



NON-VIOLENCE AND PEACE-BUILDING

I N I S L A M

MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

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Contents

Introduction	4
1. Peace is Possible, But Only Through the Right Way	7
2. Avoid Confrontation	9
3. Unilateral Action for Peace	16
4. Reform Yourself Instead of Confronting Others	21
5. Nature's Lessons for Conflict Avoidance	25
6. Water from Stones: Conflict-Resolution through Gentleness	29
7. Learn from History	32
8. The Quranic Way of Conflict-Resolution	38
9. Desist from Intolerance	45
10. Avoid Conflict by Ignoring the Lesser Evil	50
11. Communal Egos and Inter-Community Conflict	54
12. Responding to Provocation through Patience	59
13. The Solution to Communal Conflict	64
14. The Sensible Way to Respond to Provocation	69
15. Reflections on Communal Riots	76
16. Nipping Inter-Community Conflict in the Bud	82
17. Lessons for Conflict-Resolution	94
18. Practice What You Preach	103
19. Make Yourself Eligible, Don't Make Demands	110
20. Discover Opportunities in Challenging Situations	118
21. Consciousness of the Hereafter	122
Index	124

Introduction



In our closely interlinked world, peace and prosperity for everyone crucially depends on harmonious relations between communities and countries. Today, countries and communities can no longer afford to live in isolation from each other. Because we are now all now so closely interdependent, peaceful and mutually-beneficial relations between different religious communities have become indispensable. We simply cannot afford to resort to conflict in order to resolve disputes.

Today, the world is crying out for peace. Islam positively encourages Muslims to work for peace and for harmonious relations between them and people belonging to other communities.

Given the serious threat to peace posed by terrorism perpetrated in the name of Islam, there is an urgent need to articulate and promote a positive, meaningful approach to conflict-prevention, conflict-resolution and peace-building. This is what this book seeks to do. Although it touches on all three aspects, its central focus is on the first aspect—conflict-prevention. After all, if conflicts are prevented at the very outset, violence can be done away with. Amicably negotiating differences before they degenerate into a conflict is, this book suggests, the most sensible way for us to handle conflicts.

A common thread running through these essays is the assertion that one should differentiate between Islam and Muslims: one should judge Muslims in the light of Islamic teachings and not *vice versa*. Islam, as I show, citing Quranic passages and examples from the life of the Prophet Muhammad, provides inspiration and appropriate guidance for peaceful relations between Muslims and other communities and for non-violent conflict-prevention and conflict-resolution and peace-building methods and approaches. Contemporary instances of Muslims resorting to violence in the name of their religion is, I stress, in complete contrast to Islamic teachings.

The approach to conflict-prevention, conflict-resolution and peace-building outlined in this book is based on the Quran and the life of the Prophet. It draws lessons from these sources that can be applied to efforts to negotiate differences and conflicts at all levels—from between individuals to between communities and entire countries. The book also cites many empirical examples from the particular Indian context, but the lessons these provide are of universal relevance.

According to the Creation plan of God, everyone is free. But when an individual is free, he can also misuse his freedom. As a rule, whenever people find themselves in problematic situations—and life is full of such contingencies—there is a tendency to make an immediate response. This kind of instant reaction, however, serves only to add new problems to the existing ones. Reaction unleashes an unending chain of

action and reaction. The results of following this path are disastrous.

Whenever a difficult situation arises, the right course is not to take immediate action but to stop and reflect patiently on the possible consequences of one's response. Those who choose to react by making an immediate emotional response can only cause an exacerbation of their difficulties. On the other hand, those who adopt a well-considered approach will certainly find ways and means of converting problems into opportunities for improving the situation that they are faced with. There is great wisdom in engaging in this sort of result-oriented planning. This is what this book suggests.

I pray that God makes this book a means for bringing about the needed transformation in people's minds and helps them understand the importance of peace.

Wahiduddin Khan

New Delhi, July 18, 2016

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1

Peace is Possible, But only through the Right Way



If your house is on fire, you will immediately get into action to try to put out the flames. Now, there are two ways of doing this. The first way is to act according to the principles that the Creator of this universe has set for dousing a fire. The other way is that, overwhelmed by emotions, you try out some other method, a method of your own making.

You are free to choose either of these two methods. But the results of the two are not the same. God has set pouring water as the method for putting out a fire. You cannot extinguish a fire by pouring petrol on it. If you do that, it will only add to the fire.

The same holds true for other challenges in life. If God has made patience the secret of success in this world of His, you cannot attain success through impatience. If God has made positive action the means to arrive at a particular result, you cannot hope to get there through fiery speeches, angry rhetoric and inflammatory statements. If God has established pragmatism as the

solution to worldly problems, you cannot get what you want through emotionalism. If God has placed the secret of reform and progress in the silent transformation of individuals, you cannot hope to progress by stirring up agitation and strife. If God wants us to get ahead in life by acknowledging our mistakes, you cannot advance by trying to prove others to be criminals and yourself to be faultless. If God has established a rule that if you want to pluck a rose, you can do so if you steer clear of the thorns, you won't be able to obtain the rose if you start fighting against each thorn that you come across.

This world is a place for us to be tested. This is why every human being has been given the gift of free will. But this freedom is of action alone, and not that of obtaining results or the fruits of our actions. Undoubtedly, we are free to do whatever we like to, but we have not been given the power to acquire the results that we seek. You are free to choose whether to dive into the sea or not, but if you do not know how to swim, you do not have the power to stop yourself from drowning! Please remember that this world is merciless when it comes to accepting useless excuses, no matter how beautifully you might seek to embellish them.

The fact of the matter is that we do not live in a world of our own making. Instead, this world has been made by God. We can obtain what we seek only if we live in accordance with the principles that God has put into place that govern the universe. If we deviate from these principles, we cannot get anything positive at all. The devastating results of the merciless violence engaged in by terrorists is ample proof of this.

2

Avoid Confrontation



The year after the Battle of the Trench, in 628 C.E., the Prophet Muhammad had a dream. At this time, he was in Madinah. In the dream, he saw himself and his Companions visiting the House of God in Makkah. His Companions were very pleased to hear this, for it meant that, after a lapse of six years, they would soon be going to Makkah and visiting the Kabah.

In accordance with this dream, the Prophet set out for Makkah with 1400 of his Companions. When they reached Ghadir Ashtat, they heard that the news of their journey had reached the Quraysh¹. Indignant at the idea of the Muslims visiting the Kabah, they had amassed an army and vowed to prevent the Prophet and his Companions from entering Makkah, although it was contrary to Arab tradition to prevent anyone from visiting the Kabah. The Prophet was acting under divine inspiration: perhaps that is why he remained calm when he heard of the Quraysh's reaction. He learnt from

1 The Quraysh were a powerful tribe that controlled Makkah. The Prophet was born into the Banu Hashim clan of the Quraysh. When the Prophet began preaching Islam, many members of the Quraysh stiffly opposed him.

informers that Khalid ibn al-Walid, intent on blocking the Muslims' path, had advanced with two hundred cavalymen to Ghamim. On hearing this, the Prophet changed route, deviating from a well-frequented path to a little-known and arduous route, which led him to Hdaybiyah. In this way, he avoided clashing with Khalid's army.

This is how the historian Ibn Hisham¹ in his biography of the Prophet describes these events:

“Who can show us a path not occupied by the Quraysh?” the Prophet asked. Someone volunteered to do so and then proceeded to guide the Muslims by a route which led through arduous, rocky and mountainous passes. The Muslims had great difficulty in crossing these passes, but when they had done so and emerged upon an open plain, the Prophet called on them to seek forgiveness of God and turn to Him. This they did, and the Prophet said that this was the word of forgiveness which the Israelites had been called upon to utter, but they had failed to do so.

This was obviously a trying time for the Muslims, but they had to face their trial with patience and forbearance. This was the path laid down for them by God. Even the slightest hesitation to follow that path was to be considered a transgression, for which forgiveness had to be sought. That is why the Prophet urged his followers to repent and seek forgiveness for any weakness or irritability they may have shown at that

1 Abu Muhammad Abd al-Malik bin Hisham (d. 833 C.E.) edited the biography of the Prophet Muhammad written by Ibn Ishaq.

taxing time. Difficulties were to be faced with fortitude. No impulse was to cause one to deviate from the path of God.

In order to survey the situation, the Prophet made a halt at Hdaybiyah, which is situated nine miles from Makkah. From Hdaybiyah he sent one Kharash ibn Umayyah on camelback to inform the Makkans that the Muslims had come to visit the House of God, not to do battle. On reaching Makkah, Kharash's camel was slaughtered, and attempts were made to murder him as well but somehow he managed to escape and return to Hdaybiyah. The Prophet then sent Uthman to appeal to the Makkans to refrain from hostilities and tell them that the Muslims would return quietly to Madinah after performing the rites of Umrah¹. The Makkans paid no heed and took him prisoner. Later, Mikraz ibn Hafs, along with fifty men, attacked the Muslims at night, raining stones and arrows. Mikraz was captured, but no action was taken against him: he was released unconditionally. Then, as the Muslims were praying in the early morning, eighty men from Tanim attacked them. They were also taken captive and then allowed to go free unconditionally.

Lengthy negotiations with the Quraysh ensued. Finally, a truce was agreed upon between the two sides. At first sight, this truce appeared to amount to an outright victory for the Quraysh and defeat for the Muslims. The Prophet's followers could not understand how, when God had given them tidings of a visit to

1 A minor pilgrimage which, unlike Hajj, need not be performed at a particular time of the year, and which entails fewer ceremonies.

the House of God, the Prophet could have agreed to return to Madinah without performing the visit. They would be allowed to come the following year but would have to leave the Makkah after a stay of only three days. Humiliating clauses such as this, exacerbating as they were for the Muslims, were all accepted unquestioningly by the Prophet. It seemed to be an acceptance of defeat.

The Quraysh deliberately acted in an aggressive manner in order to offend the Prophet. They wanted to provoke him into initiating hostilities so that they could find an excuse for fighting him. To prevent a visit to the Kabah was in itself quite contrary to Arab tradition. Moreover, it was the month of Dhul Qadah, which was one of four months considered sacred in Arab lore, in which fighting was prohibited. The Quraysh wanted to fight the Muslims, but they did not want to be accused of having desecrated the holy month. They wanted to be able to lay the blame at the door of the Muslims, who were few in number at that time and not even equipped for battle. There the Muslims were, stranded some 250 miles from home, right on the border of the territory of their opponents. It was a perfect opportunity for the Quraysh to unleash a savage onslaught on the Muslims and give full vent to their antagonism.

The Quraysh did everything they could to provoke the Muslims into starting a fight, but the Prophet ignored every provocation; he scrupulously avoided falling into their trap. The situation was so grave that Abu Bakr¹ was the only one of the Companions not to feel that

1 Abu Bakr (573–634 C.E.) was a senior companion of the Prophet Muhammad and became the first Caliph.

in accepting the seemingly humiliating peace terms they had bowed before the aggressor. The Companions were even more astonished when a verse of the Quran was revealed which referred to the agreement as a 'clear victory'. "What kind of victory is this?" one of them protested. "We have been prevented from visiting the House of God. Our camels for sacrifice have not been allowed to proceed. God's Prophet has been forced to turn back from Hudaibiyah. Two of our persecuted brethren, Abu Jandal and Abu Basir, have been handed over to their persecutors."

Yet, it was this humiliating treaty that paved the way for a great Muslim victory.

The Treaty of Hudaibiyah appeared to be a capitulation before the opponents of the Muslims but, in fact, it gave the Muslims an opportunity to consolidate their position. The Prophet accepted all the Quraysh's demands, in return for a single assurance from them—namely, that they would cease all hostilities against the Muslims for ten years. Continual raids and threats of warfare had prevented the Muslims from pursuing constructive missionary work. As soon as the Prophet returned from Hudaibiyah, he intensified missionary work in and around Arabia, the groundwork having been done beforehand. Now that peace prevailed, the message of Islam started spreading rapidly. The Prophet also turned his attention to building up the influence of Islam in Madinah. The culmination came within only two years of the Treaty of Hudaibiyah: the Quraysh surrendered without even putting up a fight. There was

no further barrier now to the Prophet's triumphant entry into Makkah.

The deliberate imposition of a humiliating retreat from Makkah had paved the way for a great victory.

People nowadays tend to resort to violence on the slightest provocation from their opponents. When the losses of meaningless war are pointed out to them, they seek to justify themselves by saying that they were not the aggressors and that their opponents had forced them to take to fighting. "We didn't fight!" they retort. "It was those people who did it! They conspired against us to make us fight."

Such people do not know that "not to fight" is not simply that if no one fights you, you do not fight with anyone. Rather, "not to fight" means that if someone comes to fight you, still you should not fight with him. Non-violence does not mean remaining peaceful so long as no one is acting violently towards you. Rather, it means to refrain from violence even in face of violence. If someone seeks to provoke you, you should not allow yourself to get provoked. If someone conspires against you, you should render the conspiracy ineffective through wisdom and silent, positive action.

To fight one's enemies is no way to succeed in life. Only by avoiding conflict can one consolidate one's strength. Then alone will one be able to overcome one's foes. To fight at the slightest provocation and ignore the need to quietly build up one's own strength is to condemn oneself to destruction. Such conduct can never lead to success in this world of God. The

Prophet achieved success by pursuing a policy of non-confrontation; how, then, can his followers succeed by pursuing a policy of confrontation? How can they be called his followers when they are blind to his example?

3

Unilateral Action for Peace



Irrespective of what people might think are the causes of communal riots in India, the fact is that this violence can be ended only when Muslims end their role in it. If they do so, they can make others amenable to ending their role in such violence, too. It is only through such unilateral action that communal violence in the country can be finally stopped. And it is for the Muslims to take this step.

As shown in the previous chapter, at Hdaybiyah the Prophet of Islam agreed to unilateral action and thereby put an end to the violence of the Quraysh. In the same way, Muslims must resort to this sort of unilateral action by completely refusing to engage in any form of violence. But if, on the other hand, they wait for other communities to first stop their violence, they can keep waiting forever.

What should Muslims do to stop communal violence? There is only one answer—and that is, they must not get provoked in the face of provocation. The common cause of all cases of communal violence is that Muslims are unaware of a very important principle—that in life there are certain problems that simply have to be ignored.

However, instead of ignoring these problems, Muslims become greatly agitated when they are confronted with them, and the logical result of this is communal violence.

In every society, there are issues that are best left ignored. To get entangled in them will only magnify them even further. This is a basic fact of life. One simply cannot avoid it. That is why the Quran gives great stress to patience and the avoidance of conflict.

Not ignoring matters that are best left ignored is a terrible blunder that Muslims make. The only solution to communal violence is for Muslims to completely avoid confrontation with others. If they do this, communal violence can soon come to an end. But if they do not, and, instead, they continue with their present policies, this violence will continue unchecked.

Whenever Muslims talk about communal violence, they try to do just one thing: engaging in legalistic and logical analysis to try to find out which community is responsible for the violence. This is a completely wrong approach, because there are certain things in life whose rightness or wrongness is not something to be debated about. All that needs to be considered in such matters is how to find a realistic solution to the problem.

When the Hudaibiyah Treaty between Muslims and the Quraysh was being written up, the Prophet told the person who was penning the document, "Write that this is what Muhammad, the Prophet of God, has decided". But the representative of the Quraysh, Suhayl ibn Amr, protested against this, insisting that the document

should mention the Prophet simply as ‘Muhammad ibn Abdullah’ (‘Muhammad, son of Abdullah’), because the Quraysh did not accept him as a prophet. And so, in response, the Prophet told the man who was writing the document to mention him simply as ‘Muhammad ibn Abdullah’.

Had the Prophet made the matter into a question of right versus wrong, he would never have accepted this demand. But he did not make this an issue of right and wrong. Rather, he saw only its practical aspect. Since at that time there was, in practical terms, no other solution, he agreed to leave out the words ‘Prophet of God’ and to have himself referred to in the Treaty document simply as ‘Muhammad, son of Abdullah’.

The issue of communal violence and its solution is similar to this in an important sense. In accordance with the above-mentioned *sunnah* or practice of the Prophet, it is incumbent on Muslims not to make the issue of communal violence a dispute over of ‘right’ versus ‘wrong’. Instead, the only thing they should consider is what the practical solution of the issue is and then adopt it. If Muslims do not stop seeing the issue in terms of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, their attitude will only indicate their particular mindset, rather than their devotion to the Truth. Devotion to the Truth lies in adopting the *sunnah* or practice of the Prophet of God, and not in any other approach or method.

Today, Muslims everywhere are engaged in fighting, even on petty matters, and in this way are destroying themselves. They imagine that in doing this they are engaging in *jihad*. But it is actually nothing of the sort.

Through this behaviour of theirs, they are only proving that they completely lack an exalted purpose or goal in life. A person who is inspired by an exalted purpose in life will always ignore petty issues. Because Muslims have lost consciousness of an exalted purpose to live for, they have also lost their tolerance. And because they have become a people without a goal, they have lost the strength to overlook minor inconveniences for the sake of being able to carry on with efforts for achieving a higher purpose in life.

Communal violence is the price that the Muslims of India are paying for their religious degeneration. Although the religion sent by God is one, as far as Muslims' real life is concerned, there are two types of 'Islam': one, the 'Islam of pride', and the other, the 'Islam of humility'. Religious corruption and degeneration is another name for the 'Islam of pride'.

When Muslims are on the path of true Islam, they follow the Islam of modesty or humility. The fear of God takes away from them any sense of superiority. Because of this, all their unnecessary conflicts automatically come to an end. In the face of the prejudice of others, their God-consciousness makes them humble and modest. This acts like water in the face of the fire of other people's prejudices. And it brings violence to an end.

In contrast, when Muslims become bereft of God-consciousness, they become driven by the 'Islam of pride', which leads them to imagine that they are superior to others. This psychology creates all the differences and disputes that Muslims are today beset with. When every

person starts thinking that he is superior to everyone else, harmony and unity are simply impossible. The only way to cement unity is for some people to agree to become less than others. Where everyone thinks he is superior to everyone else, unity is out of the question. When the psyche of pride and superiority leads Muslims into confrontation with other communities, it can easily escalate into communal violence.

If Muslims are to put an end to both their internecine differences and their violent conflicts with other communities, they have to completely abandon the 'Islam of pride' and, instead, adopt the 'Islam of humility'. If they do not agree to do this, they must stop accusing others of being wrong, because whatever others may be doing to Muslims is the price Muslims are paying for their own corrupt understanding of Islam, which, in this age of their degeneration, they continue to cling to.

4

Reform Yourself Instead of Confronting Others



The Quran tells us (4:79):

Whatever good befalls you, it is from God: and whatever ill befalls you is from yourself.

Elsewhere, the Quran says (42:30):

Whatever misfortune befalls you is of your own doing—God forgives much—[...]

From this we learn that God has made this world in such a way that every person/group must face the consequences of his/its own actions. Whenever you confront a problem, you should search for its cause, not outside, but, rather, within yourself. This cause is always internal, located inside you.

Two examples from the time of the Prophet of Islam clearly illustrate this point. One is related to the defeat Muslims faced in the Battle of Uhud, in the year 625 C.E. The other to the heavy losses that Muslims incurred in the Battle of Hunayn, in the year 630 C.E. The Quran refers to these battles, and in both cases it places the entire responsibility for whatever happened

on Muslims themselves, rather than calling for protests against those who were opposed to them—the Quraysh of Makkah.

With regard to the Battle of Uhud, the Quran (3:152) relates that the Muslims' weakness owed to their internal differences and their not obeying their central command. It tells us that this is what made them face defeat at the hands of their opponents in this battle. Similarly, the Quran (9:25) relates with regard to the Battle of Hunayn that the losses that Muslims faced was because of their pride. Here, too, the cause was identified within the Muslims themselves, rather than without.

In both these cases, it might have been possible to place the entire blame for whatever happened wholly on the Quraysh instead and to say bad things about them. But when, in the Quran God commented on these events, He placed the entire blame on the Muslims alone.

This fact stands as an eternal testimony to how Muslims should think in similar situations: instead of identifying the conspiracies of others, they should engage in introspection. Removing their own weaknesses, they should try to move ahead. This is the way to succeed.

To further clarify this point, it is instructive to reflect on the following letter sent by Umar ibn Abdul Aziz (d. 644 C.E.), regarded as the fifth Pious Caliph of the Muslims, to a subordinate officer, Mansur ibn Ghalib, whom he had sent on a military campaign against some opponents. He advised Mansur to remain established in

God-consciousness, because, he wrote, the fear of God is the best form of preparation, the most successful way and the strongest power. The best way to save oneself from one's enemies, he explained, is to save oneself from sin, because sin is even more dangerous than the wiles of the enemy. Victory over opponents owes to the latter's sinfulness, even if they are more numerous and better in terms of preparation. If the Caliph's army, which was smaller than its opponents, were also to fall prey to sinfulness, they would not be able to gain victory over their opponents. Umar ibn Abdul Aziz advised Mansur to fear his own sins even more than he feared anyone's enmity.

The fact is that this world is God's world, not man's world. In this world, one has power only over one's self. In reality, no individual or community has any power over any other individual or community.

This means that in this world whenever you get anything, you actually get it from God, even if it appears to reach you through somebody else. Similarly, whenever something is taken away from you, it is actually taken away by God, even if it appears that there is a person behind the loss you have incurred. An intelligent person is one who in both situations turns to God.

In the face of the treatment that some Muslims face today in some places, they typically respond in just one way: by screaming and protesting against what they brand as 'oppressor' people. This is a completely un-Islamic approach and method. When everything that happens is from God, then, undoubtedly, whatever Muslims are facing is also from God. This is why the

only way to respond to this situation is for Muslims to turn to God. They should try to find out what errors they have made with regard to God because of which they are facing this punishment. In this way, they can rectify their mistakes, and once again make themselves eligible to receive God's blessings.

If stones begin to rain upon you from above and you start looking below to find out where they are coming from, you will never succeed in saving yourself from being hurt by them!

5

Nature's Lessons for Conflict Avoidance



Animals face two big challenges: finding food, and defending themselves. Animals have enemies in the animal world, and so every animal has to arrange for its protection. The diverse methods that animals use to protect themselves hold great significance for human beings, because these methods are natural methods, bestowed by God. Nature directly teaches these methods to animals. It is as if animals are students who have received this training in the school of Nature. Their ways of acting and reacting are lessons that Nature has schooled them in. These methods testify to the Creator who made them.

Consider some examples in this regard:

1. Elephants and tigers are among the largest of animals. If an elephant and a tiger clash, it can cause the death of both. They are well aware of this, and so they always try to avoid each other. It is very rare that they allow themselves to enter into a conflict. A war in which the contending parties do not have the power to eliminate each other always

ends in mutual destruction. Tigers and elephants know this, and thus they act accordingly.

2. The same thing holds true for bulls. If two bulls fight, it is very unlikely that one can finish off the other. And so, bulls have a fascinating way of avoiding such pointless confrontation—by establishing their respective territories. If two bulls enter the same locality and confront each other, they bang against each other's horns to symbolize an agreement to divide the territory into two separate zones, one for each. After this symbolic confrontation, they draw back and carefully observe the line they have demarcated between themselves. And so, it is very rare that two bulls fight with each other.
3. There is a certain insect which, if you touch it, curls up and freezes. This is the method it uses to protect itself from its enemies. When it sees that its enemy is almost on top of it and that escape is impossible, it suddenly becomes completely motionless. Its enemy thinks it is dead and so ignores it. When its enemy leaves the scene, it runs away.
4. Animals that live in burrows constantly face the threat of enemies entering their homes. Because their homes are small, they cannot run away from their front door if an intruder enters. That is why such animals make another tunnel, at the rear of their homes, which they can use to escape in an emergency situation. When they see a predator entering their burrow, they run out through this

rear door. In this way, they save themselves from their enemies.

These diverse methods of protection that Nature has schooled animals in hold important lessons for humans. For humans, too, the best policy to adopt *vis-à-vis* their opponents is to save themselves from directly clashing with them, and, instead, to try to move ahead by avoiding confrontation. Your opponent should not get the opportunity to feel that you are interfering in his domain. If you happen to confront your opponent, you should appear to be inactive, saving oneself from his aggression. Or, you should keep yourself carefully confined to your own domain, and, in this way, convince your opponent that you will not cause him any harm. Along with this, you should also adopt measures that will enable you to foil your opponent's aggressive plans in a possible emergency situation.

Animals did not invent these above-cited methods of protection by themselves. It was God who taught these to them. These methods have divine sanction. They are not a form or expression of cowardice. Rather, they indicate a very necessary pragmatism. They teach us humans that we, too, should avoid unnecessary confrontation with others, and, instead, should focus on our own growth.

Some animals roam about in search of fodder; others in search of their mates. Some busily run around building their houses. Some hunt for food for their babies. While engaged in these and other such tasks, they may suddenly confront an enemy. If they enter into a fight with them, the work that they had set out to do

would be completely disrupted. That is why all animals abstain from direct confrontation with their enemies, unless they find themselves in a situation where they feel absolutely compelled to do so. In order to continue their own constructive work, they simply avoid conflict and move ahead.

Animals use this approach to dealing with opponents on the basis of instinct. Humans must use the very same approach, but based on conscious choice and awareness.

6

Water from Stones: Conflict-Resolution through Gentleness



Several years ago, some Russian scientists conducted an experiment and discovered that it is possible to squeeze water out of stones! The experiment entailed extracting rocks from a few metres under the surface of the earth, placing them in metal containers, and then subjecting them to an immense pressure of ten tonnes per square centimetre, which caused drops of water to come dripping out.

This is a sign of God, providing us with valuable lessons about the amazing potentials and possibilities that God has kept for us to access in this world. A rock is a hard, dry object, but water can start to drip from it when a certain action is performed on it.

A certain Muslim man once built a house for himself. His neighbour was a contractor by profession and belonged to another community. There was a plot of land in between their houses, and soon they

both started quarrelling over it. Each claimed that the land belonged to him. The contractor perceived that he could not manage to get his way by himself, and so he approached some people of his community and instigated them against the Muslim man. Soon, an angry crowd gathered outside the Muslim man's house, making a great hue and cry.

The Muslim man stepped out of his house, aware that the crowd was bent on creating trouble for him. He knew that if he got even slightly provoked, the crowd could easily kill him and burn down his house. Addressing the men, he said: "Who is your representative? Please come forward so that we can talk."

Four or five leader-like men stepped out. The Muslim took them into his office. When they had comfortably sat down, he said to them, "This is a very small issue, and it can very easily be solved. As you know, the rightful ownership of a property is indicated in the official documents. By examining the relevant papers, you can find out who the rightful owner of any bit of land is. I will hand over my documents to you, and you can also take the contractor's documents. Please examine both sets of documents, and after that I would be ready to accept whatever decision you arrive at."

On hearing the Muslim man speak like this, the leaders of the crowd suddenly completely forgot their anger. "This is a very reasonable man!" they remarked in surprise. "He has allowed us to decide the issue on our own!"

The men spent the next few days examining the

documents. Finally, they decided in favour of the Muslim.

These men were, to begin with, like rocks, but when they were pressed, as it were, by the Muslim man's noble behaviour, drops of water then began dripping from the 'rocks'!

A psychologist very rightly remarks, "When one's ego is provoked, it turns into super-ego, and the result is breakdown." The fact is that there is a 'devil' inside every human being. Ordinarily, this 'devil' lies fast asleep. Your intelligence lies in letting this 'devil' in others remain sleeping. If, however you act foolishly, you will awaken this 'devil', and then it will go about doing everything that it can against you. No matter whose hidden 'devil' you awaken through your foolishness—he could be someone from your community or from another; he could even be your own brother or other close relative—you will have to face the same sort of bitter consequences.

7

Learn from History



In the past, God appointed the Jews as possessors of divine scriptures. The Jews' past provides important lessons for the Muslims' future. It is for this reason that the initial chapters of the Quran contain many verses about the history of the Jews. In the corpus of Hadith¹, it is narrated that Muslims will also face all the sorts of degeneration that the Jews faced: "You will surely follow in the ways of those before you, span by span and cubit by cubit, so much so that if they were to enter an iguana's hole, you would follow after them." (*Sahih Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim*)

All the communities that are given divine scriptures always face the same situation. The principles for their success as well as of their failure are also one and the same. In this sense, the history of the Jews is the history of every other people who were given divine scriptures. This history of the Jews provides Muslims the very same lessons as it does for the Jews themselves.

At the time of Moses, God began showering His blessings on the Children of Israel—the Jews—and

1 The corpus of reports of the deeds and sayings of, or attributed to, the Prophet Muhammad.

this culminated in His giving them the opportunity of entering Palestine and occupying it. The history of the Jews after this is one of continuous rise and fall—of being rewarded for good deeds and punished for sins.

The period of the prophet Samuel inaugurated an independent kingdom of the Jews. In 604 B.C.E., King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (in modern-day Iraq) occupied Syria and marched till the border of Palestine. Out of fear, Jehoiakim, the Israelite king of Judah, was forced to pay him tribute. After a while, Jehoiakim decided it would be more beneficial for him to ally with Egypt. And so, he revolted against the Babylonian ruler and stopped paying him tribute. This angered the latter, who began making preparations to invade Palestine. In the meanwhile, Jehoiakim died, and his son succeeded him to the throne. The Babylonian army attacked Palestine, captured the new Jewish king, and took him back with them to Babylon. The Babylonian king appointed a relative of the former king of Judah in the latter's place.

At this time, the Prophet Jeremiah appeared among the Children of Israel. He advised the Children of Israel not to try to fight against reality and to accept the existing political system. He exhorted them to stop confronting the existing government and, instead, to work in a constructive manner. But then, false leaders emerged among the Children of Israel. They issued fiery, emotionally-driven appeals, trying to stir up the Children of Israel with romantic promises. As a result, the Children of Israel fell prey to false hopes and wishful thinking. Because of this, they could not

adopt pragmatic or realistic methods. They rose up in revolt, because of which Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, once again attacked Palestine. After a siege that lasted several months, he entered Jerusalem, where he completely destroyed the Jewish Temple.

This happened in 587 B.C.E.

The Jewish king Zedekiah tried to flee, but he was captured, along with many of his men. A large number of Jews were also taken into slavery. They were taken to Babylon to work as slave-labourers.

The Jews (who were the *muslims* or 'submitters' of the ancient period) faced many such difficult times in their history. They considered all these events to be a result of the oppression by other people. But God knew this to be entirely different. God attributed all these events to the Jews themselves. They were divine punishment for the corruption and degeneration that had set in among the Jews, and not, in fact, an expression or result of oppression by others, unlike what the Jews thought.

A study of Jewish history reveals that in the period of their degeneration, a number of leaders emerged among them, driven with false dreams and wishful thinking. These people have been termed as 'false prophets' in the Bible. The Bible relates that they used to stir up the Jews with their talk about the Jews' glorious history, feeding them on the wine of false pride. They greatly exaggerated the status of the Jews, while denigrating their enemies. With their emotionally-driven rhetoric, they fed Jews with dreams of an imaginary world. This made the Jews turn extremely unrealistic. In place of

realistic efforts, they were led to think that emotionally-driven efforts would solve their problems.

At this very time, some people emerged among the Jews whom the Bible tells us were true prophets. They exhorted the Jews to be realistic. They pointed out their internal weaknesses. They told them that they would gain nothing from their false pride, and that in God's world, truthful action has value, not false pride and wishful thinking. But the Jews did not like what they said to them. Instead of listening to them, they were attracted by men who fed them with false hopes and imaginary expectations. Stirred up by the latter's rhetoric, the Jews were provoked against their enemies. But this reaction only resulted in their defeat and further degradation.

This facet of Jewish history is described in considerable length in the Bible, in the Book of Jeremiah (Chapters 27-30).

From these details in the Bible we learn several things:

1. The Bible attributed the responsibility for the repeated defeat and destruction that the Jews faced in the period of their decline entirely to the Jews themselves. In the pages of the Bible that tell of this history, there is no ranting and raving against the oppression and conspiracies of other communities. Rather, the Jews themselves were told that whatever they were faced with was only a consequence of their having angered God. The situation that they had to confront was a divine warning, rather than strife and persecution engineered by their human foes. And so, what the

Bible suggested to the Jews was that they should put all their efforts into pleasing God, only after which they could regain their lost position.

In other words, the secret of whatever happens to people in this world must be searched for in divine principles laid down for this world, rather than attributing them to the conspiracies of other people.

2. In this period of the Jews' degeneration and decline, they were clearly forbidden from what could be called 'jihadist action'. Instead, they were exhorted to try to harmonise with the then dominant communities. Instead of confronting others, they were told to focus on their own progress.

This suggests that in such circumstances, jihad is the work of internal construction, rather than an externally-oriented action.

3. In the period of their decline, poets and preachers emerged among the Jews, seeking to stir them up in the name of ethnic or communal pride and glory. They fed them on grandiose dreams and unrealistic hopes, and instigated them to resort to counter-productive activism. The Bible castigated this as strife and corruption. These men talked in terms of what appeared to be positive change. But in actual fact, the path that they sought to lead the Jews on could only result in their destruction. The Bible termed these people as wrong, and exhorted the Jews to be realistic. It told them to avoid confronting the existing rulers, and to

focus, instead, on their own internal reform and construction. The Jews were told that if they did this, one day God would reverse their fortunes.

From this we learn that when people are afflicted with all sorts of moral weaknesses, to stir them up with lofty-sounding promises and fiery rhetoric is absolutely senseless. No prophet of God ever did such a thing. This is the method of false leaders, not genuine ones.

4. When a people falls prey to moral corruption and then God issues warnings to them, the intention behind this is that they should turn to God in repentance. But if in such a situation, instead of doing this, false leaders react by blaming ‘oppressors’ and targeting, accusing, complaining and demonstrating against them, it will be tantamount to interfering in God’s scheme. Such men will be guilty of the crime of seeking to divert people’s focus from God in a different direction.

The troubles that people face at the hands of others are intended to make them engage in introspection. But false leaders quickly convert them into an excuse for condemning others. These troubles should actually be seen as a means to make people turn to and focus on God. But false leaders use these events to divert people’s attention onto, and against, other people. This, without doubt, is a serious crime. Unlike what such false leaders claim, in no way is this appropriate guidance for their people.

8

The Quranic Way of Conflict-Resolution



Today's Muslims may know much about the divine rewards for reciting the Quran. But they are unaware of the immense rewards for following the Quran in their own lives, although this is precisely the highest sort of reward that is associated with the Quran. The fact is that the solutions to all problems are contained in the Quran, but these solutions can work only for those who agree to accept them without any mental reservations.

Uthman ibn Affan¹ narrates that the Prophet remarked that the best person is he who studies the Quran and teaches it to others (*Sahih Bukhari*). According to another *hadith*, Umar ibn al-Khattab² narrates that the Prophet said that God will elevate some people through His book—the Quran—and will bring down some others through it (*Sahih Muslim*).

Such *hadith* reports indicate that the definite solution

1 Uthman ibn Affan (576–656 C.E.) was a companion of the Prophet Muhammad and became the third Caliph.

2 Umar ibn al-Khattab (583 CE–644 C.E.), was companion of the Prophet Muhammad and became the second Caliph.

to all sorts of problems that Muslims might face is to obey the Quran. Muslims can and will gain protection by following the commandments of the Quran. This is a sure way for them to save themselves from all sorts of trials and afflictions.

If you ponder on the Quran, you will discover a basic guiding principle—that good and evil are not the same, and that in a seemingly difficult situation, one must respond using the best possible method. As a result of this, your enemy will turn into a dear friend.

As the Quran (41:34) puts it:

Good and evil deeds are not equal. Repel evil with what is better; then you will see that one who was once your enemy has become your dearest friend [...]

Elaborating on this Quranic verse, Ibn Kathir¹ reports that Abdullah ibn Abbas² said:

God has commanded Muslims to exercise patience when they are angry, to express tolerance in the face of others' ignorance, and to exhibit mercy in the face of something that is wrong. When people act accordingly, God will save them from Satan, and He will soften the hearts of the enemy for them, so that they become friends.

1 Ismail ibn Kathir (1300–1373) was a scholar of Quranic exegesis and as well as a historian.

2 Born in 618-19 C.E., Abdullah ibn Abbas was a Companion of the Prophet and is regarded as one of the most authoritative commentators on the Quran.

In this regard, Abdullah ibn Abbas, as reported in the *Tafsir al-Qurtubi*¹, is also said to have remarked:

If someone behaves in an ignorant way with you, you must respond to his ignorance with tolerance.

The principle that the above-mentioned Quranic verse (41:34) reveals is also the solution to the problem of inter-communal violence. That is to say, instead of reacting to provocation, one should adopt a positive approach and method. This is the only solution to the problem of violence between communities. There is simply no other effective way. If there were, the problem would have been solved by now, because in the past all these other methods have been tried but they have miserably failed.

The only way to end communal violence involving Muslims is for Muslims to stop thinking in communal terms, and, instead, to adopt the Quranic way of thinking. Muslims are very well aware of the rewards for reciting the Quran, but they do not know about the rewards for obeying the Quran. The Quranic commandments are actually laws of nature, on the basis of which God has established the system that governs this world. It is by following these laws that the cosmic system is able to function perfectly. Similarly, it is by adhering to these laws that human beings can order their lives in the appropriate manner.

In the light of Quranic teachings, one can derive

1 A famous commentary on the Quran by the noted scholar al-Qurtubi (d. 1273 C.E.).

certain key principles of conflict-avoidance and conflict-resolution:

Firstly, the need to properly investigate something that we happen to hear before taking action on it.

The Quran (49:6) says:

Believers, if an evil-doer brings you news, ascertain the correctness of the report fully, lest you unwittingly harm others, and then regret what you have done [...]

Often, people get provoked and resort to violence on the basis of mere hearsay and rumour, without investigating the veracity of what they have heard. Sometimes, what they hear is completely baseless, but by the time they realize this, it is too late: they have already taken to violence, resulting in much loss of life and property.

Secondly, the need to avoid useless things. The Quran (23:3) says that one characteristic feature of the believers is that they 'turn away from all that is frivolous'. This Quranic verse tells Muslims that when foolish people do something wrong out of ignorance, they should not get provoked. They should avoid confrontation and conflict.

If Muslims adopt this Quranic method of avoidance of conflict, it will cut the very roots of inter-communal conflict. This is because the cause of many cases of inter-communal conflict involving Muslims is that Muslims fail to avoid reacting through confrontation in the wake of provocation. They get quickly agitated and take to fighting others.

Take, for instance, the case of a riot that broke out several years ago in a town in western India. This is a quite typical case. The riot would definitely not have happened had Muslims adopted the method of conflict-avoidance mentioned above.

The riot started when some non-Muslims burst crackers while Muslims were praying in a mosque located in a non-Muslim dominated locality. Because this happened just outside a mosque, the Muslims took it to be absolutely intolerable. They got very agitated. Finally, this resulted in a deadly riot.

According to the Quran, what they should have instead done was to simply avoid reacting to the provocation and refrain from confrontation.

Thirdly, the need to abstain from ignorant prejudice and fanaticism. In the context of the Treaty of Hudaibiyah, the Quran (48:26) relates that when the Prophet's opponents displayed their ignorant prejudice against the Muslims, the believers did not respond in the same way. Rather, they remained established in God-consciousness. It was because the believers did not behave as their opponents did that the Treaty of Hudaibiyah was possible. God termed this treaty as a 'clear victory'. Two years after this treaty, the whole of Arabia came under the sway of Islam.

If Muslims were to act according to this above-mentioned Quranic verse, all of a sudden their history would take a completely different turn. It would also put a complete end to communal violence. In many cases, communal riots break out because, in the face of

the ignorant and prejudicial ways of others, Muslims react in exactly the same way. This escalates the conflict, and then it escalates into rioting.

For instance, in 1980, the town of Moradabad in Uttar Pradesh, in northern India, was rocked by a deadly riot. It all started when a non-Muslim's marriage procession wound its way through the streets, with music and dancing. The procession happened to pass by a mosque. Muslims rushed out of the mosque and tried to stop it, claiming that it was an affront to the mosque. They tried to get the non-Muslims to take a different route, but the latter did not agree. This confrontation then rapidly turned into a deadly riot.

In this case, Muslims reacted to the fanaticism of others by expressing the same sort of prejudice and fanaticism themselves. But if, instead, they had adopted the method that the Quran recommends, their response would have been totally different. And then, Moradabad would have been saved from going up in flames.

According to a *hadith* contained in the *Musnad* of Imam Ahmad, Abdullah ibn Masud¹ says that the Prophet related that evil cannot be wiped out through evil. Rather, evil can be wiped out through goodness.

This *hadith* expresses a divine principle. The entire world is governed by this principle. And that is that in this world, every evil can be put an end to only through goodness. Had this not been the case, evil would have completely overwhelmed the world.

1 A Companion of the Prophet, Abdullah ibn Masud (d. 650 C.E.) was one of the first to accept Islam.

Contrary to what Islam tells us to do, Muslims are today engaged in trying to put an end to evil by resorting to evil themselves. They want to end provocation by resorting to provocation, to end hate by resorting to hate, to end enmity by resorting to enmity, to end communal prejudice by resorting to communal prejudice. All of this is completely against divine principles. Such efforts can never succeed. If Muslims insist on continuing this way, they will have to set up an imaginary world of their own liking, because they certainly cannot succeed in the real world in this manner.

9

Desist from Intolerance



The Quran (30:60) relates:

[S]o have patience [O Muhammad]! God's promise is true; let not those who will not be convinced make you discouraged.

Consider a new tree. Based on the law of nature, this tree will start bearing fruit after a few years. But if some impatient people start demanding that the tree start yielding fruit after just a few months, they will destroy the tree with their impatience. Because of their behaviour, the tree will not be able to manifest its natural potentiality.

Similar is the case with developments that manifest themselves in the social sphere. Those on the path of truth will be repeatedly faced by provocations from people who are opposed to them. They will have to encounter numerous challenges, both mental and physical, that threaten to provoke them. This is a very delicate period for them. In such a situation, if they lose their patience and peace of mind and get entangled in the controversies that their opponents are bent on raking up, their real task will remain unfinished and

they will start quarrelling with their opponents about unnecessary issues. By turning intolerant, they disobey God; and people who disobey God can never receive God's help.

There are many different ways in which one can lose one's patience and become intolerant. For instance, by not being willing to tolerate even a minor damage or inconvenience for the sake of a higher purpose or goal and to start fighting about this. Or, for instance, by not ignoring issues that might hurt one's sentiments and by getting worked up because of them. Another way in which people might express this lack of tolerance is if, instead of working for their own social and economic development, they start making demands on others and take to protesting, demonstrating and engaging in other such forms of negative political action. Or, they may zealously rush ahead and take seemingly very daring steps without having developed their own character. Or, they may give inordinate importance to the challenges that they will necessarily have to face in society and then get provoked and start fighting with others. They may develop unrealistic expectations of others, and when these expectations are not met, they may get angry and start quarrelling with them. They may not take into account human weaknesses, and so when they see a weakness in someone, they may create a big hue and cry about it. They may refuse to negotiate with the political authorities, and, instead, start fighting with them. And so on.

The principle of not allowing yourself to lose your patience and tolerance is based on great wisdom. If you

violate this principle in the desire for obtaining the opportunities that you do not possess, you will only lose the opportunities that you presently enjoy. If you launch an agitation to topple the political authorities who allow you to work in the non-political field, the latter will perceive you as their enemy, and, using the power at their disposal, can easily suppress you. If your opponent is strong and commits some excesses against you and you fail to tolerate this, deadly violence will break out, which will play havoc with your entire life.

Such are the perils of allowing yourself to lose your patience and tolerance.

Whenever you want to start some work, you will almost inevitably have to face complaints from others. You will have to contend with stiff opposition. Now, if you give importance to every complaint and every sort of hurt or damage caused to you by your opponents, you will inevitably start fighting with them. You will leave aside your real task, being so taken up in opposing them.

Suppose those who are on the path of truth do not abide by patience and tolerance and somehow still manage to acquire dominance in society. In such a situation, because of their lack of preparation, they will not be able to maintain this position for long. They will start fighting among themselves. If they had not focused on the task of purifying and developing their character, after grabbing political power they will promote strife and conflict, not peace and progress.

If people on the path of truth have not developed the

firm conviction that the only thing of importance for them is truth and that all other matters are secondary, they will become engrossed in other issues if they acquire dominance in society. In this way, they will give birth to new social problems. If they have not risen above the psyche of revenge, after acquiring political power they will start killing off their former enemies, causing their societies and countries to become so weak that it will become impossible to manage them. If they have not developed the power of tolerance, they will unleash war against every person or group who might hurt their egos. If, stirred by their emotions, they lose control of themselves, in the name of ending one evil they will only succeed in producing many more.

Whenever you face an unpleasant situation at the hands of someone, you generally think just one thing: "This man is my enemy! I must suppress or fight him!" But this is a very wrong way to estimate a person. God has placed great flexibility in the human psyche. It is a proven fact that human beings do not remain in one state all the time. Rather, they keep on changing. To exercise tolerance means to wait for the manifestations of human possibilities that emerge from this ever-changing nature of human beings. Islam stresses the importance of patience precisely because one should wait for a future period to come to pass when the latent potentials hidden inside people can manifest themselves.

Some people go to extremes in their opposition to others by turning aggressive. But in this world that God has made to test human beings, your opponents too,

have the freedom to act, just like you do. The best way to respond to them is to clear your own way ahead by exercising patience and wisdom, instead of becoming agitated by others and reacting angrily. A person's lack of patience and wisdom is his enemy's deadliest weapon. The most foolish person is one who hands over this weapon to his adversary himself. The same holds true for entire communities.

10

Avoid Conflict by Ignoring the Lesser Evil



U mair ibn Habib ibn Hamasha, a Companion of the Prophet, instructed his son, saying:

O my son! Keep away from the company of foolish people, because being in their company is a sickness. He who keeps away from the foolish obtains happiness. He who befriends the foolish repents. He who refuses to tolerate the lesser evil of a foolish person will have to tolerate the bigger evil of such a person. And if among you someone wants to engage in calling people to what is good and exhorting them to abstain from evil, he must be prepared to face difficulties, and he must have faith that he will receive reward for this from God. This is because he who has faith that he will be rewarded by God will not face any harm when faced with difficulties.

If a foolish person throws pebbles at someone, the latter may immediately react by doing the same thing to him. However, the best answer in such a situation is to exercise tolerance. By tolerating ‘pebbles’ you will

prevent the situation from turning into a conflict that involves 'rocks'. The fact is that not to be willing to tolerate the lesser evil of a foolish person will always mean that you will have to accept having to face a much bigger evil instead, sooner or later.

Once, a wrestler belonging to a particular community went to a wrestling ground that belonged to another community and entered into a match with a wrestler from that community. After the match was over, he began complaining that he had been cheated. Now, even if he was right, what he should have done was to simply accept the situation that he was faced with. Then, after preparing himself well, he could have returned again, after some days, for a second match. And this time, no one's cheating or deception could have caused him to lose. But if, on the other hand, he refused to accept having been cheated and was bent on taking revenge for it, say by attacking the wrestler from the other community, it would turn into a full-fledged communal riot, and then the entire town would have gone up in flames. The price of not tolerating a minor wrongdoing in a wrestling ground would have been enormous destruction of life and property.

Similarly, suppose a group of people belonging to a particular religious community is worshipping together in their place of worship. Just then, some people from another community throw something into their worship space that these people consider unclean. This is, undoubtedly, an unpleasant situation. If this group of worshippers tolerates this unpleasantness, the matter will rest there and will soon die out. But if,

on the other hand, they react by becoming angry and confrontational, the situation is bound to snowball into a riot, leading to loss of precious lives and terrible destruction that cannot be compensated for, even over a period of many years.

Suppose a group of people belonging to one community pass by the place of worship of another community while playing musical instruments and singing songs. The people worshipping inside feel disturbed. If they tolerate this minor inconvenience, after this temporary disturbance the situation will return to normal. But if, instead, they get worked up and try to stop the procession, the processionists may refuse to budge, and then the whole matter may escalate into a deadly communal riot. People who could not tolerate having to listen to musical instruments being played outside their place of worship for just a few minutes will then be forced to tolerate witnessing the sight of their houses going up in flames and of rivers of blood flowing all around them.

People very easily take to advising others and pointing out their errors because this gives a tremendous boost to their ego. It makes them imagine that they are right and that others are wrong. But the fact is that this work of advising others and admonishing them is only proper for those who are ready to pay the price for it. And the price for this is to be willing to exercise patience in the face of difficulties.

If you scold someone and criticise him for his faults, he is bound to get angry. So, when faced with a situation where someone is provoking you, you must become as

soft as snow. But if instead of doing that you react by getting angry, you will be guilty of behaving in the same way as him—and that is not something that God wants. You can save yourself from getting angry when faced with difficulties that you are bound to encounter when you try to advise and admonish others only if you do this work just for the sake of God. If you want to make people God-conscious, you must first be God-conscious yourself. If you get angry in reaction to the difficulties that you face at the hands of others, you only prove that you seek reward for your actions from fellow human beings, not from God. And when you fail to reap the reward that you expect from fellow human beings, you get angry. On the other hand, if you hope to receive the reward for your deeds from God, you will not mind at all if people praise your work or criticize it.

11

Communal Egos and Inter-Community Conflict



There was once a man who was very strict with his children. He used to constantly scold them. No one had ever heard him speaking kindly with them. His children were so terrified of him that they did not have the courage to even open their mouths in front of him. As soon as he entered the house, they would fall silent and run away.

One day, the man climbed up to the terrace of his house. When he got there, he saw, to his shock, one of his sons perched high up on an electric pole. The boy's kite had got stuck on the electrical wire and he was trying to get it down by climbing the pole. As soon as the boy saw his father, he was terrified. But, instead of shouting at the boy as he normally did, the man spoke to him very gently.

"Son, what are you doing there?" he asked. Then, very lovingly, he requested the boy to slowly climb down the pole.

Later, the man related this incident to somebody,

explaining, “I smiled and spoke in a very gentle manner with my son because I feared that if at that delicate moment I scolded him, he would fall down and injure himself, or worse. This delicate situation compelled me to speak to him sweetly, contrary to my habit.”

This example has valuable lessons, not just at the individual level but also at the social level. It applies to entire communities, too, just as it does to individuals. If you are conscious of the sensitiveness of a situation and are very careful and concerned about it, your awareness, care and concern will compel you to exercise tolerance, rather than to get agitated and angry. It will impel you to avoid confrontation, and in this way you will be able to move ahead. Instead of getting stuck in a debate about who is ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, you will focus on trying to solve the problem you are confronted with.

If, however, you are not conscious of the delicateness of the situation you are confronted with, you will, start screaming at seeing your son perched atop an electric pole, as it were, even if this means that because of this he will fall down and break all his bones.

The whole of human history testifies to the fact that if a person is sincere about something, his approach and behaviour will be different, totally contrary to that of a non-serious person. Only a sincere person will be willing to realize the significance of the issues he is faced with. Only such a person will be able to properly appreciate the delicateness of a situation that he finds himself placed in. In contrast to a sincere man, an insincere man will refuse to accept any evidence or argument that does not suit his way of thinking. He

will use every means to rebut this evidence, raising all sorts of unrelated and irrelevant debates in order to obfuscate matters. If someone convincingly answers his arguments, he will set off a new debate, simply in order to refuse to change his stance. Such a person is unwilling and unable to see things as they are.

Once, I met some Muslims from a certain town. Some days before this, a small inter-communal riot had erupted in that town. As is my wont, I spoke about the need to act with patience. But the men said, “In our town, Muslims did not do anything provocative. It was people from the other community who unnecessarily started fighting with us.”

I asked them how the riot had started.

They replied, “In our town, there is a mosque. Just next to it is a place of worship of our non-Muslim brethren. When we placed a loudspeaker in the mosque to announce the call to prayer, the non-Muslims began ringing bells at the time of their prayers. The sound of the bells could be heard inside the mosque. And so, we told these people, ‘Please don’t ring your bells while we are praying.’ But they did not listen to us. When we repeatedly asked them to stop ringing their bells, they got angry. And that is how the riot started.”

I said to the men, “What Shariah-related issue is this that you insist that during the Muslim prayer-time a non-Muslim should not ring a bell in his place of worship? Such a thing is mentioned neither in the Quran nor in the Hadith. Neither have any of our scholars of Muslim jurisprudence made any such claim. In fact, not a single

Muslim ruler ever issued a command that when it is time for the Muslims to pray, non-Muslims cannot play their trumpets or ring their bells in their places of worship. This being the case, why did you get so agitated about this matter? If someone rings a bell, let him do so. It doesn't cause any disruption for Muslims in their prayers. Nor has the Shariah made it incumbent on us to ensure that bells aren't rung during our prayer-time."

The men did not accept my point, however. Although they had no answer to the evidence that I had cited, they kept harping on their argument very zealously.

In India, most communal riots are triggered off by such small incidents. What is the reason for this? When the Islamic Shariah has not ordered us to stop non-Muslim processions passing by our mosques with their music and singing, and when it has not commanded us to prohibit non-Muslims from ringing bells in front of our places of worship, why do Muslims want to do so?

The reason for this is entirely communal, not religious. As a result of the politics of a hundred or more years, Muslims have turned such things into a supposed symbol of their communal honour. They have made them a question of their honour. If a non-Muslim procession playing music passes by their mosque, they take it as a personal insult. And if they manage to stop the procession, they imagine they have boosted their community's prestige.

This is an entirely un-Islamic approach. God and His Prophet certainly do not prescribe this. It is only their own egos that instigate some Muslims to behave in this

manner. Their egos want to provoke them against other people, people who Muslims should be inviting to God. These Muslims' egos stoke the fires of communal hatred and make sure that they can never relate to others as Muslims should, because when Muslims and others are divided by intense suspicion and hatred, the task of *dawah*, inviting others to God, which Muslims should engage in, can never happen. Needless to say, far from being rewarded by God for stoking communal conflict, it is very much possible that by giving their communal foolishness a so-called 'Islamic' label, such Muslims will be punished by God.

12

Responding to Provocation through Patience



Suppose a situation arises that threatens to turn into violence between two communities. There are two ways to respond to this. One way is by exercising patience. The other way is to get agitated. If you get agitated, it is bound to only further escalate the conflict and degenerate into violence. On the other hand, if you control yourself and exercise patience, the problem will be nipped in the bud and soon finished off.

Here, I would like to cite some instances to illustrate how by exercising patience, one can douse the flames of communal conflict.

Once—this was way back in the 1960s—it so happened that a Muslim man beat a cow that belonged to a non-Muslim. This was in Lucknow, in the vicinity of the Dar ul-Uloom Nadwat ul-Ulema, which is one of India's largest *madrāsas* or Islamic seminaries. The cow was badly injured, and it soon died.

When the non-Muslims of the area heard that a Muslim had killed a cow, they were enraged. A large

crowd of angry people gathered and began heading towards the Nadwa, raising slogans.

This was a very delicate situation. The crowd could easily have set the Nadwa on fire, and then the whole of Lucknow could have been rocked by rioting. The authorities of the Nadwa hurriedly got together to decide what to do. They agreed that there was just one way to respond to the angry crowd—by handing over to them the killer of the cow. There was no other way to save Lucknow from going up in flames. And so, the Nadwa's authorities approached the man who had slain the cow. They explained to him how delicate the situation was, and about the very real possibility of the Nadwa, and, indeed, the whole of Lucknow, being rocked by communal violence. And this, they said to him, was all because of him. If only he were to give himself over to the angry crowd, things would cool off. "We know this may be very dangerous for you," they explained, "but we hope that you will receive God's help and that nothing will happen to you."

The man agreed to their proposal. He came out and stood before the angry crowd. He said to them, "I have killed your cow, and so, you can do whatever you like to me. However, I must say that I did not strike the cow with the intention of killing it. I only wanted to chase it away. It was just by chance that it died."

When the man appeared before the demonstrators and they heard what he had to say, their anger cooled off. The men who were earlier bent on angry confrontation simply agreed to let the matter rest by taking from the killer of the cow the cost of the animal. The money was

given to them at once, and the problem was amicably solved.

Consider another instance of how patience and avoidance of confrontation can prevent an unpleasant situation from degenerating into violence between communities. Many years ago, a group of non-Muslim men were found slaughtering a pig in the bushes behind the Hadi Hasan Hall in the campus of the Aligarh Muslim University. It appeared that they planned to throw the flesh of the pig in the university campus, in the hope that this would instigate Muslims and that this would then lead to communal riots in the university area. It so happened, however, that some Muslim students spotted what these men were up to. They at once informed the university authorities, who, in turn, called the police. The police rushed to the scene and arrested the men. In this way, because the local Muslims responded to a provocative situation in a wise manner, without taking to confrontation and violence, Aligarh was spared the threat of being rocked by communal riots.

These instances show how conspiracies can be defused and rendered ineffective by responding to them through wisdom, rather than through confrontation. They illustrate how even when there is every possibility of a communal riot breaking out, it can be completely avoided if people act wisely. No matter how sensitive a situation may get, it contains within itself the possibility of being peacefully resolved. The necessary condition for this is patience. No matter how unfavourable a situation may be, the wise response is to avoid getting agitated. If you lose your patience and get worked up,

you will lose your reason. And if that happens, you will not be able to perceive things properly and make the right moves that you need to in order to defuse the situation.

Another necessary thing in such situations is the need to consult others. When decisions are taken on the basis of mutual consultation, they involve ascertaining the views of many people. In this way, the decisions that are taken would be based on a wider perception of matters. Mutual consultation also enables you to benefit from the opinions of people who can see things in a more balanced way. This makes the decision that is arrived at potentially more meaningful, effective and realistic, unlike a decision that is made by people who are heavily prejudiced one way or the other.

In a provocative situation that can easily escalate into violence between communities one must desist from making one-sided allegations. Instead, one must exercise generosity and willingly acknowledge one's mistakes. It generally happens that when people see their opponents refusing to acknowledge their mistakes, they get very agitated and seek to take revenge on them. But if your opponent sees that you openly and wholeheartedly admit your own mistakes, their hearts will melt. They will suddenly warm up to you. They will begin to feel that by your acknowledging your mistakes they have given you the 'punishment' you deserve and that there is no way that they could or should further punish you.

In the face of a provocative situation that threatens to degenerate into a communal riot, you must never try to take the law into your hands. In a country that

enjoys the rule of law, if you take the law into your hands you will make yourself a criminal. In this way, you will create two sets of enemies for yourself—one, the person who has done something wrong and from whom you want to exact revenge; and the other, the governmental authorities. If you hand over the matter to the authorities to handle, you extricate yourself from the controversy, as it were, and leave the authorities and the person who is bent on creating trouble to handle it between themselves.

True and effective effort is always silent. It does not make a hue and cry. If in the face of an unpleasant situation you start shouting and agitating, it only shows that you are overwhelmed by your emotions. People who are driven by their emotions cannot take any meaningful steps. Meaningful and effective action emerges from serious reflection and contemplation. Making a hue and cry in the face of a difficult or challenging situation renders a person completely incapable of seriously considering and evaluating matters. This rule about conflict-avoidance applies as much in the case of individuals as it does in the case of entire communities.

13

The Solution to Communal Conflict



One day, I spotted an Urdu poster in a Muslim locality in Delhi. In bold letters, it declared:

*Indian Muslims, wading through blood and fire,
demand to know!*

Once, while on a trip to Europe, I came across a young man who was enthusiastically distributing a booklet in Arabic and English. On the very first page were the following words:

India has become a vast slaughterhouse for Muslims!

Now, it is true that in some places in India, some violent incidents have taken place. But to generalize like this for the entire country is absolutely false. It is against reality. And those who want to build their case on the basis of claims that go against reality can definitely not earn God's help.

Another thing to be noted in this regard is that a sensational way of speaking, writing and thinking robs people of their realism. God has made the system on the basis of which this functions entirely on the basis

of realism. Here, in this world, if you want to obtain a certain result, you will have to be entirely in harmony with the principles and laws of nature. Given this, people who derive great pride and pleasure in falsely blaming others are bound to be bereft of realism. They will have no status left in the real world. People who keep blaming others for their woes always prove to be a cause for strife and conflict. The government of the country where they live, or the people who live around them, may do 99 things properly, but if the government or other people falter on just one thing, they whip up such a furore as if that is the only thing they know how to do!

The writer Robert Multhoff says something very interesting. He writes:

He who likes to generalize generally lies.

If you make a generalization on the basis of an isolated event, you are giving that exception the status of a general rule. For instance, something happens as a matter of chance but you claim that it is a general phenomenon. If you easily resort to making such generalizations, you will soon come to inhabit a false world, a world of lies. And you will never be able to find Truth or to arrive at the right solutions to your problems.

Often, newspapers come out with bold headlines: 'Communal Riots in India!', 'Riots in Aligarh!', 'Riots Break Out in Hyderabad!' Despite being true, such news reports are always also false. They tell the truth, but not the whole of it, because no communal riot ever engulfs the whole country or even the whole of

a city or town. But the language and style that some of our writers and commentators use create the wrong impression that the whole country or an entire city is torn apart by communal violence.

Whenever communal violence breaks out, it does not happen all across the country or even in every part of a particular city. In India, such violence happens more in the north than elsewhere. Likewise, in the city of Aligarh, inter-communal violence sometimes breaks out in the Old City, but rarely, if ever, in the relatively new Civil Lines area. Similarly, the older parts of Hyderabad are more vulnerable to communal violence than the newer parts.

Our leaders are engrossed in the falsehood of generalizations. And that is the greatest reason why they have failed to find a proper solution to this very sensitive problem of violence between communities. Because some of them claim that the entire country or a whole city is drowned in communal violence, they do not see those parts of the country or of a city that are not affected by such violence. If they could see these parts, too, they might be able to investigate what had kept these parts free of violence. And then they could seek to evolve appropriate solutions, based on this knowledge, to address communal violence in those parts of the country or of a city that are affected by such violence.

It is worth thinking about what leads some parts of a city to be rocked by communal violence at the same time as other parts of the city remain violence-free. The lessons one draws from this sort of analysis can be very

helpful. If you know what keeps a certain locality free from such violence, you can draw lessons which you can apply to other localities that are prone to such violence.

In this regard, it is instructive to reflect on the difference between North and South India in terms of inter-communal relations. The basis of this fundamental difference lies in the fact that it was mainly in the north that politics based on the so-called 'two-nation' theory gained a firm foothold, while the south remained free from this sort of divisive politics to a large extent. As a result, an atmosphere of inter-communal rivalry prevails in much of the north, unlike in much of the south.

Similarly, there is a fundamental difference between Old Aligarh and the Civil Lines area. Many people in Old Aligarh are uneducated, in contrast to the Civil Lines area. Likewise, many of the denizens of Old Hyderabad are poor, unlike in the newer parts of the city.

From this sort of comparative study one can gauge under what conditions inter-communal violence generally breaks out, and also under what conditions such violence remains absent. The method to end inter-communal violence, then, would be to try to create in North India conditions that prevail in large parts of South India that have remained free of inter-communal conflict. Likewise, in the old parts of towns like Aligarh and Hyderabad, efforts should be made to replicate the conditions or factors that prevail in the new parts of these cities that keep them free from communal violence—for instance, better education and economic development among Muslims. These conditions are

what have kept some parts of the country free from inter-communal violence, and if replicated elsewhere, they can help put an end to such violence there, too.

In this regard, one must also add that Muslims must put an end to all those factors that engender an atmosphere of conflict between them and others—such as for instance, demanding their rights, engaging the politics of protest, raking up disputes over mosques and temples, and so on.

The fact of the matter is that to end inter-communal violence in India we do not have to search for a new solution. All we need to do is replicate those factors or conditions that prevail in communal violence-free parts of the country or a city and that serve as a deterrent to communal conflict in those parts that are prone to such violence.

14

The Sensible Way to Respond to Provocation



There is one solution to conflict that every person is aware of. In fact, every person uses this very method when he feels that his personal interests are under threat. This solution involves conducting oneself in such a manner that helps winning over one's opponents, rather than engaging in confrontation with them. Lamentably, however, when it comes to relations between communities, many people forget this method completely. They wrongly believe that there is no solution to their problems other than confrontation and conflict.

The basic reason for this contradiction is 'cheap leadership'. A community that is degenerated lacks the power of action. It seeks to hide this fact under the veil of heated rhetoric. In such a community, the easiest way for someone to become powerful and 'famous' is through bombastic rhetoric. Our Muslim leaders stiffly compete with each other in this regard.

This sort of utterly superficial leadership always

proves costly for a community. As someone has very aptly put it:

The cheaper the politician, the more he costs his country.

I would like to cite an instance here—of an internationally-renowned Islamic institution in India. The authorities of this institution once played a key role in Indian politics. The solution they devised to solve the problems of the Indian Muslims was to insist that Muslims must damage their opponents. They claimed that sometimes communities have to give proof of their capacity to damage others in order to teach them a lesson and said that this is what the Muslims of India, too, should do. Until Muslims demonstrated that they could cause damage to others, they argued, their right to lead a respectable life in this country would not be accepted.

In 1967, general elections were round the corner in the country. In accordance with this institution's recipe of inflicting damage on others, it called for Muslims to support opposition parties in the upcoming elections and defeat the then ruling Congress Party. Vast numbers of Muslims were taken in by this appeal, and so this institution became for a short while (1966-67) the headquarters, as it were, of Muslim politics in India.

This, then, was the 'solution' that this Islamic institution presented for solving the problems of Muslims. But when, just a few years later, in 1974, this very same institution was faced with a serious internal crisis, it adopted a totally opposite approach! While it

had claimed that inflicting damage on others was the solution to the Muslims' social problems, when it was faced with a serious internal problem, it advocated something totally different! It called for winning over people's hearts, as opposed to confrontation.

Just adjacent to this grand Islamic institution is a big university. Now, this physical closeness of the university was a continuing problem for the institution. The students who resided in the university hostel—who were almost all non-Muslims—routinely troubled the students of this Islamic institution. They would abuse and throw stones at them and make fun of them. They wanted to provoke these students into reacting, so that they could get an excuse to damage the institution.

This carried on for several years. Complaints were lodged with the governmental authorities, and the police were also contacted, but the problem remained unresolved. Thereafter, the authorities of this Islamic institution decided to make a wise move, which finally resolved the longstanding issue.

The authorities of the institution decided to contact the leaders of the students living in the university hostel. They invited them over for tea. When the student leaders arrived, the authorities of the institution spoke to them very gently. They even gave them gifts. And then, they made a proposal. They offered to conduct a hockey match between the students of the institution and the university. The leaders of the students agreed.

The authorities of the Islamic institution started making preparations for the hockey match. They got

together some of their students and formed a hockey team. They told them, “You are not to play this match in order to win. Rather, you must play so that you lose!”

The intention was to deliberately allow the university team to win and make them heroes, and in this way get a chance to win their hearts.

The match was held on the appointed day. As per their plan, the team of students from the Islamic institution played very badly, thus allowing the university team to win. Then, as previously decided, the university team was feted about and lionized, and in different ways the members of the team were sought to be appeased. They were given handsome prizes and were treated like heroes.

The university students wanted to show off their claim of being superior, and the folks at the Islamic institution made every effort to satisfy this urge of theirs. And so, the problem that had beset the Islamic institution for several years was automatically resolved. From then on, the university students stopped troubling the students of the institution.

This is a remarkable instance of how to win over one’s opponents. But the question arises as to why some people who in personal matters choose to solve their disputes by trying to win their opponents’ hearts act in a completely contradictory manner when it comes to their community at large—by urging frenzied emotional outburst and confrontation against other communities.

The reason for this is that such people view disputes that involve their personal interests from the point of

view of finding a possible solution. In contrast, they see the problems of their community from the point of view of the possibility that these afford for asserting their claims to community leadership. If they were to adopt in community-related affairs the same approach that they adopt in their personal affairs, their cheap leadership and cheap popularity would suddenly vanish! Lamentably, no Muslim leader is courageous enough to consider doing anything of this sort. But the fact of the matter is that there is simply no other solution than this to the problems of the community, including that of inter-community violence.

We must adopt the same wise approach in matters relating to the problems of the community as we do in the case of disputes that involve our personal interests. If Muslims were to act in this way, inter-community violence would become a thing of the past.

I once met a man who lived in a place that had witnessed deadly communal riots, in which Muslims had suffered enormous loss in a span of just three days. He said to me, "I have been living in this city for the last 30 years. But never in all these years have we witnessed anything like what we witnessed in the last three days." And then, as is the norm, he began cursing the community that he singled out as responsible for this violence.

I responded to the man saying, "You think a lot about the riots that continued for three days in your city. But please also ask yourself that if for the last 30 years there had been no riots there, what was the reason for this?"

Do you think you can draw lessons only from these three days and nothing at all from those 30 years?”

I further added, “This isn’t something linked to only a particular community. It actually relates to every person and to every community. The fact is that within each human being there is a devil, who is fast asleep. This devil is anger. As long as you allow this devil of anger inside others to remain asleep, you can live in peace and security. But if you do something foolish and cause this devil to wake up, it will do everything that it can to harm you. It has nothing to do with any particular community. It applies to Muslims in exactly the same way as it does to others.”

“This, in brief, is the root of all communal riots,” I explained to the man. “Riots always emerge from anger and the desire for revenge. The fact is that God has not made a single person who in ordinary conditions is angry and vengeful. No one is perpetually angry, and nor is anyone always vengeful. Anger and vengefulness are results of temporary, not permanent, conditions. If some people were always angry and vengeful, even in normal or general conditions, there would be riots all the time, at every single moment! We would not have had a single day of peace and security, leave alone the 30 years of peace that your city enjoyed!”

Islam teaches us to avoid getting provoked by others. In this way, conflict can be prevented. This principle of avoidance is the most effective solution to every kind of conflict. But you can act according to this principle only if you surrender yourself to God’s Will. Otherwise, if you disobey His Will, you will carry on waking up other

people's sleeping egos, and this would inevitably lead to conflict and violence. And then, when riots break out, you will present yourself as 'innocent' and stupidly go about blaming and cursing others for your plight.

15

Reflections on Communal Riots



The issue that has received the greatest attention from Indian Muslim leaders is communal riots—violence between religious communities. Every time a riot breaks out in which Muslims are involved, Muslim writers and speakers are stirred into action. They deliver impassioned speeches on the subject. They issue statements condemning the violence. They set up relief funds. A veritable storm of activity is set in motion in the wake of riots. If all that had to be done to respond to this violence is what Muslims have been doing all along, then this sort of work has already been undertaken, and on such a vast scale that by now such violence should have firmly ended once and for all.

But the reality is just the opposite. The failure of all the efforts that Muslims have hitherto made to put a permanent end to riots very clearly shows that these efforts are definitely not the solution to the problem. Had they been the desired solution, the last several decades, throughout which such efforts have consistently been made, would have sufficed for the issue of communal violence to be solved for good.

Reality thus demands that we should re-examine the

entire issue and completely revise our approach and methods.

In most cases, communal riots in India are triggered off over very minor issues. That a small matter can rapidly lead to a horrific communal riot is not a chance occurrence. There are historical and psychological causes and factors behind this. Whether we accept it or not, the fact is that many people from other communities perceive Muslims as their enemies. One reason for this is the memory of the Partition of India. The Partition was in itself enough to provoke and inflame our fellow countrymen. And, more than this, the Partition was engineered in such a way that it left many delicate problems unresolved.

There are numerous other historical factors that have made many of our fellow countrymen see Muslims as their enemies and develop negative feelings about them. It is like an enormous amount of lava bottled up inside a volcano. The volcano can burst at any moment, bringing in its wake tremendous destruction.

I do accept that someone can, on reasonable grounds, claim that the demand for the Partition of India was, in part, a reaction to the attitude of others. But the question is: What is the practical use or benefit of making this claim? This sort of claim may be useful only if the aim is to make a logical or academic analysis of a problem. But it has nothing to do with real-life affairs. When an issue becomes one of life and death, an intelligent person does not think of logical analyses and arguments. Instead, he focuses on the practical aspects of the issue before him, so that he can decide

on a practical course of action to follow. If he engages in a heated debate about who is to blame for his woes, he will not be able to take any decision about the practical measures that he needs to adopt to solve them. And so, the real problem will remain as it is, unresolved.

When a knife falls on a watermelon, there is simply no use of trying to logically analyze if the knife was at fault or the watermelon, or if the watermelon was responsible for the fate that has befallen it. In such a scenario, the fundamental issue is how to extricate oneself from the difficult situation one is faced with, rather than to engage in verbal duels, hurling accusations against one's opponents and blaming them for one's woes.

It is a well-known and generally-accepted fact that the practical aspect of an issue is more important than its logical or theoretical aspect. This is the case with the question of violence between communities, too.

Once, in a certain city, a man rented a portion of the ground floor of a house. After some days, he found that his ceiling was leaking. Water was dripping from the bathroom of the flat above his. It leaked non-stop, and so it was a terrible headache for the man. Moreover, the water was dirty, because the bath and toilet were in the same room.

The tenant mentioned this problem to the man living in the flat above his. But this man paid no attention to him. Then, he began complaining to the neighbours. But, they, too, did not show any concern for his problem.

One day, someone told the tenant, "Brother! In our

city, the custom is that if water falls on your head from someone else's house, it is you, not that other person, who must arrange and pay for the necessary repairs."

The tenant replied, "This is absolutely illogical! The man who lives above me should arrange and pay for it. After all, it is *his* bathroom floor that is cracked, because of which I have to suffer!"

This other man was, however, not moved by the tenant's logic.

In a short while, the tenant came to understand that his logical arguments did not seem to have any takers at all!

Now, the men who lived in the neighbourhood were all fellow Muslims, and so the tenant began citing verses from the Quran and Hadith to back his stance. But even this did not melt their hearts. Then, some friends suggested to him that he should take to court the man whose bathroom was leaking. But he soon found out that this would be such a costly and time-consuming affair that, in practical terms, it was utterly useless.

Finally, he was forced to agree to pay for the repairs himself!

This story illustrates the approach that most people adopt when it comes to their personal affairs. In such situations, people do not get into the debate about who is right and who is wrong. They know that in this world there is often nothing weaker than logic. No matter how clearly you may prove someone to be guilty through the use of logic, in practical terms it does not solve any problem, because few, if any, people these days

are willing to cheerfully accept logical arguments. There is no difference in this regard between Muslims and others, and between supposedly religious and irreligious people. Everyone knows this to be the case as far as their own personal matters are concerned. That is why when it is a question of someone's personal interests—in other words, when, as in the story recounted earlier, 'water starts dripping from the floor above yours into your home'—you at once realize that citing evidence, offering logical arguments and engaging in debate with your opponent are all useless. Instead, you accept the responsibility and at once take steps to try to rectify the situation. Strangely, however, no one is willing to adopt this very same basic principle of life when it comes to the problems of the community as a whole. On this issue, almost every Muslim reacts in the same way—by accusing other communities for their woes. The obvious and clearly undeniable fact that such a response, tirelessly repeated over a period of several decades, has produced no practical benefit whatsoever has failed to make any dent in the Muslims' zeal in reacting in this useless fashion.

This situation has not come by chance, though. Rather, it has deep roots. The easiest thing to do is to blame others for one's miseries. In contrast, accepting the responsibility for one's conditions is enormously difficult. To accuse others for your problems, all you need to do is to open your mouth and scream out loud and make a great ruckus. But if someone accepts responsibilities for his problems, he is confronted with the need to exert himself, to act and strive and make

necessary positive and meaningful efforts to change the situation in which he finds himself.

The fact of the matter is that Muslim leaders want to do nothing more than issue statements and fiery speeches against others. Spouting fiery rhetoric is their means of maintaining their leadership position. They are not ready to engage in any practical work at all. Had this not been the case, their approach would have been entirely different.

In life, if you want to make any headway, you must try to avail of the existing opportunities. No matter how difficult or unfavourable the situation you find yourself in might seem, and no matter how bad the situation might become, such factors and opportunities are always available.

16

Nipping Inter-Community Conflict in the Bud



Every year, a wrestling match is held in Aligarh, a town in northern India, in which both Hindu and Muslim wrestlers take part. One year, a Muslim wrestler complained that he had been cheated. The target of his ire was a Hindu man, with whom he had a longstanding enmity. After the match, the Muslim wrestler decided he would take revenge on him. A few days later, he and a group of his companions spotted the man alone. They brutally stabbed him. He was rushed to hospital, where he revealed the names of his attackers and then succumbed to his wounds.

The man's death proved to be a boon to certain leaders of the town. They led an angry demonstration, raising provocative slogans. "Blood in exchange for blood!" they cried. Their emotion-driven rhetoric created a very sensitive situation. And then the town fell prey to deadly inter-communal violence.

Consider the case of another riot, that broke out in 1980 in Moradabad, another town in northern India. Early that year, elections to the state assembly had been

held, in which the Congress Party candidate, a Muslim man called Hafiz Muhammad Siddiq, won by a massive majority. The candidate of the Hindu-oriented Jan Sangh, Mr. Hans Raj Chopra, got so few votes that he lost his deposit. It was not only Muslims who voted for Hafiz Muhammad Siddiq. He received support from a good number of Hindus, too.

The defeated politician was very upset. He was on the lookout for an opportunity, which, fortunately for him, soon came his way. One day, a marriage party belonging to the Hindu Mehtar caste was passing through the streets. It was almost time for the evening prayers in the mosque. The members of the marriage party were singing, dancing and playing music. Some Muslims tried to block the party. They asked them to stop the noise they were making near the mosque and told them to change their route. The members of the party did not agree to this. This led to an altercation, which soon escalated into violence. Some more Muslims joined those who were already present. They ran after the Mehtars and entered the Mehtar locality, where they beat up some Mehtars and set fire to some homes.

It was now the turn of Mr. Hans Raj Chopra and his men. They went around Moradabad and nearby places delivering fiery speeches and creating a climate of great tension in the area.

Some days later, it was the day of the Eid festival. On that day, some people threw bits of pig flesh into an *eidgah*, a place where Muslims offer Eid prayers. This greatly angered the Muslims, who began hurling stones at the police. And then a full-scale riot broke out, with

Moradabad's Muslim localities going up in flames and being drenched in blood.

Consider, now, what guidance the Quran and Hadith provide in this regard. The Quran says that God was displeased with the Jews and sent them punishments because they did not stop their own people from committing evil deeds. Thus, the Quran (5:79) relates:

Those of the Children of Israel who were bent on denying the truth were cursed by David and Jesus, the son of Mary. That was because they disobeyed and were given to transgression; they would not prevent one another from doing the wrong things they did. Evil indeed were their deeds. You see many among them allying themselves with those who deny the truth. Evil is that which their souls have sent on ahead for them. They have incurred the wrath of God and shall suffer eternal punishment.

This principle is elaborated upon in the Hadith. A *hadith* in this regard relates that the Prophet said that when people see an oppressor and do not restrain his hand, God would punish them as a whole.

From this we learn that 'social turmoil' is always caused by 'individual misdeed'. That is why the only way to prevent turmoil and disturbance in society is to restrain individuals from wrongdoing. Accordingly, Muslim communities should remain so alert that if one person does some mischief, people around him from within the community must immediately stand up and stop him. If someone treats somebody else wrongly,

other members of the community must not sit back as neutral spectators. Instead, they must intervene. If they choose to remain indifferent spectators, the mischief of a single person can easily trigger off anarchy in society, which can engulf the entire community.

This principle can be directly applied to contemporary inter-communal violence. Their extreme emotionalism often leads Muslims to refuse to tolerate even a minor discomfort or irritant, and so they immediately start fighting with others. If these others are fellow Muslims, the damage that is caused by this kind of reaction is generally restricted to just one person or family. But if the others are non-Muslims, the Muslims' emotional reactions engulf the entire Muslim community. Opportunist leaders deliver angry speeches and whip up people's emotions and turn the issue into a major communal controversy. And this rapidly degenerates into inter-communal rioting. The cases of the riots in Aligarh and Moradabad cited above are practical, real-life examples of this.

Because in India communal riots often happen in places where Muslims are economically slightly better-off than elsewhere, Muslims often assume that such violence is engineered as part of an organized conspiracy to destroy their economic base. But the simple reason actually is that where Muslims are economically better-off, they also engage more in emotionally-driven activities. Such activities require social support, and Muslims easily obtain this support in places where they are doing better economically than elsewhere. In such places, internecine rivalries among Muslims are more

marked. In the same way, conflicts between Muslims and others are more intense in places where Muslims consider themselves secure, numerically as well as economically.

In the light of the Islamic commandments mentioned above, all efforts that Muslims have been making to end inter-communal violence seem completely useless. This is because these efforts are themselves against divine commandments. The Quran and the Prophet ordain that one should apprehend the mischief-makers among one's own people in the very first stage itself. But Muslim leaders get active only when full-blown riots have broken out and have already wrought widespread misery and destruction. No one bothers to nip the problem in the bud by apprehending the culprit when he is in the initial stages of his devious plans.

When some Muslims start making meaningless and unreasonable demands on non-Muslims, such as "Stop ringing bells in your temples when we are praying", or "Do not lead your processions in front of mosques", and so on, no Muslim stands up to stop such emotionally-driven Muslims and to tell them to desist from such behaviour. But when the misdeeds of one or a few such hot-headed Muslims leads to a violent reaction from the other side and to deadly destruction, the entire Muslim leadership is stirred into action, with each leader competing with the others in screaming and protesting.

This method is completely opposed to Islamic teachings. And if a method is opposed to Islamic teachings, it cannot produce any worthy results in this

world of God. God wants us to be active in the event of 'individual wrongdoing', too, although Muslim leaders get into action only at the time of 'social strife'. This is tantamount to walking on a path that one has devised by oneself, rather than walking on God's path. And this, in turn, is inviting God's wrath, rather than leading oneself towards divine assistance.

There are several Muslim movements and organizations in India. All of them claim that their aim is to stop inter-communal riots, protect Muslims, establish a healthy social order, convey God's message to humankind, and so on. These movements and institutions routinely hold massive conventions, where their leaders deliver lofty speeches, stirring veritable verbal typhoons. They regularly issue memorandums, statements and proposals, notwithstanding the fact that mere rhetoric of this sort cannot lead to any practical action.

All this happens in the aftermath of riots. None of these leaders bothers to snuff out the initial sparks that later turn into leaping flames of inter-communal conflict, although the actual work to be done is for Muslim organizations, movements and right-minded individuals to keep a continuous watch on their fellow Muslims in their vicinity. As soon as they hear of a Muslim troubling someone else, irrespective of religion, they, along with some respected Muslims of the locality, should meet with him and nip his mischief in the bud. If Muslims display the same energy, enthusiasm and sensitivity at this early stage that they generally do after

a deadly riot breaks out, inter-communal violence can be effectively ended.

Some people claim that communal riots are always a result of conspiracies, and that these conspiracies are the handiwork of certain non-Muslim groups. They claim this to be these groups' principal mission. It is argued that these groups have specially trained their people for this.

Now, in response to this I will say that this world is an arena of competition. Here, it is bound to happen that people will act against one another. That is why the real task to be done is not to raise a big hue and cry against these groups, but, rather, to prepare oneself to render them ineffectual through silent efforts. Experience proves that while a group's opponents adopt measures that are directed against it, such efforts can be rendered ineffectual through wisdom. Those who want that they should face no such challenge whatsoever and that no one should 'conspire' against them can leave this world of God's and invent an imaginary world for themselves elsewhere, because, according to the law on the basis of which God has made this world, such things are bound to happen. Even for the prophets God made no exception in this regard. So, how can an exception be made for us?

Everywhere, and across the world, Muslims are divided into rival camps, allied with different powers and fighting against each other. In our country, Muslims are allied with rival political parties and they fight with each other, especially during the elections. In this way, they weaken and help destroy themselves at the same

time as they get busy competing with each other in distributing relief when communal riots break out.

One major cause for communal riots in India is electoral politics. Just before and during the elections, Muslims begin to ally with different political parties. This is a major factor for infighting among Muslims, with rival Muslim factions vying to defeat each other. After the elections are over, defeated candidates make every effort to make the winners ineffective and to recover their lost ground. One of the things that defeated candidates sometimes do to win is instigating inter-communal riots.

If seen in this light, the relief efforts undertaken by Muslim leaders in the wake of riots reflect what the Quran (2:85) says:

Yet, here you are, slaying one another and driving some of your own people from their homelands, aiding one another against them, committing sin and aggression; but if they came to you as captives, you would ransom them.

What is the use of Muslim leaders distributing relief to the victims of communal riots when their sordid role in electoral battles—their allying with rival political parties and stoking internecine rivalries and thereby weakening Muslims—leaves Muslims even more vulnerable? Far from being in accordance with the divine will, these cosmetic measures are simply a cheap means to establish these self-appointed leaders' claims to Muslim leadership. God's reward is for obeying His

commandments, and not for such political gimmicks of self-styled leaders.

Today, the biggest problem for Muslims is not communal riots or the conspiracies of others. Rather, it is their not being able to understand what they should do in order to foil riots and to render conspiracies ineffectual. God has placed the solution to the problems of life in serious contemplation and realistic action. But this is precisely what Muslims today are farthest from. They are ready to splurge their wealth and expend their strength on almost everything, but when it comes to realistic methods of dealing with the question of inter-communal conflict, they suddenly seem to have neither the money nor the time. Their condition today is exactly the same as what the Quran (7:146-47) describes in the following words:

I will turn away from My signs all those who are arrogant in the land without any right, so that even if they see all the signs they will not believe in them. If they see the right path, they shall not walk upon it: but if they see the path of error, they shall choose it for their path, because they have given the lie to Our signs and paid no heed to them. The actions of those who denied Our signs and the Meeting of the Hereafter will come to nothing—they shall be requited only, according to their deeds.

When someone gets worked up, angry and emotional, he can only relate to superficial things. No serious thing will appeal to him. This is the case with Muslims today. No matter what obvious evidence you may give them in

favour of realistic approaches and methods, it does not seem to enter their minds. Instead, they enthusiastically support and embrace causes and approaches that can only result in their own further destruction. They dismiss approaches and methods that can lead to success as ‘philosophical’, ‘theoretical’ and ‘impractical’. Like a person who has lost all awareness, they go about banging their heads—sometimes against one wall, sometimes against another. In terms of results, their efforts are continuously proving to be entirely useless. Yet, their eyes just refuse to open. They continue to resort to the same superficial methods that, having been tried innumerable times before, have clearly proven their failure.

As a consequence of this mentality, Muslims either engage in escapist rhetoric or else talk in terms of confrontation and conflict. This is the case with almost every Muslim throughout the world today. The positive, constructive method does not seem to resonate or fit in with their mindset.

But if we do not want to further waste our strength and resources, there is no option but for us to change this approach of ours and to develop an effective programme in the light of practical realities.

The first and foremost task to undertake to end inter-communal conflict is to make Muslims aware and educated, so that they get over their emotionalism and also so that they understand how to respond to different situations. Muslims donate vast sums of money to help Muslim victims of inter-community violence. In the light of the fact that very often, such violence is triggered off

by the actions of ignorant and unemployed people, a better way of spending this money is to educate Muslims and make them more aware and also to develop avenues for employment for unemployed Muslims.

Muslim writers and public speakers excel in stoking Muslim emotions in order to acquire cheap popularity. This must completely stop. Instead, our pens and tongues must all devote themselves to promoting patience, realism and unity. The secret of the strength of any community is that its members know how to think in a serious way, not in excelling in making a hue and cry about this and that.

Muslims everywhere must consider it their responsibility that whenever a fellow Muslim commits some mischief, they must make every effort to stop him. In this way, such incidents can easily be prevented from snowballing into inter-community violence. It is useless to create a furore in the aftermath of a riot. The wise approach is to focus one's efforts in resolving individual or personal conflicts and complaints before they degenerate into collective or inter-community violence.

Finally, efforts must be made to focus Muslims in another direction—that of the work of calling people to God. Their enthusiasm for engaging in action needs to be redirected, from political agitation and internal conflicts to inviting people to God through peaceful activism. If Muslims channelize their enthusiasm for action in this direction, most of their conflicts with others will cease. It is like when an unemployed man who has spent a long time fighting with other people

suddenly gets a good job, he gives up his bad habits and focuses entirely on his new vocation.

17

Lessons for Conflict-Resolution



In May 1984, deadly riots rocked Mumbai and the neighbouring town of Bhiwandi. The then head of the Shiv Sena, Mr. Bal Thackeray, had delivered a speech on April 21 at a public rally in Mumbai. The media had not given it much attention, though some local Marathi papers reported on it, but in not a very provocative manner. But the *Nasheman*, a Bangalore-based Urdu newspaper, covered it—on the 5th of May, several days later. This was enough to inflame Muslim passions. Some days after this, it was highlighted by another Muslim newspaper, the Mumbai-based *Alam*, this time with bold headlines. And then, as is the norm for them, many other Urdu papers jumped into the fray, highlighting the speech and stoking Muslim emotions. They claimed that Mr. Thackeray had insulted the Quran, the Prophet and Islam—which, they declared, Muslims simply would not tolerate.

On the 3rd of May, the Shiv Sena took out a procession in the town of Bhiwandi to mark the occasion of Shiv Jayanti. This procession had been banned after the riots that the town had witnessed in 1970. But in 1984, Shiv Sena leaders managed to secure permission from the

governmental authorities and took out a Shiv Jayanti procession through the town. Muslims objected to the procession. Fearing trouble, the authorities had arranged for massive police presence, and the procession ended peacefully.

The procession further stoked the flames of Muslim anger. To counter the Shiv Sena, a Muslim leader, A.R. Khan, mobilized a procession of Muslims in the neighbouring town of Parbhani. Fiery speeches were delivered on the occasion, denouncing the Shiv Sena. A group of Muslims garlanded an effigy of Mr. Thackeray with old slippers.

It so happened that that year, Shab-e Barat¹ fell on the 6th of May, and Muslims decided to observe the occasion as a day marking the glory of Islam. The roads and narrow lanes of the Muslim localities of Bhiwandi—that are lined with filth, and which Muslims have never displayed any enthusiasm to clean up—were suddenly festooned with green flags as a sign of the Muslims' 'Islamic zeal'. During this, some Muslims supplanted a Shiv Sena flag with a green flag, which, so they thought, was an 'Islamic' one.

In this extremely tense situation, on 16th May the Shiv Sena decided to call for a strike in Mumbai. This further worsened the situation. The next day, horrific rioting broke out in Bhiwandi, which spread to neighbouring Thane and Mumbai. Large numbers of innocent lives

1 This is the night preceding the 15th day of the eighth month of the Islamic calendar. Some Muslims consider this night as sacred, although there is no reference for this in the Quran or Traditions of the Prophet.

were lost in the riots, and property worth millions went up in flames. The riots stopped only when the Army was called in. Needless to say, most of those who suffered in the riots were from one particular community.

In this case, Muslims acted in a very foolish way—like a watermelon in the face of a knife. Muslims who behave in this way may think that they are acting in accordance with Islam, but they are terribly mistaken.

According to a *hadith*, the Prophet said, “It does not behove a Muslim to humiliate himself.” Someone asked, “How can one humiliate oneself?” The Prophet replied, “When one engages in a task that is beyond one’s capacity.” (At-Tirmidhi)

In the light of this *hadith*, one can say that in this case, as in many others, Muslims acted in a very foolish way—like a watermelon in the face of a knife. Muslims who behave in this way may think that they are acting in accordance with Islam, but they are terribly mistaken.

Analysis of the Riot

One can analyze this riot in two ways. One way is to see it from the Muslim communal perspective. The other way is to see it from the Islamic perspective.

The Muslim communal perspective is the perspective that all Muslim leaders, big and small, always employ on such occasions—and they did this on this occasion, too. In the wake of this riot, every Muslim began speaking the same language, saying exactly the same things. They one-sidedly placed the entire blame for the riots on the Shiv Sena or the administration.

If you see things from a communal perspective, you do not distinguish between right and wrong. You only see things in terms of your community versus another community. And when a communal riot happens, you blindly support your community and start abusing the other community. This approach has been decried in the Hadith as *asabiyyah*, a form of tribal prejudice, which, in Islam, is utterly false and condemnable.

The other way to look at the question of riots is the Islamic way. The Islamic way is based on certain principles, and not on communal basis. When we analyze the Bhiwandi riots from the Islamic perspective, the first question that arises is: What was the issue or complaint which so angered Muslims that they took to angry demonstrations against the Shiv Sena and its leader?

Muslims said that the issue that had so incensed them was that, so they alleged, the Shiv Sena leader had demanded a ban on the Quran and insulted the Prophet. But facts revealed that this allegation was entirely false. The Shiv Sena leader did not say this at all.

The Shiv Sena leader was at that time in Mumbai. Yet, prior to the riots, no Muslim group went to meet him to find out if the allegations that Muslims were making against him were true nor not. No Muslim even bothered to contact him on the telephone in this regard. The so-called Muslim leaders, who stir into action in the aftermath of riots, did nothing at all to investigate these allegations before the riots broke out. The only thing that happened was that a Mumbai-based

Muslim paper copied a report that had been published in a Bangalore-based Urdu paper that is known for its cheap reporting and sensationalism. It had only to be published in an Urdu paper that Muslims began making a huge hue and cry about it and began reprinting it in Urdu papers elsewhere, too. And so, in a few days the situation became so heated and tense that it was almost inevitable that riots would break out.

Mr. Thackeray's Interview

After the riots, a representative of the *Link* magazine interviewed the Shiv Sena leader, Mr. Thackeray. The interview was published in the 3rd June 1984 issue of the magazine. Here are some excerpts from the interview:

Q: Some of the Urdu papers have alleged that you have demanded a ban on the Quran.

A: No, this is totally incorrect. I am not anti-Muslim.

Q: It is said that you used derogatory words against Prophet Muhammad.

A: This is another blatant lie. My speeches were tape-recorded. There was not a word against the Prophet. Actually, I gave his example. This is what I said in my speech: "Once, the Prophet was sitting in his mosque with his disciples. A Hindu came there and spat on one of the walls of the mosque. The disciples shouted, "Maro, Maro!" But the Prophet stopped them from becoming violent. Then, he washed the wall with a bucketful of water. The Hindu fell ashamed. And that is how we should win people, he told his disciples. But where is that kind of tolerance in this community now?"

Q: It is said that the speeches you made were inflammatory.

A: It's a matter of interpretation. I wanted to ventilate my grievances. Hindu grievances. If we want to organize a meeting or want to take out a procession, it is prohibited. The Shiv Jayanti procession [in Bhiwandi] was allowed after 14 years. Everyone cares for their [Muslims'] feelings. What about our sentiments? As if we don't have any emotions [and] are not human beings. As if we are not supposed to discuss our religion. Treat all religions at par. Why should mosques alone have special permission to use loudspeakers? Which religion preaches disturb[ing] somebody? Hindu temples don't use loudspeakers.

Now they [Muslims] are asking for more concessions. It is indeed disturbing. After all, this country belongs to us. Whoever wants to stay here, can stay as brothers. We're not going to put any restrictions. But to call them 'minorities' and give them special concessions will spoil the very unity of the country. I am not telling anything to my followers. I am not asking them to burn or hate this community. But the way they [Muslims] are working is generating hatred.

Q: How do you think the communal riots can be stopped?

A: Ask them [Muslims] not to attack us. And there will be no retaliation. We do not attack; we only retaliate. We will retaliate if they attack.

The incident related to the Prophet that the Shiv Sena leader related here is basically correct, although he made some partial errors in narrating it. These errors cannot be said to be tantamount to abusing Islam. At the very

most we could correct these errors while accepting what he related as true. In the actual *hadith*, contained in the *Sahih al-Bukhari*¹, Abu Hurayrah narrates that one day a Bedouin came to the Prophet's mosque in Madinah and urinated inside. On seeing what he was doing, some Companions of the Prophet rushed towards him. But the Prophet told them to leave the Bedouin and to pour some water on the place where he had urinated, because, he explained, his Companions had been given the task of creating ease, not difficulty. This meant that they should help people, not cause them trouble.

Reading Mr. Thackeray's interview, it seems that he was not hypocritical in expressing his views. He actually spoke very openly. The reality is that by himself recalling a *hadith* of the Prophet, Mr. Thackeray informed us Muslims of a very valuable secret of how to emerge victorious over all forms of trials and tribulations. But because of their intellectual degeneration, Muslims used this, too, as a means to trigger off a deadly riot that hurt Muslims themselves the most.

How very ironic indeed!

The Roots of Riots

Why do Muslims repeatedly do such foolish things?

The reason for this is their psyche of pride. Whenever Muslims face decline, they develop a false sense of pride. The decline of Muslims worldwide today is because for

1 One of the six major collections of Hadith or Traditions of or attributed to the Prophet.

them, religion is no longer linked to duty, but, rather, to pride.

The Quran (25:63) says:

The true servants of the Gracious One are those who walk upon the earth with humility and when they are addressed by the ignorant ones, their response is, 'Peace' [...]

But when the Muslim community declines, a totally contradictory mentality develops. In this stage, Muslims invoke the teachings of Islam in order to stress their claims to superiority over others, not to mould their own lives according to these teachings. And so, Muslims in this stage of decline of the community will proudly declare, "Our religion is based on pure monotheism!" and at the very same time, they will worship dead and living personalities.

They will proudly announce, "Islam stands for equality!" But this claim will not be reflected in their relationships and dealings.

They will proudly claim, "Our religion exhorts us to promote goodness and combat evil!" But if you examine their actual behaviour in the light of this principle and critique them, you will immediately become their most inveterate enemy.

Explaining the glorious character of the Prophet, they will proudly relate that the Prophet never lost his temper despite efforts to provoke him. But at the very same time, they will resort to violent protests when faced with anything that goes against their way of thinking. They

will wrongly try to justify this by saying, “When others are trying to provoke us, how can we not be provoked?”

In the course of seeking to prove other religions to be inferior, they will loudly declare, ‘Prophethood ends with our Prophet’. But they are completely heedless of the task of conveying the teachings of their prophet to other communities.

The fact is that this kind of psyche is the actual root of all sorts of strife, including communal riots. When religion becomes something to take pride in and boast about, the logical consequence is the emergence of a strong sense of what can be called a false superiority complex. People infected with this complex believe that they are always right and that others are always wrong. A natural result of this is that their behaviour *vis-à-vis* others becomes completely unrealistic. Such people revel in talking about the faults of others, but they are never ready to accept their own faults. They will live in a way as if they alone have the right to do as they please and that others have no such right.

Obviously, people who think like this cannot live in harmony with others. Their presence in this world can only give rise to riots and conflicts and other forms of strife. Needless to say, they can never play any role in building peace. People with this sort of mentality can only spread corruption and filth in this world. To live in this world with this sort of psyche is to live in an ungodly way. And those who want to live in God’s world in an ungodly way can never succeed.

18

Practice What You Preach



Many political leaders of our country routinely sing paeans to the country's Constitution, but when it comes to the question of what they practice, they play a completely different tune. They routinely cite the Constitution to pontificate on social equality, but you will not find them behaving in an equitable manner in their own lives. They will glorify the secular character of the Constitution, but in practice they hurriedly abandon their secular pretensions and bare their communal prejudices. It is as if for them the Constitution is something to boast about or to take great pride in but not a guide to action in their own lives.

The same sort of thing applies to Muslims today. They loudly proclaim the glories and beauties of Islam in their speeches and writings, but in their personal lives they are guided by their personal interests and communal prejudices, not by true Islamic teachings.

Muslims will talk at great length about belief in the oneness of God. They will stress that in Islam, worship is due only to the one God and to no one else. But, in actual practice, the community is immersed in the 'worship' of entities other than God. Some members of

the community worship their ‘elders’, others worship some ‘thinker’ or the other. Some consider some or the other living person to be ‘holy’. Others give this status to deceased people. Their gatherings resound with praises of the glories of some human figures or the other, not the glories of God. Their talk about pure monotheism is simply a means to express their claim of ideological superiority over other communities and derive a sense of pride from this. As far as their actual practice is concerned, the Muslims’ condition is, by and large, no different from that of other communities.

In the same way, Muslim writers and speakers fervently declare that, according to Islam, God is one, that humans are one, and that all Muslims share one scripture. They seem to think anything less than universal unity as lowering Islam’s greatness. They loudly announce, “We have a clear Shariah that provides guidance for all aspects of life!”

Now, all these assertions are undoubtedly true. But for Muslims, these are all now just things to be talked about. If you see their practical lives, you will discover that they behave in a completely contradictory manner. For instance—and this is an undeniable fact—there is no community anywhere in the world that is as badly divided and torn apart by strife and conflict than Muslims. Going by the way Muslims’ behave, you might think that they have nothing in common with each other and that there is nothing that can unite them. In this context, then, it would be right to claim that the word ‘unity’, which Muslims never cease talking about, is simply a means for them to express their claims of

superiority over and against other communities. Islam has now become for them simply a thing to boast about, not something to be acted upon.

This holds true across the board, with regard to all the communal or collective affairs of Muslims today.

Let me clarify this point with the help of an example that relates to the Treaty of Hudaibiyah. Often, when Muslim leaders and thinkers speak about the Prophet's life or the Quran, they highlight, with much fervour and gusto, the Prophet's policy of patience, as exemplified in the events related to the signing of this Treaty. They proudly declare, "Makkah was won through this Treaty, not through war!" But, at the same time, when it comes to the question of the conflicts present-day Muslims are involved in with other communities, their practice is completely contradictory to the spirit of the Hudaibiyah Treaty. Muslim leaders excel in highlighting and hailing this Treaty, but this Treaty is possibly the most important Islamic teaching that they continuously and consistently ignore.

Take the instance of a famous Muslim paper. Several years ago, it published a long article on the Hudaibiyah Treaty. It explained that the Treaty facilitated Islam's victory over Arabia. According to the article, the crux of the Treaty was that, despite all kinds of provocations from their opponents, Muslims would unilaterally abstain from reacting. Avoiding confrontation, they would focus on constructive and positive work and would thereby gain success. In the words of the author of this article:

During this period, while negotiations were on, the Quraysh continued with their efforts in different ways to provoke Muslims to start a fight, but the Companions all through exercised great self-restraint as directed by their leader and refused to fall into any trap. Once, a group of around 50 stealthily approached the camp of Muslims in the night and started pelting stones. The Companions of the Prophet, who had already been cautioned against reacting to such provocations, kept their cool and rounded up them all and produced them before the Prophet, who simply let them go.

The article discussed in detail this spirit that informed the Hudaibiyah Treaty. It explained that because the Muslims did not get provoked despite the provocative situation, it enabled Islam to be victorious over Arabia.

Interestingly, this very same Muslim paper which published this article has been consistently advocating precisely the opposite approach on the question of relations between Muslims and others in India. It has for long been instigating Muslims to get worked up in the wake of provocations. For instance, with regard to the Bhiwandi and Mumbai riots in 1984 (discussed in the previous chapter), it wrote that Mr. Bal Thackeray had insulted the Prophet and that, in reaction to this, Mr. A.R. Khan, a Muslim Member of the state Legislative Assembly (MLA), took out an angry demonstration and that some Muslims garlanded an effigy of Mr. Thackeray with worn-out slippers.

The paper accepted that this was not an appropriate

way to demonstrate, but, in the very next sentence, it sought to justify this behaviour. Thus, it commented:

[...] the Muslims took out an angry procession on May 11, and a Muslim MLA, Mr. A.R. Khan, in his muddle-headedness, garlanded an effigy of Mr. Bal Thackeray with worn-out *chappals*. No level-headed Muslim approves of the Congress legislator's indecent manner of protest. But one need not strain one's common sense to conclude that the initial provocation had come from the Shiv Sena chief.

The statements in the two above-quoted passages clearly contradict each other. In the first statement, the paper indicates that the Prophet and his Companions did not get agitated in the wake of grave provocations by their opponents. They ignored these provocations and acted in a positive manner. On the other hand, however, the second statement claims that, when faced with a provocation, people will definitely react to it. The Prophet's *sunnat* or practice teaches us that if we are attacked with stones, we must not reply, even with mere words. But, according to this Muslim paper, if Muslims react to words with *chappals* (slippers), they would still supposedly be in the right, because, so this paper claims, they are simply reacting to a provocation!

This twisted logic is not a unique feature of this paper alone. Rather, today, all Muslim papers and all Muslim leaders are victims of this contradiction. And it is this contradiction that has made all the efforts of Muslims to fail miserably. When it comes to writing and speaking about Islam, our leaders present glowing tributes to it. But

when it comes to the practical application or expression of Islam, they do just the opposite—they begin to think and act in terms of communal interests and prejudices. This indicates that Islam is now no longer a religion to be followed for Muslims, but, rather, simply something for stressing and boosting their communal pride. When it comes to their actions, they are guided by their own desires. But if it is an occasion for expressing their pride, they will sing the praises of Islam, and in this way seek to satisfy their urge to claim superiority over others.

The fact is that there is really no difference between Muslim and other leaders. Many of the latter routinely invoke and sing the praises of the country's Constitution. "Our Constitution has this! Our Constitution says that! Our Constitution is so great!" they proclaim with enormous pride. But their own actions are just the opposite. Muslim leaders behave in exactly the same way. They sing the praises of the Quran and the practice of the Prophet, and in this way fulfil their urge to express their pride. But when the time comes for them to act, they are guided simply by their personal interests and communal prejudices and desires.

Our Muslim leaders may not engage in inter-communal violence themselves. But when, because of the foolishness of some ignorant members of their community, communal riots are triggered off, they always lend them their support. They never hold their own people responsible for this, as the case of the Muslim paper quoted above clearly demonstrates. And so, even though they may not physically engage in rioting, they are also to be counted among the guilty.

People routinely take the name of the divine religion, but the fact is that they only know ‘communal religion’—wrongly perceiving Islam to be the religion of a certain cultural community.

19

Make Yourself Eligible, Don't Make Demands



The Quran reveals the secret of a successful life. And the secret is: Be beneficial to others. In this world, only people or communities who prove to be beneficial to others earn their respect. The world rejects those who are not beneficial to others.

This principle of life is referred to in the following Quranic verse (13:17):

He sends down water from the sky that fills riverbeds to overflowing, each according to its measure. The torrent carries along swelling foam, akin to what rises from smelted ore from which man makes ornaments and tools. God thus depicts truth and falsehood. The scum is cast away, but whatever is of use to man remains behind. God thus speaks in parables.

Using an analogy, this verse expresses an important principle of life. In a flood or when something is subjected to intense heat, useful substances remain, while unwanted substances get separated.

The same holds true in the case of human beings. People and groups gain a position of respect if they prove to be useful. In contrast, those who lose their usefulness are dumped into the dustbin of history and the world moves on.

The whole of human history supports this Quranic declaration. For instance, around the mid-20th century, various European colonial powers were forced to relinquish their control over most of Asia and Africa. But when the former European colonies in Asia and Africa won political freedom, they discovered that they had no one to man their educational institutions. And so, many of these countries invited 'experts' from the very same European countries that they had earlier been colonized by. Things went to such an extreme in some cases that political independence soon turned into technical servitude! Today, Western countries control these states by controlling their economies and through their domination in the field of science, in just the same way as they once controlled these states politically.

Like Muslims, Christians, too, are a minority in India. They could have had the some complaints with regard to the majority community as Muslims keep talking about. Yet, Christians do not face the same issues in India as Muslims do.

Why?

Christianity is a missionary religion. It is engaged in missionary work in a very organized way. Many Christians believe that salvation is possible only through Christianity, not through any other religion. They also

think it very important to maintain their separate identity. Co-religionists of the Indian Christians from Western countries—Western colonial powers—invaded and conquered India and exploited it for centuries. A Christian colonial power sided with the people who wanted to partition India. The centres of religious loyalty for Indian Christians are located outside India. Christians are sometimes accused by some people of being agents of imperialist powers.

Yet, despite all of this, the Christians' interests are fully preserved in India. This is because as a community, they benefit others. They are givers, not just takers.

Christians number just a few million in India, around 2 per cent of the country's population. The country's Muslim population is much more than theirs. Yet, there is a tremendous difference between the two communities. In this country, Christians have established hospitals, schools and social service centres on a vast scale. A sizeable proportion of government officials and employees have studied in Christian schools. Christian hospitals are considered to be among the best in the country. There are thousands of social service centres run by Christians all across India, helping the sick and the needy. And so on.

On the other hand, Muslims in this country are a community that knows only how to protest and make demands. They have hardly any educational institutions, hospitals and social service centres—certainly far from enough for serving even their own needs, leave alone for serving others.

This situation is completely against the law of nature. In such a situation, the biases or discrimination that Muslims complain about are actually in accordance with divine laws, and not, as they allege, a result of discrimination by perceived oppressors.

God has created this world. In this world, whatever God wants, happens. God has made water to quench thirst. He has made petrol so that people can use it as fuel for vehicles. And so, your success lies in availing of God's bounties in the appropriate manner—by using water for quenching your thirst, and using petrol for your car, for instance. But, if you behave contrary to this and try to quench your thirst by drinking petrol or try to drive your car on water, you are, needless to say, bound to fail!

God has made this world as a world of competition. Here, everyone enjoys freedom of choice. Everyone is trying to move ahead, through hard work and skill. This principle of competition has been established by God Himself. You simply cannot destroy it. And so, you have just one choice: and that is that in the field of competition, you need to prove your capability and win your place. If you want that the world should stop functioning on the basis of competition, and that, instead, it should start running on the basis of your making demands on others, you are living in a fool's paradise, because this can never happen. If you want to lead your life by simply protesting and demonstrating against others and demanding things for yourself, you will have to make a different world of your own other

than this world of God's, for this simply cannot happen in this world.

God has made this world a testing-ground. Here, everyone enjoys freedom of action. This is the reason why the world is characterized by constant competition between individuals and communities. This environment of competition can never come to an end. Now, there are two ways of thinking and responding in this regard. One way is by being overwhelmed by the conditions one faces. The other way is by rising above these conditions. Because this world can never be free from unfavourable conditions, people whose thinking is overwhelmed by the unpleasant conditions they face always think in terms of complaints. They have a complaining mentality. Their thinking is reactionary, because they always react—negatively—to unfavourable conditions. Instead of working positively, to help themselves and their communities, they simply engage in completely useless agitations and demonstrations against other people and communities, foolishly imagining that in doing so they are doing great work.

In contrast to this, people who rise above the conditions they are faced with and exercise their minds soon realize that unfavourable conditions and factors that they sometimes face are actually in accordance with the law of nature, rather than as a result of other people's oppression or discrimination. This realization makes them realistic. They accept reality as it is, and then make realistic plans for their lives. Instead of ranting and raving against others, they try to succeed on the basis of hard work.

The Indian Muslims have become habituated to thinking in terms of 'discrimination'. That is why they have developed an extremely narrow and confined ghetto mentality. But if, instead, they start thinking in realistic terms, they will experience a profound sense of freedom. No longer, they will realize, would they want to blame others for their woes. While in the first case, they are led to view all roads as blocked, in the latter case they will find vast vistas opening up all around them.

Take, for instance, the case of the Urdu language. Muslims complain that the Urdu language is being discriminated against in India. But if you study the matter deeply, you will realize that the problem of Urdu is actually because of the limitations of this language, rather than as a result of it being discriminated against. In other words, it is an internal, rather than external, problem. The actual problem lies in the fact that the Urdu language has failed to establish its importance in the contemporary world. That is why even the most passionate advocates of Urdu think it necessary to send their own children to English-medium schools!

Before 1959, the Russian language was given hardly any importance in America. But when in that year Russia sent a rocket into space, travelling at the speed of 7000 miles per hour and reaching the moon in a little more than 30 hours, all of a sudden the Russian language acquired great importance in intellectual circles in the West. This rocket signified that Russia had surpassed America in space technology. It led American experts to believe that their knowledge of space technology was incomplete until they had read all the available

literature on the subject in Russian. This engendered a sea-change in attitudes towards the Russian language in America. America began to arrange to obtain Russian scientific journals and to translate them into English. All important scientific treatises in Russian were rendered into English.

This sudden importance that the Russian language acquired in America was not a result of any group staging demonstrations or making demands. Rather, it was because the language was able to prove that it was useful and, therefore, deserving of such attention.

The same is true for the Japanese language today. Till the mid-20th century, not many people in the West cared to learn Japanese. But today, scientific treatises written in Japan are quickly translated into Western languages and enjoy great respect and popularity in Western countries. This is because of Japan's amazing progress in the field of electronics. Western scholars realize that their understanding of electronics will remain far from complete unless they are able to read the latest researches being conducted in this field in Japan. This is one reason why there are so many scholars of the Japanese language in the West today. By proving its importance and usefulness, the Japanese language has won for itself a very respectable position in the West that it did not enjoy before.

The actual problem with Urdu is that the corpus of Urdu writings consists largely of just two genres: one is poetry, and the other is religious sermons, written in a preachy mode. In today's scientific age, these two genres have lost their importance. There is now no

area of research where high-quality books are being written in Urdu, books that people think that if they do not read, they will not be able to get a complete and proper understanding of their subject of interest. In any discipline, be it philosophy, history, sociology or technology or whatever, there are no books in Urdu which are impossible to ignore if one wants to gain such an understanding. In a climate of such utter intellectual poverty, the 'inheritors' of Urdu themselves cannot give it adequate importance, leave alone others. And so, to expect others to give it importance is simply wishful thinking.

According to the Quranic verse cited earlier (13:17), the key to a successful life in this world is to be beneficial to others. Here, the giver receives. Here, success comes through proving oneself capable, not through making demands, protesting and stirring up a big hue and cry. This principle, according to which the world functions, has been devised by God, the Creator of the world. People who refuse to accept this God-ordained principle, on the basis of which His world runs, can make an imaginary world of their own if they want to. They need to remember, however, that in this world, success can only be had by abiding by God's will, not by following their own.

20

Discover Opportunities in Challenging Situations



Iran was conquered in 636 C.E., during the Caliphate of Umar (d. 644), the second Muslim Caliph. At that time, the commander of the Muslim army was Sa'ad ibn Abi Waqqas. When the war between the Muslims and Persians broke out, the Persians initially suffered considerable damage. They thought that further fighting was not in their interests, and so they offered to dialogue with the Muslims. Accordingly, Sa'ad sent some selected men to the court of Yazdgird, the Persian Emperor.

When this group of Muslims entered Yazdgird's court, they were not affected by the glitter and glamour all around them. They boldly addressed the king and his courtiers, speaking without any fear. This greatly angered Yazdgird. He was furious they should talk to him like that. Were it not for the custom that ambassadors were not to be killed, he would definitely have killed them. He told the Muslims to go back and tell their commander that he would be sending an army that would completely crush them.

Saying this, Yazdgird ordered his servants to bring a basket filled with mud. When the basket was brought before him, he asked the Muslim delegation, “Who is the most noble person among you?” The members of the delegation kept silent. After a while, one among them, Asim ibn Amr, stepped forward and said that he was the most noble of the group. When Yazdgird asked the other members of the delegation, they testified to Asim’s statement. Yazdgird then ordered that the basket be put on Asim’s head and that he be led out of the court and chased away, out of the limits of Yazdgird’s capital.

And so, the basket of mud was placed on Asim’s head and he was taken out of the king’s palace. He then rushed to Qadisiyya, where Sa‘ad ibn Abi Waqqas was waiting. When he got there, he related what had happened to him.

Sa‘ad did not get agitated in the least when he learned what had happened. He took it in a positive sense. “Be happy”, he said, because, he explained, “God had given us the keys to their sovereignty.”

This was the sort of lofty thinking that made the Arabs, despite having been considered a people of no consequence, victorious over an immensely powerful empire. These people, who were thought to be of no worth at all in history, charted a new history through their character and behaviour.

The system according to which this world functions has been made in such a way that here, every day is followed by night. Here, flowers come along with

thorns. There is not a single person in this world who does not face some or other unfavourable condition or situation at some time in her or his life. That is why the only way to be successful in this world is to discover the favourable aspects that exist even amidst unfavourable conditions and to develop faith and determination in the face of such conditions. Somebody may place a basket of mud on your head, intending thereby to demean you, but you must perceive that this basket is actually a crown. The 'demeaning' basket must seem to you to be a crown of respect.

The famous psychologist Alfred Adler (1870-1937) spent much of his whole life studying the human psyche. On the basis of his extensive studies he declared that one of the most amazing features of human beings is their power to turn a minus into a plus.

This unique characteristic of human beings is present inside every person right from birth itself. Only someone who taps this innate feature or capacity can achieve great success in this world. And if an entire group emerges that makes good use of this innate capacity, it charts a new chapter in human history. It closes one chapter of history and opens the doors of a new one. One such group was the Prophet's Companions. They employed this innate human capacity to the fullest, and that is why, as the example cited above illustrates, they were able to inaugurate a glorious chapter in the history of humankind.

Muslims today present an entirely different picture, however. Faced with what they perceive as unfavourable conditions, they see everything in a negative light,

drawing only negative lessons from the happenings around them. And so, they have developed an extreme persecution complex. If, however, they were to reflect deeply and see things in a proper perspective, they could make the difficult conditions they are faced with into a positive resource. Using the capabilities that God has given to all human beings, they can turn their 'no' into a 'yes', the unfavourable conditions that they presently face into favourable conditions.

This is entirely possible, but only on the condition that Muslims think in a lofty manner. And for this to happen, they must learn to view a basket of mud placed on their heads as a crown of respectability. Instead of ranting and raving against others, they must focus on discovering their hidden potentials and possibilities. They must shun the habit they have developed of blaming others for the unfavourable conditions they face. Instead, they must accept their own responsibility for these conditions. The day this happens will inaugurate a new and glorious chapter in their history.

21

Consciousness of the Hereafter



A young man from Delhi had to get to Mumbai to appear for an interview for a job abroad. He had booked a berth in a train. On the day of his departure, he left his home for the railway station in a rickshaw. As the vehicle passed through a lane, some boys threw stones at it. At this, the young man's friend, who was accompanying him, lost his temper. He wanted to get off the rickshaw, catch hold of the boys and teach them a good lesson for their misbehaviour. But the young man stopped him.

“Where do we have time for this?” he asked, as the rickshaw sped ahead.

What the young man wanted to say was, “I have to reach the station at once and catch my train. Then, after getting to Mumbai, I have to appear for the interview. I can't afford to be late, and so where do I have time to get stuck with these boys? I'd rather exercise patience in the face of their misbehaviour so that I do not miss my interview.”

People have this sort of seriousness and sincerity about their worldly affairs. But believers in God

have an even greater seriousness than this about the Hereafter, the eternal life after death. Someone who is serious about worldly affairs does not have the time to get entangled in irrelevant things, just like the man heading for the interview who refused to start a fight with the boys who threw stones at the rickshaw he was in, in the story above. In the same way, someone who is serious about God and the Hereafter will refuse to get involved in controversies that will divert him from his spiritual goal.

A passenger who wants to travel from Delhi to Amritsar, to the north-west, will not head in the direction of Calcutta, to the south-east. Likewise, a person who is journeying towards the Hereafter will not want to head off in a direction that will take him far away from his chosen destination. He will not allow himself to get stuck in useless controversies and conflicts with others.

If Muslims think of themselves as travellers in this world, they will find inspiration in the above-mentioned hypothetical example of the young man heading to Mumbai for his interview. But if they think of themselves as travellers who are journeying towards the Hereafter, they will find inspiration in the example of the Companions of the Prophet, who did not let worldly things divert them from their mission. And if Muslims follow neither path, concerned with neither sort of journey, then they are simply wandering about, without any destination whatsoever.

Index

A

Abdullah ibn Abbas 39, 40
Abdullah ibn Masud 43
Abu Bakr 12
Abu Basir 13
Abu Jandal 13
Africa 111
Alam 94
Alfred Adler 120
Aligarh 61, 65, 66, 67, 82, 85
Aligarh Muslim University 61
America 115, 116
Anger 30, 60, 74, 95
Animal 25, 26, 27, 28, 60
Animal world 25
Arabia 13, 42, 105, 106
Arabic 64
Arabs 119
Army 9, 10, 23, 33, 96, 118
Asia 111

B

Babylon 33, 34
Bal Thackeray 94, 95, 98, 100,
106, 107
Bangalore 94, 98
Battle of Hunayn 21, 22
Battle of the Trench 9
Battle of Uhud 21, 22
Bedouin 100
Bhiwandi 94, 95, 97, 99, 106
Bible 34, 35, 36

Book of Jeremiah 35

C

Caliph 12, 22, 23, 38, 118
Caliphate 118
Character of the Prophet 101
Children of Israel 32, 33, 84
Christians 111, 112
Civil Lines 66, 67
Colonial powers 111, 112
Communal violence 16, 17, 18,
19, 20, 40, 42, 60, 66, 67, 68,
76, 82, 85, 86, 88, 108
Companions of the Prophet 9,
12, 13, 38, 39, 43, 50, 100,
106, 107, 120, 123
Conflict 4, 5, 14, 17, 25, 28, 41,
42, 43, 47, 51, 58, 59, 63, 65,
67, 68, 69, 74, 75, 87, 90, 91,
104
Congress Party 70, 83, 107
Constitution 103, 108
Creation plan 5
Creator 7, 25, 117

D

Dar ul-Uloom Nadwat ul-Ulema
59
dawah 58
Delhi 6, 64, 122, 123
Devil 31, 74
Discrimination 113, 114, 115

E

Educational institutions 111, 112
 Ego 48, 57, 58, 75
 Eid prayers 83
 Electronics 116
 Enemy 23, 26, 27, 39, 47, 48, 49, 101
 English 64, 115, 116
 Europe 64
 European 111
 Evil 39, 41, 43, 44, 48, 50, 51, 84, 101

F

False prophets 34
 Fanaticism 42, 43
 Freedom 5, 8, 49, 111, 113, 114, 115

G

Ghadir Ashtat 9
 God 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 29, 32, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 42, 45, 46, 48, 50, 53, 57, 58, 60, 64, 74, 84, 87, 88, 89, 90, 92, 102, 103, 104, 110, 113, 114, 117, 119, 121, 122, 123
 God's message 87
 Good 21, 33, 39, 50, 76, 83, 93, 120, 122
 Goodness 43, 101
 Government 33, 65, 112

H

Hadith 32, 38, 43, 56, 79, 84, 96, 97, 100
 Hereafter 90, 123
 Hindu 82, 83, 98, 99
 History 32, 33, 34, 35, 42, 55, 111, 117, 119, 120, 121
 Holy 12, 104
 House of God 9, 11, 12, 13
 Hudaybiyah 10, 11, 13, 16
 Human history 55, 111, 120
 Humans 27, 104
 Hyderabad 65, 66, 67

I

Ibn Hisham 10
 Ibn Kathir 39
 India 16, 19, 42, 43, 57, 59, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 70, 77, 82, 85, 87, 89, 106, 111, 112, 115
 Indian Muslims 64, 70, 115
 Islam 4, 5, 9, 13, 16, 19, 20, 21, 42, 43, 44, 48, 74, 94, 95, 96, 97, 99, 101, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109
 Islamic institution 70, 71, 72
 Islamic seminaries 59
 Islamic Shariah 57
 Islamic teachings 5, 86, 103
 Israelites 10

J

Jan Sangh 83
 Japanese 116
 Jehoiakim 33
 Jews 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 84
 Jihad 18, 36

Jihadist 36
Judah 33

K

Kabah 9, 12
Khalid ibn al-Walid 10
Kharash ibn Umayyah 11
Killing 48, 60
Knowledge 66, 115

L

Lucknow 59, 60

M

Madinah 9, 11, 12, 13, 100
Madrasas 59
Makkah 9, 11, 12, 14, 22, 105
Marathi 94
Message 13, 87
Message of Islam 13
Mikraz ibn Hafs 11
Monotheism 101, 104
Moradabad 43, 82, 83, 84, 85
Moses 32
Mumbai 94, 95, 97, 106, 122,
123
Muslim ruler 57
Muslims 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13,
16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23,
24, 29, 30, 31, 32, 38, 39, 40,
41, 42, 43, 44, 56, 57, 58, 59,
61, 64, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 73,
74, 76, 77, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83,
84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91,
92, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100,
101, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107,
108, 111, 112, 113, 115, 118,
119, 120, 121, 123

N

Nasheman 94
Nature 25, 27, 40, 45, 48, 65,
113, 114
Nebuchadnezzar 33, 34
Non-Muslim 42, 43, 56, 57, 59,
61, 71, 85, 86, 88
Non-violence 14

P

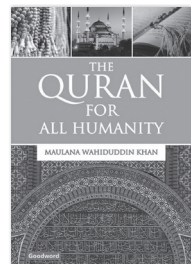
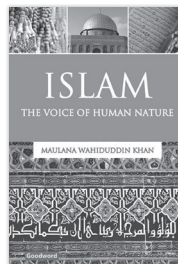
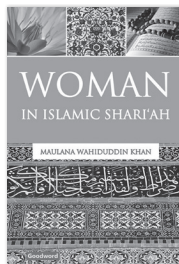
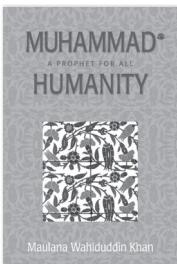
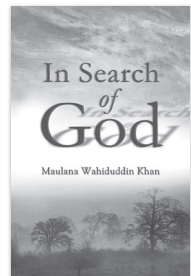
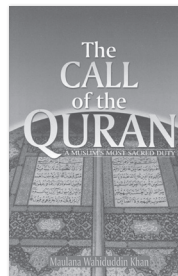
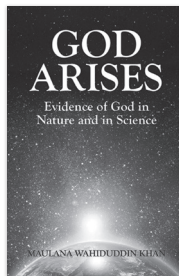
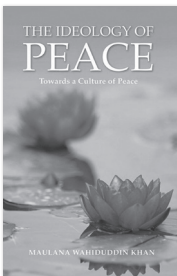
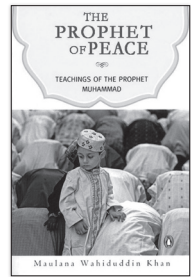
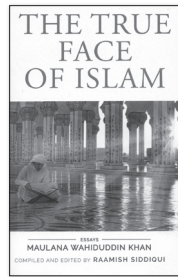
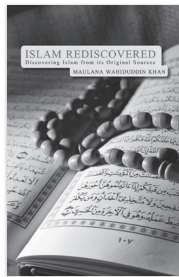
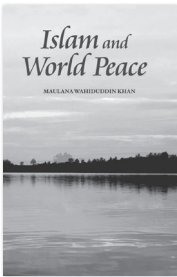
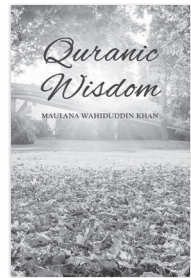
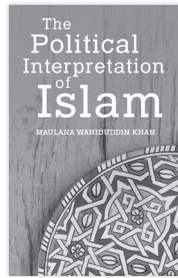
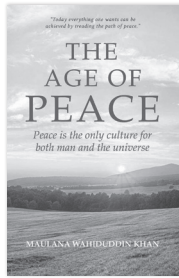
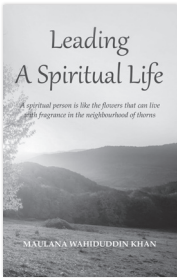
Palestine 33, 34
Partition of India 77
Patience 7, 10, 17, 39, 45, 46,
47, 48, 49, 52, 56, 59, 61, 92,
105, 122
Persians 118
Poetry 116
Political freedom 111
Prayer 56, 57, 83
Prophet 5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14,
15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 32, 33, 38,
39, 42, 43, 50, 57, 84, 86, 94,
95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101,
102, 105, 106, 107, 108, 120,
123
Prophethood 102
Prophet Jeremiah 33, 35
Prophet Muhammad 5, 9, 10,
12, 17, 18, 32, 38, 45, 83, 98
Prophet of God 17, 18, 37
Prophet of Islam 16, 21
Prophet's mosque 100

Q

Quran 5, 13, 17, 21, 22, 32, 38,
39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 45, 56, 79,
84, 86, 89, 90, 94, 95, 97, 98,
101, 105, 108, 110

- Quraysh 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17,
 18, 22, 106
- R**
- Religion 5, 19, 87, 99, 101, 102,
 108, 109, 111
- Riot 42, 43, 51, 52, 56, 61, 62,
 65, 73, 76, 77, 82, 83, 86, 87,
 88, 89, 92, 96, 97, 100
- Robert Multhoff 65
- Russia 115
- Russian 29, 115, 116
- S**
- Sahih Bukhari 32, 38, 100
- Sahih Muslim 32, 38
- Samuel 33
- Satan 39
- Scientific treatises 116
- Shab-e Barat 95
- Shariah 56, 57, 104
- Shiv Jayanti 94, 95, 99
- Shiv Sena 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99,
 107
- South India 67
- Sunnah 18
- Syria 33
- System 33, 40, 64, 119
- T**
- Tafsir al-Qurtubi 40
- Technology 115, 117
- Terrorism 4
- Terrorists 8
- Thackeray 94, 95, 98, 100, 106,
 107
- Tolerance 19, 39, 40, 46, 47, 48,
 50, 55, 98
- Tradition 9, 12, 95, 100
- Treaty of Hudaibiyah 13, 17, 42,
 105, 106
- Tree 45
- True prophets 35
- Truth 18, 45, 47, 48, 65, 84, 110
- U**
- Umair ibn Habib ibn Hamasha
 50
- Umar ibn Abdul Aziz 22, 23
- Umar ibn al-Khattab 38
- Umrah 11
- Universe 7, 8
- Urdu 64, 94, 98, 115, 116, 117
- Uthman 11, 38
- V**
- Violence 4, 5, 8, 14, 16, 17, 18,
 19, 20, 40, 41, 42, 47, 59, 60,
 61, 62, 66, 67, 68, 73, 75, 76,
 78, 82, 83, 85, 86, 88, 91, 92,
 108
- W**
- War 14, 25, 48, 105, 118
- Warfare 13
- West 115, 116
- Western countries 111, 112, 116
- Y**
- Yazdgird 118, 119
- Z**
- Zedekiah 34

Books on Peace and Spirituality by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan



The approach to non-violence and peace-building outlined in this book is based on the Quran and the life of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. It draws lessons from these sources that can be applied to efforts to negotiate differences and conflicts at all levels—from between individuals to between communities and entire countries.

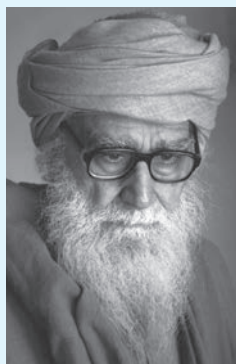
The central focus of the book is on conflict-prevention. After all, if conflicts are prevented at the very outset, violence can be done away with. Amicably negotiating differences before they degenerate into a conflict is, the author suggests, the most sensible way for us to handle conflicts.

“In a provocative situation that can escalate into violence between communities one must desist from making one-sided allegations. Instead, one must exercise generosity and willingly acknowledge one’s mistakes.”

“Conspiracies can be defused and rendered ineffective by responding to them through wisdom, rather than through confrontation.”

“No matter how sensitive a situation may get, it can be peacefully resolved. The necessary condition for this is patience.”

“Instead of reacting to provocation, one should adopt a positive approach and method. This is the only solution to the problem of violence between communities.”



MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN (1925-2021) was an Islamic scholar, spiritual leader and peace activist. His work has received international recognition for his seminal contributions toward world peace. The Maulana authored over 200 books dealing with Islam’s spiritual wisdom, the Prophet’s non-violent approach, Islam’s relation with modernity and other contemporary issues. His English translation of the Quran is widely appreciated as simple, clear and easily understandable. He founded *Centre for Peace and Spirituality International* in 2001 to popularize the culture of peace and share the spiritual message of Islam with people.

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