



# Al-Risala 1990

August

## A Gentle Reproof

It has been recorded in the Traditions that the Prophet was once present at the Masjid-e-Nabavi (Prophet's Mosque) in Medina along with some companions when a Bedouin, an uncouth tribesman just in from the desert, entered the mosque and began urinating in a corner. The Prophet's companions rushed to give him a good beating, but the Prophet forbade them to do so. When the man had finished urinating, the Prophet merely asked his companions to wash the place clean with a bucket of water. The Prophet then called the Bedouin and explained to him gently that this was a mosque where God was remembered and worshipped. This was not the place to pass water or to defecate.

The Bedouin was impressed by the gentleness of this admonition, considering how outrageous his behaviour had been. If, prior to this, his rusticity had been what conditioned his behaviour, now it was his conscience which gained the upper hand. Now with his conscience thoroughly awakened, he went back to his tribe. Where he went on telling everyone about how he had desecrated the mosque in Medina without the Prophet rebuking him or venting his anger upon him. He explained over and over and over again how all the Prophet had done was to have the defiled spot washed with water.

Muhammad being presented in such a light by the Bedouin paved the way for the whole of his tribe to come to the fold of Islam. If had only taken one member of the tribe to come to the mosque to pass water for all the members of the tribe to come to the mosque to worship the one God in all humility and submission.

This is an incident from the time of the Prophet. Now look at present day Muslims. In 1831 Syed Ahmad Shaheed Bareilvi heard the rumour that certain mosques were being used as stables for the horses of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of the Punjab. Without waiting for confirmation of this rumour and without making any further investigations of his own he gathered together a large number of Muslims and headed for the Punjab to clash with the army of Ranjit Singh. Tens of thousands of Muslims were killed in this battle. According to one account of it, the earth of the Punjab was soaked with Muslim blood.

Events took a similar turn in 1857 when it was rumoured that the British rulers had supplied Muslim soldiers with cartridges greased with pig's fats, and that English soldiers had desecrated a mosque by entering it on horseback. The immediate outcome was a mutiny, but the ultimate result of the Muslims' reacting to this provocation was that they were massacred in tens of thousands in clashes with the army. And even after the blood of such huge numbers of Muslims had flowed, the situation far from improving, went from bad to worse.

This process of clash and confirmation, which began in those early days, has continued till today. Muslim blood has been shed everywhere. If a non-Muslim throws colour on the wall of a mosque at Holi, the

festival of colour, if slogans are shouted in front of a mosque, if a procession passes a mosque with a band playing, or there is any other such incident which appears to be showing disrespect for Islam, Muslims are provoked into fighting. This fighting, then develops into Hindu – Muslim riots, and the police resort to firing. Large numbers of people are killed and, it is Muslim blood which flows most freely. By the Muslims own account of this, Muslim blood can be seen flowing in the streets.

Now let us reflect upon this state of affairs. What is the use of so much bloodshed? Does it induce God's creatures to enter into His religion? Does it turn the enemies of Islam into friends? Does it bring other communities to embrace the Islamic faith, thus adding to the strength of Islam?

Obviously this is not the case. For more than a hundred years Muslim blood has been flowing in torrents. But not a single soul has been purified by this river of blood. Not a single community, seeing Muslim blood flow, has left the path of disobedience to become true believers.

Why has the outcome been so far short of our expectations? How is it that the blood of latter-day generations has not been able to achieve as much as the water dispensed in the time of the Prophet? The reason for this is that the water given by the Prophet was the water of love: the blood of the present-day Muslims is the blood of hatred. While the Prophet showered on people the water of forgiveness, good wishes, sympathy, love and kindness, the Muslims of today are pouring upon people the blood of hatred, anger, reaction and provocation. This is the difference which, accounts for the greater success of the first phase of Islam during which community after community and tribe after tribe entered its fold, thus making Islam the most powerful religion in the world, From this early position of predominance, Islam has, in the modern world, been relegated everywhere to a position inferiority. In spite of the existence of one billion Muslims, Islam has become a weak and subjugated religion.

Everyone at birth is endowed with a conscience and an ego. Initially these faculties lie dormant. Now, if you arouse the conscience of your rival, you will benefit in your relations with him, because it will be the human part of this personality which will come into play. But if you arouse his ego, it will be the animal part of his personality with which you shall have to deal.

The Prophet always tried to arouse the human part of a man. Moreover, he behaved well not only towards the well-behaved, but also towards the ill-behaved. As a result, the dormant, human nature in people would be awakened and would remain so after conversion throughout their lives.

The present-day Muslims do not practise this *sunnah* of the Prophet – that is to mete out good treatment to bad people. Today, Muslims tend to give in to feelings of reaction. This achieves nothing. It only arouses the ego of the rival. When they should be offering God's creatures the "water of love", they deluge them instead in the "blood of hatred."

In this garden of God, it is only the thorns which will fall to the lot of such people. They can never come into possession of the flowers. This is one of the immutable laws of nature,

4 August 1990

**A good deed is of no value if it makes one proud.**

Ibn Ataullah As Sikandari wrote in his book, Al-Hikam: "A sin which makes one meek and humble is better than a good deed which makes one proud and arrogant."

## Two Countries, One Phenomenon

On October 24, 1990, the Indian city of Bhagalpur was the scene of most horrifying Hindu – Muslim riots which continued for many days. The Muslims suffered great losses in terms of both life and property. Many reports have been published giving full details. One such reports was published by Maulana Ikramuddin Qasmi of Bhagalpur, after making a personal survey of situation. Consisting of 104 pages, the report is entitled ‘Holi of Fire and Blood in Bhagalpur’.

On the title of this report is a picture showing how seven Muslims were ruthlessly burnt to ashes. The caption reads: Seven bodies of one family of Bhagalpur, including the body of an innocent child.

Now look at another picture. Karachi, a city in Pakistan, was rent with Muslim – Muslim riots on February 7, 1990. This riot continued for several days. The well known Pakistan newspaper, *Nawai Waqt* (February 8, 1990) published a news item on its first page which was titled: ‘The play of Fire and Blood in Karachi, The same newspaper in its publication of February 10, 1990, reports that during this riot there was an incident in which five people were senselessly and ruthlessly put to death. They had their stomachs cut open and then they were burned alive. This tragic and beastly occurrence took place on Manghoo Peer Road. The five mutilated bodies were found in a burnt-out Suzuki van. The five people had first been tied up with ropes, then their stomachs were ripped open and they were burnt alive.

The Bhagalpur incident may be traced to Hindu oppression. But to whom, or to what, are we to trace the oppression perpetrated in Karachi? What will those who think that the Hindus alone are cruel and blood-thirsty have to say about this Muslim – Muslim conflict? The truth is that we shall have to seek a common cause for both happenings. There is only one such common cause – intolerance.

Maintaining an even tenor of existence means bearing the unpleasant along with the pleasant, taking the rough with the smooth. If you are not ready to do so, you will sooner or later find life deteriorating into a chaos of fire and blood – whether the country you live in is Muslim or non-Muslim.

## A Lesson for Us All

At a meeting held in February this year, Maulana Ikramuddin Qasmi born in 1938 at Damranwan in the district of Bhagalpur recounted some of the incidents in his life which have a lesson for us all.

He told us first how, in 1966, after the Ganga on a steamer, he boarded a passenger train to Bhagalpur at the Bar railway station. As there was a great rush at that time, few seats were available, so when the Maulana noticed a Dalda container on a seat, he moved it aside and sat down.

A little later, a young Hindu came in. It seemed that he had placed the container on the seat to reserve it for himself. When he found that it had been removed, he asked who had done so. Maulana Ikramuddin at once told him that he had been responsible. At this the young man flew into a rage. This was because according to his beliefs – it had become polluted on being touched by a Muslim. “It contained Ganga Jal,\*” he said, “I was taking it to Deoghar. You made it impure by touching it. Now it is not worth taking home!”

In a mad rage, he kept on repeating this provocative statement that the Gange Jal had been made impure. Maulana Ikramuddin did not however react to the furious utterances, He merely got up from his seat quietly, leaving it vacant for the young man. All he said was that he did not know the container was filled with Ganga Jal or that his touch would render it impure. He regretted having made a mistake and asked the young man’s forgiveness.

The young Hindu, however, went on with his abuse. Still Maulana Ikramuddin did not react. On seeing this, other Hindu passengers turned against the youth and sided with the Maulana. “When the Maulana is keeping quiet, when he is admitting his mistake, why do you go on raging at him? They asked. Then they turned to the Maulana and said. “Maulana, you have nothing to fear, He cannot harm you.”

Maulana just kept standing and finally the young Hindu calmed down. After some time, the youth very casually asked the Maulana where he had come from. The latter told him he had come from the Kharak Bazaar. (The Maulana was actually living there at that time) The young man then remarked. There is a Maulana living at Kharak Bazaar by the name of Maulana Ikramuddin. Do you happen to know him? He is a real gentleman. My mother once went to see him to get an amulet from him. It turned out to be highly efficacious. Now I want to see the Maulana for myself.

Maulana Ikramuddin smiled and said, “He is travelling at present and will reach home tomorrow. Then you can see him.” The young Hindu then asked, “How do you know he is travelling?” At that point the Maulana revealed his identity.

\* Pure holy water of the river Ganga.

When he realized that all along it had been Maulana Ikramuddin he had been talking to, the young Hindu cast himself down before him, clutched his feet and begged his forgiveness for his outrageous behaviour. He said, "I have made a terrible mistake. I wish I could just disappear from here." He got up from his seat and insisted that the Maulana should sit down. Then he himself kept standing until they had reached their destination. When they alighted, he requested the Maulana to have break fast with him, an invitation which the Maulana accepted.

Another of the incidents he related took place in 1982 when he had gone to Bangalore to conduct the Tarawih prayers (special prayers said by Muslims at night during the month of Ramazan). One day, while he was going from Hagnoor to Koram Halli by scooter, he ran out of petrol. Then he noticed a car parked inside a coconut grove by the side of the street. The Maulana entered the grove and found a Hindu sitting there. The latter, seeing the Maulana approach, asked his man to fetch a chair and invited him to come and sit down. Then, speaking respectfully, he asked, "Hazrat, what has brought you here? The Maulana told him that he had run out of petrol and that he would have to go another eight kilometers before he could obtain any. Seeing the car parked here, he had come to the hopes of finding some petrol.

The Hindu immediately asked his driver if there was any petrol in the car, and if not to fill up the scooter tank with petrol from the car tank. After receiving the petrol, the Maulana took out a 20 rupee note to pay for it, but the Hindu stood up joined his hands and said, "No money please, we only want you to pray for us."

Maulana Ikramuddin narrated many other such incidents remarking that such character as was found among the Hindus was different to find nowadays among the Muslims.

From his experience he had learned that it never paid to make anyone angry, and that if one became angry oneself, one should never retaliate in anger. If one followed these principles, one could turn the direst of enemies into the closest of friends.

Although God has created everyone with the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, the world is not free from evil. God also gave man an ego, and it is this ego which – once aroused – brings so many evils to the world. Normally the ego lies dormant – a special blessing of God. The wisest course, therefore, is to let it remain dormant and carefully avoid arousing it.

When man's ego is dormant, he is in his natural state. His actions are what true humanity demands of him. One turns evil only when the ego has been touched. It is a wise man who does everything in his power to avoid arousing the ego of others. If, for some reason, this is unavoidable, he should endeavour by adroit handling of the situation, to nip the matter in the bud.

Those who adopt this policy will never have cause for complaint against others, regardless of which country they live in.

8 August 1990

### **An able and righteous man the most treasured asset.**

Zayd ibn Aslam reports, on the authority of his father, that Umer ibn Khattab asked some of his companions to tell him about their ambitions. "I would like to have this house full of money, so that I could spend it in the path of God," volunteered one. Another said that he would like gold – yet another mentioned pearls – so that their wealth could be spent in the furtherance of God's cause. "What I would like more than anything," said Umer, "would be to have this house full of men like Abu Ubaidah ibn al Jarrah, Muadh ibn Jabal and Hudhaifah ibn al-Yaman, so that I could use them for God's work."<sup>1</sup>



## The Felicity of Faith

*"I bear witness that you speak the truth. O, my nephew, communicate the message of truth to the people. By God, even if I were offered all that is under the heavens, I would not forsake this religion."*

When the Prophet was commanded by God to admonish his nearest kinsfolk (26:214), it was to his uncle, Hamza ibn Abdul Muttalib, that he conveyed the divine message. But since Hamza attached great importance to the religion of his forefathers, it took him several years to understand the truth of Islam. In fact, it was only in the sixth year of prophethood that he finally embraced Islam.

Yet Hamza proved to be one of those through whom God strengthened His religion. How was it that Hamza came to acquire this position? It was the result of his having taken really decisive action.

Hamza was very fond of hunting and, one day, when he had just returned from a hunting trip, still carrying his iron bow, he was accosted by a woman who told him that she had just seen Muhammad by Mount Safa where Abu Jahal was insulting him and abusing his new religion. Infuriated, he rushed straight to the Kabah. Upon entering the mosque, he immediately went up to Abu Jahal and hit him so hard on the head with his bow that it drew blood. Then Hamza declared: "You! Enemy of my nephew! Listen! My religion is the religion of Muhammad!" With these words, he declared himself converted to Islam. (Abu Jahal belonged to the Banu Makhzoom tribe and Hamza belonged to the tribe of Banu Hashim.)

When Hamza came home to his people, they reviled him for abandoning his religion. How disgraceful it was to have forsaken the path of his forefathers. How shameful to be cut off from all his relations for the sake of a nephew. Having to listen to such taunts, he now found himself in a dilemma. Perhaps, having been overcome by family pride, he had made a mistake. (According to the tribal system, an insult to any member of the clan was considered an insult to the whole clan. This would result in a vendetta.) He remained restless the whole night. The next morning, he set off for the Kabah in the same state of restlessness. Once there, he prayed to God in all humility: "Whatever I have done, my God, if it were by your guidance: make its truth clear to my heart. Otherwise, let me find a way to extricate myself from this plight."

The following day, when he met the Prophet, he said to him, "O, my nephew, I am in a quandary and I do not see a way out of it. I do not know whether I have acted under God's guidance or whether I have deviated from the true path. Please make it clear to me. o, my nephew, it is from you that I want to hear the truth." The Prophet heard him out, then he gave him his advice. He warned him of God's displeasure and gave him good tidings. Then God made him affirm in his heart the faith he had

embraced. Hamza then uttered these words: "I bear witness that you speak the truth. O, my nephew, communicate the message of truth to the people. By God, even if I were offered all that is under the heavens, I would not forsake this religion."

After this episode, Hamza became the Prophet's companion in the full sense of the word. In the days prior to Islam, he had been a rich man, but after accepting Islam he became impoverished. He was obliged to leave his home town for Medina, and had to wage war on his own people under the banner of Islam. He continued to do so until he was martyred in the battle of Uhud. Till his last breath he remained faithful to the Prophet. Till the very end, his faith in God was undiminished.

This is the great good fortune that came to Hamza. But such felicity was not his without his having done something to earn it. His sense of prestige had been turned to good account in promoting God's religion, and when Satan sowed the seeds of doubt within him, he did not yield to the temptation. Instead, he prayed in all earnestness to God. He also sought clarification of his misgivings from the Prophet. When all was made clear to him, he gladly acknowledged the truth. He not only accepted it with an open heart, but he patiently bore all his losses and difficulties, never deviating from the true path.

This was the sacrifice made by Hamza as a result of which Muslims all over the world remember him to this day in the Friday sermon as 'sayyid ash-shuhada' (the great martyr) thus acknowledging the high position he had attained in Islam.

## The Way of the Prophet's Companions

During the final days of the Meccan period, the opponents of the Prophet intensified their oppression of the Muslims. At that time the Prophet allowed those Muslims who wished to leave the country to migrate to Abyssinia. As a result, more than a hundred people left Mecca for Abyssinia.

Once there, the Muslims lived peacefully, their high moral character impressing even the Christian King Negus, who held them in high esteem. Unfortunately, during their stay in Abyssinia, an incident occurred which was highly disturbing to them. Imam Ahmad, on the authority of Umm Salma (wife of Zubayr ibn Awam), tells of how, just when the Muslims had reached a better country and had settled down in more favourable surroundings Abyssinia was attacked by a rival king. They were all naturally filled with anxiety when they received the news.

King Negus went off with his army to defend his country, ultimately reaching the other side of the River Nile. After a few days, the companions of the Prophet conferred together and decided that one of them must set out for the front to bring news of the fighting. Zubayr Ibn Awam, being young then, volunteered for this task.

Umm Salma says: "A small leather water bag was filled with air like a balloon. He (Zubayr) fastened it on to his chest and plunged into the River Nile. With the help of this bag, he managed to reach the opposite bank, where the fighting was going on. We all continued to pray for Negus's victory and for the perpetuation of his rule. We were still praying, when Zubayr returned to announce the blessing of God. Negus had won and his enemy had been annihilated. Hearing this news, we were overjoyed as we had never been before."

The inflated leather bag, used as a swimming aid, is what is known today as a lifebelt. In modern times, it takes a number of different forms, but the ancient leather bag could be regarded as the prototype.

There was no river in or near Mecca, so that the Meccans could not have known the use of such an inflated bag. Most probably the Muslims learnt about this shows what avid seekers of knowledge they had become after embracing the new faith.

Zubayr ibn Awam was a companion of the Prophet and must undoubtedly, have had perfect faith. However, even possessed as he was of the resources of this perfect and powerful faith, he did not straightaway jump into the river or display over-enthusiasm in any other way. He did not claim that since he was equipped with the armour of faith, he needed no other aid.

Far from displaying any such fervour, he ascertained how to swim and then used the same technique as the non-Muslims did. When he jumped into the river, it was after making all the necessary preparations. He was moved by his faith, but he acted only after fulfilling all the conditions of this world of cause and effect.

This was the Islam of the companions of the Prophet. The true version of Islam is, without doubt, the same as adopted by them.

## Their disagreement was for the sake of truth

Abu Bakr had always made an equal distribution of allowances. It was suggested that he should show more favour towards the Muhajirs and Ansar, but he refused. "They have their rank with God. This is a matter of everyday life, and it is better to be equal in such matters," he said.

Umer did not agree. When he became Caliph, he paid regard to rank in his distribution of allowances. Five thousand dirhams he allotted for the Muhajirs and Ansar, and four thousand for other Muslims. Accordingly, Usama Ibn Zaid got four thousand. But Umer gave his own son, Abdullah, just three thousand. "You have given Usama ibn Zaid four thousand dirhams and allotted me only three thousand," Abdullah complained to his father. "What rank does he or his father enjoy over me?" "Both his father and he were dearer to the Prophet than you," Umer told him. Towards the end of his life Umer admitted that Abu Bakr's policy on this matter had been better than his.

## Intellectual Journey

Syed Shafiuddin, one of our regular readers of *Al-Risala*, belongs to a group of intellectuals. When this group started studying *Al-Risala*, it proved to be a kind of intellectual journey for them. Experiencing various stages during this mental journey, traversing many ups and downs, they finally reached the point of subscribing wholeheartedly to its views.

Syed Shafiuddin, being a writer of poetry in English, has given very graphic expression to his and his colleagues' mental journey in the form of a poem, which is reproduced below.

Stages: Impact of 'Al-Risala'

I am furious and agitated  
Restlessly coiling, I hiss and flash ...  
You have struck hard  
At my raised hood of false pride!  
I am confused and disillusioned  
At my own battered and vulnerable position ...  
You have blown away  
The smoky citadel and bastion of my misconceptions!  
I am lost in an endless labyrinth -  
Unlit and eerie,  
Desperately searching the way out ...  
You have unmasked the fangs of my guide!  
Gradually ... very gradually  
Almost unnoticed, unknowingly  
step by step  
Stage by stage  
The dawn of TRUTH unveils itself.  
My anger recedes.  
My mind begins to clear  
And I tread in the direction –  
A ray of hope is filtering  
Through rumbling dark clouds ...

## Turning Failure to Good Account

Zahiruddin Muhammad Babar (1483-1530) was born in Farghana, a principality which lay to the north of the Hindu Kush mountain range in the region of Uzbekistan (now a part of the Soviet Union) Farghana at that time was ruled over by Babar's father, Umar Sheikh Mirza. On his father's side, Babar was descended from Timur Lang and on his mother's side was connected with Chengiz Kshan.

In the neighbourhood of Farghana was Samarkand, the ancient capital of Timur, then under the rule of Mohd Shaibani Khan, a member of the Chengiz Khan dynasty. Babar's father had constantly striven to conquer Samarkand in order to include it in his empire, but he failed in his attempts. At his death in 1494, his son Babar became the ruler of Farghana, when he was just eleven years of age. Following in his father's foot steps, he too attacked Samarkand several times in an attempt to take possession of it, but he met with a decisive defeat in 1501, after which he even lost his own ancestral kingdom of Farghana. A historian writes:

As a boy king he lost Farghana and passed through a period of adversity, having to fight his own paternal and maternal uncles. During 20 years of adversity and warfare Babur trained himself by adopting the military tactics and modes of warfare of his adversaries – Turks, Mongols, Persians, and Afghans, and he made a scientific synthesis of these systems. He became a good general through a career of many defeats and through years of homeless wanderings, privations and hardships ... Foiled in his design of recovering his ancestral domain in Central Asia, Babur turned his attention to India. (1)

Babur attacked India for the first time in 1519. He pushed onwards until he had captured Delhi and Agra in 1526, whereupon he laid the foundations of the Mughal empire in India. He had left Farghana, his home, as a defeated man, but on December 26, 1530, when he died in Agra, history had recorded him in its pages as a conqueror.

Babar's success came about because he had the courage to turn failure into success. In his own failure, he discovered which factors could bring him success.

When Babar was defeated by his rivals, he did not start complaining about them. He did not compile any lists of the conspiracies of his enemies or the plans they had drawn up for his destruction. Nor did he start making vituperative speeches against his attackers.

Instead, Babur began to work out how his rivals had managed to win. What was the cause of his defeat and their victory? Babur's thinking led him to the conclusion that his opponents' military tactics were superior. Their strategy in warfare was more effective than his.

1. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1984, Vol. 9, p. 378

Now Babar began to adopt the tactics of his rivals, and by giving much thought to them and carrying out experiments with them, he even managed to improve upon them. Equipped with better resources and better military strategy, he now set himself to conquering the new and vaster fields of the entire subcontinent. With the success of his new approach, he made himself the master of much more than he had ever possessed in his ancestral domain.

The present world is no less a world of competition than it was in the days of Babar. People still come into conflict with each other all over the world. There is sometimes just no avoiding failure and defeat. But the successful man is one who can experience the worst of failures, yet derive sustenance and inspiration from it, and who can forge ahead, acting upon whatever ray of hope he sees, no matter how small and faint.

15 August 1990

## Remaining steadfast in the face of persecution

During the Abbasid Caliphate the emergence of the Mutazilite creed stirred up controversy among Muslims, as a result of which Imam Ahmad ibn Hambal had severe punishments inflicted upon him. Yet he refused to alter the position he had adopted. Hafiz ibn Hajar tells that he was beaten so severely as to make “even an elephant flee.”



## A Happy Finding

When I was in Ambehta in the Saharanpur District on September 6, 1989, I learned of a happening which bears an important lesson.

Four years prior to my visit, a middle-aged gentleman, Dr. Shahid Rasheed Sabri, had bought a five-acre plot of land on the outskirts of the town, next to a Hindu cremation ground. When the formalities of the purchase were completed, he had a boundary wall set up. But certain members of the Hindu community objected to this on the grounds that this wall appropriated a part of the land which actually belonged to the cremation ground.

Although Dr. Sabri knew that he was dealing with professed communalists, he did not lose his composure. He simply asked them to measure the land and then to take the double of whatever piece of land had been misappropriated and to join it on to the cremation ground. He even added that if, after measuring the land, they wanted to have the work of annexation done on their own, he would have no objection whatsoever.

Two years later, in the month of August, Dr. Sabri was walking along a nearby street when he came upon a group of Hindus on their way to the cremation ground. They informed him that they were going to measure the land. Dr. Sabri told them by all means to go ahead with their task, whereupon they asked him to accompany them.

After some time, Dr. Sabri did arrive at his plot, but he did not interfere in the taking of the measurements. Finally, after measuring the land several times, the Hindus had to admit that their doubts had been ill-founded. Dr. Sabri had not only built the boundary wall entirely on his own plot, but had left a wide margin to the cremation ground.

After this incident the local Hindus were so impressed by his that they themselves asked him to stand for election as chairman of Ambehta. They told him that he would surely win, as both Hindus and Muslims would vote for him. Dr. Sabri thanked them for their good wishes, but declined to contest the election.

## The Negative Role of Polytheism

According to the Qur'an Adam was the first human being to exist on earth. God told him that his religion and that of subsequent generations would be monotheism. In this lay goodness in this world as well as in the Hereafter. For some generations people followed the true path, but soon the perversion set in. It was now that God began to send Prophets to the world. (2:213).

Noah was born in Iraq about three thousand years before Christ. He was chosen as God's messenger and entrusted with the task of reforming his people by showing them the right path. Then from Noah to the Messiah, the apostles were sent in succession. They made every effort to make people understand the error of their ways, but their hearers showed no willingness to be reformed: (23:44).

The cause of this perversion lay in these people being able to see only appearances, whereas monotheism demanded reverence for an unseen God. People unfortunately failed to find and worship this invisible God, and instead made visible objects their deities. The first form of religion had been monotheism, but the perversion that set in later times resulted in the world going in the direction of polytheism.

Monotheism is the greatest truth. When man believes in one God alone, all his affairs are set right. When he forsakes this belief, all his affairs go awry. Monotheism provides the measure by which to judge the rise and fall of all human beings.

The Quran tells us that "God is the Creator of all things. He is the Guardian. His are the keys of the heavens and the earth. Those that deny His revelations shall assuredly be lost. 'Say: would you bid me serve a god other than Allah, O ignorant men?' It has already been revealed to you and those who have gone before you, that if you worshipped other gods besides Allah, your works would come to nothing and you would be among the losers. Therefore serve Allah and render thanks to Him."

"They have not justly estimated the might of Allah. But on the day of Resurrection. He will hold the entire earth in His grasp and fold up the heavens in His right hand. Glory be to Him! Exalted be He above the partners they set up with Him. (39:62-67).

The real extent of the harm done by deviation from monotheism will become apparent in the next life. Since monotheism is the reality of the universe, deviation from monotheism means, in effect, deviation from reality. The lives of those who deviate from reality will suffer – not only in the next life, but also in the present world – from serious distortions. This is the fact which is pointed out in the above verse.

The basic reason for this is that God-consciousness is ingrained in human nature. Man, as a result of his own natural urges, is forced to believe in God and surrender to him. Man can refuse to believe in one God, but he cannot refuse his own nature. In consequence, those who do not believe in the Creator

have to pay the price by believing (as one believes in God) in God's creatures. That is to say that, flying in the face of facts, they give to some creature or the other a status which they ought to give only to God.

The Creator and the Master of this universe is God. All true greatness belongs to Him alone. When man makes God his sole object of greatness, he is acknowledging greatness in One who truly deserves such obeisance. By recognizing that God is great, man stands face to face with the truth. As such, his life becomes a true life, free from all kinds of contradictions. His thinking and his actions both follow the right course. His being comes into harmony with the universe of facts. There is no contradiction between him and this universe.

Whereas when man takes something other than God to be great, when he accords to it a status which should be God's alone, the result is that his attitude becomes unreal. He becomes a thing displaced and disjointed which cannot be in accord with the universe of facts. His whole life, instead of taking the course of reality takes the course of superstition.

Here is an example to illustrate this point. The Christians' belief in the Trinity made them suppose Christ, the son of Mary, to be God. Christ was, in reality, the son of Mary. But the Christians, exaggeratedly, gave him the status of the son of God. They accorded to him the greatness of which only one God is deserving – He who is the creator of all human beings, including Christ.

As a result of this belief, they found themselves beset by great contradictions, one of which stemmed from theological concept of the solar system.

The ancient astronomer Ptolemy (90-168) was born in Greece. He carried out research in the time of Alexander the Great, writing a lengthy book in Latin, in which he advanced the theory that the earth is static and that the sun, moon and planets revolve around it. Thanks to the patronage of the Christians, this theory dominated people's minds until it was finally displaced in the 16th century by Copernicus.

As far as the Christians are concerned, the basic belief of Christianity is that of atonement, through which God arranged for the salvation of the whole of humanity. The event of atonement, so central to this creed, relates not only to humanity but to the whole of the universe. Since this event (Christ's crucifixion as atonement for sins) took place on earth, the earth according to Christian theology, was assumed to be of the greatest importance in the universe and, therefore, its central point. This being so, Christians wholeheartedly supported Ptolemy's theory of geocentrism, giving it the status of a religious creed.

The Christians naturally opposed all attempts to prove the truth of the heliocentric theory. It was only the research carried out by Copernicus, Galileo and Kepler which ultimately proved the falsity of this theory.

According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (1984) the scheme of salvation in Christian theology is a *universal* event. The act of atonement possesses a universal significance. It is related through human

beings to animals. But the study of modern astronomy shows that the earth is no more than a small pebble in the vast sea of the universe. In view of this fact, the meaning of Christ himself has lost some of its impact, and the divine act of salvation appears merely as a tiny episode in the history of an insignificant little star. (4/522).

The Creator, Master, Planner – all are only one God. All greatness and power belong to Him alone. No one besides Him has any such greatness and power. As such, whenever any attempt is made to attach this greatness and sanctity to anyone else, such a concept comes into conflict with the whole universe, failing to fall into place in the universe as a whole.

This is why the concept of polytheism becomes an obstacle in the path of human progress, whereas the concept of monotheism opens the door to all kinds of progress for mankind.

## Nature and Science Speak about God

### 4

Take oxygen, for example. It is the source of life and is not obtainable from any source other than the atmosphere. But had it formed 50% of the atmosphere or more, instead of the present 21%, combustibility of all matter on the earth's surface would have been so high that even if just a single tree caught fire, whole forests would at once explode. Similarly, had the proportion of oxygen in the atmosphere been as low as 10%, life might conceivably have adjusted to this over the centuries, but it is unlikely that human civilization would have taken its present form. And if all of the free oxygen instead of only a part, had been absorbed by the matter present on the earth's surface, no animal life would have been possible at all.

Along with oxygen, hydrogen, carbon dioxide and carbon gases in their free form as well as in the form of different compounds are the most important ingredients of life – the very foundations, in fact, on which our life rests. There being not even one chance in a hundred million that all these elements should have assembled in such favourable proportions on any other planet at anyone given time, we have to ask ourselves how it came about that such freely moving gases formed themselves into a compound and remained suspended in the atmosphere in exactly the right proportions to sustain life. As the noted physicist, Morton White puts it, 'Science has no explanation to offer for the facts, and to say it is, accidental is to defy mathematics.'<sup>1</sup>

1. *The Age of Analysis*, p. 33.

We have to concede that there is a formidable array of facts in this world, in the universe, which cannot be explained unless we admit the intervention of a superior mind. For instance, the density of ice is less than that of water, because, as it freezes, its volume increases in relation to its mass. It is because of this that ice floats instead of sinking to the bottom of lakes and rivers and gradually forming a solid mass. On the surface of the water, it forms a layer of insulation to maintain the water below at a temperature above freezing point. Fish and other forms of marine life are thus permitted to survive throughout the winter, and, when spring comes, the ice melts rapidly. If water did not behave in this way, all of us in general, and people in cold countries in particular, would face severe calamities. Clearly this property of water is tremendously important to life.

In the world of arboriculture there are also numerous examples of nature aiding man. In the first two decades of the century, a chestnut blight, caused by the pathogen *Endothia*, spread rapidly across the forested regions of the U.S.A. It was widely felt that the holes it made in the forest canopy would never again be filled. This was highly regrettable because of the large number of useful things the chestnut tree

yielded: high-grade, rot-resistant timber, wood pulp, tannin, nuts – not to speak of its shade. It also had the special advantage of being able to grow on mountain ridges with scanty soil as well as in rich fertile valleys. The unique position occupied by the American chestnut was unsurpassed by any other species and, until the arrival of *Endothia* from Asia around 1900, it had truly been king of the forest. Now it is almost extinct. But the holes in the forest canopy were eventually filled. Tulip-trees were already there, waiting for just such openings as would provide sufficient light for that shade – intolerant species to develop. Up till then, these trees had been minor denizens of the forest, only occasionally developing into valuable timber trees. Now, chestnut trees are hardly missed where dense groves of tulip trees have become established, these often growing as much as one inch in diameter and six feet in height per year; as well as their growth being rapid, their wood is of superior quality. Can we in all conscience say that the master plan of nature is merely a set of accidental Circumstances?

In the present century too, a crisis of a different but more alarming nature developed in Australia when a certain species of cactus was grown on an extensive scale to provide fencing for the fields. Cressy Morrison writes:

The cactus had no insect enemies in Australia and soon began a prodigious growth. The march of the cactus persisted until it had covered an area approximately as great as England, crowded the inhabitants out of the towns and villages, and destroyed their farms, making cultivation impossible. No device which the people discovered could stop its spread. Australia was in danger of being overwhelmed by a silent, uncontrollable, advancing army of vegetation. The entomologists scoured the world and finally found an insect which lived exclusively on cactus, would eat nothing else, would breed freely, and which had no enemies in Australia. Here the animal conquered the vegetation and today the cactus pest has retreated, and with it all but a small protective residue of the insects, enough to hold the cactus in check forever.<sup>1</sup>

1. *Man Does Not Stand Alone*, pp. 78-79.

Can such a great scheme of checks and balances as is found in Nature develop without any deliberate planning?

Consider the marvellous mathematical exactitude which is to be found in the universe. The behaviour even of inanimate matter is not in any way haphazard: on the contrary, it “obeys” definite “natural laws”. No matter in which corner of the world, at any given time the word “water” will invariably mean “a compound consisting of 11.1 percent of hydrogen and 88.9 percent of oxygen”. Whenever a scientist in his laboratory heats a beaker filled with pure water until it boils, he knows, without using a thermometer, that the temperature of the boiling water is 100 degrees centigrade as long as the atmospheric pressure is 760 mm of mercury. If the pressure is less than 760 mm., less energy will have to be applied in the form of heat to produce vapour or steam, so the boiling point will be correspondingly less than 100 degrees. Conversely, if the pressure is greater than 760 mm., the boiling

point will be greater than 100 degrees. No matter how often this experiment is performed, by ascertaining the pressure, we can, with certainty, predict the boiling point of the water on each occasion. If there were no system and organization inherent in the working of water and energy, there would be no basis for scientific research and invention. Life in the laboratory, in the absence of immutable natural laws, would be a succession of quandaries; it would be a life fraught with uncertainty and doubt, rendering all scientific enquiry futile. Thomas Parks, a research chemist, writes:

One of the first things a freshman chemistry student learns is the periodicity or order found in the elements. This order has been variously described and classified, but we usually credit Mendeleev, the Russian chemist of the last century, with our periodic-table. Not only did this arrangement provide a means of studying the known elements and their compounds, but it also gave impetus to the search for those elements which had not yet been discovered. Their very existence was postulated by vacant spaces in the orderly arrangement of the table.

Chemists today still use the periodic table to aid them in their study of reactions and to predict properties of unknown or new compounds. That they have been successful is sound testimony to the fact that a beautiful order exists in the inorganic world.

But the order we see around us is not a relentless omnipotence. It is tempered with beneficence – a testimony to the fact that the good and pleasure are as much a concern of Divine Intelligence as the immutable laws of Nature. Look around you at the exceptions and deviations that do, in fact, defy the laws of cold rationality.

Take, for example, water. From its formula weight –18 –one would predict it would be a gas at ordinary temperatures and pressures. Ammonia – with a formula weight of 17 – is a gas at temperatures as low as minus 33° C. at atmospheric pressure. Hydrogen sulphide, closely related to water by position in the periodic table and with a formula weight of 34, is a gas at temperatures down to minus 59° C. The fact that water exists as a liquid at all, at ordinary temperatures, is something to make one stop and think.<sup>1</sup>

“On August 11, 1999, there will be a solar eclipse that will be completely visible at Cornwall.”

This is not a prediction based simply on conjecture. We know from calculations based on our observations of the solar system's functioning that this eclipse is bound to occur. We tend to take it for granted that the innumerable stars we see in the sky, like pinpoints of lights, are part of a vast unchanging pattern. But these “pinpoints” of light are actually colossal balls suspended in the vastness of space and, since time immemorial, have been moving in the same fixed orbits with such perfect precision that their paths (and, more recently, that of artificial satellites) can be accurately predicted at any given moment. Right from a tiny drop of water to the greatest imaginable star, the whole range of natural phenomena evinces a wonderful system and organization. The behaviour of such objects is uniform to such a degree that we have been able to formulate laws on this basis.

1. *Evidence of God*, pp. 74-75.

Newton's theory of gravitation explained the revolution of astronomical spheres. In accordance with this, A.C. Adams and U. Leverrier found the basis on which, without observation, they could successfully predict the existence of a hitherto undiscovered planet. As foretold by the two astronomers, when on a night in September 1846, the telescope at the Berlin observatory was turned towards the point indicated by their calculations, it was observed that such a planet did, in fact, exist in the solar system. This is the planet we now call Neptune.

(To be continued)