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The Fragrance of East

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Wisdom of Qur'an

The likeness of those who disbelieved in their Lord (is that): their deeds are like ashes, over which the wind blew strong on a stormy day; they have no power at all over what they earned. That, indeed, is the distant error. (S.14 A.18)

Commentary: By the words "stormy day" the allusion is to the Day of Judgement (Ibn Jarir, from Ibn Abbas)

Are the material achievements, tall buildings, large parks and wide roads, industries, universities, research centers and seats of learning, banks and commercial centers, high rise towers and historical monuments, arts science and literary heritage, the glittering civilization and gorgeous culture, in short, result of centuries of human endeavor, any more than ashes for the storms of the next morn?

Yusuf Ali comments: "Note the fullness of the parable. The work of the ungodly are in themselves light and unsubstantial like ashes; they are the useless rubbish that remains out of the faculties and opportunities which they have misused by burning them up. Future, the ashes are blown about hither and thither by the wind: the ungodly have no compass, direction, or purpose that can stand. The wind, too, which blows on them, is no ordinary wind, nor the day on which they seek to enjoy the fruits of their labors an ordinary tranquil day; a furious gale is blowing, for such is the Wrath of Allah. They have neither internal peace nor external gain. In the scattering of the ashes they lose control even of such things as they might have earned but for their misdeeds. Their whole nature is contaminated. All their wishes go astray. They are carried so far, far away than what was in their minds. What did they aim at, and what did they achieve?"

Pearls from the Prophet Muhammad(S)

It is related on the authority of Anas that the Prophet of Allah - blessings and peace be upon him-said, "supplication is quintessence of worship."

-Tirmidhi

Commentary : The true spirit of worship is reflected in man's humbling himself before Allah and exhibiting his total submission to Him. This is exactly what supplication does. From the beginning to the end and in its parts as well as on the whole, supplication is an expression of man's submission to Allah. Thus supplication is undoubtedly the quintessence of worship.

"Abu Huraira relates that the Prophet of Allah blessings and peace be upon him - said, 'Nothing is more honourable in the sight of Allah than supplication.'"

-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah

Commentary : As supplication is the quintessence of worship and worshipping the purpose of man's creation, supplication naturally stands as the most honourable deed of man and attracts the mercy and blessings of Allah most.

"Abu Huraira relates that the Prophet Of Allah blessings and peace be upon him said, "Allah is angry with the person who does not ask of Him."

- Tirmidhi

Commentary : Nobody gets angry with the person who does not ask of him for his needs. On the contrary he may be irritated at being asked too frequently. Even parents lose patience if a child approaches them for help too often. But Allah is so merciful, compassionate, and kind that He is displeased with the bondsman who does not ask of Him on his needs and is so much pleased with him who does. Praise to You, O Lord of the Worlds, O, most Merciful!

Editor's Note:

TERRIBLE LOSS

Serial bombings in Jaipur on May 13, 2008 evening are chilling reminders of how dangerously we are exposed to such eventualities. It was a coordinated attack because seven blasts triggered within minutes of each other. The intent of the perpetrators was quite obvious. They wanted to harm a large number of people collected in the busy market and places of worship. The way the explosions were synchronized indicate of similar means in earlier blasts elsewhere in the country. By killing innocent people, maiming thousand of them for life must be the plan of some distracted persons, misguided and lacking the human values. Such act must be condemned in the strongest possible manner.

It is unfortunate that whenever such incidents occur instead of going into the niceties of the investigation and finding out the real culprits a biased administration and some politicians known for their prejudice against Muslims start accusing the community of its involvement in such acts. We have seen this in Delhi, Varanasi, Mumbai, Malegaon, Ajmer, Hyderabad, Lucknow, Faizabad and other places. Though for argument sake we may accept that non-Muslims are the target of much attacks but then what explains the bomb blasts in Ajmer Shrine, Malegaon Masjid, Mecca Masjid Hyderabad where only Muslims were the targets. Similarly blasts in court – compounds or in busy markets where there is always a mixed gathering. To blame a particular community and assail it all round is unethical. Such accusations germinate a feeling of isolation and cause irritation. It is unfortunate that instead of honestly working out such cases and nabbing actual culprits often innocent persons are harassed and held in captivity merely on suspicion.

It is often said that these terrorist attacks are engineered from across the border. If it is so then respective countries must be engaged in fruitful talks and persuaded to spare the humanity of such blatant cruelty. An eye witness of Jaipur blast Lalit Khateri has rightly said that "It was an attack not on Hindus or Muslims but Indians." This fact must be taken note of and Indian Government must take the issue with its neighbouring countries.

A former Intelligence officer, B.Raman, writing in the Times of India (May

15) has mentioned various reasons for which terrorists periodically attack soft targets in widely dispersed areas. First they want to demonstrate their reach. They want to show that they can operate in any part of the country in the case of indigenous organizations and in any part of the world. Second, they want to discredit the police and security agencies by demonstrating their capability to strike. Third, they want to make the police and other security agencies overreact to their successful strikes. Such reaction often come in the form of large scale arrests of members of the community to which the alleged terrorists, belong and the use of harsh methods to interrogate them. This creates animosity towards the police and the government in the victim community and adds to their sense of abeination. Such over reaction, could also create a divide between different communities, thereby resulting in the flow of more recruits to the rank of the terrorist. Fourth, attacks on soft targets are also undertaken in reprisal for perceived wrong, committed by the government or police towards members of the community to which the terrorist (allegedly) belong or even towards the terrorist themselves. If they are not able to retaliate against hard targets, they retaliate against soft targets. The LTTE in Sri Lanka (and ULFA in India) often resorts to such attacks on soft targets.

Time and again we have condemned such terrorist activities and in the wake of Jaipur blasts we again hold the culprits as the cruel enemies of humanity. ■ SA

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INTELLECTUAL PURSUIT IN RELIGIOUS MATTER

S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi

Earlier Religions

We are not aware of any religion or scripture, claiming its origin to revelation or inspiration, which has urged its followers, in the way the Qur'an does, to make use of their faculties of knowing and reasoning, make lessons from past experience, observe the multiplicity of phenomena in order to reflect over them, and called to account for their mindlessness in ignoring harmony between the laws of nature and working of the universe or for paying little heed to episodes of the past.

Seeing and understanding

Among and senses possessed by man the Qur'an very often appeals to the sense of seeing so that he may observe carefully in order to understand the nature of things. Here are a few examples.

"Have they not seen how We drive the water to the dry land and bring-forth crops therewith, where of their cattle and themselves eat? What, will they not see?"

"But blind they were, and deaf. Then God turned towards them; then again blind they were, many of them, and deaf; and Allah is beholder of what they do."

"Say: Are the blind and the seeing equal? Will you then not reflect?"

"The likeness of the two parties is as the blind and the deaf, and the seeing and the hearing. Are the two equal in likeness? Are you not admonished then?"

"Say : Are these, the blind and the seeing alike, or are darkness and light alike?"

"Not equal are the blind and the seeing, neither darkness and light."

The Qur'an warns man for being headless and unreflecting on the natural phenomena which are but signs of God.

"How many a sign there is in the heavens and in the earth that they pass by turning away from it."

"Therefore take heed, you who have eyes."

In order to emphasize the need for applying one's mind, the Qur'an very often uses such expressions 'happily you will reflect', 'do you not understand' and if you will reflect;. Such phrases have been employed at as many as 23 places.

“So Allah makes clear His sign for you: haply you will understand.”

“Verily We have expounded you the signs, if you will reflect.”

“Abode of the hereafter is better for those who are God fearing. Do you not then understand?”

“And assuredly We have sent down to you a Book in which is a admonition for you; will you then not reflect.”

“And you pass by them in the morning and in the night; will you not understand?”

Those who are doomed to hell are particularly reproached for not using their intellect.

“They (also) say; if we had only listed or had understood, we would not have been of the dweller of the Blaze,”

At more than twenty places the Qur’an speaks well of those who use their brains.

The Qur’an repeatedly calls attention to the need of giving thought; praises those who are thoughtful and condemns those who are unreflecting. On eleven occasions it points out the virtue of collecting one’s thoughts and contemplating on the signs of God.

“Who remember Allah standing and sitting and lying on their sides and reflect on the creation of heavens and the earth;”

“So relate the story, haply they will reflect.”

“Surely in that are signs for the people who reflect.”

Raking one’s brain and contemplation are the means, according to the Qur’an, through which man can perceive the reality.

“Our Lord! Thou hast not created this in vain.”

Great influence on Human Race

The Quranic teachings gave birth to a rationalist trend in the widest sense of the term taken etymologically and historically. It made a deep impact on arts and literature and human civilization all over the world in such a way as if a new window had been opened to let in light and fresh air. Islam broke open the lock with which human intellect had been fastened for ages by the enemies of reason, masquerading as representatives of religion. It was then that the humanity woke up after its long sleep of several centuries, removed the hurdles placed in its way and set its foot on the road to enlightenment and progress.

A French scholar Jolivet Castelot has described this astounding achievement of Islam in his *La loi de l'histoire* (The Law of History). He writes: "Arabs rapidly made strides after the death of the Prophet since the time as also very congenial for the spread of Islam. Simultaneously, the Islamic civilization saw a phenomenal advancement and spread in the wake of Arab victories. Sciences, arts, poetry and literature reflected its influence and thus the Arabs remained the torch-bearers of intellectualism in the succeeding centuries. They were the spokesman of all the sciences like philosophy, astronomy, chemistry, medicine and spiritual disciplines. They were not leaders of thought, discoverers and inventors only in name but truly deserve to be so called for they applied their mind with wisdom and intelligence. The Span of Arab civilization was short, yet its influence was far-reaching. We can only regret its downfall."

He also says:

"Although they were feudalistic by temperament yet their accomplishments were far beyond their capacity. They gave birth to an admirable civilization. Europe is indebted to Arab civilization which held away from the tenth to the fourteenth century. Europe imbibed its philosophical and intellectual thought which imperceptibly influenced the medieval ages. Compared to Arab civilization, Arab sciences and Arab literature it (Europe) appears to us sunk in ignorance and darkness- it benefited from the health-giving thoughts propagated by the Arabs

"No civilization was there during these four centuries. Intellectuals of the west are today holding aloft the banner of this very civilization."

Gustave Le Bon writes about Arab contribution to modern civilization.

"Observation, experimentation and inductive logic which form the fundamentals of modern knowledge are attributed to Roger Bacon but it needs to be acknowledged that this process of reasoning was entirely an Arab discovery."

Robert Briffault has also reached the same conclusion for he says:

"There is not a single aspect of European growth in which the decisive influence of Islamic civilization is not traceable."

He further writes:

"It was not science only which brought Europe back to life. Other and manifold influences from the civilization of Islam communicated its first glow to European life."

It is sometimes claimed that the renaissance of Europe owes everything to the

revival of Greek thought. The renowned historian H. G. Wells, however, asserts that the modern world received the gifts of light and power from Islam.

“—————From a new angle and with a fresh vigor it (the Arab mind) took up that systematic development of positive knowledge which the Greeks had begun and relinquished. If the Greek was the father, then the Arab was foster-father of the scientific method of dealing with reality, that is to say, by absolute frankness, the utmost simplicity of statement and explanation, exact record and exhaustive criticism. Through the Arab it was and not by the Latin route that the modern world received that gift of light and power.” ■

MORAL & MANNERS

It is related by 'Abdullah bin Amr that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said, "The best of you are those who possess the best of manners."

- *Bukhari and Muslim*

Abu Hurayrah related that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said, "Muslims who possess better morals are the most perfect in Faith."

- *Abu Da'ud and Darimi*

It is related by Abu Darda, that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said, "On the Day of Reckoning, the most weighty item in the Scales of Deeds will be good manners."

- *Abu Da'ud and Tirmidhi*

THE RIGHTS OF PARENTS

S.Sulaiman Nadwi

It has been said in the Holy Qur'an :

And we enjoined man (to show kindness) to his parents, for weakness after wearkness his mother bore him and he is not weaned before he is two years of age.(31 : 14).

We have enjoined man to show kindness to his parents. With much pain his mother bears him, and with pain she brings him into the world. He is born and weaned in thirty months.(46 : 15)

Abu Huraira reported that a person came to Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and said: Who among the people is most deserving of a fine treatment from my hand? He said: Your mother. He again said: Then who (is the next one)? He said: Again it is your mother (who deserves the best treatment from you). He said: Then who (is the next one)? He (the Holy Prophet) said: Again it is your mother. He (again) said: Then who? Thereupon he said: Then it is your father.

Ibn 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated that a man came to the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and said: Messenger of Allah, I have committed a major sin. Is there any repentance for me? He (the Holy Prophet) questioned if he had his mother. He said: yes. He (the Holy Prophet) said: Then accord her good treatment.

'Abdullah b. 'Amr reported that a person came to Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and sought permission (to participate) in Jihad, where upon He (the Holy Prophet) said: Are your parents living? He said: yes. Thereupon he (the Holy Prophet) said: You should put in your best efforts (in their) service.

Abu Huraira reported. A person said: Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) who amongst the people is most deserving of my good treat-

ment? He said: your mother again your mother, again your mother, then your father, then your nearest relatives, according to the order (of nearness).

The women's role as mother is regarded in Islam as being of highest importance. Because of her innate fitness and capacity she has been entrusted the most important of all tasks; the shaping of the future generation of humanity. Islam acknowledges the immensity of the debt which an individual owes to his parents, and especially his mother, his first school in life and in many Qur'anic verses and Ahadith such as quoted above and given below:

Say: Come, I will recite to you what your Lord has made a sacred obligation on you: that you associate nothing with Him (as partner in His Divinity) and that you do good to your parents.

Your Lord has enjoined you to worship none but Him, and to show kindness to parents. If either or both of them attain old age with you, say neither "fie" unto them nor reproach them, but speak unto both of them a gracious word and treat them with humility and tenderness (and lower unto them the wing of submission through mercy) and say: Lord be merciful to them as they did care for me when I was little.
(17:23,24)

'Abdullah b. 'Amr (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: The pleasure of the Lord is the pleasure of the father and the displeasure of the Lord is the displeasure of the father.

Abu Huraira reported: Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: Let him be humbled. Let him be humbled. It was said: Allah's Messenger who is he? He said: He who finds his parents in old age, either one or both of them, but he does not enter Paradise.

The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: Paradise lies beneath the feet of mother.

It is clear in the light of the verses of the Holy Qur'an and Ahadith that the sacrifices of mother are greater than those of father. Hence one should serve one's mother with special consideration and devotion and accord kind and better treatment.

It is reported on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: Whenever an obedient son looks at his parents kindly, Allah writes for him (the credit equal to) an accepted Hajj (pilgrimage) for every look.

One must not disobey the parents unless their demand is against the tenets of Islam. On account of their extraordinary sacrifice and devotion, unparalleled self-sacrifice and deep love and affection towards the children, reverential and most courteous attitude should be adopted towards them.

'Abdullah b. 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: Three persons set out on a journey. They were overtaken by rain and they had to seek protection in a mountain cave where at its mouth fell a rock of that mountain and thus blocked it altogether. One of them said to the others: Look to your deeds that you performed for the sake of Allah and then supplicate Allah, the Exalted, that He might rescue you. One of them said: O Allah, I had my parents who were old and my wife and my small children also. I tended the flock and when I came back to them in the evening, I milked them (the sheep, goats, cows etc.) and first served the milk to my parents. One day I was obliged to go out a distant place in search of fodder and I could not come back before evening and found them (the parents) asleep. I milked the animals as I used to milk and brought milk to them and stood by their heads avoiding to disturb them from sleep and I did not deem it advisable to serve milk to my children before serving them. My children wept near my feet. I remained there in that very state and my parents too until it was morning. And (O Allah) if Thou art aware that I did this in order to seek Thine pleasure, grant us riddance from this trouble. (The rock slipped a bit) so that they could see the sky. Then the other persons supplicated to Allah giving reference to the good deeds they had performed for the sake of Allah and Allah relieved them from the rest of the trouble.

'Abdullah b. 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: The finest act of goodness is that a person should treat kindly the loved ones of his father. ■

AIMPLB TO USE QURAN'S QUOTES TO FIGHT AGAINST FEMALE FOETICIDE

"Killing the girl child is one of the biggest sins according to the Quran. When a girl is born, Allah comes down to the earth to bless the child and the family is bestowed with all His blessings..."

With the words like these from scriptures, the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) will now try to curb the increasing number of female foeticide and dowry cases among the Muslim across the country. The AIMPLB will be using two booklets written by eminent clerics, Maulana Mufti Fuzail-ur-rehman Hilal Usmani, an active member of the AIMPLB who hails from Punjab and Wali Rehmani, AIMPLB Secretary hailing from Munger in Bihar and also the convenor of AIMPLB's social wing - Islahe-maashra committee - to create awareness about those social evils.

The books are titled as Dukhtarkashi ki laanat aur iska hal (The ills of foeticide and solutions) and Ladkiyon ka katleam (Killing of girls). Apart from the quotes from Quran, the books have extensive data on dowry and foeticide from all over the country.

"We have seen that whenever religious bodies like the AIMPLB take up social cause, they come up with better results. When clerics joined hands for the polio campaign in UP and Bihar, the result were better. Hence, during the annual summit of AIMPLB at Kolkata recently, it was decided that clerics and intellectuals from the community will work together to spread awareness about female foeticide and dowry," said Shirajuddin, convenor of the AIMPLB in U.P.

In the first stage, these books will be used for mass circulation in UP and Bihar, where the problem persists in a large scale. Also, to involve the Muslims who are not Urdu literate in the campaign the Board will be releasing Hindi translations of the books.

While the Urdu versions have already been sent to various coordinating NGOs throughout the state, focusing on Central and Western UP, the Hindi versions will also be released soon for the urban areas of the state.

NGOs will also circulate the books among students and the youth, besides using them as a reference material during awareness meetings.

(Indian Express - 16-4-08)

KNOWLEDGE - A BOON

Obaidur Rahman Nadwi

The civilisation has assumed a new chapter in the 21th century which has Just begun. New values of life are driving away the old ones. Society is taking a steep turn towards the so-called modernisation and bringing with it host of problems. However, knowledge has always been a guiding factor in human life. It has played a crucial role in the past and will surely be a beacon in the present. The need of the hour is that we should acquire good and useful knowledge and put it into practice in letter and spirit. It must be borne in mind that the holy prophet Muhammad (SAW) sought refuge from such knowledge which does not benefit. Prophet's supplication is as follows :

"O Allah, I seek your refuge from a knowledge that does not benefit, from a heart that does not fear, from a soul that is not satisfied, and from a prayer that is not granted".

It is obvious that those who get knowledge and do not act on it, they have no status and value in the sight of Allah. On the Day of Judgement their knowledge would be their nuisance and curse for them. The holy Quran says, "O ye who believe ! why say ye that which ye do not ? Grievously hateful is that in the sight of God that ye say that which ye do not". (61:2-3)

Needless to add that Almighty Allah bestowed upon good and pious learned men the greatest position and held them in high esteem. The holy Quran says, "Say, shall those who know be deemed equal with those who do not". Again it says, "God will raise in rank those of you who believe as well as those who are given knowledge."

The prophet Muhammad said, "whom God doth love, He giveth knowledge of religion and guideth him in to the straight path, " and again "the learned men are the heirs of the prophets". He also said, "on the Day of Resurrection the ink of the learned men will be likened to the blood of the martyrs, " and again he said, "The learned men are the trustees of God on earth." And again he said, " The passing away of a whole tribe is more tolerable than the death of one learned man." The prophet said, "The superior rank the learned man holds over the worshippers is similar to the superiority of the moon when it is full over the other stars. And again, "The learned believer holds a rank seventy degrees higher than that of the ordinary believer".

Once the prophet was asked, "O Apostle of God! what works are best?" The prophet of Allah said, "who ever follows a path in search of knowledge, God will guide him into a path leading into paradise". And again, "verily the angles will bow low to the seeker after knowledge in approval of what he does." And again, " when the human being dies, all his deeds come to an end except for three: Firstly, Assadqah (charity) that never ends, secondly, the knowledge that benefits, thridly, the pious offering that prays for him."

Umar (R) said, "The death of a thousand worshippers who spend their days in fasting and their nights in continual prayer is a lesser calamity than the passing away of one learned man who is aware what is lawful before God and what is unlawful."

Hazrat Ali said to Kamil: "O Kamil, knowledge is better than wealth. Knowledge guards you but you are guarding wealth. Knowledge dispenses justice while wealth seeks justice. Wealth decreases with expense while knowledge increases with expense. "He said: "A learned man is better than one who prays and fights in the way of Allah. When a learned man dies, such a calamity befalls on Islam, which cannot be removed except by his successor." Hazrat Ali said in a poem:

"Glory is due to none other than to the
learned;
Guided are they and proofs to the seekers of
guidance;
Everybody is honoured proportionate to his
knowledge;
But the illiterate are disgraced as enemies of
the learned;
Acquire knowledge you will be immortal;
All men are dead, only the learned are alive;"

In his book "The Book of Knowledge" Imam Al-Gazzali has mentioned a saying of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) which is quite relevant in this context. The Apostle of God said, "For everything there is an instrument and a tool, and the instrument of the believer is his intellect, for everything there is a mainstay, and the mainstay of man is his intellect, for everything there is a support, and the support of reli-

gion is the intellect, for every group of men there is a goal, and the goal of the worshippers in the intellect; for every people there is a missionary (who calls them to the true faith), and the missionary of the devout is the intellect; for every merchant there are goods and merchandise and the merchandise of the scholars is the intellect; for every house there is a keeper, and the keeper of the house of the saints is the intellect; for the every ruin there is rehabilitation, and the rehabilitation of the death is the intellect; for every man there is an offspring who bears his name and perpetuates his memory and the offsprings of the saints, who bear their names and perpetuate their memory, are their intellects; and finally for every journey there is a shelter and the shelter of the believers is the intellect."

Now we should think of the following sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). He said, "No man will be learned unless he puts knowledge into practice." He said, "Acquire not knowledge in order to vie with the learned, dispute with and silence the insolent, and win favour and popularity among men, for whosoever would do this would be doomed to Hell-fire," and again, whoever would counceal his knowledge, would be bridled by God with a bit of fire".

Anas narrates that the Prophet (SAW) said, "I saw several men whose lips were being clipped by scissors of fire. I asked Gibrael, "Who are these people ?" He said, "These are the sermonisers of your Ummah who ask other people to do good but do not follow it themselves".

The Prophet said, "Do not attend the circle of any learned man except him who would call upon you to relinquish five things in favour of five others, namely to relinquish doubt in favour of belief, hypocrisy in favour of sincerity, worldliness in favour of asceticism, pride in favour of humility, and enmity in favour of love."

Prophet Jesus said, "The parable of him who acquires knowledge but does not do accordingly, is like the parable of the woman who has secretly committed adultery and on becoming pregnant, her sin becomes known. So it is with him who does not do according to his knowledge; on the Day of Resurrection he will be openly disgraced by God."

In a nutshell we may gain our ends and goals and attain the pleasure of God only through good and pious knowledge. Hence it is imperative that we must cultivate good knowledge and follow it whole heartedly. Besides we should imbibe sublime qualities, virtuous norms and holy acts only then we may prosper in this world and the hereafter. May God give us strength to develop such spirit of quality and abide by it. ■

SCHOLARS DISCUSS ROLE OF MADARSAS

A seminar on the role of madarsas in Urdu was organized by literary organization Bazm-e-Urdu on Sunday. Held at the Ganga Prasad Memorial Hall, the Seminar was presided over by AIMPLB President and Rector of Nadwatul Ulema Maulana S.M. Rabey Hasani Nadwi. Speaking on the occasion, Maulana Nadwi said that it was madrasas that had kept the Urdu alive. He lauded the role of madrasas in promoting the language. Maulana Salman Husaini Nadwi said that madrasas were instrumental in preserving the speeches and addresses of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Former chairman of Urdu Academy Manzoor Ahmad said that had there not been madrasas in the country, most of the valuable Arabic literature would not have been translated into Urdu.

(The Pioneer- 05.05.08)

ISLAM AND NON-MUSLIMS

S.G. Mohiuddin

“This is no time for petty and destructive criticism, no time for ill-will or blaming others. We have to build a noble mansion of free India where all her children may dwell”, was the advice given by Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru on the onset of Independence in his speech in the night of August 14-15, 1947. Unfortunately, however, an offensive of acrimony and calumny is being carried out to make free India’s “noble mansion” an uncomfortable place for the second largest segment of the nation. Here we propose to touch one such grievous drive.

Ever since the failure of an attempt to get the Holy Quran banned by the Calcutta High Court a few years back an unrelenting campaign against the Quran has been launched by an organization under different names to disparage Islam, to prove that the Holy Quran teaches indiscriminate violence against non-Muslims and that Islam was preached by sword. Instead of focussing attention on soaring prices of essential commodities, corruption, criminalisation, poverty, foreign debt etc. these individuals and organizations seem to think that by creating hatred and animosity between the two major sections of the nation they can divert attention of the people from the demand of its deprived sections for restoration of economic and social equality.

These promoters of malignant vindictiveness, mis-quote, distort and take out of context the Quranic verses relating to jihad and ignore its teachings about clement behavior towards all, the believers and non-believers. Let us, therefore, first take the verses permitting Muslims to fight their enemies and the background of revelation of these verse.

ADVENT OF ISLAM :

Islam began with the revelation of first few verses of the Quran to the Prophet of Islam (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) at Makkah as a religious movement whose central aim was the establishment of the service and worship of God alone. As such, it was bound to provoke the enmity of the Quraish, who, as the custodians of Kaba, saw their vested interests in the service of false gods in danger.

They opposed Islam persecuted the Muslims and did all in their power to prevent the faith from taking root. This phase lasted for thirteen long years of the Prophet's stay at Makkah. The Quraish, with the passage of time, intensified their efforts to repress the new faith and to oppress the new Muslim converts. When the noble Prophet found unbearable the trails and persecution to which his followers were exposed and from which he was unable to protect them, he suggested to them to migrate to Abyssinia where the King Nagus was reported to be just and kind-hearted. In two successive stages eighty-three Muslims left Makkah for Abyssinia. Unable to check the Muslim exodus to Abyssinia, the Quraish even sent an official delegation to Abyssinia to make a request for their extradition. The Quraish, however, failed in their efforts and in a fit of frustration and indignation they resorted to hysterical violence against the adherents of the new religion. They decided to completely boycott the Muslims and their Hashimite supporters. Weeks and months passed, the Muslims and the Prophet's clan of Hashimites lived in misery and hunger. The ban was so rigorously enforced that the Muslims were forced to withdraw to a rugged little valley enclosed by hills from all sides. They were reduced to eating leaves of acacia and the cries of hungry children echoed all over the valley. This isolation lasted for three years during which the Prophet and the inmates of the cramped valley could only venture outside their place of confinement during the season of pilgrimage. While the Prophet and his followers were putting up with these insufferable afflictions and ordeals, God opened a way for them in Madina where Islam had gained adherents who promised protection to their brothers-in-faith. The Prophet commanded the Muslims in Makkah to migrate to Medina. Stringent measures were taken by the Quraish against the emigrants but they left Makkah secretly leaving behind their houses and belongings and some times even their wives and children. The last to leave the city of his birth was the Prophet him self in the very night the Quraish had planned to kill him.

The Makkan period of thirteen years was characterized by passive, peaceful resistance on the part of Muslims. They bore the insults and persecution with patience and forbearance. They never ventured to fight back. No permission to fight was given by the Quran or by the Prophet, not even in self-defence, during this period.

PERMISSION TO FIGHT :

Arabia had no central authority in those days; every tribe was a state unto itself. The survival of any tribe or community depended on its relations with the tribes

living in adjoining areas. The Muslims were not left in peace in Medina also. A section of people of Medina, encouraged by the Jews of the town, tried to undermine the authority of the Prophet while Quraish conspired with this disgruntled section, the Jews of Medina, and the treacherous desert bedouins to endanger the peace and safety of Muslims in their new place of refuge. It was in these circumstances that Muslims were given permission to fight back in self-defence : it was only a permission rather than obligation to wage war of aggression.

"To those against whom War is made, permission is given (to fight), because they are wronged;-and verily, Allah is Most Merciful for their aid, (They are) those who have been expelled from their houses in defence of right,- (for no cause) except that they say, "Our Lord is Allah". Did not Allah check one set of people by means of another, there would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of Allah is commemorated in abundant measure." (Q. 22:39-40)

It is note worthy that the permission to fight is given to those "against whom war is made" and "and who have been expelled for their homes", for no other reason that they worshipped the One True God. Who can dispute that the permission to a righteous people to fight against a ferocious and mischief-loving people is not justified in these circumstances?

The Quran urged Muslims in numerous verses to fight these enemies valiantly for their survival depended on vanquishing a force much larger in numbers and far more better equipped. R.V.C. Bodley observes in *The Messenger – The life of Muhammad*, (London, 1946).

"Muhammad stood alone in Arabia, a country equivalent to one-third of the United States, populated by about five million people. His own dominion was not much larger than Central Park : his means of enforcing his wishes three thousand badly armed soldiers. Had he been weak, had he allowed treachery to go unpunished, Islam would never have survived". (p.217)

Quite naturally, the Quran exhorts Muslims to fight with all their might and inflict crushing defeat upon the polytheists and disbelievers, as the enemies of Islam were at the time. Now, picking up these verses of the Quran out of their context to show that Islam enjoins Muslims to fight non-Muslims to the end of time is nothing short of distortion and forgery. Scriptures of any other religion would be found to contain teachings to fight those who opposed that religion, but the epithets used for

such enemies are never stretched in the way these detractors of Islam are doing.

The permission to fight was, however, qualified with the condition that :-

"And fight them on until there is no more persecution and the religion becomes Allah's but if they cease, let there be no hostility except to those who practice oppression." (Q. 2:193)

The Quran contains definite directions for war and peace. It says that the Muslims should be just and kind to those who do not fight against their faith nor drive them out of their homes.

"Allah forbids you not with regard to those who fight you not for (your) faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them : for Allah loveth those who are just." (Q. 60.8)

God has commanded the believers not to be aggressive on any account.

"Fight in the cause of God those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for Allah loveth not transgressors." (Q. 2.190)

Islam does not condone aggression on the part of its followers, as illustrated by an incident in which the action taken by the Prophet sets an example for this followers for all times to come. After their migration to Medina the Muslims had to be always on guard against the machinations of the Quraish. A reconnoitring patrol was sent out by the Prophet in the second year of his emigration to Medina. Abdullah bin Jahsh was appointed as the leader of the patrol party with eight men under him, and was given a letter which he was ordered not to open until he had travelled for two days. Abdullah opened the letter after two days and found that he was instructed to collect certain information. The letter said, "When you read this letter of mine, proceed until you reach Nakhla between Makkah and Taif. Lie in wait for the Quraish and find out for us what they are doing." After reading the letter he told his companions about the order of the Prophet and went on his way, as did his companions, not one of them falling back. The party proceeded to an oasis where a caravan of the Quraish passed by them. They attacked it against the orders of the Prophet, killed one Amr bin al-Hadrami and took two prisoners, the other escaped. When they came back to the Holy Prophet, he expressed his displeasure and refused to take anything from them. The prisoners were released and blood money for the killed was offered to the relative of the deceased.

It should be borne in mind, however, that the Muslims like – other human beings – may have fallen to live up to the standards prescribed by Islam; nevertheless,

they have never had the right to attribute their deviation to any principle of Islam. Nor have they right to justify such deviation on any political or economic pretext.

Once a fight is entered upon, God instructs that it must be fought with utmost vigour, but when the enemy is beaten and he is not likely to seek again the persecution of truth, he must be well-treated and the offer of peace must not be rejected.

"Therefore when ye meet the un-believers (in fight) smite their neck; at length, when ye have thoroughly subdued them, bind a bond firmly (on them); thereafter (is the time for) either generosity or ransom". (Q. 47:4)

But if the enemy Incline towards peace, Do thou (also) incline Towards peace, and trust in Allah: for He is One that heareth and knoweth (All things).(Q. 8:61)

EMPHASIS ON JUSTICE

The Quran also sternly warns Muslims to be always just in all circumstances and even to those who are their enemies.

"Allah doth command you to render back you trusts to those whom they are due: and when ye judge between man and man, that ye judge with justice; verily how excellent is the teaching which He giveth you; for Allah is He Who heareth and seeth all things." (Q. 4:58)

The real test comes when one has to do justice to a people who hate him or whom he has an aversion. But no less than absolute justice is required of the Muslims by God.

"O ye who helieve! Stand out firmly for Allah, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice, be just: that is next to piety: and fear Allah, for Allah is well acquainted with all that ye do." (Q. 5:8)

And again: Allah loveth those who are fair and just (Q. 49:9) Allah loveth not those who do wrong. (Q. 3:57; 42:40)

Justice being one of the attributes of Allah, the Muslims are required to stand firm even if it is detrimental to their own interests or the interest of those who are near and dear to them. Islamic justice is something higher than the formal justice of Roman Law or any other human law. "It is even more penetrative" says Abdullah Yusuf Ali, "than the subtler justice in the speculation of the Greek philosophers. It searches out the innermost motives, because we are to act as in the presence of Allah, to whom all things, acts, and motives are known."

"Oye who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor: for Allah can best protect both follow not the lusts (of your hearts), lest ye swerve, and if ye distort (justice) or decline to do justice, verily Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do." (Q. 4:135)

NO COMPULSION IN RELIGION:

In many places in the Quran, the Prophet is reminded that it is not a part of his mission to compel people to become Muslims. He is repeatedly reminded that he has no control or authority over the minds and hearts of men. His mission is that of a caller, a reminder, a warner.

"Let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clear from error. (Q. 2:256) Up to you your religion, and unto me my religion." (Q. 109:6)

The duty of the Prophet and his adherents is to preach the message of Islam. It is not for them to force it on unwilling people; for any one who rejects it would find his own spiritual loss in such rejection.

"And I am commanded to be of those who bow in Islam to Allah's will- and to rehearse the Quran: and if any accept guidance, they do it for the good of their own souls and if they stray, say, I am only a warner." (Q. 27:91-91)

I has been Allah's Plan or Will to grant man free-will to seek out his own path. Therefore any compulsion or imposing one's own faith on others is no faith at all.

"If it had been thy Lord's will they would all have believed- all who are on earth! wilt thou then compel mankind against their will, to believe! no soul can believe, except by the will of Allah." (Q. 10:99-100)

THE RIGHTS OF NON-MUSLIMS:

Islam does not ignore non-Muslims living in a Muslim country. It enjoins on Muslims to protect their interests and guarantee them all facilities and rights on the basis of equality and justice. There is virtually no difference between the rights of Muslims and of non-Muslims. Both enjoy equal civil rights and are subject to the same punishments under the Islamic criminal law. There is complete equality between Muslims and non-Muslims in matters of rights, privileges and punishments under the law of the land and there is absolutely no discrimination between them on this count. The Prophet ordered the execution of a Muslim who had killed a non-Mus-

lim and said, "I am responsible for obtaining redress for the weak". Once the son of Amr-bin-al-Aas, the conqueror and governor of Egypt, struck an Egyptian Christian with a whip. The matter was brought to the notice of Caliph Umar who did not show the least regard for the high status of the offender's father, and ordered the Egyptian straightaway to avenge himself for the harm done to him. To the offender's father, the Caliph administered this telling rebuke, "Whence have you made them slaves who had been born free?" Ali, the fourth Caliph, explaining the same principle, said, "They accepted the position of zimmi (protected people) on the explicit understanding that their properties and lives will remain sacred like ours".

In all personal matters, affairs of non-Muslims are decided according to their custom or personal law and they cannot be made subject to the law of the shariah. This is because they have been guaranteed freedom of faith by the Prophet through the charter of liberty which he gave to the Jews of Medina and the Christians of Yemen and Najran. This gives them freedom of worship and performance of their religious rights and safety of their places of worship, as well as respect for their personal laws. They are even exempted from payment of jizyah tax, a monetary contribution to the defence of the State, if they offer to participate in the defence of the realm. (Miskat-ul-Masabih, Vol. II). This actually places a non-Muslim citizen of an Islamic state in an advantageous position in as much as after getting exemption from the payment of jizyah, he is liable to pay only those taxes which are levied by the State on all citizens, while a Muslim has also to pay zakat (poor-tax) which is obligatory for him. Muslim jurists also hold that no discrimination can be made between an indigent believer and disbeliever in extending assistance from the zakat fund.

The status of non-Muslims being safeguarded in both the Quran and the practice of the Prophet, it is un-Islamic to allow non-Muslim citizens in a Muslim country to suffer any discrimination either individually or collectively. It was in accordance with this principle that Muslim jurists led the Muslim public in a strong protest against Caliph Walid Ibn Yazid (684-705 A. D.) when, fearing a Byzantine attack, he exiled the non-Muslim citizens of Cyprus to Syria. Not before they were brought back to Cyprus was the Caliph allowed to rest. (Al-Shatibi, Al-Muwafaqat, I, pp. 64-65). It is no exaggeration to insist that Islam is not satisfied with preaching religious tolerance, but that it makes tolerance a part of its religious law. And even the word "tolerance" suggests a sense of superiority tempered by charity – which does not apply in this case. It is rather placing the honest application of justice between man

and man above all considerations. Sir William Muir, who cannot be claimed to be a sympathiser of Islam, had to acknowledge the historical fact that "Leniency towards the conquered and their justice and integrity presented a marked contrast to the tyranny and intolerance of the Romans The Syrian Christians enjoyed more civil and popular liberty under the Arab invaders than they had done under the rule of Heraclius and they had no wish to return to their former state." (Sir William Muir, *The Caliphate-Its Rise, Decline and Fall*, p. 128).

UNITY OF MANKIND:

All mankind has been created as one nation and differences between them are according to divine will and pattern.

"Mankind was but one nation but differed (later). Had it not been for a word that went forth before from thy Lord, their differences would have been settled between them." (Q. 10 : 19) Mankind was but one nation, and Allah sent messengers with glad tidings and warnings, and with them He sent the Book in truth, to judge between people in matters wherein they differed." (Q. 2 : 213) And again: O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female. And made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (Not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)." (Q. 49:13)

The Quran asserts that God in His divine mercy has sent His messengers to all peoples. If any messenger of God was ignored or rejected, or his message was twisted or misused, it is not the business of any one to pass a verdict on them for God will Himself judge them with justice on the Day of Reckoning.

"To every people (was sent) a messenger: when their messenger comes (before them), the matter will be judged between them with justice, and they will not be wronged." (Q. 10:47)

The Muslims are therefore required to believe and make no difference between the Prophets sent earlier, although only a few of them are mentioned in the Quran (2:136, 285; 3:84; 4:152) as the basic truth conveyed through all of them was the same. The Quran also declares that the denial or rejection of even one of them means the rejection of every other as well.

"Those who deny Allah and His Messengers, and wish to separate between Allah

and His Messengers, Saying; "We believe in some but reject others"; and wish to take a course midway they are in truth unbelievers." (Q. 4:150-51)

Muslims are even asked not to speak ill of those who are revered by others :

"Revile not ye those whom they call upon besides Allah, lest they out of spite revile Allah in their ignorance thus have We made alluring to each people its own doings." (Q. 6:108)

It is worth mentioning here that very often we find writings by certain non-Muslim authors villifying Islam and the holy Prophet. Such writings hurt the religious susceptibilities of the Muslims, but one can hardly furnish example of any Muslim writing anything disparaging those who are held in veneration by the followers of any other faith. The Quranic dictum, cited above, does not allow them to retaliate in a similar manner.

EQUALITY AND DIGNITY OF MAN:

Racial discrimination is still a great scourge for mankind. The pre-conceived ideas of white man's superciliousness to the supposed culturally inferior coloured races and the concept of purity and superiority of the German race gave rise to Nazism resulting in the holocaust on such a large scale that surpassed all the bloodbaths recorded by history. Differences in the social status of high and low-born people was the accepted norm in the entire world before the revelation of the Quran. Man had lost the sense of human equality and dignity. Oftentimes trees and animals, owing to religious beliefs or traditions, enjoyed a more coveted place than man himself. Human sacrifice at the alter of deities was common spectacle. It was in that age that the Quran gave the revolutionary call that all men were not only equal but the rank accorded to them was next only to God, and all that exists in the world has been created for man.

"Behold, thy Lord said to the angles: I will create a vicegerent on earth." (Q. 2:30)

"It is He who hath made you the inheritors on the earth." (Q. 6:165)

"We have honoured the sons of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favours, above a great part of our creation." (Q. 17:70)

It is He Who hath created for you All things that are on earth.(Q. 6:165)

It was for the first time that the world heard the inspiring message of human equality from the Prophet of Islam.

"O mankind, your God is one and you have but one father: you are all progeny of Adam, and Adam was made of clay. Lo! the noblest among you, in the sight of God, is the best in conduct. No Arab has any preference over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab over an Arab save by his piety." (Kinz-ul-Ammal)

SPREAD OF ISLAM:

Muslims have never aimed at the extermination of other religions or force conversion. That Islam was spread by sword is a myth created by the West which has still not been able to shake off its animosity against Islam, embedded deep in its subconscious psyche. "Think of Islam, and bombs and bigots may come to Western minds," writes the Economist (July 27-Aug. 2, 1996) of London. "When an American airliner blew up over the Atlantic last week, with the loss of 230 lives, thoughts automatically turned to the Islamic Middle East, It was simple to assume-despite Bill Clinton's call for caution – that this too was part of some ghastly Muslim blood feud with West." Alas! This mentality of blood feud has been inherited by some of our countrymen from their erstwhile British rulers. In Delhi itself there is an outfit which is regularly churning out blatantly tendentious and offensive booklets, misquoting, distorting or citing Quranic verses out of context to prove that Islam in India owes its existence to the violence taught by its sacred scripture. They ignore the fact pointed out by P. Hardy in "The Muslims of British India" (Cambridge, 1972) that the size and distribution of Muslim population in the area of the Indo-Ganges and the Jamuna (the Doab), is in the inverse proportion to the period and to the power of the Muslim political impact in this area. Had Muslim rulers been least interested in conversion of the indigenous population by coercion, the picture would interest in the spread of Islam, as the British rulers took by extending indirect support to the Christian missionaries.

The noted historian M. Mujeeb, known for his liberal views, writes in the Indian Muslims, (New Delhi, 1985).

"The vast majority of the Indian Muslims are converts. Their conversion may be assumed to have been due to one or more of several causes. Force was used on occasions, but the existing historical evidence does not enable us to estimate either the scale or the effectiveness of such conversions. Also, the risks involved in a policy of conversion by force should not be underrated. Islam was adopted by families or groups of families who were regarded as out-castes in Hindu society because of their profession, or because they had lost caste through association with Muslims in some

type of civil employment under the government. Service in the army was an attraction, specially for tribal groups with war-like traditions, and the service would inevitably make them out-castes. Persuasion played its part too. The Khojas, the Bohras and the Memons are the examples of conversion of whole communities by the missionaries. Most of the Muslim communities who appear to have been only partly converted must have changed their religion because of belief in the miraculous powers of particular saints. The communities practising trades that made them out-castes in the Hindu social system would have adopted Islam because of the obvious advantages, and because they were urban communities or depended on the towns for their livelihood, their conversion was also more thorough. The main agency for conversions were the mystics and most of the large-scale conversions seem to have taken place in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries." (p. 22)

Recent researches have shown that there existed a Muslim colony in Qannauj before the Turkish conquest. (R.S. Tripathi, History of Kannauj, Banaras, 1937). The Muslim saints and mystics peacefully penetrated the country and settled at a number of important places. These Muslim migrants lived outside the fortified towns amongst the lower sections of the Indian population, firstly, because of the caste taboos and secondly, because of the facility of establishing contacts with the Indian masses. Shaikh Moin-ud-din Chishti, for example, came to Ajmer before the second battle of Tarain and his deep humanism and pious way of life attracted a band of devoted followers round him. Maulana Razi-ud-din Hasan Saghani, the famous author of Mashariqul-Anwar, was born in Badaun long before the Ghaurid occupation of the town. In several towns of U.P. and Bihar there are Muslim shrines which are attributed by local traditions to the pre-Ghaurid period.

HINDUS UNDER MUSLIM RULERS:

This brief study cannot be concluded without a swift survey of the social condition of Hindus during the Muslim rule in India. There were Hindu soldiers in the army of Mahmud of Ghazni, and a Hindu general of his army is mentioned by name in the chronicles. The invasions of Sultan Mahmood only brought disgrace to the creed he professed. It must also be remembered that Masud brought back to India a good part of the treasures his father had taken away and that Hindus were allowed to rebuild whatever temples had been destroyed. Also, if the Gaznavid historians had not left records of the havoc Sultan Mahmud wrought, Hinduism had no living memory

about him and no records either. The foot-soldiers in the army of the sultanate were almost all Hindus. Their recruitment by the Sultans began quite early, Siraj, *Tarikh Firoz Shahi*, *Bibliotheca Indica*, pp. 186-187). The number of Muslims available for non-military services being small, the lower posts of administration had to be thrown open to the Hindus, and there must have been in the cities numbers of men of non-descript castes who availed themselves of the opportunity of employment (Elliot and Dowson, *History of India as Told by Its own Historians*, Aligarh, 1952, Vol: III, P. 54ff). There was no social risk attached to commercial intercourse, and this had begun centuries before the establishment of the Sultanate.

By the time Firoz Shah Tughlaq had reigned for about ten years, Zia-ud-din Barni describes, in a fanatical paragraph, the position of Hindus in the *Fatawa-i-Jahadari*:

“The desire for overthrowing infidels and knocking down idolaters does not fill the hearts of the Muslim kings (of India). On the other hand, out of consideration for the fact that infidels and polytheists are payers of taxes and protected persons, these infidels are honoured, distinguished, favoured and made eminent; the kings bestow drums, banners, ornaments, cloaks of brocade and caparisoned horse upon them and appoint them to governorsip, high posts and offices. And in their capital (Delhi), owing to the status of which the status of all other Muslim cities is raised, Muslim kings not only allow but are pleased with the fact that infidels, polytheists, idol-worshippers and cow-dung worshippers build houses like palaces, wear clothes of brocade and ride Arab horses caparisoned with gold and silver ornaments. They are equipped with a hundred thousand sources of strength. They live in delights and comforts. They take Musalmans in to their service and make them run before their horses, poor Musalmans beg at their door; and in the capital of Islam owing to which edifice of Islam is elevated, they are called rais (great rulers), ranas (minor rulers), thakurs (warriors), sahas (bankers), mehtas (clerks, officials) and pandits (priests);” (Ms. In India Office Library-I.O. 1149); English trans. By Prof. Habib and Dr. Afzal-ud-din, *The Political Theory of Delhi Sultanate*, Aligarh, 1960).

Babar is considered by several historians, both Hindus and Muslims, as the harbinger of secular era in India. His will to Humayun advising him not to discriminate among his subjects on the basis of religion, not to allow demolition of temples and cow-slaughter are well-known facts documented by historians. Akbar placed great emphasis on political and emotional integration of Hindus and Muslims. He used

both his personal influence and his political authority to reduce the eating of meat and to prohibit cow-sacrifice. He abolished jizyah in 1564. Intermarriages were forbidden. Hindus who, in childhood or otherwise, had from pressure become Muslims, were allowed to go back to the faith of their fathers. No one was allowed to interfere with others on account of his religion, and everyone was allowed to change his religion, if he liked. It meant that Muslims could also embrace Hinduism. A secular attitude was adopted to the extent of saying prayers five times a day in the court was given up. (Badayuni, Abdul Qadir, Muntakhab al-Tawarikh, Bibliotheca Indica, Vol. II, pp. 109, 315-391). Once, Shah-Jahan put a question to Shaikh Muhibullah of Allahabad (1587-1648) in regard to the position of Hindus in a Muslim state. The remarkable reply the Shaikh gave was : "It is impertinent of me to give counsel, but justice requires that the welfare of the people should be the concern of administrative officers, whether the people be believers or unbelievers, for they have been created by God, and the person who took the lead in being merciful to righteous and the evil-doers, the believers and unbelievers was the Prophet of God. This is recorded in (the history of) his victories and is stated in the Quran." (Maktubat-i-Shah Muhibullah Allahabadi, Subhanullah Collection, Azad Library,, Muslim University, Aligarh.)

Aurangzeb is the most maligned Moghul emperor accused for demolishing temples, of which there is little evidence, while B.N. Pande has discovered dozens of his firmans bestowing grant of villages for the up-keep of temples and priests. Aurangzeb's decision to levy the jizyah may be regarded as a measure necessitated by financial stringency or as an expression of his fanaticism, but it is extremely doubtful if it could be justified on grounds of shariah. However, during Aurangzeb's rule, the number of Hindus conferred the highest ranks among the generals and courtiers was highest than under his predecessors. During the later Mughal period Mirza Mazhar Jan-i-Janan (1702-1781), a mystic of the Chishtiyah order, represents the culture of his century in all its spiritual richness and social grace. He was most explicit in expressing the opinion that Hinduism was one of the great religions like Christiannity and Judaism. (Abdur Razzaq Quraishi, Mirza Mazhar Jan-i-Janan aur unka Urdu Kalam, Adabi Publishers, Bombay, 1961, p. 156.)

CONCLUSION :

Anyone who studies the history of Medieval India dispassionately will reach the conclusion that the Muslim rule in India was neither a colonial rule of Central

Asia, nor was it Islamic since the sultans and kings, though professing Islam as their faith, always acted independently in matters of administration, and the laws deduced by theologians from the Quran and the hadith were not operative as constitutional, civil or criminal laws. There were sometimes excesses committed in times of war, but rather than being expressions of fanaticism, the glorification of such events by the court historians notwithstanding, they were more dictated by political consideration than any religious feeling. Such excesses were, as a matter of fact, violation of religious laws of Islam. Be that as it may, the Indian Muslim states were not wholly secular in the sense we understand it today, but they were also not communal. Hindus co-operate with the Muslim rulers, and there was never any interference in the profession and practice of their religion. During the Muslim rule India followed its unbroken way of life, says K.M. Munshi, "where Dharmashastras were honoured and obeyed and Hinduism flourished unobstructed. Now if Hinduism means 'Aryvartaconsciousness' i.e. religious freedom – then it was alive in the whole of India. The best vaidas and Hindu astrologers were to be found in Delhi and the best Hindu teachers in Banaras. The great centres of Hindu culture in northern India, like Mathura, Hardwar, Kara etc. Were within the Empire of Delhi. All authorities, including fanatics like Barni and Baayuni, are united in declaring that Delhi had throughout a majority of Hindu population and that the upper-class Hindus were more prosperous than the upper-class Musalmans. The great officers of the Empire, who were given a fair percentage of the revenues of prosperous Indian provinces, never succeeded in balancing their budget and were constantly in debt to the sahas (bankers) of Delhi." (Cited from K.A. Nizami, *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India During the Thirteenth Century*, Delhi, 1974, p. xix) All these facts pertaining to the period of Muslim dominance in the country clearly point out the fact that Hindu and Muslims had learnt to live amicably with their distinctive identities. Any effort to disturb this ethos, built over the centuries, through distorted presentation of scriptures, faith, practice and history will only result in damaging the larger interests of our country. ■

ISLAM MISUNDERSTOOD

S.M. Murshed

The public at large have grave misconceptions about Islam. These were initiated by the western media and then repeated ad lib till they assumed the character of axiomatic truth, which then become a part of one's vocabulary. The principal myth propagated is that Islam exhorts its followers to jihad or holy war and belligerent Muslims are termed as jihadis. Among the notable proponents of this myth has been the Holy Father of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Benedict XVI.

The Pope said on September 12, 2006 at the University of Regensburg, Bavaria that while Sura 2.256 of the Qur'an mentions there is no compulsion in religion, in the later verses there is an incitement to Holy War. The Qur'an contains no such incitement; there is no mention in it of any Holy War. The Pope forgot momentarily that a Holy War was a purely Christian concept and the call for it, i.e. the first Christian, was given in 1095 AD by Pope Urban II, who granted all those taking part in it, the soldiers of the Church, absolution from all their sins as a reward.

The Pope has not troubled himself to mention the specific verse or verses in the Qur'an that he alluded to. One must, therefore, divine what the Pontiff had in mind from the Arabic word jihad, which is commonly, and wrongly, regarded by the non-Muslim world in general, and the western world in particular, as meaning a Holy War of the Muslims.

Jihad means striving or struggling for any just and righteous cause and most emphatically, it does not mean war. The word occurs 41 times in the Qur'an and not one can it be construed to be an exhortation to war. Those familiar with the Urdu language will know that the term is used in daily life in conversation, for instance, when it is said that after considerable jadd-o-jihad one has been able to overcome some bad habit like smoking or drinking. But conceivably when a struggle has to be undertaken literally on a war footing in a just cause, the war becomes jihad, such as, for instance, the Palestinians are fighting to expel foreigners, who, with Anglo-American support, have usurped their land.

Some terrorist organizations have, however, adopted the term jihadi, attribut-

ing their cause to a struggle for justice, for redressing an imagined wrong done to their fellowmen. In the instances where it has been so support can be found for it.

The transition from jihad to terrorism becomes all too easy, giving currency to the fallacious aphorism: All Muslims are not terrorists, but all terrorists are Muslims. It is Islamic terrorism, they say. Of the people killed in terrorist attacks in India in the year 2007, less than one third were killed by Muslim organisations, while the rest were killed the others - notably Left-wing extremist groups, the ULFA in Assam and PLA in Manipur.

In the UK, for years we witnessed terrorist violence unleashed by the Irish Republican Army. The first plane to be hijacked in the world, from the USA to Cuba, was by an American and the first suicide bomber was presented to the world by Sri Lanka. The Air India aircraft to be blown up in Locker bee, Scotland, was by Punjabi militants. And above all, we have two of the world's greatest terrorists in George W Bush, with his reckless bombing and subsequent rape of Iraq and earlier in Adolf Hitler, who killed millions of Jews.

Surely the Gita or the Bible cannot be blamed for much of the terrorist activities in the world, which has meanwhile, learned to blame only the Qur'an. All Muslims are not terrorists, only a minority is. Why is it that all the terrorists are not identified by their religious denominations while the term 'Islamic terrorism' comes glibly to one's tongue in identifying a section of them on the assumption that terrorism is ingrained in Islam?

(The Times of India-4-4-08)

HADITH

Narrated Abu Huraira : The Prophet said, "Faith (Belief) consists of more than sixty branches (i.e. parts). And Haya (This term "Haya" covers a large number of concepts which are to be taken together; amongst them are self respect, modesty, bashfulness, and scruple, etc) is a part of faith."

FINDING ISLAM: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

Sumayyah Meehanreverted*

I recall the day perfectly. It was the first week of December 1992. I was a sophomore in college and had just wrapped up my mid-term exams. I was excited that Christmas vacation would start in a couple of days. I had just enough time to pack up my wrap a few gifts that I had bought for my roommate.

As I put the last bow on the gifts, I just froze as a thought entered my head. And that thought was in the form of a question: if God is good, then how could He allow His only son Jesus to be crucified? This single question opened the floodgates for me. It literally took my breath away. I had to lie down on my bed to just breath and collect my thoughts, which I was afraid, were blasphemous. I went down a virtual checklist of just how much I knew about Christianity and asked myself whether or not I really believed what I knew. What I learned is that I did not know much about my religion, and what I did know I questioned

As an infant, my parents baptized me a Christian. However, they were not very religious at all, and I can only remember attending church a handful of times in my life. The only time we even went to Church was during the holidays. As a result, I always felt a deep void in my heart and I could not "feel" that God was in my life,. I knew I had to take immediate action and "find" God.

The winter break ended just as soon as it came. I headed back to college to complete the final semester before summer vacation . I knew this was the opportunity I had to explore my faith. I set out on my quest the following Sunday. I attended a catholic mass at church near my college. During the service, I did all I could to control my laughter. And the service was not supposed to be funny. I looked around me and everyone had their heads bowed.

To me, the sermon sounded ridiculous as if it were something a father would say to a naughty child that would scare him into behaving. It was ridiculous and, unlike

me, the other parishioners were swallowing it hook, line, and sinker ! why wasn't anyone asking questions or demanding the light of truth? I did not find God that day in church. My search continued.

Over the course of the next several months, I continued my quest by visiting the churches of every single denomination Christianity has to offer. I attended a Presbyterian church for couple of weeks. Then moved on to the Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist, and so on. But again I found the sermons unconvincing and was just not buying what the preachers were selling.

By this time, the void in my heart was all encompassing. I fell into a deep depression. I could not understand what was wrong with me. Was I an atheist? I did not think so since I did believe in a higher authority that created and ruled humankind. Was I in satan's clutches? Certainly, I must be since I laughed at my own religion. I could not find answers to any of my questions and fell into a blackness that made me question every aspect of my life.

Allah's light would not shine on me until almost a year later. In 1993, I met a man who just happened to be a Muslim. His name was Abid. I knew a little about Islam from high school. Surprisingly enough, we had learned about prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in world history class. So, I could converse a little with Abid about Islam, and he taught me the basic principles of the Islamic belief.

I was very skeptical at first. All I had ever heard about Muslims was bad. The media regularly portrayed Muslims as being terrorists and oppressing women. I believed what I saw on TV. At the same time, I was taking a class on "feminism" and the book we used for the class had a huge chapter that explicitly stated that women in Islam were treated like dogs and not allowed to pray in the mosque because they are considered to be impure. So, the first question I asked Abid was about how women are treated in Islam. His answer was that women are allowed to pray in mosques, but separate from the men because of piety and modesty issues for both of the sexes. He had captured my attention and made me rethink what I knew about Islam.

Unfortunately, Abid was called back to his own country, Kuwait, to tend to his sick father. So, I was pretty much left on my own to discover Islam. However, I did keep in contact with Abid over the phone. We had several furious debates about Chris-

tianity and Islam. And then he challenged me. He dared me to go out and find a copy of the holy Qur'an and read it. I had never backed down from a challenge before, and this was no different. I accepted the challenge, not knowing that it would change my life forever.

The challenge to find an English translation of the Qur'an was just that _ a challenge. I was in a city with church on just about every corner and massive Christian bookstore downtown. There was nowhere to buy a copy of the Qur'an. I decided to search the college library. I typed the word "Qur'an" into the database and one single entry came back. And It was not even listed in the theology section, which was really stunning. It was located in the children's book section, which was pretty telling to me. I trekked down to the basement where found a dirty and ragged Qur'an between two fairytale books.

That Qur'an had seen better days. It was not worn from devoted reading or interest. It was worn from sheer neglect and covered in just. Regardless, I dusted it off and proceeded to check it out much to the amazement of the librarian who leered at me as I signed my name. As if I had committed a sin in her presence! I shoved the Qur'an in my backpack and made my way back to my dorm.

Abid had given me strict instructions for cleanliness before touching the Qur'an which seemed really strange to me. The Bible , in my home, was left on the coffee table to gather dust and get an occasional lick from our dog. It was not revered as the Qur'an is. His instructions were that I should perform an act called wudu' (ablution), which consisted of washing different parts of the body.

For some reason, my mind was not wrapping around this idea. I kept telling him that I did not know how to perform "voodoo." Clearly, we were not on the same page! So, he told me to just take a shower before touching the Qur'an. After finishing my shower and dressing, I sat down at my desk with the Qur'an in hand. For some reason, I did not open it at page one but rather I opened it up somewhere in the center. And this is the very first ayah (verse of Qur'an) that I read:

"We have enjoined on man kindness to his parents; in pain did his mother bear him, and in pain did she give him birth." (Al-Ahqaf 46:)

I was stunned. What a wonderful thing to read. I flipped through the pages, and

everything I read brought a smile to my face. After reading a lot more over the course of several days, I was absolutely flabbergasted with my findings. Moses and Noah were in the Qur'an, and so were Jesus and his mother Mary! And the Qur'an gave a lot more detail, in regards to historical events, then the Bible did.

As I read and read, I felt my heart soaring. I felt was on the right path to finding Allah and knowing him. However, my quest was interrupted due to problems with my family, finishing my studies and the fact that Abid, my only teacher, was remaining in his country for an unspecified time. The feeling of loss and hopelessness once again overwhelmed me. So, I put my interest in Islam on the backburner.

It was only the sheer grace of Allah that led me back to Islam in 1995. I had continued to keep in contact with Abid during his stay in his country. One day he asked me to marry him over the phone and I agreed even though I was still Christian. I was committed to learning more about Islam but had no way of knowing if I would be able to accept this new religion.

After our marriage, we moved to Kuwait. Which is where his family was based. I took the shahadah in 1996. The tears of thankfulness to Allah overwhelmed me as I stood in the mosque surrounded by Muslim sisters. I could not stop crying. I felt that Allah had plucked me out of a life of disbelief, that He saved me from a meaningless existence and a life of reckless abandon. However, the story does not end there. I was now a Muslim, but I had very limited knowledge of Islam. No one in my newfound family spoke enough English to teach me how to pray and the Islamic books in English were scarce. I was a Muslim, but I was unable to practice my belief. It was very discouraging.

Everyone kept telling me that it was ok and I would not be held accountable for not knowing how to pray or fast. But, while that is true, Muslims are supposed to strive for knowledge and seek it out. My problems was that I did not know where to look. I felt my Islam slipping away again, but Allah in his infinite wisdom, pulled me back again for the third time!

It was exactly 4 a.m. in the morning during the summer of 1999. I was pacing my apartment because I just felt restless. The phone rang, and I nearly jumped out of my skin. I knew something was wrong. It was my sister calling from Connecticut. The

news was bad. Not only had my grandmother strangled to death by a handyman who had known her for over 15 years.

I was shattered. My grandmother was the most important person to me. I did not know how to cope. Over the next few days, I just cried myself sick. All the while I had my eyes fixated on the English translation of the Qur'an that I had on top of my cupboard. I had never opened it once since the sisters gave it to me when I took the *shahadah* at the mosque.

I felt like a failure as a Muslim because of the language barrier and because of not knowing how to pray, so I even ignored the Qur'an in my own language. But something was different. All the days I spent crying in my room because of the loss of my grandmother. I felt like the Qur'an was beckoning me to read it. I was drawn to it.

So, after two solid weeks of mourning, I began reading the Qur'an once again. But this time I would not leave it sitting around unused, rather I read the entire Qur'an from cover to cover over the course of a few months. Armed with the knowledge of the Qur'an I sought out ways to perfect my Islam. I finally bought a computer, got hooked up to the internet, and found a plethora of Islamic knowledge at my fingertips. A sister in Saudi Arabia taught me how to pray via e-mail. And whenever I had a question, I would visit an Islamic forum to find the answer.

It had been almost 11 years since I converted to Islam. The student has now become the teacher. I am a writer. I write about Islam in various newspapers and magazines in different countries. I can only wonder if my articles are being clipped and saved in a book that will help teach others about Islam. In sha' Allah they are as I come full circle. ■

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