

Why I became A Christian

Sultan Muhammed Paul

Qur'anic quotations from Pickthall's The Meaning of the Glorious Koran, New York, 1954
Scripture quotations taken from the New King James Version, Holy Bible ©1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

A REQUEST

Dear Reader:

I humbly ask that you please consider the following while reading what I have to share:

1. What are the spiritual demands upon mankind?
2. What religion can fulfil these spiritual demands?
3. What is the proper way to read the Holy Bible?

Kindly,

Sultan Muhammed Paul

INTRODUCTION

Modern man groans under the weight of false conceptions regarding family, communal, and national excellence. These false conceptions, which are easily discernible in all types of individuals and at all levels of society, issue from self-centredness which is called "the depravity of man" in religious language. This inner corruption is essentially rooted in the human heart and reveals itself in opposition to the welfare of the whole of society. Moreover, it manifests itself in rebellion against the Holy and Living God. The poisonous effects of sin have so corrupted men's hearts that, in spite of their awareness of its evil, they enjoy it and freely indulge in it. It was this fundamental problem of sin and the search for freedom from its guilt and bondage which confronted Sultan Muhammed Paul.

There may be those who choose to overlook the problem of sin and the way of salvation. They prefer to veil the condition of their hearts from themselves and others, though they well know that the hidden things of the heart are open to the inspection of God. For such persons, this story will have little relevance. Yet, there are others who are deeply concerned about sin and salvation in their own lives as well as the lives of their fellow men. For them, this booklet will help in the examination their own experiences in light of those of Sultan Muhammed Paul. May it prove to be a source of guidance and blessing from the Living God for all who ponder its contents.

EARLY LIFE AND STUDIES

My native land is Afghanistan. My father was a resident of the capital of Logar, situated about fifty miles south of the city of Kabul.

My father, Payanda Khan, held the rank of colonel in the Afghan army and had the title, "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. Lest the family should die out, he married the daughter of Sayyid Mahmud Aqa, a member of one of the most noble and illustrious families of Afghanistan. My younger brother, Taj Muhammed Khan, and I were born of this marriage. I was born in 1881.

Shortly after Abdur Rahman Khan, the Amir (ruler), arrived from Russia to the throne of Kabul, he captured six of the country's notables and deported them to some unknown destination. Later, they were put to death. Among these was my father. Then a second calamity befell my family. For political reasons, my two maternal uncles were seized, sent to the state prison in Kabul and later banished to India. Shortly afterwards, my third uncle came to India with his mother and servants with permission from the Amir, while the rest of my nearest relatives remained in Kabul. Upon arrival in India, they settled in Hasan Abdal.

Owing to further political difficulties, our whole family relocated to Hasan Abdal. After several months my mother passed away. Eventually, all my family, with the exception of my three uncles and myself, returned to our native land, after a reconciliation between my family and the Amir, Abdur Rahman Khan.

Later, I went to Delhi and entered the school, Madrasa-i-Fatehpuri, to perfect myself in the study of Arabic. At that time, the head mawlavi (instructor) was Mawlana Abdul Jalil, a pure Pathan of the District of Naushera (Pathans being the main ethnic group of Afghanistan). The second mawlavi was Fateh Muhammed Khan of Quandahar. 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 special instruction from Mawlana Abdul Jalil. Thus, by the grace of God, I mastered these subjects.

FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH CHRISTIANS

One day, when I was returning with some friends to the Chandni Chowk (the main thoroughfare of Delhi), we saw a large crowd gathered near 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 our fellow students. The former found support for the doctrine in the following verse of the Qur'an:

"And we are nearer to him than his jugular vein" (Sura Qaf 50:16).

He was saying that the first person plural (nahnu, "we") is used here and that if the unity of God were absolute, the first person singular, (ana, "I"), would have been used instead. 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, according to Arabic idiomatic expression, is used 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 fervour 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, to carry on discussions with the Christian preachers.

One day, an English clergyman, who used to come with the preachers, gave me his visiting card and invited me to his house. He was kind and said that I could bring my friends with me. Accordingly, I went to his residence in company with two or three friends. While we drank our tea, we began an interesting discussion on matters of religion. He turned to me and asked if I read the Bible. "Why should I read the Bible?" said I. "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 all Christians to be dishonest? Do you think we fear God so little that we would continue to deceive the world by changing 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 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 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 publicise the facts about him? Of course they would! From this, you can see that the Muslims' contention 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."

The clergyman then gave me two Bibles, one in Persian and the other in Arabic, and urged me to read them. We thanked him and departed. I paid no attention to the plan which this man had suggested. My object in reading the Bible was to find 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. As long as I remained in Delhi, I made it my business to carry on controversy with Christians.

FURTHER STUDIES

In time, I decided 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 felt 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. Thus, I began my study under his guidance. This mawlavi had spent most of his life in Istanbul (Constantinople), Egypt, and Arabia, and was a literary genius. He taught in Persian, the mother tongue of us both, and this facilitated my course of instruction.

During this time, another fine scholar, an expert in logic and philosophy, came from Egypt and was appointed as professor in the Madrasa-i-Zakariyya. This was Mawlavi Abdul Ahad of Jalalabad District in Afghanistan. When I learned of his eminence, I entered the Madrasa-i-Zakariyya and began a study of the advanced books on logic and philosophy. This mawlavi treated me as a son and gave me a room next to his own, so that I could call on him for help at any time.

FURTHER CONTROVERSIES WITH CHRISTIANS

One day during the course of a walk, some of my fellow students and I arrived at the Dhobi Talab (a district in Bombay). 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 ready to advance towards the preachers when a friend restrained me, saying: "Malawi 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 opposition 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 to engage 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 said that the Dhobi Talab was too far for us to reach easily, so they offered to open a reading room near our school, where we could carry on our investigations once a week to our hearts' content, if we really wanted to discover the truth about Christianity. I gratefully accepted this offer. When the reading room was opened, 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" with the aim of preparing controversialists against all non-Islamic religions, with special reference to Christianity.

When my instructor noticed 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. He asked me what I was reading. I told him and he responded angrily, "I fear lest you become a Christian." I was very much provoked at his reply and, although 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. 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 one turns away from Islam'?" "This information is inaccurate," I replied. After giving me further counsel, the mawlavi returned to his room.

JOURNEY TO ARABIA

This interesting religious conflict went on for some years, when suddenly I became possessed with the desire to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. Immediately, I made the necessary arrangements, boarded the steamship, "Shah-i-Nur", enroute to Jeddah, and then went to Mecca. From Mecca, I corresponded with Mawlavi Hassamud Din, editor of the "Kashful Haqaiq". On the day of pilgrimage, I donned my pilgrim attire and proceeded to Mt. Arafat. On that day, I saw a wonderful sight: the rich and poor, the high and low, all dressed 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 a 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 your 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, the "Nadwatul Mutakallimin" had disbanded. Immediately upon my return, I organised another society in its place. I myself became president of this society, and Abdur Rauf was its secretary. At his house, near Grant Road, our organisation held its meetings. It was our custom each week to invite a non-Muslim to address us, and one of our members was to answer the argument 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 (a Hindu theistic association).

A VITAL ISSUE

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, in my innermost being, I knew very well that my answer left me unconvinced. In fact, as I spoke, I was compelled to admit the weakness of my position. Though I had made much more noise than my antagonist, his voice was thundering in my soul with an indescribable power.

It was nearly 11 p.m. when this discussion ended. I returned home and sat down to think carefully about 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. Furthermore, I recognised that man 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 essential question is: how can one escape accountability and punishment? How is one to be saved? It became my duty to investigate this matter honestly and without prejudice. If I found that salvation was certainly to be had through Islam, then I would thank God. How bright my eyes would be and how glad my heart! But if Islam provided no such assurance, then I would be compelled to seek that religion which presents a satisfying plan of salvation. When I came to this decision, I fell on my knees in prayer before God and wept bitterly, covenanting that thereafter I would 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.

QUEST FOR SALVATION

From that day onward, I changed my attitude and, as a genuine seeker of truth, began reading and comparing the Bible with the Qur'an. For my further peace of mind, I borrowed a copy of the Avesta (the Zoroastrian book of sacred writings) 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 the most authoritative work 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. Hence, punishment is inescapable.

Furthermore, I discovered that the Arya Samaj do 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 by one way or another, it would not be eternal. Consequently, since salvation is temporal, would not one continually fear that further happiness might be refused 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.

The most weighty task confronting me was that of examining 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, You know that I am and was born a Muslim, and that for generations my ancestors were born Muslims and have died in this religion. In it, I too have been raised and have received my education. Therefore, remove every obstacle that would prevent me from discovering Your true way, and show me the path of Your salvation, so that when I leave this transitory world, I may not be displeasing to You. Amen."

What I found out through studying the Qur'an was what I had known before: attaining salvation is dependent upon doing good works. I found many verses which declare this doctrine, but shall quote 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 (Sura al-Sajda 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 (Sura al-Bayyina 99:7,8).

At first glance, these verses were 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. He has no power to continually do good and only good.

The moral philosophers of Arabia claimed that there are four faculties in man which give rise to all his actions. Of these four, three powerful ones work against his spiritual interest. There is only one, the angelic faculty, which impels man towards God, helping 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, the effects of which delight and motivate man at once. Therefore, the mind of man sees only what is on the surface; he cares only for the present,

pays more attention to worldly things, and becomes careless in the things of the Spirit and God. A distinguished Muslim described the matter thus:

"I am trapped 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."

According to the Arabic philosophers, the three faculties gained mastery over the angelic faculty, and Adam did that which God forbade 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 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 among them whose flash of light between his eyes astonished him. He said: 'O my Lord, how long have You 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 for forty years, the angel of death came to him. And Adam said: 'Are there not yet forty years of my life remaining?' He replied: 'Did you not give them to your son, David?' Then Adam denied this, 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, saints and religious leaders have confessed their sins. Thus Adam, the first of the prophets, and Eve say:

"They said: 'Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves. If You forgive us not and have not mercy on us, surely we are of the lost!'" (Sura al-A`raf 7:23).

Likewise, the Prophet Abraham says:

"Our Lord! Forgive me and my parents and believers on the day when the account is cast" (Sura Ibrahim 14:41).

The Prophet of Islam makes this prayer:

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

Abu Bakr, the first caliph 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 this evidence, the following verse from the Qur'an maintains that all men are sinners:

"Lo! man is an ingrate unto his Lord, and lo! he is a witness unto that" (Sura al-`Adiyat 100:6,7).

In this connection, the following thoughts confronted me: the Prophet Jesus was also a man. The Qur'an refers to the sins of the other prophets. But why does the Qur'an record no sin of Jesus? As I found that the Qur'an records 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 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

"For we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

"[He] committed no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth" (1 Peter 2:22).

"And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin" (1 John 3:5).

Thus, there is 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, 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 will quote two verses here which make it clear that no human being can escape condemnation, no matter what his status may be:

"There is not one of you but shall approach it. That is a fixed ordinance of thy Lord. Then we shall rescue those who kept from evil, and leave the evil-doers crouching there" (Sura Maryam 19:71,72).

Another translation reads: "There is not one of you who shall not pass through 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 go down unto it..." (J.M. Rodwell, The Koran, J.M. Dent and Sons, London, 1950).

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 if I were

consulting a physician, so that it might offer me the remedy for my sinfulness. But instead of giving me a solution, it said: "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 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 matter. After a long search, I found the following Tradition in the Mishkat (a famous book of Sunni Traditions):

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 everyone will enter hell and then emerge according to his works. The meaning of the Qur'an was plain and was supported by the statement of the Prophet of Islam himself. I wished that I could have ended my search at this point, but thought it best to seek an interpretation in the Qur'an itself. Thus, 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 hath mercy; and for that He did create them. And the Word of the Lord hath been fulfilled: Verily I shall fill hell with the jinn and mankind together" (Sura Hud 11:118,119).

I was so stricken after 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 would 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 would not need 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. But despite these difficulties, I carried my work to completion, with the help of God.

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 breaking God's laws, may enter paradise. Also, 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 repeated thrice, "Anyone who honestly believes and repeats: 'There is but one God, and Muhammed 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, he can obtain paradise by means of the repetition of a few words. It reads 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 Muhammed is His servant and His Apostle, and that Jesus is the servant of God and His apostle and the son of His handmaid 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).

The reader should kindly bear in mind that Christians do not deny the necessity of doing good works. Christians realise 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).

When I read these Traditions, the question came into my mind whether it is just that one who spent his whole life doing evil and never thought of good should enter paradise at death, while another who has spent his life in the fear of God, self-restraint, 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 himself is a needy beggar of this mercy. Unless God has mercy upon him, the Prophet himself cannot obtain salvation through works. One Tradition in the Mishkat reads 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."

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 these Traditions, I understood 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 forgive 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 be correct, proved to be 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 terror and desperation, I closed the books of the Traditions and prayed to God:

"O God, my Creator and my Lord, You know the secrets of my heart better than I know them. You know how long I have been seeking Your true religion. I have carried my investigation as far as I have been able. Now, therefore, open to me the door of Your knowledge and Your salvation. Grant that I may enter into the company of Your people who are well-pleasing unto You, so that I may be exalted and content, when I enter Your glorious presence. Amen."

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

I cannot say how I happened to come across this passage in the Gospel according to Matthew. 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 labour and sincere investigation. 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 upon Him. He does not merely point to a path which is above or beyond Him, but says: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

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 descriptions, which are applied to Jesus, indicate perfection. Secondly, according to Christians, he is perfect God and perfect man, free from all base passion and worldly ambitions. Thus, it is impossible that Christ, who, according to both Muslims and Christians possesses the highest qualities, would sin or do anything unworthy of Himself.

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

"...just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).

Upon reading this verse, I discovered how God offers salvation. Christ gave His life for us sinners. This is a marvellous way, to which the world can show no counterpart. Scores of men have founded religions in this world, but none of them has claimed that his death will serve for the forgiveness of sins. Christ alone not only made this claim, but also fulfilled it.

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 into my mind: What was the need of Christ's sacrifice and atonement? Could He not have given salvation without giving His life? After some 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. But in order to satisfy the demands of justice also, Christ paid the ransom - 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 propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

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

"Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God which is through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in his forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed...." (Romans 3:19-25).

DECISION AND CONFESSION

After completing the investigations which I have described, I came to the conclusion that I would become a Christian. Under these circumstances, it appeared to me to be honourable 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 investigations in secret.

I went to the meeting as usual. It was again the turn of Munshi Mansur Masih to speak. Before he began, I interrupted by stating that on this occasion I myself would speak against Islam. I then 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 unfavourable address." Again I rose 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 henceforth 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 quibbling, I compared the Avesta, Satyarth Prakash, the Bible, and the Qur'an. I came to the conclusion that salvation is to be found in Christ only. That is all I have to say. If there is any defect in my investigation, I would be grateful if any of you gentlemen would 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 caught up with me, he embraced me 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 organisation were educated gentlemen, and that I need fear nothing from them. "Of course," I added, "there are others whom 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 will never forget the fearful fancies and 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 would 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 inheritance 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." I then bowed my knees before God and offered this prayer:

"O, omnipotent, eternal God, Searcher of hearts, I yield myself to You. 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 Your only Son Jesus Christ publicly before all men. Hear and accept my prayer for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen."

After finishing this prayer, I felt somewhat 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 worried because I had not come. He knew that I was accustomed to tea at that hour and had already prepared some for me. After I finished my tea, we talked things over for a short time and then engaged in prayer. After prayer, we went to the home of Padre Ledgerd.

The padre was surprised at hour early arrival. Munshi Mansur Masih proceeded to tell him that I had come to be baptised. At first, he thought we were not in

earnest. But when he heard what had taken place on the preceding night, he immediately rose and embraced me, saying: "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 baptise me three days later and advised me to memorise the Ten Commandments, and Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer during the interval. 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 baptised on August 6, 1903, in St. Paul's Church, Bombay. My baptism took place in the presence of the following persons: Rev. Canon Ledgeard, who baptised me, Munshi Mansur Masih, and two other gentlemen, whose names I cannot now recall. Immediately after the ceremony, I was sent to Kanpur, since it was 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 mildness, for they knew how easily I used to lose my temper.

Before I became a Christian, I recognised sin to be sin, but I did not realise, as I do now, what a dangerous and destructive force it is. I am still merely a weak man and a handful of dust, and, when I sin, 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 Saviour. It is because of the very reason of sin that the world is daily approaching nearer and nearer to destruction.

Though Satan may 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 realise their deep spiritual need and come into the fold of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I am, my dear Muslim brothers,
Your spiritual well-wisher, Sultan Muhammed Paul
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