



# Al-Risala 1990

October

## The Greatest Guarantee

For believers, the means of salvation in the next life is righteousness in this life. Besides this, it is also the greatest guarantee of safety from enemies and opponents. In the words of the Qur'an, "know that Allah is with the righteous." (9:36). "They have nothing to fear or to regret." (7:35). "They shall have ample reward." (3:172). "The riches of heaven and earth are showered upon them." (7:96). "Allah sends special aid to them." (3:125). "They shall always triumph." (25:52). "The blessed end is for the righteous." (28:83).

How do all these benefits derive from righteousness? Here is how Umar ibn Khattab, the second Caliph, explained it to Ubayy ibn Kaab, a companion of the Prophet, when he asked him what righteousness was. Umar first asked him if he had not walked, along a path lined with thorny bushes. When Ubayy ibn Kaab replied in the affirmative, Umar asked him what he did then. He said that he gathered his clothes to him and took great care not to get entangled in the thorns. Umar then told him that this was righteousness. (Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir*, vol. I. p. 40)

*Taqwa* in Arabic means 'safeguard', connoting the saving of oneself from harmful things. By relating: *taqwa* to success and salvation God has told us the most important of life's secrets, namely, that the most important factor in achieving success is to distance oneself from the causes of failure. In this world, profit is there for the taking. The only proviso is that man must step out of the way of those harmful things with which the path of success is so plentifully strewn.

It is as if benefit and success are like the sun's rays which descend upon man in great floods. Man's role is simply to prevent any obstacles coming in the path of the sun's rays. Similarly, for success in the next life, all man must do is shun anything which could act as a barrier to success in the Afterlife. If man can do just this, success will surely come his way. Nothing can stop it from coming.

One aspect of righteousness is the saving of oneself from the temptations of self and Satan. Forgetting God, remaining oblivious to chastisement in the next life, breaking God's bounds, following one's own whims in matters of morality, and in general dealings with people, worshipping creatures rather than the creator – all these faults lead man to his doom, in other words straight to hell. It is, therefore, incumbent upon man to make every effort to save himself from all these temptations and shortcomings. Those who do so will be rewarded with heaven.

That righteousness which, for believers, is a guarantee of success in the Afterlife, is also a guarantee of success in this world; it is the surest way to the highest pinnacle of moral elevation.

In this world, there are two kinds of people - the good and the bad. The latter will abuse us, inflict harm and generally indulge in provocative activities. They will plot against Islam. They will resort to all such

activities as will provoke the faithful. But, on all such occasions, the believers must remain steadfast in their adherence to the path of patience and righteousness. They will no doubt find their path strewn with the thorns flung down by these evil men but they must never be halted by this: what they must do is press onwards on the true path, avoiding the thorns at all costs.

The secret of success in this world lies in steering clear of the thorns so that the question of becoming entangled in them never arises.

As the Qur'an puts it, "The blessed end is for the righteous." (28:83). "For him we shall smooth the path of salvation."

3 October 1990

## Willingness to give others pride of place

When 'Umar Ibn Khattab lay dying, he asked his son 'Abdullah to go and see 'Aishah. "Greet her and tell her that 'Umer Ibn Khattab asks for permission to be buried next to his master. Be sure not to call me Commander of the Faithful, for today I am no longer in that position." 'Abdullah Ibn 'Umar went to see 'Aishah, and found her seated, crying. He greeted her and gave her his father's message. "You know," 'Aishah replied, "I was reserving that place for myself, but today I will certainly give 'Umar precedence over myself."

(Ibn Sa'ad)

## Deviation in Religion

The time of antiquity was the age of mythology. It was an age in which the concept of incarnation had become a rooted belief, among those nations given over to polytheism. For instance, the Greeks and Romans believed the sun to be a god, and calling it God's son, they bowed down and worshipped it.

Likewise, the Jews and the Christians in their days of decline held this concept to be central to their beliefs. They felt that to regard Uzayr and Christ as simple messengers of God was to relegate them to a position inferior to that of the Greek and Roman deities. For this reason, they came to call their respective prophets the son of God. The son of God for the Jews was called Uzayr, and the son of God for the Christians was called Jesus Christ. "That is a saying from their mouth (in this) they but imitate what the unbelievers of old used to say. Allah's curse be on them how they are deluded away from the Truth." (9:30)

Deviation as a result of imitation has gained ground, albeit in a different form, among present day Muslims. That is, they feel they must explain Islam in terms of a system. A surprisingly large number of educated Muslims have been influenced by such thinking. But, by its very nature, this is the same deviation made, by those communities of old who had fallen under the influence of unbelieving nations.

In modern times, social and political concepts such as socialism and democracy have made their mark. Under their influence, modern man has begun to think in terms of "system." Having seen the physical salvation of man in the revolutionary changes of the social set-up, Muslims have come to think that their traditional concept of Islam is inferior to modern secular systems. In order to bring Islam abreast of the times, they have begun projecting Islam as a political system, and calling it the standard-bearer of social revolution, and so on.

What is called revolutionary thinking in modern times is actually just system-based thinking as opposed to individual based thinking. But the setting up of a system is not the objective of Islamic da'wah. Its target is the individual. According to Islamic thought, launching a movement whose target is a system is just like putting the cart before the horse. The system per se is of no value. In this world it is the individuals who form a system and not the system which forms the individuals.

In modern times, the so-called Islamic movements run on the patterns of systems, have done tremendous harm to the cause of Islam. One of the worst things they have done is take all those verses of the Qur'an which provided spiritual nourishment aimed at raising awareness through inner revolutions of the heart and mind, and associate them – by means of wrong interpretation – with system and external revolutions. Politics, no doubt, are a part of Islam. But those verses which allegedly relate to politics have, in reality, no connection whatsoever with them.

For instance, the Qur'an enjoins the faithful to "magnify your Lord." (74:3) This means to acknowledge the greatness of God from the depths of one's heart and mind. But those who are interested in system-based thinking have given a political twist to the words, maintaining that 'magnify your Lord' means establishing the political greatness of God throughout the world, and the hoisting of the flag of divine power over the parliaments of all countries. This is only one example. Many other verses have been given similar political interpretations by distorting their meaning.

All such 'commentaries' of Quranic verses fall into the category of imitation, (9:30). Their worst feature being that they have made Islam – a religion of humility – into a religion of arrogance, whose proponents have encouraged the development of a destructive mentality in their own community. As a result of such movements, the religion which was sent to cause man to fear God has, on the contrary, bred unconcern and disrespect for the divine will.

5 October 1990

## Justice for all

Muawiyah, the son of Abu Sufyan, asked Dharar to describe 'Ali. Part of Dhirar's description went like this. "He was like any one of us. No powerful person could have his way with him in pursuit of falsehood, and no weak soul had cause to despair of being treated justly by him."

## A Taunt Goes Unheeded

The proclamation, 'Jesus is coming soon!' inscribed in English – obviously by some Christian hand – appeared earlier this year on many of the walls and railings of bridges in Delhi. This stirred up a reaction among certain Hindu youths, who then saw fit to add after each proclamation 'to become Hindu.' (Not evidently the work of educated Hindus, because the correct version would be 'to become a Hindu.')

If any such rejoinder to a Muslim slogan had been written up on walls and railings in letters large enough to be seen for miles, the more shallow-minded among the Muslims would have started calling this "an insult to the Prophet!" They would have considered this "an injury to Muslim sentiments and a challenge to communal honour!" In no time at all, Muslim youths would have allowed themselves to be provoked into a mood of violent reaction which in turn would have resulted in Hindu-Muslim riots. The time would then have been considered ripe for the so-called Muslim leaders to make public statements to prove the inefficiency of the administration. Another group would have hastened to open a relief fund purely to get the credit for coming to the assistance of their community. Muslim newspapers would have had the opportunity to publish burning sensational news which would boost their circulation. But so far as the general Muslim public was concerned, their lot would only have been further destruction.

The Christians, on the contrary, took no notice of this provocative act, with the result that this event was turned into a nonevent.

On February morning I watched this incident from the flyover near the Oberoi Hotel in New Delhi. On both sides of this very broad avenue heavy traffic hurtled past, at such a speed that it is doubtful if any of the drivers could have taken in the sense of the words. None of them had the time to stop and read them. The words themselves were only waiting to be obliterated by a shower of rain or a few gusts of wind. How futile it seemed to react to them or to want others to be aware of one's reaction.

The most foolish of men are those who, willingly or unwillingly, cause full-scale riots by their mindless reaction to paltry provocation.



## The Spread of Islam: An Analysis

The founder of the Mughal empire in India, Zahiruddin Mohammad Babar (1483-1530), first invaded the subcontinent in 1519. After several battles, he finally captured Delhi and Agra in 1526 to establish Mughal ruler. He was succeeded by his son Humayun.

Jalaluddin Mohd. Akbar (1542-1605), the son of Humayun, ascended the Mughal throne in 1556 after his father's death. At that time, Mughal rule was marked by instability. One reason was that the Mughals, being foreign invaders aroused great resentment among the local people. To end this state of unrest, Akbar resorted to his policy of Din-e-Elahi. It was not, in fact, a religion. It was rather a piece of strategy designed to put an end to the hatred existing between Muslims and non-Muslims. In spite of its apparent clumsiness, this strategy worked, so that Akbar, by getting the cooperation of the majority, succeeded in bringing about political stability in the country.

Although Akbar had been largely motivated by political interests in trying out this strategy. Islam also benefitted from the disappearance of Hindu-Muslim hatred in that people began to enter the fold of Islam in great numbers. Indeed, from the reign of Akbar to that of Shah Jehan, tens of thousands of people accepted Islam. The key factor in creating this propitious atmosphere was the policy followed by Akbar.

We know nothing of Akbar's intentions. But even if he had been as evil as some people thought, the above analysis still remains valid. It is an irrefutable fact that Akbar's policy of appeasement resulted in the rapid spread of Islam. Even if, as a man, he was ill-intentioned, the results he achieved as a monarch will beat out the words of the Prophet: There is no doubt that God will help this religion even if it be through a sinner.

During the reign of the last Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb Alamgir (1618-1707), the relations between Muslims and non-Muslims once again turned sour, for his policies antagonised all communities: Rajputs, Marathas, Sikhs, even common Hindus began to dislike him. Consequently, tension again prevailed. The process of spreading Islam which was well under way, thanks to Akbar's policies, again came to a halt. Hindu-Muslim antagonism thus put an end to the friction-less atmosphere which is a must for the spread of Islam.

After Aurangzeb, the Mughal empire went into a decline. At that point, however, the situation was saved by God bringing the Sufis (mystics) on to the scene. The sufis set about establishing Khanqah (monasteries) all over the country, their main purpose being to spread the message of love among the people. In this mission they met with extraordinary success. Their following among both Muslims and Hindus increased until they became the most influential element of society in shaping the character of the people.

Just as the hatred engendered by Babar was nullified by Akbar, the hatred engendered by Aurangzeb was ended by the Sufis. It was then that there came into existence an atmosphere truly conducive to the communication of the message of Islam. That is why, in spite of the Mughal empire's decline after Aurangzeb, the spread of Islam was actually accelerated. During this period, tens of thousands of people entered its fold.

This process of the spread of Islam continued until Mr. Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1948) appeared on the scene. It was he who invented the 'two-nation theory', meaning that Hindus and Muslims were separate nations. If this theory of separateness had been purely a matter of ideology, relatively little harm would have ensued. Unfortunately, he chose to stress the geographical aspects of this divisive concept. As a result, hatred and confrontation between the two groups became matters of permanent political principle.

The 'two-nation theory' was, in fact, an offshoot of the hatred stirred up between the two nations, and it was under exceptional circumstances that this concept gained tremendous popularity among the Muslims. Indeed, the whole country responded to the 'two-nation theory'. The greatest 'religion' for both the communities became Hindu-Muslim hatred. This poisonous form of politics saw its completion in 1947 when a wall of hatred – a wall far stronger than the Berlin wall – rose up between the two communities, giving birth to the separate entity of Pakistan.

By the middle of the twentieth century, the dissemination of Islam in this country had once again halted. The principle reason for this state of deadlock was Mr. Jinnah's brand of politics having produced an atmosphere charged with hatred and bitterness between Hindus and Muslims. Now, once again, the heavens await the day when this atmosphere of hatred between Dayee and Madu will be dissipated and the door to the dissemination of Islam will open once again as before.

Islam is a natural faith, free of all adulteration, which, over a long period of history, has become a firmly established religion. These inherent qualities have given Islam the ability to spread on its own. By sheer virtue of its own strength, it can make inroads into the hearts of the people. The only barrier to its spreading automatically is the atmosphere of hatred and bitterness which has been created between the Dayee and the Madu. Now, if the message of Islam is to be successfully communicated, Muslims themselves must prevent any unfavourable atmosphere from coming in the way. If Muslims can achieve only this, Islam will enter the hearts of the people on its own. There will be no further need to make any direct efforts towards this end.

Although the actual objective of the Tablighi Jamaat is the religious reformation of Muslims, it indirectly performs the same task of putting an end to inter-communal hatred, as had been done – on a larger scale, of course – by the sufis of old. Islam, at the present time, is in the gravest jeopardy, and it will only be if the process of dispelling hatred is appreciably intensified that the spread of Islam will meet with success throughout the entire country.

9 October 1990

## A sense of responsibility, not greed for power, makes one fit to lead

When Abu Bakr was elected Caliph, he addressed the people. "By God," he said, "I never had any greed or desire for power. Never, either secretly or openly, have I asked God for it. I have only taken it on for fear of friction; despite the fact that there will be no comfort for me in the caliphate. I have put a yoke on my neck which it is beyond my strength to carry; it is only trusting in God's strength that I carry it. I would prefer anyone of you who is more fit than me for the task, to take it on."

(Baihaqi, Hakim)

## Winning Without War

The *Times of India*, in a new feature on international surveys which reflect today's political thinking, states that "war as an instrument of world power or social change is now an impossibility." (December 4, 1989)

Today, no nation can wage war and expect to reap the same benefits as the ruling classes of former times. The cost and complexity of modern warfare and its greatly increased potential for widespread destruction are factors which are rapidly ruling it out as a solution to national and international problems. Thinking on this subject is changing throughout the entire world. Everywhere, the people themselves have started advocating the method of negotiation as opposed to outright armed confrontation. Even the USSR and the USA who are the best equipped in armaments, have come to the negotiating table in order to avoid plunging themselves and the rest of the world into war.

In the world of today there is but one exception to this new rule – the Muslim nation, which is still engaged in armed conflict and whose leaders still speak in favour of armed struggle. It is unfortunate that even to this day, Muslims are engaged in meaningless warfare and their leaders are still making verbose speeches full of martial terminology.

In the times in which we are living it has become vital to put an end to this senseless war mentality among Muslims. They need to be mentally conditioned to have a proper understanding of the modern world and to build up their lives on the strength of their ideology rather than on the power of the sword. The present age being one of ideology is a blessing of God which greatly favours Muslims. By so ordering things, God has brought history to an arena in which Islam clearly enjoys a decisive position. In material strength, others may compete with Muslims, but, in the field of ideology, Islam is an unconquerable force. In the field of armed conflict, the outcome may be victory or defeat. But in the field of ideology, Islam is totally invincible.

## Actions Speak Louder Than Words

A certain person had special arrangements made for the “training’ (*tarbiyat*) of his children. A moulvi would come every day to give them religious education, while he himself would urge them to say their prayers regularly. Daily he would spend some time with them to help them memorize the creed *kalima* and the verses of benediction from the Qur’an. He would attempt to impart to them such moral values as respecting their elders, behaving with propriety towards others and so on.

Nevertheless, when his children grew up, they were no different from the average person who is worldly and clever whenever his own interests are at stake. The reason for their early training having had so little effect was that it had been little better than a form of lip service. It had all been so many empty words – empty, because the role model presented by the father was that of a man of the world. When it came to mere words, he could be described as religious. But when it came to actions, all the aura of religiosity fell away from him. For such a man it was impossible to create a truly religious atmosphere within his own home.

For example, there was a neighbour of his for whom he felt nothing but the most deadly antagonism. Having once imagined himself insulted by this man, his own ego went on fanning the flames of revenge. Out of sheer spite, he reviled his supposed enemy at home and did his level best to defame him in public. He even went to the extreme of trying to destroy his means of livelihood, by going to court and filing false cases against him.

These reprehensible activities went on for fifteen long years. His children would, of course, hear of religious values from his lips but all the while they would be breathing in an atmosphere which had been poisoned by his destructive activities. And wherever the atmosphere does not match the pious utterances made in it, a set of double standards is bound to be the result. We should never forget that actions speak louder than words.

Most parents, no matter how religious minded they imagine they are, tend to make this mistake. While they talk to their children of spiritual and moral matters, they divert practically all of their own attention to worldly affairs. They will speak of the next life, but they will set up their homes in such a way that the great goal of their lives degenerates into the mere piling up of things of worldly importance. They will extol the virtues of a righteous life, but instead of donating their wealth to good causes, they spend it in the mere fulfillment of the worldly ambitions they have for their children.

This is not religious training; it is but a mockery of it. Religious training is not achieved by the uttering of religious words; it calls for the sedulous building up of a whole religious atmosphere. In a home where there is no all-pervasive atmosphere of religion, it is not possible to instill moral values simply by letting

fall a few religious-sounding phrases. Nor is it sufficient to spend part of the family income on religious matters: conversations, family interests and daily activities must all be rooted in religion. Only then will it be possible to inculcate a truly religious way of thinking in one's children.

The deeds must fit the words. But all too often they do not. Why should this be so! Why should there be such shortcomings when it comes to putting words into action? The reason is that making any kind of statement only means mouthing a few words, whereas action is complicated by a number of problematic factors. If a man pledges himself to a particular course of action, but then shows himself unwilling to make concessions to some, or all of these factors, he cannot be said to have spoken in true earnest.

Putting principles into practice is not a simple matter. Only half the battle is won by getting up on a platform and addressing an audience. It is not really too difficult to make high-sounding speeches on the moral values of Islam. All one needs to do is to gather enough information from books on the subject and, of course, it helps to have an extensive vocabulary. But practising what one preaches is a very different affair. It is seldom that action can be taken without encountering different kinds of obstacles on the way to one's objective. Putting words into action means, inevitably, putting up a struggle.

Another inhibiting factor is the egoism of certain individuals. Even when they have demonstrably erred, they cannot bring themselves to utter the words, "I have erred," far less make amends. This would be too damaging to their prestige. This is why we find innumerable people who are all ready to bear witness to the fault of others, but who cannot, or will not acknowledge their own shortcomings.

It is all too easy to recount anecdotes relating to the acknowledgement of truth by Islamic personalities of bygone days, because the telling of such tales does not in any way detract from one's own moral standing. But when it comes to making an avowal of one's own errors, that is a very different matter because it shows up one's personality in a very unattractive light. Thus, a man who successfully projects another's acknowledgement of truth is a total failure when it comes to acknowledging his own mistakes.

This is mainly why people formulate principles, but do not act upon them. They feel that in acting upon principles, their own interests are harmed. The ego comes under attack, much unpleasantness ensues and with all that they are still obliged to return good for evil. Sometimes, people find themselves in the position of having to bow to their enemies and forsake their friends – all for the sake of principles. Equally unpleasant is the relinquishing to its rightful owner of an object which has been procured and kept by force, or by some other unlawful means. Principles mean nothing unless their formulators refuse to compromise on them.

This is undoubtedly an extremely difficult task. But the creation of an atmosphere at home which suggests that there can be no compromise on principles is the only effective way to train children. If you do not put principles into practice in your private and public life, nothing can prevent your children from receiving bad influences – even if you keep reciting the Qur'an day and night and even if you send your children to the most prestigious Arabic and Islamic schools for their education.

13 October 1990

## Worship, unity and benevolence

According to Abu Hurairah, the Prophet mentioned three actions which were especially pleasing to God. "That you should worship God, not associating any partners with Him; that you should cling to His rope, and not be divided among yourselves; and that you should be well-wishing towards those who are responsible for your affairs."

*(Muslim)*

## A Victory of Virtue

At a meeting on February 19, 1990, Dr. Abu Bakr of Bombay told me that there had been a large gathering of the Tablighi Jamaat at a place in Maharashtra, and that a police party had reached there to help in keeping order. At the end of the meeting, when the congregation had dispersed, Dr. Abu Bakr met the police officer in charge of the party and had a talk with him. The latter explained to him in Tamil that they had come there to keep a sharp look-out for any unruly behaviour, but that after seeing and hearing all that had passed during this meeting, he felt that if other people could only be like the people associated with this organisation, there would never be any need for police surveillance.

The Police Officer added that he had not formed this opinion by just listening to the speeches delivered on this occasion, but rather by watching how the people behaved. He said that, for instance, a member of the congregation forgot to pick up his watch after performing his ablutions. The police officer waited quietly nearby to see what would happen. Other people soon arrived to perform their ablutions and one of them, spotting the watch, picked it up and made off. The officer then followed him at a discreet distance until he reached a tent set up as a temporary office for lost property. The man handed over the watch without a moment's hesitation, then he went away to say his prayers.

The police officer said to him that people these days were generally only too pleased to make off with other people's possessions. But here were people who had no wish at all to keep others possession even when they fell right into their hands. And not only that, they made sure the lost property reached its rightful owner.

Good character conquers all – even the police who are notorious for their suspicious attitude towards the public. The reason is that human beings are endowed with moral sense as a matter of birthright. Consequently, no man can witness a truly moral act without being deeply influenced by it.



## Islam: Creator of the Modern Age

The year was 1965 and I was on a visit to Lucknow. There I met a highly educated non-Muslim who not only did not believe in religion but who also considered religious discussions quite meaningless. In the course of the conversation, he put this question to me: "If Islam had never come into being, would there have been anything seriously lacking in world history?" I spontaneously replied, "yes. There would have been the same shortcomings as existed before the advent of Islam." My answer silenced him. Then he had to concede that from the historical standpoint, all that would generally come under the heading of progress had not existed in the era prior to Islam. All this had come to the world only after the emergence of Islam. He still had his doubts, however, as to how all progress was related to the historical event which is called Islam, or the Islamic revolution.

It is this historical question which this book endeavours to place in its proper perspective by making a thorough investigation of the connection between the Islamic revolution and modern developments. Even those aspects of the subject have been dealt with which have only an indirect bearing on the question.

There can be no doubt that Islam, in essence, is the discovery of such divine guidance as shows man the path to eternal success in the Hereafter. Scientific and industrial developments may not be *directly* related to the aims and objectives of Islam, but it is nevertheless an indisputable fact that they are major offshoots of the Islamic revolution. Had the Islamic revolution never seen the light of day, scientific and industrial developments would also have remained unrealized.

The main purpose of a tree is to bear fruits. But, when it is fully grown, it also gives man shade. The same is the case with Islam. The main purpose of Islam is to open the door of divine guidance to human beings, so that they can come closer to their Lord. But Islam is complete truth. And when such truth reveals itself, it not only becomes the source of all blessings for mankind, – directly as well as indirectly – but it also gives guidance which is of great practical utility.

### From Darkness to Light

God created a perfect world. Then He created man in perfect form. Next He commanded man to live in the world and make use of everything he found in it. Man was told, moreover, that there was only one Creator who should be worshipped. Man was to worship this God alone, and none else besides Him.

But man went astray. He began to worship anything which was visibly prominent, such as rivers, mountains, etc: He could not continue to make an invisible God the centre of his attention. Worse, his inclination towards visible gods went on increasing. Anything large and impressive was regarded either as

a god, or as possessing divine attributes. This engendered, on the one hand, the concept of the sacredness of certain personalities and, on the other, the process of nature worship, or pantheism.

This worship of some thing or person other than God finally developed into *shirk*, or polytheism. This *shirk* gradually came to dominate all aspects of belief and practice, finding its way into every household as bringer of good omens and a nullifier of bad omens, thus becoming a part of all customs. Moreover, once it took the shape of belief in a divine king, it became a necessary part of the political system.

This was the religion of the ancient world. Worship in those days was based wholly on *shirk* – to put it in religious terminology, or, in common parlance, superstition.

All the Prophets in the past had come with the mission of rectifying this perversion. In all ages, throughout the history of man, they called for the renunciation of *shirk* and the adoption of monotheism. About one lakh (a hundred thousand) Prophets, were said (according to one of the Traditions) to have come to the world from the time of Adam to the time of the Messiah (Christ). But man was not willing to give ear to what they had to say. The message of the Prophets was thus confined only to the proclamation of truth; it could not go so far as to bring about a revolution based on this truth.

Rooting out *shirk*, or superstition was not a purely religious undertaking. It had a bearing on all human concerns. The truth is that this all-pervasiveness of superstition served as hurdle to all kinds of human development.

Placing nature upon a pedestal of sanctity had completely discouraged any investigation of it. Without such investigation, scientific and industrial progress was simply not possible. Progress towards the general acceptance of human equality was likewise barred by beliefs concerning the superiority or inferiority of a man's birth, which had grown out of a variety of baseless suppositions, all governed by superstition. The emergence of all those factors which today add up to enlightenment and progress had been rendered impossible by a complete absence of scientific vision. It was superstition which was responsible for delaying the birth of such an outlook by many centuries.

Efforts on the part of the prophets over a period of thousands of years had proved that any struggle which was confined to intellectual or missionary fields, was not sufficient to extricate man from the grip of superstition. Even the governments of those times were founded upon superstitious beliefs. The interests of the rulers lay, therefore, in the perpetuation of the age of superstition, so that their subject might continue to be swayed by the belief in the divine right of kings. (This was so that they should not question their right to rule.) That was why they used all their military and political might to suppress any attempts to put an end to polytheism and superstition by means of a missionary struggle.

Now the question arose as to what strategy should be employed to break down the barriers raised by vested interests. This was the state of affairs when the final Prophet 'Mohammad, may peace be upon him, came to the world in the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD.

It was God's decree that he be a *da'i* (missionary) as well as a *mahi* (eradicator). He was entrusted by God with the mission of not only proclaiming to the world that superstitious beliefs were based on falsehood, but also of resorting to military action, if the need arose, to eliminate that system for all time.

Addressing the Prophet, the Qur'an observes:

"We have revealed to you this book so that, by the will of their Lord, you may lead men from darkness to light." (14:1).

This same mission of leading men from darkness to light had been entrusted to all the Prophets in turn. The sense, however, in which the Prophet of Islam was distinct from the others was that in his case, God had decreed – since no Prophet was to come after him – that he should not just communicate the divine message to humanity and leave it at that, but that he should also take practical steps to change the entire existing state of affairs.

The prerequisites for putting this plan into action were all provided by God. Moreover, God also guaranteed that any shortcoming in worldly resources would be amply compensated for by special help from the angels.

This point has been made in the Hadith in different ways. The wording of one hadith goes like this: "I am the eradicator through whom God will obliterate unbelief." Thus the Prophet was not just a *da'i*, but also a *mahi*. He was the caller to the faith, but he had also to compel people to answer his call. The Qur'an clearly states that besides human beings, God's angels would also help him in accomplishing his mission.

This commandment of God was, indeed, realized through the Prophet, so that a whole new era could be ushered in.

## Forsaking this world for the next

Aisha says that one of the Companions came to the Prophet and said to him: "I have two slaves who persistently *deceive*, betray and disobey me. I beat them and scold them in return. How do I stand in relation to them?" The Prophet replied: "Their disobedience, perfidy and deception will be weighed up, and so will the reprisals you take against them. If your reprisals are equal to their crimes then the two will balance one another out: nothing will be left owing to you, and you will not owe anything. And if your reprisals are less than their crimes then you will be paid the balance. But if the reprisals you took against them are more weighty than the crimes they committed, then they will be repaid from the grace that was previously yours." The man started crying in front of the Prophet. "Why, have you not read the Book of God," the prophet said to him: "And We shall set up just scales on the Day of Resurrection, so that no man shall in the least be wronged. Actions as small as a grain of mustard seed We will bring (to be weighed out). And sufficient are We as reckoners (21:47)." "Prophet of God", the man said, "I think it would be best for me to be rid of them. You are witness to the fact that I have freed them all. (Musnad Imam Ahmad)

## On The Way

Darbara Singh, a leader of the Punjab and also Chief Minister of the State, died on March 11, 1990 at the age of 75. According to a news item in the *Hindu* (March 12, 1990), he was in New Delhi when he suffered a severe heart attack. He was immediately taken to the Batra Hospital but he died on the way.

When I was going through this news item, I felt that this was the story of not just one individual but of all human beings. Everyone is on his way to some place or the other, but everyone dies 'on his way'. Everyone wants to build the world of his dreams, but no one's dream is ever truly fulfilled. In a state of regret and depression, the man of ambition, the keen aspirant, leaves this world for the other world.

In the town of Azamgarh in the state of U.P. there lived a Raja named Harakh Chand. Some time prior to 1947, he started building a palatial house in the city. The work on the house continued for many years, but it could not be finished during his lifetime. He finally left this world without having seen its completion. In like manner, everyone is building a 'house' to his own liking and those who do not have the wherewithal to build a house of their own endeavour to usurp their fellows rights in orders to possess one for themselves.

But finally, everyone is rendered homeless. Someone's house is shattered by an earthquake. Another is separated from his house by the Angel of Death. Everyone is dying on his way. No one reaches the destination of his choice.

In this world, man is fated to die on the way. Here, no one has it in his power to reach his desired goal. The reason is that this world is only a pathway; it is not a destination. Man's ultimate stopping place is the life after death. It is therefore a wise man who regards the world as a place only to be passed through on the way to his true destination – the Hereafter.

19 October 1990

**The world is but a drop in the ocean of eternity**

Al-Mastaurid Ibn Shaddad heard the Prophet say: "The world, in comparison to eternity, is like one of you putting his finger in the ocean. What does he take with him when he brings his finger out?"

*(Muslim)*

## Medicine

Just as diseases have afflicted man in every age, so has the science of medicine always existed in one form or the other. In ancient times, however, the science of medicine never reached the heights of progress that it did in the Islamic era and also latterly, in modern times.

It is believed that the beginning of the science of medicine – a beginning to be reckoned with – was made in ancient Greece. The two very great physicians who were born in ancient Greece were Hippocrates and Galen. Hippocrates lived in the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. However, very little is known about his life. The historians of later times have estimated that Hippocrates was probably born in 460 B.C. and died in 377 B.C. Some historians, on the other hand, even have doubts about his being a historical figure. It has also been questioned whether the books on philosophy and medicine supposedly written by him were not actually written by someone else and later attributed to him.

Galen is considered the second most important philosopher and physicist of this period of antiquity. He was born probably in 129 A.D. and died in 199 A.D. Galen had to face stiff opposition in Rome, and most of his writings were destroyed. The remainder would also have been lost to posterity if the Arabs had not collected them in the 9th century and translated them into Arabic. These Arabic translations were later to reach Europe, in the 11th century, where they were translated from Arabic into Latin. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1984) concludes its article on Galen:

“Little is known of Galen’s final years.” (7/850).

It is a fact that ancient Greece produced some very fine brains and some very high thinking in this field. But the respective fates of Galen and Hippocrates show that the atmosphere in ancient Greece was conducive neither to the rise of such people to their due eminence, nor to the growth of medicine as a science. Different kinds of superstitious beliefs were an obstruction in the path of free enquiry, for instance, the attribution of diseases to mysterious powers, and the sanctification of many things, such as plants which had healing properties.

The science of medicine came into being in ancient Greece about 200 years before the Christian era and continued for another two centuries. In this way, the whole period extended over about four or five hundred years. This science did not see any subsequent advance in Greece itself. Although an European country, Greece did not contribute anything to the spread of its own medical science in Europe, or give any stimulus to progress in the field of modern medicine in the west. These facts are proof that the atmosphere in ancient Greece was not favourable to the progress of medicine.

The Greek medicine which was brought into being by certain individuals (effort was all at the individual level, as the community did not give it general recognition) remained hidden away in obscure books for

about one thousand years after its birth. It was only when these books were translated into Arabic during the Abbasid period (750-1258), and edited by the Arabs with their own original additions, that it became possible for this science to find its way to Europe, thus paving the way for modern medical Science.

The reason for this is that before the Islamic revolution, the world had been swept by superstitious beliefs and idolatry. The environment in those times was so unfavourable that whenever an individual would undertake any academic or scientific research, he could never be certain of receiving encouragement. More often than not, he had to face severe antagonism. Indeed, whenever any scientific endeavour at the individual level came to the notice of the authorities, it would be promptly and rigorously suppressed. In a situation where diseases and their remedies were traditionally linked with gods and goddesses, what appeal could the scientific method of treatment have for the people? Only when the monotheistic revolution came to the world in the wake of Islam did the door open to that medical progress which saw its culmination in modern medical science.

As the Prophet said, "God has sent the remedy for every disease in the world except death." This saying of the Prophet was the declaration of the leader of a revolution. No sooner did he announce to the world this truth about medicine than history began to be shaped by it in many practical ways.

### An Example

Small Pox is considered one of the most dangerous diseases in the world. It is a highly contagious disease, characterised by fever and the appearance of small spots leaving scars in the form of pits. The symptoms include chill, headache, and backache. The spots appear about the fourth day. This is a fatal disease. Even if one survives the attack, the skin is scarred permanently.

According to present records, this disease was identified in Egypt in 1122 B.C. and is also mentioned in ancient Indian books written in Sanskrit. In the past this disease gripped many countries in the form of dangerous epidemics. Thousands of people fell a prey to it. As far back as 1156 B.C. this disease was taking its toll of human life, there being visible evidence in the pock-marked face of the mummy of the Egyptian Pharaoh, Ramses V, who died in that year. (His embalmed body was found inside a pyramid.) Even then, it took thousands of years for this dreaded disease to be investigated scientifically.

Now we know that small pox is a contagious disease resulting from virus infection, and such remedies have been discovered as can ward off attacks, provided suitable precautions are taken in advance.

But it was not until the end of the 9th century, subsequent to the emergence of Islam, that this medical fact was unearthed for the first time. The first name which became prominent in history in this connection was that of the well-known Arab physician, Al-Razi (865-925) who was born in Ray in Iran. In search of a remedy for the disease, he investigated it from the purely medical standpoint and wrote the first book on the subject, called, *Al-Judri wa Al-Hasba*. This was translated into Latin, the academic



language of ancient Europe, in 1565 in Venice. It was later translated into Greek and other European languages, and thus spread all over Europe. Its English translation, published in London in 1848, was entitled, *A Treatise on Small Pox and Measles*.

Researchers have accepted that this is the first medical book on Smallpox in the whole of recorded history. Prior to this, no one had ever done research on this topic.

Al-Razi's book was read by Edward Jenner (1749-1823), the English physician who became the inventor of vaccination. It was this which led to his thinking of making a clinical investigation of the disease. He carried on his research over a twenty-year period, ultimately establishing the connection between cow pox and small pox. In 1796, he carried out his first practical experiment in inoculation. This was a success, and the practice spread rapidly, in spite of violent opposition from certain quarters, until, in 1977, it was announced by the U.N. that for the first time in history, small pox had been eradicated.

Now the question arises as to why such a long time had elapsed between the initial discovery of the disease and the first attempts to investigate it medically with a view to finding a remedy. The reason was the prevalence of *shirk*, that is, the holding of something to be sacred when it is not, or the attribution of divinity to the non-divine.

Dr. David Werner writes:

In most places in India, people believe that these diseases are caused because the goddess is angry with their family or their community. The goddess expresses her anger through the diseases. The people believe that the only hope of a cure for these diseases is to make offerings to her in order to please her. They do not feed the sick child or care for him because they fear this will annoy the goddess more. So the sick child becomes very weak and either dies or takes a long time to get cured. These diseases are caused by virus infection. It is essential that the child be given plenty of food to keep up his strength so that he can fight the infection (9).

When Islam came to the world, it banished such superstitious beliefs about disease, announcing in no uncertain terms that none except God had the power to harm or benefit mankind. The Creator was the one and only being who had such power. All the rest were His creatures and His slaves. When, after the Islamic revolution, such ideas gained ground, people began to think freely and independently of all superstitions. Only then did it become possible to conduct medical research into the disease in order to discover appropriate remedies.

Only after this intellectual revolution had come to the world did it become possible to make small pox the subject of enquiry. Only then did it become possible for such people as Abu Bakr Razi and Edward Jenner to rise and save the world from this dreaded disease by discovering a remedy for it.

The real barrier to finding a cure was the generally accepted body of superstitious beliefs based on idol worship; these beliefs were swept away for the first time in history by Islam.

## Harun al-Rashid

Historians say that when Harun, the Caliph of Baghdad, went on a pilgrimage to Mecca, he wished to meet Ibn Samak, the great Sufi. He went with his minister, Fazl Barmaki, to the Sufi's home. Samak's daughter opened the door of the house, which was in darkness. When Harun asked for a candle to be lit, the daughter answered that they had never had a candle. She took them to the roof where Ibn Samak was weeping and praying. When he had finished he turned around and asked, "Who are you?"

Fazl replied, "Harun is a great Caliph and we should all obey him."

"Is he following the path of Abu-Bakr and Omar so that he should be obeyed?" Samak questioned.

When Fazl answered, "Yes", Samak replied, "You are lying. In this holy city of Mecca everyone complains about his rule, so what must the situation be like in the rest of the kingdom?" Fazl remained silent.

The Caliph requested some advice and Samak counselled: "Oh Caliph! Be fearful of God! On the Day of Judgement there is only paradise or hell and no other place for you." The Caliph wept.

Fazl said he was sure that the Caliph would go to paradise. Ibn Samak didn't answer him but said, "O Caliph! Tonight, Fazl is with you, but not on the Day of Judgement. On that day he will not be able to speak for you and, even if he could, nobody would listen to him. Do justice to your people and be kind to them."

Harun promised that he would, and before leaving he gave a sack of gold to Ibn Samak.

Samak was infuriated by this gesture and cried: "I am trying to save you from the fire of hell and you want to put me into it – take your gold and get out!"

Courtesy: The Firmest Bond