

Essay

MY SPIRITUAL LIFE

by

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FORWARD

Here follows the story of how my faith started, evolved and took its final shape. Now, by walking the reader through the phases, I intended to gain him/her time and space to reflect, process and ask his/her own standing in this important issue of our lives.

I will be grateful if one may, after reading a part or the whole of this script, comment to reinforce my suggestions, or conversely, to present alternative explanations to, say, the exorcist practices or miracles publicly staged in dramatic fashion.

All in all, if this piece of writing stimulates critical thinking and self-examination to help gain broader outlook on matters of astronomy, evolution and religion, my job is done.

My Childhood

I was born orthodox Christian. My mother was deeply religious. She became a nun in later days. My father was a fighter, both by nature and circumstances. Having lost all relative in youth, and surrounded by a hostile tribe, he had to fight to survive.

We observed all the fasting dictated by the church. We fasted all Wednesdays and Fridays. Lent (8weeks) was a must. So were the ones in June (about a month for the Apostles), August (2 weeks for St. Mary), November (8 weeks for the Prophets) and some others. Fasting for me involved abstaining from meat and milk derivatives. In a cattle- herding region with no vegetables or fruit growing, the only nourishment available is forbidden, and that was hard.

After primary school, I was sent off to High school which was far removed from home. But there I felt free. Near the school was a protestant mission community. Besides teaching the bible, they offered biscuits and tea for free. So that was an attraction. I came to read the bible for the first time. Soon, I stopped fasting (but was careful not to tell my mother back home).

The central lesson was that Christ was the Savior and he was directly approachable by prayer. That got rid of all the intermediaries-priests, and their magnificent cathedrals and paraphernalia. (The key quote from the bible was John 3:16). Now bible reading became my hobby. Billy Graham was an illustrious preacher I adored.

In High School, I was, as I said, on my own for the first time. Of course, it was a boarding school and my routine was still to eat, learn & play. But I was free from parental control. Now coming in contact with the student community, I began to be aware of certain differences.

One Sunday morning we went to church. After the Mass was over, a monk took the stage to preach. He was naked above the waist, save a chain girdle coming down his shoulder. But preach he did!!! I was spell-bound. It was my first time to see such an orator. The essence of his preaching was “We live on this earth for maybe seventy or eighty years. If we sin now, we are doomed to go to hell and suffer forever!! Do you hear me? Forever! Forever! Why? Is it worth it?” Upon returning to campus, I swore not to sin by cursing, insulting or beating the weak. But for three or four of my colleagues, that was not enough. They rolled up their blankets and off they went to a monastery to begin to live a hermit’s life. Overnight though, they couldn’t withstand the cold and hunger, so they came back the next day. That is how far emotion can carry people off. No wonder, sustained preaching could bring about radicalism and extremism.

Even minor issues had significance for me. I once suggested we take a shorter route to go to someplace. “No, we have been going this way; so why change it?” “It is shorter” I said. “It does not matter” was his curt reply. That was conservatism, I learned. That person was intelligent enough to end up as university lecturer. But conservative he remained.

So attitudes remain. I sometimes wondered in later years how high-ranking people – senators and presidential aspirants could remain Mormons believing in polygamy and such other dictates. How an ex-First Lady could keep believing in superstition and astrology, etc. etc. Conservatism in that respect is a wall against change. How does that attitude of mind occur? I guess there are minds that can easily be persuaded to change, to try new ways, to take risks as adventure, to explore the unknown. There are also minds that don’t merit in challenging established practices – like saying, for example, if it works, don’t touch it or tamper with it. This set of mind could be partly due to indoctrination but, I think, it is also significantly an inherent character of the mind.

College Time

After High school, I went to college where I was joined in the student lodging compound by an Indian student who was Hindu by religion. I was watching as he sat up with his legs crossed, Buddha-style and closed his eyes. He didn't utter words but just kept silent. He used to tell me that one can cure cold, head ache or any disease by mere concentration. That, he said, gets blood & the white blood corpuscles to flow more to the point under concentration which thus helps fight the bacteria there and cure the ailment.

So I went to the library and started researching about his faith. I soon got the idea of Nirvana, and that punishment for sin is paid for here on earth and there is no hell of fire as in Christian belief. One is reincarnated as an animal to suffer to pay off the sin. e.g. If one was lazy one would be reborn as a donkey to labor and pay for the laziness. He is then given another chance as human. If he lived sinless, then the soul joins Nirvana to live happily ever. Otherwise the process will repeat. I caught on this concept and soon started kidding him. When, as walking to class, we come across donkeys driven to market gasping and heaving under heavy burden, I say to him, "Be careful! That maybe your uncle paying for his sin". The more he got angry, the more I enjoyed the fun. This went on for some time.

But one day, he got enough. His face turned red, his lips shivering and he was heaving. He lectured me- "You think your Christian faith is worth anything?! You believe Jesus is God? No! He was a man. You think he was crucified? No he did not die on the cross!" . "Then where did his body go?" I snickered. "He didn't die. Nobody dies that quick from hanging by the hands. True, he was unconscious. Then the Sabbath was nearing. So they hurried to complete the job before the Sabbath set in. They took him down and gave the body to his disciples to bury him. But when the disciples carried him off and laid him down in the shade

until they dug the grave, he regained consciousness! They were alarmed but they were careful not to tell the soldiers, because they will come back and hang him again. So they nursed Jesus until he reasonably recovered from his pains and escorted him to the far-off Himalayas where he lived as a hermit.

“How did you know all that, and nobody else knows?” I asked, “They discovered the headstone from his grave. The writing said “Jesus” but that was not an Indian name so they researched and dated it. There was no need to reveal it to Christians, because it is too painful since they believed he is God.”

I was dumb-founded! Totally flabbergasted! From that day on, I never raised the issue of religion with him. But I never forgot what he said.

Then on, I continued to read and research about the matter. Questions arose, but the answers I got were not flattering.

Was he conceived of a Virgin Mother to start with? After all, she had a fiancé, Joseph. Come to think of it; why did he carry her away when he knew she was due to deliver soon? There was a reason for that.

The reason is that she could not deliver a baby while still living with her parents! A decent girl of that era had to first get married before conceiving a child.

Otherwise it will be regarded as dishonoring her family. They will cast her out. That, by the way, is still the custom in many under- developed farming communities today. Because girls cannot plough the fields and support themselves. They need to get husband to support them. In fact a girl is expected to stay a virgin until she got married.

Because of this grave and shameful incident, Mary ran off or eloped with her fiancé. The alleged reason was to be counted in population census (of all reasons!). An unmarried and expecting mother setting off on a long journey to Bethlehem for census? Unconvincing.

But the official explanation of her pregnancy in the first place is said to be a vision or dream she saw when sleeping. The claim is that an angel told her that the baby is conceived by will of God! But who else saw that call? Who heard? Who believes that claim when she already had a fiancé?

Thus I came to the conclusion that when birth and crucifixion stories are discounted, we end up with Jesus being only a sane, wise and intelligent prophet. True, he may have felt that the end of the world was due as he said something like “this generation shall not pass before the end comes.” (Mark's Gospel 13:30). But, some questions lingering in my mind got answered. For example, when his mother and Mary Magdalene went on the third day to his graveyard with ointment, they were alarmed to find the grave empty. That is no longer a surprise for me now. Also in later day he appeared to his mother in person but when she approached him he told her not to touch him yet (because of the bruises).

Some of his disciples saw him too. That all was before he left for the last time. All that is explainable to me now. Thus it was that I suspected that he did not die on the cross and was not buried in the grave. I felt sure of my hypothesis.

But the fact is that his teachings were exemplary. He taught the world about love; he taught about forgiveness, about humility and about brotherhood. That was very important for the world. It laid down a good foundation of ethics – how people should live in peace together. That was a powerful lesson.

So when he died, the disciples fanned out to the world around and spread the teaching. Peter travelled far out west until he reached Rome (where his body was put to rest where the Basilica now stands). Mark went to Alexandria where orthodoxy took shape). Others went to India and elsewhere. Christianity spread.

Eventually questions arouse. It was not about his teachings. There was nothing wrong with them. They were top- notch ethics. It was about his personality. Was he God or man? Was he half- God, half- man? Was he a child of his mother and Joseph? Or was he a divine implant into her womb? Opinions varied. The clergy split in their opinion. The differences resulted in fighting and the situation deteriorated into rivalry. Emperor Constantine faced the prospect of break-up of his empire. So he ordered to convene a congress (the council of Nicaea 325 AD) and get the clergy settle their differences and unite by coming up with a joint declaration of their beliefs and stick to one dogma. They came up with the Nicene Creed.

That dictated that Jesus is one of three Gods. (God the Son, the Father and the Holy Spirit)

Lo! That united the parties. No more quarrels! No more differences! His empire was saved and regained unity. It was a quick and smart fix for the problem at hand. But it was a short fix that ushered in a long, simmering and bitter problem that was unforeseen at the time.

To my mind that was the gravest error made by man. That declaration is the most outstanding folly that to this day causes havoc in people's lives. I wish it has never been enacted so.

What this declaration established is that there are three Gods or God- heads. There used to be believed that God is one, but now there are three- all of equal status-the trinity as they are

called. That is indefensible to my mind. Looking at the history of the religion, it continued to spread and split. (There may be 200 or so denominations worldwide).

The first split resulted in two religions- Orthodox and Catholic. Then Protestants split from Catholics. Martin Luther argued in a letter to the church and people to the effect that God is directly accessible to everyone. So what is the need for middle men like priests? Why such splendor of garments and so expensive cathedrals? Why not each one of us be able to pray to God and contact Him? So Luther stripped the priests of their importance; and laid down a more liberal and progressive thought. That was Protestantism.

Other minor splits followed. Calvinists argued that faith in Jesus alone does not absolve sin. One has to be judged by his works too. Just believe but not living by the rules is not enough. Lutherans counter-argue that of one sincerely believed, then it follows automatically that one obeys the rules and that will direct his actions.

Anglicanism, developed in England, has historical reasons behind it. Because the Roman Pope did not allow King Henry VIII to divorce and remarry, the king broke away and appointed his own Archbishop of England (Canterbury).

But the central tenet that Jesus is God the Son remained intact in the belief.

The Nicene doctrine

All the current major problems of the world can be traced to this Nicene creed of the Council of Nicaea. That, as we saw, was where Jesus was elevated to God status. Had that not been so, I think Mohammed would not have been compelled to start Islam. Mohammed, being intelligent, just could not accept that Jesus is not a human being.

Previously all people of faith had accepted the Old Testament. The 10 Commandments were accepted. Even today the Old Testament is accepted by Judaists, Muslims and Christians. All the prophets are accepted. About 50 persons in the Testament are referenced in the Quran. Now we all know that the Jews had not accepted Jesus as God. That is why they hanged him. But to make matters worse, that Council Resolution prompted the creation of three God Heads – the Trinity. How are there 3 Gods? It took only one of them to create the universe. Where were the others? That is the problem facing Christians.

Muslims are in line with Christians on many tenets. “I your God am jealous. You shall not worship other Gods.” Is the first order of the Ten Commandments. Muslims accept that. If you blaspheme against God, there is no mercy. Muslims accept that too and go even farther to say that insulting Allah is punishable by death.

That, as we know, caused lots and lots of trouble in the world. The concept of Hell (gnawing teeth and devouring worms in eternal inferno of fire etc.), is common belief of all. Jesus taught this and stressed love, tolerance and fraternity. But unfortunately, the disciples of Mohammad (and not himself) who recorded the Quran limited this to the believers only and treated all others harshly to the extent of even killing them. There are many quotations in the Quran which call for close scrutiny, and we will visit the subject again in a moment.

But what I want to point out now is how one problem led to unintended far-reaching repercussions, and division of the world into two antagonistic camps.

Had Christians not elevated Jesus to God – status, Mohammed probably would not have been forced to break away from Christianity. After all the Old Testament is endorsed by him as mentioned earlier. Even all the Saints including Mary are acknowledged in Islam. Mohammed's objection, I think, was only the Nicene Creed. He believed, as I do, that Jesus was a prophet who taught in God's ways. Jesus himself never claimed he was God. He was Son of God in the sense that we are all children of God; but many a time, He referred to himself as Son of Man (see Bible Mark's Gospel 8:31). Even when he was pointedly asked, "Are you God?" He replied, "So you say." That was as far as he went.

So, Mohammed introduced a new religion wherein he proclaimed that "Allah is the one and only God," and that all others are created.

Because it has been written repeatedly in various verses of the Old Testament asserting that God (Yahweh) is one God-the creator of Heaven and Earth, and He is the Lord of everything. That was said in a very unambiguous way by many prophets of the Testament (Moses, Abraham, etc. etc.). So, Mohammed merely reaffirmed that and called him Allah. There was ready acceptance by all around him.

But then the successors of Mohammed, who wrote the Quran some 25 years later, went off the road. You find verses in the Quran that seem to justify certain cruelties inflicted on innocents around the world. This is what is dividing the world into two camps – the Muslims and the non-Muslims.

Of course the world had been divided into two major camps even before (believers and non-believers or communists). But that was different. True, the threat to human survival was once eminent but that was politics.

Political Division

I remember in my younger days, that rivalry was between the West and the East i.e. between capitalism and communism. The latter's motto was "from all according to their ability, to all according to their needs." One worked for the State to the best of one's ability, and got from the State all one's needs.

In capitalism, everyone worked for himself (with a minimum State interference) and cared for himself. The conviction here was that a man works best when working for himself and family. One can point out that this was an alternative classification of atheists versus believers. The West labelled communists as "God- less" and to be avoided. True, Karl Marx was very inimical to both Capitalism and religion. He argued that if the means of production (factories and services) were owned and controlled by a few rich people, their insatiable appetite for profit will lead to the working class getting enslaved and doomed to harsh labor. Thus he was for social justice and an advocate for the poor.

But in my humble thinking, he made two erroneous assumptions that led to the demise of his ideology: -

- 1) He based his argument on "unbridled capitalism." But later some holds were introduced to check and control a runaway capitalism. Monopoly was restrained to

sustain competition; and unemployment benefits, social security and food stamps and other benefits were put in place.

- 2) He stated that religion is an opium of the people. Lenin stressed it and said that religion is a sort of spiritual booze in which slaves of Capital drown their sorrows. The point was that the poor are preached that they will inherit Heaven as a reward for their sufferings. So they should bear the burden. But the rich also do not have to worry for if they give charitably, they too can go to Heaven. So Marx dished religion too.

That created condition for all religious people (conspicuously Christians and Muslims) to unite against communism. It is the first time, in my view where these major religions formed a common front to boycott and challenge the ideology. ...

But there is, I think, an irony here. We know religion stands for the poor and downtrodden. Every soul is equally important and so all people have the right to develop their god-given potential.

Looking at communism that too aims for the same things. – Equal opportunity for all. So if the State or government owned and controlled the wealth, it can distribute it equally among all its citizens.

But, unfortunately, labelling Communism as ‘God-less’ and materialist was enough to discard it.

Eventually the West advanced technologically so much that, to catchup, the East decided to adjust and adopt private ownership policy too.

In the process however, Communism collapsed. So now no more rivalry. It appeared, as one famous Japanese professor wrote, we have arrived at the end of history.

But that was not to be. Religion took over the fight, and now history is writing about that.

Blissfully all my youthful years, Muslims and Christians had lived as good neighbors.

In fact, there were more Muslims than Christians in my school than I had recognized, the reason being that not all of them held Muslim names. Many had Christian names, so I did not notice them. But it did not matter. In fact, all shopkeepers in my hometown were Arabs. When my relatives gave me coin, I took it to them and they delivered candies! So nice of them.

It was late in my youth that I heard Muslims amputate hands of thieves. I was alarmed. What if I got caught stealing? They would cut my hand at the wrist! If it happened twice, then both hands gone! How do I work and make a living? I can't even beg. The moment I raise my stump of a hand; they will know that I am a thief. Now that scared me. But of course that was my imagination. The Quran does not specify punishment for second or subsequent crimes of stealing.

Another time I heard that if a woman committed adultery, she will be stoned to death. That worried me too. "How many stone- throws does it take to kill her? Why not shoot her or hang her instead? That would be quick death for her.

Again, why only women but not men that are stoned to death?

Don't men commit adultery? If not, then with whom do the women commit it? I felt right away that God does not direct that to happen. The claim by the scribes that it is God who inspired or guided them to write it was not palatable to me.

Now after the Cold War {between Capitalism and Communism) ended, the Muslim fanaticism or extremism took the stage

Apostasy, blasphemy and Jihad, as stated in the Quran, started to play ominous roles over a wide part of the world.

I will point out some of the horrifying events that happened in very recent times, because they are still fresh in my memory.

There was the case of a woman named Meriam Ibrahim who was brought to appear before a judge in Sudan. She was sentenced to death. But before that she had to be flogged a 100 lashes in public! and then get to be killed! Why? Why? Because she is said to be apostate.

The fact is that her mother was a Christian all along and brought her up in a Christian manner. But her father, who did not live with her, happened to be Muslim. So the judge ruled that if her father was Muslim, Meriam has no right to be other than Muslim. Now for not abiding by the laws of the Quran, she is subjected to this harsh verdict. The relevant quote from the Quran to justify the judge's verdict is Quran VS 4:89 which lays down. "But if they turn renegades, seize them and slay them wherever you find them."

There was another case where Somalis al-Shabaab stormed a mall (Westgate Shopping center in Kenya). They rounded up the shoppers, separated them into two groups (Muslims and

Christians) and then shot the Christians! 67 innocent shoppers shot killed for no fault of their own. That was September 2013.

In Libya ISIS kidnapped 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians in February 2015 and beheaded them. Reason given was “they insisted to remain in unbelief”! The same year they stormed a compound where young migrants were kept in Libya waiting to go across the Mediterranean Sea to seek better life in Europe; they were taken by force and 16 of them were shot in the head and 12 beheaded in full view of the camera. Reason given; “They are worshippers of the Cross belonging to the hostile Ethiopian church.” Does this have any support in the Quran? Vs 9:5 states “But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the pagans wherever you find them.” That was the justification given for beheading innocent migrants and placing the severed heads on the corpses.

The dictate is that one cannot be anything else but Muslim. This will be enforced by the force of the sword if need be. History records that it was thus that the religion, starting out of Saudi Arabia, spread across North Africa to Egypt (the former citadel of Christianity) Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. Afghanistan, Pakistan and the other Muslim Asian countries met the same fate. It is intended to continue the fight until the whole world is converted.

Where is freedom of choice? Where is the right to be what one wanted to be? Why should one force one’s belief on others? And kill them if not.

I can’t help wondering if that is not an affront to God. Since he is Omnipotent, He can easily sniff out the life of those he hates! Does He need people to help him do that? Or are people so self-esteemed that they anoint themselves to be his helpers to kill others? I am told

that for martyrdom by suicide, they will be rewarded in Heaven by being presented a number of virgins for their enjoyment! Sex in heaven? This just cannot be believed.

That is what prophet Mohammed's teachings degenerated into.

That is how one error led to another. If the Nicene Creed had not been there, the world could probably have been saved from the debacle or chaos brought on succeeding generations.

So I feel that the successors of Mohammed, human as they were, added all these cruelties into the holy book. I continue to believe that if the teachings of Jesus and Mohammed were followed – which were about love and tolerance, even the Buddhist and Confucian teachings would have fitted in and been incorporated, and the world would have tended to unification of belief and harmony in life.

Instead, the world is in a mess now. So, I think, a second "Council of Nicaea" is in order. Let me dwell on this point for a while because of its current importance.

"IF"

If only the world listened to me, I would solve all the world's problems. That is how I thought in the heyday times of my youth. Of course there were times when nothing appeared to work for me; and the world collapsed around me, leaving me dejected, depressed and despaired. That was often times. That was when I remembered and guided by the poem titled "IF" written by the famous poet .R. Kipling.

I still remember the incident with pain, when, upon joining college, the English teacher wanted to gauge our skill of the language, since we were coming from different High School. So he ordered that we write two pages on any subject of our choice. I chose the title “If I were God”. I had thought college to be a liberal institution that encouraged or at least tolerated free thinking. So I prevaricated that I would not have created Hell; or, being Omniscient, I would not have created those people bound to end up in Hell etc., etc.

The teacher took it very badly. He singled out my paper from among the 70 or so papers in the class, and read it aloud—embarrassing me and shaming me. I later learnt that he was a Jesuit priest. Thereafter I was tagged and suffered for the rest of the academic year.

I should have learnt my lesson from those and various other incidents before and after. But here I go again!

I would hold the “2nd Nicene Conference”! That would help solve the current major problem of the world.

I have mentioned above how emperor Constantine, when faced with the prospect of breaking up of his empire, due to fighting among the Christians, convened the conference and ordered that the leaders come up with a doctrine that united them. They did, and it worked for him.

I now would order one for present-day religious leaders. Here is why.

The world this year (2015) is a mess. A Muslim radical group called ISIS (or Isi’il) has established a caliphate (Islamic State) and is fighting to spread world-wide its version of Islam.

It has now dominated a large tract of the Middle East region and is spreading fast. The way it is recruiting followers is partly by Internet using the social media like Face Book etc. That way, it is able to reach round the world. It has thus gained a large audience and people voluntarily come and join the fight in the Middle East. So far, up to 90 countries are reported to have their nationals travel secretly to join the fight there. To counter this, up to 65 countries are now joining hands as a coalition force to fight, defeat and destroy this force. The torture, bloodshed and atrocity committed in this fight is going. To mention just what took place this year (2015) alone, a Russian passenger flight was downed on October 31 and all 224 passengers on it lost their lives. Again a synchronized attack in Paris on November 13 killed 129 people outright. There were appalling scenes earlier in the year where, say, 12 or so Ethiopian Christians were kidnapped in Libya on April 19 and beheaded. The severed heads were placed on the corpses and filmed.

Such attacks were not limited to Christians only. For example, on March 20, 2 mosques in Yemen were attacked and more than 130 people killed outright. Even in Saudi Arabia, Shi'ite mosques were Attacked thus killing 21 Muslim worshippers. More were to follow later.

In response, the Coalition Forces conducted on ISIS, according to newspaper reports, more than 8000 air strikes in just 3 months. The fighting continues; and aside from human lives lost, financial costs on all sides run into several billion dollars. This is the crisis the world is facing today.

But in my humble opinion, this doesn't bring final solution to the problem. The fact of the matter is that those radicals or extremists get their inspiration from their Holy Books. Every succeeding

generation comes to read the same text and gets the inspiration anew. So if this one of their generation gives up the fight, the next one will take it up!

So the only solution, it seems to me, is to convene a conference (like the one emperor Constantine did) and to reinterpret and explain the Scriptures such that hanging, flogging, stoning beheading etc. (which were probably the norm in the 5th century society) are no longer valid, relevant or acceptable in this 21st century; and will certainly condemn the perpetrators to Hell, not Heaven.

That, I think, is the way to go.

Virtue is a way to success in life

Nobody likes death. Animals don't. Plants don't either. They struggle to survive. They will turn to anything and apply any method to continue to live. Those that went extinct were for reasons beyond their capacity. Those of us, animals and plants, who are still here is because we learned the tricks to succeed. We cooperate; we help each other in fighting off hostile encounters and in hunting prey together etc.

Many animals cooperate to bring down their prey. Lions, hyenas, wild dogs etc. work in teams with their kind to kill zebras, buffalos, or other large animals. Obviously, humans too cooperate. That is the way to overcome adversity. So love, courtesy, assistance, advice, support are all facets of the key to succeed to live. That wisdom was gained by experience many generations back, and is now embedded in our genes and is instinct. Plants may not have language, but they know how to spread their species. Those that didn't learn have been swept away long ago.

Thus there is no need to claim that rules came down from the skies. Moses did not bring down the Ten Commandments. Nine of them were already there in the society. He merely codified them. Don't kill or steal or commit adultery or give false witness etc. were already being practiced by previous societies. He only added to it the commandment to observe the Sabbath. He carved these rules on a marble plate and presented it to these followers, claiming that it was God's own finger that wrote it.

So to be kind and loving and helping is inherent in the struggle to survive as a species.

With the other natural urge, which is to procreate, the species, have attained the way to success in the business of living. So we learn from the reality of life that co-operation is essential to survive. "No man is an island" the saying goes. We could extend that saying for other animals too. Life wants to go on. We need to cooperate to succeed in living. Even animals do. Haven't we seen lions hunting as a team? Horses stroking each other's neck? Monkeys picking lice off each other?

You fight to survive – that is true. But beyond that, you win and your species wins if you cooperate and work together.

It is an expression of this fact that we see all sorts of nonprofit organizations spread across the world helping others – victims, children, orphans, elders, the sick, etc.

It gives us pleasure when we have helped others. It is not in expectation of rewards that we help the helpless. It's in the goodness in us expressing itself. It gives us pleasure and satisfaction to extend help to others because it is in our genes or instinct.

Even in primitive societies as I have mentioned, they have long known that cooperation is mandatory to survive. They hunt together. They group together to fight off enemies.

They device laws to harmonize their relationships. Don't commit adultery with your friends and neighbors. Don't steal. Don't betray. Love your family, neighbors and friends. Be kind and helpful.

Eventually codes of good conduct are codified. They are religion. All religions teach to be good, kind, generous and defender of the good.

Since that is what life dictates, we see it expressed in all major religions. But it is not religion that brought about these moral laws. They were there long before religion was organized. We watch television shows about the way of life of primitive societies like those in Amazon jungle, where people still go naked except for some leaves to cover their privates. They are maybe called pagans and probably never heard of Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha or the like. But don't we see that they love their close ones, are kind and helpful to each other? They have observed and learnt that life is more peaceful and harmonious and successful if they observe these practices and regulations.

Animals do the same though to a lesser degree. When a member of their group dies, they express sorrow. If one is caught by predator, buffaloes, for example, came back to help fight off the predator and release their member. Monkeys send out warning signals to their group if they sense an approaching danger.

This, in short, has nothing to do with religious edicts. It is a natural law of survival of the group.

In the language of evolutionary science, bonding together, or say, loving your child or spouse, is facilitated by hormones (neuro- chemicals called oxytocin) More or less of this stuff in the brain causes more or less loyalty or love or attachment. That has been shown to be so in humans and in many animals. That is nature's way of enabling mutual or reciprocal help to ensure sustainability of existence. For example, if human mothers had no concern or care for their babies, humans would have gone extinct a long time ago.

I believe that if there happen to exist people - like creatures on other planets in far-off galaxies, they will have found out that for peaceful co-existence, it is better to love, respect, and help each other out. So we should not regard those laws about love and kindness as being unique to earthlings and handed down from divine being. It is simply evolutionary behavioral development.

Now let us learn a bit about scientific facts to enlarge the horizon of our thinking.

The study of fossils and evolution

There are three types of rocks on earth. Igneous rocks that formed when the earth was formed; metamorphic rocks that are created under heat and compression; and finally sedimentary rocks that are formed by sediments piled in layers upon layers by rivers depositing them in the area.

Rivers wash down soil or sediment from upstream (mountains, hills, uplands) down to lower levels and deposit them there. This phenomenon repeats year after year for hundreds and thousands of years. So we get layers of sediment starting from the oldest at the bottom to the

newest at the top. Because of increasing weight and compression, the sediment hardens to form rock.

Now where do fossils come into the picture. Animals grazing around the lower areas, when they die, get overlaid with the sediment. In other words, corpses are covered with sediment brought down from up-stream. Every year this is repeated. The corpses under pressure become part of the rock formation. When this process is repeated for thousands of years, the skeletons of those that lived and died a thousand years before are found laid at the bottom, and the new ones near the top. By determining the age of the layer of sedimentary rock, one can identify what sort of creatures lived in those different times.

Today we find rivers cutting deep gorges and exposing these layers. The Grand Canyon in Arizona (USA) is one example. The Nile River in Africa is another. As the rivers erode the river bed, they expose the side of the banks deeper and deeper.

Geologists pick at the sides of the layers of rock to retrieve the fossils embedded in there. Since different layers represent different periods of time, geologists can construct the fauna and flora that lived in those different epochs.

Evolutionary theory states that life started in unicellular form (like amoeba) and developed stage by stage over millions of years into complex organisms. Current estimate of development history suggests that life started one to two thousand million years ago. Those were the unicellular creatures. The fish came into being about four hundred million years ago. Amphibians (frogs and crocodiles) appeared 225 million years ago. Reptiles, mammals (dogs and horses), then birds followed in that order. Last appeared human species.

This chronology of events was revealed by study of fossils. We have mentioned above that sedimentary rocks are formed layer over layer. The river washed down sediment and dead animals and deposits them downstream. The following year another layer is laid on top. Again the next year, yet another layer is laid over. Deposition continued for hundreds of thousands of years.

Now if we cut a cross- section of the rock from top to bottom, what we find in the top layer are fossils of recent fauna. What lies at the bottom will be the fossils of those creatures that lived that long ago. By careful study of the changes that followed one another over the millennia, we see the history of our development over time. i.e. how we slowly evolved over time.

Evolution-- an Exciting Study

This field of study- evolution-is really exciting. I feel it has not received adequate attention in schools today. That is why people are inclined to be cynical about it.

At my school, I started by studying the amoeba and the paramecium. Simple cells-one with soft cell wall, the other with hard cell wall. The former developed into animal kingdom and the later into plant kingdom and they diversified and developed over millions of years into what we find on earth today.

Following the amoeba's development route, we see two or more cells banding together to cooperate. More of them formed a group because cooperation helped. Now some became better at sweeping in the food to others.

The rest formed around the food and eventually created a cavity into which they received the food and absorbed the nutrients. Eventually they found it better for those talented as sweepers to be tentacles and the rest be the stomach to process the foods. Thus the hydra developed. Several stages later, we came to the earthworms where we see attempts to diversify method of procreation and signs of sex organs appear. Thousands of years later, we have small creatures developing limbs to help movement. This specialization of cells and division of work in multicellular organisms branches into legs for some, wings for others flippers for swimmers and finally hands and feet for us humans.'

Similarly, in the plant kingdom, algae appeared at some stage after the paramecium, then mosses and sponges and then simple plants before we finally arrived at the oaks and pines.

As I said, it was interesting to follow the development as life diversified into what we have today.

Of course we have to keep in mind that not all changes survived. It was random experiment; and millions of types perished along the way. The point is that if the new change did not benefit the owner, it became a burden or draw-back to it and failed it in the competition. But if it turned out to be beneficial, the plant or animal that owned it took advantage of it and won in the competition to multiply; and kept on trying out additional improvements and changing and adopting.

Evolutionary Adaptation

As we have seen, life evolved stage by stage. It started with simple unicellular organisms and over millions of years of adaptation has reached the present complex form.

With changing climate or shortage of food, the weaker ones die out. Since not all of a species are the same in height or resistance or strength, some are more adaptable than most. So they are able to overcome adversity: - they survive and reproduce. The bell-curve shifts in that direction (see page 25). Of course if the change is sudden and severe, all of the species could disappear. Many have done so. But usually changes come in small steps, and some of the species affected could adopt and survive. The trend continues in that direction. If some in the species are faster than others, then they are able to chase and catch their prey more often than the others. The stronger also will have advantage over the weaker ones when it comes to fighting for scarce food. So they out-survive the unfortunate ones.

There are many traits that make up an organism. The eagle has developed sharper eye sight that it can see its prey from sky-high and zoom in to catch it. A faster rabbit can better

escape its predator than its slower colleague. A crafty or intelligent monkey can manage life better than a dim-witted one when confronted with adverse conditions. Each time then the bell shaped curve shifts. The less qualified will perish and the successful ones became the new norm.

It is this variability in traits that helps adopt and survive. If all giraffes are equally tall, they all die together at food shortage. That is the beauty of variation in nature. It enables survival of some. The best in the game of life will survive and multiply. That trait will become dominant. That is the survival of the fittest. That applies for all animals and plants, and that is how we all are what we are today – a long way from the simple creatures that started us going.

The Bell Shaped Curve

Nature has a clever way of adapting to the changing environments. It doesn't, so to say, put all its eggs in one basket. Take people's height. Not all of us are of the same height. Most of us are maybe around 6ft. But then some are shorter or taller. Some are 5 ½ ft. and some 6 ½ ft. Fewer are 5 or 7. Still much fewer are 4 or 8. If one draws a graph of height against population, we get a bell-shaped curve. The scientific jargon for the shape is Normal Distribution.

One may count 10 people of height 6 ft.; (call these average) people; 5 people of 5 ½ or 6 ½ (short or tall). 1 person under 5 ft. or more than 7 ft. (dwarf or giants).

If the environment changes in a way to favor tall people (giants) then the 6 ½ or 7-foot people will flourish. If the circumstance turns out to favor the short ones (dwarfs), then the taller ones lose the battle and the short ones win the day.

As an example, take the giraffe. If grass dries and trees succumb to dryness, it is the shorter giraffes that die out first. Because the taller ones get additional advantage of feeding both from short and tall trees, whereas short giraffes can access only short trees. So the next generation will be taller giraffes fit for living.

Thus the Bell- shaped graph shifts to the taller side. It can shift to the shorter side if tallness is a disadvantage in life.

To Sustain the Species

There is an in- built mechanism in all living things to breed to sustain the species. If that had not been so, we would have gone extinct long ago. And indeed many must have gone so-- those that didn't have it.

Plants have a way to disperse their pollen (or stigma) to reach their mates. Some use insects like bees to carry their pollen to the other partner. Failing cross-pollination, they then use self-pollination as a last resort to continue the species.

Animals have in them sufficient urge to mate. The act gives the male enormous pleasure; so it goes to seek out a female and mate. It is not thinking about of- springs or continuation of the species. The urge is built into it to do it for self-gratification. So either by force (like the

donkey) or by seduction (like the birds) they do it. The females too have a way to show their readiness for mating. They exude a scent that alerts the males.

How did this mechanism get developed? The simplest creatures (the amoeba) multiplied by binary division – one grown cell divided into 2, and the two into four etc. That is how it sustained the species. Then over millions of years, cross pollination or mating developed by trial and stage by stage. Along the way, many must have failed and thus gone extinct. Those of us who are still living are the ones who succeeded and perfected the system. Love and attraction of the opposite sex in human beings is a refined way of developing the relationships. Whatever works succeeds, and what doesn't just doesn't.

Mutation

We believe this chance happening must have played a significant role too in developing certain mechanisms that promote the effectiveness or bring a better change more suited to survival. A chemical agent or radiation exposure or the environment can cause a DNA of a cell to change. The changed DNA of a cell to change. The changed DNA produces a different variation of the organism. If that change promotes welfare or more fitness for survival, it wins over the competition with others. More strength, or speed or agility or camouflage will advance its ability to win over its competitors. It will thus get to breed more with ease. The females too tend to choose the stronger or better one to father their off- springs.

If the mutation is harmful, of course the off- springs lose in the competition and die out. Most mutations will be disadvantageous, because they are disruptive, but the few that became

advantageous get to win the competition and at the end of the day (or century) they own the world in their niche.

Can We deny Evolution?

The Holy Scriptures state that all animals were created simultaneously (in one week – according to the bible.)

If so, then the argument goes, the dinosaurs and human beings both lived at the same time, sometime in the past before the dinosaurs went extinct. But the study of fossils does not support that argument. One cannot find the fossil of man and that of a dinosaur in the same layer of sedimentary rock. They did not live at the same time. One went extinct 600 million years ago. The other came on stage a mere 2 or 3 million years ago. Anyone denying this theory can go and prove evolution wrong if only he can find dinosaurs and mankind found together in any layer of fossil rocks.

So the claim that all creatures were created in a span of, say, one week is not supported by science – in fact it is discredited.

The Narrative about the Universe

It all started about 13.7 billion years ago. There occurred a gigantic explosion (we call it the Big Bang) that spewed out matter and energy from a tiny compressed entity. Just what started that is unknown to science, but I believe it is God. Space- time continuum got started and

as this explosion expanded it started to cool down. Sub-atomic particles condensed and hydrogen atoms formed. As time passed, these clouds of gas coalesced into bigger masses which by gravity pulled in even more substance around them. That formed stars. As the stars got bigger, compression by gravity intensified, resulting in fusion of atoms which created energy, and the stars started shining. The universe was no longer dark.

But star mass can't increase indefinitely. Pressure inside will reach a limit whereupon the star will explode, spewing out heavy elements (carbon, iron, calcium, gold, etc. etc.) which were created in the earlier process of fusion. Those elements later found themselves incorporated in other new formations of stars and their planets.

That is the composition we find on Earth – and eventually in our own make-up. So the calcium in our bones and the iron in our blood cells etc. were not made here on earth or came down from the sun. They were formed in other stars!

Billions of years later, as water started flowing about on earth, molecules got moved about, thus getting the chance to connect and combine in different orders until it hit the right combination (after probably millions of failed trials) to form the DNA which started off the creation of cells and succeeding organisms, culminating, after millions of years, in present life-forms. Human beings as a species come on stage only 2 ½ million years ago! Our species (homo sapiens) is about 500,000 years old.

All this has been irrefutably proven by science.

How Big is the Earth

We used to think that the earth is flat. Now we know it is round. That is why airplanes, if they kept flying east, will end up coming around from the west. Earth is not stationary – it goes around the sun. This is at a distance of 93 million miles. It takes light 8 minutes to travel the distance from the sun to the earth.

But the sun isn't stationary either. It is a star one out of 400 billion other stars that comprise the galaxy we call Milky Way. Milky Way is so large it takes light 120,000 years to cross from one end of it to the other. The center of Milky Way is 27000 light years from the sun. It is around this center that the whole bunch of 400 billion stars rotate, including our own sun which is just one of them.

It takes the Sun 240 million years to complete one rotation around the center, and our Earth goes with it. But the Milky Way itself is one among hundreds of billions of other galaxies! And a galaxy can contain up to hundred trillion stars!

So that gives us a picture of how small the size of our Milky Way galaxy is, and correspondingly how insignificant our sun and earth are in the universe

Is there life elsewhere?

In ancient times, it had appeared that the earth is flat and the sun moves over it and the stars shine on us. The earth was the center piece and we are made in God's image. This was how we felt so important about ourselves.

As science advanced, we learned that the earth is one out of nine planets that circle the star we call Sun. Soon we found out that other stars too have their own planets revolving around

them. It was only recently that we sent out satellites to Space for observing the stars and we found planets around them. To date (June 8, 2015) we have recorded 1930 planets orbiting around their respective suns. That is only in our neighborhood (50 light- years radius). If we looked to at least half of the 400 billion stars in our Milky Way galaxy, we will find many more of them. But if our galaxy is only one among hundreds of millions of galaxies existing in the universe, then the number of planets possibly revolving around the millions and trillions of stars will be enormous!

If our ancestors had realized that, they would not have said that life evolved only on this planet earth. If one out of a million planets evolved life, that will result in billions of planets sustaining life. In other words, the universe is possibly breaming with life throughout its vast expanse. Some among these could be civilizations more advanced than us. Our civilization started a few thousand years ago. Our Industrial Revolution is a mere 400 years old. We owned satellites only within the last hundred years. If other civilizations had a head start of, say, a million years before us, we will be considered awfully primitive by their standards.

But the problem is that we can't learn from them. They are far. If one such planet is only 100 light years away, it will take light (or radio wave) 100 years to get there from here. So if we sent a radio message saying "Hello there!" it takes 100 years to get there. If they replied immediately to say "Hello! How are you?" that will take another 100 years to get here. So it is 200 years to just exchange message! And they don't speak our language. That is why star/planet systems thousands of light- years away are inaccessible.

God and Civilization

As a child, I believed that my father was invincible. There was nothing he couldn't do. So when faced with a problem I brought it to him. Thus I had no anxiety about being faced with the unsurmountable. In like manner, even as adults, we feel safe to think that there is a power who can do everything. One characteristic of human mind is that it becomes restless when it cannot explain away some riddle or phenomenon. We rest our mind when we feel we have solution. What is lightning? Now we know it is electricity. The fact matter, though, had an idea. So they had to find explanation. Mostly it is a religion- based explanation; God or his angels have something to do with it. Lightning burns or kills as does serious damage somewhere. So may be the devil is involved here somehow – say to receive punishment. That settles the problem and rests the mind.

How does disease come? It should be Gods will. Why children die? God must have willed it. In short, if you don't know the answers, leave it to God. That, as I said, rests your mind.

But as science advances, and we learn of bacteria and viruses and their role in causing illness, we learn to cure the diseases ourselves; then God's role is lessened. We don't call on him to cure gonorrhea or syphilis; we take medicine instead.

Primitive societies call on God or pray for very many things – fertility, harvest, rain, cure, victory, safety, success, riches etc. Today we can take care of ourselves to a larger degree. Technology has helped us manage most problems. It is not enough to pray to be safe, rich or victorious; we have to develop our technology.

That transfers the burden of helping us in life to our own selves.

ANCIENT Beliefs Still in Play

In ancient Greece, there was a god of love, of war, of storm, of many other things. Remember Apollo, Aphrodite, Athena, etc. and there was the God of gods (Zeus). Today, power has been consolidated in one entity – He can manage to control all phenomena. He is defined as being omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent (all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-present everywhere). But strangely, there are angels to carry out his errands (apparently He needs their services). There is also the matter of the devil who has his own power.

In the community where I grew up, not all devils were regarded as evil. For instance, there are what we call guardian spirits. Each family has one to guard it against disease, pestilence, famine or danger. There are certain specified days when you sacrifice lamb for it. On one such date (I think it was May 9) the lamb you slay should be all black but with a white forehead. It is sacrificed outdoors and consumed totally out there. It was a feast for me. You fry it on an open fire on large tin plates – just like we grill meat in a park and enjoy it with friends – laughing, drinking, strolling around and the children running everywhere. It was a lovely occasion.

On most other dates of sacrifice, the lamb (or ram) is slain in the house. There is a distinct ceremonial procedure to it; we stand round the standing lamb and father says some prayer. Then he and I fell the lamb on its right side (the Muslims fell it on the left – so I was told).

After slaying is complete, we sit still (no talk, no movement). The dying lamb flails around until it dies and the blood settles wide on the floor. It is believed that that it is when the Spirit comes up to the home and drinks the fresh blood. If we move or talk, that could distract the spirit which may thus get angry and cause us trouble. I remember staring at the pool of blood

on the floor to see which side of it is getting licked or sucked up or disappearing. The spirit of course is invisible.

After 5 minutes or so, my father gets up and gently walks out. He is escorting the Spirit out. When he comes back, then we are free to talk and move about in our normal life and he gets to skinning the lamb. We all felt good at this exercise. It brings peace of mind to the family. The guardian spirit now protects us against evil things for the year. That is insurance! Never mind the small mishaps and misfortunes that may befall us, or the big dangers that are the will of the Almighty God, the rest is taken care of by the guardian.

This is a big psychological relief for the family. In an environment where there is no medical service of any sort, or any police to protect against the powerful, one becomes helpless and insecure unless we had such a guardian to watch over the family.

My parents are Christians. They go to church regularly and pray to God. But just in case, they also keep the peace with the Spirits. I once confronted my mother and I asked why we sacrifice for the spirits. Her answer was prompt. God has ordered that we play our part at keeping the Spirits at bay, so He could help us more effectively.

Thus it was that we lived peacefully and harmoniously despite the fact that death and decease visited us half a dozen time. We had the inner peace and strength to bear it.

In later years, the children – now grown up – started our own families; our father passed away and our mother became a nun. So she died confident and secure in that she will go to heaven.

But the unanswered question is “If God is kind, merciful and loving, why did He have to create the devil and hell after all? Do kind and loving parents do such cruel things to their children? Does a kind and loving God create a person when he knows in advance (because He is omniscient) that that person is destined to go to hell? Why create evil when He is loving and kind and merciful? That was one other question that bothered me.

The world of Spirits and the art of hypnosis

In rural societies, people possessed of Spirits are a common sight. They sit court over social problems and pass out verdict.

“Whys is my father sick?” pleads a troubled customer.

“Because he did not sacrifice sheep for his guardian spirit”.

“Who stole my Ox?”

“A dark- skinned lanky lad in your neighborhood who harbored grudge on your relative. Figure it out.”

“How can I get my husband (or wife) to love me? Go get some hair from hyena & tie it to his/her foot.” are some of the question- and- answer sessions with the Spirit man? There are of course fees to pay to get such answers, so the Spirit man or woman easily gets rich in a short time.

I remember one incident that happened in my neighborhood when I was about 12 years old. An elderly woman got sick seriously, so the husband went out and brought a Spirit man to cure her. The charge was \$15 which was exorbitant by his standards.

The sorcerer arrived around 8pm with about 6 followers. They sat down in a circle around the sick woman. Every time the sorcerer puffed out of his mouth the juice of a plant called chat that he was chewing, the woman trembled and moaned as it sprayed on her.

Around midnight the sorcerer started to talk to the patient or rather the Spirit possessing the patient. “Where did you catch her?” “She sprained her feet while walking to fetch water, so I got her fainting on the ground”. “Leave her alone now!” “No, she is my horse!” and the talk continued. Around 4 am, the sorcerer started whipping the woman.

The Spirit on her offered to leave her if given his reward – food. The sorcerer said that he is a bachelor and single, so he has only burning charcoal and ash. They got up wrestling and when, on order from the sorcerer, we bought burning charcoal and ash from the kitchen, the woman devoured that and fell to the ground unconscious.

All went quiet now, and the sorcerer, satisfied, went back to his seat. The woman woke up and was confused about what was going on. She even asked the next day why her tongue felt burned?

The sorcerer has exorcised or driven out the devil from her. This puzzle has lived with me all my adult life until I came to the West and watched live shows on hypnosis. The guide (hypnotist) was able to control the minds of his volunteer group so completely that he could make them do what he asked. They acted, talked, jumped, danced or cried as he directed. He could even get them to act out with toys what they would strictly do only with their spouses in their private bedrooms.

So that was how the sorcerer was able to put up that act. There is a certain priest, I watched on TV, who publicly exorcised the devil out of patients – even unlikely ones like deacon of the church or film- maker of renown in the country. The priest has performed such miracles as curing blind men, paralytic patients and insane people that arrived from Italy, Germany, Israel and Switzerland according to video on the YouTube.

The priest is endowed with the power to control or hypnotize people's minds. In that unconscious state of mind, the victims display acts or manifestation of their belief of devil acts.

Telepathy

There is another power of the mind which I witnessed personally. That power is extra-sensory. Let me narrate what happened to me.

I was a freshman student at a college in the capital of the country. I lived as one of eight students in a room in a dormitory. Once I woke up in the night (2 a.m. exactly) to feel my bed sheets wet. I switched on the light and was absolutely shocked to find it was blood flowing out of my nose. Am I dying? I sat up and trembled. At dawn, I went to a clinic 3 miles away to seek help. Waiting in line among other patients, I had to wait to see the doctor and was back to the dormitory around 11:30 a.m. When I walked into the dormitory I was alarmed to find my father sitting alone on my bed.

“Are you alright?” He asked eyeing the pack of tablets prescribed to me. I told him that I was sick and had to go to clinic. Not knowing where I stayed in the college campus, he had, upon arrival approached the security guard at the gate, who then took him to the administration office. They searched out my name and determined what class I should be in, so they sent him to the class, but when my name was called out, I was not there. Then my father is taken to the student dean who sent out a search team looking for me all over the campus but with no result. My father started trembling with fear. He could not go back home to face my mother, so he sat and waited.

When I asked him what prompted him to travel all this distance (45 km. on a creaky road), he replied thus: - “your mother was startled in bed at night at 2.a.m. and started crying that something happened to you and she was wailing. So in the morning, she insisted that I come

here to check that you are well". I know I am a precious child to her (because of the previous two children she had lost before I was born). But I never thought she was capable of following my well-being at such great distances. This happened a number of times later, that wherever I fell sick I was worried not so much about myself as about her since she will find out and so I get worried.

Now how does that come to happen? I do not know. But that is the power of the mind and it is near miracle. Scientifically speaking these are properties that reveal themselves when synergy is achieved among some elements. Take hydrogen and oxygen gasses binding together. They create water: that essential liquid that can turn into steam and cloud or ice and glacier. It is the essential in life! But the gasses separately are nothing but mere gasses. New property revealed itself in Synergy.

Scientist Craig Venter took up four bottles of chemicals and from therein he chose molecules and connected them up in specified order and got DNA. That can reproduce itself, build proteins from suitable media and those in turn build the bacteria which is now life itself!

The Synergy of that combination of molecules forms life! That is near miracle.

Molecules or proteins joined together to form the brain's cells , and these now attain the property of creating thought. They think! That is near- miracle. But it is the property arising from the right combination of proteins.

Telepathy and other powers of the brain that we have seen so far and that we will be able to see more of the future- are due to the right Synergy or combination of entities.

What is Soul?

Every animal has a soul. When it dies the soul departs the body. We don't know what happens to the soul then. But for human beings, the soul has destination. According to major religions, it goes to heaven or hell. But what exactly it is, it's not known. I have been told of a story when I was a kid. It seems that white man once decided to catch and examine a soul. So they placed a thick walled glass over a dying man and succeeded to trap it. It was white and fluffy – like spun cotton. It jumped back and forth in the glass, and then managed to break it and escape. No one since has succeeded to trap one. I believed it and lived with it for a long youthful life.

But nobody knows any better today? Where does it reside in the body? Does it have its own independent life outside the body? When and how does it come into the body after fertilization of the embryo? Immediately? Later? When? The same way for all animals, birds and insects?

I personally believe there is no such thing as soul. Today we can create life in the laboratory. All we needed to do to create one is to build DNA. This is a chain of molecules. We can collect molecules and string them together to assemble the DNA. Then put it in a suitable nutrient and it copies itself and multiplies and builds the organism. There is no need to import or implant soul.

I still remember the astonishment that downed on me in 9th grade science class. The teacher showed us two test tubes. They contained clear solutions. He then took one of them and poured the content into the other. Instantly something new appeared. It had yellow color.

I wondered where yellow color came from. The two solutions have reacted chemically to produce a different compound that has its own specific color-yellow. I had been thinking that colors are created not produced.

Now take water. It consists of two atoms of hydrogen and one atom of oxygen to make one molecule of water (H₂O). Water flows, boils, freezes and is a major component of life. The two gasses by themselves have no such power. But when combined thus, acquired different characteristic.

It is the same with life. When ordinary molecules combine together, they acquire life! No need to hypothesize soul. Water can be decomposed into its components: - hydrogen and oxygen. It can be synthesized to form water again. The same way DNA can be assembled and disassembled as desired. Life is a property it reveals when combined correctly-- that is all! There is no need for soul and for some agent to go around and insert soul into an embryo whenever and wherever people or animals copulate. When I arrived at the point where no such entity as "soul" existed, it was a great relief for me.

In my young days I used to wonder where and how souls of dead people were getting stored until resurrection.

The Holy Books teach that on Judgement Day Christ will return with all His glory, and all the dead will rise to receive their judgment. Punishment or reward (Hell or Heaven) will follow that. So where do the souls stay until that day? Was a question bothering me. Are they alive but without a body? Do they move? Feed? Feel?

Now that question becomes mute. The question of angels and devils also becomes redundant. Heaven and hell follow suit.

Now life is just matter that attained consciousness. As stated earlier a specific combination of inert molecules can build a DNA which assembles essential elements to make proteins and subsequently life. That has been achieved by scientists in laboratories.

My Observations in the Old Testament

In my younger days I was whole- heartedly studying the bible. The Old Testament is more or less accepted all by Christians, Jews and Muslims. But it was difficult for me to say that it is all God's word.

I have now forgotten almost all of that text I disagreed with. But I still remember some:

The biblical Jonas stayed in the fish belly for three days!" Really? What did he breathe while in the gut?

- Noah gathered the male and female of every species into his boat before the flood! All the thousands of mammals including elephants, rhinoceros, giraffes etc. into that boat? And made room for all the carnivores and herbivores as well and stored food to feed them all for 40 days? Really? All the other animals had to perish because mankind became evil? That didn't make sense to me.

Cain killed his brother Abel and later went down to the desert and established a town and married there?! Really?

Where did the people come from that he established a town? Weren't Adam and Eve the first and only ones created? Did he then marry his sister? These and other claims of the Old Testament cannot be God's words. Even if all the three major religions accept them as "God's Words", to me it was written by humans. Moses-that icon of the Old Testament – is believed to have been the one who wrote "Genesis" and four or five succeeding chapters of the Old Testament.

"The Genesis" is a credit to his stellar imagination, or it could have been a folklore of his times which he wrote down. In my village of birth, for example, there was a folklore about creation of man. Here is how it goes:

God was sitting on a big basalt rock one time when he decided to create man. He took up clay and fashioned it in human form (may be as couple). Then he baked it. When he took it out of the oven, He found it was overcooked – burnt! He threw it south towards the equator, and there the black man (race) landed. God tried to cook another clay model, but to his disappointment he found that one under cooked – still white! Angrily he threw it away towards the north i.e. Europe and there the white man – race – settled. When God tried carefully for the third time, it came out just right.

That is the Brown man-my race! I was wondering for a long time if the stone God sat on was the big boulder on the hill across the river near our house. Now what Moses wrote about God making Adam, then taking a rib off him to make Eve; then followed it up by the story of the apple and the snake talking to Eve in her language etc. This is a similar folk story to me.

In fact, I think the Quran gave a better touch to the Old Testament story. Take Genesis about Adam and Eve. The Old Testament states that God created Adam, then took a rib off him

and made Eve. Further it was a snake that tempted Eve to eat of the forbidden apple. In Quran, I am told, God created both Adam and Eve independently. So Adam gets to keep all his ribs intact.

Coming to the apple story, the snake does not come into the picture. God, having created Adam in his image directed the angels to worship him. All except one did as directed. That one exception felt that Adam was below him and so refused the order. That displeased, God, so He degraded him into devil. It is that devil that tempted Eve to eat the apple. I like this version better than that of the Old Testament.

Anyway Moses may have written down the folklore of his times or most probably, it is a creation of his imaginative mind. But, I can't help wondering that if eating an apple can bring down the wrath not only on Eve, but on her husband and all the thousands of succeeding generations of mankind, where is the fairness in justice? Why is one responsible and subjected to such harsh punishment for crimes committed by long- ago ancestors?

There are more blood- curdling atrocities narrated in the Old Testament. After Moses led the Hebrews out of Egypt, they roamed about in the Sinai and Negev deserts for about 40 years. They wanted fertile lands to settle in, but since there already was inhabitant there, they started fighting them to dislodge them and take over the land. So they fought and fought. But they claimed that God was on their side. At one time they killed in a day all the 12,000 people living in a village called Ai (Joshua 8:24-25) and carried away the livestock and plunder. This is by the order of God! Who can believe such atrocity will be by the blessing of God. Aren't the victims children of God too? Innocent people living their humble lives just mowed down?

In the present day narrative, it is like saying God ordered us to invade and kill off all the non-believing Mongols or Chinese and take their property. Even if they are heathens (or modern day Atheists) aren't they still God's children?

That is why I started suspecting if what is recorded in the Old Testament is truly dictated or inspired by God.

The Israelites claim they are a select people of God. It is written (Deuteronomy 7:6): for you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

I simply do not take that even if it is recorded in the Bible. That is why I tended to believe that the bible is not a word of God. I say this because I start with the premise that God is kind, considerate, just and omnipotent and all human beings are equal in his eyes. Thus no one should consider oneself master- race or superior to others. Now these writings betray that concept

But in a light- hearted mood, let me take the indulgence to add what I feel about Moses – He is a tremendous literary writer! He is imaginative, creative and resourceful. There are many literary people of outstanding renown who were awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. Now the Swedish Nobel Committee must make provision to award the price post- humorously and give one to Moses. In fact, he is such a towering figure that he deserves a Nobel Prize for each of his six books. Such pervading influence almost universally and over generations has got to be deferentially applauded

But please don't stain God's name by dragging it into such crude scenarios of extinction of life by flooding the whole Earth, or of wars and slayings that people inflicted on one another.

Vows, Miracles and Prayers

Does prayer work? How about Vows? Let us start with the vow. I was once invited to accompany a friend and his colleague to go attend a religious holiday. It was the day of the Archangel Gabriel and the church was, maybe, 500 kilometers away. A rough road and difficult terrain and we had to spend one of the nights huddled in the car. It was to be my first attendance of this 'national event' and so I went. The ulterior motive of my other colleague was to meet and befriend a girl said to be going there to attend. On arrival we learned that the girl had changed her mind and stayed back. He wept bitterly. He had a reason. His father, in his nineties, had wanted to see him get married soon. So he built him a house and moved him into it. The reasoning is that loneliness will force him to get married.

He was bitter. So he made a vow to the church of the Archangel. He was shedding tears when he knelt at the gate of the church to make the vow. Within a week of our return home, he felt a terrible stomach ache while in bed. He jumped out and drove looking for a pharmacy. They were all closed. The last one he checked had lights on! So he parked quick and rushed to the door only to find the lights turned out and the clerk in the act of locking the door. He begged her to reopen it and promised to escort her home if she got him the medication. The rest is history. They were married shortly. The vow has been validated.

I have been telling that miracle of the archangel all these long years. But is it really a miracle? Or was it a good lucky coincidence?

I think of it as the latter. Vows don't work. As for prayer, I don't think it works either. If we keep record of prayers of people how many of them have been fulfilled? How many of us have prayed for health and wealth (e.g. lottery), success etc. and got fulfilment? 50% success? No way!

How many mothers lost their children to famine and disease despite praying with hands outstretched to the heavens above?

Moral laws

Is Human rights, for instance, a natural law or God-sent Law? Courtesy and kindness to others is a survival kit, as I mentioned earlier. We need it to help each other out in this harsh life. Many species of animals and plants have gone extinct. They could not cope up with the vagaries of harsh environment. Now animals live and hunt hand-in-hand. They cooperate. Lions, hyenas, birds, wild dogs, wolves, etc., etc. have learnt to co-operate with their likes to catch their preys.

So why is it different for man? The Holy Books only tell us that it is right to do it; only they ascribe it to God's order.

Talking of human rights, we recognize that people are endowed with various different talents. To bring out that talent to benefit self and community, we need level ground to get the opportunity to find it and develop it – whatever it is. We should be all equal before the law. We should when we can, provide the community with education, health care, opportunity and a helping hand. The outcome benefits all of the community. This therefore must be a right thing to

do --Human Rights. If some communities afford and others don't, that is the way it is. Children die of starvation in some countries; they are well-taken care of in others. Some perish in tsunami, others in pestilence. It is a problem to explain this if it is an impartial God that sent down these rights to all His creatures.

That is why I just don't believe it.

Faith and Reason

(Education's Failure)

I sometimes get the feeling that education hasn't served us fully – at least not all of us.

These are people on the world stage who have attained degrees (PhDs, M.Sc., fellowships etc.) who do not show any capability for critical thinking? Some are even believers in superstition. Many openly profess not to believe evolution. They are bound by their dogmas. So I sounder “How could you have reached such a high level of power and yet not be able to use your critical thinking to see some absurdities?”

When I hear those proselytizing so vehemently about the bible in congregations and churches, I ask myself “have these people ever been taught about evolution?”

How about those politicians who reached the pinnacle of power as senators, congressmen and presidents? They have of course learnt their graduate laws and finances perfectly. But do they understand evolutionary theory? They are taught the bible as saying that all the 8.7 million species inhabiting the Earth were created individually and independently in a span of a week just 8000 years ago. They believe Moses' writing; but how do they explain to themselves when they visit museums and see organic bones and skulls of dinosaurs with their own eyes? These are now

extinct, but were walking the Earth 200 million years ago. These and 85% of all species died off 65 million years ago? That is a fact established by science.

How do they explain the first humanoid—Lucy (*Australopithecus Afarensis*) that lived 2.5 million years ago? Fully-developed humans (*homo-sapiens*) walked the Earth 500,000 years ago. How then do they believe that the two species (dinosaurs and humans) were created and lived at the same period of time?

With science so advanced, how can they not believe in evolution and the age of the earth?

Are we really created just 8,000 years ago when Science tells us the dinosaurs lived over 600 Millions years ago and we have their bones at hand to prove it? How can they believe with open eyes that dinosaurs and human beings lived together in the same epoch?

In other words, how can you believe all creatures were created in 7 days when fossils tell us it was in a span of millions of years? How can you deny new creatures can be created by mutilations and cross breeding when you see new breeds of dogs and have different viruses and bacteria coming out from laboratories?

The Scientist Craig Venter Strung together chemical molecules and formed DNA which started to reproduce itself by itself. Is he then going to be considered demigod? Or you refuse to see his creation in the laboratory? Would you rather believe Moses than Science?

I think we are doing injustice to humanity when we back up against the wall and let uniformed people lead society astray and make money and living on that. The earth is not flat and Genesis is wrong. No way around it.

Our (un) Holy Fathers-

There are the so-called 'chosen ones' who lead the faithful along the path to God's Kingdom. These are priests, imams, Rabbi, Hindu and Mormon high priests.

But let us look at some for their lives. The leader of one Mormon sect known as "The Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints", is serving jail term for life. The prophet - Warren Jeffs- forced teenage girls to marry people of his choice. He too is married to several wives, some taken away from their husbands.

The first Mormon prophet (Joseph Smith) reportedly took about 30-40 wives!! Including a 14-year-old and others already married women. That, we are told, is God's will!! But was it really?

Take the Catholic Church., How many priests were found to have raped boys? At least 3400 cases reported as of May 2014 and \$2.5 billion settlement in USA alone. The church itself paid millions in retribution after getting discovered. We are told that even the Pope of the time had hushed it down knowing full well what had happened. Is that holiness?

The Hindu leader had similar history. He had raped several girls under the guise of teaching them God's laws.

Yet these are people telling us that they communicate to us what they are directed by God.

Who so believes them?

Synthetic Life

To recap: Life for us starts as a cell. Sperm and egg, when united, form an embryo cell. That goes on to divide and divide to multiply and form us. The different organs (eyes, heart, limbs) are formed by direction given by the relevant genes made up of specific proteins which themselves are built by order of the DNA. This is an important molecule and carries all the information required to build the organism. The DNA is but a collection of smaller molecules stranded in a double-helix form.

Today, DNA can be assembled in the laboratory! If immersed in the right nutrients, it proceeds to build proteins which then go on to build the cell automatically. After appropriate time, the DNA divides into two, then the two strands proceed to take up the right components from the nutrient and build up their respective missing parts. They then move apart and divide the cell between them to now make two cells. The process continues to thus have 2,4,8,16, etc. cells that eventually form tissues, organs and bodies. That is all automatic and no miracle is required. That is life created in the laboratory.

Where Does the Soul Come from Then?

As I have stated earlier, there is no need to hypothesize the existence of soul. Just like hydrogen and oxygen gases combine to make water, so do the right type of molecules combine to bring life into existence. Thus, in the future, we can assemble different variations of DNA to make different species of creatures. That is synthetic life.

Evolution will then take over, and we have, over millions of years, developed the fauna and flora that make a world. Or, instead, one can conjure a situation where one can build up

selected DNA strains that grow into the various useful types of animals and plants to populate the environment. In the simplest terms, there are useful bacteria, like those in our guts helping digestion, or like milk-fermenting, or garbage breakdown or petroleum producing ones, etc. that can be improved upon to be usefully utilized.

The scientists don't claim to build a soul, but they are already building life in their laboratories.

What Do I Believe?

I believe the earth is round. I also believe the sun is 3,000 times bigger than the earth. The other stars too are equally big though they appear small because of their distance, much like an airplane big enough to hold 200 people appears like a bird in the sky. This is all science.

I also believe that the end of the world will come, but not in the way the Holy Books say. Science reveals that, as the sun gets older, it starts to expand and increase its volume so much so that it gobbles up the inner planets (Mercury & Venus) and comes too close to earth. The heat is enough to burn us out. Then eventually the sun itself completely runs out of fuel and goes dark like cinders. That end will come about approximately five billion years from now. Other stars will also burn out in time. Nothing can burn or shine forever. So it will all get dark someday.

I also believe in evolution. Dinosaurs existed until sixty million years ago. We have the organic bones in museums to prove it. They have lived and walked the earth. It follows that, in contrast, I believe not that the sky and earth were created just 8,000 years ago, nor that stars will fall down to earth like stone pebbles. St. Mark could not have imagined their size when he

wrote in the gospel. For this and many more reasons, I believe the Holy Books were man written. The claim by human beings that it is divine-guided is false.

God created space-time continuum and matter and its inherent properties and the laws of nature. Things took off from there: - stars, planets, evolution and now human history. I don't think He interferes in the working of it after that creation. He certainly does not intervene in human or animal day-to-day activities, i.e. who marries whom, who gets eaten by whom, or who wins the war. For how else can you justify the destruction of thousands of species of animals that went extinct? The Tsunami that killed thousands? The famine that wiped out thousands of innocent children? The suffering that millions around the world endure in their daily lives? Of course we like to have Him look after us but that is just a wish and an illusion.

Righteousness

All the Holy books teach that we should be kind, loving, caring and generally up-right. But this is not a commandment from high-on. It is the necessity for living. Pagans care for each other. They love and support each other. Even animals care for others, protect their offspring and cooperate in hunting. If you are courteous to others, you are rewarded in return. Respect them and they respect you. The prophets recognized this long ago but ascribed it to be commandment from high above. But it is only a natural law for survival.

Freedom of Expression (Speech)

Different people can hold different opinions. Which one is right? It is a fair bet that the opinion of the majority is right. Of course it is not always true. In a primitive society, the majority may believe the earth is flat. That doesn't make it flat. Opinions don't change reality. Other than that, it is safer to accept that the opinion of the majority is probably the right one.

In other words, there is more probability that the majority is right. That is why in gatherings or meetings it is the majority's opinion that is adopted. It also ensures most benefit for the maximum number of people. For that reason, freedom of speech for everyone is defended.

In reality there is still struggle in our society to bring this to fruition. For example, democracy in the west is the most envied in the rest of the world. But even here, there remain kinks to be straightened out. News media owned by the rich align themselves to their interest and try to influence people to their side.

Recently even the U.S. Supreme Court granted (by decision of Citizens United vs. FEC 2010) person-hood to corporations to use their money as freedom of expression (speech) to dominate the news media and drown out the voices of the ordinary people.

In Developing Countries, the violations are more blatant. That goes down to even rigging the votes in the ballot boxes. There needs to be a critical level to reach as informed citizenry to be able to achieve fairness.

Political equality will help lessen economic inequality and thus equal and fair chance to develop our talents, gifts and skills; in short, all the potentials in our pool of DNA as humans.

Now these social rules of justice, equality and freedom of speech are natural social developments.

Similarly, other progressive attributes such as beauty, gracefulness, kindness or attractiveness in any form (strength, intelligence, money) do not come down as blessing from above. When endowed by nature, they are preferentially selected and so are found useful to find mates, friends or favorable attention; so they succeed in life and procreation. They win the

competition and reinforce themselves. It is evolution at work. It is natural selection of the fittest mode or attribute to rule.

Let me dwell on this point for a while. Because some people of renown, even scientists, get befuddled on this point. They talk of moral values, the sense of right and wrong and conclude, say, "Christianity must be the path"

Some seek meaning in life and ask, "How and why are we here?" Focusing on just us – human beings – choosing to forget the millions of lives on earth and in the vast expanse of the depth of oceans which also have their own social structure however primitive. So they too have life like us.

True, we are important to ourselves. That has always been so. It reminds me of the Biblical Moses who tells us what God said and did. "Let us create man in our image," and he set to create Adam and Eve in His image. Great! God of Heaven & Earth, of all the living things on earth and of all the billions of stars and their planets in the billions of galaxies in the universe just looks like us! Moses does not say how he came to know of that creation event. But he sure reflects our own feeling of self-esteem in the universe.

Our self-importance goes even beyond identifying ourselves with God's imagery. We don't want to die. We struggle at all costs to not die. But when that inevitably comes to pass, we want our soul to continue living in happiness in life beyond. And that is to be forever and ever!

The fact is no life wants to die. All living things fight or struggle to stay alive. Moreover, they all have the urge to have progenitors. They have the urge to breed and multiply.

Take plants for example. Some produce light seeds to be able to float and get carried away. Some burst to dispense their seeds. Others produce flowers to attract say, bees, to come and collect nectar whereupon they get stuck with pollen to carry away and release it to the other plant.

Animals have their own mechanism. Some females, when ready to mate, produce and exude scents that attract and excite males to approach them. The urge to mate for, say dogs, donkeys and cattle is not a cold-blooded calculation to get offspring. I don't think they care about that. The biological urge is to get gratification. That is true of all animals. But I do not think there is need to hypothesize divine power to aid that. It is evolutionary. Those lucky ones to have acquired that urge are here and living. Those that didn't have it simply died out or went extinct. It is a 'natural selection' thing. The survivors have kept up, refining it to fit better for living. Thus, we have found that such attributes as love, empathy, devotion or sympathy are useful traits for successful living.

As for the inanimate world, the same explanation applies. The earth and planets are not designed to make perfect orbits around the sun. It is simply that all others that failed to achieve perfect orbit have disappeared – some flying out into space and others getting pulled into the sun. There is argument in physics how the natural forces are fine-tuned miraculously. If gravitational force or weak force or strong force, etc. were weaker or stronger, we would not have been here. True! But those cases where this has not been achieved, have failed and gone or disappeared. I do not know how many trials and failures have occurred before it hit it right for our case.

That discredits the argument that all this we see around us must have been made by design. It is a trial-and-failure case many millions of times out of which this one of ours hit it right.

The Mind

The working of the mind is not yet fully understood, e.g. dream is one function of the mind. Some of our dreams are amazing. People have tried to interpret dreams in various ways. Researchers have studied eye-lid movements of dreaming people; others have attached electrodes to study electrical pulses and active brain parts during the time the subject is dreaming. But we have not yet been able to grasp the essence of it. There are other activities of the mind. Telepathy is one. Hypnosis is another. Hypnotists can control the mind of their subject who obeys what the hypnotist tells them to do, i.e. squirm, talk, behave as directed and perform various acts without inhibition.

This brings me to the subject of exorcism. People claim to be able to cast out devils or demons from their subjects. The sick easily succumb to these tactics and subject themselves to be exorcised, but this is mere hypnotism. Their mind is controlled; they act out their unconscious belief in the devil. The drama is amazing, but is a sinister play on the unsuspecting. People pay a heavy price on this especially in the backward countries. Casting out the devil is a common sight where priests, magicians, sorcerers and the like make a living of it. But what are devils?

In my younger days, I have wondered about angels and devils. I still remember a poem I studied; "12 Angels Watching Over Me." That was good. But I have never heard of a female angel. All angels are addressed as male. But if there are no females, what is the point of

maleness. So really, they should be neutral gender. All angels are identified by their wings. They apparently use them to fly to places to perform God's orders.

"Does that mean God is incapable to get things done without having them to go places to do it for him?" I wondered. "How, by the way, can they fly in water to reach people in submarines? Or on the moon where there is no air? Wings cannot perform there."

There was also another problem that I was curious about. In ancient times, population was small, and their task could be manageable. But as populations exploded hundred-fold or million-fold, the burden of work increases. Is God creating more angels to meet the increasing demand? How about the devils? Their task of leading people to sin also increases with the population. Does God keep creating more of them too to live up to their task? If there is a shortage of devils, then there is less temptation for sin and so more people get to go to heaven!

All these thoughts of mine gradually evaporated as I studied astronomy and evolution. Angels and devils are the creation of peoples' minds. They don't exist in reality.

It follows then that there is no heaven or hell. It has never sounded logical to me that a person who committed sin in his short life of say seventy-years should be tortured in hell fire for eternity. There is no end to the burning fire and even to the lucky people sitting up in heaven? Forever and ever? Unimaginable. Again, Orientals were, for a long time, not included in this scheme of thinking.

The three major religions involved only the Middle East and the West. China and India, comprising half the people of the earth were not made aware of this religion. God had ignored them and talked only to the Israelites? So they all were doomed to hell? Enemies in their billions! For what fault of their own? It does not look fair, and God does not work that way.

I soon realized that those people of those times in the Middle East and West were constricted by lack of knowledge; that their region was all the world that mattered. And those beyond it, if any, did not matter. God's main concern was Israel with its Jerusalem.

Now my approach to God changed. I came to the conclusion that as He was omniscient and omnipotent to create this vast universe, He is perfectly capable to manage it at will. No need for angels, devils or prophets.

So do I pray to God? Yes! Every day? No! Only when I need Him. Biblical people gave him the image like our own. They then followed it by ascribing to Him our nature of weakness. For example, we like to be respected, glorified and entreated at every occasion. Some think He too likes the same things – praying, worshiping, and glorifying Him day in and day out. I don't think He is that petty.

He does not need glorification from us nor from the million other species living on earth. Predators tear down their prey, people suffer the wrath of nature. Life is harsh. He watches all that. In my case, I pray only when I need Him. If that doesn't do anything at least it helps me relieve my worries, and that in itself is worth it.

Do other animals recognize Him and pray to Him? I suspect so. But we will know that when we get to understand their mindset and thinking. We look to science to understand how our minds (of all creatures) work and think. I believe we animals have brains that function the same way but at different levels of cognizance.

What I Don't Believe

I have pointed out in the previous pages some of what I don't believe in the Holy Books. For brevity, I will repeat it. It all boils down to one sentence: "I don't believe the people who

claim that God showed them or talked to them, advised them or told them what to say or write about anything at all.” There is no proof and there is no way to prove it. By definition, God is fearless, so He can declare openly to the whole world any message if He wished to do so. To say that He told them to their ears, or in their dreams, or from behind the bush is unfounded. I recognize that all the moral teachings that have come down to us are from the best minds of the times; teaching about morality that best serves us to lead good lives. That is all.

Don’t take things too far as to claim that they are specially chosen agents through whom God is expressing himself. God does not need an agent or helper to carry out what He wants. So while I take their moral teachings as a useful guide to successful living, which is necessitated by evolution, when they anoint themselves as God’s mouthpiece, I say to them, “Don’t kid me.”

What to Do Next?

Let bygones be bygones. By that I don’t mean we shouldn’t learn our lessons from history. We must not forget the Inquisition – where hundreds were killed as witches, defilers or enemies of the Holy Book, etc.; and not the 100-year religious war in Europe. Not the thousands slain or killed or bombed in religious wars in the Middle East; nor the torture meted out to non-believers. Blood has been spilt in vain. People have suffered immensely and immeasurably in the hands of fanatics.

We must also realize that by instinct, we seek higher power to protect us, to look after us and for us to look up to and to pray and beg. That is a powerful urge because otherwise we feel insecure on this earth. We would like to think that this life is not the end of it all; but somehow continue in an after-life. We are afraid of death.

But we must grow up. We must face reality and stare it in the eye, and accept the inevitable and live by it. Learning astronomy will reveal to us how small and insignificant we are. Learning evolution will teach us that we are not that special. After all the gorilla and man share 99.9% of our DNA as being the same. Our difference is only 0.1%! That is not much to brag about.

We must respect science because it reveals God's laws of nature. So we should teach it. At the same time, we must point out the folly in religious preaching that down-plays science. How long can we lean back against the wall when our children are being misled by preachers who have not learned anything of evolution?

One day we will find living things on other planets. If they are people, does Jesus or Mohammed have to get born there too to teach and lead them? If there are a million such planets, how many times does this have to be repeated? One day soon, a scientist will stitch molecules together to build DNA that can start walking around and think. It could be human. Will that soul also qualify to go to heaven or hell? Who made that soul anyway?

In the short term, we can roll back the Nicene Creed and go back to Jesus's teaching. We can disavow the destructive parts of the Quran Verses and go back to Mohammed's genuine approach, which now will come closer to Jesus's teaching. In the long term, we should not shy away from science – instead we must aggressively teach evolution and astronomy.

Self-anointed so-called "God's mouthpieces" have done enough damage in our long past history. NOW ENOUGH IS ENOUGH.