

Al-Risala

2001

March-April

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Search for Truth

Man is a born seeker – a veritable truth-seeking animal. Every human being regards himself as incomplete until he has found that supreme principle by which he can explain his existence in this world and discover the purpose and meaning of his life.

Everyone is a seeker. True. But few are finders. Why? Because, where seeking is instinctive, finding is the outcome of one's own conscious effort.

In the pre-Islamic period, there were certain individuals in Arabia, called *'Hunafa*. They were all truth seekers. Confining themselves to solitary places, they would remember God and say: "O God if we had known how to worship You, we would have worshipped you accordingly."

This was due to their urge to come to grips with reality – an urge such as is found in every human being, the difference between one individual and another being only one of degree: in some, the urge is weak, in others it is strong.

Then, there are some deviations. Some people take certain material objects to be their goal in life and do their utmost to obtain them. But there is an internal evidence that they do so mistakenly. Before obtaining these material objects, they are highly enthusiastic about them. But as soon as they have them in their possession, their enthusiasm turns to frustration for, with experience, they invariably find that what they have struggled for so hard, has failed to give them the desired sense of fulfillment. All these material things in this world are meant to fulfill only our physical needs. They have nothing to do with the purpose of our lives. This purpose can be only spiritual in nature, and not something material.

To achieve this purpose is the greatest quest in life. Everyone is motivated, consciously or unconsciously, by this demand of human nature, everyone at one time or another suffers from a sense of frustration, with or without sad experiences. To make one's life meaningful, therefore, one has to discover its purpose. One should

be extremely sincere and honest in this respect. Sincerity and honesty are an assurance of engaging oneself unremittingly in this pursuit, and never giving-up, until one has discovered the real purpose of human existence.

When a man succeeds in discovering this ideal, he becomes a person who is fit to be called a complete man, one who has succeeded in making his life purposeful, in the real sense of the word. Such a person has been called in the Qur'an: *Al-Nafs al-Mutmainna* (89:27). This means a soul at rest, in peace or in a state of complete satisfaction. That is, a man who wholeheartedly follows the divine way of life and is always fully satisfied, whether or not it is in consonance with his own desires. By showing such total willingness to surrender his will to the will of God, he attains that state of humanity which is at one with the creation plan of God. Such people will be rewarded with eternal paradise in the world Hereafter.

This will to search for the truth is implanted in everyone. But it depends upon every individual himself, whether or not he pursues this natural urge. Only through sincere pursuit will he discover the truth and thus make his life meaningful. For any kind of negligence or apathy in this regard, there is no excuse, whatever the circumstances.

Philosophy

Philosophy is the only discipline which, by its own definition, embodies the quest for knowledge and understanding of the nature and meaning of the universe as well as of human life.

But after a long search of more than 5000 years, to which the greatest minds of human history have been bent, it has failed to provide any definite answer to such questions.

Bertrand Russell was a great thinker of the present world, whose life spanned almost a century. He spent almost his entire life in reading and writing on philosophical subjects. But he failed to evolve any credible ideology. Because of this failure, one of his commentators remarks that "he was a philosopher of no philosophy." This is true not

only of Bertrand Russell, but also of all other philosophers. Individually or jointly, they have failed to produce any philosophical system which might have provided a sound answer to the human dilemma.

The main concern of philosophy was to make a unified picture of the world, including human life. But the long history of philosophy shows that this still remains an unfulfilled dream. The Encyclopedia Britannica in its 27page article on philosophy and its history, admits that there seems to be no possibility of philosophical unification. The article concludes with this remark:

In the contemporary philosophical universe, multiplicity and division still reign. (EB, Vol. 14:274 [1984])

Why this failure? This failure is not of a chance or intermittent nature, but seems to be a permanent feature of the philosophical approach to reality. The Qur'an has drawn our attention to this fact, saying:

They put questions to you about the Spirit. Say: "The Spirit is at the command of my Lord and of knowledge you have been given only a little." (17:85)

This means that the problem stems from man's own shortcomings. The philosophical explanation of the world requires unbounded knowledge, whereas man has had only limited knowledge bestowed upon him. Due to these intellectual constraints man cannot uncover the secrets of the world on his own. So it is not the lack of research, but the blinkered state of the human mind, that stands as a permanent obstacle in the philosopher's path to reality. It is this human inadequacy which explains the unexplainable.

For example, suppose, in order to unveil reality and the law of life, the enquirer starts from a study of human settlements. After a detailed survey, he comes to the conclusion that since society is composed of human beings, he had better focus on the individual, and so he studies human psychology. But there he finds that, despite extensive research in this field it has resulted in nothing but intellectual chaos.

He ultimately finds that no unified system emerges from psychology. In despair of finding any solution to the problem, he turns to biology.

His in-depth study of biology leads him to the conclusion that the whole human system is based on certain chemical actions and reactions, so, for a proper understanding of the human body he begins to study physics and chemistry. This study leads him to the discovery that, in the last analysis, man like other things, is composed of atoms. So, he takes to the study of nuclear science, only to arrive at the conclusion that the atom is composed of nothing but incomprehensible waves of electrons.

At this point man, as well as the universe, are seen as nothing but, in the words of a scientist, a mad dance of electrons. A philosopher ostensibly begins his study from a basis of knowledge, but ultimately comes to a point where there is nothing but the universal darkness of bewilderment. Thus a 5000-year journey of philosophy has brought the sorry conclusion that, due to its limitations, it is simply not in a position to unfold the secrets of the universe.

It is evident from the several thousand year-long history of philosophical inquiry, that philosophy has failed to give any satisfactory answer to questions concerning reality. Moreover, there is a growing body of evidence that philosophy is inherently incompetent for the task undertaken by it. The need, therefore, is to find some alternative discipline that may help us reach our desired intellectual goal.

Science

What is science? According to its definition "Science is a branch of knowledge concerned with the material world conducted on objective principles involving the systematised observation of, and experiment with physical phenomenon."

Science has divided the world of knowledge into two parts – knowledge of things and knowledge of truths. According to this division, science has confined its study only to a part of the world and not to the entire world. A scientist has rightly remarked that "science gives us but a partial knowledge of reality."

This means that science being confined in its scope to the physical aspect of the world, has kept itself aloof from higher spiritual matters. No scientist has ever claimed that science attempts to find out the absolute truth. All scientists humbly submit that the "search for truth"

is not their target. They are simply trying to understand how the objective world functions and not why it functions. For instance, the chemistry of a flower may be chemically analyzed, but not its odour.

Chemistry can describe how water may be turned into steam power, but not why a miraculous life-giving element such as water came to exist in our world. Similarly, while science is concerned with the biological aspect of man, it is not the aim of science to try to discover the secret of the strange phenomena commonly known as the mind and spirit.

Science has never claimed that its objective is to discover the total truth or absolute reality. The concerns of science are basically descriptive, and not teleological. Although science has failed to give a satisfactory answer to the quest for truth, it is not to be disparaged, for this has never been its motivation.

Many people had pinned their hopes on science providing them with the superior life they had sought for so long. But after more than two hundred years, it has dawned upon recent generations that science has fallen very far short of fulfilling man's hopes and aspirations, even in the material sense. Now it has been generally acknowledged that, although science has many plus points for human betterment, it has many minus points as well.

Science gave us machines, but along with them it also gave us a new kind of social problem: unemployment. Science gave us comfortable motor cars but at the same time it polluted the air, making it difficult for human beings to inhale fresh air, just as with the rise of modern industry, there came the pollution of life-giving water. Production may have been speeded up, but at the cost of adversely affecting our whole social structure.

If the object of science was to provide man with the answer to his search for truth it had obviously failed. If the search for truth was not within the province of science, there was no reason for it to figure in such discussions at all. In other words, science cannot be legitimately blamed for not helping man to grasp the ultimate reality, for this was not something expected of it. Indeed the reality lies far beyond the boundaries of science.

Mysticism

What is mysticism? According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, mysticism is a "quest for a hidden truth or wisdom." The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought, defines it thus: "Mysticism is the direct experience of the divine as real and near, blotting out all sense of time and producing intense joy."

Some people mistakenly think that mysticism is the answer to the search for truth. In fact, mysticism, to be more exact, is a sort of escapism. It seeks a refuge rather than the truth.

According to the mystics, the final state produced by mystical exercises is inner joy or spiritual bliss. The subject of the present volume is the search for truth. So far as this subject is concerned, mysticism is quite irrelevant to it.

1. The search for truth, by its very nature, is entirely an intellectual exercise. Its findings too are intellectual in nature. It is successful when the seeker finds rational answers to the questions he poses about the universe and his own existence. The search for truth is not a vague matter. It begins from the conscious mind and also culminates there.

The case of mysticism is quite different. Mysticism, essentially based on intuition, is not really a conscious intellectual process. As such, the mystical experience is more an act of spiritual intoxication than an effort to apprehend the truth in intellectual terms. A drug user undergoes an experience of inner pleasure which is too vaguely and unconsciously felt to be explained in comprehensible language. Similarly, what a mystic experiences is a type of unconscious ecstasy, which does not amount to a consciously sought after or properly assessable discovery. On the contrary, the search for truth is an intellectual exercise from beginning to end.

2. Mysticism, as popularly conceived, makes the basic assumption that the physical, material, and social needs of man act as obstacles to his spiritual progress. Therefore, mysticism teaches him to reduce his physical needs to the barest minimum; to renounce worldly and social relations; and if possible to retire to

the mountains or jungles. In this way, he will supposedly be able to purify his soul. Thus, by giving up the world and by certain exercises in self-abnegation, a mystic expects to awaken his spirituality.

The educated community, however, does not find this concept of mysticism acceptable. A seeker aims at a rational explanation of the world and endeavours to discover a definite principle by which he may successfully plan his present life. Mysticism, on the contrary, teaches man to abandon the world itself; to depart from the world without uncovering its mystery. Obviously such a scheme amounts only to an aggravation of the problem rather than a solution to it.

3. The mystics can broadly be divided into two groups. Those who believe in God and those who do not. Non-believers in God assert that there is a hidden treasure in the centres of our souls. The task of the mystic is to discover this hidden treasure. But this is only a supposition. None of them has ever been able to define this hidden treasure or to explain it in understandable terms. Tagore has thus expressed this claim made by the mystics:

“Man has a feeling that he is truly represented in something which exceeds himself.”

But this is only a subjective statement unsupported by logical proofs. That is why, in spite of its great popularity, no school of this mystical thought has so far produced any objective criterion by which one may rationally ascertain that the existence of such a hidden treasure within the human soul is a reality, and not an illusion. On the other hand, no well-defined law, or step-by-step practical programme, has been introduced by any individual or group that might help the common man reach his spiritual destination consciously and independently.

Moreover, mysticism makes the claim that the natural quest of man is its own fulfillment. It does not require any external effort to arrive at the perceived goal. In other words, it is like assuming that the feeling of thirst or hunger in man contains its own satisfaction. A thirsty or hungry person is not to trouble himself to search for water or food in the outer world.

4. Those (of this school of thought) who believe in God interpret this hidden treasure in terms of God. To them the inner contemplation of a mystic is directed towards God.

This concept too is rationally inexplicable, for, if such mystic exercises are a means to discover God, then, there should be genuine proof that God Himself has shown this way to find Him. But there is no evidence that this path has been prescribed by God. On the other hand, there is a clear indication that this course separates the seeker from God's creation and leads him to a life of isolation. This makes it plain that God cannot enjoin such a path to realization as would mean nullifying the very purpose of creation.

The mystics hold that although the mystical experience may be a great discovery for them, it is, however, a mysterious, and unexplainable realization which can be felt at the sensory level, but which cannot be fully articulated. According to a mystic: "It is knowledge of the most adequate kind, only it cannot be expressed in words." (EB/12:786)

This aspect of the mystical experience proves it to be a totally subjective discipline. And something as subjective as this can, in no degree, be a scientific answer to the human search for truth. Those who have attempted to describe the mystic experience have chosen different ways of doing so. One is the narrative method, that is, describing their point of view in terms only of claims, without any supporting arguments. Another method is to make use of metaphors. That is, attempt to describe something by means of supposed analogies. From the point of view of scientific reasoning, both the methods are inadequate, being quite lacking in any credibility in rational terms, and are therefore invalid.

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Perseverance

The following story, written by Mao Tse Tung, former Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, is one which should set us all thinking.

In olden times, there was once an old man from the northern part of China who lived on the side of a mountain range which always lay in shadow. The problem was that there were two high mountains in front of his door which prevented the sun from entering his house. One day, the old man called to his young sons and said to them, "Let us go and remove these mountains by digging, so that the sun's rays may fall upon our house unhindered." A neighbour of the old man's, hearing of this plan, made fun of it. He said to the old man, "I knew that you were foolish, but I never realized that there was just no limit to your foolishness. How on earth is it possible to remove these high mountains just by digging them?"

The old man replied in all seriousness, "Yes, you are right. But when I die, my sons will dig, and after their death, their sons will dig. The digging process will thus continue for generations. The mountains, as you know, will not go on increasing in size, whereas each digging is bound to reduce them in size and, in this way, there will come a time when we shall have finally succeeded in removing these obstacles." The power to solve problems is always more significant than the problems themselves, and while problems are invariably limited, their solution is unlimited, there always being a number of different approaches which naturally vary, in scale and complexity. This story is a beautiful illustration of how a major feat necessitates not only long-term planning, but the willingness and determination to carry that planning into effect.

For a people who have the fortitude, to carry on their schemes from one generation to the next, working consistently and steadfastly, there is no mountain or river on earth which they will not be able to conquer.

Faith and Reason

It is through reason that man justifies his faith. Rational justification strengthens his convictions. Rational argument is thus an intellectual need of every believer. Without this he would not be able to stand firmly by his faith. It is reason which transforms blind faith into a matter of intellectual choice.

History shows that man has employed four kinds of argument to find rational grounds for his faith. Each of these reflects different stages in his intellectual development.

Natural Argument

The first kind of argument is one based on nature. That is, on simple facts or common experiences. This has been the most commonly used since ancient times. Some examples of this kind are found in the Qur'an, one of which relates to the Prophet Abraham. It is stated as follows in the Qur'an:

Have you not considered him (Namrud) who disputed with Abraham about his Lord, because God had given him the kingdom? When Abraham said: 'My Lord is He who gives life and causes to die,' he said: 'I too give life and cause death.' Abraham said: 'So surely God causes the sun to rise from the east, then you make it rise from the west.' Thus he who disbelieved was confounded; and God does not give guidance to unjust people. (2:258)

We find another example of the argument based on natural reasoning in the Qur'an:

Thus did We show Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, so that he might become a firm believer. When night overshadowed him, he saw a star. He said: 'This is my Lord'. But when it set, he said: 'I love not those that set.' Then when he saw the moon rising, he said: 'This is my Lord.' But when it set, he said: 'Unless my Lord guide me, I

shall surely be among those who go astray'. Then when he saw the sun rising, he said: 'This is my Lord. This is the greatest.' But when it set, he said: 'O my people! Surely, I am done with what you associate with God.' (6:75-78)

Argument of this kind may appear to be simple, but they are invested with deeper meaning. For this reason, they have been engaged in as much in the past as today.

Philosophical Argument

The second kind of argument is that first propounded by Greek philosophers. Based on pure logic, it was so popular in the medieval ages that Jews and Christians and Muslims all incorporated it into their theological system. Commonly known as First Cause, it may be summed up as follows:

The world, man observes with his senses must have been brought into being by God as the First Cause. Philosophers have argued that the observable order of causation is not self-explanatory. It can only be accounted for by the existence of a First Cause. This First Cause, however, must not be considered simply as the first in a series of successive causes, but rather as the First Cause in the sense of being the cause for the whole series of observable causes.

The Prime Mover or First Cause theory. Although obviously very sound, it has constantly been under attack from secular circles, and critics have raised a variety of objections. To begin with, they say that it is only guesswork, and not an undeniable fact. Some critics also object that the actions or free will of subatomic particles are uncaused; so, why not also the world as a whole? Moreover, even if all things in the world are caused, this may not be true of the world itself, because no one knows whether the whole is sufficiently like its parts to warrant such a generalization.

This is why some people think that the faith of Islam is not based on rational grounds. They say that Islamic belief can be proved only through inferential argument and not through direct argument. They assert that in Islam there is only secondary rationalism and not primary rationalism. But modern science has demolished this notion,

as will be shown in the last part of this chapter.

Spiritual Argument

Yet another argument is that which is based on spiritual experience. Some people, who engage in spiritual exercises and have spiritual experiences, say that when they reach the deeper levels of the human consciousness, they find an unlimited world which cannot be described in limited language. They insist that this limitless, unexplainable phenomenon is nothing but God Almighty Himself.

The critics say that even if this spiritual state is as real as is claimed by those who enter it, it is still a subjective experience; that it conveys nothing to those who have not experienced the same spiritual state.

All the above arguments are in one way or another inferential in nature and not of the direct kind. In view of this fact, the critics hold that all faiths, including Islam, have no scientific basis. They contend that Islamic theology is not based on primary rationalism, but on secondary rationalism.

However, these contentions appeared to be valid only by the end of the nineteenth century. The twentieth century has closed the chapter on all such debates. Now, according to modern developments in science, one can safely say that religious tenets can be proved on the same logical plane as the concepts of science. Now there is no difference between the two in terms of scientific reasoning. Let us then see what modern scientific reasoning is all about.

Scientific Argument

Religion, or faith, relates to issues such as the existence of God, something intangible and unobservable, unlike non-religious things like the sun, which has a tangible and observable existence. Therefore, it came to be held that only non-religious matters might be established by direct argument, while it is only direct or inferential argument which can be used to prove religious propositions.

It was believed, therefore, that rational argument was possible only in non-religious matters, and so far as religious matters were

concerned, rational argument was not applicable at all. That is to say, that it was only in non-religious areas that primary rationalism was possible, while in religion only secondary rationalism was applicable.

In the past, arguments based on Aristotlean logic used to be applied to faith. By its very nature it was an indirect argument. Modern critics, therefore, ignored such arguments as unworthy of consideration. That is why religion was not thought worthy of being paid any attention by rational people. This state of affairs presented a challenge not only to other religions but to Islam as well.

About five hundred years ago, with the emergence of science, this state of affairs did not change. All the scientists in the wake of the Renaissance believed that matter, in fact, the entire material world was something solid which could be observed. Newton had even formed a theory that light consisted of tiny corpuscles. As such, it was possible to apply direct argument as an explanation of material things. Similarly, even after the emergence of modern science, this state of affairs prevailed. It continued to be believed that the kind of argument which is applied to apparently tangible things could not be applied in the case of religion.

But by the early twentieth century, specifically after the first World War, this mental climate changed completely. The ancient Greek philosophers believed that matter, in the last analysis, was composed of atoms. And the atom, though very tiny, was a piece of solid matter. But with the breaking of the atom in the twentieth century, all the popular scientific concepts underwent a sea change. The theories about faith and reason seemed relevant only while science was confined to the macrocosmic level. Later, when science advanced to the microcosmic level, it underwent a revolution, and along with it, the method of argument also changed.

So far, science had been based on the proposition that all the things it believed in, like the atom, could be directly explained. But when the atom, the smallest part of an element, was smashed, it was revealed that it was not a material entity, but just another name for unobservable waves of electrons.

This discovery demonstrated how a scientist could see only the effect of a thing and not the thing itself. For instance, the atom, after being split, produces energy which can be converted into electricity. This runs along a wire in the form of a current, yet this event is not observable even by a scientist. But when such an event produces an effect, for instance, it lights up a bulb or sets a motor in motion this effect comes under a scientist's observation. Similarly, the waves from an x-ray machine, are not observable by a scientist, but when they produce the image of a human body on a plate, then it becomes observable.

Now the question arose as to what stand a scientist must take? Should he believe only in a tangible effect or the intangible thing as well, which produced that effect. Since the scientist was bound to believe in the tangible effect, he had no choice but to believe in its intangible cause.

Here the scientist felt that direct argument could be applied to the tangible effect, but that it was not at all possible to apply direct argument to the intangible cause. The most important of all the changes brought about by this new development in the world of science was that it was admitted in scientific circles that inferential argument was as valid as direct argument. That is, if a cause consistently gives rise to an effect, the existence of the intangible cause will be accepted as a proven fact, just as the existence of the tangible effect is accepted because it is observable. In modern times all the concepts of science held to be established have been proven by this very logic.

After reaching this stage of rational argument the difference between religious argument and scientific argument ceases to exist. The problem faced earlier was that religious realities, such as the existence of God, could be proved only by inference or indirect argument. For instance, the existence of God, as a designer (cause) was presumed to exist because His design (effect) could be seen to exist. But now the same method of indirect argument has been generally held to be valid in the world of science.

There are numerous meaningful things in the universe which are brought to the knowledge of human beings, for which no

explanation is possible. It has simply to be accepted that there is a meaningful Cause, that is God. The truth is that, without belief in God, the universe remains as unexplainable as the entire mechanism of light and motion is without belief in electric waves.

Thus, the option one has to take is not between the universe without God and the universe with God. Rather, the option actually is between the universe with God, or no universe at all. Since we cannot, for obvious reasons, opt for the latter proposition, we are, in fact, left with no other option except the former, that is, the universe with God.

In view of the recent advancement in scientific reasoning, a true faith has proved to be as rational as any other scientific theory. Reason and faith are now standing on the same ground. In fact, no one can legitimately reject faith as something irrational, unless one is ready to reject the rationality of scientific theories as well. For, all the modern scientific theories are accepted as proven on the basis of the same rational criterion by which a matter of faith would be equally proved true. After the river of knowledge has reached this advanced stage, there has remained no logical difference between the two.

19-21 March-April 2001

The Book of Guidance

Read in the name of your Lord who created – created man from clots of congealed blood.

Read! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One, Who by the pen, taught man what he did not know.

Indeed, man transgresses in thinking himself self-sufficient. For to your Lord all things return (96:1-8).

These verses of the Qur'an were the first to be revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. They tell us what God's purpose was in choosing this particular way of sending His revelations through His messengers, namely, to inform man of what would otherwise have been impossible for him to learn on his own.

For example, man leads his life in the present world for a fixed period of time, then passes away. During his life-span he appears to be free. This gives rise to two kinds of misunderstandings. One is that man's life is nothing but what it appears to be from birth to death, and the other is that man is not going to be taken to task for his actions. It was to put an end to this ignorance that God arranged for a series of prophets to bring His revelations to mankind.

In every age and in every nation messengers of God have continued to come, the Prophet Muhammad being the last of the prophets in this chain. Now he is the only source of divine guidance, since no other prophet is going to come till Doomsday.

The message passed on by these prophets was that in this present world man is not free to follow his desires. In all moral issues he is bound to obey the divine commandments given to man by God through His messengers.

However, the presence of the Prophet in person is not necessary for man's guidance. What is necessary is access to the book of God which was brought by him to mankind. With God's Book, the Qur'an available in its preserved state in every corner of the globe and also the *sunnah* (traditions) of the Prophet enshrined in authentic

collections, man has now no excuse for wrongdoing. For it must be remembered that God has not left man alone after sending His guidance. He is actually keeping a continuous watch over him and after death, he will be brought to the divine court where, according to worldly record, his guilt or innocence will be pronounced by God, and reward or punishment meted out accordingly. Man should, therefore, in building his life, seek continual guidance from the Qur'an and *sunnah*, so that he may become truly deserving of God's eternal blessings.

21-22 March-April 2001

The Noblest of God's Creation

By the Fig, and by the Olive!

By Mount Sinai, and this inviolate city.

We created man with the most noble image and in the end
We shall reduce him to the lowest of the low: except the
believers who do good works, for theirs shall be a boundless
recompense.

What, then, after this can make you deny the Last Judge-
ment?

Is Allah not the best of judges? (95:1-8)

The Sinai Mount is one where God spoke to Moses. The "inviolate city" referred to is Makkah where the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, was sent with the final version of divine guidance. Tin and Zaytoon, two hillocks near Bayt al-Maqdis is the place where Christ came and proclaimed divine guidance before the people.

These places are the historical reminders of the fact that God is watching over man. He sends through authentic missionaries the guidance of His choice. In this way God is telling everyone in advance what kind of life should be lead in this world, so that man may save himself from coming to a bad end, and may secure his share in the eternal blessings of God.

God has created man with the best of faculties. These faculties have been given to man, so that he may recognise the truth sent to him by God through His messengers, and then lead his life accordingly. Those who do so will be entitled to an eternal place of honour and prestige.

On the contrary, those who do not conform to the will of God will be bereft of the blessings of this world too, while so far as the next world is concerned, they will suffer nothing short of total deprivation. The advent of the prophets and the consequences which became manifest as a result of refusal or acceptance of their guidance

prove the veracity of this statement.

In human life, only the loftiest of goals should be aimed at. That is, man, to make proper use of his God-given faculties, should aim at the realisation of God and lead a life approved of by God. People who conduct themselves in this way deserve a great reward in the Hereafter. Those who do not come up to this standard will be nothing short of total failures in the life beyond the grave.

22-23 March-April 2001

O Man!

When the sky is rent asunder, obeying its Lord in true submission; when the earth is expanded and casts out all that is within it and becomes empty, obeying its Lord in true submission; then, O man, strive hard towards your Lord until you meet Him.

He that is given his book in his right hand shall have a lenient reckoning and go back rejoicing to his people. But he that is given his book from behind his back shall call down destruction on himself and burn in the fire of Hell; for he lived without a care among his people and thought he would never return to Allah. Yes; but his Lord was ever watching over him.

I swear by the glow of sunset; by the night and all that it brings together; by the moon, in its full perfection: that you shall march onwards from state to state.

Why then do they not have faith, or kneel in prayer when the Qur'an is read to them?

The unbelievers indeed deny it; but Allah knows best the falsehoods they believe in.

Therefore proclaim to all a woeful doom, save those who embrace the true faith and do good works; for theirs is an unfailling recompense (84:1-25).

What has been said here regarding Doomsday appears to concern an unknown world. However, so many proofs exist which indicate the veracity of these statements. One example is provided by this present world.

The presence of this world is in itself a proof that another world like this, or better than this, can come into existence. Secondly, many extraordinary aspects of the Qur'an prove that it is a book of God. With such clear evidence, those who do not believe in the Hereafter and lead a life of neglect of the Hereafter are indeed committing

an unpardonable offence.

23 March-April 2001

Those who do not control their tongues are evil

The Prophet asked his companions if he should tell them who was worst amongst them. The companions asked him to do so. "Those who seek to slander others and create discord among friends; those who lay false accusations upon innocent people", the Prophet said.

(Ahmad)

24-30 March-April 2001

Religion

Let us now come to religion. Scholars have generally believed that in the search for truth, the most reliable source is religion. That is why in every age the majority of human beings have been associated with one religion or the other. And today, this is still the case.

Why is it that people take religion to be a reliable source of truth? The reason is that the teachings of religion are based on a special source such as no other discipline enjoys. This special source is that of divine revelation. God created the universe. He knows best its creation plan. He has full knowledge of which path in this world leads to success and which path leads to failure. Therefore, God-given guidance is entirely trustworthy.

After the creation of the universe, when man first inhabited the earth, God decreed that in every age and in every nation, there would be certain individuals who would be raised as prophets to guide mankind to the path of God. God, Who has absolute knowledge, sent His guidance to man. He did this by means of revelations which he bade the angels convey to the prophets in the form of divine books. These are the sacred books on which the religions of the world are based.

These religious books have guided man in all ages. In every era a large number of people have found in them light for their minds and solace for their hearts. The goal of religions has always been to give man a proper knowledge of His Creator, so that he may properly understand the universe and the purpose of human life in it.

Religion informs man of his beginning and his ultimate end. It enables man to lead his life in this world according to the creation plan of God, so that he may be entitled to the divine rewards.

About two dozen Prophets have been mentioned in the Qur'an by name. In a *hadith*, the number of these Prophets and messengers has been put at 1,24,000. However, with the exception of the Prophet Muhammad, no authentic historical record is available of

any other prophet. But, in principle, we have to believe that God's prophets came to every nation and in every age, whether or not we have any record of them.

A religious system generally includes beliefs, worship, ethics, social behaviour, etc. One of the important contributions of a religious system is that, it provides man with a life-long centre around which his intellectual and emotional being may revolve.

Religion offers man an ideology in which he may believe with all his heart and all his soul. It gives man the conviction that he is in communion with Almighty God. On finding a religion, man feels that he has become a co-traveller with the rest of the universe. He has become a member of the universal brotherhood.

Religion gives man a practicable system of life. He finds a course which he may properly pursue day and night. Having found a religion, man feels as if he now understands the purpose of his life; he undergoes the same experience – but with greater intensity – as a traveller does on reaching his destination.

Religion, the science of life, is an eternal source of inspiration and guidance to man. As such it acts as a spur to spiritual and intellectual growth. Its absence from human life, would eliminate all possibility of man's following a course that would lead him towards a total and meaningful development of his personality.

Religions Other than Islam

The Qur'an and the Bible both tell us that, ever since the advent of man on earth, God has sent His Prophets to convey His message to mankind. According to a *hadith*, from Adam to Jesus Christ, more than one hundred thousand prophets have come to the world. Every prophet brought God's religion and communicated it to his people. This divine scheme has continued in every age and in all places.

All these religions brought by God's messengers were one and the same. Originally there was no basic difference between one religion and the other. But it happened that none of the concerned peoples were able to preserve the teachings of their prophets. Either these

religions survived in a distorted form, or they vanished without leaving any trace. Moreover, contemporary historians failed to attach any importance to these prophets or their teachings. For this reason few of these prophets found their place in the annals of history. The only exception is that of the final prophet, Muhammad, peace be upon him.

This blackout of history was so complete that even the prophets of later periods of history received scant mention in contemporary records. For instance, Jesus Christ came to the world two thousand years ago, and so little is known about his life that a western scholar was once constrained to remark: "Historically, it is quite doubtful whether Christ ever existed at all."

Due to the paucity of reliable documentation, all the previous religious scriptures, except that of Islam, have lost their historical credibility. By rational standards all other religions have assumed the status of a set of dogmas rather than that of a chronicled event. One can believe in them only as a matter of faith and not as a fact of history. However, the position of Islam in this regard is totally different. Muhammad, may peace be upon him, the Messenger of Islam, as acknowledged by all well-known historians of the world, was born in the full light of history, and whatever he said or did in his life-time has been recorded in considerable detail.

The Qur'an, the last word of God, has been preserved just as it was first revealed to the Messenger of Islam. The textual originality and purity of the Qur'an is incomparable and unquestionable. Islam, as a whole, passes the strictest criteria of higher criticism and historical verification. So, when one opts for Islam, one does so as a matter of history, not simply as a matter of faith.

One can safely say, therefore, that for a seeker after the truth, there is no whole range of options. He has only one choice to make. And that is the choice of Islam: the only religion having true historical credibility.

For instance, according to our belief, Abraham and Moses were Prophets of God. Abraham was born in Iraq and Moses in Egypt. Yet the annals of the respective countries are devoid of any mention of these great prophets. We find no reference in the ancient history of

Iraq to Abraham. Similarly, Egyptian history makes no mention of Moses.

In a similar way, as testified to by the Qur'an, Jesus was a prophet. Even Gautam Buddh is considered a prophet by his followers. But neither Jesus Christ nor Gautam Buddh come up to the strict standards of history. For example, there are long periods of Jesus's life about which nothing is known, and the stories of the New Testament were not written until more than a century after his death. Three languages – Syriac, Greek and Hebrew – were prevalent during the time of Christ, yet we have no way of knowing, with certainty, about the language in which he communicated his message to his people.

In the times of Gautam Buddh, Pali and Sanskrit were in vogue. But there is no historical evidence as to which language he spoke. The actual words spoken by Gautam Buddh are not on record. There are some who claim to have proofs that Gautam Buddh spoke in Pali, but it has not been established by the scholars of Buddhism.

The reason is that, in ancient times, before the age of the press, the concept of historiography was very limited. At that period it was only a record of kings and generals; only events relating to victory and defeat were considered worth recording. All other incidents remained unrepresented and since the prophets or the reformers were not associated with events of a political nature, the historians did not consider their lives worthy of being immortalized.

The case of the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, was exceptional in that it was quite different from that of the other prophets. Circumstances were such that he became involved in all kinds of political events, and he and his companions were able to usher in a revolution bringing about sweeping changes in the political and the social order of the time. Naturally the events of his life came to be recorded in the contemporary history and thus he became an essential part of history. In this way, by historical standards, the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, became a historical personality, in the full sense of the word.

Because of non-existent documentation, all the other religions and their founders have come to be considered lacking in credence. One who examines these religions objectively feels that he is

studying beliefs rather than history, for the personalities associated with these religions, their religious scriptures and their teachings have been demonstrated to be scientifically and historically unreliable.

An Encyclopedia of the Hindu religion, published under the title *Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, drew the comment from a scholar that it would be more aptly titled *Encyclopedia of Hindu Mythology*. This is the case with all religions. All the faiths save Islam may be classified as mythologies rather than religions in the scientific and historical sense.

The subject matter of ancient alchemy and modern chemistry is one and the same. Yet we all know that there is a basic difference between the two. Alchemy was based on unproved speculations, while modern chemistry is based on facts proved by strictly scientific methods. This same difference is found between Islam and other religions, the latter being like ancient alchemy, whereas the former is like modern chemistry.

This difference is so evident that no one can fail to notice it. One who sincerely makes a comparative study of religions of both kinds will inevitably discover it. Hence Islam is the only choice for those who seek a religion with a credible historical base.

30-31 March-April 2001

Period of Respite

By the heaven, and by the nightly visitant!

Would that you knew what the nightly visitant is! It is the star of piercing brightness.

For every soul there is a guardian watching over it. Let man reflect from what he is created. He is created from an ejaculated fluid that issues from between the loins and the ribs.

Surely He has power to bring him back to life, on the day when men's consciences are searched. Helpless shall he be, with no supporter.

By the heaven with its recurring cycles, and by the earth, ever bursting with new growth; this is a conclusive utterance, no flippant jest.

They scheme and scheme, and I, too, scheme and scheme. Therefore bear with the unbelievers, and let them be alone for a while (86:1-17).

The shining of the stars above serves, in symbolic language, as a reminder of the fact that an Observer is watching mankind. This Observer is recording human actions. He will create man again after death and then will judge all his actions. This period of respite on earth is only a test. The fixed time that man is allotted between his birth and his death, serves as a line of demarcation between this world and the Hereafter. As soon as the trial period is completed, the consequences of our actions will appear, right before our eyes, although man had thought this event to be in the far distant future.

Though the Creator of the Universe is in the unseen, His being is clearly manifest in everything. If man were to ponder seriously upon the universe, he would certainly find God. He would discover the reality that in the present universe the only behaviour proper to man is that of obedience to God. Those who indulge in insolent behaviour towards God have no place in His world. Creation is an

introduction of the Creator. For its observer, it is a manifestation of the Creator.

The System Established by God

Are you harder to create than the heaven which He has built? He raised it high and fashioned it, giving darkness to its night and brightness to its day.

And the earth He extended after that; and then drew from it water and brought forth its pastures. And the mountains He set down – a provision for you and your cattle.

But when the supreme disaster strikes – the day when man will call to mind his labours and when Hell is brought in sight (of all) – those who transgressed and chose this present life will find themselves in Hell; but those who feared to stand before their Lord and curbed their soul's desires shall dwell in Paradise.

They question you about the Hour of Doom: 'When shall it be?' But how are you to know? Your Lord alone knows when it will come. You are but a warner for those who fear it.

On the day when they behold that hour, it will be as if they had tarried in the grave only a single evening or the morning following it (79:27-46).

What exists before us in the form of the universe is so great that all other things become totally insignificant in comparison. When a great happening such as the creation of the universe can take place, why cannot matters of smaller import likewise come into existence? In this context, the tidings given by the Qur'an that man has to be reborn is something which has already been made understandable by known events on a very large scale.

Man's life stretches over two phases – one is the present, the other, the Hereafter which for the present is unseen. The actual test of man is for him to prefer the Hereafter as compared to the present world. But this can be achieved only by those who have the courage to control their selfish impulses and desires.

Man has been placed in the present world in order to be put to the test. This test necessarily requires freedom. That is why man has not been placed under any compulsion as has been done with the rest of the universe. He has the option either to conform to the system of God, or to indulge in deviations from it. But this freedom applies only to actions during his lifespan in this world; it does not apply to the result of his actions. Man's final lot will be determined in accordance with the unchangeable laws of God.

32 March-April 2001

The Qur'an is for admonition, not just for recital

Aishah, hearing of certain individuals who read the Qur'an all night, reading it right through once, or even twice in a night, remarked, "what is there in mere recitation?" I used to stay up all night with the Prophet and, in his recitations of the chapters entitled 'Cow', 'Family of Imran', and 'Women', whenever he came to a verse which contained a warning, he would pray to God and seek refuge with Him, and whenever he came to a verse bearing good tidings, he would pray to God and express his longing for what was mentioned in the verse. (Ahmad, Musnad)