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Bathing in Islam

Along with the purification of the heart and soul Islam lays equal stress on the cleansing of the body. The Prophet has even been recorded as having said: 'Purity is half the faith.' *Salat* (prayer) is the most important form of worship in Islam. According to a hadith, God does not accept any prayer without purification of the body. That is why performing *wadu* (ablution), which is almost a semi-bath, has been held compulsory.

So far as complete physical bathing is concerned, the chapters in the books of hadith dealing with purity show that the Prophet and his companions used to take a bath daily. In those days bathing before *fajr* (dawn) was prevalent.

One narration in the book of Hadith, *Musnad Ahmad* tells us that Usman, the third caliph used to take a bath every day. Taking bath in the morning is a natural human requirement. This natural requirement is certainly taken care of in Islam, which is a religion of nature in the real sense of the word.

One tradition in the *Sahih Bukhari* has actually led to doubt regarding the daily bath. Aisha narrates that on Fridays Muslims used to come to Madina from far-off places covered with dust and perspiration. On seeing this the Prophet said to one of them: I wish you had purified yourself today (*Fathul Sari* 2/447).

This hadith is not related to daily or weekly bathing. It simply means that on a day when you are joining many people to pray in congregation, you should take extra care to cleanse yourself. In this way this hadith, far from assigning the time and the frequency of bathing, describes the special importance of bathing on such congregational occasions.

Khutbah

O believers, when the call to Friday prayer is announced, hasten to the remembrance of God and cease your trading. That would be best for you, if you but knew it. Then, when the prayers are ended, disperse and go your ways in quest of God's bounty. And remember God frequently, so that you may prosper. And whenever they see some business or some sport, they flock eagerly towards it and leave you standing all alone. Say: 'Whatever God has in store is far better than any sport or business. God is the best provider' (62:9-11).

These are the verses from the Surah al-Jumu'ah (Friday, or the Day of Congregation), chapter 62 of the Qur'an. This tells us in brief how to maintain a balance between the twin demands of din and our economic liabilities.

Economic activity is a natural requirement of human existence. That is why Islam gives full freedom in this matter. However, it is essential that economic activities be subordinated to religious duties. Therefore, although everyone is free to engage himself in economic activities, he must fulfill certain conditions.

1. Earning from economic activities should be considered a blessing of God.
2. God should be constantly remembered during one's economic activities.
3. Economic activities should not be allowed to cross the limits imposed by God.

The way to strike a balance between economic activities and Islamic demands is for people always to remain prepared, so that whenever they receive a call of religion, they will give preference to the Islamic demand over the economic demand. After having fulfilled their Islamic duties, they will then have every right to return once again to economic activities.

Ambassadors of Islam

Umm Haram bint Milhan, a Sahabiya, (a companion of the Prophet) was married to Ubadah ibn as-Samit Ansari. Along with her husband she undertook several trips to foreign countries. Now her grave is in Cyprus, and is called the grave of the pious woman (*Hayat-As-Sahaba* 1/592). The grave of Khalid ibn al-Walid, who was born in Mecca, is in Hims (Syria).

The same is the case with the majority of the Companions of the Prophet. At the time of the Prophet's demise, his companions numbered more than one lakh. However it is worth noting that if you go to Mecca and Medina you will find only a small number of graves there. The reason for this is that these companions left Arabia and spread to various countries far and beyond its borders. The majority of them breathed their last in various Asian and African countries, where their graves still exist.

Why did this happen? It was because during his last days the Prophet gathered his companions together in the mosque in Medina and addressed them in these words: God has sent me as his messenger for the entire world. So you do not differ with one another. And spread in the land and communicate my message to people inhabiting other places besides Arabia. (*Seerat Ibn Hisham* 4/279).

It was this injunction of the Prophet that led to the Sahaba (companions of the Prophet) settling in foreign lands. In those countries, they either did business or earned their living by hard work, all the while communicating to their non-Muslim compatriots the message of monotheism which they had received from the Prophet. Every one of them thus became a virtual ambassador of Islam. This resulted in Islam spreading across the globe. Its evidence can still be seen in the inhabited world of that time.

I feel history is repeating itself in modern times. New circumstances, produced in the wake of industrial revolution, have resulted in Muslims leaving their homelands to spread all over the world. Today, whichever part of the globe you visit, you will find Muslims there. Mosques and Islamic institutions have come up everywhere. Muslims have settled in these countries either for work or for business. However, in respect of their religion, their actual position is that of Islam's representatives. It is as if each one of them is an ambassador of God. Now the need of the hour is to awaken the missionary spirit in these Muslims settled in foreign lands, so that they may effectively communicate the message of Islam – a task of universal magnitude made incumbent upon them by their new sets of circumstances.

Importance of Education

The field of education, covering ethics, religion, skills and general knowledge, is a very broad and very vital one. The importance of learning in enabling the individual to put his potentials to optimal use is self-evident. Without education, the training of the human minds is incomplete. No individual is a human being in the proper sense until he has been educated.

Education makes man a right thinker and a correct decision-maker. It achieves this by bringing him knowledge from the external world, teaching him to reason, and acquainting him with past history, so that he may be a better judge of the present. Without education, man, as it were, is shut up in a windowless room. With education, he finds himself in a room with all its windows open to the outside world.

This is why Islam attaches such great importance to knowledge and education. The Qur'an, it should be noted repeatedly asks us to observe the earth and heavens. This instills in man the desire to learn natural science. When the Qur'an began to be revealed, the first word of its first verse was '*Iqra!*' that is, 'Read.' Education is thus the starting point of every successful human activity.

All the books of hadith have a chapter on knowledge (*ilm*). In Sahih Bukhari, there is a chapter entitled, "The virtue of one who acquires *ilm* (learning) and imparts it to others." In the hadith, the scholar is accorded great respect. According to one tradition, the ink of a scholar's pen is more precious than the blood of a martyr, the reason being that while a martyr is engaged in the task of defence, an *alim* (scholar) builds individuals and nations along positive lines. In this way, he bestows upon the world a real life treasure.

The very great importance attached to learning in Islam is illustrated by an event in the life of the Prophet. At the battle of Badr, in which the Prophet was victorious, seventy of his enemies were taken prisoner. Now these captives were all literate people. So, in order to benefit from their erudition, the Prophet declared that if each prisoner taught ten Medinan children how to read and write, that would serve as his ransom and he would be set free. This was the first school in the history of Islam, established by the Prophet himself. It was of no matter to him that all its teachers were non-Muslims, all were prisoners of war, and all were likely to create problems again for Islam and Muslims once they were released. This Sunnah of the Prophet showed that whatever the risk involved, education was paramount.

Islam not only stresses the importance of learning, but demonstrates how all the factors necessary to progress in learning have been provided by God. An especially vital factor is the freedom to conduct research. Such freedom was encouraged right from the beginning, as is illustrated by an incident which took place after the Prophet had migrated from Mecca to Medina. There he saw some people atop the date palms pollinating them. Since dates were not grown in Mecca the Prophet had to ask what these

people were doing to the trees. He there upon forbade them to do this, and the following year date crop was very poor as compared to previous year. When the Prophet asked the reason, he was told that the yield depended on pollination. He then told the date-growers to resume this practice, admitting that they knew more about “worldly matters” than he did.

In this way, the Prophet separated practical matters from religion, thus paving the way for the free conduct of research throughout the world of nature and the adoption of conclusions based thereon. This great emphasis placed on exact knowledge resulted in the awakening of a great desire for learning among the Muslims of the first phase. This process began in Mecca, then reached Medina and Damascus, later centering on Baghdad. Ultimately it entered Spain. Spain flourished, with extraordinary progress made in various academic and scientific disciplines. This flood of scientific progress then entered Europe, ultimately ushering in the modern, scientific age.

Salat

Ibn Khaldun has recorded an incident regarding *Salat* in his *Muqaddama*. It was during the days of the second caliph, 'Umar Faruq, that the army of Sahaba entered Persia. There were no mosques there at that time, so Muslims prayed in the open fields.

Rustam, the general of the Persian army often saw Muslims saying their prayers out in the open. He saw all the Muslims standing in straight lines in rows, their leader standing in front, and amazingly, all the Muslims assuming the same postures as their leader. All the Muslims stood together, kneeled together and sat together as indicated by their prayer leader. On seeing this, Rustam once remarked. "Umar has eaten my liver (Umar has undone me completely). He is teaching the dogs the *adab* (discipline) of life."

Discipline is the outward form of *namaz* (prayer). When a non-Muslim observes the *namazis* at prayer, he will arrive at the same conclusion - that they are taking lessons in discipline.

Discipline is the external aspect of *salat*. The internal aspect of *salat* is *khushu* and *taqwa*. Just observing the external aspect of *salat* gave Rustam a scare. Now you can understand, when the external aspect is combined with the internal aspect, how powerful *namaz* could become!

Namaz is the greatest form of worship for Muslims. It is moreover, the greatest power of Muslims. If we could tap this power fully, we should receive all the blessings of this world as well as the next.

The Countless Blessings of God

Ibn Asakir records this saying of Abu Darda: "He who fails to realize that God has blessed him, not only with regard to food and drink, but in many other ways, has understood but little; such a man stands on the brink of eternal damnation." (*Hilyar al-Auliya'*)

What is Islam

Every religion or system has a set of terminology which is necessary to understand in order to have a proper appreciation of that particular religion or system. The religion of Islam too has its set of terminology. I would like here to present in brief certain basic terms.

1. Iman (Faith)

The literal meaning of *Iman* is to believe in or to have faith in something. That is, to accept Islam with conviction. This deep faith is attainable through realisation alone. Hence it would be proper to say that faith is a discovery and that there is no discovery greater than the discovery of God.

2. Islam (Surrender to God)

Islam means to submit or to surrender with a full realisation of God. Man abandons his ego, his freedom, and surrenders himself before God completely. In all matters of life he obeys God's commandments. He begins to lead a restrained life instead of a permissive one. This is what is called Islam.

3. Dhikr (Remembrance)

Dhikr means to remember – in Islamic terminology it means, to remember God. When man discovers God, the Creator, the Almighty, Who will reward as well as punish for our good and bad deeds, it is inevitable that the thought of God comes to dominate one's mind. At all times and in all situations one remembers God. This remembrance is known as *dhikr*. When a person has reached this stage, this is a sure indication that he has found God with all His attributes.

4. Salat (Prayer)

Salat means prayer. It forms the most important part of Islamic worship. It is obligatory for a Muslim to offer prayer five times a day. Besides this, *Nafil* (voluntary prayer) may be said at other times. The spirit of *salah* is *khushu* which means submission. *Salat* is intended to inculcate a deep sense of submission in a believer, which is expressed externally by his physical bowing in the postures of *ruku* and *sajda*.

5. Sawm (Fasting)

The literal meaning of *sawm* is abstinence. *Sawm* is a form of worship which has to be observed annually,

in the month of Ramadan. The outward form of *sawm* is abstinence from eating and drinking from morning till sunset. The inner state of *sawm* is renunciation of all things that God has forbidden, directly or indirectly. When a man fasts, observing all these aspects of fasting spirituality is produced within him. He comes to experience closeness with God.

6. Zakat (alms-giving)

Zakat means purity. This means that a man purifies his earnings by giving away one part of them in the path of God. In this way, *zakat* awakens the sense in man not to consider his earnings as his own possession, but a gift of God. *Zakat* is, in essence, a practical acknowledgement of God's bounties. And this admission is no doubt the greatest form of worship.

7. Hajj (Pilgrimage)

Hajj means pilgrimage. That is, visiting sacred places in Hijaz in the month of Zul Hijja in order to perform the annual worship of Hajj required of a believer once in a lifetime. Hajj is a symbol of Islamic unity. It is through Hajj that interaction takes place between Muslims on an international scale. Then it is also through Hajj that Muslims from all over the world are reminded of Abraham's sacrifice. On the pilgrimage they also witness the historical places associated with the Prophet of Islam. In this way they return with a long-lasting inspiration, which continues to activate them to adhere to the path of God throughout their lives.

8. Dawah (Invocation)

Dawah means to call, to invite. A Muslim who has received the message of God must do his utmost to communicate this message to other human beings. This *dawah* work in its nature is a prophetic task. The more one follows the way of the Prophet in the performance of this task, the greater the reward one will receive for it.

9. Jihad (Struggle)

The literal meaning of *jihad* is to strive or to struggle. In the present world, most of the time one has to work for Islam in adverse circumstances. In such circumstances, working for religion through struggle and sacrifice is called *jihad*. This *jihad* involves struggling with one's own self as well. Struggling to communicate the word of God to others is also *jihad*. In a similar way when any power commits aggression against Islam then, at that but only an established government to do *jihad* in defence moment, rising in defence against that power too is *jihad*.

10. Sabr (Patience)

Sabr means patience, for example, restraining oneself from any adverse reaction when faced with an unpleasant situation. On all such occasions, one must be able to offer a positive response instead of a negative one. This is essential. For, in this present world, unpleasant events set in motion by others have to be faced time and again. If one is invariably provoked on such occasions and reacts negatively, the desired personality will not develop in one. All the teachings of religion require a positive psychology. Therefore, one who loses patience will be able neither to imbibe religious instruction nor to pass it on to others.

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 harbour 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 Mecca, 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 favourable 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.

Freedom of Thought

A man called Mughees and his wife, Bareera, who were living in slavery in Medina, decided to accept Islam. After some time the wife was set free. By winning her freedom she legally obtained the right either to live with her husband or to seek a separation from him. Bareera decided in favour of separation. But Mughees, who was greatly attached to her wanted her to change her decision and continue to live with him.

This is a long story recorded in books of hadith in detail. To put it briefly, the matter was finally brought before the Prophet. Both of them came to the Prophet, Bareera in front and Mughees, a black, following her. As recorded in the hadith, the Prophet said to Bareera: "It would be better for you to take back your decision." Bareera replied, "O Prophet of God, is this your command?" The Prophet said: "No, it is only a suggestion." Bareera replied, "Then I do not need it."

This is the highest and ultimate example of Islam granting such great freedom to men and women. This freedom does not mean anarchy. It is a concession to human nature. The development of human nature is possible only in an atmosphere of freedom. Just as a tree flourishes in an open environment similarly the human being develops to the full only in an atmosphere of total intellectual freedom.

(234:45)

Respect for Humanity

God tells us in the Qur'an: "We have indeed honoured the Children of Adam, and provided for them means of transportation on land and sea, and given them wholesome food and exalted them high above the greater part of Our creation" (17:70).

This shows that man by his very creation deserves regard and respect. This respect is man's natural birthright, regardless of which community he belongs to.

According to a hadith: "That person is not one of us who is not merciful to our juniors and respectful to our elders." According to another hadith the Prophet Muhammad said, "One who believes in Allah and the Last Day must honour his neighbours; one who believes in God and the Last Day must honour his guests."

There are a number of such commands to the believers in the Qur'an and the hadith which lay great stress on showing due respect to the servants of God. For this is an important area in which we are actually being tested on our faith in God. Our love and devotion for God finds expression in this world in the form of our relations with other human beings. One who is a true lover of God has an inner urge to love God's servants.

Respect for humankind is one of the basic teachings of Islam. Anyone, be he of one's own religion or of any other religious tradition, whether he belongs to one community or another; whether he belongs to friendly group or enemy group, in all cases is worthy of respect. According to the teachings of Islam human beings are to be respected, despite their differences. Even where antagonism is displayed, we have to adopt the way of avoidance of conflict and continue to show respectful behaviour. In the eyes of Islam all human beings are equal and deserve our respect.

Question and Answer

During the Caliphate of Ali ibn Abi Talib, one group of Muslims revolted against him, causing great havoc. Consequently, two battles ensued in which about forty thousand Muslims were killed, later even Caliph Ali was martyred. During this uprising one of the rebel group came to see Caliph Ali and put a critical question to him. He asked how it was that there was such great disarray and dissension among Muslims during his Caliphate, whereas the respective Caliphates of Abu Bakr and Umar had not been marred by such devastating differences among Muslims. Caliph Ali replied: It is because Abu Bakr and Umar ruled over people like me, while I am ruling over people like you. (*Muqaddama ibn Khaldun*, p. 211)

One important reality emerges clearly from this question and answer that relates to the most important condition for the establishment of a true Islamic government. That is, the existence of favourable conditions in society. In the words of Caliph Ali, it would be appropriate to say that the condition for the establishment of a healthy political system is that, on the one hand, we should have individuals like Abu Bakr and Umar in the office of the head of state, while, on the other, society should be composed of people like the Companions of the Prophet. Or, to put it more pointedly, the Caliphate should be in the hands of people like Umar, and society should consist of people like Ali.

This incident shows how the first phase of Islam was marked by an atmosphere where a common man could put critical questions directly to the Caliph and the latter could answer them without losing his mental equilibrium. This also shows that when there is an open atmosphere in society, the confusion of minds is cleared, and the solution to great doubts can be offered by the concerned personalities themselves.

(237:30)

The Superiority of the Truth

Once an *'alim* (religious scholar) criticised his *shaikh* (spiritual guide) and had difference of opinion with him. Someone pointed out to the *'alim* that it was not proper for him to differ with his mentor. The *'alim* replied 'The Shaikh is dear to me, but the truth is dearer to me than the Shaikh.'

This incident tells us what the proper attitude should be in matters of differences and criticism. That is, each person must be accorded the respect and honour due to him. The human and ethical rights of everyone should be duly honoured. But when it is a matter of the truth, the truth will be held superior to everything. That is to say, if the issue is man versus man, personalities will be considered more important, but when the issue is man versus truth, the truth is important, in the absolute sense, while man's importance is relative.

Human behaviour is subordinate to ethics. But when it comes to Truth, ethics itself will become subordinate to truth. It is because there is nothing greater in this world than truth. Morality is important because truth is God's representative on earth. The appearance of truth is like the appearance of God. When God appears before one what else will be more important in comparison?

This does not mean that one who claims to be the champion of truth will wield unlimited power over others. In this matter, the truth will be considered supreme, and not the person who claims to be the upholder of truth. In actual fact, the claimant of truth will be judged by the same standard as he employs for judging others. Anyone who does not come up to the standard of truth is to be condemned. The best way is for the deceitful person willingly to accept the decree of truth against himself. Truth represents God in this world. That individual is blessed before whom truth reveals itself, on recognizing it, he bows before it.

The System of Nature

Human history pre-dates the advent of Islam by about twenty five thousand years. During this long period man made little progress in knowledge and science. True scientific progress was made only when Islam broke with the ancient system of royal absolutism, thus heralding the age of intellectual freedom.

It is a well-known fact that while intellectual progress is best made through the exchange of views, the system of determinism stalls this process altogether. This has been very well expressed by an American writer: 'When all think alike, no one thinks very much.'

The fact is that the world of realities is unbounded in scope. But the mind of a single individual-particularly in isolation – has its limitations. It is only in a situation where there can be a frank exchange of views and free interaction without any official repression, that people can learn from one another and there can be a widespread increase in knowledge. Conversely, in an environment where people's thinking is confined to a single constricted sphere, general knowledge will remain limited.

When people have full freedom to think and speak, differences of opinion will inevitably result. Each will criticize the other's viewpoint. This process of criticism is an essential part of intellectual development. In this world the choice for us is not between uncritical acceptance. It is rather between criticism and mental stagnation. If curbs are placed on criticism, what results in reality is mental stagnation rather than a state of uncomplaining acceptance.

Where intellectual freedom contributes to the system of nature, intellectual constraints are an impediment.

Freedom of Expression

Islam grants human beings total intellectual freedom. Rather it would be truer to say that it was Islam which for the first time in human history brought about a revolution in freedom of thought. In all the ages of history prior to Islam, the system of despotism prevailed, and man was consequently denied freedom of thought. This was a matter of the utmost gravity for it is a fact that the secret of all human progress lies hidden in such freedom.

The first benefit of intellectual freedom is to enable man to achieve that high virtue which in the Qur'an is called "fearing the unseen." That is, without any apparent compulsion or pressure from God, man, of his own free will, acknowledges God and leads his life in this world, going in fear of Him. In the absence of an atmosphere of total freedom, no one can undergo this spiritual experience – an indescribable spiritual pleasure – which is called in the Qur'an, going in fear of the Lord. Without such freedom it is not possible to give credit to anyone for this highest of human virtues.

Man is a thinking creature. Of necessity he forms opinions. If curbs are placed on the independent expression of his views, the content of his thought may remain unchanged, but his ideas will never find expression in his speech and writings. Curbs of this nature, imposed by a community or a state, will ultimately produce a society of hypocrites. No sincere person can ever flourish in such a repressive atmosphere. It is only freedom of thought and expression which can save man from hypocrisy.

Moreover, intellectual freedom is directly related to creativity. A society with freedom of thought will produce creative human beings: a society which places curbs on freedom of expression will necessarily witness intellectual stagnation; it will stop producing creative minds, and its development will come to a final standstill.

In matters of criticism or expression of differences, the right approach is for people to end unnecessary sensitivity to it instead of attempting to put an end to criticism and differences. This is the demand of Islam as well as of nature.

According, to the hadith it is a virtue on the part of believers: to accept the truth without any reservation when it is presented to them. That is to say, a believer is one who has the ability in the perfect sense of the word to accept the truth. Whenever truth is brought before him, whenever his faults are pointed out to him, no complex comes in the way of his accepting of the truth.

This quality is present to the maximum degree in one who is ready and waiting to accept the truth when it is brought before him. Eager for his own improvement, he accepts the truth with pleasure. This keenness for self-reform through acceptance of the truth is perfectly expressed in the words of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab: "May God bless on one who sends me gifts of my own shortcomings."

It is a fact that acknowledgment of truth is worship, nay, it is the greatest form of worship. It is an act for which man has to make the greatest sacrifice. What makes it such a great sacrifice is that it involves the setting aside of one's prestige.

It amounts to the sacrifice of one's ego. But that is the occasion when man assures his entry into heaven.

When does one find the opportunity for this great form of worship and this great good fortune? This opportunity comes one's way 'only when there is full freedom of expression. When one can criticise another with impunity. When such an atmosphere prevails in a society which permits the speaker to air his views freely and the listener may freely appreciate what is being said. Just as a mosque is the right place for the performance of prayer in congregation, similarly freedom of expression is the 'right atmosphere in which to foster the great virtues of expressing the truth and acceptance of the truth.

Islam in the Modern World

The Prophet of Islam made a number of notable predictions which have been recorded in the books of hadith. One of these being that, in the final phase of human life on earth, the word of Islam will reach all human beings inhabiting this world. In other words, future times will see the intellectual ascendancy of Islam.

However, if the word of God is to be brought into every home, conditions must exist which will favour the success of such a mission. Without such conditions no such goal can be reached. Fortunately, recent studies show that as a result of revolutions occurring over the last several years, conditions now prevail which are more conducive than ever to the communication of the Islamic message. That process having been set in motion, individuals from different communities have begun embracing Islam in countries all over the world. Now, the need of the hour is for servants of God to arise and, by fully availing of new opportunities, play a decisive role in the last and most significant chapter of Islamic *da'wah*.

Da'wah is the real strength of Islam. It is through *da'wah* that Islam makes continuous progress. That is why, in every age, believers have seen fit to engage themselves in this task. Today, there are greater opportunities than hitherto to make Islamic *da'wah* a success. The communication of the message of God has certainly been going on in every age. But now modern circumstances have made it possible for this task to be performed with a greater degree of efficacy than ever before, and on a truly universal scale.

Today, opportunities to carry out *da'wah* work are legion. But I shall cite only a few examples to illustrate my point.

Proof of the Existence of God

Rationalists have habitually attempted to deny the existence of God by asking, "If God created the universe, who created God?" Now, as we are nearing the end of the 20th century, it has become possible to answer this question on a purely rational level. This new possibility arises out of the big bang theory, which has now gained general acceptance among cosmologists. With the big bang theory, we have necessarily to accept a first cause underlying the creation of the universe. That is, if there were no cause, the universe would not have existed. It has made it possible for us to tell the rationalists that all along they have been giving their attention to a wrong set of options. In their view, a choice had to be made between a universe with God and a universe without God, whereas the real choice was between a universe with God and no universe at all. Since we cannot opt for a non-existent universe, we are compelled to choose the universe with God.

Validity of Inferential Argument

To prove Islamic belief in the unseen world, our religious scholars have so far used inferential argument. That is, they suppose an unknown reality on the basis of a known reality. The rationalists' view of this argument was that its method was academically invalid, as it was based on the principle of indirect argument. They demanded to be given an argument of a direct nature. Only then would they accept it.

In this matter – as in material matters – the river of science has been flowing in favour of Islam. The above objection had apparently carried weight in the days when the study of science was macro-cosmic in scope. But as soon as scientific research began to delve into the micro-cosmic world, the balance tipped in favour of inferential argument. For it was revealed that the deeper realities of nature itself were those which did not come under the sphere of direct argument. For instance, the establishment of the existence of oxygen or X-rays is arrived at by indirect or inferential argument. Modern philosophers, such as Bertrand Russell, have demonstrated that inferential argument is as valid as indirect argument.

That is why, in science itself, inferential argument is held to be valid. Without it, scientific study could not be continued in the microcosmic world. In this way, a new chapter on unseen realities has been opened for the *da'is*.

I was once asked by a non-believer by what set of criteria I establish the existence of God. I replied that it was the self-same criteria on which he himself relied. He remained silent at this. For he knew full well that his own scientific concepts were proved by means of inferential argument. So when inferential argument is valid in non-religious fields, it will certainly be valid in the field of religion.

Historical Credibility of the Qur'an

In the present time, all manner of things, including religious scriptures, are being subjected to investigation in the spirit of free enquiry. A permanent discipline has been set up for this special study, called historical criticism, or higher criticism. Under this general heading, all great religious scriptures, including the Qur'an and the Bible, have been subjected to historical inquiry.

The results of these studies are entirely in favour of the Qur'an. They show that the Qur'an is the only religious scripture which is a historically accredited work. The rest of the books, having been shown to be dogmatic rather than historical, have lost their formal status as purveyors of eternal truth. Such research has provided a new and powerful argument in favour of Quranic veracity. That is to say, it is only the Qur'an which enjoys historical credibility. No other religious scripture is of similar merit.

This scientific discovery has brought Islam to the position of undisputed victory, for no other religion is capable of facing this academic test.

Scientific Verification

In ancient times, superstitious notions about every object of nature were given great credence, as is evident from the literature of those days. Now in modern times, when nature has been scientifically studied, many ancient concepts have been discredited. Books written in the pre-scientific age are now suspect – as belonging to the age of superstition. Even religious scriptures have not emerged unscathed, for the periodic interpolation of superstitious notions has reduced them to the level of non-sacred literature.

The Qur'an, on the contrary, being a preserved book, is exceptionally free from such apocryphal additions. There are numerous references to nature in the Qur'an, but none of these descriptions clashes with facts discovered by science. After making a study of several such statements enshrined in the Qur'an, Dr Maurice Bucaille concludes:

“In view of the level of knowledge in Muhammad's day, it is inconceivable that many of the statements in the Qur'an which are connected with science could have been the work of a man. It is, moreover, perfectly legitimate, not only to regard the Qur'an as the expression of a Revelation, but also to award it a very special place, on account of the guarantee of authenticity it provides and the presence in it of scientific statements which, when studied today, appear as a challenge to explanation in human terms.”

Passing Modern Tests

New methods to determine the antiquity of ancient objects have been evolved in modern times. One of these, called carbon-14 dating or radio-carbon dating, was developed just after the second world war. It gave the stamp of credibility to many facts which had hitherto remained unauthenticated. It was applied in one famous instance to a mummified body, believed to be that of Merneptah, a contemporary of Moses. The mummy, discovered by Professor Loret in one of Egypt's pyramids, did amazingly prove to date back to the time of Moses, when subjected to this new technique or dating.

This same method of carbon dating was applied to the Shroud of Turin, an old linen cloth bearing the imprint of a human-face always thought to be the covering in which Christ was wrapped after his crucifixion. According to this belief, the cloth had to be two thousand years old. But carbon dating revealed that it dated back no further than the middle of the fourteenth century.

There are so many examples of this nature, that it is not possible to deal with all of them. Suffice it to say that they are symbolic of how modern sciences, on the one hand, discredit ancient religions while, on the other hand, they strengthen the credibility of Islam.

The Last Word

In modern times, great new opportunities have arisen for Islamic *da'wah*. This has made it possible for the first time to fulfill the prediction of the word of God being brought into each and every home. They point the way to Islam gaining the position of an ideological super power on a universal scale. But there is one necessary condition which is indispensable to the achievement of this goal. We shall have to adopt the same strategy in modern times as that adopted by the Prophet of Islam in the 19th year of his prophethood.

This historical strategy has come to be called the Hudaibiyya principle. This entails putting an end to the kind of controversies which create tensions between the *da'i* and the *mad'u*. Without a normal atmosphere, free of friction, no *da'wah* action can be set in motion. Today the same controversial situation has come to exist between *da'i* and *mad'u* as was found between the Prophet and his hearers after the emigration. We must, therefore, follow the same Hudaibiyya principle as the Prophet did. This is the demand of the times, and in this lies the secret of all Muslim success.

(236: II-13)

New Decision

Moradabad, an industrial township of Western UP, has a sizeable Muslim population. Recently, during a two-day visit to the town, an incident was brought to my notice which has a great lesson for us when we compare it to a similar incident back in August 13, 1990. That day, the city became the scene of a communal riot. On August 13, the day of the Id festival, Muslims had gathered at the Idgah to say their prayer, for which purpose they had spread some sheets on the grounds. After the prayers were over, the sermon began. It was at that point that a pig entered the Idgah (since Moradabad's Idgah is situated on the bank of a stream, pigs are to be found in the vicinity.) Thanks to this pig, some of the sheets were soiled, which, of course, enraged the Muslims. This incident subsequently assumed the proportions of a full-scale, Hindu-Muslim riot, resulting in great loss of lives and property. The city remained under curfew for a period of four months, as a result of which its export business was completely destroyed (the market was captured by countries like Taiwan). It took five years to re-establish it.

Now sixteen years after this incident, the same city of Moradabad witnessed another such incident, but with an entirely different reaction. March 4, 1996, was the day of the Holi festival. In a market in a locality where there are shops of both communities, a Hindu threw a bucketful of coloured water into a Muslim shop.

By the logic of the old Muslim mentality, this was a provocative act. But Muslim shopkeepers remained unprovoked. What they did was simply to down their shutters and go home. Then the floor of the shop which had been spoiled by the colour was reconstructed. Going by past happenings such an incident ought to have been enough to spark off a communal riot. Yet it passed off peacefully. No one was harmed, nor were the activities of the market disrupted.

This is no solitary incident. Such incidents are taking place everywhere. They tell us the changed mood of the Muslims. The same incidents which used to be provocative to Muslims no longer agitate them. They have learned the art of avoidance on such occasions. And this is indeed an extremely beneficial sign for the country as a whole.

After independence, Muslims in this country failed to make the desired progress. The only reason for this was the prevailing atmosphere of insecurity in which they continually found themselves. Being misled by their incompetent leaders and intellectuals, they had come to regard the country's administration as being prejudiced as far as Muslims were concerned. Since the Muslims saw that the administration was fulfilling their worst expectations, they began protesting against it, and when their protests and demands did not work they fell a prey to frustration.

But this thinking was erroneous in itself. For just like any other sphere, those of the police and administration have their limitations. They can function only where individuals are concerned. In the case of public issues, the police and administration find it impossible to transgress their limits.

Owing to the two-nation theory, and for several other reasons, Muslims and Hindus in this country have been divided psychologically into two combatant groups. Our incompetent leaders, through their continuous misguidance, have highly increased their sensitivity in this respect. That is why, whenever any friction arises between a Hindu and a Muslim, it immediately escalates into a communal issue. It is this imbalanced state of affairs which has rendered the police and administration helpless. When friction between individuals or families remains restricted as such, this poses no difficulty for the police or the administration. They can deal with such matters quite successfully. But in a sensitive atmosphere where any such friction is blown out of all proportion and becomes a communal issue, it goes beyond the control of the police or the administration. This is the principal reason, despite all protests and complaints on the part of Muslims, for the failure of the administration to be really effective.

The happening at Moradabad as well as other such happenings show us that now Muslims have discovered that the solution to this problem lies in their own hands. That is, by adopting the way of patience and avoidance in all such controversial matters, they should nip the matter in the bud to prevent it from becoming magnified into a communal issue.

Controversial matters surface in every society. This happens due to the system of nature itself rather than because of any plot or conspiracy. That is why such happenings cannot be altogether prevented. But what is perfectly possible is for Muslims to refrain from allowing themselves to be provoked. In this way, the flicker will be extinguished in the first stage itself and, as we find from the incident during Holi in Moradabad, will no longer turn into a devastating problem for both the communities.

Peace is essential to progress. Since Muslims had always reacted to provocation, the atmosphere of peace was repeatedly disrupted, resulting in communal riots. As a result, it was impossible to engage in any constructive work which would promote their progress. Now the changed situation, providing a normal atmosphere, an atmosphere of peace, has made it possible for Muslims to engage themselves in such tasks as education and commerce, business, leading to their progress and uplift. During the last few years, while travelling in various regions of the country, I have found distinct changes in the attitude of the Muslims. By adopting the principle of avoidance, they are actively engaging themselves - and very rapidly - in constructive fields.

In this way a new start has definitely been made by Indian Muslims and, undoubtedly, a proper beginning must lead on to a proper conclusion. It is certain that the Muslims will make rapid progress in this country, and their progress will contribute to the advancement of the country as a whole. Then the day will dawn when it will be felt expressly that Muslims are no liability in this country, rather an asset, being a creative instead of a stagnant part of the total population.

Social Responsibility and Media

An attempt towards the rectification of the rot that has set in the social and national life of the country is being made, with great enthusiasm, through judicial activism.

However judicial activism alone does not suffice for the rectification of this all-pervading malaise. What is urgently needed is the support of other social agencies/institutions. A very important role in this matter can be played by media activism, the topic under discussion today.

It is undoubtedly true that the position of media or journalism is not that of a mission but of a commercial industry.

The truth of the matter, however, is that our present journalism is used to presenting only half side of the picture. This is the root cause of all our problems. In view of the present circumstances media activism would amount to present a balanced reporting of the situation abandoning the present policy of selective reporting.

The principle of modern journalism can be understood from this saying:

When a dog bites a man it is no news, but when a man bites a dog, it is news.

One practical example of this method is provided by our present journalism which is constantly engaged in giving maximum coverage to any hot news created by an unruly section of Muslims. If the percentage of hot news forms only one percent the percentage of soft news is not less than 99 percent. But the reader of the newspapers are totally in the dark about this 99 percent of the picture. Whereas the one percent is being repeated again and again. Similarly if an extremist Hindu creates a hot news, this will find a place in all the newspapers the next day. Whereas even in the Hindu world there is 99 per cent soft news while hot news forms not more than one percent.

As a result of this one sided study unreal opinion is formed by both the communities regarding one another. Taking extreme forms this unreal opinion at times turns into communal riots. The selective reporting of this nature remains a permanent obstacle to the path of national integration.

For the rectification of this state of affairs a powerful journalists organisation – as we already have formed for our right-based on the principles of social responsibilities is required for the rectification of this state of affairs. Media Relations Forum is an organisation which aims at working for this goal.

Along with this I should like to put forward a proposal for bringing about an atmosphere of support and cooperation between the newspapers and social workers. Whenever a rumour spreads or a group indulges in any activity which may lead to disrupting peace, social workers should immediately engage themselves in a thorough investigation of the matter and then through the full support of the newspapers the actual version is published in the newspapers. This is the only way to maintain peace and harmony in society.

Devotion to God: food for the soul

The Prophet Muhammad is recorded as having said: "When I pass the night in vigil, I have a Sustainer and a Nourisher to provide me with food and drink."

(236:19)

Ingratitude for God's Blessings

Right from a glass of water to political power, everything that people possess in this world is from God. Everything is a direct blessing of God. Whatever one finds in this world is there because of the will of God. If God does not will it, no one can have anything, no matter how hard he tries for it. This is an undeniable truth proved by the Qur'an and the Hadith.

Another thing that we learn from the Qur'an and the hadith is that there are two forms of divine blessing. One special and the other general. Political power is a special blessing of God. We learn from the Qur'an that political power is not given to everyone. Neither can it be received through political movements or the gun culture. It is directly related with the way of God. One of the *sunnah* of God is that if a group proves, in the real sense of the word, to have true faith and to be virtuous in action, then God grants that group political power:

Allah has promised those of you who believe and do good works to make them masters in the land (24:55).

That is, even when power is desirable, the movement will begin from the point of character building and individual reform instead of political action.

Then God's general gift is what is shared, more or less by everyone. In principle, it consists of two kinds of things – peaceful circumstances and the easy availability of the necessities of life. This we learn from the following verse of the Qur'an:

God has made an example of the city which was once safe and peaceful. Its provisions used to come in abundance from every quarter: but its people denied the favours of Allah. Therefore, He afflicted them with famine and fear as a punishment for what they did. (16: 112)

Two things in this verse are called the blessings of God: peace and provision. It shows that from the worldly point of view these two things are essential for human beings. If a group comes to possess these two things, then it should not wage war for anything else, such as political power. Rather considering those blessings to be sufficient, believers should engage themselves in thanks giving to God, until God himself paves the way for whatever else is to come.

What is thanks giving to God? It is that whatever God has given us should be put to proper religious and constructive use. Remaining content with what one already has is thanks giving, whereas regarding what one already possesses as unimportant and launching stormy movements for things not in our possession is ungratefulness.

Any Muslims in possession of both peace and provision ought to occupy themselves with spiritual matters rather than political activities. Now is the time to engage themselves in producing spiritual fervour in their people; in launching movements of moral reform; in educating their people; in planning the way to communicate God's message to other communities; in spending their time in their places of worship, in developing their academic institutions, in setting up their settlements as a model abode of godly people, etc.

This is true thanks giving. This is to pay the due of God's blessings. A non-believer's eyes are on his rights while a believer's eyes are on his responsibilities. That is why an unbeliever is always running for what he has yet to possess, while a believer always engages himself in discharging his responsibilities within his own sphere.

Those who do not follow the path of thankfulness, launch heated movements towards political goals or revive the gun culture against their supposed enemies. Such people are undoubtedly anarchists. Their case is one of adding insult to injury, even if their movement has been launched in the name of Islam.

For such people it is the decree of God that they never reach their political goal, and whatever blessings of peace and worldly provision they have already enjoyed be denied to them. They will lose what they already possess. This is the way of God.