

# A Muslim's Journey to Salvation

*The effects of sin have so corrupted men's hearts that, in spite of awareness of sin, men enjoy it freely and indulge in it. It was this fundamental problem and the search for freedom from sin's bondage that confronted this Muslim many years ago in his epic journey toward salvation.*

by Sultan Muhammad Paul

**M**y native land is Afghanistan. My late father was a resident of the capital of Logar, which is situated about fifty miles south of the city of Kabul. My father, Payssna Khan, held the rank of colonel in the Afghan army with the tide of "Bahadur Khan". He was known throughout the country as "Colonel Bahadur Khan". My father had two wives. The first was from among his near relatives. She bore him three daughters but no sons. Therefore, lest the family should die out, he married the daughter of Sayyid Mahmud Aqa, who was a member of one of the noblest and most famous families of Afghanistan. My younger brother, Taj Muhammad Khan, and I were the fruit of this marriage.

Shortly after the late Amir, Abdur Rahams Khan, came from Russia to the throne of Kabal, he captured six of the notable pillars of the country and sent them away to some unknown destination. Later these people were put to death. Among these six was my father. Then a second calamity befell us. For political reasons my two maternal uncles were captured, sent to the state prison in Kabul, and later banished to India. Shortly afterwards, my third uncle together with his mother and servants came to India by the permission of the Amir, while the rest of my nearest relatives remained in Kabul.

On coming to India they settled in Hasan Abdal. Because of further political difficulties our whole family left Kabul and came to Hasan Abdal. After a few months my mother passed away. Eventually, after a reconciliation between my family and the late Amir, Abdur-Rahman Khan, all my family except my three uncles and myself returned to our native land.

Later I went to Delhi and entered the Madrasa-i-Fatehpuri to perfect myself in the study of Arabic. At that time the head mawlavi of the school was Mawlana Abdul Jalil, a pure Pathan of the District of Naushera; and the second mawlavi was Pateh Muhammad Khan of Qandahar. By the special kindness of these two gentlemen I soon completed my study of logic and turned to that of the traditions and commentaries. During the day I studied with my classmates. In the evenings I received a special instruction from Abdul Jalil. Thus, by the grace of God, I mastered these subjects also.

## First Encounter with Christians

One day, when I was returning with some of my friends from a walk to the Chandni Chowk, we saw a large crowd gathered at a short distance from our school. Arriving at the scene, we noticed that an argument concerning the doctrine of the Trinity was going on between a Christian preacher and one of the students of our school. The former was finding support for the doctrine in the following verse from the Qur'an: "And we are nearer to him than his jugular vein." (Qur'an 50:16)<sup>1</sup>

He was saying that here *nahnu*, the first person plural, is used, and that if the unity of God were absolute, the first person singular, *ana*, would have been used. Since the student was giving an answer that was not to the point, my friends urged me to answer the argument of the preacher. Accordingly, I stepped forward and said that the first person plural of the pronoun is used according to Arabic idiomatic usage as an honorific and not as an indication of plurality.

This was the first opportunity I

had to meet a Christian in argument. On that very day there was born in me an indescribable eagerness to argue with Christians, an eagerness derived from a deeply rooted fervor and concern for things sacred. Consequently, as far as lay within my power, I began to collect the notable books in refutation of Christianity. I made a careful study of many books, and on appointed days I began to go to the Fountain and carry on discussions with Christians.

One day the English clergyman, who used to come with the preachers, gave me his visiting card and invited me to his house. He was kind enough to say that I might bring my friends with me. Accordingly, in company with two or three friends, I went to his residence. The clergyman was very friendly and courteous. While we drank our tea, we began an interesting discussion on matters of religion. He turned to me and asked: "Do you read the Bible?" "Why should I read the Bible?" I said, "Who would read such an altered book which you people change every year?" At my reply a pitying look appeared on the face of the clergyman, and he said with a faint smile: "Do you consider that all we Christians are dishonest? Do you think we fear God so little that we should keep deceiving the world by making changes in the Holy Scriptures? When Muslims say that Christians keep altering the text of the *Tawrat* and the *Injil* (the Torah and the Gospel), they suggest that all Christians are dishonest and that they are deceivers of the people. Now this is a serious and unwarranted indictment. Christians believe in the Bible as the Word of God as Muslims do in the Qur'an. Thus, if no Muslim can change the text of the Qur'an, how is it

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that a Christian can change the text of the Book of the all wise God—the Holy Bible? If a mischievous Muslim were to be so foolish as to change the text of any verse of the Qur'an, would not all Muslims consider him outside the pale of Islam and publish the facts about him? In the same way, if some mischievous Christian were to change the text of any verse of Scripture, would not all other true Christians consider him outside the pale of their religion and make public, the facts about him? Of course they would! From this you will see that the contention of Muslims that the text of God's Word has been altered is absolutely without foundation and futile. I believe that this contention is held by Muslims who are generally quite ignorant of the Bible and of the faith and doctrines of Christians."

Then the clergyman gave me two Bibles, one in Persian and the other in Arabic and urged me to read them. We thanked him and departed. To the objection of the clergyman, who gave me the Bibles, I paid no attention. My own object in reading the Bible was to pick flaws in it, to prove from it the truth of Islam, and to silence Christians in argument. I did not even read through the Bible from beginning to end, but only those passages which Muslim controversialists quote in their writings. In short, as long as I remained in Delhi, I made it my business to carry on controversies with Christians.

### Further Studies

At this time I made up my mind to go to Bombay. There I had the good fortune to meet Mawlavi Hidayat Ullah, who was highly respected in that region as a man of authority and great learning. His home was in Kabul, and he was well acquainted with my family. As soon as we came to know each other in Bombay, he gladly promised to give me instruction. He thought that my regular course of studies was nearly complete and advised me to give more attention to the study of literature. He also gave me permission

to use his splendid library. I therefore began this study under his guidance. As the Mawlavi had spent most of his life in Constantinople, Egypt, and Arabia, he truly was an expert in the subject. The fact that he gave me instruction in Persian, which was the mother tongue of us both, made all work much easier.

At this time another fine scholar, an expert in logic and philosophy, came from Egypt and was appointed to a professorship in the Madrasa-i-Zakariyya. This was Mawlavi Abdul Ahad, who also belonged to Jalalabad District of Afghanistan. When I heard of his fame, I entered the Madrasa-i-Zakariyya and began a study of the final books on logic and philosophy. The Mawlavi treated me as a son and gave me a room next to his own so that I might be able to call on him for help at any time.

### Controversies with Christians

One day during the course of a walk some of us students from our school arrived at the Dhobi Talab. There we found some Christian preachers speaking to the people. Immediately my old enmity was aroused as I recalled my previous experience in Delhi. I was on the point of advancing towards the preachers when a fellow student restrained me, saying: "Mawlavi Sahib, never mind these people. It is a waste of time to argue with them. These poor fellows neither know how to carry on a discussion, nor are they familiar with the rules of debate. They are paid to do this work and are fulfilling their duty, so there is absolutely no use in arguing with them." "I know all about these people," I replied. "They may not know the art and rules of debate, but they certainly know how to lead people astray. It is the duty of every true Muslim to rescue his thoughtless Muslim brethren from their plotting and deception." I stepped forward and began raising a host of objections to what they had said. They countered with a flurry of objections to my objections.

The discussion was finally cut short

for lack of time. News of our encounter soon spread among the students of the school. They, too, were fired with zeal for engaging in controversy. We went regularly twice a week to meet the Christians in debate. Eventually two C.M.S. missionaries invited us to their home through Mr. Joseph Bihari Lal, their head catechist. While we were there, they suggested to us that the Dhobi Talab was too far for us to reach conveniently, and offered, if we really wanted to find out the truth about Christianity, to open a reading room near our school, where we might carry on our investigation once a week to our hearts' content. I gratefully accepted this offer. When they opened the reading room, we met them there according to a fixed schedule.

When I perceived that the students in the school and my other friends knew nothing of the Christian religion and were inexperienced in debate, I rented another house on the advice of Mawlavi Abbas Khan Sahib. There we formed a society called "Nadwatul Mutakallimin". The aim of this society was to prepare controversialists against all non-Islamic religions, with special reference to Christianity.

When my instructor saw that I was always involved in controversy and that I had no other interest in life, he came into my room one day after evening prayers. Just at that time I was reading the *Injil* (Gospel). He asked me what I was reading. I replied that it was the *Injil*. He responded angrily: "I fear lest you become a Christian." I was very much provoked at his reply and, though I did not wish to seem disrespectful, I could not help saying: "Why should I become a Christian? Does the mere reading of the *Injil* make one a Christian? I am reading it in order to destroy Christianity root and branch, not that I myself may become a Christian. You should encourage me in this matter instead of finding fault with me." He replied: "I said this because I have heard that he who reads the *Injil* becomes a

Christian. Have you not heard what a certain poet has said: "When he reads the *Injil*, the heart of the faithful turns away from Islam'?" "This information is inaccurate," I replied. After giving me further counsel, the Mawlavi returned to his own room.

### Journey to Arabia

This interesting religious conflict went on for some years, when suddenly I became possessed of the desire to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. Immediately I made the necessary arrangements, boarded the steamship, Shah-i-Nur, for Jeddah, and thence went to Mecca. From Mecca I carried on a correspondence with the late Mawlavi Hassamud Din, editor of the *Kashful Haqaiq*. On the day of pilgrimage I put on the pilgrim dress and proceeded to Arafat. On that day I saw a wonderful sight: the rich and the poor, the high and the low, all clad in the same white garment. It looked as if all the dead, clad in their shrouds, had emerged from their graves to render their accounts. The sight brought tears to my eyes. But at the same time the thought struck me: "If Islam is not the true religion, what will my condition be on the Day of Resurrection?" Then and there I prayed to God: "O God, show me the true religion and Thy true way. If Islam is the true religion, keep me steadfast in it, and grant me grace to silence the opponents of Islam. If Christianity is the true religion, then reveal its truth to me. Amen."

After a brief visit to Medina I returned to Bombay. During my absence our society the "Nadwatul Mutakallimin" had disbanded. Immediately upon my return I organized another in its place. I myself became president of this society, and Abdur Rauf was its secretary. At his house our organization held its meetings. One of our rules was that once a week a non-Muslim be invited to address us and that one of our members should answer the arguments of our guest. Munshi Mansur Masih

used to come regularly to speak for the Christians. Others came to speak on behalf of the Arya Samaj.

One day Munshi Mansur Masih addressed us very convincingly that there is no salvation in Islam. The members of our society asked me to answer him. To the best of my ability I tried to prove that there is perfect and certain salvation in Islam. The audience appreciated my address. Yet I knew very well that my own argument left me unconvinced in my innermost being. In fact, as I spoke, I was compelled to admit the weakness of my position. Though I was making much more noise than my antagonist, his voice was thundering in my soul with an indescribable power!

It was nearly 11 PM when this discussion ended. I returned home and sat down to think carefully of what Munshi Mansur Masih had said. The more I thought, the more evident it became to me that salvation is the vital breath of religion and its necessary foundation. Without it a religion is not a religion at all.

Furthermore, I considered that all men agree that man, as his name indicates, is a bundle of forgetfulness, disobedience, and transgression. His life never remains so pure as to be absolutely free from the stain of sin. Sin has become man's second nature. It is a true saying that "to err is human". The question is how can one escape accountability and punishment? How is one to be saved? What does Islam have to say about it? What is the message of Christianity? It is my duty to investigate this important matter honestly and without prejudice. Should I find that salvation is certainly to be had through Islam, then I should thank God. How bright my eyes would be and how glad my heart! Otherwise I shall seek that religion which presents a satisfying plan of salvation.

When I came to this decision. I fall on my knees in prayer before God and wept bitterly, covenanting that there-

after I should not read the Bible as I had been reading it. I would read it so that I, a miserable sinner, might discover in it the way of salvation.

### My Quest for Salvation

Accordingly, from that day onward I changed my attitude and, as a genuine seeker after truth, began reading and comparing the Bible with the Qur'an. For my further peace of mind I borrowed a copy of the Avesta from a Parsi friend and bought a copy of the Satyarth Prakash. Then I began to compare all these books. After reading the Avesta carefully and talking with Parsi scholars, I became still more dejected regarding the way of salvation, for there is no reasonable method of salvation set forth in this religion.

I turned next to the study of the Satyarth Prakash written by Swami Dayanand Sarasvati, which may be considered to be the most authoritative work in setting forth the doctrines of the Arya Samaj. I read it with the hope that I might find in it that for which I was searching. But instead, I found strange doctrines which made my hair stand on end. I learned from it that God cannot forgive sins. I was amazed at this and concluded that it was absolutely useless for anyone to join the Arya Samaj in the hope of gaining salvation. According to the Arya Samaj God could not forgive a man's sins, whether committed before or after his becoming an Arya Samajist, and punishment is inescapable.

Furthermore I discovered that the Arya Samaj does not consider salvation to be eternal. It became clear to me that there is no salvation with the Arya Samaj and that, even if salvation were obtained, it would not be eternal. Consequently, since salvation is temporal, would not one continually fear that further happiness might be refused to him at any time? When I reached this point and saw that there was no salvation here for a sinner like myself, I discontinued my study of the Satyarth Prakash.

### Salvation in the Qur'an

The most weighty task that still confronted me was that of the examination of the Qur'an and the most reliable of the Traditions. Before beginning my search for the doctrine of salvation in these works, I raised my hands to God in prayer: "O God, Thou knowest that I am and was born a Muslim, and that generation after generation of my ancestors were born into this religion and have died in it in it. I, too, have received my education, and in it I have been brought up. Therefore, now, remove every obstacle that would prevent me from discovering Thy true way, and show me the way of Thy salvation that, when I leave this transitory world, I may not be displeasing to Thee. Amen."

What I now found out through the study of the Qur'an was only what I had known before: that attaining salvation is dependent upon doing good works. I found many verses which declare this doctrine, but shall note only two of them here:

But as for those who believe and do good works, for them are the Gardens of Retreat a welcome (in reward) for what they used to do. And as for those, who do evil, their retreat is the Fire. Whenever they desire to issue forth from thence, they are brought back thither. Unto them it is said: Taste the torments of the Fire which ye used to deny." (*Qur'an* 32:19, 20)

And whoso doeth good an atom's weight will see it then, And whoso doeth ill an atom's weight will see it then. (*Qur'an* 99:7, 8)

At first glance these verses are very beautiful and consoling, but in my mind they raised a question: "Is it possible for us to do only good and no evil? Does man possess such power?" When I considered this carefully, and at the same time reckoned with the faculties and passions of man, it became clear to me that it is impossible for man to remain sinless. Nor has he the power continually to do good and only good.

The moral philosophers of Arabia have claimed that there are four faculties in man which give rise to all his actions. Of these four, three powerful faculties are working against the spiritual interest of man. There is only one, the angelic faculty, which impales man towards God, or helps him to obey God's commands. But its effects are hidden from man's sight. On the other hand, there is the combined strength of the other three faculties, together with the fact that their effects are such that man is at once delighted and motivated by them. Therefore, as the mind of man sees only what is on the surface and cares only for the present, he pays more attention to worldly things and becomes careless of the things of the Spirit and of God. A distinguished Muslim has stated the matter thus:

I am entrapped in four things, the ascendancy of which is the cause of my misery and suffering. These four things are Satan, the world, lust, and greed. How may I be free from these when all of them are my enemies? Evil desires allure me and throw me into the dark abyss of sensuality and pleasure.

The three faculties gained mastery over the angelic faculty, and Adam did the thing which God had forbidden him to do. The result has been manifestly inherited by his descendants down to the present time. According to a tradition:

It is related from Abu Huraira that the Apostle of God said: "When God created Adam he stroked his back, and there fell from his back all the men whom He was creating from his descendants until the Day of Resurrection. And He placed before the eyes of each man of them a flash of light. Afterwards He brought them to Adam. Adam said: "O my Lord, who are these?" He replied: "They are thy descendants." And he saw a man amongst them whose flash of light between his eyes astonished him. He said: "O my Lord, who is this? He replied: "David." Then he said: "O my Lord, how long hast Thou fixed his life?" He replied: "Sixty years." Adam said: "My Lord increase it from my life by forty years." The

Apostle of God said: "When the life of Adam was completed except forty years, the angel of death came to him. And Adam said: "Are there not yet forty years of my life remaining?" He replied: "Didst thou not give them to thy son David?" Then Adam denied, and his descendants have denied, and Adam forgot and ate of the tree, and his descendants have forgotten, and Adam sinned and his descendants have sinned." (*Tirmidhi*)

From this tradition it is clear that all the children of Adam are assuredly sinners, because Adam's sin has entered into all. Accordingly, famous saints and religious leaders have confessed their sins. Thus Adam, the first of the prophets, and mother Eve say:

They said: "Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves. If Thou forgive us not and have not mercy on us, surely we are of the lost!" (*Qur'an* 7:23).

The Prophet Abraham likewise says:

Our Lord! Forgive me and my parents and believers on the day when the account is cast. (*Qur'an* 14:41)

The prophet of Islam himself makes this prayer:

O God, wash my iniquities with snow-water. (*Bukhari*)

Abu Bakr, the first Khalifah of the Prophet of Islam, says in his famous poem:

O God, how shall I be saved, for there is no goodness in me? I am overwhelmed with iniquities, but am wanting in goodness.

In addition to all these evidences the Qur'an itself holds that all men are sinners:

Lo! man is an ingrate unto his Lord And lo! he is a witness unto that. (*Qur'an* 100:6,7)

In this connection the following thoughts confronted me: the Prophet Jesus also is a man. The Qur'an refers to the sin of the other prophets. But why does the Qur'an record no sin of Jesus? As I found that the Qur'an recorded only the sinlessness of Jesus, I therefore turned to the Injil. Here I found the following verses:

Which of you convicts me of sin?  
(John 8:46)

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning. (Hebrews 4:15)

He committed no sin: no guile was found on his lips. (1 Peter 2:22)

You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. (1 John 3:5)

Thus there was solid evidence to prove that, with the exception of the Prophet Jesus, all mankind are sinful. Under these circumstances, who was I that I should claim to be able to gain salvation by good works, when many religious leaders and philosophers and saints had failed to run this impossible course?

Again I turned to the Qur'an to examine its teachings about the doctrine of salvation by works. I quote two verses only which make it clear that no human being, no matter what his status be, can escape perdition:

There is not one of you but shall approach it.<sup>2</sup> That is a fixed ordinance of thy Lord. Then we shall rescue those who kept from evil, and leave the evil-doers crouching there. (*Qur'an* 19:71,72)

No one but myself knows with what terror, dismay, and disappointment I read these words. I, a spiritually sick man, was reading the Qur'an as I would consult a physician, that it might offer me the remedy for my sinfulness. But, instead of giving me the remedy, it said to me: "Everyone of you will go to perdition, for this is the absolute duty of thy Lord,"

But my natural love and attachment for the faith of Islam forbade me to make haste in making my personal decision. I thought it fitting to seek a commentary on this verse in the Traditions, that I might see what the Prophet of Islam himself has to say on this mat-

ter. After a long search, I found the following tradition in the Mishkat:

Ibn Masud said that the Prophet of Islam said: "All people shall enter hell. Then they will come out of it according to their works. Those who will come out first will do so like a flash of lightning, the next like a gale of wind, then like a horse at full speed, afterwards like a swift rider, then like a man springing, and finally, like the walk of a man." (*Tirmidhi and Darimi*)

The meaning of the previous verse was now clear. It is inevitable that every person should once enter hell and then emerge according to his works. Though the meaning of the Qur'an was plain and was supported by the statement of the Prophet of Islam himself, and though, had I wished, I might have ended my search at this point, yet I thought it best to seek its interpretation in the Qur'an itself. Accordingly, after a long search I came upon this verse:

And if thy Lord had willed, He verily would have made mankind one nation, yet they cease not differing, save him on whom thy Lord hash mercy; and for that He did create them. And the Word of thy Lord hath been fulfilled: Verily I shall fill hell with the jinn and mankind together. (*Qur'an* 11:118, 119)

I was so stricken at reading this verse that I slowly closed the Qur'an and became absorbed in anxious thought. Even in sleep I found no rest, for my waking thoughts, taking form in the realm of dreams, made me uneasy. It was unspeakably hard for me to forsake the faith of my fathers; I should have been more willing to forsake life itself. For some time I kept trying to think of some method of evading the problem or some way of escape, so that I might not have to leave Islam. With this intent I began to search for help in the Traditions,

This was no easy matter, for the Traditions are contained in six thick volumes. Moreover, it is a most difficult task to apply the principles of the science of the Traditions to each Tradition.

Despite these difficulties I carried my work to completion with God's help.

### The Traditions

According to the Traditions there are three ways of salvation. First, there is absolutely no connection between works and salvation. The very worst sinner, who has spent his whole life in breaking God's laws, may enter paradise. The best kind of man, having spent his life in good deeds, may enter hell. The following Traditions speak for themselves:

Hazrat Anas relates that the Prophet of Islam was riding followed by Maadh. When the Prophet of Islam thrice repeated "Anyone who honestly believes and repeats 'There is but one God, and Muhammad is his prophet,' shall never be doomed to the fire of hell." Maadh said "O Prophet of God, shall I not proclaim these tidings?" The Prophet answered: "In that case they will believe in nothing else but this." (*Mishkat*)

On this subject there is a tradition handed down by Abu Dharr, the words of which force the conclusion that salvation by works is meaningless, for even the adulterer and thief obtain salvation by the mere repetition of the words of the Muslim creed. The tradition runs thus:

It is related from Abu Dharr that he said: "I came to the Prophet, and he had a white cloth over him and was sleeping. Later on I came to him after he had awakened. Then he said: Any servant of God who says 'There is no God but Allah,' and afterwards dies relying on that, will enter heaven." I said: "Although he commit adultery or steal?" He replied: "Although he has committed adultery and theft" I said: "Although he commit adultery and theft?" He replied: "Although he commit adultery and theft, and in spite of Abu Dharr. (*Muslim, Bukhari*)

I found another tradition, as comforting as a basket of sugar to a child, which promises that, whether a man does good or evil by means of the repetition of a few words he can obtain paradise. It is as follows:

It is related from Ubadah bin Samit that the Apostle of God said: "Whoever bears witness that there is no God but Allah alone, and that He has no partner, and that Muhammad is His servant and His Apostle, and that Jesus is the servant of God and His apostle and the son of His hand maid and His word which He cast into Mary and a spirit from Him, and that heaven and hell are true, God will take him into paradise, in spite of what his works may, have, been!" (Muslim, Bukhari)<sup>3</sup>

When I read these Traditions, the question came into my mind whether it is just, that one who spent his life in doing evil and never thought of good, should enter into paradise at death, while another who has spent his life in the fear of God, continence, and good works should be cast into hell at death.

Secondly, it is shown in the Traditions that salvation is dependent upon the mercy of God, so much so that the Prophet of Islam himself is a needy beggar of this mercy. Unless God have mercy upon him, the Prophet himself cannot obtain salvation through works. One tradition is as follows:

Abu Huraira reported that the Prophet of Islam said: "No one of you will enter Paradise through his good works." They said: "Not even you, O Apostle of God?" "Not even I" he replied, "unless God cover me with His grace and mercy. Therefore be strong and morning and evening, nay, every moment, try to do good." (Mishkat)

Compare also the following Tradition:

Jabir reported that the Prophet of Islam said: "No good works of yours can ever secure heaven for you, nor can they save you from hell not even me, without the grace of God."

From the above Traditions I gathered that no one can obtain salvation unless God's mercy rests on him. This comforted me a little, but at the same time I began to think: "If God is merciful, He is likewise just. If God should for-give by the exercise of His mercy alone. He would be evading the demands of His justice and righteousness. Such

an evasion of His justice would indicate a defect in the being of God. Certainly such an act would be unworthy of the glory of God."

The third thing that became clear to me from the Traditions was that even the Prophet of Islam cannot save anyone, not even his daughter Fatimah or his relations. Hence, the idea that the Prophet would intercede for the faithful, which I thought would surely prove correct, was proved wrong. One tradition runs thus:

Abu Huraira related that when the verse, "Cause thy near relatives to fear," was revealed to the Prophet of Islam: the Prophet arose and began to proclaim: "Oh people of the Quraysh, and you sons of Abdul Manaf, and you Abbas, son of Abdul Muttalib, and you, Safiyyah my aunt, I cannot save you from the punishment of the Day of Resurrection. Take care of yourself, O my daughter Fatimah; you may use my property, but I cannot save you from God. Take care of yourself." (Bukhari)

So, after an extended and penetrating study of the Traditions, there remained nothing more for further research. In sheer fear and desperation I closed the books of the Traditions also and thus prayed to God: "O God, my Creator and my Lord, who knowest the secrets of my heart better than I know them, Thou knowest how long I have been seeking Thy true religion, I have carried my investigation as far as I have been able. Now, therefore, open to me the door of Thy knowledge and Thy salvation. Grant that I may enter into the company of Thy people who are well-pleasing unto Thee so that, when I enter Thy glorious presence, I may be exulted and content. Amen."

### The Holy Injil

In this desperate and depressed state of mind I again began to read the Holy *Injil* with the idea of correcting any possible defects in my investigations. As I opened the Holy *Injil* this time, my eyes fell on these words:

Come to me, all who labor and are

heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28)

I cannot say how I happened to alight upon this passage in the Gospel. I did not intentionally seek it. On the other hand, it was not a chance occurrence; it was the God-given answer to my hard labor and sincere investigation of the truth. For a sinner like me it was indeed the supreme proclamation of good news. This life-giving verse had a tremendous effect upon me. It brought me peace, comfort, and joy and immediately banished all uneasiness and uncertainty from my heart. The Messiah claims: "I will give you rest." He shows how salvation depends on Him. He does not merely point to a path which is above or beyond Him, but He says: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me."

Yet the question came to my mind: "Can one have confidence in this extraordinary claim of Christ?" I concluded that one could rest upon it, for in the first place Christ is accepted by Muslims as sinless, glorious in this world and the next, the Word of God, and the Spirit of God. These and other such descriptives applied to Jesus indicate perfection. Secondly, according to Christians He is perfect God and perfect man, free from all base passion and worldly ambitions. Hence it is impossible that Christ, who, according to both Muslims and Christians, possesses the highest qualities, would sin or do anything unworthy of Himself.

Then I began to ponder how Christ promises to give me salvation. To set my mind at rest, I began to search through the Holy *Injil* and came upon this verse:

Even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:28)

On reading this verse, I discovered how God offers salvation. Christ gave His life for us sinners. This is a marvelous

way to which the world can show no counterpart. Scores of men have founded religions in this world, but not one of them claimed that his death will serve for the forgiveness of sins. Christ alone not only made this claim but fulfilled it.

### The Atonement

At this thought I fell into a state of ecstasy. The picture of Christ and His love for men made an indelible impression on my heart. But while I was absorbed in this ecstasy, another question came to my mind: "What was the need of Christ's sacrifice, and atonement? Could He not have given salvation without giving His life?" After a little further thought I found the answer to this also: God is both merciful and just. If Christ had promised salvation without giving His life, the demands of mercy would certainly have been fulfilled. In order to satisfy the demands of justice also, Christ paid the ransom, which was His precious blood. In this way God has manifested His love for us.

In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins.

(I John 4:10)

In short, I continued my investigation in the New Testament, and read it several times from beginning to end. In the course of this reading I found hundreds of verses and scores of parables which proved to me beyond a shadow of a doubt that salvation (which is the very heart and purpose of religion) is available only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. I quote here only one passage:

Now we know that what ever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of

God through saith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. (Romans 3 : 19-25)

### The Night of Decision

Accordingly, after completing the investigations which I have here described, I came to the conclusion that I would become a Christian. Under these circumstances it appeared to me to be honorable to present the whole matter before the society, that they might consider it and that I might be free from any charge of pursuing my investigation in secret.

I went to the meeting as usual. It was again the turn of Munshi Mansur Masih to speak. Before he began to speak, I interrupted by stating that on this occasion I myself would speak against Islam. Then I proceeded to describe the results of my many years of research. The officers of the society were amazed at my words but took comfort in the hope that I would make the rebuttal to my own address. When I finished and took my seat, the vice-president said: "We hope that the president himself will make his own rebuttal to his unfavorable address." Again I arose and said: "Listen to me, my friends. What I have explained to you is not something which is superficial and fabricated. It is a matter which is certain and decisive, based on years of investigation. To be more specific, it began on that day when Munshi Mansur Masih addressed us on the subject of salvation. At that time I promised God that hence forth I would read the Holy Bible, not as I had read it previously but as a seeker after truth, so that, the way of truth and righteousness might be revealed to me. Accordingly, setting aside prejudice and philosophical quib-

bling, I compared with one another the Avesta, Satyarth Prakash, the Bible, and the Qur'an. I came to the conclusion that salvation is to be found in Christ alone. That is all I have to say. If there is any defect in my investigation, I shall be grateful if any of you gentlemen will point it out. On the other hand, if you yourselves wish me to make the rebuttal to these arguments, I tell you frankly that I cannot answer them. Nor is there hope of an answer from anyone else."

I left the meeting, as it was not prudent for me to remain there longer, Munshi Mansur Masih immediately followed me. When he overtook me, he threw his arms around my neck and began to shed tears of joy, saying in a trembling voice: "You must come home with me tonight. It is not safe for you to spend the night alone in your room." I replied that the officers of my organization were educated gentlemen, and that I need fear nothing from them. "Of course," I added, "there are others which one must fear. I shall come to your house before daybreak. If I am not there by that time, you may kindly come to my lodging."

After making this arrangement, we separated. I went to my room, bolted the door from the inside, and extinguished the light. I sat down, immersed in thought. I shall never forget the fearful fancies and the spiritual struggle, of that night. It was a night of decision, a night, of most desperate testing. At times the thought confronted me that, if I should become a Christian, I should lose my country, my inheritance, my rights, my family, my friends, in short everything. I was also bothered by the idea that becoming a Christian would mean entering a world where manners and all else would be different from that to which I had been accustomed. Sleep was impossible that night.

Finally I said to myself: "Sultan, consider that you are the child of an hour and the world is fleeting. When you die, your country and your inheritance

## A Muslim's Journey to Salvation

will be of no benefit to you; nor will your family and friends be of help to you. All these belong to this world alone. Nothing but your faith can go beyond the grave. Therefore, it is not wise to forsake eternal life and spiritual happiness for the sake of this transitory life." Then I bowed my knees before God and offered this prayer: "O omnipotent, eternal God, Searcher of hearts, I yield myself to Thee. Accept this offering and protect me from all the snares of the devil and from spiritual dangers. Remove from my heart the world and its desires. Grant me courage and strength that I may be able to confess Thine only Son Jesus Christ publicly before all men. Hear and accept my prayer for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen."

After I had finished this prayer, I felt some what drowsy and slept for a short time. When I awoke, I felt altogether happy and cheerful. No shadow of the former worry and uneasiness bothered me. The day was breaking. I quickly washed and left for the home of Munshi Mansur Masih. When I arrived there, I found he had been very much worried because I had not come. He knew that I was accustomed to tea at that hour and already prepared some for me. After I finished tea, we talked things over for a short time and then engaged in prayer. After prayer we went to the home of Padre Ledgeard.

The padre was surprised at our early arrival, Munshi Mansur Masih proceeded to tell him that I had come to be baptized. At first he thought we were not in earnest. But when he heard what had taken place on the proceeding night, he immediately rose and embracing me, said: "I knew that if you would read the Bible seriously you would surely become a Christian. Thank God that you have been convinced." He then promised to baptize me three days later and advised me during the interval to memorize the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. He further counselled me

not to stay among Muslims. Upon his invitation to stay either with himself or with Munshi Mansur Masih, I decided to accept the second alternative.

When Sunday came, the whole church was filled with Muslims. Seeing the danger, Mr. Ledgeard postponed my baptism. Finally, by the grace and mercy of God, I was baptized later in St. Paul's Church, Bombay. My baptism took place in the presence of the following persons: Rev. Canon Ledgeard, who baptized me, Munshi Mansur Masih, and two other gentlemen, whose names I cannot recall. Immediately after the ceremony I was sent to Kanpur, since it was too dangerous for me to remain in Bombay.

When I became a Christian, a wonderful change took place in my life. My speech, actions, and whole manner of life were so transformed that a year later, when I visited Bombay for a short time, my Muslim friends wondered at it. They marvelled at my mild manners, for they knew how easily I used to lose my temper.

Before I came a Christian, I recognized sin to be sin. But I did not realize, as I do now, how dangerous and destructive it is. Although I am still merely a weak man and a handful of dust, yet, when I have sinned, I cannot describe the shame and sorrow with which I am filled. Immediately I fall on my face and with tears I repent and beg for forgiveness. This attitude can be acquired only by the recognition of the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Sin cannot be removed by repentance alone. It must be cleansed by the sacred blood of our Savior. For this very reason the world, which makes light of sin, is daily approaching nearer to destruction.

Though Satan war against me with all the power at his disposal, I am not in the least disturbed, because I believe that Christ has crushed his head. Satan cannot harm Christ's faithful servants, nor can he prevail against them.

May God, the Creator of heaven and earth, the Searcher of hearts, turn the hearts of my Muslim brethren, as He turned mine, and give them vision, so that they too, remembering the Day of Judgement, may realize their deep spiritual need and come into the fold of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

I am, my dear Muslim brothers, your spiritual well-wisher: Sultan Muhammad Paul.

### End Notes

- 1 All English references from the Qur'an are taken from Mohammad Maraduke Pickthall, *The meaning of the glorious Koran*, New York, 1954.
- 2 Another translation reads: "There is not one of you who shall not pass though the confines of Hell..." (N.J. Dawood, *The Koran*, Penguin Books Ltd., Middlesex, 1959). Still another translation reads: "No one is there of you who shall not so down unto it..." (J. M. Rodwell, *The Koran*, Dent and Sons London, 1950).
- 3 The reader may kindly bear in mind that Christians do not deny the necessity for doing good works. Christians realize that they are to be always engaged in good works: However their salvation does not depend upon their works, for no person can do more than is required of him. Thus no one can do excess works which might serve as an atonement for his evil works. (See Luke 17:7-10.)

*[Sultan Muhammad Paul wrote this testimony more than half a century ago, prepared originally as his brief autobiography called "Why I became a Christian". This booklet appeared first in Urdu. The first English edition was produced in 1927. It has also appeared in Tamil and Malayalam. May this testimony prove to be a source of guidance and blessing from the Living God for all who ponder its contents and follow the quest toward salvation in Christ from sin.]*