

The Life and Times of Muhammad Rasul Allah

Universalizing the
Abrahamic Tradition

Tarik Jan



In his treatment of the Prophet's life, the author never loses touch with the global context while critically sifting and presenting the conventional account carefully. Page after page the work maintains its uncommon combination of learning and a wonderful style, which is spirited as well as emotive. The author's knowledge base is impressive; he draws on a vast reservoir of literature both in the Islamic and Western traditions to evoke the prophetic era.

The use of pictures and graphics is tastefully done to better the work's esthetic appeal, making it reader-friendly. In consequence, it has become a peerless work, creating its own genre.

I am sure it will go down as a landmark study in sira writing.

Dr. S. M. Zaman
Chairman, Council
of Islamic Ideology

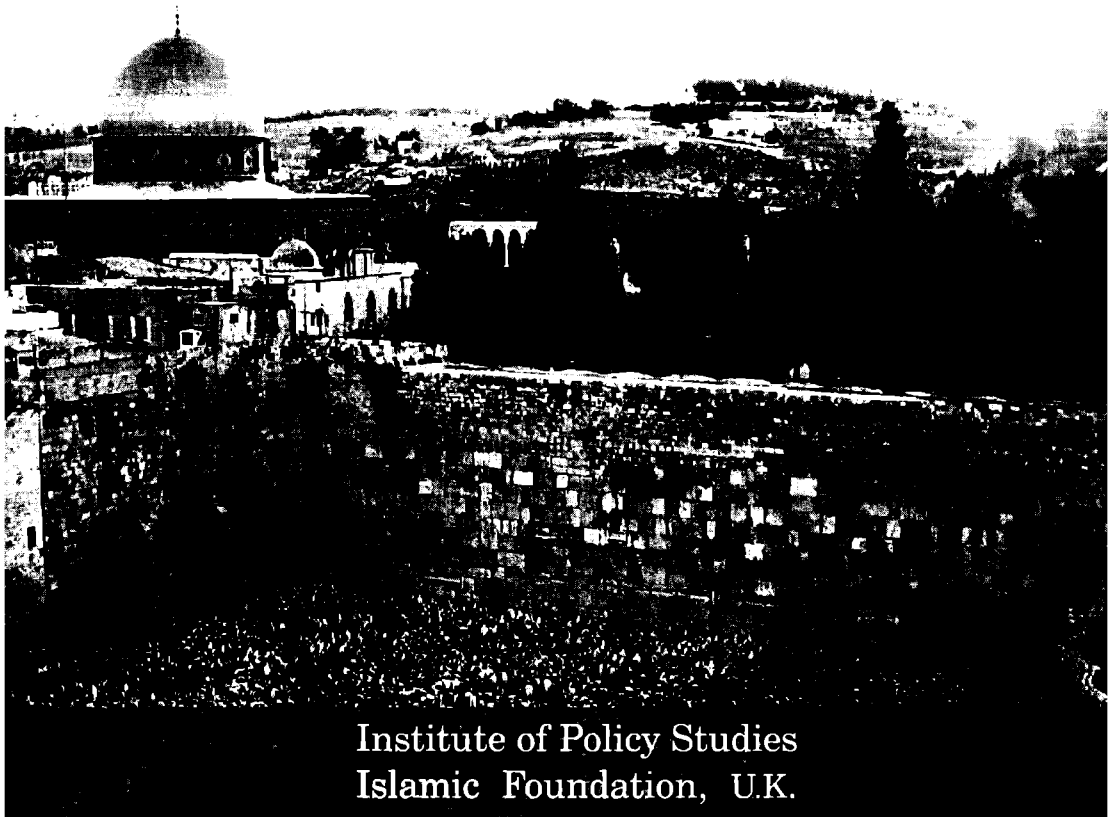
Few biographies of the Prophet Muhammad (sal-lallahu 'alayhi wa-sallam) can claim such an authentic treatment of the pre-Islamic religious scene as Tarik Jan has given it, both in proximity to the coming of the Prophet and the remoteness of the biblical times.

For example, *sira* books generally characterize pre-Islamic Arabian peninsula as pagan, while they describe the Jewish and Christian settlements as spiritual oases. But Tarik brings out the pagan character of 6th-century Christianity by underpinning its syncretic makeup, and identifying monasticism and messianic yearnings as its two main currents. The quintessence of similitude between the Jesus' message and the teachings of the Old Testament demonstrates itself in the Sermon of the Mount and the celebrated utterance of Rabbi Hillel.

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Tarik Jān



Institute of Policy Studies
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Title cover shows the important places of the three
Abrahamic faiths.

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والحب أساسي	والعقل أصل ديني	المعرفة رأس مالي
والثقة كنزي	وذكر الله أنيسي	والشوق مركبي
والصبر رداي	والعلم سلاحي	والحزن رفيقي
والزهد حرفتي	والعجز فخري	والرضاء غنيمتي
والطاعة حسبي	والصدق شفيعي	واليقين قوتي
	وقرة عيني في الصلاة	والجهاد خلقي

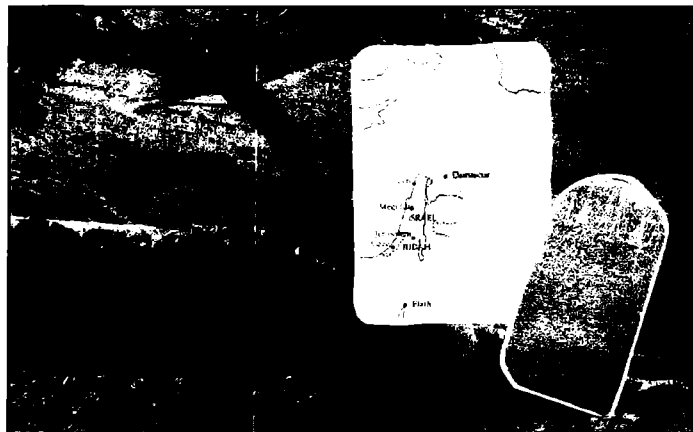
❁ The knowledge of reality is my main capital; the essence of my faith lies in rationality; on love rests my foundation; eagerness is my ride; remembering Allah is my companion; dependence on Allah is my treasury; the heart that pines is my cohort; knowledge is my weapon; forbearance is my attire; in Allah's pleasure is my booty. (the fruit of my toil); in humbleness is my pride; righteous living is my occupation; conviction is my food; in truthfulness is my intercession; obeying Allah is my inalienable wealth; my morals are *jihad*; in prayers lies my pleasure.

Muhammad Rasul Allah

MUHAMMAD RASUL ALLAH

UNIVERSALIZING THE ABRAHAMIC TRADITION

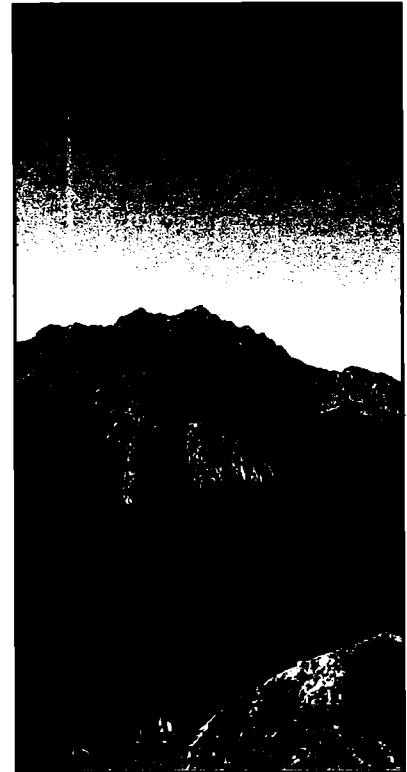
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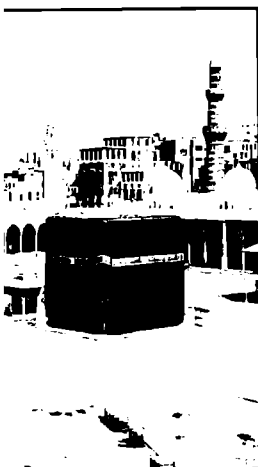


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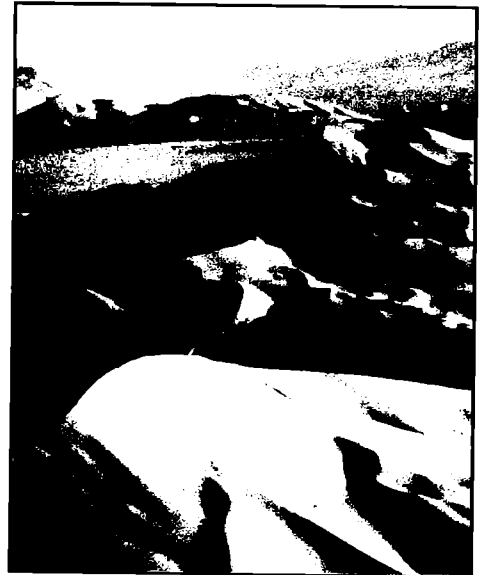
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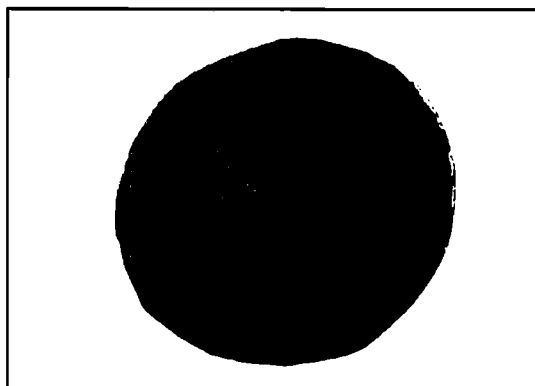
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Acknowledgments

Writing books may be very confining but finishing them is a civilizational effort: it calls for a certain interdependence, like patronage, encouragement, and logistic support. Acknowledgments are thus not formal but a genuine expression of gratitude. It is in this context that I want to mention Prof. Khurshid Ahmad. Had it not been the generous and stimulating environment of the Institute of Policy Studies and his personal interest in the project, my task would have been uphill. Twice he read the manuscript — once when it was still raw and he saw merit in it; and second, when it had assumed the final shape and he obliged by writing introduction to it. I have no hesitation in saying that his role was pivotal.

Among others, I recall with deep appreciation the names of Prof. Farhat Shah, Mr. ‘Abdullah, Dr. Sayyid Riaz Ahmad, Dr. Anis Ahmad, Dr. Mumtaz Ahmad, and Muhibul Haq Sahibzada who evaluated the manuscript and made suggestions. Besides, Muhammad Ilyas Khan was always available to improve my knowledge of the Arabic sources. I did not give him the whole manuscript to read but whatever little I gave him, he read with relish.

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Most of all, I am indebted to our sponsors: Major General Zulfiqar Ali Khan, managing trustee of the Islamic Medical College, endorsed the idea with a generous heart. His was the first rain drop that set the print work rolling; Dr. Zahir Ahmad, chairman Tamir-i Millat Foundation, adopted the project as easily as winking; Mrs. Feroza Sheikh and her son Tahir Ahmad Ayaz Sheikh of al-Tahir Islamic Foundation Karachi gave us their confidence when we needed it most. In fact, their grants were crucial in the completion of this work. With Allah the Most High is their reward.

This book would have been esthetically poor without several photographs drawn from very old issues of the famed *National Geographic*, two from Sonia Holiday and Laura Lushinton’s contributions to *His Land*, an AMEC Sunday School Union’s Publication, five from Giovanna Magi’s excellent book *Jerusalem*, a Casa Editrice Bonechi publication. To them each we are grateful and hope they would not mind our drawing upon their generosity. Besides, Dr. Zafar Ishaq Ansari and Dr. and Mrs. Tariq Baqai deserve special thanks for their maps and photographs.

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Preface

Muhammad (sallal-lahu ‘alayhi wa-sallam) is not a myth but an all-time great. As a prophet, communicator, and interpreter of divine will, he has deeply impacted the course of civilization.

His uniqueness lies in his demonstrating to the world that a human can achieve his full potential if he bonds himself to God’s guidance. As revelation’s prime recipient who had to act as role-modeler to humanity, he set an exceedingly luminous example in his person, inspiring a large mass of humanity toward a balanced life of matter and spirit. He put man-God relationship on an even keel by showing that human success could be sought not in becoming godlike or angelic but in realizing one’s moral potential. In him, religiosity discovered its true dimensions by affirming faith in one true God, the source of all guidance, on the one hand, and by restructuring society and state

on the firm foundations of morality and justice, on the other. Thus, by fusing the secular with the religion, he inaugurated a new process of history, enabling humans to establish life on piety, respect for law, equality, moral responsibility, and social justice.

On the sociopolitical level, he molded a motley crowd of warring tribes into an ummah that changed the world forever by establishing one of the greatest living civilizations which, despite its current turbulent existence, is destined to play a distinct role in saving humanity from the ravages of materialism, hedonism, rank exploitation, and rancorous hegemony of the nations of the world.

As the centerpiece of this historic process, who lived in the full glare of history for sixty-three years, his life is known in all its fullness. There is no mystery or mythology built around his person: his apostolic work is spread over a span of twenty-three years, covering all aspects of individual and community living. Whether as a man in the fullness of his relationship with others or as a reformer, a military commander, a sovereign or a statesman, his model is on a gigantic scale, luminous as well as ennobling. For sure, there is no other human in history who has played such a diverse role with such grace and dignity. The unity of the Islamic paradigm owes itself to the completeness of his person, which has ensured the ethos of the Islamic ummah — both horizontally in the essential uniformity among his followers all over the Islamic realm,

and vertically as prophet until now and beyond.

This relationship between the Muslims and their Prophet is not formal or legalistic — it is a commitment to live in his shadow, which makes it highly personal and imparts it a spiritual glow. At the same time, it is the pacesetter for social behavior and collective action. In influencing human behavior and the life-stream of history, he is peerless. In this testimony, Muslims are not alone. When Thomas Carlyle began his search for “the hero as prophet,” he could not help proclaim that Muhammad the truthful was such a person “to kindle the world.” When Bernard Shaw looked for a role-modeler to steer the human race from present-day crisis to safety, he could find no man but him. So is the case with Michael Hart. When he catalogued the list of the men who influenced the world most, he could not restrain himself say that Muhammad “was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels. ... Today, thirteen centuries after his death his influence is still powerful and persuasive” and that, it is “this unparalleled combination of real and religious influence which I feel entitles Muhammad to be considered the most influential single figure in human history.”

If Muhammad has been such a unique figure in human history, is it not in the fitness of things that every human, whether he or she believes in him or not, should at least make a serious effort to understand this man and his mission, particularly in the

context of the crisis of our own age when the dominance of the West's materialistic civilization has so disrupted the moral fiber of life that humans are faced with the prospects of losing whatever they have built over the centuries? It is my firm conviction that a deeper understanding of Muhammad's life and mission is the greatest need of the hour.

Although hundreds of biographies of the Prophet Muhammad have been written in the past in all the major languages of the world, and scores of such studies are appearing in our own time, the need for fresh efforts has never been obviated. Tarik Jan has rendered a unique service by his work on the life and times of Muhammad Rasul Allah. Based on the Qur'an and the authentic sources of the hadith and history, and written with a clear perception of his mission and message, the first volume covers the Prophet's life from birth to his *hijrah* (emigration) to Madinah.

What stands it apart in this genre is the author's profound understanding of the methods of our own times, its myths and mysteries, its agonies and travails. In this context, it is not merely a study of the Prophet's life but also a rendition of the changing times in whose making and unmaking the relevance of that luminous person can be understood. Tarik sees in his person the culmination of the Abrahamic paradigm, and the post-Muhammad era as the eternalization of that tradition. He also views things in the context of the struggle between *haqq* (truth) and *batil* (falsehood), between the

prophetic tradition and paganish deviation — from Ibrahim to Muhammad and from Muhammad to eternity — with sharp focus on the crisis of civilization in our own times. History is a continuum, and he has looked upon its decisive moments not to eulogize the past or create human idols but to identify and highlight the clues that can help set the house of humanity in order. And that makes this study so fresh, so inspiring, and so relevant.

I have enjoyed reading it; there have been moments when one is overwhelmed by the text, not merely because of the beauty and the force of the narrative but by the chords it strikes in one's soul while unveiling the relevance and the richness of the prophetic example.

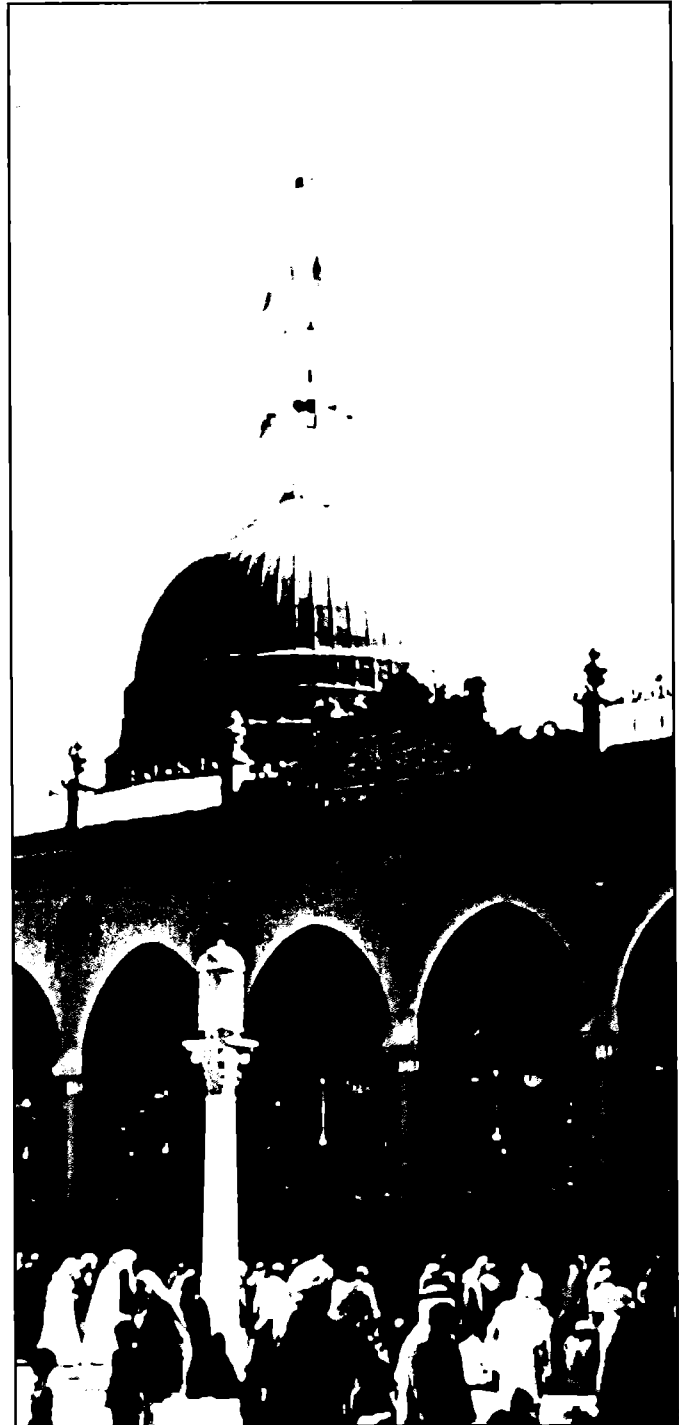
The timelessness of the prophetic model is important as the era that began with the revelation in 609 C.E. has been unbroken since then and will continue unless time comes to a stop. That is what finality of the prophethood and the relevance and the ever-increasing freshness of Muhammad's life and mission mean. This we fathom in a unique way in Tarik's marvelous work on the Prophet.

Most important, the reader will not find the narrative weighed down by unnecessary historiography and dates. Its beauty lies in capturing the spirit of the moment and recreating the event as if we are not external to the book but participants in the unfolding of this unique period. And that is what impressed me most in this biography with a difference.

May Allah give Tarik the best of the rewards and open up the hearts and souls of all his readers to the Prophet's message of truth and the life of struggle that constitute the sum and substance of this pioneering work.

Safar 23, 1419
June 19, 1998

Khurshid Ahmad
Islamabad



Author's Note

Writing on the Prophet Muhammad's life (*sira*) could be extremely difficult for a number of reasons. For example, if one follows the episodal approach of the past writers, the continuity of the narrative suffers and reading becomes choppy. Besides, episodes are good material for a speaker but not a prose writer. They do, however, provide themes on which a number of essays can be written. But again it would not serve a biography.

And if one tries to tell a tale, essential to biographies, it may end up as a piece of fiction. In writing *sira* the poetic license is certainly absent; for the writer is not dealing with artificial characters conceived in

the subjective world of the human mind but with real people, who are the most credible source of guidance and beyond reproach. The treatment calls for truthfulness, respect, and a lot of circumspection. Likewise, the characters he deals with should not become abstract and cold in his hands.

At the same time, one has to decide whether he wants to be pedantic at the expense of readability or effective at the price of shallowness. Thus, the middle ground is difficult to maintain.

Nevertheless, the most difficult aspect of the sira writing is to avoid being overtly moral. Difficult, because a prophet is a protester against the things gone wrong. His whole life is an extended moral statement on the bad and the ugly aspects of human life. Thus, a sira writer must know that he is faced with a value-loaded theme which has to be deftly handled, and that he is not writing on a politician's or an old-time autocrat's life in the secular vein of desacralizing the sacred.

On the other hand, his task is relatively easier because Muhammad ('alayhi as-salam) is uniquely qualified to be written about since there is not a single character in the entire history of humankind, even in literature, who can match his diversity, his wholeness, his warmth, and his grace. Most important, he integrates himself with the life processes on an unprecedented scale: he is an exceptional communitarian, a civilizing as well as a civilizational influence. In short, he cannot be measured even by the standards of

an epic character. A sira-writer can also sift the material according to his scheme, though he still will have to follow the signposts of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. And that is a strength as well as a weakness.

Allah be praised, this book does not suffer from any of the stated problems. I have tried to evolve a new kind of approach without soiling the purity of the sources. Whether it has worked or not the perceptive readers will find it. I may, however, mention a few salient features of my work:

- It contextualizes the coming of the last prophet in the Abrahamic tradition and its breakdown.
- The prophetic message is perceived as a radical response to a status-quo milieu, shaping a new brave world through the art of influencing, use of reason, and moral affirmation of what is the best in humans.
- Muhammad Rasullah is portrayed as a messenger with all the mystique of prophethood. The rational aspect is maintained, though not at the price of prophethood.
- The messenger and the message are integrated. In fact, the message unfolds itself as the messenger creates situation on the ground.
- The book goes beyond the

episodical frame and integrates the material to tell a tale. Nevertheless, the story does not overwhelm the subject.

- The text rationalizes the situation and the characters caught in it. Their buildup is from the ahadith. Wherever necessary it has been elliptically related to present-day themes.
- The conflict in Makkah has been brought out with the help of the Qur'an.
- An effort has been made to understand the psychological environment in which the Prophet and his companions operated.

As to the scheme of the book, it has fourteen chapters, the first four deal with the pre-Islamic religious scene, the remainder cover the sira. The first three chapters may make a relatively difficult reading, but they are important in the context of understanding the following:

- What was the Abrahamic tradition?
- How did it get distorted?
- What were the influences, current and crosscurrents that shaped the pre-Islamic religious scene?
- And what were the circumstances that called for the coming of the last prophet, Muhammad

Rasul Allah?

A word about the transliteration and the sources used. In transliteration the following key has been adopted:

th	ث
d	ض
dh	ذ
z	ز
'	ع
'	ء
Abu'l-Walid	ابوالوليد

The transliterated words and phrases are italicized only once in each chapter. The English equivalents are given in brackets. Also, I have used for Muhammad the appellations of Rasul Allah and the Prophet. Rasul Allah means the messenger of God. The adjunct in Arabic in front of his name, that is, "alayhi as-salam" are supplicatory words which mean "upon him be peace."

For the Qur'anic quotes, I have used both Pickthall's and Yusuf Ali's translations. Occasionally Ahmad Ali's has also been used. Most of the time I have combined them to create a better reading. Unlike other books, fortunately the Qur'an is available in original and can be checked if there is a problem with one's translation. For the Bible other than the *shiloh* quote, I preferred the revised version to King James' because of its smoothness. The

translation of the quotes from the Arabic sources is my own.

For me writing sira was a major event in my life. That I had the chance to project the Prophet's life is itself very comforting. As a Persian couplet says:

Allah tu karim
wa Rasul-i tu karimay;
sad shukr kay bastam
miyan-i du karimay.

Allah you are merciful
and so is your Messenger;
my gratitude is unbounded
for I am shaded by the two.



☉ Religion can affect the world only if it becomes involved in politics in the broadest sense of the word. Islam is Christianity reoriented toward the world. This definition shows both the similarity and difference between these two religions.

Islam not only includes one pure Judaic component but also many non-Judaic elements. In his classification of religions, Hegel views Islam as the direct continuation of Judaism, an idea which can be attributed to his Christian upbringing. Similarly, Spengler calls the Book of Job an Islamic writing. In his *Patterns of Comparative Religions*, Mircea Eliade places Muhammad at the transition point between the second and third (last) period in mankind's spiritual development. The third period, not yet ended, started with Muhammad. The history of the human mind, according to Eliade, is a process of general secularization. In this vision, Muhammad stands on the threshold of the triumph of religion (Christianity) and the new secular age. As such, he stands at the focal point of historical balance.

Setting aside the one-dimensionality of Eliade's historical vision ... we point out the inevitable "middle" position of Islam and Muhammad as characteristic of this "seeing." This impression persists regardless of the variety of approaches and explanations.

Alija A. Izetbegovic

Pre-Islamic Religious Landscape

THE SCEPTER SHALL NOT DEPART FROM JUDAH, NOR THE RULER'S STAFF FROM BETWEEN HIS
FEET, UNTIL SHILOH COMES, AND TO HIM SHALL
BE THE OBEDIENCE OF THE PEOPLES.

(GENESIS 49 : 10)

The belief in one unique God (monotheism) is the core value of the Abrahamic tradition. Basically a religious concept, it has brought a revolutionary change in metaphysical, esthetic, and epistemological base of human knowledge.

⊗ The Judean hills

Right: The David Kingdom. Israel was first mentioned in this stela by the pharaoh Merneptah (1235-1223 B.C.)



Small wonder, some anthropologists consider it as the crown achievement of human thought. So what is this Abrahamic tradition that we often hear about?

In brief, it is an ensemble of five primary concepts organically linked to each other, and may be summarized as under:

- God alone is worthy of worship, the Creator and Sustainer of this universe.
- Religion is one (i.e., Islam): submission to God's will and obedience to His laws.
- Creation is external to God, specially tailored to human needs.
- His laws conveyed through revelation are as binding on humans as are the physical laws on the phenomena of nature.
- Humanity is one defined by faith and not by ethnic, racial, and national considerations.

The Abrahamic tradition, which began with Adam the first human, reached its finest moments of fulfillment in the life of the Prophet Ibrahim (biblical Abraham).

Almost 4,000 years ago, he began responding to his mission in Ur, present-day Iraq. But when his call to worshiping one true God invited violence from the religiopolitical establishment and they threw him into the fire pit, he decided to leave his country. Iraq was barren to his message.

To make sure that he stays close

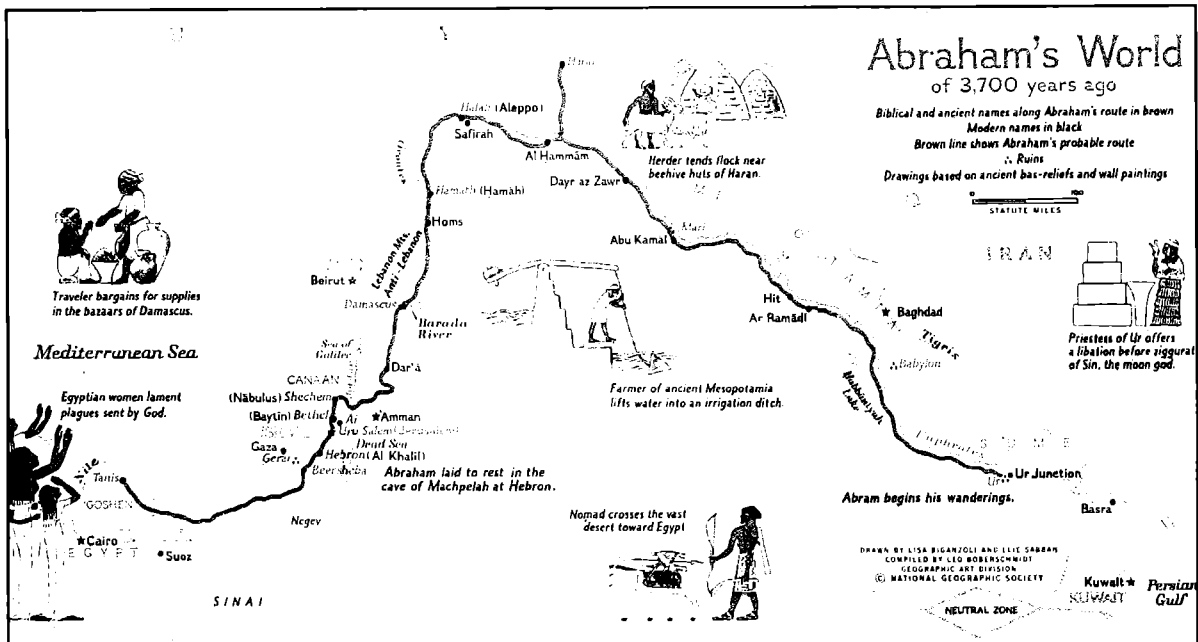
to water, he takes a long route straddling upward north along the Euphrates, passing by Abu Kamal and reaching Aleppo, then down to Homs and finally to Canaan in Jordan.

As someone who had to carry the burden of monotheism on his shoulders, he never gave in to the tyranny of idolatry, even though there was a time when he was all alone – a nation unto himself – up against a world worshiping man and his hand-made gods (polytheism).

To spread his message and thus to save the world from paganism, he divided the then civilized world into two parts. He put his son Isma'il (Ishmael) in Hijaz so that from there his tradition could go into Yemen to further down West Asia and eastward into Africa. He placed his other son Ishaq (Isaac) and nephew Lut (Lot) in Palestine with an eye on the land of Sham, and from there to Italy in Europe across the Mediterranean Sea.

It was not that his sons were grown-up adults; Isma'il was a suckling when he decided to place him in Arabia. Nor was he young himself. Still, he scattered his family so that the divine message of oneness could seek wider audiences. This was a vision as big as was his message. But before his doctrine of oneness could have swayed the world, it was made first to deflect into Judaism and later branched off into Christianity.

Thus, by the time Muhammad Rasul Allah (the last Prophet of Islam) was born, the two were at each other's throats: Jews regarded



Christianity as a deviant sect which had betrayed the main tradition of Judaism, while the Christians accused Jews of condemning Jesus to the cross.

There was some element of truth in the Jewish assertion. Jesus (upon him be peace) himself portrayed his rôle as of one who had come to uphold the Mosaic law and not to abolish it. His audiences were the Israelis whom he admonished for their misdeeds. In the biblical words, he came to shepherd "the lost sheep of Israel."

Leaving aside their disputatious positions, the two incidentally lived under the suzerainty of the Eastern Roman Empire. The demographic landscape showed Jews heavily concentrated in Jerusalem and some other parts of the old Palestine, while Christians flourished under

the active state patronage.

Contrary to the Christian experience of their brief persecution, mostly under Emperor Claudius (41-54 C.E.), the Jewish existence was marked by their prolonged subjection by foreign nations and deportation to other lands. But no matter how variegated an existence they had, their hallmark was their enduring belief in one true God, which set them apart from a world steeped in polytheism. Overrun by the Assyrians, enslaved by the Egyptians, gobbled up by the Persians and the Romans, they still retained a collective consciousness that surfaced itself time and again.

How did "Judaism," as distinct from the religion of Abraham, originate is a phenomenon at once interesting and complex. As a scriptural

⊗ The route followed by the Prophet Ibrahim



religion, following the logic of the same revelatory process from the same one source, it should have been the continuation of the religion of all the prophets preceding Abraham (upon them be peace). This is a valid argument, for the Jews are the only people who make a scriptural claim that the world is "five thousand seven hundred and forty-one years old."¹ One episodic continuum when revelation passes from one generation to another.

Equally intriguing is the development of the Judean history after the Prophet Moses (upon him be peace). The Mosaic law was given to the twelve Jewish tribes, but with the end of the Davidic and Solomon's era, its application was marginalized to only two tribes. The rest beguiled by their secular kings flung the law overboard. The royal palace in Samaria bore the rebellious inscription: "I do not recognize the God of Israel, and will have no part

SHALLUAH ELOHIM IS RASUL ALLAH

Christians think that the appellation "*shiloh*," pronounced as shiloh, in Genesis 49: 10, which has been substituted by "until he comes to who it belong," applies to Jesus on the following grounds:

One, he is heir to the David's throne as Luke 1:31-33 tells us.

Two, before his coming the Jewish rule had ended.

Muslim scholars discount this interpretation as not fair.

First, according to Luke 1: 31-33, Jesus' coming was the con-

tinuation of the rule of the Home of Jacob and David, while the Genesis 49: 10 tells about the termination of the Jewish writ when shiloh comes. Both are contradictory for if Jesus is heir to the throne of David (upon them be peace), then the Jewish dispensation could not have ended: the scepter stayed in the Judah.

This contradiction itself is so obvious that it forecloses the need for further discussion on the point. But even when the end of the Jewish rule in Jeru-

salem is conceded, the fact of the matter is that it ended some sixty-two years before the Jesus' birth. In other words, he did not end it. Far from it, the Jewish rule continued elsewhere. By the time of the Prophet Muhammad ('alayhi as-salam), they were in power in Yemen and Saba. In Madinah itself and later in Khayber, they ruled until their showdown with the Prophet.

Second, the prophecy cannot belong to Moses or David either, because the Jewish

of Him!"² The prophetic legacy thus discarded, the self-centered monarchy gave itself the name of Israel as opposed to two tribes of Judah who stayed the Mosaic course. The vagrant Judeans in exile were tagged as Jews.

The Jewish unity, which came from observing the law, was eventually replaced by acrimony and hate, opening Judea to foreign influence. Persia, with its eyes set on the land of Palestine to checkmate the Roman Empire in the West, swallowed Judea among others. Shrewd as they were, the Persians were not against the Jewishness of the Jews. In fact, a certain amount of Jewishness was helpful to them, and they wanted it to flourish so that in their encounter with the Roman Empire, they could keep present-day Middle East free from Hellenic influences. The Persians knew the nature of the cultural conflict, and how cultural domination preceded political and

military hegemony. Also, they knew that the Jews had been fighting the Hellenic thrust against their Jewishness, particularly their belief in monotheism. From the Persian perspective, the Jewish nation in the psycho-spiritual sense was useful.

☉ **Hebron:**
the past
lingers on



dispensation continued even after them. Also, Jesus is excluded from this honor, for he left no written law nor did he aspire for the royal scepter. In fact, as the Bible tells us, he asked his followers to submit to Caesar's writ and pay him taxes. The prophecy does not talk about the absolution from original sin by the blood of a crucified person, nor of a god-man's rule over human hearts, either.

Last but not least, most of the Old Testament's prophecies have been incorporated in the New Testament to prove their fulfillment in Jesus. The Gos-

pel of Matthew is particularly adept in such exercises. But neither writers of the gospels nor the disciples mention Genesis 49: 10 as applicable to Jesus. Thus, in the Muslim view "*shiloh*" is none else but the Prophet Muhammad.

David Benjamin Keldani, a Roman Catholic priest who later became Muslim, says that in the Hebrew text there are two words which are unique and occur nowhere else. ... The first of these words is "*shiloh*" and the other "*yiqha*." After giving three different versions, he zeros in on the fact that there

is a possibility of changing final letter *het* into *his* by some old transcriber or copyist "for the two letters are exceedingly alike being only very slightly different on the left side." His view is that in that case, "the word would take the form of *shiluah* and correspond exactly to the Apostle of Yah, the very title given to Muhammed... "Rasul-Allah, i.e., the Apostle of God." He further says that "*Shaluah elohim*" of the Hebrews is precisely "Rasul-Allah," a phrase chanted five times a day by the Muslim crier to the prayers.

While as a corporate body, with its state structure and Mosaic law, its entity was fraught with serious consequences for them. In the Jewish priestly class, which had by then fully entrenched itself, they found a natural ally. The new alliance served the two well in shaping the Jewish nation without a state, ruled by the priests who deterritorialized the law (*halakhah*) and gave them religion. So lasting was this change that even when the Temple in Jerusalem is restored, it does not become the temporal center of the Jews but of a nation living in Diaspora — “an extra-territorial confessional dominion.”⁷³ Interestingly, the Romans maintained the Persian model.

⊗ The ruins of a Roman road



“This was the time,” says Ilan Halevi, “when the Bible [Torah] as we know it was redacted: rewritten, codified, expurgated, annotated, completed. The ancient Hebrew alphabet — the one the Samaritans of Nablus have retained down to the present day in their liturgy — was abandoned in favour of the square alphabet of the Aramaeans, with which Hebrew is written today. It is easy to imagine the possibilities of distortion opened up by this wholesale transliteration from one alphabet to another: this was when the whole of previous history, from the creation of the Persians to the fall of Judah, was summarized and reinterpreted. This vast manipulation of the text was to leave, standing out like crystals, a few fragments of the older telling retained in the collective memory of the people. ... It was then, at this particular moment in history, which lasted almost a century, that Judaism was invented.”⁷⁴

The Jewish history is thus peppered with tension between the status-quo priestly establishment and the restorers of the Temple-state. The clergy (such as the Pharisees) is also reviled for its tampering the law. Added to this, there is an ongoing tension between the Jews (such as the Sadducees) who held Hellenization as an historical inevitability that had to be acculturated, and those who opposed despiritualizing their lives. These tensions led to another enduring feature of the Jewish history: the conflict between the letter of the law and the spirit behind it.

The Jewish struggle for their



people's moral rebound is also an important aspect of their history. The 9th-century Jandab Ben Rechab movement was against the injustices of a monarchy derailed from its spiritual and moral axis, while the 2nd-century Essenes movement spearheaded a communal life of prayers and abstinence in protest against crass materialism. Again, the Maccabees' revolt in the second and first centuries B.C. was as much an expression against foreign domination as it was against the clerical betrayal of the Jewish dream. Its degeneration later into a corrupt monarchy is again a constant of Jewish history. The Jewish spirit oscillates between their desire to fulfill

their covenant with God, elusive that it had become due to interpolation and falsification of the prophetic tradition, to their love for material life. That is why messianic nationalism took roots again and again in the mountains and rural areas, which were relatively freer from the enervating influence of Hellenic civilization.

⊗ Ruins of Capernaum where Jesus preached

The Changing face of Judaism

Corresponding to the armed uprisings, Judaism also underwent certain notable mutations, which led to many schisms in its body. Paganism, which

by its nature is opposed to monotheism, was changing Judaism from within. Two eminent Jewish scholars, like Hillel and Philo Judeaus, were representatives of this trend. Hillel was liberal in his interpretation of the Book to accommodate new emergent realities and make Jews comfortable with their Hellenic environment. But what began as a liberal stance gradually led, among his disciples, to the exaltation of the Talmud over the Torah. Philo Judeaus (30 B.C. - 45 C.E.), on the flip side, represented another kind of the undercurrent — that is: to recast Judaism in the Greek idiom in such a way that it becomes compatible with the Greek categories of thought. In fact, this reformulation of the Torah in the Greek image had started with its translation in the third century B.C. Philo's imprint added respectability to it, for he knew not only Greek better than Hebrew but was also adept in Platonism, Stoicism, and Pythagoreanism. Apparently, there was nothing wrong with such an exercise, but it had some serious implications for the Hebrew scripture: First, it turned out to be an attempt to measure up to the Greek learning, which accentuated the already existing complexes among the Jews. Second, their new generation lost its organic link with the Hebrew language, which speeded up the process of redaction further.

Yet another significant development that took place against the rabbinical absolutism were the groups which while denouncing extra-Torah approaches to the scrip-

ture called for direct access to it. The ever-changing rabbinical opinions provoked them to denounce the clerics, for they had obscured the real meaning of the Torah by incremental exegeses inspired by their personal opinions. Such groups and sects were reported to be many and served as precursors of a new mindset that concretized itself into the Karait movement at the advent of Islam. That they were persecuted by the rabbis should not be surprising.

The rabbinical role, nevertheless, remained powerful. By establishing a system of governance — a kind of protectorate within the successive empires whether Persian or Roman — they created a dependency for the people that became difficult to break as the time passed. With the Temple-state gone and the messianic nationalism crushed by the iron hand of the empire, the stage was set for the Jewish particularism to arise. The rabbis played on the theme, and people believed it because it was made believable. Perhaps it was also in the interest of the empire to enhance the Jewish ethnicity so that by becoming particularistic, it does not spread. This, however, does not discount the fact that there were strong romantic and narcissistic tendencies in the Jewish character.

Here again one sees the degeneration of a noble idea — that is, of a covenant between the people and their Creator to order their lives in light of the message given to them. The Jewish chosenness, in its original purity, was in this sense. By the

time, Muhammad Rasul Allah began responding to his call, the Jews had already distanced themselves from the rest of the human race. Reinforced by the belief that they were the chosen ones, they awaited for a messiah, who would purge Jerusalem of aliens and exalt Jews to rule the world.

Thus, the coming of the messiah is a recurrent theme in the Jewish literature — someone who could have easily brought a change in their lives. Jesus could have delivered them from the Persian-Greek domination, but the Jewish response was lukewarm, which denied strength to his movement. For the Romans, it was at best a “nuisance;” for the Jewish priestly establishment, it was inviting trouble. Together they decided to get rid of him.

Christianity: the Judaic tradition goes awry

Christianity was another fixture of the religious landscape, already more than 600-year old at the advent of Islam. Although a continuation of the Judaic tradition, it did not adopt the same kind of belligerent posture toward Hellenism that Judaism had. Rather, it manifested a desire to recognize the Hellenic reality and absorb it. This explains why despite using the same Jewish books, it deviated itself so radically that what was originally a movement within mainstream Judaism soon turned into a new faith, neither intended by

Jesus nor supported by the Bible. The name Christianity itself is suggestive of its Greek origin, for it is derived from the word *christ*, which has a different meaning than



the semitic appellation messiah. Christ stands for a world redeemer, while messiah means a savior king. Both have different connotations: christ is a pagan concept, while messiah's is embedded in Jewish religious literature. Likewise, monotheism is a Judaic theme, central to its message, while polytheism is the heart of paganism. This response to Hellenism is also obvious from the change of Semitic names into Greco-Roman ones, for example, James,

☉ A relief from a stone coffin: Roman cavalry in combat



⊗ Fifth century C.E. church panel: The pagan influence is obvious

Paul, Peter and so forth. Even the current biblical Jesus is the culmination of changes from Yeshu'a (help of Yahweh) to Iesus (Roman) to Iesous (Greek).

In the beginning the Jews were not appalled at the alleged utterances of the biblical Jesus when he called himself the son of God. The metaphor was known to them: Caesar called himself god; and the Bible used the appellation for pious people. Even Jesus' message was not non-Jewish. It was the continuation of the Judaic prophetic tradition, the same moral rage. For example, in the Old Testament, Isaiah says:

When you make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. ... How is the faithful city become an harlot...

Likewise, Jesus of the New Testament says:

Outwardly you appear to men to be upright, but within you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

His celebrated sermon on the Mount, much that one should admire it for its commonsense wisdom and eloquence, is a reverberation of the old Judaic stuff. For example, the admonition "to do unto others as you would that they should do unto you" was reminiscent of Rabbi Hillel who when asked to state the whole law, said: "Do not unto others that which you would not have them do unto you. That is the entire law."⁵

Yet another statement of Jesus, remarkable for its melodramatic effect, is known to have been said by a former Jesus, the son of Sira: "Come to me all who labour and are burdened and I will refresh you."⁶

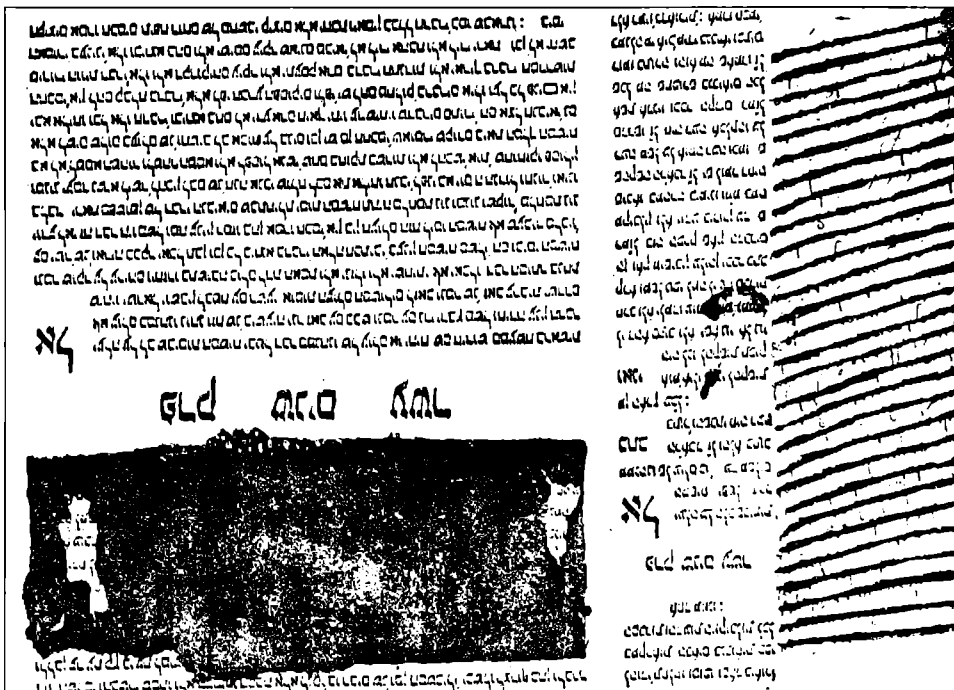
Jesus' divinity was an interpolation carried out at a much later stage, some 100-150 years after his death.

The factors involved were many: some related to the destruction of the environment that made Jesus relevant to his generation; others related to the oppositional forces of

polytheism which though subdued for a while wanted to cast Jesus in their image. The process was long but not impermanent. Its genesis ironically lay in the form of the message itself.

In the beginning, the gospel was an oral tradition. But before it could be preserved, the Jewish world, with Jerusalem as its center, was destroyed by the Romans (70 C.E.). The final showdown was precipitated by three events. First, the small state of Judea was absorbed by the Roman Empire (6 C.E.), which wiped out the last semblance of Jewish independence. The second event tested the Jewish belief in monotheism. Moved by the desire to strengthen the empire, the Roman establishment decided (37 C.E.) to place the emperor's statue for worship as God in the Temple at Jerusalem. Jews resisted it and forced the

Roman officials to rescind the decision. The third event tested the Roman patience when the Jews stopped the daily sacrifice to the emperor and butchered the Roman garrison (60 C.E.). Later, they defeated 20,000-man strong army from Syria. Of course, these events did not take place in rapid succession. There is a considerable gap between them, but they eventually led to the finale: Jerusalem was emptied of the Jews, and their books were destroyed. Such was the Jewish psyche and the Judaic environment in which Jesus was born. A deeply ingrained monotheism that believed in one God and which had the kind of virility that could challenge the Roman might. Thus, for Jesus to have declared himself God incarnate, in human flesh, one of the three, and co-eternal with the Jewish God, especially when Jesus himself made no such claim even in the New Testament, is



⊗ Censored passages on Jesus in Moses Maimonides' *Hiekhsth Melakhim*

discordant with the Jewish religious environment. Likewise, after having upheld the Mosaic law, any claim that monotheism, as preached by Moses and others, was a triad of Gods merged into one, would be inconsistent with the biblical themes.

Paul's problems in seeding a new theology

The Bible was written in the post-fall period. Periodic Jewish defiance of the pagan culture had probably made the Jews highly undesirable. The way they were killed, deported, and their properties confiscated made even their religion a curse, with

whom kinship could have invited hostility from others. The biblical writers, therefore, had to recast a new Jesus: a Jesus who would shed his messianic role of a prophet and slip into the role of a redeemer God, who had come to save a sinful world. This called for a new theology and a new liturgy that could have corresponded with the myth-craving pagan mind. The Hellenic world of Rome was rich with rituals, cults, and myths of all kinds. Out of the available material Christianity had to be structured. "[Thus,] from Egypt came the ideas of a divine trinity, the last judgment, and a personal immortality of reward and punishment; from Egypt the adoration of the Mother and Child, and the mystic theosophy that made Neopla-

The Jewish Calamity

Archelaus' troops slew 3,000 Jews (4 B.C.). Varnus, governor of Syria, entered Palestine, razed hundreds of towns, crucified 2,000 rebels and sold 30,000 Jews into slavery (C.E. 6).

Florus slew 3,600 Jews. 12,000 Jews, nearly all rich, were killed (C.E. 68). On that day the gentiles of Caesarea rose in program and slew 20,000 Jews; thousands sold in captivity. In one day the gentiles of Damascus cut the throats of 10,000 Jews.

Titus burned the Temple; 97,000 fugitives were caught and sold as slaves 1,197,000 were killed in the siege (C.E. 70).

To suppress Bar Cocheba's rebellion (C.E. 132), the Romans destroyed 985 Jewish towns, slew 580,000 men, a still larger number perished through starvation, disease and fire. ... Thousands hid in underground channels; surrounded by the Romans, they died one by one of hunger, while the living ate the bodies of the dead.⁶⁶

tonism and Gnosticism, and obscured the Christian creed; there, too, Christian monasticism would find its exemplars and its source. From Phrygia came the worship of the Great Mother, from Syria the resurrection drama of Adonis; from Thrace, perhaps, the cult of Dionysus, the dying and saving God. From Persia came millennialism, the 'ages of the world,' the 'final conflagration.' ... The Mithraic ritual so closely resembled the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Mass that Christian fathers charged the Devil with inventing these similarities to mislead frail minds."⁷ But before this could be done there was the issue of another Bible, which portrayed Jesus as a man and as a prophet, and gave a faithful account of the events leading to his death on the cross. Paul's letter to Galatians not only expresses his anxiety of people listening to "a different gospel" but also attempts to persuade them to believe in him:

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to prevent the gospel of Christ.⁸

Convincing the Galatians about the genuineness of his gospel, he says:



I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.⁹

☉ **Ramesses II the pharaoh who persecuted Prophet Musa**

Paul denied that he received his gospel from any of the apostles in Jerusalem. He laid claim to having received it from God:

When it pleased God who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal his son in me

that I might preach Him
among the gentiles.
I did not immediately
confer with flesh and blood,
nor did I go up to
Jerusalem to those who
were apostles before me.¹⁰

On his first visit to Jerusalem, he saw none of the apostles, except James and Peter. After fourteen years, when he went again there, he found everyone concerned about "his gospel." So inflamed were the people over his utterances that a crowd grabbed at him, but before they could have killed him, he was rescued by the Roman soldiers. In his letter to the Galatians, he claims that he "went up by revelation" to communicate with them his gospel; but then he was so circumspect that he communicated with only those "who were of reputation, lest by any means [he] might run, or had run in vain."¹¹

The dates of his visits to Jerusalem are not known. There are conjectures of as late as 56 C.E., which means that other than Judaic Christianity, if it would be right to call it so, there was no other Christianity in Jerusalem. Even his own constituency suffered from doubts about the crucifixion and its purgational significance for the sinners. "O foolish Galatian!," he writes in dismay, "what has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ *was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?*"¹²

Obviously, Paul was inventing a new religion, a religion which was to

divest revealed religions of a faithful's striving to seek approval in God's sight, and in which Christ's redemptive role was more important than one's deeds. The debate Paul started rested on Jesus' dialogue with the Pharisees. This had three constituents:

One, "the scribes and Pharisees ... put heavy loads of the law upon men's shoulders."¹³

Two, they "let the weightier matter of the law go — justice, mercy, and integrity."¹⁴

Three, they "are outwardly upright, but within are full of hypocrisy and wickedness."¹⁵

For sure, this was not Jesus' breach with the Mosaic law. In fact, he was affirming it. To say, however, as some quarters believe, that Jesus humanized the law could be true. Law enforcers could develop an exaggerated tendency to seek its literal application, closing their eyes to mitigating elements in a given situation. The Pharisees might have been guilty of that.

For example, of the grain on the Sabbath, the Pharisees objection to it, and his explanation of the act is one such illustration:

Have you never read
what David did when he
was in need and hungry,
he and those with him:
how he went into the
house of God
in days of Abiathar
the high priest,
and ate the showbread,
which is not lawful to eat...
And he said to them,

“The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.”¹⁶

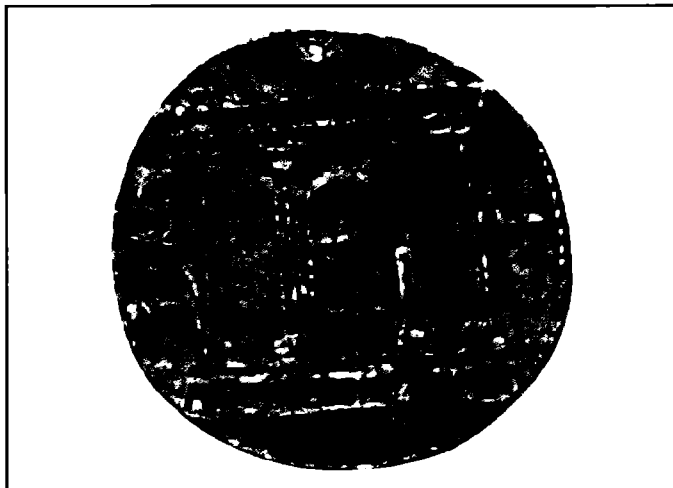
It is also possible that the Pharisees were guilty of applying law to selective cases. One such case, which has been absolutely misquoted and misused, is that of a woman who was sentenced to be stoned for adultery and whom Jesus saved by asking the crowd:

He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.

When people left the scene, he said to her: “Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, Lord. “And Jesus said to her, “Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more.”¹⁷

In both cases, Jesus was not abrogating the law but was rectifying its literal application. To Jesus, as well as other prophets, law was not an abstract entity to be worshiped; it dealt with people and their situations. Pushing it to its literal extremes could lead to absurdity and that was known to Jesus. Paul, however, was up to something else which is self-evident from his discourse. “Christ,” he said, “has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us.”¹⁸ And what is this curse of the law? Paul says it is “the works of the law.”¹⁹ To avoid being accused of encouraging immorality, he cautions against sinning, though in the same

breath, he advises: “let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.”²⁰ Obviously, he suffered from a problematic — that is:



First, how to circumvent the Old Testament (Judaism), for the law was divine and had to be followed.

Second, if conforming with the law was a biblical necessity, then how to reconcile Jesus' redemptive role with it?

Paul's problems ended with the destruction of the Temple in 60 C.E. by the Roman armies.

Nevertheless, he could not have accomplished his task if the corresponding theological environment was not ripe for it. The Haggadic preachers were constantly undermining the letter by maintaining that there was a deeper meaning to the letters of Scripture which could only be grasped when the apparent

● **Simeon Bar Cocheba's coir. with the temple's facade.**

text was ignored. To them, "at the breaking of the tablets of the Covenant the letters flew into the air." The Tannaim and Amoraim agreed that "the letter killeth but the spirit giveth life." (2 Corinthians 3:6). Rabbi Akiva Ben-Joseph's role (50-132 C.E.), in this sense, is important that he fought against this trend and succeeded in reestablishing respect for the letters and crowns "in order to guard the Jewish tradition against the radicalism of Pauline hermeneutics."²¹ The letter was sanctified, as Gudemann says, "for the spirit's sake, against the spirit emphasised by Paul."²²

But important as this development was it was too little and too late. Paul succeeded in seeding his free-from-law-theology in Christianity. "For a millennium and a half," says Jacob B. Agus, "the pagan world continued to be unready for the lofty faith of monotheism. And when Paul undertook a mighty effort to convert the most advanced nations of antiquity, he had to compromise the austere demands of the Jewish faith, interposing a human divine savior between man and God and substituting for the muscular doctrine of free will, which requires constant exertion and vigilance, the fearful notion of man's inability to save himself from the fires of hell by deeds of goodness and penitence. The 'good news' of the savior, after all, predicated upon the certainty of man's failure to achieve salvation though his own efforts to love God and to serve Him."²³

What Paul failed to achieve in life, he achieved in his death. With

the disappearance of the first generation, the oral tradition gradually died down, leaving heresy and apostasy unanswered. Nevertheless, for the Pauline theology to take roots, Christianity had to pass through many phases.

The rise of the Jewish-Christian polemics

Parallel to this scene was an acrid miasma of antagonistic feelings between the Jews and Christians. With the Jesus' alleged death on the cross, the rise of the anti-semitic polemic was but natural, more so among the non-Jewish peoples of the Roman Empire than in the lands around Jerusalem. This polemical literature by its nature was christological because of its desire to justify Jesus as a messiah and developed primarily in response to the Jewish assertion that Jesus was not the christ they had been waiting for. The Old Testament thus became the most contested source, with each side claiming to have a better knowledge of it.

The messiah foretold in Genesis 49: 10 and Isaiah 53, the Christians said, was none other than Jesus. In their response, the Jews maintained that the promised messiah was in the temporal sense who was to deliver them from foreign domination. He could not have been the messiah since by acknowledging Caesar, he had not only failed himself but his people as well.

Rewriting History

*J*osephus' *The Jewish War* is said to be the only book of history which mentions Jesus the historical person; it is extensively quoted by Christian writers as a witness for orthodox Christianity. Honest scholarship, however, gave little credence to its partial account of Jesus; many viewed it a forgery. The situation remained shrouded in doubt until 1866 when sixteen manuscripts of Josephus in the old Slavonic language were found to be at variance with the Greek text. The first striking dissimilarity was noticed in the name that reads *On the Capture of Jerusalem*. This is said to be the original title of the Josephus' work in Aramaic. The manuscript was examined by Dr. Robert Eisler in his work *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist* published in 1931.

Avoiding technicalities, we will reproduce reconstruction done by Dr. Eisler to restore the original, and the Josephus text as altered by the Christians. The anomalies in the status of Jesus (upon him be peace) are obvious.

The original text reconstructed reads : "At that time, too, there appeared a certain man of magical power, if it is permissible to call him a man, whom certain Greeks call a son of God, but his disciples the true prophet, said to raise the dead and heal all diseases."

Josephus as altered by Christians says : "At that time, too, there appeared a certain man of great power if it is permissible to call him a man, whom his disciples call a son of God, but he was the only born son of God, but the Greeks the true prophet who raised dead persons and have cured all diseases."

In the reconstruction based on the original, the disciples called Jesus "the true prophet," though certain Greeks called him "a son of God."

The altered Josephus reversed it: Disciples called him "a son of God," but the Greeks "the true prophet."

Since prophethood was a Semitic institution, the Greeks would not have called Jesus the "true prophet." They would call him a son of God for this was the appellation they commonly used for their emperors and other great men.

For the Christians, it was important that every prophetic passage in the Old Testament be deflected in Jesus' favor — of Jesus as they understood him. For example, if Isaiah 7: 14 talks about the birth of a David's descendent named Immanuel, the Christians maintained it was no other than Jesus; or if Malachi 3: 1 talks about the messenger of the Lord, they held it was John the Baptist, representing Elijah, the predecessor of Jesus.

Discounting such readings into the Old Testament, the Jews characterized them as christological exegeses at the expense of truth, for these passages alluded to King Hezekiah and not Jesus.

Such polemics, the Jews alleged, “[ignored] in the process the context in which the quotation was located or consideration to the historical conditions under which it was written.”²⁴ This kind of christological interpretation of the Bible, the Jews held, can be seen in the Christian implanting of Jesus in Micah 5:1 as he was born in Bethlehem. “But thou Bethlehem ... out of thee shall one come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel.”²⁵

Likewise, Jesus is placed in Egypt for a while so that he could qualify for the appellation of the God's Son used in Hosea 11: 1: “Out of Egypt I called My son.”

When the Jews objected to the Christian attempt to divine Jesus as God incarnate who suffered on the cross and took away their sins, the Christians quoted Isaiah 53: 4 and 52-53: “Surely our diseases he did bear, and our pains he carried.”

“... the Suffering Servant of God.”

Characterizing it as grossly misinterpreted, the Jews maintained that the “Suffering Servant of God” was the whole nation of Israel.

They also alleged that the evangelists' Jesus “in order to fulfill what is written conformed [his] acts to prophetic statement.”²⁶

Besides, casting someone as God incarnate was an impossible article of faith, the Jews observed:

It is not permitted a human mouth to say, ‘The Holy One — blessed be he — has a son.’ If God could not look on in anguish while Abraham sacrificed his son, would he then have his own son be killed, without destroying the whole world.²⁷

To the Jews, sonship was a pagan concept which invalidated the Christian attempt to make messiah out of Jesus. The coming messiah, they insisted, had to be the “son of man.” And for that they banked upon the passage in the Book of Daniel.

When the Christians continued hammering out the theme, they were told that it did not correspond with the transcendental God of the Torah “who is without form, cannot be incorporated in any shape, no matter how fashioned; without boundary and prior to all form, it is he who creates forms.”²⁸

Linked with these opposing ideas was the Christian claim that since Jews were involved in the killing of Jesus, they have been dethroned in the sight of God as Israel, scattered



⊙ The biblical Jacob's well lies in the land between Judea and Galilee

in the diaspora.

Such taunts became frequent after the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed:

But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes which I commend thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee.²⁹

Has not this been fulfilled? they were told.

Using the very words of the Torah, Peter addressed his audience:

You are a chosen race,
a royal priesthood,
a holy nation,
God's own people.³⁰

This meant that once exalted election of Israel as God's favorite has now been given to the Christian Church as its daughter. To that the Jewish repartee was: "Where there is a son, the daughter may not inherit."³¹ At the doctrinal level, their answer was that yes they were punished but not rejected for God says in the Torah:

And yet for all that,
when they are in
the land of their enemies,
I will not reject them,
neither will I abhor them,
to destroy them utterly,
and to break My covenant
with them; for I am
the Lord their God.³²

And if you still do not believe, the Jews said, then "come and see how beloved to Holy One, blessed be his

name, are the Israelites. Wherever they were exiled, the shekhinah was with them. So it was in Egypt, so it was in the Babylonian galuth, so it is in the Edomitic [Roman] galuth. Even when they are finally delivered, the shekhina will be with them, for it is written in Deuteronomy 30: 3. 'The Lord thy God will turn thy captivity.' It is not written that he will bring it back, but will turn it back. ..."³³

Making of a redeemer god

The year 325 C.E. saw Christianity consolidate itself under the powerful wings of the empire. The sailing, however, was not smooth.

The Trinity, before it assumed its present form, had many permutations. Beginning as an attempt to stress Jesus' role as a unique person, people like Paul of Samosata spoke of him as someone who strove for communion with God. His rationale was built on monotheism. "In God," he said, "are the Logos and Wisdom, but the Logos is not a distinct being and is what reason is in a man. The wisdom dwelt in the prophets, but was uniquely in Christ as in a temple. Jesus was a man, but was sinless from his birth. The Holy Spirit was in him, he was united in will with God, by his struggles and sufferings he overcame the sin of Adam, and he grew in his intimacy with God."³⁴

Sabellius took a radical turn, and was perhaps the first one after Paul of Samosata, to have said that

"Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three modes or aspects of God, much as the Sun is bright, hot, and round."³⁵ Tertullian (160-230 C.E.), on the other hand, maintained that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three persons, though one in substance. He saw in the Trinity, three parties playing their part in the divine kingdom. To Tertullian, God was always alone. Since God is rational, there was in Him Reason. This Reason or Word is identical with Wisdom, which became the Son. Tertullian therefore differed with Sabellius and viewed his three modes or aspects of God as three persons.³⁶ Nevertheless, the formulation was still far away from the Nicene creed of three coequal and coeternal beings. Tertullian still maintained that Jesus was subordinate to God, the Father. Jesus' subordination to God was also repeated by Origen. To him, the Holy Spirit was uncreated, while Jesus was created.³⁷ Origen's theology did not die with him. It found potent expression in two of his pupils, Dionysus and Arius who raised the issue with such vigor and cogency of thought that Emperor Constantine had to intervene to save Christianity from a major discord. The polar attitudes were represented by two archetypes Arius (d. 336 C.E.), an Egyptian priest, and Athanasius the Bishop of Alexandria (d. 373 C.E.). Arius maintained that Jesus was not one with the Creator. According to him, Jesus was the Logos, the first and the highest of all created beings. "If the Son had been begotten of the Father," he argued, "it must have been in time; the Son, therefore,

could not be coeternal with the Father. Furthermore, if Christ was created, it must have been from nothing, not from the Father's substance, Christ was not co-substantial with the Father. The Holy Spirit was begotten by the Logos, and was still less God than the Logos."³⁸

Forceful as the argument was, it shook the establishment. Constantine called for the conference. More than three hundred bishops attended. Arius repeated his argument. Christ, he said, was a created being and as such, not equal to the Father. If Christ was divine, he was "divine only by participation." Athanasius, his chief opponent, conceded the problem of unifying three persons into one God, but pleaded that if Christ and the Holy Spirit were not of one substance with the Father, Christianity would be replaced by paganism.³⁹

With Constantine's approval, the Council formulated the new creed:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible or invisible, and in one Lord Jesus Christ the son of God, begotten ... not made, being of one essence (homoousion) with the Father ... who for us men and salvation came down, and was made flesh, was made man, suffered rose again the third day, ascended into heaven and comes to judge the quick and the dead.⁴⁰

The new creed, however, would not have become the core of Christi-

anity unless backed by the force of law. All necessary efforts were made to make sure that nothing contrary to it was published or remained in print. Violation became punishable by the death penalty. Book containing evidence as opposed to the Church's official position were burned. As late as fifth century, the Alexandrian library, which contained the greatest collection of manuscripts in the world, was reduced to ashes.⁴¹ Such practices paved the way for redaction of the Bible, followed by the falsification of history. Josephus Flavius' (Joseph Ben Mathias) historical account of the period after Jesus' death in his *The Jewish War* and *The Jewish Antiquities* was doctored in such a way that Josephus appears to be a non-believing Jew attesting to Jesus as the Christ.⁴²

Modern research has dug up some interesting material to demonstrate that alterations were even made in the Josephus' text. Origen (185-254 C.E.), an early Christian father writing before 325 C.E., says: "The wonder is that though [Josephus] did not admit our Jesus to be the Christ, he none the less gave witness to so much righteousness in James."... "Origen did not know about the passage in the *Jewish Antiquities* as it now stands. ... That the passage was in its present form by the fourth century is attested by Eusebius, which suggests that its distortion took place between the years 254 and 340, little by little until a number of Christian reworkings made it satisfactory."⁴³



☉ **Masada
hill: the scene
of Jewish
resistance
70-73 C.E.**

The Nicene creed, though formulated and enforced, continued to be opposed by Arius and his followers at the risk of their lives and status, especially in the eastern part of the empire. Constantine's son Constantius, along with other bishops, articulated his opposition to the creed when he came into power in

353 C.E. The words like *ousia homoousia*, or *homoiousia* were disallowed, for these were foreign to the Scripture.⁴⁴ But this was a brief respite for the Arians. In 380, Emperor Theodosius, through a royal decree, ordered his subjects to follow what "Peter delivered to the Romans ... the deity of the Father

and the Son and the Holy Spirit of equal majesty in a Holy Trinity.”⁴⁵ Churches opposed to it were prohibited to function.

Casting Jesus into a God was not a mindless or an isolated act but an attempt to paganize Christianity. That is why Eucharist was transformed from the sign, which itself was wrong to begin with, to the substance of the Christ’s body. The cross became an icon to be worshipped so were the other images (such of Mary) molded in brass and marble. Huge statues of Jesus were made with no resemblance to the real Jesus.

Superstitions, a hallmark of the pagan mind, also surfaced in Christianity. An artist-made Jesus’ face impression on a piece of linen was given miraculous powers. “Its first and most glorious exploit was the deliverance of the city [Edessa] from the arms of Chosroes Nushirvan.”⁴⁶ This did not end here, either. “... [I]t was soon revered as a pledge of the divine promise that Edessa should never be taken by a foreign enemy.”⁴⁷

Edward Gibbon calls it “the grossest idolatry.”⁴⁸ In proof he cites a Christian hymn extolling the Jesus’ man-made image:

How can we with mortal eyes contemplate this image, whose celestial splendor the host of heaven presumes not to behold? He who dwells in heaven condescends this day to visit us by his venerable image; He who is seated on the cherubim visits us this day

by a picture, which the Father has delineated with his immaculate hand, which he has formed in an ineffable manner, and which we sanctify by adoring it with fear and love.⁴⁹

By the time Muhammad Rasul Allah was born, the Christian environment was surfeited with paganish cult of images and icons, invested with attributes of godhood, which were invoked to cure diseases, stave off calamities, and restore fallen spirits.

By all counts, it was the return of paganism with a vengeance. “The devout Christian prayed before the image of a saint, and the pagan rites of genuflection, luminaries, and incense stole into the Catholic church.”⁵⁰

Yet another trend, manifesting itself in Christianity, was monasticism. The Rome first vehemently condemned monasticism, but when the latter spread and became a force, the Church accepted it. The Church’s opposition to monasticism was twofold: Monasticism was a reaction to the Church’s opulence and corruption of the people’s morals. Second, monasticism believed, contrary to the accepted Pauline doctrine, that salvation was not a matter of grace but one had to earn it. Here again one sees the Church’s desire to accommodate what it could not win over.

Monasticism prescribed a rigorous regime — forbidding marriage and ease of life. Though it originated

first in non-Christian faiths, the Christianized monasticism traced its roots in the Bible. "If you want to be perfect", said Jesus to the rich young man, "go and sell what you have and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me."⁵¹ But like any other impulse, it stretched itself to painful extremes.⁵²

Messianic expectations

Though messianic expectations were nurtured by the Old Testament, they did not end with the coming of Jesus, for in the Jewish conception, he neither qualified for them nor were they fulfilled in his person. Added to this, such expectations were fueled by Jesus himself when the New Testament reported him saying that "when the Spirit of truth has come, he will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak." The Paraclete, he implied, will be seen by others for "he will convict the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment."⁵³ Small wonder, post-crucifixion era saw

these expectations develop "into a full-blown messianic doctrine within the context of an apocalyptic eschatology having a transcendental as well as a historical dimension."⁵⁴

The said doctrine drew support from the Old and New Testaments, Mishnah, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Apocalypses of Baruch and Ezra. According to these sources, the messiah's coming will be preceded by the distortion of the social scene:

... ambition shoots up. ... Government turns to heresy and there is no rebuke. The house of assembly (the synagogue) is dedicated to lewdness. ... The inhabitants of a region pass from city to city without finding pity. The learning of the sages become foolish; those who fear sin are despised; truth is banished. Youths humiliates the aged; the aged stand before children. The son demeans the father; the daughter rebels against the mother; the daughter-in-law against the mother-in-law; the members of a

☉ War scenes from Ur 2650 B.C.



man's household are his enemies. The face of this generation is as that of a dog, so that the son is not ashamed before his father.⁵⁵

The Book of Daniel (said to be in existence 167 years before the birth of Jesus) visualizes a new universal regime for the nations of the world, dominated by the pious and led by the messiah who "shall ... destroy all their idols."⁵⁶

Jesus' death gave spurt to messianic hopes, especially in the time of the procurators (44-66 C.E.) fructifying themselves in rebellion against the Roman empire. The messiah waited for was not a supernatural being. Hippolytus (300 C.E.) holds him to be of Davidic stock but not from a virgin and the Holy Spirit. Rather, he would be from a woman and man.⁵⁷

The Psalms of Solomon particularized him "as an entirely human being, righteous and learned, free from sin and holy, and endowed by the Holy Spirit with power, wisdom, and righteousness."⁵⁸ As an instrument of God, the messiah was also called the "elect." The people he will

lead would be a holy nation "sanctified by God and governed by the Messiah in righteousness. ... There is no wickedness in them because they are all holy."⁵⁹

The messiah will not be a Caanite or a Palestinian, he will come from the east in the person of a holy warrior:

And then from the sunrise God shall send a king, who shall give every land relief from the bane of war. Some he shall slay, and to others he shall consummate faithful vows. He shall not do all these things by his own will, but in obedience to the good ordinances of the mighty God.⁶⁰

Nor will the messiah confine himself to Israel — he will stretch himself to the whole humanity, which will accept the God of Israel "as the supreme judge."⁶¹

But whether the messiah will be a prophet in the biblical tradition or a priest king or of a Davidic stock, the opinion differed. The Qumran community (164 B.C. - 31 C.E.) believed in the duumvirate of the





☉ The
Ur
temple
ascribed
to the
Abrahamic
era

two, merging priesthood with kingship. Because to begin with, the messiahship did not allow the secular separation of religion from the state. That is why the Moses-like prophet figure was the most popular among the masses exerting pull over their feelings and provoking imagination.⁶²

The messianic texts did carry an eschatology of resurrection and final judgment when the oppressors will be punished, but the promised

messiah was this-worldly. For example, Talmud believes that the humanity will have to pass through three phases of history: two thousands years without the Torah; two thousands years with the Torah; and two thousands of the “messianic times.”⁶³ The Jews have been praying, among others, for the coming of the messiah since the Moses’ time, for he was said to have laid it.⁶⁴

And to Jerusalem, thy city,
return with mercy and dwell in
its midst as thou hast spoken;
and build it soon in our days to
be an everlasting buliding;
and raise up in its midst the
throne of David. Blessed art
thou, Lord, who buildest Jeru-
salem.

Cause the shoot of David to
shoot forth quickly, and raise
up his horn by thy salvation.
For we wait on thy salvation
all the day. Blessed art thou,
Lord, who causeth the horn of
salvation to shoot forth.⁶⁵

The messianic concept entailed
hope, felicity, deliverance, and salva-
tion. Thus, by the seventh century
when Muhammad Rasul Allah pro-
claimed prophethood (610 CE), the
religious landscape was character-
ized by the following:

- ↪ A significant part of the original
word of God was lost.
- ↪ What remained of it was vitiated
by interpolations and redaction.
- ↪ God was anthropomorphized.
- ↪ The Jews killed their prophets.
- ↪ Judaism though remained mono-
theistic, Christianity, its offshoot,
absorbed traits of paganism. The
one-into-three and three-into-one
formula was deviation from true
montheism. A redeemer God who
took humans' sins upon himself
through his sacrifice was essen-
tially a pagan idea.
- ↪ Monotheism was turned into

monolatry.

- ↪ The Christian world was divided
on making God out of Jesus.
- ↪ The muscular doctrine of free will
was replaced by salvation through
grace.
- ↪ Monasticism was widely prac-
ticed.
- ↪ Jewish-Christian strife had put
the two on the warring path.
- ↪ Expectations of a coming prophet
(Moses like) were rife who would
elevate his followers to dignity,
and restore monotheism in all its
splendors.
- ↪ Life was split into spiritual and
mundane, each governed by a
separate set of rules.
- ↪ People and their religious schol-
ars betrayed moral depravity.

JESUS: DISCARDING JUDAIC TRADITION FOR A REDEEMER GOD

Jesus' humanity is not a new issue that arose with modern criticism of the biblical texts or with the rise of Islam. The history of Christianity is rife with such discussions. Nor has there been a dearth of such Christians who dared to deny Jesus' divinity and were silenced by death

or by a vehement charge of heresy. Intolerance to this aspect of christology is thus not a phenomenon peculiar to a savage past but an enduring legacy.

For example: As early as 1546 in Monster, Holland, thirty thousands people were put to death because they denied Jesus' divinity.¹ Only fifteen years ago, Professor Robert



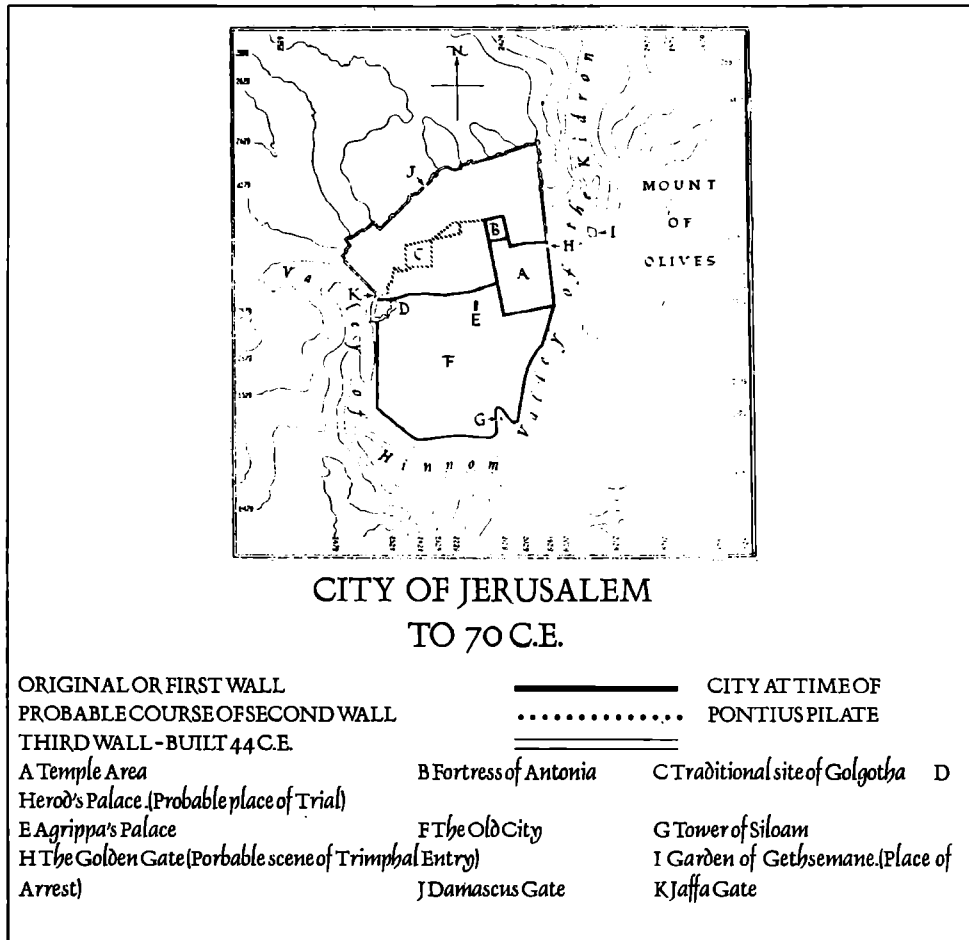


Alley was sacked from the chairmanship of the Department of Religion, University of Richmond (Virginia), because he denied that Jesus ever claimed to be the Son of God². Times have changed, otherwise he would have lost his head — something that Rev John Gray the leader of Scotland's Presbyterian Church could not resist saying on the publication of John Hick's *the Myth of God Incarnate* in July 1977:

If the authors were honorable, they would have resigned their

professorship of theology and divest themselves of their status as Christian ministers. In a more militant age, I would not have bothered myself with mere words. I would have laid a charge of heresy.³

Ironically, modern criticism of the biblical texts is more or less supportive of what the Qur'an has been saying all along: that Jesus is not a God or the Son of God, but a true and a great prophet in the tradition of the Old Testament. This criticism (or the



resultant theology) does not go beyond the New Testament. Rather it seeks justification from it.

One can develop a number of approaches from this criticism of the biblical texts for what may be considered a search for the real Jesus.

The dominant trend approach attempts to unravel the mystery surrounding Jesus by evaluating the evidence about Jesus as a man and as a God. According to this approach, which uses the biblical text for building up the case against Jesus as God, there are two trends in the New Testament — the minor and the dominant trends. The minor trend, which does not come from Jesus, has been blown out of proportion to support his divinity, while the dominant one, which comes directly from Jesus, denies his godhood.

The minor trend in the gospels derives its support from Titus 2:13; John 8:58; 10:30,33; 20:28. Biblical scholars such as James Barr however discount their clarity. For example of John 10:30, his views are:

When Jesus says in John 10:30 that he and the Father are "one," he does so in the context of numerous other sayings which make it clear that this does not betoken congruence and identity.⁴

The dominant trend stands on Mark 5:6; 3:11; 10:17-18; 15:39;

12:29; Matthew 22:37 and John 10:34, where Jesus often directly and sometimes indirectly denies his godhood. Concluding his theme, James Barr says:

At least in these gospels Jesus is not depicted as presenting himself directly as one who is God. He presents himself much more by the use of the enigmatic term "Son of Man." It is others, and not mainly himself, who designate him as "Son of God," and even these mainly either (a) among those who reject his authority or (b) who speak after his crucifixion ... In the Gospels the stress lies on Jesus fulfilling his mission, on the question whether and how he is Messiah of Israel: and only secondarily is his character and person verbalized through identification as Son of God or as God.⁵

Perhaps it was to overcome this dualistic nature of the biblical text on Jesus and to defuse de Loosten, Hirsch, and Binet-Sangel's criticism of Jesus (upon him be peace) as "psychopathic" that Albert Schweitzer suggested discarding the Gospel of John. In support he says:

Discarding the Fourth Gospel is of the greatest importance. This source long permitted the psychopathologists the assumption that we can follow Jesus' mental development through the course of three years; only this allowed them

to draw a personality continually occupied with his ego, placing it in the foreground of his discourses, asserting his divine origin and demanding of his hearers a corresponding faith.⁶

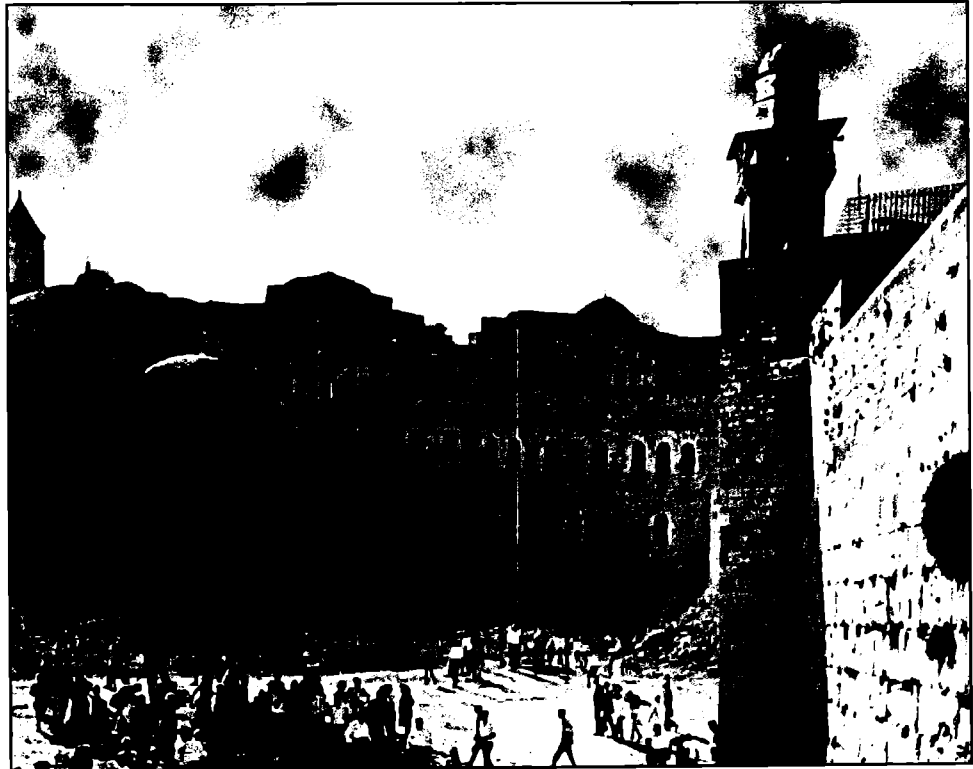
The indivisible Scripture approach is based on the Old Testament. For if the Old Testament is part of the Bible, then any concept derived from the New Testament must have its support from the Old Testament.

This approach is grounded in Jesus' saying that "Scripture cannot be broken." This is especially true of

terms like "Son of God" which are embedded in the Hebrew tradition. According to this measure, the expression "Son of God" is at best metaphorical and is often used for pious people, heavenly, angelic beings and kings. For example, 11 Samuel 7:14 and Psalms 2:7 use it for ideal king-messiah. Psalms 82:1, 6-7 refers to prophets as gods and "sons of the Most High":

God has taken his place
in the divine council;
in the midst of the gods
he holds judgment ...
I say "you are gods,
sons of the Most High,
all of you;

**The Temple
site: present
wailing wall**



nevertheless, you die
like men,
and fall like any prince.”

It was to this passage from the
Old Testament that Jesus is said to
have referred to in John 10:34:

Jesus answered them
(in response to the
charge of blasphemy
by the Jews), Is it not written
in your law,
“I said you are gods?” If he
called them gods
to whom the word of God came
(and Scripture cannot be bro-
ken), do you say of him
whom the Father consecrated
and sent to the world,
“You are blaspheming,”
because I said,
“I am the son of God.”

The environment approach
probes into pre-Christian
environment to see to what
intent and purpose and for what
kind of people the term God was
used. If it is proven that such an
expression was in use at that time,
then the divinity invested in Jesus
has to be understood in that sense.

There are countless instances of
such usage in pre- and post- crucifix-
ion eras, but for the sake of brevity,
only a few will be taken. The Greek
philosopher Pythagoras was said to
have been the incarnate son of
Hermes, who appeared to many and
came to heal men. We have on the
authority of Plutarch that Plato had
a miraculous birth:



I do not find it strange if it is
not by a physical approach,
like a man's, but some other
kind of contact or touch, by
other agencies, that a god
alters mortal nature and
makes it pregnant with a more
divine offspring. ... In general
(the Egyptians) allow sexual
intercourse with a mortal
woman to a male god...⁶

Augustus
30 B.C. —
C.E. 18 A.D.
whose
father
Jesus was
born

In fact, *Plutarch's Lives* is full of
biographies about men who had
divine genealogies. The Roman

Emperor Augustus, whose reign saw the birth of Jesus, was portrayed as god, Mercury incarnate. In his *Ode to Augustus*, Horace says:

Whom of the gods shall the people summon to the needs of the falling Empire. ... To whom shall Jupiter assign the task of expiating guilt? ... With form changed may you ... appear on earth ... later you may return to the skies.⁷

Temple of Venus

The Jewish literature is also not free of such flights of imagination. Some rabbinic traditions say that



Moses along with Enoch and Elijah went alive to heaven. It is also suggested that he transformed into an angel. In 11 Kings 2:1, Elijah is shown ascending to heaven by a chariot of fire and whirlwind.

In post-crucifixion era, we find the absurd case of Bishop Eusebius “who saw the hand of providence at work when he heralded Constantine as almost a new manifestation of the Logos bringing the kingdom of God on earth.”⁸ Needless to say, Bishop Eusebius was a leading Christian who was glorifying an emperor in the same language that the writers of gospels had used for Jesus — an interesting insight into the Christian mind so willing to see anyone out of the ordinary as a manifestation of God.

The Samaritan approach or what could be called the Samaritan hypothesis was developed by Professor Michael Goulder. To him, the genesis of Jesus’ divinity, as an idea, can be traced to Samaritan theology with which earlier Christianity had a rub. Such a hypothesis views the New Testament documents portraying a dialectic, “in which the primitive eschatological gospel reached a synthesis with just such a position.”⁹

The Samaritans were half Jewish in their beliefs. In their traditions, Simon is a legend who along with others became Christian. This Simon, Justine says, was “native of the village Gitto, who in the reign of Claudius Caesar did mighty acts of magic. He was considered a god ...

and almost all the Samaritans, and a few even of other nations, worship him, and acknowledge him as the first God.” This man-god, according to their theology, stood by God who descended for him in the clouds. Their faith in dualism and incarnation notwithstanding, the Samaritans did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. They believed instead in a final age of God’s good pleasure, when a “prophet like unto Moses” would come. In order to assimilate the Samaritans into Christianity, says Michael Goulder, the writers of the New Testament responded in the following manner:

The great power has come in the form of Jesus to reveal the truth, to give us knowledge of the divine One. Through him, and through the Gerizim traditions, we know what lies behind the universe. ... With his coming the age of good pleasure has been inaugurated. ... We have seen in him the Prophet like unto Moses who has instituted a new commandment¹⁰.

The New Testament raises itself on Samaritan theology without any discomfort. “One of Paul’s most admirable qualities,” says Michael Goulder, “is his flexibility, his ability to steal the opposition’s clothes while they are bathing.” The truth of this statement can be seen in 1 Corinthians 1-3: 8:1,7,10,11; 11 Corinthians 2:14; 4:6; 6:6; 8:7; 10:5; 11:6 and Ephesians 1:9, 17; 3:3. Professor Goulder illustrates his point



by saying that “the verbs oida and ginoska hardly occur in the Synoptics, but both come more than fifty times in John — a far cry from 1 Corinthians. “By the time Romans 1:3 is written, Paul fully embraces the idea.”¹¹

The bleak reaches that Jesus sought for solitude and prayers

The prophetic approach toward discovering the real Jesus is based on the premise that there are two phases of christology. One relates to the earliest when Jesus was alive, untouched by the writers' desire to create a larger-than-life portrait of him. This Jesus is thrust into the reader's consciousness as God's prophet who has come to warn and give the glad tidings to those who will submit themselves to God. The second phase relates to later times — long after his death — when title after title is given to him mostly as part of the evangelists' effort to win over a particular audience.

This approach first refurbishes the image of a prophet, because to an ordinary church-going Christian the title brings to his mind some kind of a soothsayer or a foreteller. Addressing this mentality, Professor Morton Scott Enslin says that "the Semitic prophet was regarded, and regarded himself, as definitely seized by the divine spirit and subject to it. Thus the word prophet was understood in the sense of foreteller, that is, one speaking for another. Indeed the Hebrew word nabi has been considered by some Semitists as the passive of the verb meaning 'to enter,' and thus the 'entered one.' Whether this derivative is etymologically correct or not, it emphasizes precisely the Semitic view."¹² This explains why Jesus' opponents thought he was possessed by an evil spirit.

As to Jesus' prophethood, which is the pre-crucifixion phase of christology, a scene in Mark 6:1-4 showing Jesus in Nazareth is of

special significance. He begins his ministry. People are astonished at the words of wisdom from his mouth, saying, "Where did this man get these things. ... Is this not the carpenter the son of Mary? ... The curiosity was justified and if they took offense that too was justified because they knew him as one of their own. Jesus is shown to be hurt by their lack of understanding his role as a God-sent prophet and says: "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house." Again when according to Luke 13:33, Jesus is informed that Herod might kill him, he observes: "... for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem." This impression is reinforced by those who are reported to have been talking about Jesus after his death. Again in Luke 24:19, Cleopas who knew Jesus, or someone whom Luke knew (if there is any such probability), responds to a stranger's inquiry (who happens by some bizarre twist to be Jesus himself, and they do not recognize him). ... "The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people."

That Jesus was a prophet can also be seen in Luke's recounting of the scene in which he is being anointed by a sinful woman. After she finishes anointing him, the Pharisee who is Jesus' host at dinner says: "This man, if he were a prophet, would have perceived who and what manner of woman this is that touches him, that she is a sinner." The Pharisee's taunting remarks would have made no sense if Jesus had not been known



River Jordan: the scene of Jesus baptism by John

as a prophet.

Even when scribes and Pharisees ask for a sign from him, they address him as “teacher.” The implications are very clear: Jesus had identified himself as a prophet of God and as a proof they were asking for a sign. Equally revealing is his response to them. He equates himself with another Israeli prophet such as Jonah. “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will be the

Son of Man...” This passage appears to be an interpolation on two grounds. First, the God incarnate compares himself to Jonah who is a prophet and a man. Second, the sign is asked for the immediate now and not in the future. Nevertheless, this reference to an earlier prophet is not a coincidence but more or less a continuing theme in the gospels. For example, Matthew 17:1-8 shows Jesus along with his three companions on a mountain.

Suddenly they see Jesus' face changing into a shining sun. At this point Peter suggests: "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Why did Peter talk about Moses and Elijah, and why did both of them later show up on the mountain is a valid point of inquiry. Whatever be the authenticity of the scene, it suggests three prophets come together. Again in Acts 3:22-26, where Peter is shown speaking to "men of Israel," we have a very clear statement from his lips. "For Moses truly said to the fathers, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren.'... To you first, God having raised up His servant Jesus sent Him to bless you..."

The biblical approach must address itself to the body of the text in the Bible, which has a reportorial style with a heavy overlay of evangelism and tainted with conflicting statements. Such reports can be divided into two parts: contextual and descriptive.

The "synoptic gospels" on scrutiny reveal dissimilar content primarily because their authors were conspicuous by their absence in the Jesus' era. Their account is not revelatory either because Jesus did not proclaim to have a book, nor did he leave anything in writing dictated to a scribe. Nor is their account a piece of historiography, for they do not disclose the sources. Besides, to critics, like Simon

Buran, the biblical knowledge of the gospel writers is faulty. "Events are represented tendentiously, in order to support *ex post facto* the messiahship of Jesus."¹³ Buran cites at least four such cases where the authors of the gospels contradict each other and in the process put the principal characters into grotesque situations, hurting their credibility. For example, according to Mark 1: 9 and Luke 3: 21, Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist who says, "I need to be baptize by you, and didst thou come to me?" The former by implication declines and says, "Let us fulfill the righteousness."

On the flip side, the fourth gospel is silent on the subject and reports that on eying Jesus the Baptist observed: "Behold the Lamb of God."

In the same gospel, the Baptist denies that he was the messiah, or Elijah, or that prophet. But Matthew makes his Jesus say that "no men born of women were ever greater than John." Matthew does this particular piece because according to the belief of the period, Elijah incarnated has to precede the messiah. Nevertheless, in the fourth gospel the Baptist by his denial demolishes the case altogether. Likewise, since Jesus' messiah identity has to be established, he is characterized as David's son. But the evangelists' desire to portray him so, results into two Davidic genealogies, forgetting that the Son of God cannot be born of parentage other than divine.

Again, in Luke Mary is pretold of the coming pregnancy free from human intervention and her son an



all-time great by the angel. But then he jolts his readers by reporting that Jesus' mother and his brother did not believe in him. Does Luke suffer from a recurrent amnesia that later in the account he introduces Jesus' brother as one of his disciples?

"No less contradictory," says Isaac Troki, "are the convictions of the evangelists concerning Jesus' mission and authority: now he is Lord, now servant; now omniscient, now ignorant of the things to come; now he intends the fulfillment of the law of Moses, now he attacks it; now he tramples Satan underfoot, now Satan tempts him and makes him offers. The same uncertainty reigns as to basic doctrines. If in one passage the divinity of Jesus is asserted, in another it is openly denied; if Paul discards works and

demands only faith, James states in his Epistle that faith without works is dead faith. Thus unresolved contradictions — both as to major points and in narrating individual incidents — misquotations, and misunderstood verses of the Bible abound everywhere. What are we to think of such men as founders of a new faith?"¹⁴

Stenheim sees an epistemological contradiction in the "doctrine of the Son as an equally substantial person, standing at once for a cosmic creative power and an historical person. An eternally-begotten Word, he is the eternal cosmic divinity; as the child of a woman, born within time, he is telluric, finite, mortal: the historical Christ. But it is obvious that one and the same being cannot be both finite and infinite, temporal and eternal, but must be either the

**An
inside
view of
the
Jesus'
prison**

one or the other. Thus, it is clear that we can no more unite the eternal cosmic principle with the historical Christ, the son of time, than we can think of a mystical Trinity in conjunction with the personal God."¹⁵

Obviously, all these approaches to the study of the biblical texts reveal Jesus to be no other than a man, though in the mold of a great prophet. If certain passages in the New Testament project Jesus as God, then it is a Greek god, built by the writers to evangelize an audience which lived in a god-complex environment.¹⁶ As Ralph P. Martin says in his *Reconciliation — A study of Paul's Theology*:

Pilate interrogated Jesus here. Now a chapel

They (the gospels) contain interpreted history, expressed and angled so as to enforce the Church's claim that, in Jesus of Nazareth, God was personally present in a new way, and that in the now exalted 'Lord' he offers his salvation, wrought out in the historical ministry of Jesus to all¹⁷.

If that is the case, what is the Gospel of Barnabas status as compared to the New Testament? Many cases can be built from the two to establish the former's truthfulness and the latter's syncretic character.

To begin with, the Gospel of Barnabas is harmonious in its doc-





trine and as such, in line with the Hebrew tradition. Its hard core monotheism is easy to understand and does not bring the reader to a point of desperation or mental exhaustion to end up with a sigh, "God is a mystery!" Added to this, its principal character does not emit fire from his mouth nor curse anyone the way he does in the New Testament. Jesus of the Gospel of Barnabas is a genuine person, deeply concerned over the fall of man. He is aware of his place in the cosmos. That is why overwhelmed by the majesty of his Creator, he serves His cause diligently without any fear. His wisdom is prophetic and his character consistent — a far

cry from the Jesus of the New Testament who talks in parables and contradicts himself every now and then. A scene from Matthew 16: 13-23 will illustrate the point:

**Jesus
passed
through
this
arch**

"When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, 'Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?' So they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?'"

"And Simon Peter answered and said, 'You are the Son of the living God.'"

**Here
Simon
took the
cross
from
Jesus**



“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.’

“Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ. From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again

the third day. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying ‘Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!’ But He turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.’ Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?’ ”

The preceding passage from Matthew has the following elements:

Jesus wants to know what people think about him. He is told people think he is either John the Baptist or Elijah or one of the prophets. Peter measures Jesus as Christ the Son of the living God.

This raises Peter's position because he is the recipient of revelation from God. He gets the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus does not want his disciples to let anyone know that he was Christ. At no point does Jesus contradict his disciples about what people think of him. He is certainly not John, nor is he the Elijah or Jeremiah. He could have told them in a smog-free expression about his self. Instead, he turns to Peter. And when Peter tells him "he is Christ the Son of the living God" — an expression commonly used for people of exceptional moral and political abilities, he honors Peter by giving him the key to the kingdom of heaven on earth.

But in the same flow of events Jesus calls the same dignified Peter "Satan" and an "offense" to him. At least, two objections can be raised to this whole episode:

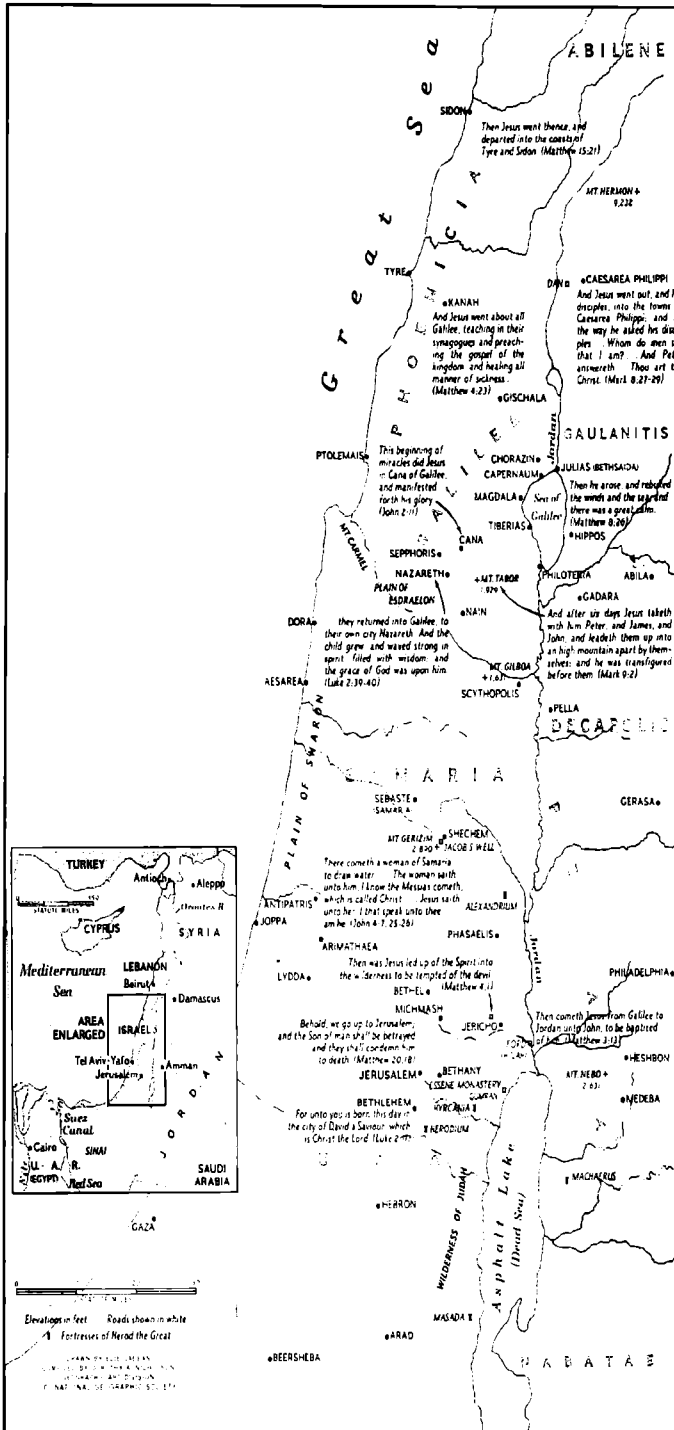
Why would Jesus like to conceal his identity as "Christ," especially when he has been sent by "the Father" to absolve people of their sins? Was he supposed to lead a shadowy life? Would it help his mission? Was he not supposed to establish a role model for his followers?

What was Peter's sin that it invited an extremely harsh name "Satan" for him? Is not Satan the symbol of everything evil? After all Peter, like a devoted follower who loved his master, only desired that

he was not harmed, "Far be it from you, Lord." Does his love for him constitute such a grave sin that it makes Jesus flare up? Where is Jesus' loving disposition? Or is he a kind of a master who knows not how to respond to his followers' love for him?

No matter how best an interpretation is given to this sudden shift in Jesus' mood, sophistry will not help salvage his character. The biblical Jesus in this scene has no redeeming feature — his character is badly distorted. The irony is unmistakable: the God incarnate who wants to die in order to save others has no disposition to bear with a disciple's love. He could have told Peter with the same love that the latter had shown for him that "no my friend I have to die." After all, Peter was not using violence to stop him. Obviously, there is something missing in this passage from Matthew. It is possible that either Jesus did not use the word Satan for Peter, or he did use it but the context is different. Perhaps Peter said something sacrilegious that called for such a stern reaction from Jesus — we do not know from this gospel.

Some biblical scholars, such as Dr. Enslin, view Matthew 13:18 — "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church ..." — a later addition and "improbable as genuine words of Jesus." He says in the whole gospel tradition the word church occurs twice to justify the existence of the Church separate from the Jewish synagogue "in deliberate opposition to the later claims of Jerusalem for



preeminence because their leader was James, the brother of Jesus.”¹⁸

But this interpolation is minor as compared to the deliberate attempt of the gospel’s writers to graft Jesus as a Savior on the readers’ mind. That in the process Jesus’ nobility has been traded-off is of little concern to them. For the sake of argument one can say what kind of God is Jesus that he does not know the psyche of Peter — in the same breath he is blessed, a recipient of special knowledge from “the Father” and moments later an accursed being, a “Satan.” This is too great a paradox to be glossed over. In portraying Jesus as a Savior and a God, the gospel ends up assassinating his character. So obvious are the problems with this passage that honest biblical scholarship is forced to take note of it. “We must not assume,” says the *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, “that these verses necessarily belong in the context where we now find them. Form criticism has made it clear that the gospel tradition was preserved at first mainly in the form of separate units; single incidents, sayings, or parables were repeatedly used in the life of the church to serve its needs. Even though a general outline of Jesus’ life was preserved, the exact situation in which a saying was spoken by Jesus was often unknown. Our gospel writers therefore had to organize their material in a form more unified than the oral tradition had. And of all the gospel writers, the writer of Matthew is most clearly skilled in organizing sayings of Jesus in large discourses.”¹⁹ How

skillful is Matthew, can be judged in light of the preceding observations.

Contrary to this, the Gospel of Barnabas gives the same episode in a far more natural way that exalts Jesus as well as his disciples:

“Jesus departed from Jerusalem after the Passover, and entered the borders of Caesarea Philippi. There the angel Gabriel having told him of the sedition which was beginning among the common people, he asked his disciples, saying, ‘What do men say of me?’ They said, ‘Some say you are Elijah, others Jeremiah, and others one of the old prophets.’ Jesus asked, ‘And you, what do you say that I am?’ Peter answered, ‘You are Messiah, Son of God.’ Then

Jesus was angry, and rebuked him, saying, ‘Begone and depart from me, because you are the Devil and seek to cause me offense!’ And he threatened the eleven, saying, ‘Woe to you if you believe this, for I have won from God a great curse against those who believe this.’ And he was ready to cast away Peter, but the eleven besought Jesus for him, who did not cast him away, but again rebuked him, saying, ‘Beware that you never again say such words, because God would reprobate you. Peter wept and said, ‘Sir, I have spoken foolishly. Beseech God that He pardons me.’ Then said Jesus, ‘If our God willed not to show himself to Moses His servant, nor to Elijah whom he also loved, nor to any prophet, do you

**Opposite:
The Jesus’
Judea**

**Below: A
page from
Gershon ben
Shelomoh’s
Sepher...
censored by
spilling ink**



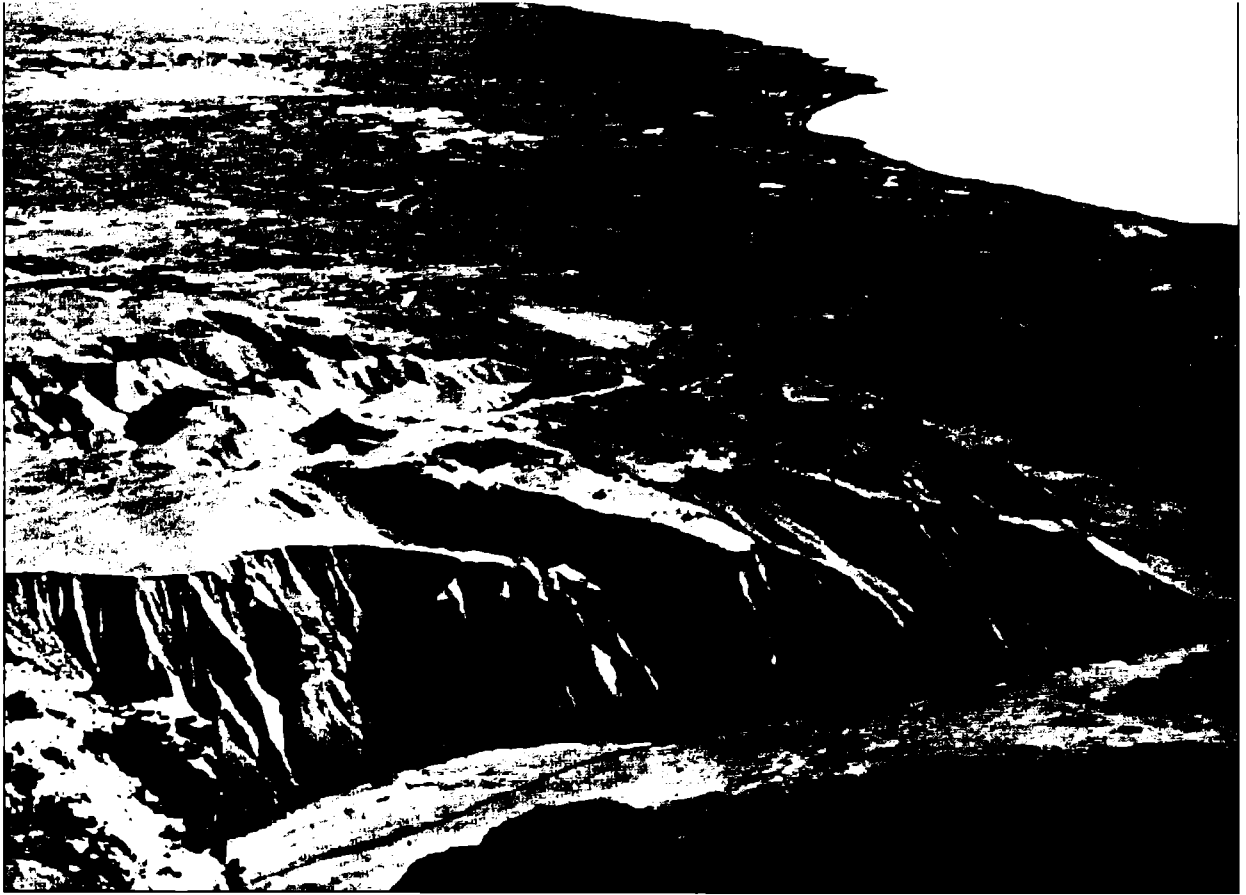
think that God should show Himself to this faithless generation? But know you not that God has created all things of nothing with one single word, and all men have had their origin out of a piece of clay? Now, how shall God have a likeness to man? Woe to those who suffer themselves to be deceived of Satan!' And having said this, Jesus besought God for Peter, the eleven and Peter weeping, and saying, 'So be it, O blessed Lord our God.' Afterward Jesus departed and went into Galilee in order that this vain opinion which the common folk began to hold concerning him might be extinguished."²⁰

In the preceding extract, Barnabas first sets the scene: There are conjectures about the person of Jesus. His miracles are causing a problem of perception for the common men. As a human being, Peter is also for a while influenced by the giddy events of the past few days, and in a moment of blurred understanding he commits his life's worst crime — maybe his master is Messiah the Son of God. Jesus, of course, should be upset with this utterance. His own disciple is guilty of blasphemy of the highest order — an offense that can be committed by a devil only and none else. But declaring Peter as devil is not anticlimactic to his exaltation as a blessed one holding the key of the kingdom of heaven on earth in the Matthean sense. Nowhere does Jesus' character come close to Matthew's absurd figure. Peter's character is also understandable — a true disciple who offends his master but then out

of remorse cries and asks for forgiveness. Matthew's narrative lacks this very important dimension of both Jesus and Peter's personalities. What follows is equally enlightening, and heightens the role of Jesus as a reformer. His discourse on the majesty of God and His uniqueness sharpens his listeners' consciousness of Him. "If our God willed not to show himself to Moses His servant, nor to Elijah whom He also loved, nor to any prophet, do you think that God should show Himself to this faithless generation." In these few words, he demolishes all the myths built around him. The greatness and the uniqueness of God come to the fore. His summation is a piece of rhetoric that goes deep into one's soul and in response the soul gives up to the greatness of its Creator. "But know you not that God created all things of nothing with a single word, and all men have their origin out of piece of clay? Now, how shall God have a likeness to man." For sure, in its monotheistic theme and genuineness of Jesus' character, the Gospel of Barnabas has no peers in the gospel literature.

Misusing the Dead Sea Scrolls

The *Dead Sea Scrolls*, ever since their discovery in 1947, have meant many things to many. Contrary to evangelists' claims, their discovery has brought no meaningful evidence to strengthen traditional Christianity based on the New Testament. The evidence presented so far is of a



dubious nature and the rationale is flimsy to say the least. For example, Manfred Barthel's *What the Bible Really Says* is jubilant over the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and makes sweeping statements about the remarkable parallels between the gospels and the Qumran Scrolls. But these parallels ironically do not exceed beyond three quotes from John and two from the Qumran's. For example, the Qumran Scrolls talk about the conflict between light and darkness. This, Barthel says, is the source of the Essene version of

"Blessed are the poor in spirit."²¹ However, this same parallel is objected to by Antony Newcombe Gilkes in his the *Impact of the Dead Sea Scrolls* on grounds that "Christ rejected all physical violence as a policy ... But the Covenanters were brought up on the war of the Sons of the Light..."²²

In order to establish the link between the gospels and the Scrolls, Barthel refers to John 1:4 — "In Him (God) was life; and the life was the light of men," followed by John 8:12 — "I am the light of the world:

**The
Qumran
valley.
Dead
Sea in
the van**



**The site of
the first
discoveries**

he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." Both are statements of universal truth, and other religions in other times have also spoken of it. Yet Barthel sees a parallel between the two. "It is not always easy to tell the difference between John, who is writing in his Greek philosophical

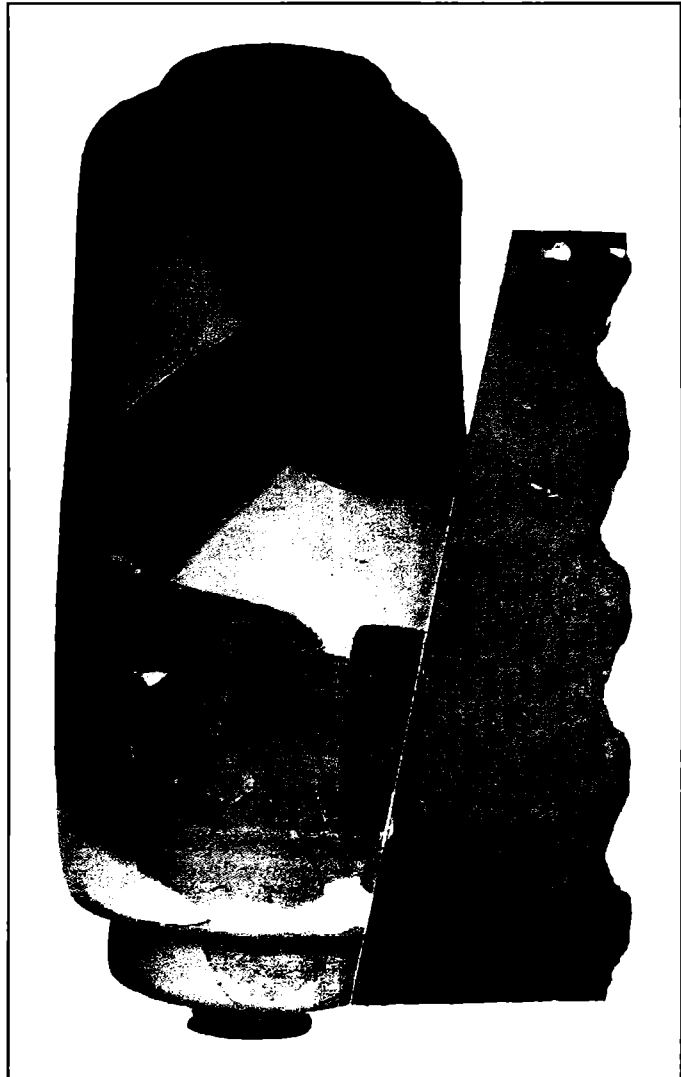
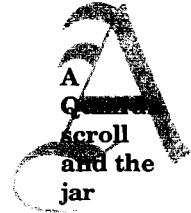
vein at least, and the Essenes," says he. "It is God who has established all things, and without Him nothing comes to pass (Qumran Texts)." And, "all things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made (John 1:3)."²³ Again, both statements are general in their import and any religion worth the

name will regard them as self-evident truth. A parallel is meaningful only if it is drawn between the specifics and not the generalities. But Barthel likes to do so. Whether there is anything in the Scrolls that authenticates the doctrine of Trinity or a savior-messiah of the New Testament, such writings would not even give a whisper. For example, the Qumran Scrolls do mention that even in the first century B.C., titles such as the Son of God and Son of the Most High were used for some human being of that era:

But your son shall be great upon the earth *O King!*
*All (men) shall make peace, and all shall serve him. He shall be called the son of the Great God, and by his name shall he be named. He shall be hailed (as) the Son of God, and they shall call him the Son of the Most High.*²⁴

But Barthel and Antony Newcombe Gilkes would not like others to reflect upon the implications of such passages from the Scrolls, because this will invalidate their cherished doctrine of Jesus' divinity. In fact, Jesus' coming did not call for the abolition of the Abrahamic faith or the institution of a new faith based on the vicarious sacrifice of a man-god but is a continuation of the Hebrew tradition. This is an exceedingly important point because until his coming, the Abrahamic faith was confined to the narrow racial and parochial concerns of the Israelis. Jesus broadened their concerns and

diluted their rigid confines. That this led to the termination of the Israeli dispensation was inevitable. But universalizing the Abrahamic tradition by enlarging upon its laws and humanizing Jesus was left to another son of Abraham, Muhammad (upon them be peace).



PROPHETHOOD:

RATIONALE AND CHARACTERISTICS

As for Ish'mael, I have heard you; behold I will bless him and make him fruitful and multiply him exceedingly; he shall be the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. (Genesis 17: 20)

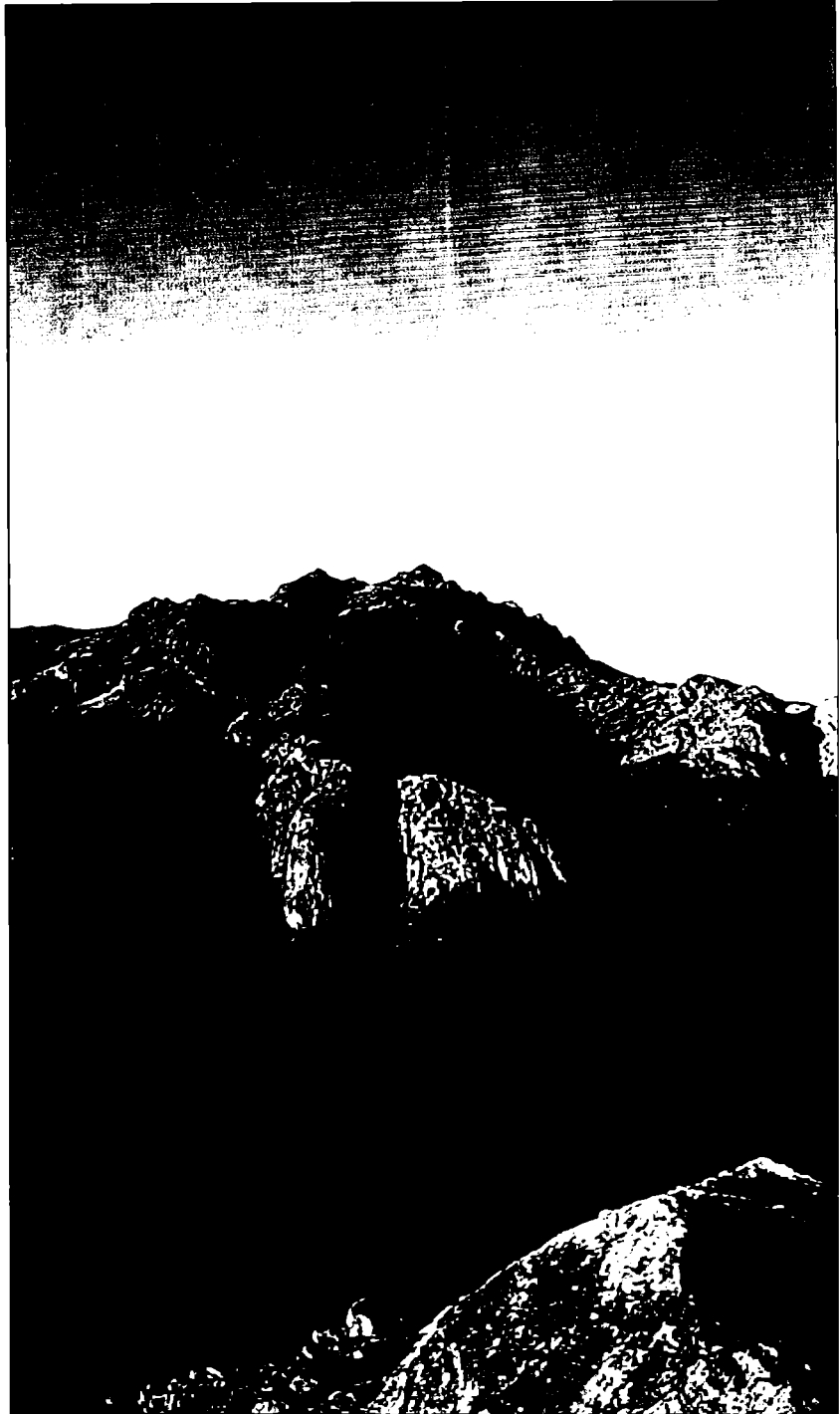
● كَانَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً فَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ
الْطَّيِّبِينَ مُبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنذِرِينَ
وَأَنْزَلَ مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ
لِيَحْكُمَ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ فِيمَا اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ
وَمَا اخْتَلَفَ فِيهِ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ أُوتُوهُ مِنْ بَعْدِ
مَا جَاءَهُمْ نُهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ بَعَثْنَا بَيْنَهُمْ
فَهَدَى اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا
لِئَمَا اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ مِنَ الْحَقِّ بِآيَاتِهِ
وَاللَّهُ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

In its nihilistic euphoria, the 19th-century science declared God “dead,” but as human knowledge nudged its way toward uncharted territories, it began to realize the hasty nature of its proclamation. Today God is back and science, which was once all set to write His epitaph (Allah forbid), stands nonplused, oscillating between agnosticism and affirmation. Martin Buber grasped this paradox of modern times better than anyone else when he observed: God “lives in the light of His eternity [while] the ‘slayers’ remain dwellers in the darkness, consigned to death.”¹

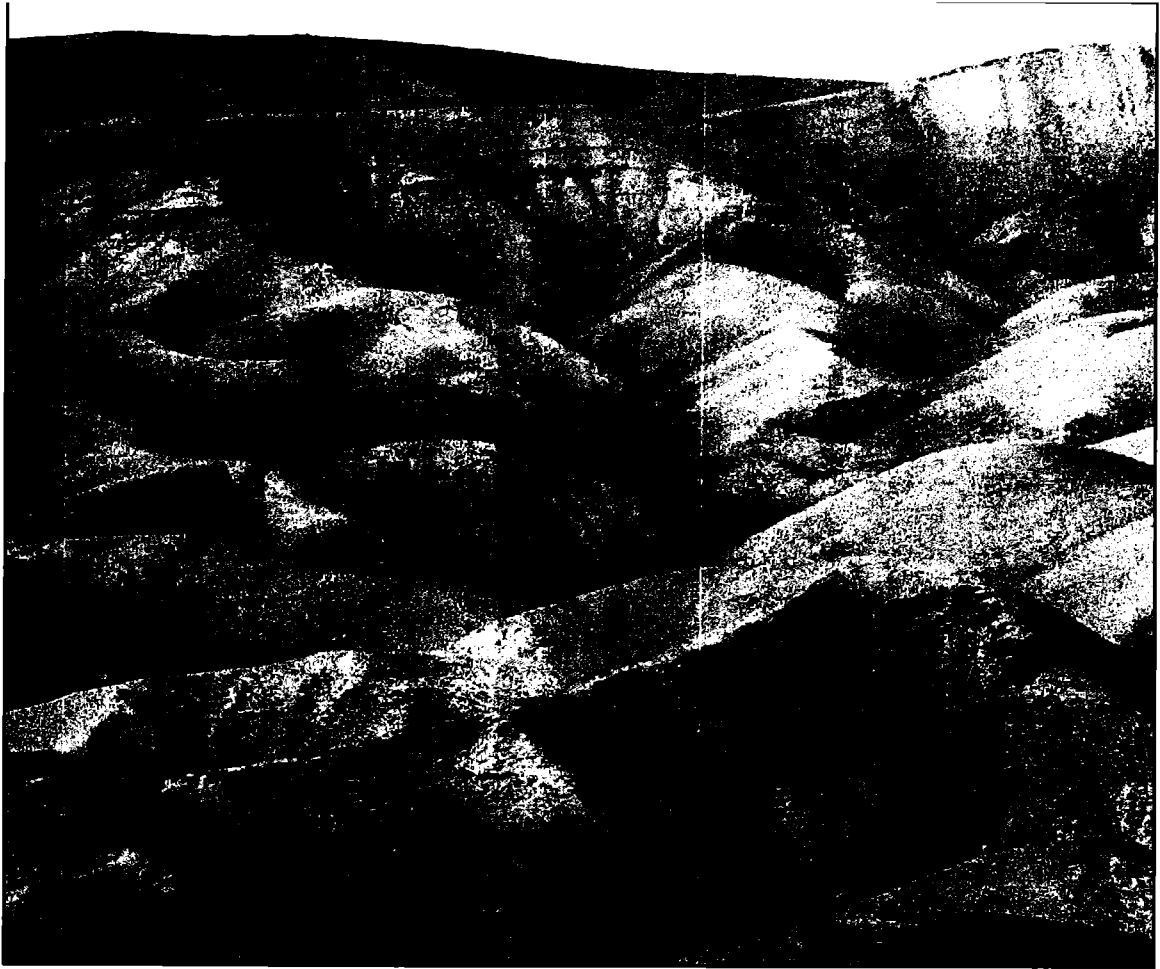
Henry James captured the spirit of modernity best when he made his

famous one-liner: "life is an art." By art, he meant the subjective human response to a real-life situation, innovative without a fixed trajectory. But no matter how one philosophizes it, modernism is "pragmatically impossible."² For by celebrating the individual self "as the final arbiter,"³ both individual and societies have emptied themselves of moral rhythm. Thus what was conceived to be exciting times free from the burden of convention, history, and morality was soon plagued by skepticism and irony. Bertrand Russell recognized it and so did George Santayana. The irony itself was manifest in their admission of failure: the "way of salvation," they said, "lay in a sort of ironic belief, in a determination to act as though one still believed the thing which once really held true."⁴

Here was an epitaph to modernism that none else could have written better than Russell, the patron-saint of scientific thinking. That being the case, does life need guidance from a source other than human? Or it should be left to itself to chart its own course, no matter how destructive it might be? The first proposition is religious and admits



Mount
Sinai



**Mount of
Temptation:
Where Jesus
fasted for
40 days**

man's helplessness in the face of a complex world, with consuming demands at his intellectual and emotional endowments. Obviously, it seeks solution in the foundational principles of the revelatory knowledge. The second is secular and believes that since man is all by himself, he should draw upon his own resources, discovering himself in speculative thought, free from a moral, social, and historic given. Both are thus mutually exclusive.

Ways to Reality

Reality has three aspects — God, universe, and humanity. Other than God who is not bonded by time and space, the rest are amenable to human perception and can be understood either through observation (experimenting), or through mental construct (theorizing), or through revelation. Each has its own place in the scheme of things.

The observation method or even

controlled experimentation as applied to humans and their social landscape is complex because the object of examination is not a static physical phenomenon but humans, who have psycho-spiritual and physical dimensions that obstruct observation, if not making it impossible. Thus, in observation, it is helpful if the observer and the object are dissimilar like man versus a physical entity. Sameness between the two, as man watching humans, creates an emotional equation which is harmful to the results.

Still another aspect of this sameness is that contrary to natural objects, which offer no resistance during and after study and can be harnessed to the benefit of the observer, humans can oppose the results and refuse being cultivated. But even if such variables are ignored, and a study is presumably finalized on how best a society can be organized and its components harmonized to achieve individual and societal goals of morality and socioeconomic growth, the question that will still plague the exercise will be to what extent it can be universalized. How much data will be enough to give reasonably justifiable results if not perfect? This aspect itself will be nightmarish.

At the same time, it can be asked if such a study will have the core elements of eternity or will it be a passing phase in humanity's march onward? To what extent will it be possible to have the kind of objectivity that will exorcise the demons of personal likes and dislikes, mental constructs and emotional hang-ups

of the racial, ethnic, and nationalistic kind? What moral and political authority it will have to make it authentic and thus conformed with?

The objectivity factor is the most disturbing one, for what is known as objective is not objective enough. Even in studies of the physical and biological phenomena, toward which one can afford to be neutral, there is no detached experimenter who could claim to have been unfettered in his observations. Gathering data and making theories may sound creating a logical sequence, but it does not happen always. The empiri-

On the contrary, if man is evolved, then at the end of his zoological ascent, he is nothing more than a mechanical being, determined by blind material forces and devoid of spiritual essence.

cist emphasis of the positivist school has now given way to the crucial role of the theoretical concepts even in science.

The data itself is not cognized as isolated, pure facts because it is configured in a pattern in which "interpretation has already entered."⁵ This happens because no observer is empty-headed, and his decision to select certain variables and drop others is tied to the purpose of his inquiry. "Observations [themselves]," as Ian Barbour tells us, "are always abstractions from our total experience, and they are expressed in terms of conceptual structures. He

cites Kenneth Boulding that "our identification of data is controlled by 'images of wholes.' Knowledge is not built up 'atomistically' from parts to wholes ... our partial understanding of wholes influences our interpretation of parts, right from the start. The interpretation of the relations between two historical events is a function of both the theoretical context in which it is viewed and the historical context in which the events occurred ..."⁶

Such being the nature of observation, it is not possible to construct an edifying system that could translate itself from a theory to a popularly accepted mode of life, and thus satisfy man's spiritual and material needs.

Something similar, though formulated in the context of speculative thought, has been said by Hans Schoeps. Idealistic systematic philosophy, he says, generates its concepts from within itself in the solitude of ratiocination.⁷ That is why civilizational decadence, as observed by Joseph Krutch, cannot be corrected by thinkers, for their "subtlest thoughts are only the symptoms of the disease which they are endeavoring to combat."⁸

The human mind itself (i.e., brain plus consciousness), though remarkable as an apparatus, suffers from certain innate incompetence. For the mind, as an implement, works at its best only when it operates within a given framework rather than independent of it. Second, mind does not seem to have an influence-free existence of its own, it is a repository of sensations brought to it through a

thousand "afferent nerves calling for attention." In fact, what we call as thought is an accumulation of sensory data synthesized by the mind swamped by an emotional setup. Not surprisingly, the mind functions extremely well when it serves emotions. Put differently, we may say there is no "pure," independent thought but processing of the material fed to mind. Even perception, which is linked to environment made of sight and sound and is the mother of ideation, is not unadulterated. Physiological studies in league with psychology are now confirming it that "[f]unctional neural connections can be selectively and predictably modified by environmental stimulation."⁹ In other words, neuro-physiological and psychological responses are inseparable: a similar perception over a long period of time can create a corresponding change in the neural connections which in turn can stamp on our senses the physiological impressions it has been receiving. Despite these built-in disabilities "men can contrive a new religion. ... Such contrivances were the 'darling vice' of nineteenth century French system builders. But they, like their Revolutionary counterparts, usually ended in parodies of historic faith and found it necessary to erect new symbols like the Absolute Spirit or The Integrating Absolute or divine Providence."

Revelation, if genuine, is impersonal because it comes from the Creator who is transcendent and free from geographical and historical constraints. Unlike humans who cannot solve even the riddle of their

existence, God's knowledge, revealed through His chosen beings (*nabi* — prophets), is absolute and eternal; His love for His creation makes divine guidance a mercy in whose presence, there is no need for humans to live a tunnel existence.

Prophethood

The issue of prophethood — whether it really exists as a divine institution — is linked with another issue: Is man a created or an evolved being? For if man is not created and is the culmination of a gradual interplay of material forces, as the evolutionists suggest, then there is no logic in either blessing him with guidance nor holding him accountable for his deeds in the life to come. Both concepts of guidance and accountability derive their legitimacy from the concept of a living, compassionate God who, having created man, did not leave him to himself to grope in a tunnel without light.

On the contrary, if man is evolved, then at the end of his zoological ascent, he is nothing more than a mechanical being, determined by blind material forces and devoid of spiritual essence. But if man is created, then he carries a divine spark within himself, an aspect of dignity that comes only with his humanness and with his being created.

In the high drama of creation, the Qur'an places him in Paradise and gives him mobility as well as choice

because the two go together. The freedom to make a choice also implies a criterion — the rightness or wrongness of an action.

For their forgetfulness, Adam and Eve are thrown out of their original home, though the fall is not eternal damnation. Paradise lost can be regained provided they follow the guidance. From the "creation" and the subsequent "fall" four salient aspects come to the fore:

- First, humans are divine (guiltless) in their origin.¹⁰

But if man is created, then he carries a divine spark within himself, an aspect of dignity that comes only with his humanness and with his being created.

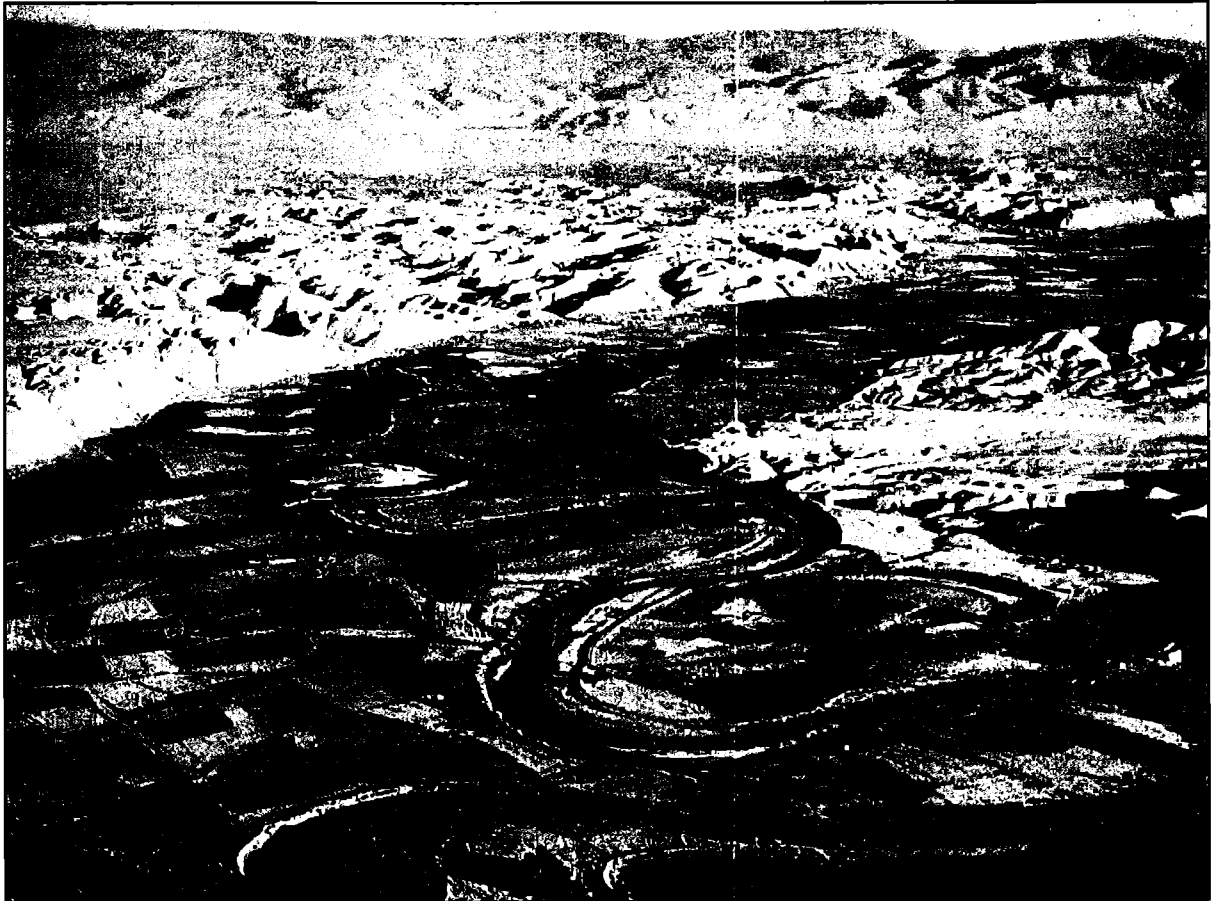
- Second, their original home is Paradise.¹¹
- Third, in a sinless state man has proximity to his Creator.¹²
- Four, this proximity is lost through disobedience.¹³

This means creation is not purposeless. The first human suffers from no identity crisis. He knows himself as well as the one who created him. He also knows the guidance given to him, though in a moment of personal failure he deviates. These are, in fact, the constituents of his consciousness and

explains his ability to follow as well as deviate from the guidance. In the pre-fall period, there is no need for an intermediary to convey him guidance because he is in the eternal gaze of Allah. In the post-fall era, the intermediary is called for in order to receive, expound, and exemplify divine guidance for humans. The institution of prophethood is, therefore, integral to *falah* (felicity) — it is a blessing and a mercy from Allah Who would like to give a fair chance to humans to come back to Him in a state of purity.

Prophethood, as such, is a continual attempt by the Creator to reveal Himself and to help shape man's consciousness on the divine pattern. This is however preliminary to the prophetic mission which, in its final outcome, aims at redirecting man's existence toward the celestial orbit, revolving around the majestic presence of God (Allah). The Qur'an calls it *tauhid* (monotheism based on the singularity of Allah).¹⁴ This is vital to prophethood for by reasserting the organic unity of the creation, man becomes wholesome — a part

River Jordan:
John is said
to have
baptised
Jesus here



of the totality. By breaking the orbital unity, he becomes a pariah in the divine scheme of things. In other words, he divests himself of God's grace.

From this viewpoint, tauhid is teleological: it is purposive. It is also immanent: the creation bears the imprint of its Creator — that is, it speaks of Him but does not embody Him. This integrative collectivity of the creation cannot be broken into bits of isolated existence, independent of each other. Fired by the divine spirit, with something of His being into them, they move in their own orbits, as if they are by themselves, and yet merge into a configuration of unsurpassed beauty, pulsating with rhythm into obeisance to their Lord.

Monotheistic permeation of the creation imparts a common origin and essence to it. This is why creation,¹⁵ time,¹⁶ humans,¹⁷ revelation, and prophethood are one.¹⁸ If that is the case, one may ask, then how can one account for the many faiths and other differences? The Qur'an puts the blame squarely on humans.¹⁹

Though intermittent in its descent, the revelatory phenomenon is marked with unity in its source, medium, and substance. The earlier revelations, prior to Prophet Muhammad, were fundamentals of faith and morals, determined by the civilizational aspects of the period. But as societal demands grew, the revelation, while retaining the past revelatory nexus, expanded itself. Thus, revelation cannot be split from its historic setting, although it

carries a sequential progression. This is so because sequential progression of the revelation is not a fixation but a flow through time. This imparts to revelation a continuity, unity, and transcendence akin to the Creator from which it comes.²⁰ "True revelation is invariably audible (precept and doctrine), not visible (incarnation). Thus its organ is the ear, while the eye is connected with covetousness."²¹

In other words, the oneness of revelation means that if God is to communicate with mankind, then

This integrative collectivity of the creation cannot be broken into bits of isolated existence, independent of each other.

His message has to be one in essence. He cannot be without a son or the holy ghost in the Old Testament and then gets for Himself a son and the holy ghost in the New Testament. The message in essence has to be one because it comes from the same God who revealed His guidance to Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Jesus and Muhammad (upon them be peace). At the same time, since these prophets or messengers served the same God, they have to uphold each other's message and not to denigrate one another. Thus, we read in the New Testament Jesus upholding the law of Moses.

Do not think that I came to destroy the law of the prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.²²

The Qur'an addresses this subject far more explicitly — it calls for belief in all of His messengers:

We surely sent among every people a messenger (with the command), "Serve Allah and eschew evil."²³

For sure, those who deny Allah and His messenger by making a distinction between (belief in) Allah and (belief in) His messenger, and who say, 'We believe in one but deny the other' and want to pursue a path midway, it is they who are denying the truth.²⁴

To be more specific, the Qur'an mentions Moses receiving the revelation from Allah:

It was We who revealed the law (to Moses): therein was guidance and light.²⁵

Also, David:

And verily We have written in the Psalms (Zabur) after the reminder: My righteous slaves will inherit the earth.²⁶

Also, Jesus:

And Allah will teach him (Jesus) the Scripture and wisdom, and the Torah and the Gospel.²⁷

The need for prophethood

"One sticks one's finger into the soil to tell by the smell in what land one is. I put my finger into existence," said Soren Kierkegaard the father of existentialism, "[and] it smells of nothing. Where am I? Who am I? How come I am here? What is this thing called the world? What does this world mean? Who is it that has lured me into this thing and now leaves me there? How did I come into the world? Why was I not consulted but was thrust into the ranks as though I have been bought of a kidnaper, a dealer in souls? How did I obtain an interest in this big enterprise they call reality? Why should I have interest in it? Is it not a voluntary concern? And if I am compelled to take part in it, where is the director?... Whither shall I turn with my complaint?"²⁸ The Kierkegaardian syndrome has marred human existence since time immemorial. Failing to find a clear-cut answer, humanity has also protested and even rebelled against the scheme of things — against a world imperfect and divested of order. These themes, however, have not come up into human consciousness with the formulation of the existentialist philosophy. Prophets were the

first ones to address themselves to these issues. The quest for answers should not lead to eternal despair because that takes the rainbow out of one's life. This is why a prophet would say: Come close to me, for I will wipe the tears from your eyes. Unburden your thoughts to me, for I will share your load. Listen to me, for I will solve your problems. And follow me, for I will show you the path, is essentially the spirit of prophethood. Viewed as such, prophethood aims at restoring faith, hope, and justice, and thus sanity to an insane world within the divine paradigm.

Prophethood does not wish man to rebel against God. For "meta-physical rebellion"²⁹ is an inconsequential exercise: it leads to loss of hope — a bottomless existence with nothing to cheer the spirits. The prophetic premise is that man by himself is nothing; with the divine will, however, in confluence with his strivings, he creates an unbeatable combination. Whenever this premise has been forgotten, humanity got itself caught in a whirlpool of moral and spiritual exhaustion. Deifying man is the negation of the negation itself. Because what needs to be negated is the power vested in man, whether it is a priest in the pulpit or a politician in the corridors of power or a corporation in the stock market. None of them has the right to wear the crown of authority and rule over man. Negation must lead to affirmation of an eternal value or the existence becomes absurd: it knocks out the structure from life. Without a valuational framework, negation

consumes itself and creates its own antithesis. Life has to have a perspective or it turns into a "world of deaf mute silence" where one's cry is a cry in the wilderness, without any response to any of the questions that eat at one's soul. Negation must stop where man ends and God begins. Prophethood, therefore, begins with the premise that there is no god but Allah.

Besides, negation, which is a prelude to rebellion, does not end in freedom but slavery. Revolution eats its own children. In their impulse to

**Fired by the divine spirit, with something of
His being into them, they move in their own orbits,
as if they are by themselves, and yet merge into a
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rebel against Providence, the rebellious spirit forgets that it was not God who was responsible for injustice but man who hallowed himself with a godly mask. Prophethood calls upon humans to submit themselves to the eternal presence of Allah Who created them. Why deify a man when in doing so the "human condition" will still be incomplete, for death cannot be conquered except by those who prepare for it: for them, it is a journey beyond the physical. Life will also continue to be wasteful, "thanks to evil," unless it is spent under the eternal gaze of Allah. It will be only then that jus-

tice will be established, only then “human condition” will turn into human affirmation. Man is not a tiny dot in a vagrant universe, “a trunk without a tag,” nor is he a



 Hira':
The site of
the first
revelation

“futile passion.” He is the most elegant figure on the divine canvas, the crown of creation who has been brought to life in an environment which is conducive to his growth and

which can be harnessed to his use so that with prophetic help, he could actualize the divine will and create history. This history is the outcome of the conflict between the forces of goodness and evil where goodness rules to make Allah’s word supreme. Death can only be overcome by refusing to live in the shadow of polytheism, and evil can only be triumphed upon by confronting it in the open. Hiding in sanctuaries is to compromise with evil. It is to integrate life processes with the claims of conscience that “one of the distinguishing characteristics of the prophetic idea is the notion that religion and politics are inseparable”. That is why “the prophets did not allow religion to be submerged by priestly sacramentalism or by other-worldly fantasies, nor did they permit the power-hungry kings to disregard the claims of conscience. The prophet is the perpetual protester against the idolatries of politics.”³⁰

Who are the prophets! The Qur’an does not use the appellation “prophet” for those whom Allah chooses for the sublime task discussed earlier. The adjective noun used is *nabi* or *rasul* (messenger), depending upon the role of that chosen person. The word *nabi* is derived from its root *naba*, meaning news. In this sense, a prophet (*nabi*) is one who bears the news (revelation). Incidentally, the present Bible also uses this appellation for at least four individuals. Two of them — that is Abraham (Ibrahim) and Moses (Musa) — are the most remarkable figures in human

history. The other two, Miriam and Deborah, are not mentioned in the Qur'an. The biblical scholars deny Hebraic origin to this word (*nabi*), though they admit that not all words in Hebrew are Hebraic.³¹

In the biblical matrix, the word prophet is more of an epithet than a title. For instance, the word "prophet" has been used for a clairvoyant "whose information concerning lost or strayed property was reliable," who accepts "a fourth part of the shekel of silver for his clairvoyance."³² Besides, as large a number as 400 prophets, according to the Bible, exist at one time;³³ they use instrumental music, such as psaltery and a timbrel, for the spirit of God to descend upon them.³⁴ They also go into an ecstatic frenzy.

Often their talk is not clear. Referring to incoherent talk coming from their frenzied strain, Martin Luther says: "They have a queer way of talking, like people who, instead of proceeding in an orderly manner, ramble off from one thing to the next, so that you cannot make head or tail of them or see what they are getting at."³⁵

Islam does not consider such people as prophets, for the prophets are raised on the best of the molds;³⁶ they are the disciples of the best of the teachers,³⁷ and their speech is at its eloquent best.³⁸ When it comes to communication (*balagha*), they are second to none. Ironically, the Bible also alludes to the speech of the genuine prophets as divine, pregnant with substance, and effective in its delivery, though unfortunately the biblical text,

barring a few occasions, fails to substantiate it. Nevertheless, the following biblical statements are of interest to note:

Touching the lips of Jeremiah,
God said, 'Behold, I have put
my words in your mouth.'³⁹

Offering Ezekiel a scroll on which his messages were written, God said, "Son of man. ... eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel."⁴⁰

Since revelation comes from

The prophetic premise is that man by himself is nothing; with the divine will, however, in support of his strivings, he creates an unbeatable combination.

Allah, its impact on the audience is astounding: "Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and a hammer which breaks the rocks in pieces,"⁴¹ reports the Bible. A statement of similar import is also in the Qur'an:

If We had sent down
this Qur'an to a mountain,
you would have seen
it humbled, rent asunder
by fear of Allah.⁴²

While receiving revelation, Prophet Muhammad is reported to have perspired, his breathing gets heavier because of the load of the

The Biblical Parān is Farān

The Genesis 21:21 establishes Hagar's stay in the wilderness of Paran. Muslim scholars maintain that Paran is Faran which is located close to Makkah, the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad ('alayhi as-salam). Christians dispute it and locate Faran in the Sina. Fine, say the Muslims, can you substantiate your claim by identifying Ishmaelites living by your imaginary "Faran?" Muslims build up their case from the Bible itself and refer to Isaiah 21: 13 which reads:

The oracle concerning Arabia.
In the thickest in Arabia
you will lodge,
O caravans of De'denites.
To the thirsty bring water,
meet the fugitive with bread,
O inhabitants of the land of
Te'ma.
For thy have fled from the
sword,
from the drawn sword,
from the bent bow,
and from the press of battle.
For thus the Lord said to me,
"Within a year, according to
the year of a hireling,
all the glory of Ke'dar,
will come to an end ... "

In this oracle, two sons of Ishmael are mentioned — that is, Tema and Kedar. The Bible places them in Arabia and not in the Sina of Egypt. Are Tema and Kedar really the sons of Ishmael? Muslim scholars say read Genesis 25: 12, which reveals their names:

These are the names
of the sons
of Ish'mael named in
the order of their birth:
Neba'ioth, the first born
of Ish'mael; Ke'dar,
Adbeel, Mib'sam, Du'mah,
Mas'sa, Hadad, Te'ma. ...

Muslim scholars even go further than that and identify habitations of the sons of Ishmael built in Arabia.

- Nabit (Neba'ioth) is a township close to present-day Yenbu.
- Daumat al-Jandal (Dumah) is located along the coastline of the Red Sea.
- Te'ma (Tayma) is close to Fidk on the route to Khayber.
- Massa went to Yemen. The

divine message. Other than that in all other aspects he is a normal human being. The revelation that he is blessed with (the Qur'an) becomes his miracle. To demonstrate how free he is from the

swoons and frenzies of the biblical prophets and how great is the message he receives, a little digression will be still pertinent.

The prophetic speech (the Qur'an as word of Allah) is so sublime that

dust and blown away,
and when the time comes
for raising the little girls
(buried alive).

For what day is that
time fixed?

The Day of Judgment.
How will you comprehend
what the Day of Judgment is?
Alas the woe that day for
those who deny!

Have We not destroyed the
earlier generations?
So shall We make the
later ones
to follow them.⁴⁴

Reminding humans of their lowly
birth, the revelation says:

Did We not create you
from contemptible water?
Then We lodged you
in a secure place
(the womb) for a
certain appointed time,
then We facilitated
you (your birth).
How well We calculate!
Alas the woe that day
for those who deny!
Have We not made the
earth a repository
for the living and
the dead, and placed
in it lofty and broad
stabilizers, and
gave you sweet water
to drink?

Alas the woe that
day for those who deny!
“Go to what you used
to deny; go to the
shadow with ramifications,

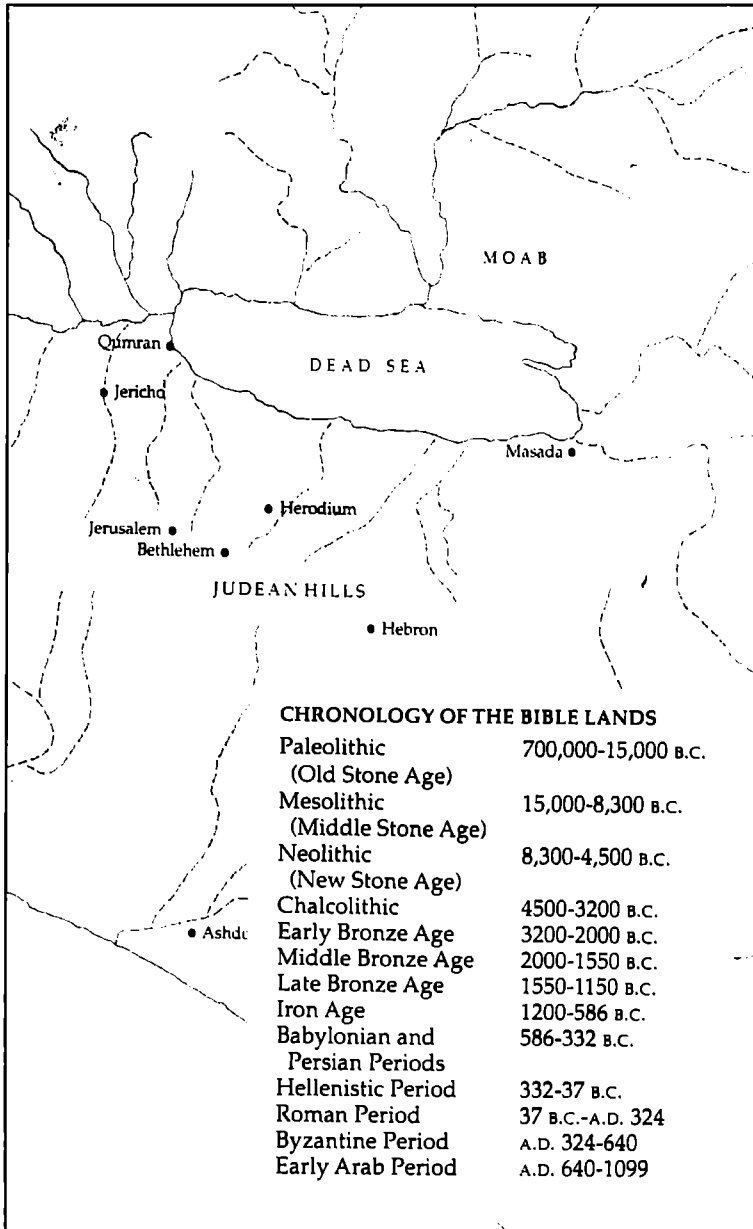
neither shady nor protecting
against the blazing Fire.
It will throw out sparks
as logs of wood
so like golden camels.”⁴⁵

Discounting the argument of the
unbelievers (kuffar) as to the
remoteness of resurrection, the
revelation says:

Are you difficult to create
or the heavens?
He built it, raised
it high, proportioned it,

**Because what needs to be negated is the
power vested in man, whether it is a priest in
the pulpit or a politician in the corridors of
power or a corporation in the stock market.
None of them has the right to wear the crown
of authority and rule over man.**

gave darkness to its
night, and brightness
to its day; and
afterwards spread
out the earth.
He brought out its water
and its pastures from it,
and stabilized the
mountains as convenience
for you and your cattle.
When the great calamity
comes, the day when
man remembers all that
he had done, and
Hell made visible
to him who can see,
then he who had been



When Muhammad Rasul Allah said that he was witness to the unseen, the unbelievers alleged he had gone out of his mind. The revelation refuted the allegation and testified on his behalf:

So, I call the receding stars to witness,
the planet withdrawing
into themselves,
the closing night,
the rising dawn,
that this is indeed the
word of an honored
Messenger,
full of power,
well-established
(in position) with the Lord
and Master of the Throne,
obeyed and worthy
there of trust.
Your companion is not
mad. He had surely seen
him on the clear horizon.
He is not chary of making
public what is unknown.
This is not the utterance
of an accursed devil.
So wither do you stray?
This is the reminder
for all the people
of the world,
for those of you who
desire to walk the path
that is straight.⁴⁷

Chronology of the Biblical lands

rebellious and who
preferred the life
of the world,
will surely have
Hell for his abode.⁴⁶

Such is the prophetic
speech, studded with transcendental
wisdom, easy to understand, and yet
rich in assonance alliteration, and
rhetoric.

There are, however, other

aspects to the prophetic speech: The Book contains statements of profound meanings which could not have come from the mouth of a sick person. According to its epistemology, Allah (God) can be known in two ways: one, through the revelation; and two, through the study of one's self and nature.⁴⁸

The two are interlocked, authenticating each other because both are verifiable to their divine origin. That is why, though the Qur'an has been revealed to an unlettered man, it contains scientific truth of verifiable nature, something which the first audience of the Qur'an could not verify. But, since the Qur'an was not bound by a particular historical era and was meant to be for all the ages, the science had to keep pace with it. In other words, Allah cannot be right in one age and wrong in the other. To maintain His credibility, He has to be consistent. This is why the Qur'an says:

And if this Qur'an had been from someone other than Allah, people would have found in it much incongruity.⁴⁹

Some of the scientific facts are ascertainable from the following verses of the Qur'an:⁵⁰

- That the earth was previously part of the sun and only after separation from it became a habitable place for mankind.⁵¹ That all life originated from water.⁵²
- That the universe was in the

shape of a fiery gas (which the Qur'an calls (*dukhan*)).⁵³

- That matter is made up of minute particles.⁵⁴
- That the oxygen content of the air is reduced at higher altitudes.⁵⁵
- That in nature everything consists of complementary elements, not only man and animals, but also plants and even inorganic matter.⁵⁶
- That the embryo in the womb is enclosed by three coverings.⁵⁷

It is to integrate life processes with the claims of conscience that "one of the distinguishing characteristics of the prophetic idea is the notion that religion and politics are inseparable".

- That fertilization of certain plants is done by the wind.⁵⁸
- That microscopic organisms such as spermatozoon exist but are not visible to the naked eye.⁵⁹
- That each human being has permanent individual fingerprints.⁶⁰

The prophetic personality has to be clean. He is of sweet disposition;⁶¹ he is resolute, with no wavering of heart and mind;⁶² he is also fearless;⁶³ he seeks nothing for himself;⁶⁴ his heart pulsates with compassion for everyone;⁶⁵ he is

obedient to his Creator,⁶⁶ nothing stops him from the execution of this task. Likewise, prophethood does not belong to the world of mechanics which can be aspired for and sought.⁶⁷ The prophetic responsibilities are assigned suddenly without any prior inkling. He has to be an upright person from his childhood because revelation selects a medium of impeccable credentials for itself.⁶⁸ In the case of prophethood, medium is the message.

This affirmation of the earlier prophets by the Qur'an leads to another logical demand — that is, not to differentiate between them. In fact, Muslims are called upon to declare their belief:

Say [O Muslims]: We believe
in Allah
and that which is revealed
unto us and that
which was revealed
unto Abraham
and Ish'mael and Isaac
and Jacob and
the tribes and that
which Moses
and Jesus received,
and that which the
prophets
received from their
Lord.
We make no distinction
between any of them,
and unto Him
we have surrendered.⁶⁹

In the Islamic *'aqidah* (creed), denying even one prophet amounts to apostasy. The Prophet Muhammad even forbade his own exaltation over

others.⁷⁰ Does it mean that all prophets had the same religion? The answer is yes: it could not have been otherwise. This leads us to Islam. What does Islam stand for? Is it a religion founded by a particular human? Is it an ethnic name peculiar to a geography or a people? No, if that had been the case, it would have negated God's unicity and his revelation. The religion had to be one. There has to be something in common among humanity, a focal point on which it could converge, a gathering of mind and feelings in obeisance to their Lord. That is Islam. Logically speaking, obeisance to one God should lead to peace because discord in personalities, as well as people, comes from conflicting poles of authority. The word "Islam" is a derivative of the root *sil'm* which "means, among other things, peace, purity, submission, and obedience. In the religious sense Islam means submission to the will of God and obedience to His laws."⁷¹ Those who follow Islam are called Muslim or one who submits. "Islam, [however,] does not get its name from its laws, order, or prohibitions, nor from the body and soul it claims, but from something that encompasses and surmounts all that: from a moment of cognition, from the strength of the soul to face the times, from the readiness to endure everything that an existence can offer, from the truth of submission to God. ... thy name is Islam."⁷²

Small wonder then, that the Qur'an describes all of the prophets as Muslims and their faith as Islam. For instance, the Qur'an refutes the

doctrinal claim of the Jews and Christian about Prophet Abraham (Ibrahim) being a Jew or a Christian:

Abraham was not a Jew
nor a Christian,
but he was an upright
man, a Muslim,
and he was not
of the polytheist.⁷³

After having cast him as a Muslim, the Qur'an gives its rationale:

O people of scripture,
why do you dispute
about Abraham
when the Torah
and the Gospel
were not revealed
until after him?
Do you then understand?⁷⁴

About Prophet Moses' faith the Qur'an says:

And Moses said: "O my people,
if you have believed
in Allah, then put
trust in Him, if you
are indeed Muslims."⁷⁵

Jesus is no exception either:

When Jesus perceived
their disbelief,
he said: "Who will
be my helpers
for the sake of Allah?
Said the disciples:
"We are Allah's helpers,

we believe in Allah.
And you be our
witness - that we
are Muslims."⁷⁶

This was to maintain the continuity of the revelation that Allah calls upon Prophet Muhammad to uphold the faith of the previous prophets:

He has ordained for you
that religion
which He commanded
unto Noah,
and that which

**Negation must stop where man
ends and God begins. Prophethood,
therefore, begins with the premise
that there is no god but Allah.**

We commanded unto
Abraham and Moses
and Jesus, saying:
Establish the religion
and be not divided
therein.⁷⁷

In al-An'am after mentioning the names of eighteen prophets, Allah commands Prophet Muhammad to follow their way:

Those were the people
who were guided by Allah;
so follow their way.⁷⁸

The Qur'an pushes its claim

about the oneness of revelation to its logical conclusion by joining all the prophets into a brotherhood who

provided they stop being rebellious; it is also the assertion of the unicity of the divine message; it is the flowering of man's genius, it is reinstatement of man's moral and spiritual essence.

Prophethood is the exaltation of man as the legatee of the divine revelation; it is bonding with Allah to actualize His will on earth.

Prophethood takes away the deafness and muteness of the world and endows it with a living and compassionate God.

The Qur'anic call is clear:

This is Allah's guidance: He gives among His creature whom He will. If they [the prophets] had associated others with Him, surely vain would have been all they did. Those were the people to whom We gave the Book and the Law and the Prophethood. But if they reject these things We shall entrust them to a people who will not deny. Those were the people who were guided by Al-

lah;
so follow their way.

Say:[O Muhammad]:



The gods of antiquity that prophets opposed

served none but one God. Prophethood is therefore a call for submission to one God Who is willing to take everyone into His mercy

“I ask no recompense
of you for this.
It is but a reminder
for all the people
of the world.”
But they failed to
make a just estimation
of Allah when they
said: “He did not
reveal to any man any thing.”
Ask them [o Muhammad]:
“Who then revealed
the Book that Moses
brought — a guidance
and light for men —
which you treat as
sheaves of paper,
which you display
yet conceal a
great deal,
though through it you
were taught things
you did not know before,
nor even your fathers knew?”
Say [O Muhammad, it was]
“Allah,”[Who revealed it]
and leave them to
the sport of engaging
in vain discourse.
And this (Qur’an) is
another Book that We
have revealed,
blessed, affirming the
earlier (revelations),
so that you may warn
the people of (Makkah)
the town of towns,
and those who live around it.
Those who believe in the
life to come shall believe
in it and be watchful of
their moral obligations.
Who is more vile than he
who slanders Allah
of falsehood, or says:

“Revelation came to me,”
when no such revelation
came to him; or one
who claims: “I can reveal
the like of what
has been sent down
by Allah?”
If you could see the
evil creatures
in the agony of death
with the angels thrusting
forward their hands
(saying): “Yield up your souls:
This day you will suffer
ignominious punishment
for uttering lies
about Allah and rejecting
His signs with arrogance.”
“You have come before
Us all alone,” (Allah will say),
“as when you were
created first,
leaving behind all that
We had bestowed on you.
We do not see your
intercessors with you
who, you imagined,
had partnership with you.
Shattered lie your ties
with them now,
and gone are the claims
you made.”⁷⁹

PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIA

Blessed are those who dwell
in thy house, ever singing
thy praise! Blessed are the
men whose strength is in thee,
in whose heart are the
highways to Zion. As they
go through the valley
of Baca they make it a place
of springs; the early rain also
covers it with pools.

(Psalms 84: 4-6)

He [Ishmael] lived in the
wilderness Paran.

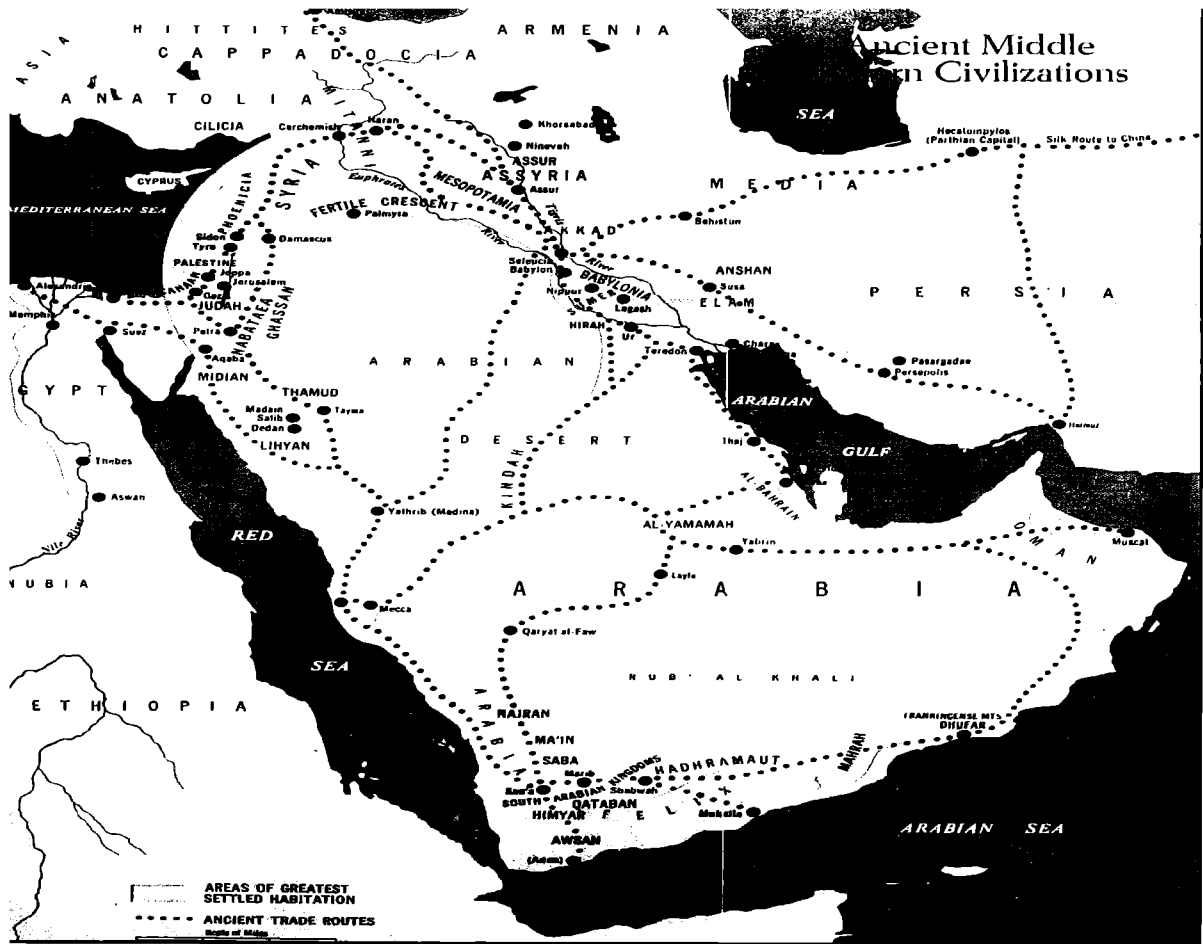
(Genesis 21: 21)

I will fall upon the quiet people
who dwell securely, all of them
dwelling without walls, and
having no bars or gates; to
seize spoils and carry off
plunder; to assail the waste
places which are now inhabited,
and the people who were
gathered from the nations,
who have gotten cattle and
goods, who dwell at the
center of the earth.

(Ezekiel 38: 11-12)



Arabs
and
desert go
together and
are required
for the
formation



Ancient Middle Eastern civilizations

Seated in Southwest Asia and stretched like a big patch of canvass over the extremities of Asia and Africa, as if holding them together, and bounded by the Arabian Sea in the south, the Red Sea in the west, the Mediterranean Sea in the northwest and the Indian Ocean in the east, the Arabian peninsula is neither a vast sand dune nor an expanse of fertile valley but combines the two. The desert plateau is shielded from the sea coast by the range of Hijaz

mountains which are not only instrumental in causing rainfall but provide an enclosing elevation to the mainland (thus the name Hijaz). From time immemorial, its significance as a trade route, has been acknowledged for its more or less central position. The Roman Emperor Justin I's directives to the Abyssinians to secure the trade routes of Asia and Africa passing through the peninsula in 570 C.E. from the possible Persian control over them and Abraha's abortive

attempt to destroy Makkah speak of the Arabia's importance.

At its widest the peninsula is 1200 miles, at its longest it is 1500 miles. Some old geography books, like *Taqwim al-Buldan*, measure its area with a camel's walk across its land. For example, it says that a fully loaded camel will take seven months and eleven days to cross the peninsula.

Arabs and the desert go together and one conjures up the other effortlessly. Records as old as Assyrian's talk of Arabs and their camels (854 B.C.). The biblical Jeremiah uses the simile of "like an Arab in the desert (3:2)" about 600 B.C. "in a tone in which one refers to a well-known fact, and more than a century earlier Isaiah (13:20) refers to the Arab pitching his tent, which presupposes a nomadic, desert-dwelling existence."¹

What kind of a people were the Arabs that deserved to be the recipients of the divine revelation is an intriguing question. This can be answered at three levels: racial, religious, and psychological.

Other than its use as introduction to humanity, race is the least important element in history. Nevertheless, as a people, Arabs belonged to the same Semitic mass of men who were earlier the recipients of Judaism and Christianity. In the Biblical tradition, they were the divine response to Abraham's supplication (Genesis 17:20-21), who settled his wife Hagar and his son Ishmael in Makkah. The latter

married into the Jurhum tribe. Out of this union, came the twelve tribes, "the prime carriers of the Arab tradition of language and ideas."²

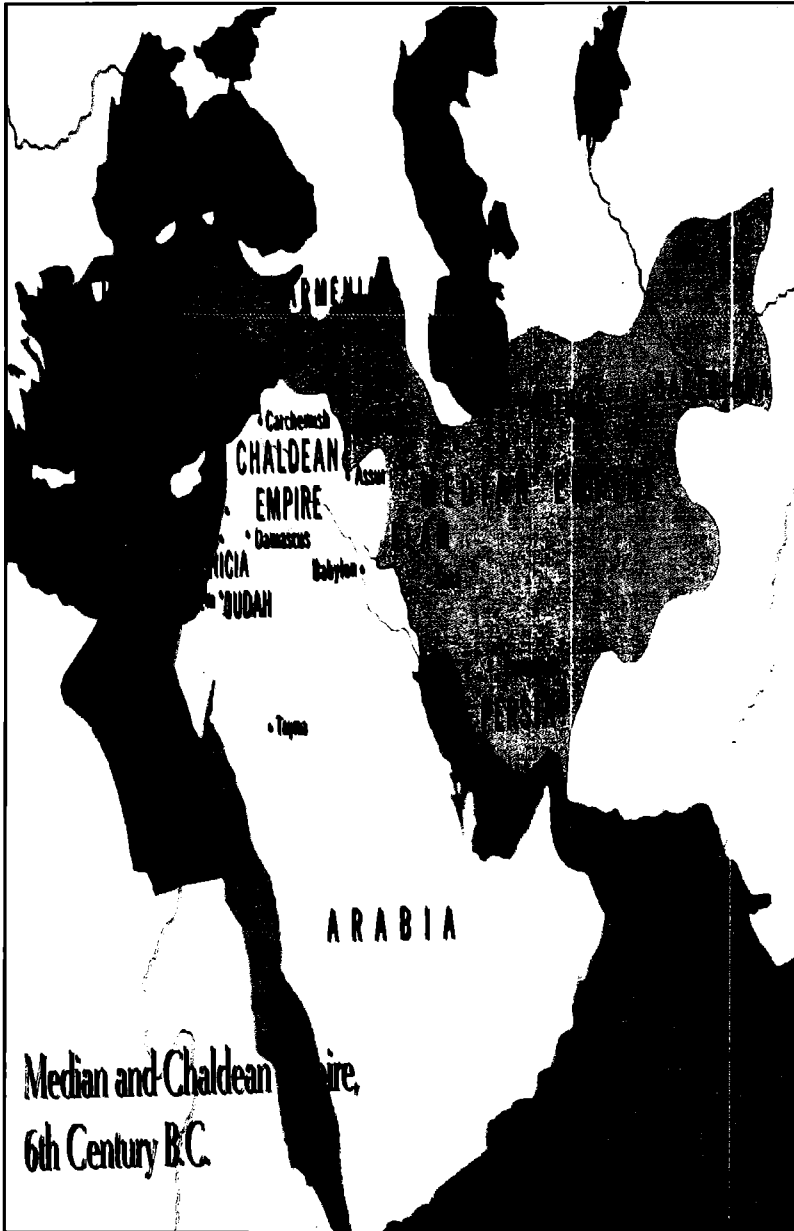
Considering Isma'il (upon him be peace) as the starting point of the Ishmaelite Arabia, one can say that their history was Islamic in origin, for Isma'il and his mother brought the Abrahamic faith to the land.

The inhospitable climate gave their character an unmatched fierceness and their isolated desert existence imparted them an unrivaled individuality. Interdependence, which breeds civilization, was not there.

The Ka'bah was built to worship the one-true God. How long the religion of Abraham subsisted after Ishmael is not known nor the process that brought about the degeneration of a true tradition.

At the advent of Islam, there were at least thirteen religious denominations, existing side by side. Among them were the Unitarians who believed that (God) Allah was the sole Creator, that life hereafter was inevitable when the righteous would be rewarded and the evil ones would be punished. The Unitarians could be considered as the remnant of the Abrahamic faith.

The Unitarians were typified by one Zayd ibn Thabit who used to supplicate in the Ka'bah negating the false gods and imploring the God



Median and Chaldean empire 6th Century B.C.

of Abraham to show him the right way of worshiping Him. The Arabs called such people *hunafa* for in their perception they had reneged the Makkan faith. Such people,

though few, were well known and conversant with the Jewish prophecies and lores of a coming prophet.³

The pre-Islamic conversation between Abu Bakr and Ta'if-resident Umayya ibn abi as-Salt speaks of their expectations when the latter asked him about the tribe of the coming prophet.⁴ For sure, Abu Bakr could not have known it, but the question stuck in his mind. Later, when he met Waraqa ibn Naufal, perhaps the only knowledgeable Christian they had in Makkah, he put the same question to him. His answer was that the coming prophet would be born in central Arabia, that he knew his lineage, and that even Abu Bakr's tribe qualified for [prophethood]. His biblical knowledge was so profound and so thoroughly he had imbibed the core of the prophetic teachings that when Abu Bakr asked him about the teaching of the coming prophet, he had no problem in saying:

Opress not,
[nor] bear with oppression,
[nor] let oppression happen.

Added to these were the people who though believed in Allah's exist-

ence and the life hereafter, nevertheless, worshiped idols, for they thought this would endear them to Allah. The Qur'an took note of them when it said:

We worshiped them
so that they provide
us access to Allah.⁵

The materialists believed in Allah to be the Master and the Creator of this universe; nevertheless, they discounted the prophetic role and negated the coming of the life after death. The Qur'an also mentioned them.

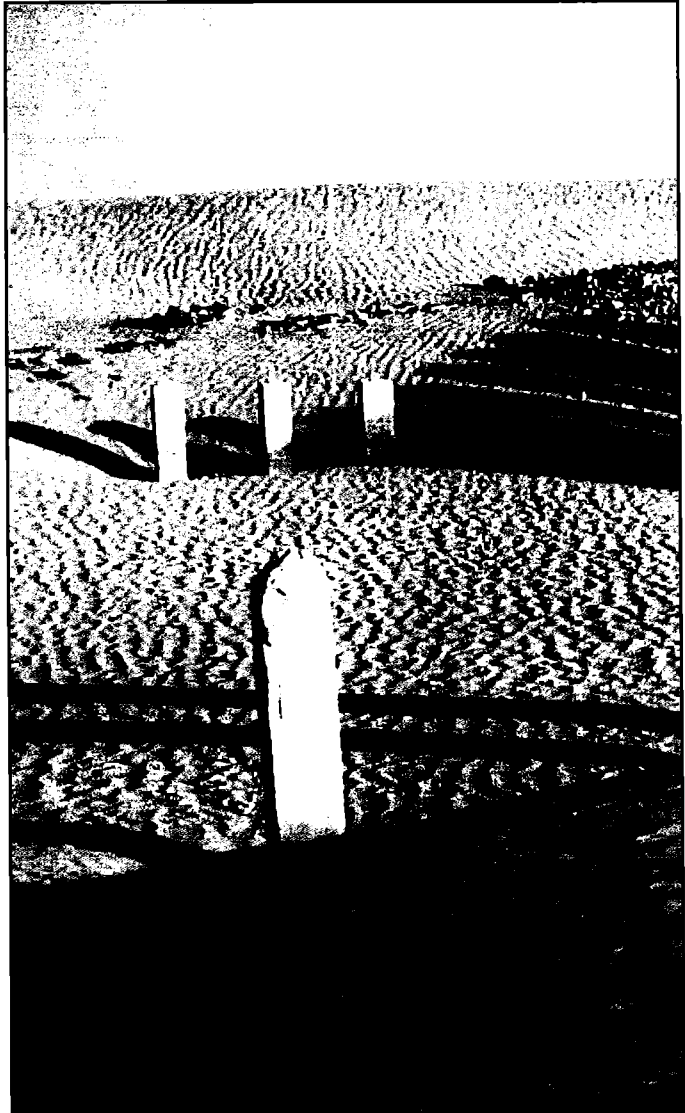
Yet another group worshiped the angels, whom they took for Allah's daughters. They believed this qualified the angels to intercede in their behalf. The Qur'an made a special reference to them:

And they suggest
daughters to Allah.
Allah be praised!
And for themselves
what they like.⁶

The Yemeni tribe of Hamiyr used to worship the sun because they considered it an angel, endowed with life and intelligence. The Queen of Sheba, on the Qur'anic testimony, belonged to this group.

Also among the Arabs were the moon worshipers, who invested it with powers which, they believed, influenced the earthly affairs.⁷ The Sabians believed in astrology, while certain other people worshiped the stars. Likewise, certain tribes of

Lakhm, Khuza'ah and Quraysh worshiped a star that appears in the



summer. Jinn were not spared either as doers of things.⁸

Polytheistic practices aside, there were also pockets of scriptural religions in Arabia. For example,

Saba: The
Temple of
Illumquh
where moon
god was
worshiped

Christianity existed in the tribes of the Rabi'a, Ghassan and some families of the Quda'ah. Judaism was found among the tribes of Hamiyr, Kinana, and the clans of Harith ibn Ka'b and Kinda; while Magianism was barely present among the tribe of Tamim.

**heir love
for horses
gave rise to
the prettiest
and the
swiftest
breed of
Arabian
horses**

Idols were made of all kinds of material, including stones, wood, and edibles. For example, Banu Hanifa had a god made of dates, shortening and barley flour. Their god's existence was, however, contingent upon their circumstances. Whenever famine broke out, their hunger triumphed over their need



for a deity — they ate him up. Offerings to idols were part of their religious practices.

The Arabian religious scene was, therefore, not dull but rich. Structurally, the society was essentially tribal. Religious polarization, or religion as one's identity, which is natural to multi-religious societies, was surprisingly nonexistent.

This could have been attributed to the Qurayshi genius which, in order to sustain its hegemony over the tribes, accommodated their gods in the Ka'bah, including Mary and Jesus (upon them be peace). The change of tribalistic affiliations and identity was, however, left to Islam which rearranged human relationship on the ideational notion of Muslim and *Kafir* (nonbeliever).

Besides, whatever be their religious denomination the pre-Islamic Arabs retained part of their Abrahamic legacy by subscribing to the idea of one-supreme being — Allah, who was the Creator and the Nourisher of the universe.

The degeneration of the Abrahamic legacy, it is possible, took place in three diverse though related ways:

“First was the human desire for a deity in close proximity in case of need. The needs of daily living are many: to foretell the future; to consult and obtain advice whether the time is auspicious to undertake war, a business undertaking, a hunt, a long journey, to appear when tragedy strikes in the hope of having it lifted; to thank when this and good fortune arrive. When any of these

needs is felt, it requires a rather strong mind and will to resist the temptation to seek satisfaction through the close and concrete if available. The tendency is operative even with the knowledge that ultimate power lies with another being, in which case the nearby deity is regarded as an intercessory agency.

“Second was the tendency to aggrandize the deceased good man whether ancestor, chieftain, patriarch, or benefactor to the point where his humanity passed into divinity.

“Idealization is a very potent idol-making in all humans. Unless it is kept in check, the deceased could easily suffer apotheosis.

“Third was the perpetual fear humans felt upon realization of their helplessness in front of the inexplicable mighty forces or tragic events of nature ... In such cases, numinous perception shifts from God, the real cause of the event, to the force of nature that acted as a vehicle or locus for it. The transcendent God is likely to be perceived as distant simply because his transcendence may be construed as distance.

“Fourth, and last, was the near total absence from the scene of any transcendentalist faiths. True, the transcendentalist tradition was kept by the Hanifs; but these were too few to be effective. While the Jews were perceived as having reduced monotheism to monolatry ... , the Christians, by their incarnation and trinitarianism, their sacramental-ism

and theo-tokos-theology, were perceived as having reduced it to polytheism. Wherever they turned, the pre-Islamic Arabs saw the transcendence of God violated ... it was their Byzantine Christian neighbors who sold them the human statues of the Ka'bah.”⁹

The desert and its dweller have an elemental one-to-one relationship that calls for a robust desire to endure the challenge and not to romance with it.

Children of the desert

The inhospitable climate gave their character an unmatched fierceness and their isolated desert existence imparted them an unrivaled individuality. Interdependence, which breeds civilization, was not there. The desert and its dweller have an elemental one-to-one relationship that calls for a robust desire to endure the challenge and not to romance with it.

Toughened by the desert life, with bare minimum to subsist upon, they had developed a remarkable instinct for survival even in adversity. Good health was natural to them. Maqrizi (1364-1442) attributes a saying to Ka'b al-Ahbar, one of the first-generation Muslims, that when Allah the Exalted created all things he

gave them each a companion. "I am going to Syria," said Reason; "I will go with you," said Rebellion. Abundance said: "I am going to Egypt;" "I shall accompany you," said Resignation. "I am going to the Desert," said poverty; "I shall go with you," said Health.¹⁰

Basically a desert people, sedentary life, which is a preliminary to learning, was not known to them. Majority of the Quraysh were tradesmen and thus were familiar with the great commercial centers of their times,¹¹ which gave them negotiating skills and some measure of sophistication. The art of writing was confined to a few people. The society, in general, depended on oral

tradition, which had its own advantages: reliance on memory gave them amazing retentive power.

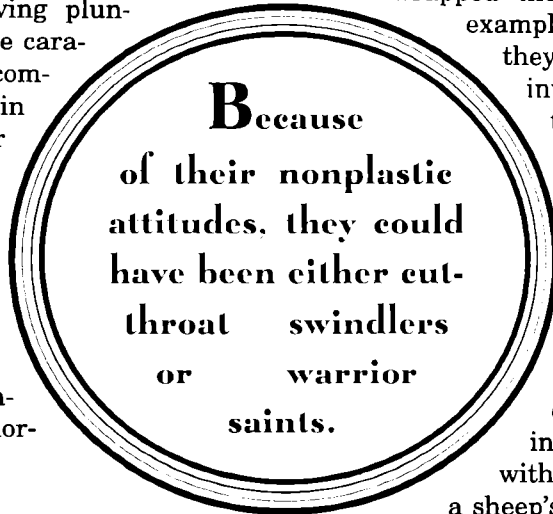
The Makkan society, whether by design or accident, was more or less patterned on what one may call a city-state, where authority was delegated and societal affairs were conducted as collective concerns. Giving advice and synthesizing differing opinions were natural to them. They had a central body of elders known as dar al-nadwa. Its representation was given to only those whose credentials, among others, called for the ability to advise and age above forty. Nevertheless, the system was run by the elite — the aristocracy drawn from

the tribal chieftains, which had marginalized the poor and the slave.

Thus, by violating all the ten commandments of the Mosaic law, their situation had ripened itself for damnation. Instead, they were hauled from the pit and transmuted so that the world could be saved for Islam (submission to God's will). And with that, the stage was set for the arrival of "the Spirit of the Truth." The wretched of Arabia were to become the material for the last Prophet and the last Testament.

The Arabian character was neither straight nor deviant in the absolute sense. It was the juxtaposition of the best and the worst: they were bold, magnanimous, hospitable, trustworthy, resilient and enterprising. But they were also mean, superstitious, acquisitive, sen-

suous, and quarrelsome when they wanted to be. For example, if the nobility of Hatim, from the tribe of Tay, was known so were Salayk ibn al-Salaka and Ta'bbata Sharran who after having plundered the trade caravans would compose poetry in self-praise for their exploits. Because of their non-plastic attitudes, they could have been either cutthroat swindlers or warrior-saints.



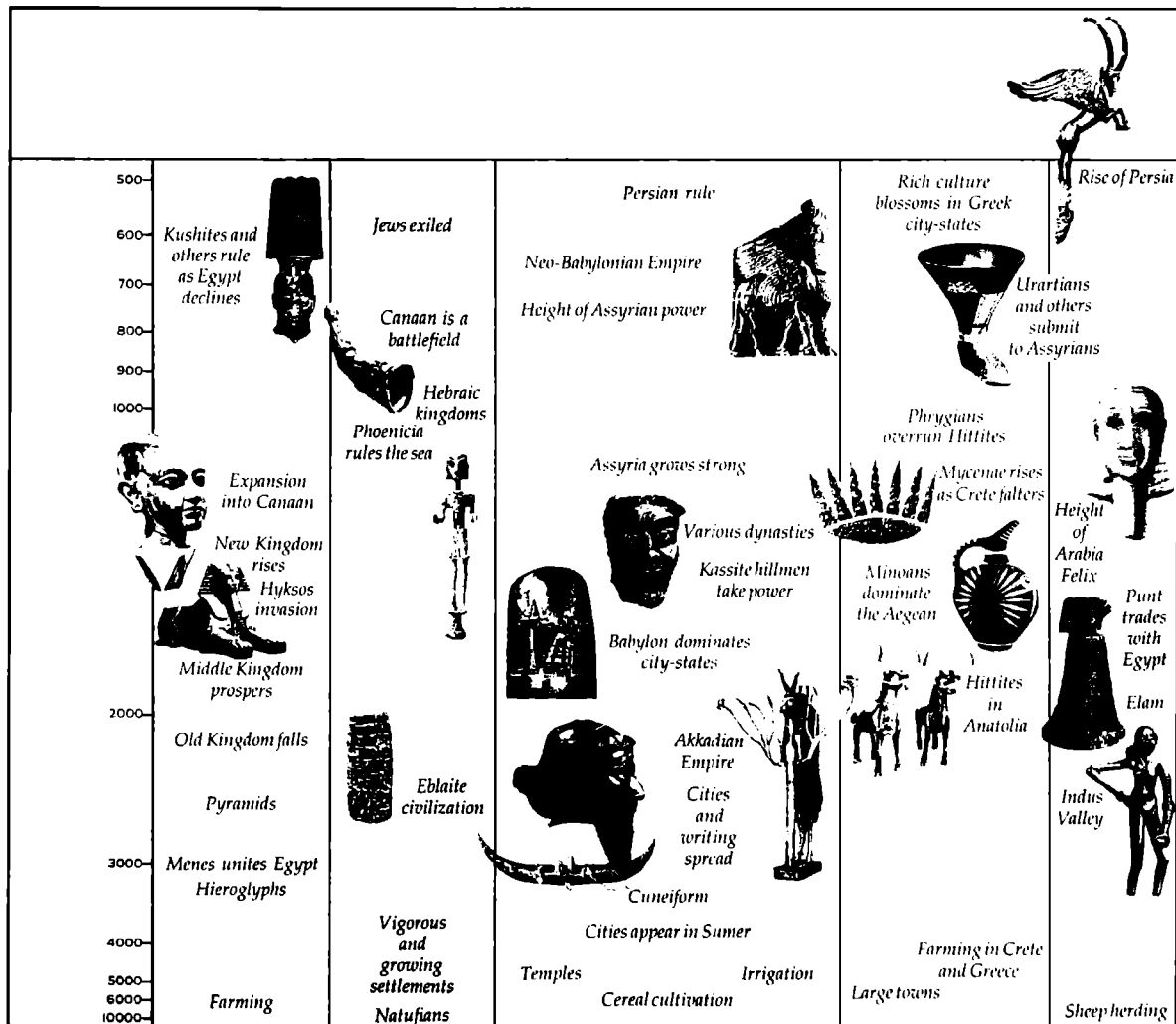
The pagan mind

Being pagan, superstitions were inbred in them. For in the absence of a strong belief in a caring, omnipotent God, they were seized with fear and had become vulnerable to seeking help from non-Godly sources. God was replaced by soothsayers and star gazers who making use of the people's gullibility had set up "clinics" in places close to a favorite idol so that they could have the hallowed face of religiosity. They prophesied about the future, and even treated the sick with omens and talisman. The Arabs in general believed that soothsayers were patronized by the evil spirits who had access to the unseen. Even poetry because of its evocative power and the rhythmic

stringing of the words was thought to have satanic emanation.¹²

But their belief in superstitions was not an occasional aberration, it wrapped their existence. For example, killing snakes, they thought, would invite revenge from their surviving mates. If the bird flew from their right flank, it carried a good omen; if from the left, it consequented a bad progression of events. Famines were averted with dry grass tied to a sheep's tail and torched, for they believed this would bring rain. Travelers lost on the trail would undress themselves and wear the clothes inside out.

The pagan mind was also cruel since in the absence of a true religious tradition, they live in the hopeless continuum of the presentness of the present, with neither the belief of a life-after-death nor of accountability. Wars were fought either to heal a bruised ego, to exact vengeance, or to prove one's superiority. That is why internecine wars were common raging for years. Arabs called such wars "Ayyam al-Arab." Among these wars, 'Abs wa-Dhubyan was fought in the name of horses (Dahis and Ghabra'), who raced against each other. By the time Islam came on the scene, it had entered its 40th year of bloodletting. But if this had to do with ferocity —



Chronology of the fertile crescent

a demonic rage to sustain it — cruelty was yet another aspect of their character. They would slit the pregnant woman’s womb and kill the unborn baby; the sight of the dead enemy would not quench their rage; mutilating them was a time honored practice: even women would string the chopped noses and ears into a necklace and wear it around their necks.

Swearing was not rhetorical but would be carried out literally. “I will drink liquor in the chalice of his skull,” was a common swearing.

Cruelty has no gender but in pagan cultures, women came out worst. They would be tied to the horse’s tail and dragged through the sand until they died. Inheritance was a male prerogative. Daughters were buried alive for in a male-

chauvinist culture, they were considered to be of little utility other than bringing shame to the family, or impoverishing the family's finances as a non-earner.¹³ Ibn Khalkan tells us that the practice was so rampant that at one point in time Sa'sa'ah ibn Najyah, the grandfather of the famous poet Farazdaq, alone saved about thirty girls by paying ransom.

In matters of usury, sex, and liquor, Arabs were modern by definition. Women were treated as sex objects; sex relations carried no obligation. Purity of lineage was not a norm. Men gave their wives for seeding to famous men believing they would beget sons like them.

Widowed mothers (especially the step ones) could become their sons' wives, and brothers could marry their sisters. A man could also marry consanguine sisters.

Nudity carried social approval. Women even undressed themselves in the House of God (Ka'bah) and circumbulated around it naked.

In societies where fornication is common, gambling and liquor are the attendant vices. This was also true of the pre-Islamic Arabs who dined compulsively. From women to cattle, and land-produce to money, nothing was dear enough to be staked. Liquor was high on the social agenda. Frequent partying where wives and children rotated the goblet among the guests and got stripped out were held with abandon. The Arab love for the sensual pleasures turned them into true hedonists; their cellars were

stacked with assorted wines. A normal drinker could have been easily taken for a connoisseur. The Arabic lexicon, not surprisingly, carried two hundred and fifty names of liquor, a feat no other language could have boasted. Liquor consumption was so commonly admired that belting down a slug of liquor was considered a sign of manhood.

The economy was bonded to slave labor, and interest transactions were common mode of business. Loans were either interest based or tied to a lien, which may be obtained against one's wife or children. In the former case, if not paid within time, the principal was increased. People, in general, traded merchandise; some had big business houses with clientage in Persia and Eastern Rome.

Thievery, including highway robbery, was a fact of life. Tribes, like Aslam, Ghifan, Muzayna, and Juhayna, even lived on it. The justice system favored the rich, who violated the norm and got away with it. The lifestyle in general was materialistic, sensuous, and secular.

Thus, by violating all the ten commandments of the Mosaic law, their situation had ripened itself for damnation. Instead, they were hauled from the pit and transmuted so that the world could be saved for Islam (submission to God's will). And with that, the stage was set for the arrival of "the Spirit of the Truth." The wretched of Arabia were to become the material for the last Prophet and the last Testament.

MUHAMMAD

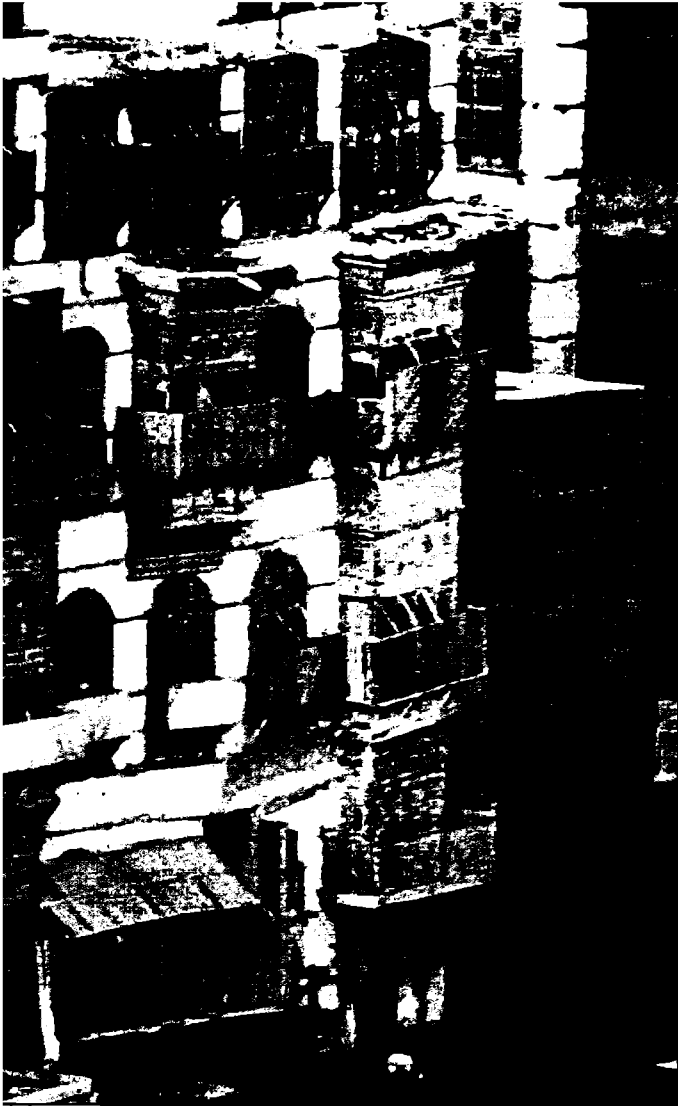
THE PROMISED ONE: BIRTH AND EARLY YOUTH

My beloved is all radiant and ruddy,
distinguished among ten thousand.
His head is the finest gold;
his locks are wavy,
black as raven. ...
His speech is most sweet,
and he is altogether desirable.
This is my beloved and this is my
friend,
O daughters of Jerusalem.

(Song of Solomon 5: 10-16)



The
dawn comes
at last



❁ **Jiddah houses: it is possible that such houses were present in the Prophet's time**

Though relatively poorer among his clan, the Prophet Muhammad's lineage was just perfect.¹ Born April 20, 571 (Rab'i al-Awwal 9) in the famous tribe of the Quraysh, his great grandfather Hashim was not only a distinguished tradesman but also the custodian of the great source of water (zamzam) in the Makkan

valley. Hashim's grandfather, Qusayy, was the autocrat of Makkah, an area of about hundred square miles. After his death, one-man rule dissipated into a corporate structure of governance where each tribe had its share of power. Whether this was by design or came through the interplay of elements in the post-Qusayy era, the devolution of authority turned Makkah into a city state.

The Quraysh traced their genealogy to Ibrahim through his son Isma'il, biblical Ish'mael (upon them be peace). In this sense, Prophet Muhammad is not a fiction, his is a historical person with known antecedents — a remarkable fact that imparts him distinction among the prophetic brotherhood. For example, Jesus' genealogy, despite biblical emphasis on his miraculous birth, which obviates the need for any such exercise, is at variance with each other in the gospels of Matthew and Luke.

The Prophet's great grandfather, Hashim, was a man of remarkable disposition and talents. It was because of him that the Quraysh prospered in foreign trade, for he pioneered expeditions to Syria and Palestine. Once when the famine clutched the Makkan valley, he specially undertook the journey to the Palestine and brought wheat loads of camels to feed his tribe. This gave him the name of Hashim — the one who feeds. His greatest contribution to the Makkan economy was however securing *ilaf* or trade charters from the Roman and Iranian emperors as well as the Najashi of Abyssinia (present-day

Ethiopia) and the king of Yemen. Besides, he struck deals with the Arabian tribes of Mudar, Tay, Kalb, and Murrah to let the trade caravans pass unmolested if they carry the Quraysh permission. These measures not only brought prosperity to the Makkans but sharpened their negotiating skills and gave them a vantage over other nations that few others could have claimed. Perhaps, it was because of their trading links with Eastern Rome and Persia, and the gifts they often brought to these royal courts, that Makkah could become an oasis of freedom in an otherwise hostile international environment.

Hashim's death brought his son, 'Abdul-Muttalib, into the stream of history. A man of epic proportions, impressively built, and with a voice that summoned attention, he did not have to assert himself to be respected. Authority was natural to him, and so was loyalty which he obtained effortlessly.

Being a trader, he went often to places outside Makkah. Yemen, in those days, used to be an important commercial center. In one of his visits to that country, he came across an extremely aged man, well conversant with old tracts on occult, mysticism, and physiognomy. The man watched him with an intent gaze, his eyes pursuing his each movement. At last he said:

"May I probe a spot in your



body?"

Amazed by this unusual question, 'Abdul-Muttalib said, "I can't allow you to probe every part of my body."

"The spot I would like to probe will be your two nostrils," he was specific this time.

"If this is what you want, then do as you please."

The old Yemeni gave a close look to his nostrils and then said, "I see *nubuwwa* (prophethood), state, and governance [in your bloodline]. Of the two though, I see one coming from

❁ A traditional kitchen like this could be a survivor from the past.

Who's Muhammadaym in Song of Solomon

Muslim scholars claim that Song of Solomon 5: 10-16 is for Muhammad ('alayhi as-salam). Their argument is based on the Hebrew Bible in which the name "Muhammadaym" is used. The English Bible carries no such name. The rendition says "... he is altogether desirable."

In many places where a Hebrew word is not understandable (wonder why?), editors and biblical scholars have indicated in the footnote. For example, in 1976 edition of the Bible at page 584, the footnotes indicate at least four places where meaning of the Hebrew word is "uncertain." In deference to the text of the holy Bible the Hebrew word "Muhammadaym" should have been indicated at least in the footnote to let the readers know that such a proper noun exists. But for reasons best known to the translators, the English version fails to carry it. Worse, it makes an absurd attempt to translate it, that too wrongly.

Muslim scholars build up their

the tribe of Bani Zahra."

How did 'Abdul-Muttalib bear with the news of that magnitude is not known. But one of the first things he did on his return was to visit Wahb ibn 'Abd Manaf in the tribe of Zahra and asked for his daughter's hand. At the same time, as if not to take chance, he asked for his son 'Abdullah the hand of Wahb's other daughter, Āmina.²

'Abdul-Muttalib, though a polytheist, was a man of staunch belief. Fifty days before the Prophet Muhammad's birth, Abraha the Christian King of Yemen came to demolish the Ka'bah — the Abrahamic House of God — and is reported to have laid his hand on 'Abdu'l-Mattalib's herd of camels. The encounter between the two speaks of the man's character. He asked for the release of his camels which surprised Abraha, for he thought it was self-centered, especially at a time when calamity awaited the Makkans. But he was neither self-centered nor senseless. His reply was measured: "I am the owner of the camels, and the house has its Master who will defend it."³

Abraha ordered that his camels be returned to him. Having retrieved them, he wrapped their feet with leather. And after marking the camels for sacrifice, he left them in the Ka'bah on the assumption that whoever caught them would invite the wrath of the Haram's Master.⁴

Thereafter, along with others he went up to the summit of the Mount Hira' and began supplicating:

O Allah, a human looks
after his possessions,
You protect yours.
Their crosses and
their stratagem
cannot overwhelm
your power.
If You let them
devastate our tribe,
then You are the mighty.⁵

As he supplicated, swarms of swallows rose from the coastal areas of Hijaz and began heading toward the Ka'bah in Makkah. Each swallow, as a report says, carried three pieces of clay rock — two in claws and one in their beaks. They zeroed themselves on Abraha's army with a guided precision, impacting them to death. A subsequent flood swept the remains of the vanquished army into the Arabian sea.

Having seen the total annihilation of the Abraha's army, 'Abdul-Muttalib and his fellow tribesmen came down the Hira'. Two Abyssinians, who were privy to his earlier conversation with Abraha, kissed his head awestruck and said:

*"Anta kunta 'alam — Indeed,
you knew better."*⁶

Orphanage tempers him

Like others in the Quraysh, the Prophet Muhammad's father, 'Abdullah, also sought the pursuit of his elders. While returning from a trade trip, he fell sick, and died within days in the vicinity of

Yathrib (Madinah). His marriage to 'Āmina, a lady of great demeanor from the clan of Zahra, was thus shortlived. Muhammad ('alayhi as-salam) was born as an orphan. Little did anyone know at that point in time that these two events — his father's death at Madinah and his mother's kinship with the same city would have such a great bearing on his life and that within fifty-three years, Madinah would become the center of an unprecedented development in the course of human history.

Though born in a very distinguished family, he was still a poor child. His father died young and thus did not leave for him much. That is why when according to the ways of his times, he had to be sent to a bedouin family for the desert upbringing, he did not seem to be a first choice among the child-seeking families. Halima of Banu Sa'd reluctantly accepted him. Whether it was his face that tugged at her heart or the nobility of his parentage that softened her, it is difficult to surmise. Maybe it was both. Her husband, however, consoled his wife: "Perhaps God will bless us on his account."

She came to 'Āmina and took the child in her lap. Her shrunken breasts swelled with milk. Uptil now she could not even feed her own son. But with Muhammad in her lap both were plentifully supplied. Halima was not a naive person. The change in her physiology was so obvious that her whole being was filled with an unknown joy. When she narrated the instant changes she was experiencing, 'Āmina took her in confidence

↪ case in the following manner: “Muhammadaym” is the plural of Muhammad the Prophet of Islam. In the Hebranic culture when a person is accorded respect, he is addressed in plural. The importance of Muhammad (‘alayhi as-salam) in the divine scheme and the prophetic brotherhood is evident from the fact that a prophet of Solomon’s stature addresses him in the plural form. The usage has parallel in the Hebranic Elohim, which is the plural of the Eloha (Allah or God). The plural use of the noun Eloha as Elohim does not mean that the Jews were trinitarian - it is out of respect to Allah (Eloha).

As to the rest of the verse, the Prophet Muhammad’s personality, as described by his companions, should be of interest to note. In his appearance, his complexion was fair with a reddish hue; his hair were black with slight curl in them (see al-Tirmidhi). When he returned to Makkah, he was accompanied by 10,000 companions, distinct among them as he was always — his head was lowered in humility to his Lord, reciting the a’yahs from al-Fath.

and said: “O kind and noble nurse, take care of your child (Muhammad), for soon he would be of great distinction. I was told three nights consecutively [in my sleep] that I should first get him breast-fed in the tribe of Bani Sa’d ibn Bakr and later in the household of Abu Dhu’ayb.”⁷

Bewildering as the information was, Halima did not know how to react. Her face beamed. For the first time in her life, she felt dignified as the foster mother of a child who from all evidence so far was a favored one by the Providence. Pointing toward her own son, she said: “His father Abu Dhu’ayb is my husband.”

But what had now become a matter of joy and pride for Halima was a moment of separation for Āmina. Saying goodbye to him was a heavy event, even though it was a temporary separation. She let him go while her lips fluttered with prayers for him:

From all the ailments
of the body and
from the evils
that cross it,
I seek refuge in
Allah the Exalted
[for my son] ...⁸

Joyously Halima took him home. Her journey back home was full of wonders.

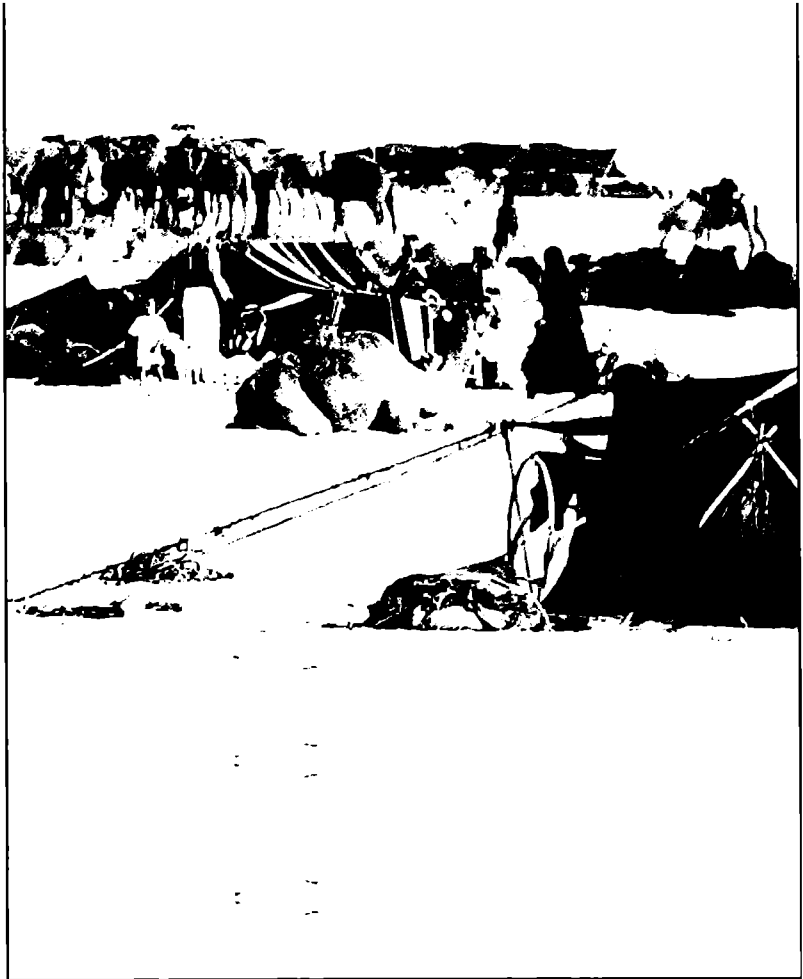
The mount, which never betrayed strength or swiftness, quickened its pace — leaving others behind. He seldom cried, always nursed himself on one breast. Halima’s goats

began giving more milk. The child's blessing were obvious. Her love for him increased. Halima's lullaby that she used to sing to him shows her love for him:

O Lord! Now that you
have given [me this child]
continue loving him ...
dignify him ... exalt him.
And save him from the
ill-designs of his enemies.⁹

His mother died when he was six years old. By then two women had left his life, his foster mother who delivered him back to his family and his mother who left him for good. 'Abdul-Mattalib, his grandfather, took him in his custody. They developed a fondness for each other. So much so that 'Abdul-Muttalib would not part his company.

When 'Abdul-Muttalib tended the arbitration and other civic responsibilities, some people would object to Muhammad's presence, and he would silence them by saying: "The child has a sense of self-importance: he considers himself an elder, and I am sure he would grow to be a great man." Perhaps it was this acute perception of 'Abdul-Muttalib about his grandson that when rain did not fall and famine broke out, he took him to the Ka'bah and while touching its walls, cried for rain invoking Allah's mercy in the name of Muhammad's noble character. What precisely made him do so is



rather difficult to say, though it did rain. This reinforced his belief in his grandson's uniqueness. But, that his son would grow to be a person of cosmological consequence, he never could have thought.

Years later Abu Talib, his uncle, while paying tribute to Muhammad would say:

That shining white
face whose lighted

☸ **The desert upbringing gave him a chaste language and courage to speak his mind. Orphanage endowed him with compassion, and living within an extended family gave him a sense of inter-dependence.**

looks were
invoked for rain
and who took care
of the orphans
and the widows.¹⁰

Their great relationship, however, did not last long either. Soon he was seen in the streets of Makkah, following the funeral of his grandfather and crying. The loss must have saddened him. This time the one who cheered him up was his uncle, Abu Talib.

**Jouf: the
city existed
in the Proph-
et's time**



Coming events cast their shadows

As a child he was of a milder disposition, communicative, and friendly. The desert upbringing gave him a chaste language and courage to speak his mind. Orphanage endowed him with compassion, and living with an extended family gave him a sense of interdependence. So much for the possible environmental influences on his person, though these could not have accounted for what he became in his

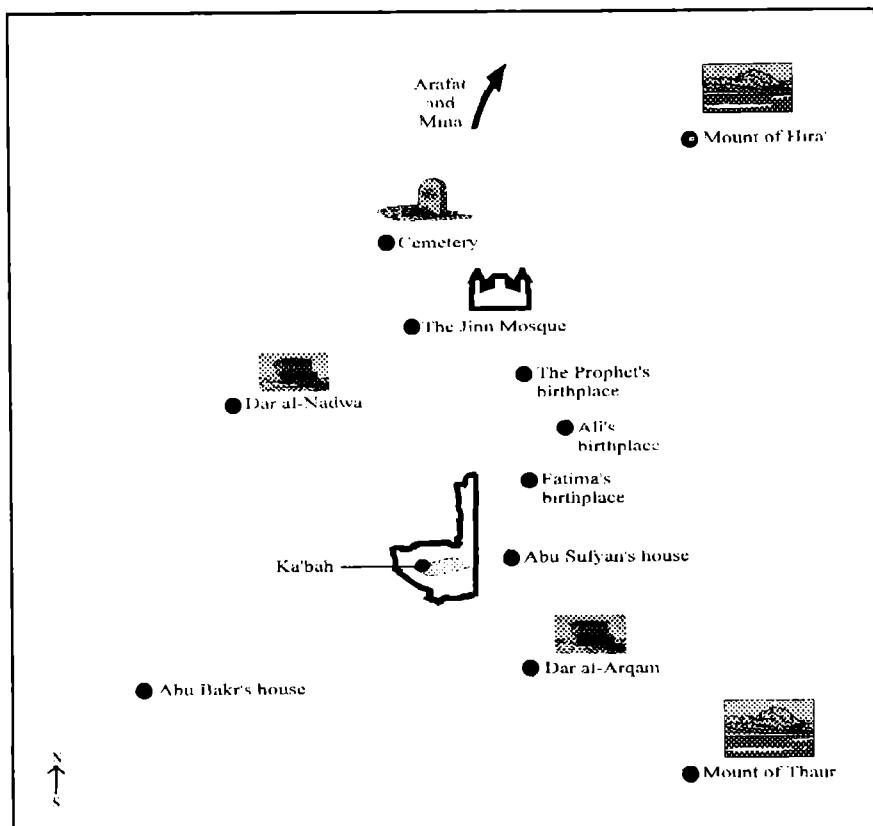
later life. In fact, he could not have been an ordinary child. When his foster mother came worried to Āmina, his real mother, and narrated her the incident of what is known as *shaqq al-sadr*: how his chest was opened by Gabriel,¹¹ she thanked her for all the care she was taking of him, and allayed her fears by telling her that when she bore him, she had a dream — a light emanated from her body and illuminated the palaces in Syria.¹²

Another incident which foreshadowed the future person of Muhammad Rasul Allah took place when his paternal aunts insisted on taking him to the festival of Buwana — an idol visited by the Quraysh. Reluctantly he entered the idol house and came out dazed. “When-

ever I came close to the idol," said he, "I was told by a very tall man with a beaming complexion: 'Muhammad stay away, don't touch it.'"¹³ His aunts never again insisted on taking him to such places.

From the beginning of his life, there seemed to be a hidden hand behind his upbringing, always making sure that he grows to be a moral person. In his early years, some construction work was going on in the Ka'bah; along with elders, children also carried bricks to the site. Seeing the bricks hurting his shoulder, his uncle 'Abbas suggested him to remove his loincloth and put it on his shoulder as a pad to alleviate his discomfort. This was not unusual in pre-Islamic Arabia. Children, even elders, did not mind undressing in public. When he tried following his uncle's suggestion, he fell unconscious, and was heard uttering "my dress, my dress..." People hurriedly covered him. His uncle Abu Talib hastened to the spot; he was told that the child had seen someone dressed in white who said, "Cover yourself." This was perhaps the first voice from the unknown heard by him.¹⁴

Even such harmless pursuits like story-telling, which was common in the Arabian society, were denied to him. People assembled at certain places where a story-teller would fabricate tales all night long. In his




childhood, he once thought of joining such a gathering. On his way, by chance, a marriage procession caught his attention and after a while he fell asleep. When he woke up, it was already dawn. An incident of similar nature occurred again, but sleep intruded.¹⁵

The Makkan map

Born in polytheism, yet not a single false God commanded his respect. The Ka'bah itself housed three hundred and sixty idols! His own tribe, the Quraysh, acted as their custodians. But he never prostrated before them, nor did he participate in heathen practices. Even the wrong Makkan customs could not obtain his

approval. To go along with tyranny was not his way.¹⁶

Before prophethood – youth is sharing responsibilities

 Muhammad (‘alayhi as-salam) did not grow up in a passive environment insular to issues. It was a passionate milieu which, depending on its perception, reacted to events and personalities with righteous indignation.

The Arab notoriety for long internecine wars before Islam owed more to this romanticism than anything else. The Fijar’s was one such war fought between the tribes of Quraysh and Qays-‘Aylan. The incident that triggered it related to the grant of protection by one Urwat ur-Rahhal to Nu‘man ibn Monzer’s trade caravan for passage through the ‘Ukaz Bazaar. The Quraysh, who held themselves superior to others, perhaps did not like the idea of ‘Urwa’s arbitrary act. When a chieftain named Barras questioned him on his decision, the former justified it as proper. “Would you grant them protection even against the Kinana?” asked Barras furiously. “Yes, even against the whole world!” he was told. Taking it as an affront, Barras killed him.

Obviously enraged, Qays-‘Aylan declared war against the Quraysh. So intense was their onslaught that the Quraysh had to flee to Makkah. The Qays component of Hawazin overtook them. By the evening, the Quraysh succeeded in disengaging themselves and straggled into the sacred

precincts of the Ka‘bah for sanctuary. In the morning, the fight picked up again. For several days, it continued with varying degree of intensity. How did it stop is not known. Maybe the warring tribes realized the futility of the fight and settled it by paying blood-money to the aggrieved party, or they were persuaded to forego the fight for it was being fought in the prohibitory months.

Muhammad was hardly twenty years old when the battle of Fijar took place. His participation remained limited to picking up arrows and giving them to his uncle Zubayr; but even this diminutive role in a meaningless fight that gravitated around the Quraysh arrogance and perpetrated injustice, the prohibitory months notwithstanding, he regretted often.¹⁷

These intermittent wars left a swath of death and destruction in their wake. The moral state of the Makkan society, though never satisfactory, had a further slide, and oppression became common. This disturbed many a noble soul who sought to restore some semblance of moral behavior among the people. What, however, shook them out of their passive thinking was an incident of injustice to a non-Makkan.

A man from the tribe of Zubayd brought some merchandise to the city and sold them to a Makkan chieftain, ‘Aas ibn Wa’il. When ‘Aas refused to compensate him for the sale, he went to the clans of ‘Abd al-Dar, Makhzum, Sahm, and ‘Adiy for help. But they all turned him

down. Obviously, 'Aas was preferred over justice to a stranger. In disappointment, he climbed the Mount of Abu Qubays and cried out to the clan of Fihir for justice. This prompted some sensitive individuals to think of some kind of a social contract to stanch oppression and dispense justice. The prominent among them was Muhammad's uncle Zubayr who gathered the clans of Hashim, al-Muttalib, Asad ibn 'Abd al-'Uzza, Zahra and Taim at the house of 'Abdullah ibn Jud'an, and there they pledged to help restore the right of the deprived. Together, they went to 'Aas and made him return the goods to the man.

The elders also arrived at an agreement in the following words:

We will join in unity to become one hand which, together with the oppressed, will raise itself against the oppressor until he restores [the former's] right. And this will continue as long as the sea goes on watering the oysters and the Mounts of Hira' and Shabbir hold on to their places, and our socio-economy is reposed on equality (and fairplay).¹⁸

In practical terms, it meant that peace shall be established; travelers shall be protected; the poor shall be aided; the aggrieved shall be supported; and usurpers of other's rights shall not be allowed to stay in Makkah.

This agreement, which was in fact a repeat of the one in practice

during the Jurham era before Qusayy took over Makkah, derived its name from *fadl* (blessing or beneficence)¹⁹. In the broader sense, it meant blessing that comes from giving rights to others. Muhammad ('alayhi as-salam) subscribed to this agreement, and in later life, he often cherished his participation in it. Once he reminisced: "I would not have bartered this agreement even for red camels. Propose an agreement like that, and I shall subscribe to it even now."²⁰

The bearing of the coming prophet



uhammad ('alayhi as-salam) grew up to be a very impressive young man. He was well built, neither very tall nor short; though when he stood among others, he appeared to be conspicuous in his height. His visage struck balance between an oblong and a round face. His complexion was fair with a reddish hue. Head prominent with thick, slightly curled hair. Eyes beautiful and wide carrying slightly red strains, with long lashes. His bone structure conveyed strength and his stately bearing evoked respect bordering on awe. Intimacy with him bred love and devotion, which even the worst of circumstances would not take away from his followers.

By the age of twenty-five he was a well-known man. His family adored him for they knew his essence, his tribe admired him for his great demeanor, disarming manners, and the excellence of his morals. Finan-

cially he was still in the formative years, struggling to establish himself. His uncle, much that he loved him, could not help him either. With income that often oscillated between plenty and subsistence, he was hard pressed to support his large family. Like others, he knew his nephew's assets and wished he could get a break that might launch him in life.

Said he: "O son of my brother, I am not a rich man. Our finances have diminished [to the extent] that we don't have even the merchandise to trade with. The trade caravan ... to Syria is about to take off. Khadija is also thinking of sending her merchandise through some hired hands. If you go to her, she would give you preference over others because she knows about your uprightness."

Said Muhammad ('alayhi as-salam): "Could it be that she herself asks for me?"

"I am afraid that she might appoint someone else," said Abu Talib.

Most probably their conversation was reported to her because on the subsequent day, she proposed the deal to him, which he gladly accepted.

Khadija was a woman of forbidding social and financial standing. Twice widowed, in her late thirties, with three children, she was a woman of exceptional business acumen, beautiful and above all of impeccable character. People called her *at-Tahira* (the pure). Of her wealth, it is said that sometime it would constitute more than half of the Makkan trade caravan. A distant cousin, she had a sigh of relief when he agreed

to be on her staff. The arrangement served both of them well: he got the break with a business woman of her caliber, and she got in him a person whose wisdom and tenability were well known. From all counts, it was a winning combination.

As a shrewd person who perhaps wanted to have a tight supervision, she commissioned her slave Maysera to the contingent. As they slogged toward Syria, Maysera felt himself drawn toward Muhammad ('alayhi as-salam). Always calm and smiling, to Maysera's surprise, nothing could wrinkle him. His speech was marked by economy of expression, succinct and to the point. Caravans by the nature of their enterprise create a strong bond between their members. This particular caravan was not different. During the journey he was hemmed in by people, interacting with them, nevertheless maintaining a dignified aloofness. Seldom demanding or authoritative, he suffered from none of the complexes associated with his age. For Maysera, it was a very pleasant journey.

Still, what struck him most was his conversation with a trader in Busra. The man wanted to draw him into a hassle over the price, which he thought was rather high. But he politely disagreed. When the man asked him to swear by al-Lat and al-'Uzza, he refused. "I never swear by them," he said. This obviously intrigued Maysera. His master was a study in contrast. Unlike other traders, who swore every now and then to make deals, he stood by his word backed by the sheer weight of his own character and charisma.



Syria was predominantly Christian, loaded with Christian lore and fables. Maysera knew about Christianity. If Muhammad was not a polytheist unlike the Quraysh, what was he — a Christian or a Jew?

Nevertheless, he liked him for his probity and the courage to decanonize al-Lat and al-'Uzza as deities. Maysera was though scared for him

lest he incurred the displeasure of the gods.

Far from any “divine” displeasure, Muhammad (‘alayhi as-salam) made great bargains. Khadija’s turnover this time was twofold. She was immensely impressed by his performance. Maysera’s account of Muhammad and his experience with him further endeared him to her. The more

✻ A typical trade caravan

she thought about him the more she liked him. She had a number of marriage proposals from some of the best in Makkah. What if Muhammad comes in her life, she must have mused because in the next few days she sent Nufaysa bint Munya to him to find out if he would be interested in marrying her.

“O Muhammad,” said Nufaysa, “why don’t you get married?”

“What? Do I have to marry [someone]?” he said plain and simple.

“That has been arranged,” said she. “I know of a person who is beautiful and rich, who carries character as well as brain. Would you agree to such a proposition?”

“And who is she?”
“Khadija.”

“How can I marry her?” bewildered he asked.

“You leave that to me,” said Nufaysa.²¹

Soon they were married. Their parents dead, both were represented by their uncles. She gave him six children, two boys and four daughters. To him, Khadija was the epitome of everything best in a woman. Besides being beautiful, she had commitment, compassion, intelligence and an unmatched generosity that knew no constraints. He in return loved her with all the intensity

of a man’s soul.

Their business grew rapidly under his management. From a big business it turned into a major business enterprise. That this boosted Muhammad’s social standing was obvious. Gradually, he escalated into a major figure, respected for his sound judgment and integrity.²²

Zayd ibn Haritha’s case demonstrates his uncanny ability to make his way to others’ heart. Zayd, who came from the tribe of Kalb, became a slave at the age of eight. He was captured while going to his grandparents’ home with his mother and later sold in the ‘Ukaz fair. Incidentally, the man who purchased him was Hakim ibn Hazzam, Khadija’s nephew. He gifted Zayd to her. When Muhammad (‘alayhi as-salam) married Khadija, he took the boy in his personal custody.

After seven-year search, Zayd’s parents eventually succeeded in tracing him down to Makkah. They met Muhammad and requested for Zayd’s release against ransom. He refused the ransom offer and said he would let the boy go free if he so desired. His father and uncle were pleased with Muhammad’s proposal for it made things easy. Zayd was called in.

“Do you recognize these two people?” asked Muhammad.


“Yes, I do, this is my father, and that is my uncle,” said Zayd.

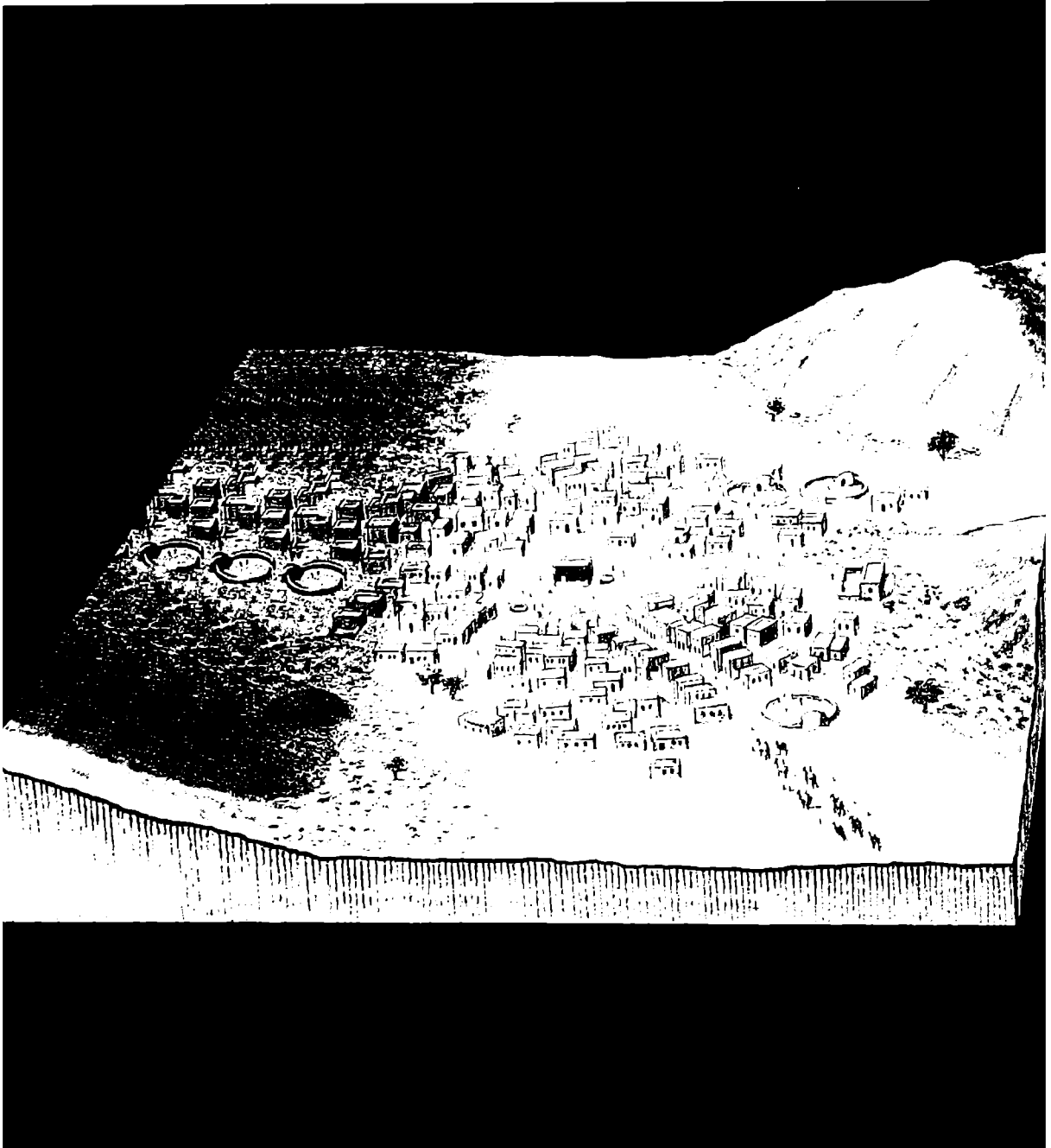
“You know me as well as them.

You are free to decide. If you want, you can go with them or you can stay with me," suggested Muhammad ('alayhi as-salam).

"I won't go with anyone!" he said.

Such a "non-sonly" response to

 The visualized Ka'bah: The Quraysh era



their paternal longing broke his father's heart. Seven years of search had gone waste in what appeared to be a moment of confused loyalties.

Said his father indignantly: [Are you telling us] "that you prefer slavery over freedom, others over your own parents and relations?"

Heart wrenching as the adjuration was, Zayd stuck to his stance. Pointing toward Muhammad ('alayhi as-salam) he said, "I have witnessed in him such great qualities that everyone else pales before him."²³

That his joy over finding his son would be so evanescent, Haritha never could have imagined. On the positive side, his son was a grown-up adult, healthy, and above all happy. The man he lived with was seemingly upright and certainly by far the most impressive he had come across in his life.

Moved by Zayd's love for him, Muhammad took him to the Ka'bah and there in front of the people he declared him to be his son.

Construction of the Ka'bah

The Ka'bah, according to a prophetic tradition, was the first house of God built by Adam and Eve. The city of Makkah, which obviously grew later around the Ka'bah, derived its name and significance from it. The second-century Greek astronomer Ptolemy called it Macroba, deriving the name perhaps from *mikrab* — that is, temple. The Ka'bah as such was known and at least according to Ptolemy, even the

city got its name from it.²⁴ The Bible refers to it as Baca (Psalm 84: 4-6), and the Qur'an also mentions the same name.²⁵

The Ka'bah was rebuilt by the Prophet Ibrahim to worship God, but when the true religious tradition degenerated, like everything else, it also fell under heathen practices: the Ka'bah assumed astral symbolism devoted to the sun, the moon, and the fire planets. A man named 'Amr ibn Luhayy brought idols from Syria and put them over there. Gradually, their number increased to 360, placed around the Ka'bah and pointing to astral directions.

In the youthful days of Muhammad ('alayhi as-salam), the Ka'bah had a cubicle configuration — four walls, without a roof. The walls, hardly higher than the height of an average man, were made up of rocks, with no cementing material in between to hold them together.

So great has been the reverence for the Ka'bah that in the entire history of its existence, it has been treated like a beggar would hold a precious gem in his possession. This was obvious from the Makkans' attitude who never built a house higher than the Ka'bah. People lived around it in tents, which defined Makkah as a tent city. The building was not even on an elevation — it was in a basin surrounded by low-altitude hills. A protective dam was built near it to divert rain water, but heavy rains often flooded the Ka'bah, eventually damaging it. Serious as it was, the different tribes converged and decided to rebuild it.

But revered as it was, the preconstruction demolition of the Ka'bah became a problem. People, scared of incurring God's wrath, would not dare demolish it. Al-Walid ibn al-Mughira, who was never short on brain, took the pick in his hand and said: "O Allah, we haven't deviated from your religion. We seek nothing but your favor."²⁶ Then in the full glare of the people watching him, he hit the structure short of knocking it down — just enough to take a rock out. If something happened to him, people said, they would put the rock back in the cavity. On the contrary, if nothing happened to him, they would take it as a signal to continue with the job. In the morning when al-Walid came out unhurt, free from divine retribution, they divided the work among the tribes and began demolishing the Ka'bah until they reached the foundations. There they stopped. The one who put the first rock back to raise the wall was Wahb ibn 'Amr, who while doing it cautioned the people: "O people of the Quraysh, spend on its construction from your rightful earnings; make sure that your contribution is not soiled by income from prostitution, usury, or that which has been secured from usurpation of somebody's right."²⁷ The entire Quraysh joined hands in the new construction, with each tribe assigned a part to complete; but the placing of the black stone turned into an issue of alarming proportions. Everyone wanted to earn the sole distinction of restoring it to its previous position. Tempers ran high, swords were drawn, and for four days a highly explosive

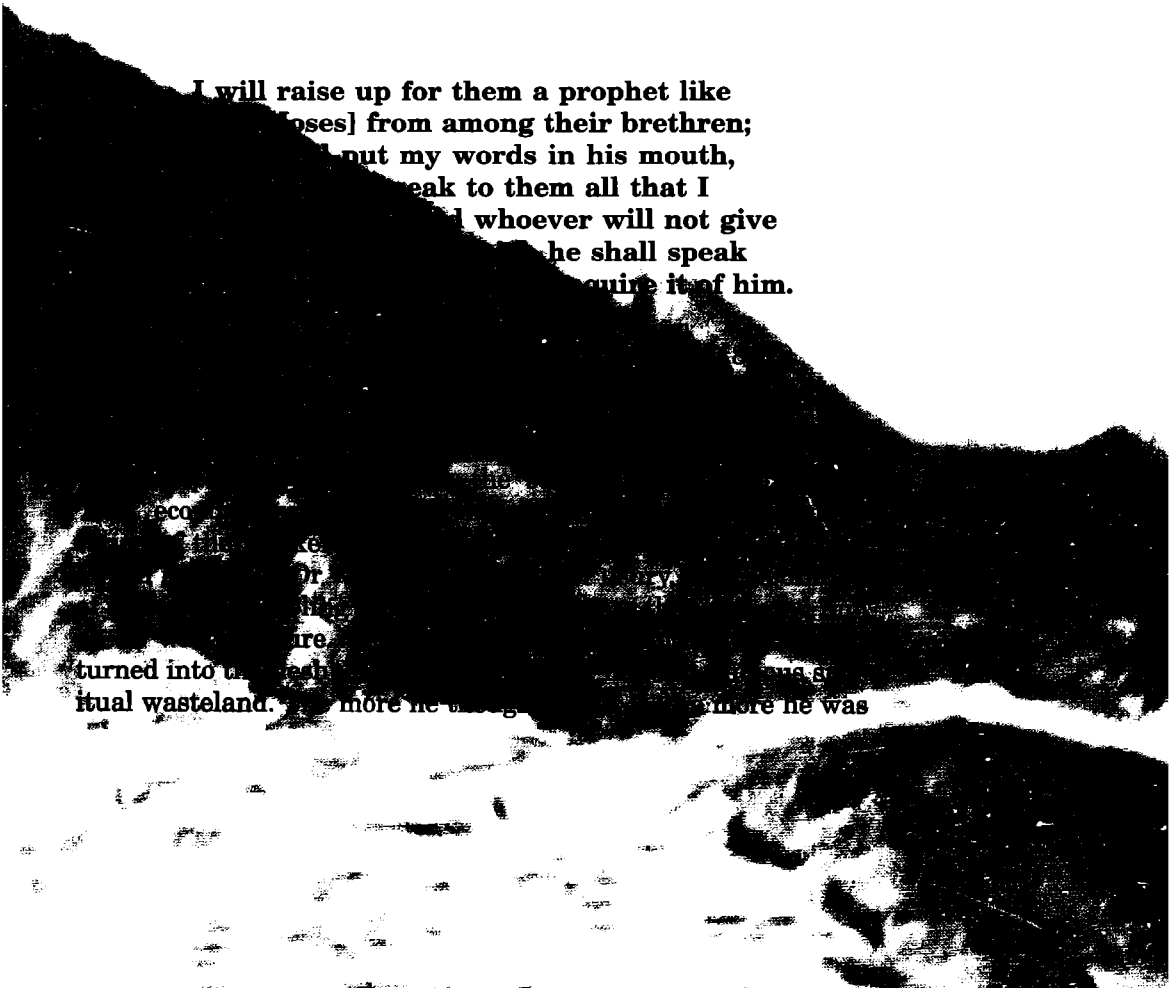
situation prevailed. On the fifth day, Abu Umayya ibn al-Mughira, an elder of the Quraysh, proposed that the issue should be resolved the following day by the person who comes first in the morning. They all agreed. As it happened, the next morning Muhammad ('alayhi as-salam) was the first one to have entered the Ka'bah.²⁸ Reading the sense of loss on their faces, he asked for a cloak, which he spread on the ground. He placed the black stone inside the cloak, and asked the chiefs of the contending tribes to hold it and lift the stone. Then, taking the black stone in his hands, he restored it to its old place.²⁹ Thanks to his problem-solving ability and more so to his unselfishness that had a natural dislike for basking alone in the glory of the moment, a war so imminent was thus averted. The new edifice now had a roof on it. Since the construction material was not enough, a part of the newly laid foundation was left uncovered. The open area is now called hatim.



◆ **The Hira' cave:
the scene of the
revelational descent**

The Moment Of Reckoning:

THE CALL COMES



I will raise up for them a prophet like
[Moses] from among their brethren;
I will put my words in his mouth,
and he shall speak to them all that I
command him. And whoever will not give
heed to my words that he shall speak
I will require it of him.

turned into a spiritual wasteland. The more he thought, the more he was

Muhammad is like Moses

This is one of the clearest prophecy in the Bible that foretells the coming of Muhammad Rasul Allah. It can also be attributed to the divine source because the use of the pronoun "I" is authoritative and takes the narrator as well as the scribe out. God is Himself directly addressing Moses (upon him be peace).

Again, as has been the case with such prophecies, both Christians and Muslims claim it in their favor. Christians relate the prophecy to Jesus (upon him be peace). Their argument is as follows:

- ☞ Jesus was born in the Israelis. Thus, he is "from among their brethren."
- ☞ The Gospel of John (5: 46) supports it for Jesus is reported to have said that Moses himself wrote the prophecy in his favor. The full quote reads:

If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me.

Muslims scholars reject the Christian claim on the following grounds:

- ☞ The biblical expression "from among their brethren" excludes the Israelis for it refers to Ishmaelites who are brethren of the Israelis.
- ☞ To validate the Christian claim, the biblical expression should have been "from among you" or "from among the Israelis."
- ☞ Similar expressions are found in the Bible. For example, Genesis 16: 12 which says about Ish'mael that "he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen."
- ☞ Jesus cannot be like Moses for he had a miraculous birth from a virgin.
- ☞ Jesus did not lead his people to war nor had he exodus or success like Moses.
- ☞ Unlike Moses, Jesus had an unnatural death.



convinced that it had to do something with idol worshiping, that the Makkans' bad ways were only surface manifestation of a deeper condition. Artificial gods, dumb and mute as they were, how could they provide a meaningful hold on those who themselves created them¹ began to provoke his thoughts. The Arabian gods never interested him, even while he was young; and now that he was entering the prime years of his life, the moral and spiritual decline of the Arabian society became his principal concern. How did his people take to idolatry? How could they be weaned from this corruption of the soul? How to make them realize the folly of their enterprise and guide them to the true concept of divine worship? Innumerable questions of this nature tolled through his mind and he pondered them for hours at times. Worried and thus withdrawn from the processes of life, he almost became a recluse.²

Three miles away from the city of Makkah, the cave of Hira' became his retreat.³ There, forlorn and far from the clatter of life, which to him anyhow made little sense, he would climb the mountain and lose himself into its solitude — stepping out of it only to visit

his family. Of all the persons, his wife understood the turbulence of his soul most. Wise and loving as she was, she knew that alienation in humans, especially when one tries to make sense out of one's existence, cannot be cured by nagging or making complaints of neglect. She respected his aloofness but made sure that he had enough food to eat.

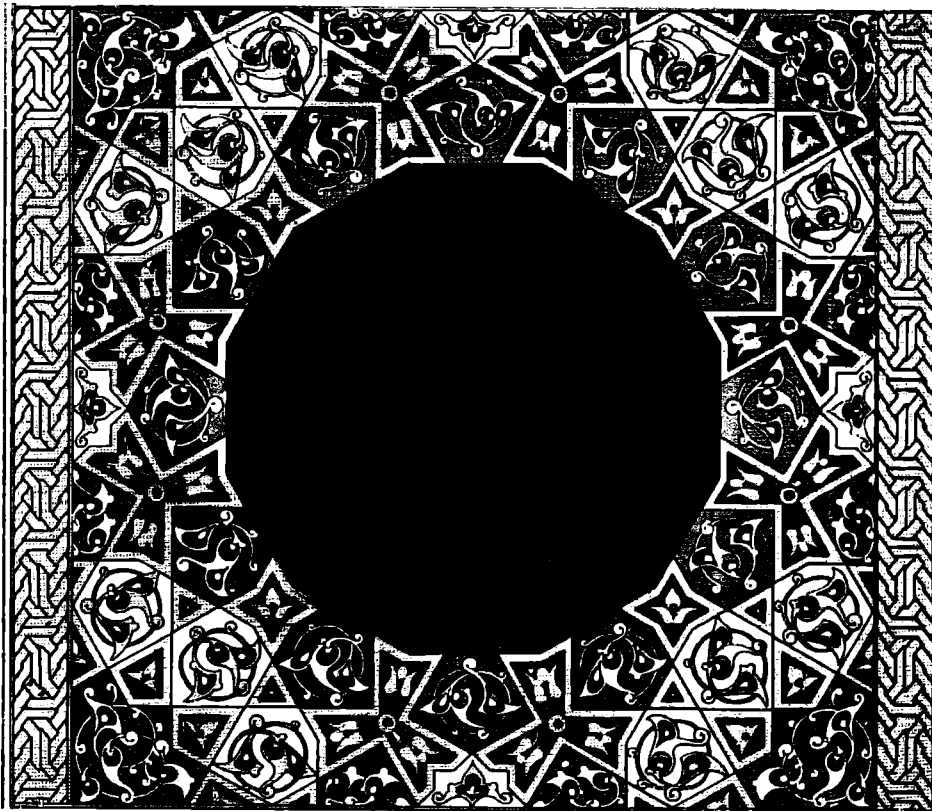
At the same time, his dreams became more vivid and meaningful. Whatever he dreamed at night, later events bore them out.⁴ This was something new in his life — why was it happening now, he had no sensible answer to that. It did, however, give him this feeling that he was different from others, that there

is an impending change in his life. What it would be like and what consequences it would have for him, he again had no idea.

The revelation descends

It was the month of Ramadan — he was in prayers as usual when suddenly the cave was filled with the majestic presence of the Holy Spirit — angel Jibra'il (Biblical Gabriel).⁵ Stricken with fear, he looked helplessly toward the angel. That was the sight he least expected.

◆ The first revelation





- Moses gave law to his people, while Jesus followed the Mosaic law.
- The Christian insistence on applying Deuteronomy 18: 18-2 to Jesus will compromise his godhood because unlike Moses, he claimed, at least in the Christian perception, that he was a son of God, one of the three.

On the contrary, Muslim scholars say that Muhammad Rasul Allah has all the attributes of a prophet like Moses.

The Qur'an itself speaks of it, supporting the biblical prophecy:

For indeed we sent you messenger who will be a witness against you — the way we sent an apostle to the Pharaoh.

(al-Muzammil: 15)

Muslim scholars also build up their case on Peter's speech in Acts 3: 18-22 which, they say, differentiates between Jesus and Muhammad (upon them be peace).

For example, says Peter: "But what God ... foretold that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled" and "whom heaven must receive until the time of establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old."

Having said that, Peter now talks of Moses who prophesied: "The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet from your brethren as he raised me up. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you."

Here two separate events are being said by Peter. The Christ has been raised up to heaven, he would stay there until everything is established "that God spoke ..." Second, "God will raise up for you a prophet from your brethren ..." In Peter's perception this is a post-resurrection event happening between the Moses' death and the second coming of Jesus.

History proves that after Moses and Jesus, there is no other prophet who could have been described "like Moses" influencing the course of events as Muhammad Rasul Allah has.

He blinked his eyes — it was real. For a while, they must have eyed each other: Muhammad perhaps timidly — his eyes hardly able to overcome the glare, the angel resolutely as if his eyes could hold the whole of existence. The few moments turned into eternity. He felt as if it was the end of his life. Then a voice, as if it was coming from the bowl of the universe, struck his ears. The moment of reckoning had arrived. His Creator had chosen him to be the blessed recipient of the last divine revelation.⁶

Still dazed by the mystique of the event, he tried to make sense of the whole phenomenon when he was suddenly commanded: "Read!" Astounded, he stammered, "I am not of those who can read." He did not even know if his words reached the angel when the latter took him into his arms and pressed him against his body and bid him: "Read!" Muhammad repeated his inability. The Holy Spirit took him again into his arms and commanded:⁷

Read: (O Muhammad)
in the name of your
Lord,
Who created man
out of a clot
(of congealed blood).

Read and your Lord
is the most gracious
Who taught by the pen,
taught man that
which he knew not!⁸

This was the first revelation. For a while, his inability to read had gone. But so unusual was the experience that his whole frame shook with fear. The Gabriel's embracing of Muhammad was perhaps an act of initiation into *nubuwwa* (prophethood). The fusion of the two — the one best among the angels, the other the best of the humans — was to prime him for the difficult task of prophethood by charging his faculties and strengthening his body. Still heaving, his eyes widely open, he slumped to the floor. The angel was gone. His body was numb with cold. He had lost his courage — the cave was not safe any more. He pulled himself out of the cave. How did he make it to his home, he did not know. The first thing he asked his bewildered wife was to cover him with a blanket.⁹

When he felt peace, he narrated the whole incident. "*Laqad khashitu 'ala nafsi* — Verily, I fear for myself," he expressed his apprehension. Khadija calmed him down. "O my cousin, be steadfast, and be of good cheer," said she. "By Him in whose Hand is Khadija's soul I hope you become a prophet of this nation. By God, God will never let you down. You are kind to the kin. You are truthful in your word, you come to the help of the poor and the needy, you extend hospitality to travelers and support the afflicted." Then, she

went to see Waraqa ibn Nufl, a distant cousin and an old pious Christian, well conversant with the Torah. Khadija told him of the whole incident.¹⁰

"Quds, *Quds* (great, great)," exclaimed Waraqa, "O Khadija, it is a very good news! Certainly, by Him in whose hand is Waraqa's soul, if what you have related to me is true, there has, after all, come unto him the same great spirit who came to Moses. Certainly, he is the prophet of this people. Congratulate him, let him now be steadfast."¹¹

For Khadija, this was a great news — to be witness to the prophetic experience was not only a blessing but something new in her life. Happily she returned to Muhammad and divulged Waraqa's interpretation of the latest events in his life.

Perhaps it was to comfort himself that he went to the Ka'bah. Waraqa chanced to see him there and asked him to give him the complete account of the revelatory experience. When Muhammad finished, Waraqa kissed his forehead and said: "Assuredly, you are the chosen of Allah. ... But people will defy you. They will mistreat you, they will exile you, and they will fight against you. If I live to see the day, I will surely try my best to help, as God would desire of me."¹²

The thought of being driven out by his own people made little sense to him of all the things! He could not believe it! "What? Will they expel me?" he asked. "Yes," Waraqa responded. "For no man has ever brought what you have without

being opposed and then forgotten by his people. This has always been so."¹³ Waraqa died within a few days.

Certitude replaces uncertainty

The trauma of the first revelation was still there and so was the uncertainty about the future. In just one encounter, Muhammad ('alayhi as-salam) had a glimpse of the Ultimate Reality: His Creator had spoken to him through Angel Gabriel, but how he should worship his Lord, he still did not know — even though his soul had yielded to His supremacy and glory. He tried to sleep but it was a hopeless exercise. Never had the night weighed on him so heavily. Early in the morning he stepped

out of his home. What was the precise time is not known. But it was in the lower basin of Makkah when Gabriel met him in human form. Splendidly beautiful and uniquely perfumed, he delivered him greetings from Allah the Most High and gave him the glad tidings of his appointment as God's messenger. From then on, his thrust into the limelight of history was assured forever. Allah the Exalted had chosen him. He was conferring on him the greatest of all honors. Gabriel hit the ground with his heel and the water sprung up like a fountain. Now was the time to teach the new messenger how to make *wudu* (ablution) as a preliminary to *salah* (prayer).¹⁴ Together they prayed two *rak'a* (units) with four *sajjud* (prostrations). With this formal initiation into *salah*, the Prophet was ready to embark upon his mission. He disclosed the great happening to his wife. This was the

◇ The
cave: inside
view



confirmation of what Waraqa had told him the day before. Overjoyed on his exaltation, Khadija almost fainted. The Prophet taught her ablution and then together they prayed.

Although the Prophet continued visiting the cave, it was quite some

time, no other message came; then, the prologue to al-Muddaththir was revealed:

O you the one
wrapped, arise
and warn
(to His Words).



time before Gabriel appeared again. The interim, however, had a wholesome effect — the initial reaction of fear, normal for human beings, was lessened by now: he felt inclined to the reception of revelation.

For some time after the revela-

And glorify
your Lord.
And purify your
garments and stay
away from filth.
and show not favor,
seeking wordly gain.

◆ **Makkah
during the
Prophet's days**

For the sake
of your Lord,
be patient.¹⁵

For its eloquence as well as economy of expression, this was a unique message; it not only gave the call but also the method to carry it out.

First, the recipient of the divine message is not a hermit who lives the existence of a cave dweller — his is a radical response to the polytheistic conditions in society. It is not the idols, the cults, and man-made systems which are to be glorified because they all lead humankind to an exploitative social order; instead, the creation must identify with the Creator so that it could come out of the darkness and thus grow to its full spiritual and intellectual potential.

Second, the revelation spelled out the methodology of *da'wah* (call): that is, a caller must not be at the receiving end; instead, he should be a giver: both in message and charitable disposition. The call should not be at the abstract level alone, a *da'wah* without compassion: it should be expressed through service without expecting anything in recompense.

Third, the revelation primed him for the coming events: A caller cannot avoid confrontation. If the call is clear, elemental, and sustained, then it is bound to invite persecution. The bearers of falsehood will invoke the gods of greed, race, conventionality, and ancestry to fight the worship of a single true God. In such an eventuality, surrender is the

death of the call; perseverance in the face of the persecution would help endure the message and that must be done — no matter how great the cost. He was asked to keep his person and body clean in order to correspond with his purified heart that has experienced the glory of the revelation, and to offer prayers so that he could be strengthened for the task ahead.

The first revelation assigned the mission; now came the formal command to rise and show to the strayed humanity the path leading to real success.

From then on a new phase commenced in the Prophet's life. He had found the light and he would not let others to grope in the darkness. The time had come to change the world forever.

The *wahy* unfolds itself

Prophethood assigned, Muhammad's first concern was now to select those people who could be invited to Islam. As a whole, the society appeared to be hostile to any concept contrary to its bohemian temperament. To present Islam in such a milieu was an uphill task. Muhammad ('alayhi as-salam) obviously had to bank upon his inner circle of relatives and friends who had directly dealt with him and knew about his integrity. Among these the closest were his wife Khadija, his cousin 'Ali, his adopted son Zayd. They accepted the new faith in secrecy without any reservation. But no matter how restricted a

plan is, it can spread even by osmosis.

Still dazed by her husband's sudden thrust into prophethood, perhaps Khadija wanted to share the knowledge; or more so, she was keen to spread the message that she confided the news to a slave girl belonging to her nephew, Hakim ibn Hizzam.

The following day, Hakim was entertaining Abu Bakr at his home when the slave-girl, perhaps still taking Khadija's word as incredulous, said: "[Did you hear that] your aunt says her husband is a prophet like Moses!" The information, but for Muhammad's personality and the fact that it emanated from his aunt, would have amused the two. Khadija, as Hakim knew her, was not an ordinary woman, least of all gullible to accept such an incredible story. And as far as Abu Bakr was concerned, the claimant to prophethood was a close friend of his. They had grown up together, like peas in a pod. How could he have taken it lightly? Leaving Hakim to his self, he darted toward the Prophet's home.¹⁶ As he quickened his pace, his mind was busy with details of their life together. Muhammad the friend is now Muhammad the prophet. The title sounded pleasant to his friend's name. But did he qualify to be one? A complex question! Nevertheless, Abu Bakr had no problem with that. Muhammad's integrity, the beauty of his manners, the charisma of his person, the charity of his disposition, and above all that unusual aura, that something unintelligible about him which

helped him through difficult situations, percolated through his mind. "Yes, he could be the promised one!" Abu Bakr suffered from no smog while thinking, his declaration was loud and clear.

Witnessing prophethood

He knocked at the door and waited. His heart beat itself rather heavily against his ribs. The door opened and he saw Muhammad ('alayhi as-salam) standing before him. The same old face with that eternal innocence, the same informality as if nothing had happened to him and their friendship. Still, there was something new to his person. The eyes did not bear the old twinkle. Abu Bakr fixed his gaze on him. Their eyes met again, and for once he saw strains of anguish in them, as if laden with responsibility, the fear of the unknown. "Is that true?" he asked. As if this is all he cared to know. The Prophet extended his hand, and he lurched forward to grasp it pledging fealty to the new faith.¹⁷

As a result of his efforts, only four persons had embraced Islam so far. Obviously, it was a long way to go. The change in his person was nevertheless profound. His ideas had become clearer and his speech succinct, to the point. When the news spread about his claim to prophethood, 'Amr ibn 'Abasa came to see him. He wanted to feel for himself the transformation Muhammad Rasul Allah had undergone since then. He was inquisitive and

the Prophet was direct, at his eloquent best:

“O Muhammad, who are with you in this (sacred) mission?” asked ‘Amr ibn ‘Abasa.

“A freeman and a slave,” said the Prophet.

“What is Islam?”

“Pleasant talk and feeding (the poor).”

“What is *iman* (faith)?”

“Endurance and benevolence.”

“Which Islam is excellent?”

“One which safeguards a Muslim against aggression of his tongue and hand.”

“Which faith is excellent?”

“Amiable disposition”

“Which prayer is excellent?”

“Standing for a long time in humility (and devotion).”

“Which emigration is excellent?”

“One by which you abandon that which your Lord dislikes.”

“Which *jihad* (fighting in the way of Allah) is excellent?”

“In which one gets one’s steed wounded and his blood is shed.”


“Which hour is most excellent?”

“The retiring end of the darkest part of the night.”¹⁸

‘Abasa knew him even before his claim to prophethood. He sounded real and concerned. ‘Abasa was tantalized by his message and felt inclined to share his vision of the world. What should he do to become Muslim? he wanted to know. But the Prophet did not like the idea of

jeopardizing his life in the inhospitable climate of Makkah. “Go back to your people and wait until Islam becomes strong,”¹⁹ he told him.

Brotherhood grows

 n Abu Bakr’s invitation, ‘Uthman ibn Ghafan, Zubayr ibn ‘Awwam, ‘Abdur-Rahman ibn ‘Auf, Sa’d ibn abi-Waqqas, and Talhah followed suit. With the seed sown, germination was only a matter of time; the Muslim brotherhood began to grow. The Qur’anic revelations during this period were comprised of small verses, beautiful in diction and sweeping in impact, redolent of the initial phase of the movement. For example:

When the sky is split asunder,
And the stars dispersed,
when the oceans begin to flow,
and the graves are overturned,
each soul will know what
it had sent ahead, and
what it had left behind.
O man, what seduced
you from your munificent Lord
Who created you, then
formed your symmetry,
then gave you right
proportion, shaping
you into any form He
pleased?
Even then you deny
the judgment.
Surely there are
guardians over you,
illustrious scribes
who know what you do.²⁰

The Makkan verses, as such, delineated the realities of *tauhid*²¹ (monotheism) and the hereafter,²² supported by irresistible arguments drawn from everyday life, history, and traditions²³. Nothing was far-fetched or irrelevant. Consequently, whoever heard these divine messages felt the impact. Muhammad was the sole harbinger of the message; but assisted as he was with the potency of the revelation, the votaries of Islam were imperceptibly increasing. The revelation did not dwell only on tauhid and the life after death; it also imparted training to him in preparation for the execution of the gigantic task assigned to him.²⁴


The revelational descent though took place in time; but by its nature, it was extraterrestrial because both the source and the medium were unique. Overpowered by the experience and the importance of the revelatory message, he would hasten to memorize it lest he forgets and fails to transmit it to the people. Assuring him of its permanence in his memory, he was comforted:

Do not forestall
(the revelation) by moving
your tongue. Surely
its collection and
recitation are
Our responsibility.
So, as We recite it,
follow its reading.
The exposition of its
meaning surely
rests on Us.²⁵

T O T H E M T H E Y W E R E A N U M M A H

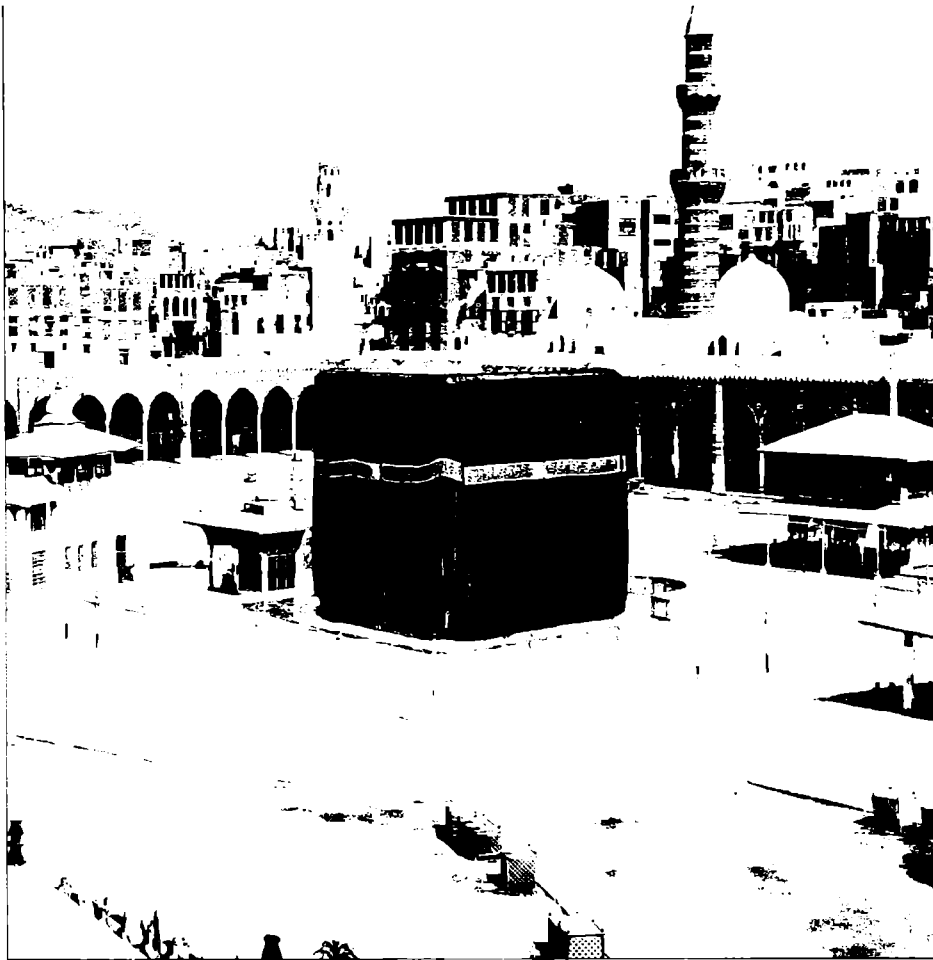
As to one who regards
himself as self-sufficient,
to him you attend;
though it is no blame
on you if he grows not
(in spiritual understanding).
But as to him who came
to you striving earnestly,
and with fear
(in his heart)
to him you were unmindful.

(‘Abasa: 5-10)

hat precisely prompted Muhammad Rasul Allah to move himself and the small number of Muslims to the house of Arqam is not known. Perhaps Makkah by then had become so volatile in its spite toward the new nation of Islam that an atomized existence among the *kuffar* (disbelievers) was now too risky. Together, at least, they could have defended themselves. Besides, it was important that they should come together and lend

support to each other at a time when they were splintering from their blood ties. Dar al-Arqam, in a way, was an experiment in communal living, to shape a new social consciousness for the world of Islam. The immediate cause was, however, an incident that took place at the outskirts of Makkah.

They had trickled into a gulch and had hardly begun to pray when they were seen by a group of Makkans. Bewildered, they watched them. So

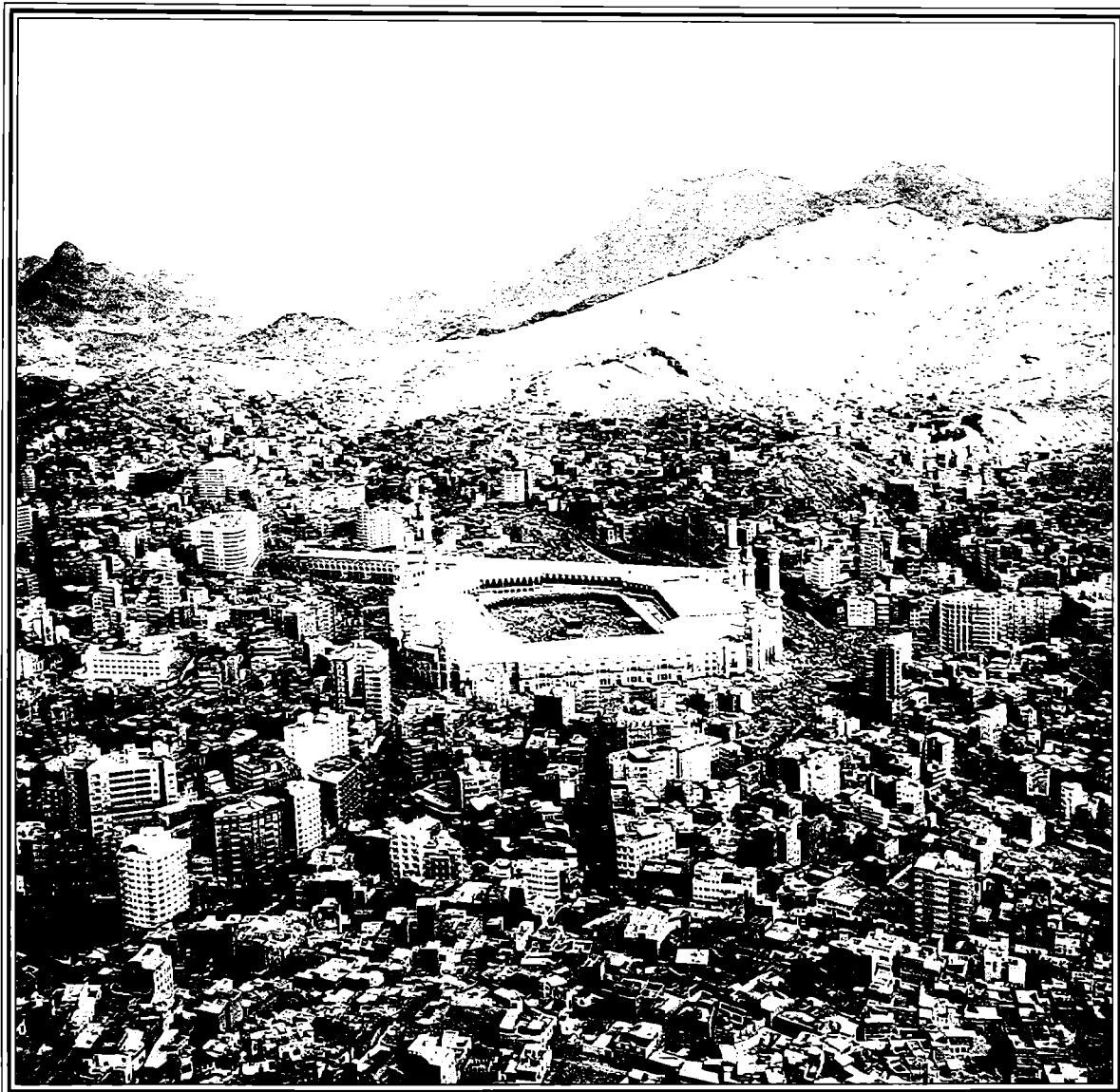


far it was just a call, which they were trying to understand in terms of its implications — a schism which they thought might resolve itself in course of time; but their worship was bizarre, every inch a shocking aberration. They ridiculed and cursed them. Annoying as the Makkans' attitude was, Sa'd ibn abi-Waqqas who was leading the prayers lost restraint and getting hold of a nearby camel's bone smashed the head of one 'Abdullah ibn Khattal, a man from

the tribe of Tamim.¹ From then onward, every activity was confined to the house of Arqam.

For a number of days after this incident, Muslims kept a low profile until Muhammad Rasul Allah was asked by his Lord to go to the Ka'bah. He took Abu Bakr along. Sizing the throng, he asked Abu Bakr to summon people toward Islam. The crowd knew him as a man of standing, but that was before Islam. At present, he was proponent of a change alien

☪ **The
changing
face of the
Ka'bah.
An almost
200-year-old
picture.**



♥ **The
changing
face of the
Ka'bah**

to their ways. In rage, they fell upon him and then with a thud brought him down on the floor. 'Utba ibn Rabi'a, otherwise well behaved, took off his shoe and began striking his head until it bled, streaking his face. So hapless a figure Abu Bakr struck, his face blotched with blood, that

some people from his tribe broke from the crowd and rescued him from their mad hold. For the rest of the day, he stayed in a state of semi-consciousness. In the evening when he regained some strength, his first inquiry was about the Prophet's safety. This was enough of an affront, and

the affinity, they had felt for him a few hours ago, floundered like a transient passion. They were not dealing with Abu Bakr of the tribe of Tamim but with Abu Bakr of the new nation of Islam, and that struck a very odd figure. They cursed him and left him to the care of his mother.

Indifferent to the shift in their attitude, his mind was preoccupied with the safety of Muhammad Rasul Allah. He asked his mother to check with Fatima bint al-Khattab. Makkah at that point was in such a siege of raw hatred and paranoia that when she was asked about Muhammad, she had to fake ignorance: "I neither know Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah nor Abu Bakr; however, should you want me to see Abu Bakr, I will go with you." It was safer to talk directly to

Abu Bakr rather than his mother, Fatima thought. But when she saw Abu Bakr's swollen face, she lost her reserve and cried: "By Allah, those who reduced you to this state, they are *kafir* (deniers) and *fasiq* (evildoers), and I hope Allah will avenge you." Abu Bakr repeated his question, but she was still wary of his mother's presence and did not like to divulge the whereabouts of the Prophet, especially when passions against him ran so high. It was only when Abu Bakr allayed her fears that she told him that somehow during the fracas, the Prophet had come out unscathed and was at the house of Arqam. On Abu Bakr's insistence, she agreed to take him over there. The city was still turbulent and she advised him to wait until it cooled down.

*L*ittle did he know that his call would invite their supercilious ridicule. In ignorance, they did not grasp the fact that Allah-worship, in its extended sense, is a whole new way of life which would change their situation from a static to a dynamic one, giving them a forward thrust in time and space. Saying "*la ilaha*" is not a negative act per se but a process of reflective negation, without which there could be no movement and hence change. Likewise, the change itself has no validation unless it affirms the new direction — the direction toward Allah, of one God, the source of all power and authority, creator, sovereign, lawgiver, master of the Day of Judgment.

Later, when the two women stepped into the house of Arqam with Abu Bakr leaning on them, the Prophet could not hold his tears; he bent upon him and kissed his mauled face. His mother half confused, half stunned watched their love for each other. As a shrewd observer of human nature, Abu Bakr knew this was the right time to invite her to Islam. Besides, she was now privy to their hideaway. He requested Muhammad Rasul Allah to supplicate for his mother's change of heart. Which he did: she embraced Islam on the spot.²

Baring Islam to the family

So far the Prophet had avoided calling the members of his clan to Islam because he knew them very well. But when the revelation told him (*wa anzir 'ashiratak al-aqrabin* — warn your nearest relations), he had to carry it out. On his wish 'Ali arranged for a feast. The whole family of 'Abdul-Muttalib, including Hamza, 'Abd al-'Uzza (Abu Lahab), 'Abbas, and Abu Talib were invited. But before he could come to the gist, Abu Lahab, as if he knew what the Prophet was going to say, forestalled him:

Here are your uncles and cousin brothers. Say whatever you want, but do not ask them to forsake their faith. You should know that your clan cannot stand up to the whole of Arabia. Of all the people, your clan has the right to stop

you. If, therefore, you continued to further your cause, it would be easier for them to foil you rather than let the other clans of Quraysh in league with their allies, fall upon you.³

Needless to say, Abu Lahab was a status-quo man who would have preserved it even at the expense of truth. His views found acceptance with the elders, and they left the Prophet's house without giving him a chance to present his views.

The following day he invited them again. Fortunately, they let him speak:

O the clan of 'Abd Manaf, save yourselves from the hellfire. I won't be of use to you before Allah. O sons of Qusayy, save yourself from the hellfire, [for] I won't be of help to you. O sons of 'Abdul-Muttalib, distance yourselves from the hellfire [for] I have no control over anything of use or disuse to you. O Safiya (the aunt of the Messenger of Allah), O Fatima (the daughter of Muhammad) — you must all strive to shield yourselves from hellfire, [for] I can't profit you on the Day of Judgment. Nevertheless, as your blood relation in [this] world; I will continue discharging my obligations toward you.⁴

Was he trying to scare them? Yes, he was. After all, post-death life was as great a reality as life itself was.

They might be ignorant but he was informed. He wanted them to come into the loop and thus save their souls. Of all the people, they knew him better than anyone else — he was not contriving a role for himself. In fact, he had never dreamed about it. He desired their understanding, for he had nothing to gain from it. If they accepted his message, they will be the sole beneficiaries and not him. He wanted them to know that they might be his blood relations but when it came to accountability in the hereafter, each person carried his own heaven or hell. He being the medium of the divine message, could do nothing but deliver it and as such, he had no claim to divinity. The clarity of his mind, the few simple words, and the clang of pathos in his voice made a compelling case. But why should they support him? To help him would mean the anticipation of opposition not only from one's own family, but from tribes, cities and the whole of Arabia as well; that too for the sake of success in the distant hereafter. No other benefit was apparent. A silence fell upon the audience.

His eyes fidgeted from one face to another. Void as they were of any feelings for his call, his eyes eventually got transfixed on Abu Talib's face — a face that he could always look up to and find love and support. Abu Talib gave one last glance to his relatives and then spoke: "I cannot forsake the religion of 'Abdul-Muttalib, but what you have been asked to do, go by it and I shall stand by you." This was typical of a man who was tied to his ancestral religion but at the same time would not like to for-

sake his beloved nephew. Abu Lahab was also an uncle of Muhammad ('alayhi as-salam), but he found no truth in his message nor did he entertain any love for him. Angrily he addressed Abu Talib: "By God, this is very bad. Stop him before others neutralize him by force." This did not deter Abu Talib from saying on their faces: "By God, we will safeguard him as long as we live."⁵

For the clan of Hashim, this was the first major split.

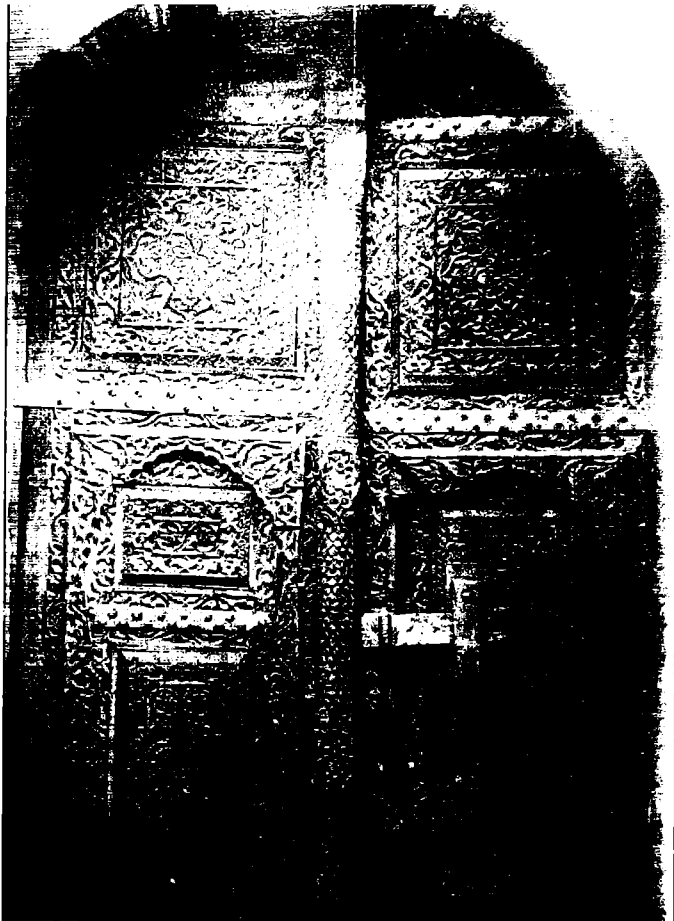
The message seeks a wider audience

For three years, the invitation to Islam remained clandestine. Then came the instructions for enlarging the operation. The Prophet went to the mountain of as-Safa and stood on the summit calling out "*wa saba ha! wa saba ha!*" The people heard his calamity call and began to converge at the foot of the mountain. As the assembly increased, he cried out the question:

"O sons of 'Abdul-Mutallib! O the clan of 'Abd Manaf! If I tell you that behind this Mount a large contingent is concealed [poised to attack you], would you believe me?"

"Why not!" they said. "You never told a lie [before]."

"Then listen to me! I warn you of a terrible calamity that awaits you. O the progeny of 'Abdul-Muttalib! No Arabian has as yet offered his people a priceless gift [of the nature] that I have for you. I want to give you all the beautiful things and all the



• An old door in Makkah

successes of this life and the life to come. My Lord has commanded me to invite you to the truth. Then who among you will support me in this great task?"⁶ he flung the eventual question.

This infuriated the Quraysh. His uncle, Abu Lahab, burst out his luddite anger: "May you perish! Is this what you called us for?"⁷

Little did he know that his call would invite their supercilious ridicule. In ignorance, they did not grasp the fact that Allah-worship, in

its extended sense, is a whole new way of life which would change their situation from a static to a dynamic one, giving them a forward thrust in time and space. Saying "*la ilaha*" is not a negative act per se but a process of reflective negation, without which there could be no movement and hence change. Likewise, the change itself has no validation unless it affirms the new direction — the direction toward Allah, of one God, the source of all power and authority, creator, sovereign, lawgiver, master of the Day of Judgment.

The call was for everyone. He went to the Ka'bah in compliance with the command from Allah the Most High (*fasda' bima tumar wa-'arid anil mushriykin* — tell them plainly what has been commanded to you and do not pay heed to the non-believers). Perhaps it was close to Maqam-i Ibrahim that he positioned himself:

O people [listen], the leader of the trail will never lie to his fellow travelers.

By Allah, even if I had the inclination to lie to others, I would not have lied to you. And even if I were to deceive others, I would not have played deception on you.

By Allah who has no peer, I have been sent to you as [His] messenger. And my prophethood has its domain over the whole humanity.

By Allah, you will die one

day the way sleep overtakes you every day. And then you will have to be ressurected the way you rise from sleep.

And remember, your deeds will be judged. [At that hour] good will be recompensed with goodness and evil with evil.

And then, you will be either the owner of Paradise or you will bake in Hell forever.⁸

Simple as his message was, its implications were clear to them: That as opposed to their numerous gods, Allah alone was the Creator and Sovereign of the vast, limitless universe.⁹ As His creation, humans were nothing but His slaves,¹⁰ and compliance with His instructions was binding on them as it was on the rest of the

creation.¹¹ To bow one's head before others, or to associate others with His authority was a negation of one's role.¹² In fact, in the Kingdom of God, humans were neither free nor subject to another being; none but Him alone was entitled to worship, obedience, and compliance.¹³ The world was not a senseless flux of sensory experience, but there was a plan to it. Nor was this earthly life a license to degrade one's humanity but to seek one's potential in a given timeframe. When it was over, humans would return to God Who, while sitting in judgment on man's deeds, would pronounce his failure or success.¹⁴

To the nonbelievers this was the greatest insult ever heaped on the Ka'bah, setting them ablaze; blinded by the mad impulse, they came hurtling down upon him. Harith ibn abi-



☪ The
Makkan
topography

Halah ran to his aid, sustained innumerable cuts from the swords, and fell down as a first martyr of Islam. The brawl finally sank, and the Prophet came out unhurt; but it left the Quraysh smoldering with anger.

His “notoriety” for sorcery spread fast. Perhaps the incident that caused it relates to Rukana ibn ‘Abd Yazid — a man known for his great physical feats as a wrestler. Muhammad Rasul Allah met him in the outskirts of Makkah and engaged him in the conversation on Islam. Immersed as he was in polytheism, Rukana turned down his message. This hurt him for Rukana was a near-kin. Changing his approach, he said: “Ya Rukana! Don’t you care for Allah that what I invite you to, you don’t accept!”

Prompt came the response: “If I had known what you say is true, I would have followed you.”

Muhammad Rasul Allah knew that Rukana was not cerebral. So instead of spelling out the message, he said something that was least expected from him:

“Tell me, if I beat you in a bout of wrestling, would you be then convinced of the truthfulness of what I say?”

Amused, Rukana eyed the Prophet. After all, he was no match for him. Very few people had dared to challenge him. And now this self-styled prophet, otherwise a very sweet man, wanted to engage him in a fight. He nonchalantly arose from his seat, as if still not believing his ears, and took hold of the Prophet’s hand in his firm grip. But as he tried

to dislodge him from his place, he felt his feet wobbling and then before he could have realized what was happening to him found himself landing flat on the ground.

Hurt, Rukana was still not willing to face the reality — the fact of his being beaten by a man who never pretended to be a wrestler. He raised himself and asked for another bout. Muhammad Rasul Allah took hold of his beefy arm and flipped him in the air again. The incredible had happened: Rukana the unbeatable had lost his sole distinction. Fortunately for him, nobody had witnessed the event; and as he knew Muhammad’s unassuming disposition, he comforted himself that at least he would not spread the story of his humiliation to others. Overcoming his shock, Rukana sheepishly said:

“Muhammad, this is strange — you beat me.”

The Prophet gave him a good-hearted smile and said:

“If you wish, I can show you something even stranger than this, provided you fear Allah and obey me.”

“What could be that?”

“Do you see that tree? I can ask it to come, and it will come,” he said, still smiling.

How can he make a tree firmly planted in the semi-rocky earth formation move? Rukana thought. But today was a day of marvels. Reality was assuming a new meaning. If his own physical excellence — so far the most believable of all things — could be paled into a doubt, then this would transpire as well.

[Come to me in the name of

Allah], said the Prophet. The tree shook itself and then with a shattering sound, it uprooted itself and moved in his direction until it stopped close to him like an obedient slave. He gave a side glance to Rukana, who stood lifeless like a figure cut into stone. "Do you still not believe me?" asked the Prophet. But he was speechless. "*Irji 'ila makaniki* — go back to your place," said Muhammad Rasul Allah to the tree and it complied. Rukana hurriedly left the desolate place, more awestruck than amused this time. His personal humiliation was now insignificant. The fact that Muhammad Rasul Allah could command even static objects of nature to compliance was more overwhelming than anything else. He volunteered the information to the Qurayshi elders.¹⁵ They agreed it was magic of a superior kind.

The second incident relates to 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, who used to look after 'Uqba ibn abi-Mu'ayt's flock of sheep. One day while grazing sheep, he was spotted by the Prophet and Abu Bakr, perhaps out on a *da'wah* mission to the tribes. Thirsty, they asked for milk. But honest as he was, 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud politely said: "I do have milk, but it does not belong to me. I am just a trustee."

Impressed by his honesty, the Prophet asked him to get him a she-goat not yet impregnated by a male-goat, meaning the one not from among the milk giving. 'Abdullah willingly complied.

Saying "*bismillah* — in the name of Allah," he touched its udder, and the milk flowed.

As was expected, the youthful 'Abdullah was fascinated by the episode.

"Sir! would you teach me this thing that you just said?"

Whether it was 'Abdullah's innocent manners or his primal honesty, he decided to take him in his fold.

"*Innaka ghulamun mu'alamun* — indeed you are an educated boy." And so he was. Abdullah's transformation was phenomenal: he became the wonder boy of Islam.

The following day Makkans saw 'Abdullah as the Prophet's personal attendant, helping him put on his shoes, walking in front of him, clearing the way for him, and waking him up from sleep.¹⁶

As the time passed, visits by individuals and groups became frequent. The nature of the visits though varied. Some were sincere in their inquiry, some made fun of him, while others tested his nerves. This used to worry him. He himself later admitted that when he was assigned prophethood, he was very circumspect lest people opposed him and made fun of him. But the revelation of al-Mai'dah: 67 — that is, "*wallahu ya'simuka minan nas: Allah will protect you from the people*" — eased his fears.

The encounter

One day a group of Makkans came to see him. They had their thoughts all laid out.

"O Muhammad," they said, "you claim you are a prophet. Right!"

“By Allah, yes I am,” said he.

“All right, do you have someone testify your prophethood?” They had poured all their venom in the question and were seething with excitement on his imminent humiliation.

He was quiet for a while. Then he answered by asking a question: “What counts most as evidence in testimony? [A human or Allah Himself?] Allah is the witness between you and me that this Qur’an has been revealed to me that I may warn you on its strength, and those whom it reaches.”¹⁷

“That does not make sense to us,” they said in jest.

“[Very well,] do you really bear

witness there are other gods beside Allah?”¹⁸

Inspired by the revelation (*wahy*) his counter offensive took them by surprise. He had snatched the edge they had enjoyed over him by leading the conversation. They looked like a confused mass of people. He continued: “[Listen!] I am clear of what you associate (with Him).”¹⁹

Al-Walid ibn al-Mughira, the polished patrician, had another idea: he thought that by reneging on their old faith the Muslims have burdened their souls. He offered them redemption. “Come back to our faith,” he said, “we will take your sins upon us.”²⁰

The Prophet was amused by his naivete. What made him think that he could deliver people from their sins?

“[What are you implying?] Shall I seek someone other than Allah for Rabb, when He is Lord of all things? the Prophet asked. [Listen Abu’l-Walid,]” he continued, “each soul earns (what it earns) for itself, and no human shall bear another’s burden. [Now if you differ], then unto your Lord is your return, and He will tell you about the things you disputed.”²¹

The Ka’bah was the most frequented place of the Makkans and non-Makkans alike. For Muhammad Rasul Allah, the place had a special significance — it was the House of Allah, which he often visited. Second, whenever a new revelation came, he would go over there and recite it loud and clear so that it could be heard by others. Whether it was

Perhaps the Quraysh were willing to listen to the message, the possibility caused quite a stir among the companions. The Prophet himself had some other concerns. Before him was Bilal who had been beaten and dragged on the streets of Makkah; ‘Ammar ibn Yasir whose mother was lanced in the pelvis and had earned the honor of being the first woman martyr in the cause of Islam; ‘Abdullah ibn Mas’ud and Salem whose recitation of the Qur’an impacted even the stonehearted with the majesty of the word of Allah, and Suhayb ar-Rumi whose antecedents in Makkah did not go beyond Islam. Some were not even Makkans. He looked at them again and felt a tug at his heart-strings. They were his most valuable assets. True, the parting between them was only for an hour or so; but how could he have asked them to leave his company in exchange for the visit of those few rich whose only merit was their wealth.

an occasion for the recitation of a new revelation or the Prophet had gone there to pray, it is difficult to say. Maybe the visit combined the two.

Abu'l-Hakam ibn Hisham (Abu Jahl) and 'Abdullah ibn Umayya were sitting in the back of the Ka'bah when they saw him on the premises. Upon Abu Jahl's bidding 'Abdullah ibn Umayya walked over to Muhammad Rasul Allah and engaged him in the conversation. His main theme was that the people would accept him as Allah's messenger provided certain conditions were satisfied. Though the Prophet was aware of the mentality of men like him and the kind of demands they made, which often bordered on absurdity, he still listened to him.

"Bounded by mountains and devoid of vegetation Makkah offers a very small earthly relief," he said, "why don't you knock them down so that we have more space. After all, you told us that Da'ud had control over the mountains (because while climbing the mountain he would recite Allah's name and the mountain would follow suit). You are no less than him in stature. Right!" The Prophet felt the jab but let him speak.

"Sulayman's control over the air," as you say, "shrank distances for him. Why don't you do the same and make Yemen's and Syria's journey easy for us. Likewise, if Jesus could revive the dead, why don't you bring our great grandfather Qusayy to life so that we could verify the genuineness of your new-found faith from him."²²

The very nature of 'Abdullah ibn

Umayya's demands were inflammatory, but the Muslims saw in them a rare opportunity for the vindication of Muhammad's prophethood. Maybe Makkans will become Muslim, they thought. They wanted him to bring the sign from Allah.

The revelation, however, discounted the idea as repugnant to prophethood and the process of *da'wah*:

... Had it been possible for
the speech to cause
the mountains
to move, or
the earth
to be torn asunder,
or the dead to speak
(this Qur'an would
have done so).
No, but Allah's is
the whole command. ...²³

Certainly such a thing was possible for Allah to happen, though it would not have benefited humans. For they must find their true nature in the Prophet's life by their own strivings. Short of this will be determinism — a mechanical, perforce change, which suits other creations (animal and plant life) but not humans whose very distinction is their ability to choose and reflect. The revelation therefore said:

Do not those who
believe know
that had Allah willed,
he could have guided
all mankind?²⁴

Besides, people like Abu Jahl and

'Abdullah ibn Umayya, mischievous as they were, did not want to be blessed with *hidayah* (guidance) nor would they have embraced the truth on seeing signs from Allah.²⁵ Haven't they seen miracles before? Surely, there is a punishment for them.²⁶ The revelation warned.

For the pleasure-seeking Arabians the promise of a distant punishment, however, became a butt of their jokes. Every time he reminded them of the life after death, they shamelessly teased him.

♥ The
desert: the
charm and
the peril

"You mean we will die — really! And will have a second life to be punished, right?"

"By the emissary winds (sent) one after another," said he,

"by the raging
hurricanes,
by those which
cause earth's
vegetation to revive;
by those who bring down
the Reminder.
To exuse or to warn,





surely that which you are
promised will fall.
So when the stars
are put out,
and when the sky is
riven asunder.
And when the mountains
are blown away,
and the messengers
are brought unto
their time appointed —
for what day is the
time appointed?
Woe unto the repudiators
on that day!"²⁷

Talking about the past nations,
Muhammad ('alyhi as-salam) was
told to inform them:

"Didn't We destroy the
former folk,
then caused the latter
folk to follow after?"²⁸

The revelation then addressed
itself to the heart of the Makkan
problem — the possibility of life
beyond the grave:

Did We not create you
from a base fluid,
which We laid up in a
safe abode.
For a known term?"²⁹

Inviting their attention to the
creation of the earth and mountains,
which are far more difficult to be
created than humans, he was asked

☪ The
desert
life

to say:

Have We not made the
earth a receptacle,
both for the
living and the dead,
and placed therein
high mountains
and given you
to drink sweet
water therein?³⁰

Later on, to dilute the hurt caused
to him, the revelation said:

And verily messengers
(of Allah) were
mocked before you,
but long I bore
with those
who disbelieved.
At length I seized
them, and how
(awful) was My
punishment.³¹

Fortunately, humans are not alike. For the non-Makkan Ikthm ibn Sayfi, who was the chief of his tribe, there was no need for miracles — the Qur'an itself was one. When he heard about the Prophet, he wanted to go and find out about him; but his tribe did not approve of his visit to Makkah. Instead, they deputed two of their wise men to the task. The Prophet granted them audience.

"We have two questions for you," they said. "Who are you, and what are you?"

"I am Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah. This goes for your first question," said the Prophet. "My answer to your

second question is that I am the servant of Allah and His messenger."

Straight and simple as that, he would have never regressed into self-glorification by exalting his bloodline. What was important for him was to deliver the message. Which he did!

Thereafter, he recited to them "*in-nallaha ya' muru bil 'adli wal ihsani ... ya' izukum la'allakum tazakkarun.*"

Stunned by its diction and high moral content, they asked the Prophet to repeat it so that they could memorize it.

On reaching the tribe they informed Ikthm ibn Sayfi of their conversation with the Prophet. "We wanted to know his bloodline," they said. "But he could not care less and mentioned his father's name only. Nevertheless, on our probing his family tree, we found him of a very noble lineage." Of his message, they recited to Ikthm the *ayah* (verse) from al-Nahl: 90. Like them, he was also struck by the lucid core of the message. "This shows," said Ikthm, "that he is preaching excellence of morals. ... Make haste and enter his faith so that you precede others."³²

'Uthman ibn Maz'un was another person who on hearing the same *ayah* found himself moving from the slippery ground of an uncertain faith to a firm conviction. He himself said that in the beginning his faith was shallow — he accepted it on others' persuasion, though deep down he had doubts about it. One day 'Uthman came to see the Prophet, when suddenly the latter was seized by the revelatory process of the *wahy*'s descent. On coming out of it, he recited 'Uthman the message. His

soul yielded to Islam. Later, he observed: "On hearing the a'yah and witnessing the wahy's descent, faith anchored itself into my being and my heart was filled with the Prophet's love."³³

The wretched of the earth inherit the Kingdom

Representing as they were the fringes of society, Islam gave them their lost zeal in life. Muhammad Rasul Allah's concept of vicegerency, which included even the poor and the wretched of the earth, had powerful emotive appeal and brought out the best in them. He rightly called such converts the favored ones, for they were selected by none but Allah the Exalted. The rich, on the other hand, hated Islam's egalitarian impulse, which while seeking the removal of wealth-based social distinctions supplanted them with one's respectability tied to *taqwa* (righteousness).

Worse still, the rich like Abu Bakr and 'Uthman, with whom the Qurayshi notables could still identify with, had lost their class consciousness and even provided support to the disprivileged. The Quraysh were not some blockheads — they knew the thrust of the Islamic message. For them it entailed their ruination. When they would see the proud bearing of the poor accompanying the Prophet to the Haram, their animosity simmered in the snide whispering of the Qurayshi notables.

[Here they come!] they would say.

"Are these the ones whom Allah has favored over us?"³⁴

This was reminiscent of the kind of feelings they had for the Prophet whom they considered socially small enough to have received the revelation. Al-Walid ibn al-Mughira had once said: "How come the Qur'an is revealed to Muhammad when I being the great of the Quraysh, its chief, and Abu Mas'ud 'Umayr Thaqfi, the patrician of Thaqif, are deprived of it ..."³⁵

Sometimes, charmed by the majestic melody of the Qur'anic verses and their unique content, they felt like listening in, but the poor's crowd around the Prophet would hold them back. Among the élites who sought his audience, subject to their stated reservations, were 'Utba and Shayba ibn Rabi'a, Mut'im ibn 'Adiy, and Harith ibn Naufi.³⁶ Perhaps the Quraysh were willing to listen to the message — the possibility caused quite a stir among the companions. The Prophet himself had some other concerns. Before him was Bilal who had been beaten and dragged on the streets of Makkah; 'Ammar ibn Yasir whose mother was lanced in the pelvis and had earned the honor of being the first woman martyr in the cause of Islam; 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud and Salem whose recitation of the Qur'an impacted even the stone-hearted with the majesty of the word of Allah, and Suhayb ar-Rumi whose antecedents in Makkah did not go beyond Islam. Some were not even Makkans. He looked at them again and felt a tug at his heart-strings. They were his most valuable assets. True, the parting between them was

only for an hour or so; but how could he have asked them to leave his company in exchange for the visit of the rich whose only merit was their wealth.

Thinking it might benefit Islam, 'Umar suggested the poor's removal, but he had to regret every word of his. The revelation asked the Prophet "not to repel those who call upon their Lord in the morning and in the evening, seeking his countenance."³⁷ Such an act, said the Qur'an, would tantamount to wrongdoing.³⁸

In three years, one hundred and thirty-three people had embraced Islam. They represented a cross section of the Makkan society — from slaves to the very poor, like Bilal, to some of the prominent ones, such as 'Uthman and Abu Bakr. Above all, the new nation of Islam had plucked the best from each tribe. This made the Quraysh very bitter. One day their elders gathered in the Ka'bah. Their subject was the perplexing phenomenon of Muhammad: what should be done to stop him? He had exposed their idiocy, reviled their forefathers, humiliated their faith, and split them from within. In their estimation, they had shown great forbearance to him. While they were talking, he stepped into the Haram and after kissing the black stone, began circumbulating the Ka'bah. When he passed them, they hurled abuses on him. He did not like it; yet, he restrained himself. He passed again, and they repeated the snub. On the third time, he stopped by them and said: "O Quraysh listen to me! By Allah who holds my soul in

His hands, I have in store for you a painful doom." Unexpected as the riposte was, the elders were stunned. They did not like what he was doing to their society and their faith and now he was promising them a devastation. Abu Jahl regained his composure and while appealing to the nobility of his character, said: "O Abu'l-Qasim, go in peace. By God, we never thought you were stupid."

The next day he saw them sitting in the shade of the Ka'bah. Ignoring them, he began to pray. Nevertheless, they were not willing to let the occasion go. Still smarting yesterday's sting in his tone, some said: "How far this man has gone against you! Yesterday, he even had the audacity to say what you heard [him say that he has in store a painful doom for you] and still you let him go in peace." Festering inside as they were, the crowd morphed into half-crazed rabbles looking for the nearest available executioner's pad. 'Uqba ibn abi-Mu'ayt rose from his seat and throwing his head-piece around Muhammad's neck began twisting it. The fiendish act was so sudden that it caught him on the wrong foot. He dropped on his knees and touched the floor in a reflex response. For a while, Abu Bakr thought as if the Prophet's life had come to an abrupt end. His face was distended, the mouth open as if gasping for air. 'Uqba was still maintaining his grip on the twist when some others fell upon the Prophet, plucking hair from his head and beard. This brought tears to Abu Bakr's eyes; interceding with them, he said: "Would you kill a person because he says his provider and

One God the Eternal Truth

Did humans start with animism and then graduated in belief to monotheism or they were monotheists first and later regressed into polytheism?

The opinion is sharply divided. A group of anthropologists (such as E.B. Tylor and F.G. Frazer) hold that it all began with animism while others (such as Andrew Lang and Peter Wilhelm Schmidt) say that it was monotheism that gradually degenerated into belief in polytheism. The first bevy of scholars can be designated as evolutionists — animism giving way to polytheism and polytheism maturing into monotheism. Emile Durkheim is a good exponent of this school. The second group can be described as regressionists.

How did the “primitive” man shift from his belief in animism to monotheism, they say it had to do with our “instinctual craving for simplification.” The belief in a spirit in every tree is a staggering concept and makes life difficult. To make it easy for themselves, they began conceiving fewer gods like the god of the woods, wind, and so forth. From there the belief in one God was just a few steps away. Wrong! says Andrew Lang. Monotheism is not the end of the evolutionary ladder. In support he cites Aborigines’ belief in the High God who after giving laws returned to “dignified seclusion in the sky.”

But was it a direct downward plunge

into polytheism? Edwards James says no, there was an intermediate phase, which he characterizes as honotheism when lesser gods were created out of the human material such as cultural heroes, athletes, and totems. To this list one can add religious divines, conquerors, and poets.

The evidence gathered by Egyptologists give support to the regressionist — the theory of the second group. Belief in the one-true God has been the fact of life with humans. Wallis Budge’s work the *Egyptian Book of the Dead* has come up with a number of inscriptions deciphered:

An inscription of (the old Egypt) says, “God is hidden and no man knoweth His form. No man has been able to seek out His likeness.”

Another inscription reads, “God is merciful unto those who reverence Him, and He heareth him that calleth upon Him.”

A third one says, “God knoweth him that acknowledgeth Him, He rewardeth him that serveth Him, and He protecteth him that followeth Him.”

About God being the creator of everything, an inscription reads, “God hath made the universe . . . He is the Creator of what is in this world, and of what was, of what is and of what shall be.”


The emergence of other gods or the elevation of the Pharaohs to godhood is a much later development and was a breach of the Egyptian tradition of monotheism.

sustainer (rabb) is Allah?” The Prophet interrupted Abu Bakr and said, “Leave them Abu Bakr! By

Allah in whose hands is my soul, I indeed have a painful doom for them.” Whether it was the confident tone of

his voice or the ominous warning, the crowd dispersed without further trouble.³⁹

The God He worshiped

ho was this God that Muhammad ('alayhi as-salam) wanted others to worship?

The primary objective of the revelation in the past, as well as in his case, was to reveal the true God; for it would have made little sense if humans were left to themselves without any knowledge of the Creator nor the purpose behind His creation. Likewise, it would have been unfair to hold humans accountable in the hereafter without their knowing the nature of the enterprise they were expected to undertake. More important, there could be no meaningful relationship between two disparate beings where the relationship is not symbiotic but that of a Creator and created, and the latter does not know the former. In this sense, God had to reveal Himself so that people could know the one they were to worship.

This last attempt by the God of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and Jesus to reveal Himself came at a time when there was either idolatry or lopsided portrayals of His being wrathful or loving, which reduced God to a one-dimensional being, more savored in human terms than His real Self. Muhammad's prophethood aimed at restoring the Abrahamic tradition of the one true God who is so majestic, so grandiose, and so omniscient that words cannot

describe Him, colors fail to paint Him, and imagination falls short of comprehending Him in the absolute sense of His transcendence. This was crucial to the Prophet's mission because impairment of Godhood often hurt the human character: the idol-worshippers, in the absence of respect for their hand-made deities, took the world for sport; Jews became particularistic, while Christians became free from sins.

Added to this mix was the belief that the material world was real while the God, who created it, was not. This led to twin development: nature was apotheosized, and God was divested of divinity. Some people worshiped fire, others trees and some even the earth because, in all such cases, both benefit and harm were so obvious. Contrary to this was the view that since creation emanated from God, it was equally holy, and any attempt to harness it amounts to sacrilege. In both these cases, man and his environment were deprived of intellectual and esthetic growth.

Muhammad ('alayhi as-salam) said: "God is one, single — there is no god but God. On Him everything depends. He fathers not, nor is He fathered. And none is like Him."⁴⁰

This singularity of Allah, as unique and supreme, is the prime idea behind the creation and accounts for its balance and order, for had there been more than one God, chaos would have prevailed.⁴¹ All forms of creation owe existence to Him, but He owes His to none.⁴² That is why in Allah's sight it would constitute insult to Him if His creativity was

questioned, or partners and children were ascribed to Him.⁴³

Talking to his companions, Muhammad Rasul Allah once said: Allah says, "Adam's son had negated Me and the Adam's son has derided Me. His negation lies in saying that Allah would not resurrect him despite the fact that compared to first-time creation, second creation is much easier; and his deriding lies in saying that Allah has children while the fact is that He is *Samad* who neither begets nor is He begotten nor has He any likeness to Him."⁴⁴

Creation is an act of His creativity — it is from Him and not of him.⁴⁵ This, however, does not mean that He has no stake in His creation or that once having created it, He turned his back upon it.⁴⁶ The creation, said the Prophet, is purposive and bound to God's Will. As Allah's agents, humans are mission bound to actualize His will and for that the entire planetary resources have been consigned to their need.

Besides, humans' relation with God is not that of a son and father but of a created and the Creator, who can recreate it in any shape He wants. As such, Allah is master, sovereign, sustainer, provider, and lawgiver — He is *ar-Rabb* because the relationship of son and father is limited while of humans and *ar-Rabb* is measureless. A father does cause birth of his son, feeds him, brings him up but after a certain point in life ceases to be his provider; instead, he can be reduced to a state of dependence on his son. *Ar-Rabb*, however, does not have a cyclical relationship with humans. He provides forever. His authority is

eternal. To call Him father is to reduce Him. To address Him *ar-Rabb* is to exalt Him. God, said the Prophet, is multidimensional. His omnipotence coexists with justice; His wrath is tempered with love. He deserves to be feared as well as loved. These opposite traits of Allah were fully expressed through the Qur'an:

When the sky is cleft asunder,
and hearkens to its Lord
and is dutiful.

And when the earth is
stretched out taut,
and throws out
whatever it contains
and is empty, and
hearkens to
its Lord and is dutiful.

O man! you have to
strive and go on
striving toward
your Lord, then
will you meet Him.

And he who is
given his book
in his right hand,
will have an easy
reckoning, and will
return to his people
full of joy.

But he who is given his
book from behind his back,
will call for death,
but will be roasted in
the fire. Surely
he was (erstwhile)
joyful among his followers.

Surely he thought that
he would never return.
Yes! surely his Lord
was always wating him.
So indeed I call to



♥ Above:
Spices were
one of the
trading items

Opposite:
Frankincense
tree: 3,000 tons
worth of
perfume was
traded a year

witness the evening
twilight, and the
night and all it gathers
and the moon when
it grows full,
that you shall certainly
enter one state after another.
But what is the matter with
them that they do not
believe, and when
the Qur'an is recited
to them, they do not make
obeisance: No! those
who disbelieve give
the lie to the truth.
And Allah knows best
what they hide,
so announce to them
a painful punishment,
except those who
believe and do
good; for them is a

reward that shall
never be cut off.⁴⁷

Here is a forbidding, stern justice
which sends chill over one's spine.
But the same Qur'an also gives
solace and comfort:

Say: O my servants!
who have acted
extravagantly
against their
own souls,
do not despair
of the mercy of Allah;
surely Allah
forgives the
faults altogether;
surely He is the
Forgiving,
the Merciful⁴⁸

One day while coming back from
an expedition, he stopped by a
habitation. A woman nearby was
tending fire. When it would slacken,
she would add fuel to it. Fascinated
by the dancing flames, her child
would stretch his hand as if to hold
them; and every time, she would pull
him back. When she came to know
about the Prophet's presence in the
vicinity, she walked in and asked if
he was him.

"Yes, without a doubt, I am!" said
he.

"Then tell me, isn't Allah more
merciful to His servants than the
mother to her child?" she asked.

"Yes, indeed."

"But the mother would not throw
her child in the fire?"

The thrust of her question was
clear: How can it be that the God

who endowed the mother with unbounded compassion will be without compassion Himself?

Overwhelmed by the woman's concern, tears welled up in his eyes. He lowered his head in grief and then after a while he said, "Allah will punish only that servant who is rebellious and arrogant and thinks Him not one."⁴⁹

To him, Allah was forgiving and readily inclined to pardon sins (*Ghaffar and Ghafur*): He gives peace and comfort (*Salam and Mumin*): He is just and forgives out of compassion (*al-'Adl and al-'Afu*); He bears with the humans' excesses (*al-Hakim and as-Sabur*): He responds to the pleas of the repentants (*at-Tawwab*); He is all goodness (*al-Birr*).

However, if a person does not repent, then He holds him or her accountable for every bad deed — even a fraction that it might have been.

Tauhid certainly was a new concept for, as opposed to polytheism's choppy view of life, Islam took a unitary view of existence.

The Quraysh celebration of senses numb their sensibilities

As the Islamic message followed its course, the Quraysh began to reveal their inner-most fears. What repercussions will it have on their custodial role of the Ka'bah? In what way will it affect their prosperity? Would it dilute their hold on the Arabian tribes? To what extent will it hinder

the celebration of their senses? For sure, from their viewpoint these were pertinent questions. The Qur'an in its own inimitable style summed up their concerns in eight words: "*wa qalu innattabi'il-huda ma'aka nuta khattaf min ardi na* — they say if we join you in following this guidance, we will be plucked from the earth."⁵⁰

After years of hardwork and some intelligent maneuvering, the Quraysh had consolidated their leadership over the tribes. The Ka'bah, though an ancient place of worship, gradually gained a new significance in the Arabian life more owing to the Qurayshi genius and their desire to hegemonize over others than the



Being secularists, they shuddered at the thought of a deprivatized faith, for they believed in life splintered between the mundane and spiritual — ruled by Lucifer and God at the same time. Islam, they thought, would lead to a bonded life stifling their urges. Their balking at any change that would have touched the core of their materialistic existence was thus understandable. In their naivety or more so in their trading mentality, they demanded changing the message in a way that would have accommodated their lifestyle, their drug addiction, their interest-based transactions, their institution of slavery, their exploitative power structure; and if not all, at least provide for some of their ancestral religion, their customs and conventions.⁵⁴ For the Prophet, this was a masked paganism — something that Islam sought to eradicate. Life in all its expressions must surrender to Allah alone, he demanded, for there is no god but Him.

fact of its being the House of God: it carried idols of all kinds and denomination, even Jesus and Mary to project an all-faith image. Every year thousands of people flocked to Makkah giving spurt to the city's commercial life.

Besides, the Quraysh were the principal beneficiaries of rivalry between Persian and Byzantine empires, carrying goods from the Roman markets to the Persian Gulf and from the Persian markets to the

Mediterranean coastal areas.⁵¹ This undoubtedly brought them affluence, and with affluence came power over the Arabian tribes whom they seduced by sharing some of their income and dishing out interest-based loans. Eventually creating a dependency out of the tribes. In an unstable world ravaged by war and famine, Makkah was thus an oasis of peace and a veritable trade link between the two opposing powers. It was to this aspect of the Makkan life that the Qur'anic revelation reminded them:

For the taming of
the Quraysh ...
(We cause) the caravans
to set forth
in winter and summer.
So let them worship
the Lord
of this House.
Who has fed them
against hunger;
and has made them
safe from fear.⁵²

The Makkans could not care less about such reminders for as true materialists they took their prosperity for granted — a fruit of their genius and labor.

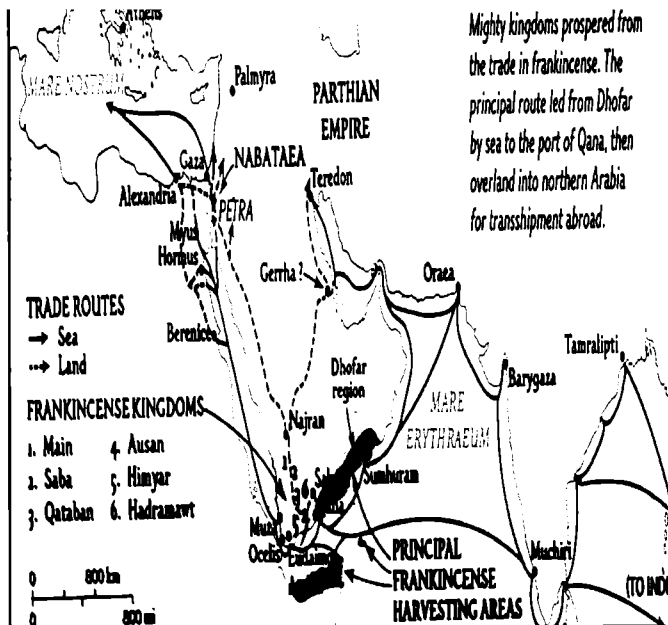
Islam wanted to purge Ka'bah of the Arabian gods by wresting it from the custodial hold of the Quraysh and making it the true center of monotheism that once it was. The Quraysh viewed it as the liquidation of their power-hold over Arabia. Reducing them to a nonentity.

Added to this was their perception that Muhammad's claim to

prophethood was a pretext for personal gains which, in their business mind, they thought could be compromised if the right kind of offer was made to him. After all, as traders they knew that the world was a bazaar and people were commodities saleable for a price. It was in this kind of a mindset that they once suggested: "Bring a Qur'an other than this, or change it."⁵³

Being secularists, they shuddered at the thought of a deprivatized faith, for they believed in life splintered between the mundane and spiritual — ruled by Lucifer and God at the same time. Islam, they thought, would lead to a bonded life stifling their urges. Their balking at any change that would have touched the core of their materialistic existence was thus understandable. In their naivety, or more so in their trading mentality, they demanded changing the message in a way that would have accommodated their lifestyle, their drug addiction, their interest-based transactions, their institution of slavery, their exploitative power structure; and if not all, at least provide for some of their ancestral religion, their customs and conventions.⁵⁴ For the Prophet, this was a masked paganism — something that Islam sought to eradicate. Life in all its expressions must surrender to Allah alone, he demanded, for there is no god but Him.

Another layer of the Makkan problem was Muhammad's prophetic personality, which was an enigma for them. First, they defined him as a poet; when the revelatory message was adjudged by their connoisseurs



as metapoetry, they thought he was a soothsayer, though he exhibited none of their traits. When the Qur'an began to fascinate the Makkans with its sublime message and superb diction, and people began to yield to its power, leaving their families and disenfranchising themselves economically, they began to define him as a sorcerer. That he was a prophet like Moses and Jesus never crossed their mind for they knew nothing about prophethood. On occasions when they thought he was helpless and could be trounced upon, he made them regret. Two incidents speak of their dilemma and his ability to surprise them. Both relate to Abu Jahl, a dyed-in-the-wool Islam hater and the principal mover of conspiracies against him.

An orphan's property was in Abu Jahl's custody as a trustee. Devastated by the circumstance of his

☛ Above: The Frankincense trade route

existence, he came to him, and asked for help out of his deceased father's estate. Callously he spurned him. Sadly he walked along until he passed the Qurayshi elders. Eager to see some fireworks between Abu Jahl and Muhammad, they mockingly suggested him the latter's intervention. Despite his adversarial relations with Abu Jahl, the Prophet walked up to him and demanded dispensation for the boy. Abu Jahl, who often emitted fire on hearing the Prophet's name, disappointed his peers when instead of standing up to him, he satisfied the orphan's need without a whiff. Later, when asked why he was so helplessly accommodative to him, he said he saw spear-wielding guards ready to kill him.⁵⁵ And this was not the only occasion when Abu Jahl cowered before the Prophet. A man from the tribe of Zubayd came to Makkah to sell his three red camels. Tempted by the beauty of the animals, Abu Jahl offered him less than the asking price which the man declined. To make sure that he was maneuvered into selling his camels to him only, Abu Jahl forced others not to make a higher bid. Caught thus in an unfair situation, the man was heard lamenting the Makkans for their unjust streak. A person informed the Prophet who, after taking Abu Jahl to task for his unfair conduct, purchased the camels himself at a higher price. Asked why did he let Muhammad have his way, his response was more or less the same: the man was guarded by undefined forces who could have killed him.⁵⁶

Yet another layer to the Makkan

problem was that the Prophet's death, which often crossed their minds as the final solution, was ridden with serious consequences. His was the noblest of the families, old and bonded by relations with almost all the known tribes that would have mattered in the Arabian power structure — such as Quda'ah, Mazim, Khuza'ah, al-Khazraj, Zahra, Makhzum, al-Namir ibn Qasit, Hawazin, 'Abd Shams, and Naufal.

True, these tribes were far from being Muslims; nevertheless, in a tribalistic society a member may be disliked for being a maverick and still be a son. Muhammad ('alayhi as-salam) was extremely likable — a man beautiful in looks and speech that captivated others. The youth especially felt the pull toward him, for they saw in him a mysterious fusion of romance and realism that was at once a conflict and an embrace. Added to these were his charitable disposition that made others feel good about themselves in his presence. People were not yet willing to give up on him. And that was the gravest side of the Makkan problem. What if he is killed and it draws everyone into an endless bloodshed? Would it be possible to isolate Muhammad from the Hashimites, and Hashimites from others? Perhaps that defined the Makkan problem.

Livid with rage, the city appeared to have lost its calm. The revelation, in a hail of punches at the rich, warned them that sated as they were with worldly pleasures, they would be held accountable for being frivolous with life. For the Makkans,

this was too much to take. Muhammad must go became their top priority. So volatile was the city that his uncle Abu Talib pulsed hostile reverberations in the air.

One day when he did not find Muhammad Rasul Allah at home, his heart sank with the unthinkable — what if they have killed him? Filled with anger, he called for the youths of Hashim and ‘Abd Manaf. They came in drove, their weapons concealed under their garments. Abu Talib detailed them to seek out Abu Jahl, ‘Uqba ibn abi-Mu‘ayt, Umayya ibn Khalaf and others of their like and kill them on the spot. Meanwhile, the Prophet was traced to Dar al-Arqam, safe and corresponding with his companions. Abu Talib had a sigh of relief but now that the youth were primed for action, he decided to bare his mind to the Prophet’s adversaries.

Flanked by the youth, he barged into the Ka‘bah. Abu Jahl was alarmed and so were the others. Rarely before they had seen so many Hashimites and ‘Abd Manaf’s clan together, with such an intense look on their faces. Something was afoot and it soon became obvious when without wasting formalities, Abu Talib asked his youthful companions to bare their arms. Shocked, their reflexes mired in emotional turbulence, the elders gave a stupefied look. Said Abu Talib deadpan: “We would have killed you in exchange for Muhammad’s life. So [for your own safety] stay away from him.”⁵⁷ The coldness of his voice, despite the inclement weather, sent a chill down their spines. Whether they heeded

Abu Talib’s warning is difficult to say but one thing was clearer to them — Muhammad was not a soft target who can be swiped at in one shot without any repercussions. He was intensely loved by his clan, even though most of them were still non-Muslims and opposed to his call.

For the time being, the threat to his life was over, but Abu Talib and his clan knew that their son would remain on the razor-edge until he gives up deprivatizing religion into Islam.

The many faces of *Falsehood*

Therefore proclaim
the praises (of your Lord);
for by the grace
of your Lord,
you are no (vulgar)
soothsayer, nor
are you possessed.

Or do they say
"A poet! we await
for him some calamity
(hatched) by time!"

Is it that their faculties
of understanding urge
them to this,
or are they
but a people transgressing
beyond bounds?

Or do they say,
"He fabricated the
(message)?"
No, they have no faith!
(al-Tur: 29 - 33)

For the last so many days, he had been pestered with a singular question: What makes him think he is a prophet? A troublesome question as it was, it had to be faced head on for it carried a certain rationale.

A person, for example, can proclaim himself a king, an heir to a throne or



an inheritor to a legacy. He could also lay claim to parentage or to a particular family as its scion. In all such cases, the burden of proof is his. He could even make a claimer without bothering to substantiate it. Proclaiming one's self a prophet, however, is a different matter. Without proper credentials, the claim could dilute itself in a moment.

The dialectic of encounter

Muhammad Rasul Allah knew about this problem since the beginning of his prophethood. People would merci-

lessly question him. And the only proof that he could give them was his own personal integrity and the revelation in bits and pieces.

To which his detractors would say "Why is the Qur'an not revealed unto you all at once?"¹

But this was not the only objection that they would make. In one gathering, he was asked:

"Muhammad, tell us who helped you in inventing these lies — fables of the men of old?"²

"My Creator who knows the secrets of the heavens and earth has revealed it to me."³

"But why is it not revealed in a

◆ **Khazneh:
a Thamudic
temple**

language other than Arabic?"⁴ The question struck him particularly revealing for it exposed their rationale to the denial of his prophethood: A Qur'an in a language other than Arabic, not known to him, would have given it divine origin — so they thought.

Thus, with their mindset unmasked to him, he separated the grain from the chaff. "For Allah it is a trifle. He could have sent it in any language. But in that case you would have said: if only its verses were expounded? What! A foreign tongue and an Arab⁵ (audience)?"

His voice animated, his face intense, he intoned:

"By Allah, it is not my invention. If Allah had so willed I should not have recited it to you, nor would He have made it known to you. (After all) I dwelt among you a whole lifetime before it (came to me). Have you then no sense!⁶ ... The Holy Spirit (Gabriel) has revealed it from my Lord with truth that it may confirm (the faith of) those who believe and as guidance and good tidings for those who have surrendered (to Allah)."⁷

For sure, such questions were primed by their meanness as well as by the novelty of his message. But what encouraged people to ask such questions was his own unencumbered attitude toward his audience, and his ability to accommodate them, no matter how insulting they could be at times.

Among the Qur'anic postulates, life hereafter was at the core of his message. The more he stressed it the more his listeners were gravitated

to it. Some were amused, others were upset. That the soul could disembodied itself and the bones could be reduced to dust and then assembled to life again, they could hardly bring themselves to believe. Thus, they started with the premise.

"Tell us: who will put life into decayed bones?"⁸

Ah! the limitation of human intellect which is entangled with the apparent and can't see the world beyond the senses. A counter question could have silenced them. But serious as the subject was, he wanted them to understand:

"He will revive them who created them at first, for He is well-versed in every creation, who has given you fire from a green tree, with which you light your fuel. Has He who created the heavens and the earth no power to create their like? Why not! He is the Creator Supreme. When He wills a thing He need only say: Be, and it is. So glory to Him in whose hand is the dominion of all things. Unto Him you will be brought back."⁹

By the telling similitude of fire from the green tree, he wanted them to know that even though the two are dissimilar in appearance, yet a green tree gives them fire. Second, the tree burns and emits gaseous elements which again become the constituents of a new tree. This cycle of growth and decay is determined by the hidden hand of Allah. Perhaps, his response was too advanced for his time. On another occasion they bothered him again:

"Muhammad, when we are turned

to bones and bits, can we be raised as a new creation?"¹⁰

"(Yes, you will): Even if you turn to stones or iron! Or some other created thing which may seem to you most difficult (to create)!"¹¹

His answer chilled them to their bones but still holding themselves to some fond hope, they said:

"Who shall bring us back (to life)?"¹²

"He who originated you in the first place."¹³

At this they mocked him: "When will that be?"¹⁴

"It will perhaps be soon," he said with a tremor in his voice. "On the day when He will call you, and you will answer with His praise, and believe you did not tarry but a while."¹⁵

Whether it was the inevitability of the death and its attendant vision of resurrection and accountability or his somber tone with a sense of finality, a hush prevailed. Muhammad Rasul Allah had made them reflect. And that was enough for today.

Attempt at managing the crisis

Keen to contain Muhammad's message, the Quraysh had a brainstorming session. The *hajj* season was at hand, they eagerly sought some contrivance to create a mental block between him and his audiences. After much brain racking, they agreed to a two-phase plan: reach the pilgrims at the Makkan outskirts; tell them not to let them-

selves seduced by a deranged claimant to prophethood. This, they measured out, would turn the audience off and intercept any possible rapport between them. Cautioning them about any reckless tirade against him, al-Walid ibn al-Mughira suggested a uniform approach — an approach that should make sense, a plausible one. For that, said he, Muhammad should



be defined: What is he? A diviner, one who was possessed, a poet or a sorcerer? Walid's contention was that he did not fall in either of these categories. He would neither spit nor knot like a diviner. Nor was he

◆ **First century C.E. structure along the road to Petra**

haunted for he showed no sign of being chaotic in his conduct and speech. Nor was he a poet for as al-Walid said, "I am the first connoisseur of poetry and letters in Arabic, and I speak with unquestionable authority. This Qur'an is not the work of humans, nor of jinn: it has a very special beauty, a very special ring, replete with light and beauty, surpassing everything known. [Muhammad's] talk (revelation) is sweet, its roots are deep, and its branches are laden with fruit."¹⁶

Abu Jahl insisted still more. Under pressure, al-Walid finally declared that the Qur'an was extraordinary but human, the work of magic, not of God's, but that it was inimitable just as Muhammad had claimed. Abu Jahl and others agreed with him and asked him to define Muhammad. He thought for a while and then said with scornful pride: we would tell the pilgrims that Muhammad was a sorcerer who by his Qur'anic verses could cause split in families, so stay away from him.¹⁷

Al-Walid's suggested approach worked very well. Whenever the Prophet wanted to say something, people would spurn him as if he was a leper. Hurt on their attitude, he turned inward, laden with grief and wondering about this new situation when the revelation informed him about the kuffar's meeting and the role played in it by al-Walid:

Leave Me alone with him
(Walid) whom I created
and endowed with vast riches
and thriving children. ...
Surely he has been

inimical to our revelations.
I will lay on him a
mounting torment.
He pondered, and he schemed.
Confound him, how he
schemed!
then he looked around him,
frowning and leering:
Then he turned away in
scornful pride and said:
"This is no more than
borrowed magic.
It is nothing but the word
of a mortal."¹⁸

That he was neither a liar nor a sorcerer was known to them, and they often confessed among themselves, including Abu Sufyan who once crossed his path outside the city limits. He was accompanied by his wife and son, Mu'awiya. The Prophet was on foot when they recognized him. Abu Sufyan asked his son to get down, and offered the mount to him, which he accepted in good faith. Not letting the occasion go, he addressed them: "O Abu Sufyan and Hind bint 'Utba! By Allah, you will all die at the appointed hour, and resurrected again. Then those who are righteous will be consigned to Paradise and those who are bad will be sent to Hell." That said, he recited the first eleven *ayahs* from Ha-Mim Sajdah, dismounted and walked out. Of the three, Hind was visibly upset. Muhammad Rasul Allah had disturbed her sense of comfort. Turning to her husband, she said: "For this sorcerer-liar, you took my son off the mount!" In a moment of truth, he corrected her: "By Allah, he is neither a liar

nor a sorcerer.”¹⁹

The conflict intensifies

Even before his rise to prophethood, Muhammad (‘alayhi as-salam) looked in contempt at the Arabian gods. This was logical as well as desirable that the one who was going to be a prophet should have consistency in his character and belief. He first went outside the Arabia at the impressionable age of twelve in the company of his uncle, Abu Talib. It was on this journey that he is said to have been interrogated by the Christian monk Bahira. “Boy, I ask you by al-Lat and al-‘Uzza to answer my question.” Bahira knew that the Arabs believed in these gods and he therefore invoked them. But Muhammad did not like the format of his question. “Do not ask me by al-Lat and al-‘Uzza, for by Allah nothing is more hateful to me than these two.”²⁰

After his elevation to prophethood, his disdain for the pagan gods undoubtedly increased, and he often expressed it. In a way, it was necessary to dilute the hold of al-Lat and al-‘Uzza over the people before they could be convinced of the supremacy of one God. The Quraysh, being no fools, knew the implication of ridiculing their deities. Letting it happen, would have wiped out the entire pagan faith. Thus, a deeply hurt Abu Jahl almost exploded on seeing him: “By God, Muhammad, you must either stop cursing our gods, or else we will curse the God you serve.”²¹

This obviously staggered him. How could he have lived with curses upon Allah — the Lord whom he served — by Abu Jahl and his likes? The revelation convinced him to change his tactics immediately:

Curse not those to whom
they pray other than
Allah, lest they curse
Allah wrongfully
through ignorance.²²

This, however, was not the only tactical approach that the Quraysh followed in frustrating the Islamic call.

As the days passed, Abu Jahl’s sentiments turned savage. Seething with hatred, one day he wanted to kill the Prophet during his prayer in the Ka’bah. But as he tried to approach him with a rock in his hand, he recoiled pale with dread.

For the first time, Abu Jahl realized to his grief, that Muhammad had the protection of divine forces. The elders in the Ka’bah were surprised at the sudden change in Abu Jahl’s appearance. “What happened?” they asked. “When I came close to Muhammad,” said he, “a camel’s stallion got in my way. By God, I have never seen anything like his head, shoulders and teeth on any stallion before, and he moved as if he would eat me.”

Among the elders was also present al-Nadr ibn al-Harith, another sworn enemy of the Prophet. He said, “O Quraysh, a situation has arisen which you cannot deal with. Muhammad



◆ Above:
Hreba
Madain
Salih: tombs
carved in
the moun-
tain

Opposite:
Sandstone
sepulcher
400 miles
north of
Makkah

was a young man most liked among you, most truthful in speech, and most trustworthy, until, when you saw gray hairs on his temple, and he brought you his message, you said he was a sorcerer; but he is not, for we have seen such people and their spitting and their knots; you said a diviner, but we have seen such people and their behavior, and we heard their rhymes; and you said he was haunted, but he is not, for we have seen the possessed, and he shows no signs of their gasping and whispering and delirium. O men of Quraysh, think about your affairs, for by God, you are faced with a grave situation."²³

What al-Nadr wanted was to make

them realize the futility of their gameplan in dealing with Muhammad. It was obvious to him that Muhammad's credibility as a truthful person was beyond reproach, and it would take a lot to get him compromised in the people's eyes. Something else had to be done, and he thought he could do it.

One day as usual, the Prophet addressed a gathering and declaimed the verses from the Qur'an, with particular emphasis on the misdeeds of past nations and their subsequent downfall. It created impact because the Arabs had seen the ruins of 'Aad and Thamud on their trade excursions to Yemen and Syria. Before the crowd could disperse, al-Nadr jumped

to his feet and began to narrate the stories of the Persian heroes, like Rustum and Isfandiyar, in the enchanting style of a traditional storyteller. Having done the mischief, he said: "By God, Muhammad cannot tell a better story than I. His talk is only of old fables which he has copied."²⁴ Of all the approaches to counter his "scare," this was the most effective since it aimed at entertaining and not enlightening, which put him in a seemingly adverse position.

The test of wits

Storytelling aside, some of the Qurayshi elders were particularly adept in dialectic. What if in a test of wits Muhammad's shallowness is exposed and he is humiliated, they thought. Egged on by their desire to shame him, al-Nadr tried to draw him into an argument, but the Prophet silenced him in his forthright manner: "For sure, you and what you serve other than God are the fuel of hell. To it you will all surely come. You proclaim them gods but if these had been gods, they would not have come to it; they all will surely abide therein."²⁵

Al-Nadr wanted to respond but found himself groping for words. The Prophet left the meeting. A chill swept over the audience. They were still muddled by the event when another prominent Qurayshi 'Abdullah ibn al-Ziba'ra al-Sahmi walked into the Ka'bah and found to his dismay that Muhammad had overwhelmed them by his speech. Upon his suggestion, they built their the-

sis:

If everything which is worshiped besides God will go to the hell-fire, then what about the angels that the Quraysh worshiped; and what about 'Uzayr (Ezra) that [some ignorant]



Jews worshiped, and Jesus that the Christians worshiped? Dialectically the thesis was sound, and they were quite satisfied with their brainstorming. After all, how could Muhammad assert that the angels, 'Uzayr, and Jesus would be thrown into hell-fire along with their followers.

Confronted with their question, he replied that those who wished to be worshiped to the exclusion of Allah will be with those who worship him. They worship only satans.²⁶

Those who received kindness from Allah in the past such as Jesus son of Mary, 'Uzayr and those rabbis and monks who have lived in obedience to Allah, whom erring people worship as Lords beside Allah, will be removed far from the fire and will not hear the slightest sound of it, and they will dwell in what their souls desired.²⁷

Those who worship angels and hold that they are the daughters of Allah, glory be to Him, He has fathered none. In fact, the angels are His honored slaves, they do not speak before He speaks, and they carry out His commands.²⁸ Likewise, Jesus son of Mary, was nothing but a slave to whom Allah showed favor and made him an example to the children of Israel.

Speechless they left. Their thesis, based as it was on untruth, was not sound after all. Nevertheless, they were not the kind who would easily give up.

The game of dialectic aside, which the Quraysh always lost, they were worried about the aura Muhammad

had about him. His message had still to find mass following, but despite his apparent weakness as a leader of a very tiny minority, his influence was on the rise. Sometimes even his worst enemies were found listening to his message. Whether it was out of curiosity or the sheer strength of the Qur'anic verses that drew them to his gatherings was immaterial. What mattered was their presence in his gatherings which, in their estimation, weakened their alliance against him.

The Quraysh contemplated a new course of action to reactivate the hostility of such people against the movement. A four-part gameplan was given to the detractors of Muhammad Rasul Allah: they should shout down his reading of the Qur'an;²⁹ surge around him and make fun of the message;³⁰ give spin to the text;³¹ and draw Muslims into aimless discussions.³² For a number of days it worked in creating problems for the message, but eventually it boomeranged to their grief. The Muslims' ability to stand on their dignity against the avalanche of abuses was impressive enough to continue influencing the Makkans. Frustrated again the elders thought of building up a tone-deaf barrier between the called and the caller. This time they asked the people to keep themselves away from Muhammad's speech; second, if they were caught listening to him, they would be asked to spit in his face.

The revelations on the resurrection of the dead were still reverberating within the Makkan society:

And they say, "what?
 When we are dead turned
 to dust and bones
 we can be raised
 as anew creation?"
 Say, even if you turned
 to stones and steel
 or some other created
 thing which may
 seem to most difficult
 to (create)!
 They will then say,
 "who will revert us back?"
 Say (Muhammad), he
 who originated you
 in the first place.³³

Ubyy ibn Khalaf, an inveterate Prophet hater, was caught listening to him by his friend 'Uqba ibn abi-Mu'ayt. As a penance, he was told to spit in Muhammad's face, or he would lose his friendship with 'Uqba.

Ubyy used the revelation as his point of reference to approach the Prophet. Taking an old bone to him he said:

"Muhammad, do you allege that God can revivify a decayed bone?" Before he could have responded to him, 'Ubyy crumbled the bone into dust and blew the particles in his face. The Prophet unruffled answered: "Yes, I do say that Allah will raise this bone as well as you."³⁴

When the confrontations on the individual and group levels failed to deter him from following his chosen path, the Quraysh mustered the social forces and unleashed them upon him: he was verbally badgered in public; allegations were devised

and baseless falsehoods attributed to him. Even children were encouraged to scoff at him. He was now insane³⁵, a wizard. People were told not to listen to him nor take his words to heart. The verses revealed during this period contained not only instructions for coping with the adverse circumstances but also refuted the allegations of the opponents. For instance, he was told: "You are the recipient of Allah's great blessings. You are not insane; very soon, it will be known who is insane. Your Lord knows best, who is on the right path and who has gone astray. You continue with the mission and do not heed those who are opposing the call. They want you to be easy with your mission so that they may relax as well. But this does not suit your calling to facilitate others' desires. Those who do not agree with your message, leave their case to Me. Soon they will come to know the consequence of the latitude given to them. Tell them you need no favor for yourself, nor have ulterior motives. If they want to prove otherwise, they should come up with evidence. Obviously, there is none. You should, thus, persevere in your mission. You and your companions must stand up against the odds with serenity and patience. Conditions will change at the appointed time."³⁶

This is a model of an address. Such exhortations were continually revealed. That the harbinger of the call was neither insane nor a poet nor a magician was clearly stated in the verses by showing the contrast between him and such people. Neither his message nor his character bore any similarity to such types.³⁷

The more the Makkans spread lies to stop others from listening to him, the greater was their eagerness to hear him.

The Thamud parallel

For the Quraysh, Muhammad (‘alayhi as-salam) was not a person anymore but a phenomenon — which, to their misfortune, they found difficult to deal with. Every day that passed compounded their problem. However, in this gloomy configuration of events, the Quraysh had a spark of hope in Abu Talib’s relationship with Muhammad. They knew the influence he had on him. Besides, they believed, this would take away the strong clanish support from Muhammad leaving him alone and thus exposed as a soft target. Abu Talib was still a nonbeliever and the Quraysh thought he might put his weight to their side. What prompted the decision was, however, the conversion of a man named Abu Dharr.

He came from the tribe of Ghiffar, which lived near the Makkah-Syria trade route. The Quraysh piloted their trade caravans on this route. Most probably Abu Dharr heard about the Prophet from them. His curiosity brought him to Makkah; and after having met the Prophet, he embraced Islam.

Makkah was turbulent, and Muhammad Rasul Allah wanted him to return to his tribe. But by sloughing off his old self, Abu Dharr had assumed a new identity of courage.

He headed straight for the Ka’bah and recited aloud: “I stand witness that there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is His messenger.” Mad with rage, the Makkans fell upon him, beating him to the ground. But before they could have killed him, ‘Abbas intervened. “Woe unto you,” said ‘Abbas to the Makkans, “don’t you know he belongs to the Ghiffar and your merchants’ route to Syria passes through their country?” This appeal to self-interest worked, and they left him alone. The Prophet did not want him to hurt himself further and urged him to return to his people: “I have been given indications of a land that has oases in it. I think that place is none other than Yathrib. Would you take my message to your people? Maybe they profit by it, and you get the reward.”³⁶ He joined his tribe and succeeded in breaking half of his tribesmen from their traditional religion. Later, he repeated his success act with the neighboring tribe of Aslam.

The spread of Islam outside Makkah in strategic locations of Ghiffar and Aslam increased the Makkan sense of insecurity. Something had to be done and fast. Thus, a delegation of their elders waited on Abu Talib.

“O Abu Talib,” they said, “you are old and we hold you in high esteem. We asked you before to restrain your nephew but you did nothing. By God, we cannot tolerate any longer that our fathers be denounced, our gods insulted, and we labeled as fatheaded and frivolous. Either you stop him or we fight both of you until one of us perish.”

With so many angry old men at his doorstep, Abu Talib called for him. Accompanied by his cousin 'Aqil, Muhammad Rasul Allah arrived to a tense scene.

His eyes glided on the picture gallery of faces in front of him and then settled on Abu Talib's. They want you to stop it, said Abu Talib. The disturbing sadness of his uncle's voice gave him a jolt. Of all the persons in the world, he would not have done a thing to displease him. But he was not his own person anymore. He was at Allah's bidding. Raising his face to the sky, he said:

"Do you see that sun?"

"Yes," they said.

"[Then listen] the sun has no power but to radiate heat to you. Likewise, I have no power but to spread the message,"³⁹ said he.

His role description was strikingly revealing. Prophethood was not different from the rest of the things in the universe. Like other phenomena of nature, a prophet is God-sent. Every morning the sun surfaces and every night it bows out in a fiery display of red and gold, without a moment's respite — and that has been happening from time immemorial. Such are the inexorable laws of Allah. A prophet is also bonded by the same eternal laws. So what are you asking for?

Abu Talib was after all his uncle. He had raised him and knew for a fact that Muhammad ('alayhi as-salam) was not a liar. If he was telling the truth, which he was, then

Abu Talib could not have done much to alleviate their discomfort.

Expressing their disapproval of the Prophet's unbecoming conduct and berating Abu Talib for patronizing schism among them, they left fuming and fretting.

For Abu Talib, it was almost coming to a cropper. "Son of my brother," said he, "your people came to me and threatened me with dire consequences if you continued with your call. Spare my life and yours and do not impose on me a burden greater than I can bear."⁴⁰

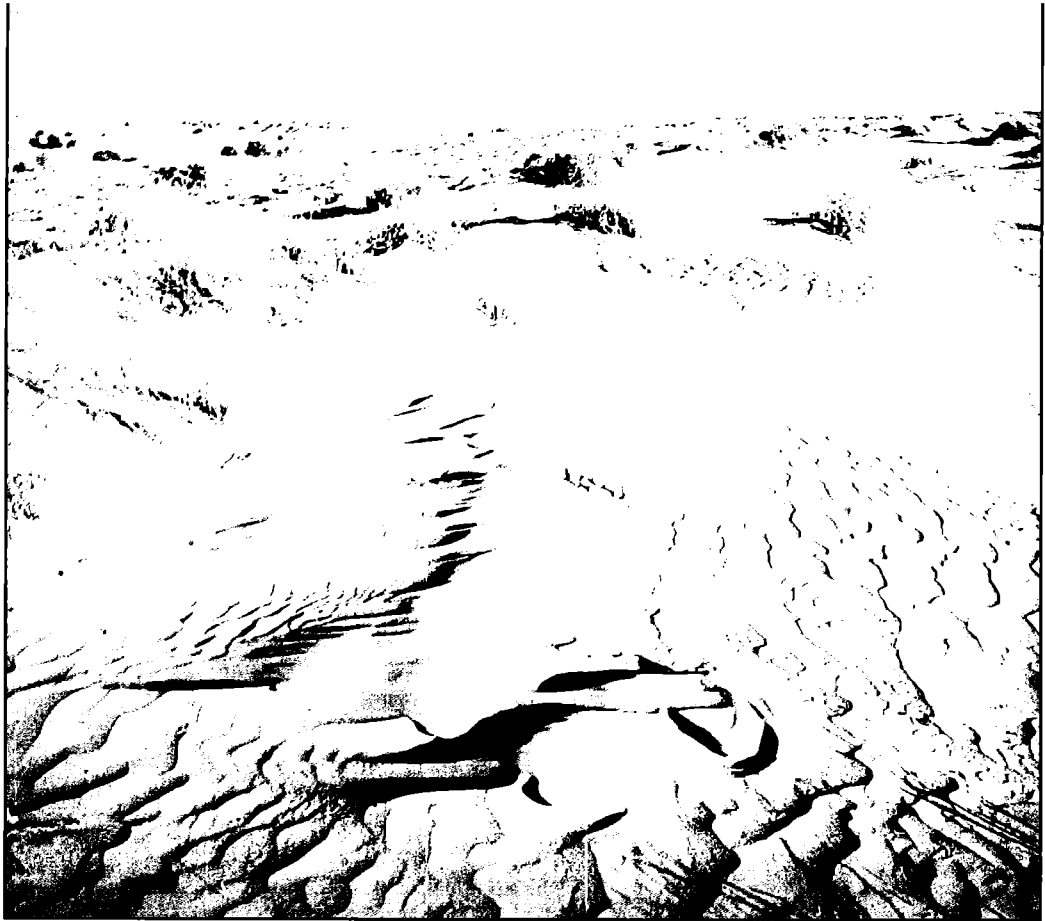
The Prophet sensed the strain in their relations but come what may, he was going to stick it out. "O my uncle, by Allah in whose hands is my soul, if they were to place the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left and ask me to abandon this course, I will not turn from it until Allah makes me victorious or I perish therein."⁴¹

His voice almost cracked with powerful emotions, but it swayed Abu Talib to his side: "Go where you please and say what you will. By God, I will never deliver you to your enemies."⁴²

It was day time. The sun was glowing like furnace low on the horizon, the occasional small patches of grass were parched out of existence, apparently never to be green again. He sat in the shade of a wall in the Ka'bah, his face reddened and eyes fixed on the Qurayshi elders:

"By the Lord of the Ka'bah!" he muttered, "man is in loss."

Such apocalyptic words caught



◆ Above:
The desert
topography

Opposite: al-
Jubah: 5th
century
tomb with
South
Arabian
characters

Abu Dharr's ears who happened to be sitting close to him.

"My parents be sacrificed for you, who is in loss?" he asked.

"Those who have wealth, and they withhold it from the poor and the needy."⁴³

Then rising from his seat, he walked up to the elders. On seeing him approaching them, they eyed each other. Most of them had developed a scare of him in their hearts. They did not like what they described

as his lashing of their faith which, in their belief, if they had borne with, would invite their gods' wrath upon them.

"May he perish," said Abu Lahab.

He knew the precise import of his vitriolic rant. Ignoring him, he said: "I have a message for you from your Lord."

This brought discomfort on their faces as if saying, "there he goes again!"

"By Allah, you can do no harm to me. I am in the protection of some-

one who is the Master of the Universe.⁴⁴ [So take this out from your mind and listen!], he intoned:

And verily We sent to
Thamud their brother Salih,
who said: "Worship Allah."
But they were divided
into two groups disputing

with one another."

[Thereupon] said he:
"O my people; why do you
wish to hasten
evil rather than good?
Why not ask for Allah's
forgiveness that you
may receive mercy."



'They said: "We warn you
of inviting to yourself
and to those with you."

He said: "The evil you presage
can only come from Allah.
In reality you are
a people under
trial (for your own
inauspiciousness).

And there were in that
city nine persons
who spread disorder
in the land
and did reform not."⁴⁵

At this, he paused for a while and
looked at Abu Jahl's and his cohorts'
crestfallen faces. His steely gaze
almost rattled them. In a strange way
the revelation was conflating the mis-
chief mongers of Thamud with the
Makkan elders. Stunned they
listened.

They said: "Let's swear
by Allah that we
will attack him
and his household
by night, and
afterward we
will say to his
friends: We didn't
see his household
destroyed. And look,
we speak the truth.

So they brewed a plot:
and We also planned,
while they perceived
not. Then see
the end of their
machinations, for
look: We destroyed

them and their
entire people."⁴⁶

Many a time before they had
dismissed his divine message as
arrant nonsense. But this one was a
clear, no-holds-barred message. Did
he see in Quraysh the Thamud
parallel? Was he throwing them a
challenge to kill him if they could?
To their dismay, Muhammad was not
a provisional figure, as they thought
in the beginning, who would fade out
in due course of time: he surely was
not showing any letup in his strug-
gle. The conflict would certainly keep
roiling. Subdued air hung over the
place.

A new breed — a class by itself

Embracing Islam was not an
easy thing to do. Those who
dared were different from
others in many ways: the heathen
practices of their society had already
distanced them from the mainstream,
though their inclination to piety had
made their characters incontestable.
Many had forsaken idolatry and felt
an inward pull toward the truth.

Islam gave a new sensitivity to
their souls and fashioned out of them
dauntless soldiers of da'wah.

'Uthman ibn Maz'un was a cousin
of Umayya ibn Khalaf, who
mistreated him often after his Islam
became public. Ironically, he was
given protection by a prominent non-
Muslim relative of his, al-Walid ibn
al-Mughira. With the Makkans in-

tensifying Muslims' persecution, his conscience was disturbed. He disliked his comfort, while his brethren-in-faith were being brutalized on the streets of Makkah. "By Allah, my coming and going under the protection of non believers is a blot on my character. From now, I seek no other protection but of Allah's."⁴⁷ And with these words, he renounced al-Walid's protection.

One day Labid ibn Rabi'a was reciting a verse in the Ka'bah: "... Everything lovely must inevitably cease." 'Uthman found the verse unpalatable, or perhaps he wanted to make a statement on Islam, he cried, "You lie! The joy of Paradise will never cease." Labid gave him a surprised look and then provoked the crowd: "O men of Quraysh, your friends never used to be annoyed thus. Since when has this sort of thing happened among you?" One of the audiences said, "This is one of the clowns with Muhammad. ... Take no notice of him."⁴⁸ This caused a heated argument.

Sensing his alienation from the crowd, Labid came close to him and slogged him in the eye. When the incident was reported to al-Walid, he said to 'Uthman: "O nephew, your eye need not have suffered had you been in my protection." Al-Walid empathized with his nephew but so profound was the change in him that he said straight: "No, by Allah my good eye needs what happened to my bruised eye. I am under the protection of One who is more powerful than you."⁴⁹

What could have al-Walid said to

such an expression of faith — it was something beyond his worldly wisdom. Mindblowing. He shrugged his shoulders and walked away.

'Uthman was not the only one who braved the Makkan animus; there were others as well who by rebuking the norms of their society were trying to reach out for the souls of their kins.

Mus'ab ibn 'Umayr came from a wealthy family. Handsome in appearance, eloquent in speech, and beautiful in manners, he was one of the most sought-after bachelors in the town. His mother first threatened to disinherit him; when it failed, she used the time-tested method of taxing a son's love for his mother by refusing to eat. But for him, it was Islam that mattered: "By God, mother, if you have a hundred souls and they all die one by one, even then I will never quit Muhammad's religion." His mother did not die; and of course, he did not renounce his faith, either. As a result, he was thrown out of the house. His identity rapidly changed, the Makkans identified him as a castout barely dressed.

Whether this was 'Uthman or Mus'ab or some other noble souls, their hallmark was loyalty to Islam, which distinguished them into the consciousness of their adversaries.

Courage was another characteristic of such Muslims who sought to make a statement, spirited enough to be noticed. And variably, they succeeded.

Physically ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ud was a weak person. By the time he accepted Islam, only the Prophet had recited the Qur’an in the Ka’bah. Blessed with a beautiful voice, he took the challenge of reciting the Qur’an there. The companions tried to stop him since they thought his poor family connections would jeopardize his security. But his mind was made up: “Let me alone,” said he, “for Allah will protect me.”⁵⁰ In the morning, he stopped by the Maqam in the Ka’bah, and began reciting the prologue of al-Jathiyah:

This book is revealed
from Allah, the exalted
in power and full
of wisdom.
Surely, in the
heavens and
the earth are signs
for those who believe.⁵¹

His high-pitched voice caught the attention of the Qurayshi assembly. “What on earth is this son of a slave woman saying?” they asked in indignation. When they found he was declaiming the message revealed to Muhammad (‘alayhi as-salam), they gave him a good drubbing. With his face swollen, he came back to Dar al-Arqam. The companions were grieved to see his facial injuries: “This is just what we feared would happen to you.” Happy as he was on the spiritual experience he had undergone, he exulted, “The enemies of Allah were never so contemptible in my sight than they are now. And if you like, I shall go and do the same thing before them tomorrow.”⁵²

Sparing Abu Bakr and ‘Uthman, others were mostly poor — coming from the lowest of the low in the Arabian society. In fact, the non-believers jeered at the Prophet’s following, whom they thought a miserable lot of no consequence.

Bilal was an African slave, owned by Umayya ibn Khalaf, a typical slave master who wanted total control over him. When he responded to the Prophet’s call by becoming Muslim, Umayya turned into his persecutor. Apparently, there was no reason for Umayya to brutalize him. After all, he still owned him. But perhaps in Muhammad’s message, he saw the death of institutional slavery. For sure, the Prophet was out to change everything in the Arabian society which antagonized people like Umayya who, together with Abu Jahl, were in the vanguard of opposition to him.

Bilal’s Islam in a way posed also a personal problem to Umayya, for the Prophet by taking away a slice of his belongings had escalated the conflict right to his doorstep, and he had to fight back by forcing Bilal to renounce his faith. He tried to achieve this by torturing him on the hot sand, with a heavy stone placed on his chest; but all he could get from him was “*ahad! ahad!*” (Allah is one). Sickened by his fidelity to Islam, Umayya handed him over to the street urchins, who would drag him around the town from a rope around his neck.

Prompted by his pathetic existence, Abu Bakr visited Umayya ibn Khalaf and asked him to stop brutal-

izing Bilal for his Islamicity. Umayya greeted him with sarcasm. If anyone, said he, was to be blamed, it were people like him who encouraged a slave to embrace a faith other than his master's. Abu Bakr pleaded for leniency, but he scorned him by saying that if he really cared for that good-for-nothing slave, he could buy him out for the "benefit in the hereafter." Umayya was obviously making a caustic jibe at Islam's postulate that the reality is more than the apparent tangibility of the material world, and that one day creation will be judged for what they have done to their lives.

Later visiting with Muhammad Rasul Allah, Abu Bakr recounted Bilal's plight to him and sought his advice on freeing Bilal from the Umayya's yoke. He readily approved the idea.

The following morning saw Bilal free, though a little disconcerted about his new situation. Where would he go now, what would be his position in the new nation of Islam? Such questions must have tolled in his mind. But when Abu Bakr addressed him as his master, he had a jolt of his life. Abu Bakr the prince of the Makkan merchants — one of the noblest among the Quraysh — was calling him "ya sayyidi." He broke into tears. And when the Prophet himself greeted him by a loving embrace, he knew he had finally come home. From now onward, he would stay in the limelight of history.

Khabbab was yet another slave whom the Quraysh sorted out for his Islamicity. They made him lie on the

burning coal, while a man, with his foot on his chest, held him down. His skin burnt so badly that for the rest of his life he bore white leprosy spots on it.⁵³

Women brave persecution

In this suffering, women were not spared either. Lubayna was a slavegirl belonging to Umar's household. She incurred his wrath when she declared her ties with the new faith of Islam. Umar's hatred of Muhammad Rasul Allah was a known fact. Her conversion to Islam flew him into rage. Like Umayya ibn Khalaf, he thought he owned her soul as well.

Her womanhood made him believe that a single beating would bring her to senses. When she persisted, he began beating her every other day. So callously he beat her that after every beating he would say: "I have only stopped beating you because I am tired." But if he was ruthless, she was resolute, and would hit back at him, "May Allah treat you the same way." At the end, it was Umar who gave up on her.⁵⁴

Zinniyya was another hapless victim of this oppression. She fell into the hands of Abu Jahl who slung her against the wall, and she lost her eyesight. When they imputed her blindness to the wrath of the gods, she dismissed it as arrant nonsense for, as she said, their gods had no eyes to see even their worshipers. Blindness or no blindness, "such decisions," she said, "were made in



◆ **Bilal's
mosque on
Abu Qubays**

the heaven above. My Provider has power to restore my eyesight.”⁵⁵ To their shame, her eyesight eventually returned.

Yet another victim was Umm Shariyk Ghizzya, a slave woman of Yemeni extraction. Her offense was twofold: she not only embraced

Islam but was instrumental in converting other women to her cause. Dreaded like a virus lest it spread, she was delivered to a trade caravan enroute to Yemen, with special instructions to rope her on the mount and avoid feeding her. After days of starvation when she was found alive and well, they freed her

and embraced Islam.⁵⁶

There were many of her kind. But of all the sufferers in the Makkan hell, the family of Yasir came out worst. Slaves as they were, their groans would filter through the air and convulse the passersby. One day the Prophet walked close to the scene of violence, and his heart sank with grief for them. "*Sabrun al-i Yasir fa inna maw'idukum al-jannah* — forbear Yasirs, your place is Paradise,"⁵⁷ said he. And to Paradise they went. Yasir could not sustain his injuries and died; his wife Sumiyya was lanced in the pelvis by Abu Jahl.⁵⁸ His son though survived but could never forget the torture he received from his tormentors. What kind of dark forces drove their masters to this grade of violence is hard to say. But perhaps in the resolute resistance of the Yasir's family, they saw the brewing slave revolt which they wanted to hold down.

These were not isolated incidents nor sporadic expression of the Makkans' hate for the Muslims that revealed itself in beatings; rather, it was a dance macabre of casual studied violence. The women's conversion brought peculiar problems for them as well as for the Prophet. In many cases they were married, residing with non-Muslim husbands, who hated their new-found faith and beat them. Also, there were women who concealed their Islam from their families lest it invite hardship for them.

Hawa bint Yazid was one such Muslimah who endured torture at the hands of her husband. Muhammad Rasul Allah came to know about her

suffering and decided to talk to her husband Qays ibn al-Hatim, a renowned poet. He met him in souq Dhu'l Majaz⁵⁹ and asked him to embrace Islam but he refused. Concerned as he was about Hawa, he made a direct reference to his mistreating her: "I have been told," said he, "that you are mistreating your wife, Hawa, ever since she renounced your faith. So fear Allah and for my sake don't bother her."⁶⁰

Softened by his polite manners, he promised not to beat her anymore.

Differing in experience, they were witness to a great spiritual awakening — a new breed in the Makkan cauldron was ready to take over the world; their success was only a matter of time.

Persecution Brings New Adherents

The parable of those who
reject their Lord is that
their works are as ashes,
on which the wind blows

furiously on a stormy day:
they shall not be
able to gain anything
from what they have earned:

that is straying
far (from the goal)

(Ibrahim: 18)

From the outset, Abu Jahl's bile against Muhammad Rasul Allah was unseemly one-sided and tone deaf. So consumingly he bred himself on hatred that if malevolent thought could kill, the Prophet would have dropped dead long ago.

One day Abu Jahl was so horridly abusive that even his camp followers were outraged by his small mindedness and moral incorrectness. For the Prophet, it was just the final close-to-the-bone insult that came his way in recent weeks. But other than

measuring the world around him and finding it wanting, he could do nothing except to pray for its moral rebound.

Incidentally, Hamza was out on the hunt in the glens of Makkah. When he returned, a slave-girl told him of Abu Jahl's coughing up his bile against the Prophet. Was it an impulsive action triggered by Abu Jahl's reported stream of invective or love for the much-abused nephew that with the bow still flung over his shoulder, he bolted toward the Ka'bah. Finding him there, he ham-



► The
Makkan
heart had
turned
into a
desert

Khabbab's skin crawled with distaste. Not knowing how to reply him, his calling became hell for him. Overtaken by rage and grief, he saw Muhammad Rasul Allah and with the impatience of a disciple who had become weary of waiting for the long-expected miracle, unloaded his frustration.

"O Messenger of Allah, oppression has exceeded all bounds of endurance: won't you please pray to Allah for our deliverance?"

Reddened with anger, the Prophet said in a voice that was new to Khabbab: "There were people before who were subjected to tyranny of a far greater magnitude: their flesh was scraped from their bones with steel-made combs; their skulls were sawed into two halves and even then, they did not give up their faith. By Allah, this mission will be accomplished: a time will come when one will travel from San'a to Hadr al-Maut and will fear none but Allah. You are just an impatient people.

mered his head with the bow; and then in a flurry of emotion, he announced on Abu Jahl's blood-stained face: "Would you dare to abuse him when I follow his religion and say what he says?"

Although Hamza declared his conversion under the impulse of the hour, the reluctance to abandon his ancestral ways was still there. He came to the Prophet and perhaps to

cheer him up, said: "Muhammad, you should be happy, for I have taken your revenge on Abu'l-Hakam." This should have pleased him, but Muhammad was another kind of nephew. Certainly he was hurt, but revenge was a passion foreign to him. "I don't like getting even with others," he said. "If however you submit yourself to Allah alone, I will be pleased."¹ Overwhelmed by his nephew's sense of altruism, he looked at his face. For the first time, he felt himself drawn toward him with a pull that he had seldom felt before. As his uncle, he knew the generosity of his disposition, but this was a new aspect of his person: there was not a trace of self-centeredness in him. In a moment of self-awareness, he knew that Muhammad was not just a nephew who needs to

be supported against his adversaries but someone to be followed — a person who is in the stream of time, presiding over destiny. The more Hamza thought of it, the more he felt the societal hold on him receding. By the end of the day as the dusk splashed its colors on the horizon, his heart began to feel at ease; his deliberative process was over — he was a willing candidate for Islam.

The message shows resilience

Despite the Makkan hostility, the Prophet's attitude remained magnanimous and never for a moment did he let bitterness eat at his endowment of generosity and compassion. Among the notables, 'Umar's and Abu Jahl's enmity was almost proverbial. Still the Prophet, even when persuasion had failed to bring about any change in them, once prayed: "O Allah! Whoever is dearer to you between the two 'Umars, energize Islam by him." A few days later 'Umar accepted Islam to the pleasure of the Prophet and his companions.

'Umar himself once recounted the event leading to his conversion: "One night, I thought of putting an end to the Prophet's life. I stepped out of my house and, incidentally, found him going to the masjid. I followed him. He entered the masjid and began to offer his prayers. I stood there and listened to him. He recited al-Haqqah. I was dazed by its substance. The diction was fascinating. I thought, by Allah, he is a poet. No sooner did this come to my mind than he recited the verse:

This is truly the word
of an honored messenger;
it is not the word of
a poet: little it is
you believe.

"When I heard [him recite] it, I felt as if he knew the inner recesses of my mind. He must be a sorcerer, I wondered. He then declaimed:

Nor is it the word of a
soothsayer: little admonition
it is you receive.
This is a message sent down
from the Lord of the worlds.

"He declaimed the whole verse, and I felt Islam descending into my heart."²

But since 'Umar was headstrong, the change did not take place on that night.

One day highly strung, egged on by Abu Jahl's bait of 100 camels for the Prophet's life, he stepped out to kill him.³ Halfway, he met Nu'aym ibn 'Abdullah who, on seeing him rumpled, inquired: "'Umar, where are you going?" "To seek Muhammad, the apostate, who has split the Quraysh, made mockery of their traditions, insulted their faith and their gods," he replied. Nu'aym who came from the clan of 'Umar had already embraced Islam. Obviously, he did not like his venom against the Prophet. He knew about the recent conversion of 'Umar's sister and had a hunch that the disclosure would hurt him grievously. So he retorted: "You deceive yourself, 'Umar! Do you think the clan of 'Abd Manaf will allow you to walk on the earth after killing Muhammad. Why don't you go to your family and set their affairs right [rather than going after others]?" This was quite a stunner for him. "And what is wrong with my family?" 'Umar snapped back. "Your sister Fatima and your brother-in-law and nephew Sa'id ibn Zayd, both have become Muslims. Now, how about dealing with them first?" taunted Nu'aym.

Spurred by the news, 'Umar headed for his sister's house. Khabbab was reading sura Ta-Ha to the new converts from a manuscript. Hearing the footsteps of 'Umar, Sa'id pushed Khabbab into a side room, and Fatima concealed the manuscript.

"What was this blather I heard?" growled 'Umar.

The couple faked ignorance.

"I know you have joined the sect of Muhammad," said he. And with these words, he pounced on his brother-in-law. When his sister intervened, she too was beaten.

'Umar knew his position in the family; his word had always a sway. But when his sister and brother-in-law showed no sign of giving up Islam, he had a surprise of his life. Discarding their ancestral faith was certainly deplorable and thus unforgivable, but their defiance was undoubtedly fiendish to him. He paused for a while to regain his breath. Before him lay the hapless figures with swollen faces, torn lips and sore eyes. His sister's hair were matted and clothes torn. The air was puffed up with agonizing groans; then out of the bustle, he heard her sobbing: "Umar, you can beat us to death, but we will not abjure our chosen path."

What gives them endurance? he wondered. And then suddenly compassion clutched his heart. He politely asked for the papyrus to know what it read like. She agreed provided he cleaned himself first, which he did. 'Umar began reading sura Ta-Ha:

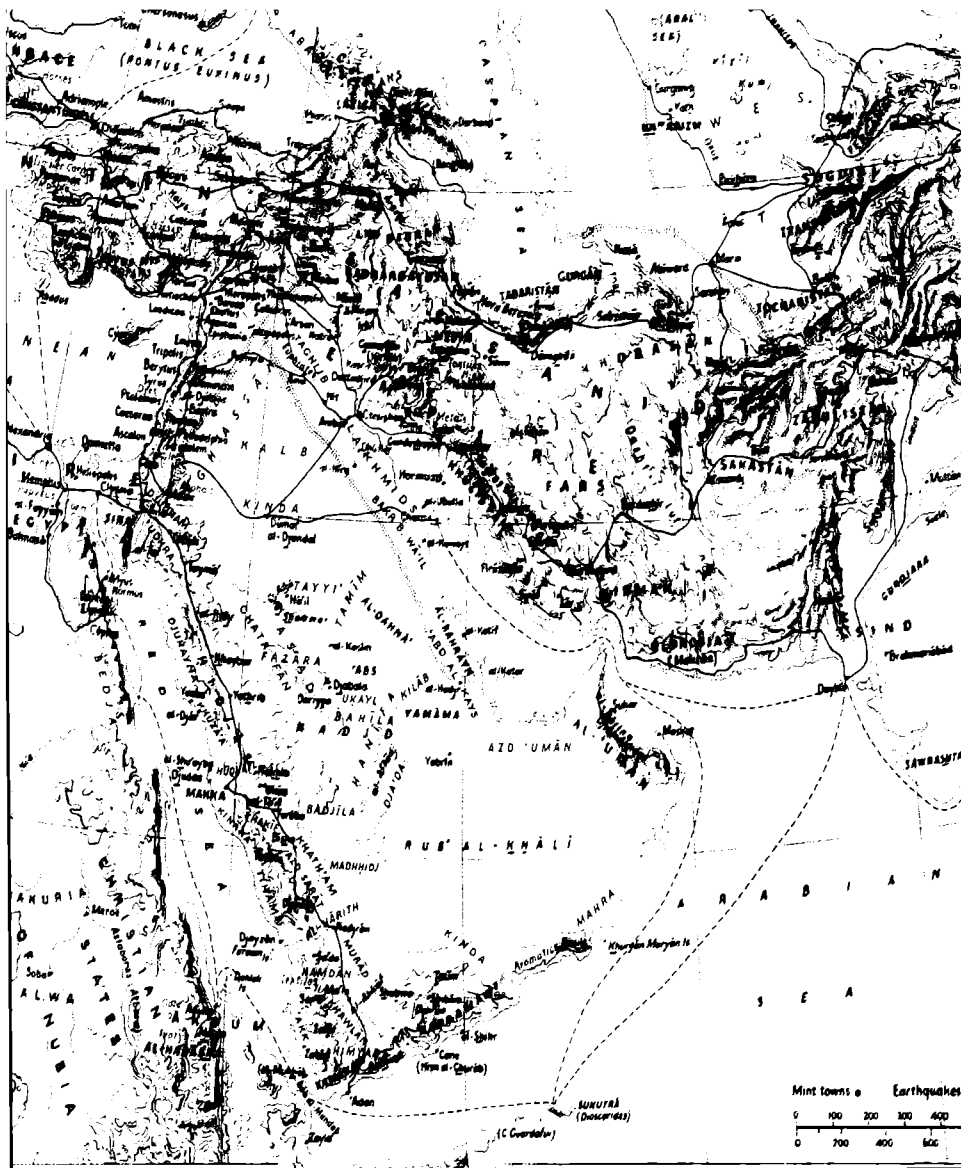
We have not sent down the Qur'an to you to be an occasion for your distress, but only as an admonition to those who fear Allah, a revelation from Him who created the earth and the heavens on high.

(God) Most Gracious is firmly established on the throne (of authority). To Him belongs what is in the heavens and on earth, and all between them, and all beneath the soil. If you pronounce the word aloud, (it is no matter): for verily He knows what is secret and what is yet more hidden. Allah! there is no god but He! To Him belong the Most beautiful names.

When he came to "Allah, there is no god but He!," he felt his old world falling apart. He decided to have a face-to-face dialogue with the Prophet. An angry man that he was, it was not prudent for anyone to trust his motives. Khabbab, perhaps, was the only person who was willing to take the chance and took him to Muhammad Rasul Allah.

This was the period when he was staying at Arqam ibn Zayd's house. 'Umar knocked at the door; but seeing him carrying the sword, the companions were reluctant to let him in. They were obviously disturbed. Thereupon, Hamza said: "Let him in, if he has come with a righteous intent, well and good; otherwise, with the same sword we will hack his head

▲ The Middle East at the time of hijrah



off.” The moment he stepped in, the Prophet caught at his cloak and said, “What brings you here, son of Khattab? By Allah, I feel as if you will not desist from *kufir* (disbelief) unless Allah imposes upon you a

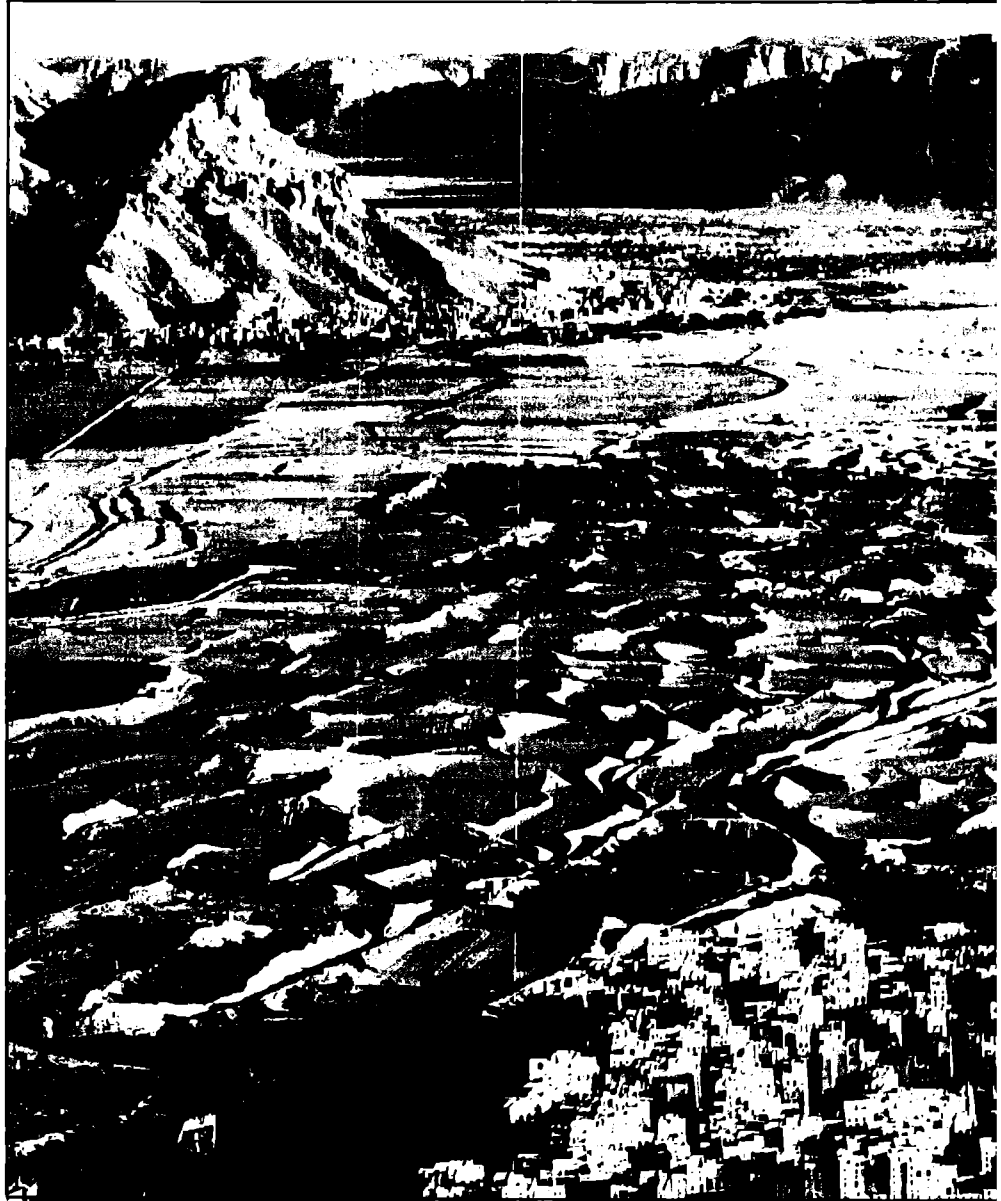
severe calamity.” Unnerved, he responded humbly, “O Messenger of Allah! I have come here to profess faith in Allah and His messenger.” For the Prophet, it was a pleasant surprise; an instant “*Allahu Akbar*”

(Allah is great) surfaced on his lips and then Arqam's house resounded with the companions' triumphal shibboleth, praising their Creator.⁴

'Umar's entrance into the movement changed its whole complexion. For the first time, on his initiative,

the Ka'bah became the scene of congregational prayers. It was an expression of maturity, of strength and resilience of the new faith. Islam had come to stay.

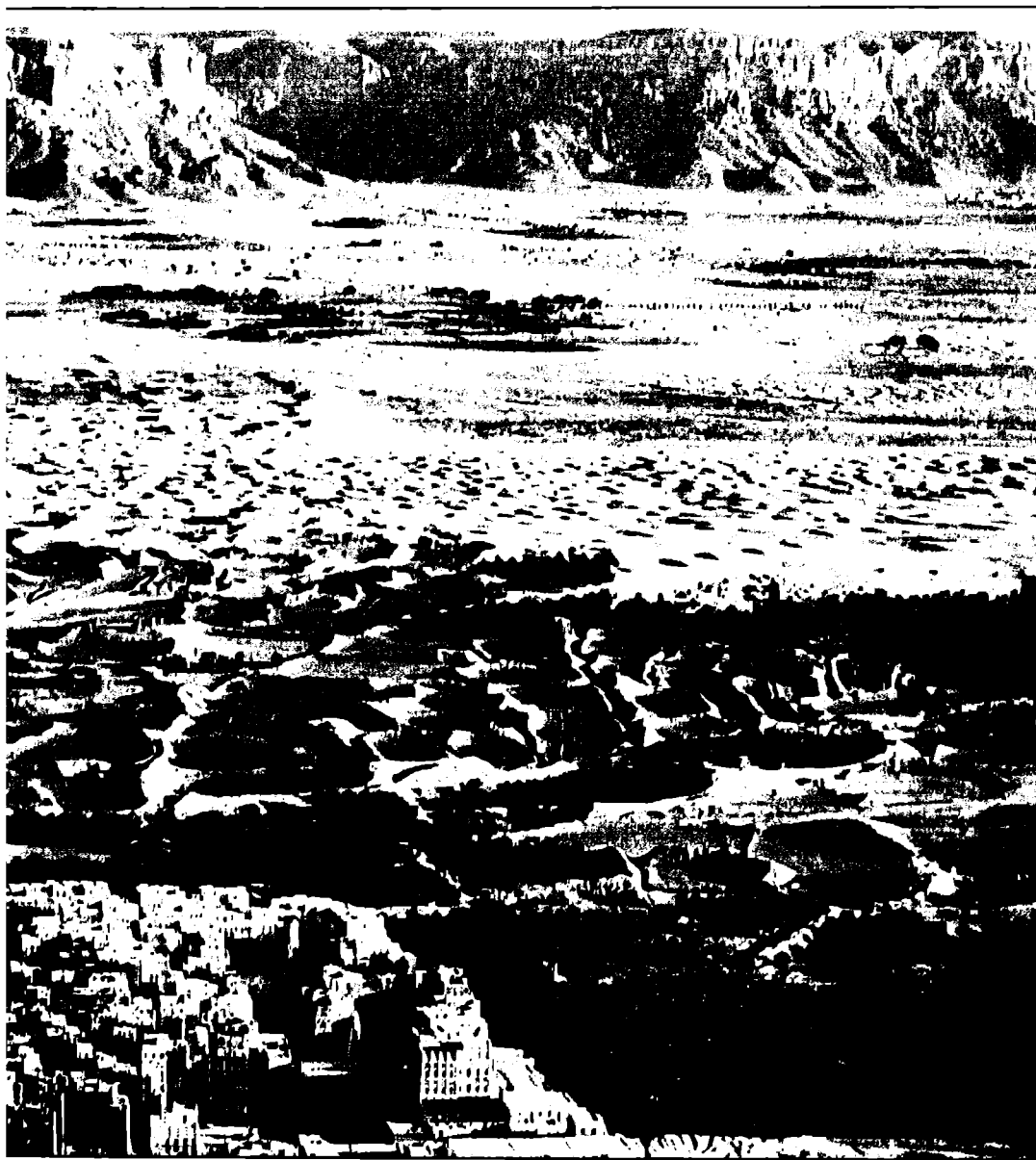
► Hadr al-Maut was rich owing to Frankincense trade. The Prophet's allusion to it is thus meaningful. It was also a prophecy that Hadr al-Maut will become Muslim.



Terror makes practicing Islam hard

Whether terror as an instrument of policy can be effective was not visible at least in the Makkan case. The message still spread, though at a

snail's speed. Nor the use of terror succeeded in prevailing upon a single Muslim to deviate from his chosen path, though the unabated persecution, with no chance of recession in sight, caused fears that it might exceed the point of endurance, particularly when practicing Islam



was becoming extremely hard.

Two incidents speak of the Makkan oppression and the psychological problems that saddled the mind of the oppressed:

'Ammar ibn Yasar's parents were brutally put to death, and he was himself tortured by the Makkans. He cried his heart out to the Prophet. "O Messenger of Allah, they did not let me go until I had abused you and praised their gods."

"How do you feel within?" he was asked.

"Satisfied with my *iman* (faith)," said 'Ammar.

"If they torture you again, respond the same way," he was told.⁵

Khabbab ibn al-Art, a blacksmith by trade, was another companion whom tyranny brought to the thin edge of his endurance.⁶ 'Aas ibn Wa'il hired him for a job. When he asked for payment, 'Aas demanded that he must denounce Muhammad to get it.

Disturbed, he said: "I won't do it unless you die and resurrect again."

'Aas did not expect such a response from Khabbab. He thought money had a higher scale of value, and if Khabbab really wanted his wages, he could have reviled Muhammad to get it. Having failed in wresting that kind of a response, 'Aas decided to hurt him a little more, in a way that should ridicule his faith as well as give him the message that payment won't be paid.

"What? Would I be resurrected after I die?" said 'Aas tauntingly. "If that is possible, [then rest assured] I

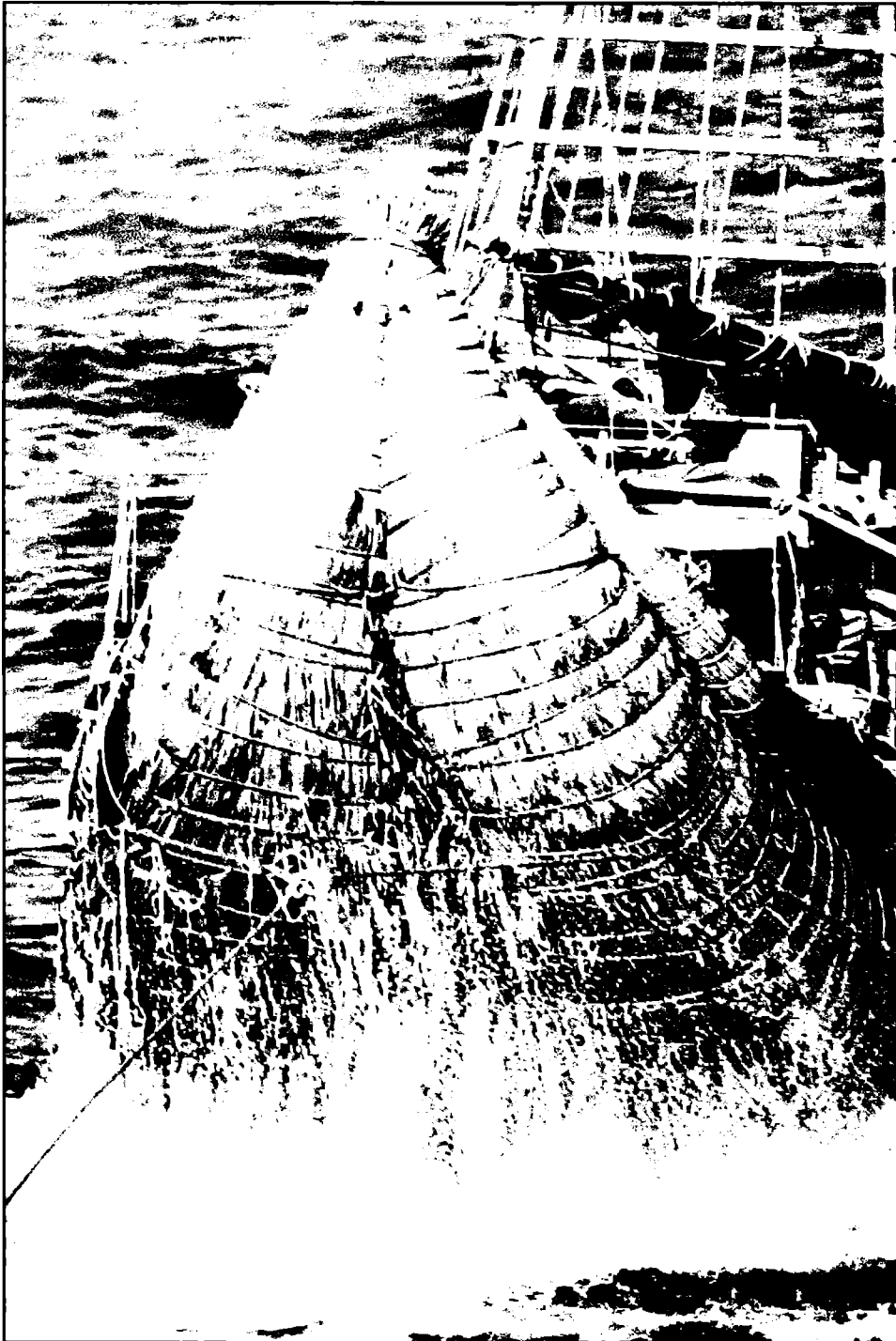
will pay your wages in my second life. For I will still have the wealth and children [with me]."⁷

Khabbab's skin crawled with distaste. Not knowing how to reply him, his calling became hell for him. Overtaken by rage and grief, he saw Muhammad Rasul Allah and with the impatience of a disciple, who had become weary of waiting for the long-expected miracle, unloaded his frustration.

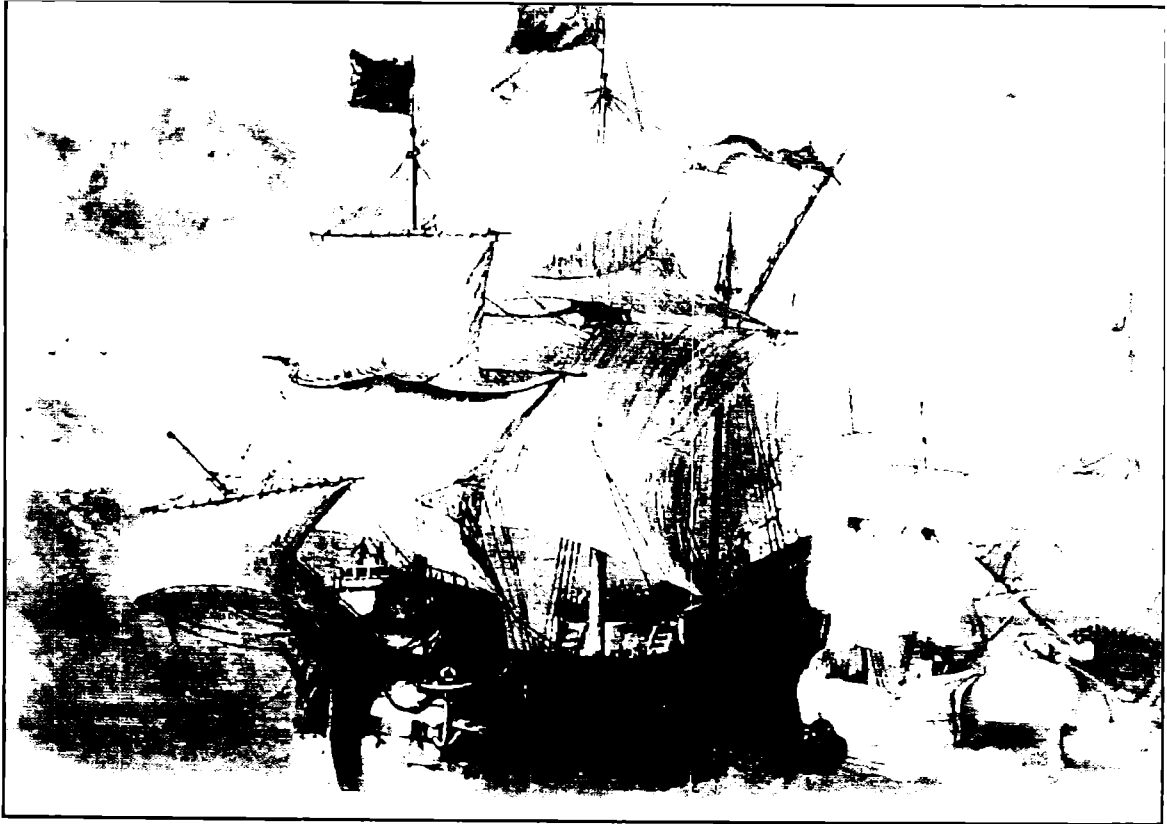
"O Messenger of Allah, oppression has exceeded all bounds of endurance; won't you please pray to Allah for our deliverance?"

Reddened with anger, the Prophet said in a voice that was new to Khabbab: "There were people before who were subjected to tyranny of a far greater magnitude: their flesh was scraped from their bones with steel-made combs; their skulls were sawed into two halves and even then, they did not give up their faith. By Allah, this mission will be accomplished: a time will come when one will travel from San'a to Hadr al-Maut and will fear none but Allah. You are just an impatient people."⁸

The revelation took issue with 'Aas. "How come he knew he would still have his wealth and children. Has he peeped into the unknown — *attala 'al-ghaiba*? Or has he struck a deal with Allah about his belongings — *amittakhaza 'indar Rahmani ahda*?" Obviously, there is nothing to that effect. Then how did he get this notion in his mind? He must know that he cannot carry his earthly belongings to the world after death. Such a notion is just a fond hope that



► **Reed ships though are traced to biblical times, their home is said to be present-day Iraq (Mesopotamia). It is possible such ships survived long into the Prophet's time and used by the fleeing Muslims to Abyssinia.**



► A large boat of this kind could also be a possible vessel to Abyssinia

will never materialize. 'Aas should know that he can be stripped off his money and children in a split second, that "We shall inherit from him what he speaks of — *wanarithuhu ma yaqulu ...*"⁹

Makkah had turned into an inferno and to have left these few noble souls in it would have wiped out the entire asset of the movement.

As a leader under divine guidance, he knew the catastrophic impact of a non-Islamic culture upon the Muslims' mind. That they must have a state and a society of their own to preserve their identity was also clear

to him; nevertheless, it was too early for the movement to make such radical decisions.

For the interim, something had to be done. He, therefore, asked some of them to emigrate to Abyssinia (present-day Ethiopia) — a country on the east coast of Africa whose Christian king, the Negus, was known for his benign disposition and sense of justice. Why did the Prophet select Abyssinia is an important area of interest. The immediate reason, for sure, was to provide relief to the faithful from their oppressive man-hole existence in Makkah. Whether there were some other con-

siderations as well would be at best conjectural. An important element in the Prophet's decision could be Abyssinia's proximity to Arabia. But this is innocuous as a motivating factor. Syria, Iraq, and Egypt were equally close, especially when these countries contained some Arabized pockets. Thus, if there is a rational basis to the prophetic decision, then it has to be found somewhere else.

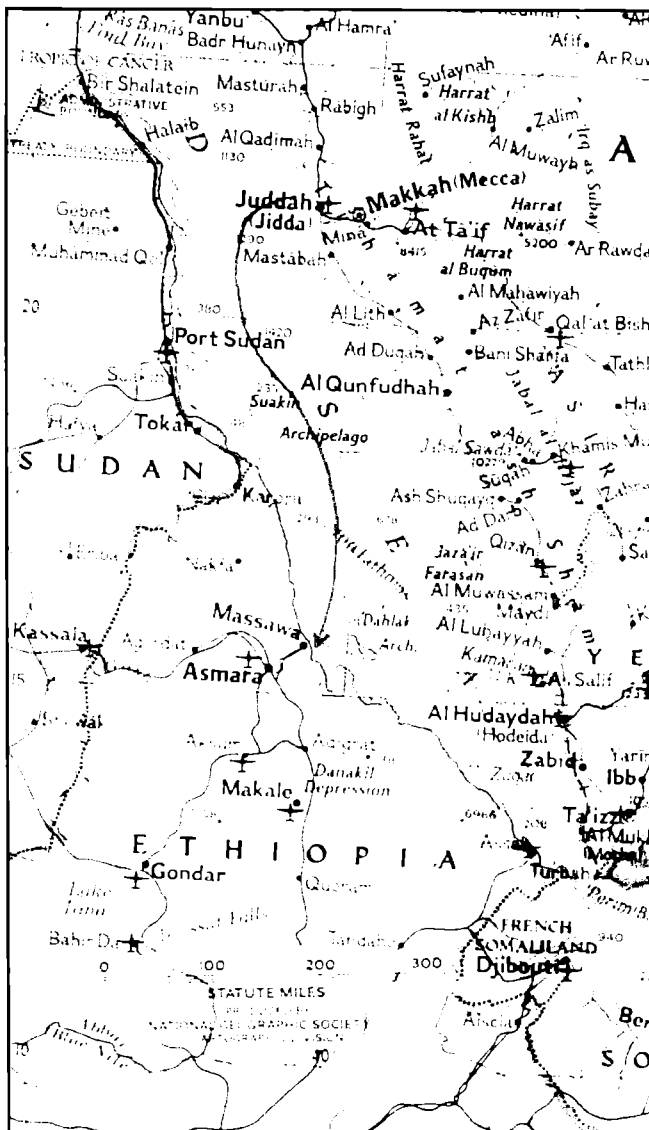
Two reasons can be cited. One, the ancient Palestine, Iraq, and Egypt were under Roman domination ruled by a militant Christianity, which considered Arabs as inferior people. Besides, the Arab sympathies for the Persians as against the Romans in the conflict between the two were viewed by the Romans as anti-Christian. The Arabian embrace of Islam, though still far from being complete, compounded their offense. For Islam, with its pure monotheism, denying godhood to Jesus (upon him be peace), was viewed by the Romans as heretic.

Abyssinia, on the contrary, was a tolerant Christianity. There are reasons to suggest that they believed, at least at the court level, in the messianic role of Jesus rather than in his being a God.¹⁰ As a geographical entity, Abyssinia was large, neighbored by Sudan and Somalia, which together constituted more than one eighth of Africa. Islam's spread in Abyssinia could have influenced Sudan and present-day littoral states of Tanzania and Kenya, giving strategic presence to Muslims in the Horn of Africa. But above all, it was the non-hostile Abyssinian environment and their language's affinity

with Arabic that gravitated toward a decision for the Negus land.

Thus, for the first time a group of eleven men and four women were ready to emigrate. It was the month of Rajab, the fifth year of prophethood when they reached the port. Two commercial ships were about to

► The map showing Abyssinia's nearness to Arabia



lift their anchor when, to the delight of the émigres' relief, they were taken aboard. The Quraysh made a belated chase, but by then they were out of their reach on the way to Abyssinia.¹¹

In the psychology of oppression, people oppress others because they think their exercise in brutality will be fruitful. Two elements sustain their self-induced optimism; first, the proximity of the victim; and second, their ability to victimize. But when the persecutors find the victim physically beyond their reach, their sense of humiliation begins. The Quraysh were obviously humiliated when they heard of the émigres' peaceful life in Abyssinia. The elders deliberated on sending a delegation to the Negus'

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royal court and demanding their extradition as culprits fled from Makkah. 'Abdullah ibn Rabi'a and 'Amr ibn al-'Aas, known for their diplomatic skills, were selected as emissaries, and with much ceremony, they sailed for Abyssinia.¹²

Worldly wise as they were, they first met with the Abyssinian generals and enlisted their support that since the refugees had embraced a new faith, which was neither like the faith of their forefathers nor like Christianity, they must be returned to Makkah for prosecution. The generals willingly agreed; and with their blessing, the request for Muslims' extradition was made to the Negus.

To Allah alone we surrender

The emissaries knew that the Muslims did not bow before anyone other than Allah. They decided to exploit what they touted before the king as Muslims' insolence toward all kind of authority. When they arrived in the court, the priests asked them to bow, but they politely declined. Outraged the king asked: "What stopped you from bowing before me?" Calmly they replied, "We bow to none other than Allah."

In the age of kings and emperors, this was discordant with the tenor of the time. But unique a king as he was, the Negus took their explanation in good faith. "What new religion [then] have you invented?" he inquired. From the side of émigres,

Ja'far ibn abi-Talib (the Prophet's cousin) spoke:

O king, we were immersed in paganism, worshipping idols, eating dead animals; severing the ties of kinship; ill-treating neighbors; the strong among us victimizing the weak. Thus we were until God raised among us a messenger of our own whose lineage, truthfulness, honesty and integrity of character we knew well. He invited us to acknowledge one-true God and to worship Him, and to renounce the stones and idols we and our forefathers used to venerate. He asked us to speak the truth, to redeem our pledge, to be kind and considerate to our kin and neighbors, and abstain from things forbidden, and from bloodshed. He forbade us from lewdness and false speech, and from gobbling up the orphans wealth and vilifying chaste women. He commanded us to pay divine honors to Allah alone and seek no associates with Him; and he ordered us to offer prayers, to pay the poor-dues, to observe fast (thus enumerating other injunctions of Islam).

So, we trusted him and believed in him. We followed him in whatever he brought from Allah. And we worshiped Allah only without associating others with Him. And we refrained from that, which was forbidden to us; and indulged in that, which was made lawful for us. Thereupon, our people turned hostile toward us, and tormented us and sought to turn us away from our religion so that they could bring us back to the worship of idols from the worship of Allah Most High, and that

we might indulge in those iniquities which we had considered lawful before.

So when they persecuted and oppressed us, and hemmed us in, and kept us from the practices of our religion, we came to your land, having chosen you over others for taking refuge. We have come here to your country seeking your protection, and hope that we shall not be troubled in your land, O king!¹³

When Ja'far finished his presentation, the king asked the emissaries. "Are they your slaves?" They said no. "Do they owe money to you?" They said no. "Then why don't you leave them," said the king.¹⁴

Turning back to the Muslims the Negus asked Ja'far to recite to him the verses revealed to his prophet from God. Ja'far recited the following *ayahs*, among others, from sura Maryam:

He (Jesus) said: "I am indeed a servant of Allah: He has given me revelation and made me a prophet; ...

"(He) has made me kind to my mother, and not overbearing or miserable; ...

Such (was) Jesus the son of Mary: it is a statement of truth, about which they vainly dispute.

It is not befitting to (the majesty of) Allah

that He should beget
a son. Glory be to Him!
When He determines
a matter, He only says
to it "Be," and it is.

For sure, Allah is my
Lord and your Lord:
So serve Him: this
is a Way straight.

But the sects differ
among themselves:
and woe to the
unbelievers because
of the (coming)
judgment of a
momentous Day!¹⁵

As Ja'far winded up his recitation from the Qur'an, tears surged in the Negus' eyes. "Of a truth," he said, "this and what Jesus brought have come from the same niche." Then addressing the Makkan emissaries, he said, "You both may go, for by God, I will never give them up to you, and they shall not be betrayed."

Of the two emissaries 'Amr ibn al-'Aas carried more venom in his veins. Talking to 'Abdullah, he said: "By God, I will say tomorrow that which will jeopardize their case. I will tell the king that they considered Jesus nothing but a human." The following day they instigated the king to ask the refugees their belief about the Christ. They thought this would antagonize the Negus.

Called again to the court the following day, the Muslims' initial reaction was one of concern but then Ja'far counseled that what Allah had

said about Jesus should be told, come what may. "Our prophet," said he, "has told us that Christ was the slave of God and His apostle, and His spirit, and His word, which He cast into Mary the blessed virgin." As Ja'far spoke, Muslims expected a thunderbolt slicing them but instead it cast a spell of silence over the audience. Whether it was a silence of reflection or of truth taking hold of them, they hardly knew until the Negus' face loosened up. Taking a straw from the ground, he observed: "By God Jesus, son of Mary, does not exceed what you have said by the length of this straw. Praise be to you and the person you come from, I bear witness that he is the messenger of Allah, that he is the same one whom we find described in the Injil (Bible), and that he is the same messenger who was foretold by Jesus son of Mary."¹⁶

Nothing could have been more uplifting for the émigrés than the Negus' acceptance of the faith. Their faces gleamed with joy. This was Islam's first victory outside Arabia. The Makkan emissaries sank into an unknown grief. With crestfallen faces, they slunked out. Muhammad had extended himself beyond Makkah without firing a single arrow from his quiver. Not dimwitted, they could anticipate the coming events.

The Negus' conversion spread to his subjects creating curiosity among the Abyssinians for the desert-prophet. About twenty of them decided to visit him in Makkah. The Quraysh resented their visit for they thought this was a boost to his fledgling situation. Besides, he was forg-

ing relations with a foreign power over their heads. But constrained by their traditional sense of hospitality, they allowed the meeting. The Abyssinians' presence in the Ka'bah created quite a stir. Trailed by the Makkans, they walked up to the place where Muhammad Rasul Allah was sitting. People milled around him to listen to their conversation. He began by telling them that Islam was the continuation of the Abrahamic legacy and that in him the prophecy about the much-awaited prophet was fulfilled. He recited to them the Qur'anic verses which brought tears to their eyes and faith to their heart. The Quraysh were dismayed, though they held themselves admirably well. But when the Abyssinians' finished with the Prophet, Abu Jahl got hold of them on the street and took them rather sharply: "God, what a wretched band you are!" said he. "Your people at home sent you to assess the situation and feed them back with information about this man. But as soon as you sat with him, you chuck your religion and believed what he said. We don't know a more fatuous band than you."

With Islam in their souls, they tried to sidetrack Abu Jahl and his associates: "Peace be upon you brethren," they said, "we will not engage ourselves in an absurd controversy. To us be our way and to you be yours. We have not been slothful in seeking what is best[for us]."¹⁷ The Qur'anic revelation spoke of their dignified stand before Abu Jahl:

Those to whom We gave
the scripture before

(the Qur'an), they do
believe in this
(revelation).
And when it is recited
to them, they say:
"we believe in it, for
this is the truth from
our Lord.
Even before it,
we were Muslims
(surrendering)
unto Him."...
And when they hear
obscene talk, they
withdraw from it
and say:
"Unto us our works
and unto you your
works. Peace be
unto you: we seek
not the ignorant."¹⁸

Persecution extends itself to the rich

While the poor and the destitute were vulnerable to persecution, the rich and the influential ones were not spared either. Abu Bakr was roped beside Talha by Naufi ibn Khuwaylid and tortured. This caused grief to the Prophet who was heard praying: "O Allah, save us from the mischief of al-Adwiyya!"¹⁹ In Abu Bakr's torture he saw hard times ahead for the Muslims. For if they could hurt him, despite his social ranking, others would be victimized as well. That much was written on the wall.

For Naufi, it was important to make Abu Bakr repudiate his faith

because, as he rightly thought, people like him gave respectability to Islam which, if not retracted, would create a domino impact on others in his class. But if Naufl was cruel and perceptive, Abu Bakr was difficult and hard to dislodge from his chosen cause. Somehow Abu Bakr got himself released. Whether Naufl was forced by someone to free him, or Abu Bakr's fealty to Islam weakened his brutal hold over him, it is hard to say; but as soon as he was free, he sought the Prophet's advice on leaving Makkah.²⁰

He chose Yemen as his next abode. Halfway, he was intercepted by ibn al-Dughunna, the chief of Qara who, despite being a non-Muslim, could not help empathize with him. That a man of his character who was considerate to a fault and generous with his money had been discarded so disgracefully by his people was surely a reflection on their lack of good taste. He persuaded him to return to Makkah in his protection. The Makkans agreed to let him stay provided he refrained from talking Islam to others. Thus forced into a tyrannical bind, he confined himself to his home where adjacent to it, he built a small enclosure for prayers. The oppressive conditions of his existence mellowed him. He would often recite the Qur'an with pathos-ridden voice, drawing a crowd of young men and women around him. No wonder the Quraysh acted fast and stopped him from reciting the Qur'an lest he corrupted their morals.²¹

Zubayr ibn 'Awwam was another scion of a powerful family. After wrap-

ping him in a coir mat so that he could not have wriggled himself out, they would suspend him upside down, and tortured with smoke from below. 'Uthman ibn 'Affan was beaten by his uncle.²²

So elemental was the fury against Muhammad Rasul Allah and his followers that it brought even parental relationship under trying strain. In many cases, the blood ties collapsed in the tussle between parental rage and their children's loyalty to Islam. Khalid ibn Sa'id went into hiding when his father got a whiff of his conversion. Caught, he was savagely beaten for embracing a faith that allegedly vilified their ancestral religion. For Sa'id, however, the Prophet represented the truth. Inflamed, his father threw him out. Out of his elements and with nothing to bank upon, he began to live with Muhammad ('alayhi as-salam). One day he was praying in the desolate of the Makkan periphery that his father got him lifted to his home. The same cycle of beating, demands, and refusal was repeated. For three days, he languished in captivity without food and water. The severity of weather augmented his misery. Eventually, he broke loose, returned to wilderness until he joined others to Abyssinia.²³

Sa'd ibn abi-Waqqas and his younger brother were subjected to another kind of torture — their mother refused to eat, drink, and sit in the shade unless the two denounced their new faith. Worse, she gave it a religious doctrine: disobeying mother, she said, amounted to disobeying God. This

made it hard for Sa'd and his brother who wanted to please Allah. Caught thus in the cleft, Sa'd talked of his dilemma to the Prophet, even though knowing well that the latter would have preferred averting a confrontational situation with one's parents. But faced as the Muslims were with such familial situations, an answer had to be found. He thus asked him to wait for the revelation. Soon Sa'd had the answer:

And We have enjoined
on man (to be good)
to his parents.
In travail upon
travail did his
mother bear him,
and in years twain
was his weaning:
(hear the command)
"Be grateful to Me
and your parents.
To Me is the journeying back.
But if they force you
to associate with Me,
that of which you
have no knowledge,
do not obey them.
Consort with them in
the world kindly
and follow the way of him
who turns to Me.
Then unto Me will be
your return.
and I will tell you
what you used to
do (in life).²⁴

Since the Abyssinian experience had been by and large a favorable

one, the Prophet allowed some more émigrés to go to Abyssinia until the number reached eighty-three.

THE TRAUMA OF SHI'B ABI-TALIB

And incline not to those who do wrong, or the fire will seize you; and you have no protectors other than Allah, nor shall you be helped. ...

And be steadfast in patience; for surely Allah will not suffer the reward of the righteous to perish

(Hud: 113 - 115)

The shi'b incident was not a sudden eruption; it had been building up for almost a decade, reaching critical mass when the Prophet's message wafted across the sea into Abyssinia. However what made a tear in the Makkan fabric of solidarity was the desertion of Hamza and 'Umar to the Prophet's cause. By its scale, it was a major development which, in the Makkan perception, could have spurred a new rhythm to the stilled Islamic scene. Thus embroiled in an unwished situation, the Makkans decided to checkmate the movement by the time-tested method of isolating the enemy from its environment and beating it into submission: the tribes were asked not to sell Hashimites anything nor buy from them nor provide them with water or food until they had handed over Muhammad ('alayhi as-salam) for execution.¹ By pouring their bile into the agreement, the Makkans had begun their desperate struggle for the Muslim soul. It was a siege. Period.

A person named Mansur ibn 'Ikrama penned down the Makkan intent of malice toward the Hashimites and the clan of 'Abd

Manaf. As he finished the drafting, his hand felt heavy. In distress, he moved his hand, but it was lifeless. Suddenly fear seized him, and he began to cry: What if it is paralysis? The grave realization of having lost his hand rose into his throat as a deathbed gasp. His voice died down.

The Quraysh crowded around Mansur to comfort him. Most of them thought it was coincidental and like other physical ailments, he would be cured in due course of time. But they were wrong. Blinded as they were with hate for Muhammad Rasul Allah, they overlooked the swift divine retribution visited on Mansur. He was paralyzed for life.² The agreement was hung over the door of the Ka'bah.

Faced thus with the situation, the Hashimites either had to hand over the Prophet to the Makkans, or to prepare for the coming hardship. Both were repulsive. Abu Talib gave a side glance to his nephew and found him seemingly nonchalant. If he was worried on the hardship he had brought upon his clan, it did not show on his face. Ironically, Abu Talib felt love welled up inside him for his controversial nephew. What kind of a charisma he carried? What kind of a hold he had over them that they were willing to suffer in his behalf?

Led by Abu Talib, the Hashimites and the clan of 'Abd Manaf housed themselves in a mountain defile, owned by him. Why did he go for wilderness? Were they forced to leave their homes? Or was it because of the safety concern for his nephew? Maybe a strewn residency increased their vulnerability. It is possible that

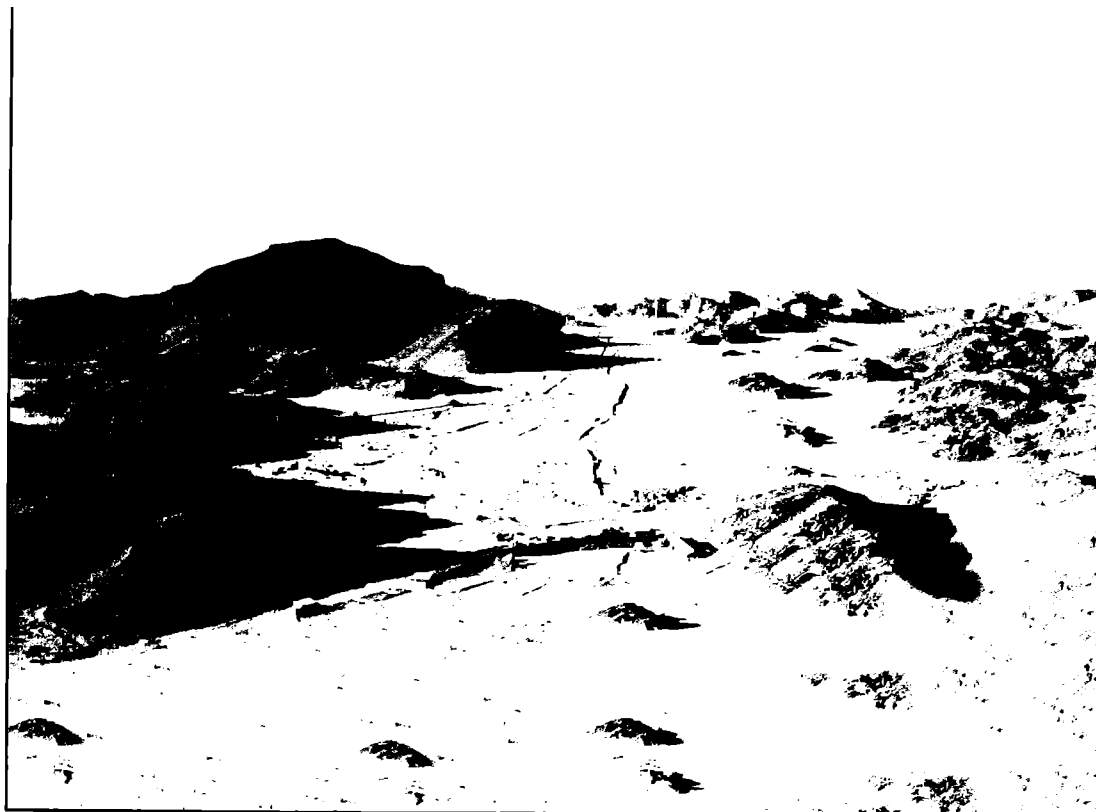
Abu Talib was reading far more diabolical in the situation: the blockade was a preliminary to his nephew's final elimination. The defile he chose must be carrying strategic features that could have been used to foil an assault on the Prophet's life. Whatever might be the reason, one thing was for sure — they were virtually caught in the cleft stick.

Full of hazards and exposed to the elements, their lives were now on the periphery of death. The food supplies began to dwindle. And each day brought the specter of hunger closer. Soon the trees were denuded of their leaves and the stems relieved of their bark. Even dried hides were not spared. Suffering from pangs of hunger, the children would cry³ and the valley would reverberate with their cries of anguish. Sometimes out of compassion, a few good souls would take the risk and throw some food to them; otherwise the embargo, on the whole, was demonic in intent and ruthless in execution.

The idea triumphs over the material forces

It was the second year of the socio-economic blockade that the Prophet decided to go to Mina. Perhaps it was the hajj occasion.

Innumerable tents, dotted the sprawling desert as if the entire Arabia had converged upon Mina. He walked from one habitation to another. The response to his call was nevertheless chilling. Wherever he went, people indiscreetly asked for a



✠ Somewhere
in this cruel
topography
was located
Shi'b abi-
Talib.

sign in support of his claim.

The night had entered and as the darkness descended on Mina, the moonlight made itself felt; the pilgrims divided in tribes and sequestered in different locations of their choice, in row after row of tents, were awash with moonlight. He was talking to the people when the moon caught his attention — it was a full moon. What if it is split in two equal parts? Would they embrace the faith? He wanted to know. When they gave their assurance, he prayed to Allah the Exalted for its occurrence. The moon first contorted like the slab of glass as if under the impact of a blow,

and then it configured into two pieces moving apart. The faithful like the rest were staggered with their mouths agape. Muhammad Rasul Allah said “be witness.” The two halves stopped at a distance with the Mount of Hira’ in between, and then began moving as if pulled inward clamoring for fusion to make a whole again.⁴ The entire episode took a few seconds right in front of the people. But other than a few souls, the rest thought it was magic.⁵ And that hurt him most. Feeling sorry for their hardheadedness and the consequential visitation of the divine wrath for which apparently they had by now

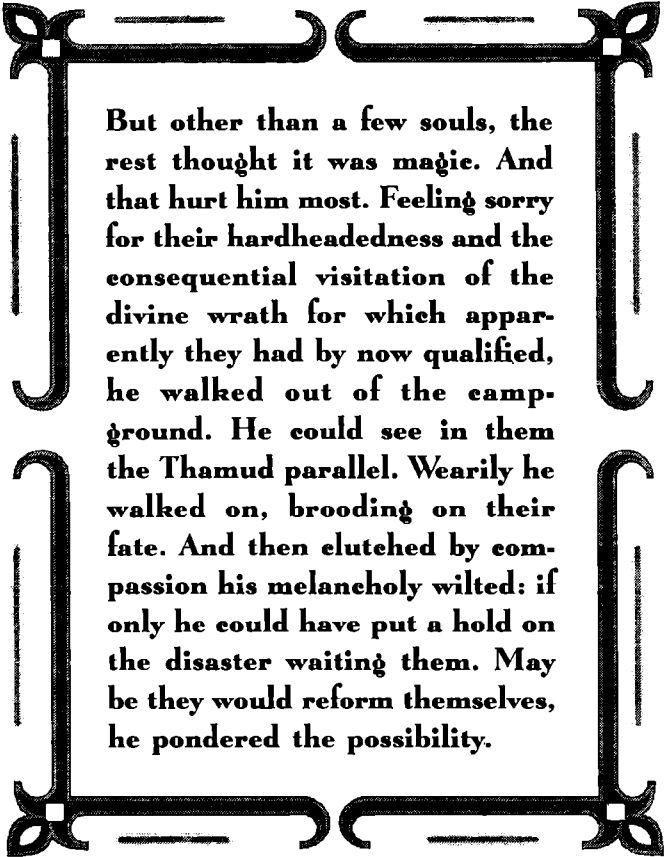
qualified, he walked out of the campground. He could see in them the Thamud parallel. Wearily he walked on, brooding on their fate. And then clutched by compassion his melancholy wilted: if only he could have put a hold on the disaster waiting them. Maybe they would reform themselves, he pondered the possibility.

A few days later, he was faced with a similar situation. Perhaps it was during *sa'iy* (lepidation) between the Mounts of al-Marwa and as-Safa when the Qurayshi elders asked for a miracle: "Why don't you turn as-Safa into gold for us?" Seeing them intent, he rose to supplicate to his Creator for the transmutation of the Mount into gold but then all of their broken pledges came to his mind. The revelation informed him that it was just a ruse. Haven't they seen miracles before?⁶ he was told. To the cynics of prophethood, the continuity of the material life was the only authentic experience. Miracles though had their origin in the extra-sensory world were still sensory in perception as well as in occurrence. And yet since they came from the person of the Prophet, a break from the normal course of physical events, they were repudiated as magic.

Sure as he was that he would not be abandoned by his Creator, it was only natural that he should have been concerned about the never-ending opposition to his cause. The shi'b experience itself was harrowing enough to have given him emotional spasm for the Muslim safety in Makkah. But so enduring was his relationship with Allah the Most

High that he would withdraw from the crowd and tune himself with the world beyond for a signal that could have answered his concerns. The revelation this time almost staggered him, absolutely surreal, discordant with the ground situation. But then Allah was all-wise, His knowledge was transcendent like His being. After talking about the Pharaonic opposition to Moses, the revelation asked: "Are your disbelievers better than those or have they some immunity in the Scriptures? Or they say: we are a host victorious. The hosts will be routed and will turn and flee."⁷

Among his audience to whom he apprised the revelatory content, 'Umar's understanding on the occasion was as confounding as was



But other than a few souls, the rest thought it was magic. And that hurt him most. Feeling sorry for their hardheadedness and the consequential visitation of the divine wrath for which apparently they had by now qualified, he walked out of the campground. He could see in them the Thamud parallel. Wearily he walked on, brooding on their fate. And then clutched by compassion his melancholy wilted: if only he could have put a hold on the disaster waiting them. Maybe they would reform themselves, he pondered the possibility.

others'. The revelation, however, was precise, clear as the day was. His face beamed with the possibilities in the future and that made others happy as well.

The embargo was in its third year. But until then, none of its objectives had been realized. The suffering was undoubtedly there and so were the daily agonies of apprehensions — whether they would be able to endure it for another day — but abandoning of the cause by the Prophet, or his deliverance to the Quraysh by his clan was nowhere in sight.

The blockade was the result of Abu Jahl, 'Uqba ibn abi-Mu'ayt and other's machinations against the Prophet; but there were people who though sought Islam's failure were not willing, at least at this moment of time, to cause hardship to the Hashimites and the clan of 'Abd Manaf who were their blood relations.

This kind of schism was there to begin with; and as the time passed, it began to grow and assert itself. The location of the shi'b itself played a contributive role in widening this wedge for when the children cried in distress, they felt weighed down by their sense of guilt.

The man who first articulated this concern was Hisham ibn 'Amr al-'Amri. He met the chief of Banu Makhzum, Zuhayr ibn abi-Umayya, a first cousin of the Prophet, and made him feel bad on inhumanity to his maternal grandfather's family. But so great was the terror created by the Qurayshi elders that he almost declared himself helpless in this matter. His words were "what can I

do by myself? If someone else could have supported me, I would have torn the embargo scroll."

Hisham saw a glimmer of hope in Zuhayr. He immediately offered his support to him. Emboldened, Zuhayr suggested they should recruit one more person to the cause.

By the time they finished their canvassing, they had Mut'im ibn 'Adiy, Abu'l-Bakhtari, and Zam'a ibn al-Aswad. Together, they barged into the Ka'bah.

After circumambulating the Ka'bah, Zuhayr addressed the crowd as planned: "O people of Makkah, is it right for us to eat, drink and wear clothes while the Hashimites are being pushed to death? Nobody buys from them nor anything is sold to them. By Allah! I won't sit still unless the scroll of this tyrannical embargo is shredded."

Sensing mutiny, Abu Jahl shouted: "You lied. That won't be shredded."

"By Allah, you are the damndest of all liars. We had our reservations even at the time when the scroll was being written," interjected Zam'a.

Allowing no letup, Abu'l-Bakhtari added: "Zam'a has said the truth. Whatever is in the scroll we are not party to it nor do we affirm it!"

Mut'im ibn 'Adiy kept the heat on by saying: "You both are right. Whoever says else is a liar. We declare, making Allah our witness, that we have nothing to do with this scroll." Hisham seconded him.

For the first time since the embargo, Abu Jahl saw his support wilting: "This is a conspiracy hatched last night,"⁸ he shouted. But his voice

was drowned in the heat that the incident had created. The chink in the anti-Muhammad alliance, though a small one, was now obvious. That it weakened Abu Jahl's hold on the events was also apparent.

Harsh as the socioeconomic embargo was, the Prophet throughout the ordeal remained sanguine. The embargo was about to complete its third year when one day, during a conversation, Abu Talib brought up the issue of women's and children's suffering, their enduring the daily agonies of apprehensions. How long would it be? he politely asked. The Prophet looked around and on almost every face he read the same concern. They looked invariably haggard and aged. This saddened his heart. His

eyes returned to Abu Talib's creased and puffy face. Two years of heartless isolation had ravaged him beyond recognition. His eyes then shifted to Khadija's once beautiful face and for a while, his eyes turned misty. She stood like a splendid ruin. He withdrew inward. Perhaps there was no easy answer to their predicament. A few moments later, he broke the silence himself. The vibrancy of his voice had staged a comeback, he intoned confidently that their present ordeal was about to be over. Other than Allah's sacred name, he said, the parchment bearing the socioeconomic boycott had been eaten by the termites.

The revelation brightened Abu

✠ **Mina: the crowd puller. The night had entered and as the darkness descended on Mina, the moonlight made itself felt ...**



Talib's horizon. More than anyone else he knew the vista of possibilities thrown open by this information. He could use it to his advantage. Overjoyed, he along with others went to the Ka'bah and broke the news to the elders.

"My nephew has informed me, and he has not told me a lie, that termites have prevailed upon your pledge by chewing its beastly contents, living in place only Allah's name. If my nephew proves to be right, then you desist from doing wrong [to us]. And if he has told a lie, I shall surrender him to you. [In that case] you may kill him or keep him alive."

"O Abu Talib, that is fair enough!" they said. Relieved at last. This was the best Abu Talib could have done to them. In a moment of euphoria, they felt as if their festering bile had been lanced. Hurriedly, they asked for the parchment hanging over the Ka'bah's door. It was moth-ridden with only Allah's name — "*bismika Allahuma*" — preserved on it.

Leaving them in a trance of shock and sitting hunched up by themselves, Abu Talib and his companions stepped into the inner sanctum of the Ka'bah and prayed:

O Allah, help us against
him who brutalizes us,
who shows discompassion to us,
and who deprives us of our
rightful possessions.⁹

The experience in the shi'b, harrowing as it was, helped them emerge as a tough people, who could

endure suffering without compromising their integrity and humanity. This softened many a hard soul who began to view Islam as the wave of the future.

The shi'b experience also helped refurbish the Prophet's image as a genuine man, who could evoke an intense love for himself in his clan, even though not all were Muslims. This was a disturbing particularity of the situation; for it proved beyond doubt that if given a free hand, Muhammad Rasul Allah could draw intense devotion to his person and cause. Also, the fact that he could preserve his dream even in an unmitigated situation, like the shi'b years, established him as a great leader — who held fast to the supremacy of the idea over the material forces; and who believed in the art of friendly persuasion, even while facing violence.

The shi'b experience in this sense was a gain for the Muslims and a loss for the nonbelievers.

Pace of the movement: slow
but forward

How did the movement sustain itself, and what repercussions did it have during the three-year embargo are not known. History is not of much help and the chronicles pertaining to this period are surprisingly nonexistent. But the Qur'an did not cease revealing itself. It is only when one keeps the subject and the teaching of these verses in sight that any surmise about the

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plight of the Muslims could be made.

The verses revealed during this protracted and heart-rending conflict were highly emotional in tone and pitch.¹⁰ In an unsurpassed beautiful way, duties were spelled out and instructions imparted to perform them; ways were suggested to achieve excellence in character; esprit de corps was created, and social sensibilities sharpened.¹¹ Besides, different methodologies were given to them to propagate the true word;¹² patience and perseverance were stressed and

the pledge for ultimate triumph and glad tidings for Paradise were given to bolster morale.¹³ With their emphasis on sacrifice and devotion, the verses succeeded in creating an emotional and mental exuberance that no amount of torture or adversity could have suppressed.

On the other hand, the verses warned the opponents of their dreadful end.¹⁴ They were told to avoid the fate of the past nations who denied the truth and in consequence were liquidated. Such events in history

✠ **Thamud:**
the old
ruins that
the Qur'an
spoke of

were known to the Arabs. Their attention was thus invited to the old ruins they often passed by.¹⁵ At the same time, the arguments for God's oneness were derived from

were detailed.¹⁶ And so were the harms caused by the blind imitation of the ancestral ways.¹⁷ The Qur'anic style on such occasions was strewn with logic, straight to the point.

Likewise, when doubts were raised to create fog, the Qur'an provided light by making appeal to reason.¹⁸

The death of the dear ones: the anchor falls

The stay at Shi'b abi-Talib had been particularly hard for Khadija (Allah be pleased with her) and Abu Talib. Khadija was the Prophet's companion in the real sense. When he married her, she was one of the wealthiest person in Arabia. And when she died in the aftermath of her shi'b stay, she was malnourished and poor. During her twenty-five years of married life, she spared nothing of hers, neither moral nor material, to cheer him, to comfort him, and to help him accomplish what was assigned to him by Allah. By the time she died, she had created a name for herself in the history of Islam — a woman who served Allah and His messenger with all the beauty of her soul. So great the impression she left upon him that years later even when he had other wives, as charming and young as 'A'isha was, mere mentioning of Khadija's name would bring tears to his eyes.

It was during the same time that Abu Talib's health began to decline. When the elders heard about his worsening situation, they came to see

commonsense observation of the signs in the universe that the Arabs knew well. The ills that plague life in the wake of denying hereafter



him. Perhaps, now was the time to clear the “mess” that Muhammad had created for them. A settlement before Abu Talib’s death would be desirable.

They were twenty-five of them, including Abu Jahl, Abu Sufyan, Umayya, ‘Utba and others. Knowing that Muhammad could not be stopped they proposed that he should at least avoid radicalizing the conflict and in return they would not bother him.

To Abu Talib that made sense. He wanted him to accept their proposal. “O uncle!” said he. “Shouldn’t I invite them to a better thing?”

“And what is that!” asked Abu Talib hopeful that some compromise might be in sight.

“I invite them to a *kalimah*, which if they sincerely embrace, Arabia will be theirs and Persia will accept their suzerainty.”

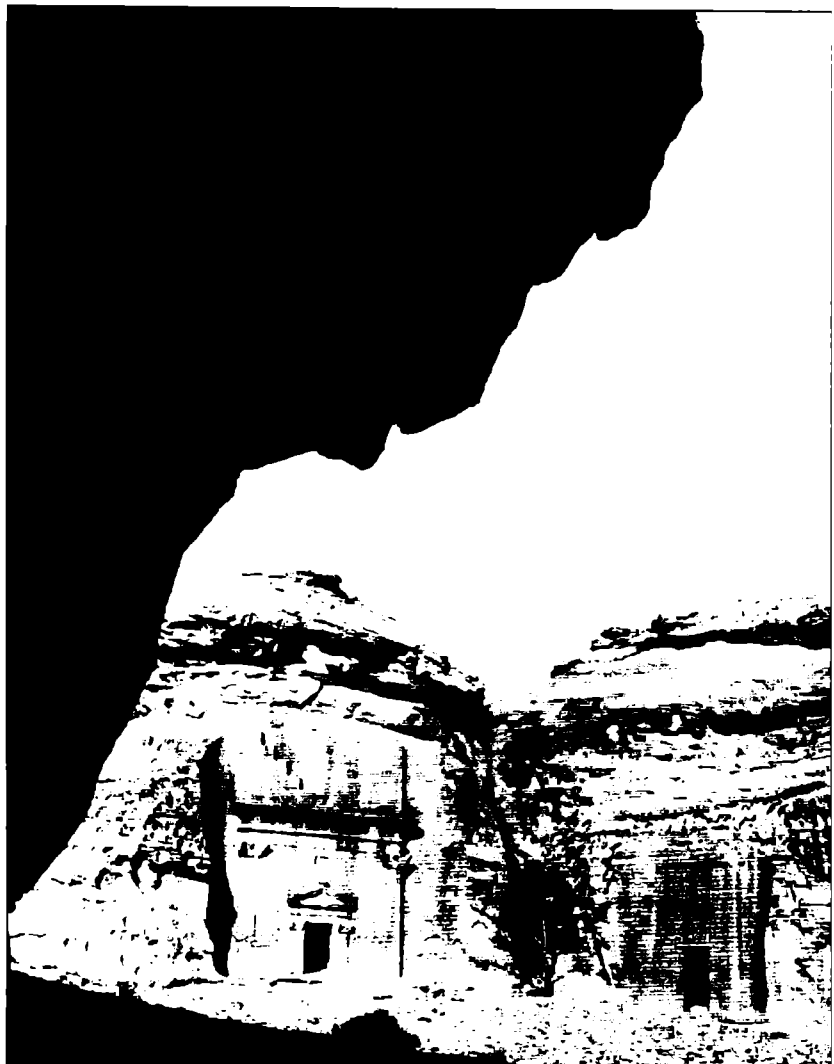
To many in the group it sounded like a pipe dream, but for Abu Jahl who valued power as an artform it was exciting. “Hey! that makes a great proposition,” said he, “... we are willing to say ten such kalimas.”

“(Then) say, *la ilaha illallah* — there is no God but Allah.”¹⁹

That put a damper on Abu Jahl’s and his associ-

ates’ spirits. For them, the Prophet’s message was out of step with the practices of their time. Christian believed in three Gods along with innumerable patron saints, each capable of doing them good; a small minority of Jews believed in Ezra as son of God; the Hellenic world was full of gods. In such a god-infested climate, his invitation to one-God was seemingly weird and nonsensical. Abu Talib’s eyes fidgeted from his nephew’s to Abu Jahl’s face. For the first time, he realized the deep chasm

✠ History can revisit them as it did to the people of ‘Aad and Thamud, the Qur’an told the non-believers.



between them. Muhammad Rasul Allah stood firmly rooted in revelation and they remained stuck with their mythopoeic mind. Their mind, determined as it was by the ancients' experience, relied more on the cultivation of imagination — poetry and oratorical flourishes — than understanding the sublime doctrine of monotheism.

Annoyed, they left saying: "*isbiru ala al-i hatikum inna hadha lashiyun yurad* — Go and firmly adhere to your gods. This is a thing designed. We never heard of this in the former faiths." ²⁰

Abu Talib was more than an uncle of Muhammad Rasul Allah. He brought him up, stood by him, and protected him from a hostile world. Doubtless, he was one of the anchors in the Prophet's life. The shi'b years took a heavy toll of this dear man. Already old by age, infirmed by the confinement at the shi'b, and broken by the uncalled for callousness of the Quraysh leadership toward his clan, his days were apparently numbered.

When the Prophet heard of his aggravated condition, his apprehensions about him arose lest he died in *kufr* (disbelief). He wanted Abu Talib to embrace Islam, for he knew it would deliver him from the consequence of dying in *kufr*. By the time he arrived at his uncle's house, he found Abu Jahl and 'Abdullah ibn Umayya sitting by his bedside. "O uncle," he said, "say *la ilaha illallah* ... and I will pray to Allah for your forgiveness." This brought out Abu Jahl's proverbial animosity toward Islam; he countered by asking Abu

Talib: "(Now that you are dying) would you give up the religion of 'Abdul-Muttalib?" The Prophet felt bad. Abu Jahl's presence was making it hard for Abu Talib to accept Islam. Repeatedly he pleaded with him; but each time, Abu Jahl offset him by invoking the religion of 'Abdul-Muttalib to Abu Talib. Caught in this crossfire, Abu Talib died as a *mushrik* (polytheist). Grieved as he was, he swore to seek forgiveness for Abu Talib's soul from Allah.²¹

How he could have given up on a man who gave him home when he had none, comforted him when he was in distress. For days, he kept on asking forgiveness for him. His rationale was simple and clear: if Allah does not stop him, why should he stop pleading mercy for him? But then eventually he was told by the revelation not to ask for it.

It is not for the Prophet,
and those who believe,
to pray for the
forgiveness of idolaters
even though they may
be near of kin (to them)
after it has become
clear that they are
people of hellfire.²²

Obviously, this put an end to all those supplications for Abu Talib's departed soul, though it left a question in the faithful's mind: If Ibrahim (upon him be peace) could pray for his father's salvation,²³ why couldn't the Prophet? Clarifying the issue, the revelation said:

The prayer of Abraham

for the forgiveness of his father was only because of a promise he had promised him, but when it had become clear unto him that he (his father) was an enemy to Allah, he disowned him. Surely, Abraham was soft of heart, long-suffering.²⁴

Abu Talib's death deprived him of a protective umbrella. Shadeless, he felt the heat badly — it was such a cruel, hostile world. His family was saddled with problems of three young daughters who missed their mother. Khadija's death took comfort and love out of his life. Barring a few disprivileged Muslims who were forced to stay in the city, the rest made good their escape to a foreign land. Never before he felt so helpless and lonely.

Abu Lahab warms up

The Makkan hostility forced him to stay inside his home. For the first time in his life, he was showing withdrawal symptoms that even Abu Lahab, despite his devious personality, could not help notice it. For a while, he felt warm toward his nephew and visited him at home.

“O Muhammad, you may go where you want and do what you did in Abu Talib's life. By Lat, as long as I live, nobody will dare hurt you,” said he.²⁵

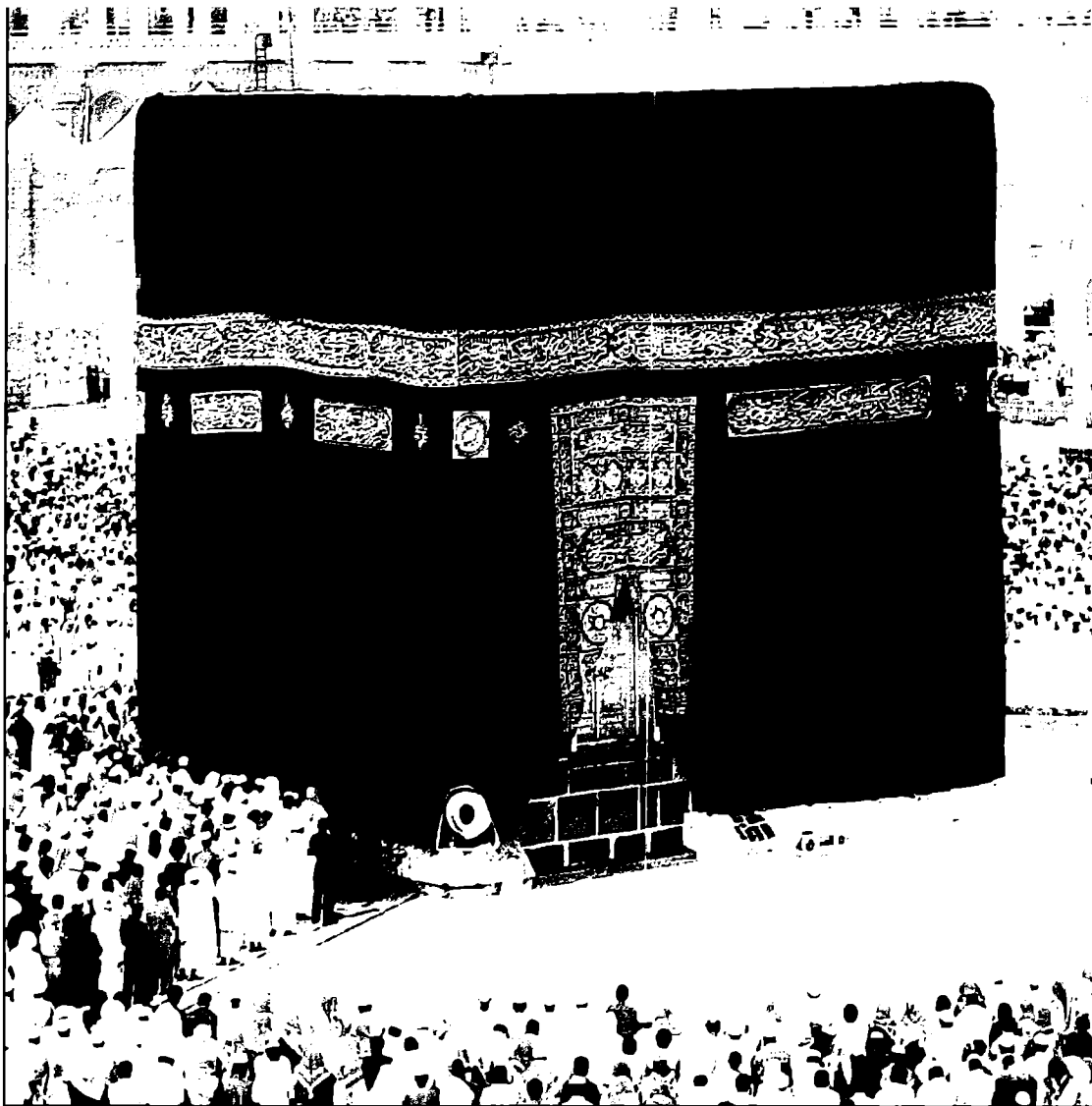
For the Prophet that was a pleas-

ant surprise — something unexpected like a cool breeze that suddenly starts blowing in the mid-summer day. The newly forged relation was soon to be put to test.

One day a man named ibn al-Ghaytala offended Muhammad Rasul Allah by using foul language. Abu Lahab sought him and short of a physical brawl let him have it. This was a new Abu Lahab. Stunned, ibn al-Ghaytala ran to the elders with information that Abu Lahab had gone apostate. The news flabbergasted everyone. But Abu Lahab allayed their fears: he was just trying to be a nice uncle to his nephew. His transformation, however, was not liked by Abu Jahl and 'Uqba ibn abi-Mu'ayt, for in their view it might be a preliminary to his becoming Muslim and that would have weakened the confederation against Muhammad. Shrewd as they were, they went to Abu Lahab and needled him:

“Did your nephew tell you the whereabouts of your father [in the hereafter]?”

The mischief was done. Later, when he met his nephew, he put him the same question. The Prophet immediately knew his mindset. He could have ducked the question by being evasive or used palliative; but that would have been unlike Muhammad Rasul Allah. At the same time, 'Abdul-Muttalib was not only Abu Lahab's father but his grandfather as well who used to love him dearly. He knew exactly where he dwelt in, yet verbalizing it was not easy. Still he said:



‡ The
Ka'bah:
the center
of the
conflict

“He is with his [kind of] people.”

His reply did not satisfy Abu Jahl and 'Uqba. They prompted Abu Lahab to go back and seek clarification, for as they made him believe, Muhammad certainly had consigned 'Abdul-Muttalib to hell.

“O Muhammad, would 'Abdul-

Muttalib be consigned to hell?” asked Abu Lahab.

“Yes, and those too who will die on 'Abdul-Muttalib's faith!” said the Prophet.

“By Allah, I shall oppose you. [I don't share] your conjecture that 'Abdul-Muttalib dwells in hell.”²⁶

With all his cunning and craftiness in the art of politicking, Abu Lahab was unaware of the fact that his nephew was not in the conjecturing business.

Makkah was getting hot, itching for a final showdown with Muhammad Rasul Allah and his followers. As usual, he waited for instructions: to fight it out or to leave his birth city, the home of the Ka'bah. Perhaps, he felt frustrated on the day's effort and wanted to comfort himself that he went to the Ka'bah and asked 'Uthman ibn Talha, the keeper of the Ka'bah's key, to open its door for him. "I cannot open it on days other than Monday and Thursday," said 'Uthman rudely.

The Prophet gave him a straight look: " 'Uthman, a day will come when you will see this key in my hand, and I will decide in whom should it be reposed," said the Prophet.

"Should that happen, the Quraysh will be humiliated and destroyed," said 'Uthman insolently.

"No! by Allah, they will be dignified,"²⁷ said he.

'Uthman was intrigued. There was something in the Prophet's manner of speech which overawed him. But that was a transitory feeling. Soon he was his normal self. That Muhammad could one day preside over the affairs of the Ka'bah, under the circumstances, was far-fetched and thus hard to believe.

PUTTING FUTURE ON THE LINE

Surely, it is We who
give life and death;

and to Us is
the final goal.

(Qaf: 43)

By the year 614, Muhammad Rasul Allah had completed the fifth year of his prophethood. Despite notable gains, he was still far from achieving his goal of retempering the Arabian society on monotheism. In fact, these were the cauldron years when his opponents had seemingly overwhelmed him. His followers were scattered up to Abyssinia, leaving him marooned in the hostile island of Arabia. Internationally, the religious landscape was predominantly anti-monotheism: the Christians who could have been a partner in the spread of monotheism were crushed by the marauding Persian forces. The Jews, the other possible ally, thanks to Judeo-Christian ongoing conflict, had confederated with the Persians in vanquishing over their joint enemy — the Byzantine Empire.

In this game of superpowers, the

Arabs by their inclination found Persians as their natural ally. Both were polytheists, both were stung by the Christians in the past. The Arabs still remembered what the Christian Abraha, the Abyssinia general, had done to them when he attacked the Ka 'bah in the year 571. Their recent wound was again caused by the Christian Abyssinia when they hosted, contrary to their wish, their Muslim renegades and refused to deliver them to the Quraysh. Thus when in 614, Khosru Pervez sacked Jerusalem and carried out an orgy of killing 90,000 Christians, the Arabs were overjoyed. So dismal was the Christian state of affairs that to almost everyone this was the end of the Byzantine Empire. To Heraclius, the Emperor, Pervez sent a theological inquiry:

Khosru, greatest of gods and

master of the whole earth, to Heraclius, his vile and insensate slave, you say that you trust in your god. Why, then has he not delivered Jerusalem out of my hands?¹

It was as if the undoing of the Christian faith. Thousands of churches were burnt. "Nothing remained of the Byzantine Empire except a few Asiatic ports, some fragments of Italy, Africa, and Greece..., and a besieged capital frenzied with terror and despair."² By all counts, it was a triumph of polytheism over monotheism. That is why when Muhammad Rasul Allah invited Arabs to monotheism, they laughed to their ribs. Which *tauhid* is he talking about, was the favorite response. The one so inconsequential that even the monotheistic God would not defend it. Obviously, it hurt him and his fellow Muslims beyond words.

One day in his pensive mood when things were totally bleak, he received a revelation that defied all the canons of man-made logic: it was predicting the reemergence of the Romans from the holocaust of their defeat. A mindboggling feat that seemed remote.

Alif. Laam. Mim

The Roman have been defeated in a neighboring land.
But after their defeat, they shall gain victory within a few years —
Allah's is the command before and after.

The Chronology Of Muhammad's Prophecy

☪	613	The war starts	
☪	614	The Roman defeat begins	}
☪	616	Romans routed	
☪	622	Romans restart the war	
☪	623	Their victories begin	
☪	625	Persians routed	

Take any date, the duration comes to nine years.

On that day the believers will rejoice in Allah's help. He gives victory to whom He wills. He is the mighty one, the Merciful.³

Incredible as it was, whoever heard the message mocked it. Ubby ibn Khalaf got hold of Abu Bakr and asked him: "[So when will the impossible happen?]"⁴

For Abu Bakr, the pricker was so sudden that he could not figure out the precise timeframe. The revelation said "*fi bidi' sinin*". But so sure was Ubby of its unmistakable droll that he tempted him with a wager of ten camels should it happen within three years. When Abu Bakr referred the wager to the Prophet, he said "*fi bidi sinin*" means within ten years. The wager, he suggested, should be raised to a hundred camels.⁵ Ubby readily agreed.



✍️ **“The Persians occupied extensive parts of Anatolia. The Turkic Avars, who ruled the region between the Don and the Alps, exacted tribute. With its treasury empty, its administration disorganized, its army demoralized, its factions engaging in civil strife, its peasants enfeebled by excessive exactions, its religious dissenters alienated by persecution, its authority challenged by a powerful aristocracy, the empire lacked the strength necessary to expel the invaders, and possibly even to survive.”** ⁴⁵

□ **Heraclius:
the Prophet’s
contemporary**

The prophecy, however, did not end here. It was also the Muslim preponderance over the Arabian peninsula on the same day that would mark the Christian Rome progressive comeback against Persia. This tickled them to a laugh again, for the statement was seemingly bizarre, discordant with reality. Muslims were scattered like the withered leaves of an autumn tree, and Muhammad Rasul Allah was isolated from his followers, alone like a fallen traveler surrounded by predators.

“[What? Did you say the believers will rejoice?]” they mocked.

“[Yes,] it is a promise of Allah. Allah fails not His promise, but most of humankind knew not,”⁴⁶ said the Prophet.

Then realizing their superficiality, their eyes tangled with the appearances, he continued:

“They know only some appearance of the life of the world, and are heedless of the hereafter.”

[“But how would it happen? Zoroastrians have trampled upon the Roman Empire. And Muslims, that despicable lot. One hundred thirty of them all — refugees without a home of their own! And you, living among us at our mercy, without a protector worth the name.”]

The Prophet felt the bite in their taunt. Inviting their attention to the phenomenon of human birth from almost nothing, he said:

“Have they not pondered upon themselves? Allah created not the heavens and the earth, and that which is between them, save with truth and for a destined end. But truly, many of humankind are disbelievers in the meeting with their Lord.”⁴⁷

Whether it would happen the way he calibrated it would determine the fate of Islam. One thing was for sure:

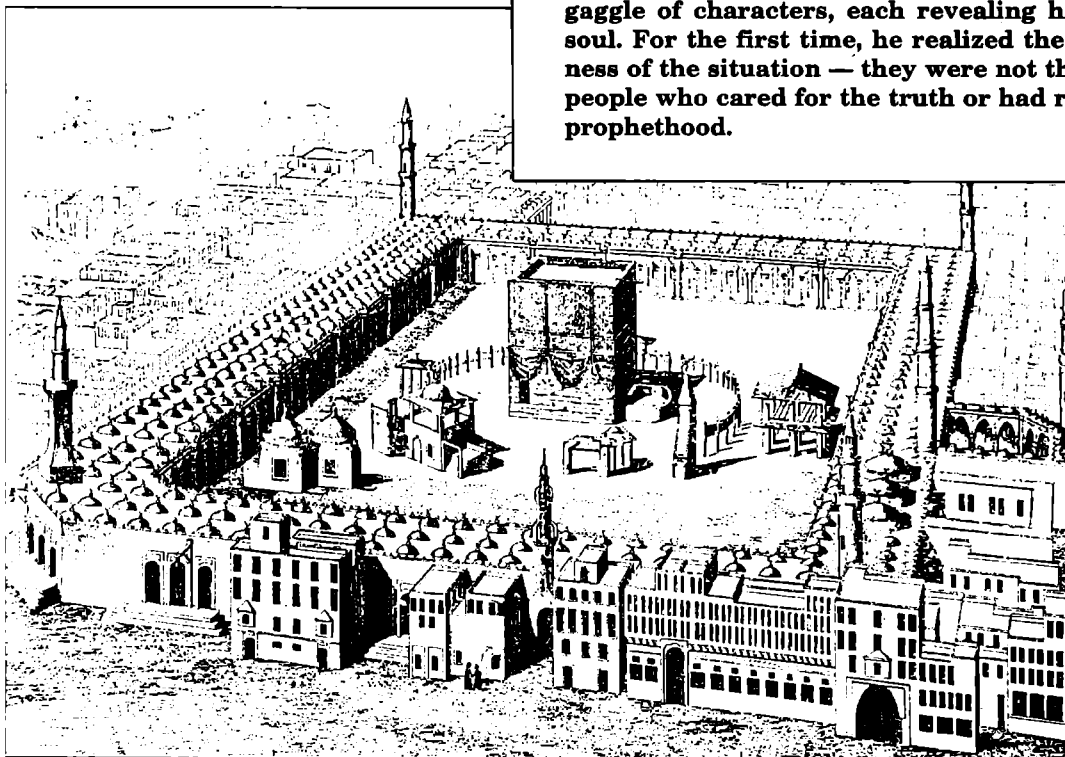
if Muhammad Rasul Allah was sure of its happening so were the nonbelievers of its not happening. The future was going to undo one of them, for-ever

Opposition intensifies a slash and burn campaign

As the time passed, the Qurayshi notables began to be insolent toward him partly because he would ignore their invectives and partly because the spread of his faith had been slow. So far he has been appealing to their good sense; occasionally he would also invoke the sanctity of the blood ties that he had with them. But nothing seemingly worked: their attitude went from bad to worse.

One day he was offering *salah* in the Ka'bah facing Bayt al-Maqdas. Abu Jahl, Ubby ibn Khalaf and others spotted him and began bothering him with their smart pricks. Abu Jahl's mind was at its devious best. When the Prophet went into *sajdah* (prostration), he suggested putting camel's intestines on his back. 'Uqba ibn abi-Mu'ayt obliged as if he was waiting for the occasion. By the time, the Prophet went into *sajdah* again, they had the stinking stuff ready. Abu Jahl gave the go signal, and 'Uqba placed it on his back.⁶ For the Prophet this was a rude shock. He prolonged his *sajdah*, perhaps not knowing what to do, when his youngest daughter Fatima came running to him and removed the filth from

✍ They were seven of them — an unlikely gaggle of characters, each revealing his clunky soul. For the first time, he realized the helplessness of the situation — they were not the kind of people who cared for the truth or had regard for prophethood.



□ The Ka'bah: the scene of the encounter



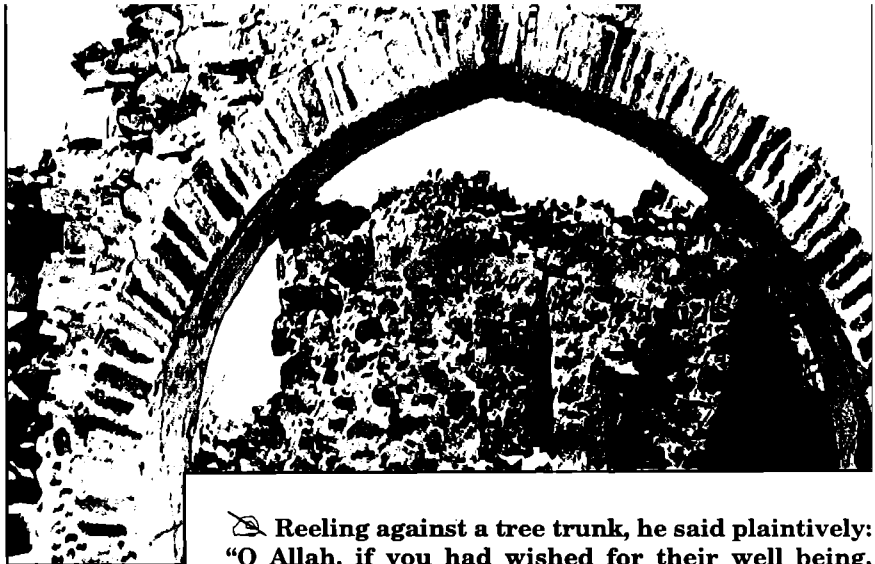
back. Their derisive laughs tolled through his ears. An inexorable surge of anger flushed his face. They were seven of them — an unlikely gaggle of characters, each revealing his clunky soul. For the first time, he realized the helplessness of the situation — they were not the kind of people who cared for the truth or had regard for prophethood. He could have asked for the infliction of divine punishment upon the whole Makkan people, disgustful as they were; but he would not go to that extent. Enough if these seven were punished. “O Allah, take on the Quraysh elders! O Allah, get Abu Jahl, ‘Utba, Shayba, ‘Uqba ibn abi-Mu‘ayt, Umayya ibn Khalaf, Walid ibn ‘Uqba, and Ubby ibn Khalaf,”⁹ he said. The tone, the wording, and the suddenness of expression mentioning each name traumatized them. Never before it happened, but never before they had qualified themselves for the prophetic anger. How soon would they be destroyed? Perhaps very soon. For the present, they will remain suspended down the rocky cleft, overpowered by the cringing fear of the impending fall.

Seeing their efforts inconsequential in squelching the growth of the Islamic community, the Quraysh now redesigned their strategy. “Harass him until he gives up,” was apparently the new line of action. The Quraysh elders, who were the Prophet’s bitter foes, lived in his neighborhood. They stooped to every degradation to harass him. Many a time thorns were spread in his way; his public addresses were disrupted with chants of “lies — don’t listen,”

and street urchins were encouraged to abuse him in public, as if he was a mad man. But far from being frightened into silence, he continued his *da'wah* errands, visiting individuals and groups seeking their help: "Who would give me patronage and [thus] help in the spread of the message of my Lord and in return get Paradise?"¹⁰ These were the lonely years, he was grievously isolated.

It was in the festival of 'Ukaz¹¹ that he walked into the camps. Whether it was out of simple curiosity or his bearing or his effortless eloquence, Harith ibn al-Harith felt like trailing him. The Prophet was fielding the proposition: "O people, say there is no god but Allah. You will attain felicity. ... Because of this *kalimah*, you will have ascendance over Arabia. Non-Arabs (like Persians and Romans) will submit to your writ. And when you will embrace the faith, you will be king(s) in Paradise."¹² His agenda was as sprawling as the desert that housed the visiting tribes. He painted for them a vision of promise but none believed in him. They threw dirt at him, abused his ancestry and his faith. Helpless, he bore with this senseless, humiliating hit-for-all offensive against him.

Reeling against a tree trunk, he said plaintively: "O Allah, if you had wished for their well being, they



✍ Reeling against a tree trunk, he said plaintively: "O Allah, if you had wished for their well being, they would not have behaved like that."¹³ To Harith he sounded like a paradigm of catholic sensitivities. Rapped by the soulful longing of his heart, he fastened his eyes on him. Even in physical abuse, Muhammad ('alayhi as-salam) cut a magnificent profile, every inch a heroic figure. Harith's heart was wrung with sympathy for him.

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☐ 'Ukaz bazaar as it survives today



The Makkans had never before seen someone exposed to such harassment and vitriolic muckraking. Only a few years ago, he enjoyed their respect. It was a slash-and-burn campaign that knew no bounds of decency.

Perhaps, it was in those turbulent years of opposition to Muhammad Rasul Allah that Āsma' bint Yazid, along with some other members of her tribe, came from Madinah to see him. It was in the outskirts of Makkah¹⁵ that she had the chance to measure him against the impression given back home. He sounded genuine. Simple yet impressive, he exuded the sort of grace, civility, and elegant simplicity that the rest of humans could merely strive for but rarely cultivate in their lives. The crowd surrounding him was equally impressive. Imbued with a new sense of importance about themselves, they were free from snobbery, honest as dirt with moral acuity that one sees seldom. He was riding a she-camel. The night was still. The sand layers and the few bushes around bathed in the pallid reflection of the moon; it was a configuration of mystery and sheer beauty, Asma' felt weak-kneed. In a moment, the old faith died inside her. Impulsively she bolted from her place and grabbed the rein of his mount. Her breath was bated. If she could have held the rein forever, she must have thought.

The camel she held was calm like the night; but then suddenly the beast became restless as if in spasm — convulsing, her belly arched as if

weighed down by a crushing load. She screeched in distress. Scared, Āsma' released her grip on the rein and looked upward toward the Prophet, expecting he would rein her to behave. But he appeared to be in a sort of trance: his head lowered, his chin almost touching his chest, the message from his Creator began to descend upon him. It was sura al-An'am containing necessary advice for the Muslims to cope with the emergent situation. They were told that the truth's apparent helplessness of the truth was ephemeral. Life was a theater and such plays had been played even before. And then, success was something to be measured not by the worldly criterion but by success in the hereafter. Undoubtedly, life in the hereafter will only be rewarding for those who adopted the way of righteousness.

The Prophet was told: Your Lord knows what is being done to you is extremely painful. But those who deny righteousness deny Me and not you. This is not something novel. There were prophets before you who were given the same kind of treatment. But they showed forbearance against such odds and bore all kinds of tribulations until your Lord came to their rescue. You are also passing through the same phase, and you will have to undergo this period of anguish.¹⁶

He and his companions were enlightened in diverse ways that the conflict between truth and falsehood was subject to a divine rule, which would not be altered per se. According to this rule, the bearers of truth were to be tested for a long time.

Their forbearance, truthfulness, sacrifice, and fidelity to the faith were to be ascertained to see how strong they were in their belief in God. Born out of this conflict, their characters would be honed into true followers of Islam. Having proven themselves, they would be the recipients of Allah's help at a predetermined point in time.

In response to his and the companions' wish for a conclusive sign from Allah to validate their cause and make the nonbelievers inclined toward Islam, he was told not to lose patience and continue his work the way it had been planned. If signs had to do his job, he was told, it would have been accomplished long before.¹⁷ Allah could have changed their hearts and led them to the right-path.¹⁸ But this was not the way He did things — for this precludes both the test of their freedom of choice as well as the moral and intellectual revolution which alone can give rise to and nurture a successful society.¹⁹

Nevertheless, if because of the people's denial of him he could not put up with the situation, he may do as it pleased him. "Seek a way down or a ladder unto the sky that you bring them a portent," the Qur'an told him pointblank.²⁰

Blood is thinner than faith

Among his opponents, Abu Lahab was in the vanguard. Ironically, Abu Lahab had more than one kind of relationship with Muhammad Rasul Allah. He was his paternal uncle, his



□ Highly decorated stairways in the Persian palace of Persepolis

two sons were married to his daughters, and he was his next-door neighbor. Muhammad's prophethood put a great strain on these ties of blood, and he turned into a sworn enemy. First he threatened his sons by denying them share in his wealth if they did not revoke their marriage contracts (*nikah*) with Muhammad's daughters. Which they did. This heartless incident caused great pain

to him. But, if Muhammad (alyhi as- salam) was set on his course, so was Abu Lahab. Being a shrewd politician, he perfected the technique of character assassination.

It was one of those da'wah visits. The Prophet was in the bazaar of Dhu'l Majaz. Recognizing a tribe, he went up to them and said:

O people, truly I have been sent to you as Allah's messenger. I adjure you to worship none but Allah. Acknowledge me and support me in accomplishing this task that Allah has assigned to me.

If you accept this word (truthfully) that "there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger," then I promise that Arabia will be yours, the world will be at your feet, and you

will be exalted in the life to come.²¹

Abu Lahab was trailing him with his entourage and tried to shout him down:

"O people, do not listen to him! He is deviating you from the worship of al-Lat and al-'Uzza. Surely, you will be misguided if you follow him."²²

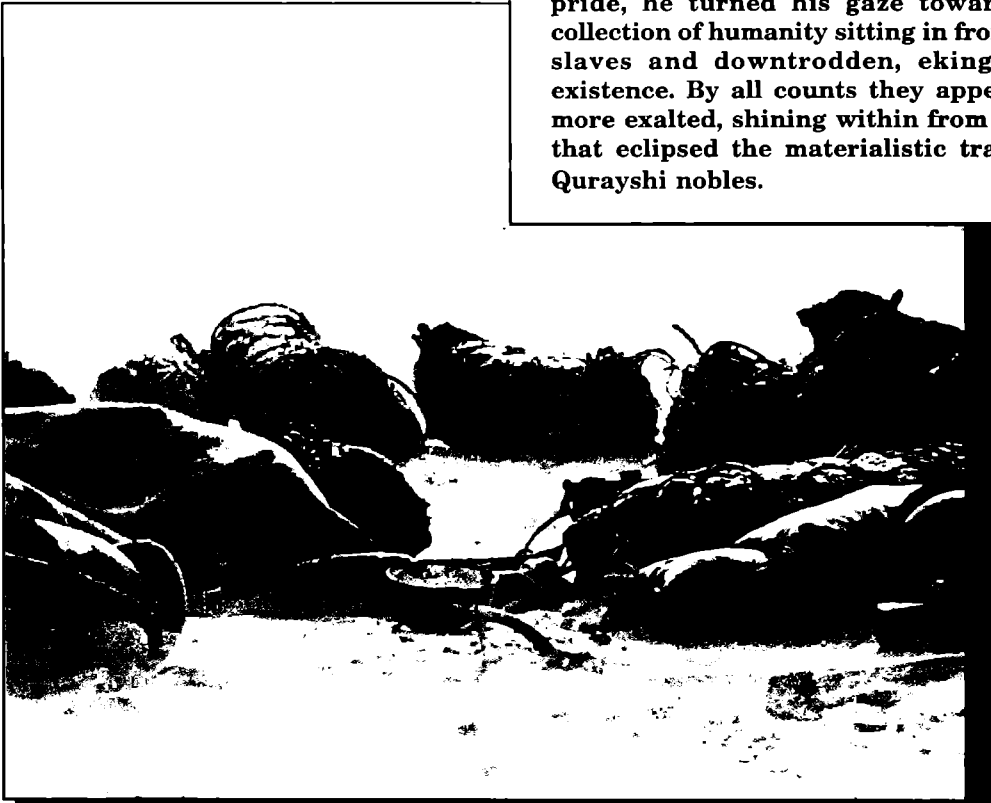
Mischief was done, he succeeded in confusing people; but he did not stop there. Taking a rock in his hand, he hurled it at the Prophet; his entourage followed suit. For the first time in his relationship with his nephew, he had exceeded verbal abuse. Blood began to drip from Muhammad's body, drenching his heels. This verbal and physical abuse had its desired impact on the audience. Muhammad was told that if his family was against him, then why they should be supporting him. The implication was obvious: he was neither a prophet nor had his message a divine origin.

But in the midst of this fierceness, Abu Lahab had his moments of weak-

ness when he would be doubting his own self. At such times, his nephew would assume a figure larger than life — threatening as well as comforting. Abu Lahab being no fool knew Islam's innate strength. There was not a family that it had not touched and won a convert to its cause. Inside, he respected his nephew for the integrity of his message and personality. Perhaps he also had the feelings that Islam could not be rolled back; it might be slow in its spread, but its movement had been unmistakably forward. Realizing Islam to be the wave of the

✍ Muhammad Rasul Allah's eyes kept chasing him. Half grieved half amused at his uncle's inflated pride, he turned his gaze toward the raggedly collection of humanity sitting in front of him, mostly slaves and downtrodden, eking out a meager existence. By all counts they appeared to him far more exalted, shining within from a spiritual glow that eclipsed the materialistic trappings of these Qurayshi nobles.

□ The desert has no compassion



future, though struggling for the moment to gain foothold in the slipping sands of Arabia, he approached him one day.

“Muhammad!” there was a sudden softness in his tone. “What will I get if I embrace your faith?”²³

For the Prophet that was quiet a jolt. Abu Lahab asking about Islam? That was incredible. Nevertheless, he said:

“The same that other faithful would get.”

“What, I the Prophet’s uncle would have no privilege over others,” he almost raged.

“What else do you want?” asked the Prophet.

Upon this he lost his reserve and blurted:

“Damn be the faith that equalizes me with these people”²⁴ [at this he pointed at the poor sitting beside his nephew] and left the place clicking his heels.

Muhammad Rasul Allah’s eyes kept chasing him. Half grieved half amused at his uncle’s inflated pride, he turned his gaze toward the raggedly collection of humanity sitting in front of him, mostly slaves and downtrodden, eking out a meager existence. By all counts they appeared to him far more exalted, shining within from a spiritual glow that eclipsed the materialistic trappings of these Qurayshi nobles.

Abu Lahab was an extreme character. For him, enmity was to be nurtured and shown for every moment of one’s life. In this odious

exercise of passions, his wife did not lag behind, either: she would throw garbage in the Prophet’s house, especially when the food was being cooked there; sometimes she would place the goat’s intestines on his back while he would be in prostration, praying to his Lord. This upset him so much that one day he pleaded with them for decency in the name of good neighborliness: “O clan of ‘Abd Manaf,” he said, “what kind of neighborliness is this...?” But for Abu Lahab and his wife this was a war, dirty and bloody that it might turn into. Out of spite for him, they had even asked their sons to divorce their wives who happened to be his daughters. And like true sons who carried the same genes, they obliged. Abu Lahab and his family had left no option for him. Out of his respect for his uncle, he would not say a word against him nor would he let any of his followers to do away with Abu Lahab’s problem. Nevertheless, the God he served was neither powerless nor blind. Abu Lahab was to be dealt with at a higher plane. The revelation that followed came in flaming words with such a stunning foreboding that whoever heard it was chilled:

Perdition overtook
both hands of Abu Lahab,
and he will perish. His
wealth and what he
earns will not avail
him: he shall soon
burn in fire that
flames, and his wife
the bearer of fuel,
upon her neck

of a halter strongly twisted rope.²⁵

This was the first and only revelation of its kind where the adversary of Muhammad (‘alayhi as-salam) was directly addressed. When would Abu Lahab perish, the revelation did not specify. Perhaps that time was coming soon. For a while, he had to live with an eternal cramp in his stomach, fearful of the revelational consequences. His son, ‘Utayba, was devoured by a wild animal while both son and father were on their way to Syria for a business deal.²⁶ The coming event had begun to cast its shadow.

Universalizing the Abrahamic tradition

The people of Madinah did not rub well with the Jews. The latter had extended interests in agriculture and commerce, which gave them a staggering edge over others. As opposed to paganish al-Aus and al-Khazraj, they also had a revelational heritage, which they occasionally gawked at their faces. The Madinans thus suffered under more than one disadvantages with the Jews. Living in their shadow however familiarized them with the institution of prophethood and revelation. They also knew about the Jewish lore of a coming prophet who would help them regain their lost honor.²⁷ This was the time when the Madinah horizon had not yet been clouded with the acrimonious war of the Bu‘ath.

Muhammad Rasul Allah was still in the initial round of his da‘wah, with hardly a few bright spots in an otherwise bleak scenario when Suwayd ibn as-Samit came to Makkah and had a chance meeting with him. An upright person, he carried with him

a copy of the *Majalla Luqman*, containing lessons in moral rectitude. The Prophet asked him to read from it. Appreciating its contents, he informed him that what he had from Allah the Most High was better than what he had. In proof he recited to him from the Qur’an. Honest as he was, Suwayd conceded the superiority of the Qur’an.²⁸

Back in Madinah, the story of his meeting the new prophet spread fast. But before the prophetic impression could have concretized into some sort of a consolidated Islamic presence in Madinah, Suwayd got killed, pushing the bloodiest conflict of the Bu‘ath between al-Aus and al-Khazraj.²⁹

In about fifth year before hijrah, a delegation of al-Aus came to see ‘Utba ibn Rabi‘a for a possible alliance against al-Khazraj. But before they could have met him, they crossed their path with Muhammad (‘alayhi as-salam). Already aware of their problem, he offered them the safety of Islam which, as he told them, would not only bring God into their lives but also put them on the world scene as a united, dignified ummah. Obviously, this was something that should have engaged their serious thought. Warmed up by the prophetic vision, a youth named Iyas ibn Mu‘adh prompted them to accept Islam for as he said: “By Allah, this thing is better than what you are

hankering for.” But Abu’l-Haysar, their leader, wrapped as he was in the immediate, had no time for distant dreams. Taking a fistful of dirt, he splashed it at Iyas’ face. “Don’t drag us into such things,” said he. “We have come for something else.”³⁰

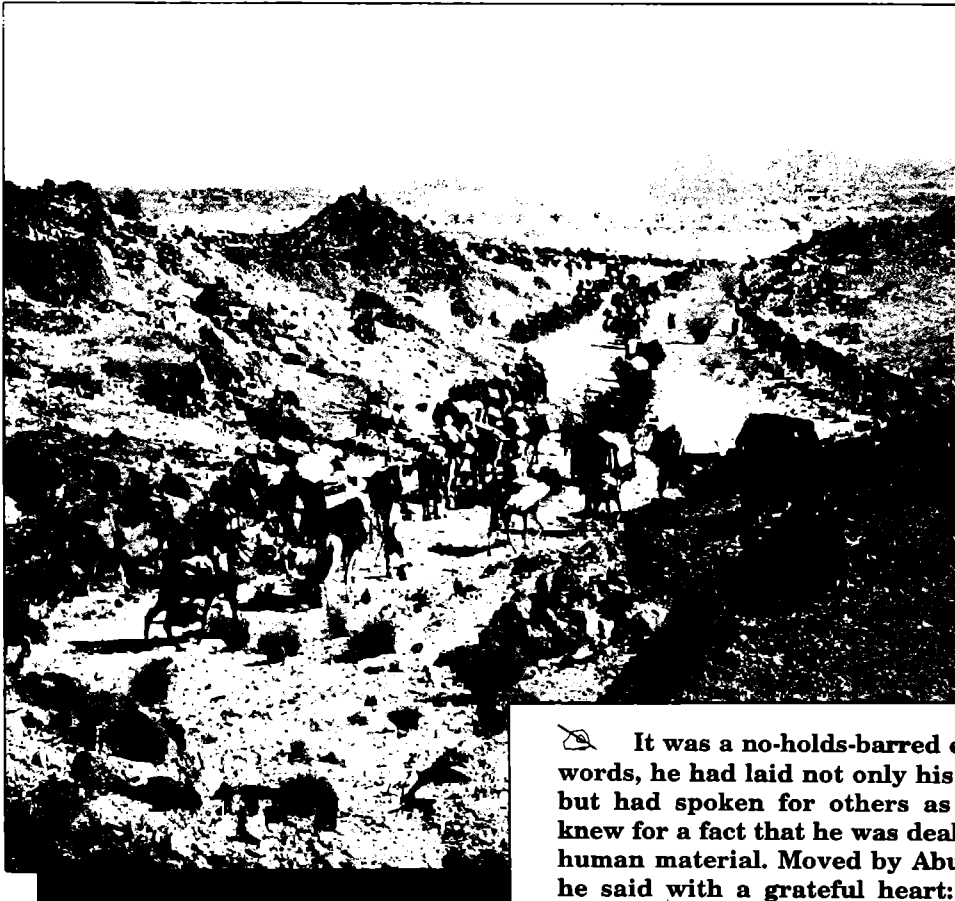
By now Muhammad Rasul Allah had a fair idea of the Madinans’ frame of mind: they were receptive to his message.

It was the fourth year before hijrah that, during the hajj, he stopped by a Khazraj group. They let him speak about Islam. Intently they listened, while their eyes romanced with his face. His manners were disarming; his speech short, free from tangles. It was a first-sight love. And as he went along with his message, their minds were reverberating with the Jewish lores about the coming prophet. “Was he the one they talked about?” “The Jews must not have precedence over them in being the firsts in Islam.” Such considerations weighed in their minds, for eventually six of them embraced his faith on that day.³¹

Important as the development was, it gave him an upbeat mood. For a man who had been riding on the spears in Makkah, this offered a chance for growth. To acquaint himself with their mind, he asked: “Would you help me spread the word of my Lord?” But coming as they were in the backdrop of a bloody conflict (the Battle of the Bu’ath) and their people still riven with the bitter after-taste, they sadly expressed their inability. For as they said, “If you happened to go there, it will be

difficult for us to summon people around you.”³² He knew they told the truth. At the same time, he also knew that love thus forged between them would create its own summit and so would come the resolve to scale it. It was only a matter of time.

And thus it happened. Next year they were seventy in numbers. Many of them had embraced Islam in his absence; they bristled with desire to see him. People like Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah suffered from guilt, for in his view leaving Muhammad (‘alayhi as-salam) alone to himself, wandering in the Makkan valley, without protection and people making fun of him, was heartless if not cruel.³³ Among them were men like al-Bara’ ibn Ma’rur who thought he should pray facing the Ka’bah and wanted to know if he was right.³⁴ Among the prominent ones in Makkah, al-Bara’ knew ‘Abbas ibn ‘Abdul-Muttalib because of his business links with him. He had often helped him in the safe passage of his merchandise through the Madinah-Syria route. Somebody guided him to the Ka’bah where he found ‘Abbas sitting beside his nephew. On being introduced, al-Bara’ had a pleasant surprise — the Prophet knew him by his poetry. He wanted to talk but the Prophet advised him to be discreet, deferring it until midnight. He would meet them at a place named al-‘Aqba in the vicinity of Mina, with specific instructions not to wake anyone or wait for anyone not present in the camp.³⁵ Makkah was still burning with rage, and he did not want them to jeopardize their safety.



□ Somewhere here, the Prophet met the Madinans

When the night fell past midnight, they began to trickle into the mountain cleavage. Muhammad ('alayhi as-salam) was already there and so was 'Abbas to receive them. Among them were two women — one from the tribe of al-Najjar, Nusayba bint Ka'b and the other from the tribe of Salama, 'Asma' bint 'Amr. They stood surrounding him in the still of the night, when after making sure that nobody else was coming, he broke the silence: "Come and give me the allegiance that you will not associate in worship anything with Allah, [that you] will not commit fornication (or

✍ It was a no-holds-barred expression. In a few words, he had laid not only his own concerns bare but had spoken for others as well. The Prophet knew for a fact that he was dealing with a first-rate human material. Moved by Abu'l-Haythm's words, he said with a grateful heart: "No (never!), your blood is my blood, and your acquittals are my acquittals. You will be bonded with me and I with you. I will fight them who fight you, and I will have peace with them who have peace with you."⁴¹

adultery), that you will not kill your offsprings, that you will not steal, that you will not utter slander, intentionally forging falsehood, that you will not disobey me in what is right, and will stand by me in weal and woe, in ease and hardship."

After stipulating the elements of the pledge, he counseled them not to break it. For "he who abides by the elements [of the allegiance] will be

rewarded by Allah. And he who is violative of them, and is punished thereof in this world, it will be expiatory for him. And he whose sin is screened by Allah, his case will rest with Him: if He wills, He will punish him; and if He wills, He will forgive him.”³⁶

For sure, embracing Islam was not a trivial act — it was an important rite of passage from being a self-centered to a God-centered person, purposive and disciplined. That is why it called for a two-party contract between a human and his or her Creator, with the Prophet and the Muslim ummah as witnesses. Simple in words, it called for a complete change of character and thus the birth of a new man. Each element of the oath was crucial to his vision of a new society, which was a break from the monastic trammels and the bohemian latitudes of a materialistic milieu. Unlike the Hebrew tradition, which was derailed from its divine course and caught up in its narrow racial and parochial concerns or the institution of a new faith based on the vicarious sacrifice of a man-god, the oath to Muhammad (‘alayhi as-salam) universalized the Abrahamic tradition by enlarging upon its laws.

In its implications, the oath was far-reaching. Three of its elements such as they will not “utter slander intentionally forging falsehood;” they will not disobey him in what was right, and will stand by him “in weal and woe, in ease and hardship” were not only emancipatory and allowed for expressing creative dissent but also bonded them to his dynamic leadership. The oath was a step toward

the impregnable tauhidi society.

For many in the audience, it was hair-triggering.

Small wonder before they could have said yes, As‘ad ibn Zurara’ interrupted : “Hold it O people of Yathrib! Do you know the implications of this oath? It is equal to declaring war against Arabia and the rest of the world.”³⁷ So obvious were the implications that another person, named, ‘Abbas ibn ‘Ubada also got concerned. Warning the assembly he said:

“O men of Khazraj, do you realize the implication of giving your support to this man? It is to war against all — blacks and whites. If you think that when your wealth is lost and your nobles are killed, you will surrender him to his enemies then better leave him now, for by Allah, it will bring you shame here and in the life to come. But if you think you will abide by the call ... even at the expense of your wealth and the safety of your elders, then hold firm his hand; for by Allah, it will profit you in this world and in the life to come.”³⁸

For a moment, the proceedings got stuck. Turbulence of feelings notwithstanding, an eerie silence fell over the place. Then quietly al-Bara’ rose from his seat and ambulated toward the Prophet. Holding his hand, he said solemnly: “By Allah, who has sent you with *haqq* (truth), we will protect you as we protect our women. Ya Rasul Allah, take our allegiance. We are (born) warriors, [our ability to fight] is willed to us by our ancestors ... ”³⁹

But before he could have finished,

Abu'l-Haythm al-Tayyihan cut him short. "Ya Rasul Allah," said he, "we have alliance with the Jews, which will be snapped (after our covenant with you). In case, Allah gives you ascendance, would you leave us and return to your people?"⁴⁰

It was a no-holds-barred expression. In a few words, he had laid not only his own concerns bare but had spoken for others as well. The Prophet knew for a fact that he was dealing with a first-rate human material. Moved by Abu'l-Haythm's words, he said with a grateful heart: "No (never) ! your blood is my blood, your ceding blood will have my support. You will be bonded with me and I with you. I will fight them who fight you, and I will have peace with them who have peace with you."⁴¹

For sure, this was a rational decision. But so loaded was the occasion that pulsing with energy they were willing to barter their lives for him.

The Prophet prayed felicity for them in the world and in the life to come.

From the very wording of the oath, it was clear that Islam was not a mystical retreat, a privatized faith, but a movement for change. Thus, before they could have dispersed, he asked them to organize themselves: "Like Moses, give me twelve *naqibs* (leaders) from among yourselves who could be responsible for (the affairs) of their tribe; and who could take care of their nation as did the disciples of Jesus son of Mary."⁴² The assembly selected three persons from the tribe of al-Aus and nine from

al-Khazraj as leaders.

Since the new religion was based primarily on self-accountability and not on coercion, he reminded them as a parting advice: "If you keep the covenant, you have the glad tiding of Paradise. If you do not, then your case is with Allah. He can forgive you or subject you to punishment."⁴³

Somehow the Quraysh got an inkling of their last night meeting. Frightened, they made a frenetic attempt to get the Madinans the following morning; but by then, it was too late. They had left Mina before the sunrise. Two of them, Monzer ibn 'Amr and Sa'd ibn 'Ubada, however, were seen near Adhaikhir. They set their horses upon them. Monzer escaped their pursuit, while Sa'd was caught. So great was their anger that ignoring Sa'd's status of a tribal chief, they tied his hands around his neck with the thong of the girth, beating him and dragging him to Makkah. It was only when Mut'im ibn Jubayr and Harith ibn al-Harb recognized him as the guardian of their trade route to Syria and took him into their protection that the Makkans let him go.⁴⁴

The second oath at al-'Aqaba marked the transition from a passive to an assertive Islam. The appointment of *naqibs* led the course of the movement toward the establishment of an ideological state in the future.



APPEASEMENT SUBSTITUTES FORCE

THE NEW SNARE

By the (winds) that scatter broadcast;

and those that lift and bear away
heavy weights;

and those that flow with ease and gentleness;

and those that distribute and apportion by
command.

Surely that which you are promised is
true;

and verily judgment and justice must
indeed come to pass.

(al-Dhariyat: 1-6)

Frustrated in their use of force, the Quraysh, as a last resort, decided to pursue the policy of appeasement. ‘Utba ibn Rabi’a, known for his subtle and elliptical conversation, was primed as an emissary to Muhammad Rasul Allah.

The Prophet was sitting in the Ka’bah. ‘Utba took a deep breath and while ambulating toward him, he started stringing out the package deal. “O my nephew,” said he, “you know that we hold your clan

in great esteem and your bloodline as superior; but you have brought a matter of serious import to your people, which has splintered them (from within). And because of you, the wisdom of their elders stands compromised, their faith and gods stigmatized, and their forefathers ridiculed as heathens. [Now] please listen to me, I will submit a few proposals for your consideration. Maybe you accept some of them.”

Having set the tone of the conversation, ‘Utba fixed his gaze on Muhammad’s calm, uncrimped face. He then dangled the bait with an unerring instinct for the art of the deal. “If you desire honor through your call, we will make you our chief so that nothing is decided without your consent. If because of it you aspire for power, we will exalt you to kingship. [And] if the one who comes to you, which you see, is some ghost who has possessed you, we will exhaust our means in exorcising it so that you are cured ... ”¹

‘Utba was confident of the outcome of his mission. After all, what else could a man aspire for? “But where is the euphoria associated with the sudden opening of such an opportunity?” he must have wondered. “Why doesn’t he grasp the moment?” Nowhere in his mind was the possibility that one could put everything at stake for serving Allah alone.

At last the Prophet’s face lit up: “Is that all you have to say, Abu’l-Walid?”

“Yes,” ‘Utba replied.

“Now listen to me,” said the Prophet, and he began to recite the

prologue to Ha-mim as-Sajdah:

Ha-mim: A revelation from the most benevolent, ever-merciful, a book whose verses have been distinguished and explained, a discourse for people who understand, announcing happy news and warnings. And yet most of them are averse and do not listen, and say: “Our hearts are immured against what you call us to. There is a deafness in our ears, and a veil lies between us and you.

So act (your way), we are acting (ours).”

Say: “I am a man like you, (but) it is revealed to me that your God is one God, so take the straight-path to Him, and ask Him to forgive your sins.

Woe to the idolaters who do not give a due share of their wealth for the welfare of others, and do not believe in the hereafter. But those who believe and do the right, will have a continuing reward. Say:

“Do you refuse to believe in Him who created the earth in two spans of time, and set up compeers to Him, the Lord of all the worlds? He placed firm stabilizers

promised, their faith and gods stigmatized, and their forefathers ridiculed as heathens. [Now] please listen to me, I will submit a few proposals for your consideration. Maybe you accept some of them.” Having set the tone of the conversation, ‘Utba fixed his gaze on Muhammad’s calm, uncrimped face. He then dangled the bait with an unerring instinct for the art of the deal.

rising above its surface,
blessed it,
and ingrained the means
of growing its food within it,
in four spans,
(meant) alike for those
who seek.

Then He turned to the
heavens,
and it was smoke.

So He said to it
and the earth:

“Come with willing obedience
or perforce.”

They said; “We come willingly.”

Then He created several skies
in two spans, and ingrained in
each sky its function,
decking the nearest heaven
with lamps, and guarded it.

This has been determined
by the mighty and
all-knowing.

If even then they turn
away, tell them:

“I forewarn you of a
terrible punishment
like the thunderbolt
that fell upon the
‘Aad and Thamud...”²

When he reached “if even then

they turn away, tell them: ‘I forewarn you of a terrible punishment like the thunderbolt that fell upon the ‘Aad and Thamud,” ‘Utba, as if by a reflex response, extended his arm toward the Prophet and covered his mouth with his hand. “Please stop it,” his voice betrayed panic.³

The Prophet went into *sajdah* (prostration). When he rose from it, he said: “Abu’l-Walid, you have heard what you have heard, now it is for you to decide.”⁴

Disappointed, ‘Utba left the place; but he was no more his old confident self. Badly shaken, his face bore the mark of a disturbed soul. So obvious was his condition that some elders could not help notice it. “By Allah, Abu’l-Walid’s coming back to you is not the same as was his going.”

‘Utba almost lumped to the ground, “What have you brought Abu’l-Walid?” they asked. He shifted his posture, cleared his voice, and began to recount his session with Muhammad Rasul Allah.

By Allah, I have heard a discourse, the like of which I have never heard before. I shall swear to God it is neither poetry, nor magic, nor witch-

craft. O Quraysh, listen to me and do as I say. Leave this man to himself and stay away from him, for by Allah what I heard him say is bound to be of great import. If the Arabs overpower him, you will be rid of his problem. And if he prevails on the Arabs, his domain will be yours, and so will be his respect. Because of him you will be the richest among all people.⁵

This was a wise advice that could have staved off confrontation; but the elders failed his triangulating exercise by upbraiding him: "You have been bewitched by his tongue."⁶ "This is my opinion," said 'Utba. "Now you may do whatever you think of it."⁷

After all, 'Utba was conversant with the poetry of his time which celebrated life by pandering to senses and was impregnated by its passion for women, wine, and horses. He could have cited Imru' al-Qays (d. 540 C.E.) to make his point:

Came I at the mid-night,
hour when the Pleiades
showed
as the links of seed-pearls
binding
the sky's girdle.
Stealing in, I stood there.
She had cast off
her every robe but one,
all but her night garment.
Tenderly she scolded:
What is this stratagem?
Speak on thine oath,
thou mad one.

Stark is thy lunacy.
Passed we out together;
while she drew after us
on our twin track,
to hide it, wise,
her embroideries,
fled beyond the camp-fires.
There is security dark
in the sand we lay down
far from the prying eyes.
By her plaits I wooed her,
drew her face near to me,
Won to her waist how frail-
lined,
hers of the ankle-rings.
Fair-faced she —
no redness noble of counte-
nance,
smooth as of glass her bosom,
bare with its necklaces.⁸

But considering the Quraysh mindset any such comparison would not have helped much. They surely did not agree with his proposal. With mediation caved in, the Makkan resolved to destroy the movement. New directives were given to subject Muslims to severe torture until they forsake Islam.

MAKKAH THE CAPTIVE OF ITS OWN IGNORANCE

The Makkan reaction to Muhammad's prophethood was prejudicial as in the case of Abu Jahl, who perceived it in the context of clan-nish rivalries — a Hashimite attempt to excel over others. The opposition was also cerebral, for in their think-

ing, if a prophet was the appointee of a being as majestic as was Allah, then he should have had at least some elements of grandeur, something of supernatural in his person, which they did not see in him. One day he was in the Ka'bah, when the opponents picked up this very theme.

"O Muhammad you claim to be a prophet. Are you sure that a prophet would eat food and walk in the shopping malls. Why don't you have an angel sent down to you, to be a warner with you?"⁹

"Yes, indeed I am," ¹⁰ said he.

"Then, where are those treasures that would have distinguished you from others?"¹¹

At this the crowd laughed, for they thought he has been cornered, and his claim to prophethood was laid bare. He looked at the faces in front of him. Not a single face had understanding for his cause or sympathy for him, they were seemingly mocking at him. Revelation brought him the answer:

"And surely, We sent messengers (to a humanity) before you, and we appointed for them wives and children, and it was not given to any messenger that he should bring a portent save by Allah's permission. For everything there is a time prescribed."¹²

"This makes no sense to us. What is so special about the prophets if they were men like us," they asked.

Muhammad Rasul Allah sensed that his audiences were not sincere in their inquiry. By repeating the same question, they had let their conversation degenerate into

the meaningless rhetoric of a quibbler. But for the truth sake he said:

"If you don't believe, ask the Jews and Christians whom you consult often about me. Allah did not send prophets other than man; He did not give them bodies that would not eat food, nor were they immortals."¹³ A simple matter of common-sense escaped their sophistication, for if they were Isma'ilites, as they claimed, then the Prophet Isma'il was a human and so was Ibrahim; otherwise, they could not claim to be his progeny.

"Should we refuse to believe in you, what will happen to us?" they teased him.

"By Allah, you will be punished,"¹⁴ he said forthwith.

"How soon?"¹⁵ And they burst into laughter again. Hurt, he pitied their ignorance.

"I am no new thing among the messengers (of Allah), nor do I know what will be done with me or with you. I do but follow that which is inspired in me, and I am but a plain warner."¹⁶

But mulish as they were in their refusal, the Qur'anic argument fell flat upon them. Like any other materialistic people, an issue that puzzled them most was of the life hereafter.

The more the Qur'anic revelations talked about it, the more it aroused curiosity as well as concern. Seeing him in the Ka'bah, they walked over to him. "Muhammad, what is this life hereafter thing that you often talk about? You don't mean we will be

restored after our death?"¹⁷ said they sarcastically.

"Precisely." Then reciting the Qur'an he said, "O Mankind! If you are in doubt concerning the resurrection, then for sure, We have created you from dust, then from a drop of seed, then from a clot, then from a little lump of flesh shapely and shapeless. ... And We cause what We will to remain in the womb for an appointed time, and afterward We bring you forth as infants, then (give you growth) that you attain your full strength. And among you there is he who dies young. And don't you see the earth barren, but when We send down water thereon, it does thrill and swell and put forth every lovely kind (of growth)."¹⁸

With the help of the revelation, he gave them the whole cycle of growth and decay. But still not satisfied with the argument, they asked:

"Shall we really be restored to our first state: even after we are crumbled bones? (If that is the case,) then that would be a vain proceeding."¹⁹

"Surely, it will need one shout, and (you) will be awakened,"²⁰ he said.

"How come life once terminated will be recalled in our dead bodies."²¹

"Are you harder (for Allah) to create, or is the heaven that He built?"²² he posed them the Qur'anic postulate. Then continuing he asked:

"Don't (you) remember that (Allah) created (you) before when (you were) nothing?"²³

His question left them crestfallen, for he had beggared their blather. He waited for a moment and then not anticipating an immediate response,

he walked out of the bedlam.

THE MAKKANS HARDEN THEMSELVES

As the conflict roiled on, the Quraysh hardened their opposition to the message. Despite his entreaties with them, they closed their ears and eyes to it. When the revelation informed him that the people accepting Islam would be dignified, he was immensely pleased. This gave him hope that with such an assurance from Allah the Most High, people would enter Islam in droves. After all, what could be so enticing than a shift in one's fortune from a scum to ascendance on the world stage and felicitation in the life to come. But it fell deaf on their ears like the rain on a rock. Withdrawn, he lamented their existence: if he did not have access to their mind and change it making them receptive to the divine message, they were surely doomed. Short of their total destruction, which he would not wish even in a thousand years, what if they were to suffer famine like the Egyptians had in the Prophet Joseph's time.²⁴ Maybe in that case, they would be inclined toward the message.

The revelation first enlightened him that he was not their custodian. If Allah wanted, humans could have been born on a single faith; but that was not His way of doing things. So do not worry about them. Just convey the message and leave their matter to Me.²⁵ Later, his wish was granted, though he was warned that

**than a shift in one's fortune from a seum to ascendance on
the world stage and felicitation in the life to come. But it
fell deaf on their ears like the rain on a rock.**

it would not work:

So watch (O Muhammad)
for the day when
the sky will
begin to emit
clear smoke,
which would envelope
the people.

(Then they will say):
Our Lord! relieve
us of this torment.
Surely, we have come
to believe.
How can there be
remembrance
for them, when a
messenger making plain
(the truth) had
already come unto them,
and they had turned
away from him
and said:

He is instructed,
a man possessed.
See, We withdraw the
torment a little.
See, you return
(to disbelief).

On the day when We
shall seize them
with a grievous hold,
seizure, (then) in
truth We shall punish them.²⁶

Soon Makkah was seized with fam-
ine, the way the revelation

depicted it. Rain was withheld,
greenery was dried up, animals died.
People afflicted with hunger were
emaciated weakening to a point, that
when they looked in desperation to
the sky, they saw smoke engulfing
them. Shook to their bones, they
hastily reformed themselves,
professing faith.²⁷

Knowing that this calamity must
have come to them because of
Muhammad, Abu Sufyan came to
him and urged him to lift the famine
from them. Never short of good
words or wanting in manners, he
struck the right chords: "You stressed
obedience to Allah, and kindness
toward one's relations, even though
your own people are about to perish.
Won't you please pray to Allah!"²⁸ Abu
Sufyan made his solicitation in the
context of al-Nahl: 90 revealed
before the famine. It was a perfect
referent made by an almost brilliant
person which succeeded in making
its desired impact.

The Prophet lowered his head,
cutting a sad visage. He never
wanted this thing to have happened
to them. But what could he have
done? To be a blessing for humanity
did not mean allowing humans to
grope in ignorance forever. If he could
nudge them a little toward Allah the
Exalted, he would do it. Also, he could
have refused talking to Abu Sufyan
and instead have asked for Abu Jahl,



□ Ta'if:
perhaps
present
roads
were
carpeted
on the
old track

Ubbay, and 'Uqba. But such considerations were not his broth. He prayed: "*Allahumma haw-layna wa-la 'alayna* — O Allah, let it be around us and not upon us."²⁹

But as soon as famine was lifted, they reverted to their previous conduct — bad as ever, abusing him and victimizing his followers.³⁰ The revelation foretold of a coming day when a big punishment would be measured out to them.³¹ When would that decisive moment be materialized, the revelation kept it to itself.

LOOKING EASTWARD FOR A FOOTHOLD

Makkah had given its best sons and daughters to the Prophet and his cause. The remainder was all contempt for him. Obviously, he looked eastward.

Without any support from his people to his cause and the threat to his life looming large, he left Makkah for Ta'if, a small habitation on the Makkan periphery. The township was renowned for its wealthy and influential people.³² Also, a Qurayshi woman was married to the scion of the Ta'if's leading family;³³ and Muhammad Rasul Allah thought it might incline them to be a little more receptive to his call than others. Any support to Islam from them would have served as a counterbalance to the Quraysh oppressive bent of mind.

He went straight to 'Abdu Yalil, Mas'ud, and Habib who had

succeeded their father, 'Amr ibn 'Umayr, and urged them to help him spread the message. But the traditional animosity of power and wealth toward the truth came into play. He was told rather savagely: "Couldn't God find but you to be His messenger?"³⁴ Another landed on him a crusher: "If you are truthful (a messenger), it would be impudent to talk to you and if you are a liar, you are not worth paying attention to."³⁵ They mouthed a litany of rejection phrases which could have felled a lesser mortal, but somehow he absorbed the shock; though distressed on their ignorance, he said:

[Listen O People,]
"By the sky and the
night-visitant (therein).
Ah, what will explain
to you what the
night visitant is!
(It is) the star of
piercing brightness.
There is no soul but has
a protector over it.
He is created from a
spurting fluid,
proceeding from
between the backbone
and the ribs:
For sure, He is able
to return him
(unto life), on the
day when hidden
thoughts will be probed.
Then will he have neither
strength nor helper.
By the heaven which gives
the returning rain,
And the earth which opens up
(with the growth of

□ Hira' : the closeness to the Mount must have given him a nostalgic feeling for it was here that he was shown the light.



tuḡ at his heart. Makkah has to be tamed for it was central to the conflict — it housed the Ka‘bah; monotheism was born here.

trees and plants).

Surely, this (Qur’an) is a conclusive word, it is no pleasantry.

For sure, they are hatching up a plot (against you, O Muhammad).

And I am devising a plan (against them as well).

So bear with disbelievers, and give them a respite for a while.³⁶

So solemn was the message and so impressive was the Qur’anic diction that some people like Khalid al-‘Adwani were moved to the marrow of their bones.³⁷ The Qur’an descended upon them, going deep into the layers of their memory, and enshrined there forever.

The Prophet turned to others but was spurned and thrown out of the town, for they thought he would “corrupt” the youth.³⁸

By now he knew Ta’if was as barren to the message as was Makkah. With a heavy heart, he left them. On the way back, while passing through the streets, he was suddenly overtaken by the riff-raff of Ta’if who, on the instigation of their elders, not only jeered him but also pelted stones at him. Faced with this untoward situation, he folded his arms around the temples to ward off the barrage of stones. Badly wounded,

the blood dripped from his body and soaked his shoes. Zayd ibn Haritha, who escorted him, gave him the cover of his body but a rock hit his head and the blood streaked his face. In his distress, he would take to any direction. When he would fall on the ground in pain, they would force him to rise. Nevertheless, doggedly he continued the trail, until he found refuge in a nearby plantation. His lips parched, and hands smeared with his own blood, he raised them in supplication to Allah the Exalted:

O Allah to you I complain of my weakness, helplessness, and humiliation before the people.

O Most Merciful among the mercifuls, you take care of the weak and you are my Master. To whom will you confide me?

To one estranged, bearing ill will, or an enemy given power over me?

If You are not displeased with me,

I care not;

for your favor is enough for me.

I seek refuge in the light of your

which all darkness
 is dispelled
 and every affair
 of this world and the
 next is set right.
 I seek shelter from
 your anger or of
 your displeasure
 descending upon
 me. I have
 consigned myself to
 your will so that
 You are pleased
 with me. And there
 is no power to
 ease hurt or cause
 good other than You.³⁹

His distress moved the heavens. Gabriel appeared to him and asked for his consent to destroy the habitation of Ta'if, but he refused and said: "No, I hope that one day from their progeny there will come a people who will worship none but Allah the Most High."⁴⁰ A genuine *da'iyah* (the caller) as he was, he had an abiding faith in the truth of his mission and no amount of hardship could have taken away his irrepressible optimism. He truly believed that no matter how long it takes, the dawn will come.

His back reclining against the wall, he sighed — more in anguish than in relief. Zayd ibn Haritha tended to his wounds. A little away from the place, 'Utba and Shayba ibn Rabi'a who owned the plantation watched the two in amazement. Such steadfastness to a cause, such devotion to a person by another person. Incredible as it was, the scene had to be believed because they were witness

the Prophet's clothes and Zayd's crying over inhumanity to his master, while cleaning his wounds, cut a sad picture. And even though they disapproved of Muhammad's faith, they could not help empathize with him. Picking some of the best grapes, they asked their slave-boy, 'Addas to serve the two. The unexpected act of grace made him forget his discomfort. Saying "*bismillah* — in the name of Allah" — he picked up a grape. The words *bismillah* surprised 'Addas for they were not in currency in Ta'if.

"Where did you come from?" asked Muhammad Rasul Allah.

"From Nineveh in Babylon."

"So you come from the town of the righteous man Yunus (Jonah) ibn Mattal."

This provoked 'Addas' curiosity. He asked: "Sir, what do you know about him?"

"He is my brother; he was a prophet and I am a prophet."⁴¹

'Addas felt as if the veil that intervened between him and Muhammad Rasul Allah was lifted from his eyes. It was an instant recognition. He lowered himself on his feet and began to kiss them.⁴²

Later, when he returned with a beaming face, 'Utba and Shayba did not like him a bit. "Stupid, why were you kissing that man's feet?" they chided him. "Don't let him seduce you from your religion, for it is better than his."⁴³ But 'Addas could not have cared less — he had found the truth that had so far remained obscured to his master.

With Makkah already turned against him, and Ta'if insolent to the message, Muhammad Rasul Allah decided to leave Ta'if as well, though still indecisive about his destination. He kept moving toward Makkah despite knowing its enduring hatred for him. Approaching Nakhla he decided to disembark. Later at night, when he finished his prayers, he was informed through revelation that Allah the Exalted had inclined a group of jinn toward him: "*wa idh sarafna ilayka nafran min al-jinni yastami'un al-Qur'an* — and when we inclined a group of jinn toward you who listened to the Qur'an."⁴⁴

Elated, he knew the significance of this revelatory information: That his writ has been enlarged, even nonhumans will be among his followers, and that the present may be amorphous and loaded with hardship, it will soon concretize itself into glory for the Muslims.

No wonder when Zayd asked him in desperation how he would go to a Makkah turned against him, he said in an upbeat tone: "Zayd, [the bad times] you see will soon be eased by Allah the Exalted. For sure, Allah is the protector of His chosen path, and He will help His prophet prevail [upon others]."⁴⁵

Zayd gave a side glance to his face, it had the calmness of the heavens on it, the stars twinkled. Fearlessly, he accompanied him. On approaching the Mount of Hira', he disembarked again. Makkah was now hardly a few miles away. Turbulent yet seductive, he felt a tug at his heart. Makkah has to be tamed for it was central to the conflict — it

housed the Ka'bah; monotheism was born here. No, he won't give up Makkah. Narrowing his eyes, he cast another glance at it. He could map out its entire topography. For a while, he distanced himself from Makkah. Hira's rugged contours stood out against the rolling sand layers of the sprawling desert. His eyes must have gone to its summit in whose lofty solitude he used to retire only a few years ago, away from the clatter of life. And then one day Allah revealed Himself to him through Gabriel, with all the answers to the people's pathetic existence; but they would not listen to him. For sure, they were an ignorant lot.

The sight of a Khuza'ah man enlivened him. He asked the man to go to Mut'im ibn 'Adiy, an old opponent, and request on his behalf asylum for him.

Mut'im had a surprise of his life. Muhammad, asking for his protection? He wanted to spurn him, but the chivalrous in him was saddened over his shattered existence. He would take him. Together they entered Makkah, announcing to the Quraysh that Mut'im had taken Muhammad in his protection.⁴⁶

AL-ISRA THE JOURNEY THAT CHANGED THE COURSE OF HISTORY

Glory to (Allah)
who did take His servant
for a journey by night
from the sacred mosque,
to the farthest mosque
whose precincts We did
bless — in order that We
might show him some
of our signs: for He
is the one who hears
and sees (all things).

(al-Isra': 1)

For the last few days, anxiety nimbled at his heart. His daughters, though grown up, still needed a mother figure that he could not have substituted for. And then, there were small household problems that nagged him. Khadija's death had pushed him into the sapping embrace of loneliness that no amount of his followers' love could have made up for. Her warmth, her sweetness, her problem-solving ability without being intrusive, swamped his mind, swinging open the memory-door with a sigh: how great a support she was! Like a creeper that tenaciously

clamps itself to a support, she teased him.

But it was not her grief alone that soaked his soul. He also missed Abu Talib who shaded him when the going was rough. With the Makkan opposition still unabated, and his

message bogged down in the moral wasteland of Arabia, he felt desolate.

The grief turns into a journey of comfort

Almost ten years ago an unlettered individual, who was deeply grieved over the fall of man, scaled the heights of Hira'. Alone in its solitude, he underwent a spiritual experience that altered his perception of himself and life. He was asked to read — an unusual happening because he lacked the skill to read — a pointer to the coming events for which he had neither the academic credentials nor the experience. Nevertheless, it was a command that he dared not defy. He only expressed his inability and the inability was overcome by the insistence of his Lord. He followed the assigned mission, met persecution for twelve grueling years. In the process, he lost almost everything. Added to this was the absence of triumph; one emigration of his faithful followers had already taken place. What would happen next? He had a vision for the spread of Islam, and to achieve it, he went to all those tribes who held strategic locations, and were strong in material and manpower, but they declined.

One such tribe was of 'Aamir ibn Sa'sa'h. He asked them for help. Impressed, a man by the name of Bayhara ibn Firas said: "By Allah, if I had this man from the Quraysh, I could have eaten up the Arabs ..." Then he addressed the Prophet, "If we pledge support to you in your

mission and Allah let you prevail over the opponents, would the right to rule be ours after you?"

"That is Allah's discretion. He would give it to whom He wills,"¹ replied the Prophet.

Not savoring it well Bayhara said, "[What?] We present our throats to the Arabs for you and then if Allah grants you dominance over others, the right to governance would go to someone else? Forget it!"²

Bani Shayban ibn Tha'laba was another tribe which Muhammad Rasul Allah sought for support. Accompanied by Abu Bakr, he walked into their camp at Mina. Abu Bakr introduced him to Mafruq ibn 'Amr, sitting next to him. Inviting them to Islam, he said: "I call you to witness that there is no deity other than Allah and that I am His messenger, that [I ask] you to extend me protection and help me accomplish what Allah the Exalted has assigned me to do. For the Quraysh, instead of upholding the truth, are pursuing falsehood and have joined hands to foil Allah's wish, even though Allah does not need people's support: He is all powerful unto Himself."

"O Qurayshi brother, what else do you call [us] for?" Mafruq asked in his friendly tone.³ The Prophet selected al-An'am 151-153 for the occasion:

Say: come, I will recite what your Lord has forbidden you :
that you associate not anything with Him,
and be good to your parents,
and not slay your

children because of poverty;
We will provide you and them;
and that you approach not
any indecency outward
or inward, and you slay
not the soul

Allah has forbidden,
except by right.
That then He has charged
you with;
perhaps you will understand.
And that you approach not
property of the orphan,
save in the fairer manner,
until he is of age.
And fill up the measure
and balance with justice.
We charge not any soul
save to its capacity.
And when you speak be just,
even if it should be
to a near kinsman.
And fulfil Allah's covenant.
That then He has charged
you with;
perhaps you will remember.
And (he commended
you, saying):
this is My path, straight;
so do follow it,
and follow not divers paths
lest they scatter you
from His path.
That then He has charged
you with; perhaps you
will be godfearing.⁴

Impressed by the moral content
of the message, Mafruq asked him to
give some more information on his
message. He recited:

Surely, Allah bids
justice and good-doing

and giving to kinsmen;
He forbids indecency,
dishonor, and insolence,
admonishing you,
so that perhaps
you remember.⁵

Having made his *da'wah* presentation, he looked zealously on their faces for a response. Mafruq who had initiated the conversation picked it up again. Seemingly moved, he said, "By God, this is not an earthy composition. If it were, we would have known. Undoubtedly, you have called us to moral excellence and righteous deeds."⁶

But this was not Mafruq alone who had to make the decision. He had in his company Hani ibn Qabysa, al-Mathanna ibn Haritha, and al-Nu'man ibn Sharik. Al-Mathanna, their military leader, perceived the Prophet's *da'wah* in a strategic frame. "We live in a place," he said, "which makes us suffer from two handicaps: one Yamama and second Samawa."

"What is the [precise] nature of these two handicaps?" he asked.

"One pertains to the mountains and the land mass of Arabia and the other to the Persian territory and Khosru's canal (system). He (Khosru) has extracted a pledge from us that we would not undertake anything contrary to the Persian interest nor would we shelter a person engaged in such an enterprise. You are calling us to something which the kings might not swallow. ... If you want our support against the Arabs, we might summon our forces to your cause [but against Persia — no sir,

that is beyond us], al-Mathanna said.⁷

“You did no wrong by telling the truth,” said the Prophet. “In fact, whoever rises to work for Allah would leave no stone unturned in His way. If you forebear a little, Allah will give you the land and the treasures of Persia. He will give you their daughters (in marriage); won’t you then worship Allah?”⁸

But despite this assurance and the vision for a great future that he held out to them, they excused themselves. Apparently, there was no reason for them to believe that something as momentous as the fall of the Persian Empire could be accomplished at their hands — the wretched of the earth could even inherit it. For sure, it was too big a dream for their small world.

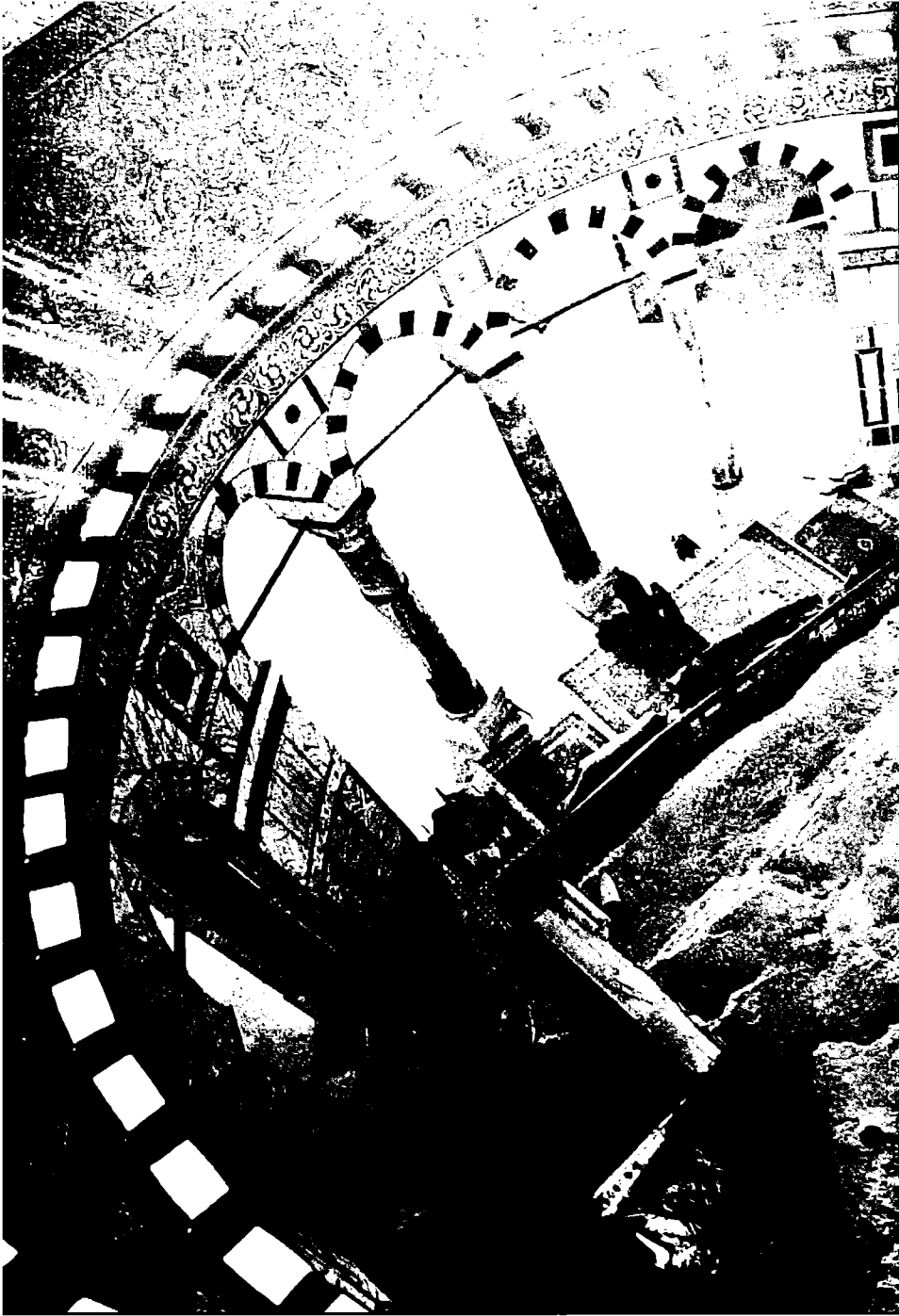
Perhaps this was the reason that Banu Bakr ibn Wa’il also refused to help him. His uncle, Abu Lahab, who often trailed him on such visits, did not miss the occasion, and said: “This man used to have an honored place among us, but (the poor thing) now has gone insane.”⁹

To the tribe’s elders this sounded like a plausible explanation for what they thought to be the aberrant behavior of the Prophet. In Abu Lahab’s remark, they found validity for their observation. “When he began talking about Iran [lightly],” they said, “we thought of him the same.”¹⁰

It was still early in the morning. He got up from his place. For a while he talked to his daughters, took his breakfast and then set out on his da’wah mission.

He was tired at the end of the day. Even his mount trudged wearily on as if tottering on its legs. It was a busy day — one of those days when nothing works. Neither the majestic melody nor the earth-shaking message of the Qur’an. He kept on thinking on the process of transformation, the psychology of encounter between humans and new ideas — why would an audience turn hostile to something as life-giving as Allah’s word? He could not explain his people’s obduracy; for a while he was overwhelmed by grief, a state of mind not foreign to him. And then, it descended upon him that he was only an instrument. That like everything else, it is Allah alone Who is the supreme factor in any change: if He wants to do it, the stony hearts can be softened and made receptive to the message.¹¹ Gradually sleep overcame him, a deep slumber without a trace of the unrest that he suffered a short while ago.

This was the night of Rajab 27. He was asleep like a baby when sometime after midnight, he was awakened by the Holy Spirit Gabriel.¹² His touch took away the load of sleep from his eyes, animating him with a celestial charge, as if he was disembodied. Gabriel took him to the Ka’bah. There engulfed in the darkness, he slit his chest and washed his heart with the water of zamzam.¹³ By now, the Prophet must have realized the significance of Gabriel’s action. An extra-physical event beyond human perception was about to happen, and he had to be ready for it.



❖ **The Dome
of the Rock**

The journey from Makkah to Bayt al-Maqdas was in four phases. He was first flown to Madinah where he offered his salah. He was informed that this was the city to which he would emigrate, the second landing was at the Mount of Tur where Prophet Musa (Moses) had the honor of talking to Allah, the third landing was at Bayt al-Laham where Prophet Jesus was born, and the fourth landing was at Bayt al-Maqdas, where al-Buraq (the mount) was disposed of.

The flight from its beginning was mindblowing, full of amazing occurrences and yet of profound meaning.

During the journey, he heard a voice calling for him to come. He paid no attention. Gabriel explained it was a call toward Judaism. Another voice came from the opposite direction. He ignored it as well. Gabriel said it was a call toward Christianity. Then a very pretty woman clad in beautiful clothes appeared. He turned his face away from her. Gabriel observed this was the world (*dunya*). He also saw an old woman. He was told to have an idea of the remaining years of the world. Then he came across an old man who wanted to have his attention, but he paid no heed to him. Thereupon, Gabriel said that it was Shaytan (satan) who wanted him to deviate from his chosen path.¹⁴

In a rapid succession of allegorical presentations, he was given to understand that the Makkan period of hardship was about to end, that Judaism and Christianity had lost their force, that Islam by stressing the moral rejuvenation in its followers would mold the world in the vision of goodness, that Islam was

the last religion, and that Shaytan, the representative of the evil forces, would not have his way against the forces of Islam.

Gabriel took him to the place where there was once the mosque of Prophet Sulayman (Solomon). There he found the assembly of all the prophets, from 'Adam to Jesus, ready for salah and waiting for the imam (leader). Gabriel took the Prophet's hand into his and asked him to lead the salah. This very act would have been enough to console him: the world may reject him, but Allah has dignified him by making other prophets pray behind him.

The greatest honor was yet to be accorded. After the *salah*, Gabriel led him to a ladder, which took him to the first heaven.

Greater wonders lay ahead: he was first introduced to a person who was the perfect embodiment of the human race, free from physical defects. Gabriel informed him that he was 'Adam, his ancestor. Around him stood a swarm of people. And when he looked at his right flank, his face would light up; and when he slung his glance at the crowd on his left side, he would cry. Bewildered, the Prophet inquired as to their identity. He was informed that the people around 'Adam are his progeny. The good among them regaled his sight, while the bad ones made him cry.¹⁵

This was the beginning of the unraveling of the mysteries. The realities of the life hereafter were no more a mere concept. For him, the timeframe was dissolved and the future was incarnated so that he

could see what others only hear about. For him also, the good and the bad deeds were personified so that he could see the consequences they formulate for their doers.

For example, those who fight in the way of Allah harvest the crop but it goes on increasing; the delinquents of salah are shown with their heads crushed by stones, the misers who refuse to share their wealth with the needy graze grass; those who amass power but do not discharge their responsibilities are shown as a man who goes on making a pile of wood, tries to lift it and fails but adds some more load to it; speakers and *khatibs* who spread mischief by their speeches, their tongues and lips are cut by scissors; the abusers eat their own flesh; the slanderers have nails of copper, and they scratch their faces and chests.

The Prophet goes on ascending until he reaches the highest point in time and space (Sidratul Muntaha). Here Gabriel bids him farewell. As an archangel, he has reached his limits but Muhammad — a man who has realized the potentials of his humanity — ascends further until he

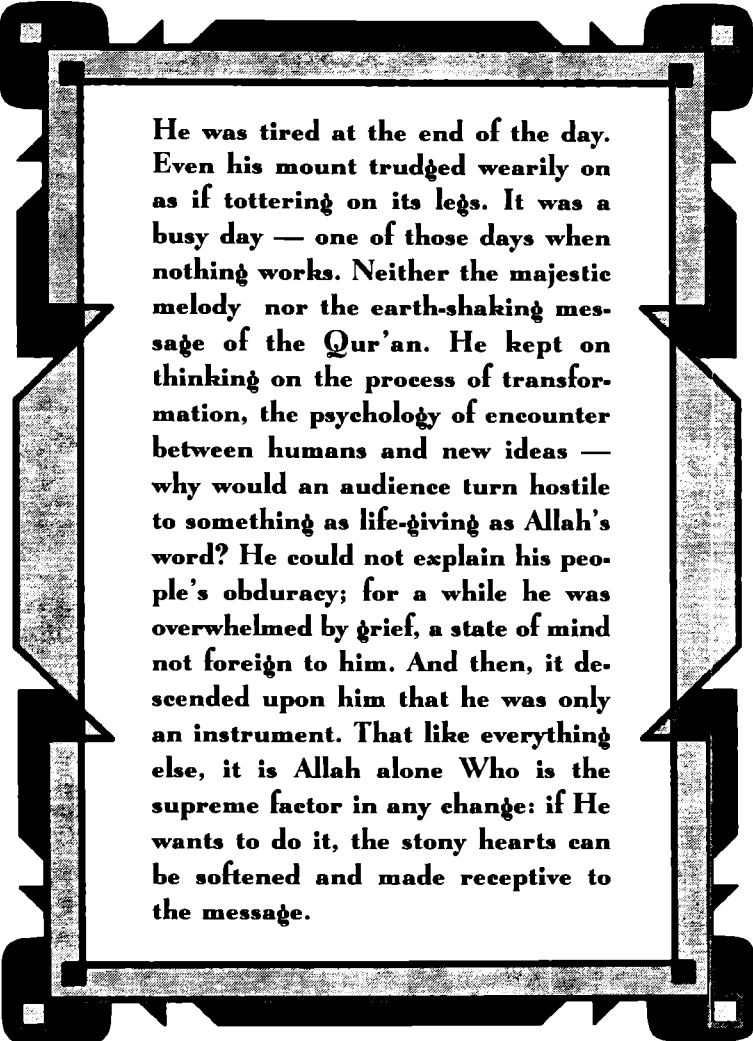
comes close to the sanctum refulgent with the presence of Allah. In a historic moment of higher spirituality, humanity transcends the constraints of its earthly existence, the “pariah” of Makkah is standing at a place where angels cannot set their feet. He has the honor of being greeted by none else but His Creator:¹⁶ “*As-salamu ‘alayka ayyuhan nabii wa rahmatullahi wa-*

barakatuhu — Allah’s blessings be upon you O prophet.” Overjoyed, he held himself together and remembering the pious ones of the past as well as of his followers, made his response: “*As-salamu ‘alayna wa-ala ‘ibadilla hissalihin* — and Allah’s blessing be on

But despite this assurance and the vision for a great future that he held out to them, they excused themselves. Apparently, there was no reason for them to believe that something as momentous as the fall of the Persian Empire could be accomplished at their hands — the wretched of the earth could even inherit it. For sure, it was too big a dream for their small world.

us and on the pious among Allah’s creation.”

It was on this occasion that five-time salah was made obligatory upon the Muslims. Allah’s generosity extended beyond Muhammad’s ascension to the heavens. Making salah obligatory, while he was still in the presence of Allah, goes well beyond symbolism. In fact, it implied that his followers can scale the same heights and come close to Allah



He was tired at the end of the day. Even his mount trudged wearily on as if tottering on its legs. It was a busy day — one of those days when nothing works. Neither the majestic melody nor the earth-shaking message of the Qur'an. He kept on thinking on the process of transformation, the psychology of encounter between humans and new ideas — why would an audience turn hostile to something as life-giving as Allah's word? He could not explain his people's obduracy; for a while he was overwhelmed by grief, a state of mind not foreign to him. And then, it descended upon him that he was only an instrument. That like everything else, it is Allah alone Who is the supreme factor in any change: if He wants to do it, the stony hearts can be softened and made receptive to the message.

through salah.

But salah was not the only blessing he received. As if to commemorate the occasion, Muslims were given the glad tidings that except *shirk* (apostasy) all their sins can be forgiven, that their suffering can come to an end if they recite frequently the summation of al-Baqarah, and that for a good deed there is a ten-fold reward while for a bad deed,

there is one punishment only. Here what started as a personal journey assumed collective connotations.

After all, *mi'raj* was not intended to be an isolated event, nor was it supposed to be an esoteric experience of a sufi — it is a milestone in the history of Islam because it led to the creation of the Islamic state in Madinah.

In fact, no action of the Prophet Muhammad was purely private. The solutions that he sought and which broke his back, in the words of the Qur'an, were not of personal nature related to him and his clan — they were societal and humanitarian. Even his personal life was not a reflection of his taste and preferences: his marriages, his interpersonal relationships, his social, economic and political moves, all in the worship of His Creator, were to set standards — a model on a gigantic scale that inspired man to slough off his bestiality and become human. As such, his prophethood was not a personal triumph, it was the triumph of humanity.

He reentered the earth orbit at the *fajr* (dawn) time. But elated as he was on this bewildering journey, its disclosure to others was perhaps not easy. Even before his ascension, the Makkans considered him an insane person. They would now make fun of him. It was this fear that

gripped the soul of his cousin-sister Umm Hani, who was incidentally the first recipient of the awesome event. She held the corner of his mantle and implored him not to tell it to the people. Umm Hani did not know the soul of a man whose convictions about his divinely ordained role were clear to him like the sight of Gabriel whom he saw in the early days of his prophethood on a chair with his golden wings spread all over the horizon from north to south. And now that he had been privy to the secrets of the secrets why should he care about the people's rejection or their scorn. Allah would not let him down. He was going to tell them all.

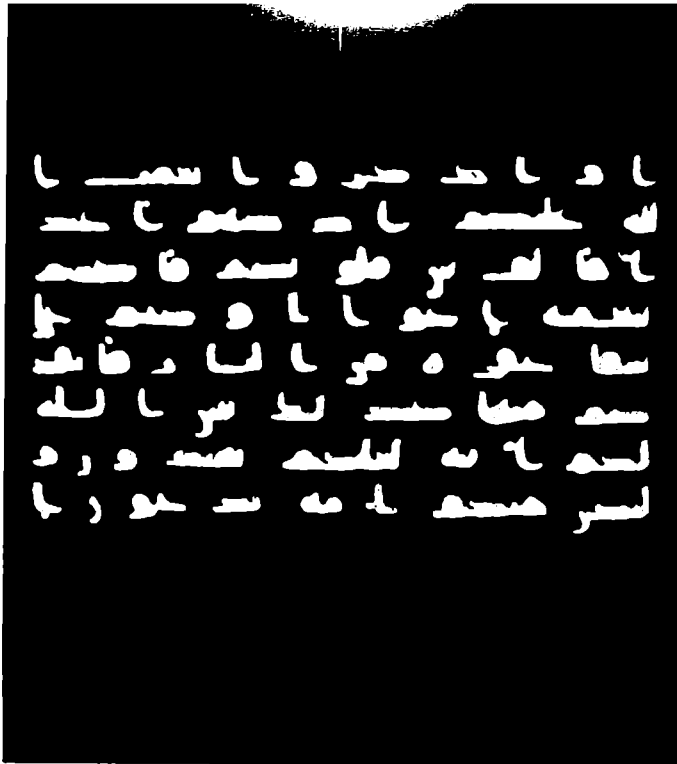
Soon he was blessed with al-Isra'. At face value, its content was out of tune with the helplessness of Muslim situation in Makkah. The sura was laying down rules for social, economic, and political relationships between individuals, and individual and society, which presupposed political order — something nonexistent in Makkah.

But he knew that a shift in the Muslim fortune was imminent. Islam, a victim now, will emerge as a force to be reckoned with; it will raise a great civilization, more divine than terrestrial, more rational than dogmatic, more compassionate than indifferent, more committed than permissive — whose product, man, will be pious but not bigot, rich but not another Shaddad, powerful but not another Pharaoh. The mi'raj presaged it, hijrah was going to accomplish it.

The nonbelievers must listen

The oppressive practices of the Makkan nonbelievers and their unfledging refusal to accept Islam had reached its extreme. With a recurring insistence, they would invoke Allah's wrath that the Prophet had prophesied in the face of their haughty contempt.

“What kind of a messenger is this? Where is the visitation of punishment with which he used to scare us?¹⁷ Why would it not come now?”¹⁸ they would tauntingly ask. To which, it was said that the method, as laid down by Allah the Exalted, was not to punish a people until a prophet had appeared among them.¹⁹ The coming of a prophet had always met stiff opposition from the wealthy and the influential who almost invariably resolved to finish him. In the conflict so caused, except for a few good souls who accepted the truth, the common man usually sided with the oppressors. Then at the appointed time, Allah's help would come to the side of the truth. But since humans are by nature hasty,²⁰ they desire for things which, though seemingly good, are of ill-consequence, forgetting that in nature things move according to a schedule. To drive this point home, they were asked to look at the cycle of day and night — a sign of God: the cycle occurred in a fixed order.²¹ And what about the nations destroyed and swallowed up into oblivion since Noah?²² Allah knew everything about His creation and rewarded all of them on the basis of their deeds.²³ The nonbelievers of Makkah must know, the Qur'an said, that from now onward they would be treated according to



❖ Qur'anic passage on the deerskin ascribed to 'Umar

their response to the call of the messenger. And the decisive moment was about to come.²⁴

There was yet another aspect to this impending change — the deposition of the Israelis who were until then, the bearer of the Abrahamic legacy. Nevertheless, what was given to them conditionally they took it for granted. Their moral corruption and tampering the divine law called for transferring their role to a new people. And this was the clan of Isma'il whom Allah selected for this great mission. So far the Jews were not directly focused. Now in al-Isra', a Makkan sura, the Jews were told — two years before Muslim emigration to Madinah — that although

they were tested twice and reprieved each time, they had neither repented nor reformed themselves.²⁵ With prophethood of Muhammad ('alayhi as-salam), they were again being given the chance to reform themselves, which if they did, their honor will be redeemed in the world.²⁶

In the oppressive condition of Makkah where death and privation loomed large, this allusion to the coming change in sura al-Isra' was of great comfort to Muslims.

The bases of an Islamic Ummah

The suffering and humiliation were at last about to end. The Islamic revolution was now on the anvil and soon a new society was to come up on the Islamic principles. These principles were part of the divine gift-package given to the Prophet during his sojourn in the heavens:

Serve no other gods but Allah lest you are despised and forsaken.

Respect your parents and obey them save when their obedience will result in disobedience to Allah.

Discharge your obligations toward relatives, travelers, and the poor. Restore individual rights in their purity and be fair to each other, since without justice and fair play no culture or civilization can survive.

- ☞ Avoid extravagance. The misuse of Allah's providence is satanical. A people who are not frugal nor spend judiciously can never prosper. Moderation should be the keynote in spending and conservation.
- ☞ Kill not your children for fear of privation since it amounts to doing away with your selves.
- ☞ Nor come close to fornication for it is the source of all evils. Avoid not only the act but also root out the elements that lead to its commission. A society that does not purge itself of this curse will be afflicted with new strain of diseases, and the family as a social unit will suffer.
- ☞ Life is sacred. So take it not except for a just cause. A society ridden with lawlessness can never progress. Protection of one's life and property is thus an imperative to growth.
- ☞ Treat orphans well. Those who are weak and cannot protect their rights deserve all assistance in making use of them.
- ☞ Fulfill your promises, including the one you made with your Lord at the time of embracing Islam.
- ☞ Give full measure while selling, and protect each other's rights in making deals. Where people distrust each other, social and economic relations

suffer, legalism takes over and interaction becomes formal.

- ☞ And pursue not that of which you have no knowledge. An unnecessary curiosity and forming opinion on heresy results in undermining individuals and society. Besides, one must bear in mind that one's ears, eyes, and heart shall be held accountable.
- ☞ Walk not in the earth with insolence for you cannot cleave it. Nor can you rival the mountains. Pride may convolute one's thinking. For the good of mutual relations, it is necessary to refrain from considering others as of lesser origin. Treating others inhumanly is equally deplorable.²⁷

Believers defined

Also, the revelation sought the following traits in a believer: Dependability on Allah and patience. Occasional frustration is natural to the strugglers in life. The believers were no exception. Thirteen years of gruesome conflict, with no recompense in sight, could have dented their spirit forcing them to capitulate at a time when the Makkan conflict was entering its final phase. To continue striving with a heartless disregard to consequences was, therefore, a must and that called for an indomitable faith not only in the rightness of their cause but in their eventual triumph as well. The divine

instructions revealed in the last Makkan phase reinforced this kind of a mindset.²⁸

Muslims were reminded that trials and tribulations were inherent in upholding Islam. In fact, this was the only criterion which, when met, could prove their fidelity to the cause. Moreover, the believers' hardship did not necessarily mean that nonbelievers had gained predominance. They must know that Islam could not be vanquished. Eventually, truth (*haqq*) was to prevail provided its votaries qualified themselves for His help.²⁹ Let there be no desertion of the cause or loss of spirit in face of hardship. In an allusion made to Prophet Noah's life, the sura recalled that while facing his nation's hostility he remained true to his mission. Prophets, like Abraham, Lot, Shu'ayb, Saleh and Moses had a similar set of circumstances and in their cases too, truth had eventually triumphed over falsehood (*batil*).

In support of Muhammad's prophethood, the revelation posed the inevitable question: Don't they know that before prophethood, you were not schooled in any discipline nor did you read or write. Still, so profound are your Qur'anic utterances that even the wisest among them could not have produced their like. And yet they continue asking for miracles. Tell them: whether or not a miracle takes place is the discretion of my Lord. I only warn you to fear the consequences of your evil deeds. How about the Qur'an, a living miracle? Why don't you reflect upon its divine verses? Don't these serve as

sufficient proof for my prophethood? Loaded with wisdom, these verses are of great blessings and healing for those whose hearts are inclined toward goodness, the Qur'an said.³⁰

The Prophet himself described the Qur'an as the greatest of all miracles: Miracles were given to all prophets which, on their occurrence, gave faith to the people. The miracle given to me is the revelation (the Qur'an), which Allah revealed to me. Thus, I hope that on the Day of Judgment my followers would exceed others.³¹

As a miracle, the Qur'an is transcendental: the other miracles were ephemeral and were relevant only to the time of their occurrence and after serving their purpose disappeared with the fleeting moment. The unsurpassed syntax of the Qur'an, its consummate diction, its prognostication of future events to which no human mind could have had access, its gripping power, and the life-giving quality of its teachings are certainly unparalleled. Despite the book's vast canvass, its immunity from contradiction,³² and the fact that it comes from a nonliterate's mouth establish it as a miracle,³³ satisfying one's mind even today as to the prophethood of Muhammad ('alayhi as-salam).

Yet another characteristic of this period's revelations is their tonal directness. The nonbelievers were told that the time for oral communication was now coming to an end. Acquiescence in the message was still open; if they continued to ignore it,

they would qualify themselves for punishment. Thus it was said:

I stand by a luminous sign that my Creator has given me. But you refute it and ask for punishment that comes in the wake of its denial. Let me make it clear that the punishment you clamor for is not in my power. It is only in Allah's discretion. If it had been up to me, I would have done it long ago. Allah alone knows the unknown. He possesses the sole knowledge of what is to happen and when. He can punish you at any moment.³⁴

The subsequent revelations one after another talked of punishment as if it was about to visit them, causing grief to the Prophet: he did not wish his people a large-scale suffering that might have led to their total annihilation. His compassion exceeded his occasional bitterness. So overwhelming was his grief that it occasioned a marked change in his physical appearance — his hair were turning gray. Abu Bakr who noted the mutation of his hair color expressed his concern: "Ya Rasul Allah, why this sudden increase of gray in your hair?" The Prophet said, "I have been aged by revelations like sura Hud."³⁵ But obviously he could do nothing about it. He was an agent of the divine will, not a counselor to Him. Now that the punishment was coming, he could do nothing about it. Undoubtedly, this was the most difficult time of his life.

At the same time, instructions were given to him that those who had reduced faith to a mere play and were reveling in the worldly life should be avoided, though the Qur'an should be recited to them. Should they refuse to acquiesce in its message, they were free to do what pleases them; the outcome will soon be apparent: they will know the right ones in the conflict.³⁶

This directness of style, portentous of coming events, was manifest also in the other revelations of the Makkan period. A pointer indeed to the confrontation entering a decisive phase.

But what form the conflict will take and where and how will it be resolved, Muhammad Rasul Allah was not sure about, though he had an inkling of it during his night journey to Bayt al-Maqdas. From all apparent counts, time was running short. His Makkan presence was reduced to elements, every moment was like the clicking of an explosion device. Makkah, the most loved of cities, had turned its back on him, threatening to spew him out. Suffering from cyclical distress of an uncertain existence in the city, the revelation cheered him up:

And they indeed wished
to scare you from the
land that they might
drive you out
from here, and
then they would
stay (there)
but a little after

thee.

Such was Our way
with the messengers
whom We sent before
you. You shall find
no change in Our way.³⁷

The divine reassurance put his heart to rest. But unlike the past, this time the revelation opened up a new window on the events, prophesying his ouster from the city. Should that happened, he was assured, the Makkans would lose the city as well. And that was the new spin to the emerging situation. Meanwhile to strengthen him, he was told:

Establish regular prayers
at the sun's decline
until the dark of
the night and (keep)
the recital of the Qur'an
at dawn. Surely the reading
of the Qur'an in the
morning carry their
testimony.

And some part of the night
awake for it, a largess
for thee (for which)
your Lord may exalt
you to a position of
praise and glory.³⁸

Of the believers' purpose in their
life, they were told to serve Allah in

❖ Economic deprivation is another fear that assaults a person on leaving his native land. The believers' faith was reinforced by telling them that sustenance was in Allah's hand: After all, innumerable animals, rodents, and insects stalked the land and none carried their sustenance with them — it was Allah Who provided food to them.



sincerity. But if this made their living harder in Makkah, they need not be worried, for His world was immense. If worse came to worst, they might die in the process, but then they should be rest assured that each of them was destined to die sooner or later and will return to Him. And if death came as a result of striving in His way, they should not be afraid. He who did good and had faith will find comfort in gardens under which there are flowing streams of water and where they will remain forever.³⁹

Economic deprivation is another fear that assaults a person on leaving his native land. The believers' faith was reinforced by telling them that sustenance was in Allah's hand: After all, innumerable animals, rodents, and insects stalked the land and none carried their sustenance with them — it was Allah Who provided food to them. Why should then the Muslims be worried about their sustenance?⁴⁰

After having allayed their fears and honing them psychologically for the coming great change, the Prophet was taught to supplicate for hijrah:

O Allah, wherever you
take me, take me for truth.
And wherever you lead
me on, lead me for
truth alone.
And lend me the support
of someone in authority.⁴¹

As the body of the supplication shows, it was not a mere prayer but a full-fledged prophecy: Allah the

Exalted was going to take him out of Makkah so that Islam could prevail over other faiths, that he might be helpless now, without the support of a state structure, but soon he will have one to back him out.

Muhammad Rasul Allah was told to announce to the world that truth had come and falsehood vanished since *batil* (falsehood) by nature was bound to perish. God-sent as the revelation was, it still carried a ring of irony. The Makkkan situation by definition was a cauldron; one could have jumped out of it but ascendance over Makkans was at best daydreaming, which obviously invited their sarcasms and ridicules.

The nonbelievers' reaction aside, such revelations not only presaged the coming of the promised revolution but also provided the necessary training commensurate with the unfolding events.



 Hijrah: a
resurrection

ON THE ROAD TO

The Hijrah

And the nonbelievers said
to their messengers:

“Return to our faith, or
we will banish you out of
land.”

But Allah revealed to them:

“For sure, We shall destroy
the wrongdoers !

And let you live
in the land after them.”

This is for him
who dreads

My eminence
and take

heed of

My warning.

(Ibrahim : 13)

What gravitated Muhammad Rasul Allah toward Yathrib (Madinah) could be imputed to a number of reasons. His links with Yathrib were from both sides of his parentage. His great grandmother, Salma, came from there; his own maternal parentage had deep roots in the same city. Perhaps, Abu Talib had these ties in his mind when he suggested Yathrib to his nephew in the eventuality of Makkah turning unfriendly toward him.

More important, it is possible that the number of Madinan converts (seventy-five in the second oath of 'Aqaba) propped Yathrib in his mind as a possible pad for Islam's future thrust in the Arabian peninsula. But this still would be a rational interpretation of the prophetic decision. In fact, long before, while Islam was still in the crib, he asked Abu Dharr, a new convert then, to return to his people for, as he told him, the homeland shown to him had "oases in it." Whether it was Yathrib, he was not sure; his words were "I *think* that place is Yathrib." The fog melted when in a pre-emigration dream, Yathrib was identified as his next abode.²

He wanted to leave Makkah quietly but once a decision as big as emigration was made, it could not be kept secret; the émigres represented a cross section of the Makkan society, including some as prominent as Sa'd ibn abi-Waqqas and 'Uthman ibn 'Affan.

Obviously, the Makkans would not have let them slip through their fingers so easily. They increasingly

pressurized them by using fear as an instrument of behavior modification, evoking visions of economic hardship and psychological problems of dislocation from a known to an alien habitat. But no amount of pressure or consideration could have made them change their mind. The first among the émigres were 'Aamir ibn Rabi'a and his wife Layla, followed by 'Ammar ibn Yasir, Bilal, Sa'd and 'Uthman. Clans like Bani Maz'un, al-Bukyr, and Jahsh emigrated with all the members of their extended families.³

There was an ineffable sadness to their banishment, a pathetic authenticity to what has happened to them, and what may happen still. But they were not a sorry drove of refugees since they knew they would eventually triumph over their odds; that the present may be amorphous, the future was theirs. Thus, as they moved into an exilic existence reciting the Qur'an, hope overtook despair: they knew they were in the vanguard of a movement to shape a new world. This in itself was enough of a charger and turned what could have been a crisscrossing trail of tears into an odyssey shot through with hope.

Their departure from Makkah gave an empty look to the city, causing grief to people like 'Utba ibn Rabi'a. "Ah! the house of Bani Jahsh is desolate today," he sighed while passing the locality of Bani Jahsh. Abu Jahl who accompanied him along with 'Abbas ibn 'Abdul-Muttalib did not like him sigh. Or perhaps, his load of guilt had cut deep into his heart that he sought

its riddance by blaming ‘Abbas and his nephew: “What makes you cry?” he asked ‘Utba. The two felt his ascerbic tone. Then turning toward ‘Abbas, he said: “This is the doing of our this brother’s nephew. He caused splits among us, convoluted our blood ties, and created differences among us.”⁴

But while they lamented their departure according to their sensibilities, Abu Sufyan, whose daughter was married to Abu Ahmad ibn Jahsh, took possession of their house and sold it.⁵

Most of the Muslims left Makkah stealthily, but perhaps ‘Umar wanted to make a statement; he quit the city in broad daylight with twenty riders. Two of his entourage — ‘Ayyash ibn Rabi‘a and Hisham ibn ‘Aas — were supposed to join him at Tanadib, a place ten miles away from Makkah; but only ‘Ayyash could make it. Hisham was caught and held back.⁶

‘Ayyash’s escape from Makkah was a personal humiliation for Abu Jahl: the two were born of the same mother. Fretting with anger, he followed him to Madinah and confronted him with the news of his mother forswearing not to eat, take bath, or sit in the shade until he returned. This disturbed him. Abu Jahl had touched his soft spot. Sensing trouble ‘Umar tried to stop him. Allowing herself to degenerate into a grubby woman, with lice in her hair, did not gel with her lifestyle. It was a trap, said he, which he must not walk into. But so great was the pull that it numbed his body’s alert mechanism.

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By the time he was close to Makkah he found himself roped by Abu Jahl and Harith who led him into the town telling the onlookers: “O people of Makkah, straighten your deviant youth the way we have done it.”⁷

Suhayb ar-Rumi was yet another person whose escape was frustrated by the *kuffar*. He was caught and brought back to the city. At night when his captors were asleep, he tried another escape but was nabbed again.

Suhayb came to Makkah as a slave and accepted Islam in the early days. Somehow he obtained his manumission and worked himself into relative ease. The Makkans neither liked his Islam nor his post-Islam prosperity. He was told that since he had prospered in Makkah, he must divest himself of everything. For him, it proffered an easy way out. After all, he was without

money even before; but to live outside the Muslim fraternity was like being a fish without water. He felt flush inside since he knew Islam was the greatest of all riches.

Gradually, the number of Muslims in Makkah waned except the few who, for want of means, could not travel, or the Prophet and his close companions such as Abu Bakr and 'Ali who, for some reason, had to stay.

Let's kill the messenger

By the thirteenth year of prophethood, the Muslim emigration to Madinah was almost complete. For the Quraysh, Islam's successful foray into Madinah, with two of its most powerful tribes bonded with Muhammad Rasul Allah, carried great risks. What if he disrupts their Syrian trade route crisscrossing the coastal areas of Madinah? So far he was threatening their ancestral faith, but now he was giving them another kind of a gauntlet: he could jeopardize their prosperity. And that was scary. The elders met at Dar al-Nadwah to deal with the post-emigration situation. Many proposals were fielded.

The first one suggested locking up Muhammad ('alayhi as-salam). The proposal was set aside because if the Muslims were to rescue him and had succeeded, the Quraysh's loss of face would be irreparable. Yet another proposal suggested his ouster from Makkah. This did not find favor either because in his ban-

ishment they saw their problems increase: his freedom could set into motion an amoeba-like growth of his followers, strengthening Islam much against their wish. The deadlock broke when Abu Jahl suggested taking a youth from each tribe and then carrying out the feral act of killing Muhammad. The syndicate thus formed would make it difficult for the Hashimites to wage vendetta against the tribes. The proposal found a willing audience; they fixed a night for their macabre killing.⁸

One noon when the sun was high, he stepped out. His face covered up to his eyes, he looked cautiously around and then headed toward Abu Bakr's house. Since the time was odd, Abu Bakr had the feelings that there was something more to his visit. Normally, he would see him either in the early morning or in the evening. The unwonted gravity of his face conferred the impression as if he was pondering a decision. Thus, as he asked for privacy, Abu Bakr knew the decisive moment had come. "My Lord has granted me permission to leave Makkah," said he. With the city almost emptied of Muslims, Abu Bakr had been itching for such a news. "My parents be sacrificed for you, shall I accompany you?"⁹ The Prophet nodded in approval. Abu Bakr offered him one of his camels, especially bought for the occasion. Touched, he gave him a soft look. In Abu Bakr's eyes, he could read a thousand stories of loyalty to the cause and their friendship. That was not new for him, but at the moment when events were configuring into a crisis situation and Abu Bakr's family were to be

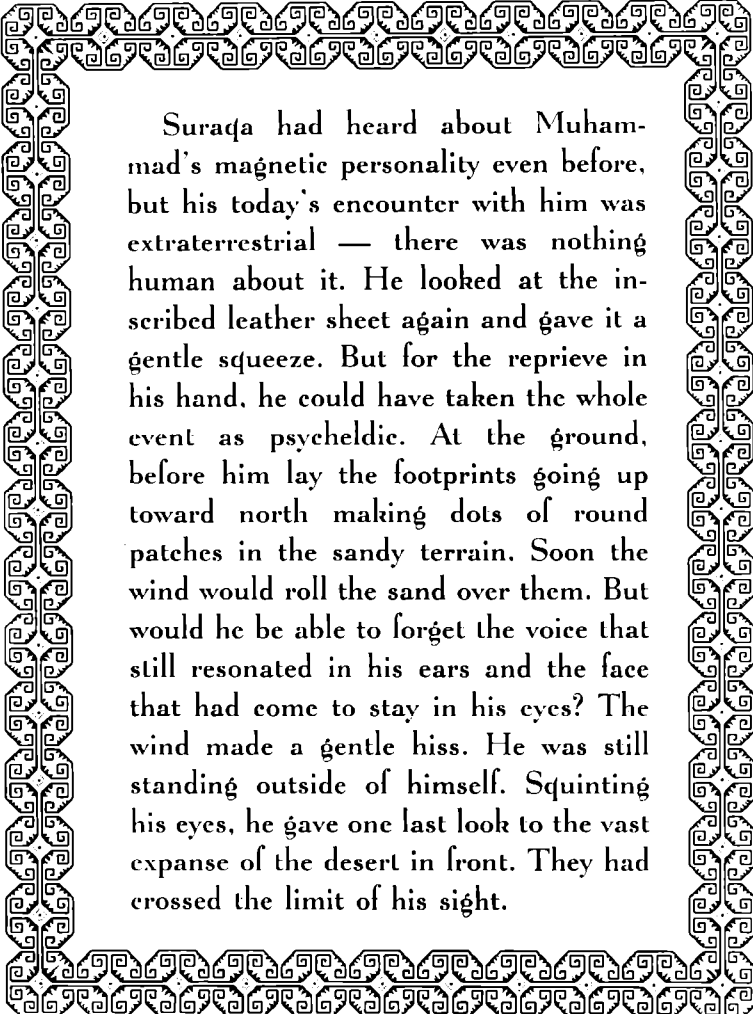
left behind, he did not like the idea of taxing their financial resources, and chose to pay for the ride himself.¹⁰

By the afternoon, they had hired a dependable guide named 'Abdullah ibn Arqat, who was told to feed the camels well and keep them available as and when required.¹¹

Having finished with these preliminaries, he came back to his home and briefed 'Ali about his plan. He wanted him to retire the people's money in trust with him. 'Ali felt the irony added to the situation by his departure wish: here was a man whom the Makkan thought honest enough to be trusted with their money and yet resisted him fiercely for his message.

As the night approached, he saw shadows around his house. His would-be assassins had arrived, including Abu Jahl and Abu Lahab, the Prophet's uncle. They jumped over the wall, but before they could have landed inside, a woman's loud wail petrified them. Then as it died, remorse took over them. What would the Arabs say when they know about their surreptitious entry into the house of one of their relatives, showing no regard even for the honor of their daughters?¹² The shadows slumped behind the wall, waiting for the dawn.

The sky was still decked with the stars not yet paled by the descending dawn. Rising from his bed, he asked 'Ali to substitute for him, and thus he strode out of the house, with the walk of a man who had the hand of Providence at his back. Then taking a fistful of dust and tossing it toward the prepatent killers, he



Suraqa had heard about Muhammad's magnetic personality even before, but his today's encounter with him was extraterrestrial — there was nothing human about it. He looked at the inscribed leather sheet again and gave it a gentle squeeze. But for the reprieve in his hand, he could have taken the whole event as psycheldic. At the ground, before him lay the footprints going up toward north making dots of round patches in the sandy terrain. Soon the wind would roll the sand over them. But would he be able to forget the voice that still resonated in his ears and the face that had come to stay in his eyes? The wind made a gentle hiss. He was still standing outside of himself. Squinting his eyes, he gave one last look to the vast expanse of the desert in front. They had crossed the limit of his sight.

passed them unnoticed.¹³ The Qur'an eternalized the event:

And when those who disbelieve
plot against you (O Muhammad)
to wound you fatally,
or to kill you
or to drive you out;
they plot,
but Allah (also) plotted,
and Allah is the best
of plotters.¹⁴

Faith transcends Makkah

Once away from his home, he quickened his pace. The night as usual was still and the streets deserted. It did not take him long to find himself at Abu Bakr's place. From there, they crossed the limits of the city and then instead of ambulating toward north in the direction of Madinah, they hurried toward south in the direction of Yemen. Makkah was now behind. The Prophet turned around; for a while he was motionless, watching Makkah with longing eyes, and then all the sadness of his soul poured on his lips: "O Makkah! I love you, but your people have turned against me."¹⁵ The turbulence of the feelings notwithstanding, there was no capitulation. Makkah was the city of their love; it housed the Ka'bah, but the ideal, which laid claim to the soul and made Makkah an undesirable place, was far more important.

Abu Bakr looked restlessly toward the city, interposing himself alternately between the Prophet and Yemen. When asked why he keeps on altering his posture, he said: "Ya Rasul Allah, when I think of the pursuers, I walk behind you; and when I fear harm from the front, I walk ahead of you." His gesture moved him, "Ah! you think that if harm comes to me, you would take it on yourself." Abu Bakr nodded in response.¹⁶

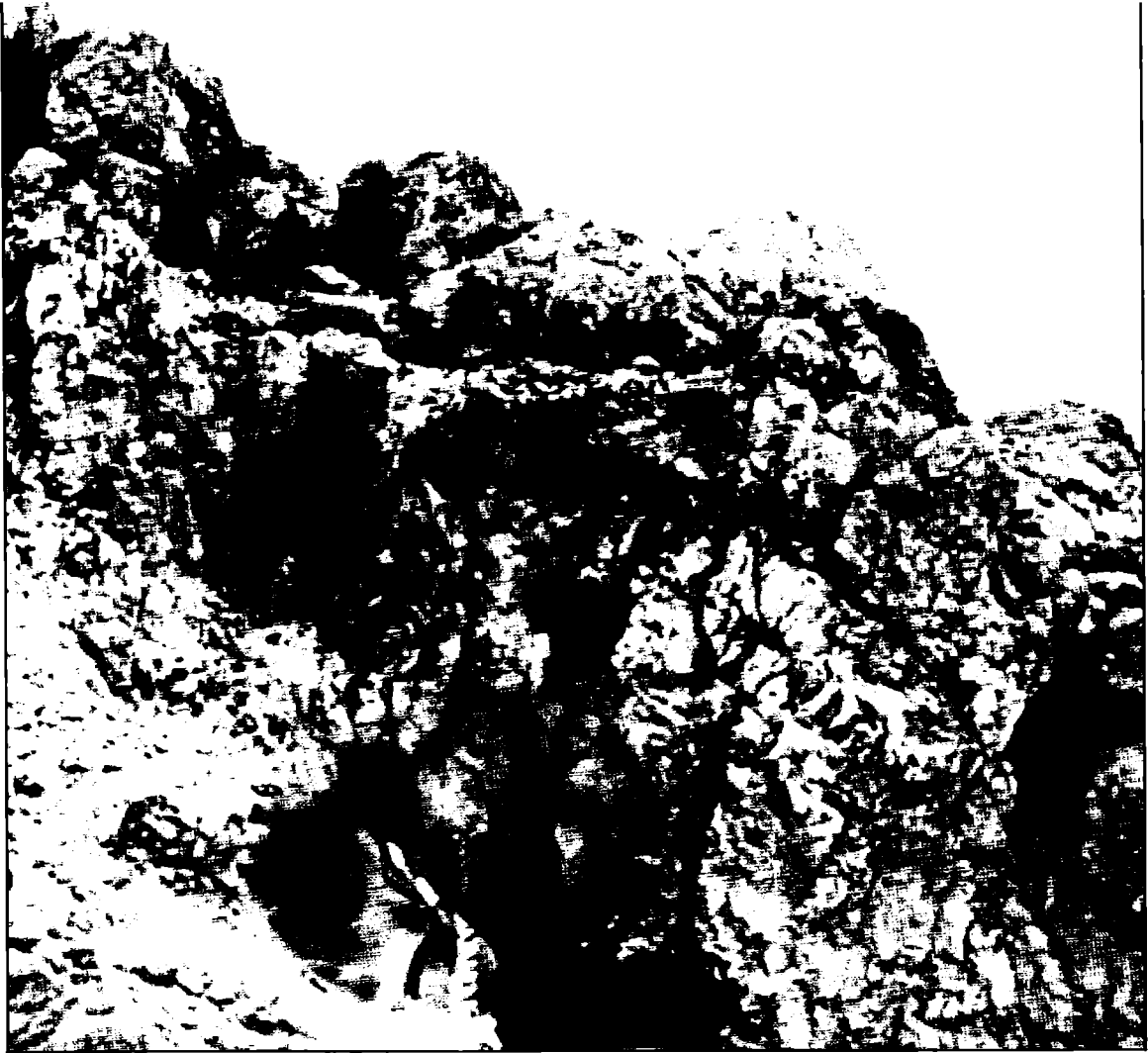
They stopped by the mountain of Thaur. The Prophet eyed upward. And then, without wasting a moment, the two began scaling it

until they reached the cave. Abu Bakr entered the cave first and began cleaning it, plugging holes with his chadar. A hole remained, which he choked by his heel.¹⁷ He was apprehensive lest the holes were inhabited by snakes and rodents.

When the morning came, the group steadied itself. The gradually rising sun added a touch of gold to the sand dunes, but the object they sought was not there. They squinted their eyes through the crevices and saw 'Ali rising from the bed. Scared, lest Muhammad had slipped through their fingers, they broke into a tempest of frightful noises. Then storming into the house, they laid their hand on 'Ali. But all they could get was his studied nonchalance: "How would I know? [I am not his custodian. You forced him to leave and thus he has gone]."¹⁸ They dragged him to the Ka'bah and beat him, but other than the valuables he held in trust for the Makkans, and which he was willing to deliver to them, he kept the secret to himself. Perhaps, the information softened them as they let him go. Soon the streets were buzzing with the news that Muhammad had left the town. But for where? Nobody knew.

The following day when Abu Bakr was not seen either, they went to his home. Abu Jahl asked Abu Bakr's daughter 'Asma' about her father. She feigned ignorance. An infuriated Abu Jahl hit her smack in the face breaking her earrings.¹⁹

In dismay, they sent horsemen to all outgoing routes. The trackers mopped the desert for spoors but in



vain. Once they reached even the mouth of the cave. Some suggested entering the cave but Umayya ibn Khalaf said: "What will you find there? The cobweb over the cave appears to be older than Muhammad's birth."²⁰ Abu Bakr could see the trackers. For a moment fear descended upon him: they had come within the whisker of being caught.

Unaware of their nearness, the Prophet offered prayers. As he finished *salah*, his eyes caught tears rolling down his companion's face. An astonished look came over him. Whispered Abu Bakr: "My parents be sacrificed for you, your people are here. If someone should look down [through the cleft], he will sight us."²¹ But so sure he was of Allah's transcendence that without a trace

☺ They plot, but Allah is the best of the plotters.

Bracelets, Khosru, and Suraqa? He felt like hit by a mighty blow. How could Khosru the emperor of Persia part with his bracelets and give them to a bedouin? None had correspondence between them. But the hour did not call for doubt, it was the moment of affirmation presided by a man who was out to create a new world.

of angst in his voice, he comforted him: "*la tahzan innallaha ma'na* — worry not for Allah is with us."²²

The "fugitives" maintained link with Makkah through Abu Bakr's teenaged son 'Abdullah, who used to stay with them at night and returned in the morning to obtain the latest Makkan thinking.²³ Another visitor was a freed slave named 'Aamir ibn Fuhayra belonging to the house of Abu Bakr. He commuted at midnight bringing goat's milk and food for the cave dwellers.²⁴

Journey to Madinah: following the Abrahamic way

On the fourth day, Rabi al-Awwal 4, he came out of the cave. Two first-rate camels procured by Abu Bakr were ready to shoot toward Madinah under the guidance of 'Abdullah ibn Arqat.

The night had traversed two-thirds of its course. The two, with

their faces covered, skirted the city and gave one last look to the empty streets. For a while, they could not take their eyes away. They were born here, it was here that they prospered and married. This was the holiest of the cities. But Makkah had turned against them.

He turned his camel around, the other followed him; and then within seconds, they were swallowed by the wilderness. A journey began from the known precincts of Makkah to the unknown environment of Madinah. They were now *muhajirin*.

But was it their first journey? No, this was their second. They made their first journey when they shifted their old faith with Islam. That was toward their Creator and the present one was also toward Him. They knew that a Muslim is a *muhajir* (one who forsakes for his faith) and Islam is *hijrah*, a journey with no recess — which goes on negating non-Islamic values with corresponding affirmation of that which is right. A struggle that ends either in death, or in the flowering of the cherished values.

After all, Islam was not capitulation, as bending knees to others was not its genus. Nor did it take suffering as a spur to salvation: it was revealed as truth to triumph over falsehood; it was an endless putsch to root out man's subjection to tyranny.

At the same time, Islam had not come for partial reforms: it attributed to itself plenary charge, which the Makkans would not concede. They wanted him to be "reasonable" and compromise, but he knew that

any trade-off would have caused death to Islam and its vision of man and his destiny. The Qur'an ruled out compromise:

Say (Muhammad): O you that reject faith! I worship not that which you worship, nor will you worship that which I worship. And I will not worship that which you have been wont to worship, nor will you worship that which I worship. To you be your way and to me mine.²⁵

Teased by his agonizing existence under an egregious polytheism, which almost desolated him, Muhammad Rasul Allah would often supplicate for the triumph of Islam. But senseless as his people were, they spurned him. The night of hijrah was the precise moment in time when the forces of nature configured in response to his supplications. The journey had begun to save the world for Islam.

The camels quikened their trot and under their feet the false notions of humanity were squelched giving rise to a new paradigm:

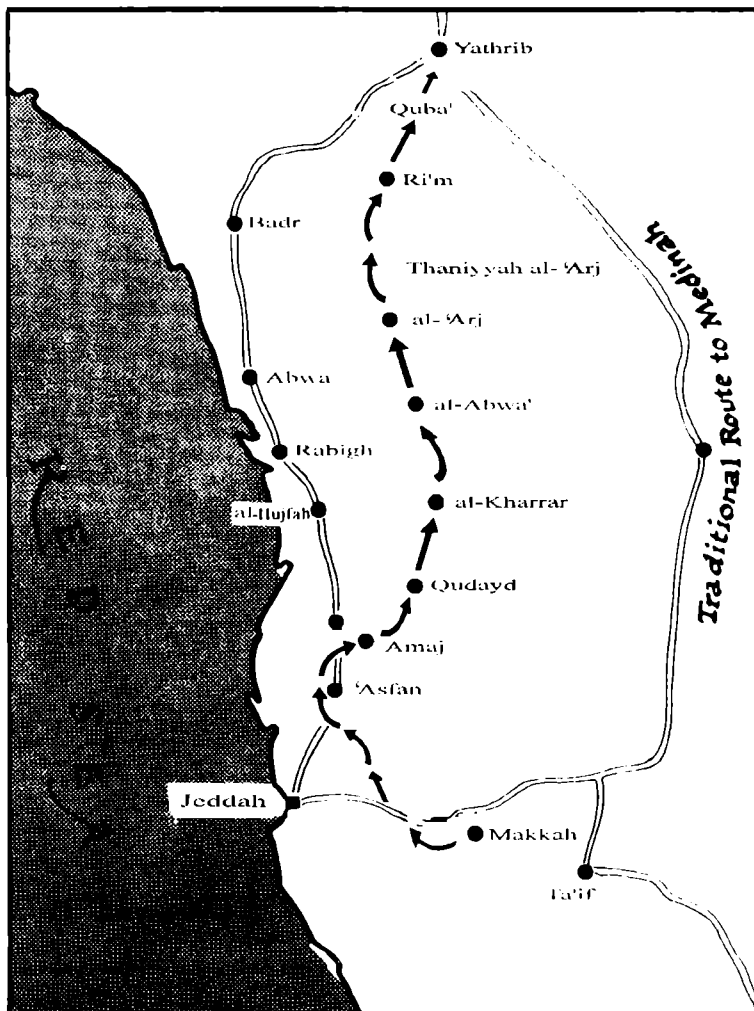
- ☘ That faith is more important than territory.²⁶
- ☘ That brotherhood-in-faith rather than race is the basis of humanity.²⁷
- ☘ That life from here to eternity is one.²⁸
- ☘ That too many poles of authority are anemic to a

dynamic life: fragmentation retards its flow.²⁹
 ☘ That statecraft is as important as the teaching of the Book.³⁰

For twelve consecutive hours, they moved on. Makkah and its animus were now far behind.

On the subsequent day, the sun rose with all the might of an equatorial sun, and the desert began to radiate heat like a fire burner. There was not a tree against the skyline to soothe the sight or regale

☘ **Hijrah's route to power and peace**



the spirit. Sweltering heat and fatigue forced them to dismount and rest for a while in the shade of a rock. A little further from the rock, a shepherd grazed his herd. Parched by the desert heat, they sated their thirst with his goat's milk and then resumed their journey.³¹

Muhammad Rasul Allah was declaiming from the Qur'an in a low-

pitched voice. 'Abdullah the guide was leading the trail, while Abu Bakr was in the rear when the galloping thuds of the horse's hoofs caught his attention.³² He looked back and saw a horseman charging toward them. His disquite clattered. Glancing in the rear, he could see the contorted face of the man and the distended nostrils of the

☺ **There was
comfort
beyond the
desert**



horse. The man and the animal synchronized perfectly: Abu Bakr urged the Prophet's attention to the approaching threat.³³ He was still engrossed in the Qur'an. Interrupting his declamation, he supplicated: "O Allah, make him fall."³⁴

The man's spear raised in the air, he spurred the animal, but it suddenly stumbled flinging him into the air over the horse's head. He scrambled into the saddle and charged again, but this time his horse stuck in the sand right up to the knees.³⁵ The man realized the futility of his pursuit; something invisible was up against him. Being no fool, he could foretell what was going to happen to Muhammad's opponents in the near future. Scared, he jumped off his horse and asked for reprieve. They let him come close. Introducing himself as Suraqa ibn Ju'shum from the clan of Mudlij, he told them about the Quraysh bounty of 200 camels (hundred each) fixed on their heads.³⁶

"O Messenger of Allah, I give myself in to your charge, I shall do whatever you ask me to do," said Suraqa.

"Stay where you are and don't let them reach us," said the Prophet.

Suraqa asked for a written remission, which 'Amir ibn Fuhira wrote for him on a piece of leather. "Suraqa," the Prophet turned to him abruptly, "what will you feel like when you wear the bracelets of Khosroe!"³⁷

Bracelets, Khosru, and Suraqa? He felt like hit by a mighty blow. How could Khosru the emperor of Persia part with his bracelets and

give them to a bedouin? None had correspondence between them. But the hour did not call for doubt, it was the moment of affirmation presided by a man who was out to create a new world.

Spurred, the animals took a faster pace. Gradually, the distance between them and Suraqa increased. He gave one look to the piece of leather in his hand; and then his eyes got fixed on the two camels hastening toward Madinah, moving away from him and getting smaller until they disappeared.

Suraqa had heard about Muhammad's magnetic personality even before, but his today's encounter with him was extraterrestrial — there was nothing human about it. He looked at the inscribed leather sheet again and gave it a gentle squeeze. But for the reprieve in his hand, he could have taken the whole event as psycheldic. At the ground, before him lay the footprints going up toward north making dots of round patches in the sandy terrain. Soon the wind would roll the sand over them. But would he be able to forget the voice that still resonated in his ears and the face that had come to stay in his eyes? The wind made a gentle hiss. He was still standing outside of himself. Squinting his eyes, he gave one last look to the vast expanse of the desert in front. They had crossed the limit of his sight.

Pre-Islamic Religious Landscape

pp. 2-29

- 1 Ilam Halevi, *A History of the Jews Ancient and Modern* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1987) p. 28.
- 2 *ibid.*, p. 30.
- 3 *ibid.*, p. 44.
- 4 *ibid.*, p. 29.
- 5 Rupéri Furnfaux, *The Other Side of the Story* (London: Cassell and Company, 1953) p. 52.
- 6 *ibid.*
- 7 Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization - Caesar and Christ* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972) p.595.
- 8 Galatians 1: 6-7
- 9 Galatians 1: 2
- 10 Galatians 1: 15-16
- 11 Galatians 2: 2
- 12 Galatians 3: 1
- 13 Matthew 23: 4
- 14 Matthew 23: 23
- 15 *ibid.*
- 16 Matthew 2: 25-27
- 17 John 8: 7-11
- 18 Galatians 3: 13
- 19 Galatians 3: 10
- 20 Colossians 2: 16
- 21 This is the summation of Max Gudenann's thoughts by Jacob B. Argus on the issue of spirit and letter in Judaism and Christianity. See his *Jewish Identity in an Age of Ideologies* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1978), p. 297.
- 22 *ibid.*, p. 55.
- 23 *ibid.*
- 24 Hans Joachim Schoeps, *The Jewish-Christian Argument - A history of theology in conflict* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963) p. 21.
- 25 *ibid.*, p.22 (Matthew 2 :5f).
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 22.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 25
- 29 Deuteronomy 28: 15
- 30 1 Peter 2: 9
- 31 Hans Joachim Schoeps, *The Jewish-Christian Argument* ... "In Shahbat 116, interpreting the reality of the union of his shekhinah with Israel even after the destruction of the temple, a legal passage from the Torah, the appeal of the wife of Rabbi Eliezar in conversation with a philosopher is to be taken as a reply to the Church's claim to have entered into its inheritance as daughter of Israel." p. 29.
- 32 Leviticus 26: 44
- 33 Hans Joachim Schoeps, *The Jewish-Christian Argument* ... p. 30.
- 34 Kenneth S. Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975) p. 144.
- 35 *ibid.*
- 36 *ibid.*, p. 150.
- 37 Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization - Caesar and Christ* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973) p. 658.
- 38 *ibid.*, p. 660.
- 39 *ibid.*, p. 660.
- 40 *ibid.*, p.
- 41 Furnfaux, *The Other Side of the Story*, p. 88.
- 42 *ibid.*, p. 87. Even present-day Bible is being edited and reedited to remove its anomalies and misstatements. For instance, John 5:7, which is the clearest statement on the Trin-

ity and was long considered to be a forgery, has now been expunged from the Revised Standard Version (1971), while other versions of the Bible still carry it.

- 43 *ibid.*, p. 97.
- 44 Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, p. 160.
- 45 *ibid.*, p. 163.
- 46 Edward Gibbons, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 2 (New York: Washington Square Press, 1962), p. 786.
- 47 *ibid.*
- 48 *ibid.*
- 49 *ibid.*
- 50 *ibid.*, p. 784.
- 51 Matthew 19: 21
- 52 Simeon Stylites (d.459) dwelt on a pillar east of Antioch for thirty-six years. “[He] is said to have touched his feet with his forehead more than 1244 times in succession, and to have dripped with vermin. ... Other monks were immured in cells, some of them so small that they could neither be at full length nor stand at full height. In one group the monks are reported to have subsisted on grass which they cut with sickles. Some passed many nights without sleep. Others went for days without food. The extreme ascetics were popularly esteemed athletes of God.” This, however, was not the only kind of monasticism known.

Besides “the eremitical life, where each monk lived in solitude [the] other was a modification of the way of the hermit, in which the monks had individual dwellings — a cell, a cave, a hut, or some other shelter — yet sufficiently near one another to make fellowship possible. They might even have over them a fellow-monk as a kind of director. Such a collection of monks was known as a

laura. A third kind of monasticism was the cenobitic, in which the monks lived in a community, or monastery, governed by a head-monk and by rules.” See Latourette’s *The History of Christianity*.

- 53 John 16: 7-15
- 54 Emil Schurer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* Vol 11, edited by Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, Matthew Black (London: Edinburg T&T Clark,1991) p. 554.
- 55 *ibid.*, p. 515. See Mishnah sot. 9: 15
- 56 *ibid.*, p. 506
- 57 *ibid.*, p. 513
- 58 Psalms 17: 23, 47; 17:42
- 59 Schurer, *The History ...* p. 534.
- 60 *ibid.*, p. 501, see Sibylline Oracles 3: 652-6.
- 61 Isaiah 2: 2; Isaiah 42: 1-6; Jeremiah 3:17
- 62 John 1: 31, 6: 14, cf 7:40; Acts 3: 22-3, 7: 37
- 63 Schurer, *The History ...* , p. 524.
- 64 *ibid.*, p. 455
- 65 *ibid.*, p. 458
66. Will Durant, *The Story ...* , pp. 544-545.

JESUS: DISCARDING JUDAIC TRADITION FOR A REDEEMER GOD

pp. 30-51

- 1 Earle M. Wilber, *A History of Unitarianism — Socinianism and its Antecedents* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1945) p. 41.
- 2 *The Washington Post*, January 5, 1978.

- 3 *The International Tribune*, July, 1977.
- 4 James Barr, *Beyond Fundamentalism* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984) p.95.
- 5 *ibid.*, pp. 58-59.
- 6 Albert Schweitzer, *The Psychiatric Study of Jesus* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1956) p. 54.
- 7 Frances Young, "Two Roots or a Tangled Mass?" in John Hick's *The Myth of God Incarnate* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977) p. 95.
- 8 *ibid.*, p. 97. Horace, *Odes*, 1.2.
- 9 Frances Young, "A Cloud of Witness," p. 29. *ibid.*
- 10 Michael Goulder, "The Two Roots of the Christian Myth," p. 68. *ibid.*
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 75.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 77.
- 13 Morton S. Enslin, *The Prophet from Nazareth* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, Inc. 1961) pp 77-67.
- 14 Simon Buran, *Kelimat ha-Goyim* (The Reproach of the Nations) quoted by Hans Joachim Schoeps in his *The Jewish-Christian Argument* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963) p. 76.
- 15 Isaac Troki, *Hizzuk Emunah* i.e. Faith Strengthened (London: 1851). *ibid.*, p. 77.
- 16 Solomon Ludwig Steinheim, *Evangelische Kirchenzeitung*, *ibid.*, p. 119.
- 17 The movement for deconstructing the Jesus godhood and making him human, as one favored by God, is already present in the writings of such eminent Christians as Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, and Karl Rahner.
- 18 Ralph P. Martin, *Reconciliation - A Study of Paul's Theology* (Atlanta : John Knox Press, 1981) p. 203.
- 19 Morton S. Enslin, *The Prophet* p. 165.
- 20 *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (New York : Abingdon Press, 1962) p. 752. Also see, Dr. Barbara Thiering's *The Gospels and the Qumran: A New Hypothesis*, Sydney, Australian and New Zealand Studies in Theology and Religion, 1981. The following quote should be of interest: "Unexplained and unlikely details [often found in the parables] do not fit the hypothesis that the parables were intended for oral transmission. If they were irrelevant to the main point, or did not make sense, they would not have been remembered or retained. Nor would such details have been added in the process of transmission, for the same reason." p. 14.
- 21 *The Gospel of Barnabas: 70*
- 22 Manfred Barthel, *What the Bible Really Says* (New York: Bell Publishing Company, 1980) p. 285.
- 23 Anthony N. Gilkes, *The Impact of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1962) p. 137. Also, see Elaine Pagel's *The Gnostic Gospels* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979). Her views have been paraphrased by Leonie Star in her *The Dead Sea Scrolls — The Riddle Debated* (Crows Nest: ABC Book, 1991): " ... if only a few of the fifty-two texts discovered at Nag Hammadi in 1945 represent early forms of the teaching of the Christian religion, then the diversity of early Christianity must be accepted. It seems that Christianity of the first and second centuries A.D. was as varied as Judaism of the first centuries B.C. and A.D. Because the shaping of Christian doctrine was a result of religious and political factors, those texts discarded by the church as heretical may well contain valuable historical material." p. 21.

Questioning the dating of the

Scrolls before the birth of Jesus (upon him be peace), Professor Max Wilcox “sets the upper date of the scrolls on historical grounds at 74 A.D., the date of the destruction of the fortress of Masada by the Romans and the mass suicide of its inhabitants, which followed the demolition of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 A.D. and the dispersion of the Jewish people. After this, according to Wilcox, ‘they could neither write any more, if they wrote them, or collect them.’ See Leonie Star, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* ... p. 30. If this is accepted, then the whole Christian claim about the prophecy in the Scrolls about the godhood of Jesus becomes invalid.

- 24 Manfred Barthel, *What the Bible Really Says*, p. 285.
- 25 J.A. Fitzmyer, “The Contribution of Qumran Aramaic to the Study of the New Testament,” *New Testament Studies*, vol 20, 1972, pp. 382-407. The italicized words are said to be fragmented in the Scrolls.

PROPHETHOOD:

RATIONALE AND CHARACTERISTICS

pp. 52-73

- 1 Martin Buber, “Eclipse of God” (New York: Harper and Row, 1952) reproduced by the *Great Ideas Today* 1967, p. 323.
- 2 Joseph Krutch, *The Modern Temper* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1956) p. 45.
- 3 Elizabeth Mersch and Alan Freeman, *The Politics of Virtue - Is abortion debatable*, Mensch and Alan Freeman (Durham: Duke University

Press, 1993).

- 4 Joseph Krutch, *The Modern* ... p. 65. This is the gist of Russell’s and Santayana’s view on the subject. George Santayana considered religion a “splendid error.” But having said it, he also thought that it “conforms better to the impulses of the soul than life. ... Why has man’s conscience in the end invariably rebelled against naturalism and reverted in some form or other to a cultus of the unseen?” Further, “[a]nimal faith, may be faith in a myth but the myth is a good myth, since life is better than any syllogism.” See Will Durant’s *The Story of Philosophy* (New York: Pockets Books Inc., 1959) pp. 491-492.
- 5 Norwood R. Hanson, *Patterns of Discovery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958) quoted by Ian Barbour in his *Issues in Science and Religion*, p. 140.
- 6 Kenneth Boulding, *The Image* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1956). Quoted by Ian Barbour in his *Issues in Science and Religion*, p. 201.
- 7 Hans Joachim Schoeps, *The Jewish-Christian Argument - A History of Theologies in Conflict* (New York: Holt, Rinechart and Winston, 1963) p. 115.
- 8 Joseph W. Krutch, *The Modern* ...
- 9 Adam Smith, *Powers of Mind* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1976) p. 24.
- 10 al-Baqarah: 30
- 11 al-Baqarah: 35
- 12 al-Baqarah: 36
- 13 al-A’raf: 22-27
- 14 al-Nahl: 49; al-Nur: 41; al-A’raf: 54 (the sun and the moon ... are subservient to Him); al-Taubah: 31 (taking religious leaders and scholars for deciding what is right or wrong

- amounts to worshipping them and negating Allah's authority); al-Jathiya: 23 (following one's desires as opposed to Allah also violates Allah's authority and is shirk—polytheism); al-Zumar: 3 (taking idols and patron-saints as powerful enough to influence Allah's decisions); al-Zariyat: 56 (Humans and jinn are for His worship).
- 15 Yunus: 3,5
- 16 "Do not abuse time (with time's vicissitude) for time (with its vicissitude) is Allah," says a hadith of *qudsi* origin (a prophetic saying whose words as well as meaning are revelatory).
- 17 al-An'am: 98
- 18 al-An'am: 83-90; al-Ma'idah: 44, 111.
- 19 Yunus: 19; al-Baqarah: 213; al-Anbiya': 93
- 20 al-Nisa': 163; Maryam: 58
- 21 Schoeps, *The Jewish-Christian ...* p. 118. Compare it with Albert C. Knudson: *The Beacon Lights of Prophecy* (Chicago: The Methodist Book Concern, n.p.d.). "Sinai," he says, "had not been to a Jacob's pillow to sleep upon, but a Jacob's ladder to climb by." p. 17.
- 22 Matthew 5: 17
- 23 al-Nahl: 36
- 24 al-Nisa': 150
- 25 al-Ma'idah: 47
- 26 al-Anbiya': 105
- 27 al-i 'Imran: 48
- 28 For Kierkegaard's quotation see E.F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful* (London: Blond & Briggs, 1973).
- 29 See for example, Albert Camus; *The Rebel* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), p. 23.
- 30 For Hermann Cohen's quotation, see Jacob B. Agus: *Jewish Identity in an Age of Ideologies* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1978), p. 70.
- 31 Ironically, they forget to mention that the omission of the appellation *nabi* for other genuine prophets in the Bible could be owing to interpolation or to the Greek influence and Latin languages. See for example, the Greek meaning of the word *prophetes* (i.e., interpreter of a god's will) and the Latin *propheta* (i.e., a soothsayer).
- 32 1 Samuel 9: 1-10
- 33 1 Kings 22: 5f
- 34 1 Samuel 10: 5-10
- 35 For Martin Luther's quotation, see J.M. Powis Smith: *Prophets and His Problems* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914).
- 36 al-Ahzab: 21; al-Qalam: 4. The Qur'an says the same thing about other prophets, for example, see Maryam: 13, 32, praising Yahya (John) and 'Isa (Jesus), and praising Lut (Lot), see al-Anbiya': 75.
- 37 al-Najm: 5-9
- 38 al-Isra': 88; al-Tur: 33; Yusuf: 1
- 39 Jeremiah 1: 9
- 40 Ezekiel 3: 1
- 41 Jeremiah 1: 10; Jeremiah 23: 29
- 42 al-Hashr: 21
- 43 al-Nisa': 82
- 44 al-Mursalat: 1-16
- 45 al-Mursalat: 20-33
- 46 al-Nazi'at: 27-39
- 47 al-Takwir: 15-28
- 48 al-Zariyat: 21, 47-49; al-i 'Imran: 190
- 49 al-Nisa': 82
- 50 Von A. Denffer, *'Ulum al-Qur'an* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1985), p. 156.
- 51 al-Anbiya': 30

- 52 al-Anbiya': 30
 53 al-Fussilat: 11
 54 Yunus: 62
 55 al-An'am: 125
 56 Yasin: 36
 57 al-Zumar: 6
 58 al-Hijr: 22
 59 al- 'Alaq: 1
 60 Al-Qiyamah: 4; al-i 'Imran: 159
 61 al-i 'Imran: 159
 62 al-Ahqaf: 35; Maryam: 12; Sad: 45-49.
 63 al-An'am: 80
 64 al-An'am: 91; al-i 'Imran: 79
 65 al-Kahf: 6; al-Taubah: 128; al-Ma'idah: 41
 66 Yunus: 15; al-Jinn: 20.
 67 "He selects for His mercy whom He wills. Allah is of infinite bounty." See al-i 'Imran: 74; al-Qasas: 86; al-An'am: 88.
 68 al-Naml: 6; al-Shu'ara': 192-193. In the transmission of *wahy*, there are two persons involved — the Holy Spirit (Gabriel) who receives it from Allah the Most High, and the prophet who has to receive it for onward diffusion among the masses. Both have to be trustworthy.
 69 al-i 'Imran: 84; al-Qalam: 4; al-Najm: 2-3.
 70 The Prophet Muhammad said, "Do not exalt me like the Jews and the Christians have exalted their prophets." See Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari, *al-Jami' al-Sahih*, "Kitab al-Anbiya'," chapter "Wadh kur fil kitab," vol 1.
 71 Hammudah 'Abdalati, *Islam in Focus* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1976) p. 7.

Also, it will be important to note

that the Qur'anic terminology used for Islam is *din* and not religion. "The primary significations of the term *din*," says Syed Muhammad al-Naquib al-Attas, "can be reduced to four [elements]: (1) indebtedness; (2) submissiveness; (3) judicious power; (4) natural inclination or tendency. ... The verb *dana*, which derives from *din*, conveys the meaning of being indebted, including various other meanings connected with debts, some of them contraries. In the state in which one finds oneself being in debt — that is to say, a *da'in* — it follows that one subjects oneself, in the sense of yielding and obeying, to law and ordinances governing debts, and also, in a way, to the creditor, who is likewise designated as a *da'in*. There is also conveyed in the situation described the fact that one in debt is under *obligation*, or *dayn*. Being in debt and under obligation naturally involves judgment: *daynunah*, and conviction: *idanah*, as the case may be. All the above significations including their contraries inherent in *dana* are practicable possibilities in organized societies involved in commercial life in towns and cities, denoted by *mudun* or *mada'in*. A town or a city, a *madinah*, has a judge, ruler, or governor — a *dayyan*. Thus already here, in the various applications of the verb *dana* alone, we see rising before our mind's eye a picture of civilized living; of societal life of law and order and justice and authority." See al-Attas' *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ABIM, 1978) pp. 47-48.

- 72 Alija A. Izetbegovic, *Islam Between East and West* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1984), p. 226.
 73 al-i 'Imran: 67
 74 al-i 'Imran: 65

- 75 al-Shura: 13
 76 al-i 'Imran: 52
 77 al-Shura: 3
 78 al-An'am: 90
 79 al-An'am: 88-93

PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIA

pp. 74-85

- 1 Raphael Patai, *The Arab Mind* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976) p.12. Arav in the Hebrew means desert or inhabitant of the desert. The Bible carries the word Arab in Joshua 15: 52; Isaiah 21: 13; Acts 2: 13; and Galatians 1: 17.
- 2 Isma'il al-Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam* (New York: Mcmillan and Company, 1986) p.
- 3 For example see: Muhammad ibn Isma'il, *al-Jami' al-Sahih*, hadith 169, vol 5.
- 4 al-Saffat: 167-170 talks about the Arabs' expectation of a coming prophet.
- 5 al-Zumar: 3
- 6 al-Nahl: 7
- 7 Ha-Mim al-Sajdah: 37 refers to such people who worshiped the sun and the moon. Also, see al-Naml: 25 which says that the Queen of Saba (Sheba) and her people were found worshiping the sun. For the pre-Islamic Arabian religious practices see Muhammad Raghil al-Tabakh, *al-Thaqafa al-Islamiyya* (Lahore: Islamic Publications Ltd., 1968), translated by Iftikhar Ahmad Balkhi, vol 1, pp. 31-33.

An excellent account is available in Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*

(New York: Mcmillan, 1970) pp. 98-106.

- 8 al-Jinn: 6
- 9 Al-Faruqi, *The Cultural ...* p. 63.
- 10 Patai, *The Arab Mind*, p.12.
- 11 The Makkans used to go twice a year to Yemen, Gazza, Bayt al-Maqdas, and Damascus. They would also go up to Ethiopia, Bahrayn, Sudan, Egypt, Iran, and present-day Pakistan from the Jeddah seaport. They carried with them home-made hides, lather, and dry grapes and brought back perfumes and herbs from Yemen, ivory from Africa, and spices from Pakistan. From China they bought silk, from 'Aden high-quality cloth, from Egypt and Syria luxury items and weapons (specially swords), food grains and oil.
- 12 The remarks of Abu Lahab's wife when the Prophet Muhammad ('alayhi as-salam) fell sick and he could not wake up for *tahajjud* (late-night) prayers betrays this kind of belief. She said: "*inni arjuni yakuna shaytanica qad taraka* — I think your shaytan has deserted you." See "Tafsir ad-Duha" in al-Bukhari's *al-Jami'* ... The Qur'an even refuted her:

Should I tell you on whom shaytan descend? They descend on every liar sinner. They only reveal heresy and often they are liars.

al-Shu'ra': 11

- 13 al-Takwir: 8-9; al-Nahl: 58-59. Also, see Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, *al-Tafsir al-Kabir* (Cairo: Matba'ah al-Bahiyah) 12: 54-56.

MUHAMMAD

THE PROMISED ONE: BIRTH AND EARLY YOUTH

pp. 86-103

- 1 His mother named him Ahmad. Incidentally both Muhammad and Ahmad have the same verbal root *hamd*. Muhammad means one who is praised repeatedly, and Ahmad means one who is praised most.
- 2 Muhammad ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabqat al-Kubra* (Beruit: Dar Sadir, 1985) vol 1, p. 45.
- 3 Muhammad ibn Ishaq, *Sira Rasul Allah*, translated by A. Guillaume (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1967) p.25. The incident is also mentioned by ibn Sa'd.
- 4 Muhammad ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat ...*, p. 92.
- 5 *ibid.*, p. 111.
- 6 *ibid.* The other report relates to his securing zamzam, the water-well, in the precinct of the Ka'bah. Until 'Abdul-Muttalib's time, the legendary well, traced to Ish'mael, lay buried under tons of dirt. One night he had a dream, someone was telling him:

"Dig *tiba!*"

Nonplused, he asked: "What is *tiba?*" He got no response.

The following night, he was again told, though the word used varied:

"Dig *barra!*"

"What is *barra?*" he asked.

Next night, he was told:

"Dig at *madnuna!*"

Unable to understand the man's cloudy expression without context, he asked him:

"What is *madnuna?* Please make it plain!"

On the fourth night, he was told:

"*Ahfra zamzam — dig zamzam!*"

"And what is *zamzam?*"

"Zamzam is a [well] whose water will neither dry up nor it will be berated [for its quality]. This is for you and after you, for your children. Pilgrims will drink it to their heart content. [You will] find it located in between the garbage and blood by the nest where the white-winged ravens fly, by the nest where the ants to and fro do ply."

The following day, without making it known to others, he took his only son, al-Harith, with him to the suggested spot and started digging. This was the place where pilgrims used to kill sacrificial animals. After three-day labor, he struck water. The unexpected find elated him. Filled with joy, he cried "Allahu Akbar — Allah is great." For sure, this was the same well that Allah long before had created for Isma'il and his mother Hagar, he said to his son.

A major discovery as it was, its secrecy was difficult to maintain from the beginning. The well was dug in the open — that too in the Ka'bah's precinct, the most frequented place in Makkah. Besides, the zamzam had spiritual and historic dimensions, the water was sweet bearing a distinct taste and plentiful. The

row over its possession was thus inevitable: they came in drove. 'Abdul-Muttalib could have countered their claim to joint ownership but among the Quraysh, as far as his household was concerned, he had only one son to stand by him.

A just man by disposition, he decided to resolve the issue through arbitration. He was sure that by all canons of justice, zamzam was his, though he wished he had more sons to stop others from usurping what he considered to be his rightful possession. As to his wish for more children, should that happen, he promised to God, he would give one of his sons to Him.

They were in all forty, twenty each from the clans of 'Abd Manaf and Hashim, agreeing to arbitration through a woman soothsayer who lived in Ma'an, a place near the Syrian border.

By the time they reached a creek, named Faqir, they had no water to drink. The creek itself was incidentally dry at that time of the year. They searched the water in the sprawling desert, but it was nowhere in sight. Dehydration emasculated them, and death appeared to be inevitable. The very water (zamzam), which had become the bone of contention, was now bringing death to them. The irony was manifest, when they asked 'Abdul-Muttalib how they could get out of their predicament. "Dig up your graves. Let not our bodies be humiliated in death," he told them. Laying side by side, they waited for the end to come. In his heart though, 'Abdul-Muttalib did not like the idea of a passive death. Rising from his place, he said if death were their destiny, then let it be in the struggle for water. Putting his foot in the stirrup, he slung himself

over his mount and as it moved, the water suddenly gushed under its feet. In such an obvious death trap the sudden appearance of water was surely a mark of Providence. The event purged their hearts of greed — they knew for a fact that 'Abdul-Muttalib was the blessed one among them. While they sought destiny, he rode the tide of destiny. Ashamed, they crowded around him. The judgment was bright and clear like the sun-lit sand around them: He who gave 'Abdul-Muttalib water in the wilderness also gave him the zamzam. Not to have conceded that would have been mean, and not chivalrous. "By Allah," they said, "we will not oppose you in this respect."

'Abdul-Muttalib had a sigh of relief. Now that the issue was resolved through divine providence, they discarded the idea of third-party arbitration and headed back to Makkah.

Soon, he was to sire eighteen children. When they grew up — all beautiful and healthy — the time of reckoning arrived. 'Abdul-Muttalib remembered his promise to Allah. One day he shared his wish with his children. Obediently, they encouraged him to fulfill it.

Together they went to the Ka'bah and standing beside Habal, a pagan idol, the lots were caste. 'Abdullah, the most handsome among them, was signaled out. 'Abdul-Muttalib took him by his hand and started leading him toward the pagan gods, Esaf and Na'ila, for sacrifice. When the Quraysh saw him intent on slaughtering his son, they ran after him, imploring him not to carry out his wish for if he did, it would set the precedent and make it hard for others to follow. They suggested seeking counsel.

- A woman named Qartaba, known for her wisdom, counseled him to caste the lot between ten camels as *diyya* (compensation amount), against a man's life, and 'Abdullah his son. In case 'Abdullah's name come up again, increase the number of camels until the verdict is given in favor of the camels. That, she said, would be the acceptable substitute for 'Abdullah in the eyes of their Lord. This must have relieved 'Abdul-Muttalib and his family for they joyously accepted her solution and began increasing the number of camels against 'Abdullah's life until it hit the mark of 100 camels. 'Abdullah's neck was saved. For this account see Muhammad ibn Ishaq, *Sira Rasul Allah*, and ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*.
- 7 Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari, *al-Jami' al-Sahih*, hadith 122, vol 2; Muhammad ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat ...*, p. 111.
 - 8 *ibid.*
 - 9 *ibid.*
 - 10 Al-Bukhari, *al-Jami' ...*, hadith 170, vol 5, narrated by Jabir ibn 'Abdullah; ibn Hajr al-'Asqalani, *Fath al-Bari*, "Kitab as-Salat (al-Istisqa)".
 - 11 Muhammad ibn 'Abdul-Malik ibn Hisham, *Sirat al-Nabi* (Beruit: Dar al-Fiqr, 1981) p. 176.
 - 12 *ibid.*, p. 176.
 - 13 Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat ...* (Leiden: E.A. Brill, 1917) vol 1, p. 93, narrated by Um Ayman, the Prophet's nursemaid in his childhood.
 - 14 Abu Bakr al-Bayhaqi, *Dala'il al-Nubuwwa*; Abu'l-Qasim ibn Ahmad al-Tabarani *al-Mu'ajm al-Awsat*, narrated by 'Ali.
 - 15 Ibn Ishaq, *Sira ...* fn. 2, based on Suhayli. See also
 - 16 Ibn Ishaq, *Sira ...* p.80.
 - 17 Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat ...*; ibn Hisham, *Sirat ...* pp. 199-201. Ibn Hisham disputes the Prophet's age at that point in time. Also, see al-Tabarani, *al-Mu'ajm ...*; Ahmad ibn Yahya al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*; ibn Ishaq, *Sira ...*, p. 82.
 - 18 'Abdur-Rahman as-Suhayli, *al-Raudu'l Unuf*, vol 1, p. 164. Also, Isma'il ibn 'Umar ibn Kathir, *al-Bidaya wal-Nihaya* (Lahore: al-Maktabah al-Qudusiyya, 1984) vol 2, pp 291, 292.
 - 19 As-Suhayli narrates a hadith from *al-Musnad Harith ibn Usama* which attributes the covenant's name to the presence of the word "*fadl*" in it.
 - 20 Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidaya ...*, vol. 2 pp. 291-292. Also see Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah al-Hakim, *al-Mastadrak*, vol 2, p. 20.
 - 21 Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat ...*, p. 89. Zarqani has detailed the episode. See also A. Guillaume's translation of ibn Ishaq's *Sira*, p. 82.
 - 22 See al-Duha: 8 — "Allah found you poor and made you rich."
 - 23 As-Suhayli, *al-Raudu'l Unuf*, vol 1, p. 164. Also see ibnu'l Jauzi, *al-Mujtaba min al-Mujtaba*, pp. 46-49.
 - 24 C.E. Bosworth, Van E. Donzel, et al, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leidon: E. J. Brill, 1991) vol 6, p. 144.
 - 25 al-i 'Imran: 90-96.
 - 26 Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat ...*, p. 93; ibn Hisham, narrated by Muhammad ibn Ishaq, p. 212.
 - 27 *ibid.*, pp. 210.
 - 28 Ibn Hisham, *Sirat ...* p. 214; also, *Musnad Ahmad*.
 - 29 *ibid*; also see ibn Ishaq, *Sira ...* p. 86

The Moment Of Reckoning:

THE CALL COMES

pp. 104-115

- 1 As to the false gods and their reduced hold on human character in pre-Islamic Arabia, Prof. Philip K. Hitti writes: "Judged by his poetry the pagan Bedouin of the Jahliyah age had little if any religion. To spiritual impulses he was lukewarm, even indifferent. His conformity to religious practice followed tribal inertia and was dictated by his conservative respect for tradition."
Hitti quotes Abu'l Faraj al-Isbahani's *Kitab al-Aghani* vol. viii, p. 70. "A story told about Imru' al-Qays illustrates this point. Having set out to avenge the murder of his father he stopped at the temple of dhu al-Khalash to consult the oracle by means of drawing arrows. Upon drawing 'abandon' thrice he hurled the broken arrows at the idol exclaiming, 'Accursed one had it been thy father who has murdered thou wouldst not have forbidden my avenging him.'"
2. Hud: 17; Hud: 28, 88. All prophets were righteous even before their elevation to prophethood.
- 3 The cave of Hira' is 12 ft in length and 5 ft 3 inches in width. Call it a coincidence or an act of Providence it faces the Ka'bah.
- 4 Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari, *al-Jami' al-Sahih*, "Kitab al-Ta'bir," hadith 3, vol 1; Muhammad ibn 'Abdul-Malik ibn Hisham, *Sirat al-Nabi* (Beruit: Dar al-Fiqr, 1981) p. 251. Also see al-Fath: 27.
- 5 Jibra'il (biblical Gabriel) is also addressed as Amin — that is, truthful and trustworthy because he is the medium for the divine message. The Qur'an also calls him "Ruh al-Qudus" or the Holy Spirit because he is the noblest of the angels.
- 6 The Qur'an confirms the fact that Muhammad ('alyhi as-salam) did not aspire for prophethood:

And you weren't cultivating
the desire for the book
to descend on you.

al-Qasas: 86
- 7 Al-Bukhari, *al-Jami'* ... hadith 3, vol 1; ibn Hisham, *Sirat* ... , pp.254-255.
- 8 al-Iqra': 1-4
- 9 Al-Bukhari, *al-Jami'* ... , hadith 3, vol 1. This hadith is narrated by 'A'isha (Allah be pleased with her). Some scholars object to this hadith on grounds of technicality that since she was not born by then she could not have said it. True, but a narrator need not be a witness to a scene. Who does not know that she had a very keen mind and a disposition to know. Is it unusual for a wife to ask her husband about the early days of his initiation into prophethood?
- 10 *ibid.*
- 11 *ibid.*; also, Muhammad ibn 'Abdul Baqi al-Zarqani: *Sharh al-Mawahib al-Laduniyya*; ibn Habib al-Baghdadi (d. 245 H.), *Kitab al-Muhabbar* (Hyderabad: 1942) p. 237.
- 12 *ibid.*
- 13 *ibid.*
- 14 Ibn Hisham, *Sirat* ... p. 263; also Muhammad ibn Ishaq, *Sira Rasul Allah*, translated by A. Guillaume (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1976) p. 112.
- 15 al-Muddaththir: 1-5; see its parallel

in the commandment to the Prophet Noah — We sent Noah unto his people (saying): Warn your people before they are engulfed by a terrible punishment. Noah: 1.

- 16 Al-Zarqani, *Sharh* ...
 17 ibid.
 18 Abu Muhammad al-Husayn al-Baghawi, *Mishkat al-Masabih*, translated by Dr. James Robson, narrated by Ahmad ibn Hanbal (Lahore: Ashraf, 1975) chapter 1, vol 1, pp. 15-16.
 19 Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad*, with explanation *al-Fath ur-Rabbani* (Cairo: Dar al-Shahab) vol 20, p 215, "dhikr min aman qasal ad-da'wah." al-Bayyanah: 5-8.
 20 al-Infitar: 1-12
 21 al-Bayyina: 5-8; al-An'am: 40-41; Yunus: 22-23; al-Rum: 32-33; al-A'raf: 54; Yasin: 36-44; al-'Ankabut: 41; al-Mu'min: 57; al-Saffat: 11; al-Qiyamah: 16-19.
 22 al-Zumar: 69; al-Tariq: 9-14; al-Fajr: 23-24
 23 al-Ghashiya: 17-20; al-Dahr: 2-3; al-Mu'min: 67; al-Shams: 11-15.
 24 al-Muzammil and al-Mudhdhathir; al-Naml: 65; al-Mu'min: 66; al-Mu'minin: 96
 25 al-Qiyamah: 16-19. Also see al-Bukhari, *al-Jami'* ... , hadith 4, vol 1.

T ❖ O T ❖ H ❖ E ❖ M

THEY WERE AN UMMAH

pp. 116-141

- 1 Muhammad ibn Yusuf, *Subal al-Huda wal-Rushad fi Sirat Khayr al-'Ibad* (Cairo: Muhammad Taufiq Awayza, 1974) vol 2, p. 430.

- 2 Isma'il ibn 'Umar ibn Kathir, *al-Bidaya wal-Nihaya* (Lahore: al-Maktabatul Qudusiyya, 1984) vol 3, pp. 30-31; Hafiz ibn Hajr al-'Asqalani: *al-Isaba fi Tamyiz as-Sahaba*.
 3 Abu'l-Hasan 'Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Athir, *al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh* (Beruit: Dar Sadir, 1982) vol 2, pp. 40-41; Ahmad ibn Yahya al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ahraf* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'rifa) vol 1, pp. 118-119, in both cases the narrator is Ja'far ibn 'Abdullah ibn abi al-Hakam.
 4 Muhammad ibn 'Isa al-Dahhak al-Tirmidhi, *as-Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, "Kitab al-Tafsir," quoted by Imtiaz Sa'id in his *Khutubat-i Rasul* (Rawalpindi: Maktubat-i Hurmat, 1981) pp. 31-32. Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari, *al-Jami' al-Sahih*, hadith 294, vol 6.
 5 Only 'Ali ibn abi-Talib who was still in early teens dared to affirm Muhammad's prophethood. See al-Baladhuri, *Ansab* ... , vol 1, pp. 118-119, for the event.
 6 Imtiaz Sa'id, *Khutubat-i Rasul*, narrated by 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas, p. 30.
 7 For Abu Lahab's remarks, see Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari, *al-Jami' al-Sahih*, hadith 495, vol 6. Also see, ibn Kathir, *al-Sira al-Nabawiyya* (Cairo: Essa al-Babi, 1964) p. 456; Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan 'An Ta'wil A'yl al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-Fiqr, 1988) vol 15, p. 336; also see Sayyid Qutab, *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* (Beruit: Dar Ihya al-Turas al-Arabi, 1971) p. 698; Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad*; al-Tirmidhi, *as-Sunan al-Tirmidhi*.
 8 Ahmad Zaki Safuf, *Jamhratu Khutaba' al-Arab*, quoted by Imtiaz Sa'id, pp. 33-34.
 9 al-An'am: 59
 10 al-Zariyat: 56

- 11 al-An'am: 100-102
- 12 al-A'raf: 172; al-Fatir: 13-17
- 13 Yusuf: 40
- 14 al-Infitar: 4-5
- 15 'Abdul-Malik ibn Hisham, *Sirat al-Nabi* (Beirut: Dar al-Fiqr, 1981) vol 1, p. 418.
- 16 Ibn Kathir, *al-Sira ...* (Cairo: Essa al-Babi, 1964) p. 444.
- 17 al-An'am: 19
- 18 ibid.
- 19 ibid; also al-Shu'ara': 216
- 20 See al-Ankabut: 12-13; Jalaluddin as-Suyuti, *al-Durr al-Manthur*.
- 21 al-An'am: 164
- 22 Ibn Kathir, *al-Sira al-Nabawiyya ...* vol 1, pp. 480-482; 'Abdur-Rahman ibn abi-Hatim, *al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil*.
- 23 al-Ra'd: 31
- 24 ibid.
- 25 ibid. This is a common equation between the prophets: people ask them for a sign so that they could believe, but they don't (al-Isra': 6). For example, in the Jesus' case "[t]he Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking for a sign from heaven to test him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and said, 'Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation.'" Mark 8: 11. Also, see Luke 11: 29.
- 26 al-Ra'd: 31. According to some exegetes, the tone of this ayah implies that the Makkans had seen miracles before.
- 27 al-Mursalat: 1-15
- 28 al-Mursalat: 16-17
- 29 al-Mursalat: 20-22
- 30 al-Mursalat: 25-27
- 31 al-Ra'd: 32
- 32 Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, 1980), narrated by Abu Ya'la, vol 2, pp. 582-583.
- 33 ibid., p. 583.
- 34 al-An'am: 53. The followers of the other prophets in the past had invited the same kind of scorn from the rich. For example see al-Shu'ara': 111 in which Prophet Noah (upon him be peace) was told: "Should we put faith in you when the lowest (of the people) follow you."
- 35 See al-Zukhruf: 31-32. The Qur'an articulates their wish. For the incident, see ibn Ishaq, *Sira Rasul Allah*, translated by A. Guillaume. Al-Walid's arrogance as well as his ignorance was evident from what he said on the occasion, "Does God send down revelations to Muhammad and ignore me, the greatest chief of Quraysh, to say nothing of Abu Mas'ud 'Amr ibn 'Umayr al-Thaqif, we being the greatest ones of Ta'if and Mecca." p. 164.
- 36 Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir ...* p. 135.
- 37 al-An'am: 52
- 38 ibid.
- 39 Ibn Kathir, *al-Sira ...* p. 472; al-Bukhari, *al-Jami' ...*, hadith 193, vol 5; Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad*. Also, see al-'Alaq: 9 "Have you seen that man who stops Allah's servant from praying ..."
- 40 al-Ikhlās: 1-5.

Did humans start with animism and then graduated in belief to monotheism or they were monotheists first and later regressed into polytheism?

The opinion is sharply divided. A group of anthropologists (such as E.B. Tylor and F.G. Frazer) hold that it all began with animism while others (such as Andrew Lang and Peter Wilhelm Schmidt) say that it was monotheism that gradually degenerated into belief in polytheism. The first bevy of scholars can

be designated as evolutionists — animism giving way to polytheism and polytheism maturing into monotheism. Emile Durkheim is a good exponent of this school. The second group can be described as regressionists.

How did the “primitive” man shift from his belief animism to monotheism, they say it had to do with our “instinctual craving for simplification.” The belief in a spirit in every tree is a staggering concept and makes life difficult. To make it easy for themselves, they began conceiving fewer gods like the god of the woods, wind, and so forth. From there the belief in one God was just a few steps away. Wrong! says Andrew Lang. Monotheism is not the end of the evolutionary ladder. In support he cites Aborigines’ belief in the High God who after giving laws returned to “dignified seclusion in the sky.”

But was it a direct downward plunge into polytheism? Edwards James says no, there was an intermediate phase, which he characterizes as honotheism when lesser gods were created out of the human material such as cultural heroes, athletes, and totems. To this list one can add religious divines, conquerors, and poets.

The evidence gathered by Egyptologists give support to the regressionist — the theory of the second group. Belief in the one-true God has been the fact of life with humans. Wallis Budge’s work the *Egyptian Book of the Dead* has come up with a number of inscriptions deciphered:

An inscription of (the old Egypt) says, “God is hidden and no man knoweth His form. No man has been able to seek out His likeness.”

Another inscription reads, “God is merciful unto those who reverence Him, and He heareth him that calleth upon Him.”

A third one says, “God knoweth him that acknowledgeth Him, He rewardeth him that serveth Him, and He protecteth him that followeth Him.”

About God being the creator of everything, an inscription reads, “God hath made the universe. ... He is the Creator of what is in this world, and of what was, of what is and of what shall be.”

The emergence of other gods or the elevation of the Pharaohs to godhood is a much later development and was a breach of the Egyptian tradition of monotheism.

- 41 al-Anbiya’: 22
- 42 al-Ra’d: 16
- 43 Yasin: 13
- 44 Al-Bukhari, *al-Jami’*, hadith 498, vol 6 — see Tafsir sura al-Ikhlās.
- 45 al-Baqarah: 117
- 46 al-An’am: 61, 102
- 47 al-Inshiqāq: 1-25
- 48 al-Zumar: 53
- 49 Muhammad ibn Yazid, *Sunan ibn Majah* (Sargodha: Idara Ihya as-Sunnah an-Nabawiyya) p. 328, chapter: “Mayurja min-Rahmatillah yumul qiyama.”
- 50 al-Qasas: 57
- 51 C.E. Bosworth and Van E. Donzel, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991) p. 145.
- 52 al-Quraysh: 1-5
- 53 Yunus: 15
- 54 al-Zumar: 64; al-Baladhuri, *Ansab ...*; ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Jami’ al-Bayan ‘An Ta’wil A’yl al-Qur’an*.
- 55 Ibn Hisham, *Sirat ...* vol 1, p. 418.

- 56 *ibid*; also see al-Baladhuri, *Ansab* ...
 57 Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat* ... (Beruit: Dar Sadir, 1985) vol 1, pp. 202-203.

The many faces of *Falsehood*

pp. 142-161

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| <p>1 al-Furqan: 32
 2 al-Furqan: 4
 3 al-Furqan: 6
 4 Ha-Mim as-Sajdah: 44
 5 <i>ibid</i>.
 6 Yunus: 16
 7 al-Nahl: 102
 8 Yasin: 78
 9 Yasin: 79-82
 10 al-Isra': 49
 11 al-Isra': 50-51
 12 al-Isra': 51
 13 <i>ibid</i>.
 14 <i>ibid</i>.
 15 al-Isra': 52
 16 Abu'l-Hasan 'Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Athir, <i>al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh</i> (Beruit: Dar Sadir, 1982) vol 2, p. 71; also see Isma'il ibn Kathir, <i>al-Sira al-Nabawiyya</i> (Beruit: Essa al-Babi, 1964) vol 1, p. 1500; Muhammad ibn 'Abdul-Malik ibn Hisham <i>Sirat al-Nabi</i> (Beruit: Dar al-Fiqr, 1981) vol 1, p. 283.
 17 <i>ibid</i>.
 18 al-Mudhdhathir: 11-24
 19 Abu'l-Qasim ibn Ahmad al-Tabarani, <i>al-Mu'ajm al-Awsat</i> — see "Kitab ad-Du'a."
 20 Muhammad ibn Ishaq, <i>Sira Rasul Allah</i>, translated by A. Guillaume</p> | <p>(Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1967) p. 80.
 21 <i>ibid.</i>, p. 162
 22 al-An'am: 108
 23 Ibn Ishaq, <i>Sira</i> ... , pp. 135-136. The Qur'an was already dispelling such notions. See for example, al-A'raf: 184 (He is not under spell); al-Shu'ara': 224 (He is not a poet for the poets are followed by weird people; al-Shu'ara': 226 (The poets do not practice what they say); al-Tur: 29-32 (Go on inviting them to guidance — you are neither a soothsayer nor an insane man).
 24 al-Furqan: 5-6. Also see Luqman: 6. Using the dancing girls' charms on the Muslims so that they deviate from the true path. Ibn 'Abbas corroborates it. For the incident see ibn Ishaq, <i>Sira</i> ... , p. 162.
 25 al-Anbiya': 98
 26 Ibn Ishaq, <i>Sira</i> ... , p. 163. About Ezra who was considered by the Jews as son of God, I have come across a passage in Emil Schurer's <i>The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ</i> (London: Edinburg T&T Clark, 1991) vol 11, which though does not bear on the subject directly, talks of him as someone who after his "assumption into heaven" would return with the Messiah. Schurer writes: "As pre-existence [of the Messiah] is explicitly taught here, so is it assumed in the promise to Ezra (14:9) that after his assumption into heaven, Ezra himself would return with the Messiah ('tu enim recipieris ab hominibus et converteris residuum cum filio meo et cum similibus tuis, usque quo finiantur tempora'). See p. 519.
 27 al-Anbiya': 102
 28 al-Anbiya': 26-30
 29 Ha-Mim al-Sajdah: 26
 30 al-Ma'rij: 36-37</p> |
|---|---|

- 31 Ha-Mim al-Sajdah: 40
 32 al-Shura: 16
 33 Yasin: 78
 34 al-Waqi'ah: 47-50; al-Isra': 49-52
 35 al-Qalam: 2-4; al-Dukhan: 14
 36 This is a summary of al-Qalam: 1-52 with expressed and implied meanings.
 37 Yasin: 69; al-Mu'minun: 70; al-Tur: 29; al-A'raf: 184; al-Shu'ara': 224
 38 Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari, *al-Jami'* ... , hadith 245, vol 5, narrated by 'A'isha. Also see Muslim ibn Hajjaj, *al-Jami' al-Sahih*; al-Tabarani, *al-Mu'ajm* ... Both of them have detailed the event.
 39 Al-Bukhari, *al-Jami'* ... ; Abu Ya'la, *Musnad*, narrated by 'Aqil ibn abi-Talib.
 40 Ibn Hisham, *al-Sira* ... p. 266
 41 ibid.
 42 ibid.
 43 Al-Bukhari, *al-Jami' al-Sahih*, hadith 630, vol 8; Ahmad ibn Yahya al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*.
 44 al-Tur: 48
 45 al-Naml: 45-51
 46 ibid.
 47 Ibn Ishaq, *Sira Rasul Allah*, p. 69; ibn Hisham, *Sirat* ...
 48 Ibn Ishaq, *Sira* ... , p.169.
 49 ibid., p. 170.
 50 Ibn Kathir, *al-Sira* ... , vol 1, pp. 392-393; also see ibn Ishaq, *Sira* ... , p. 141-142.
 51 al-Jathiyah: 2-3
 52 Ibn Ishaq, *Sira* ... p. 141-142; al-Baladhuri, *Ansab* ... ; ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat* ...
 53 Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat* ... ; al-Baladhuri, *Ansab* ... , narrated by Sha'ibi.
 54 Ibn Ishaq, *Sira* ... , p. 144; al-

Baladhuri, *Ansab* ...

- 55 ibid. See al-Ahqaf: 5-6, Zinniyyra (Allah be pleased with her) was obviously repeating the Qura'nic theme. This also shows how greatly the Qur'anic ideas had become part of the Muslims' consciousness.
 56 Ibnu'l-Juzi, *al-Mujtaba min al-Mujtaba*.
 57 Ibn Hisham, *Sirat* ... , vol 1, p. 342.
 58 Sumiyya was not owned by Abu Jahl. So why did he kill her so savagely? The sira writers and the ahadith are silent on the point. How could he have killed someone else's slave? Perhaps Makkah was so violent at that point in time toward the Muslims that ownership had become irrelevant. It is possible she might have invited the slaves of Abu Jahl's household to Islam that caused her death at his hand. One can only conjecture. But it must have been a serious affair.
 59 The souq Dhu'l Majaz was held in the first quarter of Dhu'lhajja at a place between Makkah and Ta'if. See Ya'qubi's *Tarikh* under the caption "Aswaq al-Arab," vol 1.
 60 Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat* ...

Persecution Brings New Adherents

pp. 162-179

- 1 Abu'l-Qasim ibn Ahmad al-Tabarani, *al-Mu'ajm al-Awsat*; 'Abdur-Rahman ibn abi-Hatim, *al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil*.
 2 Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad* (Cairo: Dar al-Shahab) vol 20, pp. 232-233.
 3 Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari,

- al-Jami' al-Sahih*, vol 5, hadith 207.
- 4 'Ali ibn Burhanuddin, *Insan al-'Ayun* (Cairo: Mustapha al-Babi, 1964) vol 2, pp. 14-15; also see Muhammad ibn 'Abdul-Malik ibn Hisham, *Sirat al-Nabi* (Beirut: Dar al-Fiqr, 1981) vol 1, p. 368.; Hafiz Abu Ya'la, *Masnad*, narrated by Anas ibn Malik.
 - 5 For the Qur'anic injunction on the issue, see al-Nahl: 105; Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan 'An Ta'wil A'yl al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa) vol 7, p. 122; Ahmad ibn Yahya al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*; Abu Bakr al-Bayhaqi, *Dala'il al-Nubuwwa*; Muhammad ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat ...*
 - 6 Muhammad ibn Ishaq, *Sira Rasul Allah* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1967) p. 162.
 - 7 *ibid.*
 - 8 Al-Bukhari, *al-Jami' al-Sahih*, "Kitab al-Ikrah," hadith 191, vol 5; also see Ahmad ibn Yahya al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf* (Cairo: Dara al-Ma'rifa) vol 1, p. 172.
 - 9 Maryam: 78,80
 - 10 The inscription found at the site of the Ma'rib dam supports this view because it mentions, among others, the name of Rahman (God), His Messiah, and Ruh al-Qudus (the Holy Spirit). The sonship of Jesus has been avoided. See Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs* (New York, Mcmillan, 1986), p. 105.
Hitti's comments on the inscription betray a mind which views everything Islamic with preconceived notions — that Muhammad Rasul Allah's prophethood is contrived, that he borrowed from other sources to create his "fake" faith. "The word Rahman-an," says he, "is specially significant because its northern equivalent, al-Rahman, became later a prominent attribute of Allah. ...

Though used in the inscription for the Christian God, yet the word is evidently borrowed from the name of one of the older South Arabian deities. Al-Rahim (the compassionate) also occurs as the name of a deity (RHM) in pre-Islamic and Sabaen inscriptions." His comments are flawed on the following grounds:

- The "Christian God" if He is not given a son, is the same Islamic God. So if al-Rahman is used for God in the two faiths, it is an argument for the oneness of the Abrahamic faiths. Besides, Aramaic, Hebrew, and Arabic are sister languages belonging to the same family. It is possible that at the time of the inscription at the site of the Ma'rib dam, the word al-Rahman had survived despite the mass-scale Hellenization of the Christian faith.
- One may concede that al-Rahman and al-Rahim existed as pagan gods in Southern Arabian pre-Islamic religions. But to imply that the attributes of the Islamic God were made up from the pagan religions would be absolutely unfair. Rather, the development took place the other way round. The pagan mind took the attributes of the monetheistic God of the Abrahamic faith and gave them material existence (hypostasized) of gods and goddesses. In other words, it was the degeneration of the one true God, which Islam restored.
- A somewhat similar parallel can be found in animism which made gods out of the elements of nature, like fire, air, earth, and water.

- 11 Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat ...*

THE TRAUMA

OF SHI'B ABI-TALIB

pp. 180-193

- 12 Ibn Hisham, *Sirat ...* vol 1, p. 358.
- 13 Husayn ibn Muhammad, *Tarikh al-Khamis* (Beirut: Musa Sha'ban) p. 290; also see ibn Hisham's *Sirat ...* vol 1, p. 359; Ahmad ibn Hanbal's *Musnad Ahmad*, narrated by Umm Salama.
- 14 Ibn Ishaq, *Sira ...*, narrated by Umm Salama — a witness to the event. Also, al-Tabarani, *al-Mu'ajm ...*, narrated by Ja'far himself. For the fuss over *sajdah* to the Negus, see Abu Nu'aym, *Dala'il al-Nubuwwa*, narrated by Abu Musa Asha'ri.
- 15 Maryam: 30-37
- 16 Husayn ibn Muhammad, *Tarikh ...* p. 290; also see Ibn Hisham, *Sirat ...* vol 1, pp. 359-360. ibn Hisham's account is slightly different, though he also confirms the Negus' Islam; *Musnad Ahmad*; al-Tabarani, *al-Mu'ajm ...* narrated by 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud.
- 17 Ibn Hisham, *Sirat ...* vol 1, pp. 418-419; Abu Bakr al-Bayhaqi, *Dala'il al-Nubuwwa*, narrated by ibn Ishaq.
- 18 al-Qasas: 52-53
- 19 Al-Bukhari, *al-Jami' al-Sahih*; Ahmad ibn Yahya, *Ansab al-Ashraf* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'rifa) vol 1, p. 206.
- 20 Al-Bukhari, *al-Jami' ...* vol 5, hadith 245; Muhammad ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat ...*
- 21 Hafiz ibn Hajr al-'Asqalani, *al-Isaba fi Taymiz as-Sahaba*; ibn Ishaq, *Sira Rasul Allah*, narrated by Zuhri on the authority of 'A'isha.
- 22 Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat ...*; Abu Bakr al-Bayhaqi, *Dala'il ...*
- 23 *ibid.*
- 24 *ibid.*
- 25 Luqman: 14-15
- 1 Ibnu'l-Qayyam, *Zad al-Ma'd*, vol 1, p. 42; also Muhammad ibn Ishaq, *Sira Rasul Allah*, translated by A. Guillaume (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1967) p. 159.
- 2 Muhammad ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat al-Kubra* (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1985) vol 1, p. 209; also see Muhammad 'Abdul-Malik ibn Hisham, *Sirat al-Nabi* (Beirut: Dar al-Fiqr, 1981) vol 1, p. 399; Husayn ibn Muhammad, *Tarikh al-Khamis* (Beirut: Musa Sha'ban) vol 1, p. 297.
- 3 Ibnu'l-Qayyam, *Zad al-Ma'd*, vol 1, p. 45.
- 4 al-Qamar: 1
- 5 al-Qamar: 2. The sorcery allegation was also made against other Prophets, like Musa (Moses) and Haroon (Aron), see Ta-Ha: 54.
- 6 al-An'am: 110; Ahmad Mustapha, *Tafsir al-Muraghi* (Beirut: Mustapha al-Babi, 1970) vol 8, p. 5; also see Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan 'An Ta'wil A'yl al-Qur'an*.
- 7 al-Qamar: 43-45
- 8 Ibn Hisham, *Sirat ...*, vol 1, p. 339; Isma'il ibn 'Umar ibn Kathir, *al-Bidaya wal-Nihaya* (Lahore: al-Maktaba al-Qudusiyya, 1984) vol 3, p. 96.
- 9 Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat ...* p. 210.
- 10 For example, see al-Baruj: 1-22; Noah: 1-28; al-Waqi'ah: 10-40.
- 11 al-Bald: 11-17; Ha-Mim al-Sajdah: 33-34; al-Mujadilah: 22; al-A'raf: 199-202; al-Dahr: 24-26.

- 12 al-Waqi'ah: 60-74 (it offers a detailed argument with the nonbelievers making them reflect); al-Mu'minun: 91 (argument in favor of Allah's unicity: if there had been more than one God, they would have claimed their share in the creation); al-Zukhruf: 22-24 (forefathers' ways? What, if they proved to be wrong?)
- 13 Hud: 115; al-Rum: 60; Ha-Mim al-Sajdah: 30
- 14 al-Baruj: 17-20; al-'Ankabut: 55; al-Saffat: 173-182; Yunus: 6-8 (in the cycle of the day and night, there is a lesson that human existence can alternate between life and death).
- 15 al-Haqqah: 1-12.
- 16 Yunus: 6-8; al-Rum: 20-27; Yasin: 36-44.
- 17 Luqman: 21; al-Zukhruf: 21-24; Yunus: 78 (Even the Prophet Musa (Moses) was accused of deviating people from their forefathers' way).
- 18 al-Qiyamah: 20-21, 40; al-Ghashiya: 17-20; al-Tariq: 5-8; al-Ra'd: 16.
- 19 Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat ...*, vol 1, p. 202. Also Ibn Ishaq, *Sira ...*, pp. 191-192.
- 20 Sad: 6
- 21 Abu'l Husayn 'Asakiruddin Muslim ibn Hajjaj, *al-Jami' al-Sahih*, see "Kitab al-Iman," hadith 36, narrated by Sa'id ibn Mussayb. On the Prophet's effort to seek Abu Talib's conversion, see al-Qasas: 56 saying "you can't give guidance to those whom you love."
- A minority view, for example shi'is, believes that Abu Talib had accepted faith before his death. Allah knows best.
- 22 Al-Bukhari, *al-Jami' ...*, "Kitab al-Tafsir," hadith 197, vol 6; al-Shu'ara': 104 and al-Taubah: 113. This hadith has two versions: one applies al-Taubah: 113 to Abu Talib's death and the other applies it to the death of the Madinan hypocrite 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy. The only way to reconcile the two will be to hold the view that though sura al-Taubah is Madinan in origin, *ayah* 113 relates to the Makkan era.
- 23 al-Shu'ara': 86-89; Maryam: 47
- 24 al-Taubah: 128
- 25 Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat ...* vol 1, p. 211; also see Isma'il ibn 'Umar ibn Kathir, *al-Bidaya wal-Nihaya*, vol 3, p. 134; also Husayn ibn Muhammad, *Tarikh al-Khamis* (Beirut: Mussasa Sha'ban) vol 1, p. 302.
- 26 *ibid.*
- 27 al-Zukhruf: 44; also, al-Rum: 4-6; al-Isra': 82

PUTTING FUTURE ON THE LINE

pp. 194-209

- 1 Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization — The Age of Faith* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1950) p. 147.
- 2 *ibid.*
- 3 al-Rum: 1-2.
- 4 al-Rum: 4
- 5 Muhammad ibn 'Isa al-Dahhak al-Tirmidhi, *as-Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, narrated by Abu Sa'id al-Khudri; Hafiz Abu Ya'la, *Musnad*, narrated by Bara' ibn 'Azib.
- 6 al-Rum: 6-8
- 7 al-Rum: 8
- 8 Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari, *al-Jami' al-Sahih*, vol 4, hadith 185.
- 9 *ibid.*
- 10 Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad*, narrated by Jabir ibn 'Abdullah.
- 11 The souq al-'Ukaz was close to 'Arafat and was visited by people in

- the first quarter of Dhu'lhajja once a year. See al-Ya'qubi's *Tarikh*, under the caption "Aswaq al-Arab," vol 1.
- 12 Al-Bukhari, *al-Jami' ...*, vol 4, hadith 185.
- 13 Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan 'An Ta'wil A'yl al-Qur'an*, narrated by Harith ibn al-Harith, (Beirut: Dar al-Fiqr, 1988).
- 14 Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad*; Abu'l-Qasim ibn Ahmad al-Tabarani, *al-Mu'ajm al-Awsat*, narrated by Jabir ibn 'Abdullah.
- 15 Abu'l A'la al-Maududi, *Tafhim al-Qur'an* (Lahore: Idara Tafhim al-Qur'an, 1970), especially his introduction to sura al-An'am.
- 16 al-An'am: 34
- 17 al-An'am: 35
- 18 ibid.
- 19 al-An'am: 42
- 20 al-An'am: 35
- 21 Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad*; Abu Bakr al-Bayhaqi, *Shu'ab al-Iman*; al-Tabarani, *al-Mu'ajm ...*; also see Hassan Ibrahim, *Tarikh al-Islam* (Cairo: Mustapha al-Babi, 1964) vol 1, p. 91.
- 22 ibid; al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan ...*, narrated by ibn Zayd.
- 23 ibid.
- 24 ibid.
- 25 Lahab: 1-5.
- 26 Abu Nu'aym, *Dala'il ...*; as-Suhayli, *al-Raudu'l Unuf*; al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*. According to a Suhayli's report, Abu Lahab's son, 'Utayba, insinuated that the Prophet was a "fake" by first denouncing the Qur'an and then in a fit of destructive emotions slobbered on his face. Hurt on his uncivil conduct, he said: "Ya Allah, set one of your dogs on him." This added to Abu Lahab's concern. To make sure that his son is not hurt,
- he pitched their tents encircled by camels. But the inevitable happened — at night when the caravan rested a beast, probably a big cat, jumped over the rampart of camels and killed 'Utayba.
- 27 Muhammad ibn Ishaq, *Sira Rasul Allah*, translated by A. Guillaume (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1967) pp. 197-198.
- 28 ibid. p. 196; Ahmad ibn Yahya al-Baladhuri, *Ansab al-Ashraf*.
- 29 Ibn Hisham, *Sirat ...*, p. 36.
- 30 ibid. p. 37.
- 31 ibid. p. 38. al-Baqarah: 89 talks about their expectations of a coming prophet. Also, al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan ...*
- 32 Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Musnad ...*; al-Tabarani, *al-Mu'ajm ...*, narrated by Jabir ibn 'Abdullah Ansari;
- 33 Ibn Hisham, *Sirat ...* vol 2, p. 38.
- 34 Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Musnad ...*; ibn Jarir, *Jami' al-Bayan 'An Ta'wil A'yl al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-Fiqr, 1988), narrated by Ka'b ibn Malik; al-Tabarani, *al-Mu'ajm ...*, narrated by Jabir ibn 'Abdullah Ansari; also ibn Hisham, *Sirat ...*, vol 2, p. 47.
- 35 Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, narrated by 'Awaym ibn Sa'ida (Beirut: 1957) vol 1, p. 221.
- 36 For the Qur'anic authentication of the oath, see al-Mumtahinah: 12; Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Musnad ...*; al-Bukhari, *al-Jami' al-Sahih*, hadith 232, vol 5; also ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat ...* vol 1, p. 220.
- 37 Al-Bukhari, *al-Jami' ...*, hadith 232, vol 5.
- 38 Ibn Hisham, *Sirat ...* vol 2, p. 50; ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat ...* pp. 221-222; also al-Bayhaqi, *Dala'il ...*; al-Tabarani, *al-Mu'ajm ...*

- 39 Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat ...* ; ibn Hisham, *Sirat ...* , p. 50.
- 40 Ibn Hisham, *Sirat ...* p. 50. Also, see Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Musnad ...* ; Abu Bakr al-Bayhaqi, *Dala'il ...*
- 41 Ibn Hisham, *Sirat ...* , vol 2, pp. 50-51.
- 42 Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat ...* , narrated by ibn Ishaqas well as Waqdi.
- 43 The Prophet made this statement at the conclusion of the first as well as the second oath. See ibn Hisham, *Sirat ...* , p. 42.
- 44 *ibid.* p. 59.
45. See item "Heraclius," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979) vol 8, p.782.

APPEASEMENT SUBSTITUTES FORCE THE NEW SNARE

pp. 210-223

- 1 Muhammad ibn Ishaq, *Sira Rasul Allah*, translated by A. Guillaume (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1967) p. 132. Also, Abu Bakr al-Bayhaqi, *Dala'il al-Nubuwwa*. My translation is from ibn Hisham's.
- 2 Ha-Mim al-Sajdah:
- 3 Al-Bayhaqi details this incident.
- 4 *ibid*; ibn Ishaq, *Sira ...*
- 5 Muhammad ibn 'Abdul-Malik ibn Hisham, *Sirat al-Nabi* (Beruit: Dar al-Fiqr, 1981) vol 1, p. 314. Also, ibn abi-Shaybah, *al-Musannaf*, narrated by 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar.
- 6 *ibid.*
- 7 *ibid.*
- 8 Blunt, Lady A and Sir W. S., *The Seven Golden Odes of Pagan Arabia*, p.43. This piece is by Imru' al-Qays.

- 9 al-Furqan: 7
- 10 al-Furqan: 8
- 11 *ibid.*
- 12 al-Ra'd: 38
- 13 al-Anbiya': 7-8
- 14 Hajj: 7
- 15 Yunus: 47-48; al-Anbiya': 36-37; al-Naml: 70-71
- 16 al-Ahqaf: 9
- 17 Ha-Mim al-Sajdah: 10; Yunus: 47-48
- 18 al-Hajj: 5
- 19 al-Nazi'at: 10-12
- 20 as-Saffat: 15-20
- 21 as-Saffat: 15-20; Maryam: 16
- 22 al-Nazi'at: 27; see also al-Mu'min: 57
- 23 Maryam: 67
- 24 Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari, *al-Jami' al-Sahih*, hadith 120, vol 2.
- 25 Hud: 118
- 26 al-Dukhan: 10-16
- 27 *ibid*; al-Bukhari, hadith 121, vol 2.
- 28 Al-Bukhari, narrated by 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, chapter "Du'a fi istisqa'"; ibn Majah, *Sunan ibn Majah* (Sargodha: Idara Ihya al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyya, 1400 A.H.) p. 91 under istisqa'.
- 29 Al-Bukhari, hadith 121, vol 2.
- 30 *ibid.*, hadith 133, vol 2. The Prophet Musa (Moses) was also urged by his people to remove from them the punishment, but when it was taken away, they would revert to their old selves. See al-Zukhruf: 48-50.
- 31 al-Dukhan: 10-16
- 32 In the beginning Ta'if was peopled by Banu 'Amir while Banu Thaqif lived on its periphery. The former were pastoral while the latter were inclined toward agriculture. With their eye on the fertile land of Ta'if, Banu Thaqif proposed to till the land

in behalf of Banu 'Amir. The deal was wrapped up on equal sharing of crops between the two. But as their hold on the land got secured, Banu Thaqif drove Banu 'Amir out of Ta'if a la' colonial style. See ibn Athir, *al-Kamil fil al-Tarikh*, vol 1.

- 33 Her name was Safiya bint Ma'mar.
- 34 Ibn Hisham, *Sirat ...*, vol 2, p. 28.
- 35 *ibid.* p. 29.
- 36 al-Tariq: 1-17
- 37 Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Musnad ...*, vol 4, p. 375.
- 38 The Ta'if residents behaved like the rich people in the past. For such attitudes, see Saba: 34-35.
- 39 Al-Tabarani, *al-Mu'ajm al-Awsat*, "Kitab ad-Du'a"; ibnu'l-Qayyam, *Zad al-Ma'ad*; also, ibn Hisham, *Sirat ...*, pp. 29-30.
- 40 Al-Bukhari, *al-Jami'* ... vol 1, p. 458; Muslim ibn Hajjaj, *al-Jami' al-Sahih*, narrated by 'A'isha.
- 41 Ibn Hisham, *al-Sira ...* p. 421.
- 42 *ibid.*
- 43 *ibid.*
- 44 al-Ahqaf: 29. See Isma'il ibn Kathir, *al-Sira al-Nabawiyya*, narrated by ibn Ishaq.
- 45 Muhammad ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat al-Kubra* (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1985) vol 1, p. 212.
- 46 *ibid.*

Dar al-Fiqr, 1981) vol 2, p. 33; ibn Ishaq, narrated by Imam Zuhri.

- 2 *ibid.*
- 3 Abu Nu'aym, *Dala'il al-Nubuwwa*, narrated by ibn 'Abbas on the authority of 'Ali ibn abi-Talib.
- 4 al-An'am: 151-153
- 5 al-Nahl: 90
- 6 Isma'il ibn 'Umar ibn Kathir, *al-Sira al-Nabawiyya*, edited by 'Abdul-Shafi (Beruit: Dar al-Kutab al-'Ilmiyya, 1985) vol 1, pp. 328-329; Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah al-Hakim, *al-Mustadrak*; Abu Bakr al-Bayhaqi, *Dala'il al-Nubuwwa*, edited by Dr. 'Abdul-Mu'ti Qalajiy (Beruit: Dar al-Kutab al-'Ilmiyya, 1985) vol 2, pp. 422-426.
- 7 *ibid.* See also Abu Nu'aym, *Dala'il ...*, narrated by ibn 'Abbas on the authority of 'Ali ibn abi-Talib; Yahya ibn Sa'id al-Umawi, narrated by al-Kalbi.
- 8 Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari, *al-Jami' al-Sahih*; Abu Nu'aym, *Dala'il ...*
- 9 *ibid.*
- 10 *ibid.*
- 11 For example, al-An'am: 108 says, "You are not a keeper over them nor responsible." Still, his concern for them would occasionally overwhelm him.
- 12 The journey to heaven was certainly an unusual event, but it was not something peculiar to Muhammad ('alayhi as-salam). The other prophets (upon them be peace) were also privy to secrets in the past. For example, the Qur'an says that Ibrahim was shown the internal setup of the heavens and the earth (al-An'am: 75); he was also shown the coming of the dead alive (al-Baqarah: 260). Prophet Musa was

AL-ISRA THE JOURNEY

THAT CHANGED
THE COURSE OF HISTORY

pp. 224-239

- 1 Muhammad ibn ibn 'Abdul-Malik ibn Hisham, *Sirat al-Nabi* (Beruit:

exposed to the glory of Allah at Tur (al-A'raf: 143).

- 13 Al-Bukhari, *al-Jami'* ...
- 14 Al-Tabarani, *al-Mu'ajm al-Awsat*; al-Bayhaqi, *Dala'il* ...
- 15 Al-Bukhari, *al-Jami'* ... , "Kitab as-Salat"; Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Musnad; ibn Jarir, *Jami' al-Bayan 'An Ta'wil A'yl al-Qur'an*, Abu Ya'la, *Musnad*.
- 16 Al-Bukhari, *al-Jami'* ...
- 17 al-Furqan: 7-11; al-'Ankabut: 53-55
- 18 ibid.
- 19 al-Isra': 16
- 20 al-Isra': 11
- 21 al-Isra': 12
- 22 al-Isra': 2-7
- 23 al-Isra': 13-14
- 24 al-Isra': 16-17; al-Ra'd: 40; Ibrahim: 13-14; al-Tur: 31.
- 25 al-Isra': 4 26 al-Isra': 7
- 27 al-Isra': 23-39
- 28 al-Isra': 19-21
- 29 al-Isra': 81
- 30 al-Isra': 82; al-'Ankabut: 48-51
- 31 Muhammad al-Husayn al-Baghawi, *Mishkat al-Masabih*, "Fada'il Sayyid al-Mursalin," narrated by Abu Hurayra, translated by Dr. James Robson (Lahore: Ashraf, 1975).
- 32 al-Zumar: 23; al-Isra': 68-69
- 33 al-'Ankabut: 48
- 34 This is the summary of al-An'am: 56-59. The same statement was made by prophets Noah and Shu'ayb. For example, see Hud: 28, 88.
- 35 Al-Bukhari, *al-Jami'* ...
- 36 Hud: 121-122
- 37 al-Isra': 76
- 38 al-Isra': 78-79
- 39 al-'Ankabut: 60
- 40 Hud: 6; al-'Ankabut: 60
- 41 al-Isra': 80-81

ON THE ROAD TO MADINAH The Hijrah Begins

pp. 240-251

- 1 Muhammad ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat al-Kubra* (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1985) vol 1, pp. 226-234; also, ibn 'Abdul-Barr, *ad-Durr fi Ikhtisar al-Maghazi was-Sira*.
- 2 Abu'l Husayn 'Asakiruddin Muslim ibn Hajjaj, *al-Jami' al-Sahih*, "Kitab al-Ruya," translated by 'Abdul-Hamid Siddiqui (Lahore: Sheikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1971) p. 1228.
- 3 Muhammad 'Abdul-Malik ibn Hisham, *Sirat al-Nabi* (Beruit: Dar al-Fiqr, 1981) vol 2, p. 78.
- 4 ibid., pp. 79-80.
- 5 Ibn 'Abdul-Barr, *ad Durr* ...
- 6 Ibn Hisham, *Sirat* ..., p. 84.
- 7 ibid., p. 86.
- 8 See chapter "The Many Faces ...", pages 152-154 of this book: The Prophet Saleh parallel is obvious. The Quraysh planned to kill Muhammad Rasul Allah exactly the way the Qur'an prophesied. For the incident itself see ibn Hisham, *Sirat* ... , pp. 93-94.
- 9 'Abdur-Rahman as-Suhayli, *al-Raudu'l Unuf* (Cairo: Dar al-Kutab al-Haditha, 1967) vol 4, p. 201
- 10 Isma'il ibn Kathir, *al-Sira al-Nabawiyya* (Cairo: Essa al-Babi, 1964) vol 2, p. 237; Abu Bakr al-Bayhaqi, *Dala'il al-Nubuwwa*, narrated by Muhammad ibn Sayrin.
- 11 Ibn Kathir, *al-Sira* ... p. 238
- 12 ibid., p. 236
- 13 ibid., p. 239-240
- 14 al-Anfal: 30
- 15 Ibn Kathir, *al-Sira* ... vol 2, p. 238; al-Tabarani, *al-Mu'ajm al-Awsat*, narrated by Asma' bint Abu Bakr.

- 16 Ibn Kathir, *al-Sira* ... p. 239.
- 17 *ibid.*, p. 236.
- 18 *ibid.*, p. 239-240. Also see, Muhammad al-Husayn al-Baghawi, *Mishkat al-Masabih*, translated by Dr. James Robson (Lahore: Ashraf, 1975) vol 2, p. 1295.
- Some hadith scholars do not give weight to the spider's web part of the episode because of the character problem with some of the narrators in the chain. This stress on credibility of the narrators is one of the strong points of the Muslim scholars but sometimes it could also become a liability. For instance, two points can be raised. Is it necessary that a person who lies should always lie? Second, look at the entire episode: the trackers have succeeded in mopping the Prophet's footsteps; they know for a fact he is on the mountain; there is no vegetation around to hide other than a few bushes here and there; the Mount of Thaur is not a complicated geological habitat; it does carry a cave, which is known to the Makkans; the pursuers come close to the mouth of the cave and they fail short of entering it. Why? I think this is an important question: what stops them from entering it? The only sensible answer is that the cobweb covers its mouth. The camouflage deceives them. Does it not prove the Qur'anic assertion that Allah is the best of the plotters? Ibn 'Abbas' version of the event is thus worth pondering. As reported in *Musnad Ahmad* (vol 1), which is reproduced by *Mishkat*, one of the pursuers is alleged to have said, "if he had entered the cave, the web would have been broken."
- 19 *ibid.*, p. 240; Hafiz Abu Bakr Ahmad ibn 'Ali al-Umawi, *Musnad abi-Bakr al-Siddique*.
- 20 Al-Bukhari, *al-Jami'* ... , hadith 245, vol 5.
- 21 *ibid.*
- 22 *ibid.*
- 23 As-Suhayli, *al-Raudu'l* ... p. 207
- 24 al-Qalam: 7-10; al-Dahr: 23-24. Allah took it upon himself to lead the nonbelievers to gradual destruction if the believers did their part of the job by not buckling under the pressure. See al-Qalam: 44-46.
- 25 al-Kafirun: 1-7
- 26 al-Anfal: 72; an-Nisa': 100
- 27 al-Hujurat: 10, 13
- 28 al-Baqarah: 28-29
- 29 al-Anbiyya': 22; al-Hujurat: 7
- 30 al-Hadid: 25
- 31 Al-Bukhari, *al-Jami'* ... , hadith 245, vol 5, narrated by Suraqa himself.
- 32 *ibid.*
- 33 *ibid.*
- 34 *ibid.*; also, al-Tabarani, *al-Mu'ajm* ... narrated by 'Asma' bint Abu Bakr.
- 35 *ibid.*; ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqat* ... , vol 2, p. 232. Also, al-Tabarani, *al-Mu'ajm* ...
- 36 *ibid.*; ibn Kathir, *al-Sira* ... , vol 2, p. 247. Also, al-Tabarani, *al-Mu'ajm* ...
- 37 Ibn Kathir, *al-Sira* ... , vol 2, p. 248. Also, Muhammad ibn 'Abdul-Baqi al-Zarqani, *Sharh al-Mawahib al-Laduniyya*, vol 1, p. 348; ibn 'Abdul-Barr, *al-Isti'ab*, vol 2, p. 120.

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