the Holy Prophet as follows:

"He it is Who hath sent His Messenger with the guidance and the religion of Truth, that He may cause it to prevail over all religion."

[Qur'ān, XLVIII:28]

It is clear from the foregoing verse that the responsibilities of the Prophet were not confined only to educating and training the Muslims in Islamic faith (this was, of course, a necessary preamble) but the ultimate transcendent responsibility, was to organise and make ready a body of men which would carry on the Mission of the Prophet after him and would set a precedent for all times to come, of taking the message of Islam to all peoples of the world. The institution of prophethood was terminated with the assignation of the Holy Prophet — the Seal of Messengers. Consequently it was imperative to make substitute arrangements on a permanent footing. Hence the Muslims were told:

"Ye are the best community that hath been raised

up for mankind."

[Qur'ān, III:110]

It is thus obvious that what Islam expects of its followers is that they should follow the teachings and the precepts of the Holy Prophet in such a way that they serve as models of righteousness and truth to humanity and discharge the responsibility of guiding and instructing fellow-men.

In other words, the responsibility of Muslims is of a dual nature: To follow the Islamic *Shari'ah* and to inform others of the teachings of Islam. One cardinal principle which has been given to Muslims to enable them to achieve moral and spiritual superiority over all other human beings is the criterion of right and wrong – a code of moral values to which they must conform and the list of vices and bad things they must abstain from. These they would take to other people as a gift and a warning from Allah. Thus Islam does not tell its followers to shut their doors against the flood and keep themselves dry. They are required to dam this flood of vice and save other people from being drowned in paganism and moral vileness. Leading the lives of hermits and anchorites is against the basic tenets of Islam which expects its true believers to live full lives as human beings and yet safeguard their persons against all moral vice and folly. Not only that. It is their duty to rescue their fellow-men from the evil of unbelief and the resultant life of licence, callousness, falsehood and exploitation. It expects its followers to hold aloft the torch of truth, right beliefs, human dignity, moral virtue, and the equality and fraternity of man.

Please believe me that these primary responsibilities cannot be discharged effectively if we Muslims are weak, hapless and demoralised. Such a state is unworthy, both of Islam and Muslims.

Allah has said in the Holy Qur'ān:

"For ye will overcome them if ye are (indeed) believers."

[Qur'ān, III:139]

Allah's covenant is eternally true and as long as the Muslims do not act as true believers and become dominant they will not be able to fulfil their duty "to bid honour and forbid dishonour". The Islamic world cannot hope to achieve a position of honour unless the Muslims revolutionise their lives. We have emerged from centuries of social and political slavery and backwardness. Other nations are far ahead of us in all aspects of life. We have to catch up with them and for this we will have to move faster than all of them. The present generation has inherited a situation which is full of opportunity and poses a challenge. Not only is it our responsibility to work for establishing a new order in our own respective societies in conformity with the socio-moral principles of Islam but to make it exemplary so that the rest of the world is convinced of the eternal viability of Islam and accepts it as the remedy of all maladies which the present-

day disillusioned world is suffering from.

Allah be thanked that all Muslims of the world are now drawing closer to one another and the significance of holding fast to Islam is now becoming clear to all Muslims. They have at last woken up to the fact that they have no friends outside the Islamic world. Our so-called friends will profess friendship as long as it serves their purpose and not a moment longer. The basic things which the Muslim world should now cultivate are: firm faith in Allah, complete solidarity and unity in our ranks and the proper utilisation of our limitless natural resources. Once Muslims forge unity within their ranks and catch up with the rest of the world in science and technology, they can once again achieve a position of honour amongst the comity of nations. It would then be possible for them to carry the message of Islam to non-Muslims in a far more convincing manner. And we must train a body of men in the Book and the Wisdom to carry the torch of Islam to all the corners of the world. May I assure my brethren in Islam that the world which has suffered from the extremes of licentious capitalism on the one hand, and the total suppression of totalitarianism on the other, wants a viable system of values that can help man live in peace and righteousness. If we become worthy of the great religion that Allah has blessed us with, we will be able as free men, to project its universal truth to our fellow human beings effectively. I assure you that the world is now ready for this great religion. Let us make the Qur'an our guide and search for new avenues. Let us follow in the footsteps of the true believers of early Islam who gave to the world the message of well-being in this world and of salvation in the Hereafter. Let us undertake the holy endeavour to usher in the golden era of Islamic revival and Muslim pre-eminence.

May Allah the Almighty grant us the capacity to follow the precepts of the Qur'an and to become worthy of our religion and of our eternal guide, the most perfect man in human history – Allah's final Messenger. Amen!

PLANNING FOR THE HEREAFTER

No human person has ever been or will ever be completely free of care or anxiety. If one person is after amassing wealth, there is another who is in hot pursuit of piling up worldly goods and building up an estate. If 'A' is working full-time to win prestige and eminence in society, 'B' is pining for political power and authority. Everyone one meets is in the grip of some worry. There is nobody who has no unfulfilled ambition or wish to gnaw at his mind. Undeniably as man has been given the power of perception and consciousness, in the same manner he has been endowed by Allah with the power to reason and to think. Consequently a totally unthinking life is not only not possible, it is also absolutely contrary to the natural disposition of man. Negligence, irresponsibility and thoughtlessness are highly deplorable from the moral and religious point of view. Of course what needs to be determined is the matters that deserve to be thought about or which are important enough for us to attend to. Are the things in the pursuit of which we normally expend all our energies really worthwhile? Are they really advantageous for us? Can they in fact rid us of some serious affliction and thereby bestow upon us enduring peace and tranquillity? If the answer is no, they are not so – and this is in truth the right answer – then is it wise on our part to waste our precious lives in such utterly useless pursuits?

The Holy Qur'an fixes a specific goal for those who keep engrossed in the quest of unreal and transitory things and who concentrate their entire effort and energy on obtaining perishable goods of this fleeting world and points to the real cause of their going astray in these words:

*"Nay, but ye do love the fleeting Now,
And neglect the Hereafter."*

(Qur'an, LXXV:20-21)

In other words, our love for this earthly life in preference to the Hereafter has involved us in this totally useless pursuit.

Reason would require man to put value on things that are real and everlasting and to work for them. Prudence demands that when the choice is between the present and the future the latter should have precedence over the former on the basis of its durability, permanence and everlastingness. Why? Because transitory and perishable things despite the immense immediate pleasure and happiness that they bring along with them do not and should not deserve to be preferred to enduring and eternal well-being. It is a sign of extreme moral

and spiritual weakness to find the current pleasure and happiness more attractive and alluring than an eternal state of well-being merely because that one is here and now with its lure of cash value and the other is a promise. High-mindedness would require us to undergo with grit and determination all toil and hardship that is our present lot, to ensure pleasurable and eternally happy future. It would make us face all adversity and affliction with fortitude and resilience because we have, in front of us, a lofty objective and a high aim. Just ponder. A valiant soldier undergoes the hardships of the battlefield and stakes his all, including his life. Why? Because spread out before his eyes is a vast empire. Why does a trader bring his goods to the market? Because he expects profit in the future.

If human endeavour is viewed in its entirety it will be seen that the natural method of achieving real success is to accept some hardship and inconvenience to save oneself from some bigger hardship and misery that would otherwise be inevitable, and to sacrifice transitory success and short term gain, which is immediately available, to achieve enduring happiness and everlasting future triumph. This is a truth which nobody can afford to reject. But our self-deceit has become so chronic and incurable that the be-all and the end-all of all our desires and expectations are those puny things which are transitory and of little value whose lustre is no more than the fading light of the late afternoon. The Holy Qur'an has this to say about our thoughtlessness:

"But ye prefer the life of the world, Although the Hereafter is better and more lasting."

(Qur'an, LXXXVII:16-17)

Change in our perspective and our forgetfulness of life in the Hereafter has made us crazy about this world and the short-lived pleasures that it offers and this mad rush for momentary thrills has created a world-wide crisis. All our endeavour is directed towards immediate objectives. This general attitude has made life so competitive that the human mind is getting too agitated and too confounded. Life is now like an unquenchable thirst, and the fulfilment of day-to-day needs is like the false appetite – the more one eats the more does one feel hungry. The needs keep growing, the demands of the flesh are becoming ever more urgent and ever more diverse. In this deluge of greed and avarice everybody's personal goals seem to recede further and further. Everybody feels that he is caught up in the hell of unfulfilled desires and that his toil is both endless and fruitless.

Having forgotten the Hereafter, man has made this world and its pleasures his sole aim of life. It is a fact that the attitude and the life-perspective of those who believe in the Hereafter and who think about the future life is totally different. They fully realise that the goods and pleasures of their present life, however attractive and pleasurable they may be, are in actual fact transitory and therefore of little value. They consider it a great vice to forget the Hereafter and to be involved in the mad race to get hold of these worldly things.

What we need is to ponder this verse of the Holy Qur'an:

*"O mankind! Your rebellion is
only against yourselves.
(Ye have) enjoyment of the life of the world:
then unto Us is your return
and We shall proclaim unto you
what ye used to do."*

(Qur'an, X:23)

No doubt this verse is addressed to those who disbelieve in the Hereafter. But two facts must be kept in view even by the believers. One, that this world is transitory and all that it contains – its pleasures, its luxuries, its attractions – are temporary and short-lived. And two, that the life journey, however long it may be, is after all, a journey and its destination is the Hereafter. Every human person has to return to it where every particle will be accounted for, where every man will be answerable for each and every thing he did in his earthly life. Everyone will face the inexorable law of Recompense and Retribution.

When a believer thinks of the Day of Judgement, the flames of greed and avarice get extinguished within him, the high edifice of pride and arrogance crumbles down and becomes level with the ground. The impulse to deal unfairly with fellow-beings and to exploit others is erased from the mind and he shudders at the thought of accountability. The sense of sinfulness fills his being and tears begin to flow from his eyes. He begins to take a stock of himself and the process of self-reckoning starts within him. And he pauses at every step to ponder whether what he intends doing is good in the eyes of Allah or is sinful. He is grateful to Allah for the respect and the eminence he has been blessed with and is thankful for all happiness and pleasure that he has been blessed with. And then he wonders whether he really deserves all that he has received. And he thinks about the life to come. What will happen there? Will his record be placed in his right hand or in his left hand? How will he cross the straight Bridge? What will be the result of the evaluation of his life? These thoughts terrify him.

Hadrat Ata narrates that one day he and Hadrat Umair (may Allah be happy with them both) went to see the Mother of the Faithful, Hadrat Ayesha Siddiqah, and requested her to relate to them some rare incident of the life of the Holy Prophet.

Hadrat Ayesha started crying. Later she said that the Holy Prophet came to the house one night and after sitting for a few moments said to her: Ayesha, please leave me alone so that I can worship my Lord and Master. Then he performed the ablution, offered the *Salat* and cried so hard that his beard became wet with tears. He wept so much during the prostrations that the ground also became wet. Then he got up and went and lay on the bed. Hadrat Bilal (may Allah be happy with him) came in the morning to inform him about the morning prayer and said: O Prophet of Allah! all of our past and future sins have been

pardoned by Allah. Then, why do you cry? He said: Bilal. Tonight this verse was revealed to me:

“Lo! In the creation of the heavens and the earth and (in) the difference of night and day are tokens (of His sovereignty) for men of understanding.”

(Qur’ān, III:190)

According to the Holy Prophet most unlucky is the man who reads this verse but does not ponder its meaning. The point to think about is – what is the hidden nuance of meaning that the Holy Prophet thought men who recite this verse should endeavour to find out. That hidden meaning is the inevitability of the Day of Resurrection and the Hereafter. It is said in the books of Tradition that one recurring state of anxiety that the Holy Prophet experienced was because of the thought of the Hereafter. He was always worried when he saw a dust-storm or a storm. All these things should serve as a model for us and we should emulate them. At no stage in our life should we become careless and negligent with regard to the life after death.

It is true that this life too is a great boon of Allah, the Most Exalted. The comforts and joys of this life are also given to man as His munificence. It is imperative to avail of them. To pass this life gracefully, to value well-being and comfort, to endeavour for economic affluence and to achieve eminence in society is not contrary to the thought of the Hereafter. Man would be guilty of carelessness and disregard of the Hereafter only, if he made these worldly things the main objective of his life and if he coveted anything other than the approbation of Allah and His pleasure. He would be guilty of forgetfulness if in his race for worldly success and advancement he forgets his accountability in the Hereafter and transgresses the limits of propriety fixed by the Holy Qur’ān.

HAJJ, A SYMBOL OF MONOTHEISM

Hadrat Ibrahim saw in a dream that he had sacrificed his son as a blood-offering. Acting in complete obedience and surrender on this sign he went to Mecca and then to the hill of Marwah, repeating all the time the words 'Here I am, O Lord, Here I am'. Just when the great son of this great Prophet lay down in complete surrender and Hadrat Ibrahim was on the point of piercing his son's jugular vein with the butcher's knife, a voice descended from heaven:

"We called unto him: O Abraham! Thou hast already fulfilled the vision. Lo! thus do We reward the good."

(Qur'an, XXXVII, 104-105)

It was then that Hadrat Ibrahim realised that the true interpretation of this vision was to devote his son wholly to the House of Allah and to the mission of calling people to the monotheistic faith. And the will of Allah the Almighty is that his son should become the instrument of making Ka'aba the world centre of true belief in the One-ness of Allah and His worship on Allah's good earth. History tells us that Hadrat Ibrahim had for a long time been in search of the divinely determined 'place of peace'. He was disgusted with the prevailing paganism and idol-worship. He had been inviting polytheists and men who were in the habit of bowing their heads in worship and submission before men like themselves, to come out of this state of ignorance and to submit only to Allah, their Lord and Creator. So through this vision Allah showed him the real place of *Tauheed* (One-ness of Allah) which had been there since the beginning. It was ordained that he should come here and raise the four walls of the House of Allah and, having completed it, assignate it as the centre of monotheism and abode of worshippers. The supplication that Hadrat Ibrahim made before Allah after the completion of the Ka'aba included this prayer:

*"And provide
Thou them with fruits
in order that
they may be thankful."*

[Qur'an, XIV:37]

This shows that the real import of Hajj (the holy pilgrimage) is monotheism. Hajj of the House of Allah is meant to say 'Here I am' to the call by Allah to

His One-ness, to come, in self-surrender, before His Lordship, to turn away from non-Allah and to keep alive the spirit of preparedness to sacrifice one's life and one's all to achieve the approbation of one's true Lord and Master. Its purpose is to create in the believer the all-embracing desire to submit to Allah and to obey Him. That longing was manifested by Haḍrat Ibrahīm (peace be upon him) and it was brought to its highest peak and most complete form by the last of the prophets of Allah, who revealed to mankind the full significance of the belief in monotheism. This, in real fact, is the true spirit of Hajj. It is true Islam. And the real requirement of *Īmān* is that all that impedes submission to Allah should be considered rebellion against Him. Islam demands of the Muslim that he should sacrifice customs and mores, nation and society, power and dominion, race and colour and country, indeed, all that is non-Allah for the sake of submission to Allah. All the obligations and rituals of Hajj interpret this inner feeling and response.

The lyrical expression of one's preparedness to serve the House of Allah and the voice of monotheism rings out in the environ of the Ka'aba, the adjoining holy places and all other places traversed by Haḍrat Ibrahīm and Haḍrat Ismā'il (peace be upon them both). While performing the *Manāsik* the pilgrims collect in the expanse of Arāfāt and seek Allah's forgiveness for all their shortcomings and the sins committed by them and make a solemn vow before Allah that they will be His true servants and will obey His commands in letter and spirit. This is the basic worship of Hajj. In this historic ground collect millions of Allah's slaves dressed in uniform dress, swayed by the same feeling, same inner ecstasy. And together they make a covenant to accept Allah's supremacy with all their hearts and to submit to Him with all their beings. This is a very edifying and spiritually rewarding spectacle. It fills the heart with such ecstasy, such warmth, such abandon, the pleasure of which no pilgrim can ever forget.

This, indeed, is a blessing of monotheism that people who have come from all over the world behave and pray in complete unison – indeed like one person. And all of them give practical demonstration of the unity and the indivisibility of the *Ummah*. The submission and spirit of sacrifice shown initially by the first exponent of the One-ness of Allah on this very ground had exactly the same form. The pilgrims are inspired by the love and devotion that made Haḍrat Ibrahīm build, along with his noble son, this House of Allah's worship and they repeat humbly these words of the patriarch:

"Lo! I have turned my face toward Him Who created the heavens and the earth, as one by nature upright, and I am not of the idolaters."

(Qur'ān, VI:79)

And again:

*"Say: Lo! my worship
and my sacrifice*

*and my living and my dying
are for Allah,
Lord of the Worlds."*

[Qur'ān, VI:162]

The worship of Hajj is intended to imprint an everlasting stamp of Allah's One-ness on the hearts of those persons who, declaring their faith in monotheism, make a covenant with Him that they will serve and obey Him always. By putting an end to all pagan customs previously attached to it, Islam made Hajj a perfect example of purity, simplicity, selfless submission and uprightness. Intending pilgrims are commanded to cleanse their hearts of all mundane involvements before they step out of their homes to perform the Hajj and to discard their normal apparel when they reach Miqat and put on the *Ahrām* (the loose robe) which is a beggarly dress, so that all rich and poor become equal, all distinctions of race or region disappear and all of them present themselves in the court of Allah as humble supplicants.

After putting on the *Ahrām*, not to speak of shedding human blood, even game hunting or damaging even a tree or a plant in the vicinity of the Holy Mosque is totally forbidden because all of them have life. The pilgrim is enjoined to remember Allah at every step, to offer prayer, to engage in worship, to offer ritual sacrifice, to go round the Ka'aba. And the only supplication one makes is:

"Here am I, O Lord, Here am I. Here am I – Thou hast no associate – What is Thy command, O Lord. Indeed, to Thee belongs all praise and all Munificence and Sovereignty and Dominion. Thou hast no associate".

Every pilgrim becomes a beggar and a suppliant and eradicates from within himself all pride and arrogance. He purifies his heart of the love of non-Allah. He becomes a mendicant and a seeker. He becomes peace-loving and whatever impurity had soiled his inner-being because of this world and its pleasures, he plucks it away and fills his heart with the love of Allah and the desire to submit to Him. This fills his soul with the light of divine love and the ecstasy of total self-surrender. This is the Hajj which the Holy Prophet called 'the Pure Hajj'. It is because of these blessings that anyone who has the means to undertake the journey to Ka'aba is obligated to perform the Hajj. Hajj is declared to be the fourth component of Islam:

"And pilgrimage to the House is a duty unto Allah for mankind, for him who can find a way thither."

(Qur'ān, III:97)

This world-congregation has two main purposes. One, to make the Ka'aba, the symbol of the *Ummah's* unity. Second, this world-gathering is a very potent and effective means of working out the future strategy for world peace and

and the *Ummah's* security.

Its central position in the life of the *Ummah* is proved by the fact that people belonging to different climes and countries, having different modes of living, speaking different languages, with different cultural backgrounds gather together in Mecca, perform the same acts of worship and prayer, and express their total faith and belief in the centrality of their *Qibla* (the centre to which they turn for their ritual prayer), and transcending national, tribal, cultural, racial and geographical differences and distinctions they behave as one *Ummah*, one people. All man-made barriers are removed by the unity of their faith and all geographical, linguistic and nationalistic fetters are snapped by their common belief.

Today the whole world wants to come out of the suffocating prison-house of parochialism and to join the wide circle of human brotherhood. Islam is the only religion which many centuries ago established the centrality of Ka'aba and thereby made manifest the basic importance of a world congress for the establishment of enduring peace. And it created an institution through which not once in a generation but regularly once every year the Muslims gather together to strive for peace and to contribute effectively to the creation of conditions that would ensure amity and tranquillity.

This worship is, in a way, a world conference whose presiding Judge is Allah the Almighty, the King of kings, whose verdict no person or nation dare question. It is a great act of kindness that Islam declared Ka'aba as the Islamic world centre to enable the Muslims to keep alive their commitment to the One-ness of Allah and sense of self-sacrifice. This House is a special place for the descent of Allah's blessings and bounties and Allah gave us a gathering like Hajj which is the source and fountain-head of countless, political, economic, spiritual and religious advantages.

*(This is) a Scripture which We have revealed
unto thee (Muhammad) that thereby thou mayst
bring forth mankind from darkness unto light . . .*

[Qur'ān, XIV:1]

REVERENCE OF THE HOLY QUR'ĀN

The Qur'ān is the last and complete Message from Allah, and He Himself has alluded to its exalted position, its unparalleled excellence and sanctity and the reverence man must accord to it as the Word of Allah. From the attributes ascribed to Allah in the Qur'ān numbering ninety-nine, the highest in any revealed Book, it stands proved that the Qur'ān is a blessing from Allah. And not to speak of refusing to believe in it, even indifference to it and lack of respect for it is a cardinal sin. Wherever Allah has alluded to its lofty station both as the Book and as a code of laws, He has also ordained that full reverence be invariably given to it. And it is an incontrovertible fact that, if a person does not have true reverence for the final Revelation from Allah, he shall irrevocably forfeit the blessings that emanate from it. He shall stand deprived of guidance from Allah and shall never have any knowledge of Allah nor any understanding of the significance of prophethood. He will fail to comprehend the true value of the divine code of life. Allah the Almighty, the Merciful and the Compassionate has therefore ordained that not only should we study and follow the last Message of Allah but also revere it with all our heart.

One advantage that we, the Muslims, have over people of other religions of the world is that the Holy Prophet lived under the full focus of history. Interpretations about the events of his life may vary, but that they actually occurred is beyond any doubt or controversy. And thus being in possession of the text of the Qur'ān — which is totally intact and not subject to any mutilation or variation — the Sayings and the Traditions of the Prophet, and the practice of his Companions which conformed to the text and the Traditions of the Prophet, we are absolutely justified in holding that reverence of the Qur'ān is an article of faith for a Muslim and whosoever falters in according it to the Book of Allah carries a faith that is weak and vitiated. It is a condition imposed by Allah and His Holy Prophet, and also a basic requisite of faith and we should never waver in it.

Hadrat Shah Wali Ullah has said something very significant in this context. According to him, the Qur'ān's relationship with man is both exoteric and esoteric. The esoteric part consists in regarding it as having descended from Allah (*munazzil min Allah*) and the heart of the believer should be free from all kinds of doubts or misgivings in this regard. According to a *hadīth* reported in the *Musnad-i-Ahmad*, the Prophet said: "He who harbours any misgivings about the veracity of this greatest of books shall enjoy no benefit from it". Therefore at the esoteric level the reverence of the Qur'ān demands that it should be regarded, to its last letter, as the Revelation of Allah and we ought to be

aware all the time of the relationship it has with Allah. That is to say, if Uniqueness, Omnipotence, Omniscience and Sanctity are among the attributes of Allah, they should naturally be reflected in His Revealed Book. And if Allah is the fountain-head of wisdom and greatness, His Book will naturally have these qualities.

Another characteristic of the Qur'ān is that it is the blessed Book which was revealed to the last Prophet of Allah and which he has bequeathed to mankind as the most comprehensive, eternal, and immutable code of life for mankind.

Its third characteristic — which is the point being emphasised here — is that it was conveyed to the Prophet through no other agency than that of the Angel Gabriel (peace be upon him) and it descended upon the heart of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him). The Book therefore has such a lofty station and is deserving of such high respect that Allah Himself has said:

*“That (this) is indeed a noble Qur'an
In a Book kept hidden
Which none toucheth save the purified,
A revelation from the Lord of the Worlds.”*

[Qur'ān, LVI:77–80]

On another occasion it has been said:

*“Nay, but verily it is an Admonishment,
So let whosoever will pay heed to it,
On honoured leaves,
Exalted, purified,
(Set down) by scribes
Noble and righteous.”*

[Qur'ān, LXXX: 11–16]

Yet in another verse it is said:

*“Nay, but it is a glorious Qur'an,
On a guarded tablet.”*

[Qur'ān, LXXXV:21–22]

Allah has ordained two laws about the Qur'ān. The first is that it should be touched only by those who have purified themselves. This is in keeping with its sanctity. A man who has not purified himself must not touch it. According to the jurists, even the trestle on which it is kept should not be touched by the impure. It is not like the other books; it is the eternal light of guidance, and therefore proximity to it demands purification.

The second law emphasises that, because of its lofty station among books, it should be kept in high places. Legs should not be spread in a way as to point towards it; it should not be kept underneath any other book; nor should anything be kept above it. Its pages or leaves should not be thrown away, and news-

papers, magazines and books which carry quotations from it should not be put to routine common day use, nor should its pages be burnt. If its pages being old, begin to crumble, they should be buried in the ground. The Prophet, with a view to safeguarding its sanctity, even forbade its being taken to lands inhabited by the enemies of Islam.

It has been ordained by Allah that, when verses from it are being recited, the reciter should say, "I seek refuge in Allah from Satan the Accursed", followed by "In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate". This is how the Angel Gabriel always recited the Qur'ān to the Prophet and the Companions also recited it in the same way.

An apparent mode of offering reverence to it is that if the sound of its recitation reaches one's ears or those who listen to it being recited should immediately become quiet and attend to it. Making noise or avoidable movements or indulging in loose talk while one is hearing it is tantamount to insulting it, thereby forfeiting the Mercy of Allah, Who has said about His own Book:

*"And when the Qur'an is recited,
give ear to it
and pay heed, that ye may
obtain mercy."*

[Qur'ān, VII:204]

It is also a part of the reverence we pay to the Qur'ān that we should try to understand and follow it. It is incumbent upon us that we should not confine it to the trestles, shelves, and almirahs but keep it before us and recite it with full attention and concentration. We should take stock of the feelings aroused in our hearts through its recitation. If our hearts do not respond with a feeling of fear when punishment for evil deeds is mentioned; and if our hearts are not pleased when we read about Paradise fore-ordained for good deeds; if blood does not quicken in our veins and arteries at the mention of the Holy War (*Jihād*); if we are not drawn towards humility and submission when we recite about the Greatness of Allah, His Compassion, Mercy, and Blessings, then obviously we have failed in giving true reverence to the Qur'ān.

It is incumbent upon us believers that as a mark of reverence for the Qur'ān we should spend each day of our lives in the endeavour to establish the glory of Islam in the world. The reverence we pay to it should not be confined to mere recital of it. Its edicts and precepts should be extended to encompass individuals, groups, and nations. Guidance from it should be sought at every turn. The Qur'ān having been accepted as the final source of guidance should be proclaimed as the final message of human redemption. We should publish its message throughout the world. The Prophet has said: "It is through this Book that Allah elevates some and degrades others". It is quite obvious that Allah degrades those who falter in offering due reverence to it while those who offer due respect to it are elevated by Him.

The Qur'ān is the greatest repository of eternal wisdom and spiritual and

worldly guidance for mankind. One way to prove that we revere it from our heart is to preach its message to our contemporary world which is weary and uncertain. The Prophet has said: "Allah has blessed every community with a blessing, and for my *Ummah* the greatest blessing and gift is the Qur'ān". Let us take this gift to our fellow-men and offer it to them for their peace of mind and welfare.

THE BLESSINGS OF THE RECITATION OF THE HOLY QUR'ĀN

Imam Ghazali has written that Imam Ahmed Bin Hanbal asked the Lord of the universe in a dream, "Lord and Master, which act of worship, what form of submission brings Your servant closest to You". Allah, the Most Exalted said, "Recitation of the Holy Qur'ān is the form of worship which brings My servant nearest to Me" Although this was only a dream and what transpired in it cannot be treated as an injunction or an authentic decree, yet it is in perfect accord with a *Hadīth* of the Holy Prophet and as such its importance cannot be ignored or overlooked. According to a well-known *Hadīth* the best amongst believers are they who learn and teach the Holy Qur'ān. Learning and teaching are not anything different and distinct from recitation, but a mode of the same act. It is because of this that recitation of the Holy Qur'ān has been declared as the best of all human actions and the reciters are recognised as the elite of the *Ummah* in virtue and righteousness.

The term *Aihl-Allah* (the people of Allah) is understood and used by all of us. There is a *Hadīth*, in Ibn Maja, that by 'Men belonging to Allah' is meant the people who regularly recite the Holy Qur'ān. According to a *Hadīth*, in *Mishkat*, on the Day of Judgement three categories of men will be on the top of the mount of the Black Musk and one will be of those that recite the Holy Qur'ān solely to seek Allah's approbation.

Abu Imama Bahli quotes the Holy Prophet as saying that a reciter of the Qur'ān gets the reward of ten noble deeds for each letter of the Holy Qur'ān that he recites. "I do not say that *Alif-Lam-Mim* is one letter — *Alif* is one letter, *Lam* is another letter and *Mim* still another". The Holy Prophet has also said that the true believer should cultivate in his heart the inclination and the desire to recite the Holy Qur'ān, because it is this act which is an undeniable proof of the believer's love of Allah and of His Prophet. Everything that belongs to the beloved, his disposition, his habits, his manner of speech, his bearing is adorable and lovable for the man who loves. The Holy Qur'ān is the word of Allah. The Momin, therefore, should have profound love for it in his heart. Those who repeat the words of their beloved lovingly often attract the attention of their beloved and succeed in winning his regard. Accordingly those who devote much time to the recitation of the Holy Qur'ān invite the kindness and mercy of Allah to their person.

A Companion of the Holy Prophet, Amr bin al-Ās says that every verse of the Holy Qur'ān means specific grade in the Paradise and a lamp for the home. Another Companion, Abu Hurayra (may Allah be happy with him), says that a house in which the Holy Qur'ān is recited is blessed with many bounties of Allah

and that where it is not recited has to face hardship and adversity.

Sufyan Sōri (Allah's mercy be upon him) says that when a man recites the Qur'ān angels kiss him between his two eyes.

According to a *Hadīth* quoted by Behiqi, Companion Khalid Bin Aqiba came into the presence of the Holy Prophet and requested him to recite the Holy Qur'ān before him. The Holy Prophet started the recitation from the verse *ان الله يامر بالعدل والاحسان* and concluded it at the end of the chapter. The Companion asked the Holy Prophet to recite the verses again. The Holy Prophet recited them again. When the Prophet finished, the Companion exclaimed with great fervour, "It is so sweet, its inner part has the sweetness of the drops of rain and its manifest portion has the freshness and succulence of sweet fruits".

Abdullah Bin Mas'ud, a close Companion of the Holy Prophet and a profound exegete has said that on the Day of Judgement there will be no intercessor better than the Holy Qur'ān. Recitation will intercede on behalf of the reciter in the court of Allah, the Almighty, the World-Sustainer. It is true that the best form of recitation is that which is accompanied by full understanding of the verses and an analytical insight. But even he who just recites, will not be deprived of the benefits and the blessings that are inherent in the recitation. Recitation, pure and simple, brings a great recompense. Continuous recitation over and over again does at some stage create the state of contemplation and the meanings begin to reveal themselves. In reality, recitation of the Holy Qur'ān is one of the primary acts of Islamic worship and this does not compulsorily entail full understanding of the text. On the contrary, the inner conviction that he is submitting his person to Allah and is bowing his head before his Lord and Master is enough. To enable a person to be pleased with the excellences attached to the recitation of the Holy Qur'ān the only condition is the belief that he is in communication with Allah and what he is reciting is the Word of the Creator.

Mullah Ali Qari has written on the authority of Hafiz Ibn Hajar that the recitation of the Holy Qur'ān, irrespective of the fact whether the reciter understands the words or not, is an act of worship and undoubtedly has a recompense, because the mere utterance of the words of the Qur'ān constitutes devotion to, and remembrance of, Allah. That mere recitation, without knowledge of the meaning of the text, is accepted as recompensible is a proof of the virtue of reciting the Qur'ān.

The dream of Imam Ahmed Bin Hanbal has already been mentioned. Abdul Wahab Sh'erani writes that one thing in which the Imam sought divine guidance in particular was whether a man who recites the Holy Qur'ān without understanding its meaning will get a recompense and will be allowed to come close to Allah. He was given the tidings that even a person who recites without understanding will be blessed with nearness to Allah.

Shah Waliullah has written in his treatise *Chahar Bab* that the recitation of the Holy Qur'ān is superior to *Takbir* (the call to Allah), *Tasbih* (humbly repeating His name as a form of worship), *Saum* (fasting), *Sudqah* (charity), *Nawafil* (voluntary prayer). It is therefore, obligatory for every Muslim

to recite some portions of the text everyday, conforming to the standard enunciation, with clarity and distinctness. Because the virtue of reciting with proper *Tajvid*-enunciation, has been reiterated in a large number of *Ahadith*.

If a man can learn to understand the meaning of the text, it will undoubtedly be better for him. But if he cannot, then it will suffice, if, while reciting the Holy Qur'an, he keeps conscious of the fact of its being Allah's word and that all its injunctions, positive as well as negative – what it orders one to do and what it requires one to abstain from and the incidents narrated in it, are all true and he has complete faith in their veracity.

These ideas and beliefs can create in the heart a state of humbleness and submission – and if in this state of heightened sensibility recitation is accompanied by an understanding of the meaning of Allah's Word, the reciter will be twice blessed and the recitation will be much more beneficial and edifying.

The great 19th century biographer (in the traditional style) of the Holy Prophet and scholar of unique accomplishments, Maulana Abdur Rauf Qadiri Danapuri, has written in his famous work *Asha-us-Siar* that if an uneducated and ignorant person reads the Qur'an with the firm conviction that it is Allah's revealed Book, his being will be filled with humbleness and submission to Allah. And this is the real and ultimate objective before every true Muslim. If one looks deep into the matter one will have to acknowledge the fact that very often the mind gets bogged down while trying to get to the real purport of a verse or deducing possible explanations of words containing many layers of meaning and subtle nuances. It was probably because of this that Imam Abu Hanifa, as has been unanimously mentioned by all his biographers, read the Qur'an for pondering its meaning at one time in the day and recited it with complete spiritual concentration and humility at another.

Allah the Most Exalted has commanded:

“...Recite that which hath been inspired in thee of the Scripture, and establish worship...”

[Qur'an, XXIX:45]

An important attribute of the righteous believers is specified thus:

“...Who read it with the right reading...”

[Qur'an, II:121]

The height of its excellence can be gauged from the fact that Allah, in view of the importance of His sacred Word, ordered the Holy Prophet thus, in the *sura Muzzammil*:

“...and chant the Qur'an in measure.”

[Qur'an, LXXIII:4]

According to an authentic Tradition the Holy Prophet often asked his Companions such as Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud (and Ibn Huzaifa) to recite for him the Holy Qur'an and listened to their recitation with full concentration of his soul and in a state of complete submission.

The Word of Allah brings blessings when recited and recompense if seen and touched in reverence and humility. May Allah give us the ability to recite it regularly, dear brethren in faith.

The sacred process of the enforcement of Islamic *Shari'ah* is one in most countries of the Islamic World. The enforcement of the *Shari'ah* has many requirements and requisites. One such requirement and a basic one at that, is that all that is possible should be done with regard to the teaching of Qur'ān. Parents should make proper arrangements to teach Qur'ān to their children. Adequate arrangements be made for teaching the Holy Book in schools and mosques. Proper care should be exercised in this regard and the need and importance of teaching the Qur'ān in mosques and schools should be clearly understood.

Undoubtedly the Holy Qur'ān is the Word of Allah and knowing its meaning and obeying its injunctions is obligatory for every Muslim. This is the Book which has brought about the best and noblest of all revolutions in the world. And it is only this Book which can provide true leadership and guidance to mankind – through all phases of its contemporary and future history.

QUR'ĀN AND THE CONCEPT OF FREEDOM

Many races and numerous nations dwell on this our planet. Since when they have been residing on the earth and how long they are to survive no one knows, for this is a secret known to Allah alone. Nonetheless each nation has its own history. And the sum total of all is human history. What kind of history is it? Perhaps this would be an impossible question to answer, and yet perhaps the nearest plausible answer would be that each nation in its own way has, throughout the course of history, striven to safeguard its freedom from alien domination and to uphold its freedom of thought. And this is a continuous picture that unfolds itself uninterrupted. We might transport ourselves in imagination to the pre-historic times about which we as yet know very little, and to the dawn of history, then to the era of the cave man or the ancient nomad or that of huts and magnificent castles and palaces or to our own age — from the stone age to the present day the ideas and mores of man have continued to change and new cultural trends have gone on gradually being born, and absorbed in the mainstream of life, maybe imperceptibly. This process of change has been a little too noticeable. Thoughts and values have changed and new ideas and concepts have taken their place. And yet we find that, despite these changes, and vicissitudes, in the affairs of man notwithstanding the often ominous incommensurabilities of ideas and thoughts, there has been one common strand running through the history of all nations, viz., that despite all these differences which sometimes boil into ideological conflicts on a horrendous scale, man has always striven for freedom. Never has there been any protracted lassitude — at least in this area of human endeavour. This ceaseless effort for the safeguarding of freedom is what constitutes the source material for all history — be it of individual nations or of all mankind.

When in South Asia the freedom movement had its birth and the people stood up in revolt against the imperialism of the British, the main objective was to shake off the yoke of slavery imposed by the colonialists and to establish in its place a national government. All nations of the sub-continent, without any distinction of religion or faith, were one in this struggle. The poet of the East, Allama Iqbal on this occasion provided guidance to the Muslims of the sub-continent in the light of the Qur'ān. The poet-philosopher considered the Western system of democracy to be a conspiracy to mislead people of the East. In the *Khidr-i Rah* (The Guiding Spirit), he says:

“Disguised in the robes of democracy, (stalks before thee) the monster of imperialism whom thou (through thy ignorance) hath taken to be the fairy of freedom”.

Iqbal thought that real freedom and the kind of democracy that parades itself before our eyes in the garb of human equality can never go hand in hand. Further, this kind of Western thought and system are diametrically opposed to the kind of democracy that is inherent in Islam. It is not possible for the Muslim to have through Western democracy the freedom that Islam vouchsafes to him. The main axiom of the Western system as that of Bolshevism is that sovereignty vests in the people. It is they alone in whom vests the right to rule.

The Qur'ān, on the other hand, negates this concept. According to the Qur'ān, no human being has the right to enslave another. The question, then, naturally arises: If a human being does not have the right to rule over another, who has? The Qur'ān naturally concedes that some sort of government is essential for the maintenance of civilized life, but sovereignty vests in Allah alone:

"...I am (relying) on clear proof from my Lord, while ye deny Him. I have not that for which ye are impatient. The decision is for Allah only..."

[Qur'ān, VI:57]

Nor does He assign to Himself any associate:

*His is the invisible of the heavens and the earth.
How clear of sight is He and keen of hearing!
They have no protecting friend beside Him, and He maketh none
to share in His government."*

[Qur'ān, XVIII:26]

And, finally, it follows:

*Those whom ye worship
beside Him are but names which
ye have named, ye and your fathers.
Allah hath revealed no sanction for them.
The decision rests with Allah only."*

[Qur'ān, XII:40]

This is the enduring and solid system according to which life ought to be lived. But most people do not understand this basic point. They change the format of human governments, from time to time, and feel satisfied believing that they have snapped the chains of thralldom and are free to breathe the fresh air of liberty and self-determination.

The Qur'ān says in absolutely clear and unequivocal terms that government shall be established through the Book of Allah, i.e., the Qur'ān, in which man shall not have any say, for Allah does not assign His authority to anyone. And so it has been said through the agency of the Prophet (peace be upon him):

*"Shall I seek other than Allah for judge, when He it is who hath
revealed unto you (this) Scripture, fully explained?
Those unto whom We gave the Scripture (aforetime) know
that it is revealed from thy Lord in truth..."*

[Qur'ān, VI:114]

And immediately afterwards the Holy Prophet has been told:

"...So be not thou (O Muhammad) of the waverers."

[Qur'ān, VI:114]

The Muslims of South Asia not only joined the struggle for freedom, but were its vanguard. Gradually they realized that freedom without the freedom to practise Islam in the light of the Qur'ān and the *Hadīth* was of no avail, and they decided to strive for an ideological homeland of their own. The odds were great, and yet a miracle occurred. Their sentiments were the purest and the majority community as well as the British rulers had to concede to the Muslims' demand for Pakistan.

It is nothing short of a miracle that Pakistan had its birth on the 27th day of the month of Ramadan, anniversary of the day on which the Qur'ān was made to descend upon the Holy Prophet. It was without doubt so ordained by Allah that Pakistan should come into existence on a day which is holy and about the sanctity of which the whole of the Islamic world holds unanimous views. This was a very important decision on the part of Allah as it was His will that Pakistan should come into being and have a government based upon the Qur'ān

The 27th day of the month of Ramaḍān is the day on which the Qur'ān descended. This sacred day is epoch-making for Muslims and Islam. The Qur'ān was made to descend to irradiate the dark and pitch-black niches of the world, obliterate wrong and establish the Sovereignty of Allah the Most Exalted.

As far as the concept of the Sovereignty of Allah is concerned the precepts of the Qur'ān are totally clear. Thus it has been said:

"...Whoso judgeth not by that which Allah hath revealed; such are evil-livers."

[Qur'an, V:47]

And the Holy Prophet is ordained thus:

"So judge between them by that which Allah hath revealed..."

[Qur'an, V:49]

And it is not mankind which is being addressed but the Prophet himself. Every authority except that of Allah has been called exploitative and evil. The difference between faith and disbelief has been described as follows in the Qur'ān:

"...And he who rejecteth false deities and believeth in Allah hath grasped a firm handhold which will never break."

[Qur'ān, II:256]

This verse leads us to ponder whether they who claim to have embraced the faith of Islam do really act as believers. Because they seem actually to represent the condition of those about whom Allah has said:

“Hast thou not seen those who pretend that they believe in that which is revealed unto thee and that which was revealed before thee, how they would go for judgement (in their disputes) to false deities when they have been ordered to abjure them?”

[Qur’ān,IV:60]

These are misguided people. They talk about Allah’s Laws and yet keep on constantly negating them. Their faith is hardly firm, although it has been ordained that:

“Perfected is the Word of thy Lord in truth and justice. There is naught that can change His words. ”

[Qur’ān, VI:115]

The day on which Pakistan came into existence i.e., the 27th day of Ramaḍān is like daylight after darkness. The Muslim nation had concluded a covenant with Allah that they would make Pakistan a truly Islamic state. They should pause a while and ask themselves objectively whether they have been true to their promise. If they have faltered, let them wake up and dedicate themselves to the task that lies ahead. Today is the twenty-seventh day of Ramaḍān on which the Qur’ān was made to descend. Today is the day of the birth of Pakistan. The Muslims have therefore to make the following decisions:

- * *The final authority will vest with the Qur’ān.*
- * *The laws and ordinances in every Muslim country including Pakistan will be according to the Qur’ānic Laws.*
- * *Every Muslim will mould his life according to the commands of the Qur’ān and follow the Sunnah of the Prophet.*

Each Muslim nation having set its own house in order according to the Islamic principles, will come forward and all Muslims of the world will, hand in hand, begin a holy endeavour to establish, through peaceful dissemination of the Word of Allah, Allah’s kingdom on earth, in which the entire human race will enjoy complete freedom and equality.

THIS LIFE IN THE LIGHT OF THE QUR'ĀN

Every system of life has its own peculiar concept of, and criterion for, human dispensation on earth. In fact, it is this fundamental concept which determines various aspects of individual and collective human life. Every system has its own set of values on which it evaluates the thoughts, the utterances and the deeds of its followers. Islam too has its set of values on the basis of which it invests life with certain criteria and our success or failure depends thereon. It is vital to elucidate here and now a point before proceeding further.

Contrary to other religions, there is no concept of a duality between the spiritual and the mundane or the religious and the secular in life in Islam. Likewise, Islam admits of no monasticism at all. It is absolutely foreign to the idea that after the performance of a periodical ritual of worship man can indulge, with no let or hindrance, in whatever he may like and that in all affairs of life, in business, in industry, in politics and in education, he has complete, thorough-paced and unquestioned liberty. This concept is in itself restricted and defective, and is wholly at variance with the teachings of the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*. According to the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*, the entire life of man is a span of worship. As a matter of fact, worship is the object of life as enunciated by the Holy Qur'ān:

*"I created the jinn and humankind
only that they might worship Me."*

[Qur'ān, LI:56]

See, how the Qur'ān has unmistakably pin-pointed the object of life and made it clear that the purpose of creating man is that he should worship the Creator. Precisely this divine purpose is the basis of the Qur'ānic view of earthly life..

In the light of the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* we come to realize that every human act becomes an act of worship if it is done subject to certain conditions. This concept introduces us to a broader and more comprehensive view of life. The concept of worship prevalent in other religions is confined to the performance of a few acts of ritual worship at certain fixed times and at certain fixed places. For the first time in history, Islam revealed to man that worship is done not only in the mosque but it can, rather it should, be done in the parliament, in the institutions of education and in the mines also, provided man regards himself a worshipper always and works everywhere solely to win the pleasure of Allah. Whatever he does to earn his living, to maintain his family,

to serve his countrymen or to help the wayfarer, is all worship provided it is done within the limits prescribed by Allah.

The life that is spent with this concept in mind will be free from chaos, anarchy, exploitation, and will be full of peace and tranquillity, comfort and gratification, happiness and well-being.

Islam treats this world as a temporary abode, a preparatory ground for the other world. Accordingly, those who believe in Islam cannot be licentious in this world. They are ever mindful of the Qur'ānic injunction:

*“O mankind! Eat of that which is lawful and wholesome in the earth,
and follow not the footsteps of the devil.
Lo! he is an open enemy for you.
He enjoineth upon you only the evil and the foul,
and that ye should tell concerning
Allah that which ye know not.”*

[Qur'ān, II:168-169]

Thus the Holy Qur'ān guides unequivocally that we tap the resources of this world, and derive from them every benefit permitted by Allah and His Prophet, and that we abstain from all things that are forbidden. As Muslims, if we transgress the bounds fixed by Allah we shall take to the Satanic course, the way of vice, and all distinction between us and non-Muslims will vanish. We shall lose our identity as a *Millat*, which draws a line of demarcation between ourselves and others. Islam bids us to live in this world, this place of trial-performance, with perpetual vigilance, as all we do here will be requited for in the next life with reward for good and retribution for bad deeds. Consequently, we should never forget even for a moment the rights of Allah while living here in this world, nor should we forget the rights of our fellow-beings. This life-system, with its clear enunciation of the rights of Allah and the rights of man, is invariably instrumental in establishing a society where poise, peace, honesty and integrity, and lofty examples of personal morality prevail. Above all, it should be a society where man is esteemed as man (not treated as an animal or an economic unit), where social equality and justice are the norm, and where confidence and composure are the order of the day. The Holy Prophet said:

“This world has been created for you and you have been created for the Hereafter”.

It means that all that is here is for you. Do avail of it all but do not get lost in it. Conversely, you should live here with the consciousness that the next world will be everlasting and the life there will be eternal. If man acts righteously in this world, observing the injunctions of Allah and His Prophet, he shall have success in Hereafter and if he flouts them here he shall be doomed to fail there.

In the end, let me present to you that most comprehensive and eloquent Saying of the Holy Prophet wherein he has summed up, succinctly, the concept of this worldly life. He says:

"This world is a harvest for the next one".

In these few words he has delineated vividly the criterion of real success or failure in the Hereafter. Just as the yield of a crop depends upon a farmer's hard work, integrity, and motivation, the success of this life for a Muslim depends upon his faith and deeds.

THE LOVE OF THE MUSLIMS FOR THE HOLY QUR'ĀN

The deep attachment a Musalman has for the Holy Qur'ān is exactly like the body's dependence on the life-force. Without the Qur'ān, there can be no Islam and if a Muslim does not make the Qur'ān the support and the sustenance of his life he will be deprived of the teaching of Islam and will be like a man who gropes hither and thither in a pitch dark night, but cannot find his way or see any signs of his desired destination. Without the Holy Qur'ān, a Muslim will be *sans* the spirit and essence of Islam. Without the Qur'ān there can be no inspiration, no guidance. It is the divine code of religious and worldly teachings, precepts and ordinances. It was revealed for the guidance of men, so that they read it, ponder its message, understand the facts of this universe and so obey Allah and His Prophet that they achieve excellence and eminence in this world and deserve recompense and salvation in the Hereafter. The Musalman's link with the Holy Qur'ān is so binding that without it, it would be as if he has fallen in the deep abyss of distraction and misguidance. The Holy Qur'ān is the very soul, the very life-breath of a Muslim, his very faith and belief, the sole source of his well-being and betterment, his sure guiding principle of success in both worlds and welfare. The greatest and the mightiest of the world powers cannot match and equal the *Ummah* which reads the Holy Qur'ān and devoutly follows its injunctions. It leads man to the right path, turns beggars into kings, so refines the ignorant and the unlearned that they become scholars and men of learning. It makes man understand his reality, and his innate potential and it reveals to him the hidden secrets of the universe.

At the very beginning of the Holy Qur'ān, Allah the Most Exalted says: "That is the Book, wherein is no doubt". And a special characteristic of this Book is that it gives guidance to the God-fearing. And then, it tells who are the people that it considers God-fearing. They are people who believe in the Unseen, perform the prayer and expend of what Allah has provided them and share it with others. They unhesitatingly and without question accept as true what Allah has revealed to His Prophet and they also believe that the earlier Scriptures are also Allah's revealed Word. In addition to all these noble qualities they have complete faith in the fact that this worldly life is only transitory and will be followed by the Day of Judgement, when chastisement will befall the wrongdoers and there will be ample recompense for noble deeds and righteous actions. This exposition has hopefully made it explicit, that nobody can find the path of righteousness unless he reads the Holy Qur'ān with utmost care and attention and makes it his guide and mentor. A Muslim can never dare think that he will be able to get true guidance if he ever for a moment

ignores or fails to pay full heed to the injunctions and the commands Allah has sent through His Holy Prophet. One who has such expectations is like a man who desires a crop of succulent strawberries from the bush of brambles he has raised. Muslims who do not study the Holy Qur'ān as a matter of course, are guilty of gross negligence. The sooner they realise the gravity of this act of omission, the quicker will be the end of this period of their adversity and once they are out of this their present morass their humble return to their spiritual fountain-head will entitle them to being restored to the position of world leadership. This return to spiritual and material ascendancy is inevitable because Allah the Most Exalted has given His divine promise to the righteous and has said that these are the people who have been blessed with true guidance from their Lord and these are the people who have been assured of a rich recompense.

The Holy Prophet of Allah made special arrangements for the teaching of the Holy Qur'ān and for the training of the believers according to its spiritual discipline. Consequently a majority of the Muslims of his time knew the whole Qur'ān by heart and sought guidance from it in every matter, whether spiritual or mundane. There is a well-known incident which is relevant to the subject. A Muslim came to Haḍrat Ayesha, mother of the faithful, and enquired about the moral disposition of the Holy Prophet. She said, "Study the Qur'ān with care and understanding and you will come to know the personality of the Prophet."

The sermon the Holy Prophet gave on the occasion of his last Hajj is the oldest and the most effective moral charter in the history of the world. He laid special stress on one fact in this historic sermon. He said, "I leave behind me one thing. If you adhere to it completely and devoutly you will never go astray. That one thing is Allah's Word i.e. the Holy Qur'ān".

This guidance brings into limelight the nature of a Muslim's connection with the Holy Qur'ān. The relationship is so strong, so explicit. The Qur'ān and the Muslims are like the cause and the effect. They are concomitant – the one exists for the other.

History stands witness to the fact that the Muslims maintained their pre-eminence and supremacy as long as they kept up their total commitment to the study of the Holy Qur'ān. They collided with the two super-powers of the time which claimed to be highly civilized and technologically advanced, besides being overwhelmingly preponderant in numbers as well as in latest weaponry. But both suffered one defeat after another at the hands of the Muslims, who were comparatively much smaller in numbers and hopelessly weaker in physical and military resources. Despite these handicaps they were never afraid. They had the strength and the spiritual vigour that the teachings of the Holy Qur'ān, had endowed them with. They knew that Allah has ordained that Muslims should make proper preparations before engaging in war, but they also understand the spirit of the Islamic teachings, which gave them the unshakeable conviction that the secret of victory lies in the strength of Īmān (faith) and the succour of Allah. And this conviction can only come from a deep study of the Qur'ān.

"...How many a little company hath overcome a mighty host by Allah's leave!"

[Qur'ān, II:249]

The secret of glory for Muslims, therefore, lies in their attachment and devotion to the Holy Qur'ān. Furthermore, all the advances that they made in sciences and intellectual studies during the period of their political pre-eminence were the result of their acting on the edicts of the Qur'ān, pertaining to knowledge. The Holy Book informs, time and again, that the physical universe has been made subject to conquest by man. It is therefore obligatory for man, on the one hand, to uncover its hidden secrets and utilise all its wealth and resources in the service of mankind, for its welfare and well-being, and on the other, to continue to praise the Creator of the universe and to express their humble gratitude to Him for having produced such innumerable boons, munificences and good things for their sake.

The Holy Qur'ān is the fountain-head of true faith and the source of righteous action. It tells those who believe in it that they should not sit idle and not raise the slogan of 'salvation in the Hereafter' just to evade their duty of achieving success and well-being in this world. Both the worlds are for the believers — the world of this earthly existence as well as the world of eternity.

We the people of Islam, with the Qur'ān as our guide, endeavoured hard and long for the emancipation of our peoples from alien domination. We defeated the Western colonialism because of true faith in the Holy Qur'ān. We achieved our objective on the basis of our commitment that we will establish the sovereignty of the Qur'ān in our homelands and will present the glorious spectacle of Islamic law in actual practice before the world, by adhering steadfastly and completely to the principles given to us by the Qur'ān and its first and ideal interpreter, the Holy Prophet. But we have spent the last quarter of a century — ever since our political and social emancipation — in a state of spiritual uninvolvedness and emotional unconcern. Consequently we have suffered great and grievous set-backs. The need of the hour is that we shake off this stupor and start working in right earnest for the enforcement in our lands of the Islamic *Shari'ah*, fulfil the pledge that we had made before Allah and set right our affairs by active and full commitment to Islam.

THE QUR'ĀNIC CONCEPT OF WELFARE ECONOMY

*“O ye who believe!
Observe your duty to Allah,
and give up what remaineth (due to you)
from usury, if ye are
(in truth) believers.
And if ye do not, then be warned
of war (against you) from Allah
and His messenger.
And if ye repent, then ye have
your principal (without interest).
Wrong not, and ye
shall not be wronged.”*

[Qur'ān, II:278–279]

The most conspicuous attribute of the blessings of Allah is that they are universal. His munificences are for the whole world and all human beings. Sunshine, air, water and blessings of similar nature are indeed countless; blessings for which there is no distinction of belief or unbelief.

The Holy Qur'ān is also amongst these universal blessings and whatever guidance it contains and whatever cure of the ailments of the heart it offers is not restricted to a specific period of time or to a particular region; nor is it addressed to a particular race or nation. It is an abiding and eternal blessing of Allah for all nations of the world and for the whole of mankind.

It is quite true that in this Book of guidance there are certain passages which are specially addressed by the Creator of the universe to a certain individual or a particular class of people. But the purpose of that particularisation in the address, in fact, is to stress the importance of the matter that is being discussed or to make the addressee conscious of his responsibility or to the completion of his task or assignment. A special point that is contained in these pointed references is that the person or the group thus addressed should further consolidate and strengthen his desire to be near to Allah through more single-minded submission. He should consider himself a wholetime servant of Allah and should prepare himself for ever-increasing subservience and obedience and should be duly grateful for Allah's graciousness in directly addressing him in particular.

The subject that has been stated in this verse contains many matters of vital importance. If we ponder, keeping all of them in view, the position that

will emerge needs our earnest and serious consideration. The command totally banning usury and the causes that led to this ban have been elucidated in a very persuasive and impressive manner.

No doubt it is the believers who are being addressed in this verse. But it is based on vital social, economic and moral principles and injunctions. And the aspect of mutual dealings it relates to is so wide and extensive that the injunctions it contains are in the nature of an international law. And these injunctions will be scrupulously complied with even when the dealings are with a non-Muslim. Briefly one may say that the address is special but the command is general. Because the social objectives Islam has in view will never be achieved if ever an exception is made in the application of this categorical injunction, objectives which when fully achieved will make the Qur'anic system or the Islamic state a place of well-being, and a benevolent homeland for all mankind.

It was with this ultimate purpose in view that the Holy Prophet issued strict and stringent instructions to stop usury within the boundaries of the Islamic state. He clearly wrote in the treaty that he signed with the Christians of Najrān that the treaty would be considered null and void if they ever practised usury. Not only would the treaty be annulled, it would also mean war between them and the Islamic state. The usurers of Banu Mughīra, were notorious throughout Arabia. After the victory of Mecca all their dues of usury were annulled by the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him). He did not spare his own uncle, Hadrat Abbās, talking about whom, he said that the amount of usury due to him was cancelled that very moment. He went so far in condemning this evil that he said he who takes usury and he who gives it, as also he who writes the testament and becomes a witness to the deal, all are accursed of Allah.

The purpose of these extreme measures to abolish usury is clear. It was to root out the last vestiges of capitalist mentality, capitalist morality and capitalist social system from the world of Islam and to lay the foundations of a righteous social order and a healthy economic order on the basis of mutual help and equitable sharing of resources.

A Muslim is fully seized of the fact that usury, besides being a major sin, is a heinous crime. Till a few years ago a usurer did not enjoy any respect in the society. Islam and usury were so diametrically opposed to each other that not even an unbeliever could ever visualise a Muslim being involved in this evil thing. Muslims have throughout their history abstained both collectively and individually from usury and have always considered it a sin for which there is no forgiveness at all. But unfortunately due to alien domination and the resultant ruination of the Islamic economic order by foreign imperialism, first a change occurred in the Muslim thinking about usury and it was followed by a partial participation by some Muslims in this abominable crime. And our moral plight was gravely aggravated when the concept of usury, totally taboo in Islam, became just a vague, half forgotten abstract idea, and in practice we accepted an economic order the very basis of which was usury.

The reasons our foreign masters advanced in regard to the compulsive need of usury for national economies and its great utility, which we completely and

unquestioningly owned, led, one must understand, inexorably to the accumulation of wealth in the hands of vested interests, and a sense of insecurity developed amongst the mass of people. They want us to cling on to this accursed vileness by creating in our hearts a fear of poverty and penury. Please remember that Islam calls it 'the logic of the devil'.

"The devil promiseth you destitution and enjoineth on you lewdness..."

[Qur'an, II:268]

This selfish logic keeps one away from expending in charity, stands in the way of self-sacrifice and sympathy, stops us from unselfishly lending our money and by creating a sense of insecurity makes us amass and hoard wealth. It is this evil tempter that makes us forget the life Hereafter and its great recompense and instigates us to lead a life of luxury devoted to gratification of the appetites, that quickens the lust for wealth within us, hardens our hearts and turns us into slaves of self-interest. Just consider! Can the perpetrator of a social crime, which results in Allah and His Holy Prophet declaring war on him, achieve success in any field or meet with triumph anywhere? Is it possible for us to be at peace with ourselves and to have a feeling of well-being when Allah and His Holy Prophet are at war with us? If we desire freedom, if we want to ensure our personal rectitude and the welfare of our society, we will have to move away from this present evil situation and will have to cleanse every department of our personal and collective life of the odious evil of usury. This subject has been expounded at another place in the Holy Qur'an in these words:

"Those who swallow usury cannot rise up save as he ariseth whom the devil hath prostrated by (his) touch. That is because they say: Trade is just like usury; whereas Allah permitteth trading and forbiddeth usury. He unto whom an admonition from his Lord cometh, and (he) refraineth (in obedience thereto), he shall keep (the profits of) that which is past, and his affair (henceforth) is with Allah. As for him who returneth (to usury) – Such are rightful owners of the Fire. They will abide therein."

[Qur'an, II:275]

THE HOLY QUR'ĀN – THE GREAT CHARTER OF HUMAN WELL-BEING

The auspicious month of Ramaḍān is an occasion for thanksgiving, not only because of the blessings inherent in fasting, but also for a unique bounty bestowed upon mankind during a sacred night of it – that bounty is the Holy Qur'ān which is a universally viable and complete code of life and everlasting guidance. This revealed Word started descending on the last of Allah's prophets (peace be upon him) in a moment of absolute sanctity when he sat secluded in deep spiritual contemplation in the cave of Hira. Suddenly the angel Gabriel came and squeezed him tightly and said, "Read", to which the Holy Prophet replied, "I know not how to read." The angel squeezed him again twice and then loosened the hug. The Leader of the Host of Angels then said, "Recite, in the name of thy Lord who created". The Holy Prophet was then taught the first five verses of the *Surah al-'Alaq (XCVI)*.

This was the first revelation sent down to the Holy Prophet and the process began in this very auspicious month and the last of the Scriptures of Allah the Most Exalted, continued to be revealed gradually to the Holy Prophet over a period spread of twenty-three years – till it was completed.

How great is this bounty can be gauged from the fact that Allah's revelation of His Word to the Holy Prophet has been called "the rain of grace" in the Holy Qur'ān:

*"He sendeth down water from the sky, so that valleys flow
according to their measure..."*

(Qur'ān, XIII:17)

On this similitude, the knowledge that was sent down to the Holy Prophet through revelation has been compared to the water that is sent down out of heaven. The fact is that as the rains fill the whole earth with moisture, give it life and the rain drops 'quicken the dead earth' and make it rich and fertile, in the same manner the Qur'ān is that fountain-head of guidance which will quicken the soul of mankind to righteousness and moral excellence till the end of time. It is the surest and the best guide of the human race for ever and for ever. Its message is universal and it addresses all men – irrespective of race, colour, territory or time. This Book is the divine Charter of human welfare and well-being, not a letter of which can ever undergo any change or alteration. Its teachings are not restricted or specifically meant for any particular period but are a blessing and a guidance for every age, every period of human history.

Its injunctions are not addressed to any single people but to the entire human race. Its precepts do not deal with some restricted sphere of human

life or activity. It is a complete code of life which encompasses the totality of individual as well as collective life. Its message is eternal and universal, all-embracing and revolutionary. It is for mankind, a guide, unique and *par excellence*, a great boon and blessing. Had this Book not been sent down, it would have been impossible to distinguish between Truth and Untruth. Mankind would have continued to wander in wilderness and grope in the darkness of ignorance, unable to find the straight path. It is a great munificence of Allah, glory be to Him, Who blessed us with the Holy Qur'an in the month of Ramadan which is a mirror of His Light and Radiance:

*The month of Ramadān
in which was revealed the Qur'an, a guidance for mankind,
and clear proofs of the guidance, and the Criterion
(of right and wrong)..."*

((Qur'an, II:185)

The words 'guidance to the people' are a clear indication that its message and guidance is universal and its beneficence like the light of the sun and the moon, is for one and all. The revolution brought about by its revelation proved a great boon to humanity as a whole and a positive and healthy revolution. It is during this month that man became fully conscious of his reality. Glory be to it, that it bestowed upon man the eminence that was ordained for him and gave him the knowledge of his true station in this universe, otherwise he would just have been one other species of savages. It was the Holy Qur'an that told man that he was created as a noble and superior being:

"Surely We created man of the best stature."

(Qur'an, XCV:4)

There is no inherent twist in his disposition. If he turns away from his natural calling and goes astray, it is his own shortsightedness and lack of true understanding. He is solely responsible for the evil consequences of the choice he has made.

The Holy Qur'an has expounded the nature of man's relationship with the universe. He has been told that he is not a helpless plaything in the hands of Nature. On the contrary, all resources available in heaven and earth have been placed here for him to utilise for his welfare. Man is made aware of his position of pre-eminence through this verse:

"We have honoured the Children of Adam..."

(Qur'an, XVII:70)

Before the revelation of the Holy Qur'an the world was totally unaware of the one-ness of mankind. It is through the beneficence of the Qur'an that men become aware, for the first time in history, that the human race in its totality

is a big family and a house. All distinctions between man and man on the basis of colour of the skin, race, language and geographical location are totally false.

The only criterion of superiority of man over man is righteousness and fear of Allah. This great humanist concept rooted out for ever all false and baseless concepts of *Jahiliyya* and raised man to the lofty station which Providence had ordained for him. Now, nobody could claim eminence or superiority on the basis of his race or family and nobody could be made to feel lowly because of the accident of birth. The Holy Qur'an divides mankind only in two categories:

"...One of you is a disbeliever and one of you is a believer,"

(Qur'an, LXIV:2)

This means the only difference between man and man is that of belief and unbelief, good and evil, virtue and vice. The world had never witnessed such great human one-ness before the descent of the Holy Qur'an. The Qur'an argues on the basis of the one-ness of humanity that since human disposition is uniform and since all men are descended from the same parents, their religion should also be one and the same and they all should worship one Lord. All earlier prophets who were assigned to different human communities in different periods of history invited mankind to this universal truth. The Qur'an too, invites mankind to this basic truth:

*"Your God is One God;
there is no God save Him,
the Beneficent, the Merciful."*

(Qur'an, II:163)

The Holy Qur'an liberated man from servility of men like himself by giving mankind the message of the one-ness of humanity and the one-ness of Allah. It bestowed upon the person of man absolute sanctity. This is indeed an act of great import and significance. It is because of this act of unprecedented grace and benevolence that the Qur'an is universally accepted as the universal and eternal charter of human elevation and emancipation. As is well known before the revelation of this last divine Scripture, man worshipped stones and trees and forests and the winds and the rivers — even men who were no different from himself. The Qur'an was revealed to the Holy Prophet to serve as the charter of human welfare and their eternal salvation. Since its descent the only path of salvation is complete adherence to its teachings.

This Book is the source of universal guidance and the assignation to Prophethood of the Messenger to whom it was revealed was also for the whole of mankind:

“Say (O Muhammad): O mankind! Lo! I am the messenger of Allah to you all – (the messenger of) Him unto whom belongeth the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth...”

(Qur’ān, VII:158)

One of the greatest blessings of the Holy Qur’ān for mankind is that it presented to the world the true concept of religion and a correct understanding of its Creator and Lord. It explained in full detail all the matters pertaining to the spiritual as well as day-to-day life. It gave to mankind a complete and comprehensive system of life. The world of man had never known such a universal and exhaustive code. It was only the Qur’ān that told man that none besides Allah was worthy of being worshipped. Therefore, bow only before Him. It is He who takes away life and it is He who gives it. Obey only His Command. Only His Law is the Law for mankind. And what He has given you in His last Book is His final Word, to be accepted as such and obeyed.

All misdeeds of man – theft and robbery, pillage and plunder, murder and rampage, exploitation and suppression of the weak by the strong – are sinful acts for which he will be accountable to Allah. Therefore, always be truthful, be fair and just in your dealings, do not take another’s life, do not rob a man of his goods. Whatever you take should be rightfully yours and whatever you give should conform to the canons of honesty and fair dealing. You are all men and all men are equal. After death every one of you will have to appear before your Lord and Creator and every one will have to give an account of all that he did in his earthly life.

These are some of the main teachings of this eternal Charter. And these are the bounties of the Qur’ān which are meant for the entire world of mankind and not confined to one age or one people. This great Charter of Humanity has been described thus in the Holy Qur’ān:

“This is a clear message for mankind...”

(Qur’ān, XIV:52)

My fellow-Muslims! Let us thank Allah that He gave us the bounty of the holy month of fasting and the great Charter of humanity that He started sending down to His last Messenger during a sacred night of this month. Let us pray to Allah the Most Exalted that He should make us worthy of this great Book and enable us to perfect ourselves in submission and surrender to Him. Amen!

THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE HOLY QUR'ĀN

The Holy Qur'ān is that last testament of Allah the Most Exalted which was revealed to the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him). The aim of this divine Book is to provide guidance to Man. Because of it this sacred Book has been called 'The Mercy' and 'The Light'.

*"We have brought them
a Scripture which We expound
with knowledge, a guidance
and a mercy for a people
who believe."*

[Qur'ān, VII:52]

This sacred testament contains all those subjects based on the principle of guidance to mankind which make it all-embracing, eternal and universal in its scope. It is an extremely well-organised and consistent Book. But its arrangement and consistency has a style of its own. It is exceedingly simple; but difficult at the same time. It is easy in the matter of learning and seeking guidance. But to fully comprehend all its shades of meaning and its nuances is by no means easy. To read it regularly and repeatedly with complete concentration and with fully awakened cognitive faculties is imperative to bring within the reach of understanding the inherent purposes of the Qur'ān. Its understanding is conditional upon complete belief and faith, augmented by deep contemplation of its verses. Its full implications will manifest themselves to the mind and soul if one ponders its words in the light of pure reason and true insight. The Qur'ān invites its reader time and again to do just that:

"...Will ye not then take thought?"

[Qur'ān, VI:50]

And again:

"...Will ye not then see?"

[Qur'ān, XXVIII:72]

This sacred Book has an exclusive quality of excellence that cannot be grasped

through only rational approach or mere intellectual interpretation. It requires, besides all other intellectual qualifications, complete physical and inner purity and piety. This Book is a fountain-head of guidance, but only for those people who have been blessed with a true heart and are genuinely motivated to find the Truth – who have no twist in their outlook and attitude – and who with all earnestness and sincerity desire to understand its message. The Holy Qur'ān refers to this aspect of the matter thus:

This is the Scripture wherein there is no doubt, a guidance unto those who ward off (evil):"

[Qur'ān, II:2]

To benefit from the Book, it is essential to study it with the full presence of mind and to ponder the facts stated by it with full concentration. Allah the Most Exalted has said:

Lo! therein verily is a reminder for him who hath a heart, or giveth ear with full intelligence."

[Qur'ān, L:37]

At another place it is said:

"...This is a reminder for the mindful."

[Qur'ān, XI:114]

This means that here is no ordinary Book, but a complete system of life. It is that Word of Allah which was revealed to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) for the guidance of the whole of mankind and a mercy for the whole universe. Therefore, while studying this sacred Book one should be fully conscious of the greatness and the Glory of Him who sent it down. This is the Word of the Supreme Being. And we can benefit from it only by becoming His true slaves. We should readily accept the fact that our reason and understanding are very limited and their reach is exceedingly short. The Holy Qur'ān says:

"...Of knowledge ye have been vouchsafed but little."

[Qur'ān, XVII:85]

Only our true longing and humility can help us in the true understanding of the Qur'ān. Another fact that we ought to keep in mind is that the Qur'ān is the Book of guidance till the end of time.

The first people it addressed were the dwellers of 'the mother of the cities'

the valley of Bakka, Madina Tayyaba and its suburbs. They had their own civilization, their own cultural traditions and their own set of principles. Hence the style adopted to address them and the manner of approach to problems was such as would be spontaneously comprehensible to them. But its overall perspective and message is not meant for a particular nation or territory. Its scope and sweep is universal and the whole of mankind till the last man on this planet is its audience, whether it lives in Asia or Europe, China or Japan, America or Russia – the entire world of man falls in its purview. As such it is a universal, everlasting and eternal Scripture. Allah the Most Exalted says:

*The month of Ramadan in which was revealed the Qur'an,
a guidance for mankind,
and clear proofs of the guidance,
and the Criterion (of right and wrong).*

[Qur'an, II:185]

One of its exclusive features is that whatever is said in it has in it conviction and is without even the remotest semblance of doubt or uncertainty. Whether somebody accepts or does not accept, it explains the reality explicitly and in great detail and that reality is, in the context of the historical and psychological background of man, sublime and universal. It transcends the need of being acknowledged. It was impossible to contradict the facts stated by it when they were first stated and it is impossible to contradict them today. Its truth and veracity will shine forth in full splendour till the Day of Reckoning and the springs of guidance will continue to gush forth from it in every age and for every nation for ever and for ever.

It is the foremost duty of us Muslims to ponder the text of the Holy Qur'an because we claim to believe in it as the Word of Allah. We also express our belief that the Holy Qur'an is a complete code of life and is that last Book of Allah which has in it the essence and the summary of all earlier Scriptures revealed by Allah to His messengers and which has brought to completion their teachings and their guidance.

This belief of ours makes it imperative that it should be our guide and leading light at every stage in our individual and collective life. This should be our code of life, our law, our constitution. We should consciously and willingly make it the basis as well as the pivot of our life. Its edifying words should resound in our courts and legal institutions and the lecture-halls and the corridors of our centres of learning – schools, colleges and universities should be lit up with the radiance of its teachings. This, for us, is the greatest source and fountain-head of education and learning.

It is our primary obligation as an *Ummah* and a religious duty to make immediate arrangements in sovereign Muslim states for the enforcement of the *Shari'ah*. Is it not our pledge to give the Word of Allah that place in our personal and collective life that it had in the time of the sacred Companions of the Holy Prophet? If the answer is in the affirmative, and it has to be so, then please know

that there is no department of life – politics, economy, civilization and culture, social organization or the legal and constitutional process for which it does not provide viable guidance. This sacred Book of Allah has enough light to illumine all nooks and corners of human thought and action for all times to come. If we falter at any stage in the implementation of its precepts in our respective spheres of life, it will be a failure of the whole *Ummah*. And please do not forget that Allah never forgives collective sins and failures. Such mistakes of omission and commission bring worldwide catastrophies and universal miseries. Let us strive to prevent the spread of corruption on earth.

Let us move forward with true determination and full resolve on the straight path and pray to Allah to give us the strength and the motivation to understand the message of the Holy Qur'ān and to present it to the rest of our fellow-men.

May Allah reward our efforts with success. Amen!

*And We have sent thee (O Muhammad) as a
witness and a bearer of good tidings and a
warner.*

[QUR'AN ALVIH:3]

THE INSTITUTION OF PROPHETHOOD

The world has been given to man for his dominion in his earthly life. All means and goods and things essential for his life have been provided in abundance. Every particle of dust, every atom, our own physical frame, reason, intellect and intuition impel us to ponder why has all this wealth been spread out — this universe of existence. Why have we been sent here? How did we come into being? Whose intent, authority, design and power gave us our life? And what does He Whose munificence we are availing of and to Whose sustenance we owe the continuation of our being, require of us? What does He who brought us into being from nothingness, want of us? What is the purpose of our existence? What relationship do we have with Him Who conceived and put into shape this Grand Design? What is it that binds us to those who preceded us, those who are contemporaneous with us and those who will come after us? What is the nature of this link, this bond? And last of all — as our experience has shown us, everyone who comes to this world lives out his specified span of time and then has his inevitable exit, Where does he go from here? Where shall we all go from here?

All these questions invariably arise in the mind of man. And man has, in every period of history, whatever the state of his intellect and perspective, reason and knowledge, awareness and understanding, pondered these questions. Seeking some credible answers to them, trying to discover some plausible explanations of things that baffle the mind, is in the nature of man.

We find that Allah 'the Merciful, the Compassionate' Who gave us our life, has provided all that was needed to meet the diverse demands of our nature. When this is the situation in so far as the needs of our organism are concerned, could it be that He left this innate inquisitiveness of man about his beginning and his ultimate end uncatered for? He has, surely, arranged that man gets answers to all his questions that will be completely convincing. And the arrangement that the All-knowing Allah made was that He chose some specially endowed persons from amongst human beings, taught them the answers to all questions that can agitate the human mind and ordained them to guide mankind with the knowledge that He had imparted to them through Revelation.

The Lord and Creator of the universe gave them the name of 'Prophet' and 'Messenger' and assigned them the duty to inform Allah's other creatures — their fellow-beings — that true believers will be blessed with a contented and honourable life in this world and eternal Grace and Bliss in the world to come. He enjoined them to ask men to so reshape their lives that their deeds are in complete conformity with this belief. He also made it incumbent on his messengers to explain, in full detail, that Allah has created man for a purpose and

He has laid down clearly how they should organise and order their lives so as to be able to achieve that divine purpose. He taught His prophets to teach man the nature of his relationship with other living creatures that dwell on this earth – in short show him the path of rectitude, obedience, well-being, piety and goodness, and to warn him of the terrible consequences of turning away from this luminous and bright path and choosing his own road of delusion and self-deception. This is why Allah calls his messengers 'Those who bring glad tidings and those who warn'. In other words they tell the people who tread the straight path that their earthly life is a happy life and a better life awaits them in the Hereafter – and they try to put fear of Allah in the hearts of evil-doers by warning them that unless they leave their evil ways eternal damnation will be their lot.

Allah stresses the importance of the institution of prophethood in the Holy Qur'an:

"Mankind were one community, and Allah sent (unto them) Prophets as bearers of good tidings and as warners, and revealed therewith the Scripture with the truth that it might judge between mankind concerning that wherein they differed. And only those unto whom (the Scripture) was given differed concerning it, after clear proofs had come unto them, through hatred one of another..."

[Qur'an, II:213]

The meaning of this glorious verse is explicit and does not stand in need of any detailed exposition. What I want to draw your attention to, is the fact that if we apply the purport of this verse to our present condition, it will not be difficult to arrive at the conclusion that we are exactly in the state in which Allah says were those individuals and peoples who, despite their awareness of and faith in Allah's injunctions and guidance, had turned away from them and had created dissension amongst themselves.

However the past nations had the opportunity to be guided by other divine messengers after they had forgotten the teachings of earlier prophets. But that road has been eternally blocked for the followers of the last of Allah's Messengers. Because of this fact, the responsibility of the Muslim *Ummah* becomes comparatively much greater – indeed it becomes imperative for us to always remember the teachings of our Prophet (peace be upon him).

The evil to which Allah has drawn our attention in this verse is mutual dissent and antagonism due to personal or class interests. I personally think that the root cause of all the ills and evils which have us in their grip, is this mutual distrust and dissension. Just ponder for a moment. The *Ummah* that was elected to remove the causes of strife for the whole of mankind, is itself a victim of internal antagonisms and disintegration. As a result of this monstrous evil we invariably give precedence to our individual and group interests over the welfare and the larger interest of the *Ummah* and are reaping the consequences of this rebellion against "the Truth"

Our faith in Prophethood requires that we decide with all our heart and soul, to devoutly act on the teachings of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) in which we profess to have firm belief.

The last advice that he gave the *Ummah* contained these words:

"I am leaving behind me two things; if you adhere to them firmly and completely, you will never go astray and these two things are the Book of Allah and my personal example (Sunnah)".

We claim to love the Holy Prophet and these his words show us the path, which if we follow, will protect us from going astray. These are the two primary pillars of our faith – The Qur'ān and *Sunnah* (the Prophet's personal example). If we make them the basis and the criterion of our individual and collective character, all internal dissension and confusion will vanish from our midst in no time.

THE OBLIGATIONS OF THE DIVINE MESSENGER

Taking the message of Allah, the Most Exalted, to His human creatures and conveying it fully and conscientiously to them is called "Assignment to Apostleship". Apostleship cannot be acquired. It is bestowed by Allah. He bestows it on whomever He wants:

...Allah knoweth best with whom to place His message... [Qur'ān, VI:124]

This, because Apostleship is not an ordinary position but a most exalted and glorious office. And it is the law of Nature that higher the office the more onerous will be the accompanying responsibilities and wider will be their sphere. The whole world knows that the Holy Prophet of Islam (to him all prayer and benediction) has a precedence over all prophets of Allah, since Adam. His Apostleship is eternal and universal. The Book revealed to him is Allah's final Message to mankind after which no "Word" will ever be sent down to it. The faith that he was ordained to preach and establish is so comprehensive, perfect and definitive, that no other religion or *Shari'ah* will ever be needed after it for the guidance of mankind. The institutions of prophethood and Apostleship, religion and canon, the Word and Revelation attained perfection and completion in his mission and the door was closed on them forever. He is the Prophet for the whole world, the most excellent of Messengers, 'the Seal of the Prophets'. His this glorious and lofty status is in itself a testimony that the sphere of his obligations and functions is correspondingly wide and all-embracing. And surely it is a proof of the loftiest state of his perfection that he accomplished his great and all-embracing obligations and responsibilities with such unique excellence and with such unequalled and unprecedented success that the world has never seen and will never see the like of it till eternity.

Thinkers and philosophers are completely dumbfounded by his more than miraculous achievements. Heaven and earth are lost in amazement.

...But Allah chooseth for His mercy whom He will... [Qur'ān, II:105]

The Holy Qur'ān itself has shed light on the duties and obligations of this chosen amongst the chosen messengers of Allah. Here only a few of his fundamental duties will be mentioned to illustrate the point, from which it will be possible to have some idea of how great and important his mission was in the eyes of Allah and for the whole of mankind. These are clearly and specifically mentioned at four different places in the Holy Book. The first mention is in the text of the

prayer of Hadrat Ibrahim while the foundations of the Holy Ka'ba were being laid:

"Our Lord! And raise up in their midst a messenger from among them who shall recite unto them Thy revelations, and shall instruct them in the Scripture and in wisdom and shall make them grow..."

[Qur'ān, II:129]

The second verse is:

"Even as We have sent unto you a messenger from among you, who reciteth unto you Our revelations and causeth you to grow, and teacheth you the Scripture and wisdom, and teacheth you that which ye knew not."

[Qur'ān, II:151]

The third verse is:

"Allah verily hath shown grace to the believers by sending unto them a messenger of their own who reciteth unto them His revelations, and causeth them to grow, and teacheth them the Scripture and wisdom..."

[Qur'ān, III:164]

The fourth verse occurs in the *sūra Juma*, and it enumerates the same attributes. A serious study of the verses brings out the fact that Allah, the Most Exalted, did not ordain his final Messenger only to recite the verses of the Holy Qur'ān to the people, but there were three more objectives in view. One, that he should teach the people; two, that he should teach them the wisdom to live according to the Grand Design of the Book, and three, that he should purify the inner self of the individuals as well as their collective psyche. He was required to create an environment of rectitude and well-being by abolishing all causes of collective corruption. If the teaching of the Book and the Wisdom was limited only to the recitation, before people, of the verses of the Holy Qur'ān or at the most to the exposition of their import, separate mention of the process of purification would be meaningless.

The fact is that the plans he devised from time to time for the training of the individuals and the true nurturing of an ideal society were a function and responsibility beyond the duty of speaking the words of the Qur'ānic text before the people. The duties he performed in regard to training along with education, were a part of his assignment. He had not taken this upon himself of his own accord. Every one who believes in the Qur'ān and the Holy Prophet's assignation as Apostle is well aware that both these responsibilities formed a part of his prophethood and Apostleship. That is why they are mentioned time and again and stated with such emphasis. And the Holy Prophet fulfilled these obligations wherever he was, whether alone or in company, whether at home or in the midst of the general public. And it is this fact which tells us imperatively, that

what he said besides quoting the text of the Holy Book is also authentic and not accepting the authority of his Sayings is tantamount to the repudiation of his Apostolic mission and the basic attribute of Apostleship. This special feature of his Apostolic duties has been elaborated in this verse:

"...We have revealed unto thee the Remembrance that thou mayst explain to mankind that which hath been revealed for them..."

[Qur'an, XVI:44]

The verse makes it amply clear that it was a part of his divine job to explain to the people in full detail the guidance and the injunctions Allah gave through the Holy Qur'an. The process of explanation and exposition is not confined to the paraphrase of the text and its words and phrases. It would not be exposition and elucidation if it did not include the significance and the inner implications of the words, their relevant nuances, and their applicability in the context of time and place. The Qur'an does not call him a translator but an interpreter and interpretation and exposition was pointedly referred to as part of his Apostolic mission. One purpose of exposition is to make the listener fully understand the meaning and the spirit of the thing explained. And the second equally, if not more, important purpose is to practically demonstrate its practical aspects, if it has any, by acting on it. It is this practical demonstration which will bestow upon men the honour of becoming truly aware of the intent of Allah revealing His Word.

A closer study of this verse makes it apparent that the real purpose behind revealing the Holy Qur'an was that the Holy Prophet should interpret and elucidate it through his word and deed. Because a mere repetition of its words cannot serve the purpose of those who want to know the intent and the objective of the Book. Therefore, Allah, the Most Exalted, gave to the Holy Prophet the status of the interpreter of the Qur'an. Any person who thinks this function to be apart from the office of Apostleship and only personal and a purely self-assumed duty is totally unaware of the true concept of prophethood.

It was said, a sentence ago, that the Holy Prophet did not take on the duty to elucidate and interpret the verses of the Holy Qur'an, of his own accord, but that it was specified as one of his major prophetic responsibilities by the Holy Qur'an. It seems necessary to draw attention to this verse, as a proof of this assertion:

"Verily in the messenger of Allah ye have a good example for him who looketh unto Allah and the Last Day..."

[Qur'an, XXXIII:21]

It means: follow the Qur'an in letter and spirit. In addition to the interpretation of the revealed Word of Allah, it is your function to enforce it and the extent of its expanse is hinted at in this verse:

"...He will enjoin on them that which is right and forbid them that which is wrong. He will make lawful for them all good things and

*prohibit for them only the foul; and
he will relieve them of their
burden and the fetters that they used to wear..."*

[Qur'ān, VII:157]

Not one but many verses bear testimony that Allah has also appointed him the judge and has commanded him to give his decisions in matters that are in contention. Allah, the Most Exalted says:

*"Lo! We reveal unto thee the
Scripture with the truth, that thou mayst
judge between mankind by that which
Allah showeth thee..."*

[Qur'ān, IV:105]

It means that one purpose of revealing the Book is to enable him to judge matters at issue and give decision. One of the main functions of Apostleship is to publish the faith, and it has been specified in this verse:

*"O Messenger! Make known that which hath
been revealed unto thee from thy Lord,
for if thou do it not, thou will not have
conveyed His message..."*

[Qur'ān, V:67]

As this verse indicates, it was a part of the Holy Prophet's mission to deliver the commands of Allah and His guidance, exactly as they were sent to him, to the people. It was in the performance of this function of Apostleship that he had to leave his hearth and home. But he accepted all adversity, all hardship with glorious fortitude and Apostolic acceptance, till the process of revelation came to completion and the final Message of Allah had been spread throughout the world. He progressed from extreme helplessness to Allah's succour and the complete triumph of his Apostolic mission, and while delivering his historic address on the occasion of the farewell Hajj, he asked his audience three times "O men, have I delivered the Message of Allah?"

And the audience replied three times in one voice, "Of course you have, O Prophet of Allah" Then the final Messenger of Allah in this moment of supreme triumph and glory said in all humility:

"Be witness, O Lord".

These were the manifold obligations and responsibilities of his Apostolic office which he fulfilled with unprecedented excellence and unequalled majesty. May countless blessings of Allah descend on his pure and sacred soul. Amen.

THE HOLY PROPHET AS PORTRAYED BY THE HOLY QUR'ĀN

At the time the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) was ordained as Allah's last Messenger two groups existed which called themselves 'the people of the Book'. The Holy Qur'ān has itself authenticated their claim. It elucidates some basic shortcomings of these 'people of the Book', and study of which brings out the fact that besides many other serious flaws and wrong concepts that they had introduced in the set of their beliefs, their most pronounced corruption was that they had completely distorted even the concept of prophethood. A thing worth keeping in mind, at this point, is that the concepts of prophethood that these two groups enunciated, were contrary to each other.

The first of these groups is that of the Israelites. The Holy Qur'ān tells us that their attitude towards the prophets Allah sent to them was exceedingly hostile and rude. The Qur'ān says that when Moses (peace be upon him) called them to *Jihad*, the holy war, they said to him, "O Moses! Go forth thou and thy Lord and do battle, we will be sitting here"

The Israelites openly disobeyed their prophets, behaved most insolently towards them, so much so that they even murdered some. As against this, the other group of 'the people of the Book' mixed up the concept of prophethood with the concept of god-head. They held the prophet, may Allah forgive me for repeating this heresy, to be a part of Allah. They made icons of Jesus Christ (peace be upon him) and his sacred mother Mary (may peace be upon her) and started worshipping them.

Islam came with the mission to rectify and reform the beliefs, spiritual and moral perceptions, and actions of mankind. It gave us a true and explicit definition of the role and place of Allah's prophets. On the one hand, it laid full emphasis on the fact that Allah's prophets deserve the utmost honour, reverence and love of mankind — Allah has enjoined complete obedience to the holy prophets in the Holy Qur'ān: "Obey Allah and obey His Prophet". The Qur'ān has gone far in stressing man's obligation to respect and venerate the prophets:

"O ye who believe! Lift not up your voices above the voice of the Prophet, nor shout when speaking to him as ye shout one to another, lest your works be rendered vain while ye perceive not." [Qur'an, XLIX-2]

One can well judge from this guidance the lofty and venerable status Allah has ordained for the Prophet. The Holy Qur'ān says that obedience to the Prophet means obedience to Allah, love of the Prophet is equivalent to the love of Allah and is an integral part of the believers' *Imān* (faith). On the other hand, the

Holy Qur'ān tells us clearly – in no uncertain terms – and is quite categorical in stating that the prophet is a human being. He is a man like all other men. Prior to Islam, it was an irrevocable belief, universally held, that man can never be the viceregent and deputy of Allah. Reformers, spiritual guides and prophets were considered supernatural beings. A common view was that a man who is in every way human and moves about, eats and drinks, wakes up and goes to sleep like normal men cannot be a prophet. It was on this basis that Pharaoh refused to accept the words of Moses and Aaron (peace be upon them) and scornfully said, "Shall we have to put our faith in two men who are like us and to believe in and obey them?" It is said in the *sūra Mominūn* (The Believers):

"...Shall we put faith in two mortals like ourselves..." [Qur'ān, XXIII:47]

But the Qur'ān rejected these commonly held views as false, and said more than once on behalf of the Holy Prophet:

"Say: I am only a mortal like you..." [Qur'ān, XVIII:110]

By commanding the Holy Prophet to announce this fact to the whole of mankind, the Qur'ān made it clear that Allah's prophet too was human – a man who has hands and feet like other men, who enters into wedlock, meets and socialises with other human beings, has the normal human instincts and emotions. Grief and happiness, pleasure and pain affect him as they do other men. Because Islam is a religion in complete accord with man's true nature, it is meant to ensure the well-being of men, to guide them towards righteous action and to put this wordly life in proper order. And as Allah has sent it through a prophet, he has necessarily to be a human person.

The Holy Qur'ān has always emphasised the fact that the Holy Prophet too is a servant of Allah and is subservient to His ordinance. Whatever he does or can do, is subordinate to Allah's will. In himself he does not have any special power; he does not have any jurisdiction over Providence. He is as subordinate to divine will as any other man. He cannot harm or do good to any person without the will of Allah. Allah the Almighty says in the Holy Qur'ān:

"Say: I have no power to hurt or benefit myself, save that which Allah willeth..." [Qur'an, X:49]

When Ā'ysha (may Allah be pleased with her) was asked about the Holy Prophet's disposition she put a counter question, "Have not you read the Holy Qur'ān?". She said a very profound thing in this very meaningful sentence. She told the questioner that the Prophet's life was in complete accord with the life-style enunciated by Islam. His moral conduct was of a man who acts meticulously according to the letter and spirit of Islam and his life and the Qur'ānic ideal of human righteousness are exactly identical. The Holy Qur'ān mentions some of the moral qualities of the Holy Prophet and states that he had attained to the loftiest heights of moral excellence:

"And lo! thou art of a tremendous nature."

[Qur'an, LXVIII:4]

He was love and affection personified not only for those who believed in him but even for those who belied and rejected him. He prayed for forgiveness even for his worst enemies and so incessantly, that Allah had to say:

*"Ask forgiveness for them (O Muhammad),
or ask not forgiveness for them; though thou ask forgiveness for
them seventy times Allah will not forgive them..."*

[Qur'an, IX:80]

At another place in *sūra, Tauba*, (Repentance) it is said:

*"There hath come unto you a messenger, (one) of yourselves, unto
whom aught that ye are overburdened is grievous, full of concern
for you, for the believers full of pity, merciful."*

[Qur'an, IX:128]

In the same manner eloquent and clear references about the personal attributes and moral excellences of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) are found in other *sūras*: *Al-Kahf*, *Anbiya*, *Āl-i-Imran*, *Muzzammil*, *Ahzab*, and *Al-Najm* to quote only a few. Their study shows that he had complete trust in Allah, was a man of strong determination, steadfast, of great will power, soft and pleasant, desirous of the good of all people, anxious for mercy, lover of the truth, upholder of righteousness, worshipful, seeker of Allah's refuge against His chastisement — indeed a perfect ideal for all mankind for ever and anon. The more one delves deep into the verses of the Qur'an, the more adorable will emerge the personality of the Holy Prophet and worthier of complete and unreserved devotion and obedience. The picture of Allah's last Messenger that emerges from a full understanding of the Qur'an, is of a peerless man, the greatest of Allah's messengers, the most perfect, blemishless, sacred and sanctified — the like of whom has never been seen and will never be seen by the heavens and the earth.

Blessings of Allah be on the greatest of prophets who brought Allah's last manifest word to us and showed us the path of truth, righteousness, honour and glory, well being and submission (may peace be on him, his family and his Companions):

*"He is all excellence, all perfection,
Beauty becomes manifest in his person.
He is the blend of all good attributes
Peace on him and his house"*

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SUBMISSION TO THE HOLY PROPHET
(peace be upon him)

Allah has clearly stated in His Book:

"We sent no messenger, save that he should be obeyed by Allah's leave..."

[Qur'ān, IV:64]

If a person wishes to have direct access to Allah or pray to Him without submission to the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) he has, from the Islamic point of view, strayed away from the right path. Similarly, after the assignation of the Holy Prophet, righteousness and piety consist in complete obedience to him and in following him. Anyone seeking guidance from elsewhere or looking for another faith or religion cannot hope to receive the approbation of Allah. This because Allah has pointedly exhorted mankind in the Holy Qur'ān, time and again, to follow Allah and the final Messenger. This, in effect, implies that obedience to Allah is conditional upon total submission to His last Prophet (peace be upon him).

There is much logic behind this command, because the *Shari'ah* of Islam was transmitted by Allah to mankind through the agency of the Holy Prophet. And the fact that the Qur'ān is the Word of Allah was also revealed to us by him! Had the Holy Prophet not been assignated and had he not proclaimed the true faith we would have continued to wallow in darkness, neither knowing that there is only one god and that is Allah nor being blessed with the knowledge of His commands and injunctions. Besides, the Holy Prophet is not only a Messenger, but he is the supreme guide and leader for mankind till the end of time and consequently subservience to him and obedience to all that he enjoined is, in fact, submission to the commands of Allah.

"...And whatsoever the messenger giveth you, take it. And whatsoever he forbiddeth, abstain (from it)..."

[Qur'ān, LIX:7]

Allah says about the Holy Prophet:

"Nor doth he speak of (his own) desire. It is naught save an inspiration that is inspired."

[Qur'ān, LIII:3-4]

Two facts become immediately self-evident from the above verse. One is that the statements of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) represent the commands of Allah and what he says is in effect the Word of Allah and therefore compliance is imperative for all Muslims. This fact has been elucidated by Allah at another place in these words:

*"Whoso obeyeth the messenger,
obeyeth Allah..."*

[Qur'an, IV:80]

Thus submission to the precepts and guidance of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) is submission to Allah, whilst insubordination to him is disobedience to Allah. And it has been said further:

*"...and whoso is rebellious
to Allah and His messenger,
he verily goeth astray in error manifest."*

[Qur'an, XXXIII:36]

We could perhaps give a down-to-earth example to bring home our point. An act of disobedience against an official of the state is invariably considered a violation of the laws and statutes of the state, and dealt with as such. This example, though totally unworthy of the sublimity of the matter being considered, nevertheless, should make it clear that, if a person disobeys the Holy Prophet he is in fact guilty of the crime of defying Allah, the Lord and Master of all existence.

In this context the example of Iblis is before us. He was commanded by Allah to prostrate himself before Adam, but his argument in his refusal to obey was that, since he was created from fire and Adam from clay, he enjoyed precedence over the latter. The matter in its essence was ordinary. The question was not who was superior to whom. It was a question of submitting to the Will of Allah. Satan by his refusal to obey the command of Allah became eternally accursed. Likewise, Allah specifically ordained that we obey His final Messenger and declared that submission to his Messenger is in reality submission to Him. Hence a person who deigns to disobey the Holy Prophet is guilty of the gravest of sins. He alone is a true believer who finds true happiness in complete conformity to the injunctions of the Holy Prophet. Allah's love cannot be hoped for unless one submits to the Holy Prophet with his total being. It was to explain this concept that Allah asked the Holy Prophet to tell the people:

*"Say (O Muhammad, to mankind): If ye love Allah, follow me.
Allah will love you, and forgive you your sins..."*

[Qur'an, III:31]

The personality and the attributes of the Holy Prophet are a perfect ideal

worthy of emulation by mankind till the end of time. Everything that we consider noble and great we find in his person – statesmanship, compassion, hatred of cruelty and injustice, magnanimity towards enemies, love for children, forgiveness, charity, virtue, humility – name any noble quality and you will find that the Holy Prophet was richly endowed with it. Thus the more a person brings himself in line with the life of the Holy Prophet, the more likeable will he become in the sight of Allah. The Companions of the Holy Prophet (may Allah be pleased with them) had fully realised this fact and therefore whenever the Holy Prophet wished to explain something to them employing the question-answer method and put a question they would say with great deference that only the Prophet of Allah knew best. They listened to everything the Holy Prophet said with care and remembered his each and every word, with the intention of faithfully carrying out his instructions. The happiness of the Holy Prophet was always kept in view by Allah, the Most Exalted. At one place it is said in the Qur’ān:

“But nay, by thy Lord, they will not believe (in truth) until they make thee judge of what is in dispute between them and find within themselves no dislike of that which thou decidest, and submit with full submission.”

[Qur’ān, IV:65]

The overall character (*uswa-i hasnah*) of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) is all-embracing in magnitude, for there is not a single aspect of human life in thought or deed that it does not encompass. All the books on his life and the Traditions as also the injunctions of the Qur’ān clearly bring out the point that following the example of the Holy Prophet in all matters with a willing heart is what submission to him really implies. We should like the things he liked. What he avoided or disliked we should also eschew. He always directed his followers to live like blood brothers amongst themselves. He used to tend to orphans, feed the indigent and the hungry, looked after widows, gave guidance to those who needed it and for the first time in human history, laid the foundations of an ideological state. He was compassionate and merciful even towards the pagans and infidels. He proselytised through love, not by force. The criterion by which our obedience to the Prophet will be judged is the extent to which we follow in his footsteps? For us Muslims of the 20th century, it is the Prophet who can be the true and perfect guide, no one else. It is the duty of every Muslim that he should work hard for the glory of Islam. Let us all, wherever we are, endeavour to approximate to the example the Holy Prophet set before us, to the best of our ability. Let us try to establish in the world of Islam – in all free Muslim countries – a social order on the pattern of the order he established in Madina. In the end, I offer the following prayer: Allah, praised and hallowed be Thy Name! Enable the Islamic world to hold fast to Thy true faith and to establish a dynamic world fraternity and to work for establishing Thy Kingdom on Earth. Amen!

**AL-QUR'ĀN – THE ILLUMINATED WORD OF ALLAH
THE HOLY PROPHET AS A LEADER-STATESMAN**

(The two principles he has left for mankind shall serve as eternal guidance)

The life and the disposition of the Holy Prophet is a perfect example for every Muslim to follow. As Muslims we need guidance from the life of the Holy Prophet at every step, in both our individual and collective life. There is not a single aspect of life in which he has not left for mankind a perfect example for emulation. The Holy Prophet was sent into this world as the last Prophet and as the most perfect man. He has not only presented to his *Ummah* a set of true beliefs and worship but has also given practical guidelines to achieve personal excellence and collective welfare – success in this world and divine Grace in the Hereafter. Having received a complete system of values from the Holy Prophet we do not have to look elsewhere, in any matter, big or small, for guidance. Quite to the contrary if the rest of the world begins to follow the teachings of the Holy Prophet and identifies itself with his life and personal example, it would be able to rid itself of the anxiety and the chaos in which it finds itself submerged at present.

We must realise the fact that the life of the Holy Prophet covers the entire span of human experience and affairs. He is at once a loving father, an affectionate husband, the leader of an *Ummah* and the head of an ideological state. But he is much more than all this. He showed how a man can become a true servant and slave of Allah, how conflicting group interests can be resolved, how human beings can be gathered together to make one universal fraternity, how matters in dispute can be settled on the basis of justice and equity and how a truly righteous welfare social order can be established, free of jealousies, disparities and conflicts. He achieved all this and with a perfection which has no parallel in human history.

The career of the Holy Prophet as a leader and a statesman is a beacon of light for us. In fact, it is an ideal for the whole of mankind. The Holy Prophet has clearly and unambiguously stated that in the matter of statutory punishments the rule of the law should operate without distinction. He said: "The earlier *ummahs* perished, because of dual standards of justice. If a respectable citizen was guilty of a crime he was not brought to the book while the common man was punished without a second thought". He once declared: "By Allah, if Muhammad's daughter, Fatimah, steals, I shall have her hand cut off".

How beautifully the Holy Prophet has expressed the supremacy of the rule of the law, in this *Hadīth*. The guilty should be punished irrespective of social status. Equality before law should be the basis of social organisation.

Even if the head of the state transgresses the law, he should be dealt with according to the law. The Holy Prophet has in one sentence given an eternally viable basis of social justice, equity, egalitarianism that is a sure guarantee of a stable and peaceful society.

History is a witness to the fact — and our recent past presents several shameful examples — that kings and absolute autocrats took oppressive and harsh measures to terrorise their subjects and their personal whims became the law. To consolidate their power such rulers and kings create an atmosphere of terror and total suppression of the people. But the Holy Prophet, enjoying wider powers and greater privileges than the most autocratic among kings and sovereigns, was far above the outward symbols of power and the formalities of protocol. The whole of the Arabian peninsula lay at his feet, but he used a worn out flaxen bedspread for his repose. Powerful potentates and kings were subservient to him, but he did not use his power to overawe the people. He won their hearts with love and the matchless excellence of his character, his all-embracing mercy and compassion and his adherence to absolute standards of human equality and social justice. A man who once presented himself before the Holy Prophet was overawed by him, and started trembling like an aspen leaf. The Holy Prophet, instead of being pleased with this manifestation of awe, said something that serves as a unique charter and a perfect example for mankind. Said he: "Be not afraid. I am the son of a poor woman of the Quraysh tribe, a lady who subsisted on dried meat". In these few words the Holy Prophet has presented a standard of nobility and an ideal of human kindness which will serve as a shining example to all who want to be remembered as just and kind rulers of men. The real greatness of man lies in his acts, in comportment, in knowledge, and in service and not in pomp. Ostentatious behaviour and wealth are no measures of greatness or grandeur.

For a leader-statesman it is necessary that he should be soft-spoken, and considerate towards his colleagues and should not treat them as inferiors. He should give them encouragement and help them to become self-confident. The Holy Prophet used to work as an equal with the lowest amongst his subordinates. Once the Holy Prophet went on a journey along with his Companions. The group stopped on the way to have meal. He desired that a goat be cooked for the purpose. One Companion offered to slaughter, another to prepare the meat and the third, to cook it. The Holy Prophet volunteered to bring firewood from the wood. The Companions said that they would do this chore too. The Holy Prophet thanked them for showing this consideration but said, "I do not like to sit aside as a privileged person while my friends are working. Allah does not like that a person should behave as a superior or higher being".

One other moral quality essential for a leader is sympathy and compassion. Allah had endowed the Holy Prophet with infinite sympathy and fellow-feeling. He always kept himself informed of the troubles and worries of his Companions and was most considerate to them and shared their anxieties with love and understanding. One of the ways, of warding off Allah's wrath, that has been taught by the Messenger of Allah is to help people in their time of need.

Consultation is not only useful but imperative for a head of state and leader

of a people. The Holy Prophet has not only enjoined mutual consultation but himself set an example in this regard. He made it a point to give his decision in matters of primary importance and affairs of common weal after detailed consultations with his friends and Companions.

Khatib Baghdādi has quoted a *Hadīth* from Hadrat Ali. The latter asked the Holy Prophet: "O Prophet of Allah, if we are faced with a situation about which no guidance is contained in the Qur'ān and about which we have not heard anything from you, what shall we do"? The Holy Prophet said: "In such a situation gather the wise and righteous people from amongst my *Ummah*, place the matter before them for consideration and decide in accordance with the best advice you get."

The Holy Prophet himself followed the injunction!

"...Consult with them upon the conduct of affairs..."

[Qur'ān, III:159]

And decided the affairs of the state on the basis of consensus.

The Holy Prophet saw to it that those appointed to administrative posts were people who enjoyed, because of their disposition and ability, the confidence of the people, and were well-liked by them. In other words, he was fully aware of the need to have popular and righteous people as administrators.

The Holy Prophet said: "Your best leaders are those whom you like and who like you; you pray for them and they pray for you. The worst among you as leaders are those whom you abhor and who abhor you, they curse you and you curse them".

In sum, it might be stated that the qualities of leadership so uniquely manifested by the Holy Prophet – statesmanship, mutual consultation, justice and human kindness, simplicity, straightforwardness and popularity – are what a true national and world leader should possess to be successful in his undertaking. The personal example of the Holy Prophet as the greatest leader of mankind in history will stand as a beacon light for ever and for ever for those who desire to lead mankind in order to serve it and to enable it achieve moral excellence and social and political glory.

MORALITY PAR EXCELLENCE

The Holy Qur'ān says about the Holy Prophet:

"And lo! thou art of a tremendous nature."

[Qur'ān, LXVIII:4]

This exquisite crown of moral greatness is recognised as one of the unique qualities of the Holy Prophet, because from Adam till todate nobody has been given the testament of excellence and perfection by the Lord and Master of the world, which was awarded to 'the Seal of the Prophets'. A very large number of prophets preceded him and the Holy Qur'ān has enumerated the special attributes of many of them. But the fact of the matter is that no true believer can entertain even the slightest doubt about the noble attributes of these sacred and chosen persons of Allah.

The Holy Qur'ān has given us this advice:

"...We make no distinction between any of His messengers..."

[Qur'ān, II:285]

But then, some prophets do have precedence over some others and this fact has also been announced in these words:

"Of those messengers, some of whom We have caused to excel others..."

[Qur'ān, II:253]

Amongst these preferred prophets the best is the final Messenger, the Seal of the Prophets (may peace be upon him) in whose person the institution of Prophethood and Apostleship reached its perfection as well as finality and to whom was given the final and most perfect faith of Allah for the whole of mankind. The Book revealed to him was called the last Book, the *Shari'ah* brought by him was termed the final *Shari'ah* and his teachings were established as the complete code of life. He was given a definitiveness of excellence and perfection the like of which has and can never be seen elsewhere.

All these attributes made it necessary that the life and the moral character of the sacred being in whom all of them reached their ultimate perfection should be an example and an ideal for the human race, till the end of time. And no part of his personality should be such as not to be a true guidance and a beacon light for any period of time, for any part of the world or for any tribe or race of the human stock — in short, he had to be the true guide for all mankind till eternity.

Submission reached its climax in him, so much so that Allah Himself blessed him with the title of 'the Servant of Allah'. His patience and fortitude was absolute — nothing beyond it can be conceived by the human imagination. His spirit of self-sacrifice stands unparalleled in the annals of human history and the like of it will never be witnessed by time, ever again. His commiseration and mercy, sympathy and compassion, steadfastness and constancy, self-respect, humility and submissiveness, valour and courage were all unique in their quality and for ever matchless — even his worst enemies acknowledged them as perfect. He was truthful and straightforward to a measure beyond human reach. These are the attributes to which reference has been made in this *Hadīth*: "I have been assigned to take the moral excellences to their ultimate perfection". Other prophets of Allah were also undoubtedly endowed with high moral attributes. But Allah chose him to make perfect, human moral faculty. The fact of the matter is that if he had not been assigned as the Seal of the Prophets, the consciousness of high morality would of course have been there but it would have been impossible to have a clear perspective of absolute moral perfection.

Now I want to draw your attention to the particular moment of time when the Holy Qur'an bestowed upon him this crown of moral elevation and superiority, and the distinctive moral excellence on account of which he was given the position of 'mighty morality'. In fact it was during that period of his prophetic mission when all the forces of unbelief and paganism were gathered together with all their might and resources and were obstructing the Prophet's path. The unbelievers could reject the Day of Judgement and the concept of accountability, and they did. They could deny the One-ness of Allah and they did. But there was one thing they never dared deny. And that undeniable miracle was the unparalleled honesty and trustworthiness of the Holy Prophet, his fairness and truthfulness. When they found no leeway to point the finger of accusation to his immaculate moral character they levelled the charge of madness in relation to his "Call to Truth". This vile allegation was a manifestation of their self-contradictory thinking. To contradict this wild allegation, the Holy Qur'an says:

"And lo! thou art of a tremendous nature."

[Qur'an, LXVIII:4]

The announcement of this 'mighty morality' this morality *par excellence* was made by 'swearing by the pen and the word that it writes', which clearly shows that what he is offering relates to knowledge. And where there is knowledge there is morality also, because true knowledge and moral excellence are inseparable. Where knowledge is lacking, morality must necessarily be lacking. Then why are those infidels so blinded by their malice that a person who is placed on the loftiest heights of moral virtue and whose invitation is based on true knowledge is held to be mad by them? How is it possible? In fact they who allege this are themselves lunatics. And there is an implied hint to the Holy Prophet in this announcement that "soon you will see and they also will see who in real fact is mad. Your life, O Prophet of Allah, will become a universal ideal for mankind, your mighty morality will conquer the hearts of the whole

world and will provide a glorious example of truthfulness, fulfilment of promise, honesty and trust, equality and fairness, softness and compassion. Of course the ignominious end of those who say, you are mad will be a lesson for the whole of mankind". The declaration of this 'morality *par excellence*' has another very meaningful aspect and that is to bring out the fact that what distinguishes a man from other creatures is not his natural disposition but his moral character. It is his moral character which gives him his superiority and precedence. There is no difference between a man and an animal in so far as instincts and reflexes are concerned. In fact all the prophets were sent to shape and build good moral character amongst the human kind. Wisdom and the scale of higher values was sent down for the same purpose. That is why the possessor of 'the mighty morality' (peace be upon him) has thrown light on his assignation in these words:

"I have been sent as a teacher".

Earlier, elucidating this very point, the *Hadith* which talks of the perfection of morality was narrated. If an attempt is made to find out the link that joins together teaching and perfection of morality, it will not be difficult to realise that the function of a teacher is not merely to expound a point of knowledge but to reshape and rebuild human morality. And morality can reach the stage of perfection only when the teacher himself is complete and perfect in his morality. It is, therefore, an announcement for the whole world, that the Prophet who has been ordained to make perfect morality is himself in the eyes of Allah at the highest position of moral perfection and his morality is such a perfect blend of knowledge and action, word and deed where there is not the remotest or the tiniest contrariness. Just think. Why was Abdullah bin Ubaee and his whole crowd declared 'the hypocrites and the dissemblers'. He verbally professed to be a Muslim and apparently obeyed the divine injunctions. But in reality his character rather than being blessed with unity of thought and deed was a jumble of contradictions between belief and action. As opposed to this if you study the morality of the Holy Prophet you will find his chaste and sacred being perfect in all that is good and noble and completely pure of and above all that is not decent. You will never come across even the tiniest speck or shade of contrariness or contradiction in his moral character. When he taught equality, the slaves became the masters and the masters their servants. As a result of his extolling the virtue of fraternity, strangers became better than blood brothers in Madina. He distributed vast quantities of wealth amongst the people but himself left the world in a condition that the lamp in his hut had no oil and not a handful of grain was there in it.

As Allah, by declaring that the faith had been perfected and completed, gave notice to the world that neither another prophet would be assignated nor another Book would be sent down till the end of time, similarly by saying 'you are on a mighty morality', He informed that no higher state of moral perfection could ever be conceived. Indeed, the Holy Prophet was the embodiment of the most complete and perfect morality.

If any man's moral character can be taken out of world history as a perfect and eternal ideal for mankind, it is undoubtedly the morality *par excellence* of the Holy Prophet (may peace be upon him).

THE FINALITY OF PROPHETHOOD

According to the Holy Qur'ān and the Traditions of the Holy Prophet, the problem of prophethood has basic importance in the domain of faith and belief. Or viewing the matter in a larger context this problem relates to unbelief and Islam. If a person is, in fact, a prophet or messenger of Allah and we, Allah forbid, refuse to believe in him, the whole edifice of our faith collapses at once and we become infidels. Because it is belief in the Oneness of Allah, prophethood, revelation and the life after death which constitutes the true faith. If there is even the slightest flaw in our faith, and belief in any one of these basic components is faulty, we are not true believers. On the other hand if a person is not truly a prophet or messenger of Allah and we accept him as one, we not only become infidels but are perpetrators of a grave and mighty crime against Allah and his sacred Book, because prophets are ordained by Allah and it is He who sends His messengers. If He has not sent anybody and we say that Allah has sent him we will be guilty of calumny and slander against our Lord and Master. We will be guilty of an abominable falsehood which history can never forgive.

Nations which make the institution of prophethood a joke can never hope to find the path of righteousness. The revealed Word and prophethood are the true and real fountain-head of guidance and if we are not clear in our minds about the nature of prophethood and the divine message, we can never hope to reach the goal of the ultimate truth.

The history of prophethood and apostolic mission informs us that prophets have been sent regularly and throughout history to show the path of truth and righteousness to men and to lead them to it and on it. And Allah's Word has been revealed to them and also His Books. But all the prophets and messengers who were ordained prior to our Holy Prophet were sent to particular peoples or nations. No earlier prophet was ordained for the whole of mankind, nor was the message given to any one of them meant to be universal. The teachings of the revealed Books also pertained to specific periods of time and did not encompass the totality of Time and Space. But when human civilization and culture had passed through the initial stages of the evolutionary process and the time had arrived when a prophetic message could become universal, cover the entire expanse of time and space and along with it an *Ummah* comprising people who had accepted the true guidance, and who could be entrusted with the absolute safe-keeping of Allah's Book and the practice and Tradition of the Prophet had become a practical reality, Allah in His complete wisdom decided to culminate the chain of prophethood and apostolic mission by bringing it to its final and complete form in the person of the last Messenger, our Holy Prophet (may peace

be upon him). To complete the process of providing guidance to mankind and to terminate the institution of prophethood with the completion of the mission of the the Holy Prophet He gave him the final Book which contained eternally viable teachings, and a universal message which was addressed to the whole of mankind for ever and for ever. There remained no need, after the true, complete and final faith had been given to mankind, to appoint any other person, at any future stage in human history, to the job.

In the beginning of the seventh century of the Christian era, the conditions obtaining in the world of man had made it imperative to send the last and final Messenger with a universal religion and a complete Book. To meet this need of history, Allah, the Most Exalted, appointed the Holy Prophet of Islam as His last Messenger to give guidance to the whole of mankind for all times to come and to be its eternal leader. No prophet will ever come after him; there will be no Book other than the Holy Qur'ān, no religion except Islam, no law except the *Shari'ah*, no revelation, no message besides what is given in the last Book. It is because of this that the Qur'ān today is available in exactly the same state in which it was revealed. Not a word has been changed, not a syllable added to the true and original text. And Allah has guaranteed that it will be, till the last day of human existence, exactly as it was revealed to the Holy Prophet. This, because the eternal and universal message of Allah contained in it is addressed to mankind – to the generation contemporary to the Holy Prophet and to the succeeding generations, all of them, till the end of the world.

Along with the Holy Qur'ān all the guidance and teachings of the Holy Prophet, his *Sunnah*, his practice even to the minutest detail are well and duly preserved. No aspect or phase of his life is hidden from the public eye. It is not so with other revealed Books, the lives of earlier prophets or their teachings.

And then there is another point and I think the most important consideration relating to this matter. Had it been the purpose and the Will of Allah to appoint any prophet after the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him), He would have clearly stated in the Holy Qur'ān, that He intended to do so. Instead He has stated clearly and unequivocally that the Holy Prophet is the 'Seal of Prophets', His last Apostle and final Messenger. And there are explicit hints in the light of which all Muslims, from the Companions of the Holy Prophet till to-date, have without any exception whatsoever, accepted the finality of prophethood in the person of Allah's final Messenger as an integral and irrevocable part of *Īmān*. We can get the proof of the termination of the institution of prophethood in the Holy Qur'ān, in *Ahadīth* and there has been complete consensus in regard to this belief. What greater proof can there be of the truth of a matter than the fact that it is affirmed by the Holy Qur'ān, corroborated by *Hadīth* in no uncertain manner and that it has enjoyed consensus within the *Ummah* throughout the Islamic history.

Let us first of all ponder relevant verses of the Holy Qur'ān:

"Muhammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the messenger of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets..."

[Qur'ān, XXXIII:40]

All exegetes say that the phrase "the Seal of the Prophets" means the last Prophet of Allah.

This is not the only verse pertaining to the finality of prophethood. There are clear pointers in other verses too. A major proof of the fact that he is the final Messenger is that his message is addressed to the whole of mankind and that he has been appointed as the true and only guide for the entire human race :

"And We have not sent thee (O Muhammad) save as a bringer of good tidings and a warner unto all mankind; but most of mankind know not."

[Qur'ān, XXXIV:28]

And again in the nineteenth verse of *sūra An'ām*: "And this Qur'ān has been revealed to me that I may warn you thereby, and whomsoever it may reach".

In the verse 158 of *Arāf*, it is said:

"Say (O Muhammad): O mankind! Lo! I am the messenger of Allah to you all."

[Qur'ān, VII:158]

In the *sūra Anbya*, Allah the Most Exalted says:

"We sent thee not save as a mercy for the peoples."

[Qur'ān, XXI:107]

When the Holy Qur'ān has declared to one and all the universality and the finality of the Holy Prophet's prophethood and his apostolic mission, the perfection of the true faith, the completion of divine munificences, the fact of the Prophet being mercy for the whole world and the eternal nature and viability of the guidance given to mankind through the Holy Prophet, what justification can there ever be for sending another prophet.

The second major source of the knowledge of Allah's intent and decision is the *Hadīth*, in which an unequivocal declaration is made of the culmination of prophethood in the Holy Prophet's mission.

Tirmizi says that Haḍrat Anas bin Malik quotes this *Hadīth* of the Holy Prophet:

"The chain of prophethood and apostleship ends with me. After me there will be neither any prophet nor messenger of Allah".

Many identical authentic Sayings of the Holy Prophet are found in the books of *Ahadīth*.

The third most important institution after the Holy Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* is the consensus of the Companions of the Holy Prophet (may Allah be happy with them all). History bears witness to the fact that after the demise of the Holy Prophet, the Companions waged the holy war against liars who had declared their prophethood and the people who were misled into believing

in them.

Along with the consensus of the Companions, there has been general consensus amongst men of religious learning and scholars of the faith throughout the history of Islam that the Holy Prophet is the last prophet of Allah and this high office was abolished on the completion of his apostolic mission. Those who hold this to be a basic component of the Muslim beliefs include the four exponents of the major schools of our canon and eminent scholars of the faculty of beliefs such as Tatravi Ibn Hazm Undlasi, Imam Ghazāli, Baghvi, and exegetes such as Zamakhashri, Qazi Ayaz, Shehrastānī, Rāzi, Ibn Kathir. Mullah Qāri has written in *Fiqh-i-Akber* that any claim of prophethood after the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) is unanimously held as rejection of Islam and an act of apostasy.

THE LAST OF ALLAH'S PROPHETS

Among the countless attributes of the Holy Prophet the one most distinguished and pre-eminent is his being the Seal of Prophets. This distinction of his is a clear manifestation of the fact that the institution of prophethood and apostleship reached its climax and perfection in his sacred person and in the eternal Message given to him, and thereby came to end. By giving him this divine title it was intended by Allah to make universally known the fact – that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the last Prophet and no Messenger would ever be assigned after him. The *Dīn* revealed to him is the universal and everlasting religion of truth and righteousness and is perfect in every respect. Allah the Most Exalted has Himself announced in the Holy Qur'ān that the *Dīn* given to the Holy Prophet is absolutely perfect and final:

“...This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favour unto you, and have chosen for you as religion AL-ISLAM...”

[Qur'an, V:4]

The 'Code' (*Shari'ah*) brought by earlier prophets (peace be upon them all) was also perfect and upto-date in their own times and met the human requirements and needs in their totality. But they did not have the universality and the eternal viability that is the distinguishing feature of Islam. This speciality belongs to the Seal of Prophets Hadrat Muhammad Mustafa (peace be upon him) that his message is addressed to all mankind, to the end of time. The Holy Prophet's assignation is not for any particular nation or region, but for the whole world of Man, for ever and for ever.

It is the law of Nature that every thing progresses stage by stage and reaches its point of perfection and finality after it has covered all stages inherent in its disposition and nature. Accordingly prophethood and the institution of apostleship reached its highest peak as well as the point of termination in the person of the Holy Prophet. His being the last of Allah's prophets is the greatest proof of the fact that in his person the personal attributes and excellences of all earlier prophets reached their zenith and in his *Dīn* the teachings of all prior *Shari'ah* found the most perfect and most complete expression. The Book revealed to him is not directed to any special class of men but is the complete code of life designed to provide guidance to all mankind for its well-being in this world and

salvation in the Hereafter.

He removed all flaws and badness in belief and conduct and gave us in his *Sunnah* a comprehensive and all-embracing system of life. The Holy Qur'an makes eloquent references to his status of the final Messenger time and again:

*"Their reckoning draweth nigh for mankind,
while they turn away in heedlessness."*

[Qur'an, XXI:1]

The mention of the nearness of the Day of Reckoning points to the fact that with the assignation of the Holy Prophet the human race is entering the last phase of its history. Every human faculty — knowledge, awareness and perception — is reaching its ultimate state of perfection. And after the Holy Prophet no other prophet will be assignated. He is thus the culmination of the institution of prophethood.

The belief in the finality of prophethood in the person of the Holy Prophet comes next only to the belief in the unity of Godhead in the Islamic set of beliefs. In the time of Imām Abū Hanīfa a person declared that he was a prophet and he asked people to be allowed to give proof of his assignation. Imām Abū Hanīfa who excelled in the knowledge of the Islamic philosophy and canon issued a religious verdict on this occasion:

"Anyone who asks this person for a proof or a sign will become guilty of apostasy, because the Holy Prophet has stated explicitly that no prophet would be sent after him".

In the same manner the philosopher of Islam, Hadrat Imām Ghazālī has said:

"The entire *Ummah* has consensus on the fact that the Holy Prophet unequivocally announced that there would no prophet ever after him. There is no scope of any revision of or exception in what he had said. To give it some peculiar nuance of meaning and thereby say that the institution which was terminated by him is continuing is nothing but sheer chicanery and nonsense. And after the last Prophet, any one who claims to be a prophet is guilty of clear infidelity and an act of rebellion against Allah".

In short, the decision to perfect the institution of prophethood as well as end it in the person of the Holy Prophet is the absolutely irrevocable decision and decree of the Lord of the universe.

The belief in the finality of prophethood is not a mere belief but a basic pillar of the Islamic civilisation and culture. It is the unifying link for the *Ummah* and our collective religious edifice is sustained only by this basic concept. This is the belief which makes our *Ummah* "the middle nation". Any attempt to create doubts about this primary belief which has fundamental importance

for us Muslims or to try to alter its eternal status is tantamount to causing serious damage to the identity of the *Ummah*.

The status of 'the last of the prophets' is an honour bestowed by Allah specifically on Haḍrat Muhammad (peace be upon him) and no second person can be associated with him in it, now or ever afterwards.

If we examine the matter with due care we will inevitably be led to the conclusion that there is no question at all of any other prophet ever being assigned after the Holy Prophet, because there can be only three causes of a prophet being sent after an earlier prophet.

1. The teachings of the earlier prophet have been destroyed and are no longer extant.
2. His teachings are not exhaustive and alterations and additions have become imperative.
3. The message of the earlier prophets was meant for a particular people and there is need for a prophet to be assigned to other nations and peoples.

Our Holy Prophet is a true guide and absolute teacher for the whole of mankind. Every living person, specially the Muslims, should in right earnest accept the guidance of the Holy Prophet and subordinate individual as well as collective life to his teachings. If we make an in-depth study of the matter we will come to realise that every leader of men and every philosophy of life in the last one thousand years has derived much inspiration and benefit from this universal guidance but many, by introducing narrow human perceptions in its all-embracing system, have dimmed its lustre, or given it a false glitter by adding to it spurious content. These false men and non-viable systems of thought have plundered the human mind and have done what they could to lead it astray. The Muslims should see through the dirty maneuvers which produce only falsehood and corruption on earth. We should first set our own house in order and be ready in full submission and acceptance to adhere to the guidance of the 'Seal of Prophets'. Only thus can we show to the world the true splendour of Allah's most perfect and final *Dīn*.

May Allah give us the strength and the wisdom to tread the straight path. Amen!

THE SERVANT AND THE LORD

*I created the jinn and humankind only that they
might worship Me.*

[Qur'ān, LI:56]

WORSHIP IS A BLESSING

Power and authority are apparently so fascinating that, in contrast to them, even the common man would not like to accept submission and servility, which in fact are a weakness and a shortcoming in his eyes. But there is another viewpoint also which leads people who ponder it seriously and in-depth, to a different conclusion. They are led to the realisation that submission and servility do not necessarily constitute a weakness and may, in fact, be a blessing. But how? When man worships man or when one people become a subject of another people, that is slavery and slavery is inherently undesirable and unacceptable. Neither he who enslaves others is honourable, nor he who becomes a slave is worthy of regard. Slaves, whether individuals or nations, have no position in comparison to free men and free nations. Needless to stress that it is very degrading for a man to be the slave of man. The only slavery which is an honour rather than a disgrace is that of Allah. It is the highest honour if Allah accepts a man as His slave. One worships his Creator and Lord as a servant and slave and his worship finds favour with his Lord – that, indeed, is a glory to be aspired for: “Thee only we serve, to Thee alone we pray for succour”. [Qur’ān, I:4].

Thus worship and servility can be acceptable. Only if they are an offering to Allah, the Omnipotent, the Peerless, Who created man, endowed him with countless blessings, exalted him to the highest rank and invested him with His vicegerency on earth. Not only did He create us but also He made it clear to us:

*“I created the jinn and humankind only
that they might worship Me.”*

[Qur’ān, LI:56]

What is worship? In Islam, the concept of worship is not confined to sheer ritual and the offering of formal prayers. *Ibadah* is a comprehensive term which embraces all overt and covert utterances and deeds, which are liked by Allah and earn His pleasure, such as the obligatory Prayer, Fasting, Hajj, Zakat, and moral qualities such as truthfulness, modesty, honesty, integrity, fulfilment of promise, fellow-feeling, affability, self-respect, human kindness, justice, sincerity, patience, forbearance, humility etc. In other words, the whole life of man can be a life of worship provided he leads it in submission and surrender to Allah:

*Say: Lo! my worship and my sacrifice and my living and my
dying are for Allah, Lord of the Worlds.”*

[Qur’ān, VI: 162]

In other words, if all the deeds of a person are done as acts of submission to Allah, they become acts of worship, no matter how worldly they seem ostensibly. For instance, the earning of a livelihood is prima facie a secular act but even this act acquires the grace of worship if it is done in a God-fearing, dutiful and honest way. Similar is the case of other acts, which become worship when they are done in conformity with the limits prescribed by Allah, and as an offering to Him. This attitude gives man a goal in life. He plans his activities on the basis of that goal, which serves as the yard-stick to measure virtue and vice and to distinguish the desirable from the undesirable. It is the unfailing touchstone to sort out the genuine and the spurious. Every sensible person knows that life is meaningless and barren without a high purpose. The whole beauty of life depends on having a goal. It is the end-purpose which gives life a meaning. The joy of life is predicated on the zest for it and it is through dedication to a goal that it gets organised. Such organisation enriches man with the wealth of tranquillity, poise and orderliness.

Dedication to a goal awakens in man the spirit of endeavour and it creates in him the desire to work hard and strive in earnest. The culmination of effort is the real success as it produces genuine peace of mind. Such tranquillity is the breath of life and without the composure and the confidence it creates, life would be barren and meaningless.

Impatience is one of the hurdles in the way of a total effort. In fact, it is the most telling handicap to impede effort and to thwart human striving. One of the advantages of worship is that man comes to practise patience. Thereby he has the reassurance that it is for him to try and it is for Allah to fructify it. It gives him the required measure of hope and resignation and weans him away from despair. He is steadfast in his effort, but leaves the consequences to Allah. When a person is in a haste to see the result even before the action is completed, it often becomes difficult to keep up the effort. Impatience kills the inclination to work hard. A virtuous person is patient as well as resigned to the will of Allah.

A servant and slave of Allah is not worried about his worldly affairs. In Him does he beseech and in Him does he repose all his hopes. This orientation gives him freedom, rids him of countless worries, and creates in him self-awareness and self-confidence. When he prays to Allah he has an ineffable communion with Him. It is a state of complete submission and self-effacement that is worth more than a treasure. Truly said Iqbal:

"The pang of desire is a priceless treasure.

Loath am I to exchange the bliss of my servitude with the grandeur of divinity".

THE CRITERION OF THE LOVE OF ALLAH

The inner urge for prayer and devotional activity is the manifestation of the love of Allah and the desire to get close to Him, because it is Allah, the Most Gracious and Mighty, Who is the sole aim of man's quest. The love of Allah is, indeed, the prime purpose of human life. To enable His servants to achieve this purpose, Allah the Most Gracious has delineated the means and measures in the Holy Qur'ān by which they can fill their hearts with His love. It is natural for man to love another man – parents love their children, a nation loves its sincere and selfless leaders. Man often loves some animals too. Some plants and flowers also attract him. All these manifestations of affection and love are at the human level – as between fellow creatures. But Allah in His Being is one and unique. There is nothing like Him. Man cannot conceive, can have no idea at all of His person. Hence the criterion of the love of Allah is entirely distinct and different. Allah's love for his creatures is infinitely greater than the love of parents for their children. But the nature of love in these two cases and their criteria are very different. The basis of man's love for Allah is that He should be held as 'the One and the Alone' and one should believe from within his being that He is the Creator of all existence and its sole Sustainer. There is none else to share His omniscience, His glory and His dominance. It is He alone who gives life and provides its sustenance. He bestows good health and cures disease. A necessary adjunct to this belief is the denial of all these attributes of power to non-Allah; because they pertain only to Him. It is incumbent on man to worship Him alone, and not defile his soul by bowing before any other powers, or by desiring help from and pinning his hopes on any other being.

Man should, in short, turn away from all else and attach himself fully and firmly to Allah. There is a *Hadīth* which runs thus: "Allah says when my servant offers non-obligatory, voluntary prayer, out of love and devotion and desires proximity to Me, I give him My love so that I become his ear and he hears through Me, I become his eyes and he sees through Me, I become his hands and he catches hold through Me, he begs and I grant what he begs and when he seeks refuge in Me, I give him sanctuary".

All these good qualities are acquired by man through voluntary prayer (*نوافل*), which is an indication of the fact that the criterion of man's love of Allah is that he should obey His commandments without question or hesitation—indeed with a willing and a loving heart. This is the test and the proof of man's love for Him and it is thus that one can obtain Allah's grace and love. Accordingly He has elucidated this point in the Qur'ān in unequivocal terms: A servant who

desires that Allah should love him, should unquestioningly and whole-heartedly obey the Messenger of Allah – scrupulously do all that the Prophet enjoins him and abstain from all that he has specified as vile and undesirable. This categorical imperative clearly shows that the criterion of the love of Allah is to unfailingly act according to the guidance of Allah's most loved servant and Messenger. If anybody imagines that he can obtain Allah's grace and love without total allegiance and submission to the Holy Prophet, he is completely mistaken and has lost his way.

It is so, because to Allah, Islam is the only true religion and the path of righteousness. When the only approved path of right action is the one so specified by Islam, no other path can lead man towards the inner state, that is love of Allah.

In a nutshell, the criterion of the love of Allah is acting according to the injunctions of the Holy Qur'an and giving complete obedience to His Prophet. This is how one can inculcate the love of Allah in one's heart and this is the state of one's being that ensures Allah's love for him. The Companions of the Holy Prophet had reached such an elevated moral and spiritual state and it so pleased Allah that He commended them in the Holy Qur'an and said that He was happy with them and they were happy in Him. This is the criterion of Allah's love that the Islamic *Shari'ah* has given to the believers. Allah, the Glorious, says "We are nearer to you than your life-vein," which in fact means that those who wander through dense forests and inhospitable wastelands in the quest of Allah, have turned away from the path ordained by Islam and have chosen a way for themselves which is not the one indicated by the true faith. At another place Allah says: "We are so close to man that he can ask of Us whatever he wants. When he asks for something We listen to his prayers and grant his wishes". In other words those who love Allah always find Him close to themselves, so much so that they believe in their hearts that if they continue to remember Allah – without interruption – He also will always keep them in mind and keep bestowing on them His bounties – Love and Grace.

Allah says in the Holy Qur'an:

"Seek help in patience and prayer;.."

[Qur'an, II:45]

which means "if you desire Our help and succour, be patient and make your prayers the means of Our remembrance and love".

Namaz – the obligatory congregational worship five times a day is one of the fundamental precepts and duties of Islam and an essential injunction of Islamic *Shari'ah*. It is a means of utmost importance – of remembering Allah and of coming closer to Him. All Muslims who tread this path and fulfil corresponding conditions, are sure one day to reach their desired goal.

Submission to Allah, conformity to His injunctions and obedience to His Prophet undoubtedly lead us to the high state of perpetual remembrance of Allah and His love. A side-passage or service lane to it is man's love for man; and respect for his status as man; sentiments a Muslim is required to cultivate.

A Muslim is a brother unto other Muslims – this brotherhood promotes mutual love, fellow-feeling, loyalty and affection. We are enjoined by Allah to elevate our morals so much so that our conduct in all affairs and mutual dealings should manifest our moral excellence. We Muslims should always keep in mind the fact that the Holy Prophet said that the reason for his being ordained the last of divine Messengers was “to achieve universal moral excellence”. Nothing more sublime or greater could be said about morality and indeed what the Prophet has said provides us clear guidance.

To sum up: The only way to perfect the love of Allah is to unquestioningly follow the course of subservience and submission to Him, as specified by the Holy Prophet. This is the will of Allah and His command. He has said: If you want Allah to love you, obey the Prophet of Allah – Do so and Allah will love you – Allah’s love is dependent on obedience to the Prophet.

May Allah give us Muslims the capability and the willingness to obey and follow the Holy Prophet, completely and unreservedly, to become worthy of His love and to achieve well-being and glory in this world and in the world to come. Amen!

THE TRUE LOVE OF ALLAH

Love for the benefactor, attachment and devotion to him is a natural human inclination. As Allah is the greatest benefactor of man, in the same manner, nobody can equal a true believer in gratefulness. Nobody can excel a Momin in his sense of gratitude and humble supplication which finds expression in his pledge of love and submission, to which he adheres, in word and deed, throughout this earthly life. This fact has been presented by Allah, the Most Exalted, in the Qur'ān, in these words:

"...Those who believe are stauncher in their love for Allah..."

[Qur'ān,II:165]

Manifestations of the love of Allah have always been prominent and conspicuous in the life of man. Those who had the audacity to choose their own ways of life had to fashion as best they could, their own modes of expressing the feelings of love. Since they were not taught by Allah, they ultimately proved to be not in accord with human nature.

For instance, man thought that the best method of expressing his love of Allah was to cultivate disgust for human association and so he renounced social intercourse and decided to live alone – away from other men – in wilderness. It occurred to him that nothing but self-mortification could truly express his love of Allah, so he stopped eating and drinking. One can see many other such instances in history and instances of it can be seen even in the present-day world amongst people who have not been able to benefit from divine guidance.

The Holy Qur'an calls these self-devised manifestations of the love of Allah as monasticism:

"But monasticism they invented – We ordained it not for them – only seeking Allah's pleasure, and they observed it not with right observance..."

[Qur'ān, LVII:27]

Similarly the Holy Prophet has said:

"There is no monasticism in Islam".

As against this monastic renunciation, the Qur'ān has indicated the true manner of showing one's love of Allah. It makes the Holy Prophet say:

*"If ye love Allah, follow me;
Allah will love you..."*

[Qur'ān, III:31]

It means that if the right method of showing love of Allah is chosen, Allah, in turn, himself promises to love His servants. Now let us see who are the persons whom Allah loves. It is said in the Holy Qur'ān:

"...Lo! Allah loveth the beneficent"

[Qur'ān, II:195]

In another verse Allah says:

"...Lo! Allah loveth the equitable."

[Qur'ān, V:42]

The attributes of a true believer are explained thus in a verse:

*"Who restrain their rage, and pardon the offences of their fellow-men
and Allah loves the good-doers".*

The same theme is expressed thus at another place:

*"And feed with food the needy wretch, the orphan and
the prisoner, for love of Him,"*

[Qur'ān, LXXVI:8]

All these verses inform us who the people are that deserve Allah's love and the actions which make them worthy of this great honour and recompense. The most pronounced aspect of the life of the Holy Prophet was his attitude of affection and consideration towards all men and his graciousness and utmost kindness to one and all. The fact of the matter is that the concept of true beliefs and right action that the Holy Qur'ān has given to mankind is based completely on love and compassion.

It does not isolate man's spiritual life from the mainstream of the natural law and the functional mechanism of the universe but considers it to be an integral part of the Grand Design. Hence its view that being a part of the macro-cosm which has Allah's Grace and infinite Mercy as its basis, man ought, necessarily, to be governed by the same principle – i.e. kindness and compassion. This fact has been brought out by the Qur'ān time and again and it wants man to fully understand that Allah's relationship with him is that of love, and man's true submission is submission to Him alone. Allah, for him who loves Him, is not only the object of worship but is his true beloved.

But what practical form should man's love of Allah take? Allah says that the path of His love passes through the love of His creatures. Any man who desires to love Allah should learn to love His creatures. The first portion of a *Hadīth* of the Holy Prophet, narrated by Abu Huraira (may Allah be happy with him) and quoted by Imam Muslim, runs thus: "On the Day of Judgement Allah will say to a person, 'O son of man I fell ill and you did not tend Me'. That person will be

taken by surprise and say, 'O Sustainer of all worlds, how could you fall ill'? Allah will then say, 'Did you not know that a servant of Mine, who was your neighbour, had fallen ill and you did not even care to go and enquire about his health? Had you gone to him you would have found Me close to him' ''.

This is, generally speaking, the way to cultivate the love of Allah. But this love has certain requirements and requisites. One basic requirement, as far as the people of Pakistan are concerned, is that they should know and appreciate the implications of the fact that Pakistan came into being on the 27th of Ramadan – 27th Ramadan is the day when the revelation of the Qur'ān to the Holy Prophet began, and it is the day that symbolises the freedom and sovereignty of Pakistan. The Muslims had pledged to Allah that they would establish the rule of the Qur'ān and enforce Allah's *Shari'ah* in Pakistan and would mould their lives in accordance with the precepts of Islam and truly present before the world an illustrious example of the Islamic life-style and the glory of Islamic morality and its code of higher values.

If this promise, this solemn pledge, remains unfulfilled, the Muslims will not be treading the path of Allah's love. This higher love demands that we keep our promise, however we may, and whatever its price. It demands that we love our *Ummah* and should be deeply attached to it, so much so, that every dust-particle of the world of Islam should be dear to us.

Every Muslim is entitled to our love and regard. We should love and respect one another. Mutual help should be a sacred duty for us and it should be our life mission to make Islam the universal religion it in reality is. Let us practise it in humble submission to Allah, establish a truly Islamic social order in the world of Islam and take the message of our faith to all corners of the world.

In fact this will be the visible proof and manifestation of our love of Allah – it is only then that we will come to deserve His kindness and munificence. And then His Grace and Beneficence will bring about a glorious revolution in our lives.

Let us all pray together and beg Allah, the Most Excellent and the Most Exalted, to lead us on the straight path, to protect and keep secure our *Ummah*, to fill the hearts of the Muslims of the world with His love and bestow upon them the understanding and the dynamic ability to serve Islam and Muslims. Amen!

THE COVENANT WITH ALLAH

On the day of creation, Allah took the pledge from all the human souls that Him alone they would ever acknowledge as the Lord Sustainer; and all the souls bore witness to this reality. This is the very pledge of which Allah has reminded human beings through the Holy Qur'ān in the following verse:

*“And (remember) when thy Lord brought forth
from the Children of Adam, from their reins, their seed, and
made them testify of themselves, (saying): Am I not your Lord?
They said: Yea, verily. We testify...”*

[Qur'ān, VII:172]

This interesting reality, if we think over it dispassionately, reveals man's innate passion for worship. It betokens the existence, unfelt though, of the perennial urge of that original covenant. Here it is worth noting that the people first addressed by Islam were the Arabs. They did not deny the existence of Allah. Yet they would worship too many gods, besides Allah, notwithstanding the eternal Covenant whereby they had accepted Him as their One and Only Lord. Allah alone is worthy of being called the Lord and Master; there is no god but He, and those who believe to the contrary are lost in heresy.

Islam is a natural way of life meant for the entire humanity, for all times and all climes. One of its innumerable distinctive features is that it is logical throughout in its exposition of fundamental concepts; and over and again it stresses the need to closely observe the universe and to make empirical use of reason so far as it is practicable and to acquire true understanding of the faith through objective thinking. Thus alone will the reality, that appears to be hidden, become clearly manifest, bringing into light that which is in oblivion.

Precisely for this reason, the Qur'ānic reasoning is based on history, and only those historical incidents have been narrated to prove its theses that were known to the Arabs. Besides history, nature and reason form the basis of its discourse. The Covenant to which I referred in the beginning enshrines, so to speak, Nature itself. In the Qur'ān, Allah reminds mankind thus: “Since you were a willing party to the eternal Covenant, you should by no means become remiss. You had better remember your pledge and own that Allah alone is the Lord”. In connection with the original oath taken by man in the world of souls, a *Hadīth* states that at the first touch Adam's back brought forth his offspring, and at the next touch the latter's back gave birth to further progeny. Then Allah asked all of them, “Am I not your Lord”?; and all of them replied in chorus, “Verily, Thou art our only Lord”. Thereupon, Allah said, “This

pledge has been taken to ensure that on the Day of Judgement you do not depose ignorance as an excuse, saying that you had no knowledge of it". In elucidation, another example has been given, purporting that when we were born we knew no word, while to-day we speak fluently. Undoubtedly, someone must have put these words in our mouth although we do not know when, and where. But, surely, some one did impart the requisite knowledge to us.

Similarly, although we do not remember where and when that pledge was taken from us, yet quite naturally the question arises as to who created in man the innate longing to bow his head in humble prostration. Every human being, be he a Jew or a Christian, a pagan or a Zoroastrian, a Hindu or a Buddhist, bows in prostration, albeit after his own custom and not in the proper manner the Muslims do. Anyway, this inherent sentiment of devotion is a pointer to the fact that "Someone" did take from us the pledge of worship and submission. And it is the same pledge which has been recalled in the Holy Qur'ān as "The Covenant with Allah".

This point has been further clarified in another Tradition (*Hadīth*) which states that every child is invariably born with the True Faith, i.e., Islam (which is inherent in the human soul). But, owing to extraneous causes, environmental influences, and parental and social training, it becomes a Jew, a Christian, a Zoroastrian, or even an atheist. Take, for instance, the young one of an animal. It is born with sound and safe limbs, excepting freak birth, but its owner often changes its appearance according to his own liking, by trimming its tail and its ears etc. In fact, in accord with the divine Covenant, every child is a born Muslim regardless of the religion that its parents profess. It is external factors which lead it to monotheism, polytheism or atheism.

Hence, of all the promises which man is required to honour, his covenant with Allah comes first and foremost. Firstly, it is the pledge of Nature that the Almighty Creator took from His creatures at the beginning of Time and which it is the paramount obligation of man to fulfil. Secondly, there are some other important promises and undertakings, which can be defined as a testament and which it is the moral duty of man to honour. Such oath or testament is to take an oath of allegiance to someone in the name of Allah. To carry out that promise is also essential according to the Islamic *Shari'ah*. Thirdly, there are those obligations which emanate from inter-human bilateral or multi-lateral agreements. Fourthly, there is the covenant subsisting inherently in human relations which relates to the specific rights of people, the fulfilment of which has been ordained by Allah. Apparently, these different forms of agreements are only among human beings, but truly speaking they fall within the ambit of the original covenant with Allah. Says Allah:

"And those who break the covenant of Allah after ratifying it, and sever that which Allah hath commanded should be joined, and make mischief in the earth..."

[Qur'ān, XIII:25]

In this verse, first priority is given to the fulfilment of the Natural Covenant that subsists directly between Allah and man. Next come the inter-human agreements and lastly the liabilities which devolve on man by virtue of kinship. There are four categories of such accords.

So, the divine covenant means the pledge, that Allah had taken from man at the beginning of creation and which pertained to His Dominion over all existence and man's acceptance of His Lordship. But implicit in that covenant are some matters which seemingly concern human beings alone but the observance of which has been declared by Allah, to fall within the purview of the divine covenant, thus highlighting their importance. An agreement, regardless of its nature and kind, is, after all, an agreement and to fulfil it is a point of duty, morality, equity and good breeding.

The basic tenet of Islam is belief in Allah, Who is the Lord of the two worlds and their Creator. He is the Light of Heavens and Earth, He is the sole Master of all that is and the Absolute Sovereign and we are His servants. We accept this fact with our heart and soul. Consequently it is incumbent upon us that we walk the way shown by Him and His Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

The renaissance of Islam in this century is in itself a pledge. In our struggle for emancipation we the Muslims had pledged that we would strive to establish the supremacy of Allah's Law in our part of the world. And to all intents and purposes, we would create a new world order based on the Word of Allah and the latter half of the present century has witnessed the glorious resurgence of the Muslim *Ummah* and the emergence of more than forty sovereign Muslim states. The time has now come to redeem our pledge and start working in earnest to reorientate our collective life in accordance with the dictates of our great religion.

May Allah bless us all and help us fulfil the pledge. Amen!

REMEMBRANCE OF ALLAH AND STEADFASTNESS

If we bear love towards someone, and acknowledge his kindness, noble disposition, and attainments, whether of a mundane nature or otherwise, it is but natural that we will admire him more than others and will always acknowledge his excellence. The more we talk appreciatively of a person, the greater will be our respect and love for him. Remembrance fills the heart with the light of love. And love creates a longing in the heart, an all-absorbing quest. Islam enjoins every believer to mould his person according to its principles and to conform completely to the commands of Allah and the *Sunnah* of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him). He should be unswerving and constant in his practice of the true faith. A Muslim should obey Allah all the time, whether he is in the mosque or the seminary, at work or in his own house. He has to act as a Muslim, whether he be the ruler or the ruled, owner or the slave, old or young. This is possible only if he always remembers Allah, keeps on refreshing his faith and remains conscious of the fact that he is not a free agent but a slave of Allah the Almighty and is answerable for his acts before the Master of the Day of Doom. His knowledge of his accountability will give him the realization that his life should be spent in the Way of Allah and that it is his duty to obey the commands of the Holy Prophet. Allah Himself has said:

*"...Remember Allah much,
that ye may be successful..."*

[Qur'ān, LXII:10]

A little consideration will show that this command to remember Allah is intended to tell the believer that this remembrance is the only path to salvation. And it is a fact that the salvation of man lies only in his complete submission to his Lord. Some people restrict the meaning of remembrance to repeating the name of Allah but this concept is very narrow.

The remembrance of Allah in reality has a very wide significance. When we love an individual, we not only speak admiringly of his goodness and greatness, but also try to follow him and inculcate within ourselves his attributes. Remembrance of Allah should also mean that we should utter His name and come closer to Him through our actions. There is no specific field earmarked for the obedience of His will; obedience to Him is essential in every field and in every walk of life.

The remembrance of Allah gives tranquillity to the mind and one's soul power also increases. Those who fail to keep the name of Allah in the heart

all the time get spiritually listless and their lives become rudderless. They do not possess the confidence, courage, intrepidity, and steadfastness which lead to a successful, happy, contented, and tranquil life.

When the Prophet was once asked as to who would enjoy high position on the Day of Judgement, he replied: "Those who remember Allah, be they men or women". According to another *Hadith* the Holy Prophet said: "Those who remember Allah are truly alive while those who forget Him are nothing better than cadavers".

Allah has said:

*"O ye who believe! Remember Allah with much remembrance,
And glorify Him early and late."*

[Qur'an, XXXIII:41-42]

Just see how comprehensively the command for the remembrance of Allah has been given! Just as the bodily life is dependent on regular nourishment and if it fails to get food its survival becomes problematic; in the same manner the soul derives its nourishment from the remembrance of Allah, and it cannot live without this holy sustenance. Without the remembrance of Allah the soul withers and dies and when the soul is dead, life becomes worthless. Of what value is a soul-less body? It loses all its meaning and sense of purpose. A purposeless life is no better than the existence of lower beings. It is totally unworthy of human beings. It is a purpose or an ideal alone, that gives meaning to human life, endows it with a direction and imparts strength and nobility to it. When a man has a goal ahead of him, it makes him motivated and dynamic.

I have just said that the true remembrance of Allah does not mean merely the oral repetition of His name and His attributes. By this I don't imply that it is not necessary to remember Allah and His attributes orally and that the oral *dhikr* has no importance. That is not at all what I mean. Oral remembrance of Allah is necessary for a Muslim, for it promotes action and helps the process of submission to the commands of Allah. Through this remembrance man comes closer to his Lord and Master and to move away from non-Allah. It is for this reason that the true servants of Allah always have His name upon their lips, and their hearts are filled with His Sovereignty and Omnipotence. Thus they come closer and closer to their Lord and become truly God-fearing and saintly. Hence we should not regard the oral remembrance of Allah to be superfluous. It has its advantages. But we must also remember that there should be complete co-ordination between our oral remembrance of Allah and our deeds. If these two aspects of our life are not in accord with each other, and our action belies what we say, the outcome of such a duality is hypocrisy, which in fact is the death of a man's inner self.

There is a *Hadith* upon the authority of Hadrat Abu Hurayrah according to which the Prophet said that Allah is always with those who remember Him. Allah says: When My servant remembers me and his lips move because he takes

My name I am invariably with him.”

How elevating is the realization that Allah is with us! It is difficult but not impossible to assess the possibilities this realisation opens up before a person. When man begins to walk upon the path of worship and remembrance, Allah also begins to come closer to him. And man gains a degree of steadfastness that no power on earth can weaken and that person cannot be diverted from the appointed path: Allah has Himself stated:

‘Who have believed and whose hearts have rest in the remembrance of Allah. Verily in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest!’

[Qur’ān, XIII:28]

THE FEAR OF ALLAH

Fear and love are the two primary instincts that provide the basic motivation for all human actions. They both have different sets of requisites and consequences. The profession of love finds expression in the practical life of man, occasionally in insolence and disobedience. Full confidence in the graciousness of the beloved can lead the lover to neglecting the orders and injunctions of the former. Hence a character which is built solely on the foundations of love will, in most cases, lack balance. As for Islam, it aims at creating balance in every sphere of life. Indeed justice and balance is the essence of our entire system of life. There can be no doubt about the fact that the Holy Qur'ān wants to see the hearts of all believers filled with the love of Allah the Most Exalted. His mercy and commiseration, His governance, His position as the Creator and the Sustainer, His boundless power and one's own submission make it imperative to love Him. But along with being gracious and bountiful He has specified some duties and obligations for us and given us some commands. He has enjoined us to keep away from a few evil things. All things, for the sake of brevity and succinctness may be called "The Restrictive Ordinances of Allah."

The aim of the Holy Qur'ān is that all men, specially those who profess to be believers, should pass their lives staying within the limits fixed by Allah. They should be truthful and chaste and their actions should be pure of all disallowed and undesirable things. This state of being can be achieved only through the sentiment of love for Allah. It also needs fear and awe. Therefore whenever the Holy Qur'ān mentions fervent love of Allah as an attribute of the believers, it also talks of their fear and awe:

"... And they quake for awe of Him."

[Qur'ān, XXI:28]

They are so afraid, are in such great awe, that they are always atremble. Such awe can come only from a true knowledge and understanding of the greatness, the grandeur, the all-pervading power of Allah. A man who realises that he is answerable before Allah firmly believes in recompense and retribution in the Hereafter and knows that Allah, the Forgiving and the Merciful, is also mighty in His chastisement, punishes His servants and also bestows His bounties on them, does favours and also causes deprivations, is in fact a true believer. Undoubtedly he loves Him profoundly and also holds Him in great awe.

Fear and awe are stressed by Qur'an as basic moral attributes of the believers. They have been enjoined:

*"...fear Me,
if ye are true believers."*

[Qur'ān, III:175]

This tells us that faith cannot be made perfect without fear of Allah. A man who does not have the fear of Allah in his heart is capable of committing the gravest of sins. Man-made laws can of course be complementary and helpful in the organisation of collective life and because of its operative penal code the society can be safe, to a great extent, from turbulence and commotion. But despite a deterrent legal code being in force, crimes not only continue to be committed but, one is constrained to admit, waywardness and lawlessness are on the increase throughout the contemporary world. Weakness of character prevalent in non-Muslim societies is not at all surprising. But if divine laws are broken openly and unashamedly in nations which claim to be followers of the true faith of Islam, we will have to confess that our *Īmān* (faith) is faulty and feeble, and we lack a true concept of the power of Allah the Almighty and of being answerable to Him for our misdeeds on the Day of Judgement. It is because of this that the Holy Qur'ān holds the fear of Allah as the product and the result of true knowledge.

*"...The erudite among His bondmen
fear Allah alone..."*

[Qur'ān, XXXV:28]

We should know that here knowledge means resolute faith and firm belief. It implies such complete faith in all the attributes of Allah as will create fear of Allah in the heart of a believer, so much so that it will be reflected in his word and deed, thought and action, morality and prayer. Obviously a cursory awareness and casual inkling that He is very powerful and authoritative cannot create awe about Him in the mind of a person. Only full and true knowledge of the fact that His is the absolute power and authority can create in the heart of man the state which is true fear of Allah. So we should do well to realise truly and sincerely that the demands fear of Allah makes on man can be fulfilled truly and completely only by men of true knowledge and pure faith. Allah has said this also with regard to His fear:

"...Fear them not, but fear Me!..."

[Qur'an, II:150]

This verse tells us unequivocally that it is Allah alone, the one and only Allah, that man should fear and hold in awe. There is no place in the heart of a believer for any fear of non-Allah, because he knows that all men are powerless like him. None besides Allah has any power to profit or harm anybody and there is no one except Allah who is the Master of life and death. No one other than Allah can give or take away. And these are the powers which create fear in man. Obviously all these powers belong to Allah and are His attributes. Hence only His Pure Self is entitled to man's fear and awe. And that is why in the Holy Qur'ān He says, "Fear you only Me".

The fear of Allah has received so much emphasis in the Holy Qur'ān that it has been termed as a requisite of *Imān*, It will be profitable for us to ponder what impact it creates on the life of a believer.

"But as for him who feared to stand before his Lord and restrained his soul from lust.

Lo! the Garden will be his home."

[Qur'ān, LXXIX:40-41]

One major consequence of the fear of Allah is that the believer keeps his heart pure of all desires which are unrighteous and unjust. Meticulous obedience to the dictates of Allah and subordination to the practice of the Holy Prophet in worship as well as affairs of the world are the result of having Allah's fear in the heart. It is a requisite of *Imān* that the believer should always have the fear of his accountability before Allah and as a result should continue within himself the process of self-examination. There is another state of Allah's fear which is for those who are close to Allah and are amongst His dear servants. It is this. They are always in a state of awe that due to any witting or unwitting mistake or a wrong act they may fall from Grace and be deprived of the blessings which He has bestowed on them.

The fact is that every bounty granted by Allah is a great blessing in itself. Is it not a blessing that He gave us the priceless gift of *Imān*? Is it not a blessing that He has made us the best of all nations? Is it not a blessing that He ordained the Seal of Prophets (may peace be upon him) for our guidance? Is it not a blessing that He sent down the Holy Qur'ān as a complete and perfect code of life?

Now it is our duty to continue, day and night, to express through our deeds, our gratitude for His infinite grace and countless blessings. We should always have in our heart the fear lest we should lose them because of our folly. Allah has told us emphatically that:

"O ye who believe! Observe your duty to Allah with right observance, and die not save as those who have surrendered (unto Him)." [Qur'ān, III:102]

We should always try to protect the priceless wealth of Islam and *Imān* (religion and faith). This should be our endeavour both at the individual as well as the collective level. Let it not be that we come to a wretched end due to continuous disobedience and addiction to vice. Religion cannot be safeguarded only by its acceptance by the heart and affirmation by the tongue. It has to be confirmed by righteous action and self-purification. And on our journey through this life we should at every step be in awe lest our shortcomings and lack of care should involve us in such disgrace and ignominy that when we come in the august presence of our Lord and Master our hearts are void of the blessings of *Imān* (true faith).

We should be fully alive to the fact that a true believer, in his individual capacity, has to face many ordeals and pass through many trials and tribulations

while acting completely in accord with the injunctions of Allah and many a time one feels shaky, and one's step begins to falter. Therefore in conjunction with constancy, it has been repeatedly enjoined to create an environment which is conducive to righteous living. All members of the Muslim *Ummah* are required to fashion their lives in the mould of the Qur'anic system, at every level, so that the fear of Allah becomes the foundation of the entire moral structure and righteous conduct of the *Ummah* as a whole and it becomes possible to establish a society based on moderation and balance.

It is necessary to point out here that fear beyond a certain limit—excessive fear—is against the spirit of the Qur'anic teachings. The truly Islamic life-style is that which reflects both hope and fear. Its most illustrious examples can be seen in the life of the Holy Prophet and the personal attributes of the Companions (may Allah be happy with them all). An ideal believer is he who does not despair due to obsessive fear nor by discarding fear becomes oblivious of divine injunctions through preponderant hope. Without awe hope is meaningless. Only he can hope to be treated generously who has fear in his heart. That is why the fear and awe of Allah is declared to be a basic requisite of faith and the believers are advised to subordinate hope to their feeling of awe.

THE EXAMPLE OF HADRAT IBRAHIM

Hadrat Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was the first Prophet after Hadrat Nūh who was ordained by Allah, the Most Exalted, to call the whole world to the true faith. The Holy Qur'ān holds his life as a missionary, his lofty character, his total commitment to the propagation of the belief in the One-ness of Allah (monotheism) and his unique dedication, despite the innumerable ordeals and sufferings he had to undergo in the fulfilment of his task, to his prophetic duty, as an ideal of righteous action.

That all prophets were sent to teach monotheism to their respective peoples is a recognised fact of history and the Holy Qur'ān bears testimony that the basic concept of the teachings of all prophets from the first – Adam (may peace be upon him) to Muhammad (may peace be upon him), the last of the prophets of Allah – was the unity of Godhead. But some prophets have precedence over others because of the time of their appointment and the success of their divine mission. Hadrat Ibrahim like the Holy Prophet of Islam is one of those chosen few amongst the ordained servants of Allah whose lives are presented to mankind as righteous lives par excellence, and worthy of emulation by one and all. All prophets are meant to be unquestioningly obeyed by people because they bring divine injunctions and guidance to them. But when the Holy Qur'ān specifically mentions the life of a particular prophet as a worthy example and an ideal, it surely has in view some special episodes and events which occurred in his life and which have a definite message for the human race – or his message has some universal significance and appeal because of its truth and beauty – that Allah considers it to be a means of rectitude for the whole world through all periods of history.

Undoubtedly the all-pervading sanctity of his character, the universality of his mission and its message, the nature of the example he set before mankind are among the distinctive qualities of the 'Seal of Prophets'. But what has been common in the teachings of all prophets is the belief in the One-ness of Allah and in the special sphere of steadfastly upholding the cause of monotheism, the life of Hadrat Ibrahim is a radiant torch which will light up the true path till eternity.

The glorious quality of his submission and acceptance, his total devotion and declaring the One-ness of Allah from the burning pyre contains an ever-abiding element of admonition and exhortation. It is an unforgettable lesson in total commitment and selfless devotion.

At the time Hadrat Ibrahim was ordained, people were not only involved

in idol-worship and paganism but the whole pattern of the social, political, economic and cultural life of his people was built around this false faith. Now look at the glory of the courage and the commitment to the true faith demonstrated by this true and noble missionary. To declare to the people that there is no god but Allah in a set-up where members of every affluent family behaved like gods, where the autocratic king was worshipped, where the temple-priests were considered divine, was no less than a supreme act of selfless devotion to the cause. Was he, for a fleeting moment, afraid? Did the knowledge that he was disturbing a whole pack of hungry wolves in their den, make him waver, at all? No, he was not afraid and did not waver. He knew the odds against him. He did not have a limited assignment and was not only required to fight powerful exponents of a false religion and baseless belief, he was ordained also to do battle against a corrupt society and its oppressive political hierarchy. It was no trifling matter. His assignment was not at all ordinary. He was not cast in the role of a routine reformer. The duty given to him was to bring about a revolution. The task given to him was epochal and far-reaching in its impact and consequences. His mission was in fact to wage a crusade against a tyrannical system which combined in one person the dual role of the temporal ruler and the high-priest of the pagan religion. Haḍrat Ibrahim's clarion call to the true religion of the one and only Allah created an unprecedented upheaval in the whole country. There was a deluge of animosities against him. The swell kept on rising. On the one hand, all the king's men were arrayed with their unlimited resources against him, and on the other, the monopolists of pagan temples, the priests, came out with all their unholy designs and conspiracies to destroy this solitary servant of Allah. In fact, the entire society, the whole populace rose in arms against this great Prophet of Allah because the truth of his message and the sincerity of his cause signalled an unprecedented danger to its rotten institutions.

The pagan system which was being challenged by this great exponent of truth, needs to be fully understood. Nobody belonging to this system denied the existence of Allah. Indeed he was accepted as the Lord of all lords, but the pagan fellow-countrymen of Haḍrat Ibrahim believed in other lesser gods who could bestow their bounties on them, grant their wishes and fulfil their wants. Among these false gods were grave worshippers, temple priests, monks, as also the royal personage who occupied the kingly throne. The society held all of them to be supermen. The people were so superstitious, witless and ignorant that they held angels, jinns and even the moon and stars as partners in divinity. In this society law-making was entirely the privilege of the king and the oligarchy. The king claimed that he was the absolute ruler of the country and its people. His word was law. There was no higher authority than he and any one who refused in any way to accept his absolute temporal and spiritual supremacy was not only guilty of rebellion against the state and its laws but was also an enemy of the faith of his ancestors. And he stood to forfeit his life because of this crime. Accordingly the royal court ordered Haḍrat Ibrahim to be thrown in prison. He was kept in prison for ten days after which the royal council

sentenced him to death by burning. But this great Prophet was not afraid — not even for a fleeting moment. He did not falter at any stage during this supreme test of his dedication and devotion to his Lord. The hatred of the mass of people did not daunt him in his confrontation with the all-powerful autocrat, the rigours of prison-life, even the verdict of death by burning — nothing could restrain him from declaring the One-ness of Allah. As the Holy Qur'an bears testimony, the verdict to burn him alive was no mere threat or attempt to bully him into submission. In fact a huge pyre was got ready and when its flames rose high to the sky he was thrown into it. But Allah ordered the fire not to harm Hadrat Ibrahim and so it cooled down at once. The people to whom Hadrat Ibrahim belonged, perished a long, long time ago. No relic is left of Nimrod who claimed to be a deity. But Hadrat Ibrahim who called people to Allah and showed them the path of true submission, and his glorious sons, Hadrat Ismail and Hadrat Ishaq became immortal. But for the last forty centuries wherever the light of the true faith was seen shining forth, it owed its radiance to the fire of truth, devotion, true submission and righteousness that burnt within the being of these chaste prophets of Allah.

There is another aspect of the sacred life of Hadrat Ibrahim which should be duly considered by us and that is his total trust in Allah. Leaving his devoted and pious wife and baby son in an arid wasteland which had no water in obedience to the command of Allah in His care, and his readiness to sacrifice his dearly beloved son to the extent of putting the knife on his life-vein and thereby teaching the true meaning of Islam to mankind, is that glorious chapter of his life as a prophet each single detail of which has been included in the religious ritual of Islam, so that it is remembered and followed by mankind to the end of time.

The great quality of fulfilling the multifarious duties of his prophetic mission and the great ordeals through which he passed endowed him with a unique quality of modesty and humility, which he often described in these words: "I turned my face towards that sacred Being Who created heaven and earth. I bow my head in humble submission before His unparalleled majesty and my heart is ready at all times to obey whatever command He gives to me. I am not one of the pagans. I am one of those who worship the one and the only Allah". It was this graceful self-surrender, this submission and valour, this confrontation with the whole world for a philosophic and rational presentation of the concept of Allah's One-ness and his ultimate success in firmly establishing the true faith amongst his people, after protracted struggle against the tyranny of the establishment, and his building the Holy Mosque of Ka'ba, a universal focal point of monotheism, that so pleased Allah, the Most Exalted, that not only his unique and sacred life but the lives of all who followed in his foot-steps on the path of truth and the One-ness of Allah were declared to be worthy of emulation and shining examples of righteousness in the *sūra Mumtahina*.

The exertion at Safa and Murwa and the stay at Mazdalfa and Arafat and sacrifice in the way of Allah at Mina, drinking the water of the Holy Zamzam well, going round the Ka'ba and *Talbiah* are parts of his tradition

about which he so rightly said:

“And we are the first amongst Muslims”

and which have been made the basic religious rituals of the Hajj.

It is the recompense of his supreme sacrifice and submission that Allah, the Most Pure and Exalted, declared his life to be an example worthy of emulation by one and all and in the same context declared that it is His practice to give such glorious rewards to the righteous.

THE WELL-LOVED SERVANTS OF ALLAH

The well-loved servants of Allah the Most Exalted are those persons who obey His commands exactly as the Holy Prophet has taught and shown to us through his own practice. Obedience to the Prophet is, in reality, true obedience to Allah and those people who understood the truth of this matter and followed the example of the Holy Prophet to the fullest extent of their capability were the people whom Allah loved best. The Holy Prophet's Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) whose moral excellences and noble attributes have been commended in the Holy Qur'an were well-loved by Allah because they not only offered their obligatory prayers regularly, but also because they understood their real purport and spirit. And due to this deeper understanding of the spirit of their faith they were ever ready and willing to sacrifice their material assets, their kith and kin, their very lives in the name of Allah. And their devotion and love was so complete that they made the greatest sacrifice without hesitation – without any external pressure or compulsion. They would give their all spontaneously and with a willing heart. Their reverence and obedience was so exemplary that whenever the Holy Prophet enquired about anything, even when they knew the answer, they would humbly say "the Prophet of Allah knows best". The first among them is Hadrat Abu Bakr Siddeeq (may Allah be pleased with him). After embracing Islam he became the right hand man of the Holy Prophet in calling people to Islam. He gave all that he had in the world in support of the Holy Prophet's sacred mission. No other Companion of the Holy Prophet equals him in his supreme attachment and loyalty to his friend, guide and teacher, and in total commitment to the cause. On several occasions he gave in the name of Allah, every bit of what he had in the world. Once in answer to the Holy Prophet's enquiry as to what he had left behind for his family, he said: "For them Allah and his Holy Prophet are sufficient". These are the distinctive attributes of the persons whom Allah loves most. The Holy Prophet himself had this word of unique praise for Hadrat Abu Bakr: "I have recompensed one and all for their acts of kindness. But Allah Himself will recompense Abu Bakr for his benefaction".

Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Ali (may Allah be pleased with them all) and all other Companions, male and female, people of the House, and his chaste wives were all amongst those persons whom Allah loved best. These most loved people had the unique honour of Allah Himself using words such as "Allah is happy with them" to glorify them. Their Lord was pleased with them and happy and Allah the Most Exalted accepted their complete self-surrender with

such ready acceptance that He not only gives expression to His being pleased with them but says that these people are so beloved that they themselves feel happy and pleased at being thus honoured by their Lord and Master. Mention of the servants' happiness in this manner signifies their unique and glorious position. After the Holy Prophet (may peace be upon him) it was his Companions whom Allah loved best. Hence the words of high praise that he used to signify their ideal moral excellence. He said, "My Companions are like the brightest amongst stars. You will be on the path of Truth and Righteousness whomsoever from amongst them you follow".

In this regard a very interesting and important point needs to be kept in view. Allah gave this signal honour only to his last Prophet that whoever follows him sincerely and truly will receive the unique bounty of Allah's love. And the Holy Prophet held his Companions in such high regard that he said he would feel pleased with the people who followed in their footsteps. This means, in fact, that Allah will be happy and pleased with them.

Although all the Companions of the Holy Prophet were loved by Allah yet He was particularly happy with some of them, for their soulful self-sacrifice, so much so, that He even talks about them in the Holy Qur'an. When the Helpers of Madina showed unprecedented warmth in receiving the Meccan migrants and offered unparalleled sacrifices for their sake, Allah was very pleased by their selfless sincerity. And when they wholeheartedly accepted the Prophet's decision to distribute the land, previously owned by Banu Nuzair, to the Meccan Migrants besides two Helpers of Madina, Allah expressed his profound pleasure at their spirit of self-denial. A word of special praise for them appears in *sūra Hashr* (Resurrection). Self-sacrifice occupies a position of high importance in Islamic teachings. Justice and benevolence are greatly esteemed and so are love and respect for mankind. The Helpers of Madina and the Migrants from Mecca were bound together by all these bonds and their mutual fraternal love and deep devotion will be a lesson and an illustrious example worth emulation for the whole of mankind for all times.

Once a hungry man came to the Holy Prophet. The Prophet said to the Companions who happened to be present with him at that time: "Allah will show special mercy to him who takes this man as his guest for to-night". The honour of playing the host fell upon a Helper-Companion, who took the person to his home. On his enquiry, his wife told him that there was a little food which might be just enough for the children. He told his wife to put the children to sleep and then put out the light. Then he explained to his wife the strategy of the common meal: "We will not eat but will just keep the semblance of eating, so that the guest does not feel embarrassed". The hosts acted accordingly. Next morning when the Companion in question came into the presence of the Holy Prophet, the latter told him, "Allah was mighty pleased by your generous conduct". No doubt people who make sacrifices for the sake of other persons and give them selfless love and devotion are the people who are well-loved by Allah. Moreover, the society gives high honour to such great and selfless people. The Holy Qur'an says, "Preferring others above themselves and even though poverty

be their portion". In short, the well-loved ones of Allah are those who obey, without any hesitation, every injunction of Allah and so heartily accept every decision of the Holy Prophet that it does not distract them even a wee bit. For them it is enough to know that the Holy Prophet has enjoined thus or he acted thus in a particular matter. They will at once act accordingly. This constitutes true adherence to example of the Holy Prophet. And for Muslims it occupies a high and important place. Without it one's faith – *Īmān* – can never be perfect.

Consequently it was the normal practice during the time of the Righteous Caliphs to turn to the Qur'ān for guidance in specific matters and if no clear injunctions were available in the Qur'ān pertaining to the problem, in that case to study the life of the Holy Prophet to find a satisfactory answer. Personal opinion was brought to bear on the matter only when no solution was found either in the Holy Qur'ān or in the Prophet's practice. Allah has said in the Holy Qur'ān:

"Say, (O Muhammad, to mankind): If ye love Allah, follow me; Allah will love you, and forgive you your sins. Allah is Forgiving, Merciful."

[Qur'ān, III:31]

This explicit order makes it clear that the righteous people whom Allah holds dear are only those who follow the Prophet and heartily obey him. Therefore, people who wish to be included in this circle of Allah's well-loved servants should make a profound and careful study of the sacred life of the Prophet of Allah and try to emulate it as much as they can – to the utmost limit of their capacity. They should try to conform fully to the ideal set before mankind by the Holy Prophet in prayer, in moral virtue, in temperament, in social behaviour, in regard to sympathy, affection and love for fellow-beings. He who follows the example of the Holy Prophet more devotedly and more assiduously will be to that extent dearer to Allah.

Many different nations and peoples live on this our planet. They have their separate sets of beliefs and religions. The collective thought and conduct of each nation determines its distinctive identity. And the social set up and the life-style of every nation is a mirror of its religion and beliefs. Indeed, that is what constitutes its particular identity.

The question is what is the distinctive national identity of a Muslim? What is his distinguishing characteristic? However much one ponders this question, there is only one answer to it, and the answer is that the identity of a Muslim and his distinguishing characteristic is that he believes in Allah as the Creator of the universe and considers Him to be the Lord of all that this universe contains. Man is only its trustee. A Muslim believes that the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the Prophet of Allah and he obeys Allah and his Holy Prophet all his life, in whatever he does. 'Obey Allah, obey the Prophet', is his guiding principle and the end-product of his life.

A person who accepts the teachings of Islam as the divine code and lives his life in conformity with the sacred life of the Holy Prophet and his *Sunnah*

(Practice) is undoubtedly a person who is dear to Allah. And such a man as he, is always eminent and exalted on the basis of his thought and conduct, his lifestyle, his moral principles, and spiritual elevation, and Allah makes him pre-eminent because of his noble deeds. A true and righteous Muslim is truly honourable and acquits himself in life with distinction. Islam is now universally recognised as the religion which is in complete accord with man's innate true-self. The Holy Qur'ān declares in unequivocal terms that:

"Lo! religion with Allah (is) The Surrender (to His Will and guidance)."

[Qur'ān, III:19]

Let us, the people of Islam, ponder what path we should adopt for our *Ummah's* success and pre-eminence. The path is clear and the divine light is there to guide us. The secret of our prestige and greatness lies in our becoming true Muslims and in shaping our lives on the life-pattern presented to mankind by Islam. The glory and greatness of our ideology, our faith also depends on it. May Allah be our Help and Succour, and may we become the dearly loved servants of Allah. Amen!

THE TRUE SELF AND SUBMISSION TO ALLAH

The topic for our consideration here is the true self and submission to Allah. If one looks at the matter with care and in depth, these are not merely two phrases, but in fact, two important terms which point to a special life-style and an attitude to life. However abstruse, complex and philosophical the term 'the true self' may be, its essential purport and focus is the knowledge of the inner reality of one's being. At this point, the mind is inevitably drawn towards the Supreme Being to Whom we owe our existence and to Whom we are bound in our essence. The term 'submission to Allah' connotes full realisation of the nature of this bond and its full understanding. I would therefore beg to state that the true self and submission to Allah are coincident. The two are so closely associated that they are, in fact, inseparable.

True submission consists in complete subordination to the will of Allah and obedience to Him and total rejection of the dominion of non-Allah. One who recognises Allah as one's Supreme Lord and Master, Creator and Giver of sustenance, in effect, refuses to accept the authority of all false gods. This person holds only the Supreme Being as the sole focus of his supplication and adoration. Before Him only will he bow and prostrate himself in prayer and worship. At the same time by negating the eminence and authority of all impostors he boldly asserts the superiority and excellence, the nobility and magnificence of his own person. The true self in reality, signifies a concept of submission to Allah, the Unique and the Immutable which totally rules out bowing before any other power. We can also define it as the true understanding of one's inner self and knowledge of the Absolute Self.

In the philosophic parlance, the true self signifies that permanence of the inner person which manifests the thought and action of man in a given sphere, specifies the manifestation of the "is" and "is not" of his essence and attributes and provides him with the means and the environment necessary for his growth and development.

One may well ask here – what is meant by the growth and the development of the true self? What is the summum bonum of this development? Also – what is meant by the manifestations of "is" and "is not"? The fact is that the deeper the realisation of one's existence, the stronger will be the bond with that Pure and Absolute Being who is the Creator of all existence. Strengthening of this bond to the ultimate limit is the summum bonum of the 'true self'. And this bond is of total submission, as has been stated in the Holy Qur'an:

"I created the jinn and humankind only that they might worship Me."

[Qur'an, LI:56]

The manifestations of "is" and "is not" are deeds and character, morals, and attributes and the conquest of the universe. As deeds and character become more chaste and noble, the power to conquer increases proportionately and the individuals' life begins to hold greater sway over the universe. His action and endeavour, his effort and toil, in the light of his accomplishments, make him surer of his being and ultimately he begins to understand his real inner self.

Having come so far, an innate wish arises within, in the form of a question. What is the exact status of the true self and total submission and how does it express itself? This enquiry, this search for an answer is a manifestation of the basic human nature and finding the answer to this question is the ultimate purpose and objective of human endeavour.

I will answer this question by saying that the most illustrious and perfect example of 'the true self' and total submission is the life of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him). It was due to the ideal blend of the true self and submission in his sacred person, that his life was presented to the whole of mankind as an ideal – the most noble example of human perfection, which man must emulate, if he wants to make good in life and to win divine favour. It was the glory and the majesty of his submission to Allah that despite being totally resourceless in the material sense, he and his Companions were never afraid. No power on the earth could intimidate or overawe them. It was a manifestation of his true self that, strengthened by his submission and subordination to his Lord and Master, he showed complete independence, with regard to false claimants to dominion over the world, and total indifference to the world itself. As a result of this, Allah the Most Exalted gave him dominion over the world and its temporal masters and made the whole universe subject to him.

My friends, I want to draw your attention to the fact that conquest of the elements and dominion over the universe has been promised to everyone who walks the way of the true self and submission. But unfortunately we are, today, passing through a period when there is neither any consciousness of the true self nor the awareness of the requisites of submission. We have denied ourselves the light which the Holy Qur'an had lighted for us and the guidance the Holy Prophet's *Sunnah* had endowed us with. Our thought and vision are devoid of meaning. There is emptiness all around us. Consequently, we have lost the leadership of nations and our pre-eminence and are wallowing in disgrace and lowliness. Having lost touch with our individual true selves we are reduced to the deplorable situation where we have completely lost sight of the concept of our national entity.

We moved away from the conceptual base of our nationhood and got entangled in and distracted by alien concepts. We have so despoiled our national and collective super-ego that we have no distinct identity or position in the comity of nations. Our self-indulgence and love for ease and luxury has placed the beggar's bowl in our hands and we go begging from country to country. Our present state is that:

*"...having hearts wherewith they understand not,
and having eyes wherewith they see not,
and having ears wherewith they hear not..."*

[Qur'ān, VII:179]

Eating a morsel without having worked and toiled to earn it, is totally against the spirit of Islam. Indebtedness has never been viewed with favour by Islam. Sitting idle and living on others' dole is the negation of Islamic injunctions, because it hurts and destroys the individual's inner self and the collective super-ego. True understanding of the inner self and true knowledge of Allah clearly requires that we the Muslims of the world should understand the meaning and the implications of submission to Allah, in letter and spirit and manifest this understanding and knowledge through our actions in all spheres individually as well as collectively. Submission to Allah constitutes the true self of a Muslim and it is this true self which gives a Muslim his identity, and his excellence, and it is their super-ego through which the Muslims of the world can achieve a position of distinction and a separate identity amongst the nations of the world. It is necessary for us to broaden our thought and vision and after a realistic appraisal of our moral conduct and character focus our minds and our energies on taking them to the ultimate heights of perfection. We should do a bit of heart-searching and if our external and inner perception bears testimony to the undeniable fact that we have almost destroyed our 'true self' we should avail this period of grace, left to us by Allah, to come back to the path of truth, righteousness and survival as an *Ummah*. May Allah /the Most Exalted help us. Amen!

THE CONSEQUENCES OF DISOBEDIENCE TO ALLAH

The one relationship between Him and His creatures that Allah has mentioned most specifically in the Holy Qur'an is that of His Compassion and Kindness. To keep this particular aspect constantly in his consciousness, the believer is enjoined to recite before beginning all his actions whether big or small, important or ordinary, a small line, which contains in itself a whole wide world of tender care and compassion and that line is:

"In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate".

Allah, "the Most Glorious", has recounted in this august line two of His divine attributes, that is, "the Merciful" and "the Compassionate". Both of them contain in their meaning, the element of tender care and affectionate regard. The injunction to repeat this line as often as one acts, shows that what Allah wants his creatures to always keep in view is His infinite kindness and compassion; so great and so beyond measure that the human mind cannot have even the vaguest idea of it. The Holy Qur'an which for us is "the Book of guidance", the fountain-head of our life-in-faith, our guide and leader in this worldly life, our support in the Hereafter, a sure guarantee of our eternal salvation and well-being, is itself defined by Allah, in these words:

*"...Now hath there come unto you a clear proof from your Lord,
a guidance and a mercy..."*

[Qur'an, VI:157]

Through this book of guidance, this fountain-head of compassion, Allah leads his creatures to the straight path and restrains them from going astray — indeed these are his Do's and Don'ts. But because of his precipitate nature and innate nearsightedness man considers most things that are good and noble to be burdensome. These things he considers harmful and disadvantageous but many bad things appear to him as a means of comfort and benefit. Allah Who is fully aware of this human weakness says:

*"...But it may happen that ye hate a thing which is good for you,
and it may happen that ye love a thing which is bad for you.
Allah knoweth, ye know not."*

[Qur'an, II:216]

Allah Who is Almighty and is the Lord of lords, not only enjoins man to obey Him but gives him the assurance that in obedience lies his welfare.

Whenever in the Qur'an man has been ordered to do a thing or has been forbidden from doing something Allah has not used the language of law but has talked in the mode of a benevolent and kindly lord, a knowing benefactor. Allah mostly talks to His creatures and servants in the vein of a considerate and affectionate master. He tells man again and again that whatever He enjoins is invariably good for him. He advises man, in terms of utmost affection and endearment, to obey His orders for his own well-being. And having done this He promises great recompense to man for his obedience and complete submission.

The Holy Prophet says in a revealed *Hadith*:

"Allah, the Most Exalted, says that any man who moves forward the length of a stretched hand, in obedience and submission to Him will find that He has moved one full arm-length towards him; and he who comes one arm-length towards Him, will find Him coming towards him one full metre".

Now just ponder – what end does that impudent wretch deserve who instead of obeying the injunctions of such a kind Master with a willing heart, disobeys Him.

Allah has repeatedly warned those who elect to disobey Him, of the terrible consequences of their refusal to obey His dictates. He says:

*"...And let those who
conspire to evade orders beware
lest grief or painful
punishment befall them."*

[Qur'an, XXIV:63]

At another place, it is said:

*"Deem they themselves secure
from the coming on them
of a pall of Allah's punishment,
or the coming of the Hour
suddenly while they are unaware?"*

[Qur'an, XII:107]

Similarly those who are arrogant and who disobey and tread the path of rebellion have been warned in these words:

*"Feel ye then secure that He will not cause a slope of the
land to engulf you, or send a sand-storm upon you, and then ye will
find that ye have no protector?"*

[Qur'an, XVII:68]

This and some other verses are seemingly a delineation of the awesomeness of the Majesty of Allah and His anger. But I consider them as another proof of the grandness of His Mercy. He does not wish that His creatures whom He fashioned with His own hands should disobey Him, not act according to His

express desire, behave arrogantly and in doing so become the target of His terrible fury and anger and be deserving of His chastisement. That is why 'Allah the Most Exalted' presents, time and again, vivid descriptions of dire consequences and impending terrible retribution, to frighten man and check him, every way He can, from wrong-doing, evil deeds and sinful actions. People who disregard all these warnings and words of admonition, flee from the cover of the compassion of the Merciful, the Compassionate Allah, totally unmindful of the doom towards which they are rushing headlong, are undoubtedly most wretched. The extent of their misfortune and ill-luck is beyond measure. No language has the vocabulary that can convey the magnitude of their endless doom.

The present-day spectacle of human hardship and suffering that stretches from the farthest East to the farthest West is the result of man's disregard of the graciousness of the Compassionate and Benign Lord of the universe and the consequences of his disobedience to Him. What else could cause this universal anguish, this all-pervading misery? It is due only to our wilfulness, our waywardness, our rebellion against our Lord and Master, that not a day passes when we are not overtaken by a fearsome catastrophe, or an overwhelming calamity. If only we could see them as forebodings and portents of far worse retribution that is inexorably drawing closer and closer, pay heed to them and avail of the time that is left to us and mend our ways.

These misfortunes and calamities which continue to befall us in consequence of our turning way from the ordained path and our rebelliousness, are in fact a reminder from Allah 'the Merciful' that we in our unheeding foolhardiness have taken the road to total extinction and that this is not the path He set for us. Shall we take note, turn away from this path of self-destruction and take refuge in the fold of His infinite Grace and Mercy?

"See they not that they are tested once or twice in every year? Still they turn not in repentance, neither pay they heed."

[Qur'an, IX:126]

You might have, by now, seen that wherever there is an admonition in the Holy Qur'an it is in the form of a teaching or a piece of information. The mode is of a person who is trying to explain a thing lucidly and simply, so that those whom he addresses may understand him without any difficulty. This shows that Allah does not at all desire the annihilation and destruction of those who are ungrateful, have turned rebellious and elected to tread the path of disobedience. He is ever ready to give them refuge under the mantle of His kindness. But woe to us, that we keep on moving away, farther and farther, from His Mercy, unaware of our doom, oblivious of Allah's chastisement. One should always remember that the mantle of Allah's Mercy is wider than the widest expanse of this universe, His forgiveness and pardon is boundless, so that He does not show his annoyance to even those who are quick to lose hope in his Mercy!

"And who despaireth of the mercy of his Lord save those who are astray?"

[Qur'an, XV:56]

Rebelliousness towards Allah is harmful for us in another way also. The mode of life that Allah has fixed for us is in complete accord with our natural disposition. If we turn away from the path ordained for us by Him and instead of following His guidance take the road of disobedience we will be acting against our nature and how terrible the result of contravening the dictates of natural disposition can be, is not a thing that we do not know. We have seen some world-shattering manifestations of transgressing the limits set by human nature – if you want to remember them, well, for one, revive your memories of the tragedy of Hiroshima. But while doing that please understand one thing. The retribution of rebellion against Allah is a million, million times more terrible than that holocaust.

THE MEANING OF FORGETTING ALLAH

To be forgetful of Allah can be counted as the greatest human misfortune and a lamentable calamity. The multifarious occurrences and great upheavals of history bear out the tragedy that man has always sunk into self-oblivion by walking the wrong path. Escape from self is the key factor in going astray because it opens the way to forget Allah. Whenever man forgets himself, he forgets Allah inevitably and is ultimately caught in a quagmire of misery. Undoubtedly, it is man's self-forgetfulness which leads to social disorder and anarchy, to the spate of evil and inconsistency in thought and action. You should know it fully and bear it clearly in mind that remissness about one's own self is the punishment that comes in the wake of forgetting Allah, as in the words of the Holy Qur'an:

*"...Those who forgot Allah, therefore
He caused them to forget their souls..."*

[Qur'an, LIX:19]

Undoubtedly, it is a great punishment that one should be made oblivious of one's own identity. What is the reality of man? Physically, man is a mobile piece of flesh and bones; but if he be conscious of his status and acts accordingly he is the vicegerent of Allah, the supreme Creator and absolute Lord. If he fails to maintain this status and its pre-eminence which comes from submission to Allah and good behaviour with fellow-beings, he is, in the words of the Holy Qur'an, like an animal, even worse:

*"...These are as the cattle –
nay, but they are worse!..."*

[Qur'an, VII:179]

The mark of distinction between man's greatness and glory, on the one hand, and his utter insignificance, on the other, is none else except his consciousness and remembrance of, and faith in, Allah, coupled with his righteousness or otherwise. This has been explained in the following words:

*"Surely We created man of the best stature
Then We reduced him to the lowest of the low,
Save those who believe and do good works..."*

[Qur'an, XCV:4-6]

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the crown of creation, the pride of humanity, has propounded six fundamentals of faith, namely:

“Belief in Allah, belief in Allah’s angels, belief in Allah’s Books, belief in Allah’s Messengers, belief in the Day of Judgement, and belief in destiny. Righteous conduct consists in man’s thought and action being in accordance with the divine revelations and in keeping with the Islamic Shari’ah. Faith is itself an indispensable requisite of good conduct. None of man’s actions can be defined as righteous without the true faith which seeks only the approbation of Allah”.

Hadrat Ayesha the Truthful (r.A.a.), reports that the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was ever busy invoking and remembering Allah’s name. Nothing could distract him from constant remembrance of Allah. All he said would be in praise and glory of Allah, His One-ness and other attributes. Not a single breath did he breathe without remembrance of Allah, as all his sayings and deeds covering the whole span of his life, in every conceivable of its myriad facets, were a mirror of his total belonging to Allah. He was the paragon par excellence of the remembrance of Allah. His life is the guiding light for the *Ummah* and it constitutes the blueprint of life for the Muslims.

We the Muslims of today should think over our present condition and do some heart-searching. We should hearken to the call of conscience. If we are not passing the days and nights of our transitory life in accordance with the injunctions of the Holy Qur’ān and in obedience to the Holy Prophet, we have surely been caught in the quagmire of the remissness of Allah and are accursed with self-forgetfulness which means our eternal damnation. When a person lacks human character, by no stretch of imagination can he be called a Muslim.

If we are not righteous and well-intentioned, if we have abandoned integrity and honesty, if we have no respect for human dignity, if we are given to harming others, if we disregard the Islamic tenets, i.e., we do not pray regularly, are indifferent to fasting, evade payment of Zakāt, etc., it inevitably means that we have forgotten Allah and gone astray.

Each period of human history has been given a significant name, symbolic of some of its salient characteristics. When man was yet in a primitive state—uninitiated in industry — and the satisfaction of all his needs depended only on what he could get from Nature and stone was his most enduring and effective implement, that period of history was called the “Stone Age”. Then followed the “Bronze Age”, the “Iron Age”, the “Machine Age” and today we live in what is commonly known as the “Atomic Age”. But I would beg leave of the historians and the scholars who coin terms to define periods in history, and also my fellow-beings — whose passage through time is known as history — that the only appropriate and realistic name that could be given to the present age is the “Age of Misery and Disaster”. Present-day life is so complex and the spheres of human life are so infinitely involuted that it cannot possibly be comprehended completely. The world as a whole, the various units of human society, spread

over the continents, to the last individual, are all in the clutches of insoluble problems and predicaments. To me, the root cause of all this anxiety and state of mental chaos is that man has forgotten his own self, as a direct consequence of his having forgotten Allah. If we remember Allah, we remain alive to our own entity, and this consciousness puts us on the path to well-being and a contented life. However, it must be borne in mind that the purpose of the remembrance of Allah is not fully served by merely chanting the attributive names of Allah. Actually, it means total submission and obedience to Allah, and a total belonging to Him. To obey Allah is to remember Him, and to refrain from His obedience tantamounts to forgetting Him.

Hadrat Ibn Mubārak is reported to have observed that:

“When the devil sees a man obeying Allah and steadfastly carrying out His commands, he becomes despaired of him. But when he finds a man negligent in this behalf, he attacks him with full force and holds him like a vice. When one falls a prey to Satan in this way, the latter tries his utmost to ensure that he forgets Allah for good”.

The Holy Qur’ān says:

“The devil hath engrossed them and so hath caused them to forget remembrance of Allah. They are the devil’s party. Lo! is it not the devil’s party who will be the losers?”

[Qur’ān, LVIII:19]

In a word, to be remiss of Allah means to be ignorant of one’s own reality, to be disobedient to Allah and to fall into the devil’s trap. These are the three vices that depose man from the great position that Allah has bestowed upon him. This is sheer disavowal of the blessings of Allah, and it means terrible punishment to the disavower both here and in the Hereafter. According to the Holy Qur’ān:

“But he who turneth away from remembrance of Me, his will be a narrow life and I shall bring him blind to the assembly on the Day of Resurrection.

He will say:

My Lord! Wherefor hast Thou gathered me (hither) blind, when I was wont to see?

He will say:

So (it must be). Our revelations came unto thee but thou didst forget them. In like manner thou art forgotten this Day!”

[Qur’ān, XX:124-26]

Allah gave Islam to the world with the avowed object of establishing His rule on this earth so that mankind could follow in the footsteps of His last Prophet. We Muslims were pledged to deliver the message of Allah to the whole world. This is what, indeed, we did in the past. Islam was born in the desert of Hejaz, but its call was heard as far away as the African Sahara. Its clarion call rose from the mount Bu Qabees but it resounded on the Great Wall of China. Just when history was recording the foot-prints of the followers of Islam on the shores of the Tigris and the Euphrates, hundreds of thousands of hands were being dipped in the waters of the Jamna and the Ganges in performance of ablution in order to bow and prostrate before Allah, the one and only one Lord, the sole Creator.

This is our past, and now let us for a moment ponder our condition in the contemporary world. If the contrast is incredibly staggering, it is high time to heed it and to take to the right path. May Allah help us in our quest to regain our lost glory as the 'middle nation'. Amen!

THE RIGHTS OF ALLAH

Islam has included two categories of rights in its system of life. One comprises the rights of Allah and the other, the rights of man. Since rights are linked up with relationships, it is necessary first of all to explain the relationship Allah, the Most Exalted, has with His creatures. The basic and primary relationship that Allah has specified, while talking about His rights over human beings, is that of design and creation. He states that He is the Creator not only of mankind, but of the whole universe and all that it contains, and everything including mankind is a specimen of His handiwork. He is such a Creator of all that is, and such an Artificer, that to bring things from non-being into being, to turn being into nothingness and to bring back the dead to life and give them a new existence, all lies in His power. His Providence is boundless and infinite. He is such an All-knowing Creator and Artificer that He is aware of every last atom, every last bit which His creatures are made of. All that is in this macrocosm owes its being to Him:

“He is Allah, the Creator, the Shaper out of naught, the Fashioner. His are the most beautiful names...”

[Qur’ān, LIX:24]

Allah, the Most Exalted, has addressed all His creatures at another place in the Holy Qur’ān, thus:

“O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female...”

[Qur’ān, XLIX:13]

Mankind has been told emphatically and categorically that “We have created you all”. Those who are wandering in the wastelands of unbelief and doubt are asked:

“...Is there any creator other than Allah...”

[Qur’ān, XXXV:3]

Allah, the Most Exalted, has reiterated His attribute of creativeness not once or twice but repeatedly and often in the Holy Qur’ān. This attribute of His being the Creator points towards many other attributes and makes the human intellect understand the fact that He Who is the Creator is also necessarily the Lord and Master, and that the created things belong to their Creator. Thus it becomes clear to the human reason that it is impossible to have one as Creator and another as Lord and Master. In short the relationship between Allah and

man is that of the Creator and the creature, the Owner and the owned. The first right the Creator enjoys over His creatures is that the latter should accept Him as their Creator. What greater ingratitude there could be than, Allah forbid, our not recognising Him as our Creator. Not accepting Him as such is, in fact, a refusal to accept our own being, our own existence. Consequently Allah's first right is that we have complete belief in Him. And this belief should be so perfect and flawless that His Providence and His Lordship is in no way negated by word or deed. If a man does not have perfect and complete faith in His infinite power and His attributes, his belief is not at all perfect. And when our belief is imperfect we have not done our duty even with regard to His first right over us. That it is Allah's right that we have complete belief and perfect faith in Him is enjoined thus in the Holy Qur'an:

"O ye who believe! Believe in Allah and His messenger..."

[Qur'an, IV:136]

After making perfect our belief and fully accepting the truth that He is the Creator and the Master, the second phase of our contemplation and consideration starts and that pertains to the purpose of Creation, because without its full comprehension we cannot fully understand His other rights. Allah, the Most Exalted, has explained it thus in the Holy Qur'an:

"I created the jinn and humankind only that they might worship Me"

[Qur'an, LI:56]

Worship and submission to Him is the second right of Allah. This worship and submission has some special requisites. It does not just mean bowing and prostrations. It really means that man should be only His servant in all spheres of life and should not associate any one else with Him. This concept of submission should embrace the totality of life. No part of life, whether it relates to worldly matters or religious services and worship, whether it pertains to the individual or the community, should be devoid of the concept of true submission. This is the right of Allah which has been mentioned in the Holy Qur'an in these words: "Serve you none but Allah".

In reality after *Imān* (true belief) the second right of Allah is that total submission which is completely pure of all traces of any one else being associated with Him. The true conviction that He alone is the Creator and Master demands that only He should be recognised as the sovereign and a social order absolutely free from the sovereignty of non-Allah should be established. The right to rule and to sovereignty is His, because being the Creator, He alone is the Master. Nobody other than the Lord and Master has any authority to command:

"...His verily is all creation and commandment..."

[Qur'an, VII:54]

As long as our life and the world around us is under the dominance of men like ourselves, we are incapable of fulfilling our obligation to Allah and to give Him what we owe him. We are obviously wrong if, in these conditions, we say

that we are His sincere servants. Sincere submission means that no department of life should be considered outside the dominion of Allah. This is the essential requisite without which submission to Allah cannot be made perfect.

Next to accepting Allah as the sole Creator and Master and the only true Sovereign, is His right to our true and total obedience, which has been enjoined thus in the Holy Qur'an:

"O ye who believe! Obey Allah and obey the messenger and those of you who are in authority..."

[Qur'an, IV:59]

The fact is that He has these rights over us because of His munificence too. Just ponder your own being and you will realise that every breath that you breathe is a boundless bounty. He gave us the body, He blessed us with the soul, gave us eyesight and insight, endowed us with reason and intellect and gave us countless faculties and powers, which He did not give to any other creature. Had he so wished He could have made us stones and not human beings. These are His bounties that entitle Him to our love and devotion. Devoted love is not only the requisite of our faith, it is also the return for His generosity and His kindness. His commiseration, His benignity, His sustenance, all call us to give Him our total love:

"...Those who believe are stauncher in their love for Allah..."

[Qur'an, II:165]

What is this love? It is unquestioning obedience to His commands, publishing his true faith, implementing the system of justice He has bestowed upon us, and the holy war against forces that cause obstruction and disruption in the true path He has shown to mankind.

May Allah the Exalted give us the ability to do this all. Amen!

SACRIFICE

According to the Holy Qur'an, it was Hadrat Ismail, his dearly beloved son, whom Hadrat Ibrahim was asked to sacrifice as a blood-offering in a dream.

The ancestral home of Hadrat Ibrahim was Iraq, which in the time of Hadrat Ibrahim was under Chaldean rule. The entire region was in the grip of polytheism. The worship of stars was rampant and the whole people were under the sway of paganism. In this environment, polluted by the worship of false gods, rang out the clarion call of a great Prophet:

“O men, there is only one God and that is Allah. None besides Him is worthy to be worshipped. Worshipping the stars, the moon, the sun or, in other words, non-Allah is extreme ignorance and the gravest sin. O men desist from this evil of evils.”

When Hadrat Ibrahim gave this call to monotheism he was subjected to extreme hardship and suffering by his family and the whole people. The royal family became his deadly enemy. But the Messenger of Allah, despite the hostility of the people and the rising tide of animosity, continued to invite his father and other family elders, and his people to the religion of one Allah. Not only this, he dauntlessly expounded the concept of the one-ness of Allah in the royal court. Thus he advised the people of his community, collectively as well as individually, to abstain from paganism.

Just bring the spectacle before the mind's eye for a moment. On one side is the Messenger of Allah alone and on the other are a despotic government, the whole country and the people, his entire family, even his father. When this whole array of hostile forces failed to overwhelm or silence him and Hadrat Ibrahim reiterated his message of the unity of Godhead, the enemy gave the verdict that he be burnt alive. Even the fear of this terrible death could not keep away this solitary servant of Allah from uttering the word of Truth. He accepted the punishment of death by burning but refused to budge a hairline from the Truth which he had accepted and in which he believed with all his being. This was a unique and glorious act of self-sacrifice by this great man of Allah.

The father of prophets, Hadrat Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was thrown into the pit of blazing fire. But the sky-high flames of that fire did not burn him — did not even touch him — nor could they suppress the voice of Truth. His steadfastness in the way of Allah and his constancy was rewarded by Allah through a miracle. The pit of raging fire became a garden and the tongues of flame were turned into flowers.

It was impossible to stay in the country after this ordeal and the ensuing

persecution by the establishment. Consequently, Haḍrat Ibrahim spent the rest of his life as an exile. But wherever he went, he found people lost in superstition and in worship of false gods. The circumstances required that he should keep quiet. Had he done so, he would have been left in peace. But he was a Prophet and a Messenger of Allah. It was imperative for him to invite mankind to the straight path.

It had been revealed to him that the basic reality of this universe is the one-ness of Allah and that polytheism is the greatest cause of corruption on earth and man's spiritual death. So, wherever he went, he called Allah's creatures to Him and continued to preach the true faith. As a result, he could not stay in peace even outside his native land. He called men to Islam from the hill tops of Syria and the Lebanon, in the market places of Palestine, in the towns and cities of Egypt. His inner commitment to his prophetic mission and his persecution by the people and the establishment of the countries he visited in pursuit of his calling, kept him constantly on the move. His only aim in life was to unite mankind in the worship of one Allah. This quest, this lofty objective gave him the strength to sacrifice all his personal interests and to work single-mindedly for the propagation of the message entrusted to him.

In this state of resourceless exile, when he was almost at the fag end of his life Allah blessed him with a son. And you can all realise what this son meant to him when he grew up to be a handsome and healthful youth.

The ordeals and tribulations Haḍrat Ibrahim had undergone till now, were more than enough to prove his steadfastness on the path of truth. But the position of unprecedented and unique elevation and eminence to which Allah wanted to raise him required one final test. And the final test of this man who had always proved his preparedness to sacrifice his all to prove that he had truly surrendered himself to Allah, was to ask him to sacrifice his son. Could he, to prove his love for Allah, make this supreme sacrifice? He was put to the test. And no sooner did the sign come, than Haḍrat Ibrahim got ready to sacrifice his only son as a token of his submission and surrender. But exactly at the instance of moving the knife to slaughter his son, Allah gave him the tidings that his supreme sacrifice had been accepted and acknowledged. And he was ordered to withhold his hand.

Allah did not want the blood of the son of His great Messenger. What He wanted to see was the extent of His prophet's love for Him. This was the final and the greatest sacrifice that Haḍrat Ibrahim offered to prove his dedication to Islam, the strength of his belief and his loyalty to Allah, his Lord and Master. As a reward, Allah made him the leader and guide of all men of the true faith, till the end of time.

Please ponder the nature of this sacrifice. It was not merely the offering of flesh and blood. It was a total sacrifice, a complete surrender of the heart and the soul. It was a unique manifestation of obedience to Allah, complete submission and dedication. It was a test of his state of acceptance and self-negation, resignation and thankfulness. Without successfully going through this test it was not possible to be blessed with the eternal leadership of truth-

loving mankind and with righteousness in the Hereafter. It was not only a resolve to offer the blood of his son on the altar of devotion and subservience, but also a total giving away as a humble offering of his feelings, his longings and desires, his wishes and his dreams. It was a majestic spectacle of sacrificing all volitions and all pleasures in obedience to Allah's will.

As a matter of fact, Islam is another name for one's preparedness to sacrifice one's all. It is the duty of the Muslim to come forward, fully prepared to surrender his life, to end 'corruption on earth' when he sees that the fire of tyranny and exploitation is raging, the rights of Allah's creatures are being trampled upon, the crime of paganism is rampant and people are being made to turn away from Allah and to bow in obeisance before non-Allah and before arrogant men who wield power. He is required in such situations to dauntlessly proclaim the truth and call mankind to desist from its evil ways and to come back to the path of truth and righteousness.

What we need today is to acquire the courage and the strength to proclaim our total submission to Allah. We should keep this fact in view that the *Kalima* "There is no god but Allah" requires us to live as true servants of the Truth. No prejudice, no self-interest, no personal gain, no pressure, no temptation, no power howsoever great should be able to move us away from the path of truth. We should not accept subservience to any power on earth after submitting ourselves to Allah. This is the true import of the Islamic concept of sacrifice. Whenever the Muslims became pre-eminent and won glory for themselves and for their true faith, at the back of their ascendance lay their preparedness to make whatever sacrifice was necessary for the achievement of their high objectives. Even today we can achieve success and greatness only if the whole *Ummah* is filled with the resolve to sacrifice its all for the sake of Islam.

Fellow-Muslims! It is time for us to ponder the Islamic precepts of self-sacrifice and self-surrender. Let us realise, once for all, that Islam means self-sacrifice and self-denial. If we, the Muslims of the world, desire to raise the banner of our true faith and take its message to the peoples of the non-Muslim world, we will have to be ready to undergo many ordeals and make many sacrifices. Great objectives cannot be won without the willingness to suffer adversity and hardship. May Allah give our *Ummah* the ability to follow in the footsteps of the founder of the true faith of Islam, Hadrat Ibrahim, and that of his great son Ismail who lay perfectly still, in total self-surrender, under the knife of his father. May He enable us to tread the path shown to us by these two great men of Allah. Amen!

*The month of Ramadān in which was revealed
the Qur'ān . . .*

[Qur'ān, II:185]

RAMADAN: ITS SANCTITY AND SIGNIFICANCE

The month of Ramadan (Fasting) is that of blessings, grace, and self-purification. Its advent is a source of pleasure for every Muslim and he observes the sanctity of the month with full dedication and consecration of the self. It is immaterial whether those who sanctify it and dedicate themselves to it are old people, adults, or young ones, rich or poor, men or women, whether they belong to the West or East, North or South, or are black, white, or brown. All that matters is their belief in Allah's true faith. He who believes in Islam and the principles of Islam welcomes the month of Ramadan, partakes of the blessings of this sacred month, gains in religious fervour and devoutness, and progresses in his spiritual elevation. The Qur'an says about the sanctity of this month:

*"The month of Ramadan in which was revealed
the Qur'an, a guidance for mankind,
and clear proofs of the guidance,
and Criterion (of right and wrong).
And whosoever of you is present, let him fast the month,
and whosoever of you is sick or on a journey,
(let him fast the same) number of other days.
Allah desireth for you ease;
He desireth not hardship for you;
and (He desireth) that you should complete the period,
and that ye should magnify Allah for having guided you,
and that peradventure ye may be thankful."*

[Qur'an, II: 185]

The above verse describes the glory of the month of Ramadan since it was in this month that the Qur'an was made to descend, and the Qur'an is the ultimate criterion of right and wrong. The Qur'an lays down before us unambiguous instructions and clear guidance. Another point which underscores the sanctity of Ramadan is that it is the month of fasting, and the number of the days during which a man has to fast has been determined by the lunar calendar. Thus in the Qur'an it has been laid down:

*"O ye who believe!
Fasting is prescribed for you,
even as it was prescribed for those before you,
that ye may ward off (evil):"*

[Qur'an, II:183]

The aim of Ramadan is the attainment of piety and virtue, because it was in this month that the Qur'an was made to descend, to lead mankind along the path of virtue, abstinence, and righteousness with full dedication. The Qur'an is the most complete code of morality and a viable system of life. And the greatest blessing of the Qur'an is that it was in this sacred month that the Holy Prophet (may peace be upon him) received the Qur'anic revelation, a revelation that is intended to guide mankind till the end of time. The Qur'an teaches us how to live our lives in virtue and righteousness, how to distinguish between good and evil and right and wrong, and shows us the straight path which will lead us to welfare here and Hereafter. It makes the distinction between the Creator and the created clear, and points to the blessings of the religious and mundane aspects of human life, providing us with guidance in moral and practical matters in a manner that has no parallel. It builds bonds of love between fellow-men on the basis of piety and purification of the inner self and provides directions with regard to individual and collective life. It does this with full regard to human disposition and stresses in its precepts the pre-eminence of man in this universe and his innate merit and excellence.

The second unique aspect of Ramadan is the Fast itself which provides the best means for the purification of the self. Training and discipline is a prerequisite for a pure and good life. Mere enunciation of good principles will be ineffective if it is not accompanied by training of the people in accord with them. If the profession and the performance are at variance, the profession loses all its plausibility or validity. The real nobility lies in righteous action which is the true excellence of man and it is through the actions that the eminence or the smallness of man can be truly determined. The Qur'an requires man to lead a life of action and judges him on this basis. Any society that consists of men who are incapable of doing good deeds fails to make the grade from the Qur'anic point of view. Men living in such a society cannot save themselves from ultimate ruin and Ramadan provides the best opportunity for self-assessment and uplift of the self. During this month man can conduct his own appraisal, purify himself, and make real spiritual and moral progress. He voluntarily keeps away from several permissible things for a fixed period of time. He can eat but does not, he can drink but does not. He can satisfy many of his bodily desires but abstains from doing so since what he aims at is the pleasure of Allah. He serves his fellow-beings and understands their ordeals and sufferings better because of the hardship he undergoes during the fast.

It is a blessing from Allah that He has vouchsafed to us the Qur'an. Through its light we can illuminate our hearts, better our moral conduct, and improve our ways. The month of Ramadan should bring us closer to the Qur'an and we should build up a closer relationship between the Qur'an and ourselves. We should tread along the path of our Supreme Guide and we should derive full advantage from this blessing. Allah showers His blessings during this month on His servants, and if we still remain unblessed the fault will be ours. We have been created as the servants of Allah and can pass our lives purposefully only as

such. If we violate this principle, we will have to degrade ourselves – become suppliants even before men like us.

Our path of salvation lies in adherence to the teachings of the Qur'ān alone and the best example of how we should live has been provided to us by the Holy Prophet. We do not have to look for any other ideal when we have the supreme guide as our teacher and ideal. Only by treading in the footsteps of the Prophet can we achieve greatness, and greatness is surely awaiting us. Once we walk along the pathway of the Qur'ān, greatness shall be ours without asking, and the best moment for making an effort to achieve greatness is Ramaḍan.

With these sentiments we should always bid welcome to the month of Ramaḍan and pray in all humility to Allah that He puts us on the right path and vouchsafes to us the blessings of this holy month.

FASTING AS A MEANS OF SELF-DISCIPLINE

There is a common misunderstanding about symbols, that they get out of their specific field and thereby either get dissociated from facts and the compulsions of history or become merged into it. The truth of the matter is contrary to it. Symbols keep on changing mechanically into similes and metaphors and this in fact is their meaningful utility for a truer and deeper understanding of facts. A symbol is in fact the means that links up the factual with the abstract, the particular with the universal. Symbols give a concrete shape to meaning and it is this aspect of symbols which is a part of the law of co-ordination and co-relation.

The Holy Qur'an uses the law of co-relation as a ploy to make communication more explicit and points out time and again the fact that the Creator of Time and Space has fixed countless signs for his creatures so that with their help they may be able to fully understand facts, save themselves from the evils of confusion and self-destruction and achieve a true understanding of the real purpose of their lives. A true understanding of these signs will help them to tread, without fear or hesitation, the true path specified by the Creator and to make good their lives in this world as also in the world to come.

The purpose of this discourse is to understand the true importance of the holy month of Ramadan, keeping in view the real spirit of signs and co-related attributes.

The word Ramadan (in Arabic) contains ر م د (r m d) as its basic letters. The meaning of this three-lettered word in Arabic is hot sand, or scorching sand – the implied meaning being 'heat'. Many writers have expressed their opinion in this connection and have said that the first month of Ramadan after the declaration by the Holy Prophet of his Apostolic mission fell during the summer. It can therefore be taken to denote 'heat'. But this is a mere conjecture because the implied meaning of (r m d) was already there. And another matter which needs to be kept in view is the fact that the Islamic *Shari'ah* was initiated in such a manner that the first month of Fasting fell in the middle of the summer and that too the scorching summer of a burning desert. What does this signify and what is it symbolic of?

For a deeper understanding of this reality we will have to go back once again to the law of co-relation of signs and facts. This will enable us to know clearly and fully, overcoming all doubts and uncertainties why Allah the Most Exalted, Who is Most Merciful and Most Compassionate and is Bountiful and Kind to His servants, made heat and fieriness the symbol of one of the basic pillars of Islam. If you consider the matter in depth you will realise that there

is compassion even in this symbol. It signifies His blessing and pardon and the well-being of the believers. The tradition of fasting is common practically to all religions. In the Christian Church fasting was very hard and continued day and night without break, spread over long periods. But the vigour and the duration of fasting was reduced in Islam. Fasting was restricted to one month and the timings of the fast were reduced from the early dawn to the sunset. Man was given free permission to rest and to eat and drink from the sunset to the next dawn.

We have to, at this stage, ponder the symbolic and the implied spiritual significance of heat, fire and high temperature. The root of the word Ramaḍān consists of the letters ر م ض which combine to mean hot sand. Heat imports temperature to a spiritual warmth and fervour in the human body. Fire, heat, temperature and light are amongst the essential elements of life. It was this importance of fire which created the cult of fire-worship. But by inculcating faith in monotheism — One-ness of Allah — Islam reduced fire to an agent and declared as false and baseless the idea which had taken root in some minds in relation to fire that there is nothing without it and that the sun is a globe of fire and worthy to be worshipped.

To eradicate such false notions Allah the Most Exalted prohibited prostration in worship at the time of sunrise, midday and at the time of sunset and demonstrated the fact practically that the sun is a mere 'hot mass' a burning ball and fiercer flames than its fire exist in Hell-fire. Fire was thus used as a simile for Hell.

The function of fire is to heat matter and to remove purulence and grossness so that matter becomes purified. This exactly is the condition of the human body during the month of Ramaḍān. Since hunger, thirst and other desires of the body are under restriction, its effect takes the shape of vapours and heat which rise and produce fieriness in the body, which burns the lower self, which is gross and unclean and ennobles and chastens man; exactly in the manner in which gold is heated in fire to remove its dross and to make it soft, resplendent and bright.

The fieriness of the fast gives shine and lustre to the human soul by burning the lower self and creating the warmth of true faith. The importance and the purpose of fasting is self-discipline and self-purification and purification of the self is possible only through burning its gross element, its dross, so that the religious and spiritual forces lying latent in the human system become fully active.

The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) has said that Allah the Most Exalted forgives all our sins during this sacred month and gives us life through His Grace and Bounty. He has also informed the believers that during the first ten days of this month Allah shows His Compassion to His servants. During the second ten days He accepts penitence and in the last ten days gives eternal respite to them from the fire of Hell. During the last ten days of this sacred month there are certain nights amongst which is kept hidden the Night of Glory and this is the night during which the Holy Qur'ān descended from the 'Secure Tablet' to the plane of this universe. Prayer and submission to Allah during this night

is of more value and superior to prayer and total surrender stretched over a full one thousand months.

You must have felt, in view of the contents of this noble *Hadīth*, that the mercies of Allah descend upon the believers during the first ten days of Ramadan that is, in the beginning, soft warmth gradually creeps through the body and the glow of submission and prayer begins to illuminate our body, mind and soul. The light of spiritualism descends in the shape of divine mercy. Then this state produces the feeling of modesty and shame and man feels ashamed of his sins and seeks divine grace through earnest penitence. The third period is that in which falls the Night of Glory which is kept secret – for these days is reserved the tidings of salvation from chastisement and Hell-fire and when the dross of the inner self is completely removed no devilish doubts and Satanic machinations can stand in between the servant and his Lord and Master.

If the importance of the Holy Ramadan is seen in the form of these signs and the will of Allah, then the importance of the Holy Qur'an as the last Book of the Lord becomes all the more explicit.

The scholars of the true faith are unanimously of the view that the revelation of the Holy Qur'an began during this auspicious night. Hence this is the true guidance which saves the persons, who believe in this Word of Allah and act according to it, from Hell-fire and gives them the tidings of a place in Paradise. This is the divine guidance which was sent to burn to nothingness the evils and the sins of this world so that those who believe in it truly and sincerely should bring into shape a noble social order totally free of all sin, parochialism, prejudice, injustice, ignorance, waywardness and enmity towards mankind.

Is it no more than a mere coincidence that some of the most important events of the early days of Islam occurred in this month? The Battle of Badr and the capture of Mecca are amongst these historic events.

Pakistan came into being on the 27th of Ramadan. This is not in any way an event of lesser historic importance. But just see. The sole purpose of the struggle of the Muslims of the South Asia sub-continent was to obtain for themselves a sovereign territory where their beloved Islamic traditions and religious aspirations could flourish. Consequently, it is not wrong to call this country an ideological homeland of Islam.

Men of intellect and vision, people of knowledge and understanding, the true religious scholars and eminent men of medicine and sciences are all agreed that the month of fasting, this holy month of Ramadan, carries such blessings and bounties that it is a revolutionary message for intellect and intuition, for the mind and the soul. It is also a good tidings of perfect health for the mind and the body.

Lucky are all men and women who this year got the sacred month for prayer and self-surrender and who availed fully of its munificences and blessings and made it the means of their well-being in this world and the world hereafter.

I pray to Allah that this sacred month of Ramadan should prove a blessing for Pakistan and the whole Muslim world and be a means of pre-eminence and greatness for Muslim *Ummah*. O Lord, our Exalted and Gracious Master, bless this our fervent prayer with Your Gracious acceptance. Amen!

FASTING IN RAMADĀN AND HEALTH

Eating and drinking is in the nature of man. But, evidently, nature needs to be regulated in order to derive its optimum benefit. To whatever viewpoint one may happen to subscribe, unbridled freedom is not in the scheme of things human. Here, as elsewhere, the Holy Qur'ān provides necessary guidance and fixes the essential milestones and then, subject to them, leaves matters to the human option, which is determined by taste and temper, clime and custom, age and means, economy and civilization. Thus, although the prohibitive portion is well-defined, it is discreetly limited in dimensions, leaving by far the largest segment of life open to free choice. As a matter of fact, the sphere of free choice is so vast that it creates the illusion of complete, total and limitless freedom. The whole picture of constraints and freedom brings out the fact that, in His infinite Grace and Charity, Allah does not wish to hold man, His vicegerent, in a vise-like compulsive framework. The freedom man has been granted is almost limitless, which is itself a challenge to his intelligence and reason.

There come, more often than not, moments in his life when, overwhelmed by his desires, he becomes remiss in the discharge of his duties. That remissness may assume a thousand forms. As for a Muslim, if his negligence relates to fundamental duties, to worship and prayer, to the accredited ways of struggle for existence, and to the requirements of high morality, he forfeits his peace of mind, tranquillity of life and even his self-respect.

Truly speaking, the trials and tribulations of life eventually bring solace to a true Muslim. The socio-economic fabric of human life is inevitably dependent upon endeavour, and a ceaseless endeavour at that. It is, therefore, a foregone conclusion that its every phase entails hard work and striving, and, on the whole, life is a burden of inescapable responsibilities and a chain of endless hardships.

The Holy Qur'ān says:

"We verily have created man in an atmosphere."

[Qur'ān, XC:4]

Those who remain on the move, prosper. The abundant bounties of Allah become the destiny of those persons whose target it is to keep engaged in continuous struggle, in constant endeavour, in ceaseless effort and when his efforts are centred on the objective of securing the pleasure of Allah, man attains the pinnacle of greatness.

Fasting is a compulsory worship during the month of Ramadān. It has its recognised benefits, physical as well as spiritual. To me, besides its numerous

benefits, the significance of fasting consists in that man, who has been endowed with countless blessings and who has the capacity to eat and drink, exercises restraints and denies to himself all eating and drinking. This self-denial should remind him of the suffering of those who have nothing to eat on account of penury. He should be able to recall the hunger of the penniless and the thirst of those engaged in the battle of life and the deprivation which is accepted in furtherance of principles and moral and religious obligations.

If the person who is fasting is oblivious of this aspect of fasting, I think his moral perceptions and his conscience need to be awakened.

When you fast, you obey the Creator of the universe. The restraint that you voluntarily impose on yourself from dawn to dusk is all your own. It is your own conscience that makes you go through the ordeal. When you follow the restrictions without any let or hindrance, you are aware that Allah knows it all. This belief is at the root of your obedience. Fasting reinforces the spirit of submission to Allah. It is, indeed, Almighty Allah whose injunctions you obey and observe the fast. He has granted you the freedom to eat and drink but it is subject to the condition that you don't indulge in prodigality. It simply means that we should not overeat because that would fall in the purview of prodigality and wastefulness. It also can become a cause of many physical and spiritual ailments. Whenever we overeat, our digestive system will not accept it and the extra food consumed by us will go waste.

To partake of the bounties of nature during the month of Ramadan does not mean that we should adversely affect our own finances besides creating new problems for ourselves by gathering articles of food beyond our needs and means. In fact, those who are able to utilise freely their ample resources are duty-bound to make discreet enquiries about those who live in their immediate neighbourhood and in the society at large and utilise their resources to help those who are less fortunate and deserve succour.

It is my considered opinion that those who make elaborate arrangements for eating and drinking at dawn and dusk in the month of Ramadan, contravene the spirit of fasting. Eating a wide variety of dishes is injurious to health. The snacks we take at *iftār*, the sumptuous dinner that we have at night and then all the plentiful dishes we have to our heart's content at dawn (*sahar*), is tantamount to the stuffing of meal upon meal. They are definitely much in excess of our physical need and we should take cognizance of this fact.

We would do well to remember that the more a thing approximates to reality, the simpler, the more fascinating and the more tenable it grows. It is in the scheme of things that nothing in nature is complex and involved. Complications arise only from artificiality and affectation.

Let me tell you that since the last 35 years I take nothing of the conventional snacks at *iftār*. As a matter of routine, I break the fast with dates and, if possible, with little juice of lemon or some other fresh fruit. After *Maghrib* (sunset) prayers, I take my dinner which consists of a glass of milk, a piece of unbuttered bread and, occasionally, an egg. That is all. At dawn (*sahar*), my meal is even simpler. During Ramadan I give up my normal diet of buttered

bread and rice. This routine I have adhered to for the last 35-36 years and there has been no damage to my health whatsoever.

Perhaps, I shall do no wrong if I suggest the same course to others. Let me assure you, it shall cause no harm to your health. On the contrary, it will prove beneficial for both body and soul. If you adopt it, you will have a sublimely edifying experience in offering your *Tarāviḥ* (pre-midnight) and *Tahajjud* (post-midnight) prayers, unlike the one with overfilled stomach, who is always on the verge of disgorging during prostration.

Modern science has proved that fasting eliminates cholesterol. It is this cholesterol in blood which is the major cause of cardiac diseases. According to this scientific discovery of the modern world, fasting is a blessing. This truth, discovered by modern science was certainly known to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the last of the prophets of Allah, and precisely for that reason he regarded fasting as a blessing for both body and soul, and advised the Muslims to exercise moderation.

THE HOLY MONTH OF RAMADĀN

27th of Ramadan is the memorable day of the emancipation of mankind. Allah the Most Pure and Exalted has declared this auspicious date — to be the symbol of the great blessing, the revelation of the Holy Qur'an. On this historic day mankind was for ever rid of servitude and bondage. Man had himself put the yoke of misery round his neck. But to remove it was beyond him. He was being crushed under the unbearable burden of degradation and callousness and slavery appeared to have become his permanent lot. Then, the Creator of mankind, Who is Compassionate and Merciful, Who is Omniscient and All-knowing, took pity on this unending misery of man and decided to free the uncouth, ignorant being that is man, from his self-imposed imprisonment and to give him a character of liberty, freedom and emancipation. The Absolute Will selected the Night of Excellence for this epochal event. All eminent scholars, research specialists, men of understanding and Muslim saints are unanimously of the view that the night of the 27th of Ramadan is the Night of Excellence. The Lord that caused the descent of the Holy Qur'an, Who also created the day and the night, has declared this night better than and superior to a thousand months.

Now ponder the being that is man. He is the best of all creatures. Similarly, liberty and freedom are the greatest blessings of Allah. So the night during which Allah the Creator of heavens and earth, the Most Majestic, bestowed upon the best of His creatures His most excellent blessing has inevitably to be high and sacred in the same measure. This fact has been explained thus in the Holy Qur'an:

*"Ah, what will convey unto thee what the
Night of Power is!
The Night of Power is better than
a thousand months."*

[Qur'an, XCVII:2-3]

Man has striven, in every age, for his political emancipation and freedom of thought. Indeed the history of mankind is a continuing story of that struggle. Study any period of human history, and you will see that human civilization has undergone changes in every age. New cultural patterns kept taking shape. Human attitudes and modes of behaviour seldom remained the same over a stretch of time. There were regular revolutions in human thinking. Despite all this continuous flux, every people, every nation in every period of history has had one shared value, one common ideal. Notwithstanding all contradictions and differences, distances of space-time, variance in faiths and creeds man,

from the day of his intellectual awakening, has ever been singing odes and hymns to freedom and liberty. Let Muslims all over the world ponder one particular fact of history. When the struggle for political freedom started in South Asia and the people of the sub-continent stood up against the mighty British imperialism, the objective of the freedom movement was to destroy British power. Muslims of the sub-continent were fully committed to this struggle for emancipation and formed its vanguard. At this juncture, the poet of the East, Iqbal, led the Muslims in the light of the teachings of the Holy Qur'an. He said that the Western concept of democracy was a conspiracy against Islam. He told his people that the democratic system of the West was nothing but a mask which Western imperialist tyranny had put on. It was quite the opposite of Islam. Under Western democracy man can never enjoy the true freedom that Islam bestows upon him. This is the same Western system of government which joined hands with Communism to coin the new catchword: "Sovereignty of the people" i.e. only the people have the right to govern. But the Holy Qur'an holds this concept to be totally false. According to the Holy Qur'an no human individual has the right to bring other human beings under his dominion.

The Holy Qur'an considers organised government a prerequisite of collective life: "Not to serve anyone apart from Allah".

He allows nobody to share the right to rule with him: "And He associates in His government no one".

The ground and the reason for it is: "He has commanded that you shall not serve anyone but Him".

He has commanded that man should not accept subservience to anyone except Him: "That is the right code of life; but most men know not".

Men change the form of governments and feel satisfied that they have broken the shackles of slavery and now breathe in freedom.

The Holy Qur'an says without any ambiguity whatsoever that the government will be established on the lines laid down in the Book of Allah and no man will be allowed to have any say in it, because Allah does not delegate His power and authority to anybody. To elucidate this point He made the Holy Prophet say:

*"Shall I seek other than Allah for judge,
when He it is who hath revealed unto you
(this) Scripture, fully explained?"*

[Qur'an, VI:114]

The Muslims of India joined the freedom movement and got involved in the struggle with the sole objective of establishing Pakistan where it was their intent to enact the law of Allah and have a government based on the Holy Qur'an. They were motivated by a noble sentiment. Their faith was perfect and their conviction strong and vibrant. All the mighty powers of the world were overwhelmed by the fervent faith of the Muslims of the sub-continent. The foreign imperialism accepted its defeat and conceded victory to the Muslims.

Fellow Muslims! It is a unique and wondrous reality and a miraculous manifestation of Allah's design that Pakistan, an ideological Islamic homeland,

came into being right on the day on which fell the 27th of Ramadan – the day of the Descent of the Holy Qur'an and the night was the Night of Excellence. Without doubt it was a great reward from Allah the Almighty. It was the divine will to bring Pakistan into existence on a day which is auspicious and holy, sacred and sanctified in the eyes of the entire world of Islam. It was the will of Allah that Pakistan comes into being and in it the supremacy of the Qur'an is permanently established.

The greatest significance of the night of 27th of Ramadan from the point of view of world history is the Descent of the Holy Qur'an. Of course, this is the Book which gave to man the eminence and exaltation to which he was inherently entitled. This Book bestowed its grace on the whole universe. Every darkness enveloping the earth was turned into light. It revealed to man the innermost secrets of life.

For the Muslim *Ummah* the night of the 27th Ramadan has two-fold significance. The first is the Descent of the Holy Qur'an and the second is its being the Night of Excellence (which has been declared to be better than a thousand months). During this day and night the Holy Qur'an was revealed to destroy every falsehood and to establish the truth, and the dominion of the law of Allah on Allah's earth.

Qur'anic injunctions are quite clear and explicit in this regard. Allah the Almighty says in the Holy Qur'an:

*"Whoso judgeth not by
that which Allah hath revealed:
such are disbelievers."*

[Qur'an, V:44]

And right along with it, the Holy Prophet was enjoined:

*"So judge between them by that which
Allah hath revealed,"*

[Qur'an, V:48]

The Holy Qur'an calls every power apart from Allah 'idol'. It has described the difference between unbelief and faith in these words:

*"And he who rejecteth false deities
and believeth in Allah hath grasped a firm
handhold which will never break."*

[Qur'an, II:256]

In the light of these words we should consider what value can be attached to the claims of those who say that they believe in the Book of Allah but in actual practice they want the exact opposite:

*"How they would go for judgement (in their disputes)
to false deities when they have been ordered to abjure them?"*

[Qur'an, IV:60]

No doubt these people are not on the right path. In one breath they talk of the law of Allah but in the next breath they negate it. Their heart and their

faith are both unstable, although the fact of the matter is:

*““Perfected is the Word of thy Lord in truth and justice.
There is naught that can change His words.”*

[Qur’ān, VI:115]

The contemporary renaissance of the world of Islam is a blessing bestowed upon us by Allah. If we do not strengthen the bond of brotherhood amongst the peoples of Islam and do not rebuild our social order in accord with the precepts of the Holy Qur’ān, we will be guilty of ingratitude. A living and practical manifestation of our being true Muslims is obligatory upon us for this great gift. Let us avail of the advent of Ramaḍān and make a pledge to make Islam the basis of our individual and collective life. We should fear that the gift can well be taken away. Because it is Allah’s convention to take away His munificences from those who are ungrateful. The Holy Prophet always prayed to Allah in these words:

*‘Lord! I seek refuge in You against the withdrawal of the munificences
You have bestowed upon me’.*

May Allah the Most Exalted be our Help and Support as we work for the majesty and the glory of Islam and humbly offer our gratitude to Him. Amen!

FASTING AND HEALTH

(Fasting engenders in the individual resistance
against disease and greed)

Fasting during the month of Ramadan is enjoined as an obligation upon every Muslim. It was one of the obligations that constituted worship before the advent of Islam amongst other *ummahs* based upon revealed Books, and it has been present throughout history in one form or the other as commanded by the earlier prophets on behalf of Allah the Almighty. Allah while making fasting obligatory for the Muslims, declared:

*“O ye who believe!
Fasting is prescribed for you,
even as it was prescribed for those before you,
that ye may ward off (evil);”*

[Qur'an, II:183]

The above verse from *al-Baqarah* shows that fasting was obligatory upon the preceding *ummahs* as well, and that it is intended to make man God-fearing, chaste and virtuous. No commandment of Allah, no edict of wisdom, no obligation in His behalf is devoid of purpose. It is a different matter altogether if we, because of our limited comprehension and knowledge, fail to fully comprehend the import of His commands.

Apparently fasting is supposed to imply abstaining for a given period of time from food and other bodily needs and desires as required by the *Shari'ah*, from the *sahar* (break of the day) till the *iftar* (sunset) when the fast is broken. Mere abstention from eating and drinking and indulging in physical desires is not the major purpose behind fasting. They only serve as the means for a higher, far nobler objective. One of the most elevating characteristics of Islamic worship is that none of its obligations is an end in itself, but is a means for a higher purpose and is designed to attain something greater. The Qur'an states the purpose of fasting to be *taqwa* (purity), and *taqwa* literally means avoidance of something. But the religious import of *taqwa* is that man should sublimate his desires, his bodily contingencies and urges, excessive emotions, in short everything that is either a weakness or an evil. When we pass through a narrow pathway, flanked on both sides by thorny bushes, we gather up our garments close to our body so that they may not be torn by the thorns and the body is also kept safe from them. On the same analogy, we save our soul, our conscience, and our body from the thorny bushes of sins. This desire to seek refuge against

sin and vice we might designate as *taqwa*. Without *taqwa* and abstinence it is not possible to attain to that elevated state of humanity, that humaneness, that purity which Islam aims at and enjoins. The aim and object of fasting is *taqwa* or keeping away from temptation. Fasting enjoins curbs on acts and deeds that inflame desire and lead to imbalance in the personality. The body is disciplined by the imposition of curbs on desires and appetites that are ordinarily permitted. They are thus brought under control and as a consequence spiritual power is enhanced and reinforced. In other words, fasting performs the dual function of disciplining and purifying the body as well as the inner self. The Holy Prophet has said: "Everything has its *Zakat* (alms); fasting is the *Zakat* (alms) of the body".

Fasting is the best means of controlling appetite and physical desires. In other acts of worship our actions are visible, e.g., in obligatory prayer others see that we are praying. But in fasting the reality of fasting or rather the inward reality is apparent only to the individual who is fasting. No one is with us, the whole day, to keep a watch on us. We can surreptitiously eat or drink. But we do not do it. We undergo the rigours of thirst and hunger and yet we regard it a sin to eat or drink. We thus get the much-needed training for controlling our desires. We are all the time aware whether we are being watched by someone or not, that we are before Allah, for Whom we have fasted. We know that we are accountable to Him. The Holy Prophet's *Hadith* is: "Allah says: There is a worldly return for everything a man does, but fasting is only for Me and I alone will give its recompense". By fasting we strengthen our belief and faith. This belief is a repository for acts of higher nature and nobler deeds and for the elevation of the soul, for moral uplift and for better intellectual and mental health. It is this faith that cures man of many intellectual and corporeal ailments and releases him from the stranglehold of many anxieties and worries.

Fasting is not starvation only or an intermission, a longer than normal gap between meals. Starvation is also a physical and medical necessity. Man and even animals in certain diseases and ailments do not feel the urge to eat, and at times alimentation begins to appear repulsive. This interregnum in alimentation purifies the body of the metabolic wastes and cleanses the blood. Fasting generates resistance against greed and disease. It is because of this fact, that fasting has been enjoined as an obligation. It is a sure means for the purification of the heart and training of the body. Muslims are made to follow this regimen for one full month each year and are thus provided the opportunity to discipline themselves. During Ramadan Muslims learn to be punctual. There is a medical consensus on the fact that having meals at fixed timings is a guarantee for good health and the nutrition an individual derives through meals at regular timings is not possible if one is irregular in one's eating habits.

It is necessary for a man's health that he should be in harmony with his environment. The inner states of man and his external circumstances demand that this should be so. Disharmony with the external environment is injurious for health. Any conflict between the body and the environment can lead to different kinds of diseases and ailments. Attunement of the individual's

personality to his surroundings is conducive to physical fitness and mental peace. During the month of Ramadan a perfect coordination between man and his environment becomes a reality. And the general atmosphere of virtue and piety brings the people who fast, closer to one another and gives them the self-confidence which is a necessary prerequisite of physical and mental health. The prevailing state of sympathy and mutual cooperation gives to the people a sense of belonging and security. The rich and the poor are both afforded an opportunity of understanding and appreciating one another's feelings. Among the factors that contribute to human health, the external environment is also of great importance besides personal habits. Man has been called a social animal and consolidation of social relationships is essential for his welfare and well-being.

If an individual does not create harmony between himself and his environment, his mind begins to get adversely affected. Two individuals that are fasting are physically and spiritually so close to each other that they can appreciate each other's difficulties without any difficulty.

The Holy Prophet has called fasting 'a shield' and 'a secure fortress' to save one from Hell. If we ponder it, we can comprehend the wisdom of this observation of the Holy Prophet. A fasting individual would, before acting, be forced to question himself whether his act would be right or wrong. This line of thought would enable him to exercise control over his physical desires and save him from a host of sins and vices. Man thus develops a defensive mechanism against sins and becomes secure in his state of virtue and piety. If he ever forgets his state, his co-fasters immediately remind him that he is fasting and he immediately corrects himself.

Hadrat Abu Hurayra narrates that the Holy Prophet once said: "When an individual is fasting, he should neither talk of his desires nor become noisy. If someone wants to pick up a quarrel with him, he should tell him that he is fasting". He also said: "I swear by Allah in Whose hands lies the life of Muhammad, bad odour from the mouth of the fasting man is far more appealing to Him than the fragrance of musk. The faster has two joys (in store for him): the pleasure of breaking the fast and the joy when he joins his Creator".

This spiritual pleasure and physical peace are adjuncts to the building up of the environment necessary both for an individual's health and a welfare society and through them a man can reach lofty heights of spiritual, moral and intellectual excellence and can achieve perfect physical health.

KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM

... Say (unto them, O Muhammad): Are those who know equal with those who know not?

[Qur'an, XXXIX:9]

THE PRE-EMINENCE OF LEARNING IN ISLAM

The importance attached to knowledge and erudition by Allah Himself is self-evident to Muslims since the first revelation sent down to the last of the Messengers (peace be upon him) ordained that man's first and foremost duty is to acquire knowledge. In this first Revelation Allah has said:

*“Read: In the name of thy Lord who created,
Created man from a clot.
Read: And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous,
Who taught by the pen.
Taught man that which he knew not.”*

[Qur'ān, XCVI:1-5]

This is the first lesson which Allah has imparted concerning the importance and utility of knowledge. Before the advent of Islam knowledge was considered to be the prerogative of a special coterie, with whom it was a matter of inheritance. The common man had no share of it, as it was not considered necessary for the ordinary folk. Islam is the first religion to have emphasised the universality of knowledge and made it incumbent upon every man to acquire it. Another index of the importance and pre-eminence of knowledge in Islamic way of life is provided by the fact that Allah has on numerous occasions spoken of Himself as the All-knowing and has introduced Himself to His creatures as the One Who has absolute knowledge. Allah has been called '*Alim* (the All-knowing) in the Qur'ān on nearly 150 occasions. And then Allah is not only the Knower; He is also the Teacher. He Himself has said:

“Allah is teaching you. And Allah is Knower of all things.”

[Qur'ān, II:282]

On another occasion Allah describes the beneficence and the special privileges conferred upon the Holy Prophet and says:

*“Allah revealeth unto thee the Scripture
and wisdom, and teacheth thee that which
thou knewest not. The grace of Allah toward thee
hath been infinite.”*

[Qur'ān, IV:113]

The Qur'ān has also enjoined the Prophet to pray for the enhancement of his knowledge:

*“Then exalted be Allah, the True King!
And hasten not (O Muhammad) with the Qur'ān ere its
revelation hath been perfected unto thee, and say:
My Lord! Increase me in knowledge.”*

[Qur'ān, XX:114]

And we have also been informed that the learned and the untutored can never be equal. Allah enjoins the Holy Prophet thus:

*“Say (Unto them, O Muhammad): Are those who know equal
with those who know not?”*

[Qur'ān, XXXIX:9]

These Qur'ānic injunctions bore fruit in no time. Muslims gave prime importance to knowledge, its attainment and dissemination, and increased the status of the erudite and the patrons of erudition. They made such abundant contribution to the store-house of knowledge, that mankind will for ever be grateful to them. They excelled their contemporary nations in all branches of knowledge. There was none to equal them in learning and erudition. Their pivotal role in the spread of learning throughout the known world is a golden chapter of world history.

The Holy Prophet has said about the acquisition of knowledge:

“Secure knowledge because he who does, makes good progress in the path of Allah. He who speaks of knowledge, praise the Lord. He who is in search of knowledge gives evidence of his love for Allah; and he who disseminates knowledge gives charity”. (Muslim, Tirmidhi).

The Holy Prophet has further said: “Angels spread their wings in the path of the scholar” (*Bukhārī*). He has accorded learning a status higher than that of worship. He has said: “To hear what the learned speak and to impart the lessons one has learnt to others is better than worship” (*Muslim*). And further: “The ink of the scholar is more sacred than the blood of martyrs”. (*Muslim*).

I have only given a few extracts from the boundless treasureland of the Qur'ān and the *Hadīth*. The purpose of these is just to underscore the prime position learning and erudition occupy in the framework of Islam. Muslims are commanded to venerate erudition and to encourage and honour the scholar.

All nations of the world are alive to the importance of knowledge and many have achieved pre-eminence in it. Science has been taken to the loftiest pedestal. It has achieved a breakthrough in the understanding of the physical universe and has completely revolutionised human life. It has made life comfort-

able and enjoyable and made travelling safe and easy. It has made the world look so small – one can go from one continent to another in less than a day. Industry has negotiated new pathways and automation has reduced man's labour, increasing productivity manifold per man. And yet the man of to-day is a victim of strains and stresses, and has lost the peace and the tranquillity of mind that he had till half a dozen generations ago. Is this because of the progress of knowledge and the ascendance of science? Certainly not. Neither knowledge nor science is the culprit. The reason lies elsewhere: in the lack of faith which should have been strengthened by enhancement of knowledge. Knowledge is incomplete without faith and science poorer without true belief. The utility of the knowledge of things is undeniable but without the motivating power of faith man remains deprived of the advantages of knowledge.

True knowledge is the greatest need of the hour. We are surrounded by all kinds of anxieties and predicaments because we lack true knowledge. Apparently the modern man has crossed one landmark after another in his quest for knowledge and science and has found the key to the leadership of the world. But since this scientific advance is purely materialistic and devoid of spirituality, it cannot cater to the inner longings of mankind. Only that knowledge as makes man serve the Will of Allah and transforms man into the "finest of beings" can confer real happiness upon mankind.

May Allah grant us the knowledge that is the cure of all human ailments – the knowledge that brings men together in the quest of higher and nobler goals and teaches them total submission to the Lord and Creator of the universe.

LEARNING AND EXCELLENCE

The importance that Islam attaches to learning and erudition can be gauged well enough from the fact that in the first revelation, Allah the Almighty speaks about Himself to the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) as follows:

*“Read: In the name of thy Lord who created,
Created man from a clot.
Read: And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous,
Who taught by the pen,
Taught man that which he knew not.”*

[Qur’ān, XCVI:1–5]

And that is why the spread of Islam dealt a death-blow to both ignorance and obscurantism. Wherever Islam went, it not only obliterated paganism, idol-worship and social evils and immorality but also filled the hearts of people with the light of knowledge. Allah has said:

“When it is said, Make room in assemblies, then make room; Allah will make way for you (hereafter). And when it is said, Come up higher, go up higher; Allah will exalt those who believe among you and those who have knowledge, to high ranks.”

[Qur’ān, LVIII:11]

The foregoing verse brings out the fact that Allah holds faith and knowledge to be of equal rank.

The importance and sanctity of knowledge is also borne out by the fact that it is an attribute which has been especially associated with prophets which, in other words, means that prophethood and knowledge go hand in hand.

Among the basic attributes of prophets three are particularly important:

- i) To release people from the servitude of false gods and to rid them of the disgrace of paganism (*shirk*).
- ii) To purify the hearts of people of inner defilement, and to cleanse their personalities both in thought and deed.
- iii) To inculcate in them high moral and spiritual attributes.

This is what erudition also aims at. And the Holy Prophet of Allah in a *Hadith* defined knowledge as the true heritage of the prophets. Upon us, as Muslims,

therefore, devolves the responsibility of organizing our educational system in such a way that we should be able to preserve this heritage of the prophets. This should be the basic aim of our educational system.

Addressing the believers Allah has said:

"For ye will overcome them if ye are (indeed) believers."

[Qur'an, III:139]

As long as the Muslims remained true to their responsibility of preserving the endowment of the prophets in the form of knowledge and kept true to the trust left to them, they were a force which no nation could afford to ignore. But as soon as they became oblivious of this heritage and showed indifference to the sanctity of the trust they were required to safeguard, they became a divided house and got fragmented, and their religious and secular aspects came in conflict with each other instead of being in harmony. And this duality has put the whole *Ummah* on the horns of a dilemma, with the result that the *Ummah* which was marked for world leadership has itself become subservient to other nations in both external and internal matters and among the primary causes of this deplorable state is the present educational system in the Islamic world which is totally incapable of achieving the goals and aims which the Qur'an and the *Hadith* have set before the Muslims.

Our present-day educational system is not in consonance with our political and religious aspirations and requirements, and this is the reason why the governments of Islamic countries, despite considerable expenditure in the field of education, are unable to turn out young men equipped and spiritually inspired and motivated enough to be able to compete with those who have come out of the educational institutions of nations dedicated to material progress. There is no dearth of schools, colleges and universities in the Islamic world nor is it lacking in research institutes and well-stocked libraries. But how tragic that the young men coming out of our academic institutions, even the best of them, are not dynamic or dedicated enough. None amongst them seems to be fired by the desire to achieve the impossible and to leave an indelible imprint on history.

The educated class of the *Ummah* suffers from a deep sense of inferiority *vis-a-vis* the materialistic culture of the West. If we wish to rid ourselves of this unjustified awe of Western superiority, and wish to become a force to be reckoned with, we will have to bring about revolutionary changes in our educational system. We should be able to produce highly qualified young men who besides being upto date in all branches of knowledge, would be well-versed in the legacy of erudition left by the prophets.

Perhaps, the great harm done to the Muslim world by its defective educational system, is that because of it we have lost our distinctive characteristics as an *Ummah* and have become oblivious of our identity. And a nation that loses its identity can find no place for itself in the comity of nations. Having lost our ethos and identity, we have also lost our past heritage which our fore-

fathers had collected for us at great sacrifice. When we occupied a place of honour in the world, we owed that position to the fact that both as individuals and as a people, we were fulfilling our obligations conscientiously and with complete dedication. We were in the forefront of scientific and intellectual progress because as heirs to the knowledge bequeathed to us by the prophets – we had moulded our thoughts, actions, life-style, culture and ethos according to the prophetic heritage. But now that we stand bereft of all those attributes and are indifferent to the inheritance of the prophetic knowledge, we, who were earmarked for world leadership, have lost all sense of self-confidence and have become dependent upon others. The principal and basic reason of our decline is that we have failed in the discharge of our trust which was meant to be transmitted to succeeding generations. We not only lost our heritage but also left our youth, who are to build the *Ummah* of the morrow, at the mercy of a culture that is dedicated to the cult of materialism and equipped solely for the fulfilment of mundane needs. We followed in the footsteps of our ill-wishers and have taken to worthless concepts like ‘education for jobs’ and ‘education for the sake of education’. Through our folly we have come down from the position of leadership and joined the mass of imitators. If we are really sincere in our wish to regain our past glory, we will have to get rid of those mental shackles that compel us to imitate a materialist culture and mould our lives according to the teachings of the Qur’ān and the *Sunnah*. We can then look forward to regaining our past eminence which Allah awards only to those who are deserving of it. May Allah guide us and provide succour to us. The Qur’ān addresses the Holy Prophet and instructs him to continuously pray to Allah thus:

“My Lord! Increase me in knowledge.”

[Qur’ān, XX:114]

And then in explicit and unequivocal words it declares that men of learning will be given a place of honour. The high station which is assigned to learning is truly symbolic of the ethos of Islam. Every Muslim will have to accept this fact and take steps to achieve this high place, because there is no other alternative for true believers.

May Allah, the Magnanimous, guide us on the right path and enrich us with learning and erudition.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING AND ERUDITION IN ISLAM

In Islam the importance of learning is like that of light in abysmal darkness. In fact, Islam is the final and most complete religion which has accorded basic importance to erudition. Indeed, it is the foundation upon which the edifice of Islam rests. The Holy Qur'ān has time and again exhorted people to ponder the importance of acquiring knowledge and to contemplate upon the phenomena of the universe. The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) has especially emphasised this point in his *Hadīth*: "It is obligatory upon every Muslim to acquire knowledge". Another saying of the Holy Prophet exhorts the Muslims to acquire knowledge, even if in this noble pursuit, they have to travel to the farthest corner of the world. This *Hadīth* requires an in-depth consideration and compliance.

Allah has commanded the true believers as follows:

"Those who, if We give them power in the land, establish worship and pay the poor-due and enjoin kindness and forbid iniquity."

[Qur'ān, XXII:41]

From this verse it clearly follows that not only is proselytisation a primary duty of Muslims, but they are also required to ensure that the laws of Islam are enforced. But this obligation can only be fulfilled by those who are blessed with knowledge, who understand Allah's commandments, and follow the *Sunnah* of the Holy Prophet. They should have the erudition necessary to distinguish between good and evil, and right and wrong.

The Prophet held learning and erudition to be of such great import that, when some of the prisoners captured during the Battle of Badr could not produce money for their ransom, he asked them to teach ten Muslim boys to read and write. This, the Prophet said, would be their ransom fee.

The citizens of Madina had social and business contacts with the Jews. The language of the Madinese Jews was Hebrew. They took advantage, at times, of the ignorance of the Muslims of Hebrew. When the Prophet realised that the Jews were taking undue advantage of this fact, he asked Hadrat Zayd bin-Harith to learn this language. And the Prophet prayed that he should learn it quickly,

which he did. He learned its basic vocabulary within a fortnight. This implies that Muslims have been enjoined to learn besides the Qur'ān and the *Hadīth*, all disciplines which may prove useful to them.

Of the different Arab regions that passed under the Islamic sphere of influence during the sacred period of the Prophet's life, the most extensive and highly civilised region was that of the Yemen and the Prophet had it divided into five districts to which he appointed five governors. Their primary charge was to proselytise among the followers of other religions in the area under them and to teach the converts to Islam, its basic precepts and practices. Then followed the duties regarding administration, supervision of agriculture, dispensation of justice, and the collection of the tithe (*Khirāj*). When the Prophet sent Hadrat Ma'adh bin-Jabal as the *Qadī* of a district of the Yemen, he told the latter at the time of his departure: "You are going to the people of the Book; your first job is to invite them to the attestation of faith". Then he instructed him how to proceed in educating the local people in other fields.

In the discharge of these obligations, breadth of vision and ability to give analogical interpretation of Islamic Law (*Ijtihād*) were needed. The Prophet therefore himself used to test the erudition and intelligence of the people whom he wished to charge with administrative responsibilities, to assess their capacity to appreciate complex problems and to cope with them. When he selected Hadrat Ma'adh to represent him in the Yemen, he asked him how he would decide cases. Hadrat Ma'adh said: "Through the *nass* (text) of the Qur'ān". When asked by the Prophet what he would do if he could find no guidance from the Qur'ān, Hadrat Ma'adh said: "I shall then be guided by the *Sunnah* of the Prophet". The Prophet asked: "And what will you do if you do not find any guidelines there"? Hadrat Ma'adh replied: "I will then exercise *Ijtihād* (analogical interpretation)". The Prophet was satisfied and said: "Allah be praised that He has vouchsafed to a Companion of the Prophet an attribute that His Prophet keeps dear to his own heart".

In the *sūra* entitled *Repentance*, Allah has clearly said that since it is not possible for all Muslims living in different parts of the world to come to Madina it should be so arranged that one person of every tribe comes and receives education and training in Islamic principles and acts of worship and after graduation goes back to his people and makes them aware of the dangers inherent in their state of ignorance so that they could keep away from vices and evil acts.

This shows that Allah attaches great importance to learning and knowledge. And since it is impossible for every individual to become an expert in matters of the faith, Allah enjoined that a group of specially trained experts be created who would be fully cognizant of Islamic precepts and who would be qualified to provide guidance in all matters in the light of Islamic principles. This group would besides possessing adequate knowledge of Islam have upto date proficiency

in other disciplines that are necessary for collective progress and welfare. A study of the Holy Qur'ān would amply show that Allah has exhorted the believers to ponder time and again, upon the wonders of creation. At times people are reproved for not making proper use of their reason and on other occasions they are informed about the evil consequences of ignorance and lassitude. The Qur'ān makes it clear that only those people can understand and appreciate the marvels of this universe who have been blessed with learning and erudition. At one place the Qur'ān claims: "What can an ignorant and illiterate person know and what can he understand"? According to the *Sahīh Tirmidhī* the Prophet is reported to have said: "It is the noblest of acts for a father to teach his son good manners and social etiquette". On another occasion, he said: "A father cannot give his child a better gift than erudition". Quite obviously such erudition would include a comprehensive understanding of Islam that would be necessary for the son to become a true Muslim, improve his moral sense and equip him with the intellectual means to discover the secrets of this physical universe.

In most world religions, religious guidance and catechesis and discharge of ritual functions is assigned to special families and classes such as the Levites in Judaism, Brahmins in Hinduism, the Fathers in Christianity etc. But in Islam every believer can become a proselytiser, a religious teacher, a missionary, a preacher or a judge. But these responsibilities can hardly be discharged if the believer is not well-versed in the philosophy and the moral and social law of Islam.

This, in turn, requires specialised education. The Prophet himself initiated a two-pronged methodology for the purpose. One was that representatives from tribes of different parts of Arabia came to Madina, and after receiving intensive training returned to their homes to take up teaching of the *Sharī'ah* of Islam. The other was that of regular and systematic education.

Mention of many teachers of the first category is found in the Holy Prophet's Traditions and in biographical writings of the early Islamic period. Thus a party led by Hadrat Malik bin-Hawaryth received instructions about Islam for twenty days at Madina, and was commanded by the Prophet to go back to its own tribe and teach it the basic precepts of Islam. As for the second and the more advanced method, we have an account of the school at *Suffah* where regular courses in Islamic law – moral, social and personal – were held for those who had decided to dedicate themselves to learning about Islam. One group among them was earmarked for education and the other for worship and prayer. One day the Prophet saw that there were two separate classes being conducted in the mosque. One was engaged in teaching, the other in prayer. The Prophet was greatly pleased and commended both. He said that he had been sent by Allah as a teacher, and sat down with the students. This Tradition has been narrated by Ibn Maja. It shows the importance of knowledge in Islam.

According to Islamic *Shari'ah* the unlettered and the learned can never be equal, for one lives in darkness, the other is blessed with pure light.

The point why a people that was told first of all to acquire knowledge and the first revelation to the Holy Prophet asked him to "Recite" is not in the vanguard of those who are involved in the pursuit of knowledge, needs serious consideration. We should have been far ahead of others in this field. Allah has made the heavens and earth and all that is therein the dominion of the true believer. But unfortunately we discarded Allah's largesse and other nations have made great headway in the conquest of space. We should not forget that our lives are a trust and not for a single moment should we be oblivious of the fact that Allah and His Messenger (peace be upon him) have commanded us to acquire knowledge and to disseminate it. It is my advice to the Muslim youth of today to dedicate themselves to this noble cause and to provide God-fearing and righteous leadership to mankind. The world of today, torn by hatred, dissipation, discontent, scepticism, and uncertainty, is in search of peace and spiritual tranquillity. Only those who are enlightened and erudite believers can fulfil this need of the hour.

THE PLACE OF KNOWLEDGE AND MEN OF KNOWLEDGE IN ISLAM

The high importance Islam attaches to knowledge does not stand in need of exposition. Of all the higher religions only Islam has the unique distinction that it has drawn the line between knowledge and ignorance and has stated in clear and unequivocal words that:

“Say (unto them, O Muhammad): Are those who know equal with those who know not?”

[Qur’ān, XXXIX:9]

The fact of the matter is that it is only the Holy Qur’ān, the Book which brings an ignorant world, that groans under the shackles of superstition and nonsense, out of the torments of psychological and spiritual agony and the gloom of misguided life, into the sunshine of truth and understanding. Allah, the Lord and Sustainer of the world has said that He brings men out of stifling darkness into light through the Holy Qur’ān.

Islam came as the symbol, in fact, the exponent of knowledge and true understanding and consequently brought about a universal revolution. Indeed it began its historic journey with knowledge and enlightenment. The first major event in human history occurred when Allah the Most Exalted enlightened Adam with the knowledge of names and essence of all things and declared it to be the sole reason of his being better and higher in excellence than the angels:

“And He taught Adam all the names.”

[Qur’ān, II:31]

Other religions held knowledge to be just one need among the numerous needs of human life. But Islam declared it to be one of the basic requisites of human existence. It informed that knowledge, prayer, faith and belief are words which have the same meaning and signify the same truth. Islam does not consider knowledge to be mere consciousness and cognition. According to it knowledge includes all the experiences, observations, perceptions, discoveries and above all, revelation which become a means of knowing Allah and achieving felicity and blessedness in both the worlds and enable man to truly know and understand himself. True knowledge makes the propensity, the total potential, ability, capability and the ultimate objectives of man’s life, the basis to determine his eternal success or failure.

Islam puts no value on purposeless knowledge and is the upholder and protagonist of purposeful knowledge, in the light of which man can understand and achieve total faith in the glory, the greatness, the grandeur and the unique magnificence of his Creator. This is the knowledge man is truly in need of.

Whether he receives it, audiotorily, visually, experimentally or theoretically, it should be such as to so train a person that he acquires all the moral excellences and is also fully aware of, and recognises their supremacy. This is the knowledge which produces that inner wisdom to which every particle of dust and every phenomenon of nature is an evidence and a proof of the One-ness of Allah the Almighty.

Islam is the only religion which bases its entire system, its beliefs, its obligatory religious duties and services, its code of moral values, its politics, its economy, its social order and its civilization and culture, indeed all its positive and negative concepts, on knowledge. Islam is the first and the only religion whose founding exponent, Allah's last Messenger, said, "Knowledge is my weapon".

This eloquent and meaningful Saying means that we the Muslims do not coerce or compel other peoples and nations, by force of arms, to come into the fold of Islam. We convert people on the strength of the light and enlightenment of this true religion which endows man with the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil, the beautiful and the ugly, monotheism and paganism, grace and disgrace, success and failure. And the definitive and attributive name of this enlightenment is knowledge. And this knowledge is our real and most effective weapon which we use against those who worship illusions and close their eyes to facts. According to a Tradition in Ibn Māja, the Holy Prophet (peace be on him) made the acquisition of knowledge obligatory on every person who belongs to the Muslim society.

One of the main purposes of the appointment of the Holy Prophet as Allah's last Messenger, according to the Holy Qur'an, is to teach the Book and Wisdom:

"Allah verily hath shown grace to the believers by sending unto them a messenger of their own who reciteth unto them His revelations, and causeth them to grow, and teacheth them the Scripture and wisdom."

[Qur ān, III:164]

The Holy Prophet in addition to the exposition of his unique moral and spiritual attributes and the distinctive characteristics of his personality throws light on one particular purpose of his being appointed Prophet, in these words:

"I have been ordained a teacher".

From this we can draw the conclusion that one of the purposes of prophethood is to spread knowledge. And since the Holy Prophet of Islam brought the Book which is the fountain-head of true knowledge and his sacred person was the loftiest and the most unique embodiment of highest knowledge and understanding, his most distinctive personal characteristic was presented in the context of knowledge. In other words, it can be said that the most important aspect of the Holy Prophet's sacred personality was his role as an educator and teacher. Consequently those fortunate persons who are blessed with this unequalled

wealth hold the highly venerable position of being the Holy Prophet's deputies. The *Hadīth* "scholars are the heirs of the prophets" points to this very fact. The particular knowledge towards which Islam calls mankind, has three special characteristics worth mentioning. First, the fountain-head of all branches of knowledge is Allah, the All-knowing. Secondly, the sure and true source of knowledge is the revealed Word of Allah. And lastly, higher knowledge is inner conviction about the life Hereafter and true belief in eternal existence after Resurrection.

Mere awareness of a thing has no importance. Only constructive and positive purposes endow knowledge with higher meaning, significance, worth and value. This not only fully explains the fact that Islam considers the revealed Word of Allah as the only sure source of true knowledge, but also brings out its necessary adjunct that the cultural heights achieved through the application of knowledge can prove positive and profitable only when they serve higher purposes. And knowledge cannot be purposeful and useful unless it is subordinate to religion.

Islam is not anti-scientific progress. On the contrary, it induces and encourages man to conquer this physical universe, and it looks with favour at all branches of enquiry which pertain to heaven and earth. It teaches its followers to keenly observe the world of matter and the world of spirits (living beings). But it lays down one condition – a categorical imperative – this study, this enquiry, this observation should be purposeful. Islam is not a system which divides knowledge, civilization, politics and culture into separate compartments. In its world-view, life can be put under only two broad heads, or titles, "Monotheistic life" and "Pagan life". To be informed of the Absolute Being, to believe in His Omniscience and Omnipotence – all His attributes – with all one's heart is called knowledge and the impact of this knowledge on practical life is called action.

Islam gives the good tidings of highest places in Paradise to those who devote their lives to the propagation of true knowledge. The Holy Prophet has said that the chain of a man's actions is cut off after death, but three things survive after him and the first among them is that knowledge which brings profit and proves good for others. It is because of these special qualities that while elucidating the eminence and the high position of men of knowledge, he said, "On the day of Judgement the ink of a scholar's pen will be weighed against the blood of martyrs".

Bringing out the superiority of knowledge to mere austerity and worshipfulness the Holy Prophet (peace be on him) said: "A scholar is as superior to a devotee as I am to the lowliest among my Companions". In another *Hadīth*, he said, "As the full moon is superior to all stars, similarly a man of knowledge is superior to all men without knowledge".

In fact, a true understanding of life and the commands of Allah makes a man safe from the sudden and imperceptible inroads of Satan into his mind. As a result of this immunity, prayer and submission become more sincere and candid. It is because of this that knowledge is held superior by Islam to even

martyrdom and worship. According to Islam human well-being and welfare is totally dependent on fear of Allah. This is the basis of Islamic morality also and the foundation of human dealings, submission to Allah and other aspects of human life. It remains to be seen when and how fear of Allah enters the heart of man and digs roots there. It is a fact that true knowledge and understanding cannot be gained without complete *Īmān* in the existence of Allah and His being the Absolute Lord and Master of all being and non-being. That is why it is said in the Holy Qur'an:

"The erudite among His bondmen fear Allah alone."

[Qur'an, XXXV:28]

Only a man of knowledge fears Allah. This noble state of the inner being is achieved through knowledge and divine grace. It is because of this fact that the thought of true scholars is acclaimed as the beacon-light in the wilderness of life, their guidance, the wherewithal of collective progress, and their presence as a priceless asset to society. According to a *Hadīth*, "Allah does not remove knowledge from the world without cause. When the men of knowledge leave this world, He takes away their knowledge along with them". This means that knowledge should not be allowed to remain confined to a limited circle of the intellectual élite, but all-out efforts should be made to extend its sphere so as to bring it within the reach of an ever-widening mass of humanity.

The most distinguished and eye-catching characteristic of Islamic culture is knowledge. Hadrat Ayesha says, "Knowledge does not mean preponderance in the narration of Traditions in support of *Hadīth* but the fear of Allah". Those servants of Allah who fear Him, safeguard their morals and are honest in mutual dealings, are in fact among those men of true knowledge about whom it is said in the Holy Qur'an that "only they fear Allah who have knowledge".

RESPECT FOR LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

The first Qur'ānic verse which was sent down to the final Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) pertained to knowledge. He was thus enjoined:

*“Read: In the name of thy Lord who created,
Created man from a clot.
Read: And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous
Who taught by the pen,
Taught man that which he knew not.”*

[Qur'ān, XCVI:1-5]

The first lesson given to the Muslims, therefore, stressed the vital importance of knowledge. And Islam is the first and the only religion that took knowledge out of the hands of a privileged coterie of religious elite and made it the common property of all mankind. The Qur'ān exhorts believers time and again to learn and acquire knowledge whatever the price and wherever it is available. The Qur'ān tells the Holy Prophet to pray for increase in his knowledge:

*“My Lord!
Increase me in knowledge.”*

[Qur'ān, XX:114]

We have further been told that the status of the learned is far superior to that of the unschooled, and that the learned and the ignorant cannot be equal. The Qur'ān explicitly states:

*“Say (unto them, O Muhammad): Are those who know
equal with those who know not?”*

[Qur'ān, XXXIX:9]

It was due to this Qur'ānic stress on knowledge that the early Muslims attached utmost importance to the acquisition of knowledge, and after moral excellence, learning and erudition became the most worthy qualities that a man could possess. The pages of Muslim history are filled with edifying accounts of efforts made by the *Ummah* to acquire and disseminate knowledge. Men of erudition were held in high esteem by one and all in the world of Islam. Besides what the Qur'ān has told us about the importance of acquiring knowledge, we have the Saying of the Holy Prophet on the subject. Thus the Prophet has said:

“He who acquires knowledge to please Allah does a very noble deed. He who disseminates knowledge in fact praises his Creator, and he who goes out in the quest of knowledge is the lover of Allah. Anyone who imparts knowledge to others does a charitable deed, and he who faithfully transmits knowledge to others provides a proof of total submission to Allah. Knowledge enables man to distinguish between the permitted and the unpermitted, and irradiates his path towards Paradise. It is our companion in the desert, our friend when we are lonesome, and our helper when we are in straitened circumstances. It is our ornament in the company of friends and our armour against enemies. Through knowledge man attains nearness to Allah. He achieves high position and honour in this world and bliss in the Hereafter”.

Another Saying of the Holy Prophet about knowledge is: “Angels spread out their wings in the path of the scholar”, while on another occasion he has credited it with a higher position than worship: “To hear what scholars say and to impart the lessons one has learnt to others is an act superior to worship”. And just ponder the implications of these sublime words of the Holy Prophet: “The ink of the scholar is more sacred than the blood of martyrs”.

What has been said in the Qur’ān and expounded by the Holy Prophet the chief exegete of the Qur’ān (*Shāriḥ ‘alāh as-Salam*), amply shows that learning constitutes an essential characteristic of the *Ummah*. Before the advent of Islam learning was considered to be the prerogative of a particular class of people who were regarded as religious savants and the spiritual elite. The “enlightened” Europe is not without instances of retrogressive thinking as far as learning and knowledge are concerned. The religio-scholastic mind of medieval Europe could not tolerate the idea of the earth being round, and those who believed in or advocated this self-evident truth were persecuted and some of them tortured and even executed. The world is eternally indebted to Muslims who freed knowledge from limitations imposed upon it by the rabbis, priests, the magi, and the pundits. It is the Muslims who conferred upon mankind the freedom of thought which is the basis of all knowledge. We can therefore say without any trepidation and a full sense of responsibility that it is the Muslims who are the founders and the pioneers of modern science, and it was they who took the lead in scientific enquiry and the pursuit of knowledge. They were the first world leaders of intellectual advancement and progress. The process of free enquiry in which the world is engaged today was initiated by Muslims. Allah has said in the Qur’ān:

“He giveth wisdom unto whom He will, and he unto whom wisdom is given, he truly hath received abundant good.”

[Qur’ān, II:269]

Muslims regard knowledge as their lost legacy and, in order to benefit from this legacy, it is not for them to question how and from where they get it.

What has been said above should make us ponder our present position. If we do not do a little stock-taking we will be failing in the duty which devolves

upon us as Muslims. This will only be a further proof of our general lassitude and lack of desire to overcome our drawbacks and to catch up with the rest of the world.

The fact is that our position today is the reverse of that of our forebears. We have not only lagged behind other peoples in knowledge but have fallen into the abysmal depths of ignorance. We are by and large incapable of serious thinking, objective research, analytical enquiry and inventive creativity. We even seem to be unaware of the progress advanced nations have made in the scientific field and what breakthrough they have achieved in technology. We have reached that nadir in the domain of knowledge that the best amongst our intellectuals and scientists are those who have just some superficial awareness of what is being done in developed countries of the world. All that we have is imitations and translations. It is left to others to tell us what great contribution our forefathers made to human progress in the field of scientific research and other allied disciplines. It is the prime need of the day that our scholars and thinkers should ponder this dismal situation and try to pinpoint the reasons and factors for our decline. They should inform the nation about the causes which have led to this dismal state of affairs in a frank and forthright manner.

We have already seen what pre-eminence has been given to knowledge in our collective life by the Holy Prophet. We also know how hard he worked for its dissemination. Nobody has done in one's lifetime what the final Messenger of Allah did. It is our belief, in the light of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet, that knowledge has been given to man to enable him to know Allah and appreciate the truth of the mission of the Holy Prophet, also to conquer the universe for the welfare and the glory of mankind.

The main purpose behind the acquisition of knowledge by man is to be able to face the Hereafter with a sedate mind filled with the true understanding of his subservience to Allah, the supreme Lord and Creator of the universe.

The Qur'an and the Tradition of the Prophet have lighted our pathway. This is the path of true knowledge and understanding. Those who tread this path in a spirit of total surrender achieve total dominion over the physical universe and due reward in the Hereafter.

In the end a word of advice to fellow Muslims. Let us all strive to be worthy of our great religion which is the fountain-head of knowledge that is good for mankind and our ancestors who carried the torch of learning and dissemination of knowledge for more than a thousand years and paved the way for the present day scientific miracle. Let us as an *Ummah* make a firm resolve that we will do our utmost to regain our position as leaders of the universal intellectual and scientific movement. We will not stop till we have achieved world recognition as exponents of intellectual freedom and objective enquiry. May Allah bless our efforts with success. Amen!

KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM

(Knowledge should not be confined to a few but extended to all,
so as to reach each one of us)

Whatever man has had and shall have, has been vouchsafed to him by Allah, Who is the sole Creator. For his comfort, pre-eminence and for making him the best amongst the creatures – indeed, His vicegerent – Allah has given man all kinds of gifts, all sorts of boons. He has been given all that he needed so that he may do what he has been ordained to do, provide solace to his fellow beings, and work for the glory of mankind.

Of all the gifts conferred upon man by Allah, and from amongst the countless things available to him the greatest and the best is knowledge. What was it that was given to man immediately after his creation? It was knowledge. In the *Sura Al-Baqar* we are told:

“And He taught Adam all the names.”

[Qur’ān, II:31]

The first revelation sent down upon the Holy Prophet emphasises the need to acquire knowledge:

“Read: In the name of the Lord who created.”

[Qur’ān, XCVI:1]

And Allah has introduced Himself in the following words:

*Read: And thy Lord is the Most-Bounteous,
Who taught by the pen, Taught man that which
he knew not.”*

[Qur’ān, XCVI:3–5]

Let us ponder this for a bit. Let us look closely at all that exists in this universe and see all the living beings – countless species of creatures, known and unknown. Can one ever really know how many living things keep him company on this planet and what shapes and forms they have? The only thing he can know for sure is that a vast majority of these living beings are not endowed with knowledge.

If there is any creature that has knowledge and has been blessed with both knowledge and wisdom, it is man. Had Allah not endowed man with wisdom and knowledge, what difference would there have been between him and the animals? Even amongst the human kind are those unfortunate ones who are born deaf and

mute or are mentally retarded. What a world of difference separates them from a healthy, normal man!

This is the point to ponder. The knowledge of the gulf that lies between the retarded and the normal man should make us bow before Allah in deep gratitude and continuously thank Him:

*"My Lord! Increase me
in knowledge."*

[Qur'ān, XX:114]

Knowledge is the greatest power man possesses and the pen is his greatest weapon. When in the language of the Qur'ān we say: "O my Lord, increase me in knowledge", we know and accept the fact that knowledge has been bestowed upon man in varying quantities. Some have more knowledge, some less, and some have none at all. Those who have been blessed with greater knowledge and understanding are indeed very fortunate and deserve to be respected and honoured.

It devolves upon learned men that they should use their knowledge and the power of their pen for the good of mankind. Knowledge should not be considered the privilege of a few but should be made available to the whole of mankind. The Holy Prophet has said:

"Acquire knowledge from the cradle to the grave".

This *Hadīth* of the Holy Prophet clearly enjoins that man should acquire knowledge, and it is a pre-condition of this injunction that those who govern and have been endowed with wisdom should make the social and political environment conducive to the acquisition of knowledge. Those that possess knowledge and are people of the pen should spread knowledge far and wide, and light one lamp of learning from the other – from their cradle to the grave, that is, from adulthood until death. This noble action should continue unceasingly.

Knowledge and wisdom, when they augment each other, change destinies, and all the paths of day-to-day life and inner faith get lit up. It is a gift from Allah to be endowed with both knowledge and wisdom.

The importance of knowledge is borne out by the fact that in the office of prophethood has been incorporated the obligation to act as a teacher to mankind. Obligations inherent in prophethood have been emphasised by the Lord Himself:

*"And shall instruct them in the Scripture
and in wisdom and shall make them grow."*

[Qur'ān, II:129]

These verses mention also wisdom along with the knowledge of the Qur'ān and the earlier scriptures. When man acquires knowledge, his mind also gets disciplined and he learns to distinguish between good and evil. This capacity to distinguish is *hikmat* or wisdom in the Qur'ānic parlance. The Lord has said:

“He giveth wisdom unto whom He will, and he unto whom wisdom is given, he truly hath received abundant good.”

[Qur’ān, II:269]

The heart becomes purified of all defilement when knowledge and wisdom combine in it, and this is what is meant by the act of purification.

This state of purification is attained through knowledge. It is a guarantee of man’s welfare and success. Indeed, the Lord has said:

“He is indeed successful who causeth it to grow,”

[Qur’ān, XCI:9]

Thus knowledge is the key to success. The Qur’ān calls the learned ‘the seeing’ and ‘the discerning’ and those that are devoid of knowledge ‘the blind’ and ‘the undiscerning’. It compares knowledge with light and ignorance with darkness. Of all the conditions necessary for benefiting from its teachings, the Qur’ān often recounts these two.

“Those that possess knowledge and those that possess wisdom”.

Each action and each act has a causative factor. Similarly, one needs a system in order to live; and this viable system of life is provided by the Qur’ān. It is a system which makes acquisition of knowledge and wisdom obligatory and this stress on knowledge and wisdom can also be understood in its true perspective only through knowledge and wisdom.

We have almost reached the end of our discourse. The conclusion we have arrived at is: we must acquire knowledge and make wisdom our dominion. We should live in this world as people with discernment and wisdom, for without them we can neither keep our own faith intact nor make our existence in the world meaningful and purposive. The message of Islam would therefore be:

Wake up and awaken others. Take the torch of learning and wisdom in your hands and light up all the dark corners of the earth. This is one of the greatest obligations of a true believer.

OF EDUCATION

Every life-system intended to shape the world order according to its particular style and to solve social problems in its own way should first be utilized to mould its exponents on its distinctive pattern so that they may effectively undertake the task of reconstructing human life according to its distinct principles. The most important method of producing real men is education and training. Educational concepts form an integral part of a life-system, the success of which is entirely dependent on its philosophy of life on the whole, which in its turn is enriched and reinforced by it. If an educational system is independent of or antithetical to a viable philosophy of life, it will not succeed and will not be of any service to mankind. Education is subservient to the life-system of which it is a part. Thus does a philosophy of life serve as the basis and a source of strength to education.

A study of any life-system, past or present, will reveal that first of all it concentrates its attention on the framing of a proper educational system, the harmonising of the latter with itself and on making it coherent. Islam which is held by the Muslims as a comprehensive and complete system of life and as the ideal to which, according to them, all departments of life should approximate, must necessarily have for its success an appropriate system of education. This is the reason why Islam has put great emphasis on the importance of education. The Qur'an and the *Hadith* contain clear pointers in this regard. The Holy Prophet said about himself:

"I have been assigned as a teacher".

By underlining the great difference between the learned and the ignorant the Qur'an has pointed to the lofty status of the former. In a society built on the Islamic principles, education and learning, the teacher and the student, all occupy a position of high honour. Education is universal in such a society and there is no monopolist hold of any particular group, party or class on it. In an Islamic society it is not merely the right but also the duty of every man and woman to acquire knowledge. Moreover, it is the duty of every Muslim who has knowledge, to impart it to others, instead of making it a personal preserve. To suppress knowledge is as bad as the suppression of truth and the punishment for this overt crime is eternal damnation.

Literature abounds in regard to aims and objects of education. Experts have striven a lot to determine them but if we ponder the matter with clarity of mind, and without getting involved in unnecessary arguments, it will emerge that the object of education is one and only one that is man-making. That education

which cannot transform the Homo Sapiens into a complete man is a failure. Such education as fails in the object of producing real men is not only defective but also harmful. According to the Qur'an only that man is a good man who is a servant of Allah. In other words, from the Qur'anic viewpoint, the object of education is to prepare men to be good and righteous persons.

The Qur'an reveals that the Muslims constitute the best *Ummah* raised with the object of disseminating virtues and preventing evils.

"Ye are the best community that hath been raised up for mankind. Ye enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency."

[Qur'an, III:110]

In the light of this verse the most important function of education is to turn out such persons as are good themselves, love goodness, disseminate goodness and create with their thought and deed the atmosphere in which truthfulness, virtue, decency and affability are so highly prized and so generally practised that people are impelled to be good in order to live with honour. Its aim is to create conditions that the social milieu may not be conducive to the existence of evils, and ensures that no vice can raise its head there.

It is one of the characteristics of a proper educational system that it ends the duality of knowledge and action, and word and deed. Persons educated under this system manifest harmony of thought and word. They practise what they preach. There is never any contradiction in their thought and action. It never pays in the long run to have a dual personality, to profess truth and righteousness while one's actions betray falsehood and vice. Accordingly, the educational system which confines itself to equipping the scholars only intellectually and does not motivate them to create the harmony of thought and action, is infructuous, useless and harmful. It is the function of education to illuminate the mind as well as the morals of the student. Education which cannot do this cannot be called education. It is itself in the dark – it cannot radiate any light. To spread the light of education is the duty of every Muslim. The Holy Prophet has enjoined:

"Acquire knowledge and disseminate it".

Both to acquire and to spread knowledge is a merit for which ample reward has been promised in the Hereafter. A Tradition says:

"Both the teacher and the taught are co-workers for reward in the world to come".

According to another Tradition:

"Whosoever leaves his home for acquisition of knowledge, is striving in the way of Allah till he returns".

We should give full thought to our system of education in the light of these injunctions and Traditions so that we can produce real men, sincere Muslims and true sons of Islam, the trustees of our culture and heritage, moral and spiritual builders who can meet demands of the modern age so that the world of Islam does not lag behind in the universal race for honour and glory. Progress and change are an inexorable phenomenon of human existence. A change in conditions necessitates a change in requirements and demands. There has been a tremendous increase in knowledge and a great advancement in science in the last hundred years. Present-day industrial and technological progress has also created many problems. New economic factors are having their impact on social value. As a dynamic people we have to stand up to the challenge of the time and to enrich our life with science and technology. In order to keep pace with the advanced nations of the world, we have to respond to our contemporary environment. We must accept the challenge of this technological age and move forward. And while we do so we should ensure that our culture and our traditions move along and keep pace with us. We are not against things modern and there is no harm in using them to our advantage. In fact, we shall consider every nice thing to be a part of our own heritage. As the Holy Prophet said:

"Wisdom is the lost heritage of a Muslim, he gets it wherever he finds it".

But everything new is not a source of wisdom, nor deserving of ready acceptance. Therefore, the merit of an educational system would lie in its capacity to enrichment and preservation of our cultural heritage and refurbishing of our intellectual faculties and technical expertise. We have to evolve an educational sytem which will help us retain the best in our own tradition and acquire the best that the modern disciplines have to offer.

ON STUDYING THE UNIVERSE

The Holy Qur'ān has given us eternal guidance which encompasses the totality of man's individual as well as collective life. It has provided us rational basis and a practical proof of its (1) concept of the unity of Godhead, the existence of the supreme Being, Allah the Most Exalted, (2) its principle of man's accountability in the Hereafter, with its corollary of recompense and retribution, (3) its recommended life-style and, (4) its principle of the righteous life and the components and tenets of the faith that are imperative. Qur'ān invites man to study the universe and the cosmic equilibrium to be able to arrive at the ultimate Truth and Reality.

The universe has been offered as a basic object of human enquiry at many places in the Holy Qur'ān. It says, for instance:

*“Lo! In the creation of the heavens
and the earth and (in) the difference of
night and day are tokens (of His sovereignty)
for men of understanding,
Such as remember Allah, standing, sitting, and
reclining, and consider the creation of the heavens
and the earth, (and say): Our Lord! Thou createdst
not this in vain. Glory be to Thee! Preserve us
from the doom of Fire.”*

(Qur'ān, III:190–191)

The creation of the earth and the heavens and the alternation of night and day are held forth as visible signs of Allah the Most Exalted and 'the faithful' have been specifically told that a continuing careful study of the universe and its inviolable system is a part of their prayer and worship. The truth of the matter is that it is a major act of worship. According to the great Muslim thinker and exegete Imām Ḥasan Baṣrī, a profound study of the universe with a view to achieving the inner state of resignation and surrender is a nobler act of worship than a night-long voluntary *ṣalāt* (prayer). This study illuminates the believer's soul and enhances the heart's awareness of the greatness, the glory and the uniqueness of Allah the Most Exalted. The study of the physical universe enriches a believer's faith and makes it firmer. The discovery and understanding of manifest and non-manifest facts confirm man's faith in Allah's being the sole Creator of all existence and the absolute excellence of His handiwork and creation.

A careful study of the universe inevitably leads a man with sound intellect and judgement to the great Truth that the entire system of the cosmos, be it the alternation of night and day or the change in seasons or the sunrise and sunset, or the structure and shape of the earth or the heavenly bodies, all are subservient to a wisely ordained system. A wise student's quest of the Truth will not reach fulfilment when he arrives at the knowledge that the universe is very sensibly organised and well-planned, or that the sunshine and the moonlight are glorious spectacles. This knowledge will lead him to a new quest, to a study of the creatures of Allah. And if he is not totally devoid of the moral sense, he will not find it difficult at all to arrive at the conclusion that a creature who has been given the power to utilise things to his advantage and to change them when necessary and who has been blessed with reason and the power to distinguish between things, cannot be allowed to be without checks and limitations. It would be contrary to all dictates of wisdom not to make that creature, individually as well as collectively i.e. as a species, accountable for this earthly life. It is essential to reward him for virtue and punish him for vice and evil. Thus a study of the external world inevitably leads a thinking person to complete and firm belief in the Hereafter.

A man who studies the phenomena of the physical universe naturally becomes fully convinced that Allah the Most Exalted is the best of the greatest of creators, indeed, He is the Absolute Creator. He also becomes conscious of the importance of his own being and of his responsibilities. He becomes aware of an inner urge to understand the criterion of Good and Evil and to know it in full detail. It is this urge that brings him close to the appreciation of the assignation of prophets and messengers by Allah and the need for divine guidance in the form of the revealed Word. That is why this study is deemed better than a night-long vigil in prayer and ritual worship. There is a relevant *Hadith* of the Holy Prophet:

“Contemplation is the best prayer.”

Contemplation means an inner endeavour to find the essence or the reality of things. As the remembrance of Allah is His worship, in the same manner pondering His creatures and His handiwork is also true worship. But this is so only when the sole object of this contemplation is the understanding of His Being and His purposes, and to reach the threshold of His Wisdom. Hadrat Umar bin Abdul Aziz has declared this noble contemplation as the finest worship. Some Companions of the Holy Prophet called this contemplation of the Universe and its system as ‘the Light of Belief’. The fact is that every particle of this universe, its every atom is a manifestation and a mirror of the glory and Lordship of Allah the Most Exalted as also a witness to His unique attributes and His great wisdom.

The breath-taking advances being made at present on this our planet have clearly brought out the wisdom that lies behind the Qur’anic exhortation to man to study the universe. It tells us to ‘explore the earth’ and thereby enjoins

and encourages us to study the geographical conditions prevailing in different parts of the world and to study the past history and the present affairs of people dwelling there. It points to the hidden treasures of the earth and its mineral format and informs us that all that lies there is for our use, a great munificence of Allah for His vicegerent on earth. The heavenly bodies, the stars and the planets are, according to the Qur'ān, fit objects for us to ponder and investigate. The earth's produce, the grain harvests, the limitless variety of fruits, beneficial herbs and plants, the flowers and the bees that sit on them and produce nectar for man, it has time and again induced man to explore and investigate and study all the phenomena visible and hidden from the naked eye — that human reason and science have ever considered to be fit subjects for their various disciplines. The only difference between scientific study and religious contemplation is that of the method and the point of view.

If the real object of travel and mineral or chemical research is to understand, however imperfectly, the wisdom of Allah the Most Exalted, and learn from it a lesson of submission and surrender to Him, or by making these studies advantageous to man to draw his attention to the responsibilities that devolve on him as Allah's deputy on earth, then undoubtedly this study of the universe is amongst the noblest forms of worship.

A basic requisite of this study is that by the help of the handiwork we should try to know the Maker. It is this point of view with which Islam invites man to look at and ponder the universe. If the basis of the study of the cosmos is not the desire to know the essence of things and to arrive at the ultimate Reality and if those whom the Qur'ān addresses itself specifically, ignore this injunction their existence on this earth becomes devoid of all meaning and purpose. The Holy Book has this to say about such persons:

*“How many a portent is there
in the heavens and the earth which they pass by
with face averted!”*

(Qur'ān, XII:105)

This verse exemplifies the Holy Qur'ān's universal point of view. It also brings about the fact that the focus of a Muslim's contemplation is inherently very different from that of the infidels and the unbelievers. Atheist and materialist nations get bogged down in scientific inventions, discoveries and disclosures of hidden facts, the verifiabes. Reason, however, requires that a study of the universe should, along with scientific advance, stimulate the desire to know the Creator — Allah the Most Exalted. It should strengthen man's innate feeling regarding the glory and the uniqueness of Allah and His supreme power and dominion. It should confirm his belief that this immutable system of the universe is a manifestation of Allah's wisdom and His divine purpose.

The present day scientific breakthrough has uncovered countless facts that were unknown to the common man till a generation ago. We have started exploring the heavens, interstellar space and the deep recesses of the earth.

We have started making use of innumerable minerals and atoms. But this breakthrough should also make us pause and ponder that if we are the masters of all other creatures and things of this universe, this means that in turn we also should be required to submit to and obey someone. Obviously, the only one deserving of our surrender and submission is that Supreme Being who gave us ascendance over all other creatures and gave us the power to use them to our advantage. The Holy Qur'ān invites us to investigate this universe in order to enable us to reach this higher fact of life.

Today every single aspect of the physical universe is being closely studied. And the magnitude of this investigation is so dauntingly wide that for the study of every distinct phenomenon of nature a permanent and regular discipline has been established. Man's power of conquest has brought him to the zenith of material progress. But the course of this study of the universe and research and enquiry all become totally meaningless when they fail to light up the inner being of man with true belief and firm faith.

I hope I have made the point that the object Islam has before it in inviting man to study this universe is quite distinct and spiritually oriented. Of course, Islam wants us to study scientific and physical disciplines. But our purpose should always be to see these phenomena as signs of the Creator and to make this contemplation a source of inner illumination. Our study should fill our being with the light of belief.

Muslims during the many centuries of their pre-eminence carried on the study of the external world with full zeal and vigour. The purpose of their study was never negative. Unlike the non-believing nations they were not dazzled by the radiance of the essence of things and the physical phenomena. They only led the Muslims to focus their mind's eye on the greatness and the glory, the omniscience, the providence, the wisdom and the will of their supreme Creator. And this is the stage of enquiry about which it is said that when a Muslim attains to it he proclaims: "Our Lord, Thou hast not created this for vanity." The real purpose of studying the universe is to achieve a true understanding of the supremacy of the Creator and the knowledge of our own responsibilities and subservience. A unique feature of Islam which distinguishes it from other religions is that it has united knowledge and worship and made them one entity. Where there is knowledge, you will find worshipfulness also. And where there is worship, knowledge will also be automatically present. One of the major qualities of the Muslim *Ummah* is that it gives equal importance to remembrance and contemplation. The universe and the things found in it have been called a picture-gallery of knowledge and admonition. And these are the two major objectives of its study.

In verses 17 to 20 of *sūra* LXXXVIII after mentioning some creatures and aspects of the universe it is said: "What, do they not consider?" and also "Then remind them. Thou art only a reminder." This clearly shows that the invitation to study the phenomena of nature is a Qur'ānic invitation and that this entire universe is a vehicle for advice and admonition.

Now the point to ponder is — where do we find the present-day Muslim? And what do we find him engaged in? What is his place in the field of Nature-study and obtaining the wherewithal to serve Allah's creatures and his fellow-beings?

WISDOM – THE MAXIMUM GOOD

Wisdom is indeed an invaluable asset and a bounty of Allah which has been mentioned thus in the Holy Qur'an:

“He giveth wisdom unto whom He will, and he unto whom wisdom is given, he truly hath received abundant good.”

(Qur'an, II:269)

Wisdom is discussed time and again comprehensively and with all its implications, and its intimate link with human life is duly emphasised. Wisdom in reality means the faculty to discern good and evil, to distinguish between them and to arrive at the correct decision. We know that the strife between truth and untruth, good and evil is an eternal fact. Allah, the Most Exalted, sent down His Books and assigned His prophets to define and explain truth and *inter alia* give man the guidance that the judicious use of rational faculties and the power to take decisions is essential for treading the path of Truth and Righteousness.

The path of evil and untruth is seemingly very attractive but it is the way of the devil who deceives him into thinking that it is the true and straight path. His sense of judgement fails to comprehend the reality. He sees what is apparent but cannot visualise the end. A thing however pleasing it may appear at first sight is not desirable unless its consequences are good and gainful. Vision and foresight are needed besides wisdom and good judgement to fully understand this delicate point. People whom Allah has endowed with this invaluable asset of wisdom and correct perspective exercise their faculties and try to ponder the likely consequences of each idea or act. They are quick to evaluate the pros and cons of the matter under consideration and arrive at the reality of the matter after much thought. They benefit from the guidance of Allah the Most Exalted and the teachings of the Prophet. They select the right path after due thought and careful consideration and then begin their journey with firm resolve and steady purpose.

People who adopt this straight path consciously and on the basis of an intellectual decision, bear the hardships inherent in their journey with patience and forbearance. They try to keep steadfast. They are men of strong faith. Their belief and faith never fail however difficult or perilous the path may become and whatever obstacles may impede their progress. Nor do any doubts or uncertainties gnaw at their hearts. Undoubtedly, this steadfastness is a product

of a true knowledge of good and evil and an active sense of judgement. This, in the terminology of the Qur'ān, constitutes Wisdom.

One of the greatest blessings of the Holy Qur'ān is that it endows man with the power to discern between truth and untruth, righteousness and vice and good and evil. People who accept the Holy Qur'ān as the fountain-head of guidance and try to understand life and its aims and objectives in the light of it and act upon its injunctions with all the power of their faith and belief cannot be deceived into going astray from the straight path by any power on earth. Those who have faith in the Holy Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* know it well that the bounty of well-being and success will be ultimately theirs and they will be among those who prosper. These God-fearing men never long for the luxuries of the material life and do not aim at worldly prosperity. Their sole objective is recompense in the Hereafter.

Undoubtedly many hardships have to be faced and sufferings undergone on this path and the wayfarer has to pass through many trials and agonising ordeals. But he should derive strength from his belief that this life is transitory and whatever affliction it can bring to him will also be temporary. Therefore, it would neither be correct nor prudent to barter away eternal well-being for this short-lived earthly life of ease and comfort. The element of wisdom in this attitude and outlook lies in the act of preparing for the Hereafter in the conflict between it and the transitory luxuries of this life. This ability to prefer what is everlasting to that which is ephemeral is the cognition of faith and the wisdom of belief. And no doubt, he who is given this wisdom has been blessed with a priceless boon.

Now, keep before your mind's eye this analogy. A man has much wealth and he is very careful about it. Not only he desires to amass more riches but also he withholds his wealth from the way of virtue or righteousness. He thinks that only his wealth will stand him in good stead in his time of distress. He is afraid that if he loses his wealth he will become destitute and totally helpless. Therefore, expending money even in the way of Allah is an act of stupidity in his view.

As against it, there is another man who spends the major portion of his wealth on the welfare of fellow-beings and does not bother at all that he will become poor if he spends it all. Apparently, the latter person who spends his wealth in acts of charity is much less sensible as compared to the former who keeps a tight grip over his assets. But if you look at them from the standpoint of wisdom he who expends righteously is a truly wise man, because he has preferred an eternal asset to a transitory one. If he expends what is surplus to his basic requirements, in the way of Allah, the Most Exalted, he is not indulging in wasteful expenditure. In fact, he is amassing lasting wealth. And when on the Day of Judgement every man's actions will be assessed and every righteous deed will be recompensed, his portion in the Hereafter will increase manifold. Thus ultimately he will be a gainer.

It is quite likely that a man who goes on piling up wealth may become prosperous in this world and the one who expends most of what he has to serve

his fellow-men may be, to all appearances, less well-to-do. But well-being in a short-lived existence does not prove that the former is really a wise man.

The truly wise course of action is to develop in oneself the moral quality of self-sacrifice and to make public service the primary aim of life. One should be frugal in one's own life and spend one's wealth on works of commonweal. That is the way to ensure one's well-being in the eternal life in the Hereafter. This attitude towards life is based on foresight and true wisdom. And the Qur'an is perfectly correct in saying that he who has been given this understanding and wisdom has been blessed with 'the greatest good'. He it is who has been shown the path of success and given treasure that can never be lost.

One should keep in mind the fact that as sound sense of judgement is one of the components of wisdom, in the same manner fair dealings and moral excellence are its essential requisites. A truly wise man is he who is quick and correct in his decisions, is noble and affectionate, kind and self-effacing, is motivated by a keen desire to serve his fellow-beings and is full of sympathy and compassion.

Wisdom manifests itself in one's life-style and the principles that shape and govern it. A Muslim's life should be in accord with the teachings of the Qur'an and his life-style should be the embodiment of the cardinal principles of Islam. Wisdom requires that all Muslims should inculcate in themselves the moral attributes given to them by Islam and then work whole-heartedly to make the world of Islam an illustrious show-piece of the Islamic way of life with intellectual freedom and political independence as its sheet-anchor.

To be able to visualise the glory of wisdom it is necessary to know that Allah the Most Exalted has called the verses of the Holy Qur'an 'consummate wisdom'. Sometimes He terms His last Word as 'the Ultimate Wisdom' and also *Qur'an-i-Hakim* (The Wise Book) while the other revealed Books are called 'Admonition' or 'Remembrance'. The word 'Wisdom' is used in relation to the Qur'an only. Undoubtedly, Wisdom is superior to and higher than admonition. It is that mature reason and that knowing heart which keeps man away from unbelief and paganism, and other similar spiritual defilement. A man blessed with wisdom will never feel any difficulty in distinguishing between good and evil.

The Holy Qur'an has stated the components of the true faith – unity of God-head, prophethood and accountability in the Hereafter – in lucid and unambiguous language and with incontrovertible arguments and proofs. Those who study it intelligently and with care will never have a feeling of not being totally satisfied or that any question has been left not fully answered. One cannot imagine any aspect of life about which this Book of Guidance has not given practicable instructions. This last Word of Allah is 'the Book of Wisdom and Guidance'. Therefore it guides us to the Straight Path with solid justification for each of its teachings.

An objective student of the Holy Qur'an, who studies it with faith and conviction can never get confused about what is good and what is evil. What is required is continuous contemplation and pondering the true meanings and

implications of its injunctions.... Most points of wisdom lie hidden and become manifest after deep and continuous study. That is why the Qur'ān invites us to read it time and again, and to ponder its words with a fully attentive and responsive heart. He who does it, will one day be blessed with an unshakeable faith and firm-as-rock belief. And this is the wealth about which Allah has said that one who gets it has got all:

"He giveth wisdom unto whom He will, and he unto whom wisdom is given, he truly hath received abundant good."

(Qur'ān, II:269)

EXPOUNDING THE RELIGION OF WISDOM

Whether one calls *Dīn* religion or faith and corresponding action, it is really that code of life which Allah bestows upon mankind through His prophets. The most perfect and final *Dīn* is the one that was made to descend upon His last Messenger, Muhammad, by Allah the Most Exalted, in the form of the Holy Qur'ān. The precepts and the injunctions contained in the Holy Qur'ān are universal and everlasting and are the last word in guidance to all men in all departments of life.

This *Dīn* is perfect, in all respects – in beliefs, obligatory worship and affairs of day-to-day life – and no change or interpolation is possible at all in its fundamental concepts and principles.

The final and eternal *Dīn* is Islam which was completed and made perfect through the prophethood of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him). And besides declaring its finality and eternal viability, Allah the Most Exalted, also said that henceforward no other faith would be acceptable to Him. Allah has unequivocally stated that Islam is that perfect faith through which He has completed the bestowal of His munificence on mankind:

“This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favour unto you, and have chosen for you as religion AL-ISLAM.”

(Qur'ān, V:3)

The following verse is another important declaration in the matter:

“And whoso seeketh as religion other than the Surrender (to Allah) it will not be accepted from him,”

(Qur'ān, III:85)

The Holy Prophet preached and expounded the commands of Allah to one and all and on certain occasions threw light on the delicate and subtle points of the *Dīn*. It was for this that it is said in the Holy Qur'ān about him that he teaches them the Book and the Wisdom. By 'the Book' is meant the commands and injunctions of the *Dīn* and by the 'Wisdom' is meant fear of Allah and the wisdom and the expedience on which Qur'ānic teachings are based; also along with training in the life of belief, creating the understanding that it is true belief in Allah and His Holy Prophet and righteous action that

constitutes true wisdom and understanding. Furthermore, it constitutes the knowledge that the real well-being and welfare of man lies in total adherence to the religion of nature.

Islam is a *Din* to the veracity and truth of which human reason bears witness. If one ponders the beliefs and the worship and the principles of Islam that govern day-to-day life of the individual as well as the community, one will see countless aspects of human welfare and felicity in each one of them. This is that religion of wisdom which was expounded by all prophets of Allah and the Muslims of the present-day world are obligated to depute for them and to prove to their fellow-men, by their knowledge and personal conduct, that Islam is not only a set of beliefs, it is an all-embracing system of life and each one of its principles and teachings is based on wisdom and virtue.

Just take into consideration its belief in the unity of God-head about which it made a universal pronouncement!

"Your God is One God; there is no God save Him, the Beneficent, the Merciful."

(Qur'an, II:163)

Implied in the Islamic belief in the One-ness of Allah is the pre-eminence and superiority of man. His independence and freedom require that he should never accept subservience and submission to mortal men like himself. Submission to One Allah rids us of all other servitude and raises us to the elevation ordained for us. In fact, the secret of self-respect, sense of honour and exaltation and eminence of the human individual lies in the belief in One Allah.

Just have a look at Islam's system of obligatory worship as a proof of the infinite wisdom on which this *Din* is based. In the obligatory prayer lies a world of wisdom and sagacity to which the Holy Qur'an itself has drawn the attention of mankind:

*"And establish worship.
Lo! worship preserveth from lewdness and iniquity,"*

(Qur'an, XXIX:45)

The most pronounced impact of *Ṣalāt* (the obligatory prayer) on our exoteric and esoteric life is that it cleanses us of all things that are undesirable, because the idea of our appearing before Allah five times during the day keeps us away from sins and all immodest acts. Ablution and purification of the body which are the prerequisites of *Ṣalāt*, ensure body hygiene and cleanliness. This has a very good and pleasant effect on our health and is one of the expediences of this worship. In the same manner while talking of the obligatory nature of fasting, the Qur'an explains its wisdom and sagacity. Its immediate effect on man is that it makes him God-fearing:

“O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, even as it was prescribed for those before you, that ye may ward off (evil);”

(Qur’ān, II: 183)

Taqwah (fear of Allah) is an inner state which can rightly be called the fountain-head of all virtues. Along with strengthening self-discipline it enables man to feel the intensity of hunger and thirst of those who have to go without eating and drinking because of penury and thus it creates sympathy for the impoverished people. The wisdom behind the Islamic system of obligatory alms (*Zakāt*) is so obvious and extensive that, indeed, we can call this system the basis of Islamic economics and finance. The Holy Qur’ān has brought out the significance of *Zakāt* in its inimitable eloquence and clarity:

“That it become not a commodity between the rich among you.”

(Qur’ān, LIX:7)

The best means of eliminating the possibility of the concentration of total national wealth in the hands of one individual or a small coterie is *Zakāt*.

And now let us consider *Hajj* which is the annual world congregation of Muslims. It is not only a remembrance of a unique sacrifice, but a course of practical training and a test of man’s love for Allah. The greatest wisdom and expedience behind this ritual worship is that through it Muslims have been given an effective instrument to keep the faith of Islam safe from every kind of alteration, inversion, schism and heresy. It is not possible for instance, that Islam of Pakistan be different from that of India and the Islam of Africa be different from that of Asia. At the time of *Hajj* the *Ummah* presents a unique and matchless spectacle of outward solidarity and spiritual unity and one-ness. That is why it has been unequivocally announced in the Holy Qur’ān:

“And pilgrimage to the House is a duty unto Allah for mankind, for him who can find a way thither.”

(Qur’ān, III:97)

The same wisdom and expedience is the cause for things being declared *harām* (forbidden):

“Allah permitteth trading and forbiddeth usury.”

(Qur’ān, II:275)

On the surface it appears to be a very simple and straightforward injunction.

But the fact is that there can be no better way to establish a just and equitable economic order than to make hard and honest work and mutual agreement the basis of earning money and to forbid unjustifiable and extortive profit.

Of course there are many things the wisdom behind which has not been made explicit to us. But it is obligatory on us, all the same, to believe in them. Only through perfect faith and dynamic belief can one comprehend the infinite wisdom that lies in each and every teaching of the perfect faith of Islam. Whoever is given some understanding and knowledge of this wisdom is a man twice-blessed. In fact it is a bounty of Allah that he bestows this knowledge on whom He wills:

“He unto whom wisdom is given, he truly hath received abundant good.”

(Qur’ān, II:269)

It is obligatory for the contemporary preachers and exponents of Islam to throw light on the wisdom that is implicit in all commandments of Allah, when they invite fellow-men to the true faith. This will strengthen the religious, cultural and socio-moral foundations of their faith and belief. This has always been the practice of Allah’s Holy Prophets and their methodology.

**THE OBJECTIVE OF EDUCATION IN THE LIGHT OF
THE QUR'ĀN AND THE SUNNAH**

If one has to sum up the essence of the Islamic civilization and culture in one word the most apt and definitive word would be: Knowledge. *Qur'ān-i-Hakīm* which comprises a complete and eternally viable system of life has been called 'Knowledge', by Allah the Most Exalted:

*"We have brought them a Scripture which
We expound with knowledge, a guidance and a mercy for
a people who believe."*

(Qur'ān, VII:52)

It means that the facts stated in it are based on knowledge and reason. When we talk of education and the objectives of education we should keep in view the fact that Islam uses the word knowledge in its creative nuance. The civilization and culture, the formative principles of which are given to us by Islam, is founded not on ignorance but on knowledge and solid facts. Therefore, the Qur'ān which is the fountain-head of these teachings, is in itself an embodiment of pure light. History stands witness to the fact that as a result of its blessed revelation, the believers reached those heights in scientific disciplines and fine arts which it was impossible even to imagine till the advent of Islam. Since knowledge is the essence of Islamic civilization, it would not be incorrect to say that in a truly Muslim society men of learning would be possessed of distinctive attributes and would occupy a high and pre-eminent position in it. The Holy Qur'ān says:

*"Allah will exalt those who believe among you, and those who have
knowledge."*

(Qur'ān, LVIII:11)

At another place it is said:

*"Say (unto them, O Muhammad): Are those who know equal with
those who know not?"*

(Qur'ān, XXXIX:9)

The Qur'ān also alludes to the fact that men of learning also have the ability to perceive and comprehend the reality and the nature of things as well as their ultimate end:

"As for these similitudes, We coin them for mankind, but none will grasp their meaning save the wise."

(Qur'ān, XXIX:43)

The excellence and the attainments of erudite persons are described at numerous places in the Holy Qur'ān. But it is incumbent on us to know the true objectives of education in the light of the Holy Qur'ān and to consider carefully why Islam lays so much stress on knowledge – indeed to the extent that the very first revelation contained the command to read. After a little deliberation you will come to know that in the perspective of world history Islam calls knowledge its method and its practice.

The second fact that will emerge is that knowledge does not mean only cognition – mere knowing – nor does education mean mere instruction or teaching. And when the Islamic concept of knowledge and education differs from that which they are commonly considered to denote, it is but natural to assume that the objectives of education would also be different in the Islamic framework. We will come across many verses in the Qur'ān in the light of which we can determine the Islamic concept of education. For instance, if we ponder the first revelation we will come to realise that in it Allah has given the command to read and the creative and inventive attributes of knowledge have been explicitly mentioned. Obviously it means that the first aim of learning and teaching is to acquire true knowledge about the absolute Creator and Master. We should also keep in mind the fact that from amongst his many attributes Allah has, in this verse, drawn attention to His attribute of creation so that the reader should know that his Lord is also the absolute Creator, and the seeker after knowledge should know the nature of his relationship with Him, that is, he should know that he is His creature. This verse of the Holy Qur'ān points to the primary aim of knowledge – self-awareness and understanding of Allah. This is what is called knowledge in the terminology of the Qur'ān. In effect the process of quickening these two faculties and making them manifest in the human personality is called education. The Holy Qur'ān specifies the objectives of education, thus:

*"The erudite among His bondmen
fear Allah alone."*

(Qur'ān, XXXV:28)

We should never forget that real self-awareness and understanding of Allah is the inner state that makes us God-fearing, makes us conscious of our obligations and endows our conduct and character with purity and piety. The knowledge

of the reality and the nature of things makes it incumbent on man to make it a means of improving his conduct and general moral tone. This is the reality which has been referred to by the Holy Qur'an as the Holy Prophet's attribute of 'teaching the Wisdom and purifying' in his role as the Teacher of Mankind:

"To recite unto them His revelations and to make them grow, and to teach them the Scripture and Wisdom."

(Qur'an, LXII:2)

Knowledge and education, according to Islam, are not an end in themselves. They are in reality a means to another end. Their true purpose is the reformation of morality and the understanding of Allah's will. Their sphere is not restricted to one's own self, in fact they are intended to include 'improving the moral conduct of others, teaching those who are ignorant, showing the true path to those who have gone astray, spreading truth and eradicating untruth'. In short we can say that the true aim of education is to make perfect one's person, to know Allah, and to extend the area of righteous action. The Holy Qur'an says:

"(And) lo! those who believe and do good works are the best of created beings."

(Qur'an, XCVIII:7)

This is the type of educational system with lofty aims that is commanded in many authentic sayings of the Holy Prophet. After appointing Hadrat Ma'az bin Jabal as his representative in the Yemen, the Holy Prophet said to him:

"If one man gets the true guidance through your efforts, this will be better for you than owning the world with all that it contains."

On another occasion he said:

"What a great gift and what a great endowment — a word of wisdom that you heard and preserved in your mind and then passed it on to a brother." (Tirmizi)

Abū Daūd narrates this *Hadīth*:

*"Impart knowledge because this is an act of great virtue and seeking knowledge is like worship. Talking of knowledge is like singing a hymn and discussing it is *jihād* (the holy endeavour), expounding it is a sure means of getting close to Allah and imparting it to those who do not know is a continuing act of charity."*

Amongst the basic objectives of knowledge stated by Islam next to the

knowledge of Allah comes self-awareness. The only thing that needs to be said in this context in the light of the verses of the Holy Qur'ān is that education which does not make a man fully alive to his position as Allah's viceregent on earth is purposeless and has no utility whatsoever. We should also keep this fact before us that in education there is no division of the world and the faith. The only difference lies in objectives. If the objective is not the knowledge of Allah and His pleasure, every education is anti-religious, otherwise all disciplines are in essence religious.

The references to various branches of knowledge which one comes across in the Holy Qur'ān are an irrefutable proof of the fact that Islam requires us to acquire all available knowledge that can be put to good use. The Book of Allah contains history, botany, geometry and an allusion to technology. Disciplines such as physics, chemistry, biology and astronomy are in no way anti-Islam. The real thing is the purpose of learning them.

Imām Ghazālī calls such disciplines which are considered worldly – such as technology and medicine as *kifāya*, obligations – if a few people learn them they will suffice for all. Ibn Khaldūn holds the view that the foremost aim of education is to organise society and to civilize man. We should remember that a righteous and self-sufficient society is one which has members who can look after the whole gamut of its needs. Islam encourages us to acquire knowledge and has guided us towards the true aims and objectives of education. After the knowledge of the Creator the most fundamental aim of education should be the purification of human conduct and character. The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "My Lord taught me reverence and discretion and that in the finest manner, and He commanded me to acquire moral excellence."

This is, in sum, the true purpose of education. And this is inherent in human nature. Knowledge makes this essence of morality manifest and active and by making man know and fear Allah, helps establish a righteous and culturally refined society.

*. . . He who groweth (in goodness), groweth
only for himself . . .*

[Qur'ān, XXXV:18]

PURIFICATION OF THE BEING

The concept of 'the original sin' or man's innate sinfulness is one of the basic beliefs in most religions. But Islam rejects this false belief which is both misleading and contrary to man's privileged position in the universe. Allah, the Most Exalted, has enunciated His view about the creation of man in these words in the Holy Qur'an:

"Surely We created man of the best stature..."

[Qur'an, XCV:4]

In the *sūra al-Shams* (The Sun) where He mentions His other creatures as witnesses to His being the Lord and Preserver and has sworn, by them, He has inter alia talked of the constancy and welfare of man's being. He says:

"And a soul and Him Who perfected it."

[Qur'an, XCI:7]

This means that the human soul or man's inner self is a lustrous mirror, but man's endeavour to meet the demands of life and its problems which are countless and heterogeneous, puts layers of dust on it and dulls its lustre. Man is distracted because he is required to fulfil three obligations of different types, every moment of his conscious life, that is, the duty he owes to Allah, his obligations to his fellow-beings and the needs of his own being.

Due to the hard effort involved in performing his worldly functions, man cannot often keep the requisite balance between the three types of his basic obligations, which if maintained will not let the lustre of the heart be dulled. This superior capability has been given only to the prophets of Allah. In reality every shortcoming in the fulfilment of the rights of Allah, the rights of fellow-beings and the rights of man's own self makes the mirror of the heart misty. Purification of the being or self-discipline consists in caring all the time for the heart's lustre and in rubbing off any specks or smears that may appear due to some conscious or unconscious fault or shortcoming. This process of cleansing the inner self of impurities ensures, in the eyes of Allah, the attainment of spiritual well-being and excellence. Allah says in the Holy Qur'an:

"He is indeed successful who causeth it to grow,"

[Qur'an, XCI:9]

Allah states in the *sūra al-Shams* (The Sun) that He has endowed the inner self of man with the ability to distinguish between virtue and vileness.

“And inspired it (with conscience of) what is wrong for it and (what is) right for it.”

[Qur’ān, XCI:8]

It is because of this innate faculty that a man’s heart gets a bit dimmed when he consciously or unconsciously fails to do his duty to his fellow-beings, or has inadvertently or intentionally hurt anybody or has said or done something which caused anguish or pain to someone.

The Holy Prophet has explained this point, in the context of defining sin, in these words:

“A sin rankles in the heart of a good person like a thorn”.

The teachings of Islam, that is, the verses of the Holy Qur’ān and the Sayings of the Holy Prophet enable us to understand the delicate point that a man who hears the silent speech of his conscience and having sinned, endeavours to redeem himself, does succeed in getting redemption – his inner self is cleansed of the foulness of sin.

Purification of the soul – the inner self – may be defined as the continuous endeavour to keep the mirror of the heart lustrous by removing the dust of sin, whether the sin concerns one’s duty towards Allah, one’s duty towards fellow-beings or one’s duty to one’s own being.

The gist of what has been said in this brief discourse, in a nutshell, is that a man’s inner self continues to become soiled by conscious and unconscious mistakes, shortcomings, sins and acts of carelessness. To keep one’s attention focussed on these corruptions of the soul and not being complacent about or slow in removing them is what is termed self-purification. The process is so vitally important in the eyes of Allah that it is included in the primary functions and assignments of the prophets. That is why the Holy Prophet of Allah has fully explained its methodology to his followers.

A close study of the Holy Prophet’s instructions and guidance on the subject reveals that the best means of removing the bad effects of one’s shortcomings and mistakes in the domain of one’s duty to Allah is to keep asking for divine forgiveness and pardon. This act of seeking Allah’s forgiveness is called *Istighfār* (begging for mercy) and the Holy Prophet said that he sought Allah’s forgiveness seventy times a day. But as for the mistakes, shortcomings and sins of omission or commission in reference to fellow-beings, their nature is much more vital and crucial. The Holy Prophet has said that Allah does not forgive man’s sins relating to his duty to his fellow-beings unless the affected person pardons the transgressor and the matter has been settled to his satisfaction. A man’s wrong attitude or action or his excess may hurt one person or a group of persons. In another case the repercussions of the wrong or sin may be much wider, adversely affecting the whole community or the whole *Ummah*. The resulting load on the inner self will become proportionately heavier. The heavier the

guilt and wider the sphere of the affected people, the more difficult becomes the task of redemption and self-purification. In view of this it is absolutely necessary to keep others safe from the evil consequences of the wrong use of one's hands, tongue, pen, physical and mental faculties and effects of one's vile thoughts and misdeeds. The process of self-purification does not only keep the mirror of the inner self in full lustre but also creates in man the realization that he should not do any thing during the rest of his life, which might be the source of making some other person a victim of excess or exploitation, depriving him of his due right and *inter alia* tarnishing his own inner self.

What has been stated above makes it clear that Muslim individuals and Muslim society should scrupulously adhere, in thought and action, to the teachings of the Holy Prophet in regard to self-purification. This will enable us to have a truly Muslim heart — individually as well as collectively — (a heart humble in submission and acceptance) which is what Allah approves and desires.

TRAINING OF THE INNER SELF

The word *Nafs* is used to denote many different aspects of the human person — the spirit, the life-force, the temperament, the natural disposition, the mind, etc. The Holy Qur'ān uses this word to convey all these nuances. This word has been used more extensively than any other single word in the verses of the Qur'ān. As is obvious the Qur'ān addresses its message to man and his inner self, whether you take it to mean man as such or his spirit, heart or the self or his disposition.

Let us now see what the Qur'ān says about the reality of the entity we call *Nafs*:

*“And a soul and Him Who perfected it.
And inspired it (with conscience of) what is wrong for it and (what is)
right for it. He is indeed successful who causeth it to grow. And he is
indeed a failure who stunteth it.”*

[Qur'ān, XCI:7–10]

This means that the more the soul grows at the cost of the animal life-force (which has also been equated with *nafs*), the more successful man is before Allah, and, since the soul can also function as an agency that serves to discriminate between right and wrong and good and evil, it is but human to distinguish between the two, to adopt the good things of life and avoid the wrong or evil ones.

Allah has endowed man with the ability to distinguish between right and wrong. Along with this innate faculty there is an element in man's being that impels him to do good and eschew evil. In fact the essence of human nature is this ability to understand what is right and what is wrong, to distinguish between virtue and vice, the beautiful and the ugly. But one needs ceaseless action and constant effort to bring this hidden quality into play. This distinctive characteristic of man cannot assert itself unless man works hard to bring it into the fore. The self-purification (*tazki'yah*) which the Qur'ān has stressed, time and again, and which it has called the secret of human success requires us to cultivate this faculty through constant effort. How this can be achieved has been told us by the Qur'ān:

*“As for those who strive in Us, We surely guide them
to Our paths, and lo! Allah is with the good.”*

[Qur'ān, XXIX:69]

The path of goodness is indeed an arduous one. Only when a man comes to it and treads it steadfastly, after passing through countless trials and tribulations, does he achieve righteousness. There are innumerable impediments on this path and a host of hardships and obstacles. Many temptations raise their heads within to tempt the inner self. Sometimes evil appears clad in the mantle of good. That is why Islam has emphasised the need to discipline one's thought and conduct and strengthen one's faith. Faith or *īmān* is, in fact, like a sapling which will only grow if it is tended and looked after with tender care. Only then will it bear fruit. The human soul — his inner self — needs to be constantly kept under vigil, to be trimmed and pruned, so that it becomes strong and sturdy. Man needs to keep on taking an account of his intentions, to search his heart and assess how God-fearing it really is and what sacrifice it is ready to make for achieving Allah's approbation. The Qur'ān has alluded to this in the following verse:

*“But as for him who feared to stand before his Lord
and restrained his soul from lust.
Lo! the Garden will be his home.”*

[Qur'ān, LXXIX:40–41]

To prevent the lower self from inclining towards evil and to draw it forth towards good, obviously requires hard training. And naturally it cannot be completed at one go. Training needs consistent goading. We will have to keep on with our process of self-evaluation and self-discipline in order to make subservience to the injunctions of Allah and His Holy Prophet our habit, nay our second nature and to completely subdue and vanquish the impulse and inclination towards evil.

Let us, for a moment, consider the five pillars of the faith of Islam. Faith in One Allah; faith in the Prophethood of the final Messenger; obligatory prayer; fasting; expending in the way of Allah, and the pilgrimage. And we will find for ourselves that to continue to act in accord with them is necessary for becoming a willing slave of Allah and to be able to be rid gradually but surely of vices and bad traits which are repugnant to the spirit behind these fundamental concepts of the true faith. Let us have a closer look. Every time a person recites the *Kalima* (the pledge of acceptance) he becomes firmer in his faith. Every obligatory prayer strengthens his humanity and submission to Allah, enhances the soul's purity and awareness of Allah's Omniscience. Fasting teaches self-control, endurance, fortitude, self-sacrifice and subservience to the divine will. Expending in the way of Allah eradicates love of worldly wealth from the heart and creates the desire to help the needy. Hajj (the Holy Pilgrimage) brings about the awareness of Islamic fraternity and the desire to wean oneself away from this world and to surrender oneself completely to Allah. The esoteric function of these acts of worship is to discipline the inner self.

We have in the *Sahih Būkhārī* that a Companion of the Prophet once asked him: “O Prophet of Allah, tell me of an act that would obviate the need of asking for anything else”. To this the Prophet's reply was: “Once you have said,

“No other god but Allah then just follow up this verbal acceptance by acts that are in accord with it”. Here ‘follow up’ means steadfast conformity to the faith. Shaykh ‘Abd al-Haqq Muhaddith Dehlavi has explained this as follows:

“Steadfastness is that repetition and practice as has become the secondary habit of *nafs* and the basic attribute of one’s temperament”.

When a good deed is done with constancy and a conscious effort is made to keep oneself engrossed in carrying out the precepts of Allah and the commands of the Prophet, a time comes when good deeds and sincere intentions become integrated into an individual’s temperament and he does good deeds without any constraint or hesitation. The training of the soul requires that it be kept in unremitting and constant subservience to the precepts of Islam and what does not have the sanction and approval of Allah should be strictly eschewed.

Thus the Qur’an says:

“O ye who believe! Ye have charge of your own souls. He who erreth cannot injure you if ye are rightly guided...”

[Qur’an, V:105]

Obviously for the believers it is necessary to guard their souls against all that is evil. While it is true that every individual is responsible for his own acts and the deviations of the others cannot do him any harm, yet this can be possible only if he watches his own soul with circumspectness and saves it from what is forbidden.

The closeness which the Holy Prophet enjoyed with Allah and the degree of piety which he had achieved is hardly in need of mention. But despite all this he fasted incessantly, spent his nights in prayer and orison; showed exemplary fortitude in the thick of battle waged against the enemies of Islam. In short, he never was the one to be overawed by evil. He always prayed to Allah to keep him away from cowardice, unmanly behaviour, despair, listlessness, frustration, and unbecoming sorrow. Let us pray to Allah that He endow us, in His infinite mercy with self-control and self-surrender worthy of His true servants. Amen!

PIETY

(The most exalted before Allah is the one who is most virtuous)

Sūra al-Fatihah is the introduction to the Qur'ān. In other words, it is the preamble and its basic purport is to teach man how best to seek guidance. Anyone who recites the *sūra al-Fatihah* asks his Creator for guidance, and the *sūra* is of overriding importance and is replete with meaning. It is the never-fading, ever-fresh flower that adorns the Qur'ān. It is the summary of the Qur'ān, and the key to its secrets.

The first verse of the Qur'ān is:

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

[Qur'ān, I:1]

We have to consider the word, *al-ālamīn* here. This means all the worlds, the total universe of which our solar system is a part and to which we belong, and which includes the Milky Way, the pulsars, quasars, and many an existence that we can never be aware of despite modern advances in radio-astronomy which have listed stars that lie billions and billions of light years away. We do not really know much about what we call the cosmos. We only discuss what is sensible. We must confess our limitations — there are countless worlds which are known only to Allah, their Creator.

There is someone who keeps this world, and what exists beyond our perception, in order and sustains it, for without such an agency it would be impossible for the world to sustain itself. Its sustainer is Allah Whom we praise and Who sustains the universe. Him alone we fear; Him alone we obey; Him alone we follow; and His path we tread, praying:

"Show us the straight path:"

[Qur'ān, I:6]

In other words: O Allah, give us the wisdom to know the path of righteousness, show it to us and guide us along it for ever. Fill our hearts with Your love, bless our eyes with Your divine light and keep us straight in thought, word and deed.

The Qur'ān is the fountain-head of true guidance for man. It is the most perfect code of life in accord with which we lead our lives and organise our affairs of this world and the world Hereafter. But there are certain conditions which must be fulfilled to be able to receive guidance from the word of Allah. The first requisite is piety. Allah has said :

"This is the Scripture wherein there is no doubt, a guidance unto those who ward off (evil):"

[Qur'ān, II:2]

This verse informs mankind that this is the Complete Word which was promised in earlier scriptures. This, surely, is the final Message of Allah and is a true guidance for those who fear and love Him and have the disposition to be men of virtue, who seek salvation – those are the people who will benefit from it. We shall ponder these words of the Holy Prophet:

“Fear of Allah is the basis of high morality”.

The Qur’ān provides us guidance in how to become God-fearing. At one place the word *taqwa* has been used in contrast to *istighna*, which means lack of care and lack of regard. The meaning of *taqwa* is therefore automatically established as fear of Allah and awareness of our accountability.

He who excels others in the fear of Allah is alone worthy of His Love:

*“...Lo! the noblest of you,
in the sight of Allah,
is the best in conduct.”*

[Qur’ān, XLIX:13]

Allah addressed the wise and the learned in the Qur’ān in these words:

*“...So make provision for yourselves
(hereafter); for the best provision is to ward off evil.
Therefore keep your duty unto Me, O men of understanding.”*

[Qur’ān, II:197]

At another place it is stated:

*“...Lo! Allah loveth those who
keep their duty (unto Him).”*

[Qur’ān, IX:4]

These verses clearly bring out the importance of *taqwa*. It is the first prerequisite for understanding the Qur’ān and benefiting from the Book of Guidance.

The Holy Prophet once pointed to his heart and then said to one of his Companions:

“Here resides the fear of Allah – the fear of Allah resides here”.

Taqwa is thus a state of the soul, and just as all states are recognised and understood through certain external symptoms and symbols, the fear of Allah has its own distinctive manifestations and visible features. The Book of Allah tells us what its exoteric characteristics are:

Let us see what the Qur’ān has to say in this context: I quoted this verse from the *sūra* “The Cow” a little earlier: “That is the Book wherein is no doubt, a guidance to the God-fearing”. Now let us see what follows a verse later:

“Who believe in the unseen, and establish worship, and spend of that We have bestowed upon them; And who believe in that which is revealed unto thee (Muhammad) and that which was revealed before thee, and are certain of the Hereafter. These depend on guidance from their Lord. These are the successful.”

[Qur'an, II:3-5]

These verses are among the most comprehensive in the Qur'an. This is not the occasion to go into a detailed discussion of these verses. I will just describe briefly the attributes, enumerated by the Holy Qur'an, of those who fear Allah. These are:

1. Belief in the Unseen and the Unknown. Acceptance of Allah's Commands with a willing heart. This is what the Qur'an means by "Believe in the Unseen".
2. Belief in the Holy Prophet and his teachings and acceptance of their truth and veracity. Total acceptance of facts given to mankind by him, as if they have been actually seen and witnessed.
3. Offering obligatory prayers regularly and in the manner specified by the Prophet. This has been called *Iqāmat-e-Salāt* (performing the prayer) by the Qur'an.
4. Not expending all that Allah gives on oneself alone and not to consider it one's personal property but to let others partake of it according to their need and due share. And whatever is expended on oneself is expended with full realisation that this munificence actually belongs to Allah and is a gift from Him. This sharing is not restricted to wealth, food and worldly goods but includes the knowledge, skill and excellence in any science or art – whatever one can share with others to their advantage.
5. Belief in the Books sent down to the Prophets earlier than the Holy Prophet.
6. Belief in the Hereafter.

These verses clearly establish what *taqwa* signifies and the type God-fearing men are. They have made us realise that Allah wishes us to avoid all that which can hurt or damage our own person and our fellow-men, whether they are near or far away and can be an impediment in the achievement of our noble goals and objectives and stand in the way of our achieving the excellence that is within our reach. *Taqwa* means keeping away from all sins and obeying Allah with humble devotion and dedication. It also means eschewing all such factors that hinder our progress towards the perfection of our inner self and the attainment of Allah's blessings in both the worlds.

According to these verses we should consider every good thing that belongs to us as a boon from Allah and we should utilise as much of it as is possible

for the benefit of others. We should ponder, in the light of these sublime verses, the present-day state of affairs – the anxiety and the agitation that gnaws the mind of contemporary humanity, the poverty and hunger that is reigning supreme among the under-privileged mass of people all over the world. We should try to determine the causes that have led to this tragic situation. We should ponder how easy it would be to change all this and usher in an era of universal physical and spiritual well-being, if the more affluent amongst us adopt the Qur'anic precept of *taqwa* as the guiding principle of our individual and collective life.

PEACE OF MIND

Peace of mind, ever sought after by man, is a priceless treasure. To attain it is the goal of all human effort. All through his life man remains preoccupied with a ceaseless struggle to achieve it, and once he has it he is filled with a sense of fulfilment. If somebody possesses all the blessings of life but has no peace of mind, he has little comfort in life and even if he owns the whole world it will be meaningless for him. On the contrary, if he achieves peace of mind, every moment of his life will be enriching and his whole life will become purposeful.

Islam has blessed us with a perfectly viable code of life which caters to the gratification of both the spiritual and the material aspects of life. Islam duly acknowledges the importance of man's material needs, but it simultaneously emphasises the fundamental importance of his spiritual progress and moral elevation. In other words Islam would not like us to degenerate into mere animals, desirous of satisfying our biological urges only. What it requires is that man should so lead his life that a balanced growth of both his spiritual and physical faculties can be ensured. Islam disallows licentious behaviour and enjoins that man should so organise his life that he can fully exploit the bounties of nature to his advantage and at the same time keep in active view his wherewithal for the other world where life will be real and eternal. Precisely for this reason it prescribes certain limits to human activities and forbids any transgression thereof. Adherence to them, be they related to sex life or politics or commerce, is imperative. The sole purpose of laying down these limits is that strong momentary impulses are held in check and do not create an imbalance in his personality because an imbalanced personality can never enjoy the peace of mind.

The central importance attaching to the 'heart' in human life is evident to every intelligent person. The Holy Prophet put the matter in its perspective by saying:

"You have a lump of flesh in your body which needs to be carefully looked after. When it is normal and healthy, the whole body is fit; when it is in disorder, the whole body is in disarray".

This saying of the Prophet of Allah clearly shows that physical health and welfare depend upon the soundness of the heart (the seat of thought and feeling). A defect in the heart tantamounts to malfunctioning of the whole body. Physical soundness undoubtedly includes the health and soundness of mind. The interconnection and inter-dependence of the body and the mind is a scientific reality, and so is the influence of one on the other. Unsoundness of the mind

affects the body and renders it unhealthy. Similarly, physical pain has its repercussions on the mind and mental health is disturbed. If the heart is not content, both the mind and the body are agitated and restless. It is but natural for man to need peace of mind and soul. The target of his whole endeavour is the peace of mind. The Holy Qur'ān itself makes a pointed allusion to this mental state. The Creator of the universe has affirmed that He has classified mankind into two categories so that each may be the source of solace to the other. Who can deny the need for peace and solace? That is why man willingly undergoes all sorts of physical trials and tribulations including financial hardships for the sake of his peace of mind. It is, however, necessary to remember that the nature and essence of mental peace is entirely relative. For instance, an unemployed person focuses his whole attention on seeking means of livelihood. As a result, he has no time to relax or to enjoy a few moments of relaxation in the midst of his family. On the other hand, there is another person who has plenty of leisure but has no children. Thus both of them lack, what in the final analysis is peace of mind.

One has wealth but longs for children. The other has no leisure to relax in the company of his children. This example will show that peace of mind is not dependent on any particular thing and is altogether relative. There is only one way to achieve peace of mind. It is that man should learn to have complete trust in Allah, and subordinate his wishes and pleasures to His will. The consequence of man's total acceptance of His pleasure and Wisdom is that his disposition is sublimely transformed and he comes to feel content in all circumstances whatsoever. It is mainly frustration that robs man of his peace of mind. It breeds restlessness while hope generates confidence. That is why despair is equated with infidelity and Allah has exhorted man not to lose hope of His mercy.

Despair born out of frustration leads to inaction or idleness, in truth it enhances despair. A person who does not strive, does not achieve any fruitful results and this leads to still greater despair. A totally wrong interpretation of trust in Allah is common amongst us. It is to do nothing yourself but leave it all to Him, hoping that Omnipotent as He is, He will do everything for you. Evidently, it is a harmful concept. Trust in Allah should not be tantamount to idleness and inactivity. It simply means that one should do one's utmost and then rely on Him for the desired results, instead of keeping worried about them. It means that trust in Allah and normal endeavour should go together. It is equally wrong and undesirable for man to rely solely on himself and his efforts, and being forgetful of Allah. If he relies on himself alone, success will turn his head, while failure will make him totally despondent, thus making him lose the invaluable divine gift that is the peace of mind.

From what has been said we can easily conclude that peace of mind is predicated on an active belief in Allah and the Hereafter, and on doing all that is humanly possible in the pursuit of one's objectives. Neither action without faith nor faith without honest effort can bring any peace of mind. The more firm your belief in the Omnipotence of Allah is and the more concerted your efforts in accordance with it, the surer will be your peace of mind.

The balance that Islam wants to create in human life has no other goal than that of saving man from a lopsided life, of enabling him to heed the demands of his heart and soul amid the welter of life. Likewise, Islam is also against self-denial by man and his taking to asceticism, for which there is no room in it. The concept of virtue which forgoes all human commitments for the sake of a total immersion in worship is foreign to Islam. The concept of worship in Islam is very comprehensive. Instead of confining worship only to prayers and fasting, it treats every human action as worship if it is in accord with the injunctions of Allah. It is not at all the intent of Islam to turn righteous persons into hermits and leave the world-stage to a different breed of people. Any such arrangement would be totally un-Islamic as it would deprive the mass of humanity of peace and tranquillity.

The worship of Allah and humanitarianism inherently go together in Islam and this is the sole way to attain peace.

RIGHTS OF THE SELF

All higher religions of the world attach due importance to the social rights of man. And the rights of parents are invariably held to be of utmost importance. This is but the acceptance of a natural fact. Islam like other religions holds the rights of parents vitally important. But its stand-point is also distinctly different. In the case of rights, Islam has given a set of graduated priorities. Its list of rights encompasses all possible details; so much so that no point remains unattended. Besides specifying the order of rights – rights of man on man – it has taken due notice also of the rights of beasts and birds, indeed of all living beings. How completely careful Islam is in this regard, is borne out by the fact that due importance is given to the rights of a man's own self – the rights his physical being has on him. Islam makes it clear unequivocally that unlike other religions it forbids the total negation of the needs of the body; a negation that is, often, tantamount to suicide. According to the *Pride of Prophets*, the symbol of mercy and compassion for all the worlds, the last Messenger of Allah, every man's own person has some rights on him – in fact, each limb, each part of his body has a specific right on him. It is stated in the *Sahih Būkhārī* that the Holy Prophet said:

“Of course your own being has a right on you”.

Similarly in another *Hadīth* he observed; “Your body too has a right on you, and so have your eyes”.

In some other religions putting different limbs and parts of the body under severe strain and hardship was considered a sign of piety and fear of God. A religious man was required to kill, through unnatural self-torment, his physical desires and appetites, to withdraw from the world and to devote himself to contemplation. Islam has categorically rejected these principles which militate against human nature and declares that monastic self-denial and hermitism; in other words, self-torture, do not constitute true worship and submission to Allah in Islam. In fact, Islam is totally opposed to them.

Killing one's natural bent is not permissible in Islam. The Islamic *Shari'ah* envisages that man will fulfil his obligations to his physical and organic self, will keep it alive and functional but in such a way that it will be subservient to the commands of Allah. Not the death of the body, but its total subservience to Allah comprises human virtue and piety. The objective is to purge and purify it through discipline and training and to make it conform to the checks and balances specified by Islam. The *nafs* – the ‘physical self’ – is like a sword. The sword can be used to kill innocent people or to defend them against

transgressors. The previous religious codes advised to break it and throw it away, or to so blunt its edge that it becomes completely ineffective. Contrary to this injunction, Islam wants man to keep it in excellent condition, but make it obey the laws of Allah, so that it can be used in support of the oppressed and the helpless.

The Holy Prophet never permitted total self-denial and urged his Companions and followers to eat and drink what is *ḥalāl*, to dress well and to marry; but in all this to keep within the bounds of the law (*Shari'ah*) and to conform to the norms of balance and moderation.

Prayer is, no doubt, a means of devotion to Allah. But Islam does not deem it desirable to make the body endure more hardship than it can bear.

Once a Companion came to the Holy Prophet and told him that a friend of his and he had resolved between themselves that one would give up food and the other would withdraw from matrimony. The Prophet said to him, "I enjoy my food and also enter into wedlock". The concerned Companion realized that the Holy Prophet did not approve of their intent and so both he and his friend dropped the idea. It was a long standing practice in Arabia to keep fast for many days without any break. Some Companions of the Holy Prophet showed an inclination to follow this custom. He firmly stopped them from doing it.

Abdullah bin Umar (may Allah be happy with him) was distinguished for his piety and submission to Allah even amongst his noble contemporaries. He once decided to make it a regular practice to fast during the day and pray through the night. When the Holy Prophet came to know about it, he called him to his presence and enquired if what he had heard about it was true. When Ibn Umar replied in the affirmative, the Prophet said to him, "Your body has a right on you, your eye has its right, your wife has hers – three fasts in a month are quite enough".

In short, the Holy Prophet always urged his followers not to deny their physical self the rights that are its due, like people of other religions; but while giving it satisfaction, try to keep it under control and to attain to the high state of self purification, through training and discipline. Real religious excellence consists in obeying the injunctions of Allah while allowing the body to get what is its natural due. Islam ensures worldly well-being and fulfilment along with adherence to the faith. It has taught this prayer to the believers:

"And of them (also) is he who saith: 'Our Lord! Give unto us in the world that which is good and in the Hereafter that which is good;'"

[Qur'an, II:201]

Even the chores and tasks of this world, if they are undertaken within the bounds of the *Shari'ah*, are according to Islam, part of the worship (*Ibādah*) and a means to divine approbation. Not only this, when the Holy Prophet, who was at the loftiest state of submission and was also honoured with the position of being Allah's last Messenger became so excessively absorbed in prayer and self-negating austerity, that it exceeded what was desired by the Creator of the heaven and earth, he was advised in the *sūrah Muzzammil* to keep in view the natural demands of his body. Allah directed thus:

*“Keep vigil the night, long, save a little
A half thereof, or abate a little thereof;
Or add (a little) thereto and chant the Qur’an in measure.”*

[Qur’ān, LXXIII:2–4]

This clearly means that Allah, the Most Exalted, was in every way pleased with the submission of His beloved servant. But at the same time wished that he should also fulfil the natural requirements of his physical self i.e. he should rest when tired and get some sleep during the night. This in no way implied that the Prophet should make his body and his physical self victims of excess but only that he should let them get what they needed to subsist.

In fine, Islamic *Shari’ah* insists that remaining within the framework of Allah’s commands man should so lead his life that he does his duty to his fellow-men and does not in the process victimise or oppress his own being.

Islam is a religion completely in accord with Nature. Not a single precept or edict of its *Shari’ah* is contrary to the law of Nature. When Islam guides people to maintain balance and equilibrium in life and be moderate, when they are told that the middle course is the path of Allah, it is conforming to the requirements of Nature.

The Islamic *Shari’ah* attaches prime importance to moderation in the case of the physical self and its rights. While it insists that all basic and natural requirements of the human organism should be met, it also directs that it should always obey the commands of Allah and stay subordinate to them. It shows us the way how to discipline and purify our natural bent.

In the light of the teachings of our religion we should do the best we can to avoid extremes and, along with dutifully offering our prayers and pursuing higher dictates of the soul, continue to fulfil our obligations to others.

THE STEADFAST FAITH

Allah endowed some special attributes upon his prophets, which were not only special to their sacred persons but were also conducive to the successful completion of their prophetic mission. One of their special characteristics is facility of speech and perfect communication.

When Allah appointed the Prophet Moses (may peace be upon him) with prophethood, the Prophet Moses made supplication before Him that his brother, the Prophet Aaron (may peace be upon him) be also made a partner to him in prophethood. In the Qur'an this request of the Prophet Moses has been described as follows:

"My brother Aaron is more eloquent than me in speech. Therefore send him with me as a helper to confirm me."

[Qur'an, XXVIII:34]

Allah said:

"We will strengthen thine arm with thy brother, and We will give unto you both power."

[Qur'an, XXVIII:35]

Allah has also alluded to the eloquence of the Prophet David in the following verse:

"We made his kingdom strong and gave him wisdom and decisive speech."

[Qur'an, XXXVIII:20]

In the final Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) the twin attributes of eloquence and the power to convince reach their state of perfection, and of all prophets he is the most goodly of speech. Biographers of the Holy Prophet have, besides dwelling on his intrinsic virtues and other unique moral qualities, make a special mention of his eloquence and extraordinary powers of communication.

Historians of literature are unanimous in their agreement that, after the Qur'an, the Sayings of the Prophet represent the highest degree of eloquence. This most eloquent of all men in Arabic and other languages was terse

and succinct in his speech and his choice of words was invariably matchless. His diction was perfect and his cadence enchantingly beautiful. One instance would suffice to show what we mean. A Companion (may Allah be pleased with him) of the Prophet asked him to give him just one Islamic injunction that would keep him on the straight path and would make further enquiry unnecessary. The Holy Prophet said just this in reply: "Testify your faith in Allah and then always conform to it".

Once a man has testified his faith in Allah he opens the gateway to his spiritual progress in this world and to his salvation in the Hereafter. But man is liable to err, and in doing so he falls a prey to negligence, and becomes oblivious of his responsibilities. He gets swayed by the lure of transitory, mundane advantages to himself and others and forfeits his spiritual gains. The reply by the Prophet to the Companion is precise and brief, and yet how meaningful. What the Prophet meant was that a Muslim should never lose sight of his faith, of his responsibilities to his Creator, of fulfilling the demands of the faith and enriching its spiritual content, and through his adherence to faith save his soul and his mind and body from deviating from the path of truth and virtue.

Adherence to faith means that a person who has testified his acceptance of Islam as his religion should be unswerving in his compliance of its injunctions and conformity to the mode of life he has chosen for himself. On the other hand, weakness in the assertion of faith is indicative of the frailty of his resolve and weakness of this character. Any one who saves himself from this weakness cultivates the power of adhering to his convictions and becomes spiritually strong enough to overcome the lure of baser enticements and the fear of besetting problems. Expediency cannot lead him astray from his chosen path and difficulties will not make him deviate from his onward march on the road to eternal salvation. One particular factor that may perhaps be of significance here is that a person might be ready to sacrifice his own needs and profit but might find it more difficult to ignore the demands of others. Allah, addressing the Prophet, has said:

*"And be thou upright
as thou art commanded,
and follow not their lusts,"*

[Qur'an, XLII:15]

The following verse brings out the virtue of steadfastness in faith:

*"Lo! those who say:
Our Lord is Allah,
and afterward are upright, the angels descend upon them,
saying: Fear not nor grieve, but hear good tidings of the
Paradise which ye are promised."*

[Qur'an, XLI:30]

Firmness in faith is an attribute that would save man from greed, going

astray and vice, and keep him steadfast in the path he has set before himself.

Most of us have heard of the celebrated incident in the life of the Holy Prophet which relates to the pressure exerted upon him through temptation and intimidation to desist from carrying on his assignation, in the cause of Islam. When the pagans failed to convince the Prophet, they made overtures to Abu Tālib, his uncle and protector, to dissuade him from keeping up his prophetic mission, or face the might of the Quraish. Abu Tālib called the Prophet in the presence of the grandees of the Quraish and apprised him of their proposal. The Prophet thereupon pointed towards the heaven and asked the Quraish leaders: "Would the sun that is shining in the heaven deprive itself of its light upon your demand"? And then addressing Abu Tālib he said: "Dear Uncle! Even if they place the sun in one hand of mine and the moon in the other, I shall not desist from the prophetic mission to which Allah the Almighty has assignated me".

This is only one incident. The whole life of the Holy Prophet corroborates his strength of purpose, his firm resolve and his indomitable will. These acts naturally had the desired impact upon the Companions and they also became unique figures in the annals of history.

It is our day-to-day observation that those who have consciously chalked out their path in life and marked out their objectives care little for the obstacles that obstruct their path. It is a necessary consequence of his belief in Allah and His Sovereignty that determination, faith, firmness, and sense of purpose become the wherewithal of the believer. It is those who cultivate this quality that become the leaders of great revolutions and change the history of the world.

May Allah shower His blessings upon the Holy Prophet and His pleasure upon his Companions. May we be blessed with the capacity to follow in the footsteps of the Prophet and his Companions, and keep firm in our faith. Amen!

ON BEING THANKFUL TO ALLAH

In the *sūra XIV (Ibrāhīm)* Allah has described the beneficent things and blessings with which He has endowed man. It is upon these gifts from Allah that human life and progress of man depend. It has been said:

“And He giveth you of all ye ask of Him, and if ye would count the bounty of Allah ye cannot reckon it.”

[Qur’ān, XIV:34]

The necessities of man and his desires include all the material and spiritual things he needs. Then Allah has said that even if man were to spend a lifetime in enumerating the blessings of His Bounty, he would be unable to count them. We can see for ourselves that our very being, every fibre of our body, our individual and collective life, in short, all that we have, all that we possess, and all that we hope to have is a Bounty of Allah. Besides, Allah has endowed us with another gift, that He has appointed man as His vicegerent on earth. He has been specially kind to the Muslim *millat* by making us responsible for establishing the sovereignty of Allah on earth and it is for this purpose that He made His final Message descend upon the last of His Prophets, through whom man has been addressed by Him. This special act of grace towards the Muslims has been alluded to in the Qur’ān thus:

“O mankind! There hath come unto you an exhortation from your Lord, a balm for that which is in the breasts, a guidance and a mercy for believers. Say: In the bounty of Allah and in His mercy: therein let them rejoice.”

[Qur’ān, X:57–58]

These acts of divine kindness and grace and the dignity and honour that He has conferred on mankind make it incumbent upon us not to let even a moment pass without expressing our gratitude to Him and without our offering our heartfelt thanks for His infinite Bounty. But man has his inherent drawbacks and weaknesses besides the multifarious demands of his life which make it very hard for him to devote his whole lifetime to thanksgiving. But even if he had the time, one lifetime would be totally inadequate for the purpose. Allah, the Creator of the universe and of this frail being known as man, is fully aware

of the shortcomings, defects, and helplessness of man. He does not demand that man should be engrossed in thanksgiving all the time. What Allah asks him to do is that he should obey Him. This means that, while it is impossible for man to count the blessings of Allah or to thank Him for them, he must as an acknowledgement of the blessings, submit totally to Him. Anyone who, despite the blessings of his Creator, does not obey His commands, is ungrateful. Allah has equated man's ingratitude with disbelief in Him. He has said in the Holy Qur'an:

*"If ye give thanks,
I will give you more; but if ye are thankless,
lo! My punishment is dire."*

[Qur'an, XIV:7]

We can ponder the situation which, at present, faces the progeny of Adam all over the world, from North to South, East to West. Is this not due to the ingratitude of man towards Allah in the light of what He Himself has said? And, moreover, the members of the Muslim *Ummah* are particularly indigent and helpless and are held in contempt by the more advanced nations. Is this not due to our lack of gratitude and our disregard of Allah's commands enjoining obedience to Him, besides total misuse of His Bounty?

We, the Muslims of today, are passing through an overwhelming crisis. We are not being true to our responsibilities of offering thanks to our real Benefactor and we are criminally oblivious of the imperative need of obedience to Him and His Holy Prophet. Perhaps, we are helplessly hurtling towards our doom by rebelling against Him. Our life-pattern in the world of today is not that which has been prescribed by Allah and His Prophet. Our total life individual as well as collective, is completely un-Islamic. The cultural, socio-economic, political, and educational aspects of our life as an *Ummah* are not at all in accord with the teachings of the Holy Prophet. As Muslims we know that we cannot regain our past glory and past eminence without following the edicts of Allah as enunciated by the Holy Prophet through his personal example. Until and unless we recreate within ourselves the feelings of gratitude and thanksgiving for what Allah has given us we cannot prosper. Once this feeling takes root within us, we would be able to pursue our divinely specified goals with the required zeal in every walk of life, and will be able to give a practical proof of being grateful to Him and of submission to His commands.

The fact that despite our countless shortcomings and our deviation from the straight path Allah has provided us the opportunity to mend our ways is a proof of His mercy and compassion. He has not given such an opportunity to any other people in human history.

On a collective level and as the members of the fraternity of believers we are so far gone in ingratitude that we not only do not thank Allah for His Bounty, but have become incapable of acknowledging the debt we owe to one another in our daily lives. There is no worse depravity than this for man.

We should individually and collectively take ourselves out of this morass,

and have a close look at our shortcomings. Our sheer survival demands that we start conforming to the moral and social values given to us by Allah and His Holy Prophet. If we desire to live respectably and in honour, we shall have to change ourselves.

The Qur'ān has given the call:

"...Lo! Allah changeth not the condition of a folk until they (first) change that which is in their hearts; and if Allah willeth misfortune for a folk there is none that can repel it, nor have they a defender beside Him.

[Qur'ān, XIII:11]

And then again He said:

"What concern hath Allah for your punishment if ye are thankful (for His mercies) and believe (in Him)? Allah was ever Responsive, Aware.

[Qur'ān, IV:147]

Thanksgiving to Allah is the ultimate aim of life. Gratitude is an index and manifestation of a wholesome ethical conduct. May Allah grant us the capacity to act righteously and to tread the straight path. Amen!

SINCERITY IN INTENT AND ACTION

The sincerity of one's intentions and the righteousness of one's acts are of prime importance in the Islamic *Shari'ah*. Just as the goodness of an act is dependent on intention behind it, so is the acceptance (i.e. approval by Allah) of one's intention dependent on its sincerity. In other words, the intention should be honest and sincere and the action should, as a consequence, be righteous. In Islam sincerity is almost at par with prayer. Therefore it should be free of all worldly, corporal, and selfish aims and purposes. If the case is otherwise, the acts as expressions of intentions are not inspired by sincerity, and have no virtue or goodness nor can they be reckoned as prayer or worship.

Every Muslim knows the importance of *jihād* (the holy endeavour). It is the most effective and successful way for the progress and spread of Islam. But the importance of fulfilling this responsibility will depend on the extent to which it is inspired by pure and noble intent and accompanied by righteous action. Thus, if a soldier fights in a righteous war to win glory for himself and public praise for his acts of courage, he will be sullyng the sacred aim of the *jihād* with his selfish motive and consequently his participation in the righteous war will, from the point of view of recompense in the Hereafter, have no importance or significance whatsoever.

This principle applies to other matters also. Thus, if a Muslim migrates from one country to another for the betterment of his own prospects in life, he shall not reap the divine recompense for *hijrah*. In Islam it is the intent behind an act that is of overriding importance. In the Islamic *Shari'ah* an act is laudable only if the intent behind it is sincere and selfless. What act of greater goodness could there be than prayer? But if worship is undertaken for the sake of ostentation or to obtain public approbation it is an act of sheer hypocrisy, and instead of bringing divine grace will become a cause of chastisement.

Likewise, if a Muslim distributes alms to get general adulation for his generosity, his seeming act of munificence will not be counted as worthy of *thawāb* (reward), as it has been vitiated by motives which are not at all altruistic. Allah Himself has said:

*"...Whoso desireth the reward of the world,
We bestow on him thereof;
and whoso desireth the reward of the Hereafter,
We bestow on him thereof..."*

[Qur'an, III:145]

In yet another verse it has been clearly stated that any deed done or undertaken for the sake of mere display is nothing but a mirage:

*“O ye who believe!
Render not vain your almsgiving by reproach
and injury, like him who spendeth his wealth only to be seen
of men and believeth not in Allah and the Last Day...”*

[Qur’ān, II:264]

The Hypocrites (*Munāfiqūn*) offer a patent instance of the duality of the intent and the act. In the presence of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him), they would verbally profess their belief in his Prophethood; but this profession was insincere. Therefore Allah has said:

“...Allah beareth witness that the Hypocrites are speaking falsely.”

[Qur’ān, LXIII:1]

So much for one’s intention and its translation into action. Similarly, truth and sincerity of an act depends on its being in accord with the voice of the conscience and it is a righteous act if it was prompted by a genuine and honest desire to do good. If a man helps an indigent fellow-being in secret and feels pleased, he has done a sincere act. Such an act has been motivated neither by a desire to show off nor to win acclaim. All that he aspires for is to please Allah and to satisfy his own inner self.

In the world of today noble intentions and selfless acts are all but rare. It is therefore obligatory for us Muslims to have noble intentions and to act with sincerity of purpose. We should only aim at winning the approbation of Allah, our Lord and Master and all that we do should be to seek His pleasure. The guiding principle of our lives should be the *Sunnah* of the Holy Prophet, who has clearly enjoined that our actions should be solely motivated by our hope to receive the blessings of Allah. Our individual welfare and collective glory depend entirely on our obedience to the Holy Prophet and submission to Allah. As Muslims we should so reshape and reconstruct our individual character and our collective life that we become living illustrations of the eternal viability and the universal truth of Islam. We should weed out all that is against the teachings of Islam in our social mores and adopt the teachings of our great religion in our day-to-day life. If we do that honestly and sincerely our lives will be infused with nobility of intentions and righteous deeds.

Might I at this juncture pause a while and ask what our ideas about our *Ummah* are? What intentions do we have regarding the spiritual renaissance of the Islamic world along with its economic and political progress? Allah has blessed the Islamic world with limitless natural resources. If these are fully utilised in the service of our religious revival and the welfare of the people — sincerely and honestly — Allah will surely bless our noble intentions and righteous endeavour with success. If we serve this great purpose selflessly and persevere in it, Allah will reward our efforts with success by ushering in the era of Islam’s pre-eminence and glory and will give us good recompense in the Hereafter.

May Allah grant us sincerity of purpose and enable us to work with zeal and devotion for the greatness of His true faith. Amen!

SELF-RECKONING

In the Holy Qur'ān, Almighty Allah has laid down the criteria for good and evil, virtue and vice, right and wrong, thereby drawing a distinct line of demarcation between what is permissible and what is not. All those deeds that make man a man, that ensure for other people peace and comfort, that orient man to the worship of Almighty Allah, his Creator, and reinforce the links between the Creator and His creation, that establish peace and prosperity in the world, and that ensure public weal, are good. Conversely, all those acts and deeds that produce conflicts among human beings, that snap the link between Allah and His servants, that create chaos in society, and upset the balance between the spiritual and the mundane, are evil and bad. The criteria set forth by the Holy Qur'ān in this connection are absolutely final, practicable and acceptable for the whole world. In fact, they must be and shall be accepted by the whole of mankind for its survival and progress. Indeed, the teachings of Islam are eternally viable and beneficent. It should be obvious to every discerning person that the things termed good and bad by it are actually so. It is for man to mould his life in the light of the teachings of Islam and thus discharge his duty, which in the process, will make him a complete man.

We have the Holy Qur'ān to guide us to the path of righteousness. This Word of Allah calls upon us to exercise self-reckoning and to ponder whether the life we are leading and the deeds we are doing are right or wrong, good or bad; whether we are proceeding aright or going astray in darkness. Allah has gifted man with reason and power of analysis which he should use for self-reckoning.

Hadrat Umar once remarked, "Ere you are called to account, you had better resort to self-reckoning". This is sagacious advice to human beings to realize the wisdom of the process of self-reckoning. Those who believe in Allah and the Hereafter are convinced that eventually this world will cease to exist and then it will be resurrected for reckoning on the Day of Judgement. That reckoning is inevitable. It is, therefore, better that so long as we are alive here we practise self-reckoning so that our own conscience keeps on signalling to us the nature of our deeds, thereby enabling us to avoid the situation of shame, horror and humiliation on that Day.

There is a Tradition of the Holy Prophet:

"A wise and sagacious person is he who continues to exercise self-reckoning and arranges his affairs keeping in mind the phase in the wake of death. Foolish is he who leaves his self to follow desires unchecked and then pins all his hopes on Allah".

The human disposition is the seat of wants and desires. These wants and desires of flesh need to be disciplined through thought and reason. Intellect should decide what is good and what is bad, what is virtue and what is vice, what is piety and what is sin. If the human intellect fails to keep this distinction alive, the line of demarcation between man and animal will vanish. And, that sounds the death-knell of the higher self. Man is man so long as he uses his intellect for rectitude. If he deviates from rectitude and, becoming servile to the flesh, is caught in evil, he is no longer a man. In fact, the process of self-reckoning requires that a man should ponder the propriety of his act before he does it and also evaluate it after doing it, whether it was right or wrong. If it is the testimony of your conscience that it was a wrong or evil act, the door to penance is ever open. Timely self-reckoning alone can save one from humiliation on the Day of Judgement.

It is absolutely unthinkable that man should indulge in evil and go scot-free. What is wrong can never be right. Evil will ever remain evil, and the evil-doer is bound to pine for peace and honour. This is the law of nature and the law of nature never changes.

The Holy Qur'an says:

*"And We set a just
balance for the Day of Resurrection
so that no soul is wronged in aught.
Though it be of the
weight of a grain of mustard seed,
We bring it. And We suffice for reckoners."*

[Qur'an, XXI:47]

We find that everyone living in the contemporary world is worried. Morality is in the throes of death. The socio-economic order is upset. Social relations are soulless. Decency is on the wane. Human greatness is in the vice of decadence. This state of affairs of the world and this condition of its citizens denotes that man has forsaken self-reckoning. Divorced from righteousness and justice, to-day's man is in deep anguish. Warring with nature, he has developed defeatism. Heedless of Allah and His teachings he grovels in meanness and, turning his back upon the teachings of His final Prophet, he is groping in darkness.

If self-reckoning is abandoned, human thought grows morbid and when man becomes indifferent to the Hereafter, he is care-worn and miserable. Of such people says the Qur'an:

*"O ye who believe! Observe your duty to Allah.
And let every soul look to that which it sendeth on before for
the morrow. And observe your duty to Allah!
Lo! Allah is Informed of what ye do."*

[Qur'an, LIX:18].

Let us ponder and decide that henceforth we will live as true human beings,

doing good deeds and making the world a haven of peace, that we will establish here the rule of Allah and the law of the Qur'ān, and that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) will be our guide.

Iqbal has truly said:

*Like the sabre is that nation in the hand of Destiny
that does self-reckoning every moment of its life.*

OF VIRTUOUS CONDUCT

Allah, the Most Magnificent and Exalted, is the Creator of countless worlds. It is He Who created the earth, the sky and all the existences beyond. The moon, the sun, the stars, the planets and all other phenomena were created by Him and Him alone. Everything that has been created knows its Creator, be it angels or human beings – things that live and things that have no life. All that has been created by Him is a purposeful part of a virtually limitless organisation and an infinitely complex system. The sun and the moon function under a predetermined system and neither can budge the millionth of a hairline from its orbital course. The stars, the planets, the sky and the earth all adhere to a system. So does man, who has lived on this Earth since time immemorial. To Allah does man owe his life and his death. None is born here of his own will, nor does anyone have his exit as a matter of free choice. It should by no means be difficult to conclude that the right to rule is of the Being Who is the Creator and is Omnipotent. His rule encompasses everything that exists in this measureless macrocosm that is the physical universe and, therefore, His law alone is workable.

*“...Lo! the earth is Allah’s
He giveth it for an inheritance to whom He will. And
lo! the sequel is for those who keep their duty (unto Him).”* [Qur’ān, VII:128]

*“Say: O Allah! Owner of Sovereignty! Thou givest sovereignty unto
whom Thou wilt, and Thou withdrawest sovereignty from whom Thou
wilt. Thou exaltest whom Thou wilt and Thou abasest
whom Thou wilt. In Thy hand is the good.
Lo! Thou art Able to do all things.”*

[Qur’an, III:26]

The political system of Islam is based on the belief that Allah is the real Sovereign of this globe.

The two verses that I have just quoted make it absolutely clear that Sovereignty belongs to Allah alone. To conduct the business of this world He appoints from among His creation whom He wills and then guides him. Those persons, who acquire power for the avowed purpose of conducting the affairs of the world in accordance with the will and preference of Allah and then start making laws, constitutional and otherwise, according to their own likes and dislikes, disregarding Islam and owning un-Islamic concepts, are the rebels of Allah. For this Allah will punish and humiliate them here in this world besides making them suffer His eternal displeasure in the world to come. That is the way

of Allah and in it He makes no change. We have witnessed countless instances of it in our lives and it is also the lesson of history.

When it is finally accepted that Allah is the Creator of the universe, that the earth is His, that all creation is His work, and that man is the servant of Allah, it naturally follows that the style of life in this world and what one learns and what one does here, should be in complete conformity with what is prescribed by Him and has been communicated to us, through the Qur'ān, by the last of His prophets, Muhammad (peace be upon him), who embodied all divine teachings in his own sacred person to serve as a model for mankind for ever. Those who believe in Allah are the faithful ones. The philological root of *Īmān* (faith) is "*Amn*", which means peace and fearlessness. The Holy Qur'ān lays down in *sūra "Quraish"*,

*"Who hath fed them against hunger
And hath made them safe from fear."*

[Qur'ān, CVI:4-5]

Of the several attributes of Allah, one is *Al-Momin*, that is, "the Bestower of peace". *Īmān* also means, 'to believe, to certify, to accept and to trust'. In Islamic *Shari'ah*, *Īmān* means to accept as true the thing that is known of certainty to be the utterance of the Holy Prophet.

In the light of the Qur'ān and the Traditions, the following five points constitute *Īmān* (belief):

1. Belief in Allah, with all His attributes;
2. Belief in angels as creatures and obedient servants of Allah;
3. Belief in all revealed Books, particularly in the Holy Qur'ān;
4. Belief in all prophets of Allah, including the finality of the Prophet-hood of Muhammad (peace be upon him);
5. Belief in the life Hereafter and in accountability for the present life in the life to come.

At several places in the Qur'ān the necessity to have belief in these points has been stressed. For instance, here is one verse:

*"The messenger believeth in that which
hath been revealed unto him from his Lord and
(so do) the believers. Each one believeth in Allah
and His angels and His Scriptures and
His messengers..."*

[Qur'ān, II:285]

Along with *Imān* righteous conduct is essential. It is simply unthinkable to pay only lip-service to the faith and not to cultivate virtuous conduct but to continue to indulge in deeds condemned by the Qur'ān and forbidden by the Prophet of Allah. It is necessary to remember that without righteous conduct

salvation is impossible. The Holy Qur'ān categorically states:

“For those who believe and do good works – Lo! We suffer not the reward of one whose work is goodly to be lost.”

[Qur'ān, XVIII:30]

This discourse has, I hope, amply clarified the following points:

1. Allah is the real Lord, absolute Sovereign and Master of the universe and all that is in it. Man is His servant and He is man's Lord and Creator.
2. The law of Allah alone is statutory and imperative. Any law or a country's constitution deviating and divorced from the Qur'ān cannot be acceptable to the Muslims. A Muslim cannot swear by and act upon a non-Qur'ānic constitution.
3. A Muslim is he who believes in Allah, in His Book, the Holy Qur'ān, and in His last Prophet, Muhammad (peace be upon him).
4. A Muslim should act righteously in this world and, in particular, he should offer the obligatory prayer, fast, pay Zakāt and perform the Hajj, without which there can be no concept of an Islamic life and which distinguishes a Muslim from other fellow-beings.

When you turn to Allah in every prayer and repeatedly recite: “Show us the Straight Path”, with the conviction that you are standing before Him and soliciting guidance to the true and straight path, your prayer will be granted and you will be guided on to the Straight Path.

Only those persons can be full of the milk of human kindness, can have respect for man and human equality, and be imbued with sincerity and love for the Muslims, who are on the Straight Path. Undoubtedly, for such persons is the reward of Allah.

ABSTAINING FROM VICES

The well-being and prosperity of every society, its peace and stability, progress and eminence depend basically on its moral system. Morality is the thread that binds together the different components of a society and safeguards it against disintegration and disorder. Morality denotes a set of values which enables man to discern good from evil, right from wrong and the praiseworthy from the despicable. These values are the touchstone to determine a man's character and his plus and minus points are accordingly placed in corresponding compartments.

It is the moral values obtaining in a society that provide it a decisive yardstick to measure virtue and vileness and enable it to verify the righteousness or wickedness of its individuals. Those individuals who respect established moral values and conform to them in thought and deed are considered worthy of respect and honour and those who disregard or contravene them fail to achieve any position of respectability. The moral law of a society is the most potent instrument and effective method at its disposal to induce its people to be good and to keep away from vice. It has to be quite sincere and firm in its socio-ethical attitude if it wants to save itself from corruption and safeguard its people from falling into bad ways. The values which are given pre-eminence in its moral system by a community constitute the ideal of its people, and they strive to so coordinate their character and their conduct as to be able to approximate to it.

The Holy Qur'an enjoins us to teach and promote moral excellence and to dissuade people from doing bad deeds. This Qur'anic guidance is not just an advice; it is a categorical injunction making propagation of righteousness obligatory for the Muslim *Ummah* and maintaining that as its distinctive quality.

The aim of Islamic teachings is to produce the ideal man who will be a model of goodness and moral excellence and whose being will be a blessing and a source of comfort and well-being for his fellow-men, indeed for all that lives. Man has been made Allah's vicegerent on earth. As Allah's deputy one should act in consonance with this high position and work for what He has ordained one to accomplish. Allah's benign wish is that goodness and piety should flourish and prosper on the earth. Virtue and wisdom should reign supreme, peace and well-being should be universal, nobility and human kindness should triumph, honesty and integrity should be the norm of human conduct. Evil should not find it possible to stir. Cruelty and exploitation should be non-existent. Injustice and callousness should be in complete check and falsehood and calumny should not be able to raise their ugly heads. Such is the social

order that Islam aims to create. Hence its insistence on creating an environment in which right action would be easy and wrong action would be almost impossible. Islam does not rest satisfied with just tendering good advice and offering moral inducements. It aims at a complete remoulding of the pattern of individual and collective life so as to facilitate man's journey on the straight path and to make it exceedingly hard for him to go astray. With this end in view, it provides comprehensive guidelines in day-to-day mutual dealings and transactions along with providing moral and devotional precepts. It leads man from the mosque to the school, and from there to the field of politics, trade and commerce and its guiding principles encompass the whole range of human affairs. Righteous people do occasionally have to face some difficult situations and they tend to despair. The Qur'an encourages these good people not to lose hope and not to get restless. It assures them that if they are true believers, success, glory and eminence are ordained for them. Acts of worship are an effective means of keeping a man on the right path and of protecting him from vice. The Qur'an declares submission to Allah and His worship as the main purpose of his creation. Prayer sustains man in his position of total submission to Allah. It keeps him close to Allah and confirms him in his obedience to His commands. Observance of Allah's injunctions makes him desist from doing wrong and protects him from evil. It has been said about the congregational prayer:

"...Lo! Worship preserveth from lewdness and iniquity..."

[Qur'an, XXIX:45]

In reality acts of worship and prayer are not an end in themselves. They are a means to a higher purpose and that purpose is to train a man to bow his head before Allah in total acceptance of His will, to do deeds that have Allah's approbation and to keep away from acts which Allah disapproves and which are obnoxious to Him.

Fasting is one of the fundamentals of Islam. Its purpose according to the Qur'an is to inculcate fear of Allah and devoutness in Muslims and to train them to abstain from vice:

"O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, even as it was prescribed for those before you, that ye may ward off (evil);"

[Qur'an, II:183]

Fasting is such an efficacious annual course of self-discipline that by reminding man every moment of the limits fixed for him by Allah it trains him to abide by them. During the period of abstinence even things that man is normally allowed to do become impermissible. The food that he eats every day and is *Halal* (has religious sanction) becomes taboo for the duration of the fast. This is symbolic of the fact and a reminder thereof that he is the slave of Allah and whenever Allah gives a command it is for him to obey. He does with a willing

heart and with much zeal whatever he is required to do, however much his carnal self may instigate him against it. Never does he go anywhere near things or deeds which Allah and his Holy Prophet have forbidden.

Sermons and words of kindly advice are not enough to protect man from vice. Mere formulation of rules and moral injunctions is also not of much help. A congenial environment and social atmosphere is essential to make it possible for him to stay away from bad and evil things – a social milieu where nobody will coerce a person who wants to stay good, to act against his conscience. Those who do not like to offer bribe should not find it compulsive to offer it. Similarly those who find it repugnant to accept bribe should not find it hard not to accept it. They should be complimented and honoured for their honesty. They should be able to find a position which ensures their dignity and honest livelihood. And in like manner the social situation should be conducive to abstinence from every social evil – an environment that will encourage every person to select for himself the path of righteousness.

I would like to mention here a point which, in my view, is of particular relevance to the main theme of this discourse. If it is intended to protect the people from being allured by vice, then we will have to take concrete measures and will have to create conditions which will serve as positive incentives for people to give up their bad habits and to start forming good ones. The habit of telling lies can be given up only when it is replaced by a strong and compulsive desire to speak the truth. And this objective can be achieved only when we are – one and all – determined to work for it untiringly. This noble task cannot be left to any single group or class of people: As long as our entire *Ummah*, that is, each one of us Muslims does not take up this challenge, it will not be possible to achieve the objective. The consequences of vile acts and misdeeds are being borne by the whole nation. In the same manner the whole *Ummah* will enjoy the fruits of righteous action and elimination of evil from our midst.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ACTION IN LIFE

The significance of action in life is evident from the fact that it is impossible to conceive life that is bereft of action. Motion and action constitute life while inactivity and inertia stand for death. It is action that leads man to heaven and also paves his way to hell. The cessation or absence of action implies the end of life. Inactivity turns a person listless, lackadaisical and weak, even unsure and cowardly. On the contrary, action renders him energetic, self-confident and honourable. Active and hard-working persons have confidence in themselves. It is this self-confidence which impels them to do great deeds and leads them to success and prosperity. In fact, only a self-confident person can make his mark in life. A man who lacks self-confidence can achieve little in life. Inactivity produces a kind of lassitude and cowardice, which further corrodes his potential for action. As a result, he slips more and more into laziness and inertia and, consequently it becomes more and more difficult for him to do anything worthwhile. Lack of initiative stills his ambition and demoralises him and he loses his nerve.

A person who is active and dynamic is never in need of help from others in his work. He enjoys to do all his work himself. Thus, not only is he not embarrassed by being unnecessarily indebted to others, but leads a full and enriching life. The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him), was by disposition a most active person and performed all his personal chores himself. Even the lowliest manual work did not make him feel shy or embarrassed. He would darn his clothes, milch his goats and mend his shoes. He chose to do all his work himself rather than trouble others about it. His servant, Ḥaḍrat Anas Bin Mālik, states that the Holy Prophet did more for him than he (Anas) did for the Prophet.

The Prophet of Allah would purchase and fetch the necessary provisions for the home himself and would also do the dusting and the cleaning. Besides, he would lend a helping hand in the performance of other domestic chores. He once said that he disliked ostentation.

Once, while he was repairing his house, two of his Companions came to him and assisted him in completing the work. When it was over, the Prophet of Allah prayed for them. On another occasion, during a journey, when the need arose to prepare the meals and the necessary work was distributed, he took it upon himself to bring firewood from the jungle. His Companions told him that they would do that part of the work also. But he declined the offer, and said, "I do not want to stay aloof from you all or to act the superior. Allah does not like those who talk or behave big". He did not feel shy doing the humblest job or work.

The young girls of Madina would come to him and say, "O Prophet of Allah! this is what we want to be done for us". He would instantly get up to do the needful. Once he saw that an ailing slave, afraid of his master, was grinding grain and crying out of distress. The Prophet of Allah made him sit aside and did his work for him. When it was over, he gave the slave a word of encouragement and told him to call him again if he needed help.

Similarly, once an old slave was watering the garden of his master and, his hands trembled out of sheer exhaustion and fatigue. When the Holy Prophet saw this, he took the bucket from him and did the job for him. Not only that, he also asked the old man to let him know unhesitatingly whenever he needed a helping hand. These are but a few incidents picked up at random to show that the importance of work, indeed hard work, was always stressed by the Prophet of Allah, through his own example. His whole life was a perfect model and unique example of determination, ceaseless endeavour, strenuous struggle, indomitable courage and perseverance in the face of heavy odds. The moment he proclaimed his prophetic mission to call people to Islam, an unprecedented storm of opposition arose from every quarter and he was caught in the swell of deadly conspiracies aimed at destroying him. He had to face extreme odds but he did not give up or slow down in his mission and worked day and night to carry it forward. Eventually, he conquered all obstacles and overcame all opposition. His love's labour made the mountain of impediments look no more than a mole-hill. Doubtless, devotion to the goal, continual struggle and constant effort, bring success sooner or later, and deliver one from hardships. This is precisely the way of successful people and of dynamic nations. This world is the place of action and endeavour. It is the place to prove your mettle. The opportunity to work and to act is limited to one's life-span. The reward that one will get in the Hereafter will be exactly in accordance with what one achieves here, both in quality and quantity. He shall get no second opportunity.

In this short span of life man should act with the firm realization that his every action, every movement, every endeavour will leave a lasting imprint and whatever he is awarded in the Hereafter will be exactly in accordance therewith. The Holy Qur'an teaches us:

*"And whoso doth good an atom's weight will see it then,
And whoso doth ill an atom's weight will see it then."*

[Qur'an, XCIX:7-8]

Through these words Allah has categorically proclaimed the irrevocable basis for reward and retribution. It is none other than the one summed up aphoristically, "as you sow, so shall you reap". Every action has its reaction. Nobody should harbour the misconception that he can get away with any wrong doing. Just as the throwing of a pebble in the sea must of necessity create ripples in the water, human action produces commensurate consequences.

The Holy Qur'an says:

*“Whoso bringeth a good deed will have better than its worth; and such are safe from fear that Day.
And whoso bringeth an ill deed, such will be flung down on their faces in the Fire. Are ye rewarded aught save what ye did?”*

[Qur’ān, XXVII:89-90]

According to this revelation by Allah, on the Day of Judgment nothing of the kind of wealth, fame, honour, power, race or the house shall avail at all. Human deeds alone will be the deciding factor, as the Holy Prophet warned his dearest daughter, Fatima, “Your deeds, and not I, will be of avail to you on the Day of Judgement”.

CONTINUANCE IN RIGHTEOUS ACTION

The continuous endeavour, we discuss here, pertains to man's morals and his character. It is one of those moral excellences and noble attributes without which a man has no worth or value, whatsoever, in society. Only a man who possesses higher moral values endeavours ceaselessly to reach the goal he has set before himself. Inertia and idleness, whether it is at the individual or the collective level, is a symptom of decadence and decline while dynamic and continuous endeavour is a sign of progress and ascendance.

If you look keenly into the matter you will agree about the above conclusion regarding the man who is incapable of sustained and continuous effort. But the obvious fact is that the man who has accepted a concept or a belief, will make all possible effort to overcome the odds that obstruct his progress on his chosen path. No power however high or mighty will be able to overawe him. No catastrophe, no mishap, no jolt, however strong, will make him falter or waver. He will not sell his faith and belief to save his life and property or to gain power and authority. Because the goal he has set before himself and which he is continuously striving to achieve is far higher than all these. Suppose a person has made the eternal abode in the world Hereafter his ultimate goal, and the approbation of Allah and His Holy Prophet his sole purpose in life, do you think he can waste even a fleeting moment through negligence or inertia? He knows within his heart that a brief moment's carelessness will take him ages away from his destination. And when on the Day of Judgement he is required to account for each valuable moment of his life he will not be able to give any plausible answer to how he used his trust, how he spent the days of his youth and how he came into old age. That is why Islam calls this world "the abode of action" and tells all believers to live as men of action. Allah the Most Exalted has said, "Say unto people: Act and act right, soon Allah and His Prophet will see all your deeds and actions".

The word "action" occurs at various places in the Holy Qur'an. But it always has identical meanings and signifies the same thing. According to exegetes action means unfailing adherence to the faith and total belief in the One-ness of Allah and to be steadfast in one's true conviction, with full confidence and firm determination, through all trials and tribulations. The word has another nuance, but in the same context. Because it pertains to moral excellence, continuing to pursue a wrong goal or keeping steady on the path of evil and falsehood, it cannot be termed "continuous endeavour".

Quite the contrary. In the terminology of the Holy Qur'an it will be called stubbornness, rebellion or persistence in evading the truth. Concerted and sustained effort to achieve a noble end, and to keep up the effort despite odds and

impediments is called steadfastness. There is another *Hadīth* pertaining to constancy, *Hadrat Uthmān* (may Allah be happy with him) was, once, asked what was the meaning of it. He said, "The meaning of sincere action in reality is true belief in the One-ness of Allah".

Hadrat Abu Bakr (may Allah be happy with him) has given such a comprehensive and fine definition of continuous endeavour that it stands out as unique and unparalleled. According to him the happy combination of faith and righteous action is real constancy and continuous endeavour. Belief in the One-ness of Allah to be able to have its full impact on human life needs patience and perseverance. And this is a revolutionary concept-which affects all spheres of life i.e., politics, economy, customs and social traditions, individual attitudes and collective behaviour-patterns. A time comes in this pursuit when your own people become alien and every atom of the earth under your feet becomes hostile and the whole world seems pitched against you. If only the tongue announces acceptance of the One-ness of Allah and we lose our power of resistance under the stress of difficulties and hardships, we should know that the faith is there but righteous action is totally missing, which fact makes the faith faulty, imperfect and fragile. Because those who are constant and steadfast will never yield ground. A person can and does, lying with his naked back on burning desert sand, like *Hadrat Bilāl* keep on saying 'Aḥad', 'Aḥad' (The One and Alone, the One and Alone), one can refuse to move away from the path of the true faith like *Hadrat Suhaib* and *Hadrat Ammār* (may Allah be happy with them both) despite nerve-shattering torture and unbearable physical torment. Such action will be called continuous endeavour or righteous action for the sake of the life Hereafter.

Just consider the matter from the psychological and moral point of view. Does a man who cannot, in conformity with his belief and faith, make his life active and dynamic and does not have the strength or the courage to have a confrontation with the whole world, deserve to be recognised as a man of character or a person of integrity? And how can he be called a righteous and practising Muslim, if he does not strive to reshape his society in the mould of the faith he professes.

The fact of the matter is that we have limited the sphere of righteous action to ritual worship only. In truth righteous action includes every overt or covert step taken by a person to demonstrate to the world that he does not recognise any power besides Allah, his Sustainer, Creator and Ruler. He obeys only one set of commands, the one that is given to him by the Holy Qur'an – adherence to the *Sunnah* of the Holy Prophet which the Qur'an itself enjoins. This is the true monotheism of Islam and this is what constitutes the righteous action which has been termed constancy and steadfastness by *Hadrat Uthmān* and *Hadrat Abu Bakr* (may Allah be happy with them both).

There is a tradition in *Sahīh Muslim* that *Hadrat Sufyān bin Abdullah Saqafi* requested the Holy Prophet to tell him one definitive injunction of Islam by following which he might never need any other man's guidance in matters of the true faith. The Prophet acceded to his request and advised, "Declare your

voluntary faith in the One-ness of Allah and be constant in it thereafter". Apparently, this succinct advice comprising only a few words seems so straight and simple. But just ponder to which life-style it points the way and what lofty moral character and personal excellence it demands of the person who accepts it.

In fact, the first demand pertains to *Īmān*. It requires complete acceptance and total commitment. The second demand pertains to the realisation of all imperatives of the faith. The perfection of the faith consists in dedication and sincerity, true intent, uniform pursuit of the goal and continuous endeavour, besides doing one's duty and fulfilling one's obligations to his fellow-beings despite adverse circumstances and persistent hardship. He who is able to fulfil this dual responsibility has reached that loftiness of belief and righteous action which is Islam's ultimate aim.

The repeated stress on continuous endeavour is an implied indication that all the forces of falsehood will be arraigned against you. If you don't get scared and keep constant in your pursuit of the objective you have set before yourself, you will have fulfilled the obligation you owe to your *Īmān*. This is why when Hadrat Ali (may Allah be happy with him) and Hadrat Abbas (may Allah be happy with him) were asked about the meaning of constancy, said in answer: "Fulfilling one's obligations is constancy". Of course it has many delicate and sensitive stages. Occasionally one is called upon to forfeit his life for the sake of his cause and suffer crucifixion — so, if a person keeps fulfilling all his obligations and responsibilities, he has attained the loftiest heights of righteous action.

After acceptance of the true faith and becoming firm in belief, the Holy Qur'an requires corresponding action from a believer. And passivity and negligence whether they pertain to earning one's livelihood or to the collective economy, whether they are in relation to worship or mutual dealings or concern knowledge and the arts are considered to belong to the category of detestable traits by Allah and his Holy Prophet. What the Qur'an and *Sunnah* call constancy is in fact the other name of continuous endeavour. Because constancy is not mere permanence or absence of change. It is the state of perpetuity in righteous action. And the tidings given in the verse on constancy is addressed to them also who have continuance in their goodly deeds. Allah the Most Exalted says:

*"Lo! those who say: Our Lord is Allah,
and afterward are upright, the angels descend upon them,
saying: Fear not nor grieve, but hear good tidings of the
Paradise which ye are promised.*

*We are your protecting friends in the life of the world and in the
Hereafter. There ye will have (all) that your souls desire, and there ye
will have (all) for which ye pray."*

[Qur'an, XLI:30-31]

This tidings and the blessed life consequent upon it is the recompense only of continuous endeavour. The Holy Prophet has explained this point in these words: "Only those works please Allah which are done regularly and have continuity".

Lo! man is in a state of loss. Save those who believe and do good works . . .

[Qur'an, CIH:2,3]

THE BASIC ELEMENTS OF ISLAMIC CULTURE

Before discussing the Islamic culture and the elements that go to make it, it is perhaps necessary to clearly understand what we mean by culture. Culture has been defined in many different ways. Every writer and thinker gives his own interpretation of what culture means. One definition of culture is that it means intellectual progress and evolution. It is also said that the culture of a nation is contained in its ethos, thoughts and ideas, and its distinctive life-style. Some scholars regard culture as the composite of certain attributes, customs and tradition, mores, beliefs, and laws and their observance by an organized group i.e., the people constituting that culture. Yet another definition that has been offered for culture is that it is the end-product of the intellectual, moral, literary, socio-economic and political activities spread over a long period and assuming a definite overall pattern.

In short, different writers and thinkers have, in their own different ways, tried to explain the significance and meaning of culture. But the fact is that culture means much more than what is reflected in language and literature, performing arts, the storehouse of knowledge, customs and traditions, social political and economic organisations and the mode of living of a people. Culture, in fact, is that spiritual impulse which runs through the nexus of its thought and conduct. It is this impulse which is the base of a nation's total entity and the core of its socio-economic, political, literary and artistic tradition and the characteristics that distinguish its culture from that of other races and nations. The essence of a culture is its attitude to life and concept of human nature. This basic concept of life will determine the development of a nation's language and literature, its artistic and scientific growth, the shape of its socio-economic and political institutions and customs and traditions. It is for this reason that some thinkers have designated culture as the composite character of a people. As the outward aspect of a person is to some extent an index of his character, in the like manner the outward manifestations of a nation in language and literature, arts, social and political organisation are indicative of its national character or, in other words, its culture.

The first and foremost element of the Islamic culture is an active belief in Allah and what follows from it viz., faith in revealed Books, angels, prophets of Allah and belief in the Hereafter. This faith tells a man what he really is. It specifies the real purpose of his life and endows him with a clear concept of life. On the basis of this concept he will develop his links with other fellow-beings. On the basis of this life-view he will know whether he is a free agent or a mere puppet. Islam gives man a balanced picture of life and answers the

fundamental questions of man's position in the world and to what extent he is free and accountable for his actions. If man begins to feel that he has absolute freedom and there are no checks upon him, he might run amók, and begin committing all kinds of sins and criminal acts. If, on the other hand, he regards himself as totally predetermined and powerless, possessing no will of his own, he will lose all initiative and the will to act. He will bow down in submission before everything which, *prima facie*, appears more powerful than himself, and forfeit the greatness which Allah Himself has endowed him with. This will automatically result in the death of culture and decay of civilization. Islam by declaring man to be the representative of Allah on earth, has vouchsafed to him the highest degree of eminence. At the same time it sets the limits to his freedom as well as pre-determination. Another aspect of the greatness of Islam is its universality. The culture of Islam is not confined to any particular region or age: it is for all nations and for all times.

This particular feature of Islam promotes egalitarianism. All men are the children of Adam. All men are therefore equal. What are the attributes of a great civilization? The attributes of a great civilization, in brief, are that all of its members, whether white or black, rich or poor, whether speaking the language of this country or that, whether belonging to one race or another, whether living in a desolate desert or in tropical abundance, should have equal rights and possess equal opportunities to make a place for themselves in the world. No person belonging to that civilization should be subservient to another and each should have an opportunity to utilize his talents and to reach a station in keeping with his ability. If despite openings and promising opportunities, a man lags behind, then it is his own lack of initiative and ability, and the society is not to blame. But the ideal civilization should afford equal opportunity to every individual to make good in life. One of the basic elements of the culture of Islam is equality of economic opportunity.

Patronage of knowledge and erudition is also one of the elements of the culture of Islam. The first word of the Qur'an itself is *iqra*: "Recite" or "Read". The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said that he had been sent by Allah as Teacher, for the whole of mankind, and this saying alone is enough to highlight the importance Islam attaches to knowledge and learning. The Holy Prophet, by saying that the ink of the scholar is more precious than the blood of martyrs, made learning an integral part of the culture of Islam.

In the Qur'an Allah Himself has said:

"We have honoured the children of Adam."

[Qur'an, XVII:70]

This makes respect for human life a basic tenet of Islam, and, no matter what faith a man subscribes to, his life is sacrosanct. It is the responsibility of the Islamic state that it should safeguard the lives of all its citizens and ensure their rights of privacy and personal freedom. Ethical conduct, which derives from faith, together with piety and continence which are the measure of a man's

superiority over others are the other elements of Islamic culture. The Qur'ān has said:

*"O mankind! Lo! We have created you
male and female, and have made you
nations and tribes that ye may know one another.
Lo! the noblest of you, in
the sight of Allah, is the
best in conduct,"*

[Qur'ān, XLIX:13]

The more righteous an individual is, the more honourable and worthy of respect he will be in an Islamic society. Ethical conduct and virtue is the criterion that determines a man's position in the polity. Islam has made moral excellence the pivot of Islamic culture. However great a man may be, if he is devoid of moral excellence, he does not deserve any respect. Social approbation can only be earned through the cultivation of piety and righteousness.

Social justice is also a basic element of the culture of Islam. The Qur'ān has repeatedly called for observance of the canons of justice. A society that forswears justice would be unstable and decadent. When justice is the norm of social life amongst a people, the deserving persons will be rewarded and the undeserving will not be allowed to prosper at the cost of others. This will ensure the health of the society and its continuous progress to higher levels of attainment. In sum, the culture of Islam brings into being a balanced social order which ensures peace and tranquillity, freedom, progress, and prosperity for all its members.

UNITY OF THE *UMMAH*

Islam, unlike most other religions, takes within its scope all aspects of human life, individual as well as collective. Its system caters for the spiritual as well as the material needs of man. It contains injunctions regarding obligatory prayer and worship as well as principles to govern and regulate worldly affairs. The universality of Islam requires that the *Ummah* should function as one entity united in word and deed. The Muslims have been enjoined to themselves adhere to the *Shari'ah* and also invite others to the fold of Islam. They have also been directed to do a regular exercise of individual and collective stock-taking. This means that they should try, as far as possible, to bid people to goodness and dissuade them from doing evil. But this would be possible only when the Muslim nation forges a united front and through unity acquires the capability to overcome all obstacles and hurdles in its way, and take measures to enforce the Islamic way of life. Allah has made Muslims 'the middle nation' and this, because it bids people to act righteously and prevents the commission of evil. This dual function the Muslim *Ummah* can discharge effectively only if it closes its ranks and becomes an organic whole and an invincible power. It is because of this inherent need that Allah, the Most Exalted, has made His help and succour conditional upon collective faith and true belief. He Himself has said:

"For ye will overcome them if ye are (indeed) believers."

[Qur'an, III:139]

This, in other words, means that the achievement of predominance which may be called a natural human desire, is possible only when all individual members of the *Ummah* are so completely united that they function like limbs of a single body and become, in actual fact, brother unto one another, share one another's joys and woes to the full and are, in their unity, so strong that even the mightiest power on earth cannot obstruct their onward march. They should work together to make the true faith of Islam ascendant over other ways of life and establish its pre-eminence as a complete code of life.

Who has better knowledge of the need of this unity than Allah, the Most Exalted? Without unity the Muslim world will be subject to fragmentation like the other nations of the world and the purpose which providence has for Islam will remain unfulfilled. It is the avowed aim of Allah that Muslims should be the world's "middle nation", "Calling to good, and bidding honour and forbidding dishonour", taking the message of Islam to the farthest corners of

the world, their final aim being the supremacy of Islam throughout the world. This heavy responsibility cannot be successfully discharged by a weak nation afflicted with inner dissensions. It can only be shouldered by a nation that is united and strong, and its united strength should be such as to cause envy and awe among other nations. This unity should be so firm and unshakeable as to be impervious to the blandishments and enticements offered by the enemies of Islam. In fact its complete unity, its being one in thought and deed, should serve as a shining example for the rest of the world. Islam is a religion that does not approve of being imposed forcibly upon other nations and peoples. It forbids us from even attempting to do so. Allah has said: "No compulsion is there in religion".

What the above verse implies is that those who can distinguish between right and wrong will themselves recognise the fact that Islam represents the right path. Accordingly Muslims have been clearly told never to use force in calling people to it. Muslims should rather serve as examples for others by presenting a glorious spectacle of human brotherhood, so that other nations come to feel that Muslims indeed are worthy of emulation. A *hadith* of the Holy Prophet (may peace be upon him) has it that Muslims should be like bricks in a wall, each supporting the other. If Muslims support one another like bricks that are joined to each other, they will form an entity that would be impregnable. Allah, the Most Exalted, has Himself referred to the brotherhood of Muslims:

"The believers are naught else than brothers."

[Qur'an, XLIX:10]

The gains and the losses sustained by the Muslims will be shared by them all. In their unity lies their strength. One reason of the superiority of the Muslims to other peoples of the world lies in the fact that every Muslim endeavours, solely for the welfare and the pre-eminence of the *Ummah* and to keep the nation united. He is always ready even for the supreme sacrifice.

If we look at the history of the Muslim *Ummah*, we would easily observe that Muslims once were the most successful and exemplary nation on earth. And the reason was their complete unity. They were like a rampart that was invincible. But the moment sectarian groups began to take out the bricks and make their own weak domains, the fortress of Islam began to crumble. Honour and self-respect became things of the past. In the last century there was not a single Muslim country that had even the semblance of independence. The position may have changed on paper in the last few decades. But the reality is absolutely horrendous. We are sorry witnesses to the agonising scene of disarray even to-day. We have committed a major sin by transgressing the commandments of the Qur'an and have failed in adhering to the *Sunnah* of the Holy Prophet. The situation demands immediate action to remove the causes of dissension within the *Ummah* as a whole as well as those emerging in its components. Those who do not learn a lesson from history are consigned to oblivion. Where today are the empires of ancient Egypt, Babylon, Greece, Rome and Persia? Our

age has brought home to us the imperative necessity of unity, reorganization of the *Ummah*, reconciliation of mutual differences and re-unification of all its components into one organic whole. Islam teaches self-sacrifice and self-effacement for the sake of others, and mutual sympathy. But once the links joining the *Ummah* become weak and the higher moral values of Islam are lost sight of by Muslims, disintegration of the *Ummah* becomes easy and inevitable. Once the members of the *Ummah* become self-centred and place their own interests over and above those of the *Ummah*, it will inexorably be subject to centrifugal forces that will tear it apart. We have enervated the body of the *Ummah* because we have inflicted our self-interest upon it. The existence of Muslims as Muslims is only possible under the protective canopy of faith. When the presence of this very umbrella is damaged by our evil deeds, who can shield us from the onslaught of anti-Islam forces. If we wish to live as an *Ummah* and move forward we shall have to create unity within our ranks according to the commandments of Allah and in the light of the way shown to us by the Holy Prophet. While I am saying this, my ears are resounding with the words of Allah:

"And lo! this your religion is one religion and I am your Lord, so keep your duty unto Me."

[Qur'ān, XXIII:52]

I bow in utter submission before Allah and pray that this command of His should reach your hearts and not remain confined to your eyes so that we may all join together and work for the unity of the *Ummah*. And do remember that in unity alone resides our welfare, prosperity and dignity.

COOPERATION IN COMMONWEAL

The Creator of the universe and the Lord of all beings has infinite love for His creatures and it is His wish that all men should obey Him and live together in goodwill and harmony so that this earth continues to be a place of peace and welfare, tranquillity and contentment. He desires that all creatures should live in comfort and repose.

The greatest manifestation of peace and repose is the existence of mutual affection and love between people. They should treat one another as equals, behave sympathetically amongst themselves, help one another and share the distress and anguish of their fellow-beings. This point has been beautifully expressed by an Urdu poet in a verse:

“Man was created to feel the heart ache (at the distress of others). Otherwise the angels were good enough for submission and worship”.

Now the question arises: should a man help other men invariably without any distinction? The Islamic *Shari'ah* does not believe in purposeless and potentially harmful mutual cooperation. Islam lays down the rule for believers that, in order to establish a peaceful and tranquil society, cooperation is necessary and should be offered only in works and social purposes which are good, righteous and aimed at the general welfare. A Muslim cannot and must not lend a helping hand in acts which are sinful, in the eyes of Allah, and in evil designs against fellow-beings. This means that Islam enjoins mutual help and cooperation only on the basis of general good and righteous action. Becoming partners in vice and vile deeds is not only a sin but a crime against religion. This, because encouraging vile and evil deeds results in righteousness becoming subdued and oppressed, thereby starting a chain reaction of sin and vice. Practical instances of this fact can be seen even in this advanced modern age — they were available in plenty at every stage in ages gone by.

In ancient times this absence of the prerequisite of righteousness in mutual cooperation was the cause of most wars and massacres. A person belonging to a particular tribe did a particular thing and called upon his fellow tribesmen to come and help. It was incumbent on all members of his tribe to hearken to his call and come forward to lend a hand irrespective of the fact whether the call was for a good deed or a shameful act. Even today, when man claims to be civilised and practising reflective morality, many gruesome excesses and acts of injustice are committed on racial or geographical grounds. Islam not only repudiates such parochialism but declares it to be an attribute of unbelief.

Accordingly Allah, the Most Exalted, has categorically enjoined the Muslims through the Holy Qur'an to cooperate with, and render help to one another, in acts of virtue and righteousness and never to be a party to acts of sin and waywardness. Through such clear injunctions, Islam has supplied, to all truth-loving people, a basis and a criterion for mutual cooperation and assistance and informed the Muslims in clear and explicit terms that through cooperation in virtue and commonweal man can win Allah's approbation, because it is in complete conformity with His will. As opposed to it, cooperation in badness and evil is the worst contravention of Allah's will and is bound to annoy Him.

There is a very well-known Saying of the Holy Prophet on this subject; "Help your brothers in faith, whether they be the oppressors or the oppressed". The Companions were taken aback at this statement and humbly said, "O Prophet of Allah we do understand the virtue in helping the oppressed but helping the oppressor...". The Holy Prophet did not let them complete the sentence and interposed, "Help to the oppressor consists in making him desist from his intended excess". The true implication of help and aid is to keep a man away from committing an evil act because it will save him from Allah's retribution and chastisement of Hell. What greater service can a man render to another man than to ensure his well-being in the life Hereafter.

Cooperation in righteousness is compulsory in all events. Aiding an oppressor in his act of oppression even if he is one's real brother is not permissible at all in Islam. Because in its code of conduct cooperation is necessarily linked up with goodness. If a person sets up a school or an academy, a hospital or an orphanage or is devoted to the propagation of what is good and elimination of what is evil, it becomes obligatory for all Muslims to help this good man in his noble undertakings. As against this, it will be open disobedience to the injunctions of Islam to cooperate in criminal and evil acts like smuggling, black-marketing, food adulteration, hoarding, profiteering, cheating, bribery etc. Cooperation with a thief, a criminal who has no conscience, a dishonest rascal means becoming his partner in all his sins. That is why it has been said that those who indulge in usury and those who pay them interest and all those who are directly or indirectly involved in this vice are equally guilty of a grave sin. Help and cooperation in such anti-Islamic acts is a clear defiance of the teachings of Islam and is likely to cause grave damage to the society.

It is therefore the duty of Muslims to help and cooperate only in good deeds. A point that needs to be considered here is whether those people who pay the amount of Zakāt, and charity to professional beggars instead of investing it in welfare projects such as orphanages, schools, hospitals etc., are cooperating in righteousness and commonweal? Are they sure that they are not encouraging professional beggary? The precept that no cooperation should be extended at all in bad things should always be remembered as a matter of principle. One should in fact overtly discourage them so that corruption and its various forms of manifestation can be put a stop to.

Society is nothing but the sum total of individuals. The happiness and the well-being of all individuals depends on all being morally good, on their being

cooperative and helpful in all good works and on their trying to dissuade, to the extent they can, others from doing bad deeds. When this is the general pattern of behaviour, the society will inevitably be comprised of good persons and all its members will be committed to goodness and virtue.

In view of this fact it is a fundamental duty of every member of the society to lend a helping hand in all good works and to persuade fellow-beings to be good and righteous. This type of moral excellence in individuals is still a rare commodity in our society. For instance a smuggler, who in actual fact is an anti-social person, an enemy of the people and the country and is always engaged in heinous crimes, gets the indirect support and cooperation of the common people, who consciously connive at his abominable vices and by this act of connivance cause great harm not only to the society as a whole, but also to themselves.

People generally complain that some people indulge in blackmarketing, increase the prices arbitrarily and at will, and do not feel any pangs of conscience in adulterating foodstuffs. The limit of their criminal, anti-social activity is reached when they do not spare even life-saving drugs from adulteration. All these evils flourish because we fail to take any cognisance of them. We do not point out the culprits, the professional criminals to the law enforcing agencies in time. On the contrary, we treat them with respect and affection. In other words, on the one hand, we do not cooperate with the government of the time in the eradication of anti-social elements, nor do we warn these enemies of the people against the retribution that is their inevitable lot in the Hereafter, and on the other, we give them a place of high respect and honour in our society. By purchasing their evil merchandise we commit the serious crime of patronising evil.

The injunctions of the Islamic *Shari'ah* in this respect are quite clear and explicit: Cooperate only in acts of righteousness and collective well-being. We should pray to Allah the Almighty to give all members of the Muslim *Ummah* the ability to know and realise their responsibilities. If this happens, our society can be rid of all evils and all criminal tendencies in no time.

The world of Islam is at present actively engaged in social reorganisation with a view to reshaping collective life on the basic of Islamic teachings. It is, therefore, the joint responsibility of each man, woman and child to be actively associated with this noble endeavour, this lofty mission. May Allah guide us in establishing a social order free of all undesirable things, a social order which ensures the honour, the dignity, the life and the well-being, material as well as spiritual, of all its members, irrespective of caste or creed, because as men, all are equal before Allah.

PEACE

Since its settlement on earth, the biggest problem of the human race has been to ensure stable peace and well-being. But as it was Allah who facilitated man's sojourn in his earthly abode, the guidance in regard to purifying the human society of fear and dread and leading a peaceful life was also given by Him. If peaceful conditions do not prevail in a society and turbulence becomes the norm, man will not be in a position to discharge any duty, individual or collective, whatsoever. Hence peace is held by Allah as His blessing and munificence. He says in the Holy Qur'an:

*"So let them worship the Lord of this House.
Who hath fed them against hunger.
And hath made them safe from fear."*

[Qur'an, CVI:3-4]

If these profound words of the Sustainer of the universe are pondered in depth one will easily understand the importance of peace and reasons thereof. In this verse, in the context of this blessing, are also mentioned fruits which are essentially related to peace. When peaceful conditions did not prevail, it was not possible for man to truly serve the Lord of the House. It was also difficult for him to provide for himself, because economic endeavour is impossible without ensuring mobility, safe travel, peace and tranquillity. And when opportunities to earn a living are reduced to almost nil it will become well-nigh impossible to obtain even the barest subsistence. Life will start yielding place to death. The blessing of sojourn on Allah's earth will lose its meaning. Therefore a cradle of peace and security is a necessary accompaniment to the first breath of life. Otherwise, it will not be possible to fulfil the broader demands and requirements of life.

It was undoubtedly to ensure a durable peace, to rid the world of turbulence and corruption, bloodshed and warfare, antagonism and confrontation, tyranny, exploitation, cruelty, intimidation and dominance of man over man that prophets were assigned in different periods of history and to different peoples to show humanity the straight path.

The message that they all brought from Allah, the Most Exalted, and their call to the people to return to the fold of truth and righteousness, is what constitutes *Imān* (the true faith). No doubt exegetes have pointed to many sources of which it is, a probable derivative. But the consensus is on *Amn* (Peace) being its root. *Imān* is *amn* (peace) because a man by manifesting his firm and full faith in Allah and His Messenger becomes safe and secure from the chastisement in the

world Hereafter. Even in this world, considering turmoil and corruption to be anti-faith he keeps away from violence, bloodshed, strife and war. And when a society builds itself on the foundations of belief in Allah and His prophets, the revealed Books and truth and righteousness, corruption is totally abolished from the earth and life on it becomes not only a true blessing but begins to seem the most glorious munificence of Allah, the Most Exalted.

The Holy Qur'ān condemns all such actions of men and measures as can destabilise the social order, pose a threat to peace or tend to promote corruption:

"And of mankind there is he whose conversation on the life of this world pleaseth thee (Muhammad), and he calleth Allah to witness as to that which is in his heart; yet he is the most rigid of opponents. And when he turneth away (from thee) his effort in the land is to make mischief therein and to destroy the crops and the cattle; and Allah loveth not mischief."

[Qur'ān, II:204–205]

This verse makes clear how Allah views corruption. In many verses a mention is made of bloodshed, strife, tyranny, cruelty and oppression and along with them it is said that corruption includes malice, burning of standing crops during hostilities or out of hatred, and genocide, and that Allah loathes corruption.

The question is not why anybody acts in this manner. The real problem is what this action is intrinsically and how it should be interpreted. Destruction of property, attempt to set barnyards and storehouses of grain on fire, trying to disrupt communications, plunder property and goods, trying to cause loss of human lives, putting orchards laden with fruit to pillage, to bring desolation to busy shopping arcades and markets, to aim at destroying cities and towns have been condemned, and without mincing words, clearly and unequivocally, both by religion and human conscience, as corruption and turbulence. All this has been termed 'the ruin of peace'.

Now the question arises what should be the pattern of behaviour of the nation that by accepting the true faith comprising belief in Allah and his Holy Prophet accepts the full responsibility of establishing peace in the world? It is not possible to create a situation which will totally and for ever end the possibility of collision. It is also natural and logical in the context of human nature that differences should occasionally arise. But obviously difference of opinion and disturbing the peace are two very different things. The limits of the two have been clearly specified. If difference of opinion takes a violent turn and ends up in turbulence and corruption, violence, destruction of property and life it only means that the believer has gone far beyond the limits of peace and stands deprived of a very important element of *Īmān*. He begins to be

counted, despite being a believer, amongst the horde of the corrupt. No doubt a situation of collision arises when Islam and disbelief are arrayed against each other. Then there is no evasion or avoidance. Then believers stake their very lives. This they do for the sake of a peace which is universal, higher, broader and nobler. And the unfaithful come out to fight the faithful for the dominion of falsehood over the world, which is the extreme form of turbulence and corruption. Even so, history bears testimony that the Holy Prophet always tried hard to avoid war and he showed his preference for peace. He opted, whenever possible, for a dialogue and negotiations. Just to give peace a chance, he did not hesitate to withdraw his followers at Hudaibya. The Holy Qur'ān has gone so far as to enjoin that during the battle if the enemy sues for peace, the fighting should be stopped forthwith:

*“So, if they hold aloof from you
and wage not war against you
and offer you peace,
Allah alloweth you no way against them.”*

[Qur'ān, IV:90]

It is also enjoined:

*“And if they incline to peace,
incline thou also to it, and trust in Allah.
Lo! He is the Hearer, the Knower.
And if they would deceive thee,
then lo! Allah is sufficient for thee.”*

[Qur'ān, VIII:61-62]

This clearly shows that peace and tranquillity are given such precedence over collision and war that even if the enemy is just aiming to use it as a ruse, his peace offer should not be rejected. Islam commands its followers to safeguard life, property and livestock and has shown its abhorrence of violence and display of force without justification.

The Holy Prophet could have conquered Mecca by the sword much earlier. But he did not want to initiate hostilities. And after the victory of Mecca, history witnessed the fact that the territory of Mecca became truly a haven of peace. And this great victory was won without bloodshed and was completely unsoiled by any reprisals or acts of vengeance.

The importance of peace was recognised and sustained even when Islam and disbelief were arrayed against and fought each other for supremacy in order to practically demonstrate to the world that what Islam calls *Īmān* is, on the basis of its end product, nothing but peace, and that the presence of believers in the world is a guarantee of peace for the whole of mankind. It was with this great purpose in view that the Holy Prophet declared in the moment of victory at Mecca: “Today is the day of righteousness and fulfilment of the promise”.

When there are explicit teachings of the Holy Qur'an and the example of the Holy Prophet in respect of the attitude the believers are to adopt vis-a-vis the enemies of Islam — an attitude motivated by the desire for peace and amity — it is not at all difficult to assess how detestable it is in the eyes of Islam to have bloodshed and war, turbulence and corruption amongst Muslims themselves because of mutual differences.

The truth is that the sustained and earnest efforts the believers made in the early period of Islamic history to keep this earth pure of all turbulence and corruption and discharged what they accepted as their religious responsibility with such success that their dynamic love of peace stands out as a unique feature in the history of mankind. Wherever they went, they created an atmosphere of peace and amity. Can anyone truthfully deny that Islam was a symbol of peace in every age and was recognised as such by the masses? The Muslims abolished disorder and started a unique period of safety and security in human society. They did this because it was a part of their mission. The Muslim *Ummah* was brought into being to establish the supremacy of peace and justice in the world. The followers of the Holy Prophet are called 'Momin' (the believers) because they believe in peace and always strive to create conditions that are conducive to the establishment of stable and durable peace.

If any act of omission or commission of the Muslim nation harms public peace or poses a threat to it, it is then time to do a little collective stock-taking, a time to examine whether what we are doing as Muslims is really in accord with our *Imān*. If the existence of the Muslim nation is a guarantee of peace, then what is the justification for disturbing the peace? Will it be wrong to say that a Muslim who poses a threat to peace has gone astray from the true path of his faith and that he has forgotten his unbreakable and essential relationship with peace and amity? Let all those who despite claiming to be Muslims, are contravening the precepts of Islam and causing mutual strife and internecine conflict, beware. Allah never forgives those who act as hypocrites. Let all Muslims of the world unite for the glory of Islam and peace amongst nations.

ISLAM'S CONCEPT OF A FRUITFUL LIFE

Life does not mean merely to exist or to vegetate on the physical plane. Nor can life subsist on a denial of physical urges. Physical life is a reality in its own right and it is essential to sustain and energize the body properly. The monastic concept that care of the body and the satisfaction of physical desires is repugnant to spiritual values and human dignity is totally wrong and impracticable. Evidently, no viable system of life considers renunciation feasible. The very phrase "system of life" denotes that it is the practical aspect of life which matters, because negation of life needs no order.

Islam is a living faith, a religion which believes in a dynamic and purposeful life. It is a complete system of life, embracing every facet of human existence and covering every aspect of being. Islam confers on man such a comprehensive and balanced order of life that makes day-to-day living really pleasant and active in both the mundane and the spiritual spheres. It is clearly ordained by the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) that there is no room for monasticism in Islam.

Sternly rejecting all monastic views, Islam has a conspicuously positive approach to life, calling for the proper use of its blessings, beauties and bounties. It is clearly said in the Holy Qur'an, "Whatever exists between heavens and earth has been made subservient to man". All that is there in the universe has been created by Allah for man. The underlying purpose is that he should use the limitless material resources available to him to manage the affairs of this world as Allah wants him to. Man is Allah's vicegerent on earth and as such the responsibility of conducting rightfully the affairs of life devolves on him. On the contrary, if Allah's virtuous people are compelled to flee the world or they sit back in seclusion considering the bustle of life to be antithetical to spiritual uplift, or if a refuge is sought in wilderness, undoubtedly the dregs of society will seize power, creating chaos through lawlessness and corruption, contrary to the dictates of the Creator.

In Islam absolute devotion to Allah is the object of life, as man is created only to worship his Lord. But devotion or worship does not mean only formal observance of certain rituals and rites. The Islamic concept of worship is that man must live the whole of his life like a devoted servant, a willing slave of Allah. Life is every breath a worship. Whatever man does, be it earning his livelihood, building a house for shelter, teaching in school, attending the national legislature or praying in the mosque or elsewhere, amounts to worship, if it is truly intended to seek the approbation of Allah and is in accordance with the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and if it is for the welfare of and in the service of man. Undoubtedly, the purpose of life is that

man should love and respect his fellow-men. This is precisely a part of the worship of Allah. It is also the worship of Allah to cultivate pleasing behaviour and thus to pave the way for the glory of Islam through the all conquering power of moral excellence.

Under the unhealthy influence of alien nations and foreign culture, a certain amount of monasticism has crept into the rank and file of the Muslims also. As a result, a misconception generally prevails that for the attainment of spiritual elevation it is imperative to shun all worldly desires. But, in fact, every human desire ought to be satisfied but within proper limits and through proper means.

Life is a priceless gift of Allah, to be accepted with grace and gratitude in its totality. It is the will of Allah that man should make the most of his life; live it, beautify it and cultivate it as the harvest of the life Hereafter. Allah does not at all want man to negate this earthly life because that would be tantamount to spurning His bounties.

If we ponder the teachings of our Holy Prophet and bear in mind how he lived his life we will find that he lived a full life that was all endeavour and purposeful action. He struggled hard to earn his livelihood, entered into matrimonial alliances, fought battles, executed pacts of peace and co-existence, established a state with its administrative and economic organs. His was a dynamic life, complete in every department – the supreme ideal for all mankind for ever and for ever. Likewise, the lives of his worthy Companions bear witness to the fact that they achieved spiritual perfection and sublimity not by renouncing the world but by living righteously in the midst of all its bustle.

Allah Himself was pleased to counsel the Holy Prophet to announce to the people that although Allah's final Messenger, he was verily a human being like them. This proves beyond any doubt that Allah wanted him to live the life of a normal human being along with discharging his duties as Allah's Prophet. In his supremely multi-dimensional life, he was a son, a father, a son-in-law, a father-in-law, a seller, a buyer, a ruler, a leader, a soldier, a field commander, a peace-maker, a statesman – in short all that a good and great man can be. High aims and ideals lend charm to life. Why have we been sent to this world? What are our obligations here? In any case, we have to proceed to the next world after our sojourn on earth. One can make the optimum use of life if this fundamental fact is not lost sight of. At this stage, the question naturally arises as to what kind of life we are leading as members of the Muslim *Ummah*. Is our life Islamic or even human? Do we spend every moment of our life in seeking the approbation of Allah? Are we keeping to the path of righteousness shown by our Holy Prophet?

Every Muslim must appraise his life, and if he comes to feel within his heart that his life is devoid of worthy objectives and that it deviates from the will of Allah, he must see how to make amends and bring about a revolution in his way of living.

We must accept the fact that our lives are not in accordance with the Islamic principles. We have strayed far away from the straight path; and that this wilful evasion of the teachings of the Qur'an and the *Hadith* will deprive us of our

destined position of honour and glory as the "middle nation".

It is high time for all of us, collectively as well as individually, to fulfil our promise and to mould our lives on the pattern of Islam. That is the only way to attain glory and greatness. May Allah help and bless us all. Amen!

THE PRE-EMINENCE OF MAN

Although man since his very appearance on earth has been different from other creatures and unique due to his powers of perception, understanding and the capacity to act rationally rather than instinctively, yet before the advent of Islam he was completely unaware of his reality and pre-eminent position in the universe and made idols with his own hands and bowed down before them for the fulfilment of his desires. He looked at the trees, rivers, mountains, the winds, the clouds, the oceans, the sun and the moon as awesome mysteries and natural phenomena made him afraid. It had become an integral part of his psyche to be overawed by and idolise and worship those more powerful than him. Such conditions at times produced men who claimed to be gods and man was compelled by man to deify man.

This period – stretching over countless millennia – is the period of darkness. During this period man did not know his real station in this universe. He neither had the comprehension of his own position nor the knowledge of what he represented. Moreover, he was the victim of gross ignorance. In moments of triumph or self-delusion he regarded himself as the most exalted being on earth and became proud, arrogant, heartless, cruel and the source of strife and corruption on earth. On other occasions, when he stood afraid and vanquished, he would regard himself as the most insignificant and helpless creature on earth and whatsoever in his perception, could do him good or harm, he deified it.

Islam rejected these untenable positions and made man aware of his reality. On the one hand, it shattered the myth that made man proud, arrogant and heartless. He was told that his birth is from a blood-clot. On the other hand, he was told that if he acted according to his essence, he could achieve the position of Allah's viceregent on earth, the highest of living beings. Allah Himself has said:

*"We have honoured the children of Adam.
We carry them on the land and the sea,
and have made provision of good things for them, and have
preferred them above many of those whom We created."*

[Qur'an, XVII:70]

When we see these two diametrically opposed states of man, the question naturally arises: which is man's real position in the world. The Qur'an itself has supplied the answer:

“And when thy Lord said unto the angels: Lo! I am about to place a viceroy in the earth, they said: Wilt Thou place therein one who will do harm therein and will shed blood, while we, we hymn Thy praise and sanctify Thee? He said: Surely I know that which ye know not.

And He taught Adam all the names, then showed them to the angels, saying: Inform me of the names of these if ye are truthful.

They said: Be glorified! We have no knowledge saving that which Thou hast taught us.

Lo! Thou, only Thou, art the Knower, the Wise.

He said: O Adam! Inform them of their names, and when he had informed them of their names,

He said: Did I not tell you that I know the secret of the heavens and the earth?

And I know that which ye disclose and which ye hide.

And when We said unto the angels:

Prostrate yourselves before Adam,

they fell prostrate all save Iblis. He demurred through pride, and so became a disbeliever.

And We said: O Adam! Dwell thou and thy wife in the Garden, and eat ye freely (of the fruits) thereof where ye will; but come not nigh this tree lest ye become wrongdoers.

But Satan caused them to deflect therefrom

and expelled them from the (happy) state in which they were;”

[Qur’ān, II:30–36]

The foregoing verses of the Qur’ān clearly determine man’s position. In fact, the guidance provided by Islam is Allah’s greatest gift to mān. Islam teaches him to know his true status and position on earth. Allah the Creator has vouchsafed an exalted status to man. He should be always conscious of it so that he might lead his life with respect and in peace and after death he may be blessed by Allah in the Hereafter.

When the Prophet Moses told the Pharoah that Allah is the Lord Who gives life and brings death the Pharoah, totally lost in his ignorance and arrogance, replied by saying that he also could do it. This was the historical perspective till the last of Allah’s Messengers (peace be upon him) came with the true faith to lead mankind to the path of righteousness. Through the Holy Prophet, Allah proclaimed that He has honoured mankind. This was a revolutionary message

which told man for the first time that only he is the best and the finest of all creatures and all other things that exist have been made subservient to him and are meant to be of service to him and to be of use to him. This, because, Allah has appointed man His viceregent on earth and the entire universe will be his dominion. Man henceforth shall obey Allah and make use of all things of heaven and earth for his good.

In order to universalise the concept of man's pre-eminence, it has been further proclaimed that in this particular aspect all men are equal. The status of viceregent is given to the human species as such and not to any particular individual. Race, colour and country are meant only for distinguishing one group from the other and for identification and there is nothing to them beyond that. Neither the black has any superiority over the white nor the white over the black; nor has the non-Arab any reason to feel superior to the Arab nor the Arab has any reason to feel superior to the non-Arab. Why? Because all human beings are descended from the same man and woman and are members of the same family. Therefore any prevalent distinction between man and man is the product of sheer ignorance and short-sightedness. The exalted status of man is universal, although there may be differences in its degree. For example, those who are pious, carry out Allah's commands, and regard the Traditions of the Prophet as the mainspring of their lives, are definitely superior to those who, by ignoring or disobeying the commands of Allah and His Prophet, have deprived themselves of their inherent pre-eminence.

Let us pause here and ponder another point. Man is the deputy of Allah on earth and His viceregent. This is a guarantee of his high status. But this fact also demands that in his actions, thoughts, and ideas he should be subservient to Allah. Allah is the source of all moral conduct, and man should conform to the criterion of virtue laid down before him by the Holy Prophet. Allah is Merciful and Compassionate. Man should emulate these divine attributes and should practise mercy and compassion.

Hadrat Ayesha Siddiqah (may Allah be pleased with her) once told a questioner that the life of the Prophet was the embodiment of the teachings of the Qur'an. The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) presented a perfect example of the moral and virtuous life based upon the Qur'an. He was the Messenger of Allah and also a human being; and he was elevated to the loftiest position man can attain to, a position no other man has or ever will attain. This means that each of us should emulate the example of the Holy Prophet. Allah requires each one of us to follow in the footsteps of the Holy Prophet.

This concept of the exalted status of man was presented for the first time by Islam and it freed man from the shackles of mental serfdom to other creatures. It restored him to his true glory. May Allah bless us with the capacity to deserve this glory and this position of pre-eminence by conforming to the tenets of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*. Amen!

LIBERTY

There is only one clear, appropriate and definitive meaning of liberty and that is freedom. The meaning and import of liberty has been explained in such detail and depth by Islam and it has been adopted by the Muslims as the main purpose and ultimate objective of their lives with such sincerity and earnestness that it is a unique phenomenon in the history of the world.

No other faith or religion can compare with Islam in this respect. In fact liberty is such a lustrous essence and such a priceless quality of the Muslim *Ummah* that it at once distinguishes it from people belonging to other faiths and from other nations. The thinking of a true Muslim and an honest and sincere reciter of the sacred sentence (There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger), inevitably makes him a rebel against every power of the world. He fears only one Being, Allah, the Most Exalted and the Most Munificent and he enters the battle of life with such dignity and such majesty that he makes the eye of time blink in wonder at the glorious spectacle of his liberty of thought and action. Indeed liberty is the most distinctive characteristic of a Muslim which further polished by the attribute of piety makes it a razor-edged sabre which moves like lightning in the battle between Good and Evil and leads the Muslims to victory against untruth and vanity and to the heights of true devotion. Every moment in the lives of Muslims is a shining symbol of liberty and freedom.

Islam is a complete system of liberty and democracy. And it is that true and compact religion which came to restore to humanity its usurped liberty of thought and freedom of action. Man had been deprived for long of his liberty by tyrants, despotic kings, alien governments, selfish priests and powerful vested interests which dominated all societies. These usurpers declared by their cruel actions, that might is right. But Islam categorically and unequivocally repudiated and totally rejected this evil concept. Immediately after its appearance on the world scene it announced to the whole world — as a warning to tyrants and despots, usurpers and exploiters and a glad tidings to the suffering humanity that might is not right. In reality right is might, and no power except Allah is entitled to make serfs and slaves of human beings. Islam is the only religion — the unique and supreme religion, which attaches fundamental importance to personal liberty and freedom of thought and action. It gave to the whole world its universal message of human equality and fraternity and made mankind aware of its inherent greatness and the lofty heights which it has the potentiality to scale. It declared in no uncertain terms that man is free on this Allah's earth and liberty is his birthright. Also that all men are equal as men. On this basis every man has equal status. Race, nationality, or colour is in no way the criterion

of excellence — The true criterion of excellence and superiority is righteous action. Amongst men the most excellent and the best is he whose actions are the noblest and the most righteous.

“O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct.”

[Qur’ān, XLIX:13]

In the contemporary world liberty and freedom are used to denote emancipation from alien political domination. But the concept of liberty and freedom Islam has given to mankind has two special factors: One, man should so adopt subservience and submission to Allah that it cuts off his links of obedience to all except to the Lord and Creator of the universe. The second factor is that the believer should consider his faith, the way of life Allah has Himself ordained for mankind and is according to His own testimony the perfect faith, so complete, self-sufficient and ideal that he does not need another’s help or assistance in specifying for him his attitudes and his modes of thought and action. If we assess our own attitudes and behaviour patterns in the light of these two factors it will not be difficult for us to come to the conclusion that we are still far away from that glorious point of freedom which we boastfully claim to have arrived at.

Talking of the real purpose of ordaining the Holy Prophet as Allah’s Messenger, the Holy Qur’ān says:

“He it is Who hath sent His messenger with the guidance and the Religion of Truth, that He may cause it to prevail over all religion.”

[Qur’ān, IX:33]

The guideline that this noble verse lays down for the collective life of the Muslims is that the *Ummah* which accepts Islam as its faith and accepts it as the only true religion can never in any way or manner accept to be subordinate to any non-Muslim power or to be under the sway of un-Islamic principles and concepts. This is the definition of liberty and freedom which Islam puts forward and accepts and this is the liberty which conforms to the Islamic system of values. Islamic liberty does not at all mean that a Muslim should so deprive himself of intellectual vigour and be so weak in his faith that his mind and soul become susceptible to alien concepts and philosophies. Such conditions inevitably bring a people under the alien yoke of slavery and every nuance of meaning as far as freedom and liberty are concerned is destroyed.

Fellow Muslims! Brothers and sisters in faith! If we love and cherish liberty,

and freedom is our primary purpose, and if we want to continue to be a free and sovereign *Ummah*, it would be imperative for us to establish on firm footings, in our individual and collective life, our relation of submission and total obedience to Allah and reconstruct our entire pattern of life in full conformity with Islamic values. Liberty will remain a shallow concept, bereft of value and meaning, unless we reconstruct our political system and economic and social organisation, our system of education and training, in the light of the overall system of life given to us by Islam and rid ourselves of the slavish imitation of alien thought and false ideologies and concepts. When we talk of liberty or discuss the implications of freedom, we should not forget for a moment that we will have to fight our own base desires to safeguard our liberty of thought and freedom of action. For our physical and political freedom we will have to remove from our neck the yoke of intellectual slavery of aliens. Liberty includes in its connotation the political concepts of self-determination, and dependence on aliens, whether it is in the sphere of mental attitudes of aspirations, in financial resources or economy, in politics or religion, is against the spirit of liberty. Real liberty consists in turning away from the door of aliens and submitting only to Allah. And this is the road which will lead us to a place of honour and distinction in the comity of nations. This is the way to success, splendour and spiritual eminence. And when we reach our goal, that will be the glorious time when we will rise in majesty, truly deserving the promise Allah made in the Holy Qur'an:

*"For ye will overcome them if ye are
(indeed) believers."*

[Qur'an, III:139]

Dear brethren in Islam! This is the liberty that Allah wishes to bestow upon us and this is the freedom which is the real solution of our problems. Come let us step forward on this path. May Allah be our Help and our Succour. Amen!

LIBERTY AND FREEDOM

The concept of liberty and freedom presented to the world by Islam is unmatched and unique. Islam has also made adequate provisions in its system to make it a practical reality. Its first precept in this connection is that all men are the progeny of Adam and as such deserve to be treated equally in all matters. In this human capacity no man is superior or inferior to any other man – all are equal. And in the Islamic system it is not possible for some to be more equal than others. Another precept of primary importance given by Islam is that man is personally responsible for his actions and accountable for them. There is recompense for good deeds and retribution for evil acts. And its third principle is: wish for others what you wish for yourself.

If one ponders the matter, it will become clear that the concept of freedom and liberty presented by Islam, and which was shown to the world by the Holy Prophet, in its practical shape through his own practice, is based on these three principles.

Freedom is man's birthright. It is in the nature of man to live as a member of a group or a community and the best form of social organisation is that which makes all its members feel that they enjoy full freedom of thought and action. This gives them a sense of full participation in the running of the collective life. Allah endowed man with reason and intelligence and the capacity to think, know and understand things. This exclusive inherent faculty makes it necessary that man should have the freedom to express his opinions and present his views and he should enjoy the privilege of freely commenting on the merits and demerits of the established political and economic order. Man cannot be deprived of his power to think and to reason. And as long as he has this power, he cannot and should not be deprived of his freedom of action.

Islam is the first and the only religion which accepts man's innate freedom and specifies its correct and proper use. The Holy Qur'an stresses time and again the vital need to ponder the creation of the universe. It says, if you think rationally about your mould, your birth, your existence and your environment you will inevitably be led to accept the fact that it is Allah, the Absolute Creator, Who has created the universe and sustains it through a well-regulated system. If Allah did not accept man's inherent freedom He would not have so persistently asked man to look deep and carefully into the matter of faith.

Indeed Allah has shown so much regard for human freedom that by saying that "There is no compulsion in faith", He has openly declared that man enjoys full freedom to accept or not to accept the true faith. But at the same time He took care to show him the straight path and the way of righteousness and made

clear to him the distinction and the difference between truth and falsehood. After this, man has the right and the option to accept guidance or to take the wrong path. Man's freedom is inviolable and must be respected. Nobody has the right to take it away from him.

No social order, no religion of the Book or non-revealed religion, prior to Islam, had made such comprehensive arrangements to ensure full respect for man's fundamental right of personal freedom. The decree of the ruler was irrevocable — as unavoidable as sudden death — which went like this, "Submit to the command or forfeit your life". When Nimrod had Hadrat Ibrahim thrown in the pit of the blazing fire, it had as its background the same ugly reality that the tyrant who ruled over the territory did not accept the right of his subjects to freely express their honest views and opinions. The whole population of Mecca turned violent against the Holy Prophet after he was ordained the divine Messenger and started preaching Islam, because it did not accept the fact that it was the birthright of the Holy Prophet to openly declare what he earnestly and honestly felt to be true. Prior to Islam, man had no freedom at all in anything, either in religion or in society. There was no alternative to complete acceptance of the established order of things.

Islam in fact introduced a revolutionary concept to mankind, when it announced in clear and unequivocal terms that man enjoyed full freedom even in his choice of religion. Along with this novel idea of religious freedom, it strongly advised consensus in collective affairs, thereby accepting man's right to express his views in matters of common interest.

The sacred life of the Holy Prophet is a beacon light for us Muslims. His personality was the embodiment of all the teachings of the Holy Qur'an. When he laid the foundation of the truly Muslim society in Madina he ensured full and free expression of opinion to the extent that on many occasions he gave precedence to the views of his Companions over his own views. This he did specifically to encourage his followers to think independently and objectively and to make them feel that there were no constraints on positive and concrete thinking. He made sure that they never felt stifled or suffocated or that their freedom was in any way restricted.

The first development of major importance in Madina was the Battle of Badr. When he received the information about the impending invasion he did not take any unilateral decision to start immediate defence preparations. Instead he called his leading Companions and appraised them of the situation. When the Migrants as well as Helpers amongst his Companions expressed the unanimous view to prepare for defence and gave their voluntary verdict for it, he felt happy and came out of the city with his loyal followers, to do battle in the way of Allah. He availed himself of this decisive moment in the history of Islam to initiate action on the Islamic concept of freedom of thought and expression.

When the question of the treatment of the prisoners taken in the Battle of Badr came up, he again asked his Companions to express their opinions in the matter. Hadrat Umar advised that all prisoners should be executed. Hadrat Abu Bakr advised general pardon. This post-battle conference consolidated the new

tradition and strengthened the fundamental human right of the freedom of expression.

In matters of matrimony, perhaps, the opinion of our girls today does not carry the weight which was given to it by the Holy Prophet. When Hadrat Ali asked for the hand of the Holy Prophet's beloved daughter, Fatima (may Allah be happy with her) the proposal was completely acceptable to the Holy Prophet and he was well pleased with it. But he thought it necessary to know the wishes of his daughter in the matter and said 'yes' to Hadrat Ali, after she had given her willing consent. Through this personal example, the Holy Prophet showed his followers that as the views of the people are important in administrative and political decision-making, in the same manner, in matters of matrimony, boys and girls enjoy full freedom of choice.

Freedom of expression was so fully respected by him that when the Battle of Uhad was impending, the youthful Companions insisted that the battle be joined by moving out of the city. He accepted their suggestion although he was not in favour of the strategy or lack of it. He did this just to set a precedent, for the *Ummah* for all times to come, that majority decisions should be invariably accepted and implemented.

When the terms for the Truce of Hudaibiya were settled, some Companions opposed them vehemently in front of the Holy Prophet. But he neither got annoyed nor expressed his disapproval of this demonstration. But for the satisfaction of the Muslims, he told them that his action was in obedience to the command of Allah.

The conceptual foundations of the Muslim society established by the Holy Prophet, were: 1) the individual is free to earn his livelihood, 2) to live his life normally, and 3) to participate in the affairs of the state. Man has the inalienable right to these three fundamental freedoms.

Many kinds of freedom are enumerated by people in the contemporary world. For instance, the freedom to convene meetings and to take out processions, freedom to express opinion, social freedom, democratic freedom etc. But if all these various freedoms are analysed with a bit of care, one will realise that all of them can be grouped under two heads i.e., social and economic. Social freedom includes political freedom in its purview. Economic freedom necessarily means that all avenues of earning livelihood should be freely available to man and he should be free to choose which ever profession he wants. Islam makes sure that man enjoys these two fundamental freedoms. Social freedom means the right to spend your life as you wish, but within the limit of respecting the rights of fellow citizens. Political freedom is a corollary to social freedom and consists in electing your rulers through the free exercise of the right to vote. Economic freedom was always there because no avenue of earning livelihood was closed to anybody.

When all human beings are members of one and the same family, they must have equal rights in deeds and actions. Be it the ruler or the subject, the rich or the poor, the educated or the ignorant, the white or the black, every man enjoys the same freedom, has the same rights in the Muslim social order and is personally

responsible for what he does, through omission or commission, and will be punished or rewarded according to his actions. In this way Islam stressed the fact that personal freedom should be used properly and judiciously – one should always keep in view the fact that freedom does not and should not be taken to mean licence.

The Holy Prophet gave us a very practical moral principle: Wish for others what you wish for yourself. This means that if a person wishes that there are no unnecessary constraints on his freedom of thought, his honour is safe, there are no pressures on his freedom of action; in short no person harms or damages him in any way, he is duty-bound to accept that other people are also entitled to all these considerations.

This concept of liberty is not, in any manner of speech, lawlessness. Islam has no such idea of freedom that when the 'black out siren', is sounded it means 'open sesame' for anti-social elements to rob innocent people of their honour or their worldly goods. Islam links human freedom with such bonds and limitations that make the social order a haven of peace, stability and freedom from fear. 'The people in a truly Muslim society will be totally safe and secure in person and property, even if they do not lock, from within, the doors of their homes. Islam is the exponent of fairness and justice as well as of balance and poise in thought and action. It has laid down the limits of propriety for each individual thought and deed.

A fact worth remembering is that the ideological state Pakistan came into being on 27th of Ramaḍān, the day of the commencement of the revelation of the Holy Qur'an. It was brought into being in order for the Muslims to establish in it the rule of the Holy Qur'an, to enhance the glory of Allah's true religion, Islam, and to present through collective word and deed the shining example of the truth of Islam. This was an integral part of the modern Islamic renaissance. The Muslim world has at last shaken off its lassitude and is endeavouring to reshape its collective life according to the dictates of our religion and to be the torch-bearer of human freedom and equality. Muslims of the world: Come, let us take a vow to work boldly and with courage in this direction. Let all brethren in Islam take the path specified by Allah, and make the sacred life of the Holy Prophet our true guide and ideal, and try earnestly with total devotion to follow in his footsteps for the glory of Islam and the Muslim *Ummah*. This is the true meaning and significance of freedom of thought and action.

THE ISLAMIC CONCEPT OF A WELFARE STATE

(A state guaranteeing the dignity and security of every citizen)

A welfare state according to Islam is one where a person goes out of his house to dole out alms, but can find nobody who needs financial succour. A society in which there is no indigent person, where every member feels financially secure and has a satisfying life, in every way, is a truly Islamic society. History attests to the fact that this concept of social justice and human welfare was presented to the world, in a viable framework, by Islam for the first time in human history. And the Muslims took practical steps to implement it. A system was thus developed that laid the foundations of social peace and harmony in the world. New pathways of humanism, social welfare, and dealing with fellow beings on the basis of equality and fraternal regard were shown to mankind. Islam lays down the law that the state should be at the service of the people, and it is its primary responsibility to create conditions which should ensure the well-being of its citizens in this world and their welfare and salvation in the Hereafter. On the one hand, it is responsible to provide proper religious education to all its citizens so that they can distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil, virtue and vice, truth and falsehood, what is proper and what is improper for the individual as well as the society. On the other hand, it utilises all its resources for the establishment of a just and equitable economic system, based on the injunctions of the Holy Qur'ān, which ensure that nobody within the frontiers of an Islamic state goes without the necessities of life.

It is essential that in the establishment of such a state the people should be joined to one another by love and the bond of love should be made permanent. A state based on mutual affection and love and humaneness is a welfare state. Likewise, the axiom that the earth and all the natural resources belong to Allah and that He alone is their Lord and Master, has to be accepted as the basis of social organisation. All goods and accumulated treasures, gold, silver, cattle, produce of land are resources made available by Allah and are therefore the common property of humanity.

It is He who created for you all that is in the earth. Within the society each one of us has economic rights, and each of us has a share in material production. Every person has been enjoined not to forget his own share.

The Holy Prophet has prescribed four basic rights for the individual in a society:

1. A house to live in,
2. Clothes to wear,
3. Wholesome food to satisfy the needs of the body,
4. Potable water to drink.

According to Islam it is the responsibility of the Islamic state to enable its citizens to obtain these four basic amenities. Increase in productivity and equitable distribution of wealth is basic to the responsibility it assumes. Increase in production can be achieved through proper organisation and full utilisation of all financial and material resources. To illustrate this point: an equitable organisation of agriculture, a morally acceptable system of trade and commerce, where profit is subservient to and dependent on personal labour are prerequisites of a just society. Industry should be so organised as to provide equal opportunities to all members to find work and earn a living. It is the duty of the state to devise ways and means for the utilisation of the work-force at various levels. The verse: "Surely your striving is to diverse ends" enjoins a system in which the worker is guaranteed a fair wage for his labour. And then Allah says that a man "shall have to his account only as he has laboured". This would make cooperative endeavour and joint labour absolutely necessary. Indeed mutual cooperation and working together through a properly organised system and putting into the effort all physical and mental resources are necessary for obtaining the best possible results. In order that the wheels of a society move smoothly cooperation at all levels is essential.

Islam has placed great emphasis on mutual respect and harmony between the worker and the employer and has created a perfect balance between the two, thus paving the way for general welfare. This social *modus operandi* of Islam has been practicable from its very inception and whichever state takes positive steps towards social welfare is indebted, in no small measure, to Islam. The Islamic view of fraternal cooperation between various sectors is based on its belief that all citizens are co-sharers in the collective wealth. At the same time in order to provide initiative and impetus to men of talent and in order to guarantee economic freedom, Islam accepts man's right to own private property – but within limits. When individual property becomes an instrument of oppression, the state has the right to intervene, as without this prerogative to intervene it will not be able to check exploitation of man by man.

An ideal welfare state would be one where nobody would be denied the opportunity to start an industry or a business on the one hand and no person would lack the opportunity to find work to which he is best suited on the other. In a welfare state, worthy of its name, people who are disabled or physically or mentally handicapped would not be left uncared for. The four basic rights would be ensured in it for every citizen.

The Qur'an gives us guidance with regard to the nature and structure of a welfare state. Allah has said:

*"And in whose wealth there is a right acknowledged
For the beggar and the destitute;"*

[Qur'an, LXX:24-25]

Let us also see what the Holy Prophet has said in this regard:

“Allah has made charity and alms obligatory upon Muslims – to be taken from the rich and distributed among the poor”.

It was once stated by him:

“The Islamic state is the provider of all who have none to provide for them”.

Such injunctions and guidelines are available to us in the Qur'an and the Traditions of the Holy Prophet on the basis of which an economic order can be established that will fully meet the requirements of a welfare state. A welfare state is morally and legally responsible for the welfare of the citizens whose governance is under its charge. It is binding upon it to see that the economic level of none of its citizens falls below the acceptable minimum. It is imperative for a welfare state to be righteous from the moral point of view and to adhere to the norms of truthfulness and propriety in its practical policies. It is only such a state that can guarantee the minimum quantum of social welfare and economic well-being for each one of its citizens. No state in the contemporary world can ensure for all its citizens a life of ease – a life free of social and economic distress. But what it can do is to remove hateful disparities and glaring contrasts between man and man – the idle rich on one side and starving women and children on the other.

I should like to state at this juncture that two things need special attention from the Islamic point of view. One is that each man has some fundamental rights and, second, that all men are equal before Allah whatever their station and rank in life. Allah is their Sustainer and they are His creatures and servants. A welfare state has to see that it serves as Allah's tool in this respect. No one should go without clothes, food, and shelter and everyone should be considered equal before the law and in the matter of economic opportunity and the opportunity to work for his living. If this cannot be managed mankind is bound to fall from grace.

We are living in an age of rapid scientific progress and technological advances. This should mean for us both a challenge and an opportunity. The world of Islam has been endowed by Allah with limitless natural wealth. And we are blessed with divine guidance in the form of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. These two should help us establish an ideal economic order throughout the Islamic world which should serve as a model for the rest of the world, in social justice and respect for mankind. Let us prove ourselves worthy of our great religion and practically demonstrate the viability of Islam as the system most suited to the social, economic and spiritual needs of mankind. Let us show to the world, that Islam is the noblest and the most perfectly workable form of humanism.

EXPENDING IN THE NAME OF ALLAH

The undesirable thing Islam aims at cleansing our hearts of, for the sake of shaping our character and conduct according to the highest standards of morality and for establishing a truly righteous social order, is the love of worldly wealth and material goods which, according to its moral scale, is the most obnoxious vice, second only to negation of Allah and paganism. Wealth is that sticky smog which destroys the lustre of the soul for ever.

Islam lays great emphasis on two types of the holy endeavour (*Jihād*) one of which is the crusade against one's own lower self, and the other is holy endeavour in the form of expending one's wealth in the name of Allah. This latter *Jihād* has been extolled by Islam as a most noble act and for its excellent and sure results it has been called the 'best commerce'.

The investment made in the name of Allah is very different in the nature of its profit from other forms of business. It is because of this fact that the Holy Qur'an tells Muslims, with particular emphasis, to give charity for Allah's sake. Its command is couched in absolutely unequivocal words:

*"Ye will not attain unto piety
until ye spend of that which ye love.
And whatsoever ye spend, Allah is aware thereof."*

[Qur'an, III:92]

What keeps man away from charity, generosity and alms-giving is greed and avarice. And the way miserliness has been condemned by Islam makes it certain that a Muslim will never be a miser or a greedy person. Nor is it possible that he become a victim of the compulsive desire to hoard wealth and worldly goods, because he knows what Allah has said in the matter:

*"Woe unto every slandering traducer,
Who hath gathered wealth (of this world) and arranged it.
He thinketh that his wealth will render him immortal."*

[Qur'an, CIV:1-3]

Truth has always demanded the willing surrender of one's life and worldly belongings. One who is in love with material possessions avoids adopting the path of truth and righteousness because he feels it will entail spending his wealth and he will, thereby, lose what he has collected after such hard labour, and that he will be reduced to poverty. The Holy Qur'an calls this fear the work of the

devil. In fact, wealth and material affluence is a trial for man. And to get through this trial successfully and with honour, is the first requisite of spiritual success. The truth of the matter is that whoever saves himself from falling a victim to greed and miserliness, surely attains his object, because putting one's life and wealth on stake is the condition precedent for every noble objective. To expend in the name of Allah and on righteous works is the surest and the greatest means to success and salvation in the life Hereafter. The Islamic injunctions with regard to both obligatory religious prayers and services as well as day-to-day human dealings are based on great expediences and vital considerations of a collective nature. Every society has its impoverished, indigent, helpless and unfortunate persons along with its rich and affluent people. Islam enjoins its affluent and wealthy followers to realise that their less fortunate and impoverished brethren have a right to their wealth and never to be niggardly in helping them.

One of the reasons why Islam teaches its believers to be generous and charitable is that this way wealth will never get concentrated in the hands of a few persons and the whole Muslim fraternity having partaken of it will, as a united force, come forward to defend Good against Evil and will by its concerted action hold back the advance of vice and vileness.

Islam has linked its concept of charity, generosity and expending for the sake of Allah with its belief in the life Hereafter and has made the Muslims conscious that in truth their wealth is as much for others as it is for them. According to Islamic teachings material wealth is a trust. Consequently Islam does not confine its teachings, in regard to charity, to appeals or words of encouragement and inducements. It warns the Muslims of the dire consequences of not sharing one's wealth with the needy and the indigent:

*"And what aileth you that ye spend not
in the way of Allah."*

[Qur'ān, LVII:10]

If a man thinks that he is amassing material wealth because of some unique personal talent or because he has excelled in some special art, he is working under an illusion, and is totally wrong in his thinking. One should always feel that whatever wealth one gets, is due to Allah's Grace. Allah is the Lord and Master of all the treasures of heaven and earth. He can give wealth and affluence to whomever He wants and how-ever-much He wants. He can also take away whatever He wants and whenever He wants. Allah offers the assurance that whatever you spend in His way will be fully and completely recompensed. At some places in the Holy Qur'an He has said that all charity is a loan to Him, and that on the Day of Judgement that loan will be paid back many times over. So, He tells man with great emphasis that he has been given an opportunity to expend in His way and thereby to ensure a happy future for himself in the Hereafter. Consequently he should try to fully avail of it.

The Holy Qur'an has given a comprehensive code of principles and procedures governing charity and expending in the way of Allah. First it stresses

the basic importance of the sincerity of purpose and purity of intent. It insists that charity should not be a means to earn good name or to make an exhibition of generosity. Its only aim should be to please Allah and to achieve His approbation. Along with pure intent another requisite of charity is that one should not cause mental anguish and torment to the person one has helped, by making him feel that a kindness has been shown to him. The third governing condition is that only the best portion, of what a person has, should be given in charity. To give away what is defective or useless and expect recompense from Allah is a contravention of explicit Qur'anic injunctions.

The Holy Qur'an says that expending in the way of Allah is a means of getting close to Him and of obtaining the benediction of the Holy Prophet, and has given the promise that charitable persons will enter the fold of Allah's Mercy and Compassion. Generous persons and those who fear Allah have been promised an expansive and rich abode in Paradise. It is often observed that a true Muslim expends freely and gracefully even when he does not have much to spare, because he has complete faith in Allah's promise of His Compassion, besides a rich abode in heaven, good recompense and His full approbation. These fortunate, selfless servants of Allah have been blessed with a special mention by Him in the Holy Qur'an:

*"But prefer (the fugitives) above themselves
though poverty become their lot."*

[Qur'an, LIX:9]

Once, the Holy Prophet enquired from his Companions: "Who amongst you holds the goods of his heirs dearer than his own goods". They said that none amongst them held the wealth of his heirs dearer than his own. On hearing this reply the Holy Prophet said, "But his goods, in reality, are only those that he has sent ahead of him and what he has kept behind will ultimately be the property of the heirs".

What better exposition could there be of the basic truth of expending in the way of Allah?

THE PENAL SYSTEM OF ISLAM

Once, while the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) was resting under the shadow of the compound-wall of the Holy Ka'ba, some of his Companions, who were victims of the most harrowing and cruel persecution of the infidels, for no other fault than that of proclaiming their faith in Allah and His Messenger, Muhammad (peace be upon him), and of taking to piety and righteousness, waited on him and submitted, "Would it not be your pleasure to pray that Allah in His infinite mercy may deliver us from this misery?" The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) replied, "Do you not know what happened to your predecessors who had trodden the same path? The rebels of Allah would bury them in the ground waist-deep and then would torture them by running steel combs on their heads, and yet none of them could be coerced to recant. I swear by Allah that if you remain steadfast in your forbearance, He will surely complete His last religion (*Dīn*); and as and when Islam comes to prevail, even a lonely traveller would have nothing to fear in the darkness of the night except a wild animal or Allah's wrath for committing any sin".

This observation was made by the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) at a time when there was no security of life and limb, honour and property. Any individual could rise at will and perpetrate acts of arson, loot and murder. None was immune from dishonour and defamation, for in those days, as today, might was right.

In the circumstances, the most significant consequence of the completion and predominance of Islam to which the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) drew attention was that the life and property, self-respect and honour of every human being would be completely safe. And the day came when this promise was fulfilled in letter and spirit throughout the Islamic World.

How was it done? Not by posting a policeman at every door step, but by bringing it home to people that every bit of disobedience to Allah was bound to have its irrevocable consequences, and that Allah forgives not the tyrant. Usurpation of others' rights is so heinous a crime that it totally destroys man's virtues and all that he earns through devotion. The early Muslims were so transformed by the teaching of human accountability that if any one committed a vile act in complete solitude or in privacy, where there was none to witness his act except his own conscience, he would voluntarily appear in the court of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him), confess his guilt and insist on being awarded the punishment prescribed by the *Shari'ah*, in the full knowledge that punishment in the case would by no means be less than being stoned to death. This was a miracle of the Muslim belief that consequences of all sins shall have

to be borne in the Hereafter. Any one who had committed a sin was sure that even if he escaped punishment in this world, he would not go free in the world to come, and that no punishment in this life could compare in rigour with that of what he would get in the final reckoning.

On the other hand, Islam blocked all the fountain-heads of sin which sprout the evils that mar man's character. This method of eliminating sins and crimes by removing their causes is at once moral, educative and economic. The society established by Islam is pious and righteous from every point of view. In such a righteous and noble society if, despite all the curbs on externally motivating forces, someone spreads disorder, Islam makes it imperative to award the most deterrent punishment to him, if his guilt is lawfully established beyond any measure of doubt. In some instances it goes to the extent of amputating the putrescent limb to save the social organism. As I have just said, Islam did not rest content with merely enacting penal laws but also arranged to bring about conditions in which causes of evil should get socially atrophied. And such an environment is not possible unless peace and justice prevail in society. Islamic concept of crime and punishment is made subservient to the supreme goal of human life and harmonising it totally with human nature. Besides, there are certain other features of the Islamic penal philosophy that distinguish it from other legal systems in force in the world. An instance in point is the Islamic law of capital punishment or the law of retaliation. In this regard, the Qur'an lays down:

*"O ye who believe!
Retaliation is prescribed for you in the matter of the murdered;
the freeman for the freeman, and the slave for the slave,
and the female for the female.
And for him who is forgiven
somewhat by his (injured) brother,
prosecution according to usage and
payment unto him in kindness.
This is an alleviation and
a mercy from your Lord.
He who transgresseth after this
will have a painful doom."*

[Qur'an, II:178]

Just think over the significance and the far-reaching consequences of this verse. Sworn enmity between the relatives of the murderer and the murdered is a foregone conclusion, but, with a beauty unsurpassed, this verse appeals to mercy in a spirit of human brotherhood. This subtly powerful switch-over of motivation is the unique characteristic of Islam, dovetailed in its concept of crime and punishment and wiping off for good the rancour and family-feud that would otherwise arise from murder.

As I have already said, the Islamic penal law makes it also obligatory on government and society alike to create and to maintain conditions wherein

chances of commission of any crime do not arise.

One of the basically important points about the Islamic penal law is that it disfavours the creation of turmoil and lawlessness in society by extending mercy to criminals. The Islamic law ordains that if any group of individuals, big or small, becomes a permanent danger to peace and to the life and property of people, they must necessarily be liquidated so that the common man gets relief and feels perfectly safe even if he leaves the doors of his house wide open.

Having secured first the doors of incitement to sin, Islam then prescribes heavy punishments for culprits so that honest and good citizens of the state may live in peace and their honour, life and property are absolutely safe within and outside their homes. Allah is their protector and His laws serve as a shield against all mishaps.

In short, the Islamic concept of crime and punishment is clear and unambiguous, bearing unique and distinct qualities. However, society can reap the requisite harvest of advantages only when the lives of the people are cast wholly in the Islamic mould. As the Qur'an enjoins:

"O ye who believe! Come, all of you, into submission(unto Him);"

[Qur'an, II:208]

In conclusion, I most humbly pray to Almighty Allah that He in His infinite mercy may help us live completely and exactly in accordance with Islam, and that He may grant us what is good here and what is good in the Hereafter. Amen!

PEACE – THE ISLAMIC POINT OF VIEW

It is an incontrovertible fact that Islam is the only religion which has the unique distinction that its name communicates the totality of its conceptual as well as practical system. In its name lies its complete definition as a religion and as a code of life. It has given the name *Īmān* (Belief) to the acceptance of its set of ideas and concepts to which it invites all mankind. And thereby it has also given an indication of its attitude to life as well as of what constitutes the basis of its system of values. This means that Islam, both at the individual as well as the collective level is a message of peace because the root of the word *Īmān* is 'Amn' which means peace.

The event of man's creation has been narrated by the Holy Qur'ān in full detail. The words spoken by the angels in the conversation on this occasion of epochal import indicate that after the descent of man on earth and his making it his habitat the most important problem that faced him was to find ways and means to ensure stable peace. As Allah, out of His infinite bounty facilitated man's sojourn on earth by providing him with all things that he needed for his sustenance and comfort, in the same manner he gave him detailed guidance with regard to the elimination of causes and factors that could endanger his physical safety and mental equanimity and with that elimination, enable him to lead a peaceful life. Man cannot discharge his individual or collective responsibilities without peace. Hence Allah has called peace one of His great boons. In the *sūra Qur'aish* it is said:

*“So let them worship the Lord of this House,
Who hath fed them against hunger,
And hath made them safe from fear.”*

[Qur'ān, CVI:3–4]

When one ponders the unequivocal and firm injunction emphasising the paramount importance of peace one is inevitably led to the realisation that Islam aims first of all at safeguarding the great bounty that is the life of man. Consequently, it goes all out to teach man to respect human life. One finds two clear points in the Holy Qur'ān on this subject. In the *sūra Nisa* it is said:

*“And kill not one another. Lo! Allah is
ever Merciful unto you.”*

[Qur'ān, IV:29]

And again in the *sūra Mā'dah*:

"Whosoever killeth a human being for other than man-slaughter or corruption in the earth, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind,"

(Qur'ān, V:32)

The purport of these two verses is quite clear and explicit. Islam wants every human being to be able to live in peace and tranquillity. It also desires that other human beings should also be safe from his aggression and pugnacity. Its ultimate objective is that the human race should, in complete freedom from fear, keep moving forward on the road to progress and evolution and that this world should be an enduring haven of peace and tranquillity.

One can say with complete conviction in the light of the guidance contained in the Qur'ān, that the primary purpose of the society Islam envisages is peace and security. Ponder this verse of the *sūra Jonas*:

"And Allah summoneth to the abode of Peace,"

(Qur'ān, X:25)

One of the Attributive names of Allah is *Al-Salām* (Peace).

These edicts and verses of the Holy Qur'ān clearly bring out the fact that Islam gives prime importance to peace and security and the safety and the continuation of the human race. The categorical order forbidding man to undertake any suicidal activity or to kill any human being without sufficient cause brings out the fact that it is a basic requirement of the Islamic way of life to adopt all ways and means that can ensure and promote the safety and security of human life and to frustrate and uproot all tendencies or attempts that can in any way pose a threat to human life.

But this emphasis on purposeful activity intended to ensure peace and human life does not in any way mean that the Muslims can ever compromise their basic religious values or their collective self-respect for the sake of keeping the peace or will ever accept any disgrace or insult as a people or that they can become so passive as to be utterly incapable of self-defense and totally helpless against hostile aggressors and completely at their mercy. This situation negates the very basis of the Islamic concept of peace and respect for life. This, in fact, is that trend towards regional hegemony and corruption on earth, to eradicate which prophets and apostles were assigned in different periods of human history.

When the ultimate objective is to safeguard human life, organising defense against forces hostile to human peace and progress, waging a ceaseless fight against anti-peace forces and defeating their criminal plans of genocide is also an absolute imperative for the forces designated to uphold human progress.

Islam makes it incumbent on the Muslim *Ummah* to have an invincible defense organisation. It should be strong enough to crush any potential aggressor

who is foolish enough to threaten peace. It should be always ready to annihilate the reactionary forces of evil.

True believers can never indulge in militarism of any kind. But if anti-peace forces come out with their lethal weapons of mass murder to destroy peace-loving humanity and wreck civilization, Islam makes it a religious duty of the Muslim *Ummah* to declare war on them and fight with the latest weaponry with full military skill and prowess to the end. The Muslim *Ummah* should, in every aspect of war preparations, be mightier than the enemy. And it should deal the enemy the death blow and save mankind from its evil designs. Allah the Most Exalted says in *Anfāl*:

*“Make ready for them all thou
canst of (armed) force and of horses tethered, that
thereby ye may dismay the enemy of Allah and your enemy,”* (Qur’ān, VIII:60)

Peace-loving nations must always be stronger and mightier than war-mongers. This is what the Prophet conveyed in his famous *Hadīth* “A strong believer is dearer to Allah than a weak believer.” Only thus can they save the peace. The enemy should be made to realise that his country will be completely devastated before he can do any harm to peaceful people, who want to be left in peace.

In a nutshell, the primary objective of Islam is peace and its concept of war is totally that of a defensive one. *Jihād* signifies preparedness to safeguard Islam and the Muslim *Ummah* from aggression.

This *jihād* (holy endeavour) is obligatory on every Muslim. It is imperative for the *Ummah* to safeguard its territory against expansionist adventurism because a Muslim can serve none other than Allah. He has been taught by Islam that he will neither disgrace any one nor accept insult to himself or blasphemy against the true faith. The Muslim *Ummah* attained a position of pre-eminence in the medieval world because of its dedication to peace and human progress. And in future this is the only way to make this earth an Abode of Peace.

MAN AND SOCIETY

Ye are the best community that hath been raised up for mankind. Ye enjoin the right conduct and forbid indecency; and ye believe in Allah . . .

[Qur'ān, III:110]

OF CONTRACTS

The establishment and survival of human society, whatever its type and form, depend on the regard for promises and contracts. Progressive, rather matchless in the world, is that society whose members are trustworthy, mindful of their promises and truthful beyond doubt in whatever they say and do in their mutual relations individual dealings and collective affairs. Conversely, a society whose members do not honour their promises invariably ends in disaster. Such a society loses its reliability and prestige and becomes self-destructive. Like an individual, a society also has its identity. That identity is the product of those traits and characteristics which are displayed by its members in their words and deeds. It is that identity which distinguishes one society from another and which determines its place in the comity of nations. The type of people that constitutes the majority in any society will ultimately determine the type of that society. For instance, if the predominant majority is indolent and lackadaisical it will be called a listless society. The world at large will label a society according to the predominant character pattern of its people. Hence reformers and sociologists want to project only those characteristics of their people as help to make it look trustworthy and respectable and can be shown to constitute its national identity. Honourable members make a society honourable.

Islam has taken pains to stress respect for contracts and has attached great importance to the honouring of promises. These moral qualities are amongst the basic virtues that serve as the foundation for a stable society. According to Islam, the keeping of a promise is one of the fundamental moral values, without which no collective system can be secured and without which no individual and no society can have peace. Apart from mutual contracts between individuals, the contracts entered into by two or more nations are of far greater importance. The respect of a people in the comity of nations or lack of it is determined by its observance or breach of contracts.

The Holy Qur'an ordains:

*"...Keep the covenant.
Lo! of the covenant it will be asked."*

[Qur'an, XVII:34]

From this injunction it can be easily concluded how important, in the view of Islam, is the fulfilment of a promise, for a forewarning has been given that you shall have to account for your promises in the Hereafter. If you want to be safe in that reckoning, you had better be bound by your promises. On another

occasion the Qur'ān lays stress on observance of promises in these words:

*"Fulfil the covenant of Allah
when ye have covenanted, and break not your oaths
after the assertion of them..."*

[Qur'ān, XVI:91]

From these injunctions it is clear as daylight that no Muslim can afford to break his promise. If he does, it means that he shall have to bear the consequences here and be accountable in the Hereafter. Normally a man is restrained from breach of promise by the fear of material loss but a Muslim is motivated by the two-fold fear of humiliation here and punishment in the Hereafter.

While entering into a contract some people keep in view only the benefit that should accrue from it but easily become oblivious of the responsibilities devolving on them thereby. Obviously, this approach is wrong because it deprives them of the sense of responsibility with regard to them and, when the time comes to fulfil their contractual obligations, they prevaricate and refrain from honouring them. In *sūra* XVI people have been warned not to make their covenants a cover for deceit and fraud. When irresponsible people make a covenant they have no regard for it in their hearts and their intent is to derive whatever benefit they possibly can from it and to flout its provisions which entail compliance on their part. Says the Holy Qur'ān:

*"Make not your oaths a deceit between you,
lest a foot should slip after
being firmly planted and ye should
taste evil forasmuch as ye
debarred (men) from the way of Allah, and
yours should be an awful doom."*

[Qur'ān, XVI:94]

This verse also makes it clear that it is undesirable that one people should fraudulently exploit another through a covenant in order to derive one-sided benefit. It is also noteworthy that both the contracting parties need not necessarily be Muslims as a contract can be executed between a Muslim and a non-Muslim. A contract between a Muslim and non-Muslim is valid but the contract must be carried out in letter and spirit in regard to both the rights and the responsibilities accruing therefrom. Islam is positively averse to any gain on the basis of deceit and fraud. It is decidedly against cheating any other nation and thus causing it harm.

The history of Islam contains several instances of covenanting with non-Muslim people and of meticulous observance of the provision thereof although the Muslims had to suffer in the process. However, Islam forbids Muslims from making such contracts as in any way run counter to Islam, because once they are executed they have to be carried out, and such contracts would consequently cause damage to Islam and the *Ummah*. It is, therefore, incumbent on the

Muslims to ponder well beforehand whether or not the provisions of the intended contract will negate any principle of Islam. Having given them the fullest thought and subjected them to a close scrutiny, if it is found that the contract is not antithetical and inimical to the fundamentals of Islam it may be executed with the spirit of genuine compliance and with the bonafide intention to discharge all the obligations inherent in it.

In business, people generally give precedence to self-profit and they do not hesitate from making false promises with a view to winning the other party's confidence. This often results in breach of promise. Islam disapproves of this and sternly forbids making false promises and taking false oaths. The Holy Prophet said:

"Allah will not speak to the person, nor look at him nor sanctify him to enter Paradise, who tries to prosper in business through false oaths".

A true and honest businessman will be in the company of prophets, righteous persons and martyrs on the Day of Judgment.

In short, faithful observance of a contract, be it between two persons or two peoples and be it of a political or a commercial nature, is incumbent on all Muslims.

We should evaluate our existing modes of behaviour in the light of relevant tenets of Islam and assess how far we act in compliance with them. We should see how honestly we observe our contracts and whether the fruits we reap thereby are in accordance with the principles of our true religion.

OF SOCIAL MANNERS

Every society has certain principles to govern the etiquette and manners of its members. They cover the means of earning livelihood, modes of living, norms of social relationship and civic responsibilities. Every society formulates these principles in accordance with its own requirements, environmental conditions and customs and traditions. Islam maintains its uniqueness in this field also. Luckily for us, our life-principles, our behaviour-patterns and our social manners are founded on divine revelation.

The basis for social manners in Islam is not social mores and other such tentative, temporary and unreal foundations. It is so because Islam from the very first day has existed as a sublime and universal life-system (*Din*). It was, therefore, essential to inculcate in its followers the spirit of coherence, harmony, and broad uniformity. It is a matter of pride for us as Muslims that the basis for our social ethics is the injunctions of Allah Who is not only well aware of the nature of man and his requirements but is also the Creator. Thus the Islamic code of social manners has two important characteristics. First, there is uniformity which transcends race and geography, the most common-place instance of this uniformity is our mode of greeting. Wherever two Muslims meet, be it the East or the West, the North or the South, they will greet each other with the heart-warming "As Salam-o-Alaikum" (peace be upon you). This uniformity as I said, transcends all barriers, including the one of language.

Second, because the basis of Islamic life-style is divine revelation, all aspects of human life fall within its purview. This creates in man the feeling that at every place, on every occasion, and in all circumstances he has to live up to divine guidance in both his individual and collective activities. The Holy Qur'an is the word of Allah enshrining comprehensively, and with matchless eloquence, all principles and laws of social life. These principles and injunctions were exemplified in their most perfect form in the life of the Holy Prophet. None of the aspects of his transcendent life remained hidden from the common view and none of his utterances went unrecorded. The whole span of his life is an open book for everyone, Muslim or non-Muslim.

When we talk of social manners, to start with, we should have a firm belief in the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*. Now the world admits the truth that the Qur'an is the Book that has wrought the world's greatest revolution, and the most benign one too. It also concedes that the great personality of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) has had the greatest impact on mankind. This is the epoch of wonders of science and learning, and the contemporary man, due to unparalleled and unceasing advance of science, continues to hold aloft the banner

of inventions and discoveries, and recognises the fact that the Qur'ān and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) have brought about the greatest revolution in the history of the world. It can be said without any fear of contradiction that social manners and economic principles of advanced nations are influenced by, and have been derived from, the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*. It is a strange fact, painful and humiliating, that Islam, which profoundly influenced every nation, is, more or less, conspicuous by its absence among its own followers. Their own lives are no longer a model of Islam. It is a point worth pondering by the Muslims as to where they stand today and what their position is in the comity of nations. Morality takes precedence in all matters and Islam has given it the highest place in life. Allah has called the Holy Prophet the "Teacher of Morality", and has held him to be "on a mighty morality".

The Prophet of Allah observed:

"The best among the Muslims in his faith is he who excels in morality".

"The heaviest in the scales shall be moral excellence".

"No man's faith is perfect unless his morals are flawless".

Undoubtedly, it was due to their resplendent faith and their resilient morality that a mere handful of Muslims arose from the desert of Arabia and, like the sun and the moon, bathed the whole world in the light of their unmatched righteousness. Those Muslims, true and staunch, won the hearts of whole sections of mankind that they came across and they hoisted the flag of the greatness of Islam throughout the known world, wherever they went, the environment resounded with the call 'Allah is Great'. The point to ponder for us is the qualitative difference in the state of affairs then and now. It would be apt to recall that the Qur'ānic guidance is everlasting, not open to any change whatsoever. Similarly, the guidance given by the Prophet of Allah is eternal as it is in complete accord with the Holy Qur'ān. So long as we derive our inspiration from the Qur'ān and keep the *Sunnah* as our guide, greatness will be destiny but when we turn our backs on them we shall fall in the abyss of humiliation and shall have no place of honour in the comity of nations.

To uplift our morality is the first step towards social manners. As Muslims we are brethren and we should respect and love one another.

Respect is a vital part of morality. The respect of parents by children and of teachers by students is of basic importance in social manners, just as elders and teachers should love youngsters and pupils. Without respect it would be impossible to fully observe social manners.

Social inequalities and disregard of social manners have not only rendered our lives insipid and bitter, and deprived us of the true wealth of peace and tranquillity, but have also created serious problems for our *Ummah*.

The first and foremost requirement of social manners is that we should set right the state of affairs in both the religious and the purely mundane fields,

demonstrate unity, adopt honesty and integrity, own abstemiousness, conform to the requirement of modesty and restraint, fulfil promises, be straightforward, speak the truth in all circumstances, earn our livelihood honestly and evince humility and moderation.

As we know, all these qualities figure among social manners, drawn as they are from the Qur'ān and the *Hadīth*. Let us act upon them collectively as a people. No lip service can ever be of any avail. It is high time for action. If we want to live in honour, and want to make the Muslim *Ummah* an example for the whole world we shall have to behave as gentlemen and as true Muslims. We can recapture the glory that once we had by living up to the model par excellence of the life of the Holy Prophet.

The Muslim youth can, as true Muslims, cause a world revolution and turn the tide of the current crisis in the World of Islam. May Allah enable our new generation to become the torch-bearers of moral regeneration and set an example of truth and righteousness for the whole world. Amen!

ADHERENCE TO RITUAL

(To waste money on customs and ostentatious living to establish one's superiority over others is repugnant to the spirit of Islam)

Besides the commands and directions to be followed in the observance of a religion, there are certain customs and etiquettes that are not enjoined by the religious law but are generally practised. They gradually become part of the law and, occasionally, of religion too. Although in most cases, they are deemed to have their roots in religion yet what is regarded as customary or traditional may be in fact at variance with its canon; even contrary to it.

Every Muslim knows that Allah and His Holy Prophet have given us detailed directions at every step and for every occasion, and the Holy Prophet has, by means of *Ahādith* and his own example known as the *Sunnah*, explained to us these matters in a practical manner. We have to pass through different stages in our collective life and face many different situations. Basically these experiences are of two kinds: pleasure and pain or joy and grief. We hold celebrations to mark some joyous occasion and we gather on others to mourn our loss and share our sorrow. Marriage, birth, *aqiqah* (the ceremony of shaving the hair of an infant on the sixth day after his birth and circumcision), the ceremony of the child's initiation into education, the completion of the child's reading of the Qur'an, recuperation from sickness or injury, return from a long journey, success in some enterprise, or the inauguration of an institution or a building are all joyous occasions to be celebrated together by the family, its friends and relatives. Death, illness, failure of a business enterprise etc. are sad occasions.

Among the customs prevalent in our country with respect to joyous occasions and sorrowful events most are such as are permissible but there are some that are repugnant to the spirit of Islam and a few that are impermissible. We would find that amongst the customs that appear in our list of the happy occasions there are many that are permitted by religion provided that money is not lavishly spent on them, while there are some that ought to be discouraged in the light of the *Shari'ah*.

Similarly, among the sad events there are customs that are within the fold of the *Shari'ah*, while some others are repugnant to it and still others that are not permissible at all. The reason for some festive customs being repugnant to the spirit of Islam seems to be that they are mere vehicles of lavish expenditure and ostentatiousness. Most occasions of sorrow necessarily bring man close to the remembrance of Allah and we indulge in these customs which involve wasteful expenditure in the mistaken belief that it will bring us closer to our Lord. The truth of the matter is totally opposite. Any custom which not only

has no precedent in the *Sunnah* but in fact may have elements which make it unlawful can in no way receive the approbation of the Almighty.

The examples that we have from the life of the Holy Prophet himself and of his Companions in respect of marriage are the ultimate in simplicity. The correct approach would be for us to follow these examples. We should shun customs that border on the prohibited, and avoid customs that lead to prodigality and wasteful expenditure. No harm resides, however, in observing customs that have come into vogue due to the complexities of the present day civilization, and in which inhere many socio-economic expediencies which are harmless and are devoid of ostentatiousness.

We should, however, bear in mind one essential point, that ceremonies that vitiate the faith are observed only at the cost of becoming sinful. As for the ceremonies that have been accorded the status of "admissibles" we should keep in mind the fact that their observance has not been declared essential or obligatory. It is not prudent or wise to persist in going all out for ceremonies that have just been accepted as permissible, especially when observance of these customs entails giving up, for that period of time, some duties and obligations. To quote one instance: *walimah* (dinner by the bridegroom or his elders after the consummation of wedlock) is a part of the *Sunnah* and has a precedent in the life of the Holy Prophet. If Allah has given us wealth, let us invite our relatives and friends. Let us give them the best food that we can arrange. But let us at the same time not forget to feed the poor. Let not the invitations be confined to our own stratum. Let us act according to the Islamic concept of equality.

The custom of feeding the bridegroom's party is one that has no precedent either in the *Sunnah* or in the lives of his Companions. Still it is permitted by the *Shari'ah*. What we need to ponder is the fact that we are not as prompt and keen in the discharge of our duties and obligations as we are in the observance of non-obligatory traditions. Do not we realise that if for the observance of such "just permissible customs" we take recourse to some act that is impermissible, e.g., borrowing money on interest or indulging in wasteful expenditure by depriving other people of their rights even the permissibility of such customs becomes doubtful — or delaying a ceremony because of the absence of adequate resources the whole thing becomes undesirable. Take for example the circumcision of a baby boy which is an act of *Sunnah*. If we wish to make it a festive occasion the desire is but natural and hence permissible. But by delaying it till we have adequate resources we only succeed in making the child become older and if the delay is considerable the act of circumcision may involve display of immodesty even obscenity thus making the desire to celebrate impermissible.

Prodigality and extravagance have become the norm in many of our customs. We are all aware of the harm attendant upon them. Because of them a man not only suffers materially but morally as well. Allah does not approve of people indulging in *Isra'f* or extravagance, as He Himself says:

"...Lo! He loveth not the prodigals."

[Qur'an, VII:31]

But disapproving of extravagance, Allah has released man from an unnecessary burden. But men are bending double under it out of their own free-will. Giving undue importance to ceremonies and customs and making them a part and parcel of religion is like overburdening oneself and harming both oneself as well as the society.

There is another aspect of customs and festivities. Amongst the ceremonies permitted by the *Shari'ah* there are a few that are, by virtue of their usefulness, salutary and yet their observance has progressively become more and more infrequent. One such ceremony is that of the initiation of the child in learning the Qur'an. This ceremony is observed when the child commences his studies, and the importance of education and study becomes etched out on his memory and he begins – however unconsciously – to realize the importance of knowledge. Other children who participate in the ceremony also become conscious of the importance of education and learning. Another very salutary ceremony is that of the *Amin* (ending of the reading of the Qur'an). This ceremony also is aimed at achieving the same purpose. The only condition is that these ceremonies should remain optional and not be converted into obligations. And moreover they should not be made the means of display of opulence, and material superiority over others, and of prodigality. But if they are turned into occasions of ostentation they would lead to accentuating social disparity instead of promoting mutual affection and fraternal love.

We should have a fresh look at all our ceremonies from this standpoint.

THE SOCIAL ETIQUETTE

Islam is a complete code of life which provides guidance to man in all spheres of thought and conduct and gives suitable instructions in all matters. All higher religions attach almost equal importance to beliefs and obligatory prayer and worship and give instructions with regard to them in one form or another. Along with this, some advice, mandatory as well as recommendatory, is also offered about day-to-day affairs of life. All religions stress the need to obey moral imperatives. Man is asked to cultivate moral virtues and keep away from vices and undesirable habits.

All religions give some sound suggestions and practical advice to help solve material and worldly problems, in keeping with the contemporary situation. But none of them is as comprehensive and definitive in its guidelines as the Islamic *Shari'ah* (law). Islam is the perfect religion. Hence its great emphasis on propriety in mutual dealings and on moral excellence. Its basic tenet, on which it brooks no compromise is that when a man enters the fold of Islam consciously and as a rational being, it becomes obligatory for him to demonstrate through word and deed and through his honesty and uprightness in his dealings with others, that he follows a higher and nobler system of moral, social and spiritual law – in short, a religious system which, if a person adheres to it truly and honestly, completely transforms him – so much so that even angels begin to envy him.

That is why Islam contains, besides detailed injunctions about beliefs, ritual worship and day-to-day practical affairs of collective life, full guidance with regard to social etiquette. A man is completely free, if alone in his house. He can live as he wants to and do whatever he feels like doing in the privacy of his home. But when he is in a gathering of men or in an assembly or at a get-together, he is no longer a free agent. He is now in the position of a member of a group. As such it becomes obligatory for him to talk and to behave in a likeable manner and to make his presence pleasing for other members of the group. He should see to it that his being in the company of others does not become unpleasant or irritating. He should, by his presence, add dignity and grace to the social occasion. One basic requirement of decorum is that every one should realise that every person present on the occasion has equal rights. The atmosphere of equality and of every one being at the same level should be so maintained that it promotes mutual love and regard. In short, the social gathering or the get-together should be a dignified affair and should serve as a springboard for increased mutual consideration, affection and friendship.

It is in view of this vital need to observe social propriety that Islam instructs

that when a person goes to a social gathering he should take the first available seat. In other words he should sit next to the man who is the nearest to him at the time he joins the group. One should never act as a hustler, shoving people right and left and forcing his way to the front seats. Because this not only causes unnecessary inconvenience and irritation to other people, but also creates a baseless sense of superiority in the mind of the person involved in this graceless act. It is often observed in the Friday congregational prayer, that people who come in early sit haphazardly — dispersed all over — leave the front rows vacant — and occupy the back rows. Consequently those who come at the last minute finding some front rows only partially filled, force their way through the fully occupied back rows to reach the unfilled space in the front rows. This lack of organisation and discipline is, to say the least, highly irritating and causes a lot of inconvenience to the devotees.

This lack of discipline manifests itself in yet another manner. Even when there is no vacant space in the front rows some people use physical force and literally step over people sitting in the rear rows, in their disgraceful rush to go and somehow, find space in the front rows. They do this only to demonstrate their social superiority. Such people do not only contravene the basic norms of social decorum and public morality but also commit a sin by intentionally causing physical inconvenience to their brethren. Islam has strictly forbidden such demonstrations of lack of social grace.

It has, sometimes, been observed in social gatherings and congregations that some people try to occupy the seats of other people by forcibly ejecting them. These ill-mannered people obviously suffer from some illusory notion of self-importance. It is also noticed sometimes that two persons are sitting side by side, either to have a chat on some matter of mutual interest or due to some other consideration, when suddenly a third man comes and forces himself down in between them. Thus he creates a feeling of disgust and dislike against himself in the hearts of the two persons he has imposed upon. This type of misbehaviour is much below the dignity of a Muslim.

When sitting in a social group or gathering one should be soft, pleasant and cordial in conversation. Even when a note of dissent or expression of one's difference of opinion becomes unavoidable this should be done gracefully and the language should be sober and polite. One should, in such situations, be careful not to cause any unpleasantness.

The Companions of the Holy Prophet visited him regularly and often. And they were always meticulous in their social etiquette. And the Holy Prophet frequently gave them necessary guidance in this regard. According to a Tradition, authentically narrated by Tirmizi, the Holy Prophet once told his Companions that when some people are sitting in a circle nobody should sit in the middle of that circle. The Holy Prophet said that a person who does so is accursed. Why? Because when a person sits in the middle of circle he will be facing some and have his back towards some others, which is the height of incivility and rudeness.

It is quite likely that some jokers like to sit in this manner in order to

make people laugh. Whatever the cause or the motive, this ill-mannered behaviour is highly obnoxious. In the same manner nobody should stand in front of or around a person for long, because it was the practice of non-Muslim kings and monarchs to keep their servants, courtiers, nobles and ministers standing before them. And this was such a highly exaggerated form of veneration that it often became a form of worship.

Travellers and wayfarers are forbidden to congregate on the road, because it is undignified and could obstruct the movement of other wayfarers. Likewise staring at those who come and go is also immoral. The Holy Prophet enjoined strict observance of some social manners such as keeping one's eyes looking downward in humility, removing obstructions, impediments and hurtful things from the roads, suitably answering another person's greetings and salutation, asking people to act righteously, dissuading people from doing bad things, showing the right path to those who have lost the way, helping those who are indigent or are in distress. The details are fully listed in *Abū Dāūd*.

Man is influenced most by his company. Shaykh Sa'adi, the great Muslim poet and sage says:

*Righteous company makes you a better man.
Vile company will turn you into a scoundrel.*

One should, therefore, always attend such gatherings or participate in such sittings as are arranged by, or are graced with their presence by, righteous and God-fearing people or saintly persons who are the well-loved ones of Allah. A person's natural potential, his disposition and his inclinations can be determined with considerable accuracy by noting the company he prefers to keep and the type of persons he likes to associate with. There is a proverb the purport of which is that if you want to obtain accurate knowledge of a man's moral character and his disposition you should try to find out the moral conduct, the attitudes and the habits of his friends. This fact has been explained by the Holy Prophet in these words of unique spiritual understanding: "A man is on the faith and religion of his friend".

Allah, the Most Exalted, has recounted some good social manner in the *sūra Mujadila*:

*"O ye who believe!
When it is said,
Make room in assemblies, then make room;
Allah will make way for you (hereafter).*

[Qur'ān, LVIII:11]

In short, social gatherings, assemblies and get-togethers of Muslims should be symbols of Islamic dignity and decorum and only good and noble matters should form the subject of conversation or discussion therein.

SOCIAL MANNERS

Respectfulness to seniors, refinement, propriety, piety, purity, decency, dignity, self-discipline, high-mindedness, perseverance, courage, compassion, sympathy, a developed aesthetic sense, judiciousness, spirit of self-sacrifice, sincerity of purpose, loyalty to friends, unselfishness, dutifulness, fortitude and modesty, knowledge and righteousness, hospitality, humility, affability and fear of Allah – these are the major characteristics of the Islamic way of life which blend together to make human life a model of perfection. Islam has given a concept of social organisation which when fully implemented establishes a society which is conducive to the acquisition by the individual of all these high moral qualities. A society which in turn, is privileged to have people of such moral excellence will undoubtedly be an ideal society. A society of this moral fabric is a truly Islamic society.

The Holy Prophet often used to pray:

“O Allah! grant me the company of people who are pious and virtuous”.

Who are these virtuous people? They are those who have been richly endowed with moral qualities of a Muslim and with the attributes which have just been enumerated. Men become truly noble and virtuous when they follow the directions of the Qur’an, and the *Sunnah* of the Holy Prophet and mould their lives accordingly. It is they that are Muslims and they pass their lives according to the directions given to them by Allah and His last Messenger.

Islam has provided us with guidelines with regard to every aspect of life. There is not a nook or corner of life which is not governed by clear instructions. Each department and sub-department of life is to be reconciled with the requirement of social grace.

The Qur’an in this connection says:

*“O ye who believe!
When it is said, Make room in assemblies,
then make room; Allah will make way for you (hereafter).
And when it is said,
Come up higher, go up higher;
Allah will exalt those who believe among you,
and those who have knowledge, to high ranks.
Allah is Informed of what ye do.”*

[Qur’an, LVIII:11]

Some of the aspects of the overall etiquette which the Qur'an and the *Hadith* have made obligatory are:

1. A person joining a company should take the lead in greeting others, since greeting is an expression of close relationship, respect, and sincerity.
2. One should sit wherever one gets a place. One should avoid sitting in a prominent and central place. One should sit where the host directs him.
3. One should comport himself in the assembly with equanimity, poise and dignity and should participate in the discussion attentively.
4. It is not proper to try to forcibly occupy the seat vacated by another.
5. It is neither proper nor courteous to talk in whispers, as this can cause inconvenience or embarrassment to others.
6. If one wants to speak to the people or make some announcement one should seek the prior permission of the president of the meeting, and should not adopt a manner that would tell upon the position of the person presiding over the deliberations.
7. One should not slander others,
8. One should keep one's voice low when speaking,
9. One should not ridicule others,
10. One should not behave obscenely in a gathering.
11. One should not show disregard or be inattentive to others.
12. One should not jumble up truth and falsehood,
13. One should not call people by bad names.

These are some aspects of the Islamic etiquette.

If we formulate guidelines based upon the above principles of conduct, with regard to assemblies and meetings, and always conform to them in our gatherings and meetings we can be sure that our deliberations would be more productive and meaningful. If we depart from these precepts, our gatherings and assemblies will become ineffective, lack-lustre, and unfruitful.

Social gatherings and assemblies play a key rôle in strengthening or destroying the national fabric. They are the mirrors of a nation's aspirations, its trends, in other words, its psyche. And it is through them that the ethical values that determine individual character and the predilections of the people can be seen in their totality. They are the connecting link between the more knowledgeable, the less knowledgeable, the aged and the young, the experienced and the novices. In other words they serve as a bridge for any likely generation gap or a unifying factor for different classes in a society. This is why social gatherings are so important in life and Islam has given clear instructions about how such gatherings should be organised and meetings conducted.

Most countries of the Muslim world are at present engaged in the process of reconstruction, day in, day out. If we ignore the Islamic code of conduct and ethics, we shall not only fail in our objective, but shall lose our capacity to have a dialogue at all levels – national, regional, and territorial.

What is the basis of our identity? Is it not Islam? Did we not fight colonialism so that we should have the freedom to live according to the teachings of our religion and the commands of Allah. Was it not our intent to work for the renaissance of Islam in our part of the World? Was it not implied *ipso facto* that we should become free in order to become subjects only of Allah? We have inherited a religion that is a complete code of individual and collective life. If we do not make it the basis of our economic, political, social and moral reconstruction, we will have failed in our mission as Muslims. Let us — each one of us — reconstruct our personal lives according to the concept of social graces given to us by Islam and become a beacon of light for the rest of the world in good manner.

COLLECTIVE WELFARE

Every individual wants to be happy and prosperous. This wish is but natural and none can take exception to it. In order to live and to keep his body and soul together man has to do most of the work himself. And making the necessary effort is obligatory on him. But this effort should be made in a manner and to the extent that it causes no harm to others. Nobody can call a person bad or blameworthy who works for his personal welfare. But if, in doing so, he harms other persons, or causes them hardship or suffering, he is not a likeable person. Quite the contrary, he is generally considered to be mean and selfish and earns strong disapprobation. Because, 'one's gain is another's loss' has never been an acceptable approach to human affairs. No system of social or moral values has failed to condemn it. No system of social or moral values has condoned it. The only acceptable or viable principle for the stability and progress and advancement of a society is: The welfare of one is the welfare of all.

If a person aims at success in such a way as not to cause harm to others, his success and welfare will be acceptable to all. But the moment a person begins to transgress the permitted limits, a conflict will occur and the foundations of the society will begin to shake. The basis for the enduring stability of a society is mutual co-operation, regard for the welfare of one another and collective adherence to those principles which are acceptable and beneficial for all. This collective consciousness creates mutual confidence and leads to inter-dependence. Until and unless mutual trust and reliance become an integral part of individual character no concept of collective security can take root in society. A society the members of which do not trust one another and where mutual reliance is not the norm can never enjoy peace, tranquillity and amity. On the other hand, a society where an atmosphere of trust prevails, its members feel secure and live in peace, without any fear or anxiety. Freed from the concern for self-preservation, they can pursue their objectives with full concentration and single-mindedness. They can look forward to success and make good progress in life. Their success leads to collective prosperity. Individual success, through honest effort and personal talent, is a prerequisite of collective welfare. In fact, when most members of a society have the opportunity to flourish along the right lines, we can assume that the process of collective progress has begun.

The ethos of Islam is such that it prefers collective welfare to individual gain. Whenever there occurs a clash between individual interest and collective welfare the latter will be given precedence. The Islamic history bears testimony that our forbears always subordinated their self-interest to the general good. They sacrificed their best interests and gain to ensure collective welfare.

The security and prosperity of a society reside in this concept alone and it is this feeling of collective security that will ensure overall progress. We are today witnesses to the weakening of this sense of belonging and are suffering the evil consequences of our selfishness. Since the noble feeling of collective good has dwindled within us we often relegate collective interest to the background and consequently we are deprived of the advantages a well-organised, strong and stable society could have provided for us.

Islam is the religion of Nature. If we practise what it has enjoined us with regard to collective weal and progress, we can come very close to Nature and can reap all the blessings and bounties that such a proximity to Nature makes available. One of the most important principles which the Qur'an has taught us is that we should extend help to and cooperate with others in every good and noble act and ought to refrain from participation in acts that are likely to cause injury to others. Nor should we cooperate in any sinful, harmful or destructive deed. Mutual help is obligatory only in righteous acts. A Muslim is enjoined not to help in any matter which is repulsive to Allah. Help extended to evil is equivalent to the commission of an evil act. The Qur'an is explicit on this point:

"...but help ye one another unto righteousness and pious duty. Help not one another unto sin and transgression..."

[Qur'an, V:2]

In these few words lies man's well-being in both the worlds. When evil is denied the right and the opportunity to flourish, it will automatically wither away. If a person wishes to commit a wrong act he will not succeed in his aim unless he is encouraged by another party or provided help by it. It thus becomes self-evident that no act, whether it be based upon a good or evil intent, can be successful until it receives aid from other quarters. An act that is harmful to collective well-being is possible only if it receives encouragement on an extensive scale. A man who does an evil act single-handedly cannot save himself from retribution by the society. Therefore mutual help and cooperation is a vital factor behind collective loss or gain. The Qur'an has consequently exhorted the believers in unequivocal words to help in acts of righteousness and to eschew cooperation in evil deeds.

I should like to emphasise here the point that the Qur'an has left no option for the Muslims as far as evil is concerned. It does not say "you may cooperate in evil deeds if you want to or stay away if you so desire". It has given the unequivocal command that no help whatsoever should be extended to evil. In other words, it is obligatory for a Muslim to keep away from evil at all costs. Even being a silent spectator to an evil act being committed is considered a grave sin.

The degree of collective welfare depends upon how far the members of a society forge unity of thought and deed and how far they are prepared to go in

collective endeavour. It is incumbent that whenever a noble work is undertaken all members of the society should come forward to give maximum help and support. In fact, they should themselves seize the initiative and advance forward to help a good cause with all resources at their command. The vast majority of the members of a society will naturally come out to promote goodness if goodness is placed at a premium, i.e., the righteous ones are honoured and erudition and learning is given due patronage. People will then feel inspired to spend their energies in the attainment of knowledge and excellence. This will inevitably ensure the progress and well-being of the society as a whole. Every individual of such a society will strive for the common good and mutual trust will prevail. You know what this society will be in its essence. It will be a truly Islamic society.

SOCIAL REFORM

The fundamental object of Islamic teachings is to reform society, and to reform it in such a way that all men can live in peace and tranquillity throughout the world. The way that makes morality the very breath of life, and the way that inevitably leads man to good behaviour and piety and equips him for the eternal life in the Hereafter – Islam teaches man to be good solely to please Allah. This fundamental object of the teachings of Islam can be achieved only by following the personal example of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) enjoined by the Lord of the Universe, Allah the Most Exalted, and by closely studying the way the final Messenger of Allah reformed the social environment of his time. Since our ultimate aim is to secure the pleasure of Allah – and He has revealed it in the Qur'an that He can be pleased only through complete obedience to His Prophet – it is utterly futile for us to look to any other thinker or reformer of the world for guidance. In fact, it is His promise that any one who follows His Prophet, will receive His love and blessing. If you think over it, there can be no higher status for man than that of his being close to Allah.

It is clear from these introductory observations that for initiating any programme of social reform we will have to follow the Holy Prophet, to study his uniquely perfect life and to take to the path shown by him. As good luck would have it, our ancestors have bequeathed to mankind a complete record of his life. Besides, as so beautifully stated by Hadrat Ayesha Siddiqah, the Holy Qur'an is itself a most perfect illustration of his sacred life. Her words imply that the life of the Holy Prophet is, indeed, the embodiment of all higher values enunciated by the Holy Book.

The social reform wrought by him constitutes by far the greatest and most significant chapter of human history. The Arabs were divided into countless, often mutually hostile, clans, so much so that they had little or no consciousness at all of being a single people. Ignorance and violence had alienated them from those basic concepts of morality and corporate life that essentially make society dynamic and civilized. In such society was born the Prophet of Allah and the mission of prophethood was entrusted to him. He was assigned the task of ridding society of all its prevalent ills and evils and to transform it into an ideal society where all its members should shine forth in the world as the embodiment of the Islamic concept of 'the highest good'. Allah required his last Prophet to so reconstruct the social order and so mould the individual moral character that both should serve as the absolute ideals for posterity.

The life of the Holy Prophet reveals that he acted upon two fundamental principles in order to initiate social reform. First, he never said anything which

he did not practise himself. Never was there a contradiction in his precept and practice, never a gap in his word and deed. Never did he fail to do himself what he wanted others to do.

It is axiomatic that no effort at social reform succeeds unless a reformer himself lives up to its basic principle. The Qur'an underlines the fundamental importance of complete coordination of precept and practice and emphasises its point of view by putting this question to the unbelievers: "Why do you say what you do not act upon?"

As all students of history know the Holy Prophet's mission was a complete success and he brought about the greatest moral and social revolution in the history of mankind. On the contrary, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, and scores of other philosophers, scholars and reformers devoted their lives to the uplift of society but the end-product of their grand teachings amounted to building merely on sand. None of them left any visibly enduring imprint on their immediate social environment. The simple reason is that they preached principles which they themselves seldom practised in their own lives. They taught to others the lesson of love and sympathy but neither were they merciful to the poor nor were they great enough to love their enemies.

Undoubtedly, we in the present-day world of Islam claim to be Muslims and so labelled by the world. We waged a ceaseless struggle in Africa and Asia to throw off the yoke of alien rulers in order to live freely as Muslims and remould our individual and collective lives according to the tenets of Islam and the teachings of the Holy Qur'an. All Muslims desired to be free, to be able to live in complete obedience to the Holy Prophet. We struggled for political emancipation from colonial rule as per injunctions of Allah and in the light of the teaching of His Prophet. We make a pledge indeed, that the Muslim *Ummah* would present to the world the glorious spectacle of the eternally viable moral and social system of our great religion in practice.

Countless and indescribable were the sacrifices at the back of this political renaissance of the Islamic world. The promise of Allah was fulfilled that those who take to His path would be elevated and blessed with His bounties.

But how have we behaved in the post-independence period? Have we not turned our backs on the injunctions of Allah and the teachings of His Prophet? We should ponder in honesty and true humility, whether we can be proud of what we have done since or should in reality be ashamed because we have added another chapter of hypocrisy and lack of Islamic integrity to our history.

How does our society fare to-day? Where, indeed, do we stand now? Have we not thrown to the winds the promises that we made to the mass of our people? Courage of conviction and dauntless freedom of expression are strikingly foreign to us.

The Holy Qur'an forewarns:

*"...be not cast by your own hands
to ruin..."*

[Qur'an, II:195]

Man is thus prohibited from doing anything deleterious. But, by disregarding the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*, we have put the *Ummah* on the way to social and moral decline.

A pervasive decadence has come to eat into the vitals of our society to the extent that divisive forces are out to destroy our entity as an *Ummah*. Not that reformist activities have ceased. Politicians continue to stress improvement and for many years religious leaders have incessantly exhorted people to discard all thoughts and practices that are alien to our religion. A sustained and brave effort at inducement to moral amelioration is continuing but has made little headway. This state of affairs is probably the result of another situational malady, which brings to one's mind the maxim "Physician, heal thyself!" No reformatory effort which runs counter to the *Sunnah* can ever bear fruit.

Another basic point in Islam regarding reformation is strict truthfulness. The Holy Prophet was the most complete example of this virtue and he always urged the Muslims to scrupulously refrain from telling lies. Lying is one of the meanest social evils and he was extremely careful to ensure that those within the pale of Islam remained above and beyond it. As for himself, he was far above it even before he was assigned as the final Prophet by Allah, and during the pre-prophethood period the whole Quraish, lovingly called him the 'Truthful and the Trustworthy'.

Lying tops the list of social evils. In the lexicon of Islam *La'anat* (curse) is one of the harshest words. The Qur'an uses it for Satan, the Jews, infidels and hypocrites, but for a Momin it is used only when he lies. It brings out the extreme vileness of lying. When a Muslim, who has been enjoined by Allah and His Prophet to be truthful, tells lies, there can never be any forgiveness for him. He stands accursed. The Muslim world is involved in all sorts of evils. Hoarding, adulteration, cheating, harming others for self-profit, breach of promise and trust, dishonesty, back-biting, slander, bribery, gambling, usury — indeed all moral and social vices are rife. The question is how to bring a change. Its practical answer is that the men that matter in the Muslim world should re-orientate their character by abandoning just one evil — that of telling lies. They should pledge to follow the Holy Prophet and to totally refrain from falsehood, directly as well as indirectly.

I am convinced that if people take to truthfulness, this single act will lead to a successful reformation of our society whether we live in Asia or Africa. Morality is the greatest power on earth. Both the Book of Allah and the actual life of the Holy Prophet are an immortal lesson in morality. The recent history of the Muslim world bears no testimony to high morality. As a result, we have found no enviable position in the contemporary world. Let us now learn to relish high morality, bearing it vividly in mind that thus alone can we reform our society and make the Muslim world worthy of its great religion and heritage.

THE RIGHTS OF FELLOW-BEINGS

It is necessary for human beings to live together and establish a relationship of mutual help, respect and love, because on it depend their welfare, peace, prosperity and well-being. This compulsive need for the human individuals to cooperate with one another has led to the evolution of group life and the formation of communities, tribes and nationalities. In other words society came into being and developed as a primary human institution on the basis of a viable concept of rights and obligations. Social life cannot come into existence without the sense of individual responsibility. Nor can a society progress without it.

Allah, the Most Exalted, has informed His creatures through the Holy Qur'ān, and taught them to fully recognise the fact, that this universe and all the things that it contains were created for their benefit and to meet their needs. He wants men to realise that He created all that is there to cater to their requirements.

"He it is Who created for you all that is in the earth..."

[Qur'ān, II:29]

Naturally this good earth and all that it contains is to the advantage of all His creatures. It is therefore incumbent upon all men, who dwell on this earth, to avail of His countless bounties themselves and also help others in so doing. Conscientious fulfilment of one's obligations to one's fellow-beings means paying full heed to their interests and needs and rendering them all possible help in getting their due share. To illustrate: When Allah bestows worldly wealth on a person He requires him to give out of it to those to whom it has not been given, because it is their right to partake of it. And sharing one's good luck with those who are less fortunate is counted amongst the principal human obligations.

Similarly, if Allah has given a piece of farmland to someone and he has cultivated it, and Allah in His infinite graciousness and mercy brings out of it a full harvest He makes it obligatory for the owner of the harvest, not to keep it entirely to himself but to give some portion of it to those who were not endowed with this munificence.

Islam has extended the scope of rights and obligations and in addition to the rights of man on other men, the rights of other creatures and living species have also been clearly and explicitly specified. It tells man in unequivocal terms that besides his obligations to fellow-men, which are self-evident, he has definite obligations towards animals, plants and vegetation, even towards inanimate things.

The Holy Prophet (peace be on him) once said that a man was forgiven

all his sins just because he had saved the life of a thirsty dog by procuring for him a drink of water. On another occasion pointing to a woman who kept a pet cat and did not feed it for days on end said that she would be chastised by Allah for being cruel and callous despite her fasting and regularly saying her prayers. By this he intended all Muslims to know that they are required by Allah and his Holy Prophet to fulfil all their obligations and do what they owe to men and also to other creatures.

Islam is the first and the last religion which has fixed the priorities in the domain of human relationships, keeping in view the bonds of nature. A system of human obligations which allows others to benefit at the cost of parents is totally unnatural and despicable according to Islam. It does not tolerate such unnatural and inhuman treatment of those to whom one owes one's life and upbringing. Islam gives precedence to kinship and close family ties in apportioning the extent of obligations. It expects its followers to give to all what is their due, and for this purpose, has fixed a clear set of priorities, and a clear order of precedence and eligibility. If a man does not conscientiously fulfil his obligations towards his parents, does not treat well his close kinsmen, does not look after orphans, the indigent and the neighbours, does not offer succour to the wayfarers, makes no effort to help slaves get back their freedom or to rescue afflicted and suffering Muslims from their hapless state of degradation, adversity and political slavery, he will be held guilty of not fulfilling his religious duty in regard to human rights, however generous, munificent and philanthropic he may be towards others. His generosity and philanthropy will be in the nature of rain-bearing clouds that pour their water on arid hills and wastelands but let good fertile earth lie barren for want of water.

No religious code of social morality or society prior to Islam had even the remotest notion of the importance that Islam attaches to human rights. The Islamic concept of these rights, in a nutshell, is: "Man was created to feel a heart-ache for fellow-creatures, to share their agony, their loss". Tending those who are sick, helping widows, looking after orphans, providing succour to the disabled and the helpless, arranging for the education of those who are illiterate, these good deeds are considered the best form of prayer and worship. The Islamic *Shari'ah* ordains that no neighbour should be allowed to go hungry. If one eats to full satisfaction while his neighbour goes without food, that meal is unlawful according to the Islamic canon.

The Holy Prophet was told in the Holy Qur'an to enjoin on those who enquired from him what portion of their income to expend on the needy, that whatever was surplus should be spent to help those who deserved help. This does not mean that one should spend his entire savings on others and join the category of the indigent. The purpose of Islamic charity is to expend as much as one can, without becoming destitute oneself. The beauty of it is that Islam does not say that when you help others you are being kind or generous. It emphatically stipulates that fulfilling one's obligations is deserving Allah's grace and a practical way of following and obeying the Holy Prophet.

There are many types of helplessness: mental disability, physical handicap,

blindness, retardation, incapacity — all these are forms of helplessness. There are persons in our society who, due to some tragic circumstance or some unforeseen calamity, are counted amongst the disabled persons. All such unfortunate people deserve the attention of the affluent ones of our society, the industrialists, leading traders, businessmen and other men of means. The Islamic concept of the rights of fellow-creatures makes it a sacred and immediate duty to provide succour to these our less fortunate brethren and to ensure an honourable life for them. In this noble work the affluent Muslim nations should, as a matter of religious duty, help their less fortunate sister nations and provide them resources to improve the lot of those who are physically not in a position to earn their livelihood for themselves.

DISCRIMINATION ON THE BASIS OF RACE AND COLOUR OF THE SKIN

If we delve deep into human history, analyse the events of ages gone by with care and attention, see with a discerning eye the conditions that prevailed in the world prior to the dawn of Islam and also keep in view the map of the contemporary world, we will be inevitably led to conclude that this callousness and villainy has come only to the lot of man that he victimises his own fellow-beings. And when the lust for blood takes hold of him, he satisfies his craze by shedding the blood of his own brethren. To strengthen the pillars of his power and rule he fills their foundations with the flesh and the bones of human beings like himself. To embellish the palace of his royalty he raises minarets of human skulls.

Innumerable blood-curdling and mind-shattering scenes of human genocide at the hands of man and destruction of populous cities and localities by ruthless mass-murderers that have been witnessed in the past and are being witnessed today, if analysed with the objectivity of a true historian, will lead to the conclusion that the main cause of all these universal tragedies is discrimination between man and man, people and people, nation and nation, on the basis of race and colour of the skin.

Division of mankind was rampant on the basis of colour and race even in that dark ages and that period of ignorance during which Allah ordained His last Prophet and sent him to mankind with His eternal light of guidance, the radiance of which is universal and ever-lasting. This malignant disease had, in those days too, made this Allah's good earth the arena of turbulence and corruption.

The Holy Qur'an declares to mankind:

*"Corruption doth appear on land and sea because of (the evil)
which men's hands have done..."*

[Qur'an, XXX:41]

And the treatment of this terrible malady has been prescribed by the Holy Qur'an thus:

*"O mankind! Lo! We have
created you male and female,
and have made you nations and tribes,
that ye may know one another.
Lo! the noblest of you in the sight of Allah,
is the best in conduct."*

[Qur'an, XLIX:13]

This means that races and tribes in themselves do not constitute the criterion of honour and excellence or lowliness and disgrace. Excellence and superiority come from obedience to Allah and through being God-fearing. These noble and excellent people will get recompense from Allah and will also achieve eminence and a place of high honour amongst Allah's creatures in this world.

It was as a consequence of this noble teaching of the Holy Book that people who accepted divine guidance and surrendered themselves to Allah and His Prophet, at once rubbed off their hearts and minds all marks of dynastic, racial, tribal, and national distinctions and differences, all vestiges of discrimination on the basis of colour or caste, and merged themselves in an indissoluble unity and so lost their prevailing narrow parochial identities in an all-embracing, universal fraternity that Salmān the Persian; Suhaib the Greek, and Bilāl the Ethiopian (may Allah be happy with them all) broke all their ephemeral links and affinities and became sons of Islam — their sole new identity was their being members of the Islamic fraternity.

The edifying and glorious scene of fraternal love and mutual regard, sympathy and preparedness to sacrifice oneself for fellow-Muslims that the world beheld in Madina after the arrival therein of Islam, had as its motif, the fact that Islam rejected as myth all distinctions except that of shared beliefs. The relationship of brotherhood-in-faith that it had established between all reciters of the sacred phrase ("There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is Allah's Messenger") was much stronger than the bonds of race or house or that of being blood brothers.

It was as a consequence of this teaching of Islam that the hearts of two Muslims, who were physically the farthest removed from each other, one residing in the West, the other in the Far-East, one dwelling in the North, the other in the Far-South, throbbed together — in perfect unison. Thus a word *Ummah* came into being, which, despite great physical distances was 'One Nation'. You know why the past tense has been used here — because we have again fallen into the abyss of ignorance, from which Islam had taken us out. As a consequence of our turning our backs to its inspiring teachings we have been reduced to such an ignominy that not a muscle twitches in our body, not a prick is felt in our soul, when our own brothers, our own sons-in-faith are ruthlessly massacred in another part of the world. Our own limbs, our own hands and arms are being cut to pieces and thrown in the dust and we feel no pang, no pain at all.

The reason for this insensitivity is that we have forgotten the meaning of the sacred phrase of Islam, the verbal symbol of our faith and have started worshipping the idols of nationalities and races. We are no longer sensitive to the fact that racialism and the cult of nationalities which has broken the unifying thread of our *Ummah* and has made it worthless like the scattered beads of a broken rosary, is as repugnant to an *Ummah* which worships Allah, the One and the Peerless, as paganism. In fact, the cult of nationalities and racialism is synonymous with paganism.

We were welded into an *Ummah* and given a special identity so that we could perform the duty of taking the Message of the Holy Prophet of Allah to others:

“O men, you are all the progeny of Adam and Adam was moulded from clay”.

We were given this final advice by the last Prophet of Allah on the occasion of his last Hajj:

“There is no distinction between an Arab and an Ajamite that endows one with automatic superiority to the other – the differences of colour and race are without any meaning, without any import. They are totally unreal”.

The Holy Prophet gave us this message, and subsequently, made it imperative that:

“Those to whom I have said this here, have the duty and the moral obligation to convey it to those who are not present here and have not heard my words”.

When the Muslim *Ummah* was truly righteous and adhered to the precepts of Islam, its one distinct identity was its submission to Allah and His last Messenger – All Muslims were members of a ‘single *umma*’. In that glorious period of our history there was neither any consideration of colour nor any differences on the basis of racial identity. It stood high amongst the nations of the world with all the glory and majesty of one indivisible entity and the comity of nations acknowledged its pre-eminence. Why? Because the Muslim *Ummah* had complete faith in Allah, accepted the last Prophet of Allah as its guide and teacher, because its special distinction was its firm acceptance of the teachings of the Qur’an and the Holy Prophet and acting in complete conformity to them was its sole purpose and ultimate objective.

But we know that we not only ignored but also overtly disobeyed the teachings of Islam concerning race and colour and have been gravely punished for this crime, over the last few centuries. The teachings of the Holy Qur’an and the Holy Prophet are true and eternally viable. Becoming impervious to them and evading full adherence to them can shatter the *Ummah* and its national solidarity to bits.

Dear brethren in faith! Our survival as an *Ummah*, the maintenance of our distinct identity, depends on our resolve to exist as a single indivisible entity and to work sincerely and selflessly for glory and greatness of Islam. In this lies our own honour and eminence. The entire world of Islam has to function as a healthy organic whole to be able to efficiently work to regain its lost position.

*“And hold fast, all of you together,
to the cable of Allah, and do not separate...”*

[Qur’an, III:103]

May Allah the Most Exalted give us succour. Amen!

COME, JOIN THE HOLY ENDEAVOUR

The dictionary meanings of the word *Jihād* are: An endeavour, a concerted effort, utilising all physical and mental faculties, to achieve a predetermined, specific objective. And the terminological meaning is "all effort and endeavour, undertaken purely for Allah, to achieve the victory of Islam and in the defence of Islam and the *Ummah*". Every effort for the consolidation of the nation or for proclaiming the word of Allah whether this effort is through the pen or the tongue, through the written or the spoken word, through intellect or weapons, is *Jihād*. *Jihād* is one of the basic statutes of Islam. If it is not peace-time, thereby meaning that war has been declared against Islam or the Muslim nation, *Jihād* becomes obligatory for all Muslims and not committing oneself to it is against the requisites of *Imān* (Faith) and Islam. So much so, that to turn back after taking part in it is to be guilty of apostasy – a crime against Allah. It is said in the Holy Qur'an:

*"O ye who believe!
When ye meet those who disbelieve in battle,
turn not your backs to them.
Whoso on that day
turneth his back to them,
unless manoeuvring for battle or
intent to join a company,
he truly hath incurred wrath from Allah,
and his habitation will be hell, a hapless journey's end."* [Qur'an, VIII:15-16]

Who does not know that both Islam and the nation are presently in the range of the enemy's assault. Now it is for us Muslims to ponder how best we can meet the situation and protect the higher interests of our religion and that of our nation.

At present the Islamic world is faced with exceedingly trying conditions. On the one hand, the Islamic world is itself guilty of having forgotten the dictates of Allah and the message of Islam, besides its human entity, and on the other, the situation is that the evil forces are poised for the kill. Right now, when the Islamic world is entering the 15th century of its era and is going forward with its noble intent to consolidate and strengthen the *Ummah* and fulfil its obligation to proclaim the word of Allah before all mankind, the forces of evil have woken up and are getting ready to defeat its aims. This situation has placed the Muslims

in a position which calls for *Jihād*. It is incumbent on the Muslims as an *Ummah* to join this struggle for life, this noble endeavour, this crusade, with total commitment. Allah, addressing the whole of mankind, says in the Holy Qur'an:

*"O mankind!
There hath come unto you
an exhortation from your Lord,
a balm for that which is in the breasts,
a guidance and a mercy for believers.
Say: In the bounty of Allah
and in His mercy:
therein let them rejoice.
It is better than what they hoard."*

[Qur'an, X:57-58]

The very first *sūra* of the Holy Qur'an opens the door of well-being and success and that is why it is called *Sūra-e-Fateha* – The Opening. This glorious *sūra* encourages and exhorts all men to seek the straight path.

This 'straight path' is that which enables the traveller, the individual as well as the race, to avail of all their rights and to achieve their ends and ideals in this world and the world Hereafter.

The prayer 'show us the straight path' which in this *sūra*, is taught to all mankind, tells us that Allah is the Lord of all worlds and on this account, this teaching that He has sent down, is a message for all mankind – for ever and for ever.

We have, by the grace of Allah, entered the fifteenth century of our *Ummah's* life. The history of the last fourteen hundred years is a story of ups and downs, rise and decline, vigour and decadence, knowledge and ignorance, watchfulness and stupor. It has its sunlit days of joy and dark nights of agony. The Muslims wherever they be, wish the advent of the fifteenth century to be the starting point of a new life, a better, more wholesome, edifying and fruitful future. To be able to achieve this object, we must look deep within our collective self and try to comprehend the tragic lessons and tidings of glory that our history is replete with. We must also carefully determine the factors that led to our triumphs in the days gone by and the causes of our past failures and frustrations.

Let us today humbly thank Allah, the Lord of all worlds, Who blessed us with guidance and gave us the ability to be firm in our faith. It is only His bounty that the whole world has focussed its attention on us Muslims, on account of our numbers as well as our natural resources. We should also realise that despite our abundant faith, the leadership of the world is still denied us and we are not at the helm of human affairs. Present conditions make it imperative that all Muslims should examine this matter in depth and ponder why an *Ummah* which in its first divine lesson was told to seek knowledge, and the first revelation to whose guide, the Holy Prophet, began with the word 'Recite' (Read), is not ahead of the rest of the world in the field of knowledge. Actually we should, at this time, have been at that height of glory in our quest of knowledge which

others might not be able even to dream of. Allah, the Most Exalted, has made the earth and the heavens and all things that they contain subject to man's will. But we have forgotten this great gift of Allah and other nations are busy conquering the universe.

We should not even for a moment, in this our contingent life, forget that Allah and His true Prophet have enjoined us to seek knowledge and to publish it. Therefore my message to the Muslim youth is that they should equip themselves fully with beneficial knowledge and provide a God-worshipping human leadership which is the prime need of the contemporary world. Mankind is tired of the present state of divisiveness and confusion, instability, anarchy and uncertainty, and is anxiously seeking and awaiting a balanced and just social order. Young men inspired by a dynamic faith in Allah and with hearts lit up by knowledge can bring to a happy end this period of anxiety and expectation. While entering the fifteenth century of Hijra, the Islamic world should have absolute belief and conviction that there is only one Glorious Being Who can provide us true guidance and there is only one foresight that can save us from faltering and stumbling — the Being Who, once in the distant past, lit up the Mount Sinai with a ray of His Holy Light, Who appeared in a luminous cloud of Grace on the top of the Mount Fārān, Who encouraged the two holy persons who had taken shelter in the cave of Sur with "Don't grieve, for Allah is with us", Who gave the tidings of victory in the battlefield of Badr thus: Allah is with you, so no power can prevail against you". (Qur'ān, III:160). And again in the foothills of Uhad, informed thus:

"...To help believers is incumbent upon Us."

[Qur'ān, XXX:47]

He, our Allah, is even today the Light of Hope for a pillaged caravan; the only support for a despoiled congregation.

Muslims of the 15th century should realise that there is no uglier blot on the sacred mantle of Islam than the intolerable position that they should have to learn from other nations the nature of human freedom and the means of national welfare. We firmly believe — indeed it is our *Imān* that Allah is One and without a partner (or rival) in His Self and His Attributes. We also believe that the Glorious Qur'ān's definitiveness and all-embracing guidance is unique and without a parallel.

We have the conviction that the Messenger to whom the Qur'ān was revealed is at the loftiest height of human excellence and submission to Allah and that there has never been the like of him in calling mankind to the path of righteousness and *Imān* and improving and reshaping human character.

It is therefore necessary that the *Ummah* which is bound in faith to the One Allah and adheres to the teachings of the last of His messengers should in itself be unique and should have the majesty and the grace of the noblest of nations. It should be the best in its collective life-style and its deeds. Its actions, its distinctive characteristics, its moral stature and behaviour, its knowledge,

its art and culture should be of such high standards as every other nation should follow it. Its way of life should be the ideal the whole of mankind should strive to achieve. This is the import of the verse:

"Thus We have appointed you a middle nation..."

[Qur'ān, II:143]

And it was for this that the Muslims were promised:

*"O ye who believe! If ye keep your duty to Allah,
He will give you discrimination (between right and wrong)..."*

[Qur'ān, VIII:29]

There is not a fleeting moment when in the expanse of the earth of *muezzin's* call to prayer 'Allah is great' does not issue forth, saying to people. 'Here is *Salat*' (congregational prayer), 'Here is well-being'. The present state of affairs in the world of Islam calls for total commitment to a noble endeavour, the crusade, for progress and the pre-eminence of *al-Haq* (the Absolute Truth). We should zealously accept this invitation, this challenge and reshape our lives according to the social, moral and scientific format of Islam and get ready for the glory of Islam and the exaltation of the Muslim *Ummah*.

THE DRESS OF A MUSLIM

An objective and keen study of the teachings of Islam will inevitably lead every honest person to the conclusion that Islam is a universal religion, and that its guidance is not confined to a particular class or body of men. In fact it is addressed to the whole world and to all sections of mankind. If the affluent people have not been left unchecked and unbridled by Islam, it has also provided a well-integrated system to remove the adversity and resourcelessness of the impoverished.

He who has been magnanimously endowed with worldly goods is reminded at every step that his affluence is not the consequence of his own planning or the wages of his own toil but in fact it comes from someone else and he who is lowlier than the other one has been denied bounty by the same other power. Consequently if any man of wealth, just because of his material prosperity as compared to other men, who in all other respects are just like him, and the latter's poverty, claims divinity for himself, he is making nothing but a false and baseless claim. This claim is wrong because the wealth he is so proud of is not at all his. It is the kindness of Allah and entirely a temporary trust. Similarly if the impoverished people accept the false claims to divinity of the rich people and bow their heads in homage before them or contrarily because of this wealth which is Allah's bounty collide with the former or wage war against them, they are not only working to destroy human society but are guilty of rebellion against Allah's One-ness and His Glory and Providence, which is undoubtedly a suicidal act.

It was because of such things that the first teaching given to mankind was the concept of Allah's One-ness. It was meant to purify collective life, despite social inequities and economic disparities, of jealousy and bloodshed — moral depravities which had always been the cause of bedevilling collective repose and well-being. The concept of the One-ness of Allah presented by Islam implies that Allah is the true Lord and Master of all that is. Nobody but He is the One who owns all and to Him alone all worship is due. To give and to bestow is also one of His attributes. Islam does not want people to accept the One-ness of Allah only as a concept and a belief but also aims at creating economic balance in the society. Its Grand Design is to bring into being such an ideal social order that will ensure that economic disparity between man and man does not make the society reach the stage where the rich and the poor become two different species. Now we have to see what plans Islam has to bridge the gulf between the rich and the poor and to achieve economic equilibrium in the human society.

Class disparities amongst human beings become pronounced when the

rich class adopts a consumer-oriented life-style, and the display of affluence and wealth becomes the objective of its life. Ostentatiousness in day-to-day living, in food and dress becomes an obsession and the life of the wealthy becomes so artificial that all its aspects manifest not only wealth and luxury but a dominant feeling of class superiority.

Naturally those who are economically less fortunate will, in the presence of this grandiose living, begin to have a feeling of inferiority and helplessness. Islam by laying down limits on the display of wealth and by forbidding artificiality in living and wasteful expenditure, brought the affluent class out of moral debasement and by stressing the moral excellence of simplicity removed the 'have not' feeling from amongst the poor people. By doing so it created an economic equilibrium which has no parallel in the history of mankind.

The Persians, in order to show off their grandeur and magnificence, were in the habit of wearing dresses woven in gold thread and studded with precious stones and crowns and coronets. Their thrones and seats of honour were richly jewelled. Gold and silver were lavishly displayed to manifest their superiority. Islam detests such pomp and splendour. It inculcates simplicity in gait, manner of speech, conduct and character, food and dress, way of living, indeed all aspects of human life. The aim is to create a complete sense of belonging and fellowship in the society and remove all causes which can create a sense of disparity or deprivation amongst any section of its people. With this end in view it emphasises the need to keep communal life free of unnecessary fineries and refinements. Luxurious living and wasteful expenditure which was the practice of the Persians was strictly forbidden and to eliminate such trends for ever the use of gold and silver ornaments by men was disallowed. This was, besides other things, designed to ensure simplicity and hardiness amongst men and to maintain economic equilibrium.

Islam likes moderation and balance in all spheres of life. Of course it has not declared elegance as taboo (*Harām*). Indeed, the Holy Qur'an says:

"Say: Who hath forbidden the adornment of Allah which He hath brought forth for His bondmen..."

[Qur'an, VII:32]

Undoubtedly elegance is one of the purposes why a person puts on dress, as has been stated in the *sura Araf*: "O Children of Adam! We have revealed unto you raiment to conceal your shame, and splendid vesture" (VII:26). Two other purposes are mentioned in this verse. Dress protects a man against inclement weather and meets the needs of modesty and chastity. In other words, dress which does not meet these requirements cannot be called proper dress from the Islamic point of view. But elegance does not mean beautification or display of majesty or wealth. Nor does it apply to the dress which Islam has specified for women. Elegance means sober and civilized dress, neat and clean-wearing apparel. This cleanness and neatness should be such as to look after both aspects, the exoteric as well as the esoteric. And it should also have simplicity. It should not

be bedecked with silk, gold and precious stones.

Hadrat Umar (may Allah be happy with him) quoted the Holy Prophet as having said, "Do not wear raiments made of silk, because he who wears them in this world will be denied them in the next world".

There is a *Hadīth* in *Muslim* that once the Holy Prophet said to Hadrat Ali about a gift of silk-cloth that the latter had received, "Rend it and make out of it women's head pieces and distribute them amongst women".

There is a *Hadīth* in *Abū Daūd* that Allah the Most Exalted will on the Day of Judgement give the most beautiful raiment to him who, though he had the means, yet preferred simple dress to rich apparel.

Undoubtedly a man should dress himself according to his means and position. But simplicity and dignity are imperative. So is the need for moderation. It is also imperative that dress made of silk material should not be worn because it has been strictly forbidden in a *Hadīth*.

Tirmizi has a tradition in which Hadrat Abū Musa (may Allah be happy with him) quotes the Holy Prophet as saying, "Dress made of silk and gold is forbidden to the men of our *Ummah*. But it is allowed to our womenfolk".

We have talked of the injunction forbidding the use of silk, gold and silver by men. The expedience and reasons of banning them have also been explained. With regard to silk however it is worth mentioning that the Holy Prophet had given special permission to some Companions to use silk fabrics because of health reasons.

This *Hadīth* is quoted in the *Sahīhain* from Hadrat Anas bin Mālik according to whom Hadrat Abdur Rahmān bin Auf and Hadrat Zubair bin Awwām (may Allah be happy with them) were permitted to wear dresses made of silk because they suffered from the itch.

According to another *Hadīth* the above-mentioned Companions complained to the Holy Prophet, during a battle, that there were lice in their garments, so he allowed them to wear silk shirts.

It is a recognised principle of Islamic *fiqh* (jurisprudence) that if the need is compulsive, it is permissible to use what is forbidden. Accordingly, Allāma Ibn Qayyam says about the *Ahādīth* quoted above that they have two aspects – one pertains to canon and the other to medicine. The position according to the canon is that silk is forbidden to men and permitted to women. Now as for the medical aspect and the resultant expediency and need, it is possible that it was bitterly cold and there was no other dress which could withstand the vigor. It is also possible that no other dress was available to cover the body, or it was declared permissible on medical grounds.

There are many such instances in the *Shari'ah*: It is forbidden to offer voluntary prayer during the prohibited timings to ensure against any possible resemblance with sun-worshippers: otherwise voluntary prayer obviously is an act of righteousness.

As for the medical properties and the essence of silk is concerned it is included amongst the animal medicines and is a refresher of the heart and a tonic. Hakīm Rāzi has written that silk imparts warmth to the body. However

all these instances are in the nature of exceptions. It is an indisputable fact that Islam has forbidden men to wear silk. Mainly because in the normal course of things it is put on, only to display personal splendour and magnificence and is one of those ancient Persian symbols which brought out their national inclination towards luxury and lavishness. Such dress, if it becomes the norm in a particular sector of society, becomes a symptom of economic imbalance and deepens the poor class's feeling of deprivation, whereas Islam establishes equilibrium in every sphere of life and by reducing the margin of disparity brings people closer to one another. Islam deprecates everything which in anyway smacks of pride, arrogance, or ostentation. It desires all human beings to cultivate the qualities of simplicity and moderation.

THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE OF OBLIGATORY ALMS

The process of encouraging and persuading people to expend in charity and Zakāt started in Islam at the very beginning. Accordingly it is said in the *sūra Māūn*, which was revealed in Mecca:

*“Hast thou observed him who belieth religion?
That is he who repelleth the orphan,
And urgeth not the feeding of the needy.”*

[Qur’ān, CVII:1–3]

This is an open condemnation of the people who evade fulfilling their obligations towards the less fortunate and needy members of the community.

After the migration of the Holy Prophet and the Muslims of Mecca to Madina, alms and Zakāt became doubly more important, because in the earlier period after this historic event in the history of Islam, common Muslims especially the Migrants were facing extreme penury and starvation. The numerous episodes of the financial distress and adversity of the Companions (may Allah be happy with them all) narrated in *Ahādīth*, mostly relate to this period. It was in view of this situation that Allah commanded that what was surplus to their basic requirements with the Muslims should be spent to alleviate the distress of fellow-believers. Love of wealth and the human weakness to keep it safe impedes acts of charity. Consequently many people kept their best goods away and gave to others what was defective, bad, or of little value. They were warned through this advice: “O Muslims give from your earnings and from what was produced for you from the earth, a good portion” — that is, spend out of your pure and good things in the way of Allah. In the *sūra Āl-i-‘Imrān* Allah says:

*“Ye will not attain unto piety until
ye spend of that which ye love. And whatsoever
ye spend, Allah is aware thereof.”*

[Qur’ān, III:92]

The result of these categorical injunctions was that besides those who were affluent and made full arrangements for distributing alms and Zakāt, even the poor and the people with little to spare, were also enthused towards sharing, whatever they had, with their brethren. They worked as labourers in the commercial area and would carry heavy loads on their backs to get wages so that they could spend what they earned, after a day’s hard labour, in the

path of Allah and out of love for Him on His other servants.

The social and economic importance of Zakāt can be realised only by those people who make an in-depth study of the Muslim society of the first period of Islam – the Muslim society of Madina during the life of the Holy Prophet – and try to understand how Islam managed so successfully to tackle its grave economic problems solely through the institution of Zakāt.

The most difficult problem of economics is how to maintain a viable balance and equilibrium between affluence and poverty amongst the members of a given community. No human mind, from the earliest period of recorded history till to date, has been able to find a solution to this knotty problem. Somebody once advised that all members of a society or people of a country should have equal share in its total assets and resources. Every one should have equal right to own and spend the national wealth. Some modern economic experts have offered the solution that the ruling party should have complete ownership of the total national wealth and it should accept the responsibility of providing subsistence to the masses; but on the condition that the common man should forfeit all his rights to own personal property. This means in plain language that people should be born in a government flat, eat the sustenance doled out by the government and die in a government hospital.

These days the advanced and affluent countries are spending billions of dollars in developing countries, so that the latter should be satisfied with the populations they already have and stop the process of human procreation all together. This, in the name of controlling the present-day population explosion. They want no posterity in the poor countries of the world!

The Holy Qur'an specified a new and different path. It said that the artificial concept of absolute human equality is an impossible notion because it is against the fundamental law of human nature, and because in the matter of sustenance Allah has given precedence to some over others.

Allah the Most Gracious has solved this problem by making Zakāt obligatory and declared it to be the third fundamental tenet of the true faith and instead of basing it on law founded it on *Imān* (faith), spirit of sacrifice and the natural human instinct of sympathy. It made Zakāt an act of prayer and submission to Allah. Thus it became a means of getting closer to Allah. The general principle was: give to the creatures of Allah, in the name of Allah and for the sake of Allah. This way the problem of personal kindness was also solved for ever.

The system of Zakāt has another advantage – as a result of it the indigent and the needy begin to love their affluent brethren. In other words, the wealth of a rich Muslim is a limited company in which poor Muslims also are share-holders. Full and judicious implementation of Zakāt removes the curse of beggary from the Muslim society.

The Muslim law has specified the people who are entitled to receive Zakāt and has made it clear that one who receives Zakāt without being entitled to it makes Allah angry with him and the portion received by him is illegitimate and illegal. No economic system has come up till now with as balanced a solution to this grave problem as Zakāt, which makes any society where it

operates the symbol of well-being by removing all causes of economic adversity.

Through Zakāt, Islam tried to solve economic problems and was able to create a spirit of solidarity and an atmosphere of mutual regard and fraternal love. And it was because of its social implications that when during the period of the Righteous Caliphate of Haḍrat Abu Bakr (may Allah be happy with him) some people demonstrated reluctance in paying the Zakāt, the successor and deputy to the Holy Prophet, despite the fact that the Islamic state was passing through its most critical phase, did not agree to showing any leniency to them or to giving them any concessions. At that time the Muslims of Madina were once again in the midst of a life-and-death struggle and the state of affairs was exceedingly dangerous and critical. And as happens in most situations of collective dispersion, some apostate chiefs were intent on rebellion and were dreaming to become independent rulers. Furthermore, in compliance of the will of the Holy Prophet an army under the command of Usāma bin Zaid had to be despatched towards Syria. Because of the complexity and awesome nature of the circumstances confronting the central government some influential persons refused to pay their Zakāt dues. In view of the gravity of the situation common Muslims felt that it would be prudent to postpone punitive action against those who had refused to pay the Zakāt. Despite the numerous disturbances and turmoils, being faced by the *Ummah*, the most important and delicate matter was this refusal by several tribal chiefs to pay the Zakāt. They claimed that they were followers of Islam and were also adamant about not paying their obligatory religious dues. Because of this dilemma some Companions of the Holy Prophet were against using armed force against these recalcitrants. They were of the view that the punitive action against them should not be undertaken as *Jihād* (a crusade) because they recited the *kalima* (the sacred words uttered when entering the fold of Islam, 'There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is Allah's Messenger') and believed in the One-ness of Allah and the Prophethood of Muhammad (peace be on him). They had only refused to pay the Zakāt. As such it would not be permissible from the religious point of view to use the sword against them. But Haḍrat Abu Bakr's religious insight and understanding of the spirit of the *Shari'ah* saved the day for Islam. History is a witness to the fact that his insight was at the loftiest heights of human capability. Other people saw dark clouds hanging ominously overhead. But he could also see their silver lining. Therefore at this historic juncture he said these inspiring words with full confidence: "By Allah, a man who gave a kid as Zakāt during the lifetime of the Holy Prophet and refuses to do so now, I will wage the holy war against him". This is an authentic Tradition of *Sahih Bukhari*.

Even Haḍrat Umar had to accept the correctness of his decision and his sagacity — that if these people are let off today in the matter of Zakāt, tomorrow we will have to do the same in the case of people who refuse to say the congregational prayer and to keep the obligatory fast during the month of Ramaḍan. Consequently an army was sent against the tribes that had refused to pay their Zakāt dues and as a result, Islam got a new life. Zakāt is indeed the best and the surest way to ensuring well-being and prosperity in the Muslim society.

If all Muslim countries make Islamic *Shari'ah* basis of their social reconstruction, we can become a model of social justice and collective welfare for the whole world — an example worthy of universal emulation.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLECTIVISM IN ISLAM

Collectivism is natural to man. Were this spirit of collectivism not innate to man, there would have been no families, no villages, no towns, no cities no nations. This, in other words, means that if the need for mutual cooperation and sharing were not compulsive, civilization would not have had its birth, and man would not have been any different from non-gregarious animals. At the time of the birth of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him), the people of Arabia, were embroiled in ceaseless tribal warfare and mutual conflict and jealousies. Consequently they had no idea of collectivism. One tribe was arrayed against another and often without sufficient cause. They did not feel any compunction in shedding one another's blood on the slightest provocation. To them the killing and hunting of men was a better sport than horse-racing or going after game. So far gone were they in mutual animosity that vendetta was carried from generation to generation. There was thus a never-ending chain of fighting and bloodshed.

The first thing the Holy Prophet did was to give his people a sense of kinship based on common religion in place of relationship based on race or tribe. That is to say, man was taught for the first time that the real relationship between man and man is that which is born out of intellectual harmony, identity of views and general outlook and sharing of the same moral and spiritual values. Islam thus brought into being an ideological *Ummah* and Muslims being components of the organic whole that is the *Ummah* are always ready for every sacrifice for one another and for the *Ummah*. This is why treachery is punishable in Islam in the same way as treason against the state or the party is in contemporary capitalist and totalitarian countries respectively.

The importance of collectivism in Islam is so great that in its early period it converted life-long enemies into brethren-in-faith under the guidance of the Holy Prophet, and in place of family and tribal kinship the emphasis was shifted to the religious fraternity. This put an end to mutual enmity in the length and breadth of Arabia and the Muslims were made into an organized and invincible force. Allah has said in the Qur'an:

"O ye who believe! Observe your duty to Allah with right observance, and die not save as those who have surrendered (unto Him); And hold fast, all of you together, to the cable of Allah, and do not separate." [Qur'an, III:102-103]

This is a command of Allah. What clearer guidance could mankind have for

becoming one big family, and the Muslims to become one cohesive whole? Allah made collectivism the means for the pre-eminence and greatness of the Islamic *Ummah*. It is collectivism that made them the great world power they were for many centuries. If Muslims succeed today in forging a united front, they will be able to withstand the mightiest power of the world. But, on the other hand, if they fall victims to inner dissension and forego their collective spirit, because of selfish motives and aims, the process of disintegration will naturally gain momentum and their downfall and extinction will become inevitable. Allah's laws never change. They are the same for every nation and community. He who sows the wind shall reap the whirlwind. Allah has expressly commanded:

*“And obey Allah and His messenger,
and dispute not one with another lest ye falter and your
strength depart from you...”*

[Qur'an, VIII:46]

This is the pillar upon which the edifice of Islam rests and this will last only so long as Muslims are alive to the importance of the collective spirit and are bound together in love and fraternity.

The Prophet always emphasised the importance of collectivism unequivocally. To bring home its prime importance to Muslims he used an analogy. He said that Muslims are the bricks of a wall, each supporting the other. So long as the bricks support one another the wall will stand strong and solid, able to withstand all jolts. But once the bricks begin to crumble, the wall is bound to collapse. On another occasion he compared the *Ummah* to the human body and said that individual Muslims are its organs and functional parts. So long as the organs work in unison and compliment one another, the body remains healthy. Collectivism is thus the corner-stone of Islam. Once it becomes shaky or rotten the edifice of Islam will collapse, sooner or later.

It was this collective spirit that gave Muslims of the age immediately succeeding that of the Prophet, victory over Byzantines and the Sassanids despite the fact that they were far inferior in numbers and were ill-equipped as compared to their antagonists.

In the Qur'an, Allah has sternly commanded the observance of this co-operative spirit, in all circumstances and at all costs.

*“Whoso slayeth a believer of set
purpose, his reward is Hell for ever.
Allah is wroth against him and He hath
cursed him and prepared for him an
awful doom.”*

[Qur'an, IV:93]

Next to paganism and idol-worship, the direst punishment specifically prescribed is that for the wilful murder of a fellow-Muslim. The perpetrator of this crime

shall abide in Hell for ever and he shall remain eternally accursed. This deterrent punishment was announced to ensure against one Muslim killing another, and thus weakening the power of Islam. Muslims must become victims to decline and disgrace if they flout these explicit injunctions. And this is what is happening today.

The Holy Prophet in his last address, on the occasion of Hajj, especially referred to the importance of collectivism and, emphasising the fact that all Muslims are brothers unto one another, made it obligatory for them to preserve and promote unity and collectivism. This could be achieved only through individual dependability and honesty. Muslims are forbidden to harm one another or to commit murder, or to steal one another's property.

History attests to the fact that as long as Muslims safeguarded their collective spirit and preferred the common good to their self-interest, they remained invincible; but no sooner did they begin to indulge in internecine strife than they fell before the enemies of Islam – and in so abject a manner as if glory had never been theirs. We all know what happened in Spain and the same story was repeated, though not to that horrendous extent, elsewhere as well. By the Grace of Allah the world of Islam is now showing signs of awakening and is working to forge links of collective unity. May Allah bless this noble endeavour of the followers of His beloved Messenger and enable the *Ummah* once again to achieve the pre-eminence and glory that is its ultimate destiny. Amen!

THE OBLIGATORY ALMS

Obligatory alms is one of the five basic components of Islam. Payment of this alms is as compulsory as performing the obligatory prayer. In the Holy Qur'ān the mention of the 'prayer' is generally followed by the mention of *Zakāt*. Among the foremost and immediate duties of the Islamic state is establishing a firm system for offering obligatory prayers and paying the obligatory alms:

*"Those who, if We give them power in the land,
establish worship and pay the poor-due and enjoin
kindness and forbid iniquity."*

(Qur'ān, XXII:41)

The Holy Qur'ān requires us Muslims to strictly follow its injunctions with regard to the prayer and the alms. Both are fundamental duties and acts of worship. These are the injunctions which were given to the earlier Prophets as well. That is why every religion of the world lays full stress on financial succour of the needy and the indigent.

Of all the religions of the world, Islam is the only one that has a regular system of paying alms and, by enforcing it in the first Islamic society established in Madina, it created a balanced social order and thereby it gave a practical demonstration and proof of the universal wisdom, expedience and viability of the obligatory alms (*Zakāt*).

The special distinction of Islam is that it stated in clear and unambiguous language the percentage of total wealth that is to be paid as obligatory alms — if you have this much money or gold and silver, gems and other valuables you are required to pay so much to the needy and the indigent. If what you possess is grain — this is the portion you are directed to give to those who are entitled to receive it. It is also ordered that the total annual income must be calculated to the last penny and a given percentage of it be paid regularly. Other religions have no doubt declared it to be a very noble act to help the poor people; they have indeed made financial succour of the impoverished fellow-beings a religious duty. But none of them had ever fixed the percentage of wealth which it would be imperative to pay as alms. Consequently, followers of religions other than Islam have continued to do this good and virtuous deed at personal level but alms-giving had never taken the shape of a collective responsibility or an economic institution. No other religious community has created a system such as we find in Islam, which, in fact, is the foundation of Islamic economics.

The Holy Qur'an has given it such primary importance that *Zakāt* is second only to the obligatory prayer. And by bracketing them together it has made the Muslims conscious of the fact that 'prayer' and the 'obligatory alms' are the two most important and primary symbols of the truly Islamic life. If a group of people discards these two acts of worship as a group, it can no longer be counted amongst the Muslim *Ummah*. That is why in the time of the Caliphate of Hadrat Abu Bakr war was waged against those who had refused to pay their obligatory alms.

Eminent exponents of Islamic *Hikmah* (wisdom) have, while explaining the nature of prayer and alms, said that submission to Allah can be complete only if it is expressed through both life and wealth and all bounty bestowed by the Lord should be spent in obedience to His orders in His way, in total acceptance and surrender. Hence in the religious obligations prayer is 'worship through person' and alms is 'worship through wealth'.

The real purpose behind 'the obligatory alms' is to ensure that wealth is not accumulated in the hands of a few. Islam refuses to accept that in a society established on its code of life there should exist impoverished people, on the one hand, and extremely rich, prosperous and affluent persons, on the other. Islam desires that national wealth should never be allowed to become the monopoly of a particular class of people or of a few individuals. On the other hand it should always be in circulation. It, therefore, enjoins all Muslims who are in a position to do so to expend a fixed portion of their wealth on the needy and resourceless people. This is intended to ensure that the portion taken out of surplus gold and silver, cattle and grain, and cash is passed on to the indigent and the Islamic society is safeguarded against economic disparity and disequilibrium, and national capital does not get blocked. Regular payment of obligatory alms will enable every member of the community to benefit from it.

It should be kept in mind that *Zakāt* is not only a beneficial financial institution, it has many important moral expediences. Payment of obligatory alms regularly removes all greed and avarice from the heart. One learns not to over-value worldly goods and possessions and gets fully trained to sacrifice one's all in obedience to Allah's Command. This act of virtue and righteousness promotes mutual love amongst the Muslims. *Zakāt* was made obligatory to ensure that members of the *Ummah* become brothers unto one another.

Experience shows that what detracts man from true submission to Allah is his love of life and property. Islam enables man to transcend this love. Through the concept of *jihād* (the holy endeavour) man overcomes his love for life, and *Zakāt* and voluntary charity (*sadaqah*) rid the heart of the greed for worldly goods. Thus, Islam trains a Muslim to live on this earth as a true servant of Allah who holds nothing dear except the approbation and pleasure of Allah.

Zakāt (obligatory alms) is one of the imperatives of Islam. But to win Allah's approbation Muslims are encouraged to give in voluntary charity what is surplus to their needs after they have paid the *Zakāt*. The high merit and excellence of these charitable acts are emphasised time and again, thereby drawing the

attention of the Muslims to the great recompense that awaits those who offer voluntary help and succour to the needy people. The Holy Qur'an says:

"Take alms of their wealth, wherewith thou mayst purify them and mayst make them grow, and pray for them..."

(Qur'an, IX:103)

The *Hadith* of Bukhari says that the Holy Prophet has said: "There is no doubt a right in wealth in addition to *Zakāt*."

This means that the responsibility of a Muslim does not end with the payment of the *Zakāt*. He can be required to make available a part of his wealth, to meet other social, developmental and defence needs of the *Ummah*. The obligation to pay *Zakāt* is in fact a training of the believer in generosity and magnanimity. Islam loathes greed and miserliness in man and Islam promises a sure recompense in the form of well-being and success in the Hereafter only to those who are immune from miserliness:

"...And whoso is saved from his own avarice – such are they who are successful."

(Qur'an, LIX:9)

Zakāt occupies a position of basic importance, next only to the obligatory prayer, in Islam's system of training. Therefore, all Muslims, whether male or female, if they have goods or money equivalent to the 'fixed estate' are commanded to pay *Zakāt*. In case of default they will be liable to penal action under the Islamic *shari'ah*.

The Holy Prophet has said:

"I have been commanded to wage war against people till they profess openly that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger – and from then on they perform the prayer and pay the alms."

This is no undue hardship, but a requirement of social justice which remains unfulfilled if the system of *Zakāt* is not strictly enforced. Therefore whether people are happy or otherwise if they are Muslims, the obligatory alms or the poor-tax must be recovered from them. Allah the Most Exalted has ordained its payment and has promised His blessing on the discharge of this duty in these words in the Holy Qur'an:

"...I shall ordain it for those who ward off (evil) and pay the poor-due, and those who believe Our revelations;"

(Qur'an, VII:156)

While paying this alms or poor-tax we should not forget that among those

who deserve to be included among its recipients are those people who have absolutely no income, because of the scarcity of honourable means of livelihood. Although they strive hard to earn their living yet they can neither get a job nor some other suitable work. Certainly they can be and should be helped, out of the collected alms. But we should see to it that they do not make unemployment and inactivity a habit or a regular pretext for obtaining this succour and do not begin to depend upon it as a means of income.

Those members of the community can also be helped out of the *Zakāt* collection who were once quite well-to-do but some misfortune or sudden affliction has reduced them to penury. In a state where the Islamic system is practically in force the entire *Zakāt* collection should be placed at the disposal of the Head of the State who should arrange to give succour to all who are in need of it.

GIVING MUTUAL RELATIONSHIP A SOUND BASIS

Unity and concord are the pillars on which is built the edifice of our Muslim *Ummah*. Mutual love and affection and a happy relationship between Muslims of all classes, ensures our national solidarity. That is why it is enjoined at many places in the Holy Qur'ān that Muslims should completely abstain from all such things as can even remotely disturb amity, hurt the internal accord and complicate our collective affairs.

We should evaluate our attitude and course of action at every step to find out whether we are fulfilling the responsibilities we owe to our brethren as ordained by Allah and His last Prophet. Are we jealous of anybody or is our perspective being influenced by any feeling of animosity or malice towards some individual or group? Are we being fair or are we hurting somebody without any rhyme or reason? Are we on the war path vis-a-vis some person without cause? Are we conspiring out of personal rancour against anybody. Are we in any way trying to belittle or degrade a friend or a brother Muslim or deprive him of his rights? These are the things that can weaken national unity and we Muslims are required to abstain from them all at all cost.

If we are indulging in any activity that can hurt or damage the solidarity of our *Ummah* we should take immediate steps to remedy the situation and to reform our ways. This reformatory initiation should not be confined to our individual selves. If we see that some of our Muslim brothers have fallen apart and have become hostile to one another due to some misunderstanding, it is our moral and religious duty to come forward and help remove the misunderstanding and the resultant discord and animosity. One should try to mediate between estranged friends and fellow-beings with complete sincerity and traditional affection. Allah, the Most Exalted, has commanded thus in the matter:

*“...And adjust the matter
of your difference, and obey Allah and
His messenger, if ye are (true) believers.”*

(Qur'ān, VIII:1)

The Muslim *Ummah* is the first nation in the history of the world that came into being purely on the basis of belief in Allah and His last Messenger. This *Ummah* has no considerations whatsoever of residence or race, colour of skin or nationality, caste, tribe or country. Whoever believes in Allah and His last Prophet immediately on joining the faith becomes a member of this nation,

this fraternity of believers, this nation of God-fearing men and women. Every Muslim, because of his faith and belief, is a brother unto other Muslims, more real and dearer than blood-brothers:

"The believers are naught else than brothers. Therefore make peace between your brethren and observe your duty to Allah that haply ye may obtain mercy."

(Qur'ān, XLIX:10)

This fraternity is established by Islam on the basis of belief and submission and because of this strong base the Muslims are a well-organised and well-established nation. It is our foremost duty to safeguard it and to defeat all attempts to weaken its unity. All individuals who have been joined together in a religious fraternity are committed to protect it from any discord finding a foothold in their midst. Any establishment emerging among them and any animosity developing within their polity is a matter which is repugnant to the spirit of Islam and detestable in the eyes of Allah and His last Prophet. We have standing orders that if two groups of Muslims, due to some misunderstanding, become hostile and begin to fight each other it is imperative on other Muslims to intervene and help them come to an agreement and end their mutual discord. If any of the parties is arrogant, self-conceited, and bent on transgressing the limits of propriety, force should be used against it and as long as it does not accept to turn to Allah for His verdict in the matter war should be carried on against it. But no matter what the background, when the time for decision comes all requirements of justice and equity should be fully and meticulously met. The war against the transgressor is only in compliance with Allah's command, hence animosity or rancour should not in any way be allowed to influence the final judgement. The verdict should be completely in accord with Allah's injunctions. It is said in the Holy Qur'ān:

"And if two parties of believers fall to fighting, then make peace between them. And if one party of them doth wrong to the other, fight ye that which doth wrong till it return unto the ordinance of Allah; then, if it return, make peace between them justly, and act equitably. Lo! Allah loveth the equitable."

(Qur'ān, XLIX:9)

If we assess our state of affairs at the collective and national level we will have to remorsefully acknowledge the fact that our fraternal solidarity is much weakened, because we do not have the state of Allah's fear within us, on the basis of which the *Ummah* was established. Our material interest and aims have

separated us from one another. Our problems and our objects are at variance. Godliness has been replaced by selfishness in our hearts. Turning away from the approbation of Allah we have made the acquisition of worldly goods our sole objective. We are faced with the end about which we were duly fore-warned. We were told that our religious fraternity should transcend self-interest and its basis should be the fear of Allah and submission to Him, otherwise the *Ummah* would disintegrate. Today every Muslim country has complaints against some other Muslim country. Some Muslim countries are at war against one another. All attempts at mediation are of little avail. The fact of the matter is that the area of differences and conflicting claims grows wider and wider.

The social situation is no better. Brother has imaginary or unjustifiable grievances against brother. Insincerity, lack of loyalty, malice and hostility, mutual enmity and rancour have spoiled the atmosphere. Children do not obey their parents. Near kinsmen lack regard and mutual affection. Everybody is indifferent to everybody else. Every class is full of hatred for other classes. All groups are filled with parochial feelings against rival groups and work feverishly to defeat their opponents and put them to shame. Is this the *Ummah* whose unity and solidarity was like an invincible fortress? Is this the *Ummah* which not to speak of taking up arms against its brethren-in-faith, was enjoined to abstain from all things that could even remotely hurt their feelings or interests? Are we the people whose unity and concord was declared by Allah as His special blessing and who were required by our Lord and Master to keep our mutual relations free of all dissension and in perfect shape? Was inner discord in our *Ummah* ever more pronounced or dangerous? Does not this situation which is so fraught with deadly peril require any thing of us?

Please remember, personal piety and virtue is not enough. As Muslims it is our duty to the *Ummah* as ordained by the Holy Qur'ān, to try and remove the causes of inner tension, discord and animosity. Our love for the true faith of Allah makes it imperative on us to come forward and do our very best to the utmost limit of our capability to remove corruption and turmoil wherever we see it emerging in the Muslim world, to eliminate disarray in our ranks wherever we notice it, and to promote feelings of amity, friendliness, indeed fraternal regard among individuals as well as groups and Muslim peoples on the basis of sincerity, love of Islam and fear of Allah. The present-day discord and the ever-increasing animosity amongst Muslim peoples is a challenge to our sense of honour as believers and to our covenant of submission and surrender to Allah the Most Exalted. The *Ummah* is divided in regional groups which are motivated by obnoxious, parochial animosities. This is the time for us to turn to Allah and His last Prophet. The deterioration of our mutual respect and regard into hatred and disgust has put the *Ummah* in the worst state of disarray and it has made our profession of faith a matter of deep shame for us. It is the time for a little self-reckoning. Listen to what the Qur'ān says to us:

*“...So keep your duty to Allah, and
adjust the matter of your difference...”*

(Qur'ān, VIII:1)

May Allah enable us to tread the straight path. Amen!

HELPING THOSE WHO ARE NEEDY

Islam has made it obligatory for all men to come to the succour of those fellow-beings who stand in need of it. It makes us realise the fact that the affluence we have been endowed with is not ours alone, without anybody else having any share in it. It tells us that in fact there are rightfully its co-sharers — our kinsmen, indigent people, those who are disabled or impoverished, widows and orphans who have nobody to look after them, and those needy but self-respecting people who, because of their sense of honour, cannot beg for financial help and succour.

In truth, wealth and worldly resources are in the nature of a trust and the class of people who have been blessed with wealth and affluence should not think that it belongs solely to them and they can do with it whatever they like. Instead, they should consider themselves to be its trustees.

The right of the indigent people to the wealth of the rich people has been accepted by the Qur'ān which contains many verses on this subject. For instance, it says:

*“And in whose wealth there is a right acknowledged
For the beggar and the destitute;”*

(Qur'ān, LXX:24-25)

Of course a beggar or supplicant is he who openly asks for succour or begs for help. But this verse includes in its scope every person who is needy and is desirous of succour because of his indigence. Giving such a person something out of one's wealth or goods is, in reality, passing on to him what was his rightful share in it. And this righteous act is really giving back what one has held as a trust. Turning away from a needy person who has asked for help or rebuffing him rudely is contravention of clear Qur'ānic injunctions.

We should also keep in view the fact that the needs of a suppliant can be diverse or of different types. They can be financial, physical or intellectual in nature. We should render what help we can, most willingly, generously and to the best of our ability. If a disabled person is in need of our physical aid or support, he is also needy and we should come forward to help him. If some one asks us to help him safeguard his honour and self-respect by enabling him to maintain his social respectability, we should not shirk it but should assist him to our fullest extent. Succour of the indigent is specifically mentioned, with a lot of emphasis, in the very comprehensive concept given to mankind by the Qur'ān in respect of righteous action:

“It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces to the East and the West; but righteous is he who believeth in Allah and the Last Day and the angels and the Scripture and the Prophets; and giveth his wealth, for love of Him, to kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask, and to set slaves free;”

[Qur’ān, II:177]

Giving generous help to those who are genuinely in need forms an important part of the complete and eternally viable code of life and the economic and financial system given to mankind by the Holy Qur’ān. It makes it incumbent upon every well-to-do member of the society to expend all that is surplus to his legitimate needs on those kinsmen who are in straitened circumstance or have meagre resources. The Holy Qur’ān makes it obligatory for a rich person to so arrange things that his neighbours can partake of his wealth. Islam enjoins all Muslims who have enough to spare to help those indigent people who ask for their succour besides fulfilling their financial obligations towards their parents, kinsmen and neighbours. In fact, meeting the needs of those who deserve help is obligatory for every Muslim who is in a position to do it. A man who believes in Allah, in His last Messenger and the Day of Judgement can never forget the fact that it is impossible to win Allah’s approbation without discharging this responsibility to the utmost of his physical and financial capability.

Expending in the succour of the indigent, in order to win the approbation of Allah, is superior to most other virtues because it is the touchstone of our belief and our actions — in fact a test of our being true and righteous believers. It indicates how sincere a believer in Allah and His Messenger is in his belief and his conduct and what portion of his wealth he devotes to the propagation of collective virtue and the fulfilment of his socio-moral responsibilities. It shows whether he really accepts the title of Allah to the wealth He has blessed him with, and what his standard of compassion and commiseration is for those who are less fortunate than himself.

If a man’s inner-self is lit up by belief and faith he will come forward enthusiastically to render whatever help he can to ameliorate the condition of the needy. He who expends in the way of Allah has a heart totally free of greed or miserliness and he will ultimately be blessed with success and well-being according to the tidings given in the Qur’ān:

“And whoso is saved from his own greed, such are the successful.”

[Qur’ān, LXIV:16]

This means that a true Muslim is required to be generous, large-hearted, sincere and compassionate. He must have unbounded sympathy and fellow-feeling. It is a great moral attribute which Islam inculcates in every Muslim. It expects him to excel in it, so that he participates in collective welfare not under any external compulsion but as an inner impulsion born of his submission to Allah. Islam safeguards the rights of the less fortunate and the indigent members of the community on the basis of this moral imperative.

May Allah enable us to do our best in helping our needy fellow-beings.
Amen!

**THE GATEWAY OF ISLAM
(THE FIRST LIGHT OF RIGHTEOUS ACTION AND
MORAL EXCELLENCE)**

That Islam, emerging from the Arabian peninsula, spread in a very short span of time not only in South and South East Asia but throughout the world, was no mere accident of history. On the contrary, the major causes of its quick and large-scale acceptance lay in the historical environment of the time as well as its inherent qualities that worked like a magnet for the whole of mankind. In that historical environment of ignorance and exploitation of man by man it lit the torch of humanism, compassion, social justice, self-sacrifice, sympathy and fellow-feeling. Its higher social and moral values made it a fountain-head of enlightenment, and its principles of liberty, equality, freedom of thought and action and reliability made it a blessing for all men and a cure of all human ills, whether material or spiritual. It received an enthusiastic and spontaneous welcome wherever it arrived. Why? Because its message was not meant only for the Arab people but was addressed to all mankind.

Islam says that as it is necessary for all men to believe in One Supreme Being, Allah, the Lord and Creator of the universe, in the same manner there should be only one *Din* (way of life) and a single all-embracing, universal system of beliefs and values for the entire human race. This was the only way at that time to reform and set right a world deeply distressed by corruption and this is still the only remedy of the prevailing state of human agony. The secret of human salvation lies in the total acceptance by man of Allah and His last Messenger, and complete adoption of Islam as the universal code of life. To achieve this objective it is necessary for the Muslim men of religion to undertake, on whole time basis, its propagation and dissemination.

In the letters the Holy Prophet sent to contemporary kings and rulers after migration to Madina, the third sentence, generally, was an admonition that if the king turned away from Islam he would bear the guilt of his subjects not accepting the true faith.

This clearly shows that these autocrats would be accountable for the misery of their helpless subjects who groaned under the yoke of their tyranny and suffered the ignominy of being made to worship false gods, besides being punished for their own disbelief, disobedience and criminal disregard of the truth of the revealed Word. Islam came as a divine blessing for both these classes. On the one hand, it saved the oppressed masses from submission to false gods and

cruel kings and, on the other, it turned tyrants into God-fearing believers and inculcated in them high moral qualities and the zeal for righteous and benevolent deeds. And both classes became a part of one fraternity – a brotherhood of selfless servants of Allah and His creatures, who were totally subservient to Allah and His last Prophet and were exemplary exponents of righteousness and moral excellence.

Righteous men and holy men who undertook the spread of Islam devoted their lives to carrying the last message of Allah the Most Exalted to the farthest corners of the world. They neither cared for their comfort, nor were they daunted by the perils inherent in their mission. Love of the homeland and their kith and kin could not keep them back. No racial or parochial feelings could ever become a mental block and no attachments were ever strong enough to prove a hindrance. They had only one aim in life. Only one desire filled their being and that was to carry the message of Islam to the people of the world. They desired no pillage or plunder. Neither victory on the battlefield nor the crown of a conquered territory was ever their objective. The fact of the matter is that a down-trodden humanity was itself waiting for them with outstretched arms because of the peace, tranquillity, social justice and human kindness that their religion ensured for the common man. And look at this land which has the unique honour of being the Gateway of Islam. It is an unforgettable fact of history that it was an inhuman society. An anarchic state of loot and mass-murder prevailed at that time in this region that compelled the forces of Islam to come and save humanity from the blood-thirsty maniacs who formed the ruling clique. When Muhammad bin Qasim set up an Islamic state here in 714 A.D. and made it a major centre of the Islamic world, it really became the gateway of Islam in this part of the world.

They did not come to South Asia purely on their own. They were asked to come by Iran. Humanity groaning under the Brahmin exploitation was looking anxiously and suppliantly towards Khyber.

Muhammad bin Qasim did not celebrate his victory in Sind as an acquisition of territory. He considered it as the Gateway of Islam and envisaged it as a means of bringing the true faith of Allah in this vast region.

Muslim traders too came in large numbers to South Asia through this gateway of Islam in every age. They created a lot of goodwill for themselves in the local populace because of their honesty, personal integrity, hard work, truthfulness, and high morality.

They presented to the high and low of this part of the world the countless merits of the Islamic way of life and the viable principles of justice and equality that form the foundations on which a truly Islamic state is established. Most of the Hindu kings and princes embraced Islam at the hands of these proselytizing Muslim traders.

Besides these traders, there came a whole band of great Muslim saints and mystics. These holy men did not confine themselves to this region of Sind but fanned out to the farthest corners of South Asia. They preached love, equality and human brotherhood and explained in a most convincing and uplifting way

the concept of the One-ness of the Supreme Being. They instilled in them courage, fortitude and bravery and, by making them believe firmly in Allah, the Lord and Master, enabled them to confront and vanquish false gods. One cannot afford to ignore the impact of the Muslim Sufis on this region, which flourished for many centuries as a major centre of Islamic civilization.

History tells us that the real centre or focus of all life on earth is monotheism. Whenever mankind has turned away from this basic truth it has got itself stuck in servility and slavery of one master after another. The result is not mere domination of man by man. As a matter of fact, the lower self of every man comes to have complete control over him and the whole human setup begins to disintegrate. All higher values vanish into the thin air. All distinction between good and evil is lost, and justice and equity become non-existent. Man becomes oblivious of fellow-feeling and human kindness and life loses all purpose, all meaning. Nations begin to plan each other's humiliation, in order to establish their hegemony. Strangely enough, the West as well as the East today are passing through the same exploitative and loathsome phase of expansionism which Islam faced at the time of its advent.

After many ups and downs, a historic struggle led to the partition of India in August, 1947, that is on the 27th of Ramaḍān 1366 A.H., the day of the beginning of the descent of the Holy Qur'ān. In the middle of the Night of Excellence an Islamic ideological state named Pakistan emerged on the map of the world. This state included in its territory the Gateway of Islam.

I am completely convinced and firmly of the view that if the real import of the establishment of Pakistan and the descent of the Qur'ān on the same day i.e., the 27th of Ramaḍān, is lost on its people and they fail to comprehend the significance of this auspicious conjunction, the state of Pakistan will continue to be in the grip of one catastrophe after another, and the noble object for the achievement of which this homeland was bestowed by Allah on the Muslims will remain an unfulfilled dream.

We all know the extent of our failure and witness our setbacks with mournful eyes. Our misdeeds led to the dismemberment of an Islamic state. We brought on us all our misfortunes ourselves because we strayed away from the path of truth and righteousness. We lost sight of the Islamic concept of the *Ummah's* solidarity and became enamoured of theories alien to our collective genius.

Fortunately, the ideological state of Pakistan is located in the territory of the Gateway of Islam, and Allah, the Most Exalted, has given it a rare opportunity to make Islam the basis of its collective life and its national ethos. Having done that it should start a holy endeavour to take Islam's message to the rest of mankind. It should contribute its mite to the efforts of the world of Islam to present to the contemporary world the eternally viable socio-economic system of Islam along with its edifying moral and spiritual values.

What lies in the future is known only to Allah, the Omniscient. But the contemporary conditions are very conducive to the propagation of Islam. The youth of today is completely disillusioned with the soulless materialism of

capitalism as well as communism which have reduced man to the level of a mere economic unit. He is on the look out for a system which will satisfy his entire being, his total personality including his innate longing for the intangibles. Let our traders, our students, our men of learning, our missionaries, and our mystics equip themselves with the qualities that made their predecessors such lovable preachers of the true faith. If we all do it with real dedication Allah will bless our efforts with success and the *Muazzin's* call to Allah will soon begin to resound everywhere in the developing countries as well as the developed countries of the world.

Lo! Allah enjoineth justice and kindness, and giving to kinsfolk, and forbiddeth lewdness and abomination and wickedness . . .

[Qur'ān, XVI:90]

MORALITY IS THE REAL SOURCE OF STRENGTH

What is the status of man in this world?

This is by far the most important question that has ever agitated the human mind and is a fundamental question for philosophy and religion, besides higher literature. There can be no valid and viable basis for true understanding and insight, metaphysics and morality without finding a satisfactory answer to this question. All concepts flow from, or are subservient to it.

Precisely for that reason, Islam focuses its attention on this question and answers it with unsurpassed clarity and a conviction based on universal truths. According to it the status of man in this world is that of a servant and viceregent of Allah. All that man can conceivably come across on this globe belongs to Allah. He it is who is the Lord and Creator of everything. Thus the whole human potential also belongs to Allah. He has only been granted the right to use his powers and the things around him in a specified manner. The fact of the matter is that every human being, as the viceregent of Allah on this earth, is on trial and that he or she will reap the result of his worldly life in the Hereafter. The individual, the people, and the whole of mankind shall on the appointed day render the account to Allah.

This question-answer framework decides it unequivocally that so far as morality is concerned it is not for man to determine its criteria and governing principles. It is the privilege only of Allah, the Almighty, to do so. Accordingly, we have to understand the principle of morality in the light granted to us by Allah and that is, indeed, the path of righteousness, the Straight Path. The Holy Qur'an serves as the everlasting light, in this regard as in others. It was sent down to warn as well as to guide.

The significance of morality is underlined most succinctly by the last of the Prophets of Allah thus:

"I have been commissioned to exemplify the highest morality".

Once he remarked:

"Those of you who are morally good will be the nearest to me on the Day of Judgement and in Paradise".

On another occasion he observed:

"Among the Muslims, he who is morally righteous is the perfect believer".

It goes without saying that after proclamation of faith in the *Kalima*, the edifice of Islam is built on the four fundamentals of obligatory Zakāt, Prayer, Fasting and Pilgrimage and these are also the best determinants of morality. According to the Holy Prophet:

- “ — *Prayer signifies submission, humility, supplication, commiseration and prudence.*
- *The spirit of fasting is to abstain from talking sinfully, from harbouring evil-thoughts, from doing forbidden acts, from seeing forbidden things and from hearing falsehood and calumny.*
- *Zakāt is the noblest form of human sympathy, of fellow-feeling and of philanthropy.*
- *Hajj enshrines the spirit of patience and resolve, of virtue and piety, and succour of the poor”.*

All this goes to prove that faith and morality are indissolubly linked together. High morality is basic to Islam. In one of the Traditions of the Holy Prophet, Islam and morality have been equated and it has been indicated that the neatness of morality depends upon the neatness of *Dīn* (the concept of holy life in accord with Islam), so much so that the excellence of prayer and its acceptance by Allah are held subject to the purity of morals.

The truth of the matter is that after the acceptance of the faith there are two main planks of the mission of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) and they are worship and morality. The former is oriented to Allah and the latter is man-oriented. The two combine to make Islam. Consequently it means that Islamic morality calls for an amiable behaviour with fellow-beings, in fact the whole creation of Allah, for the simple reason that thus alone can a peaceful and virtuous society be established. Islam wants all men to live in the world in the common bonds of sympathy, goodwill and fellow-feeling because they are the essential prerequisites of peace and the good life. The fundamental objective of Islam is human welfare both here and Hereafter. The achievement of this objective is possible only through love, not only for fellow-beings but for all the creation of Allah.

Sublimely eloquent and comprehensive exhortation has been made by the Prophet of Allah thus:

“A person cannot have an access to the inner reality of faith until and unless he wishes the same good for all others as he wishes for himself”.

There could possibly be no higher standard than this for the welfare of mankind. It is the basic principle of an enriching and meaningful life and the very basis of all moral deeds. It reveals that virtue transcends all barriers, is open to everybody irrespective of caste, creed, colour or country. The Holy Prophet once said, “When a Muslim does a good deed, he should do it to all, be they Muslims, good, bad or indifferent, or be they non-Muslims”. This alone constitutes true morality,

and such morality is the foundation of the life of peoples and nations. Morality alone is the source of all strength, power, honour, greatness and glory. Morality alone is the sublime light in which the vicegerence of Allah is reflected.

The truest and the greatest of all revolutionaries exhorted mankind thus: "Make the morality of Allah your own morality".

The greatness of people never stems from mere abundance of material resources. It requires a rational process and, more than that, it calls for an exercise of high morality. The morality which provides a stimulus to peoples and which takes them to heights of greatness comprises:

1. Good and virtuous habits.
2. Tolerance of utterances of the miserable and the downtrodden.
3. Forbearance and fortitude in trials and sufferings in the cause of goodness.
4. Hard work and ceaseless endeavour.
5. Affability and patience and the ability to hear the bitter truth with equanimity.
6. Fulfilment of promise.
7. Love and succour for people in misery and exercise of charity for them.
8. Humility in dealing with the poor.
9. Paying heed to genuine complaints of those who have been wronged.
10. Staking everything to protect personal and national honour.
11. Love and forgiveness towards fellow-beings.
12. Hospitality.

Besides being virtuous in all dealings and deeds, it is necessary to do all that is morally good to win over the hearts of people. Constant fulfilment of the rights of Allah and of human beings – these, indeed, are the basic requisites of moral excellence.

It needs must be remembered that all changes and revolutions in the world are at bottom indebted to morality, which is the true basis of the people's future destiny. The world of Islam cannot be an exception to the rule that morality is the foundation of the lives of all peoples. In fact Muslims are the exponents of this categorical imperative.

If we want to be able to raise our heads with dignity in the comity of nations, we shall have to enrich ourselves with higher moral qualities. May Allah enable us to live in high morality. Amen!

THE VOICE OF MORALITY

Islam's concept of morality is totally different from that of philosophers, scientific thinkers and pure moralists. According to it, moral excellence is an important part of its religious obligations and a means of making perfect man's true submission. These two things are not divided into separate compartments but have a unifying link within and between them. Complete and sincere fulfilment of man's obligations to Allah, the Most Exalted, and those pertaining to other men, comprise righteous action. Righteous action is a term with a very wide connotation and is used by the Holy Qur'an both for acts of worship as well as moral conduct. Allah, the Most Exalted, has by mentioning the two together has told us that the rights of man are no less important than submission to Him. He has also informed that perfection in submission is inconceivable without moral excellence:

*"And serve Allah,
Ascribe nothing as partner unto Him,
(Show) kindness unto parents,
and unto near kindred, and orphans,
and the needy, and unto the neighbour who is of kin (unto you)
and the neighbour who is not of kin,
and the fellow-traveller and the wayfarer
and (the slaves) whom your
right hands possess."*

[Qur'an, IV:36]

The moral vices have been explicitly enumerated, as also the moral excellence, so that the individual and the community avoid sinfulness and walk the way of virtue and piety and through constant effort purify their inner-self of vice and reach the lofty state of human rectitude. Some of the things the Holy Qur'an considers morally loathsome are:

*"And eat not up your property
among yourselves in vanity,
nor seek by it to gain the hearing of the judges
that ye may knowingly devour a portion of the
property of others wrongfully."*

[Qur'an, II:188]

Along with banning bribery, the believers have been told not to consume unlawfully the goods and money belonging to others. Another moral vice people have been asked to keep away from is:

"...and shun lying speech:"

[Qur'an, XXII:30]

Needless to say that this command covers all aspects of falsehood including false testimony about which the Holy Prophet has said that false testimony is reckoned equal, in evil, to idol-worship.

The Holy Qur'an also enjoins:

"...And be not thou a pleader for the treacherous;"

[Qur'an, IV:105]

Along with the injunction to totally eschew falsehood, the believers are told to keep away from perfidy and breach of trust and from helping the traitors who betray their trust. This is intended to make it clear to mankind that not only the traitor is considered vile by Islam but one who supports and helps him is also considered guilty of the same crime. Now listen to another advice of the Holy Qur'an:

"O ye who believe! Render not vain your almsgiving by reproach and injury, like him who spendeth his wealth only to be seen of men..."

[Qur'an, II:264]

To do a good deed for the sake of hypocrisy or to show off is morally detestable. To show generosity to a person and then to rub it in is a vile act. Such spurious acts of charity and generosity have no worth or value at all with Allah. Exhibitionist charity is no charity. It is a sheer waste of goods and money. It is a vice, not a moral excellence.

Along with this hypocritical munificence, the Holy Qur'an has occasionally mentioned miserliness as one of the worst moral vices. Miserliness does not consist only in not spending money on one's own needs or those of his family. It also applies to a man who freely spends his resources on luxuries, on entertainment and on things that interest him, but has no inclination to expend in a noble or righteous cause or in an act of virtue and charity.

Feeling jealous of people who are more affluent and economically better off and to wish that this abundance and prosperity should have been one's own lot rather than of the persons who have it, is also narrow-mindedness and a moral defect. The Holy Qur'an calls it reprehensible and says:

"And covet not the thing in which Allah hath made some of you excel others."

[Qur'an, IV:32]

This clearly indicates that to become agitated on finding another man superior to oneself in any respect is the worst form of jealousy. This vice leads one to other grave sins such as malice and hatred. He ridicules people and is also suspicious of them and becomes obsessively inquisitive about them and their affairs. The Holy Qur'an restrains the believers from all these moral evils:

*"O ye who believe! Shun much suspicion;
for lo! some suspicion is a sin. And spy not,
neither backbite one another..."*

[Qur'an, XLIX:12]

Unfounded suspicion, prying into the affairs of others and backbiting are strictly forbidden in this verse. In fact, these are vices which should never soil the person of a Muslim. Arrogance and pride are also thoroughly disliked by Allah because these moral vices destroy mutual love and affection. A proud and arrogant person is considered loathsome. That is why the believers are told:

*"Turn not thy cheek in scorn toward folk,
nor walk with pertness in the land.
Lo! Allah loveth not each braggart boaster,
"...Be modest in thy bearing and subdue thy voice..."*

[Qur'an, XXXI:18-19]

These are only a few aspects of immorality which have been quoted above as illustrations. The fact is that many more moral vices are mentioned in the Holy Qur'an. Now I want to draw your attention to those excellences to which the Holy Qur'an has invited mankind. And when a man's character is enriched by them along with true belief, his human disposition reaches the loftiest heights of perfection and becomes the instrument for the establishment of a righteous society. Those virtues and excellences are accepted as the content of genuine righteousness by every right thinking person. They are real and solid, enchanting and edifying and one can find them in the world of action:

*"Lo! Allah enjoineth justice and
kindness, and giving to kinsfolk,
and forbiddeth lewdness and abomination and wickedness.
He exhorteth you in order that ye may take heed..."*

[Qur'an, XVI:90]

In fact, cooperation in right action, defence against badness through goodness, expending in the way of righteousness and good, providing help to orphans, widows, the indigent and the disabled, looking after the helpless, courtesy and consideration towards relatives and kinsmen, patience and honouring the promise

should be intended neither to demonstrate one's superiority in the society nor to achieve dominance over others but only for the sake of Allah and for His approbation, and to purify the world of corruption. This was the content of Islam's voice of morality and it was the noble impact of these teachings that transformed the believers and enabled them to found a new civilization and culture and to establish a truly welfare society which ensured the well-being of all people. They made history and world history is waiting for the return of that Golden Age. The epoch-making leadership of this new auspicious age in human history will be entrusted by Providence to those who can bring about a revolution in human thought and action by making Islam's voice of morality heard in all the four corners of the world. And this responsibility will ultimately devolve on them who have been blessed with the true belief.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MORAL EXCELLENCE

All religions of the world attach special importance to morality. It will be correct to say that religion and morality are inseparable from each other. A man's faith cannot be perfect without moral excellence.

An authentic tradition mentions that the Holy Prophet said, "I have been sent mainly for making perfect human morality".

This explicit declaration makes it clear that the Holy Prophet came with the revealed Word of Allah and trained the Muslims morally so that they could serve as symbols of love and commiseration, sympathy and compassion for the rest of mankind and make the world a haven of peace and mutual goodwill.

A study of the Holy Prophet's life shows that he had started his noble work of so improving the conduct of believers as to make them ideally perfect – quite early in the Meccan period of his Apostolic mission. It was the beginning of his prophethood when Abū Zar Ghaffārī (may Allah be happy with him) sent his brother to Mecca to study carefully the affairs and the teachings of this new Prophet. On his return from his tour of enquiry this is what the agent reported to his principal:

"I saw Muhammad and found him teaching high morality to the people".

This statement is a clear proof of the fact that the Holy Prophet had started teaching moral excellence to people simultaneously with the work of calling them to the true faith.

During this period some Muslims, finding it impossible to suffer any longer the inhuman torture let loose by the Quraish of Mecca against them, had migrated to Ethiopia with the permission of the Holy Prophet. The grandees of pagan Mecca took this as an affront to their power and authority and sent a high powered delegation to the Negus, the King of Ethiopia, which presented to him many valuable offerings on behalf of the gentry of Mecca and also said many vile things about the migrants. Their aim was to turn the Negus, a Christian, hostile to the Muslims and to persuade him to hand over the latter to them. The Negus called the Muslims to his royal court to investigate the matter. What Ja'afar Tayyār said to him, as the spokesman of the Muslims, included these words:

"O mighty king, we were an ignorant people. We worshipped idols of wood and stone, ate the flesh of dead animals, indulged in abominations, caused

inconvenience to our neighbours, brother maltreated brother, and the strong exploited the weak without end. Then a man from amongst us rose to remedy this horrible situation. He taught us not to worship false gods, to be truthful and straightforward, to eschew shedding human blood without good cause, not to expropriate the goods and belongings of orphans, to be a source of comfort to our neighbours and not to talk calumnies against chaste and pious people”.

All the things mentioned by Ja‘afer Tayyār are amongst the basic principles of morality and that is why the Negus was duly impressed.

Hadrat Ja‘afer Tayyār had accepted the true religion and become a Muslim. So one may say that he said what he said, out of love and reverence. But an exactly similar incident occurred in the court of the Roman Caesar. And the person involved in this case was Abu Sufyān, who till then had not been blessed with *Īmān* (true faith) and was one of the chief tormentors and enemies of the Muslims. When he was asked to state the nature of the Holy Prophet’s mission of rectitude and reformation, this is, in a nutshell, what he told the Caesar: “Besides preaching One-ness of Allah and total submission to Him, this man invites people to give charity, to be truthful and to fulfil their obligations towards their families and relatives”.

This testimony relates to that period when Abu Sufyān was still dead-set against Islam. In view of what has been said here it can be stated with full confidence and conviction that the perfection of religion depends on acquiring high moral excellence. Religion means beliefs, worship and high morals. If one looks deep into the matter one will come to the conclusion that the ultimate objective of all beliefs and acts of worship and prayer is to equip man with the highest moral principles so that he can become an example worth emulating in affairs of the world inclusive of mutual dealings and be a source of peace and well-being for others.

Allah alone is the Creator of the universe and it is He who created man. As the Lord of all that is, He wants men to live together in harmony, not to cause turbulence and corruption on earth, worship only Him and live in perfect goodwill and love as members of one family.

The most difficult and burdensome moral precepts that men find difficult to act upon and adhere to are forgiveness, self-discipline, patience and forbearance. But even these hard things have been presented in such an effectively persuasive manner that they go straight to one’s heart and get firmly ingrained in it. For instance, it is said in the *sūra Anām*:

“Reville, not those unto whom they pray beside Allah lest they wrongfully revile Allah through ignorance...”

[Qur’ān, VI:108]

It is said in the *sūra Arāf*:

“Make it a habit to forgive, bid men to act righteously and keep away from the ignorant”.

Describing the attributes of the righteous, it is said in the *sūra Āl-i-Imrān*:

“And those are ones who control their anger and forgive others”.

Religion and morality are mutually indispensable and inseparable. The importance of exemplary morality in the mutual dealings of Muslims is a basic moral requisite. Allah has called them brothers unto one another and described this fraternal bond of Islam as a blessing. But the matter does not end here. Muslims are required to show consideration to and behave well even with infidels and pagans.

Tirmizi has quoted this revealed *Hadīth*: “Allah said to Haḍrat Ibrāhīm (may peace be upon him) ‘My friend, be exemplary in your behaviour even when you deal with the unbelievers and in recompense you will attain to the lofty heights of the pious and the righteous. This, because it is My decision to give a place of honour to those who have moral excellence, in My holy sanctuary under My divine Empyrean and to honour them by bringing them close to My presence’ ”.

Haḍrat Ma‘āz bin Jabl states that the Holy Prophet said, “Be God-fearing wherever you live. If you have wittingly or unwittingly committed a sin, do a good deed at once because righteousness will obliterate the sin. And be highly moral in your behaviour towards all men”.

Haḍrat Jābir quotes the Holy Prophet as saying, “The dearest to me from amongst you and the closest to my seat on the Day of Judgement will be those who are morally praiseworthy and the most highly deserving of Allah’s anger and chastisement and the farthest from me will be those amongst you who are artificial in their speech and who want to dominate others by the glibness of their tongue”.

Haḍrat Abdullah bin Mubārak in his description of moral nobility says that cheerfulness, generosity, open-heartedness and the active desire to help those in distress and in difficult circumstances constitute moral excellence and good moral conduct.

The fact of the matter is that *Īmān* (true faith) cannot reach the stage of perfection without corresponding moral excellence. Morality constitutes one half of religion and morality and human dealings have the same importance in Islam as religious services and worship. The Holy Prophet has said, “He amongst you is the perfect believer who is morally righteous and noble”.

These few words, it is hoped, have made the point that Islam attaches such basic importance to morality that Islam and morality have come to convey the same meaning and purport. The Islamic point of view is that without adherence to the higher values of ethical conduct and moral excellence affairs of individual and collective life cannot have a sound and viable basis. Nor can humanity move forward with ease and surefooted confidence on the path of collective well-being,

enduring peace and welfare in that event.

This being the fact of the matter and the decisive factor we, the people of Islam, should appraise our collective affairs with care and understanding. If our analysis of the situation leads us to the conclusion, that we have moved away from the injunctions of Allah and our conscience cries out in pain that we are too far removed from the emulation of and subordination to the practice of the Holy Prophet, then it will be imperative for us to admit that the real cause of our present immorality, degradation, adversity and moral bankruptcy as also our poverty and anxiety is our turning away from the Holy Qur'ān. This is why we have lost face before the comity of nations and have been deprived of our position of honour and distinction. And this is why we are moving farther and farther away from our national objectives.

We should realise, once for all, that without Islam we have no identity and without collective moral excellence we can achieve no success, no position of honour. Without the light of Islam to lead us and without total adherence to the Prophet's *Sunnah*, we can never achieve the goal of national well-being and glory. With them there is nothing that we cannot achieve.

RELIGION AND MORALITY

All higher religions of the world give basic importance to morality. It would not be wrong to say that religion and morality cannot be separated from each other. Man's religious faith cannot be perfect unless it is accompanied by a high moral sense. Generally people view religion as a set of beliefs and ritual worship. But in reality morality is an integral part of religion and moral excellence tops the list of religious virtues. Consequently prayer and submission to Allah are deemed inconsequential unless they are duly reflected in man's dealings with his fellow beings and his general behaviour. It is essential that those with whom a religious man has daily dealings and with whom he comes into regular contact comes to feel, by his attitude and manner, that his adherence to religion has made him a better man and there has been a positive uplift in his morals. It automatically follows that if a religious man is found wanting in Islamic morality it should be presumed that there is some flaw in his observance of religious injunctions.

The Holy Prophet says in a well-known *Hadith*: "I have been sent to make perfect man's moral excellence".

In another *Hadith* the Holy Prophet uses more explicit words:

"I have been sent to perfect human virtue".

These lucid and unambiguous pronouncements clearly signify that the Holy Prophet came with Allah's final scripture to reshape the character of his followers so that they could serve as a model of love and well-being, fellow-feeling and compassion, and by their noble efforts make this planet an abode of peace and happiness for all mankind.

A study of the Prophet's life reveals that he had started work on his assignment, to reorganise human relations so as to lift them up to the ultimate standard specified by Allah, at a very early stage in the Meccan period of his Prophetic mission. It was the beginning of his Prophetic work when Abu Dhar Ghifari sent his brother to investigate the affairs of 'this new prophet' and his teachings. On his return from Mecca, the emissary told his brother Abu Dhar, "I saw Muhammad and found him teaching higher morality to his people". This first-hand evidence makes it clear that simultaneously with his preaching of Islam, the true religion, the Holy Prophet had started explaining to the people the attributes of moral excellence.

During that period some Muslims were forced by the cruelty of their infidel tormentors to migrate to Ethiopia with the permission of the Holy Prophet.

This infuriated the hostile Meccan gentry. A deputation of grandees was sent to Negus, the Ethiopian monarch. After offering valuable presents to him, on behalf of their principals and on their own behalf, they uttered many calumnies against the migrants in their tirade. The object was to make the Negus, who was a Christian, hostile to the Muslims so that he should hand these succourless people, over to them. The Negus, a just and wise ruler, sent for the Muslim migrants to determine the truth of the matter. What Jā'far Tayyār, the spokesman of the Muslims, said to the Negus included these words:

“O King, we were an ignorant, pagan nation, who worshipped idols of wood and stone, ate the flesh of dead animals, indulged in obscenities and foul deeds, harassed our neighbours, brother oppressed his brother, the strong exploited and oppressed the weak. Then a man from amongst us came forward and taught us not to worship false gods, to always speak the truth, eschew telling lies, abstain from shedding blood, desist from misappropriating money and goods belonging to orphans, be a source of comfort to our neighbours, not to utter calumnies against chaste people whose character we knew was without blemish”.

All these teachings mentioned by this noble spokesman of Muslims, Hadrat Jā'far Tayyār are integral attributes of moral excellence. That is why the Negus was so profoundly impressed. However, Jā'far was a convert to the new religion, so one may say that he said what he said, out of love and devotion. But an exactly similar incident occurred in the imperial court of the Roman Caesar, and the man involved in it was Abu Sufyān, who till that time had not been blessed with the grace of Islam and was still a mortal enemy of the new religion, and its exponent. On being questioned about the nature and content of the reformatory call of the Holy Prophet, what he said can be put succinctly thus: “Side by side with preaching the One-ness of Allah and total submission to Him, Muhammad (peace be upon him) teaches people to be chaste and modest, always speak the truth and fulfil the obligations of kinship”. This is the testimony of a sworn enemy. On the basis of it, it may be said with full conviction that perfection in faith is achieved through acquiring moral excellence. Religion is a viable blend of beliefs, ritual worship and higher moral values. If one ponders the matter, the end-product of beliefs and religious devotion is inculcation in man of the noblest of moral qualities so that he becomes a glorious example of honesty in dealing with fellow-men and of human kindness. His person is a source of peace, comfort and well-being for all and sundry.

Allah is the Creator of the universe and it is He who created man also. It is, therefore, His wish that human beings should live together in amity, not cause strife, nor stir trouble. They should worship the one and only Allah. They should live as loving members of a happy family. The whole purpose of revealing the Qur'an was that people should worship only Allah and so improve their morals that they become a source of comfort and happiness for one another. If even adherence to religion does not elevate a man's moral behaviour it is as if a man is not cured of his malady even after proper medication.

The one moral teaching that most people find arduous and burdensome to act upon relates to forgiveness, self-control, endurance and forbearance,

but men have been told to imbibe these qualities with such love and consideration that the words go straight to the heart. For instance, it is said in the Qur'an:

"Revile, not those unto whom they pray beside Allah lest they wrongfully revile Allah through ignorance.."

[Qur'an, VI:108]

Again, it is said:

"Keep to forgiveness (O Muhammad), and enjoin kindness, and turn away from the ignorant.."

[Qur'an, VII:199]

While describing the moral accomplishments of the righteous, it is said about the true believers:

"...those who control their wrath and are forgiving toward mankind..."

[Qur'an, III:134]

Religion and morality are inseparable and mutually indispensable. Everyone knows the primary importance Islam attaches to believers conforming to the highest moral values in their mutual dealings. It has called them brothers unto one another and said that this was one of Allah's great blessings upon them. But at the same time it strongly urged them to behave nicely with infidels and pagans and to show them kindness, so much so that it instructed them not to be affronted by their taunts and sneers. To act rashly and in anger even in matters of faith is considered vile and diabolical. If such an occasion arises one should pray to Allah to save him from the snares of Satan.

The teachings of the Qur'an and the personal example of the Holy Prophet have made it clear that acting in accord with the precepts of Islam is morally edifying and makes man worthy of emulation.

May Allah give us Muslims the ability to comprehend the truth and the reality of our great religion and by devoted compliance of its injunctions achieve such moral excellence that would be pleasing to Allah to Whom we owe our being and to Whom we will one day return. Amen!

THE NOBILITY OF MAN

At the time of Adam's creation, Allah the Glorious and the Gracious addressed the angels and said:

"...Lo! I am about to place a viceroy in the earth."

[Qur'ān, II:30]

Many eminent exegetes have expressed the view that the reference here is not to Adam, the first Prophet of Allah, but to the human race and that the office of Allah's deputy has been bestowed upon man from the very beginning of his sojourn on earth.

In another verse this fact has been stated in the following words – all mankind is addressed in the verse:

*"...He it is who hath placed you as viceroys
of the earth..."*

[Qur'ān, VI:165]

And again:

"...and hath made you viceroys of the earth..."

[Qur'ān, XXVII:62]

Allah, the Glorious and the Gracious, is the Creator of both the worlds. It is He who initiated Time and Space – He has always Been and will always Be. Each and everything in this universe is in His control and under His sway. He is the Beginning and He is the End. Be it the earth or heavens, be it the sun or the moon, be it the stars or the planets, anything and everything that we think of and that which we cannot even imagine, all are from Allah.

The fact that Allah made man His viceregent on earth means that He gave him the pride of place and elevated him to the highest position amongst living beings. He gave honour to the progeny of Adam, bestowed upon it the command of the land, the flowing rivers and the mighty oceans; provided delicious and nourishing victuals for his sustenance and established his pre-eminence on this planet:

*"We have honoured the Children of Adam
and carried them on land and sea,
and provide them with good things,
and preferred them greatly over many of those We created".*

And then He sent his prophets and messengers, from time to time, to guide

humanity to the straight path. This process reached its climax in the prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him), the last of Allah's messengers to whom He revealed His complete and eternal Word, al-Qur'ān. Through His last Prophet and in His final revealed Word He gave to mankind a universally viable code, and a noble purpose of life. In it lay the rationale of pure thought and speech, the essence of knowledge and wisdom, vision and understanding, profound guidance in matters of the spirit and of the flesh. In short, He made available to man, in its state of perfection and finality, all that is beautiful and true, and the physical as well as intellectual wherewithal to use these limitless resources to reach the farthest limit of his potential of virtue and nobility. To complete His endowment He gave clear dictum:

*"...Lo! the noblest of you,
in the sight of Allah,
is the best in conduct."*

[Qur'ān, XLIX:13]

The Holy Qur'ān, the last revealed Word of Allah is the fountain-head of true guidance and enlightenment for humanity – for ever and for ever. It is a complete and exhaustive code in the light of which man can lead a good and noble life and can straighten its various ways for those who will like to be righteous. Certain conditions need, however, to be fulfilled, to be able to receive true guidance from this sacred Book and the law of Allah that it contains.

In the words of the Qur'ān, the first condition is for man to be God-fearing and pure. Allah says:

*"This is the Scripture wherein there is no doubt, a guidance
unto those who ward off (evil):"*

[Qur'ān, II:2]

This is the lofty Book which Allah had promised in earlier Scriptures. There is absolutely no doubt, that this is the Word of Allah and his complete guidance for men who have His fear in their hearts. It shows the path of total well-being to those who are pious and have the capacity to refashion their lives – who are keen for salvation – for them indeed it is the true guide.

Having come thus far in this discourse, it is now time to ponder what is fear of Allah, and who amongst men are God-fearing. We need to consider this matter in depth because our true guide Muhammad (peace be upon him) the final Messenger of Allah said: "Fear of Allah is the true basis of virtue – the foundation of piety".

The Qur'ān also throws light on this matter. At one place in the Holy Book the word *Taqwa* is used as an antonym of *Istighna* which means 'disregard' and 'not caring'. This by itself gives the exact connotation of *Taqwa* – which is reverence of Allah, thinking about Him and fearing Him.

At one place in the Qur'ān Allah turns to men of wisdom and reason and

says:

*"...So make provision for yourselves (hereafter);
for the best provision is to ward off evil..."*

[Qur'an, II:197]

Allah created man, using both His hands, commanded angels to prostrate themselves before Adam's greatness, gave to man from His spirit, ordained for him His viceregency, made him "the best of creatures" – thus man reached the ultimate heights of excellence and nobility. All this exaltation makes it incumbent on man that he make it a practice to bow in all humility before Allah, follow His injunctions, tread the straight path specified by Allah, cultivate the quality of acceptance and ceaselessly seek His grace, be full of the milk of human kindness and zealously serve his fellow human beings. Islam should be his religion, the Holy Prophet his guide and teacher, Muhammad's (peace be upon him) concept of human equality his guiding principle; Allah's Word and Muhammad's (peace be upon him), *Shari'ah* his economic and social frame of reference and the disposition of the Holy Prophet his ideal.

To me this is the only criterion of human nobility and virtue. Any man who moulds his moral life on this pattern will undoubtedly and necessarily reach the loftiest heights of human excellence, and will ensure a happy life for himself in the world Hereafter. And anyone who strays from this path will be lost. He will fall from grace and will reach the bottom of depravity and disgrace.

FROM THE BETTER TO THE BEST

Of all living things man is the most peculiar and amazing since Allah created him "in the fairest stature" and endowed him with the finest disposition and nature. It is in his nature to keep on moving ahead. He cannot stay at any one place indefinitely. His best achievement leaves him unsatisfied and unfulfilled. He must move on to still higher peaks, still greater conquests. His quest of the unknown will never allow him to rest. He is not the one to accept that he can ever reach the end of the road. Once he has achieved a certain goal, he will set before him another and start working to achieve it. Allah also desires the same for man. The Lord and Creator of this universe wants His viceregent on earth to work for his own betterment in this world and for that of his fellow beings. And to enable man to do this Allah has endowed him with a quality of mind that will not rest content with what has been achieved but will be eager to move on and to keep his view focused upon higher and nobler sights, to give his talents a new incentive and target. It is, in fact, this attribute that has made human civilisation and culture so colourful, so versatile and so rich in its panoramic variety. The world has so many distinct cultures — each with its own identity and beauty. It is man's insatiable thirst for progress and betterment, mental as well as material, that is his special bounty from Allah. A momentary flush of triumph at having created a marvel may give him the semblance of satisfaction at having done what he wanted to, but we know from experience that this feeling of contentment is at best transitory. He soon sheds off his self-complacency, and the urge to move forward fills him again, and he resumes his onward journey. This ever-present urge is the fountain-head of his advancement in the fields of art and science, philosophy, commerce and industry, health, construction and scientific discovery and invention. From the average to the better, from the better to the best, this is the ever impelling motivation which makes man continue his toil and hard work even when he knows that there is no immediate gain or profit for him and what he is doing will bear fruit, may be after many generations. A writer or a poet is seldom satisfied with the first draft. He is always in search of a better and more apt phrase, what a great writer has called, 'the illuminated line'. The same is true of the painter, the composer, the musician, and the scientist.

While this characteristic is common to all men, the Muslims are ahead of other peoples even in this aspect of life. The Qur'ān is our guide in all spheres of human existence. And in this particular aspect, i.e., the achievement of higher goals, it shows us the path in its unique and inimitable way. It urges man to put to optimum use the capabilities granted to him by his Creator and invites

him to ponder the verses dealing with the soul and the external world. Time and again Allah has exhorted man to use his reason and wisdom. In the Qur'ān utmost importance has been attached to practical acts and endeavour. Thus Allah has said:

"...Every man is a pledge for that which he hath earned."

[Qur'ān, LII:21]

And again:

*"(Then it will be said): O ye who disbelieve!
Make no excuses for yourselves this day. Ye are only
being paid for what ye used to do."*

[Qur'ān, LXVI:7]

The verses clearly highlight the importance of action which alone can take man towards advancement and progress. The Qur'ān explicitly states that unless man himself works towards his betterment, his state will not be altered.

Allah has said:

*"...Lo! Allah changeth not the condition of a folk until they (first)
change that which is in their hearts..."*

[Qur'ān, XIII:11]

This theme has been given perfect poetic expression by an Urdu poet, Hāli:

*"Allah has never altered the state of a nation which
does not make a firm resolve to alter its unhappy lot"*

The Qur'ān was made to descend upon a society, which had degenerated so much that most of its members had become victims of stagnation and inertia. When urged to relinquish the old ways of ignorance and outright vileness and take up the path of faith, they replied that they would rather follow the path of their forefathers. To them ignorance was the straight path and they were adamant about it. And thus we read in the Qur'ān:

*"...they say: Enough for us is that wherein we found
our fathers..."*

[Qur'ān, V:104]

But the Qur'ān broke this spell of inertia and stagnation. It taught man how to distinguish between good and evil and by intensive guidance and training elevated him to the heights of human greatness. The training given by the final Messenger of Allah made these hapless men of the desert scale unreachable peaks of human excellence. Their thoughts and deeds became the fountain-head

of a most glorious and outstanding culture — a civilisation the like of which the world had never witnessed in its chequered history.

Allama Iqbal says about the Holy Prophet:

*“That wisest of men, the Seal of Messengers, the mentor of mankind
To the dust of life’s trodden path he gave the radiance and
the glory of Sinai”.*

The quest for betterment bestows upon man greatness and excellence, and makes him deserving of the respect of his fellow-beings. It opens new vistas for both personal and national advancement and the result of this striving has always been that the tomorrow of mankind is better than its today. The Prophet himself has said that a believer who spends two days alike is not a true believer. And Allah has said:

“And verily the latter portion will be better for thee than the former.”

[Qur’ān, XCIII:4]

Exegetes have interpreted this verse to mean that the day that follows should be better for the Muslims than the day that is past. A Muslim therefore should, in his conduct, personal example, worship and business transactions be always moving ahead. He should note that his personal advancement has to be accompanied by collective advance. And he should be in accord with the law of Nature. As he moves from good to the better in his personal life and negotiates the rungs of personal advancement, in like manner his endeavour should also be directed towards the progress and advancement of the *Ummah*. Every individual, however humble his position in the society may be, can do something for his people. A nation is a sum total of individuals and the progress of a nation is directly proportional to the efforts of its individuals. An individual’s actions have their impact on the outlook of his nation. The thoughts, acts, and ideas of the majority of the people will make for the national ethos. A nation, the majority of whose members are honest, shall be acclaimed as a nation of honest people. We should therefore view the quest for personal betterment in the perspective of the national interest and welfare, and each coming day of our life should be better than the previous day.

Islam is the religion of Nature. It has given us full freedom to live in this world and to beautify it as best we can. It has shown us ways which will enable us to overcome all impediments that obstruct our onward progress. As Muslims it is our responsibility to see that with the dawn of each day we should be morally and materially better off than the day that has gone by. Our faith, our knowledge, our deeds should be worthier than what they were on the previous day. No two days in our lives should be alike. We are the servants of Allah and we tread the path that His last Messenger showed us. We should unfailingly move on and keep going forward on this path. May Allah bless our progress. Amen!

OF TRUTHFULNESS

A glance at the world history, whatever of its aspects we prefer to ponder even for a moment, will clearly establish the fact that the basis for any episode having been deemed as a blessing by sages and scholars is truthfulness. In other words, it can be affirmed that no good and virtuous deed of any significance is devoid of this quality. If we examine the matter carefully and with candour, we will discover that truth is the corner-stone of Islam.

From atop the mount Fārān rang the question of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), "O people: If I tell you anything, will you believe me?" Pat came the answer, "You are a truthful person. We have never heard a lie from you. Whatever you say we will believe it". This is that historic proclamation which he made to the people of 'no-faith' in the word of Allah.

It is the most salient aspect of the character of our Holy Prophet (peace be upon him), our true leader and guide, and the most complete and the greatest man in history, that he was always truthful and that never did he utter anything except what was the truth. He was a repository of truth and truth alone did he utter. This loftiness of conduct put him on that pinnacle of sanctity from where he won over the hearts of people to the message of Allah and illuminated every nook and corner of the world with the light that is Islam. This beacon-light of truth continues to guide man whose onward march will be guided by its noble light till the end of time, vindicating the fact that Islam alone is a perfect system and that to Allah Islam alone is the *Din* (the true and perfect life-system):

"Lo! religion with Allah (is) The Surrender (to His will and guidance)"

[Qur'an III:19]

Truth is a matter of both the heart and the tongue, and it is in their harmony that truth is born. Unless and until they together manifest this state of accord, truth cannot exist.

Maulana Shah Abdul Aziz, the great Traditionist of Delhi, has narrated an incident which is found in all biographies of the Holy Prophet. A certain person came to the Holy Prophet and submitted: "O Prophet of Allah! I have four major vices. First, I fornicate. Second, I steal. Third, I drink. Fourth, I lie. O Prophet of Allah! I will abandon any one of these that you will ask me to". The Holy Prophet instructed him to give up the vice of "telling lies". The man pledged that he would never tell a lie again.

At dusk he had the desire to drink and to indulge in debauchery but instantly he recollected his promise and thought of the indescribable embarrassment he would have the next morning when the Holy Prophet would ask him

how he spent the evening. If he suppressed the fact, it would be a breach of promise and if he disclosed it, he would be punished for the guilt. Consequently he was afraid and abstained from both the acts. Late in the night, when he had the sneaking wish to go out for committing a theft, the same consideration stood in his way. Breach of promise or amputation of the right hand – neither consequence was palatable and hence he decided not to move out of his abode with the evil design. Next day he went to the Prophet of Allah and narrated the incident thankfully.

As a matter of fact, truthfulness saves one from most evils, because whoever is truthful, must strive to abstain from things sordid. He will be honest, courageous, and pure of heart – never breaking his promise. Truthfulness will be his richest treasure. The Holy Prophet has said: “Truth saves while falsehood destroys”, that is, in truth lies security and in falsehood there is nothing but disaster.

In the persons whom Allah has promised forgiveness and high reward, truthfulness ranks the highest after faith in and obedience to Allah. Allah says:

“Lo! men who surrender unto Allah, and women who surrender, and men who believe and women who believe, and men who obey and women who obey, and men who speak the truth and women who speak the truth...”

[Qur’ān, XXXIII:35]

Islam has stressed the importance of truthfulness again and again, enjoining repeatedly the adoption of truth and it further requires Muslims to always side with the truthful, to belong to the body of truthful men and to develop contacts with those who are truthful:

“O ye who believe! Be careful of your duty to Allah, and be with the truthful.”

[Qur’ān, IX:119]

Commonly, truthfulness is taken to imply only the “speaking of truth” but in Islam truthfulness has a far wider connotation. It includes not only the act of speaking but also the state of action. Imām Ghazālī has given profound thought to the matter and has mentioned truthfulness in speaking, truthfulness in intent, truthfulness in motivation, truthfulness in implementation, truthfulness in deed, and truthfulness in religious actions. These can however be, for the sake of precision, reduced to the following three which inherently include the others:

Truthfulness of word,
Truthfulness of thought,
Truthfulness of action.

Truthfulness of word is a matter of the human heart. If the heart is that of a Momin, full of the light of Allah, there is no question of the utterance of a false

word. When the heart is true, it has love and sincerity also. Hence it covers both truthfulness and sincerity.

Truthfulness of action means that every human deed should reflect the inner state. Putting it differently, all that man does outwardly should accord with his conscience.

Those whose tongues, whose hearts and whose actions are true, possess absolutely unfaltering faith. No power on earth can deter them from the righteous path and, in fact, such are the people who fight for the cause of Allah. For them it is, that Allah has said:

"The (true) believers are those only who believe in Allah and His messenger and afterward doubt not, but strive with their wealth and their lives for the cause of Allah. Such are the sincere."

[Qur'ān, XLIX:15]

The highest form of truth consists in its manifestation in every fibre of man's being, in his thought, word and deed, in fact in his every movement. According to the Qur'ān, such are the true ones and their truthfulness is the sequel to perfect faith, from which action is absolutely inseparable.

If we ponder the point, it is also true that truth is one of the attributes of Allah. Who can be more true than Him? He says it Himself in the Qur'ān:

"...Who is more true in statement than Allah?"

[Qur'ān, IV:87]

Man is the servant of Allah, blessed by Him. And His blessing operates only so long as man adheres to truth and abstains from falsehood.

SERVICE TO HUMANITY

Shaykh Sa'di, the great Persian poet, has very exquisitely portrayed the concept of altruism in a verse:

*"He who serves (humanity) is universally respected.
He who is egocentric is nothing but a loser".*

The first line of this beautiful couplet implies that a person who has made human service his mission becomes entitled to respect in the eyes of his fellow-men. A man dedicated to service does, after some time, occupy a position of honour amongst his fellow-men and is accepted by one and all as a benefactor. The second line of the couplet means that a person who takes himself to be an end in himself and serves only his own selfish ends, ends up as a man disliked and hated by the people around him and finds himself totally isolated. The verse is so significant and pregnant with meaning that the more we ponder it, the more will its nuances unfold before us.

Service to humanity is one of the noblest attributes a man can acquire. An individual who renders selfless service to fellow-men gets very close to Allah. A person who bears love towards Allah's creatures and serves them without any desire for return or to achieve distinction in society receives divine approbation. It is the law of Nature that anyone whose actions are inspired by human kindness will always have a position of pre-eminence both in this world and the Hereafter.

But it must be remembered that only those persons who are not selfish and self-centred will achieve this position of honour. To get to this place they have to sacrifice personal comfort and self-interest. They have to forego their own ambitions and desires and efface themselves in order to serve others. Altruism demands preparedness to undergo hardship and a high concept of moral conduct. This can be achieved only through self-effacement and self-denial.

If we consider the issue in some depth, we will find that there is no attribute more conducive to the establishment of a stable society and for the promotion of mutual love and harmony. It is this moral quality that creates an environment of friendship, sympathy and mutual reliance. Among altruistic activities are: helping the poor and the indigent, providing food and clothing to the needy, arranging proper medical treatment of the sick, looking after the material and educational needs of the orphans and enabling them to become useful citizens in later life so that they can serve others and gain respect, and in turn giving financial assistance to, and helping, them to safeguard their respectability so

that they can continue to live as respectable members of society. All these are basic services which not only give satisfaction to the person who renders them but also are beneficial for the society economically and help it achieve overall welfare and the well-being of all its members. Altruism can serve as a guarantee against the factors which divide a society into the classes of 'haves' and 'have nots'—those who live in luxury and those who starve. The exemplary life of the Holy Prophet, the greatest benefactor of mankind, serves as an eternal model for humanity. It is this ideal which we as Muslims have been ordained to follow. The whole life of the Prophet exemplifies service to humanity and altruism. We will here narrate just two incidents from the life of the Holy Prophet to show how he served his fellow human beings.

A woman was passing through a lane of Mecca. The load she was carrying was so heavy that she was finding it exceedingly difficult to maintain her balance. Some people began to laugh at her. The Prophet was close by. He immediately took the load off her shoulders and carried it for her to her house.

On another occasion the Prophet was walking along a lane when a blind woman tripped and fell down. Some of the onlookers began to laugh. Tears came to the Prophet's eyes. He raised her and helped her to her home.

Human kindness and sympathy are among the basic moral values of Islam and are included in its fundamental injunctions. The Holy Prophet himself has set many examples of this and a poet has written a moving couplet about it:

"Acting in a manner that wins the hearts of the indigent and the helpless is indeed the Great Pilgrimage. One human heart is nobler and more sacred than a thousand holy shrines".

Allah had granted to the Holy Prophet a most generous heart and an ever-active desire to serve humanity. He was always eager to lend a helping hand to others be they friends, strangers, Muslims or non-Muslims, old or young. He was ready to help anyone who needed help and did not spare any effort, whatever its extent, to come to the aid of fellow beings. After he had migrated to Madina, his work-load became far heavier. He had to attend to many onerous tasks simultaneously: He had to plan defence against possible attacks by the enemies of Islam, to resist the insidious manoeuvres of the hypocrites, to educate the Muslims and to establish a righteous society based on the principles of Islam. All these things demanded his total attention, but, despite these multifarious preoccupations, he was unsparing in his service to humanity.

The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) gave to mankind a new way of life. Humanity was lost in the total darkness of ignorance. He brought it out into the sunshine of knowledge and truth. In the light of the Qur'an he initiated a cultural movement that wrought the greatest revolution of all times. Muslims emerged from the wilderness of Arabia, with their hearts irradiated by the power of faith. They had the guidance of the Qur'an and the exemplary life of the Prophet to lead them on the straight path. They took the light of faith with them wherever they went. They had this directive of the Qur'an before them:

"...Be thou kind even as Allah hath been kind to thee,..."

[Qur'an, XXVIII,77]

The Muslims carried themselves with such dignity and treated the vanquished with such fairness that the world was seized with wonder. Islam stood triumphant but humble and not arrogant. The life-style of the Muslims invariably won them the respect and the affection of the peoples they conquered. Muslims have the Qur'an. They have the example of the Holy Prophet. And this is such a vast storehouse of truth and guidance that they do not need anything more. All that the Muslims need is the will to practise the precepts of Islam. The sooner we realise this fact the better it will be for us. If we follow guidance of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*, it will not be difficult at all to regain our past glory. If we want to reshape our future, we will have to keep before us the concept of service to humanity. Our final aim in life should be the Qur'anic directive:

"...But prefer (the fugitives) above themselves though poverty become their lot..."

[Qur'an, LIX:9]

And we should base our lives on these words of the Holy Prophet:

"Allah helps those who extend succour to others".

It was their sincere desire to serve their fellow human beings that brought glory to the Muslims in the first phase of Islamic history. We must emulate their illustrious example in letter and spirit to prove to the world that we continue to deserve the position earmarked for the Muslim *Ummah* as the "middle nation". We must establish a social order in the world of Islam in which selfless service of humanity irrespective of caste, colour or creed is the norm of individual moral conduct. Allah has given us another opportunity to refashion our collective life. Let us go all out to recreate the ideal society brought into being by Allah's final Messenger in Madina and make it a model for the contemporary world.

OF GOOD BEHAVIOUR

The most valuable asset of man is his moral character. His rise and fall, his progress and decline, and his popularity and disrepute depend entirely on what he does. It is his conduct and character alone that takes him to the pinnacle of glory or throws him in the abyss of ignominy. The same criterion applies to collective life. If the majority of a people behave well, it will attain the heights of progress and eminence, else decadence will be its destiny. This fact is acknowledged by sociologists and is fully borne out by history.

Allah has bestowed on man the most perfect and viable life-code. No finer or more comprehensive system of individual and collective morality has ever been evolved. As Muslims, it is our belief that none shall ever be revealed or presented. In the Islamic system extensive injunctions are available for not only the individual to achieve utmost personal excellence but for the entire social order to govern all matters of collective nature – in all walks of life, to ensure the greatest good of the greatest number. A sure guide and model par excellence in every respect has also been provided. Even small things have been taken care of, for they make life pleasant and are greatly instrumental in making it worthwhile. The Holy Prophet once remarked: “Nothing weightier than good behaviour will be found in the scales for a Muslim”. Behaviour covers, of course, the whole span of life in all its activities. But I am here concerned only with that aspect of it which relates to decency and bonhomie. It is a question of having smooth and pleasant relations with fellow-beings.

The Holy Prophet has said, “Allah likes the person who does everything in the proper way – so much so that even if he has to slaughter an animal he ensures that there should be no impropriety therein. And if he has to kill a person, he will do it as an act of worship”. Hadrat Abdullah Ibn Abbās states that the Prophet of Allah once saw a person who was sharpening the knife while keeping his foot on the neck of a felled goat and the poor thing saw him doing it. The Prophet said to the man, “Will not the goat die out of sheer fright before she is slaughtered? Do you want to put her to double death?”

This is one instance of the way the Holy Prophet inculcated the sense of propriety and affability amongst his followers. It can easily be concluded from it what importance he attached to good moral behaviour in life. Good moral behaviour is indeed the basis of the pattern of life taught by him to the *Ummah*.

A decent person will manifest his moral excellence at all times and on all occasions. Every human individual has to deal with hundreds of people daily

from morning till evening. Some he meets casually and with some he has profounder relations, while there may be others with whom he has no more than a nodding acquaintance. But relations with all of them constitute the warp and woof of his behaviour. Good or bad, howsoever he behaves, it will be clearly evident and will most certainly leave its imprint on his future course of life. The way one greets another person is by itself an index of one's attitude and behaviour. A cheerful, smiling face is a manifestation of affability. If one's face brightens on seeing a person it is a positive proof of one's lively interest in and friendly regard for him. He who is generally happy to meet other people will be regarded as a well-behaved and decent person by them. The Holy Prophet has observed, "To smile on seeing your brother is an act of charity". Can anybody conceive of a higher standard of morality? No other reformer or leader could have shown greater regard for human psychology. Where else can one find such clear lessons of mutual love and social harmony? Apparently these are petty matters but they play an important and far-reaching part in social life. These small things play a decisive role in cementing and in spoiling, in making and in breaking up relations, and in fact in comparison to more important factors these small things have a far greater impact on human relations. Good behaviour prepares man and gives him the charm and the warmth which he needs to win the hearts of fellow-beings and enables him to do real service to them. A word of good cheer gives strength to a despondent and broken heart. A simple act of encouragement boosts the morale and uplifts a drooping spirit.

These are all the miracles of good behaviour. A person who is devoid of affability, however eminent or great he may be, in real fact, lacks the true essence of humanity and will never be able to have true joy in life. The greater a person is, the more gentle and more civilised his behaviour should be. Greatness implies good behaviour. Human civilization essentially entails interdependence at all levels. Elders need cooperation of youngsters and youngsters require the help of elders. The wagon of civilization moves on these two wheels. Thus do social relationships run their course. Take the case of neighbours, as an instance. No matter how rich you are and how poor and indigent your neighbour is, he is, nevertheless, your neighbour. Be it a matter of joy or sorrow, each of you will be the first to know of the condition of the other and morality requires you to act accordingly. If you do not honour this moral imperative you are not a good neighbour and, for the matter, not even a good human being. This first person to benefit from your good behaviour should be your neighbour. How excellently has the Holy Prophet expounded this point:

"If your neighbours regard you a good person, you are actually so. If their opinion about you is bad, you are, undoubtedly, a bad person".

The quintessence of Islamic teachings is that each act of a Muslim should show

him as such, clearly bringing out the difference between him and a non-Muslim. Even the manner of his knocking at his own or his neighbour's door should show that he believes in Allah and that he is mindful of the injunctions of Allah in every matter. Every act of a Muslim, over and above all, reflects his faith, as every act of a non-Muslim reflects his lack of faith. The difference in religion and in life-style manifests itself in the character, the behaviour of people and the values they uphold. A distinct line of demarcation among people is drawn by life-systems and action patterns.

Every act of a Muslim bears witness to his faith.

DOING ONE'S DUTY AS ALLAH DESIRES

Man who has been endowed with reason and volition and who because of his natural instinct is obliged to live a social life, cannot be totally free and heedless of inevitable social constraints, because it is neither possible to have an agreeable environment for mutual relationships nor can the desire for constructive endeavour motivate people without adherence to recognised principles and values. Both these factors are essential for a viable social and collective life.

Now the question arises who has the right and the authority to prescribe duties for human beings. Is it the state, with its legal system, the society as a whole or some of its members? The history of mankind offers many answers to this question. This means that man has passed through many experimental stages in this field. He has, no doubt, accepted the basic principle that every man has some obligations and responsibilities which he cannot afford not to accept. But who will lay down the ground rules for determining the area of individual responsibility is a problem that still remains to be satisfactorily resolved. Islam presents a viable solution of this human difficulty. It brings home to man the basic fact that Allah who is the absolute Creator and Who created man as He did other creatures, has the right and the authority to specify man's responsibilities, his duties and obligations, as also the main purpose of his life. And He has the right and the privilege to specify how man will live his personal life, how he will live along with others and what will be his relationship with Allah, his Lord and Master. This divine exposition and clarification of the true human position can correctly determine the nature and scope of obligations. The specification of a particular obligation inherently implies the fact that in case of failure to fulfil the particular obligation, the person concerned will be answerable to some higher Being. The other aspect of obligatory duties is that if they are done well, there will be adequate recompense for them. And the supreme Being who gives all recompense has declared in the Holy Qur'an:

*"...Lo! I suffer not the work of any worker,
male or female, to be lost..."*

[Qur'ān, III:195]

The concept that man can himself fix the sphere of his responsibilities and can fix the criterion of their fulfilment is thus proved totally wrong.

Islam in its system of thought and conduct emphasises obligations rather than rights. "Right" which in Islamic terminology is called recompense in fact occupies a secondary place. Total obedience to the injunctions of Allah and

rejection of all other authority – these are the requisites of true submission and if they are honestly and fervently acted upon, one should have complete faith that one will get due recompense because Allah has said:

“...Lo! Allah loseth not the wages of the good:”

[Qur'an, IX:120]

In the same vein He says:

“Lo! thus do We reward the good.”

[Qur'an, XXXVII:80]

The importance of conscientious fulfilment of obligations has been emphasised thus in the *sūra Nisa*:

“Lo! Allah commandeth you that ye restore deposits to their owners..”

[Qur'an, IV:58]

Without examining this verse in its proper context we cannot truly understand the Islamic concept of trust. We also fail to appreciate the magnitude and the expanse of the meaning of 'trustees'. Trust, in reality, does not signify any vast treasure hidden somewhere deep down under the earth. The proper utilisation of the faculties of thought and action Allah has endowed man with, is the real requirement of trust.

Now ponder the matter for a moment. What can be the sphere of the mutual dealings of human beings besides these. One man is a trader, another is his customer. One person is an industrialist and another is a consumer. One is a tiller of the land and other is the owner of the land the former works on. One is a common citizen and another is the head of the state. Islam desires that all these relationships should be based on its concept of trust and nobody should dare to exceed the limits of trust fixed by Allah, the Most Exalted. Allah has specified the obligations and responsibilities of all categories of human beings and has used one definitive word i.e. 'trust' for all these different sets of obligations. Why? Because the source and fountain-head of conscientiousness with regard to duty is nothing other than the concept of trust.

One's own children are Allah's trust, whose proper education and upbringing is a primary responsibility of the parents. And Tirmizi quotes an authentic *Hadith* which is relevant here. "A man who properly cares for and looks after his daughters, brings them up as refined and civilised persons with good manners and gives them suitable education, will on the Day of Judgement get the recompense of a martyr". Various *Ahadith* contain the word 'children' which includes both sons and daughters. If a man brings them up according to the Islamic concept of trust, he is promised "great recompense". On the other hand, children have

been given an explicit command to obey their parents and to show them due respect, affection and love. He who contravenes this categorical injunction is held guilty by Islam of a major sin. With regard to close relations, kindness and material and financial help, when needed, has been made obligatory by Islam. So is respect of the elders by young people and affection towards young people by their elders.

Our relationship with our Lord and Sustainer is that of a servant with his Master, of a creature with his Creator. And whatever He enjoins, it is our bounden duty to obey.

The standard of our morality will deteriorate to the extent we are lax and negligent in obeying the divine commands. Consequently we will achieve nothing but disgrace in this world and chastisement in the life Hereafter.

Just ponder. If a man does not say his obligatory prayers, does not keep fast during the month of Fasting, does not go for Hajj despite his being able to afford the expense, it means, that he does not fulfil any of the obligations he owes to Allah in regard to Allah's rights. But in addition to that, is it not a psychological fact that he is leading a life of sheer irresponsibility? And this laxity and irresponsibility will not be restricted to matters of religious services and worship only but will extend inevitably to other matters also. He who does not give unto Allah what he owes to Him, will be irresponsible with regard to his dealings with others also. Irresponsibility results from absence of the consciousness of the trust. Neglect of obligations and carelessness in regard to social responsibilities corrupts the whole society. If the trader is a liar and a cheat, if the labourer is not honest, if the ruler is not just, if the man of learning is not generous and righteous, if the neighbour is unreliable, corruption and disintegration of the social fabric is absolutely unavoidable. Islam makes its followers fully aware of the importance of their obligations by constantly bringing to the fore its concept of trust. As a result, the entire social order becomes conscientious, dynamic and active.

The Holy Qur'an says:

*"But he who turneth away
from remembrance of Me,
his will be a narrow life..."*

[Qur'an, XX:124]

This verse is, in actual fact, a warning against any negligence or shortcoming in the fulfilment of obligations and responsibilities. Let us pray that Allah help us in being conscientious in the performance of our duties and endow us with that righteousness of action and moral excellence that is the due recompense of those who fulfil their obligations as Allah's trust. Amen!

THE MIDDLE PATH

(Abstinance from exaggeration, avoidance of extremes, and adherence to the path of moderation is among the basic teachings of Islam)

Overzealousness and unconcern, extremism and immoderation, are among the characteristics that cannot be called likeable. On the contrary, moderation and avoidance of extremes have always been liked and appreciated and will continue to receive general approbation. History remembers only those who followed the golden mean. Excess of anything, whatever be the sphere of life in which it is practised, would be injurious and debasing. Not to speak of bad things, even good things, if taken to the extreme, will be counter-productive and hardly laudable. Islam is the religion of Nature, and the system embodied by it is perfect, harmonious, practicable and well-balanced. It does not allow extremes in any sphere of life or in any matter of faith, whether big or small.

When the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) was designated as the last Prophet he proclaimed the True Faith and started proselytizing. But the people were sunk so deep into the darkness of heathenism and they had deviated so much from the path of righteousness that his message did not have any appeal for them. They had become so insensitive that even the trumpet of Israfil, the angel of Resurrection, would not shake them out of their sloth. The last of the Prophets knew that his was the last invitation and the decisive one and he who accepted it would be blessed and he who turned his back to it would be doomed to eternal perdition, and nothing would save him from the wrath and retribution of Allah. The Holy Prophet was grieved by the listlessness and callousness of his people and when the Almighty saw him so overcome by sorrow He said:

"We have not revealed unto thee (Muhammad) this Qur'an that thou shouldst be distressed..."

[Qur'an, XX:2]

Another *sūra* in this context is CVIII. Here Allah tells the Holy Prophet that the Qur'an was not sent down in order that he should kill himself with anxiety. Considered in depth, it signifies a clear injunction to the Holy Prophet to follow the middle path. At stake is the establishment of the true faith and the supremacy of truth and righteousness; yet here the last of the Prophets is being commanded that he should not kill himself with exertion or worry but observe moderation and balance in the carrying out his prophetic mission. The direction to follow the middle path is not confined only to this aspect. Moderation and a well-balanced attitude are the main characteristics of Islam. This is

why the Qur'ān has been called *Al-Kitāb* (The Book) as well as *Al-Mizān* (The Balance), and the Muslims *Al-Wasat* (The middle nation). Allah has Himself said:

"Thus We have appointed you a middle nation..."

[Qur'ān, II:143]

By calling Muslims the 'middle nation' it has been shown that the middle path is their way of life and it becomes self-evident in their conduct and demeanour. Therefore, abstinence from exaggeration, avoidance of extremes, and observance of moderation is among the principal moral principles of Islam. Muslims have been told:

*"And let not thy hand
be chained to thy neck nor
open it with a complete opening,
lest thou sit down rebuked,
denuded."*

[Qur'ān, XVII:29]

This verse implies that man should not become so niggardly as not to expend God-granted wealth on anyone at all and not to satisfy the wants of his dependents, keeping them under unnecessary constraints and troubles. Nor should he be so extravagant and prodigal that he should waste money and lavish it on ostentation; he should not exceed the bounds of his income. Both these attitudes are wrong and go against the concept of moderation. Both lead to disaster and both bring nothing but trouble. Inurement to miserliness prevents a man from enjoying divine gifts, whereas lavishness makes one ultimately indigent and one ends up by losing one's self-respect. Allah has commanded man to avoid both extremes. In *al-Furqān* it has been ordained:

*"And those who, when they spend,
are neither prodigal nor grudging; and there is
ever a firm station between the two;"*

[Qur'ān, XXV:67]

We have been told in unambiguous terms and with perspicuous clarity that moderation is a characteristic or attribute of the true believer. He does not spend in excess nor withholds it when occasion requires it. He lives a good life, well-balanced, serene and equable.

The life of the Holy Prophet is a model of excellence for us and the noblest example of perfect moderation. During his own lifetime some of his Companions carried their prayers to excessive limits and showed more zeal than Allah made permissible in the performance of Islamic precepts. The Holy Prophet stopped them from this.

There is a *Hadīth* which says: "To act in moderation is the twenty-fifth part of prophethood". On another occasion he said": "O believers! Exercise moderation; exercise moderation; exercise moderation; for Allah tires not, you do".

Our personal experience shows that those who go to the extremes, forfeit their mental peace. Their personal lives become so entangled that most of their time is spent in unravelling problems which are of their own making. On the other hand, those who observe the middle path, and maintain the balance between the two extremes are people who manage to maintain a grip over their personal circumstances: they do not get entangled into complexities created by excesses and their friends and relatives do not become suspicious and wary of them. Such people pass their own lives in peace and have time and leisure to help others as well.

The middle course should be the norm for all of us in everything we do. It is not only indicated in worldly and economic transactions but is enjoined in religious affairs as well.

I will now draw your attention to another point. When we say that Islam is the religion of Nature, a perfect system, it naturally follows that excess which is unnatural should be avoided, and life should be so spent that there is a balance between rights and obligations. One should not be neglectful in fulfilling one's obligations nor should one deprive oneself of one's rights and what justifiably belongs to one. Allah disapproves extremist behaviour. The Holy Prophet invariably instructed his regional administrators thus: "Make life's path easier, do not make it rougher" and "Allah lays upon each man what he can fulfil". Allah has made Islam an easy-to-follow religion so that people do not drop out of its fold tired and exhausted by the severe demands it makes upon them. The Holy Prophet has said: "Be constant. You shall never be able to circumscribe limits. Only do what you can". Another characteristic feature of extremism is that a man may pursue his prayers and divine obligations excessively to a certain period of time, after which he exhausts himself and cannot continue. Islam therefore requires us to follow the middle path in offering our prayers so that we can continue to offer them rather than pray in excess for sometime and then give up being totally exhausted.

We have been also told that, if we pass our lives according to the injunctions of Islam and the precepts given by the Holy Prophet, our every act shall be like a prayer. Apart from praying and fasting which are formal worship, even our routine doings, i.e., sleeping and waking, sitting and getting up, reading and writing, social contacts, time spent among wives and children, in earning livelihood, and in leisure will be considered acts of worship, provided we lead our lives in strict conformity to the commands of Allah. And therefore excess in one and neglect in the other is not desirable. A *Hadīth* of the Holy Prophet "The best acts are those that follow the middle course" is a very precise summary of the whole approach.

The commands of Allah and the *Ahādīth* of the Holy Prophet show that the middle way in life-style and moderation in approach and attitude should be our

basic norms. It is applicable to all our thoughts and acts – our prayers and the routine of our daily life. We should, for example, follow moderation in our speech and conversation. The middle course demands that we sleep after offering our *isha* (night) prayers and get up before the *fajr*(morning) prayers. We should observe moderation in eating as well. We should not eat too much at one time and starve ourselves at an other time because this is a sure invitation to indigestion.

In short, we should follow the middle course and in this lies our salvation.

MODERATION

(It is an imperative for our health and our religious and national weal that we should not overstep moderation)

The Qur'ān, the final Word of Allah, is the world's greatest Book. Its code of life leaves little room for a truthful person to be worried with regard to the search for fundamental facts and realities or be in doubt about them. Those who look for the truth shall find it in all its glory in the Qur'ān and there is no matter of any importance about which it has not shown the right path. Those amongst the dwellers of this earth who have acknowledged the supremacy of the Qur'ān and have submitted themselves unquestioningly to its dictates and the will of Allah have been blessed with moral excellence and spiritual exaltation. Many contemporary nations borrow light from this revealed Word and achieve glory in various fields. Those who have shut their eyes to its eternal radiance are destined to be servile to enlightened nations, and slavery and degradation have been ordained for them. The Qur'ān is the Law of Nature – immutable and eternal – the Law that has never undergone any transformation, nor will it ever undergo any change; the Law that is meant to determine human destiny till the Day of Judgement.

In order to enable man to lead a purposeful life, the Qur'ān has provided positive guidance in respect of each and every aspect of life, and the Holy Prophet was sent to this world as a sure guide to show to mankind the path of welfare and to provide the perfect ideal, in his person, for emulation to all men till the end of time. The Qur'ān and the Holy Prophet have accorded to man the status of vicegerent of Allah on earth and give him very clear instructions with regard to health-care and physical fitness to which they attach the utmost importance.

"...Lo! Allah loveth not the prodigals:"

[Qur'ān, VI:141]

This command of the Qur'ān both about the necessities of life and the fulfilment of desires contains universal and comprehensive guidance with regard to health-care. This verse draws man's attention to moderation. If we ponder the matter and look closely at our daily lives, taking stock of our usual pattern of activities, it will not at all be difficult for us to understand its full significance.

Let us have a look at what we eat and drink every day. If we see a table laid with savoury dishes before us, how many of us would really eat with care, and how many would stop eating before they are full to their capacity. How many would care to conform to the dictates of moderation?

We all know that man succumbs to temptation where good food is concerned and the need for moderation is generally pushed into oblivion. We tend to forget the Holy Prophet's *hadīth* – “the stomach is the breeding ground of ailments”. Consequently one not only suffers agony of an upset stomach but makes himself vulnerable to permanent ill health.

Drinking is no different from eating. In the heat of desire man drinks without heeding the call of moderation and without caring about what is going down his throat. On the one hand, he forgets the command of Allah:

“Eat of that which Allah hath bestowed on you as food lawful and good...”

[Qur'an, V:88]

and, on the other, his lack of true understanding is such that he fails to give even a moment's thought to whether he or his country can afford to pay for what he is drinking. It is necessary for us to ponder whether the viands and drinks which we import at great expenditure of foreign exchange are really necessary for us or are mere luxuries and emblems of alien formal etiquette. It should also be considered whether they do any good to our body or are merely a source of financial benefit to those who concocted them and are now exporting them to us.

Let us consider, in view of what we have discussed, the existing state of affairs and ponder again the full verse:

“And eat and drink, but be not prodigal”.

[Qur'an, VII:31]

When we consider these Qur'anic injunctions about food, it becomes clear that Allah wants us to always keep in view the limits of moderation. We should take food in order to live, and not live in order to eat. This is essential not only for our health but is also in the national interest that we should not overstep the bounds of moderation. We should bear in mind that Allah does not like those who eat beyond the normal requirement of their body.

The Holy Prophet of Allah has accorded health the status of a great boon and has enjoined strict health-care. Man has the right to look after his own health and it is also an obligation for him to do so. Health is a personal as well as collective necessity. It is personal to the intent that one will not be able to fulfil one's responsibilities if one falls ill and also will not be able to make one's physical health a source of happiness for himself. Needless to say that good health is the greatest source of human pleasure. He who is bereft of health is, to be sure, bereft of all the joys of life. It is a national necessity because sick people cannot make a healthy and vigorous nation. A nation that is weak and debilitated not only would fail to have its identity acknowledged, but would be

blown out of existence by the buffets of time.

A great calamity indeed would it be if the Muslim individuals and the Muslim *Ummah* are both debilitated and sickly. This would obviously mean that the healthy nations would overwhelm it. And the nation that is ordained to expound truth would no longer be able to fulfil its divine mission. Its poor health would ultimately lead it to the acceptance of alien thought and concepts. It is time we Muslims had a look at our general standards of health through the angle of international realities and take active steps to ensure proper health-care at the collective level.

I have just said that health is an individual as well as a collective concern. Our individual health and the health of the nation are irrevocably inter-related. I should like to draw the attention of the readers to the fact that there are many in our *Ummah* – indeed, a countless number of people who do not understand the implications of hygiene and public health. This ignorance has made our homes the breeding places of all types of maladies. Each one of us should reach down to the common man and explain the importance of good health to those, who do not know. This is a sacred duty enjoined upon us by our religion.

I should like to conclude this short discourse with a remarkable statement of Prophet David (peace be upon him).

“Health is the crown that adorns the head of the healthy but is visible only to sick persons”.

SYMPATHY AND COMMISERATION

Sympathy and commiseration are moral attributes that serve as the dynamics of love and affection in societies. It is through them that a successful and progressive society binds together its members. As the bricks of a wall support and sustain one another, the hallmark of a prosperous and progressive society is that its members are inspired by feelings of sympathy and love in their attitudes and behaviour towards one another. They help one another, share the distress of others and try to remove its causes. Members of a dynamic, morally conscious social order tend the sick, are generous to the needy and give succour to the indigent. As a result, no sector of the society suffers from the feeling of deprivation and social problems and difficulties do not get aggravated to the extent that it becomes impossible to solve them.

Helping one another in time of need constitutes sympathy. But sympathy to be sincere and genuine should be selfless and without any personal motives. If a person helps another in the hope of getting better recompense some time in the future or expects the person he helps to express to him his feelings of gratitude and indebtedness, or because his act of sympathy will receive publicity amongst people, as a consequence of which he will receive greater public esteem, this seemingly noble act is of no worth to Allah, in the Islamic frame of reference. Islam puts value only on that feeling of sympathy which is inspired solely by the desire to obtain divine approbation and the satisfaction of one's conscience. Whenever a man does an overt and selfless act of human sympathy it gives him unique spiritual pleasure and contentment. This pure spiritual pleasure and joy should be the prime purpose behind all public service.

It is stated in many *Ahādīth* that one major characteristic of *Īmān* is that every noble act brings a feeling of well-being and elevation in its wake and every sin causes inner anguish and man's conscience at once begins to reprimand him.

Sympathy is one of the pillars of a prosperous and happy society. It is the motivating force behind all human progress and the major means of national success and eminence. No nation can attain to that high position of progress, which advanced nations achieved in any given period of history, unless its individuals are inspired by fellow feeling and mutual sympathy. When the Muslims were motivated by the noble feelings of mutual sympathy and fraternal regard, they became the most advanced and refined nation of the world. In the contemporary world the magnificent material advances made by America and Europe are, to a great extent, the result of mutual help and sympathy.

Self-sacrifice is the highest form of sympathy. Sympathy means that we invite our hungry neighbour to share our meal with us. But self-sacrifice means

that we give our entire food to the hungry person and ourselves go to sleep on an empty stomach. If we spend a part of our wealth on our brothers, this will constitute sympathy. But it will not be any thing like the matchless generosity of the legendary Hatim of Tai who would give all that he possessed to his brother and would himself depend on Allah for sustenance. This is self-sacrifice. If a thirsty person gives half of his drink of water to another thirsty person and is himself content with the other half, this will be an act of sympathy. But if he gives the entire drink of water to the other person it will be an act of self-sacrifice.

In short, self-sacrifice is the highest and the ultimate form of sympathy. It consists in giving precedence to the needs of others over one's needs – to keep hungry in order to feed others, undergo stress and strain personally to provide comfort to others.

Talking of this moral greatness of the Companions of the Holy Prophet the Holy Qur'an says:

"...but prefer (the fugitives) above themselves though poverty become their lot..."

[Qur'an, LIX:9]

The training of the Holy Prophet so transformed his sacred Companions that each one of them became a glorious example of self-sacrifice. Consequently, when the Muslim migrants of Mecca came to Madina they were received with open arms by the Helpers of the latter city. Their spontaneous hospitality and warmth, their spirit of self-sacrifice, stands unique and unmatched in the annals of human history. The Helpers gave away their homes to their dear guests and their orchards and their farmlands, and made them co-sharers of the wages of their toil. They underwent innumerable hardships in order to ensure the comfort of their migrant brethren. Then, when the fertile land belonging to the exiled Banu Nuzair became available and the Holy Prophet distributed it amongst the Migrants and only two Helpers, they did not at all feel hurt or neglected. This demonstration of total selflessness and spirit of sacrifice so pleased Allah the Most Exalted that it was given a special word of praise and commendation in the *sūtra Hashr*.

Once a hungry man came to the Holy Prophet. It so happened that the Holy Prophet had nothing in his house at that time except some water. Consequently he told the Companions who were at that time with him that whoever took this man home as his guest for the night, would be recompensed by the munificence of Allah. Ultimately this honour fell to the lot of a Helper Companion, who took the hungry person to his house. What a coincidence! Even he had little food in the house. The man and his wife put the hungry children to sleep without feeding them, went without food themselves and whatever little food was available was offered to the guest. Next morning when this lucky Companion went to see the Holy Prophet, he was given the tidings of Allah's pleasure at, and approbation of, his noble act.

The Muslims of the first period of Islamic history showed such unique

spirit of sacrifice and self-denial that one can only gasp in utter amazement. The training that the Holy Prophet gave them, totally revolutionised their lives. They willingly underwent sufferings in order to provide comfort to others. They would themselves go without food to feed guests and way-farers. It is comparatively easier to show sympathy to others and to help them, remaining well within one's means. But it is quite another matter and an exceedingly trying one – to spend all that one has on others cheerfully and without making any mention of it to others and for one's needs depend on Allah's succour, to make trust in Allah one's sustenance and ones' way of life. This constitutes the true Islamic spirit of sacrifice and self-denial.

Instances of unique self-sacrifice, sympathy and generosity were witnessed when Meccan prisoners of war, captured in the battle of Badr were entrusted to the Companions – instances which can rightly be presented as outstanding examples of human greatness. Just think over the whole thing for a moment. The Companions of the Holy Prophet had in their power enemies, who to make the matters worse, were also infidels. They came under the protection of men who by and large were economically not at all well-off. And what did they do? They would offer the best food they could afford to the prisoners and themselves suffice with the leftovers. They looked after them with great care as though they were not prisoners but honoured guests. Even in this twentieth century prisoners are not treated so well, nor have any instances of overt sympathy, commiseration or sacrifice on the part of their captors come to the notice of historians.

For this active sympathy and spirit of sacrifice, they were trained by the Holy Prophet who inspired in them such zest for these noble qualities that the practical demonstration given by the Companions of these virtues in their treatment of the prisoners of Badr fills the highly advanced and emancipated world of today with wonder. This illustration makes the point amply clear that the Muslims besides treating their brethren-in-faith as blood brothers make no distinction on the basis of belief or unbelief in matters requiring sympathy at the human level. In their normal lives, sympathy and commiseration, sacrifice and self-denial for the sake of fellow Muslims are the basic components of their *Īmān* (true faith).

If we Muslims of today practise these noble virtues and show sincere sympathy and commiseration to one another and make the spirit of sacrifice an integral part of our moral conduct, we can make our society the best in the world. Let us pray to Allah, the Most Exalted, to fill our hearts with the noble feeling of sympathy and the spirit of selfless service to mankind. Amen!

**HUMAN KINDNESS AND THE
SPIRIT OF SELF-SACRIFICE**

(It is essential for people to be sympathetic to one another
in order to ensure social stability and peace)

We shall have to consider three verses from the Qur'ān to be able to visualise how Allah has created the cosmos, by cosmos I mean this earth, the solar system and the universe beyond, in fact, total existence. The first verse is:

*"Who createth, then disposeth;
Who measureth, then guideth..."*

[Qur'ān, LXXXVII:2-3]

The second is:

*"...the doing of Allah Who perfecteth
all things..."*

[Qur'ān, XXVII:88]

The last runs as follows:

*"...He hath created everything and
hath meted out for it a measure."*

[Qur'ān, XXV:2]

So the Creator of both the worlds Who fashioned all things with perfection and gave them symmetry and proportion, created man also. After equipping man with reason and the power to create and invent He appointed him as His deputy and declared him to be the best among creatures. Man did not get this high position and eminence because he is straight while other creatures are not. Nor does he owe his elevation to the fact that he can create and invent. But because he has some other characteristics also that are not shared by other creatures. Man has been defined in many ways. He has been described differently by different philosophers and scientists but the true and correct definition of man would be that he is a being who is filled with compassion if he sees anybody in pain or finds him suffering and his first impulse would be to rush forward and offer help and succour.

I regard this emotion as a basic quality of man and the most important constituent of his nature. Man is Allah's best creature because he is capable of

infinite sympathy. When this quality becomes so predominant in man's life that he begins to give precedence to others over himself and tries to serve and help others even at the cost of his own interests and needs he reaches that state of moral excellence which manifests itself in self-denial and in self-sacrifice. The qualities of sympathy, compassion and self-sacrifice augment and strengthen one another. As Muslims, we regard Allah as the Creator of the universe and of everything that exists in it. And the Holy Prophet, Muhammad-i-Mujtaba, as His last Prophet. The Book of Allah, the Qur'ān, and the *Sunnah* of the Holy Prophet are the complete code of guidance for us Muslims and we regulate our lives in the light of these two sacred sources. We make the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* our guide since we know – and everyone in the world today acknowledges the fact – that there exists no better code of life than the one made available to mankind by Allah in the form of the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*.

The subject under consideration here is sympathy and sacrifice. We find that the Qur'ān guides us in this behalf at every step. And when we look at the life of the Holy Prophet, the embodiment of Qur'ānic teachings, we find that it was sequence and infinitum of love, sincere affection, sympathy, commiseration and self-sacrifice. We find that when he came out to proclaim the Message of Allah he never preached what he did not practise. When he invited people to undergo sacrifice, he himself set an example. We find him with a stone tied round his stomach to ease the agony of hunger while feeding others. When he extolled sacrifice, he was the embodiment of it. He would not let even an animal go hungry. Observing the empty stomach of a camel, he said to his Companions: "O men! be God-fearing in the matter of these dumb creatures". He advised his followers to let their mounts free whenever they passed along a pasture to give them some time for grazing and when passing through a desert to quicken their speed so that the animals did not remain hungry for long. When he taught love and affection, he was the example *par excellence* of these noble attributes. What greater proof can there be of his infinite love and compassion than the fact that every lover of truth loves and respects him? Through his example of love, compassion and sympathy, he set a noble precedent and produced such a glorious galaxy of men dedicated to the service of mankind – self-sacrificing servants of fellow-beings – that the world will never be devoid of them. The Qur'ān extols the attributes of self-sacrifice and compassion in the Companions of the Holy Prophet as follows:

*"...but prefer (the fugitives) above themselves
though poverty become their lot..."*

[Qur'ān, LIX:9]

As we have said earlier, fellow-feeling and self-sacrifice are the attributes that blend to make man the finest of Allah's creatures. A man who is devoid of these two moral attributes does not deserve to be called a man, in fact, he is no more than an economic animal.

The Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* consider sacrifice, sincerity and sympathy

to be great virtues of man, in fact, his principal characteristics. Every believer became dedicated to the service of fellow-beings and it was this attribute that led to loyalty and the spirit of self-sacrifice. The history of Islam attests to the fact that, as long as these sentiments lasted, every Muslim state flourished and prospered. If we are on the decline today it is because we no longer possess these basic attributes and each one of us has become the slave of his personal desires. We overeat while our neighbour starves. One tiny segment of the nation flaunts its riches and indulges in wasteful and ostentatious living while the larger segment is languishing in utter poverty and is driven like slaves for less than two meagre meals a day. A few lucky ones have excess of resources and riches; the vast majority is without any and its cries for help go uncared for. A handful of people can afford to obtain the best medical advice and treatment available anywhere in the world while the bulk of the people get no medical care at all. It is hardly surprising to see signs of decay if the society sinks to such a low moral level and small wonder that dissension and strife take root in it.

Every sector of our life is governed by "each one for himself". This is so because we have thrown high moral attributes like sympathy into our backyard. We should think why it is that a tiny coterie of industrialists is setting up conglomerates — one after another and why there are people who have to live on pickings from dumps of garbage. We have to bring back our society from this hatefully un-Islamic state of affairs to moral sanity and equilibrium. We have once again to strive to inculcate amongst our people the Islamic values of sympathy, fellow-feeling and the sense of self-sacrifice. What we have to understand is the sociological principle that individual sincerity can lead to general welfare. And in self-sacrifice is implicit a miracle that creates all the other miracles of social life. Hence, if we want to ensure peace and amity in our society and wish to lead our lives as self-respecting people, each one of us will have to learn to be able to transcend our self-interest for the sake of the common good. I will end this dissertation with a quotation from the Traditions of the Holy Prophet: Said the Apostle of Allah:

"If you believers bear love and sympathy towards one another, and are loyal amongst yourselves you shall find yourselves to be like one body, in which if one organ is in pain the whole body becomes feverish and restless".

MUTUAL HELP AND ASSISTANCE

Allah has so fashioned the nature of man that the desire to help others and to be of service to his fellow-men is an essential attribute of his inner being. Along with this, the needs and demands of human life are naturally and dispositionally such as to make human beings compulsively dependent on mutual help and assistance. This means that co-operation and mutual help are basic human instincts. This innate desire is of prime importance in making the *homo sapiens* humane and in keeping him so, as also in reshaping man's individual as well as collective life and in ensuring its well-being and stability. Had the human kind been bereft of this social instinct and natural inclination, this colourful and beautiful world that we find all around us, would not have come into being.

Everyone of us knows that the lives of the people who have not had the good luck of having their innate social inclinations properly nourished and developed and are without the noble and sacred desire to be of service to others, live a desolate and empty life. They are so completely lonely in this lively flourishing abode, which is full of good and loving people.

May Allah protect and save us from this earthly torment and chastisement of endless loneliness.

In fact the cause of all this colour, this festivity, this hum of activity, indeed the whole joy of living, is the natural urge in man to assist his fellow-beings, to help them, to work in harmony with them and to cooperate with them. Not only this, many of man's latent faculties, and potential excellences emerged and blossomed forth merely because he wanted to make his life good and useful for other human beings.

This urge for public service, which is nature's greatest and most useful gift to man, plays a decisive role in building up his personality and in the formation of his character and personality because this noble desire to be of service to others and to be useful to them protects him from the demeaning impact of selfishness and saves him from being self-centred and becoming a captive within the shell of his own lower self.

If you study the history of mankind and the story of the personal lives of outstanding personalities you will find that the best and the noblest amongst men who made their mark in life were those lovable and adorable persons who dedicated their lives to the service of mankind. The most resplendent and glorious amongst outstanding world figures were those who lit up the path of life for others. The most renowned and esteemed men were they who forgot their own comfort, their own welfare, their own good and spent every conscious moment

of their illustrious lives in the service of Allah's creatures, who gave precedence to the needs and requirements of other people over their personal comfort and needs.

The shining stars of the human firmament are they who showed total disregard to their own interests for the sake of meeting the needs of the indigent and the helpless amongst their fellow-beings. In other words, the people who "expended of what Allah had provided them" are the ones whose glorious deeds give lustre and glow to the pages of human history. In this sacred verse of the Holy Qur'an, Allah, the Most Exalted, has extolled the disposition of His servants whom He holds dear, that they utilise the faculties and the guidance He has given them and the affluence of life He has bestowed upon them to help and serve other human beings.

The needs and occasions which make man require the help and assistance of others are diverse. Some of them are temporary and transitory, some are of somewhat longer duration, and there are some which last for the major part of life or are life-long.

Furthermore some needs and demands are confined to an individual or a small group, while there are others which concern a large group of men and there are still others which involve the entire human race.

Most important among these hosts of needs and problems and the most extensive, both with regard to time and impact, are those which are so all-embracing and universal that they pertain to this worldly life and also to the life Hereafter. In other words their sweep is limitless and infinite.

Now see, who are those exalted men who sacrificed their all to meet this particular need of men. Not only you and I, but the whole world unanimously agrees and says with one voice that these sacred beings were those, who are known and recognised as Prophets and Messengers of Allah, from one end of the world to the other end in every period of history. These sacred and sanctified near ones of Allah helped mankind in the manner that they showed it the path of welfare, well-being, peace and security in both lives and both the worlds.

Mutual help is a human compulsion and the widest field for this help and assistance is to emulate the example of those sacred personalities whom we are proud to follow and in the truth of whose mission we claim to have complete faith and, above all, in being the followers of the greatest of Allah's Prophets, 'the Seal of Divine Messengers' (peace be upon him) and acting in accordance with his practice, help mankind by showing it the path which will lead it to peace and tranquillity in this world and Allah's love and acceptance in the world to come. This, no doubt, is the most difficult and the hardest task in the world but the recompense of those who resolve to undertake it, is also great and highly edifying.

In the Holy Qur'an, Allah says about those who take up this duty with firm and unshakeable determination:

"Ye are the best community that hath been raised up for mankind..."

[Qur'an, III:110]

Muslims of the world, I invite you to look keenly at the present state of affairs, work with grit and determination to set up a truly righteous and welfare society in your respective homelands where every person will accept the responsibility that Allah has laid down on man to love fellow-men and help them whenever and howsoever they need help. May Allah help and aid us in this noble endeavour. Amen!

NOBILITY OF SPEECH

It is narrated in Ibn Hanbal's *Musnad* that a Companion once asked: "O Prophet of Allah! what should a Muslim be most afraid of"?

The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) pointed to his tongue and said, "Of it"! And he added, "Noble speech leads to Paradise and the evil tongue to Hell".

Propriety in speech is a moral virtue and moral virtue is *Imān* (True Faith). Faith and moral virtue mean the same thing and signify the same state of being. If a man has lofty morals he will inevitably be noble in speech. In fact, mannerly speech, showing respect in mutual conversation, is a manifestation of one's being highly moral.

In *sūra Isra* of the Holy Qur'an, Allah the Most High, and the Most Glorious, says:

"Tell My bondmen to speak that which is kindlier..."

[Qur'an, XVII:53]

And why talk only of a single verse of the Holy Book? The fact of matter is that the Qur'an itself is the noblest example of noble speech. This divine testament, which was revealed during the month of Ramadan, created a revolution in the whole world by proclaiming the unity of Allah. No people, no nation in the world remained uninfluenced by the Qur'an. It made every single human being aware of the pre-eminence and the glory of being human and it enhanced the importance of mutual love and affection in human affairs, made morality the basis of social organisation and enjoined propriety and good manners in conversation, in fact, in all communication.

The history of nations stands witness to the fact that rude and vile speech has never done any good to any person and a polite and pleasant tongue has always won the day and conquered people's hearts. The truth of the matter is that man cannot fight Nature. Rude and improper speech is a completely unnatural behaviour and speaking well and nicely is the true expression of a man's innate self; it reflects his natural disposition. Indeed it is an instinctive act. We all know and know it perfectly well that:

- Nobility of speech is an alms of the tongue and a verbal oblation.
- Nobility of speech is a spiritual offspring of knowledge.

- Nobility of speech leads a person to the straight path.
- Nobility of speech is an ability that makes words the vehicle of truth.
- Nobility of speech has on countless occasions saved the day for peace and human welfare.
- Nobility of speech combined with truthfulness makes man bold and fearless.

We know one thing as absolute truth – that the eternal teacher and leader of us Muslims is Allah's last Prophet. He is the supreme and sublime guide whose every single moment of life and every single act is before us. Never has there been any other person, leader, or teacher whose whole life is so open and whose thoughts and deeds are so completely recorded – even to the minutest detail; and he has no secrets to hide. There has been only one such person and that person is our Holy Prophet. We see and we know that our Prophet, the chief of creation, the pride of all that exists (peace be upon him) was always proper and soft in his speech; invariably polite, decorous, pleasing and kindly, when he conversed with people, regardless of their station in life and their beliefs. Just ponder his life for a moment! Every passing moment of his life was epoch-making, fleeting moment was momentous. He brought about a great and unique revolution which not only changed the course of world history but became the fountain-head of human progress and universal well-being.

Every moment of the Prophet's life was crowded. He faced impossible odds and grave problems at every step in his mission to make the Islamic movement a success and to set in motion the forces of human brotherhood and equality, to establish the pre-eminence of *Haq* and *Khair* (Truth and Virtue). And lo and behold! He resolved all problems, overcame all odds and made his mission a complete success. This indeed was the greatest miracle in the history of divine guidance to humanity through the institution of Prophethood. And Allah's final Messenger accomplished it with His Grace. As a result, the light of Islam illuminated the entire world of mankind.

We are the followers of the Holy Prophet. To be counted in the *Ummah* of the last of Allah's messengers is a matter of pride and joy for us and the means of our salvation. This pride and joy can be proper and justifiable only if we adopt, in right earnest, the attributes of his sacred person, to tread the path that he showed us and make the life-view he presented to the human race the basis of our individual as well as collective life.

Come, let us make a beginning in the name of Allah, and take a solemn vow today that we will always be noble in our speech. Please believe me, if every one of our compatriots makes a promise to his inner self, and his conscience to this effect, we can change the destiny of the Muslim world. We can make our part of the globe, the sacred land that our saints and scholars spoke of in their teachings. Faith, high moral sense and nobility of speech can cure our society of all its maladies and remove all its ills.

May Allah, the Most Glorious and the Most High, give us in abundance the gift of wisdom and understanding and endow us with the will to be truly moral and noble in thought, in word and in deed. Amen!

THE QUR'ĀNIC CONCEPT OF FORBEARANCE

Tolerance and forbearance are among those cardinal virtues which bring out the best in human personality. They are the mainspring of an individual's or a society's progress and prosperity, greatness and glory. Tolerance steels one's character. It buttresses one's endurance and nurtures the faculties of mind so that a person possessing these qualities remains tranquil in the face of adversity and in misfortune. He is immune against annoyance, vexation and indignation — a master of his will and captain of his soul.

Allah created man a perfect being, blessed with a perfect disposition which shuns vice and courts virtue. Mankind, by nature, is inclined towards noble deeds and is averse to ignoble actions. These are the inherent qualities of man irrespective of caste, creed or colour. He is appreciative of high morality and deprecates moral turpitude. Falsehood and fraud, oppression and injustice, violence and calumny, back-biting and mischief-mongering and other such vices are disapproved by every society. Vices are always looked down upon as undesirable features of the human conduct. On the other hand probity and honesty, love and sympathy, loyalty and magnanimity, kindness and justice, mutual regard and cooperation, sincerity and forgiveness, soft-speaking and cheerfulness, amity and peace, charity and affability have always been upheld as the most cherished of human qualities everywhere.

Individuals and nations, enriched by these qualities, have always commanded respect and esteem, and even those who are devoid of these virtues feel regretful at heart. Virtueless people take great pains to conceal their moral bankruptcy which proves that even they secretly suffer pangs of conscience for their lack of good moral conduct.

Virtues such as tolerance and forbearance are deeply ingrained in the mind of a Muslim who must subject himself completely to the divine will and must inculcate in himself the qualities of steadfastness and compassion, righteousness and humility. He must do what is divinely commanded and must refrain from what is forbidden.

The mission of the Holy Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him) was to set an example of the highest nobility of character and gentleness of disposition, and a true Muslim is he who emulates this example wherever he is and in whatever he does. As a true Muslim, he must for ever be vigilant against moral depravity and walk along the path of virtue.

Someone once approached the Holy Prophet for advice, and the Holy Prophet advised him to eschew anger. The Caliph Ali bin Abi Talib (may Allah be happy with him) is said to have observed that wrathfulness is a kind of insanity and

that an irate person soon comes to grief. A wrathful person is carried away by the tide of passion and repents being angry later on. But a tolerant and forbearing person can control his passion and earn the respect of his fellow-men. A tolerant person does not lose his head in spite of provocations, which indeed proves his superiority to one who succumbs to temper.

To be tolerant and forbearing calls for a great deal of restraint and self-control. A person exercising tolerance and forbearance must undergo a lot of discomfort and suffering for the sake of others, but he is amply rewarded by a feeling of spiritual uplift and magnanimity and by the respect he gains.

The Holy Prophet of Islam is said to have remarked that a Muslim who fraternises with fellow-men and shows forbearance when he is put to hardship or distress by them is much better than the person who keeps away from his fellow-beings and shows temper when he is put to trouble by any body.

The Qur'ān itself says:

*“And the believers, men and women,
are protecting friends one of another...”*

[Qur'ān, IX:71]

Once a bedouin called on the Holy Prophet at the Mosque in Medina and urinated in the courtyard whereupon those present pounced upon the bedouin in great anger. But the Prophet advised tolerance and remarked: “Why beat him? Just wash the defilement away with a bucketful of water. My *Ummah* has been commissioned to bring comfort to people and not pain”.

On another occasion an uncouth person pulled hard at the Prophet's mantle as he was going somewhere along with his Companions. But the Prophet only smiled and asked the man what the matter was. The uncouth fellow asked for a favour which the Holy Prophet did not hesitate to grant.

The life of the Prophet (peace be upon him) is the noblest record of gentleness and compassion, tolerance and forbearance. During the earlier days of his ministry the Prophet was made to suffer the grossest of insults and discomfort. His very life was in constant danger, but he always wished his ill-wishers well and placed before mankind the highest example of tolerance and forbearance.

When someone is pledged to some high ideal in life, he develops remarkable qualities of character to carry him onwards to his goal. It is a sense of commitment to a task that makes man tolerant and considerate for, without these qualities, he cannot tide over the hurdles. When the human soul soars to spiritual heights, egotism evaporates and only the goal remains in sight. Without tolerance and forbearance the human soul cannot reach the spiritual state where the self becomes subservient to the ideal and deprivation, affliction, discomfort and humiliation become spurs to the inner drive.

The Holy Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him) once said: “Verily a *Momin* is the centre of love and affection, and men who do not do any good to others and whom others do not love, are men without virtue”.

This means that a believer should behave in a manner that he becomes the

centre of love and affection. To love and to be loved is the first condition of humanitarianism. A person who is incapable of loving his fellow-beings is incapable of inspiring his fellow-beings' tender feelings. The ability to love occupies the central position among virtues. It is the fountain-head of all that is good in man.

The Holy Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him) has said: "Religion is submission to Allah and His Messenger and loyalty to the leaders of Muslims and Muslims in general".

Just ponder the implications of this *Hadīth*. Faithfulness to Allah consists in submitting to divine commandments and submission to His Messenger means following in his footsteps. Loyalty to the chosen leader consists in obeying his orders so long as he does not go against Allah and his Messenger, and loyalty to Muslims in general consists in doing one's utmost for their good. This is the quintessence of the religion of Islam.

MODESTY

Modesty is a primary human virtue which protects a person from many serious vices. In fact it is the fountain-head of many noble qualities like decency, dignity, piety, and purity of mind. How blemishless a man's character will be, depends to a large extent on how modest he is. To say that modest people are totally incapable of committing an immoral act is in no way an over-statement. How can he who does not tolerate immodesty and vulgarity in others, be guilty of it himself?

There is a tender tropical plant "Mimosa sensitiva" which folds up at the softest touch – it is called *Lajwanti* in our language, which means a shy and modest plant – a plant that wilts even at the slightest feel of the tip of a human finger. This is exactly the moral state of a modest person. If he passes by somebody who is indulging in vile talk he will feel extremely embarrassed, bow his head, and quicken his pace in order to hurriedly move away from the man with the evil tongue. If accidentally some shameful deed comes into his view he will feel ashamed, deep down in his soul, and will quickly turn his eyes away from the ugly scene. A modest person will never do a thing at which others may have even the slightest occasion to look askance. Modesty endows man with a moral perspective that creates in him such a loathing for vileness that he will avoid it at all costs. A truly modest person is an angel in human form. Indeed even the angels laud his pudency. The truth of the matter is that this sublime virtue lifts a man to the level of heavenly beings.

Our Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) was the most illustrious example of modesty and pudency. He was so modest that his Companions (may Allah be happy with them) were convinced that he had attained to the loftiest pinnacle of this noble quality. A *Hadith* from *Bukhārī Sharīf* (Bukhārī's Book of the Prophet's Sayings) throws light on this aspect of the Holy Prophet's character:

"The Holy Prophet of Allah was more bashful than a veiled young virgin".

Allah himself is a witness to this virtue of the Holy Prophet. Addressing the Prophet's Companions, Allah says in this verse:

*".. Linger not for conversation.
Lo! that would cause annoyance to the Prophet, and he
would be shy of (asking) you (to go)..."*

[Qur'ān, XXXIII:53]

It means that the Prophet was so careful about the requirements of modesty that he would not disregard it even when he was put to severe strain.

Modesty is an innate quality. Some have it more, some less. A congenial social environment and proper education and training not only sustains but nourishes and enhances this virtue. On the other hand, bad social surroundings and bad company result in the gradual loss of this quality till it completely disappears and is replaced by immodesty and shamelessness. That is why Islam enjoins proper vigilance in safeguarding and nurturing it and eschewing all those things which tend to endanger it. The Qur'an has specifically mentioned some vices in this connection and says:

“...and that ye draw not nigh to lewd things whether open or concealed,...”

[Qur'an, VI:151]

Allah has directed the faithful to exercise care in the matter so that modesty is kept alive and shamelessness does not enter the heart. In our part of the world when a person becomes wanton it is said that 'the water in his eyes is dead'. This idiom denotes habitual brazen-facedness.

One of the Companions of the Holy Prophet was very modest and bashful. Once the Prophet saw his brother upbraiding him for it and told the former, "Do not get angry with him because his modesty comes from the faith". As faith in Allah makes it incumbent upon the believer to abstain from all that is vile and evil, in the same manner genuine modesty keeps a person away from all vices and unethical thoughts. The Prophet gave high praise to this noble moral quality in a famous *Hadith*:

“Only good flows from modesty”.

A virtue which leads to nothing but good, which is an integral part of our faith is twice-blessed and needs to be duly looked after and guarded so that our individual and collective self remains unsoiled and we can lead a life of goodness, honour and nobility.

In a nutshell, modesty is a virtue which keeps a person naturally away from all vile thoughts. People who are innately modest are men of lofty character and are universally held in high esteem. They can think no evil, do no evil. They can never transgress the limits of propriety.

The lives of the Companions of the Holy Prophet, whose character was moulded by the Prophet, are shining examples of this virtue. The Holy Prophet once said about Hadrat Uthman that even the angels were envious of him because of his modesty.

The Prophet once also said that from amongst the proverbs and sayings of *Jahiliyya* (the pre-Islamic period of ignorance) that has survived, relates to pudency. It runs thus: "If you do not conform to the norms of modesty do whatever evil you want to, there is nobody to restrain you from it".

I want to say just one thing more besides what has been said above about modesty. Exaggeration and imbalance in practising or preaching it is inevitably

as injurious to man, as is the case with all other natural bents of mind and habits. If modesty impedes man's efforts to acquire knowledge, goodness and righteousness, it should be discarded. But for this one exception, modesty is a basic human virtue which is totally beneficial for man. I will go a little further and say it is the crowning moral excellence. This assertion is corroborated by a Saying of the Holy Prophet:

"Modesty is one half of faith".

Now I will talk of Pakistan in the context of this great human virtue and then say a few words about the entire world of Islam.

Pakistan undoubtedly and decisively came into existence and was gifted to the Muslims by Allah because they had vowed before Him that the Qur'anic Code would be enforced in this ideological state soon after its coming into existence and sovereignty would vest in Allah and its legal system would be the *Shari'ah* of Islam. And the fact of the matter is that Pakistanis can establish and retain their Muslim identity in the comity of nations only by complete adherence to Qur'an and *Sunnah*. Without it this Muslim nation will remain indistinct and unrecognised.

A concerted endeavour is on at present to live in accord with the Islamic *Shari'ah* throughout the world of Islam. It is the duty of every Muslim to extend full and sincere cooperation in the matter, to observe the moral dicta of Islam in his personal life and become a visible symbol of its higher values and then whole-heartedly participate in the process of achieving this glorious objective of making Islam the basis of our collective life. Of course modesty is a part of our faith and it is the honour and grace of every man and every woman. It is, indeed, synonymous with morality. May the help of Allah the Almighty, and the Glorious be always with us. Amen!

HARD AND HONEST WORK

Allah created man in a manner that it is essential for him to keep working and to go on striving all the time to meet the demands of his day-to-day life as well as to achieve his long-term objectives. Utilisation of physical strength and stamina and mental abilities and faculties to ensure the supply of resources required for his physical survival and to enable him to continue with his quest of the intangibles is what is generally labelled as work or labour. The Holy Qur'an has referred to it in these words.

"We verily have created man in an atmosphere:"

[Qur'an, XC:4]

Why has man been created in trouble? Because, if man did not have to fight for his survival or do hard work, his life would be bereft of all significance. Furthermore it is imperative for him to share the fruits of his toil with those whom Allah has made dependent upon him and also with those who due to some bodily disability or some temporary or permanent sickness are unable to provide for themselves.

Another point which is worth considering here and which ought to be pondered is that the world we live in has not always been what it is today. It is subject to an unceasing process of change. Our ancestors of the distant and not too distant past did not have the comforts of life that we enjoy. The facilities and the good things of life that are available to us all, could not be dreamt of even by the mightiest kings of yore. Every bit of our present day world, every corner of this resplendent and glorious earth, humming with human activity and emblazoned with the radiant abundance of human progress and well-being reminds of the toil, the sweat and the tears of mankind in distant ages. Our well-being, our comforts, our luxuries are the fruit of the labour and the hard work of man through the ages, to conquer the universe and its resources and to place them at the disposal of posterity. The contemporary affluence is the end-product of the hard work of our forefathers. Indeed this is a continuing process. Man works not only for his immediate profit, but the betterment of succeeding generations. Human activity has always been and will always be inherently teleological. Hard work and purposeful toil is but natural to the human kind. The gist of what I have said is that man is innately good and humane. His natural disposition impels him to work hard – not only for his own good but to share what he produces or achieves materially and spiritually with his fellow-beings.

Fulfilling the needs and requirements of others is indeed the worship of Allah. But along with this altruistic concept what Islam teaches us in that fulfilling personal needs and requirements is also an act of worship, provided the purpose is noble, the intention is righteous and the means employed are honest.

Consequently hard and honest work, which is necessary for all human achievement and is liked by Allah, is also commendable in the eyes of fellow-beings. The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) has himself said in this context: "He who works hard and honestly is well-loved by Allah". Just as there are certain conditions contingent upon every act of worship, in the same manner hard work to become an act of worship, has to follow certain conditions and directions. A man striving to earn his livelihood has to bear in mind the relevant laws and regulations of Islam. If he does that, his work attains a very high pedestal. The respect to which honest hard work is entitled is due partly to the fact that almost all prophets have worked hard for their livelihood. Some were masons, some wood-cutters and iron-smiths, while some others were shepherds, tailors, and traders. This particular fact of history also shows that it is against the spirit of Islam to regard any profession inferior to others.

Now, while we are talking about hard work and manual labour in the context of Allah's prophets, we should keep in mind the fact that in the midst of the present-day life, which is so full of material goods and comforts, we can discern elements of the work done by these sacred persons. Besides, all our moral and social concepts are their glorious legacy to us. The devotion and persistence with which they carried on their prophetic mission and the dissemination of moral values reached its perfection in the personality of the Holy Prophet.

Allah the Almighty has vouchsafed to man remarkable attributes. Man has been granted intellect and wisdom as well as physical stamina and tremendous energy. He has also been blessed with good health and physical fitness. His rational faculty and creativity have given him a position of pre-eminence in the world. It is incumbent upon man, who has been given this largesse, to endeavour to make the world worth living and a haven of peace. He should never shirk or evade hard work. And Allah requires him to make his work purposeful. He should work with zeal and dedication to contribute all that he can to human weal, to help his near ones and friends and to serve humanity at large.

And now in the end I would like to make a reference to our present-day world. We find that in every nook and corner of the world man is working and striving hard. There is no dearth of sweat and toil. But there is something lacking. How many amongst us follow, in our labour and toil, in the footsteps of the prophets and work according to the precepts of Islam? All that we have — our physical stamina and intellectual vigour, our power of concentration and inventive faculty — is a gift from Allah. Consequently it behoves us that, while we devote most of our resources towards our own betterment and that of our family and near ones we also do our humble bit to disseminate the message

of Allah's prophets in our sphere of influence and to promote the way of life which was given to humanity by the last and the most perfect Prophet of Allah. I am reminded, at this point, of a prayer of the Holy Prophet:

"O Allah: Let it not be that this world and the wordly life become the sole objective of our endeavour and the entire repertoire of our knowledge".

This prayer gives us much food for thought. It provides a guideline for every Muslim of the contemporary world. Our strivings should be centred round the uplift of man and the promotion of human brotherhood. We should, in this age of science and technology, avail of the resources available to us, to work for the glory of Islam and for the establishment of the Islamic way of life in the length and breadth of the Islamic world. Let us work to the best of our ability in this direction and pray to Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate, to give us the wisdom and the strength to establish the *Shari'ah* of the Holy Prophet in our part of the world, so that we may stand with our heads erect among the comity of nations. May He bless our efforts with success. Amen!

LOVE'S LABOUR
(The real pleasure of life lies in
hard and dedicated work)

It is action that shapes life and leads man to success. Action presupposes some definite purpose, and without purpose action is neither possible nor laudable. It is purpose that confers permanence upon action. Not only action but life itself becomes meaningful if it has some ultimate purpose. It needs a purpose for sheer continuation. Iqbal has beautifully elucidated this point:

“Purpose gives life continuity and permanence”.

Purpose, objective or goal — whatever we may choose to call it — motivates man, gives him a sense of direction and prepares him for self-sacrifice. It stimulates the mental and practical faculties of man for sustained and high-minded effort. When a man's action is purposeful and sincere we may call it dedicated work or love's labour.

Working hard for a thing is itself a laudable thing. Hard work and honest labour are the characteristics of a good individual and of a living people and through hard work alone can an objective reach the stage of fulfilment. But each kind of hard work or sustained labour differs from another. One kind is intended for earning one's livelihood. There is another kind in which the person doing hard work transcends his own self and addresses himself to the needs of his people, his nation, or the whole of mankind. Such labour attains the status of worship. Dedicated labour resulting from philanthropic and altruistic motives and informed by ideas of human well-being and welfare, and accompanied by self-sacrifice is called labour of selfless love (*jan fishani*). It implies complete dedication, a keen desire and a noble impulse to achieve a given goal. In fact, the whole joy of life lies in earnest and dedicated action. Without it man can neither achieve much for himself nor for his people and nation. A soldier in the battle-field is a typical example of dedicated work. Instinct for self-preservation would demand that he ensures his own safety instead of destroying the enemy but his dedication to a higher aim leads him on to face the enemy and win laurels for himself and victory for his country, even if it involves the supreme sacrifice. There is nothing but extreme danger and rigor on the battle-field, but the pleasure a soldier gets when he faces the most edifying experience that a man can ever hope for, in advancing against the vanguard of the enemy at the risk of life and destroying the enemy is something that mere instinct or practical sense would never recommend. It requires a higher notion of pleasure and dedication to be able to do this. Everyone of us loves his life, but there

are occasions when most of us would risk everything we have to achieve our aim. This is what is called *jan fishani* and it is the sheet-anchor of a nation's safety. It ennoble the life of the individual and ensures the security of the country and the *millat*. The Holy Prophet has said:

"It is worth more than a lifetime's prayer to spend a night on the border of the enemy's territory".

If we ponder this Saying of the Holy Prophet, the true meaning of dedication and devotion to work will become evident. It is a good thing to address oneself to prayer in times of peace and tranquillity. But it is a far greater blessing of Allah to spend one's time striving, with one's life, to ensure the safety of the country and the nation. Hadrat 'Abd Allah bin 'Ali Awfa narrates a *hadith* of the Holy Prophet: "Paradise lies underneath the shadow of swords". This Saying of the Holy Prophet sheds light on the meaning of *'jan fishani'*.

Man cannot achieve even the smallest of his objectives without hard work. Dedication is a prerequisite to success and attainment. How well does the Qur'an delineate its importance:

"And that man hath only that for which he maketh effort,"

[Qur'an, LIII:39]

Muslims, guided by the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* of the Holy Prophet conquered a major part of the then known world. The Arabs emerged from the Arabian desert within, as it were, the twinkling of the eye, to conquer nation after nation and performed such wonders that the world looked on them in abject amazement. Whatever the department of life, no worthwhile results can be achieved without honest and dedicated work.

The Holy Prophet not only taught the lesson of hard work, he himself presented the best example of it. He used to perform his own chores with his own hands, and no work was beneath his dignity. Once a Madinese Companion visited him. All that he possessed was two pieces of a flaxen sheet and a cup for drinking water. The Holy Prophet instructed these to be brought to him. He brought them and said: "One piece I use as a bed-spread and the other for wrapping myself in. The cup I use for drinking water. This is all I possess". The Holy Prophet turned towards his Companions and asked: "Who is prepared to buy them?" One Companion came out with an offer of one *dirham*. The Holy Prophet enquired whether anyone was prepared to raise the offer. An offer of two *dirhams* was made. The Holy Prophet took these two *dirhams* and said to the *Ansar* Companion: "Buy food with one *dirham* and give it to your family. With the other *dirham* purchase a hatchet and bring it to me".

The indigent Companion purchased the hatchet into which the Holy Prophet drove the helve. The Holy Prophet gave him the helved hatchet, and said to him: "Go and cut wood with it for selling in the market, and come to me after a fortnight".

For a fortnight the Companion went on cutting wood and selling it with zeal. He presented himself after a fortnight to the Holy Prophet and said: "O Prophet of Allah! Within the last fortnight I have earned fifteen *dirhams*, I have purchased cloth and grain for my family and am still left with some". The Holy Prophet said: "It is for your own good. Better this than that you should carry the scar of beggary on your face on the Day of Judgement".

The Holy Prophet's teaching is that man should earn his livelihood by hard work. Depending upon others for sustenance means that the individual is a shirker and has no sense of self-respect. The Holy Prophet has expressed displeasure at everything in which the livelihood is earned by means other than hard work. He has said: "The best livelihood is that which is earned by the sweat of the brow".

Those afraid of hard work try to adopt devious means for earning their livelihood. The consequences that emanate from such means are injurious not only for themselves but for the entire nation. The life of the average man becomes confounded. Beggary and bribery become rampant. The beggar and the bribe-taker both adopt dubious and unlawful means for earning money, and both are deprived of the joy that labour and dedicated work bring with them — joy that is wholesome and in keeping with self-respect. The motivation for sacrifice and self-reliance tends to disappear, and lethargy, avarice and selfishness take its place. The Holy Prophet has said that both the bribe-taker and bribe-giver are marked for Hell.

Muslims were given the principle of *jihād* (holy endeavour) so as to confer upon them a special characteristic. Our need today is for hard work and dedicated labour. It is our love of ease that has generated most of our problems, and we have to learn to do hard work by, as it were, putting the hatchet into the helve. We can then scale rung after rung of progress and prosperity. We should remember that there is no reward or comfort without hard work, and it is our honest labour that gives us respect in society. Nobody else can resolve our difficulties for us. No one else will come to our help if we do not help ourselves. The fruits of hard work are comfort and a sense of well-being. The Qur'an tells us that Allah confers tranquillity upon those who undergo hardships, trials, and tribulations in the course of hard work, with resolution and good cheer.

COURAGE

The word 'courage' has many synonyms, such as bravery, valour, intrepidity, fearlessness, and so on; but what needs emphasis here is that it is a very major aspect of man's disposition and is essential for the furtherance of human ideals. Courage has won admiration in all ages throughout human history and it is one of the major sources of mythology and epic poetry. No matter what the culture, no matter what the clime or region, brave people have always been admired and from ancient times to the present, the brave have always received plaudits and adulation. We see that characters like Achilles of Greece, Rostam of Iran and others are among the central figures in the literature of the Classical Age, indeed these characters are the source material of all ancient literature. The stories of most heroes represent a period when different countries had embarked upon the unification of warring tribes and the building of nations. Rostam, the regent of Iran who was killed in the Battle of Qadasiyah against Muslims, has been made into a great Iranian hero through fictional representation, by the author of the *Shahnamah*, Abu al-Qāsim Firdawsi. And he has been made into a hero in such a manner that most Muslims of our sub-continent took him to be a great Muslim hero of some past age. Hence the Muslim wrestlers of the sub-continent began to regard the titles of *Rostam-i-Zamān* (world champion) and *Rostam-i Hind* (Rostam of India) as a matter of great pride.

Valour or courage is undoubtedly a facet of human character that confers greatness and magnificence upon man, but no religion prior to Islam gave due recognition to it. In fact, they mistook courage for savagery and cruelty and discouraged it. But it is in keeping with the nature of man that courage and valour should be extolled. Islam, which is the religion of Nature, and aims at leading man towards righteousness and higher ethical values does not negate the value of courage, but turns it in the right direction. For the first time in human history, it was Islam that explicitly pointed out that courage, *per se*, is not a moral characteristic but is an effective means of doing good and rendering services of altruistic nature, provided it is properly channelled. Courage can be compared to a sword and any other implement of war. It can be used to good purpose if it is in the hands of a good and a noble person who would rally to the aid of the oppressed and will use it to stave off the blows of tyrants. But should it fall into the hands of a savage, it can be used to crush the weak and defenceless people and to enslave and exploit them. The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) extolled valour, indicating when it should be brought into play. He declared it to be necessary particularly in the assertion of righteousness and suppression of ungodliness. Without valour and courage a Muslim cannot

discharge the obligation of establishing good and abolishing evil, nor can he prevent the perpetration of cruelty and exploitation. The Holy Prophet has said that we, as Muslims, should fight and defeat the forces of oppression. This is an invitation to greatness and glory, but this position of greatness can be achieved by the courageous ones only. Those who are lacking in courage will at best show impotent rage or pine with grief, when they see helpless people being tortured and oppressed. The weak are given the lowliest position among the believers by Allah.

Allah has commanded Muslims as follows:

“O ye who believe! When ye meet those who disbelieve in battle, turn not your backs to them.”

[Qur’ān, VIII:15]

And again:

“O ye who believe! When ye meet an army, hold firm...”

[Qur’ān, VIII:45]

At another place it is said:

*“Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.
And those with him are hard
against the disbelievers...”*

[Qur’ān, XLVIII:29]

From the above verses it naturally follows that this feeling of steadfastness and the firm resolve to make sacrifices for the sake of righteousness and truth cannot be made without courage. The point that requires consideration here is that courage depends upon faith in Allah. This, however, does not necessarily mean that those who are not Muslims cannot be brave. What it actually means is that those who disbelieve or have not been blessed with faith will possess courage that is more akin to that of the beasts of prey. And the attribute of courage will sometimes be used for good and at others for evil aims. But the courage that has roots in faith in Allah can be used only for good and noble objectives.

The life of the Holy Prophet is an example for all human beings, and it is so perfect that it is the ideal that mankind will find worthy of emulation. The Holy Prophet possessed courage to the highest possible degree. He displayed courage to its utmost limits both in his Prophetic mission and in war. When during the Battle of Hunayn he was surrounded by the unbelievers, he stood firm like a rock and said: “I am a Prophet. This is not a lie, and I am from the house of ‘Abd al-Muttalib’”. This was the time when the enemy archers were pouring a hail of arrows, and his Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) had strayed far from him. But the Holy Prophet showed indomitable courage

and unparalleled valour in this moment of extreme danger.

During the Battle of Badr, when the onslaught of the *Kafirs* gained in intensity, the Companions sought refuge under the mantle of the Holy Prophet. Hadrat 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) says about this occasion. "When on the day of the Battle of Badr, we sought protection by the side of the Prophet, because he was the bravest of us all — no one was closer than him to the ranks of the pagans".

It has been stated on the authority of Hadrat Anas bin-Mālik that one day there was sudden panic because of a rumour that the infidels had mounted an invasion. The Madinese, as soon as they heard this, began to prepare for resistance, but the Prophet reconnoitred the different positions outside the city, on an unsaddled horse and returned to inform his Companions that the rumour was unfounded.

The Prophet's courage did not remain restricted to the battlefield encompassed his whole life. He planted the sapling of Islam in the desert and the rocky terrain of Arabia and watered it with his life-blood. Then he defended it with a courage and fortitude that has no parallel in the history of mankind. Such a display of courage is one of the primary characteristics of Allah's prophets because they had full confidence in Allah's succour.

One *hadīth* of the Prophet has it that a real fighter is not one who would vanquish someone weaker than himself but one who, even when roused to fury, would keep his emotions under control. Seen in this context, the word "courage" is rather extensive in its implications. Courage does not mean only facing the enemy fearlessly. It is not confined to facing the antagonist on the battle-ground dauntlessly; it is seen in the field of morality as well. Courage means power; it is also trust and honesty. If a person is surrounded by adversity on all sides and is fighting for his survival any individual who extends a helping hand to him will also have acted with courage.

HONEST LIVELIHOOD IS A BOON OF ALLAH

Man's power of speech is a great gift from Allah. Through the vocal means of communication he is in a position to convey his ideas to others. The progress of human civilization is due to man's ability to understand and appreciate collective problems and to find their solutions through mutual consultation. The purpose of a society built on the basis of such mutual communication is to live in peace, harmony and comfort. But a greater gift of Allah than speech is wisdom – the power to think and to make decisions, to discover, to create and to invent. Yet another gift, superior to both these, is that Allah has made man His viceregent on earth. This means that man enjoys an unquestioned dominance over every other living creature and has the power to conquer the elements – air, water, fire, earth and to harness them into his service. Allah has given to man the power of judgement to enable him to distinguish between right and wrong, and good and bad, so that he may choose for himself the straight path (*sirāt al-mustaqīm*) and prepare himself for the Hereafter.

Let us reflect upon this for a moment. Were man not the finest of Allah's creations and had he not this superiority over other creatures, what would have been the difference between him and the beasts of burden or the predators? Were man not endowed with the power of speech and with the gift of wisdom to control his instincts and impulses would he not have been at par with the non-rational species of life? But, if man is superior to all other living creatures, and he most certainly is, should he not manifest this superiority through his actions, his character, his sense of purpose, and his discernment of right and wrong? We know from our daily observation that when an animal is hungry or thirsty, it would eat or drink whatever it can and wherever it can find anything edible. It cannot distinguish between right and wrong, the permitted and unpermitted, since it is devoid of reason and the power to discriminate and choose from amongst various options.

There was a Muslim saint, Dāhī ibn-al-Wadūd. He had made it a point not to take or drink anything until he knew for certain where the victuals offered to him had come from, that is, whether the source from which the food or the drink had come was honest or otherwise. Once his mother gave him a cupful of milk to drink. He enquired about the source of the milk, how its price was paid and to whom. His mother told him everything, but he still felt dissatisfied. Ultimately he asked where the goat whose milk he was about to drink had grazed. It was ultimately found that the pasture where the goat had grazed was one upon which the Muslims had no right whatsoever. He refused the milk. On his mother's insistence that he should drink the milk, he said: "Verily, Allah

is Merciful and Compassionate. He bestows His Compassion upon us, and I cannot soil His Compassion with sin".

The Prophet Jesus (may peace be upon him) once saw a man and asked him what he did for his living. The man replied: "I have a brother who supplies me with food". Prophet Jesus proclaimed: "Your brother is a greater worshipper than you".

From these instances we can deduce some very important points. The most important amongst them relates to honest livelihood. By honest livelihood is meant the sustenance man earns through the sweat of his brow and without any malpractice, and without any shortchanging of his fellow-beings. Islam permits the accumulation of wealth but on the condition that the welfare of the society is kept in view and no dishonest or unpermitted means are employed to earn it, like exploitation of others or depriving others of their due share. It is governed by one overriding principle: All income which causes loss to another person is prohibited, both at the individual and collective levels. And all those sources of income which are based on mutual benefit and conform to the principles of social justice and equity are permitted.

The Qur'an has explicitly enunciated this principle as follows:

*"O ye who believe!
Squander not your wealth
among yourselves in vanity,
except it be a trade by mutual consent, and kill not one another.
Lo! Allah is ever Merciful unto you.
Whoso doth that through aggression and injustice,
We shall cast him into Fire,
and that is ever easy for Allah."*

[Qur'an, IV:29-30]

The means for the accumulation of wealth which have been forbidden by the Qur'an are: bribery, usurpation of another's goods, stealing, defalcation of money and breach of trust, depriving orphans of their rights, using false measures, and weights, vice and prostitution, making and selling of liquors and other intoxicants, gambling, making and selling of idols, working in idol-houses, fortune-telling and usury.

Income earned through these and similar sources is totally prohibited by Islam. Income that is permitted is obtained only through hard work, keeping the standards of honesty and integrity before oneself and never losing sight of the fact that it must not cause loss or hurt to anybody, or impinge on the rights of others. Man must always keep in view the fact that it is Allah who is the Provider and He alone gives sustenance and wealth. He should pray to Allah to show him the right way to earn his living.

Contentment and personal integrity are the two basic elements of honest livelihood. Contentment (*qanā'at*) requires that man should keep his desires and the necessities of life within permissible bounds and should not succumb

to the desires and appetites of the lower self. He should be thankful for whatever Allah has provided him. Once man follows the twin concepts of honesty and integrity and is conscious of Allah's Omniscience, he is bound to adopt rightful means for earning his livelihood and *qanā'at* (contentment) becomes his ethos.

The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) has conveyed to mankind the Message of Allah, wherein it has been said:

*"O ye messengers! Eat of the good things,
and do right..."*

[Qur'an, XXIII:51]

Righteous deeds keep man on the straight path. He is thus able to distinguish between what is permitted and what is prohibited. It must also be realised that once a person becomes oblivious to what is permitted and what is not and begins to live dishonestly he is inevitably deprived of righteous deeds.

I gave the example of Dahb ibn-al-Wudūd who refused the milk of a goat which had grazed on a pasture upon which Muslims had no right. This is the height of honesty and is worthy of emulation by us. This is surely the pathway of salvation.

Hadrat Abd Allah bin-Mas'ūd has the Tradition of the Prophet to the effect that if a believer offers *sadaqah* (charity) in the way of Allah which has been given from wrongfully earned income, Allah will not accept it. The money he spends on himself and his household will remain unblessed. If he were to die leaving wrongly earned wealth, Gehenna will be his abode for ever. Allah does not erase a wrong through another wrong but by the replacement of evil by good.

We should keep this judgement of the Prophet before us, and if we are treading the wrong path, we must retrace our step. We must appreciate that it is the law of Nature that man should do good, love his fellow human beings, not wrong them, earn his bread through hard work and not covet what he does not have. He should be a man of integrity and be trustworthy all the time; Allah showers His blessings on people who are honest and reliable.

We see people in everyday life who have lived a life of dishonesty. These people can never have real happiness. Their conscience pricks them all the time. They forfeit their respect in this world, and are marked for punishment in the next. Rightful income is a gift from Allah and His reward. May Allah grant the Muslims of the world the capacity to follow the path of righteousness and shower His mercy upon us and enable us to earn an honest living. Amen!

HONESTY

It is a basic human wish to belong to a society which is peaceful, stable and secure; the predominant characteristics of whose psyche are love and affection, mutual sympathy and fellow-feeling. Every man desires that all men should live in peace and repose and nobody should give offence to anybody else. The ideal society which a human mind can visualise is one where every man has true affection for others, in which all members live in perfect harmony, are a source of strength to one another and all behave like blood brothers.

The question is what are the essential prerequisites for achieving this true and noble wish and which is the factor, the absence of which does not let such a fraternal and cordial atmosphere to be created, about the desirability of which there can be no two opinions. Many important factors can be pointed out in this regard. But if all these factors are closely examined they will all be found to share one basic characteristic which is honesty. It will be of advantage to us to accept that this noble atmosphere can be produced in a human community only when honesty is its fundamental motivating principle and when every individual scrupulously conforms to the dictates of personal honesty and integrity.

Honesty is at the heart of all mutual dealings in any civilised society — which means that every individual should try as hard to give to others what he owes them as he does to obtain from others what is his due. In other words, his rights should not have precedence, in his scheme of things, over his obligations. He should attach equal importance to them both. This is what we call honesty. In the Arabic language the word *Amānah* (trust) is also used to convey the same meaning. A man who fulfils all his obligations and pays every last penny of what he owes to others in total honesty and with the consciousness that it was in the nature of a trust with him, is in truth, an honest man.

A man has relationships of two kinds. One is his relationship with his Creator and his Lord and Master and the other is his relationship with his fellow-men. Of course at the third level are all living creatures which cannot and should not be ignored. Because Islam is a complete and perfect code of life, viable till eternity and also unchangeable. It contains all those things and matters which are fit subjects for human consideration and contemplation and also those which can be conceived or imagined. It deals with all of them. But as for the attribute of honesty it pertains mainly to the relationship with the Lord and Creator of heavens and earth and with fellow-beings. To be honest in one's relationship with Allah, the Most Exalted, means that one should whole-heartedly act in accordance with the injunctions of His *Shari'ah* and make earnest efforts to

enforce it in society. In the *sūra Ahzāb*, Allah the Most Exalted, has mentioned the *Shari'ah* specially as His trust with the believers. The Holy Qur'an says:

*"Lo! We offered the trust unto the heavens
and the earth and the hills, but they shrank from
bearing it and were afraid of it. And man assumed it..."*

[Qur'an, XXXIII:72]

It means that it is the compulsion of our honesty to try our best to act in full accord with it.

The sacred life of the Holy Prophet is an illustrious example for all men of good faith and a beacon light for the righteous. All those persons who want to lead their lives in moral rectitude have one ideal life to emulate, and that is the sacred life of the Holy Prophet. Whatever else is available can at best be imperfect and unreliable. In the glorious life of Allah's final Messenger every moral quality is at its loftiest peak of perfection, available in full detail and totally dependable. The moral attribute of honesty was conspicuous in his life from his early childhood. So when he was appointed to his Apostolic assignation he pointed again and again to his quality of honesty and personal integrity to satisfy the people he addressed. This term has often been used to commend many another prophets of Allah in the Qur'an. Every one of them according to it told his people that he was an honest messenger from Allah to them:

"Lo! I am a faithful messenger unto you..."

[Qur'an, XXVI:107]

This moral quality was so pronounced in the person of the Holy Prophet that before his assignation as divine Messenger the people of Mecca used to call him *Amin* (the honest one, the trustworthy).

Today the whole world accepts and every honest man bears testimony that Muhammad, the final Messenger of Allah, is the greatest, the most complete, the most perfect man in the history of mankind. He was a man who created 'the revolution of honesty' in the thinking and the vision of mankind. The Holy Prophet of Allah had a personality which has left its indelible imprint on every human environment, on every society and has changed the whole pattern of human thought and action.

If we look deep and carefully into the matter we will find that the basic thing in this revolution is honesty and trust, which was the distinguishing feature of the personality of the most perfect man in human history. History bears testimony and circumstances and events provide incontrovertible evidence that not a moment in the life of the Holy Prophet was devoid of honesty and trust.

Once it so happened that the Holy Prophet took loan of some dates. A few days later the person concerned came and demanded the return of the loan. The Holy Prophet asked a Helper-Companion to pay back the debt. The Companion obeyed the order, but some of the dates he gave to the creditor were not as good as those the latter had loaned to the Holy Prophet. The creditor

refused to accept them. The Companion asked him, "Do you refuse to accept the dates the Prophet of Allah is giving to you?". The creditor said, "Quite. If the Prophet of Allah does not do justice, who else will?" Tears came into the eyes of the Holy Prophet when he heard the reply of the creditor. He said, "This man has spoken the truth".

One can judge from this one ordinary incident which is but a simple episode in common day life, how clean and perfectly straight the Holy Prophet was in his dealings with others and how extremely careful he was in regard to honesty and trust.

Honesty in regard to one's Lord and Master consists in acting according to His *Shari'ah* and trying to enforce it in our society. Similarly, honesty with regard to fellow human beings means that we should fulfil, to the last detail, the obligations we owe to them. It is said in the Holy Qur'an.

"Lo! Allah commandeth you that ye restore deposits to their owners..."

[Qur'an, IV:58]

Our greatest duty is to look after and serve our parents. It is incumbent upon every man that he should not show even the least lack of care in doing his duty to them. This is what honesty demands. Similarly, close relations have their respective rights. Fellow Muslims also have some rights, so have common people – on every Muslim. A good honest Muslim will do his very best to discharge all these rights and fulfil all his obligations with complete honesty and in full trust. If somebody has kept something in trust it must be returned exactly as it was given. The rights of the subordinates have to be fully respected and fulfilled. One should discharge one's official duties completely, according to the job specification. In trade and commerce the procedures laid down by Islam with regard to sale and purchase must be strictly adhered to. A man who is chosen by the nation as its leader should endeavour to follow in the footsteps of Hadrat Abu Bakr and Hadrat Umar (may Allah be happy with them both). All these things are included in the requisites of honesty.

If one ponders, one will find that all this disorder and commotion that one sees in the human society today is due to the fact that those persons whose character and actions directly affect the common man's psyche are not entirely honest and do not meticulously adhere to the requirements of integrity and honesty. It is the duty of every one of us to cultivate this moral quality and to make it the basis of all our dealings and affairs. If this quality becomes universal, society will become the haven of peace and repose and this earthly life given to us by Allah, will become an earthly paradise.

As against this, if dealings and affairs are not founded on the bedrock of honesty and trust the social order can never become a healthy, vibrant and dynamic microcosm. Members of such a society can never breathe freely in contentment and repose. It is honesty which creates reliability amongst the members of a society. And reliability is the sheet anchor of happy workable

relationships. The Holy Prophet was so particular and careful in the matter that when the enemies surrounded his house and were getting ready to take his life, he was busy making arrangements to safely return the trusts that the people of Mecca had kept with him. He handed over these trusts to Hadrat Ali and emphatically told him to return them safely to their respective owners and only after he had returned all of them to their owners should he come to Madina. This is a unique and unprecedented example of honesty and trust.

The incident occurred after his assignation to prophethood. But even before this elevation he was an embodiment of honesty and its glorious symbol. So, when after being given the heavy responsibility of the divine mission, he was told to call people to the true faith, the first question he put to his people was: "What is your opinion with regard to my honesty and trustworthiness". There was complete unanimity amongst the audience and all of them said in one voice: "You have always been truthful and honest. We have complete faith in your integrity and trustworthiness".

This was the character of our Holy Prophet, the final Apostle of Allah who was sent to this world as a Mercy and Commiseration. It is imperative for us Muslims to emulate, to the best of our ability, his adorable moral qualities. Truthfulness and honesty are basic attributes of human morality. We the Muslims of the world should do all that we can to promote the moral attribute of honesty in our midst in order to achieve respect and honour in the eyes of the world and ensure that through us the superiority of the Islamic *Shari'ah* over other systems is duly established. We should so reshape our individual selves and our collective life on the basis of Islamic honesty that the world should have no option but to accept Islam as the only system of life which can bring about world peace and human well-being.

THE ETHICS OF BUSINESS

The real basis for integrity is that man should believe in the Omnipresence of Allah and in His Omniscience and have the full realization that He keeps a watch over all his actions and movements. This faith and knowledge should quicken his moral consciousness and he should perform all the tasks assigned to him and fulfil his responsibilities to the best of his ability — being sure all the time that he is being watched by Allah. A person who is motivated by his belief in Allah will never lack in the sense of responsibility, will never be negligent in his work or be a shirker. This, because he is God-fearing and is sure that Allah hears and sees and knows everything and that every remissness and breach of trust on his part is well within His knowledge. This belief cultivates in man the quality of self-vigilance. It is this concept of integrity that Allah desires man to adhere to. Human efficiency is invested with such excellence by this belief as renders both the individual and the people invincible in their respective spheres. This was the mark of distinction of a Muslim at the beginning of Muslim history and this was the character of the peoples of Islam. They bowed to Allah and every other power bowed to them, and they became the world's greatest power. Honesty and trustworthiness raised them to the highest position in the comity of nations.

All I want to stress, to impress on your heart and soul, is that honesty is directly related to the belief in the existence, the Omnipresence and the Omniscience of Allah. It simply means that faith and honesty go hand in hand. The Holy Prophet has observed:

"He who is dishonest is without faith".

Be it business or commerce or industry, the all-embracing concept of honesty and trustworthiness should be founded on the belief in Allah and the viewpoint of human welfare. Whenever anybody embarks on any industrial enterprise or starts any business he should be fully determined that he would manufacture, or deal in such things as form the real necessities of human life. Those things should be neither defective nor harmful to any degree.

When a person undertakes any industry or business with the belief in the Omniscience and the Omnipresence of Allah, and with the motive of social service, it rules out all dishonesty in his enterprise and in his dealings. In my opinion, the fundamental object of all business and the *raison d'être* of every industry should be none other than human welfare, and every Muslim should be motivated by this lofty ideal.

It is a fundamental teaching of Islam, our religion, that man should love man. Islam has exalted man, and has given him unique importance. It has bestowed upon the service of his fellow-beings the status of the worship of Allah. The guiding principles of Islam are intended to lay the foundation of society on human welfare and to invest it with the glory of equality. Doubtless, needs of the individual have to be reckoned with and, within proper limits, they must be fulfilled. But Islam requires everybody to meticulously observe frugality. There is a clear-cut injunction to spend for the well-being of others all that is surplus to one's own requirements. A businessman and an industrialist also have the right to fulfil first their own needs, but they should not be oblivious of their duty to make their vocational ventures a source of the commonweal.

No industry and no house of business can come into being or exist without a rapport between the employer and the employees. Precisely this is the starting point of mutual cooperation, common good, and collective welfare. In this behalf the Islamic injunctions are crystal-clear. They determine unambiguously the rights and responsibilities of both the employer and the employee. Commerce and industry are fountain-heads of welfare in their basic concept, and so should they be in their conscious motivation, outlook and actual operation. Surely, wages should be paid to the labour before their sweat dries up, but the labourer should also sweat. Only then can the payment of wages be deserved.

If labour laws and regulations do not treat the wages and the sweating (honest work) as two sides of the same coin, they need to be amended. Our industrial units and business centres should be motivated by the spirit of collective welfare so that altogether they make for the good of the whole community. This is possible only when we accept and live up to those standards of integrity and trust which Islam has laid down. The ethics of business starts first of all, with laying down, with complete integrity, the valid standards of commerce and industry. Once that is done, the specified standards should be scrupulously maintained without let or hindrance and without any change in them on profit motive.

The Holy Qur'an has unequivocally dealt with economic integrity and justice. It has categorically denounced dishonesty in business and has called it a curse. Thus does Prophet Shoaib (a.s.) admonish his people:

*"...O my people!
Serve Allah. Ye have no other God save Him.
Lo! a clear proof hath come unto you
from your Lord; so give full measure and
full weight and wrong not mankind
in their goods, and work not confusion in the earth
after the fair ordering thereof..."*

[Qur'an, VII:85]

On the one hand, full measuring and full weighing is stressed and, on the other, Islam distinguishes between the permissible (*halal*) and the impermissible

(*harām*) ways of earning livelihood and attaches basic importance to this distinction. There is a sustained insistence on earning wealth by legitimate means only. Here is an exhortation in *sūra an-Nisa*:

*“O ye who believe!
Squander not your wealth among yourselves in vanity,
except it be a trade by mutual consent...”*

[Qur’an, IV:29]

An aspect of the ethics of business is to fix the prices of the manufactured goods at legitimate levels, without unnecessarily burdening consumers. In this regard the safeguarding and maintenance of integrity depend upon a balanced relationship between the employer and the employee. Nevertheless it is also the duty of the administration to keep a close watch on the situation and to help rectify it whenever and wherever necessary. Undue profit is one of the gravest problems of contemporary economics and national economies. As we know, and as the world at large acknowledges the fact now, Islam’s injunctions in the matter are most natural and practicable. The economic problems of the Muslim world also will find their solution in Islam alone, which is not confined merely to prayers and worship. It guides us outside of the mosque also, in all matters of our personal and social life. Apparently, business is a “this worldly” affair but the Holy Prophet has held out the promise that a businessman of absolute integrity will be in the company of prophets and martyrs on the Day of Judgement.

Imām Ghazālī has quoted Hadrat Umar Faruq thus:

“I don’t see a better place to die than one where I can do the buying for my children without fear of being fleeced”.

Hadrat Ibrahim Adham has elucidated this point in a dialogue. He was asked whether he preferred the person who was honest in dealings or the person who was steeped in worship. He replied, “In my opinion an honest businessman is superior to a person devoted to worship”. On being asked for the reason, he added, “An honest businessman is superior because he confronts the devil all the time. The devil tries to beguile him in weighing and measuring and other transactions but the honest businessman does not yield to him”

To sum up:

Commerce and industry should be for human welfare. Integrity and trustworthiness should be the guiding principles in all commerce and industry. May Allah enable us to be honest in all our undertakings and to conform to the moral precepts of our true faith. Amen!

JUSTICE AND KINDNESS

Allah has said:

“Lo! Allah enjoineth justice & kindness.”

[Qur’ān, XVI:90]

This verse is recited during discourse before the congregational Friday prayers but there are very few of us who really understand and appreciate the purport of this command of Allah, and ponder its implications. Justice is a fundamental social principle without which no society can survive, let alone flourish. Nor can a community have peace and well-being without the enforcement of the canons of justice. A prosperous and happy life, on collective level, is possible only through justice.

Now the dictionary meaning of the word, *‘adl*, is to divide a thing into halves in such a way that there should be no disproportion at all between them and the parties receive equal share. But in practice *‘adl* means that we should act according to what we say and act in a way that fulfils the demands of truth and equity. Thus whether it is what we say or what we do, everything must be done in accordance with the norms of justice. One of the principal requisites of the Islamic culture is that every Muslim citizen should feel sure that he will receive his due share and he will get what is rightfully his. In Islam justice and equity are given primary importance, and without the observance of the norms of justice no community could be designated as Islamic. The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) practised justice to a degree that mankind had never witnessed before. The exemplary life of the Holy Prophet himself and the canons of justice that he enforced made his Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) so meticulous in the observance of justice that it was impossible for them to digress from it.

In some Muslim countries the precept of *Zakāt* (obligatory alms) is being put into practice and due care is being exercised in its recovery. Islamic concept of justice is seen at its best in this context. In the early days of the Islamic polity the persons appointed for realising the obligatory alms were so fair and strict that people were amazed at the uniform standards of justice maintained by them. We could quote two examples here to show that even the recipients of *(Zakāt)* feel that their self-respect was fully ensured and they were made to feel that what was given to them was rightfully and legally theirs. We have on the authority of Nisā’ī a Tradition according to which a person wanted to present a beautiful and perfectly proportioned she-camel to a recipient of *Zakāt*.

The latter refused to accept it, saying that the value of the she-camel far exceeded his claim. Similarly, a man presented a recipient of allowance (*mushassil*) a goat with a kid, but the latter declined it, saying that he was entitled to only one goat, and that he was forbidden to accept anything beyond his claim. The early Muslims were always eager to give far more than what they were required to give, but the recipients of *Zakāt* were firm in their observance of equity, and would not accept anything in excess of their fixed proportion.

The second Righteous Caliph, Umar bin-Khattāb (may Allah be pleased with him) bestrides human history like a colossus. Among the reforms introduced by him was the separation of judiciary from the executive branch of the government and the infusion in the judiciary of a vigour that made justice the life-force of Islam. During the days of the Righteous Caliphate the dispensation of justice was free and prompt, in fact so effectively prompt that the Islamic polity became free of all exploitation and injustice in less than a few years. The norms of justice in the early period of Islam should serve as a model for every society in the contemporary world. It is an undeniable fact that justice is a natural requirement of man, and it is impossible for any society to thrive in peace without its practice and observance. Any society that is devoid of justice becomes self-destructive.

In the context of justice there is a complimentary concept of kindness (*ahsān*). Now the Islamic inclination of using these two words in conjunction should be understood. Justice demands the honest fulfilment of a contract. Thus, if someone is under debt to another person, he is required to ensure repayment in full. On the other hand, the lender may exercise kindness and free the man who is in debt from the obligation of repayment if he feels that the borrower is in straitened circumstances. Justice demands that a murderer should pay with his life. If the relatives and heirs of the murdered person agree out of free will not to press with their charge and do not accept any blood-money (*dyat*), they have exercised *ahsān* (kindness). The basic difference between *‘adl* and *ahsān* is that *‘adl* does not always succeed in doing away with bitter feelings and the sentiment of revenge persists. But in *ahsān*, although it might appear that the forgiver has sustained a loss, the exercise of beneficence invariably generates love and loyalty amongst the involved parties. Even those who have been enemies for generations are likely to become friendly, and this ultimately is beneficial for the society.

And therefore Allah has said:

*“The good deed and the evil deed
are not alike. Repel the evil
deed with one which is better,
then lo! he, between whom and thee there was enmity,
(will become) as though he was a bosom friend.”*

[Qur’ān, XLI:34]

A Muslim is therefore exhorted by the Qur’ān to forgive his brother-in-belief

if he has harmed him and to repay him with kindness.

Justice is basic to the Mosaic *shari'ah* (canon) while kindness is fundamental to the Christian *shari'ah* (canon). Islam has chosen the middle course and has achieved a viable blend of justice and kindness. That is to say, it satisfies the requirements of justice, and it keeps the door of kindness and compassion open. In fact, at a number of places, the Qur'an has exhorted the Muslims to exercise kindness in such beautiful and attractive words that good Muslims thought it a surer means of their salvation in the Hereafter to be kind and exercise benevolence instead of asking for justice. The Qur'an has everywhere emphasised the observance of justice in all transactions. In this context it is justice that should invariably prevail. Every society knows that orphans have no succour. The Qur'an has especially commanded that the rights of orphans must be safeguarded. Thus it has been said:

*"Hast thou observed him who beliest religion?
That is he who repelleth the orphan,
And urgeth not the feeding of the needy.
Ah, woe unto worshippers
Who are heedless of their prayer;
Who would be seen (at worship)
Yet refuse small kindnesses!"*

[Qur'an, CVIII:1-7]

A word about daily transactions. Justice demands that one should be fully honest in the matter of weights and measures and shortchanging according to Islam is a cardinal sin. Allah says:

"...Give full measure and full weight, in justice..."

[Qur'an, VI:152]

In the matters that necessitate legal action in a court of law, the Qur'an has enjoined:

"...Let a scribe record it in writing between you in (terms of) equity..."

[Qur'an, II-282]

In order to ensure justice, two points have been emphasised in the above verse. One is that even if a member of the opposing parties is a relative of the dispenser of justice, the requirements of justice have to be met in full. The same is true if the party involved comprises enemies. In neither case should the norms of justice be violated. In the same *sūra* it has been said:

*"...And for him who is forgiven somewhat
by his (injured) brother, prosecution
according to usage and payment unto
him in kindness..."*

[Qur'an, II:178]

At another place, Allah has said:

"...Lo! Allah loveth the beneficent."

[Qur'an, II:195]

We desire from the depth of our heart that the world of Islam should become a shining symbol of justice and it is our wish and a natural one that we should enrich our lives with the higher values of Islam, since we know very well that this is the only pathway to our well-being and peace. May Allah bless us with the light of the Qur'an and the wish to tread the path set for us by the Holy Prophet, our Supreme Guide (peace be upon him). Amen!

“And those who break the covenant of Allah after ratifying it, and sever that which Allah hath commanded should be joined, and make mischief in the earth; theirs is the curse and theirs the ill abode”.

(Qur’ān, XIII:35)

IMMODEST EXPECTATIONS

(The most harmful effect of such expectations is that they wean man away from his responsibilities and obligations)

A saying of Satan has been reproduced in the Qur'an. This statement was made when, on account of his arrogance and vanity and his disobedience to Allah's Command, he was expelled from Allah's presence. Satan said he would retaliate by harming man:

*"Whom Allah cursed, and he said: Surely I will take of Thy bondmen an appointed portion.
And surely I will lead them astray, and surely
I will arouse desires in them..."*

[Qur'an, IV:118-119]

Each one of us, howsoever purposeless his existence may seem at surface, has an aim and an objective, and whatever we do is governed by some purpose. It is impossible that any act or deed of a man should be totally aimless and bereft of meaning. Each one of our organs is devoted to certain functions that are specific – the eyes to see; the nose to smell; the ears to hear; the tongue to speak; the legs to walk; the lungs to breathe, and so on. And do we not use them continuously?

The question is: how and for what purpose do we use these sense-organs. The eyes see good and bad things, and the ears hear what is good and what is not. The tongue can speak nobly or utter evil words. We can walk on our legs in the right as well as the wrong directions; we can make them take us away from the straight path. We can breathe fresh air and improve our health, or can inhale the smoke of marijuana or of some other dangerous stuff.

Man's environment is comprised of both good and evil. In fact, it might be said that his environment contains good things as well as bad things. It is entirely up to man to accept good things or things that are not so good or that are downright evil. The results will depend on his choice and exercise of option. Man, by acting well, can raise himself to ethereal heights or throw himself down into the pit of shame and disgrace.

Life comprises of two kinds of behaviour – that based upon reflexes and that based upon rational thinking. We defend ourselves against attack through reflex action, but acquire knowledge through the use of our rational faculties. The conclusion we thus arrive at is that our hopes and expectations give birth to purposes and objectives and the latter may be based on truth and righteousness or they may be wrong and deplorable. Correct and righteous desires generate

noble objectives and improper and wrong wishes and desires lead to misleading and unworthy purposes.

To revert to Satan's vow. He had vowed that he would keep man involved in wrong expectations, and obviously these expectations would be immoderate, unworthy and evil. All that Satan can do is to involve man in wrong expectations and through them make him deviate from the right path.

Allah has forewarned man against being deceived and misled by Satan in the following words:

"He promiseth them and stirreth up desires in them, and Satan promiseth them only to beguile."

[Qur'ān, IV:120]

And yet man falls into the net of fancies, and craves for things that are neither legally nor rightfully his and he desires things that are usually either absolutely beyond him or to which he has no moral title. Such aims fling man into wilderness and their grip upon him becomes so strong that he becomes mentally and morally sick. He loses his peace of mind and becomes a victim of untold anxieties.

Before we go any further, we should accept the fact that Allah in His wisdom has so arranged that a man of learning and one who is ignorant cannot be co-equal. There can be only one common denominator between the two and it is that they are both men and are equal in being human, although in social life the lettered and the unlettered cannot be at the same station. We have to distinguish between the two, otherwise the social as well as the economic system will collapse.

If a well-read and scholarly person whose outlook is realistic is holding the chair of the chief executive of a state, surely he is there because his services and contribution to knowledge have elevated him to that lofty place. His learning entitled him to it. But if a less educated man aspires to that position without exerting himself and striving his utmost to improve his knowledge, his wish is unjustified and uncalled for. If he continues to nurture this wish, despite his lack of knowledge, it would lead him into wrong directions and he will never be able to reach his goal. He would only create endless woes for himself. And if per chance he attains the goal, he would only mess up things through his ignorance and lack of capability.

Such instances could be multiplied, and, if we take stock of our lives, much of the discontent, the insecurity and the dissatisfaction we see around us has its roots in baseless and uncalled for expectations.

Contentment is one of the noblest attributes of man. He should live simply and be contented with what he has, and not pine for what he does not have. When man becomes dissatisfied, false hopes gestate, and false hopes lead to a vicious circle.

Allah has said:

"It will not be in accordance with your desires, nor the desires of the People of the Scripture. He who doth wrong will have the recompense thereof, and will not find against Allah any protecting friend or helper."

[Qur'ān, IV:123]

We thus arrive at the conclusion that unfounded and false hopes and exaggerated and immoderate wishes do great harm to man. They lure him away from his responsibilities and he becomes oblivious of his duties and neglects righteous action which is in fact the only means of his salvation. Uncalled for expectations combined with inaction can lead only to frustration and despair, in short, a wasted life.

DERELICTION OF DUTY

(It is foolish to assume that we can have rights without having earned them)

A peasant, when he sows, his whole being is filled with the desire to see each one of the seeds sprout, become a tender plant and then a rich harvest for him to reap and get the reward of his hard work. The peasant knows that it is the law of Nature that the seed that is sown, sprouts, grows into a plant and ultimately becomes the tree that lay hidden in it. The natural law takes its course and in this case, because the environment is favourable, the land is fertile, water is available in the required quantity, the weather is good, so all factors work together to produce the result that is desired. One might stretch this analogy to the social framework and say that a wholesome environment shall produce wholesome results and a poor and mismanaged social milieu shall compulsively generate a poor environment. One cannot sow poorly and expect to have a rich harvest. Living in a poorly organised society is like fighting against Nature: Nature will take its toll, and will have its last laugh.

The ear of the corn will come out of the corn-seed, because that is the natural process. But there are other concomitants that are necessary for the ear of the corn to sprout and grow normally. We can think about a person in the same way. His acts from his birth down to his last breath are subservient to Nature — such as his birth itself, his growing up and reaching maturity, then his approach towards full age, and, finally, death or passage into the other world. This is a process that is common to all men and continues without mutation or change in rhythm. This rhythm and pattern demands that we should have a pattern of society that is free of excesses and functions within the confines of Nature.

There is no possibility of any excess in the natural process. If there were, the world would be an impossible place to live in. There are no extremes in Nature.

“The best affairs are those that conform to the golden mean and follow the middle course”. Nature chooses the middle way and is secure therein. While talking of duties and obligations, we shall have to remain within the bounds of Nature. The whole human life is a continuous fulfilment of obligations. In other words, it is imperative for man to do his duty to himself, to fellow-men and to Allah. It would not be wrong to say, in fact, to define life as the time-span given to man to discharge his responsibilities. Examine any aspect of life and you would find obligations writ large on it. This is an imperative of Nature that cannot be ignored. Man lives an allotted period of time and in this period numerous obligations have been ordained for him pertaining to affairs of the

world as well as religion. But Providence and Nature are in action even here, with their immutable and eternal laws. Nature has not made man a prisoner only of obligations. He has been given some rights also. Creating a balance between these rights and obligations is tantamount to setting up a just and viable social order. That is to say, when the obligations are honestly fulfilled and rights are judiciously exercised a social equilibrium shall have been established; and a good society shall have come into being. From the time of his birth down to the fag-end of his life man continues to meet all the demands of Nature. Just as the farmer tends the field he has sown, the parents look after their offspring, bring them up and would like them to live a fruitful life. Parents are the instruments of Nature and fulfil the great obligations of guiding their children on the right path of life. This is the obligation that has been imposed upon them by Nature and they cannot afford to be careless about it. Carelessness or dereliction of duty in this regard would be like defying Nature. There are two ways in which the parents are rewarded for their efforts: (i) the glory of the children brings honour and satisfaction to them, and (ii) the children look after their parents in the latter's old age. This action on the part of the children is their duty and the right of the parents.

It is essential to observe balance between the two. If there is any discrepancy between the two it will inevitably result in dissension and disharmony because such a development would be nothing less than a revolt against Nature. And we know that man cannot gain anything by defying Nature. Let us consider this commandment of the Qur'an in the light of this fact:

"We have enjoined on man kindness to parents;.."

[Qur'an, XXIX:8]

We all know this all too well and it is a matter of our faith and belief that there is another life after this earthly life. In fact, the real life is that which follows upon this life. The earthly life is in fact a constant endeavour, a ceaseless striving. The dimensions and directions of this striving are that, as long as the world lasts, human life should not be without purpose. It should meet all the requirements of Nature so that the torch of onward movement is kept alight and when the light of a man's life is extinguished, he should have with him his noble deeds which would serve as the means of his redemption and eternal well-being. This would not be possible without ceaseless striving for good, which has been made obligatory upon him. Dereliction of this obligation has been regarded as a major failing.

The purport of what the Holy Qur'an enjoins in this regard is:

"Warfare is ordained for you, though it is hateful unto you; but it may happen that ye hate a thing which is good for you, and it may happen that ye love a thing which is bad for you. Allah knoweth, ye know not."

[Qur'an, II:216]

In my personal view "righteous striving" means that man should obey the commands of Allah. He should walk the path that has been shown by Allah the Almighty, and righteous striving should be his *modus operandi*. This is an obligation and once it has been carried out all the joys of this world and the world to come are ensured for him. This is why Providence asks the question:

"Which is it, of the favours of your Lord, that ye deny?" [Qur'ān, LV:13]

Providence has, on the one hand, made explicit the fact:

"And that man hath only that for which he maketh effort," [Qur'ān, LIII:39]

And on the other, it has been said: "And he who transgresses the Commands of Allah, does harm only to himself by his evil-doing".

From what has been said above it becomes evident that it cannot be of advantage to man to neglect his responsibilities and it should be clear to him that rights are given only after all obligations have been fulfilled. It is not at all possible to have rights without the concomitant obligations. Nor is it possible to be deprived of rights after discharging responsibilities honestly and conscientiously. If we wish to be triumphant in this world and the next, we should be aware of our responsibilities.

Our obligations are the rights of others. He who fails in carrying out his obligations deprives others of their rights. A society which has failed to achieve a fair balance between rights and obligations cannot be a prosperous and flourishing one. A balance between the two is essential for a viable society.

WORK-SHIRKING IS BREACH OF TRUST

In the Islamic *Shari'ah* breach of trust is a crime, a big and serious one. It includes falsehood, dishonesty, deceit, fraud, treachery and all other evils of the kind. First, let us determine what breach of trust means. It is an act of dishonesty and a breach of trust not to discharge with integrity an obligation and responsibility that you owe to another person. Generally, people restrict the concept of breach of trust to misappropriation of a deposit, and refusal to return it on demand. Surely, these are instances of flagrant breach of trust. But the true connotation of breach of trust is far wider. To illustrate; if somebody divulges to others a secret confided in him, out of trust, by another person, or a secret that has reached him of itself, he commits a breach of trust. Similarly, it is also a serious breach of trust not to do with integrity any duty entrusted to a person. Likewise, to take any step against the Muslims or their collective interests shows sheer lack of integrity. To violate the canons of friendship is also a breach of trust. If the wife is not faithful to her husband she is guilty of breach of trust. When the intent is contrary to the utterance, the thought is different from the deed or vice versa, trust has been breached.

In the Islamic *Shari'ah* all acts which amount to breach of trust are equally prohibited. Accordingly, in the Holy Qur'an, Allah enjoins:

*"O ye who believe!
Betray not Allah and His messenger,
nor knowingly betray your trusts."*

[Qur'an, VIII:27]

To shirk work is one of the worst kinds of breach of trust. Work-shirking covers breach of trust in the form of falsehood and theft, deceit and fraud, and it amounts to betraying social and national interests. Over and above these evils is the painful fact that the income accruing to a work-shirker is *harām* (unlawful and forbidden) and Allah never accepts the prayer and worship of one who has not earned his living honestly through hard work. Abdullah Ibn Mas'ūd has said that according to the Holy Prophet anybody who takes recourse to *harām* (impermissible) and then spends it in the name of Allah; his charity will not be accepted by Him; if he spends it on himself and his family it shall be a blighted expenditure, and if he leaves it as inheritance it will have his way to Hell.

In the *sura* entitled "The Story" while alluding to the episode of Prophet Moses (a.s.) taking the goatherd of Prophet Shoaib to the watering-hole and

the latter's daughter suggesting to her father that the best servant to keep is the one who is strong and honest, the Holy Qur'an uses the word "trustworthy", which signifies honesty and integrity *par excellence*. It shows that one of the most important traits of a servant is honesty, that is, he should not shirk work. Breach of trust on the part of a servant consists in the lack of honesty and diligence in him. If he is an idler and manifests indolence or he shirks work in any sense, he is guilty of a serious breach of trust, in the eyes of Allah and His Prophet.

Breach of trust figures among the evils against which the Holy Prophet used to invoke the refuge of Allah. There is a Saying of his, as narrated by Abū Dā'ūd: "O Allah! save me from breach of trust, which is an evil inner companion". The Holy Prophet also remarked that businessmen of integrity would be in the company of the truthful and the martyrs on the Day of Judgement. Here the condition of honesty has been specifically mentioned to indicate that if he is not honest he will be guilty of breach of trust and thus deserve Hell. Thus did the Holy Prophet equate the earning of one's livelihood through honest labour as the finest of *halāl* (permissible) things, provided, of course, it is not sullied with work-shirking. The act of shirking work will render even labour as *harām*, because it will be tantamount to a breach of trust.

Work-shirking also includes doing quantitatively less and qualitatively sub-standard work within the prescribed working-hours as mutually agreed upon. In all these circumstances, there is no doubt at all that a visible gap between the acknowledged potential and the actual productivity gives rise to different forms of breach of trust and to cause a wide variety of *harām*.

The fact that breach of trust is totally and unconditionally forbidden is borne out by the Holy Prophet's Tradition narrated by Hadrat Abdullah Ibn Mas'ūd to the effect that martyrdom in the way of Allah atones for all sins except that of breach of trust. On the Day of Judgement a person shall be brought to Allah, even though a martyr in His way, and will be asked to produce and pay off the deposit. He will plead to Allah his inability to do so and he will be thrown into the bottomless pit of Hell.

It is but evident that prayers, ablution, weighing and measuring, and performing labour honestly and diligently are all acts calling for observance of trust. If a person who is engaged on an agreed wage to do a job does not measure up to the prescribed standards of performance and productivity, his case is like that of the person who usurps the whole deposit and commits a flagrant breach of trust. He who gets full payment for less work is undoubtedly guilty of a breach of trust and spoils his life by eating ill-earned food.

The Holy Qur'an says:

"O ye who believe! Squander not your wealth among yourselves in vanity..."

[Qur'an, IV:29]

This verse enunciates the principle that all the earning begotten through unlawful means is *harām* — ill-begotten, impermissible and totally forbidden by Islam. It

includes sub-standard performance against mutually agreed wages.

The deterioration of morality in Afro-Asian countries is owing to an imbalance between rights and responsibilities. There is a yawning gap between promise and performance and there is little or no inclination to distinguish truth from falsehood. This state of affairs is not conducive to the emergence of a truly Islamic society and, because of the existing disequilibrium, are caught in the whirligig of worries.

Unless and until we adopt the Islamic *Shari'ah* completely and honestly these mental, physical, spiritual, financial, economic and social ills will not disappear. A stop can be put to them and human dignity restored in our part of the world only when Islamic *Shari'ah* is adopted in full and the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* are accepted in actual practice as the basis of our social edifice.

Hadrat Amr bin Ās narrates: "I asked the Holy Prophet what *Īmān* is? He told me it signifies patience and steadfastness".

This means that man should adopt the way of Allah and bear all hardships on the way with complete trust in Him and should expend from his earnings what is surplus to his needs on the welfare of the poor, the needy and the destitute. This, indeed, is patience and steadfastness.

Let us pray to Allah to have mercy on us Muslims, to save us from the evils of work-shirking and breach of trust and to enable us to walk the path of righteousness. Amen!

HOARDING AND BLACKMARKETING

There are two kinds of goodness. One pertains to the good acts of an individual. The other is of a higher kind and affects a larger number of people. The same thing is true of evil. One kind of evil is that which is restricted to the person of the evil-doer; the other kind of evil has wider repercussions and is social in nature.

If a person acts in such a way that his acts hurt or adversely affect a sizeable number of people, he shall have forfeited the credit of whatever good he had done in his life. Many of us have heard or read the famous *hadith* of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) in which he said that a worshipper of Allah will be brought before Allah who will recount to him the countless blessings He bestowed upon him and will then ask him to render an account of how he offered his thanks for what was given to him. The worshipper will speak about the regularity with which he had offered his obligatory prayers and recount his other acts of worship. But he will then be confronted with his bad acts which caused harm to others, depriving them of their rights and causing hurt to them. In the process, his bad acts will go on cancelling his virtuous deeds till all the good done by him in life will stand accounted for; nothing will be left to his credit. For what he still owes to others, the sins of his debtors will be passed on to him and he who thought himself rich in righteous deeds will stand with nothing good to his credit. Besides being totally empty-handed in virtue he will be burdened with the sins of others as a retribution of his having usurped their rights in earthly life or having hurt them. This *hadith* makes us aware of the fact that spiritual ailments and moral shortcomings, reach their lower level when they begin to harm and hurt others.

Hoarding and blackmarketing are among evils which not only affect a few individuals but almost the whole society. Blackmarketing is an evil that does not remain confined to an individual or to a limited number of people. Its effects are all-pervasive. Blackmarketeers are responsible for weakening the foundations of the society and have a most adverse impact on the collective psyche of a people. Committing theft is a bad act, an evil deed and no society will condone it. But blackmarketing is an act that is a thousandfold more evil and dangerous. The act of a thief remains confined to one individual or one family whom he has robbed. The act of a blackmarketeer creates repercussions that affect the whole society. For the sake of personal gain he places the entire community in a serious predicament and dire distress. This criminal buys his personal well-being at the cost of deep suffering to countless fellow-beings. He extorts gain to which he is not entitled and just to acquire material affluence

he tramples on moral and social principles on which depends the survival of the society.

Islam is basically a religion of moral and social welfare. It does not permit or tolerate the commission of an act that would cause suffering to Allah's creatures and would thus cause adverse effects upon the entire society. Black-marketing and hoarding are the worst ploys of a capitalist system to which recourse is taken to ensure concentration of wealth in the hands of a small coterie of self-seekers. The capitalist system does not feel concerned at the difficulties and hardships faced by the masses. It gives licence to anti-social elements, in the name of individual freedom to amass wealth irrespective of what suffering the common man suffers in the process. The industrialist and the trader enjoy fullest freedom to short-change people through every means, no matter how foul or depraved, and then increase their own assets and wealth. Islam does not allow blind accumulation of wealth. It, no doubt, respects individual freedom but not at the cost of collective welfare. It will not give freedom to a person to ensure his personal welfare by robbing other people of their peace, comfort and well-being. It has never allowed individual freedom to transgress permissible limits and has maintained a perfect balance between the desires of the individual and requirements of the society, so that the foundations of a welfare society stay firm and solid.

Islam has devised ways for preventing the formation of cartels and monopolies and the consequent concentration of wealth in a few hands. *Zakāt* (the religious tax), *Ushr* (tithe), total abolition of usury, and the Islamic law of inheritance are among the measures that make this concentration of wealth in a few hands impossible. The *raison d'être* of these measures lies in the equitable distribution of wealth. They ensure that the benefits of Islamic economic system reach the entire community.

Hoarders and blackmarketeers, taking advantage of the large sums of money at their disposal, make bulk purchases of essential commodities hoard them, and then release them for sale when they feel that the time is opportune to extract from people the asking price, since people cannot do without them.

In Islam trade and commerce have the status of worship. And what greater respect could trading have than that the Holy Prophet himself was a trader in early life? Without trade and commerce no society can flourish. It is among the principal pillars upon which the human civilization rests. But what kind of trade: the trade that flourishes on exorbitant prices or the trade that serves the people and earns reasonable profits? The answer is obvious. The second category is the one that Islam approves. The trade which is based on blackmarketing, hoarding, and avarice is according to Islam, the worst social crime and its retribution is eternal Hell-fire.

Islam does not allow the sale of sub-standard or damaged or defective commodities. It does not permit the traders to charge exorbitant prices, and the stocking of commodities with a view to realising excessive profits. It also totally forbids the short measuring of goods and adulteration. Every action in trading that is improper and immoral is a negation of the principles of Islam,

and it does not befit a Muslim to commit an act that would militate against the welfare of the people. A Muslim trader should be a source of comfort and solace to the society and not a means of suffering and exploitation.

Let us reiterate this fact unequivocally. If we are sincere in the establishment of Islam, we shall have first of all, to Islamise trading, since it is trade with which people are directly concerned and are affected by it. Without making trade and commerce follow the principles of Islam, we cannot bring about a change in the existing extortionist system or to introduce a durable and lasting Islamic order.

It is my earnest request to my brothers-in-Islam to give due respect to human beings and regard every Muslim as a kinsman and a brother and to treat him as one. A brother should not cause hurt to his brother nor deprive a person of his right, because this is amongst the greatest sins and the perpetrator of such a sin cannot thrive either in this world or in the Hereafter. The black-marketeer and the hoarder are undoubtedly sinners and doubly guilty of weakening the fabric of our Muslim fraternity. What greater crime could there be than that the world in which we live in comfort and peace should be shaken and made weaker? Let us remember that this will endanger the very survival of the world of Islam and the political emancipation that we won after decades of hard struggle will become purposeless. Let us make a firm resolve to make the world of Islam – with its more than 40 societies – a model of social and economic welfare.

JEALOUSY

Jealousy is one of the most demeaning human feelings and has far-reaching repercussions, both for the individual and the society. If one considers the matter in depth one will be led to the inevitable conclusion that most of the crimes and evils a society is afflicted with, stem from the evil that is jealousy. Most of the corruption on earth and most of the villainy man commits is born of this feeling. It destroys the heart and the soul of man, lays waste his inner world, kills all that is good and noble in him, deprives him of his power to do good and to think and act aright. Consequently, failure and ignominy become his destiny.

When Allah endows a person with learning, fame, power or any other excellence and distinction, many lesser men who cannot aspire to equal him begin to wish him ill and earnestly desire that he be deprived of the bounties Allah has bestowed upon him. From the viewpoint of the Islamic ethics, this mean and degrading wish is what is known as jealousy and it represents a moral depravity devoutly to be condemned and despised. Allah and His Holy Prophet have, time and again, shown disgust at this accursed feeling.

During the time of the Holy Prophet, the Jews were extremely jealous of Muslims because the latter had been blessed by Allah with the Holy Qur'an and the true faith and also success and eminence in this life. Their jealousy raged in their hearts and souls like wild-fire and made them sworn enemies of the Holy Prophet and the Muslims. Allah has referred to this state of the Jews in the Holy Qur'an:

"Or are they jealous of mankind because of that which Allah of His bounty hath bestowed upon them..."

[Qur'an, IV:54]

And not only were the Jews accursedly jealous of the prosperity of Muslims and their honour and dignity, but they also desired from the bottom of their souls that all these blessings should be taken away from them. A reference to this is made in the Holy Qur'an:

"Many of the People of the Scripture long to make you disbelievers after your belief, through envy on their own account..."

[Qur'an, II:109]

Jealousy is a feeling of the most shameful and depraved kind. Its aim is that others should lose what they have gained after hard work. He who is consumed by jealousy would want more than anything in life that those who are materially or intellectually better off than him should lose whatever they have, and become impoverished intellectually and materially like him. Allah has said about the hypocrites:

“They long that ye should disbelieve even as they disbelieve, that ye may be upon a level (with them)...”

[Qur’ān, IV:89]

And then again:

“...who would spare no pains to ruin you; they love to hamper you. Hatred is revealed by (the utterance of) their mouths, but that which their breasts hide is greater.”

[Qur’ān, III:118]

The worst form or manifestation of jealousy is animus. Whenever a man harbours mean sentiments regarding another individual, he wishes him harm and desires his loss of dignity, virtue and honour; in short, all that he has achieved in life. He wishes him to suffer misfortune and grief. The desire that prevails is that whether he personally stands to gain or not from the other person’s misfortune, that other person should lose whatever he has. Allah has spoken of the jealousy of the hypocrites thus:

“If a lucky chance befall you, it is evil unto them, and if disaster strike you they rejoice thereat...”

[Qur’ān, III:120]

Another cause that generates jealousy is personal pride and arrogance. If a certain individual, from amongst equals, attains a higher status, then any amongst the former co-equals may feel personal insult in the former’s elevation. This is because his sense of self-importance has been injured and makes him undergo the pangs of jealousy.

Amongst the components of jealousy and its constant factors is the desire for personal eminence and the degradation of others, so that they become subservient to him. Those of the Quraish tribe who were pagans or infidels did not speak contemptuously about the Muslims because of their poverty and indigence but because the Muslims had left their fold and become the worshippers of one Allah and followed His Prophet. Prompted by jealousy, they tended to look down upon the Muslims. Sometimes the degree of animosity reaches such a pitch that the jealous person is prepared to commit murder. Those who love

ostentation, display of personal superiority and are over-ambitious are liable to fall a prey to jealousy, as they would hate to see anyone else surpass them, or even become their equal. Since Islam cut at the very root of their pride, the pagans of Mecca over-reached themselves in their hatred. But what we have said should not imply that jealousy invariably needs a cause or a stimulus. The Jews were, of course, jealous of the Muslims because Islam put an end to their claim to superiority in religious and secular knowledge. Nevertheless we will find many who are jealous for no reason whatsoever except that they dislike virtues in others, even though they may have no personal contact with them or any clash of interests.

Islam aims at forging unbreakable links among the faithful and has unequivocally condemned the degrading and despicable feeling which we designate as jealousy. We have been warned, time and again, that if we succumb to jealousy, the *Millat* will disintegrate. The Holy Prophet has specially warned that his *Ummah* must keep away from all evils that would change love and brotherhood into hatred. He has specifically said:

“Eschew mistrust, since mistrust is one of the vilest human defects. Do not pry into the affairs of others. Neither harbour jealousy against one another nor remain unconcerned about the hardship or suffering of others. Do not be consumed by the envy of others. O servants of Allah! Be brothers unto one another”.

The *Sunan Abū-Dā‘ūd* has this Saying of the Holy Prophet:

“Keep away from jealousy, for jealousy eats away virtues as fire consumes dry wood”.

In fact, jealousy is one of the worst traits in man and the nourishment of this trait is man's greatest misfortune. The real greatness of man resides in the cultivation of his own virtues and in improving his own mind and heart with knowledge. He should strike at the very root of jealousy through sacrifice and by setting high standards of conduct for himself, and think of worldly attainments as ephemeral things that have their day and then pass away. On the other hand, love and brotherhood, humaneness and charity are everlasting. The station of man as the viceregent of Allah on earth requires that he should have these attributes as an integral part of his personality. A true believer's virtue serves as a shield against this base feeling.

SLANDER

Islam aims at the establishment of a society in which the self-respect, dignity and the privacy of each citizen is safe and sacred, and which contains no factors that can arouse bitterness between its members. It wants to see Muslims free of all moral defects and vices that could harm their self-respect or could end in acts that are against the norms of human decency.

Probably no other human defect affects the privacy of a person so seriously as back-biting or slander. Allah has therefore commanded:

*“O ye who believe! Shun much suspicion;
for lo! some suspicion is a sin. And spy not, neither
backbite one another...”*

[Qur'an, XLIX:12]

The Qur'an goes on to describe this vile habit through an analogy, so that those who are addressed by Allah may realise the depravity to which man can sink through this habit:

*“Would one of you love to
eat the flesh of his dead brother?
Ye abhor that.”*

[Qur'an, XLIX:12]

What this verse signifies is that the flesh of the human person has been declared impermissible because of the sanctity of man's being. Therefore all that which damages or does harm to the dignity and honour of man is forbidden.

We have observed from experience that some people who are choleric by disposition can, under provocation, bite and scratch another person. This is of course a highly uncivilised behaviour. A person who resorts to such misdemeanour commits a very cowardly, in fact an extremely immoral, act. If a person speaks evil of another person to the latter's face, even this act is morally reprehensible. But if he does so behind his back, uttering things to which the person who is not present cannot proffer an answer, it is most shameful misconduct and is like eating the dead brother's flesh. A person capable of such depravity is totally devoid of decency, sense of honour and compassion. His act runs counter to the spirit of fellowship and respect which Islam fosters among the believers.

The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) has in different Traditions predicted severe punishment for vilifiers in the Hereafter. According to the *Sunan Abū Dā'ūd* the Prophet has said:

"On the Night of Ascension I saw a group of people who had nails of brass with which they were scratching their own faces. I asked Gabriel: 'Who are these people'? He replied: 'These are the people who ate the flesh of others and harmed their reputation and honour' "

It is a basic social principle and also the law of Allah that punishment should be proportional to the crime or sin. If slander is equivalent to scratching the flesh of fellow-beings, the punishment prescribed for vilifiers is also that they should scratch their own faces for ever, without recess.

The *Sunan Abū Dā'ūd* has at another place quoted this Saying of the Holy Prophet:

"O believers! Do not slander your Muslim brothers and do not spy on them to find out their shortcomings; for he who looks for shortcomings in others shall have his own sins looked into by Allah. And he whose shortcomings are looked into by Allah shall have himself disgraced in his own house"

A common misunderstanding about slander is that it consists in speaking evil of a person behind his back. This is of course the literal meaning of the word *ghibat*. But physical absence of the man who is being slandered is not essential to the vice of slander, in Islamic ethics. Indeed, Hadrat Abū Hurayrah has narrated the following Tradition of the Prophet:

"Some Companions asked the Holy Prophet: 'What is ghibat'? He said: 'It is saying things about your brother (i.e. fellow-believer) that he does not like'. They then inquired: 'Supposing my brother has that defect'? The Prophet said: 'If he does possess that shortcoming, you have been guilty of ghibat, (slander) but if he be free from that taint, you have committed the vice of calumny, i.e. of making a false accusation' "

The above *Hadīth* makes it clear that recounting a person's shortcomings or speaking ill of him to his face amounts to vilification. But this does not imply that Islam does not allow Muslims to expose those bad men who are really evil. The Qur'an has itself openly condemned the evil of idolatry and the evil deeds of the idolaters. The believers or the members of the *Ummah* can also recount the vices and shortcomings of fellow-believers *provided that the aim is morally good i.e., to reform and admonish*. A sufferer has every right to narrate his sufferings, and in order to seek legal redress he can recount the high-handedness of the accused. The evils of a person can be exposed in order to prevent a conflict from rearing its head. The Holy Prophet himself once called a person the worst amongst his tribe. It is also permitted to lay bare the acts of those who are doing things contrary to faith and human decency.

What has been said about exposing those who are a danger to social peace notwithstanding, Islam does not allow slander which according to Islamic ethics is a serious crime. Allah has said:

"Allah loveth not the utterance of harsh speech..."

[Qur'an, IV:148]

Slander, if carried to its utmost limits, destroys the edifice of human virtue and lays desolate and dries up the fount of morality. One of its most harmful effects is the kindling of animosity and enmity among the members of a society. Occasionally the fire ignited by calumny envelops whole nations. There are many reasons for slander, e.g., jealousy, pride, dormant suspicion or malice. Islam desires that the believers should be free from all these flaws. Slander, whether through tongue or deed, suggestion or innuendo, sarcasm or ridicule, is a very serious social vice and should be condemned by all decent persons. Whenever we speak ill of others, we should first search our own hearts and ponder what we are going to say, since angels record whatever we say or do:

"He uttereth no word but there is with him an observer ready."

[Qur'an L:18]

The Prophet has also expressed his dislike of slanderers. He has also admonished those who lend a willing ear to slander. In the *Sahih Bukhari* there is a *Hadith* to the effect that he who has heard things about others that would be displeasing to them shall have molten lead poured into his ears on the Day of Reckoning.

According to Imam Tahawi, some Companions once asked the Prophet: "How can the sin of slander be redeemed?" He replied, "Pray for the salvation of the man slandered. This is how you can absolve yourself".

We the Muslims are at present involved, throughout the world of Islam, to rebuild our respective societies in accordance with the social and moral precepts of Islam. This is a part of our national renaissance and emancipation from alien domination. We desire that our world should be a true mirror of the high values enunciated by Islam. One way of achieving this objective is to mould our lives as true believers. As Muslims we should conform to the Islamic norms of human fellowship. We should begin by adopting the Islamic precept of self-respect, a necessary corollary of which would be to respect the feelings and susceptibilities of our fellow-men.

BREACH OF TRUST

Allah has Himself called the moon and the stars the ornaments that embellish the firmament. Just as these luminous jewels bedeck the sky, so is man the ornament and the jewel of the earth. We know that heavenly bodies stay within their orbits because of their mutual gravitational pull. The revolution of the sun and the moon, the predetermined orbit of the stars and their planets that governs their movement within the galaxy fall under an overall organisation which depends upon an immutable relationship that exists between the heavenly bodies and rests upon the will of Allah. It is not possible to visualize any deviation within this system, and the slightest trace of it will lead to the immediate destruction of the universe that is so delicately poised and balanced.

The earth is also a part of the cosmic organisation to which I have just alluded. The existence of man is not only the ultimate achievement and the zenith of Being on earth but also a part of the mutual balance and equilibrium which operates constantly here. And there is an inherent trust and brotherhood among men which has always been there. And as long as this accord endures the earth will shine in its full glory and the system of mutual reliance and trust and the organisation based upon it shall last. In fact, I shall not be very wrong when I say the glory and the beauty of the world depends upon love, fraternity and trust between human beings.

The thing that vitiates this mutual trust between man and man is its breach now and then, by those who are oblivious of the nature of their being. Trust is an ethical concept which serves as the foundation on which collective life stands and it is this principle which makes life worth-while and meaningful.

Allah has shown to man a path that assures his well-being and peace, and has provided him guidance to enable him to follow this path. In the Qur'an Allah has said:

"Lo! Allah commandeth you that ye restore deposits to their owners..."

[Qur'an, IV:58]

And breach of trust has been condemned in these words:

*"O ye who believe!
Betray not Allah and His messenger,
nor knowingly betray your trusts."*

[Qur'an, VIII:27]

The word 'trust' (*amanah*) is generally construed to apply to material objects, but as shown in the above verse it has far greater implications since what is referred to here are the spiritual aspects of trust which exists between believers and the Holy Prophet. What is actually meant is that man should not betray the responsibilities that devolve upon him with regard to obedience to Allah nor should he, having accepted the guidance of the Prophet and the truth of his message, be guilty of deviating from his teachings.

Allah be praised for being the Lord and Master of all that exists; He is the Creator of everything that was, is and will be. He has created man, so that a link between the Creator and the created may be forged. Consequently what disrupts this link falls within the definition of breach or betrayal. The Holy Prophet (may peace be upon him) is the truthful guide; and his guidance is for the whole world till the end of time. Every Muslim is enjoined to obey the guidelines provided by the Prophet. Once a Muslim has accepted to live as a believer any act that belies his pledge of acceptance, any overt deviation by him from the teachings of the Holy Prophet will be tantamount to a breach of trust, a betrayal of his faith. Observance of this trust is emphasised by the following Saying of the Prophet:

"He who is lacking in trustworthiness does not have faith that could be relied upon".

It would be useful for us to take stock at this point of the present-day conditions and ponder where we stand. It is a fact that among the causes behind our moral decline, our wilful breach of trust is the most important. This trait dries up the mainsprings of the human soul and brings down the edifice of social organisation and collective life.

A wholesome society is the product of mutual trust and the safeguarding of the rights of individuals. The very basis of collective life is the recognition of the rights of the individual and the relationship existing between him and the society. He who is guilty of betraying this trust rides roughshod over all basic concepts and by violating the laws of the society not only manifests his total ignorance and lack of decency but seriously endangers collective peace and well-being. A dishonest cheat will not mind any insults, and will unhesitatingly accept all kinds of degradation. A trader who cheats his customers treads the path of utmost moral degradation. A labourer or an employer who betrays his trust forfeits confidence through his evil deeds. Respect and personal dignity cannot be achieved without the attendant sense of responsibility, and our most important obligation as social beings is to be honest and to keep our trust.

If we reflect upon the history of Islam and probe deeply into its growth and evolution, we will notice that at every step during the early stages of their history Muslims were known for their honesty and trustworthiness. They followed in the footsteps of the Holy Prophet, who was the most reliable and trustworthy of men, and the whole world acclaimed them for their integrity.

Were honesty and trustworthiness not the guiding principle of these pioneers of the straight path, Islam could not have become a world religion and a world power in less than half a century.

We too are Muslims and profess Islam. We claim that we follow it. But let us have an objective view of the world of Islam and the general moral conduct of Muslims. What do we find? Our word and our pledge is seldom considered reliable. Is our general decline not due to the fact that we have ignored the standards of trust given to us by Islam and have no scruples with regard to dishonesty? Our industry and trade are not beyond reproach. Our self-respect as an *Ummah* is at a low ebb. Nobody is prepared to acknowledge our moral uprightness. We have become entangled in the web of our own dishonest practices bringing bad name to the true religion we claim to profess.

We should remember that Allah has Himself designated dishonesty or betrayal of trust as one of the worst acts of immorality. This is the judgement of Allah which is immutable. We should pledge ourselves to changing our attitude and make a resolve to follow the path of honesty and straightforwardness, for we cannot otherwise achieve a position in the world worthy of our great religion. May Allah the Compassionate help us in this noble resolve. Amen!

HYPOCRISY

Sometimes the relations between individuals become extremely complex and reach a critical point. Such situations require foresight, sagacity, caution and tactfulness. We can offer an example in this regard. It is quite possible that two individuals may disagree about some thing or have some cause for complaint against each other and that they have a common friend whom both of them trust. Upto this point there is nothing extraordinary in the matter. In fact, it is a proof of the sagacity and vision of the common friend that he has not allowed the mutual disagreement of his two friends to adversely affect his friendship for them. It is also a sign of goodwill of the two friends that both of them continue to accept him as a friend although each one knows that he continues his friendship with the other. What we need to ponder is what his role should be in the background of this disagreement between his two friends.

It has been observed occasionally that the person faced with a situation of this delicate nature forgets the requirements of true friendship and personal honesty and carries tales between the two of them and at the same time tries to convince them both that he has their good at heart. He thus acts evilly and his lack of integrity aggravates the misunderstanding between his trusting friends and as a result of his treachery the disagreement may assume the form of an outright quarrel. The person behind this increasing animosity between these friends is the so-called mutual friend. Occasionally nations can play the same obnoxious and treacherous role.

Islam equates such duplicity with hypocrisy. It regards such a behaviour as the basest form of moral decline. A person guilty of such treachery is worse than a back-biter, for the back-biter confines himself to disclosures about only one person, whereas the hypocrite carries the conversations of both to each other.

It is not necessary that hypocrisy be confined to the carrying of tales from one person to another and *vice versa* by a third party. Insincere talk when a person does not mean what he says is also considered hypocrisy and duplicity by Islam. When a person says something that he in his heart knows to be inherently false, he is guilty of hypocrisy. If a person praises someone to his face and talks ill of him behind his back, he has committed an outright act of hypocrisy. This was what the opponents of Islam and hypocrites did immediately after the proclamation of the true faith by the Holy Prophet. The Qur'an has described the attitude of such persons explicitly:

*“And when they fall in with those who believe,
they say: We believe; but when they go apart to their devils they
declare: Lo! we are with you; verily we did but mock.”*

[Qur'an, II:14]

In the social parlance such persons are called hypocrites – the double-faced ones. According to a *Hadīth* of the Prophet such persons are doomed to dire punishment in the Hereafter.

According to the *Sahīh Bukhārī* the Prophet said that on the Day of Reckoning such people will be in the worst state – the people who “make the face to meet the faces that they meet”, who put up appearances according to the need of the moment. According to the *Sahīh Muslim*, he who wears two faces on the earth shall have two tongues of flame coming out of his mouth, showing that his innards are being roasted.

If the ideas and thoughts of one person are carried over to another person without any dissemblance, the carrier has not been guilty of hypocrisy, but, if he adds fuel to the fire and makes interpretations or utters something which his heart belies, he has committed an act of hypocrisy.

Someone put this question to Hadrat Ibn ‘Umar: “Sir, we say one thing when we are in the presence of our tribal chiefs and say quite different things when we come out. What do you think of this action of ours”? Hadrat Ibn ‘Umar said that in the age of the Prophet such an act was that of hypocrisy. Flattery is also an ugly kind of hypocrisy.

Hadrat Abu Durda says: “We sometimes laugh to please some people, although our heart reproaches us. This is sheer hypocrisy.” Such hypocrisy is the product of the desire for worldly gains and selfishness.

Daylami has a *hadīth* on the authority of Hadrat Abu Hurayrah according to which the Prophet said that the love for worldly goods and eminence nourishes hypocrisy in the heart as fresh water helps a plant to grow.

We should remember that the termite, known as hypocrisy, begins to gnaw at the pillars of the society, and the whole edifice ultimately collapses, becoming a relic of the past and a lesson for the future generations. The conflict of one man with another, of one nation with another nation, wars and major conflicts costing millions of lives are often the consequence of hypocrisy.

Islam clearly instructs us that we should keep our actions and utterances free from hypocrisy. If we say a thing but do not act upon it, we are guilty of hypocrisy, and if we utter something which our heart does not attest, we are again guilty of hypocrisy. If we study the course of history and the rise and fall of nations with a view to drawing some kind of lesson from such a study, we shall find that hypocrisy is among the major causes of the decline of nations. Hypocrisy has often proved fatal for nations. This has happened in the past and whenever hypocrisy becomes the norm, history will repeat itself in the future with the same inexorableness.

My brethren-in-faith! Let us cast a deep glance upon our thought and vision and weigh our acts and words. If they have the element of hypocrisy, let us try to extricate ourselves from this morass, since for the *Ummah's* future greatness and exaltation we have to eschew that which our hearts do not attest.

MUTUAL MISTRUST

Only a society whose members trust one another can be regarded as peaceful, wholesome, and worthy of approbation — a society in which people do not look askance at the intentions of others and do not suspect the motives and purposes of fellow-members, a society which indemnifies its members against all conspiracies, evil designs and transgressions. In such a society no one will doubt the integrity of anybody else. The good of a society and prudence both demand that factors that could engender suspicion and mistrust among people should be removed, because when the atmosphere becomes charged with suspicion, each individual begins to feel insecure and the feelings of mutual goodwill and amity get vitiated. Mutual mistrust is in fact a social disease symptomatic of moral decline that makes collective life devoid of meaning and inner cohesion. Hatred and animosity take root in such a society and lead it inexorably towards self-destruction.

Mutual suspicion is a mental disease which springs from delusion and unjustified apprehension. Nations that are objective and outward looking do not attach any importance whatsoever to such delusions and misconceptions. Allah Himself has said:

*“O ye who believe!
Shun much suspicion; for lo! some suspicion is a sin...”*

[Qur’ān, XLIX:12]

It does not behove the believer to suspect the motives of other people. Muslims have been plainly told that, although the harbouring of mistrust and suspicion is a mental disease, yet because of its harmful social consequence Allah considers it a major sin and a grave vice.

In yet another verse of the Qur’ān this serious moral baseness has been held responsible for the decline and fall of nations:

*“...and ye did think
an evil thought, and ye were
worthless folk.”*

[Qur’ān, XLVIII:12]

One aspect of mistrust is that which pertains to persons and their affairs. There is another aspect of mistrust which relates to man’s relationship with Allah. Some people let mistrust take root in their hearts with regard to the infinite

munificences of Allah and begin to doubt them. They stand accursed and are assigned to eternal Hell. And this moral vice has been equated with paganism and hypocrisy.

According to the *Sahih Bukhari*, the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) is reported to have said:

“O men created by Allah! Eschew and avoid mistrust, since it is the meanest falsehood. Do not waste your time prying into the affairs of others nor cover to become better than them. Do not be envious amongst yourselves nor harbour animosity against one another. You should not turn your faces from one another. And, O creatures of Allah, as He Himself has said, you should be like brothers unto one another”.

The Law-giver (*Sharih 'alah as-salam*) of Islam (peace be upon him) has not only exhorted Muslims to avoid mistrust, but has, through his personal example, also shown the causes which create it and provide an opportunity for doubt and suspicion.

In the *Sunan Abū Dā'ūd* it has been reported that the Prophet was in *E'tikaf* (religious contemplation), when one of his wives came to see him in connection with some important family matter. He got up in order to escort her back home. He met two Companions on the way. They began to move out of the way, thinking that they had intruded at an inopportune moment. The Prophet told them: “O people, she is my wife, and I had come out with her to see her home”. The Companions replied: “O Messenger of Allah, how can we harbour mistrust and that too against you”. The Prophet later said: “Satan moves in the human body as the blood moves in a man's veins”.

Being a mental disease, mistrust leads people to spy on others and to pry into their personal and private affairs. In the *Sunan Abū Dā'ūd* a tradition has been ascribed to Hadrat 'Abd Allah bin-Mas'ūd according to which a man was brought before the Prophet. Those who brought him before the Prophet said that as wine was dripping from his beard, he must be a drunkard, whereat the Holy Prophet said: “We have been prohibited from prying into the affairs of others”.

According to *Tirmidhi*, the Prophet once said: “The blood of a Muslim is sacrosanct for other Muslims. The wealth of a Muslim is sacrosanct for other Muslims, and a Muslim is forbidden from mistrusting”.

Mistrust also adversely influences judgment and at times because of mistrust, misjudgments are pronounced and the requirements of justice are contravened. Hadrat 'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) has therefore said that a judgement based upon mistrust is no judgement at all. He further said: “people of the faith! Avoid mistrust as it vitiates worship and burdens people with sins”

How true is this pronouncement of Hadrat 'Ali:

“When mistrust gains entry into the heart, all possibilities of reconciliation and good faith are lost for good. It is a grave moral weakness and takes

away most other virtues of man, and replaces them with undesirable traits. Mistrust and suspicion rob man of mental stability and have an adverse effect on his sense of judgement. A man who is innately suspicious can never recognise the truth”.

As against mistrust and suspicion, Islam wishes the believers to cultivate good faith and trust. Trust in the integrity and honourableness of other confers upon man the blessings of confidence, loyalty and a man who is so disposed shall receive his recompense from Allah for being high-minded.

Islam demands that a Muslim should be kindly disposed towards his fellow-Muslims. He should pin his faith on the blessings of Allah, and in particular he should repose trust in Allah’s noble and pious servants. Mistrust towards common people is bad enough but towards those who are good and true and obey Allah’s commands is a cardinal sin.

GREED AND AVARICE

Ever since man stepped on this earth the sphere of his necessities has continued to expand and grow wider. Some of the necessities are undoubtedly essential for human life and should be counted as absolutely imperative for man's survival. They include all the basic necessities of our day-to-day life, the availability of which is an absolute must for our continued existence. Nevertheless, man's desires might exceed permissible bounds and the quest for things beyond his needs would be nothing but sheer avarice. The end-point of avarice is an insatiable canine cupidity. It is an unquenchable thirst and its ultimate consequence is dissatisfaction and distress. A greedy individual and an avaricious society pursue their selfish ends ruthlessly and in the process trample all canons of decency and higher moral values under their feet and obliterate them. A greedy individual, as well as an avid and materialist culture, loses all sense of distinction between the permissible and the impermissible. A society that is composed of individuals who would not refrain from riding roughshod over the rights of others will have little care for the sanctity of human life and the dignity of the human individual. A society that makes avidity its driving force becomes susceptible to many other defects such as jealousy, miserliness, lack of compassion, treachery and breach of trust, extortion, cowardice, mutual mistrust, shortsightedness, selfishness and complete loss of fellow-feeling and sense of belonging. And an avaricious individual succumbs to these disgraceful trends in which he wallows all his life. He would never taste the delight of repose and peace. He will cast envious glances upon every individual or people whom Allah has blessed with more affluence and wealth. He would like to see the wealth of others pass into his own hands, no matter how and by what means. He is not content with what Allah has conferred upon him. He would not like to strive for improving his circumstances, but to prosper at the cost of others, no matter how heavily it might harm or hurt others. The Qur'an has condemned such an attitude unreservedly, as it represents the lowest level to which man can demean himself. Allah has said:

"Strain not thine eyes toward that which We cause some wedded pairs among them to enjoy..."

[Qur'an, XV:88]

It is the feeling of greed and avarice which incites man to rob people of their wealth and to kill them for it. According to a Tradition, the Holy Prophet instructed the believers to eschew greed because it is this evil feeling which

made earlier peoples shed the blood of innocent persons who had done them no harm and made impermissible seem permissible to them. In another *Hadīth* the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

“Abstain from avarice, for many earlier nations were destroyed by this evil”

Because of it they snapped the bonds of truth, because of it they became miserly and due to it they committed all sorts of vices and evil acts. How avidity destroyed the life of the avid person has been convincingly elucidated in another *Hadīth*. The Holy Prophet stated: Of all the social vices greed is the most destructive for man. He is always pining for what he has failed to accumulate and because he has not been able to have all that he wanted. He is angry that other people have been able to collect more wealth than him. He wants more and more all the time. Allah in the Qur’ān and the Holy Prophet in his Traditions have called avarice an anti-human trait. Avarice destroys human decency and vitiates human dignity and honour.

We should ponder our prevailing state of affairs and our collective predicament. We should analyse it and make an appraisal of the trends that are becoming more and more pronounced in our midst. We are in the grip of avarice to such an extent that we have lost all sense of proportion and the capacity to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong. We see daring thefts, daylight robberies, and highway hold-ups. Money has become the be-all and the end-all of our life, and we are all ready and eager to transgress all bounds of moral propriety and human decency to obtain it. We have become oblivious of the fact that this state of affairs has degraded us in the eyes of other peoples. As against this there is a society and a social order that is radiant because of the light of faith and true belief where every individual is thankful for whatever Allah has given to him and is convinced that if he complies with the dictates of piety and lives as a God-fearing man and works honestly to earn his living, he will never face adversity. The Holy Qur’ān says:

*“...And whosoever keepeth his duty to Allah, Allah will appoint a way out for him:
And will provide for him from (a quarter) whence he hath no expectation...”*

[Qur’ān, LXV:2–3]

The distribution of wealth among men is according to the Will of Allah. We cannot become rich through avarice nor harm those whom Allah has blessed with affluence. We can only succeed in destroying ourselves.

Avarice belies a man’s faith in Allah and contentment with what He has given us. A greedy man is not satisfied with the distribution of wealth as ordained by Allah nor does he cherish any hopes of Allah’s munificence in store for him. He is not moved by human or ethical considerations. He does not realise that wealth cannot be acquired through greed but through Allah’s graciousness alone, for He alone is the Sovereign of all that is in the heavens and earth.

Allah Himself has said:

"... Allah beareth witness that the Hypocrites are speaking falsely."

[Qur'an, LXIII:1]

A true Muslim's attitude invariably is to ensure that his life is not defiled by greed. In fact, greed and true faith are the opposites of each other. A believer can never be greedy, as greed and faith cannot go together. There is a *Hadīth* of the Prophet according to Nisā'i in which he has said: "Faith and greed cannot take root in the same heart".

According to the Traditions of Tirmidhī, the Prophet once said: "Man grows old, but two things (in him) always remain young – the urge to live and the greed for wealth". According to Tabarāni, the Prophet remarked on another occasion: "Two wolves released among the herd of cattle cannot play that much havoc as avarice does to faith and belief".

May Allah set us on the path of righteousness and save us from avarice. Avarice has another disadvantage. It totally destroys the quality of life – a greedy person will have no time at all for the noble things of life – learning, compassion, love of fellow-beings, contentment, personal dignity, and loyalty to friends and service to mankind – indeed all things that make man's sojourn in this world really worthwhile.

FOOD ADULTERATION

(Adulteration is cheating with unlimited injurious consequences)

There are several ways in which one can cheat in trade. One way is to sell a bad article as good one; that is, the article sold is useless but the price charged is that of a good and wholesome one. The other is to sell a defective article by hiding the defect from the buyer. Some goods have numerous defects that are not apparent, but become so when they are used. An honest vendor would tell the prospective buyer about the defect of the article he is offering for sale, while a dishonest vendor would hide or minimize its defects through clever salesmanship. Another form of dishonesty in trade is to cheat in the measure by using faulty scales. This is often done by placing smaller weights in one pan or to incline one side so that the article registers more than its actual weight. Another deceit practised by the traders is that they charge more for their goods than honest business would entitle them to. Blackmarketing and smuggling also come under this category. When the supply falls short of the demand, selling goods at excessive profit constitutes blackmarketing and is a gross trading malpractice. Furthermore, to hold back goods in order to create artificial shortage and then sell them at exorbitant prices is a highly deplorable dishonesty in trading. The usual technique employed is to remove an article of necessity from the market, stop its sale, and at a later stage, sell it at arbitrary prices when the consumer's need for it becomes compulsive. This is designated as "artificially created scarcity". This process operates particularly during national calamities, e.g. war or recession, or on important national festivals or occasions of religious importance such as the Ramadan, and the two Ids. Another sad aspect of this evil is that the people, driven by the devil of necessity, entreat the trader to satisfy their wants, and the trader pleases them with great relish. Traders know that the public is constrained to make purchases on important occasions and would pay, whether they like it or not, whatever price is demanded of them.

Another ugly trading malpractice is that of adulteration. Its ills transgress against all canons of human decency. Before we discuss adulteration, let us first understand what it means and implies. It is derived from the Latin word, *adulter* which was originally used for adultery but now means that a baser element or matter is mixed with a finer one. In effect, it means that a cheap ingredient is mixed with an edible object in such a way that it is not possible to notice it unless the whole article is subjected to a chemical analysis. The baser part is obviously one that makes adulteration a profitable practice, even though its effects may be extremely injurious and different or contrary to those of the article sold. The object of adulteration is to get the price of a pure article for a

spurious one. The consumer is assured that the article he is buying is genuine and is made to pay accordingly. As a result he does not get what he has paid for.

I have described only a few of the many trading malpractices. They are all characterised by an attitude that is deleterious, immoral, and ethically undesirable – judged by any scale of human values. None of these malpractices is worthy of a civilised nation. They are the products of avarice and greed, which in the longer term prove to be short-sighted. For any Muslim society such practices are exceedingly disgraceful. As Muslims, honesty and trustworthiness should be our national characteristics. A true and sincere Muslim is so honest and trustworthy that even his enemies can repose full trust in his integrity. A Muslim can never practise deceit; it is against his temperament. The Qur'ān has clearly and explicitly commanded:

"...so give full measure and full weight and wrong not mankind in their goods..."

[Qur'ān, VII:85]

The Muslim trader is a trader *par excellence*. He purveys only what is good and flawless, and, if the article suffers from a defect, he clearly informs the buyer about it. He does not keep quiet about the article, but lets the buyer know what he is buying so that the latter has full knowledge of the bargain and does not repent having made it.

A true Muslim tradesman would refrain from harming others. He would rather undergo loss himself than see others suffer. The Holy Prophet has said: "A deceiver who is a greedy person and a selfish person shall not be able to enter the portals of Heaven".

Adulteration is an act with an almost endless chain of consequences. The harmful effects of adulteration do not remain confined to the trader and the buyer, but spread in all directions and envelop the entire society. A tradesman is a part of his community, and, therefore, ultimately the harmful effects of adulteration will inexorably rebound to him. Like other social evils, "adulteration sickness" is also contagious and makes its way to others engaged in the profession. The milkman adds water to the milk along with chalk powder and the purveyor of spices supplies adulterated chilli powder. If the former goes to buy chillies, he cannot get pure chillies, and similarly the spice-seller will not get pure milk. Adulteration leaves no one untouched.

Adulteration does grave harm to the national and social structure in three ways: (i) monetary loss to the buyer through fraud by the vendor, (ii) overall deterioration in the health of the nation, and (iii) deterioration of the socio-ethical fibre of the community.

As for the monetary losses, they become immediately apparent to the buyer. But, in addition, there is another kind of loss inflicted upon the nation, namely, its trading credibility. For credibility is as basic at the national level as it is in international dealings. The adverse effects upon health are sometimes slow to

appear and at other times quite quick; fats mixed with petroleum hydrocarbons that are not absorbed by the organism result in paralysis of the neuro-motor system. It is thus the digestive system that suffers most, but at times, as stated, the whole system gets paralysed. It is the adulterating trader who is responsible for this catastrophe and this grave hazard to the community. His action engulfs large chunks of the population in misery. Among the social consequences of adulteration might be mentioned mutual loss of trust. The building block of a sociological framework is mutual trust. A socio-economic unit that forfeits this element of trustworthiness also loses its tranquillity and equanimity. Transactions that involve adulteration would make one individual suspicious of another and the result would be large scale frustration and dis-spiritedness. Such a state of affairs would act as a poison for the whole social system.

Another result of such malpractices is that the dishonest would flourish while those who are honest would suffer. This would mean prosperity and affluence for the unscrupulous and poverty for those who are honest or, at least, harbour scruples. What would be the result? Social inequality would manifest itself to the detriment of the honest people.

It is for this reason that Muslims have been directed to desist from acts that would vitiate mutual trust, resulting in profit to one at the cost of another. The Qur'an has ordained:

"And eat not up your property among yourselves in vanity..."

[Qur'an, II:188]

or in other words – do not sinfully consume a portion of other men's goods and that wittingly. It is the responsibility of everyone of us, in view of the dire consequences brought about by adulteration, to eradicate it. It is necessary to put in an organised effort to root it out, especially if it has become prevalent. While it is the government's responsibility to curb this harmful practice by invoking its armoury of legal checks and deterrents, it is also for the people not only to save themselves from its harmful effects but also to cooperate with the government in whatever measures it adopts to curb this evil. And not only this. It should exert moral pressure upon those government officials as are reluctant or listless in the discharge of their duties, to do all they can in bringing the culprits to book. Irrespective of whether we are ordinary citizens, government servants, vendors or customers, students or teachers, journalists or lawyers, we should never cooperate with adulterators or take their acts lightly. Even if we are faced with impediments and difficulties, we should boldly face them, for without suffering there is no achievement and sense of satisfaction. One of the ways in which we cooperate with adulterators is by purchasing adulterated articles. If we have a friend who does adulteration, we should remonstrate with him and apply moral pressure upon him. If we know an official of the government appointed for the express purpose of checking adulteration, who does not check adulteration either through sheer laziness or because he accepts illegal gratification, we should explain to him the consequences that would emanate

from his remissness. Such people cannot flourish if the society looks down upon them and discourages them. We should not accept in our midst either those who adulterate or those who allow adulteration to be practised. They should be corrected instead of being ignored or tolerated. Prevention of adulteration is a cooperative and collective effort, and those who tolerate evils in the society are guilty towards their own kith and kin. People involved in adulteration are not worthy of being members of a respectable society and it is therefore the responsibility of each one of us to establish through precept and practice that we are dedicated to the ordinance of the Holy Prophet:

"He who indulges in adulteration is not one of us".

DISCRIMINATION ON THE BASIS OF RACE OR COLOUR

Difference of race and colour and resultant discrimination has been a major cause of turmoil and turbulence in the world. In other words, parochialism and prejudice based on race, colour of the skin, language, country and nationality has from times immemorial – from the earliest period of pre-history to date – divided mankind into mutually hostile and antagonistic groups; and by creating different spheres has continued to declare some people as belonging to them and others, who were born outside these sphere, as aliens. There is no rational or logical basis for these criteria of discrimination. The only basis is the accident of birth; one is born in one group, another one is born in another tribe. One is born in one particular geographical region, another one happens to have been born in another geographical region. Just on the basis of the accident of birth men got separated – pulled asunder by a mere chance. This distinction is not intended to foster love amongst a given set of people. It is an evil which finds expression in the worst orgies of hatred, hostility, disgrace and degradation, tyranny and torture. Pseudo-philosophic concepts were concocted to justify racial discrimination. Laws were formulated and enforced. Nations and empires adopted it as their *modus operandi* or imperial concept and acted accordingly for centuries. This abominably obnoxious concept of racial superiority put up a horrifyingly gory spectacle of mass murder and genocide during the last world war. Those horrendous events need no comment.

Keeping the story of this most tragic human depravity and universal corruption at the back of our minds let us listen to what the Holy Qur'ān says about them:

*“O mankind! Lo! We have created
you male and female,
and have made you nations and tribes
that ye may know one another. Lo! the noblest of you,
in the sight of Allah,
is the best in conduct.”*

[Qur'ān, XLIX:13]

Three basic truths have been expounded by the Holy Qur'ān in this verse. One, that all men share the same origin, All are one in essence. Despite this, however, it is but natural for mankind to be divided in tribes and nationalities because the evolution of the human species makes it imperative. And this fact too is not beyond comprehension that different groups of the human race dwelling

in different climatic and geographical regions may develop differences in colour of the skin and other genes, racial features, language and folk-ways. But this natural difference and variance in physical appearance does not mean that it is necessary to classify them as superior and inferior or to accept artificially created distinctions of the high-born gentry "and the low-born rabble", so that one race tries to impose its superiority and authority over another race and one group enjoys precedence in the matter of human rights over others. The fact of different races and nationalities is intended only to facilitate mutual recognition. But today this trait which was meant only to serve as a means of introduction between peoples has been turned into a means of exhibiting superiority and a source of pride, thereby beginning a process of endless exploitation and tyranny. This is the second truth enunciated by Islam.

The third truth is that Islam does believe in the classification of human beings. It accepts the indisputable fact that some men are better than and superior to some other men. But its criterion of human superiority and excellence is character and moral disposition of man not his race or colour of the skin. He who is more God-fearing, more careful in keeping away from sinful acts, is virtuous and treads the path of righteousness, deserves respect and esteem of his fellow-beings, whatever his race, nationality or tribe. And he who is otherwise, is indeed an inferior person as compared to the former, irrespective of the fact whether he is white or black.

The Holy Prophet's public address after the victory of Mecca included these historic words: "Thank the Lord Almighty Who has rid you of your defects of ignorance and arrogance. O men, mankind can be divided only into two groups. One comprises the virtuous and the God-fearing who are worthy and honourable in the eyes of Allah the Most Exalted and the other consists of the sinful and the villainous who are dishonourable and mean in the eyes of Allah. Otherwise all men are the progeny of Adam and Allah moulded Adam from clay".

Abu Haraira has quoted another *Hadith*. He says that the Holy Prophet said: "Allah will not ask you about your lineage. Before Him the most honourable and excellent is he who is the most virtuous and God-fearing". Ibn Māja narrated this *Hadith*:

*"Allah does not at all care for your looks or your affluence:
He looks into your hearts and at your actions"*.

The Holy Prophet announced categorically, in clear and unambiguous words, that Islam does not recognise any distinctions on the basis of colour or race. In his great sermon on the occasion of his last Hajj, he said: "O men, beware! You all have one Allah. An Arab has no precedence over an Ajamite, nor the Ajamite has any precedence over the Arab. The white is in no way better than the black and the black is in no way better than the white. The only thing that gives superiority to one man over another is virtue and piety. He amongst you is the most honourable and the most excellent, before

Allah who is the most God-fearing. Tell me have I conveyed to you the Word of Allah?" The people said, "Yes, O Prophet of Allah, you have indeed done so". Then the Prophet said:

"All right, now he who is here and has heard me should convey my words to him who is not present and has not heard me".

It was in the light of these teachings that Islam created a universal brotherhood *par excellence* which never allowed any discrimination on the basis of race or colour. Islam is the only religion that united all the nations spread all over the earth and blended them into one *Ummah*.

In the view of Islam all men constitute the family of Allah. Every member of the human family shares the same essence and the same origin. It therefore does not attach any importance at all to the differences of colour and race.

The Holy Prophet gave his personal testimony with regard to this fact, when he was all alone in the darkness of the night, before Allah, in the following sacred words:

"O Lord, I give my personal testimony that all your creatures and servants are brothers unto one another".

Iqbal our great poet has summed up the Islamic concept of equality and brotherhood in a beautiful line:

"Break the idols of race and colour and merge your individual identity in the Ummah".

THE END OF WAXING PROUD

When a man achieves some unique excellence or state of perfection, he naturally becomes conscious of the high position he has attained. This feeling by itself is no moral fault – nor is it a thing to feel guilty about. On the contrary, this awareness of one's unusual merit is conducive to producing a feeling of gratitude and thankfulness in him. It becomes bad only when it exceeds the limits of propriety and makes the person concerned look with contempt at those who lack the special merit or excellence that he has come to possess. Thinking oneself to be big and peerless and others to be contemptible and worthless is waxing proud. The Holy Qur'an tells us that this mental attitude and haughtiness leads to nothing but disgrace and humiliation. The end of pride and arrogance is ruination and wretchedness and being debarred from the light of divine guidance. Therefore, pride is an exceedingly grave immorality. This bad behaviour and immorality was exhibited for the first time in the history of the universe by Satan, because he considered himself loftier than Hadrat Adam. The ignoble end of this pride is described by the Holy Qur'an thus:

"He said: Then go down hence! It is not for thee to show pride here, so go forth! Lo! thou art of those degraded."

(Qur'an, VII:13)

It is a self-evident fact that if a man despite being a slave and a humble creature, waxes proud, he only invites his own dishonour and doom. He becomes oblivious of his real position, fails to recognise his inherent lowness and claims to have an excellence that, in truth, he does not and cannot have. This claim of his implies that he is mentally prepared to face the degradation and humiliation that is the irrevocable consequence of it. The Holy Qur'an has specifically referred to this consequence of Satan's pride by using the word *Sāghirīn* which means to have an inclination for humiliation and dishonour. This tells us that those who are in the habit of waxing proud and of being guilty of an immorality such as arrogance are ready and willing for every degradation and wretchedness. And just to hide their shame they, without any justification whatsoever, think themselves to be better and loftier than others.

Pride is not only a moral defect, it is, in fact, also the source and the cause of countless social evils and human vices. Look through the pages of world history and you will find that the mission of all the prophets of Allah (peace be upon them all) was opposed only by those people who were proud and haughty.

Allah the Most Exalted sent Haḍrat Mūsa (Moses) and Haḍrat Hārūn (Aaron) to the Pharaoh and his council of nobles with many great signs. But they all refused to accept the call to Allah given by these two prophets because they thought themselves to be far superior. They waxed proud because of the high position they occupied in the land. The Holy Qur'ān says:

"But they scorned (them) and they were despotic folk."

(Qur'ān, XXIII:46)

And just listen to what end they met. They were for ever denied the state of blessedness. And their destruction and wretchedness in this world became a lesson for the entire human race. These mighty men who, drunk with pride, considered themselves to be the religious, temporal, political and national leaders and who turned away in contempt from the guidance brought to them by Allah's prophets, were deprived with one stroke of their crown and sceptre. Their power and supremacy was reduced to dust. Their mansions and royal palaces were laid waste. Desolation reigned supreme where they once had their revelries. Waves of the stormy 'red sea' smashed their haughty heads to bits. They lost both the worlds. What great losers they were!

"And the heaven and the earth wept not for them, nor were they reprieved."

(Qur'ān, XLIV:29)

The same pride and arrogance destroyed the people of Noah and their mass annihilation also became an abject lesson. Who does not know that the Deluge so totally vanquished this proud and haughty people that not a trace of it was left at all?

The first consequence of waxing proud is that a seal is set on their hearts and they are deprived of the ability to accept the Truth. This deprivation of the knowledge of good is described by the Holy Qur'ān in these words:

"...Thus doth Allah print on every arrogant, disdainful heart."

(Qur'ān, XL:35)

It means the doors of the heart which is filled with pride and arrogance, are shut for ever on all that is good and all that is true and Allah puts the seal of His curse on it. However one may try to bring it to the straight path, one will never succeed in his efforts. Socially the end of waxing proud is that the haughty man is cut off from the rest of his fellow-beings and is completely isolated. He becomes rude and ill-mannered and his heart becomes susceptible to such moral ailments as jealousy, malice, hatred and rancour. He is lonely even when there are people all around him. Why? Because due to his arrogance and feeling of superiority he cannot stoop down to meet the common folk. He feels it

much beneath his dignity to associate and converse with them or to have to share a meal with them. Even exchanging a word of greeting with the rabble would be derogatory for him. That is why the Holy Qur'an has enjoined that all Muslims should keep away from this moral vice and has warned them against its dreadful consequences. It is said:

*"Turn not thy cheek in scorn toward folk,
nor walk with pertness in the land..."*

(Qur'an, XXXI:18)

The Holy Prophet has said:

"A man who has pride and arrogance equivalent to even of a mustard seed in his heart will not enter Paradise."

This means that a man who is arrogant and waxes proud will be kept away from the Muslims in the Hereafter as a punishment and his abode will be eternal Hell-fire.

May Allah protect us from the vice of pride and arrogance and save us from everlasting ruination and wretchedness. Amen!

HATRED

Every human being has feelings and there is no feeling which does not affect his moral behaviour and conduct. Most feelings have an impact on some particular aspect of conduct, but hatred is a feeling which is very wide-ranging in its negative consequences. It creates such serious defects and flaws in a man's moral conduct, his habits and mental attitude that it completely distorts his personality and destroys its equilibrium. His peace of mind is disturbed and his sense of well-being is turned into bitterness.

It is a self-evident fact that hatred and malice give rise to feelings of animosity and hostility and the person who hates somebody is always trying to find ways and means of causing him hurt or loss. He may or may not succeed in his nefarious designs but he loses his own peace of mind and equanimity into the bargain. He becomes unduly aggressive and because of his general unsociability he gets cut off from the mainstream of social life and ultimately ends up as a self-centred recluse.

If you analyse the consequences of hatred you will come to the conclusion that it makes a man aggressive, selfish, mean, hostile, and malicious. Sincerity and affection, love and fellow-feeling, self-denial and self-sacrifice, magnanimity and large heartedness, and connivance and forgiveness are laudable moral qualities. But the reprehensible feeling of hatred destroys them all. Consequently, a man who is disposed to hating others, ultimately himself becomes hateworthy and loathsome and the whole community begins to avoid him. Collective life is based on mutual cooperation and reliability, If we love and respect others they too will give us love and respect in return and will be willing and ready to cooperate with us. This mutual reliability and sense of belonging creates an environment of peace and well-being and an atmosphere of harmony will prevail in the society.

Experience has shown that hatred and ill-humour are among the basic components of a proud, arrogant man's natural disposition. It is arrogance which makes a person look at others with scorn and contempt and shows dislike for them. We can, therefore, justifiably say that hatred is not a single vice, but in fact a syndrome of countless evils. To think that a malevolent and unsociable person has only one moral evil is totally wrong. He is arrogant and malicious, is an enemy of other human beings and as a matter of fact, his own enemy too.

Like love, hatred too is a basic instinct. And it is impossible to conceive a man, who is endowed with cognition and affection, to be devoid of the feelings of love and hate. Therefore, it would be impractical to expect a man to

completely cleanse his heart of the feeling of hate. But surely one would expect a rational and civilised person to know when and where to give an expression to it. Islam, which is a code completely in accord with nature and the most effective system of moral training and purification, tells us that first of all we should subordinate our feelings of love and hate to some lofty purpose, some high objective. And for a Muslim the loftiest objective is the approbation of Allah. This means that we should both love and hate only to achieve this purpose. This will not only keep our feeling of hate within the bounds of moderation but, by making it subordinate to a high principle, also rid it of personal animosity, malice, savage aggressiveness, and feeling of rancour or jealousy which is purely psychical or is inspired by self-interest. It will keep in check that wrong sense of personal superiority which results in snapping a person's link with his social environment.

According to an authentic *Hadith* the Holy Prophet enquired from Hadrat Abū Zar which is the strongest bond of the true faith? He replied, "Allah and His Holy Prophet know better". Then the Holy Prophet said, "Your love should be for the sake of Allah and if you are annoyed or angry that too should be for the sake of Allah".

The purpose of this lesson in godliness is to cleanse the feelings of love and hate of all self-interest and motive and to channellise them into constructive directions. In practice, it will mean that one should not hate a person but only his vile deeds and his immoral conduct. As long as the person concerned has those hate-able vices he should be made to live as an outcaste and the moment he removes those defects and is cleansed of his evil traits, he should be welcomed back in society and given due love and respect.

We have thus seen that, according to Islam, the object of hate is not man, but evil deeds and immorality. Islam requires the Muslims to abstain from permanent hate and loathing. It tells us that as human beings we are all equal. The only recognisable distinction is that between paganism and belief in the unity of God-head and between good and bad conduct. No human being is evil by birth or naturally bad. All badness is that of conduct and character. Hence hate and abhorrence should relate only to immorality and evil conduct. The Holy Qur'an says:

*"...But Allah hath endeared
the faith to you and hath beautified
it in your hearts, and hath made disbelief and
lewdness and rebellion hateful unto you..."*

(Qur'an, XLIX:7)

In this verse, Allah the Most Exalted, has declared the faith of a believer to be the true object of love rather than his person and the disbelief and misdeeds of a transgressor as the target of hate and loathing – not his person. A Muslim cannot hate a human person. In the light of the guidance given by the Holy Qur'an he only hates his badness and his immoral deeds. This principled show

of distaste keeps him safe from immoderation and protects him from numerous psychical ailments. Secondly, it makes his disposition so flexible and likeable that the unbelievers are impressed by his high morality, his fairness and sense of justice and his humane qualities to the extent to produce in them a spontaneous inclination and desire to accept the true faith of Islam. Thus abhorrence for badness becomes an effective means of proselytizing. It sets a standard of moral acceptability. The vicious chain of selfishness and personal malice and rancour comes to an end and because abhorrence is concentrated on badness, the moment they are removed it is immediately transformed into affection and love, and enmity is converted into friendship. It is said in the Holy Qur'an:

*"But if they repent and
establish worship and pay the poor-due,
then are they your brethren in religion..."*

(Qur'an, IX:11)

Fraternisation is possible only if hate and abhorrence are principled. Individual and personal dislike and disgust can never be changed into love and fond regard. In the light of these verses it becomes evident that Allah desires to see the hearts of men completely free of personal hatred and rancour. This is one of Islam's higher moral teachings and keeps in view the human disposition. And to keep man's moral character safe from the undesirable effects of hate he has been told that personal hatred and disgust can never find a place in the heart of a true believer. A pure Arab and a Quraishite at that, can be Abū Jahl and Abū Lahb, if he is an unbeliever. And an unknown Ethiopian and an Ajamite, if he is a believer, can be as beloved as Bilāl-i-Habashī and Sūhaib-i-Rumi. This principled hate can bestow the happiness of embracing life-long enemies with true affection after generously pardoning them. It induces an urge to treat them well. Otherwise personal hatred is a fire which undoubtedly burns others but along with it consumes the life of the person who is filled with it. A malevolent person who finds other men disgusting acquires all those evils and vices which are obnoxious from all points of view – religious, personal and collective.

May Allah keep our hearts totally free of personal hatred and malice and protect our moral character from their evil effects. Amen!

GIVING SHORT WEIGHT

Equity is one of the major commands of Allah, the Most Exalted, and the entire system of the universe is based on it. It is obligatory on man to conform to the requirements of equity in the sphere of his authority, the purpose being that every man should get his due. This is the criterion of equity and fairness that Allah the Almighty has established in this world. If a person does not give to another man what is his as a matter of right or gives him less, he does not conform to Allah's Balance and rebels against the system of Nature that is based on justice and equity. Such a person contravenes the commands of Allah and His Holy Prophet, revolts against the law of Nature and as a matter of fact is a rebel against the system that operates in the universe.

Giving short weight is a link in this chain of rebellion. This deplorable sin is committed generally by traders and businessmen. They should understand once for all that giving short weight is in fact robbing other people of their rightful share. He who increases the weight while taking and shortens it while giving is usurping what belongs to others without any right or justification. This is not trade or 'trafficking' but a sinful practice which is highly repugnant to Islam. Allah says in the Holy Qur'an:

"O ye who believe!

*Squander not your wealth among yourselves in vanity,
except it be a trade by mutual consent..."*

(Qur'an, IV:29)

All those means and methods which are impermissible according to the *Shari'ah* and the Islamic morality are absolutely wrong. Agreement obtained through pressure, deceit or deception, is no agreement at all. Business transactions and dealings should be clean, immaculate and free of all dishonesty and deception and the parties to a transaction should fulfil their part of the bargain in all honesty and with complete integrity. Short measuring and short weighing is a breach of contract and an overt act of cheating and fraud. It is an act of perfidy and stealing. The Holy Qur'an explicitly enjoins us not to revolt against the natural system of equity and justice and not be guilty of a grave sin by short measuring and short weighing. Allah the Most Exalted says:

*"And the sky He hath uplifted; and He hath set the measure,
That ye exceed not the measure,
But observe the measure strictly,
nor fall short thereof."*

(Qur'an, LV:7-9)

In other words, we are being made conscious of the fact that we live in a balanced universe and consequently we should conform to the norms of justice. Any negation of, or revolt against it, will lead to our ruin and wretchedness.

There is a *Hadīth* from Tirmizī:

“The Holy Prophet said that you have been entrusted with two things (i.e. the measures and the scale). Nations which indulged in giving short weight and cheating were annihilated by Providence and met an ignoble end”.

This *Hadīth* tells us unambiguously and with great emphasis that short measuring and short weighing although it may appear to us a thing of little importance or seemingly insignificant, is in fact that fundamental badness in mutual dealings which leads to universal corruption on earth. That is why believers have been told specifically at a number of places in the Holy Qur’ān to totally abstain from it.

The people of Hadrat Shūaib (peace be upon him) were a nation of traders. Along with other vices they were deeply addicted to this moral depravity. Hadrat Shuaib was commanded by Allah to convey to them Allah’s command in the matter and tell them:

*“Give full measure, and be not of those who
give less (than the due).
And weigh with the true balance.
Wrong not mankind in their goods, and do not evil,
making mischief, in the earth.”*

(Qur’ān, XXVI:181–183)

This verse tells us that goods and Allah’s blessings are lost to those who indulge in this fraudulent practice and give short weight to their customers. Such a trader loses his credibility in the business circles and people begin to hate him. People are led to this sinful practice, generally by their desire to amass as much profit as they can and by the evil intent to grow rich quick. But since this illegal and impermissible way of earning income is strongly disliked and disapproved by Allah, the Most Exalted, and His Holy Prophet, this moral vice becomes a prelude to his moral and financial ruin. *Prima facie*, the lure is very tempting — whatever one saves through short weighing will be sold and will bring increased gain. Materialistically-oriented minds generally wonder how this gainful trading practice can be the cause of serious loss. The Holy Qur’ān enjoins us to always keep the ultimate end before our mind’s eye. We may through cheating make some profit once or twice, but once we lose our commercial credibility, the entire business enterprise will sink into ruination. An allusion to this fact has been made in the *Sūra Beni Isrā’īl*:

*“Fill the measure when ye measure,
and weigh with a right balance; that is
meet, and better in the end.”*

(Qur’ān, XVII:35)

In fact such fraudulent traders are not only committing an unforgivable crime against society but have become oblivious of the Hereafter as well. They are not conscious of their obligations to Allah, the Most Exalted. They do not cheat only their fellow-men but deceive themselves also. Such persons are warned of severe chastisement. The Holy Qur'an has this to say in reference to their moral depravity and its painful retribution:

“Do such (men) not consider that they will be raised again

Unto an awful Day:

The day when (all) mankind stand before the Lord of the Worlds?”

(Qur'an, LXXXIII:4-6)

It is a fact that because of their unimpeachable integrity and their meticulous honesty in business transactions and their extreme care in weighing and measuring the Muslim traders were not only considered good businessmen but their integrity had become proverbial. That is why they were not only honest and trustworthy traders but were good kings, dependable guardians of nations, custodians of peoples, world conquerors and empire-builders. But now due to their contravention of the Qur'anic principles and precepts they do not enjoy their erstwhile international credibility. There is corruption and turbulence everywhere. Our exports do not conform to the international standards of honesty and commercial reliability and this has made us distrusted throughout the world. Even within the country we do not enjoy a good name. It would, indeed, be highly gainful for us if we learn to become God-fearing and adopt, with all honesty, the principles of integrity and business trustworthiness. If we make it our practice to act upon Qur'anic injunctions we will be able to regain our lost credibility and the position of pre-eminence and moral excellence which our ancestors had occupied for many centuries.

And the believers, men and women, are protecting friends one of another; they enjoin the right and forbid the wrong . . .

[Qur'ān, IX:71]

THE TRUE BELIEVER

History stands witness to the fact that only those nations have emerged with honour from and proved their mettle in the battlefield of life that are endowed with true faith and believe, with their heart and soul, in the truth of their faith. Not only are they completely convinced of its validity, in their minds, they also conform to it completely in their deeds and always act accordingly. However grim the state of affairs, whatever the impediments and obstacles obstructing their onward march, they never waver in their convictions. Their actions are invariably and inevitably in total harmony with their beliefs. On occasions incalculable monetary benefits and material gains come up to tempt them, awesome difficulties and apparently insurmountable hardships arise to hold back their steps, but nations blessed with true faith and firm belief in their ideals never budge from the path which they believe to be the right path. They keep moving forward – however difficult their progress may be. Their feet may be sore and blistered, but they never falter and their determination never sags. This shows that whether it is an individual or a people there is only one road to success and well-being and that road is to keep steady in faith, to act rightly, to be firmly attached to truth and to be strong in resolve and patient in demeanour.

The *sūra al-Āsr* is a unique and wonderful revelation. This short *sūra*, comprising only three verses, contains a whole world of meaning. The more you ponder it, the larger is the number of the layers of its sublime import. In fact, a full interpretation and an in-depth understanding of its moral and metaphysical facets would require volumes. But for those who contemplate, this short *sūra*, in the words of Imām Shāfa'ī, is a sure and complete guidance; a beacon for the seeker. This is a *sūra* which all Muslims frequently recite in their obligatory and voluntary prayers. Let us read it together:

*“By the declining day,
Lo! man is in a state of loss,
Save those who believe and do good works,
and exhort one another to truth
exhort one another to endurance.”*

[Qur'ān, CIII:1–3]

Just think how eloquently and definitively Allah, the Great and the Glorious, has in so few words shown to man the path of success and well-being, pre-eminence and felicity.

Nothing great can be achieved in life without faith and conviction. Man does not take a step unless he is sure that what he intends doing is right. A man who has true faith in Allah and his Holy Prophet is a believer (a Momin), as has been stated in the fifteenth verse of *sūra Al-Hujurat*.

“The (true) believers are those only who believe in Allah and His messenger and afterward doubt not. ”

[Qur’an, XLIX:15]

Just ponder! by using the words ‘who believe and then have not doubted’, Allah has reiterated the basic requisite of faith that it should be so complete and so firm that it never develops a chink of doubt. Not even an iota of misgiving can ever enter the heart of the believer. Doubt is such a quagmire that when a man gets stuck up in it, he can make little progress in his spiritual journey. Uncertainty is such a gloom that it does not let man see even the explicit and shining truths and realities of life and despite having normal eyesight he cannot walk without stumbling and faltering. He becomes, inevitably, infirm of step. Next to faith, right action is a basic requisite for success. Right action is, one may say, like the straight path to the right destination. Despite the true knowledge of his destination, a man cannot reach it, if he selects the wrong path. Similarly right faith will be of little avail, if a man’s action is improper and wrong. Hence the Qur’an’s emphatic stress on right action to accompany true beliefs. According to the Holy Qur’an no action of man can qualify for being categorised as ‘right action’ unless it is subordinate to *Īmān* (True Faith). It is because of this basic concept that right action invariably follows true faith in the Qur’anic text. Not once does the Qur’an call an action right if it does not spring from the true faith. Only he is a believer who has *Īmān* and acts righteously.

The *sūra al-Āsr* which was discussed a few paragraphs earlier contains the word *Ṣalehāt*. This one word covers the entire field of righteous deeds and noble acts. Consequently a believer is he, who is profusely endowed with true faith, on the one hand, and is a symbol of righteousness on the other. A true believer who is not a source of comfort and well-being to his fellow beings is an impossibility. The Holy Prophet has stated, explicitly and unequivocally, that a believer is he whose hands and tongue do not transgress against other Muslims and they are completely safe and secure vis-a-vis him.

In another *Hadīth* it is said: By Allah, a man whose neighbour is not secure from his mischief, is not a believer.

In still another *Hadīth*, the Holy Prophet says, “A believer may be anything but he is never a coward”. We all understand what cowardice implies. But in this particular *Hadīth* the word has been used in a very wide sense. Besides the usual meaning of cowardice it also applies to a person who considers a certain thing to be true but does not openly call it so, due to expediency, fear or avarice. In other words, a man who hides the truth or keeps it back is guilty of cowardice. Similarly, a man who declares to be true, under pressure or duress, what is false

is also a coward. How can a believer be a coward? A believer is a man of singular dignity and demeanour. Even an ordinary person falls from the esteem of his fellow beings by an act of cowardice. A believer occupies the highest pedestal of grandeur and glory in this universe. To him all the wealth and the riches of this world are base and he kicks them away as filth. He feels it in his very being that there is a Power in this cosmos which none can see but from which nothing is hidden. Man's actions even if done behind countless veils and curtains are known to Allah, the All-knowing and the Most High. It is this consciousness which keeps him steady on the straight path.

A believer considers himself answerable, in the Hereafter, for all his acts and intentions. Consequently, despite having the power, he does not raise, without enough justification, his hand against another person. Being in a position of power and authority he does not treat others unjustly and is never unfair. He likes for others, what he likes for his own person. He does not oppress or exploit others, and does not side with those who exploit and oppress. He firmly believes in truth and justice and tells others to be steadfast in truth. A true believer endures hardship and faces all difficulties, in the path of righteousness and truth, with fortitude and advises his comrades to do the same. He does good to others and invites those who can, to act benevolently. A believer will not eat, if he finds another person hungry. He will share his provision with the needy. He is a considerate and loving husband, an affectionate father, a well-behaved and obedient son. He pays the wages before taking his due. If a wage-earner, he gives full value in labour, for the wages paid to him. He is not a work-shirker. He is a sign and a proof of Allah in word as well as in deed. He fully realises that this universe is intended to be of service to him, not he to be a slave to it. He considers this world to be worthless — of no value at all. Indeed it is he who is a blessing for it. When he undertakes to do anything, his first concern is to try to find out whether it will be acceptable to Allah, in what lies the good of Muslims, how best he can serve the interest of the nation, and which is the better course for mankind. A true believer is the deputy of Allah, His viceregent on earth. He acquits himself well, in this role, by whatever he does. When he becomes the ruler over people he does not become arrogant like the legendary Pharaoh (who claimed divinity for himself). He works for the general welfare, as a servant of the people. When a subject, he gives first precedence to his subservience to Allah. Whether he be a ruler or a commoner, a sovereign or a subject, a man of wealth or a pauper, a teacher or a pupil, a seller or a buyer, a true believer whatever his state or position, will always remain a true believer — a symbol of faith in and submission to Allah.

It was a 'man of true faith' who first saw Pakistan in a vision. This ideological state owes its existence and establishment to the ceaseless toil of another man of true faith. The same process was witnessed in Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, Algeria, indeed all Muslim countries. They all emerged from backwardness into freedom and progress through the struggle and sacrifices of men of true faith. Now we need such men with equal urgency. Come let us take a pledge that whatever we are, wherever we are, whatever the nature of our work, whatever

the position we hold, we will do our best to make our actions and our endeavours worthy of the greatness that the phrase 'the man of true faith' connotes. And also, that we will use all the force of higher morality and true dedication to build a greater *Ummah* – the envy of the whole world.

May Allah bless this our pledge and this our resolve with success. Amen!

THE CHARACTER OF A BELIEVER

Allah says in the Holy Qur'an:

"Blessed is He in Whose hand is the Sovereignty, and He is Able to do all things – Who hath created life and death that He may try you, which of you is best in conduct..."

[Qur'an, LXVII:1–2]

At another place it is said:

"We try you with evil and with good, for ordeal."

[Qur'an, XXI:35]

The import of both these verses is that this world is a testing place for the believer and this battlefield of life is the place of his trial. Also, from the point of view of his test, good and evil, virtue and vice, good luck and misfortune, anguish and anxiety, good days and hard ones, all have equal importance.

A true believer has firm belief in accountability and in the fact that he is under trial every moment of his life. This belief is the ground of his personality and a manifestation of his distinct character. As against this, he who neither believes in the Omniscience of Allah nor has faith in His Compassion and Grace, his moral and spiritual status is explained thus in the words of Qur'an:

"As for man, whenever his Lord trieth him by honouring him, and is gracious unto him, he saith: My Lord honoureth me. But whenever He trieth him by straitening his means of life, he saith: My Lord despiseth me."

[Qur'an, LXXXIX:15–16]

This attitude and way of thinking in reality, reflects a profit-seeking mentality. This is the mentality of the people whose sole objective in life is to obtain material goods and benefits for this worldly life and whose belief is summed up, so succinctly, by the Qur'an in the following words:

“...There is naught but our life of the world;
we die and we live,
and naught destroyeth us save time . . .”

[Qur'an, XLV:24]

But a believer, as I have already stated, treats his whole life as a time of trial. Every moment of this transitory life is for him a time to prove his moral worth.

In reality the thing to understand — and it would be advantageous for man to understand its full significance — is that Allah, the Gracious and Exalted, has created this universe and all that it contains in a special order and arrangement, for the benefit of man and to meet his diverse needs. And as movement is a sign of human life, in the same manner change is the essence of the universe. What I want to say is that as there are tides in the affairs of men, so is the process of change perpetual in the universe. The basic law of Nature is “continuous flux”.

This inevitable process of change and flux occasionally creates situations that seem unfavourable to certain individuals or groups of people. These situations are sometimes of minor nature and in some cases so serious and far-reaching in their impact that they disrupt the lives, not only of individuals or group of individuals but of entire nations. Besides, sometimes these situations occur due to the shortcomings and mistakes of individuals or of communities and on other occasions due to factors unknown and inexplicable.

This discordance of circumstance affects all persons with equal severity — a fact of life that has been there since the beginning of time and will be there till the last day of man's sojourn on earth. However, these periods of stress and adversity provide the conditions to believers in which they can prove by their actions and reactions that they are in truth the obedient servants of Allah. Those who do not have faith in the mercifulness and compassion of Allah and in His benign wisdom, consider such adverse circumstances as calamitous and catastrophic. They lose heart. But a believer, knowing that such periods of duress are in any case inevitable, does not despair. These ups and downs prove only a stimulus for his mind and his faculties — physical as well as spiritual — enabling him to further perfect his character and personality.

Deep-rooted belief that this world is a place of trial for man has a bearing on his entire thinking and completely changes his perspective of human life and its affairs. But those who believe in the permanence of this life look at its vicissitudes from their particular material angle and to them only those actions and deeds are good which are advantageous or enjoyable for themselves here and now, however bad their consequences and results may be for their fellow-beings or for the society as a whole. A believer sees far ahead and knows that an action which brings material benefits in this world may not be fruitful from the point of view of the life Hereafter. Accordingly one should first objectively assess whether a thing which *prima facie* seems profitable and pleasurable is good and praiseworthy in the eyes of Allah.

There are some acts which, if seen in a narrow perspective, do not seem to be

bad or damaging. Accordingly people do them and consider themselves successful and fortunate. But in reality those acts are harmful and injurious. Their immediate results are apparently very pleasant but their consequences in the long term are extremely frightful and bring complete ruin. A true believer has the grace and the understanding to prefer long term advantages and let go many short-term benefits because his belief in life-after-death and the Day of Judgement widens his intellectual and moral horizons and makes him far-sighted.

Briefly stated, a true believer considers himself answerable before Allah, the Great and Exalted, and his whole personality and character revolves round the axis that each and every thing that he does, nay even the slightest movement he makes, is being scrupulously recorded, for which he will, inexorably, have to pass through the stages of retribution and reward.

A believer is full of the milk of human kindness besides being God-fearing. He is all love and compassion for his fellow-beings. For fellow-believers he is soft as the softest silk but when it is a question of Truth versus Falsehood, he is hard and sharp as steel:

*“In the gathering of friends, he is all softness and love
But in the battle between Good and Evil, he is sharper
than the sharpest of the swords”.*

Because of his profound belief in the Hereafter everything that a believer does is based on honesty and straightforwardness. Even in private, when no human eye can see him, when nobody can check or restrain him, he does not do anything that even remotely contravenes his principles or is below his moral standards. He is a friend to his friends, full of affection and regard for his family, helpful to his neighbours, kind to his companions, a generous patron of the poor, grateful to his benefactors, and respectful and courteous towards his elders. In short, he is a complete man.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A TRUE BELIEVER

Before the advent of Islam it was thought by the ignorant and unlettered people that man, in order to express his relationship or association with Allah, should lead a kind of life that would be different from the normal pattern of human existence. This concept prevails even today among non-Muslims. Those who adhere to this concept make sure to look different from others by their gait, their apparel, their bearing and their visible life-style.

This attitude gives rise to two primary built-in defects. In the first place, persons who devote themselves to religious calling begin to regard themselves superior to others, and, in the second, the common man begins to believe that only a special class of spiritual elite can have communion with the Lord and Creator of the universe.

Islam completely rejects this concept. There is no intermediary in Islam to mediate between Allah and man. There is, in Islam, no distinction between the priestly class and the common believers. All believers have been given the appellation of Momin (the believer). In other religions like Judaism, Christianity, and even Buddhism those religiously inclined have to take holy orders. This inevitably leads to the emergence of a class of religious priests with special privileges. Contrary to it in Islam there is no laity and no clergy.

The only distinction it recognises is between belief and non-belief. Consequently a Muslim's distinct identity is established by those factors that establish the demarcation between the true faith and the lack of it. These factors relate to beliefs and attitudes, conduct and bearing, moral and social values — in short all aspects of life. And a Muslim can at once be recognised due to his adherence to them.

If Islam acknowledges any kind of difference between different groups and cultures, it is based upon the distinction it makes between right and wrong.

The directives contained in the Qur'an and the Traditions of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) provide the basis for the distinct identity of the believer and the nature of an Islamic society. The Qur'an and the *Sunnah* constitute the basis of individual and collective life of Muslims. And this is a basis which is truly unique in every respect.

The distinctive characteristics of Islamic life were at their noblest and highest peak in the lives of the Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) of the Holy Prophet. Allah Himself says in the Qur'an:

*“Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.
And those with him are hard against the*

disbelievers and merciful among themselves. Thou (O Muhammad) seest them bowing and falling prostrate (in worship), seeking bounty from Allah and (His) acceptance. The mark of them is on their foreheads from the traces of prostration."

[Qur'an, XLVIII:29]

Who is unaware of the fact that the Companions of the Holy Prophet never forsook the worldly life? They never lived in mountains as hermits, lost in monastic meditation. They never discarded the world. They never set themselves apart from their fellow beings. They carried out their religious obligations while leading a normal life and participating in activities that are basic to social life. Instead of becoming hermits, they dedicated themselves to living righteously. None of them deserted their wives and children. None of them expressed the wish to adopt the monastic life of renunciation. The Prophet himself has expressly forbidden the practice of monasticism. According to a *Hadīth* of the Prophet: "This anchoretic display of religiosity has no connection with Islam whatsoever".

From what has been said in the Qur'an and conveyed in the *Hadīth* it clearly follows that a characteristic of the true believer that distinguishes him from non-believers is that he does not invent novel ways for demonstrating his faith but keeps on carrying the day-to-day transactions and worldly affairs, in compliance with Allah's injunctions contained in the Qur'an, as enacted in the *Sunnah* of the Prophet, and the lives of the Companions. In fact, faith is an inner state that expresses itself through all normal aspects of human life. A true Muslim lives normally but his every deed, every movement is completely in accord with the commands of Allah and is consequently truly righteous.

Faith, as we know, is composed of verbal acceptance (*iqrār bi'l-lisān*) and attestation by the heart (*tasdiq bi'l-qalb*). Both bring about a change in man's thought and deed. Once a person has attested to his Islamic faith both orally and by heart, this change is expressed in all that he says or does (*'amal bi'l-jawārih*).

It should consequently be obvious that one's distinct qualities as a true believer should find expression in his deeds.

It is through one's acts and deeds that one should be recognisable as a believer. But the misfortune is that our individual as well as collective acts, our bearing and behaviour, our total life-style has no imprint of our true faith. Our present-day decline stems from the fact that we have forfeited our religious identity. The characteristic features of the true believer which have been enumerated and described in the Qur'an are nowhere visible in our lives, either collective or individual. Our acts, our ideas, and our mode of living are in no way different from those of the people we term 'the non-believers'. Our lives contain no distinctive feature of nobility or righteousness that would enable other people to testify that we are the people of the true faith. Individually as well as collectively we are devoid of the attributes of the true believer. This

applies to every sphere of life, be it the field of politics or law or education and training; and this is a real tragedy.

If we wish to assert ourselves as the people of the true faith and to have our due impact on the world, we shall have to accept it and to live in conformity with the injunctions of Allah in our private persons and in our capacity as members of a society. We cannot otherwise expect recognition in this world or hope for reward in the Hereafter.

Once the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) was asked by his Companions what he considered to be the best social set up. The Prophet replied: "The best society is that in which there are many who can give charity and none to take it".

In this remarkably significant utterance lies the solution of all the human problems the world has ever faced. One implication of the Holy Prophet's observation is that every *Momin* ought to strive for the establishment of the society envisaged by the Prophet.

A *Momin* should be unselfish, altruistic, and self-effacing; he should be righteous in word and deed; he should be high-minded and noble. He should be trustworthy and reliable and filled with love for his Creator and Allah's last Messenger. Honesty and integrity are among his distinctive characteristics. Never should he be remiss in thanking Allah for what he has. He should be content rather than ride roughshod over the rights of others. Generosity and self-sacrifice should be the built-in parts of his personality. He should never hurt or harm anyone without just cause; always be sympathetic and merciful. He should be a humanitarian and a guardian of the dignity of man.

What is goodness and what is sin? The Holy Prophet has said:

"That which gives tranquillity to the heart is goodness; and that which causes distress to the heart is sin, even though people may tend to justify the commission of such a sin".

Every Muslim who embodies the noble characteristics of Islam is a *Momin* and it is the duty of a *Momin* to strive for the establishment of a society in which there are many givers but no takers. It is the basic duty of every Muslim to do his utmost to discharge this responsibility.

THE INTUITIVE INSIGHT OF A MOMIN

Īmān is not mere belief but knowledge and wisdom, intelligence and insight along with it. That is why *Īmān* (true belief) is often compared to light and enlightenment. At many places Allah, the Most Exalted, has termed his Book 'Pure Light' and the believers have been given the good tidings:

"...He bringeth them out of darkness into light..."

[Qur'ān, II:257]

Unbelief is ignorance and darkness because it is against the natural disposition of man. Those fortunate people who, following the path of nature, get blessed with *Īmān* are also the recipients of intellect and comprehension, awareness and intelligence, true understanding of the inner self, the knowledge of the essence of things and a sharpening of the inner perception of good and evil. The Holy Qur'an invites man to look within and without and through this analytical perception lifts him to that high state of knowledge and understanding which is called intuitive insight. The priceless fruit of true belief is given by Allah, the Most Exalted, to them who continuously ponder His Book and earnestly look for the hidden secrets of the universe and things that exist in front of them and beyond their sense perception, day and night, utilising to the full, the force of their belief, guided by the teachings of the Holy Prophet and Allah's revealed Word. This sensory insight is not bound by extrinsic signs and phenomena. It is that fine perception, that intuitive discernment which a man achieves through the edifying beneficence of firm faith.

This fine perception is called intuitive insight in many *Ahādīth*. And to denote this special attribute, the Holy Qur'an has used the words 'those who read' for sensible believers:

"Lo! therein verily are portents for those who read the signs."

[Qur'ān, XV:75]

All exegetes are agreed that 'such as read' here means people with insight. There have been many interpretations of insight. For instance, the jurists use it in judicial parlance to denote a judge's mental propensity to know what is right, which he uses at the time of giving his judgement after examining all evidence and other aspects of a case. Because to comprehend the hidden reality of a case in the light of external evidence, the judge needs insight. According to

Allāma Ibn Qayyam this faculty of the judge is also insight.

But Traditionists and our Sufīs (mystics) use it for the special quality with which Allah, the Most Exalted, lights up the hearts of saints and by which they come to know the affairs of men by the use of this supernatural faculty and the correct and precise use of their judgement and wisdom.

Anyhow whatever interpretation be given to the word 'insight', the fact is that it relates to the knowledge of the esoteric states and many incidents narrated about the supernatural powers of the Companions of the Holy Prophet, are in reality manifestations of the insight of the believers. A reference to it is made in a *Hadīth* which says that a true believer sees with 'the pure light of Allah'.

No doubt the knowledge of common people is confined to extrinsic matters, conditions and circumstances. But because of his confirmed and true faith, his deep attachment to Allah, the resources of knowledge a true believer has are far more than and superior to those of the average man. He has the knowledge of facts through means that are not related to sense perception. One important means among these is nearness to Allah, which a true believer achieves through the perfection of his belief, the perfection of his fear of Allah and his righteousness. This intuitive insight is the reward and the fruit of this very nearness.

The incident that is about to be narrated is included in all authentic collections of *Ahadīth*: once a man who had committed the sin of looking with a lustful eye came into the presence of Hadrat Uthman. The factual position was that Hadrat Uthmān was not present when the sin was committed. But when the man came in and Hadrat Uthmān saw him, he said to the crowd which was present around him: "Some of you come to me who have fornication flowing out of their eyes. I mean, there are many who come to me having committed fornication with their eyes. I strongly wish to apply the law to them". The guilty person in that crowd felt ashamed within himself and kept quiet at that time. But on another occasion he came and asked Hadrat Uthmān: "Commander of the Faithful! Is the process of revelation continuing even after the Holy Prophet?" Hadrat Uthmān replied, "No. But the insight mentioned by the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) is there". The man was satisfied and silently went away. This apocalypse of Hadrat Uthmān has been termed "intuitive insight" by all interpreters of *Hadīth*. Hadrat Uthmān himself called it insight. All the doctors of the esoteric have referred to those verses of the Holy Qur'an in which the infidels have been compared to animals in connection with the understanding of the reality of the intuitive insight. They say that if in spite of their having the physical appearance of men — having human hands, feet and other limbs — the Qur'an calls them animals, their inner or esoteric form must have been of the specified animals. But only those people can see this invisible reality who see with the 'pure light of Allah' and are among the 'such as read'.

When a person looks deep into the verses of the Holy Qur'an and ponders their meanings and implications, his faith in Allah, in His Holy Prophet and the Book sent down by Allah keeps on becoming stronger and more firm. The realisation of the glory of Allah's greatness leads him to truer submission, feeling of helplessness and humility and in this state of complete surrender he becomes

a supplicant before Allah the Most Exalted and begs for knowledge and grace, and bowing his head in total obeisance he says:

“...My Lord! Increase me in knowledge.”

[Qur’ān, XX:114]

When Allah, the Omniscient, accedes to his supplication, He opens to him the door of the mysteries of the universe. Then a true believer attains to that insight which is far superior to empirical knowledge. It is the revelation of the reality of things. No doubt *Īmān* (true belief) and fear of Allah is the fountain-head from which flow the rivulets of knowledge and discernment, insight and cognisance, intuitive insight and revelation of facts.

The nearness Allah’s servants attain to Him because of the perfection of their true belief and submission, is referred to in these words in this revealed *Hadīth*:

“Allah becomes the seeing eye and the hearing ears of His Servants”. Materialists should surely fear this intuitive insight of the men of faith and righteousness!

If the manifestations of this intuitive insight are not seen amongst present-day Muslims, the reason is the weakness of their faith and their being bereft of the attributes of complete submission and surrender to Allah. Whether it is the empirical disciplines or the arts, the field of research or free enquiry, the process of analytical investigation or the domain of new esoteric and exoteric possibilities, we can achieve eminence and greatness provided our faith in Allah and His Holy Prophet is firm and dynamic and we show no lack of care whatever in keeping our lives subordinate to the divine injunctions. We can achieve the impossible only if we protect the purity of our inner beings and keep our heart and soul away from all things that are bad and vile.

The reason of our decline lies in our weak faith and moral deterioration. We can be blessed with the same wisdom and intuitive insight which opened the doors of knowledge and intellectual distinction, scientific research and artistic creativity to the Muslims of the early period of Islamic history. Because, as has been explained above, all their accomplishments were the fruit of their true belief and the blessing of moral excellence.

Today our state of affairs is not very edifying. We do want to achieve progress and prosperity, we do want to move forward in the field of industry, crafts, agriculture, applied and theoretical sciences, indeed in all branches of knowledge but are ignorant of the fact that they flow from the fountain-head of true belief. The glory of our collective existence lies in a perfect faith and a soul-illuminating morality. This is what gave to our spiritual ancestors sight as well as insight – an intuitive insight which completely dazzled the world.

Let us equip ourselves with the perfect faith and moral virtue and having purified our collective psyche pray to Allah to bestow upon us the priceless blessing of that intuitive insight which is the state of super-intellect. It has been said about our forbears who were endowed with this special grace that they saw with ‘the pure light of Allah’.

THE NATIONAL CHARACTER

An individual establishes his personal identity through his appearance, his disposition, his clothes, his manners, his peculiar habits and his behaviour. So do nations. A nation becomes a distinct entity through its special characteristics, collective attributes and attitudes. Every nation has its separate identity which distinguishes it from other nations.

A nation has its peculiar dispositions in the same manner as an individual has his personal temperament and character. Undoubtedly a host of factors combine to determine the special disposition of a nation. The territory that is the habitat of a nation is an important factor. Its climate, its topography, its modes of production, its natural resources and its crops – these determine what the people will eat and what type of dress they will wear. Nations having access to the open sea are more likely to be maritime and those living in mountainous regions will be hardy. Similarly their food habits will also depend upon the ecology of the region. But the most important single factor that will establish a nation's identity is its collective ethos. When, therefore, we reflect upon a nation, we shall do so keeping before us the ethos of its people. All nations pass through periods of rise and decline, the basis of which is their collective character.

Whether a race is earmarked for ascendancy or decadence depends largely upon the character of its people. A dynamic, patriotic and altruistic nation is generally expected to achieve eminence and glory. A listless, lackadaisical and insensitive nation, on the other hand, is bound to become a victim of its own inertia and end up in ignominy.

This is a universal law and an established fact. And history has taught us this lesson time and again. This inexorable law, let us state without hesitation, makes no exception. History never lies nor does it ever forgive. Nations that let go high character, moral values and high standards of thought and deed, soon fall victims to decline, while those that prove their mettle through adherence to higher values and pursue their objectives with tenacity and vigour achieve a position of pre-eminence in the comity of nations. Nations that, in the ages gone by, displayed weakness in their character and did not have any high objectives before them could not keep pace with the march of time and petered out. On the other hand, peoples who were inspired by lofty ideals and were prepared to work hard and showed grit and resolve, in the face of adversity, left their indelible imprint on time. It is the law of Allah to give to nations what they have earned through ceaseless endeavour or inertia and lack of moral strength. The return of righteous work is honour and glory and the retribution

of evil deeds is shame and deprivation. To Allah all nations and all races are equal. No nation has ascendancy *per se* over another. If there is any criterion for ascendancy, it is true faith and righteousness. Allah Himself has said:

"We destroyed the generations before you when they did wrong; and their messengers (from Allah) came unto them with clear proofs (of His Sovereignty) but they would not believe. Thus do We reward the guilty folk."

[Qur'ān, X:13]

In the same *suro* the next verse says:

"Then We appointed you viceroys in the earth after them, that We might see how ye behave."

[Qur'ān, X:14]

Exegetes of the Qur'ān say that annihilation here does not necessarily mean that a particular race will be totally destroyed. What is meant in reality is that the nation that forgets the lesson of history will be consigned to oblivion, with its culture and achievements made ineffective. It will be merged into other nations, having lost its identity and having forfeited its right to exist on its own.

It is the Law of Allah the Almighty as the second verse quoted above has revealed that once a race or a nation falls below the minimum level of moral rectitude Allah brings forward another nation to take its place. In the first verse the Qur'ān ascribes the fall of nations to their addiction to injustice and cruelty — which shows that the worst crime that nations can commit is callousness which means injustice.

We usually observe that the people who become habitually callous and cruel expose themselves to and acquire a host of other vile traits. They become arbitrary in their manner, begin to accept falsehood as truth, and treat truth as falsehood. Injustice becomes the norm of their collective life. They become incapable of practising moderation, showing mercy, compassion or forgiveness. Their life is bereft of peace and tranquillity. They lose the capacity to help others, to cooperate with or be loyal to their fellow-beings. Callous people are never prepared to listen to reason or to accept fair and just demands. They stand deprived of the characteristics of patience and tolerance. They want their unfair demands accepted and regard all that they think or feel to be true and lose the faculty to distinguish between right and wrong. Such distinctions become meaningless to them. Human considerations, such as mercy, humaneness, commiseration and compromise are words that have no meaning for the heartless. Pride and arrogance become the most conspicuous traits of their character. Self-denial, humility, and generosity which make man the noble creature that he is, have no place in their lives. They are poles apart from mercy and compassion. Cruelty in speech and wishing other people ill becomes their second

nature. Soft and comforting talk which gives solace to people in distress is foreign to them. Every excess is permissible in their view so long as it meets their ends. Their own person appears to them as the source and fountain-head of all good and excellence.

Those who are addicted to cruelty and injustice find little that is of worth in other people. They are not prepared to stand anything against their whim or disposition however wholesome or healthy it may be. Every word they utter is authentic and true and whatever others say is of no account whatsoever. They can stand no criticism however constructive or beneficial it may be.

As opposed to this, the nations that do not practise cruelty, do not transgress the Laws of Allah and show that they possess a high moral fibre, do not trip and fall into the mire of iniquity and moral debasement. They defend virtue and truth and follow the path of justice and moderation. Self-sacrifice, sympathy, compassion, and giving of succour to the needy are an integral part of their collective conduct and forgiveness and understanding of human frailty are high among the values that constitute their ethos. Living nations with high ideals are forever engaged in righteous and ennobling endeavour. They are inured to virtue; and they follow the path of ceaseless work, simple living and selflessness.

The members of such a society, race or nation are like brothers unto one another. And in their war against untruth and injustice, they are hard as steel. They always speak the truth, and they are willing to hear the truth howsoever bitter or contrary to their own perspective it may be. They accord equal importance to rights and obligations. They subscribe to the concepts of human equality and brotherhood. They do not hurt others by word or deed; and they regard service of fellow-beings as the pinnacle of greatness. They tend to think of themselves as servants not masters. A brief purview of the history of different nations rather the whole of mankind will bring into focus the evil results of cruelty and immorality. If we do not have the leisure to study history, let us have a look at the contemporary scene. We should be able to see for ourselves the consequences of injustice and cruelty as well as the noble results of righteous deeds.

Muslims of the world!

I would like to proffer humble advice. We should have a close look at our position and see ourselves in the light of the Qur'anic teachings and Allah's commandments. Our path for emancipation from foreign domination has been arduous. We have had to make untold sacrifices. But we marched on, determined that we should at last have a place of dignity in the contemporary world and an opportunity to work for the glory of Allah's true faith. Our religion teaches us to establish justice and truth in our society and to show to the world that Allah has given to mankind a system which is eternally viable and the basic principles of which are human equality, social justice, love of fellow-beings, of moral excellence in individual life and social organisation, humility, self-sacrifice, truth and righteousness.

Let us make a resolve that we will reshape the world of Islam and establish a social order which will ensure the dignity of man and serve as an example worthy of emulation for the whole of mankind.

STRONG AND ACTIVE INTELLECT

It is our daily experience and a matter of common knowledge that only those people succeed in life and achieve their ultimate objectives who are solid and mature in their thoughts and views, are mentally organised and work with singleness of purpose. Their minds do not behave as vagrants. Action is subordinate to thought; without thought action is impossible. Sometimes a thoughtful action is so spontaneous, sudden and prompt that one is held guilty of having acted irresponsibly and being thoughtless and impulsive. But the fact of the matter is that an action which we consider absolutely thoughtless is, in fact, the product of mature thought. It happens quite often that a man keeps on nurturing an idea in his mind at different times and under different sets of circumstances and suddenly, on a given occasion, he acts under the impetus of this dormant thought, without volition or without even being conscious of it. Now if the result of the particular action is not very desirable or it goes wrong, the person who did it will be accused of rashness and lack of responsibility. But if the result is positive and beneficial the action is applauded by one and all and the person concerned is acclaimed as a very wise, resourceful and brilliant person.

Actually thought is a continuous and complex process. It has many different factors and operative causes in the background. But it is a mental and psychical activity and because it remains invisible and unseen, its importance remains generally unfelt. Occasionally this long process gets entangled in the different and diverse strings of contrary ideas and perceptions. As a result, verbal, written or practical expression of what is to be communicated becomes complicated or disjointed. The human mind wants to understand what it sees around it in the external world. It also wants to know the link and the relationship a thing has with other things. Man looks enquiringly at his own person. He ponders the existence of other beings, the basis of man's relationship with the physical universe and the nature of his relationship with Allah, the Creator of this universe. He also wants to determine his place and position in his family, in his social environment and ultimately in the universe. His mind often goes astray when he thinks about these eternal objects of human enquiry. Sometimes he makes gods out of stone. The seasonal changes and changing physical phenomena overwhelm his mind and at times he thinks that the moon and the sun are divinities and he should worship them. The greatest kindness of Islam to man is that it releases him from the grip of mental confusion and bewilderment and instead enlightens his mind with a radiant concept. It tells man that this earth with its rivers and mountains, the rain-bearing clouds, the moon, the sun, air, water, beasts and birds, plants and trees, in short all that is there in this physical

universe was created by Allah. And whatever is, exists at His will and pleasure. Man too was created by Allah "Who fashioned him in the fairest mould". Allah is man's Lord and the One and the only One he should worship. It is said in the Holy Qur'an:

*"Unto Him belongeth
all that is in the heavens
and all that is in the earth, and
He is the Sublime, the Tremendous."*

[Qur'an, XLII:4]

The Holy Qur'an has fixed, in very explicit terms, the relationship between Allah the Most Exalted, man and the universe. Man is, in this world, the servant, the deputy and the viceregent of Allah and for his each and every act he is dependent on Allah's help and sanction. In view of this basic fact he should keep his true position in mind and make it the sheet-anchor of his thought and deed. The keener his appreciation of his true station in the divine scheme of things and the greater his conformity to it in actual practice, the better will be his life and he will be blessed with contentment, mental peace, steadfastness, singlemindedness and equanimity. His mind will never get distracted and his actions will never be confused or purposeless.

Those who give up the chaste word (the *kalima*) and own some foul and corrupt word and abandon belief in the One-ness of Allah, lose their composure and their thought becomes denuded of stability and firmness. They can never find the way to right thought and right action – mature, positive and firm thinking being a boon and a blessing of Allah. This boon is given only to those who are true believers – whose beliefs, ideas and thoughts are strong and stable. Mental confusion and distraction is an excruciating torment which is invariably the lot of those who turn away from the path of truth and righteousness. This mental distraction is synonymous with going astray. Intellectual firmness and stability is a characteristic and a sign of *Imān* (true faith). Stable thought and confident action is a felicity which is given only to the true believers. Allah the Most Exalted says:

*"Allah confirmeth those who believe
by a firm saying in the life of the world
and in the Hereafter, and Allah sendeth
wrong-doers astray. And Allah doth
what He will."*

[Qur'an, XIV:27]

Those who give up uncertainty and vacillation and become firm and steadfast in their submission to Allah and His Holy Prophet, their lives become immune to trepidation and their mind to distraction and confused thinking. Their moral behaviour, affairs of worldly life, relationships, beliefs, ideas and concepts all get rooted in firm and lasting foundations. They become recipients of those

blessings and munificences which are the reward of steadfastly going forward on a well-illuminated path. We observe that even in ordinary life a man who is suffering from mental distraction and confusion is weak and infirm in his beliefs. As a result he treads one path after another, can never achieve his purpose and his destination goes on receding farther and farther away from him. He can never achieve peace of mind nor can he ever have the satisfaction of success and fulfilment. Every effort he makes will fail, all his endeavours will go waste and every thing that he does will be purposeless.

It is the same with the life of nations. The strength of faith, force of conviction and constancy of thought lifts them to the highest heavens of well-being and the good life. Mental concentration, firmness of purpose and positive endeavour leads them to the pinnacle of material, intellectual and spiritual achievement. One such instance emerged in Muslim history, only a few brief decades ago.

In 1940 the Muslims of South Asia decided that for their collective welfare, for the survival of their culture and for their spiritual rehabilitation they should work for and get a sovereign homeland. The national leaders who took this historic decision were great men richly endowed with singleness of purpose, and firm and stable intellect. The people gave them total support and became one in thought and action. Consequently a task that was, in fact, formidable became easy. The lofty ideal was soon achieved. A free and sovereign Pakistan, an ideological Islamic state, was established in much less than a decade.

Now what the Muslim world faces is the question of its survival, the solidarity, the greatness and the glory of the Muslim *Ummah*, and the fulfilment of the religious duty to 'bid honour and forbid dishonour'. This great task will require firmness and balance in our thought and deed, so that we bring out collective strength of will and physical energy to bear on our sacred task and with Allah's grace take our *Ummah* to the highest peak of grandeur and glory. Only thus will we be able to achieve a distinguished and pre-eminent place for ourselves in the comity of nations — a place of honour and glory.

DETERMINATION AND STEADFASTNESS

Faith and belief bring about revolutionary changes in the ethos and the life-style of peoples and the conduct and character of individuals. Determination and steadfastness are amongst their more important end products. The Holy Qur'an has mentioned these noble moral attributes time and again and the sacred life of the Holy Prophet exemplifies them in their highest and purest form. A man who organises his life and devotes all his faculties, including his physical and mental resources, to achieving the high objectives he has set before himself, works with total dedication and faces all impediments and obstacles with fortitude and unwavering determination, is bound to succeed in the end.

Individuals and nations who are firm in their resolve and untiring in their endeavour are destined to achieve a position of honour and pre-eminence in the world. But these attributes to be fruitful must be backed by noble ideals, high objectives and honest intentions. If a man sets before himself a worthy objective, high resolution and constancy will automatically follow. And the conviction that his intentions are good and his purpose commendable will give him the strength and fortitude to overcome all obstacles that stand in his way.

Our history stands witness to the fact that the believers despite their lack of material resources always faced their adversaries with dauntless determination and their only weapons were their infinite power of conviction, their unshakeable faith in Allah and their invincible resolve and determination. The ultimate aim of the Muslims, throughout their history, has been to win the approbation of Allah, their Lord and Master. And this lofty aim was the eternal fountain-head of their unparalleled determination and steadfastness.

What do we mean by steadfastness? It is the ability to devote oneself completely to the achievement of one's objectives despite all impediments and awesome hardships that confront one at every step and the motivation to continue the endeavour, transcending all fear and all worldly attachments. When we accept in all sincerity that sovereignty vests in Allah the Most Exalted that He is our Lord and to Him only we submit and that His Revealed Word, the Qur'an, is our complete code of life, then it becomes imperative for us, as true Muslims, to act according to our belief and the dictates of the Book with full resolve and constancy whatever the odds, whatever the cost.

Steadfastness implies that we should, under all circumstances, adhere to our beliefs and ideals, follow the tenets of our religion and reject all concepts and points of view that are contrary to it.

Our collective self and our distinct identity is determined by our adherence to the Law of Allah and we should consider ourselves answerable only to Him

Whom we acknowledge the Lord of the Day of Judgement and the Creator of the universe. If our short-sightedness and deviation from our true path, our intellectual lassitude and decadence, our unholy zest for luxuries makes it inevitable for us to bow our heads before fellow human beings and we find ourselves deprived of the freedom to lead our lives according to the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* it becomes our moral, nay, our Islamic duty to fight those who have turned us into moral and intellectual parasites and slaves and force them to acknowledge the universality of our faith and our right of political, intellectual and spiritual self-determination.

We will have to bring about a revolution in our lives if we decide to confront those who have taken away our natural rights and to force them to restore to us our lost dignity and honour. We will have to change our present life-style of prodigality and adopt simplicity and contentment. We will have to renounce all luxury and lavishness. This is a prerequisite of dedication and high-mindedness. Life and property have little value as compared to the faith and the ultimate objective. Faith requires that when the need arises the faithful should sacrifice their all in the way of Allah and in normal circumstances to live a life of honour. The Holy Qur'ān has enjoined thus, in this regard:

*"...And when thou art resolved,
then put thy trust in Allah. Lo! Allah loveth
those who put their trust (in Him)."*

(Qur'ān, III:159)

When the true believers face severe hardship, they are enjoined by the Holy Qur'ān to be firm in their faith and steadfast in their endeavour:

*"...But if ye persevere and ward off (evil), then
that is of the steadfast heart of things."*

(Qur'ān, III:186)

The Holy Prophet has given this everlasting verdict in the matter that the person who truly accepts the concept of the one-ness of Allah and life Hereafter, must necessarily become firm in his resolve and constant in his pursuits. He will not accept any coercion from any quarter. A true Muslim is a man of high resolution and great courage. He is the master of his own being, a man who is free, whom no other human being can exploit, pressurise or enslave. He is the slave only of Allah, his Lord and Creator. As far as other powers are concerned, he is an eternal rebel. In this lies his steadfastness and determination. He depends only on the succour of Allah. Allah has promised thus:

*"Faint not nor grieve, for ye will
overcome them if ye are (indeed) believers."*

(Qur'ān, III:139)

A true believer undergoes all pain and adversity with courage and patience. He can face penury and starvation, impoverishment and deprivation with resignation. He will never compromise his freedom of thought and action and will not stoop down to the position where he has to go out with a beggar's bowl.

We should not forget that it was their firm faith that gave the Muslims their strength and the motivation in the early and middle decades of the present century to fight Western imperialism and compel it to get out of the Muslim countries of Afro-Asia. We now have more than forty sovereign Muslim states and throughout the world of Islam there is a strong movement of Islamic renaissance. All Muslims are one in their desire to mould their new social order in accordance with the injunctions of their true faith. We Muslims from Indonesia in the Far East to Mauritania in the extreme west of Africa have made untold sacrifices of life and property – hundreds of thousands of Muslims lost their lives and all their belongings. They accepted the loss of their homes and deprivation for the sake of political and spiritual emancipation. We Muslims have added many chapters to the annals of human glory in the 20th century. All these sovereign Muslim states are a symbol of the determination and steadfastness of the Muslim *Ummah*. Now is the time to move forward and establish the Law of Allah in our respective homelands. What is this Law? The Holy Qur'an defines it so beautifully:

"...He will enjoin on them that which is right and forbid them that which is wrong. He will make lawful for them all good things and prohibit for them only the foul; and he will relieve them of their burden and the fetters that they used to wear..."

(Qur'an, VII:157)

The Holy Qur'an was made to descend in order to liberate mankind from all types of subservience and slavery and to make them the servants only of Allah. It wants man to be free, and to have initiative and resolution. He should be strong enough to assert himself and to refuse to accept the supremacy of any man-made system of life that is contrary to the will of Allah. How could it ever be envisaged that people having firm faith and belief in the Holy Qur'an could accept the rule of mortals like themselves and in the process forget their covenant with Allah, the Most Exalted. Undaunted by the vast resources available to imperialism, the world of Islam strove for the acceptance of their inalienable right of self-determination and sovereignty. Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, the Gulf states, Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, the Muslims nations of central and western Africa, indeed all these Muslim nations, staked their all to wrest freedom from strong, unwilling hands. We all won our freedom. But the holy endeavour is not over yet. We must march on, firmly and steadfastly on the road of our ideological fulfilment. It is not the time to relax or be self-complacent. Much hard work lies ahead of us. We will, in the next few years, not decades, have to show still greater determination and steadfastness. The time for agitation is over. Now is the time for

planning and reorganisation. We have to make revolutionary changes in our outmoded social systems. We have to totally eradicate all vestiges of colonialism and restructure our various societies on the life-style given to us by Allah, through His last Book and the *Sunnah* of his last Messenger.

Come, my brethren in Islam! Let us make a pledge that we will all become the embodiment of the Islamic virtues of determination and steadfastness and work with missionary zeal for the glory of Islam. May Allah bless our resolve in His infinite Grace. Amen!

THE FREEDOM OF THOUGHT

Personal liberty is a man's most valuable possession and freedom is his greatest asset. There can be no greater happiness for individuals as well as peoples and nations than achieving freedom after throwing off the yoke of alien domination. Real freedom consists in being completely rid of political, religious, economic, social and cultural subjugation, when a nation's separate identity and sovereignty is universally recognised. Allah be praised that the world of Islam has succeeded in its struggle for political emancipation and we have now more than forty sovereign Muslim states which are playing an increasingly active role in the comity of nations.

What is freedom and what is the meaning of independence? These questions need to be carefully considered. Do we have the right to call a people a slave people when we see it under the yoke of another people? This question cannot be correctly answered unless we know what slavery really implies. The true purport of freedom can be determined only when we fully comprehend the reality of slavery.

No constraint or restriction can deprive either individuals or nations of the ability to move forward. As long as they have not lost self-awareness and have the power to think, no fetters, no chains can turn them into slaves. We may take away their freedom of expression. Even then, we cannot deprive them of their love of freedom and sense of independence.

The light of freedom gets extinguished only when a people stops thinking for itself and its collective mind and its ethos comes under the sway of foreign influence. Real slavery is that state of intellectual emptiness when a people can no longer think for itself: when it has lost its power of self-awareness and self-comprehension.

What I want to make clear is that being devoid of intellect and wisdom is a much more painful and tragic state of deprivation than political and economic subjugation. This to my mind is what constitutes real slavery.

When we are not allowed to think on our own, we should accept the tragic fact that we have lost our freedom and have become slaves. I would like here to explain what I mean by thinking on one's own. Does freedom of thought mean that the so-called independent thinking which is another name for intellectual anarchy and mental chaos? No, certainly not. What I mean to specify when I use the phrase 'our collective modes of thinking' is the eternal light and the guidance that is available to us in the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*. If you ponder the

matter from this stand-point you will agree with me that a Muslim becomes a slave when he is restrained from making the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* the basis of his thought and vision. This will in fact imply that his mind is under constraint. He has been deprived of his beacon light and left in darkness, because it is only the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* which are the basis, the sheet-anchor of his life.

Unfortunately, this is what actually happened to us. We were deprived of our distinct and separate modes of thought. We were made to forego our active intellect and our heritage of wisdom. We were free to think on the line that was laid before us, but not in the manner that had been specified for us by the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*. In other words, we enjoyed intellectual freedom, but the Qur'ānic thought was denied to us.

The Muslims, by the Grace of Allah, broke these fetters of intellectual subjugation and declared to the forces of evil that they could not tolerate mental anarchy. We made it known to one and all that our thinking is subservient to a particular system of values and is pledged to chart its course in the light of a particular guidance. It cannot change its loyalties. Nor is it available for sale. It is not free in that context. You may say it is controlled. But the limits within which it works are not imposed upon it by any human agency, but by the guidance that was sent down by Allah the Most Exalted in the Holy Qur'ān. We Muslims are subservient to the principles and the injunctions contained in this divine guidance. And on the basis of its eternal and everlasting teachings it is our belief, in fact our fundamental belief, that sovereignty belongs to Allah, who is our absolute Lord and Master. All men are His creatures and slaves. Only He has the authority to make the Law. No creature has the right to enslave or subjugate others. Man can bow his head, in submission, only before Allah the Almighty. He is enjoined to adhere and conform to every precept that has been given to him in the form of the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*. The Qur'ān was bestowed upon mankind to enforce Allah's system of Laws in the world and to rid it of the dominion of others. The Qur'ān safeguards human thinking from anarchy, ensures that loyalties are not split up in different compartments and man is not forced to the indignity of bowing his head in obeisance before man. If we consider the reality of independence in the context of the teachings of the Holy Qur'ān we will realise that it lay in a constraint that we imposed upon ourselves in the name of Allah and His last Prophet, that we Muslims would enforce the Qur'ānic life-style and the Islamic system in our part of the world and would establish that social justice in our midst which Islam has given to mankind. We placed the restriction on our thought, never to transgress the limits of propriety fixed by the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*. It is this restriction or constraint which establishes our eternal entity as the people of the true faith.

Let us, today, do a bit of self-reckoning. Let us examine our thinking, our attitudes, our intellect and our ethos. Have we been able to truly conform to the constraint we imposed on ourselves as Muslims? Is our thinking completely in accord with the teachings of the Qur'ān? Can we call our collective ethos, a truly Islamic ethos? If our thinking even today is not truly Islamic, if we still waver in basing our individual and collective life on the Islamic system, if our ethos is

not unshackled enough to be made, unhesitatingly, subservient to the guidance of Islam, do we have the moral and intellectual right to claim to be free?

The term used by the Qur'ān, to elucidate the meaning of independence is 'to be established in the land'. Now ponder the verse in full and see what the Qur'ān says about the obligations and the role of nations that have been blessed with the bounty of being 'established in the land':

*"Those who, if We give them power
in the land, establish worship and pay the poor-due
and enjoin kindness and forbid iniquity..."*

[Qur'ān, XXII:41]

If our life as an *Ummah* has been cast in this mould, if we have accepted the dominion of Allah to the extent that we will bow before none else, if the love of wealth and the worldly goods has been erased from our hearts, if a system has been enforced which will enable people to know the difference between good and evil and honour and dishonour, then indeed we have fulfilled our covenant and have completely fulfilled the obligations implied in the Islamic constraint on our collective self. Then, indeed, we have established our national identity and separate entity. We have, in that case, achieved the capability of fully availing ourselves of the boon of independence. But if we still neglect our obligations, still suffer from moral and religious shortcomings and defects, this would imply that neither we are free nor is our thinking blessed with true independence — as a matter of fact we are still under the curse of slavery and the proof of this tragic situation is that the torch of our truly Muslim ethos is still not alight. Come, let us make a pledge that we will enliven our thinking and our attitudes. May Allah make us fully comprehend the true meaning of independence and give us the strength and the ability to discharge our collective obligations. Amen!

HEALTH AND HUMAN LIFE

*And if ye would count the bounty of Allah
ye cannot reckon it . . .*

[Qur'ān, XIV:34]

LIFE MEANS HEALTH

(Health is one of the most precious gifts of Allah to man)

About the Qur'an, Allah has said:

'Now hath Our messenger come unto you, expounding unto you much of that which ye used to hide in the Scripture, and forgiving much. Now hath come unto you Light from Allah and a plain Scripture, Whereby Allah guideth him who seeketh His good pleasure unto paths of peace. He bringeth them out of darkness unto light by His decree, and guideth them unto a straight path.'

[Qur'an, V:15-16]

Everyone knows that the Qur'an is a system of values and a complete code of life for Muslims. It contains laws and governing principles for all departments of individual and collective life. Our topic here is health care and hygiene in the series of dissertations regarding the Qur'an, health and human life, and we have to see what guidance the Qur'an has provided us in this regard. When we examine it from this standpoint, it becomes clear to us that the Qur'an surpasses all the divine Books in so far as guidance in respect of the preservation of health is concerned. It has made the observance of its instructions concerning health obligatory upon its followers and I can say with assurance that in this matter as in all others the Qur'an enjoys a special place of distinction among the different celestial and divine Books. If we ever try to consider the principles formulated in the Qur'an (the principles themselves are at first sight very simple – but in reality they are perfect) and the blessings and rewards promised to those that follow them, it becomes evident that had the Qur'an not been sent down to the Holy Prophet, we would not have the knowledge about health and disease that we have today. The principles of diet, health and hygiene in the Qur'an were more comprehensive and more specific than that obtained before.

When we say that Islam has formulated and circumscribed the principles of public health, and has laid down principles of public health with remarkable clarity, this also implies that it has given certain commandments apropos of personal cleanliness, etiquette governing meals, and an injunction concerning the hours of sleep and keeping awake. Indeed, all these are essential requisites of safeguarding the health of the body and the mind. There is not a single principle of health that has not been described by the Qur'an and the *Hadith* (which is the

exegesis of the Qur'ān).

And, when the Qur'ān was made the criterion of distinguishing the right from the wrong and the Book of guidance for the believers, on whom the definition of the words, *Muslim* and *Momin*, applied in full, these believers, conformed to its divine principles with a fervour that had never been seen before in the history of mankind or surpassed since. They spread the Message of Islam to the known world and made every nook and corner of it luminous with the radiance of faith. These believers had neither gold and silver nor other worldly goods — they did not have weapons as lethal as those possessed by their enemies. They did not have awesome grandeur of the Persian Khosroes or the Byzantinian Emperors. In fact, the believers had nothing except the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* of the Holy Prophet. But this was more than all the worldly wherewithal and pomp. For when had the world ever witnessed such a Book or a life that exemplified all its teachings? It was, in short, a very healthy, sound, and vigorous *Ummah* that had its birth in Madina. It was not only physically healthy, its actions too, were morally healthy. This *Ummah* was subservient to the Qur'ānic edicts and precepts and the life it led had its precedents in the *Sunnah* of the Holy Prophet. No wonder that an *Ummah* possessing these two unique characteristics was able to assert its overwhelming superiority over the rest of the world in less than a quarter of a century after the death of the Holy Prophet. An objective historian is not surprised at all at the fact that this *Ummah* brought mankind out of the abysmal darkness of ignorance into the world of moral and spiritual sunshine and imparted to it the secret of good physical health.

Until the advent of Islam even the Europeans had no idea of the principles of hygiene beyond bathing, personal cleanliness, paring of the nails and keeping themselves free from defilement. It was under these circumstances that the Muslims brought the Message of Allah and showed to the world that:

"...Allah loveth the purifiers."

[Qur'ān, IX:108]

Who can doubt the great significance and the wisdom of making personal purification and cleanliness a part of the faith. It is now self-evident to every reasonable person that it is impossible to keep in good health without cleanliness, personal hygiene and physical purity. How can one who does not bathe, does not put on clean clothes, and does not attach necessary importance to fresh air and potable water remain healthy? It should be obvious why the Qur'ān has given such importance to cleanliness and purification. And not only at one place but on several occasions the Holy Qur'ān has stressed the utmost importance of cleanliness:

"...Truly Allah loveth those who turn unto Him, and loveth those who have a care for cleanness."

[Qur'ān, II:222]

At another place in the Holy Book the Holy Prophet has been admonished:

*"Thy raiment purify,
Pollution shun!"*

[Qur'an, LXXIV:4]

There is no language that stands comparison with Arabic in expressiveness and expanse of vocabulary. Alteration in one letter or two will make a world of difference in the meaning and import of a word, making it either universal or particular. The addition of *alif* (a) and *lām* (l) to an indeterminate noun makes it universal, and it then covers every type, every state and every quantity. Thus in *al-rujza fahjur*, by the addition of *alif* and *lam* on *rujz*, Allah makes the word pollution universal in its application that is, applies it to all kinds of pollution – spiritual, physical, individual, collective, concerning raiments and vestments, food, environment, inclusive of residents, streets i.e. total urban environment. Thus all kinds of pollution is to be shunned. Let us ponder this verse once more:

"Thy robes purify".

What a vast store-house of implications this verse is, and how noble an advice it is to remain pure! In another verse Allah has said:

*"...We send down purifying water
from the sky."*

[Qur'an, XXV:48]

The Qur'an is a celestial Book and the Word of Allah, the message that Allah conveyed to man in His own Words through His last Messenger. It is therefore the Book that guides every Muslim throughout his life – from his cradle to his grave. To study it, to chant it, and to ponder its chapters and verses is the duty of every Muslim. It commands Muslims to ensure personal purity and cleanliness, and it commands that only those that are pure and clean may touch it.

I have just said that the Qur'an has given us the principles that govern health. It is obvious that it is not feasible here to touch upon all the aspects of the matter under consideration. I have, therefore, described only the basic precept enunciated by the Qur'an that cleanliness is the cardinal principle of health – both individual and public.

I would now say a few words about health. Health is one of the most precious of Allah's gifts. Guarding and caring for one's own health is equivalent to offering thanksgiving to Allah. The more man thanks his Creator for the gifts He freely bestows upon man the more he benefits from them, and is adjudged more deserving of them. Non-recognition is a form of ingratitude. Not to look after health and to do things which lead to the loss of health is tantamount to intentionally inviting sickness. The body and the soul are very

closely linked. If the body is not in good health or in perfect equilibrium, then the mind also shall not function properly, and it would become doubly difficult to discharge responsibilities that entail exercise of mental faculties. If the body is not pure, the soul shall also become impure. Without health man is not in full control of his faculties whether corporeal or spiritual. Life is health and, therefore, the preservation of health is important both for individual and collective purposes. Healthy individuals would make a healthy nation. In view of the importance of public health, it is essential that it be given the importance it deserves. Nations that are in poor health can neither put in hard work — so essential for overall reconstruction — nor defend themselves. It is the healthy nations that acquit themselves well in face of the different trials and, concentrating their energies and initiative, can keep pace with the world in general in the sphere of reconstruction and progress.

WORSHIP AND HUMAN HEALTH

When we talk of the Holy Qur'ān, we talk of the divine code, indeed, the Law which guides us to the natural life-system that is Islam. Allah says:

*“So set thy purpose (O Muhammad) for religion as a man
by nature upright –
the nature (framed) of Allah, in which He hath created man.
There is no altering (the laws of) Allah's creation.
That is the right religion...”*

[Qur'ān, XXX:30]

The Qur'ān claims that Nature and *Dīn* are not two contrary things. *Dīn* is rather the spontaneous need of Nature, on which Allah created man and in which there can be no alteration.

When we ponder the life of the Holy Prophet in the light of the Qur'ān, it is undoubtedly found to be the embodiment of its teachings, a guide for man – the infallible guide, eternally unsurpassable in every sense. Once Hadrat Āysha the Truthful was requested to throw light on the Holy Prophet's morality, and she answered through a meaningful question: “Have not you read the Qur'ān”?

The modes of worship enjoined by Islam have the purity and the sublimity of Nature. No mode of Islamic worship runs counter to Nature. All Islamic worship is closely related to psychic and physical health. Cleanliness is a fundamental concept of Islam for the purpose of worship and even otherwise. One cannot pray unless one is absolutely clean. Cleanliness of body and soul is the basis for worship and it is directly related to human health. As a matter of fact, Islam is the first religion, the first *Dīn* (life-system) to treat health and cleanliness as interdependent, that is, to signify that cleanliness is essential for health. There is, thus, a direct relationship between worship and human health.

Ibn Malīk states that the Holy Prophet observed that it is a basic requisite of the faith to keep the body clean. Towards this end, it is incumbent upon a Muslim to take a bath and to wash his head and the rest of the body regularly. Let us here have a look at the philosophy of performing ablution which is an essential prerequisite of every prayer. Without ablution prayer cannot be offered. In ablution you wash your hands, gargle, cleanse your nostrils with water, wash your hands upto the elbow, wipe your head and finally wash your feet upto ankles. This is more than half-a-bath five times a day. Just think how much clean you will be as a consequence and how light you will feel. Prayers are not intended as a physical exercise but it may be well to remember that *Isha* (the

post-dinner) prayer is the longest of the five prayers and justifiably so. Throughout history, science and learning have recommended a post-dinner stroll. The physical exercises suggested in the latest American health literature on cardiovascular diseases are exactly similar to our prayers to the extent that even the turning of the neck is prescribed.

If a person has faith in Allah and his *Imān* in Providence is complete, and his prayers are suffused with that absolute faith, the peace of mind and the tranquillity of spirit that he derives thereby is itself a guarantee of good health. In other words, obedience to the injunctions of Allah is conducive to good health, and the peace of mind inevitably secured thus illuminates the highways of well-being. Islam is a natural *Dīn* and it treats every such act as worship that aims at winning the pleasure of Allah. It is surely an act of worship if you help your brethren in distress or quietly come to their succour in any hardship. Thus virtue brings joy to you and a sense of gratification to your conscience.

It is a medical truism that joy and gratification are themselves a source of health. We should be left in no doubt that if peace of mind is wanting in a person, he will also lack health. This is the last word in this regard and this aspect of Nature is beyond any change whatsoever. The Holy Qur'ān affirms:

"Surely the good deeds will take away the evil deeds".

Virtue alone is the basis of sound health of the human soul as well as the human body. Hence the need for us to strive to do what is good. The best man is he who is useful to his fellow-beings.

GOOD HEALTH IS A BLESSING

Allah the Most Exalted has bestowed countless blessings upon man. Some he duly recognises and accepts as divine gifts. But there are others, and they are so many and so universal, that man does not even feel their presence. Air and water are undoubtedly great boons; indeed, life depends on them for its very existence — but they are so common, that they go unacknowledged. Of course when they become scarce, or man is deprived of them, he suddenly realises how important they are for him. Health also is one such blessing and man normally does not bother to give it the value or the care that is its due. As long as his limbs and organs function normally and he does not feel any pain he remains unaware even of the existence of health as a physical state — he is not conscious that it is there. He becomes conscious of it only when he is not in sound health, i.e. develops some ailment and starts feeling physical discomfort or pain. A sick person realises the value and the importance of health to the extent of the severity of his illness. The more ill he is the more valuable good health suddenly becomes for him. A minor or ordinary ailment creates a transitory consciousness of the value of physical well-being. But when a person suffers from a serious and dangerous disease, health becomes for him a thing of supreme value.

Sound health and physical fitness are amongst the great boons of Allah. Proper health-care is equivalent to expressing gratitude to Allah for His bestowing this blessing on us. The more value a person puts on a thing the greater is his right to it and normally he is not deprived of it. Not attaching proper value to a thing is a form of ingratitude. One who does not value his health invites illness.

The body and the mind are very closely inter-related. If the body is not in good health, the mind will not be able to function as it normally does and the performance of spiritual chores will become difficult. If the body is not neat and clean, the soul will also remain deprived of purity. Without good health man becomes incapable of all normal chores or functions whether physical or spiritual.

Life means good health. Proper health-care is beneficial for the person and is also important for the nation. A nation is the sum-total of individuals. If the health of the individuals is good they will make a healthy nation. Proper health-care, thus, becomes a matter of national importance. Only healthy nations can succeed in the struggle for life by deploying their collective physical and mental energies in a concerted endeavour for national progress and prosperity. Weak and sickly nations can neither put in hard and sustained labour for their collective welfare nor can they defend their national sovereignty and territorial

integrity against external aggression.

Muslims are supposed to function collectively as Allah's deputy on earth. To be able to successfully discharge the supreme responsibility devolving on this high office needs both creative talent and physical prowess. Islam is a revolutionary religion. It has brought about a revolution in every department of life. At a period in human history when people were wedded to animism, practised idolatry, worshipped a host of natural phenomena as gods, Islam came out with its message of the One-ness of Allah. At that time, taking regular bath for ensuring physical cleanliness, paring of nails, and other measures necessary for body hygiene and purification were considered crimes by many religions. Islam strictly enjoined cleanliness and physical purity. Only he can touch the Holy Qur'an who is physically pure and clean. It is universally known that the Holy Qur'an contains the divine code and system of life for the Muslim *Ummah*. Reading it, reciting it, benefiting from its *suras* and verses is compulsory and obligatory for every Muslim. This duty cannot be performed unless we are physically pure, clean and in a state of ablution. It is said in the Qur'an that Allah the Almighty likes those who are pure and clean.

One unique feature of Islam is that according to it every righteous and noble act is an act of prayer and submission to Allah. To remove brambles, waste and movable impediments from the road, to remove filth and dirt from the habitats, keeping away from dirt and rubbish oneself, to want others to do the same and to render what help one can in the matter – all these are righteous and virtuous deeds. So, they are held important and included in the domain of prayer and submission to Allah. Islam encourages all good deeds and considers all efforts intended to help improve personal and social life praiseworthy and commendable acts. The continuance of life and its well-being are dependent on keeping in good health individually as well as collectively.

One primary and vitally important principle of health-care is cleanliness and the importance Islam attaches to cleanliness and physical purity is too well known to be dilated upon. Islam has enunciated its injunctions about cleanliness in great detail and has given us set rules about purification and cleanliness for all stages in life – from birth to death – and given detailed and explicit instructions in this regard. Every Muslim child knows that ablution is necessary for the five daily congregational prayers. All those limbs and parts of the body that are exposed to the atmosphere and are affected by dust and other impurities have to be washed prior to each prayer – five times a day – in addition, the eyes, the nose, the ears and the throat are to be thoroughly cleansed with water in such a way that all dust and other impurities are washed away. The Holy Prophet says that the ablution should be full and thorough, not just sprinkling some water on your limbs. What is intended, is thorough purification.

Allah the Almighty does not address the common Muslim in matters of cleanliness and personal hygiene. He addresses the Holy Prophet himself: In the *sūra Muddassir*, He says:

“Thy raiment purify”.

Allah says this about Himself:

*"Truly Allah loveth
those who turn unto Him,
and loveth those who have a care
for cleanness."*

[Qur'an, II:222]

There is a very explicit and unequivocal injunction about touching the Holy Qur'an:

"Which none toucheth save the purified,"

[Qur'an, LVI:79]

The guidance the Holy Qur'an provides in respect of the purity of thought is also illuminating for us. The extract from *sūra Muddassir* quoted above i.e., 'Thy raiment purify' is immediately followed by this injunction 'and pollution shun'. And this includes, besides external and physical defilement, inner impurity and corruption of thought. Morality occupies a very high and primary position in the Islamic teachings. Allah the Most Exalted has these words of praise in the Holy Qur'an for the Holy Prophet:

"And lo! thou art of a tremendous nature."

[Qur'an, LXVIII:4]

Three Sayings of the Holy Prophet on the subject of morality need deep thought:

- i) *He amongst you is the noblest whose morals are good.*
- ii) *On the day of judgement the thing that will carry most weight will be moral excellence.*
- iii) *Among all believers he has the perfect faith who is morally superior to all others.*

The minds and hearts of those persons who are morally righteous are always chaste and clean, free of all impurity, malice, rancour, and corrupt feelings cannot breed in them.

After this detailed discussion of the subject, everyone can easily come to the conclusion that to be able to continue in good health, physical cleanliness, body hygiene and a clean and pure environment are basic prerequisites. In addition, maintenance of sound health and physical fitness requires that man should keep his heart pure and his thoughts free of all defiling and corrupting elements and ceaselessly endeavour to reach the ultimate heights of moral excellence. The higher implications of purity can be achieved only thus.

Health-care is not only confined to personal health of the individual but includes in its scope, the society, national economy, national culture, collective

pattern of life, living conditions and the social system. All these factors have a bearing on individual and national health.

To be able to fully enjoy good health and to profit from it, it is necessary to be in close contact with Nature, to be moderate in everything, to be spiritually at peace and to be actively involved in social welfare activities and to share the fortunes of fellow-beings – their moments of joy as well as distress. A man can get a lot of spiritual satisfaction and repose if, besides thinking and working for his own betterment, he devotes a part of his time, talent and physical resources to the service of his fellow-beings and to their welfare.

Lack of spiritual repose and satisfaction has led the present-day man to diverse psychic ailments and mental disorders. He has also become morally weak. A firm faith in Allah, the Most Exalted, adherence to the teachings of his Holy Prophet and belief in the life Hereafter can enable man to achieve the highest standard of mental and physical health.

ISLAM AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

We all know and accept the fact that what is most vitally important for man and deserves his utmost attention is the purpose of his life. If we look deep into human history and acquire full understanding of human nature it will become clear to us that there is always an ultimate purpose, an objective which serves as the stimulus, or the motivating force behind all human endeavour and toil, indeed, all the historic and epoch-making achievements of man. Man has always gone all out, even staked his life, to safeguard his objectives and to remove all obstacles – real and potential – even those that were only remotely possible and impediments that lay ahead, in every age, in every period of history. I will not here talk about the rights or wrongs of the objectives different peoples and nations set before themselves at different stages of history. But I think it necessary to say explicitly and unequivocally at this point that the ultimate goal of life we, as Muslims and true believers, set before us is based on the revealed Word of the Creator of the universe, the Absolute Lord of Time and Space – the Word that was revealed by Him to His last Messenger, Hadrat Muhammad (peace be upon him) and which is available to us today in the form of the Holy Qur'an, the last Book of Allah – the Book which draws the line between good and evil, truth and falsehood, virtue and vice.

The matter to which I want to draw your attention is that the structure of this universe has been so devised that every human individual so long as he dwells in this habitat, must inevitably and necessarily engage himself, full time, and make total effort not only to safeguard the ultimate objectives of his life but also to ensure his own survival and well-being. Allah the Most Exalted says in the Holy Qur'an:

"We verily have created man in an atmosphere:"

[Qur'an, XC:4]

Persons and people who understood the true meaning of this vital and basic point knew that in hard toil and struggle lay their security and accepted the fact that ceaseless endeavour was absolutely necessary for their survival, peace of mind and contentment as also for the achievement of their objectives. This understanding was translated into devoting their lives to constant toil and continuous endeavour.

The history of our *Ummah*, indeed, its every significant event, every important episode bears testimony to the fact that as long as the awareness of this radiant fact kept the Muslim psyche alight, this *Ummah* steadily moved forward

on the road of progress. We do know and fully realise that the journey on the road of development and progress, honour and pre-eminence is a very hard and toilsome journey, and requires special and specific wherewithal. Some components of this wherewithal pertain to beliefs and other intangibles, while others are material and physical. If we utilise the resources of our intellect and vision and look deeply into the matter, we will become aware of a reality of basic importance, that in the sphere of resources, the physical element, which in fact means physical health, enjoys special importance. The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) has said, "A physically strong and vigorous believer is better than a weak and sickly believer". This meaningful Saying draws our attention to the real importance of physical fitness and good health.

Islam teaches us that whatever a man has, is bestowed upon him by Allah. As such all that He has given to man is in the nature of a trust. Further, it tells us that safe keeping of what is entrusted to man, is an essential requisite of belief and faith. Health is one such boon and to protect it, to keep it in good shape and to do all that is possible to shield it from all real and potential dangers is one of the basic and primary responsibilities of a true believer.

Health is endangered if and when a man revolts against Nature, decides to lead his life in obvious disregard of the principles that govern human disposition, as well as the laws of Nature. Nature requires that man should rest during the night after a full day's hard and strenuous work and get good sleep. But modern man is a rebel against Nature. He keeps awake during the night and ignores the biological need of sound sleep. We see all around a sorry spectacle — man's revolt against his own disposition has put him in distress and his mind and heart have become a problem for him.

Just have a look around. Man has stopped taking exercise. And ignoring the need to move about, he has welcomed inertia. His sedentary habits have put his entire biological organism to sleep. As a result his faculties of thought and action are almost paralysed. Fresh air and clean potable water have become meaningless words for him.

Every Muslim knows and it is his belief and faith that health is a boon of Allah and health-care is a requisite of his *Īmān*. He is also fully aware of the fact that health is not a purchasable commodity. A man cannot go to the market, pay its price and bring it home with him. It is an absolute truism that there is no power on earth which can sell or buy good health. Sound health is a primary need of man and a gift from Allah. One can protect it only by remaining within the bounds of Nature.

Health and cleanliness are very closely inter-related. Islam in its teaching has laid great stress on cleanliness. Indeed, cleanliness according to it is one half of faith. The Holy Prophet has said:

"Cleanliness and purity of the body is a component of Īmān".

Maintenance of sound health is not possible if one lives in filth. A polluted and filthy atmosphere is inimical to human health. Health will deteriorate if the

body and its limbs and organs are not kept clean. If one's dealings are not clean they too will damage one's health and weaken one's thinking power.

To put it in a nutshell: Islam considers physical health a basic requisite of life and declares that proper health care is an integral component of faith. Physical fitness and mental health are interdependent. Sound health and purity of the body and mind are essential requirements for advance and progress, motivation and action, civilization and culture, individual and collective well-being, honesty and justice, politics and integrity.

Islam invites all people to do a little serious thinking in the matter. It advises every member of the Muslim *Ummah*, indeed every single Muslim to look after his health, and, equipped with good physical and mental health, begin to actively serve the cause of Islam. Islam makes the establishment realise that it should harness all possible material and spiritual resources to provide an adequate health service to the whole nation and, having achieved that important objective, devote itself, with balance and integrity, to ensuring a better future for the *Ummah* and a period of glory and pre-eminence for Islam.

ISLAM AND HEALTH

(Islam has presented the basic principles governing health in a systematic and cohesive way)

Physical health is a basic factor in human life. In case a man's health has deteriorated or he is deprived of it, he cannot do anything properly or well. In effect, he will not at all be able to fulfil his responsibilities. Health has always been so vital a component of man's being that from the beginning of his sojourn on earth, it has played a leading role in his progress and evolution. He has striven throughout the ages to improve his health and these efforts are an integral part of his total history. Man's attitude towards health has not undergone any change whatsoever from the beginning till to-date.

Nations that have reached the peak of glory, in the annals of history, have all had high standards of collective health as a built-in component. This fact cannot be ignored insofar as their histories are concerned. They have regarded and held health to be highly desirable. Sound health and good physique i.e., robustness, uprightness, big bones and strong muscles always go together. And when decline and decadence set in, there was always corresponding deterioration in the general health standards. Loss of political freedom and decline in health accompany each other as darkness comes with night. In fact declining health standards invariably result in overall decline of peoples. Loss of freedom and ensuing slavery bring ignorance in their wake and ignorance deprives a people of its capacity to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong. And a slave becomes not only careless and oblivious with regard to the problems of his country and the nation but forgets his own status and station as a human being.

The conclusion I have drawn from my study and evaluation of the history of mankind is that Islam is the first religion — as well as the first systematic view of life — that has declared health and cleanliness to be essentially interdependent and has given viable instructions to regulate their mutual relationship. The Qur'an and the *Hadith* have provided guidance and suggested practical measures about health as have no parallel in other religions. It cannot be denied that other religions also postulate rules and regulations about health. But the position of such rules was always secondary and formed a part of miscellaneous matters. Islam went much further and made cleanliness and health indivisible and thus gave a unique concept to man and showed him a path of physical and mental well-being which opened the gateway of success and triumph for the Muslim, who then taught these principles to the rest of mankind. Just as the spiritual and moral teachings of Islam are absolutely unique, so are its concepts of health and cleanliness. In the very beginning of Islam, when the process of

revelation had just been initiated and Allah had just started giving commands to the Holy Prophet, He enjoined him thus:

*“Thy raiment purify,
Pollution shun!”*

[Qur’ān, LXXIV:4–5]

The Qur’ān and the *Hadīth* lay down the standards of health which the Muslims are required to adhere to and then specify the principles of cleanliness and purification which are necessary for achieving those standards. These directions are very clear about the time for sleeping and the time for waking up, for the drinking of water and for taking meals, for brushing the teeth (e.g., during the *wuḍu* or ablution), for bathing and performance of *wuḍu*, for exercise and rest — in fact, all aspects of personal life have been catered for and in a most perfect manner.

Take sleep for instance. Sleep up to a specific period of time is essential for man. It relieves him of weariness, provides rest and ease to the body, and replenishes the energy lost during the day. The Qur’ān has on several occasions called sleep as the repose of the body and the mind and the disregard of this natural disposition is not approved. The Holy Prophet who used to keep awake for the greater part of night was specifically directed:

*“O thou wrapped up in thy raiment!
Keep vigil the night, long, save a little —
A half thereof, or abate a little thereof
Or add (a little) thereto and chant the Qur’an in measure,
For We shall charge thee with a word of weight.
Lo! the vigil of the night is (a time) when impression is more
keen and speech more certain.
Lo! thou hast by day a chain of business.”*

[Qur’ān, LXXIII:1–7]

The Holy Prophet’s custom was to sleep for a short while after the mid-day meals. In the eighth chapter of the *sūra al-Nūr* where the servants and sensible adolescents are enjoined to take prior permission before entering the house, occasions where prior permission is imperative, have been specifically mentioned: 1) after the night prayers, 2) before the morning prayers, and 3) in the afternoon when a man takes off his formal clothes for the noon-day siesta.

This proves that one should have a little rest in the early afternoon. Today when man has conquered the moon and is bracing for the conquest of the solar system and the space beyond, we hear eminent men of medicine say exactly the things about sleep and repose which the Qur’ān and Islam had told us fourteen hundred years ago. These instructions are of a nature that their violation is fraught with immediate and mortal danger to man. On the one hand, there is

the instruction that we must not forego sleep and on the other, that we should wake up quite early in the morning. Islam has ordained that we should sleep immediately after the *'Isha* (night) prayers and we must not keep awake till late at night without reason, nor waste our time in useless pursuits. Then there is the clear instruction that we must wake up when the first morning light appears on the eastern horizon, since this is the time of the morning prayer, which is obligatory.

The world today is in the grip of ill-health and disease. The reasons are not far to seek for this unhappy state of affairs. The major cause is that man has ceased to conform to the fundamental principles of sleep and work. What the Qur'an and the *Hadith* have given, is a universal principle. We must ponder how far we have strayed from the right path and whither we are going.

Good health and a sound body are among the most precious of Allah's gifts to man. Preserving health is like offering our thanks to Him for His Beneficence. What man cherishes he deserves, and he does not lose it. Disregard of a boon is akin to ingratitude. To disregard the value of life is like throwing it away and inviting sickness. Let us value our health. Let us also do our best to preserve it. Let us observe the principles of hygiene and keep in mind the *Hadith* of the Holy Prophet:

"Cleanliness is one-half of faith".

PHYSICAL HEALTH AND PURITY OF THOUGHT

(It is essential that man should keep his heart pure to ensure good health)

Good health and physical fitness depend upon many factors, e.g., following the principles of hygiene; that is, breathing fresh air and having proper ventilation in one's place of residence, allowing the first rays of the sun to fall on one's body, eating balanced and nutritious diet at regular hours, drinking fresh clean water, going to sleep after the *Isha* prayers, getting up before the call for the morning prayer, keeping the body clean, etc. Active adherence to these principles ensures good health, is an effective prophylactic and enables a person to avoid unnecessary and occasionally injurious medication. Undoubtedly health depends upon man's practice of hygiene.

Besides these hygienic principles, there is another factor that is very closely connected with the maintenance of health: and that is self-purification, cleanliness, and ablution. When we consider the teachings of the Holy Prophet, we discover a remarkable fact. He accorded the greatest importance to the relationship between hygiene, cleanliness, and self-purification, and made it obligatory for the Muslims to practise hygiene, cleanliness, and ablution. The *Ahādith* of the Holy Prophet have placed utmost emphasis upon cleanliness and health-care. In fact, it is necessary to understand that when cleanliness, purity, and ablution are mentioned, Islam aims at both the corporeal as well as mental and spiritual purity! We find that the Qur'ān and the *Hadith* both attach supreme importance to bodily purity and chastity of the mind and the intellect. Just as it is impossible to expect a man, swaying under a load of dirt to remain healthy, so it is impossible for a man overwhelmed and dominated by evil thoughts to retain his spiritual health. A man who does not take regular bath, does not keep his teeth and nose clean, does not pare his nails, and does not comb his hair and beard cannot stay healthy. Similarly, if a man does not keep his environment clean, his health is bound to be adversely affected, since foulness and pollution have an injurious effect on man's organism. The same thing is true of evil and foul thoughts. A man who is afire with jealousy, is a prey to malice, is engaged in conspiring against his friends or relatives or is thinking of doing some harmful deed is certainly on the path of evil. Such ignoble emotions not only affect his mental and spiritual health but also his physical well-being. Such evil thoughts are inevitably degrading and reduce a man to the level of rogue beasts. Man is ordained to be the viceregent of Allah on earth, but he who comes down from his station cannot retain even his human entity.

When therefore we talk of health and cleanliness, we obviously imply that the norms of both spiritual and corporeal cleanliness should be adhered to.

Only then would a man's mental and intellectual health remain intact.
The Holy Prophet has said:

"A filthy body and dishevelled and dusty hair are repugnant to Allah".

About Himself Allah says:

"...Truly Allah loveth those who turn unto Him, and loveth those who have a care for cleanness."

[Qur'an, II:222]

It has been very clearly commanded about the Qur'an:

"Which none toucheth save the purified,"

[Qur'an, LVI:79]

The Qur'anic point of view about cleanliness is all too clear and nothing militates against its full comprehension. Alongside this, the Holy Prophet's teachings have laid full emphasis on it.

Islam enjoins the believer to eschew bodily impurity as well as mental impiety and corruption. Morality is man's greatest strength. According to Islam good moral conduct is the basic requisite for a Muslim. In the Qur'an Allah has praised the Holy Prophet in the following words:

"And lo! thou art of a tremendous nature."

[Qur'an, LXVIII:4]

Through this verse Allah tells the believers that morality is the fountain-head of human nobility. Those who are well-behaved and noble have pure minds, devoid of envy and malice. Nor can any vileness take roots there.

Our discussion thus leads us to the conclusion that for the maintenance of health it is essential to be clean in the body. At the same time to be able to stay in good health it is necessary that man should keep his heart and mind pure and continue to improve his moral character. The real implication of purification (*taharah*) can be fulfilled only thus. Without cleanliness and purity it is not possible for a man to be in good health and without sound health it is impossible to lead a fruitful and happy life. To sum up: we should observe *taharah* and stay healthy. Health is a gift from Allah and He wants us to look after it properly and care for it.

HEALTH-CARE

(Man cannot fight against nature and live in peace)

The Holy Prophet of Allah has said this about health and leisure:

"He who amongst you begins his day in good physical and mental health and has his day's provision has, in fact, all the munificences of Allah bestowed upon him".

This *Hadith* of the Holy Prophet establishes the fact that, if a man enjoys sound health and leisure and has his daily bread, he has been given all that he needs, and this state of being is the greatest gift Allah bestows upon man. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has defined health as follows:

"Health is a state of COMPLETE physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the ABSENCE of disease or infirmity" (from the Preamble to the WHO Constitution).

This definition of health is completely in line with what the Holy Prophet has said, for the word 'leisure' inevitably implies mental well-being; and social security and welfare cannot be conceived without adequate food. The definition of health now arrived at by the health specialists of the whole world after prolonged deliberations was given to us for the first time in human history by the Holy Prophet. And not only this. The Holy Prophet through his definition of health taught us a moral-lesson — because he has included contentment in his connotation. He also made it clear to us that good health is the greatest boon of Allah. It is, in fact, impossible to define health without believing that it is a blessing of Allah and His most priceless gift to man.

If we do not keep good health, what work can we do satisfactorily? If we suffer from a headache or an upset stomach can we proceed about our work with the required vigour and concentration. If our head and heart are not functioning properly, what will be our output for the day. If we suffer from anaemia, would it be possible for us to till our land or drive the tractor? If our physical strength is at a low ebb, can we fully participate in the effort required for national reconstruction. The truth of the matter is that no sustained work is possible without sound health.

In view of this fact man should give the first priority to the observance of the commands of Allah with regard to health and should make it a point to follow the dictates of Nature. Man cannot keep in good health and stay secure

if he violates the principles of Nature. If we keep awake at night when it is time to sleep and sleep during the day, which is the time to be awake, we shall have violated the natural law. The Qur'an has given its verdict in the matter thus:

*“And have appointed your sleep for repose,
And have appointed the night as a cloak,
And have appointed the day for livelihood.”*

[Qur'an, LXXVIII: 9-11]

This was a divine injunction to mankind to have proper rest and have good sleep for a few hours in the night. Unless a man keeps normal hours and has reposeful sleep he cannot carry on his functions which devolve on him as Allah's viceregent on earth. The laws of Nature are very simple and clear. By adhering to them one guards one's health – to retire to bed after the night prayer to get up before the morning prayer and to eat simple food in a quantity which is just enough to meet the needs of the body, to breathe fresh air, to allow the rays of the sun to fall on the body, to do light exercise in the morning – all these are the principles of nature that have to be followed and which keep man in good health. The Qur'an has ordained:

*“...be not cast by
your own hands to ruin...”*

[Qur'an, II:195]

This verse of the Qur'an has been used in a very broad sense. But in the context of health its implication can only be that we should not endanger our lives by defying the law of Nature.

There are many among us who do not know the value of fresh air. Those who live in villages get fresh air without having to try for it and in these days of economic disequilibrium this fresh air keeps them healthy. But in the cities – and specially in the big cities, where the factory chimneys and exhaust of vehicles keep on belching smoke without intermission, people are deprived of fresh air. Atmospheric pollution has become a real danger to health in general. Governments all over the world are considering ways and means of solving this problem but such things take time. In the meanwhile it devolves upon the average citizen to see to it that the air is kept clean. If one's car is belching out smoke, it should be got repaired immediately as the smoke thrown out by vehicles pollutes the air, which, in turn, affects the human blood stream and enervates man. Likewise, it is the responsibility of us all to keep the dust settled. It is incumbent upon every citizen to get up quite early in the morning and to inhale fresh air deeply, so that the lungs remain clear, the blood gets purified, and sound health is ensured, with the blessings of Allah. Air that has smoke, dust or smog is very injurious for health.

About food, the Holy Prophet has said that it should be clean, fresh, and simple. He has enjoined that the table should have an abundance of vegetables

and one should stop eating before being satiated. This is a comprehensive command. If we follow it strictly we can save ourselves from many diseases. Excessive eating is, after all, injurious. Similarly too much variety in courses is not conducive to good health. The fact of the matter is that most ailments result from overeating — and more people die from overeating than from starvation. [This is meant for those who are affluent]. But in our part of the world a vast majority of people are victims of poverty and starvation. They have poor health because they continue to suffer from undernourishment — this causes countless maladies. Mass undernourishment is one of the worst consequences of the evil of economic disparity. This problem can be and must be solved by them who fall ill because of overeating.

This is the month of Ramadan. I should like to state a thing or two in this context. When you fast, you should have the conviction that this form of worship is not only profitable from the medical point of view but has much spiritual value. You should ensure that in Ramadan your diet should not exceed your normal diet and the *iftar* and *sahar* should not become spectacles of feasting. If this happens, you will not only be deprived of the medical benefits of fasting but also of the spiritual benefits emanating from it. You should keep in view the fact that Ramadan is synonymous with frugality in diet. It should not be taken to mean an opportunity to get accustomed to sumptuous meals and filling your stomach with food it cannot digest. A necessary part of fasting is that you should contemplate the state of the millions who follow the commands of Allah and the Holy Prophet and go without substantial food irrespective of *sahar* and *iftar*.

HEALTH AND PHYSICAL FITNESS

Health is one of the most precious blessings of Allah. Observance of health-care is equivalent to thanking Allah for His endless bounty. The more man values a thing, the more deserving does he become of it and is normally not deprived of it. Lack of care is a kind of ingratitude. Unconcern for health and negligence towards it is tantamount to inviting sickness.

There is a very close relationship between the body, the mind and the soul. If the body is not healthy, the mind too will not be able to function normally and it will be hard for a person to fulfil his spiritual obligations. An unclean and unsound body cannot be expected to be the seat of a healthy spirit. Without good health man has little control over his actions, be they mundane or spiritual.

Life depends on health. Health-care is important both at the individual as well as the collective level. The sum-total of individuals makes a nation, and, if the health of individuals is sound, that of the nation will also be good and wholesome. It is consequently necessary to ensure the health of the people to keep up the required pace of national progress. Nations having better overall health emerge triumphant in the struggle for existence, since they can expend greater energy in constructive tasks. Nations that have relatively poorer health standards naturally lag behind healthier nations in material and spiritual advance and have to suffer the consequences of their backwardness.

Muslims are the "middle nation" of Allah on earth. In order to discharge the august and high responsibilities that devolve upon them they must ensure that each one of their individuals possesses robust constitution and good health. Islam is a revolutionary religion, and it has generated an upturn in every walk of life. In the days when people were overawed by natural phenomena and when animists used to worship many gods, Islam taught the lesson of the unity of the godhead. In the age when acts associated with physical purification were forbidden in some religions, Islam enjoined the highest standard of personal cleanliness and body hygiene. Only those who are pure can touch the Holy Qur'an. Everyone knows that the Qur'an is the code of life for Muslims and its precepts determine their ethical conduct. To read it, to recite it, to turn its pages, to memorise it and to act upon the laws enshrined in its verses and *suras* is incumbent upon every Muslim. This obligation cannot be fulfilled until and unless he is clean and pure. Allah has Himself said that His preferment is for people who are pure. One of the unique features of Islam is that it equates every good act with worship. Removing rubbish and refuse from the street, to wash and cleanse defilement, to avoid contact with filth and to save others

from it as well, are good deeds and, therefore, come under worship. Islam encourages every righteous and noble act, and considers every action directed towards human welfare worthy of the utmost approbation. But for survival and success in life, maintenance of good health is an essential prerequisite.

A most basic and important factor governing health is cleanliness, both individual and collective. The importance of bodily purification in Islam is self-evident and the Muslim who is punctual in offering the obligatory prayers cannot neglect purification. Islam has laid down the principles of purification in great detail – from the cradle to the grave. Even a child knows that before the offering of the ritual prayer all exposed parts of the body have to be washed. The eyes, the nose, the ears, and the throat are washed with water in such a way as to remove all pollution. The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) has said that ablution (*wudu*) should be performed as prescribed, which means: cleansing with water the hands upto elbows, the face (mouth, nose, ears, etc.) and the feet upto ankles. Islam has emphasised cleanliness and made it an imperative for all worship because the slightest lack of care about it tends gradually to become a habit, and mind would then stop differentiating between purification and pollution.

Personal hygiene is not a matter that concerns only the individual but is of vital importance for the whole community or nation, for no nation is worth its name if it does not regard its members as its wealth. Obviously proper health-care by the individuals will have a wholesome effect upon the society as a whole, and the benefits will accrue to the whole nation. Equally, a prosperous and dynamic national will have a healthy influence upon its people. Just to illustrate, international research has proved that healthy workers may achieve 20–25 % higher output per man-hour as compared to workers whose health is indifferent.

The principles of hygiene and personal health are extremely simple. But these self-evident principles have been allowed to go by default in many parts of the world because of the sedentary habits of present-day man and the complex nature of modern life. For example, if one goes to bed at one o'clock at night, it is hardly reasonable to expect him to take a morning walk and inhale fresh air.

Fresh air is the most essential factor in the maintenance of health. It is, by the Grace of Allah, freely available to all men, the only condition being that one should rise early and go out to avail of this divine bounty. No doubt, industrialization and the resultant pollution have made fresh air less easily available in industrial areas and yet the morning walk just outside the factory area can make us feel the difference in the air we breathe. The morning walk combined with light exercise can work magic. It is also essential that we should learn deep breathing. Preoccupation with business makes people in general breathe quickly, with the result that the supply of oxygen to the system is reduced, and the lungs do not expel the impure air fully. Breathing does not mean the ingestion of air into the body but also the required quantity of oxygen. Air, having entered the lungs, makes the chest expand. Some people breathe in such a way that only the upper part of the chest is activated. This is particularly true of people who put on tight shirts and consequently cannot breathe freely. When one

breathes with the upper part of the chest, toxic matter is likely to accumulate in the lower part of the lungs, and the likelihood of chest diseases becomes greater.

Next to air, the most important ingredient that makes life possible is water. Water too is a great boon of Allah. Nearly 80% of our body comprises water. It is water that cleanses our body and clothes. Water is not only necessary to sustain our life but is essential for metabolic action within the body which will only take place if it has enough water. Water is required to wash toxins out of our body as it is an excellent solvent. There is no better stuff than clean and cool water to fulfil the needs of the body and to quench thirst. Despite its importance, not many people use water according to the principles of hygiene, nor exercise any care to ensure its purity. Polluted water can often lead to stomach ailments like amoebic dysentery, diarrhoea, and gastro-enteritis. It is necessary to keep the water vessels clean, not to use water that is stale, keep the water container covered at the opening, and to examine the water before drinking lest it should have sediment. As far as possible, water should be boiled and filtered before drinking. It is advisable not to drink water in excess after the meals, and, if it is considered necessary to drink it during the meals, only a little quantity should be consumed. The best thing is to drink water one to one and a half hour after meals. Water should be consumed in large quantities between lunch and dinner, so that the bowels are washed and digestion is aided.

Principles of personal hygiene are also essential to our diet. Stuffing of the stomach does not necessarily mean that nutritious food has been consumed. Sweetmeats and large quantities of milled rice are the examples of imbalance in diet. Food taken should be nutritious and balanced, even if it means being a little hard on the palate and foregoing dainties. Tea, coffee, pickles, chutnies, sweetmeats, cakes, jams, etc., and other starchy things and hard-to-digest food-stuffs are injurious for the liver and the intestines, and tend to affect the proper functioning of the bowels. Our food must necessarily have the following ingredients: proteins, fats, carbohydrates, minerals and vitamins. Most of our food contains all these ingredients. Meat gives us proteins and fats. Milk gives us fats. Most of the vegetables give us vitamins and fats. Bread gives us vitamins. Fish is rich in vitamins of the 'A' group and so on. Sometimes the regimen has to be changed. Citrus fruits and carrots yield vitamins 'C' and 'A' respectively. Moreover, proteins are provided by milk, eggs and vegetables. It is also necessary to observe punctuality in eating. We may summarise what has been said so far thus:

- * Eat the food of your choice but see to it that it is nutritious.
- * Do not overeat. Stop eating well before you reach satiation.
- * Eat punctually.
- * Be at ease while eating and enjoy the food.

The ancient and medieval physicians, as well as the present-day practitioners of medicine, regard the cycles of movement and repose as essential to the

sustenance of a normal life. These include exercise and sleep. In order to be fit and alert and to lead a happy life, it is essential to take exercise. In old age when the metabolic process slows down, light exercise quickens it. But the modern man, who is engrossed in his occupational pursuits, prevaricates considering it to be unessential. Lack of exercise leads to anaemia and sluggishness of the stomach, with the result that food is not digested properly. The heart is also affected. If people are keen about optimum longevity, they must do exercise. Long walks and outdoor games are good for the health.

The second aspect relates to rest. Excess of work is as injurious for health as total lack of exercise. The metabolic system, if stretched beyond a point, will break down, and therefore rest is necessary. The human body will not function properly without proper rest. It is quite possible that hard work and the success resulting from it may not make one feel the lack of repose, but as the time passes, the storehouse of energy becomes progressively depleted, and bodily resistance weakens. Wisdom therefore demands that balance must be struck between rest and work. The best form of rest is sleep. The Holy Prophet has himself said that a short afternoon nap is good for health. Sleep does away with exhaustion and tiredness and reduces the temperature of the body. It also helps in the completion of the metabolic processes of the body. Opinions differ about duration of normal sleep. Its duration is generally reduced with age. Moreover, it differs from one individual to the other. The best principle to be observed is that a person should himself assess how many hours of sleep replenish his energy. Some people feel fresh after little sleep, while there are others who feel ill at ease and distressed if they have slept for a period less than what they are used to. The best thing is to fix the timings for sleep. It can also be said with certainty that excessive and poor sleep are equally bad for health.

In hygiene, besides the air, water, food, exercise, rest and sleep, the environment also plays a major role. In my opinion, more important than all these is the ethical and spiritual aspect. It is essential to place one's trust in Allah, while observing all these precautions. Health is a blessing of Allah. It should be highly valued and preserved within the limits, prescribed by Him. Once a man does that he achieves peace of mind and the fear of the Allah's displeasure overcomes all other fears. Fear is the enemy of health, and the peace of mind is granted to him who moulds his conduct and life according to the commands of Allah and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet. Faith is a powerful instrument which helps us negotiate perilous paths and keeps us steady. It also helps us to keep mentally and physically in proper shape.

HEALTH OF THE BODY

Islam is a universal religion and a complete code of life. It does not make water-tight distinctions between what is mundane and what is spiritual and religious. While it has emphasised the basic requirement of true faith and belief, it has also given comprehensive guidance about keeping the body and the mind in good shape. The teleological system of Islam contains all the remedial measures that would obviate conflicts within a society; likewise, the maintenance of sound health and physical fitness is also a part of its teachings. Its aim is to ensure that all men specially those who believe in Allah and His last Prophet should, besides being perfect in faith and moral conduct, be exemplary in matters of health and physical fitness. The *Sahih Muslim* says: "The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) once said 'Allah prefers a strong and healthy believer to a weak one' ". If Allah vouchsafed to the prophets revealed knowledge, He also granted to them corporal charm and attraction, imposing presence, health and vigour, cheerfulness and charisma.

In the Qur'an two attributes have been mentioned as prerequisites for a ruler. These are:

"Their Prophet said unto them: Lo! Allah hath raised up Saul to be a king for you. They said: How can he have kingdom over us when we are more deserving of the kingdom than he is, since he hath not been given wealth enough? He said: Lo! Allah hath chosen him above you, and hath increased him abundantly in wisdom and stature..."

[Qur'an, II:247]

About the Companions of the Prophet (may Allah be pleased with them), Allah has said:

"Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. And those with him are hard against the disbelievers and merciful among themselves..."

[Qur'an, XLVIII:29]

As is evident from the foregoing verse, one of the attributes of the Companions

of the Messenger of Allah was that they were stronger, more persistent in their endeavour, and hardier than the pagans and infidels. Physical strength and perseverance demand sound health. This verse points to attributes that are essential for overcoming all obstacles and odds including human opposition. Among the skills which the earliest proponents of Islam had to acquire were archery, horse-riding, swimming, wrestling and fencing. When Hadrat Ma'az bin Jabal was appointed the governor of the Yemen and sent there, he was especially told by the Holy Prophet to avoid a life of ease and luxury, because true servants of Allah are never ease-loving.

A Muslim should always be intrepid and courageous, high-minded and in good health. Good health is a prerequisite of courage, and high mindedness. Our lack of moderation in our food intake, love of comfort and ease, irregular hours and indifference to and disregard for the principles of hygiene have made us vulnerable to a host of physical and mental ailments.

We probably do not appreciate the fact that the secret of good health is simplicity and moderation, and abstinence from all things which are reprehensible from the moral and religious point of view. Needless to say that toxicity in the blood is not the result only of bad diet but is also caused by moral vileness and unnatural habits. Bad health is not only the consequence of disease but also results from immoderation.

One of the cardinal principles of good health is self-control. One should discipline one's instincts and impulses, learn to control one's appetites, abstain from lasciviousness and keep one's mind and thoughts away from straying towards vice and getting tense, agitated and unnecessarily aroused. A tranquil well-regulated mind is essential for good health. Contemporary society considers sensational scenes and lustful phenomena a sign of the good life. Use of drugs like heroin, cannabis and coke without paying heed to their fatal consequences is leading man to a point of no return in his progress towards self-annihilation.

We, the Muslims of today, are generally as bad in this regard as others. We are no longer in the habit of rising early. We shirk hard work. We lack self-control, moral purity and the tranquillity of soul and the peace of mind. We have gone so low because we do not follow the principles which Allah and His Apostle have given to us. Allah has said in the Qur'an:

"...Truly Allah loveth those who turn unto Him, and loveth those who have a care for cleanness."

[Qur'an, II:222]

This purity of soul along with physical and mental cleanliness, clean habits and clean life-style is the hall-mark of Islam. Let us now ponder what position physical health enjoys in Islam, and what principles have been given to us by ensuring good and wholesome health.

Islam counts good health among the blessings which Allah has vouchsafed to man, and it has been stated in the *Hadith* that man should be thankful to Allah for it. The Holy Prophet told one of his Companions to be thankful for five blessings and avail of them before they are replaced by five other things: Youth before old age, health before sickness, wealth before penury, leisure

before getting overwhelmed by work and life before death.

The Holy Prophet attached basic importance to health because one will need to be always in good health for his life-long endeavour in the cause of the True Faith. Whether one is engaged in the endeavour to achieve the dominance of Islam and establish a God-fearing society or is striving to achieve self-control or to imbibe higher moral virtues one will have to be in good health. Hence indifference to health is equivalent to ingratitude to Allah and indifference towards the teachings of Islam.

Let us now consider the principles enunciated by the Holy Prophet for the upkeep of health and its preservation.

Medicine and science have throughout the ages maintained that personal cleanliness is absolutely essential to keep in good health. This cleanliness encompasses the body, the mind, the clothes one wears and the environment. The Prophet's Saying, "Cleanliness is an essential part of the faith", concisely enunciates this principle. Some versions of this Saying have the word, *nisf al-īmān* i.e. half of the faith. This would clearly indicate how much importance Islam has accorded to human health. Apart from stressing cleanliness the Prophet has advised that one should cultivate poise and cheerfulness and affability because these qualities ensure vigour and freshness of the body.

Samarqandī has narrated a *hadīth* of the Holy Prophet according to which he is reported to have said: "Use the tooth brush. It has several benefits latent in it. The mouth will be clean and fresh; Allah will be pleased; the angels will be comforted; vision will improve; phlegm will be cleansed; and the mouth will be rid of odour; and over and above all prayers will multiply".

The position that bath enjoys in the preservation of health needs no emphasis. Islam enjoins every Muslim to take a bath at least once a week i.e. on Friday, brush his teeth morning and bedtime and wear perfume.

Next, after cleanliness of the body and the environment comes food. Excessive eating and luxurious living are sure passports to ill-health. Today's rich-in-fats diet has wrought havoc on the human body. Although Allah has granted to man all kinds of blessings and has not forbidden him things that are permissible, yet He has condemned lack of moderation.

The Holy Prophet has enjoined on us to follow the golden mean in everything and this includes eating habits also. Moderation requires that man should not overeat. In the *Hadīth* it has been stated that a believer eats with one intestine in motion, while the *Kafir* eats with all intestines in motion. Foods rich in fats should be taken very sparingly; the normal food should be easily digestible, simple and frugal. The Holy Prophet himself did not like unleavened bread. It is a basic principle of hygiene that one should not eat until one feels hungry. While sick, abstinence is necessary. These are the commands of the Holy Prophet. One should never dine in a state of agitation, anger, grief or anxiety. One should be in good cheer and tranquil while eating and talk of good and pleasant things. Anger, jealousy, hatred and evil thoughts adversely affect the stomach.

Love of ease and comfort and laziness also harm the human system. No doubt, man must eat, take rest, sleep and keep clean and tidy. All this should

be done keeping in view the principle of moderation. Islam forbids listlessness, lassitude and love of ease. It enjoins hard work, and physical exercise. It is essential that a believer should be strong because only then can he call others towards Islam and keep up his *Jihād* as a strong soldier in the cause of Allah Who Himself has said:

“Lo! is it not Allah’s party who are the successful?”

[Qur’ān, LVIII:22]

HEALTH AND CLEANLINESS

Good health and physical fitness are big blessings of Allah the Most Exalted. It is due to them that man can accomplish all his religious and worldly assignments and chores. A man who does not enjoy good health cannot, despite all the wealth in the world and unlimited means and resources, really enjoy life and partake of its opportunities and pleasures. He cannot feel that zest for creative thinking and have that practical initiative which bring in their wake a feeling of exhilaration and the delight of being fully involved in fruitful endeavour. A man who has been denied the blessing of good health cannot render any noteworthy service to promote the welfare and the well-being of society. Even in the sphere of his personal life he cannot, however much he may want or desire, ensure the success of his projects or hope to achieve his objectives. This causes frustration which is equally injurious to the individual concerned as well as to the society of which he is a member. Poor health does not only adversely affect the body but also the mind, the intellectual and emotional stability and the deeds and actions of a person – in short the totality of his being.

It is because of its basic importance that Islam has recounted, with great clarity and in full detail, all the requisites of health-care. The excellence and distinction of a man depends on his being in good health functionally and organically, intellectually and emotionally, in body as well as in spirit. And when Islam emphasises the need to keep away from dirt and filth and to maintain the required standards of hygiene and cleanliness its aim is to bring home, to its believers, the importance of physical purity, cleanliness of abode and dress and above all the essential requirement of keeping one's character and moral conduct, his heart and soul, completely pure and above and beyond all types of filth and pollution.

Most exegetes, of the Holy Qur'an while explaining the meaning of the Qur'anic verse "والرّجفاهجر" "and pollution shun" have mentioned all those impurities of the heart and soul which pertain to moral vices. At this stage, one thing needs to be given special thought. It is quite wrong to make any distinction between the exoteric and the esoteric with regard to man or to human life. Just ponder one aspect of the matter. If a man is not morally good, he will never be able to have spiritual contentment or real inner delight and pleasure, however much he may endeavour to keep in good physical health. He is bound to fall prey to different psychic ailments and disorders and will sooner or later lose his physical fitness also. It is one of our primary duties to look after our health and physical fitness which are nature's boons to us. If we are negligent and

careless with regard to this duty, we are guilty of being negligent towards the teachings of the Holy Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* of the Holy Prophet, and will be answerable to Allah, the Most Exalted, for wasting this bounty and showing lack of care towards it. What are the principles that Islam has given us in respect of health-care and what are the procedures which according to it will, if followed in full, ensure our spiritual and physical health? This is a question of vital importance.

Islam employs both brevity and in-depth delineation in its teachings, according to the need of the moment. On occasions it confines itself just to formulating general principles which can be understood or explained, and applied by every sensible person.

A careful consideration of the teachings of Islam in regard to health and ways and means of ensuring the good life leads one to the understanding that it is a part of the Islamic injunctions governing the believer's life-style to breathe in fresh and clean air, to ensure proper ventilation in homes so that fresh air can come in freely, to let the first rays of the sun to fall on the body, to take proper and balanced food at fixed timings, to sleep early in the night and to wake up early in the morning, to do physical exercise according to age and state of the organism, to take bath regularly and to keep the body clean and pure. Strict compliance of these injunctions is a sure guarantee against the undesirable but compulsive use of medicines.

Having considered these details, when we look for a comprehensive and definitive principle of health-care we come across words such as the 'act of purifying', 'sanctity', and 'purity' — each one of which has a wide connotation and meaning. One can say without any fear of contradiction that a distinctive feature of the Islamic teachings is that they co-relate health and purity and make them inter-dependent and inseparable. Guidance pertaining to sanctity, cleanliness and purity is given equal importance in the Holy Qur'ān and the *Hadith*. This makes it necessary to ponder whether purity means more body-hygiene and whether this latter is enough to keep one in a state of good health and physical fitness.

The fact of the matter is that purity signifies the chastity of imagination and intellect also. As a generalisation and a universal concept it can be stated that anything that produces a good or bad effect on man's senses and faculties is bound to affect his health.

Real and complete purity necessarily includes the purity of the body and the spirit and the thought and the conduct of man. The secret of man's excellence and superiority lies in this complete and all-embracing purity and the Holy Prophet has fully brought out its importance through his famous Saying: "Cleanliness is one half of *Imān*". If it did not include in its sphere the spirit, the mind and the psyche of man and pertained only to external purity and cleanliness, it would not have been declared to be 'half of faith'. As a matter of fact purity with all its extensive nuances of meaning occupies a position of basic importance in the Islamic principles of health-care.

After this detailed discussion of the matter, one is inevitably led to the

conclusion that purity of the body and the environment is absolutely essential for sound health and physical fitness. In addition to keeping in sound health and good physical condition it is incumbent on man to keep his mind and spirit pure and chaste and strive, continuously, to rise higher and higher in the scale of moral uprightness, because this is how the requirements of sanctity and purity can be met. This means that a man cannot keep in good health and maintain his physical fitness without spiritual purity. Also that nobody can lead a successful and happy life without good health and sound physical condition.

When one studies the Holy Qur'ān with full attention and care one will not miss this one particular verse. Indeed it will become the focus of his attention. I think it will be more appropriate to consider the basic Islamic teachings pertaining to purity in its context. The Holy Qur'ān holds those actions to be righteous which are completely in accord with the dictates of faith in Allah and faith in the Holy Prophet.

The life of a perfect believer could have been given various names. But the Qur'ān uses only one description, for the dynamics or the manifestation of a life moulded completely on the outlines of *Īmān* and that description is "righteous action". In other words the entire life of a believer is righteous action. And as this principle encompasses the life of the individual it applies in the same manner to the life of the community too. This fact is explained thus in this verse of the Holy Qur'ān:

*"Whosoever doth right,
whether male or female,
and is a believer, him verily We shall
quicken with good life.."*

[Qur'ān, XVI:97]

Allah has given this pledge to male believers and also to female believers. This clearly means that the particular teaching is meant for the entire Muslim society. It is also an indication that the arrangements for purity have to be made not only by the individual but also by the whole social organisation. The idea behind addressing both men and women is that the pledge of "a goodly life" is collective in its nature. It is the duty of every individual to safeguard his life against all kinds of pollution so that the society can be protected from contamination, (which would be generated by a life without faith and by vile deeds), and an atmosphere of the goodly life can be created. This will be possible only when we realise that the true faith and righteous action is a declaration of war against pollution, whatever its nature or source. An impure, contaminated and foul life can never be associated with righteous action nor can it be termed as "the goodly life" Why? Because righteous action is not a partial reality – it is the total reality – through which true faith manifests itself. Allah desires that the believers should never be unmindful of even the pettiest requirements of their faith.

Our shortcomings and our acts of negligence do not let us rise to the lofty heights of righteous action. They can cause within us a weakening of the faith and do damage to it; by involving us in moral, spiritual and physical pollution putrefy us and make the whole society rotten. That is why the Holy Qur'ān has encouraged both men and women, in other words, the entire community to accept the true faith and act righteously and as a recompense promised "the goodly life". It has indeed unequivocally declared:

*"Whoever chose the path of righteousness,
achieved well-being".*

May Allah save us and all Muslims from all types of contamination and impurity and bless us with pure, clean, chaste and "the goodly" life. Amen!

PIETY AND HEALTH
(Spiritual piety also affects bodily
purity and health)

An in-depth consideration of the teachings of Islam and Islamic prayers would reveal one very important and significant fact that Islam attaches great significance to piety, ablution (*tahārah*), and cleanliness and enjoins its strict observance. That is why the Muslims are unique in this respect. Whichever country they arrived at, as preachers or conquerors, and whatever land they graced with their presence, the first thing they did was to make it green and beautiful. They channelized the resources of the state for the well-being and prosperity of the people and introduced them to a new and good way of life. Muslims undoubtedly spread knowledge, helped the progress of civilization, and culture and introduced revolutionary reforms in the society, and enriched the landscape with beautiful buildings and splendid monuments. They did all this and much more. But over and above all in importance is the Muslim contribution to the concept of cleanliness. The first thing the Muslims did after conquering a territory was to cleanse it of all filth and defilement and to introduce hygienic systems that revolutionised the pattern of social life. The pages of history are replete with these glorious achievements of Muslims. It would be entirely correct to say that the world was not as familiar with the concept of cleanliness and piety till Islam made it known to the whole known world.

The Qur'ān enjoins cleanliness and piety. Indeed it is the law of Allah that the *Momin* (believer) should always keep clean and pure. This has been made clear by the Qur'ān:

“...And if ye are unclean, purify yourselves...”

[Qur'ān, V: 6]

“...Allah loveth the purifiers.”

[Qur'ān, IX:108]

On the one hand, these verses enjoin Muslims to purify themselves and, on the other hand, the happy tidings is given that Allah likes the pious and the clean. This command of Allah had to be obeyed by Muslims and they had no option to evade it. Hence piety and cleanliness became a part of their life and the cause of their triumph and success throughout the world.

Islam enjoins two kinds of piety: spiritual piety and bodily piety. The former means that man should purge himself of all evils. The impurities and defilement are those vices and immoral habits which tarnish and defile the soul. Spiritual piety is attained by eschewing evil and taking to good things. The more man eschews evil, the cleaner and more pious would he become; and the piety of spirit affects corporeal purity.

The second kind is corporeal purity. This means that man should keep his body free from external impurities – and should not let his body become soiled and dirty. Take bathing for example. Health, freshness, and cleanliness demand that man should take his bath every day and, if this is not possible because of the scarcity of water or for some other reason, he should take bath once in a week – on Friday. Islam has also enjoined that we should brush our teeth with *miswak*, (a twig brush) since diseases of the stomach are generally the result of foul deposits in the teeth. The Holy Prophet said: “If I were not conscious of the hardship of the *Ummah*, I would have made it obligatory upon each *Momin* to brush his teeth with *miswak* five times a day” (before each obligatory prayer).

Man’s apparel is a mirror of his habit of cleanliness or otherwise. Although Islam does not like ostentatious dress, involving wasteful expenditure – it does not favour any formality in attire – nevertheless it does enjoin cleanliness and spotlessness so far as the apparel is concerned.

Islam stresses order in the arrangement of things, because this also comes under the head of purity and cleanliness. Islam does not like a person to look wild with a dirt-ridden body and long, uncombed, dusty hair. The Holy Prophet has said:

“Allah likes not dirty body and dishevelled hair”.

Much of the foul matter is likely to enter the stomach and generate sickness via the nails. Even otherwise also it is hardly decent for a man to have long nails like savages. Among the ten acts that are included as acts of the *Sunnah* is the regular paring of the nails.

Alongside the purity of the body and general personal cleanliness Islam also enjoins the cleanliness of the environment. The house in which an individual lives should be kept spotlessly clean. He should desist from acts that are disagreeable to others and put them to inconvenience. Some of us deposit garbage on our doorsteps and throw it in the lane. In the first place, it shows the incompetence and indifference on the part of the members of the household and, secondly it shows their disregard for the comfort and convenience of others. The same may be said about spitting and blowing the nose on the streets and urinating under the wayside trees. All these acts militate against the universal concept of clean environment. Islam considers all such acts anti-cleanliness and anti-civilised life, hence against its basic spirit.

Every one of us loves life, cares for health, and longs for longevity. There is no one who does not wish that he should not be a burden upon others, that he should keep his person fully employed, and that his mind, eyes, and the tongue should stay normal. This is the wish of every one of us. But merely to wish is not enough! In order to give a practical shape to the wish, we require constant resolve and ceaseless endeavour. We cannot turn burning coal into a cube of ice and vice versa by merely wishing it to be so. If we want ice, we shall have to devise ways to produce ice. If we want fire, we cannot light it from two slabs of ice by rubbing them against each other. For this we require the flint stone and

wood. In short whatever one wants to achieve can be achieved only if the right means and correct procedures are employed.

Consequently, if a healthy life is desired, it is but necessary and imperative that first of all we should understand the principles of hygiene and follow them scrupulously. Is it rational to form habits which are injurious, to ignore all principles of sound health, and to do all that destroys health, shortens life expectation and then to expect to be immortal or to think that we are insured against illness and that good health is our due and ill-health is the lot of others? This is nothing but wishful thinking – rather it is self-delusion. Two and two make four; precisely, in the same way, man's character and his acts determine his future well-being or otherwise and presage his long life or a premature end.

Allah has graced Muslims with the title of *khayr al-umam* (the best of nations) and has made it obligatory upon them to eschew evil and follow what is right. Can a weak and debilitated nation discharge this heavy responsibility? Can a nation that is racked by ill-health and does not possess the strength and stamina to withstand the buffets of fate do it? The answer can only be in the negative.

If we really desire to be *khayr al-umam* and wish to perform the obligations that are enjoined by Allah, we should become morally pure and physically healthy. In order to play the role we are required to by Allah it is necessary – indeed, very necessary – that our health should be good as a nation and it cannot be so unless we adopt the basic principles given to us by our religion.

CLEANLINESS AND PIETY

(Sanctification and piety are among the purposes behind the assignation of prophets)

Allah brings each man into being with a uniform nature and endows him with a conscience. None of us is devoid of goodness and bereft of conscience. Man is supreme among all living creatures, because in him instinct has been augmented by reason and he has, therefore, command over his environment. The world he lives in contains both good and evil, the beautiful and the ugly, the noble as well as the wicked and it is up to him to choose either of the two. It is not given him, however, to be unconcerned about either or to be independent of them. To be able to live and live according to a pattern he must choose a certain code of life. He shall have to decide whether he wishes to spend his life, which has been given to him as an interim gift, according to the tenets of goodness, or in the way of evil, or to waver between the two alternatives. Exercising his option is a compulsion and nobody can afford, without dire peril to his being, to ignore this imperative of Nature.

The world comprises what is good and what is evil, and each one of us has been given his share of the faculty of distinguishing the good from the non-good, so that he may employ his disposition, his intellect and innate wisdom to chalk out the path he would like to progress along, and to formulate a definite plan of life. Man is a rational being, with his natural disposition and a sense of right and wrong to serve as his guide. There are those who, distinguishing right from wrong, choose the former, while there are many who take recourse to the latter. There are several factors that govern this choice. But one vital factor is the particular set of guiding principles he has before him and the nature and extent of different influences that have shared his person. It is obvious that the world abounds in those that propagate good as well as those who expound evil. Both have the freedom to capture the mind of man and use it as their instrument. Whichever of the two is stronger gains dominance over the minds of men and the social order has to mould itself accordingly. This is a universal law that obtains everywhere – in every community, every social set-up. Let us stretch this duality or division of right and wrong to personal cleanliness and piety and its opposite i.e., uncleanness and impiety. The world has both cleanliness and uncleanness and piety and impiety – and every man of average intelligence can distinguish between the two. Every individual knows that a flower is meant to be smelt and that dirt should be cleansed, and that the face has to be washed with water and soap and that dirt should not be rubbed upon the face. We all know that fresh air and water give us vigour and health, and polluted air and

unclean water would hurt our physical health. We all know – and we all can feel – that poison will kill us or make us ill and that an antidote will ward off the effect of the poison. This knowledge is instinctive in man and we have the tools of wisdom and ratiocination for our guidance.

The distinction between right and wrong, good and evil, virtuous and non-virtuous had got blurred when the Qur'ān was made to descend. The Word of Allah was sent as and when needed, throughout history, through the prophets. The teachings of Allah's prophets and specially the last message – that of the Holy Qur'ān – brought into being a definite pattern of life and gave to man a complete code of conduct. This not only elevated man's status but enabled the *Ummah* to have a true understanding of right and wrong.

It was on the basis of the guiding principles of the Qur'ān that man was led to distinguish between the powers of good that led to health and the powers of evil that drove him towards sickness. It was thus that he began to distinguish between cleanliness and uncleanness, piety and impiety. The Qur'ān provides us with a clear distinction between these contrary characteristics. In the Qur'ānic context cleanliness or piety does not denote mere superficial cleanliness but true and total cleanliness of the body, heart and the intellect, besides that of place and apparel, sense and sensibility, thought and deed, perception and intention – in effect, all the material, non-sensate, apparent and hidden aspects of uncleanness.

This significance of cleanliness and piety according to the Qur'ān is very vast, and the nature of its vastness can be gauged from the fact that piety and cleanliness are among the major subjects of the message brought by the divinely appointed prophets. And Allah Almighty Himself has said at many a place in the Qur'ān that He would like to make us pure and that He desires the cleansing of our hearts. Thus:

“...He would purify you and would perfect His grace upon you...”

[Qur'ān, V:6]

Peoples of faith have been introduced thus:

“Men who love to cleanse themselves”.

And further:

“Allah loveth the purifiers.”

[Qur'ān, IX:108]

The meaning of purification has many layers and its scope is as wide as the heavens. It, of course, includes external cleanliness to which special importance is attached. Thus, the architect of the Ka'aba, the Prophet Abraham is enjoined:

"...and purify My House for those who make the round (thereof) and those who stand and those who bow and make prostration."

[Qur'ān, XXII:26]

At another place Allah says:

"...And We imposed a duty upon Abraham and Ishmael, (saying): Purify My House for those who go around and those who meditate therein and those who bow down and prostrate themselves (in worship)."

[Qur'ān, II:125]

He has even commanded the Holy Prophet:

"Thy raiment purify."

[Qur'ān, LXXIV:4]

What has gone above establishes that the Qur'ān has as its aim the cleanliness and piety of the individual, because it constitutes goodness and virtue. Man should have his intellect and body cleansed of all impurities and keep his corporal and spiritual self free from all kinds of filth. He should also keep his wisdom, his inner self and his acts and thoughts free from external and inner impiety and should keep his house, vestments and environment neat and clean.

Those that accept the path offered by the Qur'ān and walk along the path shown by the Holy Prophet can transform this world into an earthly paradise. Those that choose contrarily shall see Hell-fire.

It is obvious that the ultimate aim of every *Momin* is Paradise. Consequently it is but natural that we all address ourselves to the task of attaining this goal.

HYGIENE

(The first condition for following the principles of Islam is observance of the principles of purity and piety)

Islam had its birth in the Arabian Peninsula. We all know what this tract of land was like, and what its status was in the eyes of the ancient nations of the world. But from this self-same land, which had no amenities of life, no comforts which we associate with civilised living, gushed forth the mighty stream of Islam which, overflowing the land of its origin, embraced a major part of the known world. Who can deny the fact of history that not one region of the whole wide world remained unwatered by the spring of Islam — the fact that Islam gave to each country of the world something in polity, something in the understanding of the operation of the social force, a lot in the ethical content that goes into a society and its socio-economic processes. Islam has definitely given something, one way or the other, to each department of human life.

What greater proof could there be for the greatness and uniqueness of a religion than the fact that all the nations of the world derived something from it? This pride of place belongs to Islam alone and only Muslims can pride themselves in this fact. But, at the same time, they should not ignore the present reality.

When I ponder the facts, I find that there is an overwhelming array of reasons for the greatness of Islam. It is not possible for me to recount them all, but I cannot refrain from pointing out that one of the basic facts that prove the eternal glory of Islam is the high standard of purification and piety set by it. This, in fact, is one of the pillars of the Islamic faith and Islam has accorded prime importance to it. Really speaking the whole edifice of human society stands structured on it. The principles and guidelines given by the Qur'an and the *Hadith* are not such that they would be applicable to one region only and non-applicable to another. Actually, they are so practicable, so simple to follow, and so strong and attractive in their content, that they are equally workable in each and every part of the world. Islam is a universal religion and is meant to be practised by all, irrespective of caste or creed, geography or climate, race or colour. Only a religion that can be practised by everyone, everywhere, can be called universal. Were this not so, the principles of Islam would not have been accepted and practised by people in every part of the world.

We can well gauge from the study of history what situation prevailed in the world before the advent of Islam. So far as hygiene and self-purification are concerned, bathing was rare, paring of the nails and other modes of keeping the body trim and tidy were almost non-existent. The Qur'an accorded the

greatest importance to self-purification and ablution and the Qur'ānic injunction: "None but the purified shall touch the Qur'ān", is the first step towards it.

It is also said that Allah likes the pure. We must bear in mind one basic point. In the Qur'ān Allah says: "The Prophet of Allah is the paradigm for you". All the acts and sayings of the Holy Prophet are in accordance with the Qur'ānic teachings. The Holy Prophet was the first to follow the Qur'ān when it descended. Were it not followed, in letter and spirit, it would have remained a Book of Laws only. The Qur'ān was followed with great care and continuity. The acts of the Holy Prophet and of the Pious Caliphs followed by those of the Companions and of the saints of the succeeding ages remain unsurpassed, and we do not find the likes of them in any other nation in any period of human history. The Holy Prophet has said:

"Allah Himself is pure, and likes things pure".

On another occasion he said. "Keep clean and pure because Islam is a pure religion". And he also said: "Allah does not like filth and dishevelled hair". The above three *Ahadith* establish the fact that in the observance of Islam purification and ablution is a pre-condition. Pollution and filth include all kinds of foulness, whether it pertains to the soul or to the body or to the environment. The fact that demands consideration is that the whole of Arabia was without water, and it was there that these injunctions were made obligatory. The amenities we associate with civilised life were just not available. If in view of such severe and harsh circumstances, purification and abstinence from pollution had not been enjoined, it would not have been a matter for surprise. But, despite the scarcity of water throughout the length and breadth of Arabia, regular bath and ablution or '*wudu*' have been made obligatory. This shows how much importance Islam attaches to cleanliness. Another unique characteristic of Islam is that every good and noble act is an act of worship. Removing garbage from roads and lanes, and cleansing the locality of filth and defilement, staying away from pollution oneself and persuading others to do the same and to render whatever service one can in this regard are all good and noble deeds that come under worship. Islam encourages acts that are noble, and purification is one of them.

As I have said already, other nations have adopted many principles of Islam. It is not easy for them. Because of racial, hereditary and other prejudices they do not find it convenient to embrace Islam. But at the same time it is impossible for them to disregard its noble precepts. They adopted these principles and are reaping a rich harvest of highly fruitful results as a consequence.

One great point about the Muslim *Ummah* is that it has made the injunctions of the Qur'ān an integral part of its life. Those of you who have travelled around the world or read about different countries, and have compared the life-styles obtaining in non-Muslim and Muslim countries, must have seen for themselves, that however poor and backward the Muslim people might be, still the spirit

of Islam has become so much a part of its collective life that other nations, despite greater wealth and cultural advancement do not measure up to the Muslims in cleanliness and general hygiene.

Those of you who have read the classical literature and have before you the master-pieces of different peoples and nations must have noticed that the accounts Muslim classics contain of social gatherings, the arrangements in the living rooms, the private quarters, in mansions as well as poor homes were all uniquely conspicuous for their cleanliness. Our mosques and dwellings even today retain these characteristics. Clean floors, aloe wood and ambergris, sprinkling the aquas of screw pine and rose on the visitors and the use of choice perfumes in palaces and simple incense in middle-class and poor homes is a special characteristic of the Muslim life-style. Even a poor Muslim would at least spend a few pence and make his handkerchief fragrant with some lotion or some simple nice smelling spray. Absolute cleanliness of household utensils and linen is a must for the Muslim women-folk and deviation from it is impossible. In short, cleanliness and ablution were adopted by Muslims in such a way that they became unique. Muslims have no doubt let go by default many of the characteristics that once were an integral part of their life. But they still retain some attachment to the basic tenets of hygiene of which ablution and cleanliness form an integral part.

One difference, however, has become more and more pronounced and it is that whereas cleanliness is still a basic feature of personal life among us Muslims, the stress on it is getting weaker in our collective life.

What is regrettable is the fact that the localities inhabited by those who are personally clean do not appear equally neat and clean. This is a regrettable state of affairs. The most patent and lasting impact of cleanliness is upon the health of man. Health and cleanliness are synonymous and indistinguishable from each other. If the environment is unclean — the locality is impure and dirty, the lanes and streets are littered with garbage — then personal cleanliness and purity are of little value. They are both interlinked with each other. Only such concerted efforts as blend the personal and collective aspects of our social life can produce the desired results. No positive result would accrue, if either of them is missing. We have to bring back our distinctive characteristics of pure living which our great religion has endowed us with, to our social organisation. These gave our forefathers loftiness of character and excellence as an *Ummah*. They can again bring about a healthy revolution in our lives today. It is not at all a difficult undertaking. What is required is resolution and grit, and, if these are not lacking, there would be no difficulty in achieving any objective the Muslim *Ummah* sets before itself.

HEALTH AND THE HEART
(As long as man observes the laws of Nature,
he retains his health)

There is a furore in the world over that ailments of the heart are spreading like wildfire. Every country in the world is harnessing its medical resources and research facilities to control cardiac ailments and yet the situation is beyond control and in specific fields cardiac ailments are becoming more unmanageable and in many sectors these ailments are at the top of the causes of fatality. The existing state of affairs has led the World Health Organization (WHO) to make cardiovascular diseases a major topic of discussion at its different symposia and seminars and to give the world the message:

"Your heart is your health"

Let us now consider what the heart actually is. The heart is a receptacle for the inflow and the outflow of the blood supply. It is the specific function of the heart to manage the circulation of the blood. The heart is, indeed, a wonder and a miracle. It manifests the characteristics of *al-Hayy al-Qayyum* – the Eternal, the Sustainer. It is the centre and the fountain-head of life and health.

According to Allah's own statement, the health of man and his well-being in real fact depend upon the heart. The Qur'an has said clearly and unequivocally:

*"The day when wealth and sons
avail not (any man)
Save him who bringeth unto
Allah a whole heart."*

[Qur'an, XXVI:88-89]

The heart is an organ with a regular beat or in the terminology of modern materialistic science, the dynamo of the bodily machinery. But in truth the heart is a link between the material and the spiritual worlds, and is the seat of the pure light of the Creator of the heavens and earth. And according to the Holy Prophet, "In the body is a lump of flesh. When it functions aright the body is sound and when it malfunctions the whole body goes wrong. This lump of flesh is the heart".

A characteristic of the heart is its inherent movement and the continuity, *ad infinitum*, of its function. All the other organs of the body depend for their

function upon the heart, but the latter is not dependent upon any other parts or organs of the body. In the embryo the heart begins to function before the other organs of the body have been formed, and it is from this point that its autonomic movement starts. And the uninterrupted movement of the heart heralds the beginning of life. Life begins with the heart and depends for its continuity on the heart-beat.

The self-propulsion of the heart proves its relationship with the other world and it is this fact which is interpreted as the soul and is termed spiritualism. The heart is the recipient of both physical and spiritual modes of existence and is their meeting point. The heart circumscribes the limits of the impressions and perceptions, resulting in the perceptive and expressive faculties which expand to universal truths that are beyond the world of sense-perception. It is the source of inspiration, seat of spiritual illumination, and higher cognition. The Angel Gabriel, for this reason, appeared upon the heart of the Holy Prophet. The Qur'an tells us:

*And lo! it is a revelation of the Lord of the Worlds,
Which the True Spirit hath brought down
Upon thy heart, that thou mayest be (one) of the warners."*

[Qur'an, XXVI:192-194]

That is why the Qur'an tells us explicitly that it is not the eyes that are blind. Blind are the hearts within the breasts.

Students of medicine and science have alike acknowledged the fact that the diseases of the heart result from unbalanced living and irregular habits. It is generally conceded, that luxurious living is especially conducive to disease, and it is therefore essential that, in order to avoid ailments of the heart, the daily sedentary routine should undergo a change. The modern materialist civilization which has had its birth in an industrial and mechanical form is at the root of many of the ailments the human society is suffering from and the life-style in this materialist society is in direct clash with spiritual values. What aspect of life – be it the diet, sleeping habits, the waking life, the apparel, our moving about, our emotions and ideas, sexual habits, economic activity, individual and collective ethics, war and peace, in short, the whole span of our cultural and social life – has been left unaffected and undiscovered by materialism?

The world is now becoming alive to the fact that either the heart is dissociating itself from life or the latter is disregarding the heart. It is also being acknowledged that the diseases of the heart are mostly related to our way of life and our ethical and social norms. It is on this point that, after due consideration, we should focus all our mental and intellectual resources and seek a solution of the problem. Our approach should be that we should abjure following a path that runs counter to Nature and change our mode of living, which, in effect means that we should at once discard material values and adopt the path of total submission to Allah.

The Qur'an and its Expositor, the Holy Prophet, have given us eternally

viable principles and guideliness for a good and fruitful life in this world in full detail. All these precepts are intended to attune man to a simple and regular living in consonance with the laws of Nature. As long as man obeys the laws of Nature, he keeps his health safe from disease. The moment he transgresses them his health begins to deteriorate. In fact, man has been ravaged by diseases of the heart mainly because his heart is devoid of the fear of Allah. The man of our age tends to regard the heart more or less as a pumping gadget. He forgets that heart is also the centre of spiritual illumination, enlightenment and intuition. By ignoring the extraphysical aspects of the heart, and by concentrating only on its physical functions – by-passing its real nature – we would fail to pin-point the real factors that cause heart diseases and would fail to achieve success in treatment. It is a moment of grave consideration for the students of medicine. The place of psychology has been delineated well in diagnosis and treatment and we have a considerable body of literature – ancient, mediaeval, and modern – upon the subject. The relationship between the heart and the mind, and the known and unknown aspects of communication between the two premier organs of the body is such that we should strive to understand the real nature of this relationship rather than negate it. Such negation can never lead to positive results, and it is because of the current material approach that we are finding it difficult to dam this outflow of ailments of the heart: “See. There is a lump of flesh in the body. When it functions aright, the body is sound, and when it malfunctions, the whole body goes wrong. This lump of flesh is the heart”.

This *Hadith* of the Holy Prophet is extremely significant. The slogan of the WHO, “Your heart is your health”, is in fact, a translation of this *Hadith* with the difference that this slogan is devoid of spiritualism. This *Hadith* takes into account both the spiritual and the physical characteristics of the heart, since without embracing both these characteristics, we cannot define health. Remove spiritualism from man, and he becomes an economic animal, and, by breaking off his link with Allah, he would become deprived of peace and tranquillity.

Our health and physical well-being depends upon the heart. The proper functioning of the heart depends upon a proper regimen and we have therefore to live peaceably and simply. We should follow the principles of hygiene and the laws of Nature and by following the Qur’an and the *Sunnah* we should prepare for the Hereafter.

LOOKING AFTER THE SICK
(Islam has given clear guidelines with regard
to looking after and nursing the
sick and the infirm)

Allah sent the Prophet Adam as His viceregent on earth, and made man the most exalted amongst His creatures. This fixed man's station in life. The Qur'ān contains numerous precepts and teachings intended to emphasise man's position of pre-eminence and to bring him from darkness into light:

*"...Now hath come unto you Light
from Allah and a plain Scripture.
Whereby Allah guideth him who seeketh
His good pleasure unto paths of peace.
He bringeth them out of darkness
unto light by His decree, and
guideth them unto a straight path."*

[Qur'ān, V:15 – 16]

Allah the Almighty, the Omnipotent, the Gracious, sent for the guidance of mankind, His Prophet, Ahmed Mujtaba, Muhammad Mustafa (peace be upon him) who, through his righteous conduct, continuous effort and constant endeavour set before man the ideal postulated by the Qur'ān. He established through his example the eternal norms of human conduct and proved the everlasting viability of Islamic principles. In him the words of Allah became personified:

*"We verily sent Our messengers with
clear proofs, and revealed with them
the Scripture and the Balance,
that mankind may observe right measure..."*

[Qur'ān, LVII:25]

There will be no conflict on earth if man adopts a way of life that is in conformity with the commands of Allah. Each particle of the earthly matter will irradiate light and illumine our inner selves if we make our lives conform to higher moral values and base our social organisation on correct concepts and righteous principles.

If we adhere to the injunctions of Islam in our individual and collective life

the whole fabric of human life will be lit up by the light of peace, well-being economic justice, equality and fraternity. The Holy Qur'ān and the Traditions of the Holy Prophet both attach great importance to righteous speech. A *Momin* can only say what is good and noble. The Qur'ān has this to say in this regard:

"Woe unto every slandering traducer,"

[Qur'ān, CIV:1]

And, again:

*"A good word
is as a good tree —
its roots are firm,
and its branches are in heaven;
it gives its produce every season
by the leave of its Lord".*

If we consider the concept of tending the sick in the context of the above verses we find that what a sick person needs most is good wishes. A sick individual is in the grip of pain, both mental and physical. He requires medicine as well as prayer. Furthermore, human kindness demands not only to ensure proper rest and comfort of the sick person but also to speak words of encouragement and to ease his pain and make all possible efforts to help him get well.

Islam does not lay the foundation of its social system on caste, colour or country. It declares that all men were created equal, and that all of them are equally in need of sympathy, help and solace. Being human, they are all brothers unto one another. The only difference between man and man that Islam recognises and accepts is that which results from differences in concepts and attitudes and religious beliefs. This, indeed, is the basis of the Islamic society. But despite differences in attitudes to life and basic beliefs man remains bound to other men in eternal and indissoluble bonds of humanity. In matters of human kindness and sympathy, even the non-Muslims deserve the maximum consideration. Attendance upon the sick is not dependent on concordance of faith. A non-Muslim is as deserving of sympathy and help as a Muslim if he is sick and infirm.

Islam has also laid down the etiquette with respect to this. When we visit a sick person, we should show maximum consideration, speak words of good cheer and give him hope by talking of Allah's Munificence and Graciousness.

The *Hadīth* has it that when the Holy Prophet paid a visit to any individual he placed his hands on his forehead and felt his pulse. He would pray for the sick person and tell him that he would soon recover by the blessings of Allah.

It is a part of the etiquette in such matters that the patient should be asked what he would like to be done for him. If what the patient asks for is not prohibited by his physician, and the visitor thinks he can provide it, he should do so.

Many Companions have reported that the Holy Prophet had given us seven injunctions. One of them was regarding attendance upon the sick. Etiquette demands that when a person visits a patient he should not talk too much to him, should not unnecessarily prolong his visit and should not talk loudly because all this will be a source of discomfort to the sick person.

Hadrat 'Abd Allah bin 'Abbās used to say that the practice of the Holy Prophet was to make his visits to ailing persons brief and to keep his voice low and soft.

It is also a part of the etiquette governing visits to sick persons to speak a few words of solace and encouragement to the members of the sick person's family and to ask them about his health. One should, if possible, help in procuring medicines, arranging examination by proper physicians and any other relevant matter. It is the duty of a Muslim to tend sick non-Muslims and during the process explain higher moral and spiritual values as a man is closer to Allah in sickness and it may be that he may embrace Islam, the religion of righteousness.

A basic part of this etiquette is that when one visits the house of a sick person he should sit at a place from where it would not be possible to have a view of the womenfolk.

The Holy Prophet also said that when we visit a sick person we should request him to pray for us also, as the prayer of the sick is like the angels' prayer. The Holy Prophet himself used to pray for the sick thus:

"Allah! Kindly remove this torment. O Lord of mankind, cure him for Thou alone can cure. There is no cure except Thy cure. Cure him fully so that not a trace of the disease remains".

Attendance upon the sick was made into an exemplary Tradition, and later became a science in itself. Nursing and attendance upon the wounded by Hadrat Ayesha, Hadrat Fātima, and Hadrat Asmā daughter of Hadrat Abu Bakr Siddiq during the wars with the pagans of Mecca was a noble act and the Holy Prophet placed it on par with worship.

WATER – A LIFE-GIVING MUNIFICENCE

Allah, the Most Exalted, has not only created this universe but all living beings that it contains. All the needs that men feel in the span of their earthly lives were also generated by Him. His relationship with man is not merely that of a law-enforcing ruler but of a compassionate and generous Benefactor. Allah the Gracious has invited man at a number of places and in different ways in the Qur'an to ponder His compassion, munificence and infinite kindness. Allah the Most High says:

*“And in the earth are portents for those whose faith is sure.
And (also) in yourselves. Can ye then not see?”*

[Qur'an, LI:20–21]

At another place, He says about His limitless, countless and infinite boons and blessings:

“And if ye would count the favour of Allah ye cannot reckon it...”

[Qur'an, XVI:18]

At yet another place, it is said:

“See ye not how Allah hath made serviceable unto you whatsoever is in the skies and whatsoever is in the earth and hath loaded you with His favours both without and within...”

[Qur'an, XXXI:20]

From amongst all the blessings of the Creator of the universe, the one which is mentioned by Him again and again is water on which depends the life not only of man but the life of all living beings. Allah the Most High says in the Holy Qur'an:

“...We made every living thing of water...”

[Qur'an, XXI:30]

This means that life, for its existence and survival, needs water and rainfall is the most important and the biggest source of supply for this basic means of the continuation of life. Allah has adjudged rain as His blessing for His creatures. It is said in *sūra Arāf*:

*“And He it is Who sendeth the winds
as tidings heralding His mercy...”*

[Qur'an, VII:57]

The Prophet Noah (may peace be upon him) told his people who were intent on rebellion:

*“And I have said:
Seek pardon of your Lord. Lo! He was ever Forgiving.
He will let loose the sky for you in
plenteous rain,
And will help you with wealth
and sons, and will
assign unto you Gardens
and will assign
unto you rivers.”*

[Qur'an, LXXI:10-12]

It means that when Allah is pleased with his creatures He sends down His mercy and kindness in the form of rain. A subtle point which this verse makes overtly comprehensible is that the prosperity, the rains are expected to bring about is not meant for any one individual but for the entire community. It is, consequently, necessary that the whole community pass their lives in a manner which conforms to the dictates of Allah and is pleasing to Him, so that the community as a whole becomes worthy of Allah's blessings and His generosity and the rains really prove to be harbingers of His grace and bounty. One of the things that is most pleasing to Allah is that His blessings are duly acknowledged and valued as such. Hence we should value water – a blessing that we receive from Him through His compassion. The way taught by the Holy Prophet of thanksgiving for this munificence is that:

1. When this gift of Allah becomes available we should drink it while sitting and with due humility.
2. We should utter the name of Allah before drinking water and having had our drink of water we should humbly thank the Lord for making available to us this satisfying and life-giving boon.

The etiquette of drinking water, the Holy Prophet has taught us, is that the pot or utensil containing water should be kept covered at the top. We should not drink water from a big vessel by placing our mouth on it. One should drink water in sips leaving a gap in between for breath, so that one does not breathe into the utensil used for drinking.

The Holy Prophet has strictly forbidden the use of the area around water reservoirs for relieving oneself or for piling up refuse and waste material. One should not relieve oneself in the place where water is stored. He has also forbidden restricting or stopping the flow of water required for general use or selling it for profit. He has enjoined Muslims not to waste water and has ordered strict economy in the use of this great boon of Allah. He once said: “Even if you are sitting on the bank of a running stream, you should avoid wasteful use of water”.

Having understood the import of the dictates of Allah and the Sayings of

the Holy Prophet in this context we should now have a close look at our attitudes and analyse our typical behaviour. Do we look after our water wealth in the manner we take care of our precious things like money, jewellery and similar things of value; although one can keep alive without possessing any such objects of worldly wealth, and most people do. But water is a thing without which life cannot exist. Indeed water is life. Without water no living creature can survive beyond three days. This period of three days is the maximum limit set by men of medicine. But what agony a man undergoes without water, can be comprehended, to some extent, by people who keep fast during the month of Ramadan. Water is the source of life. It is a vital means of good health, a source of strength, vigour and energy. Life originated in water and to it is owed all freshness, all physical energy. Most of the human organism comprises water and life's chores and functions cannot continue without it — bulk of the human and animal food is water.

In many critical and near fatal conditions the sole chance to save life is intravenous supply of water to the body. It is hardly necessary to dilate on how callously water is wasted, how carelessly it is squandered, how completely its value is disregarded because everyone of us witnesses this spectacle everyday and because of it we all, everyone of us, are guilty. When water supply gets curtailed and its flow in the taps is reduced to less than a drip, we all suffer and undergo much agony. If we care to analyse the matter, we will inevitably come to the not very edifying conclusion, that we ourselves are partly responsible for this shortage. If we realise our civic responsibilities and act as sensible citizens, such painful situation would not normally arise. Conscientious citizens of free countries themselves solve most of their day-to-day problems and a community, the majority of whose members have a developed sense of civic responsibility, is indeed a well contented and happy community.

One of the serious problems the present day world is confronted with is the supply of potable water. Keeping up the daily supply of unpolluted drinkable water to cities and townships is becoming increasingly difficult. This situation keeps on creating a variety of novel problems. The supply of clean potable water to urban and rural communities is a basic problem in the Third World, besides the perennial problem of food shortage. We should, therefore, be grateful to the United Nations Organisation for having declared the ninth decade of this century as the Decade for Water. The years 1981–1990 have been exclusively devoted to finding ways and means of solving this problem and this is a step in the right direction. Indeed it may be called a very wise step. This initiative on the part of the World Body will, it is hoped, lead most countries of the world to review their national financial resources and to revise their expenditure estimates to find resources for taking practical measures to solve this problem.

Besides scientific planning and utilisation of financial and management resources at the national level it would be necessary to seriously examine this critical situation at the individual level. In view of the shortage of water every patriotic individual should ponder the seriousness of the problem and try to find

ways to help ease the situation to the extent he can. Every individual can help by exercising maximum economy in the use of this most precious resource, and by not expending it wastefully. Even if you save a litre of water a day, please rest assured that besides helping your own self, you have rendered useful service to your own people as well as to the whole of mankind. The contemporary population explosion, the accelerating pace of urbanisation and the increasing demand for water have combined to aggravate the seriousness of the problem, which is becoming graver with each day that passes. Everyone of us should keep this gravity of the matter in mind and each drop of drinking water should be treated as if it is the elixir of life.

As Muslims, it is for us a religious duty to act according to the guidance given to us by the Holy Prophet in the matter and not to show disregard to this blessing of Allah. We are forbidden to be prodigal. Wastage, irrespective of the thing involved, is bad. Wastage of a basic resource like water should not be tolerated at all. If we keep in view the seriousness of this problem we would not like to unnecessarily expend even a droplet of water. Cleanliness is a prerequisite of our *Īmān* (faith). We should not avoid taking any measures that we can, to keep water free of pollution. Please remember, economy in the use of water is both a basic need and an obligation for us. Keeping water clean is essential for life as well as an imperative of *Īmān*.

TREE PLANTATION

Beauty, grace, elegance, simplicity, propriety and polish are some of the prominent attributes of the Islamic temperament. Islam promotes love of Nature amongst its followers who, keeping completely attuned to it, give first priority in every department of life to progress and development. They are fully aware that in national development and reconstruction woodlands and forests have a prime importance. Trees, plants, woodlands and green belts around towns and cities enrich the landscape and are a source of aesthetic pleasure. We also know that they are essential to nation-building. Construction work cannot be conceived without timber. Furthermore, trees play an important role in holding back flood waters. Not only this, trees keep in check the danger of soil erosion. They are also vital for the maintenance of human health. They not only provide delicious and succulent fruits but supply fresh air for the lungs by exuding oxygen. Trees are essential for the maintenance and preservation of health. In short, trees are important in our lives in every way. Therefore planting trees, and nurturing and looking after them is both our need and duty.

Trees are mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān at a number of places. Although the type of tree plantation that is in vogue today did not exist when the Qur'ān was revealed, specially in deserts and arid areas where fresh drinking water was scarce and in certain cases unavailable. In those days one could not even conceive a campaign of tree plantation. Despite this, the Holy Qur'ān talks about trees in a manner which clearly shows that it considers them a sacred, useful, and profitable blessing for mankind. An interesting thing to note in this connection is that the word *Jinnah* in the terminology of the Qur'ān means a beautiful, lush garden. Allah the Most Exalted says:

"...theirs will be Gardens underneath which rivers flow."

[Qur'ān, LXXXV:11]

While talking of Moses in the *sūra Qasas*, Allah says:

*"...he was called from the right side of the valley in the blessed field,
from the tree..."*

[Qur'ān, XXVIII:30]

In like manner, talking of "the allegiance in the Garden" Allah has specially stressed the fact that this "allegiance was taken under a tree". In the *sūra Ibrāhīm*, Allah has called the *Kalima-i-Taiyyaba* 'as the sacred tree' and the vile word, 'the base tree' and this comparison received a special mention in the

following manner:

“Seest thou not how Allah coineth a similitude: A goodly saying, as a goodly tree, its root set firm, its branches reaching into heaven.”

[Qur’ān, XIV:24]

The Arabian peninsula was such a stark sandy region that it was called ‘the uncultivable expanse’. The Qur’ān contains the following invocation of the Prophet Ibrāhīm:

“Our Lord: Lo! I have settled some of my posterity in an uncultivable valley near unto Thy holy House.”

[Qur’ān, XIV: 37]

And this invocation is followed in the same verse, by this fervent prayer:

“...thereby producing fruits as food for you...”

[Qur’ān, XIV:32]

This prayer thus contains an explicit wish that Allah may in His gracious bounty give them the ability and good sense to plant fruit-bearing trees and to look after them, so that they may get their food from them in this barren land.

The Holy Prophet has given clear and explicit instructions in this regard to Muslims – to take interest in agriculture and tree plantation so that they should become self-sufficient in food and also draw maximum benefit from trees both during travel as well as residence at home. Both Imām Bukhārī and Imām Muslim have narrated a tradition that the Holy Prophet observed on a certain occasion that a Muslim who plants trees and cultivates land from which beasts and birds and human beings get their food, gets divine reward and recompense because all his labour becomes an alms and an offering.

No one before the Holy Prophet ever gave a more unequivocal or clear guidance to mankind in the matter. One aim of the explicit advice of the Holy Prophet stressing the importance and the utility of trees for society was to create amongst Muslims a zest for planting trees. Fresh water was exceedingly scarce in the Arabian peninsula; wherever a stream or a rivulet was found it always had groves of trees and vegetation alongside it. These were called ‘oases’. Normally, travelling caravans would break their journey, for resting and filling their water flasks at such spots – because they provided cool shade in the scorching heat and fresh water to quench the thirst.

The Holy Prophet told the Muslims that he who plants trees will be recipient of divine reward. This brings out the fact that what Allah expects most of His servants is that they be a source of a comfort and help to His creatures – the more an act is beneficial for Allah’s creatures the greater will be the quantum of recompense from Him to the one who did it.

Modern research has shown that the benefits from trees are not restricted to the fruits they yield and the shade they provide. They extend to and are closely tied up with the whole economy of a country. If all the advantages

accruing from tree plantation are recounted, this exercise will facilitate a fuller understanding of the wide implications of this *Hadīth* of the Holy Prophet:

“Trees are equally useful and beneficial for beasts and birds and human beings”.

The Holy Prophet observed in another *Hadīth* that the recompense of planting trees will continue till the Day of Judgement. Our scholars and traditionists have explained what is meant by getting the recompense till the Day of Judgement.

In short, tree plantation is, in the light of Islamic teachings, such a great act of public service that it brings immense and eternal reward. Care for trees is given such vital importance that it is forbidden to fell, uproot or destroy trees grown in the area around the Holy Mosque in Mecca. It is strictly prohibited to even break a branch or even a twig of these trees. This in fact means that Islam enjoins plantation of trees and disallows causing any damage to them.

In the light of Islamic teachings it is obligatory for the Muslims to plant and to tend trees. We the people of Islam live in countries with different types of climate — from the tropical Far East to North Western Africa — with lush forests, mighty rivers and endless scorching deserts. It is our duty to help the natural process where it is useful and stem its tide wherever necessary. One way of doing it is to plant trees. We Muslims are known for our love for plants and flowers. Let each one of us plant a tree at the proper time of the year and then continue to look after it. This will, on the one hand, mean that we have followed the *Sunnah* of the Holy Prophet and, on the other, that we have helped enrich our part of the environment.

**CHILDREN'S HEALTH
(THE GLORY AND THE GREATNESS OF THE FUTURE)**

Human life had existed on the earth with its light and darkness from time immemorial. There was life and then was man. The earth had its seasons, its flora and fauna, its oceans and deserts, its mountains and rivers. In short, this earthly abode contained all that was necessary for the continuation of life. Despite all this wherewithal human life was in a state of chaos and man was confused and bewildered. The mind of man did not conform to the law of Nature. Life had no pattern, no governing principles, no social organisation. Man was no doubt alive, but he was uninformed about the real purpose of his existence and he was not conscious of his responsibilities. Man's intellect had not yet been able to comprehend the basic questions: What is life and why does one have to die? Nor had he been able to find any plausible answers to them. Who is the creator of the universe and who is ordained to have dominion over the earth? Man was totally unaware of such matters, and the heaven was much too beyond his understanding. This situation demanded that Providence should make arrangements to guide mankind and the Creator of heavens and earth send down His munificence. Revelation descended upon the last and the greatest Prophet of Allah and he was given the unique distinction of becoming the embodiment of Allah's Word and the true and eternal guide of mankind (peace be upon him).

There are countless ways to study the Holy Qur'an. And man has throughout the ages pondered the Book in the light of his own perception. Eminent men of learning and erudition have continued, generation after generation, to devote their lives to the study of the Qur'an and to its exegesis. Philosophers and intellectuals have, in every age, given mankind the benefit of their specialist knowledge of the guidance, the Qur'an offers to mankind in all departments of individual and collective life. Men gifted with unique insight pondered the teachings of the Qur'an from the loftiest levels of intellect and erudition and provided the means of total well-being to mankind. There is a galaxy of great minds that spread enlightenment to the farthest corners of the world in the light of the Book and the Wisdom. Consequently, the message of Islam and the Word of Allah has reached every single human person, so that he may avail himself of it to understand the true object of human life and appreciate the greatness and the all-pervading glory of the Creator of this world and the Hereafter. The universal purport of the ideal life-style and purposeful human activity has been made explicit to one and all.

The sum total of all this study is now within the reach of human understanding. The Qur'ān is the revealed Word of Allah and it is the sublime Word which invites mankind to the law of Nature and creates within the mind of man the desire and the ability to stay in the fold of Nature. That is why we say that Islam is the only religion in the world which is completely in accord with Nature, and in conformity with Nature is its distinctive characteristic. It is universal, eternally viable and complete and perfect code of life.

The first revelation said 'Read'. It invites man to learn and to acquire knowledge. From it, we are led to the inevitable conclusion that Islam invites mankind to read and to get education and that in its scheme of things, education and erudition occupy a pre-eminent position. We know that knowledge is essential to understand the universe and all that it contains. Nature requires every man who dwells on this earth to acquire knowledge and to equip himself with the best possible education.

When we move a stage further, we find that Islamic teachings attach the utmost importance to human health. It is not only Islam that needs man to be in perfect health and physically fit, but this earth needs it too. The more we study the injunctions of the Holy Qur'ān and the teachings of the Holy Prophet, the clearer becomes the fact that Nature requires every human individual to be well-educated and to be absolutely healthy. Education and health are the two wheels of the life-wagon and on them depends the progress of the human race and the glory of man.

When man takes the study of Nature and the universe a stage further and concentrates on it with all his faculties he becomes aware of the fact that the greatest wealth of man is the child. Healthy and vigorous children of a nation are its greatest asset and a guarantee of its future eminence and greatness.

We all know that our Holy Prophet, the greatest guide and teacher of mankind, was exceedingly fond of children and was ever so kind and affectionate to them. The Books of Tradition – each one of them – have an exclusive chapter on the Holy Prophet's love for children.

The guidance of the true faith, the Sayings of the Holy Prophet and his practice all combine to give us a guiding principle regarding the upbringing of children. With regard to their health we are specifically told to be fully cognizant of the fact that the future of the *Ummah* depends on the health of our children. The proper course for us is to ensure that our children enjoy perfect health so that we can present to the future a healthy and sturdy generation. We should see to it that our children receive the best education that we can provide them and thereby lay the foundations of a noble and dynamic society. While planning for our children we should keep in view the *Hadīth* of the Holy Prophet that 'Allah prefers a strong and healthy believer to a weak and sickly believer'. The sublime and universal teachings of Islam and the injunctions of the Qur'ān and the Sayings of the Holy Prophet with regard to love and affection for the children have not only been accepted as practical guidance by us Muslims but have influenced each and every nation and people of the world. The whole world owes us a deep debt in this particular domain. May Allah be praised for it.

The WHO is a world body in which all nations of the world are represented. Here eminent men from all over the world come together and jointly work out ways and means for improving world health standards. This World Health Organisation, on the occasion of the World Health Day, which fell on April 7, 1984, made children's health the subject of a worldwide campaign. This campaign was launched under the title: 'Children's Health – Future Wealth'.

It is gratifying to note that the entire world is now giving due importance to the health of children and has accepted the fact that healthy children are the only means to future well-being and greatness.

We should know and be convinced that child-health is a matter of fundamental importance. In fact this is the corner-stone of the edifice of future plans and projects. As the maxim goes, 'child is the father of man'. He who is a child today, will tomorrow be a father, a citizen, a leader of men. Hence by ensuring proper health-care for our children we will be laying the foundations of tomorrow's healthy nation and healthy society. If a child is ill and we do not attend to him with the care he requires, we will in other words be guilty of giving to the future a weak and sickly citizen.

Good health is not only an essential requisite of the well-being of the children but is also necessary for the future society and for the successful implementation of its plans and objectives.

In our part of the world people generally pay little heed to the health of children. The reason for this neglect is the prevalent ignorance of the people with regard to the principles of health and the general lack of awareness about this most unfortunate state of ignorance. The first thing we need is that every member of our nation should have at least the minimum awareness of health principles – the ability to distinguish between the state of sound health and the state of ill-health. This will enable him to detect the beginning of an ailment and consequently to take steps to cure it.

If we attend earnestly to spreading health education it should not at all be difficult for us to safeguard our own health and the health of our children from anti-health factors and forces. The child mortality rate in the Third World to which we belong is still high. So, if we want to save our future wealth from being lost we will have to give more importance to our youngsters as compared to the grown-ups.

Children's Health – Future Wealth – the topic selected by the WHO is commendable and practicable from all points of view. If we want our dreams of a healthy, dynamic, progressive future society to come true we will have to get in line with the WHO's campaign and utilise all our best talent and all our financial and moral resources to ensure the health and sound physical growth of our children. We have to begin today and work day and night to ensure against a weak, sickly and helpless future generation.

We, the Muslims, have practical guidelines given to us by the Holy Qur'an and the *Sunnah* of the Holy Prophet, which if adhered to intelligently and consciously will help us bring up a healthy new generation – fit in every way to shoulder the onerous material, moral and religious responsibilities that will

devolve on them as true Muslims.

Let us make a concerted effort in our respective societies to improve the health of our young sons and daughters and provide them with good religious as well as scientific education in order to equip them for their future role in the Islamic renaissance.

A BALANCED DIET

Health problems have become a little too complicated in the contemporary world and there is a general deterioration in human health. Many different reasons are advanced by experts for this alarming situation. Among them are factors such as: poor diet, toxicity of chemical ingredients, stresses of industrialisation, a general feeling of insecurity etc. But I think what we need most is to change the prevailing attitudes and to find out the real causes which have led to this rapid decline in health standards. Man can neither do without diet nor ignore the link that exists between diet and health. We find many guiding principles about health and clear instructions regarding preventive measures against the incidence of ill-health in our religion. For instance, the following general injunction:

*"...And eat and drink, but be not prodigal.
Lo! He loveth not the prodigals."*

[Qur'an, VII:31]

Islam does not order people not to take any diet. But in the light of this verse sets some limits to eating and drinking and disapproves of transgressing them. To enable you to fully comprehend all the implications of the instructions contained in this verse, I invite you to ponder a *Hadith* of the Holy Prophet: "Do not eat to full satiation and do not eat after having eaten, because this is the cause of all ailments." Another *Hadith* in which the Holy Prophet has laid down the principle governing the diet of the believers explains the matter in full detail: "We are people that do not eat unless we are hungry and when we eat we do not stuff our stomachs."

The fact that over-eating leads to ill-health has been universally accepted from times immemorial to the present day. More than necessary intake of food produces many maladies, most of which not only cause permanent damage to health but are a real danger to life.

Before I proceed further I will refer to another *Hadith*: "He who is frugal in his diet will have a healthy stomach and he who eats much will have a bad stomach and a hard heart".

If we ponder this *Hadith* in depth we will come to realise the fact that purity of heart is among the benefits that accrue from frugality in diet. Similarly narrow-heartedness and callousness are the product of over-eating. In all

likelihood the diffusion of Arabian and Ajamite life-styles and unprecedented affluence led to the replacement of the simplicity of the Islamic culture by luxurious and extravagant living. The simple and natural dietary tradition also underwent a transformation along with other manners and mores. In the Arabian peninsula the dietary tradition which had continued from pre-historic times comprised two meals in twenty-four hours – morning and evening. This tradition was followed by the relatively more affluent tribes, while the normal pattern was only one meal a day, which was considered quite adequate by the people. I will corroborate this two-meals-a-day principle by a Qur'ānic verse. Describing the life of the people of the Paradise, the Qur'an says:

“...and therein they have food for
morn and evening.”

(Qur'an, XIX:62)

Views expressed by numerous Muslim saints and scholars support the concept of 'frugality in diet'.

Imām Ghazālī writes in his great work *Ahya al Ulūm* that frugality in eating and drinking cures many ailments and consequently man keeps healthy and physically fit. The following saying of Asma'i not only represents the ancient point of view in the matter but is a sound advice in the context of modern research. He says, “I am ninety years old now. But neither have I lost a tooth so far nor have I fallen a prey to any nervous malfunction. I have never had any nose or ear trouble. My eyesight is perfect. There is only one reason for all this and that is frugality in diet”.

There is a famous saying of Hadrat Amr bin al-Ās which runs like this: Never has there been a people who indulged in over-eating and did not lose its reason and sense of proportion. And never was there a man who slept with an overfilled stomach and his strength and resolve did not forsake him.

Hadrat Umar Fārūq has said, “Eschew over-eating and avoid immoderation because it corrupts the organism, which leads to ill-health”. When over-eating becomes a habit it makes a man lazy and he starts neglecting the obligatory prayer. Be moderate in eating and drinking because this is the only way to keep the body in a state of equilibrium.

Have a look round. All the problems that the Muslim world is faced with such as health complications, economic adversity and moral degradation can be quickly and permanently solved if we start conforming to the simple and natural dietary principles contained in the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*. We should remove the common misunderstanding that frugality in diet or moderation in the intake of food will merely improve our general health standards. The fact of the matter is that it will have a wide and profound impact on our morality, our economy and our psyche. Abstaining from food which is surplus to what is necessary for our health will make enough food available for our impoverished population which at present does not get even one square meal a day. It will also cure us of our moral lassitude, will help our spiritual growth and will create

in us the desire to submit our being in total surrender to Allah the Most Exalted. Furthermore, it will promote our economy on the solid foundations of mutual cooperation and brotherhood.

This principle of frugality in diet is not only a basic tenet of Islam but modern advances in medical research and scientific enquiry are in full agreement with and completely corroborate it. I will support my thesis with another fact of far-reaching importance. Just look at the matter in the light of the training course which is obligatory on us Muslims during the month of Ramaḍān. The two meal hours during Ramaḍān are the *iftār* and the *saḥar*. There is no third occasion for eating in the twenty-four hours. No doubt the month of Ramaḍān is an auspicious month. And the end-product of all worship during it is to make man take to the path of moderation – adopt balance and frugality in diet – he should eat and drink but abstain from being prodigal. One of the main purposes of enforcing frugality in diet is to make man conscious of, and realistically appraise, the lot of those unfortunate millions who regularly go without food. This holy month of fasting is the month of training for us Muslims and Allah has lit up, during this period, the path of human co-operation and sharing, in answer to this prayer of the Holy Prophet:

“O Allah, make it auspicious for us whatever You give us and give us the wisdom to be content with whatever You give us”.

الكتاب الذي أنزلنا في القرآن



ALLAH HAS REVEALED
THE MOST BEAUTIFUL MESSAGE
IN THE FORM OF A BOOK
(AL-QUR'AN 39:23)

NUSTUR

HAKIM MOHAMMAD SAID