



Al-Risala 1992

August-September

Towards Peace

Pope John Paul II, speaking in Coventry, England, said:

Wherever the strong exploit the weak, wherever the rich take advantage of the poor, wherever great powers seek to dominate and to impose ideologies, there the work of making peace is undone; there the cathedral of peace is again destroyed. Today, the scale and horror of modern warfare – whether nuclear or not – makes it totally unacceptable as a means of settling differences between nations. War should belong to the tragic past, to history; it should find no place on humanity's agenda for the future. (p. 24).

This is the absolute truth. It is, in reality, the disparities existing between men – some rich, some poor, some weak, some strong, some old, some young that lead to the disruption of peace within, and between nations. It is these differences of age, rank, wealth and ability that encourage individuals and nations to perpetrate injustice in society or in the world at large.

All this is basically a question of mental attitude. The privileged need only see the underprivileged to want to exploit them. This exploitative mentality sometimes leads to extremes, such as all-out war. Such a mentality is clearly warped and only if it is somehow radically transformed will the injustice created by it be finally eradicated.

UNESCO has very aptly included in its constitution the following aphorism:

Since war began in the minds of man, it is in the minds of man that the defence of peace must be constructed.

The guidance provided by Islam on this issue can be summed up as 'accountability to God: Islam instills in man's mind the precept that he is not free in this world, but is subject to God's will. This ingrained sense of accountability makes him extremely cautious, for he knows that he will ultimately be brought before God to be judged for his words and deeds. He realizes, therefore, that he must remain within well-defined limits, never so much as attempting to overstep them by the smallest margin. He knows that if he did so, he would not be able to save himself from the grip of the Almighty.

God is the Being from whose grip no one can ever attempt to escape. With this dawning realization, none dare rebel. Such thinking serves them as a powerful check on all kinds of cruelty and injustice.

One factor which leads more to injustice than any other is the tendency of those possessing greater material luxuries to consider themselves superior to the less privileged. This encourages them to think that they can do as they please, and that no one dare stop them. It is this mentality which is one of the major causes of all chaos and strife.

Islam, however, tells us that this is not an issue between man and man, but between man and God. This being so, differences and disparities are rendered absolutely meaningless. This is because in comparison to the Creator and Sustainer, all human beings are equally weak and powerless. There is no one greater than God. There is no one more powerful than God.

In order to establish peace and stability in our time, it is essential to produce a peace-loving mentality. It is only the peace-loving mind which can, in actuality, put an end to all the chaos and strife still prevailing in the world of today.

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Public speaking and public silence

Describing the gatherings of the Prophet, Ali ibn abi Talib said, "While the Prophet was speaking, they all kept their heads bowed as if they had birds perched on top of them. Only when he had finished what he was saying would the others speak up, and no one ever quarreled about anything in his presence. While one person was speaking, the others would listen quietly until he, had finished what he had to say. In this way, everyone was given an equal opportunity to have his say.

(Al-Tirmidhi, *Shilma'il*)

Sans' Wisdom

Cicero (106-43 BC), a great scholar, thinker and orator of the Roman period, once said, 'An army is of little value in the field unless there are wise counsels at home.'

This is an extremely important fact. While the possession of an army and weapons spells power, the successful use of that power will depend upon the astuteness of the mind that guides it. Power used in a mindless way can only cause destruction. It can never yield constructive results.

Muslim conduct in modern times is the worst example of this historical truth. On innumerable occasions, Muslims of the present day have waged armed struggles against their alleged enemies, and each time the result has been their own ruination. Violent campaigning on their part has only left a trail of destruction, mainly their own. None of these steps have led in real sense to the, advancement of the Muslims, or to any benefit to humanity in general. The reason is that whatever army they had managed to assemble was not guided by wise counsels.

What acts as a spur to violent activities is the feeling of hatred, whereas the mainspring of the action in jihad ought to be love. A mujahid first of all strikes himself and only then does he rise to launch a campaign against others. Present-day Muslims have been instigated by hatred. Their activities, ostensibly in the name of jihad, fall, therefore, into the category of acts inspired by the self and not by the true spirit of jihad. If they call their activities 'Jihad', this is adding insult to injury. In this way, they are culpable before God and man.

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Constant fear of God

The second Caliph of Islam, Umar ibn Khattab once wrote a letter to Abu Moosa Ash'ari, offering him this advice: "Remain ever in fear of God; and learn the Book of God, for it is the source of all knowledge; for weary hearts, it is the freshness of spring."

(AI-Dhahak)

The Reality of Life

'Son kills mother for refusing to hand over Rs. 500' is the heading of one news item in the *Indian Express* of July 24, 1987. This grisly killing shows to what extent the rot has set in present-day society.

According to this report, Ashok Kumar, 23, of Delhi, was so infuriated when his mother refused to oblige him with the Rs. 500 he demanded, that he picked up a grinding stone and hurled it at her head. She collapsed with the impact and died on the spot.

Afterwards, Ashok locked her body in a box, having washed away all the blood marks from the surroundings. When his brother and sister came home, he told them that their mother had rushed to the Punjab after receiving the news of her husband's illness.

The very next day, however, the box began to emit a foul smell. When it was opened, it revealed – to their horror – the decaying corpse of their mother. Ashok Kumar then confessed to his crime and was taken into police custody.

In a country where mercilessness and waywardness have crossed all limits, it is quite obvious that if Muslims do not sedulously refrain from retaliation in unpleasant situations, the net result will be their own humiliation, if not destruction. Given the prevailing situation, leaders who give no thought to asking Muslims to retaliate are neither serious nor sincere. No one who was really serious and "sincere would ever advise his people to adopt a high-profile stance under the present circumstances.

While a fool knows only himself, the wise man knows others as well as himself. In a world where so many different kinds of people exist, only he can be a leader who not only knows himself, but who also takes into account the activities of others. One who sees only himself can never succeed in this life. The vessel in which he sets sail will be shattered on the reefs of life long before he ever reaches his destination.

This is one of the hard and unchanging realities of life.

Nature Acts as a Buffer

In an article entitled 'What Will Ramrajya Mean to the Female? (*Times of India*, July 06, 1991) one of the points made is that 'Ramrajya is a Hindi belt urban phenomenon confined solely to the male population.' (p. 6).

This analysis is perfectly true. The Ramrajya movement is not endorsed by all Hindus but only by some of them. Indeed, by a minority, not a majority.

An eclipse of the sun, however vast it might be, does not spread darkness all over the earth; neither does it last forever. Similarly, no evil, no matter how heinous, be nights the whole of humanity with its shadow. If one part of humanity is affected by it, we must remember that perhaps a greater part remains unaffected. It is the latter part which is often more precious and more important.

Keeping this in mind, we should not be panicked by movements launched against Muslims in India and abroad. The eternal law of nature is itself there to apply checks to them. According to this law, irrespective of the power-play of these movements, their effects will be felt only by a part of Islamic society. The greater part will remain unaffected, and this in itself will be conducive to our forging ahead towards a brighter future. Nature itself will act as a buffer between our community and campaigns launched against it. We shall thus never feel the full impact of their antagonism.

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An oath of secrecy

Abu Bakr accompanied the Prophet when he emigrated from Mecca to Medina. An idolater of the Banu Al Dayl Tribe, – Abdullah ibn Urayqit by name – who was well acquainted with the Hijaz countryside, was engaged by them as a guide. As was usual according to Arab custom, Abdullah ibn Urayqit dipped his fingers into a glass of water and pleaded himself to secrecy. Then avoiding the frequented thoroughfares, he guided the Prophet and Abu Bakr by a coastal route to Medina.

(Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*)

A Wish-List

Cleary Simpson, a highly educated American lady, undertook several jobs after the completion of her studies until; finally, she landed a job with *Time* magazine – something she had longed for all her life. Presently, she is Advertising Sales Director in *Time*'s New York office. In its issue of August 5, 1991, *Time* published a jubilant photograph of the lady, along with her happy comment: 'Working for *Time* was always on my wish-list.'

There is something in everyone's life which he regards as wonderfully superior. He thinks about it, day and night, dreaming fondly of his heart's desire. He simply longs for the day this most 'cherished goal will be achieved: This is what figures most prominently on his 'wish-list'. And there is no one in this world who does not have some such focus for his attention.

What places the believer on a different plane is the fact that at the top of his wish-list is paradise – a world of eternal, perfect blessings where he will find his lord, where he will meet truthful human beings and savour God's munificence. There he will live in a world free of absurdities, hardship and noise. The atmosphere will be filled with "peace and the praise of God. Freedom will be unbounded, pleasure unlimited.

Whenever a man discovers the reality of life, the most important thing he realises is that there is nothing greater than paradise. He yearns for paradise, but paradise is only for those whose craving for it is so intense that it amounts to greed.

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While worshipping God, respect the convenience of others

The Prophet was once in retreat in the mosque when he was disturbed by the sound of loud recitation. Raising the curtain, he said to the worshippers, "Look, you are all intent on beseeching God, but in so doing you must not trouble others. Don't raise your voices to outdo each other while reciting the Quran."

(Abu Da'ud, *Sunan*)

The Miracle of Hard Work

Akhtar Husain Ghazi Khan was born in Ghazipur in 1926. When he was just over 30 years of age, he moved to Delhi to improve his prospects in life. But he failed to find a good job as he had never received a proper education. For a very long time he lived from hand to mouth, accepting any temporary, low-paid job that came his way. Often his family had to be content with just chutney, pulses and rice. Yet, today, he lives in a well-appointed flat in New Delhi, with all the facilities, including a telephone.

Thirteen years after he came to Delhi he was still living with his wife and six sons in a single, small room next to a mosque. 'If they had little living space, they had even less to eat. Finally, his wife became so sick of this life that she told her husband to bring home some poison so that they could all put an end to it.

Hearing these words from the lips of his wife, he fell into a terrible state of anxiety. Thinking deeply about why things had turned out this way, he concluded that it was because he had not been properly educated. He realised that if he failed to give his children a good education, their fate would be the same as his. It would not be poison that he would give them, but an education was his firm resolve.

This gave him a great new incentive. The pressure of circumstances now turned him into a hero. He would work for 16 hours a day at whatever job he was offered so that he could pay for his children's education.

When I met him just last summer, he told me that for years together he had run about like a man possessed in the streets of Delhi to make enough money for his project.

The adverse circumstances which turned Akhtar Husain into a hero also had the effect of making his children work hard at their studies. Each child having devoted every available moment to study passed his examinations with distinction. It was a long struggle for all of them – twenty years – but today all of them are safely at the top of the ladder of success.

On Silence

According to Abdullah Ibn Umar, the Prophet said that the man who remained silent earned his salvation. (*Mislikat Al-Masabih*, 3/1360). According to another tradition, he said, 'Silence is wisdom. However, there are few who practise it.' (*Al-Mafredat fi Gharib al Qur'an*, p. 127)

A human being's greatest possession is his brain, and one of the first indications that he does possess a brain is his ability to remain silent. Maintaining silence then is not inaction. It is, on the contrary, a superior form of activity, indicative of the highest intelligence.

Keeping quiet and thinking are almost synonymous. In a silent state one is actually engaged in deep thought – undoubtedly one of the greatest of human actions. Where speech requires the activity of certain organs, silence requires the full activity of the brain. Silence, as an activity, has double the value of speech.

Silence is an indication of seriousness, denoting a man's efforts to have an in-depth appreciation of the matter in hand. Before venturing to speak, he realizes the necessity to reflect. Before addressing his audience, he first addresses himself. He never rushes into anything; it is his silence that tells us that he is planning well-considered moves.

Speaking is the mark of impatience. Silence is the mark of patience. Where speaking can be indiscreet, silence is invariably discreet. Where speaking can be irresponsible, silence is a sure sign of responsibility.

Speaking demonstrates a man's limitations. Once he has spoken, his hearers may take his measure. Silence, on the other hand, sets no such limits. One who remains silent is boundless, unfathomable. He is a man whose limits have yet to be revealed, and he speaks only when others have exhausted their funds of words.

Talkers are legion in this world, but those who love silence more than speech are as rare as the rarest of gems.

Islam in the Present Age

In its issue of June 15, 1992, *Time* magazine has made Islam its cover story with this title on the front page: 'Islam: Should the World Be Afraid? Another title inside the magazine on page 22 reads: 'The Sword of Islam.'

The aggressive picture of Islam as presented in the articles is no exception. Such references to Islam are common occurrences in modern times. Once during a journey to a European country, I met a Muslim youth who told me of an experience he had during an interview, which started as follows:

'Are you a Muslim?'

'Yes.'

'Then you are a terrorist.'

This is a clear indication of what the image of Islam has become in modern times – that of a terrorist religion. For this reason, people have come to regard Islam as a constant threat to universal peace, co-existence and solidarity. This, however, is a complete misunderstanding, and is totally unrelated to the actual state of affairs.

The only acceptable way to determine the real position of Islam is to find out first of all what Islam sets out to achieve. Its goal is very clearly expressed in this verse of the Qur'an: 'O believers, be worshippers of the Lord.' (3:79) The word used in this text is *rabbani*, i.e. devoting oneself to God and to no other. That is to say that, your love and your fear should all be for God and God alone. The true goal of Islam is thus to form such devout individuals. Obviously, a human being of this kind cannot be formed through violence and war. This is entirely a matter of intellectual revolution and of a change of heart. And such a change of heart and mind can be brought about only by advice, counseling and *da'wah*, and not by recourse to violence.

If one were to speak of a 'militant businessman' or a 'violent merchant', this would be a contradiction in terms. This is because no true businessman can afford to depart from the norms of peace. Commerce, by its very nature, makes one peaceable and willing to adjust. The same is true of Islam. Islam, by its very nature is a wholly pacific and conciliatory faith. An atmosphere of strife and brutality is anathema to the performance of Islamic *da'wah*, which can – produce 'results only in an atmosphere of peace. How then could Islam possibly approve of war and violence?

When Islam is, in truth, a peace-loving religion, how has it come to be portrayed as the very opposite? This is a complete misapprehension which is traceable to two sources, one past and one present.

Let us first consider past contributory causes. It is a historical fact that certain battles against non-Muslims did take place during the Prophet's lifetime. These wars, however, were in no way related to the principles of Islam. They resulted rather from the external circumstances prevailing in the world of that time. These wars did not break out because Islam wanted to fight, but because others, by waging war against the Muslims had forced Islam to defend itself.

Islam came to the world one thousand four hundred years ago, in an age marked by religious persecution. It is a matter of historical record that, in those days, a man considered it his birthright to suppress by force all religions other than his own, or that of the state.

That is why in ancient times each religion experienced violent reactions from the adherents of other faiths. For instance, for about fifteen hundred years from the time of its inception, Christianity was continuously subjected to persecution. Everywhere its followers met stiff opposition and were even subjected to torture or killed outright. Whereas today, the proponents of that same Christianity are engaged in all-out missionary work without the slightest risk of victimization.

If Christians were persecuted in ancient times, it was not because of their adherence to any militant ideology, the tenets of Christianity being the same in those days as they are today. The hostile reaction of the ancient world, as compared to' the complaisance or even indifference of today, was conditioned rather by the age in which it took place – one in which religious persecution was the order of the day.

The modern age is totally different in that it is one of the religious freedom. That is why proselytizers now meet, not with persecution, but with open-mindedness. All over the world, they are now presented with opportunities to carry on their religious work with complete impunity.

The same is true of Islamic history, in which all the incidents of armed conflict were due to the circumstances prevailing in that age, rather than to Islamic teachings. Islam had launched its missionary activities using completely peaceful means, but it being an age of religious persecution, adherents of other religions opposed it tooth and nail. In this way, incidents of armed conflict became an unavoidable part of Islamic history. Nowadays, with this factor eliminated, the possibility of such wars has also, in principle, come to an end.

Those who are unaware of this aspect of Islamic development tend to attribute early conflicts, quite wrongly, of course, to tenets of Islam; they fail to appreciate that they resulted from external circumstances rather than from the internal features of Islam itself.

In modern times, Islam's aggressive image can be traced to the circumstances now prevailing in Muslim countries. In all Muslim countries, Muslims are divided into two broad categories, one called Islamists, and the other secular, or liberal.

With non-religious ideologies dominating people's minds today all over the world, it often happens that when elections are held in Muslim countries, they are won by a secular or liberal group. Now if democratic traditions are to be upheld, the Islamist group should bear with the liberals who have come

into power until the expiry of their term in office. But Islamist groups in every country consider political power a right that they alone should enjoy. As such, whenever a liberal group is in control, the Islamist group assumes the role of aggressive opposition. Furthermore, whatever the activities of this Islamist group, they are all engaged in under the banner of Islam. As a result, its aggressive stance, whether ideological or practical, is attributed to Islam per se.

In actual fact, it is the self-styled Islamists who believe in militancy. And due to their misrepresentation of their own religion, others have come to think of Islam as a militant religion. This is simply a misunderstanding. The facts are, quite the opposite.

There is a *hadith* to guide us on this subject. It says: 'As you will be, so will your rulers be.' That is to say that it is society which produces the type of people it wants as its rulers. This ruling class then represents society.

That is why Islam has very specifically given us this injunction that when the rot sets in in the rulers, or ruling class, we should not directly clash with them. We should rather devote all our efforts to change society in a constructive manner. The day society changes, the rulers will certainly change on their own. It is society which determines what type of ruler it wants. That is why the actual problem lies in changing society rather than in launching militant campaigns directed towards the unseating of rulers.

The so-called Islamist group in Muslim countries has been engaged in ideological or practical campaigns directed against the rulers for the last fifty years. With no positive gain to date what has happened is that the image of Islam has been gravely distorted to that of a religion with violence as part of its creed.

A further error committed by the Islamist group is to suppose the whole world to be their enemies. Then, in order to counter these 'enemy' nations, they are continuously engaged in ideological and military warfare, depending upon circumstances. Indulgence in violence is thus to be found both on an internal plane against the Muslim liberals, and on an international plane, against non-Muslim nations.

This supposition that the whole world is the enemy of Islam is entirely without foundation. In the highly competitive world of today, one group or community is always trying to get ahead of the others. This is a state of affairs which has continued since man's advent on earth and it will continue until Doomsday. As such, it should be taken as a human challenge, rather than as a matter of enmity or opposition towards Muslims.

Conclusion

If we eliminate the erroneous impressions created by circumstances both in the past and the present, in particular by the Islamists' politics, unguided as they are by the Qur'an and *hadith*, the image of Islam that will emerge will be that of a religion based wholly on peace and mercy, which, in reality, is what it is. This is the real image as it evolves from Islamic teachings.

Islam: Creator of the Modern Age Historiography

The starting point in Toynbee's philosophy of history was his contention that the proper unit of historical study must be a civilization, rather than the traditional unit, the nation state.

Both these concepts, however, come to the same thing. That is, that history should not be subordinated only to certain individuals, but should rather be taken as the sum of all the activities of all groups of human beings. This approach, however, has come into existence only during the last few Centuries. If we apply the term 'man-story' to the history, or historiography of today, we have to use the term 'king-story' to describe history before the modern era. It is only in modern times that history has come to mean the study of the, academic, economic, social, political and cultural affairs of a given period. Ancient history amounted to a belittling of humanity in general; the common man was not worth mentioning. The only man worth mentioning was the one whose head was adorned by a crown.

This mentality of treating history as 'king-story' was so confirmed that achievements relating to non-kings were not considered worthy of mention, however much they were marked by greatness. The most striking examples of these lacunae pertain to the great Prophets of the world. It is perhaps the strongest aspect of the story of man that it has omitted those very elements which should, in the writing of history, have been given top priority, namely, the lives of those pious men known as the prophets, and all events relating to them. The recorded history of humanity has elaborate descriptions of the kings. It records every single detail about them from the palaces they occupied to the generals they commanded. But the achievements of the Prophets are completely passed over.

People would find it very strange if a history of the freedom struggle of India did not mention the role of Gandhiji, or if a history of the USSR made no mention of Lenin. But a far stranger phenomenon is a recorded history of humanity which is totally bereft of all mention of those pious souls, the prophets. The final Prophet, that is, the Prophet of Islam, stands out as the sole exception. The reason is that he succeeded in changing those very factors in history which had been responsible for such tragic happenings in the past.

The serious gaps which occurred in historical writings in the past resulted from the ancient historians' belief that only the king and events relating to the king were worthy of being recorded. Nothing else was of any importance to them.

The real events relating to non-kings were regarded as undeserving of any mention, while even legendary tales and concocted stories about the kings were preserved in writing as if they were great realities. Take, for instance, the building of Alexandria, the renowned coastal city named after its founder, Alexander the Great. Many strange stories are associated with the foundation of this city. One of them

concerns sea genies who were said to have put obstacles in the path of building the city when the work was first started. Alexander, so the story goes, decided to see for himself what the genies were about. He gave orders for a large box of wood and glass to be made, and when it was ready, he had himself lowered in it to the bottom of the sea. There he drew pictures of the genies and then back on land, he had metal statues cast to look exactly like the drawings. These statues were then laid under the foundations of Alexandria. When the sea genies came there, and saw that genies like themselves had been killed and buried in the foundation, they became frightened and ran away. The fact that this tale gained currency shows the credulous state in which the whole world lived before the advent of Islam.

In known human history the Arab Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), is the only historian to have changed the pattern of historiography. It was he who raised historiography from the level of mere king-story to the level of genuine man-story. 'Kingology' was changed into sociology. The truth is that the science known today as sociology is the gift of Ibn Khaldun. He himself claimed that he was the founder of sociology, and there is no reason to dispute his claim.

It was indeed Ibn Khaldun who gave to Europe the modern science of history. And it was Islam which bestowed this gift upon Ibn Khaldun. The Islamic revolution produced Ibn Khaldun and Ibn Khaldun produced the modern science of history.

This change brought about in the concept of history by Ibn Khaldun has been described thus by the 20th century English historian, Arnold Toynbee: 'A philosophy of history which is undoubtedly the greatest work of its kind that has ever yet been created in any time or place.'

(*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 9/148)

In much the same way, Robert Flint acknowledged his greatness: 'As a theorist on history he had no equal in any age or country until Vico appeared, more than three hundred years later; Plato, Aristotle and Augustine were not his peers'. (9/148)

Professor Philip K. Hitti writes:

The fame of Ibn-Khaldun rests on his *Muqaddimah* (Introduction to his book on history). In it he presented for the first time a theory of historical development which takes due cognizance of the physical facts of climate and geography as well as of the moral and spiritual forces at work. As one who endeavoured to formulate laws of national progress and decay, Ibn-Khaldun may be considered the discoverer-as he himself claimed – of the true scope and nature of history, or at least the real founder of the science of sociology. No Arab writer, indeed no European, had even taken a view of history at once so comprehensive and philosophic. By the consensus of critical opinion Ibn-Khaldun was the greatest historical philosopher Islam produced and one of the greatest of all time.

In Book I of the *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun sketches a general sociology, in Books II and III, a sociology of politics; in Book IV a sociology of urban life; in Book V, a sociology of economics; and in Book VI, a sociology of knowledge. The work is studied with brilliant observations on historiography, economics,

politics, and education. It is held together by his central concept of *asabiyah*, or social cohesion. Thus he laid the foundation of a science of history which is not based just on the description of kings, but which is, in a vaster sense, based on the economics, politics, education, religion, ethics, and culture of the whole nation.

Historians have generally acknowledged that the science of history had remained undeveloped before the emergence of Ibn Khaldun, and that he was the first person to develop the philosophy of history. The Encyclopedia Britannica says, 'He developed one of the world's most significant philosophies of history. (Vol. 9, p. 147)

The question arises as to how it became possible for Ibn Khaldun to discover something which had remained undiscovered for centuries. The answer is that other historians were born before the Islamic revolution, while Ibn Khaldun was born after it. Ibn Khaldun was, in actual fact, a product of the Islamic revolution.

One belief which hampered the development of the Science or art of history was what is known in religious terminology as polytheism. The, whole period prior to Islam was one of divine kingship. Some kings set themselves up as gods without feeling any need to philosophize their claims; while others claimed to be either the personification or representative of God in order that the public might accept without questioning, their rights to absolute sovereignty. Even in the states of kings who made no claim to their power being derived from God, the same condition prevailed. That is, whether the kings claimed divinity or not, people everywhere associated divinity with kings. This was because whenever they came upon anything out of the ordinary, they took it to be a god, or a manifestation of a god. This mentality naturally was not discouraged by the kings. 'The king has often stood as mediator between his people and their god, or as the god's representative.'

(Encyclopedia Britannica, 1984 V /816)

This state of affairs, which prevailed throughout the world, was radically altered by Islam. On the basis of monotheism, Islam brought about a revolution which eliminated the difference between king and commoner. All human beings, the offspring of Adam and Eve, were held to be equal. It was, uniquely, this great revolution of equality that paved the way for an Ibn Khaldun to lay the foundation of modern history in which the central position was held not by 'royal figures' but by humanity itself.

Towards the end of the Prophet Muhammad's life, Maria Qibtiya bore him a beautiful and vivacious son in Medina. The Prophet named him Ibrahim, after the Prophet Abraham. Ibrahim was just one and a half years old when, in the tenth year of Hijrah (January 632 AD), he died. It so happened that the death of Ibrahim coincided with a solar eclipse. From ancient times, one of the many superstitious notions in which people believed was that the solar and lunar eclipses were caused by the death of some king or other important personage they were to show, they thought, that the heavens mourned the death of the exalted in station. At that time the Prophet of Islam was king of Arabia. For this reason, certain of the Medinans began attributing the eclipse to the death of the Prophet's son. As soon as the Prophet heard

of this, he refuted it. There are several accounts of this incident in the books of hadith. One of these was recorded as follows:

'One day the Prophet came in great haste to the mosque. At that time the sun was in eclipse. The Prophet began to say his prayers and, by the time he had finished, the eclipse was over. Then, addressing the congregation, he said that people imagined that the sun and moon went into eclipse at the death of some important person, but that this was not true. The eclipses of the sun and moon were not due to the death of any human being. Both the sun and the moon were just two of God's creations, with which He did as He willed. He told them that when they saw an eclipse, they should pray to God.

The ancient rulers, on the contrary, encouraged such superstitious notions so that people would continue to regard them as superior beings. In known history, the Prophet of Islam was the first ruler who refuted such superstitious beliefs, showing them to be baseless. In this way, he led mankind along the path of enlightenment, eliminating the differences between men on an intellectual plane. He held as baseless all those suppositions and superstitions which had been responsible for creating and perpetuating to slave-master mentality.

When the whole of Arabia came under the domination of Islam, the Prophet made a farewell Hajj pilgrimage in his last days, along with 125,000 companions. During this pilgrimage he delivered his historic sermon on the plains of Arafat which is known as 'Khutba Hajjatul Wida,' the sermon of the farewell pilgrimage.

This sermon was a declaration of human rights: 'Hear, O people. All human beings are born of a man and a woman. All the apparent differences are only for the sake of introduction and identification. The most worthy before God is the one who is the most God-fearing. No Arab has any superiority over a non-Arab and vice versa. No black has any superiority over a white and vice versa. *Taqwa* (piety) is the only thing which will determine one's superiority over others.' To this the Prophet added, 'All things of the period of ignorance before Islam have been trampled down by my steps.' For the first time in ancient history, all sorts of inequality and discrimination were practically eliminated.

Only then did a new civilization come into being in which all human beings were equal. Speaking of the successors of the Prophet, Abu Bakr and Umar, Mahatma Gandhi said, 'Though they were masters of a vast empire, they lived the life of paupers.'

This revolution was so powerful that even at a later period, when the rot had set in in the institutions of the government, and the Caliphs had been replaced by 'emperors', the pressure of the Islamic civilization was so great that none of these 'emperors' could live in the style of the ancient monarchs. In Islamic history there are many such instances. The following incident, which took place during the reign of Sultan Abdur Rahman Assani, the powerful ruler of Muslim Spain, is an apt illustration.

Sultan Abdur Rahman II (176-238 AD), a powerful ruler of Spain, built a palace, called al-Zahra, to the east of Cordova, which was of such immensity that the word palace was not adequate to describe it. This

magnificent residence came to be known as al-Madinah al-Zahirah (the brilliant town). But, in spite of being so powerful and living in such magnificence, the Sultan did not regard himself as being above the law.

It happened once that he missed one fast in the month of Ramazan without having any valid excuse which would be acceptable in terms of the Shariah. He thereupon assembled the *Ulama* (religious scholars) of Cordova, and told them of his lapse. He asked them to pronounce a religious verdict which would enable him to atone for it.

Al-Maqqari writes that one of the religious scholars present was the Imam Yahya, who promptly gave his religious verdict that the king would have to observe 60 continuous fasts in expiation. On leaving the palace he was asked by one of the Ulama why he had insisted on such a severe form of expiation when the *Shariat* also provided for the feeding of 60 poor people in atonement for one missed fast. Why had he not instructed the king to feed 60 poor people instead of fasting himself?

Angered by this question, Imam Yahya replied, 'For a king to feed 60 poor people is no punishment.' As we learn from the annals of Andalusian history, Sultan Abdur Rahman II did accept the *fatwa* (verdict) of Imam Yahya, and did observe 60 continuous fasts. He showed no reaction whatsoever. He did not even dismiss Imam Yahya from his office. (*Muslim Rulers*, p. 415, with reference to *Nafh Al Tib* Part I, Page 362-368).

This can be explained in terms of the impact of the Islamic revolution, which had put an end to the difference between a subject and a ruler. It had created such an atmosphere of human equality, that no one could regard himself as being superior to others. Not even a king dared to set himself apart from the commoners or to flout the law.

Before the Islamic revolution it was an accepted fact that the King was superior to a common man. For instance, the Roman emperor, Heraclius, a contemporary of the Prophet of Islam, in spite of being a Christian, 'had married his niece, Martina, thus offending the religious scruples of many of his subjects, who viewed his second marriage as incestuous.' (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1984, 8/782).

It was known to the people that this marriage was illegal, yet there was no public outcry. This was because Heraclius was a *King* and, therefore, above any judgement by human standards. As a King, he had the right to do as he pleased.

In ancient times, this extraordinary concept of the greatness of kings was so firmly implanted, as a matter of superstitious belief that ordinary citizens began to consider their monarchs to be innately superior creatures. The observance of special rites and rituals by kings was aimed at reinforcing this way of thinking. The kings had thus, in their respective empires, achieved a temporal greatness Which was on a parallel with God's prerogative in the vastness of His universe. It was but natural that historiography came under the influence of this concept of the 'divine right of kings' so that, in practice, it became a chronicle of the lives of royal families with scant reference to the common man.

With the onset of the Islamic revolution in Arabia and neighbouring countries, objects of nature like the sun and moon were dislodged from their divine pedestals. In like manner, kings were removed from the seat of extraordinary greatness. Now a king was just a human being like any other.

The influence of the Islamic revolution which ultimately reached Asia, Africa and many European countries, paved the way for a new atmosphere on a universal scale. With this new way of thinking, the old king-centred mentality gave way to a man-centred ethos., Prominent expression has been given to a new approach to historiography in the writings of Abdur Rahman Ibn Khaldun, who in the foreword to his *Kitab al-Ibar*, propounded his theory of how history should be written. This foreword, or *Muqaddimah*, is considered so important that it has been published many times in several languages.

The most eminent of Mamluk historians was al-Maqrizi, a disciple of Ibn Khaldun. It was through him in the 15th century that Ibn Khaldun's theories were introduced into Egypt. Later, other Muslim countries came under their influence.

Between 1860 and 1870 a complete rendering of the *Muqaddimah* was published in French, thus introducing his historical theories into Europe. These thoughts took root in the soil of Europe and gained great popularity. Vico and other western historians developed this art, finally giving rise to the modern form of historiography.

What it pleased the Lord to give to His Prophet

According to Ata Khurasani, the houses of the Prophet's wives were built of the branches of date palms, with sacks made of black hair serving as doors. A time came when the governor of Medina received an ordinance from the Caliph Walid ibn Abdul Malik to the effect that he was to rebuild the mosque of the Prophet. The area where these houses stood was included in the new plan, and that meant that they should have to be demolished. On hearing this order, the people of Medina wept. "These dwellings should be left as they are," said Abu Umamah, They would act as a deterrent when people wanted to build themselves grand mansions, for then people would see what it had pleased the Lord to give to His Prophet; and he could have granted the Prophet all the wealth in the world."

(Ibn Sad, *Tabaqat*)

Why I embraced Islam

By Ali Ahmad Knud Holmboe

Mr. Holmboe is a Dane, and a journalist of established repute in his country. He is the author of a number of books.

It was in al-Kuds (Jerusalem) that I received my first impression of the beauty of Islam. What I had known before about this religion was only what is being taught in schools nearly all over Europe that Muhammad was but a plagiarist of Christianity and Judaism, and that the faith he founded was a wild and barbarous faith which had as its aim the massacre of poor Christians, especially those in Armenia.

No sincere human being, indeed, no human being, can exist indefinitely without religion, without an ethical foundation for his conduct. I sought the Truth, and was impressed by the musical beauty and the art which I found in the Roman Catholic Church.

Very soon, I understood that Christianity in all the aspects in which I knew it had very little in common with true religion; that spirit which like a red streak goes through all religions; and that the man 'Christ,' whom they have made a gold-bedecked deity would not have been a Christian if he had lived today.

I visited the Mosque of Umar, which stands where once stood the Temple of Solomon. In the Mosque of 'Umar there was absolute quietude: no priests celebrating the mass, or preaching, or changing bread and wine into God, no music to hypnotize and lead the heart away from clear understanding.

I placed myself in a corner and saw how Muslim after Muslim quietly came in, left his shoes near the entrance, knelt with his face turned towards Makkah and said his prayer: Here was no artistically sculptured Christ; here, man was alone with Almighty God, from whom a little light is reflected in the hearts of all.

Later, I borrowed an English translation of the Holy Qur'an from my Muslim friend. I began to study Arabic, and this led me to Islam.

One day I visited the mosque of Xauen, in Spanish Morocco. There was only a carpet of strap on the floor and at first I was alone. Then an old man came in. He looked at me for a moment, then he came to where I was sitting, gave me his hand and said, 'You are not from here? Why do you come to the Mosque?'

'Do you know what God is?' he asked.

I shook my head.

'If you imagined,' he said, 'That all the ethical ideals of humanity had reached perfection, this would only form a small part of God. The sight of God has crushed the hearts of the prophets and the angels, even with their understanding of only a small part of His might. What is your religion?'

I replied, 'I have none.'

He looked at me very seriously, took my hand and continued: 'Very few foreigners understand Islam – especially those of you who come from Europe, with your ideas of civilization and material progress as the only things worth living for.'

'The straight road to God is Islam.'

'But why not Christianity or Hinduism or Theosophy, or any of all the many other religions of the world?' I asked.

The old man smiled. 'All religions contain something of the truth – something of Islam. But Christianity is going farther and farther from God, because it has made the Prophet Jesus God. And it has placed the priest between man and God. The Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, does not teach, as is said, too, in the Qur'an, any new religion, Muhammad is only taking the essentials from already existing religions, which are leading man far from God. In Islam the road to God is our only dogma. We have no priests; we have no pictures in our Mosques. How can you express God by a picture? We can but pray to Him and Him alone.'

'Who, then, was Muhammad?' I asked.

'Only a prophet like Jesus, Moses, Abraham and a thousand others; one of the elect, who saw the greatness of God and had to proclaim it to the whole world. Christianity is leading men away from God; it takes from men all responsibility by teaching that Christ is the saviour and that he died for our sake. Muhammad does not teach any such thing, and says that Jesus, too, never claimed for himself that he was God. Often in the Qur'an Muhammad is recorded as saying, 'I am only a man like you.' Islam tells us that each man, for himself, has the duty of developing his soul. He must pray five times a day, so that the picture of God and of the road to God may remain with full clearness in his soul. Therefore, intoxicants are prohibited; therefore, he must fast one month of the year to keep his body a healthy place for his soul. The difference between Islam and all other religions is that the latter say that through faith you may act; Islam says, rather, that through action faith must be born.'

A few months later I was converted to Islam, the religion which I shall follow, God willing, until I die.

It is my hope and belief that Islam has a future, especially where people today are yearning for a religion which will give them more than Christianity, – a failure in every respect – and that the religion of the future will be Islam and no other. Notwithstanding the advent of Bolshevism, Socialism and all other modern ideas for the happiness of mankind. Islam alone can make every individual completely happy, and for this reason, society, though today more corrupt than ever, is still worth living in.

26 August-September 1992

Fearing God in one's dealings with men

The Prophet once came across Abu Masud Ansari beating his slave. "You should know. Abu Masud," He said. "that God has more power over you than you have over this slave." Abu Masud trembled on hearing these words of the Prophet. "Messenger of God." he said, "I am freeing this slave for God's sake." "If you had not acted thus, the flames of Hell would have engulfed you," the Prophet told him.

(Abu Da'ud, *Sunan*)