



ISLAM TODAY

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CONTENTS

Introduction

The Nature of the Problem	3
The First Phase: The Ideal Period:	4
The real cause of success	6
The Second Phase: Kingship and its Cultural Consequences	9
Reasons for the success of kingship	9
Split in leadership	9
Lack of proper education	10
The spread of pride and prejudice	11
Selfishness	11
The Third Phase: Slavery and its Aftermath.....	13
Transfer of leadership	13
Liberation movements	14
The Fourth Phase: After Liberation.....	15
A new tragedy	15
The real difficulty	16
The Present Struggle	17
Reflecting On the Future	18
Can Islam Be Practised Today?	18

INTRODUCTION

This thought-provoking paper by Abul A'la Mawdudi, although very brief, speaks volumes. The author takes us through the major phases of Islamic history, carefully tracing all the elements that have been responsible for the rise and subsequent decline of the Muslim Ummah. This is done in his usual style of providing thorough, accurate commentary set against an objective framework. He also details the factors responsible for the establishment of the first Islamic state almost 15 centuries ago, and explores future possibilities of its re-establishment once again as a dynamic spiritual force which can guide and influence the whole of humanity.

Never before, has an intellectual thinker examined the past, present and future of Islam in such a disciplined manner; nor have all the ailments that have beset the Muslim world, been highlighted with pinpoint accuracy! This illuminating work promises to enlighten, instruct, and hopefully re-ignite an Islamic awakening everywhere.

The author delivered this paper in the form of a lecture in Karachi, December 1963, under the auspices of Islami Jamiat-e-Talaba, before an audience of students and intellectuals. The electrifying atmosphere of that memorable winter evening, with Mawdudi's deep measured tones solving the riddles of history, thinning out the cobwebs on the subject in people's minds and pointing a clear road to success, shall ever be cherished. Everyone was engrossed in the subject! It stirred the souls of the audience with such a rapt attention that is seldom witnessed! When the speech was over, it seemed it ended too soon! People were deep in thought, looking detached, in a philosophical mood - as if far from this world - floating above the clouds! It is difficult to forget that occasion.

In order to re-live the spiritual ecstasy felt that evening, we have endeavoured to preserve the ideas, in print, of one of the greatest Muslim thinkers of our time. We hope, insha'Allah, that the phenomenal history of Islam will continue to provide warmth, instruction, solace and inspiration to the International Muslim Ummah, and help steer and keep her, on the right course using the wisdom provided in these pages as her guiding torch and vehicle. This work brightens the way and offers great encouragement for the future of Muslims and Islam.

THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

I propose to share with you, God-Willing, some of my own reflections on the topic Islam Today. I should like to touch upon its significance and scope, define the matters related to it and identify those outside its realm.

The phrase Islam Today is probably understood in the West to mean the same thing as Muslims today. Most people in the West generally view Islam and Muslims, as one and the same thing, often saying 'Islam' when they ought to say 'Muslims' and vice versa! We must, therefore clarify at the very outset the meaning of the said phrase. A discussion of Islam today would not mean that we examine the plight of Muslims today. Nor indeed does it mean that we

analyse how Islam is practised today. Islam is an eternal reality. It is a way of life laid down by the Creator that does not alter with the passage of time. The fundamental truths upon which Islam is based, are timeless and lasting. For example, the fact that the Universe has One Controller and Sustainer, was as true a billion years ago as it is today, and will remain just as true a billion years from now.

Similarly, it is an eternal truth that the sole duty of every creature of God is to worship Him and obey His commands. The passage of time cannot alter this fact. Life's realities transcend time and space and remain unchanged. As such, time concepts such as the past, present, future, yesterday, today and tomorrow are irrelevant when practising Islam.

We are therefore left with a few possible meanings of the phrase Islam Today:

- 1) How are Muslims conducting themselves today according to the 'yardstick' of Islamic morality?
- 2) What are the attitudes of the Muslims today towards Islam?
- 3) To what extent does Islam influence the lives of Muslims?
- 4) Is it possible for the world today, to adopt Islam as their way of life? If so, how can it be done?
- 5) Can Islam be easily practised in this day and age?

I shall discuss the subject in light of these prevailing questions. In dealing with the first three questions, that is, the attitude of today's Muslims towards Islam, their treatment of their faith, and the extent to which Islam influences their lives, to find clues to the answers, we must glance at the history of Islam.

The present moral condition of the Muslims today, is a result of what has occurred in the past. Similarly, their future state will emerge from their present situation. Therefore, in order to examine the current attitudes of the Muslims towards Islam, we must analyse their past attitudes towards it. This way, we can not only trace the historical reasons for our current thinking and behaviour, but also determine our possible attitude towards Islam in the future.

A glance at history reveals that the Muslims have passed through three historical phases and are now passing through a fourth phase. These shall be discussed in turn.

THE FIRST PHASE: THE IDEAL PERIOD

In the first phase of our historical journey, a single individual was chosen by God and appointed to reconstruct the life of mankind. This reform was based on the belief in the Oneness of God, the life Hereafter and in the Messages brought about by all of God's Messengers (peace be upon them all). For thirteen long years, this individual preached the Divine Message in Makkah. But he was no ordinary person - he was the embodiment of the type of sublime individual that the Islamic way of life sought to produce. His thoughts and behaviour, his words and motives, his treatment of others and his selfless deeds for humanity, showed the kind of character and moral excellence that Islam could develop. He was a shining example of how a believer in God should conduct himself throughout his life. This man was no ordinary man but a Prophet of God - Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be upon him), and his pure and upright personality was a perfect model of the principles he preached.

The Prophet's personal example as well as the Message he brought, soon began to have an effect on the people. Within a few years, a significant number of people joined the Islamic faith. These new recruits earnestly embraced the Prophet's Message after a thorough and conscious understanding of its meaning and significance. As a result, they had great zeal and determination to change and mould their characters upon the Islamic pattern that was enjoined. They vigorously struggled against all the internal and external forces of darkness that barred their moral and spiritual progress. Subsequently, the character of the new Muslims underwent a remarkable transformation - the kind that Islam seeks to bring about in the lives of all people.

In the process, the Muslims readily made the greatest sacrifices for their cause. They happily suffered all imaginable hardships for they treasured their new Islamic values above everything else and were not prepared to abandon them at any cost! What is even more striking, is that the new Muslims were not content to follow Islam just in their own lives. Rather, they were determined to establish it throughout the globe. They pledged to strive with all their might and means to ensure that mankind could taste the fruits of Allah's Message. They also vowed that they would never again be governed by any other way of life.

Within 13 years of Muhammad's call to Prophethood, the last Messenger was able to gather a small but dedicated group of spirited Muslims. However, the people of Makkah became more and more hostile towards the new Muslims and a wave of persecution was unleashed which aimed to crush the new faith. As their torment intensified, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) received Divine instructions to migrate to Medinah. This was the first city in which the Prophet was welcomed in a spirit of tolerance and the place in which he was to later set up the first Islamic government. The city of Medinah was small with a population of only seven thousand people. But soon this small city posed a great challenge to the whole of Arabia. The Prophet of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) began to pave the way for a new social order - one that was the complete opposite of the pre-Islamic system of the Arabs.

Within a few years, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) succeeded in setting up a model Islamic society and became head of the state. The new social order was a perfect manifestation of the Islamic teachings - of morality and social justice, of political ethics and economic equity, of compassion and brotherhood, of unity and social harmony. These teachings of Islam no longer remained theories in one's mind. They became a practical reality that shaped the lives of every individual. Now people could see with their very own eyes, the perfect model of moral excellence that Islam could produce, and witnessed the unity that it could accomplish together with all the fruits and blessings that it promised!

Within eight years, the small Islamic state, which initially covered just a few square miles, expanded and came to dominate the whole of the Arabian peninsula, extending over a million square miles! And it was not merely a political revolution, but a moral and spiritual transformation. People's perception of life and its purpose, their morals and values, their code of conduct and their complete way of living, underwent a radical change. This revolution eventually changed the course of human history! The people collectively adopted a new way of thinking and behaving - the result of accepting a new purpose and mission in life. Their new aims and aspirations became the driving force behind their thoughts and behaviour. It was a unique

phenomenon, something the Arabs had never known during the several thousands of years of their history.

For centuries before the advent of Islam, the Arabs had split into countless warring factions. Blood wars were not rare and hostilities would claim many lives. But Islam successfully eliminated all of this. It established a thoroughly humane system of life based upon the foundations of truth and justice. This was a unique achievement, more so because Islam accomplished something extremely difficult - an intellectual revolution that changed one's entire perception of one's purpose in life.

It is indeed a great pity that a biased historian will misrepresent this revolution, associating it to war and violence. Sadly, many Western orientalist persist in declaring that Islam was spread by the sword! The truth is that expeditions were mounted against the cause of Islam. As a result, wars were inevitably fought in defence of the Prophet's Message. Moreover, history records that the total number of people killed during those wars on both sides, did not exceed 1200 casualties! Anyone with a grain of sense could not possibly conclude that Islam was spread by force. And a glance at the Islamic teachings would show that compulsion in religion is forbidden. How then, could those faithful Muslims, violate this important rule yet still be loved and revered by Muslims the world over, and regarded as "the best of generations!?"

The Real Cause of Success

The truth is, the real reason for the success of Islam is very different to what the orientalist suggest. The facts of the matter cannot be emphasised enough. During the early years of the Prophet's mission, (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) while he was still propagating Islam in Makkah, only a small number of people grasped the importance of his Message. It was understood and appreciated by only those who possessed a decent power of reasoning and whose judgement was not clouded by tribal prejudice. Also, those who possessed the moral courage to sacrifice their lives for the religion of Truth, could adopt Islam against all its opposition.

Later, when the Prophet and his followers migrated to Medinah, the situation radically changed. Away from the mental and physical torture of the Makkans, the people of Medinah were willing to listen to his words. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) could now preach to an audience that showed an earnest interest in God's Message. With the help of his small, devoted group of followers, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), by the Will of Allah, succeeded in establishing an Islamic state there. As head of this State, the Prophet began to implement the Islamic principles and commandments. The state, thus, provided a solid example of the moral, social, political and economical ideals of the Islamic faith.

The people of Medinah could now see for themselves the peace and harmony, the virtue and righteousness, the devotion and diligence and the equity and equality that Islam brought about for all people and communities. People witnessed mutual respect, compassion, truthfulness and justice in all their human dealings since now the Muslims were guided by their new tenets of faith. No-one with an open mind could shut their eyes to these glaring realities

which stood in sharp contrast to the dismal state of affairs before Islam. Even those who were initially opposed to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and had pledged to fight him to the death, were gradually beginning to see the Light of Truth.

The community pledged to bear the standard of Allah and to strive to uphold the Truth throughout the world. This became the collective goal of the entire community and the peaceful propagation of their faith became their mission. They came into contact with the Prophet's exemplary moral character and needed no further proof that the principles which he stood for, were the finest and most noble. Gradually, more and more people listened, understood and willingly embraced the Message of Islam.

The formation of the first Islamic state was followed by a phenomenal expansion of its territory, which may be described as an explosion! This occurred during the rule of the Rightly-guided Caliphs. Within a span of a few years, the Islamic state had extended to a vast part of the globe, stretching from Turkey and Afghanistan to North Africa. This remarkable development is bound to provoke serious thought in the mind of any student of history.

It can easily be understood that this growth could not have been due to physical numbers or material wealth. This is because the Arabs were not the owners of physical strength. Nor did they possess material assets. On the contrary, their land lacked even the most basic of resources. With the exception of the recently discovered oil, Arabia remains miserably poor in terms of natural resources, even today. Its population does not exceed ten million people# and during the time of the rightly guided Caliphs, the population was a mere fraction of what it is today. The cause of the said expansion must therefore lie in other factors.

In reality, the reasons for the expansion of the Islamic territory, was due to the character of its Muslim members. Their upright conduct in times of war and peace, their just administration of conquered lands and their compassionate treatment of even their enemies, played an important part in the acceptance of Islam. When human authority was tempered with justice and virtue, and leadership was crowned with morality and righteousness, a charismatic 'force' was unleashed for all to see. This 'force' did not capture lands but it conquered hearts.

The subjects of the Persian and Roman empires which were defeated by Islam, could not fail to see the stark contrast of behaviour in their old and new leaders. Under the old regime, it was unimaginable that their governors would live and move about as ordinary citizens. Nor was it conceivable that they would readily speak and listen to the humblest of men, ever ready to hear the grievances of those distressed. But under the new Islamic system, people recognised the supremacy of its doctrines and the exalted character of its disciples.

The defending armies of Islam, like the Muslim governors and administrators, showed upright behaviour in all situations. For example, when beautiful women would line the balconies and streets trying to attract the attention of the soldiers, not one of them would raise his eyes to catch a glimpse of them! Indeed, whole armies were known to march by without becoming aware of the temptations of women! This was something that had never been seen or heard of before! Instead, a woman's honour was known to be violated by conquering soldiers in the past. But the noble conduct of the Muslims, would naturally win over the hearts of the vanquished people.

The highest regard for the protection of a woman's chastity and honour, is something Islam emphasises. Sincerity and justice in all human dealings is also stressed. So for instance, whenever a Muslim army was forced, by their enemy, to withdraw from a part of the conquered territory, they would automatically refund all the taxes# collected from the vanquished people. This was because the state could no longer discharge its responsibilities towards them. This move was a complete departure from the example set by earlier conquerors. Far from refunding taxes, they would rob and plunder, before withdrawing from a territory. But the Muslims set a precedent of saintly character in all their dealings and people could not help but be overwhelmed by this exemplary behaviour.

This then, was the real 'force' behind the 'explosion' of Islam. No doubt, the excellent character of the Muslims achieved much more than a show of arms could ever produce! People had embraced Islam based on a thorough understanding and appreciation of its creed and had shaped their lives in harmony with its truth. No temptation could swerve them now from their purpose, and no oppression could crush their valour or faith.

The vanquished people did not therefore become the enemies of the Muslims, but their earnest admirers. They embraced Islam freely, accepted their culture, even adopted their language. Right down to the present day, these people regard their Muslim conquerors as inspiring models to follow. On the other hand, they are not willing to identify themselves with their non-Muslim ancestors. Could such a marvellous transformation in one's thought and behaviour be brought about, even sustained, by a show of arms?!

This then, was the first phase of the history of Islam.# What needs to be emphasised and re-iterated is that Islam achieved such spectacular success due to its disciples. They had wholeheartedly accepted the universal Truth, which was fully reflected in their everyday lives. Over 14 centuries ago, they managed to establish an Islamic state and struggled hard to spread Islam across the whole world. It was their striving, determination and devotion to Allah that elevated His Message against all odds. And today, by the Grace of Allah, people continue to embrace Islam in their multitudes.

When the Muslims of today find themselves in a state of degeneration, one is still able to find the imprint of that glorious phase in their heart. However far away a Muslim may be from Islam, he still cherishes a time when he can live in an Islamic community. He can never completely forget that historical period which illuminated the heart and mind of every nation. Every Muslim yearns to live in such a society of peace and harmony, which he is convinced can only come about under Islam.

Islam has been spreading rapidly throughout the centuries since the Prophet's death (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). There is no part of the earth where the Light of this faith has not reached. This has occurred despite the fact that there has been much oppression and killing of Muslims world-wide. But now, sadly, we have ceased to be an ideal nation of believers. We are no longer a source of inspiration for mankind. If Islam is spreading today, it is because of the good character of a few amongst us, not because of our collective pristine example. The little virtue that is found in the character of a Muslim, is a faint reflection of the great qualities of that first generation of Muslims. The influence of that spectacular phase on the lives of later Muslims, has no doubt faded with the passage of time. But it has not completely vanished. God-Willing, its sway shall be momentous once again.

THE SECOND PHASE: KINGSHIP AND ITS CULTURAL CONSEQUENCES

Let us now discuss the second phase of Islamic history. It started with the rapid expansion of Islam across the entire globe. The number of people embracing Islam during this time, were so many that their education and cultivation became a difficult task. The Qur'an itself declares in one of its chapters, that whole flocks of people would accept the Truth. This is because there were Muslims of exemplary conduct - the very embodiment of Islamic teachings. Their flawless character, deeds and attitude attracted everyone who came into contact with them.

However, due to a lack of proper training and resources, it was not physically possible to educate these millions of reverts and expect the same radical transformation which the earlier Muslims underwent. Despite the fact that the number of Muslims had increased, those that followed and understood Islam properly naturally declined. Consequently, they were unable to mould their lives in complete harmony with their faith. This state of affairs eventually brought about a political upheaval. It swept away the institution of Caliphate and established kingship in its place.

Reason for the success of kingship

Different writers and thinkers have attributed the establishment of kingship to various causes. To me, it seems to be partly due to the decline in the number of Muslims practising Islam properly. Their once flawless characters were no longer a reflection of Islamic tenets. On the other hand, the number of ignorant Muslims had increased to such an extent that their deficient understanding and moral weaknesses threatened to infect the Muslim society.

Consequently, the Caliphate gave way to kingship. This phase of history lasted for several centuries. It is not possible in this brief address to discuss all the factors involved at that time. I shall, however, confine myself to explaining a few major elements which continue to plague the state of Muslims today. Our 'present' indeed bears the influence of our past.

Split in leadership

The first and most harmful result of kingship, was that it split the united leadership of the Muslims. During the days of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and the Rightly-guided Caliphs, the whole society was organised by a single authority. All of life's affairs - the spiritual, moral, social, political, economical, philosophical - were commissioned from one centre of control. And the very people who controlled these matters, were the spiritual and intellectual leaders of the State. The entire leadership of the Muslim Ummah was entrusted to these hands. But the advent of kingship produced a rift in this authority. Political matters remained in the hands of the rulers while the moral and spiritual affairs were passed on to the theologians and jurists.

This split was bound to have disastrous consequences for the Muslim community. Worse still, those with political power tried to expand their hold and sought to control the moral and spiritual affairs. The religious authorities were not prepared to tolerate any outside interference which could corrupt the principles of Islam. This conflict between the religious and political powers, produced mutual anxiety and division, and has continued to this very day.

The quest for power and territory was another grave consequence that kingship produced. Some of the kings abandoned their duty as upholders of Truth, but strove to conquer new lands and sought tributes. Their failure as just leaders, has ultimately created conditions that have caused lasting damage to Muslims everywhere. Take the sub-continent for example. Many people have migrated to Pakistan, from India, despite the fact that India was ruled by Muslims for ten centuries. If the Muslim rulers, during the Middle Ages, had done their duty to God, many people would not have been forced to abandon their homes.

Although Islam managed to spread during the centuries of Muslim rule in India it was entirely due to the efforts of the theologians. The ruling kings made no contribution to the expansion of Islam. Instead, their behaviour would tend to thwart its spread. Their oppressive policies and tyrannical rule, their bullying and high-handedness as well as their lavish lifestyle, alienated people from God's Message. This conduct was common in most kings. Only a few of them could boast of good character and inspire non-Muslims to join their faith.

No doubt kingship brought with it, a host of social evils. However, the Muslims still fared much better morally, compared to other nations during this time. For example, they produced the largest number of God-conscious kings than any other community. Although we must credit these righteous kings with due praise, there is little doubt that kingship as a whole, was detrimental to the cause of Islam.

Lack of proper education

Although the men of virtue made progress in spreading Islam and taught people the faith by their own conduct and deeds, they were confronted with some obvious limitations. They lacked the facilities to properly train and educate hundreds and thousands of new Muslims. This was the duty of the rulers but they showed little interest in the matter. If only the rulers had co-operated with the Muslim preachers and made provisions for the education of the Muslims, then things would have turned out differently. As it was, the endeavours of those spreading Islam were assisted by only the philanthropists. They set up religious trusts and established schools. However, this was not enough without government action which could essentially help liberate the new Muslims from the shackles of ignorance and mould them upon the right path.

The consequences of the Muslims' educational deficiency during their rule of India, persist today. Many Muslims in the sub-continent still believe in superstitions and ancient rituals of the pre-Islamic past. Their knowledge of Islam is poor and defective and their lives are even influenced by Hindu and Buddhist customs. So our past still hounds us and clearly affects our present state.

The spread of pride and prejudice

Racial pride, prejudice and nationalism, were other evils that sprung up at that time. These sicknesses originated as far back as the Omayyad Empire and rapidly grew thereafter, erupting from time to time like an epidemic. They destroyed various Muslim Empires in their path. Eventually, these ills brought about the ruin of the Omayyad Empire which destroyed their hold in Spain and led to the annihilation of Muslims there. The Mughal Empire and other Muslim states also fell victim to those diseases of that time.

The last Messenger had urged the Muslims, through God's Message, to unite with each other based upon their Islamic beliefs. They were now all brothers and sisters in faith which the tie of belief had secured. Unfortunately, the Muslims tended to forget or ignore these instructions and would lapse into error, harbouring prejudice against their brothers. Their tribal and nationalistic tendencies eventually caused their downfall. This is not surprising since racism and nationalism is rooted in the system of kingship. The kings themselves exploited these tendencies amongst people to the full extent. For example, the Abbasids urged the Persians to revolt against the Omayyads in a bid to serve their own national interests and replace the Omayyad kingship with their own.

Racial and national prejudice still continues to poison the lives of Muslims. Take Pakistan for example. Before these ills beset them, Muslims were united in the name of God and rallied side by side to establish an Islamic state. But no sooner after their independence, the old racial and ethnic prejudice began to re-emerge. The people's attitudes again began to be shaped by race and ethnic culture. People were subsequently viewed as Pathans or Punjabis, Bengalis or Sindhis before being identified as Muslims. If the history of Islam can teach us any lessons, it shows that nationalism uncovers itself as an evil portent.

Selfishness

Another sickness that continued to spread as a result of kingship, was the erosion of a Muslim's loyalty to Islam. It was replaced with tribal loyalties to families, clan, even to one's own self! Yet Islam successfully abolished all racial and national loyalties and replaced them with loyalty to God and His Messenger!

Based on this commitment, Islam sought to build the moral character of the individual. However, during the period of kingship, their new allegiance weakened. But since the goodness of their loyalties sprung from their new-found morality, when this waned, it naturally gave rise to selfish notions. In the absence of higher commitments, people are not willing to make real sacrifices but become consumed in promoting their self-interests. This is what happened to the Muslims. Subsequently, they became a mercenary society. The services of mercenary soldiers then became available to anyone who needed them and material comforts assumed great importance in people's sight.

The Muslims also began to provide soldiers to various non-Muslim countries on a large scale. For example, Muslims joined the armed forces of the Hindu Mahrattas - one of the deadliest enemies of Islam! Muslims also joined the British forces and helped them in the conquest of land. In fact, Britain did not need to bring in their own armies from overseas - they could gather enough soldiers within a country, recruit them, and use them to help run the country! None of the Muslim soldiers seemed to consider for a moment who they were actually

supporting! This is because they had no loyalty to other than themselves, family or clan! Such interests must eventually turn any human into a heartless creature!

This phenomenon infected the entire Muslim world and led to the destruction of all the Muslim states - from the Philippines to Morocco. This left the door open for Western domination whose stronghold was by no means, accidental. It was due to some deep-rooted problems which cannot be discussed here in depth. I have therefore briefly mentioned the causes that were responsible for our decline during the second phase.

This now leads us to the third phase of our historical journey. Here all the Muslim states fell victim to Western imperialism. The few that escaped, like Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan, were however, reduced to a condition worse than slavery!

THE THIRD PHASE: SLAVERY AND ITS AFTERMATH

In this phase, we examine the circumstances that the Muslims encountered. There is no need for great detail since this phase did not end long ago and is still remembered well.

In the sub-continent and other Muslim countries, the rulers subjected people to all kinds of oppression and inequity. They destroyed the Muslim empires, denied the Muslims access to natural resources, grabbed their religious trusts and trifled with their lives, property and honour. But far deadlier than this was the destruction of their educational system and the replacement of it with alien morals and values. This move was like a fatal instrument that dealt a severe blow to the future generations of Muslims! Clearly, it aimed at alienating them from their past history and tried to project Islam as being backward and impractical so Muslims would feel ashamed of their faith.

The new education system ultimately aimed at indoctrinating future generations of Muslims with Western ideas. It promoted the message that the West alone, possessed real knowledge and values, which symbolised what humanity should really be like. Indeed, this then was the worst crime amongst others, which the rulers perpetrated on the Muslims! In contrast, the old system, enabled the Muslims to maintain links with their past and remain acquainted with their religion. It also served to keep the community anchored to its Islamic heritage and traditions. But now, all Muslims who aspired for success and progress, abandoned their old schools of education and enrolled onto an alien system instead!

This change had far-reaching effects for the community. Intelligent and ambitious individuals flocked to acquire knowledge from this new system which only served to distance them from, and arouse distaste for, their Islamic faith, history and culture.

Transfer of leadership

Under the new system of education, the Western rulers restricted the avenues of progress. This was a deliberate move, aimed at forcing the Muslims to abandon their children to the new system thereby eliminating all links with their past. All the Western leaders pursued this move in every Muslim country under their control. The outcome of this, was that the more a Muslim could detach himself from his faith, the more opportunities would be open to him such as esteemed positions in economic and social fields.

This policy was of course, never openly propagated but secretly followed. It sought to appoint those Muslims who were the product of their new education system, in other words, Muslims in name only who supported the Western concept of life. Prominent positions in society were to be filled with this breed of Muslim. Consequently, within a short period, such Muslims took up important positions in social, economic and administrative fields.

Liberation Movements

A study of Western history and how it operated, stimulated the desire for political freedom in young people who had acquired the new education. They organised movements and rallied for the liberation of all Muslim countries. Fortunately, the leaders of the resistance groups could understand the mind of the Western advocate and used it to their advantage in their dealings with the rulers.

The Muslims who were in leading positions in society, were clearly not devoted to Islam. But most of them appealed to the religious sensitivities of the Muslims in order to secure their support.

They proclaimed that all Muslims had a duty to lay down their lives for the sake of liberation and to devote every energy to expel the colonialists. It was a struggle, they declared, against Islam and kufr (disbelief) which every Muslim had to undertake.

The Muslims of every country were deceived in this way. The latest example is Algeria where I am convinced that the desire to establish Islam, was fully exploited. I have closely examined the situation there and spoken to Algerian leaders who themselves confessed that unless they informed people that their fight was between Islam and kufr, not a single person would have supported them! Thus, people were called in the name of Islam and they responded in the name of Islam. It was their sincere faith and trust in God that mobilised them, strengthened their endurance and helped them face the daily ordeals in their struggle. However, the real aim of Muslim rulers was to reserve for themselves the seat of power, in order to serve their self-interests.

The case was similar with Turkey. When the Greeks invaded Asia Minor after World War I, Mustafa Kemal exploited the name of Islam in a bid to liberate Turkey. He would go into sections of the army waving the Qur'an in one hand, warning that those who failed to expel the invaders, would find the intruders eliminating the Qur'an from their homes! This appeal aroused the Turkish people to fight the Greeks despite a shortage of arms and strong support for the Greeks by the West.

The Turkish Muslims, like many other Muslims, were sincere in their zeal to establish Islam. As a result, they triumphed over the Greeks and turned them out of Turkey. It was the same story of struggle and deceit in every Muslim country. The leaders were ignorant and indifferent towards Islam, having been brought up under Western influences, while the ordinary Muslims had trusted these leaders and believed in their promise to establish an Islamic state. However, their sensitivities were exploited and they were betrayed all too often. But one thing is clear: whenever a country had been successfully liberated, the appeal made in the name of Islam, played a decisive role.

THE FOURTH PHASE: AFTER LIBERATION

We have now approached the fourth phase of our history. Here, almost all the Muslim lands were liberated from the grip of Western dominance.

A new tragedy

After liberation, political and economic control passed into the hands of Muslim leaders. But they had little knowledge of their religion and culture. Indeed, most of them viewed Islam with contempt and saw it as an obstacle in the way of progress. To them, the path to development and success was the wholesale adoption of Western ideas. This opinion was hardly surprising since their new education and training was designed to produce this outlook precisely.

The imperialists had deliberately fostered such designs in all the Muslim countries. Subsequently, the wars of liberation were fought by the leaders under the guise of Islam. However, following their victory after untold suffering and sacrifice made by the common people, the rulers threw Islam out! Algeria is the latest example of this. After its Muslim population had succeeded in liberating it with tremendous human sacrifices that cost hundreds of thousands of lives, the leaders suddenly declared Algeria a secular, socialist state!

Turkey, Pakistan, Egypt and Tunisia, experienced the same treachery during the past few decades. In Tunisia for example, Muslims were urged to fight in order to establish an Islamic state. The people responded by challenging and finally overthrowing French rule in a struggle that made heavy sacrifices. However, after the war, its leader President Bourguiba tried to undermine the Islamic faith in much the same way as the Soviet leadership had done. The Tunisian leader told the Muslims that their fasting in the month of Ramadhan, adversely affected production. This was clearly aimed at abolishing the obligations of a Muslim, especially since everyone except the old and sick are required to undertake fasting.

Much to the dislike of the groups that hold power in the Muslim lands today, there are sincere and religious people who have managed to survive while practising Islam. They know the principles of Islam and the guidance of Allah through the injunctions of His Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). They also know what Islamic civilisation really means. Unfortunately however, these people lack the education and training necessary for assuming leadership positions within their countries. These people share the sentiments and aspirations of many Muslims who feel confident that if they were voted into power, they would not undermine Islam or force an un-Islamic way of life upon them.

However, many Muslims do feel that the religious among them would not have the ability to lead the nation, to run the affairs of an entire country including its administration, to dispense justice, to manage the state's finances, to conduct foreign affairs and so on. The people may have good reasons for their misgivings.

The real difficulty

The average Muslim is bewildered and stands miserably divided between his loyalty to Islam and his lack of confidence in those Muslims that call for its establishment. It is true that the bulk of Muslims have little knowledge of their religion, and their conduct goes against the Islamic principles.

Nevertheless, as I have pointed out earlier, the extraordinary force of the original Islamic movement is not yet completely dormant. The spark that survives is still capable of re-kindling an Islamic revival. In fact, if one asked any Muslim whether alcohol, adultery, gambling or bribery for example, is permitted in Islam, he would answer with a decisive 'no'. This is despite his moral decline. This clearly proves that his values, in theory, remain unchanged and have penetrated his heart and run through his blood! One could ask another Muslim about the permissibility of a semi-nude woman dancing in a room! His reply would precisely reflect the same values as that of the average Muslim.

Although the average Muslim may be ignorant of the details in the Qur'an and hadith, his values still reflect the general moral concepts that Islam enjoins - something which has survived right down the generations of Muslims. Although his knowledge is vague, it is still essentially correct. Muslims in Pakistan, Egypt, Turkey, Iran and Algeria, believe in the same common Islamic values. As a result, it is not possible for anyone - no matter how much they educate or indoctrinate - to convince the Muslims that the values of the West have anything in common with Islam.

Also, there is no doubt that the average Muslim still remains fond of his faith. Recent developments in the Muslim world have proved this beyond doubt. Muslims can still be aroused and inspired to make sacrifices for Islam, whereas no other call appeals to them. A Muslim is also prepared to lay down his life for the sake of Allah when he is sure that he will be rewarded for it in Heaven. Any Muslim who does not believe this, will not lay down his life, and indeed, would be the most cowardly of people!

As previously mentioned, political leadership in all the Muslim countries has unfortunately, passed into the hands of those who oppose Islam. They seek to run the country under the flag of secularism yet continue to pay lip service to Islam. Also, they deliberately enforce Western values and culture upon the people under the guise of Islam! Fortunately, the majority of Muslims are not misled. However distant a Muslim may be from his religion, he still continues to refuse to accept any clear un-Islamic practice.

In Turkey, as well as in the Soviet Union, attempts to de-Islamise the Muslims were accompanied by such violence and cruelty that cannot even be imagined! For example, in Turkey thousands of people were killed simply because they refused to discard their Islamic head-dress! Since the Western headgear - the hat - was not available in Turkey, stocks were imported from other parts of Europe much to the dislike of the Muslims. The rulers then forced the Muslims to change their headgear - even imposing martial law in order to meet their demands! Clearly, this aimed at eliminating the Muslim identity. Thus 'reform' was introduced at the point of the bayonet! Despite this oppression, the average Muslim in Turkey is still a good Muslim! This establishes, conclusively that the Turkish Muslims as well as many other Muslims, cannot be made to abandon Islam or accept any other way of life.# *

THE PRESENT STRUGGLE

Having passed through and examined the four major phases of Islamic history, we now enter the arena of the present struggle. In nearly all the Muslim countries, the people are not willing to follow the guidance of their rulers and the rulers are not prepared to guide the people in a way they desire. The result is that a continuous conflict has arisen throughout the Muslim world.

Organised attempts to de-Islamise the people are taking place in all the Muslim countries. Education is the backbone, which has been designed to eliminate Islam from people's lives and alienate the future generations from their Islamic legacy. At the same time, new cultural values are being spread and promoted which are naturally designed to corrupt the Islamic morals. Western thinking and disciplines are being introduced and encouraged. But all that this can achieve, is to reduce the Muslims into character-less individuals; it can never succeed in persuading the Muslims as a whole, to abandon Islam and opt for a secular state instead.

The miserably slow pace of progress in Muslim countries shows the heavy cost that they have suffered as a result of the conflict that the rulers created in trying to impose alien values. Thus, none of the Muslim countries have made any significant progress in any field. Take Turkey for example. It has been an independent country since 1924, but it cannot boast of any real progress in trade or industry! On the other hand, Japan for instance during the same period, has made remarkable progress in practically every field of life, putting her among the most advanced countries of the world!

Clearly, the reason for Turkey's stunted progress, lies in the internal conflicts to which she has been subjected. While the Muslim leaders have made every attempt to discard Islam, the people have been eager to return to it. This story is the same in every Muslim country which has been liberated during recent decades.

It should be clear, that no country is able to become very strong or to make any significant progress, if there is a continuous conflict between its people and rulers. Even if the people are compelled to tolerate its rulers, they cannot give them their wholehearted co-operation. This may eventually foster resentment which might become dangerous for the state. A country can only prosper, when there is harmony between the conscience of the people and the policies of their rulers. Only those ideals, principles, and policies that people fully endorse, can in turn, bring about their full support.

To set up a secular state in any Muslim country reflects a ruler's motivation to serve his self-interests. He knows very well what Muslim people desire to live by, since he was a witness to their struggle in the name of Islam. He is also fully aware of his people's close association with Islam and all that it represents. However, such rulers have acquired a vested interest in the West and made their own children's future dependent upon the continuation of Western practices. Their self-interests therefore stand as a barrier between them and Islam. However, they remain determined to retain power while refusing to meet the people's wishes. Moreover, their policies are bent on de-Islamising the people and changing their thinking altogether where it would allow them to retain their seat of power! This is the 'logic' of their policies! This then is the condition that the phrase Islam Today sums up. Let us now look at what Islam tomorrow might be.

REFLECTING ON THE FUTURE

The future of the entire Muslim world will depend on the attitudes that it adopts toward Islam. If however, the present hypocritical attitudes and anti-Islamic policies of the rulers persist, I am afraid that the newly liberated Muslim countries will not be able to retain their freedom for much longer. Sooner or later, they will relapse into slavery again or into a state worse than their present condition. This threatened disaster can only be averted through a sincere and collective adoption of Islam as the way of life. By this, the Muslim nations can once again become a dynamic spiritual force and assume the position of guiding mankind, leading them out of the pit of immorality and into the light of faith. This will happen if those who rule the Muslims today, return to their senses and allow their citizens to choose their leaders through a just system of election.

Certainly, the Muslims are great in number and spread out in vast parts of the globe stretching from Indonesia to Morocco. They are endowed, by the Grace of Allah, with great man-power and blessed with abundant natural resources. If this entire community, unites under the banner of Islam - the flag of faith, truth and justice - and earnestly adopts the Islamic way of life, no foreign power could withstand its strength and no earthly force could halt its march on the path to progress.

CAN ISLAM BE PRACTISED TODAY?

I shall now touch upon the other questions posed right at the beginning of my discussion, namely, is it possible for Islam to be practised in this day and age and whether other communities can embrace it?

It should be mentioned, that we Muslims cannot expect the rest of mankind to embrace Islam without any effort on our part. Indeed, no community achieved such a thing in the whole history of Islam. Even the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) did not receive such a spontaneous acceptance of Islam when he first started to preach to mankind. Great movements that aim to revolutionise society can only succeed if they have a powerful and dynamic personality to drive it; someone who is determined to break the blind acceptance of tradition and change the entire course of human thinking and behaviour. Take Communism for example. It aims to bring about radical changes by putting all personal wealth under the control of the state. When some powerful personality set himself the task of achieving this and resolved to adopt it at any cost, he succeeded. Similarly, under the leadership of an exceptional personality, there is no reason why an Islamic revolution should not be successful today.

Also, on the question of whether Islam is practical today, the answer is that Islam has always been a practical way of life and will remain so till the end of time. The point is, whether there is any nation in the world today that is prepared to adopt Islam completely without having reservations.

As I observed earlier, the starting point of Islam as a spectacular world force, was when the whole of Arabia accepted it completely - that is, accepted its family, moral, social, political, economical and spiritual guidance. Also, they showed a willingness to mould their individual

characters and collective conduct in harmony with the principles of their new faith. That first community of Muslims rallied round the banner of Islam and resolved to carry that standard to the whole world. They dedicated their lives to this unique cause and were prepared to die for it in the process.

Similarly, if any community of people today adopts Islam wholeheartedly, organises its life in accordance with its principles and dedicates itself totally to upholding it, then mankind will once again witness the momentous human achievements that Islam can produce - in terms of moral, social, political and economic progress. This would be realised not just at a national level but an international one.

It is of course impossible to achieve this merely through dialogue and discussion. The way to do this would be to follow the example of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) which is the example that history presents. It would mean establishing an Islamic state that is the embodiment of its doctrines and laws. Then mankind would be a witness to its nobility and every right-minded individual would be convinced of the glory of the Islamic way. In turn, people would be moved to wholeheartedly embrace it.

Since it was God's Will that I be born into the Muslim nation and belong to it, it is natural for me to hope and pray that we should once again bring about an Islamic revolution. It is also my ardent wish that all my fellow Muslims throughout the world, combine our efforts, unite under the banner of Truth, and strive in the name of Allah to establish an Islamic state which would once again be a guiding example and a beacon for the rest of mankind.