



Al-Risala 1990

February

Result Oriented Method

In the Footsteps of the Prophet

From the martyrs who sacrificed their lives in the war against Maharaja Ranjit Singh of the Punjab in 1831 right down to the “heroes” of the Ayodhya Babari Masjid issue, all have wasted their energies in what have proved to be exercises in futility. Such actions will ultimately go down in history – if they are recorded at all – as futile, or, at best, idle.

During the thirteen years which the Prophet of Islam spent in Mecca after attaining prophethood, no less than 360 idols had been placed inside the holy Ka’bah. The Prophet worshipped there daily, but never once did he attempt to rid this holy place of idols by smashing them or throwing them out, either alone, or along with his companions. He could certainly have done so, even if only for a short time. But, had he taken such action, he would soon have found himself in direct confrontation with the idolaters of Mecca. Moreover, they would have replaced those idols the very next day. The Muslims, being in a minority, and therefore powerless, could not have stopped them from doing so. But after the emigration, when Mecca had been conquered and Islamic rule established there, the first act of the Prophet was to clear the holy Ka’bah of all idols and to restore its sanctity as a holy shrine.

This shows that the Prophet’s way of dealing with such matters was result – oriented. He believed in refraining from taking any action unless there were clear indications that a positive result would ensue. He never took such steps as would result in futile wastage of time and resources.

The Muslims of today would appear not to have learnt any lesson from this aspect of the Prophet’s *seerah*. Indeed, all activity on the part of present-day Muslims seems to run counter to the method favoured by the Prophet. From the martyrs who sacrificed their lives in the war against Maharaja Ranjit Singh of the Punjab in 1831 right down to the “heroes” of the Ayodhya Babari Masjid issue, all have wasted their energies in what have proved to be exercises in futility. All such attempts on the part of Muslims have culminated in their own ruin. There has been no positive gain whatsoever.

Such ill – judged ventures have never been, and still are not in consonance with the *sunnah* of the Prophet. Such actions will ultimately go down in history – if they are recorded at all – as futile, or, at best, idle. Their, perpetrators cannot in any sense be said to have followed in the footsteps of the Prophet.

3 February 1990

No Muslim should ever consider another Muslim inferior

Hasan, the son of Ali ibn Abi Talib, tells of how, once, when a group of Muslims came to Abu Musa Ash'ari, who was governor during Caliphate of Umar, he distributed largesse to those who were Arabs, but gave nothing to those who were not. 'On learning of this, Caliph Umar wrote to Abu Musa Ash'ari. "Why did you not make an equal distribution between Arabs and non-Arabs? When a man considers certain of his Muslim brethren to be inferior, that is proof enough of his being evil."

3 February 1990

Alarming a Muslim brother is a serious fault

A desert Arab, who once came and prayed along with the Prophet, had his horn taken away from him while he was at prayer. The prayer over, he was alarmed to discover that his horn had disappeared. When he asked what had happened to it, the Prophet spoke warningly to his companions: "One who believes in God and the Last Day should never give another Muslim cause for alarm."

(Al-Haythami)

3 February 1990

Praying for wrong-doers.

A drunkard was once brought before the Prophet, who gave orders that he should be whipped. When the man had left, some of those present fell to cursing him and praying that God should lay him low "Do not give voice to such sentiments," said the Prophet. "Do not join forces with Satan against your brother. You should rather say: 'Lord, forgive him; Lord, guide him:'"

(Ibn Jarir)

A Lesson from Turkey

“I find it hard to believe what I see around me. We made as many attempts as possible to root out Islam from the hearts of the Turks and replace it with western culture. But, astonishingly, the very reverse has happened. We sowed the seed of secularism, but the crop it yielded was Islam.”

Ismat Inunu (1884-1973), a Turkish military officer who supported Kamal Ataturk, was elected President of Turkey on the latter's death on November 10, 1938, and became permanent chairman of the Republican People's Party.

Throughout his rule, the aggressive secularism which had characterized Ataturk's reign continued to be enforced. Secularism, which was one of the famous six principles formulated by Kamal Ataturk, did not, as either ruler saw it, mean simply non-religion. Yet, even with full government machinery being employed to eradicate Islam from Turkey, religion continued to flourish. All measures taken to root it out failed miserably, and Ismat Inuna had ultimately to lift many curbs on religious practices on the occasion of his election, as he feared that without public support he would not be elected.

When Ismat Inunu was upon his death bed, he talked briefly of his experiences. The gist of this account was later published in Arabic by the journal *ai-Waie ai-Isiami* in Kuwait. (Dhul Qada, 1408 Hijra, p. 27). Speaking of repressive measures in Turkey, he said, “I find it hard to believe what I see around me. We made as many attempts as possible to root out Islam from the hearts of the Turks and replace it with western culture. But, astonishingly, the very reverse has happened. We sowed the seed of secularism, but the crop it yielded was Islam.”

The roots of Islam are deeply embedded in human nature: just as nature cannot be stamped out in man, so Islam cannot be stamped out in the human psyche.

Muslims all over the world have devoted their energies to the safeguarding of Islam, but because it has its basis in human nature, this is really unnecessary effort. All those who really wish to serve Islam should expend their energy in the field of *da'wah*. So far as the safeguarding of Islam is concerned, that is a task which has already been accomplished.

5 February 1990

Another Kind of Minority

An article published in the *Times of India* on January 2, 1989, entitled, "Two Nations in India: Western Educated and Others," states that Marx divided people into two groups on the basis of being land owners or landless. This division may be valid for India too, but that is not what has divided the country into "two nations." What has split the country from top to bottom to the general public, some sections of the latter being educated in regional languages, the rest being illiterate. The latter group makes up almost eighty percent of the country's population. The remaining 20 percent are the virtual rulers of the country, 50 percent of the national wealth being concentrated in their hands,

These are the people who have secured all the top administrative posts, who dominate in the field of journalism and in academic and educational institutions. This is the culmination of English education started in India by the British in 1833. Now after a period of 150 years, the English-educated have become thoroughly entrenched in all the best situations that India has to offer. This is a process which even the liberation of the country in 1947 was unable to check.

Abu Hasin relates how Umar used to tell newly appointed officials to make the Quran their greatest preoccupation and to place less emphasis on relating the traditions of the Prophet Mohammad: "And I am with you," he would add.

(Al-Tabarani)

6 February 1990

The Highroad to Success

"Here lies Thomas Jefferson father of the University of Virginia."

Thomas Jefferson (1743 to 1826) was third president of the USA from 1801 to 1809. A man of great erudition, he had a knowledge of English, Latin, Greek, French, Spanish and Anglo Saxon. Historians have rightly called him an "extraordinarily learned man." He studied all the disciplines from philosophy and science to religion and, in his later days, attempted an analysis of the New Testament to discover what Jesus had really said, as opposed to what he is reported to have said.

In his will, Jefferson expressed the desire to have on his gravestone, not an inscription to say that he had been president of America, but simply the words, "Here lies Thomas Jefferson father of the University of Virginia."

Knowledge is the greatest treasures. This is one of the great truths of life. For those who have learnt the importance of knowledge, even the presidentship of the USA will appear lacking in significance.

Knowledge is the only branch of human existence which, having no outer limits, never becomes tedious for man. There is no field in which it cannot be put to use. It gives man a keen awareness which helps him to discover the world, and enables him to understand things in depth. Knowledge, the currency with which you can buy everything in this world, is what sets man's feet upon the high road to success.

6 February 1990

To curse a Muslim is a great sin.

Salmah ibn Akwah says that in the days of the Prophet, if anyone was heard cursing his Muslim brethren, he would be considered to have entered one of the gates of mortal sin.

(Tabarani)

Intellectual Gap

The Prophet Shoayb born 100 years after his illustrious ancestor, Abraham, was sent by God to the people of Madian, who were said to have inhabited the Arabian coast of the Red Sea. For their part, they refused to accept the message of the Almighty from the lips of Shoayb and were subsequently destroyed by a severe earthquake.

The Quran describes Shoayb inviting his community to accept God's message and their saying, "O Shoayb, we understand little of what you say to us." Shoayb, as we know from the *hadith*, was exceptionally gifted as a speaker, expressing himself with great clarity and effectiveness; his congregation, moreover, were believers in the Prophet Abraham, their line of descent having been traced back to him through four generations. Yet, in spite of this, when the Prophet Shoayb brought them the message of monotheism, they said that they could not understand what he had to tell them. Why should this have been so?

The reason was that with the passing of several generations, the people of Madian had become so far removed from the actual teachings of the Prophet Abraham, that an intellectual barrier had been raised between them and Shoayb. This was what had proved an obstacle to their understanding the Prophet's message.

Those who live in greatness other than God's, who do not even find food for thought in the mention of God's greatness, and who are totally engrossed in material benefits, are inevitably strangers to those virtues which will bear fruit only in the hereafter. Those who can think only through their own intellect regularly fail to understand the guidance which revelation can give them. Those who can see only short term convenience are understandably slow in perceiving any blessings which the future may hold in store. Similarly, those who live by the psychology of hatred will deny the importance of the message of love, just as those who know only the language of intimidation and conflict will never grasp the wisdom of adopting a policy of patience and avoidance of strife.

In short, those who ignore revelation, and who can arrive at opinions solely through the human intellect, will repeatedly fail to perceive that which can be perceived by the Divine Mind alone.

A Second Chance

“After a few days in bed time becomes an unimagined luxury. Time to think, time to enjoy, time to create, time at last to express the best and deepest part of human nature. Illness is one of the great privileges of life; it whispers that man’s destiny is bound up with transcendental powers. Illness pares and lops off the outer parts of life and leaves one with the essence of it.”

Dr. Edward Livingston Trudeau, was sent, as a young doctor, to the mountains where he expected to die of tuberculosis. But he did not die. As he lay in bed he had a vision of a great hospital where he could rebuild other sufferers. Flat on his back, he examined patients not as ill as himself. He raised money and laboured until his dream became the great sanatorium at Sranac, near New York, that has helped thousands of tuberculosis patients. Trudeau’s affliction turned an unknown doctor into a physician of world-wide fame.

Eugene O’Neil was an utter drifter with no plan of life until he was twenty-five. A serious breakdown gave him the requisite leisure, he says, “to evaluate the impressions of many years in which experiences had crowded one upon the other, with never a second’s reflection.” It was in the hospital that he first began to write the plays that revolutionized American drama.

Like any major experience, illness actually changes us. How? well, for one thing we are temporarily relieved from the terrible pressure of meeting the world head-on. Responsibility melts away like snow on an April roof; we don’t have to catch trains, look after babies, or wind the clock. We enter a realm of introspection and self – analysis. We think soberly, perhaps for the first time, about our past and future. Former values are seen to be fallacious; habitual courses of action appear weak, foolish or stubborn. Illness, it seems, gives us that rarest thing in the world – a Second Chance, not only of health but of life itself.

Illness knocks a lot of nonsense out of us; it induces humility, cuts us down to size. It enables us to throw a searchlight upon our inner selves and to discover how often we have rationalized our failures and weaknesses, dodged vital issues and run skulkingly away.

Some patients were interviewed in a hospital. They said that they have discovered secret depths in their own life-stream. “After a few days in bed,” writes one of them, “time becomes an unimagined luxury. Time to think, time to enjoy, time to create, time at last to express the best and deepest part of human nature. Illness is one of the great privileges of life; it whispers that man’s destiny is bound up with transcendental powers. Illness pares and lops off the outer parts of life and leaves one with the essence of it.” Suffering is a cleansing fire that chars away much of the meanness, triviality and restlessness of so-called health. Milton declared, “who best can suffer, best can do.” The proof is his *Paradise Lost*, written after he was stricken blind.

(Be Glad You’re Neurotic, by Dr. Louis E. Bisch)

9 February 1990

It is best to work for one's living.

The Prophet, once questioned on the best way to earn a living, replied, "By manual labour."

9 February 1990

The breadwinner should not consider himself superior to others

Of two brothers who lived in the time of the Prophet, one used to sit with the Prophet, while the other used to busy himself earning a living for his family. The latter complained of his brother to the Prophet: "He does nothing, leaving me to do all the work." "Perhaps it is because of him that you find sustenance," replied the Prophet.

(Riyadh as-Salihin)

God Protects the Preacher

Apostle, proclaim what is revealed to you from your Lord: if you do not you will surely fail to convey His message. God will protect you from all men (5:67).

The Prophet was resolved to communicate the word of God to mankind – come what may – and it was determination on his part which elicited God’s protection at every stage in his life. He followed to the letter the Quranic injunction:

Apostle, proclaim what is revealed to you from your Lord: if you do not you will surely fail to convey His message. God will protect you from all men (5:67).

For example, in the twelfth year of his prophethood, the antagonism of the people of Mecca became so intense that it seemed as if the history of Islam was doomed to be lost, new avenues opened to the Prophet’s mission in Medina, whereupon he emigrated to that town and set about establishing a new religious base there. Such was the power of *da’awah* that, within a very short time, “there was not a house belonging to the Ansar (inhabitants of Medina) in which there were not Muslim men and women.”

10 February 1990

Barbaric behaviour is to be abhorred at all times.

Suhayl ibn Amr was one of those taken captive by the Muslims at the battle of Badr. A famous orator of the Quraysh he had been wont to make vehement attacks on the Prophet. Umar asked the "Prophet for permission to break two of Suhayl's front teeth, so that in future he would be deterred from making such speeches. This the Prophet refused, saying: "I will not disfigure him; if I were to do so, God would disfigure me, even though I am His messenger.

(Akhlaq an Nabi)

Quran: The Voice of God

All those philosophers who have attempted – without God – to solve the riddle of the Universe have fallen into the same pitfalls as Marx. As to their thinking, one is struck by how much great intellects could produce such infantile suggestions. They are like so many blind people, trying, gropingly, to identify an elephant and declaring, with finality, that it is four pillars, of four tree trunks.

Recently I have been studying Marxism in considerable detail, and have formed the impression that Marx was a man of extraordinary intellect and spirit; few men of such talent can have appeared in the annals of history. Yet, when he gave his mind to the improvement of the human condition, the remedies he offered were unparalleled in their foolishness. Why should this have been so? The principal reason is that he had made no study of the Quran. He had not gone to that great source of knowledge, without which no sound and definite opinion can be arrived at on the vicissitudes of human existence. It must be conceded that the universe is a mystery and that the only book which can unveil that mystery for us is the Quran. No mere mortal can solve the mysteries of life and the universe without the revelations of the book of God.

Medicines nowadays are usually accompanied by leaflets explaining what illnesses they are designed to cure, how they should be used and what their basic formulae are. But man is in a completely different category. He is born into the world in such a condition that he knows neither what he is nor why he has been put here. No convenient handbook accompanies him, neither are there any sign boards fixed to the summits of the mountains to give him directions or to provide him with answers to his questions. Man has in consequence, formed extraordinary opinions about himself, the earth and the sky, being ignorant of the essential reality of life. When he examines his own being, it appears to him as an amazing accumulation of intellectual and physical powers. Yet, he did not will himself into being, nor did he play any part in the making of himself; Then he looks at the world outside himself and a universe of such extreme vastness, that he can neither encompass nor traverse it, nor can he count the innumerable treasures it contains. What is all this, and why is it there? Where did this world start from and where will it all end? All this existence, what is its purpose? He finds himself completely in the dark on these subjects. Man has, of course been given eyes, but all his eyes can do is see the outside of things. He has intelligence, but the trouble with human intelligence is that it does not even know about itself. Up till now, man has been unable to find out how thoughts enter the human mind or how the mind functions. With such inadequate faculties, he is neither able to arrive at any sound conclusion concerning himself, nor he is able to understand the Universe.

This riddle is solved by the Book of God. Today, the Quran is the only scripture beneath the heavens concerning which we can say with complete conviction that it gives us definite knowledge concerning all the realities of life.

Those who have tried to understand the Universe without recourse to the Book of God are just like those blind people who try to find out what an elephant is by touching different parts of its body. One will touch its leg, and think he has found a pillar. Another will feel its ear, and think it is a winnowing basket. Its back will be proclaimed a platform, its tail a snake and its trunk a hosepipe. But where in all this is the elephant? No matter how these blind people put together their findings, they cannot arrive at the correct answer. This is the eternal predicament of all atheist philosophers and thinkers. In their attempt to fathom the nature of reality in the universe, they have failed to be guided by true knowledge. As a result, their conclusions have been like those of a man, fumbling in the dark, and just hazarding wild guesses as to the nature of his surroundings, without ever truly understanding it.

There have been people in this world who have devoted their entire lives to the quest for Truth, but who, in their desperation at being unable to find it, have even taken the extreme step of putting an end to their lives. And then there have been others who sought the Truth just as assiduously, but who, having failed to find it, settled for a concocted philosophy based on pure conjecture. While the latter, mistaking conjecture for reason, complied their conclusions and presented them to the world as Truth, the former saw speculation for what it was, rejected it, then – anguished at their own ultimate helplessness – opted out of this world of pain.

Both groups were denied True Knowledge, for, in reality, no one can understand the secret of life without the help of the original Keeper of the Secret. True, man has been given the capacity to think and understand. But this capacity is little better than an eye which can see only so long as there is some external source of light. In pitch darkness, this selfsame eye cannot see anything whatsoever. Only when light is switched on, does everything become clearly visible. The human intellect, like the eye, needs the light – the light of God’s revelation – if it is not forever to grope in the dark. Without God’s revelation, we can never arrive at the truth.

A scholarly acquaintance of mine once remarked that learning “is not acquired by reading book after book and possessing a string of degrees from colleges and universities, but consists, in its supreme form, of faith. The Quran likewise states that, “in fact, it is those who fear God who are learned.” Fully agreeing with what he said, I replied, “Karl Marx is considered a ‘prophet’ in the field of economics, but he did not have one whit of the True Knowledge which, today, by the grace of God, you possess.” Faced by a world in which a small number of feudal lords and industrial magnates had taken possession of a disproportionate share of the available wealth, while most people lived in abject poverty, Marx concluded what was at the root of these disparities was the present system of ownership which caused articles to be produced, not for their utility to the producer, but for the profit they would yield when sold to others. This permitted the privileged few to behave as plunderers, heaping up profits and increasing their own

property to the detriment of their fellow men. The remedy proposed by Marx was to abolish ownership rights altogether, and to transfer the means of accumulating wealth to the public sector. The government was then to be entrusted with the organization of a public system of creation and distribution of wealth which should serve the interests of all.

At that particular point in time, it was those who possessed the necessary capital who were in a position to profiteer. The question now arose as to the actual advantage of having the government take complete control of these funds in order to turn them into a public treasury. Would not this new group of people – the members of government – be tempted, as individuals, to do the same as their capitalist predecessors considering that they would also be vested with military and legislative powers? Karl Marx's analysis was that the system of ownership was flamed by jealousy and the opportunities it gave for outright plunder. According to him, such social defects would disappear in a communist society. "Now, tell me," I asked my friend, "was Karl Marx correct in thinking so!" "Certainly not," he replied, "The idea of accountability in the Hereafter is the only thing in this world that can cleanse a man of cruel and selfish tendencies." "That is the real answer to the problem," I said. "For Karl Marx's self-made theory resulted in even greater oppression and cruelty than in the days when political and economic powers were shared by the Czars and the capitalists. Now, under the communist system, the powers of Czars and capitalists have all been rolled into one, and it is the common man who suffers."

All those philosophers who have attempted – without God – to solve the riddle of the Universe have fallen into the same pitfalls as Marx. As to their thinking, one is struck by how such great intellects could produce such infantile suggestions. They are like so many blind people, trying, gropingly, to identify an elephant and declaring, with finality, that it is four pillars, of four tree trunks. It is only when life and the universe are scrutinized in the light of the Book of God that everything appears clearly, in its own true form; then even a person of very average ability has no trouble in understanding the truth of things; at the very first glance, he goes straight to the heart of the matter. To a person who does not possess this Knowledge, however, the universe is but a labyrinth in which he wanders, lost and distraught.

We owe much to the human sciences. Yet the very most that we can learn from them is what the universe is. Till now, they have not given us one iota of knowledge on the subject of why the universe is as it is. Bring together a few gases, minerals and salts, and you have a moving, conscious human being. Put seeds in the ground and up spring plants and trees. Just make a change in atomic numbers and innumerable elements come into being. From just two gases, water – that most precious of commodities is prepared. Steam, produced by molecular motion within water, gives inanimate engines the power to move. The electrons within an atom are too tiny to be seen through a microscope, but they too are a vital source of colossal, mountain shattering power. These are all matters of fact. Scientific events do take place as described. But this *description* is the *outer limit* of our scientific 'Knowledge.'" When we ask why things are as they are, and why things happen as they do, human science gives us no guidance whatsoever.

Human studies bring us face to face with this astonishing universe. And there they leave us. They do not tell us the true meaning of the universe. They do not tell us who causes events to take place. Neither do they tell us whose hand it is what controls the great spheres revolving in the vastness of space. If we wish to have the answers to these questions, it is to the Quran that we must turn. If we want to know how things come into existence, who they are sustained and what their future will be, it is the Quran alone which will tell us. In so doing, it will acquaint us with the Lord and Master of the Universe, opening out before us the sublime nature of His works.

The Quran bears verbal witness to the sovereignty of God. It describes, with great force and clarity, the great, hidden, determinative force at work throughout the entire world, and gives us definitive information on those metaphysical realities which elude the hand and the eye. Not only does it spell out the facts of existence, but it also builds up an astonishing gallery of world-pictures which bring a hitherto unseen world before our very eyes.

The Holy Book not only tells us that God exists, but also paints an incredibly vivid picture of the Being who sustains and directs the Universe. Not only does it tell us about the Hereafter, but describes the Day of judgement so graphically that its horrors become deeply etched on our consciousness. There is a well-known story of a Greek artist who painted such a realistic picture of a bunch of grapes that birds would come and peck at it. Just think that if a painting executed by an ordinary mortal could have such an extraordinary effect, what heights of consummate artistry could not be reached by the Lord of the Worlds in His creation of the Quran? Could any mere mortal truly appreciate the perfection of such art?

The Quran opens with the words: "Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds." This invocation is of great significance. It means: "Thanks be to God, Maker and Sustainer of all creatures in the world." A master and sustainer is one who is filled with profound concern for his subjects and provides for all their needs. Man's greatest need is to know what he is where he has come from and where he will go. He also needs to know where he will gain and where he will lose. If he were to be taken to some region of space in which there was neither air nor water, this would not be such a great calamity for him as finding himself in the world without any accurate knowledge of his origin or ultimate fate.

God has more compassion for His creatures than a father has for his own son. It is inconceivable, therefore, that He should have seen this need on the part of His servants and not provided for it. By means of revelation, He has sent down whatever elementary knowledge a man must have in order to understand himself, and He has sent it in a form which could be conveyed by the human tongue. This is the greatest favour that the Lord has done for His servants.

1. (This is Einstein's theory on the vastness of the universe, but it is only a "mathematical hypothesis." In fact, till now, no human being has been able to fathom the extent of the universe.)

A man who realizes to what extent he needs his Maker's help in acquiring True Knowledge will feel his heart simply overflowing with gratitude to and praise for his Lord, when he sees what favour He has shown him in sending him the Quran. The words: "Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds!" will spontaneously burst forth from him. These are the words of a true servant of God having been inspired in him by God Himself. Even when it is a question of how a man should serve his Lord, he needs the guidance of his Maker. The desire to serve may itself be quite instinctive, but the would-be devotee does not know in what manner to give expression to it. The Quran, however, is explicit on this subject, and even provides him with the exact words he should use. In this respect, the prayers of the Quran are the most sublime gift.

The Quran is not a book in the ordinary, accepted sense of the word. It is more an account of the final struggle to convey the message of Islam. From the most ancient times, God has been sending down knowledge of the truth through His specially chosen emissaries. In the seventh century of the Christian era, it was God's will that the inhabitants of the Earth should be provided with a final definition of True Knowledge, and that a society should be founded on the basis of that Knowledge which would be a source of enlightenment and an example for the whole human race until the Last Day.

In accordance with this aim, God raised His final Prophet in Arabia, and charged him with the mission of propagating this message among the Arabs. Those who came under the influence of his preaching were then set the task of spreading the message throughout the whole world. In spreading True Knowledge, and in establishing a society based upon it, the Holy Prophet was working under divine guidance. God sent His word down to the Prophet, revealing to him what he should preach, and providing him with the proofs he required to make his preaching effective. When his opponents raised objections, he was, therefore, able to give them answers which silenced them. And when those who accepted the message later showed some weakness, he was able immediately to bring them to book.

Moreover, the Quran formulated rules for war and peace, and laid down principles for education and guidance. It gave solace to its adherents in times of adversity and, when they ultimately triumphed, it provided the legal framework on which society could be built anew. Twenty three years elapsed between the beginning and the conclusion. At every stage during this period Almighty God, light of the World, sent guidance in the form of commandments for mankind. These guidelines were later compiled, in accordance with His plan, in a particular sequence. It is this collection which is called the Quran.

The Quran is the most authentic record of the True Call, raised in Arabia by the Final Prophet, who was guided right throughout his prophethood by God Himself. It is a collection of divine instructions, issued for the guidance of this movement at different times over nearly quarter of a century. But the Quran is not merely a historical record. It is a divine proclamation, valid for all time, and cast in historical mould in order to be presented meaningfully to mankind. It is also a permanent proclamation in that it will decide the fate – good or bad – of human beings in every epoch, in accordance with the will of God.

The various parts of the Quran were separately conveyed over a long period of time, depending upon local exigencies. These different portions did not, therefore, come into existence as a mere matter of chance. They were parts of a well-ordered scheme – perfect in its conception – which had its origin in the supernatural world. Because they were sent down as circumstances demanded, they were not originally in any regular sequence. But when the scheme reached its conclusion, it was brought together as a complete whole, according to a definite pattern, which is unrivalled in its consistency. In that way, it is distinctly different from the type of anthology which presents selections of the speeches made by the political leaders of the day.

We can perhaps have a clearer picture of how the Quran was assembled if we imagine the parallel of a factory under construction in India; for which the equipment is being manufactured in some country overseas.

This equipment for the factory has to be manufactured in separate parts in different production units. These parts have then to be loaded on to different ships and sent off to India. Throughout the various stages of its construction, our factory will necessarily appear to the uninitiated as a mass of heterogeneous and incomplete objects. But as soon as all the parts of the equipment brought in different shipments are properly assembled, they will take on the shape of a complete factory, all ready to be put into commission. It was in very much the same way that the Quran was assembled in order to produce a complete and permanent moral code for all human beings. That is why, although formed of such disparate elements, it is of such astounding uniformity. It was because it bore a message urging man to confront hostile environments and to bring them under control, that it had to be revealed in a gradual manner, thus meeting the needs of differing circumstances. Historically speaking it is a compilation of a great diversity of injunctions, but the divine scheme of an Omnipotent and Omniscient God has made it into a well-ordered and uniform whole.

So many books have been written on all branches of learning and on every conceivable allied subject – to date, millions of books have been printed and published – that it would take more than one's entire lifetime to read them all. But the Quran is a book of such a kind that, even if one could study all the books in the world, its guidance would still be a prime necessity. Indeed, one can only truly benefit from the study of other books if one has first gained from the Quran that depth of insight which is at the basis of genuine discernment in all matters of importance. Without the Quran, the human individual is like a ship adrift on a vast ocean without a compass. Just as the ocean liner is lost without its compass, so does man need divine revelation to steer him through the entangled affairs of life. Only one who has received his share of divine light will be able to steer his ship across the oceans of this life.

Those who are denied, or who have denied themselves God's enlightenment will be roughly tossed on the seas of life and are likely to founder on hidden reefs without ever having been able to bring their affairs to a satisfactory conclusion.

The Quran fills that vacuum in human nature which, in all periods of history, has set man at variance with himself. Rousseau said that man was born free, but that everywhere he found "him tied up in chains." I would say, on the contrary, that man has been born a slave, but seeks, in unnatural ways, to make himself a master. Outwardly, man appears to be self-sufficient, but in his innermost self, he is a complex web of needs. In order merely to survive, man needs air, water and the produce of the land. In the same way, in order to sustain the life of the spirit, he stands in need of external support. Man instinctively requires a prop on which he can lean in times of difficulty; he needs one, close to himself, to whom he can bow his head in reverence; One to whom he can address his needs when he is in trouble; One before whom he can prostrate himself in gratitude when happiness comes his way. A man drowning in the ocean needs to have a life line thrown to him. Similarly, a man, adrift in a vast and fathomless universe, needs a spiritual rope to which he can cling. No one, however great, is free of this necessity. It is a vacuum which must be filled. If we fill this vacuum with the Divine Being, we are following the principle of monotheism. But if we abandon God and look to some other for support, we descend into polytheism.

In every period of history, man has been forced to have recourse to one or other of these two props. In ancient times, those who subscribed to monotheism depended on one God for support and, today, they still depend upon Him and Him alone. But the direction of those who subscribe to polytheism has kept changing. Ancient man, and many people, even in more recent times, worshipped countless objects, ranging from the bright stars that shine in the sky to trees and stones and other randomly chosen objects. Today, attention tends to be focused not so much on such objects as on material progress and political power. The welfare of the nation, too, becomes an idol to be worshipped, but only in so far as it can be made to yield power and material benefits. Such then are the people's gods, fashioned by them specifically to fill the aching void in their hearts. But even with all this, people still need an ultimate destination in life's struggle which will transcend the plane of pure materialism. They still need someone or something to love. They still yearn for One in whose remembrance they can warm their hearts and revitalize their spirits. But just as idols made of stone have never given any true support or help in the past, neither do the more resplendent idols of today, for, fragile and ephemeral as they are, they do not give a nation any real strength. Throughout the annals of human history, nations have been made or broken, depending upon their adherence (or lack of adherence) to the Quran.

The Germans, for example, idolized their nation, but far from standing by them, it brought them to the point of destruction in World War II. Italy and Japan did likewise, but their respective idols could not save their countries from becoming the graveyards of the people. Britain and France also made idols of their material resources, but even then, the empires of both countries rapidly shrank, the sun finally setting on the British Empire, an empire on which it was said "the sun never set."

The Quran shows us where strength in this world really lies, giving us a handhold on a rope that never breaks. Without this, we have no real support in life. Moreover, it is only through our attachment to God that human beings can retain their hold on the cord that binds each to each.

The Quran explains that it is this One God alone who sustains us throughout our lives here on this earth. Through Him our hearts are set at ease, for it is He who provides true warmth in Life. He rescues us in times of peril, assists us in the hour of need. All power rests in His hands: honour and glory will be the rewards of any nation who looks to Him for support, while only disgrace and humiliation will be the lot of those who abandon Him. To know this is to hold the key to all the treasures in life. He who possesses this key gains all; he who loses it, loses all.

We attach great importance to the scientists who discovered electric and steam power, thus providing human civilization with opportunities for progress. But the greatness of the reality which this Book lays before us is immeasurable. It does not just give us knowledge of machines, but of the human beings for whom all these machines have been made. It tells us of Man, and Man in turn learns from it – the secret of successful living.

The Quran, first and foremost, is the Proclamation of God. Just as every enlightened sovereign has a Constitution, so is the Quran the Constitution of the Almighty, Master of Man, King of kings. To put it very simply, the Quran is a book of directions, showing man the right path to tread. It is a Light which guides his faltering steps, giving him timely reminders of God's will, awakening his sleeping nature and conveying the Lord's admonition. It is a book that, in giving him the moral sense to distinguish right from wrong, cures him, and his society, of all ills. In that sense, it is a book of wisdom, full of every expression of correct understanding. More, it is a book of laws, laying down for us the very foundations on which to build and organize society. In short it provides everything that man – as an individual and as member of society can ever need. Without this, man can never be the gainer, no matter how hard he tries.

How can a man gauge whether he has actually developed a relationship with god or not? There is only one answer to this question: by turning his eyes inward, and judging how his inner self stands related to the Quran. For how one relates to the Quran is a true reflection of one's relationship with God. The degree to which a man adheres to the tenets of the Quran will be a sure indication of his attachment to his Maker. If the Quran is the book he values most, it goes without saying that god is dearer to him than any other. But if some other book is held in greater esteem by him, then the most important person in his life will- be its author, and not his Maker. Just as it is impossible to find the true God anywhere but in the Quran, so is it impossible that, after finding God, any book other than the Quran should be more precious to him. For the Quran is the book of God. It is the means through which God converses with His servants, the living representatives of God on this earth. It is a scale on which man's devotion to God may be measured.

When man fears to stand alone, without support, in an unfathomable universe, the Quran sets his mind at rest by making his destination clear to him, and directing him towards. In the Quran man thus meets his Lord, beholds His promises and rejoices in His good tidings. In this way, the Quran fills a man with sufficient conviction to define his place in the world. Giving concrete form to the instinctive feelings

which swirl in man's subconscious about his Lord and Master, the Quran sets his feet well and truly on the path of submission to Him. In so doing, it brings him closer to God.

But it is not enough, in seeking to ascertain God's will, just to read through the Quran: one has rather to become deeply engrossed in it. It is only when one has formed a strong degree of attachment to the Quran that one has access to all the advantages it offers. One has to be bound to the Quran as one is by a contract – or *ta'ahud* (the word used by the Prophet) in order to reap its benefits. This awareness of the greatness of the Quran, and consequent adherence thereto, cannot come about at second hand. That is, one may hear a commentator or man of letters discourse upon the Quran and may form a high opinion of the speaker and his attainments, but that is not the way to form a genuine attachment with the Quran itself. A real bond with the Quran can be forged only if one reads the Holy Scriptures one self, thus having direct access to the contents. Only then will its wisdom be engraved upon one's memory. Only then will it be appreciated for what it actually is.

This is not a mere figment of the imagination. It is supported by basic psychology. For example, it may be contended that the difference between cotton wool and stone is merely relative, that, in fact, they are the same thing, both in the last analysis being accumulations of the same kind of electrons. But this contention is purely academic. In the real world, cotton cannot be thought of as anything but soft, and stone as anything but hard. It is not superficial or abstract definitions which determines the impression one shall have of the matter at hand, but the knowledge that one gains of it by direct, personal experience.

23 February 1990

Never delay the payment of wages.

Abdullah ibn Umar records the Prophet as saying, "Pay a labourer his wages before his sweat has dried.

(Ibn Majah)