



LIVING IN
GOD'S
GLORY

LEADING LIFE IN
THE PRESENCE OF GOD

MAULANA
WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

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GOD'S
GLORY

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WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

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FOREWORD

God has created an incredibly vast universe. The vastness of the universe is proof of the infinite vastness of God. Man's existence is proof of the existence of God. God has also given man the power and technology to behold the vastness of His creation. He wants man to be able to look at himself and the world around him and see a reflection of the face of his Lord. He wants man to find answers to questions relating to the creation and get to know his Creator.

If a man opens his mind to the signs of God around him, the universe will become a manifestation of God's splendour. He will discover his Lord by observing them. While dwelling in an earthly abode, he would see and feel nothing but the Lord on high. He will acknowledge that everything is from God. Seeing that he has no power in this world, he will look to God for help and protection. The beauty of this world will remind him of God's beauty; the greatness of natural phenomena impresses on him the greatness of the One who created them. So absorbed will he be in the glory of God that he will love nothing more than to spend his time singing the praises of the Lord.

FOREWORD

To believe in God is to see the invisible force behind visible objects. It requires a unique vision, enabling individuals to penetrate superficial forms and perceive the ultimate reality. A person endowed with such vision sees God's greatness everywhere; he looks only to God as great. He submits entirely to God and trusts in Him alone. So engrossed in God's overpowering greatness does he become that all worldly creatures, including himself, fade into insignificance in his sight. The essence of religion is to believe in the meaningfulness of the universe, which is yet unseen, for, in this world, all higher realities lie hidden.

God has given every human being opportunities; some use them to earn the world, others to gain everlasting life. Seeing opportunities as God's gifts and using them in the service of God will earn a man the everlasting gardens, Paradise in the Hereafter. Each step that man takes in this world leads him relentlessly toward one of the two extremes: Paradise or Hell. Everyone will want to be counted among God's humble servants on the Last Day. This privilege will only be for those who, before the coming of that day, show themselves to be deserving of divine approval. It is those pure souls that will be found deserving of Paradise.

Paradise is for those sublime souls who live in the consciousness of God's eternal greatness. Paradise is for those who have a living faith. Living faith in God means seeing God as having limitless powers. One who finds such a God does not remain the same person as one before having that experience. When faith reaches its culmination,

FOREWORD

it is converted into *dawah* which means to give words to the wordless melody of the universe. *Dawah* means to act as a representative of God on God's earth. A *dayee* or one who calls people to God is a person who converts God's silent communication into an audible one. He hears the message from the Creator and delivers it to the people.

Wahiduddin Khan

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New Delhi, India

Chapter 1

The Existence of God

ONE WHO FINDS GOD

One who finds God bathes in an indescribable kind of divine light.

To find God is to find the greatest reality. When one finds God, it is such a mighty discovery—of the intensity of an earthquake—that it shakes one's whole being.

One who discovers God in such a manner bathes in an indescribable kind of divine light. He becomes a new man. His thinking starts moving in a new direction. His actions see a complete change. All his activities become of those who can see God in this world itself before His final appearance on Doomsday. He finds himself being weighed in the balance of Doomsday before that day's arrival.

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

To deny the existence of God is to deny one's own existence. How strange, then, that many claim to disbelieve in God, which is like denying their own existence!

The most extraordinary proof of the existence of God is the existence of man himself. It is as farfetched to believe in a being like man as it is to believe in a being of the nature of God. If we believe in man, nothing stops us from believing in God.

The Quran tells us that God breathed His spirit into man (15:29). It means that the attributes of God are manifest, in mortal form, in man. Existence, life, knowledge, power, determination, and free will are all attributes found in complete form in God. Essentially, these are all divine qualities. God has not given man a share in His attributes, but He has created man in His image; He has made man's being a reflection of divine attributes. Man cannot, in any way, be said to be a part of God, but he is certainly a tangible proof of God's existence. In God, these qualities are invisible and infinite; they are visible and finite in man. To find God, then, man has only to examine his being.

Man has a separate existence of his own; he can see, hear, and speak; he thinks and makes plans; he acts on his initiative; he converts primary matter into the various forms of advanced civilization; he operates spaceships by remote control; he is a conscious being, fully aware of his existence. All these attributes, which man possesses in limited form, are present in unlimited and perfect form in God.

The difference between man and God is that man is a part of creation, whereas God is the Creator. Man owes his existence to God, but God owes His existence to no other. Man is finite; God is infinite. Man's power is an illusion, whereas God's power is a reality. Man is mortal; God is immortal. Everything man possesses has been given to him, but that which is God's is His very own; no one has bestowed it on Him.

To accept man's existence is to accept the existence of one totally unlike God, and yet just like Him; it is to accept a mini-God. What is there then to stop us from believing in a great God? To believe in God is to confirm one's existence. If one believes in oneself, there is no reason not to believe in God. For a man to accept his existence is akin to accepting the existence of God, even if he claims to be a disbeliever. To deny the existence of God is to deny one's own existence. Who can deny one's own existence?

MAN IN GOD'S WORLD

Man's vision itself is proof of the all-reaching vision of God. God wants man to be able to look at the world around him and see a reflection of the face of his Lord.

Astronomers of California spent a decade designing a revolutionary, 10-meter telescope with four times the "seeing power" of any functional telescope on earth. Finally, they needed the amount of 70 million dollars, to make the project a reality. Named after the W.M. Keck Foundation of Los Angeles, it was called the Keck Observatory, for the Keck Foundation supplied the money. When completed in 1993 and set up on Hawaii's Mauna Kea, it was the largest astronomical telescope.

The telescope, designed by astronomers at the California Institute of Technology and the University of California,

Berkeley, was so powerful that, Howard B. Keck, Chairman of the Foundation predicted at that time, "It will permit one to see the light of a single candle from the distance of the moon." The Keck Telescope enabled astronomers to see objects 12 billion light-years away. In addition, it helped them investigate the nature of quasars and explore how galaxies and stars are formed. Marvin L. Goldberger, President of Caltech, said at the time: "It should provide answers to the universe's most challenging and basic questions." (*Newsweek*, January 14, 1985)

God has created an incredibly vast universe. He has also given man the power and technology to behold the vastness of His creation. It is so that man may see the universe in all its greatness and wonder at the greatness of the One who created it; so that he may be able actually to see the things happening millions of miles away and thousands of years ago and be so dazed by the expanse of his vision that he will be moved to cry out:

"Lord, You have given light to the world. How infinitely more radiant You must be! Lord, You have given man sight. How infinitely more penetrating Your vision must be!"

Man's vision itself is proof of the all-reaching vision of God. His existence is proof of the existence of God. The vastness of the universe is proof of the infinite vastness of God. God has created the world and man in His image. He wants man to be able to look at himself and the world around him and see a reflection of the face of his Lord. He wants man to

find answers to questions relating to the creation and get to know his Creator.

THE WONDER OF WONDERS

If only man were to discover God truly, he would become absorbed in the Lord's wondrous feats of creation.

Looking at the human body from a purely physical point of view, it is made up of water, carbon, oxygen, and other chemical elements. As scientist Robert Pattison has done, one can even determine the price of material constituents of the human body. According to his calculations, their market value is about six and a half US dollars, about five hundred rupees in Indian currency.

However, out of these five hundred rupees worth of matter, God has created an incredible human being that no price can be set upon him. Not even five hundred billion rupees can buy the priceless masterpiece God has fashioned within the human frame.

One can appreciate the pricelessness of the human body when some part of it is lost. For instance, millions of dollars will not buy a new one like it if one loses a hand. If one loses one's sight, all the wealth in the world will not win it back. If one's power of speech fails one, there will be no tongue in the shops of the world that will put one's thoughts into words.

How amazing that God should fashion something so wonderful out of things of such poor monetary value! Only He can bring the dead to life; He has the power to convert insensate matter into conscious life, to make something out of nothing.

If a magician were to cast a spell on a stone, making it break into speech, everyone would be spellbound at his feat. The feat which God has performed is one of much greater complexity. He has made the inanimate matter that constitutes man's body into a moving, talking, thinking human being. However, God's feat does not cause people to wonder. How blind are those who can see the skill of a conjurer's magical feats but not the infinitely more incredible feats of God's creation? How ignorant are those who rush to become devoted disciples of anyone able to perform false tricks without feeling any adoration for or attachment to the One who performs genuinely great acts of creative genius!

If only man were to discover God truly, he would become absorbed in the Lord's wondrous feats of creation. Everything in the world would appear to him as a great sign of God's power and perfection. While dwelling in an earthly abode, he would see and feel nothing but the Lord on high.

BELIEF IN GOD

To believe in God is to believe in something we already believe. Likewise, to see God is to see something already there for us to see.

As I stood in front of the India Gate in New Delhi, I thought what a magnificent specimen of architecture and sculpture it was! It is a structure that bears witness to man's unique faculties. For a man to conceive of a thing like 'India Gate', he must think creatively before he can bring it into existence. He must make plans and then give them a concrete shape.

On observing this, the thought came to my mind that even if all the stars, planets, trees, and animals were told to make an India Gate, they would fail to do so, even if all of them put their heads together.

This is also the case with all other accomplishments of man. All of man's performances are unique and are his exclusive prerogatives. No other being in the known universe can do the things that man can do by exercising his physical and mental faculties, be it the construction of the India Gate or operating a complex machine.

God desired that man realize Him on the conscious plane and recognize Him through his intellect. That is why God created man with such distinctive faculties. Just as man is superior to all the creation of the universe, so is God superior to man.

THE GREATEST MATHEMATICIAN

If man were to reflect on the difference between him and the rest of the universe, he would comprehend the difference between him and God. God is the final and ultimate form of this superiority, which man experiences over the rest of the universe to a very small degree. To understand God is as simple a matter as understanding oneself.

The truth is that to believe in God is to believe in something we already believe. To see God is to see something already there for us to see. Another name for intensifying what man is experiencing every moment is 'belief in God'. (That is, belief in God involves only an intensification of what man is experiencing every moment.) The human being is not the "full stop" in this universe. When a high state of existence is present in the form of man, then why should the existence of another higher state in God not be a possibility?

THE GREATEST MATHEMATICIAN

Every genius is confronted with the incredible feeling that a Being greater than himself is at work in the universe. It is a measure of his greatness that he can bow to another infinitely greater Being.

God is another artist," said Picasso, "He invented the giraffe, the elephant, and the cat." Einstein once observed that God was subtle, not malicious, and very clever. On a visit

to Bombay, Sir Michael Francis Atiyah, the distinguished mathematician, said that God was a mathematician—not exactly a new idea since Sir James Jeans had seriously put forward the idea—nearly a century ago that the universe was the work of a mathematician. In contrast, centuries before that, Pythagoras had concluded that all things were numbers. The greatest of human mathematicians have come across such complexities in their subjects that they have finally understood the meagreness of their grasp of the subject. Every genius is confronted with the incredible feeling that a Being greater than himself is at work in the universe.

Those who do not recognize the signs of God throughout the universe are spiritually blind, and those who see them but still do not believe in God will suffer from the warping of the soul, which will leave them morally stunted for all of their lives. God conveys His message innumerable, but only those genuinely receptive to it will receive His eternal blessings.

THAT STRANGE PLANET: THE EARTH

The wind, water, trees, and birds all strike us as reflections
of the Lord's beauty.

When we see a piece of machinery that is quite remarkable in its complexity and perfect in its functioning, we

immediately give credit for its creation and its excellence to the initiative and skills of the manufacturer. However, ironically, we hasten to give credit where it is due in the case of material fabrication, but when we look around us at the wonders of the world, we barely think about how they came into being and how they continue to perpetuate themselves.

We need to imagine ourselves in the position of Colonel James Irwin, one of the three astronauts who travelled in the American Apollo 15 spacecraft, which landed on the moon in August 1972. When he later described the magical moment of stepping onto the moon, he said it was like the ecstasy one felt in the presence of God. He said he felt incredibly close to the Almighty as if His greatness had manifested before his eyes. Colonel Irwin did not consider this voyage one of mere scientific discovery; he looked upon it as an experience that had given him a new spiritual life.

Like Colonel Irwin stepping onto the moon, we need to look upon our earth as the strange and wonderful orb God created for humanity's benefit. It is not that the countenance of our Maker does not shine continually in the perfection of His creation; it is simply that from a very early age, we have become so accustomed to the world around us that we tend to take it for granted. We never seriously peruse over the rising and the setting of the sun, never fear the lack of oxygen to breathe, never imagine that the waters of the ocean might recede beyond our view or that the trees and plants might cease one day to grow and perpetuate themselves. Because

of the very regularity and perfection of natural phenomena, we pay less and less heed to them as we grow up. We are too familiar with them to realize how extraordinary they are. It is only in unfamiliar circumstances, or if we have had a brush with death, that we suddenly wake up to the world's wonders. The wind, water, trees, and birds all strike us as reflections of the Lord's beauty.

If we were to look at the world with the same wonder and awe as Colonel Irwin experienced as he gazed on the moon, we should begin to live on earth as if we were in God's presence. We would continually see Him and feel Him all around us, and we should then begin to lead our lives in the full consciousness of being watched over by our Creator and Sustainer.

SCIENTIFIC PROOF OF GOD'S EXISTENCE

Man's presence is proof that such a Creator exists as can see and hear, think, and bring things into existence.

When a human being exists, why cannot God exist? When air and water, trees and stones, moon and stars exist, why should the existence of their Creator be doubted? The truth is that the existence of the creation is proof of the act of creation. Moreover, man's presence is proof that such a

Creator exists as can see and hear, think, and bring things into existence.

God, of course, is not visible to the naked eye. However, there is no doubt that many things in this world cannot be seen either. Then why is it necessary to see God physically to believe in Him?

The stars twinkle in the sky. The layman thinks he is looking at the stars, but strictly speaking, this is not true from the scientific point of view. When we look at the stars, we are not looking directly at them but at the light that emanated from them millions of years ago, which has only now become visible to our eyes.

The same is true of many things in this world. All those things that man 'sees' in this world are viewed by him indirectly. There is little that man can see directly because of his present limitations.

When all the things of this world are accepted based on indirect evidence, why is it that the presence of God should not be accepted on the same basis?

The fact is that God is as much a proven fact as any other phenomenon in this world. Everything in this world is proven based on indirect evidence. Everything in this world is known by its effect. Precisely of the exact nature is the existence of God.

It is true, of course, that God is not to be seen directly with our eyes. However, God is undoubtedly visible through His signs. Moreover, undoubtedly, this is enough scientific proof of God's existence.

MECHANICAL INTERPRETATION NOT ENOUGH

Man has no alternative but to accept God, whether in religious terms as a Creator and Sustainer or in scientific terms as the operator of the great machine of the universe.

When India and Pakistan went to war in 1965, Pakistan enjoyed a superior armament position. The British-made Patton tanks owned by Pakistan were far more sophisticated than the Indian made Vijayant tanks. Likewise, the French-made Sabre jets could strike more precisely than India's homemade gnat planes.

However, India emerged victorious in this war, and Pakistan was defeated. One of the main reasons for India's victory, according to war analysts, was that the arms used by India were manufactured in their own country, so they knew exactly how to operate them. Whereas Pakistan acquired arms from other countries, their soldiers could not handle them with great expertise.

What is true of military machines applies equally to all other machines: their efficiency depends on the efficiency of those who handle them:

Even the most sophisticated warfare technology is handled ultimately by men engaged in soldiering. Therefore, its use in combat depends significantly on their skill, training, morale, and ingenuity. The doctrine of the supremacy of the man behind the gun

COSMIC UNITY

thus remains valid even in this age of push-button wars, though it will indeed become inoperative if the unthinkable turns into a reality and a nuclear conflict is unleashed through madness or miscalculation. (*The Times of India*, February 2, 1984)

Many believe that the universe is simply a soulless, self-automated machine in modern times. However, the hard facts of modern warfare above contradict such mechanical interpretation. All the machines man has known have always needed an operator. On what grounds, then, can the argument that the universe is on the move without an operator be valid? This argument must be dismissed as conjecture, for it has no practical or theoretical basis to support it.

Let us suppose that the universe is a great machine: it needs a great mind to operate. Therefore, man has no alternative but to accept God, whether in religious terms as a Creator and Sustainer or in scientific terms as the operator of the great machine of the universe.

COSMIC UNITY

The universe manifestly tells us that we should lead our lives in such a way that our thoughts, emotions, and activities should all revolve around a focal point, which can be nothing other than God.

One significant discovery of cosmic research is that the whole universe revolves around one central point. The

atom, for instance, has its nucleus, which provides the focal point around which the entire atomic structure revolves. As the solar system has its centre in the sun, all the stars and planets revolve around that centre. The same is true of the constellation in which our solar system lies; millions of stars revolve around one centre, as does the entire universe of which our constellation is just a tiny part.

Scientists hold that there will come a time when the cosmic centre will start drawing to itself all the things that revolve around it. Then, in all its vastness, the universe will return to its centre until all the objects from every far-flung corner of space will be contained in the tiny confines of the central mass. In the same way, as scattered nails attach themselves to a magnet, the entire universe will be attached to its centre. It will be just as the Quran says: "As We originated the first creation, so shall We repeat it." (21:104)

In this way, the crux of a monotheistic religion is displayed in practical form by the cosmos. The universe is manifestly telling us that we should lead our lives in such a way that everything in it revolves around a central focal point, which can only be God. Our thoughts, emotions, and struggles in life should all revolve around Him.

If an individual directs his life towards some focal point other than God, whether himself or something in the outside world, the universe refutes his stance in all its meaningfulness. The universe's structure shows that only one Being can be the pivot of man's existence and that Being is God. By itself being oriented towards a single centre, the

DIVINITY INBORN

universe is telling us something: it is telling us that this is the way that our lives should be oriented.

DIVINITY INBORN

Man can never free himself from his inborn ties with divinity. Even the staunchest of atheists, from time to time, admit that they are dissatisfied with their disbelief.

One of the most prominent atheists of our times, British philosopher, Bertrand Russell, has published several books and articles to justify his atheistic cast of mind. As the title suggests, *Why I Am Not a Christian* is specific to this issue. However, in his autobiography, he writes of his journey to Greece:

“I had never before been in Greece, and I found what I saw exceedingly interesting. In one respect, however, I was surprised. After being impressed by the great solid achievements everybody admires, I found myself in a little church belonging to the days when Greece was part of the Byzantine empire. To my astonishment, I felt more at home in this little church than I did in the Parthenon or any other Greek buildings of Pagan times. I realized then that the Christian outlook had a firmer hold upon me than I had imagined. The hold was not upon my beliefs but my feelings.” (*The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell*, p. 561)

These words were a heartfelt cry from his innermost being. It indicates how a man cannot rid himself of such feelings, even when his conscious actions have been motivated by the purest of logic. Even the staunchest of atheists and unbelievers admit, from time to time, that they remain dissatisfied in their state of disbelief. At moments like the ones Bertrand Russell experienced in Greece, they are forced to relent, to give in to such impulses as they have reasoned themselves into suppressing and have been at pains all along to disavow. Indeed, man can never free himself from his inborn ties with divinity.

EACH IN ITS ORBIT RUNS

The disciplined and harmonious functioning of the universe for billions of years is proof that a conscious being governs the universe and all its creation.

Modern technology has produced a mechanical 'man'—the robot—which performs the prodigious feats of walking, talking, and working. However, it functions purely mechanically at the end of it all, just like any other man-made machine. It does not evince the subtlety of behaviour controlled by human intelligence, which we find in homo sapiens.

On one notable occasion, a robot was hired by a London office to perform the services of an office boy. The lady

secretary, Miss Jennie Seff, decided to give it a trial run as soon as it was installed. She was testing the battery when the robot sprang to life and began stalling behind her. Miss Seff walked faster and faster as it bore down on her, then started to run to escape its relentless pursuit, but the robot followed on her heels with equal rapidity. In the process, a new typewriter was knocked over and damaged. Finally, the robot was brought under control. (*Hindustan Times*, June 30, 1981)

In today's world, those who do not believe in God say that the universe is nothing but a vast machine and moves like a robot in a mindless, mechanical fashion. However, for millions and millions of years, the perfect and harmonious movement of the universe has contradicted such a supposition. Had the universe been a mere robot-like mechanism, there would undoubtedly have been many clashes—like the one in the London office.

According to the Quran, “The sun, too, follows its determined course laid down for it by the Almighty, the All-Knowing. We have ordained phases for the moon until it becomes like an old date-stalk. The sun cannot overtake the moon, nor can the night outpace the day: each floats in [its own] orbit.” (36:38-40)

This statement of the Quran has been borne out in the present world by human observations, which is enough to prove that some conscious being governs the universe. Without this, the universe could never have been disciplined and harmonious to such a degree of perfection as it is.

MAN'S CRAVING FOR AN OBJECT OF WORSHIP

A believer sees the beauty of the Creator in the beauty of creation and surrenders himself totally to God, prostrating down before his Creator.

When the Russian cosmonaut Andrei Nikolai returned to the earth after his space flight in 1962, he said at a press conference in Moscow on August 21, "When I landed on the earth, I felt like kissing the ground."

Among all parts of the known universe, there is no place other than the earth where such an enormous number of things have been gathered to meet man's requirements. When the Russian cosmonaut went into space, he discovered that in its incredible vastness, there was nothing for man but astonishment and confusion. There was nothing to provide either for his physical or mental comfort. After this experience, when he landed back on earth, he realized his planet's pricelessness, just as a man understands the value of water when his throat has been parched with thirst for a very long time. The earth, with all its favourable circumstances, appeared so dear to him that he felt like embracing it to express his feelings towards it.

The *shariah* describes this action as turning something into a deity (*ilah*) or object of worship. Unable to see his Creator, man makes His creation his *ilah* or object of worship. A *momin* or a true believer discovers reality by passing beyond

appearances, having learned that all the things visible are God's bequest to humanity. For him, whatever is present on this earth has been created by the Supreme Being. He sees the Creator in His creation and makes him his all. All his best feelings are then offered to God.

When a man finds God, his feelings towards his Creator are similar to those of the Russian cosmonaut on his return to the earth; only they are on a far superior plane and of a much greater intensity. The true believer sees in them the light of God on being touched by the sun's rays. He should be able to find God in the very fragrance of the flower. He should see the incredible mercy of God in the flowing waters of rivers and streams. In the infinitude of space, he should see the infiniteness of his Creator.

The difference between a *believer* and an unbeliever is that the latter's vision stops short at the surface of creation, while a believer's vision passes straight through creation to its Creator. An unbeliever becomes lost in the beauty of creation because he imagines this beauty is inherent. However, the believer sees the beauty of creation and its Creator and surrenders himself to God. The unbeliever prostrates himself before mere things. The believer casts himself down before his Creator.

THE QUEST FOR GOD

Man's ideal can only be one, and that is his Creator and Sustainer. Therefore, we can only satisfy our intellectual perception of the ideal by engrossing ourselves in God's mission.

Once, an intelligent man remained pre-occupied with the thought that he could not attain his true position in life. Finally, he resolved this problem by committing suicide. In his suicide note, he wrote:

“I am putting an end to my life because I feel I have probably wandered into a world for which I was not created.”

This feeling of something being lacking is usually found in those born with great intelligence. As a result, they either live out lives of disappointment and lack of fulfillment, which only end when they die a natural death, or they cut the whole process short by committing suicide. On the other hand, it is common to find people of lesser intelligence leading thoroughly contented lives. However, among people of higher intelligence, one will rarely come across anyone who has succeeded in leading a life of contentment.

The reason for this is man's innate idealism. By his very nature, everyone is in search of an ideal. However, it has proved so difficult to find this ideal in this world that the saying, ‘The ideal is unattainable,’ has gained currency. Often, the mediocre person will imagine that he has found

SUPERSTITION: A WEAKNESS

the ideal, but that is because his sensitivity is so under-developed that he cannot discern the difference between the ideal and the non-ideal, and this leaves him happily pre-occupied with the latter. However, those with sharper intelligence immediately sense the difference; they are unwilling to accept anything that falls short of the highest standards.

Man's ideal can only be one, and that is his Creator and Sustainer. If only the people of higher intelligence who are seeking the ideal could realize that only God's existence is ideal and that only by becoming engrossed in God's mission can we find that moral zenith which will satisfy the whole of our being and which will conform in every detail to our intellectual perception of the ideal!

Man's ideal is his God, but he ceaselessly attempts to discover this ideal in a non-God.

SUPERSTITION: A WEAKNESS

Man, by his very nature, must have a deity to worship. Since man cannot see God, he substitutes some visible thing for the invisible God.

According to an official of the Republican Party of the U.S.A., former American President Ronald Reagan used to keep a golden ferrule in his pocket. This ferrule was presented to him by one of his friends five years before

he was elected president. Ronald Reagan held that this amulet's powers saved him from the attempt on his life and many other misfortunes. He could not entertain the idea of parting with it. Once when a government official asked him whether he still kept it in his pocket, he replied: "I sure do." Then he took the ring out of his pocket and showed it to him.

Without a doubt, this is just another form of superstition. If superstition can hold men's minds in its grip, it is because life's happenings are so often puzzling and mysterious and without any rational explanation. Certain unknown forces seem to be at work, which would appear to be responsible for success or failure. Moreover, these forces seem to function without any rhyme or reason. I once asked a successful businessman the secret of his success. He thought for a while, then replied, 'Luck!' Then he said if I wanted any more reasons, he would say luck, luck, and luck!

The mysteriousness that pervades our lives is due to an invisible God who remains behind the scenes. Since man cannot catch sight of Him, he substitutes some visible thing for this invisible God, be it a ring, a ferrule, or any other object.

Man, by his very nature, must have a deity. If he cannot find God, he replaces Him with something else.

COMPUTER CAPRICE

All machines are made and operated by men. Then how is it possible for a flawless universe to have come into existence by itself and continue to function so perfectly from time immemorial? Belief in a Creator and Sustainer is the only answer.

The American navy performed a military manoeuvre in July 1983 off the coast of San Francisco; the whole process was computerized. Unfortunately, no one could foresee the computer developing some defect during the artillery firing drills. As a result, the direction of the firing was reversed. According to the programming, the shelling should have been directed at a far-off place in the sea, but the shells began hitting a Mexican cargo ship instead due to this reversal.

We often come across such news about computers. Why do they go “on the blink” and fail to carry out their orders properly? They are only material machines, totally devoid of the brain. Similarly, had the universe been simply a material machine, as is generally held by the atheists of modern times, it could never have functioned so accurately and flawlessly as it does. The earth and all the human settlements on it would have been destroyed as if ravaged by an earthquake. In the wake of universal accidents, the universe and those who audaciously seek to place a material interpretation of the universe’s existence would have been annihilated.

“There is no creator of the universe; it is but a material machine.” This sentence reads very well—a good grammatical sentence. However, it loses its value when matched with reality, for its conception has an inherent contradiction. This sentence would have been correct if any self-made and self-operated machine had existed. However, there is no such thing. All the machines we know are made and operated by ‘men’. Moreover, they are not free from defects.

Then how is it possible for a flawless workshop to have come into existence by itself and continue to function so perfectly from time immemorial?

FAITH MEANS REACHING GOD WHILE LIVING IN THIS WORLD

Faith (*iman*) is another name for realizing God's presence. It is like a beam of light that illuminates his whole existence, changing one's entire lifestyle.

The connection of an electric bulb with a powerhouse is no simple matter. It entails connecting a non-lighting element with something with the exceptional power to light things up. The immediate result of such an action is that an ostensibly ‘dead’ bulb becomes ‘alive’. Somewhat similar is man's relation to God. Just as a dim bulb will pour forth

a fountain of light as soon as it is connected with a power source, so will a man become radiant with divine energy as soon as he makes contact with God.

God is the greatest reality of our world. That is why finding God is not a particularly simple matter. However, once a man has done so, it profoundly affects his whole psyche. It is like a volcanic eruption that shakes up his whole existence, an outpouring of lava that engulfs his entire personality. After the discovery of God, no one can remain the same as he was before. In the true sense of the word, a believer in God is one whose life undergoes a complete transformation the moment he finds the Almighty.

The realization of God, called faith (*iman*) in the *shariah*, is the most extraordinary experience of a man's entire life. To believe in God means that this belief has become the basis for his way of living. It is like a beam of light that illuminates his whole existence. It is the hue that colours every facet of his lifestyle.

Faith is another name for having realized the presence of God. It means losing oneself in the greatness of God and becoming immersed in the knowledge of the divine. So, it moves an individual in such a way that his feelings are transformed into a hymn to God, and his lips spontaneously praise the Almighty. *Iman* or faith indeed is an earthquake produced within a man through the realization of God. It is a flood that courses through man's being, replenished as it is by the blessings and inspiration of God. If *iman* means

to find God, then finding God means finding everything. Having once found God, what more is left to find?

NATURE BEARS WITNESS

Only the earth favours man's survival in the universe and permits him to bring civilization into being. Therefore, the earth's exception in the limitless universe is proof of the existence of an intelligent, conscious Being, God Almighty.

If one were to say that by mixing crushed pieces of stone and wood, petrol could be produced, that would only make people laugh. Indeed, no human being has the power to make such things happen. However, far stranger and more complex events of a similar nature occur every day in this world. Nature's chemistry is constantly producing phenomena that, to the uninitiated, appear unintelligible mysteries.

For example, let us take hydrogen and oxygen. When nature mixes up these two gases in a particular ratio, the resulting combination takes the form of a liquid—crystal-clear water. When carbon and hydrogen are mixed under particular conditions, another very precious fluid is formed—crude oil. When certain salts and minerals are mixed with carbon, life comes into existence. When a magnetic field and movement are brought together, a tremendous force called electricity is produced. Similarly, when a magnetic field and

electricity are brought together, an immensely powerful movement comes into being. When a seed is sown in the soil, it transforms into wood, leaves, flowers, fruits, etc.

Innumerable miracles of this type keep occurring in this world at every moment, and man is dumbfounded at seeing them. He is a witness to the fact that neither do these objects have any power to come into existence on their own, nor does man possess the power to create anything by himself. Then how is all this happening? To explain these happenings, he says that all phenomena are a part of God. It is God Himself who is manifesting himself in innumerable forms.

The Quran, however, rejects such explanations as misleading. According to the Quran, natural phenomena are not part of God but have come into existence at His command. Rather than God manifesting himself in these forms, He has created them with His divine powers.

Since time immemorial, poets have been inspired by the beauty of the stars, and man from ancient times has seen the moon as a god. The truth, however, is quite the reverse. The stars are enormous balls of fire, while the moon and other planets are just rocks, bereft of water and plant life. Despite being imaginably vast, the universe is hostile to the existence of a creature like a man. Only the earth favours man's survival and permits him to bring civilization into being in all the known universe. The earth, standing out as an exception in the limitless universe, is clear proof of the existence of an intelligent being who

consciously created such circumstances here on earth as would remain favourable to the continuing existence of the human species.

THE SIGN OF GOD

It is the sight of God's creation that enables people to discover the presence of God in this world. People must, therefore, recognize their Maker through His creation.

It was the 7th of September 1982, when I was standing in front of a tree in a hilly region of Africa. I had never before seen such a tree. It seemed to be a sign from God, so strange and wonderful it appeared to me. Its delicate flowers, chiselled fruit, and geometrically designed leaves seemed to call out that they had not come into being by themselves but had been made by some ineffable Creator.

Every tree in this world is, in truth, an example of God's artistry. However, since I had come across this kind of tree for the first time, I felt more inspired by it. On seeing this strange and beautiful African tree, I spontaneously exclaimed, "It seems that all the things in this world bear the stamp, 'Made by God', but then God, having made all these things, hid away from mortal sight. People must, therefore, recognize their Maker through His creation. It is the sight of God's creation that enables people to discover the presence of God in this world.

An experienced engineering expert can tell whether a machine has been made in the Soviet Union, the U.S.A., Japan, or Britain because of unique features in its design and performance. However, it does not take an expert to see the uniqueness of the design and performance of all those innumerable natural ‘machines’ that perform their duty in our world with such perfect regularity. These machines do not carry labels showing their place of manufacture, but the exceptional qualities of their design and their exceptional performance are, in themselves, a clear indication of who their Maker is.

None of nature’s phenomena explicitly carries labels stating their Maker, but they all bear His divine stamp in a more subtle, meaningful way. If one is sufficiently discerning to go beneath the surface of the underlying reality, one will inevitably exclaim, “Undoubtedly, God has made this! No one else could have produced such marvels of perfection!”

QUEST FOR CIVILIZATION IN SPACE

Modern man has admitted the possibility of a Creator indirectly. The truth of the matter is that the existence of a living man is evidence of a living God.

For the last few decades, scientists in the West have been carrying out a strange kind of research—listening for life in space.

The modern theory of evolution has given rise to this quest. The explanations furnished to prove the evolutionary concept of life presuppose the existence of life forms in some parts of outer space, resembling the life forms on earth. Therefore, space flights also aim to contact those life forms, among other things. Such an assumption led to the conviction that an extraterrestrial civilization exists.

In addition to space flights, giant antennas have been set up in the U.S.A. and other developed countries. These antennae are called Radio ears. They serve to send signals to outer space. Very highly sensitive instruments have also been installed to receive the expected signals.

A commentator reviewing these efforts has summed it up in these words: "If you are there, please call your friends." (*Time Magazine*, March 21, 1983)

Life and consciousness are unique phenomena in the whole universe. Since this consciousness could never have come into being by itself, it necessarily involves the existence in the space of life and consciousness on a greater plane—the source of life on earth.

Modern man has admitted the possibility of a Creator indirectly. His existence, however, is being explained away simply in terms of there being some life forms in space—forms resembling ours, but not necessarily superior to them, just another form of civilization and not a Lord and a Creator. Whereas the truth of the matter is that the existence of a living man is evidence of a living God.

PRICE NOT PAID

A realized person sees the Glory of God in His creation, showers praise due to God and bathes in the light of God. Only then can he show his real value in God's eyes.

The Bible says, "But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.'" (*Mathew*, 11:16-17)

The universe is a great exhibition. A showcase of power, wisdom, and meaning. It is so beautiful that its beauty cannot be fully described. The universe is an eternal abode of God's glory and majesty. However, in the known universe, man is the only creature who can understand this divine abode and dance to its beauty and perfection. The only creature God made with His own hand so that man could see the immense artistry in the universe and might dance with it. However, he is the one who refrains from it the most. Man does everything but does not do what he ought to do the most.

Of all the creatures, only man has been given this feeling and consciousness, which shows what God wants from him. Man is required to dance to God's "flute". He spontaneously calls out, "Glory be to God, the best of Creators." (23:14) It is only such a response that will show the actual value of man. Man's failure to do this is akin to devaluing himself in this universe. He is rendering his existence meaningless.

God created a tremendous universal stage and showed all His Signs manifested in His creation. He did all this for man. In such a situation, if a person closes his eyes and fails to shower the praises due to God, it is tantamount to such a great crime that any punishment will be less than the crime committed.

The world of God is lovely, full of heavenly scenes. It is a mirror of God's beauty and perfection. However, man fails to see His beauty. To see the universe in the heavenly form, man must come out of the false self-made shell he has covered himself with. He has to rise above the "human world" and look into the divine world. Unfortunately, man is not ready to come out of his shell, so he cannot even see God's world.

A realized person is a man who can see the universe more than anything else. Such a person begins to see God in the mirror of the universe. When a servant of God goes through this experience, he reaches a state that cannot be described in human words. He bathes in the light of God. Words fail him. His intense feeling flows through his eyes. In acknowledging God, his whole being is annihilated.

Man is so preoccupied with himself that he does not understand the divinity of God. He is so engrossed in his "feats" that he does not see the feats of God. He is so lost in his glory that he cannot see the glory of God. It is the most significant deprivation of man. How can a deprived person in this world become a recipient of Paradise in the Hereafter?

NATIONAL HERO

Muslims allow themselves to be provoked when they find a picture of the Prophet. It is hero worship: it is undoubtedly not God-worship.

A B. Sc. student burst into the office of the Dean in the Department of Theology at Aligarh Muslim University. “This is a Muslim University!” he said with great vehemence. “You are in charge of the religious affairs here. I must bring to your notice that there is a book in English in the Azad Library, which contains a picture of our Holy Prophet, may peace be upon him; you must have this book removed immediately from the library, otherwise...”

The Dean of Theology replied, “You know how big the Azad Library is. Books keep coming to it from different parts of the world. We would also receive books that make fun of God. In such circumstances, will you be provoked every time you come upon a book of this nature?” “Sir,” the student replied, “God belongs to everybody, but the Holy Prophet belongs to us.” (*Ehtisab*, Aligarh, May 15, 1984)

Why did the student think of God as belonging to all while he thought of the Prophet as his own? The reason was that he regarded the Prophet as the national hero of his community. Every community has a hero who is a source of their pride, just as every community regards its hero as superior to heroes of other communities. God can be familiar to all, but no such sharing is possible regarding a national hero. Due to this communal psychology, the Muslim student lost his

temper at the disrespect shown to the Prophet, whereas he did not show such annoyance when God was made fun of.

This incident aptly portrays the attitude of present-day Muslims, who never celebrate God's Day, but who mark the Prophet's Day with great pomp and ceremony all over the world. The reason is that, according to their narrow-mindedness, they do not feel any affinity with God because they do not take any personal pride in Him. However, on the other hand, since Prophet Muhammad has become their hero on the plane of history and, in that sense, is a source of pride for the Muslim community, they celebrate in his honour to express their natural feelings of pride.

Atheism is the order of the day. However, Muslims feel no enthusiasm about working towards the intellectual domination of monotheism over atheism. Instead, they allow themselves to be provoked by finding a picture of the Prophet. It, indeed, is hero worship. However, it is undoubtedly not God-worship.

NOT BY BREAD ALONE

No amount of wealth and fortune can supply the needs of the human soul. Therefore, the only true answer to the quest for a sense of spiritual fulfilment can be found in turning to God, the Lord, and Creator of everything.

Men of fortune become subjects of envy for the people around them. They are considered fortunate for having

succeeded in achieving worldly power and position. However, do those who have managed to reach the top necessarily feel this is so? Possibly not. Wealth is not all that man needs. It can, at best, serve the body's needs, leaving the soul to starve. The feeling of something missing spiritually disturbs people, even if they have gained it in material terms. Feeling thus deprived, they feel as helpless as an ordinary man does. Faced with an inner void, a yawning gap in the soul must be filled; it leads man to turn to something or the other for a sense of plenitude.

This fact is borne out by the news item which appeared in *The Times of India* on January 1, 1985. Despite all the luxuries at his command, Mr Alfred Ford, the famous Ford Motor Company owner in the U.S.A., felt something missing in his life. His soul was not at rest; it was hankering after something else. In this state, when he was introduced to the Hare Krishna movement, he felt attracted to it as it seemed to answer and satisfy the cravings of his soul. He joined the movement. Afterwards, he married a Hindu girl, Sharmila Bhattacharya, associated with the movement. The marriage ceremony took place in one of its centres in Australia. On this occasion, a photograph was published in the newspapers where he was seen in seamless clothes. Here is a part of the interview he gave with the AP correspondent:

“I am not a car. However, like anyone else, I am a spiritual soul,” he said. “I am only a Ford by name,” he further added.

No amount of wealth and fortune can supply the needs of the human soul. Material things do not become part of one's being. The human soul, therefore, cannot rest in things beneath Itself. That is why, amidst plenty, one is plagued by loneliness. A man always seeks something to compensate for this loss, filling the inner vacancy, which can become a part of his being. Often a man is unable to understand this and sadly goes astray. The only true answer to this quest for a sense of spiritual fulfilment can be found in turning to God, the Lord and Creator of everything.

GOING BEYOND THE VISIBLE

When a man expresses his faith in God but fails to see Him, when he believes in God but fails to realize the profundity of the godhead, when he fails to rise above his tangible world, this shows that he has failed to make God the centre of his attention.

People generally talk about community problems or, at best, discuss the superficial aspects of religion; no one seems interested in its meaningful aspects. It may be because only visible objects attract man's attention, not only now, but it has been so in the past and continues to be so in the present. It is difficult for a man to direct his attention toward the invisible.

Man makes the visible things his deities. He fails to understand how things that cannot be seen with the naked eye can be

the focus of human attention. He becomes involved with whatever can be seen and comprehended externally, but he does not know how to concern himself with things that are unseen. He well understands the importance of whatever presents itself before him in a perceptible form, but he ignores anything which he cannot perceive.

This worship of natural phenomena, which finds its final, extreme expression in the form of polytheism, is a man's greatest weakness. A consequence of this weakness is apparent in man's inability to progress in his faith.

A polytheist associates the godhead with particular visible objects, along with believing in the one unseen God. On the other hand, an atheist directly rejects the existence of God because he cannot see Him. These are extreme types of religious backsliding.

However, another aspect of the matter is equally important to discuss from the point of view of its consequences, that is, the ineffectiveness of faith despite its acceptance. It happens when a man expresses his faith in God but fails to see Him, he believes in God but fails to realize the profundity of the Godhead. He is a devotee of God but fails to rise above his tangible world to make God the centre of his attention.

Not apprehending the unseen God amounts to a failure to find the hidden significance of His existence. Many people are prepared to revere the possessors of material wealth while ignoring the Almighty, rich in spiritual treasures. Those who ignore God this way are finally the losers in spiritual meaningfulness.

WE OFFER YOU OUR LOVE

When a man discovers God as his Creator and Sustainer, the Giver of all blessings, it is only natural to be filled with love and devotion for Him.

There is a verse in the second chapter of the Quran (*Al-Baqarah*) which reads thus:

Yet some set up equals with God and adore them with the adoration due to God, but those who believe love God most. If only the wrongdoers could see—as they will see when they face the punishment—that all power belongs to God and that God is severe in punishment. (2:165)

Man is forced by his very nature and the circumstances in which he finds himself on earth to seek some external source of dependence. Unable to rely on his scant inner resources, he seeks a prop in life—one who will compensate for his shortcomings. To take another person or thing to oneself in this way is to worship it. Feelings of adoration and devotion are then directed towards one's object of worship, for to worship something is to love it above all things.

Since God is not visible in this world, man, wanting to see something before he believes it—usually stands as one who can be seen in the place that should be allotted to God alone. Usually, charismatic leaders occupy this spot, “greats” in the sight of men, who have captured the popular imagination. Such leaders are accorded the adulation that

should be accorded to God alone. Faced with an inner vacancy, a yawning gap in his soul that had to be filled, man should have turned to God for replenishment instead of other men.

Love is the greatest thing man has to offer anyone. How can man not love God when he sees that all sublime qualities come together in His majestic Being; when he realizes that whatever he owns is His divine gift; when he observes the world of nature and is filled with wonderment at the beauty and perfection of the Maker of such a magnificent work of art? Such is God, and when a man discovers one like Him, it is only natural to be filled with love and devotion for Him.

Man has nothing more significant to give anyone than love. Hence, it is not possible that he discovers God—in all His perfection—and then offers something less than love. Therefore, neither is any offer less than love acceptable to God nor is it proper for a man to offer his Lord anything less than pure, true love.

Chapter 2

The Greatness of God

PARADISE IS NOT FOR EVERYONE

Paradise is for those sublime souls who live in the consciousness of God's greatness. One who will have even an iota of pride will not enter Heaven.

Nothing is more contrary to the true nature of things than worshipping people, places, objects, and ideas as if they were on par with God. Indulging in polytheism in this way is the greatest of crimes in the eyes of God and renders one unfit to inhabit the gardens of Paradise in the Afterlife. Even having too much reverence for oneself—the sin of pride—will have the same catastrophic effect. The only thing that will save man is discovering the one God and the realization that nothing and no one can ever be His equal.

According to Abdullah ibn Masood, the Prophet of Islam was quite categorical: "One who will have even an iota of pride will not enter Heaven." When asked what was meant by pride, he said, "To ignore and reject the truth and look down upon people" (*Jami` at-Tirmidhi*, Hadith No. 1999). On polytheism, the Quran says, "God will not forgive anyone for associating something with Him, while He will forgive whomever He wishes for anything besides that. Whoever ascribes partners to God is guilty of a monstrous sin." (4:48)

The world we live in is necessarily imperfect because we are here to be tried and tested. That means that all

LIVING FAITH

kinds of people inhabit the earth—the good, the bad, and the indifferent. However, the next life will unfold in an ideal world—that of the Hereafter—in which not the slightest flaw will be permissible. There, the only ones to attain positions of honour will be those who have proved themselves worthy in the present world of trial, in the sense that they have differentiated between the true and the false. Those who indulged in pride and made polytheism their religion lived on an unrealistic plane. Their lives were full of falsity and illusion.

Paradise is for those sublime souls who live in the consciousness of God's eternal greatness. Those lowly debased creatures preoccupied with their own greatness and revering others besides God can never enter its gates.

LIVING FAITH

Living faith in God means seeing God as having limitless powers. One who finds such a God does not remain the same person as before having had this experience.

One way to see a lion is to look at a stuffed one in a museum. The other way is to see it alive, roaming in the jungle. The one in the museum is just a skin, stuffed and propped up to make it look as if it is alive and standing. Outwardly, it appears like a lion, but it is a lion in form only. People look at such a 'lion' only for instruction or for recreation. No

one feels frightened of it. No one feels the need to run away from it.

However, the lion of the jungle is a very different matter. It is a living thing, a symbol of strength. When it stalks its prey, the whole jungle becomes alarmed. When it roars, the animals are terror-stricken and rush to take refuge up in trees. When a human being sees a live lion in the jungle, he trembles from head to toe. He begins to lose control of himself. He is not as he was before seeing the lion.

This is an example that helps us to understand God. Belief in God also has two forms. One is faith through imitation, that is, just following in the footsteps of our ancestors, while the other is a living faith in God, i.e., a faith discovered, or acquired, on our own.

Faith through imitation is bound to be a dead faith. Such faith falls short of stirring up one's soul. It does not have the force of a current running through one's veins. It does not create any movement within. This dead faith requires a man only to believe in God without fearing Him.

However, living faith in God is an entirely different matter. Living faith in God means seeing God as having limitless powers. One who finds such a God does not remain the same person as before having had this experience. After the realization of God, his whole existence is completely shaken up. His soul is terror-stricken; his fear is intense. All other problems are completely overshadowed. He is now concerned with one thing alone, and that is God.

THE GREATNESS OF GOD

A living belief in God and fear of God are inseparable. The moment these become separate, true faith ceases to exist. It is then a dead, not a living, faith. Moreover, dead faith is of no value either to man or God.

THE GREATNESS OF GOD

When God's glory is extolled, the earth and the heavens reverberate with the praises of God. One who is so blessed as to sing the glories of God receives inspiration from the angels.

Everyone has an abundance of stories about his greatness, but few possess a similar wealth of stories that reflect the greatness of God. Articles are published in our journals which are entirely devoted to extolling the glory and greatness of our leaders, describing how their shining personalities have dazzled every corner of the globe with their radiance. There will be no mention in such articles of God's wonders, yet they will all end with this short sentence: "All praise is due to God." This short sentence will appear out of place when seen in the totality of the speeches and articles. When entire articles and speeches are devoted to man's greatness, does it mean anything to say that 'All praise is due to God?' Such conclusions are just a part of a formality; they are not genuinely meant. After man's virtues have been so extolled, this little phrase serves no better purpose than to fill in a blank. It does not express any great love of God. If someone

from another religion were to make a speech or write an article on his beloved personality, he would most likely end his speech with some such phrase from his religious traditions, while a Muslim would choose one from his religious scriptures. Outwardly, these conclusions differ, one being Islamic, the other non-Islamic, yet these different concluding phrases are no doubt the same when looked at from the perspective of the psychology behind it. In reality, there is no difference between the two.

Those who are proud of their activities, regarding them as achievements, will soon learn that in the eyes of God, their activities are as valueless as the travels of an ant in a pile of mud. This earth is not a manifestation (*jalwa gah*) of the charisma of their *akabirs* (senior religious personalities whom they held in great reverence). It is the manifestation of God's grandeur. Whenever anyone extols the greatness of someone other than God on this earth, he tells the biggest lie that anyone can tell.

Whenever hymns are sung to the glory of a human being, both the extoller and the listener are cursed by all the things of this earth and the heavens. On the other hand, when God's glory is extolled, the earth and the heavens reverberate with the praises of God. Eulogies of human beings are uttered by false tongues and heard by false ears. However, one who is so blessed as to sing the glories of God receives inspiration from the angels.

When the greatness of a human being enchants someone, he goes on extolling his virtues unceasingly. However, on the

other hand, when the greatness of God touches one, he is left speechless. It is because words expressing the greatness of man are written on the best of paper and are read out at glittering functions, whereas the expression of the greatness of God is stirred up in the hearts of the faithful, and these find expression only in moments of solitude. The difference between those who live in the glories of man and those who live in the glories of God is the same as the difference between man and God.

THE FACTORY OF THE UNIVERSE

A believer sees an invisible world in the visible world. He finds the Creator in creation. He finds the Organizer in the organization.

If you visit a man-made factory, you will be shown around its various departments, and its functioning methods will be explained to you. In addition, you will find instructions hung at various places telling you about the working of the machinery. There will be personnel at every point to answer your queries. Besides, the factory will provide ample literature containing all the necessary information.

The universe is the biggest of these 'factories'. However, there is no instruction board or guide to explain it. Planning and manufacturing are going on here too. There

is the packaging industry, and there is also a constant arrangement for supplies. Here the laws of supply and demand are observed. Here there is also an arrangement for the recycling of waste. Here, there is control and balance and an arrangement for procur-ing raw materials. There is all this and much more, but there is no one to tell us about it or explain it to others. The tall peaks of the mountains appear like a universal stage, but on their summits, there is no speaker. When the birds twitter, it appears they will convey some message, but we never receive it because we fail to understand their language. When there is thunder and lightning, it seems like they are the vocal cords of nature, announcing some message, but their language remains unintelligible to man.

‘Faith’ is what fills this vacuum in the human being, making him the confidante of nature’s secrets. The believer is, in a way, a scientist. A scientist explores the solar system amongst the scattered spheres of the universe. He attempts to discover the hidden powers of matter. In static matter, he sees a moving machine.

Similarly, a believer sees an invisible world in the visible world. He finds in creation the Creator. He finds in the organization the Organizer.

When faith reaches its culmination, it is converted into *dawah* which means to give words to the wordless melody of the universe. *Dawah* means to act as a representative of God on God’s earth. A *dayee* (one who calls people to God) is a person who converts God’s silent communication into

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an audible one. He hears the message from the Creator and delivers it to the people.

OBLIVIOUS OF GOD

People have a great deal to say about other human beings but are at a loss for words when it comes to God. As a result, they remain blissfully unaware of the Creator.

If you talk to someone about his son, he will have innumerable things to say about him. However, when you speak to the same person about God, he will remain unmoved, as if he had nothing to say about the Almighty. As if he knows nothing of God.

Just remind someone of a revered ancestor, and you will find him talking with great zest as if this cherished memory had stimulated his innermost feelings. However, on the other hand, mention God to the same person, and you will find him apathetic, bereft of all feeling, as if he knew nothing of what to say about God.

Talk to someone about his leader (*akabir*), and you will at once be given the benefit of all kinds of emotional outpourings. He will not stop until you interrupt to change the topic. However, on the other hand, mention God to the same person, and you will find him impassive, not in the least excited, as if he lacked the vocabulary to speak about God.

Mention the name of a community's hero to a member of that community, and he is immediately found to have at his disposal the choicest of expressions to describe the hero. However, mention God to the same person, and you will see that he remains unaffected. This is because God's name creates no stirrings within his soul, such as should come gushing out spontaneously.

How sad it is to think that people have a great deal to say about other human beings but are at a loss for words when it comes to the subject of God. They are a veritable storehouse of encyclopedic knowledge about men but seem empty and uninformed where God is concerned. Could the springs of faith have dried up within their hearts?

Have people not experienced the greatness of God, which they can relate to other people? Have people not witnessed any miracles of God? Are they aware only of the creatures while remaining blissfully unaware of the Creator?

THE CONTRADICTION MUST END

Man is a tiny part of God's vast universe, yet he goes against its laws, revelling in perverting God's world instead of trying to preserve and reform it.

As I stood on a mountainside far away from the city, lush green trees spread their branches all around me, and birds

chirping rang in my ears. Different kinds of animals could be seen roaming here and there. This scene strangely moved me. How great and perfect that God must be, I thought, who made such a vast and beautiful world and then made everything and every living creature in it function strictly according to His laws!

How beautiful and innocent is this world! Here the birds sing only those tunes which their master has taught them; the cat and the goat eat only those foods which nature has appointed for them at birth; the trees sprout and grow precisely according to the way ordained by the Almighty ever since the world came into being; the river follows the same course laid down for it for all eternity. This universe of God is a perfect collection, and all things in it act, without any deviation, precisely according to the norms set out for them by their Creator.

However, man is in an entirely different category. His lips utter such words as have been forbidden by God. He derives sustenance from things that God has strictly prohibited. He chooses those pathways in life where his Master has posted the sign: "No thoroughfare." Man is a tiny part of God's vast universe, yet he goes against its laws, revelling in the perversion of God's world instead of trying to preserve and reform it.

This amounts to creating a contradiction in God's non-contradictory world. This is to cause disharmony where there should be nothing but harmony. It is like causing a blemish to appear on a beautiful picture, like introducing

imperfection into a perfect world, like allowing Satan to pollute a heavenly atmosphere with his evil.

The power of God and His desire for perfection, which are in evidence everywhere in the universe, refute the supposition that this state of affairs (i.e., the perversion produced by man) will continue. God's power will certainly not give man the license to perpetrate such a crime indefinitely. It is against God's sublime conception of beauty and perfection to bear with such conduct.

The coming of the day when this contradiction will end is an absolute certainty. May God's will be done in this human world as in the rest of the universe.

THE SIGNS OF GOD

The universe is a sign from God. This is because it mirrors the image of the Creator in the form of creation. Therefore, one who observes the universe without prejudice will find God.

When James Clerk Maxwell (1831-1879), the celebrated Scottish physicist, so marvellously expressed the laws of electromagnetic interactions in equations, the great Austrian physicist, Ludwig Boltzmann, looked at them and exclaimed, "Was it a God who wrote these signs?" (From the introductory monologue of Goethe's *Faust*, Vol. 1, pg. 96)

NATURAL SCENES

One who studies the universe is struck by the fact that the result of all studies of the universe is something highly mysterious and meaningful. In the last analysis, the universe is a highly organized event: far from a haphazard mass. This fact forces one to believe that there is some vastly superior mind behind the scenes.

Einstein, in his nature, was a pure scientist, but he too admitted that he was more of a philosopher than a physicist, "For, I believe there is a reality outside of us."

In this sense, Einstein says, "I belong to the ranks of devoutly religious men."

The universe is a sign from God. It mirrors the image of the creature. One who observes the universe without prejudice will find God. However, those with distorted vision will continue to grope in the dark, even in broad daylight. They will not find God even if they stand in front of Him.

NATURAL SCENES

What are natural scenes? They are scenes that mirror divine attributes. God's glory is reflected in myriad scenes of nature if one has a discerning eye.

On a visit to London, a certain Mr U.K. Mukhapadhyaye met an elderly Englishman who had served as an officer in the Royal Air Force in India 50 years before, during the British Raj. Intensely interested in meeting someone from

India, he inquired of Mr Mukhapadhyaye as to how India was progressing and recalled with great nostalgia the train ride between Bombay and Poona, which he used to enjoy, for it had provided him with a regular panorama of rivers, jungles, and other scenes of outstanding natural beauty. He expressed a wish to revisit India so that he could enjoy those scenes once again.

During the conversation, Mr Mukhapadhyaye told him that Poona was no longer as he had described it. Now known as Pune, the city had a tenfold increase in its population, and the new streets, high-rise buildings, and lighting all around had given the place a mechanical rather than a natural look. On hearing this, the Englishman's interest rapidly waned, "No, I do not think I will go back to India. India probably no longer exists." (*The Times of India*, February 3, 1984)

Industrial scenes remind one of 'man', while natural scenes remind one of 'God'. The former brings one into contact with man, while the latter leads one straight to God. That is why man does not find such solace in industrial scenes as in natural settings. Human hearts will indeed find peace only in the remembrance of God. (13:28)

What are natural scenes? They are scenes that mirror divine attributes. The vast expanse of the heavens introduces God's limitless being. When the sun rises, it announces, as it were, the Almighty being an embodiment of light. As it meanders its way through mountains and plains, the river suggests the never-ending flow of God's mercy. The fragrance and beauty of the flowers are reminders of God's beauty from

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afar. God's glory is reflected in myriad scenes of nature if one has a discerning eye.

WITHOUT AN IDENTITY CARD

The time is fast approaching when everyone will want to be counted among God's humble servants. On Judgment Day, this privilege will only be for those who, before the coming of that day, have shown themselves to be deserving of divine approval.

A village boy came to the city. As he was walking along the road, he passed by a school. It was the anniversary day of the school, and hundreds of schoolboys had formed a line outside one of the windows. As he approached closer, he saw that sweets were being distributed. Each boy was taking his share and going away. The village boy also joined the line and waited for his turn, thinking that as all the other boys were given a packet of sweets each, he would also be presented with one.

Finally, he reached the window and stretched out his hand eagerly. A voice came from behind the window: "Where is your identity card?" Of course, the village boy could not show a card and was turned away empty-handed. He realized that the sweets were not for anyone who turned up at the window; they were for those who had studied the whole year in the school.

It will be much the same on the Last Day. The Last Day is the day when God's judgment will come to pass. All of humanity will be gathered before their Lord. People will find their rewards with Him. However, the rewards of that day will only be for those who have qualified for them; they will only be for those who can show an "identity card" proving their eligibility for the favours being bestowed.

The time is fast approaching when all one will want to see, feel, and adore will be the Lord of the World. Everyone will be vying to be amongst those brought close to Him. The most honourable position that one will be able to occupy on that day will be to be counted among His humble servants. However, this privilege will only be for those who, before the coming of that day, have shown their selves to be deserving of divine approval. On that day, God will neglect those who neglected Him in this world. They will reach God's world but will not be able to behold Him. That will be the day when all secrets will be divulged, but even then, they will find themselves left out in the cold and not allowed to share in the wonders that will unfold.

WHEN THE VEIL IS LIFTED

When the Angel of Death takes man from this present world to the next eternal world, he will suddenly realize that everything he did was just an illusion.

US President Ronald Reagan confidently left the White House on the 30th of March 1981. A caravan of cars took

him to the Hilton Hotel in Washington, DC, where he delivered a speech in a magnificent hall. After ending his speech, he came out with a smiling face in the crowd. He was just a few steps away from his bulletproof limousine car when suddenly, sounds of shotguns started coming from the crowd standing outside. A young man, John Hinckley, fired six shots at the President in two seconds. One bullet had entered his chest and settled in his lung. He was covered with blood and was immediately taken to the hospital. Reporters reported: "Mr Reagan appeared stunned. The smile faded from his lips" (*Times of India*, March 31, 1981). This incident is a picture of a situation that would suddenly strike one at the time of the "attack" of death.

Man considers himself free in the present world. He speaks fearlessly and does whatever he wants. If someone has some wealth, he thinks that his future is secure. If someone has any power, he uses it so that it will never be taken away from him. Every man is confident. Every man is smiling and moving towards his "limousine". Then suddenly, the veil is lifted. The Angel of Death takes him from this present world to the next eternal world.

It is the most horrible moment of every man's life. He will be terrified to see the complete opposite situation from what he had assumed when this moment comes. Suddenly he would realize that everything he did was just an illusion. Then, these words will come to his lips: "I thought I was free, but I was helpless. I considered myself a very wealthy person, but I was utterly empty-handed. I thought I was powerful, but I was weaker than the fly and mosquito in this

world of God. I thought many people were with me, but I found no one there for me.”

Alas! Man does not know what he should know the most.

THE FATE OF THE GREATS

Believers live in the greatness of God, considering all human beings as mere servants of God. Therefore, they do not react adversely to criticism as the criticism of one human being by another does not diminish anything from the greatness of God.

As Caliph Umar Ibn Khattab delivered a speech in Madinah, an individual amongst the congregation rose and administered him this warning:

“By God, Umar, if we detect any crookedness in you, we will put you straight with our swords.” (*Al-Tarikh al-Kabir* by Al-Bukhari, Hadith No. 1819)

Audacious and insolent though these words appear, Umar did not object to them; neither did anyone in the congregation challenge the man's right to address Umar in this way. On the contrary, criticism was a regular occurrence amongst the Companions. As a result, an atmosphere of healthy criticism, where people had every right to speak their minds, endured for two generations after the Prophet. There was no restriction on what people said, as long as they carefully looked into a matter before pronouncing

judgment: only criticism without prior investigation was disapproved.

There can only be one reason for the atmosphere of tolerance that prevailed during the time of the Companions and the generations that immediately succeeded them: for those people, only God was great. They lived in awe of His greatness alone. As far as they were concerned, all human beings were God's servants. Why should they object, then, when one person criticized another? They were conscious of only God's greatness, and criticism of one human being by another did not diminish anything from the greatness of God.

In modern times, however, things have changed. Try criticizing any leading personality; it does not matter how intellectually sound and well-researched one's criticism is; that person's followers will rise in anger. People attribute greatness to humans, and to see the objects of their veneration brought low is more than they can bear. It is true of Muslims just as much as others. "God is great" are just words they utter in prayer: in practice, the greatness of others besides God dominates their lives.

The aura of greatness surrounding humans in this world is just a facade put on for the test of men. Those who can see through this facade and realize that no one besides God has any real greatness will be successful in the next world. As for those who let the greatness of mere mortals rule their lives, their greatness will perish, and they will be left out in

the cold: the ones in whose shadow they had lived will no longer be there to shield them.

GOD'S SIGNS

If a man opens his mind to the signs of God around him, the universe will become a manifestation of God's splendour. He will discover his Lord by observing them.

Multiple verses in the Quran point out that there are signs in the universe for men to understand. For example, consider the following verses of the Quran.

“There are signs in the heavens and the earth for those who believe: in your own creation and all the creatures He has spread about, there are signs for people of sure faith; and in the succession of night and day, and in the means of subsistence which God sends down from the skies, giving life thereby to the earth after it had been lifeless, and in the circulation of the winds: [in all this] there are signs for people who use their reason.” (45:3-5)

According to the above verses of the Quran, God requires man to believe in certain hidden realities. To make this easier, he has set up material symbols of these realities in the outside world. Therefore, man has to see the reflection of invisible realities in the mirror of visible signs.

The sun and the moon give us a glimpse of God—the source of all light. The birds and the animals provide us with

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a picture of innocence; they are God's representatives on our planet. The sky, in its vastness, gives us an idea of the might and greatness of God. Wind and water show us the mercy of the One who has created them. The trees and the mountains provide a pointer to God's exquisite beauty.

If a person opens his mind to the world's wonders, taking in all that he sees in the universe, he will find the light of God shining in all that he beholds. He will see the divine wisdom that lies behind every object of creation. In all its vastness, the cosmos will serve as a constant reminder of the infinity of God. The earth and the heavens will become manifestations of His splendour; he will come to know the Lord by observing them.

THE BOUNTIES OF GOD

The rays of the sun do not enter a closed room. Similarly, a closed mind cannot be the recipient of God's inspiration. Therefore, for God's inspiration to reach a man, he must throw open the windows of his mind.

At first, we had an ordinary one-band transistor radio in our house. We could listen to the news broadcasts on it from Delhi and nearby stations. However, it was not possible to listen to international broadcasts on it.

We later purchased a larger, four-meter-band radio set. It used to receive broadcasts from all over the world. When

we started receiving the BBC and other foreign stations, we realized how deprived we had been of all the worthwhile programmes broadcast by the different nations. Earlier, we had a small radio transistor which we used for information and intellectual enrichment. We had tuned into a treasure trove of new ideas with the bigger set.

Man's relationship with God is similar to this. Receiving God's inspiration is like receiving a broadcast from the infinite. At all times, a torrent of heavenly nourishment is raining down upon us, but how much of this a man can receive depends on the size of his radio set. If it is small, he will receive minimal amounts. However, if it is large, he will receive such floods of heavenly inspiration as will seem like an enormous ocean.

Today, every man is the victim of his limitations. He is locked in groups, i.e., he is biased toward certain people or specific groups of people. Another is so lost in petty interests that he knows nothing of what is happening around him. However, another man's level of thinking is so low that it prevents him from plumbing the deeper realities. Narrow-mindedness has left him so intellectually bankrupt that there is no way that he can appreciate the grandeur of God's scheme of things.

The rays of the sun do not enter a closed room. Similarly, a closed mind cannot be the recipient of God's inspiration. Therefore, for God's inspiration to reach a man, he must throw open the windows of his mind.

Chapter 3
God and Nature

THE RELIGION OF NATURE

Islam is the religion of nature. By accepting Islam, man becomes God's servant both in the physical and ethical sense. He gives God his total obedience.

A man who wishes to travel across the sea will not do so if he walks on dry land. He does not go on foot straight into the sea as if he were on terra firma. Instead, for the occasion, he will hire a boat, sit in it, and continue on his journey.

By such behaviour, he acknowledges that he is living in a world made not by him but by his Creator and that the world is subject to God's laws. Man is, therefore, obliged to lead his life in complete accordance with this external world made by God, at least regarding matters of a physical nature. Had man thought himself to be the Creator of this world; he would have walked straight into the water as he walked across the land. Man has opted for this conformance with the laws of the world of nature in fifty per cent of his life. He never deviates from it. However, he has abandoned this conformance in the other fifty per cent of his life.

There are two aspects to a man's life, one is physical and the other ethical. In the physical aspect of his life, man has submitted to God, as have the rest of the animate and inanimate objects in this world. However, in the ethical aspect, he follows the dictates of his conscience—or desires—instead of God's commands. Instead of the

posture of submission, he adopts the stance of rebellion. How is this contradiction to be resolved? The only solution to this problem is that a man becomes God's servant one hundred per cent: he gives Him his total obedience.

Since the result of deviation from nature in the material world immediately comes to light, man conforms to natural laws in the material aspect of his life. However, the result of any deviation does not immediately become known in the ethical world, so man defies God's laws.

If a farmer does not follow the proper cultivation method, he cannot expect to reap a complete harvest. Similarly, one who does not obey the moral code in this world will find that only remorse and deprivation will be his lot in the Hereafter.

THE MEANINGFULNESS OF THE UNIVERSE

The essence of religion is to believe in the meaningfulness of the universe, meaningfulness which is yet unseen, for in this world, all higher realities lie hidden.

Arthur Koestler quoted Albert Einstein: "I maintain that cosmic religiousness is the strongest and most noble driving force of scientific research. A contemporary has said, not unrightly, that the serious research scholar in our generally

materialistic age is the only deeply religious human being". (The Act of Creation by Arthur Koestler, 1967, p. 262)

The meaning of religiousness in the above saying means belief in unseen meaningfulness. When a scientist sets about his research, the driving force in his work then is this hidden belief in him that there is unity and meaning in the universe. If he is bereft of this belief, he can never be serious in his research.

Thus, there is no difference between a scientist and a religious-minded person. A religious person performs certain acts of devotion with the object of pleasing God or of finding a reward in the Hereafter. The religious person neither sees God nor the Hereafter, yet he engages in his religious acts with extreme devotion and concentration. This devotion is his absolute faith in the unseen realities. Precisely similar is the case of the scientist. He devotes his whole life to investigating and researching a certain reality. The reality lies hidden in the unknown world. Nevertheless, the scientist has this prior belief and conviction that what he wants to discover lies hidden in the universe, although it has yet to come within his purview.

The essence of religion is to believe in the meaningfulness of the universe, meaningfulness which has yet to come before our eyes, for, in this world, all higher realities lie hidden. In his quest for knowledge, the scientist then stands on the same ground as the man of religion, for, in this world, all higher realities remain in the unseen. Therefore, those serious in their pursuit must believe in the hidden realities.

MAN'S HELPLESSNESS

Natural disasters are a declaration of God's power and man's helplessness. They tell us that God will catch hold of us tomorrow as He has done today. Then we will have to face the consequences of our sins in eternal life.

Bangladesh is a conglomeration of a significant number of islands. Often severe tempests and cyclones hit the area, leaving immeasurable damage to life and property in their wake. According to records, the severest known storms occurred in 1876, leaving 300,000 persons dead, with commensurate losses in terms of property.

A storm again hit Bangladesh in May 1985. Cyclones of high velocity with the speed of 150 mph hit numerous littoral islands, which at the same time were lashed by four-meter-high tidal waves. Nearly 1,00,000 people lost their lives in this typhoon. Scores of villages perished in the stormy waves. One press reporter describes the scene thus:

“Urir Char... looks like it has been bombed relentlessly. Not a single structure, save the concrete forest office stands erect. So fierce has been the force of the gale and tidal waves that the houses and building materials have been washed away, leaving behind just mounds.”

On May 29, 1985, one English newspaper described these destructive forces as “murderous cyclones which expose man's helplessness before Nature's fury.”

Incidents such as these help man to keep reality in mind. They are a declaration of God's power and man's helplessness. They tell us that God will catch hold of us tomorrow as He has done today. If a man suffers from such helplessness in the present world, how strange will be his fate when he has to face the consequences of his sins in eternal life?

FLAWED IDEALS

Man spends his energies on irrational phobias. How many lives are wasted because they are misdirected? No real ethical fulfilment is possible without a balanced set of humane ideals.

Philip John Bayer, the founder of Quaker State Refining Co., was one of America's business magnates. The only son born to him was succeeded by one daughter, Eleanor Ritchey.

Being a single child, she inherited an enormous sum of money. However, she hated human beings and chose to remain single. She died on October 14, 1968, at the age of 58.

Having no human beings as her companions, she developed curious habits to pursue pleasure. For example, she would buy numerous pairs of shoes since she never wore any pair of shoes more than once. Similarly, she would buy stationery boxes with astonishing frequency. These were a

few of her idiosyncrasies. She left 1707 pairs of shoes and 1224 stationery boxes to posterity.

Stranger still was her interest in dogs. Whenever she went out in her car, she would pick up stray dogs on the street, bring them home and look after them with special care. In this manner, she collected about 150 dogs. When her home could no longer accommodate such a massive pack of dogs, she initially bought a 12-acre piece of land to ensure their comfort.

She mentioned that all her wealth would go to her pet dogs in her will. Only after all her pet dogs had died would her wealth be transferred to the Alabama School of Veterinary Science. In the end, only one dog, Musketeer, had survived. At that time, this 13-year-old dog had become so weak when it walked; its legs trembled and fell to the ground while coughing. After Musketeer died, the School of Veterinary Science received its magnificent inheritance.

Even the bequeathing of her wealth, although, to her, it was altruistic in purpose, was marked by eccentricity and was the offshoot of flawed idealism. It would have been better if her efforts had been directed toward human ends. Without a sound set of ideals, humanity had become less than nothing for her, and her energies were frittered away in irrational phobias. How many lives are thus wasted because they are misdirected? No real ethical fulfilment is possible without a balanced set of humane ideals.

MAN'S EARNINGS

Everyone has been given opportunities; some use them to earn the world, others to gain everlasting life. Seeing opportunities as God's gifts and using them in the service of God will earn a man the everlasting gardens of Paradise in the Hereafter.

The following verse from the chapter of the Quran entitled, *Al-Ahqaf*, states:

“On the Day when those who deny the truth are brought before the Fire, it will be said to them, ‘You have had the good things of the life of this world, and you enjoyed them. Now this Day you shall be requited with humiliating punishment, because you were arrogant in the land without justification, and because you acted rebelliously.’” (46:20)

Man has been endowed with certain faculties in this world. He has been invested with bodily strength and blessed with intellectual prowess. He has been granted access to wealth, rank, resources, and opportunities. All these human faculties are from God. He has given them to man for a purpose: that man should use them to earn something for himself.

There are two ways for a man to “earn”. One is that which leads to what the Quran calls being “arrogant in the land without justification, and because you acted rebelliously.” However, another form of earning is the opposite of this, which is the earning of humility and graciousness from

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what one has. Let us put this another way. If a person is proud of what he has in this world, if he uses it for his self-aggrandizement, if he makes it just a stepping-stone to personal power, he has wasted his energies. He has wasted them because he has expended them on this ephemeral world. What can be left for him in the eternal world of God?

The other form of earning comes from seeing the resources he has been endowed with as God's gift. A man sees his helplessness before God and thanks Him for His countless blessings. Instead of using his faculties and resources for personal ends, he devotes them to the service of God. Earnings gained from life's opportunities will stand in good stead in the long run, for they will remain with man into all eternity. Man's earnings will open out to him in the form of Paradise's everlasting gardens; he will be able to taste the fruits of his earthly efforts.

Everyone has been given opportunities; some use them to earn the world, others to gain everlasting life.

GOD IS UNBENDING

The God of the Quran is not a party to evil, He will mete out due punishments to the offenders of evil.

Devi Singh, the notorious dacoit, was killed in a police encounter in January 1984. Shortly before he met his fate, Mrs Amrita Pritam, the well-known poetess, had a chance

to meet him. The fascinating conversation was published in the *Hindustan Times* on January 22, 1984. In their talks, Devi Singh admitted to Mrs Pritam that he had committed about 100 dacoities up to that time. "We are not dacoits but rebels fighting against the government. We loot treasure, but we have never sullied the honour of any girl. We observe a strict moral code. We immediately shoot him if any of our members go against it."

When Mrs Pritam asked Devi Singh to tell her how many members were there in his gang, he replied, "Seven men and the eighth is God."

At first sight, this seems to be a translation of a verse from the Quran (with one minor difference) which says: "Where there are five of your people, there the sixth one is the Almighty" (58:7). The dacoit's statement would appear to be in the same vein as this verse from the Quran. However, this is not at all the case. Apart from the similar lexicon used, nothing else is common.

The real sense in which the dacoit used these words becomes clear from what he later explained in the same interview. He said that whatever loot they took was divided between the gang members. However, instead of dividing it into seven parts, they made eight equal shares, the eighth being for God. "The part which belongs to God is given to some needy person. Giving away one part of the loot is the way of all dacoits."

The God of the Quran creates fear in the mind, while the God of the dacoits encourages fearlessness. God is there

so that He may prevent wrongdoing. However, by giving a share to God, they endeavour to make Him their Protector. Their way of thinking is that God will be their eighth member and ready to stand guard over them if the seven join together to commit some dacoity. However, the God of the Quran would never be a party to such evil. He would, on the contrary, meet out the severest of punishments to the offenders.

OCCULT FLOURISHING

The only thing that man can depend on is God. God alone is the solution to man's problems. God alone can serve his needs.

According to a report published in the Times of India: 'The occult is flourishing in France, where an estimated eight million French people last year, or one in every four of the working population, consulted a clairvoyant, sorcerer, or astrologist, reports AFP from Paris.

According to the tax authorities, there are 50,000 registered clairvoyants—more than priests or doctors—with a business turnover from 500 to 600 million dollars.

With the deepening economic recession, more and more people are turning to the occult for relief from physical and psychological ailments." (*The Times of India*, March 5, 1985)

Why do people turn to clairvoyance or the occult to solve their problems? It happens that frequently man comes face to face with the hard truth that the material resources at his command are insufficient; a desperate need for a prop to rely upon drives him towards some mysterious source.

In this quest for unknown factors he could hold responsible for shaping events, man often attributes them to some human being like himself. However, this is nothing but an illusion. It is just turning toward something as powerless as he is and is no solution to the problem.

The only thing that man can depend on is God. It is a pity that instead of accepting that visible resources are powerless, far from bringing man closer to the realization of this truth, has led him further away from his true destination. It has led him to the forgetfulness of his Lord. He missed his chance even after being within its reach. Having found a clue to assist him in apprehending the reality, he had, nevertheless, forfeited the opportunity to establish contact with it by turning toward a creature who is powerless in comparison with the All-Powerful God. God alone is the solution to his problems. God alone can serve his needs.

IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE

The attribute of forgiveness is reflected in a mother. Just as a mother forgives her child, God Almighty can forgive and reward man. However, this reward is only reserved for those who accord their all to God and become His servants.

The son beat his mother with his tiny hands. The mother picked up the son and embraced him. What is the meaning of such conduct? It means that the act of beating was sublimated into an act of love by the mother. She put the wrong action into the 'good action slot'. She converted a deed worthy of punishment into one worthy of adoration. An incident such as this in every house is one example of how the qualities of the Creator, e.g., forgiveness, are reflected in a mother's behaviour. It is one of the signs of the Almighty, by which He shows how he has distributed His blessings in this world. She did not generate the quality of love in herself; it came from God. So then, if God is the Provider of these qualities, they will be found in perfect form at their source.

Man does not know the hidden reality. That is why he is faced with having to bear many losses in this earthly life. His willpower is weak, the superficial feelings overpower him, and he commits grave errors. He has limited resources at his disposal, and he repeatedly succumbs to them, unable to overpower external forces. Such adverse circumstances have made man's life a tragedy in this world.

All the human beings in this world suffer from time to time from this feeling that they are failures. They are very conscious that they have failed to achieve what they wanted. Therefore, almost everyone is disappointed, even though he may have a well-fed body and a smiling countenance.

Can this tragedy be turned into a comedy? Is it possible that we may reach our destination in life where our failures are turned into successes, our faults put into the 'reward's slot'? As we find it reflected in the mother's heart, the divine attribute provides a positive answer to this question. God can make that event a reality on a far grander scale for His servants than that shown by a mother for her child. Through the mother's attitude to the child, the Almighty wishes to show that He can give even this reward to the seeker, the reward of converting a No into a Yes. However, this reward is only reserved for those who accord the status of the "mother" to God and become His "son". The attribute of forgiveness is reflected in a mother. Just as a mother forgives her child, God Almighty can forgive and reward man. However, this reward is only reserved for those who accord their all to God and become His servants.

THE COMPENSATION FOR ZERO POWER

God is all-powerful, while man is powerless. True prayer guarantees compensation for man's helplessness, for if it is made in all sincerity, it is bound to be accepted by the Almighty.

The difference between God and man is not greater or lesser power. It is one of omnipotence and no power at all. God is all-powerful, while man is powerless. One might ask what justification there could be for creating a situation in which man has not been invested with even one iota of power. Why was it legitimate for God to have created a being who was helpless, deriving power neither from within himself nor from anything in the outside world?

The only valid answer to this question will offer man full compensation for his helplessness. Nothing short of total redressal can be the answer. The answer must go as deep as the question, i.e., it must offer the key to transforming man's helplessness into some form of recompense.

Such an answer is to be found explicitly spelt out in the Quran and the Hadith. It lies in God's special blessing, which makes it possible for a man to secure something by merely asking for it. If a man seeks something from God, he will undoubtedly become a receiver. When a man does not possess his power, he will have it only by receiving it from God. It is something that God is ever ready to grant him.

True prayer guarantees compensation for his helplessness, for if it is made in all sincerity, it is bound to be accepted by the Almighty.

It is expressed in a Hadith in terms of the sincere prayer never going unfulfilled. Therefore, if a man calls on his Creator earnestly, his prayer is never rejected. (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 13357) Jesus Christ made the same assertion:

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. “Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you. (*Matthew*, 7:7-11)

ALL FOR ONE AND ONE FOR ALL

Man and society must have a constant interchange of the benefits each has to offer. This path can lead to man's success in this world and the next.

In shaping his own life, every individual must keep the larger interests of society in view, just as society must, in

its general development, work towards the betterment of individuals. Thus, society's and individuals' objectives and functioning should be in consonance with each other.

In such matters, excellent coordination between an individual and society is essential if harmony is to prevail. If we wish to have an example on which to model ourselves to the best advantage, we do not have to look very far for it. We have it there before our very eyes in the shape of the universe, for God has set us an example of harmonious living on the most colossal of scales. We need only observe how all of the innumerable forces in nature function with unerring precision and complete predictability to understand what is meant by perfectly coordinated interaction. As Emerson has so aptly put it, "Nature works on a method of all for each and each for all." It sums up the divine scheme of the universe, the workings of which make an enduring appeal to humanity to maintain an equilibrium of interests, whether at the individual or the societal level. If man were to heed this universal message, he would surely never stray from the straight and narrow path which leads him so felicitously to finding favour in the eyes of God; he would never do anything of a damaging nature to the structure of society. In this respect, he is like a tree in relation to the universe. The tree needs sunlight, warmth, moisture, air, soil, and gravity to survive. These requirements are met by elements already permanent features of the universe. Moreover, our world, in turn, benefits from the things the tree offers—

fruit, flowers, timber, oxygen, soil conservation, moisture and shade, etc. There is a chain of reciprocity, which, if it were broken, would be disastrous for both man and his environment.

Similarly, man and society must have a constant interchange of the benefits each has to offer. This perfect coordination between the part and the whole is desirable for man. This is the only path that can lead to man's success both in this world and the next.

GOING AGAINST ONE'S CONSCIENCE

A man's greatest mistake is turning a deaf ear to his conscience. This is akin to morally killing oneself. Moreover, when the voice of conscience is finally silenced, one's soul, too, will utter its last gasp.

During the last days of his life, Arnold Toynbee, the renowned British historian (1889-1975), once said that the staking of the claim by the Jews to Palestine as their historical homeland was like the Red Indian tribes asking for the return of Canada. The Jews have written innumerable books against the atrocities perpetuated by the Nazis, but the barbarous treatment meted out by the Jews to the Palestine Arabs is exactly as that meted out by the Nazis to the Jews.

This statement was made by Toynbee in Canada when Herzog was the Israeli Ambassador to that country. Herzog invited Toynbee to a discussion with him on this subject, after which a function was held at McGill University in which both took part. On this occasion, Herzog stated that the German Nazis had killed 6,00,000 Jews, whereas the number of Arabs made homeless in Palestine was negligible in comparison. He asked how both of these events could be treated on par.

In his answer, Arnold Toynbee said that what he had meant to highlight by comparing the atrocities committed by the Nazis on the one hand and the Jews on the other was not the actual death toll but the nature of the crime. One does not have to commit hundreds of murders to be a murderer. A single murder is enough. "I wonder why my words so offend you? I have said just what your conscience is saying."

The voice of our heart is unfailing in speaking the truth. So, when someone rejects the truth, he, in reality, rejects himself. What causes an individual to do so? It is mainly stubbornness, partiality, and the desire always to appear correct, even when he is in the wrong. Therefore, whenever a man utters such false words, his heart bears witness to their hollowness.

A man's greatest mistake is turning a deaf ear to his conscience. It is like making oneself a witness to his criminality. How strange is this moral deprivation! However, when a man's insensitivity becomes extreme, he considers the outcome of this deprivation to be his victory. While

morally, he is killing himself, he imagines that he is giving himself a new lease on life. When the voice of conscience is finally silenced, the soul, too, utters its last gasp.

LISTEN TO GOD'S SILENT MESSAGE

Through the python, God conveys in a silent language: Do not harm others even if you are powerful and far above their status.

Pythons are of many kinds, but the very mention of the name conjures up the image of a dangerous reptile. The type of python found in the Indian jungles is called python molars. Its length is about 20 feet, and its weight is 200 pounds and more when fully grown.

However, like many other beasts, the python is not a dangerous animal. It attacks a man or a living being in two instances: only when it is starving or when it is attacked. In normal times, it just lies about like any other harmless creature. After a long study of the python, one zoologist writes:

“A python, however giant it may be, is nervous by nature and, like all other snakes, will never attack deliberately, nor will it become aggressive unless provoked. It threatens by hissing or disappearing if encountered in the wild but does not stand up and fight as one might imagine.”

LIVING FOR GOD

This attribute in python is not just a matter of coincidence. It is the direct result of planning by the Creator of the universe. The python is a silent call from nature. The action language conveys the message not to harm others even if you are a python. If you are powerful and far above others in status, do not harm them.

Ironically, man is cruel to his fellow men in a world where the lesson being given to him by the universe is not to be cruel.

LIVING FOR GOD

In a God-oriented life, everything centres around God. One who lives such a life discovers God in all His greatness. He lives in such awe of God that everything else seems tiny in comparison.

There are two ways of living in this world. One is a self-oriented life, the other a God-oriented one. An individual then will either worship himself or he will worship God. His attention will be focused either upon his being or upon God. His aim in life will either be to please himself or please God. There is no third way of living in this world. Therefore, our choice is to live either for ourselves or God. In a self-oriented life, everything is centred upon one's being. You could call it a selfish life in which self-interest, personal ambition, greed, and lust are the dominating

motive forces. One who lives such a life puts all he has into furthering his interests. He is human only in appearance, for he is no different from other animals in his manner of living. As animals live for themselves, so does he.

In a God-oriented life, everything centres upon God. One who lives such a life discovers God in all His greatness. He lives in awe of God, so much so that everything else seems tiny in comparison. His thoughts centre on God; his hopes are in God; it is God that he fears. To him, God is everything, and he is nothing at all.

This second type of individual lives for God alone. He is realistic, for the path he conforms to is the universal way of nature. There is only one true destiny for man in this world, and that destiny is God. Nothing less can satisfy the needs of man.

AN UNREWARDED SUCCESS

The present world is only a place for action, not for receiving rewards. The place of final reckoning is in the Hereafter.

On the Atlantic shores of South America, Brazil, one of the continent's largest countries with a predominantly Catholic population of 119 million, was under military rule from 1964 to 1985. During this period, a democratic movement was launched against the military rule; one

of the most distinguished politicians to come to the fore was Tancred Neves. It took twenty-one years of arduous struggle before he managed to rally the people against the military junta, whose leaders were finally forced to call for general elections. These took place in 1985. Mr Neves, who suffered great hardships, was elected President with an overwhelming majority. The media lauded his great victory, and one newspaper said, "His victory capped a political career spanning nearly 50 years."

The oath-taking ceremony of Mr Neves was to take place on March 15, 1985, in the Presidential palace. Unfortunately, however, hours before the function, he fell ill that day. He was immediately taken to one of the country's best hospitals, where he was kept for a month under the observation of foreign specialists. He underwent seven operations during this period, but all these efforts to save him were of no avail. Mr Neves died on 21 April 1985 at the age of 75.

How bewildering is man's ultimate fate! He spares no effort to reach his goals but does not receive the fruits of his labour. A crown of victory is prepared for him, but it never adorns his head, nor will it ever. On the contrary, the completion of his labours signals the beginning of his destruction.

Such instances clarify that the present world is only a place for action. It is not necessarily a place for receiving rewards. That place—the place of final reckoning—is elsewhere, far beyond this mundane world. It is in the world Hereafter.

IT TAKES AN EARTHQUAKE

If a man is to enter Paradise, a moral revolution of the intensity of an earthquake must occur within him. Only such a divine refinement is the price of Paradise.

If a man is to enter Paradise, he cannot do so after living a life full of errors of omission and commission, with a resolutely deaf ear turned towards his conscience. If he is to enter Heaven's gates, a moral revolution must occur within him. Moreover, it must be of such intensity that it is like a veritable earthquake. If this seems a very high price to pay, it must be remembered that it is in every way commensurate with the divine refinement of the Paradise he hopes to secure.

Everyone is bestowed with divine nature by birth. First, however, that divine nature must be nurtured and released, very much in the way that an enormous amount of energy is released from an atom when it is smashed. In his current life of trial, man's fundamental task is to produce just such an explosion from within so that the hidden divine self may appear.

Every man is born in tune with the nature of his Maker. However, circumstances, traditions, desires, and many other such pressures, draw veil after veil across his moral vision: blurring his perceptions and muting his conscience. This conditioning covers one's inner divine nature. Then, man gradually begins living according to how his thinking

has been conditioned. If he is to make any spiritual progress, he must recognize the artificiality of these veils and tear them aside, no matter what the material cost.

Making a break from one's existing mental makeup is one of the most challenging aspects. However, in the struggle to undertake this task, God has hidden all the secrets of His blessings for human beings. According to the Quran when a man makes this necessary break, his psyche is transcended and raised to the level of the divine. (17:84)

Once awakened, the divine nature becomes the direct recipient of God's blessings. He leaves this world of limitations and enters a world of boundless joy. Just as his thinking becomes divine, so also does his moral sense. It happens in the same way that a beautiful tree emerges from a seed. However, the most crucial factor is that the seed should be willing to break open and ultimately destroy itself so that this can happen.

Every man has a divine nature which can enter the gates of Paradise in the Hereafter. However, this hidden man can come into being only when the outer self is ready to produce an inner revolution of the intensity of an earthquake.

In order to promote his worldly desires and expediency, man places everything he cherishes at stake. Detachment from material goals and a refusal to act out of expediency would immediately open the gates of Paradise to him. Unfortunately, most people are unaware of this vital truth. If a man is to enter Paradise, a moral revolution of the intensity of an earthquake must occur within him. Only such a divine refinement is the price of Paradise.

Chapter 4
Realization of God

DISCOVERING GOD

To come to know God is to know the Lord of the Worlds, the Greatest and the Most Powerful One. It is a discovery that shatters one's whole being and creates a tumult within one's soul.

There is a verse in the Quran which says, "No just estimate have they made of God, such as is due to Him. But on the Day of Resurrection, the whole earth will lie within His grasp, while Heaven will be folded up in His right hand—Glory be to Him! Exalted is He above all that they associate with Him." (39:67)

A tradition related to this verse has come down to us through various channels with slight variations in wording. Imam Ahmad's version is on the authority of Abdullah ibn Umer. One day the Prophet recited this verse of the chapter, *Az-Zumar*. He was moving his hand, backwards and forwards. "God will reveal His might," he said. "He will say: 'I am the All-Powerful, the Highest, the Sovereign Lord, the Mighty and Gracious One. Where are the kings of the earth?'" Then Abdullah ibn Umer went on: "The Prophet was trembling so much that we thought he might fall, along with the pulpit he was standing on." (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith no. 5414; *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith no. 4534)

This is what happens to a person who indeed discovers God. The Prophet of God was not looking at his Lord face to face. However, the picture he had formed in his mind of God on High was so vivid that it looked as if he would fall

DISCOVERY OF GOD

on the ground in awe and bewilderment as he explained the Lord's might.

Such is the nature of the realization of God. To come to know God is to know the Lord of the Worlds, the Greatest and the Most Powerful One. To discover such a being is no simple matter. It is a discovery that shatters one's whole being and creates a tumult within one's soul. To come to know God is to see Him, though he has not yet come out into the open; it is to fall dumbfounded before Him, though He has not revealed Himself from behind the veil of the universe.

DISCOVERY OF GOD

The discovery of God comes from concentrating on God, seeing with divine vision, and hearing with divine ears. An individual discovers God by turning away from all else. Discovery of God is not granted to those who are attached to other things besides Him.

Someone once said to the renowned Indian scientist, Sir C. V. Raman, that the discoveries which scientists have made were not the achievement of scientists; they were the result of chance. "That is true," Dr Raman replied, "But the chance of this nature only happens to scientists."

Discovery essentially comes from the concentration of the mind. The more a man focuses on a particular subject; the

more enlightened he becomes. He becomes involved in it night and day. Thus, he develops a close mental affinity for it.

Scientific discoveries usually result from the familiarity one develops with a particular subject by fully concentrating on it. A slight allusion is enough for a scientist to grasp a whole topic. Discovery is usually a progression from partial truth to an absolute one. Such progression is only possible for those who are already engrossed in their subject and have become familiar with every side of it.

What is true of scientific discovery is also true of spiritual discovery. God is also a discovery for man. However, only a person engrossed in God can make such a discovery.

The discovery of God comes from concentrating on God, seeing with divine vision, and hearing with divine ears. When someone turns away from all else and turns towards God alone, then time and time again will he experience the discovery of God. The sight of the wonders of nature, the study of the history of man, contemplation of one's being—everything in the world will make him think of God; everything will turn his mind towards the Supreme Reality. He will see His glory everywhere. Only those who abide in God can discover Him. Discovery of God is a gift that cannot be granted to those attached to other things besides Him.

BELIEF AND DISBELIEF

To believe in God is to see the invisible force behind visible objects. Such a unique vision enables a man to penetrate superficial forms and perceive the ultimate reality.

Man has an innate need for something to depend upon in this world, which he can look up to. To believe in God is to look up to Him alone, while disbelief is to live in the veneration of others besides Him.

In ancient times, the awe of natural phenomena, such as the moon and the sun, dominated people's lives. In the modern age, however, man has become more materialistic, finding fulfilment in such things as wealth and the greatness of other human beings. Whatever the object of his veneration may be, man is satisfying an instinctive urge to look up to these things and depend upon them. The urge is real enough, but such means of fulfilling it, which amount to the worship of others besides God, are false.

To honestly believe in God is to find the true answer to the human search for a superior Being. It is to see beyond superficial forms to the Ultimate Reality hidden within all things.

The outward splendour of worldly things does not beguile a believer. He realizes that God has created everything. Things of material grandeur do not overawe him because he knows that they, like him, have been created by God. He does not look to mortals to fulfil his needs, for he knows they are

helpless before God—that all are His humble servants, in truth. He presses on until he reaches the Creator, passing by all creation.

A believer acknowledges that everything is from God. Seeing that he has no power in this world, he looks to God for help and protection. The beauty of this world reminds him of God's beauty; the greatness of natural phenomena impresses on him the greatness of the One who created them. So absorbed is he in the glory of God that he loves nothing more than to spend his time singing the praises of the Lord.

To believe in God is to see the invisible force behind visible objects. It requires a unique vision, enabling a man to penetrate superficial forms and perceive the ultimate reality.

An individual endowed with such vision sees God's greatness everywhere; he looks only to God as great. Therefore, he submits entirely to God and trusts in Him alone. So engrossed in God's overpowering greatness does he become that all worldly creatures, including himself, fade into insignificance in his sight.

DEVOTION TO GOD

A believer lives in the glory of God alone, while an unbeliever lives in the glory of things other than God.

Man requires a support system for his subsistence in this world. Every man lives in the glory of something or the other. A believer lives in the glory of God alone. An unbeliever lives in the glory of things other than God.

In ancient times, man lived in the glory of heavenly bodies such as the sun and the moon. In the present materialistic world, man lives in the glory of some contrived material power. Some have glorified wealth and pursued it to find the answer to their inner quest. Some others are engrossed in worshipping their heroes and leaders, living in someone else's glory. In this way, they derive satisfaction from their natural urge to rely on a sustainer that will support their existence.

All these are different forms of *shirk* or associating others with God. These are artificial solutions to a natural quest of man. A true believer finds the true answer to this natural quest. He does not get caught in the allure of external appearances; instead, he passes them by and reaches the ultimate goal.

A true believer is not deceived by the glitz and glamour of the world. To him, all these things are mere creations. He finds them in the same powerless position as himself. A *momin* does not stop at any of these things but continues his

journey until he reaches God. He passes by all of creation to reach the Creator.

A *momin* considers everything that belongs to him as given to him by God. He expresses his utter helplessness to God. In the beauty of the earth, he finds the beauty of God. The glory of the Universe makes him realize the glory of God. All greatness to him is only a reflection of the greatness of God. He loses himself in the glory of God, finding joy in praising and glorifying the Lord.

Faith in God refers to discovering the Unseen in the perceived; to uncovering the truth hidden in appearances. One who develops this kind of vision finds the glory of God all around him. He makes God alone his everything. He is so engrossed in the glory of God that he cannot see any other glory in himself or anybody else.

SEEING WONDERS IN USUAL PHENOMENA

Most people are struck only by the wonders of unusual events. However, a truly intelligent person sees wonders even in seemingly ordinary or usual phenomena.

In 1957, Russia sent its first Sputnik satellite into space. Then, in 1981, America sent its first space shuttle, Columbia, into space, with two people on board. It was made to be used for around a hundred space journeys.

Columbia weighed around 75 tonnes costing a huge amount of money, and it took nine years to construct. It travelled at 26,000 miles per hour, remaining in space for 54 hours and revolving around the earth 36 times. It traversed a total distance of around 10,00,000 miles and then returned to Earth, landing in the Californian desert. When it entered the atmosphere back to Earth, its friction caused its outside frame to shoot up to 1,15,000 degrees Celsius, but arrangements had been made to maintain a comfortable temperature inside for the two people aboard. As a result, the shuttle landed at almost precisely the appointed time—with a difference of just 10 seconds! Some 2,00,000 people gathered to see Columbia land. Besides, millions more saw the event on television.

John Young was one of the two people on board the Columbia flight. After being in a state of weightlessness for many hours, he was so stunned on returning to earth that he burst out: “What a way to come to California!”

John Young found all of this remarkable—travelling in space in a shuttle, landing in California in this fashion, and so on. However, the matter is that everything in this world is astounding! Every journey, whether on foot or in a vehicle or a space shuttle, entails so many factors and cosmic causes that if you think about it, an ordinary journey can seem so unique that you will cry out, “My walking, on my two feet, from one place to another is as amazing as travelling in the Columbia shuttle into space and landing in the Californian desert!”

Most people are struck only by the wonders of unusual events. However, a truly intelligent person sees wonders even in seemingly ordinary or usual phenomena.

RECOGNIZING THE TRUTH

A lover of truth recognizes truth wherever it is, whether it lies within his circle or outside it.

Shri Ram Ratan Kapila had a refrigerator business in Delhi, and Shri Moti Ram Sarraf was a jeweller in the same city. The two were great friends. They usually went out for a walk together in the morning and then returned home together. One day the two were walking in an area of Delhi. Shri Ram Ratan Kapila saw something shining by the side of the road. He thought it was a piece of glass and picked it up just for fun.

After their walk, they returned home. Shri Ram Ratan Kapila went to the basin to wash his hands and thoughtlessly put the object to one side.

Shri Moti Ram Sarraf then went to the same wash basin to wash his hands. He caught sight of the object, and as soon as he saw its glitter, he recognized it as a diamond. So, he picked it up, washed it, and took it to Shri Ram Ratan Kapila. His friend was astonished to hear that it was a diamond. "I thought it was only a piece of glass," he said. "It is just as well I did not throw it away."

THE TRUE DISCOVERY OF GOD

Shri Ram Ratan Kapila was not ignorant of diamonds. He had a diamond necklace at home, kept in a special cupboard with great care. However, he could not recognize a diamond lying on the road.

Both men were familiar with diamonds. The difference was that Shri Moti Ram was a jeweller. Therefore, he could recognize a diamond wherever it was. However, Shri Ram Ratan Kapila only knew the diamond in his own familiar necklace. He did not know how to recognize a diamond outside the necklace he was familiar with.

A real jeweller is not just one who recognizes a diamond on his necklace; a real jeweller recognizes a diamond wherever he sees it. In the same way, a lover of truth recognizes truth wherever it is, whether within his circle or outside it.

THE TRUE DISCOVERY OF GOD

True believers in God feel the joy of His discovery. So boundless is their happiness that they cannot but share it with others.

Most of the stars in the heavens are larger and more radiant than the sun and have been shining for billions of years without their reserves of thermal energy showing any signs of being exhausted. So how do stars produce such vast amounts of energy? It is a question finally answered by

the Noble Prize-winning astrophysicist Hans Bethe (1906-2005) after many years of scientific study.

The day he made his great scientific discovery—he was with his wife in New Mexico. They were out in the desert at night, and the stars shone brightly on the vast open expanse. His wife, Rose, exclaimed over their exceptional brightness, and Bethe replied, “Do you realize, just now, you are standing next to the only human being who knows why they shine?”

What Hans Bethe knew was only part of the answer. Neither he nor any other astrophysicist can say, or will ever be able to say, why or how this carbon cycle comes to operate in stars at all. The crux of the matter is that some things cannot even be approached by men of science, for they belong to a realm far beyond the scope of their scientific findings. The truth lies in the domain of the Almighty—the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. God has invested the stars with a lustre that seems almost magical.

It is one of the ironies of our God-created existence that a scientist should be so emotionally demonstrative when he has discovered how some part of nature works, but not why, while the far greater discovery of God and His works should arouse in him no such feelings. True believers in God feel the joy of His discovery, and so boundless is their happiness that they cannot but share it with others. If in thinking of God and carry out religious duties, they experience no such sense of uplift, it simply means that the actual discovery of their Maker yet awaits them.

REALIZATION OF TRUTH

The only ones who can succeed in the search for truth are those who forsake everything else and give themselves up to it entirely when it comes before them.

The human mind is a mirror of reality. Everyone knows the function of a mirror: it reproduces the image of anything that is in front of it. The image it produces corresponds precisely to the reflected object, leaving nothing out and adding nothing of itself. So, it is with the human mind. When reality is placed before this mirror, it is reproduced exactly. The image of truth reflected in the human mind is the same as that which stands before it. It recognizes the truth for what it is and accepts it as such.

This being the case, why does truth come before many people, yet they fail to accept it? The answer to this question is that it is always personal attachments and commitments that prevent one from accepting the truth. There can be no reason to deny the truth; those who do so are motivated by their attachment to something else, preventing them from attaching themselves to the truth.

The image will be obscured if a third object is placed between a mirror and the thing meant to be reflected. So, it is with truth and the human mind. If something else comes in between the two, then the image of truth that should be cast onto the mind becomes obscured. Therefore, nothing must be allowed to come in between oneself and truth:

there should be nothing to prevent one from accepting it. This is an essential precondition for realizing the truth, yet it is one that people are usually unable to fulfil. All too often, they let something else come in between themselves and the reality that has been placed before the mirror of their minds. Sometimes, people to whom one is attached come in the way of the truth. Sometimes, it is self-interest or some other commitment. However, in every day and age, people have let some unconnected things come in between themselves and truth, with the result that they remained bereft of what should have been lodged in their souls.

Abu Jahl was a major opponent of Prophet Mohammad. He was prevented from accepting the truth by a concern for his power and position. Taif was one of the places the Prophet of Islam visited in his early days in Makkah. The people of Taif refused to accept the truth that he presented before them because he appeared to them to be an insignificant person. How, they thought, can they be taught by one who does not rank high among the mighty of this world? As for the Jews, they also denied Prophet Mohammad. The reason for them doing so was their superiority complex. The Roman Emperor Heraclius showed clear signs of recognizing the truth of the message of Islam. However, he did not accept it because he did not want to become isolated from his people. In each case, the truth of Islam was recognized. There was no reason for these people's denial except for their blind commitment to something else they could not break away from.

GOD WILLING

Truth only accepts one who has accepted it without any reservation, who has given himself entirely up to it. Those attached to something else they cannot break away from can never find the truth, for they cannot give truth the attention it demands. Therefore, the only ones who can succeed in the search for truth are those who forsake everything else and give themselves up to it entirely when it comes before them.

GOD WILLING

Just as secular thinkers found only the outer structure instead of the inner reality, similarly, Muslim thinkers found only the outer form of Islam; they did not discover the real spirit of the religion.

Nikita Khrushchev had said, “Our rocket went to the moon, but nowhere it found God.” The former president of Communist Russia said it in a humorous tone. However, this holds in the case of secular people.

Natural sciences have been studied extensively in modern times. Many people have discovered various things, from astronomy to earthly sciences. However, if you read the books of these people, it seems that they did not find God anywhere in the universe. They travelled from Heaven to earth but saw no glimpses of God. They recorded the sounds travelling through the silent waves, but their ears did not

hear the voice of God. Their microscopes and binoculars showed them things that man had never seen before, but they did not shake hands with the angels of God scattered all over the universe.

However, the same thing has happened to the Muslim thinkers and leaders of the present day in a different form. Secular thinkers found only the outer structure instead of the inner reality. Similarly, Muslim thinkers found only the outer form of Islam; they did not discover the real spirit of the religion.

If you listen to these thinkers' speeches and read their biographies and books, you will find everything in them except the real spirit of Islam. There will be mention of meetings with human beings, but there will be no mention of meeting with God and the glory of God. They will be enchanted by the loftiness and majesty of human art. Their writings will echo the worldly events, but there will be no mention of the events concerning the Hereafter or the glory and majesty of God. They will reveal they are astonishing discoveries. However, nowhere will you find any sign of their hearts being moved by the discovery of God.

INCREASING IN FAITH

The discovery of God is a never-ending event. Just as a scientist discovers something new in the world of creation every day, a believer should always make discoveries about his Creator—discoveries that increase his faith every day.

“Observing nature is my religion,” a scientist once reflected. “If I do not discover something new in nature any day, I feel the day has been wasted.” If this is the state of one who is absorbed in God’s creation, how can the state of one who is absorbed in the Creator Himself be any different? Just as the scientist discovers something new in the world of creation every day, a believer should always make discoveries about his Creator—discoveries that increase his faith. Any day that he does not find something new is like a day that has been wasted; it is as if he has not established contact with God on that day.

Faith is another word for the discovery of God. God is a never-ending reality; He has no limit. So, the discovery of God is also a never-ending event. Faith that does not grow is not faith at all; it is just a manner of neglecting God.

If an individual’s mind is constantly directed towards God, he will repeatedly experience new manifestations of His glory; time and time again, a new divine light will shine on him. Just as God’s virtues are interminable, similarly, a believer’s search for knowledge of God is a journey that never comes to an end.

This new knowledge is sometimes expressed in the form of divine states with which a man was hitherto unacquainted. Sometimes, it surges to his lips in the form of words of supplication that he had never conceived before. Sometimes, a previously concealed secret of God's wisdom becomes apparent to him. Sometimes, he attains unknown degrees of proximity to God. Sometimes, a profound new understanding of truth is inspired within him, which all the words he knows are inadequate to express.

THINGS LOSE THEIR NOVELTY

We should look at God's creation around us with great wonder. However, we should not lose our sense of awe and gratitude simply because familiarity has taken the edge off our awareness.

When opened, it was like a small tent, and when shut, it was all curiously joined and would fold up to the length of a man's arm." If you have not already guessed, this curious description applies to the umbrella as we know it today. However, no one nowadays finds it necessary to describe an umbrella or express any astonishment over it because it is now such a commonplace object. However, when it was first manufactured in London in 1749, it seemed such a strange, new, wonderful contrivance that it caused great excitement. An invention that aroused even greater awe was the hand pump which was installed for the first time in

an Indian village at the beginning of the 20th century. When it caused water to gush from the ground, a village woman exclaimed, “Now it is only death which can defeat man.” Today, we feel that there is nothing so extraordinary about a hand pump, and even pumps that operate on electricity and diesel oil have come to be regarded as run-of-the-mill items of agricultural equipment.

When something becomes familiar—a discovery or an invention—we tend to take it for granted. We no longer have any sense of wonder about its appearance, functioning and creation. This is even more true of the vast array of God’s creations. However, everything in this world, be it a leaf, a snowflake, or a ray of sunshine, is a veritable miracle of creation. From his earliest childhood, man has been aware of these things; yet they have become objects of such familiarity that he almost ceases to notice them. Imagine how different his attitude to them would be if he were to see them for the first time! He would be like someone who had been cured of total blindness—examining his surroundings with tremendous joy and a great sense of wonderment.

This is how we should look at God’s creation all around us. We should not lose our sense of awe and gratitude simply because familiarity has taken the edge off our awareness.

The next time the sunlight enters a darkened room, a bird sings by the wayside, the moon casts its silvery spell, or a rose gives its fragrance to the air, we should remember that these are things which go far and beyond human creativity and that, ultimately, we owe everything to God.

REMEMBERING GOD

Dhikr is to remember God, the greatest of all realities. Remembrance of such a Being is bound to be the greatest of all human experiences; there are no words that fully express the profundity of that feeling.

Dhikr is an Arabic word; it means remembrance. *Dhikrullah*, then, simply means to remember God. It is not a formal act but rather a spontaneous one, which comes as naturally to one who has come to know God as singing does to a bird.

A spiritual upheaval of utmost intensity occurs in an individual who discovers God in all His power and glory. Suddenly, God is forever in his heart and thoughts. His constant remembrance of God expresses itself in multifarious forms. Sometimes it is an inward experience—a tingle of joy, a shiver of fear that creeps down his body as thoughts of God fill his mind. Sometimes, he enters into a spontaneous outpouring of thanksgiving and adoration. This state of mind constitutes remembrance of God, whether it is expressed in the form of words of praise or silent thoughts.

Sometimes, a man looks at outer space in its infinite vastness and ponders on the stars and constellations. “How great must be the Lord who has arranged this marvellous display and runs it with such superb finesse!” Such is his reaction to the sight spread out before him. Sometimes, he gazes at rivers, trees, and mountains, and his heart is touched by their beauty, by the very meaningfulness of their existence. If an individual has discovered God, everything around

them reminds him of God, sparking a never-ending litany of remembrance in his mind and heart.

Then he will look critically at himself and realize his errors and shortcomings. Moved to seek the Lord's forgiveness, he will pray to Him for salvation from eternal punishment: "Lord, admit me into the shade of Your mercy on that Day when there will be no other place for me to take refuge." Moreover, in his helplessness and impotence, he will see the power and majesty of God. He will then cry out, "Lord, assuage my fears with Your Almighty power!"

When feelings of the Lord's presence enter a man's heart, and he puts these feelings into words, that is when he remembers God; that is when he is engaged in *Dhikr*. *Dhikr* is to remember God, the greatest of all realities. Remembrance of such a being is bound to be the greatest of all human experiences; there are no words that fully express the profundity of that feeling.

Chapter 5
Verdict of God

THE DAY OF JUDGEMENT

God will judge everybody's actions on His touchstone in the next world. On that day, that which they were proud of in this world will only cause disgrace and humiliation when they come before God.

In the Bangalore edition of *The Indian Express* dated September 9, 1983, there was a headline: 'All that Glitters Is Not Gold'.

The story was about Miss Sybil D'Silva, who lived on Artillery Road, Bangalore. She was visited in her home by a woman aged about 35, holding a child of about six months in her arms. She told Miss D'Silva that her husband was seriously ill and that she needed 5000 rupees urgently for his treatment. "I am not begging from you," she said, taking a golden necklace out of her pocket. "All I want to do is sell this golden necklace. However, dear to me, my husband's health is dearer. It would sell for 10,000 rupees in the market. However, because I need the money, I will give it to you for just 5000."

Miss D'Silva said she was not interested, but the woman kept pleading the desperateness of her case. Eventually, she persuaded Miss D'Silva to give her the money and buy the necklace.

The next day Miss D'Silva took the necklace to a goldsmith on Bangalore's Commercial Street. He tested it on his touchstone. After examination, its reality came to light.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN THAT DAY?

Telling her story to the Bangalore police, Miss D'Silva said: "He told me it was brass."

So, will it be in the next world? In this world, everyone is delighted with his deeds; everyone thinks of what he has done as gold. However, gold is only accurate when shown to be such on the goldsmith's touchstone. So, God will judge everybody's actions on His touchstone in the next world.

The value of gold will only be attached to those actions proven to be made of gold when put on God's touchstone. If one's "golden actions" are brass, they will only mean disgrace and doom for him. People attach so much value to actions that they are never ready to forsake them; they will seek to be rid of these same actions. They will disown that which was dearest to them in this world. However, on that day, there will be no disownment. That which they were proud of in this world will cause them only disgrace and humiliation when they come before God.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN THAT DAY?

On the Day of Judgement, God Almighty will give to whomever He wants, and no one will be able to overturn His Will; try as hard as he or she might.

God is the Lord of everything. Whatever anyone receives is given by God. No one but God has anything to give to

anybody. Thus, if a person were to snatch away something from someone that the latter has legitimately acquired, it is, as it were, snatching something given by God. That person wants to try to go against God's plan.

Suppose someone gets a house, and others plot to take it away from him. If someone has a legitimate source of livelihood, people want to destroy him economically. An individual leads a respectable life, but others want to rob him of his respect. Someone is at peace with his surroundings, but people institute false cases against him to destroy his peace. All such actions interfere with what God has arranged. It is a war against the All-Powerful God by absolutely helpless creatures.

What do such actions amount to? God wants something, but these creatures want something else. For example, God decided to arrange for the allocation of livelihood among people in a particular way, but these creatures do not agree. These creatures' defiance of God appears to work in this world, but this apparent success is only because, in this world, people have been granted freedom to test their ability to use it wisely. As soon as the period allocated for this test is over, people will find themselves so utterly bereft of power that they will not even have words to utter against others or the capacity to harm them.

In this world, human beings have freedom. Here, people are free to go against what God has laid down as proper for human beings to do. For example, they have the freedom to try to condemn the allocation of livelihoods among people

DO MILLIONS LEAD TO GOD?

that God has arranged. However, what will the condition of such people be when this freedom, linked to the test of life, comes to an end; when only God's Will shall prevail?

On that day, the All-Powerful God will say that He gives to whomever He wants and that no one can overturn His Will, try as hard as he or she might.

DO MILLIONS LEAD TO GOD?

Today, wealth is held to be of paramount importance.
However, in the next life, good deeds alone will count.

A 63-year-old Italian-born American living on the outskirts of New York remained unemployed for eight years. Although he was a skilled carpenter, he remained unemployed for eight years and had to eke out an existence on a modest union pension. He had not even enough resources to reap the tomato crop on the land he owned next to his house.

According to a news item that appeared in the *New Straits Times*, Kuala Lumpur, on the 28th of July 1984, one day the man decided to buy a lottery ticket. To his surprise, on 27th July 1984, the news of his having bagged the first prize of twenty million dollars was broken to him—the biggest lottery prize ever received by anyone anywhere.

The news was first announced over television. Immediately afterwards, a press conference was called. Talking to reporters, the carpenter told them that he was astonished

to hear the news. He said, "I kept checking my number with the one being announced." Even then, he could not quite believe that it was he who had won the prize. His first reaction after hearing the news was to rush to his wife, who was asleep. He said to her, "I think we are millionaires." Then, while talking to the newsmen, he said, "I got whatever I need. I got my house. I got my tomatoes."

In this world, money suffices people's material needs. It, therefore, makes them think of it as an end in itself; possession of wealth comes to be regarded as everything. However, in the next world, it is not money that will matter but God's grace.

The problems that one faces in this life are very different from those that will have to be faced in the life to come. Today, wealth is held to be of paramount importance. However, in the next life, good deeds alone will count. Today, there is nothing we cannot obtain in return for money. However, the only way our needs will be satisfied tomorrow is by God's grace.

THE VANITY OF HUMAN WISHES

If a man cannot bear being hurt by so much as a pebble today, how will he be able to bear a mountain of suffering tomorrow?

Dr Uttam Parkash, head of the Department of Surgery at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi,

excelled in his field and was awarded the coveted title of Padma Bhushan.

This distinction, however, was not enough to satisfy his ambitions. On the 17th of February 1982, he was to preside over an international Congress on Surgery, the success of which would give an even greater impetus to his career. He took special pains with all of the arrangements, even managing to persuade President Sanjiva Reddy to inaugurate the function. However, when he was congratulating himself that the arrangements were finally perfect, at the eleventh hour, a message came from the Rashtrapati Bhavan Secretariat saying that the President could grace the occasion only if the Health Minister were also present. It was a matter of strict protocol. The situation became highly awkward because the Health Minister had not been initially included, and his name did not appear on any of the programmes. However, it now being essential to invite him, Dr Parkash began to make herculean efforts to ensure that he would not decline the invitation out of pique. However, it was all to no avail.

Indeed, the minister considered it beneath his dignity to accept an invitation sent to him at the very last minute, and he refused to participate in the function. It was a great shock to Dr Parkash and more than he could bear, for three days before the inauguration, on the 14th of February, he succumbed to a massive heart attack. He was just 54 years of age. A *Hindustan Times* reporter very aptly described him as “the most worried man in town before taking the long road.” (*Hindustan Times*, February 1, 1982)

Today, people find it difficult to deal with even the slightest indignity. However, what will their fate be in the next world when they are hungry and thirsty, and there is no food to allay hunger and no water to slake their thirst? What will they do in the blazing heat when there is no shade to take a retreat? How will they endure God's terrible, engulfing wrath when no one can save them? If a man cannot bear being hurt by so much as a pebble today, how will he be able to bear a mountain of suffering tomorrow?

THE GREATEST TEACHER: DEATH

Death is the greatest teacher, but man lives through his life as if there were no such thing awaiting him at the end of life's journey.

Once when Julius Caesar had to pass by a statue of Alexander the Great in Spain, he paused to gaze upon it and with tears coming into his eyes, he said, "In the whole of my life, I have not been able to achieve even one-tenth of the feats performed by Alexander in the space of a single decade."

Alexander the Great (356-323 BC), the son of the Greek King Philip, conquered significant parts of the known world of his time in a span of mere ten years. Taking up a project entertained by his father, Alexander decided to attack the massive Persian Empire, marched in 334 BC into

Asia Minor, and quickly subjugated the cities in that region. He then conquered Phoenicia and Syria with comparative ease, and although he met with serious resistance at Tyre, he overcame this with the help of a fleet and the city was destroyed. Next, he went to Egypt, which submitted to him without a struggle. Today, the city of Alexandria, which he founded, still exists as a monument to his victory in Egypt. Then, setting out on a different career of victory, he passed through Syria into Persia (now Iran) and marched up the valley of the Tigris through Mesopotamia (now Iraq). He captured Susa, Persepolis, Ecbatana, and other Persian cities with their treasures and advanced as far as the Caspian Sea. The barbarian tribes dwelling on this seacoast were promptly brought under his rule. Alexander did not tolerate opposition, always pursuing a policy of nipping it in the bud. The new empire was organized, into provinces, each keeping its traditions and institutions. About this time, he crushed a rising led by Bessus, the successor of Darius. He next entered India, crossing the Indus near Attock in 326 BC, winning a great victory. After some further conquests, he returned through Baluchistan to Persepolis and set himself to organise the great empire he had conquered.

Alexander was a great administrator and a great soldier and spread the influence of Greece throughout the empire he had won. However, what did fate have in store for him? Amid this tremendous task and while planning a new expedition into Arabia, he died in the ancient city of Babylon—as defenceless in the face of death as any poor man in his

miserable hut. Although he started on a career of conquest with few parallels in world history, his life was too short for his empire to be welded together. Moreover, his only son having been killed in battle, none of his acquisitions could be handed down to his heirs. His vast empire was then divided between three military officers, none of whom was related to him, and there was no further cohesive or unifying force to hold it together; it was not long before his hard-won empire disintegrated.

When death comes, it impresses the immediate beholders of its ravages just how helpless man is before his Maker. Death strikes around him, sparing neither the high nor the low, yet people who are not directly affected fail to understand its significance. It has a lesson to teach, but man ignores it. Moreover, if he has paid no heed to the most urgent realities of life, death will undoubtedly leave him no respite to cogitate upon them at that time, and there will be no breathing space for him to learn lessons which he should have learned long before.

Death is the greatest teacher, but man lives through his life as if there were no such thing awaiting him at the end of life's journey.

FIVE SECONDS TO GO

Anything done only for God's sake will help man in the Afterlife. Each step that man takes in this world leads him relentlessly towards either Paradise or Hell in the Hereafter.

Once when I was on a visit to Meerut I went for a stroll one evening with my host, Maulana Shakeel Ahmed Qasmi. We were walking along the Sadar Bazaar when, all of a sudden, the whole front of a house just a few yards ahead of us, collapsed without warning, blocking the entire width of the street with debris. We were hardly five seconds away from the scene of this tragic accident. Had we been five seconds earlier, or had the house caved in five seconds later, there is no way that we could have escaped. Our deaths would have been instantaneous. So, while we happily imagined that our final destination lay far ahead, our journey would have been cut short in the middle.

At that time, it occurred to me that man is separated from death by a mere five seconds. At any point in time, there is the chance that man will make this five-second journey—and find himself in another world.

If only man could quite finally grasp the enormity of the fact that the distance between him, at any given point in his life, and death, could be so infinitesimally short, he would undergo the most amazing metamorphosis; he would continue to live in this world, but his thoughts would then become firmly focused on the life to come. Man needs to

realize that he is standing on death's doorstep, immediately after death, in the words of the Prophet of Islam, he either would enter the garden of Paradise or plunge into the pit of Hellfire. (*Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Hadith No. 2460). Each step that man takes in this world leads him relentlessly toward one of the two extremes. However, man has become so insensitive to this reality that he seldom sees fit to consider it seriously.

People trust false ideals and worship them as if they were holy, but only the humble reverence man has for God in this life can be of any avail in the next eternal world. True worship means fearing God so that He comes to entirely dominate man's thoughts. He becomes the supreme force in his life and monitors all one's affairs. Whatever is done then is for the sake of God, for the love of God, out of fear of God, and for no other. In short, a man's genuine concern is for life in the world to come. Given such concern, life's mundane affairs should pale into insignificance.

AN UNFINISHED STORY

Every human being in this world is a tale left halfway. As an individual seems to be near his destination, he is suddenly taken away. Our final destination is the Hereafter, not this world.

Mr P.N. Pathak joined the *Hindustan Times* staff as an ordinary worker in 1958 and, owing to his devotion and dedication to

work, finally succeeded in securing the high post of Deputy Superintendent of its composing department. His early death due to heart failure at the age of fifty on December 27, 1984, brought his career to an untimely end. On this sad occasion, the note in the newspaper said, quite simply, "He rose to the present position by sheer hard work." (*Hindustan Times*, December 28, 1984)

After completing his education in Allahabad, Mr Pathak worked with the *Times of India* and *Indian Express*; then, he joined the staff of the *Hindustan Times*, where he found the atmosphere conducive to dedicated work. It involved a long and laborious struggle of 25 years to reach this high post, but death cut his career short before he had time to enjoy the fruits of his labour.

Man's fate does, indeed, seem tragic and ironic. He works hard in this world to achieve some goal, but he has hardly been able to have reaped the fruits of his labours when he is removed from the scene.

How distressing is this end of life? However, no one stops to give it a thought. Instead, everyone sets himself to repeating the same story as his predecessor. Moreover, how many of these stories reach a happy conclusion? There is no human being whose life story ever quite reaches completion. However, no one seems to be concerned about discovering the reason. No one appears keen enough to find the path that will lead him to complete his story successfully.

Every human being in this world is a tale left halfway. As one seems to be near one's destination, one is suddenly taken

away. It is as if life were without a destination. Stranger still is the negligence of man towards the gravest of realities.

However, this is only a temporal way of looking at things. We have these feelings because we think of our final destination as being in this world, not the Hereafter. It is only when, with the help of God, we change this attitude that we understand that completion, fulfilment, and happiness belong to the next life and not to this.

SEEK THE ETERNAL WORLD

Death is a person's greatest compulsion. Death enters triumphantly into both the palace and hovel. Death reminds a person to rise beyond 'today' and to think of 'tomorrow'—of the eternal world after death.

Turtles live up to 500 years. Some trees can remain standing for a thousand years. Mountains and rivers can retain their glory for millions of years. However, human life is not more than 50-100 years. Man, who appears to be the noblest and superior of all creatures, lives a concise life in comparison.

What is stranger is that this short human life is nothing but a continuous story of failure. An individual's life is so full of sorrow that the few moments of joy he experiences seem to be nothing more than an aberration or delusion. Sickness, accidents, old age, dreams, and hopes are continuously trampled upon—that is what life seems like. Moreover, in

the end, after spending his days on earth in sorrow, a person accepts defeat in the face of death.

A poor man is unhappy that he does not have a house and enough money to meet his needs. However, on the other hand, the conditions of people whom a poor man envies are not significantly different. Having money creates even greater problems for a rich man than the problems faced by a poor man who has no money. A famous man, whom people constantly surround, is so troubled and miserable that he cannot get a wink of sleep at night without consuming pills. In short, every person in this world is unhappy—each in a different way.

Even if you manage to save yourself from unfavourable conditions and acquire that good fortune called joy and peace, how long will that state last? Even if you garner an enormous treasury of joys by some means, it will keep you happy just for a day, at the very most. And then the Angel of Death will suddenly arrive and grab you, and all your wealth or the army you have mustered to protect you will not be able to save you. Death overtakes everyone—rich and poor alike. It enters triumphantly into both palace and hovel. Death is a person's greatest compulsion.

Death reminds a person to rise beyond 'today' and to think of 'tomorrow'—of the eternal world after death. It tells an individual to search for success on the other side of life—in the world to come. A truly successful person draws this lesson from death. If you remain deprived of this lesson, your joys, which you wallow in this world, will soon be

snuffed out, and after death, you will find yourself in utter darkness.

THE BEGINNING, NOT THE END

Everyone is constantly making plans for the life he will lead tomorrow, but only when death strikes at lightning speed does he finally understand that his 'tomorrow' will be—not in this world—but the next, eternal world.

On July 18, 1981, a railway guard named Jabir Husain set off on his last official journey on the railways. On the following day, his long period of service would be over. With a great sense of pleasurable anticipation, he contemplated the life of retirement that stretched before him—a life of ease with the freedom to do exactly as he pleased. As he set off on this last journey, he said with great satisfaction to his colleagues, "From tomorrow, I shall be starting on a new life!" For this journey, these prophetic words were his last in more senses than one. The express train on which he was travelling was a mere sixty kilometres away from its destination when it collided with a goods train, and Jabir Husain was killed outright. Commenting on fate's irony, a railway official said, "Just another sixty kilometres and it would have been the end of his official journey." (*Indian Express*, July 18, 1981)

Who does not picture a long and eventful life for himself? Everyone thinks that he will reach some tremendous and

HOW STRANGE THAT LIFE SHOULD END LIKE THAT

exciting turning point in his life in just “another sixty kilometres”. However, before the sixty-kilometre mark can be reached, the angel of death swoops down upon him and, catching him unaware, bears him off to another world. Everyone is constantly making plans for the life he will lead tomorrow, but only when death strikes at lightning speed does he finally understand that his ‘tomorrow’ will be—not in this world—but the next, eternal world. Where he had believed implicitly that he was nearing the end of some pleasant terrestrial journey and approaching some highly coveted goal, he was, in fact, upon the brink of eternity—at the beginning of things, not the end.

HOW STRANGE THAT LIFE SHOULD END LIKE THAT

Peace and harmony on earth can only come from a man learning his limitations. There is no better way of learning this lesson than by remembering death.

Nandini, daughter of Govind Narain, former governor of Karnataka, was just 38 years old when she passed away in New Delhi on September 16, 1981. Thus, a young, vibrant life came to a sudden halt; a cheerful face was removed from the scene of life.

Nandini was an intelligent and healthy person. After receiving higher education in India, she acquired a degree in

journalism from America and became a senior reporter with the *Hindustan Times*. Her versatile and dashing talent made her a popular figure with her colleagues. As one of them put it: "She loved life to the full and wanted to live it to the full."

Several of her colleagues contributed to a commemorative article published in *Hindustan Times* on September 17, 1981. They concluded their article with these words: "It is a cruel reminder of the fact that there is a deadline for everyone."

How strange it is that the flame of life should suddenly be extinguished, a laughing face suddenly grows still to be buried beneath the earth: how strange that a spirit full of hope and aspirations should be removed from the scene of life, leaving all its hopes and aspirations behind in the world!

How meaningful life appears to be and how meaningless its conclusion renders it! How free man appears to be, but how helpless he is before death! How dear he holds his desires and ambitions, only for fate to ruthlessly stamp them out!

Remembrance of death alone should be enough to cure man's rebellious nature. Peace and harmony on earth can only come from a man learning his limitations and resigning himself to them. There is no better way of learning this lesson than by remembering death.

THE MOMENT OF DEATH

Death is not the end of our life. Instead, it is the start of a new stage of life. This stage will, for some, be a dungeon, or they will be ushered into the gardens of Paradise, leading to all kinds of comforts.

The moment of death is more severe than any other imaginable or unimaginable moment. All other difficulties humans encounter pale in utter insignificance on death's face.

Death is the journey toward the most severe stage in life, where one has no control over anything whatsoever and is entirely empty-handed and completely helpless.

Human beings are so weak that they cannot tolerate even a minor unfavourable condition or situation. If you are poked with a needle, have to face hunger or thirst for a while, or do not get sleep for a few days, your anguish will know no bounds. However, we have forgotten how vulnerable we are because we have all we need in this world. We are unaware of our reality.

Suppose this world is snatched away from us, where there is air and light and where human civilization is made possible by using the bounties of Nature. It will be impossible for human beings to create a parallel world elsewhere in the cosmos in such a situation.

When people face difficulties, they start making a big hue and cry about it. However, if they knew about the

impending Day of Judgment, they would cry, "O God! What will happen then is much more severe than now, here in this world!"

Because human beings revel in honour and comfort in this world, they are overwhelmed by pride. However, if they knew what would happen on the Day of Judgment, they would cry out, "O God! This honour and comfort have no value if they do not last after death!"

Death is not the end of our life. Instead, it is the start of a new stage of life. This stage will, for some, be a dungeon, or they will be ushered into the gardens of Paradise, leading to all kinds of comforts.

AT DEATH'S DOOR

Every person is travelling from life to death. Death means entry into a world based on the eternal consequences of our actions in the life before death. The only one who lives in the consciousness of God and the Hereafter can save himself.

Death is the most certain stage in life. Every one of us has to pass through this stage. For every being bestowed with life, the arrival of death is a must. Every living creature will one day die. Every eye that sees will one day lose its light. Every tongue that speaks will one day fall silent. Every person will one day be brought to stand before Death's door. At that

moment, the world will be behind him, and in front of him will be the everlasting Hereafter. He will be leaving a world he will never visit again and entering a world he will never be able to come out of. He will be removed from the field of action and taken to where he will have to face the eternal consequences of his actions while on earth.

Life is unreliable, whereas death is inevitable. We are alive only because we have not died as yet. Moreover, we do not know when death will come. Every moment, we are advancing toward death. We are closer to death than to life. People think that they are alive, but actually, they are dead. We have no idea when death will arrive. It can arrive at any moment. It keeps arriving at every moment, so it is more appropriate to say that it has already arrived rather than say it will arrive sometime in the future. This is why a saying of Prophet Muhammad tells us to count ourselves among the dead, or the 'people of the graves'. (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 5002)

Death nullifies everything. It is the most severe event of our lives. If death were simply the end of life, it would not be that significant. If death only meant that we would no longer exist as beings that walk, see, and hear, it would, despite all its terrors, be simply an event that occurs at a particular moment rather than an issue with eternal implications. However, the fact is that death is not the end of our lives. Instead, it is the beginning of a new and eternal life. Death means entry into a world based on the eternal consequences of our actions in the life before death.

Every person is travelling from life toward death. For some, this journey is for the sake of this world. For others, it is for the sake of the Hereafter. Some people spend their lives drowned in the things of this visible world. Others live in the things of the invisible or spiritual world. Some people spend their entire lives rushing to fulfil their desires and satisfy their egos. Others are overwhelmed by the fear and the love of God.

The difference between these two types of people may not be apparent in this world, but this is not so far as what will happen after their deaths. He who lives in God and the consciousness of the Hereafter is saving himself, while he who lives in worldly pleasures and the desires that his ego constantly hankers after is destroying himself.

REMEMBERING DEATH

If only man were to remember death, the things that make him cruel and unjust would become meaningless as he would realize that they are leading him to Hell.

Man has endless words at his disposal in this world, but there will come a time when he will be at a loss for words. There will be no one to listen to what he has to say, no press to print what he writes, and no loudspeaker to announce his words. The fool's Paradise he has constructed for himself will be razed to the ground. He will look for some respite from anguish and despair, but there will be none.

WHEN DEATH WILL EXPOSE EVERYTHING AS FALSE

If only man were to remember death, the things that make him cruel and unjust would become meaningless; he would realize that such actions would lead him towards Hell. For example, man cannot use the wealth he holds so dearly before death comes and severs him from his earnings for all time. If man were to remember this fact, he would not be so obsessed with self-enrichment in this world. Likewise, people plot the destruction of others, but death comes between them and their enemies before they can carry out their plots. If one constantly keeps this fact in mind, one will never seek to harm others; one will never plot the downfall of another.

No one is ready to buy a house to be demolished the next day. No one inhabits a city about to be devastated by an earthquake. However, everyone makes the much more serious mistake of ignoring the most severe earthquake which will strike us—death.

WHEN DEATH WILL EXPOSE EVERYTHING AS FALSE

On the Day of Judgment, only those people will be safe
who have taken refuge in the edifice of God.

It will be a strange moment when people realize that whatever they did in this world, thinking it to be some worthy action, is the inaction of the lowest sort!

In this world, people think highly of themselves and strut about puffed up with pride, whereas actually, the only thing they can take pride in is submitting to God's commandments. People think they are being very successful by trying to rationalize or explain their misdeeds, while their success lies in openly acknowledging their faults. They have been given the power of speech so that they use it to praise God, but they employ it instead to shower praises on fellow human beings. Emotions such as fear and love have been placed in them, so they should devote these to God, but they have created things as the objects of their fear and love. They think that accumulating material wealth is the most important thing, whereas the highest thing for them is spending their wealth on God's path till they have nothing left. They should have consideration for the weak, but instead, they ignore them and flatter the strong. They should devote themselves to searching for and discovering the meaningfulness of life, but instead, they drown themselves in furious agitation. The secret of their actual progress lies in engaging in constant introspection, but instead, they are busy inspecting and criticizing others. They should consider worldly wealth and worldly fame and glory as unreal and should have no attachment to them, but they begin thinking these are the most important things of all.

People seek the support of something or some being besides God, imagining it to be a strong refuge. Imagine their condition when, after they die, they will learn that besides God, no one can be a refuge for anyone! People

accumulate worldly wealth and fondly imagine they have obtained what needs to be had. Imagine their condition when death will expose everything of theirs to be false and when they will realize that they have acquired nothing at all! People prepare long lists of other people's mistakes. Imagine their state when angels will present them with a list of misdeeds! People think that this life is the be-all and the end-all. Imagine their state when they will discover that the real issue was death, not this life that lasts for just a few days!

People use the criteria they invented to convince themselves that they are in the right. Imagine their state when they realize that only those who were correct according to God's criteria were genuinely right! People often think they are fortunate to find a huge crowd to welcome them. Imagine their condition when they realize that only that person is fortunate whom God and His angels were waiting to welcome!

Every person has built a fantasy world of his own and is happy living in it. However, the Day of Judgment will destroy all these make-believe edifices. Only those who have taken refuge in the edifice of God and are in God's shade will be safe.

KEEPING ONE'S MIND ON TOMORROW

People live for the present, entirely forgetting the future. They do not realize that they are bound for the grave, where they will be brought up in the Divine Court to be judged.

In 1898, Lord Curzon was appointed the Viceroy of India. He had two daughters. When Lady Curzon was expecting their third child, she and her husband hoped that it would be a boy. However, their hopes were dashed when in March 1904, another baby girl was born to them. The couple stayed in Naldara during her birth and named their daughter Alexandra Naldara Curzon after the place. Later on, Lady Curzon returned to London. In one of the letters that Lord Curzon wrote to her from the summer capital Simla, he consoled her with these words:

“After all, what does sex matter after we are gone?”

Maybe these words just signified an attempt on Lord Curzon's part to hide his frustration. However, the reality he expressed will solve most of life's problems if one becomes conscious.

Man desires money, offspring, and power more than anything else. He does all he can to acquire them. However, if a man thinks about it, finally, he will leave all these things behind. What is the good of having something which one is bound to lose? If people were only to realize this, they would

become content with what they have. The oppression and cruelty perpetrated in the world because of greed would stop.

There is not much difference between finding and losing in this world, for no value is attached to finding something when one is only going to lose it. How much effort a man puts into acquiring wealth in this world: yet the inevitable result of his efforts is that he leaves everything behind. Every life eventually ends in death. When death comes, it tears a man away from the things he was most attached to on earth.

People live for the present; they entirely forget about the future. They think they can build a happy life for themselves by bringing destruction upon others. They do not realize that they are bound to the grave. They seek to ruin others financially by bringing suits against them in human courts. However, they are heading for ruin; it is they who will be brought up in the Divine Court to be judged. They ignore others and take delight in their glory, ignorant that soon their vainglory will vanish into thin air, and they will be exposed for the helpless creatures that they are.

O MAN!

When man reaches the next world, the power to make decisions will lie with God and not man.

Around a dozen eggs were kept on the table. They all seemed all right. However, when they were broken, each one turned out to be rotten! So, none were good, even though they all looked fine from the outside.

The same is happening with people these days. Externally, everyone seems to be a decent human being. They wear good clothes. They speak beautiful things. They all have a long list of stories of their doings that they love narrating. However, if you experience them, you will discover that they are very different. They are beautiful from the outside but not quite so from the inside.

When a problematic situation arises—when there is a question of a business transaction, when there is some complaint or bitterness, when it is a matter of someone's interests being hurt, and so on—one discovers that a person's inner reality is not the same as what appears from the outside. Ugliness is hidden behind beautiful garb. Selfishness, superficiality, show, pride, jealousy, opportunism, prejudice, and exploitation are hidden behind people's exteriors. Everyone seems like a 'good egg' on the outside, but the reality is very different if you break the 'egg' and see things inside the person.

WHEN TRUTH IS REVEALED

This is how the world is today. If you deeply examine things, you will hear either the sadistic laughter of the oppressor or the pathetic cries of the oppressed. You will see people driven by the most terrible impulses to fulfil their selfish desires, living in a state of total unawareness.

However, this is not going to remain forever. Very soon, the time will come when man will find himself in another world, where the power to make decisions will lie with God and not man.

WHEN TRUTH IS REVEALED

In the next world, only those who are truly right will be proved right. Falsehood will be exposed as nothing but false.

The following verse of the Quran helps us understand the difference between real and hypocritical prostration.

“Some people have not, in their hearts, bowed to God. Their outward prostration is a mere pretence. In the next world, they will be told to bow down before the Lord, but they will not be able to do so.” (68:42)

Prostration is not just a ritual and time-bound physical activity; it is to surrender ourselves to the sublime reality. It is to make ourselves follow the truth in our whole life. So, this verse of the Quran does not just refer to prostration

in a limited sense; it indicates a truth that pertains to the whole of our lives.

In this world, people—both on an individual and national level—do not in their hearts bow to reality; they do not adopt the path of truth. However, in their outward demeanour, they pretend to be on the side of truth; they speak words that make it seem right and are not wronging or exploiting others.

However, such deceit is only possible in this world of trial. In the next world, everything will change. Fake notes can be passed on the streets, but banks will not accept them. In the same way, in the next world, there will be no possibility of making lies appear genuine, and unjustness appear like justness.

In the next world, words will refuse to take on false meanings. No one will be able to call injustice as justice and disguise falsehood as truth. The difference between outward and inward reality will disappear. An individual will only be able to express what is in his heart. Man would appear exactly as he was in relation to reality, rather than how he used to contrive to be in front of others.

If people can convince others that they are in the right, they are sure that they have been proved right. However, only those who have proven right in God's sight are genuinely in the right. Only those who are truly right will be proved right in the next world. Falsehood will be exposed as nothing but false. This verse not only refers to hypocritical prostration; it gives us an indication of the outcome facing both individuals and nations.

Chapter 6
God and the Hereafter

A HAPPY ENDING TO THE TRAGEDY OF LIFE

The counterpart of this world is the Hereafter. The happy ending that all of us long for will be a reality if we never lose sight of the fact that there is a life after death.

The capital of British India was initially Calcutta, but in 1911, King George V announced the transfer of the capital to Delhi. The British architect, Sir Edward Lutyens (1864-1944), was commissioned to design the new capital, and construction work commenced in 1913. Eventually, the city of New Delhi came into existence and was one of great magnificence.

During this same period, the whole world was swept by a new political wave: nationalism, as progressive trends in political thought, had rendered the colonial system of government untenable. Moreover, the freedom movement in India was fast gaining momentum, and it became apparent that British rule in India would not survive for long. The completion of New Delhi thus, ironically, coincided with the decline of the British Raj.

After the construction of New Delhi, a French political leader paid a visit to India. When he saw the glittering palaces and spacious mansions of the new capital of British India, he summed up his impressions in these words: "What a magnificent world they built to leave."

This is not only true of British India but all of us in this world. We come into this world full of desires and aspirations.

DEATH'S LESSON

We do our utmost to construct a “magnificent world” for ourselves. However, just as our dream world takes shape, the angel of death visits us and takes us away from the world we have worked so hard to construct. We are then taken to what Arthur Koestler called an “unknown country”.

If that is all there is, life is a tragic story. However, like everything else in the universe, this world can only be considered complete when taken along with its counterpart. The counterpart of this is the world Hereafter. For those who have forgotten the next world, this life is nothing but a tragedy; but for those who look forward to life in the present to build their personality for the Hereafter, this world becomes an invaluable step toward a new, more successful existence in the next world.

The happy ending that all of us long for will be a reality if we never lose sight of the fact that there is a life after death.

DEATH'S LESSON

People who die give an important lesson to the living: they will meet the same fate one day. Then the living can experience death before death arrives.

Once, I attended the burial service of an individual. The man's body was washed and wrapped up in a new sheet. People said the prayers that are recited on such occasions, and then, lifting the corpse on their shoulders, they headed

to an empty grave. They lowered the body, with great respect, into the space and covered it up.

As this happened, I thought, “Why has Islam ordained such honourable treatment for a dead body?”

It is a fact that after death, a human body is nothing more than mud. However, unlike other mud, it is not thrown about here and there. Instead, it is treated like a human being.

Treating ‘mud’ as one would treat a human being is a commandment directed not at the dead body. Instead, its significance is for those who are still alive. An important lesson is conveyed to living people through a dead person—they will meet the same fate one day. In this way, the living can see themselves in the form of the dead. They can experience death before death arrives.

A man who was a living being like any of us is now dead. The other day, he was walking, talking, seeing, and so on, but now he lies perfectly still. The value he commanded in people’s eyes has suddenly been wholly wiped out. God uses this event to convey a lesson about life to others.

When a Muslim dies, people wash and clean and clothe the corpse with great care and carry it to the grave that awaits it. Moreover, when they lower the corpse into the grave, they take a handful of mud and put it inside the grave. They do this three times. While doing it the first time, they say *Minha khalaqnakum*— “From the earth, We have created you”. When throwing in the mud the second time, they say *Wa fiha nuidukum*— “And We return you to it”. The third

time, they say *Wa minha nukhrijukum taa ratan ukhra*—“And from it, We shall bring you forth a second time” (20:55).

This putting mud in the grave three times is the climax of the whole event. In this way, it serves to remind us of the reality of man and of what our final destiny is.

DEATH: THE LEVELLER

We see people dying every day. This should be enough to shake us up and learn the necessary lesson. But it does not happen, as we feel that this fate is only destined for others, not for ourselves.

An Air India plane, a Boeing 747, took off from Montreal on 23rd June 1985, carrying 329 people aboard, including the crew. It was bound for Delhi via London.

At Palam airport, Delhi, many people were waiting, as usual, to receive their relatives and friends. Some passengers were returning home after working hard at their studies or business. Some girls and boys were coming to India to get married. Still, others were to visit their homeland after a long interval to meet their near and dear ones.

Their happiness, however, suddenly turned into deep grief. While flying above the Atlantic, the plane met with an accident and plunged into the ocean off the coast of Ireland. When the list of the dead was put up on the board, the people waiting for them rushed towards it. At this moment,

a reporter of the *Hindustan Times* (24th June 1985) captures the scene in these words:

“In their moment of stunned disbelief, each thought, ‘This could not be happening to me.’ Then, however, the death list shattered all their hopes.”

Leaving aside such significant tragedies, it is a fact of life that many people pass away from this world every day in the ordinary course of events. This fact should be enough to shake people up, but it does not because everyone who watches others disappear thinks this fate is only destined for others, not for himself. It is a strange but observable fact of human psychology. By excluding himself, he fails to learn a valuable lesson. He fails to hear the message of death even when it is close at hand.

THE MIRAGE

The real pleasures are those of the next world, while the pleasures of this world are only a mirage. However, man is blissfully unaware of this reality.

Mr. R.N. Pandey, a second lieutenant in the Indian Army, mistakenly boarded the Jammu Tawi Express, thinking it was the Utkal Express. Only as the train steamed out of the station did he realize he was on the wrong train. When the train was nearing Okhla, in desperation, he opened the door and jumped out of the train, which by then was hurtling

along at full speed. He never reached the platform. He fell onto the railway track under the train and was cut to pieces by the wheels. Thus, on the 12th of November 1985, at the promising age of 35, death came to claim him for its own.

The successful man who runs a lucrative industry owns a palatial mansion, drives where he wills in limousines and possesses all kinds of status symbols, including a circle of wealthy and elegant friends, has all the things that add to success in this world. However, he is no more immune to misfortune than Lieutenant Pandey. At any moment, his factory can close, his house can crumble around him, his cars can skid with him to destruction, and his friends can one by one desert him. Those self and the same things which were such glittering symbols of success can become like so much dross under his feet and under whose deadweight he may be buried forever.

As soon as the true nature of material things is laid bare, they appear no more attractive than tombstones. To all intents and purposes, material progress leads one to splendid mansions of success. However, if we were to face reality, we would see that it takes us only as far as the graveyard—and not one step beyond.

The real pleasures are those of the next world, while the pleasures of this world are only a mirage. Therefore, the greatest mistake man can make is to pursue what is superficially attractive in this world while neglecting what is to be achieved in the next; in this way, he will have success in neither.

THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

Man considers himself free in the present world. Death makes him realize that he had been given everything as a test. He is responsible to God for his actions and would be taken to task for everything.

The power supply used to be plentiful in the Ivory Coast. Thanks to its glittering array of houses and shops, the country was once called the “Showcase of Africa”.

Everything suddenly changed in December 1983 due to a long dry season and recurrent forest fires. People were forced to eat by candlelight in luxury hotels, while lanterns lighted houses and offices; hydroelectric stations, which had supplied ninety-two per cent of the Ivory Coast's electricity, were brought to a standstill by a severe drought which reduced the water flowing through the dams to a trickle. The turbines stopped running, and the electricity supply fell so low that there would be no power for up to 18 hours at times. Industrial production was reduced by 65%. Computers, electric typewriters, refrigerators, and other gadgets ceased to operate.

For fear of being caught in the lift, many business people gave up going to their offices. One commuter explained his situation to a New York Times correspondent:

“For years, I had gone from my air-conditioned villa to my air-conditioned car to my air-conditioned office. I never realized how hot it is here.”

This businessman, dwelling in air-conditioned surroundings in the heart of Africa, lived in an artificial world. When the electricity failed him, he realized that, in reality, things were very different from what he had supposed.

The same is true, on a larger scale, for all humanity. Man considers himself free in the present world. He thinks of everything he has as his property. However, when death comes, it will dawn on him, all of a sudden, that he had just been fooling himself: he had been given freedom as a test whereas he had thought it was his right; he had taken what God had given to him as his own, whereas it was given to him for the test; he was responsible to God for his actions, but he lived under the misapprehension that, whatever he did, he would never be taken to task for it.

REWARD AND PUNISHMENT

Man is superior in moral status to all other creations as he can distinguish right from wrong. So, he is expected to act by the laws of the land and the dictates of his conscience.

The ugly and ill-tempered hero of Dostoevsky's novel, *Crime and Punishment*, murders an old woman without heirs to further his education by utilizing her ever-increasing but unveiled wealth. The other characters in the novel, and the reader, cannot but hold him guilty of a heinous crime. The older woman's wealth was as tempting to the murderer

as the flesh of a deer is to a lion. However, when a lion kills a deer to eat its flesh, some sentimental concern may be shown, but no one would seriously raise this killing as a moral issue. No one would feel the urge to frame laws prohibiting such acts. On the contrary, when a man commits a similar offence, society joins in protest and efforts are made to ensure that the murderer does not go unpunished.

Man often is instinctive in conduct like predatory animals, but he is superior in moral status to them, for he can distinguish right from wrong. Therefore, society expects him to act in accordance both with the laws of the land and the dictates of his conscience. If he fails to do so, he must expect to be brought before a court of law in his capacity as an ethical being.

The guilty, however, is not invariably brought to justice. No secular court exists with an all-seeing eye, which can unfailingly dispense justice on all the occasions warranted. At best, the courts set up by human beings can try only a certain number of identifiable offenders, and many are the wrongdoers who go scot-free because their crimes are never discovered since they can cover up their offences, because they find loopholes in man-made laws or because they can use their wealth to spread corruption on earth. Justice is only partially obtainable in this world: absolute justice is attainable only in the life Hereafter.

THE TRAGEDY OF MAN

After creating a beautiful world per man's desires, God settled human beings on earth with a condition: "You can only see this world but will not achieve it."

God created a beautiful and enjoyable world. He made all the arrangements as per man's desires in this world. After that, He settled human beings in this peaceful, beautiful world, but with a condition attached to his settlement on earth: "You can only see this world but will not achieve."

Man is attracted to the comforts and pleasures of this world. However, man cannot achieve the comforts and pleasures of this world. Therefore, a man who has not yet achieved the world finds himself as deprived as one who has already achieved it.

Gul Anand, a film producer from Mumbai, was married to a beautiful woman named Shobha. This couple had everything a man could wish for. He had many houses in Mumbai, where he started living in the Paradise of happiness.

However, after some time, he felt something was missing. They were still deprived of a child. This feeling started creating a silent distance between the two. Eventually, they adopted a boy and a girl from an orphanage, raising them as their son and daughter. Still, this artificial strategy could not compensate for their feelings of deprivation. Eventually, the distance increased to such an extent that they started living separately in different houses.

Shobha's doctor diagnosed that she was mentally disturbed. He treated her for ten years, but that was of no avail. After all, on 8th February 1983, this painful story ended. Shobha lived in Mumbai on the sixteenth floor of an apartment on Peddal Road in Neelam Baar. On February 8, she closed the door from the inside. First, she threw her children out of the window and then jumped herself. All three died on the spot. According to the reporting of the English Newspaper, Shobha's husband said: "I do not know the exact medical terms for my wife's mental disorders." (*Times of India, Mumbai*, 9 February 1983)

TURNING THE OTHER CHEEK

The only 'greater good' is the life of the Hereafter. Those who have discovered faith in the life Hereafter will readily bear any other loss as everything else is insignificant in comparison.

The corpse of a sixty-year-old man was found near Faiz Road in Delhi on July 31, 1984. It showed signs of a brutal murder. The police conducted intensive investigations, but the dead body could not be identified for a long time. Then, finally, the police managed to lay their hands on a clue. The shirt worn by the dead man bore the label of 'Azad Tailors' with code no. 52 on it. The police investigators now went to a small tailor's shop called 'Azad Tailors' in Sawan Park. The

owner, Mr Salahuddin, knew of a person called Panday who answered the descriptions given by the police, but he was not aware of his full name. The police then tried at another shop close by called the Kamal Cloth House. Here they were able to get the information they required.

The full name of the murder victim was Dev Narain Pandey. He belonged to Faizabad but lived in Delhi, where he worked polishing mosaic floors. The investigation of the murder proceeded. More missing links were brought to light one after another. Forty years ago, it was discovered that the murdered person had taken a man's life to redress some personal grievance. One Mahendar Kumar Choudhery, a nephew of the murdered man, was brought up in an environment where he repeatedly heard that Pandey had murdered his uncle. He decided, therefore, that he should avenge his uncle's murder. To carry out his plan, he came to Delhi and pretended to become friendly with Dev Narain Pandey. One day he got the opportunity he had been waiting for and lost no time in murdering him. The police finally took him into custody, and he confessed. He found himself in this terrible position because his family could not bring themselves to forgive the murder even after the lapse of forty years. It is a sorry truth that in all societies, people have some cause or the other for complaint against those with whom they come into contact. However, retaliation is no solution to this problem. The solution lies instead in rising above such feelings of vengefulness. The deliberate overlooking of such matters can diminish the existing

tensions, whereas retaliation and revenge only serve to aggravate the situation.

However, it is no simple matter to stifle such feelings. Man can give up something only when he receives something more significant. The feeling of a cause being lost, and justice not being done can only be overcome by gaining some 'greater good'. The only such 'greater good' is the life of the Hereafter. Faith in the next eternal world gives man this greater good and everything else is rendered insignificant. That is why those who have discovered faith in the life Hereafter will readily bear any other loss.

ALL FOR THE SAKE OF 31 DAYS

How extraordinary it is that man should come into the world and live here as if he will never leave, yet a departure from this world is inevitable and comes sooner than he plans!

The January 1983 elections in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh brought the Telugu Desam party under the leadership of N.T. Rama Rao, into power. On August 16, 1984, however, N.T. Rama Rao's government was dismissed by the then Governor, Mr Ram Lal, and a Telugu Desam dissident, N.T. Bhaskara Rao was invited to form a Government in alliance with the Congress party. Mr

Bhaskara Rao was given 30 days to prove his majority in the 293-member state assembly.

Mr Bhaskara Rao's group launched a concentrated effort to winning over MLAs. According to the *Hindustan Times*, dated September 13, 1984, a price of 2 million rupees was placed on the head of each MLA. N.T. Rama Rao confined members loyal to him in Ramakrishna Studios. When Mr Bhaskara Rao was unable to prove his majority on the house floor within 30 days, his government became unconstitutional and was dismissed by the new state governor, Mr S.D. Sharma. On September 16, 1984, Mr Sharma invited N.T. Rama Rao to once again form a Government.

On September 19, 1984, The Times of India published a special report on the events in Andhra Pradesh, highlighting the actions perpetrated by N.T. Bhaskara Rao during his short term of office. The month-long chief minister had released a state government fund of 100 Crore (1000 million) rupees and had started openly inviting state assembly members to "defect and be a minister". The writer continues:

"During his 31-day uncertain career as chief minister, Mr Bhaskara Rao behaved and acted as if he had come to stay for a hundred years."

It is an apt description of the way everyone acts in this world. One is in the world for only a short period; it might only be for 31 days. However, people act as if they have come to the world to stay forever. How extraordinary it is that man should come into the world and live here as

if he will never leave, yet a departure from this world is inevitable and comes sooner than he plans!

THE GREATEST NEWS

The greatest issue facing man is the Day of Judgment. One cannot see it, but it is the matter most worth talking about, the most important news that anyone can hear.

An old acquaintance with a master's degree in science is now a civil servant in Delhi. Once, I was out for the whole day. On returning home, I was told that this gentleman had called to see me several times during the day. Just at that moment, the doorbell rang. I opened the door, and there he was again, smiling. "I have come to give you some good news," he said: "I have been promoted, and my salary has been increased a thousand a month."

It struck me that if one has some important news to tell, then one cannot hide it. Tell it, one must, even if it involves searching for a listener. For example, if someone buys a new house or a car, he instinctively wants it to be the focus of attention. If it is not brought up in conversation, he will somehow bring the topic around to the cars or houses, just so that his new purchase may receive a mention. It is true of everyone, without exception. It is only human nature that he should seek to tell his important news to others.

What a mass of information there is clogging the atmosphere nowadays! Everyone has some message to convey to others. However, in all this confusion, no one is seeking to convey the message of eternal life; no one is anxious to break the news of salvation and damnation in the world to come. All people have to discuss worldly matters; no one has time for matters pertaining to eternal life. It means that no one knows the meaning of eternal life—no one has that news to tell—for if they did, they would never be able to keep it to themselves. Indeed, the importance of this matter is so critical that no other news would seem worth telling. They would expend all their time and energy telling people about the world to come. They would make it their prime task in life to inform others of the dangers of Hellfire and the joys of Paradise. If someone knows there will be an earthquake in a few moments or a volcano is about to erupt, then he can think of nothing else; he leaves all other matters aside and talks only of the dreadful fate about to descend upon him. However, speakers make their speeches, and writers write their lines, but their words do not contain mention of man's coming before the Lord to be judged. They do not even know of the coming of that fearful day.

People's minds are occupied by political, social, and economic matters of individual and national concern. They experience these things in the world about them; the effect of these matters is there to be felt. That is why they consider them important and worth talking about. However, the greatest issue facing man is the Day of Judgment. One

cannot see it, but no future event exceeds its importance. It is the matter most worth talking about, the most important news that anyone can hear.

ROSE-COLOURED SPECTACLES

Man wrongly supposes that he will be able to step into their shoes by destroying others. What man must finally come to terms with is not the 'here and now' but all eternity.

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

General Manzoor met the same fate which is the eventuality of all humanity. When their time comes, some will receive natural deaths, while others have the misfortune to meet violent ends. Death is inevitable, but no one learns a lesson from this. No 'General Manzoor' thinks that after doing away with his enemy, he too will be done to death

tomorrow; after casting others down into the pit of death, he will meet an identical fate.

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

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

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

THE GATHERING STORM

The flash flood of the Final Day will bring some human beings to Hell's doorstep, while it will usher others to the gates of Paradise.

On August 11th, 1979, a flash flood struck Maurvi in Gujarat, leaving behind total devastation. Due to heavy rain, the water level rose so high in a massive dam on the settlement bank that the dam broke. One who witnessed it said, "About 20 feet high walls of water entered the settlement with such high velocity that no one could escape their onslaught. Having destroyed all animate and inanimate objects, this floodwater receded as suddenly as it came." It is estimated that, out of a total population of about 40,000, as many as 25,000 died in this flash flood. The extent of the destruction can be gauged from the fact that, besides public contributions, the central government immediately released five crore rupees as an aid to the government of Gujarat.

Arun Kumar, a reporter for the *Hindustan Times*, published an eye-witness report in which he said the survivors had a woeful tale to tell. Still, in the grip of the shock and suffering the flood inflicted upon them, he wrote: "Some have lost their speech and look dazed and blank" (August 19, 1979). Another report (August 20, 1979) recounts how overjoyed a ruined landlord was when he was handed over Rs. 18,000 in cash and gold ornaments weighing 225

ON THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

grams which had been restored to him from his house by government officials.

Such events frequently occur on earth to remind man of the Day of Judgment. The great flood heralding the world's end will overtake us suddenly. The destruction will be such that people's tongues will fail them. They will be dazed. Those who will realize their eternal doom will be struck dumb. However, there will also be those who will be given the good tidings that the encompassing flood of death and destruction will leave them unscathed. Not only will God restore to them what is theirs but will shower them with even more incredible blessings. The flash flood of that Day will condemn some to Hellfire while it will usher others to the gates of eternal happiness. Before the "flood", man can easily find eloquent excuses to justify his cruel ways. However, on seeing the "flood of destruction", all his strength will desert him, and he will have no words to justify the unjust actions he perpetrated in the world he has left behind him.

ON THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

On the Day of Judgment, every person will come forth in his or her natural state. What a tough day that will be! If people were to realize this now, nothing in this world would give them true joy.

Imam Bukhari, a noted early Muslim scholar, has cited a narration attributed to Abdullah ibn Masud, according

to which Prophet Muhammad told him to read a portion of the Quran. The Prophet explained to Abdullah that he liked hearing the Quran from others. Thus, Abdullah began reciting the *Surah An-Nisa*, a chapter of the Quran, till he reached the verse, "What will they do when We bring a witness from each community and bring you as a witness against these people?" (4:41) The Prophet told him to stop. Then, Abdullah saw tears in the Prophet's eyes. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 4582)

How strange that time will be when God shall assemble His court! At that time, no one will be able to strut about proudly or deny God. People who were thought of by others as valueless and ignored will be brought forth as His special servants. People whom God had chosen to inform others of the impending Day of Judgment, whom others thought of as the weakest among them, will be those who shall bear witness that will determine who shall be rewarded and punished.

Imagine the condition of those people who used to speak incessantly while in the world but will then find that they have turned completely dumb! Moreover, people in the world were considered respectable and influential but will then find themselves powerless! When their reality is exposed, some people who, in this world, have donned the garb of religion will be seen to have been entirely irreligious! Much apparent goodness will be shown to be its opposite on that day!

In this world, people conceal their reality under an artificial cover. For some, seemingly charming words are a veil that

hides their inner condition. For others, this role is played by material glitter and glamour. However, on the Day of Judgment, every person will come forth in his or her natural state. What a tough day that will be! If people were to realize this now, they would stop chattering. Nothing of this world will then give them true joy. They will begin to regard material respect as utterly meaningless as worldly disrespect.

ENGINEERING NOT ENOUGH

Life is more than engineering. A man lays the foundation for great things in this world but does not stay here to witness them.

Dr Fazlur Rahman Khan was a world-famous architectural engineer. Born in Dhaka, he obtained his degree in architectural engineering from Calcutta and went to the United States to pursue his doctorate in the same subject. He started his practice by taking on a contract to design a 43-storey building in Chicago. His extraordinary brilliance enabled him to make significant innovations in his field. For example, the 110-storey Sears Tower in Chicago earned him worldwide fame as a master of modern construction. This highest building in the world at the time resulted from his unconventional concept, now known as tubular design.

Despite his extraordinary success, Dr Fazlur Rahman was never inwardly satisfied. Mr K.M. Amladi met him in 1982 in his Chicago office. As Mr Amladi felicitated him on his success, Dr Fazlur Rehman listened with an expressionless face. He said to Mr Amladi: "Life is more than engineering." Dr Fazlur Rahman died on 27 March 1982 at the age of 52. He left behind him a new concept in the field of architectural engineering. By developing this concept, the German engineer, Robert Gabriel, planned a 365-storey building that would stand one mile above the ground. During their conversation, Mr Amladi asked Dr Fazlur Rahman whether such a building could be constructed. Dr Fazlur Rahman replied in the affirmative. Citing this incident, Mr Amladi concludes his article by writing that Europe and America will have such buildings in future, but "the man who laid the foundation for making them possible, alas, will no longer be there to witness them." (*Hindustan Times*, May 9, 1982)

MINARETS OF WORLDLY GLORY

On the Day of Judgement, only those people will be successful who had surrendered to God in this world at a time when everyone else had forgotten God and had, instead, sought support from the things of the world.

Once, I struck up a conversation with a man who, around 30 years earlier, had been an ordinary mechanic. When I

met him, he had become the owner of several factories. I remarked, “Your business has expanded quite considerably!” He happily replied, “I have earned so much that even if my children do not work, they can comfortably eat for a hundred years!”

Now, this is an extreme example. However, today everyone’s case is similar to this in some sense. Everyone is confident that he has ‘settled’ his matters once and for all and that he is now free of any danger for at least a ‘hundred years’.

Some people are happy by pleasing their elders. Someone is happy that he has the title deeds of vast property. Someone takes immense pride in his job and bank balance. Someone relies on his physical prowess and his penchant to boss over and control others. Someone has nothing, yet he runs after others to flatter them and feather his own little nest. He thinks he has finally found a protective umbrella to stand under and that nothing can harm him now.

However, when an earthquake strikes, all such false supports prove meaningless. There is no difference between a grand palace and a tiny hut for an earthquake. In its eyes, the strong and the weak are alike. It destroys the helpless like those who think they have firm support to bank on. It reminds us how utterly helpless a person truly is.

An earthquake is a prior indication from God that tells us what will finally happen to every one of us one day—the Day of Judgment. It is a sort of mini-Day of Judgment that reminds us of the great Day that will dawn upon us one day. When fearsome tremors and upheavals force us to lose

all consciousness when buildings collapse like a house of cards when the bowels of the earth are thrown up and what is on the surface of the earth is swallowed inside—at that moment, a person realizes that, in the face of the forces of nature, he is utterly helpless. He can only helplessly watch the dance of devastation happening around him without being able to do anything about it at all.

The earthquake of the Day of Judgment will be a trillion times more severe than the earthquakes in this world. All the support we lean on will be utterly shattered at that time. People will be dumbstruck, completely losing all their intelligence. The minarets of glory that people have built for themselves will come crashing down, and nothing will remain of them. On that Day, only those who had not taken the things of this world as support will have a support to lean on. On that Day, only those people will be successful who had surrendered to God in this world, at a time when everyone else had forgotten God and had, instead, sought support from the things of the world.

DECEPTION ON ALL SIDES

On the day of truth, those who appeared in a particular light in this world will be exposed to a completely different light: they will be exposed for what they were rather than what they pretended to be.

This world is a world of deception and delusion. People are free to do one thing in reality here but realize that

they are doing something entirely different. They may be pursuing a policy of personal advancement and self-aggrandizement, but they use slogans that make it appear as though—far from serving themselves—they are only out to serve others. They make out that their actions are for their nation's good, whereas they are the sole beneficiaries of their policies. Everyone twists words to his advantage, making the cruelty and injustice he inflicts on others appear like justice and humanism. Those with the law on their side have a license to act as they please: if the law sanctions their misdemeanours, no one can say that what they are doing is wrong.

This is the way with people of the world. As for people who call themselves religious, the course that they follow is not very different. They have attached the label "religion" to a few lifeless dogmas; they have assigned the highest rewards to some mechanical rites and ceremonies; they make ritualistic religion appear like real religion; they give themselves credit for practising religion, whereas in fact, what they are practising is religion made by man, not the religion revealed by God.

The "God" that they have invented for themselves is one that they do not need to fear. They have appointed for themselves a prophet who will intercede for them and save them from damnation, no matter how they act on earth. The Afterlife they claim to believe in is where Heaven is for them, and Hell is for others. When they pray, they are a picture of humility, but their prayer does not prevent them from being

proud and malicious when they leave the house of worship. When they fast, they abstain from food and drink but do not bother to refrain from lying, deceit, and injustice. They have made religion a topic of argument and disputation and have forgotten that religion is something to be practised, not just to be talked about. Then, to crown it all, they claim that they are performing “missionary activity”, whereas what they are doing is seeking to consolidate their power and prestige.

However, counterfeit gold is only considered gold until it has been put to the touchstone test. So, it is with deception that man practices in this world. It can only prevail until the Day of Reckoning comes to pass when God’s truth eliminates all falsehood, and His justice end all injustice. Man is free in this world because he is being tested. He can do as he pleases as long as his trial period lasts. However, when it comes to an end, he will find himself powerless. He will want to speak, but words will desert him. He will want to run away, but his legs will not be able to carry him.

That will be the day of truth. Man will shed the camouflage that hides his actual state on that day. Everyone will appear as he or she is. It will be a revelation when the pretences that people put on fade away and reality comes to the fore. Only God knows a person’s actual state; it will be plain for all to see in the next world. Those who appeared in a particular light in this world will be exposed to a completely different light: they will be exposed for what they were rather than what they pretended to be.

GOD'S WILL BE DONE

The lesson from one's untimely demise is that we must never attach too much importance to the material successes or setbacks in this life. Instead, we must bow in all humility to God, whether in success or adversity, victory or defeat.

Syed Mohammad was born in Kerala, but he received his education in England. The extraordinary ability he was born with made his 80-year-old English teacher, Dr Stevans Cleveland prophesy: "Young man, one of these days you will come here to represent your country. Unfortunately, however, I would not be there to see you."

This prophecy was fulfilled 23 years later when Syed Mohammad was appointed High Commissioner for England.

He started his career as a barrister. Owing to his exceptional capabilities, he successfully secured several high posts. He was selected as a delegate to the United Nations, a Minister of State, and chairman of the high-powered Minorities Commission.

One of his close friends, Mr Khushwant Singh, wrote an article in his Memoir; rounding off with these words:

"He had applied for the Congress-I ticket to fight the last Parliamentary elections. Going by his record, he would have undoubtedly won it. Kerala State Congress bosses denied him the ticket. It broke

Sayyed's heart, and a month later, the setback took his life." (*Hindustan Times*, March 23, 1985)

The lesson from his untimely demise is that we must never attach too great an importance to the material successes or setbacks in this life. On the contrary, however, it should so discipline our thoughts and emotions that what looms largest on our horizon is the rewards we are to receive in the Hereafter, not for having striven for material things in this world, but for having bowed in all humility to God, whether in success or adversity, victory, or defeat.

CLUTCHING AT STRAWS

People build false props: wealth, friends, and religious personalities, thinking they will protect them. Doomsday will reveal the flimsiness of these 'structures'. There will not be so much as a straw at which to clutch.

Once in a shop in Azamgarh, I greeted an old acquaintance. There was no response. I greeted him once more, but still, he gave no sign of recognition. Although he looked straight at me, he did not utter a word. "Can it be someone else?" I thought. However, my eyes gave the lie to my doubts. He was the person I had known for the last fifteen years, and I did not think he could have forgotten me.

The owner of the shop, noticing my astonishment, explained that a tragic happening had caused him to lose his senses.

When he was constructing a new house, the newly built roof had caved in when the scaffolding had been removed. This incident had so affected his mind that he had gone half-mad. After that, he neither worked, ate, spoke, just sat about in old places, looking like a statue—which is how he appeared at that moment.

On further inquiry, I discovered that he had been the victim of certain unscrupulous elements selling spurious cement. Unfortunately, the so-called cement was a little better than grey dust, so it was not surprising that his roof met that fate.

Although this incident occurred some twenty years ago, it has always provided me with a good analogy for discussing what people regard as props in their lives—what they feel dependent upon. Some build a roof of wealth over themselves; others depend upon their persuasiveness yet think that it is enough to have friends. Great religious personalities are considered among the greatest of props. However, all of these props are false. When Doomsday finally reveals the flimsiness of these 'structures', the various roofs that people have been building to protect themselves will come tumbling about their ears. There will not be so much as a straw at which to clutch.

LISTEN TO GOD'S VOICE IN THE LANGUAGE OF SILENCE

God speaks in silence, but we want to listen to Him in the language of noise! How, then, can we at all listen to God's voice? One who deeply ponders the signs in the universe will be struck by the silence there. He will be left dumbstruck.

If you are in a room, you can measure the length and breadth of its ceiling. However, if you are in a big field, under the open sky, all your criteria for measuring things fail to gauge the length and breadth of the sky.

The same holds for the rest of the universe. A tiny seed gradually grows into a tree, a world in itself. Who can narrate how this happens? The light that the sun pours out, the circulation of the winds, the songs of the birds, the gurgling of the brooks, and innumerable similar things—we see them with our eyes, but it is impossible to express them in words.

Truth is more delicate than that which can be expressed in words. In reality, Truth starts when the tongue gets stuck and falls silent. Significance and meaning appear where words stop and cannot go further. God speaks in silence, but we want to listen to Him in the language of noise! How, then, can we at all listen to God's voice? The most precious things in this world are conveyed in the language of silence.

Those who know how to listen only to deafening din remain as unaware of these matters as a deaf person is of fine music. This world of God is infinitely beautiful. Its beauty cannot be described in words. When a person sees the world, he loses all control. He wants to become part of the winds, melt into the trees, and lose himself in the loftiness of the skies. However, his limitations stand in the way of such desire. Perhaps, this is Heaven. An individual will become free of his limitations to enter that beautiful world of Paradise that will last forever.

The civilized world humans have made is starkly different from God's world. The vehicles people have built emit pollution and create terrible noise. However, in God's world, light travels at the astounding speed of 1,86,000 miles per second without noise or pollution! Human beings live together, so they always face various problems from one another. However, the winds blow without conflict with anything in God's world. We emit our waste in the form of carbon dioxide and sweat and dump it into the outside world, but in God's world, trees emit their 'pollution' in the form of oxygen, without which human and animal life would have been impossible. Flowers emit their fragrance as their 'pollution'. We litter our streets with garbage, even though it is against the law. However, in God's world, enormous amounts of 'garbage' are produced every day without anyone even knowing or noticing this, and this 'garbage' is recycled and reconverted into valuable things.

LIVING IN GOD'S GLORY

If you deeply ponder these marvels of the universe, you will be struck by the sense of utter helplessness. He will be left speechless, unable to utter even a single word.

Chapter 7
God's World

WE ARE IN GOD'S COUNTRY

The world in which man lives is entirely of God's making. Man, then, is not in his own country: he is living in the country of God. Therefore, man can only prosper by understanding God's scheme and living in the world according to that scheme.

An American lady went on a tour of Russia. She saw pictures of the Communist Party Chairman hanging everywhere she went. She took offence to this and gave vent to her feelings in the presence of some Russians. Her companion whispered: "Madam, you are in Russia now, not America."

One can live as one likes in one's own country, but when one goes to a foreign country, one has to abide by its laws. If one does not do so, one will be considered an offender.

The same is true, in a broader sense, of this world. Man has been born into a world that he did not create. The world in which man lives is entirely of God's making. Man, then, is not in his own country: he is living in the country of God.

This being the case, the only way a man can prosper is by understanding God's scheme and living in the world according to that scheme. If he contradicts the scheme of God, then he will be considered a rebel. Therefore, he will be liable for punishment in the sight of God and stands to be deprived for all time of the blessings of the Lord.

The question is: how should man live in the world to conform to God's will? It was to answer this question that

God raised His prophets. The prophets showed man, plainly and in terms that he could understand, exactly what the Lord requires of him; they defined the scheme of God with which man should comply.

The Quran is an authentic collection of this prophetic guidance. Therefore, whoever wishes to be counted among God's faithful servants, and be granted a share in His eternal blessings, must read the Quran and be guided by it in his life.

Whoever does not do this will meet a similar—though more severe fate—than of Americophiles in Russia or Russophiles in America.

THE END OF LIFE

Death can come at any time, taking us to another world. Therefore, we must exert our time and efforts in this world to prepare for the next world where all of us are bound.

Masti Venkatesha Iyengar (1891-1986) was a famous Kannada language writer. As a young man, he went straight into the Mysore Civil Service from the university. A conscientious civil servant, his seniority and ability qualified him for ministership, but he was treated unfairly and denied the promotion he deserved. Disillusioned, he went into premature retirement.

After his retirement, he took to writing short stories and novels. With approximately 150 works to his credit, he

became famous as an outstanding and prolific writer. For one of his books, *Chakaweera Rajinder*, he received the Gyaan Peeth award from the Indian government and a prize of Rs. 150,000.

Mr Masti's interview with Sri Dhar was published in *The Times of India* (August 12, 1984). Although Mr Masti held his works in high esteem, he was not particularly moved by the latest acknowledgement of his literary prowess. He said, "I am too old to be happy."

Mr Masti meant that he was too old at 94 to appreciate any happiness. A sad end to a literary career spanned a century's larger part. Mr Masti's first book was published in 1912. Then, he had to wait 70 years for the award that should have crowned his efforts. However, when the climax of his literary career came, he was in no position to appreciate it. Old age had dampened his enthusiasm and made him indifferent to success.

The same is true of everyone in this world. Like Mr Masti, everyone works for something here on earth and exerts all his strength to achieve a particular end. However, only after an extended period, as in Mr Masti's 70 years, one's efforts reap the rewards. At that time, the concerned person is too old to relish his reward; besides, death may come, closing the pages of the story of his life, and transporting him to another world. Therefore, it is better to exert one's time and efforts in this world on preparations for the next world where all of us are bound.

THE WORLD HEREAFTER

As man finds himself safe and sound amidst family and friends, he blissfully ignores that, at any moment, death can separate him from the props of this mortal world.

The time was 8 minutes and 27 seconds past 9 o'clock on October 31, 1984. As usual, all the activities in the palatial residence of the Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi, in New Delhi were in full swing.

Peter Ustinov, the world-renowned actor, director, and writer, was sitting on the spacious lawns of Mrs Indira Gandhi's residence. He was making a film on Mrs Gandhi, and, along with his entire film unit, he was waiting there to interview her.

The Prime Minister stepped out of her house at No. 1, Safdarjang Road. No sooner did she step onto the lawn than three gunshots were heard. Then came a volley of shots from a stun gun. Two of the Sikh security guards had shot her. She could not utter even a last word. She was immediately taken to AIIMS in a state of unconsciousness, and one and a half hours later, she was declared dead by the senior doctors attending her.

Peter Ustinov, commenting on this sad occasion, said. "I wanted to ask her how, as a single child, she came to terms with her loneliness."

It was the most pertinent question that could be asked at that critical moment in her life. However, now we

have to ask how she, the Prime Minister of a country of 700 million, will face the situation when she is alone in another world.

Since man finds himself safe and sound amidst family and friends, he blissfully ignores that, at any moment, death can separate him from the props of this mortal world. Then he will be left to wander alone. He will have no one to assist him. How awful that day will be and how ignorant man is of this grave reality which must inevitably come.

IT IS NOT A MUSEUM OF THE MUTE!

In this world, one rarely ponders on the signs of God that are spread out all through the universe. However, this is the root cause of every form of evil in the human world.

A train journey can be full of myriad experiences. The train rushes ahead, carrying scores of people heading to different destinations. It passes through the countryside, through changing terrain. The train, thus, becomes a symbol of life's journey, a life full of signs and indications. However, just as the passengers in the train are unaware of the passing scenes outside, being engrossed in activities that delight them, so, too, in this world, an individual passes his time, rarely if ever pondering on the signs of God that are spread out all through the universe.

The sun rises, its face beaming, and it shines on us as if conveying a message. However, before it can speak, it sets. A tree bursts forth with branches richly laden with leaves. The sea moves ceaselessly, cradling wave after wave. All of these want to say something. However, a human being walks past them without listening to their call. The sky's loftiness and the earth's beauty are dimensions of this universal programme. They have so much to convey but do not lend their ear. But man thinks them to be inert.

Is this glorious universe a museum of mute entities? No, not at all! All these things have a message of God, which they continue to broadcast in an eternal, timeless language. However, a person is so lost in other sounds that he does not hear the silent voice of the universe.

Once on a journey, I got off the train at a mid-way stop to offer my prayers. I asked some people on the platform where the west was to determine the proper direction for prayers. However, no one had an answer to that simple question! So, I thought to myself, "The sun dawns here every day—that is a shining truth. However, these people are so lost that they do not know the east or west! How will they know what message the sun and other stars and planets convey in their silent language every day of their lives?"

The train halted at another station, and I got off and stood on the platform. The sun had just set. It was a beautiful scene—tall trees silhouetted against the pale red sky streaked with clouds. "The beauty of all these comes from their loftiness!" I mused. "But a human being is not

prepared to scale such heights. He does not live at the heights of the trees, sun, or clouds. Instead, he wallows in superficialities, personal interests, false friendships, and petty enmities. Instead of journeying with the rest of the universe, he prefers to remain closeted in his little shell. He forces himself to live in Hell in a world where a heavenly environment awaits him. It is the root cause of every form of evil in the human world. If an individual lived at the lofty level of the rest of the beautiful scenes of nature, he would also reflect on this beauty and listen to God's message in their silent language.

HOW MAN LOSES OUT

One who is seduced by the alluring pleasures of this world loses out on the next world. Feeling anguish and despair on reaching that world and beholding its eternal blessings, he will cry out, "This is the true life that I have lost."

If you give someone one dollar and then tell him that million-dollar bills are lying ahead, which can all be his if he runs to get them, he will not bother about the one dollar; he will forget all about it and rush for the fortune.

So, it is with this world and the Hereafter. The present world is a preview of the Hereafter. Here, man receives in embryonic form the joys and blessings which God has made

fully available in the world to come. It is so that he may see the infinite joys of eternity in the guise of the incomplete blessings of this world, so that he may see one drop of water and realize that it is indicative of a vast ocean beyond.

One who understands the true nature of this world will look at it like the one-dollar bill which one forsakes for a fortune that awaits him in the Hereafter. He will look beyond the ephemeral pleasures of this world to the eternal joys of the Hereafter. The only one who does not see the world in its true light will set store in it, making it his ultimate goal instead of the Hereafter.

The sun shines to acquaint man with the radiance of the Afterlife, but the man looks at the sun and makes it his object of worship. Flowers and trees blossom to remind man of God's eternal world, but man looks at them as the ultimate form of beauty and makes his Paradise among them. The pleasures of this world should increase one's longing for the world to come, but man becomes so engrossed in them that he fails to even think of the infinitely greater joys of the Hereafter.

One who is seduced by the alluring pleasures of this world loses out on the next world. What anguish and despair will he feel when he reaches that world, and he beholds the eternal blessings it offers! Then he will realize his foolishness. "This," he will cry out, "is the true life. Earthly life has no reality now. However, I have lost eternal life for the sake of the transitional blessings of the world. I have forfeited true and lasting bliss—all for the sake of pleasures which did not

endure. In seeking freedom on earth, where there was no freedom to be found, I lost the true freedom now.”

EPHEMERALITY

The coming and going of people remain inexplicable until we accept the existence of life after death. However, on the other hand, if we reject life after death, everything becomes meaningless.

The Fabian Society was founded in 1883-84 in London, establishing a democratic socialist state in Great Britain as its goal. The Fabians put their faith in evolutionary socialism rather than in revolution. They were pioneers in British social and economic reform and were mainly concerned with eradicating poverty and ignorance through education.

The society's name was derived from the Roman general Fabius Cunctator, whose patient and evasive tactics in avoiding pitched battles secured his ultimate victory over stronger forces. Early members of the society included George Bernard Shaw, Sidney Webb, Annie Besant, Edward Pease, and Graham Wallace. Later joined by Webb's wife, Beatrice Webb, Shaw and Webb were the outstanding leaders of this society for many years.

Beatrice Webb's diary, published after her death, became very popular. Here is an excerpt from it, written in 1943 during the Second World War:

“Everything and everyone is disappearing—Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin. What an amazing happening, and well worth recording in my diary. But that also will suddenly disappear.” (1943)

What outstanding people come into this world, show their metal, and then suddenly disappear; as if their appearance and disappearance were not a matter of their own choice but the responsibility of someone or something else, who summoned them back quite arbitrarily—like marionettes disappearing at a tug of their strings!

This coming and going of people, this ephemerality of life, remains inexplicable until we accept the existence of life after death, as the prophets foretold. Considering this truth, everything seems to fall quite satisfactorily into place. If life is transient, we can accept it as being so and have no regrets. However, should we reject the actuality of life after death, everything is rendered void and meaningless.

21ST MINUTE

If we consider the present life as a moment of “20” minutes and the 21st minute as an entry in the Hereafter, we can say that man is allowed to make mistakes only for 20 minutes. Then either he has to correct himself or be arrested by death.

Man finds himself free in the present world. He can do whatever he wants to in this world; no one is there to hold

his hand. Unaware of his state of affairs, everyone seems to be fearless. Every man listens to his heart and does whatever he wants to do.

However, this state of affairs is wholly temporary. Man has a limited period at his disposal. He can show disobedience within this limited period. His Lord will take him in His remand at the end of this period. After that, he will be compelled to bear the consequences of his disobedience and rebelliousness for all eternity.

It takes two pilots to fly a plane. On 21 July 1983, a plane was flying over the Atlantic Ocean. At the same time, both pilots fell asleep and slept continuously for 20 minutes. They only woke up when a particular alarm started ringing in the pilot's cabin. This plane was delayed by 12 hours at departure for some reason. The pilots were fatigued because of this unusual incident. They set their engine at a particular speed when they took off the plane. Now the plane started flying at this fixed speed.

Meanwhile, the pilots fell asleep. In the meantime, some disturbance occurred in the control system, and the plane's speed increased considerably. After that, the particular alarm of the plane started ringing under the mechanical system. The pilots got up because of the alarm and immediately took control of the engine.

A pilot has written about this event in a Journal (Feedback) published in England: "I shudder to think what could have happened."

If we consider the present life as a moment of “20 minutes” and after that consider the 21st minute as equivalent to entry time in the Hereafter, we can say that nature has allowed human beings to make mistakes only for 20 minutes. If he is not careful, till the end of this time, nature will not allow him to make a mistake after the 20th minute. After 20 minutes, either he has to correct himself or be arrested by death.

THE WORLD WE LONG FOR

Those who try to build a Paradise for themselves in this world will find nothing but disappointment awaiting them when they reach the next world. It is tragic that trying to achieve one’s greatest longing in life—Paradise—one is eternally fated to live without it.

To disbelieve in Paradise is to disbelieve in oneself, for Paradise is what everyone longs for more than anything. If, on the other hand, one believes in Paradise but does not strive to attain it, one is like a person who goes to a shop to buy something but is not ready to pay the required price.

Everyone longs for a dream world—a world of everlasting life and total satisfaction, a place immune from the limitations and disadvantages that beset us in this world. It is what man longs for above all else. Everyone in this world is striving to achieve this end, yet no one finds what they desire. People go to great pains to make themselves healthy, but soon they

are beset by illness or old age; they accumulate wealth, but it does not endow them with inner peace; they seek power, only to find that power creates more problems for them; they surround themselves with luxuries and comforts, but soon fall prey to boredom and unrest.

All humans are busy building a Paradise for themselves, but death comes, leaving the world with all their longings and desires unfulfilled before they can do so. They then go to a world Hereafter where Paradise is awaiting them. However, the Paradise of the next world will only be inhabited by those who have paid the price for it in this world. Those who fail to do so deprive themselves of what they long for more than anything.

In Paradise, we shall have all that we desire. However, Paradise lies in the next world and will only be inhabited by those who have prepared themselves for it. Those who build a Paradise for themselves in this world will find nothing but disappointment awaiting them when they reach the next world.

Moreover, a severe disappointment will await them, for they will find themselves deprived of what they had been seeking all their lives. How ironic that one's attempts to fashion in this world what is meant to be fashioned in the next should lead one to lose out on it for all time. How tragic that in man's efforts to achieve his greatest longing in life—Paradise—he is condemned to live without it!

THERE IS A SIGN IN EVERYTHING

Signs of God are spread all over the universe. One who remains open to learning lessons will see the whole world as living proof of divine realities.

The Indian writer Khwajah Hasan Nizami (1878-1955) once wrote an Urdu article entitled “Story of a Fly”. In it, he complained to a fly about the bother it caused people. “Why don’t you let us sleep in peace?” he remonstrated. “The time for sleep and eternal repose has not yet come,” the fly replied. “When it does come, you can sleep in peace. Now you should remain alert and active.” This little exchange shows that if an individual remains open to admonition, he will find a lesson for his life even in such mundane events as the buzz of a fly. On the other hand, if his mind is closed, then not even the roar of bombshells and artillery fire will be able to break through his barriers. Only the tempest of the Last Day will bring such people to their senses, but that will not be the time to take heed: that will be a time for retribution, not constructive action.

The Quran tells us that a heavenly person is one who brings before God “a sound heart” (26:89). There is a saying of the Prophet to much the same effect. “Whomsoever God wishes good for”, he said, “He gives him the ability to understand religion” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 71). These statements show that God’s greatest blessing to a person is an open mind and a sound, receptive intellect

that sees the truth for what it is. Such a mind is free of complexes: it can form opinions in a free and unprejudiced spirit. A sound mind does not take long to absorb any truth or take in any lesson contained in the world at large. The universe is like spiritual sustenance for such a mind, which develops and thrives by deriving nourishment from what it sees, feels, and hears in the world around it.

Signs of God are spread all over the universe. In some places, rocks and inanimate matter provide a pointer to some profound reality; in others, it is “flies”—menial objects—that send out a message for man. Sometimes, an event of great instructive import occurs in the human world. Sometimes, God enables one of His servants to call his fellow men to truth in plain, spoken language. One who has opened his mind to the truth will find it in all such instances. If one is not receptive to instruction, one will gain nothing from all the signs scattered worldwide. An open mind derives instruction from a “fly”, while not even divine revelation and prophetic teachings can break down the barriers of a closed mind.

There is nothing that can take the place of a receptive intellect. One who remains open to instruction will see the whole world as living proof of divine realities. However, one who lives with a closed mind is like an animal who hears and sees all but understands nothing.

DUST UNTO DUST

No lesson is learnt from the passing of all great men divested of their glory. No one considers that his end will be the same, no matter how illustrious his life is and that no trace of former glory can pass with him into the life Hereafter.

Although Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) started his career as a military officer, he so distinguished himself whenever opportunities came his way that he finally succeeded in ascending the French throne, having proclaimed himself the Emperor of France in 1804. He then set out to conquer the world. In a short time, he had dominated the whole of Europe except for England. In 1796, he married a charming French lady, Josephine, but divorced her in 1809 as she had failed to bear a successor to the Emperor of Europe.

One year later, Napoleon married Marie-Louise, daughter of the King of Austria, who, to the satisfaction of Napoleon, bore him a son and heir, Francois Joseph Charles, who would continue the monarchy. Before long, however, his excessive greed for territorial power led him to clash with Russia. Although the latter's army failed to repulse him, the Russian climate came to their rescue. When the snow started falling, and temperatures went far below zero, Napoleon's army could not advance any further, unaccustomed to such a severe winter cold. As a result, Napoleon was compelled to retreat in such a state of disarray that a significant part of his army perished on the way. With his significantly reduced

army, he was defeated by Germany at Leipzig in 1813 and abdicated in 1814. He was then exiled to the Island of Elba. However, he managed to escape but returned to power only to suffer a crushing defeat at the hands of the British at Waterloo in 1815. He was taken captive and sent off to the Island of St. Helena. The man who had been the idol of his countrymen—"the greatest adventurer the world has seen"—died in imprisonment in 1821, in a state of utter despair.

A man dreams of glory and splendour not only for himself but also as a priceless treasure to be passed on to his children; he remains blissfully unaware that before long, he is to be divested of all his glory, shorn of his titles, and reduced to a heap of dust. Each day, in this world, one 'Napolean' or the other disappears from life's stage, but scant attention is paid to this fact.

In the present world, man is given opportunities strictly defined in their scope and period in the context of the divine scheme of things. In terms of human life, they have their limitations. However, man's ambition knows no bounds, and he lives out his life in the most incautious and unrestrained manner. Moreover, what happens to the personal glory he was wont to pride himself on at the end? It is buried in the dust. But no lesson is learnt from their passing. Everyone sets out to blaze the same trails, write books, and climb mountains like his predecessors. No one considers that the end will be the same, no matter how illustrious the life and that no trace of former glory can pass with one into the life Hereafter.

Chapter 8

Man and God

THE IMPENDING DAY

God wants us to believe in Him while He is invisible to us, while people want to believe in Him only if they can see Him. In this world of tests, we have the freedom to conceal our reality. The Hereafter will expose every person for what he truly is.

When someone believes in God, he does so based on evidence in the present world. However, those who accept God in the Hereafter will do so based on His power. Thus, it is as if the evidence represents God in this world. In contrast, in the Hereafter, God will appear with His complete Being in front of people to enable them to accept Him.

Then we will learn who believed in God and who did not. Someone who believes in God accepts the weight of evidence and bows before the Truth when it comes along with nothing but verbal evidence. In contrast, someone who is not affected by something simply by its truth, who accepts the truth only when he is in some way compelled to do so, and who is not willing to accept the truth which does not involve an element of compulsion to accept it, will not believe in God.

God wants us to believe in Him while He is invisible to us, while people want to believe in Him only if they can visibly see Him. God wants people to bow down before the Truth, but man is willing to bow down only before Power. God wants people to behave justly only out of His fear, but people are willing to act justly only when compelled

CUTTING MAN TO SIZE

to do so. Where there is no compulsion, immediately they become defiant.

This world is a testing ground. Here you are given the freedom to conceal your reality. However, the Hereafter will expose every person for what he truly is. On that Day, many people who appeared to be devoted to God will be made to stand in the company of people who were not devoted to God. Many who presented themselves as followers of the Truth will be shown guilty of not following it. Many people who think they have been allotted a place in Heaven will find themselves on Hell's doorstep.

How utterly bereft of fear man is, although what an enormously frightful moment will he soon confront!

CUTTING MAN TO SIZE

Death cuts man to size. Serving as a lesson of humility before God, it teaches us that no power on earth can keep us alive if it is God's will that we die. No power on earth can interpose between Our Maker and us on the Day of Judgement.

The Government of India planned that the house of the former Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi, be maintained as a museum so that people may come and pay their tributes to the memory of the most powerful woman in the world—who died a martyr.

The great irony of this death is that not all the power in this world was able to prevent it. At that moment of horrendous slaughter, one saw in Mrs Gandhi, not a mighty leader at the pinnacle of international fame but a poor, frail, helpless victim whom nothing and no one could save. It mattered nought that she lived in a splendid mansion, possessed unparalleled political power, was heavily guarded night and day and was looked up to by millions. However, she was shot dead by the weapons that should have been used to save her life. In the end, her lot was no better than that of the poorest outcast of society.

From this, we should learn the lesson of humility before God. No power on earth can keep us alive if it is God's will that we die. No power on earth can interpose between Our Maker and us on the Day of Judgement. No memorials erected by human beings will alter one whit our onward courses towards Heaven or Hell. No human intercession will cause the slightest wavering in the judgement of our Divine Creator.

LOST IN THE WORLD

Fear of Hell and the desire for Heaven do not dominate man's life. Instead, he is guided by worldly apprehensions and desires alone.

The Prophet said: "I have never seen anything more strange than people sleeping, while they should have been running

away from Hellfire as fast as they could. Moreover, I have never seen anything more strange than people asleep while they should have been running towards Heaven—the objects of their desire—as fast as possible.” (*Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Hadith No. 2601)

How dreadful will the punishment of Hell be and how ignorant man is of this reality! How wonderful are the delights of Heaven, and how strange is a man who is not eager to attain them? Indeed, this is the strangest thing in the whole world.

These people who are asleep will be awakened only by the flames of Hell. They will then suffer destitution and debasement; there will be no escape.

Today, people are lost in the world, leading their lives as if there were no superior power above themselves, although every day, death comes to announce that man is confronted with a reality beyond his control. How helpless is man, yet how powerful does he imagine himself to be!

Man breaks his promises; he does not pay people their due; he does not bow to the truth; he accuses others but fails to admit his own mistakes; he turns away from the weak and hails the strong; he bases his life on his desires rather than on principles; he persecutes the downtrodden and cowers before the mighty; he concentrates on him-self rather than on God. Fear of Hell and the desire for Heaven do not dominate his life; he is guided by worldly apprehensions and desires alone.

The man continues in his evil ways and forgets that, in so doing, he is removing himself further from Paradise and drawing himself closer to Hell. It is the tragedy of man; he does not care for what he should most desire and does not fear that which should strike terror in his heart.

LIVING PROOF OF GOD

Witnessing the glory of God in the universe enkindles firm conviction in an individual. The existence of the created realm provides ample evidence of the existence, power and greatness of the Creator who brought this realm into being.

The universe is the mirror of God's attributes. Here, God's attributes are reflected through His innumerable creatures. The existence of the created realm provides ample evidence of the existence, power and greatness of the Creator who brought this realm into being. If your sensitivity is alive, you can find God all around you. You can see God everywhere. God's universe will then become for you living proof of God. The various forms and activities of living beings clearly announce that the Creator of this universe is a living, not a lifeless, Being. When the sun appears in the morning and things covered by night's darkness become visible again, it seems as if God has opened His eyes and sees the whole cosmos through His eyes. When a river rushes ahead, tumbling down from the mountains, it loudly declares that

the Creator of this universe is a living, active Being. When a tiger pounces upon and grabs its prey and brings it under its control, it announces, as it were, that its Creator is a Being who has everything under His control. The incredible expansiveness of space tells us that the Creator is an Unlimited Being.

Witnessing the existence and glory of God in His universe enkindles an individual faith in Him. At the same time, it makes him face questions of enormous, existential import. If God is, then why does He not directly reveal Himself in this universe? Why do evil and suffering exist? Evil is rampant in this world. Oppression is rife. People are constantly at each other's throats. All of this happens day in and day out in God's world. So, why doesn't God stop the oppressors or stand up for the oppressed?

The answers to these questions can be understood only when you understand God's creation plan, the Creator's scheme for His creatures. This world is a temporary one. Life here is short-lived. We are here in this world to be tested. This world is a field, as it were, where different plants have been given a chance to grow to see which of these will turn into fine trees and which into weeds. After this, the fine trees will be provided many good opportunities to flourish, while the weeds and thorny bushes will be uprooted.

WRONG COMPARISON BETWEEN GOD AND MAN

Comparing God to man is tantamount to arrogating to oneself a right that is God's alone. Moreover, every such supposition is entirely false because a human being, in reality, is a helpless creature, and he can in no sense acquire the status of the Creator.

A human being has always erred in trying to understand God and himself. He has thought of God to be like himself, and he to be like God. Man of every age has made this mistake. The whole of human history is the story of this mistake and its consequences.

To think of God as a man is to try to bring God to the human level. However, unfortunately, all forms of wrong notions about God result from this mistake, involving assumptions about God based on wrong analogies between man and Him.

We come into this world through biological parents. On this basis, it was assumed that if there is a God, He, too, must have a parent or parents, that there must have been someone before God who brought God into being. Because the eternal God is not physically visible to an individual, he began denying His existence. Observing himself, reflecting that he is a created being, should have led a person to acknowledge the Creator's existence. However, because of the analogy mentioned above that people drew between human beings and God, they were not ready to accept Him.

However, many who accepted God made the same mistake, albeit differently. In the human world, when they observed that things occur directly or indirectly with the help of other people, they began attributing partners and helpers to God as well. Among human beings, the recommendation of 'big' people with access to power and authority helps get things done. Accordingly, it was assumed that God had some special people who were very close to Him, had significant influence in His court and whose recommendations God would accept.

Human beings are subordinate to their emotions. Often, they ignore the demands of Truth and decide things under the sway of their emotions. Drawing an analogy from this, people invented the belief that God had a particular emotional link with members of a special group or community and that His relations with them differed from His relations with the rest of humankind.

All such beliefs are a negation of God's divinity. However, unfortunately, people often cling to such baseless thoughts and imaginary beliefs in their foolishness.

To consider himself like God is to imagine that a man is the master of his destiny and that he is entirely free to do whatever he wants or abstain from whatever he wants. It is to imagine that he is free to devise the principles of his life as he wishes and determine what is permissible and forbidden through reasoning.

Every such effort is, as it were, tantamount to putting ourselves in God's place, arrogating to ourselves a right that

is God's alone. Moreover, every such supposition is entirely false because a human being, in reality, is a helpless creature, and he can in no sense acquire the status of the Creator.

THE INNATE EMOTION TO FIND THE CREATOR

The Creator is the ideal that a human being is anxious to find. The thing that everyone is actually in search of is God, the Creator of every soul.

Human beings have a strange feature that is not shared by any other creature. It is the unlimited desire to search for something. Every human being has this desire within him, from birth itself, which makes him constantly search for something unknown that he has not yet found. No success or achievement whatsoever manages to satisfy this desire. Nor does any failure destroy it. Philosophers have termed this as the desire for the ideal.

This desire for the ideal is the real and final moving force behind all human activities. If this desire were absent, all activities in this world would suddenly stop. Sigmund Freud wrongly termed this powerful desire of the human mind as sexual desire. Alfred Adler wrongly branded it as the desire for power. William McDougall erroneously claimed that it was a mysterious result of the combination of various animalistic instincts in man. Karl Marx tried to prove

that the desire for material or economic accumulation controlled all other human activities. To write all these explanations off as erroneous, it is enough to note that even those who acquired all these things were not satisfied with their achievement. Instead, their inner being remained as restless as before, and they were no different from others.

For thousands of years, people have been trying to search for this ideal in the things of this world. However, no one could gain the satisfaction of obtaining the complete answer to this quest. In this regard, an Emperor is as unsatisfied as an unemployed pauper. This long experience of humankind proves that the answer to an individual's quest is not present in the visible world. Instead, the answer lies in the world that is not visible—the unseen realm—a world that a person can sense but cannot see.

The fact is that this desire is the desire for God. The Creator is the ideal that a human being is anxious to find. The thing that everyone is actually in search of is God, the Creator of every soul. Based on his or her innate nature, every person is continuously searching for God. This inner emotion drives people to the things of the world. They imagine that perhaps these things are the answer to their search. However, when they obtain these things and experience them at close range, they realize they are not what they are looking for.

TWO TYPES OF SOULS

In the present world, you are free to choose between two courses. You can choose to purify your soul or pollute it.

The Quran says: "He who purifies it will indeed be successful, and he who corrupts it is sure to fail." (91:9-10)

The present world is a testing ground for us before the life of the Hereafter dawns. It is an opportunity for us to prepare for the Hereafter. If you leave this world and enter the world of the Hereafter as a noble and pure soul, you will be settled in the delightful environs of Paradise. Moreover, if you depart from this world for the world of the Hereafter as a soul laden with evil, you will be hurled into Hell.

The present world is, as it were, God's nursery. Different types of plants are grown in a nursery. The gardener inspects all of them. Those that he does not want, he plucks out and throws away. However, he lifts the ones he finds desirable from their beds very carefully so they can grow and flourish in a garden.

In the present world, you are free to choose between two courses. You can choose to purify your soul or pollute it. You can accept God's greatness and surrender yourself before Him. When faced with the Truth, you can choose to acknowledge it unhesitatingly. In your dealings with others, you can choose to reflect concern for their welfare and justice. Whether in friendship or enmity, you can willingly choose to obey God's will instead of your whims

OFFERING ONE'S SELF TO GOD

or prodding your ego in every situation. If this is how you choose to be and lead your life, you have cleansed your soul. Moreover, you will then be settled in the beautiful world of God's Paradise.

However, on the other hand, you can choose to be immersed in your self-perceived greatness. When confronted with the Truth, you can choose not to accept it. In your dealings, you can choose to be unjust and cruel. You can choose to follow your own will, not God's will. You have polluted your soul if this is how you choose to be and behave. The Lord of this universe will not accept you in His neighbourhood.

OFFERING ONE'S SELF TO GOD

Paradise is for those fortunate souls who can surrender to God, obey God in every situation, and offer themselves completely to Him.

If someone is injected with blood other than his blood group, his body does not accept it. At once, his body produces antibodies, and the injected blood is expelled. In the same way, a part of the body that is badly burnt is sometimes treated by skin grafting, by stitching on a bit of skin from another part of one's own body. However, if you try using someone else's skin for this purpose instead of yours, your body will recognize it as an alien in a few days. Blood will

stop circulating in that part of your body, and the grafted bit of skin will fall off.

Remarking on this, the Scottish Canadian pathologist, William Boyd (d. 1979), author of a book on Pathology, explained: *Self will not accept non-self*.

The miniature self—man—is an example of ego (self-esteem). From this, one can draw analogies about the honour and respect of the Bigger Self, which is God. The fact is that God is far more respectful and honourable than all human beings who seek self-respect. He loves unity more than all unity-loving people put together. God cannot tolerate any sort of dualism under any circumstances whatsoever.

Who are those fortunate people who will be declared as God's accepted servants in the Hereafter? They are those who have shattered the shell of self and have agreed to lose themselves in God's Self, who are selfless and have prostrated before the one God. They have made God their sole concern and are no more enmeshed in the superficialities of the material world.

It is difficult for a person to acknowledge anyone but himself, thinking it is an affront to himself. Whenever someone appears to acknowledge someone, often it is just out of fear or some self-serving motive. An individual hesitates to offer himself to anyone. However, the Creator has demanded of a person this gift of the self which he is not ready to give anyone. Complete submission to the Creator is the meaning of Islam. A Muslim is willing to give himself to his Creator. A Muslim surrenders himself totally to God and obeys God in every situation. There is no doubt that for

a human being, this is to tolerate the intolerable. God has made this very thing the price of His Paradise. The blessing of Paradise is for those fortunate souls who can offer its price in the form of this gift.

LEARNING FROM NATURE

The highest quality of a human being can be summed up in these two words: predictable character.

Walter de la Mare (1873-1956), the English poet, once observed a lady at a dining table taking her meal. She was eating some food placed on the table, like porridge, muffins, apples, etc. He then had an extraordinary thought: outside the lady, these are food items, but once the lady takes in these items, they are readily converted into a living woman; that is, Miss T. De la Mare later composed a poem on this idea. He added these lines to the poem:

*It is a very odd thing -
As odd can be -
That whatever Miss T eats
Turns into Miss T.*

It is a miracle of Miss T's stomach. However, one's mind can conceive of something a million times stranger than this. All these food items were produced in an external world. However, miraculously, these food items are as per our needs. Both are complementary to each other. This

complementarity between two entirely different things is evidence that there is one Creator of both. It is a highly well-planned creation.

This phenomenon of nature leads us to believe that a single force controls the whole of Nature. It leads us to believe that there is a unity of purpose in Nature. It leads us further to believe in what may be called the oneness of God and the oneness of man. This phenomenon of nature gives us the right ideology of life—an ideology that is the basis of universal peace and brotherhood. It dispels the notion of 'we and they'; it promotes the oneness of thought. It saves us from all kinds of distractions.

This ideology inculcates the notion that nature is not hostile but friendly towards us. Moreover, when we discover that nature is friendly, we also have no option but to adopt this friendly culture in our society.

Then the other aspect of Miss T's experience is that we try to turn all the things around us to our advantage. We try to absorb all the things intellectually that have already been physically absorbed by our stomachs. Everyone talks of spirituality. However, what is spirituality? Spirituality is not anything mysterious. Spirituality can be arrived at through contemplation rather than through meditation. Spirituality is an intellectual phenomenon. In my experience, the basis of spirituality is the mind rather than the heart.

Our digestive system is a mechanism that can extract physical energy from material food. Similarly, our minds can extract spiritual energy from the same material items.

These items are foodstuffs, but internally, these items are spiritual in nature.

For example, if you think that God is constantly supplying all those natural bounties to man without asking for its price, this is a silent message that we too have to live as giver persons in our society without expecting that the receivers should give us anything in return. This kind of experience promotes the culture of selflessness, the culture of unilateral ethics, and the spirit of living as a problem-free member of society.

We need a model code of ethics, and nature serves as that model. Nature is a divine factory. It produces those items that are highly suitable for us. Strangely enough, this industry works without consulting us. The character of nature is a predictable one. So, it is required of us that we live in our society as predictable members of it. Nature works predictably. Thus, it gives us this lesson: live as a predictable member of your society.

The highest quality of a human being can be summed up in these two words: predictable character.

THE DESERVING ONES

The man of sterling value in God's sight proves his mettle under adverse conditions. One who sticks to his beliefs even when the world is pouring scorn on him is the one who will be brought close to God.

Born into a good family, a man experienced a decline in his fortunes. Financially, he had reached a point where he lived on the breadline. As time went on, he eventually found himself without friends. Even his relatives deserted him. He had no one to confide in. No one even greeted him on his way.

Then, one fine day, his fortunes changed miraculously, and he acquired affluence unrivalled in his town. Suddenly his old friends and relatives started flocking back to him, full of reassurance that they had always wished him well. Their reassurances, however, failed to convince him. To none of these people did he pay any regard. However, one person had stood by him through thick and thin. This faithful friend was shown great favour and taken into the man's confidence.

So it is with God. In God's sight, the man of sterling value proves his mettle under adverse conditions. He recognizes the message of truth even when to do so is to swim against the tide of his environment, and one who adheres to his faith, even in the face of ridicule and scorn from those who judge only by appearances.

HAVING IT ALL, BUT FEELING DEPRIVED

It is the spirit in which people do things that matters to God, not the physical quality of their actions. God will be well pleased with one who submitted to Him while His power still lay in the unseen realm. To do this requires inward vision—the capacity to see things that do not meet the outward eye. One who has this vision will find his place with God.

This signifies that a person is chosen for great rewards during destitution. When ignorance is the order of the day, knowledge indeed shows itself. One who sticks to his beliefs even when the world is pouring scorn on him is the one who will be brought close to God.

HAVING IT ALL, BUT FEELING DEPRIVED

In this world, those showered with blessings can be just as unhappy as those deprived of them. Unfortunately, however, there are very few who can grasp this reality.

Charlie Chaplin, who used to play the part of a comic actor in films, was one of America's first film-star millionaires, earning vast amounts of money during his 52-year film career. Born in London in 1889, he worked in films in America, ultimately making his home in a villa on a 37-acre estate overlooking Lake Geneva in Switzerland. When he died in 1977, aged 88, he was worth £10 million. After

early successes, he was showered with laurels, including a knighthood in 1975. Then, in 1972, he returned to Hollywood triumphantly to receive a unique Oscar for “the incalculable effect he had had in making motion pictures the art form of this century.”

There is no part of the globe where he has not been appreciated, and his 80 films are still being shown continuously. Even his first comedies of the 1914-17 period are still exhibited commercially, not as museum pieces, but as modern entertainment—the only motion pictures of that period still to be so exhibited. It is estimated that 300 million people have seen each Chaplin comedy.

He had “brought more joy and laughter to more people than anyone who ever lived.” However, in his old age, he stopped smiling, for as his age increased, so did his infirmities. His sight, speech and hearing began to fall. He started using a wheelchair. While the Chaplin of the screen continued to be an object of entertainment to cinema audiences, the real Chaplin lay in bed, unable to work any longer. He died a few hours before his family’s traditional Christmas celebration began.

One of Chaplin’s biographers, Dennis Gifford wrote, “While he was working, he created something more than mere films; he created life as he wanted it to be. Life with laughter and love, dreams, and hope, but where there was always a happy ending if nothing more than a walk down the road to tomorrow.” (Reader’s Digest, Jun 1978)

Another commentator, writing after Chaplin’s death, said, “Chaplin’s life has been filled with what most lives consist

of yearning after... wealth and fame and creative play and beautiful women... but he does not know how to enjoy any of the four.” (Max Eastman in *Ladies Home Journal*)

It was certainly true of his most intimate relationships; he married four times but was perhaps only happy in his last marriage. However, although extremely rich, he was still dogged by the fear that he might once again become as desperately poor as he had been in his childhood.

The story of Charlie Chaplin is the story of all men, in the sense that happiness eludes them whether, like Charlie, they have everything but cannot enjoy it or whether they are so lacking in resources that a sense of deprivation mars their entire existence. In this world, those showered with blessings can be just as unhappy as those deprived of them. Unfortunately, however, there are very few who can grasp this reality.

The futility of endlessly pursuing happiness is illustrated by the suicide note of a young American woman: “I wanted to find happiness, and so I took to intoxicants. I even went to the extent of having free sex. However, I did not find happiness anywhere. So now, frustrated, I end my life.”

Many liberated men and women stop at nothing in the quest for happiness. However, they finally learn that happiness is not attainable in the way they have chosen to seek it. After leading lives of utter frustration, many feel driven to commit suicide in sheer desperation.

How ignorant are they who lay claim to knowledge! What failures are they who top the lists of the world's most successful men!

HERE TO BE TESTED

God has put man in this world so he may be tested. Only one thing—the invisible wall of death—lies between man and the end of his test on earth.

While in an examination hall, a student has several objects at his disposal. Over his head, there is the roof of the examination hall itself. Then he has a table on which to write, a chair on which to sit, ink and paper for his answers, and attendants to see his requirements. He sits in his place and uses these facilities freely, without restriction.

If he did not have an examination hall to sit, the examinee would be exposed to heat and cold. If there were no desk and chair at his disposal, he would not be able to sit comfortably. Without pen, paper and ink, there would be no question about his writing answers.

However, a student only has these things because of his examination. They are his only so long as his examination lasts. As soon as the exam is over, all its accessories will be taken away from him. Judging from the freedom with which he used them within the confines of the examination hall,

THE LIMITS OF LAW

one would have thought they were his; now, it will become clear that they were only lent to him for a short while.

It is much the same with a man in this world. Here, man has many objects at his disposal. He considers himself free to use them as he pleases, to live the life of his own choice. However, the truth is that whatever man has in this world is his because of the test he is undergoing. God has put a man in this world so that he may be tested. For this test, a man is provided with many essential accessories, things that will only remain in his possession for the duration of his test. As soon as a man's trial has run its course, everything will be taken away from him. One who seems to own everything will be left with nothing. Man will stand alone, like a traveller stranded in the middle of a desert or a man left to drift in the voids of space.

Moreover, only one thing—the invisible wall of death—lies between man and the end of his test on earth.

THE LIMITS OF LAW

The limitations of this world necessitate the coming of another world, an unlimited world in the Hereafter. Without the Hereafter, this world is incomplete.

On August 26, 1978, two children, Sanjay, 15, and Gita, 17, were victims of a cold-blooded murder committed in the capital city of India, Delhi. This horrendous crime aroused

the nation's conscience, and a massive search was launched for the mindless killers. Finally, two men, Jasbir Singh, alias Billa, 25, and Kuljit Singh, alias Ranga, 23, were arrested at Agra railway station and charged with the murder of the two children. A lengthy court case followed, which ended with both men being condemned to death. A series of appeals followed, but all were turned down, and after their case had passed through various legal stages, both men were hanged on January 31, 1982, in Delhi's Tihar Jail.

Additional Session Judge, M.K. Chawla, delivered the sentence of death. His five-page verdict contained this sentence: "The ends of justice would be met only if the two accused were put to eternal sleep, thereby allowing others to live in peace." (*The Indian Express*, April 8, 1979)

The judge's words give an apt illustration of the limits of human law. All that human law can do is separate criminals from the rest of society; it is not capable of delivering the punishment they deserve. To take an innocent life is such a ghastly crime that there is no worldly punishment that can atone for it. A judge in a human court of law cannot punish a murderer in a manner comparable to his crime. He can only prevent those with criminal and homicidal tendencies from causing further harm to human society.

The limitations of this world necessitate the coming of another, unlimited world, which will make up for the shortcomings of this world. Without the Hereafter, this world is incomplete. Here a judge can only separate a criminal from potential victims. It is done to maintain the

smooth running of human society. It does not amount to justice. In the next world, justice will be done. Everyone will receive the punishment which they deserve. The punishment will fit the crime, which it can never do in this world.

PROOF AND PERSONALITY

When signs of truth manifest themselves, it is as if God Himself has come out into the open. Then one must accept the true God. On the other hand, one who forsakes the true God, and attaches himself to a false one, can never prosper in this world of God.

The Quran has gone into the story of Moses and Pharaoh in several places and considerable detail. It describes what happened when the Pharaoh summoned the Egyptian magicians to take Moses on. The magicians threw their wands and ropes into the arena. By magic, they appeared as snakes, writhing on the ground. God then commanded Moses to cast his staff. It turned into a serpent, far larger than any other, which devoured all they had contrived. Finally, the magicians' instruments reverted to their original form.

The magicians realized that Moses was not dealing in magic—he was dealing in divine truths. Moses' miraculous display gave them a glimpse of the face of the Lord. They

believed in him then and there. The Pharaoh was humiliated. Furious, he pronounced the severest punishment in the land—that their hands and feet should be amputated from opposite sides and then tied to the trunks of palm trees and crucified. When the magicians heard the sentence, they replied:

“Never shall we prefer you to all the evidence of the truth that has come to us.” (20:72)

On the one side, the magicians were confronted with an extraordinary personality, and on the other, with clear proof. As befits a truthful human being, they left the former and took the latter. They preferred truth to power and proof to personality.

When confronted with a sign that conclusively proves the truth of something, there is only one thing to do. One must put his proof first and forsake people who oppose it. When signs of truth manifest in this manner, it is as if God Himself has come out into the open. Individuals who put personalities before them is like putting mortals before the Eternal God. Such a person has no place in God's world, for he has offered allegiance to one who is not his true master; he has made a god of one who is not God. One who forsakes the true God, and attaches himself to a false one, can never prosper in this world of God.

THE TABLE SPREAD OF THE COSMOS

The entire universe is a table spread of divine sustenance for a true believer. Everything in this world is made so a person can draw a lesson from seeing it.

The Quran says God is the light of the skies and the earth. It means that the world is entirely an expression of divine attributes. A sensitive heart will see reflections of God in everything that exists here. The entire cosmos is a table spread of divine sustenance.

If faith in God gives someone the sensitivity that true faith in God engenders, he will see God's light everywhere in the universe. When the breeze touches him, He will feel that he is experiencing God's touch in the softness of the breeze. In the flow of a stream, he will see the mercy of God expressing itself. When he hears birds chirruping, his heart will witness a soul-stirring tune played on a divine musical instrument. It would be like bathing in divine fragrance when he smells a fragrant flower.

The entire universe is a table spread of divine sustenance for a true believer. Everything in this world has been made in this way so that a person may draw a lesson by seeing it. Those who truly love God can experience these divine states.

The Flame-of-the-Forest is a tree that bears gorgeous flowers. When autumn comes, and its leaves fall, the tree

appears like a dry stick. However, then a silent revolution happens. It sprouts brilliantly hued flowers! What had been a dry stick becomes laden with stunning flowers. It seems God has specially sent His beautiful umbrella for the tree which was thought to be a useless stick.

It happens so that some servant of God may see it and exclaim, "Lord! I, too, am a Flame-of-the-Forest tree. If you want, you can cause beautiful flowers to bloom on me! I am a dried stick. If you want, you can make me green! I am leading a meaningless existence. If you want, You can fill my life with meaningfulness! I am standing on the edge of Hell. If you want, you can admit me into Paradise!"

YOUR ACTIONS SHOULD HAVE A SPIRITUAL DIMENSION

Only those actions are significant that transform you as a person. In reality, actions that do not transform you have no value.

If there is a hole at the bottom of a bucket, and you pour water into it, all the water will flow out, and nothing will remain inside. The same is true for human beings. Only those of your actions are worthy which provide you with something meaningful about your inner development. If you appear busy doing things, but these actions do not contribute to nurturing and developing your inner being,

they have no value whatsoever. Only those actions are worthy that promote awareness in you and transform you as a person, actions that stir an upheaval deep in your soul, in your very being, drawing you to higher levels of truth. This achievement is the valid criterion for gauging the success or worth of any action. Only that action is worthy if it creates this state in you. An action that does not provide you with this is like pouring water into a bucket full of holes.

What is essential is not what you are doing but what is happening to you while you are doing something. If you have many activities that keep you 'busy', your being 'busy' is 'idle business' and nothing more. It is like the air existing, but without oxygen; like the water existing, but without the capacity to quench thirst; like food existing but being unable to provide energy to the one who eats it; like the sun existing, but not giving its light to others. Such existence is the worst sort of non-existence. If your actions do not become 'spiritual' food for you, diet for your spiritual nourishment; they are not actions. Instead, they are various forms of inaction or something even more meaningless.

If you pour water on a stone, it appears to get wet. However, the stone does not know the thrill and wetness of water. It has not experienced that aspect of water. On the other hand, when a thirsty man drinks water, it rejuvenates him completely. He enjoys an inner experience of the very reality of water.

This example indicates what people routinely do, on the one hand, and what they should do, on the other. In the name

of religion, people often simply perform a set of actions in a perfunctory, ritualistic, and formal manner. They utter words, but these words do not turn into their heartbeat. They do some physical actions that involve their limbs, but they do not touch their souls. All they do in their 'busyness' does not vibrate in their hearts and minds.

To be meaningful, our actions must become spiritual experiences for us. They should repeatedly provide our inner being with spiritual nourishment. Our physical actions must stir an upheaval in our non-physical selves. Only those actions are significant that transform us as a person. In reality, actions that do not transform us have no value. They are like a stone that appears to get wet when water is poured on it but fails to experience the sheer thrill of the quenching of thirst experienced by a person when he drinks a glass of water!

FAITH CONQUERS ALL

God does test man, but the moment he takes the plunge,
God comes forward and saves him.

When, in a dream, Prophet Abraham saw himself sacrificing his son, he interpreted this as a commandment from God and, without the slightest wavering or hesitation, he decided to carry it out. However, no sooner had he put the knife on his son's throat than he heard a voice commanding him

to stop. He had passed the test by showing wholehearted willingness to obey the word of God. He was then provided with a lamb to be sacrificed instead. (37:102-107)

This event shows that, in most cases, a sacrifice is called for but not accepted. The ‘knife’ is taken away before cutting the ‘throat’.

The real test is not physical but psychological. Man’s willingness or unwillingness is put to the test through the act. The actual act is not required in itself. God does not take a man to task unnecessarily. However, only those are absolved from the sacrifice who proved their willingness to make one.

Eschewing the path of sacrifice to a most compassionate God who loves His servants far more than their parents—amounts to distrust in the love of God. God gives far more than He takes. Prophet Abraham was asked to present to God only a son, and God, in return, conferred on him the leadership of the whole world.

Man must serve God without wavering even in the slightest degree, shedding all reservations. He must have complete faith in his most kind, compassionate Creator, who watches over him every moment. God does test man, but the moment he takes the plunge, He comes forward and saves him.

It is strange for the son not to trust his father’s call. How strange it is for man to lose confidence in his Lord!

Chapter 9
Worship of God

WHAT IS WORSHIP?

True worship comes from the discovery of God. God becomes the focal point in a man's life; he has no life of his own when separated from God; so deep are his feelings for his Lord that he cannot find words to convey them adequately.

To Nirmala Devi, an Indian dancer, dancing was a divine art. So profoundly involved was she in her art that she felt unable to fully express herself in her act, powerless to reproduce—in the form of restricted bodily movements—the feeling of total abandon that a dancer seeks to convey. As she said in an interview with *Hindustan Times*, “the dance starts where the gymnastics end.” To her, dancing was not a profession but a way of life. As a result, she felt empty, as if there was no aim in her life—when not dancing.

Such dedication to a “way of life” can also be worship. A dancer's dedication to her art creates feelings of the greatest profundity within her. Dancing becomes for her a way of life. She feels how inadequate the dance forms are when expressing the tumult of her inner emotions. She fails to express herself fully in the way she wants to. She feels empty when not dancing. There appears to be no point in life without dancing—nothing to which she can relate.

The same is true of worship of God. True worship is a divine dance, for it comes from the discovery of God—an event of such immense proportions that it makes one dance. The state of mind of one making such a discovery is

WE OFFER YOU OUR LOVE

just like that of the dancer devoted to her art: God becomes the focal point in his life; he has no life of his own when separated from God; so deep are his feelings for his Lord that he cannot find words to convey them adequately.

WE OFFER YOU OUR LOVE

Man has nothing more significant to give anyone than love. Therefore, in all His perfection, man cannot discover God and offer Him something less than love.

There is a verse in the second chapter of the Quran (Al-Baqara) which reads like this:

“Yet there are some who set up equals with God and adore them with the adoration due to God, but those who believe love God most. If only the wrongdoers could see—as they will see when they face the punishment—that all power belongs to God, and that God is severe in punishment.”
(2:165)

Man is forced by his very nature and the circumstances in which he finds himself on earth to seek some external source of dependence. Unable to rely on his scant inner resources, he seeks a prop in life—one who will compensate for his shortcomings. To take another person or thing to oneself in this way is to worship it. Feelings of adoration and devotion are then directed towards one's object of worship, for to worship something is to love it above all things.

Since God is not visible in this world, man—wanting to see something before he will believe in it—usually stands as one who can be seen in the place that should be allotted to God alone. Usually, it is charismatic leaders who occupy this spot, “greats” in the sight of men, people who have captured the popular imagination. Such leaders are accorded the adulation that should be accorded to God alone. Faced with an inner vacancy, a yawning gap in his soul that had to be filled, man should have turned to God for replenishment instead of other men.

The highest form of spiritual consciousness is true, pure love. How can one not love God when one sees that all sublime qualities come together in His majestic Being; when one realizes that whatever man owns is His divine gift; when one observes the world of nature and is filled with wonderment at the beauty and perfection of the Maker of such a magnificent work of art? Such is God, and when one discovers One like Him, then it is only natural that one should be filled with love and devotion for Him.

Man has nothing more significant to give anyone than love. This being the case, one cannot discover God—in all His perfection—and then offer Him something less than love. Therefore, no offer less than love is acceptable to God, nor is it proper for a man to offer his Lord anything less than pure, true love.

GOD'S HELP

We should have complete faith that God's help will come.
If God wills, He will convert unfavourable circumstances
into favourable ones.

Muhammad ibn Ishaq narrated in his book on the life of Prophet Muhammad that the Quraysh sent Nadr ibn Abi Harith and Aqaba ibn Abi Mu'it to Madinah. They met the Jewish scholars and asked them to tell them about Muhammad. The Jewish scholars said, "Ask them about the people of *al-Kahf* and Dhu'l-Qarnayn. If he answers your question, he is a prophet who receives revelations; if he does not, he is a false claimant to prophethood."

They returned to Makkah and asked the Messenger of God to tell them about these things. He said, "I will give you the answer to your questions tomorrow." The Prophet of God said this without saying "*InshaAllah*". He thought that Jibreel would come tomorrow, so he would ask him and tell them. However, the revelation did not come the following day because he did not say *InshaAllah*. The revelation was delayed for fifteen days.

The Prophet could not answer the next day because of the absence of revelation. This was a golden opportunity for the polytheists of Makkah. They began to spread the rumour that Muhammad could not fulfil his promise. Days passed by, but there was no response from his side. The polytheists of Makkah used this situation to their advantage. They

told the people that it had been proved that he was not a prophet. He would undoubtedly have answered according to his promise if he had been a prophet.

The days and nights of the Prophet were passing by in great anxiety. This situation went totally against him. However, God made it fully favourable for him. The Quraysh did so much propaganda throughout the city that it came to the knowledge of every single man in Makkah. Every man was eager to know what Muhammad had to say about it. The Makkans inadvertently created the atmosphere to listen to these questions on a large scale. Fifteen days later, when chapter Al-Kahf was revealed, and the story of the Companions of Al-Kahf and Dhu'l-Qarnayn was narrated in detail, all the people rushed to listen to it. (*Al-Bidaya wan Nihaya*, vol 4, p. 132-33) The preaching that used to take place in months was done in just a single day. If God wills, He will convert unfavourable circumstances into favourable ones.

PEACE OF MIND

There can only be one way for man to achieve the inner peace and contentment that he seeks: he must discover his Creator and live in His remembrance.

In the modern age, we find a world of material advancement. In recent times, man has taken great strides, but his progress

has been in technological, scientific and industrial fields. Nothing has been done to improve the state of man. As such, he still is in a backward state.

The extraordinary paradox of the present world is that we have all kinds of material progress and developments here, but we do not have contentment. There is outward laughter and frivolity, but inward peace is lacking. There are all sorts of amenities aimed at making people happy, but true happiness is something which seems to elude everyone.

What man desires more than anything is inner peace, which modern man is bereft of. The material progress in the modern age has only deprived man of true contentment. Advances in civilization may have given man outward comfort, but they have done nothing to improve his inner well-being.

This is quite simple: the spirit cannot gain contentment from material things. It is inconceivable that an entity of such a sublime order as the human soul should be able to find fulfilment in ordinary, lowly, material things. One can only agree with Julian of Norwich's words: "Our Soul may never have rest in things that are beneath itself."

If one looks at the world of creation, one finds nothing superior to man. He is, inherently, the noblest of God's creatures. There is only one being that surpasses man in excellence: his Creator. So then, there can only be one way for man to achieve inner peace and contentment: he must discover his Creator and live in remembrance of Him.

Nothing less than the Lord can provide man with the peace of mind that he seeks more than anything else.

The Quran has put this truth in the following succinct words:

“Say, ‘God lets go astray those whom He wills and guides to Himself those who turn to Him, those who believe and whose hearts find comfort in the remembrance of God—surely in the remembrance of God’s hearts can find comfort.’” (13:27-28)

REMEMBRANCE OF GOD IN TIMES OF EASE

To forget God when you are happy and at ease and rush to God when you face some difficulty has no value whatsoever.

In May 1982, the editor of the *Hindustan Times* did a field study to understand the mentality of Indians. His research concluded this about them: “*When a catastrophe strikes, God is at the top. However, money manages to push God to the second place when all is tranquil.*”

This is true not only of Indians, however. It applies to most people across the globe. For example, a person remembers God when he is in difficulty or feels helpless. At that time, he thinks only of God. However, when the situation improves,

and he is no longer faced with any problem, he makes his perceived material interests his sole concern.

However, this sort of religiosity is not religious at all. It simply expresses a person's mindset—who has forgotten his Lord. He does not remember God when he should, and then God shows him how utterly helpless he is. In making an individual face various trials and troubles, God lifts the veil of negligence from his eyes, forcing him to recognize how utterly dependent he is on Him. A person gets frightened when this happens and calls out to God.

A human being is entirely free, having been bestowed with the gift of free will. God desires that a person should, of his own free will, and not out of compulsion, worship and surrender Him. Thus, a person's remembrance of God is true remembrance when he remembers God during his moments of comfort and ease. To forget God when you are happy and at ease and to rush to God when you face some difficulty has no value whatsoever.

Those who consider wealth the greatest have made a false god their deity. How can something that cannot be a support when you are in trouble, something you forget in moments of extreme difficulty, be your deity?

THE REWARD FOR PATIENCE

When faced with challenges, if one leaves the matter to God and bears it patiently for God's sake, his action will never be wasted. Instead, he will receive from God what he could not obtain from fellow human beings.

The Quran attaches utmost importance to patience. The Quran tells us that if someone commits excesses against you and you cannot exercise patience, you can similarly respond to him. However, this is only by way of a concession. Otherwise, the higher response is to forgive him and adopt the reform approach instead of exacting revenge. If you respond this way, you will get your reward from God, and no harm will befall you. Thus, the Quran says: "Let harm be requited by an equal harm. But whoever pardons and amends will find his reward with God. He does not love the wrongdoers." (42:40)

In life, one is repeatedly faced with difficulties at the hands of others. Someone promises you something but does not live up to it. Someone misuses his position of authority to torment you. You hear a complaint about someone, and then you try to do everything to ruin him. You take advantage of a situation to rob someone of his rights. Someone's jealousy of seeing your progress is so intense that he wants nothing but your destruction. And so on.

In most cases, someone who has been oppressed by someone else burns with the desire to take revenge. Therefore, he refuses to agree to forget and forgive the wrong done to

him. Undoubtedly, it is challenging for him to forget the bruises inflicted on his heart in such a situation. However, if he leaves the matter to God and bears it for God's sake, his action will never be wasted. Instead, he will receive from God what he could not obtain from fellow human beings.

If you give your word to someone, it is as if you are giving him a cheque that can be encashed when you act on your promise. However, if you go back on your word when you must act, it is like refusing to honour the cheque you had signed when it is presented for payment. This is, of course, a very bitter experience for the victim of your action. However, if he bears with it patiently, God promises that He will reward him for this. The 'cheque' that could not be 'encashed' in a 'human bank' will be encashed in the 'divine bank', whether in this life or the Hereafter.

A BUD THAT WILL BLOOM IN HEAVEN

A true believer is a flower of the garden of Heaven. In this world, he is, as it were, a bud that will burst into bloom in Heaven in the world to come.

The Quran says: "He will admit them into the Garden He has already made known to them." (47:6)

Elsewhere, it says about the people of Paradise: "Whenever they are given fruit to eat, they will say, 'This is what we

were provided with before,' because they were given similar things. And there will be pure spouses for them, and they will abide there forever." (2:25)

A Hadith relates that Heaven and Hell result from people's actions returned to them. (*Hilyat al Auliya'*, Vol 5, p. 125)

From the above, we learn that entry into Heaven begins in this very world itself. A heavenly person obtains his Heaven in this world itself. It is as if a replica of Heaven exists in this world, and only he will enter Heaven in the Hereafter who have attained this replica of Heaven while in this world. This worldly replica of Heaven is, as it were, a cash award granted to someone before the real reward, as a preliminary indication or symbol of the heavenly reward after death.

Who are these heavenly people? In this world, they are those who experience the psychological states that make them eligible for Heaven in the Hereafter. Their hearts have been shattered into bits in the awareness of being in God's proximity and in the awareness that God is inspecting all their deeds. Expelling all feelings of envy, malice, and revenge from their hearts, they have experienced divine forgiveness. They have seen the mercy of a beneficent Master who forgives His servants who acknowledge their mistakes in their tears of repentance. They release people under their control so their Lord can set them free on that day when they will be in an infinitely more helpless condition. They willingly surrender themselves before the Truth in the same way others will fall flat on seeing God on the Day of Judgment.

BEWARE OF WEEDS GROWING WITHIN

A true believer is a flower of the garden of Heaven. In this world, he is, as it were, a bud that will burst into bloom in Heaven in the world to come. He faces various trials and tribulations in this world, just as others will experience the same in the Hereafter. The different conditions one faces in life are hidden in the form of Heaven and Hell. In the face of such conditions, if you react devilishly, you prove yourself eligible for Hell. If you respond in an angelic manner, you prove yourself eligible for Heaven.

BEWARE OF WEEDS GROWING WITHIN

As a farmer weeds his field, man must weed the field of his mind. This weeding of the field of the mind is another name for introspection. If a man does not constantly engage in introspection, he is bound to face ruin.

Numerous weeds grow independently besides a farmer's crops in a field. They cause damage to the crops by consuming water and manure, and in this way, they do not let the crops grow fully.

If a farmer allows the weeds to grow as they like, they will ruin his crops. He will then never be able to reap a decent harvest. That is why he regularly weeds his field. He carefully removes each weed to clear the field and give his crops the chance to grow fully. Every farmer knows it is not

enough simply to sow seeds in his field. Along with this, it is also essential to pluck out every weed. Otherwise, he will not be able to get the harvest that he hopes for.

As it were, this weeding of a field is what every individual should do about himself. In the terminology of Islam, this is called introspection (*muhasabah*). As in a field, where crops grow along with weeds, whenever one obtains something good, a 'weed' begins to grow, all on its own, from the inside. Therefore, it is essential to be aware of this 'weed', remove it from inside oneself, and throw it away. If you do not do this, you will face the same predicament as a field left without being weeded.

If someone acquires many worldly goods and means, he gets puffed up with an unwarranted sense of self-reliance. If he obtains political power, it engenders conceit. Likewise, wealth leads to miserliness, knowledge to pride, fame to pomp, and social respect to showing off. All of these are, as it were, 'weeds' that, if not removed, will ultimately eat up or destroy one's virtues. Thus, one should become one's guard, and whenever one spots a 'weed' growing within oneself, one should pluck it out and throw it away.

If you do not constantly engage in this sort of introspection, you are bound to face ruin. You will become like a field whose crops have been overrun and destroyed by weeds that have been left to grow unchecked.

EARNING DIVINE REWARD

Divine rewards for giving to others have to do with the intention behind the act of giving. Therefore, those actions will earn divine rewards that are done only for God's sake with no motive other than earning God's pleasure.

Those whom God has blessed with money generally pay their employees and subordinate workers only the regular salary or payment. On the other hand, they happily donate large amounts of money to conferences, relief funds and big institutions. If you ask them why they do this, they will reply, 'What we pay our employees or workers is the payment for their work. We will not get any divine reward for this payment. They have served us, and we have compensated them. What divine reward can we get from this? By paying them a salary, we have settled our matters with them. In contrast, the money we donate to institutions and community work will surely earn us divine reward!'

However, the reality of the matter is quite different. Moreover, this reply is simply an effort to conceal the real story. The matter is that deep inside his heart, every person nurses the desire that if he gives something to somebody, he should receive the reward for it in this very world. The poor man wants this recompense in the form of money. The rich man wants to be compensated in the form of social status. The hidden desire often drives rich people to donate massive amounts to various noteworthy causes.

A poor employee or worker does not have the financial capacity to make large donations. Unlike the rich, he does not have access to newspapers, who can report about him, on to the public stage, where he can garner publicity and fame. He does not have any fancy institution or a band of sycophants to welcome and cheer him. However, when a rich man donates to a famous institution or a laudable community project, he expects an impressive reward for it, in the form of being invited to preside over meetings, a prominent seat in public functions, a hearty welcome wherever he goes, a significant boost in his social status, comprehensive coverage in the media and a place among 'the rich and the famous.

Divine rewards for giving to others have to do with the intention behind the act of giving. Therefore, the divine reward for giving is for that giving which is done only for God's pleasure. Therefore, the divine reward is for giving done for God's sake, in a low-profile way and away from the limelight, with no motive other than earning God's pleasure.

If you have already obtained the reward for giving in this world, what more reward do you think you will get for it in the Hereafter?

FAKE PIETY

This world is to test us. As a result, people often show modesty in front of God. Genuine modesty lies in behaving modestly with the rest of God's creatures.

Sometimes, a bit of mud accumulates on a boulder, and then, after a while, a patch of green moss starts to grow on it. It looks like a narrow field, but the mud, moss, and other greenery are washed away if it rains heavily, and the boulder becomes bare again.

The same thing often happens with people. Externally, they seem fine. They appear to be very 'green'. However, a single blow in the form of some occurrence destroys their 'greenery'. And then they become like bare, dry boulders.

While speaking to others, a person may be the epitome of good manners and reasonableness and of being an ardent advocate of justice and humanity. However, he may behave contrary when the time to act comes. Someone may demonstrate great humility in the mosque while offering his prayers, but he may embody pride and selfishness once he steps out of the mosque. Someone who insists that others be generous and respect people's rights may show envy, maliciousness, and cruelty when his time to act comes.

This world has been created to test us. Here, every person is being tested. However, how often do we fail? How often do we forget the test that we are going through? How often do we seek to prove our truthfulness through

our words, although what alone counts is evidence of our truthfulness through our actions? How often do we show our good manners in good times, and how quickly do we change our colours when things go wrong? How often people are satisfied engaging in a show of modesty by performing some ritual actions before God, although genuine modesty lies in behaving modestly with the rest of God's creatures?

The field of moss that grows on a boulder is a deception. Such a field is of no use to the farmer. One flood strike is enough to prove it for what it truly is. So likewise, showy piety is false and utterly useless. The 'flood' of the Hereafter proves that those who cling to it for support have no support to lean on.

THE LIVING GRAVEYARD

The hospital is like a living graveyard. In seeing the scenes of helplessness at the hospital, we can realize the utter helplessness we will feel in the Hereafter.

I stood inside the hospital. There were all kinds of patients in front of me. Each patient appeared to be a picture of pain. Some had problems with their hands and some with their feet. Someone had a stomach ache, and someone's back was injured. Every man was in suffering in the hospital. Everyone was an image of human helplessness.

If one part of the body is disturbed, this becomes a person's condition. Then what will happen to one when everything is disturbed; when everything he has is taken away from him, which he thought was his possession?

In ancient times, one used to go to the graveyard to take a lesson. Now he should instead go to the hospital for drawing lessons. The dead remained beneath the ground in the graveyard. However, in the hospital, the sick persons are above the ground. Therefore, you have to deeply think about it when you are in the graveyard to bring it into your mind. While in the hospital, lesson-giving items remain in front of your eyes.

The hospital is like a living graveyard. The world of the hospital is a world full of lessons. Someone comes here after meeting with an accident. Someone suffers from a severe illness. Someone has damaged something meaningful in his body. The result is that someone is crying, and someone is screaming. There are scenes of helplessness that are visible everywhere all over the hospital.

These scenes are shown so that a person can learn a lesson from them. One could see the reflection of his suffering in the suffering of others. He may observe the whole reality in a partial event. He may realize the event of the Hereafter in the events of the world.

Such events are everywhere in front of human beings. However, there are very few people who take lessons from them. In taking lessons, we should feel the same as is felt by others. It is to see the present and how many people have the vision to see the future in the present?

OUR TRUE DESTINATION

Successful individuals are those who are welcomed when they reach the next world, and the failures are those who reach God as unwelcome guests without having anyone to receive them.

Among the Mina community of Sawai Madhopur, it has become a symbol of prosperity that the marriage procession should arrive by helicopter, even if the distance between the house of the bride and bridegroom is only 10 kilometres. In the old days, there had always been pomp and splendour in terms of dowry and tilak on the occasion of marriages, but now a much more significant step has been taken in the direction of ostentation: helicopters are being hired out by a Mumbai firm for this purpose. A *Times of India* reporter asked them the reason, and this was the reply: "The bride's parents expect the 'Barat' to reach their village with adequate pomp and show." (*Times of India*, May 30, 1985)

In this world, elaborate arrangements are made for the conveyance which is to arrive at a bride's or bridegroom's house; if people were to realize that such conveyances were destined ultimately to be taken to the court of the Lord of the Universe, their attitudes would undergo a complete transformation.

No one proceeds on his way to the executioner with pomp and ceremony. No one goes in splendour to a judge's court where the verdict is to be pronounced against him. However, at the beginning of the journey and all along the

way, everyone commits the same folly of not recognizing the final destination.

The successful individuals are those whose conveyances are welcomed when they reach the next world, and the failures are those who reach God as unwelcome guests without having anyone to receive them.

AN EXAMPLE OF SUPER PRAYER

When a person becomes so close to his Lord that “the taker” and “The Giver” come on to the same plane, this is the moment when his prayer is not just a word out of the dictionary, but it is expressive of the caller’s whole personality.

We can find an example of a super prayer in an instance that relates to a child who lived in Rampur, a town in Uttar Pradesh, (India). The child said to his father, “Please buy me a bicycle.” The father’s income was not sufficient for him to be able to afford a bicycle, so he ignored the request. The child used to ask for a bicycle repeatedly, and the father repeatedly rejected his request. Finally, he scolded his son one day: “I have told you I cannot buy a bicycle. Do not talk to me about it again? Otherwise, I will beat you.” At this, the child’s eyes filled with tears. He remained silent for some time. Then, in tears, he said: “You are my father. If

I do not ask of you, then whom should I ask?" These words touched his father. Suddenly, he was moved and said: "All right, son, I will buy you a bicycle. I will do it tomorrow." As he spoke, his eyes also filled with tears. The next day he arranged for a loan and got a bicycle for his son.

The son had just uttered some words, but his whole being had become one with his words as he did so. These words meant that he had surrendered himself to his guardian. These words brought him to the point where his son's request became as significant an issue for the father as it was for the son. The son's words brought the father face to face with the idea that if he did not give his son a bicycle, his fatherhood would be questioned.

This incident leads us to understand what kind of prayer (*dua*) attracts God's mercy to the caller. These are not words learned by rote. True prayer is one into which the caller has poured his whole being. When the caller weeps with helplessness, this cannot be borne by the heavens or the earth. When a person becomes so close to his Lord that "the taker" and "the Giver" come on to the same plane, this is the moment when his prayer is not just a word out of the dictionary, but it is expressive of the caller's whole personality. At that time, God's blessings are showered upon the servant. Both the servant and the Lord become well pleased with one another. The All-Powerful embraces the all-helpless.

Chapter 10

Divine Ethics

THE WAY OF THE UNIVERSE

There is but one proper code of ethics for both man and the universe, and that is predictable character. The rest of the universe is strictly observing that code. For a man to succeed, he must follow the same universal laws.

Man is an imperfect being in a perfect world. The stars and the planets, wind and water, trees, and animals, are all just as they should be. They do not deviate from the path prescribed for them in nature. Man, on the other hand, deviates from his natural path. The actions he performs, and the person he develops into, are a contradiction of nature. He follows a path far removed from what has been laid down for him.

While this paradox poses some questions for man, it also provides the answer to him. It shows that man's problems in this world stem from the fact that he has deviated from the path of nature; only by re-adopting that path can he find a solution. We can see that the path which the other objects in the universe follow is one of harmony and perfection. If man were to follow the same path, human society would surely acquire the same ideal qualities.

Our imperfect human world lies amid a much larger, perfect natural world that shows us our aim in life. Therefore, we must first try to understand the world around us and then strive to base our lives on the principles that function in the rest of the universe.

Observing the universe, one thing emerges with absolute clarity: everything is inextricably bound together in one specific law of nature. Nothing ever strays from the path that has been laid down for it. For instance, hydrogen and oxygen molecules can always be depended on to make water in the same way. One can consistently predict the chemical compounds which will form from mixing certain elements, for these elements invariably act according to definite laws. When metals dissolve and water turn into steam, they do not do it erratically; they do so precisely as the law of nature prescribes.

Man is required to act in the same manner. His character should be moulded according to nature's natural and specific laws to acquire a predictable personality. One should be able to depend upon him to act in specific ways in certain situations. Rather than following impulses, which sometimes lead him in one direction, sometimes in another, he should faithfully adhere to the path that the whole of the natural world follows so successfully.

There is but one proper code of ethics for both man and the universe. The rest of the universe is observing that code. The only way that man can succeed is by following suit.

THE TREE'S ELOQUENT SILENCE

My spiritual tree gives me the best definition of spirituality:
Live as a complex free soul, and you will find a complex
free world to live in.

There is a full-grown tree in front of my house in New Delhi, under whose shade I am in the habit of sitting. I call it my spiritual tree. This tree is my teacher, although a silent one. The previous winter, this tree, like many other trees, shed its green leaves. Gradually, it became simply like dry wood.

I was doubtful whether it would ever turn green again. However, in the spring, the whole scenario changed. My spiritual tree again became a tree with lush green foliage. This rebirth of this tree was a great lesson. My spiritual tree turned into a speaking tree. It gave me a very important message: 'O man! Do not be hopeless in any situation. After every dry season, there is a good harvest. After every spell of hopelessness, there is new hope; after every failure, there is a great success; after every night, there is a bright morning.'

My spiritual tree never left its allotted space. It never protested against anyone; it never demanded that others find new living leaves. Instead, it remained in the same place and started a new process. What was this process? This process was to get its food from beneath and from

the sunlight. This strategy worked. The whole of nature came to its help, and after some months, it gained its lost greenery again. It is the lesson I learned from my spiritual tree.

No protest, complaint, demand, street activism, or stage activism: simply trust your natural abilities and work silently. Try to re-shape your destiny. Soon, you will be glad to discover that you have regained your life.

What is a tree? A tree is an illustration of nature. Nature tells us of its scheme through trees—that after every winter, a new spring will follow. What is needed is only to discover yourself, to discover your potential. Discover the opportunities around you, and then avail yourself of all these opportunities by silent planning.

My spiritual tree creates no noise, no problems, and no unwanted situations. These are the secrets of a green tree. This is also the secret of human life. Adopt the tree culture, and you will be a good member of your society, just like a tree which is a good ‘member’ of its garden.

Moreover, my spiritual tree has never asked me for anything. It has never sent any bills to my office. However, it gives me pleasant scenery, shade, green branches, fresh oxygen, flowers, etc. It also provides a perch for chirping birds, who give me much pleasure with their beautiful songs. This is the culture of my spiritual tree. It silently gives me a message: ‘O man! Adopt my culture, and you will become a fitting ornament of the garden of the universe.’

My spiritual tree gives me the best definition of spirituality. Live as a complex free soul, and you will find a complex free world to live in. Your destiny is in your hands. Never allow others to decide your destiny. Instead, utilise your opportunities, turn your potential into actuality, and soon you will find that you have no complaints to register against others.

To my way of thinking, every tree is an embodiment of spirituality. It is a silent lexicon of spirituality. Therefore, adopt the tree as your teacher. The tree is a good teacher who is available to every student. The only condition for learning from the tree is to be able to listen to non-verbal language.

BIRD AND MAN

Man has an excellent example in the animals, for they live perfectly natural lives, whereas man deviates time and time again from the path of nature.

Salim Ali (1896-1987) was India's most renowned ornithologist. He became interested in bird watching when he was only ten years of age. Since then, he spent the greater part of his life with binoculars in hand, a camera strung across one shoulder, and a bag containing essential pieces of equipment. He was mostly found in the countryside, watching birds and observing their habits. He travelled

far and wide in pursuit of his interest and was said to be even more widely travelled than Jawahar Lal Nehru. It is not surprising, then, that people called him a birdman. His expertise in the study of birds earned him many national and international awards.

More than 2000 species of birds are found in India. Salim Ali's study of them enabled him to write many books. One of his books, *The Handbook of Indian Birds*, resulted from twenty years of intensive study.

Once Mr Ali was interviewed at his home in Bombay by an Indian national daily newspaper correspondent. The journalist found him courteous and urbane to a pretty exceptional degree, and it occurred to him that perhaps this immense courtesy in some way was derived from his observation of birds. In his report of the interview, he wrote: "Perhaps a course in bird-watching should be recommended to make men more human." (*The Times of India*, September 2, 1983)

Innumerable species of birds and animals are to be found in the world. In ancient times, man knew very little about them, but in the present age, extensive study has been made on the different animals that inhabit the earth, and much information about them has been accumulated. Nowadays, there are various ways by which man can become acquainted with the way of life of animals. It is one of the purposes behind aviaries and zoos.

Zoology, the science of animals, is a permanent feature of the curriculum of most universities. Man has an excellent

example in the animals, for they live perfectly natural lives, whereas he deviates time and time again from the path of nature. If a man would only follow the ways of the animals, this would be enough to earn him salvation.

FAKE FRUITS AND FLOWERS

True religion is that which makes one realize that there is but one God and Creator of this universe who will gather all human beings after death to take them into account.

These days, people have started manufacturing plastic flowers and fruits. They look just like real flowers and fruits. However, if you smell a plastic flower, it has none of the fragrance of a natural flower. If you bite into a plastic fruit, it has none of the taste of natural fruit. In just the same way, absurd forms of religiosity have appeared these days. On its face, they appear grandiose, but if you examine them closely, they have none of the true essence of religion—fear of God and genuine concern for other human beings. In this age of plastic, perhaps religiosity has become plastic, too.

Many people may appear very pious but unwilling to accept their mistakes. They are not willing to sacrifice their egos for the sake of God. They may get together with others and sink their differences and complaints about their interests. However, in this world, no one will set aside his differences

and complaints and join hands with others for the sake of God.

True religion is that which enables a person to attain the truth that there is but one God of this entire universe. This God is the Creator of all things. He will gather all human beings after their death and take account of them. And then, based on their deeds, He will put them into eternal Heaven or Hell. It is such a serious fact that if it seeps deeply into a man's mind, his entire life is completely transformed. He becomes cautious about all things that lead people to the fires of Hell, and he becomes very eager about the things that make someone worthy of the gardens of Heaven. He begins to fear God above everything else. He begins to love God above all else. He subdues his existence to live in the glory of God.

This growing awareness of God and the Hereafter makes people more attentive and responsible for other creatures. If he thinks ill of others by chance, it will make him feel that he is hurling himself into the pit of Hell. Just the thought of indulging in high-handed behaviour with others brings the fear that his action will lead angels to drag him to Hell. If he deals unjustly with people, he feels he will be taken to task by God in the Hereafter. In his sight, every person appears not simply as a human but as a being with whom God, along with all His angels, is standing together.

BOTH ON ONE PLANE

People are judged based on appearances in this world: they will be judged according to realities in the next world. If someone works for fame, he will have nothing but ignominy to look forward to when he comes before God.

On March 31, 1981, the main story in newspapers worldwide was the assassination attempt on U.S. President Ronald Reagan. A youth named John Hinckley had fired six shots at the President in two seconds with an automatic pistol. One bullet had entered his chest and settled in his lung. Before he reached the hospital, he had lost half his body's blood. However, emergency treatment came to his assistance, and his life was saved.

Before long, the President was on the way to recovery and chatting with the doctors and nurses in his hospital ward. He recalled his early career as a film star, in which he had never achieved great fame. He made one of the remarks in this connection: "If I had this much attention in Hollywood, I would have stayed there." (*Time Magazine*, April 13, 1981)

Why did John Hinckley commit this deed? He was in love with a young actress named Jodie Foster. He had written to her repeatedly but had received no response. Eventually, one day before he attacked President Reagan, he wrote to her: "Now you will know who I am."

The next day, this unknown youth had made headlines worldwide; he had become big news; his name could be heard on radio and television. He had achieved more fame by pulling a trigger than others do after a lifetime of effort. Hinckley was a would-be assassin, and Ronald Reagan was his victim; but in as much as both were after fame, both were the same. One person may seem a criminal and another innocent, but they live on the same plane if both seek worldly gain. People are judged on appearances in this world: they will be judged according to realities in the next world. No matter what an individual is doing on earth, whether his efforts seem to be directed towards a noble or an ignoble end, if he is working for fame, then he will have nothing but ignominy to look forward to when he comes before God.

THE EXCEPTION OF THE HUMAN WORLD

Even the most harmful animal does not humiliate another creature. Only man does this. God made man in the 'best of mould', but in his foolishness, man demeans himself in the lowliness of 'the lowest of the low'. (The Quran, 95:4-5)

The famous Persian poet Shaikh Saadi (1195-1226) once remarked, "I fear God, and next to God I fear them that fear

Him not.” Shakespeare said somewhat the same thing but in a different way. He has commented that man is the only animal he fears.

You know beforehand how many things in this world behave or react. You already know about fire, that if you thrust your hand into it, it will burn you. You already know that it will not behave the same way if you keep your hand away from it. The same holds true for all other things. Even about dangerous wild animals, we have prior knowledge that they do not attack human beings unless provoked and that if they attack, it is only out of self-defence.

It means that everything in this world works according to specific fixed regulations. By considering these regulations, you can save yourself from being harmed by them. However, human beings are the only creatures whose actions do not have any such fixed or predictable rules. They are entirely free and can do whatever they want, whenever they want.

In this world, human beings are the only creatures who attack or engage in unilateral action against others without any proper reason. Human greed and revenge know no bounds. You may confine yourself to your own business based on your efforts, silently trying to progress. However, you will still not be safe because others will grow jealous of you and will try to pull you down. Humans have unlimited desires that they want to fulfil. They also have an unlimited urge to see others get destroyed, which gives them malicious pleasure.

WHAT GOD WANTS FROM US

Even the most harmful animal does not know how to humiliate another creature. It does not know how to demean others to exalt itself and satisfy the urge to feel proud. It has no desire to get others into trouble and derive pleasure from this unnecessarily. It is the only man who does this. God made man, as the Quran (95:4-5) says, in 'the best of mould', but in his foolishness, man demeans himself to the state called 'the lowest of the low' in the Quran.

WHAT GOD WANTS FROM US

God wants to see evidence of a person's faith in its acceptance in the recesses of his heart, and his dealings with others; while people want to give evidence of it simply by verbal proclamations of the faith.

An examination was being conducted in a college. A student entered the examination hall and took his seat. However, he did not write anything at all on the answer sheet. Instead, he just sat in his chair. And then, three hours later, he stepped out of the hall and went to the library, where he began answering the examination paper. He had left the answer sheet blank in the examination hall, but there, in the library, surrounded by books, he filled his notebook with his scribbling.

You will say this is a fictitious story. Indeed, you will remark that no student can be as stupid as writing his examination in the library instead of the examination hall. However,

suppose this story is confirmed; you will add that this student was not in his senses.

Only a madman can indeed behave like this. However, something that appears so utterly absurd in an examination of this sort is exactly what everyone is doing about the Hereafter. A college student should write his examination in the hall, not the library. In the same way, there are appropriate places to appear for the examination set by God. People do not appear for examinations in places that God has set for them for this purpose. Instead, they want to write their examinations elsewhere.

God wants to see evidence of a person's faith in its acceptance in the recesses of his heart, while people want to give evidence of it simply by verbal proclamations of the faith. God gauges our worship based on the humility and sincerity of our prayers, while people think punctilious conformity to the minor details of external acts of worship proves their piety. God wants to see the proof of their faith in their inner being and dealings, while people express it in mere words. God wants us to follow His teachings in our lives while people are busy stirring protests against others to make them follow God's injunctions. God wants to see us help oppressed individuals, but people write, speak, and issue statements about collective oppression; never really helping oppressed individuals while presenting themselves as ardent supporters of the oppressed.

JUST WORDS, NO ACTION

Everyone knows that the answer sheet a student fills up sitting in a library instead of an examination hall is utterly useless. Alas! If only people knew that, in the same way, actions are wholly valueless when performed in any 'place' other than where God wants them to be done!

JUST WORDS, NO ACTION

People present themselves as models of decency and humility, but when their egos are bruised, they vent their jealousy and pride with a vengeance!

Today, paper is so readily available that you will find at least one bit of it lying wherever you look. However, these scraps of paper have no value. A currency note is also a bit of paper, but it has a definite value. Its value is so sure that no one can doubt it. The difference between a currency note and any ordinary piece of paper is that no one has undertaken a guarantee to honour it in the latter's case, while the former carries a guarantee from the government's bank. Every note has printed on it the promise that its bearer would be entitled to the total value printed on it. It guarantees that the bank will honour the note's value which provides value to the bit of paper that is the currency note.

The same is valid for words. Today, we are surrounded by words all around us. However, much of what we speak has no value at all. These words are not accompanied by the

guarantee of firm determination and sincerity. Someone promises to do some work for you, but when, at the appointed time, you ask him for help, he makes some excuse or the other and, in this way, does not honour the value of his words. He had given you a bit of 'paper' in the form of a verbal promise, but when the time came, he was unwilling to engage in the action that was the actual value of the words that formed his promise. His words were useless scraps of paper and not a genuine banknote.

People revel in the torrent of words that they let out, in the lofty promises that they make. However, they are simply unwilling to pay the reasonable price of their words to honour their value. Thus, their utterances become just bits of scrap paper, like the wastepaper that litters the streets, which people simply ignore.

Some people excel in passing resolution after resolution and issuing statement after statement to support the oppressed, but when a suffering person comes to their door asking for their help, they become as cold as an iceberg. How often are people's words not matched by their intentions! How often do people say things that they do not mean! How many people present themselves as models of decency and humility, but when their egos are bruised, they vent their jealousy and pride with a vengeance!

TWO KINDS OF PEOPLE

God wants people to adopt divine ethics by showing humility, and use their wealth in God's way, and when they gain the upper hand over the people, they become a symbol of justice for everyone.

The Quran says: "Every soul is held in pledge against its deeds" (74:38), "lest a soul is held in pledge because of what it has wrought" (6:70). On the Day of Resurrection, the evildoers will be told, "taste what you have earned." (39:24). The same thing has been stated in a hadith in these words: "what is your own doing will be returned to you." (*Hilyat al Auliya'*, Vol. 5, p. 125)

The fact is that every man is an industry. The believer is God's industry, and the non-believer is Satan's industry. Every man is harvesting according to the negative or positive personality he has developed. According to God's knowledge, death comes upon man when he has completed his work. Then his next life begins, where he is eternally handed over to the crop he has grown. The one who has grown the crop of thorns will find himself trapped amongst thorns. However, on the other hand, the one who has grown the crop of flowers and fragrances will enter the gardens of Paradise forever.

What is the industry? The industry is the system in which raw material is put in machines which then comes out in the form of manufactured goods. A human being is one who when invested with some greatness by God, responds to it

in the form of humility. When he is held accountable, he accepts that with feelings of humility. When wealth comes to him, he puts it to use in the way of God. When he gains the upper hand over the people, he becomes a symbol of justice and benevolence for them. This is the man who proves that he has established the industry of God within himself. Everything that enters him comes out in the form of divine ethics.

The other man is he from whose industry only thorns and poison are produced. Whenever he gets the opportunity, he uses that to achieve popularity. When wealth comes to him, he spends it on showy activities. When he receives power over someone, he makes plans to destroy him. If he disagrees with anyone, he reacts with harsh words and actions. When someone has to deal with him, he experiences selfishness, injustice, and exploitation from him.

Such a man is as if he has established the devil's industry inside him. Whatever enters into him becomes poison and fire and thorns. After death, he will find himself surrounded by the same evils. He will be found trapped in Hell with the consequences of his actions.

THE DIVINE ‘OPERATION’

The Day of Judgment is coming soon when the divine ‘operation’ will reveal the entire truth about people and when they will have no alternative but to acknowledge their crimes.

Once, in Phoenix, a town in America, a man was admitted to a hospital. He had a severe problem in his stomach. The doctors said that he required an operation. Thus, his stomach was operated upon. To their shock, the doctors discovered a diamond inside his stomach! It was this that had caused the man such intolerable pain. When the diamond was removed, it was found that it still had its price tag! It read, ‘Price: 6500 dollars’.

The police were called in at once. They questioned the patient, who initially claimed that he had won the diamond as a reward and swallowed it by mistake. However, the truth was out very soon—the man had stolen it from a shop! When he left the shop, the shopkeeper suspected he had been up to no good and went after him. When the man realized he might be nabbed, he quickly swallowed the diamond! The police had been looking for him, and now that they had found him, they arrested him. (*Hindustan Times*, November 5, 1981)

The man was unable to digest the diamond that he had illegitimately acquired. As a result, he was compelled to discharge it from his system, so he became living proof of his crime.

This sort of a thing, but in a more severe form, will happen with everyone in the Hereafter.

In this world, people oppress, rob others of their rights, and refuse to respect and acknowledge their fellow creatures. They think they are 'making it big' despite doing all this. Wielding their power and cunningness, they try to hide their crimes. However, this is only till they do not encounter death. Death is, as it were, an 'operation' that God has devised for every person that brings outside whatever is inside him. It reveals whatever he had concealed. Just as a man's stomach cannot digest a diamond, this universe of God's cannot accept oppression and injustice.

The Day of Judgment is soon coming when the divine 'operation' will reveal the entire truth about people and when they will have no alternative but to acknowledge their crimes.

Chapter 11

Travelling Towards God

WHEN THE JOURNEY ENDS

Just as life's journey is nearing completion, it is struck by disaster—inevitable death—what a tragic outcome to such a long, arduous journey!

After a long journey, the express train was approaching its destination. The view from the train indicated that the final station was near. Hundreds of passengers were filled with new life. Some were fastening their bedding; some were changing clothes; some were just peeping expectantly out of the window. All were excited, eagerly awaiting their journey's end.

Suddenly, there was a violent thud. The express train had collided with a train waiting in the yard. One can easily imagine what happened then: happiness suddenly turned to grief, vibrant lives were faced with violent death, and hope was transformed into despair. A story, which seemed to be heading toward a happy ending, became a tragedy at the final moment.

So it is with life. Man strives to make himself comfortable in this world, to see his ambitions fulfilled and his life a successful one. However, death comes just as his dreams are nearing completion. He leaves his lavish mansion for the desolation of the grave, his glistening body to be devoured by earth and worms. His life's labour vanishes without a trace as if there was no connection between him and all he had strived for on earth.

Visions of greatness had occupied his mind, but he was forced to enter the grave and proceed to God's court of justice. This world is quite different from what he had sought to construct for himself on earth. Here he is destitute, without money to fulfil his needs or clothes to hide his body. All his worldly earnings come to nothing. His friends desert him. He is left powerless with nothing he has depended on in the world to help him.

Just as life's journey is nearing completion, it is struck by disaster—inevitable death—what a tragic outcome to such a long, arduous journey!

THE TWENTY-FIFTH HOUR

People should fear most the Last Trumpet with which God will announce the end of the world. The advent of the *Qiyamah* or the Final Day is as sure as its consequences are eternal.

The thought of the twenty-fifth hour somehow takes us into a strange realm beyond our neat and comfortable ideas about the twenty-fourth hour. We happily begin another day at the end of the twenty-fourth hour. Full of life, hope and promise. As always. The *Twenty-Fifth Hour?* is the title of a book published in France, analyzing world perspectives of the day. According to its author, this twenty-fifth hour is the hour of doom, an hour which could arrive at any moment.

Why? Because the world is divided into two groups, both of which are committed to the total annihilation of the other. Inevitably, this will mean the annihilation of the whole human race. The blind arms race of these two blocs has turned the world into a vast storehouse of lethal weapons and is leading the world to the brink of destruction.

Is human warfare then going to bring upon us the Last Day? The Day of Judgement? We certainly seem to be rushing towards it on a terrifying parallel with the last earthquake with which God will bring this world to an end. The period of trial that God has ordained for man will then be over, and an eternal, perfect world will replace the present one. But only after God's last earthquake—the earthquake of the Final Day. Then will come God's judgement of all human beings. Then it will be known, with terrifying certainty, whether one is to be sent to Paradise or consigned to the everlasting flames of Hell. The moment is upon us. The twenty-fifth hour, the hour of doom, must be expected at any moment. Each morning we must ask ourselves if we will live until the evening. Will there be a single soul who can outlive the final holocaust?

People are rightly apprehensive of nuclear warfare. However, they should most fear the blowing of the Last Trumpet with which God will announce the end of the world. Nuclear war may or may not be a certainty, but the advent of the *Qiyamah* or the Final Day is as sure as its eternal consequences. Eternal bliss will then be the reward

JUST SHORT OF THE SUMMIT

for good deeds, while there will be nothing but eternal damnation for evil deeds.

JUST SHORT OF THE SUMMIT

We must always be aware that our ultimate destination lies not in the realization of our dreams in this world, but our greatest climax lies beyond the grave in the abode we finally take up in the Afterlife.

A veteran of World War I, Maurice Wilson had always dreamt of standing on “the roof of the world”—on the top of Mount Everest (at 29,028 feet, the highest peak in the world). His keenness to realize this ambition was so great that he walked out of a successful family business, spent all his money on a second-hand aeroplane and flew six thousand miles from England to India, finally touching down at Purnea on the borders of Nepal. Then, having been refused permission to proceed beyond this point in his aircraft, he sold it and approached Everest through Darjeeling and Tibet.

On the last leg of the journey, he carried only a small tent, some rice, an automatic camera, and a few other small items. He planned to stand on the summit on his 36th birthday, April 21, 1934, but when he was just a few days away from making this birthday the most memorable one ever, he was overtaken by a violent Himalayan storm and was forced to descend to his previous base. One year later,

the famous Sherpa guide, Tenzing Norgay, found Wilson's body and, next to it, his diary, in which he had written, "only 13,000 feet more to go. I have the distinct feeling that I will reach the summit on April 21." He had hoped that his automatic camera would record his moment of triumph for posterity. However, that moment never came. Moreover, no one could determine the actual cause of his death.

It was the first serious attempt to conquer Mount Everest, and it had failed. The saga of Maurice Wilson, divested of its elements of high drama, is if we could but realize it, the saga of many of the world's less illustrious, less daring millions. Most of us, in a lower key, strain after some cherished dream, some gilded ambition, full of thoughts of the happiness that awaits us at some imagined point in the future. However, death can come at any moment and may forestall the ripening of well-laid plans. It is an eventuality that many of us completely lose sight of in the struggle to achieve an ambition. However, it is an ever-present reality we must prepare ourselves for, sooner or later. We must never lose our awareness that our ultimate destination lies not in the realization of our dream world in this world but in the abode we finally take up in the Afterlife. We shall be better able to come to terms with the anti-climactic nature of human existence if we keep our minds firmly fixed on the notion that the greatest climax lies beyond the grave.

THE ETERNAL JOURNEY

A man without faith lives on earth as if he will stay here forever, while a man of faith lives like a traveller on the way to the next world.

Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi (1859-1943) went to Azamgarh, U.P., by train. A disciple of his, a railway guard, came to meet him at a station. A villager appeared and presented Maulana with a bundle of sugarcane. The gift was accepted, and Maulana asked one of his companions to have it weighed and place it in the luggage compartment. "There is no need to have it booked," the guard volunteered, "I will speak to the guard on this train. He will look after it." "But the guard will only accompany this train," Maulana replied, "and I am going on further." The guard thought that Maulana Thanawi would be changing trains at some station. "Never mind," he said, "I will tell the guard to inform the guard on the next train. You will not have to bother about it." "But I am going on still further," Maulana repeated. Astonished, the guard asked: "Where are you going? You told me a moment ago you were going to Azamgarh." Maulana Thanawi remained silent for a moment and then replied: "I am going on to eternity. Which guard will accompany me there?"

The same is accurate, not only for rail journeys but also for all matters in life. Every affair should be looked at in its eternal context. A "guard" may give someone temporary support in this world, but when he reaches the next world, there will be no one to lend a helping hand. If a man keeps

in mind that he is on the way to the Hereafter, then he will consider everything that will become worthless there as worthless now, no matter how great a worldly price it may seem to command. He will give weight only to those things that will be of consequence in the next world, no matter how inconsequential they may seem now.

In this world, a man may have command of impressive words that he uses to defy the truth; but in the next world, he will find himself lost for words. He may wield his power unjustly, content that his victims will never be able to avenge his wrongs, but in the next world, he will be divested of all power. Beguiled by wealth, he may become proud in this world, but in the next world, he will have nothing to be proud of; he will have left his wealth behind.

It is the fundamental difference between a man of the true faith and a disbeliever. A disbeliever lives on earth as if he will stay here forever, while the hallmark of true faith is the belief that a man is on the way to the next world. Of course, then, the distinction between belief and disbelief is a psychological one; but these two different attitudes to life make for vastly different practical lives—so different that one leads to Hell, while the other paves the way to the gardens of Paradise.

THE PRECIPICE

Humanity stands on the brink of a precipice, but people have the illusion of being safe at home. People are heading toward death but are happy with the thought that they are advancing on life's journey.

Once a man came to see me unexpectedly, at an odd hour, and he did not even accept the offer of a cup of tea. Instead, he said, "I have to reach home soon. My wife must be waiting for me." And then, in a hurry, he started his scooter and set off. Barely half an hour later, the telephone bell rang. It was his wife. In a greatly agitated tone, she stammered, "Your friend..." I could hear her sobs and cries, and the meaning of the sentence could be guessed. Putting the receiver down hastily, I rushed to her house. Having said goodbye to me, he had reached home but stumbled and fell while climbing the stairs. Some people carried him upstairs, and the doctor was immediately called, but he could only declare him dead.

When he rode off on his scooter, he had set off for his home, but, in truth, he was heading toward death. This is not an unusual event. Such events take place every day and in all kinds of places. For example, on May 26, 1979, a big jet plane took off from O'Hare airport. Shortly afterwards, it crashed and burst into flames. All of the 271 passengers were burnt to death. This particular accident happened to a few people, but such is the fate of all human beings. All men on the move are heading toward death and destruction. Death is closer to man than life itself. Everyone is standing

on the verge of death. Everyone is in danger of having come to the end of his period on earth and of being taken off at any moment to the next world from where he will never return. Then his existence will be one of either eternal Hell or eternal Heaven.

When a blind man comes across a well on his way, everyone knows that the most important thing at that moment is to warn him of it. How strange it is that the whole human race is standing on the brink of the most dangerous precipice, yet no one ever feels the need to give warning of it. When a servant of God gives a danger signal, he is ridiculed and labelled a traitor, far from being appreciated. He is accused of wanting to lull the nation into the comfortable sleep of cowardice, dampening the spirit of a holy war among Muslims, and shifting the emphasis from real issues. He is vilified as not the messenger of life but death and doom. Humanity stands on the brink of a precipice, but people are so disinclined to look in front of them that they have the illusion of being safe at home. People are heading toward death but are happy with the thought that they are advancing on life's journey.

A DOOR, NOT A GRAVE

Before death, man thinks of himself to be the master of his destiny. Death takes him to a world where he is compelled to accept being wholly subordinated to God.

There is a great lesson in a scene at the graveyard for those who contemplate. At the young man's death, the *imam* (prayer leader) led the funeral prayer. He conducted the whole prayer very quickly, and after that, people immediately put on their shoes as though in a great hurry to finish the formality of attending the funeral prayer and returned to their activities. After the funeral prayers were said, the body was taken for burial at the adjacent graveyard. A few people accompanied the body to the grave.

The graveyard was close by, and the grave was still being dug. People stood around in groups. Some were relating stories of oppression. Some complained about the severity of the weather. Someone offered his knowledge about the prices of things. Others were discussing the political leadership in the country. In other words, people were talking about different topics of interest.

The above behaviour was the opposite of the way taught by the Prophet. At such times, the Prophet used to say the following supplication:

“Peace be upon you, O dwellers of these graves! May God forgive you and us. You have preceded us, and

we are following your trail.” (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 974)

A grave should remind us of the verses from the Quran and sayings of the Prophet that talk about death, the Day of Judgement, Heaven, and Hell. It should make us aware that it is an open door that we are standing in front of and witnessing sights of the other world with our own eyes. It should make our hearts restless. However, unfortunately, these feelings are not aroused in people. Their problems beset them.

However, the real problems are not the ones in which people are entangled. Instead, the real problem is the one that will appear after death. If only people considered what they might have to face after their death! A person leaves this temporary world and heads toward his eternal home. Therefore, the grave is not a grave but a door that has been opened for the deceased to enter the other world. Passing through this door, one must cross over to the other side.

Whenever someone dies, it is an extraordinary moment. It is as if, at that moment, the door leading out to the other world, which is hidden from us, is opened for a short while. If one possesses eyes that can truly see, one can view through this door the other world where all of us, one day or the other, have to go. However, the sights of the present world have so bedazzled people that even when they stand before this open door, they see nothing of what is on the other side. Even though they stand so close to reality, they remain unaware.

Death indicates our reality to us. It tells us that we are moving from a situation where, in this world, we think we have control over things, to another situation, in another world where we will have no control over anything. It tells us that we move from light to darkness, from everything to nothing. Before death, humans are in a world where they think they are the masters of their destiny. However, after death, they are taken to a world where they are compelled to accept being wholly subordinated to Someone Else—God.

If you keep this reality in mind, your life will be transformed. It will make you realize, for instance, how absurd it is to trouble others because you will have to answer for this after death when you will be under Someone Else's control. It will make you ashamed for thinking of yourself as superior to others because you will realize that the supposed superiority that will one day be snatched away from you is unreal.

THE JOURNEY OF LIFE

Every person has built an entire world full of hopes and desires in his mind. Soon, he realizes he is heading instead, to the world of God, towards the Hereafter.

Mustafa Rashid Sherwani, a well-known freedom fighter, industrialist, and member of the Rajya Sabha, once travelled

on a train from Allahabad to Delhi. The train reached Ghaziabad, near Delhi, when he suffered a massive heart attack. He died on the train itself before getting any medical treatment. It happened on the 8th of April 1981. At that time, Mr Sherwani was 59 years old.

Incidents like this happen every day. Every day, innumerable people pass through the door of Death. Every day, hundreds of thousands of people set off from their homes to someplace or another, but on the way, they are seized by God's angels, who take them to the stage of the Hereafter, rather than to their desired destination.

Every person has built an entire world full of hopes and desires in his mind. He imagines that he is advancing towards the world of his hopes and walking in the direction of the 'tomorrow' of his dreams. However, very soon, he comes to know that he is heading towards the Hereafter, not to the world of his hopes, but the world of God. People are simply unaware of where they are heading and where they will arrive.

People generally give their all for the sake of their children. However, before they can see and rejoice in their children's future, death drags them off to their future, for which they had made no preparations. People make magnificent houses, hoping to live there in comfort, but even before they can enter their dream houses, death takes them away. People try to become as rich as possible, thinking this will take them to the pinnacle of honour and progress, but they soon learn that what awaits them is a deserted grave.

HOW STRANGE!

Every day, God leads some 'passenger' to the grave, while the passenger thinks he is heading to 'Delhi'. However, human beings learn no lesson from this. They still think that their destination is 'Delhi', not death.

HOW STRANGE!

If the fear of the Hereafter awakens in someone, it will move his whole personality mobilizing all the latent powers.

An Indian aeroplane flew from Bangkok to Bombay on June 3, 1984. It was a Boeing 747 with four engines and 152 passengers on board. The plane had just reached into the air when one of its engines caught fire. Captain Verma landed the plane at a nearby airport, Don Muang. After twenty minutes of take-off, the plane was back on the ground.

The plane landed safely on the runway with the pilot's vigilance, where firefighters were already present on the scene after receiving electronic information. However, many passengers were injured and were immediately taken to hospital. The cause of the injury was not the plane; instead, according to the reports published in the *Times of India* (June 4, 1984), the reason was:

Most injuries were due to passengers rushing for the emergency exit from where they descended through a chute.

When the plane landed, the passengers rushed to the door to get off the plane and injured themselves.

The fire of the plane had not yet caught anyone. The only fear was that they might be caught by the fire and burnt to death. This fear made people fall on each other. They started to run away first and go ahead of the others.

However, man is faced with even greater danger. It is death and, after that, the danger of Doomsday and the Day of Judgement. However, no one is afraid of that. No one feels the need to run away from it.

What motivates man the most in the present world is “fear”. The psychology of fear is the most significant source of action. The fear of the Hereafter is the greatest. This means that if the fear of the Hereafter awakens in someone, it will move his whole personality, mobilizing all the latent powers.

PROCESSION OF DEATH

People are continually dying here on earth. However, we fail to realize the implications of death. This is because we lack a living picture of Heaven and Hell in our minds.

A coffin is being carried aloft toward the grave. It seems like a journey, not just from one point to another, but from man's beginning to his end.

When a man is born into this world, he immediately has recourse to a mother's compassion and a father's protection. Next, he grows up among friends and relatives. Then he reaches adulthood and forges ahead on his chosen path through life.

His journey continues until, finally, death comes. Those relatives who had supported him through life now carry him to his final resting place. They lay him alone under a mound of earth, where there is just him and his Lord.

Until that point, he had been confronted with humans like himself; now, he is face to face with a God infinitely greater than himself. Until then, he had been in a world where he had power; now, he is powerless. Man, the most helpless of creatures, will come before God, the All-Powerful, a meeting so extraordinary that it is almost beyond imagining.

People are continually dying here on earth. Not a day goes by without our seeing or hearing of the death of someone or the other. However, we fail to realize the implications of death. We lack a living picture of Heaven and Hell in our minds. We are preoccupied with other, totally unrelated matters. We are too busy making homes for ourselves in this world to look to our eternal home. We are too concerned with worldly profit-making to care whether we have done enough to earn everlasting life. We are too involved in improving our society's position to consolidate our relationship with God. We think of every human being in the same worldly terms, so when a person dies, we feel only a sense of loss that one who gave so much to the world

has been taken away from it. In this ephemeral world, we see a man but fail to see him in the next eternal world. How can we realize the implications of death; how can we see that, as one is led to one's "rest," one is being led to one's meeting with the Lord to be judged for one's eternal fate?

FROM AFFLUENCE TO ASHES

Everyone is busy recording his success story in this world, ignorant that what awaits him at the end of his life's journey is a story of failure rather than success.

Ghanshyam Das Birla (1894-1983) was modern India's most significant industrial magnate. He led an extremely principled life, which was the secret of his success. Starting his career with paltry resources at the age of twelve, he reached such a height of success that his family now has broader commercial interests than any single-family in India.

Mr Birla would always rise at five in the morning and remain engrossed in his work until 9 pm. He led a simple life, often cooking his meals. He drank coffee instead of liquor and would take nothing but water in between meals. Whether in India or abroad, he never missed his morning walk. On June 11, 1983, in London, he went out to walk on Regent Street after breakfast. After a while, he felt some discomfort and informed his aides. Alarmed, they brought him back home immediately. No sooner had he

reached home than he collapsed. He was taken to London's Middlesex Hospital, where he regained consciousness for a while. "What is wrong with me, Doctor?" he inquired. The doctors told him that they would be able to say within five minutes after a check-up. However, he died before the doctors could complete their examination. It was Mr Birla's wish that his last rites should be performed at the place of his death. Accordingly, he was cremated at an electric crematorium in London, and his ashes were brought to India to be scattered in the rivers of his motherland.

Mr Birla wrote many books. The Hindi title of one of them is '*Rupaye ki Kahaani*' (*Money Story*). However, in the end, Mr Birla's "Money Story" became a story of ashes.

So it is with everyone in this world. Everyone is busy recording his success story, ignorant that what awaits him at the end of life's journey is a story of failure rather than success.

THE TEST OF ADVERSITY

Those who exhibit divine character traits even in the face of adversity are the only creatures who will have the honour to live near the neighbourhood of God—Paradise—when they enter the world Hereafter.

God, in creating man, endowed him with the nobility of character. He then set him down in a world fraught with

moral dangers, where such circumstances exist as can at any moment incite him to fall into evil ways. Life then, for man, becomes a tremendous moral tussle, a struggle in which right and wrong pull him in opposite directions. Those who consistently do good works while treading the straight and narrow path, who, in short, do their utmost to preserve the noble image in which God created man, will be amply rewarded by God, while those who become abased and wicked, sinking into sin and corruption will be consigned to Hellfire and damnation. (95:1-5)

The present world is a testing ground: it has been created solely for it. Here, fear of loss and hope of gain arouse ignoble feelings, particularly the desire to exploit fellow men. The ego is the significant obstacle that bars the way to justice. Here, sensual enticements lead man to seek ephemeral pleasures. A clash of interests engenders anger, hatred, and niggardliness. What is meant by the earth is the 'lowest of the low', as it is called in the Quran (95:5). Man must rise above such base impulses and prove himself worthy of his noble image. It can be ascertained whether the fruit is good or bad only when it is cut open. Human beings are no different in this respect. Whether they live in the company of Angels or spend their time hobnobbing with Satan can be known only when they are confronted with dire adversity. Their essential natures are revealed in situations that are full of stress and temptations.

The evil take their cue from the devil, while the virtuous act on the promptings of the Angels, their lives being

ALWAYS ON THE BRINK

characterized by love, selflessness, justice, and humility. Adversity reveals whether or not man indeed remembers God. Those who exhibit divine character traits even in the face of adversity are the solitary creatures who will have the honour to live in the vicinity of God when they enter the world, Hereafter.

ALWAYS ON THE BRINK

Confident of his wisdom and the worldly success it brings,
everyone fearlessly walks straight ahead, heedless that he
can plunge headlong into the pit of doom at any moment.

P. V. Venkatasawaran, the Chief Marketing Engineer in a government firm, attended a meeting held on the eighth floor of the Gopala Tower in New Delhi on May 29, 1982. He walked towards the lift with some of his colleagues when the meeting was over. As the door was open, he thought the lift had arrived, but it was still on the ninth floor. In an excited state of mind, at the success of the decisions taken at the meeting, he paid no attention to where he was walking and stepped into the empty lift shaft. He fell straight to the ground from the eighth floor. His doctor, who had been with him then, could do nothing for him. He could only declare him dead. He was 51 years old at the time of his death. (*Hindustan Times*, May 30, 1982)

Venkatasawaran was an extremely successful officer. In an official journal, he was described as "A thoroughbred

professional and a dashing, innovative manager with fire in his belly and ideas in his mind, an astute general.”

So far as this world is concerned, the case of Venkateshwaran is unique. However, from the point of view of life Hereafter, there is nothing uncommon about it. Confident of his wisdom and the worldly success it brings, everyone fearlessly walks straight ahead, heedless that he can plunge headlong into the pit of doom at any moment. To utter insulting words against others, oppress the weak and the innocent, take revenge, be unjust to others, ridicule others' failures, and argue without reason—all such evils are like stepping into the empty lift shaft on the eighth floor. Every such step can plunge a man headlong into the pit of destruction. It is then that neither his friends nor his wishful thinking will save him—everyone is on the brink of that lift shaft, convinced that he is holding fast to a firm rock that will never fail him.

Chapter 12
Law of God

LOOPHOLE INDUSTRY

It is easy to find ways to escape the punishment that human laws exact. However, the situation in the next world will be different. There neither wealth, resources, nor loopholes will come to his rescue.

In developed western countries, it is not bribing which is resorted to escape the clutches of the law. Instead, they have established a significant industry called the loophole business.

During President Reagan's Presidency, a tourist visiting Washington DC wandered about finding new office buildings in the city, as he had learned from the newspapers about President Reagan's announcement of a cut in the number of office employees. So, he inquired about an architect who was supposed to be renting those offices. He was told that the people engaged in the loophole industry required them. The tourist was doubly amazed. He had never heard of the loophole industry, so he inquired again what it meant. "Don't you know," the architect replied, "Washington has the largest loophole industry in the world." During the conversation, he learned that whenever a law is passed in the country, it clashes with the interest of one group or the other. People then look for some legal loopholes to save themselves from the grip of the law. To meet the demands of these groups, hundreds and thousands of people have engaged themselves in finding loopholes in the law. A single

loophole can earn millions of dollars. It has thus developed into a big institution.

It is easy to find ways and means to escape the punishment that human laws exact. However, how will man face the situation in the next world, where neither wealth, resources, nor loopholes will come to his rescue?

IN THE WORLD OF GOD

The successful man is the one who leaves his willful ways and obeys God's command in this world of God. On the contrary, the failure is the one who forgets God and begins to pursue the world according to his desires.

Describing his impression, a neo-Muslim Englishman said that after converting to Islam, he performed his Hajj in 1974. He completed his journey from his homeland England by a motor car. He shared his experience in these words:

“It was December 1973. I drove to Switzerland. I had to meet my sister in Zurich. Keeping left is enforced in England while keeping to the right is observed in Switzerland. When I entered Zurich, I did not remember that I had to drive on the right side of the road. So, as per my previous habit, I started driving on the left side of the road.

Soon a traffic constable stopped my car with a whistle at one point. When I stopped, he approached me. He saw the plate of my car. He understood that I was an Englishman,

so I was driving my car on the left side of the road. He looked at me with expressive eyes and said, 'Sir, you are not in England now.'

Although this is a traffic incident, there lies a great lesson of the Hereafter hidden in it. The present world we live in is the world of God. However, man often considers it as his own. Therefore, instead of following God's will, he starts pursuing his own will.

Just as a traffic constable stands here on the side of the road to tell people that "You are not in your own country, but another country," so God's messengers are warning people that "You are not in man's world, but you are in the world of God." The successful man is the one who takes a lesson from this silent warning and leaves his willful ways and obeys God's command in the world of God. On the contrary, the failure is the one who forgets God and begins to pursue the world according to his desires.

The consequences of violating traffic rules in the world come to light immediately. Therefore, a person corrects himself as soon as he receives a warning from a traffic constable here. However, the consequences of violating God's law will come to light in the Hereafter. Therefore, he disregards any such warning, but no mistake is greater than this.

SOWING TODAY, REAPING TOMORROW

One who sows today will reap tomorrow. This is valid for both the present and the world Hereafter.

G.D. Birla (1894-1983) was born in the village of Pilani, Rajasthan. His father was an ordinary tradesman who had a small business in Calcutta. Mr Birla left for Calcutta to assist his father's business when he was fourteen years old.

One day, Mr Birla had some work on the top story of a commercial building in Calcutta. He was stopped from entering the lift, for it was meant for the use of British officers only. He ascended the staircase, only to find that he was not allowed to sit on a chair. He was brought to a bench that was reserved for peons. However, the young Birla did not sit on it. He remained standing until his work was finished.

Experiences of this nature during the British rule instilled Mr Birla with a longing for Indian independence, and he joined Mahatma Gandhi's freedom movement. It was when wealthy capitalists were wary of associating themselves with Congress. However, Mr Birla was an extremely farsighted and courageous man. He caught a glimpse of the post-1947 Congress party in the pre-1947 era. He saw a free India in India struggling for independence; he realized that today's leader would be the minister of tomorrow; if he assisted them today, he would benefit immensely from

them tomorrow. So, he started to provide the freedom movement with regular financial support. It is said that up to 1947, he had already donated 20 crore rupees (200 million) to Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress party.

Mr Birla reaped enormous benefits from this after independence. He was granted every kind of facility by the new government. So astronomical was his rise that he soon became the greatest industrialist of free India. As a result, today, the Birla family is considered one of the richest in India.

It is the one who sows today who will reap tomorrow. Therefore, it is valid for both the present and future worlds.

REWARD AND PUNISHMENT

Our world is too limited by human mortality for there to be any possibility of absolute justice. This calls for the existence of an unlimited world. So, we can only seek true justice in the eternity of the Afterlife.

Take the case of 34-year-old Gerson Vilorio, a Filipino Treasury clerk, who had a case registered against him for forgery. After lengthy court proceedings, he was held guilty in 17 cases by the judge, Mr Romeo M Escareal. Since Philippine law lays down ten years of rigorous imprisonment for each such crime, the accused was sentenced to 170 years of rigorous imprisonment and a penalty of \$4,625. If

he could not pay the penalty, his term of punishment was to be extended. (*The Times of India*, November 9, 1979).

The culprit at the time of sentencing was 34 years of age. Even if he lived to a ripe old age, there would still be about a hundred years left for him to serve. Therefore, in the eyes of the law, he would never fully expiate his crimes. Our world is too limited by human mortality for there to be any possibility of absolute justice.

In a similar case in Thailand, a case was filed against a policewoman, Mrs Phenphanchong Imsap, who had been posted in the frontier region of Pelchabun, where she was in charge of the registration office for foreigners. The court found her guilty of earning \$25,000 illegally over 17 years by accepting bribes for registration. She was then sentenced to 1000 years of rigorous imprisonment, with no possibility of being released on parole or granted mercy. In the judge's view, such punishment would be a preventive to others.

This policewoman was not going to stay alive for one thousand years to serve her full term, but since it was felt that a criminal's punishment should be in direct proportion to the magnitude of her crime, this verdict expressed the court's desire for absolute justice.

In the present world, no judge, however well-intentioned, can hope for anything more than partial justice in a large proportion of the cases he presides over. If to expiate his crimes, a criminal must serve a prison term of 1000 years; his death will provide him with an escape route. This inevitable reality calls for the existence of an unlimited

world in which man is granted so long a life that he can never escape the full consequences of his deeds. Since, in human terms, this is an impossibility in the present world, we must seek true justice in the eternity of the Afterlife.

ASHES BEAR WITNESS

God made this world so that it gets affixed to the 'cosmic record' as soon as a deed is done, and no one can ever rub it off. So, every person is free to do what he wants, but he cannot rub off the marks of his deeds from the cosmic record.

Nabi Karim is a locality in Delhi. Ashok, a young man who worked as a labourer, lived there many years ago. One day, he was found dead near his house. According to the doctor's report, he had died of sudden heart failure. This incident was not reported to the police. The next day, Ashok's body was taken to the banks of the Yamuna, where it was consigned to the flames. His ashes were then scattered in the river.

It seemed that matters had ended with this and that if Ashok's death had been the result of a criminal conspiracy, there was no possibility of finding out the truth. Finally, however, Ashok's ashes made an astounding announcement, which no conventional sources could.

Ashok's mother, Chameli Devi, suspected that her son had not died a natural death but that his friend had killed him

by giving him liquor laced with poison. Thus, she lodged a case with the police.

The only way the police could investigate the case was to get hold of Ashok's ashes and examine them. The day Chameli Devi lodged her case with the police, a party of policemen arrived at the crematorium where Ashok's body had been cremated. As luck would have it, no other corpse had been burned on the same platform after Ashok's body, and so the police were able to gather some of his ashes. They sent these to the Central Forensic Science Laboratory for investigation. Six months later, the laboratory issued a report, certifying that Ashok had not died a natural death; but had been poisoned. Soon after this, Suresh, whom Chameli Devi had suspected of murdering her son, was arrested. In a report about this case, a daily newspaper commented:

“Dead men tell no tales, but their ashes may.”

People commit crimes and seek to hide the records of their deeds, thinking that they can wipe away the evidence of their actions. They do wrong and, imagining that they are very clever and powerful, try to conceal their actions, believing that no one will ever come to know about them. However, they forget that they do not live in a world of their own making, and that God has made this world. God has made this world so that it gets affixed to the 'cosmic record' as soon as a deed is done, and no one can ever rub it off.

Every person is free to do what he wants, but he is certainly not free to rub off the marks of his deeds. If man were genuinely aware of his inability, he would abstain from oppression and wrongful deeds.

LIMITATIONS OF THE PRESENT WORLD

This world of God is limitlessly meaningful. However, it becomes limitlessly meaningless when the Hereafter is not joined with it. Therefore, one who can sacrifice this present world for the world Hereafter will enter that heavenly world in life after death.

It was a beautiful July morning. The sun had not yet risen, but streaks of light in the vast expanse of the sky announced that it was about to make its appearance. The sun's rays peeped out from behind the clouds bunched up on the horizon, brilliantly painting the sky. The verdant green of the trees, the chattering of the birds, and the delicate morning breeze added to the beauty of the moment, and I found myself uttering these words:

“This world is amazingly delightful, but its delights do not remain for more than a few moments. The world is stunningly beautiful, but the eyes that see its beauty very soon lose their light and sight. People desperately crave respect and happiness in this

world, but they have not fully acquired these when the law of degeneration comes into play. This world has everything people want, but they cannot get all this here, even for the person who seems to have everything.”

A human being is a perfect creation, but his tragedy is that, along with this, he is a victim of various types of limitations. Various unfavourable conditions surround him. Human life, despite being perfect, remains meaningless until a person enters a world free from every type of limitation and unfavourable condition.

God has made this perfect and eternal world in the form of Heaven. However, no one can gain entrance into the world of Heaven just like that. This present, imperfect world is the price of that perfect world to come. One who can sacrifice this present world for the world to come alone will enter that heavenly world in life after death. One unwilling to make this sacrifice will also enter a world after death—not Heaven’s joyous and delightful world, but a world of eternal misery and despair.

IN THE FACE OF DEATH

Death is inevitable. No one can win over death. Therefore, we must prepare for death in this world to hope to live in Paradise eternally in the Hereafter.

Louis XI (1423-83), Emperor of France, did not want to die, and so, towards the end of his life, he began living in a closed fort, which very few people were permitted to enter. A deep moat was dug around the fort so no one could come close to him. Forty archers stood on the fort's walls at all times, while 40 horsemen patrolled the fort day and night. The emperor had declared that if anyone tried to enter the fort without permission he should be killed. Inside the fort, all sorts of luxuries were made available for the emperor to enjoy so that he would never feel sad.

Louis XI was so keen on staying alive that he ordered that the word 'Death' must not be uttered in his presence!

An expert doctor was in constant attendance on him. In addition, the doctor was paid a huge salary of ten thousand gold crowns every month.

However, this could not save the Emperor from old age and growing infirm. Towards the end of his life, he became so weak that he could hardly lift anything to put into his mouth! Despite this, his desire to live turned into a terrible obsession.

One day, someone told the Emperor that specific sea turtles lived till around 500 years and that they could help

NO ESCAPE

prolong human life. So, the Emperor dispatched men to bring some of these creatures for him. The turtles were kept in a pond near his chambers, hoping that this would help him live longer!

Finally, Louis XI fell prey to paralysis, and death overtook him. Thus, he learned, at last, that no one can win over death. When he lay dying, his last words were:

“I am not as ill as you think I am.”

All his efforts to evade death failed. Moreover, on 30th August 1483, he died.

Death is inevitable. No one can win over death. Therefore, we must prepare for death in this world to hope for living in Paradise eternally in the Hereafter.

NO ESCAPE

Words can rescue an individual from a tight corner in this world because he deals with mortals like himself. Only if his case is based on reality will he be able to escape punishment in the next world. Words not supported by reality will be useless.

Westerners visit India in large numbers nowadays. Those who stay in expensive five-star hotels expect to be provided with everything they require, including their favourite food. Since cow meat is generally prevalent in the west,

they expect it to be available in their hotels. So, hoteliers include “beef steak” in their menu before their customers.

Since the consumption of cow meat is prohibited in most of the states in India, the news that beef steak was an article on hotel menus aroused strong criticism in the country. One MP raised the question in parliament, and the government initiated investigations. Hotel managers told officials that they did indeed give their customers beef, but the word “beef”—according to the dictionary—is used for the meat of both buffaloes and cows; what they were providing was buffalo meat, not cow meat.

On May 4, 1984, the Minister of Health stated this in parliament in New Delhi. As the *Times of India* reported the next day, ‘the minister read out the Oxford dictionary meaning of “beef,” which included the flesh of buffalo as well, and not merely that of cow or ox.’ The newspaper headline was: “Five-star hotels saved by the dictionary.”

People read about this sort of thing happening in the present world and are deceived into thinking that things will be much the same in the next world; they think that just as “dictionaries” come to people’s rescue in this world, so they will find some “dictionary” in the world to come, which will save them from impending calamities. However, they could not be more wrong. A show of words can rescue an individual from a tight corner in this world because he deals with mortals like himself. However, in the next world, one will be dealing with the Lord of the Universe, and there will be no way of tricking Him.

ALL THE HEROES ARE DEAD

Only if a man's case is based on reality will he be able to escape punishment in the next world. Words not supported by reality will be of no use to anyone.

ALL THE HEROES ARE DEAD

Life becomes meaningful only when we bring in the concept of life after death. Divested by the concept of an Afterlife, worldly life loses all its significance. It becomes so inexplicable that both life and death have no meaning.

Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961), the celebrated American author whose correspondence during his military career has been published in book form, participated in the war against Italy in 1918. At one point, he was injured in battle and had to be hospitalized, during which time he wrote several letters to his relatives. In one letter, he writes:

“There are no heroes in this war. All the heroes are dead. Moreover, the real heroes are the parents. They suffer a thousand times more. Moreover, how much better to die in the happy period of undisillusioned youth, go out in a blaze of light, and have your body worn out and illusions shattered.” (*Life*, June 1981)

These words paint a gloomy, depressing picture of life.

Man seems to be born into this world only to disappear from it in a hundred years, more or less worn out with old age. If this is all life has in store, one should instead

end one's life in the hope-filled period of youth by taking a heroic plunge into the unknown.

Only when we bring in the concept of life after death do our old age and youth assume any significance. Separate the two; there is nothing but gloom and despair to haunt us forever. Divested by the concept of an Afterlife, worldly life loses all its significance. It becomes so inexplicable and mysterious that life and death have no meaning.

GOD GIVES, AND GOD TAKES AWAY

Old age serves as a reminder to make man conscious of the reality that man is only the receiver. Everything that he possesses is a gift from God.

Gifted with unusual capabilities, Professor Mujeeb (1902-1985) was ranked among the top intellectuals among Indian Muslims. Having received his education in Europe, he was equally well-versed in English, German and French, besides Urdu. One of his numerous accomplishments was reciting great stretches of Shakespeare by heart. He had held the post of Vice-Chancellor in Jamia Millia Islamia for a record period of 25 years, from 1948 to 1973.

However, fate was against him. In December 1972, he had to undergo a brain operation. It was a success because it

saved his life, but he lost his exceptional memory. He was a master of five languages and could not retain even the alphabet—not even that of Urdu. A man of cheerful disposition, who when he had found some-one in a dejected mood, would say, “Smile please, and look ahead,” was now himself reduced almost to a vegetable state.

He spent the rest of his life in this terrible state of near insanity in his Okhla, New Delhi residence. Finally, on 20th January 1985, he breathed his last at 82.

Addressing man in the Quran, it is said:

“God created you; then He shall cause you to die: and some shall have their lives prolonged to abject old age, ceasing to know anything after once having had knowledge. God is all knowing and powerful.”
(16:70)

Old age following youth serves as a reminder to make man conscious of his reality. It is to make man learn that he does not own anything, and that everything in his possession is a gift from God. He can give or take away as He pleases. If man’s knowledge or power were innate, they could never be removed. However, finding and losing indicates that man is only a recipient: nothing belongs to him.

We frequently come across such incidents. However, we seldom take heed. Neither do the ‘old’ people who undergo them learn any lesson from them nor do the ‘young’ ones who witness them.

DEATH SPARES NO ONE

Man is completely at the mercy of God. However, at the very zenith of his progress, death stops him short, as if negating the very efforts that carried him toward success.

After acquitting himself well in his studies, Mr J.A. Deo, an I.A.S. officer who was formerly Secretary to the Government of India in the Ministry of Defence, entered the Indian Administrative Service, the most prestigious of the country's service. Born in Shimla in 1923, he would have expected to retire in 1981 when he was at the peak of his career. However, barely a year after his promotion as Secretary of Defence, he expired on April 10, 1980, at the age of 57. He was cremated at Nigam Bodh Ghat, with the three Chiefs of Staff of the Indian Armed Forces attending to pay him homage. How ironic that the senior-most officers of India's land, sea, and air forces, invested as they are with full powers to inflict a crushing defeat upon any enemy who dares assail this country of crores of population, were helpless when it came to saving Mr Deo from the jaws of death.

Another even more prominent figure snatched away by death while he was still in his prime was Sanjay Gandhi, the younger son of the former prime minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi. In the 1980 elections of the parliament and state assemblies, her party had an extraordinary success, and it was widely accepted that Sanjay Gandhi would eventually succeed his mother as Prime Minister. However, on the

brink of assuming this high office, when he was still 33, he met his end in the most sudden and drastic ways. On the morning of June 23, 1980, he wanted a joy ride in a new two-seater American aircraft and accompanied by Captain Saxena, he took off from Safdarjung airport in New Delhi. Unfortunately, the aircraft was only a short distance from the runway when it went out of control and crashed due to a sudden engine failure. Both Sanjay Gandhi and his unfortunate passenger, Captain Saxena, were killed instantaneously, and when their bodies were recovered from the debris, they were found severely mutilated.

Just one day before this fatal accident, when Sanjay Gandhi had been travelling in a car along with Delhi's Lieutenant Governor, Mr. Jag Mohan, he had exuded confidence when he said, "There is no need to worry, be it a car or an aeroplane, nothing can go wrong while I am at the wheel." He did not know that the following morning's events would forever stifle that feeling of confidence. In the context of the brightness of his prospects, the *Times of India*, on June 24, 1980, observed, "What an irony that he should die so soon."

When a man is at the very zenith of his progress, death stops him short, as if it were negating the very efforts which had carried him towards success.

Chapter 13
God's Plan

GOD'S PLAN

In the present world of tests, man has been given the right to do whatever he wants, but this freedom is for trial and not for reward. A person who surrenders himself before God of his own free will makes himself a deserving candidate for Paradise.

God created a world of His choice and named it Paradise. This Paradise is a world of eternal joys and comforts. There is neither sorrow, noise, sadness, nor accident. It is free from all kinds of hardships. All kinds of blessings will be showered on man by God in Paradise. There man will never die, nor will he get tired or suffer from grief.

It is the world that, by nature, everyone seeks. Every man is in search of a hidden Paradise. However, no one can find this eternal Paradise in this present limited world. Therefore, God has placed this Paradise in the world to come after death.

However, this Paradise cannot be found by anyone on its own. Only fortunate souls who do good actions in the present life can find Paradise. Therefore, God has divided our life into two parts. A brief period of our life is in the present world, while the rest of our life is in the world to come after death. God has made the present world a place of action and the Afterlife a place of reward for action.

In the present world, to test man's exigencies, he has been given the right to do whatever he wants, but this freedom is

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

for trial and not for reward. Therefore, a man who does not fall into misunderstanding due to temporary freedom and prepares himself according to the actual situation will be settled in Paradise. Moreover, whoever opts for rebellious ways by misusing his freedom, his abode will be in Hell.

In this universe, all authority is invested in God's hand. He is the owner of everything. Every human being is in His hands at every moment. A person who accepts this reality and surrenders himself before God of his own free will makes himself a deserving candidate for Paradise. Moreover, whoever deviates from the truth and follows willful ways will be held guilty in the sight of God. He has no share in the blessings of the Hereafter.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Man can only be satisfied if he looks hopefully to his eternal life. Man's most serious problem is that he does not think of and prepare for life after death.

Dartington Hall is a prestigious liberal progressive public school in Devon, England. In 1983, parents pay up to 5000 per annum for their children to be educated there. Among Dartington Hall's illustrious students were the philosopher Bertrand Russell and the writer Aldous Huxley.

On July 11, 1983, Dr Lyn Blackshaw addressed his staff on Dartington Hall's problems. Here is part of what he said:

“The worst thing we can do for our children is to destroy their faith in the future, whether with apocalyptic visions, the unlikelihood of a job, the qualifications. If you believe that, how would you behave? I believe in many ways we are killing our children’s futures by being so damned pessimistic. If children are persuaded to believe that there is no future, then the most likely thing they would do is behave hedonistically, live in the present, and develop no consistent attitudes. I can tell you, in some ways, it is sickening coming back to this country.” (*The Sunday Times*, London, September 4, 1983)

Dr Lyn Blackshaw was correct in saying that the worst thing one can do for any generation is to destroy their faith in the future. However, achieving a livelihood after education is only a tiny portion of the future. The question of the future extends beyond the present world to the eternal world after death.

Only if man can look hopefully to his eternal future can he be satisfied in life. Man’s most significant problem is not the threat of apocalypse, the unlikelihood of a job, or the uselessness of qualifications; his most significant problem is that it has become intellectually unfashionable to think of a life after death. It is his faith in his eternal future that is being destroyed. It is the major psychological factor behind his present dissatisfaction, and it is this dissatisfaction that leads to hedonistic and irresponsible behaviour.

Man can never be content unless provided with a faith that brightens his eternal future, which fills him with the hope that the unknown country awaits him after death.

THE REALITY OF MAN

The misery of the world reminds man of his helplessness. By accepting this reality, he can become worthy of God's rewards. Accepting his powerlessness makes him eligible to enter God's eternal world in the Hereafter, Paradise.

Acknowledgement of reality is the greatest virtue. In this world, all the power rests with God alone. On the contrary, man is completely helpless and powerless. However, man is so placed in this world that he feels completely free and independent. It is the actual trial of a man. The man who understands this delicate situation and bows down before God by acknowledging this reality is worthy of being rewarded by God in the Hereafter. On the contrary, the man who fails in removing the veil of test and does not bow down before the glory of God will be held guilty and deserve punishment from God.

There is a severe problem in the world called the problem of evil. There are many kinds of sufferings in the world. A person is healthy and robust, and suddenly, death overtakes him. His incredible body is crushed in accidents. Similarly,

disease, famine, earthquakes, and various calamities destroy man's plans as if they were non-existent.

It is a matter of great cruelty, but great wisdom is hidden behind it. All these unpleasant incidents happen to open a person's eyes. It reminds him that despite having all power, he is utterly powerless. How deprived he is despite being the possessor of everything! The lesser events are a prelude to more significant events which will take place on the Day of Judgement. In this way, man is made to observe reality by removing the veil of appearances. This veil will be torn entirely on Judgment Day, which is partially done by accidents and other untoward incidents.

The misery of the world reminds man of his helplessness. These enable him mentally to discover reality and become worthy of God's rewards by accepting it. Man will be completely free and independent in the eternal world to come. There he will be completely safe from all kinds of sorrow and grief. However, this status will be given to anyone as a reward, not a matter of right. He who realizes his state of genuine humility is the one who deserves to be given the blessing of freedom. He who is satisfied with his powerlessness has proved his ability to be empowered by God in his ideal world.

THE WISDOM OF CREATION

Our earth is created according to a very proportionate balance. It is this wisdom behind God's creation that is mentioned in the Quran in these words: "For everything He has a proper measure." (The Quran, 13:8)

In 1984, India sent two of its men, Mr Ravish Malhotra and Mr Rakesh Sharma, into space with the help of Russia. The two pilots spent ten months in Russia's Star City in 1983. One of the things taught during their training was the Russian language.

At a press conference in Bangalore (*Hindustan Times*, July 24, 1983), the astronauts shared some exciting things about space. For example, one would gain about six centimetres during a space flight but return to one's average height soon after returning to earth with the atmospheric pressure acting on the vertebrate. The elongation of the human body in space is due to weightlessness, for the force of gravity creates both weight and weightlessness.

Our earth is created according to a very proportionate balance. That is why human beings' height is neither small nor large. If the size of the earth were halved compared to its current size, its gravity would be reduced. As a result, human beings would become disproportionately taller. Instead of human beings having medium height, they would become disproportionately tall. Imagine a world where camel-like human beings are seen standing everywhere

instead of the people with the present, proportionate height.

Conversely, if this size were to be doubled in comparison to the size of the earth, its gravitational force would increase enormously, putting a stop to the growth of the human body. The size of the lion would decrease to that of a cat, and the same would be the case with man. He will lose his present proportionate height, and the earth will become a settlement of tiny human beings we call dwarfs.

It is this wisdom behind God's creation that is mentioned in the Quran in these words: "For everything He has a proper measure." (13:8)

SHOWING ONE'S METTLE

The world is like a divine stage where God allows human beings to reveal their true natures. Human calibre can be discerned clearly from how people respond to different situations. Man will be rewarded or punished based on how he responds.

An elderly couple, B.K. Rama Reddy, aged 90, and his wife, Phula Bai, aged 80, were sleeping peacefully in their home at Banjara Hills, Hyderabad, when they were ruthlessly attacked on the 21st of September 1981 and killed by their 50-year-old servant, Ramaya. Now the master of the house,

he broke open their boxes, stole jewels worth about one lakh of rupees, and escaped into the darkness.

As he went furtively on his way, he passed by two police officers on night duty. Sensing something suspicious in his movements, they detained him for interrogation. On being threatened with dire consequences, he broke down and confessed to his crime, handing over the stolen goods to the two police officers, Sheikh Mahboob and Sheikh Rasheed. They then took him and his entire loot to the police station.

The police officers on duty greatly appreciated the honesty of these two policemen, who could easily have felt tempted to enrich themselves in such a situation. In addition to giving them a cash reward, they also had them promoted, Sheikh Mahboob becoming Station Officer and Sheikh Rasheed becoming Head Constable.

How opposite were the implications for different people involved in a single event! Virtue was rewarded, and crime was punished. However, there is nothing accidental in the one event simultaneously giving rise to such different consequences: such events are the divine instruments by which God puts different individuals to the test. Where one man would bring discredit upon himself, another would cover himself in glory. The individual concerned would reveal himself in his true colours in each case. Where Sheikh Mahboob and Sheikh Rasheed evinced the sterling qualities of strict honesty and dedication to duty, Ramaya revealed himself for the base, unprincipled scoundrel that he was and was rightly sentenced to life imprisonment. The world

is like a divine stage where God allows human beings to reveal they're true natures. Human calibre can be discerned clearly from how people respond to different situations.

However, it should be borne in mind that man has no intrinsic power. No one can, by himself, give anything to anyone, nor can he deprive anyone of anything. All human acts take place according to the will of God. Man exists in this world to be tested, and the test is as much concerned with his intentions as it is with his actions and their outcome, for man can only desire that an event should take place and strive to cause things to happen in the way he wishes, but if God wills otherwise, there is no way that man can see his wishes come true. Ramaya might have escaped under cover of darkness and enjoyed the fruits of his hideous crime, but he had failed the supreme test, and God willed that his punishment should be immediate.

THE DARKNESS SHALL END!

As per God's creation plan, this world is a testing ground. In the world Hereafter, man will be rewarded or punished by God based on his deeds. The darkness shall end.

A human being appears to be a contradiction in this world of God. In a world where the sun rises at its appointed time, a man says something today and then denies it the next day! In a world where water can be squeezed out even from

hard, dry stones, man cruelly oppresses his fellow man. In a world where the moon sheds light on all creatures without discrimination, man behaves in one way with someone and in another way with somebody else. In a world whose meaningfulness expresses itself in the fineness of the beauty of a flower, man behaves more cruelly than a thorn. In a world where the wind blows like a selfless servant, man lives in such a way as if there is no other purpose to his life than promoting what he regards as his interests. In a world where one tree never troubles another, one man never ceases to torment another. One person derives malicious pleasure from seeing another being destroyed.

All this happens daily in this world. However, God does not interfere in this. He does not end this contradiction. God seems so beautiful in the universal mirror of His creation, but how different His face appears in the grief-filled realm of human existence! Horrific things happen before God, but this does not stir Him. God sees people being killed, but He does not take any action. He sees the most barbaric things being done to the most sensitive person in the universe, but this does not make Him anxious or uneasy. Is God an idol of stone? Is He a statue that sees everything but does not express His reaction to it all?

This question has troubled thinkers the most in every age. However, this question arises only because we do not take into account God's wisdom about His creatures. In God's creation plan, this world is a testing ground. In our foolishness, we want to think of it in the form of a place

where rewards and punishments for good and evil actions, respectively, should be meted out. We want to experience today the outcome of the Day of Judgment.

Every day, the darkness of night is dispelled by the spreading light of the sun. So, likewise, the darkness of life will get over one day, oppression will end, the arrogant and the defiant shall have to bow down, and those who remain on the path of the Truth will be rewarded. All this will happen in its fullness, but it will happen after death, in the Hereafter, and not before it.

JOURNEY THROUGH THE DARK

In this world of tests, man has the freedom to do as he likes. However, in the world Hereafter, he will have to face the consequences of his actions.

Arthur Koestler, the famous British writer and thinker, committed suicide with his wife, Cynthia, in his London home in March 1983. At the time of his death, he was 77 years of age.

Why should a man with everything that one could wish for in this world commit suicide? He had won renown as a scholar and writer and had acquired sufficient wealth to leave £400,000 to a British university for research in parapsychology.

His suicide was due to his overwhelming horror and frustration at the evil perpetrated in the world around him—feelings reflected in the many books he wrote. For example, in his famous *Darkness at Noon* (published in 32 languages), he excoriated the so-called people's system of the Soviet Union, which perpetuated all the cruelty and exploitation it was supposed to eradicate.

In a collection of his discourses published in 1974, he puts his finger on the crux of the matter: "There is a striking, symptomatic disparity between the growth curves of technological achievement on the one hand and ethical behaviour on the other." He subsequently expresses his disillusionment with modern civilization when he writes: "We can control the motions of the satellites orbiting distant planets, but we cannot control the situation in Northern Ireland."

In this world of tests, man has the freedom to do as he likes. In the world Hereafter, he will have to face the consequences of his actions. He will receive a reward or punishment based on it.

FATAL DISEQUILIBRIUM

Life cannot but appear meaningless to a man who has no conception of the Afterlife, for the significance of the present world can be understood only in the context of our present life being followed by the Hereafter.

Animals do not kill members of their species. However, man kills his kind. After weighing up all sides of this question, Arthur Koestler concluded that an imbalance occurred during the evolution process in different parts of the human mind. This imbalance explained man's killing of a man on a stupendous scale.

This research, however, did not bring him any peace. His final philosophy was that the best thing for a man in modern circumstances was to commit suicide: "Death could be a welcome and natural relief for someone whose only alternative was pain and suffering." (*The Guardian*, London, March 13, 1983)

Applying this theory to his own life, Arthur Koestler separated himself from a world that was not of his own making and which he did not have the power to change. He saw that man opened his eyes in a world of brightness only to enter the dark realms of death. He saw that despite extraordinary progress in technology, the moral progress of humanity was still to be attained. The man could control satellites, but man could not control another man. Animals never killed their species, but human beings were eternally plotting the death of their fellow men. He could see that

WHY CALAMITIES BEFALL MAN

man planned to reform defective systems of living by making the optional use of human and physical resources, communism being one such attempt, but such 'reforms' had proved abortive, bringing more darkness than light to the human situation. Frustrated by these glaring defects in human existence, Koestler committed suicide.

Life cannot but appear meaningless to a man who has no conception of the Afterlife, for the significance of the present world can be understood only in the context of our present life being followed by the Hereafter. Unless this notion is ever-present in the human consciousness, a descent into negativism is inevitable. In the face of an inexplicably hostile world, it is not surprising that the more sensitive souls feel pushed irrevocably toward suicide.

WHY CALAMITIES BEFALL MAN

Wise is the one who considers calamities as a warning of nature rather than senseless evil. One who interprets them as nature's alarm system will humble himself before the Lord and mend his ways in the hope of inhabiting Paradise.

The guard blows a whistle when a train is about to leave a station. This whistle aims to warn people of the train's impending departure so that anyone still on the platform

can come and take his seat on the train. However, there are two ways of looking at this whistle. If it is considered just noise, then it will have no meaning. However, if it is considered an alarm, it fits into place and takes on its proper meaning.

The same is true of natural disasters. They, too, can be looked at from two different angles. Our planet is afflicted by drought, earthquakes, hurricanes, global warming, pandemics, and other calamities. However, some philosophers look at these disasters individually and see no point in them. So, they attach to them the label “problem of evil.”

Prophets, however, look at the same events from a different angle. They look at them as a source of admonition and instruction. Looking at it in this way, natural disasters become intensely meaningful. They become nature’s warning system, telling us what will come on Doomsday.

God’s prophets have explained these events as a small preview of the great calamity that will befall man on the Day of Resurrection. They remind us that we are all heading for a bad day—one in which God will appear in all His power and glory. Every mortal man will be brought before Him in a destitute and helpless state. Man will want to flee, but there will be nowhere for him to take refuge. He will cry out for help, but there will be no one to come to his rescue. The events that happen on a small scale in this world will occur on a grand scale when God raises man from the

IDEAL WORD

dead. These calamities are a reminder of what will befall us on that day. Then, the veil will be entirely lifted, and reality exposed in complete form. In this world, it is partially lifted when some calamity afflicts us so we can gain a glimpse of reality before its total manifestation.

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

IDEAL WORD

An ideal world cannot exist in the present world—the place for an ideal world to come into existence is the Hereafter. In this world, people can only be made aware of God's scheme and be called to lead a Hereafter-oriented life.

Man is an idealist by birth. Every man is seeking an ideal world. However, it is not possible to build an ideal world on earth. In this world, man can only find an ideal ideology that he can follow and not an ideal world.

The only place an ideal world can come into existence is the Hereafter. The present world has been created under the exigencies of the test. That is why it is beset with many limitations. These limitations are from the Creator Himself, and it is impossible to bring an ideal world into existence in their presence. At the same time, everyone has been granted complete freedom for trial. If good people enjoy the freedom of action here, bad people are allowed to do whatever they want. So, it would happen again and again that good people make a plan, and bad people destroy that plan by creating mischief.

The concept of the test is the key to understanding the present world. Unfortunately, philosophers and thinkers failed to find this key. Therefore, they also could not understand the world. They wanted to make the present world a world of their choice. However, in this “imperfect world”, creating a “perfect world” was not possible. Therefore, they gained nothing except mental confusion.

The fact is that an ideal world cannot exist in the present world—the place for an ideal world to come into existence is the Hereafter. Therefore, what is possible here is only to make people aware of God’s scheme and call them to lead a life oriented towards the Hereafter. As a result, if many human beings lead a God-fearing life, their gathering will undoubtedly lead to a better society.

However, there is no guarantee that this society will be ideal. Also, there is no guarantee that it will last permanently. God has placed all these things in the Hereafter, and we will

never be able to find what God has kept in the next world in today's world.

MISUSE OF OUR RIGHTS

God has given man things to test him in this world. Their legitimate use makes him deserving of Paradise, while their misuse makes him deserving of the severest punishment in the court of the Hereafter, from which he can never escape.

Operation Blue Star was the code name of an Indian military action ordered in June 1984 by Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister, to remove Sikh militants amassing weapons in the Golden Temple. This military action on their most sacred place of worship angered the Sikhs. Consequently, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated on 31 October 1984 by two of her Sikh bodyguards as an act of vengeance.

The trial then proceeded. On February 11, 1985, a 20-page charge sheet was presented against the accused in the court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Mr S. L. Khanna. The following is part of reports published in newspapers.

“Satwant Singh has further been charged under section 27 of the Arms Act for using a weapon lawfully supplied to him to commit murder.” (*The Times of India*, February 12, 1985)

The automatic weapon given to Satwant Singh was for the protection of the Prime Minister and not to assassinate the Prime Minister. Although it was a legitimate legal weapon for him, he was found guilty in the eyes of the law when he misused it. The proper use of this weapon made him deserving of a reward, while the misuse of the same weapon made him deserve punishment.

In the same way, the things given to man by God are his legitimate rights, but they are only for the proper use. Therefore, if a person uses these things the wrong way, he would be found guilty in the sight of God, and he will deserve a severe punishment in the court of the Hereafter, from which he can never escape.

LIFE'S LOTTERY

Man can never succeed in creating the world of his dreams here. Therefore, he has two choices: either consider this world as the be-all and end-all and end in total frustration or discover the secret of a successful life by opening his mind to the next life in the Hereafter and plan his life accordingly.

A truck driver, Stuart Kelly, from Ontario, Canada, once bought a lottery ticket. Much to his astonishment, he secured the first prize of \$13.9 million, the biggest lottery prize ever received by a single person in Canada.

Childless, Stuart Kelly received far more than his real or imagined requirements could be. His happiness, however, was not to last long. Within three months of receiving this enormous sum, he was doomed to bear the unbearable. He took ill; the doctors diagnosed his illness as a deadly, incurable disease—cancer. No amount of money could save him. No sooner had life seemed to offer him all possible comforts and luxuries after 35 years of hardship and toil than he discovered that death was lying in wait. The reality that all happiness would fade away, sooner or later, dawned on him.

Man's real problem is not wealth but limitation. Neither wealth nor resources can help him overcome his limitations. It is always in hiding, ready to mar our pleasures.

Limitations vary in the forms they take. Disease, accident, old age, boredom, and death, to name but a few, come between us and our desires and prevent us from fashioning a world of our choice.

Wealth is not life, but only a means to an end. It always holds a secondary place. Primary importance cannot be attached to them. Man, who often cannot differentiate between the real issues and the means, tends to ignore this fact. He considers wealth a summum bonum, an end in itself, treating it as if it were an alternative to live. That is why he sets himself to attain it, whatever the cost.

Given such insuperable obstacles, man can never succeed in creating the world of his dreams. Therefore, there are only two choices open to him. Either treat this world as the be-

all and end-all and end in total frustration or discover the secret of a successful life by opening his mind to the next life in the Hereafter and planning his present life accordingly.

MAN'S TRIAL

The price to be paid for success in the trial of life is the negation of self. A man can only discover universal truth by losing his sense of individual selfness.

What a wonderful blessing the eyes of man are! When he closes them, he can see nothing. His whole world is clothed in darkness. There is a world that he cannot see, objects he cannot perceive.

Then, an astonishing spectacle opens before him when he opens his eyes. Black can be distinguished from white. What moves appears to be moving, and what stands still is motionless in his sight. Animate and inanimate appear for what they are.

It is in this quality—the ability to distinguish between things—that man is unique. He can tell between right and wrong, light and darkness. He can see truth and falsehood for what they are. He can differentiate between what is proved by sound reason and what has no sound rational basis.

Man's uniqueness puts him in a critically testing position, for God is putting him to the test in his power of discretion.

Man must show that he used his power of discretion to differentiate between right and wrong. A path of justice and one of oppression will open out before him. He must follow the first and shun the second to succeed in his trial. He will be required to weigh up matters on the scales of sound reason. He should accept what is proved by clear signs; what has no clear proof to support it is to be rejected. This task may appear more effortless than it is. The negation of self is a price to be paid for success in the trial of life. A man can only discover universal truth by losing his sense of individual selfness. He cannot pay this price all too often, thus, falling short of the required standard. The fruits of success in life's trials elude him.

The truth appears before a man in this world, but he fails to see it. Its calls echo in his ears, but he cannot hear them. It knocks on his door, but he does not allow it in. When truth appears before a man, and he can choose to accept it or reject it, man is required to make the right choice. However, sadly he fails just where he must succeed.

TWO TYPES OF SEEDS

Hell is like a bad land where all the rotten seeds will be thrown away. Paradise is the best land where all the good seeds will be sorted out and planted so they can be harvested as green crops.

If a rotten seed is planted in the earth, it will not grow into a plant. Although its components are present on the earth, their existence has no value. They have no place in the world, nor do they contribute to the things of the world.

On the contrary, if good seed is planted in the earth, it grows as a living being. It becomes a verdant green tree and stands on the earth in a better form than before. The whole universe becomes a source of provision for it. It finds its place on the earth in the form of a complete being. God's sign tells us what will happen in the Hereafter in the language of events in plainly visible terms.

One kind of human being is unrighteous. The example of unrighteous people can be likened to a bad seed. They would be buried in the earth after death, just to become dust leaving no existence in this world except for a rotten one.

The example of the righteous is similar to that of a good seed. They will be buried in the earth after death but grow like a verdant tree, fresh than before, in the form of a new life. They will find the best place in the universe once again. They will grow like green trees in the garden of God.

NEXT PARAGRAPH

From this, we can understand the matter of Hell and Paradise. Hell is like a bad land where all the rotten seeds will be thrown away. However, on the contrary, Paradise is the best land where all the good seeds will be sorted out and planted so that they can be harvested as a green crop.

NEXT PARAGRAPH

There is only one way to stay on the path of truth: focus your attention on the Hereafter. Only that person who keeps his eye on the achievement of “tomorrow” rather than on the “deprivations” of today will be successful.

Once a novelist wrote a long novel. This novel was very thick. A friend said, “Oh, such a long novel; you were not bored while writing this.” The novelist immediately replied:

“No. My focus was always on the next paragraph.”

Human life is also a long and tiring story written with the events of our successes and failures. There is only one way to keep a constant interest in this long and dry story. Stick to the next paragraph of the story.

The same is true of the Hereafter. A person should decide that he will lead a truthful life in this world. He will do what he should do, and he should not do what he should not do. Such a person would soon know he has taken the path of “losing” instead of “gaining”. He is not rewarded for his hard work and sacrifices in today’s world.

The people he wanted to work with would have separated because of harbouring grievances. The people he considered his partners would have left him. The people for whom he had done everything would give him only the gift of accusation. The other people would build their “palace” by working less than him, whereas he would have worked harder than them, but he would not be successful in worldly terms.

In such a situation, there is only one way to stay on the path of truth. That is, a man should focus his attention on the Hereafter. His eyes should be focused on the “next paragraph” of the story. Only that person who keeps his eye on the achievement of “tomorrow” rather than on the “deprivations” of today will be successful. He should ignore today for what he is going to get tomorrow.

Chapter 14
Call of God

THE CALLER TO GOD

The caller to God can detect, from behind the veil between this world and the next, the fragrance of the gardens of Paradise and the heat of the fire of Hell. Such a person can do nothing but make people aware of the next eternal world.

Imagine that a scientist whose instruments tell him that within a few minutes an earthquake will strike is standing in a building. There are, at the same time, specific mundane affairs to be dealt with in the building. What will he do, talk about trivialities, or warn people of the earthquake? The other matters which he has to attend to will recede into insignificance. He will forget all about them and raise just one cry: he will tell people to leave the place immediately, for an earthquake is about to shatter the place to pieces. So far from giving people a lecture on the mundane matters that must be attended to within the building, he will implore them to abandon the building.

Now think of a person standing in between this world and the next. On the one side, he can see the present world. On the other, the gardens of Paradise and the Fire of Hell stretch out before his eyes. What would he be expected to do in this situation? Will he stress the importance of worldly issues or draw people's attention to what lies ahead? He will not dwell on mundane matters. Worldly issues will recede into insignificance beside the desperately pressing issues of eternity. He will have just one message for people—that

TRUTH AT ALL COSTS

they should guard themselves against the Fire of Hell and become worthy of admission into the gardens of Paradise.

One who does not know of the coming of an earthquake might be forgiven for dwelling on other matters. However, one who sees an earthquake coming will not be able to think and talk of anything else. He might not even be able to construct a coherent sentence, urging people to take precautions against the earthquake that will strike. He might only be able to muster a desperate call: "Earthquake! Earthquake!"

It is the same with one who calls humanity to God. The caller to God can detect, from behind the veil between this world and the next, the fragrance of the gardens of Paradise and the heat of the fire of Hell. Such a person can think and talk of nothing but the next eternal world. Everything to do with this ephemeral world will fade from his mind as if it did not exist.

TRUTH AT ALL COSTS

There is a significant difference between a preacher, the ambassador of God, and an ambassador whom worldly governments appoint. The former sets out to please God, while the latter is appointed to please the people.

An American statesman, scientist, and writer, Benjamin Franklin (1706-90), was a tactless boy in his childhood, yet

in later years, he rose to the coveted post of ambassadorship, being appointed ambassador of America to France. His secret to success lay in his own words:

“I will speak ill of no man and speak all the good I know of everybody.”

Man indeed loves nothing more than being praised and hates nothing more than being criticized.

However, a man of principle upholds the truth, no matter what price has to be paid. He can become an object of scorn or be treated as an outcast. However, an unscrupulous person draws the crowd. The reason is quite simple. The former abides by the truth at all costs. He does not mould himself to the people's wishes, while, to the latter, it is expediency alone that counts. He aims to earn the goodwill of the people, so he moulds himself into what they want him to be.

To pass on to others, something one does not believe in; to present falsehood as truth to consolidate one's hold on people amounts to hypocrisy. One so inclined is very likely to achieve success in this world but will be cast aside in the next world, where truth and untruth will become as clearly separated from each other as day is from night.

There is a significant difference between a preacher, the ambassador of God, and an ambassador whom worldly governments appoint. The former sets out to please God, while the latter is appointed to please the people. The latter sets his eyes on expediency, on worldly gain, while the

former set his eyes on truth, however dear it might cost him.

NEED FOR A GUIDE

Man is always in search of Truth. The search itself proves that there is a Truth that man should know. Through the prophets, God makes people aware of the Truth.

When we feel hungry, we try to satisfy our hunger, and we know that there is something in the form of food that can satisfy our hunger. We feel thirsty, and we perform some action to quench our thirst. We know that something in the form of water can quench our thirst.

The same is true for Truth. An individual is always in search of Truth. The search itself proves that there is a Truth that one should know. Truth is much greater than eating and drinking. When the answers to our more minor requirements are present in this world, why will the answer to our most essential requirements be not present here, too?

The question about the Truth is about discovering the reality of one's self. Suddenly, one day, you are born into this world. You did not take birth on your own. You now find yourself in a vast world that is separate from you. You live in this world for 70 or 90 years, then die. On your own,

you have no idea where you go after death. The question of the Truth relates to finding the truth about these realities of life and death.

You cannot learn about the Truth in the same way as you learn how to obtain food to satisfy your hunger and water to quench your thirst. Truth is limitless and eternal. If Truth were not limitless and eternal, it would not be Truth. However, a human being's reason and age are both limited. A limited mind cannot reach the eternal Truth. A person with a limited age cannot discover the Truth alone.

This inability to reach the Truth alone proves that we need prophets to know the Truth. What is prophethood? Prophethood means reaching the Truth to man, which an individual cannot reach on his own; the Truth that we cannot know through our efforts appears and tells us about itself.

Through the prophets, God makes people aware of the Truth. The prophets announced that a person should obey God, of his free will. Everything else in the world obeys God but out of compulsion. A human being should do so, but out of free choice. Based on the freedom to choose that God has given him, a person should choose to become choice-less and powerless in front of God. Despite the freedom that God has given him, he should willingly surrender to God. For those who do this, the reward is Heaven.

RAY OF HOPE

Death is lying in wait for everyone. God's prophets have taught man that there is another world—eternal and ideal Paradise—after death. Those who prove themselves worthy by their righteous actions will be admitted into Paradise

Arthur Koestler (1905-1983) put the world beyond death as an “unknown country”. We are all travelling toward that unknown country. The strangest and the most mysterious event of our lives is death. Everyone is anxious to know what will become of him after death.

The American evangelist, Billy Graham, has written a book called *The Secret of Happiness*. He writes in this book that he once received an urgent message from a famous political leader who wanted him to meet him at the earliest opportunity.

When Billy Graham reached the politician's residence, he was ushered into a separate room. There the politician addressed him in a heart-rending tone. “I am an old man,” he said, “life has lost all meaning. I am ready to take a fateful leap into the unknown. Young man, can you give me a ray of hope?”

It was, indeed, only a man of religion who could give him an answer.

Death is lying in wait for everyone. In his youth, a man tends to forget death, but the hand of fate holds sway in the

end. In old age, when his strength is on the wane, he realizes the imminence of death; he is moved to wonder about that which lies in store for him in the Hereafter; he searches for a ray of hope which can illuminate the world he will have to face after death.

It is this ray of hope that God's prophets have come to the world to provide. The prophets have taught man that there is another world—one that is both eternal and ideal—after death.

Those who will be admitted to this perfect world in the Afterlife are they who prove themselves worthy of it in this life on earth by their righteous actions.

This message has been summed up in these words of the Quran: "God calls man to the home of peace."
(*The Quran*, 10:25)

DAYEE AND MADU

A good relationship between *dayee* and *madu* is essential just like a successful speaker has to establish a strong emotional rapport with the addressed.

Michael Faraday and Lawrence Bragg, who delivered lectures at London's Royal Institute, were two of the most successful speakers of modern times.

What is the secret of a successful lecture? We give below the words of wisdom on this subject that we have gleaned from the respective memoirs of Faraday and Bragg.

“I am sorry to say that the generality of mankind cannot accompany us one short hour unless the path is strewn with flowers.”

“The essential feature for the success of the lecture is the emotional contact between the lecturer and the students.”

What Faraday and Bragg have written about becoming a successful lecturer applies with even greater pertinence to becoming a successful *dayee*, or one who calls others to the path of God.

A good relationship between *dayee*, a caller to God and *madu*, one invited to God, is essential, but it cannot be adequately established unless the delicacy of its nature is first given due recognition. If the *madu* is carried along with the *dayee*, the path must be “strewn with flowers”. The *dayee* cannot expect his *madu* to stay by his side if he places thorns and stones in the way. Dry sermons attract no hearers, so if a speaker is to be effective, he should not only compel the attention of his hearers by the engaging quality of his discourse but must establish a strong emotional rapport with them at the very outset.

FINAL DESTINATION

All activities are going on in this world. However, God's most desired task of warning people about the Hereafter is neglected. Making people aware of this reality is a prophetic task.

The Prophet was entrusted with proclaiming the call of truth before the people. So, he climbed up the Safa hill and called the Makkan people to come to him. When they had assembled around it, he addressed them thus:

“O, people of Quraysh, just as you sleep, so will you die; just as you wake up, so will you be raised. Afterwards, you will either face eternal Heaven or eternal Hell.” On hearing this, Abu Lahab rose and said, “Woe to you on this day! Did you assemble us for this?” (*Ansab al-Ashraf* by al-Baladhuri, Vol. 1, p. 119; *At-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, Vol. 1, p. 157)

When the Prophet entered Madinah as the head of the Madinan people, he also announced the same truth at the time. He had to convey the important thing to his listeners:

“O, people, save yourself from Hellfire, even if it be using a piece of date.” (*Sirat Ibn Hisham*, Vol. 1, p. 501)

We aim to revive this prophetic mission. The problems of life move people; we have taken up the problems of death. Is there any helper in this mission? People are moved to see the havoc wrought by riots and wars, but is there anyone

THIS MAN

who will be moved to see the flames of Hellfire and join us in issuing a warning to the people?

People have set their sights on the world's splendours; we have set our sights on such people as can see the grave's desolation. There is no dearth of restless people because of not having achieved their worldly goals. On the contrary, we require such persons who live in anguish for fear of being refused admission into Heaven. People are wailing over the worldly loss. We are searching for such servants of God as are restless for fear of losing out on the eternal world.

All activities are going on in this world, but God's most desired task — warning people of the most awesome days—is neglected. If men do not rise to this call, God's angel, Israfil, will make them rise to the trumpet's call. But, Oh! It will not be the time of awakening. For the ungodly, it will be the time of destruction.

THIS MAN

The call to Truth is a manifestation of God's beauty and glory. Therefore, such a call should usher in a revolution in the human soul. However, man does not prostrate.

One of the sermons of Jesus Christ contains the parable of the caller and the invitee. It is as follows:

“But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates, ‘We played the flute for you, and

you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’” (*Matthew*, 11:16-17)

The caller of God bathes in the sea of God. In this way, he can sing the songs of God in the world of God. He plays the eternal songs of God in harmony with nature. On the one hand, these songs are manifestations of God's beauty and perfection, to which he should give a thrilling response. However, on the other hand, these songs contain God's warnings, which move a sensitive person and make him cry.

The caller is a manifestation of God's beauty and glory. However, man is so heedless that these things fail to move him. God comes close to him through the caller's words, but he does not find God. He does not have the qualities of showing genuine gratefulness to God. He hears even the most soulful messages like a stone, not like the man to whom God has given the intellect to find the deeper meaning of these words.

The message brought by a caller of God is unlike that of playing a record. It is to bring about a revolution in the human soul, the intensity of which is stronger than that of a volcano. Therefore, his “songs” are not just songs but the sound of a divine shaking in the human soul.

However, perhaps the strangest thing in this world is that even such divine words fail to move man. The *dayee* lays bare his whole being in front of him, yet he remains blind. The windows of Heaven are opened in front of him, yet he is not moved to ecstasy. He is shown a map of burning Hell. Even then, he does not cry. God, Himself, comes and stands before him even then he does not fall in prostration before him. God has not created a creature more delicate than man, but no one is as insensitive as a man.

CONCLUSION

When we see a piece of machinery that is quite remarkable in its complexity and perfect in its functioning, we immediately give credit for its creation and its excellence to the initiative and skills of the manufacturer. However, ironically, we hasten to give credit where it is due in the case of material fabrication, but when we look around us at the wonders of the world, we barely think about how they came into being and how they continue to perpetuate themselves. This is because we do not attribute such a meaningful creation to an Almighty Creator.

We need to imagine ourselves in the position of Colonel James Irwin, one of the three astronauts who travelled in the American Apollo 15 spacecraft, which landed on the moon in August 1972. When he later described the magical moment of stepping onto the moon, he said it was like the ecstasy one felt in the presence of God. He said he felt incredibly close to the Almighty as if His greatness had manifested before his eyes. Colonel Irwin did not consider this voyage one of mere scientific discovery; he looked upon it as an experience that had given him a new spiritual life.

Like Colonel Irwin stepping onto the moon, we need to look upon our earth as the strange and wonderful orb God created for humanity's benefit. It is not that the countenance of our Maker does not shine continually in the perfection of His creation; it is simply that from a very early age, we have become so accustomed to the world around us that we tend to take it for granted. We never seriously peruse over the

rising and the setting of the sun, never fear a lack of oxygen to breathe, never imagine that the waters of the ocean might recede beyond our view or that the trees and plants might cease to grow one day and perpetuate themselves. Because of the very regularity and perfection of natural phenomena, we pay less and less heed to them as we grow up. We are too familiar with them to realize how extraordinary they are. It is only in unfamiliar circumstances, or if we have had a brush with death, then we suddenly realize God's blessings. The wind, water, trees, and birds all strike us as reflections of the Lord's beauty.

If we were to look at the world with the same wonder and awe as Colonel Irwin experienced as he gazed on the moon, we should begin to live on earth as if we were in God's presence everywhere. We would continually see Him and feel Him all around us, and we should then begin to lead our lives in the full consciousness of being watched over by our Creator and Sustainer.

The universe's structure shows that only one Being can be the pivot of man's existence and that Being is God. Being oriented towards a single centre, the universe is telling us something: it is telling us that this is the way that our lives should be oriented. Seeing the glory of God all around us, we should live a God-oriented life.

*I*f a man opens his mind to the signs of God around him, the universe will become a manifestation of God's splendour. He will discover his Lord by observing them. While dwelling in an earthly abode, he would see and feel nothing but the Lord on high. He will acknowledge that everything is from God. Seeing that he has no power in this world, he will look to God for help and protection.

The beauty of this world will remind him of God's beauty; the greatness of natural phenomena impresses on him the greatness of the One who created them. So absorbed will he be in the glory of God that he will love nothing more than to spend his time singing the praises of the Lord.

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