

**Al-Risala**

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2-4 March-April 2000

## 360 Joints in Human Body

Whatever the Final Apostle of God, Muhammad, (peace be on him), said in the capacity of Apostle is recorded as Traditions (Ahadith). Whenever there was no Divine inspiration or revelation from God, he used to consult his Companions, and refrained from imposing his personal opinion upon the people. Thus he taught the people the value of the freedom of expression and mutual consultation. While the language of the Qur'an is the word of God revealed to the Prophet through the medium of angel Gabriel (Jibreel), the Traditions are the inspiration from God as transmitted in the language of the Prophet himself. The scholars of Arabic can easily differentiate between the two modes of expression. This is a miracle in itself and a proof of the Divine origin of the Quran.

In one of such Traditions narrated by Ayesha, wife of the Prophet, (may peace be upon him) in *Sahih Muslim*, the number of joints in the human body is given as 360. This Hadith enjoins that it is incumbent upon everyone to show gratitude to God for everyone of the joints, because without joints we cannot move at all and cannot do anything.

Ayesha narrated that the Prophet said: "Everyone of the children of Adam has been created with 360 joints. So whoever performs three hundred and sixty good deeds by the end of the day in thanks giving, by remembering God, praising Him, glorifying Him or seeking His pardon, removing stones, thorns or obstructions from paths and thoroughfare, bidding good deeds and forbidding bad doings protects and distances himself from the fire of Hell."

Now one wonders how can an unlettered person know the number of joints in the human body when there were no medical colleges in the whole of Arabia and no physician in the ancient world and even for many centuries afterwards no one enumerated them in detail. This proves that Traditions are based on a direct inspiration to the Holy Prophet from God for the guidance of mankind.

The human body is divided into the following parts:

1. the head and face

2. the neck
3. the trunk consisting of the chest and the abdomen
4. a pair of upper limbs
5. a pair of lower limbs.

The bones in the head, face, neck and trunk constitute axial skeleton and are 80 in number in the adult. There are 32 bones in each adult lower limb, and 31 in each adult upper limb. Thus there are a total of 206 bones excluding the inconstant number of the small sesamoid bones. In the child there are 33 separate vertebrae in the backbone, but in the adult vertebrate column we find only 26 separate bones as 5 vertebrae of sacrum and 4 vertebrae of coccyx are fused together.

Now in the books of anatomy under the chapter of arthrology, a joint is described as: "A joint expresses the relations of two or more bones to one another at their region of contact. Some bones articulate at movable joints, others at only slightly movable joints."

The 206 bones in the body are joined by three main types of joints: (1) The Fibrous Joint, (2) the Cartilagious Joint, and (3) the Synovial Joints. The fibrous joints are of two types and include sutures and syndesmoses. The cartilagious joints are of two kinds. One is Synchrondrosis, and the other is Symphysis. The intervertebral discs are examples of symphyses. The synovial joints are of six types: (1) the Plain Joint (2) the Hinge Joint, (3) the Pivot Joint, (4) a Condyloid Articulation, (5) the Saddle Joints, and (6) the ball and Socket Joint.

After giving complete details of all these joints the writer sums up the article with these words:

Therefore, the number of joints in the human body is 360. This is an average figure with minor individual variation according to age etc. Detailed morphological knowledge of the human body was only perfected during the last two hundred years or so. Therefore, the giving of an exact average count of the joints of the human body 1,400 years ago by an unlettered person can only mean one thing: that this knowledge was transmitted to him by God, the Creator of the human body. In other words, the authentic sayings (Ahadith) of the Holy Apostle (peace be on him), indeed, are divinely inspired. Another significant feature of Traditions of the Prophet highlighted

by this marvellous Hadith is the meticulous care, profound faith, and complete honesty of Muslim scholars of the science of Hadith throughout the fourteen centuries which have elapsed ever since the time of the Holy Prophet (peace be on him).

5-6 March-April 2000

## Nature's Covenant

'Stand aside, O guilty people, this day. Did I not enjoin you, Sons of Adam, not to serve Satan who is your acknowledged enemy, but to worship Me? Surely that was the right path. Yet he has led many of you astray. Had you no sense? This is the hell with which you have been threatened. Bum therein this day as a punishment for your unbelief.'

On that day We shall seal their mouths. Their hands will speak to Us, and their very feet will testify to their misdeeds (36:54-65).

In this present life both good and bad people live together in the same world. In the next life the worlds of both will be separated. The followers of Satan will be with Satan and the followers of God will be with God.

No one worships Satan in the name of Satan. (That is, one does not say that one is worshipping Satan.) But indirectly everyone who worships something or someone other than God is in actual fact worshipping Satan. If this is so, it is because Satan has presented his falsehoods in an attractive light. For instance, the worship of illustrious ancestors and angels began when Satan put unreal but pleasing thoughts about them in the minds of the people, who, falling a prey to Satan's temptations (i.e. believing that their ancestors and the angels, etc. were divine beings) began worshipping them.

Modern research has shown that human skin is a kind of record of the imprints of all human voices and that these can be replayed. This makes it understandable how people's hands and feet will start narrating all their doings in the world they left behind.

The concept of God is instilled from birth in man's nature or consciousness. Everyone has it in his nature to accept God as his superior and surrender to Him. It is as if all human beings, are bound

by God through this covenant. When man, guided by this covenant, walks the path of obedience to God, he becomes a wayfarer on the straight path set by God, and is thus led to the destination of eternal blessings.

6-7 March-April 2000

## God's Prophets

When a machine is produced it is accompanied by a set of instructions for its use. An engineer is also commissioned to give a practical demonstration of how the machine functions. Man is an even more intricately designed but animate machine. When he is born, he suddenly finds himself in a world where no mountain bears an inscription answering questions concerning the nature of the world, or explaining how he should live on earth. No educational institution produces experts who know the secret of life or who can provide man with practical guidance.

To satisfy this need felt by man, God sent His prophets to the world, every one of whom brought with him the word of God. In the scriptures revealed to them, God has explained the reality of life to man, and has made it clear what man should and should not do. They showed man what sentiments and ideas he should adopt; how he should remember his Lord; how he should live with his fellows, what he should associate himself with and disassociate himself from. The prophets' lives are a practical demonstration of how a person should live a God-fearing life.

God has given everyone the power to distinguish between right and wrong. He has also placed countless signs in space and on earth from which man can learn. Moreover, His revelations have been set down in human language and several of His servants chosen from amongst mankind as prophets, so that there should be no doubt as to the true path.

7-8 March-April 2000

## The Resurrection

*Every* night is followed by day. That which is concealed in night's darkness can be clearly seen in the light of day. In the same manner, this ephemeral world will be followed by an eternal one, in which all realities will become as clear as daylight. In this world, one is able to conceal evil under a false exterior. Some are eloquent enough to clothe their falsity in a righteous garb, whilst others mask their inner impurity under refulgent exteriors. The true character of every individual is shrouded in darkness, but the resurrection will tear all veils asunder and lay bare the reality.

What a startling revelation this will be! All men will be where they really belong, rather than in the false positions they occupy in this world. Many who wield worldly power will be humbled and reduced to helplessness. Many who sit in judgement will appear in the dock to be judged. Many who have always had answers for everything in this world will be totally at a loss for words.

8-9 March-April 2000

## When Death Comes

If one closes one's eyes, the whole world appears dark. Everything, from the radiance of the sun and the loftiness of the sky to the verdure of the trees and the splendour of the cities, is plunged into darkness, as if it were not there at all.

The after-life is also an absolute reality which we cannot see, because it belongs to a world in which our vision does not function. At the time of death the veil covering the unseen world will be removed from our eyes and we will be able to gaze on the world of eternity. It will be like having one's eyes closed and then suddenly opening them.

Imagine that a blindfolded person, totally unaware of his predicament, is made to stand in front of a live lion. Suddenly the blindfold is removed. The terror which would be experienced on beholding a lion ready to pounce on him would be far exceeded by the panic which would seize him when suddenly confronted with the world waiting for him after death.

A person who, in the world finds many kinds of support, will suddenly find that there is nothing left to rely on. Friends, a source of constant comfort and pleasure in this world, will have deserted him. His own family, for whom he had been willing to sacrifice anything, will have become alien to him. Material resources, on which he depended entirely, will be of no use. Matters one ignored as trivialities will suddenly loom before one in a form more solid than iron or rock. There will not be a single prop on which one can lean.

9-10 March-April 2000

## Termination of Prophethood

The Arabian Prophet, may God's peace and blessings descend upon him, was the last of God's messengers. No other prophet will now come to the world.

All of God's prophets have taught one and the same religion. They spoke different languages, but the religion they expounded was one. Since the followers of previous prophets were unable to preserve the prophetic teachings in their original form, messengers of God used to appear frequently in order to revitalize the true religion, and refresh people's memories of it. The Prophet Muhammad for his part initiated a revolutionary process which ensured the preservation of religion in its original form and obviated the necessity for other prophets to follow him by preserving the Book of God intact, in its original form.

God's final Prophet imparted to the true religion a stability which it had never had before. His own life was exemplary, as has been reliably recorded. It is noteworthy, too, that the community that developed after the Prophet continued to demonstrate Islamic practices, like prayer in a practicable and imitable form. People of every subsequent age have found this religion exactly as it was when God's messenger preached it.

The preservation and continuity of religion are now ensured without prophets coming to the world. God's Book and the Prophet's Sunnah are now serving the same purpose which it had taken a succession of prophets to accomplish. It is the duty of their followers to carry on their mission.

10-11 March-April 2000

## Good Egg

Look at an egg from the outside. It appears to be wholesome and good. This may be so, but it is not until we break the shell that we find out whether it is really good or bad.

The same is true of many human beings today. It is not until their outer shell is pierced that we come to know the truth about them. Their bodies swaddled in elegant clothes, their ideas couched in eloquent words, they strike us as being fine creatures indeed. But under the finest veneer there can lurk an ugly, repulsive character. It is not until one gets close and has dealings with such a person that one discovers – particularly when there is a clash of interest – how uninspiring is the reality. Behind the gentlemanly facade lies a bundle of selfishness, cheapness, affectation, pride, prejudice, exploitativeness and arrogance. Challenge such a person's interests, and we see him in his true colours.

In the vast morass of conflict which exists in the world today, it often seems that it is the hypocrite who remains supreme, the one who manages to project himself as the "good egg" to the rest of the world.

But this state of affairs can never last. The time is fast approaching when man will be ushered into another world where all hypocrisy will fall away, and all power will rest, not in the hand of man, but of God.

11-12 March-April 2000

## Tolerance

Tolerance is a noble humanitarian and Islamic virtue. Its practice means making concessions to others. Intolerance, on the other hand, means showing a self-centered unconcern for the needs of others. Tolerance is a worthy, humane virtue, which has been described in different terms in the shariah: for instance, gentle behaviour, showing concern for others, being soft-hearted, being compassionate.

When true God-worship and religiosity is born within a person, he reaches above all those evils which emanate from selfishness. Instead of living within the confines of the self, he begins to live in the world of reality. The truly pious person begins to look upon people with love and compassion. He does not expect anything from anyone, that is why even when others differ from him or do not behave well towards him, he continues nevertheless to make concessions to them, and continues to be tolerant towards them.

Tolerance implies unswerving respect for others, whether in agreement or disagreement with them. The tolerant man will always consider the case of others sympathetically, be they relatives or friends, and irrespective of the treatment he is given by them, be it of a positive or a negative nature.

Tolerance means, in essence, to give consideration to others. In social life, friction between people does occur in every society, differences arising from religion, culture, tradition and personal tastes persist. In such a situation the superior course of action is to adopt the ways of concession and large-heartedness without any compromise of principle.

That is to say that the pious man should be a man of principle as far as he himself is concerned, but should be tolerant towards others. He should judge himself in the light of the ideal but in the matter of his fellow men he should show tolerance and broad-mindedness. This being inseparable from human gentility and nobility, Islam aims to produce this fine human quality of gentlemanliness by preaching

tolerance.

## The call of da'wah in the modern age

God has assigned a whole series of duties to Muslims, ranging from turning themselves into true worshippers of their Creator to working towards the reformation of backsliders. All of these responsibilities are entirely binding upon them. But their primary religious obligation is to convey the message of God's true religion to all non-Muslim nations. This should not be seen in the context of a purely national struggle, but as a global obligation handed down by the Prophet to Muslims everywhere, to be fulfilled after the termination of his prophethood.

God has associated with the task of Da'wah work all kinds of goods in this world and in the Hereafter for the Muslim ummah. According to the Qur'an, the way to protect themselves from wrongdoers is to call them to tread the path of God. (5:67) It is for the successful fulfillment of this duty that believers will be distinguished in the Hereafter by being given the position of God's witnesses. The Qur'an describes them as those who will stand in the most elevated places. (7:46). This is the greatest honour which may be conferred on the callers of truth in the life of the Hereafter.

However, calling people to surrender to God is no easy task. It amounts to a re-enactment of the history of the Prophet and his companions, who were unremitting in their efforts to bring to ordinary men and women a clear perception of the great hidden realities of the Almighty. It is to achieve on the human level what had formerly been achieved on the prophetic level.

But first the da'wah worker must himself understand the true nature of the message he brings to mankind, otherwise his activities will be irrelevant to God's cause and may even prove counter-productive. Then, in bringing others within the fold of Islam, he must also appreciate in what sense and in how many ways there has been a change in conditions as far as the propagation of religious ideas is concerned. For our predecessors, the invitation to the truth meant putting an end to idolatry - replacing polytheism with monotheism.

Nowadays, the invitation to God means putting an end to atheism.

With the end of idolatry, a new phase was launched in world history and, for a thousand years, human thinking went on developing along rational lines to the point where, in the sixteenth century, the emergence of the western sciences came to mark the beginning of yet another new era. In the present century, science, having made such rapid and tremendous strides, may be said to have reached its zenith. It is ironic that when science can now provide the means to reaffirm religious truths, atheism should have come to dominate human thinking and actions. Academically speaking, religion has become an adjunct of atheism. It has no independent status of its own.

The German statesman, E.F. Schumacher, sums up contemporary attitudes to religion in the following anecdote: "On a visit to Leningrad some years ago (August 1968) I consulted a map to find out where I was, but I could not make it out. I could see several enormous churches, yet there was no trace of them on my map. When finally an interpreter came to help me, he said: 'We don't show churches on our maps.'" (E.F.Shumacher, *A Guide for the Perplexed*, London, 1981, p.9)

This instance is a telling reflection of modern conditions. In today's world when all sciences, including history, physics, botany, zoology and astronomy have been quite elaborately developed, God has been ousted from the academic and intellectual domain. Nowhere does the name of God occur. A man of insight perceives the signs of God everywhere-in every nook and cranny of the earth, and right throughout the furthest reaches of the universe. But in the empirical sciences, God is a non-entity. Students of these sciences find no trace of Him anywhere.

Given these conditions, the task of propagating the message of the oneness of God is to re-inscribe the name of God on the map of human thought. But it would require a world-wide intellectual revolution to spur man into coming to terms once again with the truth about his Maker. Only then will man understand and be convinced of the unity of God and the reality of the Hereafter. Our predecessors succeeded in breaking the dominance of idolatrous

thinking, replacing it with the monotheistic system of thought. Now we must likewise break the hold of atheism in order to re-establish monotheism as the dominant intellectual imperative. To underestimate either the concept or the task of propagation which it entails would be displeasing in the eyes of God and His believers.

## **The relationship of *da'i* and *mad'u***

Another important issue is the restoration of the bond between Muslims and non-Muslims as that of the *Da'i* with the *Mad'u*. As Muslim Ummah, the former are the communicators of the religion of God to other communities, who are their *mad'u* (congregation). The greatest mistake made by Muslims today vis a vis other communities is to regard them as their national and material rivals, and to engage them in economic and political disputes all over the world. When Muslims seek their rights from such peoples, they negate their status as *da'is*. The *da'i*, according to the Qur'an, should seek no reward from his congregation.

If we wish to be accorded a position of great honour as God's chosen witnesses, we must be willing to forgo rightful claims on other communities. The object of this sacrifice would be to establish the relationship of *da'i* and *mad'u* on a sound and peaceable footing.

The Hudaibiyya peace accord (6 A.H.) is a good example of such a strategic withdrawal. In this instance, Muslims acceded to all the national and economic demands of their rivals on a unilateral basis (the enemy did not meet any of the demands of the Muslims) in the drawing up of this treaty. Yet soon after this accord had been finalized, God-revealed the following verse:

"Verily, We have granted you a manifest victory." (48:1)

Why did God describe an apparent defeat as a clear victory? It was because the accord subsequently reached had shifted the field of encounter between Muslims and non-Muslims to a sphere in which the Muslims had a distinct advantage. In the face of non-Muslim aggression, encounters between Islam and non-Islam had formerly taken place on the battlefield. Islam, being militarily the weaker because of smaller numbers of fighting men and inferior weaponry, was not in a position to prevail against the enemy. A number of

battles after the emigration had failed to resolve the issue. But now, with the terms of the treaty guaranteeing that there would be no further fighting for a period of ten years, encounters now took place in the arena of the peaceful propagation of the faith. The da'wah mission, which had had to come to a standstill because of the continuous fighting over the years, was now resumed in full force, and the idolaters now found themselves bereft of weapons with which to resist the onslaught of the truth of monotheism. In consequence, the Arab tribes entered the fold in such great numbers that the power of polytheism was considerably diminished. Ultimately, Mecca was conquered within just two years of the signing of the treaty.

In the present era, Muslims everywhere have been fighting wars with other communities for material ends, but thanks to their own shortcomings, they have been defeated on all fronts and left behind in every field by other nations. What they need to do is to close down all fronts and change the field of encounter by reaching an understanding with their antagonists of the kind arrived at in Hudaibiyyah. By making this sacrifice of their own volition, Muslims will be able to divert other communities from the material field of encounter to the sphere of purely intellectual activity. In the first phase of Islam, this change was brought about by the Muslims unilaterally laying down their arms; now this change can be effected by unilaterally putting an end to the campaign for Muslim rights.

The sacrifice of national interests is difficult even to contemplate. Yet in such a loss there is gain. The day Muslims acknowledge this, a chain of events will be set in motion leading to the victory of Islam. In the material sphere Muslims may have conventional weapons as opposed to the modern weapons of other communities, but in the intellectual field they are equipped with the Truth. The prejudice and bigotry which are the mainstay of other communities can never withstand Reality for long.

According to the Qur'an, God taught man by means of the pen. This underscores the significance of literature for the purpose of the Islamic call. In Islam, the production of literature does not entail just the compilation, publishing and distribution of a number of books. What it signifies, in effect, is the material process of casting the light

of the Qur'an far and wide over the whole of humanity. This means communicating the word of God - revealed originally in Arabic - to speakers of a multitude of different languages in other communities. The onus of translation, which is no easy task, clearly devolves upon ordinary mortals, as is implied in the following verse of the Qur'an:

"We sent not a messenger except to teach in the language of his own people, in order to make things clear to them." (14:4)

It would perhaps be appropriate to say, placing the matter in the eternal rather than the temporal perspective, that just as God taught mankind by means of the pen in Arabic, it is now up to human beings to teach their fellow men by the pen in other languages.

Tradition has it that the famous Arab poet, Labid, gave up composing poetry after hearing recitations from the Qur'an. When asked why he no longer composed poetry, he exclaimed, "What! After the Qur'an?" This suggests that the Qur'an had made an intellectual conquest of the people of its time. Today, we are once again in need of an Islamic literature which is capable of capturing people's minds.

To produce works which will make the right kind of impact in a world which is now flooded with both religious and secular literature from a great variety of sources may now appear well-nigh impossible. But this is not the insuperable problem which it appears to be, for God has His ways of turning the impossible into the possible. In order to support the *da'is* of truth, God has brought about a new revolution in human history- he scientific revolution. This has given man access to new possibilities of advancing arguments in support of unseen realities. We can even go so far as to say that it has become possible for us today to present to our hearers miraculous arguments which were earlier only acceptable when put forward by prophets of God.

It is a great truth that the universe is a superb miracle wrought by God. In its entirety, it presents an indisputable argument in support of its Creator's existence and His stupendous attributes. However, in ancient times, the nature of this miracle remained unapprehended or was little understood, and that is why God gave His prophets the power to perform miracles. (It is worth noting that the Qur'an uses

the common work '*Ayah*'-signs-to denote both the prophets' miracles and the signs of nature in the universe.) However, the Prophet Muhammad's contemporaries, despite their demands, were never shown miracles of the kind demonstrated by the earlier prophets. Instead, the Prophet would draw the attention of his congregation to the Qur'an's pronouncements on the universe. They were then exhorted to look at and ponder over the omnipresent signs of their Maker. As the Qur'an was revealed before the age of science, the signs referred to therein were considered sufficient proof of the truth of the Prophet's teachings. The Qur'an, having been handed down to posterity as a work of eternal truth, continued to be read in the new age of science-when miracles were no longer demanded as proofs of either natural or supernatural claims - as God's signs had passed the test of scientific scrutiny. Whereas in ancient times, unusual and spectacular miracles were depended upon to convince the reluctant believer, this service is nowadays performed by science, which has given us empirical and inferential explanations for the 'secrets' of nature.

For the nations of today it continues to be desirable that the call to true religion should be extremely clear and understandable to all, in order that it may have the greatest possible impact. Muhammad was God's final Prophet, and with the termination of prophethood for all time, what should be the means employed for the propagation of God's message to mankind, so that it should be irrefutable?

The modern revolution in thinking provides the answer to this question. Through this revolution, it is now possible to prove the teachings of True Religion on the basis of established scientific criteria. Of prime importance in this is the methodology used. Research in various fields of modern science has reached the conclusion that inferential argument, which is employed by the Qur'an, is in its nature just as valid as direct argument. This means that at the present time human knowledge has accorded the Qur'anic methodology (indirect argument) exactly the same importance as that applied to the world outside the sphere of religious learning, i.e. the sciences and other secular disciplines.

In the wake of latter-day developments in modern science, what had earlier been a matter of external information, i.e. information

revealed to the prophets, has now come within the province of human investigation. The discovery, for example, in modern science of the laws of the universe is a pointer to the existence of God. Similarly, scientists' findings that, parallel to the existing, visible world, there exists an invisible world which physicists call antimatter, clearly proves the existence of the Hereafter. Yet one of the most important things conceded by modern science is that man, because of his limitations, cannot arrive at absolute reality. This is a clear indication that man needs revelation for his guidance.

As for requiring miracles as manifestations of the divine power, should we not consider the generation of electricity by bringing together a magnetic field and motion as wondrous a divine miracle as the supernatural brilliance of Moses' hand, which was a signal to the Egyptians that he was truly God's emissary? The sailing of huge ships over fathomless seas and the flight of aeroplanes with their passengers in the vastness of the atmosphere are also as breathtaking divine miracles as that of a river parting its waters – again a miracle granted to Moses - so that people could walk in safety across the riverbed. And then creating machinery and power tools out of inert matter is surely just as strange a divine miracle as a stick turning into a writhing snake.

The fact remains that, so far as their probative value is concerned, the miracles given to the prophets in ancient times, in support of the veracity of their message, exist in abundance throughout God's universe. Since in the remote past, these miracles had not come to the knowledge of man, God had to demonstrate them when it was crucial to his moral development. The scientific investigations of today have merely unveiled those same marvels of nature which have always sufficed to reaffirm man's belief in God and the Hereafter.

The scientific revolution has indeed shed the light of rationality on God's miracles. And religious truths of the stature of miracles are now supported by scientific discovery to the extent that the miracles themselves need not be performed. By acquiring an in-depth knowledge of these scientific findings, we can in large measure reinforce the call of da'wah. If we can present this call supported by miracles in the garb of scientific arguments, the world will indubitably be witness once again to men of the stature of Labid – a

renowned poet of his time – being forced to call out, “Is there any reason to deny the truth any longer when the truth is as clear as daylight?”

Scientific argument has come in our times to replace conviction by miracles, modern science having academically authenticated all religious teachings, or at least made them comprehensible in present-day terminology. The da’is of Islam, however, have yet to turn the findings of science to good account.

## **Favourable conditions**

Inviting people to God’s religion is one of the most difficult of tasks. But God, by His special grace, has made the path smoother for us, by making such advances in the course of human history as have opened up new and better opportunities for us to spread His word. The result has been that in our times, this historical process having reached what might well be its zenith, it has become possible to do with the pen what had earlier been done with the sword.

This act of facilitation has three main aspects to it, all of which are foreshadowed in passages of the Qur’an. For example believers are enjoined to pray:

Lord, do not lay on us the burden you laid on those before us. (2:286) This prayer has been answered in the sense that daw’ah work may now be performed in an atmosphere conducive to the free expression of different opinions, whereas in the past, and certainly in the time of the Prophet, there were stringent curbs on freedom of speech. Those who proclaimed the Oneness of God were regularly subjected to such forms of persecution as stoning, burning, and the tearing of their bodies apart. The reason for this was that earlier governments were based on polytheism. That is, the kings of ancient times ruled in the capacity of representatives of their assumed gods. Whenever there was any move by enlightened persons to demonstrate that polytheism was baseless, the kings felt that the very bedrock of their royal power was being rocked. That was why they spared no effort to crush any movement launched in the name of monotheism.

As a forerunner to the inception of this new age of enlightenment,

the Qur'an had urged all right-thinking people to "fight against (religious persecution) so that religion is only for God." (2:193) And, indeed the revolution brought about by the Prophet of Islam caused idolatry to be re-defined as a matter of unenlightened personal faith, thus depriving it of the status of an institution. The ensuing separation of idolatry from politics effectively terminated that era in which the upholders of polytheism could muzzle by nefarious means the public acceptance of *tawhid*, the Oneness of God. With superstition and personal cults vanishing under the influence of Islam, the very foundations of hereditary monarchy were shaken.

As a result of freedom of opinion having become accepted as the sacred right of the individual, the principle of autocratic rule yielded pride of place to the rule of the people, culminating in the spread of democracy throughout Europe and the rest of the world. This global intellectual revolution ushered in a new era in human history in which there were vast opportunities for the *da'is* to practise da'wah freely all over the world without any hindrance.

The second aspect of God's easing of the way for propagators of the faith was the introduction of the concept of monotheism in order to demythologize the natural phenomena of the universe, thus clearing the way to their becoming the legitimate objects of rational investigation. Polytheism had formerly stood in the way of their being scrutinized, holding them to be objects of religious reverence. This investigation blossomed over the centuries into modern scientific research, which has examined these phenomena in great detail, finally setting its seal of approval on them as proofs of the existence of a Supreme Creator. These proofs remained mostly undiscovered before this revolution took place, although the Qur'an had many centuries earlier declared: "We shall show them Our signs in all the regions of the earth and in their own souls, until they see clearly that this is the truth." (41:53). These developments represented a great leap forward in the intellectual field, which spread to Europe, where in its more propitious atmosphere, it culminated in the great modern scientific revolution. (The study of nature which has provided scientific affirmation of the truth of the call of the Qur'an has been dealt with in detail in my book, *God Arises*).

The third way in which God facilitated matters for *da'is is* was to establish the prophethood of Muhammad (may peace be upon him) for all time and with such finality as would admit of no controversy down the centuries. The praise heaped upon him – during his lifetime and re-echoing down the ages – reflecting the sincere appreciation of his followers – gave a sure indication of the unique place which God intended him to occupy in history. The Prophet's predecessors, who had been sent by God to each and every nation at intervals throughout the ages, were all true emissaries bringing the same divine message to mankind. Yet, in the annals of history, for a variety of reasons, their prophethood never became historically established, so that across the centuries, as well as for the modern man, their prophethood has remained controversial. The call to Islam was easier to give when emanating from an established prophethood than when issued by prophets who were not able to gain general recognition due to the lack of support from their people.

The Prophet's status during his lifetime, and for all posterity, was defined in this verse of the Qur'an:

“Your Lord may exalt you to a position of praise and glory.”  
(7:79)

Dr. Nishi Kant Chattopadhyay (Muslim name: Mohd. Azizuddin) was a highly educated Hindu, born in Hyderabad at the end of the nineteenth century. Urged on by his quest for truth, he learnt Hindi, English, German and French and studied all the religions and faiths. But none of these could satisfy him. One of the main reason for his dissatisfaction was that none of these religions stood up to the test of history. Thus there were no grounds for regarding them as authentic.

Finally he resorted to the study of Islam. And he was astonished to, find that the teachings of Islam were still preserved in their original form. The Islamic personalities, far from being mythological characters, were genuinely historical figures. He writes :

In the Prophet of Islam there is nothing vague and shadowy, mythical or mysterious, as, for instance, in Zoroaster and Sri Krishna, or in Buddha and Christ. The very

existence of those prophets has been seriously doubted and even totally denied; but nobody, as far as I am aware, has ever ventured to reduce the Prophet of Islam either into a "solar myth" or into a "fairy tale." Then he goes on to observe, "Oh, what a relief to find, after all, a truly historical prophet to believe in." (From *Why Have I accepted Islam?*" A lecture delivered on the 26th August 1904, in Hyderabad).

This is the status described in the Qur'an as the 'position of praise and glory' (17:79), that is, the position of historical prophethood. This verse of the Qur'an indicates that the Prophet of Islam, unlike other prophets, would not be an unknown personality. His teachings would be preserved for all time to come. This is a great advantage for the da'is of Islam in modern times, since it enables them to achieve unopposed victory in the field of da'wah.

The urge to find God is something which man is born with. It remains inherent in his nature. That is why he is eternally seeking the truth. In this he resorts to human sciences, but it is of no avail. Then he turns to religions, only to find that in their present ill-preserved form, they are lacking in historical credibility. Here we are in a position to tell the seekers of truth that what they have been questing after has been available with us all along, that is, the Qur'an and the hadith in their pristine form. And if they are in that pristine form, it is because they have been so carefully and reverentially preserved. The Prophet of Islam may be regarded as the definitive source of divine truth, because his life and teachings have been fully authenticated by historical records. It is this absence of controversy which has been the mainstay of the Prophet's reputation at all times. This is a very great blessing of God, in that it has made it possible to perform da'wah today from the strongest possible position.

## **Working towards the normalization of relations**

Islamic da'wah at the present time, i.e. communicating the message of God, is so great a task when contemplated on a global scale, that enormous resources and highly favourable conditions are required if it is to be a success. Such resources are available and such conditions do exist in Muslim countries, but can be of avail only

when national regimes do not set themselves up in opposition to the call of Islam. Even where the situation is entirely favourable, da'wah can be successful only if the da'is have no political axe to grind under the guise of missionary activity.

In 1891, the Japanese emperor Meiji (1868-1912) sent a message addressed to Sultan Abdul Hamid II of Turkey, requesting him to send Muslim preachers to Japan in order to introduce the Japanese to Islam. Sultan Abdul Hameed chose Syed Jamaluddin Afghani for this important assignment and assured him of full official support in this venture.

This same Syed Jamaluddin Afghani, who commanded such great respect and was assured of all official support by the king, was later on imprisoned by the same king. He even died in prison. The reason being that Syed Jamaluddin Afghani was involved in a political conspiracy aimed at dethroning the Sultan, whom he considered an agent of western imperialism. A man who could have started a new chapter in Islamic history by introducing Islam to Japan, ended up by merely adding his name to the prison records.

This is true of all Muslim rulers. If you engage yourself in Islamic da'wah, they are ever ready to extend their full support to you, but if you wage political campaigns directed against them, they refuse to co-operate.

Unfortunately the example set by Syed Jamaluddin Afghani is being constantly repeated by Muslims in our times. Muslims everywhere are engaged in political battles with their rulers on one count or another, to the extent that the word 'Islamic da'wah' has, for Muslim rulers, become almost synonymous with subversion.

Such nefarious practices have led not only to the loss of full co-operation by Muslim governments in the da'wah mission, but also to a situation in which, even when individuals or groups attempt to engage in dawah work, quite independently of official support, the government treats such efforts with extreme suspicion and creates obstacles to their being a success.

It is high time to divorce from da'wah work any political machinations designed to destabilize or even unseat Muslim rulers, whether it be in the name of Islam or for any other cause, so that in

every Muslim country, Islamic missionaries may benefit from the cooperation of their national governments. Only with such aid will it be possible to bring about on the desired scale a revival of Islam, the introduction of non-Muslims to Islam and the reform of Muslims themselves.

## **Furnishing a task force**

Present opportunities for the satisfactory discharge of Islamic da'wah are better now than ever before, and if they are to be availed of, a task force must be raised. To this end the Qur'an enjoins the preparation of select individuals by giving them training exclusively directed towards their gaining a deeper understanding of religious matters. When by dint of intensive study of the subject, they have become thoroughly versed in the message they have to convey, and the proper strategy for its communication, it will be their duty to spread themselves across different nations in order to disseminate the concept of the oneness of God and warn people of the Hereafter. The Qur'an specified that "it is not right that all the faithful should go to war at once. A band from each community should stay behind to instruct themselves in religion and to admonish their men when they return, so that they may take heed." (9:122).

There are, of course, a number of madrasas and educational institutes for Muslims, in different parts of the world. But not one of them is devoted to the specific purpose of training and educating people with purely da'wah requirements in mind. And true da'is, whose motivating force is to serve the cause of God, can never be turned out by merely having classical literature and modern sciences imparted to them, no matter how well qualified their teachers may be, or how high the standards of their chosen institute of learning. It is a matter of the greatest urgency then that an institute of an appropriate nature should be established, whatever the cost of setting it up and running it may be in terms of today's economy. It is only after having been satisfactorily trained in such an institute that da'is will be able to effectively disseminate the message of divine religion and bring people to an understanding of what awaits them in the Hereafter.

It is imperative, however, that such trained individuals should not only be equipped with knowledge of religion, but that they should also be imbued with a sense of purpose. Knowledge

unaccompanied by a sense of purpose is no better than a meaningless accumulation of information. But when knowledge comes with the inner illumination of high intention, it is raised to the plane of divine realization. It is only devotion to a noble cause which can produce the high thinking and fine character which will enable trainees to perform their duties towards the call of God. And it should not be forgotten that such sincere and dedicated people are needed in the attainment of worldly as well as religious goals.

An advertisement, published in *The Times* (London), in 1900, appeared in ordinary print in a small box, quite unaccompanied by any pictures of female figures or anything else to lend it visual appeal. It ran as follows:

'Men wanted for Hazardous Journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in case of success.' ...Sir Ernest Shackleton.

This advertisement was for a gruelling expedition to the Antarctic. So many people responded to it that the sponsors had to make a selection from them. It was such courageous people who brought the scientific revolution to the West, thus paving the way for its global leadership.

The above example was a worldly one, but the same holds true for those brave people who forged the history of Islam. On the occasion of the second oath of Aqbah, the representatives of the Medinan Muslims came to meet the Prophet. The following conversation which they had with him is a fine example of the courage and sense of self-sacrifice which brought ultimate success to Islam. Here we reproduce a part of this conversation as recorded by Ibn Hisham:

Ka'b says that we (the Medinan neo-Muslims) went to perform pilgrimage, and we fixed in advance a meeting with the Prophet at Al-Aqbah during the night on the second day following the pilgrimage. When we had performed the pilgrimage, and the night came when the meeting with the Prophet was fixed, so we left with our companions; when one third of the night had passed, we set off on our mounts quietly leaving under the cover of

night. We had kept this appointment secret and had not informed the unbelievers among our own tribe. When we reached al-Aqbah, men and women ascended the mountain and there awaited the arrival of the Prophet. There were seventy three men and two women. The Prophet arrived with his uncle al-Abbas, who had not yet converted to Islam. Then Ibn Abbas addressed them thus: 'O men of Khazraj, do you know for what you are entering into *baya*\* (*allegiance*) with this person (i.e., the Prophet). They replied 'Yes, we know.' Abbas said, 'By entering into a covenant with the Prophet, you are making a covenant to wage war against all blacks and whites, (that is, when the antagonists of Islam, of both inside and outside of Arabia attack the Muslims, you will have to defend him at all costs ). You will suffer losses both in lives and in goods. If you are going to desert him then you had better now say so and leave him alone. As by God, if you acted like this, it would amount to humiliation both in this world and the next. But if you think that you will fulfill your covenant in spite of the loss of your elders and leaders and other influential people (as they may be killed in the ensuing battles) then only may you take this matter in your hand. By God, therein (accepting the Prophet despite his having enemies all around, as, their leader and extending him and the Muslims their total cooperation) lies the goodness of both this world and the text. The Ansars said, "We accept him in spite of all possible losses in terms of lives and wealth." Then they asked the Prophet, "O Prophet of God, if we prove our loyalty, what shall we receive in return?" The Prophet replied, "Paradise." Then they said, "Extend your hand," and when the Prophet did so, they all (73 of them) entered into *bayah* with him.

It was people of such extraordinary courage and awareness who put an end to the continuity of *shirk*, thus altering the course of human history. Today once again the need has arisen to give same impetus to human history as was given by our predecessors, when they initiated the age of monotheism by putting an end to the age

of idolatry. Now we have to put an end to the age of atheism in order to replace it with the age of monotheism. This is an extremely noble task for which people of high calibre, are required. The need of the hour is to set up an institution where individuals are given the required training and education. In the words of Dr. Philip K. Hitti, Islam is again in need of a 'nursery for heroes.' Without such a band this stupendous task cannot be fulfilled. The proposed educational centre will serve as such a nursery, a training ground where Islamic missionaries are cast in the heroic mould.

One Dr. Nishikanta Chattopadhyaya (Islamic name: Muhammad Azizuddin) whom I have already mentioned, expressed the need for such a centre in a lecture given in Hyderabad in 1904: I feel sure, that if a comprehensive Islamic mission were started in Hyderabad (India) to preach the simple and sublime truths of Islam to the people of Europe, America and Japan, there would be such rapid and enormous accession to its ranks as has not been witnessed since the first centuries of the Hijra. Will you, therefore, organise a grand central Islamic Mission here in Hyderabad and open branches in Europe, America and in Japan? *Why have I Accepted Islam?* (Dr. Nishikant Chattopadhyaya).

Today, our most urgent need is the establishment of a da'wah-cum-training centre. It is fully ninety years since this thought was given expression to by this man of noble character, but it has yet to become a reality. If a great centre, as envisaged, could be established, the new history of Islam, for which we have been striving for so long, would once again begin to take shape, provided that in its functioning, it remained aloof from all kinds of politics and controversial national issues.