

**A CALL TO  
ISLAM  
IN THE U.S.S.R.**

*An Oral Narrative of  
Maulvi Zahoor Hussain  
The Pioneer Ahmadiyya Muslim  
Missionary to the U.S.S.R.*

By  
A. R. Mughal  
1980



# *A Call To Islam In The U.S.S.R.*

*The harrowing tale of misery and torment suffered by Maulvi Zahoor Hussain in prisons in the U.S.S.R. has been briefly described in this book. An attempt has been made in the narrative not to spotlight particular events/incidents for ideological purposes. The theme deals primarily with missionary activities and the hardship and sufferings which a missionary may have to face in the performance of his duties. Maulvi Zahoor Hussain has, therefore, taken great pains to limit his painful experiences to the barest minimum. It is the triumph of the spirit over the substance.*

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## A NOTE BY THE AUTHOR

The choice of the first person in the narrative may have been avoidable and in fact it would have made my work much easier. But a writer's nightmare is the fear of being trapped in repetition. Indirect narratives are almost always running after the missing link and are, therefore, apt to be repetitive.

The writer of a true life story does not have many options. Ideas do not usually come by logical manipulations. These have to be coordinated by the writer in a sequence which fits the pattern of particular events. I know of no better way of writing a story than in the first person; especially so when it happens to be a true story. Writing has always been a difficult art. Total blankness in the beginning is a basic element for this art. In fact it serves as a soil for whatever amount of credibility the writer can accumulate for his substantive effort.

There may be certain words and phrases in the narrative which do not conform to their standard usage in this country. Also the readers may find some difference in style as compared to American writers of English prose. This is understandable in view of the fact that the writer came to this country for the first time in August 1979, and completed this narrative by mid November 1979. It is not the intention to give my shortcomings a respectable cover in any form. But it does take some time to acquire the manners, customs and language style of a foreign country. More so in the U.S.A., where the written and the spoken English possesses important variances from what we are taught in Pakistan and some other countries where English still serves as the official language. However, it is variety which lends lustre to the monotonous.

A. R. Mughal  
New York, N.Y.  
1980







*Maulana Zahoor Hussain Sahib*  
*The First Ahmadiyya Muslim Missionary to the U.S.S.R.*



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1: For Karim Zafar Malik, who has been urging me for almost a year now to work on this book for Maulana Zahoor Hussain. It is but for his constant prodding that I had to concentrate on this difficult assignment during the last four months. To say this, however, is not to say that the task undertaken by me was otherwise less important or that it had been completed under a sort of involuntary duress. Far from it. I am rather gratified that a person with low-key intensity like myself was engaged in such a high profile job as the compilation of this oral narrative. More so because the last time I met Maulana Zahoor Hussain was in March 1979, in Pakistan. Whereas a work of this nature is primarily subjective and, therefore, proximity to the original source is not only helpful but essential. But for the assistance afforded to me by Karim Zafar in keeping up the sequence of events in correct perspective, some of the portions of this true story might well have looked absurdly selective.

2. Also for Naeem Ahmad Malik, who encouraged me and helped to create the necessary atmosphere for me to start this book in earnest.

3. And, of course, more than a word of thanks is due to Malik Saleem Ahmad Nasir, who went through a portion of this manuscript and offered valuable help and advice.

4. Incidentally, Saleem Nasir is the eldest son of Maulana Zahoor Hussain and a lawyer by profession. He is a U.S. citizen by naturalization and a hard core New Yorker. Naeem Ahmad Tahir is in the middle of the row and is currently settled in Chicago. Karim Zafar Malik is the youngest son of Maulvi Sahib and presently holds an executive position in the National Bank of Pakistan, New York‡. Maulana Zahoor Hussain is justly proud of his sons—all three of them.

A. R. Mughal

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‡ Alhaj Karim Zafar Malik is at present engaged in private business and is the President of a travel corporation in Chicago, Illinois. God provided Mr. Malik with a rare opportunity to serve his father, Maulvi Zahoor Hussain, in his aging years, so selflessly and ceaselessly as to deserve his prayers profusely in this world and the hereafter.

**A Letter of Condolence from Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad (Now Khalifatul Masih IV), Addressed to Malik Karim Zafar on the Demise of His Father Maulana Zahoor Hussain. (English translation)**

Rabwah, 2-27-82

Dear Brother Zafar Karim,

*Assalamo Alaikum Wa Rahmatullah.*

I had been away in Sind during the last fortnight and thus was practically cut off from Rabwah and the daily *AlFazl*. On my return to Karachi, Mr. Mubarak Khokhar informed me of the tragic news; the sad demise of your esteemed father, Hazrat Maulvi Zahoor Hussain.

2. Your father happened to be one of the elders who deeply impressed me during my childhood. On seeing him, my heart always used to be softened perceptibly and his earnest conversation and loving handshakes always filled me with utmost affection for him.

3. Many a time, on our request, he bared the scars on his body, caused by cruel beatings in Russian prisons. This sight stirred our hearts so much that but for reasons of modesty, we could have kissed the old wounds in public. May God rest his soul in eternal paradise. The scars on his body must now have

become brighter than the moon and the stars and their glitter and glamor much more than the worldly jewels and diamonds.

4. It gives me great satisfaction to reflect that in his late years, God provided you with a unique opportunity to serve your father so selflessly as to deserve his loving prayers in abundance.

Once I saw your father reclining contentedly in the car with you after the Friday prayers. I saw marks of deep satisfaction and love on his face which clearly showed that he appreciated fully what you had done for him. I enjoyed this sight so much that during my return to my residence, my heart overflowed with love and relief for both of you.

5. Please accept my deepest condolences and convey the same also to your brothers and sisters.

Yours

(Signed) Mirza Tahir Ahmad

## SOME APPRAISALS

### *1. By Hazrat Khalifatul Masih II:*

On March 10, 1944, a huge gathering of the Ahmadiyya Community was held at Lahore in which *Hazrat Khalifatul Masih II* made the momentous announcement that the prophecy about the Promised Son and the Promised Reformer vouchsafed to the Promised Messiah in 1886 had been fulfilled in his person. During his forceful speech, Hazrat Khalifatul Masih also mentioned the name of Maulvi Zahoor Hussain and said: "Maulvi Zahoor Hussain was yet in his early twenties when he graduated from the Jamia. I once called for him and asked him whether he was ready to go to Russia for *Tabligh*. He at once expressed willingness to go. I warned him that in all probability he will not be able to obtain a visa for admission into that country. Maulvi Sahib replied that that aspect was of least importance to him. He would go to the U.S.S.R., visa or no visa. This was not an empty undertaking. For Maulvi Zahoor Hussain did go to the U.S.S.R. and spent two years in that country—as a prisoner. He proved beyond doubt that God had blessed this Jamaat with workers who would not hesitate for a moment to shed the last drop of their blood in the cause of Ahmadiyyat. God had given me such swords as would cut down *Kufr* with a single stroke. He has given me followers who would respond to my call wherever and in whatever condition they might be. If I tell some of them to leap down from the top of a mountain, they would do so without blinking an eyelid."

(Summary—*AlFazl*, February 18, 1958)

## 2. By Hazrat Sahibzada Mirza Bashir Ahmad:

*Hazrat Sahibzada Mirza Bashir Ahmad* (the Moon of the Prophets, as God called him) in his book, *The Ahmadiyya Movement*, wrote the following paragraph about Maulvi Zahoor Hussain: "On the eve of his departure for Europe, Hazrat Khalifatul Masih II sent two groups of missionaries to the following countries:

- a. A missionary to Iran (Hazrat Sahibzada Abdul Majid)
- b. Two missionaries to Bukhara, U.S.S.R. (Maulvi Zahoor Hussain and Maulvi Muhammad Ameen Khan)

The second group of missionaries assigned to the U.S.S.R. was refused permission by the Russian government to carry out missionary work inside the Soviet Union. Not content with that, the Russian authorities arrested Maulvi Zahoor Hussain as soon as he set foot on Russian territory and kept him under rigorous imprisonment in Tashkent, Moscow and other places for two long years. During his captivity, the Maulvi Sahib suffered such hardships and tortures as a mere mention of those events was enough to raise one's hairs on ends. Eventually, through the kind intercession of the British government, the Russian authorities released him and sent him back to India. It goes to the credit of Maulvi Zahoor Hussain that he continued his *Tabligh* even inside the jail and converted quite a number of his fellow prisoners to Ahmadiyyat (Translation from the original text).



### 3. *By Hazrat Maulana Abdur Rahim Nayyar:*

Hazrat Maulana Abdur Rahim Nayyar, one of the most prominent and successful Ahmadiyya missionaries to Africa, says: "It was through Divine blessings only that Maulvi Zahoor Hussain was able to successfully preach the message of the Promised Messiah to Afghans, Turks, Tartars and the Russians, even though confined inside the prison walls. It is really bewildering to see how the Bolsheviks, both officers and subordinates, were apprised with the message of Ahmadiyyat in such adverse conditions. It is an occasion of great thanksgiving for the Ahmadiyya Community that a beginning had been made in the U.S.S.R. for *Tabligh* by one of our young missionaries. I strongly recommend to the Jamaat to distribute this book (the autobiography of Maulvi Zahoor Hussain) free of cost among the non-Ahmadiyyas in large numbers. I pray to God that He may in His mercy open the hearts of the Bolsheviks and enable them to see the light of Islam at an early date. The Russians do not know that there is a living God who does not leave the work of His servants unrewarded. It was only to seek His pleasure and blessings that Maulvi Zahoor Hussain bore with exemplary patience and fortitude all the hardships and tortures in the U.S.S.R. It was for the same cause and purpose that the great Ahmadiyya martyrs like Sahibzada Abdul Latif and Maulvi Naimat Ullah laid down their lives with smiling faces." (Translated from Urdu version)



## INTRODUCTION

By God's grace, Hazrat Maulana Zahoor Hussain is alive and in his eightieth year†. He had the honor of being the first Ahmadiyya missionary to the U.S.S.R. The memory of the pioneer work for Ahmadiyyat which he did in that country has never been sharper nor brighter than it is now; a time when the Communist colossus is casting a menacing shadow across the Southwest Asian landmass.

It is one thing to write down a narrative of a past event, but it is quite a different proposition when it comes to writing a biography in skeletal form of a person who is basically a human being and abhors revelling in the past. Maulana Zahoor Hussain is a simple man without guile and without even the usual trappings of a missionary back home after a successful tenure in foreign lands.

When I asked him once whether there was anything unusual about him which prompted his selection as a missionary to the U.S.S.R., he said modestly: "I went to Bukhara more or less by accident, you might say, and I never got to thinking that I was anything special. I never forgot my humble beginning. I always remembered who I was and where I had come from and where I was going back to."

I held meetings with Maulvi Sahib on several occasions during the last seven years that I came to know him intimately. It was never my intention to write down an account of the

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† Maulvi Zahoor Hussain passed away on February 8, 1982, at Rabwah, at the ripe old age of 84 and was buried at *Bahisti Maqbara*.

years that Maulvi Sahib spent in the U.S.S.R. In fact he had, on his own, written an autobiography which comprehended the events of the imprisonment in the Soviet Union and left little scope for further elaboration. However, this autobiography was published in Urdu and Maulvi Sahib had often expressed a desire that an English version of the same should also be printed for the benefit of his friends and brothers abroad.

Translation of native scripts into an alien dialect has always been a difficult task. If for no other reason, a translation can not convey the essence or the manner of expression in speaking or writing of the original text. Besides, this autobiography was published in the mid thirties and its English translation at this stage would have been sadly out of context and contra-environmental. Not that the oral narrative now being published differs basically from the old publication. The elements or the factors that separate or distinguish the two books pertain more to the mode of explanation than to the contrast in the situations. Further, the Urdu autobiography puts greater stress on what might have been than on what actually happened to Maulvi Sahib during his two years of captivity in the U.S.S.R.

Some of the incidents related to me by the Maulvi Sahib and elaborated in the present volume may appear to be slightly out of context of a particular situation but this style had to be adopted in the interest of lucidity and current perspectives. The readers should not forget that the events described in this narrative are shrouded in the mist of the past 55 years and the present venture in recording old reflections could only be vindicated by a mingling of the bygone with contemporary concepts in historiography.

With his sallow complexion, an indifferently trimmed beard and baggy trousers (shalwar), Maulana Zahoor Hussain does not exude in his demeanor the nobleness and extreme modesty which permeates the man's speech and actions at all times. He

is an Arabic scholar of considerable eminence and has spent a lifetime in the acquisition of religious sciences with special reference to the Quranic excellences and the traditions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be on him).

Maulvi Sahib has taken considerable pains to avoid the common pitfalls in self-narratives—artful exaggerations and obnoxious strains of self-pity in personal predicaments. In fact, the hardships and tortures suffered by him at the hands of the Russians have been played down disproportionately and the general effect has been purposely mitigated by him by introducing religious elements at odd places. Maybe, he developed a soft corner for his persecutors, inasmuch as they finally let him go. Or perhaps the Maulvi Sahib has such a kind heart that he prefers to think of his opponents in terms of *forgive and forget*.

However, one thing is certain. It is always the elite who lead and articulate the sentiments of the community. If Ahmadiyyat had not produced men of towering stature like Hazrat Shahzada Abdul Latif Shaheed, Hazrat Maulvi Abdur Rahman, Hazrat Maulvi Naimatullah Khan and scores of others in the same category, then the mission of Ahmad, the Promised Messiah, would have gone by default. A large number of Ahmadies were stoned to death in Afghanistan simply because they had listened to the Divine Call and laid down their lives at the altar of righteousness without murmur or protest. Pride is never considered a virtue in Islam. But the Ahmadiyya Community is justly proud of its martyrs and of those missionaries who spent lifetimes in the service of the Faith, away from their homes and loved ones for periods exceeding 20 to 25 years in many cases.

Hazrat Khalifatul Masih II once mentioned in a Friday sermon: 'A few days back a middle aged lady came to me and begged that her husband, who had been away from home for missionary work in Africa and other places for

the last 20 years or so, should be recalled now. She said that her husband had left her a few days after their marriage and had never come back since then even to see his son who was now in his prime of life. She said that she was a young woman when her husband left her. Now she was a middle aged woman with her head covered with streaks of grey hair.' (summary). Hazrat Khalifatul Masih mentioned that he was overwhelmed with grief on hearing this request from that lady but the financial condition of the Jamaat was such at that time that he was compelled to curb reshuffling of missionaries at far off places. This is one instance only out of scores of similar instances.

Ahmad, the Promised Messiah, was a great spiritual leader who had produced men of such calibre among his followers as the world had never seen before, except in the days of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be on him). Ahmad himself went through a lifespan of vilification, tribulations and persecutions at the hands of his enemies. He was abused, molested and dragged into law courts on false charges. The main religious groups in India at that time were the Hindus, the Muslims and the Christians. All three communities had joined hands together to undo Ahmad and his followers. The Christians, of all people, who never tired of showing the olive branch to everyone, were always in the forefront of Ahmad's persecutors. On one occasion, the Christian high priest in the Punjab sued the Promised Messiah in the Sessions Court on charges of incitement for murder. Col. Douglas, a British Army officer on secondment to civil service, was the Sessions Judge at that time.

At the end of the trial, the judge absolved Ahmad of all the charges and told him that he (Ahmad) could sue Dr. Henry Martin Clark, the Christian high priest, for bringing a false criminal case against him. Ahmad, in response, raised his hand towards the Heavens and said in a low

voice: "We have filed a suit against our enemies in the Court of our Lord and He is the Best Judge."

This was not an ordinary criminal case filed against the Promised Messiah. The elders and the high priests among the Muslims, the Christians and the Hindus had all combined together to crucify the Promised Messiah in the same manner as their ancestors had done two thousand years ago with Jesus, son of Mary, in the court of Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor. Pilate, however, was a coward who washed his hands with water before the multitudes and thus absolving himself of all responsibility, turned over Jesus Christ to his enemies. Quite the reverse happened in the present case. The modern Pilate (Col. Douglas) stood up in esteem and offered a chair to the Promised Messiah as he entered the courtroom.

Many years later, after his retirement from service, Col. Douglas met some Ahmadies in England and told them: "As soon as I saw Mirza Sahib (Hazrat Ahmad) in the courtroom for the first time, I was so struck by his appearance that I decided there and then that his (Hazrat Ahmad's) was not the face of an imposter." Col. Douglas also let it be known to his Ahmadi friends that as a result of this lawsuit in his court, he had no doubt in his mind that Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, and his great Deputy, Ahmad, the Promised Messiah, were both righteous persons and true prophets.

Maulana Zahoor Hussain was one of the early missionaries who qualified from the *Jamia Ahmadiyya* in 1922. Those were hard times for the Jamaat and there was not enough money to go around for meeting adequately all the expenses of the Sadr Anjuman Ahmadiyya in connection with its missionary and other administrative activities. Most of the hardships suffered by Maulvi Sahib before entering the U.S.S.R., and afterwards, were due to pucity of funds and other resources and it is amazing how

our missionaries coped with such adverse situations as best they could.

Qadian, the birthplace of the Promised Messiah and the Renascent Islam's doctrinal seat of authority, was in those days a small town with a population of only three or four thousands. Batala, the railroad terminal, was about 11 miles to the west and was linked with Qadian by a sandy track fit for pedestrians and crude type of animal transport only. The Jamaat had been badly shaken by an internal upheaval in early 1914 when an influential and mostly affluent section of the Ahmadies left Qadian, the *Throne room* of the Messenger of God, and established a separate headquarters at Lahore, the provincial capital, about 70 miles to the west of Qadian. This split was introduced by dissidents through a process of negative capability and is briefly touched upon later in the narrative by the Maulvi Sahib himself. The *Lahories*, as this minority is commonly known, have an Amir of their own at Lahore on the pattern of the *Jamaat-i-Islami*, a group of militant Muslim fundamentalists. Their numbers have been dwindling fast until a few scores of the old guards can now be counted.

There is nothing new in human nature. The only thing that changes are the names we assign to objects. Fifty-five years ago, people had the same troubles as we have now. Communism then was the same as it appears to us today. Only the men have changed. The only thing new in the world is the history we do not know. If Maulvi Zahoor Hussain had an opportunity to go back to Bukhara now, he will probably be accorded the same treatment as he received half a century ago, or perhaps still worse. The idea is to remind the readers that they may not be wasting valuable time in reading a legend which took place in the distant past.

Hearken the younger Ahmadiyya missionaries! For most of you it has been milk and honey so far. A time may soon come



when some of you may have to stick your feet into the bear trap. But Ahmadies should always bear in mind that the Promised Messiah has given us the glad tidings of the mass conversion of Communists into Islam. The exact words, as I can recollect at this time are: "*I see Ahmadies in Russia countless as the grains of sand at a beach.*" After the nuclear holocaust, Russians will be the first among the nations of the world to recover and accept Islam in great numbers. As the Holy Prophet Muhammad also foretold the rising of the sun from the West, so it will come to pass and the Western world will also come to know the truth about the God of Islam and Ahmadiyyat. Christianity, as it stands today, is unable to provide the correct guidelines for the Western nations to assimilate the truth about God and His attributes. The doctrine of Trinity, the theory of atonement and the belief in the resurrection of Jesus are the three cornerstones of the Christian faith. The Trinity comprises of three mysterious partners in Godhead—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost—who coexist and are co-equal in all respects, combining to make one God and yet remain three entities separately. This doctrine defies all human comprehension and yet the Church adamantly adheres to it even in modern times.

The Islamic concept of the Divine Being is much simpler and cogent. Our God is not subject to the contingencies of birth and death. He is ever-living and never begets nor is begotten. No vicarious sacrifice is needed for the salvation of man. God himself can and does forgive any and all sins He wishes. True repentance is enough to attract His mercy at all times and in all ages.

True Islam still serves as a low mark for credibility in many parts of the world. Perhaps our careful reticence on individual basis in the propagation of our distinctive beliefs has prevented our numerical escalation and cramped our confrontation tactics of the past. But one thing is certain. We are only ten years behind the power curve—the second Ahmadiyya

century which is destined to usher in the era of spiritual domination of the world by Islam. Even now the signs of this spiritual revolution are so manifest that only blind prejudice can deny its existence. There is a visible movement among the Christians and the people of other faiths to understand Islam and its true teachings.

As was foretold in the Scriptures, the Kingdom of Heaven has descended to the grandson of the Promised Messiah, Hazrat Mirza Nasir Ahmad, Khalifatul Masih III, the present head of the Ahmadiyya Community†. The Ahmadiyya Movement has made tremendous strides under his superb leadership in all fields during the past decade. The flicker of the rising sun from the West is clearly discernible on the horizon. Ahmad, the Promised Messiah, has already given the glad tidings: "The time is close at hand when the true Unity of God which is felt even by the dwellers of the desert and by the illiterate will spread throughout the world. On that day, no false redemption or false gods shall survive. One blow of the Divine Hand will nullify all machinations of disbelief; but not with the sword or the gun but by means of enlightening the eager souls with Divine Light and by imbuing pious hearts with Divine Splendor. Only then will you understand what I say." (*Tabligh-i-Risalat*, Vol. VI, pp. 8-9)

The ultimate *Mujaddid*, the Great Teacher of the Latter Days, has already appeared and the shadows of doubt and disbelief are vanishing fast through his spiritual illumination. May God shower His infinite blessings on the Master Prophet Muhammad and his Great Disciple Ahmad, the Promised Messiah and Mahdi.

And finally we seek the blessings of Allah, our Lord and Sustainer.

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† Hazrat Khalifatul Masih III passed away on June 8, 1982 and the leadership of the Jamaat passed on to the able hands of Hazrat Mirza Tabir Ahmad, Khalifatul Masih IV.

## EARLY LIFE AT QADIAN

*In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful. We praise Him constantly and also seek His blessings for His noble Prophet—Muhammad.*

God, in His infinite mercy, bestowed upon me the blessings of Ahmadiyyat in my early youth and enabled me to go to Qadian in late 1910 to complete my spiritual and temporal education. My esteemed father, Sh. Hussain Bukhsh, died in Amritsar during that period and our eldest brother, Sh. Muhammad Hussain, who at that time looked after the family affairs, decided to send me to Qadian. It was during the Khilafat of Hazrat Maulana Nooruddin, the first successor to the Promised Messiah, that this eventful episode in my life took place and provided me with a unique opportunity to study Ahmadiyyat from the closest quarters.

Hazrat Khalifatul Masih I, who was endowed by God with an unprecedented insight into human limitations and capabilities, personally advised me to devote myself entirely to the acquisition of religious knowledge with special reference to the teachings of Ahmadiyyat. I had at that time little in common with the voluminous Arabic textbooks in the *Jamia Ahmadiyya*, and in fact stumbled frequently even in the recitation of the Holy Quran. I, therefore, hesitated for a while but soon made up my mind to enter the *Jamia Ahmadiyya*. I must express my deepest gratitude to Hazrat Khalifatul Masih I, whose guidance and prayers enabled me to become a full-fledged Ahmadiyya missionary in due course. I

take great pride in relating the fact that Hazrat Khalifatul Masih I mentioned this incident twice during his daily discourses on the Holy Quran. I also distinctly remember the occasion once, while ascending the stairs of the great Aqsa Mosque, Hazrat Khalifatul Masih I put his hand on my shoulder and said to me in a low tone: "Do you think that learning of Arabic will deprive you of a better livelihood? Don't you see that God has gifted me with unparalleled financial affluence only because I learned to understand the Holy Quran?"

With the decline of the Muslim empires on the great Asian and African landmass, avenues of different branches of knowledge in Arabic, which had blossomed in the heyday of the Islamic Civilization, had dried up suddenly and all that was left was a conglomeration of confused and antiquated concepts in religious sociology. My hesitation in joining the Jamia classes in the first instance was, therefore, not motivated entirely by fiscal limitations. It weighed more heavily on the minds of my relatives that a mere cleric would not be able to go far in the modern race for a good living. However, there could be no options against the advice of Hazrat Khalifatul Masih I, and I am glad I accepted it.

## Admission In Jamia Ahmadiyya

I soon entered the *Jamia Ahmadiyya*, the Alma Mater of the Ahmadiyya youth; the cradle which fostered the great missionaries who poured forth from its unobtrusive precincts in a constant flow to the far corners of the earth and contributed their mite towards the closing of the credibility gap regarding the existence of a living God, Who was, still is, and will always remain, the Creator of the heavens and the earth.

Returning to the basics, I believe it was sheer good luck that at this period, the administration of the Jamia was vested in the hands of no less a person than Hazrat Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmud Ahmad, a scion of the Exalted Household of the Promised Messiah, who, later became the second successor to *Khilafat-i-Ahmadiyya*. Hazrat Mahmud treated us in a manner as one would not expect even from our own parents. He was very regular in taking his classes and always strived his utmost towards coaching us comprehensively in all departments of our studies in the Jamia. He also took particular interest in our extracurricular activities and visited our boarding house regularly to insure that the boarding arrangements were satisfactory and the other requirements of the students, like sports equipment and laundry, etc., were being properly looked after.

Once during my early days at the Jamia, Hazrat Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmud Ahmad assembled all the students in the Jamia Hall and addressed them saying that the Jamia Ahmadiyya had been founded by the Promised Messiah himself and the purpose was to produce men like Hazrat Maulana Abdul Karim Sialkoti and Hazrat Maulana Burhanuddin Jhelami, two among the most prominent companions, who died during the lifetime of the Promised Messiah.

Ordinarily in those days, the expenses for carrying on higher studies up to the graduation level were beyond the reach of all but the affluent. To overcome this handicap,

funds were provided for the Jamia through community sources, and in this way a large number of poor students were able to continue their studies at the Jamia. I was placed in a slightly better position in this respect, inasmuch as our eldest brother bore all my expenses. Those were difficult days for the Jamaat because our opponents were greatly superior to us in resources and numbers. By sheer hard work the Jamia continued to flourish in adversity by virtue of the able leadership of Hazrat Sahibzada Mirza Mahmud Ahmad.

It was in the third year of his Khilafat that Hazrat Khalifatul Masih II asked young Ahmadies to come forward and make pledges for dedication of their lives in the cause of Ahmadiyyat and Islam. I had also applied for *Waqf-i-Zindagee* (as this pledge was called) and on acceptance of my application, I informed my mother and other members of the family about my new decision. My mother, who had not yet embraced Ahmadiyyat, showed some reluctance in the beginning but later reconciled herself with my option on the assurance from me that she would not be a loser in the long run and that the illusory happiness of worldly gains could never outweigh the real happiness which God had reserved only for the believers.

As I have mentioned already, my mother was still a non-Ahmadi and as such entertained serious misgivings regarding my future as a poor Ahmadiyya missionary. Little did she know at that time that one day her son would have the signal honor of being the first Ahmadiyya missionary to the U.S.S.R., the land of modern atheists.

I am almost eighty years old now and in 1924, when I was yet in my early twenties, it was hard to predict what the future held for the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam. It is now early 1980 and by the Grace of God, the Jamaat has spread its activities throughout the world. Previously people used to say that the sun never set on the British Empire. The tide has now turned and in accordance with the prophecy of Ahmad, the

Promised Messiah, the British Empire has now disintegrated and shrunk back to its native size. But Ahmadiyyat, from its small and insignificant beginning has developed into a mighty organization and is carrying gradually but progressively the message of Islam to the ends of the earth. The stout tree of Ahmadiyyat in 1980 was only a sprout in 1924, and now the sun never sets on the far-flung Ahmadiyya missions throughout the world. The time is at hand when our opponents will wonder at and be jealous of the power and prestige of Ahmadiyyat. The mullahs believed in their hearts that outwardly there was only a superficial distinction between an Ahmadi and a non-Ahmadi and perhaps time would come when this headstrong community would merge with the mainstream of pseudo-Muslim fundamentalists. This was never to be. The line that separates the believers from the dissidents gets thicker by the passage of time until a day comes when the dissidents are totally exposed and their ranks are depleted to almost extinction.

As all the Prophets are appointed by God's pleasure alike and their revelation proceeds from the same Divine Source and it also contains analogous eternal truths, the rejection of one Prophet means the rejection of all of them. That is why the Holy Quran describes the *Aad*, the *Thamud*, the people of Noah and those of Lot, as having rejected all Divine Messengers although they had rejected only their own particular Prophets. This Quranic injunction carries a deliberate warning for the dissidents, be they Muslims, Christians or Jews.

## The Opening of Missionary Classes at Qadian

I graduated from Jamia in 1920 and also got my degree of Honors in Arabic from the University of Panjab in due course. Soon after this auspicious event in my life, Hazrat Khalifatul Masih II announced the opening of missionary classes in the Jamia. Man cannot be arbiter of his own fate. I am convinced that it was God's special favor to me that I found myself included in the first missionary class at the Jamia. My heart is filled with the utmost feelings of gratitude when I remember the name of one of the greatest Ahmadiyya scholars who taught us in the new department of the Jamia—Hazrat Hafiz Roshan Ali, a companion of the Promised Messiah. Notwithstanding his loss of eyesight, he was the best teacher that an institution like the Jamia could ever wish for—and mind you, Jamia had always had the best. Hazrat Hafiz Sahib was really an institution himself and all the students loved him and were proud of him. The first Missionary class consisted of the following students:

- a) Hazrat Sahibzada Mirza Sharif Ahmad—the youngest of the three sons who survived the Promised Messiah—a prominent member of the Exalted Household.
- b) Hazrat Maulana Jalaluddin Shams—one of the prominent Ahmadiyya scholars who later did pioneer work in Palestine and was missionary incharge of UK Mission for a number of years.
- c) Maulana Ghulam Ahmad of Badhomalhi—who later became a missionary of great fame and rendered yeoman service to the cause of Ahmadiyyat.
- d) Maulana Mohammad Shahzad—one of those who after contributing the best part of their lives to the Cause, joined the happy multitudes in the Hereafter.
- e) Maulana Zainul Abidin of Mauritius.
- f) Maulana Zillur Rahman Bengalee.
- g) Myself.

Maximum praise will fall short of the work and effort put in



by Hazrat Hafiz Roshan Ali during the three years he spent on our coaching. He acted more like a loving father than a formal teacher. He used to invite the students to his house for dinner on various occasions and entertained us on a strictly personal level. Sometimes he would take us out to the countryside on missionary errands and thus provided us with practical training in this sphere.

I completed my training by the end of 1922 and in early 1923 was appointed a full-fledged missionary in the State of Jammu & Kashmir. The Arya Samaj, a militant section of the Hindu community, had become very aggressive in those days in Jammu and I had to go about to counter their false and malicious propaganda against Islam. Even the non-Ahmadies who otherwise opposed us vehemently everywhere, became friendly with me and requested me to challenge the Hindu scholars to a debate on the question of *Transmigration of Soul*. The debate took place in a private house but in the presence of a large number of Hindu and Muslim intelligentsia. Through God's infinite mercy I was instrumental in achieving a great victory against the Hindus and our non-Ahmadi brothers highly appreciated my cooperation in the joint cause of Islam.

The debates with non-Muslims on controversial religious topics were common in those days. The Arya Samajees were active everywhere and did their utmost to convert to Hinduism unwary and illiterate Muslims living in remote corners of India, away from the great Muslim centers of learning like Qadian etc. The Shudhi Movement (Scheme for conversion of Muslims into Hinduism) was started by the Arya Samajees a few years later which caused a permanent political schism between the Hindus and the Muslims, and enabled the British Government to prolong its sovereignty over India by at least 20 years.

The Quran comprehends all the permanent and imperishable teachings that are found in other revealed Scriptures with much more that is unilateral for the guidance of man till the Day of Judgment. Vedas, the Hindu Book, was likewise revealed in the

ancient times from the Divine Origin; but with the passage of thousands of years, its teachings had been perverted by its followers and hence was no more valid in modern times. The Arya Samajees believed that all the Prophets were imposters and the Holy Quran was not a revealed book but a figment of the brain of (the Holy Prophet) Muhammad. Not content with that, Pundit Lekh Ram, a prominent Hindu leader, challenged the Promised Messiah to show a heavenly sign to manifest that Islam was a true religion and that he (the Promised Messiah) had really been commissioned by God. Pundit Lekh Ram also invoked the curse of God on the liar.

The Promised Messiah accepted this challenge and raised his hands in supplication to the Almighty to vouchsafe a heavenly sign in his support. Thus it was that people saw a miracle, the like of which the world had not witnessed since the days of the great Prophets. The wrath of God fell in full force on the house of Pundit Lekh Ram in accordance with His words as revealed to the Promised Messiah, in which the time, date and the mode of punishment for Lekh Ram were foretold with devastating clarity. Like the Angels who visited the town of Prophet Lot before its destruction, a terrible being distinct from the progeny of Adam, entered the house of Lekh Ram on the appointed day and after cutting him down, disappeared into thin air.

Lekh Ram's wife who was sitting about five feet away from her husband shrieked in terror and called for help. Hundreds of Hindus who at that time stood guard at the house of Lekh Ram rushed into the room where Lekh Ram was felled, but found no trace of the Avenging Angel. The whole of India was stunned by this Mighty Sign which God had manifested to establish the truth of the Holy Prophet Muhammad and Ahmad, the Messenger of the Latter Days. The Hindu community was visibly shaken by the heavenly sign. In 1904 when the Promised Messiah visited the capital city of Lahore, hundreds of Hindu women came to pay respect to him, and touched his feet in token of their deep humility towards his spiritual status.

## JOURNEY TO THE U.S.S.R.

It was soon after the termination of our Annual Gathering (*Jalsa Saalana*) for the year 1923, that I requested for an audience with Hazrat Khalifatul Masih. This was in order to seek his permission to proceed to Jammu again where I was already posted as a missionary. Hazoor inquired from me whether the Sadr Anjuman (The Central executive body of the Jamaat) had relieved me from my previous assignment at Jammu. Upon my answering in the negative, Hazrat Khalifatul Masih II told me that I would get further instructions within a day or two. It was thus that I arrived at a major turning point in my life which left an indelible mark on my future career; because the next morning I was informed by the private secretary to Hazrat Khalifatul Masih II that I had been earmarked for missionary work in Bukhara, U.S.S.R.

Almost three or four months earlier, Hazrat Khalifatul Masih had mentioned in one of his Friday sermons that he intended to send a missionary to Bukhara in due course. A person had already been designated for this purpose but he would not disclose his identity for the time being. A longing rose in my heart that perhaps if I offered myself for this assignment, I might be selected for this job. However, as it was to be, I happened to be that lucky person, although I did not know it then.

Through God's deep wisdom, some events are predetermined in an individual's life, and as such one is sometimes instinctively guided towards the right course. Of late I had developed a peculiar liking for *Surah Kahf* (Chapter 18) and *Surah*

*Yusuf* (Chapter 12) from the Holy Quran and had already committed to memory both the Surahs. Surah Kahf contains a descriptive reference to Gog (the Russians) and Surah Yosuf mentions the imprisonment of Prophet Joseph on false charges. During my journey to Bukhara, I was repeatedly and almost involuntarily reciting some verses from Surah Yusuf and a conviction was slowly forming in my mind that sooner or later I would also be thrown into the prison like Joseph. And so it came to pass that I had to spend two years in U.S.S.R. in rigorous imprisonment.

It was in July 1924 that I embarked on my fateful journey to Bukhara. I was accompanied by two other Ahmadiyya missionaries—Maulana Mohammad Amin and Hazrat Shahzada Abdul Majid (a companion of the Promised Messiah). Shahzada Sahib had only to go up to Tehran but Maulana Mohammad Amin had to accompany me to U.S.S.R. We reached Duzdab (a border town in Iran) by rail and here it was that the difficult part of our journey commenced. Meshad was about 600 miles from Duzdab and the two towns were connected by a camel trail which passed through some extremely rough and barren country that one could come across in this part of Iran. We crossed this desert on mule and camelback. Sometimes the going was so difficult that we had to march on foot for miles before we could mount the mules or camels. Water supply was scarce and negligible, and as such we had to carry our own water supply with us. It took us 45 days to cross the desert between Duzdab and Meshad. We occasionally ran short of water and once when Shahzada Abdul Majid was unable to continue marching due to acute thirst, we had to wait on the roadside for someone to come to our rescue.

I reached Meshad—a big town in Iran—in a very poor condition so much so that I soon contracted typhoid fever, and in consequence of this had to stay in Meshad for a much longer period than originally scheduled. Maulana Mohammad Amin could not wait for my recovery indefinitely. He, therefore,

left Meshad for Bukhara with the instructions that he would keep me informed about his whereabouts.

My recovery was very slow and the doctor who was treating me had given strict instructions about diet which was restricted to one Kg. of milk daily. In the meantime I received a letter from Maulana Mohammad Amin that he had safely reached Bukhara and that it was not possible for him to come back soon as the snows had started falling and almost all the routes were practically blocked. He also mentioned in his letter that if I had sufficiently recovered from my illness and was presently able to perform the arduous journey to Bukhara, then he should be informed accordingly to enable him to send me a route map for my guidance. I received this letter in Meshad on December 2, 1924. It had taken about 16 days to reach me. I reckoned that further correspondence with Maulana Mohammad Amin on this subject would result in wasting of valuable time and, therefore, decided to proceed to Bukhara immediately on my own. The money that I had in my possession was also running short, and I had no alternative but to proceed on my mission as had been planned previously. Before starting my journey I wrote a letter to Hazrat Khalifatul Masih explaining the situation and requesting him for special prayers.

I left Meshad on December 8, 1924 and entered Russian territory on the night of December 10, 1924. I arrived at Arthak, a small railway station on Russo-Iranian border and my guide, a local Turk, took me to the house of one of his acquaintances where I stayed the night. By mid-day next my guide brought me a railway ticket for Bukhara and advised me to wait till evening when it would be easier to board the train unnoticed. It was pitch dark when I reached Arthak railway station and thanked my stars that there were not many people around in the waiting room. I had hardly taken a dozen paces on the platform when a voice from behind me boomed out: "Halt and make no movement." I turned around at this sud-

den interruption and beheld a burly Russian holding a dimly lit lantern in his left hand and a gun in his right hand. He led me into a office building and ordered two of his minions present in the room to carry out a thorough search of my person and belongings. They took away everything from me with the exception of the clothes I was wearing and locked me up in what looked like an old apartment dwelling unfit for human habitation.

So the expected had happened unexpectedly too soon. I have previously mentioned that before starting upon my spiritual mission to U.S.S.R., I had involuntarily formed a habit of reciting quite often some verses from the Holy Quran relating to the imprisonment of Prophet Joseph by the Egyptians. This was perhaps to serve as a pattern and forewarning for the events which were to occur during my stay within the land of the Gog. Later events justified my forebodings to the hilt. No sooner had I set foot on the Russian soil, I was pounced upon by my captors in a manner which clearly indicated that I was under surveillance the moment I left Meshad. The Russian Intelligence may be 'par-excellence' but it is very improbable that an ordinary cleric like myself was being shadowed all the way from Meshad to Arthak. Perhaps my Turk guide spilled the beans. I do not know to this day the real story. The Soviet spy network around big Iranian towns kept an eye on all newcomers and per chance a small fish like myself had inadvertently strayed into the net.

I had never been to prison before. All the same I could never imagine that detention camps maintained by the Soviet Union could be so dirty and ill-kept as the one at Arthak. Even for privy, we had to go outside in the fields under the supervision of the jail staff. The place lacked means of automatic discharge and the prisoners had to fend for themselves as best they could.

## THE DUNGEON AT ARTHAK

Before entering the musty prison cell, I had harbored some misgivings about my new lodgings and had anticipated some sort of a solitary confinement in a rat-infested cellar. To my surprise and relief, the situation turned out to be more congenial, as more than half a dozen persons were already lying on the bare floor of the apartment. I learned from my comrades-in-distress that the Russians were in the habit of bringing about half a dozen suspects daily in this room and after some routine interrogation, would let them go and bring in a fresh lot almost immediately. At first I thought that I would also be set free according to the usual practice; but later events proved that mine was a different case.

Next morning when the Russian official visited our cell, I asked him respectfully whether I would be set free immediately as nothing suspicious or incriminating had been found in my belongings. He looked at me with an evil smile on his face and shook his head in dissent. In a gruff voice he blurted out that there were serious charges against me and as such there was no point in discussing my release at this stage. I soon learned the bitter truth that in U.S.S.R. justice and fairplay was almost a negligible dimension and human existence in its familiar attitude was not adjustable in the Communist society of the middle twenties.

It was a habit with me since my early boyhood that I was used to getting up and offering my *Tahajjud* prayers during the hours of darkness regularly. Even this innocent practice on my part was looked upon suspiciously by my captors and sometimes special guards were posted outside my cell to en-

sure that my supposed attempts at escape were foiled instantly. I remained in lockup at Arthak for a fortnight and carried out the daily fatigues as best I could. My companions in the cell were very friendly towards me and often provided me with portions of their own meals as none was supplied to me. Some of my comrades even advised me to declare myself an Iranian or an Afghan as the Russians were on very friendly terms with these two States. But I was a British subject and my faith forbade me to fabricate a statement which I knew to be untrue. Incidentally, the Russians at that period suffered from acute anglophobia and as such, anyone suspected of being a British spy was a prize-find in the KGB setup. I, therefore, braced myself up for all eventualities and daily prayed to God to give me strength to bear with patience and fortitude the impending ordeals.

Some prisoners who were very friendly to me advised me to make a bid for escape to the nearby Iranian or Afghan border. But I refused all offers of help in this direction as according to me it would be a betrayal of my mission to go back to India without accomplishing that for which I had been sent out to Bukhara by Hazrat Khalifatul Masih.

After fifteen days of detention at Arthak I was shifted to Ashqabad, a much bigger town, for further interrogation and disposal at higher level.

Some of my associates in the prison had told me that the Russians hated the Indians intensely. It transpired that in the closing stages of World War I, the Indian Army led by the British had inflicted heavy losses upon the Red Army in this region. It had even occupied certain areas along the borders for sometime. As a result of this, trade relations and postal communications remained suspended between U.S.S.R. and India even after the hostilities had ceased. I could, therefore, understand the Communists' aversion to myself in the light of the past events. Even so, it provided no justification for maltreating an innocent and helpless person.



## AT ASHQABAD

Before leaving Arthak, all my books and other baggage was returned to me and I was told to carry the heavy load to Ashqabad jail under my own arrangements. Two other prisoners who accompanied me to the new place, took pity on me and carried a portion of my baggage to the jail premises.

I noticed a slight relaxation at Ashqabad in the harsh treatment I had experienced in Arthak. I started getting regular meals which consisted of eight ounces of bread and some vegetables daily. Hot water was provided in lieu of tea without sugar or salt. The cell where I was locked up also had one Russian, two Armanians, two Turks and four Iranian prisoners.

As time passed at Ashqabad I got more accustomed to the prison routine and developed friendly relations with the other inmates. Once when I had hardly gone to sleep after my late night prayers, I saw Hazrat Khalifatul Masih II in a clear vision, who admonished me for neglecting missionary work inside the prison. When I woke up, I felt greatly ashamed for my negligence in the propagation of Islam and Ahmadiyyat and resolved to take immediate steps to put things right in this direction. As a first step I persuaded a Russian fellow prisoner to teach me the Russian language. I was told by some of my wellwishers that learning of Russian language by me could cause further complications regarding my bonafides as a simple Muslim missionary. Nevertheless, I had firmly decided to go ahead in this direction and come what may, no deterrent could now upset my determination on this issue. After some

hesitation, my Russian friend bowed to my request and agreed to initiate me in his national dialect.

Initially my coaching in Russian was confined to the basics only and I started learning the alphabetical structure in various forms and routine usages. No writing material was available in the prison and I had to take recourse to makeshift arrangements like writing words on all sorts of odds and ends including the backside of the iron chimney installed in the cell for heating purposes. In a few days I had picked up the names of numerous eatables and such phrases as were commonly used in conversation. I soon learned the digits and numerals, and could easily count days, weeks and months in the Russian language.

Encouraged by my swift progress, my Russian teacher soon started initiating me in reading elementary books, and in this way I acquired a working knowledge of the language in a surprisingly short period. All this was done secretly and the Russian guards never got an inkling of my linguistic pursuit inside the prison. However, several of my friends inside the prison were not happy with my present venture and entertained serious misgivings about my misplaced academic leanings. I always allayed their fears with the remark that learning of a foreign language was no crime and God was my witness that my present effort was aimed only at creating a media for understanding between the captive and the captors. There were no ulterior motives behind it. Had I been an ordinary snoop and a spy I would have mastered the Russian language long before my coming to the territory of the U.S.S.R. I was very punctual in learning my daily lessons and my teacher was quite satisfied with the progress I had made in this field.

Reverting to some generalities, there were quite a number of people at Ashqabad who held allegiance to Bahauallah, the founder of a new faith in Iran. The starting point of the Babee and Bahai religion is the belief that the Holy Quran no longer

meets the needs of the human society in the world today. To cater for the requirements of modern times, Bahauallah is stated to have compiled a book called *Aqdas*. The Bahais claim that the Shariyah contained in 'Aqdas' is the best among sacred and heavenly scriptures and that the solution of the world problems has been fully embodied in this book. How far this claim is correct, can be judged by the fact that the Bahais have not until now plucked up enough courage to publish 'Aqdas' for the benefit of those who would care to read it. Bahauallah did not lay claim to prophethood but ambiguously inserted phrases in his writings that he was part man and part God, in the same manner as Jesus Christ was according to the Christians. 'Aqdas', the book of the Bahais is written in poor Arabic and preaches only common reformisms with the same old structure.

Bahauallah was preceded by Baab who claimed to be the Promised Mahdi. Bahauallah was originally a disciple of Baab, but after his (Baab's) execution by the Iranian Government, he claimed that God had appeared in human shape through him (Bahauallah). The people belonging to the Bahai sect were mostly traders and possessed some local influence also. Some of these men were sometimes brought to the prison for reasons unknown to me and spent a few days with me. I can not go into all the doctrinal complexities of this new faith at this stage. Enough to say that the Bahais disclaimed Islam and the Quran and had introduced 'Aqdas' a new Shariat, which according to them, had replaced the Quranic Law. I sometimes talked to them on their new ethics but found them mostly ignorant and dogmatic. I felt a great emotional upsurge in my heart for these illiterate people who had been led astray from the true path by local affiliations and old fashioned religious beliefs handed down through the ages from father to son. Sometimes I prayed for them that Allah in His infinite mercy might guide them to the true path again—the path of Ahmadiyyat and Islam.

I must admit here that I had my moments of gloom and

despair in the prison so much so that at times I felt frightened and lost all hope of seeing Qadian again. No specific charges had been brought against me so far by the Russian authorities. My only crime was that I had crossed the U.S.S.R. borders in company with a Turk who was perhaps a suspect. But guilt by association was something which had to be substantiated by sound evidence, and no fairminded judge could indict an innocent person on mere assumptions and false charges. Admittedly the Communist regime in U.S.S.R. in those days was passing through critical periods and was therefore perhaps justified to some extent in its harsh treatment of foreign travelers. But all it should have done in such cases was to expel the unwelcome visitors from their borders.

The harsh and cruel treatment that was meted out to me, an innocent missionary, was not justifiable by any international standards or norms of conduct in such cases. I was often threatened indirectly with deportation to far off places (perhaps Siberia) where I would spend the rest of my life in abject misery and terror. Sometimes the mental stresses overwhelmed me so much that had I not been a true believer reposing full faith in God, I would have become a physical wreck or worse still, committed suicide. On such occasions, I always bowed before Allah and prayed for deliverance from the clutches of my oppressors.

Shortly before my captors started interrogating me in earnest I saw Hazrat Khalifatul Masih II again in a clear vision. He was standing on a wooden platform and was exhorting his followers to bear with fortitude all terrors and tortures of our enemies. I heard his voice ringing out clearly through the space telling all Ahmadies to face troubles and hardships with courage and fortitude. This vision gave me great strength and cemented my resolve to see through to the end, the period of trial and tribulation. As it turned out later, my interrogation lasted for more than three months during which period my captors employed all means at their disposal

to extract from me some sort of confession. They wanted some excuse to deal with me in a manner known only to the Communists. All their endeavors in this directions proved abortive and whatever they got from me was insubstantial and inconclusive to start a regular trial. This was, however, only a prelude to the reign of terror which unfolded itself later as I was shifted from place to place. Methods of oppression became more diversified at frequent intervals.

An Iranian friend who had spent some time in the prison with me, one day told me about a dreadful dream he had seen about me which had caused him great worry and mental torture. According to his dream I was switched over to Tashkent and from Tashkent to Moscow. In Moscow the Russians tried to execute me and in fact put me before the firing squad. Before bullets could be fired, an unknown voice called out "This is my servant, do not kill him". The firing squad became inert temporarily but recovered soon and again aimed thier rifles at me. The unknown voice called out again and the execution was halted a second time. Again my persecutors rallied strength and as they started lifting their rifles for the third time, there was a violent underground tremor. Everybody ran and thus my execution was finally abandoned. This dream turned out to be quite true and showed an exact and amazing pattern of events which followed subsequently.

I would like to mention here that the Turks with whom I frequently came into contact during my captivity, were mostly Godfearing people and they always honored and respected me and offered me assistance and cooperation on all occasions. Their eyes often filled with tears when they heard my recitation from the Holy Quran and my supplications to Allah during prayers in the hours of darkness.

The dirt and filth had played havoc with my clothes, especially with my shalwar (trousers) which was literally infested with thousands of pests. My captors had willfully withheld from me all facilities of bathing and washing of

clothes, and more than three months passed since my last changeover in personal garments.

It was April 1925 when I was shifted from Ashqabad to Tashkent. My desire to learn Russian language had become so intense that on my way to Tashkent I persuaded my escort commander to continue coaching me in his dialect. Everything that he bought in the way of foodstuffs enroute; he would invariably indicate the Russian nomenclature and thus enabled me to enrich my vocabulary quite often. He would even tell me the Russian names of the birds and animals which I happened to see during my journey. The escort commander was quite an inquisitive person in his own way. He would often ask me about the British; as to how they administered the local population. I always made it clear to him that I was a religious missionary and had nothing in common with matters of statecraft. However, the British had allowed freedom of expression and conscience in India and everybody was free to follow the religion of his choice. This did not appear to please the Russian officer; but he gave a strong indication that they (the Russians) would prefer to be in India in the wake of the British as soon as it was practicable.



## TASHKENT AND AFTER

On arrival at Tashkent prison, I was surprised to see a big change in the general treatment towards me. I was provided with fresh clothes (from my own stock), along with two new robes of the same pattern and texture as worn by luminaries in Bakhara, U.S.S.R. I found about 30 female prisoners in Tashkent Prison who were quite impressed to see a new visitor clad in the style of religious potentates of Bukhara, as I was at that time. These female prisoners were very kind to me and sent me delicacies and other articles of food including freshly baked French bread. This luxurious episode lasted for about a fortnight when I was shifted to another cell and the gracious ladies were unable to send me further food gifts. Other inmates of the prison did not appear to resent the special favors which I received from the female detainees. Moreover, I always shared food gifts with them, and there never was an occasion when anyone complained to me on this account.

On arrival at Tashkent, I had started committing to memory some portions of the Holy Quran beside keeping myself abreast with my Russian vocabulary. There were some Muslim and Armenian prisoners on both sides of my cell who appeared to be quite impressed with my regular prayers and daily recitation from the Holy Quran. They became very curious about me and wanted to know something about my person and the circumstances which had landed me in prison. On many occasions, when the prisoners were led out of the cells by the wardens for evening stroll, they always stopped for a few moments in front of my room and gazed at me approvingly.

As already mentioned, the female prisoners used to send me food gifts quite frequently. I had become popular with them because I was the only prisoner who never cast covetous glances at them, as was wont with other prisoners. Sometimes the prisoners became riotous on flimsy pretences and caused great worry and anxiety to the wardens. I, on the other hand, always cooperated with my escorts and never caused them trouble on any account.

My exemplary behavior and good conduct did not remain unrewarded for long. On many occasions afterwards when I felt completely worn out and exhausted after my lengthy interrogations (sometimes lasting throughout the night) my guards showed great sympathy towards me and besides allowing me maximum rest, provided me sometimes with hot tea from their own meager rations. I am sure it was God's special favor which He bestowed upon his humble servants, that some of the wardens had become friendly with me and respected me in the same way as they did their own clergy. I have no intention to indulge in self-praise because all praise belongs to Allah alone, Lord of all the worlds. It was, however, important to record these reminiscences for others to read and take to heart if placed in similar circumstances.

I was not an extraordinary young man nor did I lay claim to popularity on physical pretensions. I was just an ordinary being like millions of others and possessed no special qualities to invite the attention of those around me. However, I was very particular in following the dictates of the Holy Quran in all matters and on all occasions. Even when I cleaned my cell, I did this job very thoroughly. The prison staff were greatly impressed and asked me as to why I was so meticulous in the performance of my duties. I always drew their attention to the relevant verses in the Holy Quran and told them that I merely followed the teachings of the Holy Book. The wardens were so impressed by my repeated references to the Holy Quran that some of them even expressed a desire to learn the Holy



Book with translation. As my Russian vocabulary was still in infancy, I was unable to accede to their request in this respect. Even to this day I regret my inability to do so.

It was during this period that an important event took place which made me the focus of attention on all sides. The treatment meted out to the prisoners in Communist detention camps had always been cruel and inhuman. To make matters worse, the conditions in the Tashkent Prison were not only subhuman but also fell far short of whatever was permissible under the rules. This state of affairs caused a wave of resentment among the prisoners so much that even the meekest among them wanted to assert their rights in vigorous terms. When such a stage was reached it was customary to notify the jail authorities that a complete shutdown of all activities inside the prison would be observed by the prisoners. This would continue till their grievances were redressed and normal conditions acceptable to all concerned were restored.

When the petition to the jail authorities for redress of grievances was prepared and signed by all the prisoners, the same was brought to me also for my signature. I declined to do so on the following grounds:

- a. The Quran forbade the true believers to adopt unlawful means even for redressing rightful demands. Rioting and stoppage of work was not permissible under the rules and as such, I could not be a party to this petition.
- b. There were legal methods available for the acceptance of legitimate demands. For instance, it could be brought to the notice of the jail authorities that prisoners were being detained in jail without proper charge sheets. None of them, including myself, had so far been produced before a Magistrate and no judicial remands had been obtained against any of us. This was illegal and due process of law had to be adhered to in accordance with international conventions.
- c. The jail procedure in vogue amounted to a blanket indict-

ment minus any judicial process and unless rectified immediately it would amount to a breach of all norms of human rights recognized by all the nations of the world.

Although the procedure prescribed by the Holy Quran for redress of grievances was alien to the Communist regime in every way yet it had to be brought to their notice regardless of the results or the scant regard with which the Russians were apt to view all legal processes. However, not content with only an exposition of the Islamic rules of conduct in such cases, I prepared a separate petition on the above lines and addressed it to my captors. I mentioned in my application clearly that Islam did not permit the adoption of disorderly conduct for redress of grievances and as such I had refused to associate myself with the other prisoners. At the same time, I impressed upon the prison officials that rule of law should be observed in dealing with prisoners irrespective of color, creed or nationality. Loyalty and obedience to established authority was a motto strictly followed by all members of the Ahmadiyya Community and it was our bounden duty to acquaint other people also of this moral obligation.

Next time when I was taken to the Interrogation Centre, the Russian official asked me as to why I had not participated with the other prisoners in the mass shut-down of work and other jail duties. I told him that I had already addressed a letter on this subject to my jailers and gave a brief resume of the contents of the letter to the interrogating officer. He was visibly impressed by my clarification and ordered some relaxations in the prison regulations regarding myself. The shut-down notice served by the other prisoners was completely ignored by the Russian officials. Instead, an immediate changeover of the prisoners' barracks was carried out and all the prisoners were shifted to different wards. In this manner the threat of mass disturbance by the prisoners was averted for the time being.

I was also moved to another cell where I found about a

score of Muslim prisoners, mostly belonging to Afghanistan, Bukhara and Tashkent. Some of these prisoners were very regular in their daily prayers and were already familiar with my habit of reciting the Quran daily and offering prayers during the hours of darkness. It was really heartwarming to see fellow prisoners offering their daily prayers and spending most of their time in spiritual and moral reclamation. I received a warm reception from my new comrades and, in fact, they unanimously requested me to lead them in their daily prayers and also to initiate them in the more complex religious doctrines. In the beginning my contribution in this direction was at best spotty and sometimes nothing. I didn't want to scare them in the early stages about my belief in Ahmadiyyat and the prophethood of the Promised Messiah. But as time passed and I unfolded my new religious concepts gradually, most of the prisoners were favorably inclined towards me.

The month of Ramadhan (fasting) had started and my time was mostly spent in recitation of the Holy Quran and strict observance of daily prayers. In an atmosphere of tangled loyalties, estranged cultures and conflicting ideologies, my small prison cell had become a ray of hope for those who had so far practiced only Orthodox theology, and were completely unaware of the doctrines of true Islam. Ours was an age of diminishing expectations in all fields and people sometimes stuck to religion only in search of real happiness and contentment of mind. The religious rituals practiced by the mullahs were discernible by vague titles and did not satisfy nor meet the demands of the present day sophisticated society. It was thus not an easy task for me to convert the people around me to the true Islamic concepts as propounded in modern times by the Holy Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement. But I never lost heart and persisted in my demeanor of a model Muslim before my comrades in distress; and finally through a process of gradual attrition, some of them saw the light and embraced Ahmadiyyat.

## THE FIRST AHMADIYYA CONVERTS IN U.S.S.R.

Preaching of Ahmadiyyat in the prison cell could further complicate matters for me, placed as I was in a position where my captors not only entertained grave doubts about my bonafides as a religious missionary but were firmly convinced that I was a British spy. But come what may, I could no longer hold my tongue on the subject and earnestly embarked on my mission in a systematic manner. I took great delight in tending to the ordinary and day-to-day requirements of my comrades as far as it was within my resources to do so. I assiduously kept out of reference the Ahmadiyya doctrines when discussing religious subjects with my companions for fear they might get scared away in the initial stages. I became selective in this respect and decided to start my preachings with Turkish prisoners who were generally more receptive to me than the rest of the crowd.

One of the prisoners whose name was Abdullah Khan appeared to be greatly impressed with my discourses and eventually embraced Ahmadiyyat. This venerable old man was a very influential person in Tashkent. He possessed two big fruit farms and was blessed with two wives and a son. He usually talked very little and kept people at a distance. But he was far less reticent when it came to explaining an important religious point to his listeners. He was always in the middle of a debate if a decision had to be made whether some rituals practiced by the orthodox Muslims before offering prayers

strictly conformed to the Shariat or not. His interference in the interpretation of Islamic teachings was sometimes resented by me as it was apt to retard the flow of new converts into the fold of Ahmadiyyat. However, as time passed, Abdullah Khan became a very staunch Ahmadi and was subsequently instrumental in converting to Ahmadiyyat a large number of prisoners at Tashkent. I preached almost obsessively both by word of mouth and practical example of selfless service to all the inmates of the prison. Everybody seemed to be visibly impressed by Ahmadiyya teachings and there were only a few left who still wavered on the brink.

The religious dialogues between myself and non-Ahmadies were usually carried out peacefully and seldom turned into vilification or disrespect between the believers and the non-believers. I had to be very careful in my preaching lest the prison authorities should come to know of it and put a stop to my religious activities. The new converts were vastly impressed with the teachings of Ahmadiyyat and most of them wept in their prayers and constantly sought the blessings of Allah in their new vocation. Beneath their usually demure appearances lurked the burning desire to sacrifice their all in the service of the Ahmadiyya Movement. I recollect to this day the faces of some of them which reflected immense love for Ahmadiyyat and its Holy Founder, Ahmad, the Promised Messiah and Mahdi. Whenever I mentioned to them the name of the Promised Messiah, uncontrollable tears rolled down their cheeks and they nodded their heads in assent to whatever I taught them about the new dispensation; the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam.

Although almost all of the new converts had become fully conversant with the basics of the controversy between Ahmadies and non-Ahmadies insomuch as:

- a) Jesus Christ, an Israelite Prophet, had not ascended to heaven but lay buried in Srinagar in the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

- b) All the prophecies pertaining to Jesus' second advent had been fulfilled in the holy person of Ahmad, the Promised Messiah and Mahdi. Ahmad was born at Qadian in India on February 13, 1835 and started receiving revelations from God, when he was 40 years old. Visions, dreams and verbal revelations had started when Ahmad was yet in his twenties. When he reached the age of 40 years, revelations started pouring on him like torrential rain. His ministry lasted for more than 30 years and he died on May 26, 1908.
- c) That although the Holy Prophet Mohammad (Peace and blessings of God be upon him) was *Khatamun Nabiyyeen*, yet the institution of prophethood had not ceased after him. God had raised a Prophet in the Latter Days and had shown mighty signs in his support. According to the Holy Quran, those among the believers who followed in the footsteps of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be upon him) would be honored with the noble titles of Prophets, the Truthful, the Martyrs and the Righteous. In conformity with this Quranic teaching, God had honored Ahmad, the Promised Messiah and Mahdi, with the title of Prophet and spoke to him exactly in the manner He had spoken to Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and the Holy Prophet Muhammad. Yet they (the converts) had not become familiar so far with the practical implementation of the Ahmadiyya teachings. For instance, some of them still offered their prayers behind a disbelieving Imam.

This was not permissible because only those persons were eligible to lead the faithful in prayers as had entered the Ahmadiyya fold and believed in Ahmad, the Promised Messiah: One of the new converts raised a query: "How is it that we are not permitted to offer prayers behind a non-Ahmadi Imam, when the mode of prayer, the number of daily prayers and the number of rakaat in each prayer is the same as is performed by our non-Ahmadi brothers?" I explained to him the hard core of differences between

these two Muslim factions and told him that the daily prayers and all other religious practices as performed by the non-Ahmadies, no longer found full recognition in the eyes of God. It was because the non-Ahmadies had rejected the Divine Call and had dubbed the Great Teacher of the Latter Days as Kafir and Dajjal (the Deceiver). The contribution of Ahmadiyyat towards Islam was far more than symbolic. It was in fact the essence of Islam and one could say without the faintest reservation that there is no god but Allah who revealed Himself in the present times to Ahmad, the Spiritual Son and the Trusted Deputy of the Holy Prophet Muhammad.

The new converts did not take long to become fully conversant with the teachings of Ahmadiyyat and readily followed the line given to them by me in this direction. However, the path of true religion had never run smooth. Soon some persons outside the prison came to know of my real mission, e.g., the preaching of Ahmadiyyat, and started a whispering campaign against me. My opponents tried to create a crisis of confidence around me and briefed several persons to pose as Ahmadies so as to acquaint themselves with my daily routines. This adverse turn in the friendly atmosphere inside the prison walls did not deter me from my ultimate mission and I continued to preach Ahmadiyyat to anyone with whom I came into contact during my detention at Tashkent.

I could not speak Russian fluently but could always make my listeners acquainted with what I had to say. On various occasions I informed the new converts that after the demise of the Holy Founder of Ahmadiyyat, Allah bestowed upon the shoulders of Hazrat Maulana Noor-Ud-Din, the mantle of Khilafat and he thus had the signal honor of being the first successor and Khalifa to the Promised Messiah. Hazrat Khalifatul Masih I was a unique Muslim scholar par excellence and there was none like him among his forerunners. He died in 1914 and the onerous responsibility of the *Khilafat-i-*

*Ahmadiyya* was shifted to Hazrat Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmud Ahmad who was designated by God as the Second Successor to the exalted Messiah. The Khalifatul Masih II, beside being a scion of the Noble Household of the Promised Messiah, was gifted with a unique understanding of the Holy Quran, so much so that some of his discourses and commentaries (Compiled at a later date in the form of *Tafsir-i-Kabir* and *Tafsir-i-Sagheer*) ranked among the finest of its kind and in fact stood unsurpassed in spiritual excellence and beauty for all times. I repeatedly told the new converts about the exalted personality of the Promised Messiah and his Successors so as to inculcate in their hearts true love and reverence for the Holy Founder of the *Ahmadiyya* Movement and his great Successors.

I have already made a passing reference to Abdullah Khan, a very rich and influential person in Tashkent. Before he took *baiat*, he had been keenly questioning me about my religious antecedents and sources of my apparently deep knowledge of spiritual subjects. Sometimes I left him alone to brood over his own shortcomings regarding the Islamic faith. But I used to revive my overtures to him at frequent intervals until such time that he fully understood the basics of *Ahmadiyyat*. It was during one of these discussions that I recited to him a couplet from a Persian poem composed by the Promised Messiah in praise of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him):

*Degar Ustaad ra namay nadanam,  
Keh Khandam dur dabistani Muhammad.*

(I do not know the name of any teacher except Muhammad;  
for it is from him that I have learnt everything.)

When Abdullah Khan heard this couplet he was so moved by its excellence and beauty that he started crying profusely. It was on this occasion that I told him about *Ahmadiyyat* and its Holy Founder. He had certain misgivings against *baiat* in the beginning but eventually he relented and took the *baiat* when I told him that either he was for us or against us; there was no



grey area between the two positions.

When the Russians came to know that Abdullah Khan had entered the fold of Ahmadiyyat, they sent two mullahs to contact him in the prison so as to persuade him through fair or foul means to renounce Ahmadiyyat. The first thing these spiteful mullahs did was to inform Abdullah Khan that the whole world of Islam, including the mullahs of Tashkent, had denounced the Ahmadies as Kafirs (non-believers) and that in every Islamic State, Ahmadies were invariably stoned to death if they did not revoke their new faith. However, Abdullah Khan was not impressed by the wild overstatements made by the mullahs whom he knew to be really Russian emissaries. As a matter of fact, an exceedingly large number of devout Muslims did not subscribe to the use of force in religious matters and were prone to disregard the *fatwas* of the so-called Muslim radicals which so glaringly contravened the Quranic teachings.

When the Russians failed in their initial attempt to stop the propagation of Ahmadiyyat in Tashkent prison, they selected another influential local dignitary named Abdul Qadir and sent him to see and talk to me about the new faith. I learned at a later stage that Mr. Abdul Qadir besides being a very influential resident of Tashkent, was also the boss of the local KGB. This man frequently visited the prison and pestered me with all sorts of questions, both political and religious. One of the questions this official from the Russian Intelligence asked me was: "Maulana Rumi in his famous *Masnawi* has reproduced a saying by Hazrat Baayazid Bustami (a great Muslim saint) to the effect that he (Hazrat Baayazid) was at par in excellence with the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) or even better: Was it a true statement or an involuntary practice in blasphemy?"

My answer to the query was somewhat non-committal because I did not wish to rouse the ire of the devotees of the Muslim saints. However, I explained in general terms that

when a disciple of the Holy Prophet Muhammad attributed any spiritual excellence to his person, it was only relative in sequence and that the real source of all the heavenly virtues was the person of the Holy Prophet himself and from him flowed all the blessings and excellences which were distributed evenly among the favored ones of the Ummat. Thus the Muslim saints were not independent inheritors of divine bounties but got everything through their linkage with the Ummat. The question, therefore, of any of the saints being at par in excellence with the Holy Prophet Muhammad did not arise. To talk of excelling the Holy Prophet Muhammad in any department of divine blessings or even to bypass his status in the remotest form, amounted to *Kufr* and heresy of the lowest pitch. The words uttered by Hazrat Baayazid Bustami merely signified his high status in relation to his contemporaries only. The KGB agent was much impressed by my explanation and nodded his head in assent several times.

Mr. Abdul Qadir continued to shadow me for sometime. He even went to the extent of proclaiming me a great scholar and thus made me a greater suspect in the eyes of the Russians. My captors thought that if I was really a religious scholar, then why had I chosen to enter a far flung border town like Arthak without a passport or a visa.

I could well understand this line of argument. It was true that in ordinary circumstances no one in his senses would cross foreign borders without fulfilling legal requirements for this purpose. However, things were slightly different in 1924. During my stay in Iran I had endeavored to procure the necessary documents for crossing over into Russian territory. But it was a time of profound political suspense in inter-state relations and nobody on the Soviet side cared to issue visas to unknown Indians, least of all to a person whose declared intention was to spread true Islam among the godless Communists. Nobody had asked me any questions when I crossed the border check-post. In fact there were no visible arrange-

ments to check or issue visas to visitors on either the Iranian or the Russian side of the international border.

To revert to Mr. Abdul Qadir, the day I met him, I had my misgivings about his bonafides. In fact I saw in a dream that someone from among my followers in the prison cell had thrown dust on my face causing some burning and dimness in my eyes. Subsequent events proved the truth of my vision and I thanked God that He had forewarned me about the tragic events which took place afterwards. To comprehend the Communist aversion to religion, it was necessary to cast a cursory glance at the reign of the last Czar before and during World War I. The Imperial Government was riddled with intrigues and the administration of the country was under the baneful influence of orthodox clergy who dabbled in politics and held their own interests uppermost in all walks of life. The ordinary people abhorred them intensely and when the Czar's regime was toppled, a very large number of clergymen were either killed or made to flee the country in great panic. The churches became desolate and the Bolsheviks adopted an extremely hard line against the religious-minded people.

Lenin, who led the Communist revolution, publicly proclaimed that there was no god in the heavens and that all men were equal and comrades in a godless society. The ordinary Russian citizens were greatly impressed by this announcement and gradually traces of religion were almost obliterated from the land. This was nothing like the people had ever seen and experienced before. When I entered Turkestan, Islam was still very much in practice in the great Muslim cultural centers of Bukhara and Tashkent and the advent of a Muslim missionary from India, the heartland of contemporary Islamic renaissance, was therefore something to the least liking of the Russians.

## PRELUDE TO TYRANNY

When my captors started my interrogation in earnest, I was escorted by two armed wardens to the presence of a high official. This dignitary appeared to be a Christian, well-mannered and soft in speech. He offered me a chair and before starting business, gave me some fruits and other eatables and tried to put me completely at ease. The first question he asked me was about Ahmad, the Holy Founder of the Admadiyya Movement and his teachings. I gave him a brief life sketch of Ahmad and told him that the message the Promised Messiah had brought from God was in the same pattern and manner as other prophets from the dawn of history. Ahmad (Peace be on him) had brought no new law but was commanded by God to present to mankind the true face of Islam and the exquisitely beautiful teachings of the Holy Quran.

This Great Deputy of the Holy Prophet Muhammad had appeared in accordance with the prophecies in the ancient scriptures and the Holy Quran. After his advent, the spiritual darkness which had engulfed the whole world, had begun to depart gradually but finally from the face of the earth. It was destined that the Promised Messiah, who like the full moon, was to reflect in his person fully and faithfully the glorious light of the Sun (the Holy Prophet Muhammad) would halt the tragic decline of Muslims and would be instrumental in bringing about a full-fledged Islamic renaissance in the twinkling of a century. I had with me a small booklet entitled "Difference between an Ahmadi and a Non-Ahmadi" written by the Promised Messiah himself. I translated in Persian rele-

vant extracts from this book and the official interpreter who was present during the interrogation translated the same into Russian for the benefit of the Interrogating officer. When he (the Russian officer) learned about the Ten Commandments (conditions) of *Baiat*, he was visibly impressed and noted the extracts in his personal notebook. This was a matter of great pride for me that the first book from the Ahmadiyya literature was translated into the Russian language during my interrogation and that it was read by a number of Russian officials.

In subsequent sessions the interrogators often asked me questions as were not strictly religious but were more political in nature. For instance: "What is the Ahmadiyya reaction to the Non-cooperation movement sponsored in India by Mr. Gandhi and his Muslim associates against the British Government?" I told my questioners that the Ahmadies were not affected by political turmoil in any country. We worked under the guidance of a spiritual leader—in this case the second Successor to the Promised Messiah—and we never clashed with a lawfully established government, be it Russian or British." The Russians appeared to be satisfied with my statement. I was very careful in articulating facts and theories so that the Russians might not form wrong notions about the Ahmadies. In Russia, there appeared to be more theorists than activists and, therefore, I took pains to clarify my views as comprehensively as conditions would permit.

The interrogatory process dragged on and the officers on duty were changed frequently. During this period I had to face a young scholar who was a Muslim by birth but had recently succumbed to the Communist doctrine. He was an atheist and on top of that a great intellectual. He interrogated me comprehensively on almost all topics—political, religious, social, cultural and economic. Sometimes the interrogation lasted throughout the night. He particularly asked me questions about the administrative setup of the Ahmadiyya Headquarters at Qadian (India). I had to explain elaborately all the

details concerning our foreign missions (few and far between at the time) along with the names of the missionaries. He even inquired from me the names and numbers of the newspapers, periodicals, and other publications which were published by us at Qadian and missions abroad. His interrogatory zeal was so exhaustive that he also wanted to know something about the Lahori Party or the *Paighamees* as they are popularly called. The Lahori Party acknowledges Ahmad as the Promised Messiah and Mahdi in a lukewarm fashion. One of the basic differences between the main Ahmadiyya Community and the dissidents pertains to the supremacy of the Khilafat over the Sadr Anjuman Ahmadiyya.

According to the writings of the Promised Messiah, God would install the *Khulafa-i-Rashedin* as successors after his passing away who would carry on his mission in the same manner as was done by Hazrat Abu Bakr and Umar after the demise of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. Ahmad did lay down the foundation of the Sadr Anjuman Ahmadiyya during the last years of his Ministry but it was meant to regulate the day-to-day administration of jamaat only. It may also be mentioned in passing that the Lahori Party does not believe in the prophethood of Ahmad and regards him as a reformer in the manner of hundreds of those who preceded him during the last 1400 years. They seceded from the Ahmadiyya Community at the beginning of the illustrious Khilafat of Hazrat Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmud Ahmad, Second Successor to the Promised Messiah. The Paighamees maintain a small headquarters at Lahore. Their numbers have dwindled appreciably during the last few years.

Through God's infinite mercy, it so happened that my interpreter who was a Christian, accepted Ahmadiyyat during the lengthy period of my interrogation and helped me on many occasions during my question and answer sessions with my captors. His prompt assistance during various difficult episodes in the interrogation room saved me many times from

harsh treatment at the hands of the Russians and the climate of fear and distrust which pervaded the prison atmosphere was greatly assuaged with the help of this new Ahmadi convert. I must admit that it was through his efforts that the investigative techniques employed by my captors had been softened to the least offensive level during this period.

Mr. Abdul Qadir whom I have already mentioned in my narrative proved to be a very wicked person insomuch that he was successful in finally convincing my captors that I was really a British spy. My woes really started when Abdul Qadir told the Russians that I was an expert on political affairs and had been specially chosen by the British Intelligence Service for espionage purposes within the Muslim dominions of the U.S.S.R. The mere fact that I was a Muslim scholar and was fairly well conversant with the vast Islamic literature had led the Russians to the conclusions that I was indeed a spy. The whole thing was utterly ridiculous and without any basis. The informer's reports were based on false assumptions and amounted to as much as an exercise in summer suntan would be considered an effort to look like an Arab. More persons were sent into the prison to watch my movements and do eavesdropping where possible. Security was further tightened and during my daily morning stroll, plainclothesmen shadowed me—even to the privy.

As the days passed, the behavior of the Russian officials became more and more hostile towards me. Abdul Qadir, the informer, had concocted so many stories against me that my captors thought themselves quite justified in treating me with unconcealed harshness. My friends in the prison cell had also started deserting me and had suddenly assumed a pattern of behavior, least cordial and conspicuously aloof towards me. I could not blame them for their unsympathetic attitude because everyone was under cloud for one reason or the other, and of course self interest always came first. Nobody was willing to share my hardships and even those who were very close

to me in the recent past, cast furtive glances at me in despair and disgust.

At first it appeared only as a ripple of whispering tongues. But soon I came to know that my captors had decided to execute me on charges of spying for a foreign power. Apparently this was the end of the line for me. In order to convince me that the Russians were earnest in their resolve to execute me, a Russian prisoner from an adjoining cell was executed by firing squad on charges of espionage and nobody had raised a finger in protest, or pleaded for him. However, I kept calm and gave no hint to my persecutors that their ugly designs had unnerved me in any manner. I kept myself busy in reciting the Holy Quran most of the time and on occasions looked back into the past for its elements of prologue and consolation. Although a majority of my comrades in the prison cell had isolated themselves from me, but a few from the hard core were still in sympathy with me and occasionally passed to me kind words and food gifts. I will never forget the words of consolation and sympathy often spoken to me during this period by the Russian officer who interrogated me at Tashkent. Outwardly he was an atheist and conformed to all the norms of a Communist society. But in reality he was a devout Christian, kind hearted and sympathetic to all in adversity.

I have already mentioned that security measures around my cell had recently been tightened out of all proportion to the actual requirement. I was a mere prisoner, unarmed and completely at the mercy of my tormentors. I admit that I had been excessively meek and docile in my behavior during the whole period of imprisonment. But this was not motivated by any sinister designs to make a bid for escape from the Bolshevik clutches. According to the teachings of Islam, I was not supposed to adopt unfair or illegal means for release from the prison. In certain circumstances, some people are punished by their penances. I believe that my present ordeal was brought about by my insistence in adhering to the Islamic rules of con-



duct. Frequently in the past, my friends had been persuading me to make a bid for escape. They had promised me assistance and guidance in this direction. But I did not fall for the temptation because if I had escaped from the prison illegally, I would have tarnished the fair name of Ahmadiyyat. The case of prisoners of war is different and, therefore, required different handling. As they say, a kind heart is no help in poker, a P.O.W. has to fend for himself in all types of situations and strive for his liberty by any means.

When it became evident that my execution had been decided upon at the highest level, the prison officials contrived their utmost to obtain additional incriminatory data against me so that it could be produced in a trial court by the prosecution. A large number of people were assiduously brought into contact with me to procure evidence of my guilt from false witnesses. I had already renounced all hopes of assistance and help from worldly sources. I started consoling myself with the idea that perhaps it was God's decree that the seed of Ahmadiyyat should be sown in this land, soaked in the blood of a martyr. What better fate a devout Muslim could desire than this. There was only one longing in my heart at that time; to see Qadian, the resting place of the Promised Messiah and the blessed seat of the Ahmadiyya Khilafat. As time passed and I guessed that the final hour was at hand, I diverted my full attention to my Creator and even discarded my wish to visit Qadian.

It so happened that an Ahmadi youth from Bukhara had come to Tashkent to meet some relatives. I came to know of it and sent a message to him to see me in the prison. Muhammad Hussain (this was his name) met me in the prison and informed me about his resolve to visit Qadian in the near future. I exhorted him to convey a message from me to Hazrat Khalifatul Masih II. Basing my conviction on the existing situation, I passed word to Hazrat Sahib that my execution had been decided upon and that I felt no fear in my heart on that

account and would gladly shed the last drop of my blood in the cause of Ahmadiyyat. I further mentioned in this message that I was a humble disciple of the Promised Messiah and if my captors executed me, I would not die like a coward. I will hold fast to my beliefs to the last breath; that Ahmad (Peace be upon him) had appeared as a Reformer in the Latter Days in the spirit and mantle of the Holy Prophet Muhammad and that anyone who followed Ahmad, really followed his Master the Holy Prophet Muhammad.

My visits to the Interrogation Center continued regularly despite the reliable rumors about my summary execution. One day the investigating officer asked me whether it was incumbent on all Muslims to obey the legally established government of the country where they lived. I hesitated to answer this question as I had already guessed its implication. What my captors wanted me to admit was that I was a loyal subject of the British government; so in accordance with their wishes, I had accepted to work as a spy in the Muslim occupied territories of the U.S.S.R. Of course my answer to the above question was in the affirmative, but with the proviso that a legally established government could only issue lawful commands to its subjects. Spy work in foreign lands was not a lawful command and therefore a Muslim was not compelled to comply with such orders.

The interrogator asked me to reduce his question and my answer into writing, which I did. While writing this statement I also mentioned that according to Islam, only such orders of the rulers were to be obeyed by the Muslims as were not repugnant to the basic Quranic injunctions. For instance, if an established government issued orders that Muslims were barred from observing daily prayers or fasting in the month of Ramadhan or compelled to use alcoholic drinks, such orders were not to be obeyed in any circumstances. On hearing my explanation, the Russian interrogator became livid with rage. He shouted back at me saying that since it was God who

invested the rulers with ruling powers, how was it possible for the subordinates to challenge or disobey orders issued by the government. I repeated what I had already said in this regard but added that in some cases Islam allowed a certain measure of latitude and extreme affliction was not always to be discounted against adherence to civil rights.

The interrogating officer did not appear to like my answers and further asked me with an ironical expression on his face: "Supposing the British Government was at war with a Muslim country, what would be your reaction? Would you fight against your own brothers in faith?" I told him that the Ahmadiyya Community was a non-political organization and as such had nothing to do with politics and wars. But in case of national emergency, the Ahmadies were bound to participate in the defense of their country, even though there might be some Ahmadies on the enemy side. Wars with national stakes were not to be confused with religious wars which in any case were extinct in modern times.

Sometimes some senior Russian officials also visited the Interrogation Center and expressed surprise at my statements. One of these officials one day admonished my interrogator and said in Russian, "Why are you asking such questions from a prisoner who appears to be yet in his teens?" The interrogator explained to him that this prisoner (myself) was young in age but extremely clever in understanding.

My interrogator appeared to be one of those persons who felt a certain void unless some great catastrophe was announced to them every morning. Every day he changed his posture in the hope of getting me into a tight corner. One morning when I went to the Interrogation Center, I said *hello* to him in my usual way. He answered suddenly that if my *hello* was meant for the Russian government then the time was soon approaching when the Russians would be as prosperous as the British and then he would be able to return my *hello* in a much louder tone than at present. I was, of course, surprised

beyond description at the stupidity and bias of this Russian official.

When my interrogator failed miserably in his efforts to elicit any substantial evidence of guilt from me, he changed his tactics and one day asked me if I knew anything about the modern sciences like algebra, geometry, mathematics and physics, etc. I told him that I had not learned my religion from a scientist and as such, was a layman in modern sciences. I had been educated in a religious academy and therefore my knowledge of whatever dimension was confined to religious topics only. To illustrate that I knew much more than I confessed, he suddenly asked me, "What is the sum total of  $45 + 45$ ?" I said simply "80 is the sum total."

On a subsequent occasion when my tormentors had beaten me mercilessly and blood flowed profusely from my wounds, I had to be admitted to the prison hospital. Here the civil surgeon wanted to take my statement and record his opinion about my physical condition. My persecutors had sent me to the hospital with a note that this man was demented and had wounded himself in a fit of frenzy. To convince the civil surgeon that I was really a madcap and a lunatic, the Russian interpreter asked me in the presence of the doctor "What is the sum total of  $17 + 17$ ?" I said "34". He then said "What is the sum total of  $19 + 19$ ?" I said "38". The interrogator again asked me shamefacedly "How much is  $18 + 18$ ?" I said "36". The civil surgeon glanced at my interrogator curiously and certified me as a normal person.

One day my interrogator asked me to mention the names of towns and places which I had come across during my journey from Qadian to Bukhara. I enumerated a few towns, like Batala, Amritsar, Lahore, Quetta, Duzdab and Meshad. He further asked me to name important places between Duzdab and Meshad. I wearily answered that if I had known beforehand that questions of this nature would be put to me, I would have jotted down the names of all the important places

on a piece of paper. The intention behind such questioning was probably to find out whether I had halted at any of the towns between Duzdab and Meshed, which were the hotbed of international intrigue in the Iranian territories.

As I have already mentioned on a previous occasion, the Russians had confiscated all my belongings and personal documents when I was apprehended at the Arthak Railway Station. One of these documents pertained to instructions personally dictated to me by Hazrat Khalifatul Masih II before starting on my journey for Bukhara. My captors had gotten these instructions translated into the Russian language and had kept these under deep study for sometime. One day, my interrogator showed me a typed version of this document and asked me to explain one of the clauses which ran as follows: "When you reach Bukhara and start converting people to Ahmadiyyat, do not disclose the names of the new converts to anyone. So much so that even the Ahmadi converts were to be kept in the dark about each other's identity. However, when you shift from one town to the next, then select one of the most efficient and truthful Ahmadies from the whole lot and apprise him of the names and other details of all the Ahmadies in the area. You should tell the chosen person to continue meeting all the Ahmadies in the town strictly on an individual basis. This instruction should be adhered to both in word and spirit at all times."

My reply to this query was brief and to the point. In Bukhara, as in other Muslim dominated provinces in the U.S.S.R., a vast majority of the people were Islamic hardliners; especially the mullahs among them, who were mostly religious fanatics and left little or no options for those who differed with them even on non-essentials in theology. The advent of the Promised Messiah had caused a furor among the mullah-infested Muslim community throughout the world. More so in places where the people were illiterate and the pseudo ulema held the upper hand in the ruling hierarchy. The possibility of tolerating the Ahmadiyyas in places

like Bukhara and Tashkent was, therefore, almost close to zero. For this reason alone, the secrecy enjoined by Hazrat Khalifatul Masih II regarding the new Ahmadiyya converts would have been amply justified.

There were other cogent grounds for keeping our preaching activities underground for the time being. Recent events in Afghanistan where several innocent Ahmadiyya youths had been stoned to death due to religious differences, were a sufficient proof that theocratic witch-hunt formed an integral part of the medieval statecraft as was practiced by the Afghans. One of the Russian officials had recently shown me a cutting from a newspaper published in Kabul, which contained the details of this inhuman method of slaying (stoning to death) innocent Ahmadi converts in that country. It was an established fact that the mullahs held unlimited franchise in some of the Muslim countries and, therefore, could not be bound down to specifications concerning their scope of interference in public life. The instructions given to me at Qadian provided me only with guidelines in certain types of situations and were not meant to meddle with the rules and regulations of any country. My captors appeared to be satisfied with my explanation because they did not raise this point again.

Solitary confinement was another mode of torture frequently practiced by the Russians. I was often locked up in a pitch dark room for some days and then suddenly brought out in glaring sunshine to cause me extreme mental and physical hardship. This type of punishment, though extremely obnoxious, contained certain easements for me. I usually slept comfortably during the period I remained in solitary confinement in dark rooms. As the crisis built up gradually, my captors were at a loss to get me convicted on spying charges. For sometime past the jail authorities had been maintaining a studied silence, which I was sure, portended a storm of some kind. They had already decided to execute me but so far had failed to produce sufficiently strong evidence to prove my guilt.

It was during this period that word passed around in my prison cell that my persecutors were trying to fabricate fake evidence against me by writing a confession on a piece of paper and throwing it inside my room during the night. My interrogator was sick of the long drawn out statements which he had to record personally on my case file. Throwing all caution to the wind, he had chalked out a sinister program to elicit from me a false confession. I started keeping all-night vigils to thwart my enemies' scheme. Several attempts were made to drop something in my room during the night. But I used to start shouting in a loud voice on such occasions to awaken the other prisoners in the cell. This melodrama continued for some time until it was stopped for more effective measures.

Suddenly one night the guards opened my cell and ordered me to pack up my belongings. I was to be shifted to a new place. Some of the Ahmadiyya converts in the prison helped me in packing my belongings. When I was ready to move, the guard commander escorted me outside to a horse carriage which was standing there for transporting me to my new location.

In the new prison I was conducted to a small room where I found myself to be the sole occupant. My old prison comrades were also brought to the new prison, but all of them were lodged separately from me. Previously, food was cooked inside the prison cells and distributed among the prisoners individually. In the new location, the previous procedure was radically changed inasmuch as my food was cooked outside the prison cell and was brought to me by the prison staff. My daily stroll outside was discontinued and I was told to use a portion of my room as a lavatory. I had anticipated the new hardline adopted by the jail authorities but was not fully prepared for this type of harsh treatment. However, this was no reason for self-paralysis and I became alert more than before to meet all eventualities.

The jail authorities continued their efforts to lay their hands on some sort of fake evidence against me but they were always unsuccessful. They started beating me cruelly at odd times. Winter had already started and people who have visited Bukhara and Tashkent would know how severe the cold season is in these regions. To break down my resistance, the jailors sometimes compelled me to spend the night in a cold and dark room where I was forced to lie down on the bare floor. This state of affairs continued for quite sometime with no visible signs of any change in the attitude of my captors. Sometimes when I could not tolerate the severe beating I would start shouting for help in a loud voice so that the senior Russian officials living on the upper floor would hear my voice and come down to investigate. But at most times, the result was the reverse of my expectations and my loud protests prompted an increasingly violent backlash and the wardens manhandled me with greater violence than before.





## THE TORTURE

It started suddenly without any warning. By this time I had been subjected to several beatings, some of these quite severe and brutal. But this was usually a temporary distraction and afterwards I was left alone to mend and forget. But one night, five or six wardens came and manhandled me so brutally that I almost fainted on the spot. They first tied both my hands at my back with ropes. Then they repeated this performance with my legs. Afterwards they brought a large flat wooden board and after lifting me onto it, fastened the rope around the board so tightly that I started shrieking with pain. I invoked mercy in the name of God, but nobody listened to me. They left the room after sometime leaving me alone in the darkness. The pain and anguish was so intense that I wonder even to this day how I managed to pass that dreadful night. The ropes were so tightly wrapped around my body that I could not move an inch and consequently during the natural process of urination, some parts of my body were burned due to contact with acidic fluids for long hours.

This terrible night still looms large in the shadows of my memory. In great pain and misery I lifted my eyes to the heavens and prayed to God to give me strength and patience to bear this ordeal. I also prayed fervently that God in his infinite mercy may apprise Hazrat Khalifatul Masih II of my plight so that he might contact the British government to intercede on my behalf with the Russians through diplomatic channels. Even before I finished my prayers, my heart was filled with the belief that God had heard my supplications and

that He had informed Hazrat Khalifatul Masih II through revelation about the dire circumstances in which I was passing my time in Tashkent. This turned out to be quite true. When I reached Qadian after my repatriation from Russia, Hazrat Hafiz Roshan Ali, our venerable professor in the Jamia Ahmadiyya, told me that Hazrat Khalifatul Masih II had been informed by God through revelation that Maulvi Zahur Hus-sain (myself) was being terribly tortured by the Russian authorities at Tashkent. Consequently, our *Nazarat-i-Kharja* (section of the Anjuman Ahmadiyya, dealing with foreign affairs of the Jamaat) approached the British Government in this matter, who in turn asked their Ambassador in Moscow to find out the circumstances under which I was being held prisoner by the Russians. However, this portion of my narrative pertains to subsequent events and will be dealt with elsewhere.

Reverting to my ordeal of the previous night, when the morning sun rose my whole body was aching and both of my arms were numb and almost lifeless. I heard the sound of the warden's footsteps in the corridor and collecting whatever strength was left in me, called him loudly to come to my help and loosen the ropes. The warden after talking to someone in authority came to my room and untied my arms and legs. I could not move an inch for sometime. Both my arms and legs were swollen and blood oozed out from wounds from different parts of my body. I was escorted by the warden to my room, where I was left alone, perhaps to reconsider my plans and make a speedy confession of my guilt.

After sometime the warden returned and took me before a senior Russian official for interrogation. When this officer saw my sad plight, he asked me in Russian, "Who has been maltreating and beating you so badly?" I told him the whole story of the previous night and requested him for fair treatment in the prison. I told him that I was not an ordinary mullah but a respectable Muslim scholar and a missionary

belonging to the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam. I got hurt the most during my detention because I was a foreigner and there was nobody here who would utter a kind word for me. If the relations between the British Government and the Communist Regime in Russia were not cordial, then a mere nonentity like myself should not have been made a scapegoat in the game of power politics. It is true that when the elephants fight, the grass always gets trampled. Had I not suffered enough and had not the time arrived yet to do justice in my case and free me, an innocent person in all respects. The Russian official heard my pleas patiently but said nothing till I was brought back to my room. Soon after an ambulance truck came for me and took me to the hospital for treatment.

Apart from an unfortunate misunderstanding in the beginning, I was treated well during my two months stay in the hospital and was transferred back to my prison cell after my wounds had healed completely. My persecutors for some unknown reason did their utmost to obtain an unfavorable certificate from the civil surgeon about my mental fitness. My deep religious inclination and offering of daily prayers punctually had perhaps stung their atheist conscience so much that they started seeing me in the usual profile of a religious fanatic. At times they intentionally tried feeding me with pork. I resisted such efforts vehemently and made it a practice to eat simple bread mixed with water. Although this was a safe alternative, but it cut across my physical health badly and I found myself reduced to almost a skeleton. It was totally outside the bounds of international ethics to feed prisoners something from which they abstained on spiritual and religious grounds. But such were the conditions at Tashkent in those days and one could only make the best of what was available.

There is an old saying that affliction does not strike you at once. Adversity marches forward slowly but steadily until it engulfs you completely in its tentacles. Until now, my woes

were limited only to the limits of the Interrogation Center. The word had now reached to some of the mullahs in the city of Tashkent that a Qadiani (Ahmadies are sometimes called Qadianis, as the Holy Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement was born and brought up at Qadian) was preaching Ahmadiyyat in Tashkent prison. Some Muslim ulema disguised as prisoners were imported into my prison cell who in league with the prison authorities, planned to liquidate me with least publicity. I was apprised in time about this plot to assassinate me and with the help of Almighty God, I was successful in foiling all their attempts in this direction. Some of my friends had advised me to desist from preaching Ahmadiyyat as, according to them, dissimulation in time of crisis was permitted in Islam and the present conditions in the prison were not conducive to religious tolerance and ethnic harmony. I always turned down such advice and insisted that I was a missionary and my life's mission was to spread the light of Islam whatever the circumstances or the environment.

More than six months had passed since my incarceration in the Tashkent prison. During this period I had seen what could be termed as the best of times and also the worst of times at the hands of my captors. There were times when in my reckoning I had reached the end of the line. But God always came to my help and rescued me from the clutches of my malefactors.

It is a pity that almost all the informers employed by the Russians were Muslims who did their utmost to harm me in every possible manner. Islam has a highly legalistic code of its own, which mandates the fair treatment of hostages and prisoners. The fair name of Islam has been tarnished beyond recognition by its pseudo well-wishers. According to the orthodox Muslims, Islam is more like Judaism in that it is descended from the Hamurabi concept of an eye for an eye. However, according to the Holy Quran, moral reformation forms the basis of the penal laws of Islam. The real object

underlying the awarding of punishment to the guilty person according to Islamic teaching is his moral reclamation. If forgiveness is calculated to do him some moral good, he should be forgiven. But he should be punished if punishment is likely to lead to his reformation. The punishment, however, should not be disproportionate to the offense committed.

Islam does not believe in the monastic teaching of turning the other cheek, nor in the Jewish doctrine of an eye for an eye under all conditions. It adopts the golden mean. The mullah is basically an activist and very rarely believes in peaceful confrontation. During my imprisonment at Ashqabad and Tashkent, it was the Muslim informers who always provided false information to the authorities and thus compelled me to face violent tribulation at the hands of the Communists. This should not be deemed as an indictment against the Muslim community in general. A large number of Muslims, both at Ashqabad and Tashkent, provided me with much needed assistance at critical junctures and some of them went all out to help me at great risk to themselves. Most of my fellow prisoners were Muslims and they all showed great respect to me as a Muslim scholar. Some of them drew so near to me that they accepted Ahmadiyyat and acknowledged me as their moral and spiritual leader.

As time passed, some changes in the administrative staff at Tashkent prison were made which subsequently proved a boon for me. The previous superintendent of the prison was an atheist who took great delight in causing maximum trouble for me because I believed in a living God. He had me beaten several times by his wardens and made me suffer in every conceivable manner. I was, therefore, greatly relieved at the news of his transfer to some other station. The new superintendent was a devout Christian and even before his arrival at Tashkent, I had heard good words about him. I had made up my mind to apprise him of the cruelties I had suffered at the hands of the previous Management and to request him to

order my release from the prison.

On his arrival, the new superintendent inspected all the prison wards and also had words with me. I was rather disappointed at his cold attitude on that occasion. But afterwards I came to know that he wanted to listen to my tale of woes in detail from my own mouth in private. He summoned me one night to his presence and asked me a few questions. His main objection related to my belief in a living God. At the outset he said to me "If there is a living God and you are his servant, then let your God tell your Khalifa Mahmud Ahmad through revelation that you are imprisoned in Tashkent and that he (Khalifatul Masih) should strive for your release." I told him that God had informed me in a vision that news of my imprisonment at Tashkent and the terrible hardships I had borne at that place, had already been revealed to Hazrat Khalifatul Masih II. Consequently, the Hazrat had approached the Russian government through the British Ambassador in Moscow to shed some light on the circumstances leading to my imprisonment and also that I should be set at liberty, being a simple missionary belonging to the Ahmadiyya Movement.

The superintendent was so surprised that he looked at me blankly for sometime and then asked me as to how I had come to know of this information. I repeated my statement regarding our belief in a living God, who heard the prayers and supplications of His servants and showed signs to assist them when they needed His help the most. He then asked me another question, "Is your Khalifa the most learned Muslim scholar on earth or are there others like him, for instance yourself?" I told him I was nowhere comparable with the Khalifa in any sense. The Khalifa was like an ocean of knowledge whereas I was not even a drop. He was like a beautiful garden full of trees laden with different kinds of fruit. His personal fragrance pervaded the atmosphere everywhere, and I comparatively could be likened to a dry leaf which had fallen down from a tree and for all intents and purposes worthless.

The third question, the superintendent asked me was: "What is your profession?" I told him that I was a religious missionary and my duty was to spread the light of Ahmadiyyat or the true Islam anywhere and everywhere. It was futile to find a rationale for the spiritual urge that an Ahmadi had in his heart to proclaim from the housetops the new message of God. Human identity is often defined by what one owns in the shape of temporal belongings. But for an Ahmadiyya missionary, spiritual dimensions underscored everything else. The superintendent then put to me his fourth question, "Do you find any difference in treatment towards the prisoners between the present Management and the previous Management?" I told him there was a world of difference between the two Managements. The previous superintendent was cruel and heartless and he treated me like dirt under his feet. He never provided a basis for establishing a dialogue between himself and the helpless prisoners. He lacked emotions and had a stony look towards whatever happened around him. In fact, his emotional voltage was so low that he could stare at a man being beaten to death without blinking an eyelid.

I deliberately put great emphasis on the fact that the present change in the administration had been brought about by prayers uttered by a tormented heart. I also explained to him that I was a humble follower of the Promised Messiah. It was the Exalted Messiah who had prophesied about World War I ten years before it actually started in 1914. Not only that but the Prophecy had clearly mentioned the downfall of the Czar at a time when his Imperial Government was at the zenith of its power. I recited to him a verse from the prophesy, which ran as under:

*Muzmahil Hojaengay iss Khof se sub Jinno Ins,  
Czar Bhi hoga to hoga uss ghary baa haali zar.*

"The strong and the weak nations of the world would be paralyzed by this grim calamity, so much so that even the Czar would be afflicted with a terrible humiliation."

On hearing this, the superintendent jumped from his seat

and demanded of me to give him a solid proof regarding this prophecy having been uttered much before the execution of the Czar. I told him that the proof was simple and beyond any shadow of doubt. This prophecy was mentioned by the Promised Messiah in his book entitled *Brahin-i-Ahmadiyya, Part V*. This book was published in 1905 and a copy of the same could be recovered from the heap of my books confiscated by the Russians at Arthak Railway Station. The superintendent literally became speechless with amazement. He told me that from now onward, I could go to my room and sleep peacefully. As far as he was concerned, the period of my tribulation had come to an end.

Although better times had now come, the probe regarding my espionage activities still continued. The spy ring around me had loosened a bit but not entirely removed. One of the informers who had been recently imported into the prison often asked me religious questions, mostly unimportant and relating to academic wastelands. For instance, one day he came to me and asked me to explain the Islamic concept regarding the conditions under which the human soul was kept after departing from its physical environment in this world? He also mentioned a saying of the Holy Prophet that when a person died, a small curtain was opened for him in the grave, towards heaven or hell depending upon his physical actions in the previous life. According to him, many graves had been dug but no such apertures were visible anywhere.

I told him that events pertaining to the Hereafter were always described in parables. The graves in which apertures will be opened toward heaven or hell were not the ordinary physical graves in our graveyards. The graves where one experienced spiritual phenomena were located in the Hereafter and, therefore, their apertures as mentioned in the traditions of the Holy Prophet could not be discovered in this world. On hearing my reply, the informer appeared to be quite satisfied and afterwards became very friendly with me.



A prominent Muslim scholar from Bukhara who was also in the Tashkent prison was so impressed by my steadfastness and piety that he embraced Ahmadiyyat after sometime. He mentioned to me once that he was greatly impressed with my conduct in the prison. The fact that I had survived in a world of endless corruption and misery in the Tashkent prison was sufficient testimony that I was motivated by high spiritual principles and that I had not tripped over any vital issue regarding my religious beliefs so far.



## **BUKHARA MUSLIMS AT THE CROSSROADS**

After spending almost nine months at Arthak, Ashqabad and Tashkent prisons, I was under orders to proceed to Moscow for further interrogation and disposal. I was escorted to the Tashkent railway station under an armed guard. When we reached the railway station it was found that no reservation was possible as all the passenger tickets had been sold out. I had to come back to my prison cell and spend another two days in Tashkent. This was in accordance with a vision I had seen earlier. However, our next attempt for obtaining tickets was successful and I started my journey for Moscow. My escort commander was very kind to me and entertained me with fruits and other eatables enroute. When we reached Moscow I was driven to the new prison in a car and on arrival at the new location, I had to wait for quite sometime before I was allotted a cell on the fifth floor.

The mention of Arthak, Ashqabad and Tashkent would always leave a bitter taste in my mouth. With the exception of Arthak, the other two cities were centers of the ancient Muslim culture. The population was predominantly Muslim with a smattering of Armenians and a few scores of Russian officials.

The Communist ideology appeared to have taken roots only among the young intellectuals and was still in the process of penetrating the hard crust of the theocratic barrier. The mullah was still a force to be reckoned with and his impor-

tance even then transcended the nightmare of an alien way of life as represented by the Bolsheviks. There was no evidence to prove that force was being used by the Russians to coerce the masses into accepting the socialist creed blindly. On the contrary, the Russians appeared to believe in the process of gradual attrition of the old customs. The indoctrination of schools and colleges into the mystique of confrontation politics was also being processed slowly and the measures adopted for this purpose were mostly cosmetic in essence.

This method was producing the desired results. The younger generation was imperceptibly but surely becoming secular minded and had started losing interest in theoretical religious concepts of the Muslim clergy. The doctrine of inerrance of the Grand Mufti or other individuals of similar status did not exist in Islam. Even so the legendary figure of the mullah was still held in high esteem in this region and the Russians were careful not to offend this class unnecessarily. The typical mullah in Tashkent and Bukhara was normally so big in size, he could be divided in half and still not be slender. With his antiquated religious beliefs he was fast losing his influence among the masses and for that reason was confining his activities to ritual services only—funeral rites, marriage ceremonials and celebration of religious festivals.

I have mentioned previously that quite a number of people in Tashkent had embraced the Bahai faith. It was not that this new religion had any spiritual attraction for seekers of truth. It was vague on fundamentals like Divine Revelation, the institution of prophethood, the form of life in the Hereafter. It was even vaguer about the relations between man and his Maker. The simple Islamic teachings as propounded by the Holy Quran relating to different spheres of human society lacked even a remotely comparative counterpart in the Bahai scriptures. There had been numerous Baabs and Bahaullahs in the Shiite hierarchy during the last 1,000 years.

The Holy Quran and the traditions of the Holy Prophet

Muhammad (Peace and blessings of God be upon him) were replete with prophecies about the appearance of a Great Reformer among the Muslims in the Latter Days whom God shall bless with the names of Masih and Mahdi. According to a consensus among the great Muslim theologians of the past, the appearance of *Mahdi* could not go beyond the Fourteenth Century, A.H. We come across many instances in the Islamic history where certain ambitious persons laid claims to *Mahdawiyyat* but soon learned to their cost that they were only pursuing a mirage and that their claims did not conform to the Divine schedule.

As the Fourteenth Century, A.H., drew nearer, a mushroom of claimants sprang up who laid claims to *Mahdawiyyat*. We will leave aside the less known in this field and will briefly mention only those who left their imprint on the pages of history soaked in blood and tears. Mahdi Sudani and Ali Mohammad Baab were almost contemporaries and both followed the classical pattern of *Jihad* (Holy War) against the legally established regimes in their respective countries. Mahdi Sudani met his tragic end at the hands of the British in Sudan and Baab, the Founder of the Baabi and Bahai Cult, was executed by the Iranian Government for his anti-state activities. Bahauallah who was a disciple of Baab adopted a slightly different line after the death of Ali Mohammad Baab and throwing the *Mahdawiyyat* claim to the winds, declared himself a half-mast between God and man.

The Muslim world in general was in the process of its worst decline during this period and the ignominious end of the two *Mahdies* had aggravated the dark shadows across the Muslim lands. The people of Tashkent and Bukhara had never before heard the name of Ahmad, the Promised Messiah, and Mahdi. Iran being contiguous territory, the Baabi and Bahai fugitives had come to Turkestan and in accordance with the shiite tradition had been preaching the Baabi and Bahai faith to the local Muslims in the form and accent as conformed to the Sunni

doctrines. Bahatism offered certain relaxations to the business community inasmuch as the daily prayers at fixed timings were not obligatory and imposition of interest by money lenders was legalized. However, these were minor persuasions and the majority of the Muslim population stood at the crossroads still waiting for the Promised Mahdi and the Final Savior.

There were many saintly faces among the ulema of Bukhara and Tashkent who looked like new silver coins. But they were all empty handed and could offer nothing to the masses except their bald heads and heavy beards. There were talented writers among them who overwhelmed the ignorant with literary hospitality. But the net result was total emptiness. Everybody groped in the dark and waited in vain for the lone ray of light. It was like a whole community living in a prologue. It was at this juncture that a humble follower of the Promised Mahdi—the genuine Mahdi who had appeared with thousands of heavenly signs at the beginning of the Fourteenth Century A.H., came to Bukhara to point to the people the full moon which had arisen on the eastern horizon. Some of the learned people of Tashkent met me in the prison and wanted to know the decisive borderline between Ahmad and the other claimants to Mahdawiyat in the recent past. This was a lengthy discussion but I confined myself to the following three basics only:

- a. The greatest sign by which the true Masih and Mahdi will be distinguished from false claimants, was the dual eclipse of the sun and the moon on specified dates in the month of Ramadhan in the Latter Days. According to the Holy Quran and the traditions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, this sign was so majestic and awe-inspiring that the like of this had never been witnessed since the creation of the heavens and the earth. The sun and the moon were eclipsed in the month of Ramadhan in 1894, in the fourth year of the Ministry of Ahmad, the Promised Messiah. This unique miracle which took place only once in the

history of mankind was witnessed by millions of people both in the Eastern and Western Hemispheres.†

- b. In the traditions, it was clearly laid down that *Mahdi* will be like a son unto the Holy Prophet Muhammad, and will follow his Shariat and fix the banner of Muhammad on the loftiest of the minarets. Ahmad, the Promised Messiah and Mahdi was the only claimant who acknowledged the spiritual parenthood of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. The Iranian Baab and others claimed *Mahdawiyyat* independently and did not acknowledge the Holy Prophet as the source of all divine blessings. In fact Baab and Bahaullah both invented new Shariats and claimed that the Holy Quran no longer catered for the spiritual and mundane needs of humanity.
- c. In the Quran and the Old Scriptures it is explicitly stated that false prophets will be slain and that God will never let them prosper. History is full of instances where false prophets were executed by their opponents and their missions failed in their lifetime. Ali Muhammad Baab was executed by the Iranian Government shortly after he wrote his new Shariat. Bahaullah remained a prisoner for more than 24 years. In fact he died in prison—a tragic fate for a person who claimed to possess divine attributes. But Ahmad proclaimed his ministry for almost 40 years. The whole of the Indian sub-continent rose up against him and tried to undo his mission. But God was with him and He always ran

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† My father, Mian Abdul Aziz Mughal, who was one of the earliest companions of the Promised Messiah once related to me "It was in 1894 that the great eclipses occurred during the month of Ramadhan. Initially the sun had darkened only partially but soon afterwards the whole celestial body was fully darkened so much that people started running outside their homes in abject terror. One of the bitter opponents of the Promised Messiah, who lived next door to us, tore his clothes and started shouting from his housetop, "Oh, God, what have you done! Everybody will now say that Mirza (Hazrat Ahmad) is the true M a h d i ."

to his help against his enemies. When Ahmad passed away in 1908, he was acclaimed a Victorious General by his opponents and even his bitterest enemies acknowledged that Ahmad was one of those illustrious persons who were the pride of Adam's progeny and who appeared on the world stage only on extremely rare occasions.

On the eve of my leaving the Muslim areas of the U.S.S.R., I thought it fit to record my feelings and remind the readers of this narrative that it was not enough for Ahmadiyya missionaries to establish missions among the free countries of the world. The Muslims at present are like the lost tribes of Israel and we are duty bound to go in search of them everywhere in the world.



## THE MOSCOW PRISON

It was my first day in Moscow. This city was the seat of the Russian Government and as such I had expected a slightly higher profile in the treatment of political prisoners. In essence there was no difference and the same routine as I had observed at Tashkent was being followed here with minor variations. My interrogation started the very next day and the first question that a Russian officer asked me was whether I believed in the existence of God. Upon my answering in the affirmative, the officer made a wry face and after muttering some abominations, left the room. As already mentioned, my cell was located at the fifth floor and there were seven or eight other prisoners also in the cell. The quality of food served to the prisoners was extremely poor and at times I preferred to go hungry than eat the sour black bread and the soup with the awful taste. There were no toilets in the prison premises and we had to go outside to the privy twice daily. Most of my room mates were Islamic fundamentalists and professed to adhere strictly to the tenets of the Muslim faith. But in practice they were no better than the Russian atheists and followed the western customs and manners meticulously at all times.

I had barely passed a comparatively uneventful month at Moscow, when my interrogation commenced again with the same intensity as at Tashkent. One day the jail superintendent gave me a typed document and ordered me to sign it in token of my understanding its contents. This document, bypassing the elementary ingredients of diplomacy told me bluntly to make a confession in accordance with any of the following



three courses:

- a) That I was an ordinary tourist but had entered the Russian territory without a passport. If this assertion was authenticated, I would merely be awarded six months imprisonment and then deported to India.
- b) That I was an Ahmadiyya Missionary who had come to Russia to spread the light of Islam in the country. If this claim was proved, I would still be subject to a term of imprisonment for entering U.S.S.R. territory without a passport.
- c) That I was a British spy and had entered the Russian territory for espionage. In case this was established then in accordance with the law of the land, I was liable to be executed by a firing squad.

The Russian interrogator made it quite plain to me that the contents of this document were only procedural and had been put down on a piece of paper to satisfy some legal requirements. Otherwise, my captors were convinced that I was a British spy and that I would be executed accordingly. They gave me three days to ponder over the matter and warned me in no unmitigable terms to tell the truth. On a previous occasion, my inquisitors had informed me that if I made a confession regarding my espionage activities, I might escape execution but would be sent to Siberia for a long term of imprisonment.

A few days later when I was questioned again about my antecedents, I stated categorically that I was not a British agent and had never been so in the past. I was a Muslim missionary who had entered Russian territory to acquaint its Muslim population with the advent of Mahdi and the Promised Messiah. The rhetoric about myself being a British spy had been growing wilder with each passing day due to the false reports submitted against me by the local informers. My repeated denials to this charge did not seem to impress my captors in the least with the result that episodes of mindless violence continued against me at regular intervals. The cruelties

practiced on my person were such as appeared to be in excess of all permissible levels even as these applied to Communist regimes.

One night some wardens came to my cell and after taking away my overcoat, tied my hands and feet with a thin rope so tightly that even a little movement caused me great pain. One of the wardens then drew out a sharp knife and threatened to castrate me in the presence of other prisoners. On my raising a hue and cry and calling for help loudly, they left without returning my clothes to me. Similar incidents happened almost every day. Moscow is extremely cold and dreary in the winter, so much so that it is sometimes many weeks before the sun shows its pale face from the cloudy skies. I was not aware of the jail rules in this connection but nobody had allowed me to have a haircut during the last 12 months. Previously the jail management had occasionally permitted me to change my clothes, etc. In Moscow my captors had reneged on a commitment made earlier at Tashkent that I will not be tortured in future. They would not allow me to change my clothes, nor to cut my nails which had almost reached the feminine fashion lengths.

I do not know to this day why a person in his early youth who by no stretch of imagination could be considered suitable for espionage work should be suspected of spying on behalf of the British Empire. Being a simple student of theology I could not be capable of espousing the kind of militancy as would plunge the whole Muslim population of Tashkent and Bukhara into some sort of political turmoil. Perhaps the Russians thought that the people of Turkestan were on the brink of an Islamic uprising and therefore they feared even their own shadows. There was no doubt that some local ulema were always on the lookout to seize upon the ideological malaise which the godless Russians had introduced among the Muslim masses. But I was not even a cog in the political wheel and nobody could think of placing me, a raw Indian, as the first among equals in the catalogue of the suspects. I do not even

know whether the socialist doctrine is specifically environmental or functions as an institution. It is not possible for a layman like me to segregate the evidence in this context to separate boxes labelled according to requirement.

To revert to my woes, I was quite often subjected to the rigors of solitary confinement and my jailors did their utmost to extract something incriminating from me. They invariably failed in such attempts but to satisfy their ire, reverted to my maximum physical impairment. I made it a practice to proclaim the existence of God, His Omnipotence, His power of showing miracles even in the present times, to everyone who interrogated me or came into contact with me in the prison cell. Quite a number of people became interested and there were sometimes heated debates about the existence of God in the Moscow prison. Someone told me that a report had been published in a local Russian newspaper that a madcap from India was propagating the existence of God in Moscow prison and had requested the authorities to put an end to this madness. Little did they know that I was only a harbinger of the message of the Promised Messiah and time was at hand when the scepter of Czar would be handed over to the true believers.

According to a vision of the Promised Messiah, the Russians would be the first to recover from the horrors of the Nuclear War of the Latter Days and the number of the Ahmadies in Russia would be like the sands of the sea. It is true that the world stands at the sidelines of ignorance and disbelief at present. But soon, God will manifest mighty signs in support of His Messenger and prove the truth of His revelations. It was not my intention to introduce religious topics in my narrative but I feel it is my duty to reproduce here a revelation of God vouchsafed to Ahmad, the Promised Messiah (Peace be upon him):

*"A Warner (Prophet) came unto the world and the world heeded him not. But God will accept him and prove his righteousness with mighty signs" (Tadhikira).*

In one of his sayings, the Promised Messiah has mentioned: "My people have not recognized my exalted status. But the time will come when the nations of the world will weep in my memory." Ahmad, the Promised Messiah, started his ministry in 1884 and passed away in 1908. According to old Scriptures and the Holy Quran, the Messiah's second advent in the latter days will be such as there shall be none like unto him till Doomsday. I distinctly remember that whenever I mentioned the prophecy regarding the conversion of the entire Russian people to Islam in the not too distant future, some of my comrades in prison laughed indulgently, while others raised their eyebrows in utter disbelief.

It was quite often that I suffered the contempt of my persecutors on account of my religious beliefs. Sometimes they chided me as to what had happened to my God, who could not come to my succor and arrange my release from the prison. Many a time, I had impressed upon them that His help will eventually come and I would be a free man again. My personal problems were only marginal in importance and the real object of my visit to U.S.S.R. was to enlighten the Russian masses to the exquisite beauty of the Quranic teachings. Mental torture and physical punishment could not deter me from my assigned course and I was prepared to lay my life in this sacred cause. The humanitarian nightmare which the Bolshevik revolution had brought about in the U.S.S.R. and its dominions had served as a monument to total moral frustration and compelled the people to look for salvation elsewhere. It was by sheer luck that I had been chosen as the first Ahmadiyya missionary to the U.S.S.R. and the hardships which I had endured during the eighteen months in prison were nothing as compared to the divine rewards which were held in store for the true believers.

It was at Moscow that my jailors one day showed me a photograph of one of the closest companions of the Promised Messiah, Hazrat Mufti Muhammad Sadiq. They asked me to confirm whether this was the photograph of Hazrat Khalifatul

Masih II. I instantly informed them that this was not the photograph of our great Imam. I could not understand the reason for this novel incident at the time but afterwards I came to know that this was a sort of test to find out whether I really belonged to the Ahmadiyya community. One of the jail officials came to me one day and mentioned in a cursory tone that they (the Russians) did not generally believe in latitudes for personal opinions and it was therefore imperative to adopt a tougher stance on the right of speech and personal freedom. With this rather ambiguous introduction he asked me whether our Imam (Hazrat khalifatul Masih II) who was leading a comparatively comfortable life at Qadian, had visualized the terrible suffering and hardships to which his missionary (myself) would be exposed once he set foot on the territory of the U.S.S.R.?

This question offended me so much that my whole body shook with anger at this preposterous insinuation. I told the Russian official that his question was only a reflection of the traditional approach of the Communists towards religion. As for myself, I considered it a great honor that a mere nonentity like myself had been selected for this job. In fact it was the hottest of the hot topics among the Ahmadiyya missionaries as to who was the lucky person earmarked for this signal honor. Therefore, the insinuation made by the questioner was extremely offensive and pained me to the core of my heart. My interrogator appeared to be touched by my fierce reaction and tried to mollify me by another question. He said, "When you are in audience with the Khalifatul Masih, how do you behave towards him? He perhaps expected a dilatory response from me and sat down on the chair in a relaxed position. I told him that when we met the Khalifatul Masih, we kissed his hands and sometimes even touched his clothes for spiritual blessings. We spoke in low tones in his presence and gave answers to his queries briefly and to the point.

In the Russian prisons I had learned my lessons the hardest

way and therefore never took liberties with my captors. The jailors were never soft and did not give latitudes for personal opinion. The feeding and clothing facilities were limited to the barest minimum and arrangements, if any, for the few festive occasions were always on the rocks. Most of the prisoners were Muslim Turks, but they had adopted the customs of their masters in many ways. For instance, when the prisoners took baths, they invariably removed all their clothes and bathed naked in groups. This was against Islamic norms and strictly forbidden in Shariah. This inhibition was too well known in the Islamic society, and as such, plea of ignorance was not readily acceptable. It might perhaps be an expedient solution to the Communist designs towards destruction of moral and religious obligations. I always used a loin cloth for taking a bath and was often made a target of ridicule on this account. It is true that fashion is an evolution of necessity but it provides no excuse for avoidable moral pitfalls.

While I was in Moscow prison, I often recited the verses from the Arabic works of the Promised Messiah in praise of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. A few of such verses are quoted below:

*"O my heart, recollect Ahmad who is the fountain of spiritual guidance and who effaced enmity from the hearts of men and planted love therein. He is noble, righteous and showered blessings on mankind. His bounty is like sea, limitless and boundless."*

The last verse in this Qaseeda says: *"O, my opponents, today you disown me and consider me anti-Muslim. But the time will soon come when you will realize that I am robed in the mantle of Ahmad (the Holy Prophet Muhammad) so much that I have also become Ahmad in my own right."*

I was firmly convinced that the Promised Messiah had followed the footsteps of the Holy Prophet Muhammad so faithfully, loyally and meticulously, as to have merged into an image which fully represented the person of the Holy Prophet.

Likewise I believed that Hazrat Khalifatul Masih II was the Promised Son who had fully imbibed the excellence of his Great Father, the Promised Messiah in all respects. This belief always comforted me that Hazrat Khalifatul Masih II had my welfare in his mind and that he was constantly praying and striving for my release. As later events proved, my conviction was hundred percent correct and my subsequent release from Russian prisons was brought about entirely by the prayers of Hazrat Khalifatul Masih II.

The Communists did not believe in moral codes and had in fact flaunted their contempt for my good behavior on many occasions. They had taken my meekness and total subservience to established rules as a sign of rank stupidity or at best inherent cowardice. As most of my time was spent in prayers or rendering small kindnesses to my comrades in prison, my jailors thought that I was a hypocrite and wanted to hide my nefarious activities under the garb of piety and selfless service to humanity. To some extent they were justified in this assumption inasmuch as a godless society could not possibly believe in the value of abstract virtues and in fact had no use for vague humanistics. In socialist society disappointment with nobler human echelons ranked near the top brass and had filtered through to the lowest ranks during the last two decades; thus subverting all moral values which made life worth living on our planet.

During the period of my imprisonment at Moscow I had often seen many vivid visions about my impending release from captivity. On many occasions I met Dr. Muhammad Ismail, a close and beloved companion of the Promised Messiah, in my dreams. Ismail is an Arabic word which means "God has heard the prayers". Seeing Dr. Muhammad Ismail frequently in my dreams was a clear indication that the hour of my deliverance was at hand and it won't be long before I would physically meet Dr. Muhammad Ismail at Qadian. Hardly three months had passed when I was set free and on reaching Qadian, I met the

worthy doctor and thus saw the fulfillment of my visions within a short period.

In Moscow prison someone told me that when Lenin assumed power in the U.S.S.R., he issued a proclamation to the effect that there was no God of the universe and all Russians were comrades and brothers in arms. A large number of clergymen had to flee to other lands seeking refuge against communist tyranny. According to Lenin, the root cause of the trouble in Czarist Russia was the presence of priests in the ruling hierarchy, who made decisions in accordance with centuries old religious tenets. During the last stages of the Czarist regime, predictive physical signs clearly indicated that a big change was in the offing. The doctrinal orthodoxy practised by the old Russian Church had effaced all traces of fidelity on the part of the masses to the Christian traditions. The revolution brought drastic changes with the result that the Church teachings which were already unspecific became practically non-existent. It was, therefore, quite natural that when Lenin assumed the reign of power in U.S.S.R., he forbade all religious activities in the realm save such as pertained to individuals privately.

In the Moscow prison, there were quite a number of business magnates who were being held under lock because they represented the bourgeoisie. Some of these elites were very kind to me and always impressed upon me to hide my belief about the existence of God. This sort of advice had always been repugnant to my conscience and I had never acted upon it in the past. I had endured great physical sufferings on this account at the hands of my captors. The more I was tortured on account of my religious beliefs, the more insistent I became in my preaching of the Islamic doctrines. In fact, my sufferings acted as a stimulant and prompted me to greater effort in the cause of Ahmadiyyat. The following verse from a poem composed by Hazrat khalifatul Masih II was always on my lips in those days and I used to recite it frequently before my comrades in the prison.



*Uss Zindagi se maut he behtar hai aiy Khuda  
Jismae keh taera naam chhupana parey hamaen.*

O, Lord, I prefer death a hundred times to a life in which I am compelled to hide Thy name."

The winter in Moscow is always severe. I had been praying to God that He in His infinite mercy might provide me with some easements during the colder months ahead. It seemed that some sort of correspondence was going on between the British and Russian governments regarding my disposal. The Russian authorities had treated me very harshly in the past and apparently they now wanted things to be tightened up across the board as a backlash for their previous misdeeds. Consequently, my jailors had started showing some symptoms of kindness towards me so much that they ordered my removal to the hospital for recuperation and convalescence. The amenities for the patients in the hospital were so affluent that I was almost overwhelmed with comforts. I started getting clean clothes and was allowed to take hot baths at least twice a week. The hospital wards were centrally heated and therefore provided a sharp relief from the cold and desolate cells of the Moscow prison. The doctor on duty visited the patients daily and inquired about their health and welfare in sympathetic tones.

I had some difficulty with the female staff. The nurses were usually fond of shaking hands with the patients probably as a gesture of kindness and good will. Islam forbids males to shake hands with females. I, therefore, always abstained from shaking hands with nurses which they resented as an affront to feminine coquetry. The food provided in the hospital was always of good quality. The breakfast consisted of white bread, butter and two or three other delicacies. The lunch and evening meals were top class and I was really surprised at this unexpected VIP treatment.

## FREEDOM AT LAST

After spending some very comfortable months in the hospital, I was transferred back to my prison cell for further questioning before my final release. One day, I was led into a large chamber in the upper story where nearly two dozen officials were sitting on chairs in a semi-circle. I saluted them politely and also uttered the Islamic salutation, *Assalamo Alaikum*, meaning peace be on you. I was told to sit down on a chair and I promptly complied. The seniormost among the officials then leaned towards me and asked me: "Do you believe in the existence of God?" I stood up and declared in a firm tone that it was in my personal knowledge that God did exist and that He is Omnipotent and All-Powerful. I became emotional slightly and raising my voice pointed towards a big portrait of Lenin hanging on the front wall of the chamber and said that he erred manifestly when he declared that there was no God of the universe.

All the officials assembled in the big room gasped with amazement. One of them addressed me and said: "Do you know who this person is?" Without pausing for a moment I told them that I had read about Lenin; that he was the father of the Russian revolution and also that he was the Head of State. I again emphasized that I explicitly believed in the existence of God and I rejected the no-God theory as a mindless concept. If there was no God, then all talk about freedom, equality and fraternity was humbug and futile. According to the Holy Quran, Our Lord is our Father, and all human beings are unto Him like children.

One of the officials asked me as to where I had learned the Russian language? I told him that I had learned it during my imprisonment at Ashqabad and Tashkent. I then addressed all the officials present in the chamber and told them that I was a theologian who belonged to the Ahmadiyya Community and had come to the U.S.S.R. to preach the doctrines of Ahmadiyyat or true Islam to the Russian people. Ahmadiyyat was nothing more than a reorientation of Islamic teachings on faith and morals. I had been misunderstood here and erroneously kept captive for almost two years. The impression that I was a British spy had loomed large in all their (my captors) calculations and had completely obscured all approaches to reason and fair play. Everyone without exception whom I had come across so far had jumped upon the bandwagon and joined the witch-hunt for a non-existing British master spy. What I had heard of the people of U.S.S.R. was that they were mostly intelligent, fair-minded and unprejudiced against foreigners. Couldn't they realize that a youth hardly out of his teens, ignorant of the local dialect and without a passport in his possession, was hardly a person whom the British would choose to head their spy network in the U.S.S.R.?

My speech had a ring of sincerity in it and although it was not couched in very polite terms, but it appeared to have evoked a positive response from my listeners. For before dismissing me from their presence, some of the officials shook hands with me and looked at me approvingly. A female official tried to shake hands with me but I held back. She was offended at first but on my explanation, appeared to be satisfied. I then returned to my room. I forgot to narrate previously that while I was still in the hospital, five or six young women came to see me one day and asked me some irrelevant questions. Before they left, they assured me that my release from prison was at hand and I soon would be going back to my country.

With the passing of the winter months, Moscow was returning to normal and large crowds could be seen thronging the

streets engaged in their daily tasks. I was having an easy time nowadays. There were no interrogations and the wardens appeared to be least interested in my doings. I had seen straws in the wind but nothing positive had yet come to pass regarding my freedom. I had become weak and thin and the last two years in prison had noticeably affected my health. I had been constantly praying for my early freedom and God had consoled me many times in visions that the days of woes and hardship would soon be over.

Then it happened all of a sudden. One fine morning a warden came into our prison cell and called out my name. When I responded, he read out the order of my release from a paper which he held in his hand. He also gave me fifty roubles and after getting my signature on the release order, the warden strode out of the room.

I bought a pair of shoes and some other necessary articles for immediate use and saved some money for future requirements. I had to wait another three weeks in the Moscow prison before I was finally moved out by train to Baku, a Black Seaport. I stayed a few days at Baku under detention, waiting for a boat to take me to the Iranian port of Hanzalli. While I waited at Baku for my sea passage, I requested for an interview with the chief warden of the detention camp where I was lodged. He readily acceded to my request and on seeing me, asked me if he could do anything for me. I acquainted him with the whole story of my imprisonment in the U.S.S.R. and requested permission to go out into the city to fulfill at least a part of my mission, e.g., the preaching of Islam openly to the people. I told him that in the past I had been accused of being a British agent and consequently had to spend two years in prison. But now that I had been completely exonerated of the spy charges, I should be allowed free access to the local population for a few days. The chief warden was reluctant to entertain my request and in fact told me that he had no mandate to grant me permission for preaching my religion at Baku

and surrounding areas. I was very much disappointed but had no option except to restrict my *tabligh* to the inmates of the detention camp.

Generally speaking, the Russian people at large were mostly unsophisticated peasants, honest, sincere and simple in habits. I had tried to peep into the hearts of the Moscovites and had found them amenable to the simple doctrines of the Islamic faith. It would be a gross venture into self-delusion to assume that the Russian masses could be converted to Islam easily and speedily. But I was sure the time would soon come when fundamental human rights would be acknowledged by the Russian government and people would be free to practice and preach the religion of their choice. Ahmad, the Promised Messiah had foretold about the Russian Revolution and had also prophesied in accordance with a revelation from God that Ahmadiyyat in Russia will be multiplied beyond numbers, so much so that it would be easy to count the grains of sand but difficult to determine numerically the Ahmadiyya multitudes in the U.S.S.R. Words of God cannot exchange and the world will certainly witness the truth of God's revelation in due course.

When I was in Moscow prison, people from various walks of life met me and sometimes discussed with me the social and political conditions prevailing in India then. Due to jail restrictions, I was not in a position to engage in intensive dialogues on this subject with my visitors. However, I was quite outspoken in admiring the British Government inasmuch as it had allowed complete religious freedom to all people living in the Indian sub-continent. In Russia, no one was allowed to preach religious doctrines openly and freedom of speech and press was also confined to a minimum. It was doubtless a fact that anti-Communist propaganda outside the Iron Curtain was not always the gospel truth. Exaggerations in depicting the different aspects of everyday life in U.S.S.R. had fouled the true picture considerably. Human behavior, if

viewed in true perspective, is almost alike everywhere and similarities always outweigh the dissimilarities. Avoidance of extremes is the essence in international relations and nothing should be condemned outright to sustain certain types of ideals. However, one was constrained to express a certain amount of skepticism in the present circumstances about the iron-clad Communist society in the U.S.S.R. The Communist ideology usually nourished a climate of militancy and did not tolerate differences of opinion in pertinent spheres.

After spending a few days in Baku, I embarked on a Russian vessel which brought me to the Iranian port of Hanzalli within about 24 hours. As the boat entered the Iranian territorial waters and came within sight of the port, I lifted both my hands in prayer that God in his mercy may facilitate my entrance into Iran and my further sojourn to my own country. When the ship docked at the quayside, the passengers thought that I was begging alms and they started throwing coins into my cupped hands. However, I finished prayers and after obtaining my temporary visa documents from a Russian official, I walked towards the Iranian Immigration office, a little apprehensively. I was afraid lest something might happen here and instead of the Russian prison, I might find myself in an Iranian prison. However, nothing untoward happened. The Iranian official looked at my papers, signed them and gave them back to me.

On my way to a hotel, I read the wording of the Russian visa which ran thus: "This is Maulvi Zahoor Hussain. He is a missionary and belongs to the Ahmadiyya Jamaat at Qadian, District of Gurdaspur. Mr. Zahoor Hussain has passed his graduation in the Arabic language. On his admission in Iran, he should be dispatched to Ahmadiyya Headquarters at Qadian."

I spent the night in a small hotel and the next day went to see the British Consul at Hanzalli. I was advised to proceed immediately to Tehran and report to the British Ambassador

in person. I had two minds at this stage; whether to go to Meshad and collect some of my belongings which I had deposited there with a friend before going to the U.S.S.R., or to go straight to Tehran as already directed by the British Consul. I decided to go to Tehran and on reaching the Iranian capital, went in search of Shahzada Abdul Majid, with whom I had travelled from Qadian to Meshad about two years ago. I soon found my friend and stayed with him for two or three days. I had an interview with the British Ambassador who after first verifying my credentials from Shahzada Abdul Majid, directed me to go to Bagdad immediately and meet the British authorities there for further journey to Basra and onward to India. I reached Bagdad and met some Ahmadies who were permanently stationed there in connection with their official duties.

The British authorities soon sent me to Basra. At Basra, I met a number of Ahmadi friends who sent a telegram to Karachi (now in Pakistan) about my expected date of arrival in India. Within a week I was in Karachi and was given a warm reception by local Ahmadies, some of whom were my old friends. I dispatched a detailed letter to Hazrat Khalifatul Masih II describing all the events of the past two years including the harrowing details of my misery and hardship in the Russian prisons.



## EPILOGUE

It was in the fall of 1926 that I again set foot at the sacred soil of Qadian. I cannot find words to express my joy and feelings of thanksgiving to God, who had made it possible for me to see Qadian again, the sacred abode of the Promised Messiah, the place which had kissed the feet of the Messenger of God for almost 80 years. This was the small village where God had established a throne for his exalted Messenger. According to the writings of the Promised Messiah, God had decreed the deliverance of Qadian from all afflictions because it was the throne room of His Messenger.

I had been dreaming for the last two years to tread the sacred streets of Qadian and God had been so kind and merciful to me as had made my dreams come true. I was so overwhelmed with emotions that I could not believe my eyes that I was really looking at Qadian, its sacred mosques, the *Darul Masih* (House of the Promised Messiah) the *Qasri-Khilafat*, the offices of the *Sadr Anjuman Ahmadiyya*, and last but not the least, the *Bahishti Maqbara* (the paradisiacal graveyard where the Messenger of God lay in eternal sleep).

I arrived at Qadian in the early morning and found a large number of friends and relatives gathered at the *Yakka* stand to receive me. The Sadr Anjuman Ahmadiyya had declared a general holiday to honor me and I was ushered in audience with Hazrat Khalifatul Masih II after the noon prayers, the same day. Hazrat Khalifatul Masih II was so kind as to invite me to dinner in the Qasri Khilafat. This function was attended



by a large number of dignitaries of the Jamaat along with some of my friends and relatives.

My narrative has come to an end. I request all my friends and other Ahmadi brethren to pray for me and my children also. God has blessed me with three sons and three daughters. All of them are obedient and loyal to me. They all love me and always pray for me. I am eighty years old now and have almost forgotten the rigours of my 24 months of imprisonment in the U.S.S.R. I have avoided, as far as possible, to deliver any violent broadsides against my old persecutors. In fact I always pray for them and I am sure the days are at hand when the sun of Ahmadiyyat and Islam shall start shining in the territories of the U.S.S.R.

I do not claim to have narrated all the events lucidly and brilliantly. If I have uttered some bitter words against my captors, it was against particular individuals and not a people as a whole. Some persons are sadists by nature. Such distinctive practitioners of the ancient art of torture and repression are to be found in every society and it would be unwise to pass judgment in such cases on regional or nationalistic basis. A few political glimpses have crept into my narrative more inadvertently than by design. The reason behind these infrequent ideological flashes is easily discernible insomuch as it was necessary to conform references to the context.

I am modest by nature and would be the last person to dominate the headlines for ulterior motives. My story will achieve some sort of relevance only when it invokes in the heart of Ahmadiyya youth an irrepressible urge to come forward and spread throughout the four corners of the earth, the message of Ahmadiyyat and true Islam. It diminishes me in my own estimation when I consider that I have fallen far short of the mission which had been entrusted to me by Hazrat Khalifatul Masih II. My shortcomings have always been an obsession with me and I pray to God that He may cover my shortfalls with compassion and forgiveness.

Finally, some words of prayer for those who care to read this booklet: May Allah bless them all. And may all of them become the true followers of the Holy Prophet Muhammad and Ahmad the Promised Messiah. May Allah inspire all Ahmadies with love and devotion towards Hazrat Khalifatul Masih and the exalted Household of the Promised Messiah. I also humbly pray to God that He in His infinite mercy may so inspire my progeny that they may also follow the course which has been dearest to me throughout my life; the right and straight course of Islam. Finally I raise both my hands before God and humbly submit to Him that He may soon usher in the period for which Ahmad "The Messenger of God in the mantle of all the Prophets" has uttered the prophetic words:

*Woh ghari aati hai jab Isa pakarengay mujhe,  
Ab to thorey rehgaey Dajjal kehlaney ke dinn.*

(The hour is at hand when Jesus Christ shall seek my help and succour (to save his people). The Anti-Christ has now but few days to live (when he will perish finally)‡.

*"All praise to Allah the sustainer of the Worlds."*

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‡ This prophetic verse may have different meaning also, but the version explained above applies more aptly to the Western nations, who, on acceptance of Islam will cease to be associated with *Dajjal*.

