

**Al-Risala**

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## Perseverance

The following story, written by Mao Tse Tung, former Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party is one which should set us all thinking.

In olden times, there was once an old man from the northern part of China who lived on the side of a mountain range which always lay in shadow. The problem was that there were two high mountains in front of his door which prevented the sun from entering his house. One day, the old man called his young sons and said to them, "Let us go and remove these mountains by digging, so that the sun's rays may fall upon our house unhindered." A neighbour of the old man's, hearing of this plan, made fun of it. He said to the old man, "I knew that you were foolish, but I never realized that there was just no limit to your foolishness. How on earth is it possible to remove these high mountains just by digging them?"

The old man replied in all seriousness, "Yes, you are right. But when I die, my sons will dig, and after their death, their sons will dig. The digging process will thus continue for generations. The mountains, as you know, will not go on increasing in size whereas each digging is bound to reduce them in size and, in this way, there will come a time when we shall have finally succeeded in removing these obstacles."

It is true that the power of solution is greater than the power of problem. While the problems are invariably limited, their solutions are always unlimited. This story is a beautiful illustration of how a major feat necessitates not only long-term planning, but the willingness and determination to carry that planning into effect.

For a people who have the fortitude, to carry on their schemes from one generation to the next, working consistently and steadfastly, there is no mountain or river on earth which they will not be able to conquer.

## Personality building

God created wood, but He did not make this wood into boats. He put iron in the earth, but He did not fashion it into machines. Aluminium and plastic were brought into being by Him, but aeroplanes were left unmade. God has put raw materials in the earth, and on the other, he has put a brain in man's head. It is for man to take the materials God has provided and develop them: to make something out of unfabricated matter. In this way the forces of nature are channelled into the building of civilization.

The same thing has to be done in building the human personality. God has created man "in the most noble of images: (Qur'an, 95:4). Human nature has been made to stand out among all forms of creation. Still, this excellent nature is just a raw material; it is for man to give new form to his original being, to build on the foundations God has laid down. God has presented man with an empty page of history on which man has to write his own destiny. Herein lies man's test in life, and it is upon the outcome of this test that his entire future depends. Man's consciousness has to be turned to realization of Truth, his senses to remembrance of God. The characteristics God has endowed him with have to be moulded into a devout character, his personality developed into a picture of humility and submission to God.

One is given the power of speech at birth: that power must be used either to uphold the truth or to reject it. One is born with superb faculties and one can use them either for worthwhile or for selfish objectives. One can remain as one was – simply the issue of one's mother's womb, or one can take oneself in hand and make oneself into a different, a more worthwhile person.

Everyone has been given a piece of land on which to work. He can either beautify it with flowers or ruin it with thorns – he can make it into a paradise or he can turn it into a raging inferno.



## Our potential is our wealth

Psychologists have estimated that man puts to use only ten percent of the abilities with which he is born. Professor William James of Harvard University has very aptly observed, "What we ought to be, we are not ready to be." In spite of the inborn qualities nature has endowed us with the successes which should have been ours in this world keep eluding us for the simple reason that we quite unthinkingly consent to lead inferior lives. Then, discontented, we put the blame on others for not giving us our due. But it is inside ourselves that we should look if we are to find the reasons for life's deficiencies. Constantly viewing others with envy and a sense of grievance will lead us nowhere, and can turn us into our own worst enemies. The fact should be faced fairly and squarely that it is only if we exploit our own potential to the full that we shall meet with success. Any other course will lead to failure.

It is essential, however, to determine at the outset whether our efforts are directed at worthwhile objectives. Without proper direction our potential will be wasted.

In ancient times and even up to mediaeval times, gold being greatly prized, one of the great preoccupations of the 'scientists' of those days was to convert base metals into gold. Dreams of instant wealth drove innumerable people over the centuries to superhuman efforts. But all this expenditure of time, money and energy was in vain, for death always overtook them before they could achieve anything. It never seemed to occur to any of them that these metals with which they worked had a different and greater potential than anyone could ever have imagined. Iron, for example, was convertible, not into gold, but into machinery, and could be used as a versatile building material of great strength. In the world of today, western nations having learnt these secrets and directed their energies towards building up the relative technology, have succeeded in acquiring far greater wealth than mere silver and gold.

## An unfinished story

Mr. P. N. Pathak, joined the *Hindustan Times* staff as, an ordinary worker, in 1958, and, owing to his devotion and dedication to work, finally succeeded in securing the high post of Deputy Superintendent of its composing department. His early death of heart failure, at the age 50 on December 27, 1984 brought his career to an untimely end.

The note in the newspaper on this sad occasion, said, quite simply, "He rose to the present position by sheer hard work." (*The Hindustan Times*, December 28, 1984)

After having completed his education in Allahabad, Mr. Pathak worked for some time with the *Times of India* and *Indian Express*, then he joined the staff of the *Hindustan Times* where he found the atmosphere conducive to dedicated work. It involved a long and laborious struggle of 25 years to reach this high post, but before he had time to enjoy the fruits of his labour, death cut his career short.

Man's fate does, indeed, seem tragic and ironic. He works hard in this world to achieve some goal but, hardly has he been able to reap the fruits of his labours, than he is removed from the scene.

How distressing is this end to life! Yet no one stops to give it a thought. Everyone sets himself to repeating the same story as his predecessor. And how many of these stories reach a happy conclusion? There is no human being whose life story ever quite reaches completion. But no one seems to be concerned about discovering the reason. No one appears keen enough to find the path which will lead him to the successful completion of his story.

Every human being in this world is, in fact, a tale left half way. As one seems to near one's destination, one is suddenly taken away. It is as if life were without a destination. Stranger still is the negligence of man towards gravest of realities.

But this is only a temporal way of looking at things. We have these feelings because we think of our final destination as being in this world, and not in the hereafter. It is only when, with the help of God, we change this attitude that we understand that completion, fulfillment and happiness belong to the next life,

and not to this.

## The journey of life

*But do they give such careful consideration to the jourey which will take them to the brink of the grave and beyond? It would not appear from present human behaviour that many are keenly interested in that inevitable Final Journey.*

A book entitled, *Unsafe At Any Speed*, written by an American lawyer and published in 1965, analyses to what degree the mechanical engineering of a motor car guaranteed the safety of its occupants. As the title suggests, the degree of safety offered was so low that it seems remarkable that no one should have wanted to travel by car at all. This same author wrote a number of books on the perils of the modern machine, but "*Unsafe at Any Speed*" was the one which really made the American public sit up and think. Everyone from government officials to industrialists was startled into thinking not just about how luxurious or short a journey could be made, but about how safe it could be made for human life. Such serious consideration was given to this, that it sparked off a revolution in the motor car industry which had repercussions all over the world. Now, the feature of their products which car manufacturers display with the greatest pride is the safety factor in overall performance.

When a car is travelling at high speed, all kinds of unforeseen accidents can take place which may be serious, if not actually fatal, for all those involved. To meet such exigencies, cars now have 'active' and 'passive' safety arrangements built into them, the 'active' set designed to anticipate and prevent, or minimize accidents, the 'passive' designed to deal with eventualities, should an accident actually take place.

When the safety aspect of car travel was spotlighted in this way, people all over the world promptly began to give their attention to it. Why were they so prompt about this? Naturally, anyone who travels by car is very serious about wanting to reach his destination safe and sound, and it was precisely this self-interest which forced people everywhere to give this matter such careful consideration.

But do they give such careful consideration to the journey which will take them to the brink of the grave. and beyond? It would not appear from present human behaviour that many are keenly interested in that inevitable Final

Journey. Few care to give it serious consideration. Few are of the opinion that even greater safety precautions need to be taken on it than on our everyday earthly journeys. People nowadays are so preoccupied by the mundane cares of the wayside, that they hurtle onwards, in pursuit of the material, quite unmindful of what their actual, ultimate destination is to be.

## The brashness of ignorance

Nadira Begum Quraishi of Bilaspur, Maharashtra, who was divorced by her husband after the birth of a daughter, is now suing her ex-husband for maintenance. According to *The Times of India* of May 1, 1986, when she was asked why, when it was against Islamic teachings, she had followed the lead of Shah Bano of Indore in demanding maintenance under article 125 of the Indian criminal law, she burst out with: "What has Islam done for me that I should follow its tenets?" Neither the judge nor the lawyers were able to persuade Mrs. Quraishi to withdraw her case. Moreover, she rejected Mr. Quraishi's offer to take her and her daughter back. She then called upon the court to order her ex-husband to give her a monthly allowance of Rs. 500. Unlike Mrs. Shah Bano, she is young – just thirty years of age – and is a graduate.

Although she is supposed to be an educated person, her utterances are those of an ignorant, illiterate woman, for she is clearly unaware of the fact that whatever women have nowadays is the gift of Islam. She does not realize that even being able to question Islam in public with impunity is a great freedom given to her by Islam. Before the advent of Islam, no woman who valued her life would have dared question religious authority, and certainly not in the terms used by Begum Quraishi.

8 March 1994

## **God's own are those who accept the Quran**

Anas ibn Malik reports the Prophet as saying: "Some people belong to God." Asked who they were, he said, "Those who adhere to the Quran."

(Al-Darmi, *Sunan*)

## **Uphold the faith - but with understanding and compassion**

*"If an idolater seeks asylum, with you, give him protection so that he may hear the word of God, and then convey him to safety. For the idolaters are ignorant men"*

The Qur'an makes it clear that "God and His apostle are free from obligation to the idolaters" (9.3) and that the latter are to be sternly dealt with if their breach of trust, other evil-doing and in particular, their unwillingness to repent so merit it. But in the same chapter it is said that "God will show mercy to whom He will" (9.27) and the faithful are advised that "if an idolater seeks asylum with you, give him protection so that he may hear the word of God, and then convey him to safety. For the idolaters are ignorant men" (9.6). In spite of the iniquities of the idolaters, they are to be, treated leniently if repentant, their vulnerability is to be used not to extirpate, but to reform them and their ignorance is to be seen as a mitigating factor in any judgment passed upon them.

The Qur'an leaves us in no doubt that the negativism of enmity should never be allowed to diminish or destroy the opportunity to bring enlightenment to any of God's creatures. Although the Qur'an says, "Believers, make war on the infidels who dwell around you. It also says in the same verse, "Deal courteously with them. Know that God is with the righteous" (9.123).

## The bigger the better

*Always remember that it takes a bigger man to walk away from a fight than it does to stay and fight.*

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

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

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

## Modern science echoes the Qur'an

It is both disturbing and puzzling that while Muslims themselves have been intent in recent years on publicizing the Islamic cause from political and nationalistic platforms, it has been left to non-Muslims to throw light upon the true relevance of the teachings of Islam. Two scientists of considerable eminence in the field of biology, Dr. Maurice Bucaille, the author of *The Bible, The Qur'an and Science* and Dr. Keith Moore, Chairman of the Anatomy Department of the University of Toronto, Canada, and author of two important books on embryology, have both expressed their amazement at the scientific accuracy of the Qur'an's statements about the physical development of human beings. They both feel that it is astonishing that as early as the 7th century, the Qur'an provided such information as has only become available through scientific research in the last 15 years. Dr. Moore expresses the hope that the relevant Quranic verses "may help to close the gap between science and religion that has existed for so many years." (*The Muslim*, Islamabad, December 24, 1984). According to *The Muslim*, "Dr. Moore's statement was carried by all Canadian newspapers, and was circulated by the national news agency, the Canadian Press. *The Ottawa Citizen* carried it on page one with a banner headline."

The result of Dr. Moore's research having provided undeniable proof of the Qur'an being the Book of God – for only God has knowledge of all past and future events – Muslims should concentrate on this aspect of Islam to the exclusion of political and national imperatives, for the latter, far from furthering the true cause of Islam, only serve to erect the barriers of antagonism and suspicion. Muslims should stress the fact that the truth is the common concern of all mankind, and that when it is made known with proper emphasis, the walls of prejudice will crumble and fall.

## Submission to God

Henry de Castro, a senior French officer posted to Algeria during the days of the French occupation, was once leading a contingent of thirty Arab horsemen through the desert when he was informed by his men that the time had come for the afternoon prayer. Without further ado, they dismounted, and, without asking his permission, they gave the call to prayer, lined up in rows and began to pray. De Castro, affronted at what he considered arrogant and undisciplined behaviour on their part, nevertheless remained silent. Bringing his horse to a standstill, he observed his men at their devotions. Somehow these orderly rows of men engaged in earnest prayer made a deep impression upon him. Although he had at first felt that his men were guilty of insubordination, he became more and more touched by the humility with which they prostrated themselves before their Maker. He realized that it was certainly not pride which had made them act as they had. Later, when the prayer was over, he questioned them about it and listened attentively to everything they had to say. When he went back home, he began to make a study of Islam, first of all reading a French translation of the Qur'an, then travelling extensively in Arab countries to observe the Islamic way of life. His impression of Islam became more and more profound and, eventually, he came within the fold. He later wrote a book in French on how he had come to accept Islam. This was translated into Arabic by the famous Egyptian writer, Fathi Zaghlul, and was published under the title of *Al-Islam: Khawatir wa Sawanih*. This recounts how it was the sight of God's servants bowing before Him which had awakened his true nature and inspired in him a feeling of submission to God.

## Missionary ethics

Paradoxical as it may seem, the ethics of the missionary bear a striking resemblance to the code of conduct adopted, consciously or unconsciously, by a businessman. Though differently motivated, neither the missionary nor the businessman can afford to offend or discourage those with whom he comes in contact. Just as the profit-seeking businessman makes all kinds of concessions to his customers, putting up with awkwardness and inconvenience in the hopes of doing good business, the divinely inspired missionary goes out to meet his congregation with a lenient, tolerant attitude, ready to ignore taunts and insults, and eager to forgive lapses in decorum or downright obstructive behaviour. Just as the businessman will be extra careful never to do anything which would put a potential consumer off buying his goods, the missionary will take great pains to see that a tension-free ambience is created in which his sermons can have their full effect. Both will avoid evoking negative responses at all costs. This concept of missionary ethics is exactly according to the message of the Prophet Jesus as well as the teaching of Islam. Here we quote a part of a sermon given by Jesus Christ:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.

But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

And if any man will sue thee, at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.

And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

You have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

That ye may be the children of your father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?

And if ye salute your brethren only what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

(Matthew 5:38-48)

Those who fail to plumb the depths of the Prophet Jesus' teaching tend to raise objections to this passivity. To them it appears little better than passive submission, which is surely not practicable in this material world.

"I would venture to state that this is a gross misinterpretation of the sermon. Actually, what Jesus has prescribed is a strict moral code for preachers, and not for the general public. In conveying his message to others, the preacher is supposed to bring about an intellectual revolution among the people. To do this, he has to impress it upon the hearts of the people that his message is of paramount importance. This is possible only when the preacher and his congregation have a normal, tension-free environment.

This normal environment can never become a reality if the preacher demands that it be established bilaterally. If a preacher decides that he will only remain calm provided that others do so, and that he will allow himself to slip into being provoked by his audience, a receptive environment can never be created in which proper attention is paid to the message conveyed. This is why it is the responsibility of a preacher to create such a rapport unaided. If he is to pave the way for truly harmonious relationship, he shall have to rise at all times, above retaliatory tactics.

In most cases, conflicts and discord between the preacher and his audience are caused by worldly issues. To obviate this problem, the Prophet Jesus enjoined upon his followers that on any such occasions the preacher must be willing to bear material loss unilaterally so that no unnecessary obstacles be placed in the path of the dissemination of the message. If the congregation wanted to rob the preacher of his shirt, he had to be ready to hand over his cloak as well, so that no attention should be diverted from his message.

## The teaching of Islam

Contrary to what is generally believed, the teachings of Islam do not differ from the teachings of Christ: the code of ethics formulated by Christ for his preachers is identical to that laid down by the Prophet of Islam.

A notable example is that of Suhaib ibn San'an, an inhabitant of Rome who came to live and work in Mecca where, by dint of hard work, he amassed a considerable quantity of gold. Like so many others, after receiving the message of the Prophet, he accepted Islam. In those days, however, there was terrible persecution of the Muslims at the hands of Meccan non-Muslims and, when it became intolerable, the Prophet asked the Muslims to migrate to Medina, to which place he too subsequently emigrated. Suhaib soon followed the Prophet, but, hardly had he set off when the Quraysh lighted upon him and barred his way. They said to him, "You came to us in an abject state of destitution, but then, while you were with us in Mecca, you gradually improved your position until you reached your present state of affluence. Do you really think we will let you run away and take everything with you?" A heated argument ensued, then Suhaib asked, "If I hand over all of my gold to you, will you let me go?" They readily agreed, whereupon Suhaib handed over his entire fortune to them. On arriving at Medina, he told the Prophet of his encounter with the Quraysh. The Prophet was greatly pleased to hear of how Suhaib had come to join the caravan of Islam after turning over all of his possessions to the enemy. "You have made a good bargain!" he exclaimed.

Many other incidents can be quoted from the lives of the Prophet and his companions which are illuminating on this point. One outstanding example is that of the *Muhajirs* (Emigrants) who left for Medina, leaving behind their homes and their properties in Mecca, returning only after eight long years when Mecca was finally conquered by the Muslims. The real point of the story is that even after the conquest, the Prophet did not allow his companions to retrieve their properties from the usurpers, the reason being that the dwellings and other such places were still occupied. In many cases their Meccan occupants had even sold them off to others. Now the Prophet still had to project Islam to those who were as yet unconverted, and he was fully determined to bring them into his fold. But were the Muslims to claim their rights, this would spark off an unending series of clashes and conflicts and, in the process, missionary activity would be severely hampered. In his wisdom, then, the Prophet prohibited the emigrants from raising any material issues with their non-Muslim compatriots.

## The path of patience

A part of the Qur'an on patience reads like this:

"And who speaks better than he who calls others to the service of God, does what is right, and says: 'I am one of the Muslims.' Good and evil deeds are not alike. Requite evil with good and he between whom and you is enmity, will become your dearest friend. But none will attain this save those who endure with fortitude and are truly fortunate.

And if a malicious attempt is made by the devil to tempt you, seek refuge in God. He hears all and knows all." (41:33-36).

This verse of the Qur'an shows that for one to become a preacher of Truth, it is necessary to be virtuous. Here 'virtuous' means being true in both word and deed.

Total dedication to his goal helps the preacher to observe this strict code. A true preacher is so serious about his message that it assumes the utmost importance in his eyes. All else is relegated to a secondary place. When such a dedicated man appears on the scene of Dawah he becomes the embodiment of the same character as is described in the verse quoted above.

The life of a preacher has to be governed by the strictest moral code of conduct. This implies that even when he is treated badly, his treatment of the wrong-doer should be magnanimous. When he is harmed, he must pray for the person who has harmed him. A preacher is duty-bound to behave correctly in all circumstances. The adoption of such a code calls for great courage, patience and endurance on the part of the preacher. But there is no doubt about it that it is in this unilateral good behaviour that all the secrets of success are hidden.

Man's nature, as God has made it, can be won over by such acts. This is the greatest and most positive weapon that a preacher can have. Whenever a preacher discovers that the urge to revenge and retaliation is gaining the upper hand, he should stop short in what he is doing and allow the full realization to come to him that this is the work of Satan. It is Satan placing temptation in his way, trying to drag him down from the pedestal of virtue. It is Satan trying to rob him of the priceless weapon of good behaviour so that he will lose his audience and his missionary efforts will come to naught. Should Satan succeed, the missionary will be a failure both in this world and in the

hereafter.

All the prophets of God have served as His preacher. The Qur'an says of them that all were well-wishers of the Nations to which they addressed themselves. In chapter 79, various prophets are mentioned as having told their respective nations that they were their sincere friends and advisers and had come to "give you honest 'Counsel".

The preacher must figure as the well-wisher of his congregation. This should radiate from his personality, for it is the source of all missionary virtues. Being well intentioned towards others means being eager to guide and reform, and to seek the benefit of his interlocuters – never his own personal gain. Sincerity urges him on to striving for greater powers of conviction and, even in solitude, he puts his heart and soul into praying for others. When he brings a message to his congregation, no matter how passionate his own feelings may be on the subject, he takes every care to introduce his ideas gently and gradually, wisely and with consideration, so that no one should take offence. He must take into account the character, temperament, education and mood of his audience, and mould what he has to say accordingly. Suddenly confronting people with truths, no matter how noble, can frighten away the faint of heart and the poorly educated, and every concession should be made to whatever human inadequacy is likely to obstruct, distort or halt the preacher in his work. Provocation must be borne with patience, or turned aside with good humour and pleasantry, and on no account should clashes and confrontation vitiate the atmosphere tranquillising so necessary for moral receptiveness. There can be no fruitful response if this atmosphere is dissipated or destroyed.

## **Avoidance**

One important principle which the preacher must observe is avoidance, as it is stated in the Qur'an at one place that the ignorant should be avoided.

This is something which the preacher must do independently. For it is he who is required to avoid ignorance and not the congregation. This means viewing in a spirit of cool detachment whatever the congregation says and does to thwart him in his missionary activities. The responsibility of maintaining a peaceable environment clearly falls on the preacher. No matter what heckling he has to suffer and no matter how unruly his congregation, he must adhere to the

principle of reacting positively and under no circumstances should he ever evince even the merest hint of a negative reaction. He must never allow himself to digress from the true path, even if success is nowhere in sight.

## **A shining example**

Maulana Muhammad Ilyas (1886-1944), one of the famous Muslim reformers of modern times, was endowed with this missionary temperament. Here is an event which illustrates this very clearly.

In the first quarter of the twentieth century, Maulana Ilyas was working in Mewat, in Haryana, an area he used to visit frequently. One day while he was stressing the importance of *kalima* (article of faith) and *namaz* (prayer) to a Mewati – the Mewatis were an uncouth, uneducated, ignorant people – the latter took offence and hit the Maulana so hard that he staggered and fell down. Far from becoming angry, he picked himself up as soon as he had recovered from the blow and said to his assailant. “You have done your work. Now let me do mine. Now listen to what I have to say.”

Thus without wasting a single moment on recriminations, Maulana Ilyas submitted to this gross injustice, and moments later, he was again trying his best to help the Mewati to understand *kalima* and *namaz*. This way of dealing with the situation was so unprecedented, and moreover, so gentle, that the Mewati could not but be moved. He not only listened to him then with patience and attention, but asked his forgiveness and expressed his determination to mend his ways. He ultimately became a permanent helper in the mission. The missionary ethics, in a word, has unilateral good behaviour at its core, and it is only those who have the courage to adopt this code of ethics who can carry out the mission of truth. It is they alone who are worthy of the task.

20 March 1994

## **Swallowing one's anger increases one's faith**

Abdullah ibn Abbas records the Prophet as saying: "The draught of one who swallows his anger is dearer to God than any other. God fills with faith one who swallows his anger for God's sake."

(Ahmad, *Musnad*)

## No rose without a thorn

The rose is so beautiful that it has been called the queen of flowers. Yet, on the very same branch where the rose blooms so prettily, there is formidable array of thorns which make it a difficult and sometimes painful business to pluck the rose. But such is the law of nature. There is no rose without its thorns.

The prick which the thorn gives us is a valuable reminder that there are many seemingly attractive propositions in life which have their difficult or unpleasant sides and that if we are to game whatever is attractive or advantageous in any such situation, we must be prepared to accept and deal with its untoward elements. We cannot separate the rose from its thorns; we have to take the two together.

If we seek advantages, we must also be prepared for setbacks. Success in life means winning through despite severe hindrances and outright failures. There can be no progress without the urge to press onward in the face of all obstacles. Anyone who wishes to achieve anything at all in life has to resign himself to being the loser at some point or points in his career. It is seldom that there can be profit without there being loss at some time or another.

A few days ago, I dropped my spectacles and the lenses broke. The floor they fell on was made of stone, and so fragile a thing as glass could naturally not withstand the shock of hitting so hard a substance. Had I been standing on an earthen floor, perhaps my glasses would not have broken. As it was, the hard floor underfoot had left me with a pair of useless spectacles dangling in my hands. This was a sharp reminder of how so many of our choices provide us with something we consider of great concrete value and also, sometimes, of great and wonderful beauty, only to leave us with something belonging to a different scale of values hopelessly shattered and of no further use to us. This so often a feature of everyday life that we must – if we are to go forward – prepare ourselves to face such eventualities, accept them, and then press on regardless of them. We must simply learn to take the rough with the smooth.

## **On hearing the Hereafter mentioned, he waived his claim**

Umm Salamah tells of how two of the Ansar brought dispute before the Prophet about a long-standing issue of inheritance for which neither party could produce a witness. "You bring me your disputes," the Prophet said to them, "and, when no proper evidence is brought forward, I judge them according to my own way of thinking. I might, on the basis of partial evidence, make a settlement in favour of one of the parties, but in so doing, it may be that I take away from the other what is his rightful due. In that case, the one in whose favour I pass judgement should not accept what has been apportioned to him, for that would be like his accepting a firebrand which, on the Day of Resurrection, would stick on his neck." At these words, both the Ansar broke down and wept. "Prophet of God!" they both cried out, "he can have my rightful share!" "The Prophet then told them that in view of their changed attitude they should go and, seeking to do what was just and right, should divide the inheritance into two parts. Then they should draw lots as to who should have which part. In this way, each would have the other's approval of the share he received.

*(Kanz al-Ummal)*

## Moral inheritance

Karim Bux was an unpretentious, religious gentleman who lived quietly in a village on a modest income. When he finally passed away at the age of 65, he left no material inheritance worth the name to his family. After his death his eldest son, Rahim, left the village and went to settle in the city so that he could make a living for his family. Whatever meagre resources he had went into the small business he set up there.

Karim Bux may have left no money to his family, what he did bequeath to them was of inestimable value. What he left to them was an ideal – of contentment. Simple living and avoidance of confrontations. By virtue of these things, Rahim managed to make slow but steady progress, despite his initial investment being negligible. His innate desire to avoid clashes was a major factor in smoothing the path for his business to go forward. Needless to say, everyone was happy with him. Everyone helped him in times of need.

In spite of Rahim's resources being limited, he never lacked credit, thanks to his fairdealing and his reputation for always fulfilling his promises. Whenever there was any friction, he would pray for anyone who wronged him. Whenever he was tempted to do anything dishonest or unfair, the innocent face of his father would appear before him and he would be keenly aware of how his wrongdoing would torment the spirit of his poor father in his grave. Such thoughts immediately caused him to dismiss all temptations from his mind and he would regain sufficient mental poise to continue to treat the same path as his father had trod.

Rahim's business may have been a very ordinary one, but such was his courtesy, honesty and selflessness that he could command the same respect and live with the same honour and dignity as a top business magnet.

When his business began to flourish, he felt the need of assistance. So he invited his brothers one by one to come from the village and stay with him. Finally all the four brothers were united. The business for convenience, was divided into four separate departments, each one being placed in the charge of one of his brothers. For a time they all lived happily together in a joint family although, in

their respective spheres, they worked independently of each other.

But after some time, Rahim Bux felt that his brothers were not taking as much interest in the business as they should. At first, only two options appeared to be open to him. Either, as the eldest and owner of the business, he could continue to keep everything firmly in his own hands and remove his brothers from their positions of trust, thus incurring their immediate wrath and unending hostility, or he could allow things to go on as they were and then ultimately face the consequences of allowing a joint-family concern to be irresponsibly run. Inevitably it would mean mutual grievances coming to a head, great deal of bitterness and a final splitting up of the business.

Rahim Bux gave this matter careful consideration for several days, then a third option having become clear to him, he gathered his brothers together and put the whole matter before them. His suggestion was that the best course would be for each brother to become the proprietor of his own department and then to run it independently of the main business. "In this way," he said, "our father's spirit will be at peace and it is my sincere hope that this will prove a blessing to all of us, for it is only by the grace of God that no disaster has as yet befallen us." All of his brothers then expressed their gratitude and approval and gave him a free hand to apportion the business as he saw fit. After a brief discussion it was decided that the fairest way would be to draw lots for the different department and the distribution was subsequently carried out to the satisfaction of everyone.

All the four brothers then set themselves to their tasks with a will and a way, working hard day in and day out. And now their children have been brought into the business to assist them.

All the four brothers have improved their relationship with one another, being at all times prepared to give unstintingly of their assistance. Although they have all had separate accommodation built for themselves, Rahim Bux still commands respects as the eldest brother, and he can always have his say. The women and children also help one another when the need arises, for they still think of themselves as one big family.

Most fathers think that the best legacy they can give their children is wealth and property. But, in truth, the most fortunate children are those whose parents leave them a model for principled living. Those who, before leaving this world, have taught their children to have faith in hard work, to avoid confrontation, to remain content, to look forward to future opportunities rather than immediate

gains and to adopt a realistic attitude rather than indulge in wishful thinking, have left behind them a moral inheritance that is far more lasting and of much greater value than the greatest fortunes in the world. But how many fathers are there who realize this great truth?

## The greatest adventure

Thor Heyerdahl, the world-famous Norwegian anthropologist, once conceived the idea – highly novel at that time – that the Pacific Islands could have been populated centuries ago by aboriginal peoples who could have arrived by sea from the South American continent. But since it is over 4,000 miles from the West coast of South America to the nearest island, his idea did not gain currency. It seemed unlikely that such early peoples could have had any craft sufficiently seaworthy to carry them such an enormous distance, or that they could even have developed the skills to steer themselves in the right direction, let alone survive the innumerable hazards which must have beset them in the vastness of the ocean, such as encounters with whales, sharks, giant squid etc., not to speak of high winds, rough seas and violent storms. But Heyerdahl was convinced that his idea was wellfounded because of the racial mixture and their cultural artifacts which he had observed on these islands and because there was a strong ocean current – the Humboldt – constantly flowing westwards which could have assisted small ships or rafts to cross the ocean. Now the only thing left to do was to prove it to the world by making the journey himself in the kind of vessel that was used by the pre-Inca peoples.

He had seen ancient drawings of rafts made from huge, but very lightweight Balsa log with a large sail and adjustable centre boards used for steering which went vertically down into the water. He reckoned that a raft of this construction would allow huge waves to pass over it without sinking it, for the water would run off at the sides, or drain through between the logs, and that it would serve better than a boat, which would fill up with water in a storm, or even capsize. Rafts like this were no longer made, so Heyerdahl decided to have one constructed to the exact dimensions shown in the old drawings, using balsa wood from Ecuador.

But this was clearly a voyage which he could not make on his own. So he sent out an appeal for men to join him who would be interested in such an unusual and hazardous expedition. In an incredibly short time, he found himself with five eager crew-members, all from different walks of life, who were willing to join him out of a keen sense of adventure.

Their raft – the Kontiki – set out from Callao in Peru on the 28th of April 1947 and, after a marathon voyage of 101 days at sea, reached the Raroia Reef on the 7th of August. They had their hair-raising adventures on the way, like their early forerunners, but all miraculously survived to \*tell the tale, and the annals of anthropology are the richer for it today.

It is exactly such keenness, such courage, such selfless zest for adventure which Islam is so much in need of today. The Islamic Centre may have every good intention of bringing the truth to the unenlightened through *Al-Risala* and other publications, but it is essential that zealous individuals should come forward to form a 'crew' with the same bravery, enthusiasm and willingness to cooperate as Heyerdahl's men.

They should have the same willingness to relinquish the material things of this life in order to bring the true message of Islam to the peoples of the world.

The Muslim world today is engaged in all manner of activities but it has sadly neglected the all-important task of propagating the faith. To accomplish it, one must be ready to rise above the tangible gains of this world and think only of the intangible blessings of Paradise, for that is God's promise to those who valiantly come forward to struggle for His cause.

## The power of love

*In the world, there is no power greater than that of love. Through love, one can win an opponent over to one's side and can turn a total stranger into a friend... the love one offers must be heartfelt and true.*

Swami Ram Tirath (1873-1906), an extremely learned man, was renowned for his sagacity. One of his aphorisms wisely observes that "on all the doors of life is written 'Pull' but we generally prefer to 'Push'!"

A fluent speaker of English, Swami Ram Tirath set off in 1903 for America in order to propagate his religion. When he disembarked at San Francisco, he was approached by an American who was interested in finding out who he was. "Where is your luggage?" asked the American, "This is all the luggage I have," replied the Swami "Where do you keep your money?" was the American's next question and on hearing that the Swami had "none to keep," he asked him how he "got by." "I love everybody. That is how I get by." "But you must have some friend in America..." At this Swami Ram Tirath placed both his hands on the American's shoulders and said, "Yes, you are that friend." The Swami's action had a profound effect upon the American. He became such a close friend of the Swami's that he took him to his own house, stayed by his side throughout his sojourn in America and offered him every kind of service. Eventually the American became Swami Ram Tirath's disciple.

In the world, there is no power greater than that of love. Through love, one can win an opponent over to one's side and can turn a total stranger into a friend. But for this to be so, the love one offers must be heartfelt and true. No mere show of love can ever have the effect of genuine, sincere love.

## Souls stand in wait

*All souls indeed, stand in wait for the opportunity to enter the everlasting world of God Almighty. So great is the power of Islam to win over the human heart, that it can even overcome the force of arms.*

The Turks captured the Greek island of Crete in 1669 AD, following which several wars were fought between Turkey and Greece for control of the island. Turkish rule finally came to an end in 1898 AD, but there is still considerable mention of Crete in the history of the Turks. One such history book, written by Muhammad Hafiz Qurayshi, and published in Wore in 1922, summarizes events from the beginning of the Ottoman Empire to the deposition of King Abdul Majid II. Referring to the Turkish war with Crete, the author writes:

In 1066 AH, a Christian naval commander from amongst the Venetians came before Sultan Muhammad Khan IV, along with 30 soldiers who had accepted Islam in all good heart, on the way to Turkey. Hearing this the Sultan congratulated him and put him in charge of a ship-building yard. Not only did he please the Sultan, but he also rendered countless services to Islam in this way more than atoning for his past misdeeds (pp. 105-106).

In Islamic history, there are numerous instances of enemies coming over to Islam in the very midst of hostilities, leaving their own ranks and joining the ranks of the Muslims. This demonstrates the ability of Islam to win over people's hearts. The truth is, Islam is the religion of nature and, as such, it, holds immense appeal for all human beings, there being a secret longing for Islam already lodged in their hearts. All souls indeed, stand in wait for the opportunity to enter the everlasting world of God Almighty. So great is the power of Islam to win over the human heart, that it can even overcome the force of arms. It can be effective even in the heat of battle, and as history has shown, has put an end to age-long enmity.

## Through fire and water

*The people who ultimately succeed are those who are undaunted by disadvantageous circumstances, who waste no time in lamenting over them and who give their attention instead to overcoming whatever difficulties they are faced with.*

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

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

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

## The best price of all

During the Caliphate of Abu Bakr, there was a period when the people were in great distress because of a prolonged drought. But the Caliph told them to be of good cheer, because the Almighty would surely come to their rescue. Sure enough, the glad news soon spread that a caravan, belonging to 'Uthman, had arrived laden with foodstuffs from Syria. It was a big caravan – of one thousand camels and all the great traders of Medina rapidly converged on 'Uthman's house. When he emerged to meet them, they expressed their urgent desire to purchase the foodstuffs so that they could pass it on to those who needed it in Medina.

Ushering them inside, he asked them how much profit they were prepared to give him on this merchandise. "Twelve dirhams on every ten dirhams worth," they replied. "But I can get a better price," said 'Uthman, "Then we'll give you fourteen." 'Uthman again said that he could get a better price, where upon they put their price up to fifteen dirhams. But 'Uthman stood firm. Bewildered by his attitude, they asked him who could give him a better price, considering that all of the merchants of Medina were already assembled there. "I can get ten dirhams for every dirham's worth," he told them, then asked them if anyone of them could give a better price than that. No one spoke up. Then 'Uthman recited the *ayah* of the Qur'an which says that those who do good will be rewarded tenfold (6:60). He explained to them that he intended to give away all the wheat and other foodstuffs to the needy people of Medina.

Having faith in the promises of the Almighty raises one's courage to a plane where there is no self-sacrifice which appears too great or too difficult to carry out.

