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## Concentration

Charles Darwin (1809-1882) one of most famous thinkers of modern times, (although the writer does not agree with his views) played a major part in the intellectual formation of modern man.

Darwin achieved this position of eminence in the modern world by dint of exceptionally hard work. *The Encyclopedia Britannica* (1984) says of him:

“All his mental energy was focused on his subject and that was why poetry, pictures and music ceased in his mature life to afford him the pleasure that they had given him in his earlier days.” (5/495).

Such intellectual concentration is vital to peak achievement in any field, be it right or wrong. Man has to be so engrossed in his work that everything else pales into insignificance beside it. Unless everything else loses its interest for him, he cannot climb to any great heights of success. If we examine the lives of the truly great, we find that they all worked in the same dedicated way.

In any task of greater or lesser complexity, there are always aspects of it which present problems which appear at first sight to be insoluble. Sometimes innumerable facts have to be marshaled which can be interpreted only with the keenest of insight. Often a mysterious, elusive factor emerges just at a point when one thinks that all questions have been answered. Such difficulties can be overcome, and such secrets unveiled only when one's total intellectual capacity is directed towards the unraveling of the mystery. Without the utmost devotion and one hundred per cent concentration, success will remain forever beyond one's grasp (125:20).

If we assert that the world was created on a certain date, then this means that there must have been a Creator before that date. If we go on to assert that this Creator was Himself created on some previous date, however, then our claim can have no meaning. The Creator cannot himself have been created; He always was. In His infiniteness He has created a finite world. His existence, and that of all mortal creatures, is dependent upon His immortality.

Since God is immortal, He must also be absolute, for absoluteness is the greatest attribute of immortality. The one cannot be found without the other.

This world is a manifestation of God's attributes, but its shortcomings and limitations show the manifestation to be incomplete. A complete manifestation of a perfect and infinite God would itself be perfect and infinite. Another world must be awaiting us. This incomplete manifestation of God's attributes requires a sequel for its fulfillment.

Paradise is that eternal world of God in which His attributes will appear in all their perfection. It will be free of all the defects we experience in the world about us. Paradise is evidence of God's absolute power to make beauty perpetual and joy boundless in a world of everlasting peace and contentment.

Everyone is seeking some unseen fulfillment. Everyone seeks a perfect world, but this has always eluded man. Yet it is quite natural that he should continue to strive, for the universe in which he lives testifies to the existence of one, infinite God. The emergence of a world of infinite blessings is just as likely as the existence of the present transitional world. How can an inherently infinite Creator be satisfied with a finite manifestation of His attributes? God, Who created all things from naught, can surely endow creation with perpetuity. This second creation is no more difficult than the first.

Immortality is God's unique quality, in which He has no partner. Immortality signifies the highest possible perfection to which only God can attain. No one can today imagine the wonderful nature of that paradise which is a manifestation of God's immortality: that beauty which will never fade; that joy which will never end; that life, the continuity of which will never be interrupted; that world where all our hopes and desires will be fulfilled. No one will wish to part for even a moment from this wondrously delightful paradise, no matter how many millions of years have passed.

Man is always searching for a world of everlasting content. This quest is quite correct and in accordance with human nature; but our dreams cannot come true in this world, for here, there cannot be an eternally perfect order. The resources needed for such a world are lacking. The Prophet taught that God has made this world one of trial and tribulation, not one of reward and retribution. The world is full of things which put man to the test, whereas the factors required for a life of everlasting delight and repose will be forthcoming only in the next world. Death divides these two worlds. Death marks the completion of the trial of man and his entrance into the world of eternity.

If one wishes one's dreams to come true, one should not try to construct a heaven on earth. One should rather try to succeed in the trial of life, accepting the role of God's true servant, adopting the life pattern of the Prophet and restricting one's freedom to the limits which God has laid down. The dreams of those who succeed in the trial of life will be fulfilled in the next world. Those who fail will find nothing but woe awaiting them there.

## Working Together

One particular quality of true believers has been pin pointed in the Qur'an. It is that when they are with the Prophet – or in other words the person responsible for Muslims' affairs – “on a matter requiring collective action, they do not depart until they have asked for his leave ...” (Qur'an, 24:62). Here collective action means any activity involving a group of people working together. And the “asking of leave” is indicative of the wider spirit in which the work is done – a spirit of deep commitment, like the commitment one feels to some personal work.

A high degree of motivation is required for a person to become so deeply involved in a task that he will not leave it until the work in hand has been accomplished. Such motivation is inherent in work involving personal profit: it is in one's own interest to see the work through to the better end, and so one does so. One is moved by a sense of personal responsibility: if one does not accomplish the task oneself, who will do it for one? With work involving a group of people, on the other hand, one tends to lay the onus on other people. If I don't carry, on, one thinks, there are plenty of others who will continue in my place. Seeing that there is no personal profit to be gained from the work in hand, one tends to see it as a burden best laid on others' shoulders. Only when one has come to think of the common good as one's own good, of the profit of society as one's own profit, will one become fully committed to collective work. Such commitment requires, above all, a deep sense of social consciousness; it requires one to be oriented towards the needs of the community, as anyone would normally be oriented to cater for his own needs.

A Muslim is required to possess just such a sense of social consciousness, moving him to throw himself heart and soul into collective Islamic work, whenever such work is required of him. Then, when he has involved himself in it, he will see it through to the final stage. When he takes leave from the authority under whose direction he is working, he does not do so in order to desert the cause to which he is committed; rather, he has some valid reason for going away, and will return as soon as circumstances allow. For this reason the Qur'an says that, if possible, such requests should be granted. But both the request, and the granting of it, should be made in the correct spirit, with both parties praying for the other, even as they part.

## Working on the Individual

A man was riding his bicycle one day when all of a sudden his brake jammed. Luckily there was a cycle repair-shop nearby, so he took his bike there to have it fixed. Thinking that the mechanic would fix the brake at the point where it was jammed, the cyclist was surprised to see him tap away with a small hammer at a completely different place. Before he was able to express his surprise, however, the mechanic handed the bike over. "That's fixed it. You can take it away now," he said. And off the cyclist rode, with his bike once again running smoothly.

What was true of this bicycle is true also of human society. When there is something wrong with society, people usually jump to the conclusion that where the malaise lies, there also lies the cure. But this is not case. Usually the root of the malaise lies in a different place, far away from the symptoms. Until the cause is removed, the malaise itself will not go away.

For instance, there might be a lack of solidarity in society, or one's people may be the victims of oppression. Maybe society is beset with an atmosphere of intrigue, with the result that its voice carries no weight in the world. Detecting these symptoms, one who determines to right the ills of society might well think that the cure lies in calling meeting and conventions in order to bring people together, feeding them emotional speeches and passing high sounding resolutions, and so on.

But this is not the way to cure the actual ills of society. To do so, one has to work on the cause, not the symptoms, for usually one will find that while a problem seems to be afflicting one part of society, the cure lies elsewhere. If there is a lack of solidarity, for instance, the reason for this is the failure of individuals to stand together. It is the individual, then, who has to be worked on. Solidarity has to be achieved at an individual level before it can come about in society. For it is a law of nature, which applies to human society as well, that for a tree to bear good fruit, it is the seed, not the fruit, that has to be improved.

## Idleness

The second Caliph, Umar ibn Khattab, often used to express his sense of disillusionment about people he had come to like, when, on further acquaintance with them he discovered them to be idle. "On learning that he does not work, he appears to me of no value (he has debased himself in my eyes)."

Whichever way you look at idleness, there is no gainsaying the fact that it is a great evil, causing one to fritter away one's best talents and leaving one unqualified to face life. A student who is too lazy to study cannot ever hope to acquire knowledge, or have his critical faculties sharpened in any way, and his failure in examinations will leave him without the 'paper' qualifications which is the 'Open Sesame' to good jobs. Without the necessary groundwork, he will find himself leading a vacant existence, simply drifting from pillar to post. Even people who have managed to qualify themselves suitably cannot afford to rest on their laurels. When the period of education is over, it is equally necessary to be consistently hard-working. Many make the excuse between the receipt of a degree and entry into a profession that they are waiting for the right job to come along. But one cannot go on waiting forever, simply idling away one's time.

Sometimes one inadvertently slips into idle ways because there are no economic pressures in one's life. Those who inherit legacies, or have property or investments which bring them some return are an easy prey to idleness. But this is no existence for a human being. Anyone who allows the poison of idleness to creep into his system might as well be dead.

Either one must opt for a regular job, which brings one a suitable income and keeps one mentally healthy, so that one never becomes a financial or emotional burden on anyone else, or, if one is financially independent, one should turn one's attention to higher things, pursue noble ends, serve worthy causes and keep oneself fruitfully occupied day in and day out. A person with no sense of commitment is only living on the fringes of existence. He is out of touch with reality and will soon lapse into utter degeneracy. No really superior being has ever been found among the ranks of the idle.

As the old saying goes, the Devil finds work for idle hands.

## The Making and Breaking of History

According to B.Tuchman, "history is the unfolding of miscalculation." In other words, history usually develops in a manner quite contrary to people's expectations. While events are unfolding, observers may pass judgement on the course they are taking; but the course of history defies all prediction, and in the end things turn out quite differently from what people had initially expected.

To take an example from Islamic history, in the year 6AH the Treaty of Hudaibiyah was signed between the Prophet Muhammad and the Quraysh of Mecca. At that time the Quraysh were one in thinking that the Muslims had signed their own writ of destruction, for they accepted peace on terms which were clearly favourable to the Quraysh. Yet afterwards it transpired that this apparent defeat contained the seeds of a great victory for the Muslims. The same thing has happened time and time again throughout history. In 1945, when atom bombs were dropped on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan, it seemed to the Americans as if Japan would lie in ruins for several decades to come. Yet this was not to be: now, just forty years after the event, Japan stands at the pinnacle of her economic strength, the leading industrial power in the world.

This goes to show that it is not man who fashions his own history; in truth, it is God who fashions human history in accordance with His own will. It is not people or events who control history, it is God. History may take place before our eyes, in the material world, but the course it takes is determined from the super-natural world which lies beyond our vision and perception.

Those who have been written off as spent forces can take solace from this fact of history. Experience shows that sparks erupt from volcanoes that have lain inactive for years. In this world the very annihilation and destruction of something means that it is ready to arise and take its place as a new power on earth; a force which is spent turns into a living force.

One should never lose hope because of the dismal course events appear to be taking. When the pages of history turn, events may turn out to have been leading in a direction quite contrary to all our expectations.

## Some Make Themselves, Others Make History

There are two types of people in this world – the self-making type and the history-making type. The aim of those who are self-making is to serve themselves, whereas history-making people seek to serve humanity as a whole.

The attention of a self-making person revolves around himself. He hovers around those areas where his own self-interest is likely to be served; where there is no profit to be gained for himself, he does not care to venture. His heart flutters with excitement when he is set to make some gain, but if there is nothing to be gained, no excitement is aroused within him. Personal gain is uppermost in his mind; he will sacrifice everything in order to achieve it. He abides neither by promise nor by principle. Free of the influence of both moral exigencies and the needs of humanity, he can put everything aside in pursuit of his own ends. All other considerations fade into insignificance as he relentlessly seeks to fulfill his selfish desires.

A history-making person is quite different. Emerging from his own shell, he lives not for himself but for a higher purpose. What matters to him is principle, not profit. He cares not whether he himself wins or loses; what is of importance to him is that his ideal should be served. It is as if he has detached himself from his own person and pinned his flag to the needs of humanity as a whole.

In order to become a history-making person there is one thing that has to be done: one has to stop being self-making. As soon as a person effaces himself, he becomes capable of building for the future of humanity. Such a person lays personal grievances to one side. As his own self-interest and ambitions evaporate before his eyes, he shows no reaction, as if all this were not happening to him at all.

It is people such as these who are destined to forge human history. They are the ones who, of their own free will, are concerned about the rest of humanity; they have no rights to be safeguarded; they have only responsibilities, which they discharge whatever the cost to themselves.



## Education

Knowledge is of two distinct kinds: that which we have been blessed with in the Qur'an and the Hadith, and that which we acquire as a result of our own research and endeavour. The first kind acquaints us with our Lord, and makes plain the issues to be faced in the everlasting world which awaits us after death. More important, it shows us how, in the course of our present life, we may prepare ourselves to meet those issues. The second kind of knowledge provides solutions to the social and economic problems which we encounter in everyday life.

It is imperative that Muslims should seek both forms of knowledge, but they should never lose sight of the fact that they vary considerably in importance. Their primary aim in life should be a knowledge of the Qur'an and the Hadith, while the acquisition of a knowledge of the other sciences should come about as a matter of worldly necessity. Without a knowledge of religion, what must be done in this world to earn an everlasting reward, will constantly elude one's understanding, and it goes without saying that one can never then consider oneself a Muslim in the true sense of the word.

The secular sciences guide us only in worldly matters, giving us instruction in the agricultural, industrial and civic practicalities of life. But it is the Qur'an and Hadith which set our feet on the path to eternal development. Clearly, it is just as important for Muslims as it is for anyone else to study various branches of knowledge, but they must distinguish between ultimate objectives and adventitious necessity. Muslims must not only study the Qur'an and the Hadith, but must be keenly aware that the real reasons for studying them are very different from those which prompt them to seek worldly knowledge: they must constantly bear in mind also that religious knowledge take moral priority over all other forms of knowledge.

## The Psychology of Success

The World champions often possess equal physical strength and capabilities, and receive training of an almost equal standard. Then why does one win and another lose? This question has been a topic of research in America for the past three years. The report of the group of scientists working on this has recently been published.

They chose the top international wrestlers and made comparisons of their physical strength and psychological reserves. They found out that there is one marked difference between the winners and the losers in world competitions. It is not a physical difference, yet it plays the most crucial role in winning or losing a competition. The experts discovered that the winners were more conscientious and in control of themselves than the losers. The report is summed up as follows:

“Losers tended to be more depressed and confused before competing, while the winners were positive and relaxed.”(The *Times of India*, 26 July, 1981). This applies equally to the broader field of life. In life when two individuals or two groups confront one another, their victory or defeat does not depend so much on material resources as on intellectual and psychological reserves.

The conviction that one's goals are worthwhile, the observation of discipline with no contradiction between words and thoughts, cool thinking, even in times of crisis – all these are qualities of mind and heart which determine success, and obviate failure in the wider field of life.

**Per Ardua ad Astra**  
*(Through Hardship to the Stars)*

According to an English scholar, Ian Nash, who spent eleven years in Japan making a detailed study of the language and nation, what shook the Japanese most profoundly was not upheavals in politics, but the great Kanto earthquake, which devastated the whole of the most populated eastern part of Japan on the first of September, 1923. Another terrible blow was the reduction of two of the great cities of Japan to smoldering mounds of waste by the dropping of atomic bombs. This led to the ultimate defeat of Japan in the Second World War in 1945.

One might imagine that any country which has been dealt such shattering blows would never be able to rise again from its ashes. But this is far from being true, for Japan has not only rehabilitated itself, but now figures most prominently of all on the world commercial and industrial scene. Japan has become a great hive of technological activity in spite of having launched itself on an industrial course long after Britain, Europe and America. This is all the more remarkable, considering that Japan has none of the natural resources that the older established industrial nations have, buried right there in their own soil just waiting to be extracted.

In man's life the most important thing is the will to act. Had the Japanese succumbed to a sense of loss and frustration, and frittered their energies away in futile political protest, their country would have been doomed to decline and ruination. But, as it was, they conquered any sense of victimization they might have had and set about reconstructing their national life with a will and a way. Although earthquakes had brought them death and destruction, they had also galvanized them into building their lives afresh.

In such situations of grim affliction, provided one has the will, all one's hidden potential and latent faculties are brought into play. One can think better, plan more successfully and make the greater efforts needed to bring one's plans to fruition. One who lacks the will to improve his life is just like an idling motor which is going nowhere.

Experience has shown also that complacency and a sense of comfort can be even greater vitiating factors in man's progress through life than devastation and despair. This does not mean that adversity by itself is beneficial. No. It is simply the spark which ignites the fuel of man's soul and drives him on to greater things. It is the mainspring of his initiative and the force which propels him relentlessly forward. In the face of adversity his hidden capacities come to the fore and it is possible for him to reach undreamt of heights. But first and foremost there has to be the *will* to do so. There has to be the *will* to stop wallowing in self-pity and to get up and take action.

It is not ease, but effort, not facility, but difficulty which make a man what he is.

## What is Truth?

There is only one straight line from one point to another; so there can only be one path leading a person to God. This is the true path. The question is: what does truth consist of and how can it be found?

Fortunately for us, there are not several truths to choose from. There is only one truth for us to accept. This solitary truth consists of the teachings of Muhammad, the Prophet of God, on whom be peace and God's blessings. Anyone who earnestly seeks the truth will find that no exacting choices have to be made. The choice is between truth and falsehood; there are no two truths to choose from.

For at least five thousand years philosophers have searched in vain for truth. Their tedious investigations have only exposed their inability to provide conclusive answers. Philosophy seeks truth by means of rational contemplation, not realizing that knowledge of the entire cosmos – something beyond the range of the limited human intellect – is a pre-requisite for genuine gnosis. The philosopher can never attain to cosmic knowledge, so that neither can he conceive of an accurate idea of reality.

Science has never claimed to be in a position to explain the truth. It only looks into matters which can be repeatedly proved experimentally. Science discusses the chemistry of flowers, but not their fragrance, for the chemical parts of a flower can be analysed; its odour cannot. Science has itself restricted its scope, making it clear that it will deal only with partial truth and is in no position to expound on universal realities.

Some spiritual adepts claim, or their followers believe, that they know all about truth, and can communicate absolute information concerning it, but their belief is groundless. They claim to have reached the truth by means of spiritual disciplines. The so-called spiritual disciplines are in fact of a physical nature, and spiritual discovery by means of physical discipline is an unfeasible proposition in itself. Secondly, no spiritual adept is free of the limitations to which all men are subject. The obstacles which prevent others from reaching a full understanding of truth also block his path. No self-discipline can enable man to transcend these natural limitations and convey to him a knowledge of absolute truth.

So the stage is left to the Prophet. A prophet is a human being who asserts that God has chosen him and revealed true knowledge to him for the purpose of conveying it to others. Intrinsicly, this is the only plausible claim so far, for only God, who is eternal and omniscient, can have actual knowledge of truth. God's divinity itself is proof of His all-pervading knowledge of reality. The claim of one who asserts that he has received knowledge of truth from God is worthy of consideration.

Here the question arises of there having been not just one prophet. There are many divine scriptures and many prophets have been sent to the world; which of them should be followed? A person who is really sincere in his search for truth, however, will have no trouble in finding the answer to this question.

There is no doubt that in the past God has raised many individuals to the status of prophethood, but one can judge an event only by virtue of its historical credibility and only one prophet possesses credentials which make his prophethood a historical certainty rather than just a belief. Of all those who have claimed prophethood, only Muhammad, on whom be Peace and God's blessings, can be said to have achieved full historical credibility. Everything about him is established historical fact. We are just as well informed about the Prophet of Islam as we are about any contemporary person, or even more so. Apart from him, all prophets are legendary figures. No complete historical record of them exists, nor are the scriptures they left preserved in their original state. Only the life of Muhammad, may peace be upon him, has been completely chronicled. The book which was handed over to people as the inspired word of God is also present in its original form. So, looking at the matter rationally, there can only be one answer to the question. "What is truth?" From a practical as well as a theoretical point of view, we should accept the only realistic answer there is. We should not try to select a solution from a wide range of alternatives.

This truth is the word of God and the word of God is immutable. God's commandments never change, either with respect to man or the rest of creation. The terrestrial and celestial orders have not altered despite the passing of billions of years. The principles which govern vegetation and water in one location are equally applicable in another. That is the way with God's commandments to man also: they are the same now as they were thousands of years ago. That which applies to one nation applies with equal force to all.

Some factors in life, such as transport or architecture, are continually being altered, but truth always remains the same. Truth is attached to that side of human nature which never changes. The truth is concerned with matters like whom one should accept as one's Creator and Master; whom one should worship; whom one should love and whom one should fear; according to what criteria one should assess success and failure; what the purpose of one's existence is and the focal point of one's emotions; according to what code of conduct one should deal with people. Truth deals with matters which are not affected by time and place. Everyone, at all times and in all places is confronted by these questions. Just as God is one and everlasting, so the truth is also one and will always remain so.

## A Danger Warning

What is the reality of life? Normally people do not like to think of such things. For them, there is one life – that of the world – and they try to live it in as prestigious and comfortable way as possible, for afterwards, neither man, nor anything that concerns him, will remain. Some do think about this matter, but only on a philosophical level. They seek a theoretical explanation of the world. Such explanations are interesting from a philosophical point of view, but they are of no basic value to man. Theoretical discussions about whether a cosmic spirit keeps the whole universe revolving for its own fulfillment, or whether everything is part of some sublime being, do not raise any personal issues for man. Some have a religious answer to the question, but their solution is also of no import to man. Some religions hold that the son of God was crucified in atonement for man's sins; others see life as a mysterious, recurring cycle, with man repeatedly being born and dying; some claim that man will be rewarded and punished in this world. These are the creeds of which most religions are made.

All such solutions to the problems of life differ from one another considerably but in so much as none of them raises any serious personal issue for man, they are all the same. They are either explanations of events or a means of providing us with some sort of spiritual satisfaction. They do not issue us with any warning or stir us into any action.

But the answer provided by the Prophet Muhammad is of an entirely different nature. Whereas the other answers do not raise any critical issue for man, the answer provided by the Prophet places every individual in a precarious position from which the next step leads either to an awesome abyss of destruction or to a world of eternal bliss. It requires every man to take a serious view of his situation – even more so than a traveller in the night whose torch reveals a black snake slithering menacingly in front of him.

The message taught by Muhammad, may God's peace and blessings be upon him, contains a greater warning for all mankind. He taught that after this world a vaster world is awaiting us, where every person will be judged and then punished or rewarded according to his deeds. The props which man relies on in this world will not support him there, for there will be no trading, no friendship and no acceptable intercession.

The warning which the Prophet delivered to mankind makes his existence a matter of personal importance to everyone. Everyone's fate, according to his teachings, hangs in the balance. Either one can believe in his message and follow his guidance, thus preparing oneself for everlasting paradise, or one can ignore his teachings, thus resigning oneself to eternal hellfire.

There are two things which make this matter even more worthy of our attention. Firstly, the arguments of

those who have expounded other theories on this matter have been very dubious. Those who consider material aggrandisement to be all that is worthwhile in life have no proof for their theory; their ideas are based on superficial attractions. Those who speak in philosophical terms have only analogies to offer as evidence. They themselves do not have full faith in what they say, so how can others be expected to accept their theories?

Then there are those who speak with reference to the prophets and scriptures. Basically their platform is solid, but the prophets and books to which they refer belong to an age long past. We have no reliable historical information regarding them at our disposal. Even though the original source of these religions is sound, we still cannot rely on their teachings as they are at present. The criterion with which to judge the past is history, and history does not verify the authenticity of their dogmas.

With the Prophet Muhammad, however, the case is quite different. On the one hand, his prophetic credentials stand up to any scrutiny. He was the epitome of everything a prophet should be. There is no doubt about his prophethood; it is an established historical fact which no one can deny.

The facts of the Holy Prophet's life and teachings have also been carefully preserved; their historical credibility cannot be contested. The Qur'an exists in its revealed form. The Holy Prophet's words and actions are recorded in book-form, so one has no difficulty in establishing exactly what he said and did in his life.

The Prophet warned us that we are confronted with a reality which we can never change; we have no choice but to face it. Death and suicide only transfer us to another world; they do not obliterate us altogether. The Creator has established an eternal scheme for success and failure which no one can alter or opt out of. We have to choose between heaven and hell; we have no other choice.

If the meteorological department forecasts a hurricane, it is telling us about an impending disaster in which those affected will have no say in the matter; another power will control events. One can either escape or expose oneself to destruction. So, when the earthquake of the Last day occurs there will be no path to safety save that which the Prophet of Islam has laid down. We ignore that path at our own peril.

## The Teachings of the Prophet

God's religion is one religion. It is that one religion which has always been revealed to prophets, but man, in his carelessness, has always marred or altered the true way. The Prophet Muhammad revived the divine religion and presented it in scriptural form for posterity. His religion is the true religion until the end of time. It is the only way to achieve closeness to God and salvation in the afterlife.

He taught that God is One; He has no partner. He created all things and has complete control over the universe. We should serve Him and submit to Him alone. In Him should we repose our hopes and to Him should we pray. Though He cannot be seen, he is so close to us that he hears and answers us when we call upon Him. There is no greater sin than to consider that He could have any counterpart or equal.

There is no intermediary between God and man. By remembering God, a person establishes direct contact with Him; there is no need for any go-between. No one will be able to intercede before God in the Hereafter either. He will decide everyone's case according to His own knowledge; no one will be able to influence His judgement. God is not accountable to anyone for His decisions. All His judgements are based on wisdom and justice; He is not influenced by intercession and proximity.

Worship of God is much more than just superficial rituals; it is total submission. If one worships God, then one devotes oneself entirely to one's Lord, fearing Him, loving Him, having hopes in Him, and concentrating on Him alone. Worship of God is total self-surrender; it is much more than occasional observance of mere formalities.

When dealing with others, we should always bear in mind that God is watching over us. He will deal with us as we have dealt with others. So, in order to avoid recrimination when our actions are weighed up on the divine scales of justice, it is essential that we avoid evils such as cruelty, dishonesty, pride, antagonism, jealousy, selfishness and callousness. If one fears God, one will not treat His creatures with disdain, for those who mistreat God's creatures should not expect kindness from the Creator; only those who have treated others will deserve good treatment from Him.

The Prophet taught that the only acceptable life is one of total obedience to God. The basic principles of this life are forms of subservience as laid down in the Qur'an, and God's Prophet has demonstrated them practically in his life. The only life pleasing to God, then, is one which follows the guidance of the Qur'an and the example set by the Holy Prophet.

The religion which the Prophet left us guides us in every walk of life; everyone should proceed in accordance with the scheme with which he has provided us. This scheme is based on certain tenets on which the whole of the Islamic life is based.



Firstly, there is the testimony: "There is no one worthy of being served save God, and Muhammad is His messenger." This declaration marks man's exit from one arena and his entry into another – his departure from all that is un-Islamic and his inclusion in the ranks of Islam Secondly, prayer that is worship five times a day in the manner of the Prophet. Thirdly, fasting, a test of patience and endurance annually performed during the month of Ramadan. Fourthly *zakat*, the setting aside of a fixed portion of one's income for the poor. Fifthly, pilgrimage, a visit to the House of God at least once in a lifetime, if one has the means. When one fulfills these five conditions, one becomes part of the prophetically established Islamic brotherhood.

Life can be lived in either of two ways; it can be founded either in the Hereafter or in the world. In the former case, the Prophet's guidance is accepted and a person forms his beliefs and arranges his life according to his instructions. In the latter case a person guides himself, letting his own intellect dictate the way he thinks and acts. The first person can be called a God-worshipper, while the second is a self-worshipper.

There are several parts to the credo based on prophetic guidance: belief in God, the angels, the scriptures, the prophets, the resurrection of man and life after death, heaven and hell, as well as recognition of God as the overriding Lord and Sovereign. If one bases one's life on these tenets of faith, then one has truly submitted oneself to God. All one's efforts in the world become oriented towards the Hereafter. One's worship, sacrifices, life and death are all dedicated to God and His prophets.

The self-guided life, on the other hand, is a free and unprincipled one. One who lives such a life is unconcerned about the nature of reality. He believes what he wants to; he passes his time in whatever way his intellect and desires direct him; his efforts all centre on worldly gain; he develops into the sort of person he wishes to be, rather than what God and His prophets would like to see.

People who adhere to the religion of some previous prophet can only be counted as God's true servants if they believe in the Prophet of Islam. Belief in him is in no way incompatible with adherence to their own religion in its most complete and perfect possible form. Those who deny his prophethood are proving by their actions that all they follow is a religion of conventional norms and prejudices, to which they have attached a prophet's name. Those who follow a religion simply because it is their national one can never discover the divine religion which the prophet brought. The veil of their prejudices will never allow them to see the truth which God has revealed to the last of His prophets. Those who really believe in God and His prophets recognize the religion of the Prophet of Islam as their own. They receive it with enthusiasm as one does a long-lost belonging.

## Planting the Tree of the Nation

The former U.S. President, John F. Kennedy, referring to Lyautey, once remarked:

“I once asked my gardener to plant a tree. The gardener objected that the tree was slow growing and would not reach maturity for a hundred years. I replied, “In that case there is no time to lose, plant it in the afternoon ...”

*Charted Account, New Delhi, 79. (Supplement)*

The growth and development of a nation is likewise a lengthy affair, and there has to be a tremendous input at both the individual and national levels before it finally bursts into blossom and finds the position of honour and glory that it merits in world affairs. But to one who points out that no one can wait for a national policy to mature if it is going to take a hundred years, the only answer is: “In that case, we cannot afford to lose even a single moment. We must plant our ‘tree’ this very minute”.

If it takes a mighty tree one hundred years to reach its full stature, whoever wishes to possess such a tree has no option but to tend it for that period. If instead of nurturing it with care and skill, people come out on to the streets and launch a strike campaign in the name of trees, or gather in some open place or march through the streets shouting slogans about it, they will never possess a single tree, lest own an orchard.

Similarly, you cannot own a house by making eloquent speeches about the need for one. It would be the crassest stupidity to do so. Neither can a nation fortify itself by working miracles only in the field of politics. In the rarefied world of poetry, revolution can occur as a result of a mere play on words. A demagogue can make impassioned speeches and attract great crowds. But real results can be achieved only by long-term planning and continuing dedicated effort.

Needless to say, the two great virtues which are indispensable in the struggle are patience and fortitude.

## Voluntary Submission

We offered Our trust to the heavens, to the earth, and to the mountains, but they refused the burden, and were afraid to receive it. Man undertook to bear it, but he has proved a sinner and a fool. Allah will surely punish the hypocrites and the unbelievers, both men and women, but Allah pardons believing men and believing women. Allah is Forgiving and Merciful (33:72-73).

Man and the universe are creations of God. It is required that both of them completely surrender themselves to God. However, there is a difference in the nature of each surrender. Whereas the universe has from the outset been subjected to God's will, man is required when he reaches the age of reason to submit himself to God of his own free will.

'Trust' here relates to free will. Free will is a matter of trust because it is a gift which God has given to man temporarily in order to test whether he will put it to the best use or not. Trust, in other words, is the tacit understanding that the subservience which God exacted from the stars and the planets will be offered to Him by man of his own volition.

In this universe it is only God who is Lord and Sovereign. All other things are His subjects. It was God's will that a creature should come into being which does what God wants him to do, without any compulsion, of his own free will. This voluntary submission is so subtle a test that even the heavens, the earth, and the mountains cannot bear it. However, man, despite great apprehensions of his failing to fulfill the responsibility, accepted it. Now man in this world is the repository of one of God's trusts. He has to impose on himself what God has imposed on other objects in the universe. He has to rigorously apply the commands of God to himself. Man is in a state of trial and the present world serves as a vast trial ground for him.

This 'trust' is an extremely delicate responsibility, for the matter of reward and punishment is based on its fulfillment. Other creatures have no freedom, therefore, in their case, this question does not arise. Man enjoys freedom. That is why his actions must be subject to divine retribution.

## Try, Try, Try Again.

A young man who was employed as an ordinary worker in a Bidi factory soon learnt the entire art of the business and set up his own factory. He initially invested only Rs. 5000 in his business, but then by dint of fifteen years' hard work, his business progressively increased until it expanded into a big factory. One day, narrating his life story to his friends, he said: "Just as a young child grows into boyhood after fifteen years, so does a business. I have not reached this stage in one day. It has been a fifteen-year struggle."

In truth every piece of work is accomplished in "fifteen" years, be it of an individual or a nation, be it a business or a social service. Those who long for a recipe for instant success are, in fact, living in a fool's paradise. It is all very well to say that a hop, step and jump can take you right to your destination. But as soon as one comes face to face with reality, one realises that this is just an illusion. Glenn Cunningham, a sportsman who became champion of the one-mile race, saw the school in which he was studying go up in flames. His own experience was terrible. His feet were so badly burnt that he could not even move his legs. The doctors lost all hope of his ever walking or running. They said that only a miracle could save him. Surprisingly Glenn Cunningham's incapacity excited in him a new zeal and eagerness to walk and run. All his mental faculties concentrated on his decision to walk. So he began to experiment with different kinds of exercises till he hit upon a novel idea. It was to drag himself along by holding on to the handle of a moving plough. When his feet could even so much as rest on the ground, he felt encouraged, and intensified his efforts. Finally, the miracle of which the doctors had so despaired, took place. The new technique was a tremendous success and, ultimately, he could not only walk, but could also run. Later he entered for a race. He set up a new record and became a champion of the one-mile race. But this grand success was not achieved in a few days. He had to spend "fifteen years" realizing his goal. Only after a fifteen year stint had it been possible for him to become a racing champion.

In truth, no success is possible in this world without working for "fifteen years." It is God alone who has the power to achieve instant success. But God has not created this world on the basis of instant success. Man must learn his lesson and should not fritter away his time in futile efforts. In this world of God, innumerable events are taking place, all of which are based on eternal, immutable laws. Not even a blade of grass grows here on the ground as a result of wishful thinking, not even an ant can manage to live by ignoring the realities of life. How is it possible then for man to change the divine laws? The only condition of success is continuous effort, that is, to make such unflagging efforts, as are essential to achieve the desired objectives in the world of God according to the law of God. By following the same principle we can achieve success in this world; it is the same principle which will bring us success in the next world.

## Our 'Turnkey' Civilization

In the modern, industrial world, the term 'Turnkey Project' has come to be widely used. Ready-made house and factories are made today in which everything is provided by the seller. The buyer has only to turn the key in order to use it. The behaviour of certain Muslims of the present day suggests that they think the world is theirs for taking, that God has handed it over to them ready-made and that all they have to do is 'turn the key' and everything and everyone will be ready to do their bidding.

Little do they realize how far this is from being the true state of affairs. This world, in reality, is one of vigorous action and keen competition, and no worthwhile position can be attained without working hard on every aspect of the project in hand, and no job is well done unless carried out with scrupulous care from beginning to end. Our very right to live has to be proved by competing with others. Only when we plunge wholeheartedly into the fray, can we hope to attain the place we desire in this world of cause and effect. There is no question of just 'turning the key'.

Muslims of the present day must learn before all else that they are at the beginning of history, and not the end. Everyone knows that this is January, 1986 and that for it to be December, 1986, we shall have to wait for twelve months. The earth shall have to revolve on its axis 365 times and only then shall we come to the end of one year. This is common knowledge. But Muslims tend to overlook such obvious facts when it comes to the building of their nation. They have only just entered the first month, but they want to leap straight into the twelfth. They make no effort to lay the foundations of the homes they keep imagining, but already they want to stand on their rooftops. The very phrasing of their speeches and writings gives the impression that they have actually attained their objectives.

We should remember, first and foremost, that we can create a nation only if its inhabitants are imbued with a sense of purpose and, to that end, we must educate our people: they must have full knowledge of both the past and the present if they are to progress towards an ideal future. We have to inculcate in them the will to work unitedly in spite of their disagreements. We have to instill in them the courage to sacrifice their personal feelings and their short-term interests for long-term ones. Only then will it be possible to fashion history anew.