

Chapter 4: Ancestors of The Prophet

1. Ibrahim, The Champion of Monotheism

The object of giving an account of the life of Prophet Ibrahim is to make known the ancestors of the Holy Prophet of Islam for he was a descendant of Ismail who was the son of Ibrahim. And as these two venerable persons as well as many other noble forefathers of the Holy Prophet have a great share in the history of Arabia and Islam, it is appropriate that a brief account of their lives may be given here, because the events of the history of Islam have, like the rings of a chain, a perfect relationship with the events simultaneous with the dawn of Islam as well as those which are somewhat remote from it.

For example, the protection and support accorded to the Holy Prophet by Abdul Muttalib, the favours bestowed upon him and the hardships suffered for his sake by Abu Talib, the greatness of the family of Hashim and the origin of the enmity of Bani Umayyah (with the family of Hashim) are considered to be very important events on which the history of Islam is based. It is for this reason that a chapter of the history of Islam is allocated to the discussion of these events.

We come across some very prominent and outstanding incidents in the life of Prophet Ibrahim. It is not possible to forget his struggles to uphold the standard of monotheism and to uproot the worship of idols and men. Similarly his significant and elegant debates with star-worshippers, which have been quoted by the Holy Qur'an with the object of education and guidance of the people, are the most sublime instruction in monotheism for the seekers of truth.

Why Worship of Creatures Came Into Existence?

The factors which occasioned worship of created things by man were no other than his ignorance coupled with the absolute commandment of nature (which, as a general rule, believes in a cause for every phenomenon). On the one hand man, being controlled by nature, was obliged to take refuge in some locality, to consider a subduing and powerful authority effective in creating this unique system and to imagine the beautiful paintings in the shape of different phenomena to be the work of a skilful painter.

On the other hand, however, as he wanted to traverse this path without the guidance of the Prophets, who are the Divine guides and have been appointed to ensure the completion of the spiritual journey of man, he took refuge in inanimate objects as well as in animals and men before he could reach his real object (i.e. the One Allah) and find His trace by observing the signs of creation and seek refuge in Him.

He therefore, imagined that these were the objects which he had been seeking. In view of this the scholars have acknowledged, after studying the Heavenly Books and the manner of the invitation extended to the people by the Prophets and their debates with them, that the object of the Prophets was not to make people believe in the existence of the Creator of the Universe.

In fact their basic role in the society was to free the people from the clutches of polytheism and idol-worship. In other words they had come to tell the people, "O people! Allah in whose existence all of us believe is this and not that; He is One and not two. Don't give the creatures the place of Allah. Accept Allah as One. Don't accept any partner or peer for Him".

The sentence 'There is no god but Allah' bears a glowing testimony to what we have stated above. This was the starting point of the preaching of the Holy Prophet. The purport of this sentence is that there is no one fit to be worshipped except Allah and this necessitates that the existence of the Creator should evidently be an admitted fact, so that the people may be invited to accept His 'Unity' and 'Oneness'.

This sentence shows that in the eyes of the man of that time the first portion (i.e. the Universe has Allah) was not a matter of dispute. Besides this, the study of Qur'anic stories and the conversations of the Prophets with the people clarify this point further. [1](#)

[Birthplace of Prophet Ibrahim](#)

The Champion of 'Monotheism' was born in the environments which were permeated with the darkness of idol-worship and man-worship. Man expressed humility before the idols made with his own hands as well as before the stars. In these circumstances the thing which elevated the position of Ibrahim and crowned his efforts with success was his patience and fortitude.

The birth-place of the standard-bearer of monotheism was Babylon. The historians have considered it to be one of the seven wonders of the world and have recorded many narrations about the grandeur and magnificence of the civilisation of this territory. The famous Greek historian Herodote (484 – 425 B.C.) writes thus: "Babylon was constructed in the shape of a square. Each of its sides was 120 leagues long and its perimeter was 480 leagues". [2](#)

This statement, how much so ever exaggerated it may be, reveals an undeniable reality (when read along with other writings).

Of those attractive scenes and lofty palaces, however, nothing can be seen today except a mound of clay, between the Tigris and the Euphrates, which is covered by the silence of death. This silence is at

times broken by the orientalists through the excavations which they carry out in order to gain information about the civilisation of the Babylonians.

Prophet Ibrahim, the architect of monotheism, was born during the reign of Namrud, son of Kan'an. Although Namrud was an idol-worshipper, he also claimed to be a deity and, taking advantage of the ignorance of the credulous masses, imposed his beliefs on them. It may appear somewhat strange that a person should be an idol-worshipper and should also claim to be a deity.

However, the Holy Qur'an provides us an example of this belief. When Musa son of Imran shook Firaun's authority with his forceful logic and gave the lie to him in a public gathering the supporters of Firaun said to him:

Will you allow Musa and his people to commit evil in the land and to forsake you and your gods?
(Surah al--A'raf, 7 125).

It is well known that Firaun claimed to be a god and used to declare "I am your supreme lord". However, this verse shows that, notwithstanding his belief and claim, he was also an idol-worshipper.

The greatest defence which Namrud acquired was the procurement of the support of astrologers and fortune-tellers who were considered to be the sages of that age. It goes without saying that their humility before Namrud paved the way for the exploitation of the down-trodden and ignorant classes by him.

Moreover, some relatives of Ibrahim (for example Azar who made idols and was also conversant with astrology) were amongst the followers of Namrud. This in itself was a great obstacle for Ibrahim, for, besides having to struggle against the general beliefs, he had to face the opposition of his own Kith and Kin.

Namrud had plunged into the sea of superstitious beliefs. He had spread the carpet of feasting and drinking when the astrologers rang the first bell of danger and said "Your government will tumble down through a person who is the son of this soil". The latent fears of Namrud were awakened and he said. "Is he born yet, or not?" the astrologers replied that he was not yet born.

He then ordered the separation of women and men (during the night in which, according to the prediction and calculations of the astrologers, conception of his fell enemy was to take place). In spite of this, however, his executioners killed the male infants. The midwives were ordered to send reports about the particulars of new-born children to a special office.

The same night conception of Ibrahim took place. His mother became pregnant and, like the mother of Musa son of Imran, she kept the fact of her pregnancy secret till the very end. After delivery she resorted to a cave, situated near the town, in order to protect the life of her dear child. She left her son in a corner of the cave and visited it during day or night, as the circumstances would permit. With the passage of time Namrud acquired peace of mind as a result of this oppression, and believed that he had

slaughtered the enemy of his throne and government.

Ibrahim spent thirteen years of his life in the cave which had a narrow passage and then his mother brought him out. When he appeared amongst the people the supporters of Namrud felt that he was a stranger. Thereupon his mother said, "This is my son. He was born before the prediction made by the astrologers".³

When Ibrahim came out of the cave he strengthened his innate belief in monotheism by observing the earth and the sky, the shining of the stars and the verdure of the trees. He witnessed a strange and astonishing society. He saw a group of persons who behaved in a very stupid manner vis-a-vis the shining of the stars. He also saw some people whose level of intelligence was even lower than other. They made idols with their own hands and then worshipped them. The worst of all these things was that a man, taking undue advantage of the ignorance and foolishness of the people, claimed to be their god and declared himself to be the one who had given life to all the beings and foreordained all events.

Prophet Ibrahim was obliged to prepare himself to combat on these three different fronts. The Holy Qur'an has narrated the story of his campaigns in these three fronts.

Ibrahim's Campaign Against Idol Worship

The darkness of idol-worship had completely permeated throughout Babylon, the birth-place of Prophet Ibrahim. Numerous terrestrial and celestial gods had deprived different classes of the society of their reason and intellect. Some of these people considered the gods as possessing power themselves, whereas others treated them to be intermediaries for obtaining favours of the Almighty Allah.

Secret of Polytheism

The Arabs before the advent of Islam believed that every being and every phenomenon must have an independent cause and that the One Allah is not competent to create all of them. This was because of the fact that at that time science had not discovered the relationship which exists between different natural beings and phenomena and various events.

Consequently those people imagined all beings and various natural phenomena to be separate from and unconnected with one another. On this account they were obliged to assume an independent god for every phenomenon like rain and snow, earthquake and death, famine and dearth, peace and tranquillity, cruelty and blood shed etc. They had no idea of the fact that the entire Universe is a unity and all its parts are interconnected and everyone of them has a reciprocal effect on another.

The crude human intellect of those days had not yet realised the secret of worshipping the One Allah and was not aware that Allah who rules over the Universe is an Omnipotent and Omniscient Lord. He is the Creator who is free from every weakness and defect. His power, perfection, knowledge and wisdom are unlimited. He is above everything which may be assumed for Him.

There is no accomplishment which He does not possess. There is no possibility which He cannot create. He is the One Allah who is competent to create all beings and phenomena without the help of any person and without any supports. He can create other beings and phenomena in the same manner in which He has created the present ones. Hence, according to reason the existence of the mediation of an authority which may detract from the independence of the will of the peerless Allah is unacceptable.

The belief that the Universe has two creators, one of whom is the origin of good and light; and the other is the source of evil and darkness is also not acceptable. And the belief about there having been mediation by some persons like Maryam and 'Isa in the matter of the creation of the Universe, or the administration of the physical world having been entrusted to a human being is a manifestation of polytheism and exaggeration. A monotheist is one who, with due deference to the Prophets and the saints, preserves the position of The Creator of the Universe and does not attribute the work of one to the other.

The method employed by the Prophets for the teaching and guidance of the people is that of logic and reason, because they are concerned with the minds of the people. They desire to set up a government which should be established on the basis of faith, knowledge and justice and such a government cannot be established by means of violence, warfare and bloodshed.

We should, therefore, differentiate between the governments of the Prophets and the governments of Firouns and Narnruds. The object of the second group is security of their rule and government by all possible means, although their State may break down after their death.

On the other hand the divine people wish to set up a government which should have its way in private as well as in public and whether the ruler is strong or weak at any particular time or is alive or dead. Such an object cannot, of course, be achieved by use of force and pressure.

In the first instance Ibrahim campaigned against the faith of his kith and kin (viz. idol-worship), amongst whom Azar occupied the top-most position. He had not yet achieved complete success in this field when he had to fight at another sphere of operations. The level of thinking of this second group was somewhat higher and clearer than that of the first, for as opposed to the religion of the relatives of Ibrahim, these people had discarded the mean and worthless terrestrial beings and they worshipped the heavenly stars.

While campaigning against star-worship Ibrahim stated in simple words a number of philosophical and scientific truths which had not yet been conceived by the people of that age and even today his arguments command admiration of the scholars well-versed in the arts of logic and debate. Above all this, the Holy Qur'an has also quoted the arguments of Ibrahim and the author of the present book has the honour to reproduce them in these pages with brief explanations.

After coming out of the cave Ibrahim, in order to guide the people, fixed his eyes one night on the sky at the time of sunset and remained awake till sunset on the following day. During these twenty four hours he debated and conversed with three groups and disproved their beliefs with strong arguments.

The darkness of night approached and hid all signs of existence. The bright star 'Venus' appeared from a corner of the horizon. In order to win the hearts of the Venus-worshippers, Ibrahim concurred with them and affected to follow their line and said: "It is my nourisher" However, when the star set and disappeared in a corner, he said "I cannot accept a god which sets". With this cogent reasoning he rejected the belief of the Venus-worshippers and proved its falsity.

At the next stage his eyes fell on the luminous disc of the moon with its fascinating brilliance and beauty. With a view to win the hearts of the moon-worshippers he outwardly admitted its being the deity, but later tore this belief also to pieces with his forceful logic.

It so happened that the strong hand of Providence made the moon also sink below the horizon and its light and lustre disappeared from the face of the earth. Ibrahim, without injuring the sentiments of the moon-worshippers, said with truthful insight "If my real Lord does not guide me, I shall surely go astray, because this god sets like the stars and is in itself subject to a constant order and system shaped by someone else".

The darkness of the night came to an end and the sun appeared, tearing the bosom of the horizon, and began scattering its golden rays on the face of earth. The sun-worshippers turned their faces to their deity. In order to observe the rules of debate, Ibrahim also acknowledged its god-hood. However, the setting of the sun confirmed its being subservient to the general system of the Universe and Ibrahim explicitly repudiated its being fit for worship. (Vide Surah al-An'am, 6:75 - 79)

There is no doubt about the fact that, while staying in the cave, Ibrahim had, through an extraordinary divine favour, acquired from the fountain of the Invisible, that innate knowledge about monotheism, which is a speciality of the Prophets.

However, after perusal and study of these celestial bodies he gave that knowledge the shape of argument. Thus, besides showing the right path to the misguided people and providing them with a means of guidance, he has left behind a store of invaluable knowledge to be utilised by those who are in search of truth and reality.

Ibrahim's Logic Explained

Ibrahim was well aware that Allah rules over the Universe, but the question was whether that source of power consisted of these celestial bodies, or it was an Omnipotent Being, superior to them. After studying the conditions of these itinerant bodies he found that these bright and luminous beings are themselves subject to rising, setting, decline and disappearance in accordance with a particular system and they rotate on an unalterable path and this in itself proves that they are subservient to the will of someone else and a greater and stronger power controls them and makes them rotate in a specified orbit.

Let us clarify the point further: The Universe entirely consists of 'Possibilities' and 'Needs'. Various

creatures and natural phenomena are never independent of the Almighty. They need an Omniscient Allah during every second of day and night – the Allah who should not, at any moment, be oblivious of their needs.

Now as regards the celestial bodies they are present and useful at one time and absent and useless at another. Such beings do not possess the necessary competence to be the gods of other beings and to meet their needs and requirements.

This theory may be propounded in the shape of various theoretical and philosophical statements. For example we may say 'These celestial bodies are in motion and move on their respective axes. In case their movement is without any option and under compulsion there must be a stronger hand that controls them. And if their movement is in accordance with their own free will it will have to be seen as to what the object of this movement is.

If they are moving to achieve perfection and are like a seed which rises from the earth to grow into a tree and to bear fruit, this will necessarily mean that they need a kind, powerful, wise and independent being who should remove their short-comings and endow them with the quality of perfection.

But, if their movement and rotation tends towards weakness and deficiency and they are just like a person who is past his prime and has entered the wrong side of age, then their movement will be an inclination towards decline and destruction and will not at all accord with the position of the deity who should rule the world and all that it contains.

Method of Discussion and Debate Adopted by The Prophets

The history of the Prophets shows that they commenced their reforming programme by first inviting their relatives to the true path and later they extended the 'invitation' to others. This is just what the Prophet of Islam did immediately after his appointment to the prophetic mission. First of all he invited his own people to Islam and laid the foundation of his 'call' on their reformation, in compliance with the Divine commandment

Admonish your nearest kinsfolk (Surah al-Shu'ara, 26:214)

Ibrahim also adopted the same method and first undertook the reformation of his own kinsfold. Azar enjoyed a very high position amongst his relatives, because, besides being an educated man and an artist, he was an expert astrologer. In the court of Namrud his word was treated to be authoritative and his astrological conclusions were accepted by all the courtiers to be correct.

Ibrahim was aware that if he could win over Azar to his side he would have captured the strongest fortress of the idol-worshippers. He, therefore, advised him in the best possible manner not to worship inanimate things. For some reasons, however, Azar did not accept the message and advice of his nephew Ibrahim.

So far as we are concerned, however, the most important thing in this episode is the method of invitation and the manner of conversation of Ibrahim with Azar. Deep and careful study of the Qur'anic verses in which this conversation has been reproduced makes the method of argument and invitation adopted by the Prophets abundantly clear. Now let us see in which way Ibrahim invited Azar to the true path:

He said to his uncle: Father! how can you serve a worthless idol, a thing that can neither see nor hear?

Father, the truth has been revealed to me about many mysteries; therefore, follow me, that I may guide you along an even path.

Father, do not worship Satan; for he has rebelled against the Lord of Mercy.

Father, I fear that Allah's scourge will fall upon you and you will become one of Satan's minions.

(Surah Maryam, 19:44 – 47)

In reply to Ibrahim's invitation Azar said "Do you dare renounce my gods, Ibrahim? Desist from this folly or you shall be stoned to death. Begone from my house immediately"

Magnanimous Ibrahim bore this ill-speaking on the part of Azar with perfect calmness and replied "Peace be on you. I shall implore my Lord to forgive you".

Could there be a reply more appropriate and a conversation more mild and agreeable than these words of Ibrahim?

Was Azar The Father of Ibrahim?

The above quoted verses as well as 15th verse of Surah Tawbah and 14th verse of Surah al-Mumtahinah would give the impression that Azar was related to Ibrahim in the capacity of father and Ibrahim too, has addressed him as 'father'. However, the idol-worshipper Azar's being his father is not in harmony with the concensus of opinion of the Shi'ah scholars, who believe that the forefathers of the Holy Prophet of Islam as well as all other Prophets were pious people who believed in monotheism.

The distinguished Shi'ah scholar, Shaykh Mufid has, in his exquisite book,⁴ considered this proposition to be one on which all the Shi'ah scholars are unanimous and a large number of Sunni scholars have also concurred with them in holding this belief. The question, therefore, arises as to what is the real import of the apparent contents of the aforesaid verses and how this problem should be solved.

Many commentators of the Holy Qur'an assert that, although the word '**Ab**' is usually used in Arabic to mean 'father', this meaning is not exclusive and at times it has been used in the Arabic lexicon and in the Quranic terminology to mean 'uncle' as well. For example, in the following verse the word '**Ab**' stands for 'uncle'.

Were you present when death came to Ya'qub? He said to his children: 'What will you worship when I am gone' They replied: We will worship your Allah and the Allah of your forefathers (Aba) Ibrahim and Isma'il and Ishaq: He is the only Lord. To Him we have surrendered ourselves. (Surah Baqarah, 2: 132).

There is no doubt about the fact that Isma'il was the uncle of Ya'qub and not his father, because Ya'qub was the son of Ishaq who was the brother of Isma'il. However, in spite of this, the children of Ya'qub have mentioned him as father of Ya'qub i.e. they have called him '**Ab**' vis-a-vis Ya'qub.

As this word carries two meanings it is possible that in the verses related to Azar having been invited to the right path by Ibrahim it may mean 'uncle', and especially so in view of the consensus of opinion mentioned by Shaykh Mufid. And possibly Ibrahim called him 'father', because he had acted as his guardian for quite a long time and he (Ibrahim) looked upon him as if he were his father.

Azar in The Holy Qur'an

With a view to find out the verdict of the Quran about the relationship between Ibrahim and Azar we should like to invite the attention of the reader to the explanation of two verses:

1. As a consequence of the strenuous efforts made by the Holy Prophet, Arabia was illuminated with the light of Islam. Most of the people embraced this religion whole-heartedly and realized that polytheism and idol-worship would end in Hell and torture. Although they were happy to have come within the fold of the true faith, they felt grieved to recollect that their fathers and mothers were idol-worshippers.

Hearing of the verses which depict the plight of the polytheists on the Day of Judgment weighed heavily on them. To get rid of this mental torture they requested the Holy Prophet to pray to Allah for the forgiveness of their forefathers who had died as infidels, in the same manner in which Ibrahim had prayed for Azar.

The following verses were, however, revealed in reply to their request

It is not for the Prophet or the believers to beg forgiveness for idolaters, even though they be related to them, after it has become manifest that they have earned the punishment of Hell. Ibrahim prayed for his father only to fulfill a promise he had made him. But, when he realized that he was an enemy of Allah, he disowned him. Yet Ibrahim was a compassionate and tender-hearted man. (Surah Tawbah, 9:113 – 114)

It would appear more probable that the conversation of Ibrahim with Azar and his promising the latter to pray for his forgiveness, which ended in the severance of their mutual connections, and renouncement of each other took place, when Ibrahim was young i.e. at a time when he was still residing in Babylon and had not yet intended to go to Palestine, Egypt and the Hijaz. After studying this verse it may be concluded that, when Azar persisted in his infidelity and idol-worship, Ibrahim, while still young, severed

his connections with him and never thought of him thereafter.

2. During the last part of his life i.e. when he grew old, Ibrahim, after discharging a great responsibility (i.e. construction of the Ka'bah) and bringing his wife and child to the dry desert of Mecca, prayed, from the core of his heart, for a number of persons, including his parents, and sought acceptance of his supplication from Allah. At that time he prayed thus

'Forgive me, Lord, and forgive my parents and all the faithful (believers) on the Day of Reckoning.

(Surah Ibrahim, 14 41)

These verses clearly show that the ceremony of supplication took place after the completion of the construction of the Ka'bah when Ibrahim was passing through his old age. If the father for whom he has shown love and devotion in this verse and he prayed for him is the same Azar it would mean that Ibrahim did not remain dissociated from him throughout his life and at times also prayed for him, whereas the verse which was revealed in reply to the request of the descendants of the polytheists makes it clear that after some time, when he was still young, Ibrahim broke off all connections with Azar and kept aloof from him – and aloofness and renouncement means ceasing to be on speaking terms, lack of attention and abandoning supplications for each other's salvation.

When these two verses are read together, it becomes clear that the person whom Ibrahim came to hate in his young age and with whom he broke off all ties of interest and love was a person other than that whom he remembered till his old age and prayed for his forgiveness and salvation.[5](#)

Ibrahim The Idol-Breaker

The time of the festival approached and the neglectful people of Babylon left for the jungle to get rid of their fatigue and to reinforce their faculties and perform the ceremonies of the festival. Thus the city became empty of them. The antecedents of Ibrahim and his reproaches and criticisms had made them anxious.

They, therefore, insisted that Ibrahim should also go with them and partake in the ceremonies of the festival. However, their proposal, rather insistence, coincided with Ibrahim's illness. In reply to their suggestion, therefore, he said that he was ill and would not participate in the ceremonies of the festival.

Indeed, that was a day of joy for the one who was a monotheist, as well as for the polytheists. For the polytheists it meant the celebration of a very old festival and they had gone to the foot of the mountain and in green fields to carry out the ceremonies of the festival and to revive the custom of their forefathers.

And for the champion of the monotheism also it was the august day of the first unprecedented festival for which he had longed for quite some time, so that the city should be cleared of the opponents and he should break up the manifestations of infidelity and polytheism.

The last group of the people left the city, Ibrahim considered this time to be very opportune and, with a heart imbued with confidence and faith in Allah, he entered the idol temple. He saw from a distance the sculptured pieces of wood and the lifeless idols. He thought of the enormous food which the idol-worshippers used to bring to their temples as offerings to seek blessing, and went in search of it. He took a morsel of bread in his hand and pointing it to the idols said jeeringly, "Why don't you eat these all kinds of foodstuff?"

Evidently the artificial gods of the polytheists did not possess power to make the slightest movement, not to talk of their being able to eat anything. A deathlike silence prevailed over the spacious hall of the idol-temple, which was broken only by the heavy blows which Ibrahim was giving on the hands, feet and bodies of the idols. He broke all the idols, till a big mound of broken and shattered pieces of wood and metal was formed in the middle of the temple. However, he spared the biggest idol and placed the axe on its shoulder. This he did purposely.

He knew that on return from the jungle the polytheists would understand the actual position and would regard the apparent situation as artificial and unreal, because they would never believe that these blows had been given to the other idols by the big idol, which possessed no power at all to move or do anything, and in that event he (Ibrahim) would utilise the situation for his 'call' and say that when, according to their own admission, that idol did not possess the least power, how could it be possible that it should be the lord of the world?

The sun moved to the horizon and ceased to throw light on the world. At that time the people began returning to the city in groups. Time for performing the ceremonies of idol-worship arrived and a group of the idolaters entered the temple. The unexpected scene, which clearly showed the disgrace and humility of their gods, attracted the attention of all of them. There was deathlike silence in the atmosphere of the temple and everyone was impatient.

One of them, however, broke the silence and said 'Who has committed this mischief?' Condemnation of the idols by Ibrahim in the past and his open criticism of idol-worship convinced them that it was only he who had done all this. A tribunal was, therefore, set up under the supervision of Namrud and young Ibrahim and his mother were brought up for trial.

The mother was charged with the offence of concealing the birth of her child and not reporting it to the special office of government, so that he could eventually be executed. She gave this reply to the charge "I found that as a result of the final decision of the government of the time (i.e. killing the children) the human race in this country was being exterminated.

I did not inform the government office about my son, because I wanted to see how he progressed in the future. In the event of his proving to be the same person about whom the foretellers (priests) had predicted, there would have been a reason for me to inform the police so that they might desist from shedding the blood of other children. And if he does not happen to be that person, then I have saved a

young man of this country from death". The mother's argument fully satisfied the judges.

Now Ibrahim was cross-examined. He said "The state of affairs would show that the big idol has struck all these blows and if the idols possess power of speech you had better ask him". This vague reply, tainted with ridicule and contempt, was meant to serve another purpose; and that purpose was that Ibrahim was sure that those people would say in reply, "Ibrahim! You are well aware that these idols do not possess power of speech. They do not also have any will or intellect".

In that event Ibrahim could invite the attention of the tribunal to one basic point. By chance, the same thing happened which Ibrahim had anticipated. He spoke thus with reference to the statement of those people which testified the weakness, humility and helplessness of the idols "If they are in fact like that as you describe them, then why do you worship them and why do you pray to them to grant your requests?"

Ignorance, obstinacy and blind imitation ruled the hearts and intellects of the judges, and in the face of irrefutable reply of Ibrahim, they found no alternative but to give a judgement which conformed with the wishes of the government of the time.

They, therefore, decided that Ibrahim should be burnt alive. A large stack was set on fire and the champion of Divine monotheism was thrown into the blazing flames. However, Almighty Allah extended His hand of Kindness and blessing towards Ibrahim and kept him immune from harm. He (Allah) converted the artificial hell made by man into a green and pleasant garden.⁶ (Vide Surah al-Anbiya, 21:51 – 70).

Instructive Points of This Narrative

Although the Jews claim to be the forerunners of the Caravan of those who believe in monotheism, this story was not well-known amongst them and it does not find place in their present Torah. Amongst the Heavenly Books it is only the Holy Qur'an which has undertaken to narrate it. We, therefore, mention below some instructive points of this story which are in fact the very points which the Holy Quran wishes to bring home to the people by narrating the stories of various Prophets.

1. This story is a clear proof of the extraordinary valour and bravery of the friend of Allah (Ibrahim). His determination about breaking the idols and destroying the manifestations and means of polytheism was not a thing which could remain hidden from the people of Namrud because, by his reproaches and criticism, he had already made his extreme aversion and hatred for idol-worship quite manifest and he used to say openly and clearly:

"If you do not desist from your shameful practice I will take a decision about them". And on the day people went to the jungle he openly said: By the Lord' I will overthrow your idols as soon as you have turned your backs. (Surah Anbiya, 21:57)

Allamah Majlisi quotes thus from Imam Sadiq: 'The movement and campaign of one person against the

rows of the infidels, whose number exceeded a few thousands, is a living proof of the valour and perseverance of Ibrahim, who did not harbour any fear in his mind in the path of the exaltation of Allah's name and strengthening the base of the worship of One Allah ".7

2. While the smashing blows by Ibrahim were apparently an armed and hostile revolt, but, as is evident from his talk with the judges, this movement had actually a propagandistic aspect, because he considered the last means of awakening the wisdom and conscience of those people to be that he should break all the idols except the big one and place the axe on its shoulder so that they might make further investigations into the causes of this incident.

And as eventually they would consider the scene to be a mere mockery and would not at all believe that the blows had been struck by the big idol, he could utilise this thing for propagating his views and say: "According to your own admission this big idol does not possess the least power, so why do you worship it?"

This shows that from the very beginning the Prophets have used only logic and argument as their sharp weapons, which have always borne results. Or else what was the value of breaking a few idols as compared with the danger to life with which Ibrahim was confronted? It was necessary that this act should have carried a great service for his mission in its lap, so that it should have been admirable for him, from the point of view of reason, to sacrifice his life for it.

3. Ibrahim was aware that, as a consequence of this act, his life would be finished. As a rule, therefore, he should have become agitated or should have hidden himself somewhere or at least refrained from witticism and humour.

Nevertheless, however, he had complete control over his spirits and nerves. For example, when he entered the idol-temple he approached every idol and asked it mockingly to eat food. After becoming desperate he reduced the idol-temple to a heap or broken wood and treated all this as something quite ordinary, as if it were not to be followed by his own death or execution.

When he appeared before the tribunal he replied to their questioning, "Surely (some doer) has done it, the chief of them is this, therefore ask them, it they can speak.". Such witticism before the court could be expected only from a person who was prepared for all eventualities and did not feel any fear or awe in his heart.

Even more wonderful is the study of the attitude of mind of Ibrahim at the time when he was stationed on the catapult and knew it for certain that he would soon find himself amidst the flames of fire – the fire, for which fire-wood had been collected by the people of Babylon to perform a sacred religious rite, and whose flames were rising with such intensity that even a falcon dared not fly around or above it.

Just at that time the celestial angel (Archangel Jibreel) descended from the heavens, expressed his readiness to render him (Ibrahim) every assistance and said: "Tell me about your heart's desire". Ibrahim

replied to him: "I do have a desire. However, it cannot be made known to you but to my Lord only".⁸

This reply clearly manifests the nobility and spiritual greatness of Ibrahim.

In a big palace, situated a few miles away from the scene of the fire, Namrud waited anxiously and impatiently for vengeance being wreaked upon Ibrahim and wished to see how the flames of fire devoured him. The catapult was put into operation. With one jerk the body of the champion of Divine monotheism fell into the fire.

However, the penetrating will of the Lord of Ibrahim converted that artificial hell into a garden in a manner which surprised them all, so much so that Namrud turned involuntarily to Azar and said "Ibrahim's Lord holds him dear"⁹

In spite of all these incidents Ibrahim could not preach his faith with complete freedom. Eventually the government of the time decided, after holding consultations, to send him in exile. This opened a new chapter in his life and became the beginning of his journeys to Syria, Palestine, Egypt and the Hijaz.

A New Chapter in The Life of Ibrahim

The court of justice in Babylon banished Ibrahim from the country and he was forced to quit his birth place and to proceed to Egypt and Palestine. 'Amaliqa' who ruled those territories accorded him a warm reception and gave him many presents, one of them being a slave-girl named Hajar.

Ibrahim's wife Sarah had not borne any child till that time and the above-mentioned developments stimulated her sentiments for her honourable husband. She, therefore, suggested to Ibrahim to marry Hajar so that possibly she might be blessed with a son who should become a source of their joy and happiness. The marriage took place and after some time Hajar gave birth to a son who was named Isma'il. It was not long before Sarah too become pregnant; and bore a son who was given the name of Ishaq.¹⁰

After some time Ibrahim, as commanded by Allah, took Isma'il and his mother Hajar towards south (Makkah) and stationed them in an unknown valley. This valley was uninhabited and only the caravans which travelled from Syria to Yemen and vice versa pitched their tents there. For the remaining days of the year this place remained absolutely isolated and was only a burning desert like other parts of Arabia.

Residence at such a dreadful place was very trying for a woman who had spent her days in the territories of Amaliqa.

The scorching heat of the desert and its extremely hot winds presented the scene of death before her eyes. Ibrahim himself was also much concerned about these developments. While he was holding the bridle of his riding animal with the intention of saying good bye to his wife and child a flood of tears began to flow from his eyes and he said to Hajar: "O Hajar! All this has been done according to the

command of the Almighty and His command cannot be defied. Rely on Allah's blessings and rest assured that He will not humiliate us". Then he prayed to Allah in these words with perfect concentration:

Lord! Make this a land of peace and bestow plenty upon its people, those of them that believe In Allah and the Last Day. (Surah Baqarah, 2:126)

When he was descending the hill, he looked back and prayed to Allah to shower His blessings on them.

Although apparently this journey was very difficult and vexatious, but later it became evident that it carried momentous happenings in its lap, amongst them being the construction of the Ka'bah which provided a great base for the monotheists, flying the flag of the worship of One Allah in Arabia and laying the foundation of a great religious movement, which was to take shape in future, viz. the great movement which came into operation in this land through the last of the Prophets.

How The Fountain of Zamzam Came Into Existence

Ibrahim took the bridle of his riding animal and, with tears in his eyes, bade farewell to the land of Makkah as well as Hajar and his son. After a short time however, food and water available with the child and his mother was exhausted and the breast of Hajar also became dry. The condition of her son too began to deteriorate. A flood of tears flowed from the eyes of the banished mother and moistened her lap.

In utter confusion she got up on her feet and reached the Safa mountain. From there she saw the spectacle of a mirage near Marwa mountain and ran towards it. However, the bitterness of the deceptive landscape disappointed her very much. The lamentations and uneasiness of her dear child made her run more fanatically in all directions. Thus, she ran seven times between the mountains of Safa and Marwa to locate water, but eventually lost all hopes and returned to her son.

The child must have reached his last breath by that time and must have lost the capacity of weeping or crying any more. However, at that very moment the prayer of Ibrahim was granted. The tired and weary mother saw that limpid water had begun gushing out from beneath the feet of Isma'il. The mother who was looking towards the last breaths of her son and believed that he would pass away after a few moments felt extremely happy on seeing this water. Both the mother and the son drank their fill and the clouds of despair and hopelessness which had cast their shadow on their lives were driven away by the zephyr of Divine blessings. [11](#)

The appearance of this fountain, which is called "Zam Zam" since that day, made the birds of air fly over it and spread their broad wings like a cover on the heads of the afflicted mother and son. People of a tribe named "Jarham" who lived at a distance from this valley saw the birds going to and fro and came to the conclusion that water had become available in the vicinity. They sent two of their men to verify the position.

After a good deal of wandering those persons reached the centre of Divine blessing. When they drew near they saw a woman and a child sitting by the side of a pool of water. They returned immediately and reported the matter to the chiefs of their tribe. The members of that tribe soon pitched their tents around this blessed fountain and Hajar was thus relieved of the hardship and bitterness of loneliness which she had been suffering.

The growth and perfect sociability of Isma'il became the cause of his making a matrimonial alliance with the Jarham tribe and thus benefit from their support and society. Isma'il soon married a girl of that tribe. From their mother's side, therefore, his descendants are related to that tribe.

They Meet Again

After leaving his dear son and wife in the land of Makkah, under the command of Allah Almighty, Ibrahim thought at times of going there to see his son. During one of his journeys, which was perhaps his first journey, he reached Makkah and found that his son was not present in his house. By that time Isma'il had grown up to manhood and had married a girl of the Jarham tribe. Ibrahim asked Isma'il's wife, "Where is your husband?" She replied, "He is gone out for hunting". Then he asked her whether she had anything to eat. To this she replied in the negative.

Ibrahim was very much grieved to observe the rudeness and unkindness of his son's wife and said to her, "When Isma'il returns home convey my greetings to him and tell him to change the threshold of his house" He then returned to his destination.

When Isma'il returned he smelt the odour of his father and realised from his wife's account that the man who had visited his house was Ibrahim himself. He also understood from the message left by his father that he had desired him to divorce his present wife and choose another, because he did not consider his present wife to be a suitable partner of his life. [12](#)

It may perhaps be asked as to why, after having performed so long a journey, Ibrahim should not have waited till the return of his son from hunting and why he went back without seeing him. The historians explain that he returned hastily because he had made a promise to Sarah that he would not stay there longer and his early return was with a view to keep the promise.

After this journey he was also ordered by Allah Almighty to perform another journey to Makkah, to construct the Ka'bah there and to attract to that point the hearts of those who believe in monotheism.

The Holy Qur'an testified that in the last days of the life of Ibrahim, Makkah had grown into a city, because, having performed his task, he had prayed to Allah in the following words:

Lord! Make this (Makkah) a land of safety. Preserve me and my descendants from worshipping idols. (Surah Abraham, 14:35)

And at the time of his arrival in the desert of Makkah he had prayed: Lord! make this a land of peace (Surah Baqarah, 2: 126).

In order to complete the discussion, it would have been appropriate to narrate the circumstances in which the Ka'bah was constructed and also to give a brief history of it. However, lest we should minimise our real object, we give below the particulars of some of the revered forefathers of the Holy Prophet who are well-known in history.

2. Qusayy Son Of Kilab

The following are the names of the father and forefathers of the Holy Prophet in upward order:

Abdullah, Abdul Muttalib, Hashim, Abd-i Manaf, Qusayy, Kilab, Marra, Ka'b, Loo, Ghalib, Fahr, Malik, Nazar, Kananah, Khuzamah, Mudrasah, Ilyas, Mazar, Nazar, Ma'd and Adnan. [13](#)

The genealogy of the Holy Prophet up to Ma'd son of Adnan is as reproduced above. However, there is a difference of opinion with regard to the number and names of intermediate persons from Adnan upwards upto Isma'il, and, according to the report quoted by Ibn Abbas from the Holy Prophet, when the genealogy of the Holy Prophet reaches Adnan one should not proceed beyond it, because whenever, the Holy Prophet himself mentioned the names of his forefathers he did not proceed beyond Adnan, and ordered that other too, should not narrate the names of his other forefathers upto Isma'il.

He also said that what was commonly known amongst the Arabs regarding that portion of the pedigree was not correct. Hence we have also quoted that portion of his genealogy which is admittedly correct and now proceed to give detailed particulars of some of the persons concerned.

The above-mentioned persons are well-known in the history of Arabia and the history of Islam, too, has relationship with some of them. Hence, we give below an account of the lives of those from Qusayy upto the revered father of the Holy Prophet (Abdullah) and refrain from narrating the events of the lives of others who have no concern with the matter under discussion. [14](#)

Qusayy was the fourth ancestor of the Prophet of Islam. His mother, Fatima, married Kilab and gave birth to two children named 'Zohrah' and 'Qusayy.' The second of them was still an infant when Fatima's husband died. She then married another man named Rabi'a and accompanied him to Syria. Qusayy received fatherly support from Rabi'a till differences arose between him and Rabi'a's tribe, as a result of which they drove him away beyond the frontiers of their home-land.

His mother was touched by the treatment meted out to him and decided to send him back to Makkah. The hand of destiny pulled him to Makkah. His hidden qualities enabled him to establish his superiority over the Makkans and especially the tribe of Quraysh. Within a short time he acquired the high governmental offices in Makkah and also became the custodian of the keys of the Ka'bah and the undisputed ruler of that city.

Many remarkable events are associated with his name. One of these was that he encouraged the people to construct a house with the name of 'Darun Nadwah' adjacent to the Ka'bah and thus founded a Council Hall for the Arabs so that their dignitaries and chiefs might sit together in this public centre and solve their problems. He died in the 5th A.D. and left behind two sons named Abdud Dar and Abd Manaf.

3 . Abd Manaf

He was the third ancestor of the Holy Prophet. His name was Mughirah and he enjoyed the title of 'Qamar al-Bat'ha' (the moon of Bat'ha). He was younger than his brother Abdud Dar, but enjoyed great respect amongst the people. He was very pious. He invited people to virtue, behaved well with them and maintained very good relations with his kinsfolk.

Although he enjoyed a very honourable position in the society he never became a rival of his brother, Abdud Dar in the matter of acquisition of high offices connected with the Ka'bah. According to the will of Qusayy the rulership rested with Abdud Dar, but when the two brothers died their sons began quarrelling for various offices. After a good deal of contention and conflict they eventually got reconciled and divided the positions amongst themselves.

It was decided that the custodianship of the Ka'bah and the chairmanship of 'Darun Nadwah' would remain with the children of Abdud Dar and the functions of providing drinking water to the pilgrims and their entertainment would be performed by the sons of Abd Manaf. This division of offices was still intact at the time of the advent of Islam.[15](#)

4. Hashim

He was the second forefather of the Holy Prophet. His real name was 'Amr and he enjoyed the title of 'Ala. He and Abd Shams were twins and their two other brothers were Muttalib and Nawfal. It is narrated by the historians that at the time of the birth of Hashim and Abd Shams a finger of the former was stuck on the forehead of the latter. Blood flowed profusely when they were separated from each other and the people took this occurrence to be a bad omen.[16](#)

Halabi writes in his 'Seerah' that this bad omen later manifested its effect, because, after the advent of Islam, fierce battles were fought between Bani Abbas who were the descendants of Hashim and Bani Umayyah, who claimed their descent from Abd Shams.[17](#)

This shows that the writer of 'Seerah' has completely ignored the tragic events connected with the descendants of Ali, although the bloody drama which Bani Umayyah staged by shedding the pure blood of the progeny of the Holy Prophet is a glaring evidence of the existence of enmity between the two families. It is not, however, known as to why the said writer has failed to mention these events.

One of the particular points about the descendants of Abd Manaf, which are reflected in the battle-cries and literature of Arabia, is that they died at different places viz. Hashim died in Ghaza, Abd Shams in Makkah, Nawfal in Iraq and Muttalib in Yemen.

To quote an example of the magnanimity of Hashim it may be stated that whenever Zil-Hajj moon was sighted he came to the Holy Ka'bah, leaned on its wall and delivered a speech on the following lines:

'O people of the tribe of Quraysh, you are the wisest and noblest amongst the Arabs. Your race is the best amongst all races. Almighty Allah has provided you accommodation by the side of His own House and has granted you superiority, in this regard over all other descendants of Isma'il.

O my kinsmen, beware! Pilgrims of the House of Allah are coming to you this month with extraordinary favour They are Allah's guests and it is your duty to receive them. There are many indigent persons amongst them, who will be coming from far off places. I swear by the Lord of this House that if I had been wealthy enough to entertain all the guests of Allah, I would not have insisted upon you to provide assistance.

At present, however, I am going to spend all that I can afford, and which I have earned by lawful means. I administer an oath to you in the name of the honour of this House that you will not spend, for this purpose, anything which you have usurped, or give or spend anything hypocritically or under compulsion. If anyone is not inclined to assist, he is at liberty not to spend anything. [18](#)

For all intents and purposes the leadership of Hashim was for the welfare of the Makkans and had a great effect on the betterment of the conditions of their lives. Whenever a famine occurred, his magnanimity did not permit that people should experience any hardship on this account. One of the outstanding steps, which he took for the advancement of the commerce of the Makkans, was the conclusion of an agreement with the ruler of Ghassan.

It was in the wake of this agreement that similar agreements were concluded by his brother Abd Shams with the King of Ethiopia and by his two other brothers Muttalib and Nawfal with the Ruler of Yemen and the Emperor of Iran respectively. Merchandise could be exchanged freely with various countries.

This agreement solved many difficulties and brought into existence a number of shopping centres in Makkah which also existed at the time of the advent of Islam. Besides this, one of the beneficial activities of Hashim was the establishment of journeying by the Quraysh to Syria in summer and to Yemen in winter. This practice continued for quite some time even after the birth of Islam.

[Umayyah Son of Abd Shams Feels Jealous](#)

Umayyah, son of Abd Shams, was jealous of the greatness and dignity of his uncle, Hashim, and endeavoured to attract the people to himself by bestowing gifts on them. However, in spite of his best efforts and obstructionist activities he could not divest Hashim of his position. On the contrary his

vilification and slandering of Hashim increased honour and respect for the latter all the more in the hearts of the people.

The fire of jealousy continued to burn in the heart of Umayyah. At last he insisted upon his uncle that both of them should approach one of the sages (fortune-tellers) of Arabia and only he whom that sage confirmed to be fit for rulership should take the reins of administration in his hands.

Hashim's magnanimity did not permit him to enter into a dispute with his nephew. However, as Umayyah was very much insistent, he (Hashim) agreed to the proposal on two conditions. Firstly that whoever lost the case should sacrifice one hundred black-eyed camels during Haj season and secondly that he should remain out of Makkah for ten years.

Now it so happened that, as soon as the Arab sage (the fortune-teller of Asfan) saw Hashim, he began praising him and decided the case in his favour. Umayyah was, therefore, obliged to leave Makkah and spend ten years in Syria. [19](#)

The effects of this hereditary enmity continued to exist for 130 years after the advent of Islam and occasioned crimes which are unprecedented in the history of mankind. The above-mentioned story, besides bringing to light the fact as to how the enmity between the two families originated, also explains the reasons for the influence which Bani Umayyah enjoyed in Syria, and it becomes known that their old relations with the Syrians prepared ground for their rule in that area.

Hashim Marries

Salma, daughter of 'Amr Khazraji, was a virtuous woman, who had obtained divorce from her husband and was not prepared to remarry. While returning from Syria, during one of his journeys, Hashim stayed at Yathrib (Madina) for a few days and proposed to Salma. Salma was impressed by the nobility, affluence and character of Hashim and by the influence which he wielded amongst the Quraysh.

She agreed to marry him on two conditions, one of which was that at the time of giving birth to a child she should be amongst her own people. According to this agreement she spent some time in Makkah with Hashim and when the time of her child-birth approached she returned to Yathrib. There she gave birth to a son who was named Shibah and later came to be known as Abdul Muttalib. The historians have mentioned the following reasons for the assumption of this title by Shibah:

When Hashim felt that his death was approaching, he said to his brother Muttalib "Brother! Find out your slave Shibah". And as Hashim (father of Shibah) had called his son, "the slave of Muttalib", he later came to be known as Abdul Muttalib (i.e. slave of Muttalib).

Another version is this: "One day, while a Makkan was passing through the streets of Yathrib, he saw many children practising archery. When one of the children won the match he said immediately "I am the son of the chief of Bat'ha (Makkah)". The man from Makkah came forward and asked the boy, 'who are

you?". The reply was, "I am Shibah son of Hashim son of Abd Manaf".

On his return to Makkah that man informed Muttalib, the brother of Hashim and chief of Makkah, about this incident. The uncle was reminded of his nephew and, therefore, went to Yathrib. The bearing of the nephew personified before Muttalib the very personality of his brother and tears trickled down his cheeks. Both of them exchanged kisses of love and emotion. The mother was not willing to part with her son and objected to his being carried away to Makkah, but her objections and protests made the determination of Muttalib all the more stronger. Eventually Muttalib succeeded in achieving his purpose and, after having obtained the permission of the mother, made Shibah mount along with himself and proceeded to Makkah.

During the course of the journey the scorching heat of the sun blackened the silvery face of the nephew and his dress was also worn and torn. For this reason, therefore, when the two arrived at Makkah, people thought that the young man was a slave of Muttalib.

They whispered to one another "This young man (Shibah) is Muttalib's slave". And, although Muttalib announced time and again that the lad was his nephew, the wrong impression which had taken root in the minds of the people continued to persist. The result was that the nephew of Muttalib came to be known as Abdul Muttalib (the slave of Muttalib).[20](#)

Still another version is this Abdul Muttalib was called so, because he had been brought up by his uncle and it was usual amongst the Arabs that whenever a person was brought up by another man he was called the slave of his benefactor.

5. Abdul Muttalib

Abdul Muttalib son of Hashim, the first ancestor of the Holy Prophet, was the chief of Quraysh and a renowned person. His entire social life was replete with brilliant attributes. As the events of his chiefship are also related to the history of Islam we narrate hereunder some of them.

There is no doubt about the fact that however resolute and strong a man may be, he is eventually influenced, to some extent, by his environment, and the habits and customs of the society affect his way of thinking. At times, however, some persons have an innate tendency to resist the factors governing their environments with great daring and courage, and keep themselves and their surroundings immune from all sorts of contamination.

The hero of our discourse was a perfect specimen of those people in whose lives we observe many brilliant points. If a person who, in spite of spending more than eighty years of his life amongst people who are habituated to idol-worship, drinking wine, usury and homicide, does not, throughout his life, let wine stain his lips and restrains people from committing murders drinking wine and doing wicked deeds, and prevents them from marrying the persons with whom marriage is prohibited, and from going round

the Ka'bah unadorned, and remains firm in the matter of vows and promises till the last breath of his life, he is certainly one of those ideal men who are born rarely in human society.

Of course, it was necessary that the person in whose body the light of the Holy Prophet (the greatest guide of humanity) had been deposited should be pure and free from every pollution.

From the brief anecdotes and instructive sayings ascribed to Abdul Muttalib it is learnt that even in those dark environments he was counted amongst those who believed in monotheism and in the Day of Judgement and used to say "An unjust person is punished in this very world. However, if, by chance, he dies before being duly punished, he will meet retribution for his actions on the Day of Judgement".²¹

Harb son of Umayyah was a near relative of Abdul Muttalib. He was also considered to be one of the distinguished persons amongst the Quraysh. A Jew was the neighbour of Har'b. One day the Jew displayed harshness towards Har'b in one of the bazaars of Tahamah and hot words were exchanged between them.

This incident culminated in the Jew being murdered at the instigation of Har'b. Abdul Muttalib came to know about the matter and severed his relations with Har'b. He also made efforts to realise blood-money from him and to pass it on to the survivors of the Jew. This brief anecdote is a specimen of the enthusiasm of this magnanimous person for helping the weak people and for dispensation of justice.

Re-Excavation Of The Well Of Zamzam

From the day the well of Zamzam came into existence the people of the tribe of Jarham had settled round it and benefited from its water during the long years when they ruled over Makkah. However, as a result of the advancement of Makkans in business, their affluence, negligence on their part and lack of any restraint on the use of the water, the well gradually dried up.²²

Another version is this: When the people of Jarham tribe were threatened by Khaza'ah tribe and were obliged to abandon their homes, their chief and distinguished man, Mazaz son of 'Amr, realised that he would soon cease to be at the helm of affairs and the enemy would attack and destroy his territory and government.

He, therefore, ordered that two deer made of gold and a few precious swords, which had been brought as a present for the Ka'bah, should be thrown into the well, which should then be filled up completely so that the enemy might not lay his hands on these things, and later, when they (Jarham tribe) recovered their territory and throne, they themselves should utilise this treasure. After some time the tribe of Khaza'ah commenced their attacks and the tribe of Jarham as well as a large number of the descendants of Isma'il were compelled to leave Makkah and proceed to Yemen, and none of them returned to Makkah thereafter.

From that time onwards the tribe of Khaza'ah ruled over Makkah till Quraysh gained ascendancy by the

coming into power of Qusayy son of Kilab, the fourth ancestor of the Holy Prophet. After some time Abdul Muttalib came at the helm of affairs. He decided to dig the Zamzam well once again, but unfortunately the location of the original well was not known for certain. After excavating a good deal he was able to locate the real spot and resolved to take preliminary steps to dig the well with the assistance of his son Harith.

In every society there is usually a group of negativists who try to find one excuse or the other to prevent the performance of every positive act. Hence, the rivals of Abdul Muttalib, fearing that this honour might fall to his share, began criticising him and addressed him thus "O elder of Quraysh As this well is a memorial of our ancestor Isma'il, and all of us are reckoned to be his descendants, it is only appropriate that you may let all of us partake in this task".

For certain reasons Abdul Muttalib did not accept their suggestion, because his intention was to dig the well alone and let all of them use its water free of cost. He also wished to assume himself the responsibility of supplying water to the pilgrims on specific occasions so that this function could be performed in good order under his personal supervision. This could however, be ensured only when he had this job in his own hands, being independent of others.

This resulted in a good deal of bickering and it was at last decided that they should approach an Arab sage (fortune-teller) and his decision should be binding on all. Thus Abdul Muttalib and his rivals started their journey. They passed through many barren tracts of land. On their way, they were faced with extreme thirst, and became almost certain that they would perish.

They, therefore, became anxious about their death and subsequent burial. Abdul Muttalib suggested that every person should dig a grave for himself and, as and when anyone of them died, others should bury him. And, if they continued to be deprived of water and all of them died, they would all be buried and be saved from being devoured by beasts and birds, except the person who would be the last one to pass away.

Abdul Muttalib's suggestion met approval and everyone of them dug a grave for himself. Now they awaited death with dejected and pale faces. Suddenly Abdul Muttalib cried out "Men! This will be a very ignominious and disgraceful death. It will be better if all of us move about in the desert in search of water. It is possible that Almighty Allah may have mercy on us.[23](#)

All of them mounted and began moving about. They were not very hopeful of finding water and looked at one another with dismay. By chance, however, they soon came across wholesome water and were thus saved from certain death. From that very place they returned to Makkah and, gladly agreeing with Abdul Muttalib's view with regard to the digging of the well, gave him full authority to carry out his project.[24](#)

Abdul Muttalib began digging the well with his only son Harith and a mound of dust appeared around the spot. Suddenly they touched upon two deer made of gold and a few swords. Now Quraysh kicked up another row and claimed a share in this find. Eventually it was decided to settle the dispute by drawing

lots. By chance, the two golden deer fell to the share of the Ka'bah and the swords to that of Abdul Muttalib, whereas Quraysh received nothing. Noble-minded Abdul Muttalib utilised the swords for constructing a gate for the Ka'bah and installed the deer upon it.

Steadfastness In Keeping Promise

Some of the qualities of the Arabs of the Age of Ignorance merit praise. For example, they considered breaking of promise to be the most loathsome act. At times they concluded very onerous and burdensome treaties with the Arab tribes and respected them to the last. And on some occasions they took extremely tiresome and intolerable vows but made an all-out effort to fulfil them.

While digging Zamzam Abdul Muttalib felt that owing to his not having many sons his position was rather weak amongst Quraysh. He, therefore, resolved and took a vow that when the number of his sons would become ten he would sacrifice one of them in front of the Ka'bah. He did not, however, make a mention to anyone about his having taken this vow.

With the passage of time the number of his sons rose to ten and the time therefore, arrived for him to fulfil his vow. The very thought of the proposition was very trying for him. He was, however, afraid of lagging behind in the performance of this task and thus becoming one of those who failed to keep their promises. He, therefore, decided to mention the matter to his sons and, after obtaining their agreement, to select one of them for the purpose, by drawing lots.[25](#)

The ceremony of drawing the lots was performed and the lot fell upon Abdullah (father of the Holy Prophet). Abdul Muttalib immediately caught the hand of Abdullah and led him to the sacrificial altar. Qurayshite men and women came to know about the vow and the drawing of lots and became very much grieved. A flood of tears was flowing down the cheeks of men. One of them was heard saying: "O that they should have killed me instead of this young man!"

The chiefs of Quraysh were saying "If his life can be redeemed by property we are prepared to place all our wealth at his disposal". Abdul Muttalib was wondering what to do in the face of the roaring sentiments of the people. He was reflecting within himself lest he should be guilty of disobeying the Almighty and breaking his vow.

Notwithstanding all this he was also thinking of finding a solution of the problem. One of those present said: "Take this problem before one of the Arab sages. It is possible that he may suggest a solution". Abdul Muttalib and the chiefs of the tribe endorsed the suggestion and proceeded to Yathrib, where the particular sage resided. The sage asked for a day's respite to give a reply. On the following day all went to him. He asked "What is the blood-money fixed by you for one human being?" They told him that it was ten camels.

Thereupon the man said: "You should draw lots between ten camels and the person whom you have selected for being sacrificed. If the lot falls on that person then raise the number of camels to twice as

many (i.e. twenty). And if the lot falls on that person again then raise the number of camels to thrice as many (i.e thirty) and draw the lots again and continue doing so till the lot falls on the camels.

The suggestion made by the sage cooled down the emotions of the people, because it was easier for them to sacrifice hundreds of camels as compared with seeing a young man like Abdullah rolling in blood. One morning, after their return to Makka, the ceremony of drawing lots was performed for the tenth time, when the number of the camels had risen to one hundred, the lot fell on them. The deliverance and safety of Abdullah gave birth to very strange emotions.

However, Abdul Muttalib said "It is only appropriate that I should draw the lots anew so that I may know for certain that the Almighty is pleased with my action. He then drew the lots thrice and every time the lot fell on one hundred camels. He was thus convinced of Divine pleasure and directed that one hundred camels, out of those belonging to him, should be slaughtered that very day in front of the Ka'bah and no human being or animal should be restrained from eating their meat.[26](#)

Tumult Of The Year of The Elephant

When a great event takes place in a nation, its root-cause is at times religious and occasionally national and political. It is usually admired by the masses and is for this reason treated to be the starting point of their history for past and future events. For example, the movement of Prophet Musa, the birth of Prophet 'Isa and the migration of the Prophet of Islam are the starting points of history for the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims respectively and the followers of these religions reckon the events of their lives with reference to these happenings.

At times, some nations, in spite of possessing a basic history, also treat some particular events to be the starting points of their history. As we find the great French Revolution and the October 1917 Communist Revolution in the Soviet Union are the starting points of history for many events in the Western countries. Uncivilized nations, which are deprived of such political and religious movements, naturally consider unusual events to be the bases of their history.

For this reason, the Arabs of the age of ignorance, on account of their not possessing a proper civilisation, considered unpleasant occurrences like wars, earthquakes, famines and other unusual phenomena as the measure and origin of their history. In this way we observe, in the pages of history, a number of starting points for the history of the Arabs, the last of which was the disturbance of the Year of the Elephant viz. the attack by Abraha to destroy the Ka'bah, which became the starting point of history for other events. We give below a detailed account and analysis of this great event, which occurred in 570 A.D., to be the year of the birth of the Prophet of Islam.

The Origin Of This Event

The event of the 'People of the Elephant' has been mentioned briefly in the Holy Qur'an and we shall, after narrating the story, mention the verses which have been revealed about it. The historians have

stated the origin of the event to be as follows:

After strengthening the capital of his government, Zu Nuwas, the King of Yemen, passed, during one of his journeys, through the city of Yathrib (Madina). At that time Yathrib enjoyed a high religious position. A group of the Jews had concentrated at that place and had built a number of synagogues at different points in the city.

The opportunist Jews accorded a warm welcome to the king and invited him to their own faith so that, under the protection of his government, they might remain safe from attacks by the Roman Christians and the Arab idolaters. Their efforts in this regard were fruitful. Zu Nuwas embraced the Jewish religion and made maximum efforts for its advancement. Many persons became inclined to him on account of fear. Some were awarded severe punishments on account of differences.

However, the people of Najran, who were converted to Christianity some time earlier, were not prepared at any cost to forsake their religion and follow the teachings of the religion of the Jews. The King of Yemen was very much annoyed on account of their disobedience and defiance and came up with a large army to suppress the rebels.

The commander of the army encamped by the side of the city of Najran, dug a ditch there, lit up a huge fire in it and threatened his opponents with burning. The brave people of Najran, who had firm faith in Christianity were not, however, dismayed. They welcomed death and burning with open arms and their bodies were devoured by the flames of fire.[27](#)

The great Muslim historian Ibn Athir Jazari writes thus:

In the meantime one of the residents of Najran named Daws went post-haste to Caesar, the Roman Emperor, who was a great supporter of Christianity in those days, and informed him about the happening. He also requested the Emperor to punish the blood-thirsty man who had extinguished the lamp of guidance in Najran and to establish firmly the tottering pillars of Christianity in that area.

The Roman ruler expressed his grief and sympathy and said: "As the principal seat of my government is far away from your country I am writing to the Negus, the King of Ethiopia, to take revenge on that cruel person for killing the people of Najran. The Najrani took Caesar's letter and proceeded to Ethiopia as quickly as possible.

On reaching there he related the complete story to the Negus. The sense of honour of the king of Ethiopia was roused. He despatched an army exceeding seventy thousand men to Yemen under the command of an African named Abraha Ashram. The organized and well-equipped Ethiopian army crossed the sea and pitched its tents on the coast of Yemen. Zu Nuwas was taken unawares. All his activities proved to be of no avail and no reply was received by him to the letters which he had written to the tribal chiefs requesting them to take part in the battle.

One brief attack was sufficient to pull down the foundation of his government and the populous country of Yemen came in the possession of the Government of Ethiopia. The Ethiopian king appointed the commander of the army, Abraha, as viceroy of that area.

Abraha was very happy for having taken revenge and achieved victory and began leading a free life. In order to win the favour of the King of Ethiopia he constructed a splendid Church at San'a which had no parallel at that time for its grandeur.

Then he wrote a letter to the Negus on these lines: "In compliance with the wishes of your Majesty the construction of the Church has been completed. I hope that it will be possible for me to make the people of Yemen abandon the pilgrimage of the Ka'bah, whose place will now be taken by this Church".

When the contents of the letter became known, there was a very unfavourable reaction amongst the Arab tribes. So much so that one night a woman of the tribe of Bani Afqam polluted the precincts of the Church. This act, which showed grave disrespect, contempt and enmity on the part of Arabs for Abraha's Church, made the government of the time very much excited. Besides this, the more Abraha endeavoured to increase the apparent adornment and decoration of the Church the more the people were attached to the Ka'bah.

These developments made Abraha swear that he would destroy the Ka'bah. He organized an army for this purpose, put fighter elephants in the fore-front, and decided to pull down the House, the foundation of which had been laid by the champion of Divine monotheism Prophet Ibrahim.

The chiefs of Arabia realized that the situation was delicate and dangerous and took it for certain that the independence and individuality of the Arab nation was bound to collapse. The past victories of Abraha also kept them from taking any useful decision. Nevertheless, some zealous chiefs of the tribes who were facing Abraha fought with great bravery.

For example, Zu Nafar, who was one of the nobles of Yemen, exhorted his people, with fiery speeches, to defend the Sanctuary (the Ka'bah). However, the immense army of Abraha soon cut down their organized ranks.

Thereafter Nafil son of Habib put up a fierce fight, but his people also met with defeat. He himself was captured and requested Abraha for forgiveness. Abraha agreed to grant his request on the condition that he should guide his forces to Makkah. Thus Nafil became his attendant and led him upto Ta'if. There he entrusted the job to one of his friends named Ayurghal. The new guide led them upto Mughmas – a place near Makkah – and there Abraha's army encamped.

According to an old custom Abraha ordered one of his officers to plunder the camels and other domestic animals of Tahamah. Out of the camels so plundered 200 of them belonged to Abdul Muttalib. Later Abraha ordered another officer named Hanatah to carry his message to the chief of the Quraysh.

He addressed Hanatah with these words: "I can visualize the actual scene of the destruction of the Ka'bah. It is also certain that in the first instance Quraysh will resist. However, to ensure that their blood is not shed you should proceed to Makkah immediately. There you should contact the chief of Quraysh and tell him that my object is to destroy the Ka'bah and if Quraysh do not resist they will remain safe from molestation"

The messenger sent by Abraha arrived in Makkah and saw various groups of Quraysh discussing the matter at different places. On his enquiring about the Chief of Quraysh he was led to the house of Abdul Muttalib. After hearing Abraha's message Abdul Muttalib spoke thus: "We are not at all inclined to fight. The Ka'bah is the House of Allah. It is the House which was founded by Prophet Ibrahim. Allah will do whatever He deems fit".

Abraha's officer also expressed pleasure on hearing the soft and conciliatory words of the Chief of Quraysh which were indicative of his spiritual faith. He, therefore, requested Abdul Muttalib to agree to accompany him to the camp of Abraha.

Abdul Muttalib Goes To The Camp of Abraha

Abdul Muttalib proceeded to the camp of Abraha accompanied by a few of his sons. The sobriety, grace, and dignity of the leader of Quraysh made Abraha admire and respect him. So much so that he descended from his throne, took the hand of Abdul Muttalib in his own hand and made him sit by his side. Then he very respectfully enquired from Abdul Muttalib, through an interpreter, as to why he had come there and what he wished.

He said in reply: "The camels of Tahamah, which also include two hundred camels belonging to me, have been seized by your soldiers. I would ask you to give orders that those camels should be returned to their owners".

Abraha replied "Your luminous bearing possessing a holy aspect made me consider you to be a very great man. However, the request made by you for insignificant things has diminished your worth in my eyes. Keeping in view the fact that I have come to demolish and destroy the sanctuary of your ancestors, I was expecting that you would talk about the Ka'bah and request me to desist from accomplishing my object which will deal a deadly blow to your independence and political and religious life. I did not hope that you would talk about a few insignificant and worthless camels and intercede in that behalf".

In reply to Abraha's remarks Abdul Muttalib spoke a sentence, whose value and worth is still preserved. He said: "I am the owner of the camels. The House too has a Master who forestalls every intrusion upon it". On hearing this Abraha shook his head and said proudly "There is none so powerful as to keep me from achieving my object". Then he ordered that the plundered property should be returned to the owners.

Quraysh Await Abdul Muttalib's Return

Quraysh were anxiously awaiting Abdul Muttalib's return to learn about the result of his talk with Abrahah. So, when he met the Qurayshite chiefs, he said to them "Take refuge immediately in the valleys and on the hills along with your animals so that you may be safe from every harm". Soon thereafter the people abandoned their homes and found shelter in the hills. At night all the hills and valleys were resounding with the cries of children, the lamentations of women and the noise made by the animals.

In the very middle of that night Abdul Muttalib and some other Qurayshites descended the summit of a hill and reached the gate of the Ka'bah. He (Abdul Muttalib), with flowing tears and burning heart, held the chain of the gate of the Ka'bah in his hand and recited a few verses addressing the Almighty. He spoke thus:

"O Allah! We do not pin our faith on anyone except You, for remaining immune from their mischief and harm.

O Lord! Hold them back from your Sanctuary. The enemy of the Ka'bah is he who is inimical to you.

O Nourisher! Cut off their hands so that they may not pollute Your House.

I have right over my own property, so I am endeavouring for its safety.

However, safety of Your House is Your responsibility.

Don't let that day come when the Cross becomes victorious over it, and the inhabitants of their lands encroach upon Your land and conquer it".

Then he released the chain of the gate of the Ka'bah and took shelter on the summit of a hill to watch the developments.

Early in the morning Abrahah and his forces got ready to march towards Makkah. All of a sudden, however, a flock of birds appeared from the side of the sea, holding tiny stones in their beaks and claws. The shadow of the black birds made the sky above the encampment dark and their small and apparently insignificant weapons produced a very strange effect. The birds, armed with small stones, showered those stones under the command of the Almighty on the army of Abrahah in such a manner that their heads were broken and their flesh was severed from their bodies.

One of the stones hit Abrahah on his head, whereupon fear overpowered him and he began to tremble. He became sure that the wrath of the Almighty had descended on him. Then he cast an eye on his soldiers and observed that their bodies had fallen on earth like the leaves of the trees. He, therefore, immediately ordered those who had remained safe to return to Yemen and to proceed to San'a through the way they had come.

The remaining army moved towards San'a but, while on their way, most of the soldiers perished on account of wounds and fear. And even Abraha reached San'a in such a condition that the flesh of his body was turned off and he died a very queer death.

This dreadful and strange event became known throughout the world. The Holy Qur'an narrates the story of the "People of the Elephant" in these words:

Have you not considered how Allah dealt with the Army of the Elephant? Did He not foil their evil plots by sending against them flocks of swallows which pelted them with claystones, so that they became like left-over grass grazed by cattle. (Surah al-Fil, 105: 2 - 5).

What has been narrated in these pages is a gist of Islamic history on the subject²⁸ and that which has been stated specifically in the Holy Qur'an. Now we shall study the comments made by the great Egyptian exegete Muhammad Abdoh and the famous scholar, Dr Haikal, former Education Minister of Egypt.

A theoretical discussion about miracles

Recent surprising advancement of man in various branches of physical sciences and coming to an end of the life of many scientific hypotheses, created a strange tumult in the western countries. Although the explanation for these changes lay in scientific transition and revolved on the pivot of physical sciences alone (for example, Ptolemy's theorem was falsified) and did not have the least connection with religious beliefs, they created a strange pessimism amongst different classes about the theories and beliefs which had still survived.

The secret of this pessimism lay in the fact that when the scholars saw that the old theories which had ruled human thought and centres of learning for centuries stood falsified now, with the strong hand of knowledge and the might of experimentation, and, moreover, no information was available about different heavenly spheres and minute movements and centrality of earth, and also about scores of other theories; they thought to themselves that no one knows the remaining religious and scientific theories might also be like the other ones?

This way of thinking gradually sowed the seeds of doubt in the minds of most of the scholars of physical sciences and within a short time this doubt grew and spread to all the European scientific circles of that day like a contagious disease.

Furthermore 'Inquisition' (Department for the investigation of beliefs) and the severity of the Church authorities had full share in the germination, rather the growth of this pessimism, because the scholars of that time who succeeded in discovering some scientific theory were being annihilated by the Church with torments and torture.

And it goes without saying that such pressure and persecution must have had a bad reaction and it was

predicted from that very day that if at any time these scholars gained power and made sufficient progress in the physical field they would say good bye to religion and piety on account of the wrong policy of the Popes.

By chance matters did come to such a pass. As knowledge with regard to various matters increased and the scholars penetrated more and more into the inter-relationship of physical beings, disclosed the secrets which had remained hidden from man for ages, and gained knowledge about the causes of many natural phenomena like earthquakes and rain as well as causes of various diseases, they devoted comparatively lesser attention to metaphysical matters. (Origin, Resurrection, miracles and unusual performances by the Prophets etc.) and the number of sceptics and deniers increased day after day.

The self-conceit and pride with regard to their learning, which some scholars harboured in their minds, and the pressure exerted by the Popes and the priests, became the cause for some scientists looking upon all religious matters with contempt and disregard. They were no longer agreeable that the names of Torah or Evangel should be mentioned.

According to them the event of Prophet Musa's rod and his luminous hand should be treated as a mere story and the breath of Prophet 'Isa which brought to life many dead persons with the permission of Allah was also, mere fiction.

It so happened because pride on account of advancement of scientific knowledge and the memories of the pressures to which they were subjected in the past made them think within themselves 'How can it be possible that in the absence of a natural cause a piece of wood should assume the shape of a dragon or dead persons may come to life by means of a prayer?'

The scholars who were intoxicated with their successes in the field of science thought that they had acquired the key for all branches of knowledge and had understood the relations between all beings and occurrences. It was for this reason that they could not find the least connection between a piece of dry wood and a boa or between the prayer and attention of a person on the one hand and coming to life of dead persons on the other. Hence they either viewed these matters with doubt and hesitation or denied them totally.

[Way of Thinking of Some Scholars](#)

Nowadays this way of thinking, with slight modifications, has been adopted by some Egyptian scholars. These scholars, who are in fact a link between the centres of learning of the East and the West and have for years been transferring, earlier than anybody else, the knowledge and the ways of thinking of the West to the East and are truly considered to be a bridge of learning and educational relationship between these two blocs, have been influence more than anyone else by this way of thinking (of course with particular modifications) and follow this method in the matter of explanation and analysis of historical and scientific problems.

Some of them have chosen a method by which they wish to keep satisfied the Muslims who believe in the obvious meanings of the Holy Qur'an and of the decisive Ahadith (reports) and also to adopt the view-point of scientists, or, at least, not to express an opinion which cannot be explained in the light of the laws of physical sciences.

On the one hand they see that the Holy Quran comprises a chain of undeniable miracles and this Heavenly Book is the final authority for the Muslims, and whatever it says is correct and in conformity with facts. On the other hand they find that the physical sciences and the supporters of material learning do not recognize these phenomena which, according to their own thinking (which insists on a natural cause for every natural event), are at variance with scientific laws.

As a consequence of these two factors, none of which, according to their belief, is flexible, they have adopted a course by means of which they wish to keep both the groups satisfied ... viz. they safeguard the apparent meanings of the Holy Qur'an and the decisive reports and also do not say anything against the scientific laws.

Accordingly, they endeavour to explain away the miracles and unusual performances of the Prophets according to modern scientific standards and account for the miracles in such a way that they appear to be natural occurrences. In this way they have safeguarded the respect due to the Holy Qur'an and the decisive reports, and have also freed themselves from every kind of pessimism and protest. We narrate below, as a specimen, the explanation offered by Muhammad Abdoh, the famous, Egyptian scholar, about the event of the 'People of the Elephant', which has been mentioned in the Holy Qur'an.

"It was the disease of smallpox and typhoid fever, caused by petrified dust, which spread in Abraha's army through insects like mosquitoes and flies. And by 'clay-stones' is meant petrified infected clay which the wind scatters everywhere and thus contaminates the feet of those insects. As a consequence of the contact of those insects with the human bodies the germs are transferred to the pores of human skin and make painful and dirty wounds appear on it. And these germs are the strong divine soldiers which are called 'microbes' in scientific terminology".

A modern writer says in support of the view expressed by the afore-said scholar that the word 'Tayr' used in the Holy Qur'an means anything which flies and includes mosquitoes and flies.

Before we take into consideration the remarks of the afore-said writers we consider it necessary to reproduce once again the verses revealed in connection with the 'People of the Elephant'. Almighty Allah says thus in Surah al-Fil:

Have you not considered how Allah dealt with the Army of the Elephant? Did He not foil their evil plots by sending against them flocks of swallows which pelted them with claystones, so that they became like left-over grass grazed by cattle. (105: 1- 5)

On the face of it, these verses show that the people of Abraha were subjected to Divine wrath and the

only cause of their death was these clay–stones which the birds were carrying and which were pelted on their heads, faces and bodies.

A deep and minute study of these verses leads us to believe that the death of those people took place on account of these very unnatural weapons (apparently worthless and insignificant claystones but in fact very powerful and destructive things). As such these Divine verses cannot be interpreted to carry any meanings given to them by means of an explanation which is at variance with their apparent text, unless a positive proof about the correctness of such an explanation is advanced.

Notable Points With Regard to The Above Mentioned Explanation

1. The above–mentioned explanation, too, cannot manifest the entire event to be natural and some points still remain in the story which can be explained by advancing unnatural reasons. Thus even if we suppose that the death and annihilation of those people took place on account of microbes of smallpox and typhoid fever, the question remains as to how and by what means and as a result of whose guidance and training did these birds come to know that microbes of smallpox and typhoid fever had settled themselves in these clay–stones at that particular time, and instead of going in search of their sustenance, they flocked together towards the clay–stones and holding them in their beaks pelted them at Abraha's people like an army attacking its enemy? In the circumstances can we treat the entire event as usual and natural?

If we are prepared to admit that all these things happened in accordance with Allah's command and that a supernatural power was at work in this event where does the necessity lie that we should consider only a part of that event as natural and run after explaining away its causes.

2. The minute animals called 'microbes' which are enemies of entire mankind did not then have any relationship with anyone. As such how can this thing be explained that they attacked only Abraha's army and ignored the Makkans? The history books which we possess at present are unanimous that all losses were sustained by Abraha's soldiers and the Quraysh and the Arabs did not experience even the slightest harm, although smallpox and typhoid fever are contagious diseases and various natural factors transfer them from place to place and at times it so happens that they ruin the entire country. In the circumstances can the event in question be treated as something usual?

3. Diversity of opinions of those, who have furnished this explanation, about the genus of the microbes, itself weakens their proposition. At times they say that they were the germs of cholera and occasionally they assert that they were those of smallpox and typhoid fever, whereas we have not yet found any authentic and reliable document concerning this dispute.

Amongst the exegetes only Akramah, who himself is an object of dispute amongst the scholars, has considered this probable and, amongst the historians, Ibn Athir, while quoting this probability as a weak statement, has straightaway proceeded to refute it.[29](#)

Most strange is the explanation given by the author of 'Hayat-i Muhammad' (Dr Haikal, former Egyptian Education Minister), while narrating the story of the 'People of the Elephant'. Notwithstanding the fact that the object before his eyes is the verse 'We sent against them flocks of birds', he, after quoting Surah al-Fil, says thus about the death of the army of Abraha: "Perhaps cholera germs came with the wind and from sea-side".

Now if wind had brought the cholera germs why were the birds flying on their heads? Moreover, the birds were pelting clay-stones at them; – now what part did those clay-stones play in their death? Hence, we should not follow this way of thinking and unnecessarily explain the great miracles of the Prophets and great spiritual people in this manner.

In principle, the attitude of religion in these matters, towards the physical sciences, whose sphere is limited to the usual relations of natural phenomena, is two fold. We should not, therefore, abandon our established religious principles to please a few people whose religious knowledge is insignificant and who do not possess information about matters of this type, especially when we are under no obligation to do so.

Two Important Points

We would like to mention the two important points here.

1. There should be no misunderstanding about the fact that by the above remarks we do not want to correct and explain the things which people attribute to the Prophets and religious leaders by way of hearsay – things which are not supported by any authentic evidence and have usually a superstitious aspect. What we mean to say is that according to the authentic evidence, which we have in hand, the Prophets of Allah performed some unusual acts to prove their relationship with the supernatural world. Our aim is to defend these kinds of miracles.
2. We do not at all say that a miracle is an exception to the law of cause and effect. We fully respect this law and believe that all events of this world have causes and no phenomenon makes its appearance without a cause.

However, what we say is that it is not necessary that the causes of the miracles should belong to the category of usual and material causes. thence, the miracles and unusual acts of the Prophets have causes which do not conform with the usual natural causes and everyone is not familiar with these mysteries.

After The Defeat of Abraha

The tumult of the 'Year of the Elephant', Abraha's death and the destruction of the enemies of the Ka'bah and Quraysh, made the Makkans and the Ka'bah very honourable in the eyes of the Arab world. Now no one could dare think of attacking Quraysh or doing them any harm or destroying the House of Allah.

The common thinking was to this effect, that: "Allah has, for the sake of the honour of His House and for the honour and greatness of Quraysh, made their sworn enemy roll in dust and blood. In view of this Divine decree Quraysh and the Ka'bah have become respectable in the eyes of the People". They seldom reflected that this development had taken place simply for the sake of the protection of the Ka'bah and the greatness or smallness of Quraysh had nothing to do with it.

This is proved by the fact that the enemy chiefs of that area had attacked Quraysh several times but had never been faced with such a situation.

This victory and success, which was secured without any toil and without even a drop of the blood of Quraysh being shed, created new thoughts in their minds and their conceit, pride and heedlessness increased. They now began to believe in the limitations of others, because they considered themselves to be the distinguished group among the Arabs and thought that they alone were the object of attention of three hundred and sixty idols and enjoyed their support.

From the day they became unrestrained their revelry and voluptuousness knew no bounds. They quaffed cup after cup of palm–date wine and occasionally indulged in wine–drinking in the precincts of the Ka'bah, and according to their idiom, 'spent the best days of their lives' in the neighbourhood of idols made of stone and wood which pertained to the Arab tribes.

In these assemblies everyone who had heard any story about the Manzariyans of Hirah and the Ghassaniyans of Syria and the Yemenite tribes, narrated it to others and they believed that they owed their own happy lives to the attention of idols which had humiliated ordinary Arabs as compared with them and had granted them (i.e. Quraysh) superiority over all others.

Imaginary Frontiers of Quraysh

God forbid that this two–footed being (man) should one day find the horizon of life clear and may assume himself to be of an imaginary privileged class. It is on that day that he appropriates existence and life to himself and does not believe that his fellow–beings are at all entitled in the least to any life and worth.

In order to prove their greatness and superiority over others Quraysh decided on that day that they would not extend the least respect to the people of "Hil" (the area extending upto four leagues from the Ka'bah in all the four sides is called "Haram" and the area beyond that limit is called "Hil"), because, according to them, others were dependent on their Sanctuary and had seen with their own eyes that they (Quraysh) were the object of the favours of the gods of the Ka'bah.

From that time onwards Quraysh began meting out harsh treatment to others. Exercising perfect dictatorship they decided that whenever the people of "Hil" came to perform pilgrimage they should not utilize the edibles brought by them but should obtain food from the people of the "Haram". They also decided that at the time of going round the Ka'bah only the local dress of the Makkans, which had a

national aspect, should be worn. If a person could not afford to wear that dress it was necessary for him to perform the pilgrimage without wearing any clothes.

As regards some Arabs of high rank who did not agree to this arrangement it was decided that after going round the Ka'bah they should take off their clothes and throw them away and nobody was permitted to touch those clothes. As regards women, however, they were obliged, in all circumstances, to go round the Ka'bah unclad. They could cover only the sides of their heads with a piece of cloth and were required to hum some particular verses.

After the event relating to Abraha, who was himself a Christian, no Jew or Christian was permitted to enter Makkah, except as a hired worker of Makkan. In that case also it was obligatory upon him not to utter even a word about his faith and religion.

Things had come to such a pass that they had abandoned some of the ceremonies of Haj, which were to be performed outside the sanctuary. For example, they were not prepared to perform the ceremony of staying at 'Arafah (it is a place beyond the "Haram" where the Hajis are required to stay till sun-set on the 9th of the month of Zil Hijjah.[30](#))

And this was in spite of the fact that their ancestors (the descendants of Isma'il) considered stay at 'Arafah to be a part of the ceremonies of Haj and for their entire apparent superiority Quraysh were indebted to the Ka'bah and to these very Haj ceremonies, because it was on this account that the people were obliged to come to this barren place every year. But for the sanctuary no one would have been inclined to visit this place even once throughout one's life.

From the point of view of social accountability such corruption and discrimination is unavoidable. It was therefore necessary that the environment of Makkah should have been submerged in corruption and pollution so that the world should have become ready for a basic revolution and a penetrating movement.

All these privations, feasting and drinking and lack of restraint were making the environment more and more ready for the appearance of a great reformer of the world and it was not without reason that when Waraqah bin Nawfal, the sage of Arabia, who had embraced Christianity during the last days of his life and had acquired knowledge of the contents of the Evangel, spoke about Allah and the Prophets, he had to face the wrath of the Firaun of Makkah in the person of Abu Sufyan who used to say "We Makkans don't stand in need of Allah or the Prophets, as we enjoy the mercy and favours of our idols"

Abdullah – Father Of The Holy Prophet

At the time when Abdul Muttalib purchased the life of his son by sacrificing one hundred camels in the name of Allah, Abdullah was not more than twenty four years old. This event, besides becoming the cause of his (Abdullah's) renown amongst the Quraysh, ensured for him a great position and honour in his own family, especially in the eyes of Abdul Muttalib. The reason for this was that a person loves

specially that thing, which proves expensive for him, and for which he takes excessive pains. As such Abdullah enjoyed extraordinary respect amongst his friends and kinsfolk.

It goes without saying that when Abdullah was going with his father to the sacrificial altar he was faced with violent antithetical sentiments. The sentiment of respect for his father and appreciation of the great hardships which he had suffered for his sake controlled his entire self and for this reason he had no alternative but to submit to him. On the other hand, however, as the hand of destiny wished that the spring flowers of his life should wither like autumn leaves, a tide of disturbance and agitation rose in his mind.

Abdul Muttalib also found himself, struggling betwixt two dominant forces of 'faith' and 'attachment' and this situation had definitely created a chain of acute worries in the minds of both of them. However, when the problem was solved in the manner narrated above, he thought of making amends for the bitter emotions by immediately marrying Abdullah with Aminah and thus unite his life, which had reached the stage of exhaustion with the most basic relationship of one's existence.

Hence, while returning from the sacrificial altar, Abdul Muttalib, who was still holding his son's hand in his own, went straight to the house of Wahab son of Abd Manaf son of Zohrah and concluded Abdullah's marriage with Wahab's daughter Aminah, who was well-known for her purity and modesty. In the same assembly he (Abdul Muttalib) himself married Dalalah, a cousin of Aminah, who gave birth to Hamzah, the uncle and coeval of the Holy Prophet.[31](#)

The contemporary historian Abdul Wahhab (Professor of History in the University of Egypt, who has written very useful notes on the history of Ibn Athir) has treated the above-mentioned development as something unusual and writes thus: "Going of Abdul Muttalib to the house of Wahab on that very day (when the sentiments of the people were at a high pitch and tears of delight were flowing down their cheeks) and that also with the object of asking for the hands of two girls – one for himself and the other for his son Abdullah – does not conform with the usual standards. The only thing suitable and becoming for them was to take rest, so that both of them could get rid of their mental fatigue, and then attend to some other business."[32](#)

However, we believe that if the said historian had studied the matter in the manner in which we have viewed it, it would have been much easier for him to confirm their action. Abdul Muttalib had appointed a time for the consummation of the marriage and, according to the custom of Quraysh, when that time approached the wedding ceremonies took place at the house of Aminah.

Abdullah and Aminah remained together for some time and then Abdullah left for Syria for purposes of trade. During his return journey, however, he breathed his last, as mentioned below in detail.

Death Of Abdullah In Yathrib

By contracting marriage Abdullah opened a new chapter in his life and his apartment was lighted up by

his having had a spouse in the person of Aminah. After some time he left for Syria for trade along with a caravan which was proceeding there from Makkah. The bell for departure was rung and the caravan proceeded on its way, carrying hundreds of hearts along with itself. At that time Aminah was pregnant.

After a few months the van of the caravan appeared. A number of people went out of the city to receive their kinsfolk. Abdullah's old father was awaiting him and the curious eyes of his wife were also searching for him amidst the caravan, but unfortunately he was not visible anywhere. After making inquiries they learned that, while returning from Syria, Abdullah had been taken ill at Yathrib and had, therefore, stayed there with his relatives to take rest. On hearing this Aminah became very sad and tears trickled from her eyes.

Abdul Muttalib asked his eldest son Harith to go to Yathrib and to bring Abdullah along with him. On reaching there he learned that one month after the departure of the caravan Abdullah had died owing to the same ailment.

On his return Harith informed Abdul Muttalib as well as Abdullah's widow of what had happened. The property left behind by Abdullah consisted of five camels, a herd of sheep and one female slave named Umme Ayman who later nursed the Prophet.

[1.](#) But what was their conception about the idols? Did they consider them fit for worship and to be only intermediaries or they thought that they too possessed power like Allah? This point is beyond our discussion for the present, although the first view is firm and proved.

[2.](#) Qamus-i Kitab-i Muqaddas, root 'Babal'.

[3.](#) Tafsir-i Burhan, vol. 1, page 535

[4.](#) Awa'il al-Maqalat, page 12

[5.](#) Majma'ul Bayan, vol. III, page 319 and al-Mizan, vol. VII, page 170

[6.](#) As regards the particulars of this chapter and matters relating to the birth of Prophet Ibrahim and his breaking the idols, refer to Tarikh-i Kamil, pp. 53 – 62 and Biharul Anwar, vol. XII, pp. 41 – 55. For the sake of brevity we have refrained from mentioning the source of all its contents.

[7.](#) Biharul Anwar, vol. V, page 130, Company Print.

[8.](#) al-'Uyun, page 136; Amali Saduq, page 274 and Bihirul Anwar, page 35.

[9.](#) Tafsir-i Burhan, vol. III, page 64

[10.](#) Sa'dus Su'ud, pp. 41 – 42 and Biharul Anwar, vol. XII, page 118

[11.](#) Tafsir-i Qummi, page 52 and Biharul Anwar, vol. XII, page 100

[12.](#) Biharul Anwar, vol. II, page 112 as quoted from Qassas-i Anbiya.

[13.](#) Tarikh-i Kamil, vol. II, pp. 1 and 21

[14.](#) Their lives have been discussed by Ibn Athir in Tarikh-i Kamil, vol. II, pp. 15 – 21.

[15.](#) It is an admitted fact that the offices related to the Ka'bah did not exist when the sanctuary was constructed, and they came into existence gradually, according to the exigencies of time. Till the advent of Islam these offices were divided into four parts: (1) Custodianship of the Ka'bah and holding charge of its keys (2) Providing water to the pilgrims during Haj season (3) Providing food to the pilgrims. (4) Chiefship of the people of Makkah, standard bearership and command of the army.

[16.](#) Tarikh-i Tabari, vol. II, page 13

[17.](#) Seerah-i Halabi, vol. I, page 5

[18.](#) Seerah-i Halabi, vol. I, page 6 – 7

[19.](#) Tarikh-i Kamil, by Ibn Athir vol. II, page 10

- [20.](#) Tarikh-i Kamil, vol. II, page 6; Tarikh-i Tabari, vol. II, pp. 8 – 9 and Seerah-i Halabi, vol. I, page 8
- [21.](#) Seerah-i Halabi, vol. 5, page 4
- [22.](#) One of the causes for a society being subjected to adversity is the prevalence of sin and debauchery amongst its people and it is not improbable that shameful deeds should bring famines and other calamities in their wake. This proposition, besides being in conformity with philosophical principles, has also been mentioned expressly in the Holy Qur'an and in the Islamic traditions.
- [23.](#) The question arises as to why others did not come up with this suggestion? Possibly they had lost all hope of finding water.
- [24.](#) Tarikh-i Yaqubi, vol. I, page 206 and Seerah-i Ibn Hisham, vol. I, page 45.
- [25.](#) The above-mentioned incident has been narrated by many historians and writers of Seerah. This story is worthy of appreciation for this reason only that it manifests the nobility of character and steadfastness of Abdul Muttalib and clearly indicates how ardent he was in the matter of his faith and in keeping his promises.
- [26.](#) Seerah-i Ibn Hisham, vol. I, page 153 and Bihar, vol. XVI, pp. 74 – 79.
- [27.](#) Tarikh-i Kamil, vol. I, page 253 onwards.
- [28.](#) Seerah-i Ibn Hisham, vol. I, pp. 43 – 62; Faza-il Shazan, pp. 52 – 64, Biharul Anwar, vol. XV, pp. 146 – 155, and Tarikh-i Kamil, vol. I, pp. 260 – 263.
- [29.](#) Tarikh-i Kamil, vol. I, page 263.
- [30.](#) Tarikh-i Kimil by Ibn Athir, vol. I, page 266.
- [31.](#) Tarikh-i Tabari, vol. II, page 4 and Seerah-i Halabi, vol. I, page 54.
- [32.](#) Tarikh-i Ibn Athir, vol. II, page 4 – a part of the footnote.

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