



Al-Risala 1990

May

Islam In The Soviet Union

Twenty years ago *Time* magazine's representative was expelled from Moscow. But now, with Mr. Mikhail Gorbachev's open-door, *glasnost* policy, no less than eleven reporters and five photographers from *Time* magazine have been allowed to spend four months criss-crossing the country to observe and study various aspects of Russian life as affected by the new policies. A detailed 62-page report prepared by the *Time* team has been published in the issue of April 10, 1989.

This report, which gives up-to-minute information on various aspects of life in the Soviet Union, devotes 12 pages to the present state of Islam throughout the country. This section is entitled, 'Islam Regains its Voice' and carries three coloured pictures showing Muslim religious life. Both the layout and printing of these two pages are so superbly done, and the result so attractive, that I fell to thinking that there was not a single magazine run by Muslims anywhere in the world which was in a position to produce such a well-researched and beautifully presented report. Journalism is one of the key features of nation-building in present times. No community which lacks powerful journalism can be assured of a place in the field of life in today's world. The only place such a community can be assured of is in the nearest graveyard.

The report begins: " 'Allahu akbar! Allahu akbar!' The call to prayer echoes forth from a minaret in Tashkent".

One of the things the report says is that nowadays the government is more tolerant of Islam. When the communists took over in 1917, most of the country's 26,000 mosques and 24,000 religious schools were shut down. Now 1,400 mosques have been opened to Muslims. Besides re-opening mosques, the regime has virtually ended official anti-Muslim propaganda... Islam, like the country's other religions is a major beneficiary of "new thinking," (p.59)

Whatever the various reasons for this change in the Soviet Union's system, it has thrown open new avenues to Muslim activism. But the Russian Muslims will be able to avail of this opportunity only when they have learnt that the present freedom is not limitless. They must learn to carve out their plan of action strictly according to what is possible, rather than strain after the impossible.

The main cause of Muslims' ruination in present times can be traced to their ill-considered activities. They are not content with what is possible, so they chase after the impossible. They set their sights on things which in all conscience are simply inaccessible.

Moreover, the Muslims speak out where they should maintain an imperturbable silence. They opt for violent agitation where the problems need to be solved through discreet negotiation. They create an atmosphere of hatred and conflict where they should foster an atmosphere of love. They launch campaigns leading to clashes and confrontation where they should follow the policy of patience and restraint. When they stay quietly at home, they take to the streets to shout slogans.

In this world, action has to be in terms of the possible. Straining after the impossible is simply a waste of time and energy, and in the long-run is counter-productive. This is a very simple fact of life, but, to date, it seems to have eluded our leaders, both great and small.

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Being content with what God has given, and always seeking knowledge.

Abu Qulaba was asked who the richest person was. "The one who is Content with what God has given him," was Abu Qulaba's reply. And who is the most knowledgeable? "The one who benefits from the knowledge of others."

Divorce

An abnormal event which takes place in abnormal circumstances.

“Those that renounce their wives on oath must wait four months. If they change their mind, God is forgiving and merciful; but if they decide to divorce them, know that He hears all and knows all.

“Divorced women must wait, keeping themselves from men, three menstrual courses. It is unlawful for them, if they believe in God and the Last Day, to hide what He has created in their wombs: in which case their husbands would do well to take them back, should they desire reconciliation. Women shall with justice have rights similar to those exercised against them, although men have a status above women, God is mighty and wise.” (Qur’an, 2:226-228)

In any household both men and women have rights and responsibilities in equal measure. It is therefore an injustice if one or the other takes advantage of chance circumstances, or makes use of natural advantages to victimize his or her partner in life. It is at such moments that it should be borne in mind that the marriage bond is too serious and too delicate a matter to be constantly jeopardised by the indiscriminate and mindless swearing of oaths. Divorce is an abnormal event which takes place in abnormal circumstances. When it comes about, emotions are bound to run high. But one should be careful not to be carried away by one’s feelings at such a time, and should remain within the limits of propriety. God has decreed that we conduct ourselves properly and with kindness at the critical moment of divorce. Indeed, our conduct throughout life should be based in these very same principles.

The annulment of a marriage should not come as a sudden blow. The divorce procedure should be spread over three stages, reaching completion in as many months. The sober manner in which we should approach this marital crisis is explained in the following verses of the Qur’an.

“Divorce may be pronounced twice, and then a woman must be retained in honour or allowed to go with kindness. It is unlawful for husbands to take from them anything they have given them, unless both fear that they may not be able to keep within the bounds set by God; in which case it shall be no offence for either of them if the wife ransom herself.

“There are the bounds set by God; do not transgress them. Those that transgress the bounds of God are wrongdoers.”

“If a man divorces his wife, he cannot remarry her until she has wedded another man and been divorced by him; in which case it shall be no offence for either of them to return to the other, if they think that they can keep within the limits set by God.”

“Such are the bounds of God. He makes them plain to men of understanding.”

“When you have renounced your wives and they have reached the end of their waiting period, either retain them in honour or let them go with kindness. But you shall not retain them in order to harm them or to wrong them. “Whoever does this wrongs his own soul.”

“Do not make game of God’s revelations. Remember the favours He has bestowed upon you, and the Book and the wisdom he has revealed for your instruction. Fear God and know that he has knowledge of all things.” (2:229-231)

Even after separation, there should be a certain period during which a reconciliation should be considered. And just deciding to put an end to a marriage does not mean at either party should ignore the other’s rights. The rules divorce, in fact, have important lessons to give us not only in this but in other spheres of our lives. From them we can judge what our demeanour should be, no matter when or how we come into conflict in life. Our decisions should never be arrived at in haste, but should be carefully thought out, in a circumspect manner. Then, in our dealings with one another, we should keep strictly to the path God has laid down for us, and should not seek to evade His commands by legal manoeuvrings.

In our implementation of divine law, then, we should have regard not only for the letter of the law but also for its spirit. For example, when a couple separate, no attempt should be made to take back gifts, and the period prior to the final separation should be passed in an amicable manner, with regard for former happier times which the couple have had together.

The Prophet and his companions

Certain bearers of gifts to Abu Dhar Ghafari, failing to find him in Rabdhah, because he had gone on a pilgrimage to Mecca, went on to meet him at Mina, and happened actually to be in his presence when he was told that Uthman ibn Affan, who was the caliph of the Muslims at the time, had prayed four rak'ats in Mina; he had not shortened his prayer, as one normally does on a journey. This upset Abu Dharr, and he had some harsh words to say. "How does Uthman pray four rak'ats," he wondered, "When I myself have prayed two rak'ats with the prophet, with Abu Bakr, the first Caliph, and with Umar, the second Caliph." Then Abu Dhar arose, and prayed four rak'ats himself. People were puzzled at his doing the very thing for which he had criticized the Commander of the Faithful, and asked the reason. "Causing conflict is a grave matter," he explained.

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How a believer should treat others

Ali said of the Prophet: "He himself shunned three things: quarrels, pride and idleness. And three things he refrained from inflicting upon others: he did not belittle anyone, did not lay blame on anyone; nor did he dwell on anybody's weaknesses. "

(Tirmidhi)

The First School

Islam attaches paramount importance to the acquisition of learning: education as a first priority overrides all other considerations. It is ironic, therefore, that in the field of education Muslims have been left far behind by other communities. One fundamental reason for this is that Muslims in the main, have opted not to send their children to modern institutions, where the majority of the teachers are non-Muslims, for fear that the latter will exert a baneful and ineradicable influence upon them. The consequences should have been foreseeable, i.e. the Muslims ultimately lagging far behind others in education.

This turning away from modern education because of possible “harmful” influences on Muslim children was inappropriate and uncalled-for. An incident from the life of the Prophet will make this clear. The first school¹ set up by the Prophet of Islam in Medina was entirely staffed by non-Muslims – prisoners of war, who were idolaters and the avowed enemies of Islam. We learn from *Musnad* of ibn Hambal that the teaching of reading and writing was fixed as a ransom for these prisoners of war by the Prophet himself.’ (Ibn Kathir, *Seerah*, Vol.II, p. 512.)

As all these prisoners of war were avowed enemies of Islam, there was great risk involved in setting them free once they had fulfilled the conditions of their ransom. And, indeed, they did later re-organize themselves, attacking Medina again within the space of a year. Yet, such a high value was placed upon, education, that it was considered well worth running this risk. Incarcerating these prisoners for life would simply have meant losing the opportunity to avail of their teaching skills.

The importance of learning in Islam is so great that it has to be acquired at all costs.

There is evidence of a school having been set up prior to this at Saffa (Saffa was a platform outside the first mosque built by the Prophet at Medina). But this was a training centre, rather than an educational centre, and was meant for migrants from Mecca with no homes in Medina, Thus the first proper educational centre was that in which all the teachers were non-Muslim prisoners of war. – Editor

Clearing the Path for Islam

Patrick Ryan writes that extraordinary success in the propagation of Islam was achieved “by learning to live lives of submission to God and to His messenger in a pluralistic, sometimes even unsympathetic environment. What eventually contributed to that environment changing to a ‘realm of Islam’ (Dar al-Islam) was not the militancy of the Muslim minority but the religious interest of the non-Muslim majority in what they came to recognize as a peaceful and attractive form of faith.”¹

It has been generally accepted that the dissemination of Islam on an international scale in later centuries was achieved mainly through traders and sufis. This does not, however, mean that these Muslim traders or sufis were engaged in dawah work in an organized fashion. There is no record, in fact, in the history of Islam, of there having been any regular, organized activity on their part which could be interpreted as a missionary struggle.

It being a historical fact, however, that Islam did spread through the traders and sufis, the question then arises as to the reason for the vastness of scale on which this dissemination took place. The reason is not far to seek. In those days the widespread phenomenon we now recognize as the ‘politics of protest’ had not yet come into being. Today, this policy, adopted by Muslims in one way or another in almost every corner of the world, is – if we could but realize it – the greatest obstacle to the spread of Islam.

The reason is that this brand of ‘protest politics’ causes tension and strife between *da’i* and *mad’u*. And Islam simply cannot be communicated in such an atmosphere of tension and antagonism.

The revolution that marked the first era of Islam, bringing a great history into being, grew in size until Islam itself became a veritable flood: now Islam had been invested with tremendous power to spread on its own. The meaningless politics of hatred of our present-day Muslim leaders have, on the contrary, acted as a deterrent to the flood of Islam. Remove this obstacle and Islam will go on spreading on its own.

We need, in this day and age, to understand and appreciate what exactly was achieved by the traders and sufis of old, and how exactly they accomplished this. In effect, they did nothing more difficult or complicated than lead simple, quiet lives and refrain from causing friction in any other community. It was this frictionless co-existence which removed the barriers from the sweep of Islam’s great floodwaters. Given such ideal conditions, Islam spread unceasingly on its own. Our present-day Muslim leaders are the first group in Islamic history who, by their meaningless activities in the name of Islam, have brought its dissemination to a complete standstill by placing the obstacles of hatred and prejudice in its path.

1. *Islam and Politics in West Africa: Minority and Majority Models*, Quoted by the *Muslim World*, January 1987, p.6

The same spirit, with which the traders and sufis of old were imbued, needs to be reborn among the Muslims of today. That is, they must follow the path of adjustment and not confrontation, a policy which, as Patrick Ryan has rightly observed, made possible the wide dissemination of Islam in the past.

Confrontations between Muslims and other nations take place mostly on issues of a political, economic and social nature. If, on such occasions, Muslims adopt an attitude of intransigence, this can only result in *da'i* and *mad'u* being constantly at loggerheads, with the ultimate cessation of any spread of Islamic influence among other nations.

The Price of Success

*“Every prize has its price.
The prize is the yes; the price is the no.”*

“God is with those who are patient.” (2:249) In the words of the Prophet, “Consider that victory always follows patience.”

The price of success is patience. This entails the avoidance of all side issues and the unremitting pursuance of one’s goal. Igron Gorin, the noted American singer, tells of how, in his early days of voice-training, he loved to smoke a pipe. One day his professor said, “Igron, you will have to make up your mind. Whether you are going to be a great singer or a great pipe smoker. You cannot be both.” So Igron stopped pipe-smoking. He went on to become a great singer. The act of renunciation in order to gain is possible only if one has patience, an attribute alluded to by an American psychologist when he says, “Every prize has its price. The prize is the yes; the price is the no.” (*Reader’s Digest*, March 1990, p. 68)

This observation ‘has great significance. If you want to be a disciplined and principled person, you must give up many unnecessary or counter-productive habits. It hardly needs stressing that if you want to become a healthy person, you have to bid farewell to all those things which ruin the health. The pangs of saying ‘no’ have to be borne before you can have the joy of saying ‘yes.’

In like manner, anyone wishing to make progress in education, industry, etc., shall have to eschew confrontation. And his avoidance of all conflict with others shall have to be unilateral. He must also consciously stay away from all such activities as are likely to disrupt harmony with other social groups. Progress can be achieved only in an atmosphere of peace. The journey of progress can no more be made in an atmosphere of hostility than a train can pass down a railway line which has been blown up.

Before And After

Raising men from the level of animals

What were the Arabs before Islam, and what did they become after Islam? Before the advent of Islam they had fashioned statues from stone, which they named al-Lat, Manat and al-'Uzzah. They took great pride in these sculptured statues and would say: "Al-Lat and al-'Uzzah and Manat – they are the great ones, and we shall bow to their will."

This was the state of their thinking before they received the message of Islam. After receiving it, they changed in their entire outlook. As a people, they underwent a complete change of character. Those who had taken pride in their idols were the very ones to smash them with their own hands. Those who had formerly bowed before men now came to make men bow before God.

One such was Ribī ibn Amir, who went in 14 AH to Qadsia in Iran, to the court of Rustam, the Iranian Commander in Chief, in order to carry on negotiations. When Ribī ibn Amir entered the court, Rustam was seated in great magnificence on a golden throne, and surrounded by every splendour. Rustam immediately invited him to sit on a finely wrought chair. But Ribī ibn Amir declined, and seated himself on the ground instead. Rustam asked him the reason. He replied, "We do not like sitting on such elaborate seats." Then Rustam asked him what had brought him to his country. Ribī ibn Amir replied: "God has sent us so that those who are willing may be brought from the worship of men to the worship of God; from the narrowness of the world to its vastness; and from the cruelty and injustice of religions to the humanity and justice of Islam. Thus God has sent us with His religion to His creatures so that we may call them to it."

12 May 1990

Not India Alone

"It would be better if the community kept a low-profile, because high-profile Islam in India can only provoke confrontation;"

A book entitled *The Struggle Within Islam* by Rafiq Zakaria has recently been published in New Delhi in 1988. One of the issues dealt with in this book is that of the Indian Muslims. The author writes: "It would be better if the community kept a low-profile, because high-profile Islam in India can only provoke confrontation."

Mr. G. Habibullah has brought out an article in *The Times of India* (June 18, 1989) in which he has criticized this viewpoint. He says: "Compare the bland Christian reaction to the vulgar and blasphemous film, 'The Last Temptation of Christ', and the vigorous Muslim reaction to *The Satanic Verses*. Islam is just not going to keep its head down and behave in a prudently gentlemanly fashion."

Keeping a low profile is in essence a principle, and is not just a matter of keeping one's head down. Whether it be a Muslim country or a non-Muslim one, success can be achieved only by following the low-profile path. Even those who fervently criticize this policy set their own personal affairs in order by adopting the very same policy.

Muslims must adopt the low-profile path as a matter of principle, not only in India but all over the world. In present times, there is no other way to live in this world.

12 May 1990

People are losing just what they want to find

The Prophet said: "How wonderful, paradise is. Yet those who seek it have fallen asleep. And how terrible the Fire of Hell is. Yet those who dread it are also asleep."

Raising Standards

There are two levels of character – the ordinary and the superior. An ordinary character is based on the principle of 'do as you would be done by'. This might be termed the 'knee-jerk character', for one who is possessed of such a character offers only reflex responses to treatment by others, breaking with those who break with him, wronging those who wrong him, and harming those who harm him.

In ancient times a code of ethics based on the principle of tit for tat was prevalent in Arabia. A poet belonging to the pre-Islamic era says of his own tribe, vis a vis rival tribes. "We have never been found wanting in retaliation. We have always meted out what was meted out to us."

With the advent of the Prophet of Islam this concept of ethics was radically transformed. The eye-for-an-eye principle had to yield pride of place to superior ethics, that is, to the principle of doing good even to those who wrong you. A saying of the Prophet to this effect is as follows:

"Never debase your character by saying that if people treat you well, you will treat them well, and if they harm you, then you will do worse to them. Rather, become accustomed to being good to those who are good to you, and not wronging those who harm you."

(Mishkat al-Masabih)

One tradition of the Prophet is to raise people's consciousness thereby raising the standard of their character. He himself left no stone unturned in working towards their uplift.

The most important task before us today is, therefore, to raise human standards from the intellectual, academic and moral point of view.

Know Your Tomorrow

“I live for today,
I do not care for tomorrow.”

Veer Bahadur Singh was born at Harnahi, Gorakhpur in 1935. After passing his post-graduate examination in Geography from Gorakhpur University he joined the Congress party. From then on he continued to rise up the political ladder until he became a minister.

He assumed the office of Chief Minister of U. P. on September 25, 1985, a position which he held for three years. Then he was assigned the portfolio of the Communications Ministry at the Centre. As central minister for communications he went to Paris to attend an international conference. During this conference, he suffered a massive heart attack and died on May 30, 1989, in a hospital in Paris.

The worst communal riots in Meerut on the issue of the Babari Masjid occurred during his chief ministership. For this he became infamous among Muslims. Here is a paragraph of an article published in the Lucknow edition of the *Times of India* (May 31, 1989) written by V.M. Badola.

“He displayed an utter lack of political farsightedness. He never cared to look back, as he often boasted, but then, he was also incapable of looking ahead. A case in point was his handling of the Babari Masjid issue and he is said to have masterminded the opening of the locks of the disputed property at the instance of Mr. Arun Nehru, then Union Minister for internal security, only to appease the Hindus. The mishandling of the Muslim problem in general and the Meerut riots in particular did not particularly endear him to the people.” (p. 13)

While reading these words I began thinking that even a Muslim writer could not perhaps have commented so openly. This is undoubtedly a very just and bold comment, and the writer deserves to be congratulated for this.

What is most lamentable is that the greater majority of our Muslim writers and speakers recount little other than tales of oppression and prejudice. They know all about the Veer Bahadur Singhs of this life but are totally ignorant of the V.M. Badolas.

God has declared in His Book that *'usr* (difficulty) always accompanies *yusr* (ease) in this world. But our present Muslim leaders are *yusr-blind*. They can see only *'usr*, the scenes of *yusr* are just not visible to them.

Here is another point which relates to Mr. Veer Bahadur Singh. Just a few months before his death he had said in an interview that “I live for today, I do not care for tomorrow.” Whatever he did in connection with Meerut and the Babari Masjid was traceable to this. He could see only today; tomorrow

did not matter to him. But the truth was that his today was going to end within a few days on May 30. The tomorrow that awaited him was his being summoned before God as a common man in order to account for himself. Had Veer Bahadur Singh known this truth he would have been worried more about his tomorrow than about his today. While the knowledge of today makes one defiant and unjust, the knowledge of tomorrow does the very reverse: it makes one responsible and just. People know only their today. That is why they have become defiant and rebellious. If they knew what tomorrow would bring, their lives would undergo a complete transformation.

15 May 1990

Humility at all times

Abdullah Ibn Masood told how, during the Badr campaign, there was one camel to every three men. People used to ride in turns. It was the same with the Prophet: he was sharing a camel with Abu Lababa and Ali. They both asked the prophet to ride on the camel; they would walk in his place. "You are no stronger than me," the Prophet told hem. "Nor do I have any less need of reward from God than you." (*Al-Badaya wa'n-Nahaya*)

A Misunderstanding

A seminar was held in New Delhi under the auspices of the Times Eye Research Foundation on 'Eye Donation and Religion'. The proceedings took place in the India International Centre on September 6, 1989. The writer too was invited to read a paper on the subject.

During the proceedings of the seminar the programme manager, Mr. A.P. Atri, told us of an incident which bears a lesson for us. His own grandson had died some days previously, at the age of seven. When the time came to perform the last rites, Mr. Atri's relatives and friends gathered at his house. On seeing the body of the child, one of this friends said, "Atriji, you exhort people to donate their eyes after death, yet I find here that you have not donated your own grandson's eyes. His eyes are there just as they were before death. "

This objection was based on a misunderstanding. The truth was that after the death of the child, Mr. Atri telephoned the hospital to make his wishes known. A trained doctor then came with all the necessary equipment to extract the eyes. He replaced them with artificial plastic eyes so neatly that it appeared that nothing had been removed.

Mr. Atri's friend, being unaware of this process mistook the artificial eyes for real eyes. Hence the misunderstanding.

In most cases, mistrust and suspicion are the result of wrong constructions being put upon badly understood facts. Strictly speaking, we should refrain from forming bad opinions of others, especially if we are not in complete possession of the facts. But, in cases where we are required to form an opinion, it is always better to do so only after making a thorough investigation of whatever appears at first sight to be doubtful. It is unethical to form any opinion whatsoever without proper investigation.

Look Within for the Cause

Martin Luther King Jr., once said, “A man can’t ride your back unless it is bent.” Here, in symbolic language, is one of life’s great truths. For it is a fact that so long as you stand upright, no one can jump up and sit on your back. This is possible only on a bent back – never on a straight one.

Experience has shown that the same is true of life in general. You will be ruled over only if you allow your weakness to be exploited. Wisdom and realism demand that whenever you find yourself being placed at a disadvantage, the first thing you must do is face up, fairly and squarely, to whatever weakness it is that has encouraged another to take advantage of you.

This point is aptly illustrated by an important event in Islamic history – the battle of Uhud, which took place in the Prophet’s lifetime. This battle had initially gone in favour of the Muslims, but in the later stages, what had seemed a sure victory turned into defeat. The reason for this was a mistake made by the Muslims, and promptly turned to good account by the enemy. It is significant that when the Qur’an commented on this incident, it had nothing to say about the oppression or rebellion of the rival group. Instead, it admonished the Muslims (3: 152) so that they should realize their error to the fullest extent: only then would they appreciate how to prevent anyone triumphing over them on subsequent occasions.

Whenever one suffers a defeat, it is invariably due to one’s own shortcomings. Remove any such shortcomings and there will be no need to lament the aggressiveness of others.

Superiority of Character

In 750 A.D., the Abbasids wrested the throne from the Umayyads, a dynasty of Arab caliphs who had reigned in Damascus over a considerable empire from 661 A.D. The Abbasids thereupon set about slaughtering the members of the Umayyad dynasty, so that no claimant to the throne should survive. One of the younger members, Abdur Rahman ad-Dakhil, did, however, manage to escape this general massacre, fleeing from Damascus to Spain, where he established the famous Umayyad empire, with Cordova as his capital.

In the contest of the rivalry between the Abbasid and Umayyad kingdoms, the Abbasids sent valuable gifts from their capital, Baghdad, to the Christian rulers of France, the object being to curry favour with them and to encourage them to turn against their Umayyad neighbour across the Pyrenees.

Now, Heraclius, heir to the ancient Roman empire, had taken refuge in Constantinople after losing a large part of his empire. In need of allies, and inspired by Baghdad's efforts to persuade the Christian rulers of France to attack Spain, he sent his messenger in 209 AH to Abdur Rahman the Second, the Umayyad ruler of Spain, with the proposal that they join forces against Baghdad. In the process, he hoped to find favour with the rulers at Cordova. Abdur Rahman might, indeed, have been expected to give a cordial reception to Heraclius's messenger, considering that he brought the offer of an alliance against his old enemy. By throwing in his lot with Heraclius, Abdur Rahman could, indirectly, have satisfied any urge he might have felt for revenge. But Abdur Rahman paid no heed to this messenger, even in spite of the latter holding out the hopes to him that, if he joined forces with Heraclius, he would be able to retrieve his ancestral empire (Syria, Iraq, Arabia, etc.) from the Abbasids. After an exchange of formalities the messenger was sent back empty-handed to Constantinople.

Forging a friendship with the enemy of one's enemy in order to satisfy a desire for revenge is simply stooping to baseness. The truly superior man is one who raises himself above such feelings and who enters into relationships with others, not on the basis of friendship or enmity, but on the basis of principle.

Doing everything, but feeling one has done nothing

Mughaira Ibn Shu'aba's fire-worshipping slave, Abu Lulu, had made his murderous attack on Umer, the second Caliph of Islam. When Umer drank some milk, its whiteness flowed from his wounds. "If I had the earth full of gold," he said, swearing a solemn oath, "then I would give it in order to free myself of the Lord's punishment before it descends on me." "When the Muslim were oppressed," Abdullah Ibn Abbas said to Umer, "the Prophet prayed that God may strengthen both Islam and the Muslims through you. You became Muslim and Islam was the stronger for your conversion. Muslims held their heads high with you at their side. You emigrated to Medina and joined in every campaign with the Prophet. When the latter died, he was well pleased with you. You then became the first Caliph's advisor and assistant; he too was well pleased with you when he left this world. Then you were elected Commander of the Faithful. Through you God gave the Muslims prosperity and progress. His enemies capitulated before you. Now he has given you a martyr's death. Blessed are you." "The one who believes the like of you will be deceived," Umer said, and then asked. "Abdullah, will you bear witness on my behalf on the Day of Resurrection?" Ibn Abbas said that he would. Umer then asked his own son, also named Abdullah, to place his face on the ground. Abdullah Ibn Umer raised his father's head and rested it on his own ankle. "No, on the ground," Umer said. Abdullah obeyed. "Woe betide you, Umer," the second Caliph said to himself. "Woe betide the one who gave birth to you, if God does not forgive you." He then surrendered his soul. May God be pleased with him. (Tabrani)

The Effortless Religion

A certain Muslim on his way to Azamgarh from Jaunpur by taxi, got into conversation with a fellow passenger, who happened to be a Hindu. After a few preliminaries by way of introduction, the Hindu said to him, "You used to be a Hindu. Why don't you revert to your earlier religion?" The Muslim replied, "Islam has given us monotheism. What will you give us in return? If you give us idol-worship, just consider that that is something which you yourselves are already giving up. Islam has given us social equality. What will you give us in return? If you are going to give us the caste system and discrimination, then that is something which you are already on the way to abandoning altogether." The Hindu had no reply to this.

Another Muslim, a scholar, was once approached by a Hindu while he was sitting outside his house. The Hindu introduced himself as a Brahmin from Gorakhpur, and when the interchange of greetings was over, he very quickly came to the point: for a long time there had been confusion in his mind. He had consulted several pundits and priests, but his problem had not been resolved. "I am still seeking the path to man's salvation," he said. The Muslim scholar told him that the path to salvation lay in believing in one God acknowledging the prophethood of Muhammad, may peace be upon him, the final messenger of God, and giving thought to the hereafter, as instructed by the Prophet. The Brahmin said at this point that he believed in all three basic principles of Islam.

As they continued to converse, the call to evening prayer rang out – *Allahu akbar, Allahu akbar!* The Muslim said to him, "Come, let's go to the mosque and say our prayers." The Hindu demurred, saying, "How can I say your kind of prayer when I'm a Hindu?" The Muslim replied, "When you already believe in three fundamental tenets (monotheism, prophethood, life hereafter), then you are a Muslim. The Hindu agreed, and after performing his ablutions, he joined the Muslim in prayer. (*Milli Jamiat weekly, New Delhi, April 15, 1989*)

Such incidents show how simple a religion Islam is. This simplicity, is, in fact, its greatest strength. Islam is so simple a religion that it can be easily understood by anyone, and easily explained to others. It is so natural a religion that anyone who is free from complexes will immediately be moved by it.

The only time that there is any obstacle to the spreading of Islam is when there is not normal, tension-free atmosphere in which its voice may be heard and understood. The truth is that if all feelings of strangeness between Muslims and non-Muslims could be dissipated, and the atmosphere freed of tension, Islam would spread of itself, without there being any organized missionary activities. It is only normal relations between the two communities which will favour the spread of Islam.

Other existing religions have so complex a system of beliefs and worship that only highly qualified priests (pundits) can introduce it to others. But the case of Islam is totally different. Islam is an extremely simple and perfectly natural religion: as such, it can be introduced to others by any Muslim whatsoever.

There are thousands of people all over the world who have entered the fold of Islam without any organized efforts on the part of missionaries. It is actually a daily happening. In most cases, in the ordinary course of events, in which they have normal contacts with Muslims, they witness certain of the teachings of Islam in practice, which causes them to feel curious about Islam. Then, after reading the Qur'an, or other books on Islam, they feel so impressed by it that they come to accept it as the only true religion.

The following incident is an apt illustration of this point. It concerns an American woman, Rosanna De La Torre, who, after living the life of a "mod", changed over to the Islamic way of life, thereafter remaining in purdah. The following letter, explaining her acceptance of Islam, appeared in the American journal, *Islamic Horizons*, in December, 1988.

I am an American woman – former high fashion model – born and raised in California. I was brought up as a Catholic and attended Catholic schools all of my life. But even as a child, I rebelled against the teachings of the Catholic Church and yearned for the Truth.

I can recall an incident when I was five. I was told that due to my refusal to bow down to kiss the statue of Jesus, I would end up in Hell. My refusal to worship the statue was interpreted by my parents as pride. But in reality, I did not associate deity to a statue.

My family's misunderstanding of my spiritual philosophy made me feel like an outcast. I imagine that this was very difficult for my family as well, since they are all devout Catholics. My Catholic upbringing made me feel quite confused because it did not make any sense to me. However, this made me more determined to search for the truth. I prayed for God's guidance.

I began my search by studying various religions. I read many religious books day and night. I attended religious retreats and Bible study classes. Yet I was not satisfied. I continued to pray for guidance. At that time I had not heard of Islam, until one day I found myself in a Muslim country – the United Arab Emirates. A woman from Abu Dhabi had undergone surgery in Los Angeles and I was asked to accompany her back to her country. I knew nothing of Islam at the time, nor did I know any Arabic. I was literally struck when I heard the *adhan* (the call for prayer) for the first time.

"Rosanna come to me, for I am the truth and what you have been looking for."

The message of the *adhan* was powerful. It hit my heart like a bolt of lightning. This is what sparked my interest in Islam. From then on I read Islamic books, attended conferences on Islam, and studied the Qur'an with other sisters. *Al-hamdulillah*, Allah, *subhanahu wa ta'ala*, has blessed me with Islam. My thirst has finally been quenched. My entire view of life has been transformed, and I have been blessed with so much peace and happiness.

My prayers were answered and my confusion and struggle since childhood have vanished. Now I'm proud to say that I am a Muslim. I also wear the *hijab* (Islamic clothing). No longer do I dress in a fashion to please the world – only Allah.

May Allah bless all of those who were instrumental in teaching me Islam. May Allah give Abu Dhabi a special blessing for it was there that Islam was introduced to me. In conclusion *la ilaha illal lah Muhammadur rasulul lah*.

Rosanna De La Torre Marina Del Rey, California, U.S.A.

Missionary value is inherent in Islam. It attracts people without its adherents having necessarily made any efforts to bring this about. The only thing Muslims need to do is to put an end to the present atmosphere of tension and hatred by unilaterally adopting the path of patience and restraint. The day this happens, Islam will make inroads into the hearts and minds of the people without any formal effort whatsoever.

23 May 1990

Looking at one's own faults rather than those of others

Rabee' Ibn Khaythima never used to say anything against anyone. Once he expressed his amazement at people who fear God with regard to others' faults, but not with regard to their own.