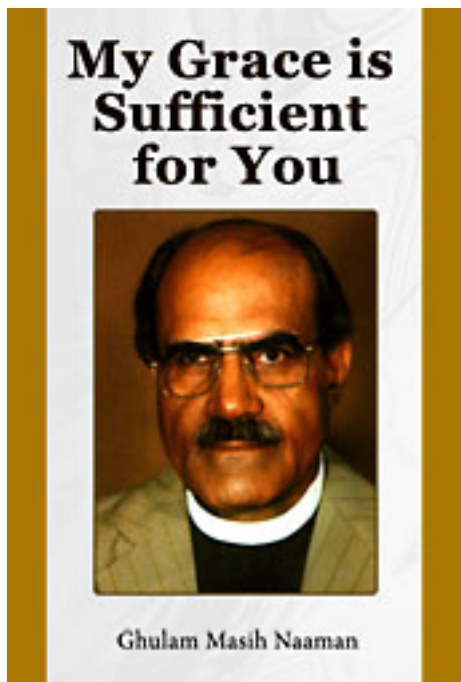


# MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR YOU

## Ghulam Masih Naaman

1 My Muslim Home.....	2
2 Who is This Jesus?.....	7
3 Battles Within and Without.....	11
4 Freedom Fighter.....	15
5 The Unexpected Enemy.....	20
6 Cornered and Conquered.....	26
7 Pilgrimage.....	31
8 Miraculous Escape.....	36
9 Evangelising for Christ.....	40
10 All for Jesus.....	44
11 Quiz.....	46



## 1. My Muslim Home

We were a Muslim family of eight. I had four older brothers and one younger. I was born in Jammu, Kashmir, where my mother had gone for a holiday, but my ancestral hometown was Zaffarawal in Sialkot. My forefathers originally came from Mongolia and had been wealthy land-owners. My father too was a landowner with rich farmland. He grew wheat near the Nala Dek River which ran fast and full during the rainy season, watering the land on its banks. It enabled us to produce so much wheat that we never needed to purchase more. We were a fortunate family that never experienced deprivation. We even had servants who did most of the farm work and I do not recall seeing my father performing any of the labour. When my brothers were old enough, they took over the responsibility for the farm.

After the births of my older brothers, my mother had other children who died in infancy. My birth and survival were seen as a miracle and I carry on my body a mark which signifies this: a pierced ear. My mother had longed for another child. She was a devout Muslim, yet retained a belief in goddesses -- something she had inherited from our ancestors. She went up into the hills in Kashmir where there was a shrine of a certain goddess. She promised this goddess that, if she had a son, she would dedicate him to her, bringing him to the shrine yearly as a sign of gratitude. Thus, my ear was pierced with a gold ring to show that I belonged to the goddess.

You can imagine what this symbol did for me at school. In addition to its being the cause of much teasing from my friends, it also was what the hands of the other boys reached for whenever I was involved in fights. This sign of my miraculous birth and preservation from death brought pain and embarrassment to me. But later in life, I came to understand that a divine hand had indeed been laid upon me -- not the hand of the goddess, but that of the living God.

My paternal uncle took pity upon me and removed the ring. I was relieved, but my mother was deeply upset. She was distressed, because she believed that this would bring about my death. The ring was a kind of talisman guaranteeing me the protection of the goddess -- so she thought. Without it, I would be exposed to danger and even death. But my uncle again came to my rescue and said reassuringly, "You will not die." My mother was just being superstitious. When she asked me to go to the shrine, I politely refused. I was about nine years old. As the days passed and I did not drop dead, I was delivered from

any fears that still lingered in the back of my mind. From that time on I never experienced fear again until later in life -- even in dangerous situations. However, I did experience grief when my younger brother, Ramazan, suddenly contracted pneumonia and died within a few days.

I was still young when my four elder brothers married. We all lived in the same large house with eight bedrooms and a big hall. My brothers had separate rooms for their wives and children. We shared everything, a situation typical of the social structure in India during that time. In a town or village, this was an essential element for the security of all members of the family. Each family member, whether healthy or handicapped, employed or unemployed, shared in the common property and inheritance.

Our household was a happy one, with a kind mother, an affectionate father, and loving in-laws. I always called my sisters-in-law "sisters" and my father taught me to treat them as such, because I had none of my own. We loved one another very much.

In a household with four daughters-in-law, it might be expected that conflict would be commonplace. But it was not so in our home. Mother was a gentle woman and the atmosphere we breathed was one of love and understanding. From my mother, I learned the value of serving others. "To live for myself," said she, "makes me no different from animals. We can only prove ourselves to be true human beings if we live for others." I saw her live out this principle even in threatening circumstances. Her attitude and example were a bedrock for me. Despite the darkness which would threaten to engulf

me later in life, I never totally departed from this foundation.

My father had been a military man and held a Viceroy's Commission in the First World War. During that time, Indian nationalism had not yet reached the stage of opposition to joining the army under British control. India was still part of the British Empire and fighting overseas was regarded as an honourable occupation. My father cherished his memories of the war. He had a vast supply of stories with which to fill our imaginations. We loved to listen to him tell us tales about the exploits of the army during the campaigns in Africa. Father instilled within me a love for heroic tales. Indirectly, he taught us that a man should identify himself in this world by doing something extraordinary. People should be able to recognise our abilities; we should not advertise them, but we should act in a way in which they can be honestly evaluated. This attitude had consequences in my life. Lacking fear as I did, and wanting to excel in life, I was led into some dangerous adventures.

My father was concerned for others. If anyone was oppressed or so poor that he could not afford to obtain justice, my father was always ready to do what he could by seeking remedy from the courts. But he never took any lawsuit of his own to court. Even soldiers, in receipt of a pension, used to turn to him to deal with their affidavits. My father was compassionate, and because of this, he was respected in the neighbourhood and held a high standing in the community.

Because my father had a generous spirit, many guests came to stay in our home. On one occasion, he even welcomed the murderers of his own brother. This brother

had been involved in a land dispute, and a group of people had killed him. Afterwards, this group fled, seeking someplace to hide; unwittingly, they hid in a small shed my father had built in the fields. Not knowing of their foul deed, my father invited them into the house and gave them a meal. Later, the friends of his brother, who were pursuing this murderous group, arrived and denounced them. When my father learned of the death of his brother, he was grieved. But to the surprise of all, he was not angry with the murderers. He was a caring person and did not harbour resentment against anyone.

Father derived his character from his religion. He did not care much for the externals of religion and distrusted the Maulvis (the religious teachers of Islam). He disliked public worship and prayed in private. He was a mystic.

Mysticism or Sufism in Islam (direct communion of the soul with God) was most likely modelled upon Christian hermits who were scattered in the deserts of Egypt and Arabia. The movement was confirmed in Islam by Al-Ghazzali who died in A.D. 1111. In its earliest stages, Sufism was characterised by great devotion, humility, and asceticism, based on self-discipline and self-denial. Obedience to God was seen as that which must spring from the heart. A loving response to God is sought, not mere observance of laws. In search of purity and personal experience of God, the early mystics stressed the importance of prayer and contemplation, enjoying the ecstasy of knowing the love of God. Because of this love, they were able to love God in return and respond obediently to Him. Later on, they used drugs and music to induce a state of ecstasy. The mysticism of my

father was a deliberate attempt to cultivate a personal relationship with God, but it never developed into a longing for a mystical union with Him. He did not resort to the use of drugs, music, dance, or incantations to induce a mystical state. He maintained a moral equilibrium which governed his whole life.

At home, he was a gentle person, concerned with our welfare and education. My brothers and I were educated in a school two miles from our home. To make it easier for us, our father built a house near the school in Zaffarawal, so that we could get to school on time.

I entered primary school when I was five. At this time, I began to go to the mosque near our home. Every Muslim boy from the age of five was expected to go to the mosque once a week, to learn and recite the Qur'an. The mosque was the centre for congregational worship and instruction, and I attended every Friday, the day of devotion for Muslims, along with my friends. While the Imam (prayer leader) uttered the prayers, we all prostrated ourselves at selected intervals, following his example. Usually, he would give a short address in which he explained some aspect of the teaching of the prophet Muhammed. It was not always easy to understand him, but our religious leaders made certain that we learned our faith. From my earliest years, the basic witness of Islam was instilled in me: *La ilaha illa Allah; Muhammed rasul Allah*, "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammed is his Ambassador."

My primary-school headmaster had great influence on me. He was a poet, orator, writer and musician. Owing to his encouragement, I began writing poetry

myself. This has been a source of delight to me throughout my life and my notebook is never far from me. I also learned to play the harmonium, but was not allowed to do so at home. So, my headmaster granted me permission to practise at his house. The hand of God was upon me from my earliest years. He was preparing me for a life of service. He was concerned with me and with the smallest details in my life. Truly, He is a great God.

I spent four years in primary school. When I was nine, my brothers left home; two went to Jammu and two to Lahore. Then, it was time for me to go to high school. While there, I did not develop much interest in academic work, but my family was determined that I should apply myself to it. The school they chose for me was in Jammu, Kashmir: the Maharajah Ranbeer Singh High School. It was a privilege for me to go there because it was built for the sons of the rajahs or ruling families. The rajahs were the kings who conquered and established themselves as rulers in various parts of India. There were twenty-two rajahs in Kashmir during this period. I was the only Muslim student in that school. Muslims were not allowed there, only Hindus. But since my father had been in the army and was socially influential, he persuaded the headmaster to accept me. People always found it difficult to refuse the requests of my father.

This school offered a kind of pre-military training as befitting the sons of warrior kings. Riding horses featured prominently and I loved it. I also enjoyed shooting. My father's Greener Gun was very light and I could cope with its recoil. I remember spending a lot of time with it whenever I had the opportunity. This was much more pleasant than fetching milk every morning,

a small task which our servants performed, because I had refused to do it. Hunting interested me more than studies, because diligence and hard work had not yet become part of my character. Besides, the purpose of my preparation at school was not yet clear to me. The sons of the rajahs were being prepared for their future professions; some were commissioned as junior officers in the army and others went into public service. But I was not yet sure where my education would lead me.

Because this school was one for Hindus, we observed the practices of Hinduism. I learned to look forward to getting up early for prayers. We had to memorise perfectly, word by word, the mantras or passages of the Hindu Scripture, which enshrined the basic teachings and precepts of the religion. Hinduism did not attract me, but what I learned gave me invaluable understanding of this religion. I also had to learn Hindi, which I speak fluently to this day.

There was a big gap in my education at the high school. I did not learn anything about Islam. I was happy about this, but my brother, Khuda Bakhsh, was not. Because my father had died, he had assumed the responsibility for my education. He made me leave the school and enter at Jammu Islamiyyah High School. It turned out to be an orphanage rather than a boarding school, but this did not bother my brother. He was so eager for me to have more knowledge of Islam that it made no difference to him where I gained it.

I was not an enthusiastic student; I used to skip lessons and go home for meals at any time during the day when I felt like it and when I knew my brother would be away. My "sisters" did not reveal my actions.

Inevitably, the school made formal complaints and this soured the relationship between my brother and me. He was paying for my education and I was making little use of the opportunity he was working so hard to provide.

This situation worsened as a result of a relationship I had formed with a young girl. During one of the vacations, I went to a village near Srinagar where we owned a plot of land. There, I met Salima and fell in love. I was captivated from the moment I set my eyes upon her. She was the daughter of the family that tended our land and with which we had a distant relation. We became good friends and used to meet frequently. I did not realise that the attraction was mutual until the day before I was due to leave. We were together and she suddenly began to weep. She did not want me to leave. This touched me deeply and our love grew stronger every minute. The next year when I returned, I found that she had grown even more beautiful. However, I could sense a change in her. She avoided the intimacy we had previously shared, remaining distant. She reassured me that her love for me was greater than ever and that she had missed me terribly. I was puzzled.

What could be wrong, I wondered. Our relationship had been a pure one. We simply enjoyed being with each other. Real love can be experienced without sexual expression. I learned early in life that sexual intimacy can destroy a beautiful relationship. One must reserve that for one's life partner, after marriage. However, it became clear to me that a marriage between the two of us was not to be. Her family had sensed that my family would never approve of such a marriage. The family of Salima was not wealthy

enough and mine would never allow such a union to take place. My heart was broken, but there was nothing I could do. The relationship between my family and me became strained further.

With my heart full of grief, I returned to school. I just could not apply myself to my work. I had never really been excited about work, but now it seemed absolutely senseless. I was not happy there nor at home. I felt that my family had deliberately spoiled my chance for real happiness. It was not long before the tense relationship between my family and me reached a climax.

During one of the periods when I skipped a lesson, my brother returned home unexpectedly and found me in a nearby tea shop. These shops were common places of gossip and idleness, but I enjoyed sitting there and watching the crowds. Suddenly, I was startled. My brother was standing beside me. He demanded to know why I was at a tea shop when I should have been at school. Of course, I had no satisfactory answer to give and he became angry. He saw a young boy who was seven or eight years old working in the shop, and seized the opportunity to disgrace me publicly. My brother called this boy and began to question him. Child labour was not forbidden nor was education compulsory, so it was not unusual to see children working. His position contrasted sharply with my very privileged one.

"Sonny," my brother asked, "what time do you get up for work in the morning?"

"I get up about 3 o'clock in the morning, sir, and I clean all the dirty dishes from the night before, scour the pots and pans for the morning purees (flat cakes) and halvas

(batter pudding), and then I remain with the shopkeeper all day."

"What time do you go to bed at night?"

"Never before eleven o'clock, Sir."

My brother turned to me, his eyes blazing with anger and said: "Look at this child, hardly old enough to leave the side of his mother; he only gets four hours of sleep a day. Let him be an example and lesson to you. You do not study or work. Be a man! Life can be extremely harsh for those who throw its opportunities away." With that, he turned abruptly and left.

I was left confused and embarrassed. I was confronted with my idleness and felt shame. My family was wealthy and had a good reputation, but I was becoming an intolerable thorn in their flesh. My dependency dawned upon me, so I took the words of my brother as a personal challenge and decided that from then on I would rely entirely upon myself. I would not continue to live on the favours of others. This resolution, however, did not lead to a more zealous application to my work at school. Instead, I grew irritable with everything. The tenth-year examination was to be held in March. Just before this, I ran away.

## 2. Who is This Jesus?

World War II had begun, and I was sixteen years old. India was caught in a dilemma. How could she join in the war with an imperialist power that held the entire Indian sub-continent in subjection? Naziism was evil and needed to be condemned, but for many Indians, it represented an extreme embodiment of the same imperialism and racism that held

India in subservience. The Indian National Congress was loud in declaring that only a free India could join in the war against Germany. "The people must be consulted," was its cry. The political leaders, however, were divided. They hated the aggression of Hitler, but were also hostile to the idea of helping Britain. Yet, a subject nation cannot determine her own course, and when war broke out, India found herself fighting on the side of the British.

Like most Indians, I too shared the intense desire for independence from British rule, but I was too young to understand all that was going on with politics and ideologies. My immediate concern was to find something to do. I was alone and could not expect help from my family -- nor did I want any, for that matter! I was resolute in my determination to stand alone, so I joined the Armed Forces. When I applied to enter the Royal Air Force, I had no difficulty. I answered a few questions and was enlisted as a flight mechanic, concerned with the maintenance and repair of airplanes.

My initial aviation training took place in Lahore where I learned under American instructors, and my first appointment was to an airport in Calcutta. After a time of instruction, I was sent to Burma and Rangoon. I did normal army routine and was on twenty-four-hour duty.

I was later sent to the Air Force Academy in Calcutta. There, I earned a master's degree in military intelligence. One of our administration instructors said something that I have never forgotten: "Always win the confidence of your subordinates." This became a guiding principle in my association with the men under me. I tried to build up a personal relationship with

them. Whenever one of them had any difficulty, I would try to help in whatever way I could. For me, the value of every man did not depend upon his colour, race, or creed. Life is precious in every person. Unfortunately, not everyone shared this view.

I never disobeyed the orders of my senior officers, nor would I allow my subordinates to disobey mine. During war, disobeying orders carried the death penalty, but I never made use of this punishment. If a young subordinate did not obey my order, then I attempted to find a way of cancelling it honourably.

Full dedication to my work, integrity and trustworthiness -- these were the qualities that enabled me to succeed in every position. I did not tolerate dishonesty in myself nor in others. I never put pressure on my subordinates without good reason, and would listen carefully to their legitimate requests. Thinking only of their well-being, I was even prepared to perform an interval of duty for them myself. This is why they were ready to shed their last drop of blood for me.

On the advice and recommendation of my senior Indian officers, I became part of a combined group of the Intelligence Corps. I was not anti-British, yet I could not help noticing that relationships in the Air Force were not pleasant. Some of the British officers were condescending in their attitude to the Indian officers. They regarded us as inferior and called us "bloody Indians" and their language to us, in general, was not polite.

There were even greater problems that troubled me, however. I was disturbed by the preferential treatment given to the

British. Their lives were esteemed while Indian lives were devalued and dispensed with easily. This formed a wide gap between Indian and British officers, even those of the same rank. Racial discrimination was widespread. The British made no attempt to socialise with the Indians. Many believed that one of the great joys of going to a place like Simla, a famous hill station in the Himalayas, was not only to get away from the heat, but also from the native population!

This attitude was once manifested in tragic proportions in an incident with my close friend, Squadron Leader Surinder Singh. Our area commander had been notified several times of defects in a certain bomber. One day, he sent orders to our workshop, saying that because of these reports, Surinder Singh should take this aircraft on test-flights himself. Surinder was prepared to go, but was rather apprehensive. He took the aircraft and flew it in the appointed direction. We lost radio contact with him after roughly fifteen minutes. When another fifteen minutes had passed, we saw that an airplane was coming over the Bay of Bengal. It was Surinder. The land forces had not been alerted to provide cover for him, and the Japanese had blown away half his face and one of his eyes.

A second distressing situation arose out of a famine in Bengal. It revealed human wickedness at its worst. During 1943-44, Bengal and East and South India were devastated by famine. Epidemics followed the famine, particularly cholera and malaria. This soon spread to other provinces. Unofficial accounts put the death toll at 3,400,000 but the official Famine Enquiry Commission concluded that 1,500,000 deaths occurred in Bengal



"as a direct result of the famine and the epidemics which followed." Whatever the exact figures, no one could doubt that death was claiming thousands of lives every day. The awful results of the famine could have been averted, but the authorities manifested a sense of indifference and complacency. One could scarce believe the horrific accounts that came out of the devastated areas. Some authorities accused the reporters of dramatising the situation. But a time came when these reports could no longer be denied, and the arguing over who was to blame only diverted attention from relief to self-justification. Thousands were dying daily, yet rations lay rotting in the government's supply houses. Malaria was a killer disease in those days, yet a vast supply of anti-malarial medicines remained unused in our medical stores. Sickened by the insensitive behaviour around me, I began taking tea, sugar, rice, and lentils from the ration depots and distributing them freely among those in need. I also gave away some anti-malarial medicines.

Times were so bad that even wealthy Indians, with all their accumulated riches, could not buy food for themselves. People were reduced to exchanging the virginity of their daughters for provisions. Of course, there were some who seized this opportunity to exploit their fellow human beings, selling antimalarial tablets for one rupee each! There were those whom no human tragedy could stir. While the famine raged and the epidemics took their toll, revelry went on daily among both the English and the wealthy Indians in Calcutta. They with their petty squabbles and love of pleasure carried on as if nothing were happening.

My mind was thrown into turmoil over all of this and I could only react emotionally to all that was going on around me. My youthful years seemed to be racing by and I matured quickly in those circumstances. Once, I and a fellow Indian officer named Puran picked up two boys abandoned on the road and brought them to the camp. We kept them hidden for more than six months. When our commanding officer became aware of this, we were severely reprimanded. My colleague and I were prepared to pay any price to save the lives of these children, but they ended up being sent to a refugee camp in a remote part of West Bengal. We hoped that they would come to know some kind neighbours who could help them, for we could not help them any longer.

How hard it was to swallow my emotions. Why is life here valued so cheaply? How is human life to be evaluated? Does no one really care? If there is a God, where is He in all of this? These are the questions I kept asking myself. But I soon discovered a light in the darkness. It is true that the dominant attitude of the British officers towards the Indians was one of arrogant superiority, sometimes resulting in brutality; yet, there were those whose lives were shining examples of goodness and love. These were Christians who sought to imitate their Master, Jesus Christ, and they revealed the light and love of God. Their example planted a seed within me that would later grow and flower into full conversion.

One of these people was Captain Baxter. He was a young officer who was transferred to our wing. Like most of the British, he was reserved, but he was also broad-minded. In his treatment of his subordinates, we could clearly see the kind

of person he was. He was neither patronising nor condescending to the Indian officers. He cared for our welfare. There was a time when the Indian staff requested separate cooking and eating arrangements. Muslim food requires special preparations and ovens in order to cook properly. Our most urgent need was to have chulhas (ovens of clay) made for the new hall. It was agreed that we should have these, but it was difficult for us to see how our needs would be met, considering the conditions under which we were living. You can imagine my amazement and amusement when I returned from the workshop one day to find that Baxter had got hold of a book of instructions and was attempting to construct an oven himself. My admiration for him grew. As I watched him, I began to realise the great love for others that was in his heart. There he was, trying to construct our oven with his own hands. He appreciated the nature of our request and was determined to see it fulfilled. It was a simple gesture, but it moved me deeply.

It is a sign of acceptance and friendship when people share a meal together. Strangers know that they are welcome if they are invited to have a meal with their host. Baxter ate breakfast with us every morning -- something the other British officers would never do. Again, this may seem a trivial thing, but in the climate of foreign domination under which we lived, this was touching. It was a genuine act of friendship and we all responded warmly to it.

Baxter was not a man to reprimand his men for trivial offenses, even when correction would have been appropriate. For example, some young men once came to breakfast unshaven. Instead of rebuking

them, Baxter produced a blade from his own pocket and gave it to the men so that they could go and shave.

What impressed me most about Baxter, however, was his behaviour in times of raids. If there was a Japanese bomb attack while he was present, instead of going to the trenches for shelter, he would say to all the men: "Come on, lads. Let's go to the chapel." The chapel was just a tent used for worship. We normally obeyed him. During the times in the chapel, he did all the praying himself. The only thing we had to do was to say "Amen," when he was finished. This happened two or three times. One day, there was a severe attack. The sky was full of planes, and we started running for the trenches. Death seemed inevitable. Baxter shouted: "Boys, it is no use running to the trenches; you will not be safe there. Let's go to the unit chapel." We chuckled at this seemingly silly order. It was alright to go to the chapel when there was a minor raid, but this time it seemed ridiculous. Yet Baxter had a note of authority and assurance in his voice. He said: "I am going to pray to the Lord Jesus. You do not have to believe in Him or do anything; just say 'Amen' when I am finished." Although we were skeptical, we obeyed and entered the tent with him. We sat down, amazed at this gesture in such a crisis. As Baxter began to pray, he wept. His words still ring in my ears:

**Lord Jesus, reveal Your strength and power today. Prove to these little ones that You are real. For the sake of their loved ones and their parents, protect them from this attack. Let these men know that You are alive and that You save not only man's body but also his soul from destruction. Amen.**

While Baxter was praying, a peculiar transformation took place in the chapel. Everyone became absolutely silent. Stranger still, we could not hear anything outside. We were only in a tent, yet there seemed to be a blanket of silence draped over it. When we emerged from the tent, the sight was appalling. Pieces of human flesh were strewn about. The unit which was based on the other side of the canal had been hit by several bombs. Heartrending groans from the young men reached our ears. Bombs had also fallen into the canal behind the main mess-hall, and the water in it was boiling. Mud was overflowing the banks, and a fog hung everywhere. In the midst of this destruction, we were safe. Dazed and shocked, we could not help concluding that Baxter's Lord Jesus was alive and that he listens to prayer and saves his people.

Who is this Lord Jesus I wondered? As far as I knew from the Qur'an, he was simply a prophet like all the other prophets. Yet, people do not pray to dead prophets for deliverance. I never had heard a prayer such as Baxter's. It was so simple yet direct. When I was a boy growing up in our hometown, I used to go to an American mission station with my friends. What we enjoyed most was going to the house of the missionary after the services to sing choruses with his wife and play with the toys that were there. But during the services, I never understood what the missionary said or prayed. He shouted a lot. Baxter, however, seemed to be talking to a friend standing by his side. It seemed so easy. Was it really possible?

### **3. Battles Within and Without**

Shortly after the Japanese bombing ended,

I started work again as a flight mechanic. But my work was cut short by an accident which nearly cost me my life. We were repairing damaged aircraft and testing them after they had been fixed. One day, I received orders from our commanding officer to test a particular plane, because the work which had been done was not satisfactory; the communication system was not functioning properly. At this point, I recalled what had happened to my friend during a test flight and how half of his face had been blown away. But I had to obey orders, so I embarked on my flight along with another friend of mine. We were given thirty-three minutes to test it and return. When only thirty miles from the workshop, I was hit from below. My friend, Putan, pushed me from the pilot's seat and took over the controls. We managed to land safely and I was taken to the 56th Indian General Hospital. The whole right side of my face was severely burned.

When I arrived, I was given first aid. I was hardly conscious of what was happening, but realised that there was difficulty involved in my admittance. Two days previously, a bomb had fallen on the ward reserved for the British officers. Lying semi-conscious on a stretcher, I overheard a conversation between the senior medical officer and two nurses. When they inquired what was to be done for me, the medical officer insisted that he could not admit me into the general ward because I was RAF personnel. The nurses were upset because they knew the extent of my injuries. One of them asked the officer, "What is more important -- rank or life?" But they did not succeed in securing my admittance. They offered to look after me themselves in a room in the nurses'

quarters.

I could not see where I was, because both my eyes were bandaged. I learned of my injuries from the conversations I overheard. For twenty days, I lay in that room, but was not neglected; my two "angels" saw to that. With their own hands, they fed me and made sure that my needs were met. I do not remember what other medical treatment I received. All I know is that I have not been able to see properly with my right eye ever since.

Early in the morning of the day when I had to leave, these two nurses came into my room and introduced themselves. They were Amber and Mary, two Indian nurses. I was curious to know why they had shown such love for me when others seemed so indifferent. I was deeply moved by their answer. "The reason we attended you," they said, "is not that you are a handsome man (they could hardly think this of me in my stricken condition with bandaged eyes!) or because we are seeking reward, but simply because we are Christians. Our Master suffered for the salvation of man and it is our duty to serve others."

I was overwhelmed by this simple confession. I wept so much that it seemed I would drown in my own tears. That these two nurses should care for me so compassionately in the name of their Lord humbled me. They comforted me and said, "You must not cry; your wound is still fresh." I bowed my head in a feeling of immense gratitude and dearly longed to kiss their feet. Once again, I was confronted with the Lord Jesus in these two disciples of His; He seemed to be pursuing me and I could not escape. In the midst of all the slaughter and lack of

concern for human life I witnessed daily, here were God's people, caring and living for others. They were upholding another set of values similar to those my mother had taught me. I sensed the presence of God with His people and wondered if He was beckoning me.

There was no time for such reflections to be prolonged. I was discharged and sent back to camp. Upon arrival, I was told that I would be given lighter work to do. My job was to prevent Air Force personnel from entering sections of the city that were off limits -- red light districts. In this position, I became acquainted with the people who lived in these areas. This would seem an unlikely place to witness genuine love, but this is precisely what I found.

There was a young airman in our workshop named Philip who was born in the province of Bihar. His companionship provided us with fun and laughter. Punctuality was often shirked, with the excuse that so much enjoyment was found in the company of Philip that no one could leave his presence. But it was not only his pleasant nature which drew me to him. It was the sacrifice he was willing to make out of love for his Saviour.

One morning, I was ordered to inform Philip that he was being transferred to another workshop. He was upset and did not want to go. When I asked him why, he said that there was a girl, Kumla, a prostitute from a disreputable family, with whom he had fallen in love. I tried to reason with him that to marry such a girl was contrary to accepted social practice, but he remained resolute. His decision was one which sprang from his deepest convictions. He said: "My religion is based

on sacrifice. The Lord Jesus loved a wicked person like me and offered His own life as a sacrifice for the salvation of my soul. If He can receive someone like me, then it is my duty to accept sinful people whom the world despises." These words surprised me. Philip had given the impression of someone who was lighthearted and carefree. Now he appeared totally different. His ideals shone like brilliant lights in the darkness. Nothing I could say had any effect on him; his mind was made up. To him, this proposed marriage was an act of sacrifice, almost a direct imitation of his Master's. Captain Baxter understood. With his help, I was able to explain the affair to the commanding officer and the order of transfer was revoked. Kumla was invited to stay in the camp until the wedding which was performed by the area chaplain. Later, they both went to live in Philip's village. This was ultimate bravery. He could easily have gone to a place where no one knew them, but to go among his own people, where criticism and disapproval were sure to surface, took a lot of courage.

In the following days, I kept reminiscing over my past experiences: the quiet, Christian life of Baxter, the kindness of Amber and Mary, and the practical example of self-sacrifice displayed by Philip. These memories whirled in my mind and I could not help but reflect upon them. From where did the grace and strength come for a man to defy social convention and prejudice to marry a girl like Kumla? These people believed that they owed their lives to the sacrifice which the Lord Jesus had made for them, and they were allowing Him to direct and govern their lives; they did not merely believe a set of doctrines. These thoughts

transported me into a different world -- one in which I could imagine everyone loving and caring for the other. What a vision! But there was no time for such thoughts. Perhaps there ought to have been. In a world which was becoming meaningless, I had caught a glimpse of another in which human life was sacred and precious.

The inner turmoil which my experiences created within me was nothing compared to the greater turmoil that was engulfing our country. Politics invaded one's existence whether one liked it or not. The Indian subcontinent was on the verge of a great upheaval.

World War II ended in 1945. Peace had arrived in Europe, but for India, it was one of the bloodiest periods of her existence. This time, it was not our foreign rulers who were responsible, but religion. Religion became the rock upon which our people stumbled. Hindus and Muslims were no longer able to live together peacefully. The concept of all Indians sharing one India, united and peaceful, was shattered. Now they were caught up in a wave of bitter hatred for each other. Fear fuelled this hatred to an extraordinary degree. The scale of murders, riots and arson which ensued, baffled even the most cynical.

Islam was not a new religion. It had arrived in India in A.D. 712. Despite occasional clashes, it was tolerated and coexisted peacefully with Hinduism which was deeply established in the country. Only later did Islam become a political force in northern India, as a descendant of Genghis Khan captured Delhi in A.D. 1526, establishing the Mughal Dynasty. The Mughals did not attempt an entire

conversion of the population to Islam; the powerful class of Hindu Brahmins would not have let them even if they had tried. While some among the Muslim upper classes were descendants of the Mughals, the masses of the adherents of Islam had been converted from the lowest castes of Hindu society. In the end, the Hindus and Muslims were hardly distinguishable from each other. Both were found among the poor and exploited.

Why did people, who had lived together peacefully, now rise up in hatred against each other? The answer lies in the political scene. Muslims feared that Hindu domination in an independent India would put them in a weak position. They believed that the Hindus could not be trusted to treat them justly. Muslims were also growing aware of themselves as a people with their own identity. Thus, the Muslim middle class began to assert itself. The Muslim League, formed in 1906, was a deliberate attempt to safeguard Muslim rights, and the resulting policy of the British towards them changed, becoming more and more favourable.

Amid the political ideas absorbing the minds of Hindus and Muslims, one cry sounded loud and clear: Muslims must have their own state -- Pakistan. Thus, nationalist propaganda ignited the imaginations of Muslims. Added to this was a religious fervour which set the political scene ablaze. Previously, the cultural heritage which Hindus and Muslims shared was enough for them to coexist peacefully. But now, their faith, allied with nationalism, became the rock upon which they fell, and they were irretrievably divided.

To establish peace in the country, the

British Army was asked to help the national police. My part in this was short-lived. Baxter was no longer with us. He had been transferred to another station. One day after the evening meal, I was arrested. On the following day, I was taken to an Indo-Chinese island called Bala Nakamatti near Singapore. I had no idea of the charges against me but soon learned that they were connected with the Indian National Army. A week later, my papers arrived. These were the charges:

1. I was caught selling rations to a Bengali, and before the unit guard could blow his whistle, I shot and wounded him with a revolver.
2. I and Corporal Izhaq had greeted and garlanded Mr. Mahatma Gandhi, while we were wearing government uniforms.
3. I and Sergeant Aslam had been heard addressing the political meeting of Mr. Muhammed Ali Jinnah, and our words contained an incitement to revolt.

The presiding officer in the camp read all the papers and returned them. These charges could not be proven. Instead of sending me back to Chittagong, he sent me to a group near Barrackpur. Although all further proceedings against the Indian National Army were dropped in April 1946, the resolution demanding the release of all the prisoners was not carried through. I was eventually released in March, 1947.

I was at a crossroads. I wondered what to do with my life. There seemed to be no purpose in remaining with the Air Force, and I was deeply disenchanted with life there. The war and fighting sickened me and, with my injury, I could only do light work. All the training in aviation and

intelligence work was of no use to me now. When I began the murderous game in the Air Force, I was simply following in the footsteps of my father. I had hoped to see exotic lands and perhaps gain a medal for meritorious service. I did enjoy an excursion to Burma and Singapore, but my desired medal eluded me. Life in the Air force with all its discrimination and prejudice seemed intolerable to me. I needed to get out.

Once again, my family began to exert pressure upon my life. I had kept in touch with them during my time in the Air Force, and if ever there was an illness in the family, I always went home. But now they demanded my return. Because my father had died, I decided to give in to their requests and put forward my name for discharge.

At first, it seemed that I could not go immediately. Regulations stipulated that a person involved with intelligence work should be kept in the forces for eighteen months from the day a request for discharge was made. The purpose of this was for the person in question to forget the secret codes, so that he would not be able to use any of the information he had acquired once he returned to civilian life. But Captain Dr. Abdullah came to my rescue, dispensing with this condition in my case, saying that I needed immediate medical attention. I was discharged and left for home with the discharge papers bearing the remarks of Dr. Abdullah about the injury to my right eye. But my mother was shocked when I returned. Her son had been given no medal!

#### **4. Freedom Fighter**

Sensing a vacuum in my life, I returned to

Jammu, Kashmir, in March, 1947. But the climate of hostility and disruption forced me to be concerned with the safety of my family and to help them in the troubled times in which we lived. Here was an opportunity to heal the breach in our relationship.

It was a tense time. We had to be careful in what we said and did. Hindus were the majority in Jammu, and the Muslims in northern Kashmir. We were conscious that we were surrounded by a hostile people. The position of Kashmir was not settled.

British rule in India ended in the middle of August 1947, but two countries appeared instead of one. The Muslim country of Pakistan, with one wing in the east and the other in the west, was partitioned from the rest of India. An upheaval of population took place as thousands of families moved to the country of their choice. For Muslims, this often involved a journey of several hundred miles to Pakistan in the west. The suffering was unimaginable. Riots gave way to widespread massacres. Independent states like Kashmir were given the option of joining whichever country they wished. Kashmir was one of the few important states which had not signed the Instrument of Accession which all the independent states had been invited to sign. The Maharajah of Kashmir was entangled in a dilemma. Hari Singh, the hereditary Maharajah, was a staunch Hindu and there was intense hostility between him and Pandit Nehru, the prime minister of independent India. Fearing that India would impose democracy in his state, Hari Singh postponed any union for as long as possible. Although he had been repeatedly urged by all the political authorities to determine the will of the people, he showed no intention of doing

so. The majority of his people were Muslim, but it was unthinkable for a Hindu ruler to submit to Muslim supremacy. He played the game of procrastination with great relish.

The killings and brutalities, which had begun after partition, continued unabated. No one was safe anywhere. Events were moving quickly and the reign of terror was spreading and permeating every level of society. But even in this darkness, there were small lights shining. Not everyone is transformed into an enemy simply because the political situation changes. Our very kind and dear neighbour, Iqbal Singh, a Sikh, entreated us to leave town because the situation there was getting desperate. He said to me, "If anyone should threaten your lives, we as your neighbours will be obliged to defend you -- even with our own lives." Such generosity of spirit in a sea of hatred was a beacon of light in the whirlpool which threatened to drown us. We knew that the Maharajah would eventually join India, even though the majority of people in Kashmir were Muslims.

Our lives were in constant danger and we had to do something. I persuaded my brothers to send their wives and children to our village home. They did so reluctantly, but they had no other choice. The situation grew worse. Daily, we heard news of atrocities being committed. Every restraint upon the murderous instincts of the people seemed to have been removed. The authorities appeared helpless to stop them. I had to force my two elder brothers to leave and join their wives. This was a heavy blow for them because they had land and property here in Jammu. To leave would mean abandoning all they had worked hard for all their lives. But since

their lives were in danger, they were forced to choose their priorities and they realised that they could not exchange their lives for their property. Despite their distress and grief, they left. I promised to stay on and look after our familial interests.

The terror crept nearer and invaded our own factory. We had a fourteen-year-old labourer whose name was Illyas. When he did not return home for lunch one day, his younger sister came to the factory to find out what had happened. I told her that he had never even come to work that morning, but she insisted that he had left home for work as usual. My suspicions were aroused. Could he have become the latest victim? I became alarmed and feared the worst had happened. Taking the young girl by the hand, I walked with her through the streets in search of her brother. Suddenly, to our horror, we saw him, lying dead in the gutter. I felt sick and the little one beside me began to cry uncontrollably. My attempts to comfort her were in vain. Later, I broke the news to the family and helped with the funeral arrangements. Illyas was buried that same day.

Who would be next? We were all prime targets. Our Sikh neighbour again pleaded with me to leave. It was not easy to persuade the workers to go because their wages at the factory were their only income. To leave meant unemployment and consequent starvation for their families. Besides, they were loyal and would not entertain the thought of leaving me alone in this difficult situation. But I insisted that they leave and paid them. Sialkot, the city over the border in Punjab, Pakistan, offered some safety, so they went there. I closed the factory. This was such a sad occasion for me. Our last hope



to save what we had was gone. In Jammu, we had three houses, a shop, a factory, and four-hundred acres of valuable land. Now this had to be all left behind. Paying for our new state had a costly price, but the idealistic concept of a separate country for Muslims -- Pakistan -- had triumphed.

Near the end of September, 1947, I put on my RAF uniform, took up my gun, and began walking through the streets. I assumed an official manner, so that I would not be molested. It was dark when I reached the Tui River and this provided a convenient cover as I swam across. On the other side, I heard the word "Halt!" and became quite alarmed. Seeing my uniform, the guard said, "Okay, I was only checking." I continued walking. As soon as I was out of sight, I ran the rest of the twenty miles to my home in Zaffarawal. My mother welcomed me with tears in her eyes. The life we had built together now crumbled around us. The future seemed bleak. But according to the politicians, it was an exciting and new beginning for us. We were fortunate. Our circumstances were not as distressing as they could have been. We still had a comfortable house, sufficient food, and were spared being sent to a refugee camp.

Life lost all meaning for me. Everything seemed pointless and empty. I was plunged into despair and depression. But I could not shake the idea that life did have a meaning and purpose. It was I who had lost it and it was my job to find it again. I turned to religion to find solace and a new direction -- something to live for, even to die for. My whole being craved for some worthwhile activity. I was convinced that all that I was, as well as what I had experienced and been trained for, needed a new outlet.

I began to take Islam seriously. It was the religion I had been brought up with. I was determined to be a good Muslim, and prayer became a regular feature of my life. Muslims are obliged to pray at five specific times, but I did not feel restricted by this requirement and regarded it as the bare minimum. I also sought religious teachers whom I hoped could point me in the right direction.

The call to prepare for Jihad or "Holy War" was being sounded from every mosque. As we had feared, the Maharajah of Kashmir had finally aligned the province with India. Most Muslims were incensed; if Kashmir would not be part of Pakistan, then they preferred it to be separate. Thus, they were now called upon to fight a holy war for its independence. This was a supreme service. The principle of Jihad is a call for all faithful Muslims to fight against infidels or unbelievers. Since the inception of Islam, politics and religion have always been linked. It was my supreme duty to please Allah that guided me to become a freedom fighter. Thus began that period in my life when I sank to the lowest depths in which all the values of my upbringing seemed threatened. My zeal overruled the voice of conscience, and I succumbed to the thirst for vengeance and death. I began preparation for this new movement which seemed to offer me all I needed at that time. At last the vacuum was going to be filled.

I met Sardar Muhammed Ibrahim, the first president for a free Kashmir, who gave me his personal card and sent me to the headquarters of the Muslim army of freedom fighters. I enlisted and joined as an ordinary soldier. I did not want to impress anyone with my previous experience, so I said nothing about my life

and training in the RAF. Most of the freedom fighters were ex-army or air force men. But the freedom movement was not well-organised, and no one was paid. Those who supported us fed us. We had no resources of our own. When nothing was available, we simply killed an animal to satisfy our hunger. There were often tensions with the Pakistan National Army which would have preferred to see us as a well-organised and disciplined set of fighters. But this was impossible.

By October, large numbers of men from the Northwest Frontier were pouring into Kashmir. Some of my companions and I joined them in the first attack launched from Muzaffarabad on Bada Mavla. Skirmishes on that front continued for about two months. When cold temperatures set in, I was sent to the southern front. Here also were several battles. The platoon to which I was sent was entrusted with blocking the road that connects Pathankot (and therefore the rest of India) with Jammu and, if possible, with seizing and occupying it. After the Maharajah had aligned himself with India, Indian troops were sent to help him quell the riots and repel the tribesmen. We persisted in our attempt to occupy the road, but we suffered several defeats and many were killed. However, we did manage to inflict casualties on the side of the opposition, even while we were being beaten.

It was during the height of my involvement in the freedom movement that I met Salima again. She was delighted and eager to renew our friendship, and even to consider marriage. My family had been stripped of its wealth and therefore no one could object to our marrying. I too longed for this, but not just yet. I was too

caught up in the mood of nationalist fervour and religious zeal to pursue my own happiness. We parted, but little did I know that this was to be our last meeting.

Some time later, I went to Salima's village, but found that she was sick. I was not allowed to see her. Not knowing the extent of her illness and determined to pursue the course I had set for myself, I left the village without demanding to see her. But I was back at the village within a month, and the sight that greeted me sent a chill down my spine. My heart began to beat so quickly that I thought my chest would burst. I saw Salima's brother, family, and relatives returning home with sad faces and downcast eyes. I became alarmed and fear gripped my heart. Had something happened to Salima? Her brother told me the worst: "Salima died this morning. We have just buried her." I was shattered.

As I looked up, I could see the sun setting. There was such a beautiful glow in the sky. The day was nearly at its end, and Salima's life had also been brought to a close. Did she die of a broken heart and was I to blame? Anguish and remorse filled me. The door to personal happiness now seemed shut forever. I had lost the most precious thing I could have had. I returned to my fighting unit with a shattered heart. The only way for me to drown my sorrow was to plunge myself more deeply into the freedom movement. It seemed to be all I had to live for.

My commanders were not slow in noticing my experience and training which could be invaluable to the movement. It was decided that I should become one of them and I was commissioned at an evening ceremony. Everything had to be done in great secrecy in this guerrilla warfare. I

was made sector commander and was given responsibility for training the other freedom fighters. Gradually, I became more and more involved in intelligence work.

I remember one occasion vividly. We were on an operation and had two more days to complete it. There were three of us doing intelligence work in the hills. We ran out of food. Our diet consisted mainly of sweet corn which we used to cook in ghee (butter). We were desperately hungry. Not far from us was a place where Hindus burned their dead. This site was supposed to be haunted and no Hindu would loiter there. But I was never frightened of anything, and as I wondered how to satisfy our hunger, I had a very good idea -- so I thought. In the distance, I saw the smoke of a funeral pyre rising and there was a field of sweet corn nearby. I picked some of the corn and made my way towards the funeral pyre. We were in enemy territory and could not light fires of our own; that would have only attracted attention. I went and roasted the corn on the smouldering charcoal embers of the funeral pyre. My companions were pleased to see me returning with roasted corn and could not resist asking me how I had managed to do it. After they had eaten, I told them reluctantly. Not surprisingly, they were disgusted and began complaining of stomach pains. I was amused by their predictable, psychological reactions!

Our operations included all kinds of deception. On one occasion, I disguised myself as a Hindu Brahmin and pretended to be a refugee from Pakistan. In the uprooting of peoples after the partition of India, the presence of refugees from Pakistan or India was a common sight. I knew that I would not be conspicuous,

because thousands of Hindus were abandoning all their possessions in Pakistan and heading towards India. My mission was to find out the strength and resources of the Indian army in that area. When I arrived at the border, I began crying and related how my family had been killed and my belongings taken away. They were deeply affected and comforted me, assuring me of their help. I was told that I would receive a house and household articles, so that I could start all over again. I was relieved; so far so good. But then, to my dismay, they asked me to recite certain passages of Hindu scripture. I knew a lot of these, having learned them at the Hindu school in Jammu. But I did not know the particular ones they wanted to hear. The game was up. Alarmed, I had to think fast. I decided to throw myself at their mercy and began to cry again. I said I was too confused and exhausted to recite the mantras. But they did not fall for this and became suspicious. I became desperate. If they discovered who I was, they would also suspect that some of my men would be nearby.

It would not be difficult for them to determine whether I was a genuine Hindu or not, because I carried the mark of my true identity on my body. Like every Muslim boy, circumcision had been part of my initiation rites into Islam. They only needed to strip me to discover what I was. To make matters worse, I had two grenades hidden in my clothing. When they took me aside for examining, I managed to wrench myself free and jumped over the wall. I threw the first grenade, waited fifteen seconds and then threw the second. The whole place was engulfed in flames.

Such destruction of human life and

property was not unusual. It was our practice to enter a village, send everyone at the point of a gun into their homes, shut the doors securely from the outside, and set the village aflame. The inhumanity of these actions did not penetrate my consciousness. I was merely doing a job and it had to be done well. If Allah was pleased, why should I question it?

This freedom fighting went on for two years. At the end of this time, certain events would occur that would help me remember those values I had learned as a child: the sanctity of life and living for others. These ideals had been submerged, but they would resurface and take priority in my life again. But not just yet.

As sector commander, I found myself arranging meetings for more raids. We often received help from the Pathans of the Northwest Frontier, who volunteered to strengthen our numbers. They were not usually the best people, being more interested in women and adventure than in fighting for the freedom of Kashmir. But we arranged a meeting in my sector to discuss our plans with them. As the time for the meeting approached, I walked through the street when, to my astonishment, I heard someone call my name. It was the faint voice of a woman, yet I recognised it. The name she used was one that only my family and most intimate friends used. She called me "Gama," a nickname which had been given to me. I looked toward the direction of the voice and saw a young girl, the sister of some Hindu friends, standing behind a barred window. I could barely recognise her, but I remembered that she was a member of a family my mother had sheltered in our home for two months, before they could safely cross the border into India. I asked,

"Are you the sister of Sudesh?" She nodded. "How did you come to be here?" She was too shy and embarrassed to tell me. I pleaded with her, because I could see how distressed she was. Eventually, she told me of her horrible experience. Twelve Pathans had crossed the border, raided her village, and brought her to this place where each one had raped her. I became speechless. What was I witnessing? Was this the result of religious zeal? Does Islam produce this kind of behaviour? For the first time in my self-chosen career, a big question mark was raised against my activities, and doubts began to awaken. This tiny spark proved difficult to extinguish. In the present situation, I had to do something positive. I brought her what she needed for her injuries and used all my influence to secure her release. I took her to my mother who kept her at our home until she was sufficiently recovered and ready to reunite with her family across the border.

This unjust incident caused me to remember a scene I had once witnessed. I was in the town of Gujarat on my way to Kashmir. As I walked through the bazaar, I witnessed a sale of human beings. The value of the three women was reflected in the prices asked for them. One woman -- a virgin -- was being sold for three hundred rupees; another, who was married and had a small child, for two hundred rupies; and an old woman for fifty rupees. I remember how shocked I was. How is a human being to be valued, I asked myself?

## 5. The Unexpected Enemy

My mental stability had been disturbed. I was no longer sure of myself. However, I had to go on. I could not stop in

midstream. A pact between Pandit Nehru, the prime minister of India and Liaquat Ali Khan, the prime minister of Pakistan, was now in effect. The Indian army benefited from this pact and strengthened its position in Kashmir. But the freedom fighters in the Free Kashmir Army began to grow demoralised. The movement and deployment of the freedom fighters were made without much forethought or planning. Almost paralysed by their limited resources, these Muslim fighters were able to fight only at night.

One evening, I entered a village with some of my companions. The village was only a short distance inside the Indian border. I had heard that some non-Muslims still lived in the village, so I summoned the Numberdar, the village chief, and asked if this was so.

"There are no Hindus, sir," was his reply, "but there is one Christian family."

"Christian? Do you mean the followers of Isa?" (Isa is the Qur'anic name for Jesus.)

"Yes, just three people."

"Well, they are not Muslims. Come along. Take us to their house and we shall deal with them!"

This step seemed very natural to me in light of my understanding of Christianity at this stage. I remember once asking a Maulana (a qualified teacher of Islam) for an elaboration of the word Kafir, "an infidel or unbeliever." He replied that whoever is unwilling to recite the Kalimah, the Muslim Creed, was an infidel. The Kalimah consists of two basic tenets:

*There is no god but Allah. Muhammed is his Ambassador.*

Every true Muslim must believe and confess this basic creed. Anyone who does not recite it can be considered an infidel. Therefore, there are just two possibilities for everyone: the portal of peace or that of war. Unless a person accepts the creed and submits to the teaching of Muhammed, he cannot have the peace and protection of Allah; he chooses war and its consequences.

All this was straightforward and clear. But then I asked a specific question. What did the Maulana think about Christians? His answer threw me into confusion. He said they were also "People of the Book." Christians and Muslims both claim to worship one God and believe that He has given revelations in a book. For the Christian, this consists of the Old and New Testaments; for the Muslim, the Qur'an. Muslims believe that the revelations to Muhammed in the seventh century in Mecca and Medina were given by the Angel Gabriel, and that these have their counterpart in heaven. They summarise the message of God to all previous prophets and are the final revelation of God to man. In the Qur'an, Jesus is rejected as the Son of God, but is recognised as a prophet like all other prophets. Muslims believe that the Jewish and Christian Scriptures have been abrogated and replaced by the revelation given to Muhammed in the Qur'an. Nevertheless, it seemed to me that if Christians were also "People of the Book," they could not be in the same class as infidels or unbelievers. But if the definition of an infidel is strictly one who does not recite the Muslim Creed, then they were infidels, and war against them was justifiable. The Maulana would not go so far as to sanction my conclusion, nor could he approve of all that it would lead

me to do. This conversation had been more confusing than enlightening. But for me, the issue was clear cut-cut; either they were infidels or they were not. Since they did not recite the Kalimah, they were infidels and must prepare for war.

With such thoughts in my mind, I set off for the house. Inside a walled courtyard was a small room, but its door was fastened from the inside. We knocked and the door was opened.

"Are you Christians?"

"Yes, we are."

"You have been Christians up to this point. Can you not now become Muslims?"

Two middle-aged people were standing in front of me, trembling in the dim light given by an oil lamp. They were searching for an answer when a girl of about ten years suddenly crawled out from under a bed, came forward, and answered my challenge.

"No, we cannot become Muslims."

I burst out laughing and asked her why.

"We cannot change our religion for any reason whatever," she replied.

"Silly girl!" said I, "Nowadays, you have to think about saving your life, and this is the way." She did not give in.

"We believe in someone who said, 'I am with you to the end of the world,' and we believe that He is with us even today."

It was difficult for me to remain patient any longer. I was irritated by her obstinacy and reached a quick decision. "Alright," I said. "We will make an end of the two old people and we will take you away to camp

with us and exchange you for a Muslim girl from India." But this little ten-year-old was not going to submit to my intimidation.

"Do what you want, but we have one request," she persisted.

"What is that?"

"We will not ask you to spare our lives, but just give us a few minutes for prayer, so that we may ask the One who gave us this promise to come to our aid," she said confidently. No fear was in her eyes.

"Foolish girl! No god today saves anyone. No one has saved Muslims on the Indian side of the border, and no god has saved Hindus on this side. Have you not seen the temple at Fort Haptal over there and how our demolition party razed it to the ground in a matter of hours?" I said this to try to frighten her.

"Just let us have a few minutes," she persisted.

"Yes, yes. You say your prayers," I replied and added sarcastically, "Just see if you can produce an atom bomb by praying."

The girl and the two others fell on their knees. I did not hear what they were saying but I noticed tears were rolling down the girl's cheeks, and her lips were moving. Then the silence was broken with the three of them saying together: "In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen."

As the word Amen was uttered, a wall of brilliant light rose out of the ground, hiding them from our sight. Although I had toyed with the deadly fire and flames of high explosives, I had never in all my life seen such a bright and terrifying light. It was a unique, ethereal light which I

cannot describe in words.

Gradually, this light moved closer to me and I started to panic. It seemed as if it would advance and burn me up. I broke out in perspiration and began to hypersalivate. For the first time since I was nine, I experienced fear -- real, chilling fear. I did not know what to do. Suddenly, the thought rose in my mind that I ought to apologise to these wretched creatures and beg their forgiveness; so I said in fear and trembling, "Please forgive me.." Why I should have wanted their forgiveness was beyond me, but they were obviously in touch with a greater power than I had ever witnessed. Perhaps I should ask "it" for forgiveness. Anyway, I heard, "We forgive you in the name of Jesus Christ."

As soon as this sentence was uttered, the wall of light vanished. They stood once more before us, peaceful and calm, ready to do whatever I commanded. We could not stay there any longer. In our possession was some jewellery that we had stolen from the abandoned homes of the Hindus. We threw them some and left, feeling that we owed them something for the trouble we had caused.

After returning to my quarters, I could not sleep. The name of Jesus Christ kept ringing in my ears, assailing my mind again and again. I began to recall the previous experiences I had had when the name of Jesus Christ was brought forcefully to my attention. There was Baxter's "Lord Jesus" who had protected me and my companions from the Japanese bombs. If Baxter's claim was true -- and we all acknowledged that it was the only explanation for our lives being spared -- then I owed my life to Him. Yet, I did not know Him personally, nor did I even know

much about Him. How could I show gratitude to someone I did not know? But I ought to have, for He saved my life.

Then, there was Amber and Mary's "Jesus Christ" in whom they had trusted and for whose sake they had saved the life of a helpless young man, tending his wounds. Not only had this Lord Jesus saved my life, but He made sure His disciples looked after me when I was injured and helpless. Why should He do this for me? I did not give Him my allegiance. I did not know what way of life He required of His followers, nor was I following it. As a true Muslim, I observed the law of Islam. I did not belong to Jesus Christ.

Philip's "Jesus Christ" gave him strength to make great sacrifices. I too had made sacrifices, giving up my chance for personal happiness with Salima and losing her forever because of my desire to please Allah in Holy War. But I did not feel any personal relationship with Allah, nor did I believe that he gave me courage to do anything. I relied upon my own resources and ingenuity.

The most impressive of all my experiences was my encounter with the little girl's "Jesus Christ" who came and saved her at precisely the right moment. He was One who kept His promises. If I had any doubts about Him saving our unit during the Japanese bombing, then I could not possibly have any on this occasion. I had witnessed His protection with my own eyes. There was no escaping that fact. This "Lord Jesus" seemed to be pursuing me wherever I went. Amazingly, I had asked the family to forgive me; I had never done any such thing before. Did it occur to me that I was wrong for even having thought about murdering them? Was my whole life

sinful and a willful disobedience against what I instinctively knew to be right? And they had forgiven me in the name of "Jesus Christ."

Suddenly, I began to detect a pattern in all these experiences. They were like scattered pearls which, when strung together, made a perfect necklace. I had been spared from certain death, cared for, and shown what effect the sacrificial offering of Jesus Christ meant in the lives of those who had been forgiven in His name. Was I being singled out for something? And if so, what?

Such tormenting and haunting thoughts gave me no rest. They were forcing themselves upon my attention. However, they were not powerful enough to drown other thoughts and commitments. I was still deeply involved in the freedom movement. I could not simply lay down my arms and walk away. I had nothing else to which I could give myself. Although my zeal had been diminished, I still carried on with my activities.

One night, my platoon planned and carried out a successful attack and set fire to a village deep inside the district of Jammu. I was standing alone at the corner of a field on the road that led into the province. I could hear the cries and shrieks of people being killed and burned in the village. I was waiting to welcome with my bullets anyone who tried to escape in that direction.

An elderly woman came into view through the flames, keeping the smoke and fire away from something she was carrying. She had an infant flung over her shoulder. I thought it would be useless to waste a bullet; a small blow with the butt of my

revolver would be enough to finish both her and the child. When I advanced towards her, she lowered the child to my feet and said: "Kill! Go on, kill it! This is a Hindu child. Your god likes killing people, so kill it!"

My hand stopped in mid-air and I stood still, utterly confounded. It was one thing to kill them without any exchanges between us and without any thought of what I was really doing. But to be confronted with their presence in this direct way and to be challenged to carry out my task was more than I could bear. Taking advantage of my obvious hesitation, the lady came forward and, looking me straight in the eyes, asked me boldly, "Son, do you have any children?"

"No, mother. But my brothers do." (I had not lost my sense of respect for the elderly, so I called her "mother".)

"Have you watched those children closely when they make mud houses during the rainy season?"

"Yes, mother, I myself have made mud horses, oxen and houses several times."

The conversation was gradually disarming me. How clever she was, engaging me in conversation the way she was doing. She continued: "And how did you like it when someone broke down those mud houses and toys?"

"I was very annoyed, mother," I replied rather sheepishly.

"Well then, my son. Just imagine that God made the body of this little soul with His hands to express His goodness. If you were disgusted when anyone ruined something you had made, then how can you think that God likes all these things



that you are doing? Is God so weak that He needs your help to kill infidels? If God does not like any person or thing, then He is well able to put an end to it Himself."

These words struck in my mind and soul like a sledgehammer, and I shouted out: "That is enough, mother! After today, these hands will never be raised against anyone in the name of religion. You have made me realise what an utter wretch I am. I will put an end to this. Dear mother, pray for me. I know that I am lost."

I realised deep down in my heart that she was right. She had brought to a climax all the doubts I was beginning to have concerning the activities I was involved in. My resolve to continue in this warfare had been considerably weakened already. Now at last, I could not go on. I was completely broken. I ordered my section to withdraw for retreat. The men thought I was silly or mad and began grumbling. This was so unlike me, they were baffled. Nevertheless, they obeyed.

That night, I reflected on my violent ways. What I saw made me feel that everlasting punishment in hell was the only place left for a person like me, because I, with my own hands, had killed what belonged to God. God Almighty had brought the whole universe into being, and I had destroyed His most noble creation. But I would not accept total responsibility for my actions. Surely, I was only surrendered to my religious teachers. But if I was not responsible for this whole game of bloodshed, who was? God?

Tormented by these thoughts, I came to the conclusion that I could not go on with my present life. I no longer felt that I was pleasing Allah by killing infidels. I had to

get out. Resignation was the only course open to me. Yet I could not bear to think of the consequences. I only knew that it had to be done. I went to the commanding officer and asked him if I could resign from the freedom movement. Amazement and disbelief were written all over his face. "Why do you want to resign?" he demanded. I could not bring myself to tell him the whole story. It would seem too fantastic to him. In any case, at this stage I could not explain to anyone what I was really thinking. I had no time to work it out for myself, so I merely told him that I was not bound to the movement. I received no salary and they had no claim upon me. I had freely joined and now I wanted to freely resign. He realised that it was futile to go on arguing with me and trying to persuade me to stay on. He asked for my resignation in writing. This gave me a chance to put down my thoughts coherently. I wrote four pages, trying as best I could to explain the reasons for my wanting to resign. He read these patiently and carefully. He told me in no uncertain terms what he thought of me. He said that I had gone crazy. I thanked him for his opinion and said that I was happy I had become crazy. Through this weakness in my brain, the true light was penetrating. I was coming to my senses at last. The commanding officer was baffled, but he offered me another job which I accepted -- gathering all the movable property abandoned by the Hindus who fled into India. With me were some other volunteers of the Muslim National Guard and a religious guide.

This job brought me back to my family again. One day when I arrived home for a meal, my brother, Haji Khuda Bakhsh, saw that I had a beautiful scarf and asked me

where I had found it. I explained that I had taken it from the confiscated property in one of the Hindu's houses. My brother took it from me and threw it in the fire. "You have disgraced yourself and us by taking this scarf," he exclaimed in anger. "Now you will remain at home and from now on you will not continue this duty connected with plundering property! Do you hear me?"

I was amazed. It was not that I was doing anything extraordinary. Even our religious teachers did not consider it immoral or beneath their dignity to take and use abandoned property. I remember a certain Maulvi who had taken earthenware ovens belonging to Hindus and placed them in his own home. This man was well-known to our family. When he was away at Deoband and Bulandshahr, two training colleges for Muslim religious leaders in northern India, my father helped to support him financially. He even managed to acquire a great mansion abandoned in a nearby Hindu village. One day, I had seen him claiming, in the presence of a district official, that he was a refugee from India! He had filled in a claim form which stated that he had left a great deal of cultivated land in India and wished to be compensated for it. How true the saying is:

*I found many robbers dressed up as leaders,*

*Should I save myself or my honour?*

Yet, here was my brother, filled with rage over my taking a simple handkerchief. Whose example could I trust? Here I was again in confusion and disillusionment, with no job. What was I to do with my life?

## 6. Cornered and Conquered

My confrontation with the elderly lady on that fateful night had prompted my vow to never take another human life. In my determination to keep that promise, I resigned from the freedom movement. After I left the RAF, my desire to please Allah had led me into the movement to fight for a free Kashmir. My life then seemed to have meaning and purpose. But now, neither my religious zeal nor my political enthusiasm fired my imagination. Instead, I was appalled at the brutalities and atrocities of war, no matter what kind it was nor what purpose instigated it. Once more, I was stopped, as it were, in my tracks. I was standing at a crossroads and did not know which way to turn.

Instead of emptiness, however, I was filled with doubts and fears. One fear in particular would not leave me -- that of dying and going to hell. I could not see any other destiny for myself. Death seemed so real to me. I wondered what would become of me if I died then. I, who had rarely experienced fear since I was nine, who had never been afraid of dangerous missions, and who had often come near to death, was now caught in the iron grip of fear -- fear of what I knew I deserved. I saw myself fit only for hell.

Doubts assailed me and threw me into greater confusion. What if there was no God? I could not then be punished for what I had been and what I had done. There would then be no need to fear hell. I had witnessed death and the destruction of human life all around me. God could not possibly have been in all this. But the voice of my conscience refused to be silenced. It would cry out with authority

and conviction, saying, "There is indeed a God." The existence of the universe was proof enough to me that someone was the source of its origin. If this was not so, then God would not be closely involved with his creation and the world would be desolate and unattractive. But I knew this was not the case; the beauty of nature was an undeniable witness.

Even if I conceded that there was a God who had created this world and all its beauty, I wondered why He allowed destruction of what He Himself had made. I believed and was encouraged by those religious leaders who thought that Allah was pleased with infidels and unbelievers being killed. But how could this be if He had created all? Surely, it would be better if He would win their allegiance instead!

Perhaps God himself was not responsible for the misuse man makes of his free will. Maybe He was displeased with the killing of human beings. But God must be ultimately responsible, I thought, since it was He who gave man free will in the first place. When I killed infidels, I felt I was given a divine order to do so. If God was displeased, then He could easily have overruled my will to accomplish His own ends. As a devout Muslim, I believed that I had acted correctly by responding positively to the call from the mosque to engage in Holy War. I had submitted; Islam, after all, means "submission." I could not therefore be held responsible for all I had done, and if I was not responsible, then there was no reason for me to feel guilt or to deserve hell. If I was not guilty, then there was no reason to repent. Maybe I was totally wrong. Perhaps I should have exercised my free will in such a way that I would not have done the things which my own conscience condemned. If my

conscience condemned me and if there is a God, then He must surely be greater than my conscience.

The more I thought about these matters, the more confused and despairing I became. My mind was torn and tossed by tormenting thoughts. I felt like a man who had been utterly misled. There was not a glimmer of light left in my life. But I was mentally ill-equipped to cope with such questions. My state of mind was such that I could not sleep at night. Sometimes I would lie awake thinking; sleep would come only as a result of sheer mental exhaustion. Maybe I should have given up trying to find an answer. Perhaps all religions were man-made fabrications by those who wanted to make ordinary people feel inadequate.

My tormented mind raced with thoughts and could not find solace. There had to be an answer. I had to find it. The questions demanded answers and I found none. Sleep and food meant nothing to me. I once went without food for seventeen days and nights. My inner turmoil was aggravated by my own behaviour and attitude, and by those around me. I became irritable and difficult to get along with. My company was no longer sought out by my friends. I criticised all religion and was contemptuous of its values. I totally rejected any counselling from our Muslim religious leaders. People began to say that I had probably gone mad. They surmised that the killings in which I had been involved had disturbed my mind. I was not sure whether it was I who disliked people or whether it was people who disliked me. Perhaps it was both.

I even became estranged from my family. I knew that I was a stranger in my home and

no one in the family liked to talk with me. They could not understand what was happening and felt quite helpless. Despair of this kind can often turn into resentment. My poor mother was very distressed by all this. "Tell me, my son, what your difficulty is and I will help you," she implored. But no one could help me. I was distressed because of the misery I had caused, and yet I could do nothing about it. I seemed locked in an never-ending spiral of disturbing thoughts and demanding questions.

Occasionally, but only fleetingly, a small beam of light would penetrate the darkness as the thought occurred to me that not all of life was empty and meaningless. There was a God. The impressive regularity of the world speaks eloquently of a controlling power. To this power, the whole world, man, and the rest of creation was somehow accountable. Man cannot be free to do whatever he likes without any thought of the consequences; neither has he been put into a world of random forces, subject to whatever fate these decree. I became increasingly determined to find this power or God and make peace. I too was beginning to fear for my sanity. I realised that I could not find it where I was. I was isolated from those who loved me and whom I loved.

At the beginning of May, 1949, I quietly left home. I had no idea where I was going. I had one burning desire -- to find peace. I did not even say good-bye to my family.

My search began in earnest, but I did not turn to Christianity. I had met people in whom the peace I was seeking was visibly present; yet, I made no effort to look in that direction. I was still a Muslim and

determined to examine Islam more carefully before I discarded it. A man may renounce a lot of things in life, but to renounce his religion without strong reasons seemed like folly to me; and when that religion is Islam, it becomes more difficult, for Islam involves an all-encompassing committal of one's life to Allah. I had no serious doubts or hesitations about accepting the first basic tenet: "There is no god but Allah." For me, there could only be one God, as Islam gloriously proclaims. Just how remarkable this belief is can be seen when one looks at the religious background from which it sprang. The Arabs were polytheistic, having 360 idols in the Ka'ba, a shrine in Mecca revered by the Arabs because of the black meteorite embedded in one of its walls. The cult of the goddesses Lat, Manat, and Uzza was a firmly-established part of the religion. These goddesses were known as the daughters of Allah. Allah was the supreme deity. Muhammed designated Allah as the only god and abandoned polytheism. To embrace this belief was to embrace a noble truth; yet, Islam had already become discredited in my eyes. Could it possibly provide me with what I wanted?

According to our religious leaders, Allah commands his followers to engage in Jihad or Holy War against infidels. It was involvement in the Holy War which had brought me into the state of despair I was now in. I delved deeper and found that Islam teaches that I could hope for forgiveness after death if I performed good deeds while on earth. But I wanted forgiveness now, and peace and reconciliation in this life. After my death, it would be too late. To live the rest of my life just hoping to be forgiven after death

was not enough to satisfy me and rescue me from my present predicament. In addition, I found it difficult to respect and listen to the Maulvis. I recalled the words of my father: "Listen, my son, the majority of the Maulvis are immoral people. Listen to what they say, but do not follow their example. They send innocent people to the gallows in the same way as they killed the mystic, Mansoor. Certainly, respect them, but do not trust them. And if it is possible, keep them well away from your home."

My father probably said this at a time when a woman, in questionable circumstances, was taken from the house of a certain man who was able to recite the whole of the Arabic Qur'an by heart. It is the ambition of religious Muslims that their sons, by the age of twelve, should be able to recite the whole of the Arabic Qur'an and so become a Hafiz Al-Qur'an, a protector of the Qur'an. But the fact that this Maulvi was a Hafiz Al-Qur'an did not prevent him from indulging in immoral practices. It was as a direct result of the impure lives of the religious leaders that my father stopped going to the mosque to join in the common prayers which Muslims utter on Fridays at noon, preserving their corporate identity.

The mystic, Mansoor, to whom my father referred and whom he greatly admired, lived in the tenth century. He was put to death in a barbaric way at Baghdad. To orthodox Muslims, he was a blasphemous heretic. He uttered the words, Ana Haqq or "I am truth." It was a doctrine of personal deification. He had achieved the ultimate in mysticism -- perfect union with God. But any blurring of the distinction between God, the ultimate reality, and created man is not acceptable to orthodox Muslims. My father, who regarded himself a mystic,

probably never saw this difficulty. For him, the words of a Persian verse truly express his understanding of the relationship between God and man:

*Men of God never wholly become God, but they are never separate from God either.*

As I reflected upon the words and ideas of my father, it struck me that like him, I too could become a mystic. Perhaps in this way I could find the peace for which I was seeking. As I mentioned earlier, in the Islamic world of the eighth or ninth century, men of devotion who sought the peace of a contemplative life were called Sufis. In many ways, they resembled the Christian hermits who penetrated the Middle East. For the Sufis, the obedience demanded by Islam to an external code of human behaviour was secondary. The primary thing was a reverent response of the human heart to a God of love. They believed in a direct experience of God. Surely, I thought, this was what I desired above all else.

It was becoming obvious to me that I needed help. My solitary search was getting me nowhere. Consequently, I spent wakeful nights at various shrines and cultivated the company of many "holy men". However, the more I sought the company of "holy" or "godly" men, the more disappointed I became. Perhaps this was due in part to my military training which made me skeptical. Whenever I considered the lives of these men carefully, I discovered that although they claimed to be searchers of divine truth, they were always shown to be sadly misguided. I found them involved in such horrific activities that I am ashamed to relate them. When, in turn, I considered the lifestyles of the pirs or murshids (Sufi

spiritual guides), I again was pained. While their peasant labourers went hungry, they engaged in such frivolous pastimes as importing dogs from Russia for breeding purposes. Those working in the fields of these pirs could not feed their children, but the precious dogs were being fed fresh meat twice a day. The contemplation of such decadence reduced me to a state of mental paralysis.

I did not give up easily, however. I went so far as to join a group of Muslim students who indulged in drugs, music and dance to induce a mystical state of consciousness of God; yet, this proved a futile exercise and I gained nothing, growing more perplexed instead. My search for peace ended in complete disillusionment. In my despair, I recalled the opening words of the Qur'an:

Guide us on the right path, the path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed thy favours not upon those upon whom wrath is brought down nor those who go astray.

The "right path" (Sirat) is generally understood to mean the Muslim faith. It is also the name of a very narrow bridge which Muslims believe is situated over the mouth of hell. Good Muslims will be able to cross safely, but others will fall into the flames.

Having lost all confidence in man-made creeds, I felt that there must somehow be a way of escape and deliverance from my own hell, and I asked God to show me the way in this life. I had continued to rise early in the morning and began earnestly to implore God to guide me. From the inner depths of my being, my cry for spiritual help went up:

**"O Lord Almighty! It is impossible to deny Your Being. My every vein and**

**fibre is a manifestation of Your glory. The whole of creation is a concentration of Your Being. I acknowledge Your existence. My soul affirms Your Being. I acknowledge also that You have created me and all men. By imitating worthless religious leaders and by following their destructive counsel, I have oppressed those whom You created. My evil deeds convince me that hell is my portion, for You, O Master, will judge sinners. I do not trust any religions and creeds in this world. O my Lord, show me the straight path. I do not want to go to hell. Show me the right path, so that I may behold You. I am suffering, O Master. I desire peace of mind and cannot find it. Help me, Lord. The consciousness of my sin pierces me like a lance. Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy. Amen."**

I do not remember the date, but it was three or four o'clock in the morning and I was saying my usual prayers. I was weeping bitterly and was exceedingly despondent. I was in the waiting room of a railway station when I uttered this particular prayer. Suddenly, I was aware that someone had come up behind me, put a loving hand on my shoulder, and said,

**"My grace is sufficient for you!"**

This sentence was repeated three times and then I felt as if an electric charge had gone through my body. The weight on my mind was immediately lifted. It was as if an invigorating and exhilarating ecstasy had unexpectedly overtaken me. I felt lifted up and experienced what I can only describe as a union with God. Nothing seemed to separate us. The sense of forgiveness and reconciliation was so real. I began to repeat these words from God rapturously. I had never experienced such depth of

happiness and joy before. It was truly "heavenly".

A railway employee was cleaning near the bench where I was lying and, when he noticed my joy, he stopped and asked me if I was a Christian. When I shook my head, he was amazed and said, "Then why do you keep saying, 'My grace is sufficient for you?'" I replied: "I do not know why I am repeating these words. All I know is that someone has just said them to me and showed me some tablets with all my evil deeds written on them. But with one sweep of his hand, he wiped all these tablets perfectly clean. Since that moment, I have felt like a new man. The entire burden has been lifted from my spirit. My heart wants to sing aloud."

"It is the Lord you must thank, my son, for this deliverance," he told me. "The One who came to you was the Lord Jesus Christ. He said these words to the Apostle Paul. I do not remember exactly where, but I know that it is written in the sacred New Testament. The Lord Jesus now wants you to become His servant."

"How, sir? How can I become His servant?"

"Be baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and begin to follow Him at once."

"Tell me exactly what I must do, sir. I have reached the turning point of my life."

"My son, I know nothing more. I only know that if you go from here to Tandlian-wala and then on to Isanagri, there is a clergyman there called Rev. Inayat Rimal Shah. He will help you."

This old man now put down his broom and came even closer to me, his eyes filled with tears. I embraced him, clasping him

firmly in my arms. We both cried freely and gave vent to our deepest emotions. For a brief moment, I wondered if he might be the father of that little girl whom I and my companions had wanted to murder. I could not bear that thought. How deeply moved I was that this man who belonged to that despised and lowest of all classes, the sweepers, should have been there to show me the next step. It is not difficult to see why so many among their class receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In Him, they find their true identity. Realising that they are made in the image of God, that they are His children, they find new dignity and worth. I was happy to be identified with them.

With the words "My grace is sufficient for you" resounding in my ears and my heart full of joy, I boarded the train for Isanagri. The turmoil at last was over. Now peace reigned. What a bliss it was! It almost overwhelmed me. My mind could not take it all in. The Lord Jesus Christ who had saved me from physical death, cared for me in my illness, shown me His sacrifice and revealed His all-sufficient grace, had now conquered my heart. He had triumphed. No longer would I wander aimlessly about the world, seeking a purpose and meaning which kept eluding me. I now found the true meaning and purpose for my life. I had found Him who gives us His peace and reconciles us to Himself. He is mine and I am His.

## 7. Pilgrimage

My soul had been wonderfully freed from the hopelessness and despair which had darkened it. My heart was overflowing with joy as I got off the train at Isanagri village in Faisalabad District and met Rev.

Inayat Rimal Shah. He greeted me warmly and offered me hospitality. After our meal, he smiled and asked, "Well sir, why do you want to become a Christian?" Not knowing anything of my background or my deep longing for peace which had just been miraculously satisfied, he seemed almost casual. But it was not I that was choosing Christ or Christianity. It was not a question of my wanting to become a Christian. Jesus Christ had chosen me. Not wanting to upset the Reverend, I simply answered: "Someone told me to. Around three or four o'clock this morning, Jesus Christ himself met me and said, 'My grace is sufficient for you.'" There was a picture of Jesus Christ crucified on the wall. Rev. Shah took hold of my hand and with the other hand he pointed to the picture. Was this the same Jesus Christ who had spoken to me? I heard Rev. Shah say: "People robbed Christ even of His own clothes. He was stripped, flogged and nailed to a cross! What can He give you?" The implication of that question might have upset me if I were in a different frame of mind. I did not want anything except His peace. Salvation was what I had sought and found. If I were a conceited person, I might have become angry and upset. I might have thought that I should have been welcomed with open arms. But the whole situation was still too new and overwhelming for me. Thus, these emotions found no place in my heart which was so full of happiness.

I did not know it then, but I soon discovered that those who inquire about Christianity or want to become Christians are usually regarded with suspicion. It seems that many want to become Christians because they are attracted by the benefits which missionaries offer: a

good education, food, clothing and shelter. Not surprisingly, the majority of Christian converts from Hinduism have come from the sweeper class, the poorest of the poor. But one must not assume that all these converts come for material gain. Like me, many must have found in Christianity the satisfaction of their deepest longings. For them, the following words are true:

**Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to Thy Cross I cling, Wash me, Saviour, or I die.**

To the question I could only reply: "Do not say that Christ is helpless and can offer me nothing. He has already given me everything. He has made me a new man and has given me peace of mind."

"Good," he said, "the only thing I can do for you is to send you to a missionary friend of mine in Gojra. He can help you."

I was not going to be received instantly, and I even could not expect it. The road ahead would be a long one. A few minutes later, Rev. Shah put a letter in my hand and gave me some money so that I could go to Gojra by bus. What an inauspicious beginning to my pilgrimage; yet, I was in no way disheartened or discouraged. My new faith meant too much to me. I had at last found my great treasure and no one was going to rob me of it.

I reached Gojra in the afternoon and met Rev. R. W. F. Wootton. By now, I think I was fully aware that the way forward was not going to be easy. Rev. Wootton told me that they would first have to test the genuineness of my desire to become a Christian and then a decision would be made about baptism. I gladly agreed. Baptism was a momentous step. It is not something that happens to a person in the



natural course of events. It means a deliberate commitment to Christ and the Gospel of the kingdom of God. A whole new lifestyle and set of values opens up before a convert. In a country with a non-Christian history, conversion inevitably involves the uprooting and a crossing of cultural barriers. For some, this can be a painful experience. Baptism is never to be undertaken lightly. To be a Christian in an Islamic country is like committing an act of treason. Muslims who convert to Christianity relinquish the "privilege of living in a Muslim state as a Muslim." In some Muslim countries, converts are excluded from the protection of the law. Such people cannot appeal to the courts for justice when their property is damaged or their family members molested. It is not uncommon for Christian converts of Muslim background to lose their lives. But I was happy to be tested. In the process, both they and I could ascertain the true substance of my allegiance.

Rev. Wootton arranged for me to have a visitors' room. The only furniture there was a rickety, old bed with two quilts. If I drew the quilts up, the heat bothered me; if I put them off, the mosquitoes flew off, bloated with my blood! No proper arrangements had been made for food either. When I was given something, I ate; if no one remembered me, I went hungry. On one occasion, no one thought about my food for three days! For the first two days, I managed to survive and spent a lot of time in prayer. But by the third day, I was so weak that I took to my bed. Rev. Wootton had been away from the mission compound and when he returned, he came into my darkened room. "Are you ill, brother?" he asked.

"No, I am not ill, sir," I replied faintly.

"Then why are you so weak? Have you had anything to eat?"

I shook my head and he asked, "For how long?" There was not much strength in my body and however much I tried I could not prevent my eyes from welling up with tears. I indicated with my fingers that I had not eaten for three days. He was distressed at this news and comforted me.

"What kind of people are we?" he asked. "How mean and cruel! Was there not a single person here who thought about you or inquired about your meals while I was away?"

"It does not matter, sir. I thought that this might be part of my testing and so I did not mention it to anyone. I did not even go out of this room, because people whispered unkind things about me. One said that I wanted to become a Christian simply because I wanted to find a young girl to marry. Another said that I was looking for employment as a mission servant. And another said that I merely wanted money. I heard it all, but said nothing."

The people on the compound had been unkind to me right from the start. To them, I was an intruder. It was their privileged position to be working for the missionaries. They had no time for me.

I was beginning to feel pity rather than hurt or anger towards these Christians. They are perhaps the saddest group of people. Living in the mission compounds, they are cut off from their own people. They vie with each other to gain the missionaries' acceptance and admiration, and this tends to breed hypocrisy rather than sincerity. Instead of welcoming inquirers as those who are seeking a higher

goal and deeper meaning for their lives, they tend to despise them and treat them as rivals. They are not interested in the sacrifices that inquirers make, but seek instead to please the missionaries rather than the Master to whom they have committed their lives. I was merely a victim of this attitude.

Rev. Wootton, however, showed me much kindness. He brought me to his home and instructed his cook to prepare meals for me whether he was there or not. I never went without food again, but the atmosphere in the compound did not change. Attitudes became intolerable. As a result, I persuaded Rev. Wootton to make arrangements for me to stay at the mission hostel.

During this time, I did not tell Rev. Wootton anything about myself. The past did not seem important. I did not want any knowledge of my wealthy background or the fact that I had been an RAF officer to influence his treatment of me in any way. When he suggested I should become a night watchman or security guard, I gladly agreed, because I did not want to be a burden to anyone. The school and hostel at Gojra were closed during the month of June. Consequently, arrangements for me were entrusted to a Christian in the compound who was a saintly man. His name was Sewak Boota Masih. I was extremely fortunate to be working along side such a man. He was a messenger in the girls' school and hostel. His wage was exceedingly small; yet, he helped people like me.

Boota Masih could only read Gurmukhi (written Punjabi, the language of the Sikhs). His friendship formed the basis of my spiritual growth. It was from him that I

learned the true nature of the Christian faith and what a practical Christian life involved. Prayer played an important part of his life. One could almost say that his whole life was one of prayer. We used to spend whole nights together in prayer. I remember being with him one night before I went on duty. We got so caught up in prayer that time passed without our noticing. To my amazement the next day, people said that they had seen me four times during the night. They wondered how I could be so zealous in my duty. I then realised what a wonderful thing had happened. While we were praying, Jesus himself had done my assignment! My heart rejoiced in my Saviour who was making Himself so real to me.

At the end of September, 1949, I was told that my baptism would take place on October 2, at the first meeting of the Gojra Convention. Some questions were put before me to ascertain the depth of my understanding of the step I was taking. One of them concerned the amount of Christian literature I had read. I was pleased to say that I had read nearly all of Rev. Wootton's Urdu books and a considerable number of his English ones.

On the night of September 30, as I was praying, the Lord roused my conscience, pointing out that I had not been fully honest with Rev. Wootton. The fact that I had not told him about my past seemed to suggest that I had something to hide. This was cowardly and deceptive, and it was an obstacle in my spiritual growth and progress. I found it impossible to relax after this revelation. I got up right then in the middle of the night and went to Rev. Wootton's house. I had to unburden myself and told him everything about my past. He was pleased with my frankness and

honesty, and we had a good time of prayer together.

My baptism took place on October 2. It gave me great joy that in receiving baptism I was following the example of our Lord. I had now become a visible part of the Christian brotherhood. As a sign of the debt I owed to my humble friend and my appreciation of what his friendship meant to me, I took the name of *Ghulam*, "slave," as my baptismal name and added *Masih*, "Messiah" or "Christ," so that it expressed my new vocation -- a slave of Jesus Christ.

For the next two weeks, I lived in a state of great happiness. The sense of belonging to Christ and to the Christian fellowship lifted me onto another plane. My Lord was so real to me. The resolution to serve Him for the rest of my life grew daily in strength and intensity. I truly felt the favour of God resting upon me and knew what it was like to be loved by my Creator and to feel a responsive love stirring within me, despite my unworthiness. However, I soon learned what it was like to be put through the refining fire. My outward circumstances suddenly changed drastically. It happened on a day when the compound seemed to be deserted. Neither Rev. Wootton nor Master Charan Dass, head of the boys' hostel, nor Rev. B. M. Augustine who had baptised me was there. I learned later that they had all gone to Lahore for a meeting. I was alone when confronted by an angry maternal uncle and elder brother who arrived that day and had come for me.

In most Eastern countries, the word family includes not only mother, father, sisters, and brothers, but uncles, aunts, and cousins from both the maternal and paternal side. One has duties and

responsibilities to all of them. Good relationships with them are important in the shaping of one's destiny. I could not ignore them with impunity. It would have been almost impossible for me to declare my independence of them. They had wealth, power and influence. My uncle gave me two options. The first was that I should go away with them immediately, without letting anyone know. The second was a threat. If I refused to go with them, they would go into the town and make the news of my conversion public. This would so anger the people that both I and all the Christians in Gojra would be mercilessly beaten. The well-being of my new Christian family was at stake if I did not do as they asked. I could not allow harm to come to my fellow Christians. Although deeply upset and a little uncertain about how I should deal with this crisis in my early Christian pilgrimage, I remembered to whom I had given my life. It was the bidding of my Master that I wanted to obey and that of none other. His will was to be the guiding force in my life. Therefore, I said to my uncle, "I will ask my Master."

I shut the door of my room and asked the Lord what I should do. I was left in no doubt. He told me, "There are still many more thorny obstacles for you to overcome as you follow me. Go with them, for at home is the first place where you must begin your work of witnessing about me. You are to stand as my witness, 'first in Jerusalem, then in Judea, then Samaria, and then in the whole world.'" How amazing that I should have been commissioned in the same way as the disciples of Christ in the Acts of the Apostles.

I returned to my relatives and said that I

was ready to go with them. I was not afraid to entrust myself to them, for I knew at whose bidding I was doing it and I knew whose hands were underneath, upholding me. So I accompanied them to Lyallpur which is now called Faisalabad.

## 8. Miraculous Escape

My conversion gave me peace of mind and a meaning and purpose for my life. What a transformation this was from the state I was in when I was last with my family! Unfortunately, this meant nothing to them. They had only one passion: to have me renounce Christianity and become a "good Muslim" again. My conversion was a reproach to them and they could not ignore it. People of their standing could not tolerate a Christian in the family. Only the poorest of the poor became converts and, as a Christian, they knew I would no doubt be mingling with such folk socially. This was disgraceful and intolerable. My family was scandalised. I remember being told by one of my nieces later that many of her suitors turned away as a result of my conversion. What I had become brought distressing repercussions on my family. As far as they were concerned, I just had to be convinced of my error.

For them, Islam was an exalted and noble religion. How could I possibly exchange it for Christianity? There is only one true God and Muhammed is his Ambassador -- this is what is drummed into the ears of every Muslim child from his earliest years. But here I was declaring that Jesus Christ was not simply a prophet like the other prophets, but that He is the Son of God. That was blasphemy to my family, for they insisted that God does not have a son. Since the Muslim conception of sonship is

purely physical, this confession contained the ultimate sacrilege; yet, metaphorical concepts are not foreign to the Islamic tradition. One of the friends of Muhammed was named *Abu Harera*, "Father of Cats," because he was very fond of these animals. An uncle of Muhammed was called *Abu Djihal*, "Father of Ignorance," because he did not accept Muhammed as the Prophet. Thus, "fatherhood" is used to describe a concept totally removed from a physical relationship. The same is true of the "sonship" of Christ.

Sometimes people dismiss as nonsense something they cannot understand, because the challenge can be too great. If a Muslim were to acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God, then the significance of Muhammed as the prophet of Allah and the revelation in the Qur'an would need to take second place to the One who is the Son of God -- He who has given the fullest revelation of God to mankind.

Muslims believe that good works done in this life will gain for them forgiveness of sins and happiness in the next life. But I saw the need for my sins being forgiven now, so that I could give my life to God immediately and let Him determine the nature of its course right away.

To my family, I had become an infidel and they did not hesitate to treat me as such. On my return home, I was compelled to eat my meals in the street. Nevertheless, I gave thanks and ate without murmuring. The persecution from my family gave me an opportunity to witness publicly about my Lord.

No stone was left unturned in the effort to bring me back to the fold. My uncle took me to his village in Sheikhpura District.

Religious teachers were sought out and brought to the house to reason with me. One newly trained Maulvi gave up after a short while and issued a certificate of insanity before he left, out of desperation.

Six weeks of meetings with various Maulvis proved futile. It was then that I decided to meet Sayyed Ata Ullah, Shah Bakhari (a descendant of the Prophet Muhammed), who was to visit Sheikhpura around that time. At the appointed hour, I was ushered into the presence of this man. However, instead of conversing with me and attempting to have me renounce Christianity, he laughed loudly and derisively, saying, "So, you have become a Christian?"

"Yes," I replied. There was an uneasy silence. "Please go on and say more," I said, the tone of my voice expressing both respect and annoyance.

"What more can I say?" the Shah asked contemptuously.

"You can give a little more advice and guidance perhaps," I answered, curious as to what he would say to a man who appeared willing to renounce his conversion, if persuaded strongly enough.

"What kind of guidance do you want? There is only one reason for which people like you become Christians," he responded.

I knew what he was thinking. He was attributing my conversion to a desire to marry a Christian girl. I could restrain my anger no longer and asked permission to speak: "Dear Shah, I came to listen to you because my family had great hopes that you would guide me to the 'True Path,' but I did not expect such coarse accusations from you. What is more, I would like to

say that sex and religion are two different things, and anyone who rejects or accepts a religion for reasons of sex is a fool. I would also like to point out that as a Muslim, I was entitled to four wives -- more if I could manage it! After my death I could hope for seventy-two wives in paradise. But religion and faith transcend such earthly considerations. They cannot be compromised just for sex. You have accused me of allowing sex and marriage to be the foundation of my new faith and yet, by all accounts, I could have a better prospect with both of these if I were to become a Muslim again. Your arguments are not sound."

My outburst caused the Shah to lose control and he roared in anger, "Silence, you ill-mannered brute!"

I meekly said, "Dear Shah, there is no need for anger; let us reason together."

"Throw him down the stairs!" he shouted. The feelings of my brother were at last aroused. "I forbid you to lay a finger on him. If it had simply been a matter of beating him up, the family would have taken care of it," my brother retorted.

After these unsuccessful efforts, my brother and uncle began to realise that I could not easily be persuaded to abandon my new faith. They decided to send me to Lahore. Hussain Ali, a relative of my uncle, probably had something to do with it. He had discovered that while I was staying with my uncle, I used to visit with a pastor, Captain Isaac of the Salvation Army, at night in the neighbouring village for prayer. This could not be allowed to continue.

While I was in Lahore, my family did not say or do anything publicly which would

have made my conversion known to our other relatives. During this time, I was able to establish contact with Rev. Wootton by mail, and one day a missionary named Douglas managed to find me. He had been asking for me by my Christian name, Ghulam Masih, and of course no one knew me by this name. When I saw him standing in the bazaar, I approached him and said, "I am Ghulam Masih." He asked how I was and left. But news of this meeting soon reached my brother. He and his friends decided that the time had come for more drastic action. They would bring this shameful business to an end, once and for all. Lahore was chosen for the site because the Ravi River flowed through this area. This river had the reputation of "sweeping people into its currents" and ending their earthly sojourn. Corpses which were dumped into it were carried far downstream. The Ravi had fulfilled this function for ages, but a climax was reached in 1947 when hundreds of corpses of Muslims floated along from the Gurdaspur and Pathankot districts in India. That night, the Ravi would play its traditional role. My brothers decided that I must be consigned to its current in a sack.

December 6 was a cold night. In Lahore, winter nights can be very bitter. After the evening meal, I was stripped of all my clothing except for an undervest and loin cloth. I was then locked up in a cold and empty room. The reason for this was that I should become so numbed with cold as to be unable to offer any resistance.

When they had locked me in the room, I knew what was going to happen and all I wanted to do was pray. From the day I became a Christian, I developed the habit of memorising the Scriptures. I began to recite those passages I knew by heart.

Passages such as "The Lord is My Shepherd" gave me great comfort. Sometimes I cried, sometimes I recited, but most of the time I talked to the Lord. I knew He was present with me and that I would embrace Him after death. I was torn between joy at being in His presence and anguish over the agonising death I would have to experience. Sometimes I even laughed, because I had known the power of the Lord; the idea that my family could end my life was ludicrous. Never for a moment did I doubt the goodness of the Lord. Never did I think that I was mistaken in the path I had chosen. I knew that Christianity was the only way for me. I had perfect assurance that I would be with the Lord after my death. Nothing could shake this conviction. I knew that I had chosen the right path, even if it seemed my life would come to an inglorious end in this world.

While repeating and finding comfort in the Scriptures, one section in the letter of the Apostle Paul to the Philippians struck me forcibly: "I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body" (Phil. 1:23,24). Although I found death attractive because of the glorious life I knew would begin after it, I was now drawn into another direction -- to live for the sake of my brothers. It occurred to me that I ought to want to live for those still in darkness. I wanted to be able to take the light of the Gospel to those of my fellow countrymen who needed it -- the good news of what God has done for mankind through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This new conviction was strengthened as I recalled the words of Sadhu Sundar Singh (a converted Sikh): "It is easy to die for

Christ, but hard to live for Him, because dying may take one or two hours, but to live is to die daily." Slowly but surely, this idea took hold of me and filled me with a strange sensation of exultation. What a wonderful vision appeared before my eyes -- not to die just this once for my Lord but to die daily. How my spirit rejoiced within me as this vision permeated my whole being. The only gain from my death would be for my family; they would no longer be embarrassed by my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. They would even try to blot me out of their memory, since remembering me would only bring bitterness.

I was torn between wanting to die once for Christ and dying daily for Him in a life of total commitment and sacrifice. I realised that the sacrifice He made for me in dying upon the Cross was so precious and deep that even if I were to die a thousand times a day, it could not be compared to one drop of His precious blood that was shed for me. I was convinced that I needed to pray earnestly for deliverance, not because of fear of physical death or anything else but simply that I might live and die daily in witnessing for Him who had loved me and given Himself for me. Thus, my prayer went up:

**"My Master and Saviour, my spirit is at peace, because I know that after this life I will come to You. Then there will be no barrier between You and me. But the people, especially those who are involved in this scheming and murderous game, will have the impression that they were able to end my life. Death is the gateway to life for me. Part of me longs to enter, but my death will mean an end to my witness to your name in this country. Therefore, if it is pleasing to You, get me out of this**

**place tonight and give me the privilege of proclaiming Your great deeds among men. I will then be able to tell them how You can refresh people's spirits and give sinners the assurance of eternal life. I desire, O Lord, my Master, that just as my tongue had issued orders for killing others, so from this night I may declare words that give life. My eyes have seen Your power. Now if it pleases You, release me from here, so that the coming morning can be a new morning in my life. Escape from this death cell will prove to me that You want to keep me alive as your witness. O Lord, tonight let me be cleansed of selfishness and concern for my own life. If You keep me alive, I promise to bind myself to a life of service to You with the sole purpose of bringing glory to Your name. Lord, You do not need my help and service, but it will be my delight and privilege to serve You. Just as I was zealous to wipe out people whom You created, so may I be zealous to bring them to You. If this be Your gracious will, then deliver me this very night from this place. Amen."**

After uttering these words, I discovered that instead of being frozen, I had beads of perspiration on my forehead! Suddenly, someone opened the lock from the outside. I waited patiently, listening for footsteps, expecting someone to enter. When no one came, I cautiously looked outside and saw that the street was completely deserted. It was then that I heard the Lord whispering in my ear, "Run, I have opened the door for you!" I began to run, but I did not know in which direction to go. I had only two friends in Lahore and they were Muslims. I did not know any Christians there. I continued to run along the railway line which goes from Lahore to Raiwind.

Just beyond Cantonment Station, I tripped and fell into a ditch. I was extremely tired and stayed there for the rest of the night. I fell asleep and did not awaken until eleven the next morning, with the warm rays of the sun upon me. I got up and began walking towards Model Town (a wealthy district in Lahore). Looking at the fine buildings, I suddenly became acutely aware of my attire which contrasted sharply with my surroundings. Behind Model Town, I saw another village and walked towards it.

When I entered the village, there were some children playing in the square. I asked one of them, "Son, are there any Christians here?" "Yes," he replied. "My father is the minister here. What can we do for you?" "Take me to your father, please," I implored. The child took me to his home where I met his father, Captain Samuel of the Salvation Army. I was so relieved. Captain Samuel was gracious to me when I told him what had happened to me. He assured me that I was quite safe now and that if there was any trouble, he would defend me with his own life. We had a short time of prayer and then he showed me to a bed. He then sent for the village doctor who examined me and gave me an injection and some medicines. I stayed with the captain four days and then requested permission to go to Gojra. This kind man also gave me a shirt, a pair of shoes, a shawl, and five rupees.

On December 15, I reached Gojra. All my friends were delighted to see me, especially Rev. Wootton, Rev. B. M. Augustine, Bawa Masih, and Master Charan Dass. The story of my miraculous escape was the cause for much rejoicing. On Christmas Day, I worshipped along with my friend Bawa Masih in his village

with other people from outlying areas. The father of Bawa Masih and his younger sister, Grace, were very close to me. The most important thing for me was that I now was part of the Christian community. I regarded these poor and deprived people as my near and dear ones. Love for one another was mutual. Christian fellowship in which there is harmony and trust is a wonderful source of encouragement and help in the growth towards Christian maturity. I was safe among friends who accepted me. There was so much for which I was grateful to God.

## 9. Evangelising for Christ

In the security and peace of Christian fellowship, I began to contemplate which form my ministry should take. Until I was converted, my search had been for personal fulfilment, but now my thoughts turned outwards. I recalled the words of the poet, Ghalib:

No victory will come, to love's labour of prayer,  
till from selfish passions, the soul is washed  
clean.

My well-wishers at Gojra had various suggestions. Some thought that I should go into business and others felt I ought to enter the ministry. But I knew what I wanted to do. I had not forgotten the resolution I had made during the night of my deliverance from certain death. While praising the Lord for all He had done for me, I made this further request:

**"Lord, give me the grace to proclaim Your wondrous deeds in the world. Give me such devotion to You that I may keep myself pure even in this sinful world. Give me such love that I may drown in its depth, so the world will**



**never find me. Illuminate my path as I tread these rocky ways, so that I may not stumble and cause shame to come upon Your glorious name."**

I became convinced that my work for the Lord should be evangelism, and I decided to begin where I was. With some of the young men from the hostel, I went into the villages around Gojra and began preaching the Gospel. Sometimes Rev. Wootton came along with us, but I was not enthusiastic about this, because it inhibited people from treating me as they wanted to. In addition, I wanted to gauge my own acceptability and effectiveness among the people. The area of my service expanded rapidly and it was not long before I was witnessing in villages all over the Punjab. At first, I went by foot. Later, a friend bought me a bicycle. People used to call me a Sadhu (holy man). I made it my practice to always stay with the poor wherever I went. It was my way of identifying with my fellow Christians. I wanted to share their way of life in every way. If they went without food, so did I. My wealthy background never became a hindrance to me.

Whenever I went into a new area, my policy was always to introduce myself to the pastor of that area, so that I did nothing in his parish without first seeking his approval. This meant that I also had the opportunity of speaking and preaching to Christians, strengthening their faith. During my travelling ministry, I arrived one night at an Anglican mission station near Lahore. I was to stay with Canon Stanley Huck and take part in some meetings he was arranging. While I was waiting for him in his office, the Lord spoke clearly to me. He said: "You should go and give your testimony to your

brothers in Lahore. That is the place to start." It was nine o'clock in the evening. As my only ambition was obedience to my Master, I had no hesitation in doing what he commanded. I felt compelled to go that very night. I left my bicycle there and took a train to Lahore. I knocked on my brother's door and he opened it. Amazed, and yet with a slight glimmer of hope in his eyes, he asked, "Have you come back?" I suppose he wanted not only to know if I had come back to the family, but also if I had come back to the faith. "Yes," I said. "I have come back, but not to live with you again. I simply want to tell you that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Saviour. He has saved me and I know He can save you also." His expression immediately changed. Trying hard to control his anger, he replied forcefully: "Thank you very much. But we do not want you nor do we need your Lord Jesus. We do not want His salvation either. Good-bye." With that, he shut the door in my face. I was sad but not surprised. I was also relieved that I had fulfilled my duty even though it seemed fruitless.

The words of the Lord on that night sank deep into me, and I became convinced that I should witness among my Muslim friends in my ancestral village of Zaffarawal. I remember going to the home of the American missionary and his wife who had a mission station in our village. As a child, I visited their home with some other boys and joined in the singing which his wife led. After my conversion, I avoided going into this area, but now I wrote to the missionary and told him that I wanted to visit him because the Lord had shown me that I should begin my ministry in my village. He was very eager to see me. Consequently, I went to Zaffarawal in

March, 1950. When I arrived, I learned, to my great sorrow, that my mother had died a few days earlier, owing to her grief of separation from me. I deeply regret that I never saw her before she died. She had no knowledge of the plan to murder me; to her I was a disturbed person whom she desperately wished she could help. But I did not allow this tragedy to deter me from my intention to serve the Lord who had brought me to my village again.

After the death of my mother, the hatred of my brothers for me grew even deeper. They laid various murderous plots for me. While I was staying with the missionary, they came several times to invite me to their home. At first I refused, but then I asked my friend for his advice. He suggested that I go, but not alone; I should take two friends with me. I followed his advice and visited my brothers. While we were sitting and talking, I noticed a sword on the table next to me. It had been sharpened and was ready for use. I suspected that I was its intended target. As I picked it up, I thought to myself: "To kill someone with such a sword, you must kill yourself first. Your inner being dies before you raise your hand. It is a sign of weakness." I put it back into its sheath.

The discussion went on for a long time. My brothers had invited a Maulvi to talk with me. It was useless, however. He had nothing very relevant to say. Finally, we were offered a cup of tea. I took my first sip. It was horribly bitter and I realised immediately that it had been poisoned. I was not afraid, however, for I remembered Jesus' words to the disciples after His resurrection that those who believed and were baptised would see many signs. One of these was: "when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all" (Mark

16:18). I believed that this was my opportunity to experience one of these signs. I drank the remaining tea and prayed, "Lord, hold me up." I soon became restless and felt very dizzy. I told my friends that it was time to go. My brothers did not know how I was feeling. Outside of the town, not far from the mission station, I told my friends to go on ahead and leave me alone. It was ten o'clock at night. I began to pray: "Lord, if I die tonight, people will say that Christianity is false. It is not my name but Yours which will be dishonoured."

As soon as I finished praying, I vomitted twice and all the poison left my system. I then slept peacefully. In the morning, I went to the mission station. My brothers were anxious to know what had happened to me, so when I saw someone from the village walking nearby, I knew that he had been sent by them. I recognised him as one of their servants and told him to tell my family that I was alive.

It was not only my faith which was annoying to my family. My brothers were also afraid that I would claim my share in the inheritance. They made another attempt on my life. While I was on a visit to Narowal, a Muslim friend of mine arrived at the home of Rev. Isaac Dass to tell me that some Kashmiri youths were waiting for me at the toll bridge. I resolved that I would steer clear of all those things which could adversely affect my resolve to serve the Lord; so I declared formally in writing that I renounced all claim to the estate of my father, Chaudhry Lal Khan, in favour of my brothers. Thus, I severed all ties with my family. They had nothing to fear from me now. Perhaps they would leave me alone to live my life of witnessing. But it gradually became

obvious to me that my life was not safe in the Punjab. I had begun my ministry there as I had been told, but there was no reason why I should remain. It was during this time of reflection that I met a kind and loving friend, Rev. Chandu Ray, who later became a bishop. We had a long conversation about my ministry. He advised me to go to Sukkur in Sind. I accepted his advice, remembering the words of Bulhe Shah, the Punjabi poet:

Come on Bulhe, Let us go to a place where no one knows our caste or pays us any special attention.

The missionary at Sukkur at this time was the venerable Padre Carson. For a few months, I worked for the Bible Society; this work involved some administration and report-writing. I became very troubled, however. My heart was just not in this kind of work. Moreover, I began to feel that I was getting too commercially oriented. I felt uneasy. I was straying from my original vision, so I decided to relinquish my post.

I saw myself as an evangelist and therefore I had to equip myself for this task. I started learning Sindhi with the help of Padre Carson. Quickly, and with not much effort, I mastered Sindhi and began to speak, read and write it fluently. The language barrier was now removed and I was able to join Mr. Carson in his evangelistic work.

There was a setback to my work in Sukkur. The summer season began and the heat proved too much for me. Although I had made up my mind that Sind was to be the area of my ministry, I had to leave it for a while.

I returned to the Punjab. While there, I met Leroy Selby, an American pastor, at

Lyallpur (now Faisalabad). He invited me to join him in working among the young people. The Lyallpur convention had only just begun. For the first two years of its existence, this convention was essentially for youth. I had nowhere to stay, and because I did not like living with missionaries, I made arrangements to stay with a Christian, Chaudhry Jalal Masih. He was a gracious man and was almost like a father to me. I was accepted as one of the family and his son and daughter treated me as a brother. This relationship opened the doors of the community for me, and I became even more engrossed in my service for the Lord. From this base in Lyallpur, I went all over the country on my bicycle. I covered about 12,000 miles, travelling several times between Kemari in the south (in Karachi) and Landi Kotal in the north (near Peshawar on the Afghan border).

I was once taken to a small town by an American friend, a Reformed Presbyterian missionary. I was asked to preach at a service he was conducting. When the time came for the offering, I had a mental struggle. All I had was eight annas or half a rupee. What was I to do? I needed that money; yet, I could not let the collection plate pass without putting something in it. When it came to me, I had no choice. I simply put my hand in my pocket, drew out the eight annas, and dropped them into the plate. The battle was over. The service concluded but I kept wondering what I would do without any money. Little did I know that within a short time I would experience the wonderful provision of God again.

I returned to the home of a Pakistani friend. His wife met me with the message, "Brother, someone wanted to see you." I

was most surprised, because I had expected no one. She then explained that two nurses from the hospital came to see me because they knew I was leaving the next day. They were sorry they had missed the service and left an envelope for me. When I took it to my room and opened it, there was a bundle of rupees in it with a note saying, "The Lord has shown us that you need money for your travels. Please take this and be thankful." I was speechless. God is truly good!

One occasion is indelibly printed on my mind. I had decided to visit a man who had shown some interest in the Christian faith. I went to his town but failed to find him. Disappointed and tired, I boarded a bus to return to the station. Sitting next to me was an old Muslim man, and we got into a conversation. He started questioning me about myself, and when I told him that I was an evangelist, he was excited and delighted. It seems that I was the answer of God to his prayer. Muslims usually aim to make at least one visit to Mecca and he had been there seven times, yet he did not find what he was looking for. He told me that someone had given him a copy of the Gospel in his own language and he had been reading it. Like the Ethiopian eunuch in the Acts of the Apostles, he needed someone to explain it to him. Here he was on this bus praying that God would send someone and I was sitting by his side. When I learned this, all the weariness left and I joyfully accepted the privilege of explaining the Gospel to him. When we arrived at his stop, he invited me to his home. He was a landlord and owned 7,000 acres. After a long conversation in his gracious home, he asked me to pray for him. I told him to pray for himself. He seemed very surprised and asked, "Can I?"

"Yes," I replied, "if you can talk to me, you can talk to God." Then he said, "Lord Jesus, thank you for sending me Your servant, for leading me in the right path. Please accept me; I take You for my Saviour from today." I knew that God had accepted him. There is no limit to the goodness and generosity of God. All those who truly call upon the Lord are saved.

## 10. All for Jesus

My God has led me in the path He has chosen for me, and I have submitted. Only in this way can I live my life to his glory. I owe it all to Him who first loved me and set His love upon me. In my own strength, I could have done nothing. All that I am and all that I have been able to do have been accomplished only through His working in me.

The road to my "Calvary" has been a thorny one. It has been more difficult than I expected. But I have known all along that a certain man, Jesus of Nazareth, walked this way before me. This thought gave me strength and kept me going even when the weight of my "cross" seemed to be too much for me. I was constantly reminded of His words: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). For me, this was the only path I could tread, the only way I could serve Him and bring others to the foot of the Cross. It was my response to His great love for me.

The path of service is a lonely one. Sometimes this loneliness can be misunderstood as, when for weeks and even months, I find no enjoyment in the conversation and company of other people. But it is at these times that I am able to identify closely with my Lord and Master.

Dying for Christ in this life enables me to experience the power of His resurrection. In Him, I experience the victory of life over death, while still in this life. A great poet of Pakistan, Sir Muhammed Iqbal, has defined life and death as follows: "Life is the name of the visible order of things; death is when this order is broken and scattered."

After I left my extended family of forty-two members, I found it hard to adjust to my new circumstances. I had kind sisters-in-law who showed me much love, a mother who never spoke a harsh word to me or to anyone in my presence, a father whose gracious personality was a shining example to me and who provided me with wise guidance, and my four brothers who were concerned about my well-being and who wanted to see me a happy young man; unfortunately, they became my bitter enemies. Life without them seemed very bewildering. Even my best Muslim friends who had valued my friendship and faithfulness became strangers to me, even though these relationships had been forged in very difficult situations. I remember one occasion when, as a freedom fighter, I was in charge of an operation on the Kashmir border. We were in the midst of fighting. Gunfire had been exchanged from both sides. My friend, Akbar Kazmi, found his rifle jammed. He was terrified. It was like being unarmed. I watched him and saw the look of hopelessness on his face. I threw my rifle to Kazmi to use for his own defense. I felt that I did not need it as much as he, because I was a strong young man and knew how to protect myself without any weapons. This action cemented our friendship. But when my family began to persecute me, even a close

friend like Kazmi was unable to do anything to help me. Devoid of relatives and friends, I had to find my own way in life; it was like a "social death" for me. Yet, I kept on walking on the road I had chosen.

To die daily for our Lord is not a way of life one should embrace lightly. I have not regretted doing it. When I see lives changed and blessed, it brings me great joy. But there have been discouraging moments when my labour has seemed to be in vain. When I see young women, whom I have helped to educate and bring-up in the Christian faith, abandon all to become the second wives of Muslim men, I become distressed and depressed. I am soon reminded that our Lord died for all and yet so few respond to His love. Then I ask myself, "What is my love and labour compared to His?" His self-sacrifice on the Cross was seen as weakness. When I am abused and do not retaliate, I am also accused of being weak. I cannot expect to be treated any differently than my Master.

I am now ready when He calls me to "change my old clothes and put on new ones." I know that death for a Christian is not the end of life but the beginning of a new and better one. After I am gone from this world, I will have no chance to die daily for Him. I can encourage many to walk in this world with confidence, to glorify the name of my Master, and to praise Him. My Lord and God has led me faithfully all my years. Praise His name!

A few years ago, I went to a diocesan meeting in Karachi and saw Manzur and Dadu officiating at the Eucharist at Holy Trinity Cathedral. I bowed my head in thanksgiving and praise. When I received

the blessed sacrament at their hands, such a thrill went through me that I almost felt my heart would burst with joy! I had been instrumental in bringing both these men to the Lord. What more could an unworthy servant desire?

I thank God that He met me. My prayer is that those who read of Him in this book will be numbered among the saints who praise Him in everlasting light.

## 11. Quiz

Dear Reader, if you have read the testimony of Rev. Ghulam Masih Naaman, you will be able to answer the following questions.

1. What did the family of the author mean to him?
2. Why did his father become an Islamic mystic?
3. What is the aim of the Sufis?
4. Why did the author stop his education and enter the Air Force?
5. How did the prayers of Baxter affect his subordinates?
6. What Christian principles led the two nurses, Amber and Mary, to care for the wounded Naaman?
7. Which motive led Philip to marry a girl with a questionable reputation?
8. Why did the author leave the Air Force?
9. How did he become a freedom fighter?
10. How does Islam legalise Holy War?
11. Which harsh realities shook the freedom fighter in his service?
12. How did Jesus answer the testimony and prayer of the ten-year-old girl and her parents in the village near the border?
13. What was the disturbed request of the freedom fighter to the family whom Christ protected? What was their response to him?
14. What did the older Hindu lady explain to the leader of the killing unit, in order to save an infant from death?
15. What were the thoughts of the author regarding Holy War during his renewed Islamic studies?
16. What were the main words in the prayer of the despairing Ghulam to the Almighty God?
17. Which words did Jesus speak, to save the broken seeker of God in the waiting room of a railway station?
18. What did Jesus grant to Ghulam while he spoke with the old railway sweeper, a Christian from the lowest caste?
19. What were the realistic words of Rev. Rumal Shah in Isanagri?
20. How did Ghulam learn fellowship in prayer with Sewa Boota Masih, and what did it mean to him?
21. What hardships did the author endure, while living with the Christian employees at the mission compound?
22. What did baptism mean to the author as a young believer?
23. Why did Ghulam follow his brother and uncle, going home with them, even when he knew that his life would be in danger?
24. How did the family of Ghulam attempt to bring him back to Islam?
25. Why did the brothers of the author want to kill him, and what was their method?
26. What was the aim of the author's

prayer, when he was locked in the ice-cold cell, stripped of his clothes?

27. What did Jesus tell His servant and how did he escape?
28. Where did Ghulam begin his evangelistic service? What was its result and where did he go later?
29. What were the important principles of faith in the evangelistic service of Ghulam?
30. What did you learn from this testimony?

If you have any question about this testimony, you may write us directly.

[Please use our Email-Form to contact us or write to:](#)

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