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Science at the Door of Religion

Sir Fred Hoyle, a distinguished contemporary scientist, has written a 250-page book, *The Intelligent Universe*, in which he has shown that modern scientific studies of the universe have, surprisingly, contradicted the trend of thought which dominated people's minds in the 19th century. The universe had come to be considered a blind interplay of unconscious matter, but research conducted in various departments of science in the latter half of the 20th century explicitly demonstrates that the universe is not simply a material thing. It is, rather, an 'Intelligent Universe.' Far from there being a mere blind interplay of chemical forces, intelligence seems to be at work everywhere.

The writer then goes on to identify the reason for this atheistic interpretation of the universe having held sway in spite of there being a "mountain of evidence" in support of a force outside of the earth at work. He writes: "This indeed is just what orthodox scientists are unwilling to admit. Because there might turn out to be – for want of a better word – religious connotations, and because orthodox scientists are more concerned with preventing a return to the religious excesses of the past than in looking forward to the truth, the nihilistic outlook described above has dominated scientific thought throughout the century" (p.9.).

The truth is that, in the modern age, the study of nature has led man right up to the door of religion. But modern man, who has been brought up in the traditions of the Bible, hesitates to walk through that door, because of the baneful course which religious history took. The very concept of 'religion' recalls painful memories of the severity of 16th and 17th century persecutions. It was the time when Europe was on the threshold of science as we now understand it, and the Christian religion with all its might and power arose to suppress it. Modern man equates the idea of religion with Christianity and Christianity, based as it is upon a set of irrational beliefs, can be no match for science.

Later, in *The Intelligent Universe*, Sir Fred Hoyle writes that "Conservative religious thinking during the eighteenth century had compressed the whole history of the Earth into a biblical time-scale of only a few thousand years. The first clear perception of the enormity of this error, which weighed heavily, and still weighs heavily, against the religious fundamentalists, is usually credited to James Hutton (1726-1779) the father of modern geology. From a lifetime spent in the observation of rocks and landforms, Hutton became convinced that every aspect of the Earth's surface was produced in the past by just the same processes we see around us today, implying that millions of years would have been needed for hills and valleys to form. The great geologist Charles Lyell (1797-1875) repeated and extended Hutton's observations in the field, and soon came to the conclusion that Hutton's "Principle of Uniformity" as it became called, was indeed correct. Lyell's *Principles of Geology*, the first volume of which appeared in 1830, was in a considerable measure responsible for the disappearance of the biblical time-scale from all

serious discussion. Indeed, Lyell's books were largely responsible for convincing the world at large that the Bible could be wrong, at any rate in some respects, a hitherto unthinkable thought" (p. 28-29).

When the biblical version of the age of the earth and certain other scientifically verifiable matters had been proved unreliable, people became generally convinced that it must also be equally unreliable in matters of religion. Such thinking continued to gain ground until religion itself ultimately came to be considered unreliable and wrong.

The truth is that it is a matter of the greatest urgency that Islam should be introduced to the world. It has been shown that the errors of Christianity were the result of wrong interpretations, bad translation or interpolation in biblical texts. Since the Quran is free from interpolation, it is free of all such errors.

If Islam were to be brought before modern man in its real, pure form, there would be many who would welcome it, recognizing in it just what they had been waiting for all along, for it would meet every demand of their nature and their sciences. Where the Bible had led them away from religion, Islam will help them to come closer to it.

3 November 1986

Man Proposes, God Disposes.

When Abdullah ibn Masood had built himself a house, he asked Ammar ibn Yasir to come and have a look at what he had built. Ammar went and saw the house. "You are planning a long way ahead, but soon you will die," was his only comment.

(Hilyatul Auliya)

God Arises

The title of this book was inspired by a verse from the Bible:

Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered.

Let them also that hate Him flee before Him.

As smoke is driven away, so drive them away;

As wax melteth before the fire, so let the

Wicked perish at the presence of God.

But let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice

before God: yea let them exceedingly rejoice.

Psalms 68: 1-3.

The new discoveries in the world of science in the 18th and 19th centuries came to be interpreted by and large as if they contradicted time honoured belief in God. This atheistic approach having very rapidly dominated the thinking of the educated classes all over the world, it seemed as if religious truths had outlived their usefulness.

But, with the advent of the 20th century, attitudes began to change: such discoveries have come to light as have rendered an atheistic interpretation of the universe meaningless, and in large measure have restored religious thinking to its central position in moral philosophy. As Lord Kelvin, one of the world's greatest physicists, asserted: 'If you think strongly enough, you will be forced by science to believe in God.' The 'enemies' of God, who had gathered on different fronts to oppose Him, have been definitively 'scattered'.

This book is an attempt to present an account of this act of God.

Beginning with this issue, we start serialising the English translation of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan's famous book, *Mazhab our Jaded Challenge (Modern Challenges to Religion)*. The book entitled in English '*God Arises*', has been translated earlier into a number of languages including Arabic, Turkish and Indonesian.

Religion Accepts the Challenge

With the splitting of the atom, all of man's conceptions of matter have been drastically altered. In fact, the advance of science in the past century has culminated in a knowledge explosion the like of which has never before been experienced in human history, and in the wake of which all ancient ideas about God and religion have had to be re-examined. This – as Julian Huxley puts it – is the challenge of modern knowledge. In the following pages, I propose to answer this challenge, for I am convinced that, far from having a damaging effect on religion, modern knowledge has served to clarify and consolidate its truths. Many modern discoveries support Islamic claims made 1400 years ago that what is laid down in the Quran is the ultimate truth, and that this will be borne out by all future knowledge.

'We will show them Our signs in all the regions of the earth and in their own souls, until they clearly see that this is the truth.' (Quran 41:53).

Modern atheistic thinkers dismiss religion as being unfounded in fact. They maintain that it springs from man's desire to find meaning in the universe. While the urge to find an explanation is not in itself wrong, they hold that the inadequacy of our predecessors' knowledge led them to wrong conclusions, namely, the existence of a God, or gods, the notions that creation and destruction were a function of the godhead, that man's fate was of concern to God, that there was a life after death, in heaven or hell, as warranted by the morality of man's life on earth, and that all thinking on these matters must necessarily be regulated by religion. They feel that, in the light of advanced learning, man is now in a position to make a re-appraisal of traditional ways of thinking and to rectify errors of interpretation, just as in secular matters he has already exploded myths and overturned false hypotheses whenever facts and experience have forced the truth upon him.

According to Auguste Comte, a well-known French philosopher of the first half of the nineteenth century, the history of man's intellectual development can be divided into three stages the *theological stage*, when events of the universe are explained in terms of divine powers, the *metaphysical stage*, in which we find no mention of specific gods (although external factors are still referred to in order to explain events) and the *stage of positivism*, where events are explained in terms of common laws deduced from observation and calculation without having recourse to spirit, God or absolute power. We are now passing through the third intellectual stage which, in philosophical terms, is known as *Logical Positivism*.

Logical Positivism

Scientific empiricism, or logical positivism, became a regular movement in the second quarter of the 20th century, but as a trend of thought, it had already long before – taken hold of people's minds. From Hume and Mill up to the time of Bertrand Russell, many philosophers have been its proponents, and it has now become the most important contemporary trend of thought, buttressed as it is by numerous

centres of research and propagation all over the world. A dictionary of philosophy published in New York gives the following definition of logical positivism:

'All knowledge that is factual is connected with experiences, in such a way that verification or direct or indirect confirmation is possible' (p. 285).

Anti-religionists feel, therefore, that man's recent mental evolution is the very antithesis of religious thinking. Modern, advanced knowledge has it that reality is only that which can stand up to the tests of observation and experience, whereas religion is based on a concept of reality which cannot in this way be subjected to analysis and scientifically proved: it follows then that it has no basis in actuality. In other words, religion gives an unrealistic account of real events. Since man's knowledge was limited in ancient times, the correct explanations of natural phenomena were bound to elude him. This being so, the suppositions he made which hinged on religion were distinctly far-fetched and, at best, tangential. But, thanks to the universal law of evolution, man has at last emerged from the darkness in which he was engulfed, and now, in the light of modern knowledge, it is possible for him to discard old, conjectural beliefs and arrive at the true nature of things by purely empirical methods.

T.R. Miles writes:

It might be said that metaphysicians of the past have done something comparable to writing a cheque without adequate funds in the bank. They have used words without proper "cash" to back them; they have been unable to give their words "cash-value" in terms of states of affairs.

'The Absolute is incapable of evolution and progress' is a grammatically correct sentence; but the words are like a dud cheque, and cannot be "cashed", (p. 20)

(Religion and the Scientific Outlook, George Allen & Unwin Ltd.)

All those things which were formerly attributed to supernatural forces are now wholly explainable in terms of natural causes, modern thinking having it that the 'discovery' of God was a mere assumption arising from ignorance. With the spread of knowledge, this belief has automatically disappeared.

Julian Huxley writes:

'Newton showed that God did not control the movements of the planets. Laplace in a famous aphorism affirmed that astronomy had no need of the god hypothesis: Darwin and Pasteur between them did the same for biology: and in our own century the rise of scientific psychology and the extension of historical knowledge have removed gods to a position where they are no longer of value in interpreting human behaviour and cannot be supposed to control human history or interfere with human affairs.' *(Religion without Revelation)*, New York, 1985, p. 58).

Physics, psychology and history have proved conclusively that all those events which man explained in terms of the existence of a God or gods, or some abstract Power had entirely different causes, but that man, steeped in ignorance, continued to speak of them in terms of religious mystery.

In the world of physics, Newton is the hero of this revolution. It was he who put forward the theory that the universe is bound by certain unchangeable principles, there being certain laws according to which all celestial bodies revolve. Later, many other scholars carried this research forward to the point where all events on earth and in the heaven allegedly took place according to the immutable 'Law of Nature.'

After this discovery, it was but natural that the concept of an active and omnipotent God as the power which made things move appeared meaningless. At the most this discovery allowed for a God who had initially set the universe in motion. Therefore, Newton himself, along with other like minded scientists, believed in God as the Prime Mover. Voltaire for his part said that God had created the universe in just the same way as a watch-maker made a watch, assembling the parts, arranging them in a particular order, but afterwards having nothing to do with it. Hume subsequently abolished this 'inactive and worthless God' by advancing the argument that we had seen watches being made, but that since we had not seen the world in the process of creation, it was not possible for us to believe in God.

Atheists maintain that the progress of science and the expansion of knowledge has enabled man to observe that which was beyond his observation in the past. In the dark about chains of events, we had not been in a position to understand isolated events, now, equipped with knowledge, we no longer stood in awe of natural phenomena. For instance, the rising and setting of the sun are now understood as matters of common knowledge. But in early times these events seemed inexplicable, and man supposed that there must be a God who was responsible for them. This led to the acceptance of there being a supernatural power: whatever was beyond man's knowledge was described by him as a miracle wrought by that power. But now that we know the rising and setting of the sun is the result of the earth's revolving upon its axis, where is the need to believe that there is a God who makes the sun rise and set? Similarly, the functioning of all other things, which had been attributed to some invisible power, purported, according to modern studies, to result from the action and interaction of the natural forces now known to us. That is, after the revelation of natural causes, the need to posit, and to believe in the existence of God, or a supernatural force, vanished of itself. If the rainbow is merely a colour effect produced by the refraction and internal reflection of sunlight in minute droplets of water in the air, it is not in anyway a sign placed in the sky by God. If the plague is inevitably generated by the *Bacillus Pestis* and spread by rat-fleas, an outbreak of this disease can no longer be looked on as a sign of divine wrath. If animals and plants have slowly evolved over hundreds of millions of years, there is no room for a 'creator' of animals and plants, except in a metaphorical sense quite different from that in which the word was originally and is now normally used. If hysteria and insanity are external symptoms of disordered minds, there is no place left: in them for possession by devils.

Citing such events in support of his argument, Julian Huxley observes with great conviction:

'If events are due to natural causes, they are not due to supernatural causes.' (*Religion Without Revelation*, p. 18-19).

He holds that their ascription to Supernatural Beings is merely due to man's ignorance combined with his passion for some sort of explanation. Subsequent research carried out in the field of psychology further strengthened this point of view, as it revealed that religion is the creation of man's subconscious

self rather than the discovery of some external reality. In the words of a scholar; 'God is nothing but a projection of man on a cosmic screen.'

The concept of another world was nothing but 'a beautiful idealisation of human wishes'. Divine inspiration and revelation were merely an 'extraordinary expression of the childhood repressions.'

All these ideas are based on the premise that there is something called the subconscious. Modern research has revealed that the human mind is divided into two major parts, one being termed the conscious mind, the centre of those of our ideas which take shape in a state of consciousness; the other part is the subconscious. In this part of the mind, ideas are not usually alive in the memory, but exist below the surface and find expression either in abnormal circumstance, or in sleep, in the form of dreams. Most human thoughts are buried in this subconscious cell, the conscious part of the mind being the smaller part. The subconscious is like the eight-ninths of the iceberg, which remain below water, while only one ninth, the conscious part is visible.

After extensive research in psychology, Freud discovered that during childhood, certain happenings and ideas are repressed in our unconscious minds which can later result in the irrational behaviour of adults. The same applies to the religious concepts of the hereafter, heaven, hell, etc., which are but echoes of those very wishes which were born in the child's mind but never fulfilled, circumstances being unfavourable, and consequently, repressed in the subconscious. Later, the subconscious for its own satisfaction, supposed the existence of a dream world in which its unfulfilled wishes would be realized, just as, deep in sleep, one dreams of wishes coming miraculously true. When childhood fancies, which had been thoroughly repressed, suddenly burst through to the surface, producing a state of frenzy or hysteria, or other abnormal behaviour, people mistakenly attributed this to supernatural forces which had found expression in human language. Similarly, the generation gap and the Father complex in a family gave rise to the concept of God and slave. Thus what was simply a social malaise was carried to the cosmic scale in order to forge a theory. In the words of Ralph Linton:

'The Hebrew picture of an all-powerful deity who could only be placated by complete submission and protestations of devotion, no matter how unjust his acts might appear, was a direct outgrowth of this general Semitic family situation. Another product of the exaggerated superego to which it gave rise was the elaborate system of taboos relating to every aspect of behaviour. One system of this sort has been recorded and codified in the laws of Moses. All Semitic tribes had similar series of regulations differing only in content. Such codes provided those who kept them with a sense of security, comparable to that of the good child who is able to remember everything that his father ever told him not to do and carefully abstains from doing it. The Hebrew Yahveh was a portrait of the Semitic father with his patriarchal authoritarian qualities abstracted and exaggerated. Such a judicial concept which believes in God being a political authority has occupied a central place not only in Judaism, but is also incorporated in the religious concepts of Christianity and Islam as well.'

Ralph Linton, *The Tree of Culture*, (1956, p. 288).

(To be continued)

The Message of the Quran

Chapter II, contd.

“Children of Israel, remember My favour which I have bestowed upon you and that I exalted you among the nations. Fear the day when no soul avails another; when neither ransom nor intercession shall be accepted from it, nor shall anyone be helped. When his Lord put Abraham to the proof with certain commandments, and Abraham fulfilled them, He said: ‘I have appointed you a leader of mankind.’ ‘And what of my descendants?’ asked Abraham. ‘My covenant,’ said He, ‘does not apply to the evil-doers” (2:122-124).

The Children of Israel were selected by God to perform a very special task: they were to call other nations to God, impressing on them the fact that they were answerable to Him for their actions. God sent innumerable prophets among them to help and guide them in the performance of this task – Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Solomon, Zakaria and John the Baptist, to name just a few. After a while, however, the Children of Israel went into decline. They took their privileged position, which was in fact due solely to the lofty task that had been entrusted to them, to be an indication of ethnic superiority. So it was that they lost their right to be representatives of divine religion on earth. The coming of the Arab prophet signified the replacement of the Children of Israel by the Children of Ishmael as God’s favoured people: it was they who were chosen to carry on the task of communication of God’s word to other nations of the world. Those among the Children of Israel who were truly pious and God-fearing soon realized that the teachings of the Prophet of Islam came to him from God. They recognized that the word he preached emanated from the same source as that preached by the Prophets before him. Those who denied him were acting out of prejudice alone: they refused to accept that any other nation besides their own could be selected for God’s favour.

These people were warned, through the Arab Prophet, that in the next world the only things of any value would be true faith borne out by solid actions. In this world one person is able to bear the burden of another; sometimes intercession is accepted; sometimes one can free oneself by giving compensation; sometimes a helper is at hand to see one through a difficult situation. In the next world, however, none of these things will be of any use. No particular ethnic group holds a monopoly over the next world. There, God’s justice will apply to one and all equally. Take the example of the Prophet Abraham, forefather of both the Arabs and the Jews. He was granted leadership of mankind only after he had been through very severe tests, and had shown himself to be faithful and true to God under all circumstances. God demanded of Abraham the supreme sacrifice – his son’s life – and when God finally intervened before Abraham could actually kill his own son, it was because Abraham had demonstrated his perfect willingness to make any sacrifice demanded to him by God, no matter how great or how terrible. The rule that applied to Abraham applied to every generation: only those who prove themselves worthy will

be granted a share in God's covenant; those who do not will meet the same fate as any other offenders in God's sight, regardless of the nation to which they belong. One who is willing to make sacrifices for a cause shows his utmost 'dedication to it: it is only just and natural, then, that he should become its leader.

"And when We made the Kabah a resort and a sanctuary for mankind saying: 'Pray in the place where Abraham stood.' We enjoined Abraham and Ishmael to cleanse My House for those who walk around it, who meditate in it, and who bow down and prostrate themselves. 'Lord,' said Abraham, 'make this a land of peace and feed its people with fruits, those of them that believe in God and the Last Day.' 'As for those that do not,' He answered, 'I shall let them prosper awhile and then drag them to the scourge of the Fire – an evil destination (2: 125-126).'"

Every year, the Faithful come from all over the world to visit the House of God in Mecca, where no one is allowed to harm even the lowliest animate creature; for Mecca has been made into a sacred place of worship for all time. It is meant to be kept clean of all impurities and all activities that are contrary to its basic purpose. Here, circumambulation of the Kabah is performed. People come to this place to remember God in an atmosphere of peace and solitude. They bow and prostrate themselves before God. In ancient times Arabia was the most arid land on earth: its sandy surfaces and barren rocks were totally unsuitable for any kind of cultivation. Worse, it was totally exposed to attack from the outside world. Four thousand years ago Abraham was commanded to take his family into this "uncultivable valley", and settle them there. Without the slightest hesitation, Abraham carried out this commandment. Once he had reached Mecca, in accordance with God's commandment, he asked God to hear his prayer. "Make this town a place of peace," he prayed, "and make special arrangements for their worldly provision; for the land that they inhabit is uncultivable." Abraham's prayer was answered: the land of Hijaz has remained an abode of peace and plenty up to the present day.

A believer's whole life should be an act of worship. In whatever far-off corner of the world one lives, one should at all times remember that one day one will have to return to the Lord. One should cause no harm to one's fellows. As for the earth one lives on, it should be thought of as a place of worship, and kept clean of all pollution. One's life should be focused on God – it should revolve around Him alone. Though one has to live in the world, one's heart and one's mind should always be on God; one's whole life should be one of submission to Him. True religion makes certain demands of a person. Sometimes one is even required to take one's children to a place as arid and uncultivable as Abraham's valley. Whatever is entailed, one should faithfully carry out God's commandments. When one has done so, that is the time to pray to God that He should prosper one's efforts. It may well be that God will make fountains gush forth from a dry desert, and lush crops spring forth from a barren land.

Whatever splendour and glory one is accorded in this life, these things in themselves do not signify that one is considered fit by God for the leadership of mankind. Everything given to man is a means of testing him and there is no one who is exempt from God's trial. While Imamah (leadership) indicates that one has been selected by God to represent Him in the nations of the world, the highest form of leadership is only for those who have been found fit by God to represent His divine religion on earth.

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Retribution here and Now.

Uthman ibn Affan, the third caliph, said one day to his slave, "Once I twisted your ear. Now take your revenge." The slave caught hold of Uthman's ear and the latter told him to twist it as hard as he could. "How good that retribution should be meted out in this world and not left to the next world," said the Caliph.

Enterprise

A survey has been carried out on American Businessmen who have made it spectacularly to the top, and an analysis has been made of what it has taken to place them on their respective pinnacles of success. Their extraordinary feats in business and industry have been attributed largely to their "hard struggle, a devotion to work with such a sense of involvement that family, entertainment, etc., come to take a secondary place." however, according to one research (*Reader's Digest*, May, 1982) the key feature which is the common denominator in all of the case histories was their having been "masterful opportunists, keenly alert to any chance of personal advancement." This is not to say that hard, dedicated work did not play a major role, but, obviously, without that initial plunge taken by the budding entrepreneur, no subsequent meteoric rise in life would ever have been possible.

Taking the plunge, needless to say, almost invariably involves taking risks. It is rather like plunging into a mountain stream. Both what one knows and what one does not know about it give one grounds for hesitation. There is the intense cold of water, the swiftness of the current, the danger of being dashed against rocks, swept over rapids and hurled headlong down waterfalls, and then – how deep is it? Then man who is keen to reach the other side will first look for the safe, easy way. He will simply cross a bridge. But where there is no bridge, he will have to measure up his own strengths against the crushing powers of nature. Is he strong enough to battle the current, are his reflexes fast enough, has he the wit and adaptability to deal with sudden and unexpected crisis? Can he find ways of protecting himself, warding off danger? Can he even trust himself to do the right thing when it comes to the crunch? The man who is really determined to reach the other side of the stream, will summon up all his strength, courage and intelligence, and will plunge straight into the icy waters before him. He will, of course, choose a vantage point from which to do so, but, once having found this point, he will no longer hesitate.

In the world of industry, there are risks to be taken which are no less formidable. Some are fortunate enough to find the safe, easy bridges to success, but, for the majority, the plunge into the mountain stream is an unavoidable hurdle on the path to glory. Often, opportunities suddenly emerge before a man on the brink of launching himself on a career. It is his ability to seize up the opportunity, then grasp it when the time is ripe that will make all the difference to the direction his career takes from that point onwards. Opportunity seldom knocks twice, and the potentially successful man is the one who fully realizes this. Often too, a successful career is one in which a whole series of opportunities have had to be seen and thoroughly exploited. No career is ever such a cut and dried affair that new opportunities may be complacently ignored. The most successful men are those who are ever alive to the state of affairs around them, and who keep abreast of whatever events are likely to improve or damage their prospects. There is a great deal to the old saying: "Strike while the iron is hot!"

Suffer in Silence

“When one’s ego is affected,” says a contemporary psychologist, “it turns into super-ego, and the result is breakdown.’ Umair ibn Hubaib ibn Hamsha, in his final days, gave this piece of advice to his grandson, Abu Jafar Alhazmi:

“One who will not bear the minor evils of a foolish person shall have to bear greater evils from him.”

Both these quotations, although differently worded, imply that there is only one sure way to avoid the malice of others – keep out of the line of fire.

Every man is born with an ‘ego’ which is normally dormant. Our safety lies in our allowing it to remain so. But if through ill-considered action it is somehow dealt a blow, it will rear up like a serpent and wreak all kinds of havoc.

It is not uncommon in social living for suffering to be inflicted upon us by mischief-makers and fools. The best way to deal with such situations is to refrain from reacting to the initial hurt which, frequently, at that stage is not particularly severe, for if we promptly retaliate, the troublemakers will be provoked in turn, and there will be no end to the dispute. The result will be that having refused to suffer in silence when the first pebble was cast, we shall have to endure being pelted with a whole shower of stones.

The Vanity of Human Wishes

Dr. Uttam Parkash, head of the department of Surgery at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi, so excelled in his field that he was awarded the coveted title of Padma Bhushan.

This distinction, however, was not enough to satisfy his ambitions. On the 17th of February, 1982, he was to preside over an international Congress on Surgery, the success of which would give an even greater impetus to his career. He took special pains with all of the arrangements, even managing to persuade President Sanjiva Reddy to inaugurate the function. But, at the eleventh hour, when he was congratulating himself that the arrangements were now perfect, a message came from the Rashtrapati Bhavan Secretariat saying, that the President could grace the occasion only if the Health Minister were also present. It was a matter of strict protocol. The situation now became extremely awkward, because the Health Minister had not originally been included, and his name did not appear on any of the programmes. But it now being absolutely essential to invite him, Dr. Parkash began to make Herculean efforts to make sure that he would not decline the invitation out of pique. But it was all to no avail. The Minister did, indeed, consider it beneath his dignity to accept an invitation which had been sent to him at the very last minute, and he refused to participate in the function. This was a great shock to Dr. Parkash, and obviously more than he could bear, for three days before the inauguration, on the 14th of February, he succumbed to a massive heart attack. He was just 54 years of age. A Hindustan Times reporter very aptly described him as “the most worried man in town before he took the long road.” (*Hindustan Times*, February 1, 1982).

Today people find it beyond them to put up with even the slightest indignity. But what will their fate be in the next world when they are hungry and thirsty and there is no food to allay the pangs of hunger, and no water to slake their thirst? What will they do in the blazing heat when there is no shade to retreat to? How will they endure the terrible, engulfing wrath of God when there is no one at all who can save them? If a man is unable to bear being hurt by so much as a pebble today, will he be able to bear a mountain of suffering tomorrow?

Why Calamities Befall Man

When a train is about to leave a station, the guard blows a whistle. The purpose of this whistle is to warn people of the train's impending departure, so that anyone still on the platform can come and take his seat on the train. But there are two ways of interpreting this whistle. If it is considered to be just a noise, it will have no meaning. But if it is considered to be an alarm, then it fits into place and takes on its proper meaning.

The same is true of natural disasters. They too can be looked at from two different angles. Our planet is at various times afflicted by drought, earthquakes, hurricanes and other such calamities. Some philosophers look at these disasters as meaningless events and simply label them as "natural phenomena" or "natural disasters".

Prophets, however, look at the same events from a different point of view. They look at them as a source of admonition and instruction. Looked at in this way, natural disasters become intensely meaningful. They become nature's warning system, telling us of what is to come.

God's prophets have explained these events as a preview in miniature of the great calamity that will befall man on the Day of Resurrection. They are a reminder that we are all heading for a dire day – one on which God will appear in all His power and glory. Every mortal man will be brought before Him in an absolutely destitute and helpless state. Man will want to flee, but there will be nowhere for him to take refuge. He will cry out for help, but there will be no one to come to his rescue. The very events which happen on a small scale in this world will occur on a grand scale when God raises man from the dead. These calamities are a reminder of what will befall us on that day. Then, the veil will be entirely lifted and reality exposed in total form. In this world it is partially lifted when some calamity afflicts us, so that we can gain a glimpse of reality before its total manifestation.

Wise is the one who considers such calamities as a warning given by nature rather than a senseless evil. One who interprets them as nature's alarm system will humble himself before the Lord, and set about mending his ways. If they are looked at as a sign of the evil of nature, on the other hand, then they will only induce confusion and contumacy. And there is a world of difference between these two forms of mentality. The former leads one towards heaven, while the latter brings one closer to hell fire.

Adverse Circumstances

Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) is now accepted as an outstanding figure in English literature. Yet, in the early stages of his life, he was in such financial straits that he appeared to be doomed to failure. But it was this very financial stringency which drove him ultimately to success.

Until middle age, he was regarded as being a man of very ordinary capabilities – a third rate poet, in fact. By this stage of his life he was overburdened with debts from which his rather uninspired poetry could obviously not rescue him. But the desperation to which his circumstances had reduced him, far from crushing him, unleashed new and unsuspected forces from within him. These hitherto unrevealed capacities were to find their outlets in what was, for him, a new field that of the historical romance in novel form. The pressure of his debts spurred him on to tremendous literary efforts over the next few years, and, because of his desperate need to sell his books rapidly and at high prices, he devoted himself to writing the kind of stories which were sure to arrest the attention of his readers. Such extraordinary diligence became the guarantee of his novels' popularity. They sold like hot cakes, and he paid off his debts. He was a great literary success. Later in life he was knighted in recognition of his contributions to English literature; but if he had not originally had the stimulus of his debts, he might never have composed works of such high literary merit, he would never have been so prolific and would certainly not have become Sir Walter Scott. It was his determined tackling of a serious situation which led to his being awarded one of the highest places in English literature.

It is the challenges in life that either make men or break them.

Separating Truth From Glory

“Whenever Our revelations are recited to them, they say: “We have heard them. If we wished, we could speak the like. They are but fables of the ancients.”

These words refer particularly to a man, Nazar ibn Harith who was a contemporary of the Prophet. He conducted business in Persia where he would hear grand stories about kings and commanders, and on returning home would give highly exaggerated versions of them to his countrymen in order to mock the contents of the Quran. After narrating his stories with great relish he would boast to his friends: “Whose stories are better, mine or Muhammad’s.” Later, this man came to fight the Muslims in the battle of Badr and was slain.

Today, no one in Mecca would think of uttering such words. Then how was it that fourteen hundred years before one could dare to do so? The reason is the difference of the times. Fourteen hundred years ago, both the Quran and Muhammad were objects of controversy. But today, as a matter of ancient history, the divine origin of the Quran and the Prophethood of Muhammad have come to be acknowledged as established facts.

The historical standing of the companions of the Prophet remains undiminished, for they attached themselves to Islam, judging the Quran and the Prophet purely on merit, at a time when Islam had yet to establish its glory. Today it is regrettable that many of those who wax eloquent on the subject of Islam do no more than recognise the glory that is Islam, forgetting that, whether or not it has fourteen hundred years of history to back it, Islam has to be accepted as truth.

19 November 1986

The Inevitability of the Grave

One day, when Umar came to see Abu Ubaidah, he found him lying on a piece of sacking used to saddle camels, with a bundle serving as a pillow. "So you have not done as our companions did?" Umar remarked, meaning that he had still not adopted the more prosperous ways of the times. Abu Ubaidah replied: "Commander of the faithful, this is enough to take me to my final resting-place."

(Hilyatul Auliya)

Rose-coloured Spectacles

On May 30th, 1981, the former president of Bangla Desh, Ziaur Rahman (1936-1981) paid a visit to Chittagong. That night, as he lay asleep in the official rest house, he was attacked and murdered by one of his own officers, Major General Manzoor. The latter hoped that by eliminating President Ziaur Rahman, he himself would be able to take over the reins of the government. But he had made a fatal miscalculation. With the exception of one loyal Squadron, the common soldiers did not extend their support to him, and just two days later, on June 2nd, he was shot dead by his enemies.

General Manzoor met the same fate which is eventually to be that of all mankind. Some are carried away, when their time has come, by the angels of death, while others have the misfortune to meet violent and untimely ends. Death is inevitable, but no one learns a lesson from this. No 'General Manzoor', thinks that after having done away with his enemy, he too will be done to death tomorrow; that after casting others down into the pit of death, he will meet an identical fate.

This world is a formidable testing ground. Everyone has been given a free hand in the sphere allotted to him so that he may either prove his mettle, or reveal himself for the unworthy person that he actually is. But, sad to say, life is full of cruelty and irresponsibility. And, ironically, those who are most guilty of these lapses are the very ones who complain of others' misdemeanour. Everyone is a 'General Manzoor' – engaged in the annihilation or oppression of others. Everyone wants to set himself up on the ashes of other men. Everyone wrongly supposes that by destroying others, he will be able to step into their shoes. He ignores the fact that what awaits him is not the high and splendid positions of this world, but his own dreary grave.

Woe betide those who perpetually see themselves through rose-coloured spectacles, for life will ultimately force them to look directly at the plain, unvarnished bleakness of their own moral failures. No one stops to give thought to this aspect of the future, so engrossed is he in the present. Everyone is fully conversant with what is happening today, but is oblivious of the blows that will fall tomorrow.

What man must finally come to terms with is not the 'here and now' but all eternity.

Looking Ahead

Delivering a speech at a public function in New Delhi recently, Admiral S.N. Kohli, former Navy Chief said, "Success is wholly a thing of the mind. When one has the will, one will find ways and means to achieve one's goals, but in its absence one will simply say, 'It's just not possible.'" As an example he cited an incident which had taken place during the Indo-Pak war of December 1971. An attack had to be made on Karachi harbour and the only war planes the Indian navy had were designed basically for defensive roles. The attack was nevertheless carried out quite successfully – much to the astonishment of the enemy. This success was obviously not the result of superior equipment but of the available equipment having been "intelligently used."

The principle so aptly illustrated by Admiral Kohli applies to individuals and nations alike. Success comes to those who firstly have the determination to achieve their ends and who, secondly, put the resources at their disposal to the best use. In the process much care, intelligence, ingenuity and farsightedness are vital. Conversely, failure often results not so much from a lack of resources as from available resources having been underexploited or wrongly used. Take the case of the villager who decided to build himself a brick house in his village. Unmindful of the fact that his resources were severely limited, he dug the foundations of his modest dwelling so deep that people began to wonder if it was a house he was building or a fortress. Friends began to express their doubts about his ability to complete it, and unluckily for him, they proved to be right. So much building material had been used in the base that there was little left for construction above ground-level. With great difficulty, he managed to build the walls, but then there was nothing left to roof them over with. Finally, he managed somehow or the other to provide a roof for just one room so that he could start living in it, but the rest of the rooms remained forever open to the sky. Had he not squandered precious materials in the foundations, he would have had enough material to complete his house. As it was, his bad planning had left him almost without a roof over his head.

Unless the mind be trained to selflessness and infinite compassion, one is apt to fall into the error of seeking liberation for self alone.

This is Where We are Bound

The Prophet Mohammad, may peace be upon him, initially forbade his followers to visit graves. The Muslims had only recently shaken off the pre-Islamic customs of idol-worship and, if they had gone to graves, old customs might have found new expression in undue veneration at gravesides. The real purpose in visiting graves might have been lost on them. When the Prophet finally lifted the prohibition, he defined in clear terms exactly why they should do so: "Visit graves", he said, "for they remind one of death."

(Sahih Muslim)¹

Just as visiting graveyards is meant to remind one that this is the destination of every person, so the act of burial in Islam is designed to remind the living that each one of them will one day be undergoing the same process. For this purpose the death ceremony has been made a live, poignant event, one which those who are living will be able to relate to themselves, one which will make them realize that the very same thing can, and will, happen to them.

First the dead body is washed, then covered in a shroud. The funeral prayer is then recited over it, and it is carried on people's shoulders to the place of burial, where with deference it is laid to rest.

Why has Islam taught one to treat the dead with such respect? Is it not true that the body is no more than dust after death? Why is it not treated as such, and disposed of without ceremony? Why is it handled as if it were a live, sensate being, and not as the dead, insensate body that it is? These questions can only be answered when one realizes the purpose behind all Islamic injunctions related to death: they are meant as a lesson to the living. It is not for the sake of the dead that they are treated with such respect; it is for the sake of the living. The dead are treated as if they were alive so that the living can see themselves in the position of those who have passed away; so that they can experience death before it comes.

The same thing could be done with a human effigy; but when performed with a real human being, it becomes a lesson of real importance to others. Here is a person who was alive like any of us. Suddenly his feet halted in their stride, his tongue froze into silence, his vision faded into darkness; the worth attached to a live human being was attached to him no more. The same will happen to every living person.

The climax of the event is when one places earth on the grave. One does this three times. "From the earth we have created you," one says the first time; "and to the earth We will restore you," as one places earth a second time; and finally "and from it We will bring back to life." (Quran, 20:55) So ends a life. The person concerned is no more, but the event is a very real one. Thus the living are shown what they are in reality, and where they are bound. (1) The most authentic collection of traditions.

Hasten Slowly

“A young man once came to a venerable master and asked, ‘How long will it take to reach enlightenment?’ The master said, ‘Ten years.’ The young man blurted out, ‘So long!’ the master said, ‘No, I was mistaken. It will take you twenty years.’” The young man asked, ‘Why do you keep adding to it!’ The master answered, ‘Come to think of it, in your case it will probably be 30 years.’” (Philip Kapleau, *Reader’s Digest*, 1983)

A goal can be achieved in the course of ten years, but you want to attain it in just ten days. This means that you want to reach your destination in tremendous leaps and bounds. But there is an old saying:

“The more hurry, the less speed.”

A traveller who wants to dash straight as an arrow, without allowing time for twists and turns, will collide with many obstacles in his headlong flight. Far from reaching his destination faster, he will surely come to grief and fall by the wayside. He shall then have to retrace his steps to the starting point, heal his wounds and only then set forth again. All of this will take time, precious time – time which should have been spent on the onward journey. Had he proceeded in a normal, unhurried way, he would have reached his destination all in good time.

Just as it is wrong to delay, it is equally wrong to be in too much of a hurry. All work can be completed in due course. To delay work is idle and irresponsible, but to do it with unseemly and unwarrantable haste is a sign of crass impatience. In the world of God, where each event has its allotted time, both extremes are doomed to failure.

24 November 1986

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I have received a copy of AL -RISALA I found the articles appear to be objective and without bias. Let us all create a climate where all the various sects and groups in this two important division speak with one voice and preach of the fundamentals of love and brotherhood, peace and equality, tolerance and understanding.

AHMEDALLY GULAMHUSEIN

KATHAWALA.

Bombay.

I have been receiving AI-RISALA for a year now through my dear sister, Mrs. T.R. Sherwani. We have been enjoying reading it. But the book, *Muhammad The Prophet of Revolution*, is wonderful. I feel what you have written are my own thoughts, its language is super.

RASHIDA M.Z. KHAN

Allahabad

I have had the opportunity to read only a few volumes of AL-RISALA but each of these has given me a feeling of great pleasure and joy, particularly in these days when everyone is hankering for material things and other worldly attainments. It is good that there are still some noble souls whose 'Noor' shines brightly through their writings'

ANWAR ALI

Lucknow

I am a regular reader of AL-RISALA, and impressed by its contents, so I want to gift it to my friends.

Please make arrangements to dispatch the same from its very first issue and oblige.

NILOFAR S.R.Q.

Bombay.

