



Al-Risala 1991

January

Why Ask for the Impossible?

One day a washerman set out for the river bank along with his donkeys. The local residents told him that they would let his donkeys pass through their area on one condition only, i.e. that they did not bray, because they did not like the noise they made.

The washerman replied: "I could have fulfilled your condition if you had asked me to stop my donkeys from kicking anyone, but it is not in my power to stop my donkeys from braying."

This story aptly illustrates the issue of communal rioting. The root cause of most of the riots that occur in India is that whenever one community's procession passes through a neighbourhood populated by another community, the latter makes the condition that the procession must go on its way without any provocative slogans being raised. But this is a condition, which can seldom be met. There are always certain participants who feel compelled to raise provocative slogans, which, in turn, incites the other community to retaliate, generally by stone-throwing. This starts off a chain reaction of hand-to-hand fighting and sometimes even shooting. The result is the kind of large-scale riot, which brings in its wake death and destruction for the entire locality.

There is no doubt about it that leading processions through the streets is a shallow business. And it is only shallow people who participate in such activity. Serious, educated people seldom join in. In other words, a procession is much the same as a string of donkeys. Except that it is made up of human beings. To demand that such people should refrain from raising slogans is totally unrealistic. This is because they are constitutionally incapable of maintaining a discreet silence.

We must understand the difference between what is practicable and what is not. We should learn to demand only what is practicable. What is the point of demanding something, which has been proven impracticable?

So far as the spoken words are concerned, we must show patience (Qur'an, 74:10), for the damage done by the spoken word is purely psychological. But so far as actions are concerned, we should apply restraints, for actions are largely aimed at physical harm. Whenever slogan-raising is likely to become an issue, we should ask the administration only to ensure that the participants in a procession do not engage in any violent activities. If we could but adopt this policy, we would have found a way of putting an end to communal riots forever. Demand the possible in this world, and you will meet with success. Why expect the impossible?

Meaningful Life

Dr. Garaudy was born to a Christian family in France in 1913. The Great Depression of 1933 affected his mind so much that he joined the French communist party. He could not, however, find mental solace either in the existing form of Christianity or in communism. Later on he studied Islam and accepted the faith in 1982.

Dr. Garaudy was given the prestigious Shah Faisal award for service to Islam by the Shah Faisal Foundation in 1986. A function was organized on this occasion at which Dr. Garaudy made a speech giving a detailed account of his life. He made this speech in French, the complete Arabic version being published in the Saudi Arabian journal *Al-Riyadh*, on March 12, 1986.

When Dr. Garaudy became disillusioned with communism, he was inclined towards religion. First of all he studied Christianity, but it failed to satisfy him, so he began studying Islam. In this he received full mental satisfaction and accepted the faith. While describing his intellectual journey, he stated that he had done so in order, in the words of Kierkegaard, to invest his life with meaning.

The search for meaning in life is a natural urge. Everyone has it from birth. Man seeks all around him for ways to satisfy it. But all the things available to him either have no answer, or they supply the answer only in part. As such, man is not fully satisfied; he does not feel that he has found the correct and complete answer to his search.

This is because the correct and complete answer to his search lies only in Islam – the preserved religion of God. This distinctive quality of Islam is the greatest guarantee of the success of Islamic *daw'ah*.

Loss of Sensitivity

One of the most dreaded of all human afflictions is Hansen's disease, commonly known as leprosy. It is caused by a bacillus, which destroys the peripheral nerves, thus causing a loss of sensation. This loss of sensation is so severe that a leprosy patient can have a desensitized part of his body exposed to the most searing heat without his being at all conscious of being burnt; he will make no instinctive move to withdraw the affected part from the source of heat.

The human body has a very delicate and highly sensitive nervous system. Whenever a part of the body meets with an accident, the nerves flash the message to the brain, which instantly commands the removal of the affected part from whatever is causing it pain. In leprosy patients, however, these particular nerves have been deadened, so that if, for example, the hand comes in contact with a red-hot piece of metal, the brain will neither receive this news nor issue any command to remove the hand. The hand may be severely burned before the patient even notices it.

This physical disease is one of God's signs, which enable us to recognize a spiritual blight. This disease of the spirit is that alluded to in the Qur'an as a 'hardening of the heart.' (57 : 16) This is a state of moral and spiritual morbidity in which man's sensitivity to good and evil has been deadened. His heart is never moved, and he no longer feels morally compelled to run towards good and away from evil.

There are many instances of this spiritual deprivation arising from moral insensitivity. For example, during the expedition of bani-Mustaliq, a simple incident, with no overtones of wrongdoing was built up into a serious issue when a group of Medinans concocted a false story about Aisha, the Prophet's wife. People started spreading this story without troubling to find out whether it was true or not. It was in this context that the following Qur'anic verse was revealed: "You carried with your tongues and uttered with your mouths what you did not know. You may have thought it of no account, but in the sight of God, it was a grave offence. (24 : 15).

Spreading stories aimed at character assassination, without ascertaining their truth or falsity, is a very serious matter to a sensitive heart. But those who have undergone a spiritual death will not hesitate to start propagating such stories. The reason is that, as in the case of a leprosy patient, their sensitivity has died away. It is this lack of sensitivity, which makes people throw caution to the winds. But those who have retained their sensitivity will hesitate a hundred times before maligning others. They would rather cry out "It is not right for us to speak of this." (Qur'an, 24 : 16)

Abu Hurayra has related that the Prophet said: "Man utters words which anger God, and he regards that as a trifling matter. But due to those very words, he is cast into hellfire." (al-Bukhari, *Sahih*).

The moral burden of such words as dishonour another, make false allegations, or amount to character assassination will be heavier to bear than the Himalayas to those whose hearts tremble in fear of God. But those whose sensitivity to self-appraisal has been deadened will repeat such words lightly, as if they were enjoying a good story.

Just as physical insensitivity is a symptom of leprosy, so are irresponsible talk and the spreading of baseless allegations the symptoms of spiritual disease. This disease appears in those who are insensitive to God's chastisement in the life hereafter. (164: 13-14).

5 January 1991

Attachment to the world makes one lose sight of eternity

“There will come a day when you will be as insignificant as the flotsam carried by a flood,” the Prophet once said to his Companions who asked him why that would be. The Prophet told them that something he termed “Wahn” would develop within them, and the Companions once again asked what “Wahan” was. “It is to love worldly things, and be reluctant to face death,” the Prophet explained.

Islam: the Only Choice

We are living in an age of crisis – economic crisis, political crisis, military crisis. But, today, the most crucial of all is man's crisis of the intellect. This is the result of modern man having been deprived of a sound intellectual base on which to stand – on which to lay the very foundation of his life.

It was a very different matter for people living in ancient times, for the age of antiquity was, by common consent, the age of superstition. In those days it was both possible and acceptable to live by superstition and supposition. Today man wants to live by reason, for the age we live in is the age of reason. But when man actually tries to do so, he soon discovers that there is no truly rational basis on which he may live.

There are two things, however, which are thought to provide such a basis for human living – religion and science, that is to say, revealed knowledge and scientific knowledge. But modern man is already in the process of losing both of these foundations. From time immemorial, religion had formed man's intellectual base, but in modern times, when certain religions have been scrutinized in the full light of reason, they have been found to be lacking in cogency.

Take, for instance, the case of the Bible. On the one hand, the Bible presents the concept of monotheism, when it says: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord".¹

1. Bible, Deutronomy, 6:4

On the other hand, the same Bible says: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost"² – an injunction which clearly implies the existence of what the Christians call the Trinity.

2. Bible, Matthew, 28:19.

Such inconsistencies surely make these beliefs untenable. When God is One, He cannot be Three. And if he is Three, then He cannot be One.

Similarly, at one place in the New Testament, Jesus Christ is called the son of God (Mark 1:1) while at another place, he is called the son of David (Matthew 1: 1). The Bible abounds in such contradictions. As we see it, this problem of contradictions has occurred because of human additions to the word of God. For modern man, such additions have rendered the Bible incomprehensible, and, in consequence, unacceptable.

If, in the age of superstition, man could adhere to a religion based on irrational beliefs, it was because, religion being sacred to him, he could not think rationally about it. But the age of today is the age of

reason. Today man analyses everything in the light of reason. That is why he is no longer prepared to believe in a non-rational religion.

Let us now take this matter from the standpoint of science. With the emergence of modern science, man was led into thinking that this new discipline would be able to provide an intellectual base upon which he could firmly plant himself. Science had helped man to discover the natural world – a world which was extremely meaningful in that it had perfect order, planning. Science, as opposed to the existing religions, was thus free from internal contradictions.

Yet, once again, man was baulked of the perfect system of thought that he so desired. And this was because of a serious shortcoming in science itself. That is, science could only answer the question 'What?' It could not tell man anything about the 'why' of things. It was as if science had given man a good machine in perfect working order, but had told him nothing about its maker.

Man seeks an explanation for everything – being an explanation – seeking animal. So that when science introduces man to a universe, which has design and planning without introducing him to the designer and planner, man, instead of being satisfied, is baffled. He is at his wits' end to understand how design could come into existence in the absence of a designer. How could a plan exist without there being a planner?

It is this shortcoming of the scientific world, which leads all thinking people, right from Albert Einstein to Stephen Hawking to feel strongly that "there are aspects in the universe which are extremely difficult to understand." This intellectual difficulty has been expressed by Schrodinger in these words: "The most incomprehensible thing about nature is that it is comprehensible."

True, the universe, as discovered by science, is unmarred by anything of a contradictory nature. Yet scientists have not been able to build up a convincing body of scientific knowledge without making reference to God. This is because a universe, which is free of contradictions, cannot be explained without God. It is this state of impasse which I have called modern man's intellectual crisis. The man of today finds himself beset on all sides by it. To rid himself of this problem, he looks to religion. But most religions – due to human interpolations do not come up to the standards of reason. Likewise, when he looks to science, it fails to provide him with the mental satisfaction he so desires.

The only solution to this crisis of the intellect is Islam – a pure and unadulterated religion, which exists still in its original, revealed state, without human interpolation. As such, it is the only religion, which is in any position to provide with a complete system of thought to modern man. Islam is in perfect consonance with his nature. At the same time it holds out to him the pure concept of monotheism, by which he may explain the universe. The greatest service to mankind today is to introduce it to Islam. It is the only system, which can resolve the intellectual crisis of mankind.

At this point, I should like to mention two incidents, which make clear how Islam can lead man out of his present intellectual dilemma, and into the state described in the Qur'an in these words:

'Surely in the remembrance of God, all hearts are comforted.'³ The first of these incidents relates to Dr. Nishi Kant Chattopadhyaya, a highly educated Hindu, who accepted Islam in 1904. He has given an account of his mental journey in a book entitled, *Why Have I Accepted Islam*.

3. The Qur'an, 13:28.

He writes that when he grew up, he felt discontented with his ancestral religion. He then began to study other religions. But he found that none of them was historical, in the sense that their scriptures and their religious personalities did not conform to the highest standards of historical accuracy. Finally, however, when he came to the study of Islam, he found that both the religion and the personality of its Prophet could stand up in every respect to the most rigorous historical investigation. He thus came to accept Islam. This, the most thrilling event in his life, caused him to write: "Oh! what a relief to find, after all, a truly historical Prophet to believe in!"⁴

4. Dr. Nishi Kant Chattopadhyaya, *Why Have I Accepted Islam?*

The second incident concerns a Frenchman, a Dr. Roger Garaudy. He, too, was an individual who felt an urge to seek the truth. To this end, he studied various philosophies and religions until finally he came to the study of Islam. This, he found, gave him complete satisfaction, and he accepted that faith in 1982. When asked why he had accepted Islam, he replied, "So that I could give meaning to my life."⁵

5. Al-Riyadh (Saudi Arabia), March 12, 1986.

Both these incidents are a pointer to the greatest of man's needs today. What man is most in need of is what Dr. Bradley has called the 'new religion', or, to be more precise, Islam. Bradley's new religion, or as others have termed it, scientific religion, is, in fact, Islam. Since there is no other religion, besides Islam that is preserved today in its original form. This is the greatest thing that Muslims of the present day can give to mankind.

Here I should like to emphasize that giving the message of Islam to the world is not just a matter of making a simple announcement. This is something, which requires a great deal of patience. Unfortunately, Muslims, having been hurt in various ways by the *mad'u* nations, have reacted by developing a psychology of anger and complaint against them. While such a psychology persists, no *daw'ah* work can ever be carried out. If Muslims are to shoulder the responsibilities of *daw'ah* that devolve upon them, they shall certainly have to rise above this tendency towards reaction. They shall have to bear – unilaterally – any injury they are subjected to by their *mad'u* nations.

Only after making this sacrifice can they become the *da'i* of Islam in the world of today. It is this truth, which has' been expressed in the Qur'an in the words of the Prophet: 'We will endure your persecution patiently.'⁶

6. The Qur'an, 14:12

In conclusion, I would say that the Muslims, being in sole possession of the solution to the intellectual crisis which besets man at the present time, should be aware of the opportunity this gives them to become the intellectual leaders of the world. However, such intellectual leadership can be gained only through patience. This is the reality, which is thus expressed in the Qur'an:

And we appointed from among them leaders, giving guidance under our command, when they persevered with patience.⁷

7. The Qur'an, 32:24

A Closed Mind

The Greek philosopher, Aristotle, (384-322 BC) wrote in a treatise of the circle being an absolutely perfect geometrical form. On the basis of this supposition Aristotle maintained that since all of nature's work follows the standard of perfection, the orbit chosen by nature for the revolution of heavenly bodies could only be circular.

This theory of Aristotle so dominated peoples' minds across the centuries that all the systems of astronomy, for instance, those developed by Ptolemy, Copernicus and Tycho Brae, were based on the supposition that the heavenly bodies, i.e. the planets of the solar system, revolved in space in circles.

Johannes Kepler is the first person known to have thought differently. He made calculations in 1609 to the effect that Mercury's revolution around the sun was not circular but elliptical. He predicted that all other satellites of the sun would be discovered to revolve around it in ellipses. This theory advanced by Kepler is today an established fact.

Ancient astronomers remained lost in the concept of the circle for two thousand years. They could not think of any other pattern for the revolution of the planets. The reason was the sanctity attaching to this theory of Aristotle. Having unquestioningly accepted this theory as an established fact, their minds were unable to work in any other way.

This reverence for tradition is not peculiar to ancient times. It has been a feature of thinking throughout the ages. In every epoch, some thoughts so dominated the human intellect that it became impossible for people to think independently. This still happens in both religious and non-religious spheres. It must be conceded that the greatest obstacle to all progress is the mind that remains obstinately closed.

10 January 1991

Swallowing anger increases one in faith

The Prophet said: "God fills with peace and faith the heart of one who swallows his anger, even though he is in a position to give vent to it."

Islamic Identity

If the Hindu communal parties of India were to demand that Muslims wear the same dress as the majority community, e.g. dhoti-kurta, or that they greet people by joining their hands as Hindus do 'in order to bring about communal harmony,' all our Muslim leaders would raise a hue and cry that this was a plot hatched to destroy our communal identity, and that we would never agree to fall in with it.

This shows the degree to sensitivity of Muslim leaders on the subject of communal identity. But those same leaders are totally insensitive to *the Islamic identity* as such. In fact in present times, Muslims have actually submerged their Islamic identity in large numbers, without any of our leaders having come forward to launch campaigns against backsliding, or to try-to compensate for the damage already done. Evidently, it is only when the danger to communal identity comes from other communities that Muslims can be gathered together en masse on this issue. But since Muslims themselves are responsible for abandoning their 'Islamic identity' it is hardly possible to bring together large number of Muslims even to discuss this issue, for such a move would amount to self-blame. They would do well to remember that an important attribute of the Islamic identity is the kind of self-restraint which is implicit in the following verse from the Qur'an: "they pay no heed to vain talk, but say, 'We have our actions and you have yours. May Peace be upon you. We do not seek the company of ignorant men.'"(28: 55, 25: 72).

Ibn Kathir in his commentary on the Qur'an, elaborates on the above verse. The righteous do not return idle talk for idle talk. They rather forgive those who so speak. If they find themselves in such company, they leave politely so as to avoid friction. They have no ill-will against anyone. They wish everyone well. They behave in the same manner as the Prophet, who, faced with the acrimony of the ignorant, only became more tolerant and forbearing.' (Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir*, part III, pp. 324-25).

At another place, the Qur'an says: 'Those who do not lose their dignity when listening to profane chatter.' (25: 72).

Maqatil, in his commentary on the Qur'an, construes the above verse to mean, 'when the righteous are abused they pay no heed'. (*Al-Tafsir Mazhari*, vol. VII, p. 54)

According to both the Qur'an and the Hadith, the Islamic identity of the faithful is such that they simply do not react to those who abuse them; they avoid all risk of friction and pass by such places with dignity where they are being abused and hurtful things are being said against them.

Now, if you view this issue in the light of the Qur'anic injunction, you will appreciate that the Muslims of this country have lost their Islamic identity in this respect. Consider how they behave when the non-Muslim majority community lead their processions through the streets of Muslim localities – a regular occurrence in India – shouting slogans hurtful to Muslim sentiments in the way of the 'ignorant'

in the Qur'an. What, for their part, do the Muslims do on such occasions? Provoked by slogans, they retaliate – mostly by stopping the processions. Their reaction, I would stress, is wholly against Islamic teachings. On those very occasions when the Qur'an asks them to remain patient and follow the path of avoidance, that is exactly when they react, and retaliate, unable to ignore provocation. Muslims have thus lost a vital part of their Islamic identity.

This abandoning of the Islamic identity is undoubtedly a far more crucial matter than the loss of cultural identity through the adoption of non-Muslim dress, etc. But, on this, Muslim leaders have nothing to say. Even in full awareness of the problem, they do not tell Muslims to adhere steadfastly to Qur'anic teaching and to maintain their Islamic identity at all costs.

The state of present-day Muslim leaders is such that where it is a question of preserving the communal identity vis a vis the Hindus, they speak with great eloquence, but when it comes to preserving the Islamic identity, as concerns all Muslims, they fall silent. This neglect of the more serious issue on the part of our leaders has reached criminal proportions. By following such a policy our leaders have, of course, proved successful in maintaining their popularity among Muslims. But are they not afraid that this policy might make them 'unpopular' in the next life? For the moment they cross the dividing line between this life and the next, no amount of eloquence will suffice to exonerate them (164:11-12).

Democracy

The ninth election to the Indian Parliament was held on November 22, 1989. For a variety of reasons, the ruling Congress Party was not re-elected to power. Although it had won more seats than any other single party, it failed to secure an absolute majority. As such, it was not eligible to form a government on its own strength. Consequently, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had to resign.

There are many aspects of this election, which give us a lesson. One particularly worth mentioning is implicit in the statement made on television by the former Prime Minister, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, just after the election results had appeared. The following is an excerpt.

The people have given their verdict. In all humility, we respect the verdict. A new government will be formed. We extend to them our good wishes and offer them our constructive cooperation. Elections are won and lost. But the work of a nation never ends. (*The Times of India*, November 30, 1990).

This is the attitude, which makes possible the continuance of democracy in a country. Democracy, ideally, is a system, which permits an honourable admission of defeat, for, in the election process, there is generally just one winner, but several losers. If the losers refuse to admit defeat, democracy breaks down as a system of national governance.

This applies not just to elections and Governments, but to the entire gamut of human existence. In this world, there are always those who forge ahead, and there are always the others who are left behind. Given this situation, those who have been left behind should 'not hesitate to admit defeat. Such admissions freely made are what save society from disintegration. Refusal to acknowledge the facts turns society into a jungle of destructive activity. Society cannot progress without the recognition of true merit.

Putting Responsibility Before Rights

In a long article on Indian Muslims in the *Illustrated Weekly of India*, a Muslim leader once wrote of his meeting a delegation of Muslims from Himmat Nagar, a city in Gujarat. For the first time this Gandhian city had been rocked the previous year by communal violence. Twenty five shops were burnt down, but no life was lost. The leader of the delegation told him that they had never had anything to do with politics, and had never harmed anyone, interrupting their observations, the Muslim leader pointed out that no minority could survive without entering into the campaign of political awakening and practical politics. Neither could it receive its rights without active participation in politics. Everything depended upon politics. He emphasized that if they remained away from politics, no one would pay any attention to giving them their rights. And if they associated themselves with one political party, even then they would not benefit as desired. Politics, he told them, was a game of hopes and risks. A party should fear losing their votes. A party should set store by their votes. Muslims enjoy such democratic rights. And that is all that they have got. Their future depends on when and how they use their democratic rights. (*Illustrated Weekly of India*, 9-15 January, 1983)

Muslims have been endeavouring to solve their problems at the political level for the last one hundred years. In the elections – so they imagine – they make a party win or lose. Yet all their communal problems are left unsolved. This being so, the leaders who say the same sort of thing as is expressed above are either so unwise as to be incapable of grasping life's realities, or are very clever indeed in seeking to establish their leadership by means of cheap slogans.

The problem of Muslims does not relate to the use of their democratic rights: it relates rather to the fulfillment of their Islamic responsibilities. If Muslims have found themselves beset by problems, it is because of their neglecting their responsibilities as *Ummah*. If they are to find themselves a place of honour once again, it will only be if they set themselves in earnest to the fulfillment of their religious responsibilities.

A Precious Piece of Advice

A senior member of the Tablighi Jamaat, a reform movement, once made a speech in which he advised all those associated with the movement to do their work quietly and unostentatiously, no matter where they were. He also advised them against entering into the system of their chosen environment or trying in any way to interfere with it.

This is a valuable piece of advice, which is in complete consonance with Islamic wisdom. For instance, if you are at a university, neither should you enter into the politics of the union, nor should you take part in any agitations against the vice-chancellor or any of the other university authorities. If you are a functionary of a system of government, you should neither express a desire for particular appointments, nor should you, in the manner of the opposition, involve yourself in activities, which are directed against the administration. That does not mean that there should be no arena for your activities. By all means, have such an arena, but keep it apart from your official functions, and remain aloof from activities, which could be misconstrued as being seditious.

The advantage of this approach is that one is never denied the opportunity of working under any given system. Once a part of a system, one has, of course, to face opposition from time to time, and if one attempts to effect changes, the system itself will place obstacles in one's path. Wherever such a situation develops, good work, which could otherwise have been possible, cannot then be done. And it is only a waste of energy to try to surmount such obstacles head-on.

Those who adopt the policy advocated by the Senior Tabligh Speaker can save themselves from the negativism of eternal complaints against others; they will also thus free themselves of all contradictions between their ideology and their actions and, with their sights set on all such opportunities as are still open to them, will be to find a field of action for themselves in any sphere of their choice. They will come to possess that greatest wealth of all – a 'serene soul' as it is called in the Qur'an.

Demonstrating in the streets against the supposed excesses of others, and getting one's name in the newspapers is not real work.

Real work means making strenuous efforts to change the minds of the people, having quietly thought out the best strategy for dealing with the situation. One who is really concerned about doing such work will shed tears over it in solitude.

16 January 1991

Beyond Death

M.S. Oberoi is the most distinguished personality in the hotel business in India. He owns a hotel empire, not only in many cities in India, but also in other countries where his hotels are being run with great success. Mr. Oberoi was born on August 15, 1900 in a small village, Bhanu, in the district of Jhelum, which now forms a part of Pakistan. Now, at 90, he lives on a farm on the outskirts of Delhi. He says: "My farm is my refuge and gives me solace." Reflecting on his life he concludes:

In the evening of life, I have few regrets and there is comfort in knowing that I have been able to, in my humble way, help people in need and that whatever I have achieved has also helped to raise the prestige of my country. What more could any man have wished for?

Reflecting upon these words, I began to think that one who has lived for his country must feel that, in his extreme old age, he is about to leave behind everything that he ever lived for. On the contrary, one who has lived for God will feel in his last days that the Being he has lived for is there, before him. While the former will find only a vacuum beyond death, the latter will find a whole new world full of hope.

Then shouldn't man live for God? Why should he live for something other than God, if, at the bitter end, all that is left to him is his own sense of frustration?

Remaining Content with Less

Six whole years had passed since the Hijrah, during which period the Muslims longed to visit the Kabah and perform the pilgrimage and *umara*. One day, as they congregated in the mosque in the morning, the Prophet informed them of a vision he had had according to which they should enter the holy sanctuary of Makkah secure, shaven and unarmed, and without fear for their safety. As soon as the Muslims heard this news, they praised God for His Grace and spread the good tidings all over Medinah. About one thousand four hundred men then set forth from Medinah to perform the pilgrimage.

The Prophet and his companions had reached al-Hudaybiyyah, nine miles south of Makkah, when they were stopped by the Quraysh from going any further towards Makkah. The Quraysh then sent some delegates to the Muslim camp to dissuade the Prophet from executing this plan and to start negotiations to this effect. The parleys between the Prophet and the Quraysh went on for a long time. Finally after several rounds of talks, 'it was decided that the Prophet and his companions would return to Medinah this time, and that they should come for the same purpose the following year,

In accordance with this pact, the Prophet decided not to perform *umara*, and to leave Hudaybiyyah for Madinah. However, he decided that the animals should be sacrificed and heads should be shaved, even if the circumambulation and *sa'i* could not be performed. After performing the sacrifice himself, he shaved his head, and asked the others to do likewise. They too, therefore, slaughtered their animals and shaved off their hair.

This showed their willingness to be content with less, in spite of having been convinced by the Prophet's vision that they were sure to enter Makkah, performing the pilgrimage with all the rites of *tawaf*, *sa'i*, animal sacrifice and the shaving of hair. But when, due to the tenseness of the situation, the performing of *tawaf* and *sa'i* was rendered impossible, they were willing to postpone their entry into Makkah, and just make do with the animal sacrifice and the shaving of hair.

Herein lies one of life's secrets. In this world, one has to be content with less; only then will One become the receiver of more. One who is not content with less in the initial stages will find neither less nor more later on. Ultimately he will only fritter away his energies in initiating hostilities. And when, having exhausted all his energy and resources, he is unable to put up a fight, he tries to console himself by saying that he was on the point of victory, but that enemy plots caused his downfall.

Willingness to be content with less is also one of the *Sunnah* of the Prophet.

18 January 1991

Pride precedes a fall

The Prophet had a she-camel named Adhba. No one would let their camel walk ahead of it. One day a desert-dweller, riding on a small she-camel, came along and rode in front of the Prophet. When the Prophet realized that this was not to the liking of his companions, he said: "God has taken upon Himself to bring low anything which raises itself up in the world."

(Bukhari)

18 January 1991

Pride is to scorn the truth

Pride was mentioned in the Prophet's presence, and he had some harsh words to say about it. Then he recited this verse: "God does not love the arrogant and boastful." (Quran, 4:36) Someone admitted to the Prophet that he was fond of the whiteness of his clothes when they had been washed, of his sandals when they were properly strapped up. "This is not pride," the Prophet told him. "Pride is to pour scorn on the truth, and to look down on people."

(Tafseer Ibn Kathir, Vol. III)

19 January 1991

The Wisdom and Folly of Speech

The Prophet of Islam held that one who believed in God and the Last Day should give utterance to what is good and right, failing which he should remain silent.

Jean de la Bruyere (1645-1696), a French writer, expressed much the same idea when he wrote; "It is a great misery not to have enough wit to speak well, nor enough judgement to keep quiet."

The ability to speak is one of the greatest gifts bestowed on man by God. If this ability is properly used, it is a divine blessing, but, if improperly used, it becomes a misfortune of the worst kind.

If the power of speech is to be put to the proper use a man must think before he speaks. He must listen before he says anything. Before mouthing even a syllable, he must bear in mind that he has to account to God for every word he utters. Even if he has something to say, he should by preference keep quiet. And when he speaks, it should not just be for the sake of speaking, but as a matter of responsibility.

Speech is improperly used when a man speaks without thinking, without trying to understand the matter in hand. Such a person is generally not interested in listening to others, and when he begins to speak, it is more to impress his audience than to express some truth.

Speech, therefore, although the greatest good, can also be the greatest sin. One who knows this truth will make his speech as meaningful as his silence.

19 January 1991

Some look to eternity, others see only the present world

When the Prophet was commanded to make his mission public he stood on top of the hill of Safa and called on the people of Mecca. They gathered to hear what he had to say. "I am warning you of a dreadful damnation to come," he said. "Perpetual damnation be upon you," Abu Lahab replied. "Is that all you called us together for?"

20 January 1991

The Final Recall

Dr. Gopal Singh was born in Atabad on November 29, 1917, and died in New Delhi on August 8, 1990. He was a man of considerable accomplishment, being well-versed in different languages. In his heyday he was India's Ambassador to Bulgaria and British Guiana, while at a later period he was appointed Ambassador to Nagaland and Goa. Besides these appointments, he occupied various other important posts.

Just a few days before his death, Dr. Gopal Singh wrote an article which appeared in *The Hindustan Times* of August 12, 1990, under the heading of 'An Ex-Governor Speaks Out! In this he described the bitter experience he had had during his governorship. Appointed Governor of Nagaland, where there are 97 per cent Christians, he found that no development work was going on there. He, therefore, arranged for a supply of electricity and started several projects. For instance, he set up a paper mill with an investment of Rs. 87 crores. He further developed an existing sugar mill and established a new university. In fact, he became fully preoccupied with the development of the state. Then he says, 'But, I was recalled, before time!'

While Dr. Gopal Singh was lamenting his recall from the office of governorship, he did not know that just a few days later he was going to be called away from this world itself. How unaccountable it is that man thinks of being 'recalled' only from material situations, and remains oblivious of the great, final recall.

Every individual who comes to this world has to leave it one day. Man is born into this world only to leave it after death in order to appear in the Divine Court for the Last Judgement of his deeds. For man, this is a matter of the greatest possible concern. There is nothing, which can ever take precedence over this in importance. Yet this is an issue with which man never cares to concern himself.

21 January 1991

Psychological Weakness

A close friend of the Roman King Nero, Petronius Arbiter (d. 66), who was appointed magistrate of Rome in acknowledgement of his extraordinary abilities, gave many interesting sayings to posterity. Here is one of them:

'The mind longs for what it has missed.'

This is just as true today as it was in the past. Indeed, this psychological weakness is so prevalent that not just individuals, but whole nations suffer from it.

The basic reason for this is that whatever was lost was not absolutely clear in the past but in the present, it has become more sharply defined. In the past this missing thing could not be the centre of attention because it was either not known of or if known of, it was not clear in every detail. Later on, in the full glare of publicity, it becomes a matter of common knowledge and, as such, becomes the general focus of attention. To allow this to happen is the crassest foolishness.

It is due to this human weakness that superficial leadership can come into being in a nation. Such shallow leadership is invariably raised on grounds of 'known deprivations'. This is because the easiest way to arouse a people is to dwell on their known losses. For instance, if a Pakistani leader announces that Kashmir has to be taken possession of, he will immediately gain in popularity with the public and he will easily collect crores of rupees in donations. Why? Because all Pakistanis think of Kashmir as being lost to Pakistan.

On the contrary, if a Muslim leader of Pakistan says that we have to rise as a *da'i* group, he will never be able to collect an audience, for the loss of our *da'i* status is not generally known. False leadership is based on known losses: true leadership is based on invisible losses. (That is, worldly losses are evident to everyone, but loss in terms of the life hereafter eludes comprehension, because it can never be visible to the naked eye.)

Smash the Evil Within

Wafaq is a daily newspaper of Pakistan, which is published simultaneously in Lahore, Rawalpindi, Sargodha and Rahim Yar Khan. On the first page of its issue of May 10, 1990, there is a photograph, which shows a crowd laughing, and throwing stones and pieces of wood at some object. The caption under the picture reads: 'Demonstrations organized by the Jamaat Islami against nudity and obscenity. The demonstrators are smashing a TV set!

Wafaq also published a detailed report on this incident: "On the final day of this campaign to eradicate evil, launched by the Jamaat Islami, a TV set was symbolically stoned at Hasan Square, Gulshan Iqbal (Karachi) to express condemnation of evils such as nudity and obscenity. When thousands of stones landed on the TV set, it was smashed to pieces in no time. This demonstration by the Jamaat Islami in which thousands took part, was of an exceptional nature. Addressing the demonstrators, the Naib Amir of the Jamaate Islami and Professor Ghafoor Ahmad, the secretary General of the Islami Jamhoori Ittihad, said that today, a TV set has been destroyed, but if the TV does not change its programmes, tomorrow, the hands of the public will reach the walls of the TV station. If even this does not stop the satanic exhibition of obscenity, the next things to be broken will be the hands of satan's agents.

It is almost certain that many of those who smashed the TV set with stones themselves have TV sets in their homes. This being so, is it not also satanic to expect that by placing a defective TV set at a crossroads and then stoning it, the evils of television will be eradicated from the country. The truth is that the evil of TV exists, not within the TV station, or in parliament house, but within the people themselves.

If you want to put an end to the evil of TV, you must change people's hearts. The evil of TV can never end just by raising slogans against the government. Even if the Pakistan government ordered the stoppage of all of the current TV programmes, and permitted only programmes on the Qur'an and the Hadith to be relayed, there would still be no benefit to the public if the people themselves had not first experienced a change of heart.

Experiments of this nature were made during the long rule of General Ziaul Haq, but they were a dismal failure. For instance General Ziaul Haq announced that as Indian films showed obscene sequences, he was banning the exhibition of Indian films on TV and in the cinema throughout the length and breadth of Pakistan. But the only difference this made was that, now, instead of seeing Indian films on cinema or TV screens, people obtained video cassettes of them and played them on VCRs so that they could watch them at home on their own TV screens.

General Ziaul Haq had absolute power in Pakistan for about eleven and a half years. Everyone from Maulana Abul Ala Maududi to Maulana Sayyed Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi upheld him as a true believer. Moreover, Ziaul Haq had given the entire administration of the Ministry of Information to the Jamaat Islami, and General Ziaul Haq, with his powerful military influence, made joint efforts to end the evil of television in Pakistan, but they could not reduce it by even one per cent. According to estimates made at the time, the situation, if anything, deteriorated.

This experience dearly proved the futility of the theory held by the Jamaat Islami and, of course, by Maulana Abul Ala Maududi, that the reform of television, as well as other social evils of this nature, could be effected by the power of the government. If such reform had been possible just by promulgating ordinances, it would have already been carried out when such powerful men as Ziaul Haq and his Minister of Information joined hands to put an end to moral backsliding.

The truth is that those who stoned the television set should have stoned themselves instead. It is this ill-considered theory held by the Jamaat Islami and Maulana Maududi, which is the greatest obstacle to ending the evils of TV in Pakistan. If the members and supporters of the Jamaat Islami had not been misguided by it, they would not have allowed their energies to founder on the rock of politics; they would have devoted them rather to the reform of individuals. Their ultimate objective would by this time have been achieved. The fact that it has not already been achieved shows that the problem has been approached from the wrong angle.

It was Maulana Abul Ala Maududi who formulated this quite baseless theory that the reform of society, or of social institutions, can be effected only by the government. It therefore became incumbent upon those who subscribed to this theory to keep channelizing all their energies towards the assumption of governmental power. In spite of this theory being unsupported by events, the members of the Jamaat Islami have continued over the last fifty years to launch such campaigns as will bring the reins of government into their hands.

In respect of argument, this theory has already been rejected, evidently because attempts to put it into practice during the mandate of General Ziaul Haq (1977-1988) proved abortive. Now if the members of the Jamaat want their activities to bear any fruit, they must first of all concede that their political theory was wrong. Then, desisting from all destructive activities, they should devote themselves to reforming the minds of individuals in a purely constructive way. Although this method takes longer to produce results – because it has no appeal for the masses – it is preferable to any other method, because there is, in fact, no other method which is truly effective.

The eradication of social evils by using government power is ostensibly a beautiful theory. But, in practice, this does not work. If you attempt to end evils at the level of the government, without having first changed the wrong doer from within, the only result will be that evil will re-appear in a new garb. It can never be abolished in this way from the lives of the people.

The first task to be undertaken in ending social evils is to create a willingness on the part of the people to shun those evils. Without this, no campaign launched by the government to forbid evil can never be of avail. Such evils as already exist will only become more and more rooted.

Attracting large crowds and then stoning TV sets is false leadership. The true leader is one who can so condition people's minds that when they go home, they voluntarily break up their own 'TV sets'. In the whole of the Islamic world, no such leader exists today.