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Islam in Brief

What is Islam? This is a vast subject. Here we shall give a brief account of some of its basic aspects in the light of the Qur'an and *hadith*.

True Guidance

The Qur'an leads us to the true guidance. In this connection, we quote a passage from the Qur'an:

Allah is He besides Whom there is no god, the Ever-living, the Self-subsisting by Whom all subsist; slumber does not overtake Him nor sleep; whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is His; who can intercede with Him but by His permission? He knows what is before men and what is behind them, and they cannot comprehend anything out of His knowledge except what He wills. His knowledge encompasses the heavens and the earth, and the preservation of them both does not tire Him, and He is the Most High, the Great. There is no compulsion in religion; truly the right way has become clearly distinct from error; therefore, whoever disbelieves in Satan and believes in God, shall indeed lay hold of the firmest handle, which shall not break off. God is All-Hearing and all-Knowing.

God is the guardian of those who believe. He leads them from darkness to the light. As for those who disbelieve, their guardians are false gods who lead them from light to darkness; they are the inmates of the fire and in it they shall abide forever. (2:255-257)

Now, let us try to visualize the above quoted Qur'anic passage, in its applied form, so that we may have an idea of what kind of individual, what kind of society and what kind of State would respectively emerge, if Islam were consciously accepted and practised in letter and spirit.

A. Individual

Islam is the religion of the universe. The Qur'an says:

Are they seeking a religion other than God's when every soul in heaven and on earth have, willingly or by compulsion, bowed to His will? (3:83)

This means that submission to God is the only true religion for both man and the universe. All the things on the earth or in space are following God's commands to the letter. The revolution of the stars, the flowing of water, the growing of trees, in short, all things are following the same course which was determined for them by God. Nothing is allowed to deviate from the divine path. The Qur'an says:

The sun is not allowed to overtake the moon, nor does the night outpace the day. Each swims along in its own orbit. (36:40)

The same is required of all human beings. Everyone should strictly obey the commands of God without any deviation or alteration. The Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, has declared:

A believer with his faith is like a horse with its tether. The movement of the horse is restricted to the length of its tether. So is the case with the believer. His words and deeds are all restricted by the limitations set by his faith. (*Mishkat al-Masabih*, vol. 2/1226)

The true Muslim leads a highly disciplined life, always adhering to the set of do's and don'ts ordained by God Almighty. He is entirely pure in speech, and even subordinates his intention and thinking to the will of God. He always feels himself to be a servant of his Lord. The Qur'an depicts the true Muslim thus:

And the servants of the Beneficent God are they who walk on the earth in humbleness, and when the ignorant address them, they say: "Peace." And they who pass the night standing and prostrating themselves before their Lord. And they who say: O our Lord! Ward off from us the punishment of hell, for surely its punishment is everlasting. Surely it is an evil abode and (evil) place to stay. And they who, when they spend, are neither extravagant nor parsimonious, but keep the golden mean. And they who do not call upon any other god besides Allah and do not kill, which Allah has forbidden, except in the requirements of justice, and (who) do not commit fornication and he who does this shall meet with evil; his punishment shall be doubled on the Day of Resurrection, and he shall abide in abasement forever; unless he repents and believes and does good deeds; for them Allah will change his evil deeds to good one and is Forgiving, Merciful. And whoever repents and does good shall surely return to Allah. And they who do not bear witness to what is false, and when they hear what is profane they maintain their dignity. And they who, when reminded of the signs of their Lord, do not fall down thereat deaf and blind. And they who say: 'O our Lord! Grant us in our wives and our offspring the joy of our eyes, and make us examples to those who fear you.' These shall be rewarded with lofty places in paradise because they were patient, and shall be met therein with greetings and salutations. There they shall abide forever: a blessed dwelling and blessed resting place. Say (to the unbelievers): Little cares my Lord for you if you do not invoke Him. But now that you have indeed rejected (the truth), His punishment is bound to overtake you. (25:63-77)

B. Society

The foundation of society in Islam is based on mutual well-wishing. In chapter *Al-Asr* (The Time) the Qur'an says:

By the time, verily Man is in loss, except for those who believe and do good works and exhort one another to truth and to patience (103:1-3)

How should a Muslim live in a society? The answer is given in one of the *hadith*: "If anyone of you sees

an evil in society, he must rectify it by his own hand. And if he has no capacity to do so, he should do it by his tongue. And if he is unable even to discourage it, then, let him condemn the same in his own heart.” (Bukhari)

A society based on these principles will naturally be a place in which good will flourish as a result of mutual reminding, and the roots of evil, if not totally eradicated, will dry up due to public discouragement. As the truth is openly propagated and the virtue of patience is highly recommended in this society, there will definitely prevail a peaceful atmosphere which is prerequisite for the healthy growth and development of both the individual personality and the social system at large. It is only in an atmosphere of such peaceful social order that the rights of individuals and communal harmony are ensured, and the higher values of brotherhood, cooperation and altruism are sincerely observed; and, finally, the projects of common welfare, progress and prosperity are successfully achieved.

To sum up, when the ideals of Islam are consciously put into practice by its adherents, there will emerge a society that will be appreciably more secure, free of violence and naturally cooperative, progressive, prosperous, good enhancing and evil-resisting.

C. State

What is a State? It is an organised political community under one government. Islam does not prescribe any particular form or structure of the State. Nevertheless, Islamic teachings seem to be so comprehensive that they embrace all essential issues of life including the State and its related national or international problems as well.

What is an Islamic State? A State governed by Muslims is not necessarily an Islamic state. Apart from its monotheistic doctrinal basis, an Islamic State would, in practice, be identified with the summum bonum principle of ‘no-compulsion.’ No compulsion should be exercised, either before or after the gaining of power. For power gained through compulsion or power used for compulsion in any sphere whatsoever, particularly in religious matters, is strictly prohibited and condemned in Islam. That is why the coercive forms of States, though governed by Muslim dictators, have never been considered ideal Islamic States by the scholars of Islam. Islam, moreover, does not allow its followers to rebel against any established State, even though it may not seem to be in accordance with the Islamic Ideal. Compulsion on the part of the State should never be resisted by means of counter-compulsion, i.e. it has to be countered through negotiation, backed up by conviction. This ensures such stability of law and order as will subsequently help promote Islamic values and this may gradually prepare a firm ground for a real Islamic State to stand on.

To establish an ideal Islamic State is not the main target of Islam, as is wrongly projected by some groups of Muslims. An Islamic State is something that may ultimately emerge from a society consisting of sincere, practising Muslims, and its government may take any workable form, – this being neither predictable nor pre-determinable. Such a State, according to the Qur’an (24:55), is a worldly reward of

God granted to His righteous servants, when He wills, and not a direct target towards which the Muslim community must struggle.

To conclude, Islam begins when one discovers God as the ultimate truth. This results in a spiritual transformation which leads to new thinking and new sentiments – indeed to the emergence of a whole new personality. A new man is born: he is quite different from what he was before. He now becomes a combination of spirituality, compassion and tranquility. This is like an intellectual and spiritual revolution. This inner transformation finds expression in his external behaviour, in worship, in character, in social relations, etc. To produce a person like this is the main target of Islam. All other aspects of Islam hinge on the fact that man lives in a society and the greater the number of such individuals in a society, the greater the changes brought about at the social level. This process leads to what may be called the social system of Islam.

This revolution among individuals and society goes on developing until, conditions being favourable, it culminates in what is termed the Islamic State. This process is mentioned in the Qur'an:

God has promised to those of you who believe and do good works that He shall make them masters in the land as He made their ancestors before them, and that He shall certainly strengthen the religion which He has approved for them, and that He shall certainly change their fears to a feeling of security and peace. Provided they worship Me. (24:55)

In a garden it is the individual tree which has the real existence. The garden is only a collective manifestation of a number of trees. This is true also of man. In the Islamic scheme, it is the individual – who is a real part of the body of Islam while society and the State are only its relative part.

Those individuals who have undergone spiritual transformation are called "*rabbani*" in the Qur'an. Where there are "*rabbani*" individuals in considerable numbers, the "orchard," that is, Islamic society, and the state, will come into existence on their own.

Unforeseen Circumstances

A woman belonging to Lima in South America, having failed to find a satisfactory job made up her mind to try her luck in North America, an affluent country. Too poor to afford an air fare, she conceived the notion of shutting herself inside a suitcase and having herself dispatched as a piece of luggage. The plan was carried out.

The plane which carried her landed at the Los Angeles International airport. All the bags of the passengers were unloaded from the aeroplane for collection. All but one suitcase was uncollected. The police, therefore, intervened to open this abandoned suitcase and take into custody the goods inside, so that it could be handed over to the claimant whenever he turned up. Much to their horror, they unlocked it to find the corpse of a woman. Detectives were called in to investigate the case. They said:

“The woman may have been crushed by the weight of other luggage” (UPI)

This incident serves to illustrate one of life’s truths: taking whatever steps we feel are necessary does not, in itself, ensure our success. This is because there are so many external and unforeseen factors involved which determine the course of our actions. We must take them into account whenever we are deciding upon a course of action. It is only when these factors are in consonance with the steps taken, that we can hope to reach our destination.

This state of affairs takes a more critical turn when the offender is a leader and he goes wrong in framing a policy which involves the whole nation. This is bound to cause widespread misery, if not total destruction. It is, therefore, imperative that a leader be as discreet and careful as possible in his decision-making. He should consider all of the possible pros and cons. He should look before he leaps. His failing to do so would amount to an unpardonable offence. It would be far better for him to take no action at all than to plunge the whole nation into strife and torment.

Capability and Alertness

Raja Mohinder Pratap (1886-1979) was one of those Indians who went to Russia and met Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924). He was one of a delegation of freedom-fighters who met the Russian leader in 1919. He tells how, when he entered the room of the first ruler of communist Russia, Lenin rose to his feet, and went himself to fetch a small armchair from the corner of the room. Raja Mohinder Pratap took his seat on the armchair and Lenin sat next to him on a sofa. The revolutionary leader's first sentence was:

“In which language should I speak: English, German, French or Russian?”

It was finally settled that the conversation would be conducted in English. Raja Mohinder Pratap offered Lenin a copy of his book 'The Religion of Love'. “I have read this book,” Lenin said, as soon as he took hold of it. Raja Mohinder Pratap was astonished. Where on earth could Lenin have obtained the book? The previous evening, Lenin explained, when Raja Mohinder Pratap had met his secretary to fix the time of appointment, he had given the secretary a copy of the book. “I took it from him and read it during the night, in order to familiarize myself with the thought of the person I was going to meet the next day.”

Lenin was the founder of modern Russia. He was an extraordinarily gifted man. Two of his qualities – capability and alertness – are illustrated in the above incident. He had studied so assiduously that he knew four different languages and was able to converse fluently in each one of them. Then so alert and on-the-ball was he that – despite his enormous preoccupation with affairs of state – he read the book of an unknown Indian at night, just so that he could have some prior knowledge of that person's thought when he met him the next day. Lenin made every effort to cultivate this natural talent; he made the most of the opportunities that were provided him; that was how he rose to the ranks of triumphant world leaders.

These two qualities – capability and alertness – are required for any kind of work. They are indispensable for the service of the Islamic cause, just as they are essential to one working in some other, secular field.

Firstly one must be fully equipped with contemporary knowledge, and secondly one must show oneself to be absolutely prepared in whatever one does. Lenin showed how one, equipped with these qualities, can achieve success in the secular field. If people who show capability and alertness of this nature apply themselves to the service of the Islamic cause, then they too will achieve the desired goal.

Bear hardship with patience, and one's sins will be forgiven in the next world

Abu Bakr once recited this verse of the Qur'an before the Prophet: "He that does evil shall be requited with it. There shall be none to protect or help him." (4:123) "How," he asked, "can things now turn out well for us, since we shall have to pay for the evil that we do?" "May God forgive you, Abu Bakr," the Prophet said, "don't you ever become ill, or feel fatigue or distress? Aren't you sometimes afflicted with hardship? Don't you fall into error now and then?" Abu Bakr said that he did indeed. "This then is the requital of your sins in this world," said the Prophet. (*Kanz al-Ummal*)

Talking Tall

A group of sightseers around Delhi zoo in the winter of 1985 looked at various animals in turn then paused in admiration before a great rarity – a solitary white lion which was pacing up and down outside its den.

“This is the only white lion left in the whole world!” exclaimed a member of the group. “You see, the Maharajah of Rewa owned two white lions, both of which he handed over to the Indian government after independence. One of them died, and we are now looking at the one which was left – the sole survivor of its species!”

If this gentleman had cared to walk a little further, he would have seen a board attached to the white lion’s cage on which the zoo authorities had given detailed information, namely, that 69 white lions still exist in the world today, 25 of which are to be found in India alone. Yet just a few yards away there was a gentleman who claimed that there was just one white lion left in the whole world, and that was the one in the Delhi zoo.

How ignorant people can be of established facts, and yet how keenly they feel the urge to expound their views as if there were nothing in the world that they did not know.

Before holding forth on a subject, one should make a thorough study of it, for opinions based on inadequate research are bound to mislead the unwary. Empty utterances may impress the ill-informed, but to the knowledgeable, intelligent listener, they are simply a proclamation of the speaker’s ignorance.

Sadly it is often the greatest of ignoramuses who make the weightiest of pronouncements (111:18).

Discovery of Islam

Once a Muslim scholar from the UK visited India to give a lecture on: 'Islam and the West.' During the question hour, an Indian Muslim asked: 'You have given us so much information about Islam and the West, now, would you please tell us what the Muslims should do, when in the minority, in countries such as India?' The scholar remained silent for a while and then replied: "It is, indeed, a difficult question. In Islam we find a model for a position of strength. But, there is no model in Islam for the position of modesty." This is not just a stray remark. In fact, it illustrates the way of thinking prevalent almost all over the Muslim world today. It clearly shows the mindset of today's Muslims. Consciously or unconsciously, they look to their glorious history in order to understand their status and role in the world. Their mentality is such that when they find a prominent model of strength, they naturally conclude that what Islam stands for is world-wide Muslim political dominance. It is this attitude which prevents them from penetrating the veil of their glorious history to seek guidance directly from the Qur'an and Sunnah. Had they done so, they would certainly have succeeded in finding role models for all human positions including that of modesty. They would further have realized that it is not the political but the ideological spread of Islam through peaceful *da'wah* work that the Muslim Ummah has to struggle for everywhere and under all circumstances.

Contrary to the prevalent misconception that Islam failed to provide its followers with any model of a low-key position, an unbiased study of the Prophet's biography will reveal that up till the conquest of Makkah in the 8th A.H., 20 of the 23 years of his life as a Prophet, were spent in exactly what is nowadays termed a state of modesty. When, chronologically, more than three quarters of the Prophetic mission portrays a picture of humility, what is it that makes one remark that there is no Islamic model for Muslim minorities in India or elsewhere? The fact is that such people are so overwhelmed by the political glory built up during the later period of Muslim history, that their eyes are totally blinded to the glory of the modesty in the life of the Prophet.

This shift in later history of drawing inspiration from political glory instead of from the Qur'an and Sunnah, has, unfortunately, blurred the general vision of present-day Muslims to such an extent, that the original Islam has turned for them into an alien religion. They proudly claim that Islam is a complete code of life and that their Prophet had set a perfect role model for all times to come, yet due to their own misdirected approach, they are unable to find any model for the position of modesty which is comparatively much more important than the model for a position of strength, as it is popularly called.

This state of affairs is entirely in accordance with the prophetic prediction: "Islam began as a stranger. And, finally, it will again become a stranger. Let, then, the strangers be blessed" (Muslim). It would be no exaggeration to say that the original version of Islam has literally become totally unfamiliar to both

Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Islam, has thus, to be rediscovered. And to rediscover Islam, we have first of all to discover what the factors are that have made Islam a stranger in the world today. In the following pages, the reader will find a thorough analysis of the historical and political reasons for the tragic phenomenon of the alienation of Islam as predicted in the *Hadith*.

Why Islam alone

We seldom hear the adherents of other religions complaining about their faiths being misunderstood. For instance Hindus, Buddhists and Christians do not hold that their respective religions are badly understood. One reason is that they do not mix their religions with communal politics, and do not generally try to advance their own worldly interests in the name of their religions – as present-day Muslims are doing on a large scale.

One who studies Islam, directly from its sacred scriptures, is astonished to find that the original Islam is totally different from what it is now generally held to be. Other religions are known to people as they are; hence the need to rediscover them does not arise. The problem of misapprehension applies therefore exclusively to Islam. There is a great need to study Islam from its original scriptures in order to rediscover it in its original form. In modern times many books have been published with the aim of removing misunderstandings about Islam. One title is as follows: 'Islam, the Most Misunderstood Religion'.

But titles such as these are not in accordance with the actual state of affairs. These books start with the premise that non-Muslims have mistakenly come to regard Islam as a religion of intolerance and violence and then they attempt to remove these misapprehensions. But the actual question to be addressed is why there should ever have been such misunderstanding. It has to be conceded that it is based not on some allegation but rather on the fact that the Muslims of today, in almost every country, repeatedly display violence and intolerance towards others. They have adopted this course of action in the name of Islamic movements or Islamic *Jihad*. Were Muslims to do so in the name of their own communal interest and people attributed that to Islam, this would amount to misunderstanding based on an allegation. But when Muslims themselves attributed their activities to Islam, it becomes a case of *proper understanding and not that of misunderstanding*.

Furthermore, the educated class of modern times is obsessed with the concept of anthropology, which treats religion as a social phenomenon instead of as a vehicle for revealed truth. Therefore, according to their way of thinking, they naturally come to regard the activities of Muslims to be Islam itself. And their thinking is further confirmed when they find that Muslims engage themselves in these activities in the very name of Islam.

The first phase, following in the footsteps of the Prophet was given the utmost importance but in later times, the Prophet was glorified as a national hero, so that Muslims might assert their own superiority

over other nations. While the thinking of the first generation was that they could earn paradise only on the basis of their personal deeds, the people of the later period came to hold that mere association with the Ummah (community) was enough to secure them paradise. People of the first generation turned to the original texts as preserved in the Qur'an and Sunnah to seek guidance in every matter; while people of the later generation referred to the commentaries and interpretations produced afterwards. In the first phase self-reckoning and criticism were appreciated, but in later times criticism became a taboo as Muslims became reluctant to accept their own faults, considering themselves above any shortcoming.

Due to these differences, the religion of the first phase of Islam became an unknown religion for the people of the later phase. Indeed, when they were called to the religion of the first phase, they found it so unfamiliar to their thinking and practices that they became dire opponents of such a call. However, there is no doubt that one who loses his popularity among the people as a result of calling them to the original Islam will have a great reward reserved for him by God in the Hereafter.

Communalization of the Religion

Another reason for public alienation from the real Islam is that the faithfuls fall from the high pedestal of principled religion to the level of communal religion. Then, this communal agenda is Islamized, the ideals of Islam being replaced by communal aspirations. This is the result, in modern times, of Muslims being faced with many kinds of communal problems, such as the usurpation of their land, deprivation of political power, cultural invasion, exploitation in terms of economic resources, etc. And there are many other similar communal problems from which present day Muslims are suffering at the hands of their opponents.

All over the world, Muslims have launched movements on these scores. In some places they take the form of protest and demands, while in others they develop into armed conflicts. If such activities have any justification, it is purely communal. Muslims fight for their communal objectives, but they call it Islamic jihad. Their leaders form political parties, they enter into violent conflict with other rulers in order to gain power, but they carry out all these activities in the name of Islam. Power play, pure and simple, is given the name of Islamic politics. The so-called Islamic jihad is the most glaring example of engaging in non-Islamic activities under the banner of Islam. In different parts of the world, wherever Muslims are engaged in fighting for their own communal purposes they inevitably call their activities Islamic jihad. The harm done by such violent jihad has multiplied 1000 fold due to the modern media's selective coverage of news. Since hot news is more profitable than soft news, examples of Muslim *jihad* are seized upon by the media as grist to the mill. This has distorted the image of Islam to such an extent that, today, Islam and violence have become synonymous.

A state of affairs has developed in which Muslims have come to believe that the cause of Islam can be served only through jihad activism, that is, armed struggle. With this mindset, they are unable to understand the significance of peaceful struggle. Anyone who talks in terms of peace and tolerance finds

his integrity in question. Any attempt at making them understand the importance of peaceful struggle is seen as a conspiracy to keep them from performing jihad as a “religious duty.” It is thus an extremely difficult task to call Muslims to peaceful Islam. Such a mission involves the risk of being discredited among one’s own co-religionists. In consequence, the call goes unheeded.

The Veil of Interpretation

One reason for original Islam becoming alien is that as time went by self-styled interpretations of the Qur’an and Sunnah gradually placed a veil over the original content of these texts. A time came when the original Islam was completely obscured from view. The wrong, man-made interpretations took the place of revealed guidance. In later times, people mistakenly took them to be the real Islam.

In the early phase of Islam people derived their religion directly from the Qur’an and Sunnah, therefore, their association with the original Islam remained intact. But the interpretations and explanations of later days served only to obscure the original teachings. The natural beauty of Islam disappeared. The Qur’an and Sunnah now turned into relics instead of being instruments of guidance. Thus the religion came to be based on latter-day interpretations and explanations instead of on the original scriptures.

How did this corruption set in the literature produced by the later generations? The answer is that certain people, having a command over the language were able to acquire a superficial knowledge of the scriptures but were unable to understand them in depth; for this realization (*ma’arifa*) is required. When one finds religion at the level of realization, one is endowed by God with the wisdom (*hikmat*) to be able to understand the deeper meaning of the words of the scriptures. On the other hand those who are not blessed with this special gift of wisdom, have nothing by which to understand Islam, except their own preconceptions.

They begin to interpret religion according to their own mindset. The result is that, although they refer to the Qur’an and Sunnah, their interpretations have little bearing on the original texts. Religious degeneration ensues in which they appear to follow Islam but actually stray far from its spirit. They fail to differentiate between God-sent religion and man-made interpretation. At this point, one who calls people to the original Islam becomes an alien among his own people. He fails to gain popularity even among those already in the Muslim fold. However, losing popularity in this world for the sake of God will earn him a greater reward in the life Hereafter. For, when the image of Islam had been distorted, it was he, who was ready to take all the risks involved in the process of reviving its original form.

One great loss created by these additions to the original Islam was the shift in emphasis. Some important teachings of Islam were relegated to the background – for instance, concern for the larger humanity, *da’wah*, patience, etc. *Da’wah* is the greatest mission of the Muslim Ummah, for, although prophethood came to an end with Muhammad, may peace be upon him, the mission of the Prophet has not yet come to an end. The mission continues through the *Ummah*, as a matter of religious duty. It would be no exaggeration to say that without the performance of this duty, its very credibility of being the Muslim

Ummah would become doubtful. Strangely, indeed, *da'wah* found no place in the literature of the centuries after the Prophet. Neither has it been mentioned anywhere in the Muslim agenda of today. The classical commentaries of the Qur'an (*Tafsir*) also fail to give any prominence to *da'wah* as a concept. In books of *hadith* too, we find chapters on all subjects except *da'wah*. The same is true of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) in whose texts we do not find a chapter on *da'wah*.

According to the Qur'an, the exercise of patience (*sabr*) is a deed which makes man eligible for the highest reward (8:46); the patient man will be rewarded "beyond measure" (39:10). But the interpretation that gained popularity in later times was that the injunction of *sabr*, patience, had been abrogated and replaced by *jihad* (in the sense of *qital*, fighting). Thus, one who studies these books, gathers the impression, that consciously or unconsciously, patience might have been important in the past, but that nowadays it has lost its relevance. Now *jihad* (in the sense of *qital*) and not *sabr* is of the foremost importance.

It follows that whenever a reformer calls Muslims back to their duties concerning *da'wah* and *sabr*, they become antagonistic to such a call, because they have become conditioned to finding it alien to their thinking.

The Obsession with Historical Glory

As mentioned above, one of the major reasons for the original Islam becoming an alien religion among the Muslims is that for latter day generations the basis for the Islamic ethos became the later history of Islam instead of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Muslims found their glorious history far more attractive than the Qur'an and Sunnah. For them they were just sets of words. Their history, on the contrary, gave them an immense sense of pride, as it was full of imperial grandeur and conquests. Although they continued to pay lip service to the Qur'an by reciting it, they were, in fact, lost in the glories of Islamic history. Gradually they came to associate themselves and Islam with this grand history: instead of the Qur'an and Sunnah, history became their chief source of inspiration.

This change of the source of inspiration wrought immense harm. When the Qur'an and Sunnah are one's intellectual sources it is modesty that is bred in the mind, whereas if one takes history as one's intellectual source, pride is bound to be generated.

If the Qur'an and Sunnah are taken to be the true sources of knowledge of God's will, all mankind, in the words of a *hadith*, will be regarded by the believers as God's family; the whole of humanity will become their concern: whereas, when the mind is shaped by history, Muslims see themselves as rulers, and others as subjects. If they derive Islam from the Qur'an and Sunnah, then all God's creation – even a blade of grass – will appear to them as God's signs. Whereas when history is the source of their Islam, the forts and palaces of their kings become signs of grandeur and glory to them. This is exactly what has happened with the latter day Muslims. Almost all the activities of Muslims in present times bear testimony to this fact. The speeches of their leaders, the books of their writers, the poetry of their poets,

seem to centre on their glorious history. Their writers and speakers provide them food for thought about historical glory rather than divine glory. This is the reason why in modern times a large number of books have been written by the Muslims bent on the celebration of history, while perhaps not a single book has been produced on the majesty of God Almighty.

Given this state of affairs, when a reformer arises to call Muslims to the religion of the Qur'an and Sunnah, his voice naturally appears strange to his hearers. For they feel that this person is calling them to a position of modesty, whereas their religion (that is, history) aims at placing them in a position of strength. In such an atmosphere, the words of the reformer will impinge as worthless, alien and unacceptable.

Right Man – Right Results

The late Sir C.V. Raman (1888-1970), who received the Nobel Prize for physics in 1928, achieved international repute and is still the most famous name in the field of Indian science. His discovery, known as the Raman Effect, is one of the established pieces of scientific information which is useful in the study of molecular energy levels.

Born in an ordinary family, (his father was a school teacher drawing a monthly salary of Rs. 10), Raman had to work hard in difficult circumstances to make his way to the top. This is how he described his journey to success – “A long history of frustration, disappointment, struggle and every kind of tribulation.”

All great men have their detractors, and one of them, wishing to underrate his academic success, commented that his famous discovery had been a mere accident, as in the case of many other scientists who had discovered important things just by chance. On hearing this, Raman displayed no annoyance but replied quite seriously that “the idea that a scientific discovery can be made by accident, is ruled out by the fact that the ‘accident’ if it is one, never occurs except to the right man.”

Dr Raman summed up the process of discovery in these words: “The right man, right thinking, right instruments and right results.” (*The Hindustan Times*, January 17, 1987)

Man's True Purpose in Life

Man attains his highest distinction only when he leads a purposeful life. Such a life characterizes the most advanced stage of human development. This does not mean that by taking up just any task which is apparently significant, man's life becomes truly purposeful. A really purposeful life is one in which man discovers his supreme status; a life in which his personality makes manifest its unique distinctive quality. An animal strives to obtain food; a bird flies in search of a better country when the seasons change; a wasp busies itself building up its own home from tiny particles of earth; a herd of deer takes measures to protect itself from wild beasts of prey. All of these appear to be purposeful actions. But when the phrase 'a purposeful life' is applied to man, then it does not refer to efforts of this nature. Without doubt arranging for one's food, clothes and habitation are some of the tasks that man has to perform in this world; but this is a level of purposefulness in which men and animals, being concerned only with bare survival, are equal. Its true application in relation to man can only be one in which he appears in all his dignity. Man's life becomes purposeful only when it goes beyond common animalism and takes the form of superior humanism.

God's creations in this world fall into two categories: animate and inanimate. Obviously, animate objects enjoy a certain superiority over inanimate objects. The former can be divided into three classes: the vegetable, the animal and the human. Modern scientific research has shown that plants also possess life, in that they nourish themselves, they grow and they have feelings.

But animals and men surely represent a higher form of life. In what way does man excel animals? Many theories have been advanced in answer to this question over the ages, and great minds are still studying it. But modern biologists have come to the conclusion that it is man's capacity for conceptual thought which distinguishes him from other life-forms. Animals lack this quality, whereas man is conscious of the fact that he is thinking. He consciously forms a plan of action in his mind; in his everyday life his actions are determined by himself. Whereas this is not the case with animals. Though many of their actions appear to be like those of men, they are not the result of thought; they all stem from pure instinct. Animals are simply led intuitively by their desires and their needs in a certain direction. Their actions are governed by environmental stresses from without and physical pressures from within.

It is in terms of this unique conceptual quality of man that we can conceive of what his higher purpose in life should be. The latter can only be one which does not result from the pressures of desire or of immediate exigencies. It must emanate from his own urge to worship God.

Man's true purpose in life can only be one which reflects the higher side of his personality; one which displays him as the superior being he is.

If one pauses at this stage to take note of what the Qur'an has to say, one will find that it gives us clear guidance in this matter. Man's purpose in life has been explained in the Qur'an in the following words:

"I created mankind and the jinn that they might worship Me. I demand no livelihood of them, nor do I ask that they should feed me. God alone is the Munificent Giver, the Mighty One, the Invincible.

These verses specify man's purpose in life as worship. This is a purpose which elicits from man his uniqueness in its ultimate form. It raises man to a much higher plane than that of animals. Not a trace of animalism contributes to the achievement of such a goal. God does not demand of you a livelihood, the verse states; rather He himself is responsible for your livelihood. This means that worship of God is a purpose which is motivated neither by inward desires nor outward influences. Rather it comes into being through thought alone. Only when a person goes beyond his self and his environment can he understand that there is a higher purpose on which he should focus his life.

The motive force towards the fulfillment of this purpose is not the urge to satisfy one's needs or those of others. The worshipper seeks neither to gratify his own desires nor those of the Being he worships. It is a purpose which sets before man a goal far above all these things – a goal which does not follow internal needs or external pressures, but results purely from conceptual thought.

When a person works, makes money, builds a house, makes an effort to improve his standard of living, he appears to be engaged in efforts towards some worthy end. But a life of this nature cannot be called a purposeful life, for these activities do not demonstrate man's unique status. It might seem as if they are the result of deliberation, but if one looks at the matter in depth, one will see that in actual fact the motive force behind these actions is the same urge that motivates an animal in various ways, in its concern for its own survival. It is the driving force of one's desires; the pressure of one's needs and the wish to fulfill the demands of one's self that underlie such a life. These are the considerations which, in fact, guide a person in his search for his livelihood.

When man grows up, he realizes that there are certain material necessities without which he cannot live. He requires food, clothes, a place to live; he requires a reliable source of income to sustain him throughout his life. He is forced by these considerations to obtain these things. Then he sees that those who have an abundance of these material things enjoy respect and apparently possess every form of happiness and luxury in this world. Thus he is driven on to do more than just seek a livelihood; he desires to earn to a degree greatly in excess of his actual requirements.

In bustling markets, grandiose offices, and opulent buildings, he is not really guided by deliberate thought. Rather, he is being guided by inflated ideas of his own needs, desires, longings and ambitions to achieve fame and high status in this world. For this reason these activities cannot be considered as being directed towards the purpose which sets man apart from the animal and lends him a higher distinction.

Man's greater dignity can be based only on a purpose which emanates from inner desires and pressures of environment. Man's true purpose in life can only be to seek the pleasure of God. When man seeks the pleasure of his Lord, his human qualities find full manifestation. This is a purpose loftier than the one towards which an animal directs its energies. It distinguishes man from animals. It is the ultimate station of human dignity.

To determine the purpose of life is, in short, the effort to make life meaningful. It must surely, therefore, be one which is in accordance with man's unique status; it must be one which leads man on the path to success and progress in terms of his true nature.

The Bigger the Better

In his book, *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*, first published in 1948, Dale Carnegie mentions that when he started writing it, he offered a two hundred-dollar prize for the most helpful and inspiring true story on "How I Conquered Worry." A story written along these lines was sent in by a Mr. C.R. Boston, one of the most significant parts of which we reproduce below:

"I lost my mother when I was nine years old, my father when I was twelve. We were haunted by the fear of being called orphans ... Then Mr. and Mrs. Loftin took me to live with them on their farm. Mr. Loftin told me I could stay there 'as long as I wanted ... I started going to school. The other children picked on me and poked fun at my big nose and said I was dumb and called me an 'orphan'. I was hurt so badly that I wanted to fight them, but, Mr. Loftin, the farmer who had taken me in, said to me: 'Always remember that it takes a bigger man to walk away from a fight than it does to stay and fight.'

What is meant hereby 'bigger'? In this context it has nothing to do with being taller or stronger, but signifies greater-hearted, broader-minded, and more able than a 'smaller man' to sustain injury or insult without losing one's composure. One's 'bigness' here has to do not with physical hardihood, but with moral courage.

No Half Measures

A noted western writer once, after studying the lives of great men, attempted to pinpoint the special qualities that were common to all of them. He came to the conclusion that all of the men he had studied had been filled with curiosity and discontent. Curiosity had kept them in hot pursuit of things, ideas and ideals which had at first eluded them, and discontent had never allowed them to indulge in the thought that they had reached the final peak of achievement. These qualities had proved to be the mainspring of their inspiration.

A similar comment is made by Mrs. Anita Straket, a mathematics adviser from Wiltshire, in a 108-page educational report she had compiled for the school's council. Evaluating certain traits in talented children, she says, "Pupils who are impatient with anything that is second best are probably gifted." (*The Hindustan Times*, 2 February, 1983).

A demanding temperament of this kind compels one to go on seeking absolute truth. It prevents one from being content with half-truths and paltry successes, and one is continually spurred on to higher and greater things. Such a temperament demands that duties should be carried out in an ideal way and, indeed, anyone so inclined can never know happiness unless and until things have been done in the best possible way. A man endowed with such a temperament will never stop until the highest good has been achieved. There can be no half measures for him and he will never be content with things of lesser value.

The Beginning of a New Era

With the end of the 14th century Hijrah, a whole era of Islam has come to an end. With the beginning of the 15th century we are now on the threshold of a new era – and one of great promise, for we are fortunate in having around us all the circumstances most conducive to the creation of a new and great era of Islam.

When the darkness of the night gives way to the light of the sun, it is nature's silent way of announcing that one revolution of night and day is over and that with a fresh day, a fresh life is beginning, and that with the light of day, the wayfarer may take courage and hope to reach his destination. The morning sun sheds light on two views of life. One backward looking, one forward-looking. One is of the opportunities left behind, while the other is of the opportunities still ahead, waiting to be seized. He who uses his opportunities well will surely be successful in life. In this world of trial and competition, however, opportunities appear as such only to those who are capable of availing of them. Fail to grasp them and you will find that opportunity seldom knocks twice. Success, in other words, means the immediate exploitation of existing opportunities.

No one can make his start from yesterday. If a start is to be made, it must be from now, today. Those who choose to live in the past can expect little other than a steady deterioration of their circumstances and final annihilation.

Forget lost opportunities and learn to make full use of the chances of today. Just remember that the day once gone is gone never to return, and you may expect no quarter to be given you by the relentless march of time. Strike while the iron is hot and success will surely come your way.

The Learner - Teacher

Having a mission in life is the greatest spur to achievement within a few days of landing in Bombay, in November 1922, a young Spanish priest by the name of Fr. Henry Heras found himself in the presence of the St. Xavier's College, Bombay. He met the principal of the college. The young priest was a historian, and had a degree in Spanish history. "Which branch would you like to teach?" the principal asked him. "Indian History," Fr. Heras replied. "What do you know about Indian history?" The principal asked him. Fr. Heras said he knew nothing "How, then, are you going to teach it?" "I shall study it." Fr. Heras answered.

To those who knew that he had a degree in history from Spain, it might have seemed strange that he did not just choose a branch of the subject with which he was thoroughly familiar, then settle into a comfortable teaching routine which would bring him his salary with the minimum of effort. Strange indeed, until one discovered that his purpose in doing so was to bring him into contact with the widest possible range of young people in order that he might the more effectively pursue his mission. It was essential that he should have a permanent base from which to work, and this kind of teaching assignment was ideal in that it gave him the opportunity to function both intra – and extra – murally.

So intent was he upon carrying out his mission that he did not once balk at the enormity of the task that lay ahead. It meant learning the history of a whole sub-continent – and one, too, which dated back to the most ancient of times, and into which were interwoven the histories of many peoples. The complexity of the task was intensified by the lack of documentary evidence for certain important periods of Indian history and the fact that much had to be pieced together on the basis of archeological discoveries. But he set about his task with such thoroughness and determination that he became not only an accomplished teacher of history, but a historian of repute of the same class as Sir Jadunath Sarkar and Dr. Surendra Nath Sen. He died in 1956, but his work is still commemorated by an institute in Bombay which is named after him: the Heras Institute.

It is when one has a great and over-riding mission in life that no task seems too difficult, no hardship too great.

One who gives receives

“Every day, two angels visit the servants of God on earth. One of them prays: “lord, reward those who spend,” while the other prays, “lord, destroy the wealth of those who withhold.”

(AJ-Bukhari, Muslim)

Super Performers

A book published in America in 1986; entitled *Peak Performers*, makes study of the lives of a number of individuals in modern America who have played a heroic role in life. One point which the writer especially emphasizes is that a great mission can beget in a man the powerful urge to superior effort which ultimately leads him to exceptional achievement.

America sent its first manned spacecraft to land on the moon in 1967. The launching of the rocket had been the result of the combined efforts of a large number of experts, who had been engaged to work for this mission. One of this team, a computer programmer, said that something extraordinary began to happen as the work got under way. The thousands of ordinary men and women, who had been working to make the space programme materialize, had all of a sudden been transformed into super-achievers. They had started performing with an efficiency that they had never in their whole lives been able to muster.

Within the short period of 18 months, all of the work had been accomplished with exceptional rapidity.

“Want to know why we’re doing so well?” our manager asked me. He pointed to the pale moon barely visible in the eastern sky. “People have been dreaming about going there for thousands of years. And *we’re* going to do it.”

It is understandable that what inspires a man more than anything is to have a great mission before him. That is what arouses a man’s hidden potential and makes him capable of all manner of sacrifices. It makes him, in short, a peak performer.

Through Fire and Water

As Dale Carnegie – that most pragmatic of modern thinkers – once remarked: “ The most important thing in life is not to capitalize on your gains. Any fool can do that: the really important thing is to profit from your losses. That requires intelligences; and it makes the difference between a man of sense and a fool.

It is seldom in this world that aspirants to wealth and fame meet with nothing but success throughout their careers. Many are the trials and tribulations through which they must pass before they can savour the fruits of their endeavours. The people who ultimately succeed are those who are undaunted by disadvantageous circumstances, who waste no time in lamenting over them and who give their attention instead to over coming whatever difficulties they are faced with.

The idea of profiting from one’s losses may seem paradoxical, but it is something definitely worth aiming at, whether it be an individual, a group or a nation whose welfare is at stake. It is not, after all, the man who has never had to face any difficulties whatsoever who is necessarily the most successful in life. The truly successful person is one who can carry his ambitions into effect no matter what hurdles he has to leap over. He is the one who will arrive at his destination no matter what obstacles are strewn in his path. He is the one who is prepared to battle through fire and water right to the very end.