

Islam Today

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It has been said of the Irish people that they are “utterly immune to reality.” There have been times when I have wondered if this might not also be said of the Muslims today, at least in terms of politics and of the bitter realities of the contemporary world. One should, of course, add that, on a higher level, the Muslims are fully aware of reality, the true Reality, the supreme Reality of Allah (SWT). But many of our brothers do seem to have only a hazy perception of the nature of the world in which they are now awakening. Significantly, the Irish were for many centuries an oppressed people. This is true also of the Muslim *Ummah*. It is understandable that the experience of intolerable oppression should result in an unwillingness to face facts. Unfortunately, facts have to be faced.

There have always been Empires of one sort or another, but European imperialism had a unique quality. The only possible comparison would be with Roman imperialism, upon which it was modeled. It was based not only on superior worldly power, but upon a claim to human superiority, that is to say, superiority in intelligence, morals, culture, and the general conduct of life. The Europeans did not simply say to their subjects, Asian or African: “We are stronger than you, so you must obey us.” That would have been bearable. They said, in effect: “We are better than you, so you must learn from us as children learn from their teachers.” Many of their subjects were persuaded to accept this assessment.

Pride and self-confidence might have been restored if the subject peoples had won independence entirely through their own efforts. Except in the cases of Algeria and Indonesia, this was not so. Elsewhere the colonial powers withdrew, on the one hand because they had lost the will to rule, on the other for economic reasons. You might ask me: What about India? I am sorry if this offends anyone, but in my view the independence struggle would not have succeeded if the British had not lost the will to rule and the ruthlessness which reflects this will. Imagine how the Nazis or, for that matter, the Soviets under Stalin, would have dealt with Gandhi and others like him. I do not think they would have lived for long.

I might add that I do have some knowledge of these matters. In the late 1950s, and early ‘60s, I was employed by the British Colonial Office at the very time when many of the colonies, particularly in Africa and the Caribbean, were being given their independence. I remember very well that we — I have to say “we,” since I was involved! — were in such haste to rid ourselves of these encumbrances that we were deeply dismayed when some small colony begged to be allowed to retain its colonial status rather than be set adrift on dangerous waters.

It may be on account of the humiliation of the subject peoples on the moral and intellectual level that European colonialism was no destructive. Many years ago, as a student, I happened to read in a book of anthropology a quotation from an American Indian sage which greatly impressed me. It went something like this: “At the beginning of time, every people was given by the Great Spirit a cup from which to drink their lives. Our cup is broken. It can never be mended.” This is true of the old cultures of Africa and of Polynesia as it is of the Amerindians. But this sage should have added that there is one way in which the cup may be replaced; that is by Revelation, which brings down a fresh, new cup from which the people drink their lives. This is why Islam was more resistant than other cultures to this destructive process.

I have sometimes thought of comparing the Muslim *Ummah* today to an individual knocked over and badly injured by a speeding motorcar. After a while his physical injuries heal, broken bones are mended, and he can no longer use ill health as an excuse for his failures. It is then that the hidden symptoms of trauma, both psychological and physical, make their

appearance. He is not quite the man he was. Perhaps he limps, though his legs are as good as new; sometimes he suffers from mental aberrations and from outbursts of futile anger, and he is unwilling to face facts. It takes a long time to recover from such a trauma.

The case of the Muslims was different to all the others, for we had been, for roughly half the period between the *Hijrah* and today, the dominant power in the world, the dominant civilization. It is much more difficult for a master to tolerate a condition of slavery than it is for those who have never known power, authority, or independence. It is true that the Qur'an teaches us that, in the lives of peoples as in the lives of individuals, nothing endures and there is no certainty that those who are strong today will not be weak tomorrow: "Thou givest sovereignty to whom thou wilt and withdrawest sovereignty from whom thou wilt..." (Aal Imran 3:26). Nevertheless, human nature being what it is, we find the loss of power, and failure after success, particularly bitter. This is what makes it so difficult for us to consider our situation calmly, objectively, and in terms of factual reality.

Can we still offer this bitter experience as an excuse for our behavior in recent years? I have mentioned before the passion that Muslims today have for quarreling, fighting, killing each other in the name of "Islam" and to the disgrace of Islam. The unbelievers look on. They watch. They call us "barbarians," but on account of our behavior. Now it is customary in the liberal, tolerant West to excuse every crime on the grounds that the criminal could not help acting as he did; his upbringing and social conditions, his ill treatment as a child or his misfortunes, are thought to excuse his crimes. Are we to justify ourselves in this way? Shall we say that colonialism, foreign exploitation, injustice, give us a right to fall so far below the standards of behavior required of us as Muslims? That, I think, would be a poor excuse, and it is not one that is in accordance with the teachings of Qur'an and *Sunnah*.

Dr. Israr Ahmad has touched on these matters in his booklet on the *Rise and Decline of the Muslim Ummah*. Referring to the periods of chastisement suffered by the Jews and then by the Muslims, he points out that the period of deterioration and degradation has lasted much longer for the Muslims. He points out that the "majestic power structure of the *Ummah*" rotted from within. This, I think, forbids us to put all the blame on others. Those who invariably blame others for their own faults and failures are unlikely to make the necessary effort to correct these faults and redeem these failures. I mentioned in my first talk the loss of self-confidence which the Muslim *Ummah* has suffered and the need to re-establish self-confidence. I should, perhaps, amend that statement. We cannot, as Muslims, place full confidence in ourselves and in our own puny powers. We place our confidence in Allah (SWT). Having done so, we do not — or should not — sit down and go peacefully to sleep.

On the contrary, we have two firm obligations, while placing our confidence in our Creator. The first is to strive to merit the *Nasrullah*, Divine Help, by molding ourselves and our lives to the requirements of our Faith, and in this way hoping to please our Creator. Secondly, we have to do what little we can, always within the bounds of righteousness, always within the limits set down in the *Shari'ah*. We cannot use our misfortunes as a justification for acting outrageously, unjustly, and without concern for the morality of our actions. If we do that, we have no right to complain if Divine Assistance does not always come to our aid.

Something further must be added to righteousness as such, and that is sobriety, combined with realism and common sense. It is characteristic of the weak and the feeble to threaten when they cannot carry out their threats. You may remember the occasion when, a few years ago, Kaddafi promised to turn the Mediterranean into a "sea of blood." I am sure you will recall Saddam's threat to soak the desert sand in the blood of the Americans. We all know what happened. I am aware of the tradition in Arab tribal conflict, the tradition of issuing dreadful

threats thereby asserting the pride of the tribe and hoping to frighten the enemy. Such threats evoke in the West nothing but contemptuous laughter. There is a basic rule in all hostile encounters: Never issue a threat that you cannot be sure of carrying out if necessary. To some extent, the threats which certain Muslim rulers make and, indeed, which young revolutionary Muslims make, are simply a substitute for action because they lack the power to act effectively; but, under such circumstances, quietness and modesty are more appropriate and may even be more successful, provided that they are rooted in true *Iman*.

If we consider the causes of our present weakness, we are obliged to look with sorrow and anxiety upon the political scene in the Muslim world. The first point I would like to draw to your attention is the prevalence of idolatry: the national leader as an idol. It is surely extraordinary that this should arise within the *Dar-ul-Islam*? We, of all people, should not be inclined to put a fellow human creature, fallible and imperfect as ourselves, upon a pedestal and bow down before him; and to become hysterical in shouting his praise is, for Muslims, a public disgrace. There is a *hadith* which seems to me of great significance in this context. As you will remember, a Companion (RAA) came to the Prophet (SAW) asking to be given the governorship of an area which had recently come within the fold of Islam. The reply he received was this: "Because you want it, you are not fit for it!" Where in today's world shall we find a Head of Government who neither sought nor welcomed power?

Leaders and governments are necessary for our convenience, and in the *Dar-ul-Islam* they are — or should be — the servants of the servants of Allah (SWT). With very rare exceptions they are where they are because they thirsted for power, by whatever means they may have achieved it. It was said by the great historian Lord Acton that: "All power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." For their own good and, above all, for our good, our leaders need sometimes to be mocked so that they are not allowed to take themselves too seriously or to imagine that they are superior beings. This, I think, is one lesson that may be learned from the West. But, when megalomania sets in, as it has done with certain national leaders over the past few years, we must place some of the blame upon those who fed this man's pride and vanity by rich flattery and adulation. We are weak, as the Qur'an frequently reminds us. Where is the man who can rise above the adulation of the people and remember that he is still no more than a poor servant? We should blame, not only the tyrant, but all those who encourage him in his tyranny.

I still remember the amazement I felt in 1967, after Abdul-Naser had led the Arabs into that utterly disastrous conflict which left all Palestine in the hands of the Zionists, on seeing him adored by the mob. I had thought it likely that he would be seized and hanged from a Cairo lamppost! I could hardly have been more mistaken. This illustrates what I mean by political "idolatry."

That brings me to the very difficult and sensitive question of "political Islam," that is to say Islam regarded primarily as a political ideology and often as a political slogan. Everyone says, everyone reminds me, that Islam is a total religion from which no aspect of human existence can be excluded, therefore politics is necessarily and rightly included within the orbit of the Faith. True. No one will disagree with this statement as it stands. But we have nonetheless to consider the context in which it is made. Islam is a religion, not an ideology. Ideologies, that is to say theories for the betterment of mankind and the creation of the perfect society, are the product of the Western mind and the Western history. As I see it, what we, as Muslims, should understand by "politics" is the disposition of the affairs of the community; the practical affairs, the governance and regulation of the community, the promotion of good in society and the suppression of evil. These things have nothing to do with Utopian theories.

Some of our young people think that they are speaking — I should say shouting — for the Faith when they are simply intoxicated with theories, often the sick political theories originating in Europe and painted green to “Islamicise” them. In my view there are many things of foreign origin that never can be Islamicised — or “Islamised,” as they say. These things are too alien to our Faith and too discordant in relation to our culture to be absorbed. We used to hear a great deal about “Islamic Socialism.” In that case, one is tempted to ask “Why not Islamic atheism?” Surely we have, in Qur’an and *Sunnah* and, indeed, in the wisdom of the great thinkers of earlier times, the basis from which to construct something better?

I mentioned in my last talk the young man in our mosque in London who, when reproached for the noise he and his friends were making when others wished to pray, responded with the words: “Go and pray somewhere else!” This suggests to me the substitution of a purely worldly, *dunyawi*, Islam for the Faith as it has been lived for the past fourteen centuries. It reminded me of something I was told a few years ago when I was in Tunisia. I was talking with an elderly university professor who said to me: “You know, forty years ago, all my students were Marxists. If a few of them were religious, they kept quiet about it for fear of being mocked. Today, all my students are enthusiastically Islamic. If a few of them are less enthusiastic, they keep quiet about it for fear of being beaten up.” Does one immediately and without hesitation say: *Alhamdulillah*? I am not sure. It is not for us to judge what is in the hearts of these young people, but we may be permitted to wonder if, in the course of a few years, true *Iman* has entered into their very being. Is it possible that, having found that one political ideology — Marxist Socialism — has not led to success, Islam is now being used as an alternative ideology? What, then, if this too fails them?

I recall also a *hadith* of Sayyidina Isa (AS) in one of the Gospels which, if I remember correctly, goes like this: “Seek first the Kingdom of Heaven, and all the rest shall be added to you.” I take this to mean that, if we give priority to first things, then secondary things will fall into place. This is not simply an ideal. It is a practical plan of action. With regard to the Jama‘at-e-Islami, Dr. Israr Ahmad ascribes their failure to their misconceived notion of faith and the error of their view of Islam; in short, to attitudes based on the Western standpoint and showing a preference for material existence and worldly pursuits. This, surely, is a case in point.

The correct balance between, on the one hand, spirituality and concern for the Hereafter, and, on the other, concern for the affairs of this world is difficult to achieve, but we have to make the attempt and we have, in the Messenger of Allah (SAW), a perfect example of this balance. We know that the *Akhirah* is “better and more lasting”; logic compels us to take note of this fact. Although our ultimate fate depends upon Allah (SWT), yet seen from our side of the *barzakh*, it depends also upon our conduct here and now.

This obliges us to pay adequate attention to the *dunya*, which, in any case, most of us must do for the sake of our livelihood. Of course the young think that life lasts for ever. I have reached an age at which one is well aware of its brevity. To give exclusive attention to the *dunya*, even in the name of righteousness and in the cause of justice, is, to say the least, short-sighted. Moreover, there is another important consideration. There are two kinds of action in this world: the successful and the unsuccessful. Now unconsidered, hasty action, driven by passion rather than wisdom, tends to be unsuccessful, and the more emotionally involved one is in a particular action, the more likely one is to fail. To put this in its simplest terms, action must be rooted in contemplation. Contemplation in its turn demands detachment, that detachment which every Muslim should have at his disposal if he is fully aware of life’s brevity, aware of Divine Judgment, aware of the overwhelming presence of Allah (SWT). Here, it seems to me, virtue and practical necessity come together. The more we act as we should, the more likely we are to succeed.

What I have said regarding detachment is, I think, in accordance with what Dr. Absar Ahmad says in the introduction to one of his brother's publications: "True faith entails ceaseless vigil on purity of motive and inner integrity." This is indeed a difficult task. My impression of the young enthusiasts — what some would call the "fundamentalists" — in Britain is that they have no capacity to see themselves objectively and make no attempt to do so. When — perhaps understandably — they are angry, bitter, filled with hate, as they often are, they cover these entirely personal feelings (this fever of the *nafs*) with the coverlet of Islam. They are, I fear, angry on their own behalf, but have persuaded themselves that they are angry on behalf of Allah (SWT). It is, I must admit, all too easy to say this. Self-deception seems to be a human characteristic which is almost inescapable, and who among us can swear that he never deceives himself as to his real motives? But this, precisely, is why "ceaseless vigil" is so necessary. True *Iman* demands of us a mighty efforts to examine and purify our motives and intentions. If this sometimes prevents us from acting when the need for action seems urgent, it also saves us from many foolish or wicked actions. Allah (SWT) does not ask the impossible of us. He does demand that we do our best, and that we refrain from attributing noble, religious motives to a motivation that is, at root, self-interested.

No doubt I shall be accused by some of "quietism," a dreadful sin in the opinion of the activists. I rather wish that the English language included a corresponding term, "noise-ism"! Unfortunately it does not. But I am sure there are occasions when quiet is greatly preferable to noise, and may even be more efficacious in the long run. This reminds me of a little story I was told many years ago which I have retained in memory. Some young people came to an elderly Sheikh in Teheran and said to him: "It is such a beautiful day, we are going into the park to curse the memory of Abu Bakr and Umar." This, as I am sure you are aware, is the practice of certain extremist Shi'ah sects. The old man answered very politely: "How kind of you to invite me. It is indeed a beautiful day. But, if you will excuse me, I think I will stay at home and curse my own *nafs*." There is surely a lesson in this. Beware of those who embark on violent action before they have purified and tamed the *nafs*!

This brings me, unavoidably, to the vexed question of the Islamic State. I must admit to you that I am in two minds when the subject is raised. In principle, I recognize the necessity for this. In practice I have reservations because of the ways in which it is proposed to bring this principle to realization. In considering this question, it seems to me that most of the activists think exclusively in terms of Law and in terms of a system. I tend to think in terms of people and of a community. For me, a truly Islamic State would be a community in which the vast majority of the people have true *Iman* in their hearts and are, in the full sense of the term, good Muslims by conviction. Then, surely, everything would come right? What worries me is the intentions of those who are more concerned with political systems than they are with the cultivation of *Iman* and who wish to impose what they believe to be an Islamic system upon the masses.

You cannot impose *Iman* by force. You cannot impose virtue by force. *La ikraha fid-Deen!* I am not impressed by those who seem to think that, in order to establish such a State, it is sufficient to cover up the women, pour whisky down the drains, and introduce severe punishments. It is my belief that the imposition of virtue by force leads, eventually, to a reaction in the opposite direction. We have a prime example of this in British history. Oliver Cromwell, as military Dictator in the 17th century, tried to do precisely this. The outcome, within a very few years, was the Restoration period, a time of the utmost license and moral laxity. Outside the domain of religion as such, we have a telling example in what has happened to the former Soviet Union. It is sometimes forgotten that Lenin's intention was not to set up a perfect political system immediately but to create a new kind of human being, the "new Soviet man." I am sure he understood very well that the achievement of a communist society would be quite impossible

unless human nature underwent a radical change. I believe history demonstrates to us that human nature cannot be radically changed. After 70 years of harsh rule and the murder by Stalin of all those whom he considered to be unregenerate, we see the Russians and other former subjects of the Soviet Empire just as greedy, just as selfish, just as inclined to immorality as any other people. All that pressure and indoctrination had no effect whatsoever.

Moreover, those who are most intent upon setting up a truly Islamic State overnight seem to forget that the Mercy of Allah (SWT) takes precedence over His wrath. In my view, which is not widely shared, the introduction of *hadd* punishments should be the final step in creating such a State, not the first step. Until we have a genuinely Islamic society, until there is the kind of social justice required by Islam, I am doubtful whether it is legitimate to impose the full rigor of the Law. We should proceed gently, and never in haste (which, according to a *hadith*, comes from the *Shaytan!*). We should proceed cautiously and humbly, not arrogantly and impulsively, and we should not attempt to break old habits — even if they are bad habits — overnight, for that involves breaking people. And we should never make the mistake of underestimating the problems.

The Prophet (SAW) pointed out that his was the best generation, with the clear implication that there would be an inevitable decline in spiritual quality thereafter. If the Muslims of the early centuries did not succeed in establishing the ideal Islamic State, then we should not assume so readily that we can do what better men than us could not do, unless there comes about a profound renewal of *Iman* and what I would dare to describe as a miraculous intervention on the part of Allah (SWT).

So what of the *Shari'ah*? Does not every Muslim have the right to live under the *Shari'ah* or under a government which acts in accordance with the *Shari'ah*? Yes indeed, in principle. But I find among those who talk most about *Shari'ah* a lack of definition. Some mean by this simply the general principles drawn from Qur'an and *Sunnah*. Others mean the full body of Law created, so far as we are concerned, by the four *madhhahib* and, for the Shi'ah, Jaffari Law. We need to define this term when we use it. If we mean everything embodied in Islamic *fiqh*, then we must face some awkward issues. Many ordinary and, perhaps, uneducated Muslims are convinced that the *Shari'ah*, understood in this sense, has answers to every possible questions. I see this exemplified almost every week at the London Mosque. A simple man comes to the Chief Imam (who was trained in *fiqh* at Al-Azhar) and says: "I am thinking of doing such-and-such. Is this *halal* or *haram*?" The Imam points out the difficulties in arriving at an infallible answer. Imam Malik (RA), he says took one view, Shafi'i (RA) another; moreover, there is nothing in the Law books exactly corresponding to the man's dilemma. His visitor is so furious at not receiving a clear answer that he starts shouting: "You're not a Muslim. You're a *kafir*!"

How can we expect the ancient laws we have inherited to solve every problem in this extraordinary world in which we live? Let me take one example: the question of organ transplants. Al-Azhar has given approval to this practice, and I think most authorities agree. Islam favors the preservation of human life when this is possible. On the other hand, Islam does not favor the mutilation of the dead body. Moreover, when any new technique is devised, one has to consider not only the situation as it is today, but also the situations to which it may lead. Is this what we call in England "the thin end of the wedge"? It is difficult, for example, to object to transplantation of the cornea. Who could object to giving sight to the blind? The question is where we draw the line and whether this line can in fact be drawn. I find myself imagining a situation in which human bodies are kept alive on machines while one organ, then another and then another is removed until nothing is left but a shell, which may then be buried. As a Muslim, I have an instinctive revulsion against this, but I cannot prove (from Qur'an or *Sunnah*) that I am right.

An even more difficult question is that of genetic engineering, which is already applied to domesticated animals. The genetic structure of a cow is altered so that it produces more milk. It was recently pointed out in a television program that it would be possible to design a cow without legs, which, because it would not be using any energy moving around, would produce even more milk. From this it is a short step to changing the genetic structure in human beings. Can we honestly say that the *Shari'ah* has answers to such questions? I think not. But I would like to believe that answers may be found in the heart of the Muslim who possesses true *Iman*. To say this is to speak of the Muslim whose very substance has been penetrated by the Qur'an. The Lady Ayesha, (RAA) questioned about the nature of her husband, said that his nature was the Qur'an. As Muslims we hate the word "incarnation," but I think it is legitimate to use this world in relation to such a man. Do I shock you if I suggest that the Qur'an was "incarnate" in the heart and the soul and the human substance of the Messenger of Allah (SAW)? The man — and such men are rare — of whom this is at least partially true may, perhaps, give spontaneous answers to questions with which the Law does not deal in accordance with Qur'an and *Sunnah*. If I am wrong about this, then where do we turn for answers that are in accordance with our Faith?

I spoke earlier of the Law. It seems to me that the application of this Law in modern times has to be flexible. Amongst the many radical differences between Islam and the contemporary Western world, the attitude to Law is particularly significant. In the West, laws are changed according to public opinion which changes, if not from one year to the next, then certainly from one decade to the next. What was "wrong" ten years ago is "right" today, and vice versa. Take the example of homosexuality. When I was young, such practices were punishable with a long term of imprisonment; now it is an offense to discriminate against homosexuals. I was recently asked to look at a Police Training Manual because there was a section in it dealing with the Muslim community. I glanced also at other parts of the manual and came across the statement that homosexuality is just as "normal" as heterosexuality. This is surely an indication of the way in which so-called "moral values" change in the course of a few years? On the other hand, these laws, so long as they remain on the statute book, are rigidly applied.

In Islam, because the basic laws are derived from an Eternal Source and not from constantly changing human opinions, these laws are, as such, unalterable. At the same time, allowance is made for circumstances and for the conditions of the time. The Prophet (SAW) after all advised us to "avert penalties by doubts," and you will recall that, in the face of special circumstances — a famine — Umar Ibn Al-Khattab (RAA) permitted the people to eat forbidden food. I suggested earlier that, as things are, the more severe laws of the *Shari'ah* should be applied only with hesitation and while making allowances for circumstances. What matters, from our point of view, is to hold tight to the principles and make sure we do not lose sight of them, while acting in a merciful, humane, and sensible way.

I have expressed my opinions. They are only opinions, and I have a good reason for emphasizing this point. I spoke earlier of the necessity for Muslims to "agree to differ." Clearly, most of us have great difficulty in applying this principle, hence the bitter and angry divisions amongst our people. Why is this? I have a theory which I will submit to you in the hope that some may think it makes sense. I call this the theory of "leakage." Let me put it to you this way. Islam is based upon certainties, just as Christianity is based upon a person. We speak of faith but, so far as these self-evident certainties are concerned, we might equally well speak of "knowledge." We acknowledge that Allah (SWT) is One without partner, that Muhammad (SAW) is His final and conclusive Messenger, and that the Qur'an is His word, eternal and unalterable. Beyond this there are opinions of every kind, but no opinion is final, no opinion carries with it the seal of certainty. We shall know soon enough who was right and who was wrong, and that must suffice us in this world.

Since we are accustomed to being certain about the essentials, we tend very easily to lend this same quality of certainty to convictions, beliefs, and opinions which carry upon them the mark of human fallibility. In other words, the sense of certainty leaks out from its proper domain into the realm of relativity which is, almost by definition, the realm of uncertainty. We are not content to believe that our personal opinions are correct. We make them articles of the Faith, claim that they are infallibly based upon Qur'an and *Sunnah*, and condemn as *kafirs* all who do not share these opinions. That is what I would define as "fanaticism," and it is a source of weakness in the *Ummah*. What we most need, if we are to live at peace and to cooperate together for the general good, is a touch of humility concerning our opinions. If we cannot achieve this, then we are likely to face a bleak future.

In the situation in which we find ourselves at the end of the 20th century of the Christian era, we cannot afford disunity. We would do well to say: "He who is not our enemy is our friend"; a policy adopted by the Prophet (SAW) himself at certain critical times. There is a common English saying that those who do not "hang together" (in the sense of uniting and cooperating) are "sure to hang separately" (perhaps from the nearest tree). If we are not prepared to "hang together" for religious reasons, as we should, then let us at least do so for practical reasons. So far as the Muslim States are concerned, it may be said that they face a stark alternative. Either they must learn to make common cause in close cooperation, forming a powerful block with an effective voice in world affairs, or else they may continue to quarrel among themselves, in which case they will have to do as they are commanded by the West and bury, deep in the sand, any sense of pride they might have. We have seen all this before. Meditate for a moment on the story of Muslim Spain, defeated from within by disunity.

Human beings, if they are an atom of good sense or even of self-interest, will usually combine in the face of a danger which threatens them all. As you know, I was born in Switzerland, and it seems to me that, of all the countries in the world, the Swiss have found the most satisfactory solution to the political problem, the problem of living together peacefully in spite of differences. They do not even have a shared language, since they speak, according to the area in which they live, French, German, Italian, or Romansh. Yet no country could be more united. Why is this? Simply because, whether rightly or wrongly, they have always believed themselves to be under threat from their more powerful neighbors. Their unity is therefore a unity imposed by their geopolitical situation. We too are threatened by those more powerful than ourselves. Will that sense of shared danger ever persuade us to unite? I do not know.

But I do know that, if such unity is achieved, it must include real and practical concern for our fellow Muslims who do not have the benefit of living in the relative safety of a country such as Pakistan. I need not recite to you the list of Muslim communities who are persecuted and oppressed. I am sure you have this list in your heads and, I hope, in your hearts, the most recent case being that of the Burmese Muslims killed, tortured, and exiled. However much we may be concerned with our own problems, it is not permissible for a Muslim to ignore or even be unaware of the sufferings of his brothers and sisters who are persecuted and driven from their homes.

When, as a child, I was being foolish or lazy, I was told to "pull my socks up," no doubt a very English way of putting things. Let me say that it is time that we, as Muslims, "pulled our socks up"! But, if we are to do so, we must be true to our Faith, not only in outward behavior, but inwardly. All strength comes from Allah (SWT), which, in effect, means that it is rooted in *Iman*. Our Islam, in the sense of obeying the Divine commands blindly from hope for Paradise or fear of hell, is not enough. The power and the sweetness of *Iman* is essential, most of all when we are shaken and unmanned by the problems with which this world presents us today.

I ended my third talk by saying that it is quite impossible to make predictions about the future. Indeed it is. But there is one final point I would like to make before concluding. Everything in the *dunya* sooner or later declines and everything comes to an end. The life-span of a civilization or a culture is limited just as the life-span of the individual is limited. We tend to assume, or many of us assume when trying to come to terms with the modern world, that Western civilization will go on, if not for ever, at least for the foreseeable future. Yet, like every other civilization or culture, it contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction. There will be an end to it, as there is an end to everything under the sun. We shall be better placed, as Muslims, when that time comes if we have been true to our Faith, true to our traditions and true to ourselves. We may feel defenseless here and now. So perhaps we are, if we think of this only in worldly terms, but what we possess — in the Qur'an and in the *Sunnah* of our Prophet (SAW) — is incalculably more precious than anything that the West holds in its hands today.

We have reasons for anxiety. We have no excuse for despair. But if we allow ourselves to be too dazzled, too impressed by that worldly dominion, that worldly strength, which looms over us for the time being, then we shall indeed be the losers. Let us take the long view and live together in peace, doing what we can to purify our hearts and our intentions and trusting in Allah (SWT). We really have no practical alternative!