



S. ABUL HASAN ALI NADWI

LIVE TO LEAD :

A CALL TO INDIAN MUSLIMS

*[This speech was delivered on the eve of
the 100th Anniversary of Darul-Uloom
of Deoband, India, held on March 1980]*

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BY

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In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

Call to mind when ye
Were a small (band),
Despised through the land,
And afraid that men might
Despoil and kidnap you ;
But He provided a safe asylum
For you, strengthened you
With His aid, and gave you
Good things for sustenance :
That ye might be grateful. (S. VIII. 26)

Dear friends and brothers in Islam !

The Quranic verse from the chapter "Al-Anfal" that I have just read to you descended upon my mind here and now. I felt as if an unseen power whispered to me, "Look at this large throng of Muslims, a gathering in hundreds of thousands, which has been drawn to this small place today in the name of Islam." In the first century of the Hijra it would not have occurred even to a person of extraordinary wisdom, ambition, and foresightedness that such a large number would ever come together just for the love of Islam in a small place like this, situated so far away from the Arabian peninsula and so different from it in regard to language, culture, law and national and racial heritage.

Friends ! Ponder again on the above Quranic verse and recall the circumstances in which Muslims of the first century of the Islamic calender had to live in Madina. They were, as this verse informs us, only a handful then—not more than a few thousand in all. Weak and vulnerable, they suffered from a constant fear that the enemies of Islam might suddenly fall upon them, seize them by force, and do away with them (here the word *takhattuf* has been used in the Qur'ān which means "to snatch away something by forcibly grabbing it"). At that time Muslims were an easy prey to non-believers. No super-power was needed to destroy them; the tribe of the Quraish alone was sufficient to blow out the light of Islam for ever.

In the Qur'ān the simile of the light being put out by a blow of the mouth has been used in this context :

Their intention is

To extinguish God's Light

(By blowing) with their mouths : (S. LXI. 8)

This allegory has, of course, literary gracefulness, but more than that it presents a very realistic picture of the situation of Muslims in the early period of Islam. The light of Islam, to use the Quranic imagery, could have been extinguished then very easily merely with a blow of the mouth—no strong blast of wind was wanted. Allah has used this expression in the Qur'ān at two or three places to portray realistically the circumstances in which the early Muslims lived.

Then, as Allah says further:

But He provided a safe asylum
For you, strengthened you
With His aid, and gave you
Good things for sustenance:
That ye might be grateful, (S. VIII. 26)

He helped the early Muslims with divine protection and support against odds and blessed them abundantly with things beneficial and clean in nature, so that they might be thankful to Him. The expression *tayyibāt* used in the Qur'ān at this place is wide and comprehensive and includes all divine blessings, such as the power of law and administration, the pleasure of freedom and independence and the honour of leading a respectable life. The aim of the Lord behind this favour, again, was that Muslims should be thankful to Him.

Today when I am standing in front of such a large gathering of Muslims here, I am reminded of the early time when the above Quranic verse was revealed to the Prophet mentioning the increase of Muslims in number—which was merely a few thousand at that time—as His special favour. In this context it is, of course, such a great favour of the Almighty that a call in the name of Islam has drawn today such a large number of believers to such a small place from different and distant corners of the world. This gathering presents the picture of 'Arafat—if it be no irreverence to make such a comparison—for the power which attracts hundreds of thousands

of Muslims to 'Arafāt for the annual pilgrimage has drawn a large number of them to this village today.

And proclaim the Pilgrimage
Among men : they will come
To thee on foot and (mounted)
On every kind of camel,
Lean on account of journeys
Through deep and distant
Mountain highways ; (S. XXII. 27)

Whether Muslims gather in Makkah Mukarramah, the centre of Islam, or they assemble in an Islamic institution such as this Darul-Uloom of Deoband in India, the common drawing force is the *sunnah* of Prophet Abraham and that of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon them). Even today the call of the Islamic faith has such a tremendous power that the strongest government or any other form of organization of the temporal world cannot even aspire to attain. Even if the United Nations dies a hundred times and is reborn, even if the powerful nations like the United States of America and Soviet Union of Russia die and live and die again, they will never be able to win the hearts of people as Islam has won them. The call of the true Islamic faith (*imān*) which draws the hearts of Muslims unfailingly is like a magnet that pulls iron chips towards it. Nothing in the world but faith (*imān*) has such a power.

I have told Arabs on different occasions that Allah raised them up from a state of insignificance to a state of

eminence through Islam. I say the same to you now and wish to say it as strongly as possible that you too were worth nothing in the past and that you own virtually everything you can take pride in now to the religion of Islam. Think of your past. What did you use to worship in India? You used to bow in worship even to things as humble and helpless as trees and stones. Who took you out from the deep darkness of such gross ignorance and indignity? Undeniably, it was the redeeming call of the prophets of God, which was perfected in the message of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the last in the line of prophets. If Arabs should be thankful to Allah for the favour of Islam once, you should do so a hundred times. I very often address Arabs and try to critically analyse their situation to draw their attention to it. I am full of praise for their open-heartedness and broad-mindedness; for, whenever I tried to awaken them, they listened to me attentively; whenever I called them, they responded eagerly; whenever I pointed out their weaknesses to them, they showed magnanimous tolerance. I realise I had no right to do so, for I am myself a humble Muslim benefiting from the fountain of faith that flowed first from their land. But being one of you, my countrymen, I have a right to ask you to think from what depths Islam has elevated you.

Friends and elders! Try to understand the secret of your prominence and distinction. What has helped you in maintaining your characteristic Islamic features in this world of change, although the challenge has been so trying for you? Take, for example, the case of India.

This land has been called "a melting pot of nations" by Altāf Hussain Hālī a renowned Muslim scholar. The nations which migrated to this land gradually lost their distinctive characteristics and were completely dissolved in the mainstream of the country. Neither the Aryans nor any other nation is an exception to this process of absorption. But what are the protecting forces which have shielded you against this phenomenon of change and helped you live with your Islamic identity intact? These are, first, belief in the unity of God and, second, sincere adherence to the precept and example of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Your sheet-anchor in this tumultuous sea was your declaration of the supremacy of Allah, with the total negation of all other so-called powers, and your deep love for the Prophet of Islam.

These were the factors which made it possible for us to see such a large gathering of Muslims present here today. We have with us today a number of Arab guests. We have invited them here to tell them that we remember so dearly the lesson of the Islamic faith that we received from them through Muhammad Bin Qāsim Al-Thaqafi and through other pious preachers (whether they came from Arabia directly or through other countries). We have called them here to witness how Islam has been a living force for us, and I am sure that they are witnessing this fact here and now in this exemplary large and enthusiastic gathering. We have called Arab scholars here not to relate to them the history of the Darul-Uloom of Deoband, nor to recount to them the contributions of this Islamic center of learning ; we, instead, want to read

to them the verses of one of their famous poets, Abū Firās Hamdānī, for his words speak for us best :

The ventures undertaken by persons of nobility and excellence are now shining bright ;

The tree planted by persons of kindness and capability is now bearing abundant fruit.

We were like arrows ; when the archer set us in the bow-string and shot at a target, we hit the center ;

Praised be the arrows, but praised also be the archer.

Gentlemen ! I invite you to make a decision that you shall live in this country with your distinctive qualities as Muslims. We are Muslims and we shall live in this country with our Islamic characteristics : this should be our determination.

Friends and elders ! What is the philosophy of Islamic migration (*hijrah*) ? Under what circumstances does Islam enjoin migration ? As we know, when Muslims find it impossible to practice Islamic injunctions in a land, it becomes obligatory for them to migrate from there. We cannot live in this country at the cost of the characteristics that distinguish us as Muslims. We never shall agree to sacrifice anything which relates to our faith in Islam. We are not ready to lose in any form and to any degree our love for the hallowed practice of our Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

For myself, I declare in explicit terms and wish you

also to declare clearly and unequivocally for yourselves that Muslims are not prepared to accept a degenerate mode of life, to be fed and sheltered even as animals are. We, Muslims, reject once for all such a mean and despicable status in this society. We shall live in India with our prayer-calls and prayer-performances. We are not ready to give up any Islamic practice, much less our obligatory devotions. We shall dearly hold to heart every single tradition of the holy Prophet (peace be upon him). Our only ideal will be to follow the example of the best exemplar, the Prophet of Islam. Friends and elders! Today the selected leaders and scholars of Islam are gathered here. We see here such jurists today whose verdicts are honoured in the Islamic world. In their presence I appeal to you that before you leave this gathering you make a firm resolve to live in this country as Muslims and never to relinquish this position of yours.

Brothers in faith! Know your own strength. Do justice to yourselves. The question of the day for you is limited neither to the character of an Islamic institution, nor to the validity of a school of thought, nor to the completion of some construction plans and projects. Today the main challenge for you is to protect your Islamic identity and the sources of Islamic knowledge which form and inform Islamic character. The question that you have to answer relates to the leadership of this country. You have not been raised here to passively follow in the footsteps of others, to attend and wait on others, or to take a cue from others. Your responsibility, in fact, is to diagnose the ailments of the present society

of this country and to offer remedies. We do not believe in any sweeping spate of nationalism. We believe only in the Islamic stream which urges us on to guide and lead the world.

Gentlemen ! This country seems bent on committing suicide and plunging into a ditch of fire. It is about to sink under the morass of immorality and homicide. No one but you can save this country. You pronounce the word of Allah and His Prophet and offer the rare and redeeming values of Islam. You do not at all need to be put to auction in the market to go to the highest bidder. You are the rarest of goods and Allah alone is your buyer. I say it openly—I wish I could hammer it into your minds and hearts—that you alone have the power to save the country. You are armed with the belief in the unity of God and in the equality of man. You possess a complete system of collective justice. You have faith in the Hereafter and believe that its bliss is for the God-fearing. You are not of those who are tempted by might and power and in whose view all that matters is wealth and property and the support of the majority. Nor are you of those who regard success in election and access to parliament as their highest achievement.

Friends and elders ! Those who believe in the gospel of Mammonism and hail the rising sun are bound to meet annihilation. Nobody can avert their doom. It pains me to say that the Arabs do not see the real danger of this mode of life either. I am not saying it in Urdu, a language unintelligible to them, out of any fear.

I have said to them in their language so many times :

“I am not afraid of impoverishment for you. I rather apprehend that the world may be given to you in abundance as it was to the people before you, and then you begin to compete with one another for winning it as they did, and be destroyed by it as they were.” (*Hadith*)

I have said it in Makkah and Madinah and have given the call wherever I could that only that nation shall survive which lives by the faith in Allah and His Prophet, accepts the Islamic Law as eternal, and reposes trust in Allah's promise of succour and triumph. If Indian Muslims inculcate in themselves the true Islamic qualities, the fire of Nimrud, symbolically speaking, shall once again turn into a garden as it did for Prophet Abraham.

Dear friends ! I say with full conviction that Maulānā Muhammad Qāsim Nānutwī, the founder of the Dārul-Uloom of Deoband, and Shaikhul Hind Maulānā Mahmoodul Hassan, Maulānā Ashraf 'Alī Thānwī and Maulānā Husain Ahmad Madani, all staunch supporters of this institution, had the same message for the Muslims of India. They reminded Indian Muslims, each in his own way, that they must preserve their religious identity, take the Qur'ān as guide, and stand as one body united by belief in the unity of God and in the sanctity of the practice of the holy Prophet. This is the message of the Darul Uloom of Deoband and this has been its hallmark. This center of learning has always tried to preserve our Islamic heritage and avoided bringing controversial issues to the forum.

Let us all understand that the Darul Uloom of Deoband is, in fact, an heir to the legacy of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi. And a true successor of Shaikh Sirhindi was Shāh Walīullah of Delhi. Our men of piety and eminence agree that this Darul Uloom of Deoband is a rose-garden of Shāh Walīullah's school of thought. I think, wherever in India there are educational institutions disseminating their light of guidance, they derive it from the work of Shāh Walīullah.

Gentlemen ! Realize that your role in this society is that of a guide and a leader. It is intolerable for me that others dare to tell Muslims how they should lead their lives. Who on earth has a right to address Muslims in this way ? Shall there come another prophet after the Prophet of Arabia ? Shall there be revealed another book of guidance after the Qur'ān ? Shall there be made another law for us in place of the Law of Muhammad (peace be upon him) ? The Prophet of Allah alone is our guide, and Allah's revealed Book, the Qur'ān, and His Prophet's example our only companions. Dear Muslims ! Be determined before you leave this place that you shall live in this country as true Muslims, holding Allah's Book and the Prophet's practice dearer than your own lives and be always prepared to make any sacrifice in face of a challenge to this life-style. If this is your decision, a life of honour and eminence awaits you.

So lose not heart,
Nor fall into despair :
For ye must gain mastery
If ye are true in Faith. (S. 111 : 139)

A number of the graduates of this Islamic institution who will be awarded degrees today as an acknowledgement of the successful completion of their studies are present here. To them I wish to mention some distinctive characteristics of this Dārul Uloom of Deoband. I hope these will serve them as guidelines for the future.

1. The most prominent characteristic of the Dārul Uloom is that it has always tried to unite Muslims on the commonly agreed principles of Islam, such as the oneness of God and the traditions of the Prophet (peace be upon him), and has kept away from debatable questions among the Muslims as far as possible. It has set for itself this line of action as a result of the influence of Shāh Waliullah of Delhi, Shāh Ismā'il Shahīd of Delhi, and Sayyid Ahmad Shahīd of Rae Bareli and has sincerely adhered to it to this day.
2. Another remarkable characteristic of the Dārul Uloom is its adherence to the traditions of the Prophet (peace be upon him).
3. The Dārul Uloom has always tried to engender among Muslims a concern for developing a strong relationship with Allah, His recollection in the heart, remembering Him with the tongue, and examining their own conduct as Muslims.
4. The Dārul Uloom has always stood for presenting the word of Allah to the people with dignity, concern and determination.

The persons associated with this institution have demonstrated these admirable qualities in their character, and I hope that the graduates of this year will maintain these glorious traditions.

The general Muslims should not have an impression that the above obligations are limited only to the graduates of the Dārul Uloom. You too, my brothers, have a very important role to play. To you my call is that you protect cautiously your faith in the oneness of God (*tawhid*) against the influence of polytheism and innovation which are so common everywhere today. You all should have a sincere desire to follow the ideal of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and be mindful of your obligatory religious duties. You should try your best to inculcate in your heart a deep love for your Lord and establish with him such an intimate relationship which exists between the rememberer and the remembered, the lover and the beloved, the creature and the Creator.

وآخر دعوانا ان الحمد لله رب العالمين

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