

Experiences of Travel

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Excerpt:

In his talk, the Maulana relates the experience of his recent travel to Agra. By citing references from Quran and Hadith, he explains the importance of recognising divine signs in nature and drawing lessons from them.

The signs of God in this world are so many that it is not possible for any thinking individual to ignore them. This ability of recognising the divine signs increases manifold during travel because man is uprooted from his comfort zone. However, if one does not travel with open eyes and ears, and fails to draw lessons, it is tantamount to denial of divine signs.

Unfortunately, the present-day Muslims are only aware of Takzeeb-e-Ambiyya (denial of Prophets) and not of the other form of Takzeeb that is, Takzeeb-e-Alaa (failure to draw lessons from divine signs in nature). It must be remembered that every moment of life, man is either in a situation of earning reward by acknowledging the signs of God or of earning His wrath by declining His signs!

The lesson:

Highlighting the importance of learning during travel experiences, Maulana explains two kinds of takzeeb (denial): Takzeeb-e-Rasul (denial of the Prophet of God) and Takzeeb-e-Alaa (failure to drawn lessons from the signs of God in nature). While people know the former, they have failed to recognise and act on the latter!

Introduction

Today, I would like to share the experiences I had during my visit to Agra this month. A two-day conference was organised by the *Sarvodya Samaj* in Agra from October 22-23, 2013 where I was invited as the inaugural speaker.

I must highlight that Quran gives a lot of importance to the travel experiences of a believer. One of the traits of a believer is said to be, '*as-sahiyun*' (one who travels). This term is mistakenly understood as '*as-saimun*' (one who fasts). There are two verses in the Quran, which indicate the importance of lessons drawn out of travel experiences. These are as follows:

Say, 'Travel about the land and see what was the end of the deniers' (6:11)

**So travel across the earth and observe what was the end of those who rejected the messengers
(16:36)**

According to the Quran, there are two kinds of *Takzeeb* (denial): *Takzeeb-e-Rasul* (denial of the Prophet of God) and *Takzeeb-e-Alaa* (failure to draw lessons from the signs of God in nature).

Takzeeb-e-Alaa

Takzeeb-e-Alaa pertains to failure of man to draw learning from the signs of God in nature. Just as denial of Prophet of God is tantamount to denial of God, similarly, failure to extract lessons from the signs of God in nature is equivalent to denial of God.

The commentators explain the above verse of the Quran in the context of the ruins of Ad and Samud (in and around Syria) only. Doing so, however, confines the meaning of this verse significantly because it is only for those to experience who get the opportunity to undertake the travel till where these are situated! But Quran implores the believer in the following words

Which of your Lord's wonders would you deny? (55:13)

The signs of God in this world are so many that it is not possible for any thinking individual to ignore them. This ability of recognising the divine signs increases manifold during travel because man is uprooted from his comfort zone. However, if one does not travel with open eyes and ears, and fails to draw lessons, it is tantamount to denial of divine signs. During any travel, therefore, I always try to draw lesson from every experience I undergo.

The importance of right literature

Let me begin by giving a brief background about the organisation, '*Sarvodaya Samaj*'. Literally, the term, '*Sarvodaya*' means 'progress of all'. The term was first coined by Mahatma Gandhi in 1908. He came to use it as the ideal of his own political philosophy but he did not begin any movement on its lines. Later Gandhi's followers like Vinoba Bhave, brought together like-minded Gandhians and founded the *Sarvodaya Samaj* in 1948 in Delhi. Subsequently, Jayaprakash Narayan also joined the Samaj and the two leaders became the patrons of the movement.

My first contact with the *Sarvodaya Samaj* was around 1955 when they organised a conference at Azamgarh, UP where Jayaprakash Narayan (d.1979) also participated. At that time, I was associated with *Jamaat-e-Islami* and along with some others, we put up a book stall at the conference venue. Our book stall had the following banner, '*Go through the revolutionising literature of Islamic movement and play your part in building up a new world!*'

Though the literature at the stall was in two languages, English and Urdu, we got no response. Neither any of the visitors showed interest nor did we have an opportunity to interact! This event triggered my mind. Instead of becoming negative about Hindus and looking at this event as a case of prejudice, my mind started thinking on the reasons which led to the lack of interest in the literature. This thought continued in my mind for long time and I took to studying and interacting. During my interactions, I learnt that the root cause was *Jamaat-e-Islami's* literature which provided a political interpretation of Islam and failed to address the mind of an individual. So, on one hand it was not the correct representation of Islam and on the other, it did not address the mind. It is for this reason that *Jamaat-e-Islami*, whether in India or Pakistan, got reduced to being *Jamaat-e-Muslimeen*. In other words, *Jamaat-e-Islami* became a *Jamaat-e-Milli* because it lacked the literature which could address man's nature.

After this, I started writing on my own. One of my initial pamphlets was titled, "*Naye Ahad ke Darwaze Par*" (On the Dawn of a New Era). This was the beginning of my new thinking. I continually wrote till several books were prepared. Eventually, *Al-Risala* was released in 1976. The literature I prepared was not based on political interpretation and it addressed the spiritual nature of man. I learnt that in order to work among non-Muslims, three conditions must be met. These are:

- Being a well-wisher;
- Mindset free of debate and false sense of Muslim superiority;
- Adopting the way of *Taleef-e-qalb*.

Taleef-e-qalb

In commentaries, *Taleef-e-qalb* is only understood in the context of distribution of war booty to the Quraysh by the Prophet on the occasion of Hunayn. But I discovered that there are multiple ways of doing *Taleef-e-qalb*. The Prophet adopted one of the ways on the occasion of Hunayn when he distributed the spoils to the Muhajirin.

I must add that in order to study Quran and Hadith, it is important to have the right background. When the mind is challenged and it is deliberated upon in the light of the Quran and Hadith, the learning drawn is greater.

When I failed to get any response from the non-Muslims, it challenged my mind to re-think and rediscover the meaning of Quran and Hadith. Consequently, I discovered several examples of *Taleef-e-qalb*. For instance, Ibn ‘Umer narrated, the prophet said, whenever a honourable person (i. e. leader) of any community came to you, give him respect (Ibn Maja: 3712). It means that respect is another form of *Taleef-e-qalb*.

On another occasion, some representatives from Yemen came to visit the Prophet. After listening to him, the Prophet said,

They are scholars, wise men, it is almost to be prophets because of their sincerity.

(Hilyah-tul-Awliya: 9/279)

This means acknowledging is another way form of *Taleef-e-qalb*. I adopted this form and began participating in conferences. The respect we received in Agra was a demonstration of the success of the acknowledging approach of *Taleef-e-qalb*.

The topic of my speech was Gandhi and his contribution in history. What I said about Gandhi was something that even his followers had not discovered about him. Gandhi’s life begins with an experience in South Africa. Gandhi was born in India and after completing his Bar-at-Law from London, he returned to India. He later went to South Africa in 1893 to serve as legal counsel to a merchant house. The same year while undertaking a train journey, Gandhi was seated in the first-class compartment, since he had purchased a first-class ticket. A European who entered the compartment hastened to summon railway officials, who ordered Gandhi to remove himself to the van compartment, since non-whites were not permitted in first-class compartments. Gandhi protested and produced his ticket, but was warned that he would be forcibly removed if he did not exit himself. As

Gandhi refused, he was summarily pushed out of the train, and his luggage was thrown out on the platform. The train steamed away, and Gandhi withdrew to the waiting room in the night of the bitter cold winter. This was a harsh experience of violence that Gandhi underwent. He also witnessed the First World War where countless lives were lost. And when Gandhi returned to India, the instance of Jallianwala Bagh took place where on General Dyer's orders, masses were shot in open. Despite witnessing three forms of violence in personal, national and global sphere, Gandhi presented the philosophy of peace to the world! He was so mature that he underwent the experience of violence but from that, he extracted peace! His greatness lay in not succumbing to negativity and wringing out a positive ideology from experiences of violence! Since the Gandhians in the gathering had not thought about Gandhi's contributions in this manner, they were very appreciative of the credit I gave to him. I discovered that acknowledging someone is a super item of *Taleef-e-qalb*. The organisers not only urged the audience to read our books, the distribution took place on a large scale!

Learning during the travel

When we started our journey from Delhi, every aspect of it was well-organised. The route and the total time of the journey were both known beforehand. Continuous contact was maintained through mobile phone and it struck me that had such means of communication existed at the time of Imam Hussain, he wouldn't have been killed. The day Imam Hussain set out for Kufa was the day when his emissary had been killed by Yazid and his men. The people of Kufa had betrayed their oath of allegiance to Imam Hussain thereby eliminating the very basis of his travel. Remembering this event, I thanked God for blessing us with an offering that did not exist at that time!

As we travelled on the Agra Highway, which comprises eight lanes, I saw heavy vehicles and trucks moving about. I compared this to the time when Shahjahan commissioned the construction of Taj Mahal. The stone used for its construction was sourced from Rajasthan and it used to be ferried on carts with eight bulls. It was for this reason that Taj Mahal took so long to finish! Today, transportation happens fast and quick! God brought about such change in the world that we have come to avail, what even the kings of earlier times did not possess.

I realised that if we come across such instances where we experience the blessing of God and we fail to acknowledge and express gratitude to Him, it is tantamount to '*Takzeeb*' (denial of God's signs).

We were travelling in a mini-bus. The driver of our bus was a Muslim, Muhammad Chand. During the course of his conversation with one of our companions, he mentioned that he drives spectators to sanctuaries and wild life parks. In order to increase his knowledge and better guide the tourists he accompanies, this man studied the science of birds! I was astonished to learn about this development. I felt that this man was a symbol of new era for Muslims!

When India was partitioned in 1947, all Muslims succumbed to frustration thinking that there was no hope for them in this country. Slowly, they took to odd jobs like painting and carpentry. It is now that Muslims have discovered that modern age is the age of professionalism! Our driver discovered that if he remained a driver, his income would be less but if he becomes a 'driver plus', his income would also increase. This development is symbolic of how Muslims have discovered new livelihood avenues for themselves. Those who attribute oppression and discrimination to India know nothing about the opportunities present in this land. They are unaware of the progress Muslims are making in this country. They generalise exceptional instances and defame the country. Such an act is an example of *Takzeeb-e-ayaan*. Being oblivious of the unprecedented opportunities that God has opened up in every field - livelihood or dawah work – such people fail to acknowledge the divine blessings!

On both sides of the highway, there were green trees and it occurred to me that when the travel in this world is so pleasant, what the travel in paradise would be like! I prayed to God to give us the opportunity to experience the beautiful landscapes of paradise, which would be billion times better, so that we may pray to Him and praise Him for His bounties!

Once in Agra, we were provisioned to stay at Hotel Grand, a reputed city hotel. I noticed two photos hung in their office premises. Upon enquiry, we were told that one was of the Hindu owner and the other of a Muslim. Later, the owner told us how their family, which originally hailed from Gujranwala town of Pakistan, left their hometown after partition and shifted to Agra. Among their acquaintances was a Muslim, who was the owner of the land on which the hotel stood. He had purchased it from the British. When the Muslim was about to die, he instructed his family that if they ever decide to sell off the property, they should sell it to his Hindu friend only. The Muslim family then sold off the hotel property to the Hindu family, which developed it into a Hotel. This incident made me deliberate on how despite the occurrence of so many negative events and riots, the Hindus and Muslims still shared cordial relations. The owner of the Hotel used to come and meet us with great reverence! This was because of the tradition established by Sufis, as a result of which the two communities lived and helped one another through all times!

The events that are perceived as acts of “*zulm*” or oppression are less than one percent. Our environment is filled with more than ninety nine percent instances of cordial relations between Hindus and Muslims. We must understand that events featured in media are less than one percent! More than ninety nine percent instances reflect the positive progress of Muslims in India! For example, initially Nizamuddin had a majority of Hindu population as its residents. Gradually, Muslims have earned enough money to buy the houses and today the majority of residents in the area comprises of Muslims. We must understand that the negative items portrayed in media are less than one percent. Such a mindset, would inculcate hope about the boundless opportunities that God has opened up in this country.

Such instances transpire in every travel that one undertakes. The new situations faced increase the traveller’s ability to draw lessons from his surroundings. We must understand that of the two forms of denial, one pertains to *Takzeeb-e-ambiyya*, as a result of which communities incurred wrath of God. The ruins of such communities can be found till date. But this era is over now. The present day world is one of *Takzeeb-e-ayaat* or *Takzeeb-e-alaa*. According to the Quran

Who, then is more unjust than one who rejects the signs of God and turns away from them?

(6:157)

Unfortunately, while people are aware of *Takzeeb-e-Ambiyya*, they know nothing of *Takzeeb-e-Alaa*.

Takzeeb-e-alaa

Taj Mahal is a popular tourist destination, which is visited by tourists from across the globe. I read an instance about a European lady who travelled to India to visit Taj Mahal. When she saw the monument, she exclaimed, “Wonderful, Wonderful!” My mind began to compare that during her journey from Europe to India, this lady would have witnessed millions of divine signs but she failed to acknowledge their wonder and glory! This is an example of *Takzeeb*. Beginning from when she would have sat in the car and experienced matter running on the road to when she would have taken a flight to witness matter flying in air, to when she would have eaten food where non-food gets converted into food – all these are examples of divine wonders! But to that lady, only Taj Mahal appeared wondrous! Therefore, the period of *Takzeeb-e-Ambiyya* is over but the phase of *Takzeeb-e-Alaa* remains.

Towards the end, I would like to highlight that it is not only a matter of travel but one may discover and acknowledge the signs of God, where ever he may live! Such a discovery arouses thrilling Shukr within one whereas being neglectful of the signs of God makes one a denier. We must remember that every moment of life, we are either in a situation where we acknowledge the signs of God and earn reward or by declining His signs risk His wrath! Since I undertook the travel with this thought in mind, I could draw lessons from the events that transpired: sometimes experiencing fear and at other times, experiencing gratitude towards the Creator!

May God guide all of us to lead life as per the Creation Plan and become entitled for His rewards.
May God help us!

Question – Answer

Q1: Few months ago, I gave a copy of the Quran to a colleague which she graciously accepted. Next day, she gave me the copy of the Bible; I took it and thanked her. Some days later, she met me and I asked her if she read the Quran. She asked me if I had read the bible she gave me. I said 'Not as yet but will do so shortly. She replied that she will read the Quran, the day I read the Bible. What should be the correct response in such situation? Please guide.

A: Dawah work is bilateral in nature. It is a process of mutual learning where both – dayee and madu - learn from one another. The lady reminded you of the essence of dawah work, that you did half the work but did not do the remaining half. This example reminds us of the duty of a dayee and clarifies that we should not consider dawah work as a unilateral process. A dayee must seek to interact and make the exchange a source of mutual learning.

Q2: Some time back, Russian President Mr. Putin said that if minorities prefer Shariah law, then we advise them to go to those places where that is the state law. Russia does not need minorities, they need Russia. We will not grant them privileges or change for minorities howsoever loudly they may cry, 'Discrimination'. Kindly give your remarks.

A: In this case, the Muslims are at fault and not the Russian leader. Muslims erroneously believe that Islam is a collection of laws and want to impose these laws wherever they are in the world. Instead of this approach, if Muslims present the picture of Islam as a set of laws of nature, which is common for all mankind, it would be a different case.

Muslims must understand the importance of adopting a realistic approach. They should not analyse the statement of the Russian leader in the literal sense but should understand the spirit behind it, which does not seek to make Muslims a subject but urges them to adopt a pragmatic outlook.

The only realistic option for Muslims is to do peaceful dawah work and make man aware about the Creation Plan of God. There is no need for Muslims to discuss laws and politics! The statement of the Russian leader should be perceived as a positive step towards reminding Muslims to rectify their approach.

Q3: You have written in your book that we should not quit our job till we get another one. What should we do if we are required to lie in the job or follow an unethical system?

A: I know of no job which forces the employees to lie. Such thinking is an outcome of erroneous interpretation. In fact, it is a known fact that Muslims who work seek time off for prayer in the day. The question that arises is why should the Company grant a concession? Muslims should adjust and combine their prayers. If you have a relevant example to share, you must do so with specifications.

Q4: Why is it so difficult for man to accept his mistakes?

A: I think it is because of Satan's dominant influence over man. It is the Sunnah of Iblis to not accept a mistake. Satan was asked to bow before Adam but he refused. He was punished for his mistake but he tried to put the blame on God. Unfortunately, most people hand over their control to Satan, who teaches them not to admit their mistakes.

It must be remembered that in the present world, leading life on a certain pattern, invites the company of angels whereas the other type of life pattern invites the influence of Satan. If you are able to free yourself from the trap of Satan and attain the companionship of angels, you would find it easy to admit mistakes and say, 'I was wrong'!

Q5: You often tell us to adjust. What is the difference between adjustment and compromise?

A: The difference between the two is on account of intention. By way of type, both are similar. As far as intention is concerned, if something is done keeping personal interest in mind, it qualifies as compromise. On the other hand, if something is done for the sake of principle, it is a matter of adjustment. In other words, whatever is done for the sake of principle, it is correct whereas whatever is done for self-interest is not correct.

Q6: If a person contributes in dawah work indirectly though donation etc, but does not engage in actual distribution, will it still be considered as dawah work?

A: Yes, it would be in the category of dawah work. According to a Hadith, the Prophet said

"Deeds depends upon the intentions and every person will get according to what he has intended." (Al Bukhari :1)

Whatever is done keeping in mind the situation one is in and with the intention of contributing to dawah work, would be rewarded accordingly by God. There will be equal reward if the intention (*niyyah*) is of performing dawah work.

Q7: What is soul and in which form will it exist in the hereafter?

A: We exist in this world at the level of soul. The fact that the body alters whereas the soul does not, is conclusive proof of the transitional nature of the body and the eternal nature of the soul. The body therefore is merely a vehicle whereas soul is the real aspect of personality, which exists here and shall also exist in the world hereafter.

Q8: According to Seerah writings, when Prophet moved from the land of ruins, he asked all with him to hasten as it is a place where God's wrath was incurred. Please explain.

A: The case in point does not refer to speed of walking: slow or fast. It is a matter of drawing lesson.

Q9: Recognising God's signs necessitates that we don't live in self Glory but glory of God. How should we do this?

A: We would discover glory of God in everything we observe, only if we think on these lines. Today morning, I was thinking about old age. I realised that old age is a blessing because it takes discovery to the highest level of realisation. For example, I knew *ijz* (helplessness) before but not as much as I know it now. It is a blessing of God that in order to make it clear to man, He makes him undergo an experience or shock or challenging situation.

We must bear in mind that this division of man being a totally helpless creature and God being the All-Powerful creator is the crux of *marefat* (God-realisation) but this realisation does not attain conclusion without attainment of old age. Thinking this, I realised that God has brought me to a point in life, where as a matter of fact, I know that I am helpless; All Power rests with God alone.

But all this is a matter of thinking and realising. Some, despite being old, fail to understand and give in to irritation and frustration. Marefat in other words, is linked to one's ability to contemplate and introspect.

Q10: How do you compare the migration of Muslims in 1947 to the migration of Prophet and his companions?

A: The first tradition in Bukhari clarifies the meaning of Hijrat. At the time of migration to Medina, a person migrated with the thought of marrying a lady in Medina. So, while at the face of it, the act was a Hijrat, the intention was different. According to the Hadith

The Prophet said, "Deeds depends upon the intentions and every person will get according to what he has intended. So whoever emigrated for worldly benefits or for a woman to marry, his emigration was for what he emigrated for." (Al Bukhari :1)

This Hadith highlights two reasons: money and marriage. If the migration was for the purpose of earning, it will be considered as that. Such a migration will not be what Prophet Muhammad underwent. Recently, I met a person who expressed the desire to go to America to do dawah work. Upon scrutiny, I came to know that his case was similar to the one above as he wanted to marry a lady in America and so wished to travel.

It must be clearly understood that only that migration which is done for the sake of God (to do dawah work) would qualify as *Hijrat*. If however, the intention is to earn or marry, it will not qualify as the *Hijrat*, which the Prophet and his companions undertook.

Q11: How can I identify my role to be able to do it wholeheartedly?

A: Why do you have to ask this question? Is it a matter of asking? If you take role in terms of responsibility, there are only two things which a believer is responsible for:

- To earn as is required for livelihood
- To do dawah work and work for the mission of God.

If you take up anything other than this as your goal, it is tantamount to being led astray. A Muslim has no other duties to discharge besides the above two. Some people succumb to self-styled political *bidat* and instigate others for establishing an Islamic system. Such an approach is truly baseless. A believer should strive to earn as much as is required by him to lead his life and spread the message of God.

Any extra money a believer has, he should spend it for the cause of God, not in the way of personal luxuries.

Q12: Is communication gap the reason for increasing instances of riots of India?

A: It is not a matter of communication gap but of lack of patience. Today, everyone carries a mobile but no one is able to tolerate even the smallest of instance. People should have the mindset of patience and avoidance (*airaaz*).

I have analysed some cases of communal riots in India as test cases and found out that riots were instigated by an innocuous occurrence, which people failed to tolerate. They fail to understand that such instances take place everywhere, even at home! From what I have been able to analyse, lack of tolerance is the genesis of communal riots in India and therefore the principle is social life pertains to ignoring such harmless events. According to a tradition,

□ **Umayr bin Habib bin Khumāsha says: “One who is not ready to keep patience on a lesser [harm] from the ignorant is bound to face a greater [harm] from him.”**

Al-Mu□jamu Al-□Awsa□ of Al-Tabrāni 2/370/2258

In social life, something unwanted may always come up. Therefore, the choice for man is not between evil and no evil. The option is between lesser evil and greater evil. This principle applies everywhere, be it Egypt, Iraq or India.

Q15: Quran is the Book of God, which has no other meaning other than what has been stated. Then, why has Quran been misinterpreted? Is it a phenomenon of present day or is it because there are too many distractions today?

A: Knowledge has two big branches – humanities and physical science. Physical science is based on mathematics but this does not apply to the field of humanities. The latter is based on philosophical thinking. While mathematical calculation is the basis for physical sciences and cannot be denied, this rule does not hold in the field of humanities.

Dawah work is the concern of humanities and can therefore be subjected to misinterpretation. Man can always add arguments to what is being said. The essential difference is that while in physical sciences, the text alone can save one from misinterpretation, in the field of humanities, what saves man is his sincerity. Text alone cannot save one from succumbing to misinterpretation. The precondition is that man is sincere and truthful.

I am reminded of an instance at this point. Once while walking on a road, I noticed a scene. A young man was riding fast on his bicycle and on a turn, he hit an old village man. The old man got up from the ground and said to the boy on the bicycle, “Why did you not ring the bell?” The boy retorted, “What if there is no bell? The old man asked again, “Why did you not apply the brakes?” The boy snapped, “What if there is no brake?” The old man said angrily, “If you have no bell or brake why are you speeding up?” The boy’s rejoinder paints the picture of man’s insensitivity. He said, “Should I ask you and then ride?”

It is unfortunate that whatever may be said to man, he can always find misinterpretation when the topic is in the field of humanities. Only in physical sciences, an argument, supported by mathematical reasoning cannot be refuted.

When it concerns humanities, misinterpretation cannot be eliminated but checked if man has fear of God and upholds virtues like honesty and sincerity. In other words, it is fear of God and sincerity that may save man from succumbing to misinterpretation, nothing else!