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Two Paths

Surely there came over man a period of time when his life was a blank? We have created man from sperm mixed (with ovum) so that We may put him to the proof. We have endowed him with sight and hearing. We have shown him the right path, whether he be grateful or ungrateful.

For the unbelievers We have prepared chains and fetters and a blazing Fire. But the righteous shall drink of a cup tempered with Camphor – a fountain from which the servants of God will refresh themselves: they who keep their vows and dread the far-spread terrors of the Day (of Judgement); who, though they hold it dear, give sustenance to the poor man, the orphan, and the captive, (saying): 'We feed you for God's sake only; we seek of you neither recompense nor thanks: for we fear from Him a day of anguish and of woe.'

God will deliver them from the evil of that day and make their faces shine with joy. He will reward them for their steadfastness with robes of silk and the delights of Paradise (76:1-11).

After being created with freedom in this world, man has been shown both the paths – the path of gratefulness and the path of ingratitude. Now which of the two paths he adopts is up to him. For one who opts for the path of ungratefulness there awaits the chastisement of hell. And for one who opts for the path of gratefulness there await the blessings of paradise.

One who realises God, realises all other realities as well. The knowledge of God opens the door to all other knowledge. If moreover the individual becomes a man who knows himself, he comes to know reality, i.e. everything as it is in the full sense. This realisation enables him to pay the dues of God as well as of man.

So far as reality is concerned, there is no difference between nature and the *shari'ah*.

The Wisdom of Life

Machines, for instance, clocks and watches generally run on a system of cog wheels. The movement of one such wheel sets another in motion. If either of the wheels does not mesh with the other, neither will the cog wheel move, nor will the machine be set in motion.

The same applies to human plans in the modern world. There are two “cog-wheels” here as well. And life’s system functions properly only when the two engage and work together in unison.

One wheel in this world is that of man, while the other is that of concomitant circumstances. Here, the individual can be effective only to the extent that external circumstances will permit. Given this state of affairs, wisdom lies in his knowing what is possible and what is not possible for him in terms of his circumstances.

Where interests are in conflict, the actual point at issue is not what should be the settlement from the point of view of justice; the actual solution to be sought in such a situation, is that which is possible in practical terms. That is why, in such instances, one should be willing to accept the possible, instead of engaging in futile hostilities over the issue of ideal justice. Such efforts will lead to nothing but further loss.

The same is the case with nations. Here, too, the leaders should look to what is achievable and what is not in respect of actual circumstances. I have traveled to many parts of the globe and have tried to ‘understand this matter in depth. To me, the degree of success achieved by the individual or the nation is in direct proportion to the effective interlocking of “cog-wheel,” within a broad framework of non-adherence to rigid ideologies.

It was America’s good fortune that it found leaders throughout its history, who were free from the delusions of utopianism. They understood the laws of nature and started their national journey in accordance with these laws. By making steady progress for the last hundred years, America has come to be the foremost power in the world.

This principle of nature, in brief, favours healthy competition. The American leaders granted freedom to their citizens and opened up opportunities to achieve the desired success by proving their capability in a highly competitive field. These leaders limited the Government’ sphere to law and order, thus granting its citizen full freedom on action in other fields. As a result everyone found unhampered opportunities for the optimal development of personal potential.

The American leaders did not attempt to pour society into the mould of a fabricated ideology as the basis for national progress. Instead they looked only at what was naturally sustainable and adopted it.

On the contrary, in the Soviet Union certain theorists clinging to a contrived ideology, attempted to re-structure the whole of society accordingly. When society refused to accept this, the rebels were killed in millions, as if they had no more significance than insects. This scheme of things was against nature and that is why, after a tumultuous struggle spanning over 75 years, it met with total failure.

The same was the case with India and Pakistan. Here too certain leaders devised certain ideologies of their own and wished to re-cast their entire countries in this mould. The attempt to implement this system by force was a total failure. And the precious period of fifty years of freedom was wasted callously.

The Indian and Pakistani leaders should have adopted the same principle as nature adopts with regard to water. When water flows from a mountain peak, it is left free to cascade down the hillsides, meander across the plains, spread out into lakes – in short, follow its own natural course until it reaches the sea.

India and Pakistan should have done the same. Having properly understood actual conditions and circumstances, they should have left society to proceed unhindered on the thoroughfare of nature. In this way an atmosphere of healthy competition would have been produced, and the capabilities of all their citizens would have played their role in the process of progress and development. But this was not to be. Ideological fanaticism produced the logic of coercion, which vitiated everything which came within its orbit.

The right way to proceed in this world is to allow things to take their natural course without placing any obstacles in their path. If any wielder of power conceives of a plan which in his view is superior (whatever its actual merits may be), he should work towards its implementation along peaceful lines, remaining strictly within the sphere of persuasion. He should wait also for the appropriate moment when people's thinking has changed, so that his plan may be carried into effect, in consonance with the law of nature itself. In that way, its outcome will be beneficial to all.

The actual point worth considering in the building of the social system is not some ideological scheme of things formulated by any particular leader, but what is humanly achievable from the practical standpoint. The part played by any given leader in the overhaul of the social system and, moreover in its subsequent consolidation, is only fifty per cent. The remaining fifty per cent is attributable to external circumstances. If a leader, failing to grasp this reality, is under the misapprehension that the entire country is his personal fiefdom, it would be the gravest blunder on his part to force upon the people his personal ideology. This would be verging on madness, for whatever he then did as a result of his misunderstanding should culminate not in construction but the very opposite.

It is good to be an idealist, but it has to be conceded that the attainment of the ideal in social life is seldom within the realms of the possible. The secret of success in restructuring society is for leaders and followers alike to aim at elevated goals, while taking care to subordinate personal idealism to overarching practicalities.

Peace is the name of God

In every religion including Islam God is described as a Being Who is the source of peace. In the Quran we find a number of names for God which are descriptive of the divine attributes. One of these is *As Salam* (59:23), meaning Peace.

This name for God which specifically denotes peace occurs only once in the Qur'an. But there are many other names which indirectly connote peace. For instance, the word *Rahim* (Most Merciful) has occurred in the Qur'an more than two hundred times. Similarly, the word '*Rahman*' (Most compassionate) occurs not less than two hundred times.

As represented in the Qur'an, God is All Peace. He is peace in His very being and He desires that His servants live peacefully in this world. They should have peace in their hearts and extend that feeling to everyone. That is why one of the teachings of Islam is that when the Muslims meet one another, they should greet each other by saying "*Assalamu-Alaikum*," May peace be upon you.

One notable incident in the early history of Islam is very relevant to this topic. In 2 AH the battle of the Badr took place between the Prophet of Islam and his opponents. As we learn from traditions, the Prophet of Islam was seated at that time under a tent on a small hillock at the edge of the battlefield. At that moment an angel visited the Prophet and said: 'O Muhammad, God has sent you *Salam* (peace).' On hearing this, the Prophet expressed himself thus: 'God is Peace, Peace is from Him and Peace is to Him.' (Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah*, Vol. 3, p 267)

This incident shows how great is the importance attached to peace in Islam. Even at a time of war hysteria, the message of God brought by the angel was one of peace. Moreover, the words uttered in response by the Prophet at such a delicate moment were those of peace.

Besides the Qur'an, the books of Hadith contain many saying which tell us of the importance of peace in Islam. For instance, the Prophet of Islam said, 'Peace is from Islam'. On another occasion, the Prophet of Islam observed, 'God is peace'. We also learn from traditions that the wording of the conclusion of the Prophet's prayer included the eulogy: 'O God, You are Peace and Peace is from You.'

A tradition in Sahih al Bukhari is related by a companion, Ammar ibn Yasir "There are three actions, the performance of which is equal to possessing the whole faith. These are doing justice, doing one's utmost for the peace and well-being of the world, and spending on others in spite of a lack of means."

This part of the hadith, exhorting one to do utmost to bring about peace in the world, is extremely important. This shows the real Islamic spirit – a kind of special awareness that Islam wants to inculcate in human beings, which would predispose everyone to live in peace himself, to be anxious for the peace of all the people living in this world, and to do his very best to bring peace to the world.

The truth is that the maintenance of peace is the most important of God's laws. It is on the basis of this law that the entire universe is able to function. If its various elements did not follow this law, the whole universe – its systems thrown into disarray – would simply collapse.

The greatest success of the human being in this world lies in his intellectual development, in his spiritual advancement, in the production of the divine soul – the ultimate goal of man. And the struggle towards this goal can be carried on only in an atmosphere pervaded by universal peace. Without peaceful conditions, it is impossible to achieve any worthwhile goal.

The many communities living in different parts of the world are dissimilar in a variety of ways. But in one characteristic way they are alike: They all want to set out on the journey of progress. But this can be undertaken only in peaceful circumstances. It is vital, therefore, to give the topmost priority in the establishment of peace at the international level.

The eminent should grieve for the lowly

It happened that a woman of Madinah, who used to clean the mosque, passed away. She was black-skinned and mentally deranged and there were few to perform her funeral. Those who came to it did not think it proper to inform the Prophet. When he finally heard about it, he asked to be informed of the death of any Muslim in future, irrespective of his or her status.

Aiming Directly at the Target

The American writer, Charles Gafield, who has made a thorough, psychology study of peak achievement, says that in a study of 90 leaders in business, politics, sports and arts, many spoke of 'false starts but never of 'failure'. Disappointment spawns greater resolve, growth or change. Moreover, no matter how rough things get, super-achievers always feel there are other avenues they can explore. They always have another idea to test."

Reader's Digest, October, 1986

The writer emphasizes the fact, however, that these high achievers are neither superhuman, charismatic nor even singularly talented. What they do have in common is an "uncanny knack for increasing the odds in their favour through simple techniques that almost anyone can cultivate." He delineates five major areas of concern. First and foremost, one must have a great sense of mission, and a strong desire to turn everything that comes one's way to good account. Secondly, one must be result-oriented, so that one is not just preoccupied with unceasing activities, but with a definite outcome of one's efforts. Thirdly, one has to take stock of whatever knowledge and skills one has and bring out whatever is latent and waiting to be used, so that it can be tuned up to a peak of perfection. Very often, it is not so much a question of adding to one's knowledge and skills as of developing what is already there – capacities of which we are sometimes barely aware. Frequently, it is one's initial sense of mission which taps these hidden resources.

Sometimes it is impossible to achieve distant goals without the aid of one's fellowmen, in which case, one has to develop the capacity to inspire the team spirit in others. Particularly in highly competitive situations, it is essential to be able to encourage other competent people to make a significant contribution to one's own performance.

But no one sails through life without bumping into obstacles and suffering a variety of setbacks. This is when one must beware of lapsing into passivity. Then one has to take oneself firmly in hand and decide to look upon such things not as great gulfs from which one will never emerge, but simply as hurdles which have to be surmounted if one is to finish the race. One's initial feeling of disappointment should quickly transform itself into a great determination to try harder, to alter one's approach, to seek different and better ways of achieving one's goal, and to channel one's energies more effectively towards their ultimate target.

Patience and Da'wah

The moral character of the *da'i* must be marked by patience. It takes patience to wait for the right opportunities for *dawah* work to arise, and it also takes patience for the right sets of conditions to be created. Those who are unwilling to remain patient in the face of ignorance, obduracy and unpleasantness can never fulfill the true calling of the *da'i*.

Sir James Jeans, the renowned English scientist, once stated in the foreword to a book he had written on physics and philosophy in 1941, that the scientific study of the universe had led us to the point where it seemed to suggest that *the door may be unlocked, only if we could find the handle.* " (p.16)

This notion was put into words by this English scientist at a time when Muslims the world over, provoked at the domination of English, were waging bloody war against them. When the Muslims looked at the English, they saw in them only hateful enemies. Had they displayed patience – even only temporarily – at their political domination, they would very soon have discovered that the "handle" the English sought to the door of Reality, was already available to Muslims in the form of the Qur'an.

With this knowledge their entire attitude towards the English would have drastically changed. Soon they would have come to regard the English as their *mad'u* (congregation) and not as rivals. And then instead of praying for their doom they would have prayed for their guidance, and reformation. As their well-wishers they would have told them that what they (the English) required to reach the destination of reality had already been sent by God in the form of the Qur'an.

Patience is the necessary condition of *da'wah* – where there is no patience there can certainly be no *da'wah*.

Admitting One's Faults

A young player who had participated in a big football match for the first time, wrote to his father after his team had been defeated:

"Our opponents discovered a great gap in our defence line, and that was me."

Such acceptance of one's shortcomings is rare, for it requires great courage. Without it, we cannot make social progress. Since every defeat is attributable to a gap in the line of defence, the best remedy is to accept it, for in so doing, one is well on the way to solving the problem.

Becoming Muslim

- Shariffa Carlo

The story of how I reverted to al Islam is a story of plans. I made plans, the group I was with made plans, and Allah made plans. And Allah is the Best of Planners. When I was a teenager, I came to the attention of a group of people with a very sinister agenda. They were and probably still are a loose association of individuals who work in government positions but have a special agenda – to destroy Islam. It is not a governmental group that I am aware of, they simply use their positions in the US government to advance their cause.

One member of this group approached me because he saw that I was articulate, motivated and very much the women's rights advocate. He told me that if I studied International Relations with an emphasis in the Middle East, he would guarantee me a job at the American Embassy in Egypt. He wanted me to eventually go there to use my position in the country to talk to Muslim women and encourage the fledgling women's rights movement. I thought this was a great idea. I had seen the Muslim women on TV; I knew they were a poor oppressed group, and I wanted to lead them to the light of 20th century freedom.

With this intention, I went to college and began my education. I studied Quran, hadith and Islamic history. I also studied the ways I could use this information I learned how to twist the words to say what I wanted them to say. It was a valuable tool. Once I started learning, however, I began to be intrigued by this message. It made sense. That was very scary. Therefore, in order to counteract this effect, I began to take classes in Christianity. I chose to take classes with this one professor on campus because he had a good reputation and he had a Ph.D. in Theology from Harvard University. I felt I was in good hands. I was, but not for the reasons I thought. It turned out that this professor was a Unitarian Christian. He did not believe in the trinity or the divinity of Jesus. In actuality, he believed that Jesus was a prophet.

He proceeded to prove this by taking the Bible from its sources in Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic and show where they were changed. As he did this, he showed the historical events which shaped and followed these changes. By the time I finished this class, my deen had been destroyed, but I was still not ready to accept Islam. As time went on, I continued to study, for myself and for my future career. This took about three years. In this time, I would question Muslims about their beliefs. One of the individuals I questioned was a Muslim brother with the MSA. Alhamdulillah, he saw my interest in the deen, and made it a personal effort to educate me about Islam. May Allah increase his reward. He would give me dawah at every opportunity which presented itself.

One day, this man contacts me, and he tells me about a group of Muslims who were visiting in town. He

wanted me to meet them. I agreed. I went to meet with them after ishaa prayer. I was led to a room with at least 20 men in it. They all made space for me to sit, and I was placed face to face with an elderly Pakistani gentleman. Mashallah, this brother was a very knowledgeable man in matters of Christianity. He and I discussed and argued the varying parts of the bible and the Quran until the fajr. At this point, after having listened to this wise man tell me what I already knew; based on the class I had taken in Christianity, he did what no other individual had ever done. He invited me to become a Muslim. In the three years I had been searching and researching, no one had ever invited me. I had been taught, argued with and even insulted, but never invited. May Allah guide us all. So when he invited me, it clicked. I realized this was the time. I knew it was the truth, and I had to make a decision. Alhamdulillah, Allah opened my heart, and I said, "Yes. I want to be a Muslim." With that, the man led me in the shahadah – in English and in Arabic. I swear by Allah that when I took the shahadah, I felt the strangest sensation. I felt as if a huge, physical weight had just been lifted off my chest; I gasped for breath as if I were breathing for the first time in my life. Alhamdulillah, Allah had given me a new life – a clean slate – a chance for Jennah, and I pray that I live the rest of my days and die as a Muslim.

The Day of Defeat and Victory

It was He who created you. Yet some of you are unbelievers, while others have faith. He is cognizant of all your actions.

He created the heavens and the earth to manifest the Truth and He formed you and gave you good shapes. To Him you shall all return.

He knows what the heavens and the earth contain, and knows all that you hide and all that you reveal. He knows what is in your hearts.

Have you not heard of those who disbelieved before you? They tasted the fruit of their unbelief, and a grievous punishment is yet in store for them. That is because, when their apostles brought them clear signs, they said: 'Shall mortals be our guides?' They denied the truth and gave no heed. But Allah was in no need of them: He is Self-sufficient and Glorious.

The unbelievers think that they will not be raised from the dead. Say: 'By the Lord, you shall assuredly be raised to life! Then you shall be told of all that you have done. That is easy enough for God.'

Believe then in God and His Apostle and in the light which We have revealed. God has knowledge of all your actions.

The day on which He will assemble you, the day on which you shall all be gathered – that shall be a day of mutual loss and gain. Those who believe in God and do what is right shall be forgiven their sins and admitted to gardens watered by running streams, where they shall dwell for ever. That is the supreme triumph. (64:2-9)

Those who achieve success in this world are happy, while those who suffer failure become small and insignificant in the eyes of others. But the truth is that although both defeat and victory in this world have their value, the actual place of defeat and victory is the Hereafter. The loser is one who loses in the Hereafter and the victor is one who is victorious there. The standard of both loss and gain there is totally different from what it is in the present world. Victory and gain in this world are based on patently material things, while victory and defeat in the Hereafter will be measured on a divine standard. At that time people will be astonished to see that here matters have been completely reversed. What people had considered gain was actually loss, and what people had considered loss by worldly standards was, in actual fact, gain by the standards of the Hereafter.

Two Heights

I swear by this city, (and you are a resident of it), by the begetter, and all whom he begot: We created man to try him with afflictions.

Does he think that none has power over him? He will (boastfully) say: 'I have squandered vast wealth.' Does he think that none observes him?

Have We not given him two eyes, a tongue, and two lips, and shown him the two highways (of good and evil)? Yet he would not scale the Height.

Would that you knew what the Height is! It is the freeing of a bondsman; and feeding, in the day of famine, of an orphaned relation or a needy man in distress; to be one of those who believe, and enjoin patience and mercy.

Those who do this shall stand on the right hand; but those who deny Our revelations shall stand on the left, with Hellfire close above them (90:1-20).

In no circumstance is man able to free himself from hardships. This shows that man is under some superior power. Similarly, human eyes tell us that there is a superior eye which is watching us. Man's power of speech is indicative of the fact that there is a Being with superior power of speech, Who has given him the faculty of speech and has shown him the right path. If man were to recognise himself in the real sense he would certainly recognise God.

God has commanded man to scale two kinds of heights. One is just behaviour towards human beings and bowing to their needs. Another is firm belief in God. When this conviction is embedded deeply within man, it does not remain confined to his own self but is transmitted to others. The true believer makes the utmost effort to bring others to the same divine path which he himself has come to tread.

Man finds it most difficult to lead a life which is guided by divine principle. But this apparent difficulty is in actual fact a facility, as it is going to lead man towards eternal salvation.

Conversion: A Healthy Historical Process

A few years ago I went through a book by an Indian writer called *The Politics of Conversion*. I found that there was only one point on which I differed from the author and that was the choice of title for the book. I felt that it might more justifiably have been called *The Politicization of Conversion*. This would have underscored the necessity to avoid the sensationalism of giving a political hue to something, which was, after all, a natural reality.

What is conversion? Usually conversion is equated with proselytism. But conversion, in its broadest sense, is much further reaching, in that it is a universal principle of nature. It is a historical process – healthy and inexorable – and attempting to put a stop to it would be like trying to put a stop to history itself. And who in this world has the power to do so? Conversion, in reality, is the birth of an entirely new entity resulting from the encounter between old and new schools of thought. This is a universal law established by nature itself.

The study of human history reveals that one process is always at work. Carl Marx had wrongly called this dialectical materialism. More rightly this is a dialogue-conversion process. That is, when two systems of thought clash with each other an intellectual revolution ensues.

This dialogue – conversion process is the only ladder to all kinds of human progress. That is, whenever any revolution of civilization has been produced or a human group has succeeded in performing some great creative role, it has always come in the wake of this same dialogue-conversion process.

There is no single form of this process. It can be religious or non-religious in nature. In the history of the last fifteen hundred years we find two major examples – one of religious conversion and the other of secular conversion.

The history of the Arabs provides the example of religious conversion. By the sixth century A.D., the Arabs were leading a confined tribal life under the idolatrous system. Then in the beginning of the seventh century Islam, the religion of monotheism, appeared. In consequence, intensive dialogue began between the monotheists and idolaters. This dialogue assumed such an aggressive character that it came to the point of collision. As a result a new way of thinking was born among the Arabs, which went on growing till it took the form of a great intellectual revolution.

This intellectual revolution, or this discovery of a new idea, resulted in the emergence of a new personality among the Arabs. In the words of a European historian, every one of them acquired such a revolutionary personality that their entire people became a nation of heroes. Within just fifty years they

brought about that historical event which is called by a historian “the miracle of all miracles.” Briffault puts this in a nutshell: “But for the Arabs, the western civilization would never have arisen at all.”

Another example is that of European Christian nations. After the crusades, a historical process extending several hundred years these nations too went through a conversion process. This conversion was secular rather than religious. Intense conflict took place between science and religion. One report of this conflict can be seen in the book: *Conflict Between Science and Religion*.”

This encounter continued for several hundred years in the form of dialogue and conflict until a new intellectual revolution was produced within the European nations and they finally bade good-bye to the old and opted for the new. This revolution is known as the Renaissance. It was this revolution, which enabled the European nations to perform the greatest feat of history by emerging from the traditional age into the age of science. The truth is that the human mind is a treasure house of unlimited power. In normal situations the human brain remains in a dormant state. It is only external shocks, which awaken it, and the greater they are the greater the intellectual revolution within man. This shock treatment produces in man what psychologists call brainstorming. This brings about a new intellectual change, a conversion that elevates a normal man to the level of superman who is then able to perform great feats.

Religious conversion is only a small part of this whole process. When the dialogue-conversion process is set in motion it cannot have limits set to it. It is not possible to allow one kind of conversion and to prohibit another. Being a stormy process, it is boundless.

It must be appreciated that there are two major kinds of religious conversion – inner faith conversion and inter faith conversion.

Now let us take an example of inter faith conversion. There was a multi-lingual Bengali Doctor of Philosophy, Nishi Kant Chattopadhyay, (a) who, having first studied philosophy, then all major religions, faced intellectual confrontation with different faiths. Finally he made an intellectual discovery in consequence of which he left his ancestral religion, Hinduism in favor of Islam. His Muslim name was Azizuddin. He wrote a book, *Why I have embraced Islam*, which describes in detail the story of his intellectual development.

For instance, there are men and women who were born in Muslim families, later on they threw away their family religion to turn into secularists or even atheists in some cases. However, sooner or later they approached a turning point in their lives when they came back to Islam as sincere practicing Muslims.

The author of this book is an example of this kind of inner faith conversion. He was born in a Muslim family and until 1942, kept on performing all religious duties and rituals under the influence of the family. Then, an intellectual revolt took place in his mind against Islam and consequently he became a totally irreligious person for many years to come, it was not before 1948 when after half a decade long systematic analytical study of modern philosophy, science and religion the author was fully convinced with the continuing relevance and credibility of Islam and decided to return to it again. But, this time it

was a return or conversion to a consciously chosen and rediscovered Islam, not to the traditionally inherited one.

To sum up, conversion is a universal and inescapable law of nature. A study of psychology and history tells us that in order to give a new impetus to an individual or a group and to bring about a moral revolution what is most effective is the sense of discovery. This feeling of having discovered some truth, which was as yet unknown, awakens all the dormant powers of the individual. This feeling turns an ordinary man into superman. It is such supermen who cross the Ocean, who scale mountains, and who by their heroic character let history enter a new age. Today human history is once again facing a deadlock. History is once again in need of people who pass through this experience of a discovery. For such people charged with new human power, will give a strong push to human history to enter a new and a better age.

Islam: The Ideological Super Power

Muslims number more than one billion today. If you go around the world to study the minds of Muslims inhabiting various regions you will probably come to the conclusion that Muslims all over the world share the feeling that the history of Islam had reached an impasse. Despite enormous sacrifices no way out is in sight.

It is our firm belief that Islam offers guidance at all times and in all situations. Therefore it must certainly be able to offer us a clear guidance as regards the present state of affairs. I must say that it does exist in a very clear form. The history of Islam provides us two very clear examples of bringing into play the *da'wah* power of Islam.

The first guiding example recorded in the early period of Islamic history is that of *Sulh-e-Hudaybiyya*. As we all know, the Prophet of Islam was compelled to migrate from Makkah to Madina. The majority of Muslims followed him. Consequently Madina became a center of Muslims. However, afterwards the event took a more serious turn. The opponent of Islam now started armed onslaughts against the Muslims. Yet after several full scale wars and so many minor armed conflicts the balance failed to tip on any side. Apparently the history of Islam reached an impasse.

At this critical juncture, according to the Qur'an, the Prophet of Islam was shown the straight path in this matter (48:3-4). This straight path was to create a conducive atmosphere for peaceful *da'wah* work by ceasing armed conflicts altogether. Accordingly the Prophet in the 19th year of his prophethood entered into a peace treaty with his Arab opponents. This step put an end to the state of war. This event is referred to in the history of Islam as *Sulh-e-Hudaybiyya*. This peace treaty diverted the field of encounter between Islam and its rivals from the battlefield to *Da'wah* field. This peaceful activism brought incredibly revolutionary results.

The power of peace proved itself far superior to the power of war. This treaty rendered a widespread interaction between Muslims and the opposing group possible in normal atmosphere. In this way the peace treaty cleared the path for the direct propagation of Islam to take place. The opponents came to accept Islam in great numbers, ultimately the numerical power alone sufficed for the victory of Islam.

According to Imam al-Zuhari, *Sulh-e-Hudaybiyya* was the greatest victory in the history of Islam. Prior to this whenever Muslims and their rivals encountered one another fighting ensued. But after the reconciliation the state of war ended and peace prevailed. Now they began meeting one another in normal, tension-free atmosphere. This interaction naturally led to an exchange of ideas. When someone heard anything of Islam and found it appealing, he would go in, without fail, to enter into the fold of Islam. That is why after a mere two years of *Sulh-e-Hudaybiyya* such large number of people entered the fold of Islam as had never happened before (*Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah* Vol. 4, p. 170).

This great increase in term of numbers resulted in making Islam a religion of majority in Arabia; this greatly facilitated its dominance throughout the land.

The second well known example of the caravan of Islam having reached an impasse concerns the first half of the thirteenth century with the emergence of the brute force of the Tartars. They were able to destroy the Muslim power almost completely. It seemed as though the journey of Islam has once again reached an impasse, finding no way out for its further advancement.

At exactly that point in time the ideological power of Islam made its appearance. Muslims being in no position to take up arms to encounter them, diverted their field of action by silently engaging themselves in peaceful da'wah work among the victorious Tartars. This act of *da'wah* verified the dictum of the Qur'an that through da'wah the opponents of Islam will become its supporters and friends (41:34).

The historians have acknowledged this event in quite clear terms. Philip K. Hitti, for instance, remarks, in his famous book *The History of the Arabs*:

'The religion of the Muslims had conquered where their arms had failed' (p. 488)

Now in the twentieth century the history of Islam has once again apparently reached an impasse. Our enormous amount of sacrifices have yet to succeed in taking the caravan of Islam forward.

According to al-Imam Malik the state of affairs of Muslim Ummah will be reformed by following the same course of action as were followed by the Muslims of the first phase to rectify their matters. In the light of this remark it can be safely said that we must once again opt for this tested method of the past. We must take such steps as put an end to the hostile situation prevailing between Muslims and non-Muslims. This would result in peaceful interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims in a normal situation. Hodaybiyya symbolizes the greatness of the power of peace as against the power of war. Today once again we need to follow this course of action.

As soon as this happens, the ideological power of Islam will appear to its full force – which is undoubtedly eternally invincible. Afterwards the virtues of Islam will begin reaching people automatically through exchange and interaction. Then it will also be possible to perform da'wah work properly. Under the influence of their own nature people will start joining the ranks of Islam. And there is no doubt about it that the greatest strength for any group consists in its manpower.

Muslims can be weakened and subjugated at any point in time. But Islam is an ideological superpower forever. It has the capacity to conquer the greatest power on earth through *da'wah*. It is the need of the hour to produce conducive conditions, on a universal scale. It is necessary to bring into play the ideological power of Islam in order that *da'wah* work could be set in motion in the full sense of the word. And then certainly Islam will emerge as the dominant and conquering force, and Muslims of the world too will receive their place of honor and glory along with Islam.

Starting from Scratch

“I have reached my present position by climbing a ladder and not by coming up to it in a lift.” This observation was made by a tailor who had started with nothing but his own two hands and the will to work, and who had become eminently successful in his line of business. “Making a good coat is not child’s play. The whole process is so complicated that without detailed information as to how to proceed, long experience and a high degree of skill, it is almost impossible to accomplish. It is only after a lifetime of hard work that I have succeeded in running a prosperous shop in the city.”

The tailor went on to explain how he had served his apprenticeship under the guidance of an expert tailor. Just learning the art of cutting and sewing had taken him five long years. When he opened his own little shop, he discovered that he had difficulty in giving his customers a good fitting. This was because during his apprenticeship he had never really grasped the fact that people could be of such different shapes and sizes. He therefore set himself to the task of studying human anatomy, but it was only after many years of effort that he could make a coat with an absolutely perfect fitting. He eventually became so expert in this that he could even give perfect fittings to those who unfortunately suffered from deformities – such as hunchbacks. “In any type of work, there are many things which one has to learn on one’s own. Often one cannot foresee these things at the outset, and each obstacle has to be overcome by hard work and ingenuity.”

The tailor talked of many things of this nature concerning his skills, and it seemed to me as though I were listening to a lecture on the building of the nation by some very experienced person.

In truth, the only way to solve our economic and social problems is to follow the example of the tailor. After this initial apprenticeship, he had gone ahead and done things on his own. He had gone up by the stairs and not by the lift. There are no buttons which you can just push and then automatically reach your goals. You can only make progress step by step. Progress can seldom be made by leaps and bounds. By means of the ladder you can progress even to the stage of owning the lift, but you cannot make a success of your life by starting with the lift and expecting it to do everything for you.

The Bounty of Food

Let man reflect on the food he eats: how We pour down the rain in torrents and cleave the earth asunder; how We bring forth the corn, the grapes, and the fresh vegetation; the olive and the palm, the thickets, the fruit-trees and the green pasture, for you and for your cattle to delight in.

But when the dread blast is sounded, on that day each man will forsake his brother, his mother and his father, his wife and his children: for each one of them will on that day have enough sorrow of his own.

On that day there shall be beaming faces, smiling and joyful. And on that day there shall be faces covered with dust and veiled with darkness. These shall (be the faces of) the wicked and the unbelieving (80:24-42).

Man is a creature who needs a continuous supply of food for survival. The arrangement for food which prevails on this earth on a large scale has been done without any effort on our part. One part of this sustenance is directly derived from crop yields, such as cereals, fruits and nuts, and from the abundant provision of water everywhere. This produce of the earth is consumed by animals, who convert it into meat and milk, thus indirectly providing us with another source of sustenance.

This divine blessing demands that man live on earth as a worshipper of God. The true way to worship God is, in actual fact, to express gratitude for all His bounty. If man were to think of his creation and give thought to all the beneficent arrangements of nature around him, the feeling of gratefulness to his Lord would necessarily arise within him.

The leading of a life directed by divine guidance, a life of being grateful to God, of worshipping none other than God as a result of this sincere feeling of gratefulness is what is called a God-oriented life in the true sense. Honour and success in the Hereafter await those who lead such lives.

Da'wah Explosion

The battle of Cesmi is a significant event in the history of the Turkish caliphate. In this battle, fought in July 1770, the Ottoman naval establishment was destroyed by a Russian fleet at the harbor of Cesmi on the Aegean Sea. (13/ 784)

A few years later, in May 1799, the British forces defeated and killed the Muslim ruler Tipu Sultan of South India. This was the beginning of the end. Subsequently, the European Christian nations conquered, directly or indirectly, all of the Muslim countries one after the other, thus establishing their own political supremacy.

Now, at this stage, the entire Muslim world reverberated with the call of jihad which was considered to be the only solution to its problems. It was felt that it was only by following this path that Muslims could regain their lost political power and glory. Therefore, the process of jihad (in the sense of militancy) was set in motion everywhere. It was a kind of explosion, the impact of which was felt all over the Muslim world. This militant jihad is still being pursued in different regions in one form or the other.

Now in the last quarter of the 20th century another revolution has occurred, but on a vaster scale. Over the last few years there has been a rapid spread of Dawah work. In any town or country, wherever you go you will witness Dawah activity. Its increase has been so great that it would not be an exaggeration to call it a Dawah explosion.

Now let us compare the dawah of the last twenty years to the jihad of 200 years. You will find a significant difference between the two so far as the result is concerned. During this prolonged and all-out war Muslims unilaterally brought down destruction upon themselves. Even after political defeat Muslims had had great resources at their disposal. But now they have lost all these in the process of continuing militancy.

On the other hand, Muslims have lost nothing in Dawah work. In fact, there have been positive gains, for every day and everywhere people are leaving their flawed, imperfectly preserved religions to enter the fold of Islam, which has been preserved in its pristine form. This is plain for all to see. A glance at the journal *Al-alamul Islami* issued from Makkah, will suffice to prove this statement.

This Dawah explosion has been so sudden that it seems as though set in motion by God Himself. This is an all-encompassing movement in which both sincere as well as insincere people are taking part. Even non-Muslims are playing their part in carrying this mission forward at a great speed. Both Muslims as well as non-Muslims are publishing Islamic literature on a large scale, and Islamic conferences are being held by non-Muslims as well as by Muslims. Big institutions are being established for this purpose. This is a historical process in which even anti-Islamic elements such as Salman Rushdie have also had a hand. It is because this age is marked by the spirit of enquiry. This is why, when the opponents of Islam publish a

book against Islam, they inadvertently awaken the desire in millions of people to make a thorough study of the subject.

The truth is that the Dawah explosion is no simple matter. It is a historical process which started at the proper time, as predicted by the Prophet, so that with the approach of Doomsday, the message of Islam would be brought by God to every home. It seems quite obvious that this process has been set in motion according to the prediction. First of all, propitious circumstances have been produced towards this end. For instance, modern communications; the urge to study different religions; freedom of religious expression; commercial value in religion etc. By creating such a variety of favorable conditions, God has Himself arranged for the successful outcome of Dawah work. This is a historical process which will keep advancing on its own. It will be our great good fortune to become a conscious part of it thus securing for ourselves the blessings of Allah. While others are working for it under the pressure of historical process, we must perform this noble task by our own conscious decision.

Creation Plan

Blessed be He in Whose hands is all sovereignty: He has power over all things.

He created life and death that He might put you to the test and find out which of you acquitted himself best. He is the Mighty, the Forgiving One.

He created seven heavens, one above another. Do you see any fault in the work of the Merciful? Turn up your eyes: can you detect any rift?

Then look once more and yet again: your eyes will in the end grow dim and weary.

We have adorned the lowest heaven with lamps missiles for pelting devils. We have prepared a scourge of flames for these, and the scourge of Hell for unbelievers: an evil fate! (67:1-6).

When one studies the present world, one finds an apparent contradiction, that is, that the entire universe besides man is quite perfect and organised. At no point is there any defect to be seen. By contrast, human life is marred by oppression and injustice. This is due to the nature of man being different from that of the rest of the universe. Man in this world is in a state of trial. Trial requires, of necessity, freedom of action. It is this freedom which enables him to perpetrate oppression and tyranny in this world.

Tyranny in the human world is the price of human freedom. Yet, without freedom, how can those precious human souls who opt not to be unjust and oppressive-despite the opportunities that present themselves – be differentiated from the willing perpetrators of injustice and oppression? Without freedom, how can those who choose not to indulge in insolent behaviour although quite free to do so be held above those who do not hesitate to stoop to insolence?

Besides man, nothing in the universe is going to be sent to heaven or hell. If man's fate is different, it is because, having been given the exceptional capacity to distinguish between right and wrong, between truth and untruth, he is a *responsible* creature. This moral endowment is, in essence, the key to man's lot in the Hereafter. In the final judgement, those who have put their freedom to the right and proper use will be rewarded. Those who have not will be punished.

In Giving We Receive

According to *Time Magazine* of October 17, 1986, her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II had long voiced a desire to visit the People's Republic of China. But as long as Britain ruled a piece of Chinese territory, the crown colony of Hong Kong, such a journey was impossible. The 1984 Sino-British agreement returning Hong Kong to China in 1997 provided the price of admission (p. 22).

Returning Hong Kong to the mainland was no easy task, for it amounted to losing a jewel from the British Crown, but it was clear that the British Monarch's desire to visit China was not unconnected with Britain's avidity for trade with that country and, obviously, the ensuing gains would be immense. Relations between Britain and China had been uneasy over the last hundred years, but with the Queen's historic visit – the first ever made to China by a member of a British Royal family – the gates to trade were thrown open. A successful piece of diplomacy, it paved the way to an annual trade agreement of over one and a half billion dollars.

A jewel may have been lost from the crown, but the subsequent benefits will be enormous. Clearly, we have to give in order to take. That is the way of the world.

Rectifying others and being ready to be rectified oneself

When Abu Bakr was elected to be the first Caliph of Islam he addressed the people. "I have been put in charge of your affairs," he said, "though I am no better than you. I will consider the weakest of you as the strongest, as long as I have not ensured that he receives his rightful due. And the strongest among you will to me be the weakest, as long as I have not ensured that he pays what he owes. People, I am just like any one of you. If you see that I am pursuing a proper course, then follow me; and if you see me err, then set me straight,"

The Test Paper

As for man, when his Lord tests him by exalting him and bestowing favours on him, he says: 'My Lord is bountiful to me.' But when He tests him by withdrawing His favours, he says: 'My Lord humiliates me.'

No! But you show no kindness to the orphan, nor do you urge one another to feed the poor. Greedily you lay your hands on the inheritance of the weak, and you love riches with all your hearts.

No! But when the earth is crushed to fine dust, and your Lord comes down with the angels, in their ranks, and Hell is brought near-on that day man will remember his deeds. But what will memory avail him?

He will say: 'Would that I had done good works in my lifetime!' But on that day none will punish as He will punish, nor will any bind like unto His binding.

O serene soul! Return to your Lord joyful, and pleasing in His sight. Join My servants and enter My Paradise (89:15-30).

Man is confronted in this world with two kinds of states, sometimes of gaining, sometimes of losing. Both these conditions are in the nature of tests. They are designed to judge man on the response he makes to these situations. If on gaining, a man becomes vain and proud, and on losing, he suffers from negative feelings, then he has failed in the test.

A very different kind of person is one who, on gaining, bows before God in thankfulness, and, on losing, bows again to express his humility. It is the second of these two who has been called a 'serene soul.'

Whatever man receives in this world in the form of wealth, or in any other form, are all tests of one kind or another. These have no value in themselves; they are a means to another end. That is, man should make use of these things in such a way that, in the times to come in the eternal world, they may become the means of his salvation.