THE DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF ISLAMIC CULTURE

VOLUME ONE

Foundations of Islam

Editors:
Zafar Ishaq Ansari
Isma'il Ibrahim Nawwab

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PREFACE

The UNESCO Constitution states that 'ignorance of each other's ways and lives has been a common cause, throughout the history of mankind, of that suspicion and mistrust between the peoples through which their differences have all too often broken into war.'

Since its creation 70 years ago, UNESCO's message has underlined the importance and value of diversity for all societies and for humanity as a whole, to build understanding and dialogue, while fighting discrimination and upholding human rights.

UNESCO's Histories project is the flagship taking this ambition forward. *The different aspects of Islamic culture* makes a seminal contribution to exploring the richness of Islamic civilization, and its immense contribution to the history of humanity. In 1976, the UNESCO General Conference of UNESCO launched this vital work, which has since been carried out with equal passion and commitment.

The scope of these volumes is broad. They document the theological foundations of Islam, the status of the individual and society in the Islamic world, the expansion of Islam and the way in which the rights of converted peoples were preserved, the fundamental contribution of Islam to education, science and technology as well as the cultural achievements of Islamic civilization, through literature, philosophy, art and architecture.

In the middle Ages, the influence of Islamic civilization was felt throughout the world. From the China Sea to the Atlantic coast of Africa, people who embraced Islam adopted a set of cultural and spiritual references while preserving their own identity. Muslim thinkers and scientists, drawing on the rich heritage of ancient Greece, developed their own worldviews and influenced the emergence of the European Renaissance. Muslim philosophers, geographers, physicists, mathematicians, botanists and doctors made influential contributions to the adventure of science. Averroes taught at

the University of Padua in Italy, and knowledge travelled with no heed across borders. Islamic culture developed a conception of the individual and the universe, a philosophy of life and art that has profoundly shaped our common history.

This creative diversity, anchored within universal spiritual and cultural references and values, offered fertile ground for the dynamic development of scientific knowledge, artistic refinement and intellectual exchange that marked all great Islamic civilizations.

In these volumes, the reader will (re) discover how, over the centuries, Islam has been a driving force for the Rapprochement of Cultures, and provided a framework within which diverse cultures have flourished and interacted. At a time when violent extremists seek to distort the message of religion, it is critical that we share the knowledge of truth, and share the depth of wisdom of Islam as a religion of peace, moderation and tolerance.

I wish to thank the eminent scholars from all over the world who have contributed to this Collection and guaranteed its high scientific standards. It is my hope that this Collection, of which this is the fifth volume to appear, will encourage a more informed understanding of Islam, its culture, values and civilization, as well as promote intercultural dialogue and the rapprochement of cultures. I am also determined that the in-depth knowledge demonstrated in these volumes reach a wide audience because it is essential that young generations take pride and draw lessons from this heritage, in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding.

Irina Bokova
Director-General of UNESCO

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Introduction

Zafar Ishaq Ansari

It was otherwise an ordinary day in the month of August 610 CE when Meccans wearily lay wrapped in darkness after having faced a full day of blazing summer. The Meccans were asleep, and so was Muḥammad – except that he was in his favourite cave, Ḥirā. It was Ramaḍān and Muḥammad had climbed up the hill called Jabal al-Nūr (the Mount of Light), where the cave is located. He had brought along sufficient provisions to be able to spend a good stretch of time in retreat devoted to a kind of contemplative worship called *taḥannuth*. Not much is known of how Muḥammad filled his days and nights in the wilderness of the Mount. Nor are we aware of what ideas crossed his mind in the solitude of the cave, what concerns agitated his soul, and what were the maladies of his people for which he sought cures.

While Muḥammad lay asleep, he was jolted by the Angel, a clear indication that his quest had come to an end. In fact, it was not so much Muḥammad's quest for the Truth that had come to an end as it was a signal that the Truth had decided to whom Eternal Knowledge and Guidance should be bequeathed. Let us see how Ibn Hishām, an early biographer of the Prophet, records the event.

> The Angel came to Muḥammad and said to him: 'Recite'. Muḥammad said, 'I cannot recite'. Thereupon the Angel whelmed him in an embrace until he had reached the limit of his endurance. Then he released him and said: 'Recite'.
>
> Muḥammad again said, 'I cannot recite'.
>
> Again he took him and whelmed him in an embrace, and again when he had reached the limit of endurance, the Angel released him and said: 'Recite'. Again he said, 'I cannot recite'. Then a third time he whelmed him like before and then released him.

Thereupon the Angel gave Muḥammad what would become the first revealed verses of the Qurʾān:

> Recite in the name of your Lord Who created, created man from a clot of congealed blood. Recite: and your Lord is Most Generous, Who taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know. (Qurʾān XLVI.1–4). (See Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya*, eds., Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā el als., Part-I comprising vols. 1 and 2, II ed. (Cairo, al-Ḥalabī, 1955), pp. 236f.

While initially this unusual experience terrified Muḥammad, he was comforted by his wife Khadīja and her Christian cousin, Waraqa. The latter was quite convinced that Muḥammad had been visited by the great *Nāmūs*, the very same who had visited Moses many centuries ago. Waraqa was also sure that Muḥammad would be the Prophet of his people. This visit to Ḥirā provided Muḥammad spiritual enlightenment and renewal without the travails of journeying to Mount Sinai. He found access to God and God found in him a trustworthy bearer of His Final Message and a representative of His Mercy to His creatures.

On that day in August 610 hardly anyone could have imagined that this obscure incident in the darkness of Ḥirā would be the most momentous turning point in human history. Nor was it possible for Muḥammad's Meccan compatriots, intelligent though they were, to visualise that the posthumous son of ʿAbd Allāh of Banū Hāshim would emerge as the supremely impactful personality of all time. Not surprisingly, such people have been unable to make sense of the major developments that followed the Message of Muḥammad and the striving of his followers.

Be that as it may, as Gabriel made his way to Muḥammad, a new era dawned. Initially the Meccans and eventually a great mass of humanity recognized that through Muḥammad's message it was God who beckoned all to a life informed by God-consciousness, uprightness, justice, benevolence and compassion, a life in which one could be at peace with oneself, with one's neighbours, with one's environment and with one's Creator.

Soon a set of changes was observable and a new kind of life began to pulsate in Mecca where Muḥammad and his followers pioneered new behaviour patterns to live according to God's imperatives. For about thirteen years Muḥammad and his followers struggled to live according to Islam's message. But the entrenched ignorance of Arabia – extensive and deeply rooted enough to designate that period as the Age of Ignorance – forced Muslims to forsake Mecca and find a haven of refuge in Medina (then called Yathrib), where circumstances were propitious to implement the Islamic blueprint of life. Medina soon witnessed the burgeoning of a new kind of life and the rise of a new socio-political order and eventually of a new and splendid

civilization that interacted with other civilizations, benefiting from them and in turn casting its salutary and enriching impact on other civilizations.

Islam's rise was so spectacular that within a few decades after the Prophet's demise, one of the two existing super-powers that had set out to impede the spread of Islam lay shattered. As for the other, it was to a great extent crippled by losing some of the richest territories under its occupation. The dramatic character of these developments do not detract from the fact that the conquests proceeded smoothly, that the reforms which Islam sought to bring about met with the willing acceptance of the conquered populace; in fact, a fair section of them welcomed the new regime. Those who held the reins of power also exhibited a rare maturity in dealing with the populace under their control and were generally inclined not to change things unnecessarily lest they caused inconvenience to people. They also bestowed upon this populace, who mostly belonged to religions other than Islam, the opportunity to manage their affairs; in fact, it led to the grant of a kind of internal autonomy to them. Judicious concern for common good and commitment to justice and well-being of all made human life and culture blossom.

The obscure incident in the cave of Ḥirā eventually led to the flowering of a great and distinctive civilization – one that enriched the whole world religiously, morally, intellectually and culturally. It brought about a spiritual awakening that not only fixed Man's gaze on God and the eternal bliss of the Hereafter, but also reminded him of his due share in the life of this world. This civilization was rooted in an integral view of truth and sought pervasive good for the sons and daughters of Adam.

* * *

During the last fourteen centuries and a half, the tree of Islam has grown immensely, both vertically and horizontally, and has struck deep roots in the earth. In history Muslims have been both active and prominent virtually in all walks of life. Except for a few centuries, Islam has been ascendant and expanding, both religiously and politically besides splendidly enriching human civilization and culture. As a religion it enabled billions of people to establish a direct and close nexus with God and to develop a set of institutions to actualize the ideals of brotherhood and justice. Islam also provided its followers peace and tranquillity as well as avenues of fruitful effort and self-fulfilment. While various aspects of Islamic history and culture have been under study by scholars, a concerted effort was still needed to cover the whole saga of Islam. It was befitting, therefore, that UNESCO took the initiative to prepare and publish a fairly ambitious multi-volume series of works to highlight *The different aspects of Islamic culture*. This series of six volumes was carefully planned by the UNESCO-appointed International Scientific Committee

which was comprised of a galaxy of renowned scholars and thinkers. After due deliberations it was decided to publish the following volumes:

1. Foundations of Islam
2. The Individual and Society in Islam
3. The Spread of Islam throughout the World
4. Science and Technology in Islam (Parts I and II)
5. Culture and Learning in Islam
6. Islam in the World today (Parts I and II).

The *Foundations of Islam* is the first in the 6-volume series on '*The different aspects of Islamic culture*', though it is not the first to go to the printers. The series has been carefully planned in a way that each volume brings out a truly vital aspect of Islamic Culture. The distinction of the first volume, however, lies in the fact that it aims to make a lucid presentation of the very core and kernel of Islam, its *Weltanschauung*. It tries to bring into sharp relief those basic ideas and ideals which, over the centuries, have shaped Muslims' outlook, have endowed them with a distinct vision of life, have inspired them to pursue goals higher than self-indulgence, goals that have given meaning, purpose and direction to their lives.

The present volume, like its sister volumes, is addressed alike to Muslims and non-Muslims, and both to a specialist and to a broad, non-specialist readership. Hence an attempt has been made to avoid, as far as possible, the use of technical jargon and excessive recourse to those formal scholastic trappings that usually characterize works exclusively addressed to the academic *élite*. This does not detract from the fact that the volume is a work of exacting and rigorous scholarship based on a careful and critical study of the relevant sources, both primary and secondary, required for a deep understanding of Islam's foundations.

At the same time it may be pointed out that this volume does not aspire to be a typical work in the tradition of 'history of religions'. It is not just another 'objective' survey and analysis of the Islamic religious tradition or simply another study of the historical phenomenon called Islam. Instead, it aspires to combine rigorous and painstaking scholarship with the perception and insight of the 'believer' so as to project Islam from within and thus intimate the vision, the faith and the spiritual dimension that have characterized the lives and attitudes of men and women of faith in Islam.

Muslims, like adherents of other religious traditions, find themselves today in a radically changed socio-cultural context. The world in which their theologians, jurists, and pious scholars had elaborated their vision of life—one to be lived in faithful submission to the imperatives of the Creator—scarcely exists. Muslims are, therefore, faced with the agonizing problems of relating the valuable insights, perceptions and values enshrined in their religious

tradition to the demands of a world that has not only changed, but appears to be caught in a vortex of seemingly endless transformation. The contributions of the authors of this work to our understanding of the fundamental aspects of Islam have been made in this context. They are designed to show the abiding relevance and significance of Islamic concepts and values and its rich heritage of law and jurisprudence and its socio-economic institutions to the problems and concerns of contemporary men and women.

* * *

The present volume is divided into four parts.

Part One attempts to explain the basics of the Muslim worldview by elucidating Muslims' perspectives on the perennial phenomenon of religion as such, as well as to their own religion, spelling out their concept of God, of the universe, of Man, and of the present world and the Hereafter.

Chapter 1, 'Islam and other religious traditions', stresses the perennial human urge to reach out to the Ultimate Reality. It takes seriously the universality of humankind's innate urge to relate to the Transcendent. It also elucidates how Islam looks at itself in the broad sweep of human religious history and how it views other religious traditions of the past and the present.

From an Islamic perspective, the original religion of human beings was 'Islam', that is, a voluntary self-surrender to God's command, a religion which, in the course of time, humans tended not only to disregard but also to distort and corrupt. This called for God's intervention in human history. This was done by renewing this primeval religion from time to time by raising Prophets and Messengers who brought God's Guidance to various peoples. This continued until the advent of Muḥammad when Divine Guidance reached its zenith and assumed its definitive universal form.

Chapter 2, 'The Islamic approach to God', attempts to elucidate the characteristically Islamic concept of God. Does the Qurʾānic teaching of God envisage a personal or an impersonal God? What are the basic attributes of God? How are God's attributes to be understood—literally, allegorically, or, should God be viewed from the vantage-point of the opposite tendency which might render Him into a pure fantasy, a mere figment of imagination? What is the significance of the Islamic emphasis on God's unity and uniqueness and His being beyond every comparison: 'There is nothing like Him' (Qurʾān XC.11). This God is transcendent on the one hand and is closer to Man's jugular vein, on the other. What is the meaning and significance of the Islamic concept of God for human life? The chapter attempts to answer some of these questions.

Chapter 3, 'The Islamic view of Man', seeks to spell out the distinctively Islamic attitude regarding Man. It seeks to answer questions such as the

following: Is Man a purely biological being as quite a few people have come to believe in our time? Or, contrarily, is he to be regarded as a unique composite of the animal and the divine, of material and spiritual elements? What is the significance of the concept of Man's vice-regency of God, of his being the bearer of God's 'trust' and of the notion that there is a unique relationship between Man and God? What is the significance of God's command to angels to prostrate themselves before Adam? What is the position of Man in the Divine scheme of things? What is the purpose of his creation and his mission on earth?

Chapter 4, 'This world and the Hereafter', affirms that Man will survive earthly death and that in the World to Come he will see the ultimate consequences of his performance. While Islam emphasizes the overwhelming importance of the Hereafter, it does not negate the legitimacy of Man's predilection to seek fulfilment of his worldly as well as spiritual urges. On the contrary, as Muslims are taught, the Islamic scheme of life is designed to seek 'good in this world and good in the Hereafter'. Islam's position can possibly be described as one that says 'yes' to life and 'no' to both asceticism and hedonism.

Chapter 5, 'The Islamic view of the Universe', is an endeavour to identify the Islamic position as regards the universe. Humans have tended to look at the universe from a variety of motives. One such motive is the cognitive one—the desire to understand the universe, to unravel its mysteries, to discover the laws operating in it. Another motive – and one that is often allied with the former – is the utilitarian one: how best can benefit be derived from the universe? Islam recognizes the legitimacy of both these motives. At the same time, it emphasizes that apart from everything else the universe embodies and reflects the *āyas* (portents, signs) of the Creator. Man is thus not only capable of knowing the universe and of benefiting from its resources, but what is more, if he looks at it from the right perspective, the universe can also direct him to the cognition of the ultimate truths and bring him closer to the Creator.

Part Two focuses on Revelation and Prophethood.

Chapter 1, 'The Prophet Muḥammad: the Meccan period', is a study of approximately the first fifty three years of the Prophet's life. Keeping in view the circumstances of Arabia and the life-pattern obtaining in the sixth-seventh century Mecca, the birth of the Prophet, his childhood and youth and the beginning of his mission are surveyed. The major thrust of his teachings and activities during the Meccan period of his life are carefully explored. What were the major aims he sought to achieve? What were the major problems and difficulties he encountered? What was the overall achievement of the Prophet during the Meccan period of his life? What were the circumstances

of the Prophet's migration to Medina and the basic contours of his character, personality and message? What was their impact on Mecca and the Arabian peninsula?

Chapter 2, 'The Prophet Muḥammad: the Medinan period', seeks to highlight the last decade of the Prophet's life following the *Hijra*. Does this period show a metamorphosis of Muḥammad — the transformation of a 'prophet' into a worldly person, into a mere 'politician' and 'ruler'? Or was his Medinan life a natural extension of the Meccan period of his life that led to the actualization of Islamic ideals? What were the major problems that confronted the Prophet during the Medinan period and how did he solve them? How basic was the transformation in the lives of individuals and the structure of the society that the Prophet succeeded to bring about?

Chapter 3, 'The Message and its impact', seeks to bring out how the Islamic Message influenced the course of human history on various planes: intellectual, moral, cultural, political and economic. How was Islam able to usher in a new era in Man's history? What was the influence of Islam on the regions and peoples committed to the Islamic way of life as well as on non-Islamic peoples and societies?

Part Three deals with the sources that have inspired and continue to inspire Muslim thought and action. These have been subdivided into three parts: A – The Qur'ān: the prime source, B – The *Sunna*, and C – The auxiliary sources. Besides identifying and elaborating the basic sources, the methodology through which the teachings of the Qur'ān and the *Sunna* are applied has also been elaborated.

Chapter 1, 'The Qur'ānic text', deals with 'the collection of the Qur'ān' from an historical angle, showing how the text of the Qur'ān was established. It also seeks to explain how it became possible to preserve the last Message of God from any loss or distortion, an aspect that marks the Qur'ān with a unique stamp of authenticity.

Chapter 2, 'The growth and development of Qur'ānic exegesis', deals with the stupendous output of Muslim scholars during the last fourteen centuries to understand the import of the Qur'ān. It introduces the different schools, trends, approaches and motives which are reflected in the *Tafsīr* literature commencing virtually from the time of the Qur'ān's revelation to our own.

Chapter 3, 'The major themes of the Qur'ān and its characteristics', identifies the themes persistently recurring in the Qur'ān in order to highlight the thrust of the Qur'ānic Message. Also, the noteworthy characteristics observable in the Qur'ānic treatment of these themes have been identified. This chapter shows the inner coherence of the Qur'ān and underlines the

basic thread of meaning that magnificently weaves these pearls – the different parts of the Qurʾān – into a necklace.

Chapter 4, 'The concept of *Sunna*' elucidates the second major source of Islamic thought and practice. After explaining the lexicographical and technical meanings of *Sunna*, the roots of the concept in the Qurʾān and in the *Ḥadīth* of the Prophet are elaborated. How has *Sunna* been understood in the Islamic scholarly tradition? *Sunna*, as we know, consists of the sayings and acts of the Prophet, of his tacit approvals, and the traits of his character and personality. What confers sanction and authority on *Sunna*? What have been the dominant attitudes of Muslim jurists, theologians, philosophers and Sufis towards *Sunna*? What is the importance of *Sunna* as a basis of Islamic thought and practice in Islam's history?

Chapter 5, 'The *Sunna* as the application of the Qurʾān' shows the close, organic relationship between the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*. To put it succinctly, the Qurʾān lays down the basic guidelines of belief and action and the *Sunna* elaborates them; the Qurʾān lays down broad principles whereas the *Sunna* provides guidelines and framework for their application.

Chapter 6, 'The early history and methodology of *Ḥadīth*' highlights the process of recording the sayings and actions of the Prophet. The chapter clarifies when the process of recording *Ḥadīth* began and how did it proceed. It also explains the main forms in which *Ḥadīth* was transmitted and recorded. In this regard an elaborate methodology was followed to ensure the authenticity of the traditions and to keep the grain separate from the chaff. The whole task was carried out so rigorously and meticulously that we have as a result of all these efforts a magnificent academic discipline which has hardly any parallel in any other civilization.

Chapter 7 seeks to elaborate 'The major themes of *Ḥadīth* and its characteristics'. This is a replication of the effort made in chapter 3 of this Part with regard to the Qurʾān whose major themes have been highlighted. The author has identified the major themes of *Ḥadīth* around the mission of the Prophet. The chapter conclusively shows that the transmission, collection and study of *Ḥadīth* was not merely an intellectual and scholastic effort of great magnitude. What was more, it was motivated by the desire to be able to translate the Prophet's life and teachings into terms of practical life.

Chapter 8 deals with '*Ijmāʿ*'. What does *ijmāʿ* mean? How is it established? What are the various kinds of *ijmāʿ* in Islam? What is the extent of its importance and what is its function? What is the relationship between *ijmāʿ* and social change? What is its relevance for the problems of the Muslim society in the present times?

Chapter 9 discusses '*Qiyās*', the method of legal reasoning developed by Muslim scholars in order to apply the Qurʾān and the *Sunna* to the myriad problems that arise in human life. After clearly defining and explaining the

concept of *qiyās*, its function is surveyed in the course of Muslim legal history, its structure is considered and its potential and position in modern times are appraised. Additionally, other supplementary sources of Islamic jurisprudence which supplement *qiyās* such as *istiḥsān*, *maṣaliḥ mursala* and *maqāṣid al-sharīʿa* are elucidated and their significance for the present times is carefully examined.

Part Four portrays five different but fundamental aspects of Islamic life.

Chapter 1, 'The *shahāda*: faith'*,* deals with faith as a believer's testimony to the unity of the Deity and the truth of the Divine Message. What is the nature of this testimony? What is its content? The entire life of a Muslim is required to be a continuing *shahāda*, an ongoing testimony to the lordship and benevolence of God, and to the soundness and validity and beneficence of God's Guidance bequeathed to His Last Messenger Muḥammad.

Chapter 2, 'Worship in Islam', is an exposition of the distinct concept and significance of worship in Islam. How does a Muslim look at prayer, *ẓakāt*, fasting and pilgrimage, the prescribed forms of worship in Islam? How do these acts of worship affect and enrich the individual and collective lives of Muslims?

Chapter 3, 'Islamic jurisprudence and the schools of religious law', deals with law as a unique aspect of Islamic civilization. It unravels the intellectual activity of Muslim jurists who devoted themselves to elaborating and systematizing Islamic Law, an activity that gave birth to it and to its different schools. What explains the multiplicity of schools of *fiqh* among the followers of a single religion? Is the multiplicity of legal schools in Islam necessarily an unsalutary development?

Chapter 4, 'Islamic ethics', elucidates the goal of life in Islam and the moral values that Muslims are required to pursue in order to achieve that goal. The chapter attempts to illuminate the fundamentals on which Muslim morality – individual and collective – rests. Several faulty notions that made inroads among Muslims over the centuries and the damage that this has done by causing conceptual confusion and a blurring of the truly Islamic ideals of life are noted. The author stresses that rigorous effort is needed to sift the healthy from the unhealthy and work out a vision of ethics faithfully rooted in the letter and spirit of the Qurʾān.

Chapter 5, 'The inner, experiential dimension', shows that Islam addresses itself not only to the outer being of Man, but also to the deepest recesses of his soul. What are the roots of this 'inwardness' in the Qurʾān and in the life of the Prophet? The Prophet's immersion in the Will, Presence and Reality of God were striking and so was his single-minded devotion to do His Will. An attempt has been made to show how Muslims sought to imitate the Prophet's model in order to draw near to their Creator.

The Qurʾān's recitation and study has been a sustained source of inner experience and spiritual growth for Muslims. In addition to that are the ordained forms of ritual worship that initiate a process of inner change and purification in the being of the worshipper. Besides the spirit underlying prayer (*ṣalāt*), *zakāt*, fasting, and Ḥajj is the inner dimension of *jihād*, including the concept of *al-jihād al-akbar*. Supererogatory acts of worship also play their part and reinforce the effect of the obligatory rites of worship. *Dhikr* has also been an important element of spiritual growth and enrichment and a section of devout Muslims have founded the science of *sulūk* or wayfaring towards God.

The 'Epilogue' draws attention to the vibrant and resilient nature of the Islamic worldview as well as to its ability to guide and inspire human beings of the twenty-first century no less than it did in the seventh century and onward. For sure, the challenges of modernity are formidable and so is the phenomenon of Islamophobia that has unfortunately seized the minds of powerful segments of humanity. All this further necessitates that the best Muslim brains devote themselves to a clear and more profound understanding of their Islamic heritage and undertake a rigorous effort to develop a vision to make Islam a living reality of life. This will not only enable Muslims to live an honourable life under the sun in submission to God but will also make them worthy followers of their Prophet who was sent as 'Mercy for all the Worlds.'

* * *

As we prepare the text of the *Foundations of Islam* for the press I feel obligated to record the gratitude and pay our tribute to some of those who played a vital role in bringing forth this volume but who are no more with us to see the outcome of their efforts.

The first and foremost of these is the late Professor Muḥammad al-Mubārak of Syria, a brilliant Islamic scholar and thinker who raised a whole generation of scholars to contribute to the riches of Islamic scholarship. Professor al-Mubārak was a member of the International Scientific Committee of this project and was also appointed the Editor of The *Foundations of Islam*. This writer is beholden to him for inviting him to collaborate with him in editing this volume. It was tragic indeed that before this writer could attend the first meeting of the International Scientific Committee after accepting its membership Professor al-Mubārak had passed away. Professor al-Mubārak played a major role in working out the outlines of the work on *The different aspects of Islamic culture*. Besides that, he laid the foundations of the present volume. His work has guided the efforts of those who assumed its editing after his demise. As this volume is being sent to the printers, we pay our fulsome tribute to the late Professor al-Mubārak for his pioneering effort.

It was a great pleasure for me personally as well as for the International Scientific Committee to welcome Professor Ismāʿīl Ibrāhīm Nawwāb to join as one of the two Editors of this volume. Nawwāb was a distinguished scholar and a highly elegant writer. As for editing, he was simply cut out to be an exemplary editor, disposed to very high standards of perfection. As things are, an editor's contribution in enhancing the quality of the edited work is often not palpably identifiable. The authors of the various chapters of this volume which he fondly edited might, however, notice an added sparkle in their writing. This is thanks to Professor Nawwāb's golden pen and his illustrious editorial skills. It was heart-rending to learn that in September 2013 he had suddenly passed away. To God do we all belong and to Him shall all of us return. For me it was a very personal loss, the loss of one of my dearest friends. Likewise, it was a major setback for preparing the work for publication. Above all, the volume was deprived of his own chapter on the Prophet Muḥammad in preparation of which he had devoted about two decades of his life. It is with gratitude to him that this volume is being typeset in Nawwāb fonts. The spectacular quality of Nawwāb's editorial and writing skills are also evident from the chapter on Introduction to *Sunna* which he both translated and edited.

During the course of the years spent on preparing this volume, four distinguished contributors to this volume passed away. The first of them was Khurram Murad (in 1996), followed by Mona M. Abul-Faḍl and Muṣṭafa Aḥmad al-Zarqā (both in 1999), and then Muhammad Abdul Haq Ansari (in 2013). Each of them made a lasting contribution to one or the other branch of Islamic scholarship, and also greatly enriched the present work. It is with deep fondness for them as scholars and their contribution that I pay my tributes to them and pray that their souls may rest in eternal peace.

* * *

As the preparation of this volume approaches its end, it is hard for me to adequately express how deeply grateful I am to UNESCO and its Secretariat. They have all along been immensely cooperative and greatly patient with the editors of the volume. Special thanks are due to Dr. Idris El-Hareir, the Chairman of the International Scientific Committee and to Mr. Mohamed Salih Ziadah of the UNESCO Secretariat for having been constantly helpful; never did they deny us anything needed for the success of this volume. Little could have been achieved without their whole-hearted cooperation.

I also wish to record my gratitude to several friends and colleagues who assisted me in a wide range of tasks related to the editing of the text. Most valuable is the assistance I am received from Imran Ahsan Khan Nyazee, Syed Akif, Muhammad Modassir Ali, Ghassān ʿAbd al-Jabbār, Qaiser Shahzad, Muhammad Islam and Bilal Ahmad. They provided effective help to me in too many tasks to be mentioned here. As for the critical comments and

I hope that despite a few possible blemishes and lacuna, the *Foundations of Islam* will contribute to a better understanding of Islam and to bringing people of different ethnic, national and religious affiliations a little closer to one another. I also hope that it will provide an impetus to fostering brotherhood and goodwill and to building a multi-cultural world in which different religious and cultural entities can live in peace and harmony, a world in which a pervasive compassion and friendship prevails.

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THE WORLDVIEW

Chapter 1.1

Islam and other religious traditions

Muzammil H. Siddiqi

Islam, taking human religiousness seriously, recognizes it as an absolute and central characteristic of human existence. Human religiousness however, has been expressed in history in a wide variety of ways. As a result, many religious traditions have accumulated, each with its distinctive doctrines and practices. This chapter attempts to explore Islamic attitudes and approaches to other religions, from both the doctrinal and historical perspectives. We shall see how Islamic thought in its formative period viewed the phenomenon of diversity of faiths and cultures, and shall then examine how Muslims, as a religio-political entity, dealt with non-Muslims, especially those living in the domain of Islam (*Dār al-Islām*). Finally, in the light of this cumulative tradition of Islamic thought and practice, we shall attempt to suggest the directions in which intellectual effort is needed for a better inter-religious understanding that would serve as the basis for a more fruitful relationship between the followers of Islam and other faiths.

The Qurʾānic view of religious diversity

Before we embark on a study of the prevalent attitude(s) of Muslims towards other religions in the early centuries of Islam, it is important to see how the Qurʾān itself views human religiousness and the phenomenon of religious diversity in human history. For the Qurʾān, as we know, has been and remains the most important source of the thought and action of Muslims. It is the Word of God as revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad. It has therefore played, and continues to play, a pivotal role in the formulation and development of the Islamic perspective pertaining to virtually all aspects of life. Likewise, the *Sunna* –

that is, the normative and authoritative traditions embodying the sayings, actions and attitude of the Prophet – is also of great importance since its predominant function has been to explain, elaborate and apply the Qur'ānic teachings to different aspects of life. The *Sunna* has also played a great role in the shaping of Islamic law, including the laws which regulate the relations of Muslims with non-Muslims, especially those living in the Islamic lands.

The Qur'ān concerns itself with a number of vital questions pertaining to the unity and diversity of humankind, and religion and its diversity in human life. What is the origin of human beings? Where did they receive their religious consciousness from? How did they become divided into various cults and communities? These are some of the most important questions that we shall look into in the Qur'ān and see how it answers these questions, for, without grasping the Qur'ānic viewpoint on these questions, it would hardly be possible to appreciate the Muslim theological formulations concerning other religions.

Nature and origin of human beings

The Qur'ān emphasizes that God, the creator of everything and everyone in the universe, bestowed a special and honoured place upon human beings: 'We surely honoured the children of Adam and provided them with transport on land and sea, gave them good and pure things for sustenance, and conferred on them special favours above a great part of Our creation,' it says (XVII.70)[1]. It is perhaps a measure of this special position that God created the first human being, Adam, with His own hands (XXXVIII.75) and breathed into him out of His spirit (XV.29; XXXVIII.72). God gave man the faculties not only of seeing and hearing but also of intellect (*fuʾād*) (XVI.78; XXIII.78; XXXII.9; XLVI.26 and LXVII.23) as well as the capacity to articulate (*bayān*) (LV.4). God also gave human beings a special knowledge which even the angels did not possess (II.31, 32) and placed them on earth as His vicegerents (II.30). Moreover, He created everything in the heavens and the earth for human beings (XXXI.20; XLV.13) and granted them authority over His creation (VI.165; XVII.70; XXXV.39). Over and above all this, God also gave human beings the freedom to choose between right and wrong (LXXVI.3; XCI.8).

The Qur'ān also emphasizes the essential unity and interrelatedness of all human beings as the children of Adam (see II.213; VII.26, 27, 31, 35, 172; XVII.70; XXXVI.60 and XLIX.13). This interrelatedness embraces both genders (III.195; IV.1) as well as all tribes and races (XLIX.13).

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1. All references to the Qur'ān are by *sūra* (chapter) followed by *āya* (verse). The rendering of Qur'ānic verses is as in the well-known translation of the Holy Book by ʿAbdullāh Yūsuf ʿAlī, slightly modified [Eds].

Religious consciousness among human beings

Human beings, the Qur'ān suggests, are religious by nature. This is so because God instilled in them His awareness through their 'primordial nature' (*fiṭra*) (XXX.30).[2] This primordial nature in human beings is so constituted as to enable them to recognize God, truth and goodness. All human beings have common religiousness, just as they have common sense. Furthermore, this original nature was strengthened by the 'primordial covenant' (*mīthāq*) that God took from every person in their pre-existence:

> And when your Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves (saying:) 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Yea! We do testify', lest you should say on the Day of Judgment: 'Of this we were never mindful.' (VII.172)

The story of the origin of human beings is related in the Qur'ān in several places (see, for instance, II.30–9; VII.11–25; XV.26–44; XVII.61–5; XVIII.50; XX.115–23; XXXVIII.71–85), and on each occasion some fresh point or new insight is introduced. The basic message of the story is that God honoured the first parents of humanity and allowed them to stay in Paradise for some time. God told them that they might enjoy everything, might eat and drink all they wished, but were required not to approach a certain tree. However, Iblīs – the devil who was their enemy – misled both of them, causing them to be expelled from Paradise, thereafter they were told to beware of the Devil and not to fall into his trap. They were also assured that God would send His guides and messengers among them to show them the path of truth and righteousness. If they followed God's prophets and messengers they would return to Paradise wherein they had been originally placed, or else they would lose it forever and end up in the perdition of Hell. (See II.38–9 and elsewhere in the Qur'ān.)

Thus, as God had promised, messengers were raised from time to time among all peoples. 'There was not a community', says the Qur'ān, 'except that a warner came to them' (XXXV.24). 'For every people there was a guide' (XIII.7). Finally, the last Prophet Muḥammad came, concluding the prophetic line and giving the complete and final message of God to all mankind (XXXIV.28).

The Qur'ān emphasizes that the messages of all the prophets of God were identical, at least as far as fundamental beliefs are concerned (see VII.59–93; XXI.25 and XXVI.1–191) although they differed in some practical details (*sharā'i'*, plural of *Sharī'a*, generally translated as law) presumably in consideration of the vicissitudes of time and place (V.48). The religion of all the prophets and messengers of God throughout history was one and

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2. The Prophet Muḥammad alluded to this in his statement, 'Every child is born with a [primordial] nature, then his parents make him a Jew, a Christian, or a Magian' (al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Janā'iz*, *Bāb Mā qīla fī awlād al-mushrikīn*).

the same – Islam – that is, 'submission to God'.[3] Islam, in this sense, is not a new religion; it is rather the original religion of all humankind. Likewise, the Prophet Muḥammad is not the founder of Islam, but its final message-bearer.

DIVERSITY AMONG HUMAN BEINGS

Although human beings hail from one and the same origin and were originally one community, they do have differences. What are the causes of their differences, and are those differences acceptable to God or not? Answers to these questions are given in different chapters of the Qurʾān. The Qurʾān seems to tell us that there are mainly two types of diversity among human beings: first, the diversity that has been designed by God and is the direct outcome of His action; and second, the diversity that has come about by the attitudes and actions of human beings.

The diversity introduced by God in the human situation consists of the variety of genders, colours and languages among human beings and the multiplicity of races and tribes. These diversities are considered natural and are called 'God's signs' (*āyas*) in the Qurʾān (XXX.20–2). They are indicative of God's creative power and wisdom, and are good and healthy since they endow human life with richness and beauty. God wants human beings to derive benefit from this diversity and not to allow it to generate unhealthy schisms and divisions in their ranks because of the natural variety on grounds of gender, colour, language or racial and tribal origins:

> And from amongst His signs is this that He created you from dust; and then behold, you are humans scattered far and wide. Among His signs is this that He created for you mates from among yourselves that you may dwell in tranquillity with them, and He has put love and mercy between you. Verily in that are signs for those who reflect. And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the variations in your languages and colours; verily in that are signs for those who know. And among His signs is the sleep that you take by night and by day, and the quest that you make for livelihood out of His bounty; verily in that are signs for those who hearken … (XXX.20–3)

Thus, the diversities of races, families and tribes have a healthy, constructive purpose: that 'you may know each other'. In the words of the Qurʾān, 'O people, We have created you from a male and a female and made you into races and tribes so that you may know each other. Surely the most honoured of you in the sight of God is the one who is the most righteous of you' (XLIX.13). However, there is no reason why, instead of enabling human

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3. For Noah see the Qurʾān X.71–2; for Abraham II.130–2; for Joseph XII.101; for Moses X.84; for some prophets of Israel V.44; for Jesus III.52; and for the followers of Jesus V.111; etc.

beings to know each other better, these diversities should create barriers, let alone cause animosities among them.

In addition to these natural diversities, as pointed out earlier, there are others that were introduced by human beings. These are, for instance, diversities of viewpoints. The Qurʾān recognizes the individuality of each human being as well as the individuality of their groups and communities. Not all diversities of views and opinions are considered evil. On the contrary, sometimes the difference of opinion (*ikhtilāf*) might be a token of God's mercy.[4] However, the differences that lead to divisions and acrimonious disputes and give rise to sects are denounced in the Qurʾān: 'Those who divided their religion and broke up into sects, you have no Part in them in the least. Their affair is with Allāh. He will, in the end, tell them the truth of all that they did' (VI.159). Such divisions arose, the Qurʾān points out, because of undue selfishness, transgression, aggression and mutual jealousy (II.213; III.19). The Qurʾān also points out that these divisions arose among human beings when they ignored God's word and His guidance and became involved in petty things (II.79), or went to extremes (*ghuluww*) in their religion, corrupting God's message (*taḥrīf*), consigning some parts of it to oblivion or taking one part of God's teachings and ignoring the other. Each group divided God's messages and instead of following the true knowledge (*al-ʿilm*) that was given to them by God's prophets, they followed their own whims and desires (*ahwāʾ*). Thus some religious leaders who were given to evil-doing went astray and also misled their followers (V.177; XLV.18; II.120, 121; XXX.29; XLVII.14, 16; VI.119).

If God had so willed, says the Qurʾān, He could have forced people to come together to the right path. However, He did not do so. God did no more than send His prophets from time to time so that the right path might be made clear to them. As regards the final judgement as to who followed the truth and who did not, that will be made known on the Day of Judgement by God Himself. In keeping with this principle, God also forbade His prophets and other believers from having recourse to coercion in religion. 'There is no compulsion in religion', says the Qurʾān (II.256). The revelation of the Qurʾān had made the truth distinct from falsehood. Hence people were told: 'Let him who wants to believe, believe; and let him who wants to deny, deny' (XVIII.29).

It pleases God that people are led to the right path and follow it, but He would not impose that right path upon them in this world. Instead, He wants them to accept true guidance by their own free choice: 'If God had so willed, He would have made all of you one community, but He has not done so so that He may try you in what He has given you; so compete in goodness.

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4. A saying attributed to the Prophet, but it is probably a saying of some later authorities. See Shams al-Dīn al-Sakhkhāwī, *al-Maqāṣid al-ḥasana,* Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1399/1979, pp. 26–7.

To God shall you all return and He will tell you (the truth) about what you have been disputing' (V.48). This does not mean that God is pleased with or approves religious divisions. It would please God if people were to accept the truth and follow the right way, but He does not force His will upon them and He does not permit any coercion in the choice of religion.

THE QUR'ĀNIC VIEW OF RELIGIONS

The Qur'ān also makes us fully aware that there are a variety of religious communities, each happy with its own version of the truth (XXIII.53; XXX.32). Each of them possesses some truth which is a part of the true Islam in their midst, but regrettably none of them has preserved the message of God in its complete and authentic form (V.13–14). It would perhaps be pertinent at this stage to point out that the Qur'ān does not condemn any religion by name. Instead, it commends the religious communities for whatever good they do and censures them whenever they depart from the true and authentic teachings of the prophets and commit any wrongs. It urges each person to purify their life, to search for the truth, to follow God's true and authentic message, and do so with earnestness and sincerity. Salvation, according to the Qur'ān, does not depend on formal affiliation with one community or the other. It rather depends on having true faith in God and in the Hereafter, and on righteous behaviour (II.62; V.69; XXII.17).[5]

The Qur'ān has also identified some religious communities as the 'People of the Book' (*Ahl al-Kitāb*). Among them, Jews and Christians have a special status. However, they are both praised and criticized. Their prophets are recognized as the authentic spokespeople of God, and several of them are mentioned by name in the Qur'ān. Their religious scriptures are also recognized, albeit along with some reservation about and criticism for the tampering to which they were subjected to by their adherents. Despite this, Islam recognized the right of the adherents of other religions to practise their religion in the Islamic state without any let or hindrance. Muslims were also allowed to have social relations with them: that is, they could eat the flesh of the animals slaughtered by them, and within certain limits; they could also have matrimonial relations with them. As Muslims came into contact with other faiths, they developed their *modus vivendi* in respect of these religious communities broadly on the model of *Ahl al-Kitāb*.

We shall see presently how the historical contacts between Muslims and other religious communities developed, and how they sought, in both theory and practice, to relate to other religious communities.

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5. See also Muzammil H. Siddiqi, 'Salvation in Islamic Perspective', *Islamic Studies*, XXXII, pp. 41–8.

I–1.1   Al-Aqṣā Mosque. Jerusalem
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Muslims' relations with other religious communities

The encounter between Islam and other religions began very early in the history of Islam. In his article on 'Islam and the encounter of religions' this is what Seyyed Hossein Nasr has to say:

> If we exclude the modern period with its rapid means of communication, it can be said with safety that Islam has had more contact with other traditions than any of the world religions. It encountered Christianity and Judaism in its cradle and during its first expansion northward. It met the Iranian religions, both Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism, in the Sassanid Empire. It gradually absorbed small communities in which remnants of last Hellenistic cults continued, especially the Sabaean community of Harran which considered itself the heir to the most esoteric aspect of the Greek tradition. It met Buddhism in northwest Persia, Afghanistan, and Central Asia, and Hinduism in Sind and later throughout the Indian subcontinent. There was even contact with Mongolian and Siberian Shamanism on the popular level. And the Muslims of Sinkiang were in direct contact with the Chinese tradition.[6]

The Prophet Muḥammad himself met, spoke and discussed religious issues with the people of other faiths. After his migration to Medina in the year 622, he met the Jews of that town. Various Christian groups belonging to different sects and persuasions from different parts of Arabia also visited him in

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6.   Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 'Islam and the Encounter of Religions', *Islamic Quarterly*, X, p. 54.

Medina. He sent letters to Christian and other rulers of the Middle East.[7] He was aware of the Sabaeans and probably also met Mazdaeans, Manichaeians and other religious groups. After the Prophet's demise, his Caliphs and their governors encountered different religious communities outside Arabia in the seventh and eighth centuries CE.[8]

Quite a few of these encounters were peaceful. Under the Qurʾānic directive that there be 'no compulsion in religion' (II.256), Muslims allowed these communities to follow their religious beliefs and practices freely. Wherever an Islamic state ruled according to the laws of the *Sharīʿa*, non-Muslim communities were granted the status of *Ahl al-Dhimma* (the protected communities), or *al-Muʿāhadūn* (the holders of covenant). The Dhimmīs were given full rights to live and govern themselves according to the traditions of their faith.[9] In this matter Muslims generally followed the guidance of the Qurʾān, the *Sunna* of the Prophet and the example of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs.

As far as relations with non-Muslims are concerned, the Qurʾān has clearly directed Muslims to be good and benevolent to those non-Muslims who are not actively hostile to Muslims and to honour the commitments they had made to them:

> God forbids you not regarding those who warred not against you on account of religion and drove you not from your homes, that you should be good and benevolent to them and deal justly with them. Lo, God loves the just. (LX.8)

> O you who believe, fulfil your contracts. (V.1)

> And if you give your word, do justice thereunto, even though it be against a kinsman; and fulfil the covenant of God. This He commands you that haply you may remember. (VI.152)

> Be faithful to them [with whom you have a covenant] as long as they are faithful to you. Allāh loves the God-fearing. (IX.7)

The thrust of these teachings was reinforced by the several statements made in the same spirit by the Prophet, who directed Muslims not to

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7. See Ibn Isḥāq, *The Life of Muḥammad. A Translation of Ibn Isḥāq's Sīrat rasūl Allāh*, tr. A. Guillaume, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1955, pp. 652–9.

8. J. Waardenburg has very ably outlined the historical encounter of Islam with other faiths, mentioning details of this encounter century by century and region by region. See Jacques Waardenburg, 'World Religions as Seen in the Light of Islam', in A. T. Welch and P. Cachia (eds), *Islam: Past Influence and Present Challenge*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1979, pp. 248–9.

9. See A. R. Doi, *Non-Muslims Under Sharīʿa*, London, TaHa, 1983, pp. 85–105. See also S.A.A. Maududi, *Rights of Non-Muslims in Islamic States*, Karachi, Islamic Publications, 1961.

be cruel to non-Muslims or deny them their legitimate rights. 'Beware! Whosoever is cruel and hard on a contractee, or who curtails his rights, or burdens him with more than he can endure, or takes anything of his property against his free will, I shall myself be a plaintiff against him on the Day of Judgement.'[10] He also said: 'Once they [non-Muslims] are willing to conclude the *dhimma*-contract, then let it be clearly known to them that all rights and duties are equal and reciprocal between you and them.'[11]

All this was further reinforced by the way the Prophet dealt with the non-Muslims after he became the head of the Muslim community and of the Muslim state in Medina. In this new capacity, the Prophet prepared the document which has come to be presently known as the Constitution of Medina, in which he spelled out the terms that would govern the Muslim community's relations with the non-Muslims living in the realm of Islam. This document clearly laid down: 'All Jews who choose to join us shall have all the protection that Muslims have. Neither will they be oppressed, nor may there be a Muslim communal agitation against them.'[12] When they came under the Islamic rule, the Prophet made the same agreement with the Christians of Najrān:

> The people of Najrān and their dependants, they have God's enjoined protection, and the pledge of His Prophet and Messenger Muḥammad. This equally applies to their property, life, religion, the absent and the present, kith and kin, churches and all that they have, little or much. No bishop in his bishopric can be changed by Muslims, or monk in his monastery. Never will they be humiliated. No army will put its feet on their soil.[13]

During the reign of the early Caliphs, the same rules were followed and new treaties and covenants were made between Muslims and the non-Muslim communities of the conquered territories. The most famous among these treaties is the Covenant of 'Umar that was given to the people of Jerusalem when it came under Islamic rule in the year 15/636. According to this covenant, the people of Jerusalem (Aelia) were granted 'security for their persons and for their churches and their crosses'. They were assured that 'their churches would not be destroyed and the people would not be coerced in any matter pertaining to their religion, and they shall not be harmed'. On their part the

10. Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-Kharāj*, Beirut, Dār al-Maʿrifa, AH 1302, p. 125.
11. ʿAbd Allāh Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī, *al-Tashrīʿ al-islāmī li-ghayr al-muslimīn*, Cairo, Maktabat al-Ādāb, n.d., p. 64. See also Said Ramadan, *Islamic Law: Its Scope and Equity*, n.p., 1970, p. 123.
12. Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya*, Beirut, Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, n.d., II, p. 148.
13. Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-Kharāj, op. cit.*, p. 72.

people of Jerusalem were required to pay *jizya*, just as the people of Madāʾin (Persia).[14]

This is not to suggest that all Muslim rulers or individuals always fully adhered to these principles in letter and spirit and that they never indulged in acts for which they could be faulted. What is undeniable, however, is that for the most part the general attitude of Muslims was that of tolerance and peaceful coexistence. The Christian inhabitants of Muslim states often appreciated the tolerance and the considerate treatment that they received under Islamic rule. Many of them even wrote to their co-religionists about their satisfactory state of affairs. For instance Eliyya, the Metropolitan of Nisibin (399–441/1008–49), wrote to one of his friends:

> What we believe concerning the Muslims is that their obedience and love impresses us more than the obedience of people of all other religions and kingdoms that are opposed to us, whether we are in their land or not, and whether they treat us well or not. And that is because the Muslims regard it as a matter of religion and duty to protect us, to honour us, and to treat us well. And whosoever of them oppresses us, their Master, i.e. their Prophet, will be his adversary on the day of resurrection. And their law approves of us and distinguishes us from the people of other religions, whether Magians or Hindus or Sabians or the others who are opposed to us …. It is clear also that Muslims, when they have oppressed us and done us wrong, and then have turned to their law, find that it does not approve of their harming and oppressing us; but people of other religions, when they honoured us and do us good, and turn to their law, find that it does not praise them for this. So the wrongdoing of the Muslims toward us, and their enmity against us, and their confession that in treating us thus they are acting contrary to their law, is better for us than the good treatment of others who confess that it is contrary to their law to treat us well.[15]

Intellectual encounter and Muslims' study of other faiths

The Muslims' study of other religions, not unlike their practical encounter with their followers, began quite early in the history of Islam. There were many factors that contributed to the development of this field of knowledge. First, there was the Qurʾānic factor. In order to understand the Qurʾān and its references to the religious history of humankind, Muslims had to know about other religions. In order to understand some of the Qurʾānic references

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14. Muḥammad Ḥamīdullāh, *Majmūʿat al-wathāʾiq al-siyāsiyya li-l-ʿahd al-nabawī wa-l-khilāfa al-rāshida*, 3rd ed., Beirut, Dār al-Irshād, 1969, pp. 379–80. See also T. W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam: A History of the Propagation of the Muslim Faith*, Lahore, Pakistan, M. Ashraf, 1961, pp. 56–7.

15. 'Dialogue with the Wazīr al-Maghribī', in L. Cheikho, *Trois Traités*, Beirut, n.p., 1923, pp. 66–7. See also L. E. Browne, *The Eclipse of Christianity in Asia*, New York, Howard Fertig, 1967, pp. 48–9.

to the Biblical prophets and their stories, Muslims looked into the Bible or discussed with Christian and Jewish scholars the personalities and events mentioned in the Bible. They also made comparison between the Qurʾānic and Biblical statements on identical matters. Following the example of the Prophet Muḥammad, who engaged in dialogue with the Jews of Medina and the Christians of Najrān, Muslims held discussions with non-Muslims, especially in the course of introducing Islam to them. These discussions must have taken place at different levels of the society. Unfortunately, history has preserved only some of them, in which the caliphs and their governors took the initiative and invited both Muslim scholars and the religious leaders or scholars of other faiths to engage in inter-religious dialogue.[16]

With the expansion of the Islamic state, Muslims increasingly came into contact with the followers of several other religions. They were thus able to directly observe the religious practices of these non-Muslim religions and form more accurate opinions about them. Many non-Muslims also accepted Islam, and these converts also contributed to this fund of knowledge. The atmosphere of free discussion and interchange with the adherents of other faiths, alongside the large-scale conversion of non-Muslims of various religious backgrounds to Islam, gave rise to discussions on many new issues that had hitherto been unknown to Muslims. The complex politico-religious disputes among Muslims which created factions in their community also gave rise to a plethora of new problems for both Islamic theology and jurisprudence. Questions were raised on issues related to the nature of God, revelation, human freedom, eternal salvation, the relation between faith and action, and so on. There also arose several heresies threatening to subvert the simple and authentic faith expounded by the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*.

16. The earliest dialogue that has come down to us in a more or less complete form is that between the conqueror and the first governor of Egypt ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ (d. *c.* 42/663) the Muslim commander and the Monophysite Patriarch of Antioch, John I (d. 648). This took place in Syria in the year 18/639. ʿAmr asked John the Patriarch to speak about the Gospels, the person of the Christ, Christian laws, and how he would reconcile the Christian doctrine of the divinity of Christ with the teachings of the earlier prophets of God mentioned in the Old Testament. A lengthy and interesting discussion followed. John was able to speak freely without any inhibition in the presence of the Muslim commander.' (See M. F. Nau, 'Un colloque du Patriarche Jean avec l'Emir des Agaréens', *Journal Asiatique*, V, 1915, pp. 225–69. Another interesting inter-religious discussion took place between the third ʿAbbāsīd Caliph al-Mahdī (d. 169/785) and the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I (d. 823). This continued for two days and involved discussions about the Christian doctrines of the Incarnation, the Trinity, the Christian scriptures, the prophesies about the Prophet Muḥammad in the Bible, and the Christian laws. See A. Mingana (ed. and trans.), *The Apology of Timothy the Patriarch before the Caliph Mahdī*, Woodbrooke Studies, Cambridge, 1928, II, pp. 1–90. Both of these and other early Muslim–Christian dialogues are mentioned in my unpublished doctoral dissertation, 'Muslim views of Christianity in the Middle Ages: an Analytical Study of Ibn Taymiyya's Work on Christianity', Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 1978, pp. 6–18.
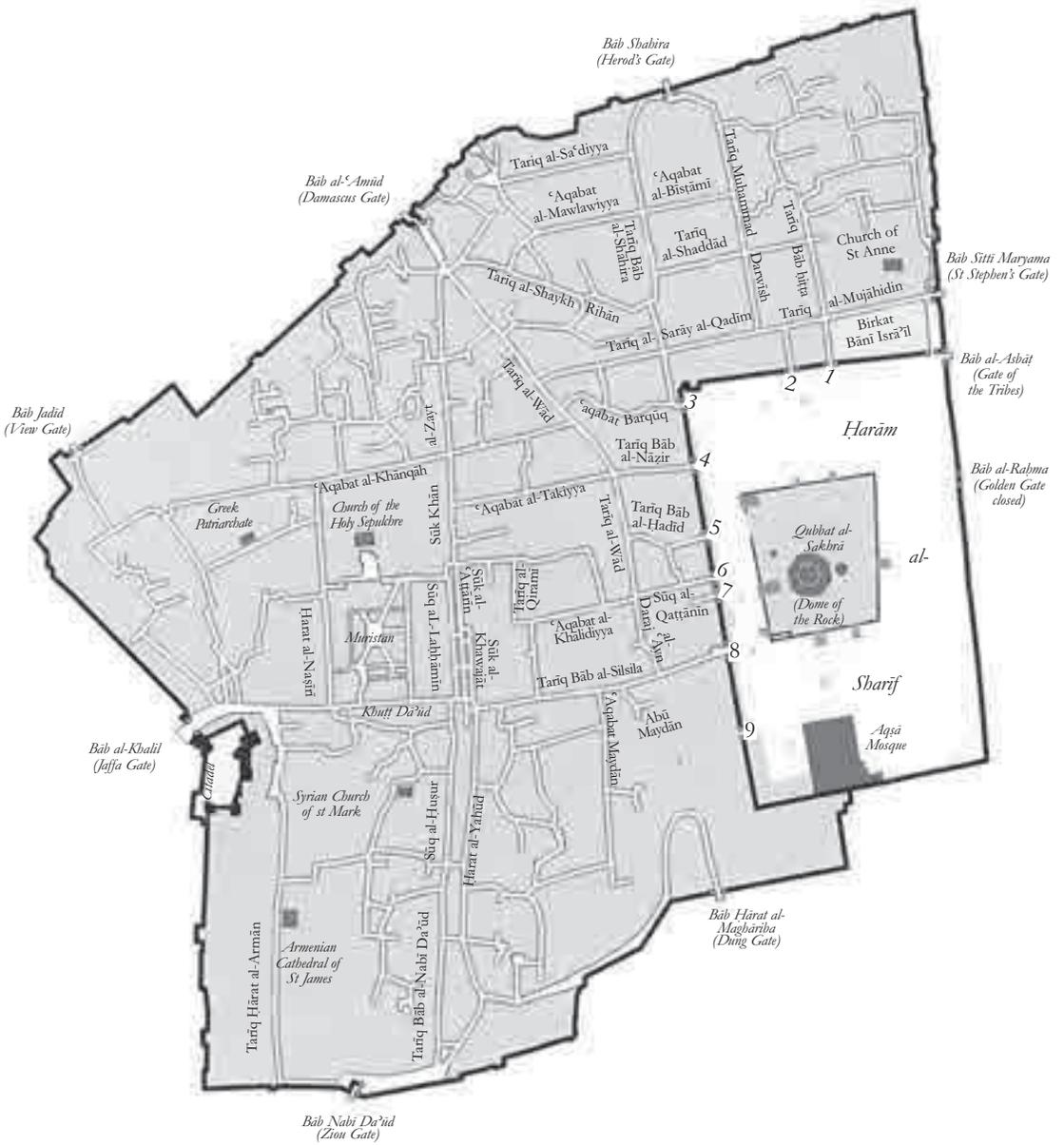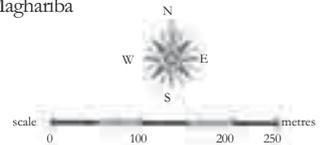
I–1.2   Map of Jerusalem
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It was natural in the context of these developments that many Muslims felt the need to study carefully the religions and philosophies of others in order to defend Islam and refute the teachings of the groups that were opposed to or deviated from Islam. Thus *kalām*, a new genre of learning dealing with faith and theology, was born in Islam. Muslim theologians began their studies on different beliefs and cults. They compiled and put together every conceivable doctrine that they found around them. Their books also contained refutations and rebuttals of the heresies that had emerged among Muslims. At the same time they must be credited for bringing together a wealth of information about a great many religions and philosophies other than Islam. These works exhibit a universalist spirit and approach. Thus, Muslim scholars developed in the course of time a very rich and engaging tradition in comparative religion.[17] Theologians, historians and commentators of the Qur'ān all contributed to this academic field. Franz Rosenthal has rightly observed:

> The comparative study of religion has been rightly acclaimed as one of the great contributions of Muslim civilization to mankind's intellectual progress. Bestriding the middle zone of the Oikeumene, Medieval Islam had contact with many religions and probably all conceivable types of religious experience… There were also two possible ways to confront the challenge arising out of the multiplicity of competing religions. It could either be blandly ignored or it could be met head on. Greatly to our benefit, Muslim intellectuals chose the second alternative.[18]

Some of the basic Islamic approaches and positions relating to the major religions of the world will now be outlined.

ISLAM AND THE BIBLICAL RELIGIONS

The Qur'ān has generally used the expression *Ahl al-Kitāb* (the People of the Book) for Jews and Christians, thereby recognizing their distinctive position in the eyes of Muslims. Their God and the God in whom Muslims believe in is one and the same (III.64; XXIX.46). Additionally, as mentioned earlier, the Qur'ān mentions many of their prophets by name as God's true prophets

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17. Waardenburg has noted that 'after the *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 377/987) the work of scholars like Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) and al-Bīrūnī (d. after 442/1050), al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) and Rashīd al-Dīn (d. 718/1318) provide evidence of a relatively high state of knowledge available in medieval Islamic civilization about religions other than Islam. Then, from the fourteenth century onward, there was a sharp decline of interest in them, and it is only in the last thirty years that books about comparative religion have been written again by Muslim authors.' See Waardenburg, 'World religions …', *op. cit.*, p. 270, n. 1.
18. B. Lawrence, *Shahrastānī on Indian Religions*, Religion and Society Series 4, The Hague and Paris, Mouton, 1976, preface by Franz Rosenthal, p. 2.

(VI.83–7), prophets in whom Muslims are required to believe, and should hold in veneration (II.136). Their scriptures – the Pentateuch (*Tawrāt*), the Psalms (*Zabūr*) and the Gospel (*Injīl*) – are regarded as books revealed by God. In view of the above, it is understandable why Islam permitted Muslims to have preferential relations with *Ahl al-Kitāb*. Notwithstanding all this, there are certain differences between Islam, Judaism and Christianity which the Qurʾān does not fail to mention and even emphasize.

Let us consider, first, the attitude adopted by Muslims towards the followers of Biblical religions.

Judaism

The Qurʾān speaks extensively about the Children of Israel (*Banū Isrāʾīl*) and recognizes that the Jews (*al-Yahūd*) are, according to their lineage, an offshoot of the ancient Children of Israel. They are the descendants of the Prophet Abraham through his son Isaac and grandson Jacob. They were chosen by God for a mission (XLIV.32), and God raised among them many prophets and bestowed upon *Banū Isrāʾīl* what He had not bestowed upon any others (V.20). He exalted them over the other nations of the earth (II.47, 122) and granted them a holy land (V.21).

Banū Isrāʾīl, however, repeatedly disobeyed God and showed ingratitude for these favours: they lost the original *Tawrāt* that was given to them, and introduced their own ideas in the sphere of religion for which they had no sanction from God. They became arrogant and claimed that they were God's children, and went about vaunting their position as His most chosen people (IV.155; V.13, 18). They also brazenly committed sins, and their rabbis and priests did not stop them from doing so (V.63, 79). God raised His Prophet Jesus among them so that he might confront them with several miracles and thereby guide them to the right path, but they rejected him, attempted to kill him, and even claimed that they had indeed killed him although they had not been able to do so. (It was by an act of extraordinary intervention that God saved Jesus and raised him towards Himself: IV.157, 158.) Finally, God sent His last Messenger Muḥammad to them even as He sent him to all humankind, but they became spiteful towards him and rejected him since he did not belong to the Children of Israel (II.109; IV.54).

Despite all this, says the Qurʾān, not all of them are alike. Among them there are also pious and righteous people, and when they recite the Book of God and pray to God, tears flow from their eyes. Such people command what is right and forbid what is wrong, and try to exceed each other in acts of charity and goodness. Such are assured that whatever good they will do will not be denied them and they shall receive their reward with God (III.113–15). This is basically what the Qurʾān says about the Jews.

I–1.3   Rug with the Dome of the Rock and the first part of the first
verse of Sūra XVII (al-Isrāʾ)

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After his migration to Medina, the Prophet Muḥammad had a troubled relationship with the Jews. Quite early during his stay in that city, he entered into a covenant with them, making them a part of the Islamic body-politic in which they had reciprocal rights and duties with the Muslims.[19] The Prophet also invited them to Islam and treated them as equal partners in the nascent state of Medina. They, however, not only rejected his claim to be a prophet but in the course of time also broke the terms of the covenant and the treaty relations in which they had entered with him and engaged in acts of active hostility. The Prophet dealt with their hostile posture by resorting to a series of firm and resolute actions against them. In spite of this conflict between the Muslims and the Jews in the early history of Islam, the Muslims did not have any trouble in interacting with them subsequently. There was no special anti-Jewish feeling among Muslims. On the contrary, Jews lived in peace and flourished in the Islamic state. As Ismāʿīl al-Fārūqī writes:

> When the Islamic state expanded to include northern Arabia, Palestine, Jordan and Syria, Persia and Egypt, where numerous Jews lived, they were automatically treated as legal citizens of the Islamic state. This explains the harmony and cooperation that characterized Muslim–Jewish relations throughout the centuries that followed.
>
> For the first time in history since the Babylonian invasion of 586 BCE, and as citizens of the Islamic state, the Jew could model his life after the Torah and do so legitimately, supported by the public laws of the state where he resided. For the first time, a non-Jewish state put its executive power at the service of a rabbinic court. For the first time, the state assumed responsibility for the maintenance of Jewishness, and declared itself ready to use its power to defend the Jewishness of Jews against the enemies of Jewishness, be they Jews or non-Jews. After centuries of Greek, Roman, and Byzantine (Christian) oppression and persecution, the Jews of the Near East, of North Africa, of Spain and Persia, looked upon the Islamic state as liberator.[20]

Apart from other aspects of the relations with the Jews, Muslim scholars also studied Judaism with great interest. It was perhaps they who initiated the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Arabic. The translation of Saʾdya the Gaon (279–331/892–942)[21] was made under Muslim patronage. Muslim scholars such as al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153), Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) and several other

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19. See Ibn Isḥāq, *The Life of Muḥammad*, *op. cit.*, pp. 231–3.

20. Ismāʿīl R. al-Fārūqī and Lois Lamyāʾ al-Fārūqī, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*, New York, Macmillan, 1986, pp. 194–5.

21. Saʾdya was a Jew from Fayyum in Upper Egypt. He translated the Pentateuch mostly from the Masoretic text of the Hebrew but also used the targum of Onkelos and the Greek Septuagint. See F. C. Burkitt, 'Arabic versions', in *A Dictionary of the Bible*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905, pp. 136–8.

scholars were fully aware of various Jewish sects and their positions. Ibn Taymiyya (d. 652/1254), who wrote a full-scale work in refutation of Christianity, was also well-versed in Judaism and made references to the Masoretic and Samaritan Bibles.[22]

Beside their studies of Judaism and its various sects and beliefs, Muslim scholars also critically examined the biblical text. The Qurʾān has charged *Ahl al-Kitāb* with changing their scriptures. *Taḥrīf* (corruption or removal of words: II.75; IV.46; V.13, 41), and *tabdīl* (substitution or alteration: II.59; VII.162) are the main terms that have been used in the Qurʾān to describe the changes to which the biblical text was subjected. The Qurʾān also says that 'they forgot some of the messages' (V.13, 14). Muslim scholars attempted to examine how these changes took place. Some believed that the changes were caused by misinterpretation (*taḥrīf al-maʿnā*) while others believed that the changes embraced both in words and meanings (*taḥrīf al-lafẓ wa-l-maʿnā*). Some took the position that in the *Tawrāt* the corruption occurred mostly in the narrative part (*akhbār*) rather than the legislative part (*aḥkām*), while in the Gospels it occurred in both the narrative and the legislative parts.[23]

The Jewish concept of the 'Chosen People' was also questioned by Muslims. They posed the question whether this chosenness was conditional, being contingent upon their pursuit of a mission, or was unconditional and had nothing to do with promoting the message of God and acting as witnesses on His behalf. The notion of unconditional chosenness was criticized as arbitrary and unethical, as a notion that could not be from the God who is just and loves all humankind without any distinction of race and colour. Muslim scholars also critically examined the Jewish position that the Mosaic law was valid for all times and could not be replaced by the Islamic *Sharīʿa*. An interesting debate on the possibility or impossibility of *naskh* (abrogation) also continued for centuries between Muslim and Jewish scholars.

Christianity

Like Jews, Christians are also recognized in Islam as the 'People of the Book'. Thanks to the teachings of Islam in regard to them, Christians have a special status which is reflected in the Islamic theology of religions as well as in the socio-political attitude of Muslims towards them. The Qurʾān itself has made some very positive statements about Christians (II.62; V.69 and 82). Likewise, Jesus has been assigned an exalted position (II.87, 253; III.45; IV.171; VI.85). The Qurʾān speaks about his miracles in glowing terms (III.49). There is no religion other than Christianity that has spoken as highly about Jesus as Islam.

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22. See Siddiqi, 'Muslim views …', *op. cit.*, pp. 152–6.
23. I have described in detail various positions held by Muslim scholars on this point in *ibid.*, pp. 196–204.

Historically speaking, Muslims came into contact with Christians very early in their history. The Prophet Muḥammad himself had meetings and discussions with them. The attitude of the Prophet was reflective of the Qurʾānic attitude towards Jesus and his followers.

The basic position of the Qurʾān is that Jesus was a Prophet of God who was born miraculously to Mary, a highly pious Israelite lady. She was a virgin consecrated for the service of the Temple. The angel of God visited her and gave her the good news of the birth of a noble child. When she delivered the baby and came to her people, they accused her of unchastity. Jesus, however, grew up as a young man and God conferred upon him prophethood and wisdom. He received the Gospel as a divine message given to him to deliver to his people (XIX.21–34).[24] He preached to the Israelites about God, truth and holiness. God saved Jesus from the attempt to kill him and he was raised to the heavens where he is alive and shall return to the earth before the end of time to fulfil his Messianic mission (IV.157–9). After his departure from earth, however, those who followed him became confused about him (XIX.37). They split up into a number of sects and factions and fought each other (II.253). They consigned the true message of Jesus to oblivion. Some of them called him God and Son of God, following in the steps of the pagans among whom they lived (IX.30, 31). They introduced priesthood and monasticism, which God had not prescribed for them (LVII.27). They also introduced the concepts of the Trinity and Incarnation (V.72, 73) which were also devoid of any sanction from God. Notwithstanding, the Qurʾān says that there are righteous and pious people among them, those who are humble and show no arrogance. They are also the people closest to and most conspicuous in their affection to Muslims (V.82, 83).

With the expansion of the Islamic state to other countries such as Syria, Iraq, North Africa and Spain, Muslims came into direct contact with Christians belonging to almost all their major sects. Millions of Christians lived under Islamic rule, so it was possible for Muslims to interact with them and to learn more about their religion directly from them. Muslims wrote a large number of books and treatises, both short and long, on Christianity. Some of these works were written for the purpose of inviting Christians to Islam, works written with a view to enable the latter to see the strength of Islamic doctrinal positions and, in contrast, the weakness of their own doctrinal positions. Other works were written as responses to Christian polemics against Islam and Muslims. Besides, there are also historical and plain descriptive works that

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24. I have discussed the similarities and differences between the Qurʾān and the New Testament on the description of Jesus in Siddiqi, 'Jesus in the Qurʾān: Some Similarities and Differences with the New Testament', in M. R. Waldman (ed.), *Muslims and Christians, Muslims and Jews*, Columbus, Ohio, Islamic Foundation of Central Ohio and the Catholic Diocese of Columbus, Ohio, 1992, pp. 35–46.

were written to inform the readers about non-Muslim religious groups and their doctrines. The following issues received special attention from Muslim scholars when they wrote on or about Christianity:

- The Christian doctrines of God, and more specifically, the doctrine of the Trinity;
- Christian doctrines and beliefs about Jesus, his life and his alleged Crucifixion. Also related to these views were the doctrines of Incarnation, the Sonship of Christ, his role as a Redeemer and the idea of Original Sin;
- Christian scriptures, their history, their questionable authenticity, and connected with this, the issue of the prophesies of Jesus about the Prophet Muḥammad; and
- Christian laws and practices.[25]

Muslim authors critically questioned whether the doctrine of the Trinity was compatible with the teachings of Islam on the oneness of God (*tawḥīd*). There were interesting debates on this subject between Muslims and Christians. Both parties resorted to their respective scriptural as well as theological and philosophical arguments in support of their doctrinal positions. Muslims are unanimous that though the Qurʾān and the New Testament have very different purposes and objectives when they talk about Jesus, his description in both the scriptures has many similarities and Muslims can learn a great deal about the person of Jesus from the accounts of him in the Gospel. Muslim writers never hesitated to quote some of the sayings of Jesus in the New Testament. Many details of his birth, life and works were taken over from the New Testament. Muslims were, however, careful to point out that the New Testament did not always represent the most authentic words and descriptions of Jesus. The Gospels were not written in Jesus' own time or in the language that he spoke. Moreover their authors were not the eyewitnesses of the events that they recounted, and those books were not always transmitted very carefully.

The New Testament was viewed by Muslim authors in the same way as was the Hebrew Bible: it had the words of God and His Prophets but it also had been subjected to *taḥrīf* and *tabdīl*. Concerning the title 'Son of God' for Jesus, some authors take the position that this title was falsely attributed to Jesus, while others hold that if Jesus had ever used it, then it must have been in a metaphorical, rather than in a literal sense.[26] Muslim authors also believe that most of the laws and practices of the Christian churches were introduced after the time of Jesus, and that they reflected Graeco-Roman and other foreign influences.

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25. See Siddiqi, 'Muslim views …', *op. cit.*, p. 276.
26. A very interesting work holding this position is attributed to the famous Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111). See R. Chidiac (ed. and tr.), *al-Radd al-jamīl li-ilāhiyyat ʿĪsā bi-ṣarīḥ al-Injīl*, Paris, E. Leroux, 1939.

Several of these works indicate their authors' thorough knowledge of the Christian scriptures, beliefs, doctrines and sects. Muslim writings on Christianity, however, are not monolithic. The socio-political conditions in which different Muslim authors lived and worked, and their own philosophical and theological positions, did influence their works and opinions about Christian faith and doctrines. It is, however, a unique characteristic of medieval Muslim writings on Christianity that they were generally written with deep religious feelings and dignity. Even while disagreeing with the basic Christian beliefs and doctrines, Muslim authors did not engage in deliberate distortions, contemptuous remarks, abuses and innuendoes. Caricatures of Christian faith and morality in these writings are scarce, and occur only on rare occasions, which were generally caused by external factors such as wars and/or some socio-economic strains in Muslim–Christian relations.[27]

Islam and non-biblical religious traditions

We have noted earlier that, according to the Qurʾān, God's guidance was communicated to all peoples and none were deprived of His message (see XXXV.24; XIII.7, etc.). God, the Lord of the whole universe, does not have a special relationship with the people of any particular region. When God raised the Prophet Muḥammad, it was neither for the first time that a prophet was sent to Arabia, nor did God necessarily send all His prophets to the region that is presently called the Middle East. Prophets were raised from the beginning of time and were designated to all peoples and regions of the world. Some prophets are specifically mentioned in the Qurʾān while many others are not so mentioned: 'Of some messengers We have related to you the stories before and of others We have not' (IV.164).

It is obvious that the Qurʾān is not an encyclopedia of religions, or a book on the history of religions. It is primarily a book of religious guidance. It clearly and categorically states that God had made religious guidance available to all. It also illustrates this point by mentioning the names of some prophets, whose names and stories were known and familiar to the first addressees of the Qurʾān, namely the Arabs.[28]

27. See Siddiqi, 'Muslim views …' *op. cit.*, p. 280. This is perceptibly different from the style and attitude of Byzantine and other Western Christian authors who wrote about Islam. For a good study of their writings see N. Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1960, and R.W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1962.

28. The Qurʾān mentions twenty-five prophets by name. Of these, twenty-one are the same as those mentioned in the Jewish and Christian Bible. The Prophets Hūd, Ṣāliḥ and Shuʿayb are not mentioned in the Bible. As for the Prophet Muḥammad, according to the Qurʾān, he is mentioned in the Bible (see VII.157), but the Jews and Christians do not recognize that.

When Muslims came into contact with the followers of other religions and tried to understand them and their faiths, they kept in mind the Qurʾānic model regarding the People of the Book. At the practical level, Muslims treated the followers of these religions more or less as they had treated the People of the Book before. Thus the model developed for the treatment of Christians was applied to Zoroastrians when Muslims entered Persia in 14/636. Subsequently, when Muḥammad ibn Qāsim entered India in 91/711 Muslims came into contact with Hindus and Buddhists. Muḥammad ibn Qāsim wrote to the caliph in Damascus seeking his instructions about how to treat Hindus and Buddhists. 'They appeared to worship idols and their doctrines were at the farthest remove from Islam. Their founders were unheard of by Muslims.' The Caliph called a council of *ʿulamāʾ* and asked them to render judgment on the basis of the governor's report. The judgment was that as long as the Hindus and Buddhists did not raise arms against the Islamic state, and paid *jizya*, they were free to 'worship their gods' as they pleased, to maintain their temples and to determine their lives by the precepts of their faith. Thus, they were accorded the same status as the Jews and Christians.[29]

Later, when Muslim scholars travelled to India or had the opportunity to study the Indian religions, they developed the categories of thought required to include these religions in their universal theology of religions.

Hinduism

Among the non-Middle Eastern religious traditions, Hinduism received by far the greatest attention from Muslims. On the popular level Hinduism was very different from Islam, but Muslims soon realized that India also had some profound spiritual, religious and intellectual traditions. Abu-l-Rayḥān Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Bīrūnī (d. *c.* 442/1050) was perhaps the first Muslim scholar who studied Sanskrit and gave very serious thought to Indian traditions. He not only translated Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* into Arabic, but also wrote his very serious work on India and its religious and philosophical traditions.[30] Waardenburg notes that al-Bīrūnī 'believed in the "original unity of higher civilizations", and he opened the eyes of educated Muslims to Indian, in addition to Greek science and philosophy, and held that both could be integrated into one intellectual worldview.' Al-Bīrūnī extended his affirmation of God's universality to the point where he contended that

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29. Al-Fārūqī, *The Cultural Atlas …*, *op. cit.*, pp. 198–9.

30. Al-Bīrūnī, Abu-l-Rayḥān Muḥammad b. Aḥmad, *Taḥqīq mā li-l-hind min maqāla maqbūla fī-l-ʿaql aw mardhūla*, ed. E. Sachau, London, 1887, repr. Hyderabad, Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1958. The English translation of the work by E. Sachau was published in London in 1887 and reprinted in Hyderabad in 1910.

Greeks and Hindus knew of Him as the One and sought spiritual unification (*ittiḥād*), leading not only to scholarly knowledge but also to insight of the mind.[31] Al-Bīrūnī realized that while the intellectuals or elite (*khawāṣu*) among the Greeks and Indians recognized one universal divine being, the masses remained submerged in idolatry and superstition.

Al-Bīrūnī opened the way for Muslims to have a sympathetic view of Hinduism. A hundred years later Shahrastānī in his *Kitāb al-Milal wa-l-Niḥal* reckoned Hindus among those who could be called '*Semi-Ahl al-Kitāb*' (*man lahum shubhat al-Kitāb*).[32] Bruce Lawrence observes that for Shahrastānī Hindus were like the Sabians (*al-Ṣābi'ūn* of the Qur'ān), and could be divided into various groups according to their degrees of idol worship. Thus:

> The Vaisnavas and Saivas are like the *Ṣabi'a aṣḥāb al-ruḥāniyyāt*: they venerate Visnu and Siva as Spiritual Beings or mediators who were incarnated and brought laws, albeit without a scripture, so they cannot be called idolaters in the real sense of the word. Those adoring Aditya and Chandra (sun and moon considered as deities) are star worshippers (*'ibādat al-kawākib*) which is a grade lower but still not idolatry. Only those who adore and prostrate themselves before real idols are real idolaters (*'ibādat al-aṣnām*) of the lowest rank, like the Arabs of the *Jāhiliyya*.[33]

Although Muslim scholars were critical of the Hindu practice of idol worship, the doctrine of the transmigration of the souls (*tanāsukh al-arwāḥ*), the caste system, extreme asceticism and some other peculiar customs and practices such as the burning of widows to death (*satee*), they also had positive appreciation for many aspects of Hinduism. Although Dārā Shikūh (d. 1070/1659),[34] the great-grandson of the Moghul Emperor Akbar (d. 1014/1605), did not believe in his great-grandfather's eclectic and syncretistic religion known as *Dīn-i Ilāhī*, as a scholar of Sanskrit language and Hindu religion, he very much wanted a rapprochement between Islam and Hinduism. He was responsible for the translation of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the *Yoga Vaisishtha* and the *Upanishads* into Persian. It was from these Persian translations that the later Latin translations of these books were done. Dārā Shikūh suggested 'that all holy books including the Vedas stem from one source, that they constitute a commentary on each other'.[35]

31. Waardenburg, 'World religions …', *op. cit.*, p. 253.
32. Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa-l-niḥal*, ed. Muḥammad Sayyid Kaylānī, Beirut, Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1975, 2 vols.
33. B. D. Lawrence, 'Shahrastani on Indian idol worship', *Studia Islamica,* XXXVII, 1973, pp. 61–73.
34. Shahrastānī, *al-Milal* …, *op. cit.*, I, p. 38.
35. Bikrama Jit Hasrat, *Dara Shikoh: Life and Works*, 2nd ed., New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1982, pp. 174–287.

Buddhism

Like Hinduism, Buddhism is one of the major religions of the world. Muslims encountered Buddhism very early in their history. Buddhists lived alongside Muslims in Central and South-East Asia, and there are still sizeable Muslim minorities in Buddhist countries, such as Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Viet Nam and Cambodia. Also in China, Muslims had daily encounters with Buddhists.

Although Muslim scholars did not write on Buddhism as much as they wrote on Hinduism, they nevertheless seemed to have had good basic knowledge of the life of Buddha and his religious precepts.[36] They were also aware of many groups and sects among the Buddhists. There is such a variety of religious expressions in Buddhism that scholars have rightly spoken of Buddhism as not a single religion but a whole family of religions. Thus it was difficult for early Muslim scholars to take a single position about this faith. They spoke about the Buddhist doctrines of rebirth, Bodhisattvas (Buddhist saints or enlightened persons), and monasticism as well as idol worship. The Buddhists with whom Muslims came into contact were so closely identified with idol worship that their very founder's name, Buddha, became a synonym for idol, in Persian and subsequently in Urdu.

Buddhism seems to have had a degree of influence on some of the Sufi practices. ʿAziz Aḥmad, in *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment*, expresses the opinion that some of the Sufi exercises such as *ḥabs-i dam* (holding back of breath) seem to be of Buddhist provenance. The Sufi concept of 'peace with all' (*sulḥ-i kul*), which became a feature of several Sufi groups of India in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, seems to have been borrowed much earlier from Mahayana Buddhism. Also, it is possible that the concentration of the Sufi disciple on the teacher's image in the early stages of an initiate's education was adopted from Buddhism.[37]

Towards new horizons in the Muslim approach to other faiths

There are basically three positions that the adherents of major religions have taken towards faiths other than their own. We may call these positions exclusivist, inclusivist and pluralistic. The exclusivists generally consider their own religion to be true and brand all other religions as untrue, false and even demonic. They generally have a strong missionary impulse and consider eternal salvation to be the exclusive privilege of the adherents of their faith alone. As for others, exclusivists believe them to be destined for Hell and

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36. See, for example, Shahrastānī, *al-Milal …*, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 252–3.
37. ʿAziz Aḥmad, *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1964, pp. 125–6.

damnation. There are others among them who are devoid of any missionary impulse because they may consider their own group to be 'the chosen' one and others far too insignificant to be granted the privilege of sharing their exclusive and special tradition.

The inclusivists, on the other hand, hold that their tradition does not exclude but includes the other traditions. They might believe that what was partially revealed in other traditions is fulfilled in their own, or what was primitive became more complete and developed in their own faith. But they do recognize that some element of truth is available in other faiths as well. They may also have a missionary impulse, and may consider that the assured salvation in the eternal world belongs to the adherents of their faith, but would not necessarily consign others to Hell.

Finally the pluralists generally hold that all faiths are human attempts to seek or to respond to the truth. They believe that the understanding of God and His will is partial in all religious traditions, and no one has an absolute knowledge or possession of the truth. They are also missionary as they also wish that others adhere to their positions. However, they do not pass judgement on who will go to Heaven or to Hell. They hold that anyone who sincerely follows any path to truth and righteousness will be saved.

The Islamic position, as we explained in the beginning of this chapter, seems to fall somewhere in the second category: that of inclusivists. This does not mean that among Muslims there were no exclusivists or pluralists. Muslims had and still have thinkers and scholars who hold strong exclusivist positions, and there have also been a number of Sufis who championed the pluralistic approaches to other faiths. However, based on Qurʾānic data and the extensive discussions and elaborations of scholars and theologians, it would be accurate to say that the Islamic tradition is more inclusive than exclusive or pluralistic. Islam would not accept pluralism on the level of epistemology. A Muslim cannot subscribe to the position that the truth is only partially available to humanity, or that the Qurʾān is essentially a human effort to verbalize the Will of God. Muslims believe that the Qurʾān is the Word of God which gives the most authoritative, authentic and complete guidance towards understanding and living the Will of God. However, on the sociological level, Muslims do recognize that doing the Will of God must be free and voluntary. Islam also advocates peaceful coexistence with all, and upholds the rights of freedom, dignity, honour, life and property for all human beings. It teaches that Muslims must strive to treat others as they themselves would like to be treated. They must wish for others what they wish for themselves. Muslims must never bear false witness against anyone, and must try to live with people of other faiths neither by denying their own faith, nor by denigrating the faith of others.[38]

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38. See p. 32 above.

I–1.4   Jerusalem, the Dome of Notre Dame Church and the Dome
of the Rock
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Islam provides an inclusive, yet critical, approach towards other religions. It recognizes that God's message was available to all peoples in the past and Islam is not the name of an exclusive religion that became known for the first time to humankind in the seventh century through the Prophet Muḥammad. Instead, Islam has been available virtually in all religious traditions. Originally all these traditions received the full measure of truth. Islam does not subscribe at all to the notion that the truth was given to them partially or in a primitive form and it became fully available only in the Islam that was vouchsafed to/by the Prophet Muḥammad.[39] At the same time, the Islamic position is also critical. It evaluates other traditions from its own historical and truth perspective, identifying their positive and negative aspects.

Among modern Muslim comparative religionists it was Ismāʿīl Rājī al-Fārūqī (d. 1986)[40] who strongly advocated this position. We would like to explain his position because, in our view, it adequately articulates the Islamic

39. A contemporary Muslim thinker has put it very beautifully: 'God never gave a defective (*nāqiṣ*) religion to any of His creatures', W. Khan, *Ẓuhūr-i Islām*, Delhi, Maktabah'i al-Risāla, 1984, p. 6.
40. For biographical details on Ismāʿīl al-Fārūqī see M. Shafiq, *Growth of Islamic Thought in North America*, Brentwood, Md., Amana, 1994, pp. 7–39.

position and promises a very positive development in Muslim understanding and study of other religions. Al-Fārūqī proceeded with his work in the field of comparative religion on this approach, but his death prevented the full development even of his approach as it prevented publications to the extent that his fecund academic potential seemed to promise.[41]

Al-Fārūqī believed that the comparative study of religions is a 'supremely ethical endeavour'.[42] In the long preface to his work on *Christian Ethics*, he wrote:

> This branch of learning [meaning comparative religion] has, besides the academic, a particularly serious task to perform. This is, to clean the atmosphere of this world community of all prejudice and misunderstanding and then to establish positively the *essential* of man's fellowship with man in this most important aspect of life.[43]

In order to achieve this ethical objective, al-Fārūqī outlined the task and the nature of work involved in the study of religions. In his 1964 lecture delivered at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago entitled 'History of Religions: its Nature and Significance for Christian Education and the Muslim–Christian dialogue,' he said, 'History of Religions is an academic pursuit composed of three disciplines: reportage, or the collection of data; construction of meaning-wholes, or the systematization of data; and judgement, or evaluation of meaning-wholes.'[44]

In reportage or the collection of data, al-Fārūqī suggested that religious data should be broadly based and every human act should be studied 'because every act is an integral part of the religious complexus.'[45] He criticized the reductionist tendencies of many Western comparativists who tried to give religious data a narrow definition and developed theories that isolate the religious elements and identify them in terms of 'the religious', 'the holy' or 'the sacred'. The second discipline, namely the systemization of data and the construction of meaning-wholes, requires that:

- the data be classified in such a way that it answers the organizational needs of a modern inquiry;

41. For a collection of al-Fārūqī's articles which embody his views on the Islamic attitude to other religious traditions, see his posthumously published series of articles on the subject *Islam and Other Faiths*, ed. Ataullah Siddiqui, Leicester, Islamic Foundation and International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1998.
42. Ismāʿīl R. al-Fārūqī, *Christian Ethics: A Historical and Systematic Analysis of its Dominant Ideas*, Montreal, McGill University Press, 1967, p. 10.
43. *Ibid.*
44. Ismāʿīl R. al-Fārūqī, 'History of Religions: its Nature and Significance for Christian Education and the Muslim–Christian Dialogue,' *Numen*, XII, 1965, p. 35.
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 43.

- the relation of each datum with the whole complexes of history to which it belongs be shown and established; and
- the religious data thus classified and systematized ought to be distilled for their meaning, and these meanings be elucidated and systematized in turn.[46]

In both of these disciplines, al-Fārūqī suggests utmost care and sensitivity. Religious matters, he says, are life-facts and they should not be treated as 'dead-cold data and static external observables in human behaviour' or as 'enemy territory'[47] which must be reconnoitered in order to be conquered with the least possible effort.

The third discipline in the comparative study of religion he calls 'evaluation and judgment'. Here al-Fārūqī very boldly and strongly debates the reasons and justification for evaluation, and outlines the principles and methods of judgment. Many modern students of that discipline have argued that the task of the comparativists' ends at reportage and elucidation. Some phenomenologists called it *epoché*, or suspension of judgement. Scholars of comparative religion were asked to put themselves entirely in parenthesis. This was indeed an improvement on the sad situation of the earlier Western tradition in comparative studies. Al-Fārūqī, however, suggested ways to go beyond *epoché* which, if taken too far, can lead to relativism in epistemology. That, he believed, is a real danger. He forcefully argued that judgement is both necessary and desirable.[48]

Al-Fārūqī's methodology, if adopted and developed further, will definitely lead to the emergence of new horizons in the Islamic approach to other religions. Muslims have to perform this task today. With the growing encounter with people of other faiths in all walks of life, it is important that Muslims engage in both study and dialogue.

There are many areas of commonality between all faiths. It is also possible to cooperate with people of other faiths in a large number of areas of genuine human concern. In all acts of virtue and goodness Islam teaches cooperation with others. There is no reason to believe that to be religious means to be exclusive, to be devoid of concern for others, let alone to be selfish and arrogant. On the contrary, to be religious requires us to work with and for others for the common good, seeking God's bounties on this earth as well as salvation in the Hereafter.

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46. *Ibid.*, pp. 53ff.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
48. Al-Fārūqī, *Christian Ethics* …, *op. cit.*, p. 8. See also Siddiqi, 'Ismāʿīl al-Fārūqī's Methodology in Comparative Religion', *Islamic Horizons*, Aug.–Sept. 1986, pp. 81–2.

Chapter 1.2

THE ISLAMIC APPROACH TO GOD

Zulfiqar Ali Shah

INTRODUCTION

Friedrich Nietzsche (d. 1900 CE) declared God to be dead. This was not a bolt out of the blue, but the progressive culmination of some of the trends triggered by the Enlightenment. Over time, philosophic materialism, agnosticism and a virulently hostile attitude to religion spread around the world, especially among the Western peoples. Only seventeen years after Nietzsche's death, a new Communist regime seized power in Russia and officially adopted atheism as its 'state religion'. This meant not only verbal affirmation of atheism, but also the commitment to aggressively root out the idea of God from human minds. This was considered an integral part of the struggle to liberate humanity. With the passage of time, this ideology took hold of a good part of eastern and central Europe, and around the mid-fifties of China. Leaving aside those who clearly deny God's existence, a great number of people today treat the traditional God and his institutions as irrelevant to their lives. Science, modernity and rationalism, it is claimed, have done away with the need of God in human culture and activity.

James C. Livingston, a scholar of modern religious thought, believes that the outcome of this development is 'the death of the ultimate ground and support of all traditional values. For over two thousand years, men have derived their "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" from God, but that is now coming to an end.'[1]

Be that as it may, in Islam God remains the central figure in the entire system of existence. He is the alpha and omega of Islamic religion, culture, and civilization. He is the central concern and focus of Muslims at large,

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1. J. C. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought*, New York, Macmillan, 1971, p. 196.

permeating every aspect of their lives. Every Muslim village, town and city resonates, quite literally, with God's glory five times every day.

Thanks to this overwhelming God-concern, the Qur'ān remains one of the most seriously read books in the world. It is the most memorized book, and the book that has the greatest impact on people daily lines. It is God's Word in quite a literal sense, and for this reason Muslims all over the world read it, reflect upon it, and consider it the yardstick to judge human acts. It is accepted as the determining principle and the primary source of the Islamic system of beliefs, laws, and ethics and even emotions and attitudes. It has been the dynamic force behind the rise of Islamic culture and civilization. It is neither ordinary prose nor poetry, yet it has the ability to arouse its hearers and readers to heights of spiritual ecstasy. The Qur'ān's combination of instruction about uprightness in mundane matters and its exhortation to devote single-mindedly to God makes it the most unique book in the world.

The Qur'ān refers to itself as 'guidance for mankind'. It is fully cognizant of its nature and purpose. God and His Revelation fill the consciousness of Muslims with a presence that is perhaps not as conspicuously observable elsewhere. Quite often the dualistic dichotomy of the sacred and the profane plays a key role in the life of humans, dividing their existence into two realms: the secular and the religious. As a result, religious scriptures are usually limited in terms of application to spiritual or so-called religious aspects, while the mundane aspects of life are governed by mostly non-scriptural and culturally conditioned secular norms. The Qur'ān is unique in so far as it tackles this dualistic dichotomy in a manner that allows the sacred to dissolve and overcome the profane, merging life into a God-centred whole, suffusing every aspect with a consciousness of the Divine. In this way, the otherwise mundane dimensions of life, such as politics – in fact, all mundane activities including even acts yielding sense-pleasure – are elevated to the heights of sanctity. Boundaries such as those that exist between the Church and the State are effectively eliminated by submission to God and pursuit of righteousness and justice. In short, each and every aspect of Muslim existence and Islamic society is ultimately rooted in the explicit or implicit teachings of the Qur'ān and hence in God. As the Muslim newborn enters the world, the first thing he/she hears is the *adhān* which is recited into his/her ear. As the child grows, he/she lives his/her entire life surrounded by the sound of the *ādhān* and the Qur'ān, and finally after death, God's mercy is beseeched through the funeral prayers. The Qur'ān is recited on this occasion to mark the transition from this material existence to the life Hereafter. In a sense, all Muslims are enveloped in the psalmody of God and His Word, the Qur'ān, from the cradle to the grave. This has been the situation ever since the advent of Islam in the seventh century CE to the present day.

Not only do Muslims tenaciously hold on to belief in God, but have also resisted the penetration of secularism which banishes godliness from much of human life. Ernest Gellner, a British sociologist, observes:

> At the end of the Middle Ages, the Old World contained four major civilizations. Of these, three are now, in one measure or another, secularized. Christian doctrine is bowdlerized by its own theologians, and deep, literal conviction is not conspicuous by its presence. In the Sinic World, a secular faith has become formally established and its religious predecessors disavowed. In the Indian World, a state and the elite are neutral *vis-à-vis* what is a pervasive folk religion, even if practices such as astrology continue to be widespread. But in one of the four civilizations, the Islamic, the situation is altogether different.[2]

He further argues that 'there is one very real, dramatic and conspicuous exception to all this: Islam. To say that secularization prevails in Islam is not contentious. It is simply false. Islam is as strong now as it was a century ago. In some ways, it is probably much stronger.'[3] He attributes this stability and resisting power to its 'emphatic and severe monotheism, the view that the Message received by the Prophet is, so to speak, terminal, and that it contains both faith and morals—or, in other words, it is both doctrine and law, and that no genuine further augmentation is to be countenanced.'[4]

In Islam, God, the Most Merciful and Compassionate, stands alone: transcendent and majestic. The faith is marked by a strict and uncompromising monotheism which requires its followers to translate into action the Divine attributes of mercy, compassion, charity, love, justice and peace in an effort to establish a human society characterized by devotion to God and righteous and benevolent conduct.

The word 'Islam' means submission and peace:[5] submission to the moral imperatives of the One and only God, and peace with the Creator and His creatures. On the vertical level (God-to-man relationship) Islam means submission. On the horizontal level (man-to-man relationship) it means peace. The true love of God and submission to His commands is the guarantor of peace and harmony among His creatures. In its purest sense Islam is nothing but the act of devoutly loving God and being just and benevolent to His creatures.

Allāh is *al-Salām*, which is one of His Ninety Nine Most Beautiful Names. It means that He is the source and originator of all peace, the peace that

2. E. Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*, London and New York, Routledge, 1993, pp. 5–6.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 5
4. *Ibid.*, p. 6; see also his *Muslim Society*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981.
5. See the root s-l-m in E.W. Lane, *An Arabic English Lexicon,* Lahore, Suhail Academy, 2003; reprinted London and Edinburgh, William and Morgate, 1863, I, pp. 1412ff.

needs to permeate every aspect of this cosmos, especially human society. It is significant that the Prophet used to recite the following supplication after performing the obligatory prayers, and a Muslim is recommended to do the same. It states: 'O Allāh, You are Peace and from You emanates all peace, blessed are You, O Possessor of majesty and honour.'[6] The very first verse of the Qurʾān, 'In the name of Allāh, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate', is an emblem of love, mercy and compassion. The same theme of love and mercy is continuously repeated throughout the Qurʾān as this verse is repeated in the Qurʾān 113 times. It shows the level of the significance of the Islamic concepts of God and religiosity *vis-à-vis* values, such as mercy and compassion. The Prophet Muḥammad, is mentioned in the Qurʾān as mercy for all creation. Paradise too is the eternal abode of peace. In short, Almighty God and His teachings are geared to bringing harmony and peace. The Qurʾān refers to Islam as 'the paths of peace' (V.16). It raises the banner of reconciliation (IV.128) and states that God abhors disturbance of peace (II.205). The ideal society, according to the Qurʾān, is '*Dār al-Salām*' which means the abode of peace (X.25). Even war in Islam is geared to the actualization of peace and justice. This concern was stated in a nutshell by the Prophet: 'Allāh grants through *rifq* (gentleness) what He does not grant by means of *ʿunf* (violence).'[7] This signifies that aggressive and violent wars are not of God's liking. Peace should be the rule and war the exception. Allāh has also prescribed punishments for crimes which are equitable and serve corrective and reformative purposes. These punishments, harsh though they might seem at first sight, in fact manifest God's love for the victims for He wants to ensure justice, and prescribes retribution and punishment so as to serve as deterrents and provide a life of peace and security to all. In most cases, a sincere apology to the victim, an earnest plea for forgiveness and a solemn penitence can absolve the perpetrator of the crime.

The Islamic devotional system which is comprised of daily prayers, alms giving, fasting the month of Ramadan and pilgrimage to Mecca not only vivifies one's devotion to God but is also meant to cultivate self-discipline, self-sacrifice, kindness, benevolence and self-accountability.

In short, the Islamic devotional acts and even its punitive laws are all part of a comprehensive scheme of social rehabilitation, reformation and promotion of peaceful and harmonious coexistence. In a sense, they are also an extension and manifestation of God's love, mercy and justice.

In the same way that God is the ultimate Love, Mercy, Justice and Wisdom, so are His commands. A loving submission to His commands is the only right relationship with Him. This submission to the Creator is also the guarantor of harmony among his creatures.

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6. Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Cairo, Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth, n.d., I, p. 441.
7. Ibn Māja, *Sunan Ibn Māja,* Cairo, Dār al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya, n.d., II, p. 1216.

The Islamic credo *Lā ilāha illā Allāh* is a reflection of God's universal love and kindness. It declares that there is no *ilāh* except Allāh. It is important to understand these two fundamental Islamic terms. The Arabic word *ilāh* stands for a number of mutually interconnected meanings. For instance, it means:

1. Achieving peace and mental calm by seeking refuge in or establishing loving relationship with someone.
2. Giving the necessary shelter and security to someone frightened of the prospect of an impending mishap.
3. Turning to someone in utter devotion, due to the intensity of one's feelings for him.
4. Rushing of the lost offspring of the she-camel to snuggle up to its mother on finding it.
5. Adoring, loving and worshiping someone tremendously.

These literal meanings of the word make it clear that the word *ilāh* stands for something awfully mysterious and extremely attractive to absorb one's whole being, demanding absolute love, adoration and closeness to the extent of worship. Therefore, God or *al-Ilāh* means the one who is *al-maʾlūh* meaning *al-maʿbūd* (worshipped). Worship or *al-ʿibāda*, as Imam Ibn al-Qayyim defines it, is 'utmost love of God accompanied with total submission.'[8]

The word 'Allāh' also denotes extreme love. Views vary about the etymology of the word 'Allāh'. Allāh is the proper name (*ism ʿalam*) that God has given to Himself, argues the famous Muslim theologian Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī. Other theologians like Ibn al-Qayyim, and philologists like the renowned Sībawayh, prefer to derive it from *ilāh*, one who *ilāh*s (as a verb) another when the latter seeks refuge with him during the time of fear or calamity, and he would grant him refuge and safe haven; so the word would become *ilāh* (as a noun) of people. This viewpoint is supported by al-Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī and a group of scholars. There are, however, others who do not agree with them.[9]

Some say that the word 'Allāh' is derived from the verb *walaha* (past tense), *yawlahu* (present tense), from the root noun *walah*. The *waw* was replaced with a *hamza*, just as the case with *wisad* and *isad,* for instance. *Walah* is extreme love.

Therefore, the Islamic statement of faith can be considered as the credo of love, compassion and mercy. 'There is no refuge, security, protection, love, mercy, compassion except the extreme loving Allāh.' Nobody, however, knows the essence of this loving God as the finite can never comprehend the infinite.

8. Aḥmad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn ʿĪsā al-Sharqī, *Sharḥ qaṣīdat Ibn al-Qayyim*, Beirut, al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1962, II, p. 259.
9. M. Iqbal, 'Allāh Most High', *The Integrated Encyclopedia of the Qurʾān*, Sherwood Park, AB, Canada, Center for Islamic Sciences, 2013, I, p. 4.

He can only be known through His names and attributes, as will be discussed in detail later in the chapter.

The ethical monotheism of Islam unequivocally eliminates all notions of polytheism, pantheism, dualism, monolatry, henotheism, tritheism, and indeed any postulation or conception of the participation of others in God's divinity. Strict monotheism allows people to focus solely upon the One and Only authority – i.e., God Almighty – and derive their moral values from this one and only source. This is Islamic transcendentalism. Mainstream Islam has always emphasized the absolute transcendence and unity of God, avoiding corporeal notions and anthropomorphic images (that is, the images of His Being description of God in physical human terms, categories or forms inappropriate to His Majesty). God is certainly not a man and His ways are totally different from those of mortals. He does not resemble any of His creatures in any way or form. He is the absolute other. However, this understanding of transcendence is not abstract in the philosophical sense of the term that would make God impersonal or abstract, for many expressions are used in the Qurʾān to establish a kind of modality with regards to God, so as to make the transcendent deity personal, immanent and live, enabling a meaningful relationship with Him.

This transcendent God, however, loves man, the crown of His creation. He is closer to him than his jugular vein, He responds to man's pleas and supplications, helps him at the time of need, and provides him with sustenance, health, wealth and whatever is needed for a fruitful earthly life. Allāh is the most merciful, the most compassionate, the most caring, giving, and forgiving. He is One, Unique and Absolute in His loving compassion as He is One, Unique and Absolute in His being and essence. He is the best of protectors, supporters, helpers, sustainers, openers of closed doors, and even the best of all guardians and friends. There is a love relationship between God and His creatures. He loves them all without exception. He loves them more than even their mothers and does more for them than any other being can even think of. The Prophet Muḥammad stated that Allāh created 100 units of mercy on the day He created the heavens and earth. Out of these 100 units, He granted one unit to the entire existence. This one unit of mercy is the source of mutual love and affection of all creatures. On the Day of Judgment, Allāh will complete and perfect His mercy by adding this one mercy to the remaining ninety nine mercies and bestow them upon His creatures.[10]

God has also bestowed honour and dignity on all children of Adam. God creates man from dust, models him with His own hands, blows into him a soul, fashions man in the most beautiful of shapes, provides for him in the darkness of the mother's womb even while changing sides so as to avoid causing the baby any physical imbalance or disfiguration, guarantees his

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10. See n. 93 below.

sustenance and wellbeing at every step of his temporal life, guides him through various phases of his life, enables him to understand His commandments, grants him additional favours for following God's commands and then takes him back when he becomes sick, old and fragile and is unable to manage himself. God is there for man when man's own children, wife and relatives might abandon him. He becomes his best companion, his most intimate friend, caregiver and host. God also becomes man's eternal companion in Paradise. He punishes only those who belligerently deny His love, mercy, guidance and call for reform. Paradise is in the neighbourhood of God, and only the kind-hearted, loving, merciful and morally upright can enjoy God's proximity. The immoral, cruel, unjust, criminal and deviant people are ultimately distanced from His proximity and suffer the consequences of their wrongful choices and actions. Their sins engross them, the eternal fire of extinction absorbs them, and they suffer the anguish and agony of being distanced from God, the original and ultimate source of their being, and hence the only source of their eternal happiness and bliss.

The transcendent God of Islam is also disposed to the collective good of humanity. He requires the actualization of human equality and socio-economic and political justice. In that sense, God also has an impact on human history and is thus not out of it. His pleasure is realized through socio-moral activism. He would like to see the establishment of a just human society in which all members, even the most vulnerable, weak and downtrodden, are treated with genuine consideration and respect. Therefore, even the socio-political arena of human existence and realization of God's will through the state is not at all un-godly; rather, it is within the established realms of Islamic spirituality and religiosity.

The Islamic concept of God is also logical, rational and comprehensible and yet, at the same time, mysterious. God, who is ontologically the absolute other and the ineffable transcendent, is functionally also the closest to man. The polar dimensions and tendencies are all united and diffused in Him as He is the Creator of these dimensions. He is the Inward and the Outward at the same time. 'All that is in the heavens and the earth glorifieth Allāh; and He is the Mighty, the Wise. His is the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth; He quickeneth and He giveth death; and He is able to do all things. He is the First and the Last, and the Outward and the Inward; and He is Knower of all things' (LVII.1–3). His ineffability is so awe-inspiring that it prods man to a sense of Divine sublimity, while His immanence prompts man to recognize His absolute love, mercy, kindness and a sense of utter dependence upon Him. The believer lives his/her life, vacillating between these two states of fear and hope: the fear of falling from God's grace and the hope that the Lord loves him so much that He will never let him down. In short, God is the focal point of man's quests that engages the totality of a believer's being.

The Pre-Islamic Religious landscape and the Rise of Islam

Islam appeared on the historic scene in the seventh century Arabian Peninsula populated mostly by pagans with a sizeable Arabized Jewish community in the South. Arabia was surrounded by the two super powers of that time, namely Christian Byzantium and Zoroastrian Persian Empire led by the Sassanians. A small Christian community existed in the Yemen city of Najrān and on the borders of the Byzantine Empire.

ZOROASTRIANISM AND ISLAM

Zoroastrianism was the state religion of the Sassanian Persian Empire, one of the two super powers of the Prophet's time. The faith started with the teachings of Zoroaster between 1400 and 1000 BC[11] The Persian Zoroastrians believed in a dualistic theology according to which Ahura Mazda, the god of Light, was pitched against Angra Mainyu or Ahriman, the god of Darkness, both vying for human souls through their cosmological agents called *yazatas* or angels. Ahura Mazda was 'the one uncreated God, existing eternally, and Creator of all else that is good, including all other beneficent divinities… in the beginning, only one beneficent Being existing in the universe, Ahura Mazda, the all-wise, and also the wholly just and good, from whom all other divine beings emanated.'[12]

Angra Mainyu or Ahriman was the second god who created everything evil. Mary Boyce, a modern scholar of Zoroastrianism, observes that 'Truly there are two primal Spirits, twins, renowned to be in conflict. In thought and word and act they are two, the good and the bad…. And when these two Spirits first encountered, they created life and not-life, and that at the end the worst existence shall be for the followers of falsehood (*drug*), but the best dwelling for those who possess righteousness (*asha*). Of the two Spirits, the one who follows falsehood chose doing the worst things, the Holiest Spirit, who is clad in the hardest stone [i.e. the sky] chose righteousness, and (so shall they all) who will satisfy Ahura Mazda continually with just actions' (Y 30:3–5).'[13] Boyce further states that 'An essential element in this revelation is that the two primal Beings each made a deliberate choice (although each, it seems, according to his own proper nature) between good and evil, an act which prefigures the identical choice which every man must make for himself

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11. See M. Boyce, *Zoroastrians, their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1979, p. 16.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 20; See also M. Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism: the Early Period*, Leiden, Brill, 1989, v. 1, pp. 192–3.

in this life.'[14] The constant battle between the forces of goodness (Ahura Mazda) and evil (Ahriman) will continue until the end of time when Ahura Mazda will finally overcome Ahriman, 'for Ahura Mazda knew in his wisdom that if he became Creator and fashioned this world, then the Hostile Spirit would attack it because it was good, and it would become a battleground for their two forces, and in the end he, God, would win the great struggle there and be able to destroy evil, and so achieve a universe which would be wholly good forever.'[15] That stage will usher the next life.

The two equal deities were uncreated but were themselves[16] creators of a number of lower deities. For instance, Ahura Mazda created life and goodness upon the earth. Goodness was not merely an abstract concept of morality as understood today. It was the personification of a deity, Asa, and could be worshipped and in reality very effective when worshipped. Angra Mainyu, on the other hand, created the deity 'Drug', the god of evil, darkness and deceit. Zoroastrianism propagated absolute human freedom. Man was free to wilfully follow the *Asa* or *Drug* and deserve a 'life and not-life'. Boyce observes that 'the evocation, through his Holy Spirit, Spenta Mainyu, of six lesser divinities, the radiant Beings of Zoroaster's earliest vision. These divinities formed a heptad with Ahura Mazda himself, and they proceeded with him to fashion the seven creations which make up the world. The evocation of the six is variously described in Zoroastrian works, but always in ways which suggest the essential unity of beneficent divinity. Thus Ahura Mazda is said either to be their "father", or to have "mingled" himself with them, and in one Pahlavi text his creation of them is compared with the lighting of torches from a torch.'[17]

In Zoroastrianism, there is a clear-cut hierarchical emanation scheme of divinities worthy of worship. The six 'Holy Immortals' or 'Yazatas' are Ahura Mazda's agents in the universe and have a supporting role. The 'six great Beings then in their turn, Zoroaster taught, evoked other beneficent divinities, who are in fact the beneficent gods of the pagan Iranian pantheon. (He himself invokes a number of them in the Gathas, notably the "other Ahuras", that is, Mithra and Apam Napat; Sraosha, Ashi and Geush Urvan). All these divine beings, who are, according to his doctrine, either directly or indirectly the emanations of Ahura Mazda, strive under him, according to their various appointed tasks, to further good and to defeat evil. Collectively they are known in Zoroastrianism as Yazatas, "Beings worthy of worship", or Amesha Spentas, "Holy Immortals".'[18]

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14. Boyce, *Zoroastrians …*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

16. See Boyce, *A History …*, *op. cit.*, I, p. 194.

17. Boyce, *Zoroastrians …*, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Ahura Mazda does not want people to worship Ahriman, but people do it anyway due to their corrupted habits. 'Angra Mainyu himself - false gods who were not to be worshipped because they stood for conflict among men, luring them through their greed for offerings to bloodshed and destructive strife.'[19] Zoroastrianism requires men to side with Ahura Mazda and fight against the forces of evil along with Ahura's six 'Immortal Beings'. These Holy Immortals are assigned a specific portion of creation to protect. 'The doctrine of the six Holy Immortals is fundamental to Zoroaster's teachings, and has far-reaching spiritual and ethical consequences, since these Beings hypostatize qualities or attributes of Ahura Mazda himself, and can in their turn (if rightly sought and venerated) bestow these upon men. For every individual, as for the prophet himself, the Immortal who leads the way to all the rest is Vohu Manah, "Good Purpose"; and his closest confederate is Asha Vahishta, "Best Righteousness" – the divinity personifying the mighty principle of *asha*, whom Zoroaster names in the Gathas more often than any other of the six.'[20]

It is sometimes argued that Zoroastrianism is a monotheistic religion and that Islam borrowed a good portion of Zoroastrian teachings such as the concept of good and evil, Iblīs or satan, five times daily prayers, afterlife, Hell and Paradise. Justin Paul Hienz, for instance, claims that the 'Number of times prayer is performed throughout the day was primarily a Zoroastrian influence.'[21] These are mere conjectures without any substantial proof.

It becomes evident from the above discussion that the Zoroastrians in the Prophet's time believed in a dualistic cosmogonic theology, an idea totally alien to Islam. The Zoroastrians believed in two equal, eternal, uncreated, independent, omnipotent and omniscient divinities. Islam strongly confirmed the absolute oneness and uniqueness of God. The Islamic concept of 'Iblīs' or 'Satan' is totally at variance with the Zoroastrian concept of 'Ahriman', as Iblīs is a fallen angel or jinn who owes his existence to God. Iblīs has no independent power other than the power of persuasion. Iblīs is granted permission by God to try to lure man for a specified time. He, however, has no control whatsoever upon human beings. Unlike the Zoroastrian divinities, neither Iblīs nor any other figure is worshipped in Islam. Islam condemnes the Zoroastrian worship of fire as a symbol of God and indicts Zoroastrianism for worshipping two gods.[22] The Islamic 'Providential Monotheism' is absolutely different from a possible Zoroastrian eschatological monotheism. The Islamic

19. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 22

21. J. Hienz, 'The Origins of Muslims Prayer: Sixth and Seventh Century Religious Influences on the Ṣalāt Ritual', thesis presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School, University of Missouri-Columbia, USA, 2008, p. iv.

22. See M. N. Dhalla, *History of Zoroastrianism*, London, Oxford University Press, 1938, p. 548.

concept of angels is also different from the Zoroastrian concept of the 'Holy Immortals'. The angels are neither independent of God nor worthy of worship. In Islam, angels are nothing but submissive agents of the One and Only God. Nothing is eternal, everlasting, omnipotent and omniscient except the One and Only God.

JUDAISM AND ARABIA

Judaism was the oldest monotheistic tradition in the Arabian Peninsula. Some Jewish tribes made an exodus to northwest Arabia as a result of the Babylonian Exile in 597 BC and others followed suit as a result of repeated persecutions by some Hebrews within Palestine and non-Hebrews without, especially the Romans. A wave of Jewish tribes migrated to Southern Arabia as a result of the Great Revolt in 70 CE, almost six centuries before the appearance of Islam. As the Jewish tribes lacked autonomy and lived mostly as protégés of one or another of the regional Arab tribes, they had the propensity to express their superiority on the basis of their patriarchal, scriptural, legal and monotheistic legacy. The Jews had by then produced one of the greatest legalistic traditions of all time due to their affinity with scripture and law. They boasted about their monotheistic consciousness. This predilection stirred monotheistic and legalistic instincts in some native Arabs but on a very limited level.

Jewish monotheistic tradition, however, was marred by a number of intrinsic problems. Judaic tradition was an amalgam of anthropomorphic and transcendental tendencies.[23] The Israelites attributed a visible human form to God. Indeed, a majority of mortal, human, physical and mental categories appeared to be present in the Hebrew God: God had a body; in the plains of Mamre, He appeared to Abraham in a mythico-anthropomorphic form; Abraham bowed down towards the ground, offered God water, requested Him to let him wash His feet, fetched Him a morsel of bread and God responded to Abraham's request and did eat (Genesis 18:1–9). In the Hebrew Torah God appeared in human form, ate, drank, rested and was refreshed. For example, in a well-known Biblical encounter, God even wrestled with Jacob, dislocated Jacob's thigh and was even shown to be weak, unable to physically dominate Jacob, to the point of finally asking Jacob to let Him go as dawn broke. As a result of this wrestling encounter, God changed Jacob's name to Israel, meaning 'he who struggles with God'.

Additionally, vestiges of animism, polytheism, henotheism, monolatry, national monotheism and universal and ethical monotheism, all these 'isms' were overlooked in most cases if not sanctioned by the Hebrew Bible's writers and were hence present in one way or another, even though inertly, in the

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23. For details, see Zulfiqar Ali Shah, *Anthropomorphic Depictions of God*, pp. 55ff.

Hebrews' conceptions. The Jewish community's God was a national god who had made a special covenant with Abraham, chose his progeny through Abraham's son Isaac as His Chosen People, and granted them the eternal real estate rights of the Holy Land. Very often He represented the Hebrews' national aspirations, projecting in a sense their failures, dreams and fears into the cosmos. A. Lods states that 'the god whom Moses sought to win over to his people was not a universal god like that of Islam: he had a proper name, Jahweh, local centres of worship, and an essential national character; he was and chose to be the God of Israel.' He further argues that, 'the Israelites, when they emerge into the full light of history… were not monotheists. They only worshipped one national god, Jahweh; but they believed in the existence and power of other gods: they were monolaters. But monolatry is a form of polytheism.'[24] Thus in the Hebrew God, what we had was not the absolute, transcendent and universal God but rather an imperfect, local, national, corporeal and finite God.

CHRISTIANITY AND ARABIA

Romans ruled over Syria and parts of Mesopotamia long before Islam's advent. Christianity was co-opted by the Roman Emperor Constantine in an effort to control internal strife by bringing the warring Christian sects under one official umbrella. The inherent tension between the transcendental views of Godhead and redemption through the sacrificial death of God in Jesus Christ was the source of Christian in-fighting. In 325 CE Emperor Constantine convened and presided over the Council of Nicaea in order to develop a statement of faith to unify the church. The Trinitarian Nicene Creed was written, declaring that 'the Father and the Son are of the same substance' (*homoousios*).[25] Posterity followed the Council in defining Christianity as a faith centred around the redemptive works of Jesus Christ who was believed to be full God and full man. Apollinarius (d. 390 CE), bishop of Laodicea, took the Trinitarian Christology of the Word-flesh to its logical limits by contending that Jesus Christ had only one theo-anthropic or divine-human nature and that at baptism the divine Word was substituted for the normal human soul in Christ. When the Trinitarian formula and 'Logos Christology obtained a complete victory, the traditional view of the Supreme deity as one person, and, along with this, every thought of the real and complete human personality of the Redeemer was condemned as being intolerable in the Church.'[26]

24. A. Lods, *Israel, from its Beginnings to the Middle of the Eighth Century*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1948, p. 257.
25. For details, see Zulfiqar Ali Shah, *Anthropomorphic …*, *op. cit.*, p. 328ff.
26. A. V. Harnack, *History of Dogma*, tr., Neil Buchanan, New York, Dover Publication, 1961, III, p. 10.
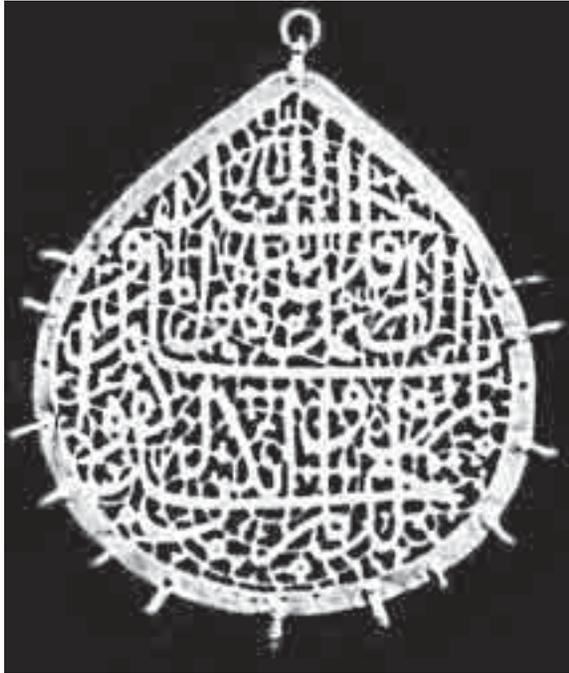
I–2.1   Steel fretwork of *Sūrat al-Ikhlās*,
seventeenth century
© Nasser Khalili Collection of Islamic Art (Nour
Foundation)

Christianity had entered the centre of power but political authority was no real solution to the unresolved theological issues. The profound theological convolutions inherent in the Trinitarian formula continued to haunt Church leadership as well as common believers. The controversy regarding the person of Christ came to a head-on collision in the fifth century when Nestorius became bishop of Constantinople (428 CE). He protested against the tendency very common among the masses, especially among the monks in the neighbourhood of the capital, to exalt the Virgin Mary as 'Mother of God' or *theotokos*.

> 'God cannot have a mother', he argued, 'and no creature could have engendered the Godhead; Mary bore a man, the vehicle of divinity but not God. The Godhead cannot have been carried for nine months in a woman's womb, or have been wrapped in baby-clothes, or have suffered, died and been buried.'[27]

H. Chadwick observes that 'Nothing caused so much scandal as a remark of Nestorius that "God is not a baby two or three months old".'[28] Nestorius

27. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1958, p. 311.
28. H. Chadwick, *The Early Church*, New York, Dorset Press, 1967, p. 198.

was declared guilty of heresy and was deposed in the general Council of Ephesus (431 CE) but the final settlement was reached at the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE).[29] The dissenting Christians such as Nestorians, Gnostics and Arians were excommunicated, persecuted and exiled so that finally a great many of them settled in the deserted Arabian Peninsula, far away from Church authorities. Due to their missionary zeal they were able to win over some Arab tribes to their version of Christianity. Their converts were limited mostly to the Banū Ḥārith of Najrān and Banū Ḥanīfa of Yamāma, and some of the Banū Ṭayy at Taymāʾ. A certain Famiyun, a Nestorian Christian from Syria, is usually credited with initiating and solidifying the Christian community at Najrān. Nestorian Christianity was superseded by the Monophysite followers of Eutyches (380–456), an oriental Christian, a presbyter and archimandrite at Constantinople, who declared that Jesus Christ possessed only one nature, namely the divine. He contended that Jesus Christ was the real God bearing a human form but not human nature, soul or blood like other human beings. This Monophysite Christology was supported by the Christian Abyssinian Empire and gradually became the dominant form of Arabian Christianity. At the advent of Islam, the same Monophysite Christianity was pretty much prevalent at al-Ḥīra, Egypt and in the greater Syrian region.

Were Judaism and Christianity the inspiration of Islam?

Such a detailed account of the Jewish and Christian concepts of God is required for a number of significant reasons. Firstly, Islam emerged in the backdrop of these Abrahamic traditions and frequently acted and reacted to them. It was natural to have some cross cultural fertilization, outward resemblance and even assimilation of ideas due to the shared milieu, history and ideals. But the Islamic conception of God radically differed on some core issues from both the Jewish and Christian understanding of God, as we shall see in the coming pages. Secondly, Islam claimed to have come to reform, rectify and purge religious life of the accumulated tamperings and distortions that had resulted from mistaken scriptural interpretations by Church leaders and scribes. That is why Islam drastically diverged at the doctrinal level from both traditions and called for a comprehensive monotheistic reform. These reforms were and still are the hallmark of Islam, distinguishing it from both Judaism and Christianity. Thirdly, there is a tendency among some Western scholars to belittle Islam by claiming that Islam borrowed many of its essential ideas, concepts, stories and principles from Judaism and Christianity.

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29. For details, see Zulfiqar Ali Shah, *Anthropomorphic …*, *op. cit.*, pp. 255ff.

The emphasis upon the Judeo-Christian background of the Qurʾān is an old hypothesis and has been repeatedly mentioned by many Western writers. S. Zwemer,[30] J. Gardner,[31] D. Margoliouth,[32] C. Torrey,[33] and S. Goitein,[34] are just a few examples. J. Anderson, for instance, claimed that 'The long rambling accounts of Jewish patriarchs and prophets [in the Qurʾān] correspond in so much detail with the Talmud that of their essentially Jewish origin there can be no doubt.'[35] A. Geiger concluded that 'Muḥammad had appropriated much from Jewish sources by means of oral communication, frequently without being aware of the differences between sacred text and later embellishments or exegetical comment between primary biblical and post-biblical materials.'[36] Ahrens, on the other hand, argued that Muḥammad 'during the greater part of the Meccan period…was predominantly dependent upon Christians in the formulation of his doctrines.'[37] He also claimed that Muḥammad compromised the best of those principles that had been drawn from Christianity because of political opportunism.

However, many Western scholars have partly or totally rejected these theories of Islamic borrowings from the Judaic-Christian traditions. For example, the famous scholar R. Bell recognizes that 'Of any intimate knowledge for the Prophet of either [of] these two religions or the Bible itself there is no convincing evidence.'[38] Additionally, two thirds of the Qurʾān, mostly focused upon the concept of Divine unity, morality and eternal life, was revealed in Mecca and many of these doctrines and dogmas were at odds with their Jewish and Christian counterparts. Moreover, as J. Fueck observes, 'There is no evidence for the existence of a strong Jewish colony with a living tradition at Mecca, nor does [the] Qurʾān give evidence of that intimate knowledge of Jewish matters which we would expect if Muḥammad had actually been

30. S. M. Zwemer, *The Muslim Christ Oliphant*, London, Anderson & Ferrier, 1912, p. 12.

31. J. Gardner, *The Faiths of the World: an Account of all Religions and Religious Sects, their Doctrines, Rites, Ceremonies, and Customs*, London, A. Fullarton, 1858, II, p. 279.

32. See D. S. Margoliouth, *The Early Development of Mohammedanism*, London, Williams and Norgate, 1914; and also his *Mohammedanism*, London, Butterworth, 1912.

33. See Charles Cutler Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*, New York, KTAV Pub. House, 1967.

34. See S. D. Goitein, 'Mohammad's Inspiration by Judaism', *Journal of Jewish Studies*, (1958), IX, pp. 149–62; also his *Jews and Arabs: their Contacts through the Ages*, New York, Schocken Books, 1955.

35. J. N. D. Anderson, *The World's Religions*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976, p. 57.

36. A. Geiger, *Judaism and Islam: A Prize Essay*, London, M. D. C. S. P. C. K. Press, 1898, p. xx.

37. See J. Fueck's reference to Ahrens in 'The Originality of the Arabian Prophet', *Studies on Islam*, ed. M. L. Swartz, New York, Oxford University Press, 1981, p. 88.

38. R. Bell, *Introduction to the Qurʾān*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1958, p. 70.

dependent on Judaism.'[39] M. Watt observes, 'There is no great difficulty in claiming that the precise form, the point and the ulterior significance of the stories came to Muḥammad by revelation and not from the communications of his alleged informant.'[40] In addition, if Muḥammad had borrowed material from the Christians or Jews, he could never have preached a faith so radically different from Christianity and Judaism, as we will see later in this chapter. Moreover, given the hostile climate and antagonism that existed between Muḥammad and his adversaries, and given that he lived in the full light of history, the name of an alleged informant could scarcely have remained unknown to or hidden from his detractors down the centuries. The Qurʾānic concept of cyclical prophetic missions and familiarity with earlier prophets and their historical settings is no evidence of the Qurʾān's dependence upon prior scriptural sources. Fueck states that the concept of cyclical revelation is intrinsic to Muḥammad's prophetic consciousness.

> This cyclical theory of revelation cannot be derived either from Judaism or from Christianity. The idea … seems to be Muḥammad's own creation. It reflects his philosophy of history and indicates how he understood his relationship to other peoples who had previously received a divine revelation. It is convincing evidence that Muḥammad could not have received the decisive stimulus to prophetic action from either Jews or Christians.[41]

The presence of a number of Biblical stories in the Qurʾān is often cited as proof of Islam's dependence upon Christian and Jewish sources. Yet this is false logic and there is no rational justification for this for a number of reasons. First, the Qurʾān itself has come to affirm the truth of previous scriptures and to correct that which had been corrupted. Second, as any student of the Qurʾān and the Bible would easily notice, the Qurʾānic accounts contain many important differences, including different points of emphasis.

In fact, the Qurʾān focuses largely upon the lessons to be drawn, the glad tidings and warnings that are to be taken note of, the explanation of Islamic doctrines that has been made, and the consolation of the Prophet that has been provided through these stories. 'All that We relate to thee of the stories of the messengers, with it We make firm thy heart: in them there cometh to thee the Truth, as well as an exhortation and a message of remembrance to those who believe' (XI.120). Furthermore, the Qurʾān does not give a detailed account of all the previous prophets sent to mankind: 'Of some messengers We have already told thee the story; of others we have not' (IV.164), and of those prophets whose stories are mentioned, little historical detail is given concerning them. The Qurʾān's emphasis is upon the moral and spiritual

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39. Fueck, 'The Originality of the Arabian Prophet', *op. cit.*, p. 88.
40. W. M. Watt, *Muḥammad at Mecca*, Karachi, Oxford University Press, 1980, p. 160.
41. Fueck, 'The Originality of the Arabian Prophet', *op. cit.*, pp. 92–3.

lessons to be gained from these stories. Another important point of difference is that the Qurʾān makes no mention of the immoral behaviour which the Hebrew Bible ascribes to a number of prophets including Lot (Genesis 19:30–38), David (II Samuel 11:1–27), and Solomon (I Kings 11:1–10). On the contrary, the Qurʾān vindicates these prophets, purging their personality and character of the indecencies, obscenities, and myriad of moral and spiritual shortcomings attributed to them.[42] In the Qurʾān they are not only presented as God's prophets and messengers, but as men of sterling character, as infallible human beings who lived their lives as walking embodiments of submission to God. Watt observes that 'there is something original in the Qurʾān's use of the stories and in its selection of points for emphasis',[43] and to him 'its originality consists in that it gave them greater precision and detail, presented them more forcefully and by its varying emphasis, made more or less coherent synthesis of them; above all, it gave them a focus in the person of Muḥammad and his special vocation as messenger of God.'[44] Additionally, Biblical stories are used in the Qurʾān as illustrative material, thus playing a subordinate role to substantiate Qurʾānic themes. Fueck observes that

> it was the discovery of a substantive correspondence between his [Muḥammad's] own preaching and what Christians and Jews found in their sacred books that first motivated him to concern himself more directly with their tradition, for it is the second Meccan period that first reflects an extensive knowledge of biblical stories.[45]

Therefore, the theories of Islam's direct dependence upon and borrowing from Jewish and Christian sources are unsubstantiated. It was the coexistence and shared ambience that contributed more than anything else to an outward resemblance, but the essence, objectives and details of many core Islamic doctrines, stories and principles are quite distinct.

PRE-ISLAMIC ARABS

The pre-Islamic Arabs were predominantly polytheists. Though there existed a group of strict monotheists called *Ḥanīfs*, they were a negligible minority in the sea of pagans worshipping a myriad of deities made of wood, stone and metals. They worshipped idols, angels, jinn, saints and other lesser deities as intercessors and intermediaries between themselves and Allāh, regarding these deities as absolute, independent gods, autonomous from Allāh, the Supreme

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42. For Lot see Qurʾān XXI.74–5; XXVI.160–73; for David and Solomon see XXI.78–82, XXVII.15–44, XXXVIII.17–40.
43. Watt, *Muḥammad at Mecca, op. cit.*, p. 85.
44. Fueck, 'The Originality of the Arabian Prophet', *op. cit.*, p. 88.
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 94–5.

Deity. Joseph Henninger concludes his famous article 'Pre-Islamic Bedouin Religion' with the observation that

> Here then are the elements of this religion: Allāh, creator of the world, supreme and undisputed lord, but relegated to the background in the cultic and practical life of the people; next, manifesting the rudiments of a polytheism, several *astral divinities* (at least that of the planet Venus) and *atmospheric divinities* (perhaps the attributes of a creator god which have been hypostatized); finally, ancestors and *jinn*, these last having more importance in the belief system than in the cult. All of this, moreover, is somewhat vague and far from being organized into a real pantheon or hierarchical system.[46]

M. J. Kister concludes about the pre-Islamic Arabs: 'The Jahiliyya tribes cannot be said to have been straightforward polytheists; they were *mushrikūn*; i.e. while accepting and admitting the existence and supreme authority of God, they associated other deities with Him.'[47] David Waines gives more details of the Meccans' belief system. He explains that for the pagans Allāh was the 'High God', neither the sole object of worship nor indeed the sole existent god. For Meccans Allāh merely stood above, or apart from, all other tribal divinities. Despite this marginalization He nevertheless played a particular role in pagan life: first, as the giver of rain, to ensure the sustenance of life for the inhabitants of the arid desert; second, as the guarantor of oaths, and therefore regarded as crucial to the binding nature of agreements, tribal or individual, sworn in His name. Indeed violation of such an oath was deemed a grave offence, as it involved serious consequences for social peace and order. Waines writes:

> In a somewhat vague way, too, Allāh was viewed as the creator of the heavens and the earth, although in general no moral conclusions seem to have been drawn from this regarding an individual's behavior and future well-being…. Thus in matters of daily concern, Allāh occupied a particular place, but alongside other gods in the Arab's pantheon.[48]

T. Izutsu observes that though the Meccans believed in Allāh as the Creator of the universe, this belief did not play a vital role in their daily life. The occurrence of

> words like *khalq* 'creation', *khāliq* 'creator', *bāri'* 'originator' etc. in pre-Islamic literature should not mislead us into thinking that the concept of Divine Creation was playing a decisive role in the Jahili Weltanschauung… Unlike the Koranic

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46. J. Henninger, 'Pre-Islamic Bedouin Religion', *Studies on Islam*, ed. Marlin L. Swartz, New York, Oxford University Press, 1981, p. 15.
47. M. J. Kister, *Society and Religion from Jāhiliyya to Islam*, Variorum, UK; Vermont, USA, Gower Publishing Group, 1990, pp. 47–8.
48. D. Waines, *An introduction to Islam*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 8–9.

system in which Allāh the Creator governs the entire Weltanschauung Jahiliyya did not attach great importance to this semantic field… This is tantamount to saying that the idea of Allāh's being the very 'source' of human existence, if it *was* there, meant very little to the minds of the pre-Islamic Arabs. And this is why the Koran tries so hard to bring home to them the very significance of this idea and to awaken them to the grave implication of it.[49]

Although Allāh was conceived as the Divine lord, this fact did not really amount to much for he was very much regarded as a distant god, put aside, and relegated to the back burner as it were, in matters of daily life including man's social, financial and political dealings. This god did not interfere in man's affairs. Thus, there existed a clear distinction between what was thought to be religious and what was perceived to be mundane. This dualistic dichotomy was so complete that Allāh, as stated, despite being lord was in fact not given much of a role to play in the day to day life. Hence,

> In the jahili system, the creative activity of Allāh is both the beginning and the end of His intervention in human affairs. He does not as a rule take care of what He has brought into existence just like an irresponsible father who never cares for his children; the task is taken over…by another Being called Dahr. In the Islamic system, on the contrary, creation marks just the beginning of the Divine rule over the created things.[50]

Interestingly, this ancient Meccan conception of the Divine coincides closely with many modern secular trends. Much like the Meccans, God the Creator is perceived today as divorced from the world and the cosmos, with the universe and all that it contains, somehow thought to run automatically. Ergo, the modern concept of 'Nature', comes very close to the Meccans' understanding of the being, or force, they termed *dahr*.

The other gods – *Lāt, Manāt, ʿUzzā, Hubul*, etc.,– were consulted on various matters of domestic and other concerns. K. Armstrong notes that the 'shrine [Kaʿba] was also surrounded by 360 idols, or effigies of the gods, that may have been the totems of all different tribes that came to worship there during the appointed month.'[51] It was not only in Mecca and around the Kaʿba that other gods were worshipped. They were celebrated all over the Arabian Peninsula.

P. K. Hitti notes that 'To spiritual impulses he [the pagan Arab] was luke-warm, even indifferent. His conformity to religious practice followed tribal inertia and was dictated by his conservative respect for tradition.'[52] To

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49. T. Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran*, New Hampshire, Ayer Co. Publishers Inc., 1987, p. 123.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

51. K. Armstrong, *Muḥammad, a Biography of the Prophet*, San Francisco, Harper Collins, 1992, p. 62.

52. P. K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, 9th ed., London, Macmillan, 1968, p. 96.

Armstrong this was the reason that 'Muḥammad is constantly accused by his enemies of being a danger to society, of neglecting the religion of the fathers and of atheism…'[53]

Therefore, we can infer that the pre-Islamic Arabs were 'religious' in their own way yet different from the modern connotations of the term 'religious'. Their religiosity owed much to their enthusiasm for continuity with the past or traditionalism rather than the outcome of an intellectually thought out and developed system of belief. As such, this enthusiasm would fade if in conflict with their craze for tribal honour and pride, or humanism (*murūwa*), which to M. Watt, was the effective religion of the Arabs of Muḥammad's day.[54] To Izutsu, worldliness and tribalism were the two cornerstones of the pre-Islamic Arab religious consciousness.[55]

Islam's Advent and its Monotheism

Islam came in the backdrop of the above sketched religious landscape. It censured the historical manifestations of the Jewish and Christian conceptions of God and claimed to have come to rectify the historical misapplications of the pristine concept of One, Unique, Universal, Perfect, Infinite, Ineffable and Transcendent God. Though Islam's initial struggle was against the Meccan polytheists, its overarching scheme of reformation included the Zoroastrian, Jewish and Christian doctrines in conflict with God's unity, universality, majesty and sublimity. The Islamic reform scheme aimed at restructuring the God-to-man relationship. This was needed for its own sake and also to rectify the countless existent faults in the man-to-man relationship. The conception of God was sluiced of concrete anthropomorphism, Trinitarianism, associationism, localism, tribalism, immorality, finitude, injustice and partiality. The ethical monotheism expounded by Islam connected with the human moral sphere and human actions was firmly tied to eternal life, the Day of Judgment. This morality based salvific scheme excluded all possibilities of salvation through the redeeming works of Jesus Christ, tribal or blood ties with patriarchs like Abraham or intercession of other intermediaries such as the angels, idols and jinns. At the same time, focus upon eternal success did not mean denunciation of this world. The temporal world was the foundation and the field to be fully attended to for felicity in the life to come. Therefore, the mundane sphere of man's existence and its reform was the main goal of

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53. Armstrong, *Muḥammad …*, *op. cit.*, p. 110.
54. W. M. Watt, *Muḥammad*: *Prophet and Statesman*, London, Oxford University Press, 1961, p. 51.
55. T. Izutsu, *Ethico Religious Concepts in the Qurʾān*, Montreal, McGill–Queen University Press, 2007, p. 46

Islam and not simply the verbal glorifications of God Almighty. The main objective of Islam was man and his welfare. The centrality of God and His judgment in the whole scheme of salvation was directed towards the reform of man's relationship with the Creator and His creatures. The absolute unity of God demanded a sense of unity and equality in the entire system of existence. Islam accomplished this goal of existential unity through the concept of God's unity or *al-tawḥīd*.

God's unity is the very essence of Islam. The Islamic worldview divides reality into two generic categories: God and non-God. God is the Eternal Creator and nothing is like unto Him. He remains forever the transcendental other, devoid of any resemblance, similarity, partnership and association. He is that unique being who alone can be called the Reality and the Being as everything other than Him derives its reality, existence and being from Him. Allāh, the Arabic word for God, is semantically the highest focused word of the Qur'ān, signifying the fact that the Islamic worldview is theocentric to the core. Ontologically, nothing can stand equal or opposed to Him. He always remains the One who presides over the entire system of existence as its Master and Creator. Everything other than Him is His creature and stands inferior to Him in the hierarchy of being.

The second realm consists of everything other than God. It is the order of time-space, of creation and experience. Human beings, *jinn*, angels and all that exists come under this category. Ontologically, these two orders always remain disparate. The Creator neither descends to the realm of space-time and experience to be united, diffused or confused with creatures, nor can the creatures ascend to be ontologically united or diffused with the Creator. He always remains the utterly sublime 'Other' but a unique kind of 'Other' who, at the same time, is extremely close to man by dint of His knowledge, mercy, love and compassion. This is the Islamic concept of God's Unity. All Qur'ānic concepts and ideas are woven together to pinpoint, elaborate, and describe this doctrine of God's Oneness, Unity, and Uniqueness, and to encourage mankind to establish a meaningful and appropriate relationship with Him.

Islamic monotheism does not start with monolatry or even with the affirmation of the existence or Oneness of the Deity. On the contrary, it starts by absolutely negating all concepts, ideas, understandings, and illusions of divinity or godhead other than the One and the only Divine. It starts with *Lā ilāha illā Allāh* ('there is no god but God'), the *shahāda* or confession, which is derived from the Qur'ān itself. The whole Qur'ān is a commentary on these four simple words. The first part of this declaration, *Lā ilāha*, negates the existence of every false god, and condemns false devotion, worship, and ideas of dependence upon such gods. The profession of faith is a commitment to radical ethical monotheism.

I–2.2   Page of al-Ghazālī's *Kimiāyē saʿādat* (The Alchemy of Happiness)
© National Library and Archives of the Islamic Republic of Iran

The second part of the *shahāda* contains an immediate corollary on the mission and prophethood of Muḥammad. It says, *Muḥammadun Rasūl Allāh*, 'and Muḥammad is the Messenger of God'. The true reality is historically revealed through the mission and prophethood of Muḥammad. He is the vehicle of God's message of monotheism and its concomitant, upright conduct, rather than manifestation of the Divine Person. Therefore, true submission to God's command is only possible by following the life-pattern and directives of the Prophet Muḥammad whose advent marks the culmination of Prophethood. His prophetic consciousness is nothing but a substantiation and culmination of the missions of the earlier Prophets such as Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. The credo of Islam is, in a sense, a universal declaration of the accumulative morality.

The pronouncement of this confession, quite obviously, is also the pronouncement of God's Oneness. Perhaps this is the reason that it has been mentioned in the Qur'ān and the traditions of the Prophet more frequently than any other phrase. In the Qur'ān, the Islamic unitarian formula in its *Lā ilāha* form occurs 41 times. This is in addition to the numerous other forms (23 different formations) in which the Qur'ān negates godhead or divinity in all forms. The Qur'ān states, 'And your God is One God: there is no god but He, Most Gracious, Most Merciful' (II.163). At another place it says: 'Allāh! There is no god but He, the Living, the Self-Subsisting, the Supporter of all' (III.2). The reality of God's unity and transcendence is witnessed by God and by all of His righteous creatures: 'There is no god but He: that is the witness of Allāh, His angels, and those endowed with knowledge, standing firm on justice. There is no god but He the Exalted in Power, the Wise' (III.18). The famous 'Throne Verse' (*āyat al-Kursī*) also starts with the same confession.

> 'Allāh! There is no god but He, the Living, the Self-subsisting Supporter of all, no slumber can seize Him nor sleep. His are all things in the heavens and on earth. Who is there who can intercede in His presence except as He permitteth? He knoweth what (appeareth to His creatures as) Before or After or Behind them. Nor shall they compass aught of His knowledge except as He willeth. His Throne doth extend over the heavens and the earth, and He feeleth no fatigue in guarding and preserving them for He is the Most High, the Supreme (in glory)' (II.255).

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF *SŪRAT AL-IKHLĀṢ*

Presumably the most frequently recited *sūra* of the Qur'ān is *sūra* CXII, *al-Ikhlāṣ*, meaning 'sincerity'. This short *sūra* is an epitome of God's Oneness, Uniqueness and Transcendence so that if one does not read from the Qur'ān anything other than this short *sūra* and properly apprehends its meaning, one

will not remain in any doubt or confusion regarding the Islamic concept of monotheism.

T. B. Irving translates the *Sūra* of 'Sincerity' (*al-Ikhlāṣ*) as follows:

'Say: God is Unique! God is the Source [for everything]; He has not fathered anyone nor was He fathered, and there is nothing comparable to Him.' [56]

Al-Ikhlāṣ or the chapter of Sincerity, consists of only four verses. Yet, this brief construction has monumental implications: it emphasizes God's Unity, Uniqueness, Self-Sufficiency, Transcendence and Purity. It stands as a powerful statement against the possibility of multiplicity or division in the godhead; it demands sincere and exclusive worship of the One and Only God, eliminating the possibility of any partnership or association with Him. It is said to be equal to one third of the Qur'ān (according to a *ḥadīth* reported by Bukhārī # 4628) since it explains *tawḥīd* which is one of the three most essential doctrines of Islam, the other two being Prophethood/Revelation and the Day of Judgement.

The pagans of Mecca asked the Prophet about Allāh's lineage (origin). In response Allāh revealed this verse 'Say: Allāh is Unique'. The Arabic term *aḥad* instead of the more frequently used word *wāḥid* used in this *sūra*, stresses the Unicity of God. The term *aḥad* is much more precise than the more frequently used term *wāḥid* which simply means 'one'. *Aḥad* has the added connotations of absolute and continuous unity and the absence of equals. It also denotes the unfathomable mystery of the Deity.

The second verse of the chapter contains the word *al-Ṣamad* that has been used nowhere else in the Qur'ān except in this *sūra*. The word itself is so comprehensive that it has been translated differently by different translators. *Al-Ṣamad* is one of the 'Beautiful Names' of God, and its root has the primary meaning of being 'without hollow' or 'without cleft'. Allāh is without mixture of any sort, without any possibility of division into parts, because in Him there is no 'hollow'. *Al-Ṣamad* also denotes that God is unknowable, that He enjoys intrinsic self-sufficiency and unicity without cleft or internal division. The famous classical scholar Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī explained the word *al-Ṣamad* as meaning 'The Master who is depended upon in all matters.' [57] The renowned Muslim scholar Muḥammad Asad translates it as 'God the Eternal, the Uncaused Cause of All Being.' He further observes that

This rendering gives no more than an approximate meaning of the term as-samad, which occurs in the Qur'ān only once, and is applied to God alone. It comprises the concept of Primary Cause and eternal, independent Being,

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56. For publication details, see n. 64 below.
57. Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *Muʿjam mufradāt alfāẓ al-Qurʾān*, Beirut, Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1972, p. 294.

combined with the idea that everything existing or conceivable goes back to Him as its source and is, therefore, dependent on Him for its beginning as well as for its continued existence.[58]

The third verse of *Sūrat al-Ikhlās*, 'He begets not, and neither is He begotten', reaffirms this unicity by categorically rejecting any multiplicity within the Divine unity. It also simultaneously negates the 'daughters of God' concept held by the polytheists of Mecca, as well as the Christian concept of the Holy Trinity.

The last verse of *al-Ikhlāṣ* dispels all possibilities of crude anthropomorphism, corporealism and incarnation in relation to God. The verse is unequivocal in stating that nothing resembles God either in His being or in His actions and attributes. In fact, God is the only effective power in existence. He is the absolute reality with absolute qualities and attributes. Everything other than Him is relative and dependent upon Him for its existence, sustenance and continuity. The claims of God's absolute unity and uniqueness made in the verses cited above are hereby sealed, confirmed and elaborated by this final verse, 'there is nothing like unto Him'. Muḥammad Asad writes:

> The fact that God is one and unique in every respect, without beginning and without end, has its logical correlate in the statement that 'there is nothing that could be compared with Him', thus precluding any possibility of describing or defining Him…. Consequently, the *quality* of His being is beyond the range of human comprehension or imagination: which also explains why any attempt at 'depicting' God by means of figurative representations or even abstract symbols must be qualified as a blasphemous denial of the truth.[59]

> In addition to insisting upon God's unity and transcendence, the Qurʾān vigorously debunks all forms of idolatry, monolatry and polytheism. *Shirk*, the act of associating anything or anybody with God, according to the Qurʾān, is the only unforgivable sin: 'Allāh forgives not that partners should be set up with Him; but He forgives anything else, to whom He pleases; to set up partners with Allāh is to devise a sin most heinous indeed' (IV.48). Verse IV.116 reiterates the same message and contains an additional line: 'one who joins other gods with Allāh, hath strayed far, far away (from the right path).' In verse XXXI.13, *shirk* is declared to be 'the highest wrong-doing'. 'Being true in faith to Allāh, and never assigning partners to Him: if anyone assigns partners to Allāh [he] is as if he had fallen from heaven and been snatched up by birds, or the wind had swooped (like a bird on its prey) and thrown him into a far-distant place' (XXII.31).

58. M. Asad, *The Message of the Qurʾān*, Bristol, Book Foundation, 2003, p. 1124.
59. *Ibid*.

In addition to these warnings, the Qurʾān vehemently denies the existence of any divinity other than the Almighty.

> Whatever ye worship apart from Him is nothing but names which ye have named, ye and your fathers, for which Allāh hath sent down no authority: the Command is for none but Allāh: He hath commanded that ye worship none but Him: that is the right religion, but most men understand not (XII.40).

Therefore, gods are nothing but human inventions having no independent reality of their own. In the realm of supernatural beings, Allāh stands alone as the 'Real', depriving all other so-called gods of all reality. These are 'mere names', not corresponding to any real entities. 'In the terminology of modern semantics, we should say that in this conception the term *ilāh* (pl. *āliha*), when applied to anything other than Allāh Himself is nothing but a word having connotation but no denotation.'[60]

Furthermore, the Qurʾān brings home the point using various proofs from the creation to establish God's unity. Almighty God is the Creator. He has created the heavens and the earth and all that is in the universe. He is also their sole Sustainer. 'He it is who has created for you all that is on earth, and has applied His design to the heavens and fashioned them into seven heavens; and He alone has full knowledge of everything' (II.29). 'He has created the heavens and the earth with truth; far is He above having the partners they ascribe to Him' (XVI.3; also see VII.54, 185; IX.36; X.3, 5, 6; XIV.19; XXV.2, XXV.59; XXX.8; XXXI.10). The Qurʾān then inquires: '… Such is the Creation of Allāh: now show Me what is there that others besides Him have created: nay, but the transgressors are in manifest error' (XXXI.11). The conclusion the Qurʾān wants people to derive from this is simple and straightforward: 'Is then He Who creates like one that creates not? Will ye not receive admonition?' (XVI.17).

It becomes clear from the above discussion that the Qurʾān has categorically refuted all kinds of polytheism, henotheism and associationism, in addition to vigorously affirming the transcendental otherness and Godhead of the One God. In the Qurʾān just as the concept of *tawḥīd* (unity) is presented with strong and convincing arguments, likewise the concepts of polytheism, henotheism and associationism are rejected with strong and irrefutable evidence. The Qurʾān does not confine itself to mere assertions about God, but arrays various arguments, logical as well as these drawn from the cosmos, to substantiate its claims. The Qurʾān employs a variety of methods and cognitive categories to drive home the point of God's transcendental unity and moral functionality. It safeguards an already self-explaining and convincing concept with additional evidence so as to allow no doubt or confusion concerning it.

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60. Izutsu, *God and Man* …, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

As belief in a strict ethical monotheism is the primordial act needed for the reform and salvation of humanity, the Qurʾān presents it in a very simple, straightforward and logical way that is self-explanatory and self-sufficient. It is also coherent, systematic and methodical. There exist no layers of progressive or evolutionary revelation or conflicting tendencies in the Qurʾān. The Qurʾānic monotheism is thorough and systematic to the core.

The external as well as internal unity of God is described in Islam by the word *al-tawḥīd* which is the verbal noun of the second form of the root *w-ḥ-d*. It indicates the action of unifying and of conferring unity. Etymologically it designates the knowledge one has of the unity of a thing. Although the word *tawḥīd* does not occur in the Qurʾān, it does appear in the authentic sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad.[61]

Tawḥīd and Muslim Theology

When religious learning later developed, the particular branch of learning known as ʿIlm al-Kalām (meaning the science of the word of God or about God) was also called ʿIlm al-Tawḥīd (the science of Divine unicity). However, when the term *tawḥīd* is used with reference to God Almighty, it means affirmation of the Divine unity and transcendence in all of man's actions related to Him. It is comprised of the belief that Allāh is One and Unique, without any partner in His dominion and His actions (*rubūbiyya*), One without similitude in His essence and attributes (*asmāʾ wa ṣifāt*), and One without rival in His divinity and in worship (*ulūhiyya*/ *ʿibāda*). The science of *Tawḥīd* revolves around these three constituent elements so much so that omission of any of these at times overlapping categories will nullify the essence and mission of ʿilm al-tawḥīd and its foundation, monotheism.

These three categories of *tawḥīd* are sometimes referred to as *Tawḥīd al-Dhāt* (unity of the Being), *Tawḥīd al-Ṣifāt* (Unity of the Attributes) and *Tawḥīd al-Afʿāl* (Unity of the Actions). The Unity of God, according to the Qurʾān, implies that God is the Absolute One in His person (*dhāt*), Absolute One in His attributes (*ṣifāt*) and the Absolute One in His works (*afʿāl*). The Oneness of His person means that there is neither plurality of gods, nor plurality of persons in the Godhead. As for the Unity of attributes, it implies that no other being possesses any of the Divine attributes in the absolute sense; His Oneness in works implies that none can do the works

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61. The word *ahl al-tawḥīd* has occurred in the *ḥadīth* of Jābir ibn ʿAbd Allāh. See Imām al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, ed. Aḥmad Shākir, Beirut, Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, n.d., *ḥadīth* no. 2737. When the Prophet sent Muʿādh ibn Jabal as governer of Yemen, he told him: 'You will be going to Christians and Jews (*ahl al-Kitāb*), so the first thing you should invite them to is the assertion of the oneness of Allāh (*yuwaḥḥidu Allāh*).' See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, op. cit., XXII, p. 363, *ḥadīth* no. 6824.

which God has done, or which God may do. It may be added here, that this tripartite division of *tawḥīd* owes its origin to the Qurʾān, as its material is wholly Qurʾānic, though the specific names mentioned above have resulted from later theological expositions.[62]

Tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya, then, means to accept Almighty God not simply as the only Creator but also as the only Sustainer, the Nourisher, the Lord, the Master, the Sovereign, the Supreme authority. Therefore, when a Muslim is asked to affirm that 'There is no god but God', he is being asked to state that there is no other Creator and Sustainer of the universe, no other Ruler or Lawgiver in the absolute sense, no other Reality that can harm or benefit, give or withhold, cause life or death, except with the permission of God Almighty. He creates and sustains the creation out of His mercy, without any need for it. Nobody can challenge His sovereignty. He is the exalted Lord Who is not accountable to anyone, while everybody else is accountable to Him, 'He cannot be questioned for His acts, but they will be questioned (for theirs)' (XXI.23). His acts are always based upon eternal wisdom, knowledge, justice and mercy.

The main thrust of this kind of *tawḥīd* is that God, after creating the universe, did not detach Himself from nor become indifferent to His creation. He effectively rules over the universe as a whole as well as every part of it. All power and sovereignty rest with Him. The universe is not operating on autopilot as some scientists seem to suggest. It is actively governed and administered by God Almighty. *Tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya* dispels misconceptions of absolute human or cosmic autonomy. Two suppositions come into play when God is divorced from the cosmos. Firstly, beings other than God are considered to have the power to make or mar man's destiny. Man is, therefore, bound to turn to these beings in devotion and subservience. The second possibility for man is to consider himself the master of his own destiny. In this case, man considers himself independent of and indifferent to any higher being. The vocabulary employed in the verses related to *tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya* denote, Divine kingship, dominion and sovereignty to dispel all such suppositions. The absolute unity and transcendence of God is maintained with regards to His lordship and sovereignty. The Divine unity and authority means that the

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62. Very often this division is attributed to Ibn Taymiyya and his school of thought and many scholars do not take it as standard. But we see it in its embryonic stage in a number of earlier works. It is not as elaborate as is the case of later theological formulations but its seeds are very much there. See, for instance, Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī (d. 386/996), *Kitāb al-Jāmiʿ fi-l-sunan wa-l-ādāb wa-l-maghāzī wa-l-taʾrīkh*, eds., M. Abu-l-Ajfān and ʿUthmān Baṭṭīkh, Beirut, Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1983, pp. 107–10. See also Ibn Khuzayma, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, Cairo, Maktabat al-Kulliyyāt al-Azhariyya, n.d. Here we are adopting this tripartite formulation to help us elaborate the point under discussion and not necessarily as the standard Islamic expression of the concept of *tawḥīd*.

entire existence, including nature, is also one and united, and absolutely under God's control. There are no ruptures, gaps or discrepancies in the universe. It is a well-knit cosmos which works by its own innate laws ingrained in it by the One and Only God. The cosmos can be considered to be autonomous but not autocratic as it cannot govern itself by itself. It needs the Sovereign Master for its existence, functioning, hauling and re-hauling.

The idea of God's absolute Sovereignty and Lordship is so clear and emphatic in the Qurʾān that even a casual reader cannot possibly miss it.

> Whatever is in the heavens and on earth, declares the Praises and Glory of Allāh: for He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise. *To Him belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth:* it is He Who gives life and death; and He has power over all things. He is the First and the Last, the Evident and the Hidden: and has full knowledge of all things. He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in six Days, then He established Himself on the Throne. He knows what enters within the earth and what comes forth out of it, what comes down from heaven and what mounts up to it. And He is with you wheresoever ye may be. And Allāh sees well all that ye do. *To Him belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth: and all affairs go back to Allāh.* He merges night into day, and He merges day into night; and He has full knowledge of the secrets of (all) hearts (LVII.1–6).

Tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya (the unification of Deity/*ilāh* or *ʿibāda*) means to accept and believe that there is no *ilāh* (deity) other than God Almighty, and man is required to submit to Him and *worship Him alone*. The word *al-ilāh* in the Arabic language means the one who is *al-maʾlūh*, meaning *al-maʿbūd* (worshipped). Worship or *al-ʿibāda* means utmost humbleness, extreme humility, submission, obedience, compliance and service to God. As noted earlier, Ibn al-Qayyim defines it as 'utmost love [of God] accompanied with total submission [to Him].'[63] Therefore, *tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya* denotes sincere and unadulterated inner as well as external submission to and worship of God, an absolute sense of dependence upon and devotion to Him alone with the exclusion of everything and everyone other than Him.

This second kind of *tawḥīd* eliminates all possibilities of associationism, trinitarianism and saint worship. In spite of the wide range of implications contained in the first category of *tawḥīd*, firm belief in the Oneness of the Divine Lordship is not sufficient to meet the requirements of the Qurʾānic concept of *tawḥīd*. It must be accompanied with a strong commitment to worship, devotion and obedience to God alone in order for *tawḥīd* to be completed. This aspect of the Qurʾānic monotheism is unique and distinguishes it from other versions of monotheism including the Christian

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63. al-Sharqī, *Sharḥ qaṣīdat Ibn al-Qayyim, op. cit.*, II, p. 259; see also Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Ighāthat al-lahfān min maṣāyid al-shayṭān*, ed. Muḥammad S. Kaylānī, Cairo, Maṭbaʿat Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1961, II, pp. 128–9.

one. Christianity in its various forms has historically allowed the worship of Jesus, Mary and other saintly figures. Islam denounces such worship as an act of *shirk* or associationism. An absolute sense of dependence upon God and a sheer sense of submission to His commands requires, as its corollary, that nothing else be worshipped other than the Almighty God. To fulfil the demands of monotheism, one has to confess the lordship of God as well as to worship Him in submission. This point is substantiated by the fact that the Qurʾān vehemently censures the Meccan belief system as one of associationism, dubbing its followers as *mushrikūn* (polytheists), and this in spite of their confirmation of several aspects of God's lordship. The Qurʾān states the following about the polytheists of Mecca:

> 'If thou ask them, who it is that created the heavens and the earth. *They will certainly say,* "(*Allāh*)". Say: "Praise be to Allāh." But most of them understand not. To Allāh belong all things in heaven and earth: verily Allāh is He (that is) free of all wants, worthy of all praise' (XXXI.25–6). [64]

It is interesting to note that the polytheists of Mecca did believe that God was Exalted in Power, full of Knowledge (XLIII.9). Furthermore, they also believed that other natural phenomena like the sun and moon were also the creation of God Almighty: 'If indeed thou ask them who created the heavens and the earth and subjected the sun and moon (to His Law), *they will certainly reply,* "*Allāh*"'. How are they then deluded away (from the truth)?' (XXIX.61). They also acknowledged that God was the only source of rain and the cultivation resulting from it: 'And if indeed thou ask them who it is that sends down rain from the sky, and gives life therewith to the earth after its death, *they will certainly reply,* "*Allāh*"'! Say, "Praise be to Allāh!" But most of them understand not' (XXIX.63). They also recognized that they owed their own creation to God Almighty. 'If thou ask them, *Who created them, they will certainly say, Allāh:* how then are they deluded away (from Truth)?' (XLIII.87). They understood that both sustenance, life, death, and the keys of all affairs were all in God's hands (X.31).

Given all this, why were the Meccans regarded as polytheists? The answer is simple: they did not recognize for God, the Creator, His due role in their daily life, spirituality and morality. God was dormant and not functional in the pre-Islamic Arabs' concepts. The Meccans also lacked purity of worship. To the Qurʾān, this was paganism. *Tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya* aims to purge the conception of God of every element of in-actionism, associationism or multiplicity. It also vehemently affirms God's absolute control over and effective governance of the universe. Notions of God's practical divorce from nature and man were eradicated, reaffirming God as the sole Lord and Sovereign, fully in control of man's life and surroundings.

64. The translation is from Irving, *The Noble Qurʾān with English Translation,* Lahore, Suhail Academy, 2002.

The act of sole worship, absolute devotion, and utter submission to God's commandments is no less fundamental and intrinsic to the Qurʾānic concept of the Deity than belief in Him as the sole Creator, Sustainer, and Master of the universe. For the Qurʾān, *tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya* without *tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya* remains a kind of polytheism. Perhaps there would not have been much opposition to the Prophet Muḥammad's message had it not been for his uncompromising stance against every kind of associationism with Allāh. The Qurʾānic concept of the Deity was intensely stringent, approving nothing except the worship of and devotion to the One and Only God. This was the supreme issue and the line of demarcation between the Qurʾānic understanding of the Deity and the pagans' conception of God. In fact it is this that the Meccans recognized and disputed: 'Has he made gods (all) into One? Truly this is a strange thing!' (XXXVIII.5).

Islam vehemently stresses that it is only Almighty God Who is the Ultimate Reality and the ultimate concern of man and his actions. Absolute submission to the will of God and willing submission to Him and harmonious and benevolent relationship with His creatures is the essence of the Islamic message.

Islam claims to be in unison with the original messages of prophets such as Moses and Jesus, but finds fault with the historical Judaic and Christian notions of the deity. The Hebrew Bible's corporeal and national conceptions of Yahweh (God) and Christianity's belief in a triune God are both discordant with Islam for they are considered to have compromised God's transcendence and unity. Islam contends that corporeal, national, partisan or trinitarian notions of God are partly to blame for doctrinal confusions with regard to God. Such a view of the Divine has weakened the authority of God and religion and at worst annihilated it in favour of a meaningless view of existence. In response to the creation story found in the Hebrew Bible, someone once quipped, 'God created humans in his image and then humans turned around and returned the favour.' In these two Abrahamic traditions, the ability (and even the necessity) to slightly anthropomorphize God for the sake of a communicative modality has too often gone beyond the mere need or attempt to talk about God in terms comprehensible to humans, and has led instead to a disturbing tendency to enlist God in support of human concerns and agendas, and this latter has had disastrous results.

The Qurʾān, on one level, was revealed as a corrective measure, to rectify not only the polytheistic conceptions of God but also to clarify and emend Jewish and Christian compromises regarding God's transcendence, majesty and authority. Islam identifies the source of this compromise in the historical distortion of the previous revelations – both intentional and unintentional – and claims to have settled the problem through the revelation of the Qurʾān, returning to the original purity of the message. Islam also claims to have avoided

the historical mistakes that led to the intermixing or interjection of human words with the Word of God. Indeed, it deems historical authenticity, textual purity and faithful preservation of the original scripture, as key safeguards to guarantee and preserve the transcendence of God and humanity's correct perception of Him.

Tawḥīd al-asmā' wa-l-ṣifāt: As Almighty God is One, Unique, and incomparable in His lordship, sovereignty, and worship, He is also One and Unique in His names and attributes. In the other two Abrahamic traditions, the conception of God is to a greater or lesser extent bound to the limitations of His creatures. Islam emphatically proclaims that Almighty God, the Transcendent and Exalted Lord and Sustainer of all that exists, is far above possessing any of the creaturely attributes which have been ascribed to Him by man. He is not bound by any of the limitations of human beings or any of His other creatures. He has neither form nor body, nor corporeal or physical attributes, features, or characteristics. Rather, His attributes are infinite and absolute and incomparable to any other. They are far above any limitations, defects, and deficiencies, such as His having a beginning or an end, begetting or being begotten, having physical dimensions, or having needs such as food, rest, or procreation, etc. He is the One Who gives such dimensions and characteristics to His creations, while not sharing them in the slightest degree.

Islam emphasizes that God, by the very definition of His reality, cannot simply be a sort of supernatural or superhuman being, directing worldly affairs from the heavens whilst simultaneously sharing in creaturely attributes, needs, and qualities. For God is nothing less than the Creator, Originator, and Fashioner of this vast universe, the One Who keeps it functioning in accordance with His infinite wisdom. God transcends anything which the human mind can possibly perceive or comprehend, or which the senses can grasp, imagine, or articulate. God is far above any similarity or comparability with any of His creatures. This special emphasis upon Divine transcendence is what the third category of *tawḥīd* is designated for. God is One in His Names and Attributes. His Names, Actions and Attributes surpass human names, actions and attributes as much as His Being surpasses their beings. The Absolute Creator utterly transcends the relative actions and attributes of His creatures. This is implied in the first assertion of the Islamic creed that 'There is no god but God'. In addition to being a denial of any associates to God in His worship and His dominion over the universe, it also contains a denial of the possibility of any creature representing, personifying, or in any way or form expressing the Divine Being. The Qur'ān says of God that 'To Him is due the primal origin of the heavens and the earth: When He decreeth a matter, He saith to it: "Be", and it is' (II.117; II.163). 'There is no

God but He, ever-living, ever-active' (III.2). 'May He be glorified beyond any description!' (VI.100). '…No sense may perceive Him' (VI.103). '…Praised be He, the Transcendent Who greatly transcends all claims and reports about Him' (XVII.43).

As a result of this emphasis upon God's uniqueness, Muslims have been careful not to associate, in any manner possible, any image or thing with the presence of the Divine or with their consciousness of the Divine. This fact is well reflected in the Muslim discourse concerning the Divine. Indeed, Muslims have been careful to employ the language of the Qurʾān and its terms and expressions to describe God, that is, the language and terminology chosen by God Himself to describe Himself.

The Qurʾān prescribes the fundamental criterion in the following verses: 'There is nothing whatever like unto Him' (XLII.11). 'And there is none like unto Him' (CXII.4), and 'Knowest thou of any who is worthy of the same Name as He?' (XIX.65). After having established this criterion, the Qurʾān represents God as having 'the Most Beautiful Names':

> Allāh is He, than Whom there is no other god: Who knows (all things) both secret and open; He, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Allāh is He, than Whom there is no other god;- the Sovereign, the Holy One, the Source of Peace (and Perfection), the Guardian of Faith, the Preserver of Safety, the Exalted in Might, the Irresistible, the justly Proud, Glory to Allāh! (High is He) above the partners they attribute to Him. He is Allāh, the Creator, the Originator, the Fashioner; to Him belong the Most Beautiful Names: whatever is in the heavens and on earth, doth declare His Praises and Glory: and He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise (LIX.22–4).

This is a passage of great sublimity. It sums up the generic attributes and names of Allāh. While establishing the fundamental principle of Divine otherness by the words 'nothing is like unto Him', the passage institutes the basis of a possible Divine modality. The One and Unique God is the most Merciful, the Compassionate. His knowledge extends to everything seen and unseen, present and future, near and far, in being and not in being; in fact, these relative contrasts do not even apply to the Absolute God. He is unknowable in His being yet knowable through His names and attributes. These beautiful names and attributes are the source and basis of a possible Divine modality. They make the transcendent God both immanent and personal. This is perhaps the reason why the Qurʾān and *Ḥadīth* have taken upon themselves to lay down the boundaries of this modality to avoid confusion and excesses.

The Beautiful Names of Allāh

Due to their sheer significance, these Qurʾānic verses have been explained and reflected upon by a great many Qurʾānic exegetes, theologians and Sufis. The

mere recitation of the Qurʾānic passage quoted above is encouraged and is said to carry great merit, the merit being connected with the beautiful names of God contained in the passage. The Prophet Muḥammad is reported to have said that 'Allāh has ninety-nine names, one hundred less one; and he who memorized them all by heart will enter Paradise.'[65] Ibn al-Qayyim observes that a Muslim is 'firstly, to count them and memorize their words; secondly, to understand their meanings and intent; and thirdly, to call upon God with them, as God has said in the Qurʾān: (The most beautiful names belong to Allāh: so call on Him by them)' (VII.180).[66]

Muslim scholars, however, argue that the number ninety-nine should not be taken too literally. It is easy to find more than the ninety-nine names of God both in the Qurʾān as well as from the authentic sayings of the Prophet. Part three, chapter one, of Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī's famous work *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, is titled, 'On Explaining that the names of God most high are not limited to ninety-nine so far as divine instruction is concerned.' In this chapter al-Ghazālī contends that the Qurʾān and *Ḥadīth* literature contain names other than ninety-nine and several lists of Divine names could be formulated by combining various *ḥadīth* reports on the subject.[67] Al-Ghazālī, like Ibn Ḥajar, Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim, argues that the Prophet said:

> Whatever distress or affliction that befalls a person, let him say: 'O God, I am Your servant, and the son of Your servant, and the son of Your bondsmaid: my forelock is in Your hand, Your judgment concerning me is done. I implore You by every name which is Yours, by which You have named Yourself, or which You revealed in Your book, or which You taught to anyone from Your creation, or which You appropriated to Yourself in Your knowledge of hidden things, that You might make the Qurʾān a renewal of my heart, a light for my inmost thoughts, a way through my affliction, and the unraveling of my distress'; and God-great and glorious- will remove his distress and affliction, and replace them with happiness.[68]

Al-Ghazālī argues that the Prophet's saying 'which You appropriated to Yourself in Your knowledge of hidden things' shows that the names are not limited to those mentioned in the well-known versions.[69]

Abū Bakr Ibn al-ʿArabī has given a count of 146 names,[70] Ibn al-Wazīr 173, and ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī has narrated a report from al-Rāzī that there

65. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *op. cit.*, XXII, p. 393, *ḥadīth* no. 6843.

66. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Badāʾiʿ al-fawāʾid*, Beirut, Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, n.d., I, p. 164.

67. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, tr., D. B. Burrell and N. Daher, Cambridge, The Islamic Texts Society, 1992, p. 167.

68. Abū ʿAbd Allāh Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-imām Aḥmad*, Cairo, Muʾassasat Qurṭuba, n.d., VIII, p. 63, *ḥadīth* no. 3528.

69. Al-Ghazālī, *The Ninety-Nine …*, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

70. Abū Bakr ibn al-ʿArabī, *Aḥkām al-Qurʾān,* Cairo, Maktabat ʿĪsā al-Bābī, 1967, II, p. 805.

are 4000 names for God, with the qualification that such a statement cannot be substantiated from the Qurʾān or *Sunna*.[71] A contemporary Muslim scholar. ʿUmar al-Ashqar has shown that 88 names are mentioned in the Qurʾān itself and 22 more are mentioned in the *Ḥadīth*.[72] These scholars argue that although to enumerate these ninety-nine names would suffice to grant a person reward in the Hereafter, in no way are the Divine names restricted to the number ninety-nine. It is, notes al-Ghazālī,

> like the king who has a thousand servants: one could say that the king has ninety-nine servants, and were one to seek their assistance, no enemy could oppose him. What is specified is the number required to obtain the assistance one needs from them, either because of the addition of their strength, or because that number would suffice to repel the enemy without needing anymore; it does not specify that only they exist.[73]

The beautiful names of God can be classified into three main categories. Some of them can be called the 'Names of God's essence' (*Asmāʾ al-dhāt*), others as 'Names of God's attributes' (*Asmāʾ al-ṣifāt*), and still others as the 'Names of His acts' (*Asmāʾ al-afʿāl*).[74] Some scholars divide them into the Names of Perfection (*Asmāʾ al-kamāl*), the Names of Majesty (*Asmāʾ al-jalāl*) and the Names of Beauty (*Asmāʾ al-jamāl*).[75]

The essence (*dhāt*) of something is its reality, the innermost core that defines what it is. In the case of God, the question of *dhāt* means that which is God's very self. What is His essence that makes Him God and differentiates Him fundamentally from everything other than Himself? The typical Qurʾānic answer is that God is so unique and transcendent that 'Nothing is like unto Him' (XLII.11). Therefore, God's essence is what He is and what everything else is not. That is what the first category of names explains.

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71. See al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fatḥ al-bārī*, *op. cit.*, XI, p. 220.

72. See a very good discussion in ʿUmar S. al-Ashqar, *al-Asmāʾ wa-l-ṣifāt*, Amman, Dār al-Nafāʾis, 1993, pp. 66–79.

73. Al-Ghazālī, *The Ninety-Nine …*, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

74. This is only one of the ways to classify the names. There could be several ways to classify them. Al-Ṣanʿānī classified them into four kinds. The only difference between our classification and his is that he has further divided the names of essence into 'Proper Name' which is Allāh and 'Negative Names' like *al-Quddūs*. (See Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl al-Amīr al-Ṣanʿānī, *Subul al-salām fī sharḥ bulūgh al-marām*, Cairo, Maktabat ʿĪsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1938, IV, p. 209). We have modified it a little for the purpose of convenience. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya divides them into six categories (see *Badāʾiʿ al-fawāʾid*, *op. cit.*, I, p. 160), al-ʿAsqalānī into five (see *Fatḥ al-bārī*, *op. cit.*, XI, p. 223) and scholars of ʿIlm al-Kalām into four. For more details, see Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Kitāb al-Iqtiṣād fī-l-iʿtiqād*, Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1983, pp. 19–83.

75. See S. H. Nasr, *Islam: Religion, History and Civilization*, San Francisco, Harper, 2003, p. 61.

Among the commonly employed Qurʾānic names, Allāh is the most frequently used name.[76] It occurs in the Qurʾān 2602 times: 980 times in the *marfūʿ* (nominative) case, 592 in the *mansūb* (accusative) case, 1125 in the *majrūr* (genitive) case and 5 times with the formula *Allāhumma*.[77] The author of the article on 'Allāh Most High' in the *Integrated Encyclopedia of the Qurʾān* argues that the divine name Allāh occurs 'in the Qurʾān 2697 times in 85 of its 114 *sūras*, aside from its presence in the theonymic invocation which occurs at the head of every *sūra* except Q IX.'[78] Many Muslim scholars and theologians argue that Allāh is the proper name (*ism ʿalam*) that God has given to His (*dhāt*), to Himself. Al-Ghazālī observes, that

> it is a name for the true existent, the one who unites the attributes of divinity, is subject of the attributes of lordship, and unique in true existence… It is most likely that in indicating *this* meaning (Allāh) is analogous to proper names, so everything which has been said about its derivation and definition is arbitrary and artificial.[79]

Other theologians like Ibn al-Qayyim, and philologists like the renowned Sībawayh, prefer to derive it from *ilāh*, and hold that it means simply 'the God'.[80]

Among many others, al-Ghazālī argues that Allāh is the greatest of the ninety-nine names of God. Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767), one of the leading Muslim jurists, considers 'Allāh' as the 'Supreme Name' (*al-ism al-aʿẓam*).[81] This is the reason that Muslims generally prefer to use the name Allāh instead of 'God' while referring to the Supreme Being. This name transcends the sphere of time, space, and history, and is so specific that it is inconceivable that it could be shared, either literally or metaphorically.

The other names of God's essence are those that describe His absolute transcendence and negate all kinds of imperfection. *Al-Quddūs* is one of the names of essence. It occurs in the Qurʾān twice (LIX.23; LXII.1) and means '*the Holy*'. Al-Ghazālī observes that al-Quddūs is the One

> who is free from every attribute which a sense might perceive, or imagination may conceive, or to which imagination may instinctively turn or by which the

76. For the etymology of the word 'Allāh' see Muzaffar Iqbal, *Integrated Encyclopedia of the Qurʾān*, I, p. 4

77. See al-Ashqar, *al-Asmāʾ wa-l-ṣifāt*, op. cit., p. 89.

78. Iqbal, *Integrated Encyclopedia …*, op. cit., I, p. 3.

79. Al-Ghazālī, *The Ninety-Nine …*, op. cit., p. 51; also see ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ḥasan Ḥ. al-Maydānī, *al-ʿAqīda al-islāmiyya wa-ususuha*, 3rd ed., Damascus, Dār al-Qalam, 1983, p. 157; for details see art. 'Allāh' in Gibb and Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, photomechanical reprint, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974, p. 33.

80. See ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Ḥasan Āl al-Shaykh, *Fatḥ al-majīd sharḥ kitāb al-tawḥīd*, Makka, Maṭbaʿat al-Ḥukūma, 1967, p. 11; M. Yāsīn, *al-Īmān*, Amman, Dār al-Furqān, 1985, p. 35.

81. Iqbal, *Integrated Encyclopedia …*, op. cit., I, p. 3.

conscience may be moved, or which thinking demands. I do not say: free from defects and imperfections, for the mere mention of that borders on insult; it is bad form for one to say: the king of the country is neither a weaver nor a cupper, since denying something's existence could falsely imply its possibility, and there is imperfection in that false implication.[82]

Human beings can praise God by ascribing to Him attributes taken from their perfections i.e., knowledge, power, hearing, seeing, etc., and denying to Him attributes taken from their imperfections, while God, according to al-Ghazālī:

> transcends attributes taken from their perfection as much as He does those reflecting their imperfections. Indeed God is free from every attribute of which the created can conceive; He transcends them and is above anything similar to them or like them. So if no authorization or permission had been given to use them, it would not be permissible to use most of them.[83]

Al-Salām is another name that describes God's transcendence in absolute terms. It means 'the Flawless'. Al-Ghazālī explains it as 'the one whose essence is free from defect, whose attributes escape imperfection, and whose actions are untarnished by evil; and given that He is like that, there is nothing flawless in existence which is not attributed to Him, and originates from Him.'[84]

Al-Subbūḥ means the one 'who transcends the defects and attributes that befall the contingent because of its contingency.'[85] *Al-ʿAlī* (the Most High),[86] *al-Ghanī* (the Rich),[87] *al-Samad* (the Self-Sufficient, the Eternal),[88] *al-Wāḥid* (the One),[89] *al-Awwal* (the First) and *al-Ākhir* (the Last),[90] are also among the names that denote God's transcendence in absolute terms.

If the names of essence tell us what God is not, the names of attributes tell us what God is. It must be said at the outset that through these attributes one cannot fathom God's self. Therefore, there is no contradiction between God's unknowability and knowability. When we describe some of the attributes of a person and say of him that he is this or that, by no way can we exhaust that person's reality. Likewise, to say that God is Merciful, or All-Knowing or All-Hearing, etc., is neither to describe God's essence nor exhaust His reality. He is far above being exhausted by finite knowledge, imagination,

82. *Ibid.*, p. 59; see also Abū Bakr Aḥmad al-Bayhaqī, *Kitāb al-Asmāʾ wa-l-ṣifāt*, Beirut, Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1358/1939, pp. 37–8.

83. Al-Ghazālī, *The Ninety-Nine …*, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

85. Al-Bayhaqī, *Kitāb al-Asmāʾ …*, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

86. See al-Ghazālī, *The Ninety-Nine …*, *op. cit.*, pp. 102–5.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

88. *Ibid.*, pp. 131.

89. *Ibid.*, pp. 130–1.

90. *Ibid.*, pp. 133–4.

or perception. The limitations of human knowledge and comprehension are obvious even in the sphere of our scientific knowledge. As for God, 'Nothing is like unto Him' is the Qur'ānic dictum that clearly tells us that we cannot understand His Being or essence. 'God is the infinitely and absolutely Real, about which the relatively real can know but little. We can understand reality to the extent that we are real. And that raises the question of how real we are. That is what *tawḥīd* is all about.'[91]

Allāh is also *al-Raḥmān*[92] (which occurs 57 times in the Qur'ān and 170 times in the *basmala*), and *al-Raḥīm* (occurring absolutely for God 114 times in the Qur'ān), the Infinitely Good and the Merciful. Both names are derived from the root '*Raḥma*' meaning mercy. Mercy is one of the most frequently mentioned and discussed attributes of God in the Qur'ān. 'Thy Lord is Self-sufficient, full of Mercy' (VI.133). 'Your Lord is full of Mercy all-embracing' (VI.147). 'He hath inscribed for Himself (the rule of) Mercy' (VI.12). 'Your Lord hath inscribed for Himself (the rule of) Mercy' (VI.54; also see VII.156; XVIII.57; XL.7). God is in fact 'the Most Merciful of those who show mercy' (XII.64, 92; XXI.83; XXIII.109, 118). In addition to these many verses of the Qur'ān, the *shahāda* itself is one of the great witnesses to this Divine attribute. The *shahāda* tells us that all mercy is the gift of the Merciful. 'There is no god but the Merciful' which means that 'There is no mercy but God's mercy', or 'There is none merciful but the Merciful'. God's mercy overshadows all the mercy in the universe. His mercy is the true and real mercy whereas others' mercy is relative. The Prophet expressed this idea in the following *ḥadīth*:

> God created a hundred mercies on the day He created the heavens and the earth, each mercy of which would fill what is between the heaven and the earth. Of these He placed one mercy in the earth. Through it the mother inclines toward her child, and the birds and animals incline toward each other. When the day of resurrection comes, He will complete those mercies with this mercy.[93]

God's mercy is both inclusive and perfect. The act of mercy requires an object of mercy. No one requires mercy until and unless one is wanting. A compas-

91. S. Murata and W. C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam*, New York, Paragon House, 1994, p. 65.
92. The fact that the name *al-Raḥmān* has been used as the proper name for God in several verses of the Qur'ān has led some Orientalists to conclude that 'Muḥammad derived the formula from South Arabia seems proved…' (Gibb and Kramer, *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *op. cit.*, p. 35). Andrew Rippin in his article 'Raḥmān and the Ḥanīfs' tries to prove the same. See A. Rippin, 'Rahman and the Hanifs', *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles Adams*, ed. W. B. Hallaq and D. P. Little, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1991, pp. 153–65. It may be added that the arguments presented in favour of this thesis are good guessworks without any substantial historical basis.
93. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ …*, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 2109; English translation from Murata and Chittick, *The Vision of Islam*, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

sionately merciful person may not be called truly merciful if he or she accomplishes mercy without volition, intention or sincere concern for the one in need. To al-Ghazālī, perfect mercy is

> pouring out benefaction to those in need, and directing it to them, for their care; and inclusive mercy is when it embraces deserving and undeserving alike. The mercy of God is both perfect and inclusive [*tāmma wa ʿāmma*]: perfect inasmuch as it wants to fulfil the needs of those in need and does meet them; and inclusive inasmuch as it embraces both deserving and undeserving, encompassing this world and the next, and includes bare necessities and needs, and special gifts over and above them. So He is utterly and truly merciful.[94]

Moreover, mercy in our sense is accompanied with an empathy which affects the merciful and moves him to meet the needs of the one in need. Therefore, the one who is merciful out of such feelings of empathy and concern comes close to intending to alleviate his own concern by his actions. Human mercy is relative and a little selfish as humans are; by their acts of mercy too they look after their interests. God's mercy is absolutely perfect. It is a one-way traffic as it is directed towards creatures and not vice versa. It does not relieve God of any suffering or anxiety, as these negative passions do not exist in God. He is the uniquely other. Hence, there are no anthropomorphic implications of this attribute in God. The name *al-Raḥmān* is more specific than *al-Raḥīm*. *Al-Raḥmān* is not used for anyone other than God while *al-Raḥīm* can be used for others. Always preceded by the definite article in the Qurʾān, the term *al-Raḥmān* is considered to be a proper name of God because nothing is said of *al-Raḥmān* that is not also said of Allāh. Allāh is thus nothing but absolute Mercy. The term Allāh focuses thought on the unfathomable unicity, while *al-Raḥmān* focuses it on the depths of God's mercy and benevolence.

Several Western scholars seem inclined to portray Allāh as a fearful master ever ready to mete out punishments, a harsh God Who does what He feels like, and so on. Baillie, for instance, considers that 'Islam is too moralistic…. Its God is too sheerly transcendent, the Lawgiver, but not the Gracegiver, not the indwelling source and author of the obedience which He demands.'[95] Such a depiction of Allāh seems quite arbitrary and unjustified when seen in the context of the Qurʾānic verses such as those regarding God's mercy and benevolence. Contrary to what has been contented, the Qurʾānic Deity is full of Grace. For instance, 'Allāh is Lord of abounding Grace', is a phrase which readers will frequently encounter even while flipping through the Qurʾān (II.105; III.74, 174; VIII.29; LVII.29; LXII.4 etc.). 'Allāh is full of grace

94 Al-Ghazālī, *The Ninety-Nine …*, *op. cit.*, p. 52.
95. D. M. Baillie, *God was in Christ*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1980, p. 123.
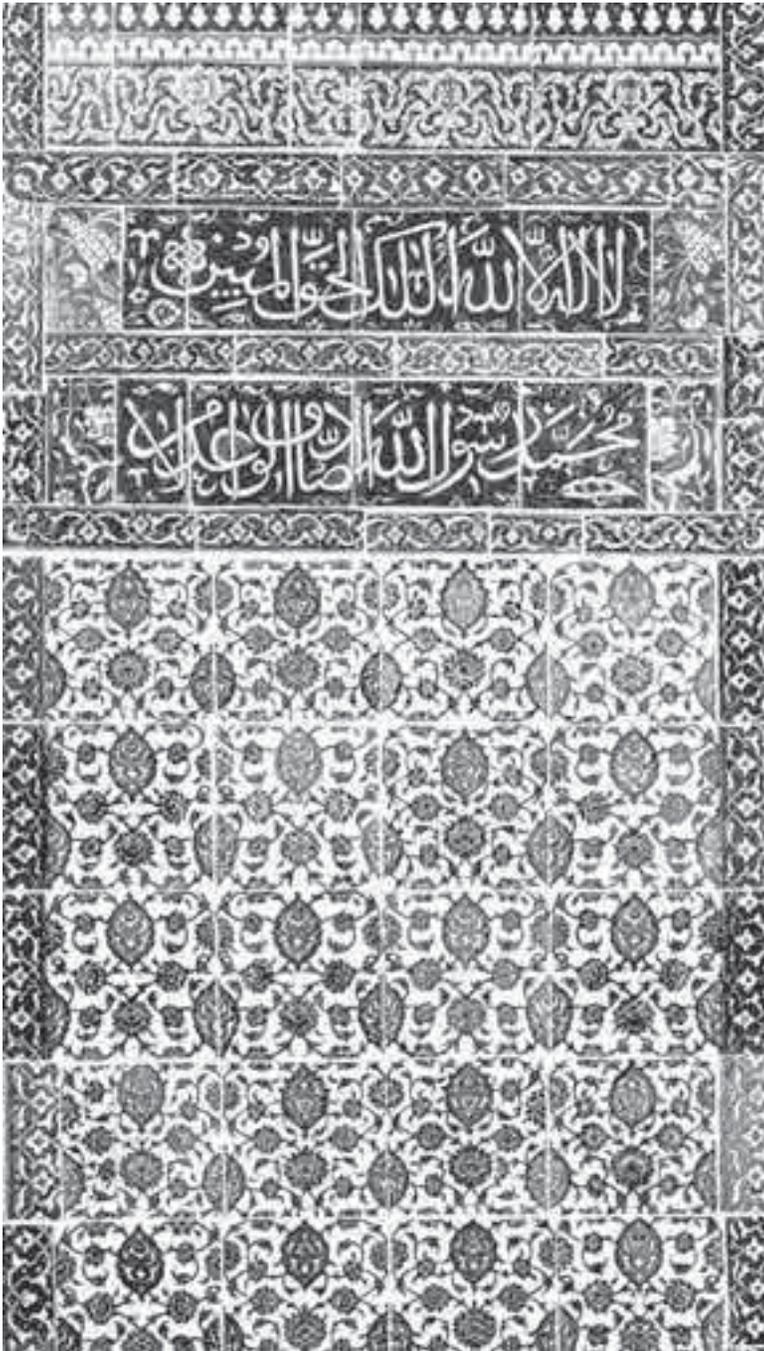
I–2.3   Ottoman panel of *Shahādatayn*, Syria, seventeenth century
© Nasser Khalili Collection of Islamic Art (Nour Foundation)

to mankind, but most of them are ungrateful' (II.243; X.60; XL.61); 'Allāh is full of grace to all the worlds' (II.251); 'Allāh is full of grace to the believers' (III.152); His grace is manifest, (XXVII.16) and the highest (XXXV.32; XLII.22).

Allāh is also Oft-Forgiving (*Ghafūr*). This name, *Ghafūr*, occurs in the Qur'ān 71 times in the nominative case, and 20 times in the accusative case. God loves to forgive all sins for He is the Oft-Forgiving, is the message communicated throughout the Qur'ān (V.39; VI.54; VII.153; XV.49; XVI.119; XXXIX.53); 'Your Lord is Most Forgiving, Full of Mercy' (XVIII.58). This is why He has also given Himself the name *al-Ghaffār*, which means, that not only does He love to forgive, but that He also conceals and covers sins so as not to humiliate or embarrass the sinners. So in what sense can God's mercy or grace or benevolence as underlined in the Qur'ān be disputed? Some Western scholars tend to cling tenaciously to such notions despite a wealth of Qur'ānic verses which leave no basis for such notions.

Additionally, God is *al-Laṭīf* (the Benevolent), *al-Wadūd* (the Loving-kind), *al-Ḥalīm* (the Mild), *al-Ra'ūf* (the All-Pitying), *al-'Afū* (the Effacer of sins), *al-Barr* (the Doer of Good) and possesses many other such names to express His infinite Love, Mercy, Grace, and Kindness towards all of His creatures. Fazlur Rahman observes that

> The immediate impression from a cursory reading of the Qur'ān is that of the infinite majesty of God and His equally infinite mercy, although many a Western scholar (through a combination of ignorance and prejudice) has depicted the Qur'ānic God as a concentrate of pure power, even as brute power – indeed, as a capricious tyrant. The Qur'ān, of course, speaks of God in so many different contexts and so frequently that unless all the statements are interiorized into a total mental picture – without, as far as possible, the interference of any subjective and wishful thinking – it would be extremely difficult, if not outright impossible, to do justice to the Qur'ān's concept of God.[96]

It is enough to simply quote the Qur'ānic data to substantiate this claim. In the Qur'ān, the names referring to God's mercy are much more frequent than those describing him as an awesome master. In the Qur'ān, God is called *al-Qahhār* (the Fearsome) four times and once as *al-Jabbār* (the Irresistibly Awesome, LIX.23). This is how God should appear to criminals, perverse hypocrites or impious disbelievers. In cases where the more stern names are used, this is almost always with reference to an admonition of the sinners, and yet despite the warning, the admonition is generally followed by a salve, the wish that the sinner perhaps may return to God: 'maybe he will return [unto God]' XXVII.46) since God is both 'Lord of majesty and of generosity' (LV.78). For those who serve Him and are faithful, He is the Most Indulgent

96. F. Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'ān*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2009, pp. 1ff.

One who never ceases to pardon, the continual Giver, the Dispenser of all that is good, the Generous, the Consenter, the Answerer of prayers, the Friend and Protector, the Pitying, the Guide and Leader, and the Most Patient who is slow to punish. All these are Qurʾānic names that emphasize and clarify al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm, the Merciful, the Compassionate. The attributes of mercy and omnipotence might appear to be contradictory while in reality they are not. The Qurʾānic dictum is that God's mercy is an expression of His omnipotence and hence inseparable from it. These two perfections represent the two poles of Divine action that complement each other.

B. F. Skinner and some other leading psychologists and students of behaviourism have shown that 'When it is possible to arrange a situation so that punishment immediately follows the undesirable behavior, but does not occur at other times, it may be effective in suppressing undesirable behavior without producing harmful side-affects.'[97] Therefore, the point can be made that the Qurʾān's promises of severe punishment as an admonition to those who sin, could be a positive stimulus, suppressing the undesired behaviour of sinners, without the harmful side effects of their despairing or losing sight of God's surpassing mercy. These two polar aspects (Omnipotence and Mercy) of the Divinity mutually strengthen each other, encouraging and fortifying the desired behaviour. On the other hand, their correlativity is such a positive factor that it can be helpful in checking wrongful human attitudes and inclinations.

The Muslim theological discourse, however, impresses one that it fails to strike a judicious balance between the two correlative Divine aspects of omnipotence and mercy. However, as far as the Qurʾān is concerned, its approach is quite clear in this regard. The Qurʾān indeed is very emphatic about the grace and mercy of God Almighty. Kenneth Cragg rightly observes that

> Despite its uncompromising severity, however, it is throughout an understanding about mercy and compassion. Somehow these elements were less exposed to the issues which needed such vigilance from the theologians in respect of sovereignty and will. As befits its emphasis the classic theology of Islam is less concerned about the 'comfort' of man than it is about the majesty and immunity of God, since these must be seen as, in every event, a prerequisite of the mercy. In its own urgent way, the Qurʾān is warmer, kindlier, more compassionate than the theologians. While the Book of Islam underwrites and prompts the latter in many of their concerns and something of their temper, its vitality and fervor, its mission and movement, bring the reader into a different world from the aridity and calculation of the dogmatists.[98]

97. W. F. Hill, *Learning, A Survey of Psychological Interpretations*, New York, Harper Collins, 1990, pp. 72ff.
98. K. Cragg, *The House of Islam*, Belmont, CA, Dickenson Publishing, 1969, p. 7.

God's absolute Omniscience is expressed by the names ʿĀlim al-Ghayb wa-l-Shahāda (the Knower of the hidden and the manifest), and by al-ʿAlīm (the Omniscient). The name ʿĀlim al-Ghayb occurs in the Qurʾān 13 times (10 times with the combination of both i.e., ʿĀlim al-Ghayb wa-l-Shahāda) (VI.73; IX.94, 105; XIII.9; XXIII.92; LIX.22). 'Verily Allāh knows (all) the hidden things of the heavens and the earth: verily He has full knowledge of all that is in (men's) hearts' (XXXV.38; III.119; V.7; VIII.43). 'He knows what they conceal, and what they reveal: for He knoweth well the (inmost secrets) of the hearts' (XI.5; LXVII.13). 'Does not Allāh know best all that is in the hearts of all the creation' (XXIX.10). 'He knows the treachery of the eyes, and all that the hearts (of men) conceal' (XL.19). 'And verily your Lord knoweth all that their hearts do hide, as well as all that they reveal' (XXVII.74; XXVIII.69). 'He knows what is hidden and what is open: too high is He for the partners they attribute to Him'(XXIII.92). This is why He is called the Omniscient, al-ʿAlīm. This name occurs 140 times (nominative case), 22 times (accusative case), and 4 times as ʿAllām. The perfection of this name lies in that Allāh comprehends everything by knowledge – manifest and hidden, small and large, first and last, inception and outcome. His knowledge is infinite as well as perfect. Additionally, it is not derived from things known; rather things known are derived from it.

He is also al-Khabīr, the All-Aware (33 times in the nominative and 12 times in the accusative case). Al-Khabīr is the one from whom no secret information is hidden, for nothing goes on in the realms of heaven or earth, no atom moves, and no soul is stirred or calmed, without His being aware of it. It has the same meaning as 'the Omniscient', yet when knowledge [ʿilm] is related to hidden secrets it is called 'awareness' [khibra], and the One who possesses it is 'He who is aware of everything'. The Qurʾān informs us that

> With Him are the keys of the Unseen, the treasures that none knoweth but He. He knoweth whatever there is on the earth and in the sea. Not a leaf doth fall but with His knowledge: there is not a grain in the darkness (or depths) of the earth, nor anything fresh or dry (green or withered), but is (inscribed) in a Record clear (to those who can read) (VI.59).

> 'Him who knows the unseen, from Whom is not hidden the least little atom in the heavens or on earth: nor is there anything less than that, or greater, but is in the Record Perspicuous' (XXXIV.3; X.61).

God is also al-Samīʿ (the All-Hearing). This name occurs in the Qurʾān a total of 47 times (43 in the nominative and 4 in the accusative cases). Al-Samīʿ is the One from whose perception nothing audible is removed, even if it be hidden. So He hears secret talks, even whispers, and what is subtler and more concealed than these; 'indeed He perceives the crawling of a black ant on a massive rock in the dark of night.' He hears the praise of those praising Him

and rewards them, as well as the entreaties of those praying, and responds to them. Al-Ghazālī writes:

> He hears without any auditory organs or ears, as He acts without limbs and speaks without a tongue; and His hearing is free from accidents which could befall it. When you elevate the All-Hearing above changes which happen to Him when audible sounds occur, and exalt Him above hearing by ears or by instruments and devices, you will realize that hearing, so far as He is concerned, is tantamount to an attribute by which the perfection of the qualities of things heard is dissolved. Whoever does not take care in considering this matter will inevitably fall into pure anthropomorphism. So be wary about it, and be precise when you consider it.[99]

The Qurʾān asks the Prophet to witness this attribute of God with the following words: 'Say: "My Lord knoweth (every) word (spoken) in the heavens and on earth: He is the One that heareth and knoweth (all things)"'(XXI.4).

God is also *al-Baṣīr*, the All-Seeing (occurring 51 times, 36 in the nominative and 15 in the accusative cases). God is the One Who witnesses and sees in such a way that nothing is remote from Him, even that which is under the earth. His seeing is also above having dependence on pupils and eyelids, and exalted beyond reference to the impression of images and colours on His essence, as they are impressed on men's pupils, for that is a form of change and influence which requires coming-into-existence. Since He is above this, 'seeing in His case is equivalent to an attribute through which the perfection of qualities of visible things is disclosed. And that is clearer and more evident than what may be grasped by perception on the part of a sight limited to the appearances of visible things.'[100] The Qurʾān states: 'Verily Allāh knows the Unseen of the heavens and the earth: and Allāh sees well all that ye do' (XLIX.18). This message is stressed by a great many Qurʾānic verses (83 times as 'He knows what you do "*taʿmalūn*",' and 56 times as 'they do "*yaʿmalūn*"'.) 'He knows what enters within the earth and what comes forth out of it, what comes down from heaven and what mounts up to it. And He is with you wheresover ye may be. And Allāh sees well all that ye do' (LVII.4).

> Seest thou not that Allāh doth know (all) that in the heavens and on earth? There is not a secret consultation between three, but He is the fourth of them,- nor between five but He is the sixth,- nor between fewer nor more, but He is with them, wheresoever they be: in the end will He tell them what they did on the Day of Judgment. For Allāh has full knowledge of all things (LVIII.7).

> It was We Who created man, and We know what suggestions his soul makes to him: for We are nearer to him than (his) jugular vein (L.16).

99. Al-Ghazālī, *The Ninety-Nine …*, *op. cit.*, pp. 83–4.
100. *Ibid.*

In short, God is Omniscient as much as He is Omnipresent. He is too exalted to be contained in any one place and too holy to be circumscribed by time; for it is He Who created time and place. There is nothing like unto Him in His essence nor is there of His essence in any other besides Him. He changes not as He is far beyond contingencies. He abides through all generations with His glorious attributes, free from any imperfection. Therefore, the examples of the Divine names and the related Qurʾānic passages mentioned above speak for themselves, proving that the Qurʾānic Deity is absolutely Omniscient and Omnipresent. God is absolutely free, in terms of His Omniscience and Omnipresence, of the limitations which are falsely ascribed to Him in some Biblical passages. Moreover, the Qurʾānic representation of God's attributes of omniscience and omnipresence are abstract in the sense that they are not connected with any physical organs or corporeal qualities. His knowledge and power is felt but not imagined or represented in any way or form in human or material categories.

There are a number of names that denote God's absolute Omnipotence. *Al-Qādir* (the All-Powerful), *al-Qawī* (the Strong), *al-Matīn* (the Firm), *al-Muqtadir* (the All-Determiner), *al-Wājid* (the Resourceful), *al-ʿAzīz* (the Eminent), *al-Muqīt* (the Nourisher), *Mālik al-mulk* (the King of Absolute Sovereignty), and *al-Malik* (the King), are just a few of them. The name *al-Qādir* occurs in the Qurʾān 7 times, *Qadīr* 45 times (39 nominative and 6 accusative case), and *al-Muqtadir* 3 times. 'To Allāh belongeth the dominion of the heavens and the earth; and Allāh hath power over all things' (III.189), is the thread which weaves through the Qurʾānic fabric. The Divine omnipotence is extolled by frequent reference to the acts of creation, annihilation, sustenance, preservation, and unparalleled Lordship, 'the Lord and Creator of all things' (VI.164; XIII.16). He is the absolute initiator (*al-Badīʿ*) and creates whomsoever He wishes and causes death to whomsoever He wishes. When He wills something to be, it simply is. 'When He decrees a thing, He but says to it "Be" and it is' (II.117; XVI.40; XIX.35; XXXVI.82; XL.68). Al-Ghazālī observes that the names All-Powerful and the All-Determiner

> both mean 'one who possesses power', but 'the All-Determiner' is more emphatic. Power is equivalent to the intention by which a thing comes into existence according to determined plan of will and knowledge, and in conformity with both of them. The All-Powerful is one who does what he wills, or does not act if he so wills, and is not so conditioned as to will necessarily. So God is all-powerful in that He could bring about the resurrection now, and He could bring it about were He to will it. So if He does not bring it about, that is because He has not willed it, and He does not will it to happen now inasmuch as His knowledge had previously fixed its appointed time and moment according to plan, which hardly detracts from His power. The absolutely powerful is He who creates each existent individually without needing assistance from anyone else, and this is God most high.[101]

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101. *Ibid.*, pp. 131–2.

God cannot be dominated by anybody or anything from among His creation as He is *al-Qawī* and *al-Matīn*, the Strong, the Firm. In God, strength indicates perfect power, while firmness indicates intensification of strength. He transcends creaturely weaknesses. 'We created the heavens and the earth and all between them in Six Days, nor did any sense of weariness touch Us' (L.38). From this perspective, the Hebrew Bible's narrative that God could not overcome Jacob (Genesis 32:28ff) appears preposterous. According to the Qurʾān, even after performing the stupendous task of creating the cosmos, God did not require rest, nor needed to be refreshed, on the seventh day of creation.

All this emphasis upon God's Omnipotence is geared to showing God's close proximity to His creatures. He is directly and intimately related with His finite creatures through His all comprehensive power, mercy, sustenance, guidance and knowledge.

Among this category of names, *al-Malik* (the King), perhaps seems to give the most tangible impression about God. Just like the other names it is neither anthropomorphic nor pictured in concrete terms. It means that God's kingship is so absolute and real that nobody other than He really deserves to be called a king. He is eternally King and His kingship never fades away. Humans gradually acquire kingship, work for it and then, at the most, relinquish it at death. On the other hand, real power, authority and sovereignty belong only to God, while earthly rulers, presidents and kings at best are hardly pale reflections of God's kingly power. In reality, the term is used in its metaphorical sense with regard to earthly rule while primarily denoting God's transcendent kingship. There is no king but the King. Likewise, any of God's names can be placed in the statement of *tawḥīd*: 'there is no god but God'. Thus the Muslim confession can serve as a quick formula for stating the various implications of *God's unicity and transcendence.*

It is evident that the names of God's attributes maintain God's transcendence as vehemently as do the names of God's essence. The Qurʾān has denied God all the limitations and imperfections of mortals (as well as all limitations and imperfections as such) while emphasizing His absolute attributes such as the Ultimate Reality. The category of names and their connected attributes also perform another important function, i.e., God's immanence. They produce a kind of modality for human imagination, but soon human imagination is reminded of its limitations when clearly told that these names and attributes are not relative like the attributes of human beings or any of God's other creatures. They are the attributes of the transcendent God Who is Absolute; hence, His attributes know no bounds and transcend the sphere of time and space as much as God Himself transcends His creatures. Furthermore, the relation of these predicates to their subject cannot be analyzed in the empirical sense as all human categories of expression are finite while God and His attributes are infinite.

Therefore, the pervasiveness of these names and attributes in the Qurʾān and their commonly known and understood lexicographic meanings make the Qurʾānic Deity very vivid, alive, and immanent, but at the same time also infinitely mysterious, awesome, and transcendent. Such a presentation of the Deity gives enough opportunity for a kind of modality to exist, allowing for a man-God communication, but denying at the same time any similarity, comparison, and concrete image of the Divine. Man is encouraged to establish a meaningful and respectful relationship and adopt an attitude of imploring and invocation towards God, yet the limitations are always stressed so as to maintain God's majestic otherness.

The Qurʾān establishes the immanence of God by bringing the beautiful names or the related attributes of God as epilogues of a great majority of the Qurʾānic passages. These names and attributes are not arbitrary; rather, they are astonishingly meaningful and contextual. The Divine names mentioned in the Qurʾān are always connected with the subject matter under discussion. God's names of mercy, love, and forgiveness, for instance, are brought as epilogues to those verses encouraging repentance while emphasizing God's love, mercy and grace.[102] 'Say: "O my Servants who have transgressed against their souls! Despair not of the Mercy of Allāh: for Allāh forgives all sins: He *is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful*"' (XXXIX.53).

> Whatever is in the heavens and on earth, doth declare the Praises and Glory of Allāh: to Him belongs Dominion, and to Him belongs Praise: and He has power over all things… He knows what is in the heavens and on earth; and knows what ye conceal and what ye reveal: yea, Allāh *knows well (ʿAlīm)* the (secrets) of (all) hearts. (LXIV.1, 4).

> As to the thief, male or female, cut off his or her hands: a retribution for their deed and exemplary punishment from Allāh, and Allāh is *Exalted in Power, full of Wisdom*. But if the thief repent after his crime, and amend his conduct, Allāh turneth to him in forgiveness; for Allāh is *Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful*. Knowest thou not that to Allāh (alone) belongeth the dominion of the heavens and the earth? He punisheth whom He pleaseth, and He forgiveth whom He pleaseth: And Allāh *hath power over all things* and (*Qadīr*) (V.38–40).[103]

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102. The books on *Iʿjāz al-Qurʾān* give a detailed account of the relationship between these names and the subject matter of the passages.

103. Verse 38 should not confuse the reader that Islamic Law recommends such a severe punishment for small acts of theft. There are many strict prerequisites like proper investigation, enough eye witnesses, the amount of the stolen commodity involved, etc. The books of *fiqh* in general and the books on *al-Fiqh al-janāʾī* (Islamic Criminal Law) in particular give details of the requirements as well as the process. See ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAwda, *al-Tashrīʿ al-janāʾī al-islāmī*, Beirut, Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1986, I p. 2; ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Jazāʾirī, *Kitāb al-fiqh ʿala-l-madhāhib al-arbaʿa*, Beirut, Dār al-Irshād li-l-Ṭibāʿa wa-l-Nashr, n.d., V, pp. 124ff; Abu-l-Walīd Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Rushd, *Bidāyat*

The third category of Beautiful Names denotes God's actions towards His creatures. The names of attributes do not need anybody or anything other than God Himself as they describe His perfection. On the other hand, the names of acts are distinguished by the fact that they make sense only in terms of God's creatures, and that they have opposites that are also Divine names. Examples are *al-Muḥyī* (the Life-Giver) and *al-Mumīt* (he who causes death), *al-Muʿizz* (the Honourer) and *al-Mudhill* (the One Who humbles), etc. So God is *al-Razzāq* (the Provider), *al-Bāriʾ* (the Producer), *al-Muṣawwir* (the Fashioner), *al-Khāfiḍ* (the Abaser), *al-Rāfiʿ* (the Exalter), *al-Mujīb* (the Answerer of prayers), *al-Wakīl* (the Guardian), *al-Māniʿ* (the Protector) and *al-Ḍārr* (the Punisher), etc.

It is pertinent to reiterate that all of God's names are derived from the Qurʾān and the *Ḥadīth*; they are *tawqīfiyya meaning that they are pre-concertedly determined either by a Qurʾānic text or an authentic ḥadīth*. Nothing can be added to them or subtracted from them. The reason is one's utter dependence upon God regarding the proper knowledge of Him. Such sheer dependence upon revelatory knowledge is in fact a recognition of the impossibility of knowing God except through what He has decided to reveal to us.

Another established criterion among all mainstream Muslim scholars is that God possesses all these perfections from eternity. God cannot be characterized by names insinuating that He acquired these perfections, or by blemish or bad names such as poor, cruel, cheat, etc. He cannot be given any evil quality or attribute. Scholars also agree that diminutives of God's names are prohibited as are words alluding to dual meanings such as those conveying praise as well as condemnation. The other established criterion is that God's absolute transcendence and exalted majesty must be maintained at all costs. All ideas, concepts and even perceptions leading to resemblance, similarity, comparability, corporeality, and anthropomorphism must be denied of Him.

It is important to realize that the presence of some of these names and qualities in humans does not really matter, firstly, because their presence does not make these attributes of God anthropomorphic or corporeal, and secondly, because in God they are perfect and absolute, while in humans they are imperfect and relative. These attributes, when used with regard to God, are non-corporeal. Thus, to describe these attributes and absolute qualities to God in no way makes Him similar or comparable to man. They are simply

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al-mujtahid wa nihāyaṭ al-muqtaṣid, Beirut, Dār al-Fikr, n.d., II, pp. 372ff. Due consideration is given to the requirements of a fair and just trial. Moreover, the circumstances of the crime play a vital role in determining the punishment. The above-mentioned punishment cannot be implemented if the individual was forced by his circumstances. For instance, ʿUmar declined to cut off the hands of those who stole during drought in Medina in view of their extraordinary circumstances. See Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī ẓilāl al-Qurʾān*, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 882–6.

expressions which pave the way for man to try to know God as much as human limitations allow. Al-Ghazālī rightly observes:

> So if God had an attribute or a specifying property, and there were nothing in us corresponding to it or sharing its name-even so much as the sweetness of sugar shares in the pleasure of intercourse-it would be inconceivable that we would ever understand [the attribute or property] at all. For each person only understands himself, and then compares his own attributes with those of God the most high. Yet His attributes are too exalted to be likened to ours! So this will be an inadequate knowledge in which imagining and resemblance are preponderant. So it needs to be complemented by the knowledge which denies any likeness, and which rejects any grounds for commensurability, even though the name be shared.[104]

> Therefore, God is unknowable, as 'knowing something is to know its reality and its quiddity, not the names derived from it.'[105]

Consequently, all efforts should be directed towards reflecting upon the creatures of God instead of reflecting upon His essence, for there is no other way that one can comprehend it. 'He knows what is before or behind them: but they shall comprehend Him not' (XX.110). The Prophet pinpointed this fact by encouraging reflection upon God's creation and not upon God Himself.

In short, the Transcendent God has not even the least resemblance with His creatures who are limited, deficient, and imperfect. Entirely out of the question is His resemblance to any gods and, of course, their semi-human nature; deities fashioned by the minds of men, whose lack of knowledge and understanding, and the need to supply the deficiencies of their own comprehension, caused these inane inventions. Contrary to this, God enjoys all attributes of perfection appropriate to His Divine Majesty and Exalted Power. Contemplation upon these and His beautiful names is the only way to grasp the barest glimpses of His Divine Majesty.

Conclusion

In light of what has been discussed so far, we can conclude that the Qur'ānic concept of God is clear and straightforward. It consists of the absolute denial of the existence, authority, rule, sovereignty, and ability to harm or benefit, of other gods (completely and utterly rejecting their worship and the representation of God in any way or form) whilst simultaneously affirming all these attributes and qualities to God. Accordingly, God's attributes and qualities are absolute and are never connected with any physical object, or any part or organ of the body. For instance, God can speak through inanimate

104. Al-Ghazālī, *The Ninety-Nine …*, *op. cit.*, p. 40.
105. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

things such as a bush or a tree, as in the case of Moses (XXVIII.30) and in fact, 'It is not fitting for a man that Allāh should speak to him except by inspiration, or from behind a veil, or by sending a Messenger to reveal, with Allāh's permission, what Allāh wills: for He is Most High, Most Wise' (XLII.51). God does not have a body. Nobody can see Him. Moses' request for a glimpse of God was answered by the following words:

> Allāh said: 'By no means canst thou see Me; but look upon the Mount; if it abides in its place, then shalt thou see Me.' When his Lord manifested (revealed) Himself to the Mount, He made it as dust, and Moses fell down in a swoon. When he recovered his senses he said: 'Glory be to Thee! To Thee I turn in repentance, and I am the first to believe' (VII.143).

The reason is that 'No vision can grasp Him, but His grasp is over all vision; He is the Subtle, Well Aware' (VI.103). In short, the Qur'ān has explained its monotheism in simple, logical, and intelligible terms and categories, has elaborated it with additional logical arguments and examples and has protected this concept from possible violations. The Divine transcendence is an intrinsic part of the Qur'ānic concept of the Deity. The transcendent God is also immanent by dint of His countless absolute attributes expressed through His Beautiful Names and many other signs and manifestations throughout His creation. Moreover, the Qur'ān ensures to keep, the immensely important concept of God's Unity, Uniqueness, and Transcendence immune from whatever is discordant. This original alertness, observes Kenneth Cragg,

> against all false theologies accompanies the whole elaboration of Muslim religion. It is, as it were, a supreme 'Protestantism' in its very genesis, a cry of heart and a mission of will against all that violated the Divine unity or distracted men from the single direction of their love, their loyalty, and their obedience.

Cragg continues that the

> ringing shout of praise that echoes through all Islamic ritual and dogma: *Allāhu akbar*, 'Greater is God', which, grammatically, is a comparative form made all the more striking by its refusal, indeed its inability, to enter any stated comparison. 'God is greater' than all that could conceivably be set in any clause after 'than'. The idea of framing such a clause is itself unthinkable. Yet the superlative ('God is the greatest') is not preferred, for this could imply approximate equality and would, as such, be open to ambiguity, as the psalm is which declares: 'He is a great king above all gods'. Are we to understand that the gods exist, if only as underlings? Or do we mean that the Lord reigns in utter majesty alone? Islam has no truck with such double possibility of intention. It was not the existence of *Allāh* that Muḥammad proclaimed. The tribes knew Him by His name. It was His *sole* existence, negating all pluralism. God is exalted above all that might – though always impossibly – compare with Him.[106]

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106. Cragg, *The House of Islam*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

It is this notion of God's absolute transcendence that has been reflected in Islamic art, architecture and indeed so many other aspects of Islamic civilization and culture. Islam is, and has always been, on guard against any corporeality, anthropomorphism or any form of comparability, or mixing the Divine with the non-divine. It is significant that Islamic art has always avoided sensory images, anthropomorphic depictions and corporeal portrayals of God. No mosque has ever contained any object, depiction or statue even remotely connected with God.

The same strict precautions have been taken in verbal expressions about God. Islamic theological discourse strictly revolves around Qurʾānic terminology, despite the existence of, and in fact serving as an interface between, the tremendous geographical, linguistic, cultural and ethnic diversities that span the Muslim world. This is the objective of the Qurʾānic dictum. 'We (God) have revealed it as an Arabic Qurʾān' (XII.2; XX.113). Hence, any God-talk by Muslims is predominantly scriptural or Qurʾān-talk, generally utilizing Arabic categories, terms, literary forms and expressions peculiar to the Qurʾān. Muslims have always avoided the use of phrases such as father and son regarding God-man relationship. Hence, phrases such as 'God the Father', 'Mother of God', 'Son of God', 'Crucified God' or 'Sons of God' or their equivalents are not found in Islamic writings. This was necessitated to prevent the rise of any notion that could lead to confusion and difficulty with regard to God's essence, as happened in the case of Judaism and Christianity. The Qurʾānic transcendental axiom is uncompromising in separating the Divine realm from the non-Divine one. For the sake of analogy, God stands on one side of the boundary, alone and unique, whilst everything other than He stands on the other, dividing the transcendent from the natural. This is the necessary criterion of Muslim God-talk and a presupposition of God's axiological ultimacy. On the other hand, however, terms such as 'Lord', 'Master', the 'Most Merciful', the 'Compassionate', are frequently used to denote God, while phrases such as 'servant' (*ʿabd*), 'mankind' (*al-nās*), 'human being' (*al-insān*), and 'creation' (*khalq*) are used to denote humans and the rest of creation.

Tawḥīd, with all its multiple emphases, is not meant merely to exalt God and chant His glories. Nor is it meant to claim any privileged position with God, nor to exploit such position for self-indulgence or to assert superiority over others. None of these elements are implied in the Qurʾānic exposition of monotheism. *Tawḥīd* is a responsibility rather than a privilege. It is meant to create the proper response in man, the response that is essential to encourage him to work towards transforming himself in accordance with God's revealed will. The unity of God leads to the unity of His creation. No superiority is granted to anyone based upon origin, ethnicity, colour or financial or social status. Man's dignity, freedom, equality and justice are universally bestowed upon all humans because of their humanity. Right relationship with God is the sole guarantee of the right relationship between humans. A loving connection

between man and his God will contribute to building a morally equipped and caring human society. On the other hand, any wrong understanding of who God is or a wrong relationship with Him will cause imbalance in man-to-man relationships. Islamic monotheism, if understood properly and applied in accord with its true spirit, can give rise to a balanced and caring human society. It is grounded in human responsibility, socio-political and economic accountability and universal justice.

The essence of *tawḥīd* can be summarized in the following five terms: (1) Duality of reality (God and non-God) and God as the moral normativeness: meaning the Being Who commands and Whose commandments are ought-to-be. (2) Ideationality: meaning that the relationship between the two orders of reality is ideational in nature. Man can easily comprehend this relationship and its requirements through the faculty of understanding. (3) Teleology: that the nature of the cosmos is teleological; that it is purposive, serves the purpose of its Creator, and does so by design. Man also has a purpose and that is to be God's vicegerent on earth. (4) The capacity of man and the malleability of Nature: since the nature of the cosmos is teleological, hence the actualization of the Divine purpose must be possible in space and time. (5) Responsibility and Judgment: i.e., man stands responsible to realize the will of God and change himself, his society and his environment so as to conform to the pattern prescribed by God. To do so is success and to disobey Him is to incur punishment and failure. The foregoing five principles, argues Ismaʿīl al-Fārūqī, are 'self-evident truths. They constitute the core of *tawḥīd* and the quintessence of Islam.'[107]

Therefore, the Qurʾānic message is squarely aimed at man and his well-being. Indeed, it calls itself 'guidance for mankind' (*hudan li-l-nās*) (II.185) and numerous equivalents elsewhere. Although God's names and attributes are the subject of countless Qurʾānic verses, the Qurʾān itself is not so much a treatise about God and His nature as about how man can achieve success and felicity. The Divine existence is functional. God is the Creator, Sustainer and Cherisher of man and the cosmos. He has created the universe to serve man. He wants to guide man. He loves man and cares about his salvation. Finally He will judge man and mete out justice, inclining in His judgement to clemency and forgiveness. He has taken upon Himself that He will not forgive human violations of others' rights until the person who has been violated against is compensated for and satisfied. Izutsu presents the point in the following words:

> For among all these created things 'man' is the one to which is attached so great an
> importance in the Koran that it attracts at least the same amount of our attention
> as God. Man, his nature, conduct, psychology, duties and destiny are, in fact, as

107. I. R. Al-Fārūqī, *Al-Tawḥīd: its Implications for Thought and Life,* Herndon, The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1992, p. 14. I am heavily indebted to al-Fārūqī in this aspect of the discussion about *tawḥīd*.

much the central preoccupation of the Koranic thought as the problem of God Himself. What God is, says and does, becomes a problem chiefly, if not exclusively, in connection with the problem of how man reacts to it. The Koranic thought as a whole is concerned with the problem of salvation of human beings. If it were not for this problem, the Book would have not been 'sent down', as the Koran itself explicitly and repeatedly emphasizes. And in this particular sense, the concept of man is important to such a degree that it forms the second major pole standing face to face with [the] principal pole, that is the concept of Allāh.[108]

Consequently, *tawḥīd* is directly connected with the moral sphere of human life. Its essence cannot be achieved without actualizing its demands of unity and universality of truth, equality and equity among humans, and all good that has to take place here and now in human society. Al-Fārūqī expresses the point succinctly:

Al-tawḥīd commits man to an ethic of action; that is, to an ethic where worth and unworth are measured by the degree of success the moral subject achieves in disturbing the flow of space-time, in his body as well as around him. It does not deny the ethic of intent where the same measurement is made by the level of personal values affecting the moral subject's state of consciousness alone, for the two are not incompatible….

He continues:

Having acquiesced to God alone as his Master, having committed himself, his life and all energies to His service, and having recognized His Master's will as that which ought to be actualized in space-time, he must enter the rough and tumble of the market place and history and therein bring about the desired transformation. He cannot lead a monastic, isolationist existence unless it be as an exercise in self-discipline and self-mastery.[109]

This moral function of man justifies his creation in God's moral image, in the best of forms as God's vicegerent on earth. Therefore, the Islamic understanding of monotheism is moralistic through and through.[110] This

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108. Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran, op. cit.*, p. 75.

109. Al-Fārūqī, *al-Tawḥīd, op. cit.*, p. 33.

110. See J. E. Kelsay's doctoral thesis titled 'Religion and Morality in Islam', Charlottesville, University of Virginia, 1985; F. Carney, 'Some Aspects of Islamic Ethics', *Journal of Religion*, 1983, LXIII, part. 2, pp. 159–74; R. M. Frank, 'Moral Obligation in Classical Muslim Theology', *Journal of religious ethics*, 1983, XI, no. 2, pp. 204–23; for a general study P. Helm, ed., *Divine Commands and Moral Requirements*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1981; M. G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1974, I–II; J. M. Idziak, ed., *Divine command theory*, New York, Mellen Press, 1979; W. Madelung, 'Early Sunni Doctrine Concerning Faith', *Studia Islamica*, 1970, XXXII, pp. 233–54; F. Rahman, 'Some Key Ethical Concepts of the Qurʾān', *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 1983, XI, no. 2, pp. 170–85; and A. K. Reinhart, 'Islamic Law as Islamic Ethics', *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 1983, XI, no. 2, pp. 186–203; M. Khadduri, *The Islamic Conception of Justice*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984.

explains why the Qurʾān almost always combines faith (*īmān*) and good deeds (*ʿamal ṣāliḥ*), the one reflecting the other (II.25, 82, 277; III.57; IV.57, 122, 173; V.9, 93). The Qurʾān also vehemently stigmatizes those who disobey God's moral will and follow their own desires, inclinations, and moods as their gods. The word the Qurʾān employs to denote this tendency is *hawā* (occurring 17 times), which can be translated as 'caprice or whim.' 'Have you seen him who has taken his own caprice to be his god?' (XXV.43; XLV.23). This moralistic understanding of *tawḥīd* along with its notion of the Day of Judgment is reflected in the very early Meccan *sūras* of the Qurʾān. Such a concept of the Divinity is dynamic and plays a vital role in Muslim life. The following early Meccan chapter (107 *al-Māʿūn* 'Neighbourly Needs'), is sufficient to illustrate the Qurʾānic correlation of belief in God and the Day of Judgment and the effort to transform oneself and one's surroundings: "Seest thou one who denies the Day of Judgment? Then such is the one who repulses the orphan and encourages not the feeding of the indigent. So woe to the worshippers who are neglectful of their prayers, those who (want but) to be seen, but refuse (to supply even) neighbourly needs."[111] The Qurʾān connects human salvation with morality, and not with any family lineage or mere belief in or confession of a specific set of doctrines or dogmas. Our own actions in this earthly domain contribute to the kind of existence we will have in the Hereafter. The Qurʾānic message of unity diametrically opposes tribalism, racism, nationalism, ethnic discrimination, human differentiation, cultic veneration, domestication of the Divine, superstitious dogmatism and indifference to God's guidance in practical life.

Furthermore, the Qurʾānic concept of monotheism is not evolutionary. It is original and universal. The Qurʾān gives this moralistic understanding of monotheism a universal dimension by asserting that this was the same message revealed to all nations through their prophets since the beginning of time. 'For We assuredly sent amongst every people a Messenger, (with the command): "Serve Allāh, and eschew Evil"' (XVI.36; XXXV.24). The message is for all times, in unchangeable and of universal import. So Noah, for instance, one of the most ancient of prophets, was sent to his people with the message: 'Worship Allāh! Ye have no other god but Him' (VII.59). All subsequent prophets and messengers of God received and communicated the same message (VII.65–93). This theme occurs very frequently in the Qurʾān.[112] The Ten Commandments given to Moses were rehearsed by Jesus on the Mount and referred to in the Qurʾān. The *Shalom* of the original Hebrews

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111. See, for details, Rahman, *Major Themes* …, *op. cit.*, chs. 1–3.
112. See for details Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm ibn Mūsā al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt fī uṣūl al-sharīʿa*, 3rd ed., Cairo, al-Maktaba al-Tijāriyya al-Kubrā, 1975, III, p. 118; Maḥmūd Shaltūt, *al-Islām: ʿaqīda wa-sharīʿa*, Cairo, Dār al-Qalam, 1966, p. 29 and M. Quṭb, *Madhāhib fikriyya muʿāṣira*, Beirut, Dār al-Sharq, 1983, p. 13.

is the *Salām* and Islam of the Qur'ān. Jesus' original message of salvation was nothing but 'follow the commandments.' 'Love your God and love your neighbour.' We can, therefore, speak of the essence of this universal monotheistic consciousness

Islam connects its ethical monotheism to socio-political and economic justice. Injustices, according to Islam, lead to disruption of peace. They must be confronted and corrected. In reality Allāh is Himself Justice. The following Qur'ānic verses use Allāh and justice interchangeably.

> O you who believe! Be you staunch in justice, witnesses for Allāh, even though it be against yourselves or (your) parents or (your) kindred, whether (the case be of) a rich man or a poor man, for Allāh is nearer unto both. So follow not passion lest you lapse (from justice) and if you lapse or fall away, then lo! Allāh is ever Informed of what you do (IV.135).

> O you who believe! Be steadfast witnesses for Allāh in justice, and let not hatred of any people seduce you that ye deal not justly. Deal justly, that is nearer to your duty. Observe your duty to Allāh. Lo! Allāh is Informed of what you do (V.8).

The goal of all Prophetic missions and scriptures is to establish justice. The Qur'ān states:

> We did send our apostles with manifest signs; and We did send down among you the Book and the balance, that men might stand by justice…(LVII.25).

Therefore, God the Love is also God the Justice. Following His equitable teachings is a prelude to inner as well as external peace. He is peace in Himself and He wants humanity to work towards gaining peace both at the individual and societal level.

The Muslims of the world, and indeed all humans, are today in dire need of Allāh, the Source of all peace. Unfortunately, a great many humans, including a good number of Muslims, have enlisted God in support of spectacular displays of violence. It must be noted about Islam in particular that it abhors the killing of even a single innocent person and regards it as the slaying of all humanity. Innocent men, women and children, Muslims and non-Muslims alike are being brutally slayed just because the flawed understanding of some people prompts them to do so. God needs to be rescued from the hands of those who are terrorizing God's creatures. The twisted interpretations of the Islamic concept of God also need to be corrected so that the original, Qur'ānic, Loving God of the Prophet Muḥammad can be brought back to the Muslim societies and the world at large.

The Islamic view of Man

Agency, rationality and morality as seen through the Qur'ān

Mona M. Abul-Fadl

I

God, 'Man', and their relationship has been amongst the most contested topics in human history. The focus on these subjects has sharpened in our age when most human beings find themselves lost in the wildernesses of their own creation. Alexander Pope, an enlightened mind of seventeenth century CE England, made a seemingly sound appeal when he wrote: '… the proper study of Mankind is Man'. Taken up all too literally, even zealously, this advice has eventually yielded even more controversy.

The history of humankind has become very complex due to its various perspectives and classifications. However, at any given time, only one of these perspectives constitutes the dominant paradigm. In today's global technological age, the modern culture industry with its centre in the American 'Cultural West', is the bearer of this dominant paradigm. Beginning with a pagan Graeco-Roman antiquity, and later qualified by a Biblical gloss, this legacy was shaped by the dialectics of European Renaissance and Enlightenment.

In this perspective, the principal division which qualifies modern consciousness is the distinction between tradition and modernity. According to this division, knowledge is of two kinds. The first is knowledge that has been shaped by tradition - knowledge which is accepted as given and transmitted down the generations. This knowledge is premised on trust and faith. The other is knowledge conceived as a rational and systematic enterprise, the function of the scientific as opposed to the mythological mind. This latter kind of knowledge is rooted in scepticism and nurtured on doubt. The key to distinguishing these two worldviews of knowledge would seem to lie in their contrasting premises. distinguishing these two worldviews of knowledge would seem to lie in their contrasting premises.

However, it is now accepted that this binary perception is misconceived because the differences are subtler than at first imagined. Indeed, no knowledge is possible without an element of faith. There always have been, are, and will continue to be elements of uncertainty, and not just curiosity, which instigate a search. In time, these elusive subtleties cloud perceptions. So the issue today is not whether the proper study of humankind is 'Man', but what the parameters of this study should be.

The distinctive mark of this 'grand divide of knowledge' lies in identifying the crucial central point: Does knowledge take its bearings from 'Man' or from God? Is Man's consciousness of himself and his world Man-centred or God-centred? What constitutes the ultimate knowable reality? Is it the physical universe or the metaphysical one? Which is the ultimate valid source for human knowledge: is it Reason or Revelation?[1] What are the instruments of verification of the different kinds of knowledge, and how are they developed? These are among a host of fundamental questions that could be raised, all of which take their common point of departure from establishing the initial bearings of human thought.

Today's dominant paradigm defines modernity in terms of its 'human-centredness'. With its source in the Italian Renaissance's 'humanism', the main characteristics of this phenomenon developed over the three centuries-long period of cultural ferment that culminated in the eighteenth century Enlightenment. This process has also been identified with the steady disenchantment of the mainstream with all that is Divine through a culture of secularisation and secularisation of culture.

Thus, the single most significant consequence of modernity has been the shifting of the agency and the responsibility for life and mortality away from the Divine to the human. This process has been variously associated with conflicting trends which have deified Man and nature, leading to the development of humanism and naturalism. With the triumph of materialism Man has been reduced to his biology - at best with a behavioural dimension. With science ready at hand to resolve all and sundry, there is no reason why the behaviour of a particular biological organism, and its physiological

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1. Cf. In his *al-Iqtiṣād fī-l-iʿtiqād,* al-Ghazālī makes this comment, 'The like of Reason is that of the sound, unfailing vision, and the like of the Qurʾān is that of a brilliant radiating sun; neither can do without the other except for those who are fools. He who denies reason and confines himself to the light of the Qurʾān, is just like one who exposes himself to the sunlight only to close his eyes. There is no difference between such and the blind. Reason in the presence of revelation is a light upon light, and whoever sees with only one eye is tethered to the yoke of vanity'. The hallmark of the Muslim thought remains to this day bound by the debates proportioning and prioritizing the relationship between *al-waḥy* and *al-ʿaql*. See ʿAbd al-Majīd al-Najjār, 'al-khilāfa bayna al-ʿAql wa-l-waḥy' in *Insān* XIII, (1990), pp. 7–11.

reactions, should not be brought to subscribe to scientific formulae. By the same reductionist logic that has been used to cut Man down to his constituent elements, society can also be conceived mechanically or organically, as an object of mass engineering, manipulation and control whether in whole or in its constituent parts. Accordingly, as human beings have treaded into various self-created abstractions, occasionally without much consideration of the consequences, the chances of retrieving anything Divine in nature have receded even further.

Together with the restoration of our links with nature has come about reconciliation with ideas about our 'misperceived origins'. The Biblically inspired concept of imposed alienation from nature had long been accepted as a consequence of human guilt and retribution for our fallen nature. As credentials of the Divine wore out and seeds of doubt germinated in old faiths, a new wave of ideas swept in. These in turn brought about the freedom to indulge our supposedly repressed instincts and enjoy the fullness of our desires and whims.

Under the combined weight of conflicting faiths, Man has been struggling to cope with a new kind of fatalism wherein he has lost the power to command the monsters of his own creation. Man has been steadily marginalized, from agency to incumbency. Where reason fails him, Man must believe. When grounds for that belief are not ascertainable with the instruments of verification Man has conditioned himself to rely upon, he must condition himself to trust an untested sense of discernment. The 'End of Man' has itself been contemplated in a mood qualifying the arrival of an era of post-modern incertitudes. '… they have forgotten Allāh so Allāh has made them forgetful of themselves' (LIX.19).

II

Thus, our search is for an oft-disdained, usually ignored, and now long-forgotten pole of knowledge. While we continue to extend the boundaries of our own measures, we cannot, surely, maintain the claim of being the measurers of all things. The only certainty is that a time will come when that which ought to be shall prevail. 'Say, Truth has come, vanity is gone, truly all that is vain is evanescent' (XVII.81).

Exploring the Islamic view of 'Man' is a means of recapturing and modulating both individual and collective voices from the human past. 'Man' is in search of his true essence and himself. Today, his God created natural state (*fiṭra*) is at stake. The relevance of a search that transcends parochial settings is very pervasive. This has come to constitute a universal moral quest. To the Muslim the onslaught of modernity has hardly spared him his traditions, leaving him stranded in the post-traditional age. To those of the

West and therein, modernity has always outstripped itself and continues to do so, leaving its adepts weary at the threshold of a constant 'post-modern age'.

While the world has changed, some things have not. In Islam, a 'sacred history' coincides with an empirical history whose subjects are not confined to the stories of prophets and to the metaphysics of a sacred creation. This history has within its purview a concrete version of creation and mortality, with 'Man' occupying a place of pride or a pride of place in the outcome.

The 'Man' at the centre of this picture is not an autonomous entity, a being that exists in, of, and for itself. For 'Man' to be the Islamic ethical being (*insān*) worthy of his design, he would have to be an entity other than one that is assumed to be caught in the womb of an inhospitable universe out of which it must fight every inch of the way in order to wrest its 'emancipation'. The 'Man' emerging here is a relational entity crowning a hierarchy of creation. He is created in a web of dependencies that sustain the universe. The Islamic 'Man' is not hedged or otherwise constrained in the course of his journey. He is certainly not the abandoned 'cosmic orphan' in a vast and forlorn universe.

Ours is a species in the hierarchy of creation which, from the outset, has been assigned a mission by an Almighty Creator in a benign habitable universe that constitutes the stage and material for implementing that Divine assignment. Having been accorded a privileged status of meaningful purpose, our life in this temporary, earthly abode is a sign of Mercy and is contingent on Divine Munificence.[2]

In consonance with that same measured munificence, Man is endowed with faculties that are designed and destined to enhance his capacities and ensure his ability to go about his temporal mission. Foremost of these are the synchronized faculties of knowing and acting in a developed social setting. Without civilization Man would have graduated little beyond the biological instincts he continues to share with his early companions in this earthly habitation. However, Man's present status is itself a gradually improving one which, in the Islamic view, would not have been possible without the guidance of the *Sharīʿa* (the total Islamic 'Way'). The essence of the human state is based on a relationship between Reason and Revelation and the assurance of Man's balance in his worldly mission. The Divinely ordained earthly rule of Man (*khilāfa*) is a function of this relationship. Without this potential in Man's make-up for synchronizing his knowledge (*ʿilm*) and his actions (*fiʿl*), civilization would not have emerged from the vast and undifferentiated expanse of a created nature (*khalq*).

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2. This has been made possible through *taklīf* (trust and charge) and *takrīm* (ennoblement or honouring) and through *taskhīr* (subjection, rendering malleable).

In the course of realizing the purpose of his creation Man has two faculties at his command: the first is a practical and communicative Reason which crowns, mediates, and arbitrates a host of ready instruments of knowledge. The other is an innate inclination in the self to 'unfold' and to strain to imprint its setting as much by doing as by withholding. This is the 'self' (*nafs*) which provides the seat and site for a propensity to act in one way or the other. The *nafs* is the active agent that is capable of both commanding and restraining. Ultimately it is the *nafs* that is responsible for Man's inner condition – whether it is in turmoil or at peace. In this view, Man is capable of reason and, as such, essentially a reasonable being. At the same time, the human agent is a moral agent and this morality is conditioned on a capacity to choose freely (*ikhtiyār*).

Choice presupposes a capacity to discern and discriminate just as it does a bifurcation of paths in a situation that calls for a deliberate response. Observing the terms of a primordial Covenant with his Creator is the pivot of this choice (VII.172–3). In tracing the story of Man, it is just as important to keep this primordial event in view as it is to learn of Man's faculties and to chart out his course. Without knowing something about this Covenant, it makes little sense to speak in terms of a mission, or a purpose of creation, or indeed to attempt to make sense of Man in his world.

The premises of the Islamic View of Man include, firstly, Man's mission as constituting the purpose of his timed stay in a worldly setting, and, secondly, the notion that this mission is embedded in a founding Covenant which also sets the terms for its conduct. With this the queries start. Where can one learn the terms of this Covenant? Secondly, when in the profusion of the encumbrances of this world, should one forget the terms, where can one turn for remembrance? Remembering is the counterpart of forgetting and Man is endowed with the disposition for both experiences. The knowing agent is further expected to act in all consciousness. Endowed with the disposition to learn, one cannot obliterate either learning or consciousness.

Of course, only a free agent capable of reasoning ahead and considering the consequences of actions can be ultimately taken to account for the choices made and rewarded or punished for actions taken. Such an agent is 'Man'. As a knowing and willing agent, 'Man' would need to be qualified for the task in order for a Divine claim of responsibility and accountability to be made. It is in this context that Man's acceptance of a status of earthly rule is presented as a majestic event by the Almighty:

> Verily, We did offer the trust to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains: but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. Yet Man took it up –

for, verily, he has always been prone to be unjust and foolish (through his ignorance of the nature of that trust and its consequences) (XXXIII.72).[3]

That trust (*amāna*) is dependant upon reason and volition. The vocation of the vice-regent (*khilāfa*) has as its substance ethical responsibility (the *farāʾiḍ*). The injustice and folly to which most human beings are generally prone denotes the failure to measure up to that moral responsibility; it lies less in their qualification than in their disposition. It is with this concept that Man was created and destined for a vocation and a destiny. As for the qualities that prepare Man for the task, these define the core concept of 'Man' as an integral being, essentially created in that perfect mould whose essence is balance and whose test is the maintenance of that balance.

Man's cognitive 'equipment' includes such instruments as reason, senses, and intuition while his disposers include impulses as motivation, passions, desire, and conscience. All this is confirmed by an observation of Man as an intelligent and active agent inhabiting this world. Such an observation also confirms the need to look beyond this world to locate the terms and purposes of this active and intelligent earthly stopover. Indeed, the terms of the quest have already been framed based on this view which presupposes an actor and a goal, a role and a destination in a journey. Like almost every other journey, this one too cannot be intelligently intercepted midway in any earnest attempt to understand it. Knowledge about its beginning and end is thus essential.

This line of reasoning also pre-supposes that one knows something of what 'Man' is about, or at least that such knowledge is possible. It also suggests that a measure of self-knowledge is mandatory and not a matter of option, nor a preserve for the few. Man needs to know something about himself in order to act responsibly and attain some certainty about the basis of his knowledge. The Delphic oracle 'Know thyself' has etched this elemental wisdom in the annals of human reason. However, whereas the end of self-knowledge has generally remained the source of much ambiguity in the Western tradition, in the Islamic paradigm it has derived its force from its unequivocal source. To know oneself was the beginning and not the end; it was the way and the precondition to knowing God as ultimate reality in a milieu of knowledge

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3. In affirmation of a vast corpus of tradition, Yūsuf ʿAlī in his notes to this verse rightly places it in the context of a *mīthāq* or *ʿahd*, a covenant between Allāh and humanity, whether at the generic, individual level as in VII.172–3, or at the historical level such as the covenant with the Banū Isrāʾīl, symbolic of a more general bonding of a community of the faith with its Lord. The fact that the *sūra* itself in which this verse occurs has a pledge and its attendant obligations as a general theme, confirms this link. More specifically, mention is made of the covenant with the prophets (XXXIII.7–8, 39–40) and implicitly with their followers, and of a generalized category of believers, men and women (XXXIII.35) such as those who strive to live up to their trust (XXXIII.23) who are distinguished from those who betray it.

where no doubt existed about the uniqueness and complete otherness of the Creator from the worlds of His creation

There is a broad base of general conceptions shared by a majority of all rational beings. Beyond that, one begins the journey of knowledge. In a ladder metaphor, this is an ascent in which circumstantial evidence leads to higher levels of ascertainable and more assured knowledge. Eventually one may reach the highest point of penetrating reality with the eyes of certainty.

In rooting Man's knowledge in an element of certainty, the beliefs and his convictions underlying his actions are also assured cogency. Yet, the gap between unsubstantiated opinions and mounting gradations of certainty can hardly be covered by unaided human reason. Where can one turn for this knowledge, and how can one know that what one knows is true? How can one know that one's knowledge is reliable and that it constitutes a valid and viable foundation for being – one's own and that of the world around? In short, how can one distinguish knowledge from opinion, and how can one unravel the strands to distinguish truth from its illusion?

This search for the Covenant and knowledge of Man's mission is a desire of many thinking men and women in the modern age. In the Islamic view, this search cannot be launched in the absence of Divine Revelation. Unfortunately, not every such revelation has retained a historical integrity that can make it the source for unequivocal answers. In Islam, one does not have to look far for such answers, not merely to the question of the Covenant and to the purpose of Man's creation, but also to a host of vital questions relating to Adam's privileged progeny. It is the range of questions asked and the comprehensiveness and unequivocalness of the answers provided which sets the stage of the Islamic view of Man.

In the *tawḥīdic* perspective[4], existential questions are foundational questions. They cannot, therefore, be left to the hazards and tribulations of trial and error through Man's own divinations and falterings. These are not objects for testing Man's expertise in an arena marked out for delegated competencies. For one, human ambition may attempt to overreach itself in a finite living world that is the site for this striving. On the other hand, the world may paradoxically be seen to constitute an unfathomable set of circumstances that beckon humans to strive towards the infinite. Seen as such, the human milieu provides the qualified setting in which Man has been singled out by his Lord and Creator for a task of selective competencies.

It might appear paradoxical that the Man so effectively equipped to deal with the physical universe is hardly qualified to understand himself. Yet this should come as no surprise. In a universe tuned by its Creator to receive Man's

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4. *Tawḥīd* or the absolute unity and powerfulness of the Godhead is a crucially central belief of Islam.

services, human proficiency is a matter of contingency, not necessity. This contingency presupposes an intimate, ongoing and interactive environment of compassion and of gratitude (*shukr*). Howsoever the relationship between Man and his environment is seen, it is important to see a complementarity, and not just antagonism, between them, an ecology of husbandry and not one of rape.

In this pre-ordained situation, there are limits to which Man can go in exploring both himself and the minuscule segment of the universe that is his habitat. In fact, he can only know so much about himself with a degree of self-reliance and critical aptitude, and he can only verify that much of his acquired knowledge empirically. Beyond that he can only indulge his imagination and engage in clever suppositions which cannot be verified. This pastime is not without its perils. Speculation can fill the voids created by the spiritually ravished or vanquished self in a long and forlorn journey through the unknown.

Biblical thought assigns the start of this journey to a momentous event qualified as the Fall. Its counterpart in the Islamic view is referred to as the 'exiting' from Paradise (*khurūj*). Seen as more of a pre-ordained and necessary event, rather than a mark of debasement and abandonment, man's eviction to an earthly sojourn is attended by Providential signs constituting its redeeming parameters. The difference in interpreting a cardinal cosmic event in the two revealed traditions hinges on the Qur'ānic version of the account. The details of the beginning of that journey are of particular consequence not only for substantiating the essentials of the temporal passage, but for clearing Man's conscience and establishing his credentials in a world where his presence has frequently been skewed through injustice and folly of his own kind.

From the outset of our encounter with the story of Adam, we are struck by the poised awe with which (pre-existing) creation stands in anticipation of a great event. As announced by God in a declaration to the inhabitants of a supreme realm, the Angels, a vicegerent is to be appointed upon the earth, one to whom God has bestowed the qualities that would entitle him for the charge.[5] Assuming a certain foreknowledge, the Angels are perturbed at the prospect of a creation that could wreak much havoc on the earth. Yet they can

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5. More conventional renderings of vice-regency include deputyship and vicarage. All these terms emphasize different dimensions of rulership and appointment by another to a delegated authority. Vicegerency conveys more strictly the divine command to appoint Man for his designated vocation. Muḥammad Asad chooses to translate the *khalīfa fi-l-arḍ* (II.30) as 'one who shall inherit the earth', in line with other occurrences of the term and its derivatives (*khalāʾif*: successors and inheritors). However, in view of our interpretation of the *amāna* or the trust, and in the presence of the persistent theme of a *mīthāq* or *ʿahd* (covenant), we express some reservations about equating *khilāfa* with being given *possession* of the Earth. Note too, that in contrast with dominion, the *khilāfa* is exercised 'within', or possibly 'on/upon' in the sense of acting within a given realm or setting. It is not exercised *over* and above or against anyone or anything. This again is a nuance which is frequently missed in the translations of the Qur'ān.

only see part of the picture. They do not know of the command to all other creations to bow in deference to this privileged being. All heed the command, except one who happened to be in their midst, though not one of them, at the moment of the great decision. That is Iblīs or Satan or the 'fallen angel' in Biblical tradition. In reality, as the Qur'ān makes clear, he is a member of another species, the jinn, one created of fire and endowed with its particular faculties including an independent will and a limited power[6] to exert it within their own sphere.

As in the case of Adam's offspring, not all jinn are wayward; some are benevolent and believers. Iblīs was of the wayward group. There is something in this account which makes the relationship between Adam and his descendants and Iblīs and his own one of necessity. From the very beginning, Iblīs emerges as the symbol of and instrument for waywardness and distortion in the life of Man and in his vocation as *khalīfa* (VII.27; XX.117; XVII.53). Henceforth, it would seem that wherever there was Man, there was also the possibility of evil, of rebellion and defiance, of arrogance and corruption. The seeds for the disruption of Man's peace of mind and the prospects of peace and goodwill on earth were sown from the moment Iblīs refused to submit to the command of his Lord to bow to Adam with the rest of the angels (II.34; VII.11–12). From that moment, damnation was spelled on Iblīs as he was excluded from the Mercy of God down to the end of time (XV.35). Out of spite for Man, who having been created of an inferior make of 'dust and clamorous clay' appears an unworthy rival in the hierarchy of creation, and also as the cause of his own Satanic degradation, Iblīs became his foresworn enemy (VII.13–18; XVII.61–5).

While Adam's descent from the Garden (of Eden), the site of Man's preparation for his worldly vocation, into this world was attended by such enmity and strife, this was not Man's pre-ordained lot. Created for a noble vocation, the earth was no site for purgatory, but a stage of trial on a 'pilgrim's progress' for the Children of Adam. Accordingly, it was a site for achievement as well as for tribulation. The instance of Adam's – and also Eve's – forget-fulness and temptation before the seduction and false promises of Iblīs, is a crucial warning and vital reminder of what Man needs to heed to and what he must guard against in the pursuit of the destined temporal vocation. Above all, it is a lesson in repentance (*tawba*) and genuine return to God on the part of mortals who, in spite of their learned virtues and endowed qualities, remain vulnerable to their mortal weaknesses.

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6. A categorical article of the faith is that all power belongs exclusively to God, and that nothing on the earth or in the heavens can bring Man an iota of good or evil, without God's intervention (VI.17; X.107; XVI.53). This is one aspect of *tawḥīd* for the individual conscience and the constructive meaning of *tawakkul*, or total and exclusive reliance on God and none other.

This is also a lesson in God's Forgiveness and Mercy, a conditional Grace that remains within the reach of all who sincerely seek it. In the Islamic view of Man, the lesson of the fall is also a lesson in recovery therefrom: a recovery of consciousness, of resolve, of grace and acceptance. It is also the discovery of the Way to secure against a relapse, should it recur, and to assure the return and uphold the resolve that restored Adam to the wholeness of his natural state that would be the boon and legacy of mercy for all the generations to come.

In this temporal life, God's chosen and honoured creation would remain within the orbit of a saving grace and mercy as long as God's promised guidance is observed (II.38–9; XX.123–6).[7] Described in various ways – a Light, a Criterion, a Remembrance, a Summon, a Solace and a Healing, a lucid Exposition and the Book – Qur'ānic guidance sets forth the terms for Man's Covenant with God, and demonstrates the way to be followed in discharging the trust and mission for which Man was created in this world.

Guidance came to Man through persons who were chosen and then prepared for their Divine calling – communicating God's Guidance. These were Prophets and Messengers who came to their people both as warners and bearers of good tidings, and as living examples and pointers to the Way. The Prophets represented a class within a class of the chosen ones, *al-muṣṭafīn*, assigned the specific calling of reminding their fellows in humanity of their honoured status and the terms of their trust. They were simply heralds and enunciators, without the authority to coerce anyone to accept their call. Freedom was, after all, a privilege in itself, like the ability to discern the call and to distinguish right from wrong and the true from the false. The rest would constitute the burden of Man's morality, his test and tribulation. Within this Divine scheme of Mercy (*raḥma*), Satan's power has been confined to those who wilfully neglect the guidance of their Lord and who, in their neglect and heedlessness, become easy prey to the machinations of Iblīs, their foresworn enemy. (See Qur'ān XV.39–42).

This is a condensed account of Man's origin that has been communicated through the Prophets and scriptures from the Source of all true knowledge. The full account can be traced through a systematic study of Qur'ānic verses

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7. It is in the light of this assurance that an Islamic anthropology of religion holds to the inclusiveness and universality of Guidance, and to the belief that monotheism is the original natural state of Man - *fiṭra*. This is true whether the guidance comes in the form of a warner to every single community (XXV.51) or whether it is made Manifest in Man's conscience, in nature or in revelation. Trial and punishment are linked to Manifest guidance and sending of warners (VII.94; XXVI.208). For a prospectus on an Islamic Anthropology see M. W. Davies, *Knowing One Another: Shaping an Islamic Anthropology*, London, Mansell, 1988.

which provide a comprehensive account that has retained its integrity in the preserved and unadulterated text of the final revelation. This is the Islamic view of Man which sets the record straight by not only expunging the 'fallen nature of Adam' but also clearing him of the stigma of an original sin that was visited on his offspring. Just as importantly, it comes to clear Eve of any stigma of complicity in the fall. Rather, the story of creation, and of Man's vocation, of the Covenant and the trial and tribulation, the strengths and the weaknesses, the honour and the 'shame', comes through the Qurʾānic version as a joint account which includes both Adam and Eve, from start to finish. This conception of parity has its ethical consequences. Beyond this there can only be speculation.

No matter how well intentioned, the speculation of philosophers on the subject of 'Man' can only be the breeding ground for vain illusions. Engaging in it without revealed guidance nurtures the mind-set of the gambler in which life is simply a wager. More often, many self-professed speculators end up disillusioned, confirmed in an innate cynicism about Man. Oblivious to the hallowedness of creation, they are convinced of the hollowness and absurdity of the world. From this perspective, speculation can hardly constitute grounds for either reliable knowing or for sane being. The wager premise is radically opposed to the principles of a divine economy of Mercy. This conclusion demands comprehensive answers which can only be sought in the pristine sources of a universal revealed guidance.

III

A Replenishment from the Sources

By turning to the Qurʾān to learn about Man, one assumes the only posture that is consistent with the Islamic perspective on the subject: 'This is the Book in which there is no doubt, in it is a Guidance sure, to those who are God-conscious (and take heed)' (II.1).

If the Book (the Qurʾān) is the only reliable point in a quest as elusive and yet as vital as that of question 'What is Man?' what do we know about ourselves and what can we know? Our quest need not end there either. The essence of the injunctions of this Divine Guidance is that Man should exercise a critical reflection on his experience and on his surroundings in order to arrive at some reliable and considered knowledge.

'Say, (O people), go forth in the land and examine the traces of those who have gone before' (XXX.42).
'Do you not stop to reflect upon yourselves, (and see what you can learn)?' (LI.21).

I–3.1   Mosque of Mohamed Ali,
The Saladin Citadel of Cairo, Egypt
© Naipung/Shutterstock

There are many Qurʾānic injunctions which invite us to investigate for ourselves the Divine signs in the universe so that we may arrive at a knowledge which, beyond its utility, can lead to a conception of the truth. There is in such injunctions a significant lesson to be learned by Man about himself. These verses suggest that he must begin by seeking his Creator as the premise for enlightening his temporal abode. The lesson further confirms that all true knowledge begins with Divine Guidance, even if it does not end there. It is a reminder for those who take heed. In its absence, Man's search for reality remains a matter of sheer speculation which can neither substitute nor compensate for real knowledge. In the absence of Revealed Guidance, the love and pursuit of wisdom can only verge on delusion and vanity. The presence of Revealed Guidance and its acceptance is a natural starting point for exploring life. Yet, parallel to knowledge is the search for mastery and dominion. If this latter quest is pursued independent of its revealed moorings, it can only lead to self-destruction.

In the Islamic view, such knowledge and action have exact measure and proportion. If these qualities are lost, the balance founders. Man himself is a creation of a balanced order, a microcosm of the universe; any excess in his pursuits spells turmoil. This excess (*ṭughyān*) is a cause and symptom of disorder, a disrupting sign in the balance of creation which is equated with injustice. Because all things in creation are subject to this balance, our pursuit in search of wisdom must conform to a measure that assures it balance. This too is a function of the Guidance, absence or neglect of which constitutes the signal for chaos. This is because, in essence, creation is good and has a purpose, and because the Creator is essentially the All-Merciful and All-Beneficent Who has provided for this Measure and this Guidance throughout creation, even before its differentiation.

> Allāh the Most Gracious! It is He who has taught the Qurʾān, Who has created Man and taught him speech (the power of self-expression and of intelligently apprehending relations of things and explaining them); the Sun and the Moon follow courses (exactly) computed; and the stars and the trees, both alike bow in adoration; and the firmament He has raised high, and He has set up the Balance (of justice); in order that you may not transgress (due) balance. So establish weight with justice, and fall not short in the balance… (LV.1–9).

Man through the Qurʾān

There are at least two possible approaches to learn about the Islamic view of Man from the Qurʾān. The obvious one is seeing *what* it says about Man. The other is to see *how* the Qurʾān addresses 'Man'. Those who turn to the Qurʾān usually confine their attention to what it says and only rarely to how it addresses its readers. However, it is from both of these, the form of address

and the content, that we can identify 'Man' as a unique creation and learn what he shares with other creation. The Islamic view of 'Man' is based on certain unique attributes which make 'Man' stand out from the rest of creation as well as on a basic affinity which exists within and throughout creation. This understanding is at the centre of the Qurʾānic address on the subject and may even provide a key to the psychology of the Divine Discourse. By analyzing the explicit statements found in Qurʾānic verses we can attempt to construct the Islamic concept of 'Man'. The idea then, is to see 'Man' through the Qurʾān in the context of what the discourse contains, as well as how it unfolds, i.e. by exploring the strategy of the discourse.

Revelation as divine discourse

One can postulate three levels of discourse in the Qurʾān relating to generic 'Man' – the *insān*. The first is the discourse on human creation. The second is a discourse on Man's elevation and ennoblement into 'God's Honoured Creation'. Finally, the third is a discourse on Man's guidance and instruction. As could be expected, the three levels often overlap as they are aspects of what ultimately constitutes an integral and comprehensive discourse addressed to Man by God for ensuring Man's guidance; any differences are only of emphasis. The Qurʾānic ethos provides the basis for this discourse.

Guidance constitutes the bond in an economy of Divine mercy. It institutes the principle of Man being a whole whose effective wholeness and wholesomeness can only be fulfilled by reintegrating with the greater whole to which it is intrinsically related. In the absence of this perception of Man's being and his place in the scheme of creation, all kinds of deviations can and do result. In this field, the pendulum moves back and forth between an absolute autonomy (that transmutes into claims of absolute mastery) and an absolute unison with the world (that translates into various shades of pantheism). It is because of Man's innate relatedness to something other than the egoistic self that there is a ceaseless quest to establish a relationship beyond himself. The problem becomes one of finding the proportions between autonomy and dependency.

This is where Divine Guidance serves as Mercy ingrained. Nowhere is this more tellingly represented than in Man's designation as *ʿabd Allāh* (servant of Allāh). The balance of Man's being in this world, of culture and of society, is a function of perfecting this relationship between master and servant. Guidance does not impose itself on Man and does not deny him the measure of autonomy that has been granted him from the outset of creation. Beyond freedom, there is dignity that is assured Man by the breath of Divine creation. Man is free to choose and free to err, provided he is made aware of the Way and of the consequences of his choice. Guidance is there to assure him the

opportunity of ascertaining the proportions without which he could hardly hope to attain the peace and prosperity for his worldly sojourn as well as the hereafter. This is the twin goal-propelling conceptions of *falāḥ* (prosperity, achievement, success) and *najāt* (salvation). Revealed Guidance assures Man the Way, but it does not assure him its pursuit. Therein lies the test and the burden: the test of his freedom and the burden of his morality.

An Islamic ethos is perhaps best illustrated by an outside view: Hamlet's dilemma characterizes a culture where existence itself has traditionally been conceived as problematic. In the Qur'ānic ethos, the problem is not one of being but of doing, and the issue is not that of what we know and how we know, but rather of what we believe and of how we live our lives in accordance with our beliefs. In a way, the Qur'ān teaches the irrelevance of the central questions of philosophy and draws our energies to the central tasks of life. It does so not by ignoring such questions as where do we come from and whither are we bound, but by providing the simple, comprehensive and conclusive answers which put the human heart to rest and spare it futile anxieties. It also goes beyond that. Given the fact that Man has been created for a purpose and that Divine Guidance assures him the soundness of its pursuit, it is only consistent that the Message should have as much to tell us about the addressee as about the terms of his pursuit.

Interpreting the Message of Guidance from Man's perspective involves its own challenges. Issuing forth from the All-Knowing and concerned with the subject of His creation, it is, as can be expected, an authoritative discourse about one of the most elusive subjects in human thought processes. However, the Qur'ān is not a Manual on what Man and his characteristics are, and what his story on earth is all about. It is an exhortation to Man to rise to his innate humanity and to fulfil the purpose of his creation. It is a statement of the consequences of his submission or transgression. In this process of acquiring a mature self-understanding, we gain an insight into the Islamic perspective of reality and its concepts of time, space, events and characters.

Qur'ānic Revelation is not simply a book; it is a compelling voice penetrating through the senses to our hearts and minds. It is a process that both invites and enables us to be interactive participants in an Eternal Discourse. In this sense, Revelation is a call from Heaven that summons us as witnesses whose sights are fixed to the source of the call, and who begin to listen, reflect, perceive and understand, in order to observe the meaning of the message in their own lives. In the Islamic view, there is no dichotomy between the life of the intellect and that of volition, between contemplation and action.

Conventional human thought has distinguished between 'reason' and 'revelation'. This distinction has always conveyed a sense of dualism, if not an opposition. So overplayed has this distinction been that it has obliterated

the essential consonance between the two. Qurʾānic discourse draws our attention to this consonance: Thus we come to see how revelation depends on reason as a medium for its processing. The Voice of Heaven addresses Man in a speech that penetrates the heart without losing its intelligibility to the mind. It reminds listeners, that it is not the eyes that are blind, but that real blindness rests in the hearts (XXII.46). However, the sensibility and its medium are not to be confounded. Indeed, Revelation defines itself in terms of categories that can only be appreciated through recalling the functions of the mind.[8]

The mind recognizes and analyzes the signals that it receives; it remembers; it discriminates between the elements it recognizes; it also processes information it receives to construct the meaning of a message. Hence, the mind is not merely a receptacle, a storage and retrieval system, a processing agency, a screening and monitoring device. The mind functions as an operational command centre directing and co-ordinating responses beyond its inner workings to stimulate and activate another formidable reserve energy chamber in the human machine: the human will.

If we come to see the Qurʾān as being primarily a voiced reading that has retained a precise, intricate and impeccable system of oral transmission and vocal delivery uninterrupted down the centuries, we can appreciate the utility of a cybernetic approach. Impeccability and precision refer to the nature of a Divine promise to keep the Word intact and to assure the Revealed Guidance its certitude and infallibility. Following such a reflection on its communicational integrity, Revelation becomes a system of signals that is initially picked up through hearing, and immediately triggers off a chain of responses in the brain leading to a series of mental, bodily and spiritual responses.

Those who wish to resist the message are, from the outset, bent on an irrational course – irrational because they have taken their position on an issue before they have even listened to the case. Man is capable of prejudice, as well as reason. The Qurʾānic discourse about Man addresses both possibilities.

8. Interestingly, it was a Westerner who, upon having being enabled by God's Mercy to perceive the truth of Islam, attributed the lack of appreciation among Westerners for the Qurʾān to two substantial factors: its rationality and its unitary conception of life, itself conceived within that rationality. Writing in the 'Foreword' to his translation of the Qurʾān, Muḥammad Asad states: 'It is more than probable that one of the main reasons for this lack of appreciation is to be found in that aspect of the Qurʾān which differentiates it fundamentally from all other sacred scriptures: its stress on *reason* as a valid way to faith as well as its insistence on the inseparability of the spiritual and the physical (and therefore also social) spheres of human existence …. This absence of any division of reality into "physical" and "spiritual" compartments makes it difficult for people brought up in the orbit of other religions, with their accent on the "supernatural" element allegedly inherent in every true religious experience to appreciate the predominantly rational approach of the Qurʾān to all religious questions".' p. 13.

Prejudice is a function of either misinformation and misunderstanding, or of sheer perversity – a will to resist the truth, whatever its motivation may be. A prejudiced stance screens minds by transposing whims, passions or preconceived interests in place of reason and true interests. The Qurʾān depicts this screening quite graphically. It does so in consistence with a dialectic of persuasion that moves from the surface to the depth, and works its way back to the surface again. In this context, the 'locks on the heart' which impair perception is a telling metaphor conveying an attitude of sheer wilfulness: 'Will they not, then, ponder the Qurʾān or are there locks upon their hearts?' (XLVII.24).

This carries us on to another level that conveys the visible reactions embodying the complexities of an invisible process taking place within the heart. Some men and women, in this case the unbelievers, attempt to bar access. They close their ears and eyes and try to get away from the witness stage, literally, attempting to shrug off the event. This is a pathetic attempt to block the message at the sources of its reception so as to prevent the series of voluntary and involuntary operations that are bound to flow upon such reception of the signals of the Recitation and the Message. They do so out of arrogance which evokes its own discourse. Or they act out of fear, and an apprehension of changing their ways, despite the fact that the perception of the need to do so and the ability to change oneself remains one of the most characteristically human and valued qualities. Such persons believe that by blocking access to Revelation, they can avoid the chain of processes triggered off upon picking up signals and which may then induce an understanding they do not wish to entertain, or which may prove to them the futility of their self-imposed inhibitions they do not wish to abandon. Such conduct would appear to defy rationality – assuming that Man is pure reason. While rationality may be presumed to crown Man's personality, the latter is a composite, and there is nothing to assure that reason prevails unconditionally.

Assuming that a calculated self-interest is part of a practical human rationality, there are other factors which rule out recourse to rationality, howsoever it may be qualified. Man is also disposed towards inflicting pain and suffering upon himself, and in this sense he can also wrong not just others but also himself. In all cases, such conduct, as is wrought in the vain attempt to turn a deaf ear to the Message, is irrational, and against the interests of the human agent. The reasoning of Revelation repeatedly Remonstrates this.

In the Islamic view, Man can certainly fall prey to his caprices and to his vanity when irrational and self-destructive impulses take over, yet he is not incorrigible nor is he beyond the pale of salvation. This belief is rooted in another original Islamic concept relating to an ingrained disposition to righteousness and truth which is innate to Man's created nature, i.e. a humanistic *fiṭra*. Ultimately, given the right conditions and the will to truth,

reasonableness and sound reasoning are not just possible but are expected to prevail. This is another reason why the Qur'ān, with commanding presence, remains accessible to all who only will. However, it is also clearly acquiescent in Man's free agency which can avail him of either a perversion of that benevolence or of its consecration and its perfection: 'Assuredly We have created Man in the best of forms; then we caused him to revert to the lowliest of the low (through his own perversity); except for those who believed and did good deeds.' (XCV.4–6).

Degradation in this world and damnation in the Hereafter are consequences of a moral choice that is predicated on the human faculty of discernment and the ability to distinguish right from wrong. Thus, the reason-in-revelation in its function as *dhikr* (reminder, remembrance) and *bayān* (clarification, elucidation), addresses this faculty in its patient summons and repeated admonition and exposition. In so doing, it simultaneously upholds the freedom of conscience as a universal and all-embracing principle and re-asserts the integrity of Man's consciousness as two conditions for preserving human dignity.

If religion is seen to be the highest value in a range of life-promoting values, this is because Man's intrinsic *fiṭric* religiosity is the crystalline expression of his worldly existence being in a state of relatedness and dependency as opposed to autonomy and self-sufficiency. Maintenance of the principle of freedom in religion is essential to securing the freedom of conscience. The Qur'ān says: 'There is no compulsion in religion: for truth is clearly distinguishable from falsehood' (II.256).

This verse further adds reason to volition and consecrates rationality in the same breath as it guards freedom. However, it is hardly sufficient to uphold the principles of human agency, i.e. freedom and rationality, without also cultivating some awareness of the predisposing factors to this agency. Left on his own, Man can only speculate and ponder over the secrets of the psyche and the elements of society. There has been no dearth of opinion on the subject through the ages and in different cultures. Unfortunately, this abundance has been matched only by disarray and confusion which has been induced by the variety of conflicting views on Man's psyche and on the social implications of human conduct.

As the urge to act in one way or another is contingent on those innermost calls which emanate from the self (*nafs*), the voice of Divine reason holds that 'self' up in the mirror for Man to see. Here again the admonition to look into oneself, in order that one might act responsibly and knowingly, is predicated on a practical injunction about the self from the All-Knowing – as always, as a sign of his All-Encompassing Mercy and Compassion. It is the injunction to stop to scrutinize ourselves which, as we have seen above with the Delphic oracle, prepares the ground for both the contemplative and scientific outlooks

in its train. 'And within yourselves [are signs of the existence of God]: Can you not see? [*wa-fī anfusikum afalā tubṣirūn*] (LI.21).[9]

Whereas the introversion of the philosopher and the sage might be of uncertain consequences, this Qur'ānic injunction provides both security against the hazards of the journey and assurance of the ultimate destination. These safeguards are contingent on an integral discourse on creation and its attendant ethical dimensions. The created agents who have been honoured by an ennobling status and mission in a temporal crossing which takes them beyond their worldly sojourn are neither the emanations of a pure intellect nor the instruments of pure will. Both categories are meaningless abstractions which are figments of the imagination and constitute wanton projections of the speculative mind. Instead, they are simply created as human beings with a composite of reason and will.

The different projections of Muslim thinkers and scholars like Ibn Sīnā [1037 A.D.], al-Ghazālī [d. 505/1111], Ibn Ṭufayl [d. 581/1185], al-Jīlānī [d. 561/1165] Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī [d. 606/1209] and al-Iṣfahānī [d. 429/1037], among others, may have been a matter of emphasis, but it was rarely one of neglecting any of the human faculties and constituents at stake. The integrating concept upon which the structure of Islamic discourse is primarily built is the Qur'ān.

Insān is essentially that perfected and perfectible being, a microcosm of a universe which has been conceived and created to perfection. As an active agent, and like the greater universe of which he is a part, Man was not created in jest. He is endowed, from the outset of his embryonic conception, and before he has even left the womb that carries him, with an innate disposition to both good and evil, a disposition backed by a cognitive faculty enabling it to distinguish between the two by virtue of an 'inner light'. The latter, in turn, is supplemented, insured, and reassured by an 'external light' that is there for all to see. This is the import of the Clear Signs brought forth by a noble line of Messengers throughout history and inscribed, for all time, in the Book that is to be preserved for all to consult until the end of time.

Such is the irrefutability and the power of the Guidance that there is no excuse, nor pretext, left for the conscientious to wilfully err. God has sent Messengers so that people may expunge from their consciences the burden of denial and ignorance (see IV.165). Indeed, such too is the Decree of

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9. A Muslim trend in the contemporary scientific era has been to rediscover aspects of the inimitability of the Qur'ān through a reading enlightened in the scientific discoveries of the age. Although eliciting the scientific marvels of the Qur'ān is a controversial subject in modern Muslim circles, there is much to substantiate the endeavour. On this point see 'La Vocation de l'Homme' in M. Talbi and M. Bucaille, *Reflexions sur le Coran*, Paris, Seghers, 1989. See also M. Bucaille's classic, *La Bible, Le Koran, et la Science*, Paris, Seghers, 1978.

Magnanimity passed by the Dispenser of Justice and Mercy that it is stated: 'Mercy (is) inscribed for His rule in creation' (VI.12) and 'to embrace the breadth of all things in His Mercy…' (VII.156 and XL.7).

The foregoing gives the essential outlines of the Islamic worldview constructed in light of the discourse on Guidance. This integral and balanced conception of Man (*insān*) is contingent on a holistic perspective which is permeated by a cluster of related concepts pertaining to God, the Universe, prophethood, and destiny. No Islamic discourse on Man can be complete without an understanding of the nexus of conceptual and existential relationships in which he has been created and in which he finds himself. In brief, the Qurʾānic discourse on Man is a discourse of reason as much as it is a discourse of faith grounded in the belief and rationale of *tawḥīd*. This we will see in the example and lesson of the first *ḥanīf* and Muslim, Ibrāhīm (Abraham), upon whom be peace, and in the long line of Messengers and Prophets.

THE ABRAHAMIC WAY

Man is also created with certain needs. Foremost amongst these is that of making sense of himself and his environment and seeking meaning that would give his strivings in life one or more goals and purposes. Counterbalanced with these needs are Man's inherent abilities to think, to reason, and to act: these all begin with the ability to learn, understand and apply knowledge. Also intrinsic to Man and to all human civilizations is religion: it lies at the meeting point of certain basic human needs and Man's abilities to learn, to reason, to understand and to act.

There can be no meaning without understanding because it is this understanding that challenges established practices and ideas when they become devoid of meaning. Thus acquiring knowledge and learning are the prerequisites for attaining understanding and elucidating meaning. These are insights we glean from the Qurʾānic discourse.

There are as many perspectives on the story of Abraham in the Qurʾān as there are on the story of Adam. Whereas Adam exemplifies Man at the cosmic plane, Abraham, coming mid-stream in a long line of God's Messengers, is the archetype of Man at the moral and historical level. We encounter him in a setting that is already peopled, where men and women have established their ways and patterns of life. By exercising his inherent abilities and powers, Abraham reflects upon these ways, questions them, and finds them wanting. He turns his face away from the false gods of his people in search of the truth and the meaning of life; he finds it in the One God, the Creator and Sustainer of himself and all that is in the Universe (VI.74–80; XXXVII.83–99).

Abraham's way to God is the way of reason and the logic of his reasoning is simple, impeccable, and open to all (XXVI.69–102). The lesson of Abraham as that of one who turned away from all that was false, the *ḥanīf*, and as the first true Muslim, provides an ideal point of reference in this regard. 'And who could be of better faith than he who surrenders his whole being unto God and is a doer of good withal, and follows the creed of Abraham, who turned away from all that is false – seeing that God exalted Abraham with His love?' (IV.125; cf. II.135; VI.161; XVI.120; XXII.78).

Abraham's persistent rational inquiry addresses more than a simple speculative curiosity. Inspired by an inner urge for the truth, his fervent passion to reach the 'Truth' is such that upon finding it he wholeheartedly embraces it and makes it into the pattern, the code, and the goal of his life. The rational way is anchored in a heart that is untarnished and whole, open and pure, the *qalb salīm*.[10] The heart here is taken as the seat of intentionality, the scale that tips the balance in favour of or against every human act. In the Islamic view, the way of Abraham is the way of integral reason. Backed by a sound heart, it is a way open to every Man and woman of intellectual and moral integrity. This way of wholehearted devotion and unswerving commitment is put by the Qurʾān as:

> Say: 'Truly my prayer, and all my acts of worship, and my living and my dying are for God alone, the Sustainer of the worlds, in whose divinity none has a share: for thus have I been bidden – and I shall [always] be foremost among those who surrender myself unto Him.' Say: 'Am I then to seek a sustainer in other than God when He is the Sustainer of all things?' (VI.162–4).

Living in the midst of established societies with their prevailing measures of reality, persons like Abraham find that they need to take a stand and take a decision that can lead them away from their people and their ways, and to embark on the course of striving, hardship, and sacrifice. Launched by Abraham and trodden by all those Prophets who came after him and their followers, Abraham's way is not just the way of reason, faith and commitment, but it is also a way of trial and tribulation to be borne with a single-minded devotion.

10. Cf. XXVI.89 and XXXVII.84; it is essentially a heart that sees, cf. *qulūb mubṣira* (L:37), and a 'returning heart', *qalb munīb* (L.33), and its opposite is the 'diseased heart' identified with the hypocrites (II.10; XXIV.50; IX.125; XLVII.20) and having its variations in a 'hardness' of hearts (V.13; XVII.46; XVIII.57; XLI.5) with hearts shrouded/veiled from the truth [*akinna*]; and hearts that are 'sealed' against the truth (IX.87; VII.100); or rusted hearts (LXXXIII.14) and other morbidities. This Qurʾānic concept of '*qalb salīm*' is behind the shaping of a legacy of Muslim thought geared to it in practical ethical contexts. Commenting on II.7 where the first reference to wilful rejection occurs, Asad observes that it is a natural law instituted by God, whereby a person who persistently adheres to false beliefs and refuses to listen to the voice of truth gradually loses the *ability* to perceive the truth so that finally, as it were, a seal is set upon the heart.

I–3.2   Two folios written in *Muḥaqqaq*, with Sura headings in gold *thulth*,
from a single volume Qurʾān
© Nasser Khalili Collection of Islamic Art (Nour Foundation)

   In the Islamic view of Man, there are both personal and social dimensions:
the first operates at the inner level in an uniquely intimate relationship of Man
to his Creator. The latter interpersonal dimension carries with it historical
implications for the shaping of communities and events. Both dimensions are
operative in the example of Abraham: On the personal and intimate level he
goes through his conscious transformation, recovers and rediscovers his true
identity and vocation, and ends up affirming his pledge or *ʿahd* to his Lord
and Creator. At the same time, he is the founder of a lineage and a following
with which his affinities lie on a plane of moral piety and spiritual, rather than
biological kinship (II.124).
   It is hardly surprising that in the Qurʾān the two figures held up for
Mankind as archetypal examples and models, whose paths are to be followed,
are those of Abraham and Muḥammad (LX.4; XXXIII.21). The first laid the

paradigmatic foundations of the Way and the Community while the latter came to perfect that Way, and to provide for its pragmatic demonstration and fulfilment. For Project Man (*insān*) to be achieved, human potentials and needs have to converge on that Way. Only then the elements of an integrated and balanced personality that emerges would be consonant with the requirements of passage over the narrow ridge that bridges the journey's start to its end.

IV
The Qur'ānic Discourse on the Creation of Man

The Qur'ānic discourse flows from the command to 'Read!' The Prophet Muḥammad, upon whom be peace, is the paradigmatic Man to whom this injunction is given in the very first revelation. That he could neither read nor write when this Divine command was uttered through Gabriel, serves to emphasize the *fiṭric* (inherent, natural) potential. Its implication is that everyone with a sincere intent can start from a clean slate. The command is thus based on an intimate knowledge of human nature and its latent possibilities.

The view of Man's creation which emerges from the Qur'ān is at once factual and scientific and most profoundly spiritual and mystical. The creation of the *nafs* (self), like all creation, is at once a Divine sign (*āya*) and a key proof (*burhān*) brought forth by the Creator. It is an empirical testament which points to its source and to the truth which has been revealed. In the Qur'ān, Man is repeatedly urged to look at himself and his own creation, as well as into the past as the record of his present and as an indicator of his future. He is expected to do so with an eye that investigates, an intellect that scrutinizes, and a mind that comprehends. 'And upon yourselves do ye not (stop to) reflect. Can you not see' (*wa-fī anfusikum afalā tubṣirūn*?!)

The terms used to urge Man's critical self-reflection include such key root verbs as 'see' (*ab-ṣa-ra*) and 'reflect' (*ta-da-bba-ra*). *G*enerally, these occur in the form of a strong rhetorical question: *afa-lā*, which might be rendered into English as 'Indeed, do you not' or 'Truly, would they not' to convey that elemental reprobation inherent in all sound reason. As if to leave no doubt, the rhetoric is substantiated by an affirmation in the Divine promise and assurance:

> Indeed, We shall show them Our Signs in the (furthest) horizons and (innermost) in themselves, (and We shall continue to do so) until it becomes (self-) evident to them that it is the Truth [It signifying the Revelation and the Meeting with their Lord and Creator upon their ultimate return and judgement] (XLI.53).

This is one of the standing challenges of the Qur'ān. It is directed towards human reason and to cumulatively acquired knowledge, in particular that

objective scientific knowledge which comes through direct observation and careful investigation. The view of Man taken from its Qurʾānic sources is not an isolated one; instead it occurs as part of the entire spectrum of creation. Indeed, it goes beyond creation to its common source in a commanding and sustaining Creator. Deriving from an understanding and a manner of seeing that do not stop at the outer manifestations of being, this view of Man probes into causality and essence. It constitutes a reflection on the scientific/ philosophic mind which the Qurʾānic culture engenders and which sees the truth as indivisible. A closer look at the sequence and context of any of a number of verses which address Man's constitutional make-up and evolution will suffice to establish this reasoning: 'It is He who created mortals of water: then has He established out of it (that watery substance) the network of (social) relationships through lineage and marriage…' (XXV.54).

The above verse occurs in a context which addresses water as a vital constituent in the physical universe in affirmation of the precept of water as elemental to all life (XXI.30). The fluid of which Man and his progeny ensue is essentially pure. The same water blends with the good earth to perfect the ingredients of his mortal physique. Man's creation is invoked throughout the Qurʾān in such a manner as to draw attention to his intimate affinities with the universe he inhabits at every level. Physically he is of dust and unto it he shall return:

> And from it (the Earth) We have created you and to it We will return you, and out of it We will bring you forth again (XX.55).

> And God has caused you to grow out of the earth (as with a sapling that is germinated and gradually matures into its fullness); and thereafter He will return you to it (in death); and then He will bring you forth from it (in Resurrection) (LXXI.17, 18).

Spiritually, too, Man is potentially one with a universe that draws its elemental harmony from its being in tune with its Creator.

> Do you not see how all things that are in the Heavens and on Earth bow to God in worship… (XXII.18).

> Whatever beings are in the heavens and the earth prostrate themselves to Allāh… (XIII.15).

The reverence that is inspired by Man's reflection on creation encompasses him as part of that creation which is never seen as an end in itself but always in terms of its reverential bond to its source and creator. In this view, there can be no nature worship, no deification of Man. There can only be an infinite serenity drawing on the Source of all life – one which is nourished from a pervasive affinity that binds all creation. In his physical creation and spiritual

vocation, Man in Islam is essentially at peace with the world – if he so chooses. This peace is a function of his inner integration. Anything that distracts him from this condition becomes an element in his disintegration, a catalyst to his estrangement. Worship as devotion to the One True God is Man's self-fulfilment in life and as such it meets its own reward.[11]

This ever-integrating outlook has the advantage of preventing fragmentation and estrangement of the human psyche. Instead, it engenders a synthesis and fosters elements of wholeness which reflect on human perceptions, conduct, and way of life. These elements can either be frustrated or they can be fully developed to fructify in their consequences, depending on how they are reinforced by other dimensions of human conduct and social organization.

The view of Man developed by a perusal of the Qur'ānic discourse is further reinforced from yet another direction. The integrated discourse which is both a factual as well as spiritual is above all teleological and purposeful. There is no room for randomness in creation, including the creation of Man, whether this randomness is clad in the garb of myth or science. Everything conforms to a meticulous measure and a design fully known only to the Creator, but also partially verifiable by us: 'He it is who creates everything and determines its nature in accordance with a meticulous design' (XXV.2).

With specific concern for human creation, God knows what any female bears (in her womb) and by how long the wombs may fall short [in gestation], and by how much they may increase [the average period]; for with Him everything is created in accordance with its scope and purpose (XIII.8). In the same context is the verse: 'Did We not create you out of a humble fluid, which we then let remain in the womb's firm keeping for a term pre-ordained?' (LXXVII.20–2). In a more general sense: 'He it is Who sends down, again and again, waters from the sky in due measure: and as We raise therewith dead land to life, even thus will you be brought back to life' (XLIII.11). In short: 'Behold, everything We have created in due measure and proportion' (LIV.49).

The cardinal failing in Man is in his own failure to measure up to his destiny and vocation, a failing which starts by distorting due measure (VI.91; XXII.74; XXXIX.67). In denying his Lord and Creator, Man's sense of measure and proportion founders, and he begins to lose sight of meaning and purpose in life. In the Islamic view of Man, meaning is inherent to Man

11. This explains the verse which categorically dissociates Man's worship of God from any 'need' by the Almighty, proclaiming God's absolute self-sufficiency and deflecting all benefit to the worshipper not the Worshipped (LI.56–8): 'I have not created jinn and *ins* (human beings) save that they should serve Me. No sustenance do I require of them, nor do I require that they should feed Me. Indeed Allāh is He who gives all Sustenance - His is the Command and the Power, Steadfast forever.' The verse immediately preceding this admonition invokes the remembrance of God in the assurance that such remembrance profits believers.

because his source is nature (*fiṭra*). In the absence or blurring of this source, Man's sense of meaning and balance is jeopardized. It is this conception of meaning, purpose and design underlying creation which is rooted in the Muslim faith and nourishes its precepts. It underscores the worldview of Muslims today as it did in the past. It also explains why philosophical trends which originated elsewhere only found a limited resonance in the Muslim climate of opinion.

Thus, if we took the same Divine instruction about the constitution of Man at other levels of contemplation, another discernible pattern emerges. In every case, the admonition occurs in a context that entails a commitment to an injunction, or a conviction in an article of faith. The reminder that 'It is Allāh Who has brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers, not knowing anything, and (it is) He who gave you hearing and sight and intelligence and affection that ye may be grateful' (XVI.78) occurs in a more general context of alerting us to our responsibilities. Foremost amongst these are the obligations to observe justice, to achieve excellence and generosity, to renounce evil, wrong-doing, and rebellion, and to fulfil one's pledges (XVI.90–2). This, in fact, is a recurring pattern: human creation and origins are invoked as a reminder and an urge to human piety and to observe one's obligations in discharging one's trust. The beginning of *Sūrat al-Nisāʾ* (Chapter 4: 'Women'), which primarily addresses the legislative and moral obligations in the context of the family, epitomizes this pattern.[12]

Belief in the Unseen being most difficult for an entity encumbered by the density of his own materiality, the logic of the conviction must be impeccable. Thus, in one typical Qurʾānic verse, the essentials of this logic are flashed in a synopsis contouring life's journey from its inception to maturation and decline, in order to induce the conviction in the Hereafter: 'Verily the Hour will come: There can be no doubt about it; or about the fact that God will raise up all who are in the graves' (XXII.5–6). The inimitable discourse persuades by invoking a logic that overwhelms by its directness, its simplicity, and its irrefutability: 'Do they not see that He Who began Creation is able to restore it?' (XXIX.19; also XXX.27; XXI.104; XLVI.33) and 'Is not He Who created the Heavens and Earth able to create the like (again)?' (XXXVI.81; XVII.99). This logic induces Man – the reasonable and reasoning being – to believe in what cannot be known first hand by leading them through that which they already know, or that which they can eventually come to know, by immediate experience or through scientific inquiry.

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12. O Mankind! Be conscious of your Sustainer who has created you out of one living entity, and out of it created its mate, and out of the two spread abroad a multitude of men and women. And remain conscious of God in whose name you demand (your rights) from one another, and of these ties of kinship. Verily, God is ever watchful over you (IV.1).

This is the logic that inspired great written works in the Islamic legacy and shaped many a life in the tradition of the great Sufi masters. In all cases, it was the spirit of the Qur'ānic logic that was imbibed and exemplified. Inspired by a sense of wonder, both initiates and adepts acquired knowledge and certainty by proceeding from the realm of the seen to the Unseen and became enthralled with what they witnessed. It is the same logic that induces modern scientists and experts to rediscover the perennial relevance of an unadulterated Scripture and to stand in a recovered sense of reverence and humility before the 'scientific marvels of the Qur'ān'.

Man in Islam is essentially a seeker of knowledge. Everyone who has set his foot on the path of devotion to his Creator and Sustainer is potentially capable of attaining the station of the Perfect Man, notwithstanding the fact that Absolute Perfection belongs to God alone. Accordingly, Man's reward is in the striving, rather than in the attainment. It is Man's lot to strive and to toil. Where his will is distracted and his knowledge faulted, he toils in vain.[13]

V

The Parameters of a View:
Unity and Variety, Change and Constancy

The foregoing observations on the Islamic view of Man are based on a Qur'ānic reading that continues to be its crucible. To explore this view more substantially, we need to address two related questions. First, in referring to a perennial core of constancy in the changeless sources, do we infer a similar constancy and immutability in the Islamic view of Man? Is this an implicit indictment of a static element in Islamic thought which may conduce to its sterility, as some Orientalists infer? The other related question addresses the implicit homogeneity in the Islamic view of Man. Given that the sources are changeless, how can we expect variety and, if such variation does occur, what are its parameters? The answer to both questions may be found in the legacy of Muslim thought on the subject and inferred from its evolution.

To take up the second question first, the Islamic view of Man can hardly be described as monolithic. There is a wealth and variety of controversies in the classical period. This variety persists till today and makes it possible to understand how any two contemporary Islamic thinkers addressing the same topic in a debate may come up with entirely different readings which, while

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13. Cf. 'O Man, verily thou art toiling towards thy Lord and Sustainer in painful toil. Then shalt thou meet Him' (LXXXIV.6) and 'Verily, We have created Man into a life of struggle, toil and trial' (XC.4).

not necessarily being contradictory, are definitely conceived at different planes of thought and evoke different moods.[14]

Perhaps the problem with the questions posed lies in the implicit assumptions that prompt them. They are, above all, modern questions which assume a virtue in change that is not necessarily there. They postulate a basic scepticism, which questions any ultimate values or goal-model. Yet, regardless of the substance and nature of these assumptions, it would seem that the fault lies more in a structure or mode of reasoning than its content. These are prompted by a mindset riveted to the 'either-or' dichotomy preconceiving a categorical exclusivity and necessarily antagonistic and irreconcilable polarities.

In the Islamic worldview, unity and variety are compatible categories; the Qur'ān teaches the unity of Mankind through the unity of its Creation and Sustenance. At the same time, it makes diversity an element in its splendour. Similarly, change and constancy may be seen to relate in much the same way; to use a theosophical metaphor, as the rim relates to its axis. Movement and change are as much part of a changeless order as they are dynamic elements of it. This movement can be cyclical or linear, or like that of a pendulum, depending partly on perspective and partly on purpose. Regardless of its rhythm or form, change is ultimately subject to principles of measure (*bi ḥusbān*) (LV.5) which, in human affairs, as opposed to natural or physiological/neurological events, might be rendered as 'predestination'.

In the evolution of Islamic thought, we can expect the same possibilities of variety and shifting emphases within parameters which lend it unity and constancy. The variety derives from the historicity of the human condition: the fact of its being situated in time and place, which are both a function of

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14. We can take Muḥammad Iqbal (d. 1938) from the Indian sub-continent in the mid-1920's and Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966) from Egypt writing in the 1950s and 1960s. Iqbal writes in a mood that evokes the poetic and the intuitive, as well as the intellectual and the philosophical. He writes in the tradition of Sufi masters of the past, evoking the poetry of Rūmī. His ideal is also the 'Perfect Man' (*al-insān al-kāmil*). His themes, which emphasize the self (*nafs*) and the heart (*qalb*), find their echoes in a long theosophical tradition which has influenced the cultural life and Muslim practices of the average educated and devout Muslim throughout the Muslim world.

Sayyid Quṭb, on the other hand, may ostensibly have very little to do with anything hailing from those philosophical, theosophist, and Sufist currents. His focus is the social problem, not the existentialist dilemma. In addressing the need for Muslims to be better Muslims, he invokes their lapsed obligations to one another in this worldly life, and how this lapse constitutes a default on their original covenant with their Creator and a betrayal of their *dīn*. His concern is with Man as *khalīfa*, God's vicegerent on earth, who has somehow fallen short on his trust. His task is to redefine the Islamic worldview so as to anchor Man firmly in its vision that he might be able to reform and perform at the level of that trust. Yet, by no means is Quṭb writing in the vein of the *faqīh*: there is rather a strain of the mystic and the intuitionist as he ploughs into the field such as leads one to detect there echoes of an Islamic 'post-modernistic existentialism'.

a created flux and pre-ordained diversity. Its rigidity, on the other hand, owes to its double grounding in the perennial concerns of the human condition and, more significantly, in the orientations and responses provided for them in the Islamic sources. The rediscovery and recovery of this core-matrix and its renewed articulation and formulation in relevant terms has become the moving spirit behind the current intellectual and cultural revival among Muslims today. It is also these constants which provide us with the enduring guidelines for interpreting the ontic and ethical implications of a humanism which addresses some of the preoccupying issues of modernity like human equality and privilege.

VI

Questions Ontic and Ethical:
Sparing Man the Ordeals of the Philosophic Quest

Philosophy was invented by Man, the truth-seeker, to provide himself with the methodology for his search of truth. It has, therefore, emerged to address some of these very questions which are at the centre of religion. In fact, the relationship between these two may be understood in terms of questions raised and answers given. However, while religion addresses Man as an integral being on concrete aspects of reality, philosophy is more of a method in the pursuit of reality, which may or may not achieve the mark depending on which aspects it chooses to address. Ultimately, the range of philosophy remains bound to the range of human reason; the answers it may provide, no matter how eloquent, are more likely to remain problematic, speculative, and have little finality of authority. It ensues from reason and its appeal stops there.

Still, it is in the nature of reason to soar beyond its range whether in its immediate temporality or in its finitude. It is in the nature of the 'self' to be curious and anxious about the questions which concern it most – those relating to its creation, its destination and everything in between. These questions are fundamental to philosophy. Yet, howsoever badly Man craves to know their answers, he cannot hope to learn these for sure. Being a creature born in time, Man can hardly hope to learn directly about issues of timeless dimension which are beyond his time-bound sensibility. Unless there is a means of informing about them outside Man's limited range of experience, these are bound to remain open questions consigned to the travails of human philosophical speculation.

As stated earlier, in the Islamic view, to leave issues at the core of worldly life to speculation constitutes an aberration from the essence of a just order in which created beings cannot be tested beyond what they may bear. Their Creator is, after all, conceived as All-Merciful and All-Compassionate. The Islamic view of Man gains a consistency from its core matrix which takes for granted the answers to the questions of existence as they are provided

in the *waḥy* (Revelation). Herein the fundamental questions relating to Man's creation are dealt with succinctly and conclusively. The very first revelation to the Prophet establishes the uniquely purposeful and relational position of Man within a created universe. We might paraphrase its essential message here: 'Read in the Name of thy Lord who created Man of a clot. Read! for thy Lord is most gracious Who taught with the pen, taught Man that which he knew not. Yet clearly, Man is inclined to transgress; once he is (empowered), he feels he can dispense with his Lord and Creator and become self-sufficient (a law and end unto himself). Nay, remember this, that ultimately your sure return is to your Lord' (XCVI.1–8).

Thus, from the outset, we meet Man as a biological entity with capacities for moral and intellectual achievement which are originally assured him by virtue of a Munificent Creator and Sustainer. Inferring from their noble origins, these capacities are intended to be used to the good. However, we equally encounter the possibility of a deviation from the norms instilled in Man's *fiṭra* at creation together with a hint of its immoral consequences. The crux comes with the certainty of the Return. Throughout, the Qur'ān enunciates and elaborates different aspects of the same basic truth.

Man's ultimate fate and return occupies a priority in a discourse that is premised on a rational sensibility.[15] Being an event in a future which, like its antecedent in Man's remote past, cannot be immediately experienced or directly verified, it belongs to the realm of the Unseen: a category that demands faith upon being informed about it, particularly when this knowledge is dispensed by One who is All-Encompassing, All-Knowing (XXVII.6 and LXVI.3). Such faith, in the Islamic view, can never be blind; it must be reasoned and reasonably inclined, a quality which is already implicit in the injunction to 'read' and to pursue the means and disposition associated with its requisites. Consequently, it is reiterated in different contexts and approached from diverse angles: That the return is the logical sequel of death and one which is attendant with resurrection. Without that ultimate court of justice, where each soul shall be meted its just dues, and where none shall be wronged even by a 'hair's breadth'[16], there would be no meaning to Man's striving in this world.

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15. For instance, with regard to Man's ultimate return see II.28, 281; XLI.21; X.4, 56; XIX.40; V.48, 105; as the logical sequence to death, XXIX.57; and attended by the resurrection, VI.36; as to his trial in this world, see LXXVI.2; XXI.35; and that this return is related to his trial, see XXI.35; XXIII.115; XLV.15; V.105; X.23; XXIV.64.

16. For this rendition of the term '*fatīlan*', see Muḥammad Asad's footnote to IV.49 (no. 67) in his translation. The idea is that no matter how minor the action, how insignificant the utterance, nothing will go unrequited. Cf. 'Whoever does an atom's weight of good shall see it and whoever does an atom's weight of evil shall see it' (XCIX.7–8). Justice, in the Islamic view, it should be stressed, occurs in an overarching frame of mercy, benevolence, and bounty (IV.40; VI.160).

Meaning is the essence of creation.[17] As Man 'toils his way to meet his Lord' (LXXXIV.6), he bears his share of trial and tribulation which beset his worldly lease of life in anticipation of a just return. In a nutshell, creation, re-creation, life, death and the Hour (of Resurrection and Judgement) are all links in a consistent and unbreakable chain, which gives essence and fundamental structure or order to Man's being.[18] In the absence of this perspective, and failing that bondedness to a Creator, to a beginning, to a return and to a beyond, not only would life be thrown off balance, but Man's very humanity would be impaired.

If the above provides the core answers related to being, then nothingness, or a philosophy of nihilism, is meaningless within the cultural parameters of the Islamic view. Man's knowledge about his beginning, his end, and his very existence in the immediate world cannot be based on mere speculation on his part. Just as in his creation Man is indebted to his Creator, so too in his knowledge he is bound in guidance to the wisdom and experience of the All-Knowing, the All-Encompassing.[19] Such knowledge spells its own assurance for its certainty transcends Man's finitude. Endowed with hearing and understanding, Man can readily recognize and acknowledge the voice of revelation through the legacy of prophethood. With the Prophet Muḥammad, the seal of prophethood, Divinely communicated knowledge has come to the state of being consummated, perfected and preserved untarnished to be read, listened to, contemplated and reflected upon. Above all, it is a voice that is intelligible because its address is tuned to Man's logic and reason, and its credibility is enhanced through the consonance of its content to human nature.

Once Man was instructed about his beginning and his return, and once he realized that his creation was for a purpose and not in vain jest, and that consistent with such purpose, he would be answerable for his actions and intentions, he needed to learn something about the Criterion. As a moral being, his actions could be such as to invoke censure or praise. Similarly, as there was meaning in life, there can be no neutrality, or amorality in the course of its actualization.

There was an equally pressing dimension concerning the question of values. In the phenomenal world, where diversity and plurality were the rule, how was it possible to arrive at knowing with any certainty something about the measure that distinguished truth from falsehood, and good from evil?

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17. Meaning is to truth what meaninglessness is to vanity, jest, sporting, or even foul play. Cf. Qurʾān, XV.85; XLIV.38–40; XXI.16; XXXVIII.27.

18. See the Qurʾān, II.28; X.56; XXVIII.70; XXX.11.

19. It should be noted that reference to God's transcendental knowledge is in fact more frequently associated with the awareness and responsiveness to the needs of His creation; to His being the All-Hearing and the All-Wise. This is to reinforce another dimension of the bondedness of men and women with their Creator Who is closer to them than their jugular vein (L.16). Hence, God is closer to us than the hub of our consciousness and the pulsating of our life. Cf. elsewhere for the relationship between the All-Hearing and His creatures (II.186).

I–3.3   Manuscript of Qurʾān with translation in Persian
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Left to himself, Man can wax into an infinity of latitudes and relativities which would render all measure(s) a hoax. The alternative was to standardize the measure(s) into one. But then, which measure should this be? There was nothing to recommend the standards of one person or one segment of humanity rather than another for this onerous task. In the end, it would be a matter of rival claims with nothing to weigh them against one another save the use of force. This could only be the beginning of dogma and the unabashed reign of tyranny in human affairs. Once again, to avert chaos and abandon, there was a need for a source beyond the multiplicity and diversity that could set the standards which would, in principle, oblige all.

In the Islamic view, *insān* has potentiality but not self-sufficiency. Man acknowledges this need for an external source and renounces any claims that are not his due as he strives to live up to an ideal of justice-in-truth and truth-in-justice. Truth (*al-Ḥaqq*) is the basis of all value and that justice (*al-ʿadl*) attends truth as its rider.[20] *Al-Ḥaqq*, Truth, is a Name and an Attribute of God as well

20. See, for example, for *al-Ḥaqq*, XXII.6, 62; XXXI.30; XXIV.25 and for *al-ʿadl* XXVI.90; VII.159, 181; V.8.

as a qualifier or a signifier of His Will. Integrity in word and deed as referred to in *ṣidq* is derived from its intransitive form. *Ṣidq* (truthfulness) is a virtue that can be acquired by Man, whereas *Ḥaqq* is the end and the purpose to be striven for and the measure for ascertaining the worth of Man's deeds. In striving for *Ḥaqq*, Man seeks the Authority that binds, and in this search Man affirms his morality. The only authority worthy of his allegiance must be the one qualified to set the terms for such allegiance in a realm where loyalty is the essence of faith and virtue is its enactment. *Dīn* or 'the Way' is that elemental indebtedness which structures and gives meaning to a way of life.

As Man delves into the foundations of his morality, there are no half measures. Man is either obliged or he is not. He cannot be half-hearted about his grounding condition in this world and vacillate between truth and falsehood. There can be no autonomy for value, and no alternative source for its conception. It can be owed to none other save to Him Who has created, for it is He who sustains, and unto Him is the return and before Him is the final Judgement. In this view, then, there is an unavoidable logic and a simple but compelling consistency: the Source of all life must also be its ultimate measure. Failing that there would be an elemental disorder in creation, a 'cosmic dyspepsia' (XXI.22; XXIII.71).[21] In this measure human worth essentially lies in *taqwā* - piety and God-consciousness. This value is measured against its ultimate source and not against its interposed surrogates. 'And refurbish yourselves well (for the journey that is your worldly life): and remember that the worthiest of all refurbishments is that of *taqwā*' (II.197).

Human deeds that are deemed worthy, like his being, begin by his achievements and his strivings in the scale of his devotion to his Maker. Other than that dignity with which he is initially and inviolably endowed by virtue of his createdness, there is no intrinsic value in Man as such. Man is not a source of value in himself even if he is inclined to arrogate such a station for himself through a surfeit of knowledge, wealth, or material achievement (Cf. XXVIII.76–9; XCVI.6–7). He himself and his deeds being subject to the one primary scale, there can be no acquired title to merit nor born-status by which he can boast an unfair advantage over his fellow-beings. In piety and good works, there is room to excel and scope for distinction for both individuals and communities, for there is no end to striving and no leveling in

21. We take the Qur'ānic expression of corruption/disruption (*fasād*) on the earth attributed to the denial of the Oneness of God as also the consequence of the multiplication of deities and to a corresponding multiplicity and confusion of measures of truth. This is substantiated by another reference which attributes *fasād* to the dominance of *ahwā'* [sing. *hawā*], i.e. to the prevalence of human passions and whims. The fact that mistaking Man as the measure constitutes the epitome of a self-deification identified with the rule of *hawā* is suggested by the use of this term elsewhere in the Qur'ān (see XXV.43; XLV.23).

achievement. Beyond that, the human condition is one of an intrinsic equality that is itself owed to Man's createdness and indebtedness to his Creator.

The dignity claimed by Man against his created peers is assured him by virtue of the very breath that animates his life and gives it sanctity and not by any virtue of his own. The Divine breath that was blown into him (XV.29; XXI.91 and XXXVIII.72) has transformed him from a compound of organic and inorganic matter into the new creation in which it emerges. Thanks to his Creator, the Most Beneficent and Merciful, Man has been created in the best of forms and endowed with all the faculties that make him worthy of a mission for which he has been set. In the ultimate analysis, if there is any special station for which Man is singled out and by which he is privileged, it is constituted by his selection over a multitude of creation for a special role as the *khilāfa* (vicegerent).

Man's indebtedness in his privileges as in his very creation remains to his Maker and Arbitrator. He is meant to assume this privilege with confidence, trust, and resolve, not arrogance or excess.[22] On all the above-mentioned planes, dignity is innate to Man by virtue of his physical, mental, psychic and spiritual constitution and by virtue of the appointed mission. The test of humanity for men and women lies in the way they consciously observe this dignity and in how they use or abuse a privileged position. The condition for the one and the other lies in Man's freedom to choose, and in his conscious awareness of the nature and the consequences of that choice.

In the Qur'ānic account of creation it is possible to infer all three dimensions of a moral agency residing in cognition, will, and – bridging the two – a coherent value-core. This core provides the umbilical cord to the Source of Man's life and the road-map to the destination of his ultimate return. The paradigm of Adam is that of Man's mortality in his physical, psychological and moral constitution, as well as a paradigm of Man's vocation on earth. Through the Qur'ānic discourse on creation (as on responsibility and the Trust), the purpose of Man's creation, his destiny and

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22. Again, these terms draw on a rich semantic field. Thus 'confidence' and its affiliates convey an array of qualities associated with the Believer, *mu'min*: e.g. *wafā'* (faithfulness, fulfilment) (III.76; IX.111; LIII.37), *ʿizza* (honour, self-respect) (XXXV.10), *īmān* (faith, belief) (VI.82; VIII.2), *ʿazīma* (resolution, determination) (III.186; XLVI.35), *thabāt* (firmness, stability) (XIV.26; XVI.102), *rushd* (discernment, integrity of conduct) (XVIII.66; XXI.51), *muthābara* (endurance, perseverance) (III.200; XXXIX.10) Similarly, 'arrogance' and excess evoke connotations of *kibr/istikbār* (arrogance, pride) (VII.36; XXXIII.7), *ghurūr* (conceit, illusion) (LXVII.20), *baghyī* (injustice, wrong) (VII.33), *ṭughyān* (oppression, tyranny) (VII.186; XVII.60). The example for the one is found in the conduct of the prophets while the negative traits are afflictions which come from devil to whose machinations and 'summons' Man is susceptible through forgetfulness and the neglect of 'the purification of the self' (*tazkiyat al-nafs*).

destination, and his relationship with the rest of creation are clarified. This is the determinant of all subsequent bonds, relationships, and allegiances in the course of Man's worldly passage. It is in this context of Man's moral agency and conscious discrimination in a framework of relationships that we next turn to another dimension of the Islamic view of moral Man.

VII

Gregariousness and Merit
The Social Implications of the Discourse on Creation

How does Islam see moral Man in the context of his sociability – his relational existence in society? As emphasized earlier, Man's intrinsic worth is derived from an acknowledgement of his devotion to his Creator and Sustainer. In a context of diversity, differentiation and hierarchy, equality in Man's devotional status becomes the basis for mediating other social values. In an Islamic perspective, values are related to one another at the most fundamental level in a manner that enhances human value and assures the standards of morality and humanity. This is because they are both premised on the belief in Man's createdness.

Another related and relevant observation concerns the basis of human morality. As modern Man has lost traditional moorings in the shifting sands of a pragmatic morality, the bases for moral obligation have also foundered. With the dissolution of a reliable and enduring frame of reference, it is no longer possible to justify one system of values any more than it is possible to provide criteria for relating values to one another. From an Islamic vantage point, without the premises of Man's createdness, modern humanistic claims to both equality and privilege remain no more than a matter of opinion with little claim of any binding authority. In this non-system, governed at best by a situational ethic, the shaping of the human personality in our times has come to be the professional domain of psychologists and other social scientists.

On the other hand, value-claims based on premises of Man's createdness hail from a Source whose authority is, in principle, acceded to by all. Indeed, by and large most people do not contest the basic idea of God, howsoever they may quibble over its conceptual bases. Given their sacrosanct origin, violations of such Divinely inspired values constitutes a moral offence. These are not violations of any one Man's right, nor even those of an abstract humanity. Rather, they constitute infringements of a primordial order of creation which is grounded in morality. This order is one of Truth, and its consummation calls for a decree of Justice. The obligation is to the Creator and it is binding on the conscience of each and every individual, singly and collectively, in such a way that there can be no escaping one's ultimate accountability. The Islamic

basis of value assures it a reliable and enduring justification. Uncompromising in essence, this view of Man reflects on his self-image, on his personality, and on the public order of morality. It becomes the persistent catalyst for conscientious men and women to protest every situation where justice and righteousness are seen to be at stake.

In a gender-conscious age, the Man-centred terminology signals an exclusiveness that is not just politically-incorrect but also basically flawed. In taking 'Man' as the focus of the discourse, there seems to be an absence, intended or otherwise, of the other, in this case, woman. Some omissions are implicit in the terms we use while others lie in the usage of these terms and in their accompanying intention. Such barriers prevail whether they persist along the lines of gender, race, ethnicity, class or any other exclusive perceptual bearing. As such, the denial of equality and the abuse of privilege is a human failing, to which men and women are susceptible if they do not take heed of their Lord in *taqwā* (God-consciousness). These are 'cultural' traits that may be identified with one tradition or another at a given moment of time taking root collectively and finding expression in the doctrines and practices of the group (e.g. slavery, feudalism, racism, colonialism). The Qurʾān, in contrast, speaks of generic 'Man', and of the process of creation, and of the relatedness of human entities to one another, as individuals and as groups. It does so through accessible metaphors of kinship.

Like Many significant words in the Qurʾānic Arabic lexicon, *insān* is typically a self-defining term. Denoting Man in generic humanity this term is all-inclusive and emphasizes generality, equality and universality. *Insān* is a noun with no gender specification. This becomes even more evident as we reflect on other terms qualifying the processes of creation, procreation and re-creation. They too maintain an essential gender neutrality and an elemental universality.[23]

The basic unit of address at the most intimate level within human beings remains the *nafs*, which shares the same root with the noun 'breath' and verb 'to breathe'. It is not however identical with the divine breath, the *rūḥ* ('spirit') which was breathed into the 'sounding clay', the 'fetid mud' or the 'dark slime transmute' to give it life (XXXII.9). The Muslim tradition has distinguished between the body, the mind, and the spirit: the *nafs*, the *qalb* (heart) and the *rūḥ*.

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23. This is a point which is generally lost in translating the meaning of the Qurʾān. In every case, the term '*insān*' is used, it is rendered in English or French as 'Man' or '*homme*', and despite the fact that these are terms conventionally used to denote universality, their gendered bias remains inherent to the detriment of their universality. Thus, every time the Qurʾānic universal address to '*nās*' (plural of *insān*) is rendered as 'O Men' the essential universality of that address is at stake, just as the generic human being is lost in rendering '*insān*' as Man. The irony is that when these terms are translated back into Arabic, they carry this distortion.

If *insān* is the outward embodied integral whole, the *nafs* is the site of his affections and sensibilities as well as the site of his innate endowments and faculties. For the most part, *nafs* is the mercy of its own perversities and passions, unless it is embalmed in Providential Mercy. In practice '*nafs*' is translated as self, human nature, the psyche, and occasionally, as soul, and spirit – (with the distinction of the term for the spirit, *al-rūḥ*). An Islamic view of Man based on Qurʾānic ethos is not likely to dwell on hair-splitting subtleties relating to the Unseen out of deference to the injunction: 'They ask thee (O Muḥammad) concerning the Spirit: Say the Spirit pertains to the affairs of my Lord; Verily, (take heed O men and women) you have only been imparted but a modest portion of knowledge' (XVII.85).

When the Qurʾān addresses *insān* as a rational being, it evokes the 'mind' – which, Islamically speaking, has its core in the heart. Indeed, it is not the eyes but 'hearts' that are blind. When it addresses *insān* as a discerning and feeling creature, capable of being stirred into a conscience, it addresses the *nafs* – 'the conscience' – as the core of being. This connotes an immortality that may be contrasted with the finite life associated with the flesh.[24] As the physical body with its organic and inorganic processes degenerates and returns to its constituent dust, it is the self which we encounter as the object of Divine address. Therefore, it is important to seek an understanding of the various dimensions of the *nafs*.

First invoked in its pre-physical phase, the *nafs* is witness to the oneness of its Lord and Creator and to covenant. Once again it is the *nafs* that is encountered at journey's end, as it too is returned to its source and origin and is reclaimed by its Lord on the expiry of *insān*'s earthly lease. As the books are balanced, one book is closed and another opened, and it is the *nafs* that presides at the threshold of another realm. In between the two stages, the *nafs* maintains its vitality for Man's life as the setting for the conflicting pulls and urges: as it conjoins with the heart it becomes the mechanism which either purifies or clouds Man's intentions.

Finally, immediately relevant to a discourse on equality is the unitary conception of humanity, it is the *nafs wāḥida* – that singular entity – which is the locus for creation (VII.189; XXXIX.6). Out of it God created its pair, and of their union He spread forth a multitude of men and women to people the earth, to inherit it, to steward it, until that moment when, by His leave, the earth and its temporary heirs-designate are all returned unto Him. Created out of the same entity, men and women share an identical nature which becomes

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24. The Qurʾānic view of Man is essentially unitary not binary or dichotomous. Etymologically, the term '*bashar*' ('*bashariyya*') connotes a surface, skin, complexion, flesh. However, its Qurʾānic usage it conveys an aspect of integrality as well as mortality, and does not denote a split in Man's being as is the custom in human philosophical and theosophical thought.

the material for a growth and maturing and which qualifies them for morality and responsibility.

Indeed, the site for this morality is the *nafs* which is the object of the Divine address as well as the medium for Man's immortality. The *nafs* itself is a vital and dynamic entity transcending gender and whatever other differences that might subsist between any two individuals, singly or collectively. Given this fact, there is one of three possible states which qualifies any given person at any one time depending on his inner state of being or, conversely, on the disposition of his *nafs*. This depends on which impulse is in command: the *nafs ammāra*, the *nafs lawwāma*, or the *nafs muṭma'inna*.

The *nafs ammāra* may be rendered as the prodding and impetuous self (similar to the id). As the seat of passions, it is always urging Man to act where better counsel demands caution. That 'better self' is stirred to protest, or even intervention, by a roused conscience. This is the 'self' reckoning with itself. Only when it has restituted its wrongs and set its qualms at rest, does it arrive at its own reconciliation and balance. This is the reassured and literally appeased self, *nafs muṭma'inna,* which has attained its inner peace. Indeed, not only do these states mark off one person from another psychologically, but they are a means of gauging the fluctuations which the average person goes through in the span of a lifetime. Thus, human nature and human potential are the same for all created beings.

A society where the *nafs ammāra* is left unchecked is likely to be degenerate and disintegrate as a result of its members being enslaved by their own passions and subdued by various tyrannies including that of the self. If and when such a society is seized by a crisis of conscience and goes through a period of stock-taking, it might well continue to demonstrate the strife and turmoil that marked its unchecked dissolution while it is on a return trek towards reform and recovery. Having attained a relative equilibrium between the moral and material well-being of its members, a pervasive sense of contentment, constructive disposition, and a general identification with the public good will reign.

The Qur'ānic precept that moral reform is the basic condition and catalyst for social reform, and that change in the condition of a people begins with a change in their consciences, and through their own initiative, is intimately related to the Islamic view of Man and to the integrality of morality both in the individual self and in the moral community (VIII.53; X.23; XIII.11).

The case for oneness of the human race and for an identity that sets all its members on an equal footing can be reinforced by further illustrations from Man's createdness at the physical, material and evolutionary levels. However, the Islamic approach must be distinguished from the humanist approaches which lay emphasis on material evidence of Man's origins and evolution and which as a result are constrained to reduce Man to the status of a higher ape in order to establish a common human bond. Notwithstanding the misconstructions in

modern science, there is no doubt that the wealth of evidence in the Qur'ān testifying to Man's physical creation and to the identity of his composition, significantly confirms Man's equality in this elementary creation.[25]

In the Islamic perspective, human equality is not a cosmetic additive or a theory that has been belatedly discovered or acquired. It is a status that was imparted with the Divine breath being blown into the foetus. The very sequence of the verses in this context suggests that the intrinsic value of life that flows from and is contingent upon this Breath. In the Qur'ān, this reminder occurs in that characteristic frame of discourse which relates humanity to its source in God, and relates the pieces to the whole.

> Such is He Who knows all that is beyond the reach of a created being's perception, as well as all that can be witnessed by a creature's senses or mind: the Almighty, the Dispenser of Grace, Who makes most excellent everything that He creates. Thus He begins the creation of Man out of clay. Then He causes him to be begotten out of the essence of an humble fluid; and then He forms him in accordance with what he is meant to be, and breathes into him of His spirit. And (thus O men) He endows you with hearing, and sight, and feelings as well as minds: [yet] how seldom are you grateful! (XXXII.6–9).

Again, the human equality at stake is not without its privileges and responsibilities. Conversely, the materialist humanist might have some difficulty explaining why a composite of organic and inorganic matter should be endowed with equality, rights, or any claims to dignity and worth. [26] Here the questions which arise are: Why has it taken humanity a long and arduous course to come to terms with such fundamental claims as men and women make upon one another? and Why is it that the rights of groups and the claims they make against one another remain in jeopardy in an era that prides itself in its own

25. In light of the advances in modern biology and embryology and genetic research in general, a new range of Qur'ānic scholarship has developed in the past two decades. Aḥmad Zakī and Kamāl al-Ghamrāwī in Egypt probably pioneered this field in the forties, and it gained momentum with the publication of M. Bucaille's work in the seventies.

26. When Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes sought to apply the principles of evolution to his understanding of what Man was all about, and how, in consequence the law ought to be applied, he was speaking within the liberal American tradition which consecrates the equality of Man, but equivocates about its sources:
'I see no reason for attributing to Man a significance different in kind from that which belongs to a baboon or a grain of sand. I believe that our personality is a cosmic ganglion, just as when certain rays meet and cross there is a white light at the meeting point; but the rays go on after the meeting as they did before, so when certain other streams of energy cross at the meeting point, the cosmic ganglion can form a syllogism or wag its tail.' O. W. Holmes, *The Essential Holmes: Selections from the Letters, Speeches, Judicial Opinions and other Writings of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr*, ed. Richard A. Posner, Chicago, Ill., University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 108.

humanity? The answers lie not so much in what we know, but in what we believe or do not believe.

Equality is essentially a relational status which derives not from relations of beings among themselves, but from a relationship with a Source that imparts value to beings and to their mutual relationships. The equality of men and women as created beings is ultimately contingent on maintaining the primordial founding and defining relationship between Man and his Creator/Sustainer. Maintaining the absolute transcendence of God, and affirming Man's exclusive devotion, all human beings sharing the same station are equidistant from God and alike unto one another. Conversely, where the lines between Man and God are blurred, stations are interchangeable, and it is just as easy for men to load it over one another as it would for them to misappropriate Divinity for themselves. In such a state, equality becomes contingent merely upon physical origins or attributes.

Only by affirming one's devotion to the One and Only God does one accede to a share in the fraternity of a potentially common body of like-minded devotees. The case for equality, transcending race and gender, is thus anchored not only in the fact of Man's createdness, but also in his relatedness to his Creator. The scope for privilege remains possible within this equality by striving in the way of devotion and good works to seek God's countenance. In this case the boundaries of equality overlap with those of privilege and Man assumes a status earned as much as a status conferred.

The equality that emerges in the Islamic view of Man is not a mathematical equation or a juxtaposition of cold and abstract isolates. Rather it is an equality that connotes a deep human compassion, an attitude of caring.[27] It is inspired by an essential affinity of origins and destiny: 'Verily, [O humankind], this community of yours is one, and I am your Lord and Sustainer. So worship Me alone' (XXI.92).

Other verses of the Qur'ān reveal that variation and diversity are implicit in a cosmic order of multiplicity. Human order, in its social and cultural expression, is no exception to the rule: 'And among His wonders is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the diversity of your tongues and colours: for in this are signs indeed for all who are possessed of (innate) knowledge, (XXX.22).

The specific mention of gender clearly occurs in this functional setting of procreation. Biology is a means to an end, a science merely of physical life. Should we not also consider the essence that makes for human bondedness? Pairing, the norm throughout creation, exists at a number of levels:

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27. Signified in the Qur'ānic terms of *marḥama* and *mawadda*. For the usage of *marḥama* in the Qur'ān see XC.17 and for *mawadda*, see especially XXX.21. Significantly, God is described as *wadūd*, which is derived from the same root, and means 'intensely loving'. See XI.90 and LXXXV.14).

pairing which suggests complementarity and affinity; pairing which implies complementarity without any necessary affinity, and pairing which suggests polarity and tension. The human pairing of the male and female belongs to the first category. The night that follows day and the negative and positive charge in an electron, or the pairing of the botanical world might be taken as examples of the second. The concurrence of dark and light, good and evil, or of perpetrators of corruption and tyranny and those who fend for justice and truth, exemplifies the third category.

When differentiation is done along biological lines, male and female can be seen as the agents of human procreation and the joint pillars for upholding the fundamental social unit perpetuating that process. Here, the equality of status does not spell an identity of roles any more than role differentiation entails discrimination in the functions performed or the merit of their incumbents. Rather, the bond that draws male and female together is enacted at a formal level as a social contract. This contract presupposes the equality of the contracting partners and postulates a code of mutuality and reciprocity beyond the respective legal obligations: 'And among His wonders is this: He creates for you mates out of your own kind, so that you might find rest in them, and He engenders love (tenderness) and compassion between you. In this, behold, there are signs for those who ponder' (XXX.21). In this sense it is the spiritual bond of mutual caring and sharing that conditions the contractual status. The family thus provides a primary nexus of differentiation along gender lines that is reinforced by its web of rights and obligations. Beyond that, role differentiation in the Qur'ānic worldview is not gender bound. It is the function of a given society and culture and varies according to time and circumstance.

Starting out from the family nexus of relations and responsibilities, the defining parameters of the Islamic worldview extend outward to encompass the bonds that bind men and women in consonance with the requisites of the *khilāfa* and its joint trusteeship. The tone is set by the injunction that believers, men and women, are the friends and protectors of one another, bidding the good and forbidding the evil and jointly overseeing the conduct of their affairs (IX.71). At its most general and basic level, the relationship between men and women is subject to the same criteria which determine individual merit and worth, singly and collectively. Together they stand equal before God in their efforts towards God-consciousness and attempts to live up to their pledge for upholding their *dīn* [the Way] (XLII.13). Consequently, the categories of human differentiation are generalized, among the genders as among the social aggregates. There are the believers who fend off corruption and urge the good, there are the deniers and adulterators of truth who spread corruption and substitute it for good, and then there are the hypocrites, who appear as one thing and act to the contrary and wreak a greater havoc still.

Just as there is a code for regulating the principle of pairing in creation, there is a similar code for regulating the diversity that exists as a pluralistic and dispersed humanity. Similar to the code regulating the pairing of the male and female in the human species, and its attendant consolidation in the basic kinship unit of the family, is a generality befitting the extension and mutations in the larger nexus. It is the organizing principle at both levels that concerns us here. The principles of equality and complementarity that order the basic pairing in the gender relationship becomes the pervasive rule for all the subsequent relationships that follow from it. If love and compassion is the rule in the one, mutuality and getting to know one another through processes of interaction, transaction, and exchange at the institutional level is the crux of humanity. Relationships which enhance bonds of fraternity and promote the ideal of a common weal is the norm in the wider circle of a humanity that is tuned to its Creator and draws on His benevolence instead of being drawn to its exclusive and narrow egocentricities. Human history may have begun with biology and culture, but these imperatives can also be the sources for the obfuscation of the meaning of that history and its distortion to the detriment of Man.[37] It is only the awareness of the existence of that code for imparting value and of its interpretation as it is provided in the Qur'ānic injunctions that pre-empts the abuse of biology and the debasement of culture.

The differentiated categories of humankind at its widest spectrum continue to be defined by the parameters enjoined on men and women as incumbents of the *khilāfa*. It is the *khilāfa* which symbolically presides over and mediates a community of human equality, fraternity, and binding. The *khilāfa* is the token of the unity of Mankind in all its diversity, and the seal on the enduring sustaining overlordship of Allāh, Unique and One. As the cardinal privilege and common patrimony, it is shared among men and women as groups and as individuals as a grant and honour from the Creator Who is the Ultimate Sovereign and Judge in all human affairs.

The vast multitudes of humans may be oblivious to this meaning, but innumerable persons also bow with the rest of a *Muslim* creation, in deference of its truth (XXII.18; cf. XIII.15; XVI.49). As Muslims stand in prayer five times a day, God the Merciful, the Compassionate, comes alive as the Lord of the Day of Reckoning, as the Supreme Judge and the Most Just of all justices of the peace (XI.45; XCV.8). Belief in the Day of Judgement transforms this magisterial event in the believer's consciousness into an imminent reality that conditions all and sundry. In the same manner as the Muslim contemplates the affairs of Man in this world, he invokes the Lord of all power and dominion, *Mālik al-mulk*, King of Kings and Sovereign of all Sovereigns Whose Will is destiny. This conception of God is particularly significant when we assess the ethical consequences of Man's vocation as *khalīfa*, and how more particularly, it reflects on the Islamic view of Man.

This honour of having been bestowed a Divine Mandate and destined vocation deserves scrutiny. While this 'vestment' is located in each individual member of a universal community (*umma*), its consummation is only properly attained in its joint practice. It is a calling in which every man and woman is potentially honoured, but its perfected disposal calls for the cooperation of men and women as groups. In this sense, it is hardly surprising that politics being the realm of organized public affairs should be assumed as a natural site for measuring the Mandate of *khilāfa*. This interpretation is justified by two specific contexts in which the term *khilāfa*, unconjugated into its derivatives, occurs in the Qurʾān. In the one case it is mentioned in the account of creation and Adam is honoured with its vestment (II.30). In the other, it is mentioned in the context of kingship, as David is instructed to govern his people and administer justice in light of revealed guidance (XXXVIII.26).

It has been suggested that the *khilāfa* as mentioned in the Qurʾān is analogous to the Biblical notion of dominion. While this confirms the affinity amongst the many revelations in the Abrahamic tradition, it would be misleading to fuse the two terms, which, in practice, lead to diametrically opposed orientations towards the world. Dominion connotes mastery, rule, sovereignty and power and autonomy. While it is true that in the Islamic view God has given Man power, mastery and rulership, yet this is a conditional and relational grant. In spite of the possession of power, there is no question of owning the resources of the earth and of being free to dispose of either power or wealth at will as the sovereignty inherent in dominion would seem to allow. Rather, in *khilāfa* the issue is one of an entitlement to use power and wealth on certain terms.

In contrast to autonomy, *khilāfa* entails a delegation of power from a Sovereign and Master to his 'vassal'. Disengaging the latter term of its feudal connotations in medieval European history, we are left with the main ideas of a person being awarded the conditional usage of the land – the good earth – for a term in return for doing homage and pledging fealty to an overlord. Delegation of power connotes entrusting with responsibility, and implicit in this is the idea of reckoning, of accounting and judgement. The crucial point in 'deconstructing the text' is that these key ideas of delegation, power, responsibility, fealty, pledge, trust, allegiance, representation, and indeed, election and affinity, are all contained in the term *khilāfa* or, in its more precise construct, in the designation *khilāfat Allāh fi-l-arḍ* (Deputyship of Allāh on earth). In this term not only is Man's autonomy discounted, but God's Power is expressly absolutized. As the terms that relate Man to God are further spelled out in the idea of the Covenant (the *mīthāq* and the *ʿahd*), the balance between Man's autonomy and dependence is definitively established. From this relationship between the relative and the Absolute, it is hardly surprising that an encompassing ethic of responsibility should follow.

However, if vassalage in the human context evokes nuances of servitude blended with servility, *khilāfa* connotes election (*iṣṭifāʾ*) and ennoblement (*takrīm*) such as already indicated above. 'He Who taught Man that which he knew not' and 'He Who taught Man by the Pen' (and, He Who swore by the pen) was the same bountiful Benevolence and Wellspring of all knowledge and wisdom Who also taught Adam the Names and gave him thereby an advantage over the rest of creation. The imparting of that qualifying and ennobling knowledge through reason and the faculty for conceptual thought occurs in the context of that cataclysmic moment in the crowning of creation when God assigns Adam, generic Man, the Trust and elects him for the *khilāfa*. The recurring theme throughout the three-tiered discourse on Man – a discourse on creation, on the honouring and the assignment of responsibility (*taklīf*), and on guidance – is that He Who creates also imparts the knowledge which makes the command possible and which also renders the disposal of the bounties of creation within human reach. It was this election and ennoblement that the angels had acknowledged in obeisance and that Iblīs had grudgingly conceded – and contested – in envy (XVII.62).

These are but a few of the nuances and meanings which are inherent in the notion of the *khilāfa*, that station into which Man is born and the vocation for which he was elected. They make it another of these self-contained Qurʾānic terms, irreplaceable and unique, carrying within it all its moral implications. It also accounts for the unique place which Man occupies in the Islamic view.

Retracing a path

The journey's end is usually a point that begets other journeys in its wake. The social being we encounter as Man is a forgetful creature**.** This forgetfulness is a folly with consequences for himself as well as for others in the community. Man is capable of not only rising to great heights but also falling into depravity. In his rise and fall he raises or brings down others along with himself.[28] Thus, in Muslim history, social and political reform has been contingent on a moral or inner reform that starts with the self and extends to the community. In drawing closer to God, the conscience is stirred, the heart renewed, and one's sense of obligation for the well-being of the community quickened. Coming together to protect one another, to enjoin the good and ward off evil, becomes a means of reinforcing and sanctifying the individual selves. In Islamic idiom this is termed making the truth prevail. Such efforts only take place beyond the knowledge and conviction that real honour and glory

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28. The only time we encounter Man alone is at the beginning of time and its end in the beyond (VI.94). Other than that, Man/*insān* is a being in time who is tested in his resolve as he acts with and amidst a species of his kind.

belong to God and to those who strive in righteousness, and in the certainty that ultimately truth and justice will prevail: 'Truth has [now] come, Falsehood has perished, for, behold, all Falsehood is bound to wither away' (XVII.81).

This is the self-confident and optimistic note in the Islamic view of Man. It is a view that is oriented towards the future. In this ethic, if it is of Man's folly to err, and a sign of his weakness to succumb to the promptings of the devil, or the self. It is also of his greatness to retract, to see the error of his ways, to repent and to make amends through. The *awwāb a wū bā Lisān al-ʿArab* Ibn Manẓūr is he who is ever-returning to his Lord, and *tawba* See *Tā wā bā* in *Lisān al-ʿArab* Ibn Manẓūr is that act of sincere repentance from one who has erred. The door of forgiveness and compassion is always open. God's mercy that embalms the individual self is one that is promised to a community which lives up to its collective responsibilities.

Ultimately, Man/*insān* is capable of much good. It is for this purpose that he was originally created. At the same time he is capable of great evil too –through wilful arrogance and a tendentious contentiousness. The former blinds him to the truth, the right and the just, while the latter deludes him into rationalizing and justifying his waywardness. Because the seat for such appetites lies in a sodden heart, Man is urged to purify his inner being and is shown the way to purification or *tazkiya*. 'To a happy state indeed shall he attain who causes this self to grow in purity, and truly lost is he who buries it in darkness' (XCI.9–10). In the same way, he is urged to purify his outer or material possessions. 'For he shall be spared it [the torment of hellfire] who is truly God-conscious, who spends [over others] of his possessions that he might grow in purity [and through thus spending it his own wealth will grow in purity]' (XCII.17–18).[29]

Nothing is evil about Man in himself, in his action or in his setting. The burden lies in the intention that accompanies the act and attends the gain. Man is furthermore a creature of his needs as well as of his aspirations. Those needs range from the moral, the intellectual, and the spiritual to the physical and the material. They demand fulfilment if Man is to attain his integrality. An Islamic view of Man takes these needs into account not only on the basis of an empirical inquiry into Man, but in light of the imperatives of a revealed guidance which addresses them. Accordingly, basic human needs have been

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29. Cf. in an analogous sense IX.103. Significantly, the third of the 'five pillars' of the faith is *zakāt*, the poor-due, etymologically comes from the same root signifying to grow and to purify. The command to observe that Mandatory spending of *zakāt* (apart from the pervasive urging to maintain charitable spending as a commendable practice, *ṣadaqa*) occurs throughout the Qurʾān in the context of the twin command to observe the prayer/ *ṣalāt* in all steadfastness, providing thereby the most persistent reminder of the integrality of Man: body and soul, material and moral, as well as the rigorous ground for training for it. See, for example, II.43, 83, 177; IV.162; V.55; XIX.31; XXII.41.

provided for in that comprehensive ethical code that assures the sanity and continuity of the human species. This is the *Sharīʿa*.

Through its radical yet simple, flexible yet sophisticated, encompassing conceptual matrix it assures the convergence of the moral Man. The internal values are reinforced at their limits by the external sanctions of the law. The *Sharīʿa* has a symbolic as well as a concrete meaning. Semantically, it is the path that leads to a water source – water which itself is the source of life. Concretely, it is the formalization of that ethical code which safeguards the foundations of Man's social being and assures him the requisites for attending to his vocation, the *khilāfa*, so that settling the earth assumes the way of God and goodness. Without an awareness of the *sharīʿa*, its range and purpose, no account of the Islamic view of Man is complete.

Human beings themselves in the midst of all their formal diversities share certain basic commonalities. These common aspects are the means by which the categories of Mankind are identified, always in accordance with the kind of standards of a moral classification which unites them across time and space. What are these categories? Is the essential divide between men acquired or inherent?

In Islam the categories that count are those which can be acquired: God is fair and gives men and women a chance to choose the category to which they want to belong by their deeds and their intentions. The inherent variations by way of race or gender are not the subject of a moral discourse. Rather, the categories that count are set forth from the very beginning of the Qurʾān as a perfected legacy of prophethood bequeathed to a matured and maturing humanity. Following the *Fātiḥa*, the Opening, the Qurʾān opens with a universal disclosure addressed to all people, whether they are believers (II.2–5), deniers of the truth (II.6–7), or those diseased-at-heart, who say one thing and mean another and claim to do the good when they fill the earth with corruption, i.e. the hypocrites (II.8–20).

These are the generic classes of humans, as individuals and collectivities, such that any other temporal classification falls within them. They retain their validity beyond any specific history and group. Thus any historical group or given individual can also recognize affinities within the one or the other. These categories are essentially derived from the human response to Divine guidance. From an Islamic view of Man, in addition to essential, existential Man, Man as *ʿabd* and devotee, there is also social Man, accountable through time and beyond it into requiting his covenant and upholding his trust as *khalīfa*. The full meaning of history cannot be seen apart from these generic and morally laden categories.

Although moral Man is the pillar and mainstay of a moral community, growth in purity is encouraged both individually and collectively. The community in the Islamic view is more than the aggregate of its individuals. A

community that meets them adequately constitutes a basic moral and integral community.

There is an added relevance and dimension to a view of this relationship which is constructed on the basis of the Qurʾānic discourse and which could be further reinforced in a practical sense by the Prophet's teachings and example. Within and beyond that relationship, we see there a special position reserved for women: the double affirmative maintained in the Qurʾānic discourse in this regard comes as a corrective against a universal human weakness to distort and confound; in such cases, historically, the weaker elements of society are likely to become victims. Woman is honoured jointly with Man as *insān*, and together they are paired of the same entity; she receives an additional emphasis, in her moral capacity, to assure her honour in her difference. In the same light, the process of pairing in creation and its significance for the view of Man is elevated beyond a biological to a cosmic and spiritual significance. Ultimately, beyond pairing, procreation and multiplicity, there always remains the worth of the individual self and whether it elects for its station that of God-conscious *taqwā* attaining to *īmān*, *amn*, and *iṭmiʾnān* or otherwise.

The ontic and ethical discourses in the Qurʾān are inexorably linked and they converge around a meaningful and coherent view of Man as a moral being, in himself and within society. Man/*insān* is moral firstly in view of his createdness and primal allegiance to his Creator, and secondly, because of the inviolability of the moral order itself as a function of the Divine Will and its Ordinance for creation in general, and pre-eminently for Man as its crown and culmination. Rights and obligations derive from God and that human being's obligations to one another have also been conceived within a framework of Man's dues to God in which the boundaries on mortal freedom are equally ascribed to God. In this framework *ḥuqūq Allāh* (the 'rights of Allāh') and *ḥudūd Allāh* (the 'limits of Allāh') provide the defence line for human rights and human freedom and dignity, as they protect humans against their own potential excesses against themselves.

VIII

Summary and Conclusion

The foregoing is no more than a summary highlighting the relevance of the Islamic view of Man in the modern age. The exposition has necessarily been confined to select themes of what constitutes 'Islamic humanism' and of how it compares with other versions of an ideal that claims to uphold the dignity and integrity of Man. In contrast, the dominant paradigm of secular humanism, through its various philosophies of Man, only offers a refutation of Man's subservience to the idolatries of his own making. The most such

philosophies can attain is the first half of the Islamic testament, the *shahāda*: 'There is no god…' The instant they try to go beyond this point, they become philosophically meaningless and self-negating assertions. They point to the paradox of Man's ultimate dispossession in the midst of plenty. Only Islamic humanism can hold its own because it draws its impulse from the core-belief in *tawḥīd,* the absolute oneness of God, and also because it acknowledges the limits of Man's autonomy and attests to the nature and range of his indebtedness to his Creator.

A view of Man is in fact a view of human life, society, culture, religion and the world. Only a part of our selective focus was on Man's rationality, moral agency, and responsibility in an exclusively Islamic idiom. There is nothing essentially new about this definition of Man's humanity. Muslim thinkers have in the past arrived at the same conclusion in their own way because they also drew on the same steadfast and reliable sources we draw upon today. They realized then, what we belatedly re-acknowledge as we recover our links with our common sources. For them as for us, Man's humanity is not contingent on Man's anatomy or on his external form, but of the *rūḥ*, that divine breath, that gave him life at the origins and of *'ahd*, that original pledge/covenant with his Creator. It is this that has assured him his destiny upon his ultimate return. Beyond that, the challenge for men and women in the here-and-now becomes a matter of maintaining the balance by walking the straight and narrow path between autonomy and dependence. The goal is to shoulder a trust, the *amāna*, and to deliver a pledge. As conscious and conscientious moral agents, men and women assume their trust in the light of the Divine guidance. Striving to fulfil their mandate, they become worthy of their vicegerency of their Lord and Creator, Who is also their ultimate refuge and before Whom they will tender their final account on the Day of Judgement. This is the Muslim's understanding of himself and his role in life. It is an understanding with a range of practical implications going beyond Man's perceptions of his deeds and conduct, and inclusive of his conception of himself, his relationship to others and to the world that is his temporary abode.

The Qur'ān is singular in presenting a comprehensive and balanced account of integral Man/*insān*. This includes his physical, psychological, and spiritual aspects. The Book presents a full spectrum of human life spanning the pre-worldly to the post-worldly phases encompassing the here-and-now as well as the transcendental. The meaning of Man's indebtedness to his Creator and of the place of *dīn* in this scheme are also important aspects of the Islamic View. However, beyond the metaphysics and the biology of creation, its cosmology and its eschatology, certain dimensions can only be properly understood in the light of elaborating key *tawḥīdic* concepts relating to *fiṭra, amāna, khilāfa*, and *dīn*.

The Islamic view of Man is to be found in the lives of those who strive to measure up to the Criterion and to the Balance as they have been revealed and through the Way of the Prophet. It is a view that shines out in the efforts and sacrifice of those who strive to follow his path as their example. Because it has been clearly, coherently and consistently articulated in the sources of the faith, the Muslim who has been bred on its authentic sources has no trouble understanding it. His is not the existential anguish which has inspired much speculative eloquence in other traditions. His challenge is to implement that understanding in a setting which has been pre-ordained for its testing

The task of Muslim thought is to rediscover that which has been elucidated in these sources and to synthesize the much needed perspectives so that it could share its own with others with assurance and with humility. Its task is definitely not one of creation, invention, improvisation or speculation in an area where God in His infinite wisdom and knowledge, unbounded in His grace and mercy, has taken it upon Himself to instruct, to enlighten, and to guide. It is intrinsic to the Islamic view of Man that the burden of morality, freely granted Man and freely assumed by him, has its limits and that these limits are borne out in striving for its implementation and not for its re-invention. The precept is: 'No soul shall have laid on it a burden greater than it can bear' (II.233), and the invocation of the believers is 'Our Lord, lay not on us a burden greater than we have the strength to bear' (II.286).

THIS WORLD AND THE HEREAFTER

Muḥammad al-Ghazali

The doctrine of *tawḥīd*, affirming the absolute unity and oneness of a unique, personal, transcendent, omnipotent, compassionate and merciful God, constitutes the very essence of Islam. Often rendered in English rather inadequately as 'monotheism', *tawḥīd* gives rise to certain fundamental principles that are central to the belief and practice of the Muslims. These principles should be borne in mind for a proper appreciation of the Islamic conception of the 'here and the Hereafter', which itself is a necessary and practical consequence of *tawḥīd*.[1]

Acknowledging God as the creator and the sustainer of all existing things entails acceptance of Him as the sole deity and master who alone can determine the purpose of the existence of all His creatures, including humans, whom He has 'made in the finest of forms' (XCV.4). The purpose of human creation is compatible with their superb natural constitution.[2] Human beings' acknowledgement of God and their consequential struggle in life to realize the purpose of their creation is thus a process of their own self-fulfilment more than anything else (XVII.15).

Human beings have been created to be God's vicegerents (*khalīfa*) on earth. This lofty position demands that humans be granted the necessary free will to act. Hence they are called upon to fulfil the terms of their vicegerency by exercising voluntary choice (XVIII.29). According to the terms of this vicegerency, humans are required to establish a moral discipline in the inner kingdom of their own selves, and to undertake a collective effort to fashion this world in harmony with the ethical vision given by God. This vision has

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1. Cf. D. Waines, *An Introduction to Islam,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 24–30.
2. See Muḥammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'ān,* Gibraltar, Dār al-Andalus, 1980, for comments on XXX.30.

been communicated to humankind through a number of chosen human beings who, under divine guidance, have demonstrated the practical application of this vision in their ideal lives. These were the prophets and messengers of God whom He commissioned, from time to time, to remind humans of the purpose of their creation and thus enable them to live according to that purpose. Indeed the first man, Adam, the ancestor of all humankind, was also the first prophet. The prophet Adam and all those prophets who succeeded him taught humanity the following simple and unambiguous universal message of Islam: acknowledge God as your lord and act in a manner that would be conducive to a favourable judgement in the Hereafter by conforming to the ways prescribed by Him. The process of providing divine guidance to humankind through the prophets continued in the course of history in consonance with the changing requirements of human society in different climes and milieux. This process was finally consummated in the mission of the last Prophet and Messenger of God, Muḥammad, in the seventh century of the Common Era (CE).[3]

Belief in God and accepting human accountability before Him in the Hereafter is the quintessence of Islam. In the scheme of life contemplated by Islam, this world and the Hereafter are two necessary stages in the existential journey of humankind. Both these stages, though they may be sharply contrasted to each other, are yet to be understood as mutually complementary. Neither of them can meaningfully be defined without appreciating the significance of the other. The intrinsicality of the here and the Hereafter and their mutual dependence thus assume practical significance in the existential enterprise envisaged by Islam for humanity.

In order to understand the significance of the duality of the here and the Hereafter that is inherent in the life of Muslims, it is necessary first to see what meaning has been assigned by Islam to life itself. Life is not just seen as a given objective fact. There is a great deal more to it than is comprehended by the senses or intellect. It is a purposeful project sponsored by God Almighty, the creator of human beings and of their environment. Humans, the vicegerents of God and His trustees and stewards in this world, have been commissioned to translate divine imperatives into practical patterns of piety (*birr*), virtue (*khayr*) and excellence (*iḥsān*) within the framework of the opportunities afforded by this worldly existence. This view of life looks at every man and woman as born innocent, with the potential for good and promise to realize moral ideals and spiritual objectives and thus qualify for Paradise, the real home of lasting happiness, which is reserved for the righteous.

3. This is one of the recurrent themes of the Qurʾān. See for example XXXV.24; XIII.7. This Qurʾānic theme – sending forth messengers to humanity for guidance – has significant bearing on the concept of accountability propounded by the Qurʾān. According to this concept no one, whether an individual or a people, shall be liable to God's punishment unless the divine message to guide humanity is communicated through the prophets. See for example XVII.15.

According to this philosophy of religion, life is a serious vocation and assumes the sanctity of a divine trust. God the creator and sustainer of all living phenomena is the final and absolute arbiter of all endeavours of humankind. It is He alone who will pronounce His conclusive judgement at the appointed hour concerning the value of all human acts. Those who, in God's estimation, achieve success in accomplishing their moral mission by earnestly striving to conform to the ways laid down by God will be assigned to Paradise. Contrariwise, those whose acts and attitudes violate the purpose of their creation and hence are adjudged as evil shall be consigned to Hell following God's judgement to award the evil-doers their due punishment.

Consequently, the Islamic concept of life entails the following for human beings:

- The present phase of human existence is merely transitional;
- The present phase is a prelude to a subsequent and essential stage of human existence, which is permanent and lasting;
- The present stage is the indispensable means to realize success in the subsequent stage;
- The present phase is not valuable in itself. It is valuable only to the extent that it is an inevitable means for attainment of bliss in the Hereafter;
- Life here is rendered worthless and may well prove to be a curse if it is devoid of sincere pursuit of the purpose assigned to it by God;
- If human beings acknowledge that their existence is due to God and consciously identify with the objectives set for humanity by God, by engaging in the all-pervading struggle to realize those objectives, they are reckoned successful in the estimation of Islam, even if they fail in every other endeavour of this worldly life;
- The sole criterion of respectability among human beings is *taqwā*, that is, voluntary and sincere identification of human discretion with the revealed will of God. But the final judgement concerning all human deeds is the exclusive prerogative of God, which is held in abeyance until the end of time and the termination of worldly careers. Nobody should therefore pretend or claim to have any superiority or precedence over other fellow-beings on account of their assumed piety and good conduct. Hence all human acts and deeds in this world are to be classified into good or evil only tentatively until the pronouncement of the final divine judgement in the Hereafter concerning human endeavours;
- The present phenomenal world, this arena of empirical experience, has been designed for the service of human beings – the vicegerents of God. Therefore, this world of matter and of time and space shall be dispensed with upon the termination of humanity's habitation in this world and its eventual transference to the subsequent stage of life, namely the Hereafter. This world is, therefore, nothing more than a serviceable tool and an auxiliary instrument subservient to the purposes of humanity and not *vice versa*; and

- The nature of the present phenomenal world cannot adequately be comprehended in all its dimensions without recognizing a higher realm that lies beyond the present cognitive and experiential domain of humanity.

In the Islamic worldview, the essential features of which have been outlined above, there is no room for asceticism or total this-worldliness. Muslims are not only permitted but positively urged to acquire, possess and enjoy the good things of life. At the same time they are warned on every occasion and reminded at each step not to transgress the limits of propriety, fairness, justice and decency sanctioned by God. Moreover, when people enter the fold of Islam by their free choice, they are urged to engage in an active pursuit of the bliss promised in the Hereafter by devoting all available worldly bounties – knowledge, time, power, prestige and material resources – to serving the cause of God.

Serving God's cause with the instrument of earthly potential and mundane resources by no means entails renunciation of this world. Nor does this service imply any escape from the demands of sociability. Furthermore, devoting yourself and your worldly resources to God does not mean that God is in need of the devotion of His servants. For God is perfect unto Himself and is absolutely self-sufficient. No amount of human generosity can make the slightest addition to His infinite treasures. Nor will human obedience to God, whatever its extent, add at all to His absolute authority and His dominion over the universe. Nor can the rebellion of all humankind diminish God's supreme sovereignty over the cosmos. It is not God – the creator of humanity – who is in need of human servitude; it is rather humans – the creatures of God – whose success here and salvation in the Hereafter are contingent on God's pleasure and approval.

The way to success here and salvation in the Hereafter requires that humans of their own volition should follow Islam, the religion chosen by God for all humankind. Islam, an infinitive noun, denotes 'submission', 'surrender', 'acceptance'. This submission is an attitude of the mind and heart which consists in surrendering your whole being, consciously and voluntarily, to the will of God. This will is expressed in the divine revelations, the latest and final version of which is embodied in the Qurʾān and objectified in the historical example of the Prophet Muḥammad, the ideal servant of God and His last messenger. The central point of the teachings contained in these two sources of Islam – the Qurʾān and the *Sunna* – is that humans owe their lives with all their attendant opportunities to God. Once people make this acknowledgement of indebtedness to God, the rest of the attitudinal changes demanded by Islam come as a natural corollary of this basic acknowledgement.

Humans are masters of nothing of what they apparently possess. This is true even of their existence, for they neither beget themselves nor bring into being anything out of their own will. This world is complete without humans, but humans cannot survive without this world. Therefore, human

beings owe all their possessions including their own selves to God. The only way of repaying this supreme debt lies in surrendering ourselves entirely to our creator and master. This total surrender of the self to God is not possible in any way other than offering total obedience to Him in the whole spectrum of individual and collective life. This holistic view of religion introduces an inseparable relation between life here and life in the Hereafter. According to this view of religion, no aspect of our worldly concerns here can be free from the predominant considerations of the Hereafter. If anything of this world is likely to bring dividends in the next world, then it is really worth our while. But any amount of worldly riches is worthless if it is not conducive to the limitless potentialities of the bounties of the Hereafter.

A life thus lived under the paramount consciousness of the Hereafter will maintain a distinct outlook on 'success' and 'failure'. It will have its own standards of judgement to determine what constitutes success and where lies failure. Those who adopt this approach to life will also maintain their own likes and dislikes distinguishable from all those who do not subscribe to this view of life. It will not be reasonable for them – to take one simple instance – to engage in the pursuit of their selfish interests at the expense of the legitimate interests of others. They will not be out to grab the best of this mundane life at the cost of the next person. For while this selfish triumph might be seen as success by others, it will be considered sheer failure by those who take a long-range view of things. Any immediate advantage in this world, if acquired through violating the canons of divinely ordained morality, shall indeed be perceived as utter loss when assessed in the scales of the Hereafter. Hence, thanks to this view of things, there is set a certain balance and a definite touchstone in the mind of all truly believing Muslims, with the help of which they can try to weigh and test the value of all things pertaining to this world. Success, happiness, advantage, profit, interest, victory and triumph would thus assume a unique meaning because of belief in a worldview oriented to the Hereafter.

A life characterized by an active pursuit of the Hereafter and a desire and longing for the bliss promised therein will render it well nigh impossible for true believers to become imprisoned in their shells of selfishness. When such a belief is fully absorbed by the mind and heart it can emancipate a person from narrow concerns and elevate them into the vast expanses of a universal human fraternity. Likewise, absence of the notion of final accountability from the consciousness of humanity often generates the worst possible attitudes of greed and selfishness. This selfishness in turn engenders a series of sins and evils as a natural consequence of the mindless pursuit of our own interest in utter disregard of the well-being of others. Further, if unchecked, this selfishness leads to increasing vanity and arrogance. The effects of internal maladies of the mind and heart continue to multiply, and result in countless problems and miseries for humanity in the form of discord and dispute, hostility and belligerence, clash and conflict. History bears testimony to

these evil consequences of the increasing arrogance and inflated vanity of individuals and collectivities. They have wrought no ordinary damage on the peace and tranquillity of human life on earth.

As pointed out at the outset, the concept of the Hereafter is a necessary and practical consequence, a logical corollary, of the cardinal doctrine of *tawḥīd*. Affirming the absolute unity and oneness of God and the consequential acceptance of His attributes of omnipotence, perfection and all-pervading compassion and beneficence culminates in the recognition of the Hereafter as the real and lasting abode of humanity, where all ultimate aims will be realized. For a God who is omnipotent in an absolute sense and whose will overtakes human intentions cannot be a mere spectator of history. No incident, no act, however major or minor, can possibly escape God's notice or be beyond His grip. He is ever vigilant and watchful over the whole of His kingdom, which embraces the entire cosmos. 'Neither sleep nor slumber can take hold of Him' (II.255). Nor does He need any rest on the ground that He was 'fatigued by the act of creation' (L.38). His creative power is constant and He cherishes His creation endlessly without interruption. He is above time and beyond space. His infinite knowledge encompasses all the general facts as well as particular facets of the reality of each being and non-being, whether relating to the sphere of the possible or pertaining to the domain of the impossible.[4]

Yet by common observation human beings seem to have a free hand in their world. There appears little divine intervention to check their wayward pastimes or deter them from the vicious pursuit of evil. All this is fully commensurate with the divine scheme in the creation of humans and their appointment as the vicegerents of God. Humans were commissioned in that capacity to fashion their world according to the ways prescribed by God. These ways are available to humans both by means of natural intuition and through express divine revelations brought by the prophets and messengers, who in turn practised them apart from expounding them to the rest of humankind. Further, humans are equipped with all necessary means to realize the purpose of their creation. These means have been provided both within (for example, as sense perception, intellection, memory, intuition and imagination) and without (in the divine signs spread all around them in the world of nature). Scores of other signs and indicators have been placed within and around human beings to remind them of their *raison d'être*.

A transient opportunity has been given to them in the form of life in this world. Human responsibility is basically individual, but in some cases it is also collective because sociability is integral to human nature. All individuals are essentially answerable for themselves. But those individuals who assume

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4. See for further elaboration of the essential features of Islamic ontology and its relation to eschatology, M. Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, ed. M. Saeed Shaikh, Lahore, Pakistan, Institute of Islamic Culture, 1986, pp. 1–22.

leadership of any large or small unit of human association – starting from the family and extending to an empire – incur by virtue of their role of leadership a dual responsibility. They will be answerable on the Day of Judgement, not only for themselves but also for all those people whose leadership they assumed in this world (XXXIII. 67–8).

If this world and life have a purpose, then humans must be responsible to realize it. If humans are responsible, then the Hereafter is necessary because responsibility warrants accountability. No doubt, there are various human-made procedures for accountability in this world. But quite often truth is distorted and evidence suppressed, and as a result justice is tarnished. The weak and the destitute seldom receive their rightful share in this world. The strong and the sturdy often devour the resources of this earth – the common possession of humankind – and divest the poorer and weaker of their due portion of humanity's shared inheritance. The Hereafter is therefore necessary for dispensing the fullest measure of justice.

Further, despite all His favours to humanity, God has not compelled people to accept the truth and follow His commands. Rather He has set them free to accept or reject the true religion (II.256, 18–29). The fact that people have a choice also necessitates the Hereafter. If humans were not free agents in this world with unlimited scope to perpetrate evil and fill the Earth with terror and turmoil, to unleash all forms of malice and mischief against their fellow-beings and even to commit physical and spiritual suicide, then perhaps there would be no reason for a Hereafter. Therefore, there is a logical correlation between *tawḥīd* and the Hereafter. This world has no meaningful explanation without God. If God exists then humans must be answerable to Him, for they cannot become gods unto themselves. Also, if people are answerable, they must be free. And if they are both, then there has to be some stage beyond the confines of this temporal life where stocktaking of their deeds might be possible. All this unmistakably leads us to the inescapable conclusion that the Hereafter is the logical culmination of this life.[5]

The centrality of belief in *tawḥīd* and its concomitant acceptance of the Hereafter as the ultimate human destiny defines the meaning of this world in the life of Muslims. Unlike the effects of some other creeds and cults of the past and the present on their followers, to Muslims this world is neither essentially holy nor necessarily impure. Muslims need neither humble themselves before this world and prostrate themselves before its apparently magnificent and powerful phenomena such as the sun, stars, moon, mountains, rivers, oceans, thunder and lightning, nor regard this world as profane and hence inconsistent

5. A lucid statement of the Islamic credal philosophy underlying its peculiar worldview can be found, inter alia, in S. Haneef, *What Everyone Should Know about Islam and Muslims,* Lahore, Pakistan, Kazi, 1985, pp. 3–38; see also H. Abdalati, *Islam in Focus,* Indianapolis, Ind., American Trust, 1977.

with their religiosity. Muslims approach this life free from such presuppositions. This world is a creation of God designed to serve the purposes of humanity. Humans – the vicegerents of God and His best creation – are meant to devote themselves to the pursuit of ends and aims that are beyond the limits of this biological and material context of time and space. Thus this world is a means, albeit an indispensable one, but not an end in itself. This worldly life can be a blessing for humans if it is employed as an instrument for the realization of the higher ideals of human life. But it is worthless if it is devoid of an active pursuit to attain the divine pleasure that leads to the bliss of the Hereafter. It may even become downright evil and a curse for humanity if it is spent in violation of God's commands and is devoted to pursuits that are inconsistent with the very purpose of human existence.

People are, therefore, fully entitled to enjoy the good things of this world, if only because God has created them for the benefit of humanity. That is precisely why the survival of this world – the habitat of humankind – is contingent on the human presence here. As soon as humanity is recalled to enter the subsequent stage of its existence – the Hereafter – this world with all its treasures will be dispensed with and reduced to naught. But since humans are not the exclusive masters of themselves and their environment, their entitlement to this world and its vast potential of resources is subject to the moral mandate and ethical writ of God. Humans have been invited to establish a relationship with their environment as its trustees and stewards, in which capacity they are called on to strive for the realization of the ethical vision derived from Revelation in regard to life in the world so as to bring the world of nature under moral control.[6] All pleasures or pastimes that this world might offer to humanity remain healthy and legitimate only as long as they are pursued within the limits of the moral order prescribed by God.

Apart from these ethical considerations there are important epistemological implications – that is, implications for our beliefs – of this duality of the Here and the Hereafter. Whatever comes within the range of human observation and sense perception constitutes only a small portion of reality. Hence human observation and perception do not exhaust reality. There are other dimensions of reality, either pertaining to the higher spiritual realm or relating to the sphere beyond the present existential scope of humanity, that are indiscernible to human perception for the time being. Since the present worldly existence is meant to be a test for people's ability to

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6. For a discussion of the environment from an Islamic perspective, see F. M. Khalid and I. O'Brien (eds), *Islam and Ecology*, London, Cassell, 1992. See also R. E. Timm, 'The Ecological Fallout of Islamic Creation Theology' in M. E. Tucker and J. A. Grim (eds), *Religion, Philosophy and the Environment*, New York, Orbis, 1994, and S. P. Ouis, 'Islamic Ecotheology Based on the Qur'ān', *Islamic Studies* Occasional Papers 27, Islamabad, Islamic Research Institute, 1998.

acknowledge their debt to God by free choice, many dimensions of the reality are concealed from their view during their temporary tenure of this earthly life. However, in the subsequent stage of their existence, these hidden realities shall be revealed to humanity. People are urged in this world to attest to these hidden dimensions of reality by way of belief in the unseen. But as soon as they enter the Hereafter, they will be able to behold some of those facts that they had been asked to accept as postulates of faith. Therefore, humans must regard this world as merely a tip of the iceberg. They should fully exploit their intellectual potential to comprehend this phenomenal world, functioning under a coherent and consistent divine law whose jurisdiction extends far beyond the confines of the observable phenomena.

This view of the world as an extension of another higher realm provides a distinct epistemological framework which leaves no room for credulous superstitions, dark spots representing incomprehensible gaps of knowledge, or any mystification of this world. What is more, people are emancipated from every kind of obscurantism and fear associated with natural phenomena, and can achieve a firm conviction about the friendliness of nature. The conclusions that modern empirical knowledge has reached in recent times about the natural environment being congenial for human survival have been an axiom of Muslim belief from the very outset. Indeed, the present conviction of ecologists that this world of nature is compatible with the biological needs of the human race could not have been possible without some kind of a notion that this world has been tailored to the requirements of humanity. And if this is so, then surely there is a purposeful and intelligent scheme underlying all the diversity of the natural phenomena. In this scheme, human beings emerge as the purpose of this world and not vice versa.

Human beings as God's vicegerents

God has distinguished the human race among all His creatures as His vicegerents. By this distinction God has conferred upon them a singular honour and a great promise for felicity here and eternal bliss in the Hereafter. With this appointment to the office of vicegerency, God has put humanity to a great test. At the same time, He has invested them with all those faculties of mind, heart and body that qualify them to take on this formidable test and shoulder its onerous responsibilities (*taklīf*).[7] These faculties have provided them with first, intention and free choice, and second, an intellect which is

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7. The Islamic doctrine of *taklīf* – charging humans with responsibility – is closely related to the concept of final accountability in the Hereafter. For a seminal philosophical discussion of this doctrine see Shāh Walī Allāh, *Ḥujjat Allāh al-bāligha,* Lahore, Pakistan: al-Maktaba al-Salafiyya, n.d., pp. 2–23; see also its English translation by M. Hermansen, *The Conclusive Argument from God*, I, Leiden, Netherlands, Brill, 1996, pp. 57–68.
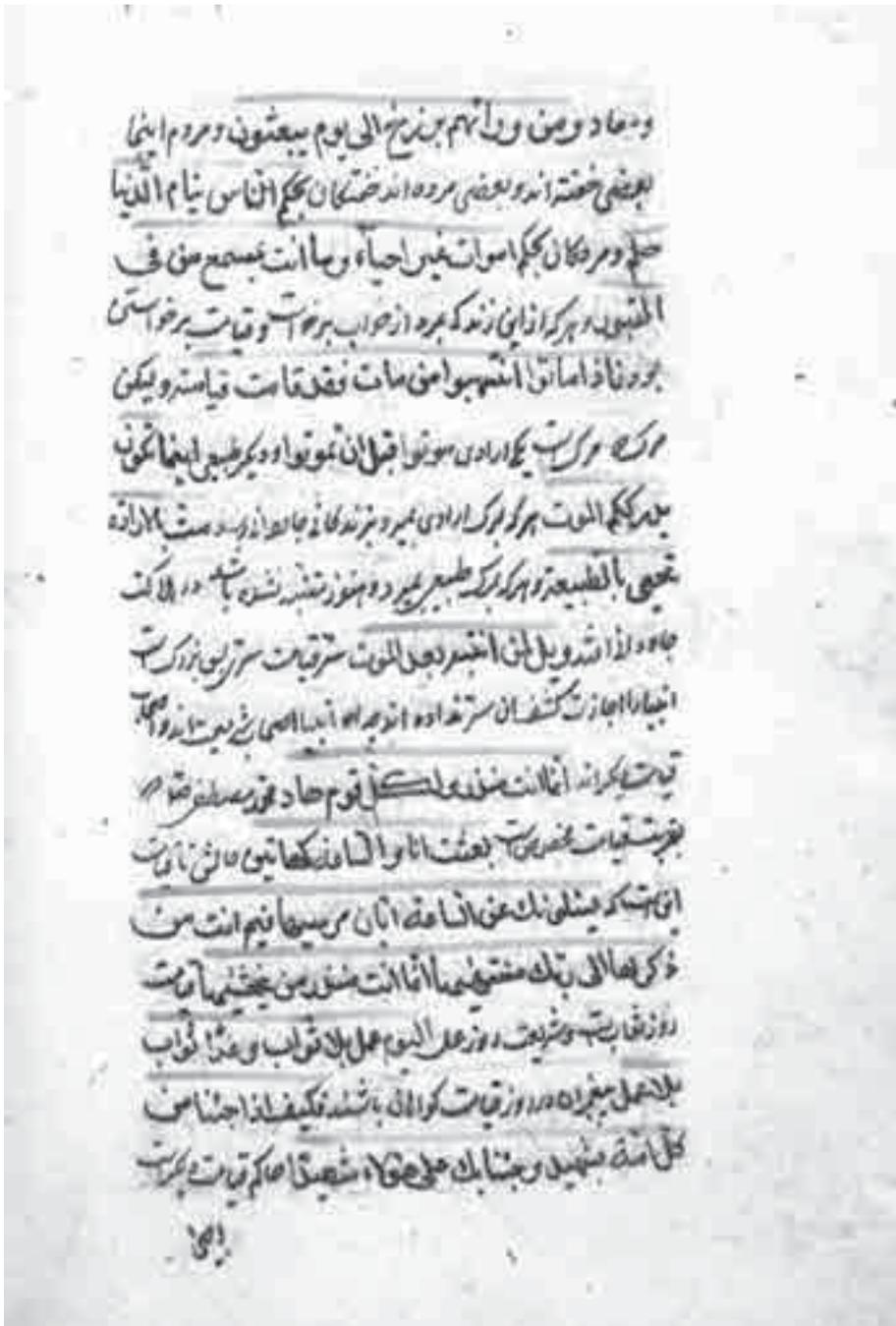
I–4.1   Manuscript of *Āghāz va Anjām* of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, AH 1186
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fully equipped with the potential to comprehend and carry out the divine commands: that is, to do certain things and not do others, to discriminate between right and wrong and to distinguish between what is beneficial and what is harmful in both worlds.[8]

By employing these faculties, people are able to acknowledge their gratitude to God and to praise Him for His unlimited bounties. These bounties are both manifest and hidden, moral and material, physical and intellectual, psychological and spiritual, within humans and outside them. This acknowledgement by humans of God and His bounties logically leads to an all-pervading conduct of gratitude. This conduct of gratitude is to be concretized in practical terms through sincere and exclusive servitude to God in all spheres of human existence (LXVII.2–14; LXXVI.2–3).[9]

Thus, the very obvious message and the foremost implication of *tawḥīd* is that humans have not appeared on the scene of history in vain. They were purposefully created and primordially given a temperament fit for taking this test of life. While they were provided with reason and its necessary instruments to discover good and pursue it, they were also given the potential to court greed, malice and lasciviousness. They are thus placed between the incentive to do good and the impetus to indulge in evil. While they are naturally attracted to God, and the higher ideals given by Him, at the same time they have certain baser instincts that prompt them to respond to the call of Satan and be lured by the temptations of their lower selves. But humans have been encouraged to pursue the path of truth and virtue through a natural inclination duly supplemented by revealed guidance preached by the prophets of God.[10]

This placement of human beings in a constant condition of test in this life demands a full measure of reward and recompense. Otherwise this placement would be a futile affair, and obviously God's actions are free of futility. But since recompense cannot adequately be realized in this world – given its finitude – this very fact calls for another world to realize this objective. Therefore, wide scope has been provided to people to employ the opportunities of this world so as to attain lasting reward in the Hereafter, and to save themselves from divine chastisement. The ways of both good and evil, truth and falsehood, virtue and vice, have been opened to them in this world

8. Cf. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ḥasan Ḥabannaka al-Maydānī, *al-ʿAqīda al-islāmiyya wa-uṣusuhā*, Damascus, Dār al-Qalam, 1983, pp. 621–6.

9. In the latter verse and several other verses of the Qurʾān, while gratitude has been described as synonymous with obedience to God, ingratitude is equated with infidelity and disbelief.

10. This concept of human nature combining the potential for good and possibilities of evil has been elaborated in the Qurʾān on a number of occasions. See the Qurʾān, *passim*, but especially chapter 91 which is devoted to this theme. See the English translation of ʿAbdullāh Yūsuf ʿAlī, new revised edition, Brentwood, Md., Amana Corporation, 1409/1987, pp. 1654–6.

to enable them to make a free choice between right and wrong (XXI.35). In this condition of test, the primary responsibility is individual. All members of the human race are answerable for themselves personally. No one is to bear the burden of another (II.286; XXXV.18).

It should be borne in mind that all human beings are to be held accountable relative to their capacity. The greater the ability, competence and resourcefulness of an individual, the greater is their responsibility. The less their resources, the lighter shall be their burden of accountability. This leaves no room in Islam for collective or impersonal responsibility. Therefore, the idea of redemption – so typical of the Christian creed – is alien to the teachings of Islam.[11] Moreover, since every individual human being is placed in a different set of conditions in this life, the nature of the test for each one is different, and everyone is to be held answerable in the context of their own peculiar set of circumstances.

It should also be noted that, notwithstanding the law of requital and recompense, God has promised that He will show overwhelming mercy and compassion to His servants. His mercy and clemency encompasses all humankind, and will be manifest both in this world and in the Hereafter (XII.54; VII.156).

That is why the door of repentance is always open for people in this world (XLII.25–6). Among the attributive names of God, we find *al-Raḥmān, al-Raḥīm, al-Ghaffār, al-ʿAfuww* and *al-Ghafūr*. These attributive names underline the fact that in His treatment of humankind, God tends to compassion and clemency rather than to wrath and chastisement, something that we find overly emphasized in the Jewish idea of God. Similarly, unlike the Christian notion of a merely benevolent God, the Islamic doctrine of *tawḥīd* does not perceive God as given to clemency.[12] This notion undermines the absolute authority and omnipotence of God. In Islam, God is indeed merciful, but He has laid down clear conditions for His servants to qualify for divine mercy. Those who persist in transgression and admit partners to God, assigning His exclusive attributes to any of those partners, deprive themselves of His blessing and mercy (IV.48). But whatever failing on the part of an individual that falls below the degree of this cardinal sin of polytheism is indeed forgivable by God. In short, according to Islam, God is indeed a forgiving, compassionate and beneficent God. But He is not bound to be so on account of any baptizing commitment obtained from any quarters by His creatures, for all authority as to the granting of reward or inflicting of punishment rests exclusively

11. For further elaboration of this aspect of the Islamic creed, see Iqbal, *The Reconstruction* …, *op. cit.*, p. 76.
12. For a comprehensive elaboration of the Islamic idea of godhead with reference to His attributive names see al-Maydānī, *al-ʿAqīda al-islāmiyya* …, *op. cit.*, pp. 155–246.

with God. None can intercede with Him without His prior permission, all intercession being contingent upon His will (II.255; X.3; XIX.87).[13]

Moreover, the divinely ordained recompense is sometimes provided immediately in this world whereas at times it is deferred to the Hereafter. The virtuous deeds performed by humans are often rewarded in this world in the form of divine help, victory, glory, honour, prestige, a feeling of happiness, contentment of the heart and the pleasure of receiving divine knowledge, wisdom, light and luminosity, and the divine blessings of their time, wealth, spouse and children. In the same way, evil deeds sometimes immediately incur various forms of moral and material punishment. These forms include exposure to conditions of humiliation, economic difficulties, failures of various efforts, feelings of grief, confusion of the mind, perplexity of the heart, lack of blessings of time, wealth, spouse and children, and deprivation of success in various endeavours, accompanied by a sense of pessimism (XVI.30; VII.4–5, 96; XLVIII.18–19; XIII.34).

It also needs to be borne in mind that at times there may appear conditions of adversity even in the lives of pious people. These conditions of apparent adversity are meant to be a trial for the virtuous. The sign for distinguishing between travail and trial – that is, between punishment and reward – is that in the case of the former the victim goes farther from God and sinks into hopelessness and despondency upon the slightest jolt of affliction. But in the case of a trial to which the virtuous are subjected, the person who is the target of trial comes nearer to God and repents of their sins and misdeeds. Thus, the end result of the trial is an elevation of their spirituality and an enhanced degree of proximity to God (XXV.70–1).

The immediate consequences of human actions that might sometimes appear in this world in the form of reward or punishment are also meant to reinforce the admonition embodied in the Qur'ān and the *Sunna*. As mentioned above, a reminder is initially given to humanity in the form of the natural human temperament created by God which tends to submit to God and acknowledge His bounties. Express reminders conveyed through the messengers of God supplement this natural disposition to goodness in humanity. Over and above this twofold reminder, people are shown signs in this vast world of nature in the form of the superbly organized cosmic order as well as in the accidents of history that occur both within the individual sphere of life and on the collective plane of human society. Such incidents occurring in the lives of individuals as well as groups serve the purpose of awakening human beings from their negligence and heedlessness. While success is meant to generate gratitude to God, failure ought to revive repentance of misdeeds. Notwithstanding these reminders and signs of God, both within and without,

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13. See Asad, *The Message of the Qur'ān*, explanatory note on verse X.3 of the Qur'ān.

this world is essentially a transient abode of trial for humanity. The real and lasting consequences of the deeds of this life shall appear in the Hereafter.[14]

Human responsibility and its consequences in the afterlife

The test to which humanity has been put by God is confined to this world. Death transfers people to the subsequent stage of their existence, and as soon as that stage arrives, this worldly test comes to an end. That is why with the beginning of the process of death, the door of repentance is closed (IV.18). For no sooner have people witnessed the spectacle of their death, than the reality of the higher world starts appearing to their vision. Since at this stage of exit from the confines of this temporal world there remains no significance of 'belief in the unseen', the time of man's trial comes to an end.

Moreover, the test in this world is contingent on certain conditions of responsibility. Children and insane people are not held responsible because they are devoid of the required intellectual maturity to comprehend and carry out the divine commands. But as soon as we attain the required maturity of mind, we are reckoned responsible in the sight of God. This responsibility is contingent on the presence of conscious intention in humans that emanates from an understanding of right and wrong. Whenever this conscious intention is absent temporarily or permanently, a person will not be held liable for his actions. Also when there is resolute intention to perform a virtuous deed, or to commit a sinful act, this intention will constitute the basis for reward or punishment. Similarly, human deeds at times earn recompense for the subject even if their consequences might appear after some time.[15]

In a nutshell, the scope of responsibility and its consequential reward and punishment have been laid down in the following verse of the Qur'ān: 'He who does an atom's weight of good shall see it and he who does an atom's weight of evil shall see it' (XCIX.7–8).

Thus, in the scheme of Islamic recompense, everyone is basically responsible for his intentions. No one is entitled to the merit of another or is liable for the blame of another, except where they have exerted some decisive influence on others to do either good or evil (VI.164; XVII.15; XXXV.18; XXXIX.7; LIII.38–9).

Despite its apparent charm and fascination, this world remains an imperfect world. It neither yields perfect happiness nor dispenses complete justice. Therefore, there has to be another higher realm that is free from the limitations and imperfections of this world, where the ends of both justice and

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14. See Shāh Walī Allāh, *Ḥujjat Allāh al-bāligha*, *op. cit.*, pp. 24–5. See also *The Conclusive Argument* …, *op. cit.*, pp. 93 ff.
15. For further elaboration of the Qur'ānic philosophy of recompense see Shāh Walī Allāh, *Ḥujjat Allāh al-bāligha*, *op. cit.*, pp. 15–20.

happiness can be realized in the fullest measure. Thus, belief in the Hereafter is an ethical requirement for humanity more than anything else. The Hereafter is also inevitable for eternal human bliss, if only because the finite scales of this world and its obvious imperfections render it incapable of providing such bliss.

The Qurʾān deals with the themes of life in this world and that in the Hereafter, and contrasts the two at great length. It underlines the acceptance of the reality of the impending next world as a *sine qua non* for the felicity and salvation of humankind in many of its verses. There is hardly a chapter of the Qurʾān that does not touch on this theme explicitly or implicitly. The Qurʾān regards those who deny the reality of the Hereafter as being farthest from the path of guidance. It marshals evidence derived from reason, intuition and empirical logic to argue for the inevitability of the Final Judgement that awaits humankind. At times the Qurʾān cites the Hereafter as an incentive to disbelievers to accept the truth, and at others it refers to it as a warning to deter disbelievers from their attitude of infidelity or rejection of faith (*kufr*). On other occasions the Qurʾān mentions the spectacles of the Hereafter as an impetus to believers so as to encourage them to promote pious conduct in order to prepare themselves for the final accountability and to qualify for the life of perfect happiness in the Hereafter. It employees various figures of speech and metaphorical expressions to bring home the scenario of the Hereafter and render it close to the minds of its listeners and readers. On some occasions we find the Qurʾān refuting by the force of various kinds of argument the stance of those who deny Doomsday. The Qurʾān also explains on different occasions the various stages of the Hereafter, which start with death and culminate in the process of accountability, leading to the consignment of some people to Hell and assignment of others to Paradise. It employs various terms to describe graphically the scenes associated with the Hereafter.[16]

16. In its description of the spectacles of the Hereafter, the Qurʾān has employed a number of terms. The term most frequently used is *Yawm al-Qiyāma*, 'the Day of the Great Rising'. This occurs no less than seventy times in the Qurʾān. Another Qurʾānic term used in this context is *al-Sāʿa*, 'the Hour', which occurs forty times. On other occasions, we come across the terms *al-Yawm al-Ākhir*, 'the Last Day' and *al-Ākhira*, 'the Hereafter', which occur twenty-six times and over a hundred times respectively. Apart from these expressions, we also find the following terms that refer to various dimensions of the Hereafter: *Yawm al-Dīn*, the Day of the Requital, *Yawm al-Faṣl*, the Day of Decision, *Yawm al-Ḥisāb*, the Day of Reckoning, *Yawm al-Fatḥ*, the Day of Judgement, *Yawm al-Talāq*, the Day of Meeting, *Yawm al-Jamīʿ*, the Day of Gathering, *Yawm al-Khulūd*, the Day of Abiding, *Yawm al-Khurūj*, the Day of Coming Forth, *Yawm al-Baʿth*, the Day of Resurrection, *Yawm al-Ḥasra*, the Day of Regret, *Yawm al-Tanād*, the Day of Calling Forth, *Yawm al-Āzifa*, the Day that Draws Near, *Yawm al-Taghābun*, the Day of Manifestation of Losses, *al-Qāriʿa*, the striking calamity, *al-Ghāshiya*, the overwhelming calamity, *al-Ṣākhkha*, the deafening calamity, *al-ʿāmma*, the predominating calamity, *al-Ḥāqqa*, the great truth, and *al-Wāqiʿa*, the great event. See al-Maydānī, *al-ʿAqīda al-islāmiyya …*, *op. cit.*, pp. 626–30.

I–4.2   Interior of Masjid Nabawi in Medina, Saudi Arabia
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The Qurʾānic verses in which these terms are used bring home the various stages and dimensions of life after death. The general connotation that these terms convey may be summarized as follows.

A bodily resurrection of all the dead will take place sometime after the occurrence of death. On a certain day specified by God, all humans will be brought out of their graves. They will stand individually before God to give an account of their deeds in this world. The fullest measure of justice will be delivered on that occasion, and people will receive due recompense for their deeds.

This day will witness the regrets and tortures of those who disobeyed God in this world, and this day will usher humanity to its final destiny. Consequent on the divine verdict, the virtuous, the faithful and humble servants of God will be assigned to Paradise – a life of peace, love, honour, happiness and eternal bliss that will be blessed by God for ever. The sinful, the disobedient and the arrogant will be consigned to Hell – a life of trouble, torture, grief, guilt, hatred, animosity and the wrath of God. God will eternally damn the dwellers in Hell, except those who might subsequently receive His forgiveness, which depends on His sheer grace.[17]

Besides, the Qurʾān speaks about the various signs and events that will precede the occurrence of the 'Final Hour', the exact knowledge of which is exclusively with God. Hence, this Final Hour will come upon humanity all of a sudden (VII.187). However, various signs are mentioned in the Qurʾān and in the statements of the Prophet which serve as a reminder to humanity to prepare itself for facing its final destiny.[18] According to the Qurʾān, this world of matter will be dispensed with along with the exit of humanity from it. For as soon as humankind leaves this world, it will lose its utility and *raison d'être,* and hence it will be made to disappear into nothingness (XXI.104; LXXXII.1–6).

The relevant statements of the Qurʾān also emphasize the imminence of the Final Hour. This imminence has two important aspects. First, death – being the door to the next life – is imminent to every individual. It may happen suddenly to any individual and transfer them from this world to the Hereafter. Second, the hour of the 'Great Rising' (*al-Qiyāma*) may come upon all humanity at any time without anticipation. Hence, the occurrence of the Hereafter is imminent both individually and collectively. Speaking about the scenario of the Final Hour, the Qurʾān says:

> He [man] asks: 'When is the Day of Resurrection?' So when the sight is confused and the moon becomes dark, and the sun and the moon are brought together, man shall say on that day: 'Whither to flee?' There is no refuge! With thy Lord on that day is the place of rest. Man will that day be informed of what he sent

17. *Ibid*.
18. *Ibid*., pp. 633–42.

before and what he put off. … Nay, but you love the present life and neglect the Hereafter. Some faces that day will be bright, looking to their Lord. And other faces that day will be gloomy, knowing that a great disaster will be made to befall them (LXXV.6–25).

On another occasion, the Qurʾān depicts the scenes and the signs of the Final Hour in these words: 'When the stars are made to disappear, when the heaven is rent asunder, when the mountains are carried away as dust and when the Messengers are made to reach their appointed time' (LXXVII. 8–11).

The general idea conveyed in the relevant verses of the Qurʾān is that, prior to the occurrence of the Final Hour, humanity as a whole will reach the lowest ebb of its moral integrity. Knowledge and the ways of virtue will disappear, and ignorance and immorality will become the order of the day. These conditions of humankind's moral decadence will deprive it of the right to live any longer, as it were. Thus, the moral failure of the whole of humanity will spell the end of history.

Life after death

The Qurʾān calls the stage that comes immediately after death *barzakh*. The word *barzakh* literally means 'something that serves as a barrier between two things.' This Qurʾānic term signifies the state of humans between death and resurrection, as connoted in the following verse of the Qurʾān: 'Until when death overtakes one of them, he says: "My Lord, send me back that I may do good in that which I have left." By no means! It is but a word that he speaks. And before them is barzakh until the day when they are raised' (XXIII.99–100).

This intervening state is also often referred to in the religious literature of Islam by the word *qabr*. *Qabr*, which literally means 'grave', is used frequently in the Qurʾān and the traditions of the Prophet in the wider sense of the state of human existence following death. For example, the Qurʾān says, 'Then He causes him to die, then assigns to him a grave; then when He will, He raises him to life again' (LXXX.21–2).

Thus *barzakh* and *qabr* are Islamic terms that are identical in meaning and represent the state in which humans are placed after death until their resurrection. We are told by the Qurʾān that evil-doers are made to taste some of the consequences of their deeds in this state of *barzakh*, while the full consciousness of the chastisement shall become clear on the Day of Resurrection: 'And the evil chastisement overtook Pharaoh's people – the fire; they are brought before it every morning and evening and, on the day when the Hour comes to pass, make Pharaoh's people enter the severest punishment' (XL.45–6). In the same way, the righteous will experience a pleasant condition during the state of *barzakh* or *qabr*. This condition will be commensurate with

the virtuous deeds performed by the righteous during their worldly life. For example, describing the condition of martyrs in the life of *barzakh*, the Qurʾān says:

> And think not of those who are killed in God's way as dead. Nay, they are alive, being provided sustenance from their Lord; rejoicing in what God has given them out of His grace, and they rejoice for the sake of those who being left behind, have not yet joined them, that they have no fear nor shall they grieve (III.169–70).

The statements of the Qurʾān and the explanations found in the traditions from the Prophet concerning the nature of human life in *barzakh*, some of which have been cited above, show that it affords a peculiar kind of experience. In contrast to the full awakening characteristic of the Final Hour of rising or resurrection, the state of *barzakh* has been likened to a state of sleep or semi-consciousness (XXXVI.52). A total consciousness of the reality of the spiritual realm and witnessing the theatre of the requital will only be attained at the time of the Final Hour of rising and the general resurrection of all humankind. But a clue to those scenes will be given to all human beings in the life of *barzakh*. Further, a tentative categorization into the virtuous and the wicked will take place in *barzakh* prior to the final divine judgement that will be delivered after the Resurrection.

Speaking of the various stages of the Hereafter, the Qurʾān tells us that two successive trumpets will be blown. The first will spell the end of the present world, causing the annihilation of humankind and the total destruction of their habitat: 'And when the trumpet is blown with a single blast, and the earth and the mountains are borne away and crushed with one crash; on that day will the event come to pass' (LXIX.13–15). This will be followed by the second blow of the trumpet, which will cause a general resurrection of all the dead at once: 'Surely the day of decision is appointed – the day when the trumpet is blown, so you will come forth in hosts' (LXXVIII.17–18).

Consequent upon the blowing of the second trumpet, all humans will be ushered into a vast and barren plain. Every single member of the human race will be made to stand in this gathering of the whole of humanity. This gathering, *ḥashr*, is mentioned several times in the Qurʾān as an essential stage of the Hereafter (XXXVI.1; L.41–4; XVII.97; XX.102).

As soon as humans are assembled in this grand gathering, their accounting will start. Each individual will be shown a written record of his deeds on this occasion and will be questioned concerning all the major and minor sins committed. A balance of deeds will be set to weigh the virtuous and wicked deeds. Those whose virtuous deeds outweigh their wicked deeds will carry their record in the right hand, but those whose evil deeds are heavier in the balance will be given their record in the left hand, or behind their back (LXIX.25; LXXXIV.7–12).

The Qurʾān also speaks of the monitoring of the good and evil deeds of individuals during their present life. This observation of human conduct, for which God has commissioned special angels, will constitute the basis of evidence against humanity on the Day of Judgement. In this connection, the Qurʾān repeatedly mentions the process of constant vigilance about the state of humans by the angels who are engaged in writing down the most minute details of all the good and bad acts committed by them and in preparing an exhaustive written record of their lives. It is on the basis of this written record that individual will be taken to account on the Day of Judgement (XLIII.80; XLV.28–9; XVIII.49; XXI.94; LXXXII.10–12).

A deeper understanding of the verses that talk of recording the actions of human beings, or preparing a comprehensive book of their deeds, leads to the conclusion that human actions are necessarily productive of certain effects. It is these effects of our own actions that are referred to in these verses. For instance, 'And we have made every man's actions to cling to his neck, and we shall bring forth to him on the Day of Resurrection a book which he will find wide open' (XVII.13). Making the actions cling to the doer's neck clearly means causing the effects of the actions to impact on the person concerned.

As soon as the accountability of the people – both the virtuous and the wicked – has been completed, they will be made to pass over a narrow passage. This passage, which is known as *al-ṣirāʿ*, is fixed over the Hellfire. Those who are among the virtuous will pass quickly and enter Paradise. The wicked will fail to reach Paradise and will be cast into Hell (XIX.72).

Human abodes in the Hereafter

The standard Qurʾānic terms for Paradise are *janna* and *firdaws*. The former occurs more frequently; the latter term is used only twice in the Qurʾān. *Firdaws* appears to be the arabicized form of Paradise. *Janna*, meaning 'garden', is used in both singular and plural forms in the Qurʾān to indicate the abiding place of the righteous in the Hereafter.

The description of Paradise as a garden (*janna* or, in plural, *jannāt*) with rivers flowing in it, is clearly stated to be an approximation and likeness, and is not to be identified with actual gardens encountered in this life: 'A parable of the garden which is promised to those who keep their duty: therein flow rivers; its fruits are perpetual and so is its shade' (XIII.35). 'A parable of the garden which the dutiful are promised: therein are rivers of water not altering for the worse' (XLVII.15). And quite in keeping with this description is the statement made elsewhere, that the blessings of Paradise cannot fully be imagined in this life, for the obvious reason that they are not things of this world: 'No soul knows what refreshment of the eyes is hidden for them: a reward for what they did' (XXXII.17).

Thus, the rivers of water, milk and honey (XLVII.15), the thrones, the cushions and carpets, the ornaments, the bracelets, the silk robes (LXXXVIII.12–16; XVIII.31), the abundance of fruits and sustenance and the company of beautiful partners are mentioned in the Qurʾān as spectacular scenes of life in Paradise. The description of these scenes in the Qurʾān indicates that whatever may serve to perfect the happiness of human beings will be there. But humans cannot yet know their exact form because their present senses are incapable of conceiving it. All descriptions of the blessings of the next life are only a 'likeness' or 'a parable' (*mathal*), as is explained in the Qurʾān (XLVII.15).

One of the various attributive names of Paradise that we find in the Qurʾān is *Dār al-Salām*, 'the abode of peace' (VI.127). Perhaps no other expression conveys the nature of Paradise more meaningfully than this appellation. Life in Paradise, more than anything else, will afford an abiding peace in contradistinction to the endless anarchy and grief that characterizes life in Hell. This peace will be realized by the promised meeting with God, which is typically expressed in the famous Qurʾānic verse, 'Verily unto God do we belong and verily unto Him we shall return' (II.45–6, 156; XV.45–8; XXXV.34–5; XXXVI.55–8; LVI.25–6; XXXIV.37). This meeting with God, according to the Qurʾān, constitutes the ultimate object and the highest end of all virtuous men and women's arduous struggle in life (see II.45–6; LXXXIV.6; XVIII.110; LXXV.22–3).

Hence, Paradise is worthwhile for human beings because it promises a meeting with the Lord. And Hell is the worst abode for humans because it will debar its inhabitants from their Lord (LXXXIII.15 and XXIX.23). Further-more, the Qurʾān speaks of the unending progress of the dwellers of Paradise to unlimited heights. In contrast to this promise of progress in Paradise, life in Hell represents falling down to an abysmal depth. Moreover, both Paradise and Hell have different degrees relative to the level of reward or chastisement that is awarded to different persons, whether virtuous or wicked (LVI.7–56).

The condition represented by Hell is described in the Qurʾān by different names. The name used most frequently is *jahannam*, which literally means 'extreme depth'. Among the others are *jaḥīm*, 'furious fire', and *ḥuṭama*, 'vehement fire'. This latter word is derived from *ḥaṭam*, which also means the breaking of something thin or rendering something infirm (CIV.4–5). These different names used by the Qurʾān to convey the condition of Hell describe a state of utter failure, futility, despair, disgrace, burning, blackening of face, destruction, despondency, pain and remorse, and falling down to the lowest of the low.[19]

19. See Muḥammad Fuʾād ʿAbd al-Bāqī, *al-Muʿjam al-mufahras li-alfāẓ al-Qurʾān al-karīm,* Lahore, Pakistan, Suhail Academy, 1983, to locate the verses that contain the words *jahannam*, *jaḥīm* and *ḥuṭama*, alphabetically.

According to the Qurʾān, all this damnation will come about as a result of people's own deeds. Those who follow their lower desires and baser passions bring about their own fall into the depths. The burning is caused by wanton worldly desires, and petty passions will change into flaming fire after death. Just as the blessings of Paradise are a manifestation of the hidden realities of this life, so are the depths, the fire and the failures of the next, for the Day of Resurrection will be the day of the manifestation of hidden realities,[20] when the veil is removed from the eyes of humans so they see clearly the consequences of the deeds of which they took no heed in this life.[21]

Hell thus represents the evil consequences of evil deeds committed by humans in this life. But at the same time, Hell also has a remedial function for the believers. It has already been pointed out that both Paradise and Hell have different levels according to the degree of reward or punishment to be given to each person. The lowest abode in Hell, according to the Qurʾān, will be occupied by the hypocrites (IV.145). Similarly, the highest station in Paradise will be bestowed upon the prophets, those who never deviated from the truth, and the martyrs (IV.69–70). The remedial role of Hell will come into play in respect of those believers who persistently committed grave sins in life. According to the consensus of Muslim theologians, such sinners from among the believers will be made to enter Hell temporarily for the sake of purification. They will be admitted into Paradise after they become fit for admission through their purification from the evil consequences of their sins.[22]

There are many theological issues involved in the Islamic conception of the Hereafter, but the reader of this chapter will not be served any better if the theological questions that have engaged different Muslim schools in the course of history are raised here. Suffice it to allude here to the two trends that have existed in Muslim theology with regard to Resurrection and its nature. While the orthodox view that has mostly dominated Muslim religious thinking has held that resurrection will be corporeal,[23] a minority of scholars have held a sort of rationalistic notion that its nature will essentially be spiritual.[24]

20. See the relevant discussion in al-Maydānī, *al-ʿAqīda al-islāmiyya* …, *op. cit.*, pp. 660–1.
21. See the following Qurʾānic verses that describe various features and dimensions of Hell: CIV.4–7; II.167; XXII.30–1; XVIII.104–6; X.26–7; III.105; LXXX.40–2; XVI.27; XLI.16; VII.50; LXXVIII.25; LVII.13.
22. Cf. al-Maydānī, *al-ʿAqīda al-islāmiyya* …, *op. cit.*, pp. 660–1.
23. For the orthodox view typically represented by al-Ghazālī, see N. A. Faris, *The Foundations of the Articles of Faith* (an English translation of the relevant portions from *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*), Lahore, Pakistan, Shaikh Ashraf, 1974, pp. 91–8.
24. For the details of the rationalistic ideas on resurrection, see G. F. Hourani, *Islamic Rationalism: The Ethics of ʿAbd al-Jabbār*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1971, *passim*.

The eschatological scenes – that is, those relating to death and the afterlife – described in the Qur'ān and the *Sunna* are quite elaborate. I have, however, briefly outlined above those important developments that will form the essential stages of the Hereafter. These constitute the essence of the Muslim vision of the afterlife as defined by the Qur'ān and the *Sunna*.[25] Like other Abrahamic religions, Islam perceives the termination of the march of human events with the Day of Resurrection and Reckoning, whereupon humanity is transported from this visible world to the invisible states of existence, celestial or infernal.

Indian religions – because of their teachings on the transmigration of the soul (*samsara*) based on an impersonal causal law of action and reaction (*karma*) – can envisage the destiny of multiple humanities succeeding one another in this world undergoing successive dissolutions and purifications. But Islam sees the overall cycle as involving only one human life, as do Judaism and Christianity. Previous or subsequent incarnations do not enter into its picture of earthly human cycles. The fate of people who have lived on this Earth, as measured by a posthumous Heaven and Hell, is the unique preoccupation of Islam. Accordingly, there is no reason for Islam to be concerned about other humanities prior to the present one or after it, in the way the ancient Aryans, or Indo-Europeans – like the Greeks and the Hindus – were. This is no doubt one reason that the Semitic traditions emphasize Heaven and Hell with such force. For them, there is the humanity of this world; then there are the two posthumous conditions, Heaven and Hell, and their consignment to one or the other is determined while people are still in this world. There are no pre-human or post-human levels of transmigration in intermediate domains, in which the soul can traverse repeated lives and deaths while working out its salvation through karma. Although the limbos and purgatories of the Semitic faiths approximate the intermediate states of Hinduism, they have never been stressed to any great degree in these traditions. In any case, they have not been considered as goals worth striving for in their own right, or as states for a vast number of souls who are not good enough for Heaven or bad enough for Hell, but who merit something in between. This is why, once the Last Judgement takes place, Islam shifts its attention from this world to the Hereafter, where Heaven and Hell begin their long-lasting periods of existence with populations who had formerly inhabited the Earth.[26]

Notwithstanding the differences between world religions with regard to the ideas of the Here and the Hereafter, there are certain similarities among them. While the materialistic and irreligious outlook takes this world to be the final abode of humanity and the physical death of an individual to be the end of their existence, the major religions of the world share a belief in some kind

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25. See for details al-Maydānī, *al-ʿAqīda al-islāmiyya* …, *op. cit.*, pp. 649–64.
26. Abd al-Jabbar Danner, *The Islamic Tradition*, Lahore, Pakistan, Institute of Islamic Culture, 1988, pp. 24–5.

of existence beyond the grave. Of course, there are significant differences among them as to the nature of that post-mortal existence. Religions of Indian origin have a very similar approach to the whole idea of life after death, while the religions of Semitic origin (also known as the Abrahamic religions) maintain an altogether different perspective. Another ancient religion of the east, Zoroastrianism, seems closer to the Semitic tradition.

The major religions that originated in India, such as Hinduism, Jainism and Sikhism, share a belief in the idea of transmigration. According to this belief, the end of the present physical life of an individual is synchronized with a rebirth, in which they assume another body in accordance with their deeds in the present life. Every human being has a soul residing in his body. When physical death takes place, this soul does not die but transmigrates into a fresh body. But those humans who attain knowledge and perform virtuous deeds do not have to be reborn after death. They are exempted from transmigration. They attain a spiritual status of perfection and immortality. In certain versions of Hinduism, there is also found some notion of Heaven and Hell to which people are assigned subject to their virtuous or wicked deeds. It seems as if transmigration is not meant to be an endless cycle of birth and rebirth, but a transitional phase preceding the eventual stage of Heaven and Hell.[27]

The essential elements of the concept of life after death in the Semitic religions take account of the good and bad deeds of people in this world, resurrection of the dead, the Day of Judgement and the subsequent assignment of the virtuous to Heaven and the consignment of the wicked to Hell. This much is the common creed of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Certain aspects of this concept are somewhat vague and indefinite in Judaism. At times it seems to deny any life after death for sinners, who according to the Judaic view will perish upon physical death in this world.[28]

There is a striking similarity between Islam and Zoroastrianism in the idea of *ṣirāṭ*, which constitutes a bridge between Heaven and Hell. This bridge, *chinvat* in Zoroastrianism, signifies more or less the meaning represented by *ṣirāṭ* in Islamic eschatology.[29]

Although the three Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – distinctly share the main features of their eschatology, there is a significant difference in their perspectives on the 'here and now'.

Judaism conspicuously represents a 'this-world' tendency. The Judaic mind has been concerned in the main with a Paradise on earth.[30] In contrast,

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27. R. C. Zaehner, *Hinduism*, London, Oxford University Press, 1962, p. 55.
28. See Kedar Nath Tiwari, *Comparative Religion*, Delhi, 1990, pp. 119–22.
29. *Ibid*.
30. For further elaboration of this comparison between Judaism, Christianity and Islam see Alija Izetbegovic, *Islam between East and West*, Indianapolis, Ind., American Trust, 1993, p. 187.

Christianity became increasingly oriented to the Hereafter in the course of its historical development. It appealed to a definite renunciation of this world and urged its followers to strive for the 'Kingdom of God' in the next world.[31]

Islam sought to combine the two approaches within one unified and harmonious whole. All the teachings of Islam are focused on striving for the Hereafter through an active and fruitful utilization of the potential afforded by this world.[32]

Islam's distinctive position regarding the spirit and the flesh

Between the two extremes of Judaism and Christianity, Islam occupies the middle position in that it seeks to affect an equipoise between an abiding interest in this world and a constant concern for the Hereafter. Indeed the Qurʾān regards the Muslim community as a 'middle community' (II.143) which maintains an equitable balance between extremes:

> This community is realistic in its appreciation of man's nature and possibilities rejecting both licentiousness and exaggerated asceticism. In tune with its oft-repeated call to moderation in every aspect of life, the Qurʾān exhorts the believers not to place too great an emphasis on the physical and material aspects of their lives, but postulates at the same time, that man's urges and desires relating to this 'life of the flesh' are God-willed and, therefore, legitimate.[33]

Islam thus rejects the supposedly inherent conflict between the spirit and the flesh. It unequivocally affirms and stresses the natural unity in this twofold aspect of human life. This balanced attitude to body and spirit, or harmonious blending of this world and the Hereafter, is a natural corollary of *tawḥīd*, the unity of God, and directly flows from the unity of purpose underlying all the creation of God.[34]

Moreover, statements abound in the Qurʾān[35] that establish a complete acceptance of the world and a total rejection of any conflict with nature:

> The material world is not Satan's kingdom; the body is not the seat of sin. Even the world to come, the object of humanity's greatest hopes, is portrayed in the Qurʾān in the colours of this world. In this fact, Christians see a sensuality which is incongruent with their own religion. In fact this only shows that the material

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31. *Ibid.*
32. For a detailed discussion of the comparative perspectives of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, see Ismāʿīl Rājī al-Fārūqī (ed.), *Trialogue of Abrahamic Faiths*, Herndon, Va., International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1986, pp. 13–22.
33. Asad, *The Message of the Qurʾān, op. cit.*, note on verse II.143 of the Qurʾān.
34. *Ibid.*
35. Qurʾān, II.146; VI.94–5; XVI.10–14, 65; XXI.33; XXII.44–5; XXVI.7; XXX.9; L.6–11; LXXXVIII.17–20; LVI.63, 68 and 71.

world is not inwardly alien to Islam, and that it is free from the Christian instinct of rejecting the world.[36]

Islam's orientation toward the external world gave it a special realism in its conception of humanity. Acceptance of nature in general implies the acceptance of human nature. Rejection of this world, which also implies the rejection of the human body, characterizes many religions. The subject matter of certain verses of the Qurʾān may sound odd to some. There are verses, for example, concerning the acceptance of pleasures, sexual love, struggle and hygiene. This is the most decisive fact in the history of religions and in the history of the human mind in general. It has marked the appearance of:

> the religion of the two worlds, of the all-encompassing system of human life, of the cognition that man has no need to reject religion for the sake of science or to renounce the struggle for a better life for the sake of religion. Islam's far-reaching importance lies in the fact that it has not overlooked the existence of suffering and the fight against suffering which is the crux of human history.[37]

While affirming the greatness and dignity of humanity in general, Islam is very realistic, almost anti-heroic, when dealing with human beings as individuals.[38] Islam does not encumber them with anything beyond their natural capacity. The Qurʾān unequivocally declares, 'God does not charge any soul beyond its capacity' (II.286).

Hence, Islam is not interested in nursing any attitudes among its followers that might be incongruent with their natural instincts. This is so simply because these instincts are God-given and are thus ingrained in the very constitution of humanity. Indeed, the Qurʾān affirms in unmistakable terms that the 'enjoyment of worldly desires through women, and children and heaped-up treasures of gold and silver, and horses of high mark, and cattle and lands have been made alluring unto man' (III.14). Therefore, the urge to pursue and possess these worldly sources of pleasure and riches and to engage in diverse forms of mundane activity to preserve and promote them is both natural and legitimate. The success of individuals in the test to which God has put them lies in their ability to enjoy the healthy pleasures of life without being oblivious of the demands of the life Hereafter (XXVIII.77).

In the scheme of life postulated by Islam, God has created this world and all its treasures for humanity (II.29). But humans were created to serve God (LI.56). Therefore, it does not behove humans to lower their station in the hierarchy of God's creation by making themselves subservient to this

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36. Izetbegovic, *Islam between* …, *op. cit.*, pp. 219–20.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 223–4.

38. *Ibid.*

world, which is nothing more than a perishable instrument and serviceable tool for them.[39]

The unitarian worldview of Islam that gave rise to the middlemost community in the seventh century CE, under the guidance and leadership of the Prophet Muḥammad, sought to combine prospects for immediate felicity here with a true promise of lasting bliss in the Hereafter. The Prophet who realized this mission in history was not only the supreme leader, guide and teacher of this community, but was also the archetypal and perfect model in whose ideal example this symmetry of the Here and Hereafter, this synthesis between materiality and spirituality, was objectified.

While *tawḥīd* provided the metaphysical articulation of the worldview of Islam, the *Sunna* of the Prophet embodied the historical concretization of this unitarian idea. In his practical example, the Prophet demonstrated to his community, and through it to humanity at large, how humans should pursue spiritual progress without abandoning the legitimate concerns of this world. The Prophet lived for twenty-three years (610–32 CE) in the full view of history. He led an eventful life, engaging in multifarious relations: familial, matrimonial, social, economic and political. All this was in addition to his supreme dedication to worship of one God and the constant pursuit of proximity to Him through the highest level of spiritual activity attainable to a human being. What is more, he regarded marriage as necessary and in consonance with human nature.[40] He also engaged in trade and commerce to earn a legitimate living for himself and his family. Indeed the Qurʾān, while recording some of the typical allegations levelled by the opponents of Islam against the Prophet and his mission, tells us that they 'say: "What sort of apostle is this man who eats food like all other mortals and goes about in the market-places?"' (XXV.7). This remark of the disbelievers of Arabia not only typifies the stance of the Prophet's enemies, but also amply highlights a core element of his mission.

Little wonder, therefore, that the modes and manners of worshipping one God that the Prophet taught his followers under the divine mandate significantly synthesized the two dimensions: the spiritual and physical, or this world and the Hereafter. For instance, there can be no Islamic devotional worship (*salāt*) without cleanliness (IV.43; V.6). In fact the Prophet went to the extent of regarding cleanliness as an inseparable part of faith.[41] Moreover, the Qurʾān declared, 'God loves those who keep themselves pure and clean' (II.222; IX.108). Outer physical cleanliness has been thus prescribed as

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39. The high status of divine vicegerency granted to humans demands that they should subordinate the resources of this world to their needs while they should dedicate themselves to the higher ideals to which God and His prophets have guided them.

40. Al-Nasāʾī, *al-Sunan, Kitāb ʿIshrat al-nisāʾ, Bāb Ḥubb al-nisāʾ*.

41. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Ṭahāra, Bāb Faḍl al-wuḍūʾ*.

something intrinsic to the inner spiritual performance of this fundamental ritual. Furthermore, the Qurʾān emphasized that the spiritual fruits of devotional worship must appear in the form of greater social responsibility and ethical amelioration of those who perform it (XXIX.45; CVII.4–7). Thus *ṣalāt* – which has been regarded by the Prophet as the foundation of faith – is not only a religious obligation, but has at the same time far-reaching implications for human life in this world.

The emphasis in Islam on congregational worship five times a day brings together the inhabitants of a locality and invests the act with a significant social meaning. This regular coming together for the sake of worshipping one God is devoid of any selfish consideration, and goes a long way in cementing social cohesion and doing away with excessive individualism. This social cohesiveness is further enhanced by the weekly Friday congregation on a larger scale, and by the grand congregations twice a year on the occasions of the Islamic festivals of *ʿīd al-Fiṭr* and *ʿīd al-Aḍhā*. The social dimension of worship in Islam, or this-worldly aspect of Islamic spirituality, is further accentuated by the institution of *zakāt*. With the enforcement of *zakāt*, Islamic spirituality takes on the contours of a social movement. *Zakāt* thus serves as a vital instrument of social solidarity. It greatly helps eliminate privation and misery among the poor, and indifference and selfishness among the rich.[42]

In short, from the perspective of Islam, this world is but a transient testing ground for humankind, and life here is a constant trial. All here are required to prepare themselves by their voluntary choice and individual endeavour to achieve the abiding bliss and avoid the unfathomable misery that awaits humanity after its temporal journey is ended. What awaits man and woman in the Hereafter, their everlasting abode, depends on their actions in this world.

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42. Izetbegovic, *Islam between …, op. cit.*, pp. 206–10.

Chapter 1.5

THE ISLAMIC VIEW OF THE UNIVERSE

Seyyed Hossein Nasr

Lo! In the creation of the heavens and the earth and in the difference of night and day are portents [*āyas*] for men of understanding, such as, remember God, standing, sitting and reclining and consider the creation of the heavens and the earth, (and say): 'Our Lord! Thou createdest not this in vain. Glory be to Thee' (III.190–1).[1]

In this and many other majestic verses, the Qurʾān states the significance of the cosmos in the Islamic tradition and lays the foundation for a religious worldview which has always embraced the world of nature in a positive manner, and which possesses a strong cosmic dimension. The Islamic view of the universe, elaborated over the centuries by numerous theologians, Sufis and philosophers, is deeply rooted in the Qurʾānic message concerning the origin, nature, end of the universe and humanity's role therein. In this essay, dealing with the foundations of Islam, I shall therefore deal primarily with the Qurʾānic view concerning the universe, leaving it to other sections of this work to treat the monumental Islamic literature on the subject, which has grown like a vast tree, with its branches stretched east and west and its life spread over fourteen centuries of Islamic history, but its roots firmly grounded in Islamic revelation.[2]

The Qurʾān and the study of the universe

The Qurʾān was revealed not only to humanity but in a sense also to the cosmos, and its message concerns human beings as well as the natural world. Cosmic events and phenomena from the glorious sun to the lowly gnat are mentioned in the sacred text, and creatures other than humans are taken as witness by God

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1. Pickthall's translation slightly modified. Throughout this essay the translations are from *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* of M. M. Pickthall, occasionally slightly modified.
2. I deal with the various schools of Islamic cosmology in the fourth volume of this work.

and are even sworn by in the Qurʾān. The word of God does not only concern ethics, the affairs of humans and sacred history; it is also, and in fact above everything else, a book of knowledge concerning first of all God Himself, and second, all that is other than God (*mā siwā Allāh*) including both humanity and the cosmos. There are hundreds of verses concerning the universe, verses which are usually called *āyas al-kāʾināt* (the verses pertaining to creatures).[3]

Some of these verses concern actual natural phenomena which people are invited to study and meditate upon, while others concern hidden and spiritual realities which the phenomena symbolize and make manifest. The Qurʾān invites people to study the universe and the phenomena of nature as signs of God's wisdom (*ḥikma*) and as ways of being led to the supreme truth of the unity of God (*al-tawḥīd*). There are, moreover, levels of understanding of the universe to which the Qurʾān refers, the highest being not simply observation through the senses but intellect (*taʿaqqul*).

God manifests himself in the Qurʾān not only as the creator of human beings and their judge, but also as the creator and sustainer of the universe whose phenomena reveal His wisdom and which possesses a purpose related to the entelechy of man as God's vicegerent (*khalīfa*) on earth:

> He is the cleaver of the Daybreak, and He hath appointed the night for stillness, and the sun and the moon for reckoning. That is the measuring of the Mighty, the Wise. And He it is Who hath set for you the stars that ye may guide your course by them amid the darkness of the land and the sea. We have detailed Our revelation for a people who have understanding (VI.96–7).

Also:

> Lo! in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of night and day, and the ships which run upon the sea with that which is of use to men, and the waters which God sendeth down from the sky, thereby reviving the earth after its death, and dispersing all kinds of beasts therein, and the ordinance of the winds, and the clouds obedient between heaven and earth: are signs [*āyas*] for people who use their intellect [*yaʿqilūn*] (II.164).[4]

As can be seen in these and many other verses, the phenomena of nature possess a meaning beyond the world of phenomenality and brute facts. They are signs and symbols to be read and deciphered, but only by those 'who have understanding' or 'who use their intellect' (III.190; XXIX.53). The Qurʾān invites humans to study the universe, but not as sleepwalkers who

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3. There are some 450 verses concerning the Earth, 300 the sky, and about 200 the world and the universe as a whole.
4. The Arabic word *ʿaql* used in this verse cannot in the West be translated simply as reason but refers primarily to the intellect as this term has been understood in the traditional schools of metaphysics.

would reduce the universe to a domain of reality independent of God and its phenomena to facts without any meaning beyond the world of physical existence. The Qurʾān also contains knowledge of the natural world which is not simply a rudimentary physics, astronomy or natural history, but a key to unravelling the meaning contained in the book of nature, a code with which to read the cosmic book.

In traditional Islamic sources, there are many references to the written Qurʾān (*al-Qurʾān al-tadwīnī*) and the cosmic Qurʾān (*al-Qurʾān al-takwīnī*). The Qurʾān as the mother of books (*umm al-kitāb*) is not only the archetype of the Qurʾān revealed and made accessible to man through the Prophet, but also the archetype of the universe.[5] The same pen (*qalam*) which wrote the word of God upon the Guarded Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*) also brought into existence the beings of this world in the 'World of Divine Command' (*ʿālam al-amr*). There is an inner nexus between the revealed and the cosmic Qurʾān, as well as with the soul of humans who are commanded to read both versions of the sacred text. This inward relation is demonstrated by the fact that the same term, *āyā*, which means sign, symbol or portent, is used to refer to the verses of the Qurʾān, the phenomena of nature and the events taking place within the soul of human beings. This truth is affirmed by several verses of the Qurʾān including the famous verse 'We shall show them Our portents [*āyas*] on the horizons [*al-āfāq*] and within themselves [*fī anfusihim*] until it will be manifest unto them that it is the Truth' (XLI.53). The *āfāq* refers to the macrocosmic world, the world of cosmic phenomena, and within themselves (*fī anfusihim*) to the microcosmic world or the soul of human beings.

Moreover, the Qurʾān not only establishes a correspondence between humanity and the cosmos in this verse, but also asserts once again that it is the truth that is being revealed by these *āyas*. It is, however, the *āyas* of the Qurʾān which act as the bridge between humanity and the cosmos, and enable people to read the chapters and verses of the cosmic book. We must have faith in the Qurʾān in order to be guided by it so as to be able to face facts as signs and symbols revealing a truth beyond those facts, for as the Qurʾān asserts, 'And in the earth are portents [*āyas*] for those whose faith is sure. And (also) in yourselves. Can ye then not see [*tubṣirūn*]?' (LI.20–1). To be able to have sight (*baṣīra*), we need more than physical eyes. We need vision, which revelation alone makes possible, because it is only revelation which on the one hand provides knowledge of the principal world, and on the other provides the objective framework for the functioning of the intellect (*al-ʿaql*) within human

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5. See S. H. Nasr, 'The cosmos and the natural order', in S. H. Nasr (ed.), *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, XIX of *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest*, New York, Crossroad, 1987, pp. 345–57.

I–5.1 Folio of Ibn Sīnā's *Sharḥ-i Ishārāt*, by Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī
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beings, the intellect which must not be confused with reason and which is identified by the Qurʾān and the traditions of the Prophet, the *Ḥadīth*, with the heart and not the brain.

To read the cosmic text, the intellect within humans must be operative. We must possess a high level of realized knowledge (*al-maʿrifa*) to be able to read in the wind blowing through the forests, the birds soaring into the sky, the waterfalls cascading from mountains, and the stars shining in the dark desert night the verses of the book of primordial revelation inscribed upon the pages of the cosmic text. This knowledge reveals the book of nature as a precious document to be read and understood, for it concerns truths of the greatest importance for humans as immortal beings. The cosmic text contains lessons which concern human beings intellectually, spiritually and morally, not to speak of the aspect of their being terrestrial creatures born to live and function in this world.

The emphasis on the study of the cosmic book as a source of wisdom and guidance does not in any way detract from the Qurʾān's insistence on the virtue of gaining knowledge of the natural order. The great attraction to the study of nature during the first centuries of Islamic history was in fact due to the command of the Qurʾān to study the natural world. But it must be remembered that, in contrast to the view of certain modern Muslim thinkers, this was not an invitation to a form of scientism which somehow went astray in the Islamic world, only to be pursued avidly and brought to its 'glorious' flowering in the modern West. Rather, the invitation offered by the Qurʾān was to read the cosmic book in order to gain knowledge of God's wisdom. This emphasis on gaining wisdom did not, however, exclude the importance of studying natural phenomena without reference to their symbolic and hidden significance but simply as manifestations and indications of God's creative power, which also reveal the laws that reflect His will. That is why Islamic scientists ranging from astronomers and geologists such as al-Bīrūnī (d. 440/1048) to zoologists like al-Damīrī (d. 808/1405), referred to the Qurʾān as their guide, and sought to study the phenomenal world as means of gaining greater knowledge of God's creation.

It remained for the 'people of vision' (*ahl al-baṣīra*), whether they were scientists or not, to gain the highest knowledge revealed by the words and phrases of the cosmic book. But whether it was the people of inner vision seeing the divine archetype in a natural phenomenon, or a botanist studying the growth pattern of a plant which forms part of God's creation, the impetus came from the Qurʾān. It invites men to observe, study, meditate and finally 'intellect' the meaning of the phenomena of nature and to come to know the cosmos which, for the traditional Muslim, participated in the Qurʾānic revelation and became an aspect of Islam possessing profound religious and spiritual significance.

The Islamic doctrine of the origin of the universe

The Qurʾān asserts categorically the divine origin of the universe, and all schools of Islamic thought have accepted this principle even if they have debated among themselves concerning the origination of the world in time or beyond time.[6] The Qurʾān describes majestically the divine origin of the world

6. It must be remembered that even for the Peripatetic philosophers, such as Ibn Sīnā, who were attacked by the theologians (*mutakallimūn*) for believing in the eternity (*qidam*) of the world, the world is ontologically utterly dependent on God who is the necessary being (*wājib al-wujūd*), while everything else is contingency (*mumkin*) and literally nothing in its essence. See S. H. Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1978, pp. 197ff.

which was created by God, is sustained by Him and returns to Him. God is eternally the creator (*al-Khāliq*); otherwise, a change would occur in His nature. But this particular world with which the present humanity is concerned has a beginning and an end, even if God will then create a new creation, or as the Qur'ān states, 'Hast thou not seen that God hath created the heavens and the earth with truth? If He will, He can remove you and bring [in] some new creation' (XIV.19).

The Qur'ān expresses the created nature of the universe in diverse ways, which have given rise to the vast speculations of different schools of Islamic thought concerning the meaning of creation. The sacred text speaks first of all of God as *al-Khāliq* (the creator) of the universe, as in the verse 'Praise be to God, who hath created (*khalaqa*) the heavens and the earth' (VI.1). This term *khalq* has been interpreted by many later commentators as meaning creation of something from something else, such as the creation of man from clay. The Qur'ān also uses the term *yuḥdith* in the verse 'It may be that God will afterwards bring some new thing to pass [*yuḥdith*]' (LXV.1), which in contrast implies creation from nothing, hence the use of the term *ḥudūth* in later Islamic theology and philosophy.

In verse II.117 of the Qur'ān, God is furthermore called *Badī'*, or the giver of existence to the heavens and the Earth, while numerous verses refer to Him as the one who originates or produces (*yabda'u*) the creation, as in the verse 'Say: Is there of your partners one that produceth [*yabda'u*] creation and then reproduceth it?' (X.34). God is also the originator in the sense of *fāṭir*, or giver of primordial nature to creatures, as stated in the verse 'Say: Shall I choose for a protecting friend other than God, the Originator [*fāṭir*] of the heavens and the earth?' (VI.14). Finally, God is the fashioner (*sāni'*), to which reference is made in the verse 'the fashioning [*ṣun'*] of God who perfecteth all things' (XXVII.88).

'He is the First [*al-Awwal*] and the Last [*al-Ākhir*] and the Outward [*al-Ẓāhir*] and the Inward [*al-Bāṭin*] and He knows infinitely all things' (LVII.3). This famous verse in a sense summarizes the rapport of God and the universe. According to it, God is at the origin and end of the universe in reference to the dimension of time as well as principally. He is also the inward and the outward, these names referring to the dimension of space. He is at once immanent at the heart of all things and transcendent, 'encompassing' the whole universe.

The first is the principle inasmuch as it precedes manifestation; 'the last' is the principle inasmuch as it follows it. The principle 'externalizes' itself through manifestation or existence, but it is also 'the inward' or 'the hidden' insofar as it is veiled thereby like an invisible centre, although in reality it contains manifestation. 'Anteriority', 'posteriority', 'exteriority', 'interiority': these four aspects of the principle express the principle–manifestation

relationship in terms of succession and of simultaneity, or in other words, from the points of view of 'becoming' and of 'being'.[7]

The science of the divine names reveals that God is not only creator, originator, giver of existence and fashioner of things as well as their origin and end, the inward and also the outward, but also that He is the primordial reality (*al-Qadīm*) who ordains and has power over all things (*al-Qadīr*), who bestows life (*al-Muḥyī*) and death (*al-Mumīt*) and who alone subsists (*al-Bāqī*) while all else perishes. The Qurʾān asserts clearly that 'Everything will perish save His countenance' (XXVIII.88). The universe has its origin in God, is sustained and administered by Him through His host of angelic agents, and returns to Him.

In the Qurʾān, the creative act is associated with the command of God 'to be' (*kun*). It is the very word of God which existentiates everything, as asserted by the verse: 'But His command, when He intendeth a thing, is only that He saith unto it: Be! and it is [*kun fa-yakūn*]' (XXXVI.82). As to the question of creation *ex nihilo*, what *nihilo* or *ʿadam* means has been debated extensively by various schools of Islamic thought ranging from theologians to Sufis and philosophers. Some have seen *ʿadam* as meaning only ordinary non-existence or nothingness, while others have seen it as referring to the archetypal realities residing in God's knowledge which possessed no existence before the 'breath of the compassionate' (*nafas al-Raḥmān*) 'breathed' existence upon them, thereby bringing them into existence and making them manifest.[8]

It is not possible here to go into the elaborate doctrines of cosmogenesis contained in the teachings of various schools of Islamic thought. Suffice it to say that they all emphasize the divine origin of the universe and the return of universal existence to God. They also point out the meaningfulness of creation, that it was not created 'in vain' and that it possesses a purpose. The 'divine *Ḥadīth*' (*Ḥadīth qudsī*),[9] 'I was a hidden treasure; I wanted to be known. Therefore, I created the world so that I would be known,'[10] has echoes over the centuries in the works of numerous Islamic thinkers who have pondered the role and meaning of the universe. The fact that God is the creator and originator of the universe means that the universe can lead to Him, provided

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7. F. Schuon, *Dimensions of Islam*, trans. P. Townsend, London, Allen & Unwin, 1970, pp. 30–1.

8. This view has been expounded by Ibn ʿArabī and the followers of his school. See T. Burckhardt, *An Introduction to Sufism*, trans. D. M. Matheson, London, Crucible, 1990, chapters 2–4; see also W. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, Albany, N.Y., State University of New York Press, 1989, p. 19.

9. On *Ḥadīth qudsī*, see chapter in this volume on 'The concept of *Sunna*' by Y. al Qaradawi, pp. 457–86.

10. Abu-l-Qāsim Aḥmad ibn Manṣūr al-Samʿānī, *Rawḥ al-arwāḥ*, Tehran, Shirkat-i Intishārāt-i ʿIlmī wa Farhangī, 1368/1989, p. 221.

I–5.2   A Qibla compass of brass with engraving, open,
late nineteenth or early twentieth century
© Nasser Khalili Collection of Islamic Art (Nour Foundation)

we can read the signs of His wisdom upon the pages of the cosmic book and
not mistake these signs for brute facts or the ontologically dependent universe
for an independent domain of reality.

The end of the universe and the Islamic conception of time

The Islamic conception of time as stated in the Qurʾān is dominated completely
by the eschatological realities which mark the end of cosmic time and the origin
which marks its beginning. As the first (*al-Awwal*) and the last (*al-Ākhir*), God
'determines' the universe not only ontologically but also cosmically in the sense
of limiting its duration. This universe has a beginning and will have an end
although, as pointed out by so many Islamic thinkers, the universe cannot
be said to have a beginning in time since time itself is a condition of cosmic
existence. God as creator cannot cease to create, hence certain allusions made
in the Qurʾān and *Ḥadīth* to other creations. But the life of this creation in
which the present humanity lives is bound by the act of its creation and its final
dissolution, expressed so vividly in numerous verses of the Qurʾān such as:

> And [remind them of] The Day [*yawm*] when the Trumpet will be blown, and
> all who are in the heavens and the earth will start in fear, save him whom God
> willeth. And all come unto Him humbled. And thou seest the hills thou deemest
> solid flying with the flight of clouds. (XXVII.87–8)

The reality of time is dominated by the Day, which is the omega point of
cosmic existence, the point which is also referred to in several Qurʾānic verses

as the Hour (*al-sāʿa*) as in the verses, 'Unto Him is referred (all) Knowledge of the Hour' (XLI.47), and 'The Hour [*al-sāʿa*] draws nigh and the moon is rent in twain' (LIV.1). The latter relates the Hour directly to eschatological events reflected in an astronomical phenomenon. The Hour refers at once to the end of cosmic life and of individual human life, to both the macrocosm and the microcosm. It, therefore, determines the conception of the flow of time subjectively as well as objectively.

It is important to note that the word *al-zamān*, which is the ordinary Arabic word for time and sometimes duration, is not used in the Qurʾān. Rather, it is words derived from the root *waqt* that we find in the Qurʾān. For example, concerning the coming of the Hour, it is said, 'He (God) alone will manifest it at its proper time [*waqt*]' (VII.187). Also, 'Lo! thou art of those reprieved until the day of the time [*al-waqt*] appointed' (XXXVIII.80–1). Other derivatives of this root, such as *mawqūt* and *mīqāt*, are also found in the Qurʾān, reflecting the central role that the concept of *waqt* plays in the Qurʾān.

In contrast to *al-zamān*, which signifies continuous duration, *al-waqt* signifies the instant, and time itself is a 'constellation', a galaxy of instants which reveal the divine order.[11] Other terms used in the Qurʾān, such as *ḥīn* and *al-ān*, both meaning the moment, or *lamḥ al-baṣar*, meaning the twinkling of an eye, refer to the same basic reality which is the atomic unit of time, the moment which determines the reality of time. Moreover, in Arabic grammar as well as in *fiqh* and *sūfism*, there is always emphasis upon the now or *ḥāl*, while Islamic theology (*kalām*) developed over the centuries an elaborate doctrine of atomism which included not only objects and space but also time. The reality of time as moments which are reflections of eternity[12] was so strong in early Islamic thought that the materialists were called *dahriyyūn*, literally those who 'divinized' duration (*al-dahr*).

Islamic thought, of course, developed elaborate theories of time and duration in relation to the movement of the heavens, the consciousness of the passage of time and the constant change within the natural order itself.[13]

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11. L. Massignon, *Testimonies and Reflections*, sel. and intr. H. Mason, Notre Dame, Ind., University of Notre Dame Press, 1989, p. 85.

12. On the relation of time and eternity in Islamic thought see A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Time and Eternity*, New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1988, pp. 86ff. On the debate between the philosophers and theologians concerning creation and the nature of time, see S. van den Bergh, *Averroes' Tahāfut al-tahāfut*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1954, 2 vols.

13. While earlier philosophers derived time from the motion of the outermost sphere of the Ptolemaic cosmos, Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī and his followers believed that time is the consequence of the change which characterizes the natural world as such, the world being in constant trans-substantial motion (*al-ḥarakāt al-jawhariyya*). See S. H. Nasr, 'Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī', in M. M. Sharif (ed.), *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, Wiesbaden, O. Harrasowitz, 1966, pp. 948ff, and Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, *The Wisdom of the Throne*, trans. J. Morris, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1981, pp. 119ff.

I–5.3   Miscellany, philosophic treatises, and poems Farsi, Arabic, signed
by Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī
© National Library and Archives of the Islamic Republic of Iran

But at the heart of the Islamic concept of time, there has always resided that awareness of the moment (*al-waqt*), the now (*al-ān*), which reveals God's will for the world and for humanity, and which relates human beings to the eternal order. The past is already gone and the future is not yet here. The only reality is the present moment in which the spiritual person seeks to live, avoiding that daydreaming which turns people away from the reality of the eternal present.

The Qur'ān also describes a sacred history which delineates an implicit philosophy of the 'march of time'. The Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth* speak of Adam as the first prophet and harbinger of *al-tawḥīd*, the doctrine of unity. This original message which contained the quintessential truth was gradually forgotten, necessitating the renewal of revelation through numerous prophets, concluding with the Prophet of Islam with whom the prophetic function comes to an end.

History is, therefore, composed of cycles, beginning with the perfection of the origin at the time of revelation and ending with forgetfulness and ignorance, which precede the next revelation. That is why the Prophet said that the best generation of his community was that of the Companions, followed by the generation after them, and then the next generation to the end of time.[14] The only difference in the case of Islam is that there will be no new revelation after the Qurʾānic one because history itself will come to an end, when the message of al-tawḥīd will again become forgotten.

The traditional Islamic perspective is based on not a linear but a cyclical notion of the march of time. Nor is it based on the idea of continuous progress which, in its popular version, is an eighteenth-century European invention which certain modernized Muslims have adopted and tried to read back into the Qurʾān and Ḥadīth.[15] This cyclic conception of time has, moreover, had a cosmic as well as historic dimension. Although Muslim thinkers have opposed the doctrine of cosmic cycles in the manner found among the Hindus, some have spoken of al-adwār and al-akwār, or cycles which govern cosmic existence.[16] The mainstream of Islamic thought has, however, limited itself to a single cosmic cycle within which there is not simply a linear march of time but smaller cycles marked by the rejuvenation of the Earth and of human history by divine intervention through revelation, and the subsequent gradual running-down of the cycle through the downward flow that characterizes all that is earthly.

Within this grand scheme, there have developed numerous theories ranging from the views of al-Bīrūnī concerning the earlier periods of creation of this world and the appearance of various orders of plants and animals to Ibn Khaldūn's (d. 808/1406) analysis of human history based upon cycles determined by the interaction between nomads and sedentary people. But the Qurʾānic teaching of the reality of time, being the 'galaxy of moments' which reveal the will of God for the human and cosmic orders, has been central over the centuries, and remains to this day at the heart of the Islamic conception of time.

Causality, qaḍāʾ (decree) and qadar (measure)

Causality reigns in the Islamic universe in the sense that God is omnipotent and has power over all things. The phrase 'Indeed, God is dominant (powerful)

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14. See Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb Faḍāʾil al-ṣaḥāba, Bāb Faḍāʾil aṣḥāb al-Nabī. Eds.
15. On the authentic Islamic conception of the march of time, see Abū Bakr Sirāj ed-Din, 'The Islamic and Christian conception of the march of time', Islamic Quarterly, I, 1954, pp. 229–35.
16. This is particularly true of a number of Ismāʿīlī thinkers. See H. Corbin, Cyclical Time and Ismaili Gnosis, London, Kegan Paul International, 1983.

over all things' [*inna-Allāha ʿalā kulli shayʾin qadīr*] (II.20) is repeated in one form or another some forty-five times in the Qurʾān. Combined with the constantly repeated Qurʾānic theme that God is omniscient (*al-ʿAlīm*), this recurring theme of God's omnipotence depicts a universe in which there is strict causality from on high. The universe is dominated in its working by the divine names, *al-Qadīr* and *al-ʿAlīm*. The Islamic universe is one in which everything is both known and dominated by God. The major question which has engaged various schools of Islamic thought for some 1,400 years is whether there are secondary causes (*asbāb*) and, if so, what is their relation to God as the supreme cause or the cause of causes (*ʿillat al-ʿilal*). But all schools of Islamic thought agree about the reality of God as the supreme cause and the fact that the universe and all that occurs in it is created and moves according to a determined measure established by God, and is not simply the result of chance.

The Qurʾān speaks in several places of *qaḍāʾ* and *qadar*. For example, 'He it is Who hath created you from clay, and hath decreed [*qaḍā*] a term for you' (VI.2). As for *qadar*, the Qurʾān states, 'Thus We determined [*qadarnā*]. How excellent is Our determining' (LXXVII.23). The Qurʾān also states, 'God hath set a measure [*qadr*] for all things' (LXV.3).[17] The two terms *qaḍāʾ* and *qadar*, which are often used together by Muslim scholars, constitute a major theme of Islamic theological and philosophical thought, and numerous treatises have been devoted to the subject by Muʿtazilites and Ashʿarites as well as Islamic philosophers and Sufis. Many of these works have dealt with the moral, theological and eschatological dimensions of this theme, but the concepts of *qaḍāʾ* and of *qadar* also possess a cosmological aspect which is important for the understanding of the Islamic conception of the universe.

Later commentators have often considered *qaḍāʾ* and *qadar* to correspond to different levels of reality. *Qaḍāʾ* concerns the divine order, the principal domain, in which the reality of a particular cosmic manifestation is decreed. *Qadar* refers to the created or cosmic order itself, and 'determines' the particular mode of existence of the cosmic manifestation in question. Some have, however, compared *qaḍāʾ* to the Pen (*al-qalam*) and *qadar* to the Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*) according to the well-known Qurʾānic symbolism in which creatures are symbolized by 'words' written pre-eternally by the Divine Pen upon the Guarded Tablet which, therefore, contains the principal realities of all things.

In any case, according to the Qurʾānic teachings, the root or reality of all things is with God who has dominion over everything. 'Therefore glory be to

17. Not only *qadar* and *qadr* but also *miqdār*, meaning likewise measure, are used in the Qurʾān, as in XIII.8. It is of great interest to note that the root of power as in *qādir* and measure or determination as in *qadar, miqdār* is the same. In fact, *qadr* is used to mean both power as in the 'Night of Power' (*laylat al-qadr*) and measure as in LXV.3.

Him in whose hand is the dominion [*malakūt*] over all things' (XXXVI.83). He is the ultimate cause of all things, the creator who has created everything in this universe according to a determined and just measure. Nothing moves or functions in this world without His knowledge and His will, whether it be a blade of grass or a galaxy.

The major question that engaged Islamic thinkers over the centuries, however, was whether God as the first or ultimate cause is also the immediate cause of all things, or whether there are intermediate causes leading finally to the first cause. The text of the Qur'ān speaks of God's omnipotence and at the same time of God's agents in creation, the angels. It also speaks of cause and effect, without which there would be no relation between human action and its reward or punishment in this world and the next. Some Islamic thinkers, chief among them the Ashʿarite theologians, went to the extreme of denying all causality and reducing every cause to the ultimate cause which is the will of God. Others, including the Islamic philosophers, insisted on the reality of secondary causes which lead ultimately to the first cause.

The debate between the *mutakallimūn* and *falāsifa* on the question of causality is one of the basic features of the history of Islamic thought, reaching its peak in the debate between al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) and Ibn Rushd (d. 590/1198), as recorded in the former's *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* and the latter's *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*.[18] Later Islamic thinkers also continued to be concerned with the problem, and some of the most profound discussions of the subject are in fact to be found in the writings of such later figures as Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī (d. 1050/1640), who sought to do full justice to the reality of secondary or horizontal causes while insisting upon the dazzling and immediate reality of God as the vertical cause and bestower of existence upon every existent.[19] Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, like so many other Muslim thinkers, was concerned with a universe dominated by God's will, ordered according to 'measure' and displaying a harmony which relates all multiplicity to the One and which is itself the result of the manifestation of the One in multiplicity. These are features of the Islamic worldview rooted in the Qur'ānic message. As for his insistence upon the network of various secondary causes, it was a main interpretation of the Qur'ānic doctrine of causality to which certain

18. For a summary of this debate, see S. H. Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam*, Cambridge, Islamic Texts Society, 1987, pp. 318ff; H. A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of kalām*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1976; J. Obermann, 'Das Problem der Kausalität bei den Arabern', *Festschrift Joseph R. von Karabacek*, Vienna, Holder, 1916, pp. 15–42; and B. S. Kogan, *Averroes and the Metaphysics of Causation*, Albany, N.Y., State University Press of New York, 1985.

19. The most extensive discussion of causality in the writings of Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī is to be found in his *al-Asfār al-arbaʿa, al-marḥala al-sādisa*, of the first journey (*safar*), II, Qum, Dār al-Maʿārif al-Islāmiyya, n.d., pp. 126ff.

theologians opposed their own view of causality, according to which God is the direct cause of all things. Water makes us wet not because it is in the nature of water to do so but because God has so willed it. This view led to a voluntarism which is certainly an important aspect of later Islamic thought. But it was by no means the whole of Islamic thought, many of whose schools insisted upon God's all-powerful will while accepting the reality of secondary and horizontal causes on their own level.

The hierarchy of the universe

The Islamic view of the universe is eminently hierarchic despite the 'levelling process' evident in certain schools of *kalām* and the fact that the Islamic perspective insists upon the nothingness of every existing thing from the 'Pleiades to the earth' before the divine majesty. The Qur'ān speaks not only of God and His creation, but also of levels of hierarchy in the universe. Even in the divine order there is distinction to be made between the divine essence (*al-dhāt*) and the divine names (*al-asmāʾ*) and qualities (*al-ṣifāt*). Below the divine order stands the *rūḥ*, the spirit, which is the centre of cosmic manifestation. Then there are the angels themselves, distinguished according to their ranks, then the heavens and the Earth, the world of the *jinn* and humans, the animals, plants and numerals. Finally, there are the paradisal, purgatorial and infernal regions to consider, which are eschatological realities with cosmological significance.

The Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth* also speak of the Divine Pen (*al-qalam*) and the Guarded Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*) upon which, as already mentioned, the realities of things are 'written', as well as of the Throne (*al-ʿarsh*) and the Footstool (*al-kursī*), God's throne being upheld by eight angels according to the verse 'And the angels will be on the sides thereof, and eight will uphold the Throne [*al-ʿarsh*] of their Lord that day, above them' (LXIX.17). Likewise, the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth* speak of the light of God and God as light, and of the hierarchy of lights stretching from the heavens to the Earth for, according to the Light verse (*āyat al-nūr*), 'God is the light of the heavens and the earth' (XXIV.35).[20]

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20. The 'Light verse' has given rise to elaborate cosmologies which are based upon the Qur'ānic verse and certain *ḥadīths*, the most famous of the treatises dealing with this subject being the *Mishkāt al-anwār* of al-Ghazālī which was to influence the *ishrāqī* school of Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234) based upon the light symbolism and an ontology which equates light with being. Perhaps the most comprehensive commentary on this verse is the work of Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, *Tafsīr-i Āyah-yi mubāraka-yi nūr*, ed. M. Khajavī, Tehran, Mawlawī, AH 1362. This remarkable opus considers both the macrocosmic and microcosmic significance of the famous 'Light verse', and brings out the multidimensional aspects of the meanings of this verse in an unprecedented manner.

As far as the Throne is concerned, it bears several meanings, expounded later by such figures as Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240).[21] Since 'God sitting on His Throne' implies a relation between God and something else, the Throne symbolizes on the highest level the separation between God and His creation, the immeasurable hiatus which separates the divine order from the domain of manifestation. The Throne, according to many traditions from the Prophet, is the first thing created after the Pen (*al-qalam*) and the Guarded Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*), and upon it is written the word 'divine mercy' (*al-raḥma*) from which the whole universe issues, all the possibilities of a particular creation being 'recorded' by the Pen on the Guarded Tablet.[22] As for the Footstool (*al-kursī*), like the Throne, it is created of light but is peripheral to the Throne. As the Throne symbolizes formless manifestation, the Footstool signifies formal manifestation. There are in fact two aspects to the Footstool or two Footstools, one related to the divine mercy or beauty (*al-jamāl*) and the other to the divine glory (*al-jalāl*), and from them these two qualities descend throughout the cosmos to the Earth.

As has been noted, the Pen and the Guarded Tablet as well as the Throne and the Footstool are made of light, which refers, as noted in the Light verse, to God Himself, who is the archetype of light whether it be of the heavens or the Earth. It is in view of their proximity to God and direct access to His light that the Qurʾānic teachings concerning angels being created of light must be understood. In Qurʾānic cosmology, there is an explicit cosmic hierarchy consisting of creatures created from light (*al-nūr*), those created from fire (*al-nār*) and those created from the earth (*al-ṭīn*). The first corresponds to the angels, the second to psychic beings such as the jinn, and the third to humanity. Reference has also been made to these levels by certain later Qurʾānic commentators and cosmologists as *al-jabarūt, al-malakūt* and *al-mulk* respectively.[23] This tripartite division does not, however, negate the Qurʾānic dictum that God is the light of not only the heavens but also the Earth. The attribution of light to the substance of which the angels are created refers to their direct access to the divine light, while creatures belonging to the

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21. In his *ʿUqlat al-mustawfiz*, Ibn ʿArabī refers to several meanings of *ʿarsh*, such as the glorious throne (*al-ʿarsh al-majīd*), the immense throne (*al-ʿarsh al-ʿaẓīm*) and the throne of mercy (*al-ʿarsh al-raḥmānī*). See H. S. Nyberg, *Kleinere Schriften des Ibn al-ʿArabī*, Leiden, Netherlands, Brill, 1919, pp. 40ff. On the cosmology of Ibn ʿArabī, see W. Chittick, 'Ibn ʿArabī and his school', in S. H. Nasr (ed.), *Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations*, *op. cit.*, pp. 49–79. See also Schuon, *Dimensions of Islam*, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 107ff.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 144ff. I have also dealt with Islamic cosmology rooted in the Qurʾānic view of the universe in several of my works, including *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines, Islamic Science: An Illustrated Study*, London, Festival of the World of Islam, 1976, and *Science and Civilization in Islam*.

lower levels of existence participate in this light only indirectly. All light, both heavenly and earthly, has the divine light as its prototype.

The Pen and the Tablet, as well as the Throne and the Footstool, still belong to the divine order. It might be said that cosmic manifestation begins, properly speaking, with *al-rūḥ*, the spirit, about which the Qur'ān says, 'They will ask thee concerning the Spirit [*al-rūḥ*]. Say: 'The Spirit is by command [*amr*] of my Lord' (XVII.85).[24] The *rūḥ* is like the supreme angel, and is mentioned often distinctly with the angels, as in the verses 'On the day when the angels and the Spirit stand arrayed' (LXXVIII.38) and 'The angels and the Spirit ascend unto Him in a Day whereof the span is fifty thousand years' (LXX.4). Also when God speaks of the 'Night of Power' (*laylat al-qadr*) when the Qur'ān descended, He speaks not only of the angels but says, 'The angels and the Spirit descend therein' (XCVII.4). Moreover, the traditions from the Prophet which refer to eschatological realities state that, because of its immensity, on the Day of Judgement the *rūḥ* will stand all by itself separate from all other angelic orders. The *rūḥ* stands at the centre of the cosmos and is the supreme archangel, superior to the other four archangels, Jibrīl, Mīkāʾīl, Isrāfīl and ʿIzrāʾīl, to whom major functions such as the giving of life, sustaining of the heavens and Earth, bringing about death and announcing resurrection have been bestowed by God. There are, therefore, altogether five archangels who stand at the top of the cosmic hierarchy.

Below these supreme angels stand a host of angels extending from those who sustain the Throne and encircle it in praise of God according to the verse 'and thou (O Muḥammad) seest the angels thronging round the Throne, hymning the praise of their Lord' (XXXIX.75), to those in charge of the affairs of human beings and other creatures on earth. The Islamic universe is filled with a vast hierarchy of angels who carry out the will of God at every level of cosmic existence and possess a blinding reality in the traditional Islamic universe, in the life of both humans and all other creatures in the cosmos. That is why all types of traditional Islamic thinkers who have drawn their inspiration from the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth*, from scholars of Qur'ānic commentary to jurists to theologians to philosophers and finally to Sufis, have been concerned with angels and have discussed their functions in this world and the next.[25]

Below the angelic realm stands the domain of the jinn, who are often referred to in the Qur'ān along with humans. The jinn are beings of the psychic world, possessing intelligence and even being recipients of revelation. Some are benefic and others malefic, against whom people should take refuge in God,

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24. That is why in many schools of Islamic cosmology, the universe is divided into the 'world of creation' (*ʿālam al-khalq*) and the 'world of command' (*ʿālam al-amr*).

25. For a summary of this vast subject, see S. Murata, 'Angels', in S. H. Nasr (ed.), *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, *op. cit.*, pp. 324–44.

as stated in the Qurʾān: 'Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind …. From the evil of the sneaking whisperer. Of the jinn and mankind' (CXIV.1, 4, 6). The jinn are not simply subjective psychological states, as asserted by some Muslim modernists, but beings possessing objective reality and belonging to an intermediate cosmic realm between the world of the angels and that of material existence.

Qurʾānic cosmology also concerns itself with the visible universe whose hierarchy it depicts not in scientific but in symbolic language.[26] It speaks not only of the Earth and the heavens in general but of seven heavens, as in the verse, 'God it is who hath created seven heavens, of the earth the like thereof' (LXV.12). Moreover, 'He ordained them seven heavens in two Days and inspired in each heaven its mandate: and we decked the nether heaven with lamps, and rendered it inviolable' (XLI.12). All that is in the heavens and the Earth praises God and to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth, for 'All that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth glorifieth God' (LIX.1); 'His is the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth' (LVII.5); and 'God's are the treasures of the heavens and the earth' (LXIII.7). Much has been written by commentators on the meaning of heaven; this meaning cannot, in fact, be limited to only one level of reality. But whether taken to mean the spiritual world or the visible heavens, the heavens as used in Qurʾānic terminology point to a hierarchic universe standing below the archangelic and angelic realms and reaching down to the Earth, which is the abode of humanity and the members of the mineral, plant and animal kingdoms.

Reference is made in many Qurʾānic verses to the animals and plants as well as stones and mountains, the clouds and rain, all of which live in harmony according to the laws decreed for them by God. As already mentioned, the three kingdoms play an important function in the Qurʾānic universe and in a sense 'participate' in the Qurʾānic revelation. God Himself swears in the Qurʾān not only by the sun, the moon and the stars, but also by certain animals and plants, while mountains are mentioned to have been offered the burden of the divine trust (al-amāna) before humans. The universe depicted by the Qurʾān and Ḥadīth is a vast realm extending from the Divine Throne (al-ʿarsh) to the ground (al-farsh), embracing the archangelic and angelic levels, the realm of psychic substances, the levels of the visible universe, reaching to the earth with its multifarious creatures from mountains to trees to animals, and finally humans, who alone can be conscious of this whole hierarchy and

26. All attempts to interpret the teachings of the Qurʾān concerning the cosmos 'scientifically', that is, according to the current teachings of the secular sciences prevalent in the West today, are doomed to failure because secular science is ever-changing while the Qurʾān is God's permanent Word. Sacred scripture contains the roots of a complete cosmology as this term is understood traditionally, but it is not a scientific text in the current sense of the word 'scientific'.

beyond it, of the divine nature itself and of their being created as God's vicegerents on earth. Human beings are in a sense the lowest creature in this hierarchy, but they are also the central beings with whom the journey of return to God begins. They are the only terrestrial beings capable of understanding fully the Qur'ānic dictum 'Lo! we are God's and lo! unto Him we are returning' (II.156).

The role of humanity in the universe

To understand the role of humanity in the Islamic universe, it is necessary to turn briefly to the Islamic conception of human beings. The Qur'ān speaks several times of humans as being God's vicegerents (*khalīfa*), as in the verses 'And when Thy Lord said unto the angels: Lo! I am about to place a vicegerent [*khalīfa*] in the earth' (II.30), and 'He it is who hath placed you as vicegerents of the earth' (VI.165). Moreover, the function of vicegerency is considered to be carried out only partially, and to remain for the most part only potential in the case of most men and women, only the prophets being God's perfect vicegerents. That is why the prophet David is called vicegerent in the verse 'O David! Lo! We have set thee as a vicegerent on earth' (XXXVIII.26).

Moreover, God refers to people in the Qur'ān as His slaves or servants (*'abd*), as in the verse: 'Lo! I am the slave of God ['Abd Allāh] (XIX.30); and also 'Ye are requited naught save what ye did – save sincere slaves of God[27] [*'ibād Allāh al-mukhlaṣīn*]' [XXXVII.39–40]. To the extent that people become perfect, they surrender their will to God and become His *'abd*. Here again this profound and primordial nature of humanity, which is that of servitude to God (*al-'ubūdiyya*), is not realized fully except by the perfect human, who is exemplified by the prophets and great saints. That is why one of the names of the Prophet of Islam was 'Abd Allāh, for he was at once the perfect *'abd* and the perfect *khalīfa* of God on Earth.

The role of humanity in the universe, according to the Islamic perspective, can only be understood in the light of these two cardinal concepts. As the vicegerents of God, humans have first of all been taught all the 'names' of things in the world of creation. This means the possibility not only of knowing all things which their God-given intelligence carries within itself, but also of having dominion over all things, for in the traditional perspective to know the 'name' of something also means to have domination over it. The Qur'ān even speaks of the created order being subservient to humanity, as in the verse 'And [God] had made of service [*sakhkhara*] unto you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth' (XLV.13).

This and similar verses have been understood by many modernists in the Islamic world to mean Qur'ānic sanction for the conquest and plunder

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27. Literally, 'chosen slaves of God' (eds).

of nature which has been carried out so systematically and successfully by Western civilization since the eighteenth century. This interpretation is, however, totally false because the being to whom God taught all the names is the being who remains God's *ʿabd* and not an individual who declares independence of God's will. That is why in another verse referring to animals the Qur'ān says, 'Thus have We made them subject [*sakhkharahā*] unto you that ye may magnify God' (XXII.37). The ecological tragedy in the modern world may be analysed in Islamic terms by asserting that modern human beings have sought to live as God's vicegerents on earth without being His *ʿabd*, of playing the role of deity on earth in subjugating the whole of nature to the never-ending needs of their passions without being responsible to any authority beyond themselves.

In the Islamic perspective, the quality of being God's servant implies surrendering our will to God and obeying His Will. Now, it is this Will as well as the theophanies of God's Names that manifest themselves in the remarkable harmony which dominates over the natural world, a harmony which far outweighs the strife that is also to be seen in the natural order. God cares for all of His creatures and not only humanity. To be His servant is to share in this caring for the other creatures which share the earth with humans, and not to act in any way against His Will. To be His vicegerent is to participate actively in the care of His creation for humans, as the central beings in this world, like the window through which the light of the Divine shines upon the world. All creatures worship God through their very existence but not consciously. Only human worship is active and conscious. Their prayers must, therefore, be for all creatures, and they must represent the light of the higher world of the Spirit in the created order.

Humans as *ʿabd* must be perfectly passive towards God, while as *khalīfa* they must be perfectly active towards the world about them. This activity must, however, be always in their function as God's vicegerents and not simply as earth-bound creatures with unlimited passions and a cunning intelligence clever enough to satisfy the artificial needs they create for themselves at the expense of the right of other creatures to life and existence. Humanity must be a bridge between heaven and Earth, between God and His creation. It is only in being this bridge (*pontifex*) or in remembering their true nature as the pontifical man that human beings fulfil their role in the universe according to the profoundest teachings of the Qur'ān and the *Sunna*.[28]

28. I have dealt with this theme of pontifical humans, a notion Islam shares with other traditions, in *Knowledge and the Sacred*, Albany, N.Y., State University of New York Press, 1989, chapter 5. See also G. Eaton, 'Man', in S. H. Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality: The Foundations*, *op. cit.*, pp. 358–77; and S. H. Nasr, 'Who is man? The Perennial Answer of Islam', in J. Needleman (ed.), *The Sword of Gnosis*, Baltimore, Md., Penguin, 1974, pp. 203–17.

I–5.4   A page of Ibn-ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*
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The spiritual significance of the cosmos in Islam

The Islamic perspective is based on a positive appreciation of creation as reflection of God's wisdom. The world (*al-dunyā*) must be distinguished from the natural created order (*al-khalq*) which was not 'created in vain'. The world in the Qurʾān is contrasted with the eternal realm (*al-ākhira*), which is considered to be better for humanity than this world according to the verse, 'The Hereafter is better and more lasting' (LXXXVII.17). People are advised to shun the world because it causes forgetfulness of God, but it is the world as source of worldliness that is at issue, not the world as locus of the reflection of God's names and qualities. The world of creation is not only a veil (*ḥijāb*) but also the source of unveiling (*kashf*), being itself God's primordial revelation, whose significance is, however, brought out only in the light of the revelation of the Qurʾān and of other revelations before they are confirmed by the Qurʾān.

In certain schools of religious thought, emphasis is placed upon the spiritual world to such an extent that the spiritual significance of the cosmos, of the world of nature, is eclipsed or neglected. Such is not the case in Islam, where the Qurʾānic revelation is in a sense addressed to the world of nature as well as to human beings. In the Islamic universe, the sun and the moon, the desert and the sea, the birds and the plants play almost as major a role as human beings themselves. The first goal of Islamic revelation is to save the souls of human beings, but it is also a goal to reveal knowledge of God, which includes knowledge of His creative power and wisdom as reflected in the created order. Even the salvation of human beings is in a sense related to the spiritual significance of the natural order. We must remember that the Islamic paradise contains animals and plants, and that according to certain traditional sayings of early religious authorities and a number of traditions from the Prophet, the animal and plant kingdoms also participate in resurrection and have a role in the ultimate entelechy of man.[29]

The religious significance of the natural order in Islam may be said to be twofold. The natural order is a source of knowledge and wisdom for human beings, and it provides the background for their religious life in their journey in this world. The cosmos reflects the wisdom of God through all of its seemingly never-ending and ever-renewing activities. The change of seasons, the cycles of birth and death, the regularity of heavenly movements, the turning of the day into night and the night into day all point to the wisdom of

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29. This subject has been developed by a number of later Islamic intellectual authorities such as Shīrāzī in his *Risāla fī-l-Ḥashr* and in his *magnum opus*, *al-Asfār al-arbaʿa* where chapter 13 of the fourth book is entitled *Fī-l-ishāra ilā ḥashr jamīʿ al-mawjūdāt* (concerning allusion to the resurrection of all beings). Ṣadr al-Dīn himself bases much of his assertions in this section upon *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* of Ibn ʿArabī.

God as expressed so eloquently and picturesquely in the Qurʾān. Moreover, the beauty observed so abundantly in natural forms from the expanses of the sky to the blooming flower reflects aspects of divine beauty. These forms are supreme works of art created by the supreme artisan and each natural phenomenon, whether it be the lowly gnat or the mighty sun, reveals in its very existence something of the creative power, wisdom and even nature of that artisan.

For Muslims, the Qurʾān is the key for the understanding and appreciation of this wisdom and beauty in creation, while the soul transformed by the Qurʾān sees and hears the signs of God at every turn as it journeys in the 'enchanted' world of nature during its earthly life. For the person whose soul has become completely transformed by the message of the Qurʾān and the Muḥammadan *baraka*, every flower is a reflection of a flower of paradise and every running brook an 'extension' of *al-Kawthar*.[30] Every plant which blooms in the spring is a reminder of the obedience of all creatures to the will of God, and the daily and nightly rising and setting of the sun and the moon are the most evident proof of the harmony which pervades the universe and which is a consequence of the unity of God, for as already stated, harmony is nothing other than the consequence of the reflection of unity in multiplicity.

There is, moreover, a complete science of the cosmos whose principles are provided by the Qurʾān and *Ḥadīth*. From these principles, there grew over the centuries the vast cosmological schemes ranging from those of the Ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ and Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) to the cosmological teachings of Ibn ʿArabī and Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī. These teachings provide a knowledge with the help of which people can journey through the cosmos and ultimately beyond it to the divine presence. They are maps for the journey of life itself, understood not on the ethical level where the *Sharīʿa*, Islamic law, provides the necessary guidance, but on the noetic level. The universe seen in this light provides the background for the spiritual journey of humanity, while it 'participates' in this journey by providing guide-posts and signs for the traveller.

The cosmos also possesses a spiritual and religious significance in the ordinary life of Muslims. The Islamic rites are related to the rhythms of the cosmos. The daily prayers are performed at times related to critical moments in the movement of the sun. The fasting during the month of Ramadan is determined again by moments connected with the rising and setting of the sun, while the beginning and end of the month are determined by the waxing and waning of the moon. The canonical prayers are performed on the ground which was sanctified when the Prophet first put his forehead on it in prostration before God and following His command to institutionalize the rite

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30. A river in paradise according to the Qurʾān.
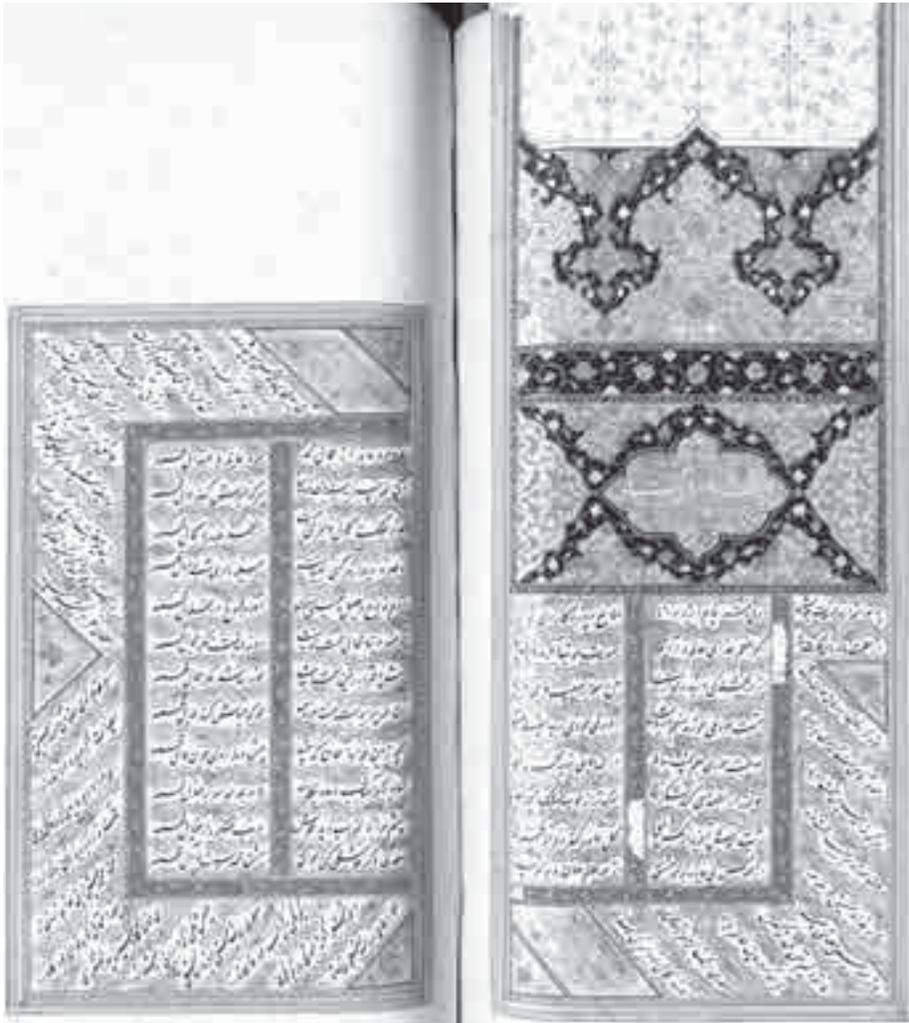
I–5.5   *Kullīyāt-e Sʿadī*, mid Safavid Period
© National Library and Archives of the Islamic Republic of Iran

of the prayers (*ṣalāt*).[31] The direction of the prayers is determined by the locus of the Kaʿba which is itself located at the intersection between the vertical axis descending from heaven and the Earth. Space is thereby sacralized and made to converge upon a single centre toward which all mosques are oriented,

31. See S. H. Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality*, Albany, N.Y., State University Press of New York, and London, Golgonooza Press, 1987, chapter 3. [Editors' note: For a brief discussion of the variant translations of *ṣalāt* in English, see chapter in this volume on 'The concept of the *Sunna*' by al-Qaradawi, pp. 457–86].

whether they be in the Philippines or Morocco, in South Africa or America. Muslims live in a 'qualified' space transformed by the Kaʿba and a 'qualified' time punctuated by the daily prayers which remove them systematically from the experience of the profane time of so-called ordinary life and bring them face to face with the Eternal.

The elements also play a significant role in the daily religious life of Muslims. It is water with which ablutions are made before the prayers, the water which far from being simply a 'natural' substance symbolizes and is virtually the original substance of paradisal existence, and which purifies not only the body but also the soul. In the absence of water, earth can be used for ablution because it represents innocent and passive purity. As for air, it is connected to the very principle of life or the spirit, for God breathed His spirit into Adam according to the Qurʾānic verse, 'So, when I have made him and have breathed into him of My spirit'[32] (XV.29). Finally, fire does not only remind the Muslim of the torments of hell and the danger of transgressing God's laws, but is also a visible symbol of the light of God which, according to the Light verse already partially quoted, shines from the lamp containing the oil of the blessed olive tree. The elements, as well as space and time and the creatures living in their matrix, accompany Muslims in their religious life and activities, and possess the greatest significance in their religious and spiritual life.

The natural order also plays a role in the daily religious life of Islam according to the injunctions of the *Sharīʿa*, many of which pertain to the domain of nature. There are laws concerning the use of water and inhibitions against its pollution. There are injunctions concerning the planting or cutting of trees and the treatment of animals, including the necessity of sacrificing an animal in order to be able to eat its meat. In the *Sharīʿa*, the created order is treated on the one hand as the background for human life and on the other hand as an independent order of reality with its own rights. The rights of humans to make use of the bounties from the world of nature are recognized, but these are combined with an emphasis on their responsibilities towards all creatures which have their own right of existence.

The spiritual significance of the cosmos in the Islamic perspective cannot in fact be fully understood without emphasis upon the responsibility which humans bear towards God's creation. According to the Qurʾān and *Ḥadīth*, humans are responsible for all their actions, and not only those actions concerning themselves and other human beings. The responsibility of humanity extends to the animal and plant worlds and even to the mineral kingdom. People must not plunder or squander. Their use of nature must

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32. We need only recall the relation between the words *rūḥ* (spirit) and *rīḥ* (wind) and also *nafs* (soul) and *nafas* (breath) in Arabic. These similarities are not confined to Arabic, but can be found in other Semitic as well as Indo-European languages.

be measured and combined with regard for the right to existence of other creatures. Their charity and compassion must extend beyond the human world to embrace the whole of creation, as must their love. People must love the created order because it is God's handiwork and because God's love and care also extend to the whole of His creation. As the Persian poet Saʿdī says, 'I am joyous with the world because the world is joyous through Him.'

Humans bear a great responsibility by virtue of being human. They are first of all responsible for their immortal souls, which they must save by living virtuously. But they are also responsible for the created world about them by virtue of the power and knowledge given to them by God as His vicegerents on Earth. In a mysterious way, the created order shares in human religious life, and Islamic soteriology includes the created order. The universe participates in the miracle of human delivery from the bondage of the cosmos, envisaged as a labyrinth, by making available knowledge of God's wisdom as reflected in His creation as well as providing the perfect example of surrender (*taslīm*) to God's will. If only humans could become like the birds and trees, the mountains and the stars, completely surrendered to God, they would become perfect Muslims, perfect servants of God in surrender to the will of the creator. And when humans do become perfect Muslims, then nature participates in their *islām* as they become the channel of grace for the natural order. Their prayers become the prayers of all of nature and they participate in the unending prayers to God of the whole of creation, of eagles flying upon sublime mountain peaks and fishes swimming in the vast oceans, for as the Qurʾān asserts, 'there is not a thing but hymneth His praise' (XVII.44). The ultimate significance of the universe is that it possesses a meaning beyond itself and that it participates in that spiritual reality which constitutes the very substance of humanity and the alpha and omega of human existence.

– I I –

REVELATION AND
PROPHETHOOD

Chapter 2.1

The Prophet Muḥammad: the Meccan period

Muzaffar Iqbal

This chapter traces the life and mission of the Prophet Muḥammad in Mecca, from his birth through his migration (Hijra) to the oasis of Yathrib. The Prophet's migration is taken in Islamic sources to have epochal significance, founding the Islamic calendar and marking a maturation of the nascent Islamic polity. The chapter follows the course of traditional Islamic sources in narrative form, in order to offer a sense of the texture of Islamic sources as well as to impart their chronography. It draws primarily on collections of *ḥadīths* (traditions of the Prophet) and the genre of Prophetic biography (*Sīra*), with occasional reference to Qurʾānic exegeses.

Islamic traditions consider the birth and the subsequent prophetic career of Prophet Muḥammad to be the culmination of the prophetic cycle which commenced with Ādam, after he and his spouse were expelled from paradise and sent to Earth. More specifically, his appearance is understood as Divine acceptance of the supplication made by Prophet Ibrāhīm (Abraham) while building the House of God in the sanctified city of Mecca, where Prophet Muḥammad was born some 2500 years after his ancestor's supplication, mentioned in the Qurʾān as:[1]

> And [recall] when Ibrāhīm (Abraham) and [his son] Ismaʿīl (Ishmael) were raising the foundations of the House (the Kaʿba at Mecca), [saying], 'Our Lord! Accept [this service] from us. Verily! You are the All-Hearer, the All-Knower. Our Lord! and make us Muslims [in submission] to You and from our descendants [raise] a nation submissive unto You. And show us our rites and accept our repentance. Indeed, You are the Acceptor of repentance, the Most Merciful. Our Lord! And raise up in their midst a messenger from among them who shall recite unto them. Your revelations, and shall instruct

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1. See *Tafsīrs* of al-Ṭabarī and al-Bayḍāwī, *sub* Q II.129.

them in the Scripture and in wisdom and purify them, Indeed, You are the Exalted in Might, the Wise'. (II.127–9)

The lineage of the Prophet is traced back to Prophet Ibrāhīm through his son Ismāʿīl.[2] He was born in Mecca in the 'Year of the Elephant' (570 CE), so-named because in that year Abraha, the Governor of Yemen (then under Abyssinian rule), had sent an army with an elephant marching in its lead, with orders to destroy the Kaʿba to which pilgrims people made annual pilgrimage– an event he attempted to divert to his newly constructed cathedral in Ṣanʿāʾ.[3] The Quraysh, as custodians of the House built by Ibrāhīm, chose the Prophet's grandfather ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib to negotiate with Abraha. When the two met, the latter was so impressed by ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib that he returned his camels which the invading army had captured, but remained adamant about attacking the Kaʿba. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib returned to the Quraysh and advised them to retreat to positions in the nearby hills, leaving the House of God to God Himself.[4] Islamic traditions report that Abraha's army was then destroyed by birds sent by God: each bird cast three pebbles down, whoever was struck by them dying instantaneously or shortly thereafter.[5]

The Prophet was born soon after this remarkable event. His father, ʿAbd Allāh, had died in Yathrib a few weeks before his birth while returning from a trading trip to Syria. His mother, Āmina, who was in the home of her uncle, sent word of the birth to his grandfather.[6] Upon hearing the news, ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib visited the house, where the newborn was, held him in his arms, kissed him and then took him to the House of God, where he offered a prayer. The boy was named Muḥammad.[7]

2. According to Ibn Hishām, the Prophet's genealogy up to ʿAdnān is as follows: Muḥammad, son of ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib b. Hāshim b. ʿAbd Manāf b. Quṣayy b. Kilāb b. Murra b. Kaʿb b. Luʾayy b. Ghālib b. Fihr b. Mālik b. al-Naḍr b. Kināna b. Khuzayma b. Mudrika b. Ilyās b. Muḍar b. Nizār b. Maʿadd b. ʿAdnān; his genealogy beyond ʿAdnān is not certain. See Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Malik b. Hishām, al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya, ed. M. al-Saqqā, 4 vols. in 2, 2nd ed., Beirut, Dār al-Wifāq, 1375/1955.

3. Ibn Hishām, Sīra, I, p. 2.

4. Ibid., I, pp. 49–50.

5. Ibid. This incident was later mentioned in the Qurʾān: 'Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the people of the elephant? Did He not bring their stratagem to naught; And send against them swarms of birds; Which pelted them with stones of baked clay; And made them like green crops devoured' (Q 105).

6. According to Ibn Isḥāq, the Prophet was born on Monday, 12 Rabīʿ al-Awwal. This corresponds to 25 April, 571; other sources mention 9 Rabīʿ al-Awwal. Muḥammad b. Yasār al-Muṭṭalibī b. Isḥāq, al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya, ed. A. F. al-Mazīdī, Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1424/2004, I, p. 48.

7. 'Muḥammad' is the emphatic passive participle of the root ḥ-m-d, meaning 'one who is often praised'. The Prophet has another name in the Qurʾān (LXI.6), Aḥmad, which is the superlative form from the same root, meaning 'one who is highly praised', and which is the
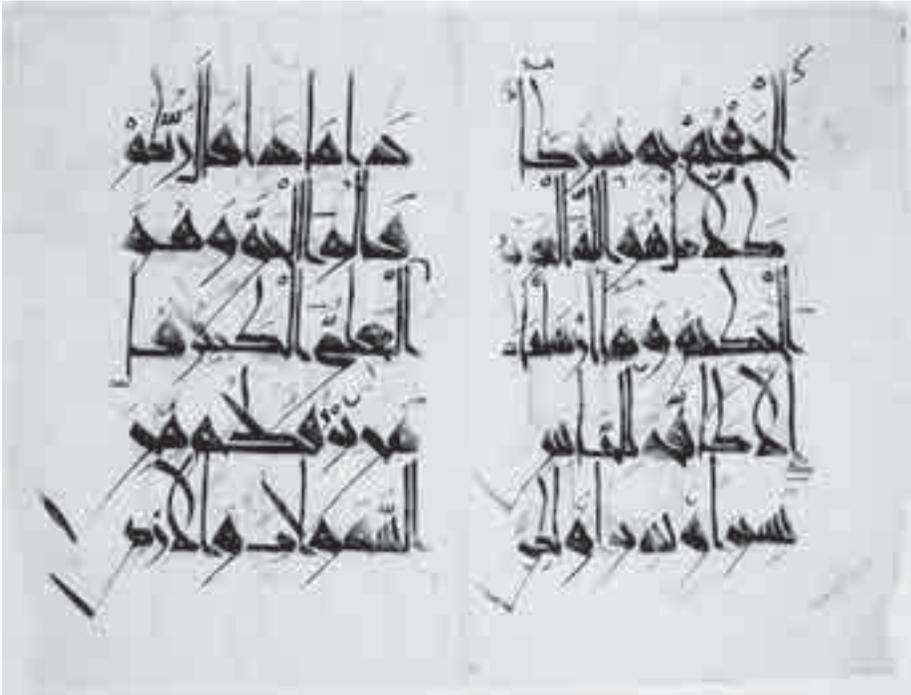
II–1.1   Manuscripts of Qurʾān, Kūfic Script, eleventh century
© Nasser Khalili Collection of Islamic Art (Nour Foundation)

Following the prevalent Arab custom, the Prophet was soon sent to the desert to be nursed and reared by Ḥalīma bint Abū Dhuʾayb and her husband Ḥārith. Later, Ḥalīma was to recall her trip to Mecca, where she had gone in search of families looking for foster mothers: 'it was a year of drought. We had nothing left to eat. I rode our lean grey she-ass, which often fell behind others in the caravan. We were accompanied by our old

name the Qurʾān records Jesus to mention in his prophecy about the Prophet: 'And when ʿĪsā son of Maryam said: 'Children of Isrāʾīl! Behold, I am the Messenger of Allāh unto you, confirming whatever is before me of the Torah, and bringing good tidings of a Messenger who shall come after me and whose name is Aḥmad' (LXI.6). *Ḥadīths* note that this name, like 'Yaḥyā' (cf. Q XIX.7), was never given a Prophet before, so the prophecy leaves no doubt as to who is meant. Other names of the Prophet include al-Mutawakkil ('the one who relies on Allāh'), al-Māḥī ('the Obliterator', i.e. of disbelief), al-Ḥāshir ('the Gatherer', i.e. of people), al-ʿĀqib ('the Successor', i.e. who is not followed by another prophet), Nabiyy at-tawba 'the Prophet of Penitence', and Nabiyy ar-raḥma 'the Prophet of Mercy'; see Gibril Fouad Haddad, 'Aḥmad', in *Integrated Encyclopedia of the Qurʾān*, I, pp. 33–7, and its references to relevant *ḥadīths*.

she-camel, which did not yield a drop of milk. I did not have enough milk in my breasts to feed our son and his wailing kept us awake at night.'[8]

The caravan stayed in Mecca for a few days. Ḥalīma met the Prophet's mother and saw the boy, but she had hoped to find a wealthier family whose patronage, per tribal custom, could prove bountiful in years to come. A few days later, when the caravan of her clan Banū Sa'd was preparing to leave and Ḥalīma had yet to find a baby, she said to her husband: 'I dislike to return empty-handed; I shall take that orphan'. Later 'I carried him with me to where our mounts were', she said,

> and no sooner had I put him in my bosom than my breasts filled up with milk. He drank his fill and his foster-brother drank his fill and they both fell asleep. When my husband went to our old she-camel, he found her udders full. He milked it, both of us drank her milk to our satisfaction, and we slept well. At dawn, my husband said to me: 'By God, Ḥalīma, you have taken a blessed creation'. 'That was my hope', I said.[9]

Ḥalīma also related how, on their way back, her mount preceded all others in the caravan and how, upon arrival in her home, she found her barren land to have been transformed such that her flock of sheep would return in the evening full of milk and her neighbours would tell their herdsmen to take their flocks to where her flock was grazing.

Two years later, Ḥalīma took the Prophet back to his mother. He had become a strong boy and Ḥalīma wanted to keep him longer. She convinced the Prophet's mother to allow her to bring him back with her. It was a few months after their return from this trip to Mecca that one day her son came to her in a state of shock and said: 'That Qurayshite brother of ours! Two men in white dress came, took hold of him, laid him down and opened his breast and they are stirring it with their hands.' Ḥalīma and her husband rushed to the scene and found the Prophet standing with a pale face. They embraced him and asked, 'What happened to you, our dear son?' He said: 'Two men clothed in white came, laid me down, opened my breast, and searched it for I do not know what.'[10] Ḥalīma's husband feared for the boy's well-being and advised her to take him back to Mecca. When they arrived, Āmina was surprised to see them and inquired about their sudden return. Ḥalīma first avoided telling her, but when she disclosed what had happened Āmina replied: 'Great things are in store for my little son.'

Many years later, when some Companions asked the Prophet to relate to them some events of his childhood, he said:

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8. Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, I, pp. 160–7.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*

I am the response of the supplication of my father Ibrāhīm and the glad-tidings announced by ʿĪsā. When I was in my mother's belly, she saw radiance coming out of her belly, illuminating the castles of Syria. I grew up among Banū Saʿd, drinking [milk from my foster mother]. We were tending to our flock in the pasture when two men in white clothes came; they had a gold basin full of snow. They held me and split open my chest. They took out my heart, split it open, and removed a black clot and cast it away. Then they washed my heart and my breast with the snow until they were purified.[11]

Islamic sources understand this event as a preparation for prophethood, in the context of what the Prophet related to his Companions on another occasion: 'Satan touches every son of Ādam the day his mother gives birth to him, save only Mary and her son.'[12]

The death of the Prophet's mother and grandfather

The Prophet now lived with his mother in Mecca. His extended family included his grandfather, ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, several uncles, aunts, and cousins. After about three years, Āmina took her son to visit his relatives in Yathrib. On their way back, she became ill and, after a few days, died at a site near Yathrib called Abwāʾ. Baraka, the slave girl accompanying them on this trip, brought the six-year-old child back to Mecca, where his grandfather took charge of the orphan. They had a close relationship; ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib often took his grandson to the assembly of tribal elders, declaring to any who objected that, 'By God, a great future is in store for my son'. The two would also be seen sitting together in the shade of the Kaʿba, where a couch would be placed for ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib and where no one else would venture to come sit with him. This time, however, was short-lived: ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib himself died two years after the death of Āmina. On his deathbed, he entrusted his grandson to his son Abū Ṭālib, who was a full brother of the Prophet's father. Henceforth, Abū Ṭālib and his wife, Fāṭima bint Asad, showered their love on the Prophet and treated him like their own child.

Baḥīra the monk

Abū Ṭālib had inherited little; as his family needs increased, he began trading via caravan to Syria. The Prophet pastured sheep and goats in the nearby hills to support the family income. When the Prophet was twelve years old (or nine, according to some sources), Abū Ṭālib took him along on one

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11. Al-Ḥākim, *al-Mustadrak ʿala-l-ṣaḥīḥayn*, 5 vols., Beirut, Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1986; repr. of Ḥaydarabād, Dāʾirat al-Māʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1916, II, p. 656 §4174.
12. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Faḍāʾil*, *Bāb Faḍāʾil ʿĪsā ʿalayh al-salām*.

of his trading trips. As the caravan approached, Baḥīra, a monk who lived in a cell near Buṣrā, noticed that a cloud was hanging over a section of the caravan, protecting it from the intense sun. When the caravan finally halted, the monk saw that the cloud held still over a tree that had lowered its branches to protect those beneath it. This portent was a hint for Baḥīra, who knew from ancient scriptures that the time was approaching for the appearance of a prophet.

In order to ascertain whether the prophecy was coming to pass, Baḥīra prepared a feast for the caravan and invited them all to his cell. They were only too happy to accept this invitation, but left the boy behind to take care of their camels. Baḥīra welcomed his guests, scanning their faces for the one he was looking for. Finding none matching the characteristics mentioned in Scripture, he inquired if they had left anyone behind. 'Yes', he was told, 'we left behind the youngest member of the caravan to take care of the camels'. Baḥīra replied, 'Do not treat him so; rather, call him and let him be present with us at this meal'. They obliged, feeling guilty of discourtesy.

As soon as Baḥīra saw the boy, he knew the person he was looking for was before him. He noticed how the boy ate, how he sat, how he talked; when, after the meal, Baḥīra asked him a few questions, he was convinced that he was face to face with the one mentioned in the prophecy. With much affection and respect, Baḥīra asked if he could see the boy's bare back; when the boy lifted his cloak, Baḥīra found (as he sought) the seal of prophethood between the shoulder-blades. He then took Abū Ṭālib aside and asked: 'What relationship do you have with this boy?' 'He is my son', Abū Ṭālib answered, per the Arab custom by which a nephew is called "son". 'That can't be so! This boy's father cannot be alive at this time', Baḥīra exclaimed. Abū Ṭālib then explained his relationship with the boy and told him how his brother had died when the boy was still in the womb. Baḥīra, convinced that he had encountered a future prophet, said, 'Great things are in store for this nephew of yours; leave this city with him as soon as you can.'[13]

Little is known about the life of Muḥammad after this trip until his marriage at age twenty-five, except that he was present with his uncles at the Battle of Fujjār (called 'Sacrilegious War', as it was instigated in one of the four sacred months when combat was forbidden), where he gathered enemy arrows that had missed their mark. Later he was present at the house of the chief of Banū Taym, who was one of the wealthiest men in Mecca and who had invited a number of Qurayshite clans to enter into a pact (ḥilf al-fuḍūl) pledging to protect the weak and to uphold justice. The Prophet was later to recall: 'I was present at the house of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Judʿān. It was so excellent

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13. Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, I, pp. 180–2.

a pact that I would not exchange my part in it for a herd of red camels; and if now, in Islam, I were summoned unto it, I would gladly respond.'[14]

Marriage

As the years passed, Muḥammad grew to be a handsome, strong man with an upright character, known to his fellow Meccans as *al-Amīn* ('the Trustworthy'). His strikingly attractive features were later to become the subject of countless poems in various Islamic languages and he has been described as of medium stature. As described in this literature, he had a large head, broad shoulders, and proportioned body (inclined to slimness). His thick, black, slightly curly hair reached midway between the lobes of his ears and his shoulders, and his beard accentuated his face. His complexion was fair, and slightly ruddy. He had large black eyes with long lashes. His skin was soft. The palms of his hands and the soles of his feet were firmly padded. He walked with a firm gait, as if striding downhill.[15]

When he was about twenty-five, he received a message from Khadīja, daughter of Khuwaylid, a wealthy aristocrat of Mecca from the tribe of Banū Asad. She asked whether he would take her goods to Syria in return for double the amount she had ever paid someone to do so, offering also to have one of the young men in her employ accompany him. When this caravan rested at Buṣrā, according to one of the earliest biographies of Muḥammad, a monk by the name of Nestor identified him as the Prophet whose coming had been foretold in Christian sources. Upon their return to Mecca, the trading having been more profitable than expected, Maysara (the young man sent with Muḥammad) told Khadīja all that had transpired during the journey. Khadīja decided to offer herself in marriage to Muḥammad, her friend Nufaysa approaching him on her behalf. When he consented, a marriage was formally arranged through their uncles. Khadīja received twenty camels as dowry.[16]

The household of the Prophet in Mecca

The marriage brought immense happiness to the couple. Muḥammad moved into Khadīja's house not far from the Kaʿba, and she bore six children in the course of the next fifteen years: first a boy named Qāsim, whence the Prophet's teknonym (*kunya*) Abu-l-Qāsim ('father of Qāsim'), who died before

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14. *Ibid.*, I, p. 134.
15. Abū ʿĪsā Muḥammad b. ʿĪsā al-Tirmidhī, *al-Shamāʾil al-Muḥammadiyya*, Beirut, Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, n.d., p. 19.
16. Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, I, pp. 187–90.

his second birthday; then four daughters, Zaynab, Ruqayya, Umm Kulthūm, and Fāṭima; and finally a son named ʿAbd Allāh, who died in infancy. Khadīja bore all but one of the Prophet's children.[17] In addition to his own children, the immediate household of the Prophet consisted of Zayd, his adopted son,[18] and ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, his uncle's son whom the Prophet had taken in due to economic difficulties faced by his uncle. On the day of his wedding, the Prophet emancipated Baraka, the slave who had brought him back to Mecca when his mother died. She had married a man of Yathrib, but returned to live in the household of the Prophet with her son, Ayman (either because her husband died or she was divorced).

In the traditional society of Arabia, one's extended family was as important as the immediate household. The nobility of both sides of the Prophet's family was well-recognized by the tribal chieftains, and the personable characters of both Muḥammad and Khadīja were highly respected. The latter was constantly sought for advice and aid by a wide range of people, both those directly associated with her husband and those who came to her through her own circle of friends and family. Muḥammad, now widely known as *al-Amīn*, was considered by many members of his extended family as the future leader of their clan.

In due course, their eldest daughter, Zaynab, married Abu-l-ʿĀṣ, the son of Khadīja's sister Ḥāla, and Ruqayya and Umm Kulthūm were betrothed to ʿUtba and ʿUtayba, the two sons of the Prophet's uncle Abū Lahab.

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17. His only other child, Ibrāhīm, whose mother was Māriya al-Qibṭiyya, an Egyptian Coptic slave sent him by the Sassanid governor of Egypt, was born in the last month of the year 8/630. Ibrāhīm died in the hands of the Prophet when he was sixteen or eighteen months old. Upon his death, the Prophet was to say: 'The eyes send forth their tears and the heart is grieved, but we do not say anything except that which pleases our Lord. Indeed, O Ibrāhīm, we are bereaved by your departure from us' (*Ibid.*, p. 190).

18. Khadīja had gifted Zayd to him at the time of their wedding; at that time, he was fifteen years old. Zayd's father, Ḥāritha, belonged to the great tribe of Kalb, living on the plains between Syria and Iraq. His mother was from the illustrious tribe of Ṭayy, whose chieftain Ḥātim was known throughout Arabia for his legendary generosity. Zayd had been kidnapped and sold into slavery. When Zayd's father came to Mecca and found his son, Zayd refused to go with him and instead chose to stay with the family of the Prophet. The Prophet then took him to the Kaʿba and declared: 'All you who are present, bear witness that Zayd is my son; I am his heir and he is mine.' See Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, I, p. 247; Abu-l-Qāsim ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Aḥmad al-Suhaylī, *al-Rawḍ al-anf fī sharḥ al-sīra al-nabawiyya li-Ibn Hishām*, ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām al-Salamī, 7 vols., Beirut. Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1421/2000, I, p. 286; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, p. 314; ʿIzz al-Dīn Abu-l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Abī-l-Karam Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Jazarī Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī-l-taʾrīkh*, ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmīrī, 10 vols., Beirut, Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1417/1997, II, p. 58.
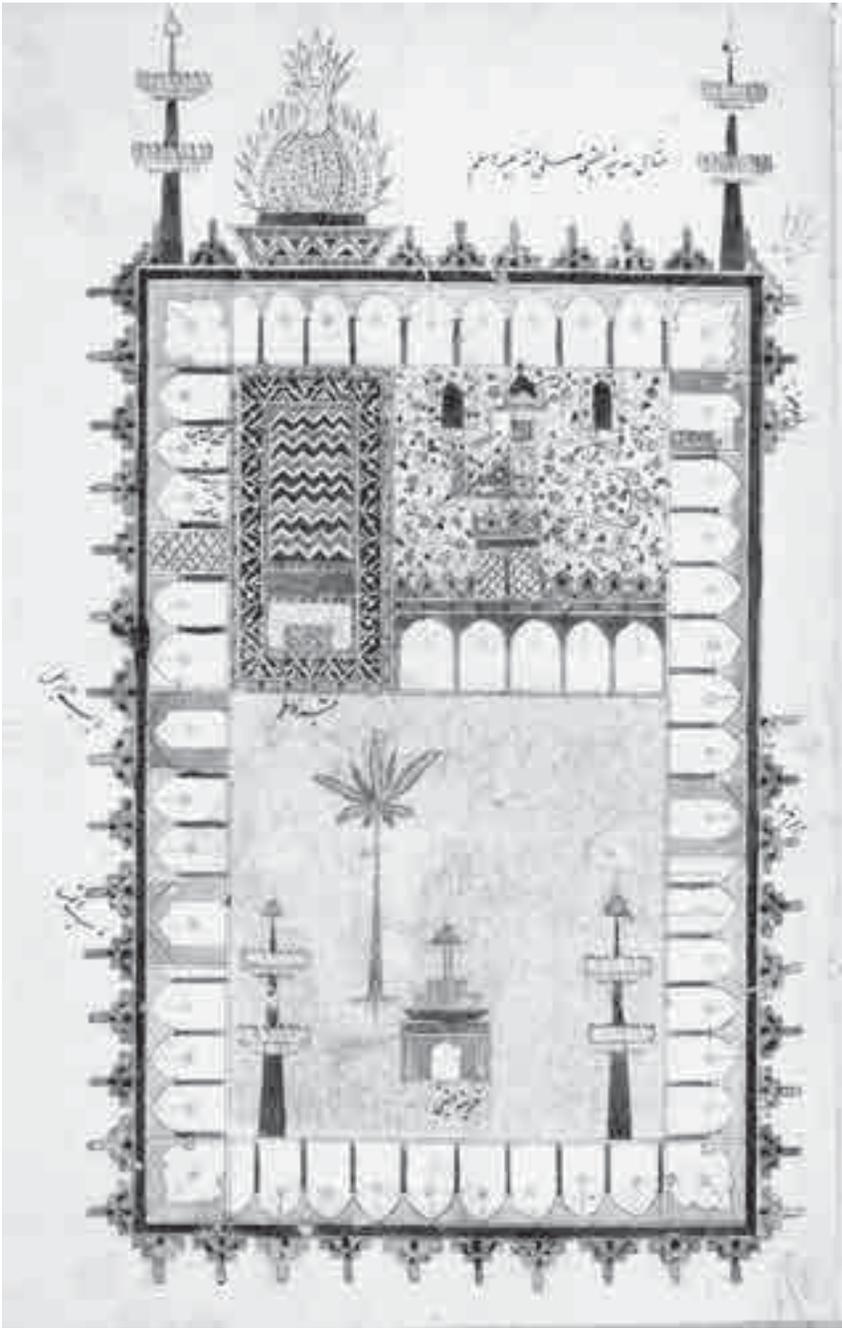
II–1.2   A guide to pilgrimage, sixteenth century
© Nasser Khalili Collection of Islamic Art (Nour Foundation)

The rebuilding of the Kaʿba

The Quraysh considered themselves 'people of the House of God'; they revered the Kaʿba, which had brought them honour and bounties over the course of centuries. Even though they clove to many rites not part of the Abrahamic practice, they still associated themselves with Prophet Ibrāhīm, and the House of God built by him remained the focus of their religious, social, and economic life. When Muḥammad was about thirty-five, the Quraysh decided to rebuild the Kaʿba. Lacking a roof, no taller than a man, its walls made of loose stones and the relics in its vault exposed to theft, it decidedly needed to be rebuilt. The tribal leaders' decision (galvanized after a theft in fact occurred) was speeded by the availability of lumber from a wrecked Greek ship at Jedda and an expert Coptic carpenter who was then in Mecca.

The Qurayshite leaders, however, feared Divine retribution for dismantling the loose stones of the current structure, until Walīd, chieftain of Makhzūm, finally came forward to knock down part of the wall between the Black Stone and the Yemenite Corner, saying, 'O God, we intend nothing but good'. When no ill fell upon him overnight, the next day they joined together to remove, portion by portion, all the stones of the existing walls until they reached the large green cobblestones of the Abrahamic foundations. Someone tried to remove one of the foundation stones, whereupon the whole of Mecca shook. They took this as a sign that the foundations of the House should be left as they were.[19] It is reported by Ibn Hishām that they found a piece of Syriac writing under the Black Stone, which was later read out by a Jewish man who could read it: 'I am God, the Lord of Bakka. I created it the day I created the heavens and the earth, the day I made the sun and the moon, and I placed around about her seven inviolable angels and they shall protect it as long as its two hills stand; its water and milk hold blessings for its people.'[20] They also found other writing beneath the Station of Ibrāhīm, the small rock near the door of the Kaʿba bearing the footprint of Prophet Ibrāhīm: 'This is the Holy House of Allāh; its sustenance comes to it from three directions. Let not her people be the first to profane her.'[21]

The rebuilding of the Kaʿba was assigned to different clans, each raising the walls to a certain height. More stones were gathered to increase the height of the building. When the southern and easterly walls had been rebuilt to the height where the Black Stone was to be placed in the corner, a dispute broke out over who would have the honour of placing it. These arguments went back and forth for days, tribal affiliations and acrimonious histories yielding competing factions. Amidst rising tensions, the most elderly man among them,

19. Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, I, pp. 194–6.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 196.
21. *Ibid.*

Abū Umayya, proposed a solution: 'Let the first man to enter through the gate of the precinct decide amongst you.' This proposal was readily agreed upon.

The first man to enter the complex was Muḥammad, returning to the city. When they saw him, they exclaimed, 'This is the Trustworthy (*al-Amīn*); we all know him, this is Muḥammad; we accept his judgment.'[22] When the dispute was explained, Muḥammad asked them to bring him a large cloth. He put the Black Stone upon it, asking the representatives of each clan to raise the cloth. Then he himself lifted the Black Stone from the cloth and set it in place. The construction resumed and was completed in due course, without extending to the full area of the Abrahamic foundations because of a dearth of building materials. This area, known variously as Ḥijr and Ḥaṭīm, remains outside the Kaʿba walls to this day.[23]

The beginning of revelation

Soon after the rebuilding of the Kaʿba, Muḥammad started to experience true dreams (*al-ruʾyā al-ṣādiqa*) described to be like 'the breaking of the light of dawn', and the traditional sources note that solitude became dear to him.[24] He would take provisions for extended periods and retreat to Ḥirāʾ, one of the caves of Jabal al-Nūr ('the Mountain of Light'), about five kilometres from Mecca. The mountain lacks both water and vegetation, except for thorny desert shrubs spread across its rocky terrain. The grotto at its summit is formed by huge boulders, providentially placed to create a cavity with a narrow entrance facing the Kaʿba. The opening is high enough for one person to stand upright near its entrance, but it is merely three feet high toward the enclosed end, which has a narrow slit through which cool air enters.

The Prophet would later describe how he began to hear salutations from the stones and trees during these trips, addressing him with 'Peace be upon you, O Messenger of Allāh'.[25] This period lasted about three years. Then, during the month of Ramadan when he was in the fortieth year of his life, an

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22. Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, I, p. 197; al-Suhaylī, *al-Rawḍ al-anf*, II, p. 183; Abū Saʿd ʿAbd al-Malik b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Naysābūrī al-Kharkūshī, *Sharaf al-Muṣṭafā*, 6 vols., Makka, Dār al-Bashāʾir al-Islāmiyya, 1424, II, p. 234.

23. Before he died, the Prophet was to tell his wife, ʿĀʾisha: 'Had your people not been unbelievers in the recent past (i.e. had they not only recently accepted Islam), I would have demolished the Kaʿba and rebuilt it on the foundations of Ibrāhīm; for when the Quraysh rebuilt it, they reduced it, and I would also have built [a door] in the rear.' Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Ḥajj*, *Bāb Naqḍ al-Kaʿba wa-bināʾuhā*.

24. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Īmān*, *Bāb Badʾ al-waḥy ilā Rasūl Allāh ṣallā Allāh ʿalayh wa-sallam*; al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ Muslim*, II, p. 197.

25. Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb Badʾ al-waḥy*, *Bāb Kayfa kāna badʾ al-waḥy*; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Īmān*, *Bāb Badʾ al-waḥy ilā Rasūl Allāh ṣallā Allāh ʿalayh wa-sallam*.

Angel came to him during his retreat and cried: 'Recite!' 'I am not a reciter', he responded. As he himself was to relate later,

> the Angel thereupon embraced me so hard that all my strength was squeezed out. Then he released me and said: '"Recite!" I said: "I am not a reciter". The Angel embraced me again to the limit of my endurance and said a third time: "Recite!" and again I said, "I am not a reciter". Then the Angel whelmed me as before, and then released me, and said: Recite! Recite in the name of thy Lord who created! He created man from a clot of blood. Recite; and thy Lord is the Most Bountiful, He who has taught by the pen, Taught man what he knew not.'[26]

This time he recited after the Angel, for the words were as if written upon his heart, but now he was seized with horror. He fled the cave. When he was halfway down the slope, he heard a voice saying, 'O Muḥammad, you are the Messenger of Allāh and I am Jibrīl.' He looked up to see the Angel's presence filling the entire horizon. The Angel repeated, 'O Muḥammad, you are the Messenger of Allāh and I am Jibrīl.'[27] He stood where he was, gazing at the Angel, seeing the Angel whichever way he turned. Finally the Angel left and the Prophet descended the mountain.

Shivering when he entered his home, he said, 'Cover me! Cover me!' His wife, deeply alarmed to see him, quickly brought him a cloak. She reassured him when he told her what had happened and that he feared for his life. Then she recounted what had happened to her old, blind cousin, Waraqa b. Nawfal, who had studied earlier scriptures. Waraqa said, 'By Him in Whose hand is Waraqa's soul, there has come unto Muḥammad the greatest Nāmūs (a term denoting the angel of revelation, Jibrīl), the same that had come to Mūsā; verily, Muḥammad is the Prophet of this people.' Khadīja returned to her husband and gave him Waraqa's assurances.[28] Sometime later, having finished his retreat, the Prophet met Waraqa while the latter was sitting in the Mosque. Waraqa inquired about the encounter with the Angel and, after hearing the details firsthand, repeated what he had said to Khadīja, adding, 'You will be called a liar and ill-treated, and they will cast you out and make war upon you; and, verily, if I live to see that day, I will help His cause.' Then, leaning forward, he kissed the forehead of the Prophet.[29]

After the first revelation a period of silence ensued. There are varying reports in the Islamic sources about its length: some claim it to have been a few days, others mention three years,[30] but there is unanimity that it caused

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26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.*

28. Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb Bad' al-waḥy*; Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-bārī*, I, p. 22.

29. Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīra*, I, p. 121.

30. Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-ʿAsqalānī Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-bārī*, ed. Muḥammad Fuʾād ʿAbd al-Bāqī and Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb, 14 vols., Cairo, Dār al-Rayyān, 1407/1987, VIII, p. 710.

the Prophet great distress, for he feared that God was displeased with him.[31] When the revelation resumed, the first five verses of Q LXXIV were revealed: 'O you enveloped in your mantle, arise and warn, and magnify your Lord, and purify your clothes, and shun [all] defilement.' Another early *sūra* of this period reassures the Prophet and commands him to proclaim the message of Islam:

> By the morning brightness, and by the night when it is still, your Lord has not forsaken you, nor does He hate you, and the last shall be better for thee than the first, and your Lord shall give abundantly to you, and you shall be satisfied. Did He not find you an orphan and sheltered you; and found you astray and guided you, and found you needy and enriched you? So for the orphan, oppress him not, and for the beggar, repel him not, and for the bountiful grace of your Lord, proclaim it! (XCIII)

The first three years

The first to accept the message of Islam were the members of the Prophet's household: his wife, Khadīja; his ten-year-old cousin, ʿAlī, who lived with them; and Zayd b. Ḥāritha, his adopted son. Beyond the immediate household of the Prophet, the first person to respond to his call was his friend Abū Bakr of the clan of Taym, who was a respectable merchant well-known for his acuity in dream interpretation. Abū Bakr believed in the veracity of the Prophet's calling and it was through him that certain others heard about the coming of the new prophet. These included a distant kinsman of the Prophet's mother, ʿAbd ʿAmr, whose pagan name (meaning 'the slave of ʿAmr') the Prophet changed to ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (meaning 'the slave of the Most Merciful').

This period of secret preaching lasted about three years. During this time, about forty persons are said to have accepted the message of Islam. Some of them were influential and rich men from various clans of the Quraysh, but the majority were impoverished and slaves who were being harshly treated by their owners. These early believers included ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān, the wealthy son of the Umayyad branch of the clan of ʿAbd Shams; Ṭalḥa, a cousin of Abū Bakr; ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd; the Prophet's cousin Zubayr; Saʿd b. Abī Waqqāṣ; the Abyssinian slave Bilāl; Abū ʿUbayda ʿĀmir b. al-Jarrāḥ; Bū Salma b. ʿAbd al-Asad; Arqam b. Arqam; ʿUthmān b.

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31. This is also supported by a tradition in al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Tafsīr*, *Bāb wa-l-rujza fa-ahjur*. Other sources mention Q LXVIII as the second *sūra* in order of revelation; see al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, Type 7. Al-Suyūṭī quotes a *qaṣīda* by al-Burhān al-Jaʿbarī in which he lists, in order of revelation, all the 86 *sūra*s revealed in Mecca as well as the remaining 28 in Medina.

Maẓʿūn and his two brothers, Qudāma and ʿAbd Allāh; ʿUbayda b. Ḥārith b. Muṭṭalib b. ʿAbd Manāf; Saʿīd b. Zayd and his wife, Fāṭima bint al-Khaṭṭāb; and Khabbāb b. Arat.[32]

Among the many remarkable recorded events of these early days of Islam is the conversion of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd, a youth who had just entered manhood. He was a confederate of Banū Zuhra and met the Prophet and Abū Bakr as he was pasturing the flocks of ʿUqba ibn Abī Muʿayṭ. The Prophet asked him if he had any milk to give them to drink. When he refused, explaining that the flocks were not his but merely entrusted to his care, the Prophet asked if he had a young ewe that had never been bred. He said yes, and brought her to them. The Prophet tethered her, put his hand to her udder, and prayed, whereupon the udder swelled with milk. Abū Bakr brought a stone with a cavity for use as a cup. The Prophet milked into it, and they all drank. Then he said to the udder: 'Dry', and it dried.[33] A few days later, ʿAbd Allāh went to the Prophet and entered Islam. He was gifted with an exceptional memory and would commit to memory every new revelation, becoming one of the most authoritative reciters of the Qurʾān.

The revelations continued apace while these initial conversions were taking place. The souls of the small community of believers shook with the power of the Qurʾānic verses, which spoke of the ephemeral quality of earthly life and invited them to an everlasting life in the Hereafter, following the Resurrection and the Last Judgment. The revelations mentioning the Glory of God, His Infinite Mercy, His absolute Oneness, Wisdom, Goodness, Bounty and Power filled their hearts with joy, hope, and fear, exalted spiritual states deeply intensified by the marvellous eloquence of the language of the Qurʾān. One day Jibrīl came to the Prophet while he was in retreat and taught him the method of ablution and instructed him in ritual prayer. The ritual prayer established a formal mode of worship, and was later instituted as one of the five pillars of Islam (alongside formal testimony of faith, fasting the month of Ramadan, paying an alms-tax, and pilgrimage to the Kaʿba).

Some of these early believers had known each other previously; others met for the first time as brethren in faith. The small community started to take distinctive form as their spiritual transformations produced visible changes in their personal and social behaviour. They now greeted each other with the

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32. Many of these early converts would later become prominent members of the Muslim community. See further below, as well as the chapter on the Medinan Period in this volume. See also Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīra*, I, p. 143.

33. Abu-l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Abi-l-Karam Muḥammad al-Jazarī ʿIzz al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-ghāba fī maʿrifat al-ṣaḥāba*, ed. ʿĀdil al-Rifāʿī, 8 vols., Beirut, Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1417/1996, III, p. 381 §3182.

greetings taught to the Prophet by Jibrīl (*as-salāmu ʿalaykum,* peace be upon you) and their mutual interactions were full of Divine remembrance and thanksgiving (e.g., *al-ḥamdu Lillāh*, praise be to Allāh).

The call to Islam

One day the Prophet received revelation commanding him to 'warn your family who are your nearest of kin' (XXVI.214). He asked his cousin ʿAlī to prepare a meal and invite the leading men of his clan, the Banū Hāshim. About forty men gathered and partook, but before the Prophet could address them, his uncle Abū Lahab announced to everyone that Muḥammad had put a spell on them and they must quickly disperse. They left without listening to what the Prophet had to say. The next day, the Prophet asked ʿAlī to again prepare a meal and this time he addressed them: 'O sons of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, I know of no Arab who has come to his people with a nobler message than mine. I bring you the best of this world and the next. God has commanded me to call you unto Him. Which of you, then, will help me in this, and be my brother, my executor and my successor amongst you?'

When no one spoke, ʿAlī said: 'O Prophet of Allāh, I will be your helper in this'. The men dispersed, laughing and taunting Abū Ṭālib to follow his young son's commands. Abū Ṭālib was not hostile to the message of Islam and promised to help the Prophet, but he himself was not willing to forsake the religion of his forefathers.

A few days later, the Prophet climbed to the summit of Ṣafā, the small hill near the Kaʿba, and called the Qurayshite clans by name until they gathered around him: 'O sons of Fahr, O sons of ʿAdī! If I were to tell you that an army of horsemen on the other side of this mountain is about to attack you, would you believe me?' They replied in concert, 'Yes, we affirm your honesty, we have never experienced anything but truthfulness from you.' He then said to them: 'I have been sent to forewarn you of a great punishment; protect yourself from the Fire'.

The Prophet's uncle, Abū Lahab, said, 'May you perish! Is this for what you have summoned us here?'[34] The Divine response came with the revelation of *sūra* CXI: 'Perish the two hands of Abū Lahab and perish he! His wealth and what he has earned shall avail him naught, Soon shall he burn in a flaming fire; and his wife, too, bearer of slander. Round her neck shall be a halter of twisted palm-fibre'.

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34. Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb Tafsīr al-Qurʾān, Bāb wa-andhir ʿashīratak al-aqrabīn*; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Īmān, Bāb fī qawlihi taʿālā: wa-andhir ʿashīratak al-aqrabīn*. Also, see *Tafsīr*s of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn ʿAṭiyya, and al-Baghawī, *sub* Q XXVI.214.

Opposition to the message of Islam

It took some time before the Quraysh realized that if the new message was accepted, their idols as well as their rites and customs would have no place in society. Their first response was to seek to persuade the Prophet to stop proclaiming his message against their idols. To this end they approached his uncle, Abū Ṭālib, who listened to them and put them off diplomatically. The Prophet continued to openly proclaim the message of Islam.[35] A few weeks later, they made another, more formal attempt and sent a delegation to Abū Ṭālib. 'O Abū Ṭālib', they said, 'we hold you in honour and high esteem and we had asked you to restrain your brother's son, but you have not done so. By God, we will not suffer our fathers to be insulted, our ways scoffed at, and our gods reviled. Either make him desist, or we will fight you both.'[36]

This time, Abū Ṭālib called the Prophet and said, 'O son of my brother, spare me and spare thyself; do not put such a burden upon me that I cannot bear.' The Prophet responded, 'By Allāh, if they put the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left on condition that I abandon this course before He has made it victorious or I have perished in the course, I would not abandon it.'[37] The Prophet rose to leave his uncle in a state of distress, but Abū Ṭālib called him back and said, 'O son of my brother, go and do as you wish, by God, I will never forsake you'.

The chiefs of the Quraysh then met to discuss further measures, because the pilgrimage season was approaching and they feared that the message would reach the hundreds of pilgrims who normally came to Mecca then. Everything they had heard of the Qur'ān so far was enough to convince them of the power of its message, but they could not agree on how to respond. Some proposed that the Prophet be called a poet; others proposed that he be called a sorcerer; still others wanted to denounce him as a soothsayer and a madman. Finally, they asked Walīd son of Mughīra, the powerful chieftain of Makhzūm, what they should do. Having considered the matter, he proposed that they call the Prophet a sorcerer who could drive a rift between a man and his father and brother, between a man and his wife—a trait for which sorcerers were notorious. Commentators agree that Q LXXIV.18–25 refers to Walīd and his disdainful counsel: 'Indeed, he thought and deliberated; Perish he, how he decided! Again, perish he, how he decided! Then he contemplated. Then he frowned and scowled. Then he turned his back in disdain and said this is nothing but the speech of a man.'[38]

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35. Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, I, p. 265.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Cf. Tafsīr*s of Ibn ʿAṭiyya, al-Rāzī, and Ibn Kathīr, *sub* Q XXVI.214.
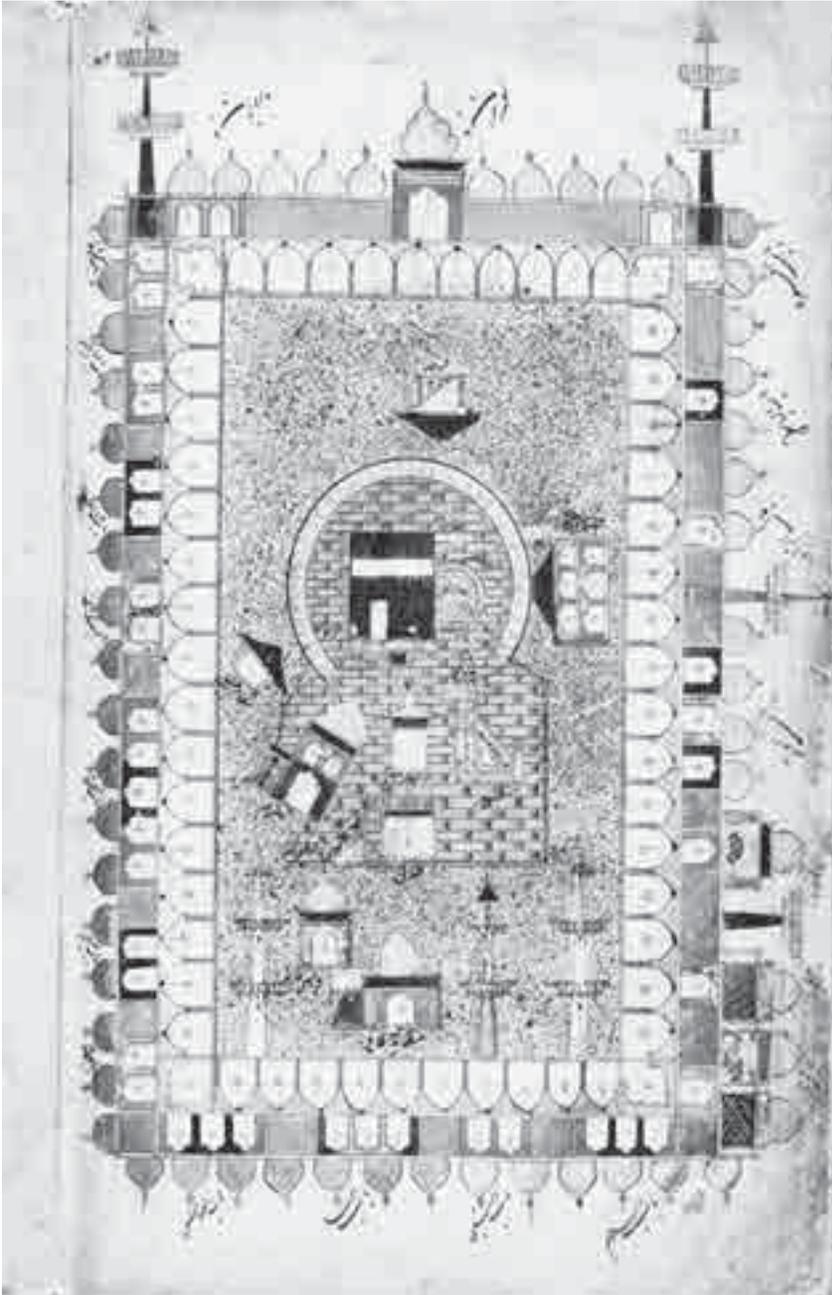
II–1.3   A guide to pilgrimage, sixteenth century
© Nasser Khalili Collection of Islamic Art (Nour Foundation)

The pilgrimage season in this fourth year after the commencement of the prophetic mission was thus marked by unusual activity: pilgrims arriving from far and wide were approached by designated men of the Quraysh warning of a dangerous sorcerer they must avoid during their stay in Mecca. In some cases, this had the opposite effect; and in all cases, it meant that news of what the Prophet was proclaiming spread rapidly among the pilgrims and their tribes, when they returned home. One of two notable cases was the conversion of Abū Dharr of the tribe Ghifār, who lived by the Red Sea north-west of Mecca and was notorious for their brigandry. Abū Dharr had already heard about the Prophet from his brother Unays, who had visited Mecca and become acquainted with Muḥammad's reception among his own tribe. Abū Dharr found the Prophet in the courtyard of the Kaʿba complex and asked him to recite some of the revelation he had received. When the Prophet recited a *sūra* to him, he responded directly, 'I testify there is no god but Allāh and Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh!' The Prophet looked at him and asked, 'Who are your people?' When Abū Dharr told him his notorious tribe's name, he said in amazement, 'Indeed Allāh guides whom He wills!' Abū Dharr returned to his people and started to spread the message of Islam.

A second conversion of note during this time was to introduce Islam to the westerly tribe of Banū Daws through one of their poets, Ṭufayl, who was thoroughly warned by the men of Quraysh against listening to the Prophet. Ṭufayl later recalled how he heeded the warning, plugging his ears with cotton before entering the courtyard where he found the Prophet reciting the Qurʾān. Despite his stuffing, some of its verses reached his ears. 'God would not have it', he said, 'but that He should make me hear something of what was recited, and what I heard was beautiful words. So I said to myself: I am a man of insight, a poet, and not ignorant of the difference between the fair and the foul. Why then should I not hear what this man is saying? If it be fair I will accept it, and if foul, reject it. I stayed until the Prophet went away, whereupon I followed him and when he entered his house I entered it upon his heels and said: "O Muḥammad! Your people have told me this and that and they so frightened me about your state that I stuffed mine ears lest I should hear your speech. God would not have it but that He should make me hear you. So tell me, in truth, who are you?"' The Prophet explained Islam to him and recited some verses to him and Ṭufayl made his declaration of faith.[39]

Persecution and hostilities intensify

The hostility of the Quraysh to the Prophet and the message of Islam was both personal and doctrinal. The former was rooted in three broad sources:

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39. Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-ghāba*, III, p. 77 §2613.

tribal allegiances and rivalries exacerbated the prejudice against believing that a clansman like themselves could be a prophet; leaders' personal ambitions saw his claim to prophethood to threaten their political and economic interests; and uncritical adherence to the ways of their forefathers required they refuse anything that challenged tradition. Due to these three elements, the Prophet was reviled as a soothsayer, a liar (XXXVIII.4), a man possessed (XV.6). Denying his claim of receiving revelation, they mockingly asked what kind of Messenger of God was he, who 'eats food and walks in the marketplaces', and that an angel was not 'sent down to him, to be a warner with him' (XXV.7). To this, the Revelation responded: 'We never sent before you any messengers but lo! they verily ate food and walked in the market places' (XXV.20). They also claimed that the message of the Qurʾān was forged: 'Naught is this but a lie which he has forged, and others have helped him at it' (XXV.4). The Qurʾān responded: 'In truth it is they who have put forward an iniquity and a falsehood. And they say: "Tales of the ancients, which he has caused to be written: and they are dictated before him morning and evening." Say: "The (Qurʾān) was sent down by Him who knows the mystery [that is] in the heavens and the earth: verily He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful"' (XXV.5–6).[40] The Prophet was often reminded of his high station as a warner to his people: 'Was it a wonder to the people that We revealed to a man from among them: "Warn the people, and give thou good tidings to the believers that they have a sure footing with their Lord?". '

In doctrinal matters, most of the pagan opposition was directed against the Qurʾānic messages of *tawḥīd* (the Unicity of God) and Resurrection. The former is succinctly expressed in the *Sūra* of Sincerity (*Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*, Q CXII), which enjoins the Prophet to claim: 'Say: He, Allāh, is One. Allāh, the Eternally Self-Sufficient (*al-Ṣamad*). He begets not, nor is begotten. And none is like Him.' Expounding this absolute truth, the Sufi exegete Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) was to point out that this chapter explains, in condensed form and chiefly by negation, the transcendence of Divine unity, 'refuting in four verses all [forms of] disbelief (*kufr*) and fancies (*ahwāʾ*). It is named "the *Sūra* of Sincerity" because it sweeps away all impurities foreign to the transcendence (*tanzīh*) of Allāh, Exalted is He, above all that is not fitting for Him'.[41] The Qurʾānic description of God as Absolutely Unique, One, and incomparable (II.163; IV.171; V.73; VI.19; XVI.22; XVIII.110; XXI.107; XLI.6; XLII.11; CXII.4), without need of any partner or helper (II.22, 165; XIV.30; XXXIV.33; XXXIX.8; XLI.9) and unlike anything else (XLII.11), directly contradicted the Qurayshite obeisance to multiple deities, each with

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40. Also see VI.25; VIII.31; X.38; XI.13, 35; XVI.24, 83; XXVII.68; XLVI.8–9, 17; LII.33; LXVIII.15; LXXXIII.13.

41. Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr*, *sub* Q CXII.

his or her own specific roles. The message of Islam entailed nullification of their pagan customs.

The revelation repeatedly reminded everyone the true nature of reality of life in this world and what awaited them in the Hereafter: that this life is short; every living soul has to taste death; there is Resurrection after death—an awe-filled event, 'when the sun shall be darkened and the stars fall; and when mountains move, and when she-camels with mature fetuses are abandoned; and when the wild beasts are herded together; and when the seas boil; and when kindred spirits are united; and when the infant-girl buried alive shall be asked for what sin she was slain; and when the deed-sheets are unrolled and when the sky is skinned off; and when Hell is ignited and when the Garden is brought near—then every soul shall know what it had prepared' (LXXXI.1–14). For a people oblivious of higher truths and engrossed in the pleasures and sorrows of this world, the concepts of resurrection and rigorous accountability required they reform their ways of life and prepare for the day when one would wish, if one could, to buy one's release with an 'earthful of gold' (III.91; also see V.36; X.54; XIII.18; XXXIX.47; LVII.15; LXX.11).

The Qur'ān also directly responded to their objections based on the seeming impossiblity of quickening of decayed bones: 'When we are bones and crumbled particles, will we [truly] be resurrected as a new creation?' (XVII.49). Several other verses (like XVII.98; XXIII.35, 82; XXXVI.78; XXXVII.16, 53; LVI.47, and LXXIX.11) quote and respond to other aspects of the disbelief of those unwilling to acknowledge the origin of the created order in a Transcendent, Omnipotent, and Omniscient Creator. The Qur'ān rebukes this mocking behaviour and the Prophet is commanded to 'Say: "Be you stones or iron, or any [other] created matter which, in your hearts, appears yet harder…,"' the implication in context being 'you nonetheless will be resurrected'. The argument of the disbelievers is extended: 'Then they ask: who shall bring us back [to life]?' to the Divine response: 'The One who brought you into being in the first place. Then they shake their heads at thee [O Prophet] and ask: "When shall this be?" Say: "It may well be soon"' (XVII.50–1).

As the Quraysh failed to prevent the spread of Islam, they gathered one more time to find new ways to curtail the ever-increasing circle of believers. One of the most vociferous among them was the nephew of the aforementioned elderly Walīd, the Makhzūmite ʿAmr, whose family and friends called him by the honorific title of Abu-l-Ḥakam ('the father of wisdom'). He was rich, feared, conceited, and ruthless, already acting as though he had succeeded his uncle as leader of the clan. The Muslims would instead call him Abū Jahl ('the father of ignorance'), for his evil character. He would sit by the Kaʿba with his friends and insult the Prophet with his vile remarks. On one occasion, when the Prophet was praying in the

courtyard of the Mosque, Abū Jahl and some of his friends decided to take matters further. One of them (ʿUqba b. Abī Muʿayṭ) brought the foul innards of a camel and cast them onto the back of the Prophet while he was prostrating. The Prophet remained in that position until his daughter Fāṭima removed them.

On yet another occasion, while the Prophet was making rounds of the ancient House of God, some of the chieftains of Quraysh who were sitting around the Kaʿba started to taunt him as he passed by them, raising their voices and uttering slanderous calumnies against him. When they raised their voices against him the third time, he stopped and said, 'Listen, O men of Quraysh! Verily by Him who holds my soul in His Hand, I bring you slaughter!' His words silenced them at once, as if they had suddenly understood the reality of their disbelief; no one moved, no one said a word. As the Prophet stood there, looking at them, one of them finally broke the silence and said, 'Go on, O Abu-l-Qāsim, by God, you have never said anything unreasonable'.[42] This respite did not last, and the Quraysh soon reverted to their hostile acts against the Prophet as well as other Muslims. Those who were poor or without the protection of a wealthy and influential person faced the worst. Bilāl, the Abyssinian slave of Umayya, then the chief of the Jumaḥ clan, was often taken out in the heat of noon to be pinned to the ground with a large rock on his chest, commanded to renounce his religion and instead to worship the two Qurayshite goddesses al-Lāt and al-ʿUzzā. Enduring the hardship, Bilāl would respond by reaffirming his belief: 'One, One'.

When Abū Bakr saw this, he remonstrated against Umayya, asking him, 'Do you have no fear of God, that you treat this poor fellow like this?' 'You are the one who has corrupted him, so save him, if you can', Umayya responded. Abū Bakr then made a deal with Umayya and had him free Bilāl in exchange for another slave. Abū Bakr set free six other slaves who were being mistreated by their masters because of their acceptance of Islam.

The Meccan crucible

For most Meccans, the coming of the Prophet and the conversion of a small number of mostly uninfluential men and women represented a disruption in the general pattern of their lives. Mecca and its environs had a distinct and complex web of family and tribal relations, steeped in their peculiar understanding of what constituted virtue and vice. The rich vied for recognition in their generosity and courage, while the poor sought their protection and material and moral support. Generosity in their desert environment was equated with unrestrained spending, often under the influence of intoxicants;

42. Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīra*, I, p. 220.

bravery meant living and dying for one's word given as promise. They felt threatened by the Qurʾānic revelation because it constantly spoke of the life of the Hereafter as infinitely superior to the life of this world. While its powerful verses reminded listeners of the ephemeral nature of life of this world, the Qurʾān also redefined good and evil, virtue and vice: God-wariness was one of the greatest virtues and associating equals with Him was the greatest evil. The Quraysh recognized Allāh as supreme God but they had, over time, become firmly devoted to their idols, whom they considered His partners and through whom they purportedly received good and bad. The Qurʾān completely rejected these idols, and this incensed them. Furthermore, they were firmly convinced that there is nothing beyond the life of this world; they laughed at the very idea of resurrection. One of them once came to the Prophet with an old and decaying bone in his hand and said, swinging its dust in the air, 'O Muḥammad, who will bring this back to life when it has decayed?' The Prophet said: 'Indeed, Allāh will resurrect it; and He will cause you to die and He will resurrect you and He will then cast you into the Hell Fire'.[43]

The Qurʾānic response to such disbelief was summed up in the following verses: 'Does man not see that We created him of a sperm-drop? And yet he is flagrantly contentious and coins for Us a likeness, forgetting his own creation. He says, "Who would give life to bones when they have crumbled to dust?" Say: He who brought them to life in the first instance will bring them back to life again! And He has full knowledge of every kind of creation' (XXXVI.77–9). In another passage, the fate of those who sarcastically ask about resurrection after their bones have crumbled is vividly portrayed through a description of 'chosen servants of Allāh' in Paradise: 'Then some of them will turn to others, and they will question each other. One of them will say: "Behold, I had a close companion [in my worldly life], who was wont to ask me, 'Why, are you really one of those who believe it to be true that after we have died and have become mere dust and bones we shall be brought to judgment?'" [Another] will say: "Do you wish to know [where that companion is now]?" Then he will look down and find him (his one-time close companion) in the depths of Hell, and will say: "By Allāh, you almost ruined me. Had it not been for my Sustainer's favour, I would surely be among those who have been mustered [in Hell]'" (XXXVII.50–7).

The Divine message being revealed in those early years brought warnings and responses for the disbelievers, but also brought joy and hope for those who believed in it: 'Verily those who say: "Our Lord is God," and who then follow His path, on them descend the Angels saying: "Fear not nor grieve, but hearken to good tidings of the Paradise which you are promised. We are your protecting friends in this worldly life, and in the Hereafter wherein you shall

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43. This event is variously ascribed to Ubayy b. Khalaf and al-ʿĀṣ b. Wāʾil al-Sahmī; see al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr, sub* Q XXXVI.78.

be given that which your souls long for, that which you pray for, in bounty from Him who is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful"' (XLI.30–2). The sight of the believers was fixed on the Hereafter and on seeking the pleasure of their Lord. The promise of Paradise and the life of immortality in the Garden, where 'all that they shall desire, for ever and ever' was a true promise— 'a promise that your Lord has bound Himself to fulfil' (XXV.15–16).

Yet nothing convinced the disbelieving majority, which continuously asked for miracles as proof. Among the manifest signs they demanded were that an angel testify before them that Muḥammad was indeed a prophet, or for him to go up to heaven and return with a sign. The greatest miracle granted to the Prophet was the Qurʾān itself, which declares, in a number of self-referential verses, that it has been revealed by Allāh, who is variously described as 'the Lord and Cherisher of the Universe' (*Rabb al-ʿālamīn*) (XXXII.2; LVI.80; LXIX.43); 'the Mighty, the Most Merciful' (*al-ʿAzīz al-Raḥīm*) (XXXVI.5); 'the Mighty, the Most Wise' (*al-ʿAzīz al-Ḥakīm*) (XXXIX.1); 'the Mighty, the Omniscient' (*al-ʿAzīz al-ʿAlīm*) (XL.2); and 'the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful' (*al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*) (XLI.2). It even indicates its own coherence, asking: 'Do they not reflect on the Qurʾān? Had it been from any other than Allāh, they would have found in it many an inner contradiction' (IV.82). *Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* (CXII.1–4) enjoins the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, to proclaim: 'Say: He, Allāh, is One. Allāh, the Eternally Self-Sufficient (*al-Ṣamad*). He begets not, nor is begotten. And none is like Him'.

The disbelievers' demand for a miracle was also met when they asked the Prophet to split the full moon above while they and Muslims were around the Prophet. No sooner had they demanded it than the full moon broke into halves, each drawing away from the other until they saw one half shining brightly on one side of a mountain and the other on the other side. 'Bear witness!' the Prophet said. But those who had made the demand rejected the miracle as mere magic, saying that he had cast a spell over them.[44]

One day, while the Prophet was sitting near the Ṣafā entrance of the Sanctuary, Abū Jahl came to him and verbally abused him in the worst manner. He then went to boast to the gathering of the Quraysh, assembled in the Ḥijr by the Kaʿba, as the Prophet returned to his home, dismayed by the incident. Just then, the Prophet's uncle Ḥamza entered the Sanctuary after returning from a hunting trip. As he was about to make his customary rounds of the House, he was approached by a freedwoman of the household of the now-deceased ʿAbd Allāh ibn Judʿān, the man in whose house the Prophet had witnessed the chivalric pact some twenty years earlier. Addressing Ḥamza by his *kunya*, she said, 'O Abū ʿUmāra, if only you had seen how your brother's

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44. This was later mentioned in *Sūrat al-Qamar*: 'The Hour has drawn nigh: the moon is split. Yet if they see a sign they turn away, and they say "A continuous magic!"' See *Tafsīr*s of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn ʿAṭiyya, and al-Bayḍāwī on Q LIV.1–3.

son was treated by Abu-l-Ḥakam!' She then recounted to Ḥamza every word she had heard from her house nearby. Incensed, Ḥamza went straight to where Abū Jahl was sitting in the company of his friends; standing over him, he raised his bow and brought it down upon his back with all his force. 'Will you insult him so!' he said. 'Now that I myself am of his religion, and now that I proclaim what I proclaim? Come, strike me blow for blow, if you dare'. Abū Jahl desisted, even though some of the Makhzūmites present rose to their feet to help him against Ḥamza. He said, 'Let Abū ʿUmāra be, for by God I reviled his brother's son with an ugly reviling'.

The conversion of Ḥamza brought strength to the believers, for the Quraysh then knew they could not mistreat the Prophet without serious consequences. They were also aware that despite their opposition, Islam was slowly spreading. They decided to make some conciliatory efforts, sending ʿUtba ibn Rabīʿa to the Prophet with certain offers. ʿUtba respectfully addressed the Prophet: 'Son of my brother', he said, 'you are of a noble tribe, holding a place of honour because of your lineage, but now you have brought your people discord and rift; you have spoken against their religion, their gods, their way of life, and called your forefathers infidels. So hear what I propose, and see if any of it be acceptable to you. If it be wealth that you seek, we will put together a fortune for you from our various properties to make you the richest man among us; if it is honour that you seek, we will make you our chieftain and we will make no decision without your consent; if you desire kingship, we will make you our king; and if you cannot free yourself of the one among the jinn who visits you, we will find you a physician and spend our wealth until you are cured.'[45]

When he finished speaking, the Prophet asked if he would listen to him in turn. When ʿUtba responded in the affirmative, he recited a few verses of the Qurʾān, which so affected ʿUtba that he sat there affixed, listening to the verses which spoke of the creation of the heavens and the earth; of the appointment of the prophets to the Peoples of Old who, having resisted them, had been destroyed and doomed to Hell; of the believers, promised a life of bliss in the Hereafter; and of the Signs of God apparent in the coming and going of the day and the night, the alternation of the sun and moon: 'And of His signs are the night and the day and the sun and the moon. Bow not down in adoration unto the sun nor unto the moon, but bow down in adoration unto God, their Creator, if Him indeed you worship' (XLI.37). After reciting this verse, the Prophet prostrated[46] and then said to him: 'You have heard what you have heard, O Abu-l-Walīd, and all is now between you and that'.[47]

45. Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, I, p. 207.
46. This verse is one of the fourteen 'verses of prostration' in the Qurʾān, following which anyone reciting or hearing it prostrates. (The Shāfiʿī School includes a fifteenth such verse at Q XXII.77).
47. Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, I, p. 208.

'Utba returned to his companions, shaken. When they saw him, they asked, 'What has befallen you, O Abu-l-Walīd?' 'I have heard an utterance the like of which I have never yet heard', he replied. 'It is not poetry, by God, neither is it sorcery nor soothsaying. Men of Quraysh, listen to me and do as I say. Come not between this man and what he is about, but let him be, for by God the words that I have heard from him will be received as great tidings. If the Arabs strike him down you will be rid of him at the hands of others, and if he overcomes the Arabs, then his sovereignty will be your sovereignty and his might will be your might, and you will be the most fortunate of men.' The Quraysh, however, mocked him saying: 'He has put a spell on you with his words'. 'I have given you my opinion', he responded, 'so do what you see as the best'.[48] Yet 'Utba himself did not further respond to the call of Islam.

The Quraysh then made another attempt. They repeated their offers to the Prophet, who responded, 'I am neither possessed, nor seek honour amongst you, nor kingship over you. Allāh has sent me to you as a messenger and revealed to me a Book and commanded me that I should be for you a bringer of good tidings and a warner. So, I have conveyed to you the message of my Lord, and I have given you good counsel. If you accept from me what I have brought you, that is your good fortune in this world and the next; but if you reject what I have brought, then will I patiently await the judgment of God between us.'

Their response was to again ask the Prophet to perform miracles so that they would be assured of his message. 'Ask your Lord to remove from us these mountains which hem us round and to flatten for us our land and to make rivers flow through it even as the rivers of Syria and Iraq; and to raise for us some of our forefathers, Quṣayy amongst them, that we may ask them if what you say is true or false. Or if you will not do these things for us, then ask your God favours for yourself only: ask your God to appoint to you an Angel who shall confirm your words and give us the lie. And ask Him to bestow on you gardens and palaces and treasures of gold and silver, that we may know how well you stand with your Lord.'

But the Prophet responded, 'I am not one to ask of my Lord such things, nor was I sent for that, but God has sent me to warn and give glad tidings'. The Qurayshites, in their arrogance, mocked, 'Then bring down the sky in pieces on our heads!' in scornful reference to the already revealed verse: 'If We will, We shall make the earth gape and swallow them, or make fall the firmament in pieces upon them' (XXXIV.9). 'That is for God to decide', the Prophet said. 'If He will, He will do it'. They then accused him of reciting to them a text of merely human provenance, and said, 'We swear by God that we will not leave you in peace until we destroy you or you destroy us'.[49]

48. *Ibid.*
49. *Ibid.*, I, pp. 197–8.

During these days of open hostility, the need for support from the leaders of the Quraysh became urgent, that their aid might shield the nascent Muslim community from the pagans' persecution. The Prophet hoped some of the Qurayshite leaders would themselves become receptive to the message of the Qur'ān, as those who had so far accepted Islam were neither influential nor feared by those who were ruthlessly bent on persecuting the young, poor, and slave converts. On one occasion, the Prophet found Walīd, the chieftain of Makhzūm, sitting alone. While he was deep in conversation with him, a blind man who had recently entered Islam came and, interrupting their conversation, asked the Prophet to recite to him some of the Qur'ān. The Prophet advised him to wait, but he insisted and when the conversation with Walīd was so disrupted, the Prophet frowned and turned away. This incident caused Divine rebuke, Jibrīl brought a new *sūra*, which started abruptly with a reference to the Prophet's action: 'He frowned and turned away, because the blind man came to him. As to him who suffices unto himself, with him you are engrossed, yet it is not your concern if [he] purifies himself or not. But as for him who came unto you in earnest and in fear of God, from him you drew away' (LXXX.1–10).

There was no formally accepted leader of the Quraysh at that time, but recognition of leadership was implicit in the roles certain individuals had carved out for themselves. Tribal rivalries ran deep, in the context of which we might understand Abū Jahl's invective, 'We and the sons of ʿAbd al-Manāf have vied for honour. They have fed the poor and so have we; they have carried the burden of others, and so have we; they have given, and we have given, and thus we have been running equal, knee to knee, like two mares in a race, but now they say: "One of our men is a Prophet; Revelations come to him from Heaven!" How shall we attain to the like of this? By God, we will never believe in him, never admit him to be a speaker of truth.'[50]

As time passed, the leaders of the Quraysh became more rigid and hostile toward the Prophet. His uncle Abū Lahab and his uncle's wife, Umm Jamīl, compelled their two sons to break off their betrothals to the two daughters of the Prophet, Ruqayya and Umm Kulthūm. Thereafter, ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān asked for the hand of Ruqayya, and was gladly accepted as a son-in-law by the Prophet. This marriage brought happiness in a time of persecution.

Beyond Mecca

Despite their haughty gestures and their pride in their idols, the Quraysh admitted the superiority of the Jews in matters of religion through their interactions with the three Jewish tribes who lived in the northern town of Yathrib, some five

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50. Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, I, p. 190.

hundred kilometres from Mecca. They thus decided to consult the Jewish rabbis about the Prophet, agreeing in one of their regular assemblies to send two envoys to Yathrib. The rabbis told the envoys to ask the Prophet three questions and return with the answers. The first of the three questions regarded some young men of ages past who had left their people to take refuge in a cave; the second question concerned a traveler who had reached the far ends of the earth, east and west; and the third question asked after the Spirit (*rūḥ*).

When the Meccans asked the Prophet these questions, he replied, 'I will tell you tomorrow', hoping God would reveal the answers to him. But no revelation came, and the Prophet grew distressed. When they came the next day, the Prophet put them off for one more day. This went on, day after day, for fifteen nights, according to some reports. With each passing day, the Quraysh grew bolder in their taunts. Finally, the silence broke and Jibrīl came with revelation, advising the Prophet, 'And say not of anything: verily I shall do that tomorrow, except you say: if God wills' (XVIII.23–4), and providing answers to all three questions. The youths who took refuge in a cave were the young men (their exact number known to God alone) who remained faithful to the worship of the One God when their idolatrous people were persecuting them. They were miraculously put to sleep for over 300 years, as the rabbis knew when they asked, but the revelation provided further details about their appearance and how their faithful dog lay with his front paws stretched over the cave's threshold. The revelation responded to the second question by naming the great traveler Dhū al-Qarnayn ('he of the two horns') and mentioning, in addition to his journeys east and west, a third journey to a place between two mountains whose inhabitants requested him to make a barrier between them and Gog and Magog, who would devastate their land. The revelation proclaimed that God gave Dhū al-Qarnayn the wisdom and power to build a wall by which to confine them until a Divinely appointed day (XVIII.93–8). As for the Spirit, the revelation responded, 'They ask you about the Spirit. Say: the Spirit proceeds by the command of my Lord; and you have not been given knowledge, but only a little' (XVII.85).

When the rabbis received these answers, they recognized the truthfulness of the Prophet but were evasive in openly confirming it. The public questions and answers, meanwhile, brought news of the new prophet to the tribes who lived around Yathrib. As for the leaders of the Quraysh, they had no intention of accepting the truth even if the rabbis had openly confirmed it. Instead, they intensified their persecution of the believers.

Hijra to Abyssinia

One day the Prophet said to his gathered companions, 'If you were to go to the land of the Abyssinians, you would find there a king under whom none

suffers wrong. It is a land of sincerity in religion. Until such time as God shall make for you a means of relief from what ye now are suffering.' The Companions started to leave Mecca in small groups, seeking relief from the persecuting Quraysh. The emigrants included ʿUthmān and his wife Ruqayya, Jaʿfar and his wife Asmāʾ, and seventy-nine other adults.[51] They were well received in Abyssinia, but had hardly settled when the leaders of the Quraysh sent ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ and ʿAbd Allāh b. Abī Rabīʿa with gifts for the king and his courtiers, asking him to send back all the Muslims who had come to his land. The envoys first approached the Negus' courtiers, giving them gifts and winning them over. They told them that the refugees were foolish young men and women who had abandoned their religion for a newly invented one, and that they had been sent by the Qurayshite nobles to return them so they could decide how best to deal with them.

ʿAmr and ʿAbd Allāh were welcomed by the Negus and their gifts softened his heart toward them. He heard them out, as supported by the voices of his own courtiers. But he was a God-fearing man and objected to their request: 'By God, those who have sought my protection and made my country their abode and chosen me above all others shall not be betrayed. Instead, I shall summon them and question them concerning what these men say about them, and if it be as they have said, then will I give them back so that they may take them to their own people and deal with them. But if their affair is other than what they have said, then I will be their protector so long as they seek my protection.'[52] The Muslim emigrants consulted among themselves about how best to present their case. They decided to directly tell the King what their Prophet had told them concerning their religion. Umm Salama was to later report what happened on that historic day:

> When we arrived in the court, we found that the Negus had invited his bishops, who had brought with them their sacred books, which they had spread them open round about the throne. The Negus asked: 'What is this religion you have adopted, separate from the religion of your people, and different from my religion and that of any other of the folk that surround us?' The one who responded to the Negus was Jaʿfar b. Abī Ṭālib. He said: 'O King, we were a people steeped in ignorance, worshipping idols, eating unsacrificed carrion, committing abominations; the strong among us oppressed the weak. Thus we were, until God sent us a Messenger from among ourselves—one whose lineage, veracity, and integrity was known to us. He called us unto God, that we should testify to His Oneness and worship Him and renounce all that we and our forefathers had worshipped from the stones and idols; and he commanded us to speak honestly, to fulfil our promises, to respect the ties of kinship and the rights of our neighbours, and to refrain from

51. Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīra*, I, p. 176.
52. *Ibid.*, I, pp. 213–17.

crimes and from bloodshed. So now we worship One God alone, setting naught beside Him, taking as forbidden what He has forbidden and as licit what He has allowed. For these reasons have our people turned against us, and have persecuted us to make us forsake our religion and revert from the worship of One God to the worship of idols. That is why we have come to your country, having chosen you above all others; and we have been happy in your protection, and it is our hope, O King, that here, with you, we shall not suffer wrong.'[53]

The royal interpreters translated all that Jaʿfar said. The Negus then asked if they had with them any Revelation that their Prophet had brought them from God and, when Jaʿfar answered in the affirmative, he asked him to recite it, whereupon Jaʿfar recited XIX.16–21: 'And mention Maryam in the Book, when she withdrew from her people unto a place towards the east, and secluded herself from them; and We sent unto her Our Spirit, and it appeared unto her in the likeness of a perfect man. She said: I take refuge from thee in the Infinitely Good, if any piety thou hast. He said: I am none other than a messenger from your Lord, that I may bestow to you a son most pure. She said: How can there be for me a son, when no man has touched me, nor am I unchaste? He said: Even so shall it be; your Lord says: It is easy for Me. That We may make him a sign for mankind and a mercy from Us; and it is a thing ordained'. The Negus wept until his beard was soaking in tears, and his bishops wept also and the pages of their books became wet; and when it was translated they wept again, and the Negus said: 'This has truly come from the same source as that which Jesus brought.'[54]

Then he turned to the two envoys of Quraysh and said: 'Ye may go, for by God I will not deliver them unto you; they shall not be betrayed.'

But when they had withdrawn from the royal presence, ʿAmr said to his companion: 'Verily, tomorrow I will bring to them a thing that shall tear up this group [of emigrants]. I will tell him that they claim that Jesus the son of Mary was nothing but merely a slave (ʿabd)'. So the next morning he went to the Negus and said: 'O King, they utter an enormous lie about Jesus the son of Mary. Ask them what they say about him'. The Negus sent them word to come to him again and to tell him what they say of Jesus, whereupon they were troubled, for nothing of this kind had ever yet befallen them. They consulted among themselves and they knew that they had no choice but to say what God had revealed. So when they entered the royal presence, and it was said to them: 'What do you say about Jesus, the son of Mary?' Jaʿfar answered: 'We say of him what our Prophet brought unto us, that he is the

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53. Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, I, p. 336. This and the following translation adopted from Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*, Cambridge, Islamic Texts Society, 1996, p. 83–4.
54. *Ibid.*

slave of God and His Messenger and His Spirit and His Word which He cast unto Mary the blessed virgin'. The Negus took up a piece of wood and said: 'Jesus the son of Mary exceeds not what you have said by the length of this stick'. And when the courtiers around him snorted, he added: 'For all your snorting'. Then he turned to Jaʿfar and his companions and said: 'Go your ways, for you are safe in my land. Not for mountains of gold would I harm a single man of you;' and, with a movement of his hand towards the envoys of Quraysh, he said to his attendant: 'Return to these two men their gifts, for I have no use for them.'[55]

ʿUmar enters Islam

The emigration of some seventy Muslims to Abyssinia and the failed attempt of the two envoys to bring them back hardened the hostility of the Quraysh. What incensed them most were the growing rifts in families in which some members had accepted Islam. Almost everyone in Mecca was aware of the new religion, and although the leaders of the Quraysh were still not alarmed by the actual number of conversions, they were increasingly impatient with those who considered their idols worthless pieces of stone and who had left the customs and lifestyle of their forefathers. The younger generation, in particular, saw the emergence of the community of strict monotheists as divisive, having been raised with a sense of veneration for the Kaʿba and the idols housed there. ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, the nephew of Abū Jahl, was one such person. He was then around twenty-six years old and, after pondering the issue for some time, reached the conclusion that he must decisively remove the man who had caused all of this. In a sudden wave of anger, he picked up his sword and left home with the intention of killing the Prophet.

Along the way, he met Nuʿaym ibn ʿAbd Allāh, a fellow clansman who had converted to Islam but had not disclosed it yet. When Nuʿaym asked where he was going, ʿUmar replied, 'To that renegade, Muḥammad, who has split us into two factions—I shall kill him!' Nuʿaym knew ʿUmar well enough to take him at his word. He told ʿUmar the consequences of his action might be dangerous for him as well, but ʿUmar was not concerned about what might happen afterwards. Then Nuʿaym took another track. 'O ʿUmar', he said, 'go and set your own house in order first!' When ʿUmar demanded he explain what he meant, Nuʿaym disclosed that his own sister, Fāṭima, and her husband Saʿīd b. Zayd had both entered Islam. Distraught and angry, ʿUmar left him and went to the house of his sister.

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55. *Ibid.*

When he arrived at the door, he heard a voice coming from inside, reciting the Qurʾān. It was the voice of Khabbāb b. al-Arat, who would go to their house and recite with them whatever new portion of the Qurʾān was revealed. On this occasion, it was the newly revealed *Sūrat Ṭā Hā*, which they possessed in inscription as well. ʿUmar called his sister from outside the house. She concealed the text and Khabbāb hid behind a curtain, knowing well ʿUmar's temperament. When Fāṭima let ʿUmar in, he asked, 'What was that confounded speech I heard?' 'Nothing', she said, 'you heard nothing.' But ʿUmar directly broached the subject and told his sister flatly: 'Indeed, I heard it, and I have been told that both of you have become followers of Muḥammad!' He pounced upon his brother-in-law, and when his sister came forward to defend her husband, he struck her a blow that raised blood.

'It is even so', Fāṭima and Saʿīd said, 'we are Muslim and we believe in Allāh and in His Messenger. So do what you will.' Whether it was the certitude of her words, the sight of her wound, or the effect of both, a sudden change came over ʿUmar and he was struck by acute remorse. He asked for the text he had overheard, but his sister said, 'We fear to trust you with it'. 'Fear not', he said, and, laying down his sword, he swore by his gods that he would give it back after reading it. She could see that he had softened, and she was filled with longing that he should enter Islam. 'O my brother', she said, 'you are impure in your idolatry, and only the pure may touch it.' Thereupon ʿUmar washed himself, and she gave him the page on which was written the opening verses of chapter Ṭā-Hā. He began to recite it, and when he had read a passage he exclaimed, 'How beautiful and how noble are these words!' When Khabbāb heard this, he emerged from his hiding-place and said: 'O ʿUmar, I have hope that God has chosen you through the prayer of His Messenger. I had heard him pray yesterday to strengthen Islam with Abu-l-Ḥakam son of Hishām, or with ʿUmar son of Khaṭṭāb!' 'O Khabbāb', said ʿUmar, 'where will Muḥammad be at this time, that I may go to him and enter Islam?' Khabbāb informed him that he was at the house of Arqam, near the Ṣafā Gate, with many of his Companions.

ʿUmar then went there and pronounced the two testimonies of faith. In later years, he used to recount how the next morning he went to the house of his uncle, Abū Jahl, whom he knew to be the bitterest enemy of Islam, and how he was greeted with a warm welcome: 'The best of welcomes to my sister's son! What has brought you here?' When he responded, 'I have come to tell you that I believe in Allāh and in His Messenger Muḥammad; and I testify to the truth of that which he has brought,' Abū Jahl vehemently replied, 'God curse you, and may His curse be on the tidings you have brought!' Then he slammed the door in ʿUmar's face.[56]

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56. Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīra*, I, pp. 181–2; Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, III, pp. 202–4.

The three-year boycott

The strengthening of Islam for which the Prophet had prayed was immediately visible in Mecca, as ʿUmar was now publicly seen worshipping in the Kaʿba. Sometimes he and Ḥamza would enter the Sacred Mosque with a group of Muslims and pray there. On such occasions, the Quraysh would simply withdraw and leave them alone in the sanctuary because they could neither stop nor tolerate the scene. They knew that they could not touch ʿUmar or Ḥamza without major conflict erupting. In response, Abū Jahl instead proposed that the entire clan of Banū Hāshim be subject to an indefinite social boycott: no one should marry Hāshimite women and no one give their daughters in marriage to Hāshimite men; no one should sell or buy anything from them until they disowned Muḥammad or renounced his claim to prophethood. Since the clan of Muṭṭalib refused to forsake their Hāshimite cousins, they were also included in the document that was drawn up and signed by approximately forty leaders of the Quraysh. In order to add sanctity to the pact, the signed document was placed inside the Kaʿba.

The social boycott they now endured forced Banū Hāshim to gather round Abū Ṭālib in Shiʿb Abī Ṭālib, the quarter of the Hollow of Mecca where he lived. The Prophet moved into that quarter with his household. Abū Lahab, who was the only member of the clan who was openly hostile to the Prophet, moved out to live in another house he owned elsewhere. Although the ban could not be totally enforced, the two clans of Banū Hāshim and Banū Muṭṭalib faced considerable hardship. Despite the efforts of Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, and relatives from other tribes, there were shortages of food and other essential items, and they could not carry on their businesses. Only during the four sacred months could those now sequestered (effectively besieged) in the neighbourhood of Abī Ṭālib move freely.

After three years of this boycott, a counter-current spread among those who had close relations with the two clans. The first to act was Hishām, who had so often sent his camel with food and clothes to the Hollow. He went to Zuhayr, one of the two sons of the Prophet's aunt ʿĀtika, and said to him, 'Are you content to eat food and wear clothes and marry women when you know about the hardships being faced by your mother's kinsmen?' Zuhayr was eventually persuaded to act as well, but, cautiously, sought the support of a third to act against the boycott. Hishām then went to Muṭʿim ibn ʿAdī, the grandson of Nawfal b. ʿAbd Manāf—the brother of Hāshim and Muṭṭalib—who, like them came from a prestigious line. 'Is it your desire that two of the sons of ʿAbd Manāf should perish while you look on in approval of Quraysh? By God, if you enable them to do this you will soon find them doing the like to you.' He won Muṭʿim's support and then too that of Abu-l-Bakhtarī and Zamʿa al-Aswad, both of the Asad clan. Together, the five of them made a plan.

The next day, they went to the Mosque where the Quraysh were gathered in their assembly. Zuhayr circumambulated the Kaʿba seven times and then addressed them, facing the assembly: 'O people of Mecca! Are we to eat food and wear clothes, while the sons of Hāshim perish, unable to buy or sell? By God, I will not be seated until this iniquitous ban be torn up!'

'You lie', shouted his cousin Abū Jahl, the staunchest supporter and sponsor of the ban. 'It shall not be torn up.' 'You are the liar', said Zamʿa. 'We were never in favour of it in the first place when it was written.' 'Zamʿa is right', this time Abu-l-Bakhtarī spoke, 'We are also not in its favour, neither do we hold it.' 'You are both right', now Muṭʿim raised his voice against the boycott, 'We call God to witness our innocence of it and of what is written in it.'

Abū Jahl sensed the plot and began to accuse them of having orchestrated the confrontation, but Muṭʿim cut him short, entered the Kaʿba and brought out the document. After moments of suspense and silence, everyone saw that the small piece of vellum in his hand had been eaten away by worms, except for its opening words 'In Your Name, O God.'[57]

This was enough evidence for most of the Quraysh witnessing the exchange that they had been wrong in enacting the ban, and it was formally revoked. This news quickly spread around Mecca and beyond, exaggerated reports even reaching Abyssinia (by whose authority some of the Muslim exiles there decided to return to Mecca). But rather than embracing the longstanding objects of their derision, the Quraysh grudgingly offered to the Prophet a new solution by which both religions (rites of both idolatry and monotheism) would be practiced in Mecca, neither denouncing the other. Thereafter, the Prophet received a new revelation, clearly stating the Divine verdict: 'Say: O disbelievers, I shall not worship that which you worship, nor will you worship that which I worship, nor have I worshipped that which you worship, nor have you worshipped that which I worship. For you your religion and for me mine' (CIX).[58]

The year of sadness

Not long after the annulment of the ban, the Prophet's wife Khadīja died. During the past twenty-five years, she had been his most intimate companion, sharing his joys and sorrows and remaining firm in her belief of his veracity and witnessing numerous Divine blessings on him. Soon after her death, Abū Ṭālib also died, leaving the Prophet and his household, which included his four daughters, ʿAlī, and Zayd, more vulnerable than before. The Prophet could not expect any protection from his uncle Abū Lahab, who now succeeded Abū

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57. Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīra*, I, pp. 165–7.
58. See introductory notes on this *sūra* in the *Tafsīrs* of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn ʿAṭiyya, and al-Rāzī, all of whom mention the compromise offer of the Quraysh.

Ṭālib as the chief of Banū Hāshim. A new era of ill-treatment of the Prophet started.

The Prophet now decided to go to the walled city of Ṭāʾif, some ninety kilometres north of Mecca, to take the message of Islam to Banū Thaqīf. This tribe was the guardian of the idol al-Lāt, considered by them to be a goddess. Directly upon his arrival, the Prophet went to the house of three sons of ʿAmr b. Umayya (then the leaders of the tribe) and presented Islam to them. He was met with ridicule and mockery. 'If God has truly sent you, then I will tear down the hangings of the Kaʿba!' exclaimed one of the sons. The second said: 'Could God find none but you to send?' The third said: 'Let me never speak to you, for if you are a Messenger from God as you claim, then you are too great a personage for me to address; and if you are lying, then it is not fitting for me to speak to you.'[59]

The Prophet left them, hoping to find others in town who would listen to him, but they let loose their slaves against him, who insulted him and shouted at him. As he walked through the city, others joined the crowd. He took refuge in an orchard, where he tethered his camel to a palm tree and sat under the shade of a vine, praying: 'O God, unto You do I complain of my weakness, of my helplessness, and of my lowliness before men. O Most Merciful of the merciful, You are the Lord of the weak. And You are my Lord. Into whose hands will You entrust me? Unto some far off stranger who will ill-treat me? Or unto a foe whom You have empowered against me? I care not, so long as You are not wroth with me. Your favouring help—that is for me the broader way and the wider scope! I take refuge in the Light of Your Countenance whereby all darkness is illuminated and the things of this world and the next are rightly ordered, lest You send down Your anger upon me, or lest Your wrath beset me. Yet if Your Will is to reproach [it is Your right] until You are well-pleased. And there is no power and no might except through You.'[60]

The orchard where the Prophet had taken refuge belonged to ʿUtba and Shayba, two leaders of Banū Shams, who had seen what had happened from their garden adjoining the orchard. Feeling sympathy for a man from Mecca, they called their young Christian slave ʿAddās and sent some grapes to the Prophet. The Prophet accepted the gift, uttered his customary invocation, 'In the name of God', and ate. ʿAddās was surprised to hear the invocation and said, 'Those words are not what the people of this land say.' 'From which land are you?' asked the Prophet, 'and what is thy religion?' 'I am a Christian, from the people of Nineveh.' 'From the city of the righteous Jonah, the son of Matta', said the Prophet. 'How do you know Jonah son of Matta?' asked

59. Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, I, p. 336.
60. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, p. 345.

ʿAddās. 'He is my brother', said the Prophet, 'he was a Prophet, and I am a Prophet.' Hearing this, ʿAddās bent over him and kissed him.[61]

When he returned to his masters and they asked what made him kiss that man. He said, 'Master, there is none better than him on the face of this earth. He has told me of things that only a Prophet could know.' 'Out upon you, ʿAddās!' they responded. 'Let him not seduce you from your religion, for your religion is better than his.'

The Prophet departed Ṭāʾif. Late that night he reached the valley of Nakhla, about half-way between Mecca and Ṭāʾif, where while he was standing in prayer reciting the Qurʾān, a group of Jinn was directed toward him so that they could hear him recite. He was later informed about this in a revelation: 'And when We turned toward you a group of jinn, giving ear to the Qurʾān; and when they were in its presence they said, "Be silent!" Then, when it was finished, they turned back to their people, warning; they said, "Our people, we have heard a Book that was sent down after Moses, confirming what was before it, guiding to the truth and to a straight path. O our people, respond to the caller to Allāh, and believe in him, and He will forgive you some of your sins, and protect you from a painful chastisement"' (XLVI.29–31).[62]

When the Prophet reached the outskirts of Mecca, he sent word to al-Akhnas ibn Sharīq, asking for his protection to enter the city once more. Yet al-Akhnas responded to the message-bearer that he could not offer such protection because he was only a confederate of Banū Zuhra and as such had no power to speak in the name of the clan. The Prophet then sent the same message to Suhayl, who also declined, saying that the clan of ʿĀmir do not give protection against the clan of Kaʿb. As the Prophet did not want to enter Mecca without the express announcement of a powerful protector, he went to the cave of Ḥirāʾ, where some eleven years ago he had received the first Revelation. From there he contacted Muṭʿim, the chief of Nawfal, who readily agreed. The next morning, Muṭʿim and his sons and nephews, fully armed, escorted the Prophet to the Kaʿba. Abū Jahl asked if they had themselves accepted Islam, to which they replied, 'We have given him protection.'[63]

The Night Journey and Heavenly Ascent

The Prophet was a most welcomed guest at the house of his departed uncle, Abū Ṭālib, where now his widow Fāṭima and her daughter Umm Hāniʾ and her husband Hubayra lived. His aunt and cousin had both entered Islam; although Hubayra was not receptive to the Divine call to worship One God

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61. Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, I, p. 421.
62. See al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr, sub* Q XLVI.29.
63. Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīra*, I, p. 234.

alone, he always welcomed the Prophet warmly whenever he came to visit. One night, while the Prophet was at their place, Umm Hāniʾ invited him to stay overnight. Their house was near the Mosque, to where the Prophet customarily went after a brief sleep. That night he fell asleep near the Ḥijr stone. Sometime later that night, as recorded by traditional Islamic sources, he saw a white creature named Burāq, 'between a mule and an ass, with wings at its sides', which the Angel Jibrīl instructed him to mount. They travelled northward from the Sacred Mosque in Mecca to the far Temple in Jerusalem, passing through Yathrib and Khaybar. There they were met by a company of Prophets—Ibrāhīm, Mūsā, ʿĪsā, and others—whom the Prophet led in prayer. Then two vessels were offered to him, one containing wine, the other milk. He chose to drink from the vessel of milk, at which Jibrīl informed him, 'You have been guided to the primordial path, O Muḥammad, and wine is forbidden you.' Again mounting Burāq, the Prophet was led from the rock at the Temple upward through the heavens, Jibrīl revealing himself as a heavenly being. As they ascended, transcending bodily forms, the Prophet met all the Prophets he had met in Jerusalem in their celestial splendour. Crossing the seven Heavens, the Prophet reached the Lote Tree of the Uttermost End (*sidrat al-muntahā*); as it was later revealed in *Sūrat al-Najm*, 'There enshrouded the Lote Tree that which enshrouded it, the eye wavered not nor did it transgress. Verily he beheld, of all the signs of his Lord, the greatest' (LIII.16–18). The Prophet was enjoined to instruct his community in performing fifty prayers per day. Descending through the seven heavens, he passed by the Prophet Mūsā, who asked:

> 'What has Allāh enjoined on your community?' I replied: 'He has enjoined fifty prayers on them.' He said: 'Go back to your Lord, for your community will not be able to bear it.' So, I returned and He reduced it to half. Then I returned to Mūsā and informed him [about the reduction]. He said: 'Go back again, for your community will not be able to bear it.' I returned and He halved them again and I returned to Mūsā, and informed him. He said: 'Go back to your Lord, your community will not be able to manage that.' I returned; [this time Allāh said]: 'They are five and they are fifty. My word does not change.' I went back to Mūsā and he said: 'Return to your Lord.' I said: 'I am too shy to go back to my Lord [to ask Him to reduce them again].'[64]

The Prophet and Jibrīl made their descent to the Rock in Jerusalem from where the heavenly journey had begun, and from there they returned to Mecca. When they reached the Kaʿba, the Prophet returned to the house of his cousin.

A little before dawn, he woke Fāṭima and Umm Hāniʾ for the morning prayer. After the prayer, the Prophet informed them of his night journey and

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64. Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Ṣalāt*, *Bāb Kayfa furiḍat al-ṣalāt fī-l-isrāʾ*.

heavenly ascent. 'Do not tell this to the people', Umm Hāniʾ said, 'for they will not believe you and they will insult you.' 'By God, I will tell them', said he.[65] He then went to the Mosque and told those present of his journey to Jerusalem, and they mocked him for thinking he had travelled there and back overnight. When they dispersed, some of them met Abū Bakr and asked him: 'What do you think of your friend who tells us that last night he went to Jerusalem and prayed there and then returned to Mecca?' Abū Bakr replied, 'If he says so, then it must be true.' When the Prophet heard of his response, he gave him the title al-Ṣiddīq ('the great confirmer of truth').[66]

New directions

It was the custom of the Prophet to go to various groups of pilgrims during the annual pilgrimage season and invite them to Islam. He would visit Minā, the site of sacrifice, the bazar of ʿUkāẓ, where the greatest commercial activity took place, and other well-established sites where pilgrims gathered. In the year 620 CE, when he was at ʿAqaba, near Minā, he met and invited to Islam six men from the oasis of Yathrib. All six belonged to the tribe of Khazraj, and they had already heard about the new Prophet from the Jewish tribes who were their neighbours. They were deeply troubled by the unending conflict between their tribe and Aws, which, together with three Jewish tribes, formed the population of Yathrib. These six men were pleased to meet the Prophet and, after a few queries, all entered Islam, saying to each other, 'This is indeed the Prophet that the Jews promised us would come. Let them not be the first to reach him!'[67] They told the Prophet: 'No people are torn asunder by enmity and evil as our people; maybe God will unite them through you. We will invite them to your religion and if God gathers them together around you, then no man will be mightier than you.'[68] The men returned to Yathrib and started to invite their close friends to Islam.

It was around this time that the Prophet married Sawda, the daughter of Zamʿa, who was then about thirty years old. She had gone to Abyssinia with her first husband Sakrān, who had died shortly after they returned to Mecca with some other emigrants. Later that year, the Prophet also contracted a marriage with ʿĀʾisha, the daughter of Abū Bakr, after he was instructed to do so in a series of dreams. This marriage was not consummated until some four years later. Not long after these events, the Prophet told his

65. Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, I, p. 402.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 398.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 428.
68. *Ibid.*

Companions of another dream-vision: 'I have been shown the place of your emigration: I saw a well-watered land, rich in date palms, between two tracts of black stones.'[69]

Two pledges at ʿAqaba

In the summer of 621 CE, five of the six pilgrims from Yathrib who had entered Islam at ʿAqaba in the previous year returned, bringing with them seven more, two of whom were of their opposing tribe of Aws. They again met the Prophet at ʿAqaba and formally pledged themselves to the Prophet. ʿUbāda b. al-Ṣāmit, one of the twelve present at the occasion, was to recount later:

> We pledged our allegiance to the Messenger of Allāh that we would associate nothing with Allāh, that we would neither steal, nor commit fornication, nor slay our offspring, nor utter slanders; and that we would not disobey him in that which was right. And he said to us: 'If you fulfil this pledge, then Paradise is yours; and if you commit one of these sins and then receive punishment for it in this world, that shall serve as expiation. And if you conceal it until the Day of the Resurrection, then it is for God to punish or forgive, even as He will.'[70]

The Prophet sent the Companion Muṣʿab b. ʿUmayr back with them to Yathrib, that he might teach them the Qurʾān and instruct them in other matters of religion. Muṣʿab was hosted by Asʿad b. Zurāra, one of the six who had entered Islam the previous year. Muṣʿab led the new converts in prayer and invited others to Islam. Slowly a community of believers started to emerge in the oasis.

The next year, seventy-three men and two women came from Yathrib, all pledging themselves to the Prophet at ʿAqaba. This event, known as the 'second pledge', established a formal pact between the Prophet and the two tribes of Yathrib. When they met, the Prophet recited some verses from the Qurʾān and then said, 'I make with you this pact on condition that the allegiance you pledge me shall bind you to protect me, with the kind of protection you have for your women and children.' In response, Barāʾ b. Maʿrūr rose and, taking the hand of the Prophet in his own, said: 'By Him who sent you with the Truth, we will protect you as we protect them. So accept the pledge of our allegiance, O Messenger of Allāh, for we are men of war, possessor of arms that have been handed down from father to son.'[71] Abu-l-Haytham b. al-Tīhān, a man of Aws, broke in and said, 'O Messenger of God, there are ties between us and other

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69. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb Manāqib al-anṣār*, *Bāb Hijrat al-Nabī wa-aṣḥābuh ilā al-madīna*.
70. Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, I, p. 434.
71. *Ibid.*

men', meaning the Jewish tribes of Yathrib, 'and we are willing to sever them. But might it not be that if we do this, and if then God gives you victory, you will then return to your people and leave us?' The Prophet smiled and said: 'No, blood for blood, and forgiving of blood for forgiving of blood; I am yours and you are mine. Whom you war against, him I war against. With whom you make peace, with him I make peace.' The Prophet then asked them to choose twelve men he would appoint as their leaders to look after their affairs. They presented nine men from Khazraj and three from Aws.

The Hijra

Within ten weeks of the Second Pledge of ʿAqaba, the only Muslims left in Mecca with the Prophet were Abū Bakr, his two daughters, and ʿAlī. All the other Muslims had left the city for safe harbour in Yathrib. Abū Bakr had also sought the Prophet's permission to leave, but the Prophet had replied, 'Do not hurry, for it may be that Allāh will give you a companion.' Abū Bakr understood from this that he might have the honour of accompanying him and he started to prepare for the journey.

One day, the Prophet was informed by Jibrīl about a plot the Quraysh had hatched against him. They had met at Dār al-Nadwa, the house of Quṣayy ibn Kilāb, where they often met to discuss important issues. One of them proposed that they should simply bind the Prophet in a cell, there to await the fate that befell the poets Zuhayr and Nābigha. Another man proposed that they should drive him out of their lands altogether, sending him into exile. It would be immaterial to them then, he argued, what happened to the Prophet, where he went and what he did; their lives in Mecca would be restored to their former state. Then Abū Jahl rose and proposed: 'Let us take one strong, reliable, and well-connected young man from each clan and at an appointed time they should all attack the Prophet, each striking a mortal blow so that his blood will be on all clans. Since Banū Hāshim will not be able to fight with all clans, they will only be able to demand blood money in revenge, which we will pay, and thus rid ourselves of a man who, as long as he lives, will give us no peace.'[72] To this they all agreed.

However, Jibrīl told the Prophet of their plan, and so the next day he arrived at Abū Bakr's house at an unusual hour (during the prime heat of the day). As soon as Abū Bakr saw the Prophet, he rose from his seat and asked the Prophet to be seated. The Prophet requested him to acquit himself of any guests he had there, and, upon being told there were none, informed Abū Bakr, 'Allāh has granted me permission to leave the city and to emigrate.' 'Together with me, O Messenger of Allāh?' Abū Bakr asked. 'Together with

72. *Ibid.*, p. 480.

thee', said the Prophet. Abū Bakr wept with joy. They finalized a plan and the Prophet returned to his home, where ʿAlī was waiting for him. He told ʿAlī about the Quraysh's plan, and that he was about to leave for Yathrib; ʿAlī was to stay behind until everything entrusted to the Prophet for safe-keeping had been returned to its owner.

When night fell, the young men of Quraysh who had been chosen to kill the Prophet started to gather outside his house. The Prophet gave ʿAlī his cloak and said, 'Wrap thyself in this Ḥaḍramī cloak of mine and sleep in it on my bed; no harm shall come to thee from them.' Then he began to recite *Sūrat Yā Sīn,* and when he came to the words 'And We have enshrouded them, so that they see not' (XXXVI.9), he opened the door and passed directly (sight unseen) through the midst of the throng standing outside. As he walked toward the house of Abū Bakr, he came across a man who recognized him, but the Prophet kept on walking. When that man passed by the Quraysh standing outside the house of the Prophet, he asked: 'Who are you waiting for?' 'Muḥammad', they replied. 'Allāh has deprived you', the man said, 'for Muḥammad is gone, don't you see your state!'[73]

The young men of Quraysh were astonished; they did not believe him, for they had been standing there, alert and watchful, and had not seen anyone leave the house. Then one of them crept to the wall of the house from where he could see inside. He saw someone wrapped in the green cloak of the Prophet, sleeping on his bed. He returned and reassured his companions that the man they had come for was sleeping inside. When they finally realized that it was ʿAlī, not the Prophet, they knew that they had been outmaneuvered. They rushed to the chiefs of their clans to report what had happened. Later, in a Revelation, Allāh reminded the Prophet of this incident: 'And how the disbelievers were scheming against thee, to imprison thee or to slay thee, or to drive thee away; they were scheming and Allāh was scheming; And lo, Allāh is the best of all schemers' (VIII.30).

Abū Bakr was ready when the Prophet arrived at his house, and they left through a window at the back of the house where two camels were waiting for them. The Prophet mounted one camel, Abū Bakr the other; his son ʿAbd Allāh rode behind him. They went south, toward Yemen, while the Quraysh sent search parties to the north, expecting the Prophet to immediately go toward Yathrib.

ʿĀmir b. Fuhayra, Abū Bakr's freed slave, followed them with his flock of sheep, covering their tracks. Soon they reached Mount Ṭawr. Abū Bakr sent his son back with the camels, instructing him to find out what was being said in Mecca and return at night. He was to tell ʿĀmir to pasture his sheep with the other shepherds as usual, but to bring the flock toward the cave once again

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73. *Ibid.*, p. 483; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, II, pp. 371–2.

at night, covering ʿAbd Allāh's tracks. ʿAbd Allāh turned toward Mecca and the Prophet and Abū Bakr started their ascent to the cave at the summit. The night was in its final phase and countless stars twinkled in the vast expanse of the sky as angels descended from the heavens. The path curved as they climbed above the rocky hills which surrounded the mountain. When they arrived at the entrance to the cave, Abū Bakr went in first to confirm there were no wild animals or snakes inside. This was the beginning of their three days of companionship in the cave.

On that first day, they had no provisions with them. That night, Abū Bakr's son, ʿAbd Allāh, returned to the cave with his sister Asmāʾ, bringing food. They told the Prophet what they had heard during the day: the Quraysh were offering a reward of one hundred camels to anyone who could find the Prophet and bring him back to Mecca. Soon ʿĀmir arrived with his flock of sheep and gave them milk.

This went on for two days. On the third day, they heard the voices of men coming up the mountain. The voices grew louder; it was one of the search parties, climbing up the difficult terrain in anticipation of the generous reward. Seeing anxiety on Abū Bakr's face, the Prophet said, 'grieve not, for verily Allāh is with us' (IX.49). The approaching voices grew louder until the men stood at the very entrance to the cave. They saw, however, that the entrance was obstructed by an acacia tree standing about the height of a man, and the gap left between the tree and the rocky wall of the cave was spanned by a spider's web; behind the web, in a hollow of the rock, a dove had made her nest and was sitting close as if she had eggs, with her mate perched on a ledge not far above. The men decided that there was no point in looking inside the cave and turned back. Their voices receded and finally died away. Abū Bakr went to the mouth of the cave and saw the acacia tree, the spider's web and the pair of doves, none of which had been there in the morning.

Night came and so did ʿAbd Allāh and Asmāʾ. The Prophet and Abū Bakr emerged from the cave, gently drawing aside the web and taking care not to disturb the dove. They descended the slope; at the base of the mountain, they found ʿĀmir waiting for them with the Bedouin who had been entrusted with the two camels Abū Bakr had chosen for their journey. The Bedouin, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Urayqiṭ al-Laythī, could be trusted, as he was truly a son of the desert, known for his honesty and commitment even though he was not yet a Muslim. He knew the trails of the desert like the lines of his hands. He also had his own mount. Abū Bakr offered the better of the two camels to the Prophet but the Prophet refused, saying, 'I do not ride a camel that is not my own'. 'May my parents be your ransom, O Messenger of Allāh, it is yours', said Abū Bakr. 'Nay', said the Prophet, 'but what price did you pay for it?' Abū

Bakr knew the solemnity of the occasion, and he also knew that though the Prophet had accepted many gifts from him in the past, this was not the time to insist. Abū Bakr named the price, which the Prophet paid and thereupon mounted his newly purchased camel. Her name was Qaṣwāʾ, and he was to develop a special relationship with the animal. Qaṣwāʾ would accompany the Prophet on many expeditions during the next ten years, and she would be his mount on his triumphant and victorious return to Mecca. Abū Bakr mounted the other camel.

Asmāʾ came forward with the bag of provisions she had brought. She had forgotten to bring a rope to tie it to the saddle. Now she quickly took off the length of fabric belted around her waist, tore it into two pieces, and used one length to tie the bag securely to her father's saddle, thus earning the title *dhāt al-niṭāqayn* ('she of the two sashes'). ʿĀmir sat behind Abū Bakr and the four of them left. After their departure Asmāʾ and ʿAbd Allāh returned to Mecca.

Not long after, Abū Jahl came to their house with some other men and asked, 'Where is your father, O daughter of Abū Bakr?' 'By Allāh, I know not where he is', replied Asmāʾ. Abū Jahl slapped her on the face and then left along with the other men. For three days, Asmāʾ and her brother had no news of their father and the Prophet, until someone heard a voice coming from the lower part of Mecca, singing in the Arab fashion:

> Allāh, the Lord of the people, gave the best of rewards, / To the two companions who have rested in the two tents of Umm Maʿbad; / They came with virtue and departed at nightfall; / The one who accompanied Muḥammad as a companion attained success; / May the Banū Kaʿb be pleased with their places and dwellings, / For these are the places of rest for the believers.[74]

People followed the voice but saw no one until the singer emerged from the higher part of Mecca; Islamic sources report that he was one of the jinn. When Asmāʾ and her brother heard of this incident, they knew that the Prophet and their father were heading toward Yathrib.

The Prophet had been forewarned that his people would turn against him and that he would be driven out from the city where the first House of Allāh was built, but that had been more than twelve years ago, at the beginning of his prophetic mission. The blind and aging Waraqa ibn Nawfal, who had predicted this exile, was no more; all that was foretold had come to pass, yet it was not without grief that he left the city where generations of his family had lived since approximately 2200 BC, when his ancestors Ibrāhīm and Ismāʿīl had arrived in this remote and barren valley. Following their expert guide and Abū Bakr's freedman, they took the shortest and the most difficult of the

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74. Ibn Hishām, *Sīra,* I, p. 487.

four traditional roads to Yathrib. After reaching the coastal region of the Red Sea, they turned northwest for a few days. It was on this road that they met Ṭalḥa ibn ʿUbayd Allāh, who was returning from one of his frequent trips to Syria with camels laden with fine garments and other merchandise. Ṭalḥa had accepted Islam when there were only seven other Muslims in Mecca. Almost a week previously, when his caravan had stopped off in Yathrib, he had observed a sense of joyous expectation and anticipation through the city. He told the Prophet about this eagerness, gave him and his Companion some Syrian garments, and bade them goodbye with the intention of soon joining them in Medina. After this encounter, the Prophet and his Companions turned north, gradually veering away from the coast, and finally travelled directly toward Yathrib.

As they rode their camels under the clear September sky, with the new moon of Rabīʿ al-Awwal hanging low and small hills appearing as dark silhouettes to the north, the silence of the immense desert absorbed the thumping sound of the padded feet of their camels. They rode toward their new residence on earth—a journey destined to mark a new beginning not only for Muslims but also for all humanity. It is impossible to know exactly what filled their hearts and minds during these ten days as they travelled toward their new abode. We do know, however, that shortly after leaving the cave, the Prophet had turned around, and addressing Mecca, he had said: 'Of all Allāh's earth, thou art the dearest place unto me and the dearest unto Allāh, and had not my people driven me out from thee I would not have left thee.'[75]

The people of Qubāʾ, a community then some five kilometers to the south of Yathrib, had received the news of their departure from Mecca. Every morning after dawn some of them would leave the precincts of the town, others would go to the rooftops, all looking beyond the palm groves far into the desert. When the heat would grow intense, they would return home, disappointed. On the Monday the Prophet arrived, they had already returned to their homes as the sun had become fierce. By the time the travellers had descended the rocky slope beyond Qubāʾ, only one person was still standing on the roof of his home, a Jewish man who had seen his neighbours go out every day in expectation of the Prophet. When he saw the shining white garments of the two riders contrasting sharply against the bluish-black volcanic rock, he knew at once who they were. 'He's come', he shouted from his rooftop, 'O sons of Qayla, he's come!' A wave of joy swept through Qubāʾ. Men, women, and children ran from their homes toward the tract of greenery which separated their hamlet from the surrounding hills. The riders had already reached the palm grove. Shortly after their arrival, the Prophet addressed the nascent Muslim community of Qubāʾ: 'O people,

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75. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, *Faḍāʾil Makka*, p. 18.

give unto one another greetings of peace; feed the hungry; honour the ties of kinship; pray in the hours when men sleep. This is how ye shall enter Paradise in peace.'[76]

Thus ended the Meccan period of the life of the Prophet. During these fifty-three years, he had been intensely loved and honoured by those who saw in the light of his countenance hope for an everlasting bliss in the abode of peace, beyond the perishing and fleeting life of this world. As recorded in Islamic sources, he experienced love, joy, and sorrow like all other mortals, but his immense character—to which the Qur'ān testifies, '*And indeed, you are of an exalted character*' (LXVIII.4)—remained steadfastly anchored in the consciousness of the presence of God. He witnessed the death of his beloved mother at the tender age of six and that of his loving grandfather shortly after that. Growing up as an orphan in the house of his uncle, he experienced poverty and want. Even at that young age, he was recognized by all for his extraordinary charisma and beauty. As he grew into a young man, everyone in Mecca called him *al-Amīn*, 'the Trustworthy one'. But when he called them to worship one God and live a life of virtue and piety, they rejected him. Like all Prophets before him, he experienced fierce opposition and was blamed by those whose hearts were blind to the higher truths. He patiently reasoned with them for almost a decade, counselling them, and drawing their attention to the signs of Divine truths in and around them. Protected, loved, and respected by a small number of believers, he endured all kinds of hostilities until God commanded him to leave the city of his birth.

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76. Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, I, p. 500.

The Prophet Muḥammad: the Medinan period

Imad ud din Khalil

Introduction

This chapter deals with the prophethood of Muḥammad during the Medinan period, and especially highlights the civilizational dimension, which has not received sufficient attention in the writings on the subject.

We are here faced with the transition of the message of Islam from one period to another, and this transition includes a rich patchwork of self-expressive, civilizational phenomena at three different levels, namely, the Qurʾān, the *Sunna* (the sayings and practices of the Prophet) and the historical narratives. While the Meccan period was particularly concerned with establishing the faith amongst Muslim individuals and the Muslim community, the Medinan period took the process further by legislating for and institutionalizing the state and thereby giving life to a number of civilizational artefacts, with regard both to the establishment of institutions and principles aimed at ensuring the permanence and continuity of civilizational development in the future and the pursuit of civilizational activities within various contexts of everyday life.

From the beginning, the Islamic state found itself facing a series of challenges, internally from the Hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*) and the Jews, and externally from Arab paganism and the Christian-Byzantine alliance. To respond to and overcome these challenges was not only essential from the doctrinal, political, military viewpoints and in the best interest of Islam's dissemination but also a civilizational necessity, given the need to ensure the continued development of the emerging state and to enable it to deal with the fragmentation, defeatism, the nomadic and conservative outlook, tribalism, clientism, chauvinism and clannishness of contemporary society. All of these, as we know, ran counter to the new religion's aspirations which were imbued

with a rich array of monotheistic, unitarian, independent, universal, tolerant and progressive values.

The struggle against paganism, the Hypocrites, the Jews, the Byzantines and their Christian allies occupies a large part of the old compilations of the *Sīra* (Biography of Muḥammad) such that the greater part of the Medinan period appears to have been entirely taken up with war and fighting, and that the efforts aimed at developing a new sedentary civilization seem to be incidental compared with the much more enduring and consistent rule of fighting one's enemies.

Both modern and contemporary studies of the *Sīra* have, except in a few instances, followed the same pattern, so that the period seems to comprise nothing more than military campaigns, raids and wars. However, if we were to look closely at the battles the Muslim state fought with its adversaries, we can appreciate to some extent that they were not simply battles, but could also take on various civilizational overtones according to the nature and the political, intellectual, social and even psychological state of the adversary.

Let us, then, as far as the scope of this study will allow, look briefly at the politico-military circumstances of the Medinan period before going on to examine the civilizational background from the points of view of history, of Muḥammad's life as a Prophet and the teachings of the Qur'ān.

The Problem of Arab Paganism

Arab paganism, with all its intellectual, religious and social backwardness, constituted a barrier to the spread of Islam, and the pagan leaders of Mecca chose, at all costs, from the very beginning to dissuade the members of the new religion from their chosen path. This meant that the principle of freedom of choice advocated and put into practice by Islam was not applicable in this case, and that, in order to preserve its applicability, the pagan leaders would have to be eliminated unless they granted the Arabs the freedom to embrace the religion that had been revealed to them.

From the first year after the *Hijra*, the Prophet adopted a strategy of lightning strikes using limited numbers of men. These are known as raiding parties (*sarāyā*). The Muslims thus managed to familiarize themselves with the routes around Medina (*al-Madīna al-munawwara*, the radiant city) and those leading to Mecca, particularly the trade routes between Mecca and Syria that were so vital to the Quraysh. They also managed to become acquainted with the tribes in the area and established friendly relations with some of them. The Muslims thus demonstrated that they were a formidable force, well able to defend themselves and their faith against the pagan Quraysh and the neighbouring tribes, not to mention the inhabitants of Medina and the Jews.

By so doing, the Muslims sought freedom to spread their message without interference from Arab paganism.[1]

With his raiding parties, the Prophet hoped to bring the surrounding tribes and countryside under the control of Medina, to establish its sphere of influence and boundaries and forge alliances with the tribes living in the vicinity. This was because the city could not live in isolation or survive without the surrounding countryside to keep it supplied with provisions and enable it to carry on its business. Thus, the Prophet sent out raiding parties in every direction to make the countryside safe from raids by the Bedouins. This was needed to keep them in check and to constantly remind them of Medinan power, while not allowing them the slightest opportunity to launch a concerted attack against the city. The Prophet would always surprise them before they could do so because, for him, pre-emptive strikes were the best means of defence. These circumstances enabled the emerging state in Medina to become established.[2]

The Muslims had left Mecca and emigrated to Medina, leaving behind them homes and properties. In time, the struggle to survive began to affect them badly. In the second year after the *Hijra*, historical factors began to converge, culminating in the decisive Battle of Badr. The Prophet was informed that a large caravan belonging to the Quraysh and consisting of a thousand camels was heading for Mecca from Syria and was led by Abū Sufyān with thirty or forty Mecca merchants. This was an ideal opportunity to get reparations. Without hesitation, the Prophet told his Companions, 'This is a Qurayshī caravan containing Qurayshī property; go out to it so that Allāh may grant it to you as booty.'[3]

Abū Sufyān was able to divert to the Red Sea coastal route and safely arrived with his caravan to Mecca, where he mobilized a fighting force. At Badr, on the road between Mecca and Medina, the first decisive encounter of the Muslims and their opponents took place, resulting in the defeat of the pagans and the triumphant return of the Muslims to Medina with a number

1. Maḥmūd Shīth Khaṭṭāb, *al-Rasūl al-qāʾid*, 2nd ed., Baghdad, Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāt and Maktabat al-Nahḍa, 1960, pp. 60–1.

2. Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Sharīf, *Makka wa-l-Madīna fi-l-jāhiliyya wa-ʿaṣr al-rasūl*, 2nd ed., Cairo, Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, 1965, pp. 400, 451.

3. Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Malik Ibn Hishām (d. 218/833), *Tahdhīb sīrat Ibn Hishām*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn, 2nd ed., Cairo, al-Muʾassasa al-ʿArabiyya al-Ḥadītha, 1964, p. 148. See also Muḥammad Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/922), *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa al-mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad Abu-l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, Cairo, Dār al-Maʿārif, 1961–2, II, pp. 420, 427; Muḥammad Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/844), *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, ed. E. Sachau et al., reprinted from the Leiden edition, Brill, 1325/1907, by Muʾassassat Naṣr, Tehran, II, part 1, p. 6; Muḥammad Ibn ʿUmar al-Wāqidī (d. 207/922), *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, ed. Marsden Jones Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1966, I, p. 20.

of prisoners, whom the Prophet ordered to be treated well and whom he set to teaching Muslim children reading and writing in exchange for their release.

It was the unified leadership, the new sense of mobilization, the deep-rooted faith and high morale that enabled the Muslims to secure victory, thereby enhancing the power of Islam, strengthening the new state and paving the way for the dissemination of the message of Islam. The law allocating a fifth of the spoils of war following the Battle of Badr was of great significance, as it was the first official Qurʾānic law on property other than the law on alms (*zakāt*). It led to the establishment of the treasury in Islam and facilitated the implementation of the Qurʾānic precept of helping the needy and devoting official funds, and not just private contributions, to the public welfare of Muslims.[4]

The following year (3/625), the Meccans amassed an army of 3,000 men in an attempt to launch a decisive, retaliatory attack on Medina. As usual, the Prophet consulted his Companions on the plan of battle. Some of the older Companions shared the Prophet's idea of making defensive arrangements inside the city, but the enthusiasm of the younger elements and their insistence on taking the fight directly to the Meccans caused him to defer to their wishes. As a result of the desertion and withdrawal of the Hypocrites just before the battle, as well as the dereliction of the group assigned to cover the Muslims' rear on the hill of Uḥud, victory which appeared certain during the first hours of battle turned to defeat, resulting in the deaths of seventy Muslims. The fierce fighting came to an end once the Muslims had regrouped on the hill of Uḥud, where they desperately defended the Messenger of God and thus prevented the Meccans from fulfilling their objective of annihilating the Muslims and turning the battle into a decisive victory.

The pagans then capitalized on their partial victory by mowing down propagators of the Muslim faith, killing four of them at al-Rajīʿ and executing three in Mecca. Forty were also killed at Biʾr Maʿūna. In 5/627, the Meccans formed a vast tribal confederacy at the instigation of the Jewish Banū al-Naḍīr and Banū Wāʾil, consisting of 10,000 fighting men, and once again they marched on Medina. Owing to the disproportionate size of the respective forces, the Prophet found himself obliged to adopt a defensive strategy and make use of Medina's natural fortifications on three sides. This allowed him and his Companions to implement a plan to dig a trench (*khandaq*) along the exposed northern flank. In order to carry out the work prior to the pagans' attack, the Prophet divided his Companions into groups of ten men, each responsible for digging a length of 40 cubits of the trench. The Prophet himself enthusiastically took part in the digging alongside

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4. Muḥammad ʿIzzat Darwaza, *Sīrat al-rasūl: ṣuwar muqtabasa min al-Qurʾān al-Karīm*, 2nd ed., Cairo, Maktabat ʿĪsā al-Bābī, 1965, II, pp. 329–30.

the others. This enabled the completion of the trench, which stretched for 12,000 cubits, in six days. In the final part of the plan, the Prophet positioned his 3,000 fighting men behind the trench with their backs to Mount Salā, and put the women and children in fortified strongholds so that the Muslims could move around freely in the event the enemy managed to break through. He also formed his Companions into battalions and ordered them to deploy to the other sides of the city, where breaches might occur, as well as into groups which patrolled the city to guard against any treachery from within on the part of the Jews. He then manned the trench alongside his Companions.[5]

The Prophet resorted to all possible means to break up the confederacy, which became more dangerous when the Banū Qurayẓa broke their agreement at a most critical moment. The Prophet managed to achieve his objective and the enemies could not form an effective alliance against the Muslims. Time dragged on until strong winter winds came, blowing away the tents of the polytheists and preventing them from pitching camp. This lowered their morale and made them want to withdraw. At this point, the Prophet announced to the assembled fighters, 'The Quraysh will not attack you after this year, but you will attack them.'[6]

It is true to say that the retreat of the confederacy from Medina was a great victory, and was undoubtedly a significant factor in the triumphant emergence of Islam and the subsequent spread of its influence and message. The withdrawal also had both positive and negative effects in that it prompted the Hypocrites and those Arabs whole had remained neutral to regard the outcome as evidence of a God-given victory which morally strengthened the Muslims. They, therefore, refrained from any further action. The Meccans also resolved not to pursue their aggression.[7] After that day, it was no longer possible for Medina's adversaries to form such a confederacy; the Quraysh started to doubt the loyalty of the Arab tribes, who in turn began to have doubts about the ability of the Quraysh to overcome the Muslims.[8]

5. Ibn Hishām, *Tahdhīb* …, *op. cit.*, pp. 211–12; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* …, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 565–6; Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, *op. cit.*, II, part 1, pp. 47–51; al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī* …, II, pp. 441–3, 449; Aḥmad Ibn Yaḥyā al-Balādhurī (d. 279/892), *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, part 1, ed. Muḥammad Ḥamīdudllāh, Cairo, Maʿhad al-Makhṭūṭāt li-Jāmiʿat al-Duwal al-ʿArabiyya and Dār al-Maʿārif, 1959, I, p. 343; Aḥmad Ibn Wāḍiḥ al-Yaʿqūbī (d. 292/905), *Taʾrīkh al-Yaʿqūbī*, ed. Muḥammad Ṣādiq Baḥr al-ʿUlūm, Najaf, al-Maktaba al-Ḥaydariyya, 1964, II, p. 41.

6. Ibn Hishām, *Tahdhīb* …, *op. cit.*, p. 233; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* …, *op. cit.*, II, p. 593; Abu-l-ʿAbbās al-Zubaydī Ibn al-Mubārak (d. 735/1334), *al-Tajrīd al-ṣarīḥ li-ḥadīth al-jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ li-l-Bukhārī*, 2nd ed., Beirut, Dār al-Irshād, 1386/1965, II, p. 82.

7. Darwaza, *Sīra* …, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 245–6.

8. Al-Sharīf, *Makka wa-l-Madīna* …, *op. cit.*, p. 458.

II–2.1   Al-Muwājaha (Gate to the Prophet's noble grave)
in the Prophet's Mosque in Medina
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From the position of strength attained by the Muslims after the Battle of the Trench, the Prophet decided to perform the Lesser Pilgrimage (*ʿumra*) to Mecca with his Companions in order to achieve three objectives. The first of these was to make all people aware that it was not necessary for relations between Islam and the other powers to continue to be at war and conflict, and that periods of peace, reconciliation and co-existence could prevail, regardless of religion or allegiance. Secondly, he wanted to put an end to the fighting with the Quraysh and concentrate on the other powers, particularly after the escalation of the conflict with the Jews on the one hand and with the Byzantines and their Christian Arab allies on the other. As for the third objective, he wished to establish that Mecca and its holy sites must not be a pagan monopoly, where polytheists freely practised their primitive rituals and had control over events, allowing access to the *Kaʿba* to some and excluding others arbitrarily. The Muslims, the descendants of Ibrāhīm, the founder of the True Religion and builder of the *Kaʿba*, were, in fact, more deserving and more worthy of access to the Holy Place (*al-Ḥaram al-āmin*) to perform their true monotheistic rites, for which the sacred city had been founded in that barren *wādī*.

While the Quraysh were adamant that the Muslims should not enter Mecca that year, the Muslims were determined to do so. The pagan leaders sent a number of emissaries to negotiate a solution to the crisis they had themselves started. The Prophet received them generously, as if he could clearly see the sweet fruit that the Muslims might reap if a period of peace with the Quraysh were to prevail. To that end, he was prepared to be flexible with regard to certain formalities in order to secure the peace treaty, which came to be known as al-Ḥudaybiyya after the place where it was concluded,[9] despite the opposition and dissatisfaction of a number of Companions.

The treaty stipulated that there should be peace for a period of ten years, and that the Muslims should withdraw that year, but would be allowed to enter Mecca the following year, with their swords sheathed. Each tribe was entitled to enter into an agreement with either of the two sides as it saw fit. It was laid down that there should be no treachery or deceit. Anyone who came to Muḥammad from Quraysh without the permission of his guardian had to be returned by Muḥammad, while anyone of those who were with Muḥammad who came to the Quraysh did not have to be sent back.

The Treaty of al-Ḥudaybiyya, as Ibn Hishām called it, was a victory: 'There has never been a greater victory in Islam. Where people had come together, there had been fighting, but when the truce came, the war was brought to an end and people put their trust in each other, met and negotiated. No one with any discernment spoke of Islam without embracing it … and, in those two years after the treaty, as many, and more, embraced Islam as had done before.' This is evidenced by the fact that the Prophet went out to al-Ḥudaybiyya with 1,400 men, and when he set out to conquer Mecca two years later, he was at the head of 10,000.[10] The British historian, Sir Thomas Arnold, felt that 'the continual warfare with the people of Mecca had hitherto kept the tribes to the south almost entirely outside the influence of the new religion. But this truce now made communications with southern Arabia possible.'[11] The spread of Islam into Yemen during the period following the Treaty of al-Ḥudaybiyya was particularly significant from a military point of view since the Quraysh were now surrounded by Muslims to the north and to the south. The fate of Mecca and the Quraysh was finally sealed.[12]

9. Ibn Hishām, *Tahdhīb …*, *op. cit.*, pp. 256–7; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh …*, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 233–4; al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī …*, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 606–7.

10. Ibn Hishām, *Tahdhīb*, *op. cit.*, pp. 258–9; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh …*, *op. cit.*, II, p. 638; al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 609–10, 624.

11. T. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam*, 4th reprint, Lahore, Ashraf, 1979, p. 37; see also its Arabic translation *al-Daʿwa ilā -l-islām*, trans., Ḥasan Ibrāhīm Ḥasan et al., 3rd ed., Cairo, Maktabat al-Nahḍa al-Miṣriyya, 1971, p. 67.

12. Khaṭṭāb, *al-Rasūl al-qāʾid*, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

The Quraysh broke their agreement with the Muslims in less than two years by attacking their ally, the Khuzāʿa, at the Holy Site (*Ḥaram*), killing many of them. The Prophet ordered his men to make ready. He, however, maintained secrecy and did not announce his intentions, so that he might be able to enter Mecca with a minimum of bloodshed.[13] He achieved his aim and arrayed his forces on the heights above Mecca, presenting the Quraysh warriors with a *fait accompli*.

The Prophet issued orders to his commanders not to fight unless forced to do so, and announced a curfew, adding that anyone who remained inside their house or within the *Ḥaram* would be safe. He then deployed his army at the four entrances to Mecca, to which access was gained with complete ease, without any significant resistance and with no more than a few dozen casualties.[14]

The Prophet entered the *Kaʿba* and personally smashed the idols. He went out to the idols lining the outside of the edifice and began destroying them, saying 'Say: Truth has come and falsehood has passed away. Verily, falsehood was bound to pass away.' Then he sent a number of his commanders to destroy the idols in neighbouring villages,[15] and quickly declared a general amnesty for all Meccans, saying 'Go, for you are set free (*tulaqāʾ*)', while Bilāl, the Abyssinian, climbed the *Kaʿba* in order to chant the first Muslim call to prayer from the former centre of idolatry.

The last vestiges of resistance by the idol-worshipping Arabs was that of the mighty tribe of Hawāzin, but the Prophet lost no time in subduing them at Ḥunayn in the same year (8/630), and distributed the booty amongst the fighting men, keeping none of it for himself. He then returned to Medina in order to receive the numerous Arab deputations that had begun to converge on Medina to pledge allegiance to Islam.[16]

Towards the end of the year 9/631 at the time of the Pilgrimage, the first verses of the *sūrat al-barāʾa* were revealed (the *sūra* in which the faithful were

13. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh …*, *op. cit.*, III, pp. 51–2; al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī …*, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 787, 792, 796.

14. Al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī …*, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 825–6; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid, Cairo, Maktabat al-Nahḍa, 1956–7, I, p. 44.

15. Ibn Hishām, *Tahdhīb …*, *op. cit.*, pp. 291–4; Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt …*, *op. cit.*, I, p. 46; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh …*, *op. cit.*, III, pp. 65–6; Khalīfa Ibn Khayyāṭ (d. 240/854), *Taʾrīkh Khalīfa*, ed. Akram al-ʿUmarī, Najaf, Maṭbaʿat al-Ādāb, 1967, I, p. 51.

16. For more details, see Ibn Hishām, *Tahdhīb …*, *op. cit.*, pp. 336–71; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh …*, *op. cit.*, III, pp. 96–100, 112–15, 122–39, 158; Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt …*, *op. cit.*, I, part 2, pp. 38–86, 122; al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī …*, *op. cit.*, III, pp. 960–80; ʿAlī Ibn Aḥmad Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064), *Jawāmiʿ al-sīra*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās and Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Asad, *Silsilat al-Turāth al-Islāmī*, No. 2, Cairo, Dār al-Maʿārif, pp. 255–8; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾrīkh …*, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 68–9; Abi-l-Fidāʾ Ismāʿīl Ibn Kathīr, (d. 774/1372), *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, Cairo, Maṭbaʿat al-Saʿāda, 1932, V, pp. 40–96; Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam …*, *op. cit.*, pp. 39ff.

granted *barāʾa* or release from contractual obligations towards the polytheists); this *sūra* announced that paganism would be eliminated from the Arabian peninsula once Islam had given its adherents sufficient time to reflect on their emergence from the depths of pre-Islamic ignorance (*jāhiliyya*) in which they had wallowed for centuries. The time had now come for them to return to the Truth and commit themselves to the Straight Path; otherwise, the new religion would not grant them a second opportunity after having been patient with them.[17]

The *barāʾa* or release from contractual obligations which finally put an end to the paganism of the pre-Islamic era cannot be fully understood unless we see the civilizational and strategic aspects of the question as two interdependent imperatives which led to such a decisive step. The first is that paganism, as distinct from the other religions, represented the lowest possible form of religious relationship of human beings to the universe, one that bound individuals to idols of stone, preventing them from making progress and denying them a proper perspective on their own role in the world and their relationship with the other forces in creation. If the Arabs had remained pagans, that limited outlook would have kept them prisoners of their own ignorance and backwardness, trapped in a world of such narrow horizons that they would have remained isolated from the rest of the world and confined to their desert sands.

The second derives from the fact that this fideistic state, or state rooted in faith, which had been established in the heart of the Arab region, whose influence extended throughout the Arabian peninsula, and which had begun to mobilize its military strength and resources to take the next step towards moving into the entire surrounding area, had to adopt a clear-cut and vigorous strategy in order to protect itself in the peninsula from the pockets of Arab paganism and pre-Islamic centres of power. It also had to protect its home base with a cordon of political and doctrinal unity lest it be attacked from the rear while throwing the bulk of its resources into the fight against external forces.

Given the close link between these civilizational and strategic imperatives, we see how practical a proposition Islam was as compared with a number of other religions. Indeed, its truce with the Jews and Christians in the peninsula stemmed from the fact that as scriptural creeds these two religions were intellectually far superior to all other religions prior to or contemporary with Islam, and also that numerically they posed no strategic threat to the Muslim

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17. See al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh* …, *op. cit.*, III, pp. 122–3; Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt* …, *op. cit.*, II, part 1, p. 122; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb* …, *op. cit.*, I, p. 383; Ibn Ḥazm, *Jawāmiʿ* …, *op. cit.*, p. 258; al-Muṭahhar Ibn Ṭāhir al-Muqaddasī (d. 355/966), *Kitāb al-Badʾ wa-l-taʾrīkh al-mansūb li-Abī Zayd al-Balkhī*, ed. Clement Huart, Paris, 1899, IV, pp. 240–1.

state in the peninsula. However, when the Jews, both before and after the decisive raid on Khaybar, sought to harm the state and establish numerous contacts with foreign powers on the lookout for such openings, an order was given not to allow them to remain in the northern sectors of the peninsula that were close to the Muslims' power base. The announcement of release from contractual obligations was thus a civilizational and strategic victory for the Muslim state as it prepared for the next phase in civilizing the world and fighting the leaders of idolatry in order to bring freedom of belief to people wherever they might be.

Relations with the Jews

The roots of the relations between Islam and the Jews go back to the Old Testament and other religious books. Zayd ibn Aslam said: 'It has been reported to us that ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sallām used to say that the description of the Messenger of Allāh in the Torah is, 'O Prophet, we have sent you as a witness, a messenger, a herald and a sanctuary for the illiterate. You are my servant and messenger, I have named you *al-Mutawakkil* (He who trusts in God). He is neither coarse nor uncouth nor loud-mouthed in the market place. He rewards not evil with evil, but is forgiving and understanding. I shall not take Him unto myself until I set straight, through Him, the deviant community so that they say: 'There is no God but God'. Then He will open eyes that are blind, ears that are deaf and hearts that are closed'. Kaʿb al-Aḥbār heard this and said: ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sallām is right except that in the oral tradition, it is 'the eyes of the common people, the ears of the deaf and the hearts of the closed'.[18] We read in the Old Testament, Haggai, 2:6–7, 'For thus saith the Lord of Hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory'. In a commentary on the Hebrew original, it says that 'the desire of all nations' is *ḥamūḏoṯ*, namely, that which all nations glorify.[19]

As a result, the Jews from time to time announced the imminent appearance of the last prophet, boasting about it, warning that they would join him, and threatening those who contradicted them.[20] Most Jewish rabbis were not expecting the new prophet to come from anything other than the familiar Jewish stock. Were he to be of Arab descent, he would pose a danger to their profitable existence: his open, universal message would sweep away

18. Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt …*, *op. cit.*, I, part 2, p. 87, see pp. 88–9 for more details.
19. See *Deuteronomy* 18 and *Isaiah* 42; Ibrāhīm Khalīl Aḥmad, *Muḥammad bayna al-Tawrāt wa-l-Injīl wa-l-Qurʾān*, 2nd ed., Cairo, Maktabat al-Waʿy al-ʿArabī, 1964, p. 22.
20. See al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh …*, *op. cit.*, III, p. 354.

their closed, ethnic communities and his clear, liberal principles would expose their rituals and secrets.

As the Muslim state in Medina took shape, the Jews living there were initially unable to declare their open opposition at a time when the adherents of the new religion were daily increasing in number, nor was it in their interest to take on the role of Islam's major adversary while the Quraysh were still a powerful force. Most of the Jewish tribes, therefore, agreed to the statute or document (ṣaḥīfa) drawn up by the Prophet for the regulation of political and civil affairs in Yathrib (Madīna), to which they agreed as parties in order to allow themselves a breathing space, given the speed with which events were unfolding. Despite the fact that this agreement stipulated that the Jews should participate alongside the Muslims in countering any aggression from the Quraysh against Medina, and contribute to meeting military expenses, the Jews did not implement these conditions; nor did the Prophet wish to insist that they must do so, the important issue being that they should cease their activities against Islam so that efforts might be focused on the decisive confrontation with the Quraysh. This explains the Prophet's response to the Helpers (*Anṣār*) at the Battle of Uḥud when they asked him: 'O Prophet, shall we not seek assistance from our allies the Jews?' to which he replied, 'We have no need of them'.[21]

The Prophet's purpose in the *ṣaḥīfa* and other similar agreements made with the various clans of Yathrib was to destroy the old order and institute a new one in which the various elements of Yathrib could be united so that, after a period of disunity, it might be reborn as a single city.[22]

For some time after the *Hijra*, the relations between the Prophet and the Jews remained good. On his part, the Prophet sought to explain to the Jews the religious motives and aims of his movement, and the common elements linking the earlier religions to Islam, especially as they could see for themselves in their own scriptures the allusions to his prophethood. The common origin of both religions led to some Muslim rites and ceremonies being performed in ways similar to those practiced by the Jews. This was logical for the new message, which was to proclaim on more than one occasion that it was merely the continuation of the great religious message first delivered by Abraham (Ibrāhīm) and subsequently proclaimed by Moses (Mūsā) and Jesus (ʿĪsā). Here we see the ingenuous error committed by a number of authors and orientalists, such as Carl Brockelmann, who wrote: 'The Prophet's religious attitudes during the first days of his sojourn in Medina were influenced by his links with the Jews, and it is very likely that, following his arrival in Medina, he wanted the Jews to join his religion. He therefore attempted to win them over

21. Ibn Hishām, *Tahdhīb* …, pp. 175–6.
22. I. Wolfensohn, *Taʾrīkh al-yahūd fī bilād al-ʿarab fi-l-jāhiliyya wa-ṣadr al-islām,* Cairo, Maṭbaʿat al-Iʿtimād, 1927, pp. 116–17.

by modifying Muslim rites so that, in certain respects, they were in keeping with Jewish rituals.'[23]

The Jews, noting this Muslim affinity with them at the beginning of the Medinan period, but without understanding the underlying reasons for it, hoped that the Prophet might give precedence to their creed. The principal source of danger which the new message posed for Judaism then gradually began to dawn on them. The Prophet called for a type of monotheism which differed from the exclusive, elitist and ethnic form in which the Jews believed, namely, that the One God was the God of Israel, who had chosen them for himself above all other peoples, whereby they saw themselves as superior to all others. When Muḥammad came, he called on all people, irrespective of race, to pray to this One God, and thus removed the distinctiveness whereby the Children of Israel sought God's help against all others. Hence, the Jews thought that there could be no peace between them and Muḥammad, who was endeavouring to demolish the established principles by which they lived. There then arose between them and the Prophet various arguments and disputes, which quickly led the Jews to adopt a provocative and obstinate stance and harden their opposition. This eventually prompted them to accord preference to Meccans, despite other idolatry, to those who believed in One God.[24]

The conflict between the Prophet and the Jews began with a religious debate, in which the Jewish rabbis obstinately posed a number of provocative questions to the Prophet, which were subsequently dealt with in the Qur'ān.[25] The tension increased when the Hypocrites joined the Jews in their battle against the Muslims.[26] The Jews then proceeded to sow discord between the Emigrants (*Muhājirūn*) and the Helpers, and between the Aws and the Khazraj, and lure them away from their religion and bring them back to polytheism.[27] Nevertheless, there are a number of verses in the Qur'ān which make an exception for some Jews and which commend the integrity of their positions since some of them accepted Islam willingly.[28] There was also a good relationship between the Emigrants and some Jews, who would come to their meetings, ask questions and listen to their replies, and who saw the Torah as confirmation of the Qur'ān and vice versa.[29]

23. *Tārīkh al-shuʿūb al-islāmiyya*, trans. Fāris and al-Baʿlabakkī, 5th ed., Beirut, Dār al-ʿIlm li-l-Malāyin, 1968, p. 47

24. Al-Sharīf, *Makka wa-l-Madīna …, op. cit.*, pp. 412–15.

25. Wolfensohn, *Taʾrikh al-yahūd …, op. cit.*, pp. 123–5.

26. Darwaza, *Sīrat al-rasūl …, op. cit.*, II, p. 121.

27. Al-Sharīf, *Makka wa-l-Madīna …, op. cit.*, pp. 474–9.

28. Darwaza, *Sīrat al-rasūl, op. cit.*, II, pp. 207–8; see also the Qur'ān II.59, 62, 66, 80, 83; III.113–15, 199; and IV.162.

29. Al-Sharīf, *Makka wa-l-Madīna …, op. cit.*, p. 474, concerning the commentary of al-Ṭabarī, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 281–4.

The bitter struggle between Islam and Arab paganism began with the Jews throwing their weight behind the polytheists and employing in their counter-offensive every possible tactics which might serve to escalate the psychological warfare and polemical attacks;[30] these included social unrest, assassinations, military maneuvering, treacherous behaviour at critical moments, and mobilizing and inciting the forces opposed to Islam to strike their blow. Unfortunately for the Jews, however, they did not confront Islam as a cohesive force, which enabled the Prophet to deal with each group of Jews separately and defeat them one by one, starting with the Banū Qaynuqāʿ (2/624) and ending with the Jews of Khaybar (7/628), following the defeat of the Banū al-Naḍīr and the Banū Qurayẓa (5/627). The Jews might have contemplated collective action were it not for their fear of the consequences of being left exposed, since they were unaccustomed to overt action. They, therefore, opted for the alternative which was for each of their tribes to choose an appropriate moment to strike at Islam and weaken the Muslim state.

Khaybar was, by virtue of its strategic military position, the last stronghold of the Jews in the peninsula, from which several attacks against the Muslims and their state had been launched. It had also become a refuge for any Jew who had been evicted from Medina; for all these reasons, it was necessary to eliminate it. Despite the decisive victory gained by the Prophet against the Jews of Khaybar after fierce resistance, he agreed to spare their lives when they asked him to do so. When they came to him and asked to be allowed to stay on their land in exchange for giving the Muslims half their produce, the Prophet consented, being aware of their agricultural potential and wishing to take advantage of any opportunity to populate and exploit the land. However, he made it clear to them that his consent was not binding in perpetuity and that, as a precaution against any treachery or deceit on their part, he could, if he so wished, expel them.[31]

According to the Jewish historian, Israel Wolfensohn, it was particularly significant that among the booty seized by the Muslims during the attack on Khaybar were numerous fragments of the Torah, which the Prophet ordered to be returned to the Jews when they came to ask for them. This demonstrates the importance of these documents in the mind of the Prophet, which caused

30. See al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh …, op. cit.*, II, pp. 401, 412; al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī …, op. cit.*, I, pp. 184–5, 204, 413; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb …, op. cit.*, I, pp. 284–5.

31. Ibn Hishām, *Tahdhīb …, op. cit.*, pp. 261–4; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh …, op. cit.*, III, pp. 10–15, 20–21; Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt …, op. cit.*, II, part 1, p. 80; al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī …, op. cit.*, II, pp. 643–77, 690–1; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, I, p. 352. See also Taqiyy al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442), *Imtāʿ al-asmāʿ bimā li-l-rasūl min al-atbāʿ*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir, Cairo, 1941, I, pp. 310–32.

the Jews to respect him, as he had not allowed their holy scriptures to come to any harm. This was in contrast to the behaviour of the Romans when they conquered Jerusalem in 63 BC, burned the holy books and trampled them under foot, and that of the Christian fanatics during the persecution of the Jews in Andalusia, where they too burned copies of the Torah. Therein lies the difference between those conquerors and the Messenger of Islam.[32]

When the Jews of Fadak, a neighbouring Jewish village, heard that their co-religionists in Khaybar had been treated well, they sent word to the Prophet expressing their desire to come to an agreement on the basis of half of their land.[33] Wādī al-Qurā, on the other hand, remained defiant, and the Prophet imposed a blockade on it. He called on its people to embrace Islam, but they insisted on fighting. A number of limited skirmishes took place between the two sides. The Prophet again asked them to embrace Islam, but they refused. He then managed to take the town by force, but left the agricultural land in their possession on the basis that half the produce was to be given to the Muslims. When news of the Muslim victories reached the Jews of Taymāʾ, they sued for peace in return for payment of *jizya* (poll-tax) and remained in their town.[34]

Thereafter, the Jews remained citizens, but were no longer a military force. They exercised their rights within the framework of the Muslim state and were not harmed by anyone. Some returned to Medina, as evidenced by accounts in the *Sīra* of Ibn Hishām and *Maghāzī* of al-Wāqidī. There are many historical texts and narratives which show that the Prophet treated the Jews in a spirit of tolerance after the attack on Khaybar. On one occasion, he advised his governor in Yemen, Muʿādh ibn Jabal, not to entice the Jews away from Judaism. The Jews of Baḥrayn received similar treatment in that they were only required to pay *jizya*, and remained devoted to the religion of their forefathers. Most important were the rights and privileges granted by the Prophet to the Banū Sanīna of Khaybar, the people of Maqnā and a good number of the clans of Khaybar, in addition to providing for their retention of the land and half its produce, as mentioned by Ibn Hishām and al-Bukhārī.[35]

32. Wolfensohn, *Taʾrīkh al-yahūd* …, *op. cit.*, p. 170.
33. Al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī* …, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 706–7; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ* …, *op. cit.*, I, p. 33; Ibn Khayyāṭ, *Taʾrīkh* …, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 47–8.
34. Al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 709–11; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ* …, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 39–40; Abu-l-Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Masʿūdī (d. 346/956), *al-Tanbīh wa-l-ishrāf*, Beirut, Dār al-Turāth, 1968, p. 224.
35. Wolfensohn, *Taʾrīkh al-yahūd* …, *op. cit.*, pp. 175–176, 7, 178, 181. See also al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ* …, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 66, 85, 91.

Relations with the Christians

The first links between Islam and Christianity go back to the moment when the Christian Waraqa ibn Nawfal stood before the Prophet hours after the commencement of his Prophetic mission. Waraqa said to him: 'By the One in whose hands I am, you are the Prophet of this community. The Archangel Gabriel has come to you as he came to Moses, and verily, you shall be accused of lying, shall be wronged, expelled and attacked. And if I live to see that day, surely I will effectively work for God's [cause].' Then he brought his head closer to him and kissed him.[36] Waraqa, however, died without seeing the day when the Prophet was accused of lying, was wronged, expelled and attacked by the Arab pagans.

We can, in fact, trace the beginning further back in time to the remaining passages in the New Testament foreshadowing Muḥammad, the Last Prophet: '.. the word must be fulfilled that is written in the law', says Jesus, 'that they hated me without reason. But when the *munaḥmnā* is come, whom God will send to you … he will bear witness to me … These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be offended.'[37]

In Syriac, *munaḥmnā* equates to the Arabic Muḥammad, meaning praised.[38] The Gospel of Matthew says, 'The stone which the builders rejected, the same has become the corner-stone. This is the Lord's doing and it is wonderful in our eyes. Therefore, I say to you, the kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.'[39]

The Messiah said to his disciples: 'There is still much that I could say to you, but the burden would be too great for you now. However, when he comes who is the Spirit of Truth, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but will tell only what he hears; and he will make known to you the things that are coming.'[40]

Relations between Muslims and Christians during the Meccan period were remarkably friendly and close. From the very first revelations, the Qurʾān stressed the common origin of the Qurʾān and the Scriptures and the principles and aims of the other revealed religions, and called upon the People of the Book to be witnesses to the truth of its message in a way which inspired them to bear affirmative witness to it, and which demonstrated

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36. Ibn Hishām, *Tahdhīb …, op. cit.*, p. 48.

37. The Gospel of John, 15:25–7.

38. Ibn Hishām*, Tahdhīb …, op. cit.*, pp. 44–5.

39. *The Gospel of Matthew*, 21:42–3.

40. *The Gospel of John*, 16:12–13. For details of the Gospel's prophecies and justifications with regard to the Prophet, see Ibrāhīm Khalīl Aḥmad, *Muḥammad …, op. cit.*, pp. 43–8; Jawād ʿAlī, *Taʾrīkh al-ʿarab fi-l-islām (al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya)*, part 1, Baghdad, Maṭbaʿat al-Zaʿīm, 1961, pp. 83–6; Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-manār, op. cit.*, part 9.

confidence in and reliance on them, just as it foreshadowed their acceptance of its message, and the victory of and widespread support for that message.[41] Muḥammad never concealed his affection for the Christians. The Qurʾān is full of evidence of that. Muḥammad used to cite as examples the Christian martyrs of former centuries in Yemen, the Ukhdūd martyrs, and extolled the virtues of the priests and monks on the borders with Syria, whom he greatly admired. He was also pleased that the Byzantine conquest had not resulted in the destruction of Christian churches, 'wherein God's name is often mentioned'.[42] Muḥammad saw in the People of the Book (Jews and Christians) the allies who would confirm his message and affirm the truth he was proclaiming: 'When they hear what has been sent down to the Messenger, you see their eyes overflow with tears because of the truth they recognize …'[43] Muḥammad interpreted the move by the more knowledgeable of the People of the Book to join forces with him as evidence of the truth of Islam and the falsehood of the polytheists' cause, and declared that his message was what had been heralded in the Bible.[44]

The Messiah occupies an exalted position in the Qurʾān. His birth was no ordinary birth as compared to others. He was the Messenger of God, to whom God spoke openly. He was the living word of God, and not confined to revelation alone. The Qurʾān refers to true Christianity when it says that Jesus was the word of God or the Spirit of God imparted to Mary (Maryam), and that he was human. It does not hold with those who profess the divinity of the Messiah or with those who practise the rite of offering bread to Mary before eating it, or other such doctrines that are Christian in name, but not in accord with true Christianity. A Christian can only acquiesce in the Qurʾān's rejection of the Trinity. 'And when God said, O Jesus, son of Mary, did you say to the people, Take me and my mother as gods apart from God?'[45].[46]

Eventually, as Muslim influence expanded to the north and the news of Muslim victories over Arab paganism reached the northern tribes, the Byzantine camp began to realize the imminent danger posed by the presence of Islam to the south. It is quite likely that the Byzantine Emperor and his senior commanders initially saw it merely as a large, tribal incursion to the north, or an attempt by an emerging Arab kingdom to expand its territory, as the kingdoms of Kinda or Tadmur (Palmyra) had done. They felt that their

41. Darwaza, *Sīrat al-rasūl* …, *op. cit.*, see other references in I, pp. 335–44.
42. Qurʾān XXII.40.
43. Qurʾān V.83.
44. E. Dermenghem, *Ḥayāt Muḥammad*, trans., ʿĀdil Zuʿaytar, 2nd ed., Cairo, Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya, 1949, pp. 128–30.
45. Qurʾān V.116.
46. Dermenghem, *Ḥayāt Muḥammad*, *op. cit.*, pp. 131–2.

Arab allies would be able to spare the Byzantine state the trouble of blocking that ambitious kingdom's advance northwards.

So began the conflict between the Muslims and the Arab Christians who were loyal to the Byzantines: first, the raid on Dawmat al-Jandal (5/626) and the attack on the tribe of Kalb (6/627), in both of which the Muslims were victorious, and then the raid on Muʾta (8/629), in which three Muslim commanders, Zayd ibn Ḥāritha, Jaʿfar ibn Abī Ṭālib and ʿAbd Allāh ibn Rawāḥa, were killed, and where Khālid ibn al-Walīd eventually managed to save the Muslim army from what seemed certain annihilation. Lastly, there was the raid on Tabūk (9/630), for which the Prophet assembled 30,000 fighting men and penetrated deep into the north under harsh conditions until they overlooked the forward positions of the Byzantine army, who then preferred to withdraw, perhaps hoping to lure the Muslims into the Syrian interior where they could choose the most suitable position from which to crush them. The Prophet, however, did not take the bait, but made use of his stay of over twenty days to make contact with many of the Christian tribal leaders, receiving their deputations and concluding peace treaties and co-operation agreements with them. He was thereby able to break their allegiance to the Byzantines and make them citizens or allies of the Muslim state, which had been his objective from the beginning of the conflict with the Byzantines. Among those who came to Tabūk to make a truce with the Prophet were Yūḥannā ibn Ruʾba, the ruler of Ayla, and the people of Jarbūʿ and Adhruḥ, and they gave him *jizya*, which signified a material sign of their membership to the Muslim state and a renunciation of their ties to anyone else. The Prophet drew up an agreement with Yūḥannā, which served as a model for the agreements he made with the Christian communities, granting them freedom of both religion and citizenship, and confirming that they were now part of the Muslim state and under its protection and authority: 'In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, this is a guarantee from God and the Prophet Muḥammad, the Messenger of God, to Yūḥannā ibn Ruʾba and the people of Ayla, their ships and caravans on land and sea, they shall have the *dhimma* (guarantee of security) of God and the *dhimma* of the Prophet Muḥammad, as shall whoever is with them from among the people of Syria, of Yemen and the sea…it is not lawful that they should be denied access to water or that their passage by land or sea should be hindered …'[47]

47. Ibn Hishām, *Tahdhīb …*, *op. cit.*, pp. 332–4; al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh …*, III, pp. 108–9; Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt …*, *op. cit.*, I, part 2, pp. 28–9, 37, II, part 1, p. 120; al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī …*, *op. cit.*, III, pp. 1025–32; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ …*, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 71–3; al-Masʿūdī, *al-Tanbīh*, *op. cit.*, p. 236. See also Muḥammad Ḥamīd Allāh, *Majmūʿat al-wathāʾiq al-siyāsiyya li-l-ʿahd al-nabawī wa-l-khilāfa al-rāshida*, 3rd ed., Beirut, Dār al-Irshād, 1969, pp. 87–9, 90–1, 91–5.

However, the Prophet's greatest victory was in his response to the challenge from the Byzantines. He advanced to join battle with them and they withdrew from his path. He waited for them to attack for some twenty days, but they made not the slightest move. This constituted a severe blow to Byzantine hegemony in Syria, a weakening of its civilizational influence and control over the Arab tribes, and an end to the Arabs' fear of Byzantine power. It was a psychological victory that enabled the Arabs a few years later to renounce their former allegiance, to strike against the Byzantines and inflict defeat on them, and to liberate Syria and Palestine from their control, under which some of the most severe forms of persecution and sectarian discrimination known to history had been practised.

Building a new Society and State

From the moment he entered Medina, the Prophet sought to perform the tasks incumbent upon him at the outset of this new phase of his mission: to establish the Muslim state on a firm basis and to create the necessary conditions for the achievement of that objective. The first step was the building of the mosque, and this was followed by the promulgation of the *ṣaḥīfa*, ensuring good relations between the Emigrants and the Helpers, and the formation of a Muslim army capable not only of protecting the emerging state but also of helping it to achieve its objectives.

The Prophet issued the order to build the mosque and personally took part in the task himself, alongside the Emigrants and the Helpers. He made it square with the length from the wall nearest the *qibla* (the direction of Prayer) to the opposite wall being one hundred cubits, the width being the same. At first, the *qibla* was towards Jerusalem. A number of rooms were constructed at one side for the Prophet and his family.[48]

The mosque quickly became a symbol of the universal and integrated nature of Islam. It also became a spiritual centre for the performance of rituals and acts of worship; a political and military base from which to direct the internal and external affairs of the state; a place of education and legislation, where the Prophet's Companions assembled, in whose courtyards debates were held, and from whose rudimentary pulpit instructions and sermons were dispensed, and also a social institution where Muslims learned about social order and equality, and where they practised monotheism, brotherhood and self-discipline. It seems clear that in the early years, the Muslim state's lack of funds and its constant preoccupation with internal and external affairs meant

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48. Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt …*, *op. cit.*, I, part 2, pp. 2–3; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ …*, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 4–5. For details, see Abu-l-Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Samhūdī (d. 911/1505), *Wafāʾ al-wafā bi-akhbār dār al-Muṣṭafā*, Cairo, Maṭbaʿat al-Ādāb wa-l-Muʾayyid, 1326/1908, pp. 229–56.

that it was unable to establish a greater number of specialized institutions, each of which might undertake a particular assignment. This caused the mosque to be inundated with official duties and tasks to the extent that it became, quite simply, a kind of clearing-house upon which converged and from which emanated all government business and many of the activities of the Muslim community.

The mosque was the first building block in the construction of the new family and community social structure in that it was instrumental in bringing those who professed the Muslim religion together in a single intellectual unit by means of meetings for discussing learned and legal matters, for worship, for buying and selling and for a variety of other functions. The mosque was not simply a temple or place of prayer, but, rather like Islam itself, brought together the different aspects of religion, politics and society.[49]

The next step was the drawing up of the document known as the Constitution of the Prophet, on the basis of which relations between the new Muslim community and the other groups living in Medina, particularly the Jews, were regulated.[50] The provisions of the document were in keeping with the basic principles of the Qur'ān. It considered the Muslims to be a single community (*umma*), distinct from other peoples; Muslims were enjoined to love and respect one another and work together; they were urged to preserve their bonds of allegiance and the rights arising therefrom, and to safeguard the rights of kinship, companionship and neighbourly protection (*jiwār*). It also established the principle of personal responsibility, rejecting the pre-Islamic laws of retaliation, recognizing the need to abide by the rule of law and to refer matters to the state for decision, including matters of war and peace. Disputes between individuals were a public matter and were not to be settled on an individual basis. It also required individuals to assist the state in establishing the rule of law, in restraining wrongdoers and refraining from aiding or sheltering criminals.[51] The document provided a characterization of the Muslim community and affirmed that they were a single community distinct from others. By this expedient, the Prophet eliminated tribal divisions or, at least, did not allow them any official status within the state; in other words, he placed himself above the narrow confines of tribalism so that Islam might belong to whoever embraced it. In this way, many people came to Islam,

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49. Anwar al-Jundī, *al-Islām wa-ḥarakat al-taʾrīkh*, Cairo, Maṭbaʿat al-Risāla, 1968, p. 32.

50. See the text of the document in Ibn Hishām, *Tahdhīb …*, *op. cit.*, pp. 134–8; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya …*, *op. cit.*, III, pp. 224–46; Muḥammad Ḥamīd Allāh, *Majmūʿat al-wathāʾiq …*, *op. cit.*, pp. 41–7.

51. Al-Sharīf, *Makka wa-l-Madīna …*, *op. cit.*, pp. 393–4.

and the Prophet took care not to obstruct their participation in the life of the Muslim community.[52]

The document also established the concept of religious freedom in its widest sense, and opposed bigotry and the stifling of opinions and beliefs. This open, tolerant position arose from a strong belief that the Jews, as a People of the Book, would be favourably disposed towards the new cause and would come out in support of it in case of a threat or a struggle against the common pagan enemy - as the provisions of the document itself confirmed - or that, in the worst-case scenario, they would at least refrain from causing trouble and obstructing the process of building the new state and combating the pagan forces that were taking up positions around it. What actually happened, however, was the exact opposite, as we saw in our discussion of relations between the Jews and the Muslims.

The promulgation of the document represents an important development in socio-political concepts. For the first time in the Arabian Peninsula, there was a community based on a non-tribal consideration and was unconstrained by the ties of blood-relationship, whereby the two tribes of Aws and Khazraj were assimilated into the community of the Helpers, and the Helpers and Emigrants then merged into the Muslim community. This community of Muslims subsequently established links with the Jews, who for the first time lived alongside them in Medina under the rule of law, with all matters being referred to the state. Through a process of rapid, comprehensive change, the constitution put an end to the tribal nature of the social contract in favour of a new, more positive contract that was closer to notions of collective responsibility and ideological unity.[53]

The Prophet then made his next move, which was to alleviate the crisis in living conditions that had dogged the Emigrants since their departure from Mecca, and to regulate their social relations with their brothers, the Helpers, so that they might recover their material well-being and manage to attain an adequate social status. He, therefore, adopted a system of fraternal bonding and sharing between two persons, an Emigrant and a Helper, saying: 'Act as brothers in God'.[54] From this emphasis on brotherhood came the arrangement whereby, on the death of a member of the Helpers, his

52. Al-Sharīf, *Makka wa-l-Madīna* …, *op. cit.*, p. 395. For an explanation and details of the document, see pp. 394–9 and also Julius Wellhausen, *The Arab Kingdom and its Fall*, trans. M. G. Weir, London, Curzon Press and Totowa, N.g., Rowman & Littlefield, 1973, pp. 10ff.; see its translation, *Taʾrīkh al-dawla al-ʿarabiyya wa-suqūṭuhā*, trans. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Hādī Abū Rīda, 2nd ed., Cairo, Lajnat at-Taʾlīf wa-l-Tarjama wa-l-Nashr, 1968, pp. 11–15.

53. Al-Jundī, *al-Islām wa ḥarakat* …, *op. cit.*, pp. 33–4.

54. Ibn Hishām, *Tahdhīb* …, *op. cit.*, pp. 138–9; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 270–1; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya* …, *op. cit.*, III, pp. 226–9, al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ al-wafā* …, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 190–1.

property would pass to his Emigrant brother rather than to his own blood relatives, whether men, women or children. This continued until the Battle of Badr in which the Muslims gained considerable quantities of booty and goods, and God revealed that 'Those related by blood are nearer to one another in the Book of God',[55] at which point the rules of inheritance reverted to their original form.[56]

The Helpers received the Prophet's commands with great delight and opened their hearts and homes to their brothers in the faith. Al-Wāqidī even mentions that, when the Prophet turned from the Banū ʿAmr ibn ʿAwf in Qubāʾ to Medina, so too did his Companions amongst the Emigrants. The Helpers then vied with each other over whom the Emigrants should stay with until they drew lots and no one stayed with anyone except by drawing lots.[57] The Helpers also declared that they would give the Prophet a free choice of plots of land for building houses in their town, saying, 'If you like, take our houses'. He thanked them and then chose plots for his Companions on land that did not belong to anybody.[58]

The Emigrants greatly appreciated the kindness and generosity of their brothers, and reciprocated by refusing from the outset to be dependent on them or live at the expense of those who had given them shelter and sworn an oath of allegiance to them; thus, they strove to find work that would provide them with a good income, taking care to benefit from every opportunity that would yield them a lawful living.[59]

This fraternal bonding was an early experiment in the history of social justice, which the Prophet cited as an example of the flexibility of Islam and, in the appropriate circumstances, its openness to the most egalitarian and just forms of social relations. In consonance with God's concerns, which know no favouritism, he adduced this fraternal bonding to refute all those who claimed that Islam constituted only a partial reform of the social question for that period, and every period, is shaped by its means of production, had not allowed Islam to evolve a new paradigm of social relations, which the current stage of production had not yet produced or dictated. The years of the Prophet's mission are replete with other such social experiments which run counter to such an analysis and which are no less weighty or significant

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55. Qurʾān VIII.75.
56. Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt* …, *op. cit.*, I, part 2, p. 1; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb* …, *op. cit.*, I, p. 270.
57. Al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī* …, *op. cit.*, I, p. 378.
58. Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb*, *op. cit.*, I, p. 270.
59. See al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* …, for a description of the incident at the marriage of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAwf.

than the fraternal bonding arrangement; for reasons of space, we shall simply refer the reader to the relevant works.[60]

The fourth measure was to raise an army capable of defending the nascent state, meeting challenges and putting pressure on the pagan leadership to allow people the freedom to practise the new faith. Most of the followers of the Prophet had fought during their pre-Islamic days and knew how to bear and use arms. However, the Muslims faced a new situation because of the escalation of the struggle between Islam and the pagan forces, and the revelation of Qurʾānic verses calling on the faithful to take up arms.[61] All this made it incumbent upon the Prophet to develop these capabilities and induce his followers to undergo further training so as to enhance their military proficiency. This was necessary to withstand the enemy that was encircling the new state as closely as a bracelet round a wrist. Throughout the Medinan period, the Prophet, as the commander of the Muslims, sought tirelessly to instruct his followers in the arts of warfare and to train them in the use of arms. In his endeavour to create the Muslim warrior, he employed two parallel methods: moral guidance and practical training. Through the former, the Prophet endeavoured to raise the morale of his fighters by giving them the certain hope of either victory or Paradise. Since then, that hope has spurred Muslim soldiers on the battlefield and prompted them to exert their best mental, physical and technical efforts in order to either secure victory or die by the sword.

Through practical training, the Prophet endeavoured to put all the available energies of the men, women, children, young and old of the community (umma) to good use, and to hone every kind of fighting skill, including lance-throwing, swordmanship, archery and horsemanship. He also emphasized the need to learn how to fight in every environment, whether on land or at sea, in accordance with God's word, 'Make ready for them whatever force you can'.[62]

With these four measures, the Qurʾān and the Prophet established the basic foundations of the Muslim state in Medina. The legislation springing from the Qurʾān and the Prophet's *Sunna* began to grow from one day to the next. This did not take place in any theoretical or abstract manner divorced from reality, but in a way closely linked to everyday experience. This meant that its provisions were more pertinent to the movement of the Muslims and the development of their state, more relevant to their actual situation, and more conducive to their legal and social needs, given that this legislation kept

60. See, for example, Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt* …, *op. cit.*, II, part 1, p. 78; al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī* …, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 377–8, II, p. 680, III, pp. 863–4; al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ* …, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 33, 88; *Ansāb* …, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 352–3, 519
61. Qurʾān XXII.39ff.
62. Qurʾān VIII.60.

pace with their everyday problems and experiences on a daily, even an hourly basis.

Thus began the stage of building the Muslim state following the *Hijra,* the previous stage having been concerned with the construction of Muslim individuals and society and their preparation, both individually and collectively, to be fully receptive, psychologically and mentally, to the legislation comprising arrangements and limitations that were to be imposed, and to accept them without hesitation, reluctance, deceit, disloyalty, evasiveness, rejection or desertion. It was an absolute and clear-sighted recognition of the fact that such revelations in the field of legislation and regulation were the Absolute Truth, the Supreme Good and Right, besides which there was only manifest error.

This development, which was designed to promote the Muslim message, allowed the new structure to be built on a firm foundation which was deeply imbedded in the Muslim psyche at both the individual and collective levels, and to form an interlocking and coherent whole. Furthermore, the new conception of time, responsibility and moral vigilance that the faith had implanted in the Muslim soul, caused Muslims not simply to accept the new legislation, restrictions and injunctions and to implement them scrupulously, but to seek to gain time and to hasten to transform them into real-life, everyday situations and experiences, just as it had prompted them to strive to do good and to work creatively in order to please and obey God to the utmost degree. All this ensured a continuous evolution in the emerging state's legislative institutions and a marked acceleration in the process whereby their provisions filtered down to the street, homes, the market place, the mosque and the town square, thus demonstrating, from a civilizational point of view, the astonishing speed with which the Muslims constructed their new world and their well-balanced civilization.

One matter which should be mentioned here is that of calling the first Muslim state, the Medinan state, by virtue of its location in the holy city of Medina. The appellation 'the Medinan state' may give rise to a misunderstanding by suggesting that it was a regional city-state, something similar to ancient Athens or Sparta. In fact, it was purely incidental that the *Hijra* state was associated with Yathrib (Medina). It was, from the very beginning, a universal, fideistic state, and could have arisen in any place that adopted the idea and professed the faith. In the same way, the new state was the *Hijra* State, not the state of the Emigrants, since the Emigrants were not seeking to destroy or displace the original inhabitants, nor were they in the business of establishing colonies or putting up barriers between themselves and the inhabitants of the city to which they had moved. This was different from the European colonization of America, Australia and South Africa, with the varying degrees of harshness which that entailed. It was a doctrinal, fideistic state, in which

the indigenous inhabitants and the more recent Emigrants enjoyed the same humanitarian consideration and legal rights. The faith was open to all by virtue of their humanity, regardless of their homeland or tribal affiliation. It was an open state that did not exclude any specific groups, unlike other 'religious' states in the past: 'It is for the poor Emigrants, expelled from their homes and property, seeking grace and favour from God and helping God and his Messenger, they are the truthful ones; And those who settled in the abode and professed the faith, before them, love whosoever emigrated to them and do not find in their breasts any need for what they have been given and prefer others above themselves even though there be poverty amongst them and whosoever is preserved from the greed of his own soul, they are those who prosper; And those who came after them, say "Lord, forgive us and our brothers, who preceded us in the faith and do not put into our hearts any ill-will towards those who believe. Lord, you are indeed Compassionate and Merciful." '[63]

This state is unique in the history of religion because it established two principles that only exist in non-religious states. The first was the freedom of religion, which was a freedom the Muslim state did not simply tolerate but actually committed itself to safeguarding. The second was the recognition of the idea of a tolerant and humanitarian nation-state in its widest sense, a principle that guaranteed equal rights and established national obligations amongst all citizens of the state, regardless of their ethnic origin, colour, language or customs.[64]

The Islamic Transformation

One may note from the preceding pages how some fundamental civilizational changes were stressed and developed in the Qur'ān, the *Sunna* and the historical practice of the early Muslims; these can be summed up under the following themes: (1) monotheism in place of idolatry and polytheism; (2) unity in place of fragmentation; (3) state in place of tribe; (4) law in place of custom; (5) institution in place of tradition; (6) community (*umma*) in place of clan; (7) restoration and construction in place of demolition and degradation; (8) order in place of anarchy, superstition, baseless fancies and heretical tendencies; (9) knowledge in place of ignorance and illiteracy; (10) equilibrium and harmony in place of contradiction, antagonism and conflict.

There is not enough space here to examine each of these themes or to stress their doctrinal and historical veracity. It will suffice, therefore, to

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63. Qur'ān LIX.8–10; Muḥammad Fatḥī ʿUthmān, *Dawlat al-fikra*, Kuwait, al-Dār al-Kuwaitiyya, 1968, pp. 16–17.
64. Al-Sharīf, *Makka wa-l-Madīna …*, *op. cit.*, pp. 383– 4.

consider certain facets of these themes in order to identify the civilizational parameters of the Medinan period of Muḥammad's prophethood with regard to aspects of thought and everyday life in their various contexts.

The conceptual-doctrinal shift

No movement in human history so liberated and dignified the intellect and placed it in its rightful place as that initiated by Islam: this change of humanity's orientation from diversity to unity, from the worship of God's creatures to the worship of the One God, from an infatuation with stones, idols, statues and graven images to a love of the intangible and invisible Truth; breaking down the physical barrier to the Unseen and enabling the mind to grasp concepts which are more elevated than what can be perceived through one's earthly senses.

It is to this shift that the Qurʾān refers when it says that Allāh brings the people who believe from 'darkness into light'[65] and again, when it says that Islam has come to liberate humankind, 'making lawful for them the good things and making unlawful for them the bad things and relieving them of their burdens and the yokes that were upon them.'[66] On more than one occasion, it proclaims that the new religion is 'the Straight Path', besides which there is only wilderness, deviation, perdition, heresy and error, and that no one, no matter how intelligent, can function, give the best of themselves and achieve great things while stumbling blindly in such a wilderness or bound in such chains.

The new faith had come to lead the human race to a life of plenty, to justice and to monotheism, such that the mind—reshaped by these principles— finds itself capable of moving and operating throughout this vast range of possibilities made available to it by Islam. The new faith also removed the constraints by any overwhelming, intellectual force compelling it to accept the unacceptable in the name of religion, confident in the free and direct encounter between God and humankind, such that all barriers and forms of mediation fall apart, and God alone has the right to provide guidance, to receive adoration, and to control destiny.

In order to understand the sheer scale of this conceptual shift within the faith, we must recall the mind-set of the Arabs during the pre-Islamic era, their ways of perceiving the world and of coping with the images conjured by the forces controlling and directing them, and compare this with the position achieved by the Muslim intellect as a result of its new set of beliefs.

65. Qurʾān II.257.
66. Qurʾān VII.157.

This faith was built on a set of conceptual values such as divinity, universality, equilibrium, permanence, monotheism, dynamism, a positive outlook and realism, which came together and interlocked, forming a doctrinal array that no other positivist or religious ideology in the world has even come close to emulating. This solid array is consistent both with the deepest roots of human nature and, at the same time, with the characteristics and aspirations of pure reason.

THE COGNITIVE SHIFT

This shift is a process in the innermost recesses of the mind enabling it to interact with the universe, the world and existence as such in a manner which is in keeping with the demands of the Muslim conception. In the very first verses to be revealed in the Book of God, we can see this cognitive shift already under way: 'Read in the Name of your Lord, Who created, created man of a blood-clot. Read, and your Lord is the most generous, Who taught by the pen, taught man that which he knew not.'[67] Over the period of 23 years, during which the verses of the Qur'ān were revealed, this emphasis gradually intensified and the process made that shift a normal, everyday fact of life.

The Qur'ānic appeals expressed as injunctions to read, think, perceive, comprehend, contemplate, etc., and which are scattered throughout the Qur'ān, rang out loud and clear throughout both the Meccan and the Medinan periods. Indeed, the entire Qur'ān from beginning to end, with regard to faith, legislation, behaviour and points of fact, constitutes an array of cognitive injunctions which, if taken earnestly, were bound to inflame the human intellect and imbue it with a cognitive yearning for all the phenomena, events and objects surrounding it.

The Qur'ān addressed itself to the ordinary masses, who had only a scant amount of learning. Pre-Islamic traditions and values and intellectual immaturity continued to be present in the minds of the people. But through the power of faith, the Qur'ān managed to teach them to reshape their minds in order to be able to assimilate the new concepts.

Islam is not concerned with details, but strives to create an environment of endeavour and achievement which is conducive to productiveness. And so, through this cognitive shift, Islam managed to create such an environment by raising up from the very depths of pre-Islamic Ignorance a community (*umma*) of people who succeeded in fashioning a civilization which has amply contributed to the good of humanity.

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67. Qur'ān XCVI.1–5.

THE METHODOLOGICAL SHIFT

This shift is, to some extent, connected to the two preceding shifts, and at the same time springs from them. We now know how crucial a part is played by methodology in the intellectual and civilizational movement of humanity. This shift effected by Islam extended to three different areas:

1. *Causality*: Examining the content of the Qur'ān, we see how its clear verses have given the Muslim mind a composite view of the world, of life, humankind and existence, a view which links cause and effect through reflection, research and investigation, and endeavours to pinpoint the thread that binds together phenomena and objects in a given field. The Qur'ān wanted the Arab intellect to go beyond its simplistic, superficial, disjointed approach, which saw objects and phenomena as cut off, isolated and separate from each other. Such an approach was unable to collate, compare, draw analogies, pick up similarities and discard heterogeneous elements; nor could it synthesize, summarize and focus on the essential in order to arrive at the ultimate significance of a given phenomenon.

Indeed, one of the methods found scattered throughout the various parts of the Qur'ān is the emphasis on the need to adopt this causal view of things in order to probe the miracle of creation and realize the uniqueness of the Creator. Without this ability to link cause and effect, the mind of the believer would be unable to ascertain the truth with sufficient conviction, and the wondrous signs of God that pervade nature; the world and existence will be unable to provoke in us that leap of profound faith which is rooted in the discovery of the preordained link between the miracle of creation and the Creator.

The universe, which is itself an expression of God's creativity, is governed by a single set of laws, causes and principles emanating from a single Will. The universe will never be understood unless it is seen through an approach which is capable of gathering together, putting in order, comparing, summarizing and synthesizing in order to arrive at the truth being sought.

2. *The laws of history*: The Qur'ān reveals to the human intellect a very significant methodological truth: human history is not a chaotic process, without direction, but is governed by rules and norms in the same way as are the universe, the world, life, nature, and indeed all things. Historical events are not engendered by accident, but under specific conditions which direct them towards a given outcome.

Laws govern history. This is a concept which had not fully crystallized prior to the revelation of the Qur'ān, which provided the basis for a sound methodology for dealing with human history, moving away from mere compilation and presentation to an attempt to derive the laws governing the socio-historical phenomena that used to be known as customs and practices, and which are today called 'the laws of historical movement'.

The Qurʾān does not merely stress the permanence of these laws; it also transforms them into a dynamic force impelling the community of believers to overcome the pitfalls that had led earlier human communities to destruction, and to cope better with the forces of the universe and nature, deriving their values and teachings from the course of history itself.

3. *The senses and empiricism*: It may be said that neither the discovery of causality nor the laws of history can match the cognitive advance represented by the methodology of sensory, empirical research that the Book of God propounded, emphasized and regulated.

The Qurʾān urged people to reflect on the essence of their existence and their links to the surrounding universe through sensory perception, beginning with their own footprints and ending with the innermost recesses of the soul and the boundaries of the universe. It gave the senses responsibility for every step human beings took as they searched, examined, reflected, learned and experimented, and it encouraged them to look closely at everything surrounding them, their own disposition, their food and drink, the intelligible world, history and the evolution of humanity on earth, God's creatures and wondrous signs pervading everything, social laws, nature and the world, and how this earthly life began, developed and progressed. It invited them to listen carefully in order to learn and be discerning, and to look carefully in order to observe and see.

Time after time, Qurʾānic verses stress that hearing, sight and the heart are what gives human life its value and uniqueness, and that if human beings mobilize these forces and energies, they may occupy a position of responsibility as God's deputy on earth. If , however, they do not draw on these energies, they thereby choose the lowest rank, which God had not intended for them when He blessed them with sensory powers—the rank of beasts and animals.

Some 50 other verses urge the use of the intellect and invite the faithful to reflect and seek to understand what the senses can provide. The Qurʾān also stresses the need to rely on proof, evidence and sound argument in order to reach correct conclusions based on thorough examination, comparison, assessment and analysis. We cannot include here or even refer to all the verses of this sort. Suffice it to say that in one form or another, the root denoting knowledge (*ʿilm*) appears in more than 750 verses.[68]

In short, the Qurʾān places the human community of the faithful at the heart of the world and nature and urges them to do their utmost to search for the laws of nature in the depths of the earth and in the physical bonds between atoms and molecules. We are dealing here with a civilizational phenomenon in which faith is linked to discovery and innovation, divine knowledge to the

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68. For verses relating to the sensory, empirical approach, see, Qurʾān XVII.21–36; LXXX.24–31; LXXXVI.5; VII.185; XL.82; LXXX.17; V.75; XXX.50; VI.99; XXIX.20; VIII.21–24; LXXVI.2; XLVII.3; II.17; IV.78, 157; III.7; XLVI.23.

gradual penetration of the mysterious ways of nature, and the attainment of a high spiritual level here on earth to the subjugation of natural energies to achieve a corresponding degree of material progress. Indeed, Islam has never made a distinction between the two.

Conclusion

Now, as we approach the end of this chapter, it behoves us to sketch the main features, or rather the course charted by the Qurʾān and the *Sunna* of the Prophet in order to give rise to a nexus of suitable conditions which, in conjunction with the above-mentioned shifts, were aimed at engendering a civilizational climate which was favourable to creativity and achievement.

1. The first word that came down to Muḥammad in the cave on Mount Ḥirā, when the unlettered Messenger first met the archangel Gabriel, was not a negative command or prohibition. It was not 'Thou shalt not kill nor steal nor commit adultery' but rather it was affirmative and positive, a command to perform a civilizational act, namely, reading: 'Read, In the name of your Lord, Who created; created man from a clot of blood. Read, and your Lord is the most generous, Who taught with the pen, taught man what he knew not.'[69] Reading, knowledge and the pen are the words of the first verses of the first *sūra* to be revealed, placing Muslims at the very heart of the world rather than far away from its hustles and bustles.

2. It also represents the desire to liberate the human will rather than to repress it, as may be the case with some other religions. From the very beginning, in addition to its encouragement of intellectual activity in the world, Islam emphasized the liberation of the human will: '… [Making] lawful for them the good things and unlawful for them the bad things and relieving them of their burdens and the yokes that were upon them.'[70]

3. It also represents a clear and unequivocal call to constantly look forward and not to turn back. However, in certain circumstances, it may be necessary to look back: for instance, if the ancestors have passed on a legacy of knowledge which may guide communities in distinguishing between right and wrong. But if this is an unconscious act of blind imitation, it will put us in conflict with the teaching of the Qurʾān, which blamed the polytheists and reactionaries for clinging to the practices of their ancestors: 'They said, Have you come to us to turn us away from what we found our fathers doing?'[71] 'We have found our fathers upon a community and are following in their

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69. Qurʾān XCVI.1–5.
70. Qurʾān VII.157
71. Qurʾān XII.78.

footsteps.'[72] This is the wrong guidance, which Islam utterly rejects. Toynbee, the celebrated British historian, identifies two ways in which ancestral legacies are handled: namely, blind imitation during periods of cultural decline, and emulation of the elite and their rich experience during times of cultural advancement. The Qur'ān rejects the former on the grounds that it leads to backwardness and stagnation: 'That is a nation that has passed away, what they have earned awaits them and what you have earned awaits you and you will not be questioned on what they did.'[73]

4. This represents a refusal to squander one's energies on areas for which they were not intended. The Prophet says, 'Reflect on the blessings of God and not on God Himself'.[74] He invites us to reflect on creation, which leads to knowledge and technology, and at the same time stresses God's creativity in the world and belief in His uniqueness. He warns against speculating about God's essence, whose abstruseness goes far beyond our understanding and leads to the transcendental, to an abstract treatment of the 'necessarily existent' and the absolute beginning, to metaphysics, resulting in a waste of the intellectual faculty. He wants us to deal with the physical universe, to discover its laws in order to enhance life, whose potential has been harnessed for the benefit of humanity, and in order to ensure that we act as God's agents working to make the world prosperous, rather than squander our energies on what is beyond our limits and powers and the requirements of our civilizational development here on earth.

5. This represents a call to seize the context in which Man is placed. The Qur'ān contains hundreds of appeals to come to grips with the world, understand its laws, and benefit from its potential: 'Consider', 'Reflect', 'Understand', 'Hear', 'See', 'Know', 'Go'. There is no place in the world for those who do not use their intellect or senses to see, reflect, investigate, hear, examine, test and travel throughout the world. This is a continuous and dynamic endeavour, making Muslims, if they heed this injunction properly, optimally effective and able to contribute. This appeal is not made in a vacuum, nor is it intended to give rise to dreams and wild aspirations. Rather, it is a call to come to grips with and harness the physical environment in the interests of a devout and happy world, which serves human beings, frees them from necessity, and thus enables them to fulfil the higher demands of the faith. Indeed this is the meaning of the appointment of human beings as God's agents working to make the world flourish. Freedom from the harsh necessities and physical

72. Qur'ān XLIII.23.
73. Qur'ān II.134, 141.
74. Ibn ʿUmar related it from the Prophet as did Abū Nuʿaym in *al-Ḥilya*; al-Iṣbahānī in *al-Targhīb*, al-Ṭabarānī in *al-Awsaṭ*, al-Bayhaqī in *Shuʿab al-īmān* and al-Dylamī in *al-Firdaws* from other sources. Despite the weakness of the chains of transmission from the Prophet (*isnād*), their consistency strongly supports the *ḥadīth* suggesting that its meaning is correct.

constraints of the world is not brought about through passive devotion, but through a devotion combined with action, turning the forces of the sky and the earth into tools in the hands of human beings, and liberating them from necessity.

6. This also represents a call to seize the time. The Prophet says, 'If there is a time when one of you has a seedling and is able to plant it, let him plant it: he will be rewarded.'[75] Until the very last moment, the day on which the trumpet is sounded, the believer must cultivate the earth, and build, develop and continue human works. The Qur'ān says that earnest believers 'hasten to do good works' and 'are foremost in attaining them'.[76] Hastening and being foremost are temporal expressions which put Muslims in a constant state of striving, overcoming difficulties and obstacles and husbanding time even in extreme cases of hardship, tension and activity. This is another requirement of civilizational advancement which Islam has provided for, one that is no less significant than the others.

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75. ʿAlī Ibn al-ʿAzīz mentioned it in *al-Muntakhab*, as being transmitted by Anas through a good (*ḥasan*) chain of transmission, see Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī, *ʿUmdat al-qārī fī sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, the chapter on 'Cultivation and Agriculture.'
76. Qur'ān XXIII.61.

APPENDIX
The Life of Prophet Muḥammad (53 ʙʜ–11 ᴀʜ/570–632)

Date	Event	Description
570 CE	Birth of the Prophet	Born to Āmina bint Wahb, whose husband ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, had died a few weeks before the birth of the child in the 'Year of the Elephant', when Abraha, the governor of Yemen (then under Abyssinian rule), had sent an army with an elephant marching in its lead, with orders to destroy the Kaʿba. The child is named Muḥammad ('one who is often praised').
570 CE	Sent to the desert	In accordance with prevailing Arab custom, the child is sent to the desert for nursing and rearing. His foster-parents are Ḥalīma bint Abī Dhuʾayb and Ḥārith, both of the clan Banū Saʿd b. Bakr.
575 CE	Returned to mother	Following the incident of Angels coming to wash the chest of the child, Ḥalīma and Ḥārith bring him back to Āmina.
577 CE	Death of mother	After his mother's death, Muḥammad is taken into the care of his grandfather, ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, and after his death, into the care of his paternal uncle, Abū Ṭālib.
579 or 582 CE	Encounter with Baḥīra the monk	Muḥammad goes with his uncle on a trading trip; near Buṣra they meet the monk Baḥīra, who recognizes Muḥammad as the prophet foretold in scripture.
585 CE	Battle of Fujjār	Muḥammad accompanies his uncles to battle, where his task is to collect enemy arrows. He is present when the Qurayshite clans enter a pact (ḥilf al-fuḍūl) to uphold justice and protect the weak.
595 CE	Marriage to Khadīja	Muḥammad marries Khadīja, daughter of Khuwaylid, an aristocrat in Mecca from the tribe of Banū Asad. Over the next fifteen years, they have six children: Qāsim, Zaynab, Ruqayya, Umm Kulthūm, Fāṭīma, and ʿAbd Allāh, the first and last of whom die in infancy.
605 CE	Rebuilding of the Kaʿba	Controversy arises over who should place the Black Stone during the reconstruction. The dispute is settled when Muḥammad asks representatives of all the tribes to raise it and himself sets it in place.

Nubuwwa 1/610 CE (Year of Prophethood, hereafter NB)	The beginning of the descent of the Qurʾān	For a period of about three years, Muḥammad seeks solitude and often retreats to the cave of Ḥirāʾ on the Mountain of Light (Jabal al-Nūr) near Mecca. During Ramaḍān in his fortieth year, he is visited by the archangel Jibrīl bearing the first revelation.
1 NB/610 CE	The first to accept the message	Revelations continue. The first to accept Islam are among the Prophet's household: his wife Khadīja, his cousin ʿAlī, his freedman Zayd b. al-Ḥāritha. This is closely followed by his friend Abū Bakr.
1–3 NB/610–13 CE		The message spreads quietly at all levels of the society for about three years; some believers are among the rich and influential but most are among the impoverished and destitute.
3 NB/613 CE	The call to Islam	Muḥammad forewarns the leaders of his clan, the Banū Hāshim. His own uncle Abū Lahab denounces him, 'May you perish!'
3–5 NB/613–15 CE	Opposition to the message of Islam	The initial indifference of Meccans to the message of the Prophet slowly turns to anger and opposition. His uncle Abū Ṭālib, though he does not accept Islam, promises to protect Muḥammad. Deputations are sent to Abū Ṭālib by the hostile Quraysh. Compromises are suggested. Persecution of Muslims grows.
5 NB/615 CE	Emigrants to Abyssinia	Seventy Muslims emigrate to Abyssinia to flee persecution. They are welcomed by the Christian king. Envoys from the Meccan Quraysh appeal to the king to send them back, but the refugees remain in the king's protection.
6 NB/616 CE	ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb enters Islam	ʿUmar, nephew of Abū Jahl, intends to kill the Prophet, discovers that his own sister is a believer; he turns from being a bitter enemy to a staunch defender of the faith.
6–10 NB/616–19 CE	Boycott of the believers	The Quraysh ban all social interaction and economic exchange with Muslims, who thereafter move to the enclave of Mecca called Shiʿb Abū Ṭālib; they cannot conduct their businesses. Shortage of food and essential items brings great hardship to the Muslim community.
10 NB/619 CE	The Year of Sadness	The Prophet's wife Khadīja dies; his uncle and protector, Abū Ṭālib, dies.
10 NB/619 CE	Marriage with Sawda	The Prophet marries Sawda, widow of Sakrān b. ʿAmr. Marriage contract with ʿĀʾisha.

11 ɴʙ/620 ᴄᴇ	The Prophet goes to Ṭāʾif	The Prophet approaches Banū Thaqīf in their mountainous city of Ṭāʾif; he is cast out and returns to Mecca.
11 ɴʙ/620 ᴄᴇ	Night Journey and the Heavenly Ascent	The Prophet is carried to Jerusalem and then is taken to the Heavens on a steed named Burāq. The Night Journey and Heavenly Ascent (*isrāʾ wa-miʿrāj*), is mentioned in the opening verse of Q 17.
11–12 ɴʙ/621 ᴄᴇ 13 ɴʙ/622 ᴄᴇ	Pledges of ʿAqaba	In 620 ᴄᴇ six pilgrims from Yathrib had entered Islam at ʿAqaba, the site close to Minā where animals are sacrificed during the annual Ḥajj pilgrimage. The next year five of these six return with seven more, to pledge allegiance to the Messenger, and thereafter the community of believers grows in Yathrib. In 622 ᴄᴇ, 73 men and 2 women come from Yathrib to ʿAqaba to establish a formal pact of mutual allegiance and protection. Within ten weeks of this Second Pledge at ʿAqaba, almost all the Muslims have left Mecca for Yathrib.
13 ɴʙ/622 ᴄᴇ	The Hijra	The Prophet escapes to Yathrib, which is renamed Madīnat al-Nabī ('City of the Prophet'). This flight from Mecca to refuge in Medina marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar. The Emigrants (Muhājirūn) from Mecca are welcomed by the Helpers (Anṣār) in Medina. The Prophet establishes a formal pact of brotherhood between the Anṣār and the Muhājirūn, which together comprise the Muslim community.
1 ᴀʜ/622–3	Early battles led by the Prophet and his companions	
Ramaḍān 2 ᴀʜ/March 624	The Battle of Badr	The historic Battle of Badr in which several leading Qurayshites are killed, including the chief pagan antagonist Abū Jahl.
2 ᴀʜ/624	Change of *qibla*; fasting of Ramaḍān ordained	The direction of prayer (*qibla*) is changed from Jerusalem to the Kaʿba in Mecca; fasting the month of Ramaḍān is prescribed.
Shawwāl 2 ᴀʜ/April 624	Exile of the Jewish tribe of Qaynuqāʿ	Breaking their treaty, the Banū Qaynuqāʿ conspire with the traitorous Hypocrites against the Muslim polity; they are surrounded and then exiled from Medina.

Shawwāl 3 AH/ March 625	The Battle of Uḥud	Battle of Uḥud.
Ṣafar 4 AH/July 625	The Event of Rajīʿ	Six (or ten) Companions of the Prophet, sent to the tribe of Hudhayl to teach them Islam, are captured by trickery and killed.
Ṣafar 4 AH/July 625	The Event of Biʾr Maʿūna	ʿĀmir b. Mālik asks the Prophet to send some Companions to Najd to invite them to Islam. The Prophet sends seventy Companions, all but three of whom are deceived and killed at Biʾr Maʿūna.
Rabīʿ I 4 AH/ August 625	Siege and exile of the Jewish tribe of Banū al-Naḍīr	The tribe of Banū al-Naḍīr invite the Prophet and conspire to kill him. They are defeated, their weapons are confiscated, and they leave Medina with all their possessions.
Shawwāl-Dhū al-Qaʿda 5 AH/ March-April 627	The Battle of the Trench	A siege by the Meccan axis on Medina ends when the Meccans retreat after one month.
Dhū al-Qaʿda 5 AH/April 627	Battle with Banū Qurayẓa	The third Jewish tribe of Medina, Banū Qurayẓa, is besieged by Muslims in retaliation of their conspiracy to attack the Muslims while most of the adult Muslims were at the Battle of the Trench. After twenty-five days, they surrender and are executed except a few.
Shaʿbān 5 or 6 AH/January 626 or 627	Marriage with Zaynab	
Shaʿbān 5 or 6 AH/January 626 or 627	Battle with Banī al-Muṣṭaliq; the Event of Slander-mongering (Ifk)	Ghazwat Banī al-Muṣṭaliq; event of Ifk (Slander-mongering)
Dhū al-Qaʿda 6 AH/March-April 628	The Treaty of Ḥudaybiyya	Following a dream, the Prophet departs Medina for the Ḥajj Pilgrimage, but the Quraysh do not allow him to enter Mecca. The Muslims encamp at Ḥudaybiyya where a treaty is concluded with the pagans.
End of 6, beginning of 7 AH/628	The Prophet sends letters to kings and rulers	
Muḥarram 7 AH/May-June 628	Expedition to Khaybar	Khaybar is attacked and conquered.
7 AH/628	Marriage with Ṣafiyya	The Prophet marries Ṣafiyya bint Ḥuyayy while at Khaybar.

7/628	Poisoned at Khaybar	The Prophet is given poisoned meat by Zaynab bint Ḥārith, the wife of Salām b. Mushkim, but the Prophet recognizes it after chewing the first bite and throws it out. One Companion, Bishr b. Barāʾ b. Maʿrūr, dies after eating from it.
Dhū al-Qaʿda 7 AH/March 629	ʿUmra Qaḍāʾ	The Prophet performs ʿUmra with two thousand Companions.
Jumāda II 8 AH/August-September 629	Battle of Muʾta	Three thousand Companions go to Muʾta (in present-day Jordan) for an expedition against the Romans.
Ramaḍān 8 AH/January 630	Opening of Mecca	After the Quraysh violate the treaty of Ḥudaybiyya, the Prophet goes to Mecca with an army. The Quraysh surrender the city without a fight.
Shawwāl 8 AH/January-February 630	Battle of Ḥunayn	The Battle of Ḥunayn against the Bedouin tribe of Ḥawāzin.
Dhū al-Qaʿda 8 AH/March 630	Battle of Ṭāʾif	Ṭāʾif surrenders after considerable resistance.
9 AH/630–1		All the remaining Arabian tribes accept Islam. Battle of Tabūk. Death of Umm Kulthūm. Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq leads the Ḥajj; new revelation (*Sūrat al-Tawba*) forbids disbelievers to participate in Ḥajj thenceforth.
Dhū al-Ḥijja 10 AH/March 632	The Farewell Pilgrimage	The Prophet performs Ḥajj, delivers the Farewell sermon.
Rabīʿ I AH/June 632	Death of the Prophet	The Prophet dies in the chamber of his wife ʿĀʾisha and is buried there.

Chapter 2.3

THE MESSAGE AND ITS IMPACT

Ahmad Dallal

Students of early Islamic history have often focused their studies on exploring the origins of Islam in earlier religious traditions, and on explaining the sudden success of the new religion and the speed with which the Muslim community was able to claim a prominent presence in the world. Yet, regardless of the various perspectives on its origins, the rise of Islam marked a definite turning point in global history, and a watershed which is comparable only to a few major events in the history of humankind.[1]

The historical process which left its imprints on world history owes much to the establishment of an Islamic empire; but even before the Muslim conquests, some of the most enduring legacies of Islam were written into the early social and religious dynamics occasioned and initiated by the Qurʾān and Muḥammad. Its modest regional origins notwithstanding, the new Islamic order appropriated local histories but invariably transcended them.

The Islamic order as a break with the past

Right from its very beginning, Islam was a marker that distinguished a new community and differentiated it from its surroundings. Despite inevitable

1. On world history, see W. MacNeill, *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community*, Chicago, Ill., University of Chicago Press, 1963. On Islam in world history, see J. Voll, 'Islam as a Special World System', *Journal of World History*, V, No. 2, 1994, pp. 213–26; M. Hodgson, 'The Role of Islam in World History', in M. G. S. Hodgson and E. Burke III (eds), *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam, and World History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 97–125; and M. Hodgson, 'The Interrelations of Societies in History', in *Rethinking World History*, pp. 3ff. See also K. Blankinship, 'Islam and World History: Towards a New Periodization', *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, VIII, No. 3, 1991, pp. 423–52; and R. Eaton, *Islamic History as Global History*, Washington DC, American Historical Association, 1990.

continuities, the new Islamic order signalled a decisive break with the past. As Muslims spread their domain into the realms of earlier empires, Islamic culture evolved through contacts with older cultures that were absorbed into the new Muslim empire; yet at the same time, Islam grafted itself into and reshaped these cultures.

Although Islam owes much of its trans-regional impact to the establishment of Muslim empires, the formative ideas articulated in the practices of the nascent Muslim community during Muḥammad's lifetime were ever present in various periods of Islamic history.[2] The new features of the religious, social and political order ushered by Muḥammad's message provided lasting traits that characterized the otherwise dynamic and diverse societies into which Islam spread.

Underlying the role Islam played in shaping world-historical events was a measure of cultural unity which was itself grounded in the formative events of early Muslim history. The binding laws of Islam that were introduced and implemented by Muḥammad replaced the parochial, non-binding tribal laws of Arabia.[3] In a significant divergence from pre-Islamic Arabian practices, Muḥammad introduced new notions of religious, social and political authority, ones that recognized the ultimate authority of a legal and moral code and underscored the equality of Muslims before it. In addition to submitting to the Prophet's political and moral authority, Muḥammad's newly established order required Muslims to partake in the new social order of Medina: to pledge loyalty to the Medinan society, both by defending it against its enemies and by abiding by its laws. The laws of the new society as revealed to Muḥammad regulated the religious practices of Muslims, but also such fiscal, social and political matters as the payment of taxes, marriage and inheritance contracts, and the conduct

2. The literature on the Prophet Muḥammad is vast; for the earliest traditional Islamic account, see ʿAbd al-Malik Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya*, ed. I. Shalabī, Cairo, al-Ḥalabī, 1955; English trans. *The Life of Muhammad: a Translation of Isḥāq's* [sic. Ibn Isḥāq's] *Sīrat rasūl Allāh*, with introduction and notes by A. Guillaume. London, Oxford University Press, 1955. For an account based on the traditional Islamic sources, see M. Lings, *Muḥammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*, London, Islamic Texts Society, 1983. For a modern Orientalist account, see W. M. Watt's two volumes, *Muhammad at Mecca*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1953 and *Muḥammad at Medina*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1956. For a sociological approach, see M. Rodinson, *Muḥammad*, translated from the French by A. Carter, New York, Pantheon, 1980.

3. The primary source which outlines the early teachings of Islam is, of course, the Qurʾān. Only a small portion of the Qurʾān deals with regulations and obligations, while other parts deal with various doctrinal and religious issues, and with narratives of sacred history. Still, the legal portion of the Qurʾān is substantial, whether dealing with religious obligations, dietary rules, or personal and commercial interactions. See F. Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qurʾān*, Minneapolis, Minn., Bibliotheca Islamica, 1989. See also the chapter 'The major themes of the Qurʾān' by Khurram Murad, in this volume.

of war. In a sense, therefore, becoming a Muslim entailed the adoption of a universal ideology with distinct religious, social and political implications.

The new Medinan social order

The new social order established in Medina was qualitatively different from what had existed before in Arabia, and in some respects in the surrounding empires that Muslims were soon to overrun. Primary among the new features introduced to Arabia with the coming of Islam was the ability to envision and establish a state, with a clear structure of authority. In practical terms, this meant the introduction of a legal order that stood above the earlier tribal-egalitarian principles of Arabia, a taxation system, a clear definition of the leadership of the new community, and a pluralistic definition of the religious make-up of the new society in Medina. These innovations in the areas of law, politics, social structure, economy, and ethics were the foundations on which the later Muslim empires established themselves and left their imprints on the world scene.

A multi-religious and multi-cultural empire

The first critical characteristic of the expanding Islamic empire was its multi-religious and multi-cultural make-up. To be sure, in some phases military conquest was a primary vehicle of empire-building, but the new empire defined itself as an aggregate of more than one religious and ethnic community, each with its recognized norms and internal social arbitration mechanisms. The Constitution of Medina, a set of pacts regulating the relationship between the new Islamic polity in Medina and its various constitutive components, clearly indicates that the community envisioned by Muḥammad included Muslim as well as Jewish tribes, and even suggests that the title 'Muslim' was used to refer to both groups.[4] From the earliest phases of their history, a relatively developed Islamic doctrine defined Islam as part of a universal religious scheme. In this scheme, the People of the Book – that is, Jews and Christians – were acknowledged by the sacred scripture of Muslims; as such they were ushered into history by Divine will and not just by human agency and considerations of expediency.

As a result, from a purely religious perspective, the People of the Book could not be written out of sacred history even if historical Muslim agents were to wish to do so. Moreover, despite the natural tendency of various ethnic or tribal groups to dominate the political landscape, the central ethical

4.   See R. B. Serjeant, 'The Constitution of Medina', *Islamic Quarterly*, VIII, 1964, pp. 3–16. See also Akram Ḍiyāʾ al-ʿUmarī, *al-Mujtamaʿ al-madanī fī ʿahd al-nubuwwa*, Al-Madīna al-Munawwara, al-Jāmiʿa al-Islāmiyya, 1983.

principles of the formative state militated against discrimination between Muslims of differing ethnic and tribal backgrounds. Together, these features provided normative standards that created an ideologically hybrid space, informed the conduct of the evolving Muslim empire, and distinguished it from earlier empires.

The influences of several religious traditions are clearly traceable in the earliest articulations of Islam. The increasing universal tendencies of the earlier religions integrated into Islam corresponded to the increasing economic interlinks of the world. The coming of Islam, however, marked the culmination of the long historical processes through which monotheistic religions transcended their parochial origins and were universalized. Moreover, Islam was not a mere heretical branch of older religions but a new religion which transcended both its own local Arabian particularism and the sum total of the inherited religious traditions. The Islamic empire which rapidly, and for centuries to come, became the leading universal polity of the world was founded on a universal worldview articulated in the teachings of the Prophet. Already in the early Meccan phase of his career, Muḥammad rejected offers to compromise with the Arabian pagan cults or to be subsumed under the dominant, parochial polities. This profound independence of Islam was paralleled only by its insistence on considering itself as the culmination of the earlier monotheistic religions.

Distinctiveness of the new religion

Yet just as Islam situated itself within a larger scheme of sacred history, deliberate attempts were also made to define the new religion in distinction from the earlier traditions. A relatively elaborate system of religious teachings was articulated in the Meccan and early Medinan phases of Muḥammad's career, and included teachings about God, creation, prophets, ethical precepts, reward and punishment, and the hereafter. While many of these teachings recalled Jewish and Christian ideas, there were also distinctions which were systematically and deliberately articulated in the emerging Qurʾānic narrative. For example, subtle but significant differences characterize the Islamic views about the oneness of God, the concept of prophethood, the narratives of creation, and the role of human beings within a larger scheme of sacred history. In addition to these distinctively Islamic religious doctrines, the Medinan model for a legal and political order was part of the formative legacy that characterized the Islamic notions of intellectual and political authority, and shaped the communal identity of Muslim society.

A substantial number of Muslims, initially in Arabia and eventually in the vast domains of the Muslim empire, identified with the evolving ideals
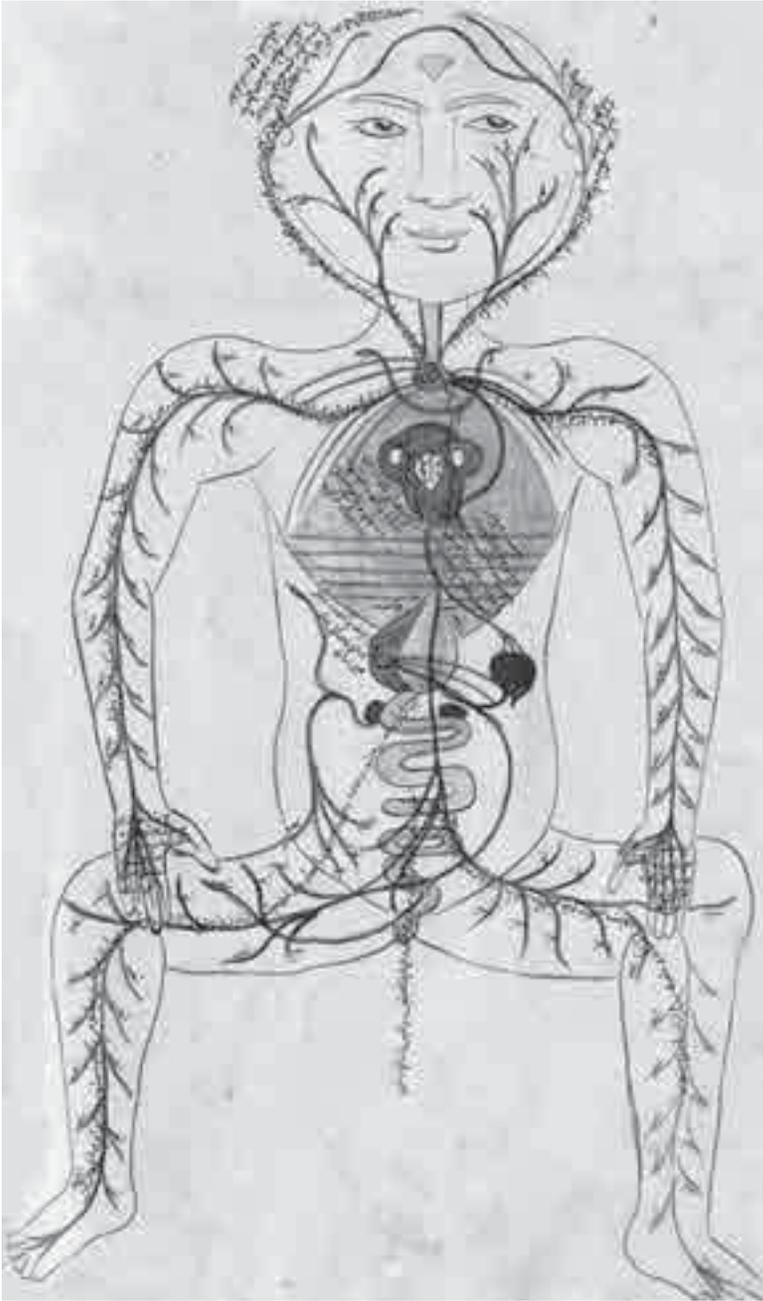
II–3.1   Section of the book titled *Dhakhīreh Kharazm-Shāhī*,
seventh century AH
© National Library and Archives of the Islamic Republic of Iran

of the formative period of Islam. Primary amongst these ideals was the decisive social character of the Islamic project. After Muḥammad's death in 11/632, the nascent Islamic community he left behind faced a set of internal and external challenges that threatened to undermine the very existence of the emerging Islamic social experiment. Significantly, Muḥammad made no arrangements for succession, aside from announcing, in no ambiguous terms, that the chapter of prophethood was over and that there would be no prophets after him. As guidance to his community, Muḥammad also proclaimed that he was leaving the Book of God and his own life-model.

In the absence of a blueprint to settle the question of succession, Muḥammad's Companions, the elite of the Islamic state, opted to uphold the example that Muḥammad had set in motion. Throughout Arabia, numerous tribal groups that had pledged allegiance to Muḥammad withdrew this allegiance. To quite a few, therefore, the new Islamic model died with the death of its founder. Other Arabian actors were willing to associate themselves with the religion of Islam, but absolved themselves of the legal and political implications of this association. In place of a universally binding set of obligations, including the payment of taxes and recognizing the higher authority of Islamic law and the religio-political elite in charge of its execution, many Arabian groups opted for what would have amounted to an individualized, cultic form of Islam. In the face of these tendencies, the Muslim elite of Medina insisted on upholding the practices introduced by Muḥammad, and on identifying Islam with the social and political order of the Islamic state of Medina. As such, the emerging Muslim elite insisted on a social and not just religio-ethical definition of Islam.

Islam's expansion and impact

Building on the distinctions already introduced during the lifetime of Muḥammad, the Prophet's successors consolidated his achievements and quickly proceeded to project the Islamic model beyond its immediate Arabian environment. Following the rapid consolidation of power in Arabia, and within more than a decade of continuous campaigning after Muḥammad's death, Muslims conquered Syria, Iraq, Western Iran and Egypt, and were thus positioned to assume the role of a major world empire by replacing the older Sassanid (Persian) and Byzantine empires, and reducing the surrounding powers to local actors or regional states. The success of the Muslim conquests can be attributed to an organizational breakthrough by a new state that was capable of planning and executing a large-scale conquest and integration

policy.[5] To do this, the new elites of the Islamic state had to overcome the extreme fragmentation of pre-Islamic Arabian society, and to provide sufficient ideological coherence under the banner of Islam.[6]

This quick and decisive transformation first impacted the political landscape, but it was followed, within a relatively short period of time, by equally radical transformations in the social and cultural spheres. In the course of time, Islam transcended its local origins and became a world religion, and a substantial portion of humanity became Muslim. But rather than being absorbed by the superior cultures of the conquered lands, the Muslim conquests triggered a cultural transformation primarily because they were executed on a foundation of religious and social ideals inspired by the formative Islamic model of Medina. The mechanisms of this execution, however, were also instrumental in the establishment of the Muslim Empire and the subsequent role it played in world history.

In fact, a central dimension of the early conquests was the insistence by the new Muslim political leadership on retaining and developing the structures of state established by the Prophet in Medina. In other words, the conquests, as well as the settlement activities that followed, were executed by a state conscious of its own novelty and intent on asserting its distinctiveness. To some extent, therefore, the city state of Medina, with its pluralistic make-up, informed the political and cultural practices of Muslims in the conquered lands. These practices, in turn, set in motion historical processes, the outcomes of which are as relevant today as they were at the time of their unfolding.

Islamic rule, non-Muslim communities

The first generations of Arab Muslims ruled over the conquered territories by virtue of military ascendancy. Yet even in this early phase, the Arabo-Islamic rulers did not stifle the local non-Muslim communities, nor did they burden the local economies under their rule. Rather, the Islamic conquests brought opportunities of social and economic development to the conquered regions. Moreover, rather than marginalizing them, many aspects of the local cultures were absorbed into an emerging, overarching Islamic culture. The economic and social prosperity ushered in by Muslim rule, along with the appropriation of local cultures, gradually enabled the transformation of the Arab Muslims from

5. [Note: to call this 'settlement' is somewhat imprecise. It anachronistically reminds us of the white settlers of modern times; Arabs never settled conquered lands in a similar way. Kufa and other 'amṣār' towns do not represent 'settlements' in the modern colonial sense. Eds.]

6. For an excellent overview of various scholarly attempts to explain the sudden success of the Islamic conquests, and for a detailed analysis of the organizational aspects of the conquest movement, see F. McGraw Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1981.

occupying forces to a ruling class, and the transformation of an assortment of occupied lands into a cohesive, integrated empire. Along with this process, significant portions of the populations of the different regions of the empire gradually converted to Islam peacefully, and Arab Muslims were no longer merely the ruling elites of the empire but became one of the manifold groups that constituted the subjects of this empire.[7]

Islamic history is immense, always in flux, and like all other histories, punctuated with episodes of political upheaval. Yet in addition to its distinctive religious system, enduring cultural legacies traversed this history and gave it its characteristic traits. It is on this cultural level that a lasting impact of Islam on the course of human history can be traced. Once again, the momentous cultural developments that impacted Muslim and non-Muslim societies were made possible by historical events in the formative periods of Islamic history. The historically bounded choices of early Muslims, beginning with the Prophet, provided the reference for the later articulations of dynamic Islamic norms in the realms of ethics, politics, social organization and economics, as well as in legal, literary and intellectual practices.

One of the most decisive choices of the early Muslims was to absorb rather than reject and suppress the cultures of the conquered lands. By so doing, the religious ideal of recognizing the legitimacy of multiple religious communities was translated into a civilizational norm. The willingness of the early Muslim conquerors to grant cultural autonomy to the conquered populations was facilitated by the confidence which these conquerors enjoyed due to their successes on the battlefield. Yet the willingness of the Islamic polity to tolerate and absorb its subject populations would have been impossible were it not for the doctrinal framework provided by the teachings of the Qurʾān and the precepts of Muḥammad. Equally important, however, was a constellation of material and ideational factors that set in motion historical processes that shaped the hybrid legacies of Islam in all areas of cultural production. Whether in religion or literature, law or mysticism, science or architecture, the cultivation of seemingly multiple and often divergent traditions occurred in the context of larger trends in the development of Muslim societies to which we now turn.

The early Muslim conquests were forceful and decisive, but from the perspective of the conquered societies they were largely non-destructive. Unlike many other forms of nomadic incursions on the territories of imperial states, the conquering Muslim armies were neither repelled nor absorbed by the older imperial powers. Rather, the Muslims survived the crossing of boundaries, and after their quick rise to a position of military and political dominance, they proceeded gradually to shape a hybrid culture of their own. The political

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7. For the best study so far of patterns of conversion to Islam, see R. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1979.

takeover by Muslims was achieved without substantial losses by either the local populations or by the revenue-yielding sectors of the economy. Rather than being an economic liability, the conquering Muslim armies and the early settlers received fixed salaries which they invested in the local markets, thus generating substantive increases in local economic productivity. Moreover, the proliferation of new urban settlements and the expansion of older towns to accommodate Muslim settlers resulted in a boom in the housing industry and a significant urban growth in the regions under Muslim rule. The expanding urban population triggered an increase in diverse manufacturing activities and, more important from the perspective of the larger economy, an exponential demand for food supplies. To meet this demand, Umayyad as well as Abbasid rulers invested heavily in agricultural development, further contributing to the cycle of economic growth and prosperity.

The economic impact

Generally speaking, the populations of the regions that came under Muslim rule enjoyed higher standards of living than they did under the earlier empires. Despite changes over time, the taxes levied by the early Muslim rulers were less than what the local populations had to pay under the earlier empires. Moreover, the decline of Byzantium and the destruction of the Sassanids removed a major barrier which had divided the Near East into separate blocks, and transformed the vast eastern and western regions of the Islamic empire into one common market under the same ideological and legal regimes. Already under the Umayyads, the economic reach of the Islamic empire extended from the Mediterranean basin to central Asia, resulting in a substantial increase in the volume of long-distance exchange.

Intensive commercial activity in this region was coupled with the introduction of legal and financial operations conducive for long-distance trade. From its earliest formulations, Islamic law was favourable to economic activities in general, and especially to trade and capital accumulation. The development of two particular kinds of legal contracts, partnership and commenda, proved vital to the ability to sustain long-distance trade. In effect, a partnership contract enabled the creation of corporate entities in which partners acted as a single legal person in relation to third parties. The mutual agency of such partners extended to sales, profit and loss, mutual surety and liability. Moreover, liability was in proportion to a partner's share in an investment. In a commenda, on the other hand, investors entrusted capital or merchandise to an agent or manager who agreed to return the invested principal and a share of the profit. However, to limit the risks of all parties, and to facilitate the otherwise risky long-distance trade, a commenda agreement stipulated that the potential loss in this trade was borne exclusively by the investors.

II–3.2   Tadhhīb: A Gilded Book cover
© Tehran Museum of Contemporary Arts

These tools of commerce were introduced by Muslim merchants into Italian cities in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and played a key role in the expansion of medieval trade. Other instruments of trade introduced by Muslims included the establishment of credit and credit partnership to reduce the need of transferring large amounts of money during long-distance trade, the transfer of debt, and the use of letters of credit. Together, these contractual tools enabled the combining of capital resources, and the formation of commercial investments to share the risks of commercial ventures.[8]

Economic and cultural regeneration and the spread of Islam

The above conditions were conducive to a long-lasting economic regeneration, the benefits of which were not limited to the Muslim section of the population. The profit-oriented social climate led to the accumulation of wealth, which promoted technological inventiveness and innovations. This prosperity, in turn, sustained the expansionist policies of the Muslim states, and generated new opportunities for cross-cultural encounters and exchange through land and sea routes. To buttress the economic and political expansiveness of their empire, Muslims elaborated their system of belief and deployed it to lend coherence to their civilization. Along with trade, Muslim merchants brought their religious and cultural traditions to regions beyond the frontiers of the Muslim empire. As such, trade routes were conduits for the transfer of commodities as well as beliefs and various forms of cultural production.

The official sponsorship by the expanding imperial state of the Islamic belief system gave rise to large-scale conversions. However, in contrast to the earlier expansions prior to the advent of Islam, in which the imperial powers either did not care to convert the subject populations or converted them by force and coercion, Islam was not simply adopted by the emerging imperial state but occasioned its very rise. Furthermore, while some conversions were en masse, many were individual, voluntary and gradual, and took place over long periods of time. Yet even after large-scale conversions, none of the local cultures of the various regions of the empire passed without leaving its imprints on the Islamic culture which emerged in its place.

Driven by imperial expansion and trade, the cross-cultural encounters within and beyond the domains of the Islamic empire were dynamic, pervasive and diverse. The rich cultural traditions of the conquered regions both informed and were refashioned by the emerging Islamic traditions. Culture was often used by the state as a tool for legitimizing political authority.[9] Yet cultural

8. See A. L. Udovitch, *Partnership and Profit in Medieval Islam*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1970.
9. On the ideological use of cultural symbols by the Abbasid Caliphs, see D. Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbasid Society*, London and New York, Routledge, 1998.

production was never the exclusive purview of the state, but a much wider activity that penetrated all sectors of society. The intensification of political, economic and cultural exchanges in the Islamic era led to unprecedented levels of integration of the various regions of the eastern hemisphere.[10]

The cultural ties across distant regions were such that the eighth/ fourteenth-century traveller Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (d. 769/1368) could set out from Tangier in present-day Morocco, travel some 73,000 miles in territories that comprise forty-four modern countries including Arabia, Mesopotamia, Persia, India, the Maldive Islands, Ceylon, China, Syria, Egypt, Morocco, Spain and Mali. In most of these countries, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa could identify communities of Muslims who spoke familiar cultural languages and to whom he could relate.[11] Beyond trade and conquest, and long before the time of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, it was Islamic culture that enabled the forging of organic bonds between vast and diverse regions of the globe.

The contribution of the Arabic language to cultural coherence

The Arabic language was a primary tool that contributed to the integration and cultural coherence of the Islamic empire. As one of the most distinctive highlights of Islamic culture, Arabic rapidly became the lingua franca of a vast, unified empire. Already before the rise of Islam, Arabic was the primary form of cultural production amongst the Arabs. A rich poetic tradition was developed by the Arabs, and the mastery of poetic language was a principal marker of cultural prestige amongst them. The high and widespread regard for Arabic peaked with the revelation of the Qurʾān as the linguistic miracle of the Prophet Muḥammad and Islam. Muslims believed that, like other prophets and messengers before him, God supported Muḥammad with miracles to prove that he was a genuine prophet. The miracle of Muḥammad and the ultimate proof of the truthfulness of Islam is the Qurʾān. Following the way the scripture describes itself, Muslims believe that the Qurʾān is the timeless word of God, the like of which no human can produce. This trait, called *iʿjāz* (inimitability), is based on the belief in the divine authorship of the Qurʾān. Thus, unlike earlier religions, the miracle of Islam is a literary miracle, and Muḥammad's other supernatural acts are subordinate to it.

This belief in the consummate nature of the Qurʾān has led Muslims to devote great intellectual energies to the study of its contents as well as

10. M. Hudgson traces such global developments at different points in history in his *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, 3 vols., Chicago, Ill., University of Chicago Press, 1974.
11. See Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta,* trans. H. A. R. Gibb, Millwood, N.Y., Kraus Reprints, 1986.

its form. In addition to interpreting the scripture and deriving doctrines and laws from it, manifold disciplines of Qurʾānic studies seek to understand the linguistic and literary qualities and to illustrate the divine, and hence perfect, origins of this pivotal symbol and fundamental document of Islam. As a result, beginning in the first Islamic century, Arab and non-Arab Muslims, as well as non-Muslim Arabs, were engaged in intensive linguistic activities, the effects of which penetrated all areas of cultural production.

The impact of this linguistic activity precipitated the first main cultural transformation that occurred after the establishment of the Islamic empire. After the early conquests, most of the regions and peoples of the ancient world came under Islamic political rule. Outside Arabia, however, conversion to Islam was gradual and proceeded at a slow pace, while the linguistic conversion of the conquered lands was much faster. Within one century, Arabic became the official language of the state and its bureaucracy. In many regions of the empire, Arabic completely replaced other tongues, while in other areas it coexisted with them as the primary language of communication within the vast domains of the empire. In fact, the linguistic conversion of the former peoples of Byzantium and the Sassanid empires preceded their religious conversion. And once again, this was not simply a miscellaneous effect of the spread of Arabo-Islamic rule; rather, the cultural centrality of Arabic was the outcome of deliberate and religiously sanctioned intellectual efforts that were invested into the development of linguistic disciplines.

These intensive linguistic efforts enabled an unprecedented level of language communication and, by extension, a deeper level of cultural exchange. Gradually but steadily, Arabic became the language of the political elite and a large section of the subjects of the empire. Less than a century after the rise of Islam, the Umayyad ruling elite invested massive resources in order to Arabize the language of administration and bureaucracy from Greek in Syria, and Persian in Iraq and Iran, into Arabic.[12]

In addition to politics and administration, the existence of a shared language of communication enhanced trade and the creation of economic bonds in a vast market stretching from the borders of China to Spain. Already by the end of the Umayyad period, the majority of the people of the Levant and Iraq had adopted Arabic as a native tongue. Elsewhere, knowledge and use of Arabic were widespread, especially in commerce and cultural production, and in facilitating the exchange of goods and ideas.

12. On the social context of the Arabization of bureaucracy, see George Ṣalībā, *al-Fikr al-ʿArabī al-ʿilmī; nashʾatuhu wa-taṭawwuruhu*, Balamand, Lebanon, Balamand University Press, 1998.

II–3.3   Miḥrāb, Rukn al-mulk Mosque, Isfahan
© G. Degeorge

Never before in history did one language penetrate as wide and deep within such a large territorial span. Furthermore, the spread of Arabic removed major linguistic barriers which had previously inhibited the full mixing of the cultural traditions of the older empires. Once Arabic was established as the language of high culture through the intensive linguistic efforts of the early Muslims, the intellectual legacies of the Greeks, Persians and Indians were forged into new, distinctively Islamic hybrid traditions. To be sure, the pre-Islamic, imperial cultural legacies were always in contact with, and often influenced, each other. However, important as they were, these contacts were at a much smaller scale than the full synthesis which was produced in the Arabic-Islamic era. Nevertheless, the process through which Arabic gained its privileged cultural status was not always smooth and without setbacks. In particular, many of the cultured subjects of the young and still unrefined Islamic empire resisted the hegemony of Arabs. This resistance precipitated the Shuʿūbiyya controversy, in which cultured Persian intellectuals mocked and derided the alleged vulgarity and lack of civility of Arab elites.[13] However, rather than undermining the role of the language, this controversy was diffused when Arabic was transformed into a primarily linguistic rather than ethnic marker, and the Arabic language was appropriated by non-Arab Muslims as the quintessential language not just of religion but also of cultural production. Arabic, therefore, became the primary marker of a cultural identity which cut across ethnic and regional lines, and brought an unprecedented level of unity and coherence to the fragmented cultural spaces of the old world.

Wealth, the emergence of interconnected, cross-regional markets, and the forging of a transregional space of cultural exchange gave rise to affluent cosmopolitan classes in the numerous urban centres of the empire. These classes spawned and sustained a spectacular array of literary, artistic and scientific cultures. The objects of this cultural activity included writings in the diverse fields of religion, literature, science and philosophy, artistic works of calligraphy, music, and countless architectural monuments such as mosques, hospitals, observatories and palaces. In each of these areas, the distant regions of the large Islamic world developed their specific styles of cultural production, but the economic and linguistic conduits of cultural exchange endowed these diverse cultural traditions with a shared and distinctively Islamic character.

13. See R. Mottahedeh, 'The Shuʿūbiyya Controversy and the Social History of Early Islamic Iran', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, VII, 1976, pp. 161–82.

The new universal culture of science

The linguistic research of the first two Islamic centuries laid the foundations for a new universal culture of science. Of particular relevance to the later development of science were the extensive compilation efforts by Arabic philologists and lexicographers. The specialized lexicons that were produced in this period were the first of their kind in world literature, and represent a large-scale attempt at collecting and classifying the knowledge of the Arabs. These attempts were not always 'scientific', and they were eclipsed by later, more systematic achievements. Nonetheless, these encyclopedic efforts provided a linguistic foundation which fostered the development of the various intellectual disciplines. Together, the invention of a scientific diction in Arabic and the transformation of Arabic into a language of science contributed to the universality of an Islamic scientific culture in which Arabic was the universal language of expression and communication. Within the large geographic area under Islamic rule, scientists from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds participated in the production, exchange and dissemination of scientific knowledge. Most important, the Islamic era ushered a level of scientific exchange unprecedented in earlier civilizations.

When the peoples of the Byzantine and Sassanid empires were gradually undergoing a linguistic conversion under the new Islamic rule, a deliberate effort was made to appropriate the cultures of these ancient civilizations. As early as the second/eighth century, but primarily in the third/ninth centuries, scientific works were translated into Arabic. The translation of scientific works from Persian, Indian languages and Greek into Arabic was itself a consequence of the growing interest in science at the time. The most influential body of scientific knowledge was undoubtedly the Greek. Yet the existence, prior to the rise of Islam, of the same Greek scientific works among a population that spoke Greek was not in itself sufficient to preclude a period of several centuries of steady decline in scientific activity. Hence other factors must have contributed to the emergence of Arabic science.

One factor was the growing awareness in the new society of the status of Islamic civilization as heir to world civilizations. At a more tangible level, the increasing complexity of social organization and the subsequent social demand for professional expertise provided both opportunities and incentives for aspiring professionals to cultivate scientific knowledge. And the foundational philological work done by the early lexicographers was itself the first step in the production of a scientific culture.

Starting in the third/ninth century, and for a period of about seven centuries, the primary sites of activity in all fields of scientific research were in the Muslim world. The earlier fields of medicine, pharmacology, optics, mechanics, astronomy and the various mathematical sciences were

developed, often beyond recognition, and numerous new, specialized discipline were invented. The invention of algebra by Muḥammad ibn Mūsā al-Khawārizmī (232/848), the discovery of the lesser circulation of the blood by ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Abu-l-Ḥasan ʿAlī Ibn al-Nafīs (687/1288), and the long tradition of reforming Ptolemaic astronomy are only a few of the countless contributions of the Islamic scientific legacy.[14] Beginning in the fifth/eleventh century, and during the following centuries, the significant portions of the Islamic scientific legacy that were transmitted to Europe laid the foundations for the eventual rise of the new sciences.[15] The main sites where Arabic scientific works were translated into Latin were Toledo in Spain and Palermo in Sicily.[16] However, the European contact with and transmission of knowledge from the Muslim world was diffuse, and took effect mostly through the direct influence of books and the indirect exposition to the material culture of the Muslim world.

Technological advancements

The scientific advances in the Muslim world proceeded in tandem with technological innovations devised to meet the needs of an expansive empire and its sophisticated societies. Luxury items were produced on a large scale for consumption by the affluent classes of the numerous urban centres of the empire. More important, however, were the technologies developed to regulate and sustain the lives of the huge urban populations.

These technologies were deployed in construction engineering and all sorts of public works, but also in the organizational techniques needed to run the increasingly complex fiscal, administrative and legal institutions of the empire. For example, diverse taxation systems of varying degrees of flexibility

14. See A. Dallal, 'Science, Medicine, and Technology', in J. L. Esposito (ed.), *The Oxford History of Islam*, London and New York, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 155–213. For a comprehensive treatment of the Arabic-Islamic contribution to the world across many fields, see A. Y. al-Hassan, M. Ahmed and A. Z. Iskandar (eds), *Science and Technology in Islam, The different aspects of Islamic culture*, IV, Paris, UNESCO, 2001, 2 vols.

15. For the transmission of knowledge from the Muslim world to Europe, see the somewhat outdated but still useful work by N. Daniel, *The Arabs and Medieval Europe*, London, Longman, 1975, H. Hugonnard-Roche, 'The Influence of Arabic Astronomy in the Medieval West', in R. Rashed (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the History of Arabic Science*, I, London, Routledge, 1996; G. Ṣalībā, *Rethinking the Roots of Modern Science: Arabic Manuscripts in European Libraries*, Washington DC, Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, 1999. See also C. Burnett, 'The Transmission of Arabic Astronomy via Antioch and Pisa', in J. P. Hogendijk and A. I. Sabra (eds), *The Enterprise of Science in Islam*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 2003.

16. See, for example, M. Abattouy, J. Renn and P. Weinig, 'Transmission as Transformation', *Science in Context*, XIV, No. 1, 2001.

were introduced; similarly, huge and complex bureaucratic and administrative structures were developed, and a large body of literature was generated in order to provide appropriate training for the new classes of bureaucrats and civil servants.

To provide food for an increasingly large population, and to support the essentially agricultural economies of the empire, successive Islamic states invested heavily in intensive agricultural development projects. Such projects included the construction of massive networks of both surface and underground artificial irrigation systems, as well as river dams, and the development of effective agricultural technologies in such areas as soil improvement, botany and various kinds of agricultural engineering. Furthermore, the increased prosperity of Muslim societies stimulated the cultivation of new tastes and consumption trends, which led in turn to the introduction and large-scale consumption of new crops and agricultural products such as rice, sugar, spices and a large variety of fruits. Some of these items were previously available to the ruling elites, but in Muslim societies many of these exotic food items became available for mass consumption. The cumulative effects of these agricultural developments amounted to no less than an agricultural revolution of lasting global effects.[17]

Religious institutions

The civilizational legacies of the Islamic era encompassed countless forms of material and intellectual cultural production. From its inception during the lifetime of Muḥammad, Islamic religious doctrine placed a great value on the preservation of the Qurʾān. This preservation was seen as a mark of the uniqueness of Islam, which distinguished it from the earlier religious traditions of the People of the Book. As a result, one of the earliest expressions of religiosity focused on studying, reciting and writing down the Arabic scripture. At a later stage, energies were also devoted to the collection and preservation of *Hadīth*, the sayings attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad. Driven by a keen and critical literary sensibility, the traditional religious disciplines multiplied, but along with these, numerous literary genres were also developed in tandem with the interests and proclivities of an increasingly diverse and cosmopolitan culture. New literary interests generated, and in turn received further impetus from, the promotion of literacy and education, and the spread of educational institutions. Numerous schools were established throughout the Islamic empire, initially for the teaching of Islamic law, but later for teaching and promoting research in numerous other subjects. The madrasas in particular

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17. See A. M. Watson, *Agricultural Innovation in the Early Islamic World: The Diffusion of Crops and Farming Techniques, 700–1100*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

were the first historical instances of university education which evolved over time and gave rise to the modern institutions for higher education.[18]

Of all Muslim institutions, the mosque is the most important locus for public Islamic religiosity and communal identity. Itself a physical manifestation of the public presence of Muslims, and of uniquely Islamic aesthetics, the mosque has served as a point of convergence of Islamic social and intellectual activity. Like all other forms of cultural manifestation, Islamic architecture was influenced by the manifold styles of the various regions of the Muslim empire, and along with many simple ones, monumental mosques of striking beauty and complex architectural styles were built in various cosmopolitan cities of the Islamic world. Yet despite the borrowings from diverse earlier civilizations, certain common features became characteristic of most mosques and thus serve to distinguish them from the sacred spaces of other religions and cultures. The most important characteristic of a mosque is that it should be oriented towards Mecca. One or more niches (*miḥrāb*) on one of the walls of the mosque often serve as indicators of this direction, called *qibla*. Once again, in this material form of cultural production, as in other forms of intellectual activity, Muslims preserved the cultural legacies of their subjects, but fused these legacies into multiple, hybrid traditions that were distinctively Islamic.

One of the main sociocultural legacies of Islamic civilization is the mystical tradition known as Sufism. This ascetic tradition, marked by profound personal piety and self-discipline, contributed to Islamic cultural diversity, and further enriched the literary heritage of Islam. Armed with a strong individualistic appeal, and the ability to blend traditional Islamic religiosity with local forms of cultural expression, Sufis expanded the territorial reach of Islam and initiated large-scale conversion trends in the post-classical periods of Islamic history. Through far-flung and extensive missionary activities, and the establishment of networks of Sufi orders, the collective practice of Sufism also contributed to the forging of cross-regional bonds that counterbalanced the political fragmentation of the Muslim world. In later times, Sufi orders also functioned as mass movements which exerted great influence on the social and political life of Muslim societies.

Islamic models for social order

In addition to the material and intellectual realms, some of the most enduring legacies of Islamic culture derive from the Islamic models for social order, and for regulating the relationship between state and society. By the time the city

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18. See G. Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West,* Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1981.

II–3.4   Late Islamic Glass
© National Library and Archives of the Islamic Republic of Iran

of Baghdad was established in 144/762, legal, administrative, educational and military institutions were structured and defined with unprecedented levels of sophistication. Until the Mongol invasion in 656/1258, Baghdad remained the political and cultural capital of the Islamic world, and for a good part of this interval, it was the most important city in the civilized world. Throughout this period, first in Baghdad and later in a galaxy of cities modelled after it, a complex and influential apparatus was constructed to attend to the administration of the public sector; a network of courts under the supervision of a chief judge appointed by the caliph was established; and the army was separately organized and administered. Education was widespread, and both privately and publicly sponsored education was made readily accessible to all segments of the society.

The Islamic legal system

Beyond the interference of the state, social life was regulated in accordance with a complex, comprehensive and largely autonomous legal system. Initially, neither the dictates nor the procedures of the law were systematically elaborated, although there can be little doubt that both the Qurʾān and *Ḥadīth* were regularly invoked and used to provide guidance in the everyday life of early Muslims. However, by the beginning of the ninth century the use of these two sources was systematized, and a complex legal theory was introduced.

Drawing on the early scriptural injunctions, as well as a variety of legal practices that preceded the rise of Islam, a vast and diverse system of distinctively Islamic applied law, covering personal and public life, was formulated. In addition to the laws pertaining to the five basic religious obligations (profession of faith, prayer, fasting, almsgiving and pilgrimage), Islamic law covers such areas as dietary laws, purity, marriage and inheritance laws, commercial transactions, relationships with non-Muslims, and criminal law. Vast intellectual energies and resources were devoted to the development and articulation of Islamic law. By the end of the third Islamic century, the multiple individual reflections on the law cohered into distinct legal schools, of which four Sunni schools (Mālikī, Ḥanafī, Shāfiʿī and Ḥanbalī) and the Jaʿfarī Shīʿa school continue to command the largest following amongst Muslims. Individual Muslims are expected to abide by the injunctions of the law as articulated by one of these schools; however, it is up to individual Muslims to choose which school to follow. To some extent, therefore, the rule of law in classical Muslim societies derived from a sense of communal moralism which allowed individuals great latitude and freedom of choice.

The classical Islamic legal system also allowed non-Muslims under Islamic rule a significant level of legal autonomy. In legal cases involving Muslims and non-Muslims, or public issues such as trade, contracts and

sales, Islamic law functioned as a secular system of law and was applied to all subjects of the state. However, the internal relationships and affairs of Jews and Christians, as well as other non-Muslim communities under Islamic rule, were regulated in accordance with the dictates of the religious laws of these communities. Accordingly, one of the distinctive features of the Islamic legal system is its plurality and ability to accommodate multiple legal registers. As a result, the model for a social order that derives from the historical experiences of Muslim societies is a flexible and inclusive model in which society is held together primarily by a normative system of shared values and expectations, of legal and ethical norms, and not through the coercive power of the state.

Another primary characteristic of the Islamic legal system is its contractual nature, a trait that underscores the egalitarian potentials of the law and makes it conducive to social mobility. Yet perhaps the most distinctive feature that characterizes Islamic legal thinking specifically, and Islamic doctrine generally, is the centrality of justice. According to Islamic doctrine, mercy and justice are the two primary attributes of divinity. In this doctrine, God's mercy is manifested in the dedication of all creation to the service of humankind. This mercy is further manifested in the privileged status that God accorded to humanity. According to the Qur'ān and later traditions, God appointed humankind as His vicegerents (caliphs) on earth, thus entrusting them with the grave yet honourable responsibility of fulfilling His scheme for creation. As a sign of His mercy, God sent a succession of prophets and messengers to humanity to remind them of His perennial message. However, this succession of prophets and messengers ends with Muḥammad, after whom the burden of prophethood is entrusted to all of humanity. This doctrine bestows on the collectivity of Muslims a heightened sense of moral agency, and partially accounts for the recurrent appearance in different periods of Islamic history of social movements and intellectual currents that champion the causes of justice in the name of Islam. Moreover, Islam's rigorous monotheism, as well as the belief that all Muslims are equal before God and worthy of fulfilling God's sacred scheme, provide the basis for a collective sense of universal loyalty and identity that transcends, and continuously undermines, narrower forms of ethnic and national identity.

Autonomy of society

One of the historical manifestations of this sense of collective identity and moral agency was the general insistence of the social elites of classical Muslim societies on the autonomy of society and its exclusive responsibility for the articulation of social norms. The dynastic, political history of classical

Muslim societies was often characterized by a high level of volatility and instability. Yet in contrast to this instability, Islamic social history was marked by a high degree of stability and permanence which cut across dynastic lines. The remarkable resilience and durability of the social order, in the midst of all kinds of political upheavals, suggests that Muslim societies were not held together primarily by centralized rule, but by the reproduction of Islamic cultural norms over the centuries. This is not to suggest that officialdom did not play a role in the production of culture. In fact, successive Islamic states and dynasties provided the imperial context which was a prerequisite for all subsequent cultural developments in Muslim societies. However, in classical Muslim societies, the primary locus of cultural production, for the articulation of social norms, and for the maintenance of social order, was society and not the state. This relative autonomy of society not only explains, but also defines what was uniquely Islamic about classical Islamic culture and society. No other city-based culture enjoyed such a limited normative input by the state.[19]

Challenges of modern life

Despite significant changes over time and space, the defining trait of past and present Islamic identity is a unifying cultural legacy cultivated over the centuries in institutions of learning and through the development of dynamic canons of study that permeated and homogenized the cultural universe of the Muslim world. In practice, Islamic cultural norms were propagated through the activities of networks of lawyers, Sufis and merchants. These activities reproduced familiar patterns of social organization and society–state relations in various parts of the Islamic world, while the Islamic religious and spiritual traditions further cemented the structural links amongst Muslims and enabled a level of integration and social solidarity that often superseded traditional forms of tribal and ethnic affiliation and loyalties.

The occupation in the nineteenth century of most of the Muslim lands by European colonial powers was a main turning point in the history of the Muslim world. In a sense, Muslims are still trying to come to terms with the legacies of colonialism. In the post-colonial period Muslims are divided, as never before, along national lines, and their traditional systems of governance, social organization and education are largely undermined by the institutions of the modern nation-state. Yet despite the political and ethnic diversity of

19. On the structure of classical Muslim societies, see R. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur: A Study in Medieval Islamic Social History*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1972; R. Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society*, Princeton, N. J., Princeton University Press, 1980 and I. Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 1984.

Muslim countries, a core set of beliefs continues to provide the basis for a shared identity and affinity among Muslims. Owing much to its cultural appeal, Islam spread within a couple of centuries after its rise from its original home in Arabia into Syria, Egypt, North Africa and Spain in the west, and Persia, India and beyond in the east. In the following centuries, Islam also spread into Anatolia and the Balkans in the north, and sub-Saharan Africa in the south. At present, the Muslim community comprises over one billion adherents spread over fifty Muslim countries in all five continents, and Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the world. Despite the diverse political, economic and cultural conditions under which Muslims live, Islam continues to inspire many contemporary Muslims who draw on the multiple legacies of Islam as they confront the challenges of modern life.

– III –

SOURCES

Section A

The Qurʾān:
the prime source

Chapter 3.1

THE QURʾĀNIC TEXT

Mustansir Mir

The Qurʾān has a unique textual history in the annals of religious texts. There is a fairly high degree of certainty about the accuracy of the Qurʾānic text as it has been transmitted from the earliest to the present times. It is for this reason that it is sometimes questioned whether we can properly speak of a 'history' of the Qurʾān. This is because such a history typically deals with the evolution of a text from a possibly unattested or uncertain beginning to a relatively definite final form, with all the problems of reduction attendant upon that evolution. But while the history of the Qurʾānic text has been remarkably free from such problems, the very fact that the text has reached us intact calls for an explanation. Also, the literature – modern as well as traditional – on the subject raises certain issues which need to be addressed. Let me begin by presenting and analysing the traditional account of the transmission of the Qurʾānic text.[1]

1. General discussions of the history of the Qurʾānic text are found in three compendia by Muslim authors: Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī (d. 794/1392), *al-Burhān fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*; Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), *al-Itqān fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*; and a twentieth-century work, ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm al-Zarqānī (d. 1367/1948), *Manāhil al-ʿirfān fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*. A major issue is the so-called variant readings of the Qurʾān. The *Ḥadīth* ('tradition') of the Prophet Muḥammad is believed to contain sanction for such readings, and relevant *ḥadīth* reports are found in, among other works, the *Ṣaḥīḥ* ('Sound') collections of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, named after their compilers (both third century/ninth century). A selection of these reports, taken from al-Bukhārī and Muslim and other sources, is given in the *ḥadīth* anthology, *Mishkāt al-maṣābīḥ* of Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Khaṭīb al-Tibrīzī (d. after 737/1336). (*Ḥadīth* books are cited in this article by book and chapter rather than by particular edition.) Another category of sources for variant readings is the Qurʾān codices of a number of early authorities, including

The traditional account

The Qurʾān is a seventh-century document, and according to Muslim belief, was revealed to Muḥammad from 610 to 632 CE. In 610 Muḥammad, aged forty, announced his prophecy, which began with a revelation, and he continued to receive revelations until his death in 632. The many revelations that came to him during this period were written down, put together, and called the Qurʾān, although of course the word 'Qurʾān' is also used for a part of the scripture.

The First Compilation

According to the traditional account, we can speak of three compilations of the Qurʾān. The First Compilation was made under the direct instructions of the Prophet.[2] When a revelation came to Muḥammad, it was avidly memorized by Muslims, memorization being, in the predominantly oral culture of Arabia, the principal mode of transmission of knowledge. At the same time, Muḥammad would ask a literate Muslim to write down the revelation in a designated place within the Qurʾānic textual sequence.[3] The compilatory order the Qurʾānic revelations thus received was often different from the order in which they came, and both orders were known to Muslims.[4] The writing materials available were rudimentary in character and not all written records could be maintained in the new – and evolving –

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the Companions of the Prophet. The *Kitāb al-Maʿārif* of Abū Bakr ʿAbd Allāh b. Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī (d. 316/929) records the variant readings in several such codices. In his edition of this work, Arthur Jeffery (d. 1959), drawing on other sources as well, has conveniently arranged the readings by codex and compiler. The English section of the edition is entitled *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qurʾān*. Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) in his Qurʾānic commentary, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān,* provides a comprehensive account of such readings, quoting from *Ḥadīth* and numerous other authorities. Several Western scholars have written on the subject. The third part of the most detailed statement is found in the second volume of Theodor Nöldeke's (d. 1931) *Geschichte des Qorans*, as revised by Friedrich Schwally, which deals with the collection of the Qurʾān, and in the third volume of the same work, revised by Gotthelf Bergstṛḥsser and Otto Pretzel, which treats the history of the Qurʾānic text. Arthur Jeffery offers a brief discussion. Richard Bell's *Introduction to the Qurʾān*, revised by W. Montgomery Watt, provides a useful summary of the views of several Western scholars. John Burton's *The Collection of the Qurʾān* approaches the subject in the context of Islamic legal history.

2. For a general outline of this compilation, see al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān* …, *op. cit.*, I, p. 241; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān* …, *op. cit.*, I, p. 58; al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil,* I, *op. cit.*, pp. 239–41.

3. This activity of recording the Qurʾān in writing became more systematic in Medina, and the total number of scribes employed by Muḥammad at one time or another is said to have topped forty.

4. ʿAbd Allāh Darāz, *Madkhal ilā al-Qurʾān al-karīm: ʿArḍ taʾrīkhī wa taḥlīl muqārin*, p. 35.

compilatory order. Therefore, different Muslims who had any, several, or all of those records had them in different arrangements, though they knew the order in which the Prophet intended them to be arranged. The activity of writing the Qur'ān down was coterminous in time with the duration of the revelations, some twenty-three years. The First Compilation aimed at no more than bringing into existence a written record of the Qur'ān, the main reliance for preserving the Qur'ān still being placed on memorization.[5]

Considering that the ideas of 'writing', 'book', and 'pen' are introduced quite early in the Qur'ānic revelations, and that the Qur'ān frequently calls itself a 'book' – implying that it was meant to be written down – it is only logical that the Prophet should have taken steps to have the revelations written down. Representing as it does the first elaborate and methodical exercise in Arabia to record in writing a substantial body of material, the compilation of the Qur'ān as a book made a clear break with the native Arabian tradition of relying on memory as almost the sole means of transmission of lore and learning. It is important to remember, however, that the break consisted not in supplanting the medium of memory with that of document, but in reinforcing the former by means of the latter, or rather in establishing a parallel channel of transmission, the two channels being independent of each other and yet mutually reinforcing.[6] The tradition of memorization thus not only continued but was established on a surer footing. Systematic attempts on a large scale were now made by both lay persons – motivated by considerations of piety – and scholars – motivated also by the desire and need to preserve the central text of Islam – to commit the Qur'ān to memory.[7] The writing materials available for use in the First Compilation were quite rudimentary: parchment, thin flat stones, and animal shoulder-bones. This meant that, while the order of the Qur'ānic revelations was otherwise known to Muslims, it was physically not possible to induce such an order among the numerous items on which the scripture had been inscribed.[8] Circumstances soon necessitated the making of another compilation.

5. Al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil*, I, p. 255.
6. As Darāz says, 'a memorized Qur'ān, unless it agrees with the written Qur'ān, is unreliable, and vice versa': *al-Naba' al-'aẓīm: Naẓra jadīda fī-l-Qur'ān, op. cit.*, p. 13.
7. Memorization received a further boost with the growth and development of the discipline of *ḥadīth*. Al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil* …, I, *op. cit.*, pp. 284–308, identifies a series of factors that contributed to a solicitous and systematic memorization of the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth*.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 243–4.
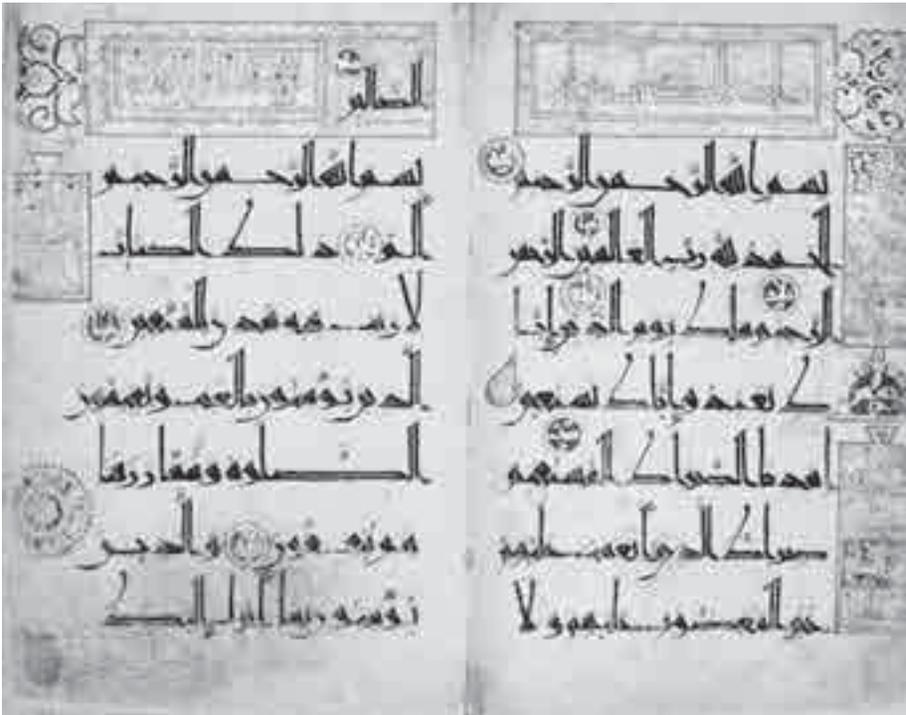
III–1.1   Manuscripts of Qurʾān, Kūfic Script, twelfth century
© Nasser Khalili Collection of Islamic Art (Nour Foundation)

The Second Compilation[9]

Abū Bakr succeeded Muḥammad as the political head of the community. During his caliphate several tribes revolted against Islam, one of them being the Banū Ḥanīfa of Yamāma in central Arabia. The Banū Ḥanīfa were crushed in the battle of Yamāma (12/634), which claimed the lives of many Muslims who knew the Qurʾān by heart. The death of these Qurʾān-readers (*qurrāʾ*) made some apprehensive: what if more Qurʾān readers were to be killed in future wars? Would it be possible to preserve the Qurʾān in that case?[10] The apprehension indicates that the First   Compilation was not considered adequate for the purpose of preserving the Qurʾānic text for long, just as it suggests that the transmission of the text was still heavily

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9. Al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān* …, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 234–5; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān* …, *op. cit.*, I, p. 58; al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil* …, *op. cit.*, I, p. 58.

10. The objection sometimes raised that the Yamāma incident could not have motivated Muslims to start thinking of compiling the Qurʾān because not many of those who died in the war had memorized the Qurʾān will be taken up later.

reliant on memorization.[11] The apprehension is understandable because the First Compilation, written on sundry materials of varying durability and produced by a number of scribes in different writing styles, not only could not be expected to last for very long, but from a practical standpoint would have been difficult to use and refer to had there arisen a need to do so.

It was probably these considerations that prompted 'Umar – who was to succeed Abū Bakr as caliph – to suggest to Abū Bakr that the latter have the Qur'ān compiled. Abū Bakr was at first unwilling to accept the suggestion, for he did not want to undertake something the Prophet himself had not attempted, but in the end he was prevailed upon by 'Umar, and in turn persuaded Zayd b. Thābit, one of Muḥammad's scribes, to compile the Qur'ān.

Zayd's charge was to make an authentic copy of the complete Qur'ān, and to this end he was to use all available sources. Zayd says that he began to compile the Qur'ān 'from palm branches stripped of leaves ('usub), thin, flat slabs of stone (likhāf), and the breasts of men', the last phrase referring to human memories. Zayd prepared the text on many 'sheets' (suhuf). We cannot be certain whether these sheets were parchment, cloth or papyrus, but in any case they must have been more durable than the materials used for the First Compilation. This compilation had a uniform writing style as it was produced by one man, and a uniform written format (suhuf). Being 'between two covers', moreover, it was much easier to handle and make use of. The preparation of a single copy of the Qur'ānic text thus seems to have addressed satisfactorily the concern raised by the tragedy of Yamāma.[12]

Several things are notable about the Second Compilation. To begin with, the choice of Zayd, a young man, indicates that he already had some reputation as a scribe of the revelation. In fact, he was appointed a scribe on account of his interest and competence in the arts of reading and writing, and because he was an able scholar. Entrusting him with the task of compiling the Qur'ān was a way of ensuring a quality outcome.[13]

Second, Zayd's mandate was to preserve not only the content of the original revelation, but also the order imposed on it by the Prophet. And herein lies a principal difference between the First and Second Compilations. We have already noted that the compilatory order of the Qur'ān was different from the chronological one. While each compilation contained all the revelations Muḥammad had received, the First Compilation did not – indeed, by definition could not – have the order in which Muḥammad had had the material arranged. In other words, in the case of the First

11. See al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil …*, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 233, 235, 239, 242.
12. The report about the Yamāma incident is discussed below.
13. See Muḥammad Abū Zahra, *al-Muʿjiza al-kubrā: al-Qurʾān*, pp. 30–1. For more details on the selection of Zayd, see al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil …*, *op. cit.*, I, p. 243.

Compilation, reliance for preserving the compilatory order was placed mainly on human memories, though in some cases portions of written texts may have indicated that order. But in the case of the Second Compilation, that order too was objectified in the document produced. In short, both in respect of content and form, the Second Compilation made for much greater accessibility of the Qurʾānic text.

Third, Zayd undertook to prepare an exact replica of the revelations to the Prophet, and in order to achieve that goal, he not only collected the existing pieces of material containing the Qurʾānic text,[14] he also took oral testimony. He refers to both physical pieces of evidence and human memories. This is a crucial datum, for it highlights the inseparability, within the unique Islamic cultural framework, of memory and document as the two – or rather twin – modes of transmission of the Qurʾānic text. Due appreciation of this fact will answer some of the questions raised about the textual history of the Qurʾān. Such questions usually proceed from premises borrowed from cultural frameworks very different from the Islamic.

Fourth, the procedure followed in preparing the Second Compilation was remarkably democratic: Zayd invited the whole community to help him carry out his task by making sure that no part of the Qurʾānic text remained unrecorded and nothing that did not belong to the Qurʾān became part of it. The consensus that emerged on the Second Compilation became a guarantor of its authenticity, and it was doubtless on account of its authoritativeness that this compilation was used in the preparation of the Third Compilation. The 'sheets' prepared by Zayd were left with the caliph Abū Bakr. After Abū Bakr's death, ʿUmar, the next caliph, took charge of them, and after his death they passed into the care of his daughter Ḥafṣa.[15] Yet another compilation was made during the period of the third caliph, ʿUthmān. But first a few criticisms made of the Second Compilation need to be addressed.

W. Montgomery Watt, representing several Western scholars, raises several objections against the reports about the Second Compilation. First, 'there is no unanimity about the originator of the idea of collecting the Qurʾān,' whether it was Abū Bakr, ʿUmar or both. Second, very few of those who died at Yamāma possibly had much of the Qurʾān by heart, for 'those killed were mostly recent converts.' Third, 'according to the tradition itself, much of the Qurʾān was already written in some form or other, so that the death of those who could recite it from memory need not have given rise to

14. It is not known what happened to the writing materials on which the Qurʾānic revelations had originally been inscribed. It is evident, however, that they were used in making the Second Compilation. As such, their main function came to be to serve as a foundation for making a 'fair copy', the Second Compilation.
15. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, *Bāb Jamʿ al-Qurʾān*.

the fear that parts of the Qur'ān would be lost.' And finally, '[T]he weightiest criticism of the tradition is that an official collection of this kind might have been expected to have had wide authority attributed to it, but of this we find no evidence.'[16]

These are rather weak objections. As for the first, Abū Bakr can be called the first collector of the Qur'ān because he ordered – he alone, as caliph, was in a position to order – the compilation of the Qur'ān, and ʿUmar may well be called the first collector because he first propounded the idea. Also, there are reports indicating that ʿUmar was Zayd's colleague in the actual task of collecting the Qur'ānic text. In fact, considering Zayd's key role in producing the compilation, it would not be wrong to say that Zayd was the first collector of the Qur'ān. To insist that the reports, in order for them to be considered authentic, must identify only one person as the collector of the Qur'ān is to make a demand that is perhaps not very reasonable.

The second and third objections can be dealt with together. The battle of Yamāma is said to have claimed the lives of hundreds of Muslims, of whom seventy are said to have been Qur'ān readers. Considering that in Arabic 'seventy' can mean 'many' or 'quite a few' (the same figure is given for those killed in some other battles), it is possible that while not all or most of the Qur'ān readers of the Muslim community died in the battle, the number of the Qur'ān-readers killed was considerable enough to cause concern. Also, it is not necessary that the word *qurrāʾ* in the report means those who had memorized the complete Qur'ān. Especially at such an early time, the word would not necessarily exclude those who had memorized large parts of the Qur'ān and thus deserved the title. With this definition of *qurrāʾ* in mind, we might conclude that the number of Qur'ān readers was greater rather than less than seventy. On this definition, moreover, some of the 'recent converts' – who, as Arabs, would have had little difficulty in memorizing the Qur'ān – may also qualify as *qurrāʾ*, further swelling the number of those whose death in the battle raised concerns that the Qur'ānic text might be lost. Furthermore, the reports about the battle of Yamāma make it quite clear that the true motivation behind the compilation of the Qur'ān was not the number of the Qur'ān readers killed in the battle but the very real possibility that if wars continued to claim Qur'ān readers, the preservation of the Qur'ānic text would become difficult. In other words, what prompted the compilation of the Qur'ān was not the number of those killed in this particular battle, but the feared casualties in future wars.[17]

Finally, in response to Watt's comment that the death of the Qur'ān readers need not have led to the compilation of the Qur'ān because much of

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16. Bell and Watt, *Introduction to the Qur'ān, op. cit.*, p. 41.
17. Al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil …, op. cit.*, I, p. 265. See also Darāz, *Madkhal …, op. cit.*, p. 36.

the Qur'ān already existed in written form, let me refer to a fact noted earlier: the Second Compilation differed from the First in that the revelations in it had the order which the Prophet had imposed upon them. Before the Second Compilation was made, this order was found only in the 'breasts of men' – that is, was known only to living human beings. It is reasonable to assume that ʿUmar's suggestion was that the new compilation represent the order the Prophet had given the revelations – for this is the order that the Second Compilation actually came to have. It is also possible that ʿUmar's motivation in making his suggestion was composite. Considering the nature of the First Compilation, he might have felt that there existed an independent need to record afresh the Qur'ānic revelations in writing.

The fourth objection fails to take into account two things: the exact nature and purpose of the First Compilation, and the state of literary development in Arabia at the time of that compilation. The compilation was made not in order to be displayed, like Roman tablets, in a public square so that everyone could come and read it – not least because not many people could read – but only in order that it might serve as an authoritative backup to the Qu'ānic text which otherwise continued to be preserved in human memories and passed on through a human chain of transmitters. This backup was to be used, we might say, in the event of an emergency – though it could be argued whether such an emergency was or was not likely to arise.[18]

The Third Compilation

There are two accounts of the Third Compilation. According to one, it differed from the Second only in number. The document of the Second Compilation (which was in Ḥafṣa's possession) was used to make several copies – four, according to most reports. Of these one was kept at Medina, while the others were sent, one each, to the major centres of Kufa, Basra and Syria. Other

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18. Again, it is the failure to understand the nature of the Second Compilation, and the fallacy of analogizing from a modern political situation, that leads people to raise the following objection. Why was the compilation handed over to a private individual like Ḥafṣa, instead of being given over to ʿUthmān, who was to succeed ʿUmar as caliph? To this Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ (in *Mabāḥith fī ʿulūm al-Qur'ān*, p. 77) makes the following response: ʿUmar had willed that the document be entrusted to Ḥafṣa, who was no ordinary citizen, for she was Muḥammad's widow, and had not only memorized the Qur'ān, but also was a competent reader and writer of the Qur'ānic text. Furthermore, ʿUthmān could not have received the document because ʿUmar had entrusted the task of electing the next caliph to a committee, and ʿUthmān was elected next caliph only after ʿUmar's death. The mere fact that Ḥafṣa rather than ʿUthmān received the document cannot thus be made grounds for dismissing the account of the Second Compilation as 'an effort by ʿUthmān's enemies, of whom he had many, to deny him the honor of making the collection' (C. J. Adams, 'Qur'ān: The Text and its History', in *Encyclopaedia of Religions*, New York and London, Macmillan, 1978, XII, p. 162).

reports say that Mecca, Yemen and Bahrain also received one copy each. According to the other account, the Third Compilation was necessitated by special circumstances, and was different from the Second – and by implication from the First – in several important ways. It is said that during the military campaigns in Central Asia, the general Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamān, noting the variant readings of the Qurʾān by the Muslims engaged in the campaigns, visited the Caliph ʿUthmān and expressed a concern that Muslims, like Jews and Christians before them, would develop irreconcilable differences in the reading of their scripture. He urged the caliph to remedy the situation before it was too late. ʿUthmān appointed a committee of four persons, among whom was Zayd b. Thābit, and had them prepare several copies of the Qurʾān, using the Qurʾān of the Second Compilation. The copies were then sent to major cities.[19]

Read in detail, the two accounts have some common elements. It was ʿUthmān who ordered the making of the compilation, Zayd was involved in both projects, and copies were sent to major cities. They differ principally over whether the Third Compilation consisted simply in making several copies from the text of the Second Compilation, or involved achieving consensus on one version of the Qurʾān out of the several variant versions in circulation and conferring on it canonical status against the others.

On this point, the second account is the one generally accepted, but it raises a few questions, the foremost among them being, what exactly were those variant readings that so troubled Ḥudhayfa? We shall come back to the Ḥudhayfa report a little later, but let me note here that the report is remarkable for its lack of specificity. It provides no examples to illustrate what kind of differences in reading Ḥudhayfa had in mind or what understanding ʿUthmān had of these differences. It is thus very difficult to say anything with certainty on the basis of this report.[20] But there are a series of other reports which are said to provide context to the Ḥudhayfa report. Many of these reports are attributed to the Prophet himself, and have therefore acquired great authority. According to

19. See al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān* …, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 235–36; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān* …, *op. cit.*, p. 59; al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil* …, I, pp. 248–53. Al-Bukhārī, *Kitāb Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, *Bāb Jamʿ al-Qurʾān*. Charles Adams (in 'Qurʾān' p. 163) points to some 'difficulties' with the compilation made under ʿUthmān, but they have to do with differences in the reports about the compilation. These differences, in spite of Adams's attempt to exaggerate them, remain minor and do not cast any serious doubt on the compilation. Adams's conclusion, in line with the views of certain other Western writers, that the Qurʾānic text 'did not reach its climax until the fourth Islamic century', is too speculative to warrant discussion.

20. John Burton, in *The Collection of the Qurʾān,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977, chapter 7, all too readily draws the inference that the reading differences mentioned in the Ḥudhayfa report (and others) amounted to difference of versions. Not only is the evidence for this view scant – the better-known *ḥadīth* reports on the subject contain no such evidence – the very fact that numerous interpretations of these differences exist in Muslim sources (as we shall find out soon) makes it difficult to hold this view.

these reports, the Qurʾān was revealed to the Prophet *ʿalā sabʿati aḥruf* ('in seven readings'). This brings us to the issue of variant Qurʾānic readings as found in the *Ḥadīth*.

The variant readings in the *Ḥadīth*

The best-known of the *ḥadīth* reports on the subject are the following:

1. The Prophet said, 'Gabriel taught me [the Qurʾān] in one reading. I asked him for more, and continued to ask for more until he got to seven readings.'[21]

2. In a meeting between Muḥammad and Gabriel, the latter said that God had commanded Muslims to read the Qurʾān in a single reading. Muḥammad pleaded that the community would be hard pressed if restricted to a single reading, and the angel, on a second visit, brought permission to read the Qurʾān in two readings. Muḥammad continued to ask for still greater relaxation, until God finally permitted the community to read the Qurʾān in seven readings.[22] This *ḥadīth* is explained by another, which says that the Prophet, in requesting that the Qurʾān be given in more than one reading, said to Gabriel, 'Gabriel, I have been sent to an unlettered community, which includes old women, men advanced in age, young boys and girls, and men who have never known how to read.'[23] In other words, the community, if confined to one reading, would be hard pressed in the sense that people of different ages and backgrounds would find it difficult to follow a single reading. In the report found in the *ḥadīth* compilation by al-Nasāʾī, the following addition occurs: *fa-kullu ḥarfin shāfin kāfin*, 'Each of the [seven] readings is satisfactory, sufficient.'[24]

3. The Companion ʿAbd Allāh b. Masʿūd reported the Prophet as saying that the Qurʾān had been revealed in seven readings, and that every reading had 'an exterior (*ẓāhir*) and an interior (*bāṭin*), and a boundary (*ḥadd*) and a horizon (*maṭlaʿ*).'[25]

21. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb Tafsīr al-Qurʾān* [section] *Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān, Bāb Unzila al-Qurʾān ʿalā sabʿati aḥruf.*

22. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Ṣalāt, Bāb Bayān anna al-Qurʾān ʿalā sabʿati aḥruf wa-bayān maʿnāh.* See also al-Bukhārī, *Kitāb Tafsīr al-Qurʾān* [section] *Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān, Bāb Unzila al-Qurʾān ʿalā sabʿati aḥruf.*

23. Al-Tirmidhī, (also Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, with some variation), quoted in Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Khaṭīb al-Tibrīzī, *Mishkāt al-maṣābīḥ, Kitāb Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān, Bāb Ikhtilāf al-qirāʾāt wa-jamʿ al-Qurʾān,* Faṣl 2.

24. Quoted in al-Tibrīzī, *Mishkāt, Kitāb Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān, Bāb Ikhtilāf al-qirāʾāt wa jamʿ al-Qurʾān,* Faṣl 2.

25. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān …, op. cit.,* I, p. 9.

4.   The Companion Ubayy b. Kaʿb heard a person in the mosque reciting the Qurʾān in a way Ubayy refused to recognize as correct. He brought the matter before the Prophet, who asked both men to recite the Qurʾān, each according to the way known to him, and then confirmed each in his reading, telling Ubayy that the Qurʾān had been revealed to him in seven readings.[26]

5.   A deeply perturbed ʿUmar complained to the Prophet that he had found Hishām b. Ḥakīm, another Companion, reading one of the Qurʾānic *sūras, al-Furqān* (*sūra* XXV) very differently from the way in which he himself had learned it from the Prophet. The Prophet had both ʿUmar and Hishām recite the *sūra*, and confirmed each in his reading, saying that the Qurʾān had been revealed 'in seven readings', and then adding, *fa-qraʾū mā tayassara minh*, 'Read of it whatever is easy [or convenient or easily available]'[27] – this last phrase being a quotation from a Qurʾānic verse (LXXIII.20).

6.   The Companion Ibn Masʿūd brought a man into the presence of the Prophet, complaining that the man read the Qurʾān in a way different from that in which he, Ibn Masʿūd, had learned it from the Prophet. The Prophet confirmed each in his reading, adding, 'Do not differ, for those before you differed, and as a result perished.'[28]

An analysis of these reports reveals several things. To begin with, the reports, like the Ḥudhayfa report cited above, lack specificity: none of them says what the actual problem was. Did the differences in reading consist in differences in the pronunciation of the same words, as might happen, for example, in the case of two persons who speak the same language but come from two different parts of the same land? If so, then this is no cause for concern, for allowance is always made for such differences as long as the words spoken are the same.[29] Or did the differences consist in the utterance of different words? But what, precisely, did this utterance of different words amount to? Did it have to do with different synonyms used to express the same idea? Or did it have to do with the difference in the amount of the text recited, so that one person's text contained more words than another's?

26. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Ṣalāt, Bāb Bayān anna al-Qurʾān ʿalā sabʿati aḥruf wa-bayān maʿnāh.*

27. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb Tafsīr al-Qurʾān* [section] *Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān, Bāb Unzila al-Qurʾān ʿalā sabʿati aḥruf*; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Ṣalāt, Bāb Bayān anna al-Qurʾān ʿalā sabʿati aḥruf wa-bayān maʿnāh*; al-Ṭabarī, *op. cit.*, I, p. 10.

28. Al-Bukhārī, quoted in al-Tibrīzī, *Mishkāt, Kitāb Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān, Bāb Ikhtilāf al-qirāʾāt wa-jamʿ al-Qurʾān*, Faṣl 1.

29. In the report involving ʿUmar and Hishām even this cannot be claimed, for both belonged to Quraysh. See al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān …, op. cit.*, I, p. 219; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān …, op. cit.*, I, p. 47.

To this question the reports provide no answer, and it is for this reason that the notion of 'seven readings' has been interpreted in many different ways – there are said to be no fewer than forty interpretations.[30] Al-Zarkashī cites in some detail fourteen of the interpretations, and most of them are not only different from, but also incompatible with, one another.[31] Al-Suyūṭī cites thirty-five, making the picture more complicated.[32] None of the interpretations has a basis in any ḥadīth of the Prophet, nor does there exist any well-attested statement of any of the Prophet's Companions that would help us reach a definitive conclusion.[33]

It is obvious, however, that the crucial word in the reports about the seven readings is ḥarf (singular of aḥruf), and an acceptable solution of the problem will be one that explains this word adequately. The difficulty is that ḥarf has multiple meanings. The third/ninth century Kūfī grammarian Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Saʿdān said, 'The Arabs call a verse ḥarf, and they call the whole of an ode ḥarf. The word ḥarf is used of the individual letters of the alphabet, and ḥarf also means 'meaning' and 'direction'.'[34]

It is now time to see whether, for our purposes, an adequate interpretation of the word ḥarf exists. I shall begin by offering a few remarks about the ḥadīth reports quoted above. In my view, the most significant of the reports are the second, third and fifth. Ḥadīth 2 tells us that the Prophet's request for several readings was made in order to make Qurʾān-reading easy for people of different ages and capacities. We have to assume that, in making the request, the Prophet had in mind the different mental levels of those addressed by the Qurʾān, and that he wished the revelation to cater to the different needs of the addressees. It would make good sense, then, if the Prophet were to request that the same message of the Qurʾān be presented, in different places in the Qurʾān, in different ways, so that people of ordinary intelligence no less than those of a high intellectual calibre, and individuals with little education no less than well-educated persons, might be able to properly understand and appreciate the message. On this interpretation, there would be no need

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30. Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān …*, *op. cit.*, Vl. 1, p. 45; al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān …*, *op. cit.*, I, p. 212, gives the figure of thirty-five.

31. Al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān …*, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 213–26.

32. Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān …*, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 45–9.

33. Al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān …*, *op. cit.*, I, p. 212.

34. *Ibid.*, I, p. 213. Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī, a contemporary Pakistani Qurʾān exegete, notes that ḥarf in the ḥadīth reports about the seven readings means 'mode' (or 'style, vein'). (As can be seen, the meaning assigned to the word by Iṣlāḥī is very close to the last of the series given by Muḥammad b. Saʿdān (d. 231/846). In thus interpreting the word (for references and details, see Mustansir Mir, *Coherence in the Qurʾān: A Study of Islahi's Concept of naẓm in Tadabburi Qurʾān,* Indianapolis, Ind., American Trust, 1986, p. 97. Iṣlāḥī draws support from it for his view that the Qurʾānic *sūras* are divisible into seven groups, these groups representing an aspect of Qurʾānic ḥarf (see below).

to assume that a single verse of the Qur'ān, for example, was revealed in seven different ways, but that a single thought was expressed in seven, or many, different ways, in seven, or many, different places, each expression in itself having a fixed form, but all forms complementing one another in meaning and message. If so, then this is exactly what the Qur'ān itself calls *taṣrīf* (variegation) – that is, the use of various forms and means to explicate the message – which would include, for example, the stating of the essential teachings in different words in different places and the use of a variety of literary devices to illustrate ideas and concepts.[35] Consider the following verses of the Qur'ān:

> Observe how We present [*nuṣarrif*] the signs in so many different forms, and yet they turn away. (VI.46; also 65, 105)

> In this way do We present [*nuṣarrif*] the signs in different forms for a people that would be grateful. (VII.58)

> And We have made this Qur'ān variegated [*ṣarrafnā*], that they might take remembrance; it, however, only increases their aversion. (XVII.41; also XLVI.27)

> And We have used, for people, every [necessary] similitude, in different forms [*ṣarrafnā*]. Most people, however, would only become averse. (XVII.89; also XVIII.54)

> And thus it is that We have revealed it, making it an Arabic Qur'ān, and sounded in it the warning, in many different ways [*ṣarrafnā*], that they might be on their guard, or that it might occasion in them remembrance. (XX.113)

> And We have presented the signs in many different forms [*ṣarrafnā*], that they may come back [to the truth]. (XLVI.27)

These verses make it plain that the Qur'ān consciously tried to explain its message in many different ways so that all could understand it, and so that a lack of clarity in its message might not become an excuse for continued disbelief. The Qur'ān calls itself a 'lucid' (*mubīn*: V.15; VI.59; X.61; XI.6 and elsewhere) book, one that provides a clear exposition of its message. Moreover, since it is addressed to humanity at large, it is only logical that it should seek to address all levels of intelligence. And this, precisely, is the import of *ḥadīth* 2.

This interpretation of the word *ḥarf* finds support in *ḥadīth* 3, in which the Prophet says that every *ḥarf* of the Qur'ān has an outside aspect and an inside aspect, and a boundary and a horizon. We often speak of a discourse as having an obvious or outward (*ẓāhir*) meaning, and an implicit or inward (*bāṭin*) meaning, as having limits or boundaries (*ḥadd*) within which the discourse is to be understood or interpreted, and as having horizons (*maṭlaʿ*) of meaning. Is

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35. See Iṣlāḥī, *Tadabburi Qur'ān*, 8 vols., vols. 1–2, Lahore, Dār al-Ishāʿat al-Islamiyyah, 1387–91/1967–71; vols. 3–4, Lahore, Anjuman-i-Khuddāmu'l-Qur'ān, AH 1393–96; vols. 5–8, Lahore, Fāran Foundation, 1398–1400/1977–80, I, p. 15.

it too much to suggest that the four key terms, as explained here, could occur meaningfully in the context of a book that sought to satisfy the wide-ranging intellectual needs of its large and diverse audience?

In *ḥadīth* 5, in commenting on the 'seven readings', the Prophet instructs ʿUmar and Hishām – and, by extension, the whole Muslim community – to recite 'of' (*min*) the Qurʾān whatever they find easy or convenient to recite. Several points need to be considered here. First, we noted above that the phrase *fa-qraʾū mā tayassara minh* in this *ḥadīth* is from the Qurʾān. In the Qurʾān, the phrase means, in context, that Muslims who offer supererogatory prayers all night, reciting the Qurʾān in those prayers, may find the exercise difficult, and so they are given permission to spend only as much time in prayer as they easily can, and recite in it only as much of the Qurʾān as they conveniently can.

By no stretch of the imagination can the so-called 'seven readings' be squeezed into the Qurʾānic context. It is the quantity of recitation, and not the variety of readings, that is being talked about. Is it not possible, in fact likely, that *ḥadīth* 5 is also referring to the quantity of recitation? Here it might be objected that the *ḥadīth* is quite explicit about the variance in the readings of ʿUmar and Hishām. There is a possible threefold response to this. First, in the interpretation of the *ḥadīth* generally offered, the word *ḥarf* is taken to mean the words that make up a text, so that ʿUmar and Hishām are actually supposed to be reciting different texts. This interpretation has too many problems for it to be considered plausible.[36] Second, I have already stated that the *ḥadīth* is not at all clear about the nature of the variance, and so we cannot build a case for variant readings on such utter lack of evidence. Third, it is conceivable that ʿUmar heard Hishām recite not the whole *sūra* – which has seventy-seven verses – but only a portion of it which he himself had not, until then, received from the Prophet. If so, then ʿUmar and Hishām could have recited in the Prophet's presence two different portions of the

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36. For in this case the Prophet's comment, in which both ʿUmar's and Hishām's versions are approved, would suggest that not only this *sūra* but the whole Qurʾān was revealed in seven readings. It would also suggest that not until the incident involving this *sūra* – which is said to be the fortieth to be revealed – did ʿUmar find out, and then only accidentally, that the Qurʾān was being revealed in so many readings. This comment would also indicate that the fact of the Qurʾān's having been revealed in multiple readings was not common knowledge at all (Hishām, too, was unable to provide a satisfactory explanation why he read the *sūra* differently from ʿUmar). This also shows that the Prophet had never until that time alerted the community to the momentous fact that the Qurʾān was being revealed in seven different readings! Had the Qurʾān been revealed in multiple readings in the sense in which ʿUmar is supposed to have thought, there should have been not one or two but hundreds of reports similar to the ʿUmar and Hishām reports. Such, as we know, is not the case.

sūra, and the Prophet's confirmation of each in his recitation would be quite understandable.

There is yet another possibility. *Al-Furqān* is not only the name of a *sūra*, but it is also one of the names of the Qur'ān, 'The criterion'. The *sūra* takes its name from the word *al-Furqān* which occurs in its opening verse and refers to the Qur'ān: 'Blessed is He who sent down the *Furqān* [that is, the Qur'ān] on his servant [Muḥammad], so that he may be a warner to the world.' Now if, as we saw earlier, *taṣrīf* is an aspect of both the Qur'ān's style and substance, several passages of the Qur'ān would naturally bear a close resemblance to one another not only in theme and substance but also in form and vocabulary. Therefore, upon hearing a certain passage, we might conceivably take it to be from a certain *sūra* whereas it actually is from another. Such a misunderstanding could also occur within a single *sūra*, especially if it is long. Even those who have memorized the Qur'ān have to take special care to distinguish between such passages when they recite the Qur'ān from memory. It is possible that 'Umar, upon hearing Hishām recite a certain passage, assumed it to be from a certain *sūra* whereas it actually was from another, and concluded that Hishām was making errors. The Prophet, upon hearing the recitation of each, confirmed each in his recitation for the simple reason that the two passages belonged to two different *sūras*. The Prophet's comment that the Qur'ān had been revealed 'in seven readings' would then simply be referring to the fact that the Qur'ān is marked by variegation, in the above-stated sense.

The Ḥudhayfa report

The attempt to explain the Ḥudhayfa report with reference to the so-called seven readings of the Qur'ān is not very successful. Apart from the report being in itself unclear in its import, there is another problem with it. A reader cannot help but be struck by the fact that 'Uthmān's reaction as narrated in the Ḥudhayfa report is the exact opposite of the reaction of the Prophet to a similar problem, brought before him by 'Umar and others. While the Prophet had permitted the reading of the Qur'ān in seven readings, 'Uthmān is said to have ordered immediate compilation of the Qur'ān in a single reading. If Gabriel had brought express sanction for reading the Qur'ān in several readings, on the grounds that the Muslim community consisted of people of widely different backgrounds, then the community had become much larger by 'Uthmān's time, and the difference in the background must have become even greater, so that if anything, a greater number of readings should have been allowed! The question that persists and must be answered satisfactorily is, how could 'Uthmān disallow reading the Qur'ān in ways the Prophet himself had declared correct and

legitimate, and on what authority could he do that?[37] We saw that Abū Bakr was initially reluctant to have the Qurʾān compiled on the grounds that no prophetic precedent for it existed. It is a little difficult to believe that ʿUthmān would, unlike Abū Bakr, unhesitatingly accept Ḥudhayfa's suggestion, particularly in a case where a clear prophetic precedent did exist. There are only two possible explanations: either the problem brought by Ḥudhayfa before ʿUthmān was very different from that brought before the Prophet, or the permission granted by the Prophet for reading the Qurʾān in several ways had nothing to do with 'variant readings'.

The variant readings: codices

So far we have been concerned with the phenomenon of variant readings as found in *ḥadīths*. There is another aspect of the phenomenon, and it has to do with the so-called pre-ʿUthmānic codices of the Qurʾān. A number of the Prophet's Companions prepared their own collections of the Qurʾān. These works, according to Arthur Jeffery, pose a challenge to the received ʿUthmānic codex. The Muslim position, Jeffery wrote, is 'that the ʿUthmānic text is perfect and unchallengeable, and the variants must therefore be regarded as conscious and unconscious corruptions of this text'.[38] Jeffery thought this position untenable.

Modern scholarship naturally cannot accept so easy a way out of the difficulty, for it is quite clear that the text that ʿUthmān canonized was only one out of many rival texts, and we must investigate what went before the canonical text. On the one hand it seems likely that in canonizing the Medinan text tradition, ʿUthmān was choosing the text that had all the chances of being nearest the original. On the other hand there is grave suspicion that ʿUthmān seriously edited the text he canonized.[39]

That such codices exist and contain readings different from the ʿUthmānic is a well-known fact. That they constitute a challenge to the ʿUthmānic text is, however, not certain. Before we can talk about the status of these codices – and we need to do so in order to be sure that they pose a challenge to the ʿUthmānic codex – we need to talk about the function they appear to perform. The best way to determine their function is by examining the internal evidence

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37. It cannot be argued that the community reached consensus (*ijmāʿ*) on the ʿUthmānic compilation, and that this *ijmāʿ* is the sanction for the ʿUthmānic codex, for it is an established principle in Islamic jurisprudence that *ijmāʿ* cannot override a prophetic decree.

38. Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qurʾān*, *op. cit.*, p. 9. This is the English section of the work, which contains the Arabic text of Abū Bakr ʿAbd Allāh b. Abū Dāwūd's *Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif*.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. ix–x.

of the codices. Irrespective of what view we ultimately form of these codices, one thing is clear. The nature of the data found in them is so diverse – it might be described as contradictory and confused – that no single, self-consistent interpretation of those data can possibly be arrived at. What we can hope for, therefore, is to reach an interpretation that is least vulnerable. While detailed discussion is not possible here, a few remarks are offered below on how these codices might most profitably be viewed.

The first of these codices, those attributed to the Companions ʿAbd Allāh b. Masʿūd and Ubayy b. Kaʿb are usually considered to be the most important. A study of the two works leads to the general conclusion that that they reflect the dual roles of their authors as scholars and teachers, as do many, perhaps all, other codices. Being scholars, they annotated their copies of the Qurʾān when necessary. Each of them taught large numbers of people, including both Arabs and new converts. They wrote their notes and comments within the codices and used these copies like teacher's manuals, adding in the margin or wherever convenient explanatory notes and comments for instructional purposes.

Let us take a few examples. Qurʾān II.19–20, citing a similitude in which a scene of thunder and lightning is depicted, says that whenever the light shines, the disbelievers walk in it. The Arabic for 'they walk in it' in the verse is *mashaw fīh*. Ubayy's codex reads *mashaw fīh marrū fīh saʿaw fīh*[40] (or, with punctuation: *mashaw fīh: marrū fīh, saʿaw fīh*). Here the single Arabic word of the original has been explained by means of two, each conveying a certain shade of meaning. The Qurʾānic *mashā* means 'to walk'. Of the two explanatory synonyms supplied by Ubayy, the first, *marra*, suggests the idea of movement continued, whereas the second, *saʿā*, suggests quick movement. Both are excellent glosses because they fit the context: the disbelievers, when the lightning shines, continue their movement in this moment of relief, enveloped in pitch darkness as they otherwise are, and they hasten because they want to cover as much distance in the light as they can before being again stopped by darkness.

The two words thus represent an attempt at elucidating the meaning of a Qurʾānic word by means of analysis that is both close and imaginative. Qurʾān III.50 contains the following phrase: *Wa-ji'tukum bi-āyatin min rabbikum fa-ttaqū -l-lāha wa-aṭīʿūn* ('And I [Jesus] have come to you [Israelites] with a sign, so fear God and listen to me'). Ibn Masʿūd's codex reads,

40. *Ibid.*, p. 117. Ibn Masʿūd's codex (ibid., p. 25) reads *marrū fīhi wa-maḍaw fīh*. Thus it differs from Ubayy's in three respects: it contains two phrasal verbs (*marrū fīh* and *maḍaw fīh*) instead of three; it inserts a conjunction (w) between the verbs; and the second of the verbs, *maḍā*, though another synonym of the Qurʾānic *mashā*, is not found in the Ubayy's version.

Wa- jiʾtukum bi-āyatin min rabbikum fa-ttaqū -l-lāha li-mā jiʾtukum bihi mina -l-āyāti wa-aṭīʿūnī fīmā adʿūkum ilayh[41] ('And I have come to you with signs, so fear God on account of the signs I have brought you, and listen to me in respect of what I am calling you to'). Can Ibn Masʿūd's reading be called anything but explanatory?

Another example is the prayer for guidance in the fifth verse of the short opening chapter of the Qurʾān: *Ihdina -l-ṣirāṭa -l-mustaqīm*, usually rendered as 'Guide us to the straight path'. The imperative *ihdinā* is glossed by Ubayy as *thabbitnā*. This is quite appropriate, for the prayer, though taught by God, is presumably made by the believer, which implies that the believer, being already on the straight path, is praying for confirmation and establishment in that path. Grammatically too, *thabbitnā* makes sense because the preposition *ilā*, which normally follows *hadā* (the base form in the imperative *ihdinā*) is omitted in the original. Such omission in classical Arabic serves to add emphasis, and it is this emphasis that the gloss *thabbitnā* seeks to bring out. What these examples indicate – and there are many others like them in the codices – is simply that the authors are trying to arrive at a more precise understanding of the meaning of Qurʾānic words and expressions, their glosses representing some of the earliest attempts at Qurʾānic exegesis.

Second, the codices reflect many sectarian differences, especially those between the Sunnis and the Shīʿīs, and these differences obviously arose long after the death of the Prophet. Consider LXXV.17–19, which assures Muḥammad that God Himself will collect, preserve and expound the Qurʾān, and instructs him to read the text as directed by God. The Arabic is *Inna ʿalaynā jamʿahu wa-Qurʾānah, fa-idhā qaraʾnāhu fa-ttabiʿ Qurʾānah, thumma inna ʿalaynā bayānah* ('It is Our responsibility to collect the Qurʾān and recite it. When, therefore, We recite it, follow its recitation. Then it is Our responsibility to expound it.'). Ibn Masʿūd and Ubayy are reported to have read here the following: *Inna ʿAliyyanā jamʿahu wa-qaraʾa bih, fa-idhā qaraʾnāhu fa-ttabiʿ qirāʾatah, mina -l-qirāʾah, thumma inna ʿAliyyanā bi-bayānih.*[42] ('It is Our ʿAlī [the fourth caliph in Islam, who, the Shīʿa believe, was wrongfully dispossessed of his right to succeed Muḥammad immediately as head of the community] who collected it and recited it, so when We recite it, we then follow [O Muḥammad] his recitation. Then it is Our ʿAlī who is charged with expounding it.') Would it make any sense to say that texts containing such sectarian statements are pre-ʿUthmānic? Could they be called original revelations of the Qurʾān at all?[43]

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41. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

43. There are several other categories of readings which cannot be said to have formed part of the original revelation. For example, III.144 refers to Muḥammad as a *rasūl*, 'messenger.' Ubayy's codex adds the customary salutation Muslims use on taking

The plausible scenario is not that the readings of the codices were a 'rival' of the readings ʿUthmān wished to canonize, but that they were ignored simply because they lacked all canonicity, real or potential, to begin with. The reason that Muslim scholars are not excited about these codices in the same way as some Western scholars are is that the codices were never understood by Muslims, in pre-ʿUthmānic or in post-ʿUthmānic times, to constitute a challenge to the text that has come down to us as the Qurʾānic text.

Third, the whole argument against the non-ʿUthmānic codices is based on the premise that they are pre-ʿUthmānic. This, as we just saw, is by no means certain. What is also uncertain is that the codices were produced each by a single individual, after whom they are known. The evidence of the work of many hands in any of these codices is more than apparent. This being the case, the question facing us is not how they constitute a challenge to the ʿUthmānic codex, but on what grounds they might themselves be considered authentic.[44]

Fourth, there is a general argument against regarding the codices as a rival to ʿUthmān. The Qurʾān claims to be a book of matchless beauty, and history reports that this claim was accepted by believers and unbelievers alike. Let us concede for a moment that the non-ʿUthmānic codices are legitimate variant readings, and then imagine that a manuscript containing all the variant readings of the Qurʾān exists. Would such a Qurʾān stand any chance of being considered a masterpiece by anyone? Would its first opponents not have laughed such a composition out of court? Has there ever been found a book, sacred or profane, whose text is so utterly fluid and indeterminate as to exist in many different readings? There are many 'variant readings' of the Qurʾān which, if considered legitimate, would rob the Qurʾān of its beauty, playing havoc with the rhythm and flow to boot. To take just one example, can the above-quoted Ubayy reading of Qurʾān II.20 (in which Ubayy uses two verbs, *marra* and *saʿā*, to explain the Qurʾānic *mashā*) possibly be called a legitimate alternative variant?

Muḥammad's name: *ṣallā -l-Allāhu ʿalayh*, 'May God bless him'. The salutation is obviously an expression of piety on the part of Ubayy (or some other person, whether an editor or copyist of the codex), and it would be absurd to say that it represents an alternative Qurʾānic 'reading'.

44. It should also be noted that the codices do not agree among themselves, and that the different versions of the same codex differ from one another as well. Jeffery does manage to note this highly crucial fact, but only incidentally, and then only in a footnote (p. 23, n. 2): 'There is a statement in the *Fihrist* [of Ibn al-Nadīm], p. 26, from [Muḥammad] b. Ishaq, that there were many Codices in existence purporting to be exemplars of Ibn Masʿūd's Codex, but no two of them agreed with one another.' It needs to be added that the secondary codices based on the so-called primary codices also have serious differences. For further analysis of the non-ʿUthmānic codices, see Darāz, *Madkhal …*, *op. cit.*, pp. 48–9.

'Reading' as 'interpretation'

We are now in a position to present a general conclusion. If in the context of variant codices the word 'reading' is taken to mean 'interpretation', some problems, if not all, will be happily solved. In several reports, some Companions of the Prophet are reported as having 'read' a certain word in a specific way. It would be entirely reasonable to suppose that a particular word in the Qurʾānic text was read – that is, interpreted – by a certain Companion in a certain way. It would be equally reasonable to suppose that, if this person happened to have a written copy of part or all of the Qurʾān, he wrote down his gloss in that copy, either next to the word in the Qurʾānic text or in the margin. That Companion, we can be sure, knew the distinction between the text and the gloss, and there was no danger, as long as the manuscript remained in his possession, that the text and the gloss would be mixed up. But someone who happened to use that copy for the purposes of making a copy for their own use, or happened to hear the Companion 'read' that word in a certain way, failed to distinguish between the text and the gloss, and this confusion led to the equation of an interpretation with a reading.[45] Such confusion, likely to occur in peacetime, is liable to become worse in wartime, especially if we remember that the Muslim troops fighting in Central Asia consisted of both Arabs and non-Arabs, and included recent converts for whom the Qurʾān was a new text. If Ḥudhayfa, therefore, expressed his concern over divergent readings, it is possible that the problem of the confusion of text and gloss, hitherto under control, had by that time become a serious one, and that the caliph, anticipating further trouble, acted quickly, nipping the problem in the bud. By commissioning the making of several copies, to be used in major cities as the standard text, he took effective measures to stop the problem from getting out of hand, and this was the only logical thing to do.

The concept of *tawātur*

Earlier in this paper I noted the independent, and yet mutually supportive, character of the two sources of transmission in Islamic tradition, memory and document. Let me now underscore the importance of memory in connection with the transmission of the Qurʾān. First, however, it should be made clear that 'memory' in this context is not to be confused with 'orality'. Just as the word 'tradition' does not capture the spirit of the word *ḥadīth*,[46] so 'orality' does not convey the spirit of the mode of transmission I have labelled 'memory'.

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45. Al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil …*, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 264–5.
46. See M. G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, Chicago, Ill., University of Chicago Press, 1974, I, pp. 63–4, for a criticism of the translation of *ḥadīth* as 'tradition'.

The term 'orality', as understood in Western literary criticism, affirms the existence of an essential content but not of a fixed form. A certain folk tale, for example, may be widely known, but two storytellers, while recognizably telling the same story, could give it different forms – in aspects such as brevity and detail, omission or retention of certain elements, and addition and embellishment. Not only does an orally transmitted folk tale have no fixed form, it is not supposed to have one. Orality by definition requires plasticity of form and militates against formal rigidity.

Moreover, the concept of orality, like that of tradition, does not imply that the report originated with a certain person or has a certain point of origin in history; both imply anonymity of origin and originator. What I called memory above has a technical name: *ḥifẓ*. The definitional components of *ḥifẓ* are in exact opposition to those of orality. Unlike orality, *ḥifẓ* signifies the existence of, first, a definite body of material that is to become the object of *ḥifẓ*; second, a definite point of origin, in history, of the object of *ḥifẓ*; and third, a body of known people who are engaged in the activity of *ḥifẓ*. The Qurʾān, committed to memory or *ḥifẓ* and transmitted through *ḥifẓ*, is thus fundamentally different from a text that has been transmitted orally.

A related point should be noted. In transmitting the Qurʾān, the Muslims were transmitting a text that was crucial to their existence as a religious community. As such they must have viewed this as a task requiring the utmost care and integrity, and carried out the task with the deepest sense of responsibility. The Qurʾān was to them the Word of God, and therefore could not be tampered with. It had to be preserved in its original form. The Muslims considered it an imperative to memorize, recite and relay the revelation verbatim. Quite naturally, then, they would not accept as Qurʾān anything that did not exist in its original revelatory form. From a psychological as well as from a religious standpoint, therefore, any theory that even remotely likens the transmission of the Qurʾān to that of a folk tale must be rejected forthwith.

One of the unique disciplines of knowledge in Islam is the *ḥadīth*, which is concerned primarily with the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muḥammad. The discipline revolves around two concepts, report and reporter, a *ḥadīth* scholar trying to verify, for example, a certain saying of the Prophet by examining the report containing the saying and by investigating the reliability of the persons who report the saying. This process of verification has led to the emergence of a vast and complex body of knowledge.

A crucial concept in this body of knowledge is *isnād*, or 'chain of transmission'. If, for example, a *ḥadīth* is claimed to go back to the Prophet, it must be shown convincingly that there exists, through history, an unbroken chain of transmission made up of the several people transmitting that *ḥadīth* and linking the first narrator of the *ḥadīth* to the Prophet himself. It might be imagined that Muslims, who went to such

III–1.2   Folios of Qurʾān
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great lengths to authenticate the *ḥadīth* of Muḥammad, took even greater pains in authenticating the text of the Qurʾān. No such attempts were made, however. On the contrary, in the discipline of Qurʾānic studies, there are no chains of transmission comparable to those in the discipline of *ḥadīth*.

This seems surprising, but it really is not. The Arabic word *tawātur*, as an Islamic technical term, denotes such frequent occurrence, in unbroken historical continuity, of a report as to render the veracity of that report beyond all doubt or suspicion. The Qurʾān has come down to us through so many channels and its text has been transmitted by so many people in every generation that it would be superfluous to institute a system for the purpose of verifying its text. In other words, the Qurʾānic text has reached us through much more reliable channels than have the *ḥadīth* texts, so that a system of verification is needed for the latter, but not for the former.

The Qurʾān, therefore, is marked by *tawātur*, and its *tawātur* is sufficient guarantee that it has reached us intact. This *tawātur*, as is probably clear by now, is oral (in the ordinary sense of the word, not as an adjective of the technical term orality, discussed above). In other words, what has really

guaranteed the authenticity of the Qur’ānic text throughout the ages is this oral *tawātur* rather than the continued existence of one or more texts. As Abū Zahra says, *Wa-l-tawātur yakūnu bi-l-talaqqī fi-l-ṣudūr, lā fī-l-suṭūr* (‘The *tawātur* [of the Qur’ānic text] is realized through transmission from one breast to another [that is, through the memory of one person to that of another] rather than through the written word’). Abū Zahra adds, ‘The *tawātur* of the written word itself comes to exist only when the written word is read out before the one [that is, master or authority] from whom it is taken and who certifies it.’[47]

Sundry issues

Western scholars are generally sceptical of the traditional view of the collection of the Qur’ān, though different scholars are sceptical for different reasons and in different degrees. They have also reached different conclusions about the reliability and authenticity of the Qur’ānic text. I have already commented on some of the Westerners’ views on the subject, and shall now examine a few more.

Reviewing both the traditional reports about the history of the Qur’ānic text and the views of several Western scholars, W. Montgomery Watt writes:

> On general ground then, it may be concluded that the ‘Uthmānic revision was honestly carried out, and reproduced, as closely as was possible to the men in charge of it, what Muḥammad had delivered. Modern study of the Qur’ān has not in fact raised any serious question of its authenticity.[48]

He adds, however, ‘The question whether the Qur’ān, as we have it, contains all that Muḥammad delivered, is more difficult to answer.’[49] He tends to believe, on the basis of certain reports, that there is a likelihood that some parts of the Qur’ān have been lost, though he quickly adds, ‘There is no reason, however, to think that anything of importance has gone astray. The very fact that varying and even contradictory deliverances have been preserved is strong proof that, with perhaps minor exceptions, we have the whole of what was revealed to Muḥammad.’[50] It may be of interest to examine some of the evidence that leads Watt to conclude that parts of the Qur’ānic text may have been lost.

‘The Qur’ān itself’, Watt observes, ‘speaks of the possibility, of God causing Muḥammad to forget some passages.’ In support of this possibility he cites Qur’ān LXXXVI.6ff., which reads, ‘We shall cause you to recite, and you shall not forget, except what God wills,’ and II.106, which says that

47. *Ibid.*
48. Bell and Watt, *Introduction to the Qur’ān, op. cit.*, p. 51.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

whatever God abrogates or causes to forget, He replaces with something better or similar. He also cites a *ḥadīth* 'which describes how Muḥammad heard a man reciting the Qurʾān in a mosque, and realized that the passage recited contained a verse (or verses) which he had forgotten.[51]

Did Muḥammad forget parts of the Qurʾān? Al-Zarqānī provides a partial answer to this 'doubt', and I shall summarize the answer. The exception drawn in Qurʾān LXXXVII.6ff., 'except what God wills', does not necessarily prove that Muḥammad forgot certain Qurʾānic verses. The exception is 'formal' (*ṣuwarī*) rather than 'real' (*ḥaqīqī*), and the verse means that it will be as a result of a special blessing from God, rather than through his own efforts or on account of his own ability, that the Prophet will remember the Qurʾān and not forget it, and that the only being who could make him forget is God himself: if, that is, God should so desire. The implication, however, is that God will not desire the Prophet to forget the Qurʾān, and so it can be taken for granted that the Prophet will not forget. Al-Zarqānī quotes the Egyptian scholar Muḥammad ʿAbduh, who remarked that the real import of the verses is complete negation of the possibility of forgetfulness on the Prophet's part (*fa-l-qaṣdu huwa nafī-l-nisyāni raʾsā*).[52]

As for the Prophet's 'admission' that a certain person's recitation reminded him of a Qurʾānic verse he had forgotten, al-Zarqānī says that forgetfulness in the said *ḥadīth* does not have to mean amnesia. We sometimes 'forget' something in the sense that we temporarily drop it from our thoughts, though we have not lost all memory of it.[53] The Qurʾān (II.106), too, does not necessarily imply that parts of the Qurʾān were forgotten. The verse occurs in the context of interreligious debate, and it is by no means certain that the 'causing to forget' (*nunsihā*) in the verse refers to the Qurʾān. It is much more likely that it refers to earlier scriptures.[54]

THE GHARĀNĪQ VERSES

Another, and more serious, objection raised by Watt and others involves certain verses which, it is said, were part of *sūra* LIII but were later removed through a subsequent revelation when Muḥammad recognized their satanic origin. The verses are about angelic intercession. The idolatrous Arabs believed in the efficacy of the angels – whom they called the daughters of God – in interceding with Him on behalf of their votaries, the Arabs, and persuading Him to bless the latter in this world and in the next. It is alleged that Muḥammad, who was hoping the Arabs would accept his religion, received the following revelation,

51. *Ibid.*, p. 54; also Watt, *Muhammad's Mecca: History in the Quran, op. cit.*, pp. 69–70.
52. Al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil …, op. cit.*, I, pp. 260–1.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 259.
54. Iṣlāḥī, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 253, 267–8.

which begins with the names of three presumably angelic beings worshipped as deities by the Arabs:

> Have you considered al-Lāt and al-ʿUzzā
> and Manāt, the third, the other?
> These are the intermediaries exalted,
> whose intercession is to be hoped for
> Such as they do not forget.

Later, it is said, Muḥammad received an emended revelation containing the following verses after the first two:

> Is it the male for you and the female for him?
> That would then be a crooked division.

In other words, it is claimed that the first passage permitted but the second rejected angelic intercession. The conclusion drawn is that the story, since it is found in Muslim sources and could not have been invented by Muslims, must be true. Let us now briefly examine the story.

The Arabic phrase for 'the intermediate exalted' is *al-gharānīq al-ulā*, and the 'amended' verses may therefore be called the *gharānīq* verses. The story, which is true, is found in Muslim sources, but it is also true that it is in a rather confused form, so that even those few Muslim scholars – and they are few – who think that it might have some basis in fact are not sure what to make of it. Pending a more detailed examination of the story, the following points may be noted.

First, *sūra* LIII is Meccan, and quite obviously represents a single revelatory event.[55] Verse 19 of the *sūra* begins with the expression *a-fa-ra'aytum*, 'Did you, then, see?' This expression (or its base form, *a-ra'ayta*) is normally used for surprise or disbelief, suggesting that something is odd, fanciful or incredible. Here it is equivalent to 'Did you note the absurdity of?' (that is, did you note the absurdity of taking al-Lāt, al-ʿUzzā and Manāt as deities?). This is the sense in which this phrase, or a variation thereof, has been used in many places in the Qur'ān, including verses 33–4 of this *sūra* itself. It would be hard to explain how the 'expunged' verses would fit into a passage beginning with *a-fa-ra'aytum*, whose being part of the initial revelation is not denied. The occasion, as clearly signalled by this phrase, is one of disapproval and condemnation rather than of approbation.

Second, the key idea in the alleged addition is that of angelic intercession. The idea cuts to the root of the Qur'ānic doctrine of recompense. The whole of *sūra* LIII is a sustained argument in support of the notion of just recompense (see verses 31–32, 38–39, 50–53). By implication, an equally

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55. According to certain reports, verse 32 is Medinan. But that would not affect the argument advanced here.

sustained argument against the notion of intercession would make nonsense of the notion of just recompense. In view of this, the inclusion at any time of the *gharānīq* verses in the Qurʾānic revelation would have made for a glaring contradiction in the Qurʾān, and it is hard to believe that the first audience of the Qurʾān, Muslims and non-Muslims both, would have failed to see the contradiction.

Next, other questions arise. For example, assuming the story is true, is the psychological reaction of the Quraysh and the Muslims reported in the sources the expected, normal reaction to the 'compromise' struck by the so-called repealed verses? And is the story at all in keeping with the character of Muḥammad? The answer to both questions, it need hardly be said, is 'No'.

Fourth, we must still answer the question, how could such a remarkable story become part of the Muslim tradition? Probably the most cogent answer is the one provided by Abu-l-Aʿlā Mawdūdī in his Qurʾān commentary. Citing authoritative reports from al-Bukhārī and other sources, he summarizes the sequence of events as follows. The Prophet was addressing a gathering of people, including Muslims and non-Muslims, in Mecca when this *sūra* was revealed to him and he started to recite it. Muḥammad's Qurayshī opponents often heckled him when he recited a portion of the Qurʾān, but in this particular case they were so overwhelmed by the powerful discourse of the *sūra* that they quite forgot to make a scene. At the conclusion of the recitation of the *sūra*, the Prophet and his followers prostrated themselves on the ground (the last verse commands the hearers to perform prostration), and the Quraysh, still overwhelmed, involuntarily joined the Muslims in prostration. Later, when they realized their mistake, they became regretful, and also were criticized for the egregious error by their fellow idolaters. At this they made up the story that they had heard Muḥammad utter words of praise for the three goddesses, and thinking that Muḥammad had finally accepted the ancestral religion of the Arabs to be valid, they, the Quraysh, in a spirit of compromise, made prostration alongside Muḥammad and the Muslims. This was the justification they offered for making prostration. It was quite obviously a weak justification, since as Mawdūdī comments, 'Only an insane person could have thought that the sentences they claimed they had heard Muḥammad say could have belonged anywhere in the total context of the *sūra*.'[56]

Concluding remarks

I have not dealt with all the objections that suggest parts of the Qurʾānic text may have been lost. It is neither possible nor necessary to do so in this

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56. Abu-l-Aʿlā Mawdūdī, *Tafhīm al-Qurʾān*, *op. cit.*, V, pp. 189–90.

study.[57] The discussion above of two representative issues – the possibility of Muḥammad's forgetting Qurʾānic verses, and the *gharānīq* verses – should indicate that such objections are weak. On the other hand, I have also made a critique of the Muslim sources, showing that the accounts of the compilation of the Qurʾān found in these sources are vulnerable on several counts. I have, however, accepted these accounts in their essentials, for in spite of the problems they run into, they bring out fairly convincingly the – often insufficiently appreciated – inner logic of the process that produced the three compilations.

An important conclusion to be drawn is that the history of the Qurʾānic text cannot fully be understood without duly appreciating the mutually supportive roles of the two modes of the transmission of the text, memory – as distinct from orality – and document.[58] I have also said that, from the religious and psychological viewpoints, it is entirely credible that the Muslims of the Prophet's period – and of subsequent periods too – should have taken the utmost possible care to preserve and transmit the Qurʾānic text in its original form. Although Burton arrives at his conclusion about the *muṣḥaf* (Qurʾān) on very different grounds, I can agree with him that 'What we have today in our hands is the *muṣḥaf* of Muḥammad.'[59]

57. One set of problems that could not be discussed in this article has to do with what J. Burton in *The Collection of the Qurʾān* calls the distinction between the Qurʾān as document and the Qurʾān as source. Burton rightly points to 'confusion and serious contradiction within the Muslim accounts of the history of the collection of the texts of the Qurʾān' (p. 112). A more detailed study than I have offered of the subject is certainly needed. In the present context, the following remarks should suffice. If there is one constant in the area of the history of the Qurʾānic text, it is the universal Muslim acceptance of the ʿUthmānic codex. No matter what importance is attached – even by Muslims themselves, and for whatever reason, exegetical or legal – to the non-ʿUthmānic codices or variants, the fact remains that the ʿUthmānic codex is believed by all Muslims, Shīʿīs as well as Sunnis, lay persons as well as scholars, their one fundamental scriptural text. In the ultimate analysis, it is easier to explain away the non-ʿUthmānic versions than the ʿUthmānic codex.

58. A. Brockett, one of the few Western scholars who recognizes the importance of the simultaneous oral and written transmission of the Qurʾān, draws attention to the difference between the Orientalist and Muslim attitudes toward the Qurʾān. See 'The Value of Ḥafṣ and Warsh Transmissions for the Textual History of the Qurʾān', in Andrew Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qurʾān*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988, pp. 31–4. Brockett's own conclusion is that 'The transmission of the Qurʾān has always been oral, just as it always has been written' (p. 45).

59. J. Burton, *The Collection* …, *op. cit.*, pp. 39f.

The growth and development of Qur'ānic exegesis

Abdul Khaliq Kazi

O humankind! A proof has now come to you from your Sustainer,
for We have sent down to you a manifest light.
As for those who believe in God, and hold fast
To Him, He will soon admit them to mercy
and bounty from Him, and will guide them to Him
on a straight path.

(Qur'ān IV.174–5)[1]

We have sent down a Book to thee,
full of blessings, that they may ponder its signs
and that men of understanding may reflect.

(Qur'ān XXXVIII.29)

The Qur'ān, God's 'manifest light', is His final revelation to humankind. The clarity of the sacred book's essential message, the comprehensiveness of its vision, the opulent meanings of its verses, the inimitable beauty of its style and the authenticity of its text have captured the minds and hearts of billions of people throughout history. All Muslims recite a portion of the Qur'ān in their five daily ritual prayers. It is the scripture with the widest worldwide readership and audience. The very act of the recitation of the Qur'ān is considered a devotional deed, and countless ordinary men, women and children read it in

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1. Cf. another reference to the Qur'ān (V.15–16):
   Now there has come unto you from God a light,
   and a Book Manifest,
   whereby God guides whosoever follows
   His good pleasure in the ways of peace
   and brings them out of the darkness into
   the light by His leave; and He guides them
   to a straight path.

its Arabic original – including hundreds of millions of non-Arabs – to seek the blessings and guidance of God.

The Qurʾān is the Muslims' essential everyday guide to life in conformity with God's plan for humanity. It is the primary source of Islam's teachings on moral, theological, social, economic, educational and political issues, and the cornerstone of the unity of the Muslim *umma*. Therefore, ever since the Qurʾān was revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad in the seventh century CE, the Muslims have been engaged in the serious study of its meaning and message. In this they have been encouraged by the Qurʾān itself, which invites humanity to reflect on its message, stories and parables, and on the wonders of God's creation, power and bounties. The greatest of Muslim scholars have taken up this divine invitation and exercised their intellect to probe into the inexhaustible riches and immeasurable profundities of the Word of God. Their attempt to understand and explain the Qurʾān – the divine light which illumines the believers' journey on the 'straight path' – culminated in a brilliant discipline: the science of Qurʾānic exegesis. With the passage of time, this devotional and intellectual edifice has been soaring higher and higher.

Meaning of exegesis

Exegesis of the Qurʾān, *tafsīr*, means to explain, expound and interpret the meaning of the Qurʾān. There is a vast amount of literature on the interpretation of the Qurʾān in many languages spoken by Muslims, the bulk of it being in Arabic. *Tafsīr* began as oral explanations given by the Prophet Muḥammad (d. 11/632) to his Companions and then by them to others. The exegesis of the Qurʾān continued mainly in that oral fashion for approximately the next 200 years, and consistently took a written form starting in the third/ninth century.

Reasons for exegesis

There were many and complex reasons which made it necessary to explain and interpret the Qurʾān. The main ones were the following: first, the literal and figurative language of the Qurʾān, which at times needed elucidation; second, the specific occasions on which individual verses were revealed, the knowledge of which might help explain the text; and third, the special nature of the message of the Qurʾān. Moreover, the varying individual perspectives that the Qurʾān commentators brought to bear on understanding the Qurʾān resulted in differences in interpretation and emphasis. In order to explain the beginnings of exegesis and appreciate its vast, variegated literature, it is proper to explain a little further the reasons and the problems associated with the *tafsīr* of the Qurʾān.

The language of the Qurʾān

The Qurʾān is the first Arabic book.[2] Revealed in the dialect of Quraysh – the Meccan tribe into which the Prophet Muḥammad was born – the Qurʾān reflects the Arabic of North Arabia of the seventh century CE. It was in this highly developed literary Arabic that the pre-Islamic poets of sixth-century Arabia and those of the early seventh century composed their poems. This literary Arabic was either close to the dialect of the Quraysh or at least influenced by it. Qurʾānic Arabic was, therefore, understood without much difficulty in Mecca and Medina, the main cities of the Hijaz, and in the literary circles of Arabia at large.

Arabia was a vast land of a great many tribes speaking different dialects. As most tribes lived independently of each other – their limited inter-tribal social discourse generally being confined to annual fairs in the periods of truce – several dialects developed and thrived. Those Arabs whose habitat was at some distance from the Hijaz, therefore, encountered occasional difficulties with some words of the Qurʾān when they converted to Islam in the days of the Prophet or later during the early Caliphate. This is supported by the famous tradition allowing seven *aḥruf* in the Qurʾān.[3]

Thus, during the life of the Prophet, and certainly more so after him, a great number of Arabs who entered Islam and heard or read the Qurʾān for the first time required some words to be explained in their own dialect. Later, when the Muslim community became more diverse with the expansion of Islam into Egypt, North Africa, Iran and north-west India (present-day Pakistan), the need for explanation of the Qurʾān increased. The Companions of the Prophet and those who learned from them were the first generation with the knowledge to answer that need.

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2. For a history of its text, see Mustansir Mir, 'The Qurʾānic text' in this volume. [Eds].

3. The word *aḥruf* may be translated as 'modes' to allow for the various interpretations offered for the word. There are a number of *ḥadīth*, or prophetic traditions, which tell us that the Qurʾān was revealed in seven 'modes' (al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān*, *Bāb Unzila al-Qurʾān ʿalā sabʿat aḥruf*). This *ḥadīth* is generally understood to mean that seven different dialectical variations were accommodated in order to facilitate the reading and understanding of the Qurʾān. Some scholars suggest that 'modes' here refers to seven major dialects spoken by the Arabs at the time of revelation. Names of the tribes who spoke these different dialects are also given in Islamic sources. The word may also mean synonyms, not necessarily based on dialectical variation. For a discussion of this issue, see Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*, Beirut, Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1972, I, pp. 211–77 and A. von Denffer, *ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān*, Leicester, Islamic Foundation, 1994, pp. 113–17. The *aḥruf* are also discussed in Mustansir Mir, 'The Qurʾānic text'.

Historical and situational information

Much of the Qurʾān can be understood without knowing the situational context of the verses, though knowing the situation or the incident to which a particular verse was related would add to its understanding. But there are verses where this kind of information is crucial to the proper comprehension of the text. A perfect illustration for this is provided by XXX.1–5. These verses state that the Romans were defeated and prophesy that after their defeat, they will be victorious. It would be impossible to comprehend these verses fully without knowing the history of the military conflict between the Byzantines and the Persians, and of the political sympathies of the Prophet's followers for the Romans, and those of his adversaries for the Persians. This kind of historical information was obviously a necessary part of the exegesis. The Companions of the Prophet were again the ones who could supply this information.

The nature of the Qurʾān

The Qurʾān is the last Word of God (*kalām Allāh*) revealed in a human language to Muḥammad, the last Prophet of God, whose mission it was to convey and explain the Divine Word to humankind. A proper understanding of the Qurʾān, the Word of God and His eternal attribute, is intrinsically linked to the concept of God. In the Qurʾān, God is one, eternal, unique, transcendent and yet immanent; of the nature of God, nothing can be known.[4]

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), an outstanding Sunni theologian and an ardent Sufi who is credited with reconciling orthodoxy to Sufism and who exerted a powerful influence in shaping Muslim theological thought, maintained that since God is unique and incomparable, His attributes, as revealed in the Qurʾān, cannot fully be comprehended by humans.[5] Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), a towering contributor to Sufi literature, states, 'None knows Him save Himself.'[6]

According to this view, no one knows the full meaning of the Qurʾān, save God. On the other hand, the Qurʾān, as revealed in time and addressed to humankind in human language, has a human dimension. In any divine communication to humans there is a gulf to be bridged for effective communication to take place. The bridge, so to speak, spans two realms, linking the infinite with the finite, the eternal with the ephemeral, the unknown with

4. M. M. Sharif, *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, Karachi, Pakistan, Royal Book Corporation, 1983, I, p. 137.
5. F. Shehadi, *Ghazālī's Unique Unknowable God*, Leiden, Netherlands, E. J. Brill, 1964, p. 37.
6. S. H. Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, New York, Caravan, 1976, p. 107.

the known, the divine with the human. The Qurʾān is this bridge. Inasmuch as it is addressed to human beings for their guidance, it must belong to the realm of the known and the knowable; otherwise, it would fail in the very purpose of its revelation. But in its divine aspect, it invites wonder and constantly challenges attempts to understand it.

The polarity of this dimension of the Qurʾān – the Word of God in the form of a book – is expressed in the famous doctrine of one of the stalwart supporters of orthodoxy, Abu-l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/935), regarding the Holy Book. There he makes a distinction between the Word of God, which is His attribute, and the words of the Qurʾān, which are written and recited. This is what he says:

> His [God's] Word is one: it is command, prohibition, statement, interrogation, promise and warning. All these, however, are merely aspects of His Word, and do not imply numerical division of the Word itself or its expression. The sentences and words which are revealed through the tongues of the angels to the prophets are signs of the eternal Word: the sign itself is created and originated, but what is signified by it is eternal. The difference between reading and what is read, between reciting and what is recited, is like the difference between the words spoken and the one spoken of. The words spoken are created, and the one spoken of is eternal.[7]

Muḥkam and mutashābih verses

Pointing the challenge of understanding some of the Qurʾānic verses, and also perhaps reflecting its own nature as discussed above, the Qurʾān classifies its verses into *muḥkamāt* (clear, precise; sing. *muḥkam*) and *mutashābihāt* (allegorical or susceptible to different interpretations; sing. *mutashābih*). The Qurʾān says:

> It is He Who has sent down to you [Muḥammad] the Book [the Qurʾān]. In it are verses that are entirely clear; they are the foundation of the Book, others not entirely clear [allegorical]. As for those in whose hearts there is a deviation [from the truth], they follow thereof what is not entirely clear, seeking *fitna* [mischief] and seeking for its hidden meaning, but none knows its hidden meaning save God. As for those who are firmly grounded in knowledge, they say, 'We believe in it; the whole of it [clear and unclear verses] are from our Lord.' (III.7)

With the seemingly unbridgeable gulf between God and humanity, the revealer and the receiver, limitations on understanding divine communication are obvious.

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7. Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa-l-niḥal*, trans. A. K. Kazi and J. G. Flynn as *Muslim Sects and Divisions*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985, pp. 80–1. See also the discussion of this in Aḥmad Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Karīm Ṣubḥī, *Fī ʿIlm al-Kalām*, 4th ed., Alexandria, Muʾassasat al-Thaqāfa al-Islāmiyya, 1982, pp. 201–4.

Muḥkam (clear) is defined as 'that verse which is capable of only one meaning.'[8] With this definition of *muḥkam*, many verses of the Qur'ān are clear enough to mean the same thing to all those who have sufficient knowledge of Arabic. While it is suggested that it is not possible to declare with absolute certainty that such and such verses are *mutashābihāt* and the rest *muḥkamāt,* or vice versa, most of the Qur'ān is held to be of the *muḥkam* category, regarding whose meaning there is no serious dispute. There is good reason to presume that the Companions of the Prophet had a common understanding of many of the verses of the Qur'ān. Some of the *muḥkam* verses are of general but fundamental theological nature, such as 'there is nothing like Him' (XLII.11). Most of them deal with commands, prohibitions and matters which are *ḥalāl* (permissible) and *ḥarām* (impermissible), in other words with human spiritual and moral life.

A *mutashābih* verse, on the other hand, is one that may bear more than one meaning, as indicated in III.7; or it may have an uncertain allegorical meaning, such as 'The Most Beneficent is seated on the Throne' (XX.5); or the verse may refer to a metaphysical reality whose meaning remains a matter of human conjecture. Only those steeped in knowledge may attempt such conjecture, according to those who understand III.7 as follows: 'None knows its hidden meaning save God and those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: "We believe in it, the whole of it is from our Lord…".'

The Muʿtazila, the rationalist school of theologians of the second-third/ eighth-ninth centuries, interpreted XX.5, and other similar *mutashābih* verses, in line with their philosophical position. The majority of the Muslims, on the other hand, accommodated both views, somewhat uneasily, allowing and disallowing the interpretation of *mutashābih* (allegorical) verses. Some held that the Qur'ān was revealed for the guidance and benefit of humanity; therefore, its meaning must be accessible to humans. The ambiguous and the allegorical, however, would only be accessible to those who were firmly grounded in knowledge.[9] It is interesting to note that ʿAbd Allāh Ibn ʿAbbās (d. ca. 68/687), who is regarded as the most illustrious *mufassir*, or exegete, among the Companions of the Prophet, is reported to have said that he himself was one of those firmly grounded in knowledge and knew the meanings of allegorical verses. His disciple Mujāhid ibn Jabr (d. ca. 102/720) also held the

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8. Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī, *al-Fawz al-kabīr fī uṣūl al-tafsīr*, Lahore, Pakistan, al-Maktaba al-ʿIlmiyya, 1970, p. 72; al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān* …, *op. cit.*, II, p. 68.

9. According to al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (d. 502/1108), as quoted by al-Zarkashī, the majority of theologians are of the view that all of the Qur'ān must be capable of being understood; otherwise, its usefulness will be nullified. Most of the commentators of the Qur'ān, however, believe that there may be verses in the Qur'ān whose true meaning is known to God alone. See al-Zarkashī, *op. cit.*, II, p. 74.

view that 'those firmly grounded in knowledge' are capable of interpreting the allegorical verses of the Qur'ān.[10]

The dominant orthodox view, however, has been that, in the light of III.7, no one knows the meaning of allegorical verses save God. This view is summed up by the famous theologian Taqiyy al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), who says that the Qur'ān is to be interpreted with the help of first, other verses in the Qur'ān; second, the *Sunna*; and third, the sayings of the Companions, for they were witnesses to the revelations.[11] It is impermissible (*ḥarām*) to give a personal opinion in interpreting the Qur'ān. He quotes for support a saying of the Prophet: 'Whoever gives his own views in the interpretation of the Qur'ān, even if his views happen to be correct, has erred.'[12] There is, however, another *ḥadīth*, prophetic tradition (pl. *ḥadīths*), also quoted by Ibn Taymiyya, which says 'Whoever interprets the Qur'ān without knowledge, let him occupy his seat in Hell.'[13]

This *ḥadīth*, however, does not appear to forbid a personal attempt at interpretation. It only stipulates that individual interpretation must be based on knowledge. Ignorance is surely not a sound basis for interpreting the Qur'ān. Scholarly knowledge of the fields appropriate to the understanding of the Qur'ān is an essential prerequisite. This is the point of view of the Qur'ānic scholar and Egyptian Shāfiʿī jurist Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Zarkashī (d. 794/1392) expressed in *al-Burhān fī ʿulūm al-Qur'ān*, and also what Shāh Walī Allāh (d. 1176/1762), one of the greatest of Indian Muslim reformers and thinkers, maintains in *al-Fawz al-kabīr*. Ibn Taymiyya, however, interprets the *ḥadīth* rather narrowly. To him the *ḥadīth* means that people may only interpret the Qur'ān if they *know* another section of the Qur'ān, or a *ḥadīth*, or a saying of a Companion which would help explain the given verse. In the absence of that specific knowledge, an interpretation would be a conjecture, a baseless personal opinion. That kind of interpretation, in Ibn Taymiyya's view, is *ḥarām*. In accordance with this view, if such a situation arises people should stop and say, 'I do not know what this or that verse means'.

Ibn Taymiyya's view might appear to inhibit individual efforts to understand the Qur'ān. A great deal of possible insight into the Qur'ān could thus be lost. The view, however, should not be easily dismissed as irrational and obscurantist, for it is based essentially on the assumption that the human mind is incapable of fully comprehending the transcendent God and His Word except within the limitations of a human language much circumscribed in its ability to serve as a medium for His Word. People must, therefore, tread with

10. Muḥammad Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Beirut, Dār al-Fikr, 1988, II, p. 183, henceforth referred to as Tafsīr.

11. Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima fī uṣūl al-tafsīr*, Lahore, al-Maktaba al-ʿIlmiyya, 1968, pp. 29–31.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 35–6.

13. *Ibid.*

care in interpreting the text of the Qurʾān lest they attribute to it a meaning which was not intended. Purity of the message must be guarded. In order to do that, the Qurʾān must be understood, first, in the light of the Qurʾān itself, and second in the light of the *Sunna* of the Prophet, the exemplar of the message of the Qurʾān. In addition, people must be guided by the explanations provided by the Companions of the Prophet, for they possessed indispensable contextual information. As we shall see, the history of the exegesis of the Qurʾān covers the wide spectrum of liberals and rationalists on the one hand, represented by those philosophically inclined such as the celebrated Qurʾān commentator Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), and over-cautious conservatives on the other, represented by Ibn Taymiyya.

The beginnings of Qurʾānic exegesis

EXEGESIS BY THE PROPHET

According to the Qurʾān, the Prophet's role is not merely to remind, warn and convey the divine message (the Qurʾān) but also to explain it. The following verse is commonly quoted in this regard: 'We have revealed to you the message so that you might explain to humankind that which has been revealed to them' (XVI.44). Some Islamic scholars, including Ibn Taymiyya, believed that the Prophet, therefore, not only communicated the words of the Qurʾān but also explained every word that needed explanation.[14] This view is based solely on verse XVI.44. Ibn Taymiyya does not produce or refer to any material evidence to prove that the Prophet did in fact explain the Qurʾān fully. The Caliph ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān (d. 35/656) and ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Masʿūd (d. 32/653), one of the closest Companions of the Prophet and an exegete of the Qurʾān, are reported to have said that when the Companions learned ten verses of the Qurʾān from the Prophet, they went no further until they had fully learned the verses in terms of both *ʿilm* (knowledge) and practice.[15]

A polymath who perhaps is the most prolific author in the annals of Islam, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), is however of the opinion that the Prophet explained only a few words and verses of the Qurʾān.[16] This view agrees with what ʿĀʾisha (d. 58/678), the Prophet's wife, is reported to have said.[17] The evidence seems to suggest that the Prophet did not engage extensively in elaborating the text of the Qurʾān. The *ḥadīths* containing *tafsīr*

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14. *Ibid.*, pp. 29–30.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
16. Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī (d. 1397/1977), *al-Tafsīr wa-l-mufassirūn,* Beirut, Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1967, I, p. 49. See also Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*, 2nd ed., Beirut, Dār Iḥyāʾ al-ʿUlūm, 1992, II, p. 179.
17. Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272), *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, Cairo, Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1387/1967, I, p. 31.

are sparse indeed. Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), the traditionist and jurist-founder of one of the four major Sunni schools, has included a number of *ḥadīths* on Qur'ānic exegesis in his renowned collection of traditions, the *Musnad*. He is reported to have said that there was not much exegesis available that is based on the properly authenticated traditions of the Prophet.

Other *ḥadīth* collections, such as those of al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870), Muslim (d. 261/875) and al-Tirmidhī (d. ca. 270/883), have devoted a section of their books to exegetical traditions, but two points need to be mentioned. One is that the majority of the exegetical traditions attribute explanations of verses to the Companions or their disciples, rather than to the Prophet himself. The second point is that the *ḥadīths* containing exegesis by the Prophet in those collections are so few in number that they do not justify the view that the Prophet explained everything in the Qur'ān. It would be closer to the truth to say that the Prophet gave explanations or made comments only occasionally, such as when he explained that *ẓulm* meant *shirk* (VI.82), *ʿibāda* meant *duʿāʾ* (XL.60) and the middle prayer meant *ʿaṣr* prayer (II.238).[18] He otherwise left it to the Companions to understand the verses on their own. After all, most of the verses were clear enough to be understood for the purposes of guidance.

As to understanding the Qur'ān in depth, it requires, in al-Zarkashī's view, intelligence, piety and power of reflection in addition to what is known of the meaning of the Qur'ān on the basis of language and traditions.[19] People possess these abilities in varying degrees. That is why Ibn ʿAbbās aptly said, 'The Qur'ān has four levels of exegesis: one which Arabs understand on the basis of their language, one where ignorance is not to be excused, one that the scholars know, and one that is only known to God ….'[20] The nature of the Qur'ān being what it is, there cannot be a final, immutable determination what some of its words or verses mean in an absolute sense, with the possible exception of the *muḥkam* verses whose meanings are quite clear.

However, as the Prophet is the exemplar of the message of the Qur'ān, his *Sunna* is the Qur'ān's interpretation in concrete. Reference is frequently made to ʿĀʾisha's saying that the Prophet's character was an embodiment of the Qur'ān.[21] The Prophet's life was a living commentary on the Qur'ān, in all aspects: in his consuming concern for the salvation of humankind, in conveying the divine message, in being a living example of God-centredness, in offering worship and giving charity, in generosity and modesty, in tenacity and courage in the face of adversity coupled with gentleness and compassion, and in

18. Al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān* …, *op. cit.*, II, p. 156; al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa-l-mufassirūn*, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 45–6.
19. Al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān* …, *op. cit.*, II, p. 155.
20. Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima* …, *op. cit.*, p. 40.
21. Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, Beirut, Dār al-Fikr, n.d., VI, p. 91.

faithful surrender to the will of God. Moreover, his practical implementation of many of the commands in the Qurʾān supplied details not fully spelled out in the Qurʾān. For instance, in God's command to the faithful to establish ṣalāt (devotional worship), it was the Prophet's example that instructed the followers on the spirit, the form, the content, the times and the modalities of the daily ritual worship.[22]

Growth of traditional exegesis (up to the second/eighth century)

Qurʾānic exegesis can be divided into two broad categories in terms of the methodology it followed: traditional exegesis and rational exegesis. Traditional exegesis is based on the Prophet's verbal interpretations or specifications, his practical example, and the explanations of his Companions (ṣaḥāba; sing. ṣaḥābī) and of the Successors (tābiʿūn; sing. tābiʿī; the generation immediately following the Companions of the Prophet). Reliance on these traditions exclusively for the purposes of interpretation is the hallmark of the traditional school of exegesis. The bulk of traditions on which this school relies heavily are in fact commentaries by the Companions of the Prophet and their Successors, some of whom gained wide acceptance as Qurʾānic scholars.[23]

Among the Companions of the Prophet, Ibn ʿAbbās was acknowledged as the person most gifted with the understanding of the Qurʾān. As he was only thirteen years old when the Prophet died in 11/632, it was during the second Caliph ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb's (d. 23/644) caliphate that Ibn ʿAbbās's expertise as a *mufassir* of the Qurʾān began to be recognized.[24] Ibn ʿAbbās is particularly known for giving his personal understanding of a word or a verse

22. On the Prophet as an exemplar, see Yusuf al-Qaradawi's chapter, 'The concept of the *Sunna*' [Eds].

23. Among the Companions the most-quoted commentator of the Qurʾān is the cousin of the Prophet ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās (d. 68/687), followed by ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd (d. 32/652–3), then Abū Hurayra (d. 58/678) and the Prophet's wife ʿĀʾisha (d. 58/678). Other Companions less frequently mentioned are the first caliph, Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (d. 13/634), the second caliph, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23/644), the third caliph, ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān (d. 35/656), the fourth caliph, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), Ubayy ibn Kaʿb (d. 21/642), the Prophet's amanuensis Zayd ibn Thābit (d. 45/665), Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī (d. 44/665), ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr (d. 73/692), Anas ibn Mālik (d. ca. 93/712), ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar (d. 73/693), Jābir ibn ʿAbd Allāh (d. 78/697) and ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ (d. 65/684).

24. This recognition found support in the Prophet's prayer to God to teach Ibn ʿAbbās the interpretation of the Qurʾān. See Abu-l-Fidāʾ Ismāʿīl Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm* Cairo, Maktabat Dār al-Salām, 1992, I, p. 3. For more on Ibn ʿAbbās see Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348), *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, ed. Shuʿayb al-Arnāʾūṭ, 4th ed., Beirut, Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1406/1986, III, pp. 331–59.

based on his knowledge of the period of revelation, the knowledge that he had accumulated through his association with the Prophet and with other senior Companions. Additionally, he had recourse to his thorough knowledge of the Arabic language and particularly of pre-Islamic poetry. This knowledge is such a distinctive feature of Ibn ʿAbbās's exegesis that he is regarded as the father of the linguistic *tafsīr* of the Qurʾān.[25]

Ibn ʿAbbās's exegesis is reported either in the *ḥadīth* collections, such as those of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, or in the exegetical works, such as the universally acclaimed *Tafsīr* of Muḥammad Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and the popular Qurʾān commentary of ʿImād al-Dīn Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373). As to the work known as *Tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās,* doubts have been expressed about the soundness of its attribution to Ibn ʿAbbās.[26]

Ibn Masʿūd is another Companion of the Prophet who is widely quoted in exegetical traditions. His knowledge of the Qurʾān was also recognized by other Companions. His strength lies in his knowledge of where and in what circumstances a particular verse was revealed. He was one of the early converts to Islam, reportedly the sixth one in Mecca. He settled in Kufa during the caliphates of ʿUmar and ʿUthmān and established his reputation there as a teacher of exegesis, *ḥadīth* and law.

The influence of these two great Companions in their respective areas was such that both of them left behind a number of disciples, and founded the schools of Mecca, which generally followed Ibn ʿAbbās, and of Iraq, which generally followed Ibn Masʿūd.

SCHOOL OF MECCA

The best-known Qurʾānic commentators of the school of Mecca are Mujāhid ibn Jabr and Saʿīd ibn Jubayr.

Ibn Jabr was a *mawlā*[27] of the Banū Makhzūm, an influential clan of the Quraysh. In addition to reporting the interpretations of Ibn ʿAbbās or those of the Prophet reported by Ibn ʿAbbās, Mujāhid carried on the methodology of Ibn ʿAbbās in having recourse to personal opinion (*raʾy*) in interpreting the Qurʾān. For instance, he interpreted God's command in II.65 that the people concerned became despised apes in a figurative sense, meaning that those who had transgressed the Sabbath were changed into apes mentally, rather than physically.[28]

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25. Al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa-l-mufassirūn, op. cit.*, I, p. 75.

26. See A. Rippin, 'lexicographical Texts and the Qurʾān' in A. Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretations of the Qurʾān*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998, pp. 158–74.

27. The word *mawlā* was used in the early period of Islamic history for a non-Arab who embraced Islam and was affiliated with an Arab tribe.

28. Al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa-l-mufassirūn, op. cit.*, I, p. 106.

III–2.1   Portrait of Muḥammad ʿAbduh
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Ibn Jubayr (d. 95/714) was one of the Successors and a *mawlā* of Abyssinian origin. Unlike Mujāhid, Saʿīd was reticent in giving his personal opinion in explaining the Qurʾān. He was regarded as reliable and competent in *ʿilm* (knowledge) by his contemporaries and later by the authors of biographical works.[29]

Others are ʿIkrima ibn ʿAbd Allāh (d. 105/723), a *mawlā* of Ibn ʿAbbās and of Berber origin; Ṭāwūs ibn Kaysān (d. 106/724), a *mawlā* from the Yemen; and ʿAṭāʾ ibn Abū Rabāḥ (d. 114/723), a Nubian-descended *mawlā* of the Banū Fihr, respected for his scholarship by Ibn ʿAbbās and Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767), the founder of one of the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 102–3.

School of Iraq

The best-known scholars associated with the school of Ibn Masʿūd are Masrūq ibn al-Ajdaʿ (d. 63/683), an Arab of Kufa; ʿĀmir al-Shaʿbī (d. 103/721), also a Kufan; al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) of Persian origin; and Qatāda ibn Diʿāma (d. 118/736), an Arab of Basra, all of whom are famous Successors, *tābiʿūn*, and are known for their Islamic scholarship in different fields including exegesis, *ḥadīth* and *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence). Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī was also highly esteemed as a theologian and as a pious ascetic.

School of Medina

There was also a minor school of exegesis in Medina. It is difficult to be certain who of the Companions was most prominent in *tafsīr* activity in this city. After all, it was the home of the Prophet after the *hijra* to Medina and where he died; also many of the Companions continued to live there, or were at least active teachers there before moving elsewhere, such as ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), Ibn ʿAbbās and Ibn Masʿūd. ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, his learned and pious son ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar (d. 73/693), and finally Ubayy ibn Kaʿb (d. 21/642), a Jewish scholar in pre-Islamic times who accepted Islam, are all mentioned as sources of exegesis in Medina. Among the Successors who were disciples of these Companions and were engaged in *tafsīr* were Abu-l-ʿĀliya al-Riyāḥī (d. 90/709), a *mawlā*, whose narrations appear in *ḥadīth* collections and are used by al-Ṭabarī,[30] Muḥammad ibn Kaʿb al-Quraẓī (d. ca. 118/736), famous for his knowledge of *ḥadīth* and for his interpretation (*taʾwīl*) of the Qurʾān, and Zayd ibn Aslam (d. 136/753), well known for his exegesis and *fiqh*.

Modes of exegesis

The exegetical activity of this period may be summed up as follows.

Explanation of words

There is much in the exegesis of the Companions and the Successors that simply explains or elaborates the words of the Qurʾān. For instance, Ibn ʿAbbās explained that the word *ḥūr* in LV.72 meant the 'black-eyed ones'.[31] Explaining LII.1, Mujāhid says that the word *al-ṭūr* is originally a Syriac word meaning *jabal*, mountain, and Qatāda adds that the word *masṭūr* in LII.2 means *maktūb*, written. A report in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī says that

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30. *Ibid.*, p. 115.
31. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Tafsīr, Sūrat al-Raḥmān, Bāb Ḥūrun maqṣūrātun fī-l-khiyām. op. cit.*

aḥlām (LII.32) means *'uqūl*, 'minds', and so on.[32] Most of the elucidations in this category are either one-word explanations providing an easier word, or brief explications. The basis for such explanations by the Companions and their Successors was their knowledge of the Qurʾān, *ḥadīths* and the Arabic language.

Occasionally there is a wider expounding of a verse or part of a verse, where in the view of the commentator, the meaning of the verse is somewhat more than what the words on the surface may suggest. A verse in question may, in the opinion of a *mufassir*, be linked to an event in the life of the Prophet, which, therefore, may be cited for a better understanding of the verse. For instance, XVII.80 could be rendered as 'And say (O Muḥammad), "My Lord! Let my entry be good and (likewise) let my exit be good, and grant me from Your presence an authority to help me".' In the opinion of Ibn ʿAbbās, this verse was revealed in connection with God's instruction to Muḥammad to leave the city of Mecca and migrate to Medina. In this context, through this verse, the Prophet is taught a prayer for the occasion. This view of Ibn ʿAbbās is amplified by al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. On the basis of this explanation the first part of the verse means 'My Lord! Let my entry into the city of Medina be good and, likewise, let my exit from the city of Mecca be good.' Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī suggests that the last part of the verse has to do with God's promise that the kingdoms of Rome and Persia will collapse and that Islam's authority will extend to these kingdoms. Now, since nothing is attainable without God's help, the Prophet was instructed to pray to Him in this manner. This part of the verse was, therefore, to be understood to mean 'And grant me from Your Presence an authority to help me achieve the subjugation of these two kingdoms.'[33]

Fresh theological issues

THEOLOGICAL DEBATES AND EARLY EXEGESIS

This early period – the second half of the first/seventh and early second/eighth centuries – also witnessed the beginnings of theological discussions in Islam. The earliest theological issue that was raised at this time was *qadar*, whether man's deeds are predetermined (*muqaddar*) by God, or whether man has power (*qudra*) over his own actions. Opinions were divided, and

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32. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Tafsīr, Sūrat al-Ṭūr, op. cit.*
33. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm, op. cit.*, III, pp. 58–9.

the common person needed to know what the view of the Qurʾān was in this matter. Obviously a theological opinion was unsustainable if it did not have any support in the text of the Qurʾān. Some theologians, such as the controversial early sectarian Jahm ibn Ṣafwān (d. 128/746), believed in God's omnipotence and humanity's absolute powerlessness, and understood the Qurʾān to be saying that God predetermined people's deeds. Others, led by the famous al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, believed in human freedom to act, quoting for evidence verses from the Qurʾān. The issue of human power in relation to God's predetermining power became a new development in *tafsīr* in the times of Successors. In the course of time, further theological developments forced a reader of the Qurʾān to explore meanings that had not occurred to its earlier perusers. We shall see more and more of this tendency with the passage of time.

It is worth observing that not only was the Qurʾān's support and guidance being sought on fresh theological issues, but the people seeking them were also, apart from some Arabs, people of non-Arab, mainly Persian origin.

Elaboration of Qurʾānic narratives

However, before leaving this period – the first/seventh and second/eighth centuries – we must note the trickle and then the flood of explanatory material from Jewish and Christian sources, known as *Isrāʾīliyyāt,* which often supplied detailed information on references to the biblical stories in the Qurʾān. The Muslim community had a genuine desire for exegetical guidance to understand those references. In the beginning, this guidance was supplied in a judicious manner by ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām (d. 43/663), a Medinan Jew who had accepted Islam at the hands of the Prophet. He was followed by Kaʿb al-Aḥbār (d. ca. 33/653), a Yemeni Jewish scholar, who had accepted Islam during the caliphate of Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (d. 13/634), or possibly later in the early period of ʿUmar's caliphate. His piety and intimate knowledge of Judaic and Christian sources earned him the respect of such prominent Companions of the Prophet as Abū Hurayra, Ibn ʿAbbās, and Muʿāwiya ibn Abī Sufyān (d. 60/680), who became the first Umayyad Caliph. Also Kaʿb al-Aḥbār contributed greatly to the Isrāʾīliyyāt material. This tendency to amplify and elaborate the Qurʾānic narrative continued for some time.[34]

It would seem from the accounts of exegesis in this period that the Isrāʾīliyyāt material – as an aid to the explanation of the Qurʾān – was not accepted unanimously by all. Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī (d. 1397/1977),

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34. Al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa-l-mufassirūn, op. cit.*, I, pp. 169–203. For traditions on the creation of Eve in explanation of II.35, see also al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr …, op. cit.*, I, pp. 229–30.

the foremost modern Egyptian chronicler of the development of Qurʾānic exegesis, says that some authorities on *tafsīr* eschewed Mujāhid ibn Jabr's commentary and explanations because he was known to consult the People of the Book.[35] There was a natural concern during this period among many Muslim scholars that – notwithstanding the general value of the biblical stories as a historical backdrop to the Qurʾān – the indiscriminate use of supplementary information from the Bible or other sources to amplify some of the stories in the Qurʾān might either distract from, or distort the purpose of, the Qurʾānic narrative. After quoting a saying of the Prophet in which he allowed his followers to quote from the Jews, Ibn Taymiyya sums up what became crystallized as the orthodox attitude in this matter in the following words: 'Isrāʾīliyyāt material is to be used as supporting evidence, not as a source of belief or doctrine.'[36] 'Where the details of a story which God left out and the knowledge thereof is not helpful to the story, such as the names of the men or the colour of the dog in the story of the Cave,' he says, 'these are to be avoided.'[37] He bases his reservations on the saying of the Prophet: 'When the People of the Book quote something to you, neither consent to it nor deny it.'[38]

Exegesis by the Companions and Successors

Some of the commentary by the Companions is given explicitly on the authority of the Prophet. Such commentary is regarded as authoritative provided, however, that the report containing the Prophet's exegesis is judged to be a sound *ḥadīth* according to the accepted canons of *ḥadīth* criticism. Not all the reported *ḥadīths* containing *tafsīr* fall into this category. Al-Suyūṭī has cited a little over 250 exegetical traditions which, in his own view, include many that are weak in terms of *isnād* (also called *sanad*), the record of the chain of transmitters of a *ḥadīth*.[39] Ibn Ḥanbal is quoted as saying, 'There are three types of books that have no firm basis: accounts of the military campaigns of the Prophet, stories of battles, and those on exegesis.'[40] This statement is understood to mean that material pertaining to these areas is often not supported by a sound and unbroken chain of authorities, which is regarded as a must for accepting any *ḥadīth* as sound.

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35. Al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa-l-mufassirūn, op. cit.*, I, p. 105.
36. Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima …, op. cit.*, p. 32.
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
39. Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān …, op. cit.*, II, pp. 191–206.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 180.

Traditional versus rational exegesis

In many cases, Ibn ʿAbbās gave his own personal understanding of a verse which was not based on a saying of the Prophet. His talent in understanding the Qurʾān was recognized and the method was not seriously questioned in his case. This method of exegesis came to be known as *al-tafsīr bi-l-raʾy* (explaining a word or a verse of the Qurʾān in the light of a person's opinion). This attitude was adopted by only some of the students of Ibn ʿAbbās, such as Mujāhid ibn Jabr and ʿIkrima ibn ʿAbd Allāh, while others, choosing the path of caution, refrained from adopting this method. Here we clearly see the birth of two distinct schools of *tafsīr*, one strictly traditional – championed later on by Ibn Taymiyya – and the other a rational school of exegesis, or more accurately a non-traditional school.

Ibn Taymiyya summed up the traditional position by saying that interpreting the Qurʾān merely on the basis of personal opinion was forbidden. This view was held on the strength of a saying of the Prophet reported by none other than Ibn ʿAbbās: 'Whoever interprets the Qurʾān without knowledge, let him occupy his seat in Hell.' The Prophet is also reported to have said, 'Whoever gives his own views in the interpretation of the Qurʾān, even if his views happen to be correct, has erred.' The first *ḥadīth* is reported in Abū Dāwūd's collection and the second in the collections of Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī and al-Nasāʾī.[41] While the first *ḥadīth* attempts to set conditions for interpreting the Qurʾān, the second *ḥadīth* prohibits independent understanding altogether. Al-Tirmidhī regards this *ḥadīth* as *gharīb* ('strange'), for one of the narrators in the chain was criticized for his unreliability. Regardless of the level of authenticity of this *ḥadīth*, it can be seen to express, if not determine, the cautious attitude of many Companions and Successors in interpreting the Word of God. It is in this spirit that we may understand Abū Bakr's cry, 'Which land will carry me and which sky will shade me if I said about the Qurʾān what I did not know?'[42]

Perhaps even more illustrative of the attitude of caution is the story of the Caliph ʿUmar. When he read the verse wherein the following words occur, '*wa-fākihatan wa-abbā*' (LXXX.31), he enquired about the meaning of '*abbā*', but then corrected himself by saying, 'This is an idle pursuit; what difference does it make if you did not know it?'[43] Not only Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, but a host of other Companions and Successors and the scholars who followed them in the next generation, avoided this kind of 'idle pursuit'. But as long as not understanding every word did not have a harmful effect on their practice of Islam, they did not think it that it was a matter of consequence. The

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41. Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima …, op. cit.*, pp. 35–6 and al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān …, op. cit.*, II, p. 138.
42. Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima …, op. cit.*, pp. 35–7.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 36–7.

important thing was right practice, not so much an 'in-depth' understanding of every word in the Qurʾān. The main thrust of the Prophet's mission and the Qurʾān's message was, in any case, to invite people to Islam and inspire them to lead good lives rather than to delve into theological speculation and engage in religious controversies.

This strict prohibitive position, however, could not be sustained in practice. Words that have rich meanings or intriguing nuances or multiple connotations invite attempts at understanding them (see XVI.44 for an example). The Qurʾān specifically extends such an invitation. A number of Muslim scholars have, therefore, taken up the defence of the use of *raʾy* in interpretation. To begin with, as the traditionist Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066) said, the authenticity of this *ḥadīth* is doubtful because of a weakness in its *isnād*. Even granting that the *ḥadīth* is authentic, what would be forbidden is an opinion that is imposed on a given text without any evidence to support it. If, on the other hand, a *raʾy* is supported by a cogent argument, it is permissible.[44] Al-Ghazālī points to a verse of the Qurʾān which attributes knowledge to those who make deductions from the Qurʾān (IV.83) and affirms that making deductions from the Qurʾān is a necessary rational exercise.[45] As it is, the use of *raʾy* in exegesis is practised in varying degrees by almost all the major commentators on the Qurʾān. Some, such as al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr, exercise it in a limited way; others, such as al-Rāzī, know almost no bounds in its use, with the result that in his voluminous *tafsīr* the Qurʾānic text seems to be a faint pretext for his philosophical discourse.

Tafsīr and *taʾwīl*

In connection with the exegesis of the Qurʾān, two Arabic terms, *tafsīr* and *taʾwīl,* have been used to denote the two approaches that can be, and indeed are, adopted. Both words are used in the Qurʾān, *tafsīr* once and *taʾwīl* six times. *Tafsīr* lexically means 'uncovering and unveiling'. In its solitary Qurʾānic usage, *tafsīr* means explanation. In this verse (XXV.33) the Qurʾān itself is an explanation and illustration of the truth. In exegetical literature too, *tafsīr* is employed to mean explanation, albeit a conservative one. *Tafsīr* generally signifies explaining the Qurʾān by clarifying difficult or unusual words in it,[46] an explanation which is considered to be the assured meaning, one which indicates what God Himself meant by the use of a certain word in the Qurʾān. Such an explanation is usually based on sayings

44. Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān …, op. cit.*, II, p. 173.

45. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, Cairo, Kitāb al-Shaʿb, n.d., I, p. 136.

46. Al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa-l-mufassirūn, op. cit.*, I, p. 12.

of the Prophet or those of the Companions.[47] As an ordinary human being is not capable of saying categorically what is the meaning intended by God in any given text of the Qur'ān, the first and sure explanation, *tafsīr*, of the revealed word is one made by the Prophet, the receiver of the revelation. The Companions are the second source of sure explanation, in as much as they witnessed the revelation and were aware of the events and situations associated with it.[48]

Ta'wīl, on the other hand, means 'to return, to go back'. It is used in the Qur'ān in the sense of interpretation of dreams (XII.44 and 100), in the sense of significance and interpretation of events (XVIII.78 and 82), or in the sense of bringing out the interpretation, true significance and real meaning of the verses in question (especially in the case of ambiguous verses) which are not apparent from the text (III.7). In exegetical literature, the word *ta'wīl* has been variously defined as 'abandoning the literal or the obvious meaning in favour of another possible meaning on the basis of some evidence that leads to that meaning'[49] or 'preferring one of several possible meanings, without certainty, and asserting that which is intended by God.'[50] According to some, while *tafsīr* is an understanding based on *riwāya* (traditions), *ta'wīl* represents a deeper understanding, or as posited by the Qur'ān commentator Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1035), *ta'wīl* is an explanation of the inner connotations of the words of the Qur'ān, which is nevertheless derived from their basic meanings.[51] As an illustration of the process of *ta'wīl* let us look at the interpretation of *mirṣād* in LXXXIX.14, which etymologically means 'ambush'. The verse literally means that God waits in ambush, but it is interpreted to mean that a person must not treat lightly the commands of God and must make adequate preparation for appearing before Him.[52]

In all these definitions, *ta'wīl* involves human effort to arrive at a likely meaning of a Qur'ānic text, a meaning that the words in the text can sustain on the basis of evidence that supports the deduction of that meaning. *Ta'wīl* within those defined parameters was and remains unavoidable, and by and large came to be accepted. Al-Ṭabarī, who is the leader of traditional *tafsīr*, in fact used the words *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* without making any distinction between the two, acknowledged the interpretations, *ta'wīl*, of his predecessors and indicated his preferences on rational grounds. Wherever a *ta'wīl* is far-fetched, and the suggested interpretation is not supported by text or reason, except by subjecting

47. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
48. *Ibid.*, pp. 21–2.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
52. *Ibid.*, pp. 20–1.

the text to what would seem to be purely arbitrary interpretations such as those given by some extremist Shīʿa,[53] it has been unacceptable to the majority of the commentators. *Taʾwīl*, however, is there to stay as a part of the exegesis of the Qurʾān, and it became as vital to the evolution of the understanding of the Qurʾān as *ijtihād* (personal reasoning) was to the development of Islamic law and jurisprudence. It made possible the emergence of different approaches to the understanding of the Qurʾān from various perspectives.

Later developments in exegesis (second/eighth to fourth/tenth centuries)

Islam had expanded into Syria, Iraq, Persia and Egypt in less than thirty years during the Rightly Guided Caliphate (11–40/632–61). During the Umayyad Caliphate (41–132/661–750), the territory of Islam expanded to include Sind in India and some regions in Afghanistan, and the steppes of Russia as well as North Africa and Spain in the West. A number of people in these regions accepted Islam, and their keen minds brought their rich cultural traditions as well as biases to bear on their study of the Qurʾānic text.

New and old cities, such as Kufa, Basra, Baghdad and Damascus, grew as centres of commerce and learning where races mingled, religions encountered each other, the study of philosophy was pursued, theological issues were debated, and science and learning flourished. It is no wonder that it is in those cities that new perspectives on approaches to the understanding of the Qurʾān emerged. These perspectives included the results of mature scholarship and reflection in the fields of syntax, morphology, rhetoric, literary criticism and philosophy.

A more challenging perspective came from the birth of a variety of Muslim sects and schools of thought, each with its own views and doctrines on important issues. The three major groups[54] that emerged were the Sunni, for whom the basis for all obligation was revelation rather than reason, and who maintained that the community could lawfully choose any qualified person as caliph; the Muʿtazila, who are known for their conspicuous recourse to legal and theological arguments drawn from reason; and the Shīʿa, whose main initial disagreement with the Sunni was that the *imām* of the community ought to be a descendant of the Prophet. Quite naturally, as we shall see, the various commentators of the Qurʾān would reflect their own theological perspectives in their understanding of the Qurʾān.

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53. Shīʿa, 'the Partisans' (of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib). This subject is treated in detail below.
54. For details of these three sects and others see al-Shahrastānī, *Muslim Sects and Divisions*, pp. 20–7, the English translation of al-Shahrastānī's *al-Milal wa-l-niḥal*.

Another group that has been important in the history of Islam, the Sufi, has not figured significantly in the disputes over the principles or politics of the leadership of the Muslim community or doctrinal matters. Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153), author of *al-Milal wa-l-niḥal*, one the most famous, reliable and objective accounts of Muslim sects and divisions, has not included Sufis as a sectarian group within the seventy-three sects of Islam he mentions. This is perhaps because Sufis were not an exclusive and delineated sect. Sufis represented a deeper and a more spiritual dimension within whatever doctrinal group they belonged to.[55] There are, therefore, Sunni Sufi as well as Shīʿa or Muʿtazilī ones. A Sufi might 'see' levels of meaning in the Qurʾān which an ordinary 'eye' cannot 'see'. Thus, we shall look at Sufi *tafsīr* as independent from other approaches to Qurʾānic exegesis.

Main genres of classical exegesis

Now let us look at some of the *tafsīrs* written from these different standpoints from the third century/ninth century to the eighth/fourteenth century.

Traditional exegesis

Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī

Jāmiʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān by Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) is the earliest major *tafsīr* that has survived to this day. There is universal agreement among scholars that it is the preeminent Qurʾān commentary of all time.[56]

Al-Ṭabarī was born c. 224/838 in the city of Āmul in Ṭabaristān, hence the toponymic appellation al-Ṭabarī by which he is known.[57] One of the leading polymaths of the Muslim world, he mastered all the major religious disciplines of his day, including the Qurʾān, *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, history, rhetoric and grammar. His Qurʾānic exegesis is one of two monumental literary achievements, the other

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55. The characteristic of the Sufi path is the belief that everything has an external and an internal aspect, somewhat analogous to the body and soul in a human being. This distinction applies to the *Sharīʿa* as well as to the Qurʾān. Knowledge of the inner aspect comes through gnostic experience, a process of illumination that Sufis encounter as they follow the Sufi path of the love of God.

56. To mention just one example, al-Suyūṭī (*al-Itqān …*, *op. cit.*, II, p. 213) quotes the prominent traditionist and Shāfiʿī jurist Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277) as saying that there is consensus among all Muslims that the like of al-Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr* has not been written.

57. R.A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 350.

being his comprehensive *Ta'rīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk* (The History of Apostles and Kings).[58]

Jāmiʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān, or *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, as it is popularly known, is an encyclopaedic work which was printed in Egypt in 1323/1905 in 30 volumes. There is hardly a *tafsīr* written since the time of al-Ṭabarī that has not drawn on this magisterial work as an indispensable source of information on early Qur'ānic exegesis.

Al-Ṭabarī is, in principle, opposed to the use of reason in explaining the Qur'ān. He supports this view by quoting the Prophet's saying, on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās, which expresses disapproval of *al-tafsīr bi-l-ra'y*.[59] Yet he maintains that the Qur'ān must be explained and learned. 'The Companions, when they learnt ten verses, would try to learn their meaning before learning any more verses,' said Ibn Masʿūd.[60] Saʿīd ibn Jubayr, famous for his piety and his interpretation of the Word of God, is quoted by al-Ṭabarī as saying 'Anyone who reads the Qur'ān and does not explain it is like a blind person or like a bedouin.'[61]

Al-Ṭabarī classifies the Qur'ānic verses into three groups. The first group can only be explained by the Prophet. These are the verses which pertain to proscriptive or prescriptive matters. The second group consists of verses the meaning of which is only known to God, such as the 'abbreviated letters' (*muqaṭṭaʿāt*), the knowledge of the Hour and of the time when Jesus would return. The third group of verses is open to general interpretation, based on the Arabic lexicon – which incorporates a vast and vital repertoire of early poetry – for this is the tongue of the Qur'ānic revelation.[62] Al-Ṭabarī also relies heavily on the sayings of the Prophet and the interpretations reported from the Companions and the Successors.

In most cases al-Ṭabarī is content simply to quote after each verse all the relevant interpretive material that has come to his knowledge. Let us take, for instance, the verse 'Will they wait until God comes to them in canopies of clouds with angels and the question is thus settled?' (II.210). First of all al-Ṭabarī gives various readings which change the meaning slightly, then he deals with the question of the mode of God's coming. He says:

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58. Nicholson says of al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh*, 'Al-Ṭabarī's compilation is not so much a history as a priceless collection of original documents placed side by side without any attempt to construct a critical and continuous narrative. At first sight one can hardly see the wood from the trees. But on closer study the essential features gradually emerge' (*op. cit.*, pp. 351–2.

59. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr …, op. cit.*, I, p. 27.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

62. J. D. McAuliffe, 'Qur'ānic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr', in A. Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretations of the Qur'ān*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988, pp. 49 –52. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr …, op. cit.*, I, pp. 29–32.

III–2.2   Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, founder of the pan-
Islam movement and resistance to the British mandate
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There are a number of opinions on this. Some hold that God's coming cannot
be described differently from what God has said. It is not permissible to say
anything about God's Names and Attributes. Only God or His Prophet can
say anything in that regard. Some say that God's coming is comparable to the
coming of any other being, from one place to another place, or movement from
one place to another. Others say that God's coming means the coming of His
command. Still others say that it conveys the coming of His reckoning, His
reward and punishment.[63]

63. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* …, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 191–2.

Often al-Ṭabarī shows his preference for one of the interpretations. For instance, in the interpretation of *al-ʿālamīn* in the first verse of the *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* ('the Opening'), al-Ṭabarī indicates his preference for a reported explanation from Ibn ʿAbbās and declares that most of the commentators also agree with it. According to this report, the verse means 'Praise be to God, to Whom belong all the creatures, heavens and Earth, and all those that are in them and between them, those that are known as well as those that are unknown.' Al-Ṭabarī explains that humankind is thus an *ʿālam* (world), as are *jinn* and all other kinds of creatures. He, however, goes on to quote other reports from Ibn ʿAbbās and Saʿīd ibn Jubayr, according to which *al-ʿālamīn* means *ins wa-jinn* (human beings and *jinn*), without pausing to note that this interpretation is narrower than the first with which he had sympathized.

It is not uncommon, however, for al-Ṭabarī to express his preference where a number of explanations are offered by the Successors, or to give his own interpretation of a word based on his considerable knowledge of the Arabic language and of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, thus disagreeing with the meanings suggested by the Successors, or at least some of them. For example, al-Ṭabarī interprets 'Be apes despised' (II.65) to mean that the sinners were miraculously transmogrified into apes, whereas Mujāhid, the venerable *tābiʿī*, is reported to have held that these words were a divine metaphor for the spiritual degradation of the sinners' hearts, and did not literally indicate their transmogrification into apes. Al-Ṭabarī criticizes Mujāhid here for going against the text of the Qurʾān and the elucidations of the majority of the authorities, and for not having any evidence to support his interpretation. To al-Ṭabarī this was *al-tafsīr bi-l-raʾy,* which was not allowed. Elsewhere he said 'We are obliged to believe in the *ẓāhir* (apparent) meaning of the revelation. We are not obliged to seek to know beyond that.'[64]

Al-Ṭabarī was also a historian whose knowledge of Jewish and Christian historical material was vast. This material he used extensively, albeit cautiously, for amplifying the historical narratives in the Qurʾān. Where details trivialize a story, he pointed out their triviality. For instance, in interpreting V.112–13 he reported contradictory stories detailing the types of food that God sent for the disciples of Jesus, with the comment that knowledge of these details is not helpful in any way in understanding the text of the Qurʾān, nor is being in ignorance of them harmful.[65] Al-Ṭabarī's exegesis also reflects the theological controversies of his time. He generally makes a point of defending the Sunni position and refuting the Qadariyya, who believed in the absolute freedom of humans, and the Mushabbiha, who conceived of God in anthropomorphic terms.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

The main elements in the great *Tafsīr* of al-Ṭabarī are:

- Explanation of difficult words in the light of their usage in classical Arabic poetry;
- Variant readings of the Qurʾān (*qirāʾāt*);
- Material from the *ḥadīths* of the Prophet and the interpretations of the Companions and the Successors. Where pertinent, these explanations include information on the contexts and the situations in which some specific verses were revealed. Al-Ṭabarī's exegesis is in fact so comprehensive that it has covered many diverse schools such as those of Ibn ʿAbbās, Ibn Masʿūd, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib and Ubayy ibn Kaʿb;
- Historical material from Jewish and Christian sources;
- Elaboration of points of Islamic law;
- Grammatical analysis. Al-Ṭabarī harnesses all the tools of grammatical analysis from the two schools of Kufa and Basra to serve Qurʾānic interpretation.

Al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmiʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* represents the best model of traditional exegesis (*al-tafsīr bi-l-maʾthūr*) and has been given the seal of approval by traditionists and theologians including Ibn Taymiyya. The only complaint against it is its length, which persuaded some scholars to attempt its abridgment. It was, however, used by all the commentators who came after him as the earliest and most comprehensive traditional exegesis. At some unknown time in history, presumably on account of its cumbersome size and partly because of the availability of the bulk of its material in subsequent traditional works of exegesis, it seems that it almost ceased to be used as an independent work, and therefore no more copies of it were made. In 1860 Theodore Nöldeke (d. 1350/1931), the famous Orientalist, declared his regret that not a single manuscript of al-Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr* was to be found anywhere.[66] It was a delightful surprise for Qurʾānic scholars when the work was first published in Cairo early in the twentieth century. It has been republished a number of times since.

Ibn Kathīr

After al-Ṭabarī, a number of Qurʾān commentaries were written which fall under the category of *al-tafsīr bi-l-maʾthūr*. The most acclaimed is *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm*, known as *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, by ʿImād al-Dīn Ismāʿīl ibn ʿUmar Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373). Ibn Kathīr grew up in Damascus, which was at that time a centre of Sunni scholarship. The teacher who influenced the young

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66. I. Goldziher, *Madhāhib al-tafsīr al-islāmī,* translation of *Die Richtungen der Islamischen Koranauslegun* by ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm al-Najjār, Cairo, Dār Iqraʾ, n.d., p. 108.

man most was Ibn Taymiyya, the great Ḥanbalī theologian, jurisconsult and reformer.[67]

Ibn Kathīr introduced his *Tafsīr* with a chapter explaining the permissible methodology of *tafsīr*. He began by saying that it was the duty of the *ʿulamāʾ* to unveil the words of God and explain them to people. But the meanings of these words had to be sought from the proper sources. Then he set out to explain the appropriate sources for the *tafsīr* of the Qurʾān. What follows is in fact a word-for-word copy of a section of Ibn Taymiyya's small treatise on exegesis published under the title *Muqaddima fī uṣūl al-tafsīr*.

As a strict traditionist, Ibn Kathīr, using Ibn Taymiyya's words, proposed the following methodology for *tafsīr*. First, the Qurʾān should be explained in the light of the Qurʾān itself. We should find that what is left unexplained in one place in the Qurʾān is often elaborated in another. Failing that, we must turn to the *Sunna*, for the *Sunna* explains the Qurʾān. The Prophet said that he was given the Qurʾān and 'its like with it'.[68] The reference here, says Ibn Taymiyya, was obviously to the *Sunna*. The *Sunna*, like the Qurʾān, is based on revelation, with the difference that reading the *Sunna* is not considered to have the religious merit of reciting the Qurʾān.

If, however, there is nothing in the Qurʾān or the *Sunna* to explain a specific verse, then we may turn to the sayings of the Companions, for they knew the situations in which any particular verse was revealed. Among them Ibn Taymiyya specifically mentions the names of Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUthmān, ʿAlī, Ibn Masʿūd and Ibn ʿAbbās.

Again, in the absence of exegetical explanations by the Companions, we may refer to the sayings of their Successors. He then addresses the question of the degree of the authority of their interpretations.[69]

The principle suggested is that if there is consensus among the Successors on the interpretation of a verse, then it is authoritative. If they differ, then none of them has authority over the others or over those who came after them. In that case, we may refer to the language of the Qurʾān, the *Sunna*, the sayings of the Companions and the general usage of the Arabs.

67. Ibn Taymiyya was a man of exceptional intelligence, memory and courage. As Ibn Ḥanbal – the founder of the Ḥanbalī school – had done centuries earlier, Ibn Taymiyya stood for a strict and almost literal adherence to the Qurʾān and the *Sunna* as the only two authoritative sources for Islamic dogma and practice. He therefore repudiated all external influences which had permeated Islamic theology and religious life. He particularly railed against Greek philosophy and Sufism with its then-prevalent saint worship. His outspoken criticism earned him the hostility of many *ʿulamāʾ* who had him exiled and imprisoned in Egypt and then incarcerated in the citadel of Damascus, where he died. Ibn Kathīr associated with him in those turbulent years.

68. See *Sunan*, Abū Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-Sunna, Bāb fī Luzūm al-sunna*.

69. See Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima …*, *op. cit.*, pp. 29–40.

With regard to the *Isrāʾīliyyāt* material, Ibn Kathīr also quotes Ibn Taymiyya, whose view is a slightly modified version of al-Ṭabarī's opinion. Finally, like al-Ṭabarī, he is totally opposed to *al-tafsīr bi-l-raʾy*. But the opposition is obviously against pure *raʾy*. In Ibn Taymiyya's treatise there is in fact a considerable acknowledged borrowing from al-Ṭabarī's introduction to his *Jāmiʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, but Ibn Taymiyya's methodology is spelled out with a higher degree of clarity.

The *Tafsīr* of Ibn Kathīr is shorter than al-Ṭabarī's and much easier to comprehend. It is not surprising, therefore, that it is the most widely consulted commentary, and is regarded as the best example of Sunni traditional *tafsīr* (*al-tafsīr bi-l-maʾthūr*).

RATIONALIST EXEGESIS

Al-tafsīr bi-l-raʾy (independent rational interpretation) encompasses a vast range of exegetical activity. It is in the nature of rational interpretation that there are very considerable differences in interpretation, for people do not think alike. Rationalist *tafsīr* allows for a greater scope for the individual and sectarian points of view to be reflected in the exegesis of the Qurʾān. Every sectarian group has supported its interpretations by citing the Qurʾān. While some of the explanations were within the bounds of what was admissible as rational interpretation, given the verbal meaning of the text, other rationalist explanations stretched, or even exceeded, the limits of conventional linguistic usage.

Rationalist interpretation was purely an internal development as one of the elements in Qurʾānic exegesis, with Ibn ʿAbbās and his disciple Mujāhid as its early champions. It acquired a further far-reaching stimulus when Muslims came into contact with the followers of other religions and entered into debates with their theologians. Islam had to be explained to them persuasively and defended against their attacks. These inter-religious and wide-ranging cross-cultural contacts which reached their peak during the reign of the ʿAbbāsid caliph al-Maʾmūn (r. 189–218/813–33) made the Muslims aware of the wealth of scholarship possessed by the people of the conquered areas. These contacts also led to an intellectual ferment in many fields, including theology. One of the influences on Muslims was Greek thought.

The first Muslims to incorporate aspects of Greek philosophy into their theological system were the Muʿtazila. Before long Greek thought had become an integral part of Muslim theological thinking, whether Sunni, Muʿtazilī, Shīʿa or Sufi, although the diverse Muslim schools differed in the extent of their openness to it.

Fundamental to the Muʿtazila's understanding of the Qurʾān is their reliance on reason rather than on reported traditions, provided the words and literary norms allow such an interpretation. According to them, if in this

exercise reasoning leads to different interpretations, such reasoning should be followed to its logical conclusions. The Muʿtazila held that a verse may have more than one interpretation and that all of them may be accepted as the meaning intended by God for that verse. God's command to every person, therefore, is what they arrive at through their *ijtihād*.[70] Despite this clearly stated liberal rationalism, however, the Muʿtazila had a clear sectarian bias of their own. They did not, for instance, extend liberal tolerance to much of the Sunni interpretation on the grounds that the views of the Sunnis were not rationally tenable.[71]

Jār Allāh al-Zamakhsharī

Several commentaries on the Qurʾān were written by Muʿtazilī scholars, but because of a sharp decline in their numbers their school went into eclipse by the seventh/thirteenth century. Consequently, most of their *tafsīrs* were lost for lack of devoted followers. The one that has survived is the famous *al-Kashshāf ʿan ḥaqāʾiq al-tanzīl* by Abu-l-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1143), better known as Jār Allāh (meaning neighbour of [the House] of God) in view of his long stay in Mecca. It speaks volumes for the book that despite the author's Muʿtazilī interpretations, *al-Kashshāf* is accepted by Muʿtazilī as well as non-Muʿtazilī scholars as one of the best exegeses ever written. In fact, the preservation of the work owes itself largely to the Sunni admiration of the work.

In order to adequately understand and appreciate al-Zamakhsharī's commentary on the Qurʾān, we need to be aware of the doctrinal views of his school, the Muʿtazila, about God and the Qurʾān. The Muʿtazila believed the Qurʾān to be created, not the eternal Word of God, for only God is eternal. Moreover, the Qurʾān adopts norms of literary expression with which Arab society was familiar and in which figurative speech was not uncommon. We must, therefore, be aware of figurative and allegorical expressions in the Qurʾān, for to understand all verses literally is likely to distort their meaning. This, in their view, is particularly so where there are references to God which, taken literally, are likely to give an anthropomorphic image of God. As God is not a corporeal being, all anthropomorphic expressions with regard to God are to be interpreted figuratively.

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70. Al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa-l-mufassirūn*, *op. cit.*, I, p. 375.
71. Mutual intolerance unfortunately took ugly forms at the level of the mobs who had no understanding of the complexities inherent in the divine Word. Al-Ṭabarī was subjected to mob violence when he stated in interpretation of XVII.79 that it did not mean that the Prophet would be seated on the Throne of God. See Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, London, Luzac 1931, VI, p. 436. See also Goldziher, *Madhāhib al-tafsīr …*, *op. cit.*, pp. 122–3.

Al-Zamakhsharī's knowledge of rhetoric was unrivalled and he had written a book on the subject. He was, therefore, able to employ his expertise in rhetoric skilfully in the interpretation of the Qurʾān. Al-Zamakhsharī considered that the use of metaphor, allegory and similes was integral to the style of the Qurʾān. This, in his view, was the key to understanding many of the verses of the Qurʾān. Given some of the fundamental Muʿtazilī theological assumptions, he could not accept a literal interpretation that contradicted those assumptions. Thus, with regard to 'God sealing the hearts of the unbelievers' in II.7, al-Zamakhsharī says[72] that, as a matter of fact, there is no sealing of their minds or their hearing, nor covering of their sights in a literal sense. The words 'sealing' and 'covering' are used metaphorically, implying that because they turned away from the truth in disdain, it no longer penetrated their minds. Similarly, as the unbelievers refused to listen to the voice of truth, their ears were, therefore, as good as sealed. The seal on the minds and ears of the unbelievers and the cover upon their eyes figuratively meant their refusal to understand the truth, rather than God's, purposefully making them incapable of seeing it. For if God had incapacitated them, His justice would become meaningless. Again, while interpreting the word *kursī* in the famous Throne verse, 'God's Throne encompasses the heavens and the earth' (II.255), al-Zamakhsharī says, 'It is no more than an image expressing God's greatness; there is neither *kursī*, nor an act of sitting, nor one who sits.'[73] All these interpretations were suggested in order to avoid attributing anthropomorphism to God.

While the stylistic excellence of the Qurʾān had been recognized as the key aspect of its inimitability (*iʿjāz*) as expressed in its challenge to the opponents to produce a *sūra* like it (II.23), the earlier exegeses had not paid particular attention to it. In the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries, a number of works appeared, authored by both Muʿtazilī and Sunni scholars, in which the Qurʾān's literary qualities in terms of *faṣāḥa* and *balāgha* (eloquence and stylistic excellence) were highlighted. No commentary, however, accomplished what al-Zamakhsharī did in illustrating the literary excellence of the Qurʾān, and in making full use of the growing science of rhetoric in interpreting its text. Here lies al-Zamakhsharī's special and lasting contribution.

With regard to the *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* verses as mentioned in the Qurʾān (III.7), al-Zamakhsharī interpreted[74] *muḥkamāt* as those verses that are categorical in their expression and meaning (that is, secure from confusion and

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72. Maḥmūd ibn ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf ʿan ḥaqāʾiq ghawāmiḍ al-tanzīl wa-ʿuyūn al-aqāwīl fi wujūh al-taʾwīl*, Beirut, Dār al-Maʿrifa, n.d., I, p. 27.

73. M. Ayoub, *The Qurʾān and Its Interpreters*, Albany, N.Y., State University of New York Press, 1984, I, p. 251. See also al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf* …, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

74. Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf* …, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 188–9.

from being wrongly interpreted), and *mutashābihāt* as those that are capable of a number of interpretations. The *mutashābihāt* are to be interpreted based on the *muḥkamāt* which, as the Qur'ān says, are the essence of the Book. Thus, he goes on to say that 'No vision can grasp Him, but His grasp is over all vision' (VI.103) is a *muḥkam* (clear and categorical) verse, which therefore means that God cannot be seen. The reference in 'Some faces that day will beam – in brightness and beauty – looking at their Lord' (LXXV.22–3) falls in his view within the category of *mutashābih* verses and must be interpreted so as not to contradict the *muḥkam* verse VI.103.[75]

It is pertinent to point out that according to al-Zamakhsharī – and other Mu'tazilīs – the meaning of the *mutashābih* verses is known to God and to those who are firmly grounded in knowledge. This is contrary to the Sunni view on the matter, which al-Zamakhsharī quotes without criticism.

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī

In *al-tafsīr bi-l-ra'y* (independent rational interpretation) and yet within the parameters of orthodoxy, the best representative *tafsīrs* are *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-ta'wīl* by 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar al-Bayḍāwī (d. ca. 691/1292). Al-Rāzī was a man of encyclopaedic learning which, in addition to the traditional scholarship in linguistics, rhetoric, *fiqh*, exegesis and theology, included knowledge of philosophy and the natural sciences. All this knowledge he pressed into the service of Qur'ānic exegesis. Philosophy and the natural sciences dominated his Qur'ān commentary to such an extent that it was somewhat sarcastically described by al-Suyūṭī as 'having everything except tafsīr'.[76]

Al-Rāzī's general position always remained orthodox. But when he had to dispute heterodox views, he took great pains to explain these views objectively, including those of the philosophers and the Mu'tazila. If there was a complaint about his exegesis, apart from the one given above, it came from the orthodox: that his defence of orthodoxy at times lacked vigour and strength whereas he took special care to explain heterodox views.

The general characteristic of al-Rāzī's exegesis was the process of deduction and inference from a given text, on the premise that God's Word encompassed everything in the world. No wonder, then, that when al-Rāzī looked at the Word he saw the world. He certainly was not the last exegete

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75. *Ibid.*, I, pp. 198–9. This interpretation is contrary to the Sunni view that people in Paradise will see their Lord. The Sunni view is based on the verses LXXV.22–3 and a number of traditions.

76. Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān …*, *op. cit.*, II, p. 191.

to look at the world, including the natural sciences, through the prism of the Qur’ān.[77]

Al-Bayḍāwī

‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Umar al-Bayḍāwī’s *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-ta’wīl*, on the other hand, has a more modest aim. It is essentially a Sunni version of al-Zamakhsharī’s exegesis: that is, it avoids the rationalistic interpretations of al-Zamakhsharī while retaining, in a summary form, the masterly explanations of the literary qualities of the Qur’ān, a feature that was unique to al-Zamakhsharī’s *al-Kashshāf*. Al-Bayḍāwī also drew considerably on al-Rāzī’s *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* and the philological exegesis of al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (d. ca. 502/1108) – known mainly through the *tafsīrs* of al-Bayḍāwī and al-Rāzī. Thus, in addition to relying on his own intellectual and scholarly resources, al-Bayḍāwī drew on the foremost literary, philosophical and philological authorities on exegesis. The result was a major and indispensable medium-sized commentary which the learned community of Islam has received with acclaim from the seventh/thirteenth century onward.

The early Sunni theologians had been reluctant to engage in purely theological debates on the attributes of God. Thus they could remain free from the influence of the Greek categories of thought. But this could not be resisted for long. Al-Ash‘arī, the former Mu‘tazilī who became a champion of orthodoxy, used Greek-impregnated Mu‘tazilī methods of argumentation to defend orthodoxy. But less than two hundred years later al-Ghazālī refuted Greek metaphysics in *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (The Incoherence of Philosophers), even though he had accepted Aristotelian logic, and as a Sufi, also accepted a great deal of neo-Platonism. While it cannot be said with certainty that al-Ghazālī personally dealt a death blow to the tradition of Greek influence on Islamic theology, it is nevertheless certain that after him the influence of Greek philosophy continued to decline in the Muslim world, at least among the Sunni, the predominant wing of Islam. In Spain it survived for another century due to its championship by two of the greatest Muslim philosophers, Ibn Bājja (d. 533/1139), Latinized as Avempace, and Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198), known to the medieval West as Averroës. Nevertheless, after al-Ghazālī, philosophy suffered a long eclipse in most of the Muslim world.

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77. Al-Rāzī’s, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* has been published in eight large volumes, Beirut, Dār al-Fikr, 1978. In our time, Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī wrote a commentary on the Qur’ān (see below) in which he interpreted some verses in the light of the modern sciences.

III–2.3   Portrait of Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī
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SOME OTHER EXEGETES

There are scores of other exegetes during this period who made significant contributions to the effort to understand the Word of God or focused on some special feature of the Qurʾān. It would be impossible to do justice to them all, and likewise not useful to crowd this chapter with myriad names. However, two works of unequal size but of equal importance deserve mention here.

Al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʾān by Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Anṣārī al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272) is a superb culmination of a genre of *tafsīr* which deals with aspects of *Sharīʿa* in the Qurʾān, often known as *aḥkām al-Qurʾān*. This is one of the most comprehensive works on the subject. At the

same time it is a full-fledged traditional exegesis of the Qur'ān. Al-Qurṭubī's scholarship and a general lack of bias are universally recognized. In modern times when there is keen interest in the *Sharī'a*, al-Qurṭubī's *al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qur'ān* is an indispensable source for any serious student of the *Sharī'a*.[78]

Another landmark among the scholars and mufassirs of the Qur'ān was the prodigious Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī. His major contribution in the field of Qur'ānic studies is his *al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, which has become an indispensable source for scholars on most issues connected with the Qur'ān. It deals with such matters as the collection of the Qur'ān, the debate over the *aḥruf* (dialects) and *qirā'āt* (readings) of the Holy Book, Meccan and Medinan chapters, *asbāb al-nuzūl* (events and circumstances related to the revelation of particular verses), *nāsikh* and *mansūkh* (the phenomenon of abrogation of verses) and the history of exegetical activity. The book, in two large volumes, is in itself a compendium of Qur'ānic studies.

Though al-Suyūṭī wrote a multi-volume commentary, *al-Durr al-manthūr fī-l-tafsīr li-l-ma'thūr*, his popular fame as a *mufassir* rests on *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*. As the title suggests, the book is authored by two scholars, each one of them called Jalāl al-Dīn. One of them was Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī (d. 864/1495), who began the work by writing a commentary on the second half of the Qur'ān from the *sūrat al-Kahf* (The Cave) to the last *sūra* of the Qur'ān – but including the first chapter. The earlier part was completed by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, who followed the same methodology. The commentary is in the form of very brief explanatory notes. The hallmark of *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* is its brevity, so that readers are left with the feeling that they are reading the text of the Qur'ān with only such explanations as are absolutely necessary for understanding it. The total words of the explanatory notes of *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* do not much exceed the words of the Qur'ānic text.[79] It is perhaps the most widely read *tafsīr* and has been published many times.

Shī'a exegesis

Shī'a exegesis does not quite fit into either of the rational and the traditional methods of exegesis discussed above. If anything it corresponds to traditional exegesis (*al-tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr*), except that to the Shī'a, the traditional material (*ma'thūr*), generally speaking, does not primarily comprise the interpretive traditions which are reported from the Prophet or the Companions. Instead, the authority for the interpretation of the Qur'ān, in their view, rests with the *imāms*. The Shī'a believe that God revealed to the Prophet both the Qur'ān

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78. The work was published by Dār al-Kutub in Cairo in 1967 in ten large volumes and was recently reprinted in Beirut by Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī.

79. Al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa-l-mufassirūn*, *op. cit.*, I, p. 337.

and its interpretation. The Prophet taught the community of the faithful the sacred text of the Qurʾān, but left its exegesis to the Shīʿa *imāms*.[80] There are many sectarian divisions and subdivisions among the Shīʿa, and the differences among them about dogmatic and theological matters as well as in their approach to *tafsīr* are not insignificant and even better, but here I shall confine my remarks to the two major divisions of the Shīʿa: the Ithnā ʿAsharīs and the Ismāʿīlīs. Both the Ithnā ʿAsharīs and Ismāʿīlīs – whose positions on some major theological issues are different – hold that the *imāms* are the repositories of knowledge and of the true meaning of the Qurʾān. They are in fact the 'speaking' (*nāṭiq*) Qurʾān, whereas the text of the Qurʾān itself is the 'silent' (*ṣāmit*) Qurʾān.[81]

Apart from the differences that exist between the Shīʿa and the Sunna regarding the sources and guidelines for the interpretation of the Qurʾān, there are two areas in which Shīʿa *tafsīr* is fundamentally different from both Sunni and Muʿtazilī exegesis. This is so despite the fact that the Ithnā ʿAsharī Shīʿa scholars were disciples of Muʿtazilī theologians. First and fundamentally, there is a difference among a narrow circle of Shīʿa *mufassirs* in their attitude to the ʿUthmānic recension of the Qurʾān, and second and equally important, there is difference in the perception of the general thrust of the message of the Qurʾān. On the ʿUthmānic recension of the Qurʾān – that is, the text in our hands today – the opinion of a few Shīʿa authors, who claim to base their view on the statements of their *imāms*, is that while the Qurʾān that is in our hands comprises the revelations made to Muḥammad, it does not contain all of the Qurʾān, since there were certain facts, such as the name of ʿAlī, that were deleted from it. We find this view clearly expressed by Mullā Muḥsin al-Kāshānī (d. 1199/1777), whom Maḥmoud Ayoub, a respected contemporary Shīʿa scholar of Lebanese origins, regarded as one of the 'extremist Shīʿa ʿulamāʾ'.[82] However even al-Kāshānī, in face of the evidence accepted by the large body of Shīʿa scholars, had to reject the popular claims among some of the Shīʿa about the inauthenticity of the ʿUthmānic recension and had to say that the Qurʾān that is in our hands is 'the word of God which, if interpreted correctly, contains all that the community now needs.'[83]

Most other distinguished Shīʿa scholars, such as the preeminent Ithnā ʿAsharī exegete and jurist Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī

80. M. Ayoub, 'The Speaking Qurʾān and the Silent Qurʾān: A Study of the Principles and Development of Imāmī Shīʿī Tafsīr', in A. Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qurʾān*, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

81. *Ibid.*, pp. 182–3 and I. K. Poonawala, 'Ismāʿīlī Taʾwīl of the Qurʾān', in A. Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qurʾān*, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

82. Ayoub, 'The Speaking Qurʾān and the Silent Qurʾān' …, *op. cit.*, pp. 182 and 190.

83. *Ibid.*, pp. 182 and 196.

(d. 460/1067), have unequivocally asserted the authenticity of the ʿUthmānic recension.[84] Murtaḍā Muṭahharī (d. 1399/1979), an influential modern Iranian Ithnā ʿAsharī philosopher, jurist and thinker, makes the position of the majority of the Shīʿa, the Ithnā ʿAsharīs, fairly clear on this point:

> The first distinguishing characteristic [of the Qur'ān] is the absolute authenticity of its source. That is, without the slightest need of any comparison between the oldest manuscripts, it is evident that what we recite as the verses of the Holy Qur'ān, are exactly the same words presented before the world by Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh.[85]

Shīʿa exegetical works reflect these two distinct attitudes to the text of the Qur'ān, some radical and highly polemical and others somewhat restrained and moderate.[86] Common to both, however, are the distinctively Shīʿa elements of exegesis which I shall now discuss.

Whereas the Sunni perception of the Qur'ān is that its essential function is to lead humanity to God, the Shīʿa perception is that the Qur'ān was sent down concerning the *imāms* to lead people to the *imām* of their time who in turn will guide them to God.[87] Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/756), the Ismāʿīlīs' fifth and the Ithnā ʿAsharis' sixth *imām*, is reported by the Shīʿa as saying, 'The Qur'ān was sent down in thirds: one third concerning us and those we love, another concerning our enemies and the enemies of those who were before us, and one third is *Sunna* [example of bygone generations] and *mathal* [parable].'[88]

With that perception of the message of the Qur'ān and its contents, the Shīʿa exegetes naturally found references to their *imāms* in the Qur'ān which are in no way obvious from the text to a non- Shīʿa reader. The key to 'finding' the references was the principle that the Qur'ān had two levels of meaning: *ẓāhir* (external; exoteric), and *bāṭin* (internal; esoteric). Al-Ṭabarī too in his *Tafsīr* reports Ibn Masʿūd as saying that every word of the Qur'ān has a *ẓāhir*

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84. *Ibid.*, p. 190. Modern Shīʿa scholarship takes a similar position on the authenticity of the Qur'ān to that of the Sunni.

85. M. Mutahhari, 'Shīʿi Interpretation of the Qur'ān: The Three Distinguishing Characteristics of the Qur'ān', in S. H. Nasr et al. (eds), *Shīʿism: Doctrines, Thought and Spirituality*, Albany, N.Y., State University of New York Press, 1988, pp. 25–6.

86. Despite the different approaches of the Sunni and Shīʿa to *tafsīr*, there have been many renowned Imāmī exegetes whose work rose above sectarian and polemical considerations. Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1402/1981), one of the most profound Shīʿa religious scholars of modern times, for instance, had an eclectic approach in his *tafsīr*, in which he quoted the Prophet's traditions from both Sunni and Shīʿa sources of *ḥadīth* [Eds].

87. Ayoub, 'The Speaking Qur'ān and the silent Qur'ān' …, *op. cit.*, p. 180, quoting al-Qummī's (d. *c.* 307/920) *Tafsīr*.

88. *Ibid.*, p. 188.

and a *bāṭin*,[89] but this did not form a fundamental basis of exegesis for him or for any of the other Sunni or Muʿtazilī exegetes. In fact, the vast majority of Sunni traditionalist *mufassirs* regard the concept of *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* meanings of the Qurʾān as fraught with interpretive excesses which can easily lead the community to a slippery, chimerical theological slope resulting in a plethora of sects each with its own credal position. This Sunni caution has been amply justified by the history of this type of exegesis. This twofold division is, however, fundamental to Shīʿism in general, and to their offshoot, the Ismāʿīlīs, in particular. To the Shīʿa, it is imperative for a proper understanding of the Qurʾān that we should realize, first that the inner dimension of the Qurʾānic meaning is as important as the outer dimension, at times perhaps even more important;[90] and second, that the inner dimension of the Qurʾān can only be expounded by the *imāms*.[91] In this regard, it seems necessary to study separately the views of the Ithnā ʿAsharis and Ismāʿīlīs since these vary significantly on certain points.

ITHNĀ ʿASHARĪ EXEGESIS

The Ithnā ʿAsharī (or Imāmī) exegesis, compared with the unbridled *taʾwīl* of the Ismāʿīlīs, would seem to be restrained. Various *tafsīrs* have been written by the Imāmī scholars, some following the common method of explaining the Qurʾān verse by verse, and others in the form of essays on certain key issues.[92]

Some of the early Imāmī exegetes, such as al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (d. 406/1016), his celebrated brother al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044), the famed Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭūsī and his disciple Abū ʿAlī al-Faḍl al-Ṭabarsī (d. 548/1153), belonged to the group of Qurʾān commentators who not only accepted the ʿUthmānic recension of the Qurʾān but also exercised some moderation in their Shīʿa interpretation of the Qurʾānic verses. They also quoted, with due acknowledgement, Sunni exegetical sources in order to elaborate their own interpretations. Al-Ṭabarsī's *al-Bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* is the best example of this school of *imāmī tafsīr*. While advocating the Shīʿa point of view on theological and legal matters, it exhibits a degree of Muʿtazilī rationalism and enjoys the respect of some Sunni scholars.[93] On the other hand, the *tafsīr* of another group is marked by a dogged attempt at explaining every verse possible in terms of the *imāmate* of ʿAlī

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89. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr …, op. cit.*, I, p. 9.
90. Al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa-l-mufassirūn, op. cit.*, II, p. 31.
91. Ayoub, 'The Speaking Qurʾān and the Silent Qurʾān', *op. cit.*, p. 187.
92. Al-Dhahabī mentions twelve works, within which there is a considerable range, as the most important ones. See his *al-Tafsīr wa-l-mufassirūn, op. cit.*, II, pp. 42–3.
93. *Ibid.*, II, p. 144.

and his descendants. Al-Kāshānī's *al-Ṣāfī fī kalām Allāh al-wāfī* is an excellent illustration of this trend.[94] He maintains that the knowledge of the meaning of the Qur'ān is confined to the descendants of the Prophet and to those who have derived their knowledge from them. Interpretation by any other person is not to be relied on.[95] He also typifies the fecund use of esotericism to buttress extremist sectarian polemical arguments.[96]

ISMĀʿĪLĪ EXEGESIS

The Ismāʿīlīs do not seem to have engaged in a systematic exegesis of the Qur'ān. They hold that any *tafsīr* can be used for the external philological exposition of the Qur'ān and to explain the occasions on which the verses were revealed, but its inner, true meaning can be obtained only from the legitimate *imām*.[97] Since even for the inner meaning no comprehensive Ismāʿīlī exegesis is known to us, it may be presumed that it was left to the *imām* of the time to reveal as much of this meaning to his followers as he saw fit. There are, however, several works such as those by al-Qāḍī al-Nuʿmān (d. 363/974), Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī (d. 393/1002), and a few others, which offer examples of the Ismāʿīlī methodology of interpretation.

According to al-Sijistānī, there are two types of verse that require interpretation: those on natural phenomena, such as the earth, mountains, rivers, trees and heavens; and the *mutashābih* verses whose interpretation is known only to God and to those steeped in knowledge, the legitimate *imāms*. For instance, the 'blessed olive tree' (XXIV.35) is interpreted by him as referring to ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn (d. ca. 95/ca. 713), the fourth *imām*. The Qur'ānic prescriptions of the *Sharīʿa*, too, are interpreted by al-Sijistānī in terms of their supposed inner dimension. Thus, ablution before devotional worship means rejection of the unjust claimant of the *imāmate*, the purifying water represents knowledge, worship itself signifies devotion to the *imām*, fasting means withholding secrets from the uninitiated, and pilgrimage to the House of God in Mecca symbolizes having an audience with the *imām*, because he is the house wherein the knowledge of God resides.[98] This mode of interpretation is peculiar to some branches of the Ismāʿīlī Shīʿa who do not pay regard to the observance of the religious duties imposed by the *Sharīʿa* because they believe that they are in possession of deeper truths.

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94. Ayoub, 'The Speaking Qur'ān and the Silent Qur'ān' …, *op. cit.*, p. 185.
95. Al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa-l-mufassirūn*, *op. cit.*, II, p. 152.
96. Examples of al-Kāshānī's extremist esoteric interpretations of some Qur'ānic verses in his *al-Ṣāfī fī kalām Allāh al-wāfī* are quoted in al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa-l-mufassirūn*, *op. cit.*, pp. 155–60. [Eds].
97. Poonawala, 'Ismāʿīlī taʾwīl of the Qur'ān' …, *op. cit.*, p. 200.
98. *Ibid.*, p. 219.

SUFI EXEGESIS

Sufi *tafsīr* is in a category of its own. While there is no definition of a Sufi which would fit all Sufis, they may be described as people who attempt to experience the presence of God more closely and lay greater emphasis on the spiritual aspects of humanity than the average believer.[99] Starting with simple renunciation of worldly things and sensual desires, they encounter a heightened spiritual awareness and devote themselves to the intense worship and remembrance of God, which they feel may be less of a frequent experience for most people who are more involved in worldly affairs. These experiences help them 'see' things that others do not. This manner of 'seeing' is known as experiential knowledge.[100] While in that state, Sufis report flashes of insight into spiritual verities and illuminations. As a result of these illuminations, a verse may mean to a Sufi something beyond its obvious meaning. According to Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī, the most prolific Sufi writer, it is none other than God who directly teaches the Sufis somewhat in the same way as He teaches the Prophets.[101] The basis for this statement is his understanding of XCVI.4, LV.1–4 and II.269.

Sunni attitudes to Sufis and their interpretations based on such spiritual experiences and the ensuing insights vary a great deal, ranging from total rejection to guarded acceptance. Al-Zarkashī, leaning towards acceptance, says that Sufi interpretations should not be seen strictly as exegesis.[102] A more accepting view is expressed by al-Suyūṭī, who quotes Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftazānī (d. 793/1390) as saying that together with the obvious meaning of a verse there are allusions to subtle points which are known only through mystical intuition (*kashf*) by those in the Sufi path, without there being a conflict between the two.[103] Al-Dhahabī elaborates the Sunni position a little further by saying that as long as a Sufi interpretation is not presented as *the* meaning of a given verse of the Qurʾān, it may be accepted.[104] Most of the Sufi explanations, al-Dhahabī maintains, are of this kind. However, not every verse of the Qurʾān is interpreted in this manner, nor do Sufi *tafsīrs* concern themselves with explaining every verse. In their view, that purpose is well served by the traditional Qurʾān commentaries. Sufi exegetical oeuvres, such as those by Sahl ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) and Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn

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99. For more on Sufi and Sufism, see the chapter by Hamid Algar, 'The inner and experiential dimensions of Islam', [Eds].

100. Moreover, working on the premise that every word of the Qurʾān has an outer meaning and an inner meaning, Sufis are in search of the inner meaning which they receive through divine illumination, not through the process of rational deduction.

101. Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiya*, Beirut, Dār Ṣādir, n.d., I, pp. 279–80.

102. Al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān …, op. cit.*, II, pp. 171–2.

103. Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān …*, II, p. 195.

104. Al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa-l-mufassirūn*, II, p. 352.

ibn Mūsā al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), therefore, deal with only those verses that yield to Sufi interpretations. Two examples will suffice. In the verse 'Mischief has appeared on land and sea' (XXX.41), al-Tustarī sees land as referring to the limbs of humans, whereas the sea stands for the heart of humans. Again, in the interpretation of the verse 'The people of Moses made in his absence, out of their ornaments, the image of a calf (for worship); it seemed to low' (VII.148), al-Tustarī says, 'Every man's calf is whatever he turns to, even if it be his spouse or children, whilst turning away from God.'[105] In both these cases references to an external phenomenon (mischief on land and sea) and a historical event (worship of the calf by the Israelites) are brought closer to humans and seen as personal and subjective realities. But in both cases, the obvious meaning remains the valid meaning in its own context.

Al-Ghazālī in *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences) introduces Sufism to the educated layperson, and devotes a section to the defence of the Sufi interpretation of the Qurʾān.[106] The fundamental point that he makes in his *magnum opus* is that the outward meaning of the Qurʾān as given by traditional Qurʾān commentators is not the ultimate understanding of the Qurʾān. There are, in fact, levels of meaning beyond the outward meaning which those of understanding may be able to penetrate in stages commensurate with the levels of their own spiritual development.

Ibn ʿArabī represents a fundamental departure from the position given above, however, and his views were rejected by many orthodox scholars. His interpretation of the Qurʾān is not based merely on mystical intuitions or illuminative experiences. It is based on fundamental theosophical principles arrived at through both mystical experiences and an extensive study of the various strands of philosophies prevalent at the time. The core principle in Ibn ʿArabī's theosophy was the unity of existence (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), or the essential oneness of all that exists. This, to him, was the implication of Islamic *tawḥīd*. This principle gave Ibn ʿArabī a totally novel approach to his understanding of the Qurʾān, leading to interpretations which broke the bounds of traditional *tafsīr*, but in which the verses of the Qurʾān were burdened with meanings which the text and the context did not necessarily support. Ibn ʿArabī's esoteric *tafsīr* is extremely complex and its formulations highly obscure, allowing for different interpretations. Consequently, both Sufis and non-Sufis are sharply divided in their attitude to him and to some of his extremely controversial views.[107]

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105. *Ibid.*, pp. 366–7.
106. Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 34–7.
107. It should be noted that Ibn ʿArabī did not leave an independent work on *tafsīr* as such. While there is a widespread recognition that he is a highly controversial Sufi, the authenticity of the disputative exegetical opinions attributed to Ibn ʿArabī have been questioned by some scholars, including Muḥammad ʿAbduh and Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī. See al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa-l-mufassirūn*, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 382–4 [Eds].

III–2.4   Folio of single volume Qurʾān, Kūfic Script, twelfth century
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Exegesis in modern times

As the pioneering, erudite *mufassirs* covered almost every conceivable aspect of the Qurʾān, the exegetes who followed them could add little original to *tafsīr* literature. This was particularly so from the ninth/fifteenth to the eleventh/ eighteenth centuries, a period of relative political and intellectual stagnation in the Muslim world.

But this period was not completely devoid of theological stirrings. The twelfth/eighteenth century marked the birth of the modern renaissance, which can generally be traced back to two simultaneous developments in that era, one in Arabia and the other in India. In the Arabian Peninsula, these stirrings appeared in the form of the revivalist movement of Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb (d. 1206/1792), which came to be labelled as Wahhābism by its opponents. Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb was born in Najd, studied in Mecca and spent a number of years in Syria, Iraq and Iran, which afforded him deep insight into the religious and political state of affairs of Muslims. He became convinced that the Muslims of his day no longer followed the Islam that had been preached and practised by the Prophet and his Companions. Following Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb strove to revive the original Islam as

incorporated in the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*, emphasizing the strict unity of the transcendent God, the need for the implementation of the *Sharīʿa,* and purification of Muslim society from non-Islamic ideas and practices – such as worship of saints – which were rampant in his day. His successful alliance with Muḥammad ibn Saʿūd (d. 1178/1765), a chieftain of Najd, ultimately gave birth to a state which developed into the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the fourteenth/twentieth century. Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's ideas either created or influenced indigenous reform movements in India,[108] Egypt[109] and other places.

In India, the Islamic renaissance began at first with the activist (some would say revolutionary) reformist movement of Aḥmad al-Fārūqī of Sirhind (d. 1034/1624), generally known as Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī, who laboured to make Islam and its *Sharīʿa* supreme in India. In his reform programme, he went against the policies of the Moghul emperor Akbar (d. 1014/1605) and his son Jahāngīr (d. 1037/1627), policies which were seen as representing a compromise with Hindu beliefs and practices. A century later, Sirhindī's revivalist movement was given a fresh theological and intellectual momentum by Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi (d. 1176/1762), who was a contemporary of Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb and was also taught by the scholars of Mecca.[110] But whereas Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's reform had involved a strict return to the pure and original Islam, and thereby a rejection of almost everything that was extraneous to it, such as Muslim philosophy and Sufism, Shāh Walī Allāh tried to integrate various strands of Islamic thought such as Sufism, orthodoxy and rationalism, as al-Ghazālī had done centuries earlier.[111] Shāh Walī Allāh, moreover, explored avenues of reconciliation between the Sunni and Shīʿite sects. While his attempts at reconciliation between the two still wait to bear fruit, Shāh Walī Allāh's rational, theological, legal and mystical exposition of Islam, and his efforts to lay solid foundations for the future of Islam in India, left distinctive and lasting marks on Indian Muslims. Most of the Indian Islamic movements that came after him, despite their differences, reflect his influence.

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108. For instance, Sayyid Ahmad Barelvi (d. 1246/1831), the leader of the *jihād* movement against the Sikhs. See A. Schimmel, *Islam in the Indian Subcontinent*, Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1980, pp. 182–4.

109. In Egypt this is reflected in the writings of Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, the disciple of Muḥammad ʿAbduh. See Goldziher, *Madhāhib al-tafsīr* …, *op. cit.*, pp. 365–7.

110. Schimmel, *Islam in the Indian Subcontinent*, *op. cit.*, p. 153. For a brief overview of the thought and contributions of Shāh Walī Allāh see Muḥammad al-Ghazali, 'Introduction', in *The Socio-Political Thought of Shāh Walī Allāh*, Islamabad, International Institute of Islamic Thought; Islamic Research Institute, 2000, pp. 3–12. See also J. M. S. Baljon, *Religion and Thought of Shāh Walī Allāh Dihlawī (1703–1762)*, Leiden, Netherlands, E. J. Brill, 1986.

111. Shāh Walī Allāh may be regarded as the founder of neo-rationalism in Indian Islamic thought of the twelfth/nineteenth and early fourteenth/twentieth centuries.

The twelfth/eighteenth century saw the political map of Islam change radically, much to the chagrin of Muslims. The newly industrialized West was gaining ascendancy over the Muslim East. As the thirteenth/nineteenth century unfolded, many Muslim states began to collapse and fall under Western – mainly British, French and Dutch – colonial rule. During the next hundred years, Muslim political, legal, commercial, educational, social and cultural institutions were either severely shaken by the underlying principles of Western institutions and their impact, or replaced by them. Many Muslims became exposed to new ideas such as rationalism and liberalism, which fascinated some and shocked others. They witnessed the growth of science, scientific discoveries and technological progress in the West. The acceptance or rejection of modern science had to be evaluated from an Islamic perspective. When Muslim thinkers looked at their own situation and contrasted it with that of the West, they saw many ills in their society, such as ignorance and fatalism, which needed to be remedied. They also saw Christian missionaries at work among Muslims, and noted how the image of the Prophet and the authenticity of the Qurʾān and its teachings were under constant attack and their faith under siege. They came to realize that the onslaught against Islam had to be repulsed and their faith in its fundamental teachings needed to be restored.

The exegetical works of this period represent attempts at responding to these challenges. Muslims have always turned to the Qurʾān for both comfort and guidance in times of crisis. Such times are occasions for discovering somewhat new 'meanings' from the same text, meanings that could only be understood then and not before. We could, therefore, be justified in saying that the Qurʾān had only one *nuzūl* (that is, it was revealed once to the Prophet Muḥammad), but has many *tanazzulāt* (when it is freshly 'received' and understood by individual faithful readers).[112]

Thus, it is not surprising that the past 120 years have witnessed a surge of exegetical activity, and not only by the theologically trained scholars of Islam, the *ʿulamā*. Responses through reinterpretation of the Qurʾān often came from those who were closest to the challenge.

The main *tafsīrs* of this period may be divided into three main types: scientific, modernist and reformist.

Scientific tafsīr

Scientific *tafsīr* (*al-tafsīr al-ʿilmī*) made its appearance as a genre of exegesis in the first half of the fourteenth/twentieth century. It tried to counter the initial

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112. Al-Ghazālī says (*Ihyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, *op. cit.*, III, p. 524) that there is ample room for arriving at new meanings of the Qurʾān, for certainly we have not come to the final meanings in what has been given by the exegetes.

rejection by Muslim society of science and scientific pursuits as if they were alien to Islam. It also attempted to find proof for modern scientific theories in the Qur'ān to establish its divine origin.

Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī

The most comprehensive and best-known scientific exegesis is *al-Jawāhir fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-karīm,* popularly known as *Tafsīr al-jawāhir,* which is the work of an Egyptian scholar Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī (d. 1359/1940). The author says that his main aim is to draw the attention of young Muslim minds to the fascinating wonders in the heavens and on Earth, and to motivate them to study science so that one day they themselves might become well versed in science and even surpass Westerners in agriculture, medicine, mathematics, mineralogy, astronomy and engineering. In support of his drive for popularizing science, he points out that while there are fewer than 150 verses in the Qur'ān dealing with law – to the study of which scholars have devoted volumes and on which they have built the lofty edifice of Islamic jurisprudence – there are 750 verses that are clearly scientific in nature.[113] He regrets that these have so far been ignored. In the Qur'ān there are a number of statements, revealed some fourteen centuries ago, regarding the realm of nature which modern scientists have come to confirm now.

This kind of exegesis has not received the universal approval of Muslim scholars.[114] *Tafsīr al-jawāhir* has been particularly criticized for its approach on grounds that it detracts from the essential message of the Qur'ān. Despite such criticism, however, the Qur'ān continues to attract scholars of science searching in it for scientific verities. Maurice Bucaille's *The Bible, the Qur'ān and Science* is a recent exploration along the same path. Bucaille, a French surgeon, says in the introduction to the book that having examined the text of the Qur'ān closely wherever there were allusions to the natural phenomena, he had to acknowledge that 'the Qur'ān did not contain a single statement that was assailable from a modern scientific point of view.'[115]

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113. Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī, *al-Jawāhir fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-karīm,* Tehran, Intishārāt-i Āftāb, n.d., I, p. 53.

114. See for instance Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā's comments in *al-Manār*, XXX, 514–16.

115. M. Bucaille, *The Bible, the Qur'ān and Science*, trans. from French by Alastair D. Pannell, Indianapolis, Ind., North American Trust, 1978, p. viii. The original appeared as *La Bible, le Coran, et la science: les Écritures saintes examinées à la lumière des connaissances modernes*, Paris, Seghers, 1976.

MODERNIST/LIBERAL EXEGESIS AND REFORMIST EXEGESIS

The division of *tafsīr* into modernist and reformist that we are about to discuss is not strictly justified, for scholars who espouse either of these trends aim at the reform of Muslim society through exegesis of the Qurʾān. Their common underlying concern is that contemporary Muslim society needs to be changed and reformed. The question is, changed to what? The answer to this question sets the two groups of exegetes apart.

A modernist *mufassir*, for the purposes of our discourse, is one who is convinced that the material progress and political success of Western societies in the thirteenth/nineteenth century was primarily due to modern science and a healthy dose of rationalism. Since these were missing in Muslim society, it was weak and backward. If Muslim society could be convinced that Islam saw no conflict between reason/science and revelation, the Muslim nations would be reformed and regenerated and would join the ranks of the advanced nations of the world. The most important step was the assertion of the role of reason, and therefore of *ijtihād*.

As various Muslim countries faced Western political and military dominance in the twelfth/nineteenth century, they reacted to it in the light of their national situation. This also affected Qurʾānic interpretation. For example, in India, with its large Muslim population – which was assailed by the loss of power to the British, by an ascendant Hindu majority, and by zealous Christian missionaries – there arose scholars who saw their task as saving the Muslims and preserving their identity by the introduction of modern education and scientific concepts. Prominent among them was Sayyid Aḥmad Khān (d. 1315/1898), an influential educational and social reformer. He also wrote an Urdu-language commentary on the Qurʾān, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān wa-huwa al-hudā wa-l-furqān*, which was characterized by a rationalist approach. His aim was to reconcile Islam with modernism. But his views brought down the wrath of the traditional *ulamā*, and his controversial and uncompleted *tafsīr* did not leave a perceptible mark on exegetical literature. Another *tafsīr* in Urdu, also only partly complete, was written by Abu-l-Kalām Āzād (d. 1377/1958), a Mecca-born Indian Muslim scholar and politician. In his *Tarjumān al-Qurʾān*, Āzād attempts to demonstrate the harmonious coexistence of science and religion and the essential unity of all religions. While chafing against what he considered to be the fetters inherited from those early exegetes whose work had been influenced by Greek philosophy, Āzād also vigorously opposed the tendency of some of the modernists to explain the Qurʾān in the light of modern scientific theories.[116]

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116. Sayyid Aḥmad Khān's Tafsīr, covering the first seventeen *sūras* of the Qurʾān, was published in six volumes (Lahore: 1881–95). For more on Sayyid Aḥmad Khān's exegetical perspective, see J. M. S. Baljon, *The Reforms and Religious Ideas of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, Lahore, Sh. Muḥammad Ashraf, 1964, *passim* and A. Ahmad, *Islamic Modernism in India and Pakistan, 1857–1964,* London, Oxford University Press, 1967, pp. 42–51. For Abu-l-Kalām Āzād, see Aziz Ahmad, *op. cit.*, pp. 175–85.

Contemporary with the development of modernist exegesis in India, Egypt witnessed the beginnings of a similar movement. The stimulant for the modernist exegesis in Egypt was Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (d. 1314/1897), one of the foremost leaders of the Muslim renaissance in the thirteenth/ nineteenth century. Al-Afghānī, a contemporary of Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, was a political activist and agitator, a pan-Islamist and a revivalist reformer who had found refuge in Egypt for a while, where he taught and influenced a number of disciples. He himself was not an exegete, but his views on *tafsīr* were important in fashioning the direction that his disciple Muḥammad ʿAbduh (d. 1323/1905) took in his famous *Tafsīr al-Manār*. Al-Afghānī had said, 'The Qurʾān alone is the source for guidance. The views of men and their deductions from the Qurʾān which appear in exegetical works are layers upon it and must not be seen as revelation itself.'[117] He agreed with Sayyid Aḥmad Khān that there was nothing in the Qurʾān that contradicts established scientific facts. He held that any apparent conflict could only be specious if the Qurʾān was correctly interpreted.

Muḥammad ʿAbduh

Muḥammad ʿAbduh is in some respects the Egyptian counterpart of Sayyid Aḥmad Khān. Like him, Muḥammad ʿAbduh's approach to the interpretation of the Qurʾān is rational, so that he affirms the need for *ijtihād* and is committed to the reconciliation of science and revelation. But ʿAbduh, a graduate of al-Azhar University, the bastion of traditional Islamic learning, is more firmly grounded in Muslim theology.

His *Tafsīr al-Manār* – essentially a series of lectures given by ʿAbduh covering the first four chapters of the Qurʾān – was put together by his Syrian disciple, Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1354/1935), who also continued it to the end of *sūra* XII (*Yūsuf*). *Tafsīr al-Manār* particularly avoids three elements of exegetical material: first, the Isrāʾīliyyāt, because it either distracts from the essential message of the Qurʾān or erroneously suggests a meaning not intended by the Qurʾān; second, *asbāb al-nuzūl*, that is, the information about the event to which a particular verse is addressed, since this material, in his opinion, fragmented the Qurʾān and unnecessarily limited its meaning;[118] and finally, explanatory traditions. While expounding ʿAbduh's methodology in exegesis, Rashīd Riḍā maintained that apart from the authentic traditions of the Prophet, which must of course be accepted, the bulk of the traditional material only leads to obscuring the intent of the Qurʾān and, therefore, ought

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117. Fahd ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Sulaymān al-Rūmī, *al-Madrasa al-ʿaqliyya al-ḥadītha fī-l-tafsīr*, Beirut, Muʾassassat al-Risāla, 1987, p. 86.

118. Fahd al-Rūmī, *op. cit.*, pp. 316–19.

to be avoided.[119] This is no doubt a radical departure from the traditional Qurʾān commentaries such as the *Tafsīr* of Ibn Kathīr.

The fundamental bases for the interpretation of the Qurʾān, according to ʿAbduh, are the following:

- The Qurʾān itself. Explaining the Qurʾān with the help of the Qurʾān is strongly emphasized by ʿAbduh.[120] This principle had been stressed by Ibn Taymiyya in *Muqaddima fī uṣūl al-tafsīr* and followed by Ibn Kathīr in his *Tafsīr*;[121]
- Philological works which help explain the literal meaning of the words in the Qurʾān;
- Reason equipped with modern knowledge.

ʿAbduh's rational interpretation of the Qurʾān is seen by many Egyptian scholars as 'new and original'.[122] There are a number of significant departures from the classical commentaries in ʿAbduh. Let us consider, for instance, the word *Furqān* in the following verse: 'He sent down the Book [the Qurʾān] with truth, confirming what came before it. And He sent down the Torah and the Gospel aforetime, as guidance to humankind, and He sent down the Furqān' (III.3–4). The classical exegetes have interpreted this word in a variety of ways. But the commentators seem to agree on two points: first, *Furqān* is that by which we distinguish between right and wrong, and second, *Furqān* is not of this world; it is something revealed. To ʿAbduh, however, 'Furqān is reason by which we discern between truth and falsity.'[123] The significance of this interpretation lies in the assigning by God of a power of discernment to reason, and its placement along with the Torah, Gospel and Qurʾān as a source of guidance. This interpretation became the Qurʾānic basis for ʿAbduh's rationalism.

It must be remembered also that Muḥammad ʿAbduh was a reformer who attempted to change old attitudes as well as to reinterpret the *Sharīʿa* wherever necessary so that its provisions do not hinder progress. Modern times have brought many changes to society, including changes in the areas of commerce and financial institutions, and some believe the payment of interest on loans is integral to the system. According to ʿAbduh, a total ban on interest is therefore not possible. With regard to the question of *ribā* (usury),

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119. *Ibid.*, p. 337.

120. Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, Beirut, Dār al-Maʿrifa, n.d., I, p. 22.

121. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

122. J. J. G. Jansen, *The Interpretation of the Koran in Modern Egypt*, Leiden, Netherlands, E. J. Brill, 1980, p. 23.

123. *Ibid.*, p. 22. See also Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, *op. cit.*, III, p. 160.

ʿAbduh's view was that *ribā* in the Qurʾān[124] refers to the practice in the pre-Islamic period of charging compound interest. It does not signify interest on the principal as such.[125] This meant that a rate of interest determined by an institution or the state which did not double or triple the debt was acceptable in the light of the above verse. This view coincides with the views of Sayyid Aḥmad Khān on the question of *ribā*.

ʿAbduh's views and his methodology in *tafsīr* were well received by many of his disciples and friends, and his *tafsīr* continued to be consulted in the Arab world, even in distant lands such as Indonesia. But his views were also opposed in his time and continue to be condemned by his critics. ʿAbduh's rational school of Qurʾānic exegesis is criticized for almost totally abandoning *ḥadīth* in favour of reason as a source of interpretation. It is obviously an age-old conflict between the rational and traditional schools of *tafsīr* in a more intense form.[126]

POST-ʿABDUH EXEGETES

Several Qurʾān commentaries have appeared in more recent times, but there are three distinctive works of *tafsīr* – two Sunni and one Shīʿa – in the fourteenth/twentieth century that ought to be noted. These exegeses naturally share the common tradition of Islamic scholarship as well as the milieu of modern times in which they were written, while reflecting their particular Sunni or Shīʿa background.

In the classical period, both the Sunni and Shīʿa schools had come under the influence of Greek philosophy, either directly or through the rational school of the Muʿtazila. But before long, the two schools adopted different positions with regard to the Islamic approach to Greek philosophy. Whereas the Sunnis, led by al-Ashʿarī and al-Ghazālī, moved away from philosophy, considering it as an encumbrance to genuine Islamic thought, the Shīʿa, being closer to the Muʿtazila on a number of theological questions, maintained an active interest in the Islamic philosophical tradition of Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) and Abū ʿAlī Ḥusayn ibn ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037). This difference in attitude to philosophy has until recently continued to manifest itself in every scholarly and intellectual pursuit, including *tafsīr*.[127]

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124. 'O believers! Devour not usury, doubled and redoubled, but fear God that you may be successful' (III.130).

125. Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 123.

126. For a thorough critique of the rational school of exegesis in Egypt see al-Rūmī, *al-Madrasa al-ʿaqliyya*, *passim*.

127. For a fuller discussion, see Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 'Intellectual Science and Philosophy', in S. H. Nasr, H. Dabashi, and S. V. R. Nasr (eds), *Shīʿism: Doctrines, Thought, and Spirituality*, Albany, N.Y., State University of New York Press, 1988, pp. 301–5.

The reaction to modern Western political and cultural domination within the majority Sunni community, but also within the Shīʿa, has been largely Islamic rather than sectarian, with considerable commonality and a disposition on the part of Muslim scholars of different intellectual backgrounds to learn from each other. Consequently, the intellectual and political currents in the Muslim world in recent history have run across sectarian boundaries.

The two Sunni *tafsīr* works that I shall discuss do indeed exhibit a degree of the reformist and rational approach characteristic of Muḥammad ʿAbduh and his time. While they are more traditional than ʿAbduh was in his commentary, they also differ from one another. These works are *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-karīm* (the first ten parts only) by Maḥmūd Shaltūt (d. 1383/1963), an influential Azharī scholar, and *Tafsīr al-taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr* by the chief muftī of Tunisia, Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir Ibn ʿĀshūr (d. 1393/1973). The Shīʿa exegesis, *al-Mīzan fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* by Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī (d. 1402/1981), the outstanding scholar of modern Iran, leans towards the philosophical exposition of the Qurʾān, even though it too reflects many of the concerns that were common to the Muslim world in his time. Let us now look at the three scholars and their works.

Maḥmūd Shaltūt

Maḥmūd Shaltūt was influenced by the prevailing intellectual Islamic environment in Egypt generated by the rational, activist and reformist ideas of al-Afghānī and ʿAbduh. He became a respected member of the body of senior scholars (*Kibār al-ʿUlamāʾ*) and then rector of al-Azhar. But he is not a disciple of ʿAbduh, and in fact takes issue with him on some of his views regarding the interpretation of the Qurʾān, such as the question of allowing modern banking practices with regard to interest. He devotes thirteen pages of his *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-karīm* to the explanation of the verse 'O believers! Devour not usury, doubling and redoubling, and fear God that you may be successful' (III.130). He stresses that this and a number of other verses in the Qurʾān, when read together, leave no doubt that usury in any form is forbidden. He goes on to explain that on moral, social and economic grounds, usury is an evil. He argues strongly against those who 'misinterpret' the verse to mean that only exorbitant rates of interest which double and quadruple the loaned sum are forbidden.[128]

Shaltūt's main contribution, however, lies in two areas: first, in bringing the Qurʾān closer to people and thus using it as an instrument of social reform, and second, in pioneering what has come to be known as the thematic exegesis of the Qurʾān. In a thematic exegesis, the *mufassir* takes up themes of the

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128. Maḥmūd Shaltūt, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-karīm,* Cairo/Beirut, Dār al-Shurūq, 1982, pp. 139–52.

Qurʾān, such as the concept of humanity, and brings together all the relevant verses to throw light on the subject.[129] Shaltūt's *Tafsīr*, being an early attempt at a thematic exegesis, is a compromise between the traditional chapter-by-chapter and verse-by-verse *tafsīr* and a purely thematic *tafsīr*.[130] He follows the chapters as they stand in the Qurʾān, but instead of going through the whole chapter verse by verse, as is usually done in a traditional *tafsīr*, he highlights and explains some of the themes in that chapter. For instance, in dealing with the exegesis of the chapter *al-Māʾida* ('The table spread'), Shaltūt elaborates on the following issues that have been touched upon in the chapter:

- Muslims must abide by the agreements and contracts entered into by them;
- Muslims must refrain from things declared by God as unlawful, such as carrion, blood and the flesh of swine; people must not make lawful what God has declared unlawful or declare unlawful what has been made lawful;
- Muslims are allowed social interaction with Jews and Christians and to share their food, but only such food as Muslims are permitted to eat;
- In principle, a male Muslim may marry a Jewess or a Christian. However, Shaltūt adds that, in his view, the reasons behind the original prohibition of a Muslim woman marrying a non-Muslim are now applicable to men also; therefore, the prohibition today covers both, men and women;
- Regulations for ritual cleaning and ablution for performing prayers.[131]

These topics do not necessarily cover all the themes in *Al-Māʾida*. Whether in the exegesis of this chapter or others, neither the themes chosen by Shaltūt for comment nor their treatment is exhaustive. His is a one-volume *tafsīr* and rather brief compared with other commentaries on the Qurʾān. He was, however, quite successful in addressing through this compact *tafsīr* issues that were relevant to his day, in a style that was accessible to lay Muslim readers.

Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir Ibn ʿĀshūr

Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir Ibn ʿĀshūr's *Tafsīr al-taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr* is one of the massive Qurʾānic exegeses of modern times. He was a student of Jāmiʿ al-Zaytūna, the famous religious educational institution in Tunisia, many of whose scholars were familiar with, and sympathetic to, the reformist ideas of al-Afghānī and ʿAbduh. The Arabic weekly *al-ʿUrwa al-wuthqā,* jointly written and edited by them from Paris, made a considerable impact on the intellectual life of Tunisia. This influence was reinforced by a number of visits undertaken by ʿAbduh to

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129. The best-known example of this type of exegesis in English is *Major Themes of the Qurʾān* by Fazlur Rahman (d. 1408/1988).
130. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Sharīf, *Ittijāhāt al-tajdīd fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-karīm fī Miṣr,* Cairo, Dār al-Turāth, 1982, p. 326.
131. *Ibid.*, pp. 260–346.

the country.[132] Ibn ʿĀshūr dedicated himself to the task of educational, social and intellectual reform. For this purpose, he broadened his own intellectual horizons by learning French, establishing contacts with Muslim reformers and thinkers in the East, and reaching out to Christian thinkers in the West.[133]

Like Shaltūt, Ibn ʿĀshūr was moved by the reformist zeal of al-Afghānī and ʿAbduh, especially in the field of religious education. But he recoiled from their liberalism and what he saw as their attempts to accommodate Islam to modern Western thought. To his dismay, Ibn ʿĀshūr saw how Tunisia was being drawn rapidly into the Western cultural and secular orbit and away from its roots in the Islamic world in the days of Bourguiba (d. 1420/2000), the president of Tunisia from 1957 to 1987.

The theory of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿa*, or objectives of the law,[134] has an important place in Ibn ʿĀshūr's exegesis.[135] In the introduction to his *tafsīr*, which consists of ten sections, the fourth section is devoted to explaining what he sees as the objectives of the divine revelation. These objectives must, in his view, guide the exegete in interpretation of the Qurʾān. They include the inculcation of correct belief, the cultivation of moral character, the establishing of laws for the conduct of the individual and society, and the giving of guidance to the faithful for the well-being of the community.[136] Ibn ʿĀshūr remains equally concerned about the Qurʾānic objectives (*maqāṣid*) of true belief and right conduct, which are the cornerstone of his reformist *tafsīr*.

In his *Tafsīr,* Ibn ʿĀshūr follows the traditional methodology of explaining the Qurʾān, beginning with the linguistic and literary analysis of the text, followed by an explanation of its theological and legal content. This methodology makes his *Tafsīr al-taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr* appear more traditional than many of the contemporary Qurʾān commentaries. But his treatment of the subject is, nevertheless, in keeping with the spirit of ʿAbduh's rationalist orientation. For instance, while discussing II.102 in which magic is spoken of in connection with the story of Solomon, he denies the reality of magic and asserts that it is no more than an act of deception and trickery by which the

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132. Al-Ṣaḥbī al-ʿAtīq, *al-Tafsīr wa-l-maqāṣid ʿinda al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir Ibn ʿĀshūr,* Tunis, Dār al-Sanābil, 1989, p. 11.

133. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

134. For more on the background of this theory and its growing importance in Islamic law, see the chapter in this volume on '*Qiyās*' by Muḥammad Khalid Masud [Eds].

135. A gifted scholar and an accomplished jurist, Ibn ʿĀshūr made a significant contribution in his work entitled *Maqāṣid al-sharīʿa* ('Objectives of the *Sharīʿa*'). *Maqāṣid al-sharīʿa* is a theory of the objectives of the law by which the legal prescriptions are seen not as the blind will of the Lawgiver but rather as serving God's benign purposes for the benefit of humankind. This theory, as expounded by Ibn ʿĀshūr and others, gives Islamic law a much-needed vitality and flexibility to cope with modern problems.

136. *Ibid.*, pp. 38–42.

simple and the gullible are made to see things contrary to reality.[137] According to him, the reason for the Qurʾānic condemnation of magic and the prohibition against its practice is magic's inherent falsehood and its promotion of false beliefs, social ills and immoral acts.

Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī

Al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī differs markedly from his two Sunni contemporaries. A traditional Iranian Shīʿa scholar, he studied for ten years in Najaf, the centre of Shīʿa learning in Iraq. He finally settled in Qum, Iran, and was universally respected for his scholarly attainments. His exegesis, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, is eclectic and quotes *ḥadīths* from Shīʿa and Sunni sources. Al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī shows a grasp of the whole range of classical exegetical literature, ranging from the comprehensive Shīʿa *tafsīr*, *Majmaʾ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* of Abū ʿAlī al-Ṭabarsī (d. 548/1153), to the Qurʾān commentaries of such Sunni luminaries as Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. He subscribed to Ibn Taymiyya's methodological principle of exegesis, that the verses of the Qurʾān must first and foremost be explained with the help of other verses in the Qurʾān,[138] which, according to al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, is exactly what ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib had said.[139] Coming to modern times, ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā's *Tafsīr al-Manār* was not only known to al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī but used and referred to, albeit critically. With Shaltūt and Ibn ʿĀshūr, he interestingly shares a common concern for demonstrating the integral unity of the Qurʾānic chapters as well as for highlighting their objectives and themes.

    Al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī divides his interpretation of verses into at least two parts, sometimes into three or four. After quoting the passage to be explained, he begins the first section of explanation, which he calls *bayān,* by quoting other relevant verses of the Qurʾān. These help bring out the intended meaning of the given verses. Here he may offer an interpretation (*taʾwīl*) if needed; in this case, he may argue for or against the explanations given by others, without naming them. His interpretation is largely rational and generally not sectarian. This section is followed by what he calls traditional discussion of the verse (*baḥth riwāʾī*). Here he quotes interpretive traditions primarily from Shīʿa sources, often without much elaboration or emphasis. This section may, on occasion, be followed by a section devoted to philosophical discussion (*baḥth falsafī*) of the points implicit in the verses.

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137. *Tafsīr al-taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr*, Tunis, al-Dār al-Tūnisiyya li-l-Nashr, 1984, I, p. 637.

138. ʿAlī al-Awsī, *al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī wa-manhajuhu fī tafsīrihi al-Mīzān,* Tehran, Muʿāwiniyyat al-Riʾāsa li-l-ʿAlāqāt al-Duwaliyya, 1985, pp. 125–9.

139. Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 'The Shīʿa Interpretation of the Qurʾān', in *Shīʿism: Doctrines, Thought, and Spirituality*, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

For instance, verses II.153–7 counsel believers to seek God's help through patience and prayer in times of strife and suffering. In the *bayān* section, al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī explains the naturalness of the phenomena of human suffering and struggle at the individual and community levels. If the suffering leads to physical struggle (*qitāl*), it requires sacrifice and patience. He quotes verses of the Qurʾān which explain the necessity of struggle and sacrifice and underscore the virtues of patience and prayer. He then goes on to discuss life after death, and explain, on the basis of the Qurʾānic verses, that the soul is an entity separate from the body. In the section of *baḥth riwāʾī*, he quotes exegetical traditions attributed to ʿAlī, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and other Shīʿa *imāms*. These traditions describe three things: the experiences of a person in the grave, which depend on the deeds performed during his life on earth; the activities of the soul in heaven; and the ability of each soul to recognize other souls in heaven. This section is followed by a lengthy philosophical discussion (*baḥth falsafī*) of the concept of the soul as an entity independent of the body. He argues against the views of the materialist group of philosophers and psychologists as well as some Muslim theologians. This points him to a further discussion in the field of ethics (*baḥth akhlāqī*) where al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī explains human beings' struggle to attain moral virtues, a struggle which leads them individually and as a species towards moral perfection.

It is obvious that al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī's *al-Mīzān* is a highly academic *tafsīr* of the Qurʾān, meant for the scholarly community and for mature readers who have undertaken a sustained and serious study of the Qurʾān. It is a major Shīʿa contribution to exegesis whose depth of scholarship and balanced interpretation are universally recognized.

Reformist exegesis

The first decade of the fourteenth/twentieth century saw the birth of a Muslim intellectual and political reassertion based more authentically on the community's Islamic heritage. Then many sought the road to modernization not in the adoption of Western models, but through the renewal and reform of Islamic models.[140] This led to a fresh reformist trend in exegesis.

The reformist Qurʾān commentaries are closely associated with two key figures of the contemporary religio-political revivalist movements: al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn (Muslim Brethren or Muslim Brotherhood) in Egypt and Jamaʿat-i Islami (Islamic Association) in India and Pakistan. The influence of these two movements has spanned the entire world of Islam. The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in 1928 CE by Ḥasan al-Bannā (d. 1368/1949), a dynamic and inspiring

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140. J. L. Esposito (ed.), *Voices of Resurgent Islam,* New York, Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 65.

leader. Through dedicated effort, he succeeded in making the Brotherhood a strong organization within a short span of time. He called upon Muslims and their leaders to follow Islam as a way of life and to unite in addressing the threats posed by the political and cultural dominance of the West.[141]

Jamaʿat-i Islami was founded by Sayyid Abu-l-Aʿlā Mawdūdī (d. 1399/ 1979) in 1941 CE in Lahore, Pakistan (then part of British-ruled India) in the more complex situation of the Muslims of South Asia, who shared the agony and the ethos of Muslims everywhere, and were also involved in defining their position within the Indian struggle for independence from the British.

Sayyid Abu-l-Aʿlā Mawdūdī

Sayyid Mawdūdī was Jamaʿat-i Islami's founder, its *amīr* (head) as well as the chief exponent of its ideology, and played a leading role in shaping the Islamic orientation of Pakistan.[142] An Islamic scholar of the first rank and a very competent and prolific writer in Urdu, he produced a large number of books, both short and long.[143] Many of his works have been translated into other languages, including Arabic and English. The influence of his ideas and activism, therefore, is not confined to Pakistan and India. His exegesis is entitled *Tafhīm al-Qurʾān*.[144]

Viewed in the wider perspective of Islamic theological history, Mawdūdī may be classed with al-Ashʿarī, who combated excessive Muʿtazilī rationalism and undertook a rational defence of orthodoxy, and with Aḥmad Sirhindī, who rescued Islam in India from the state-sponsored slide into the pantheistic philosophy of Hinduism. Mawdūdī too feared that the modernist approach to progress was in fact undermining Islam. To build a fortress against indiscriminate Westernization of Muslims and their institutions, Mawdūdī laid stress on two fundamental concepts: the

141. On al-Bannā and al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn, see I. M. Husaini, *The Moslem Brethren,* Beirut, Khayat, 1956.

142. For a fuller appreciation of Mawdūdī's contribution to the framing of the constitution of Pakistan, see Charles J. Adams, 'Mawdūdī and the Islamic state', in J. L. Esposito (ed.), *Voices of Resurgent Islam, op. cit.*, pp. 99–133.

143. For a bibliography of Mawdūdī's works, see K. Ahmad and Z. I. Ansari (eds), *Islamic Perspectives: Studies in Honour of Sayyid Abul Aʿla Mawdudi*, Leicester, Islamic Foundation, 1979, pp. 3–10.

144. Mawdūdī's *Tafhīm al-Qurʾān* was published in Urdu in six volumes (1949–72). It first appeared in English as *The Meaning of the Qurʾān*, 6 vols. (Lahore, Pakistan, Islamic Publications, 1408/1988), trans. Chowdhry Muḥammad Akbar et al. Recently seven volumes of *Tafhīm al-Qurʾān*, retranslated and edited by Zafar Ishaq Ansari, were published under the title *Towards Understanding the Qurʾān,* Leicester, Islamic Foundation, 1408–21/1988–2001; this translation is continuing.

sovereignty of God and the centrality of the *Sharī'a* for the Islamic way of life. On the sovereignty of God, he said:

> the most fundamental and most revolutionary political concept of the Qur'ān is the sovereignty of God over the entire life of man. So far as the concept of the sovereignty of God over the universe is concerned, it is accepted by most of the people but what the Qur'ān demands is that they must also acknowledge Him as the sovereign in their moral, social, cultural, economic and political spheres of life.[145]

Thus, Mawdūdī shifted the emphasis in the concept of God from *qudra* (power), which led to predeterminism in the realm of humanity, to *ḥukm* (sovereignty), which required humans to accept voluntarily, but necessarily, the will of the sovereign. Mawdūdī says in the 'Introduction' to his *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* that it would be inconsistent with the limited autonomy conferred upon humans by God that He should exercise His overwhelming power and compel human beings to be righteous.[146] Once people have acknowledged the sovereignty of God in these all-embracing terms and agreed to serve Him, the mode in which they have to serve God and the path of obedience to Him is the *Sharī'a*.[147]

In the 'Introduction' to *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*, Mawdūdī also reiterated the classical orthodox position – in contrast to the Mu'tazilī doctrine – which he regarded as fundamental for a correct understanding of the Qur'ān. He said, 'The essence of true knowledge is that which God revealed to man when He appointed him His vicegerent,' whereas 'concepts relating to God, the universe, and man which have emanated from man's own limited knowledge run counter to reality.'[148] This view puts a limit to human overconfidence in human philosophical views, the Sufis' experiential knowledge, scientific theories and human-made laws. According to this view, it is the revealed truth that is the criterion by which to judge a philosophical view or a scientific theory, not the reverse, as the modernists were attempting to do.

Thus, Mawdūdī's *tafsīr* does not contain references to science, for as he says, 'the Qur'ān does not provide instruction in physics',[149] or philosophical discussion, or mystical interpretations even where the verses appear of highly mystical import such as the Light verse (XXIV.35). On the other hand, his exegesis is extensive in treatment of the verses that deal with legal matters, such as those that deal with marriage (IV.3). It is in keeping with his principle

145. Mawdūdī, *Islamic Law and Constitution*, trans. and ed. Khurshid Ahmad, Lahore, Pakistan, Islamic Publications, 1960, p. 177.
146. *Towards Understanding the Qur'ān*, Mawdūdī's *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*, 'Introduction', *op. cit.*, I, p. 10.
147. Mawdūdī, *Fundamentals of Islam*, Lahore, Pakistan, Islamic Publications, 1982, p. 84.
148. Mawdūdī, 'Introduction', in *Towards understanding the Qur'ān*, *op. cit.*, I, p. 12.
149. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

that the fundamental message of the Qur'ān is to guide Muslim society in the service of God and humanity.

Sayyid Quṭb

In the case of the Muslim Brotherhood, while the organizational leadership of the party passed to Ḥasan al-Huḍaybī (d. 1393/1973) after Ḥasan al-Bannā's assassination, it was Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1386/1966), a gifted and lucid writer, who became the ideologue of the Brotherhood, occupying a position analogous to Mawdūdī's in Jama'at-i Islami. In fact, the two of them became in the 1950s and the 1960s the leading exponents of the Islamic alternative to Western political philosophy and institutions.

Sayyid Quṭb was influenced in the early 1950s by the writings of Mawdūdī and Muḥammad Asad (d. 1413/1992), a European intellectual who converted to Islam and shared and advocated the Muslims' vision of a modern Islamic renaissance.[150] Quṭb took the concept of the sovereignty of God (ḥākimiyya) from Mawdūdī, and interpreted the Muslim profession of faith, 'there is no god but God', to mean 'There is no governance except for God, no legislation but from God, no sovereignty of one person over the other because all sovereignty belongs to God.'[151] This concept led him to propound a liberation theology: 'This religion is a general proclamation for the liberation of "man" on earth from bondage to creatures.'[152]

Like Mawdūdī, Quṭb highlighted the centrality of the *Sharī'a* in the ideology of Islam. He saw the *Sharī'a* as a God-given system of laws that is eternal and suitable for all times and places. For Muslims, the path to glory lies in faithful observance of the *Sharī'a*, not in subservient adoption of Western social, political and economic doctrines.

Quṭb wrote some twenty-five books, several of which were translated into English and other languages and influenced Muslims in many parts of the world. His exegesis *Fī ẓilāl al-Qur'ān* is Quṭb's most significant contribution to contemporary Islamic thought, as well as a significant addition to the periodic attempts at making the message of the Qur'ān relevant to contemporary society. In his *tafsīr*, Quṭb is a preacher and educator in a language that conveys and inspires conviction, and is easy to understand. The style is sometimes that of a storyteller, whereby he makes the reader become a close witness

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150. On Muḥammad Asad's thought, see Ismā'īl Ibrāhīm Nawwāb, 'A Matter of Love: Muḥammad Asad and Islam', *Islamic Studies*, XXXIX, No. 2, 2000, pp. 155–231. This article also discusses Muḥammad 'Abduh's influence on Asad's *The Message of the Qur'ān*, his translation of and commentary on the Qur'ān *op. cit.*, (pp. 182–4).

151. Esposito, *Voices of Resurgent Islam, op. cit.*, p. 89.

152. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

of the Prophet Muḥammad's encounter with his people – the believers (*muʾminūn*), the unbelievers (*kuffār*) and the hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*).[153] There are also appropriate references to modern scientific knowledge of natural phenomena in order to illustrate statements in the Qurʾān inviting human wonder at God's creation. 'There is complete harmony between the scenes of the universe portrayed in *sūra* LXXXVI and the facts it states,' says he.[154] But without becoming unduly distracted by modern science or involved in theological intricacies, Quṭb tries to bring to life the message of the Qurʾān, inviting the reader to share with him a life 'in the shade of the Qurʾān', the Arabic and English titles of his exegesis.

Fī ẓilāl al-Qurʾān, in six large volumes, is a popular *tafsīr* and has been reprinted many times. It presents a dynamic vision of Islam and of the role of the Muslims, and vigorously rejects the attempts of some modernists to import secularist and materialistic modes of thought and policies into the Muslim world. For Quṭb, the Qurʾān provides the basis of solutions to the perennial problems facing humankind in all aspects of life. The message, relevance, readability and stylistic brilliance of *Fī ẓilāl al-Qurʾān* have captivated most Muslims, Sunni as well as Shīʿa. The vibrancy of its appeal among the Shīʿa is illustrated by the fact that parts of it have been translated into Persian by ʿAlī Khāminiʾī, the present spiritual guide of Iran. The popularity of *Fī ẓilāl al-Qurʾān* is a testimony to the value Muslims attach to Qurʾānic exegeses which address their contemporary concerns.

CONCLUSION

Since Muslims believe that the Qurʾān is the Word of God with a timeless message for humankind, it was the task of the commentators, from Ibn ʿAbbās to Sayyid Quṭb, to interpret it in terms of 'now' for those who needed such interpretations. The exegetical works that have been treated in this essay, and hundreds of others that could not be accommodated in it, reflect the 'world' of their times. Contemporariness is a necessary dimension of an exegetical work. In future, as Muslims encounter challenges of deep and far-reaching significance, they will doubtlessly read the Qurʾān with that perspective, and fresh grounds in exegesis are bound to be broken.

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153. See Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī ẓilāl al-Qurʾān,* Beirut, Dār al-Shurūq, 1980, VI, pp 3571–81.

154. *In the Shade of the Qurʾān*, an English translation (London: MMH, 1979), p. 122. This is the translation of the last *juzʾ* of the Qurʾān by M. A. Salahi and A. A. Shamis. Quite recently, the Islamic Foundation published two volumes comprising the translation of *sūras* 1–3. See *In the Shade of the Qurʾān: Fī ẓilāl al-Qurʾān*, trans. and ed. M. A. Salahi and A. A. Shamis, Leicester, Islamic Foundation, 1999–2000.

But in the end, despite human attempts to fathom the profound meanings of God's words, these necessary endeavours, which are enjoined by the Qurʾān itself, will always remain circumscribed. Humanity can only skim over the surface of God's infinite knowledge and wisdom, for, as the Prophet was instructed to say:

> If the ocean were ink for my Sustainer's words,
> the ocean would indeed be exhausted
> ere my Sustainer's words are exhausted …

<div align="right">(Qurʾān, XVIII.109)</div>

Chapter 3.3

THE MAJOR THEMES OF THE QURʾĀN AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS

Khurram Murad

The Qurʾān is a unique book.

What makes the Qurʾān unique? And what does it have to say? It is unique because it is the only book that claims to be literally the word of God. For this reason, it has inspired and influenced the lives of its followers as no other book has.

The Qurʾān is the divine response to the human cry for guidance expressed in its first *sūra*, 'The opening' (*al-Fātiḥa*): 'Guide us on the straight path' (I.6). The response is pronounced clearly and soon: 'This is the Book of God, let there be no doubt about it' (II.2).[1] It is only the Qurʾān that asserts it is from God so explicitly and forcefully. No other book believed to be divine ventures such a claim.

Those who first heard the Qurʾān through the Prophet Muḥammad had absolutely no doubt that God was speaking to them. That is why it transformed them totally. It seized their hearts and minds. It made their eyes overflow with tears and their bodies tremble with awe; even their hair stood on end (VIII.2; V.83; XXXIX.23; XVII.107–9). It also radically altered the course of their earthly lives and the fabric of human civilization and world history.

Even today, 1,400 years later, the Qurʾān continues to make an unparalleled impact upon the lives of one-fifth of the human race. For most Muslims, the first lesson in learning to read the Qurʾān is the initial step on the road to become educated. Millions have the whole text inscribed on the tablets of their memories; almost everyone must know some part of it by heart. Five times every day it is

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1. This Divine pronouncement is then repeated throughout the text, and many *sūras* open on the same note: 'It is We who have sent down the Book upon you'; 'Praise be to God Who has sent down the Book upon His servant'; 'Sending down of the Book is from God' (IV.105; XVIII.1; XXXIX.1 and many other similar verses).

recited in devotional prayers. Multitudes throng to hear its entire text during the nights of Ramadan, the month of fasting. It still influences and shapes Muslims' thinking and conduct, both private and public, in innumerable ways.

More significantly, the Qur'ān is the only book, among those believed to be divine, that even today inspires its believers to shape their future and build a way of life based on its ideals, values and commandments. It is a remarkable testimony to the unique power of the Qur'ān that, in an age when God has been made almost irrelevant to human existence and concerns, Muslims still cling tenaciously to it as the only blueprint for a bright, progressive, post-modern future.

What the Qur'ān has to say is, therefore, not only the key to the understanding of Islam and Muslims. It may be crucial for the destiny of humankind too.

The Qur'ān as the word of God

Is the Qur'ān, then, truly the word of God? Or, in other words, was Muḥammad a true Prophet of God? This simple question is crucial in as much as it underlies all that the Qur'ān says, and remains central to its proper understanding.

From the very moment the Prophet Muḥammad announced that he was God's messenger, and that the Qur'ān was composed of God's words put in his mouth, his claim has been disputed by all those who, for their own different reasons, chose to deny him.

In his own time his opponents, like the rationalists of our day, found the very idea of the divine communicating with the human preposterous. They accused Muḥammad of being an imposter who claimed what he had himself composed to be God's own words.[2] Various crude allegations were made to explain away the sudden pouring out of words of such power and beauty, at the age of 40, by a person who had no such feat to his credit before. His opponents accused him of being a poet, a magician, a soothsayer (*kāhin*); they claimed that he was possessed, deluded or crazy. His detractors even impugned that it was not the Prophet but certain outsiders who were writing the Qur'ān, or at least helping him in his venture.[3]

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2. 'He is nothing but human, who forges lies attributing them to God, hence we are not going to believe him', they said (XXIII.38; also X.37–8; XI.13; XVI.101–5; XXXII.3; XXXIV.7–8, 43; XLVI.8).
3. 'Nay, they say, "A hotchpotch of nightmares! Nay, he has forged, and other people have helped him to it … stories of ancient times which he has got written down, and they are recited to him morning and evening"' (XXV.4–5); 'They turned away from him and said, "A man taught by others, a man possessed"' (XLIV.14).

Yet both Muḥammad as the Prophet and the Qur'ān as God's word in fact stand or fall together. Explanations of the event of the Qur'ān, such as calling it poetry, or claiming it to be the product of soothsaying, sorcery or demonic possession, or attempting to trace it to alleged foreign influences – Baḥīra the monk and Sergius the apostate Christian teacher – have been put forward since the time of the Prophet. Medieval Christendom repeated the same accusations as those levelled by the Prophet's contemporary foes, which are reflected in such outbursts as that of William of Tyre in the twelfth century: 'He [Muḥammad] broke out into such madness … that he dared to lie that he was a Prophet, to say that he was sent by God.'[4] Such explanations as epilepsy, hysteria or overpowering fits of emotion were considered respectable as late as the nineteenth century. Quite familiar in the medieval world, they have now been replaced by symbols and myths more acceptable to the modern mind, like attributing the Prophet's appearance to the Meccan social milieu, Judaeo-Christian influences, or his intense desire for an Arabic scripture to produce Arab unity. To this day, his opponents cling to the same views: he was not a true Prophet, nor is the Qur'ān the word of God. Indeed, their prejudiced explanations are today deceptively dressed in a modern and sympathetic academic garb, cloaking what they indignantly call the fantasy and ignorance of yesterday.

The Qur'ān takes up all such explanations of its origin and all accusations of forgery against the Prophet, and exposes their hollowness.[5] At the same time, it quite categorically proclaims that every word of it is the word of God unauthored, unadulterated, untampered, and unalterable by any extra-divine source. This theme runs throughout the Qur'ān.

Were the Qur'ān a human composition, other human beings, especially the Prophet's contemporaries, who prided themselves on their linguistic prowess and literary skill, should have been able to produce a text like it. A challenge is, therefore, thrown to them: produce any discourse comparable to the Qur'ān, ten *sūras* (XI.13), or even one *sūra* (X.38). But none has ever been

4. See N. Daniel, *Islam and the West*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1960, p. 27.
5. The Qur'ān says that its message could not be poetry, nor the Prophet Muḥammad a poet: 'We have not taught him poetry, nor would [poetry] have suited him [in his mission]; it is but a reminder and a [divine] discourse, clear in itself and clearly showing the truth' (XXXVI.69); 'And as for the poets only the perverse follow them; have you not seen that they wander in every valley, and they (often) say what they do not do?' (XXVI.224–6). For the same reason, the Qur'ān cannot be the work of a soothsayer (*kāhin*), a madman or a man possessed. 'Remind, then, for by your Lord's blessing, you are neither a soothsayer nor a madman. Or do they say, "He is a poet; let us await what time will do unto him?" Say, "Await, then; I too wait with you". Is it their minds that bid them [say] this? Or they are [bent on being] transgressors? Or do they say, "He himself has composed this?" Nay, but they are not willing to believe. But then let them bring a discourse like it if what they say be true' (LII.29–34).

able to take up this challenge (II.23–4). The Qurʾān goes on to say that 'if all men and *jinn* joined hands to produce the like of this Qurʾān they would never produce its like, even if they (fully) helped each other' (XVII.88).

This challenge demonstrates the 'inimitability' or *iʿjāz* of the Qurʾān. In what particular characteristics does its inimitability lie? The Qurʾān answers perennial human questions. It imparts knowledge of things and phenomena concerning the universe and humanity which lie beyond human perception, a knowledge which only God could give (XXV.6). Its unique influence, unmatched wisdom, indispensable guidance, unbounded mercy, tested remedies for the soul's maladies, unsurpassable rhetoric and rhyme, peerless style, immensely effective communication (*balāgh*) – all these are part of the Qurʾān's inimitability. So is its consistency: 'Do they not ponder the Qurʾān? Had it been from other than God, surely they would have found in it much inconsistency.' (IV.82). Similarly remarkable is its coherence and the organic unity of its words, passages and *sūras*.

The Prophet's life is another irrefutable piece of evidence that he could have had no hand in authoring the Qurʾān. Suddenly, at the age of 40, he began to deliver such powerful and profoundly meaningful discourses as he had never uttered before. Nothing in his life prior to this event gave any indication that he could perform such a feat: he had acquired no knowledge, received no education and could not even read and write. Never before had he written any poetry, nor had he produced any discourse on the themes dealt with so aptly in the Qurʾān. Also, never before had he been untruthful. How could then he suddenly begin to utter the greatest untruth of all: attributing his own words to God? All his life, he had lived among his detractors, and even today the most minute details of his life are there for all to see. So sudden an eruption of a momentous message – at great personal risk to the Prophet – was no less than a miracle, and could not be but from God: 'Say, "It is not possible for me to alter it [the Qurʾān] of my own accord. I follow nothing except what is revealed to me"; Say, "Unless God had willed it, I would not have conveyed it to you, nor would He have brought it to your knowledge. Indeed a whole lifetime have I dwelt among you before (His revelation came to me):will you not, then, use your reason?" And who then does greater evil than the one who forges lies attributing them to God, or who gives the lies to His messages?'[6] (X.15–17).

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6. In this regard the Qurʾān also says, 'And none could deny Our messages except such as would deny (even an obvious) truth. For, never before this [revelation], you [Muḥammad] recited any Book, nor did you ever transcribe one with your own hand, for then those who refute you could have reason to doubt. Nay, these messages are self-evident to the hearts of those who have been given knowledge' (XXIX.47–9). 'And thus have We revealed to you the Divine message by Our command. [Before this] you knew not what the Book is, nor what the Faith is' (XLII.52). 'This Qurʾān could not have been devised by anyone apart from God; for it confirms whatever [revelation] came before it, and clearly spells out [what is in this] Book. Let there be no doubt about this: it is from the Lord of all beings' (X.37).

The absurdity of allegations regarding outside help in composing the Qurʾān are also fully exposed. 'And We know very well that they say, "It is but a human being who teaches this to him." But the language of him they hint at is non-Arabic; whereas this is clear Arabic language' (XVI.103).

Not only could the Prophet not have produced anything like the Qurʾān, or altered it at will, but were this gift taken away from him, he could not continue to produce anything like it any longer. 'If We so willed, We could take away whatever We have revealed to you, then you would find none to guard you against Us' (XVII.86). 'Do they say, "He has forged a lie attributing it to God?"; But had God so willed, He could have sealed your heart' (XLII.24).

The Qurʾān stresses the elaborate divine arrangements made to ensure that it remained unadulterated and unaltered. From its heavenly source, 'upon a well-guarded tablet' (LXXXV.21–2), it was 'brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit' (XXVI.193), upon the heart of the Prophet, by 'a noble messenger, being powerful and secure with the Lord of the Throne, obeyed, and worthy of trust' (LXXXI.19–21); 'by the hands of messengers, noble and most virtuous' (LXXX.15–16).

No outside agency could, therefore, tamper with the communication from God, through the angels to the Prophet (XXVI.210–12; XXII.52). And not only during the process of revelation, but forever the Qurʾānic text remain safe against any alteration and tampering, for 'it is We who have sent down this Reminder, and it is We who shall guard it (against all corruption)' (XV.9).

At the heart of the contention about the Qurʾān as the word of God lies the question, who was Muḥammad? Was he a true Prophet? Or was he an imposter, a false prophet, who authored the Qurʾān, even borrowed from outside sources around him if necessary, and presented it as the word of God, thus forging a lie against God? Or, was he a man who was quite sincere in his belief and utterly convinced that he was a Prophet and that the messages he received were from God but still, in fact, was not, nor did he know correctly the nature and source of his revelatory experience, in which respect his understanding kept changing and growing? In other words, was he a self-deluded man, who took as God's word what in reality was his own inner voice, arising from his experiences, his reflections on his milieu, his meditations on the divine, and his sense of what his compatriots needed?

This last view is the most untenable of all if we look at the Qurʾān. That what he attributed to God was not from God is constantly denied. The positive assertion that it is from God is repeated often. Is it not grossly irrational to believe that Muḥammad, for twenty-three long years, was persistently asserting the truth of his position and denying the opposite in words he was attributing to God and yet he was an insincere man? Or, that while he was busy composing in his own language only what his inner

voice was dictating him, or what he was knowingly borrowing from outside sources, he was debating this very issue? Could a sincere man engage in such fierce controversies while he was only deluding himself to be what he was not? Could he instil in his followers an unshakable faith and lead them to actualize his ideals in their lives while all the time doubting the source of his revelations? Only a genuine man or an imposter could have been so persistently categorical.

Was he then an imposter who was forging lies against God? Going beyond repudiating this accusation as outlined above, the Qurʾān points to the heinousness of such a crime. What sin could be greater than forging a lie against God? By implication, then, denying what is truly God's and alleging, without any basis, that it is forgery would be an equally heinous sin. The Prophet is above both of them, though his opponents are accused of denying what is true. ʿAnd who commits greater evil than he who forges against God a lie, or says, "It has been revealed to me", while nothing has been revealed to him, or he who says, "I, too, can send down the like of what God has sent down?"ʾ (VI.93).

The Prophet's truthfulness, honesty and integrity were unanimously recognized by his contemporaries. How could he suddenly begin to utter the greatest of all lies, and commit the greatest of all sins: attributing his own words to God? The argument is, therefore, closed: ʿDo they say, "He has forged it?" Say, "If I have forged it, my sin is upon me, but I am free of the sin you do (of giving the lie to God's true messages)"ʾ (XI.35). The Qurʾān further states that were the Prophet to commit the sin of attributing his words to God, or making even the slightest alteration in them, he would have been severely punished.[7]

A constant argument against the Prophet since his time, especially taken up by medieval Christendom, has been that he worked no 'miracles'. Alternatively it is said that angels should have appeared to prove and support his claim. All such demands for miracles to prove that Muḥammad was His true Prophet and the Qurʾān the word of God are flatly rejected in the Qurʾān.[8]

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7. ʿSending down is from the Lord of all beings. Had he [to whom We have given revelation] attributed some [of his own] sayings to Us, We would have seized him by his right hand, then We would have surely cut off his life vein, and none of you could have saved him' (LXIX.43–7; see also XVII.73–5; XLVI.7–8).

8. The Prophet is asked to repeat that he is only human and works no miracles (e.g. see XVII.90–3). As to the question why messengership was conferred on a human, and not on an angel (VI.8; XI.12; XXV.7, 21) the Qurʾān replies: ʿHad there been angels walking about on earth, We would have sent down upon them an angel out of heaven as Messenger' (XVII.95). For only a human could communicate effectively with his fellow human beings, and only he could be a living example for them.

And even if miracles were produced, those who did not want to believe would not. For faith must come about by our own volition and reason, and not because of coercion; and an incontrovertibly self-evident truth would be coercive. Therefore, whatever the miracle, those who do not want to see, hear or believe would not do so (VI.7–9, 25; XIII.31).

Could there be any logical or scientific proof of divine revelation to a human being? The event of revelation is an experience which, in Qurʾānic vocabulary, belongs to the realm of the 'unseen' (*ghayb*), to the world beyond human perception. In this event, God the infinite speaks to humans the finite. Hence, the conclusive evidence is none other than God's own witness that the words entrusted to the Prophet are God's words (IV.79, 166; VI.19; XIII.43).

What is the nature of divine revelation? The Qurʾān has, at least in two places, spoken about the event of revelation (LIII.1–18; LXXXI.19–27). But that description too belongs to the realm of the unseen, and falls under the category of allegorical verses. Many have tried to explore the meanings of these verses, but they all amount to nothing but conjecture. Indeed, only God knows what they truly mean. Whom did the Prophet see? What does the 'highest horizon' or the 'clearest horizon' mean? What is the 'farthest lote-tree?' It appears that the Qurʾān is not concerned with the nature of the phenomenon. Its only concern lies with establishing the truth of the event of revelation and the authenticity and certitude of the experience of the event. What it is keen to stress is that the Prophet 'has not gone astray, nor is he deluded, and neither speaks out of his own desire' (LIII.2–3); that what he speaks 'is nothing but revelation' (LIII.4); that his 'heart did not lie about what he saw' (LIII.11); that 'his eye did not waver, nor did it stray' (LIII.17); that he 'is not mad' (LXXXI.22) nor does he convey 'the word of any accursed Satan' (LXXXI.25); nor is he 'niggardly in giving the knowledge of the Unseen' (LXXXI.24). The Qurʾān, then, pointedly asks, and thus firmly establishes the authenticity and reality of the experience, 'Will you, then, doubt and dispute what he actually saw?' (LIII.12), and confronts the opponents, 'Where, then, are you going?' (LXXXI.26).

The Prophet was not the first human to assert that God spoke to him, that he received messages from Him, and that whatever he proclaimed was on His authority. 'Say, "I am not the first of the Messengers"' (XLVI.9). The history of religion records that from the beginning, all faiths have been based on revelatory experience, whatever its meaning and nature may have been, in whatever way it may have been understood, or in whatever manner it may have come to be believed in. The Qurʾān mentions many earlier Prophets, and places the Prophet Muḥammad in the same chain (IV.163–5; VI.83–91).

The nature of humanity

The Qur'ān is 'the Book of God beyond all doubt' (II.2); it is 'the guidance for humankind' (II.185), and 'only God's guidance is the true guidance' (II.120).

But why should human beings need, and be dependent on, an extra-human source at all, like the Qur'ān, to find out how they should live in order to make a success of their earthly lives? And why should only God's guidance be the true guidance? These important questions lead to the Qur'ān's worldview of humans, the universe and prophethood. The Qur'ānic view of the world and of humanity are in turn essential to understand all that the Qur'ān says because it is the human being, placed in this world, who is the focal point and the principal addressee of all its messages.

The Qur'ān in several formulations and contexts states the fundamental reality that God has created the universe, the heavens and the Earth, and all things in the heavens and on Earth and between them 'not in vain' (XXXVIII.27), but with purpose and meaning [*bi-l-ḥaqq*]' (XXX.8). God has given everything He created – enormous as the heavens, or tiny as a cell, a gene, or a quark – qualities, potentialities, and laws of behaviour fully appropriate for the specific purpose of its creation and fulfilment: 'Glorify the name of your Lord the Most High, who creates [everything], then gives it a form [consistent with its purpose], and who determines its nature and then guides it[to its fulfilment]' (LXXXVII.1–3).

Every created being fulfils its function. Day and night, the sun and the moon, the stars and the trees, the winds and the clouds, the birds and the bees, and the cells and the genes which develop exactly into their appointed forms to produce countless varieties of humans and animals, fulfil their functions because God has written down His laws in their forms and natures (see II.164; III.27, 190–1; VI.1, 141; X.6; XIV.33; XXXV.27–8).

It is in this sense that the Qur'ān says that everything in the universe obeys God, and is therefore *muslim*: 'Unto Him surrenders whatever is in the heavens and on earth, willingly or unwillingly' (III.83). The language that the Qur'ān employs to express this universal state of surrender in the universe is exactly the same as it uses for humankind's worship of God: worshipping, glorifying, praising, prostrating.[9] This demonstrates that the nature of worship is the same, whether by human beings or angels or anything else in the universe. The only difference is that humans worship God only if and when they choose to do so.

It is in having this freedom that human beings are unique among all created beings that we know of so far. While all else are bound to worship

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9. 'The stars and the trees prostrate [*yasjudān*] themselves [before Him]' (LV.6). 'The seven heavens and the earth, and whatsoever is in them, glorify Him [*tusabbiḥu lahu*], and there is not a thing that does not proclaim His praise [*ḥamd*], but you do not understand their glorifying' (XVII.44). Even the angels 'never disobey God in what He commands them, and always do whatever they are commanded' (LXVI.6).

God, that is, live in surrender to Him and obey the commands He ingrained in their nature, humans alone are given the faculty to differentiate between right and wrong and good and evil, as well as the free will to choose between these alternatives. Human beings can worship God, ignore or deny Him, and acting accordingly. Hence, they are moral beings who, in order to fulfil the purpose of their creation, must remain engaged all their lives in a ceaseless effort to choose, and do, good. Given free will, they are responsible and accountable for how they live their lives with respect to the law of God, and for all their doings, non-doings and wrongdoings. For the same reason, they are liable to be judged on their conduct during their earthly life, and to be rewarded or punished as the case may be.[10]

Among all creatures, it is only humans who are liable to be rewarded or punished because only they are to be judged. Punishment following judgement is quite understandable because humanity has been given free will.

It is ingrained in the nature and form (*fiṭra*) of humans that they have not been created for any purpose other than to 'worship Me alone' (LI.56). This law, or divine command, is also confirmed by the primordial covenant when God asked humans: 'Am I not your Lord?' and they pledged 'Yes' (VII.172).

The reason that humans have been put on this earth for a limited period of time is to test them: '(God) has created death and life so that He might test you, who among you is best in conduct' (LXVII.2). All individuals are on trial as to how they use their freedom and how they conduct themselves: whether they, out of their own volition, surrender themselves to their Creator, desire good, strive to be good and do good, and pursue excellence in the eyes of God, or let themselves fall down to the depths of wrongdoing and immoral behaviour, thus causing harm to themselves and their fellow human beings. Put simply, how do they acquit themselves as moral beings? Conversely, a fair test demands that humans must have the freedom to choose how to act.

This view of humanity is the bedrock of all the Qur'ānic teachings, and leaves no room for predeterminism of the kind the Qur'ān is widely – and wrongly – believed to advocate. It is beautifully illustrated in the Qur'ānic account of the creation of Adam. It is also highlighted in the Qur'ān's treatment of many fundamental aspects of human nature and people's trial on earth, such as their proneness to neglect and forgetfulness, weakness of will, propensity to be tempted, Satan's hostility against them, as well as Satan's powerlessness before human determination, and God's promise to guide human beings and to forgive their sins (VII.11–25; XX.115–27; XXXVIII.71–85). Speaking to the angels, God declares, 'I am going to set on earth a vicegerent.' The angels quite

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10. 'Do you not see that before God prostrate [i.e. worship Him] all who are in the heavens and all who are on earth: the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, the beasts, and many of human beings, too? But there are many who come to deserve punishment rightly' (XXII.18).

correctly perceive that a vicegerent, by definition, would be given freedom and power, and would therefore be very likely to work mischief on earth and shed blood (II.30). The dialogue is not a protest against God, or condemnation of humans, but a graphic way of explaining to humans the freedom they are given, and the potential of evildoing which such freedom entails.

Another account also graphically demonstrates the free moral nature of humanity: 'We offered the Trust (*amāna*) to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to bear it because they were afraid of it. Yet man took it up; surely he is (liable to be) wrongdoer and ignorant' (XXXIII.72).

Trust (*amāna*) here means precisely human beings' responsibility for moral conduct rooted in their freedom. Thus, they are liable to be punished if they act wrongly and betray this trust, and deserve to be shown mercy and forgiveness if they do their best to act rightly, as the Qurʾān says (see XXXIII.73). The 'refusal' and 'fear' ascribed to objects as huge as the heavens and the Earth and the mountains, on the one hand, reflect that their nature was found wanting, and on the other, make vivid the enormousness of human responsibility. That 'man took up' the Trust means that their nature, as endowed by God, is equal to the task.

The earth may shake and cause havoc, mountains may slide and bring destruction, skies may pour down rain and produce floods, rocks may roll down the hills and may kill, animals may hurt and cause injury, but no sane person will hold them responsible for such actions. It is not the 'act' of human beings taking up this enormous responsibility that amounts to 'wrongdoing' and 'ignorance'. These two epithets are not to condemn humans, but only to demonstrate that they enjoy freedom of will and action as moral beings. Only they are liable to go wrong and be held responsible as 'wrongdoers' or 'unjust' because only they are free and therefore have the opportunity to become 'just'.

Human trial on earth, their responsibility, and their judgement, require not only that they possess free will, but also that they should not by nature be sinful, nor should they labour all their lives under the burden of 'original sin', nor should their sins be wiped out vicariously. The Qurʾān makes all this very plain.

As far as 'original sin' is concerned, it was forgiven the moment Adam sought divine forgiveness, indeed in the very words that the All-forgiving God Himself taught him. And thus the door for direct seeking and receiving of forgiveness from God, without any intermediaries, is always open to all Adam's children.[11]

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11. 'Partake of all good things which We have provided you [in earthly life], but do not transgress therein [the bounds of equity and do not go near the forbidden], lest My anger fall upon you, and on whomsoever My anger falls, they do perish indeed. Yet I forgive those who repent, and believe, and do righteous deeds, and thereafter keep to the right path' (XX.81–2).

In Adam's falling prey to the evil promptings of Satan, human beings discover their freedom, and to what ends their freedom can lead them. If they want to, they can disobey God Who has given them all that they have. If they rebel against God, they must realize that they have to take full responsibility for their acts of disobedience, as Satan has no power over them except that of inviting them to disobey God. In accepting Satan's invitation, people succumb only to their own evil tendencies, for which they have to blame only themselves – neither Satan nor God nor any other entity: 'Lord we have wronged ourselves' (VII.23).

The Qur'ān teaches that human beings are not sinful by nature and that they have a tendency for good within them as well, powerful enough to overcome their evil inclinations and lead them back to God. The Holy Book clearly tells us that human beings have been endowed with a form and nature which are capable of doing both good and evil; they have tendencies and disposition towards both, and though they have been shown the right path, through their nature, through the nature around them, and through God's revelation, they are free to follow it or disregard it. 'Have We not made for him two eyes, and a tongue, and two lips, and shown him the two highways [of good and evil]?' (XC.8–10). 'Surely We have shown him the way; he can be grateful or ungrateful' (LXXVI.3). 'Say, "The truth (has come) from your Lord", so let him who will, believe and let him who will, reject it' (XVIII.29). That is why 'there can be no coercion in religion' (II.256).[12]

That is also why neither the Messengers of God nor Satan have any power over human being to coerce them to choose good or evil or to compel them to believe them and do what they bid them. Addressing the Messengers, the Qur'ān tells them: 'Verily, you cannot guide whom you like, but God guides whom He wills, and He knows very well those who receive guidance' (XXVIII.56); 'Remind them, for your task is only to remind, you cannot compel them to believe' (LXXXVIII.21–2). 'Had God so willed, they would not have been idolaters; hence We have not made you their keeper, neither are you their guardian' (VI.107). Messengers are likewise directed to declare that they have no power over humans and that their main responsibility is confined to conveying God's message. (See, for instance, III.20; V.99; XXIX.18.)

Similarly, a scene from the Day of Judgement vividly expresses the powerlessness of Satan over humans, and human beings' total responsibility for their own actions: 'And when everything will have been decided Satan will say, "…I had no power at all over you, but that I invited you, and you responded to me. Hence, do not blame me, but blame yourselves"' (XIV.22).

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12. The Qur'ān dwells on this point in other verses: 'By the soul, and the proportion and order given to it; and its inspiration as to its wrong and right, truly he succeeds that purifies it' (XCI.7–9). 'Surely this is a Reminder, so he who will, may take the way unto his Lord. But you cannot will it unless God wills, for God is ever All-knowing, All-wise' (LXXVI.29–30). 'God chooses unto Himself whomsoever He will, and He guides to Himself whosoever turns unto him' (XLII.13).

III–3.1   Qurʾān School, Pakistan
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That is also why the truths belonging to the realm of the unseen, which are the essence of faith – like God, the Hereafter, the angels, and revelation – could not be made so self-evident as to leave no margin at all for doubt or denial. Were this to happen, as it ultimately happens after death, then the 'earthly trial' would have had to end, and the Hour of Judgement would have had come.[13]

For the same reason, there can be no such miracles as would altogether compel people to believe in the unseen. While rejecting all demands for miracles, the Qurʾān says that whatever miracles earlier Prophets showed contributed little towards convincing those who did not want to be convinced.[14] Were

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13. 'Do they wait for the angels to come to them or that your Lord [Himself] should appear, or that some of your Lord's signs come? On the day that some of your Lord's signs do come, no good will it do a soul to believe then, if it believed not nor earned good through its belief' (VI.158). 'They say, "Why has an angel not been sent down to him?" Yet had We sent down an angel, all would have been settled at once, and they would have been given no respite [for repentance]. And had We made him [the Messenger] an angel, We would certainly have sent him as a man, and confused for them a matter which they themselves are confusing' (VI.8–9).

14. 'Had We sent down on you a Book on parchment and they had touched it with their hands, yet those who are bent on denying the truth would have said, "This is nothing but manifest sorcery"' (VI.7; also XV.14–15). 'Those against whom your Lord's word has come true will not believe even though every sign should come to them until they see the painful chastisement' (X.96–7).

miracles the basis of belief, it would amount to 'coercion'. Those who do not want to hear, see, or think for themselves never find the truth, and should be responsible for their failure. Human beings are endowed with perception and reason precisely to enable them to find the right path. If they refuse to use their God-given faculties, the disease lies inside them, in their hearts. Only those who use their innate faculties benefit from God's guidance. 'Surely in this there is a reminder to him who has a heart, and gives ear with a conscious mind' (L.37). 'It is not the eyes that become blind, but blind become the hearts within the breasts' (XXII.46). 'And if your Lord had so willed, all those on earth would have believed, all of them, all together. Will you, then, compel people until they believe? No human being can ever believe save by the leave of God, but He lays the abomination (of disbelief) only upon those who will not understand. Say, "Behold whatever is in the heavens and on earth!" But neither signs nor warnings benefit those who do not [want to] believe' (X.99–101; see also XLVII.24; XLIII.40, XXVII.80; X.42–3).

Had God willed that all humankind automatically follow one right path, as everything else in the universe like the sun and the moon and the stars do, it would not have been at all difficult for Him. But then the whole purpose of imparting value to human actions and opening for them the doors of God's highest rewards by endowing them with freedom would have been lost. Then there would have been no opportunity for them to obey God out of volition, and thus deserve God's mercy and His immense blessings. Opportunity for gain must carry the risk of loss.[15]

So categorically does the Qur'ān hold each human being responsible for his/her actions that all excuses he/she invents to justify his/her wrongdoings are totally repudiated. Sometimes people hold society and the process of socialization responsible for their misdeeds: 'Or lest you say, "It were our forefathers before us, who used to be idolaters, we were but their offspring after them. Will you, then, destroy us for the doings of (those) vaindoers?"' (VII.173). Sometimes they blame the leaders and tyrants of their age, the system, for having led them astray: 'On the Day when their faces would be turned about in the Fire … they shall say, "Our Lord, we obeyed our leaders and our great men, and it is they who led us astray from the right path"' (XXXIII.66–7; also XXXIV.31–3). At other times they blame their friends and companions: 'Alas, would that I had not taken so-and-so for a friend' (XXV.28). Sometimes they even hold God responsible: 'They say, "Had the All-merciful so willed, we would not have worshipped them (idols)"' (XLIII.20). 'The idolaters say, "Had God so willed, we would not have worshipped aught but Him – neither we nor our forefathers"' (XVI.35).

15. 'Had your Lord so willed, He could have made all humankind one [rightly guided] community, but they will continue to follow different paths, except those on whom your Lord has mercy. To this end He has created them' (XI.118–19; see also XVI.93; XLII.8).

It is abundantly clear, therefore, that human free will is the whole basis and *raison d'être* of Qur'ānic teachings, divine guidance, prophethood, God's summons to human beings to surrender to Him, and the Day of Judgement. In the Qur'ān, there is no trace of absolute determinism of any kind: biological, physical, material, historical, societal, environmental or otherwise, though all of them play their part in shaping human beings and society.

However, there are some verses that appear to speak differently. They seem to indicate strong fatalism, absolute determinism, and a human being totally impotent before God's predestination. They tell us that 'God guides only those whom He wills' (II.213, 272); 'that you shall not will unless God wills' (LXXVI.30; LXXXI.29); that 'God seals up their hearts and hearing, and puts blinds on their eyes' (II.7); that 'We have put chains around their necks' (XXXVI.8), 'a barrier in front of them and a barrier behind them' (XXXVI.9), so 'they do not see' (XXXVI.9). How should we then understand these seemingly contradictory positions?

The question of free will as against predeterminism is no doubt a complex question. People have debated it from ancient times, and failed to find a totally satisfactory solution. This too is because the problem of human free will as against God's absolute power belongs to the realm of the unseen, like the question of the existence of God. Such mysteries cannot have a categorical answer. Like physical phenomena – such as light and subatomic particles – the question of free will versus predeterminism has many aspects. Because it is complex, it appears to be contradictory, though it constitutes a single, harmonious whole. Also because of its complexity, different people have described it from different, often conflicting perspectives.

What does the Qur'ān say about this tangled question? When God speaks from the human perspective, He speaks in categorical, though not absolute, terms of freedom and responsibility as granted by God. Were it to be otherwise, the entire Qur'ānic view of the human trial on Earth and God's judgement would be drained of all meaning. But when He speaks from God's perspective, then, being God, He must by definition have absolute power in all matters. He categorically points to His will as the source of all things and all happenings in the universe. For were it to be otherwise, anything having any power independent of God could not be but another god. But there is no other god, apart from the One God; were there to be, the Universe would be in utter chaos.

However, almost everywhere, while pointing to His will as the source of whatever happens – even whatever goes wrong with human beings and societies because of their freedom – God clearly states that it is because of people's own actions that God makes them unable to see the truth, leads them astray, entrenches them in their wrongdoing, seals up their hearts, destroys

them in this world, or punishes them in the Hereafter.[16] It is also frequently stressed that God never does any wrong to anyone; it is people who wrong themselves: 'God does not do the least wrong to men, but it is men who wrong themselves' (X.44).

The Qur'ān urges people to feel and make themselves utterly dependent on God. That may be another reason that at instances it uses words which ascribe all acts to God, and thus inducts humans into a state of utter dependence. Unravelling the mystery of creating a free, finite moral being within the domain of an absolute infinite Creator, besides being beyond human perception and language, is not at all necessary in fulfilling the purpose of human creation. The Qur'ān says, 'And none knows its final meaning, save only God' (III.7); and 'They say, "Had the All-merciful so willed, we would not have served them [i.e. false gods]." They have no knowledge about it; they only conjecture' (XLIII.20).

Aspects of human nature described in the Qur'ān, such as that people have been created 'weak and fragile' (IV.28), weak in will and prone to forget God (XX.115), and utterly dependent upon Him (XXXV.15), are quite in keeping with human freedom, and a prerequisite for a fair test. Were they never to forget God or disobey Him, never to go against the purpose of their creation or never to sin, they would have been angels or other beings like every other creature in the universe.

Such weaknesses have been put in human nature by God in order that they may be properly tested (LXVII.2). Most importantly, people forget that it is God Who has given them, and continues to give them, everything, that they are utterly dependent on Him for all their physical needs as well as for guidance. 'And We gave Our command to Adam, but he forgot it' (XX.115). At the same time, they are liable to suffer from lack of determination and constancy: 'We did not find strength of will in him [Adam]' (XX.115).

Being forgetful, negligent and weak-willed, people become slaves to their own desires. None of the human urges – such as hunger, sex, anger, acquisitiveness – is evil in itself, but it becomes a god if it is made the sole object of human endeavour, and is desired above all other things, without regard for the limits set by God.[17] Thus, because of their free will, people who have the potential to rise higher and higher, morally and spiritually, fall lower and lower when they blindly follow and worship their desires (VII.176; XCV.4–6).

16. 'You cannot will unless God wills; but He is also All-knowing, All-wise. He admits into His mercy whomsoever He wills and for the evil-doers, He has prepared a painful chastisement' (LXXVI.30–1). 'Have you seen him who makes his own desires his god, and [therefore] God has led him astray, out of [His] knowledge, and set a seal upon his hearing and his heart, and laid a covering on his eyes? … [it is] they [who] say, "There is nothing beyond our present life; we die, and we live, and nothing but time destroys us"' (XLV.23–4). 'Each [people] We seized, [We punished] for their sins' (XXIX.40).
17. 'Do you not see him who makes his desire his god?' (XXV.43; XLV.23) and 'He who follows his desire without any guidance from God' (XXVIII.50).

Human desires are usually for things that are immediate and superficial in nature: 'No, indeed, you love things that are immediate and fleeting, and leave things which are to come later' (LXXV.20–21; see also III.185), for 'man has been created out of haste' (XXI.37) and 'he is prone to be hasty' (XXI.37, see also XVII.11). This makes people pettish and querulous. The Qurʾān often repeats this theme, each time with some new light. When people are blessed with good things and glad tidings, they become inflated with self-exultation and pride. They then consider themselves the cause of all good coming to them and believe themselves to be self-sufficient. They fail to see God behind any of this. But when afflictions and hard times befall them, when they succumb to despair, only then might they remember God and call on Him.[18]

With all these human weaknesses, will not human beings always fail the test? No, says the Qurʾān. Their nature has been formed to fulfil the purpose of their lives. No evil forces can overpower them. Good tendencies within them have the power to overcome all of their weaknesses. For example, greed can be turned into a powerful force to strive for God's pleasure and Paradise. One symbolic meaning of the prostration by angels before Adam, among many others, is that the forces of good are on humanity's side. Everything in the universe is their ally as they prostrate themselves before God. God Himself is on their side, provided they are sincere in their intentions and make the required effort. Not only is God on humanity's side, but He also helps people, gives them strength, forgives their sins and failures, and shows them His mercy. The only thing people have to do is to come to Him in utter dependency and humility and follow His teachings.

The Qurʾān often describes the biological and physical origins of human beings: from the male sperm and its union with the female egg, through various stages in the womb, to the final emergence as a being, physically fit, seeing, hearing and endowed with reason (XXIII.12–14; XXII.5). The purpose of such description is not just to stress their lowly origin, as is often thought. Rather, it is to emphasize how utterly dependent people are on God's mercy and care. It is also to highlight the human need for divine sustenance for their physical, cognitive and spiritual fabric. Only God's mercy and sustenance, and His decision to create a free moral being from a microscopic cell, has made that cell into what a person is.

Therefore, people are, and must remain, utterly dependent on God's guidance. This divine guidance reminds humans of what they ought to be when

18. 'If We let man taste Our mercy, and then take it away from him, he abandons all hope and becomes ungrateful; but if We let him taste ease and plenty after hardship has visited him, he says, "Gone is all affliction from me", for he is given to vain exultation and glories in himself' (XI.9–10). 'When We bestow Our blessing upon him, he says, "I have been given (all) this by virtue of (my own) knowledge"' (XXXIX.49). 'When He bestows His blessing upon him, he forgets what he was calling to before and sets up compeers to God, to lead astray from His way' (XXXIX.8; also see XLII.48; XLI.49–51; LXX.19–20).

they are forgetful and negligent, and when they are blinded by momentary
and superfluous desires. It holds their hands and leads them on the straight
path when they fail and falter. It is out of this state of utter dependence on,
and humility before, God that they cry out: '[Lord], guide us on the straight
path' (I.6). In response to this urgent and paramount human need, God has
sent all His Prophets and Books and, finally, the last Prophet, the Prophet
Muḥammad, and the last revelation, the Qur'ān.

The prophethood

The Qur'ān not only proclaims the prophethood of Muḥammad, but is
equally emphatic in proclaiming all the Prophets God sent to guide humanity.
The coming of divine guidance, its universality and continuity, and belief in
all the Prophets without any discrimination, even if they are not mentioned in
the Qur'ān, are fundamental to its teachings.

Humans too are dependent on God for guidance, both physically and
morally. Physically, every one of about a trillion cells in their bodies, all
identical, is guided to their required form and function. Morally, it is only He,
and no one else, who can guide people to act rightly and navigate through
the perils of their freedom successfully. Being the Creator, only God has the
required power and knowledge to do so. There is no power except His, and all
knowledge apart from His is no more than speculation and conjecture, which
is of little help in arriving at the truth.[19]

God's grace has ensured human beings' moral guidance.[20] First, their
nature (*fiṭra*) has been so formed as to be congruent with the divine purpose,
and divine guidance is rooted in their own nature (XXX.30). God has shown
them the right path in order to test them fairly so that they do not argue against
Him on the plea of ignorance.[21] Second, nature and the universe around them,
and history too, all point to the same guidance, so that they may hear, see

19. 'Say, "Is there any of those you make gods who can guide you to the Truth?" Say, "It is
God only who guides to the Truth. Which, then, is more worthy to be followed; He who
guides to the Truth, or he who guides not unless he is guided? What, then ails you, how
do you judge?" And most of them follow only conjecture, and conjecture can never be a
substitute for Truth' (X.35–6; see also LIII.28–30).

20. 'Our Lord is He Who gives everything its true nature and form, and then guides it' (XX.50;
also LXXXVII.2–3).

21. 'We have revealed to you just as We revealed to Noah, and the Prophets after him … to the
Messengers …. We have already mentioned to you before, as well as the Messengers We
have not mentioned to you Messengers as heralds of good tidings and as warners, so that
mankind might have no argument against God, after [the coming of] these Messengers'
(IV.163–5). Elsewhere the Qur'ān says, 'Whosoever follows the right path, follows it but
for his own good; and whoever goes astray, goes but astray to his own loss; and no bearer
shall bear another's burden. We never chastise [any community] until We have sent a
Messenger [to them]' (XVII.15).

and ponder to arrive at the right guidance. But they still have to be shown the path they should follow in their earthly lives. As they are prone to ignore or reject the guidance given by nature and history, they also need full divine help and mercy if they begin to follow it as they are liable to fall into temptation (XLII.13; XXVI.78; X.9; XXIX.69; XLVII.17).

Because people cannot do without God's guidance, 'to guide' is a divine promise. This promise was made to humanity at the time Adam was created.[22] If the fulfilment of the purpose of human life, and consequently salvation, depends on receiving and living by divine guidance, then its appearance could not be exclusive to any people or country, nor could it wait for any particular moment in history. The need of the first man in this regard, or let us say the divine 'promise' to him, was no less than that of any other human being at any other point in time and space. Just as the first man was a Prophet, so God's Prophets came in all ages, in all lands, and among speakers of all tongues. They all had the same essential message as the first and last Prophets. Some are mentioned in the Qur'ān, while some are not, perhaps because the Qur'ān's first direct addressees were not aware of them, and mentioning their names would only have raised a host of unnecessary and irrelevant questions. 'And God chose Adam and Noah, and the family of Abraham and the family of 'Imrān' (III.33).[23]

To fulfil the divine promise, God acts through human agency. He sends down His guidance to humankind through such persons as He chooses, to whom He speaks and whom He entrusts with the responsibility of proclaiming what 'the Lord says' (VI.124; XXII.75; XXVII.59; XXXV.32).

The initiative and the content and words of the messages are entirely divine – an act of His great mercy and love for humankind: 'We sent it down … as mercy from your Lord' (XLIV.3–6; see also LV.1–2; XLI.2; X.57). Since revelation is entirely a gift of God, it cannot be something self-acquired by the perfection of human faculties, or through meditation and contemplation: 'Only God knows where to place His message' (VI.124). Revelation is not a psychological delusion (*jinna*), a poetic inspiration (*shi'r*), a political insight or ambition, or a mystical experience. Nor is it a subjective act, a personal and human response and interpretation of the divine revelatory experience. None of the words attributed to God by a prophet are that prophet's own words; they would then be liars, the greatest sinners. Nor can they attribute words to

22. 'There shall most certainly come to you guidance from Me, and whoever follows My guidance, no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow. But those who reject the truth and cry lies to Our messages, those shall be the inhabitants of the Fire: and therein shall they abide' (II.38–9).
23. 'We have revealed to you just as We revealed to Noah and the Prophets after him' (IV.163), 'and We sent Messengers before you; some of them We have mentioned, and some of them We have not mentioned to you' (XL.78).

God under any delusion; they would then hardly be able to guide, to suffer, or to face their adversaries, as all the prophets did. The message is always clear, luminous and without any dubiety: 'And what of him who stands upon a clear sign from his Lord, and a witness from Him recites it!' (XI.17).

The agency is human because the addressees are human. Human beings have always found it difficult to accept the idea that a person like themselves could be the recipient of a divine message, that God would speak to a mortal (XXV.7; XXIII.33). There have been religious difficulties before; there are scientific objections now. And yet, when such prophets appeared, the impact of their godly lives was such that some of them were elevated to a divine status; some people even believed that God became flesh and blood. But the Qur'ān unequivocally affirms the humanness of all prophets.[24]

Divine guidance came in the form of human speech. To speak is to be human, responsible and free. Therefore, Adam was given the knowledge of 'names' (II.31). Language, the capability to comprehend, analyse, express, articulate, and communicate, is the greatest gift of God's infinite mercy, the essence of humanness, and is, therefore, the channel for the gift of revelation (LV.1–4).

Though the prophets were human beings, the Qur'ān lays great stress on their piety, their spotless character, their noble conduct, their unflinching devotion and loyalty to God and His message, and the great sufferings they resolutely endured. They were the best of humankind, models to be followed, and importantly, truthful in their claims.[25]

One important criterion for judging a 'true' prophet from a 'false' one is their truthful and pious life, which always made a deep impact on their own age and on succeeding generations. The other one is the content of their message. All prophets brought the same essential message: worship God and follow His teachings.[26] The other theme that forms the common core of their message was 'to do good'.[27]

This does not mean that the guidance each one of them brought was similar in all details. The rites and rituals, the rules and regulations, the emphases on particular individual and social ills, varied from one prophet to

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24. 'And nothing prevented men from believing when the guidance came to them, but that they said, 'Has God sent forth a human being as Messenger?' Say, 'Had there been in the earth angels walking as their natural abode, We would have sent down upon them out of heaven an angel as Messenger'(XVII.94–5).

25. 'Each one We guided … each was of the righteous … each one We favoured above all beings … and We elected them, and We guided them to a straight path …. Those are they whom God has guided; so follow their guidance' (VI.84–90).

26. 'And We never sent a Messenger before you except that We revealed to him, saying, "there is no God but I; so serve Me alone"' (XXI.25).

27. 'And everyone We made righteous, and appointed them to be leaders who would guide by Our command, and We revealed to all of them the doing of good deeds, and to perform the prayer, and to pay the alms, and Us alone they worshipped' (XXI.73).

another. This variation can, however, be no basis for the followers of those faiths to have any special claim to salvation, or to resort to intolerance and violence against each other.

The Qur'ānic theme concerning universal prophethood demonstrates that all religions must have much in common, not because they have borrowed from one another, but because the same divine reality has communicated His words to all the prophets. That the same basic message was at the source of each religion and still forms part of its heritage is something which, for all time to come, can form the basis for peace and cooperation between the followers of diverse faiths.

Indeed, nowhere does the Qur'ān declare that it has a new message or a different one from that brought by earlier prophets. Rather, the Qur'ān declares repeatedly that it reiterates and incorporates what had been said before.[28] That is why the Qur'ān summons its followers to believe in all messengers and all messages, and holds that to deny one is to deny all. We cannot become Muslims by believing in the Prophet Muḥammad alone.[29]

The Qur'ānic view of prophethood has profound meaning for interfaith amity, tolerance and coexistence in a multi-religious world. When the Qur'ān asserts that the first man was a prophet, a Muslim, that his religion was Islam, that all prophets were Muslim and brought Islam, this assertion means that it is making some important propositions which, instead of leading to 'absolutism', 'uniqueness' and 'culmination', lays down the intellectual bases for coexistence of all diverse faiths in 'one world'. The Qur'ānic view implies that 'All religions are of Divine origin. Therefore, being divinely guided is not the monopoly of anyone by virtue of belonging to any particular group or race or religious denomination.'[30]

Salvation in the Hereafter is not the prerogative of anyone merely by virtue of belonging to a particular 'religion'.[31]

28. 'And We have sent down unto you [this] Book, setting forth the truth, confirming the revelation that came before it, and determining what is true [in what remains therein]' (V.48; also III.3; VI.92; XII.111; XXXV.31).

29. 'This is the Book of God … to guide … those who believe in what has been sent down to you and what has been sent down before you' (II.1–4); 'The Messenger, and the believers with him, believe in what has been sent down to him from his Lord: they all believe in God, and His angels, and all His Books, and all His Messengers, [saying] we make no distinction between any of His Messengers' (II.285; II.136; III.84; IV.131; VI.84–90).

30. 'And they say, "Be Jew or Christian, and you shall be guided." Say, "Nay, but the way of Abraham, who turned away from all (false gods), and he was no idolater"' (II.135).

31. 'And they say, "None shall enter Paradise unless he be a Jew or a Christian". Such are their wishful beliefs! Say, "Produce your proof, if what you say is true". Nay, but whosoever surrenders his whole being unto God, and is a doer of good, shall have his reward with his Lord' (II.111–12; also II.62).

All religions do have some common elements, despite their diversity, for they all originate from the same source.

The Prophet Muḥammad was the last prophet; hence, the Qur'ān is the last divine word sent down for human guidance. Thus, the Qur'ān issues a clarion call for believing in the Prophet and the Qur'ān that he brought. It is obvious that because Muḥammad was the last in the chain, we are required to believe in him and obey him.

The Qur'ānic position on salvation is very largely determined by its view of prophethood. First, the Qur'ān clearly states that salvation does not depend on which religious denomination someone belongs to. Second, it clearly distinguishes between belonging to an established 'religion' and having true faith (*īmān*) and doing righteous deeds (*ʿamal ṣāliḥ*). Another Qur'ānic refrain expresses this as seeking, finding, accepting, confirming and living by the truth (*al-ḥaqq* or *al-dīn*). Even regarding Muslims at the very time the Qur'ān was being revealed, it used the word 'those who believe' (*alladhīna āmanū*) in two senses. In the first sense, it referred to those who belonged to the Muslim community, and in the second to those who had true faith (see II.62; IV.136; V.69).

As the last revelation from God, the Qur'ān is the ultimate reminder, light, teaching, advice, admonition, healing, law – in sum, the final guidance for humankind. And the main thrust of its message remains the same as was that of the earlier prophets: let God be the only God and centre all life on Him, and live preparing for the Day you will return to Him to render an account of your life.

God

The Qur'ān's main burden is that God is the only God. Every other Qur'ānic theme revolves around God: how He relates to humans and all other beings, and how humans ought to relate to Him. It is to issue God's summons to humanity in clear and categorical terms that the Qur'ān has come: 'I am your Only God, there is no God but I: so worship only Me' (XX.14). This was the essential and basic message and mission of every messenger of God (XVI.36; XXI.25, 92).[32]

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32. The Qur'ān reiterates the same message in various forms and refrains: 'Hold fast unto God …' (XXII.78); 'Whosoever holds fast unto God, only he is guided on the straight path' (III.101); 'Flee unto God and make no other god with God' (LI.50–1); 'Turn towards your Lord alone and surrender yourself unto Him' (XXXIX.54); 'Surrender yourselves wholly unto God' (II.208); 'I have turned my face unto Him who brought into being the heavens and the earth, having turned away from all (apart from Him)' (VI.79); 'Say, "All my prayers, all my acts of sacrifice, and my living and dying are for God alone"' (VI.162).

The Qurʾān is all about human beings, because it is a guide to enable humans to answer the divine summons. It is about the human condition and predicament arising out of free will and moral responsibility, and about human destiny – but all in relation to God.

The Qurʾānic discourse 'about' God is not a discourse 'on' God. It does not at all dwell on His nature, for God is one and unique in every respect (CXII.1). Only He is the creator, all else that exist or could exist cannot but be His creation. He has no beginning and nothing precedes Him. He has no end, and nothing can outlast Him.[33]

By the very fact of being God, He is fundamentally different, unfathomable and undefinable. To comprehend Him or to define Him is impossible, for He is beyond the reach of human categories of thought and imagination, language and expression. He is infinite while humans are finite; He is the creator while humans are created beings; and all human categories of perception and imagination are confined to finite, created things. He is totally different from anything human beings can conceive, imagine, envision, comprehend or define: 'No human vision can comprehend Him' (VI.103). Nothing can be said about Him, the Creator, without comparison or correlation with some created thing. Hence, every statement about Him in human language or imagination would imply imperfection and incompleteness, from which He is totally free. Even questions about why He does something – in terms of His own purpose – and how He is different are beyond human categories of thought. Therefore, whatever is said about Him must be qualified by confessing that 'limitless in His glory is God' (*subḥāna Allāh*).

Yet the Qurʾān does talk about God. That it must do, to make and keep humans intensely aware of God and to have them live in the right relation with Him, is the primary mission of the Qurʾān. To do that, the reality of God must be made comprehensible to humans in a language that their reason and emotion can grasp. Having made the necessary qualifying statement, the Qurʾān, therefore, proceeds to speak about God in the very same human categories of imagination, thought and expression: 'God on the Throne' (XX.5); 'His Chair comprises the heavens and the earth' (II.255); 'His hands are spread out' (V.64); 'You are before Our eyes' (LII.48); 'He is with you wherever you are' (LVII.4); 'We are nearer to him [i.e. the human being] than the jugular vein' (L.16); He 'hears and sees' (XXII.61); 'give God a good loan' (LXXIII.20); He 'loves' (II.205, 222) as well as becomes 'angry' (V.60); He is 'Vengeful' (III.4) as well as 'All-forgiving' (II.173); He draws people 'near to Him' (XIX.52). Thus, what in fact is inaccessible, the Qurʾān makes accessible

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33. 'Can, then, He who creates be like any being that does not create?' (XVI.17). Therefore, 'there is nothing like Him' (XLII.11). 'He is the First and the Last' (LVII.3).

to human imagination, without letting in any imperfection, or comparison with the imperfect.

Human beings are made aware of God through the effects of His activities on and with them as well as the universe known to them. These effects they can comprehend, perceive and conceptualize, though in a manner imperfect and insufficient in respect of God, but sufficient in respect of humans relating to God. God is made known to humans through His attributes or 'beautiful names of perfection and goodness' (VII.180; XVII.110; XX.8; LIX.24). These names too describe only the 'effects of His activity', and in no way circumscribe His reality.

Because of the free will human beings enjoy, they may, if they want to, neglect, ignore, exclude or even deny God; or they can set gods apart from, or to the exclusion of, God. They may refuse to hear His voice from within, to see Him behind every phenomenon in nature, or to heed His Messengers and follow them. In fact, it is quite possible for them to explain away, satisfactorily and rationally, almost every phenomenon in the universe, including themselves, without the help of God and His activity, or by creating as many gods as they want. All these possibilities are available to them and are inherent in their nature.

That is one reason that the Qur'ān embarks upon proving the existence of God in the way it does. Were conclusive proofs of His existence possible, beyond all doubt and possibility of denial, human freedom would be severely circumscribed, and it would amount to 'coercion' in faith. Then trial on earth and faith would have been emptied of all meaning. The Qur'ān often says that once people 'see' the hour of their death, the angels or God, the span of their freedom would terminate and the opportunity for faith and action would end (X.90–1; II.210; VI.8; XXIII.99–100).

God is such a powerful reality, the only truth, the being that gives meaning and existence to humanity, and is so manifest, so overwhelmingly present everywhere that wherever people turn to, in the universe or within their own selves, the Qur'ān brings them face to face with God.[34]

Instead of adducing proofs that 'God exists', or expounding His nature, the Qur'ān, by the power of its message and unique style, ushers people – the totality of their beings, hearts and souls, minds and bodies – into the very presence of God.

Human beings are constantly reminded of God, and become aware of Him and remember Him in every state: standing, sitting, or lying down (III.191). They are reminded of His countless blessings (XVI.18; XXXI.27), of His infinite mercy and majesty, of His sole sovereignty over humanity, the heavens and the Earth and whatever is in them.

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34. 'So, wherever you turn, there is the face of God' (II.115). 'He is with you wherever you are; and God sees whatever you do' (LVII.4). 'We indeed create man; and We know what his self whispers within him; and We are nearer to him than the jugular vein' (L.16).

As soon as the Qurʾān admits human beings into God's presence through signs of His continuing activity, they are overwhelmed by His mercy and majesty, fall upon their knees, and exclaim, 'All thanks and praise belong to God alone,' *al-ḥamdu li-l-llāh* (I.2).

The Qurʾān opens with these two words, summoning humankind to its universal message. These words sum up the essence of the God–human relationship. God is fount of everything that people receive or that happens to them. Human beings, therefore, live constantly in an exclusive relation of praise of, and gratitude to, Him, aware of His countless bounties and favours, and recognizing the benevolence, mercy and goodness in all that they receive from God. The invocation of *al-ḥamdu li-l-llāh* also disowns and dethrones all false gods that are set apart from God. It terminates all false relations of allegiance and trust with objects other than God, and demolishes all notions of human self-sufficiency.

Humans beings have not created anything, nor can they point to anyone apart from God as the source of creation. Neither has anything come out of 'nothing', nor can it be a product of chance. Thus, everything praises and thanks only God, and no one else.[35] Once praise and thanks are engraved upon people's hearts and fill their whole lives, they are left in no doubt that the God they worship is not the 'God of terror' but the 'God of

35. 'Have they been created out of nothing? Or are they the creators? Or did they create the heavens and the earth?' (LII.35–6). 'What, do they associate [as partners with God] those who do not create anything, but they themselves are created and they have no power to help them, neither can they help themselves' (VII.191–2). Hence they give nothing on their own and deserve no gratitude and praise. 'They are dead, nor living' (XVI.20–1).
'Say, "All praise belongs to God …. Who is better, God or the gods they associate with Him? Who is it that created the heavens and earth, and sent down for you water out of heaven; (it is) We who caused to grow therewith gardens full of loveliness, whose trees you could never grow. Is there a god with God? … Who is it that made the earth a fitting abode, and set in it rivers, and set upon it firm mountains, and placed a barrier between the two seas? Is there a god with God? … Who is it that answers the distressed when he calls unto Him, and removes the evil, and makes you inherit the earth? Is there a god with God? … Who is it that guides you in the darkness of land and sea, and sends forth the winds, bearing good tidings before His mercy? Is there a god with God? … Who is it that originates creation, then brings it back again, and provides you out of heaven and earth? Is there a god with God?" … Say, "Produce your proof, if you speak truly"'' (XXVII.59–64).
'Have you considered the seed you emit? Is it you who create it, or are We the Creators? … Have you considered the soil you till? Is it you who make crops grow, or are We the grower? Were it Our will, We would have made it chaff, and you would be left bitterly jesting "We are ruined; nay, we have been robbed". Have you considered the water you drink? Is it you who send it down from the clouds, or do We? Were it Our will, We would have made it bitter; so why are you not thankful? Have you considered the fire you kindle? Did you make its timber to grow, or did We make it? … Then magnify the Name of the Lord, the All-mighty' (LVI.58–9, 63–72, 74).

mercy,' that they do not worship Him out of fear but from gratitude and love which must saturate all their worship and acts. The fear of God is there. It too is central in shaping earthly life, yet it is a fear born out of love and not terror: the fear of having behaved ungratefully to God, of becoming unworthy of His mercy and benevolence, of becoming unworthy of His love and blessings, both here and in the Hereafter, of displeasing Him, of shame on the day of meeting Him face to face (LV.46; LXXIX.40), and of becoming alienated from Him (XXIII.108). Indeed, while there can be fear without love, there can be no love without accompanying fear. In the Qur'ān, the fear is made concomitant with the 'Most-merciful' God. One who fears the 'Most-merciful', the 'Sustainer Lord', is a Qur'ānic refrain (XXXVI.11; L.33; XCVIII.8).

The images of punishment on Judgement Day are certainly terrifying, but see how the ultimate terror is described. 'Those who barter away God's covenant and their pledges for a little price, they shall have no share in the blessings of the Life to Come; God shall not speak to them, neither look towards them on the Resurrection Day, neither will He cleanse them' (III.77). 'Today We shall forget you as you forgot meeting Us on this Day of yours' (XLV.34). God's mercy is abounding, infinite. The exceptional nature of God's mercy is brought home, twice, in exceptional words: 'God has written down ['ordained'] on Himself mercy' (VI.12). There are two contexts in which God's mercy is emphasized: first in the context of the Resurrection Day (VI.12), and second in the context of His forgiveness (VI.54). This is further stressed: 'My mercy overspreads every thing' (VII.156).

The Qur'ān says that 'God is mercy.' The attribute of *al-Raḥmān* (the merciful) is mentioned fifty-six times. It is the only attribute occurring singly in relation to God's activity in the universe, in much the same way as the words Allāh and *Rabb* are used: *al-Raḥmān* 'sits on the Throne' (XX.5; XXV.59); *al-Raḥmān* 'has taught the Qur'ān, and created man' (LV.1–4); '*Al-Raḥmān* sends down the revelation' (XXXVI.15; LV.1–2). It is used alternatively for Allāh; and total identification of Allāh with *al-Raḥmān* is made explicit: 'Call upon Allāh, or call upon *al-Raḥmān*' (XVII.110). As He is infinitely merciful, so is He ever mercy-giving, *al-Raḥmān*. His every activity is an activity of mercy-giving. Creation itself is a manifestation of His mercy: 'Every created being praises Him' (XVII.44). Whatever He creates is provided with everything it needs for sustenance, growth and self-fulfilment. This aspect of mercy is *rubūbiyya*; God is *Rabb*. The alternation of day and night, the suitability of Earth for human habitation, as well as the provision of sustenance from the heavens and the Earth, the winds and clouds and rain, the storage and supply of water, the mountains and valleys, the animals and plants, the variety of colours, sexes and procreation, are all acts of sustenance and mercy. So are divine guidance, availability of divine forgiveness, and justice and mercy on Judgement Day.

III–3.2   Folio written in maghrebi from a square format Qurʾān
parchement. North Africa, thirteenth–fourteenth century
© Nasser Khalili Collection of Islamic Art (Nour Foundation)

When people become deaf and blind to the voices and signs within
themselves and in nature, beckoning them to the straight path, they lose
their way and go astray. God, in His great mercy, sends His messengers and
books to guide them back.[36] Humans, as free beings, slip, falter, make mistakes
and commit sins. But as they then repent, return to Him and ask for His
forgiveness, His mercy is always there to embrace them.

From God's mercy, the Qurʾān proceeds to elaborate God's sustenance
and lordship. Being the creator, the sustainer, and the mercy-giver, He is
necessarily the master, the owner and the possessor of everything. He is
the only sovereign ruler: everything is under His power, to everywhere His
authority extends. The attribute of *Rabb,* which the Qurʾān so often uses for
God, is both the description and ground for His sole lordship.[37] These themes,

36. 'We have sent it [the Qurʾān] down on a blessed night. We have always been sending [Our
guidance] as a mercy from your Lord' (XLIV.3–6).
37. 'God is the Owner of everything in the heavens and the earth and everything in between
them' (V.17–18); 'His Kingdom extends everywhere' (LVII.2; LI.47; II.255).

brief but profound in meaning and implications, are stressed in the Qur'ān
repeatedly.

Being the sole Lord, the Qur'ān says, 'He has power and authority over
everything' (II.20, 106), a theme which occurs thirty times in these very
words, and many more times in varying forms. This again is the essence
of the human relationship with the one God. All these attributes are inter-
related. Being mercy-giving, He is all-powerful and all-mighty. His power is
such that 'when He wills a thing to be, He says to it "Be" and it is. So glory
be to Him, in Whose Hand is the dominion over all things' (XXXVI.81–3).
Neither will nor power other than His shall prevail, or can overturn His will.
None but He could do anything, 'were He to take away light and prolong
the night forever, or take away the night and prolong the daylight forever'
(XXVIII.71–2).

Human life inherently and continually faces good and harm, gain and
loss, joy and pain. But neither good nor harm comes to anyone unless God
so wills.[38] No one apart from God has any power to harm or benefit a person,
and hence no one else should be made a god (X.106). Nothing is beyond His
knowledge. He even knows what is hidden inside human hearts.[39]

The Qur'ān has no room for a clock-maker God, who has created but
does not rule and govern. On the contrary, it repeatedly makes it plain that
God not only created, 'He also sits upon the Throne' (X.3), and all affairs are
directed by Him. He is the Lord of space as well as time. He is the God of
nature as well as of history. 'God is He who created the heavens and the earth,
and all between them, in six days, then seated Himself upon the Throne ….
He directs all affairs from heaven to earth' (XXXII.4–5); 'To Him belongs the
kingdom of the heavens and the earth; and unto Him all matters are returned
(for decision)' (LVII.5).

The greatest rebellion against God, therefore, is to make gods other than
God. *Shirk*, idolatry or the association of other gods with the one God, is the
most heinous violation of human nature and the nature of the universe. That
is why it is one of those sins that do not deserve forgiveness.

38. 'No calamity can ever befall unless it be by God's leave; he who has faith in God, He guides
his heart' (LXIV.11; LVII.22–3). 'If God should touch you with misfortune, there is none
who could remove it except Him; and if He intends good for you, there is none who could
turn away his bounty' (X.107; VI.17).

39. The Qur'ān stresses this repeatedly. 'He has full knowledge of everything' (II.29). 'He
knows whatever enters the earth, and whatever comes out of it, and whatever comes
down from heaven, and whatever goes up into it' (LVII.4). 'With Him are the keys of the
Unseen; none knows them but He. He knows what is in land and sea; not a leaf falls, but
He knows it. Not a grain in the earth's shadows, not a thing, living or dead, but it is in a
Book Manifest. It is He who recalls you by night, and He knows what you work in daytime,
then He raises you up each day, that a term set by him may be fulfilled' (VI.59–60).

Gods, however, are not made only of stone and wood, of flesh and blood, of cosmic objects and natural forces, of angels and demons. Even self-desires, opinions, and convictions can become gods. 'Have you, then, seen him who has taken as his god his desire?' (XXV.43). In the same way, our culture and society can also become gods. 'We shall follow only the way of our ancestors' (II.170; V.104; XXXI.21). To follow and obey those who lay down laws and ways which God has not sanctioned amounts to making them partners with God (XLII.21; VI.121). Even conceding absolute legislative authority, whether to persons or institutions, amounts to making them gods (IX.31).

The central message of all divine revelations in all ages has been 'I am your only Lord, so worship, serve and obey Me alone' (XXI.92). Significantly, the call goes further, explicitly demanding what is inherent: 'Repudiate every power in rebellion against Me, and never make anyone a god, because there is none apart from Me: they are all false, mere names' (VII.71; XII.40; LIII.23). The uniqueness of the Qur'ān lies in making the implicit explicit: in making it manifest, critical and essential.

Making all life God-centred has cosmic dimensions. To accept the reality of the creator is to accept Him as the only Lord, and the only source of guidance. Such acceptance brings all life and being under His rule. He is worshipped with our entire being, with the heart and the body. He rules everywhere, in homes as in the hearts, in manners as in minds, in public as in private life. He exercises sovereignty over the soul as well as over society. Prayer and progress become milestones along one straight path. The decision to surrender is personal and free, but once we commit our life to God, our commitment must be total. A ceaseless striving towards that end is the substance of a life of faith in God. Affirmation of and allegiance to the One God, *tawḥīd*, then is the issue, not power and politics. Nothing should be wilfully left out of His lordship, not even the tiniest territory of life, whether in our heart or our behaviour. Otherwise, God's worship would be incomplete, less than total, and life less than *muslim*, in the technical sense of the word. How then can power, politics and the state be allowed to remain outside His kingship? How can they remain out of our foremost duty to worship Him alone, or out of our ultimate concern to earn His pleasure? Shall whoever has control of them, whether independently or in defiance of God, not become a god? Shall they not end up becoming gods themselves? And powerful gods, too!

These questions are extremely important and central to human life. For what is power? In a comprehensive sense, it is the ability or authority to act, or make others act, as we choose or will. In a relational situation, obedience is its necessary consequence. Power relations are thus the substance of life, especially in the sense that they form the basis and texture of all social relations and institutions. No life can be God's without bringing all such relations

under God. Nor can anyone claim or exercise power, or demand obedience, independently of God, without becoming a god. *La ḥawla wa-lā quwwata illā bi-l-llāhi al-ʿaliyyi -l-ʿaẓīm*: neither effort nor power can succeed save with God, the most high and great.

In common parlance, however, power is understood only as political. It especially stands for the power of states, the rights of individuals, and the influence exerted over citizens and society through political authority. In this restricted sense too, it is obviously important to bring it under God. *Tawḥīd* requires that political power be exercised, and that rights be given, according to God's will. The modern state is a recent invention, but state power has always been there. Whenever the state exercises its authority independently of God, it becomes a god. Such powers and institutions have always had the propensity to become gods. Western notions of power, however, nurtured in a godless culture, have made them omnipotent.

Such power, wherever it resides, cannot coexist with a life which demands surrender to one God alone. How can any created being, individual or institution, be allowed to have an unlimited right to influence other created beings in ways not intended by the creator and through means not approved by Him? How can it force obedience, absolute obedience, to its will in disregard of God's – on whatever basis? If it can do this, then it too would be a god.

Science, technology, race, language, nation, country, culture, state and those unguided by revelation – these are some of the modern-day gods which, in the light of the Qur'ān's teachings, ought to be dethroned. These new 'gods' are no less pernicious than the 'idols' fashioned by polytheistic man. Gods described in the Qur'ān are in no way accorded different statuses from all claims made to power and worship by these contemporary gods. Contemporary trends of rebellion against God neither deny God's existence, nor make gods apart from God. Rather they exclude God from human life and make Him irrelevant and redundant to human concerns.[40] They exclude God in the name of human self-sufficiency and under the claim that 'man has come of age' and people stand in no need of any extra-human interference in their affairs, or any supernatural explanation of natural phenomena. To this insolence, the Qur'ān points out in the very first revelation, 'No, indeed man transgresses [all limits], for he believes himself self-sufficient' (XCVI.6–7).

40. Speaking of people who exclude, ignore or neglect God, and are unmindful of Him, the Qur'ān says, 'Be not like those who forgot God, and so He made them forget [what is good for] their own selves' (LIX.19). 'And pay no heed to anyone whose heart We have made neglectful of Our remembrance so that he follows his own desires, and all his affairs have become subject to excesses' (XVIII.28).

The signs of God

In essence, the overarching theme of the Qur'ān is to guide human beings to God, permeate their existence with the consciousness of God, fill their memory with the thought of God, lead them ever closer to God, and help them shape their lives as God wills them to live them. Every verse of the Qur'ān points and leads to God. Directing people to God, each verse is, therefore, an *āya*, or a sign, a sign of God – a clear, luminous, indubitable sign.

The same God Who has sent down the Qur'ān has also created the universe and everything in it, and – governing and directing all affairs – is as much the sovereign God of history as of the universe. Hence, the Qur'ān continuously points to everything in the universe, in human life, and in history too, as 'signs of God' (II.21; LI.20–23; XLI.53; XII.105; X.1–6; XIII.1–4; XVI.1–18; XXX.17–27). The realm of nature and history is for the person who 'has a heart' (L.37) or 'will give an ear with a conscious mind' (L.37). It is for anyone who is prepared to see and think. This realm brings them into communion with God, nature, history and their own selves. Then, this world of everyday experience brings them into a continuing encounter with God's infinite mercy and majesty, His absolute power, and His judgement.[41]

Just as people are shaken to their roots as they recite and reflect upon the Qur'ānic *āyas* (signs), they are also moved as they begin to encounter God in nature and history. If they see, hear and reflect through these signs, people are sure to find that everything in the universe is dependent on God's power, mercy and majesty. The wonderful, orderly, harmonious universe points to an all-mighty, all-wise, all-knowing, all-merciful being behind it. They also point to a purposeful creation, and hence to judgement in history and in the Next Life. These signs make it amply evident that, to understand the universe, there is no need for any god beside God. Indeed, any other god beside God would only create chaos in the universe.

The godly life of taqwā

As soon as people choose to respond to the divine summons and follow God's guidance, their foremost task is to let God be their only God. The Qur'ān constantly stresses that to do so, they should immediately begin translating their commitment to God into a life lived in total surrender to His will: they should transform their private and public lives, mind and body, heart and

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41. The Qur'ān says, 'Surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth and in the alternation of day and night there are signs [*āyas*] for all who possess insight. It is they who remember God when they stand, when they sit, and when they lie down, and reflect upon the creation of the heavens and earth [saying], "Our Lord, You have not created this [creation] without meaning and purpose"' (III.190–1).

home, soul and society, into godly lives. This life is summed up as the life of faith (*īmān*). *Īmān* is an act, an ideal and a state of being, and a life dedicated to the doing of good deeds (*al-ṣāliḥāt*). It is also striving to do all that would earn God's pleasure, and fearing to do anything that might displease – and consequently alienate people from – Him.

A mere confession of the *shahāda*, or *kalima*, the profession of faith, might suffice legally for belonging to the *umma*, the Muslim community (IX.5, 11). But the act of faith that finds God's acceptance is that act which leads a person to live a godly life. This life is centred on making God the ultimate goal of all desires and endeavours, on giving our heart and soul to Him, and on living and dying in love for Him.[42]

The Qur'ān often points to Abraham as the exemplary model of such godly life, and emphasizes that the essence of his example lies in his becoming *ḥanīf*, that is, in turning away from all else besides God, and becoming only His. All other messengers too are presented as models to be followed: 'Follow, then, their guidance' (VI.90).

Only living in total surrender (*islām*) to their creator brings human beings to peace with God, with themselves, and with the universe around them. *Islām* means not only 'surrender' but also 'peace'. The Qur'ān sets forth a beautiful parable in this regard. The tiny seed of the word and the act of faith planted within the heart grows into a mighty, firmly rooted tree, with its branches reaching out all over the sky, providing their shade and fruits – of goodness, justice and mercy – in all seasons to individuals and societies (see XIV.24–5).

The Qur'ān, from the very beginning, defines the quality of this godly life as *taqwā,* and avers that it has come primarily to guide humankind to develop *taqwā* (II.2). *Taqwā* literally means 'to save oneself from, or to guard against, harm.' The only real harm, and the lasting one, is caused by God's punishment invited by our wrong actions. In this sense, *taqwā* is translated as 'fearing God'. And because its attainment depends entirely on how much we are conscious of God, of being in His presence, of meeting Him one Day to account for our lives, it may be translated as 'God-consciousness' as well.

Saving ourselves from harm or loss, and acquiring benefit or gain, are the two most powerful motivating forces in human life. That is why the Qur'ān uses the word *taqwā* for the quality of life it desires people to live. *Taqwā* in the Qur'ān encompasses all aspects of a good life: starting from faith, going through prayers, alms-giving, fasting, pilgrimage, nightly vigils, and extending

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42. 'Among men there are some who sell themselves to seek God's pleasure' (II.207). 'I have turned my face unto Him Who has brought into being the heavens and the earth, having turned away from all else' (VI.79). 'O you who have faith! Surrender yourself wholly unto God, and follow not Satan's footsteps' (II.208). 'Say, "My prayers, and my sacrifices, and my living and my dying all belong to God (alone)"' (VI.162). 'And they give away what they possess out of love for Him' (II.177).

to justice, social ethics and law, even personal hygiene. In fact there is no aspect of life, no divine command, that is not in one way or another grounded in *taqwā* or linked with it as its source, spirit or fruit (see especially II.2–5, 177; LI.15–19; III.130–9; XLIX.10–15; V.2, 7–8).

It is the *muttaqūn*, the God-conscious, who will deserve all the successes and rewards in the Hereafter as well as in this world (e.g. LXV.2–5). Societies and nations that possess the qualities of *īmān* and *taqwā* are especially promised an abundance of material benefits too.[43]

Taqwā shapes a person's entire life: their inward and outward behaviour, their heart and home, their personal piety and politics, and their individual and social conduct. But essentially it is an inward quality, a power within the heart (e.g. XXII.32, 46; XLVIII.3). Hence, only God can have a true measure of it, and any pride or boasting on account of *taqwā* is strongly criticized (IV.49).

Taqwā gives people the strength and ability to overcome impediments in obeying God's command like the whisperings from within, the temptations from without, the natural human weaknesses, petty-mindedness and love of the immediate and superfluous, and the urge for the instant gratification of desires. It is the best provision to take along and to earn during the pilgrimage. More specifically the demands of fasting include *taqwā*, though it is also generated by constancy in devotional prayers and in the giving of alms. It is, for example, during fasting that we give up even perfectly legitimate physical desires like hunger, thirst and sex for the sake of God. We are thus trained to overcome unlawful desires as well.

Faith in the unseen, *ghayb*, is the solid rock on which *taqwā* is built. In a life of *taqwā*, we have to give up what is tangible and immediately available for the sake of what lies with God, behind the veil of the unseen. The stronger the faith that we are always in God's presence, that His promises of Paradise and warnings about Hell are real, the greater the strength we have to overcome temptation. That is why the Qur'ān says that it is people who possess *taqwā* 'who believe in the Unseen' (II.3).

The crux of all Qur'ānic themes about godly life is that humans should acknowledge God as the only God, ever remain conscious of Him, remember Him 'as much and as often as he can' (XXXIII.31), in the 'morning and evening' (LXXVI.25), and in every state, whether standing, sitting or lying down on their sides (III.191). This consciousness and remembrance – *dhikr* in Qur'ānic parlance – is the key to godly life, because memory is the key to all human actions. The five daily ritual prayers have been instituted primarily to perpetuate the remembrance of God: 'And be constant in devotional prayers, so as to remember Me' (XX.14).

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43. 'Had the peoples of the cities īmān and taqwā, We would have opened upon them blessings from heaven and earth' (VII.96; see also III.120, 125).

In order to inculcate *taqwā*, the Qur'ān makes its readers constantly alive to the reality of God. It repeatedly reminds them that God is with people wherever they are – seeing, hearing, and knowing everything people think or do, even the whisperings of their own selves and the thoughts hidden in the deepest recesses of their hearts. It also constantly reminds them that one day they are certain to return to God to render Him a full account of their earthly lives. God will then judge human beings and reward or punish them as the case may be. On that Day nothing will benefit or harm them except what they have done here and now (see, e.g. XX.109; LX.3; II.123; XXIV.48; X.52; IX.121; XX.15; XLV.28. See also LIX.18; XXXI.33; L.16–18; X.61–3).

'Fear God as He ought to be feared, and see that you do not die, save while living in surrender to Him' (III.102). This task of developing *taqwā*, living a godly life, in a world where freedom pulls people in very many opposite directions, is an uphill task, and the journey is long and arduous. But take heart, the Qur'ān categorically assures; God does not require anything from you which is beyond your ability and reach. 'God does not charge any person with any duty beyond his ability' (II.286). Being all-merciful, God does not make human success in this earthly trial dependent on a *taqwā* which is too difficult or impossible to attain.

Taqwā has an amazing quality about it. Not only is it the ultimate measure of life to be desired and pursued, but as soon as we begin to make an effort and gain some *taqwā*, it also begins to increase. The qualities of *taqwā* are to be pursued, though they may not necessarily be attained in full measure or with perfection. 'Those who are willing to be guided, He increases them in guidance, and makes them grow in taqwā' (XLVII.17).

Because all blessings are from God alone, the Qur'ān calls insistently that all life should be lived praising and thanking Him. It opens with the theme of praise: 'All praises and thanks [*ḥamd*] belong to God alone' (I.2). The instruction to praise and thank God, in various forms and contexts, runs throughout the text of the Qur'ān.[44] Thankful praise, *ḥamd*, according to the Qur'ān, is thus the beginning and the end of faith. It is the most fundamental and profound activity of faith. It lies at the centre of a godly life and is the spirit that moves through whatever a believer says, does or thinks.

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44. 'Praise your Lord when you arise, and in the night praise Him and at the setting of stars' (LII.48–9); 'And praise your Lord before sunrise and before sunset' (XX.130); praise Him 'for having guided us' (VII.43); praise Him for having 'sent down the Book upon His servant' (XVIII.1); praise Him for having given 'help and victory' (CX.1–3). The last cry in the Hereafter after Judgement will be the cry of praise (XXXIX.75), and similarly, the praise of God will be the last invocation of the devout in Paradise (X.10). A being and a life permeated by praise and gratitude is in total harmony with the entire universe, for 'the seven heavens and the earth, and whatever they contain, extol Him; nothing is, that does not proclaim His praise' (XVII.44).

Throughout, the Qurʾān equates faith, *īmān*, with gratitude, *shukr*, and contrasts it with *kufr*, the act and attitude of denial of God, which also means ungratefulness.[45] The origin of faith is a deep awareness of God's unbounded mercy and limitless bounties, and not fear and terror of His punishment. The outcome of an awareness of God's bounties upon humanity and their gratitude to God can be no other but love for Him. In the context of a narration of such bounties, the Qurʾān cites the creation of the heavens and the Earth, day and night, rains, crops, biological life, winds and clouds. All these point to the most profound aspect of a life of faith: 'Those who have faith must love God more than anything else' (II.164–5).

But praise, gratitude and love always give rise to apprehensions and fear: fear of being unworthy of God's limitless blessing and mercy, fear of not showing enough gratitude, fear of losing His favours, fear of being deprived of His succour and of His love, and fear of earning His displeasure, anger and punishment. Numerous verses describe this dimension of godly life. But it is very significant that His fear is always placed in the context of His mercy and lordship, 'who fear the All-merciful (*al-Raḥmān*) without seeing Him' (XXXVI.11; L.33; XCVIII.8) or fear the day of meeting Him.

The sense of utter dependence on God's limitless power and mercy brings forth another basic aspect of godly life: *tawakkul*, or putting trust in God and entrusting everything to Him. The Qurʾān repeatedly emphasizes that nothing happens without His leave: nothing lies outside His power, or beyond His knowledge (LXXVI.30; VI.59; X.61). As none except God can do harm or good to humans (X.107), he/she should not worship, or fear, or call on anyone apart from God. This is the essence of *tawḥīd*.[46] But *tawakkul* in no way diminishes the responsibility to act and strive with all possible means at our disposal.

Parallel to the theme of praise and gratitude, the Qurʾān places another important theme: 'Seek forgiveness from your Lord. He is All-forgiving' (II.218). Humans are inherently liable to sin because of the very freedom they are given and the test they have been put to. Sin is essentially human 'ungratefulness' to God despite His limitless bounties: 'If you count God's blessing, you can not' (XIV.34). People are never able to thank God enough. This points not only to the inevitability of sin, but also to the inevitability of God's mercy and forgiveness. God's forgiveness of the repentant sinner is vouched for not only in the context of *ḥamd*, but also in the often repeated command to 'seek forgiveness'. 'Whosoever does evil, or wrongs himself,

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45. 'We have shown him the way, [it is up to him] to be grateful or ungrateful' (LXXVI.3). 'If you deny Him, God has no need of you, yet He does not like ingratitude in His servants; but if you are grateful, He likes it in you' (XXXIX.7).

46. 'Do not be an idolater, and do not call, apart from God, on that which neither profits nor harms you' (X.106).

and then seeks God's forgiveness, he will find God All-forgiving, ever Mercy-giving' (IV.110; see also XV.49; XX.82; IV.64; VI.54; XL.42).

The divine promise to forgive is inherent in the human travail. God taught Adam the very words in which to seek His forgiveness, and then forgave him (II.37; VII.23). This promise is repeated frequently in the Qurʾān, and so are the commands, calls and exhortations, directly and through messengers, to individuals and societies to seek His forgiveness.

The Qurʾān does not demand that those who are striving to live godly lives be free from sin. Rather, their hallmark is that as soon as they commit a sin, they immediately realize its gravity, and regret it; they are not adamant or insistent, but turn to God, and seek His forgiveness.[47]

People must take the initiative to ask for divine forgiveness (*istighfār*). Forgiveness cannot be obtained unless it is sought, and sought only from God. 'God turns unto those who turn unto Him' (XXV.71). It also must be sought before it is too late – before life's candle is burned (cf. IV.17–18).

All occasions and all people stand in dire need of *istighfār*. At the very moment when the Prophet – who had some years earlier been driven out from Mecca – victoriously entered the Holy City and realized the ultimate triumph of his mission, the Qurʾān directed him 'to praise God, and seek forgiveness from Him' (CX.3). The godly people who are highly praised by the Qurʾān for fighting by the side of the Prophets, neither wavering, nor showing any signs of weakness, 'constantly seek forgiveness from God for their sins and excesses' (III.147). Even God's messengers are instructed to seek His forgiveness (XLVII.19). Also, communities are exhorted to seek forgiveness and great material benefits are promised in return for doing so.[48]

Seeking forgiveness is a process of change through self-accountability, self-judgement and self-correction. It is a profound process of healing and of development. Hence the promise of material blessings.

As most personal sins have social dimensions, sins in human relations and the family, and in economic, political and civilizational relationships must also be acknowledged and forsaken for both individual salvation and social peace and progress. Therefore, seeking forgiveness from God is the most fundamental and all-encompassing Qurʾānic dimension of godly life.

What supports and sustains godly life against all external obstacles and internal temptations is the cardinal virtue of *ṣabr*, or patience, a recurrent

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47. 'When they commit a shameful deed or wrong themselves, they remember God, and seek forgiveness for their sins for who could forgive sins but God and do not knowingly insist in doing things they did' (III.135).
48. Before Hūd and other prophets, Noah called his people 'by night and by day … openly and in public and secretly in private, and said, "Ask your Lord to forgive your sins, He is ever All-forgiving. He will shower upon you abundant blessings from heaven, and aid you with wealth and children, and bestow upon you running waters"'' (LXXI.5–12).

theme in the Qurʾān. Literally, *ṣabr* means to bind, stay with and restrain. *Ṣabr* in the Qurʾān is not a passive quality in the sense of 'resignation', but is the strength to face all afflictions and the active pursuit of desired goals with steadfastness, perseverance and tenacity. Its role in shaping a godly life is pivotal.

The Qurʾān usually places *ṣabr* in the context of awareness, gratitude and praise, all generating and reinforcing one another.[49] In social relations as well, while struggling in the cause of God, *ṣabr* provides the strength and inspiration to abide by the Qurʾānic injunction of 'turning back evil with good' (XXVIII.54), and 'repelling the evil with what is better [i.e. good]' (XLI. 34–5). A cluster of virtues like controlling anger, forgiving people, showing compassion and kindness are also centred on *ṣabr*.

Communities, like individuals, are required to observe patience in their social life in the face of adversities and adversaries. Patience binds people together (XVIII.28), sustains and strengthens harmonious interpersonal relations, and generates cohesiveness and self-discipline against selfishness and against the forces of social disintegration. Thus, *ṣabr* imparts the strength that guarantees God's help, victory over foes, and attainment of social goals (VIII.45–6; III.120, 125; VII.137; XVI.96; XXIII.111; LXXVI.12).

The Qurʾān gives an equal emphasis to the theme of humans' proper relationship with their fellow human beings, indeed with all creatures, and even the universe. It treats this relationship as part and parcel of God-consciousness. The theme of compassion, kindness and mercy, on the one hand, and justice and equity, on the other, is the core and substance of all social ethics, public morality and law which the Qurʾān teaches.[50] Schooled in faith, praise and gratitude, love and fear, seeking forgiveness and observing patience, a Muslim must live a life of mercy and compassion, justice and fairness, tolerance and forgiveness.

A Muslim's life must be spent in 'giving' instead of in 'having' and 'taking' (XCII.5–10). Those 'who did not believe in God the All-mighty and never urge others to feed the needy' will be severely punished in the Hereafter (LXIX.30–4); 'those who give the lie to the Judgement are the ones who thrust the orphan away, do not urge others to feed the needy … make display of their praying, and refuse charity' (CVII.1–7). On the contrary, those with

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49. 'Seek help in patience and prayer; surely God is with the patient' (II.153). 'Be patient, but your patience will come from none but God' (XVI.127). 'And be patient in (awaiting) your Lord's judgement, surely you are before Our eyes' (LII.48). 'Face with patience what they say, and praise your Lord' (XX.130; L.39).

50. 'God enjoins justice, and goodness, kindness and compassion and giving to kinsfolk, and He forbids all that is shameful, and wrong, and all transgression …. And fulfil your pledge to God, whenever you pledge, and do not break oaths after having confirmed them' (XVI.90–1).

whom God is pleased sleep little, worshipping God at night and seeking His forgiveness during the pre-dawn hours, and 'in all that they possess there is always a share for beggars and have-nots' (LI.17–19); and 'whatever God has given them [and not only wealth], they spend on others' (XXXII.16). The Qur'ān inculcates this spirit in Muslims with regard to all living things and the rest of God's creation.

Loving God more than all else is the true measure of *īmān* (II.165). Once such love comes to reside in our heart, we must also love His creatures and show them compassion. When we believe that everything we have – body, mind and wealth – belongs to God rather than to us, and has been given to us out of God's great mercy, we become willing to give ourselves and our wealth away to others 'out of his love for Him' (II.177; LXXVI.8). Then we are cured of our pettiness, narrow-mindedness and avarice. *Zakāt,* the second pillar of Islam, is the kernel of this life of 'giving' rather than 'having'.

The Prophet is 'a mercy for all the worlds' (XXI.107) and 'full of compassion and mercy towards the believers' (IX.128). Thus, those who follow the Prophet too are 'full of mercy towards one another' (XLVIII.29). But this extends to all humankind, and to all conduct and behaviour. Indeed, as the Prophet Muḥammad explained, if you have nothing to give, at least have a smiling face and a kind word.[51]

The orbit of those who must be treated with justice and goodness is quite wide: 'Do good unto your parents and near of kin, and orphans, and the needy, and the neighbour who is a stranger, and the person by your side, and the wayfarer, and those whom you rightfully possess' (IV.36). Regarding people who are yet unbelievers and idolaters, the Qur'ān instructs that those 'who have not fought against you regarding your faith [*dīn*] nor expelled you from your homes' deserve that 'you should be kindly to them, and act justly towards them, surely God loves the just' (LX.8).

In addition to the great emphasis on forgiveness, the Qur'ān also requires the controlling of anger. Large-heartedness which makes people generous and spend their wealth 'in time of hardship as in time of plenty' (III.134), also leads to 'controlling anger, forgiving people and seeking of forgiveness from God' (III.134–5). Those who expect God to forgive all their sins should

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51. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Zakāt, Bāb al-Ḥathth ʿala-l-ṣadaqa wa-law bi-shiqqi ṭamaratin aw kalimatin ṭayyiba, op. cit.* The Qur'ān speaks often of the traits it deems praiseworthy in Muslims. The 'true servants of the All-merciful are only they who walk (conduct themselves) on earth with gentleness, and whenever the foolish address them (to ridicule and fight), they reply with words of peace' (XXV.63). 'And do not turn you cheek away from people in scorn, and do not walk on earth haughtily. Be modest in your bearing, and keep your voice low' (XXXI.18–19). Even words spoken should be kind, sweet and just: 'You shall speak to all people in a kindly way' (II.83); 'when you speak, be just, even though it be [against] near of kin' (VI.152).

extend forgiveness even to those who behave wrongfully towards them and are ungrateful (XXIV.22). While permission to demand retribution is given, it is stressed that 'if you have to respond to an attack, respond only to the extent of attack levelled against you; but to remain patient is better for you' (XVI.126). 'And remember that it is absolutely prohibited to go beyond what is even and fair requital, even against erstwhile oppressors and tyrants' (II.190; XLII.40). Hence 'whoever forgives and makes peace will have his reward from God' (XLII.40).

The Qur'ān treats the theme of justice as the quintessence of mercy, and mentions it as the cornerstone of godly life. God's justice is an essential manifestation of His mercy and lordship in history (VI.12) and on the Day of Judgement (I.1–4). It is concomitant with the creation of human beings and His grace in guiding them through revelation and endowing them with moral responsibility (LV.1–9). Justice is the supreme rule of God's kingdom.[52] The whole object of sending the messengers and sending down the books is described succinctly in the Holy Book: 'so that people might behave with justice' (LVII.25).

The Qur'ān commands that justice must be done and upheld 'even though it be against your own selves or your parents and kinsfolk, whether the man be rich or poor; God's claim takes precedence over either of them. Do not follow your own desires, lest you swerve form justice' (IV.135), so much so that it requires that even enemies be treated justly.[53]

Emanating from justice and compassion are the social ethics of fellowship between individuals, as the equal children of Adam, but especially between Muslim and Muslim, as fellow-travellers on the path of God. These include the inviolability of life, property and honour.[54]

The sterling quality of character which gives the strength to remain true to the demands of godly life is the quality of being true to our pledge, covenant, or vow, be it made with God or with our fellow human beings. Hence, the Qur'ān gives prominence to this aspect of *taqwā* (II.177; VI.152; XVI.91; XVII.34; III.76). Those who violate their covenant or pledge 'with God' are the ones who are iniquitous and go astray. This leads them to 'cut asunder what God has bidden to be joined' (II.27) and to behave unjustly

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52. 'God bears witness that there is no God but He and [so do] the angels and people possessing knowledge ruling [over everything] with justice' (III.18). In this context, the Qur'ān repeatedly stresses to those who serve only One, All-merciful God: 'Do not transgress in the balance, and weigh with justice, and do not skimp in the balance' (LV.8–9; see also VI.152; XVII.35; VII.85; XI.84–5). 'I have been commanded to be just', the Prophet is instructed to declare (VII.29; XLII.15).

53. 'Never let your hatred of a people, those who barred you from the House of Worship, lead you into transgressing the limits [of justice]' (V.8).

54. 'Whoso kills a person unless it be [in punishment] for murder or for spreading corruption on earth is as he has killed all mankind; and whoso saves a life, is as he had saved the lives of all humankind' (V.32; see also VI.151; XXV.68; IV.92–3; XVII.33).

and oppressively. Being true to our word and upholding mutual rights and duties is obligatory in all relationships: interpersonal relations, familial bonds, obligations towards the needy, the destitute and neighbours. Those who fail in this regard 'cause corruption to spread on earth' (II.27).

The Qur'ān's reference to the human covenant with God refers primarily to the primordial pledge to God to serve and worship Him alone. But every pledge given by one person to another person, or to a collectivity, according to the Qur'ān, is a 'pledge to God' and must be fulfilled as such. This pledge to the creator includes all moral and social obligations toward all created beings arising from one's faith in God.

The family is the heart of the social order and an integral part of godly life. While the Qur'ān devotes little space to the details of the rites of worship, it deals at length with the rules and norms of family matters, like marriage, divorce and inheritance.

The Qur'ān takes great care to accord women an equal status as people, as the linchpins of the family, and as members of the social and moral order it establishes. The very idea of original sin is done away with, and any notion that women were the source of evil is demolished. Men and women have the same moral nature, same freedom, same trial, same potential for receiving God's rewards and punishments. 'Whosoever does righteous deeds, man or woman, and is a believer, shall enter paradise and shall not be wronged by as much as the groove of a date-stone' (IV.124). Similarly, there is no difference in the moral obligations of men and women, whether pertaining to personal piety, ethics, social responsibility or *jihād*, striving in the cause of God (XXXIII.35; IV.124; III.195).

The relationship of mutual love and support between husband and wife is beautifully described in the Qur'ān: 'And of His signs is that He creates for you, of your own kind, spouses, so that you might repose in them, and He sets between you love and mercy' (XXX.21). In another verse, the metaphor used is this: 'They are as a garment for you, and you are as a garment for them' (II.187). The Qur'ān is also very explicit on the spouses' mutual rights and duties: 'The rights of wives [with regard to their husbands] are equal to the [husbands'] rights with regard to them, although men have precedence over them' (II.228). But man's precedence over woman is only regarding his social role within the family structure.

While prescribing injunctions, the Qur'ān at every step strongly stresses the inward spirit, and inveighs heavily against empty religiosity hoisted on empty hearts, or rites and rituals devoid of the inner dimension.[55]

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55. 'True piety does not consist in turning your face towards the East or the West' (II.177). For 'both the East and the West belong to Allāh. To whichever direction you turn, Allāh's countenance will be there' (II.115). So 'turn your face towards the Holy Mosque [of Ka'ba]' (II.144) and, above all, 'vie with one another in doing good deeds' (II.148). Likewise,

God's infinite mercy envelops people and takes charge of them as soon as they choose to live a godly life. What He requires from humans is a decision and determination to turn to God, and to make whatever effort they can to live in submission to, and carry out, the will of God. Once they make the effort, God becomes their helper. He keeps them on the right path, guides them along, supports them, forgives them when they fail and falter, acts as their guardian and protector, becomes their refuge from all hazards, and sustains, nourishes, and nurtures them (II.218; IV.95; VI.127; VIII.74; IX.19–22 and 88–9; XVI.110; XXII.50 and 78; XXIX.7 and 69; XXXIV.4; XLV.30; and LXI.10–14).

The eternal, universal message and the Muslim *umma*

The Prophet Muḥammad is the last Messenger of God, and was sent to all humankind. Therefore, the Qurʾān is a message for all people for all time to come, though its first addressees had to be specific people, in a specific context of time and space. 'Say, [O Muḥammad!] "O humankind, I am the Messenger of God to you all, of Him to Whom belongs the kingdom of the heavens and of the earth"' (VII.158). 'We have not sent you otherwise than to humankind at large, to be a herald of good tidings and a warner, but most people do not understand' (XXXIV.28).

What was sent down upon the Prophet, who was to pass away, was therefore given in the charge and trust of a community, commissioned to discharging the same duty towards the Qurʾān as the Prophet did. The Qurʾān began to shape that community from the moment it began to come down. The Qurʾān called it the *umma muslima*, a community living in total surrender to God alone. The Holy Book laid down, with great emphasis and in copious detail, this community's duties and responsibilities. It also promised the community rewards if it faithfully discharged these duties and responsibilities and warned it of dire consequences if it neglected or betrayed its teachings. This is an important theme, vital for the Qurʾān as a living document, which it constantly takes up.[56]

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while fasting is important but it is no less important that 'you do not devour one another's possessions wrongfully, and neither employ legal artifices' (II.188). The same emphasis on the true spirit and purpose of religious acts is evident from the following verse which pertains to the ritual of animal sacrifice: 'Never does the flesh [of sacrificial animals] reach God, and neither does their blood; it is only your God-consciousness that finds acceptance with Him' (XXII.37). In like manner, along with emphasizing *ṣalāt* as a basic religious duty, the Qurʾān also emphasizes that success belongs to those believers '*who humble themselves in their Prayer*' (XXIII.2).

56. 'Thus we have appointed you a middlemost community [*ummatan wasaṭan*], so that you may be witnesses [to the truth] before all mankind, [just as] the Messenger is a witness to it before you' (II.143; see also XXII.78).

From every people in whose charge and care a divine book was ever given, a pledge was always taken that they must discharge the responsibility entrusted to them. The pledge required from those who were granted earlier Books is mentioned in the Qur'ān.[57] In this respect, warnings of serious consequences are given to the *umma* if it does not discharge its responsibility towards the Qur'ān (II.174; II.159–61; III.77). For this purpose, they have been shown the consequences faced by the Jews and the Christians – the earlier followers of the divine message – for violating God's pledge. *Al-Baqara*, *Āl ʿImrān* and *al-Māʾida, sūra* II, III and V, located at the very beginning of the Qur'ān, refer to this subject in great detail. Whatever is said about the followers of earlier faiths is not intended primarily to condemn them, but rather to warn Muslims, the adherents of the last and final divine message.

The *umma* is charged with the mission of establishing a just social order, caring for the deprived and weak: 'O Believers, be upholders of justice, [thus] bearing witness for the sake of God, even though it be against yourselves, or your parents, or kinsmen; whether the man be rich or poor, God's claim takes precedence over either of them' (IV.135; see also V.8).

Muslims are required to strive for their utmost to prevent corruption and injustice and to establish righteousness and justice. This struggle is *jihād*, the theme the Qur'ān stresses again and again. As it has a bearing upon the peace and welfare of all humanity, according to the Qur'ān, *jihād* is the highest virtue, and the desire for it has been put parallel to the love for God and His Messenger.[58]

God's judgement

Another major theme of the Qur'ān is divine judgement. The Qur'ān's verses drive into human consciousness the stark reality and eventuality of such a judgement, its utter inevitability, and its rationale. They also describe, very vividly and graphically, and in great detail, the scenes of judgement, reward and punishment.

Human beings have been given moral responsibility, the sense of right and wrong and the freedom of moral choice. They have been put on Earth to be tested on how they use their freedom (XXXIII.72–3; LXVII.2). This requires that they be judged both individually (XIX.95) and collectively (X.4). Were no judgement to take place in history and after life ends, the very notion

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57. 'Make it known to humankind, and do not conceal it. But they cast this pledge behind their backs and bartered it away for a small price. How evil was their bargain!' (III.187).
58. *Jihād* is a due test of this love (IX.24). 'Do you consider the giving of water to pilgrims and the inhabiting of the Holy Mosque as being equal to [the deeds of] one who believes in God at the Last Day and strives hard in the cause of God' (IX.19. 'Go forth, light and heavy! Strive hard in God's cause with your possessions and your lives' (IX.41). 'Unless you do this [unite and strive in God's cause], there will be great oppression on earth, and great corruption' (VIII.73).

of a purposeful creation of humans and the universe by an all-wise and all-merciful God would be absurd.[59]

The fact that God has guided humans to the right way of living through their innate nature, the universe around them, and His messengers, requires that they should be accountable for their response to the divine guidance (VII.6). God's continuing judgement in history is also a manifestation of His mercy and justice: 'The last remnant of those who had been bent on evildoing was cut off: all praise belongs to God, the Lord of all the worlds' (VI.45).

The Qurʾān puts judgement in the context of God's infinite mercy. It is an act of great mercy, and not an act of revenge. For God's mercy demands that justice be done and redress provided to those who are wronged. Treating at par those who use their God-given freedom rightly and those who go wrong would negate that mercy. God sitting in judgement will be the God of mercy, *al-Raḥmān*, a fact to which the Qurʾān points in many places (e.g. XIX.93 and 87; XX.108–9; XXV.26; XXXVI.52; LXXVIII.37).

The Qurʾān also deals extensively with doubts about the possibility of life after death. Look at the procreation of humans; the Qurʾān often asks: from nothingness to a tiny cell to orderly growth in the womb, to a being endowed with reason and volition (LXXVI.1–2; see also e.g. XXIII.12–16; XXII.5–7). Resurrection after death will not be different in essence and, therefore, cannot be considered an impossible or irrational phenomenon.[60]

The continuing re-creation around humans – their own cells, the plants, and the dead earth – is also an ever-present reminder of the inevitability and feasibility of resurrection (e.g. XXII.5–7). Look, too, at the creation of the heavens and the Earth, the Qurʾān further asks: should it be more difficult to resurrect the dead than to create the universe?[61] Or, can it be at all difficult for

59. The Qurʾān poignantly asks, 'Did you think that We created you without any purpose, and you would not be brought back to Us [for judgement]' (XXIII.115). 'We have not created the heavens and the earth in mere idle play' (XLIV.38). 'Do those who commit evil deeds think that We shall make them equal both in their life and their death as those who believe and do righteous deeds? How bad is their judgement! God has created the heavens and the earth with meaning and purpose and [therefore] every person shall be recompensed for what he has earned, and none shall be wronged' (XLV.21–2; see also XXXVIII.28). 'He will surely gather you all on Resurrection Day, the [coming of which] is beyond any doubt' (VI.12).

60. 'We have created you, why, then, do you not believe? … you know the coming into being in the first instance, why, then, do you not bethink yourselves' (LVI.57–62). 'And they ask, "What, when we have become bones and dust, shall we really be raised up again in a new creation?"… Then they ask, "Who is it that will bring us back to life?" Say, "He who brought you into being the first time." Then they will shake their heads at you [in disbelief] and ask, "When will this be?" Say, "It may well be soon"' (XVII.49–51; see also XVIII.48; LXXV.36–40; XXXVI.77–9).

61. 'Indeed the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of human beings …. Those that are blind and those that see are not equal, and those who believe and do righteous deeds and the wrongdoers [cannot be equal] …. The Last Hour is coming, let there be no doubt about it' (XL.57–9).

God to create a new order of the universe, similar to this order? 'Is not He, who created the heavens and the earth, able to create the like of them? Yes indeed He alone is the All-creating, the All-knowing' (XXXVI.81).

The open-ended nature of human beings' moral actions has consequences which extend far beyond their earthly life both in time and into other people's lives. People cannot be judged fairly and fully in his earthly life, or in this world. For that judgement to take place, the present world has to come to an end at an appointed time. Everything will perish. Human life too will end and people's account books will be closed. 'God has not created the heavens and earth and all that is between them without purpose and a term set [by Him]' (XXX.8). 'Everything shall perish, except His face' (XXVIII.88). 'Every person shall taste death and only on the Day of Resurrection you shall be paid in full your wages [for whatever you have done]' (III.185). 'Surely We shall bring the dead to life and We write down whatever deeds they have sent ahead and the traces [of good and evil] they leave behind: everything We record in a clear register' (XXXVI.12).

The time of the Last Hour, whether for a person or for the universe, has not been made known to humanity, for considering that God is All-forgiving, the test would not be fair and people would not try their utmost: 'The Last Hour is coming but I have kept it hidden so that every person may be recompensed for what he strove for' (XX.15).

Yet the urgency in the Qur'ānic tone leaves a deep sense of immediacy in every mind: the Hour is near at hand; it is coming; it may come any moment; it may be nearer than the twinkling of an eye. 'The knowledge [of the Hour] is only with my Lord … heavy it is in the heavens and the earth. It will not come on you but suddenly' (VII.187). 'And the matter of the Hour is as a twinkling of the eye, or nearer' (XVI.77).

The judging of responsibility requires a new moral universe in place of the present physical universe, where moral values and laws will prevail, where good intentions and moral actions will acquire value, while all worldly criteria, values, possessions and wealth will count for nothing. '[His promise will be fulfilled] on the Day when the earth shall be changed into another earth, as shall be the heavens, and when all shall appear before God, the One, the Omnipotent … so that God may recompense every person for all he earned' (XIV.48–51).

In the new moral world, it will be possible to weigh all actions, and even intentions, even the tiniest ones, to accord them their due value. 'So We shall set up just balances on the Resurrection Day and no person shall be wronged in the least even if there be the weight of one mustard-seed [of good or evil], We shall bring it forth' (XXI.47).

The due process of justice will be meticulously observed: a complete charge sheet will be handed over (XVII.13–14; XVIII.49; XXIII.62; XLV.29;

XCIX.2–8); full opportunity will be given for making any pleas; and witnesses will be produced to give evidence (XXXIX.69; XXXVI.65; XLI.20–22).

Judgement will be made only on the basis of faith and deeds. This is the eternal law, the Qur'ān says, and has been universally proclaimed: 'Has he not been told of what was in the revelation of Moses, and of Abraham … that no bearer of burdens shall bear another's burden and that nothing shall be accounted unto man but what he strives for' (LIII.36–41).

The Qur'ān makes it crystal clear that the only time and place to act to acquit ourselves well on the Day of Judgement is to act now and here on Earth. As soon as this life comes to an end, there will be no opportunity whatsoever to do anything, to make any amends, or to offer any excuses. Nor will any worldly thing be of any avail – intercession, or blood ties, or wealth, even if it were to fill up the entire Earth. Only good deeds will be of help (XXIII.99–108; XXXII.12–13; VI.27–8; XXXIX.54–9; XLII.47; XXX.57).

The rewards and punishments of the Day of Judgement – physical, psychological and spiritual – are described in great detail. They belong to the world of the unseen. These cannot be like what we encounter here, nor can they be totally different from them. This is because the Hereafter is a continuation of our earthly life, of the delights and pleasures we experience, and of what we value and desire in this world (II.25). The only way we can get some idea about the rewards and punishments of the Hereafter is through the language and experiences we are familiar with in this world.

As far as individuals are concerned, personal destiny and the end result of all pursuits lie in the Hereafter, *al-ākhira*, where success there is enduring and eternal. That is what people must strive and compete for (XXXVII.60–1; LXXXIII.26; III.133). This should suffice to inspire people to make those rewards the object of their pursuits here, and do whatever they can to escape the punishments of the life to come.

The responsibility and accountability of individuals is firmly established by a very elemental aspect of God's judgement, as stressed by the Qur'ān. All individuals will meet their Maker as individuals, and will be solely accountable for their personal life, whether private or public. 'And each one of them will come as an individual' (XIX.95; also XIX.80; VI.94).

Like Judgement in the Hereafter, judgement in history is one of the major themes of the Qur'ān. Nations, societies and civilizations too are judged by God in this world. A collective entity is also tested (X.14; VI.165; VII.129). Its destiny depends on how it uses its freedom and power, and on how it conducts itself with regard to the goals set for it by God.

A people rise, decay or perish as a consequence of their socio-moral conduct, as opposed to an individual whose life cycle is biological, inevitable and irreversible. No individuals die simply because they are evil, or have their life span extended because they are good. But such is not the fate of

communities. Their fate is neither cyclical nor organic, neither inevitable nor irreversible. It is governed primarily by moral laws.[62]

Deeds, no doubt, are the decisive factor in winning God's Paradise and His pleasure. But no one can win them unless they first deserve His forgiveness and mercy. For no one can be free from sin, nor can anyone ever be grateful enough for the limitless bounties of God. But it is only through their good deeds that people deserve God's forgiveness and mercy, and thus admittance into Paradise.

And finally, although the next life, *al-ākhira*, is the enduring and the eternal goal, the road to our destiny in *al-ākhira* lies in this world, *al-dunyā*. As a final goal for our life, this world is of no value. Yet *al-dunyā* is very important, for it is the only ground on which we can earn eternal bliss and reward in *al-ākhira*. If we had no life to give away, no body to exert with, no wealth to spend, no temptations to overcome, no desires to subdue, no beings to show us compassion and justice, we would have no opportunity to earn *al-ākhira*. Hence, *al-dunyā*, according to the Qur'ān, is a real, serious business. Its wealth is *khayr* (good) and *faḍl Allāh* (the bounty of God). All its worldly goods are God's blessings unless their possessors act in defiance of God. *Al-dunyā* is transient and in itself valueless; *al-ākhira* is enduring and priceless.

By making *al-dunyā* both worthless and highly valuable, the Qur'ān creates that beautiful, symbiotic relationship in which diverse, paradoxical demands, constantly in tension, are kept in a delicate, meaningful, enriching balance. The Qur'ān maintains this relationship in many matters: God's sovereignty and human freedom; the decisiveness of human actions and their absolute dependence on His mercy and forgiveness; the imperative of human obedience and the need for God's grace; and human hopes and fears.

The theme of God's judgement, here and in the Hereafter, inculcates a constant vigil and effort to prepare to meet the Maker: to send good deeds forward for tomorrow, to live in the present with our eye on the future, and to correct and improve the social order.

Characteristics

To round off our understanding of the Qur'ān's message and major themes, it is important to bear in mind some of its important characteristics.

The Qur'ān was revealed piecemeal over a period of about twenty-three years. Some readers, especially Westerners, complain about its alleged incoherence, disjointedness and jumbled narration. But if reflected upon properly and deeply, the entire Qur'ān, indeed each *sūra*, is found to be a

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62. 'We destroy no people but for the wrong they do to their own selves, and for the corruption they spread on earth.' This is the persistent, oft-repeated motif in the Qur'ān (XXII.45; XXIX.40; XI.117; VI.131; X.13).

coherent, orderly, dynamic whole, woven around pointed and interrelated themes. Once its coherence and themes are comprehended, it becomes a rich, meaningful and joyful enterprise to read the Qur'ān. The difficulties in comprehending its order and coherence arise because the Qur'ān is not arranged in chapters and paragraphs like a human book, which would have caused it to lose its dynamic, moving impact. The peculiar nuances of the Arabic language also present some challenges to the non-Arab reader and translator.

There is internal evidence within the Qur'ān which demonstrates that its arrangement is thematic, orderly and coherent. *sūra* and verses, and passages within a *sūra,* revealed at various times and in different contexts, were collected together under divine guidance and as instructed by the Prophet. The order in which they were recited in his time, the congruence of the opening theme of a *sūra* with the closing theme of the preceding *sūra,* are only a few of those obvious examples which demonstrate the unity and coherence of the Qur'ānic arrangement.

No doubt the Qur'ān was related to specific points in space and time, but its guidance is timeless and universal. Hence, it has not been arranged chronologically. But its arrangement is not dictated mechanically by the length of the *sūras*; otherwise, *al-Fātiḥa* would not have been the 'Opening'. One reason for the form of its compilation and arrangement is obvious. After the revelation came to an end, it had to be given in the charge and trust of the believers. Initially, the Qur'ān's first addressees were those who did not believe in its fundamental teachings – the unity of God, the Day of Judgement, revelation and prophethood. But once compiled, its first addressees were the believers themselves. The Qur'ān had, therefore, to speak to the Muslims about their purpose and mission, their community, and what needed to be done to keep their family and society wholesome and cohesive. These are the themes of *al-Baqara* (*sūra* II) and *Āl ʿImrān* (*sūra* III). That is why they have been placed in the beginning, not because they are the longest *sūras*.

It is also important to bear in mind that while every revelation in the Qur'ān is an event in time and has a context and locale, or an 'occasion of revelation' as the exegetes call it, its message has an enduring relevance. Therefore, while it is useful and sometimes necessary to know the historical details surrounding a specific revelation, to understand properly the meaning and contemporary relevance of the Qur'ān, such a revelation has to be transposed over time and understood in the present context. Put simply, every context to which the Qur'ān is relevant is an 'occasion of revelation'.

The Qur'ān's main objective being to guide humanity to the straight path, it does not go into details which are not relevant to this purpose. The Qur'ān, of course, contains nothing which is historically, scientifically, empirically or factually wrong; but it is not a book to teach history, astronomy, biology,

agriculture, medicine, or other branches of knowledge. Therefore, it does not mention any historical or scientific data in any more detail than is necessary for expounding its basic teachings. To search for lessons in science or history in the Qur'ān, or to weigh the Qur'ān in the changing scales of scientific and historical knowledge, misses a very important point: the purpose of its revelation, which is to guide humanity.

The Qur'ān does not mention the names of the Prophet's opponents except that of Abū Lahab, nor of his Companions except that of Zayd, or his own name except in four places. Though world history and the rise and fall of nations and civilizations is a major theme of the Qur'ān, the historical facts are kept to a bare minimum. What is important is the awareness of God that we gain from considering historical events, looking at the cosmos, contemplating nature, or pondering procreation genetics. The beauty in the Qur'ānic treatment of such themes lies in that it is equally educative for a layperson and for an expert, and is never out of step with the level of knowledge reached by humanity in any period.

The style of the Qur'ān is unique. The Holy Book's purpose is not to inform people or sermonize them, but to awaken them, to quicken their hearts, to change their minds, to alter the course of their lives, and to reform their individual and social behaviour as well as their conduct. Its sonorous words, cadenced rhymes, and inimitable rhetoric impinge upon human hearts and lives. It insists that its addressees use their reason and eschew blind following, and appeals to humans as holistic beings who integrate their reason and emotion.

The Qur'ān, it might be thought, has an almost impossible task before it: to educate men and women, old and young, scholars and illiterates, Arabs and non-Arabs, through all stages of development of human knowledge, technology, society and civilization. But its pedagogical style is remarkably effective. Its method, combining dialogue and an interrogative style, forces people to think, guiding them to the right answers. Its employment of examples from nature, history and the inner human self is a key to its power of persuasion. A sun, a moon, a star, a rainfall, the succession of day and night, can be as meaningful to an illiterate nomad in the seventh century as to a university don in the twentieth.

Only through the Qur'ān's guidance and its invitation to people to consider nature, history and the human psyche can people be schooled to lead a life of *īmān* and *taqwā*, justice and peace, in this world and be prepared for the eternal, rewarding life awaiting them in the Hereafter.

The Qur'ān is a book unlike any other. Its success and influence have been wide and enduring. It has quenched the spiritual thirst of billions of men and women. It nourished the birth and growth of a unique civilization, one that sought to glorify God and assign to humans the dignified status of God's vicegerents on Earth, and changed the very course of world history.

Section B

The *Sunna*

Chapter 3.4

THE CONCEPT OF *SUNNA*

Yusuf al-Qaradawi

Sunna is an Arabic word which literally means 'the way followed' or 'the accustomed way'. In Islam, it refers to the practice established by the Prophet Muḥammad (d. 11/632). The *Sunna* occupies a place of distinction in Islamic religion and society. Being the second source of Islam after the Qurʾān, it is second in importance to the Holy Book.

The Holy Qurʾān is the constitution which gives rise to Islam's precepts and fundamentals: its articles of belief, rites of worship, morality, civil and legal systems and rules of behaviour. The *Sunna* – embodied in the Prophet's traditions (*ḥadīths*, sing. *ḥadīth*) – is the theoretical explanation and the practical implementation of the Qurʾān.

It is the duty of the Muslims to follow the Prophet's *Sunna*, in the same way that they obey the Messenger in the revelation he received. The obligation to follow the Prophet is found in the Qurʾān, the *Sunna* itself, the consensus of the community and plain common sense.

The *Sunna*, which comprises the Prophet's words, actions, decisions, physical description and anecdotes from his life, provides a road map for Islamic life: for the life of the individual Muslim, for the Muslim family, for Muslim society, and for the Muslim state. The Qurʾān lays down Islam's general foundations and its overall principles, and dwells on its essential injunctions. The *Sunna*, on the other hand, gives details of matters summed up in the Qurʾān, clarifies what it leaves ambiguous and lays out how its guidance can be implemented. For instance, we find in the *Sunna* detailed statements of faith in God and His angels, books, prophets, the Last Day, and divine foreordainment (*qadar*), for both good and ill. We also find in it the elaboration of the cardinal obligations prescribed in the Qurʾān, such as the ritual of devotional worship

(*ṣalāt*),[1] the alms tax (*zakāt*), fasting during Ramadan and the pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) to Mecca.

The Prophet's mission, besides proclaiming the Qur'ān sent down to him by God and preaching Islam, was to purify the believers. The Qur'ān speaks of the Prophet's mission in several places. In *sūra* II, it says, 'As We sent among you a messenger of your own, who will recite to you Our signs and will purify you, and teach you the Book and wisdom, and teach you what you did not know' (II.151). And again: 'God conferred a great favour on the believers when He sent among them a messenger from among themselves, reciting His verses and purifying them, and teaching them the Book and wisdom, though before that they had clearly been in error' (III.164). This wisdom is the knowledge of the deeper meanings, the aims of divine ordinances and the best path, leading to the good life in this world and the next and to inviting others to Islam; and 'whoever is given wisdom, he is given a great good' (II.269).

The Qur'ān on following the Prophet

The Qur'ān itself requires Muslims to obey Muḥammad, the Messenger of God. It links this obedience to obedience to God. The Qur'ān says, 'O you who believe, obey God and obey the Messenger' (IV.59), and puts these two kinds of obedience on a par: 'Whoever obeys the Messenger obeys God' (IV.80). It makes such obedience result in right guidance: 'If you obey him you are rightly guided' (XXIV.54), and 'Follow him, that you may be rightly guided' (VII.158). It makes this a sign of God's love and forgiveness: 'Say, if you love God then follow me, God will love you and will forgive you your sins' (III.31). Muḥammad is the exemplar for all Muslims: 'You have in the Messenger of God a good example (*uswa ḥasana*) for anyone whose hope is in God and the Last Day and who remembers God much' (XXXIII.21).

The Qur'ān also enjoins Muslims to follow the Prophet's commands or prohibitions: 'So take what the Messenger gives you, and desist from whatever he forbids you' (LIX.7). It instructs them to respond to the Prophet's call, considering that this summons is a call to life: 'O you who believe, respond to God and to the Messenger, when he calls you to that which will give you life' (VIII.24). It warns against contravening the Prophet's command: 'Let those beware who go against his command, lest some trial befall them or some fierce punishment' (XXIV.63).

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1. *Ṣalāt* is usually translated as 'prayer', but this is imprecise and confusing. Prayer is a voluntary act referred to in Arabic as *duʿāʾ*, supplication or invocation. I have, for the sake of accuracy, retained the untranslatable *ṣalāt* to speak of the Islamic ritual of devotional worship, which is one of the 'five pillars' of Islam [Eds].

It also makes it obligatory to refer to the Prophet in any conflict: 'If you oppose one another in anything, then refer it to the Messenger, if you believe in God and the Last Day' (IV.59). No believer is given a choice about accepting the Prophet's judgement: 'When God and His Messenger have decided a matter, it is not fitting for any believer, man or woman, to have any choice about their decision. If anyone disobeys God and His Messenger, he has clearly gone astray' (XXXIII.36). The Qur'ān denies the belief of anyone who opposes the Prophet's judicial decisions, or does not yield to his judgement willingly: 'Nay, by your Lord, they do not [truly] believe until they make you judge in any dispute between them, and find in their souls no resistance to your decisions, but accept them fully' (IV.65). It makes acceptance of the Prophet's judgement or turning away from it the touchstone to distinguish faith from hypocrisy: 'They say: we believe in God and in the Messenger, and we obey; but even after that a party of them turn away, and those are not [true] believers. And when they are summoned to God and His Messenger, in order that he may judge between them, behold, a party of them decline' (XXIV.47–8). On the other hand, referring to the believers the Qur'ān says, 'The answer of the believers when they are summoned to God and His Messenger, that he may judge between them, is: they say: we hear and we obey, and those are they who will prosper' (XXIV.51).

The *Sunna* on following the Prophet

The *Sunna* was recognized in the time of the Prophet as being closely linked to, and based on, the Qur'ān. Various prophetic traditions establish this point clearly. For example, it is reported, that 'Some people came to the Prophet and said: Send with us men who will teach us the Qur'ān and *Sunna*; and he sent to them seventy men of the Helpers (*Anṣār*), who were called the reciters (*qurrā'*).'[2] Scholars have, therefore, called the Qur'ān the recited revelation, and the *Sunna* the non-recited revelation.

There are numerous *ḥadīths* which show the obligation to follow the Prophet and obey him. The Prophet has been quoted as saying, 'My whole community will enter Paradise, except anyone who refuses. He was asked: And who refuses, O Messenger of God? He replied: Whoever obeys me will enter Paradise, but whoever disobeys me, refuses.'[3] Referring to his *Sunna*, the Prophet said, 'I have been given the Book, and also the like of it.'[4] Criticizing those who argue that the Qur'ān alone is sufficient to guide the Muslims, the

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2. See Muslim b. Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Imāra, Bāb Thubūt al-janna li-l-shahīd*.
3. See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-I'tiṣām bi-l-kitāb wa-l-sunna, Bāb al-Iqtidā' bi-sunan Rasūl Allāh Ṣalla Allāh 'Alayhi wa-sallam*.
4. See Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, *Kitāb al-Sunna, Bāb fī Luzūm al-sunna*.

Prophet also said, 'My *ḥadīth* may reach a man reclining on his couch, and he may say: Between us and you we have [only] the Book of God; where we find in it something lawful, we have allowed it; where something unlawful, we have forbidden it. But what the Messenger of God has forbidden is like what God has forbidden.'[5] The Prophet encouraged the proclamation and the spread of the *Sunna*, as in the well-known tradition 'May God prosper a man who hears something from us and passes it on as he had heard it; for many a time a person who has heard information indirectly may remember it better than he who has heard it directly from its source.'[6] In the Farewell Pilgrimage, the Prophet said 'Let the one who is present tell the one who is absent; for the eye-witness may tell one who can understand it better than he.'[7]

On seeing the excessive zeal of one of his Companions (*ṣaḥāba*, sing. *ṣaḥābī*) in devotional matters, the Prophet counselled him, saying, 'Anyone who leans towards my *Sunna*, he is rightly guided. But anyone who leans towards something else will perish.'[8]

The consensus of the Companions and the community after them

The Companions of the Prophet recognized during the Prophet's lifetime the value of the *Sunna*, and that it was the second reference source for them after the Qurʾān. The Prophet confirmed them in that, as in the well-known *ḥadīth* of Muʿādh b. Jabal (d. 18/634).[9]

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5. Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, *Kitāb al-ʿIlm ʿan rasūl allāh*, *Bāb Mā nuhiya ʿanhu an yuqāl ʿinda ḥadīth al-Nabī*.

6. See al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, *Kitāb al-ʿIlm ʿan rasūl allāh*, *Bāb Mā jāʾa fi-l-ḥathth ʿalā tablīgh al-simāʿ*. Cf. also the *ḥadīth* narrated by Zayd b. Thābit and quoted in al-Tirmidhī, *ibid*.

7. See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al ʿIlm*, *Bāb Qawl al-Nabī rubba muballagh awʿā min sāmiʿ*.

8. Related by Ibn Abī ʿĀṣim and Ibn Ḥibbān in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*. Also mentioned by al-Mundhirī on the importance of following both the Qurʾān and *Sunna* in *al-Targhīb wa-l-tarhīb*. See tradition in Ibn Ḥanbal: 'Every servant has some evil, and every evil has some weakness; if towards innovation, then whoever's inclination is … etc.' Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir confirmed this *ḥadīth*'s *isnād* in his edition of Ibn Ḥanbal's *Musnad*, no. 6477.

9. See al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, *Kitāb al-Aḥkām ʿan rasūl allāh*, *Bāb Mā jāʾa fi-l-qāḍī kayf yaqḍī*. This tradition has been considered weak by some, but Ibn al-Qayyim defended it in *Iʿlām al-muwaqqiʿīn*. Its *isnād* is considered good by Ibn Kathīr in his *Tafsīr*, and Ibn Taymiyya in his *Fatāwā*, and al-Dhahabī in *Talkhīṣ al-ʿilal al-mutanāhiya*. [Editors' note. The tradition the author refers to states that when Muʿādh b. Jabal was being sent as governor to the Yemen, the Prophet asked him, 'How will you decide cases that will be brought before you?' Muʿādh replied, 'I shall decide them according to the Book of God.' The Prophet then asked him, 'But if you do not find anything [applicable to any particular cases] in the Book of God?' Muʿādh said, 'Then I shall decide them according to the *Sunna* of the Messenger of God.' The Prophet again asked Muʿādh, 'And if you do not find anything in the *Sunna* of the Messenger of God?' 'Then,' replied Muʿādh, 'I shall not fail to exercise my own judgement.' The Prophet thereupon patted Muʿādh's chest and declared, 'Praise be to God, who has made the messenger of God's Messenger please God's Messenger!']

The Companions agreed upon having recourse to the *Sunna* and considering it a source of legal judgements along with the Qurʾān. The Rightly-Guided Caliphs – Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (d. 13/634), ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23/644), ʿUthmān b. ʿAffān (d. 35/656), and ʿAlī b. Abū Ṭālib (d. 40/661), the four immediate successors of the Prophet as rulers of the Muslim state – and their successors followed the same path, in words and actions. When told that there are references in the Qurʾān to ṣalāt in a place of domicile (ṣalāt al-ḥaḍar) and in time of fear (ṣalāt al-khawf), but no reference to ṣalāt while people are on a journey (ṣalāt al-safar), ʿAbdullāh b. ʿUmar (d. ca. 73/ca. 693), a Companion of the Prophet and the son of the second caliph, ʿUmar, said, 'God sent us Muḥammad at a time when we knew nothing; so we act only as we have seen the Messenger of God act; shortening worship when on a journey is a *Sunna* established by him.'[10]

If they could not find a clear decision or injunction in the Qurʾān, the first two caliphs, Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, would base their ruling on the *Sunna* if they knew it or found someone whose knowledge of it could be authenticated. But if their decision could not be buttressed by the Prophet's *Sunna*, they would consult with the Muslims. There are many instances of this. ʿUmar wrote to Shurayḥ b. al-Ḥārith al-Kindī (d. 78/697) when he appointed him *qāḍī* of Kufa: 'Regard what is clear to you from God's Book, and do not ask anyone about it; where anything is not clear to you, follow therein the *Sunna* of God's Messenger, and if it is not clear from the *Sunna*, then form your own opinion, and take advice from people who are learned and pious.'[11]

The Companions and their Successors (tābiʿūn, sing. tābiʿī) – the generation which came on the heels of the Companions – established this path. Their example was followed by the jurists (fuqahāʾ, sing. faqīh) of the major cities as well as by the leaders of every juristic school (madhhab) and their disciples. Thus, succeeding generations of pious Muslims followed the Qurʾān but continued to have recourse to the *Sunna* in order to implement the teachings of Islam by learning about all matters: religious, civil and legal.

Most legal judgements stem from the *Sunna*

It is undisputed that the vast majority of the ordinances that Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) deals with in the various recognized schools of law have been established on the basis of the *Sunna*. This will be very clear from a study of the books of *fiqh*. If we omit the *Sunna* and the heritage of legal learning which we derive from it, no *fiqh* worth mentioning would be left. Therefore,

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10. See Ibn Māja, *Kitāb al-Ṣalāt*, *Bāb Kayf furiḍat al-ṣalāt*.
11. Ibn al-Qayyim in *Iʿlām al-muwaqqiʿīn*. Transmitted by al-Suyūṭī in *Miftāḥ al-janna fī-l-iḥtijāj bi-l-sunna*.

the *Sunna* is studied extensively in all the books on the principles of Islamic jurisprudence and among all the recognized legal schools. These studies cover the *Sunna*'s definition, evidentiary authority (*ḥujjiyya*) and proof, the conditions for accepting it, and other matters that are pertinent. This is true of all the juristic schools, from the 'literal' (*ẓāhirī*) school of Dāwūd b. Khalaf (d. 270/884) and Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064), who deny analogy and legal justification (*taʿlīl*), to Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767) and his companions who are known in the history of Islamic jurisprudence as the 'school of opinion' (*raʾy*).

THE *SUNNA* IN THE 'SCHOOL OF OPINION'

The juristic school of Abū Ḥanīfa – the leader of the 'people of opinion' – never once discarded the *Sunna*, and other leading jurists continued to use it as evidence and base their judgements upon it. Where they felt they had to go beyond the Qurʾān to the *Sunna*, and whenever prophetic sayings provided guidance on any matter, these jurists based their opinions solely on them. This is shown by the many books of the Ḥanafī school.[12] A good example is *al-Hidāya,* the celebrated work of Ḥanafī jurisprudence by Burhān al-Dīn al-Marghīnānī (d. 593/1197) and its magisterial commentary *Fatḥ al-qadīr* by the great Ḥanafī scholar Kamāl al-Dīn b. al-Humām (d. 861/1457), wherein we find a vast wealth of *ḥadīth*.[13]

ALL JURISTS BASE THEIR DECISIONS ON THE *SUNNA*

All Muslim jurists regardless of their school or geographical region – whether belonging to a school of law which is extant or not, and whether this school has followers or not – adhered to the *Sunna*. They did so because they believed that this is a part of the religion of God and they could not contravene the *Sunna*'s commands. This is true of those who followed both the school of opinion and the school of *ḥadīth*.[14] For example, Abū Ḥanīfa said that, when

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12. Ibn Khaldūn in his *Muqaddima* argued forcefully against those who claimed that Abū Ḥanīfa or other great jurists were insufficiently learned in *ḥadīth*; see *Muqaddima*, 2nd ed., ed. ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Wāḥid Wāfī, Lajnat al-Bayān al-ʿArabī, III, pp. 1143–5. Refer also to Zāhid Muḥammad al-Kawtharī, *Fiqh ahl al-ʿIrāq wa-ḥadīthuhum*, ed. ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda, Beirut, al-Maṭbūʿāt al-Islāmiyya, 1390/1970.

13. The chains of transmission of prophetic traditions in *al-Hidāya* have been covered in one of the great books of the period, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Zaylaʿī's, *Naṣb al-rāya li-aḥādīth al-hidāya*. The *hidāya* was also summarized, with learned additions, by Ibn Ḥajar in his *al-Dirāya fī takhrīj aḥādīth al-hidāya*.

14. Al-Bayhaqī reported from ʿUthmān b. ʿUmar: A man came to (the leading jurist) Mālik (b. Anas) and asked him about a problem. The man said, The Messenger of God said such and such and asked Mālik, What is your opinion? Mālik replied (in the words of the Qurʾān): 'Let those beware who oppose his [Muḥammad's] command, lest there befall them some temptation or a painful punishment' (XXIV.63).

issuing a judicial ruling, he first followed the Qurʾān and if he found nothing in it, then he followed the *Sunna*. If he found nothing in the *Sunna*, he would choose from among the legal opinions of the Companions of the Prophet and would not leave their rulings for those of other people. But if the matter came down to the opinions of the Successors of the Companions – even the opinions of such very learned and pious Successors as Ibrāhīm b. Yazīd al-Nakhaʿī (d. 96/815), ʿĀmir al-Shaʿbī (d. 103/721), Muḥammad b. Sīrīn (d. 110/728), al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), ʿAṭāʾ b. Abū Rabāḥ (d. ca. 114/ ca. 732) and Saʿīd b. al-Musayyab (d. 94/713) and others – whose rulings were derived from their independent thinking (*ijtihād*), then Abū Ḥanīfa too exercised his independent thinking as they did.[15] Al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820), another pioneering jurist, is reported to have said that if anything he wrote contradicted the *Sunna*, then the *Sunna* should be supported and what he said should be disregarded.[16]

Reasons why leading jurists may not observe a specific *Sunna*

It follows from the above that it is not to be imagined that any *madhhab* or legal school, or a jurist who practises *ijtihād*, purposely intends to reject any *ḥadīth* which to their knowledge is authentic, or has an unequivocal judicial significance, or is not contradicted by another prophetic tradition.

The great medieval juriconsult Taqiyy al-Dīn b. Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) meticulously clarified this question in *Rafʿ al-malām ʿan al-aʾimma al-aʿlām*. In this valuable, brief work, he defends the great jurists in the face of some literalists and unwise critics who suspect them of opposing the *ḥadīth* and neglecting the *Sunna*.

Ibn Taymiyya says that not a single publicly recognized jurist intends to contradict the Prophet in any matter relating to the *Sunna*, however small or great. All jurists are agreed that it is necessary to follow him, and that any other person's dicta can be taken up or disregarded, but not Muḥammad's. However, if the opinion of any jurist is contradicted by a sound *ḥadīth*, then there must be some legitimate reason for leaving it aside. These reasons are of three types: first, the jurist does not believe that the Prophet said that *ḥadīth*; second, they believe that the tradition does not refer to the specific situation under consideration; third, they believe that this particular injunction was subsequently abrogated (*mansūkh*) by the Prophet. Ibn Taymiyya then proceeds to detail these types. He further writes, 'In many cases it is possible

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15. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Taʾrīkh Baghdād*, Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, n.d., XIII p. 368.
16. Jalāl al-Dīn Al-Suyūṭī, *Miftāḥ al-janna fī-l-iḥtijāj bi-l-sunna,* Cairo, Idārat al-Ṭibāʿa al-Munīriyya, AH 1347, pp. 49–50.
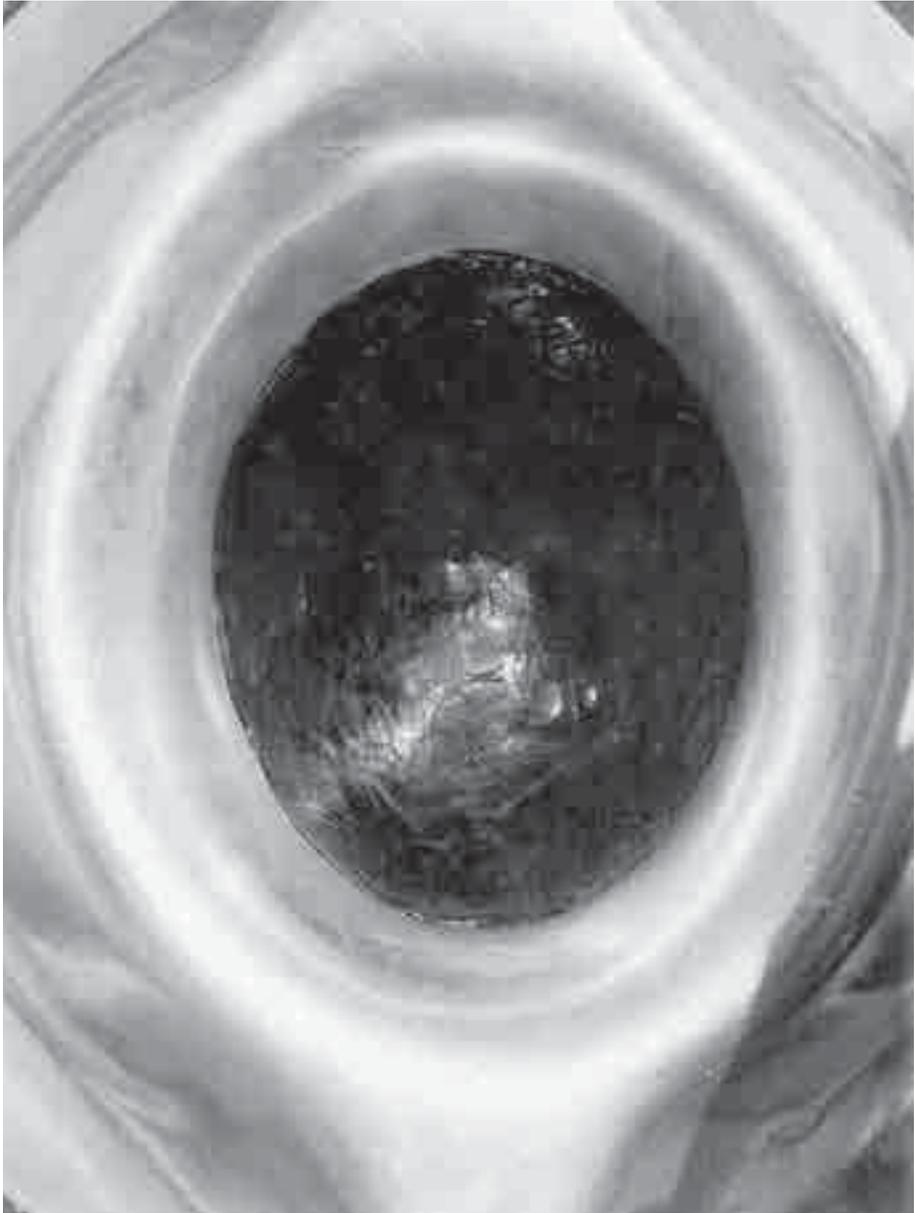
III–4.1   Al-Ḥajar al-Aswad (The black Stone)
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that the scholar has some good cause for not putting the *ḥadīth* into practice, of which we are not aware, for there are varied ways of perceiving knowledge, and we are not ourselves aware of all that is within the minds of the scholars. A scholar may or may not make his argument public; if he does, we may or may not hear of it; if we do, we may or may not grasp the point of his argumentation; and this applies equally whether or not the argument in the matter itself be correct.'[17]

One more reason may be mentioned here: the *Sunna* that the jurist does not follow might, in his opinion, not have been intended as a source for legislation, such as certain actions of the Prophet which arose from his innate disposition or his personal habits, or where general legislation was not intended. These acts or opinions might have originated in connection with the leadership of the state, or some unique legal decision, not as a general legal opinion and proclamation of divine origin.

The *Sunna* in the conventional usage of the scholars of Islam

As the *Sunna* assumed importance from the early days of Islam, Muslim theologians (*ʿulamāʾ al-uṣūl*), jurists and other scholars have each had their own technical definition of the word. For theologians the term '*Sunna*' denotes a source of legislation secondary to the Qurʾān. They recognize it to be whatever speech, action or approval that emanates from the Prophet, considering that anything thus originating from him indicates his way of understanding the divine religion and practising it. *Ḥadīth* scholars go further than this. They consider the *Sunna* to include five categories: the Prophet's speech, action, approval, description and conduct. For most of them, the *Sunna* is synonymous with *ḥadīth*.

Jurists apply the term '*Sunna*' to whatever contrasts with duty (*farḍ*) or obligation (*wājib*). For them, '*Sunna*' means acts 'recommended' or 'desirable' under Islamic law (*Sharīʿa*), but not required as a duty or obligation. The jurists illustrate this by the two-*rakʿa* pre-dawn *ṣalāt* and by the fasting of six days during the month of Shawwāl following the ʿĪd al-Fiṭr at the end of Ramadan. They consider these devotional acts as *Sunna* because it was the Prophet's custom to perform them, though they are not prescribed by the Qurʾān as were the obligatory five daily *ṣalāts* or the Ramadan fast. Fulfilling this type of *Sunna* is rewarded by God, but omitting it is not punished.

The term '*Sunna*' is also used in contrast to innovation in religious belief or practice (*bidʿa*). This is based on the *ḥadīth* which states that, after the time

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17. See Taqiyy al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya, *Rafʿ al-malām ʿan al-aʾimma al-aʿlām*, 2nd ed., al-Maktab al-Islāmī, pp. 1–31.

of the Prophet, people will be faced with great differences. 'So you must follow my *Sunna* and the *Sunna* of the Rightly-guided Caliphs after me: cling firmly to it, and beware of any newfangled matters, for every bid'a is an error.'[18]

Let us return to the *ḥadīth* scholars' definition of the *Sunna*. They hold that the *Sunna* includes the Prophet's sayings, actions, decisions, moral and personal characteristics and conduct. We shall examine each of these.

THE SPOKEN *SUNNA*

The sayings of the Prophet include his instructions or information or reports from him. The reports from the Prophet can be about God and His names, attributes and actions. They include divine *Ḥadīth* (*Ḥadīth qudsī*), such as the well-known tradition, 'O my servants, I have forbidden myself any wrong-doing, and have made it unlawful to you, so do not commit wrong.'[19] It is most likely that the meaning of the *Ḥadīth qudsī* is of divine origin, but its wording is from the Prophet.

Among the Prophet's reports are those on the unseen world: the angels, the jinn, the throne and other matters which do not come within the scope of the senses or of human knowledge. The Prophet, for instance, speaks about life after death and about the next world, rewards and punishments, and Paradise and Hell. He also informs us about the lives and sayings of former prophets and holy people. Being both 'a warner and a herald of good news to a people who believe,'[20] he speaks of the future of his community and humankind, but only within what God had granted him to see of the future, for he knew only those unseen things of which God had informed him.[21]

Other prophetic traditions contain religious and moral guidance, encourage goodness and obedience to God, and warn against evil and disobedience to God. Some include legislation binding on the individual Muslim (*farḍ 'ayn*) and the whole Muslim community (*farḍ kifāya*), even when it is in the form of information.[22] His sayings also include commands, prohibitions and devotional invocations. The Prophet's spoken *ḥadīths* may

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18. *Ḥadīth* transmitted by al-'Irbāḍ b. Sāriya. See Abū Dāwūd, Ibn Māja and al-Tirmidhī; al-Tirmidhī classified the tradition as good and sound. Cf. the tradition narrated by Ibn Mas'ūd and related by al-Dārimī: 'Being prudent in the matter of the *Sunna* is better than making a great effort in *bid'a*.'

19. Related by Muslim.

20. Qur'ān VII.188.

21. '[He alone] knows the unseen, nor does He acquaint anyone with His mysteries, except a messenger He is pleased with …' (Qur'ān LXII.26–7).

22. As in the *ḥadīth* related by Ibn Ḥanbal and Ibn Māja: 'No one should be injured or cause mutual injury.'

be short and concise, consisting of a single sentence, like 'do not be angry'[23] or 'leave what causes you doubt for that which does not.'[24] Some may be long, filling several pages, concerning the past or the future, like the traditions concerning stories of ancient peoples, or the circumstances surrounding the resurrection, or a dream he had had.

Ḥadīth might begin as an explanation by the Prophet, to teach people some religious principle they need to know, as in his words, 'Shall I not tell you of the worst of grave sins?'[25] or 'Shall I not show you something higher in excellence than *ṣalāt*, fasting and almsgiving?'[26] This includes his sermons on Fridays and festivals. Traditions may also be an answer to a query, like the Prophet's reply, in a famous *ḥadīth*,[27] to the questions put to him by the Archangel Gabriel. Then there is the person who asks the Prophet to tell him about Islam in a nutshell so that he would not ask anyone else about it again. Muḥammad's eloquent, succinct reply is, 'Say: I believe in God; then act uprightly.'[28]

Traditions of the Prophet can also be comments on something he saw or heard. Of this kind are his remarks on the day his infant son Ibrāhīm died. This event coincided with an eclipse of the sun in 10/632. Someone said to him that the sun had gone into eclipse because of Ibrāhīm's death. The Prophet replied, 'The sun and the moon are God's signs. They do not go into eclipse for the death nor the life of anyone.'[29]

The second aspect of the *Sunna* is represented by the Prophet's actions: his practice in both his private and public life, and in religious and worldly affairs. All of these have been handed down, even the most personal details of his domestic life and marital relations.

Unlike other religious and public figures, Muḥammad's life as a prophet unfolded in the full light of history and is an open book for all posterity. The Messenger of God, for example, never forbade any of his Companions or wives to pass on anything they saw him do or heard him say. Thus, we have the fullest details about his daily life: whether alone or in company, travelling or at home; about his food and beverage; about his comings and goings;

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23. See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Adab*, *Bāb al-Ḥadhr min al-ghaḍab*.
24. See al-Nasāʾī, *Sunan*, *Kitāb al-Ashriba*, *Bāb al-Ḥathth ʿalā tark al-shubuhāt*.
25. See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Shahādāt*, *Bāb Mā qīl fī shahādat al-zūr*.
26. See Aḥmad, *Musnad*, 6/444.
27. Quoted by al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Book of īmān, No. 47, on the authority of Abū Hurayra.
28. Related by Ibn Ḥanbal, Muslim, al-Nasāʾī and Ibn Māja, from Sufyān b. ʿAbdullāh al-Thaqafī.
29. See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Kusūf*.

about his clothing and mounts; about his laughter and crying; about his life as a husband and father; about his social and political relationships; about his legal rulings and verdicts;[30] about his conduct in peace and war; and about his responsibilities as a ruler of a state. His actions also include those of his commands and prohibitions that have not reached us in his own words. Some scholars believe that the Prophet's abstaining from doing something, especially in matters related to worship, establishes a *Sunna*. Hence, we find them calling both his action and his abstention from action *Sunna*. Furthermore, his practical *Sunna* encompass accounts of his acts of devotion and supplication aimed at attaining a close relationship with, or proximity (*qurba*) to, God. In all of this, the Prophet is the Muslims' example and guide.

Thus, the Companions of the Prophet were eager to imitate him in seeking 'proximity' to God. This is exemplified in the famous anecdote about the Caliph ʿUmar. When he kissed the Black Stone, which is part of the edifice of the Kaʿba in the mosque at Mecca, he observed, 'I kiss you, knowing that you are a stone which can neither harm nor help anyone. Had I not seen the Messenger of God kiss you, I would not do so.'[31]

The *Sunna* of approval

The third kind of *Sunna* is represented by the Prophet's approval (*taqrīr*). It refers to the Prophet's knowledge and acceptance of some act he witnessed or saying he heard, while he could have rejected such an act or saying. This type of *Sunna* is important to the community because it shows that this act is not forbidden. As it was the Prophet's duty to transmit God's teachings, it is inconceivable that he would approve something objectionable to God.

His approval of an action could be merely by keeping silent, indicating that he did not reject it. For instance, the Prophet confirmed *muḍāraba*, a form of commercial partnership which was practised before and after the coming of Islam. As some of the Companions practised *muḍāraba*, and he did not censure them, all legal schools are agreed on its lawfulness.[32]

Another example of the Prophet's approval is recorded in the case of two groups of Muslims who interpreted his instructions about the time of *ṣalāt* differently when they went on the expedition against the Banū Qurayẓa. Some of the Companions understood them literally, while the others fulfilled what they considered to be the intent of those instructions. The Prophet did not disapprove the different decisions that the two parties took on this issue;

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30. Ibn al-Qayyim has devoted a large part of his *Zād al-maʿād* to the Prophet's injunctions and legal decisions.
31. See al-Bukhārī.
32. See ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad ibn Saʿīd Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Muḥallā*, Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1988, VIII, p. 285, question 1367.

this amounted to his approval of each group's actions. In the light of the Prophet's attitude to both parties, the majority of scholars concluded that those who do their very best in interpretation do not commit a sin, even if they make a mistake.[33]

The Prophet's approval could be by something more positive than silence, such as smiling or showing pleasure. This is seen in the story of ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ (d. 42/663), when he led his companions in *ṣalāt* on a bitterly cold night, without taking a ritual bath, even though he was in a state of major ritual impurity (*janāba*). The companions complained about him to the Prophet, who questioned him, and ʿAmr replied, 'I remembered the words of God: "Do not destroy yourselves, for indeed God has been merciful to you."[34] So I performed *tayammum* (ablution by sand) and then prayed. The Prophet laughed.'[35] His concurrence can take other forms, as when he approved the fencing of the Ethiopians in the mosque in Medina on *ʿīd* day and he permitted his wife ʿĀʾisha (d. 58/678) to watch them.[36]

Description and conduct of the Prophet as *Sunna*

The scholars of *ḥadīth*, or traditionists, include the description of the Prophet's physical and moral characteristics and of his personal conduct in their concept of the *Sunna*. These aspects of the *Sunna* have been treated in special oeuvres.[37] Generally, *ḥadīth* works cover the Prophet's sayings, actions, approvals, characteristics and conduct even from before the beginning of his mission. They include wide-ranging information on the Prophet's life from his birth to his death, mostly after his call to prophethood. These works focus especially on his life after the *hijra* (migration from Mecca to Medina) in 622 CE. It was after this landmark event that the Muslims were organized as a community, and a state, governed by Islamic law, broadcast its message universally. Apart from the traditionists, there also arose a whole class of remarkable scholars who devoted themselves to writing comprehensively the Prophet's biography (*sīra*).

Muslims are agreed on relying on the authenticated traditions of the Prophet for evidence about all matters pertaining to their faith, such as the unseen world. In fact, every Muslim believes that the Prophet, 'who does not

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33. See Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fatḥ al-bārī fī sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Aleppo, VIII, p. 413.

34. Qurʾān IV.29.

35. Related by Ibn Ḥanbal, Abū Dāwūd and al-Dāraquṭnī; also referred to in al-Shawkānī, *Nayl al-awṭār min asrār muntaqā al-akhbār*, al-Bukhārī, Ibn Ḥibbān and al-Ḥākim.

36. See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kītāb al-Jumuʿa, Bāb al-Ḥirāb wa-l-darq yawm al-ʿīd.*

37. One such famous work is Muhammad ibn ʿĪsā al-Tirmidhī's *al-Shamāʾil al-muḥammadiyya*, Cairo, Būlāq, AH 1276.

speak of his own desire,'[38] is infallible (*maʿṣūm*),[39] and therefore accepts any genuine tradition transmitted from him regarding belief or practice. There are, however, disagreements about certain dogmas whose rejection is considered tantamount to disbelief (*kufr*). Such dogmas must be confirmed by both a definitively established text – the Qurʾān and the uninterrupted *Sunna* (*Sunna mutawātira*) – and by a definitively established connotation, thus excluding any other interpretation. It is for this reason that the majority of Sunnis do not accuse the Muʿtazila and the Khārijīs and other sects of disbelief, despite their denial of certain dogmas based on *ḥadīth*s accepted by the Sunnis as authentic, though the Sunnis do condemn them for innovation and deviation from the path of the Companions and their pious followers.

The *Sunna* depicting the detailed path for Islamic life

We find in the *Sunna* details of the rituals of worship and devotional acts which represent the essence of practical piety, such as *ṣalāt*, the alms tax, fasting and the pilgrimage. These details are essential for carrying out obligatory duties, such as the *ṣalāt* five times daily, the Friday worship every week, the alms tax imposed every year or every harvest time, the annual fast of Ramadan, and the *ḥajj* once in a lifetime for whoever can fulfil it, in addition to acts of worship classed as voluntary.

When we examine the duty of *ṣalāt*, we find that the *Sunna* treats it and all the rituals associated with it extensively. The *Sunna* speaks of ritual purity (*ṭahāra*), ablution (*wuḍūʾ*) and *tayammum*. It deals with the call to *ṣalāt*, and congregational *ṣalāt* and its leadership. It details the times, numbers and manner of performance of *ṣalāt*. It informs us of its essential requirements, of how to perform it in accordance with the Prophet's practice, and of the acts that render it void. The *Sunna* also clarifies the various types of *ṣalāt*: that which is obligatory, that which was the Prophet's regular *Sunna* or custom, and that which is *witr*, an odd-numbered *ṣalāt* which he also performed. Moreover, the *Sunna* speaks of other supererogatory devotional practices, such as nocturnal and early morning *ṣalāt* (*ṣalāt al-ḍuḥā*). It also tells us which *ṣalāt* is performed in congregation and which is not, which is offered once or twice a year – like the *ṣalāt* of the ʿĪd al-Fiṭr and ʿĪd al-Aḍḥā – and which is performed for special reasons, like the *ṣalāt* at the time of eclipses and for asking God for rain or for guidance (*istikhāra*).

As for the *zakāt*, the alms tax, the *Sunna* provides the information required for levying it. It tells us what is taxable, at what level it is taxable, and the amounts or quantities that are due as an alms tax. The *Sunna* also informs us about when the alms tax is due and to whom it is payable. The same is true of other basic

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38. Qurʾān LIII.3.
39. This is a reference to the view of Muslim theologians that all the prophets of God were infallible in their transmission of divine revelation [Eds].

duties such as fasting, the pilgrimage and *ʿumra*, the lesser pilgrimage. It is the *Sunna* that gives us details of the observances applying to them.

These religious practices form a large part of the books of the *Sunna*. They make up almost a quarter of al-Bukhārī's (d. 256/870) *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ*. If we were to also take into account the material on prayers, invocations and recitation of the Qurʾān – which are certainly part of the religious practices – it becomes clear how much emphasis the *Sunna* places on this subject.

Moreover, there is in the *Sunna* detailed guidance about ethics, which God sent His Messenger to perfect. Islamic ethics comprises a universal system of moral values that is indispensable for leading a virtuous life. The *Sunna* has considered such values among the branches of faith and the virtues of the believers. On the other hand, it has considered the absence of these values a sign of hypocrisy. Among the moral values are truthfulness, trustworthiness, generosity, courage, loyalty, modesty, compassion, mercy, justice, humility, patience, forbearance in times of anger, forgiveness when in a position of power, filial piety, maintaining family ties, honouring neighbours, and caring for orphans, the indigent and wayfarers.

The *Sunna* also includes what can be called 'God-centred moral qualities', which are the mainstay of spiritual life. These include loving God, turning to Him in repentance, entrusting oneself to Him, being sincere to Him, hoping for His mercy, fearing His punishment, and accepting His decree. They also include being patient under God's testing, showing gratitude for His blessings, loving and hating for His sake, being friendly towards His friends and hostile towards His enemies, abstaining from forbidden things, keeping away from indulgence in worldly pursuits, and seeking what pleases God. These qualities have been the concern of genuine Sufis, so much so that some equate this type of Sufism with a way of life that is illuminated by a moral character.[40]

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40. The attitude of the Sufis, the Muslim mystics, towards the *Sunna* is in need of clarification. Some of them did not attach any importance to the prophetic traditions, because they thought that they could receive guidance directly from God through *kashf* (illumination), and indulged in extravagant language. But these Sufis were a minority. The vast majority of the Sufis – including such eminences as al-Junayd b. Muḥammad (d. 298/910), Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī (d. 215/830) and Abu-l-Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258) – disagreed with the views of this group and believed strongly that it was obligatory for all Muslims to follow both the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*. One of the main criticisms levelled at the Sufis is that they accepted weak, even fabricated, traditions, as well as *ḥadīths* without *isnād*. In this they had something in common with those scholars who justified recourse to weak traditions in exhortatory contexts. Scholars of *ḥadīth*, however, did subject the traditions quoted by the Sufis to rigorous criticism. For example, Zayn al-Dīn al-ʿIrāqī (d. 806/1404), in *al-Mughnī ʿan ḥaml al-asfār fi-l-asfār: fi takhrīj mā fi-l-Iḥyāʾ min al-akhbār*, thoroughly examined the traditions – some of them weak or unauthentic – cited by the outstanding theologian, Sufi, reformer and jurist Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) in his classic *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*. For an evaluation of the Sufis, see Ibn al-Qayyim's *Madārij al-sālikīn*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥāmid al-Faqī, Cairo, al-Sunna al-Muḥammadiyya, 1956, II.

III–4.2   Tomb of Imam Bukhari
© National Commission of Uzbekistan to UNESCO

The *Sunna* also gives us the details of Islamic good manners which inform the everyday life of the Muslims and form part of the culture and etiquette which are common to the Muslim community worldwide. This can be seen in the way Muslims eat and drink, sit and walk, exchange greetings, visit their relatives and friends and take leave of them, go to sleep and wake up, dress and decorate, speak and keep silent, and meet and disperse. For instance, when Muslims eat or drink, they invoke God's name. They eat with their right hand. They should eat in moderation and from what is closest to them, and praise God when they are finished. Thus, we find that the prophetic *Sunna* defines good manners fully and carefully for the Muslims' daily conduct. As a result, there have arisen traditions distinguishing Muslim society from others, which have given individual Muslims an independent personality, distinctive in outward appearance and inner reality, and capable of withstanding any cultural assimilation which goes against the grain of the Muslim ethos.[41]

41. Muḥammad Asad (d. 1413/1992), the well-known Austrian convert to Islam, has a valuable section in his *Islam at the Crossroads*, Lahore, Pakistan, Muhammad Ashraf, 1963, in which he explains vigorously and with sound logic and argument the potent influence and perennial value of the *Sunna* in the daily life of the Muslim community.

Similarly, the *Sunna* provides details for putting family life on a solid foundation, organizing its relationships, protecting it from disintegrating, and ensuring its preservation. To this end, it has instituted an elaborate and coherent legislative system for the family, or what is generally known as 'personal law'. The *Sunna* pays great attention to the proper choice of a husband or a wife, betrothal and its rules, the wedding and its customs, and the mutual rights of both spouses. It explains what is binding on both spouses in cases of incompatibility and divorce, the waiting time (*ʿidda*) for a divorcée or a widow, and maintenance expenses and remarriage. It specifies the rights of children over their parents and of parents over their children, and the particular rights of various classes of relatives.

The *Sunna* also contains numerous regulations related to *fiqh al-muʿāmalāt*, a branch of jurisprudence dealing with the Muslim community's legal and civil matters. Among other subjects, these regulations cover buying and selling, gifts and loans, commercial partnerships, endowments and wills, written testimony, legal punishments (*ḥudūd*) and retaliation (*qiṣāṣ*).

In addition, the *Sunna* organizes the relationship between the rulers and their subjects in administrative, financial, legal and other affairs. This wealth of prophetic traditions has provided material for works on legal theory, finance, land taxes (*kharāj*) and other areas of public concern. The *ḥadīth* also contributed to the development of a full-fledged, innovative Islamic theory of international law which has served as a guidepost for the relationship of Muslims with non-Muslims and the relationship between the Islamic state and other states in peace and in war.[42]

The *Sunna*'s elaboration depending on the subject matter

The elaboration of the *Sunna* varies according to the subject. It covers religious practices differently from the way it treats civil and legal matters and family affairs from those of the state. Matters with the stamp of permanence and continuity, connected with the essence of human life – such as religious practices, morality, manners and family affairs – are dealt with in much greater detail, so that they are not at the mercy of human caprice and are not constantly subject to the winds of change. But matters requiring change and flexibility, such as administrative, political, judicial and procedural issues, are less detailed and allow for more latitude, so that Muslims should not be constrained by forms and situations where God has been generous and has not wished to burden them.[43] This is the area that the Prophet referred to as latitude (*ʿafw;*

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42. The great Indian scholar Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī (d. 1176/1762) has written perceptively and comprehensively about the *Sunna* in his unique work *Ḥujjat Allāh al-bāligha*.

43. For the overall point of view of Islam on flexibility, see for example Qurʾān V.6: 'God does not wish to place you in a difficulty' [Eds].

ʿāfiya), and is illustrated by the *ḥadīth*, 'Whatever God has made lawful in His Book is lawful, what He has made unlawful is so. Where He is silent that is His latitude, so accept from God the latitude He has granted, for God does not forget anything.' And the Prophet recited from the Qurʾān: 'Your Lord is not forgetful' (XIX.64).[44]

Relationship of the *Sunna* to the Qurʾān

The Qurʾān is the basis and support of Islamic law, and the *Sunna* expounds and elucidates the Holy Book. The *Sunna* is therefore considered the second source for Islam. The Qurʾān is the primary source because its entire text is confirmed definitively and collectively by the community (*mutawātir*), leaving no room for doubting its authenticity. This contrasts with the *Sunna*, in which some practices are established definitively and collectively by the community beyond any doubt, but others are narrated on the authority of single individuals (*āḥād*).

The *ḥadīth* of Muʿādh b. Jabal[45] and the actions of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs show that a legal ruling has to be sought in the Qurʾān first, and if it is not found there, it has to be sought in the *Sunna*. There are injunctions clearly indicated in the Qurʾān, such as the inheritance of a husband from his wife, that of a woman from her husband, and the waiting period (*ʿidda*) of a divorcée past child-bearing age or a very young woman or one whose husband has died but who is not pregnant. But it is the *Sunna* on which we must depend in most other cases, for it clarifies and details these ordinances. Examples of such cases include the inheritance of a grandmother and paternal relatives, and the waiting period of a pregnant woman whose husband has died.

The material contained in the books of *Sunna* can be classified into three categories. The first class of traditions emphasizes and supports Qurʾānic verses, without adding details or further explanation. Such are the *ḥadīths* which call for filial piety and warn against filial disobedience, for loyalty to family ties and warn against cutting them, and for respect for neighbours and warn against harming them. This category also includes sermons, edifying stories and other *ḥadīths* which encourage righteous living and warn against impious behaviour.

The second type of traditions amplifies the Qurʾān, whether by giving details of matters the Holy Book has summarized, or by specifying or defining what it mentions in general terms. Clarifications of matters expressed summarily

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44. The *ḥadīth* was related by al-Ḥākim from Abu-l-Dardāʾ; he authenticated it and al-Dhahabī (II/375) agreed with al-Ḥakim. It is mentioned by ʿAlī ibn Abū Bakr al-Haythamī in *Majmaʿ al-zawāʾid*, Beirut, Dār al-Fikr, 1412/1992, I, p. 171. It is also related by al-Ṭabarānī in *al-Muʿjam al-kabīr* and by al-Bazzār. Its *isnād* is good and its narrators are trustworthy.

45. See note 9.

in the Qurʾān include the number and times of *ṣalāt* each day, the number of the *rakʿas* of each *ṣalāt*, and the manner of its performance. The *ḥadīth* thus amplifies God's command, 'Establish *ṣalāt*' (II.43). Similarly, traditions spell out the practical details of the Qurʾānic injunction, 'Pay the alms-tax' (II.43). They expound the *zakāt's niṣāb* (minimum amounts or quantities of property that is taxable) and the types of property on which *zakāt* is to be levied. The *ḥadīth* also explicates religious practices such as fasting and the pilgrimage, as well as the regulations of the *Sharīʿa* concerning legal punishments ordained in the Qurʾān, sale transactions and usury. In addition, the *Sunna* makes general rules specific. Such is the restriction of the heirs mentioned in the Qurʾān so as to exclude a murderer, for a *ḥadīth* says, 'A murderer cannot inherit.'[46] Traditions also restrict general ordinances such as putting an upper limit to the amount a testator can bequeath through his will to beneficiaries not mentioned in the Qurʾān. The Holy Book says, 'It is prescribed when death approaches any of you, if he leave much wealth, that he make a bequest to parents and next of kin, according to what is fair; this is a duty on those conscious of God' (II.180). The *Sunna* restricts such a bequest to a third of a person's assets, for a *ḥadīth* says '[Bequeath no more than] a third, and a third is plenty.'[47]

The third category of traditions gives rulings on social, civil and religious matters that the Qurʾān neither disallows nor affirms, but on which it is silent. Thus, the *Sunna* exclusively has rulings on the prohibition of concurrent marriage to a woman and her aunt; the inheritance of grandmothers and agnates; and the *shufʿa* (the pre-emptive option of a co-owner to buy the shares of a partner who wants to sell to a third party). It alone has rulings on foster relationships which forbid marriage in the same manner as do blood ties with some close relatives; the unlawfulness of the meat of domestic donkeys, predatory animals and birds; the unlawfulness of silver and gold dishes for men and women, and of gold ornaments and silk for men in particular; the condemnation of tattooing; and the prohibition of using graves and mausoleums as sites for mosques.

This third kind of *ḥadīth* is not at all in conflict with the Qurʾān, as Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 751/1350) has said,[48] for it is simply legislation originating from the Prophet, in which it is unlawful to disobey him. This is not giving *ḥadīth* precedence over the Qurʾān, but is rather in consonance with God's command of obedience to His Messenger. If the Messenger of God were not obeyed in this domain, the command to obey him would have no meaning. If he only has to be obeyed in whatever corresponds to injunctions decreed in the Qurʾān, and not in additional matters, there is no obedience owed specifically

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46. See Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, *Kitāb al-Diyāt*, *Bāb Diyāt al-aʿḍāʾ*
47. Tradition related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.
48. See Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Iʿlām al-muwaqqiʿīn*, ed. Ṭāhā ʿAbd al-Raʾūf Saʿad, Beirut, Dār al-Jīl, 1973, II, p. 307.

to him. The Qurʾān, however, says, 'Whoever obeys the Messenger obeys God' (IV.80). Some scholars do not at all consider prophetic legislation as independent of the Qurʾān but link it to the Holy Book by analogy with either the Qurʾān's text or its basic principles.

To illustrate this, the concurrent marriage to a woman and her aunt is prohibited in the *ḥadīth* by analogy with the Qurʾān's prohibition of concurrently marrying two sisters. Giving a share of inheritance to a grandmother when a person's mother is no longer living is on an analogy with the grandmother and the mother. The prohibition of the meat of predatory animals and birds is in accordance with a basic Qurʾānic principle enunciated for the Muslims: 'He (that is, God) forbids them what is evil' (VII.157). The prohibition of the usage of vessels of silver and gold follows from the Qurʾān's censure of luxurious living.

Despite some theoretical differences on whether or not prophetic legislation is to be considered independent of the Qurʾān, all scholars are agreed on the *Sunna*'s right to declare certain matters – which are not covered explicitly by Qurʾanic injunctions – obligatory or not, and lawful or unlawful.[49]

Claims that the Qurʾān dispenses with the *Sunna*

In view of the foregoing, it is clear that the claim of some that the Qurʾān is sufficient without the *Sunna* because God sent it down 'explaining all things' (XVI.89), is a false claim. This dismissal of the *Sunna* is rejected by the Qurʾān itself, which makes it evident that the Messenger explains what God has revealed: 'And We have sent down to you [Muḥammad] the message, that you may explain clearly to humankind what is sent down for them' (XVI.44).

This claim is rejected by the *Sunna* and by the community's consensus (*ijmāʿ*). Ayyūb said, 'When I relate a *Sunna* to someone, and he says: "Leave that alone, but tell us something from the Qurʾān," then I know that he is going astray.'[50]

Emphasizing the importance and indispensability of the *Sunna*, Muṣṭafā al-Sibāʿī (d. 1384/1964), a famous authority on the *Sunna*, says:

> No Muslim who is fully acquainted with the religion of God and the regulations of His *Sharīʿa* would deny the *Sunna*'s evidentiary authority, or claim that Islam's teachings are to be found in the Qurʾān alone. This would contradict the facts, for most of the regulations of the *Sharīʿa* have been confirmed by the *Sunna*. Moreover, the Qurʾān's ordinances, for the most part, are general principles requiring explanation.[51]

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49. See Muṣṭafā al-Sibāʿī, *al-Sunna wa-makānatuhā fi-l-tashrīʿ al-islāmī*, 2nd ed., al-Maktab al-Islāmī, pp. 281–5.

50. Al-Suyūṭī, *Miftāḥ al-janna fi-l-iḥtijāj bi-l-sunna*, *op. cit.*, pp. 35–6.

51. Al-Sibāʿī, *al-Sunna wa-makānatuhā fi-l-tashrīʿ al-islāmī*, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

Al-Sibāʿī then goes on to quote the illustrious scholar and jurist Ibn Ḥazm, who trenchantly criticized those who dismissed the *Sunna*, saying that the Qurʾān alone suffices Muslims. Speaking first of the *ṣalāt*, Ibn Ḥazm asks rhetorically:

> Where in the Qurʾān is it found that the noon ṣalāt has four, and post-sunset ṣalāt three, *rakʿas*? Where is in the Qurʾān a description of how to perform its genuflexions (*rukūʿ*) and prostrations (*sujūd*), of what to recite in it and of how to say the greeting at its end? Where are in the Qurʾān the details of fasting; and of the zakāt on gold and silver, and sheep, camels and cattle? Where is in the Qurʾān a detailed explanation of the rites of the pilgrimage, such as the time fixed for the Standing at ʿArafāt; of the ṣalāt there at Muzdalifa; of the lapidation; of the state and ritual garb for the pilgrims' consecration (*iḥrām*); and of what is proscribed while in iḥrām? Where is in the Qurʾān an elucidation of the cutting off of the hand of the thief; of marriage that is forbidden in certain cases of foster-relationships; of forbidden foods; of slaughtering, and sacrificing animals; of regulations concerning punishments ordained in the Qurʾān; of divorce; of sales transactions; of usury; of judicial cases and claims; of pious endowments (*aḥbās; awqāf*) and temporary endowments; of voluntary alms (*ṣadaqāt*; sing. *ṣadaqa*); and of all other juristic matters? The Qurʾān itself contains but general pronouncements; if we were left with them only, we would not know how to carry them out. Our reference in all these matters are the traditions handed down from the Prophet. As for consensus, its scope is limited, and it is therefore a necessity to have recourse to the *ḥadīth*. If someone were to say: 'We do not accept save what we find in the Qurʾān,' he would be considered an unbeliever by the consensus of the community.[52]

Authentication of the *Sunna*

Muslims have recognized from the time of the Companions the *Sunna*'s spiritual and legislative significance and its place in their life. They were, therefore, eager to preserve and proclaim it and pass it on. This was done with the encouragement of the Prophet, who as mentioned before, said, 'May God prosper a man who hears a saying of mine, memorises it, and then passes it on as he had heard it, for many a time a person who has information indirectly may remember it better than he who has heard it directly from its source.'[53]

At the outset – as most of them were not accustomed to writing – the Companions relied on learning the *ḥadīth* by heart. They had exceptionally good memories, a characteristic inherited through narrating poetry and other oral material, which after the advent of Islam was further enhanced

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52. Quoted by al-Sibāʿī, *al-Sunna wa-makānatuhā fī-l-tashrīʿ al-islāmī*, *op. cit.*, pp. 165–6, from Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Iḥkām fī uṣūl al-aḥkām*, Cairo, Maṭbaʿat al-Saʿāda, II, 79–80.
53. See note 6.

by religious motives. The Prophet himself, at the beginning, forbade them to write anything but the Qurʾān, as one of the Companions, Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī (d. 74/693), reported. These over-precautionary measures were taken so that nothing else would be confused with the Qurʾān. Had this not been done, the door might have been left wide open for those who at this time might not always have been able to differentiate between the Qurʾān and the ḥadīth and thus might have confused them. Besides, those who could write were few, and writing materials were difficult to come by, so it was more appropriate at this stage for all the effort to be primarily concentrated on writing down the Qurʾān. But the Prophet did later allow his Companions to write down his *Sunna*, as was done by ʿAbdullāh b. ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ (d. 65/684), who recorded hundreds of traditions in the booklet, *Al-Ṣaḥīfa al-ṣādiqa*.

The Prophet himself dictated a great deal. The material he dictated includes the well-known 'Constitution (*wathīqa*) of Medina' defining the relationship between the inhabitants of that city-state, both emigrants and helpers, and those Jews who entered into alliance with them. Then there are his letters to the Sassanian Chosroes, to the Byzantine Emperor, to the Negus of Ethiopia and to the Muqawqis of Egypt, and other rulers. The caliphs Abū Bakr, ʿUmar and ʿAlī all recorded *ḥadīth*s pertaining to various detailed injunctions issued by the Prophet on matters such as *zakāt*.

The only reason some Companions – including the three caliphs named above – initially prohibited the writing of *ḥadīth* was their concern for the Qurʾān, and their fear lest people, in their preoccupation with the *ḥadīth*, neglect the revelation, as peoples before them had done with their scriptures.

Many Companions later agreed to permit the writing of traditions. The Prophet's wife ʿĀʾisha, ʿAbdullāh b. ʿAbbās (d. ca. 68/ca. 687), Abū Hurayra (d. ca. 57/ca. 676), ʿAbdullāh b. ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, ʿAbdullāh b. ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ, Anas b. Mālik (d. ca. 92/ca. 710), al-Barāʾ b. ʿĀzib (d. 71/690), al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī (d. 50/670), and Muʿāwiya b. Abū Sufyān (d. 60/680) are among those who agreed to this.

Later, the writing of traditions became widespread until there came the age of recording them into books. These collections of *ḥadīth*s were of various types. Some of them were arranged under the name of the Companion who narrated the traditions, regardless of the subject matter. This type includes the *Musnad* of Abū Dāwūd al-Ṭayālisī (d. 204/819), the *Musnad* of Abū Bakr al-Ḥumaydī (d. 219/834), and the *Musnad* of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855). Other collections were arranged by subject matter into chapters and sections, such as articles of faith, religious practices, civil and legal relationships, manners, Qurʾān interpretation, epistles and moral exhortations. Among the collections arranged by subject matter is *al-Muwaṭṭaʾ* of Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/796), compiled at the request of the ʿAbbāsid caliph Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr (d. 158/775). Other works include those collectively known as the

Six Books. These are first, the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī
(d. 256/870) – considered the most reliable book after the Qurʾān – and the
Ṣaḥīḥ of Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj (d. 261/875), which is also universally acclaimed
for its authentic traditions. The other four books of the *Sunna* which enjoy a
high reputation are those by Abū ʿAbdullāh Muḥammad b. Yazīd al-Qazwīnī,
known as Ibn Māja (d. 273/886), Abū Dawūd Sulaymān b. al-Ashʿath al-
Sijistānī (d. 275/889), Abū ʿĪsā Muḥammad b. Sawra al-Tirmidhī (d. ca. 279/
ca. 893), and Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Aḥmad b. Shuʿayb al-Nasāʾī (d. 303/915).

Scholars of the *ḥadīth* have laboured hard and long to study the *isnād* (chain
of tranmission) and the *matn* (text) of every tradition in these works critically.
Many of them have dedicated their lives to writing extensive commentaries on
the collections of *ḥadīth* or to abridging, summarizing or supplementing them.

Journeying in search of the *Sunna*

No people have ever travelled as much, or as far, in search of knowledge as
have the Muslim community. This is especially true of the *ḥadīth* scholars, who
set an unparalleled, wonderful example in crossing vast deserts on camelback
or on foot, solely to hear a unique *ḥadīth* from one who had memorized it or
was its best surviving authoritative source. This type of travel started with
the Companions of the Prophet. Jābir b. ʿAbdullāh (d. 78/697), for instance,
travelled to Syria – a month's journey – to see ʿAbdullāh b. Unays (d. 54/674)
in order to hear one single *ḥadīth* from him, which Jābir had not heard from
the Prophet.[54] Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī (d. 52/672) travelled to Egypt to see
ʿUqba b. ʿĀmir (d. 58/678), and when he met him said, 'Tell us what you
heard from the Messenger of God about concealing a Muslim's faults: no one
else who heard it is still alive.' After ʿUqba had related the requested tradition,
Abū Ayyūb rode off, returning to Medina without dismounting![55] Yet another
Companion travelled to Egypt to see Faḍāla b. ʿUbayd (d. 53/673), and when
he approached him said to Faḍāla, 'Now, I have not come to you on a visit, but
I have heard, so have you, a *ḥadīth* from the Messenger of God, and I hope
that you have some knowledge of it.'[56]

These, and other equally striking accounts, show that the Companions
journeyed either to hear *ḥadīths* that they had not heard directly from the
Messenger of God, or to confirm a *ḥadīth* that they had already learned
but which could not be verified from a local source – even if they had to
travel for a month to do this. Eventually, many Companions migrated from
Medina to other cities and far-flung places. Their Successors – who could gain

54. Yūsuf ibn ʿAbdullāh Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Jāmiʿ bayān al-ʿilm wa-faḍlih*, Cairo, al-Ṭibāʿa al-
    Munīriyya, n.d., I, p. 93.
55. *Ibid.*, pp. 93–4.
56. Al-Dārimī, *Sunan*, *op. cit.*, I, p. 38; al-Khaṭīb, *al-Riḥla fī ṭalab al-ḥadīth*, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

knowledge of the *Sunna* only by personally meeting, and learning it from, their predecessors – had therefore to travel farther and even more frequently than the Companions.

Sa'īd b. al-Musayyab, one of the great Successors, said, 'I used to travel in search of one *ḥadīth* on a journey lasting for days and nights on end.'[57] Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī travelled from Basra to Kufa for a similar purpose.[58] Abū Qilāba al-Jarmī (d. 104/722) waited in Medina three days, just to meet a man who was expected to arrive there, and narrate a *ḥadīth*.[59] 'Āmir al-Sha'bī related a *ḥadīth* to someone, then said to him, 'We have given you this for nothing; yet for less than this people used to travel all the way to Medina.'[60] Abu-l-'Āliya al-Riyāḥī observed, 'We used to listen to traditions in Basra on the authority of the Companions of God's Messenger, but were not content until we rode to Medina and heard them from their own lips.'[61] In the generation of the Successors a new factor appeared prompting those seeking *ḥadīth* to travel: the search for the 'high' *isnād* (*al-isnād al-'ālī*), for this is the shortest way of the uninterrupted *ḥadīth*. In this type of search, a Successor – who had heard a *ḥadīth* from another Successor – travelled to learn the tradition directly from the Companion who had first reported it from the Prophet.[62]

The science of the principles of the *ḥadīth* (*uṣūl al-ḥadīth*)

It would be incorrect to think that Muslims accepted *ḥadīths* from everyone who said, 'The Messenger of God said'. The scholars knew, and made known, those who for various motives lied about the Prophet. They relentlessly went after those who fabricated traditions, and exposed them. The pious scholar 'Abdullāh b. al-Mubārak (d. 181/797) was asked, 'What of these fabricated *ḥadīths*?' He replied, 'The perceptive critics expose them!' The traditionists devoutly, diligently, ingeniously and lovingly built the great discipline of *ḥadīth* and its many auxiliary sciences on solid foundations and well-defined principles. In his celebrated introduction to the science of *ḥadīth*, known as the *Muqaddima*, Taqiyy al-Dīn Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī (d. 643/1245) enumerated sixty-five sciences, or types, of prophetic traditions. Other scholars after him, such as Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277) and Zayn al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥīm b. al-Ḥusayn – better known as al-Ḥāfiẓ al-'Irāqī (d. 806/1404) – and Ibn Ḥajar

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57. Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *Jāmi' bayān al-'ilm …*, *op. cit.*, p 94; al-Khaṭīb, *al-Riḥla fī ṭalab al-ḥadīth*, p. 402.

58. Al-Khaṭīb, *al-Riḥla fī ṭalab al-ḥadīth*, *op. cit.*, p. 402.

59. Al-Dārimī, *Sunan*, *op. cit.*, I, p. 136.

60. Al-Bukhārī, *op. cit.*, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, I, p. 35.

61. Al-Khaṭīb, *al-Kifāya fī 'ilm al-riwāya*, *op. cit.*, 402–3.

62. See Akram Ḍiyā' al-'Umarī, *Buḥūth fī ta'rīkh al-sunna al-musharrafa,* Baghdad, Maṭba'at Irshad, 1972, pp. 208 ff.

al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852/1449) developed further Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ's exposition of this discipline. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) added in his commentary on al-Nawawī's *al-Taqrīb* other types, bringing their total to ninety-three.[63]

The first of these principles was not to accept a *ḥadīth* without an *isnād*, nor could anyone simply be believed if asserted 'the Messenger of God said' unless he were a Companion, one who had seen the Prophet and listened to him.[64] God has testified to the probity of these Companions and praised them in several *sūras* of the Qurʾān – for instance at the end of *al-Fatḥ* (S. 48). He especially praised the emigrants and the helpers, and those who participated in the Pledge of Good Pleasure (*Bayʿat al-Riḍwān*).[65] The Prophet too bore witness to their good character in many traditions.[66]

The conduct of the Companions testifies to their righteousness and crucial role in the formative period of the Muslim community. They were the ones who preserved the Qurʾān and *Sunna* and handed them on to the community, and who spread the religion of God in many countries. They, in fact, were the most excellent generation ever known to humankind. History has recorded many qualities of Muḥammad's Companions, for which disciples of other prophets have not been famous. These qualities include unmatched piety, high moral attainments, a readiness to undergo great sacrifices, and amazing feats of heroism.[67]

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63. See Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Tadrīb al-rāwī fī sharḥ taqrīb al-Nawawī*, ed. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ʿAbd al-Laṭīf, 2nd ed., Cairo, Maṭbaʿat al-Saʿāda, 1385/1966, II, pp. 386 ff.
64. For the Companions, see al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *al-Kifāya fī ʿilm al-riwāya,* Hyderabad, Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāmiyya, AH 1357, pp. 49–52, and the 39th *nawʿ* (section) of Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ's *Muqaddima* and its divisions.
65. See Qurʾān, XVIII.28; IX.100; LIX.8–9; XXII.58–9; XLVIII.18.
66. I shall simply quote here the well-known *ḥadīth* 'The best people is my generation, then those who follow them, then those who follow after them.' Related by al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, and Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*. It is reported, in similar phrasing, from Ibn Masʿūd and ʿImrān b. Ḥusaīn. In Muslim it is related from ʿĀʾisha and Abū Hurayra; in al-Tirmidhī and al-Ḥākim from ʿImrān b. Ḥusaīn; and in al-Ṭabarānī from Jaʿda b. Hubayra. Al-Suyūṭī has therefore said that it seems likely that this *ḥadīth* has been handed down continuously and its authenticity is beyond doubt (*mutawātir*). Also see Zayn al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Munāwī, *Fayḍ al-qadīr: sharḥ al-jāmiʿ al-ṣaghīr*, Beirut, Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1391/1972, III, pp. 478–9; and *Ṣaḥīḥ al-jāmiʿ al-ṣaghīr wa-ziyādātuh*, ed. Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, al-Maktab al-Islāmī, III, *ḥadīth* nos. 3283, 3288, 3289, 3290, 3296 and 3312.
67. See the standard references on the Companions, especially (Abū ʿAbdullāh) Ibn Saʿd's (d. 230/845) *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā,* Beirut, Dār Ṣādir li-l-Ṭibāʿa wa-l-Nashr, 1957; Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr's (d. 463/1070) *al-Istīʿāb fī maʿrifat al-aṣḥāb*; (Abu-l-Ḥasan) Ibn al-Athīr's (d. 630/1233) *Usud al-ghāba fī maʿrifat al-ṣaḥāba*, Beirut, Dār Ṣādir, AH 1385; and Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī's (852/1449) *al-Iṣāba fī tamyīz al-ṣaḥāba*, Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2005. For an examination of the moral and religious trust worthiness (*ʿadāla*) of the Companions, see al-Baghdādī's *al-Kifāya fī ʿilm al-riwāya*, pp. 46–9.

After the Companions, anyone transmitting a tradition from them had to trace it all the way back through a succession of narrators to the Companion who had heard it directly from the Prophet himself. The links between the narrators had to be unbroken, meaning that each narrator took their material directly from their informant. This chain of narrators could not be accepted when one link was missing, from the beginning, middle or end. This chain with continuous links of narrators is what Muslim scholars named *isnād* or *sanad*. Traditionists were very strict and circumspect about the *isnād* from an early period – to be precise from the beginning of the breaking out of civil strife (*fitna*) in 'Uthmān's time – when some people fell prey to partisan views and it became necessary to submit every *ḥadīth* to rigorous examination.

Such circumspection is reflected in the observation of Muḥammad b. Sīrīn, the well-known Successor,[68] jurist and *ḥadīth* scholar, about *isnād*:

> People were not used to asking about the isnād, but when the fitna arose, they would demand: 'Tell us your authorities.' They looked with favour on the people of tradition (*ahl al-Sunna*) and accepted their *ḥadīth*, and they avoided the *ḥadīth* of the people of [religious] innovation (*ahl al-bidʿa*).[69]

'Abdullāh b. al-Mubārak said, 'The isnād is a part of religion, and if it were not for the isnād, anyone would say whatever he liked!'[70] Ibn Sīrīn and others said, 'These *ḥadīth*s are (part of) religion, so regard carefully from whom you accept your religion!'[71] According to other accounts, Ibn Sīrīn too used to assert that the *ḥadīth* and Islam were equivalent.[72] This notion was current before Ibn Sīrīn, that is, in the time of the Companions. Students of history and of religion – such as Ibn Ḥazm[73] and others – recognize that the stipulation of the sound, unbroken *isnād* in transmitting religious learning and knowledge of Muḥammad's prophetic office is a distinctive characteristic of the Islamic community. Those not familiar with Islamic culture and the value it places on the importance and authenticity of religious learning may mistakenly believe that Muslims accept any *isnād*, or that it is open to anyone to compose a 'chain' of names of authoritative narrators, reaching back to the Companion who had heard a tradition from the Prophet. This is not the case. The traditionalists scrutinize every *isnād*, accepting only those that fulfil certain conditions.

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68. It is the Successors of whom the Qurʾān says 'and those who follow them in good deeds' (IX.100).

69. Narrated by Muslim in the introduction to his *Ṣaḥīḥ* and by al-Tirmidhī in *ʿIlal al-jāmiʿ*.

70. Ibn Abū Ḥatim al-Rāzī (d. 327/938), *al-Jarḥ wa-l-taʿdīl*, Hyderabad, India, n.p., 1371/1952, I, Section 1.

71. *Ibid*; narrated with its *isnād* from Ibn Sīrīn and others.

72. *Ibid*.

73. Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Faṣl fi-l-milal wa-l-ahwāʾ wa-l-niḥal,* Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 2001.

The first condition is that every narrator's person and life must be known. Not only that, but their person and conduct must be acceptable. Thus, a chain of transmission which says 'So-and-so told us on the authority of someone, or a teacher,' without naming every narrator (*rāwī*) would not be acceptable because such an *isnād* does not name the transmitters of the tradition.

An *isnād* would not be accepted if the following were unknown about one of its narrators: their place of origin, or their place of domicile, their teachers, and the date of their death. This type of narrator is called *majhūl al-ʿayn* (unknown as a person). Nor is a *rāwī* considered acceptable if he is known as a person but nothing, whether ill or good, is known about his life and conduct. This kind of narrator is called *majhūl al-ḥāl*, or *mastūr*, that is, someone whose trustworthiness can neither be confirmed nor called into question.

Second, the *rāwī* must be described as upright. Uprightness is linked to the narrator's piety and character, and to his trustworthiness in what he narrates and passes on. His words and deeds prove that the narrator is a God-conscious person who knows that he is accountable to God. Scholars of *ḥadīth* take the greatest care and reject a tradition if there is the least doubt about the personal conduct of any of its narrators. They hold that freedom from immoral behaviour is a corollary of uprightness. If, for example, they know that a narrator has lied, they reject traditions from that person, and call their *ḥadīth* fabricated (*mawḍūʿ*), or false (*makdhūb*) – even if they are not known to have lied in the narrating of *ḥadīth*s, since it is assumed the narrator might believe a liar.

The uprightness of the *rāwī* requires that he should not be known to have committed a grave sin, or to have persisted in any minor sin. Moreover, the traditionists demand that a narrator's piety should be buttressed by virtue (*murūʾa*), which is interpreted as freedom from bad habits and anything disreputable, like eating in the street, or – in earlier times – walking bare-headed. They are not content merely that a narrator should refrain from what is disapproved by the *Sharīʿa*, but require that he should refrain equally from what is frowned upon by custom (*ʿurf*). The narrator is thus, according to the traditionists, a person acceptable to God and to the people.

People may pretend to be upright and simulate virtue, while they are sham and spiritually barren: they preach what they do not practise and do not reveal their true traits. But deception is ultimately uncovered and hypocrisy exposed. As the fourth caliph, ʿAlī b. Abū Ṭālib said, 'Deception of the heart appears on the surface of the face, and is betrayed by slips of the tongue.'[74]

Third, a narrator is not accepted and considered reliable simply by being described as upright and pious, but in addition to these characteristics, he must

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74. The actual saying is 'None hides anything in his heart except that the heart …'. See al-Qāḍī al-Quḍāʿī, *Dustūr maʿālim al-ḥikam*, Cairo, n.p., AH 1323, p. 23.

possess the quality of accuracy (*ḍabṭ*). A *rāwī* could be one of the most God-conscious, most pious and most worthy of people, but not accurate in what he relates. Even worse, people might make many errors, or forget, or confuse one *ḥadīth* with another. Therefore, a narrator must be accurate and careful in memorizing traditions or in transmitting them in writing. Traditionists stipulate that for a *ḥadīth* to be considered sound, it should be transmitted by a *rāwī* who demonstrates the highest level of accuracy and precision, so that his memory and proficiency can be relied on. They find this out by an internal comparison of the individual's own traditions and by an external comparison with similar traditions transmitted by other trustworthy authorities.

Often *rāwīs* are accurate and have memorized *ḥadīth* well, but as they advance in years, their memory fails them. When this happens, the traditionists reckon them as weak, saying that they were confused 'at the end' – that is, at the end of their life. They also express reservations about those who relate traditions on this person's authority. They say that so-and-so narrated from the person before they were confused, and hence those traditions are accepted, but that so-and-so narrated from them afterwards, or at a time unknown, and therefore what was transmitted is rejected.

Next, all the links in the chain of transmission must be uninterrupted (*muttaṣil*), joined one to the other, from beginning to end, that is, to the original source, the Prophet. So if one link, or *rāwī*, is missing from the beginning, middle or end, the *ḥadīth* is weak and is rejected. It does not matter how reliable and accurate the individual narrators might have been, even if they were prominent Successors – such as al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, or ʿAṭāʾ b. Abū Rabāḥ, or Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742) – through whom people prayed for rain, and to whom people travelled vast distances in search of knowledge. If one of these eminent Successors were to have said, 'The Messenger of God said' without naming the Companion they had heard the *ḥadīth* from, the tradition would not be accepted, because it is possible that this Successor might have heard it only from another Successor, that is, the *isnād* if the tradition does not go back all the way to the Prophet. In this case, the intermediary narrator (*wāsiṭa*) is not known, and the *ḥadīth* is not accepted. This type of tradition is called interrupted (*mursal*) because one *rāwī* or more are missing in the chain linking the Successors to the Prophet. Some jurists accept a *mursal* tradition, but only under special conditions.

This means that every *rāwī* receives the *ḥadīth* from the one preceding him directly, with no intermediary. The narrator is not permitted to omit the intermediary on the basis that the person is considered trustworthy, for that narrator might be considered unreliable by someone else; on the contrary, the mere suppression of the intermediary raises doubt concerning the omission. Sometimes a *rāwī* who is deemed reliable and acceptable in general omits the intermediaries, and mentions a phrase like *ʿan*, 'on the authority of so-and-so'. The traditionists term this method 'deceit to conceal defects' (*tadlīs*) and do

not accept that narrator's *ḥadīths* unless he says 'So-and-so told me' or 'So-and-so informed me' or 'I heard So-and-so' or something similar. The scholars of *ḥadīth*, for instance, maintain that when Muḥammad b. Isḥāq (d. ca. 150/ ca. 767), the well-known author of the Prophet's biography, says 'on the authority of So-and-so' his traditions are weak, because *ʿan*, 'on the authority of', suggests that there is a probability of there being either intermediaries or direct reception involved in transmission. Such ambivalence about the links in *isnād* weakens any *ḥadīth*.

Fifth, the *ḥadīth* should not be exceptional (*shādhdh*), a term which means that a reliable narrator relates a tradition in contradiction to a *rāwī* who is deemed more reliable. This is the case when a reliable narrator transmits a *ḥadīth* with a particular wording or explanatory addition, while another stronger and more reliable *rāwī* transmits it in a different version and with a variant explanatory addition. Similarly, a *rāwī* might narrate one version of a tradition, but two or more narrators transmit it in a conflicting form. In such a case, the traditionists accept whoever is more trustworthy, and this version of the *ḥadīth* is called preserved (*maḥfūẓ*), while the contradictory tradition is rejected and called exceptional (*shādhdh*), even if its narrator is personally trustworthy and acceptable.

Finally, the *ḥadīth* should contain no serious weakness in either its chain of transmission or its text.

This is a branch of learning confined to specialists with life-long acquaintance with, and expertise in, *ḥadīth*. These scholars scrutinize chains of transmissions and texts. A *ḥadīth* may appear at first glance to be acceptable and faultless, but as soon as these thoroughbred critics examine it, they might discover a defect in it. On the basis of this defect, they would classify the *ḥadīth* as weak. Thus arose an extensive discipline and unique field of study in the world of Islam called *ʿilm ʿilal al-ḥadīth*, the science of the deficiencies of traditions.[75]

Some critics of the authenticity of *ḥadīth* have raised doubts about this science. They have alleged that some people could invent a sound *isnād*, even an invincibly sound one, and attach it to a tradition which can make things lawful or unlawful, or obligatory or not. They also claim that such a fabricated *ḥadīth* can be passed on to jurists or traditionists, who would accept it despite its origin. But it is evident that such thinking and criticism are clouded by a lack of understanding of the very rudiments, true nature and unparalleled achievements of the science of *ḥadīth*.

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75. See *al-ʿIlal fī-l-ḥadīth* by Dr ʿAbd al-Raḥīm Saʿīd, Amman, Dār Nashr al-Mūdī, n.d., a methodological study of *ʿIlal al-Tirmidhī* by Ibn Rajab.

The unique achievement of the science of *ḥadīth*

The science of *ḥadīth*, with its diverse auxiliary and exacting disciplines, is a unique, brilliant creation of the Muslims. In the first instance, it arose because of God's command to Muslims that the Prophet should be obeyed and emulated. To this end, his traditions were preserved in memory and writing and the traditionists channelled their energy to develop the science of *ḥadīth* on original and sound foundations. Their success in this enterprise is stupendous. Never in history have the sayings and deeds of any man been recorded in such detail and with similar accuracy and been subjected to comparable scrutiny as those of Muḥammad, the Messenger of God. Never in history have historical facts relating to any individual been verified rigourously with such a razor-sharp scientific methodology as those pertaining to the character and life of the Prophet. Centuries before higher criticism of religious or historical material appeared elsewhere, Muslims practised it as it has never been practised before or since. The high standards of authentication, criticism and integrity which Muslim scholarship set in the field of prophetic tradition have not yet been attained by the most meticulous modern biographers and historians of modern times. Muslims are beholden to the traditionists for preserving the *Sunna* of the Arabian Prophet; the world should be beholden to them for pioneering a research methodology of unequalled excellence.

Chapter 3.5

The *Sunna* as the application of the Qur'ān

Muḥammad Abdullah al-Sharqawi

Introduction

The *Sunna* is the practical application by the Prophet and his Companions of the Qur'ān on the basis of the evidence and intentions of the Qur'ān. It has been transmitted from the Prophet by an uninterrupted chain of transmitters to later generations.[1] Explaining the relationship between the *Sunna* and the Noble Qur'ān and the elucidation of the various aspects and spheres of application of the *Sunna* will lead us to cover concisely a number of points. We will be taking into account the agreed consensus (*ijmāʿ*) of the scholars of the *Sharīʿa*, what the leading religious scholars consider most likely in areas of doubt and the considered opinion of the majority. We will not be going into great detail or discussing all the ramifications. However, relevant examples will be given where necessary.

Among Muslims, the relationship between the *Sunna* and the Qur'ān is self-evident, established and hardly open to discussion or independent reasoning (*ijtihād*). Therefore, we have relied on the classical works of the *Sharīʿa* and will be quoting from them in order to clarify the issue of the *Sunna* as the Application of the Qur'ān.

Revelation: Qur'ān and *Sunna*

Imām al-Shāṭibī says: 'It is established that the Noble Qur'ān is the totality of the *Sharīʿa*, the pillar of the Muslim community, the source of wisdom, a proof of the prophethood of Muḥammad and a light for people of vision

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1. Maḥmūd Shaltūt, *al-Islām: ʿaqīda wa-sharīʿa*, 18th edition, Cairo, Dār al-Shurūq, 2001, p. 491.

and foresight. Without the Qurʾān there is no path to God and no salvation. There shall be no attachment to anything which violates it. All this requires no justification or demonstration as it is well known as the religion of the *Umma*. Therefore, anyone seeking to learn about the general principles and intent of the *Sharīʿa* […] should study it both in terms of its theory and practice. In so doing, he may well succeed in his aims and find himself among the first generation of Muslims. However, success in this noble aim depends on an assiduous study of the *Sunna* as the explanation of the Qurʾān and what was said by the leading religious scholars from the past and our forefathers.'[2]

The Qurʾān is also known as the *Furqān* (lit. the Proof, the Evidence), the Guidance, the Proof, the Explanation and Elucidation of everything. It is the proof of God for mankind and is given in general and specific terms […].[3]

To talk about the themes and knowledge which the Qurʾān contains in a general form, we have to bear in mind that the intent of the Qurʾān is to call mankind to worship God and to follow His religion. From this intent, two things inevitably follow from which all the themes of the Qurʾān derive. The first is the explanation of the worship to which mankind is called; the second is stating the incentives to induce people to follow His religion. Worship is divided into two kinds: the foundations of the faith and the principles of action. Actions are of two kinds: those which promise reward and those which admonish.

As for the details, the Qurʾān has seven themes: knowledge of God, prophethood, the Hereafter, the principles (*aḥkām*) of Islam, the promise of the reward in the Hereafter, the threat of retribution in the Hereafter and stories of the Prophets.[4] This is not the place to elucidate all the themes contained in the Noble Qurʾān, but it can safely be said in accordance with Imām al-Shāfiʿī that, 'Everything revealed by God in His Book is a mercy and a proof. True, there are those who know it and those who do not. But those who are in ignorance of it shall not know it; and those with knowledge of it shall not be ignorant.'[5]

The *Sunna* is the term applied to everything emanating from the Prophet with regard to the evidence of the *Sharīʿa* which is not in the Qurʾān. It is not

2. Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt fī uṣūl al-sharīʿa*, Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh Darāz (ed.), Cairo, al-Maktaba al-Tijāriyya al-Kubrā, 1975, III, p. 346.

3. *Ibid*., p. 354. See also al-Āmidī, *al-Iḥkām fī uṣūl al-aḥkām*, ʿAbd al-Razzāq ʿAfīfī (ed.), Beirut, al-Maktab al-Islāmī, n.d., I, pp. 159–2.

4. Ibn Juzay al-Kalbī, *Kitāb al-tashīl li-ʿulūm al-tanzīl*, ʿAbd Allāh al-Khālidī (ed.), Beirut, Sharikat Dār al-Arqam, ᴀʜ 1416, I, p. 14.

5. Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Risāla,* Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (ed.), Cairo, Maktabat al-Ḥalabī, 1940, p. 13.

miraculous in any way but is the record of the sayings, deeds and decisions of the Prophet.[6]

The religious scholars of Islam are agreed that the Noble Qur'ān and the veritable *Sunna* come from a single source. Abū Muḥammad ʿAlī b. Ḥazm says: 'We have shown that the Qur'ān is the fundamental authority in matters of Religious Law. When we read the Qur'ān we find the obligation to obey what the Messenger of God, has commanded us to do. We also find that God, has said of His Messenger 'nor does he speak out of his desire. This is nothing but a revelation that is conveyed to him' (LIII.3–4). We can, therefore, say that the Revelation from God to His Messenger is divided into two kinds:

One is inspired, recited, compiled and structured in a miraculous way; this is the Qur'ān.

The other is inspired, transmitted without being compiled, has no miraculous structure and is read rather than recited. These are the reports transmitted from the Prophet. They explain God's purpose with regard to us.

God says 'that you may elucidate to people the teaching that has been sent down for them' (XVI.44). We find that God has commanded obedience to this second kind of revelation, as he ordered obedience to the first, i.e. the Qur'ān, and there is no difference between them.[7] God said: 'Obey Allāh and obey the Messenger' (XXIV.54).

'Everything reported from the Prophet is reported exactly as he said it. It is the truth and reliable in everything reported from him and about him. This is regardless of whether or not we use it as a basis for working out the various obligations (*taklīf*). Similarly, if he gave a ruling on matters of law, or a command or a prohibition it has been reported exactly as he, said. There is no difference between what the Angel reported to him from God and what God inspired in his soul or showed him of the Unseen in a miraculous way. All this has been considered and demonstrated and used as a basis for deriving both principles of faith and action: the Prophet was supported by infallibility and did not speak on a whim.'[8]

Inability to act on the basis of the Qur'ān alone

The human mind alone, that is the mind which has received neither revelation nor the support of God in understanding it, is unable to understand the Religious Law, including the details and principles thereof, from the Qur'ān alone.

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6. Al-Āmidī, *al-Iḥkām* …, *op. cit.*, I, p. 169.
7. Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Iḥkām fī uṣūl al-aḥkām*, Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (ed.), Beirut, Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīda, n.d., I, pp. 96–7.
8. Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt* …, *op. cit.*, IV, pp. 80–1.

The Qurʾān is characterized by the highest degree of inimitability (*iʿjāz*) and the highest degree of eloquence and concision in its expression. It contains profound themes, treasures and secrets. The Qurʾān veils a great deal of these secrets from us and nobody, except God and he to whom it was revealed, can understand them. The Qurʾān contains some texts which talk in general terms and others which give specific details. When working with these texts, a commentary (*sharḥ*) is necessary to explain, clarify and interpret them. This *sharḥ* must come from God, because it is He who has made certain things obligatory for mankind and because He knows best His purpose and design. Other than God, there is no other source of information on these matters. This *sharḥ* is the *Sunna* which was revealed by inspiration (*waḥy*) or which was established by God through His Messenger when he used his own independent judgement (*ijtihād*).[9]

The intent of the Revealed Law as expressed in the discourse received by those who are obligated to fulfil the divine command is to make them understand their rights and obligations and what is in their best interests in this world and the Hereafter. This requires a clear explanation and without generalization or ambiguity. If this intent were accompanied by ambiguity and generalization, it would be incompatible with the fundamental objective of the divine discourse and would have no benefit.

Indeed, this cannot be the case since it is inconceivable that an intended message would be devoid of an intention rendering that message acceptable.[10]

Therefore, the Prophet was the explanation of the Qurʾān by means of what he said, what he did and what he made no comment on. In this, the Prophet was fulfilling the trust assigned to him by God: 'We have now sent down this Reminder upon you that you may elucidate to people the teaching that has been sent down for them' (XVI.44), i.e. the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*.

The Prophet would explain by what he said. An example is what he said in the *ḥadīth* on divorce: 'This is the *ʿidda** as God has commanded by which women should be divorced.'[11] He told ʿĀʾisha when she asked him the meaning of: Whoever is given the Record in his right hand shall be called to an

* *ʿIdda* is the legally determined period of time following a divorce during which a woman may not re-marry.

9. ʿAbd al-Ghanī ʿAbd al-Khāliq, *Ḥujjiyyat al-Sunna*, Herndon, Virginia, The International Institute of Islamic Thought, AH 1406, pp. 322–3.

10. Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt …*, *op. cit.*, III, p. 344.

11. See Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, Muḥammad Zuhayr b. Nāṣir (ed.), Beirut, Dār Ṭawq al-Najāt, AH 1422, VII, p. 41; Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Muḥammad Fuʾād ʿAbd al-Bāqī (ed.), Beirut, Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, n.d., II, p. 1093; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dawūd*, Muḥammad Muḥyi al-Dīn (ed.), Beirut, al-Maktaba al-ʿAṣriyya, n.d., II, p. 255; al-Nasāʾī, *al-Sunan al-ṣughra*, ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda (ed.), Ḥalab, Maktab al-Maṭbūʿāt al-Islāmiyya, 1986, VI, p. 137.

easy accounting (LXXXVIII.7–8), 'That is the presentation before God [on the Day of Judgement] (*al-ʿarḍ*).'[12] And to a man who asked about the meaning of *āyat al-munāfiq thalāth*, he said, 'It means such and such'.[13] Examples of this are countless.

The Prophet would also explain by his actions. 'Did you not tell him that I did that!'[14] God says: 'We gave her in marriage to you so that there should not be any constraint for the believers regarding the wives of their adopted sons after they had accomplished whatever they would of them. And Allāh's command was bound to be accomplished' (XXXIII.37). And, by his actions, he explained to them how to perform the prayer and the pilgrimage. For example, he said: 'Pray in the manner you saw me pray'[15] or 'Your rituals you shall take from me'.[16] Of this, there are many examples.

The Prophet's approval was also a means of explanation, for example when he learnt about something but did not condemn it. According to the jurists, had what he heard been invalid or prohibited, he would have condemned it.[17]

Were it not for the explanations given in the *Sunna,* nobody would know their obligations, the provisions of the Revealed Law would be ineffective, the Commandments of God would be null and void. To think this of God, would be preposterous. Shaykh ʿAbd al-Ghanī ʿAbd al-Khāliq has explained this with several examples. He says:

God said: 'Establish Prayer and dispense *Zakāt* (the Purifying Alms)' (II.43). From this we learn that to pray and to give alms are obligations.

However, what is the nature of this prayer we are obligated to perform? When should it be performed? How many should be performed? Who is obligated to perform these prayers? How many times should they be performed in a life time? What is almsgiving? Who is obliged to give alms? What is the property on which alms should be given? How much should be given? What are the conditions to be fulfilled?

God said: 'Believers, bow down and prostrate yourselves' (XXII.77). So, we understand we have to bow and prostrate.

12. See Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, I, p. 32; Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, IV, p. 2204; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, III, p. 184; Abū ʿĪsā al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, Bashshār ʿAwād Maʿrūf (ed.), Beirut, Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1998, IV, p. 195.

13. See Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, I, p. 16; Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, I, p. 78; Abū ʿĪsā al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, IV, p. 315.

14. Mālik b. Anas, *al-Muwaṭṭaʾ*, Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-Aʿẓamī (ed.), Abu Dhabi, Muʾassasat Zāʾid b. Sulṭān, 2004, III, p. 415.

15. Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, I, p. 128.

16. Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, II, p. 943.

17. Al-Āmidī, *al-Iḥkām …*, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 331.

But, how is this to be done? What is meant by it? Is it prayer or something else? If prayer is meant, then does the number of bows equal the number of prostrations? Or are there more of one than the other?[18]

Ibn Ḥazm had asked similar questions previously: 'In which Qur'ān is it said that in the midday prayer there are four *rakʿa* (bowing), in the sunset prayer three *rakʿa* and that the *rakʿa* is to be done in such a way and that the sujūd (prostration) is to be done in such a way and that the Qur'ān is to be recited in such a way? [In which Qur'ān will one find] an explanation of what one should avoid while fasting, an explanation of the rules governing almsgiving (*zakāt*) vis-à-vis gold, silver, sheep, camels and cows, an explanation of how many should be given as *zakāt* and the amount of *zakāt*? [In which Qur'ān will one find] an explanation of the pilgrimage rituals, the timing of the standing at ʿArafa, a description of the prayer to be performed at ʿArafa and Muzdalifa, the throwing of stones (*jumār*), a description of the state of ritual consecration (*iḥrām*) and what should be avoided during the pilgrimage? [In which Qur'ān will one find] an explanation regarding the amputation of the limbs of thieves, an explanation of the foster-mother being one of the forbidden degrees of marriage, an explanation of which foods are forbidden, an explanation of sacrificial offerings, an explanation of legal punishments, an explanation of divorce, an explanation of the provisions regarding selling, an explanation of usury, an explanation of legal obligations (*al-aqḍiya*), legal proceedings, faith (*īmān*), religious bequests (*aḥbās*) and other juristic matters? All these matters are discussed in general terms in the Qur'ān. If the Qur'ān were all we had, we would not know what to do with it. The source of authority in all these matters has been transmitted from the Prophet: 'There is no other course of action but to seek authority in the *ḥadīth*.'[19] Imām al-Shāfiʿī[20] had discussed these matters in general terms. They were subsequently discussed in detail by Ibn al-Qayyim.[21]

Al-Shāfiʿī says: 'Were it not for the evidence in the *Sunna*, we would have to judge by the external meaning (*ẓāhir*) of the text of the Qur'ān. We would have to amputate the limbs of anyone deserving to be called a thief, we would give a hundred lashes to anyone committing adultery, both freeborn and the widow or divorcee … etc.' He goes on to say: 'The *Sunna* of the Messenger of God is an explanation from God of the meanings He intends. It is evidence for general and specific principles and conditions.'[22]

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18. ʿAbd al-Ghanī ʿAbd al-Khāliq, *Ḥujjiyyat al-Sunna*, p. 24.

19. Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Iḥkām fī uṣūl al-aḥkām*, II, p. 79.

20. Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Risāla*, pp. 73–104.

21. Ibn al-Qayyim, *Iʿlām al-muwaqqiʿīn ʿinda rabb al-ʿālamīn*, Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Salām Ibrāhīm (ed.), Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1991, II, pp. 220–35.

22. Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Risāla*, p. 226.

The Provisions of the Qur'ān are: General Principles of which the *Sunna* is the practical application

'Most of the provisions of the Qur'ān relating to legal matters are defined in general rather than specific terms. Where such provisions are defined in specific terms, they also have a general application.'[23] This means that they do not apply to a specific person, a specific case or a specific time. Also, they are not set down in minute detail to include all the conditions, basic principles and interdictions which their application or prohibition would involve.[24]

'The Qur'ān, despite its concise style, is comprehensive and would not be comprehensive unless it dealt with all matters in their totality. In addition, the totality of the *Sharī'a* was completed by the revelation of the Qur'ān, as God says: 'This day I have perfected for you your religion' (V.3). However, not all the provisions relating to the prayer (*ṣalāt*), almsgiving (*zakāt*), striving in the way of Allāh (*jihād*) and similar matters are given in the Qur'ān. Rather, they are explained in the *Sunna*, as are practices relating to marriage, contracts, punishments and the divine statutes and penalties (*ḥudūd*), etc.

The Qur'ān, therefore, needs a great deal of explanation; the *Sunna,* by virtue of its wealth of detail and the wealth of the issues it covers is the explanation of the Qur'ān.[25]

Therefore, the principles are 'established in the Qur'ān and given in detail in the *Sunna*'.[26] As a result, the *Sunna* 'is the practical application by the Prophet and his companions of the Qur'ān in accordance with the evidence for the commands and intentions of the Qur'ān… This is the practical approach which has been transmitted by an uninterrupted chain of transmitters from the Prophet and is known to all.'[27]

On this basis, 'one should not, when making deductions from the Qur'ān confine oneself to the Qur'ān without looking into its explanation and commentary, namely the *Sunna*. Since the Qur'ān deals with the totality of things, as is the case with prayer, almsgiving, the pilgrimage and fasting, etc., there is no alternative but to study its explanation (i.e. the *Sunna*).'[28]

The Qur'ān contains an explanation for everything. One who is learned in the Qur'ān will know all of the *Sharī'a* and will lack nothing in his knowledge. In other words, his knowledge will be of the generalities

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23. Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt* …, *op. cit.*, III, p. 366.
24. *Ibid.*, f.n. 2.
25. Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt* …, *op. cit.*, III, p. 367.
26. *Ibid.*, IV, p. 28.
27. Maḥmūd Shaltūt, *al-Islām:* …, *op. cit.*, p. 491.
28. Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt* …, *op. cit.*, III, p. 369.

of the *Sharīʿa*. This is proved by God saying: 'This day I have perfected for you your religion' (V.3), and 'We have neglected nothing in the Book (of Decree)' (VI.38), and 'Verily this Qurʾān guides to the Way that is the Straight-most' (XVII.9) meaning 'the straight path' (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*), namely the complete system governing the relationship between the Creator and His Creation. If all the meanings in the Qurʾān had not been completed and perfected, it would be incorrect to say that such and such a meaning was in fact the truth. For example, certain verses (*āyāt*) of the Qurʾān say that the Qurʾān is a guidance (*hudā*) and heals what is in the hearts of mankind. It can only heal everything in the hearts of mankind by containing an explanation for everything.

If we consider the moral absolutes of the *Sharīʿa*, namely 'that which is required' (*ḍarūriyyāt*), 'that which is necessary' (*ḥājiyyāt*) and 'that which improves' (*taḥsīniyyāt*), we find that the Qurʾān contains them all,[29] as we will show in the following.

> The religious scholars believe that the *Sunna*, the consensus of the religious scholars (*ijmāʿ*) and analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) are founded on the Qurʾān. People regard God saying 'So accept whatever the Messenger gives you' (LIX.7) as implying's the *Sunna*; that God saying 'and follows a path other than that of the believers' (IV.115) implies the *ijmāʿ*; and God saying 'that you may judge between people in accordance with what Allāh has shown you' (IV.105) implies *qiyās*. Al-Shāṭibī comments on this as follows: 'This is extremely important.In the authoritative collections of the *ḥadīth* on the authority of Ibn Masʿūd, the Prophet said: "God has cursed tatooists and those who have tatoos done to themselves".[30] This was related by a woman of the Banū Asad, Umm Yāʿqūb. She was reading the Qurʾān. She came to him and said: "I have heard that you cursed so and so?" and reminded him exactly of what he had done. ʿAbd Allāh b. Masʿūd said: "And why shouldn't I curse those who the Prophet of God cursed and which is in the Book". The woman said: "I have read the Qurʾān from cover to cover (*bayna lawḥay al-muṣḥaf*) and did not find it". He said: "If you had read it, you would have found it". God said: So accept whatever the Messenger gives you, and refrain from whatever he forbids you (LIX.7). Al-Shāṭibī commented on Ibn Masʿūd's inference by saying that ʿAbd Allāh b. Masʿūd was one of those who was most knowledgeable about the Qurʾān.[31]

29. Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt* …, *op. cit.*, III, p. 368.
30. Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, VI, p. 147; Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, III, p. 1678; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dawūd*, IV, p. 77.
31. Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt* …, *op. cit.*, III, p. 368.

The Qur'ān is the Authority for the Meanings in the *Sunna*

Scholars believe that the Qur'ān is the authority for the meaning of words and expressions in the *Sunna*. The *Sunna* gives detail where the Qur'ān speaks in general terms, explains where the Qur'ān is problematic and expands the meaning where the Qur'ān is concise. This is because the *Sunna* is the explanation of the Qur'ān, as God, indicates when He says: 'and We have now sent down this Reminder upon you that you may elucidate to people the teaching that has been sent down for them' (XVI.44). You will not find anything in the *Sunna* whose meaning has not been indicated in the Qur'ān, both in general and specific terms. God has described His Messenger, as follows: 'and you are certainly on the most exalted standard of moral excellence' (LXVIII.4). ʿĀʾisha explained this when she said: 'His character is the Qur'ān'. This indicates that what the Prophet says, does or decides finds its authority in the Qur'ān. What one says and does constitutes character and the character of a man emerges in what he says and does. What the Prophet said and did, and everything else, came from the Qur'ān. His actions, sayings and decisions are what the jurists of Islam call 'the *Sunna*', as we have already mentioned.

Because God made the Qur'ān as an explanation of everything, it necessarily follows that the *Sunna* contains all of the Qur'ān as it only explains that which God said. Therefore, the *Sunna* explains the Qur'ān and that is why it turns to the Qur'ān for its authority.[32]

The status of the non-legislative content of the *Sunna* *vis-à-vis* the Qur'ān

The writer of *al-Muwāfaqāt* says: 'When we say that the Qur'ān is indicative of the *Sunna* and that the *Sunna* is an explanation of the Qur'ān, this is in relation to the divine command, prohibition and permission and their consequent requirements and the totality of things relating to the actions of those obligated to observe the precepts of the religion with respect to the divine command.'

Everything which falls outside this category which does not relate to the divine command, prohibition and permission falls in two categories:

The First: Content of the *Sunna* which interprets the Qur'ān. This is an unparalleled source of explanation, as God says:

but enter the gate a prostrate, saying, 'Repentance' (II.58).[33]

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32. *Ibid.*, IV, pp. 12–13.

33. Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, IV, p. 156; Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, IV, p. 2312; Abū ʿĪsā al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, V, p. 55.

The Second: Content of the *Sunna* which does not interpret the Qurʾān. This is content which does not relate to obligations of faith or action and which does not necessarily originate in the Qurʾān. These matters are supplementary to the divine obligation. Also *Sunna* deals with matters extraneous to the primary intent of the Qurʾān, which is to establish the *Sharīʿa*.

This is shown in exemplary fashion in the *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī[34] in the *ḥadīth* on the leper, the bald man and the blind man, the *ḥadīth* about Jarīḥ al-ʿĀbid, the death of Moses, and a collection of stories about the Prophets, and bygone peoples and nations. Such material does not serve as a basis for action. However, it can be seen as akin to the stories in the Qurʾān which seek to 'promise reward' and 'admonish'. In this way, they serve the divine command and prohibition and are considered as supplementary to the basic requirements of the *Sharīʿa*. In this respect, such material falls within the first category[35] as, in explaining the Qurʾān, it contributes to the primary intent of the Qurʾān.

The three aspects of the Qurʾān and *Sunna* which explain the intent and purpose of God

Perhaps al-Shāfiʿī was the first to make this tripartite division. In his *al-Risāla* (lit. 'The Treatise'), he says:

'Explaining the religious obligations provided for in the Qurʾān is one of these aspects. These include:

First: Qurʾānic material which was revealed to explain the Qurʾān, and which requires no other explanation;

Second: Qurʾānic material which explains what has been obligated and obligates obedience to His Messenger. The Messenger of God explains what God requires: how the religious obligation is to be fulfilled, who is to fulfil the religious obligation, when part of the obligation may be waived, what is established and what is an obligation.

Third: Explaining what is well-known in the *Sunna* but has no Qurʾānic foundation.

All of the above explain the Book of God, (i.e. everything in the *Sunna* is an explanation of the Book of God and the Prophet and explains what his Lord requires of mankind.) Anyone who accepts his obligations from God as stated in the Qurʾān also accepts the *Sunna* of the Messenger of God by virtue of the fact that God has made obedience to His Messenger an obligation for mankind and that mankind should ultimately refer to His judgement.

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34. Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, IV, p. 171.
35. Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt …*, *op. cit.*, IV, pp. 55–8. Also see ʿAbd Allāh Darāz's clarifications.

Whosoever accepts the Messenger of God will be accepting God through his obedience to what God commanded.

Acceptance combines what is in the Book of God and in the *Sunna* of the Messenger of God with acceptance that both are from God. And if the reasons for their acceptance, namely what God has permitted, forbidden, obligated and stipulated as punishments, are scattered between the two, then this is how He willed it.'[36]

This is the summation of Imām al-Shāfiʿī which has been accepted by the majority of scholars of the *Sharīʿa* ever since. In the following, we will present Ibn al-Qayyim's detailed analysis of these three aspects as given in his *Iʿlām al-muwaqqiʿīn*. He says:

First: Its acceptance must be in every respect. The fact that the Qur'ān and *Sunna* deal successively and consecutively with a single principle is an example of how evidence can appear separately yet concatenate.

Second: It must be an explanation and interpretation of the Qur'ān.

Third: It must give an answer regarding a provision on which the Qur'ān is silent, or prohibit that which the Qur'ān has not prohibited. It may not go beyond the limits of these categories nor oppose the Qur'ān in any way. That which is supplementary to the Qur'ān originated from the Prophet. In these matters he must be obeyed; disobedience is not permitted. This is not to put the *Sunna* on a higher level than the Qur'ān. Rather, it is in obedience to God's command that His Messenger is to be obeyed. If the Messenger of God were not obeyed in this category, obedience to him in any context would be meaningless and become null and void. For if obedience to the Messenger meant obedience only to that to which the Qur'ān had given its express consent and no more, then there could be no specific obedience owed to the Prophet. Yet God has said: He who obeys the Messenger thereby obeys Allāh (IV.80). How, then, could a scholar not accept a *ḥadīth* which is supplementary to the Qur'ān, not accept a *ḥadīth* which forbids a women being united through marriage with her paternal or maternal aunt, not accept a *ḥadīth* which includes relations of fosterage within the forbidden degrees of marriage, not accept a *ḥadīth* allowing withdrawal from a contract in certain circumstances (*khiyār al-sharṭ*), not accept a *ḥadīth* on the right of pre-emption (*shufʿa*), not accept a *ḥadīth* on giving guarantees and pledges in urban as opposed to rural areas even though it is supplementary to that in the Qur'ān, not accept a *ḥadīth* on the legacy of a grandmother, not accept a *ḥadīth* on giving the slave girl an option when freed in marriage, not accept a *ḥadīth* preventing a menstruating woman from fasting or performing the prayer, not accept a *ḥadīth* necessitating expiation if sexual intercourse takes place during the daylight hours of Ramadan, and not accept the *ḥadīths* (sing. *ḥadīth*) which

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36. Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Risāla*, p. 32.

establish that the wife of a deceased husband is entitled to a longer period of *ʿidda* than is stated in the Qurʾān?[37]

The issue is perfectly clear to the scholars of the *Sharīʿa*. 'The One who has made obedience to His Messenger an obligation and acceptance of what he says with regard to this supplementary material is the One Who has made obedience to His Messenger and acceptance of what he says an obligation in other contexts. He is the One who told us: So accept whatever the Messenger gives you' (LIX.7). He is the One Who established this supplementary material in the Revealed Law when He made His Messenger say: 'Glory be to God. He appointed him as His legislator *ab initio* and appointed him to explain what he/He wanted to explain by his word of mouth. Indeed all that he says is an explanation from God.'

For the supplementary matters, in all their aspects, do not deviate from the explanation in any way. They are an explanation of the intent and purpose of God in general through obedience to God and obedience to His Messenger. There is no difference between the explanation of this intent and purpose of God and the explanation of the intent and purpose of God with regard to prayer, almsgiving, the pilgrimage or circumambulating the *kaʿba*, etc. Rather, the one is the explanation of God's intent and purpose with regard to some things and the other is an explanation of God's intent and purpose with regard to more general matters. In fact, to violate the explanation is to violate the Qurʾān and the *ḥadīth* together.

Everything which the Prophet laid down as legally binding on his community is his explanation from God that this is His law and His religion. There is no difference between what he said in his recited speech (i.e. the Qurʾān) and what he said while inspired and which has been reported (i.e. the *ḥadīth*). This is similar to the revelation in the sense that they are both to be obeyed and that the violation of the one is equivalent to the violation of the other.[38]

Imām al-Shāfiʿī reiterates this sense in several places in his *al-Risāla* and *Kitāb al-Umm*. He says: 'Everything which the Prophet established as legally binding but which is not in the Qurʾān, (about which we have written in the present work when mentioning how God has blessed mankind by teaching us the Qurʾān and the Wisdom (*ḥikma*), indicates that the Wisdom is the *Sunna* of the Messenger of God.'[39]

Al-Shāfiʿī goes on to say: 'What the Messenger of God established as legally binding on which there was no judgement (i.e. in the Qurʾān), he

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37. Ibn al-Qayyim, *Iʿlām al-muwaqqiʿīn* …, *op. cit.*, II, p. 220.

38. Ibn al-Qayyim, *Iʿlām al-muwaqqiʿīn* …, *op. cit.*, II, p. 224. See also: ʿAbd al-Ghanī ʿAbd al-Khāliq, *Ḥujjiyyat al-Sunna*, pp. 495–497.

39. Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Risāla*, p. 32.

established by the judgement of God. God has explained this to us by saying: Surely you are directing people to the Right Way' (XLII.52).

The Messenger of God would establish legally binding principles on the basis of the Qur'ān, but would also establish legally binding principles when there was no express provision in the Qur'ān.

With regard to both, God has shown that it is an obligation to obey His Messenger. God has allowed no one, from all His Creation, to excuse himself for violating a command which he knew to be from the Messenger of God. He has made everyone dependent on His Messenger in the practice of their religion and has established His proof which will guide them to Him. The Messenger of God has explained what God wills with regard to the performance of His religious obligations as stated in His Book so that He may teach those who know about them what we have described. The *Sunna* of the Prophet is a clear *Sunna* from God to explain what God requires from what he has made obligatory when there is a provision in the Qur'ān and when there is no provision in the Qur'ān. There is, therefore, no difference between the judgement of God and the judgement of His Messenger. Indeed, the latter is binding in every eventuality.'[40]

Kinds or Categories of Prophetic Explanation

Scholars believe that the *Sunna*'s explanation of the Qur'ān is of various kinds or categories:

The First: Explanation of the essence of revelation through its manifestation in speech after its meaning had formerly been hidden.

The Second: The Prophet's explanation and interpretation of the meanings of revelation for those who need it. For example, he explained that 'wrong-doing' (*ẓulm*) mentioned in God saying:

'Those who believe and did not tarnish their faith with wrong-doing for them there is security' (VI.82) means 'associating partners with God' (*shirk*). Similarly: shall be called to an easy accounting (LXXXVI.8), means 'That is the presentation before God [on the Day of Judgement] (*al-ʿarḍ*)'. The Prophet explained that the 'white and black threads' refer to the whiteness of the day and the blackness of the night. He explained: Indeed he saw him a second time, by the lote-tree at the farthest boundary, near which is the Garden of Abode. (LIII.13–15) as referring to Jibrīl (Gabriel). He explained: or for some Clear Signs of your Lord to appear before them? (VI.158) as the sun rising in the west [a sign of the Day of Judgement] and: 'the example of a good word? It is like a good tree' (XIV.24) as referring to the date-palm. He explained 'Allāh will establish in strength those who believe, with the word that stands

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40. Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Risāla*, p. 90. See also the commentary of ʿAbd al-Ghānī ʿAbd al-Khāliq and Aḥmad Shākir on the same text in the former's *Ḥujjiyyat al-Sunna*, pp. 537–539.

firm, in this world and in the Hereafter' (XIV.27) as referring to the grave when the deceased is asked 'Who is your Lord?' and 'What is your religion?' And he explained how when the People of the Book took their priests, rabbis and monks as lords apart from God, what they were in fact doing was 'permitting the prohibited and prohibiting the permitted'. The 'power' (*qūwwa*) which God commanded us to prepare against His enemies, he explained as 'throwing'. He explained: 'Whoever does evil shall reap its consequence' (IV.123) as being the hardship, fear and pain with which the servant (*ʿabd*) is rewarded in this life (*al-dunyā*). He explained 'ziyāda' (superabundance) as being to look into the Noble Face of God. The prayer in Your Lord said: 'Pray to Me, and I will accept your prayers' (XL.60), he explained as referring to worship (*ʿibāda*). He explained the *idbār al-nujūm* as being two *rakʿa* before dawn and the *idbār al-sujūd* as being two *rakʿa* after sunset.

The Third: Explanation by the Prophet's actions when he explained the times for the prayer to someone who asked him.

The Fourth: Explaining provisions he was asked about, which were not in the Qurʾān and for which revelation subsequently gave an explanation. For example, he was asked about the false accusation of fornication against a woman (*qadhf*), then the oath of condemnation was revealed.

The Fifth: Explaining a question by means of inspiration (*waḥy*) and not through the Qurʾān. He was asked about a man who had entered a state of ritual consecration (*iḥrām*) while wearing his jubba after putting on perfume (*khulūq*). Inspiration (*waḥy*) came and he advised that the man should take off his jubba and wash away all traces of the perfume.

The Sixth: Explaining provisions by the *Sunna* without a question being asked. For example, he forbade the eating of donkey meat, the practice of temporary marriage (*mutʿa*), hunting in Medina and the union of a woman with her maternal or paternal aunt through marriage, etc.

The Seventh: Explaining to the community (*umma*) that something was permissible by his doing something which was particular to him and which he did not prohibit others from doing.

The Eighth: Explaining that something is permitted by his approval of it, either by watching it or telling them what they were doing.

The Ninth: Explaining that something was permitted by his silence even though he did not expressly permit it.

The Tenth: The Qurʾān provides a ruling on a question, or prohibits or permits something together with principles, conditions, impediments, restrictions, specified times, circumstances and specific characteristics. These, God has allowed His Messenger to explain as in: 'But it is lawful for you to seek out all women except these' (IV.24). Here the context is the conditions which validate a marriage, the absence of impediments thereto, the attendance of people at the time of the marriage and the suitability of the place for the

III–5.1   Manuscripts of Qur'ān, Northen India, 1650–1730
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marriage. Once again, Ibn al-Qayyim has commented on this by saying: 'If the *Sunna* gives an explanation for all that, this will not be extraneous to, and thus abrogating of, the text, even if it is a removal of its apparent wider applicability.[41]

An explanation of the relationship between the Qur'ān and the *Sunna*

Scholars believe that the relationship between the Qur'ān and the *Sunna* is shown in a number of aspects:

The First: Evidence for the validity of acting in accordance with the *Sunna* and the obligation to obey it is taken from the Qur'ān. There are many *āyāt* which show this, some of which we have mentioned before, such as: 'So accept whatever the Messenger gives you, and refrain from whatever he forbids you' (LIX.7).

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41. Ibn al-Qayyim, *I'lām al-muwaqqi'īn …*, *op. cit.*, II, p. 226. See also Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt …*, *op. cit.*, IV, pp. 55–8.

The Second: This aspect is well known among scholars. It relates to traditions of the Prophet which deal in general terms with various religious provisions and principles with regard to how things are to be done, reasons for them, conditions governing them, impediments to them, supplementary matters, etc. An example of this is the explanation regarding the various prayers, the different times for each, the number of bowings and prostrations and other provisions. Similarly, the explanation for obligatory almsgiving (*zakāt*) contains details about amounts, times of collection and distribution, minimum amounts of wealth and property liable for *zakāt* and determining what is subject to *zakāt* and what is not. Likewise, the principles relating to fasting require explanation as there are no explicit Qur'ānic provisions on certain aspects. Other things which require explanation are: various forms of ritual purity (*ṭahāra*) whether accidental (*ḥadathī*) or major (*khabathī*), the pilgrimage (*ḥajj*), ritual slaughter, hunting, permitted and prohibited foods, marriage and related matters, such as divorce, remarriage with a divorced wife, *ẓihār* [A pre-Islamic form of divorce or repudiation requiring the uttering of: 'You are to me like my mother's back'], sworn allegations of adultery (*li'ān*), principles governing buying and selling, crimes, punishments, etc. All of the above, which are provided for in general terms in the Qur'ān, require detailed explanation and so come under the following *āyās* of the Qur'ān: 'and We have now sent down this Reminder upon you that you may elucidate to people the teaching that has been sent down for them' (XVI.44).

'Imrān b. Ḥusayn related how he told a man: 'You are a complete idiot! Where can you find in the Book of God that there are four *rak'a* in the midday prayer and that one should not recite aloud?!' He then listed for him: the prayer, almsgiving, the pilgrimage, etc. Then he said: 'Did you find any of this explained in the Book of God?'

For the Qur'ān has made some things obscure; these are explained by the *Sunna*.

Muṭarrif b. 'Abd Allāh was told: 'Speak only to us on the basis of the Qur'ān'. Muṭarrif said: 'We do not want an alternative to the Qur'ān. What we want is someone who knows the Qur'ān better than all of us. That person is the Messenger, because when he speaks he explains the Qur'ān.'

Muṭarrif b. 'Abd Allāh was speaking of the *Sunna* as a means to explain the Qur'ān.

Al-Awzā'ī relates on the authority of Ḥasān b. 'Atiyya who said: 'The inspiration (*waḥy*) would come down on the Messengers of God, and Jibrīl would come with the *Sunna* which would explain what had been sent down.'

This is the sense in which some religious scholars believe that the *Sunna* is the judge over the Qur'ān and not *vice versa*. This is because the Qur'ān can sometimes be understood in more than one way, while the *Sunna* will

specify one of these meanings. In this case the *Sunna* is to be consulted and the requirement of the Qur'ān waived.

Similarly, the literal sense (*ẓāhir*) of the Qur'ān may mean one thing while the *Sunna* will deviate from this literal sense and restrict its general application, specify a general meaning or give it a meaning which might be other than its literal sense, in accordance with the fundamental precepts of religion (*uṣūl*). For example, the Qur'ān states that every thief should have his limbs amputated, while the *Sunna* specifies who is to be considered a thief and the magnitude and nature of the theft which necessitates the penalty of amputation. The Qur'ān literally states that *zakāt* is to be collected on all property, while the *Sunna* specifies that *zakāt* is to be collected on private property. God says: 'But it is lawful for you to seek out all women except these' (IV.24) and the *Sunna* has extended this to include prohibiting the union through marriage of a women with her maternal or paternal aunt. All the above examples show how the literal meaning of the Qur'ān is waived in favour of the *Sunna*. There are many similar examples.

Perhaps this was what al-Awzāʿī meant when he said: 'The Book needs the *Sunna* more than the *Sunna* needs the Book.'[42]

Al-Imām al-Shāṭibī says, 'When the *Sunna* is the judge over the Book, this does not mean that the *Sunna* is superior to the Book or that the Book is to be repudiated. Rather, what is expressed in the *Sunna* is the intent and purpose of God as given in the Qur'ān. The status of the *Sunna* is as the interpretation and commentary upon the meanings of the provisions of the Qur'ān. This is indicated by God saying: 'that you may elucidate to people the teaching that has been sent down for them' (XVI.44). The *Sunna*'s explanation of the *āya*: 'As for the thief — male or female — cut off the hands of both' (V.38) is that the amputation is from the elbow and that the penalty only applies after a theft of a determined magnitude and nature has been committed. This is the meaning intended by the *āya*. This is not to say that the *Sunna* has established a provision while disregarding the Qur'ān. Similarly, if Mālik or another Qur'ān commentator explains the meaning of an *āya* or *ḥadīth* and we base our actions on this explanation, it is not true to say that we are acting on the basis of what a Qur'ān commentator has said. Rather, we say that we are acting in accordance with what God or His Messenger, has said. This is true of everything which the *Sunna* has explained of the Book of God. Therefore, to say that the *Sunna* is the judge over the Book we mean that the *Sunna* explains the Book of God. Where the Qur'ān speaks in general terms without specifying its intent, the

42. Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt* …, *op. cit.*, III, pp. 8, 9 and 26. Also see Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Risāla*, p. 84.

Sunna explains this intent. This does not mean that the *Sunna* has precedence over the Book of God.[43]

The *Sunna* contains more than is necessary to explain and comment on the Qur'ān

To explain this, if we contemplate the Noble Qur'ān we find that those things it identifies as beneficial are to be warmly embraced and those things it identifies as causing corruption and evil are to be avoided. As mentioned before, that which is beneficial comes under no more than three categories:

a) That which is required and its attendant complementary actions;
b) That which is necessary to which complementary actions are added;
c) That which improves from which complementary actions follow.

There are no more than these three categories.

Looking at the *Sunna*, we find that it does not go beyond establishing these three categories. The Qur'ān contains these three categories as fundamental principles and provisions, while the *Sunna* plays a supplementary role in explaining these categories in the Qur'ān. The *Sunna* contains nothing extraneous to these three categories.

The 'Requirements' (*ḍarūriyyāt*) are five in number. They are firmly established in the Qur'ān and fully explained in the *Sunna*. Maintaining the religion (*ḥifẓ al-dīn*) means three things: submission to God (*islām*), faith in God (*īmān*) and the performance of good deeds (*iḥsān*). These originate in the Qur'ān and are explained in the *Sunna*. They are complemented by three things: the call to Islam by promising reward and admonishment, striving in the way of Allāh (*jihād*) against those who oppose the religion or intend to undermine it and making good any deficiencies which occur in the religion's basic principles. These have their origins in the Qur'ān and are fully explained in the *Sunna*.

Maintaining the soul means three things: establishing its legitimacy through legal marriage, maintaining its existence once it leaves the world of non-being to enter the world of existence, both externally and internally, from the point of view of food and drink which maintain the soul from the inside and from the point of view of clothing and housing which maintain the soul from the outside. All of this originates in the Qur'ān and is explained in the *Sunna*.

These are complemented by three things: preventing the soul from being placed in a sinful situation (*ḥarām*), such as adultery. This is achieved by validating marriage and everything related to marriage, such as divorce (*ṭalāq*), divorce at the request of the wife (*khulʿ*) and the sworn allegation of adultery

43. Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt …*, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 10.

(*li'ān*), etc.; preventing the soul from being fed anything which could harm it, kill it or corrupt it; and the establishment of everything which is indispensable for the above to be possible, the legitimacy of punishments, the consequences of accidental damage and the like.

Maintaining the legitimacy of procreation comes under this category. Its fundamental principles are stated in the Qur'ān and explained in the *Sunna*.

Preserving property means that its entry into ownership complies with legal criteria for the transfer of ownership and investment. This is complemented by the payment of damages when these criteria are violated, such as waste, theft and other causes of damage. To prevent the corruption of the basic principles regarding property, recourse is to forcible prevention (*zajr*) when no damage has occurred, application of the prescribed penalties (*ḥudūd*) and replacement when damage has occurred. These cover cases such as usurpation (*ghaṣb*) not resulting in damage, replacement (*ḍamān*) when damge has occurred and the prescribed penalties when theft (*sariqa*) is proved. These three preserve the validity of property ownership. The basic principles for the above exist in the Qur'ān and are explained in the *Sunna*.

Preserving the mind is assured by the avoidance of everything which would corrupt it. This is seen in the Qur'ān in those *āyāt* which indicate that it is permitted to eat all 'good things' and that waste, aggression and the consumption of alcohol are prohibited. This principle is complemented by the legal punishment for consuming alcohol or the forcible prevention of all other narcotics. Neither the Qur'ān nor the *Sunna* determines a specific punishment in this regard. The judgement was left to the independent reasoning (*ijtihād*) of the Muslim community. With regard to forcible prevention, they said that it depended on the kind, nature and magnitude of the crime. Similarly, the punishment for the consumption of alcohol is not specified in the Qur'ān or the *Sunna*. Sometimes the flogging would be done using sandals and at other times using palm-leaf stalks, without the number of lashes being specified. The figure of eighty lashes was reached by analogy with the punishment for defamation. For example, 'Alī said: 'If a man drinks, he gets drunk. If he gets drunk, he talks foolishly. If he talks foolishly, he will tell falsehoods about people.' Therefore, 'Umar's opinion was that the punishment for consuming alcohol should be eighty lashes.

Imām al-Shāṭibī adds: 'If you were to look at the category of "needs" (*ḥājiyyāt*), these would be treated along similar lines to the category of "necessities" (*ḍarūriyyāt*). The same may be said of the category "luxuries" (*taḥsīniyyāt*).'[44]

The principles of the *Sharī'a* are perfected by the Qur'ān and the *Sunna*: the Qur'ān creates the basic principle, the *Sunna* expands and explains it.

44. Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt …*, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 29.

Nothing has been left out. This is easily demonstrated by those who know the most of the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*. For what the venerable forefathers (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*) said became the accepted norm.

The writer of *al-Muwāfaqāt* says: 'For further information, it may be said that the category of "needs" revolves around the need to facilitate, to alleviate hardship and to promote kindness.'[45]

In relation to the preservation of religion, there are concessions regarding ritual purity (*ṭahāra*), such as *tayammum* [using sand in ritual ablutions when water is unavailable] and the waiving of the provisions on impurity if its elimination is difficult. Similarly, the prayer (*ṣalāt*) may be shortened and legal cases may be suspended if a party faints. Similar concessions relate to combining prayers in cases of *force majeure*, performing the prayer standing or apart. Likewise, the fast is allowed to be broken by those who are sick or travelling. Such concessions are found in relation to all the acts of worship. For while the Qurʾān specifies certain details such as *tayammum*, shortening the prayer and breaking the fast, etc., many other provisions talk in general of easing the burdens of worship. It is, therefore, the task of the *mujtahid* to extract the basic principle and establish other concessions accordingly. The *Sunna* is the primary source for this.

Similarly, in relation to the soul (preservation of life), concessions are provided, such as permission to eat the flesh of an animal which has not been slaughtered according to Islamic principles when there is no alternative and the expression of sorrow by means of giving alms (*zakāt*), etc. Hunting is permitted even if the prohibited blood shed is differently conceived from that involved in the legal giving of alms. In this context, the permission is granted as a concession to alleviate hardship.

With regard to preservation of progeny, in marriage for instance, there is the contract of cohabitation without specifying the dowry (*ṣadāq*) and the allowing of certain foolish things which are questionable, as is the case with certain transactions (*buyūʿ*). Divorce is pronounced only three times, and no more.[46] Allowing divorce in itself is a concession, as is the right of the woman to request divorce, etc.

With regard to preservation of property, concessions are also made concerning risk and making things easier such as, compensation (*jaʿāla*), forward buying (*salam*), *ʿarāyā*, loans, the right of pre-emption (*shufʿa*), competition, sharecropping (*musāqāt*), etc. Included in this is the capacity to accumulate wealth, retain more than one actually needs and enjoy the 'good things' which have been permitted, but without extravagance or miserliness.

45. *Ibid.*
46. *Ibid.*, IV, p. 350.

With regard to the preservation of the mind, it is to be protected from all that is loathsome and from being forced to say things out of fear for its soul (for the soul in this context is superior to the mind) or out of hunger, thirst, illness, etc. All this comes under the principle of alleviating hardship – a principle which is expressly founded in the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān contains everything in its totality, while the *Sunna* explains the ideal practice which is to be imitated.

The category *taḥsīniyyāt* is linked to *ḥājiyyāt*. It involves developing moral character and good habits, such as the ritual purity required for performing the prayer (in the opinion of those who consider such ritual purity within this category). It involves appropriate apparel, comportment and perfume. It involves selecting the best of what one possesses for giving as alms and charitable gifts (*infāqāt*) and being good company during the fast. It involves kindness, beneficence and all matters of personal etiquette, hygiene and decorum. With regard to marriage, it involves treating one's spouse in a kindly manner and divorcing with equity and fairness, not oppressing one's wife, and friendliness in social relations, etc.

With regard to property, this involves being cautious and mindful in its acquisition and use. It further involves being generous in giving to the poor. With regard to the mind, this involves the total avoidance of, and contact with, alcohol, in accordance with what God said: 'So turn wholly away from it' (V.90).

The fundamental principles for the above are all in the Qur'ān which explains them in general or specific terms or both at the same time. The *Sunna* is the criterion for determining their meaning by making them easier to understand and by clarifying their import.[47]

The *Sunna* in the field of independent reasoning (*ijtihād*)

The Sunna has established the method by which the mujtahid may draw conclusions based on the Qur'ān

This can be illustrated by examples:

First Example: God has permitted 'good things' and forbidden 'bad things'. Between these two extremes lie many things which could be termed 'good' or 'bad'. The Prophet clarified this issue. For example, he prohibited all beasts of prey with canine teeth and any bird of prey with talons. He also prohibited eating the flesh of domestic donkeys and jackals, etc. All these were

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47. *Ibid.*, IV, pp. 28–32.

categorized by the Prophet as 'bad things', while the lizard,[48] bustard,[49] hare[50] and similar animals[51] were categorized as 'good things'.

Second Example: God has permitted drinks which are non-alcoholic, such as water, milk, honey and the like. He has forbidden wine as it overpowers the mind, engenders animosity and hatred and prevents the remembrance of God and the performance of the prayer. Between these two categories there are drinks which are not really alcoholic but which are suspected of having potentially alcoholic effects, such as the wine of *dubbāʾ* and the like. The Prophet therefore, prohibited such drinks by considering them as alcoholic drinks and thereby settling any argument. He then reinforced the message that certain drinks were permitted, such as water and honey. The Prophet said: 'I have forbidden any fermented drink, so desist. All alcoholic drinks are prohibited (*ḥarām*).' Even a small amount of alcohol is considered prohibited. The Prophet explained: 'If a large amount of something intoxicates, then a small amount is also forbidden.'[52]

Such examples fall between the two extremes of 'good things' and 'bad things'. The decision of the Prophet determines which of the two categories something belongs. We note here that the *Sunna* leans towards prohibition when that is necessary, but, in the absence of necessity, inclines towards making things permissible.[53]

The Third Example: God has permitted game which has been caught by a trained hunting animal and has forbidden game caught by an untrained hunting animal, because the latter hunts only for itself. Between these two basic principles is the case when a trained hunting animal eats some of the game it has caught. Its training requires it to save the game for you, but hunger requires it to hunt for itself, not for you. Therefore, the two basic principles come into conflict. The *Sunna* explains this dichotomy. The Prophet said: 'If it eats, then you do not. I fear it will keep the game for itself'.[54] In another *ḥadīth*: 'If it has killed the game and has eaten none of it, then keep it for yourself'.[55]

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48. Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, VII, p. 71; Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, III, p. 1541; Abū ʿĪsā al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, III, p. 304; al-Nasāʾī, *al-Sunan al-ṣughra*, VII, p. 197.

49. Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dawūd*, III, p. 354.

50. Al-Nasāʾī, *al-Sunan al-ṣughra*, IV, p. 223.

51. Such as locusts (*jarād*). See Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, VII, p. 90; Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, III, p. 1546; Abū ʿĪsā al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, III, p. 331; al-Nasāʾī, *al-Sunan al-ṣughra*, VII, p. 210.

52. Abū ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Māja, *Sunan Ibn Māja*, II, p. 1124.

53. Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt* …, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 34, f.n. 1.

54. Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, I, p. 46; Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, III, p. 1546; Abū ʿĪsā al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, III, p. 331; al-Nasāʾī, *al-Sunan al-ṣughra*, VII, p. 210.

55. Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, III, p. 1530.

In another *ḥadīth*: 'If you send out your dog and mention the name of God, then eat, even if it has eaten some of the game'.[56] These traditions of the Prophet are all based on the two fundamental literal principles, i.e. the two clear eventualities.

The Fourth Example: The Qur'ān has explained which things are permitted (*ḥalāl*) and which things are forbidden (*ḥarām*) of all kinds. However, between these two extremes some things are ambiguous, as they have aspects of both. The Prophet, explained this in both general and specific terms. In general terms, he said: 'What is permitted is self-evident; what is forbidden is self-evident. Between these two, some things are obscure.'[57]

In specific terms, in a *ḥadīth* related by 'Adiyy b. Ḥātim on the subject of hunting, the Prophet said: 'If, while hunting, a dog, which is not from your pack, joins your pack, do not eat of any game caught as it might have been killed by the other dog.'[58] Of a well into which some rubbish had been thrown: So he judged on the basis of one of the extremes, namely purity. Shaykh Darāz commented on this, saying: 'In consideration of the difference between the question of hunting and the question of the water, the Prophet thought it more likely that hunting involved things which were not permitted, while, with water, he gave more weight to purity.'[59]

In exercising his independent reasoning (*ijtihād*), we find that he begins with the basic principle. The basic principle here is purity (*ẓakāt*) which is lawfully established and well-known. Now, the hunting of game is permissible within certain conditions. When it cannot be determined that the conditions have been fulfilled, we return to the basic principle and deduce that it is not permitted because it is impure. Regarding water, we may also resort to the basic principle or norm. This is how things are unless there is evidence to the contrary. If such evidence is not forthcoming, the norm shall prevail.[60]

The Fifth Example: Among the 'good things' which God has permitted is game from the sea. Among the 'bad things' which God has forbidden is flesh from an animal which has not been killed in the manner prescribed by Islam (*mayta*). Game from the sea which has not been killed in the prescribed manner falls between these two extremes. Reaching a judgement on this issue

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56. Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dawūd*, III, p. 109.

57. Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, I, p. 20; Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, III, p. 1291; Abū 'Īsā al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, II, p. 502; al-Nasā'ī, *al-Sunan al-ṣughra*, VII, p. 241.

58. Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, I, p. 46; Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, III, p. 1531.

59. Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt …*, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 36, f.n. 3.

60. *Ibid.*

is problematic. The Prophet said: 'If the water is pure, then so is the *mayta*'.[61] According to Abū ʿUbayda, the Prophet would eat of what the sea cast forth.

Therefore, we can see how the *Sunna* establishes general provisions on the basis of non-specific provisions scattered throughout the Qurʾān. For example, the *ḥadīth* 'slaughtering of the mother is slaughtering of its foetus.'[62]

The various branches of the *Sunna* explain the basic principles stipulated in the Noble Qurʾān

The religious scholars have given many examples to illustrate this.

For example: God has forbidden usury (*ribā*). People in the *Jāhiliyya* used to say: Buying and selling is but a kind of interest (II.275). The creditor would tell the debtor to either settle the debt or pay interest on it. This is referred to by God, the Prophet said: 'The usury practised in the *Jāhiliyya* is finished and the first *ribā* which I put an end to is that of al-ʿAbbās b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib. It is gone forever.'[63]

For example: God has forbidden a mother and her daughter being united through marriage or that two sisters should be united via marriage. The Qurʾān says: 'But it is lawful for you to seek out all women except these' (IV.24). The Prophet has forbidden that a women be united through marriage with her maternal or paternal aunts, on the basis of analogy (*qiyās*) as the reason for the prohibition in the explicit case obtains also in these cases. In this regard, the following *ḥadīth* is related: 'If you do so, you have severed your wombs.'[64] Al-Shāṭibī comments: rationalization must always invoke analogy.[65]

For example: God has described how He causes pure water to descend from the sky and stores it in the ground but has said nothing similar about sea water. The *Sunna* extends the basic provision to include sea water with other types of water as being pure for purificatory puposes and pure with regard to the dead game (*mayta*) therein.

For example: God included the relationship of fosterage among the forbidden degrees of marriage: 'your milk-mothers, your milk-sisters' (IV.23). The Prophet extended the two cases mentioned in the Qurʾān to include other degrees of relationship through fosterage, such as: maternal and paternal

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61. Abū ʿĪsā al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, I, p. 125; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dawūd*, I, p. 121; Abū ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Māja, *Sunan Ibn Māja*, Muḥammad Fuʾād ʿAbd al-Bāqī (ed.), Cairo, Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya, n.d., I, p. 136.

62. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad Aḥmad*, XVII, p. 442; Abū ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Māja, *Sunan Ibn Māja*, II, p. 1067.

63. See Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, II, p. 886.

64. Abu-l-Qāsim al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-kabīr*, Ḥamdī b. ʿAbd al-Majīd (ed.), Cairo, Maktabat Ibn Taymiyya, n.d., XI, p. 337.

65. Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt …*, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 43.

aunts, nieces of brothers or sisters, etc. In such cases the extension of the original provision is through analogical reasoning (*qiyās*).

For example: God made Mecca a sacred place after Abraham's supplication: 'O my Lord! Make this a place of security' (II.126) and God said: 'Do they not see that We have given them a sanctuary of safety' (XXIX.67). The Messenger of God, prayed to God asking Him to make Medina a sacred place in the same way that He had made Mecca a sacred place following Abraham's prayer God responded to him and made everything between its mountains a sacred place (*ḥaram*). The *ḥadīth* says: 'I am making everything between the hills of Medina a sacred place – a place where no one may cut down its bushes or go hunting.'[66] 'Whosoever does mischief therein or harbours a criminal shall be cursed by God, Mankind and the Angels all together. On the Day of Resurrection, God will accept no excuse from him whatsoever.'[67] This is a type of supplementation (*ilḥāq*) on the basis of Mecca as a sacred place. On this, God says: 'Whosoever deviates therein from the Right Way and acts with iniquity, We shall cause him to taste a painful chastisement' (XXII.25). Unbelief (*ilḥād*) includes all deviation from the path of rectitude (*ṣawāb*) towards inequity (*ẓulm*) and the perpetration of all prohibited acts. This is the explanation of the *Sunna*.

For example: God says: 'and call upon two of your men as witnesses; but if two men are not there, then let there be one man and two women' (II.282). So, in relation to property, God has stipulated that the testimony of women be associated with the testimony of a man. God explained the reason for this: 'so that if one of the two women should fail to remember, the other might remind her' (II.282). … In the *Sunna*, a witness and the taking of an oath are equivalent. This was decreed by the Prophet: a witness and an oath are equivalent to two male witnesses, or, by analogy two female witnesses. What is hidden, the *Sunna* will elucidate.

For example: God advised Abraham about the dream in which He had told him to sacrifice his son. God also mentions Joseph's dream and the dream of the two young men [imprisoned with Joseph]. These dreams were true. This does not mean, however, that all dreams are true. The Prophet explained this: the dream of an honest man which proves true is one of the components of prophecy. It falls into many types, constituting its provisions, and can include others not mentioned; this is on the basis of analogy and may be amply illustrated.[68]

66. See Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad Aḥmad*, Shuʿayb al-Arnaʾūṭ, ʿĀdil Murshid (et al) (ed.), Beirut, Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 2001, XVII, p. 270; Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, II, p. 992.

67. Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, III, p. 20; Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, II, p. 999; Abū ʿĪsā al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, IV, p. 6.

68. Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt* …, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 47.

The *Sunna* does not abrogate the Qurʾān

The majority opinion among the scholars of the *Sharīʿa* is that the *Sunna* does not abrogate the Qurʾān. In other words, 'the provisions of the Qurʾān regarding obligation, prohibition or authorization are not invalidated in their totality by the *Sunna*. When the characteristics of a Qurʾānic provision are modified by the addition of conditions and restrictions or by the specification of conditions permitting or prohibiting a given provision, this does not mean that the *Sunna* has abolished, invalidated or is opposed to the Qurʾānic provision. Rather, the intent of the *Sunna*, by adding conditions, prohibitions, restrictions or specific circumstances to the Qurʾānic provision, etc., does not imply an abrogation (*naskh*) which necessitates the invalidation or abolition of the original provision. If the general meaning of abrogation is to enhance the outward sense of something by adding specific conditions, restrictions, conditions or prohibitions, then this is the sense in which we are using the term, and as such there can be no dispute. No one can deny that, in this sense of the word, the *Sunna* abrogates the Qurʾān. Indeed, everyone agrees on this. Controversy, however, over the permissibility of the abrogation of the Qurʾān by the *Sunna* relates to a particular type of abrogation which involves the abolition of the original provision in its entirety such that it is as if it had never existed.'[69]

The independent judgements of the scholars of the *Sharīʿa* differ on this issue and the books on the principles of religion explain it in great detail. Al-Āmidī says: 'Al-Shāfiʿī and most of his followers and the Literalists (*ahl al-ẓāhir*) asserted the impossibility of the Qurʾān being abrogated by the *Sunna*, as did Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal.'[70]

Imām al-Shāfiʿī says: 'When God abrogates something in the Qurʾān he does so by means of the Qurʾān. The *Sunna* does not abrogate the Qurʾān. Rather, the *Sunna* supplements the text of Qurʾān and explains in detail the meaning of what God revealed in general. … God has stated that the Qurʾān is only abrogated and revealed by a similar Qurʾān.'[71]

Al-Āmidī, al-Fakhr al-Rāzī[72] and Ibn Ḥazm have discussed this issue in great detail. For our purposes, however, there is no need to examine the issue in this context.

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69. Ibn al-Qayyim, *Iʿlām al-muwaqqiʿīn* …, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 226–7. Also see Ibn al-Qayyim's lengthy remarks in the *Iʿlām* in the section entitled *Ziyādat al-Sunna ʿalā al-Qurʾān*, II, pp. 220–35.
70. Al-Āmidī, *al-Iḥkām* …, *op. cit.*, III, p. 153.
71. Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Risāla*, I, p. 106; al-Āmidī, *al-Iḥkām* …, *op. cit.*, III, p. 156; Cf. Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Iḥkām fī uṣūl al-aḥkām*, (for a literalist [*ẓāhirī*] approach), IV, pp. 107–114.
72. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Maḥṣūl fī ʿilm uṣūl al-fiqh*, Ṭāhā Jābir ʿAlawānī (ed.), Beirut, Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1997, I, pp. 331–61.

THE EARLY HISTORY AND METHODOLOGY OF *ḤADĪTH*

Muhammad Mustafa al-Aʿzami

In the twenty-three years of his mission, the Prophet established a following of people for whom learning, living and propagating his mission were the most important pursuits of their lives. As a result, they spared no effort to preserve a detailed knowledge of this mission. They used writing as a means to preserve the knowledge that the Prophet had brought, but they did not limit themselves just to writing it down. For although written records are important, they can be inaccurate even as they are written, and can also be tampered with after they have been written. To understand the way in which the knowledge communicated by the Prophet was preserved, then, we must look at written records, but must also look beyond them.

The centrality of the Prophet Muḥammad's role in the preservation and interpretation of the Qurʾān

As the creator of the entire universe and of every facet of existence and eventuality, Allāh is supreme in nature and in power; none can benefit or harm Him in any way. He declares that the sole purpose of creating humanity is that they may worship Him, and Him alone. 'I have created jinns and humans, only that they may worship Me. No sustenance do I seek from them nor do I demand that they feed Me. For verily Allāh is Himself the Provider of all sustenance, Lord of all might, the Eternal' (LI.56–8). As befits His exalted nature, the Almighty did not leave humans to perform their worship as they saw fit. They were created for this act, and this act was to be carried out according to the dictates of Allāh and not the whims of men. So to each community He dispatched prophets and messengers, each specific for one time and place but all bearing one core belief in the Oneness of the Creator and proclaiming the unifying message, 'Be mindful of Allāh, and obey me' (XXVI.108). Prophets came to carry out their mission among a specific people

and after they went away, in the course of time, their message lost its original purity and became tainted to the point when another prophet was raised. This occurred for centuries upon centuries, 'for there never was any community but that a warner resided and passed away in its midst' (XXXV.24). However, there came a time when humanity as a whole reached the threshold of maturity and at this juncture the Almighty dispatched the final messenger, The Prophet Muḥammad, the seal of the prophets, and the one whose message was not to be hemmed in by a particular time and place but to retain its authority throughout time and for every place (XXXIV.28; XXI.107; XXXIII.40).

Accomplishing this task required something permanent. A parting of the sea or a raising of the dead, while undeniably powerful and impressive in its own right, is a cursory event and once the sea returns to normal and the dead return to their graves, the incident becomes a part of history and can no longer be observed. In the case of this final messenger God bestowed on him a text, a miracle, Words of immense permanence, which would transcend time and space and for whose preservation He Himself assumed responsibility: 'We have undoubtedly sent down the message, and We will assuredly guard it [from corruption]' (XV.9). This miracle is the Qurʾān.

Revealed over a period of twenty-three years, the Qurʾān makes it clear that it is the Word of Allāh and that the Prophet had no control over the content or timing of the revelation (X.15; XIX.64). From its most nascent stages, the Muslim community recognized the Qurʾān as the paramount source of knowledge (ʿilm): memorizing it had tremendous merit, and Muslims were urged to recite it and ponder over its meanings. Leading the prayers, a position of clear authority and responsibility, was reserved for whoever in the congregation had memorized the most verses. Since then untold millions have memorized the Qurʾān in its entirety. During every Ramadan communities gather throughout each night of the month while the *imām* recites the Qurʾān; the congregation stands behind him, attentive to his recitation, contemplating the verses, and correcting him should he make a mistake in reciting a verse that they know.

But simply preserving the integrity of the words is not enough. By its very nature the Qurʾān encompasses a wealth of topics. Proclamations of faith, remembrances, histories, etiquette, transactions, supplications, wisdom and much more. It melts hearts and stirs up courage; it provides Muslims with a focus: it is first and foremost a book of guidance. It concentrates on grand principles but discusses other, everyday matters too in a succinct fashion. For instance, the word *ṣalāt* (prayer) is mentioned in the Qurʾān 67 times, but the attention is primarily on its spiritual dimensions while the minutiae are not addressed. How many *rakʿas* are there in each of the five daily prayers? When is the Qurʾān to be recited audibly or softly? What is the timing for *ʿaṣr* or *ʿishāʾ*? What are the building blocks of each *rakʿa*? How are the prayers of *ʿĪd, istisqāʾ*

and eclipse different from the norm? What if someone makes a mistake during prayer, or is on a journey or is ill?

In His Book, the Almighty takes it upon Himself to preserve the text (LXXV.17) but immediately moves beyond that to assure believers that it is also His responsibility to provide explanation (LXXV.19). Allāh never descended to earth to personally expound on this or that verse. The instrument of explanation is none other than the Prophet Muḥammad, for Allāh instructs him that, 'We have bestowed this remembrance upon you that you may make clear to mankind all that has ever been thus bestowed upon them, and that they may take heed' (XVI.44).

In the context of the Qur'ān, the Prophet, then, performed multiple duties for he was not only the vessel for receiving and communicating revelations, but was assigned the further task of expounding on this message through his words and deeds, to epitomize the Qur'ānic ideals through his lifestyle. 'Truly, in the Messenger of Allāh you have a noble example for everyone who looks forward to Allāh and the Last Day, and remembers Allāh profusely' (XXXIII.21). Thus, Allāh instructed the believers to follow His Prophet's example, to model their lives upon his, to carry out what he enjoined and refrain from what he forbade (VII.157).[1] 'Say [O Prophet]: If you love Allāh follow me, and surely will Allāh love you' (III.31).

As his life became the practical embodiment and the living example of the Qur'ān, maintaining an account of the Prophet's words and actions became a necessity. These individual accounts became known as *ḥadīths*.

Ḥadīth, *Sunna*, and bearing witness

A '*ḥadīth*' is a religious or secular communication, story or conversation. When Muslim scholars use the word, they use it as a technical term to refer to descriptions of the words and deeds of the Prophet and of the words spoken or the deeds done in his presence with his express or tacit approval, as well as a description of the Prophet's features.[2]

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1. See also. 'O believers, obey Allāh and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. If you quarrel on anything, refer it to Allāh and the Messenger, if you believe in Allāh and the Last Day; that is better, and fairer in the end' (IV.59). And: 'But no, by the Lord, they will not believe till they make you the judge regarding the disagreement between them and find in themselves no resistance against the verdict, but accept it in full submission' (IV.65). And: 'Whatsoever the Messenger gives you, take it. And whatsoever he forbids you, abstain from it' (LIX.7). Indeed, 'We sent no messenger save that he should be obeyed by Allāh's leave' (IV.64. See also III.32 and 132).
2. M. M. al-Aʿẓamī, *Studies in Ḥadīth Methodology and Literature*, Indianapolis, American Trust Publication, 1977, pp. 3–9.

While *ḥadīth* consists of statements describing the Prophet's life, the word '*Sunna*' refers to that life itself. Since it is the *ḥadīth* that tells us what the *Sunna* is, the two words are very closely related and are in fact often used interchangeably.

The Prophet viewed himself as a teacher and taught his Companions in the mosque. He would repeat himself a number of times to make sure that he was heard and understood. After he would leave the assembly, his students would repeat what they had heard until they memorized it. So Anas relates, 'We sat with the Prophet, maybe sixty in number, and then the Prophet taught us *ḥadīth*. Later on, if he went away on an errand we used to memorize it among ourselves and, by the time we left, it would have been cultivated in our hearts.'[3] The Companions took their study seriously. If anyone among them was unable to attend a session he would coordinate with someone who did, an arrangement which the Prophet himself recommended.[4] It is narrated that the Prophet said, 'May Allāh cause that person to shine, who hears my statement, comprehends it, safeguards it and delivers it [to others].'[5] Some Companions made regular arrangements among themselves to attend whenever the other was away.[6]

In *Sūrat al-Ṭalāq* (*Sūra* LXV), the Almighty, while setting out the rules for divorce, proclaims, 'And let two persons of [known] integrity (*ʿadl*) from your community bear witness' (LXV.2). From early on Muslims took this as evidence that in bearing testimony, in being a witness, the presence of integrity was not an option but a necessity. Across multiple sects of Islam, the idea was agreed on that, anyone who claimed to be transmitting some information concerning the Prophet Muḥammad, of his deeds or words, was in fact bearing witness to something which was no longer visible and, therefore, had to be of sound character (*ʿadl*) for his or her testimony to be admissible. The earliest generation to report on the Prophet's activities was that of the Companions, whom Allāh had already pronounced as trustworthy.

The precise word used by Allāh in the verse above is *ʿadl*. Qāḍī Shurayḥ (d. 78/697), once praised by Caliph ʿAlī as the most accomplished judge amongst the Arabs, was the first – to the best of my knowledge – to define this term technically. He stated that *ʿadl* refers to one who associates with his community, performs his prayers in congregation, and steers clear of indecency. Later, al-Suyūṭī gave a slightly expanded definition, that of a mature

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3. M. M. al-Aʿẓamī, *Dirāsāt fi-l-ḥadīth*, Beirut, al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1413/1992, p. 330, quoting Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ, *Kitāb al-Ilmāʿ*, Cairo, Dār al-Turāth, 1978, p. 142.

4. See Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-ʿIlm*, *ḥadīth* no. 67, ed. Muṣṭafā al-Bughā, Damascusm Dār al-Qalam, 1401/1981.

5. See Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, *ḥadīth* nos. 2656, 2657 and 2658.

6. See Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *op. cit.*

Muslim who is mentally sound, who is free from the causes of indecency, and who abides by the standards and norms of his community.

Realizing the centrality of *ʿadl* in the transmission of knowledge, Muslim scholars took this idea to its logical conclusion. Each generation's student is the next generation's teacher, and so every person engaged in the transmission of knowledge, whether teacher or student, had to possess *ʿadl* to be accepted. In this way the contents of *ḥadīth*, and therefore the essence of *Sunna*, flowed across generations not through hearsay but via reliable chains of narration with each link in the chain authenticating what came before it.

There is a corollary to this idea, one that is of great relevance to our times. Muslims cannot prevent others from writing on Islamic topics, be it *ḥadīth*, the Qurʾān, jurisprudence or the Prophet's biography. But what the Muslim mind is required to remember, and must remember, is that the presence of *ʿadl* must be ascertained before anyone's ideas or writings are considered further. If an author is a non-practicing person and is indecent in his views, or altogether not a believer in Allāh and His Prophet, then the requirement of *ʿadl* is completely lacking. In such cases, it is the Muslim reader who accepts these writings or gives them credence who is at fault for not following the logical and legalistic dictates of his own beliefs.

Ḥadīth: the written record of the *Sunna*

While literacy remained rare as the Prophet embarked on his mission in Mecca,[7] with his active encouragement this number rapidly increased to where, today, we know of approximately 75 Companions who served as his scribes. By filtering them through the prism of what they usually wrote, we find that a particular group specialized in recording the Qurʾān[8] while another noted sundry matters of concern to the state.[9] Among this latter group some wrote to kings, such as Zayd ibn Thābit; others penned treaties, such as al-Mughīra ibn Shuʿba, or wrote debts and contracts, such as ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Arqam, or catalogued the booty, or recorded crop estimates for the Hijaz region. Additionally, there was one Companion, Ḥanẓala ibn Rabīʿ, who earned the nick-

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7. Al-Balādhurī recorded an estimate of seventeen and another of eleven in *Futūḥ al-Buldān* on the authority of al-Wāqidī: See al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, ed. ʿAbd ʿAlī ibn Unays al-Ṭabbāʿ and ʿUmar ibn Unays al-Ṭabbāʿ, Beirut, Dār al-Nashr li-l-Jāmiʿiyyīn, 1337/1957, pp. 660–4.

8. Ibn Ḥajar, *Fatḥ al-bārī*, IX, p. 22. See also al-Aʿẓamī, *The History of the Qurʾanic Text*, 2nd ed., Sherwood Park, Canada, al-Qalam, 2011, p. 72, and al-Aʿẓamī, *Kuttāb al-Nabī*, 6th ed., pp. 22–32.

9. Al-Jahshiyārī, *al-Wuzarāʾ wa-l-kuttāb*, ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā et al., 2nd ed., Cairo, al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1357/1938, pp. 13–14.

name 'Ḥanẓala al-kātib' (Ḥanẓala the scribe) for filling in for any scribe who was absent from his post.

The literature of the first century of Islam testifies to the rapid growth of literacy in the Muslim state. Muʿādh b. Jabal's (d. 18/639) legal opinions were documented in Yemen and Syria.[10] The legal opinions of ʿUmar[11] and ʿAlī,[12] the second and fourth caliphs, as well as Zayd ibn Thābit[13] were also recorded. Just a short while later the legal opinions of ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd, ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās, ʿUrwa ibn al-Zubayr (d. 93/711) and Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī (d. c. 95/713), along with many others, were noted and made their rounds within scholarly circles. ʿUrwa ibn al-Zubayr[14] and Abān ibn ʿUthmān (d. 105/723) wrote biographies of the Prophet, while Ubayy b. Kaʿb (d. 22/642)[15] and ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās[16] wrote on Qurʾānic exegesis. Other scholars wrote books on history,[17] precious metals,[18] literature[19] and medicine.[20]

The most important, however, was the recording of the Prophet's *Sunna*: the *Ḥadīth* literature.

Counting the number of *Ḥadīths*

Any text reporting the words or deeds of the Prophet, or words or deeds carried out in his presence, counts as a *ḥadīth*. A proper *ḥadīth* text must begin with a 'chain of narration' that serves as its documentation. For example:

> A. Isḥāq ibn Ibrāhīm and Muḥammad ibn Abī ʿUmar and Muḥammad b. Bashshār, all three, related to us on the authority of al-Thaqafī, while Ibn

10. See ʿAbd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Ṣanʿānī, *al-Muṣannaf*, ed. Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-Aʿẓamī, Beirut, al-Maktab al-Islāmī 1972, VIII, p. 245 and X, pp. 337–74. See also Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al kubrā*, Hyderabad, Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, AH 1344, VI, p. 39.

11. See al-Aʿẓamī, *Dirāsāt fi-l-Ḥadīth*, *Dirāsāt: Journal of the College of Education*, King Saud University, Riyadh, II, 1978, pp. 18–19. Cited hereafter as 'Dirāsāt'.

12. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Fuʾād ʿAbd al-Bāqī, Beirut, Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, n.d., Introduction, *ḥadīth* nos. 13–14. See also al-Aʿẓamī, *Dirāsāt …, op. cit.*, pp. 19–20.

13. See al-Aʿẓamī, *Dirāsāt …, op. cit.*, pp. 108–9.

14. See ʿUrwa ibn al-Zubayr, *Maghāzī Rasūl Allāh*, ed. M.M. al-Aʿẓamī, Riyadh, Maktab al-Tarbiya li-Duwal al-Khalīj al-ʿArabiyya, 1401/1981.

15. See al-Aʿẓamī, *Dirāsāt fi-l-hadīth …, op. cit.*, p. 100.

16. See Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fahrist*, ed. Riḍā Tajaddud, Tehran, Dānishgāhi, nd., pp. 36–7.

17. See Ibn al-Zubayr, *Maghāzī …, op. cit.*, pp. 16–19; and al-Aʿẓamī, *Dirāsāt fi-l-hadīth …, op. cit.*, pp. 58–9.

18. Al-Aʿẓamī, *Dirāsāt …, op. cit.*, p. 56.

19. See Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Asad, *Maṣādir al-shiʿr al-jāhilī*, 2nd ed., Cairo, Dār al-Maʿārif, 1962, pp. 155–64; see also al-Aʿẓamī, *Dirāsāt …, op. cit.*, p. 56.

20. See Ibn Juljul, *Ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbāʾ*, Cairo, Imprimerie de l'Institut Français d'archéologie orientale, 1955, p. 61; also al-Aʿẓamī, *Dirāsāt …, op. cit.*, p. 57.

Abī ʿUmar related to us on the authority of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb from Ayyūb, from Abū Qilāba, from Anas ibn Mālik, that the Prophet said,

B. 'Whoever possesses three characteristics has tasted the sweetness of faith: that Allāh and His Messenger are dearer to him than anyone else; that he loves a person only for the sake of Allāh; and that he hates returning to disbelief after Allāh has rescued him from it in the same manner as he would hate being thrown into fire.'[21]

We can represent this *ḥadīth* as follows:
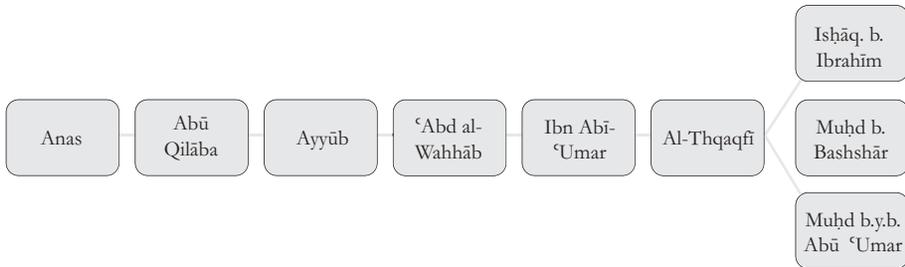
Figure 1

This same *ḥadīth* appears in four places in Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*.[22] The text is practically identical to the version quoted in full above. The chains of narration are:
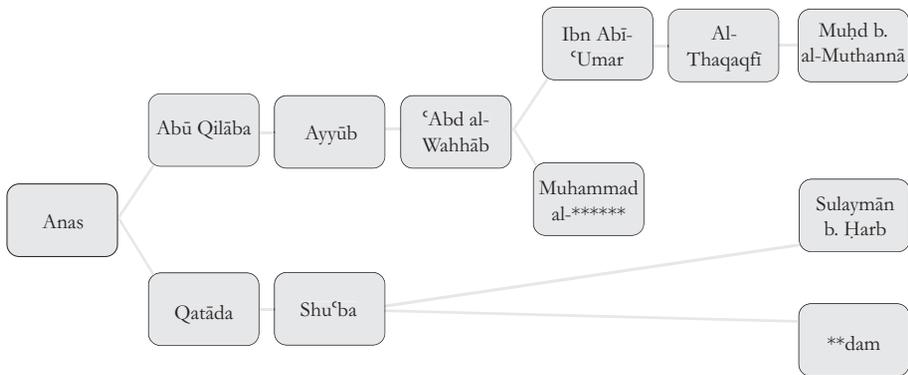
Figure 2

21. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *op. cit.*, *ḥadīth* no. 43.

Were we to consider the text of this *ḥadīth* only, it will be reckoned as one *ḥadīth*. But when we consider the text alongside the chains of narration as a single entity, these become seven *ḥadīths* (with the first three from figure 1 having been collapsed to form a 'single' *ḥadīth*).

Bukhārī quotes this *ḥadīth* in four places. The first two are in the chapter in which he has collected *ḥadīths* concerning the nature of faith. He uses the *ḥadīth* once to establish that faith can increase and decrease, and a second time to illustrate that a characteristic such as 'sweetness' can be associated with faith. The third occurrence is where Bukhārī has brought together *ḥadīths* describing the ideal character of a Muslim, since the *ḥadīth* speaks of three such qualities. The fourth is where he discusses issues pertaining to someone who does something under duress – since the *ḥadīth* speaks of a person who prefers being thrown into fire rather than abandoning his belief.

Today a modest library of *ḥadīth* books will house many hundreds of volumes. But counting the pages and volumes of *ḥadīth* works cannot provide an accurate estimate of the sum total of all the material reported by the Companions from the Prophet. The Prophet's own words might have been recorded in six or seven lines, but they will be linked to a chain of narration that is usually as long as the text itself. Those words may also be reported through dozens of narration chains. Finally, that single text will be quoted repeatedly in a variety of contexts. In this way, a few words from the Prophet have the capacity to fill up pages.

Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 751/1350) estimates that there are about five hundred *ḥadīths* relevant to the basic aspects of Islamic law, while roughly four thousand deal with its details.[23] On an average the text of a *ḥadīth* is about three lines long. So all of this material adds up to roughly a few thousand to ten thousand lines – i.e., a single volume of 650 pages assuming twenty lines per page.

The coming sections weigh the evidence for the activity of writing during the Prophet's lifetime, as well as the period that followed, to reveal that much of this material was already recorded in written form in those early days.

Letters and documents dictated by the Prophet

Towards the end of the Prophet's life, most of the Arabian Peninsula had accepted him as Allāh's Prophet and Messenger and as their leader. Of the roughly 75 scribes who worked for him, some wrote only a few documents whilst others frequently took dictations. Some may have been reserved exclusively for writing down Qur'ānic revelation and, indeed, there is evidence of a time in the beginning when the Prophet directed his scribes to write

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23. Ibn al-Qayyim, *Iʿlām al-muwaqqiʿīn*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Wakīl, Cairo, Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha, n.d.

down only the Qurʾān.[24] But as the Prophet assumed greater responsibility for the affairs of much of the Arabian Peninsula, and the inevitable issues arising from governance and administration, there is full indication that his words were recorded. Abū Bakr, as caliph, handed over to Anas ibn Mālik (who was then governor of Baḥrayn) a document containing tariff of the annual obligatory almsgiving (*zakāt*). It consisted of the Prophet's letter on the subject which he was unable to send during his lifetime. Likewise, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib composed a treatise that contained many legal *ḥadīths*.[25] One *ḥadīth* records that the Prophet commanded someone to write down one of his sermons for a Yemeni, Abū Shāh.[26] ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ (d. 65/684) also wrote down the *ḥadīths* of the Prophet with his express permission. This collection, *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Ṣādiqa*, was passed down among his descendants.[27] *Ḥadīths* also record that on various occasions the Prophet and the succeeding caliphs requested that lists be drawn up of those who embraced Islam, or those who took part in military expeditions.[28]

People also penned duplicates of the Prophet's letters and other significant documents during his lifetime. Thus, two copies were prepared of the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyya, one for the Prophet and the other for Suhayl ibn ʿAmr (d. 18/639).[29] ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar says that the first thing he wrote in his hand was the Prophet's pact with the people of Mecca (*i.e.* the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyya),[30] and since he was not present at the time the treaty was concluded, he must have duplicated it from the Prophet's original, or from a copy held by someone else. ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, among the Prophet's scribes, kept copies of all the pacts and correspondence that he penned for dispatch to notable

24. In the early days, the Companions of the Prophet were not familiar with the Qurʾān and its style. The Prophet feared that his own words and the words of the Qurʾān might become intermingled, so he told the Companions that they should only write down the Qurʾān (Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *ḥadīth* no. 3004). But as they became familiar with the Qurʾān, the Prophet not only gave them permission to write his words down, he even dictated materials, as we shall see in this section later.

25. For details see al-Aʿzamī, *Dirāsāt …*, *op. cit.*, pp. 127–219.

26. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ …*, *op. cit.*, *ḥadīth* nos. 445–59.

27. The *ḥadīth* of this collection do not attain the highest levels of reliability because it is likely that some of the descendants of the original compiler had simply read the book on their own without actually reading it out in front of the authority they were taking it from. There is no doubt, however, that this collection existed and was transmitted. See al-Aʿzamī, *Studies in Early Ḥadīth Literature*, *op. cit.*, pp. 43–4; and al-Aʿzamī, *Dirāsāt …*, *op. cit.*, pp. 121–5.

28. See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ …*, *op. cit.*

29. Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar ibn al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, ed. M. Jones, London, Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 612.

30. ʿAbd al-Ḥayy al-Kattānī, *al-Tarātīb al-idāriyya*, Beirut, Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al ʿArabī, n.d., II, p. 244.

people.[31] In fact, the practice of duplicating critical documents became so central that within a quarter of a century after the Prophet's death there was already an office in Medina called *Bayt al-Qarāṭīs* (the House of Documents) which was adjacent to ʿUthmān's house.[32]

ʿAbd Allāh Ibn ʿAbbās [33] and some scholars of the succeeding generations, such as Abū Bakr ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) possessed copies of some of the Prophet's letters.[34] To acquire these, they must have travelled to various locales to seek out either the individuals to whom they were originally sent or, more plausibly, Companions who made copies of these letters before the Prophet dispatched them, from which these scholars then penned their own duplicates.

As for *ḥadīths* proper, I have identified at least 51 Companions and 49 Successors who recorded or dictated *ḥadīths* in various contexts.[35]

Learning from teachers, learning from books

The vast majority of *ḥadīth* books in use today were composed in the third century AH, often incorporating it into the *ḥadīth* collections and documents from earlier times.

As noted above, apart from being one segment in a book, each *ḥadīth* also has an existence of its own, as each is independently supported by its own scholarly apparatus in the form of the narrative chain. Hence, we can speak of a book, in which a single document that incorporates authentic material, but also perhaps of material of questionable authenticity. In the first centuries of Islam it was mostly not the whole book that was judged as authentic or otherwise; rather, each report within it was judged separately. See, for example, the *Sunan* of al-Tirmidhī where he judges *ḥadīths* separately.

A modern reader may argue that possessing an original manuscript is surely a valuable guarantee of authenticity, no matter how many times a work has been subsequently incorporated into later compilations. This view relies on the idea that the authenticity of a text is sealed simply by achieving a written form. Perhaps today, with millions of printed copies being assembled by machines, this might be true. But when texts were hand penned, a number of factors, such as scribal errors, bad handwriting, the use of inferior ink, the fading of parts of the document and, occasionally, intentional tampering,

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31. Taqiyy al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ al-Maqrīzī*, Cairo, Būlāq, 1854/1270, I, p. 295.
32. For details see al-Aʿẓamī, *Dirāsāt …*, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
33. ʿAbd Allāh ibn Yūsuf al-Zaylaʿī, *Naṣb al-rāya*, Beirut, al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1393/1973, IV, p. 420.
34. Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Ṭūlūn, *Iʿlām al-sāʾilīn ʿan kutub Sayyid al-mursalīn*, Damuscus, al-Qudsī, n.d.
35. For a detailed study of the subject see al-Aʿẓamī, *Studies in Early Ḥadīth Literature*, *op. cit.*, pp. 34–74, and al-Aʿẓamī, *Dirāsāt …*, *op. cit.*, pp. 92–167.

all combined to make writing an insufficient guarantee for the accurate preservation of a text.

The need for direct contact between teacher and student

The transmission of Islamic knowledge began with the Prophet teaching his disciples, one human being learning from another. A disciple may well have written down the words of the teacher, but his discipleship also involved staying with the teacher and learning from him; it was not simply a matter of possessing a written copy of his words.

In the period following that of the Prophet's Companions, the knowledge of *Ḥadīth* spread all over the Muslim world. Gathering of knowledge or collection of *ḥadīth* required extensive travelling, so new methods of learning had to be developed. Overall, there were eight ways:[36] (1) *Samāʿ*: that is reading by the teacher to the students; (2) *ʿArḍ*: reading by students to teachers; (3) *Ijāza*: permiting someone to transmit a *ḥadīth* or book on the authority of the scholar without reading by any one; (4) *Munāwala*: handing someone the written material to transmit; (5) *Kitāba*: writing *ḥadīth* for someone; (6) *Iʿlām*: informing someone that the informer has permission to transmit certain material; (7) *Waṣiyya*: entrusting someone with his books; and (8) *Wajada*: finding some books of *Ḥadīth* written by someone just as we nowadays discover some manuscripts in a library or a museum. For the last method, simply finding a book does not automatically grant the finder the right to narrate it. It is incumbent upon such a person narrating from it to clearly state this fact.[37] It is worth noting that during the period of the Companions, only the first method was in use, while the use of other methods was negligible.

The insistence on having read to or heard from a teacher, or having obtained the consent to narrate from a book, was really an insistence on direct contact and on not confining oneself to using written materials that were devoid of a pedigree. In general a student had a manuscript that he read from as he learned the *ḥadīths* and as he, later on, transmitted as a teacher. But the legitimacy of using the book rested on his teacher's 'certifying' his possession of that manuscript, by the student's reading it before his teacher, or conversely hearing it from him, or by receiving it from him in written form by hand, or by correspondence or as bequest, or at least on the basis of permission from the teacher to narrate the *ḥadīths* within.[38]

Strictly speaking, the student was permitted to legitimately read only from the actual manuscript that had been 'certified' (or a direct copy thereof).

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36. Aʿẓamī, *Studies in ḥadīth* …, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
37. Some examples of *wajāda* can be found in Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *op. cit.*, *ḥadīth* nos. 1422, 2439, 2443.
38. See for details Aʿẓamī, *Studies in ḥadīth* …, *op. cit.*, pp. 24–31.

Reliance on any other copy of the same book, from some other source, was prohibited. For example, if a student read the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī to a teacher, that student could quote and teach the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī using only his own manuscript, or that of his teacher, or his teacher's teacher, or copies made directly from his own or his teacher's. If instead he utilized a copy which someone else had read to his teacher at another time, he was labelled 'careless' and such an incident would tarnish his scholarly reputation.[39]

Today, too, in the world of Muslim scholarship, a *ḥadīth* scholar learns his *ḥadīths* from a teacher who had learned them from another teacher and so forth, until the chain reaches the early *ḥadīth* scholars, the Successors, the Companions and then the Prophet himself. For the basic books of *ḥadīth*, the scholar will have the permission on the grounds of hearing or recitation. For other books, it is enough that one finds a reliable publication of a *ḥadīth* work and reads it on his own. But this mode of learning was considered inappropriate by early scholars.

The master-disciple model worked well in the first century AH, perhaps also in the beginning of the second, when it was feasible for a student to spend enough time with his teacher, each learning to trust the other until the student was recognized as his teacher's disciple. In the gradual transition from master-disciple to book reading, many of the early didactic customs had to be abandoned. Throughout, however, scholars were resolute that their students understand the texts in both words and spirit. The master does not simply read out instructions to a disciple: he introduces him to a life based on these instructions, and the master is not content until the student has properly adopted the way of living he wants to convey. Out of this same concern, today the *ḥadīth* teacher grants his students the permission to narrate, on condition they live in accordance with the *ḥadīths* they learn.

Muḥammad ibn Sīrīn (d. 110/728), a celebrated scholar of the late first and early second century AH, once said, 'This knowledge [of religion] constitutes faith, so be careful of whom you acquire this knowledge.'[40] A number of statements from first century AH scholars illuminate the beginnings of what evolved into this elaborate system of checks on the transmitted texts. A recurring theme in many reports is that the early students, some claiming to possess knowledge of the Prophet's ways, had succumbed to 'innovation': the pure desire to learn the *Sunna* had become infected by attachment to ways and doctrines of their own liking. Muḥammad ibn Sīrīn elaborates, 'People did not [initially] ask about chains of narration, but when dissension surfaced in the community they began to insist, "Give us the names of your informants."

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39. Al-Aʿẓamī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, *A Facsimile Copy of the Manuscript at Koprulu Library, Istanbul*, Riyadh, Azami Publishing, 2013, Arabic introduction, p. 24.
40. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* …, Introduction, *op. cit.*, I, p. 14.

They identified those who adhered to the way of the Prophet and accepted their *ḥadīths*, and pinpointed innovators and rejected their *ḥadīths*.'[41] Another distinguished scholar of early Islam, ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās, states, 'We listened to the Prophet's *ḥadīths* when people did not attribute things falsely to him. But when people became involved in all manner of things, both familiar and unfamiliar, we gave up listening [uncritically].'[42] The rationale of this attitude was that a fascination with anything other than learning to live according to the Prophet's *Sunna* would distort their grasp of what Allāh had ordained, and may have even led the unscrupulous to falsify and fabricate. Thus, a *ḥadīth* teacher's personal attachment and commitment to learning, preserving and conveying the Prophet's life, as exactly as possible, was the real guarantor that he would teach the texts responsibly, whether written or memorized.

Mechanisms for verifying the reliability of a *Ḥadīth*

With each cycle of teachers passing on *ḥadīths* to students of the next generation, the 'versions' of all *ḥadīths* swelled rapidly to the point where, today, we can easily discern one hundred or more versions of the best-known *ḥadīths*: a single text narrated through different branching chains, each chain leading to the same text (with potentially some minor variations). By the second century AH, there already was an overabundance of these versions, some far more reliable than others. From the early part of the second century and on into the third, Muslim scholars began sifting through this material to identify those narrative chains that were most reliable – *i.e.* the combinations of narrators who showed the best ability to preserve and convey a text accurately. For example, a narrator may be found reliable when narrating from people in Kufa but less so when narrating from people in Mecca, perhaps because his brief stay in Mecca had not afforded him enough time to double-check what he had written there. He may have been reliable when narrating from one teacher but not from another, perhaps not having invested enough time with the latter. Students of a certain teacher may be more dependable if they learned their material from him before a certain date, while the later students less so, due to the teacher's creeping senility. On the whole, a teacher may be judged reliable, but during a particular voyage those who learned from him are found to possess unreliable material because, perhaps, he had neglected to carry his manuscript and was dictating from memory.

Comparing the narrations of various students of a single teacher was the most frequent way of gauging the reliability of *ḥadīth* narrators. A well-known illustration of this method relates to the third century AH scholar Abū

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41. *Ibid.*, I, p. 15.
42. *Ibid.*, I, pp. 12–13.

Zakariyyā Yaḥyā Ibn Maʿīn (d. 233/848). Ibn Maʿīn went to ʿAffān, a pupil of the celebrated scholar Ḥammād b. Salama (d. 167/783), to read the books of Ḥammād back to him. Surprised that a scholar of Ibn Maʿīn's calibre was approaching him, he enquired if he had read those books to any other students of Ḥammād. He replied, 'I have read them to seventeen of his students before coming to you'. ʿAffān exclaimed, 'By Allāh, I am not going to read these books to you'. Unfazed, Ibn Maʿīn answered that by spending a few silver coins he could journey to Basra and read there to other students of Ḥammād. True to his words, he undertook the voyage and was soon approaching Mūsā b. Ismāʿīl, a pupil of Ḥammād who had settled in Basra. Mūsā asked him, 'Have you not read these books to anyone?' Ibn Maʿīn answered, 'I have read them to seventeen students of Ḥammād, and you are the eighteenth'. Mūsā asked him what he proposed to do with all those readings. He replied, 'Ḥammād b. Salama committed errors and his students compounded a few more to his. So I want to distinguish between the two sets of mistakes. If I find all of Ḥammād's students committing a mistake unanimously, then the source of the error is Ḥammād. But if I find that the majority say one thing and a particular student says another, then the error is from that individual. In this way I distinguish between the two sets.'[43]

By careful application of this method, Ibn Maʿīn was able to objectively judge the relative reliability of Ḥammād's various students.

Mechanism for verifying the reliability of books

The reader will note that even in this manner of appraising *ḥadīths* and their narrators, the unit of evaluation is not the 'book' but every single '*ḥadīth*'. Two books are not being compared side-by-side; rather, the original *ḥadīths* related by Ḥammād are compared with those of his students. Starting in the late second century and gaining force throughout the third and onwards, *Ḥadīth* scholars developed a system of 'certificates of reading' (*ṭabāq*) to ensure that the student had acquired his *ḥadīths* from a proper teacher. Whereas the method of comparison leads to conclusions about the reliability of narrators by analysis and focus on the text of a *ḥadīth*, certificates of reading provide direct information about the teacher-student relationship and they focus on the entire book.

This is how the system worked. When a scholar taught a work of *Ḥadīth*, he/she or a senior student would record within the book the names of those in attendance, distinguishing between those who attended the entire session and those who missed parts, and (if someone was very young) that person's

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43. Ibn Ḥibbān, *Majrūḥīn*, ed. M. Zāyid, Aleppo, Dār al-Waʿy, 1396/1976. See also al-Aʿẓamī, *Manhaj al-naqd ʿind al muḥaddithīn*, Riyadh, Maktabat al-Kawthar, 1410/1990, pp. 49–80.

age. Also noted were the date and location of the reading. On occasions even the names of maids and servants find their way into the certificate.

Here is an example of a reading certificate from the third century AH:

Teacher's name:	Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm ibn Mūsā
Book's title:	*Kitāb al-Ṣamt*

Name of participants: ʿAlī ibn Yaḥyā, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Yūsuf, Muḥammad ibn Isrāʾīl, Sulaymān ibn al-Ḥasan, Nasr, client of ʿAbd Allāh…, Asbāṭ ibn Jaʿfar, Lakhm, client of Ṣāliḥ, Ḥasan ibn Miskīn ibn Shuʿba, Aḥmad ibn Isḥāq, Ḥātim ibn Yaʿqūb, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Muḥammad, ʿAlī ibn Maslama, Muḥammad ibn Muṭayyib, al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad ibn Ṣāliḥ.

Name of city:	Asnā
Date:	Rabīʿ al-Awwal AH 276
Pedigree:	'I copied these two books from the manuscript of Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm ibn Mūsā.'[44]

The book begins:

This is *Kitāb al-Ṣamt*, part of the *Jāmiʿ* of Ibn Wahb. In the Name of Allāh, the Most Merciful… [The chapter of] speaking when a matter should not be spoken of, and when it serves no benefit [to speak]. Abū Isḥāq informed us that Ḥarmala ibn Yaḥyā informed them that ʿAbd Allāh ibn Wahb told him…'[45]

Orientalists and *Ḥadīth* literature

From the above example, an image of the Prophet's traditions comes into focus, in particular, how they were being preserved with tremendous care. It appears puzzling, therefore, that Western scholars of Islam have generally been inclined to view the whole corpus of *ḥadīth* as overwhelmingly, if not wholly, spurious. How is this to be explained?

In the first place, it is natural to try to study unfamiliar things in terms of analogies with familiar ones. When Western scholars turned their attention to *ḥadīth* in the nineteenth century AH, they approached the basic Islamic religious texts as they or their colleagues approached the Jewish and Christian texts, and this at a time when the project of demystifying the scriptures was being pursued vigorously in Europe. This project itself was part of a triumphant mood which had widely engendered the confidence that science would solve all problems, and was imbued with a negative view of religion as the primitive man's superstitious attempt to explain the unexplainable.

44. *Jāmiʿ Ibn Wahb*, ed. David-Weill, Cairo, 1939, p. 77.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

However, this project may have fared in the West; the initial attitude of the colonizer towards Islam's textual material continues to shape the nature of the discussion of *ḥadīth* to this day. When the colonizer himself was unwilling to allow his own scripture's claim of embodying the truth, there was no question that the scriptures of the conquered (and thereby inferior) races could be considered to reflect the truth.

At the most innocuous level, the Western secular project attempts to explain all human phenomena entirely in material terms. Hence, an Orientalist scholar studying Islam finds himself under pressure to participate in the project by doing what he can to show that the Islamic scriptures, like the Jewish and Christian scriptures, are entirely a human creation and have nothing to do with any manner of God or prophet.

At a less innocuous level, an Orientalist scholar is under pressure to establish his credentials to speak of the Islamic scriptures to his own audience. Islamic scholarship and Muslim scholars of over thirteen centuries stand in his way. Consciously or otherwise, as an 'expert advisor' on Islam to the Western audience, the Orientalist is predisposed to those interpretations which free him of having to account to Muslim scholars or scholarship. There is no more urgent task for him than to snub the thousands of Muslim scholars around the world as a faction guided by a superstitious commitment to their religion and to dismiss their scholarship as 'biased and partial', to brush aside the thousands of volumes of primary and secondary literature of the Muslim scholarly tradition as irrelevant 'for our purposes'. This task accomplished, one is free to theorize about the Islamic origins as one wishes.

This can be illustrated by one of the best-known European scholars of *ḥadīth*, Joseph Schacht (d. 1969), who dismissed more than a dozen centuries of Muslim scholarship with the stinging statement that 'their whole technical criticism of traditions… is irrelevant for the purpose of historical analysis.'[46] Having swept aside the scholars and scholarship of the natives, Schacht then reshaped the topic into an image of his own choosing. This image, the substance of the Orientalist study of *ḥadīth* in general, is almost entirely limited to the issue of determining the time at which *ḥadīth* texts were 'fabricated'. Building on the earlier works of Ignaz Goldziher (d. 1921), Schacht concluded that all *ḥadīths* were in fact fabrications; legal *ḥadīths*, for example, had been fabricated starting as of AH 110 as jurists, yearning to justify their particular take on a subject, fabricated statements and ascribed them to the Prophet to strengthen their view. The basis for his conclusions can easily be dismantled, however, using the very same examples with which he attempts to prove his point.[47]

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46. J. Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence,* Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1950, p. 163.

47. See M. M. al-Aʿzami, *On Schacht's Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence,* London, John Wiley, 1985.

III–6.1   Photo of al-Ḥaram
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Juynboll, yet another Orientalist specialized in *ḥadīth*, being familiar with the criticism levelled against Schacht's theory, attempted repeatedly to modify the Schachtian formula by placing additional obstacles in the face of traditional *isnād* valuation. *Isnāds*, which are unable to pass his obstructive course far more demanding than Schacht's, indicate to him (and his school) that the *ḥadīth* is fabricated. Using this technique, the general outcome coincides with Schacht's conclusive dismissal of all *ḥadīths*.

Juynboll's methodology has not remained consistent, however. In the 1980s, he formulated a 'common-link' (cl) theory (which, of course, is Schacht's theory):[48] in the early generations of *ḥadīth* activity, each teacher had to transmit to at least two students; the teacher highest up along the chain who had taught multiple students was the common link, the person who had actually fabricated the *ḥadīth*. But even with this method there remained a corpus of *ḥadīth*, and a significant one at that, which challenged him further. The common-link theory was intended to prove that all *ḥadīths* were fabricated in the second century AH, as Schacht had asserted, but there were many instances where the common link went back to the first century AH. So the earlier method was modified a few years later and made more 'rigorous':[49] it was not sufficient now that only the early generations show a binary teacher-student transmission. Now, for each *ḥadīth*, all the generations up until the composition of the classical works of Bukhārī, etc. – generally 6 to 8 generations – had to show this pattern. Thus, for a given *ḥadīth* requiring 8 generations to find itself in Bukhārī, a total of at least 255 narrators must be involved in a binary fashion for the common-link, the person who concocted the fake *ḥadīth*, to be acknowledged. If any link in this elephantine chain does not meet the binary condition, then the fabricator is further down the chain, further away from the first century.

The case of Imām Mālik (d. 179/795) proved particularly troublesome for Juynboll, however, when he chose to test his new theory on the famous *ḥadīth* of *ṣadaqat al-fiṭr* (the compulsory alms given during *ʿīd al-fiṭr*). While he charges Imām Mālik with being the common link, there are other contemporaries of Mālik who also pass Juynboll's new, rigorous test. They too qualify as common links under his theory. And since they and Mālik were fellow students under the tutelage of Nāfiʿ (d. 117/735), it is Nāfiʿ who becomes the common link. This brings the situation dangerously close to the first century AH. To counter this, Juynboll simply amended his new theory further: in the specific case of Mālik, two *additional* common links are required to classify Nāfiʿ as the

48. G.H.A Juynboll, 'Some Isnad Critical Analytical Methods Illustrated on the Basis of Several Women Demeaning Sayings from *Ḥadīth* Literature,' *Al-Qantra*, Madrid, X, 1989, pp. 343–84.
49. G.H.A Juynboll, 'Nafiʿ, the *mawlā* of ibn ʿUmar, and his Position in Muslim *Ḥadīth* Literature', *Der Islam*, Band 70, Heft II, 1993, pp. 207–44.

real common link. Numerically, this means up to 765 narrators in the binary chain – instead of 510, before the person who 'fabricated' the *ḥadīth* – can be acknowledged to have lived in the first century AH. And then to cement the situation, he published only one-third of the relevant *isnād* chains for this *ḥadīth* and ignored the remaining two-thirds!

Let us, however, look at the total picture as it emerges after taking into account all relevant evidence. In fact Nāfiʿ had not two or three, but several students, each of whom in turn fulfils Juynboll's exacting binary obstructive course. Nāfiʿ, in possession of a volume of *ḥadīths* which had been recorded by Ibn ʿUmar (d. 74/693), transmitted these *ḥadīths* in turn to his students. The students read while he listened, and subsequently they penned duplicate copies for themselves once their names were established in the chain. These have been published. Following is the text for the *ṣadaqat al-fiṭr ḥadīth*:

أن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم فرض زكاة الفطر من رمضان على الناس، صاعًا من تمر،
أو صاعًا من شعير، على كل حرّ أو عبدٍ، ذكرٍ أو أنثى، من المسلمين.[50]

Among the earliest references to his *ḥadīth* are in the compilations of ʿUbayd Allāh ibn ʿUmar (d. 145/762); Juwayriyya (d. 173/789); Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179/795); and Ibrāhīm ibn Ṭahmān (d. 162/778), a pupil of Mūsā who in turn learned from Nāfiʿ[51] (see Figure 3). These channels fulfil the common-link criteria, each on its own, thereby marking Nāfiʿ the common link[52] (see Figure 4).[53] In the works of the second and third centuries AH alone, this *ḥadīth* emerges in nearly one hundred references, spanning the globe from Afghanistan to Spain and from Turkey to Yemen. With the full evidence at hand, the common link is set firmly within the first century AH, backed by a multitude of hundreds upon hundreds of narrators that bridge it to the age of the classical authors.

Hence, it takes a tally of 200–800 narrators, spanning 6 to 8 generations, before Juynboll's latest theory will admit that a particular *ḥadīth*, only the one *ḥadīth* in question, originates from the first century AH, not from the Prophet, but from a first century fabricator. His method, which is simply a means of invalidating *ḥadīths* so that Schacht's conclusion stands, is not infrequently considered to be precise and sophisticated.

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50. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *op. cit.*, *ḥadīth* no. 2275.

51. See al-Aʿẓamī, *Dirāsāt …*, *op. cit.*, pp. 119–21, 170–1, 213, 215–17, 290–1, 298–300.

52. Quoting Juynboll, 'In earlier publications I myself still regarded Nafiʿs position as cl in bundles as unassailable.' [*Der Islam*, Band 70, Heft II, 1993, p. 227, n. 30]. Later on he claims, 'Only if we had found next to Mālik's pcl position two or more other historically believable pcls as pupils of Nāfiʿ, could we have safely drawn the conclusion that Nāfiʿ is indeed the cl. But in none of those 1088 *isnāds-cum-matns* has Nāfiʿ been found to be the historically believable cl' (*Ibid.*, pp. 227–8).

53. The Bukhārī references to the chart are from a different edition. See Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. M. Zuhayr al-Nāṣir, Beirut, Dār Ṭawq al-Najāt, AH 1422.
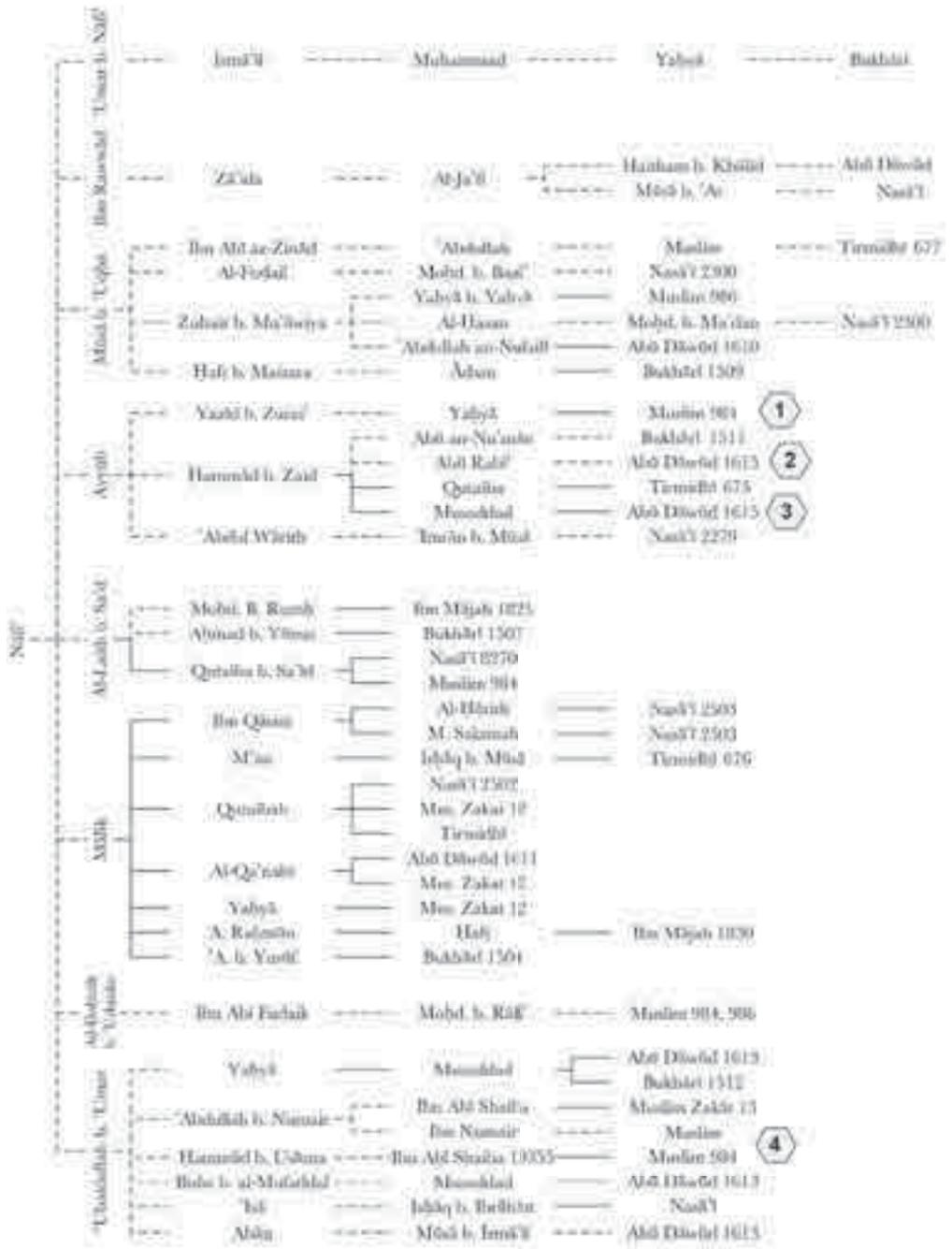
Figure 3. Juynboll's original chart. The solid red line indicates Juynboll's common link, while the dotted black line is a strand which, according to Juynboll, does not produce a common link. As can be seen in this figure, Juynboll has not been consistent in marking common link and strands. We marked some of these places using numbered hexagons.
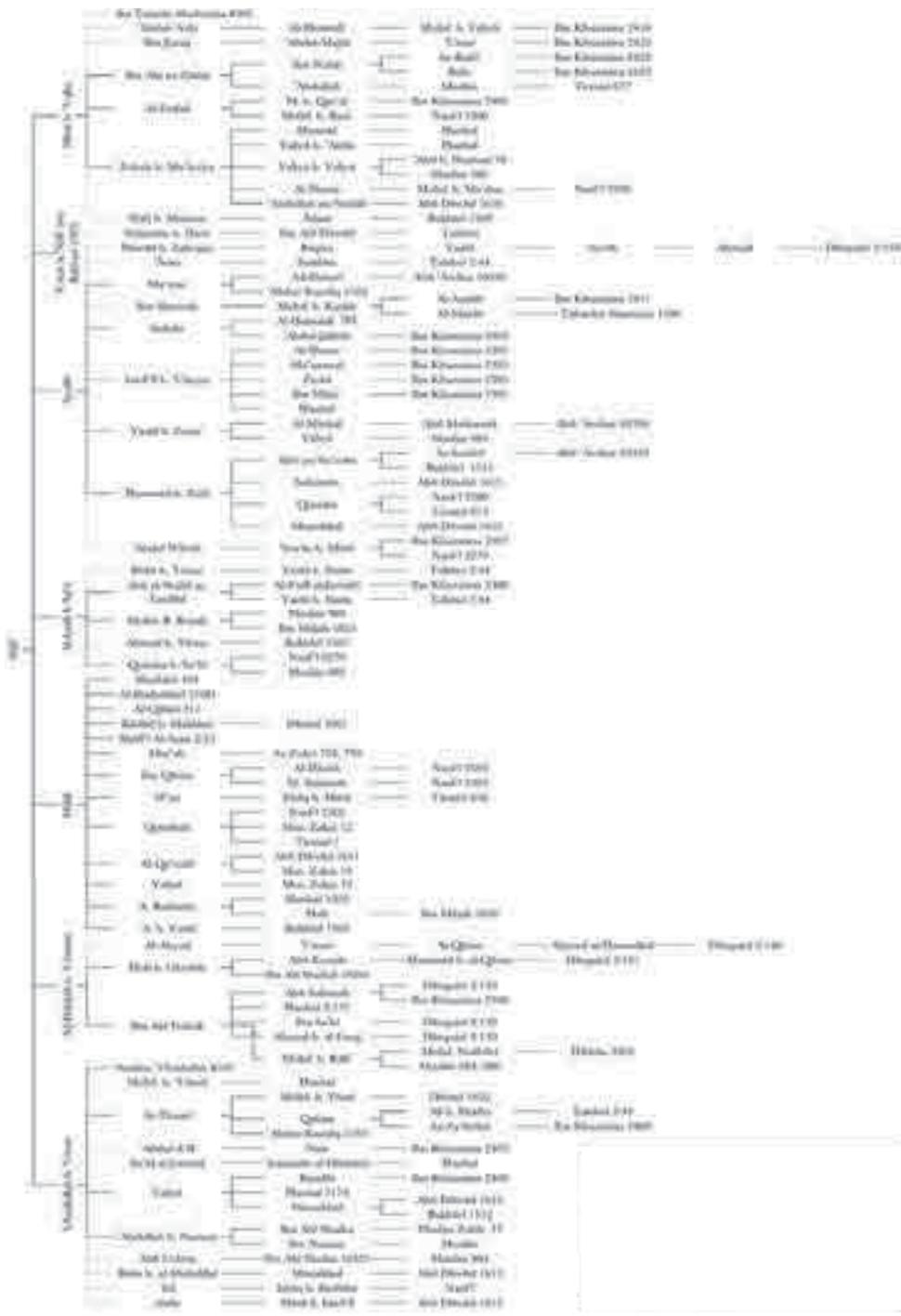
Figure 4. The chart is not exhaustive and it is possible to have missed some names, e.g. Ibn Rawwād (the author discovered that this name is missing from the chart in Figure 4 and it was too late to add).

It is pertinent to point out that the argument of some Orientalists on the question is marked by an overt self-contradiction. (One is reminded of the person who lives in a glass-house and yet relishes throwing rocks at others' houses). This is because quite a few scholars who resort to a radical critique of *ḥadīth* while dealing with Islamic tradition smugly set aside those very canons of criticism when they deal with the authenticity of the Old and New Testaments.

It is common knowledge that the Old Testament (OT) was lost from written form for at least 600 years. Evidence does not even suggest that it was preserved orally. According to the Damascus Document (of which seven copies were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls), the Torah was sealed in the Ark for centuries, from the time of Joshua (1200 BCE) until King Josiah (seventh century BCE). During the 600 years in-between, it was unknown to the masses; even rabbis did not know its contents and so did not pass judgment according to it.[54] Therefore, when it was miraculously rediscovered during Josiah's reign, he set out on a programme of sweeping reforms.

> The Temple was purged of all heathen altars and cult objects, particularly those belonging to the Assyrian worship of the sun, the moon and the stars…. The practice of child sacrifice … was stopped 'that no one might burn his son or his daughter as an offering to Molech.' [2 Kings 23:10] The idolatrous priests were killed, the pagan house of male prostitutes was pulled down, and the local shrines outside Jerusalem were destroyed and defiled by burning human bones on them.[55]

These unenviable events underscore the Torah's complete absence from the collective Israelite consciousness. Josiah's elder son subsequently murdered the Prophet Uriah and reverted his nation to pagan rituals.[56] For two centuries the OT again disappeared from the scene. Hence, between 1200 BCE and 450 BCE, a span of 750 years, the law was known in written form at best for a meagre 35 years (621–586 BCE).[57] Despite this, there are scholars who accept the Torah and do not question its historicity.

With regards to the New Testament (NT), the earliest references to the gospels were penned in the mid second century CE and include five authors. Of these, the writings of only one survive. The other four are briefly quoted by Eusebius (265–340); none claims to have seen an autographed copy.[58] Thus,

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54. G.A. Anderson, 'Torah Before Sinai– The Do's and Don't's Before the Ten Commandments', *Bible Review*, XII, no.3, June 1996, p. 43. See also 2 Kings 22.

55. J. Comay and R. Brownrigg, *Who's Who in the Bible*, New York, Bonanza Books, 1980, p. 243.

56. *Eerdman's Bible Dictionary*, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdman's Publishing, 1987, pp. 558–9.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 370.

58. E. Hoskyns and N. Davey, *The Riddle of the New Testament*, London, Faber & Faber, 1963, pp. 184–6.

here we have a writer from the early fourth century CE quoting passages from second century CE books. Here again many Biblical scholars of different orientations show no reluctance in accepting the historicity of Eusebius' quotations. None questions the accuracy of what he quotes, or whether he fabricated or exaggerated details within these passages, though they are of pivotal import as the earliest extant references to the gospels.

Thus, we have scholars born within the Western tradition who accept the historicity of the Torah, though lost for 600–700 years with no evidence of even oral preservation, and who accept the accuracy of the early church fathers in quoting sources from over two centuries before, though there is no information on how they acquired the manuscripts nor how reliable they were. Yet Muslim tradition is required to submit a roll call of nearly 800 narrators before a single *ḥadīth* is acknowledged as emanating, not from the Prophet, but from an unscrupulous first century AH fabricator who wanted to pass off his viewpoints as authentic.

There was once a time when Orientalists, such major figures as Wellhausen and Nöldeke, made sweeping statements in denigration of the very subject they had chosen as their life's work and were content to go no further. 'Thus Nöldeke could declare in 1887 that the sum total of his work as an Orientalist was to confirm his "low opinion" of the Eastern peoples.'[59] The thrust was to corroborate Islam's 'latent inferiority'. For many, that is no longer sufficient: pointing out weaknesses is no longer practical if it does not coincide with a root change in how the religion is followed by its adherents. For them, theories can no longer be limited within the confines of an article or a book; to bring about genuine change on the ground requires addressing the Muslim community directly.

Conclusion

Before we end this chapter, let us ask ourselves: who should be considered a reliable source on the Qur'ān and the *Sunna*? Or, in general terms, whose writings about Islam and its myriad facets should be given credence and weight? Evidently, anyone can sit at a keyboard and begin typing away about Islam. However, quite obviously, it is only those who strongly believe in Islam's Divine provenance and hence are possessed of the necessary disposition to comprehend its inner logic and coherence whose work should be given preference to the work of those who do not consider Islam to be at all a part of God's scheme to guide humankind. As for the Orientalists, were we to place our primary reliance on them, we ought to remember that they altogether lack the empathy that would enable them to have a proper understanding

59. E. Said, *Orientalism*, New York, Vantage, 1979, p. 209.

of Islamic subjects. On the contrary, their work in general is informed by a brazen antipathy. 'My contention', notes Edward Said, 'is that Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West.'[60] Moreover, the root principle of Orientalism is that the Prophet Muḥammad must have been an imposter who deceived his people all along, or an ill man given to hallucinations, or a fictitious person conjured up by an entire community in what must be the best-executed hoax in all history. For all those who earnestly seek to know and come to grips with Islam should mainly draw upon Muslim scholarship. All exogenous attempts at advancing other, competing views must be marginalized. This selectivity lies at the very heart of Ibn Sīrīn's golden rule, which I repeat in closing:

> This knowledge [of religion] constitutes faith, so be careful of whom you acquire your religion.[61]

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60. *Ibid.*, p. 204.
61. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* …, Introduction, *op. cit.*, I, p. 14.

Chapter 3.7

The major themes of *Ḥadīth* and its characteristics

G. A. Jabbar

Ḥadīth literature consists of about 30,000 different passage-length texts all describing things the Prophet said or did, or things that were said and done in his presence. Each passage is reported with many slight variants, so that when we consider each variant to be a separate *ḥadīth*, the number goes from 30,000 to a few hundred thousand.

The search for themes in this literature is a search for context. The Qurʾān is a book. It has a beginning and an end. It has chapters that have a beginning and an end. As a result when people speak of themes of the Qurʾān they can make the claim that they are just describing the themes of the Qurʾān: their own activity in the creation of these themes is unobtrusive.

But when we speak of the *ḥadīths* (the plural of *ḥadīth*), there is no book, no beginning and no end. My role as I 'describe' the major themes of the *ḥadīths* is so active and so creative that it is impossible for me to ignore it. In addition, I fear that the way I am approaching this task is so utterly my own that there is no reason for anyone else who knows this subject to agree with me.

The Prophet is the subject of all these texts, but to group these texts into themes, we must impute purpose to the Prophet's words and deeds reported in these texts. For example, there is a *ḥadīth* that 'Vinegar is an excellent condiment for bread'.[1] Just looking at these words we might say that this *ḥadīth*

1. Sulaymān ibn Ashʿath Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan abī Dāwūd,* Riyadh, Dār al-Salām, 1420/1999, *[#]*3821; T 21:39; M 26:38. (References to the works of Muslim, Abū Dāwūd, Al-Tirmidhī, Al-Nasaʾī and Ibn Māja begin with the *ḥadīth* number followed by the chapter and section number according to the reckoning of Mizzī in his *Tuḥfat al-ashrāf,* followed by the chapter and section number according to the reckoning of Wensinck in *Muʿjam al-mufahras li-alfāẓ al-ḥadīth. Ḥadīth* number and chapter and section number from both books are as recorded in the Dar al-Salām publication of each book.)

should be placed with *ḥadīths* that have to do with the Prophet's tastes in food. However, a few versions of this *ḥadīth*[2] report that when the Prophet asked for something with which to eat bread, his host was embarrassed and said that all they had was some vinegar. At this, the Prophet said, 'Vinegar is an excellent condiment for bread.'

If this is actually the background of this *ḥadīth*, then the Prophet's words might very well have been an attempt to put his host at ease. In this case, we would group this *ḥadīth* with *ḥadīths* that describe the Prophet's social grace.

The Prophet was first of all a prophet. I shall start with what the Semitic tradition tells us of prophets, and add what Muslim scholarship tells us of the broad features of the Prophet's mission as a prophet. This understanding of the broad features of the Prophet's mission provides headings under which to group *ḥadīth* texts. The themes of *Ḥadīth* literature will appear within these groupings when we try to understand what the Prophet was trying to achieve in the words and deeds reported in a certain *ḥadīth*.

Fundamentally, prophets come to teach faith and deeds. Islam is the name of the life based on faith and deeds. This life is initially taught in the mosque and then as people learn it, it spreads to their family life, their commercial life, their social life, political institutions, and to their dealings with citizens of other states.

The life of the mosque develops attitudes and emotions within individuals that allow them to ignore immediate personal material benefit and act with God's pleasure in front of them at home, in the marketplace, in social situations, with their rulers and their ruled, and in the battlefield.

The Prophet came to teach faith in God, His power and the Hereafter. To admit of these things is faith at an intellectual level. This intellectual faith demands obedience in the form of deeds. Deeds done on the basis of faith strengthen faith and give it an articulation within the person in the form of qualities of faith, which in turn make it easier to do deeds in the face of difficult situations.

So the major portion of this chapter traces within *ḥadīth* texts the Prophet's efforts to teach his Companions faith and deeds. Another section discusses the themes that provide the organizational scheme of some *ḥadīth* works that are popular today and the peculiar circumstances of their composition. In a final brief note, the importance of the conscious choice of choosing the Prophet's work as the framework within which to view the major themes of the *ḥadīth* will be demonstrated.

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2. For example, Muḥammad ibn Yazīd Ibn Māja, *Sunan ibn Māja,* Riyadh, Dār al-Salām, 1420/1999, *[#]*3318; T 21:33; M 29:33; ʿAlī ibn Abī Bakr al-Haythamī, *Majmaʿ al-zawāʾid*, ed. ʿAbdullāh Muḥammad al-Darwīsh, 10 vols., Beirut, Dār al-Fikr, 1412/1992, *[#]*10251 6:257. Also in *Majmaʿ al-zawāʾid*, *ḥadīth* *[#]*13630, 8:328 supports a similar interpretation.

The objects of faith, its results and signs

Faith in God and in His qualities is the main demand of Islam. This faith is naturally accompanied by faith in the Prophet Muḥammad, and the central elements of his teachings. There are numerous *ḥadīths* speaking of these things in which we must have faith. In addition, faith has natural results. If people truly have faith in God and the Hereafter, this faith will lead them to do certain things and to avoid others, and it will shape their character by creating certain qualities within them.

The 'objects' of faith: faith in God and His qualities

The centrepiece of Islam is the 'profession of faith': 'There is none worthy of worship but God, and Muḥammad is his messenger.' To say this with our tongue is enough to qualify us for the rights and responsibilities of a Muslim. To live our life according to its demands is Islam. To believe it in the depths of our heart is that faith which makes us the beloved of God in this world and in the Hereafter:

> 'There is none worthy of worship but God': these words are exalted in God's presence, and they have a special place with Him. These are words such that whoever says them truthfully God will grant him entry into Heaven, and whoever says them falsely, his person and wealth will deserve protection, and when he meets God, He will take him to account.[3]

There are numerous *ḥadīths* that describe the value of the profession of faith in God's eyes. So Abū Hurayra related that the Prophet said, 'Whenever one of God's subjects says, "There is none worthy of worship but Allāh and Muḥammad is his messenger" only to please Allāh, the doors of the heavens open up for his words and they reach straight to God's Throne, as long as he avoids major sins'.[4]

In the Hereafter, on the Day of Judgement, a *ḥadīth* describes an individual with a long list of misdeeds. When people are certain that they are doomed, God will tell them that He has recorded one good deed for them on a slip of paper, and He will command them to get it weighed. People will hesitate, wondering what good this one deed will do for them – but when they get the slip of paper weighed, it will outweigh all their misdeeds. The slip of paper will be a record of their having borne witness that there is none worthy of worship but Allāh and that Muḥammad is his messenger.[5][5]

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3. Al-Haythamī, *Majmaʿ al-zawāʾid, [#]*5, 1:174.
4. Muḥammad ibn ʿĪsā al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī,* Riyadh, Dār al-Salām, 1420/1999, *[#]*3590; T 41:130; M 45:126.
5. Al-Tirmidhī, *[#]*2639; T 34:17; M 38:17.

A number of Companions narrate that after the making of initial decisions to send people to Hell or Heaven, God will command that anyone who had said these words with even a speck of faith in their heart should be removed from Hell.[6] A Companion, Ḥudhayfa, described the final days to his student:

> Islam will fade like the ornamentation on old cloth fades: people will neither know about fasting, nor about prayer, nor about pilgrimage, nor about charity. One night God will lift up His book so that not a single sentence of the Qur'ān will remain on the earth. Some groups of people, some old men and women will remain who will say: 'We found our forefathers saying "There is none worthy of worship other than God," so we say it.' His student, Ṣila, asked, 'What good will "There is none worthy of worship other than God" do them when they know of neither prayer, nor of fasting, nor of pilgrimage, nor of alms?' The Companion ignored him. The student repeated the question a second and a third time. Finally the Companion said, 'O Ṣila: It will save them from the fire of hell! It will save them from the fire of hell! It will save them from the fire of hell!'[7]

Just as this ḥadīth makes the value of the profession of faith independent of doing any good deeds, a series of ḥadīths contain very general statements that just this profession of faith is sufficient to save someone from Hell. Other ḥadīths speak of people initially going to hell and then being saved because of their faith. This is why scholars suggest that these general ḥadīths refer either to saying these words with the strength of faith that is enough to outweigh our bad deeds, or that they mean that after an initial period of suffering punishment for misdeeds in Hell, such people will be saved because of their profession of faith.

A ḥadīth says: 'The best way to remember God is to say, "There is none worthy of worship other than God", and the best way to ask God for one's need is to say, "All praise is for God".'[8] Another ḥadīth tells us that these words are linked to faith: 'The Prophet said, "Keep refreshing your faith". People asked him, "O Messenger of God, how should we refresh our faith?" He said, "Say: There is none worthy of worship other than God' repeatedly".[9]

There are many ḥadīths regarding this profession of faith. But if we consider those ḥadīths that add a few qualities of God to the words of the profession of faith, the number of ḥadīths increases many times. For example, a ḥadīth tells us that whenever the Prophet was distressed, he would say, 'There is none worthy of worship other than God, the Great, the Foregoing, there

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6. For example, Al-Tirmidhī, [#]2593; T 33:9; M 37:9.
7. Ibn Māja, [#]4049; T 28:25; M 36:26.
8. Al-Tirmidhī, [#]3383; T 41:9; M 45:9.
9. Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, Beirut, al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1398/1978, 2:359.

is none worthy of worship other than God, the Lord of the heavens and the earth and the lord of the Great [Divine] Throne.'[10]

Another *ḥadīth* tells us that when people go to the marketplace, they should say, 'There is none worthy of worship other than Allāh, alone, He has no partner, His is dominion [over everything], His is all praise, He brings to life, He brings death, whilst He Himself is ever alive, never dying, benefit is in His hands alone is, and He has power over everything.' The *ḥadīth* goes on to say that the angels write a million good deeds for the person who says this in the marketplace, and God forgives a million of his sins, and has a palace built for him in Heaven.[11]

These exhortations to repeat these words represent the practical side of the Prophet's teaching. It is easy to sit at home and speak piously of God's unmatched power, and it is useful too. But when we enter the marketplace, every piece of merchandise in every store is crying out, 'Buy me, I will benefit you'. At this time, the Prophet tells us to remind ourselves that God alone is worthy of turning to, worthy of praise, and holds all sorts of benefit in His own hands.

When eating as well as when wearing new clothes, a *ḥadīth* tells us to say, 'Praise is God's alone, who has fed me this food, and has granted it to me without any of my own power or ability. Praise is God's alone, who has clothed me with this, and has granted it to me without any of my power or ability.'[12]

Numerous *ḥadīths* teach such prayers for different occasions. A look at them shows a continuous concern that while people must engage in the mundane activities of everyday life, in the midst of these activities, they must remember that the real agency is God's and the real source of everything is God's decision. These *ḥadīths* make it clear that the 'profession of faith' and other such formula provide a door to enter. 'Worthy of worship' must be expanded to 'worthy of attention, worthy of love, worthy that we should turn to Him for help'. That only God is worthy of worship does not just mean that we should reserve worship for him, but rather that He is the one we will run to at every twist and turn of our lives.

The 'objects' of faith: faith in the life to come

A second main element of the teaching of the prophets is their news of a life after death. The route a human being must travel on the journey to the

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10. Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Riyadh, Dār al-Salām, 1419/1999, *[#]*6345, 80:27. (References to Bukhārī are to the *ḥadīth* number followed by the chapter and section number as recorded in the Dār al-Salām publication.)
11. Al-Tirmidhī, *[#]*3429; T 41:36; M 45:36.
12. Abū Dāwūd, *[#]*4023; T 26:1; M 31:1.

Hereafter is described in many *ḥadīths*. Upon death, the first stop is the grave, then the gathering together and waiting for the Day of Judgement, then the Day of Judgement, when people will be handed their books of deeds, then the weighing of deeds, then passage over a bridge which is built over Hell and goes to Heaven.

When all have passed this bridge, or have fallen into Hell in their attempts to pass it, all will have found their places either in Heaven or in Hell. After this there will be a few more stages where people will be taken out of Hell and put in Heaven. When the last person is brought out of Hell and brought to Heaven, the doors to Heaven and Hell will finally be closed.

We find three themes running through all the *ḥadīths* on these stages on the journey to the Hereafter. One type of *ḥadīth* speaks of the severity of each stage, and the great rewards for the winners and great punishments for the losers in each stage. A second type of *ḥadīth* speaks of God's great mercy at various stages of this process. A third type of *ḥadīth* speaks of how these rewards and punishments have to do with deeds done in this world:

> When God created mercy, he created it in a hundred parts. He held back ninety-nine parts and sent down one part to all His creation. So, if unbelievers were to know all the mercy that God has, they would not lose hope of entering heaven, and if believers were to know all the punishment God has in store, they would never be complacent about escaping hell.[13]

Speaking of the severity of these stages, the Prophet once said, 'If you knew what I know, you would cry a lot and wouldn't laugh very often.'[14] Death itself can be punishingly painful or it can be a painless exit to the world of eternal rewards. Thus, a *ḥadīth* tells us that the martyr feels the pain of death no more than the pain we feel at the bite of an ant.[15] At the same time, there is the following graphic description of the tortures in the grave:

> Once the Prophet entered the mosque and [saw] people laughing. He said, 'If you would remember "the destroyer of pleasures" often it would keep you too busy for this. Speak often of "the destroyer of pleasures" – of death. Not a day goes by when the grave does not speak and say "I am the house of exile. I am the house of loneliness. I am the house of dirt. I am the house of worms". When a believing subject of God is buried, the grave says to him: "Welcome! Be at home! Of all the people who walked me, you were one of the most dear to me. Now that you have been given over to me you will see how I treat you".' The Prophet said: 'So the grave will expand until as far as he can see and a door to heaven will be opened up in his grave. And, when one of God's disobedient servants or an unbeliever is buried, the grave says to him: "There is no welcome

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13. Al-Bukhārī, *[#]*6469, T 81:19.
14. *Ibid.*, *[#]*6485, 81:27.
15. Al-Tirmidhī, 1668; T 18:26; M 21:26

for you! May you not rest! Of all the people who walked me, you were one of
those I most disliked. Now that you have been given over to me you will see how
I treat you."' The Prophet said: 'The grave will close up upon him until the sides
touch each other and his ribs are interlaced.' The narrator of the *ḥadīth* says that
the Prophet demonstrated this by lacing together the fingers of his two hands.
The Prophet said, 'God will set seventy serpents upon him so poisonous that
if one of them were to breathe on the earth, the earth would become barren
forever. The serpent will bite him and injure him until he reaches the Day of
Judgement.' The narrator said, the Prophet went on to say, 'The grave is either a
garden from amongst the gardens of heaven, or it is a pit from the pits of hell.'[16]

The reader might note the similarity between this *ḥadīth* and similar descriptions
of death, the grave, Heaven and Hell in other religious world literature. This is
not at all unexpected since the Qurʾān and *ḥadīths* clearly state that the religion
of Islam is simply a reaffirmation and a continuation of previous scriptures
and religions. At the same time, scholars distinguish between *ḥadīths* that are
properly attributed to the Prophet and material from other sources that is
wrongly ascribed to the Prophet.

These descriptions of severe punishments and great rewards are the food
of sermons and storytellers: notorious for their lack of attention to academic
fine points when they find a moving account. While there are many soundly
attributed texts on these topics, there are many texts attributed to the Prophet
that *ḥadīth* scholars have identified as forgeries.

Various *ḥadīths* identify specific acts as being effective in causing or
preventing punishment in the grave. Thus, a *ḥadīth* tells us that if people
recite the sixty-seventh chapter of the Qurʾān every night, that chapter will
take material shape and will effectively protect them from the punishment
of the grave whenever it tries to approach them.[17] Another *ḥadīth* tells us
that carelessness in cleaning ourselves after urinating is a common cause for
punishment in the grave.[18]

Many verses of the Qurʾān have brief but graphic descriptions of people
rising from their graves to be gathered in a large field where they will wait for
God to come and sit in judgment. A long *ḥadīth* describes how many years
will pass as people wait, terrified by their own misdeeds, until finally they
will prefer that they be sent to hell instead of being made to wait any more.
They will go from prophet to prophet until finally the Prophet Muḥammad
will agree to intercede so that God start the judgement. The Prophet will put
his head down on the ground and will praise God in a way in which no one

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16. *Ibid.*, *[#]*2460; T 31:90; M 35:25.
17. Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdullāh Al-Ḥākim, *al-Mustadrak ʿala-l-ṣaḥīḥayn,* 4 vols., Beirut, Dār al-
Kutub al-ʿIlmiya, 1411/1990, *[#]*3839, 2:540.
18. *Ibid.*, *[#]*653, 1:293.

has ever praised God. Eventually God will command him to raise his head and ask for the judgement to start. When the Prophet asks God to begin the judgement, the Day of Judgement will begin.[19]

Many *ḥadīths* describe the extreme conditions of that day. Some of the most moving *ḥadīths* are descriptions of God's mercy on that day. So the Companion Abū Dharr relates that the Prophet said:

> A man will be brought forward on the Day of Judgement and the command will be given that his smaller sins be presented. So his smaller sins will be brought forward and his greater sins will be kept in hiding. [For each sin] he will be asked 'Did you do this on such and such day?' He will admit [it] and will fear the moment when his larger sins will be presented. Then God will command, 'Write a good deed for him instead of every bad deed he has done.' At this he will say, 'I have sins that I don't see here!' Abū Dharr says that he saw the Prophet break into smile so wide that his teeth showed.[20]

The Prophet used descriptions of both the severity of punishments and the sudden forgiveness of sins to create a tension between hope and fear. Looking at God's mercy we have immense hope that we will be forgiven. Looking at our own record of sins, we have immense fear that we will be held to account. When there is no hope for forgiveness there is no incentive to work to do good deeds. When there is no fear of punishment there is no incentive to avoid bad deeds. Thus, Zuhrī (d. 124/718), a student of the disciples of some of the younger companions, said to his students:

> Should I not tell you two strange *ḥadīths*? Ḥumayd ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān told me from the Companion Abū Hurayra, from the Prophet, that the Prophet said, 'A man had lived a life of sin. When he was about to die he communicated his will to his sons: "When I die, burn me. Then crush my remains into powder and blow my remains away with the wind into the ocean. Because, by God, if my Lord gets a hold of me He will punish my like He has never punished anyone".' The Prophet said, 'So they did this to him. Then God said to the earth: 'Return to Me what you have taken'. Instantly, the man was standing. God asked him: 'What made you do what you did?' He said, 'Fear of you, my Lord!' So God forgave him because of his fear.' Zuhrī said, Ḥumayd also related to me from Abū Hurayra from the Messenger of God: 'A woman was sent to hell on account of a cat that she had tied [up]. She wouldn't feed the cat, nor would she let it go so it could survive on insects, until the cat died of hunger.' Zuhrī says: [These two *ḥadīths* go together] so that a person neither becomes self-assured in what he has already done, nor does he lose the hope that he might be forgiven.[21]

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19. Al-Bukhārī, *[#]*4712, 65:5.
20. Ibn Ḥanbal, V.157.
21. Muslim ibn Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Riyadh, Dār al-Salām, 1419/1998 *[#]*6981, *[#]*6982; T 38:5; M 49:26.

THE 'OBJECTS' OF FAITH: FAITH IN GOD'S UNSEEN SYSTEM

Heaven and Hell are important, but the Qur'ān describes a human being as loving immediate rewards and turning away from long-range benefit.[22] So the Prophet would often describe the immediate benefits of good deeds and the immediate harm of bad deeds.

Thus, the Prophet told the Companions the story of a man from previous times who had heard a voice from the sky addressing a cloud, saying, 'Go rain upon so-and-so's farm'. Surprised, the man followed the cloud as it went to a farm and began to rain upon it. The man went to the farmer who owned the land and asked him what his special good deed was. It turned out that every year the farmer would divide his produce in three parts. He would use one part to feed himself and his family, a second part for seed and expenses for running his farm, and the third part to give all in charity.[23]

The Prophet is also reported as saying, 'A person will be deprived of his sustenance because of a sin he does, and only prayer can stop the decisions of destiny, and only good deeds can increase the years of one's life one is destined to live.'[24]

We find numerous *hadīths* linking specific good deeds and bad deeds to good conditions and bad conditions in this world. The Companion Barā' ibn ʿĀzib says that the Prophet once addressed his Companions and said, 'O you people who have spoken the words of faith but faith has yet to enter their hearts! Don't speak of the faults of Muslims behind their backs and don't seek out their faults. Whoever seeks out their faults, God Himself will seek out his faults, and God will disgrace whosoever's faults He seeks even as he sits in his house.'[25]

ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿAbbās reports what the Prophet said when people asked him, 'O Messenger of God, what does "five for five" mean?' He said, 'Whenever a people break their promises, God imposes their enemy upon them. Whenever they rule without regard to the law God has given them, God spreads poverty amongst them. Whenever indecency becomes widespread amongst them, God spreads death amongst them. Whenever they withhold the annual obligatory alms, God holds back rain from them. Whenever they cheat in weighing and measuring things, God holds back growth of their produce and punishes them with famine.'[26]

ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAwf says that the Prophet once said, 'By Him who holds my life in His hands, I swear upon three things. Never has almsgiving

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22. Qur'ān LXXV.20–1.
23. Muslim, 7473; T 41:3, M 53:2.
24. Ibn Ḥanbal, 5:277.
25. Al-Haythamī, *[#]*13141, 8:176.
26. *Ibid.*, *[#]*4346, 3:203.

decreased wealth. So give in charity. And never does a subject of God forgive injustice for God's pleasure except that God will honour him for it on the Day of Judgement. And never does a subject of God open upon himself the door of begging except that God opens upon him the door of poverty.'[27]

Many *ḥadīths* describe the Prophet encouraging his Companions to take their needs to God by engaging in deeds that please him. Thus, a *ḥadīth* tells us that when someone's family would come upon hard times, the Prophet would command them to perform ritual prayers and would recite to them, 'Go and command your family to perform ritual prayer and hold steadfast to it yourself: we do not ask you for provision, we will provide for you.'[28] [29]

The results of faith: deeds and qualities

When belief in God and His qualities, belief in all the difficult stages of the Hereafter and belief in the power of deeds settle into the heart, it is natural that these beliefs change a human being. If action does not change, no matter how loudly someone proclaims belief, we would question how deeply this belief has settled into his heart.

The Prophet said, 'Listen! There is a piece of meat in the body; when that piece of meat is rectified, the whole body is rectified. When that piece of meat becomes corrupt, the whole body is corrupted. Listen: this piece of meat is the heart!'[30] The heart is the seat of faith. Once the heart is rectified by having the proper faith, the whole body acts according to this faith. At the same time, if wrong beliefs and wrong emotions corrupt the heart, the whole body is used for corruption.

The Prophet himself would remedy weakness in practice by working to strengthen faith. Thus, once the Prophet received a silk shirt as a gift. The Companions gathered around to admire it. Ever attentive to the training of his Companions, when the Prophet saw that they were impressed by it, he said, 'What is so great about this? A single handkerchief of [my Companion] Saʿd ibn Maʿādh's in Heaven will be far better than this.'[31]

Faith finds a practical articulation in the demands it places on individuals in particular situations. Repeatedly regulating our behaviour according to those demands shapes certain qualities that are based on faith and that make it easier and easier to turn away from the demands of personal desire and towards God's will in each practical situation.

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27. *Ibid.*, *[#]*4577, 3:274.
28. Qur'ān XX.132.
29. Al-Haythamī, *[#]*11173, 7:166–7.
30. Muslim, *[#]*4094, T 12:41; M 22:20.
31. Al-Tirmidhī, *[#]*3847; T 42:124; M 46:50.

In a striking *ḥadīth*, the Prophet describes the relation between faith and
deeds with the words, 'When the fornicator fornicates, he is not a person of
faith. When the thief steals, he is not a person of faith. When the drinker [of
alcoholic beverages] drinks, he is not a person of faith. The door to repentance
remains open.'[32]

The Prophet drew an image of faith as a tree with deeds as its branches:
'Faith has more than sixty branches. The greatest of them is saying, "There
is none worthy of worship other than God," the least of them is to remove
something that could cause harm from the road. Modesty is an especially
important branch of faith.'[33]

When someone asked the Prophet what faith was, his answer described
the relationship between the deeds of the body and the emotions of the heart:
'When your doing a good deed pleases you and your committing bad deed
displeases you, know that you have faith.'[34]

Faith in God and His qualities, in the power of deeds and in the life
to come are the bases of numerous other qualities essential to the practice
of Islam: obedience to all of God's commands. We see how faith in God
naturally leads to bravery in the incident during a journey when, while the
Prophet was sleeping, an enemy took out a sword and woke him up, holding the
sword against him. In this situation he asked the Prophet, 'Who will save you
from me?' The Prophet replied, 'God'.[35] This ability to ignore the immediate
circumstances and keep our eyes fixed on God's power is the basic strength
that allows us to obey God even when there is apparent loss or danger.

We can see how faith will totally transform our world in Ḥāritha's response
when the Prophet asked him, 'How do you find yourself this morning, O
Ḥāritha?' Ḥāritha replied, 'This morning has come upon me while I am in
a state of true faith'. Then the Prophet said, 'Be careful of what you say.
Everything has a reality; what is the reality of your faith?' Ḥāritha replied, 'My
heart has turned away from the [material] world. For this reason I have spent
my night awake [praying in front of my Lord], and I have spent my day in
thirst [i.e. fasting]. It is as if I am standing in front of my Lord's Throne, and
in front of the people of Heaven enjoying themselves in it, and in front of
the people of Hell being punished.' The Prophet said, 'You are right. You are
a man of true faith whose heart God illuminated.'[36]

32. Al-Bukhārī, *[#]*6810, 86:20.
33. Muslim, *[#]*152; T 1:13; M 1:12.
34. Ibn Ḥanbal, V.251.
35. Al-Bukhārī *[#]*4135, 64:32.
36. Al-Haythamī, *[#]*190, 1:221.

Deeds

The demand for deeds grows out of the demand for faith. Thus, when the Prophet sent Muʿādh ibn Jabal as governor to Yemen, he instructed him to invite the people there to the verbal expression of faith: to give witness with their tongues that there is none worthy of worship other than God and that Muḥammad is His messenger. The Prophet instructed Muʿādh that *if they agree to this*, then he should inform them of the other duties of Islam.[37]

Faith is the recognition that we need God, in this world and in the Hereafter; hence, it becomes important to please Him. God's pleasure is outlined in a single word in the Qurʾān, when God commands Abraham, 'Submit'. Turn yourself over to God: in everything you do, look not at what you or someone else wants, look at what God would have you do. This is God's demand of human beings when they are in the mosque, with their families, in the marketplace and sitting as ruler or as someone who wields authority over others. In each of these fields, the demand is that every decision be based on what God wants and not on any other consideration.

Believers begin with a personal decision to turn their lives over to search for God's pleasure in living out the way of life the Prophet brought. Deeds provide believers with a practical implementation of this decision in their personal life, then in their social and family life as well as in their financial dealings, and finally in their dealings with their state and country and with others in other states and countries. Thus, the life the Prophet brought comes into practical existence within themselves, their homes, marketplaces, societies, and finally, throughout their countries and throughout the world.

The first deed is to decide to turn to God: to repent. After repentance, a whole range of deeds opens up to the individual as hundreds of paths to God's pleasure. The most fundamental type of such deeds is worship: ritual prayer, fasting, performing pilgrimage to Mecca, reciting the Qurʾān, praying to God for our needs, praising God, asking God's forgiveness, and praying that God send His blessings on the Prophet.

Worship is something between the worshipper and God. It develops and strengthens worshippers' faith in God, their commitment to the way of life the Prophet brought, their attention to God, their desire to please God and their willingness to tolerate any difficulty that comes in the way they live their lives according to God's commands and according to the way of life the Prophet brought. These qualities are what provide them with the strength to live their lives with God and the Prophet in front of them when it comes to life with other human beings and life in society.

Worship does not create any competition between attention to others' needs and our own desires. But to live the life that God loves, the life that the

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37. Al-Bukhārī, *[#]*1496, 24:62.

Prophet brought, in our dealings with other humans and in our lives in society, requires sacrifice of money and of our desires. This more strenuous exercise of the qualities that worship produces further develops those qualities.

The final test of faith and the qualities of faith occurs when God tests individuals by giving them positions of temporal authority over others, when God makes them rulers or judges, or when they have to take decisions of war and peace on behalf of their people. When people are entrusted such power, apparently there is no one to question them for what they do this side of the Day of Judgement. Here again, they should live the life that God loves, the life that the Prophet brought.

I shall begin this discussion of *hadīths* that deal with deeds with a brief section on *hadīths* on the initial decision of repentance, and follow it up with a section discussing *hadīths* on worship, another section about *hadīths* on the theme of family and social life and financial dealings, a section on *hadīths* about the wielding of power in an Islamic society, and a final section on *hadīths* about taking Islam to other communities.

GOD'S MERCY, REPENTANCE AND ASKING FOR FORGIVENESS

If it were a simple logical world, deeds would follow immediately from faith. Unfortunately, as faith works on human beings to push them towards deeds, human desire and the feeling that 'I too am something' hold them back. As soon as they commit misdeeds, sinners can look in two directions. Looking at themselves, to disobey God who is continuously showering them with favours is the height of ingratitude, and it is entirely fit that it should be punished. Looking at God, forgiving hundreds and thousands of sinners is nothing to Him. Anas ibn Mālik reports that the Prophet said that God says:

> O son of Adam: As long as you call on me and hope of me, I will forgive no matter what you do, and I won't care. O son of Adam: If your sins reach the clouds in the sky, then you ask me forgiveness, I will forgive and I won't care. O son of Adam: if you come to me with sins which would cover the whole earth, and then you met me in a state that you don't consider anyone or anything partner to me, I will meet you with as much forgiveness as the sins you have brought to me.[38]

The essential evil in sin is that it makes us turn away from God in despair. We can see that the numerous *hadīths* on forgiveness cluster around this point: to stop sinners before they reach despair. In a remarkable *hadīth*, the Prophet tells us that God loves repenting sinners so much that if human beings did not sin He would create another people who would sin and ask for forgiveness.[39]

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38. Al-Tirmidhī, *[#]*3540; T 41:107; M 45:98.
39. Muslim, *[#]*6965; T 38:3; M 49:2.

Asking for forgiveness and repenting renews the human being's relation to God, so it is an occasion of great divine pleasure. A *ḥadīth* describes a traveller in the desert who has all his provisions on his camel. When the traveller lies down to rest, the camel breaks loose, and when he wakes up he finds that the camel and all his provisions are gone. After wandering here and there in the desert trying to find his camel, eventually he loses hope, closes his eyes and lies down to die. As he lies there, he opens his eye for a moment to find his camel standing in front of him with all his provisions! The Prophet says that in his great joy he shouts out, 'O God! You are my slave, I am your Lord', saying the opposite of what he wanted to in his great joy. The Prophet tells us that God's pleasure at the sinner's repentance is greater than the joy of this person when he found his camel.[40]

Worship: the human being and God

Worship refers to those acts a human being does for God which make no sense were it not for God having commanded them. Thus, washing our face and hands, wiping our head and washing our feet before standing, bowing at the waist and then putting our head down on the floor in the direction of Mecca are not things people could have thought up for themselves. They make sense only in that the Prophet told us that God would have us do this process five times a day.

After the profession of faith, there are four major duties of worship: ritual prayer five times a day, a month of fasting every year, alms obligatory on the wealthy once a year, and pilgrimage once in a lifetime for those who can afford the journey to Mecca.

These are the minimum obligatory forms of worship. In *ḥadīth* after *ḥadīth* we see the Prophet encouraging people to hold to at least these minimal forms of worship by promise of reward, and warning them of the danger of punishment if they backslide on this minimum. In a general statement, when a villager asked the Prophet of his duties, the Prophet informed him of these five duties, saying, with each one, that this was the minimum and he could do more if he wished. Having heard the minimum for each form of worship, the villager said that he would 'neither do any more than this [minimum] and nor any less'. The Prophet's response to this was to announce, 'If he holds to this, he will succeed'.[41]

When, however, worship is the main way in which we can gain God's help in this world and in the Hereafter, maintaining the minimal is certainly not the recommended way of doing things. Amongst the Companions and the first

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40. *Ibid.*, *[#]*6960; T 38:2; M 49:1.
41. Al-Bukhārī, *[#]*46; 2:34.

few generations after them, scholarship meant knowing the Qurʾān. Those
who had memorized the Qurʾān would normally try to finish one recitation of
the Qurʾān each week in pre-dawn optional ritual prayers. At a reasonably fast
pace, it is possible to recite the entire Qurʾān in about fifteen hours. Thus, this
means spending at least a few hours every night in extra-obligatory prayers.
In addition, many Companions would fast two days a week, or a minimum
of three days a month. The obligatory alms come around on the rich once a
year: most Companions would regularly give away most or all of their wealth
in optional alms quite frequently.

Naturally, this devotion to worship was a result of the Prophet's training,
and we find the Prophet's efforts reflected in many *ḥadīths*. The Prophet
himself set the example, so that the Companion Ḥudhayfa said, 'Whenever
something would trouble the Prophet, he would engage in ritual prayer.'[42]
Then, when the Prophet found Abū Hurayra complaining of stomach ache,
he told him to get up and pray, 'for, in prayer there is healing'.[43] In the most
general terms, the Prophet states:

> Whoever has any need, whether it be of God or of any of His creation, he
> should wash himself and perform ritual prayer. Then he should say, 'There is
> none worthy of worship but God, Forbearing and Generous. God, the Lord
> of the Great Throne is above all defects. All praise is for God, the Lord of the
> Universes. O God! I ask you deeds, which bring down your Mercy and your
> forgiveness once and for all, and that I be granted a portion from every good
> deed, and that I remain unblemished by any sin. I ask you that you forgive every
> one of my sins, and that you dispel every grief, and that you fulfil every need
> of mine which it is your pleasure to fulfil.' Then he should ask for whatever
> he wants of this world or of the hereafter because God is able [to grant him
> whatever he asks].[44]

Of fasting, God Himself stated in the Qurʾān that it helps us gain the fear
of God that exhibits itself in a controlled life – *taqwā*.[45] The Prophet advised
young men that if they were able to, they ought to marry; otherwise, to help
them gain that inner control which will save them from sin, they ought to fast.[46]

The Prophet's exhortations to spend the money we do not need on those
that need it are so many and so strongly worded that some Companions were
of the opinion that we are simply not allowed to keep any money other than
the bare minimum we need. The general opinion of the Companions was that
once people have paid the minimum obligatory annual alms (which is two

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42. Abū Dāwūd, *[#]*1319; T 2:312; M 5:22.
43. Ibn Māja, *[#]*3458; T 23:10; M 31:10.
44. *Ibid.*, *[#]*1384; T 3:228; M 5:189.
45. Qurʾān II.21.
46. Al-Bukhārī, *[#]*5066, 67:3.

and a half per cent of the person's total wealth), it is permissible for them to keep their wealth. But there is a *ḥadīth*, for example, which says, 'A person who sleeps on a full stomach while his neighbour is hungry and he knows of it does not believe in me [as his Prophet]'.[47] In another *ḥadīth* the Prophet says that all wealthy people are doomed, except for those who spend right and left, and such wealthy people are very few.[48]

We find many *ḥadīths* about four other forms of worship, none of which is obligatory, but each of which is essential to the life of someone striving for God's love: praying to God for our needs, reciting the Qurʾān, reciting various prayers at prescribed occasions, and repeating various formulae describing God's qualities, or asking God's forgiveness, or asking God to bless the Prophet.

Asking God for our needs is, in the words of one *ḥadīth*, the 'essence of worship'.[49] In another *ḥadīth*, the Prophet says that worship itself is no more than asking God for our needs.[50] In yet another *ḥadīth*, the Prophet says that God will be angry with someone who does not ask Him for their needs.[51]

The Qurʾān is God's word given to human beings. To learn it, understand it and teach it is clearly a central duty of Islam. As a result, the Prophet put his Companions and those who came after them to this task by promising great rewards to those who learn it, memorize it and live their lives according to it.

Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī narrates that Caliph ʿUthmān said that the Prophet had said, 'The best amongst you is the person who teaches and learns the Qurʾān.' The narrator of Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān says that Abū ʿAbd al- Raḥmān devoted himself to teaching the Qurʾān during ʿUthmān's caliphate until the time of the governor Ḥajjāj. Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān said, 'This *ḥadīth* is the reason I am sitting here'.[52]

Scholars and lovers of God over the centuries tell us that to stand in front of God for long hours and recite His word to Him is a special form of worship that cannot be matched. The Prophet tells us that David's fast was the most beloved in God's eyes: he would fast one day and not fast the next. David's night-time prayer was also the most beloved in God's eyes: he would sleep half the night, then he would pray for a third of the night, then he would sleep the final sixth of the night.[53]

The Companion Ḥudhayfa describes an occasion in which he joined the Prophet as the latter was busy in his night-time prayer. Ḥudhayfa describes

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47. Al-Haythamī, *[#]*13554, 8:305.
48. Ibn Ḥanbal, II.309.
49. Al-Tirmidhī, *[#]*3371; T 41:2; M 45:1.
50. Abū Dāwūd, *[#]*1479; T 2:359; M 8:23.
51. Al-Tirmidhī, *[#]*3373; T 41:3; M 45:2.
52. Al-Bukhārī, *[#]*5027, 66:21.
53. *Ibid.*, *[#]*1131, 19:7.

how the Prophet started off his ritual prayers by reciting about a sixth of the Qur'ān. Ḥudhayfa says:

> He would recite slowly. Whenever he came upon a sentence that spoke of God's transcendence, he would glorify Him. Whenever he came upon a sentence that could be the occasion for asking God for something, he would ask. Whenever he came upon a sentence that could be the occasion for asking God's protection from something, he would ask His protection.[54]

At a fairly fast pace, it takes about two and a half hours to recite a sixth of the Qur'ān. To this we can add the fact that the Prophet was reciting slowly, and he would stop to pray to God for whatever was appropriate to the section of the Qur'ān he was reciting. This is why a number of *ḥadīths* tell us that often he would have swollen feet because of the length of these prayers. When his wife ʿĀʾisha asked him why he prayed so long when God had already forgiven his sins, he answered, 'Shouldn't I be a grateful servant of God?'[55]

At the same time that he subjected himself to such a strenuous routine, the Prophet was careful that his followers take only as much worship upon themselves as they were able to sustain. For as we shall see in the coming three sections, worship is only one part of the way of life the Prophet taught.

The Prophet taught his Companions that quality in worship was more important that quantity. Thus, the Companion ʿAbdullāh ibn Masʿūd said to his students, 'You engage more in ritual prayer than the Companions of the Prophet and you work harder at worship than they did, but they were better than you are.' When his students asked him what made them better, he told them, 'They loved this material world less than you do, and they loved the Hereafter more than you do.'[56]

The Qur'ān gives the most simple criterion by which we can measure ourselves: '[O Prophet] say: if you love Allāh, follow me, Allāh will love you!'[57] Perhaps the most effective implementation of this following of the Prophet is in the numerous prayers for various occasions that the Prophet taught. We find *ḥadīths* teaching us of what the Prophet would say from the time he got up in the morning, until the time he went to sleep at night.

There are prayers for waking up sleepless in the middle of the night, prayers for bad dreams, prayers for getting up in the morning, prayers for going to the bathroom, prayers for coming out of the bathroom, prayers for beginning to wash to prepare for ritual prayers, prayers for finishing washing for ritual prayers, and so on throughout the day. A person who learns these

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54. Muslim, *[#]*1814; T 3:135; M 6:27.
55. Al-Bukhārī, *[#]*45837, Sūra XLVIII.2
56. Al-Haythamī, *[#]*18290, 10:584.
57. Qur'ān III.31.

prayers and lives by them will find it difficult not to be attentive to God all day long.

Finally, a very important form of worship beyond the simple obligatory minimal forms of worship is to sit down alone and practise repeating certain formulae with the intention of learning to focus our attention on the content of these formulae. Though there are numerous invocations and formulae that are recorded in the words of *ḥadīths*, we can classify them into three groups.

One group of such invocations describes God's qualities. For example, a well-known *ḥadīth* tells us, 'There are two sentences that [God] the Merciful loves, that are light on the tongue, and that will weigh heavily in the scale of judgment: "God is above all blemish and I speak His praise; God, the Great, is above all blemish".'[58]

Another group of formulae are prayers to God that He send blessing on the Prophet Muḥammad. To sit and focus on all that the Prophet has suffered for us and then ask God to bless him is a sure means to increasing our love of the Prophet. This love itself is a foundation of Islam. Even without any focus or attention, a *ḥadīth* tells us that God sends his mercy down ten times and forgives ten sins for whoever prays once for blessings on the Prophet.[59]

A third group of formulae are words asking God for forgiveness and proclaiming our repentance. As usual, to teach the Companions to keep asking God for forgiveness and keep repenting, the Prophet began by demonstrating it himself. Thus, ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿUmar says, 'In a single sitting we would count a hundred times that the Prophet would say, "O my Lord: Forgive me and accept my repentance, certainly you are ever forgiving and ever ready to accept repentance".'[60] In another *ḥadīth*, the Prophet says, 'I find moments when my heart is not as strongly attentive towards God as it usually is. [So] I ask God forgiveness a hundred times every day.'[61]

DEALINGS: THE HUMAN BEING WITH OTHER HUMAN BEINGS

When we deal with people in our family, in the marketplace and in society, we deal with human beings who have rights and responsibilities. To attend to God in these domains is a test of the faith in God and of the attention to Him that we develop in solitary worship.

In some of our dealings with human beings there is some incentive to do what God has commanded, in others there is less incentive, and in yet others there is a strong incentive to turn away from God's command.

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58. Al-Bukhārī, *[#]*7563, 97:58.
59. Al-Ḥākim, *[#]*2018, 1:735.
60. Abū Dāwūd, *[#]*1516; T 2:362; M 8:26.
61. Muslim, *[#]*6585; T 37:12; M 48:12.

In financial dealings, people who have claims on us will themselves ensure that we pay them their dues in full, but in our dealings with family, relatives, younger people, older people, often the other party to the dealing is not in a position to demand its rights from us. This puts us in a position where we might get away with not giving such a person his right. It requires even more self-restraint to attend to God's command when it conflicts with social custom or fashion. Here not only is there no one to insist that we do what God says, social pressure drags us away from God's command and from the way of the Prophet.

Worship is between the human being and God. *Hadīths* that have to do with the mutual interaction of human beings are the subject of this section of the chapter and that of the next two sections, this section having to do with dealings, and the next with relations of power and dealing with other communities. Among the qualities that the Prophet desired of his followers in these two domains, a number are common to both domains. So the themes discussed in these two sections overlap. I have separated the topics of these sections because family life, financial dealings and dealing with social custom are things that people always have to face, wherever they live. Positions of power and taking the message of Islam to other communities in the sense I speak of deserve separate treatment since they presume an Islamic state.

Financial dealings

The Prophet took great pains to make sure that people understood that piety in worshipping God should translate to piety in dealings with other human beings. Thus, the Prophet said, 'The truthful, trustworthy merchant will be [raised up on the Day of Judgment] with the prophets, the first line of their believers, and the martyrs.'[62]

Once, the Prophet passed by someone selling grain in the market. The Prophet put his hand inside one of the mounds of grain and found that the grain on the inside of the mound was wet while the grain on top was dry. He asked the merchant, 'What is this?' The merchant replied that the grain had got wet in the rain. The Prophet told him that he should have put the wet grain on top so that everyone could see. He followed this up by saying, 'Whoever cheats is not one of us!'[63]

It is quite possible that the merchant had not been dishonest and the grain had actually got wet in the rain. On the other hand, it was his responsibility to identify his merchandise clearly. So the Prophet says, 'Muslims are brothers:

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62. Al-Tirmidhī, *[#]*1209; T 10:4; M 12:4.
63. Muslim, *[#]*284; T 1:42; M 1:43.

it is not permissible for a Muslim to sell defective merchandise to his brother without informing him of the defect.'[64]

There are a number of *ḥadīths* like these two that explicitly demand that the parties to a transaction should make the terms of the transaction clear to each other. A large number of *ḥadīths* prohibiting various kinds of commercial transactions also carry this demand implicitly. For example, *ḥadīths* state that people may not sell the fruit on trees in an orchard until the viability of the fruit becomes clear;[65] other *ḥadīths* tell us that people may not sell the grapes of a vineyard until they are close to being ripe, and may not sell the grain of a field until the grain has become almost ready to harvest.[66]

A common theme running throughout the *ḥadīths* on all types of dealings with each other is that we should be gentle in demanding our rights in order to gain God's pleasure and His reward. A *ḥadīth* states, 'Have mercy on the inhabitants of the earth, the Dweller of the heavens will have mercy on you.'[67] The Prophet told the story of a person from a previous people who had no good deeds to his credit except that he used to give people loans and had instructed his employees to forgive any poor individuals they dealt with. When this man came before God, God said to him, 'It is more appropriate for Me to forgive than it is for you. Forgive him'.[68]

One time, a person wanted to test the Prophet's patience before he would accept Islam. So he gave the Prophet a loan and set a date for payment. He came to the Prophet a few days before the date and grabbed him by his shirt and began abusing him and demanding that the Prophet pay him back immediately. 'Umar lost his temper and started threatening him. At this the Prophet smiled at 'Umar and said, 'O 'Umar! Both of us need something other than this from you. His need is that you should tell him to ask me nicely, while my need is that you should tell me to repay his debt promptly.' Then, the Prophet commanded 'Umar to pay him back and pay him an additional amount as compensation for 'Umar's having threatened him.[69]

The Companions too learned from this example. Someone owed a Companion, Abū Qatāda, some money and was hiding from him. When Abū Qatāda found him, the man said, 'I am poor'. Abū Qatāda said, 'I have heard the Prophet saying that whoever would like to have God save him from the torments of the Day of Judgement, he should give the poor [indebted] person extra time [to pay his debt] or he should just forgive him.'[70]

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64. Ibn Māja, *[#]*2246; T 10:45; M 12:45.
65. Abū Dāwūd, *[#]*3367; T17:23; M 22:22.
66. *Ibid.*, *[#]*3371; T17:23; M 22:22.
67. Al-Tirmidhī, *[#]*1924; T22:16; M 25:16.
68. Muslim, *[#]*3997; T 12:27; M 22:6.
69. Al-Ḥākim, *[#]*6547, 3:700.
70. Muslim, *[#]*4000; T 12:27; M 22:6.

When faith in the Hereafter and in the Day of Judgement grows beyond just an intellectual understanding, we learn to be confident that our own rights are protected: God will pay us back for whatever injustice is done to us. The fear, however, is that we might leave this world owing something to someone.

A companion asked the Prophet how God would deal with him and his slaves whom he used in his business, but who would lie to him, cheat him and disobey him, so he would beat them for this. The Prophet said that on the Day of Judgement, God would weigh the punishment he had given them with the injustice they had done. If they had done more injustice than he had punished them for, God would take their good deeds and give them to him until he was fully compensated. If his punishment was more than their injustice, God would give them as many of his good deeds as would be enough to compensate them for the excess punishment.

Hearing this, the man began to wail and cry. The Prophet asked him, 'Don't you read the Qurʾān? And we will set up the scales of justice, then there will be no injustice on any soul?' The rest of the statement in the Qurʾān is, 'and if there is even the equivalent of a sesame seed [of good or bad] we will bring it forward, and We are sufficient to take account.'[71] At this the man decided to free all his slaves.[72]

To deal with an eye on the Hereafter is to have a relationship of giving to people, while taking only from God. There are many *ḥadīths* on this theme, but perhaps the most touching ones are those that show how the Prophet put his Companions to learning this lesson in the most difficult of circumstances.

Once his daughter, Fāṭima, tired of many days of hunger, came to him and asked him, 'O Messenger of God, the angels get their nourishment from speaking of God's Oneness, speaking his purity, and praising God. How are we to find nourishment?' The Prophet spoke of how there had been nothing to cook in his houses for a whole month. But then he put two options in front of his daughter. He said, 'If you want I can give you five lambs [which had come into his possession at that time], or if you want I can teach you five words [of prayer] that the angel Gabriel has just taught me.' Fāṭima chose to return with the prayer.[73]

When some people came to the Prophet asking him to give them something, he spent all he had on them, and then said to them, 'I won't hold back anything I have from you, [but] whoever tries to abstain [from asking people for their material wealth], God will grant him the ability to abstain; whoever tries to do without [asking others for material help], God will grant

71. Qurʾān XXI.47.

72. Al-Tirmidhī, *[#]*3165; T 40:22; M 44:21.

73. Alī Al-Muttaqī, *Kanz al-ʿummāl,* 16 vols., Beirut, Muʾassassat al-Risāla, 1989, *[#]*5022 (References are to *ḥadīth* numbers).

him freedom from want; whoever tries to live with patience, God will grant him patience, and no one has been granted any gift more vast than patience!'[74]

In the section on worship, I spoke of prayers that turn our attention towards God when our attention wanders to others. The Prophet's teachings in human dealings with each other actually train us to turn to Him with our needs in practical situations of everyday life.

We find two stories of Companions whom the Prophet advised when they were in difficult financial circumstances. One came to the Prophet asking him for material help. The Prophet sold off all that he owned (a mat and a wooden drinking bowl), had the man buy an axe with it and told him to make his living cutting wood and selling it in the marketplace.[75]

The Prophet saw the other Companion looking worried in the mosque. The Prophet taught him a prayer and said that if he recited it every morning and evening, God would arrange for the payment of his debt: 'O God: I seek refuge with you from worry and sorrow, and from inability and laziness, and from cowardice and miserliness, and O God, I seek refuge with you from becoming overpowered by debt and from human beings gaining power over me!'[76]

Turning to human beings for help damages the fabric of our faith. In certain extreme circumstances we may ask for help, but there is no question that the essence of faith is to take all of our needs to God. ʿAbdullāh ibn Masʿūd says that the Prophet said, 'Whoever faces lack of food and takes his need to people, his need will not be fulfilled. Whoever takes his need to God, God will soon grant him freedom from want: either by granting him death before long or by granting him wealth before long.'[77]

When a slave asked the fourth caliph, ʿAlī, for help in paying off his debt of manumission, ʿAlī said to him, 'Why don't I teach you a few words that the Prophet taught me such that [if you pray to God with those words] God will arrange for the payment of your debt even if there be a mountain of debts on you? [Say:] O God, grant that what you have made permissible for me become sufficient for me so that I do not have to look towards what you have forbidden, and make me free of want by Your Grace.'[78]

The general attitude we find regarding dealings is summarized in the *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet says:

On my responsibility: the person who gives up an argument though he be in the right will get a castle on one side of heaven; and the person who gives up telling

74. Abū Dāwūd, [#]1644; T 3:29; M 9:28.
75. *Ibid.*, [#]1641; T 3:27; M 9:26.
76. *Ibid.*, [#]155; T 2:368; M 8:32.
77. *Ibid.*, 1645; T 3:29; M 9:28.
78. Al-Tirmidhī, [#]3563; T 41:121; M 45:110.

lies even in jest will get a castle in the middle of Heaven; and the person who learns to deal well with people will get a castle in the highest Heaven.[79]

A major theme uniting *ḥadīths* on financial dealings is generosity towards God's creation based on a trust in God. Displaying this generosity towards God's creation further strengthens and develops this trust in God, and we learn to give to people and take only from God. Another theme is the explicit and the implicit demand that the terms and conditions of people dealing with each other be absolutely clear.

Family life

In the Qur'ān, wherever there is mention of women, we inevitably find encouragement to practise *taqwā*: fear of God. When a woman leaves her house and moves in to her husband's house, she is left rather at the mercy of the man she has married and the family she has married into. In the *ḥadīth*, this theme is reinforced both by encouraging good behaviour towards women and children, and by warning those who do not do so of God's punishment.

In the final pilgrimage, the Prophet addressed his Companions with what was farewell advice. Part of it was an admonishment about women: 'Be good to women: they are your helpers and that is all you own of them.'[80]

While one *ḥadīth* states that the best amongst Muslims is the one who teaches the Qur'ān, another *ḥadīth* states that the best amongst Muslims is the one who is best towards his wife and children.[81] At another time, some women complained that their husbands had been mistreating them. The Prophet announced to his companions, 'Listen: these people [whose wives complain of their treatment] are not the better people amongst you.'[82]

ʿĀʾisha, his young wife whom he formally married when she was only six and who moved in to his house at the age of nine, recounts numerous anecdotes which give us a glimpse into the Prophet's kindness towards her. She tells of how the Prophet would quietly invite young girls into his house so that they could play with her.[83] She speaks of when the Prophet came across her collection of 'dolls'. He asked her, 'What is this, ʿĀʾisha?' She said, 'These are my daughters'. One of these was supposed to be a horse that had two little pieces of cloth attached to its middle. When the Prophet asked what this was, she said it was her horse that had wings. When the Prophet expressed his surprise at this, she said, 'Don't you know? Solomon's horse had wings!'[84]

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79. Abū Dāwūd, *[#]*4800; T 35:8; M 40:7.
80. Ibn Māja, *[#]*1851; T 7:3; M 9:3.
81. *Ibid.*, *[#]*1977; T 7:50; M 9:50.
82. *Ibid.*, *[#]*1985; T 7:51; M 9:51.
83. Al-Bukhārī, *[#]*6130, 78:81.
84. Abū Dāwūd, *[#]*4932; T 35:62; M 40:54.

Ḥadīths about the Prophet's dealing with younger people convey his kindness. When the Prophet arrived in Medina, Anas was a ten year-old boy, and his mother gave him over to the Prophet to serve him and learn from him. For the next ten years, he lived with the Prophet. We can sense his deep attachment to the Prophet in this description of his days with him:

> I served the Prophet for ten years, and he never said the slightest word of complaint to me. He never said to me about something I had done, 'Why did you do that?' Nor did he say about something I hadn't done, 'Why didn't you do that?' The Messenger of God was the most good-natured of all people. I have never touched any kind of silk or anything else that was as soft as the hand of the Messenger of God. I have never smelt musk or any other perfume as fragrant as the sweat of the Prophet.[85]

Once a villager saw the Prophet kissing a child. The man said, 'You kiss children? We don't kiss them.' The Prophet replied, 'What can I do if God has stripped your heart of kindness?'[86]

The Prophet's granddaughter would climb on to his back when he had his forehead on the ground during ritual prayers. The Prophet would wait until she got off before he lifted his head up.[87] Under normal circumstances, such interruption in worship is not tolerated. With children, however, the Prophet was all kindness. During the Friday sermon, it is simply forbidden to do anything at all other than listen carefully to the sermon. However, once, he was in the midst of delivering the Friday sermon when his two grandsons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, came into the mosque, 'tripping on their shirts'. The Prophet stopped his sermon and got up to pick them up and sat them down on his lap.[88]

Slaves, too, are in a position of weakness in any household. As a result, a *ḥadīth* tells us that the very last words on the lips of the Prophet were, '[Be careful about] ritual prayer, and [be careful about the rights of] slaves.'[89]

Someone visiting the Companion Abū Dharr saw that he was wearing a piece of fabric and his slave was wearing a matching piece of fabric. The visitor suggested that Abū Dharr take the two pieces and make himself a suit, and buy something else for the slave to wear. Abū Dharr told him that the Prophet had said to him that these slaves are our brothers whom God has turned over to us. So whoever has gained power over one of his brothers should feed him from what he himself eats, should clothe him from what he

85. Al-Tirmidhī, *[#]*2015 T: 22:69; M 25:69.
86. Al-Bukhārī, *[#]*5998, 78:18.
87. *Ibid.*, *[#]*516, 8:9.
88. Ibn Māja, *[#]*3600, T 24:20; M 36:20.
89. *Ibid.*, *[#]*1625; M 6:64; T 4:64.

himself wears, and should not give him work that he would be unable to do. If he does give him such difficult work, he should himself give him a hand.[90]

The prophet's way in the face of custom and fashion

To practise the way of the Prophet in family life, it is enough to be human and kind. In holding on to his ways in the face of custom and fashion, we need courage. The way of the Prophet is something to hold on to because it is good and makes sense to us, but also because it is part of our identity: 'Someone who imitates a people is from amongst them.'[91]

Attention to detail by the Prophet did things in the lives of many Companions. ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿUmar, the son of the second caliph, ʿUmar, was well known for this. He was a young man of twenty-three when the Prophet died. For a number of reasons, he was a prime candidate for the caliphate on the death of the third caliph. However, he sacrificed this political opportunity and devoted himself to learning. His son tells us that Ibn ʿUmar was so entirely devoted to learning every small detail of the Prophet's life that onlookers would fear that he was insane.[92] The famous turn of the century scholar al-Zuhrī says, 'Don't give anyone else's opinion the weight of Ibn ʿUmar's opinion: he lived for sixty years after the Prophet so that nothing of the Prophet's way and of the way of his Companions remained hidden from him.'[93]

Thus, we find numerous *ḥadīths* documenting details of the way in which the Prophet would do simple everyday tasks: how he preferred to use his right hand in everything good he did, such as washing himself, combing his hair and putting on his shoes;[94] how he did not like it that when someone lay face down on their stomach;[95] and how he preferred a lower garment to reach to the middle of the calf and definitely not hang so low as to cover the anklebone;[96] how he did not like a person to blow or breathe into a bowl as he drank from it.[97]

A strong thread running throughout all the descriptions of the Prophet's life at home and his ways in society is simplicity, thrift and humility. He made

90. Al-Bukhārī, *[#]*6044, 78:44.

91. Abū Dāwūd, *[#]*4031; T 26:5; M 31:4.

92. Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *Kitab tadhkirat al-ḥuffāẓ,* ed. Z. ʿUmayrat, 5 vols. in 3, Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1419/1998, I, p. 32.

93. *Ibid.*

94. Aḥmad ibn Shuʿayb al-Nasāʾī, *Sunan al-Nasāʾī, al-mujtabā,* Riyadh, Dār al-Salām, 1420/1999, *[#]*5242; T 31:61; M 48:63.

95. Abū Dāwūd, *[#]*5040; T 35:103; M 40:94.

96. Ibn Māja, *[#]*3573; T 24:7; M 32:7.

97. Abū Dāwūd, *[#]*3728; T 20:20; M 25:20.

do with simple food and clothing, a humble mount, minimal housing, and marriage uncomplicated by expensive and intricate customs. The clear message is that at best these are needs; they are certainly not things to compete in. As the Qurʾān puts it, 'This worldly life is no more than a distraction and game, and the abode of the hereafter is the real life.'[98]

The Prophet even warned his wife ʿĀʾisha, 'If you want to meet up with me in the hereafter, you should make sure to get by with only that much of this material world as the person on the back of a mount carries with him; and beware of the company of rich people; and don't discard a garment until you have patched it [and worn it patched].'[99]

In this same vein, the Prophet once held the teenaged ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿUmar by his shoulders and said, 'Live like a stranger in this world; rather, like a wayfaring traveller.' When narrating this ḥadīth, ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿUmar would add, 'When you find yourself alive in the afternoon, don't expect to live until the morning; when you find yourself alive in the morning, don't expect to live until the afternoon.'[100]

Once, the Prophet saw ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿAmr fixing the wall to his thatched hut. The Prophet told him that he felt death was closer than the falling of the wall.[101] Many ḥadīths discourage spending beyond our bare need on houses. Perhaps the most general statement the Prophet made was when one of the Companions built a small dome on his house. On learning of the Prophet's displeasure, he destroyed it. The Prophet said, 'Every construction will have evil consequence upon the one who does it, except that which is absolutely necessary.'[102]

Weddings are another place where the Prophet discouraged expenditure. Thus, after the death of the Prophet, his wife ʿĀʾisha showed someone an inexpensive shirt of rough cotton which she lent to many different girls who used it as their 'bridal gown'.[103]

In many cultures, wealthy people marry repeatedly to exhibit their wealth both in the festivities and in the later maintenance of multiple households. While many ḥadīths insist that we must respond to an invitation to food, and the host should feed people on the morning after the wedding night, the Prophet warns that 'The worst of food is the food of a wedding feast: rich people are invited while the poor are neglected. [Nevertheless,] whoever refuses to respond to an invitation has disobeyed God and His Prophet.'[104]

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98. Qurʾān XXIX.64.
99. Al-Tirmidhī, 1780; T 19:38; M 22:38.
100. Al-Bukhārī, [#]6416, 81:3.
101. Ibn Māja, [#]4160; T 29:13; M 37:13.
102. Abū Dāwūd, [#]5237; T 35:168; M 40:156, 157.
103. Al-Bukhārī, [#]2628, 51:34.
104. *Ibid.*, [#]5177, 67:73.

A survey of the Prophet's weddings shows that he made it clear that weddings were not the place to spend money. The only public expenditure was a 'feast' on the morning after the wedding. On the occasion of one of his weddings, the Prophet told people to gather together whatever food they had, and everyone sat down and ate it together. On another occasion he served each guest a bowl of milk: that was the 'feast'!

When these *ḥadīths* are viewed in light of the *ḥadīths* that describe the Prophet feeding people at weddings and on other non-specific occasions, the point becomes clear that the groom should feed people as well as he is able to, since feeding people is certainly a good thing. People are encouraged to use the occasion of the wedding feast to feed the poor; at the same time, weddings are not to be made difficult by making them dependent on such expenditure.

Two themes run side by side in the *Ḥadīth* literature on expenditures of this kind: to spend as little as possible on our own needs, and to spend as much as possible on other people's needs.

Summary

Many *ḥadīths* speak of the importance of being good-natured in our dealings with people. Thus, the Prophet says that nothing will weigh heavier than being good-natured, in the scale of deeds on the Day of Judgement, and by being good-natured people can reach higher ranks with God than they can with a lot of extra fasting and ritual prayer.[105] The Prophet's wife Umm Salama asked him, 'Say that one of us women marries a man, then a second man, then a third man, and then a fourth and then she dies. She enters Heaven along with all her husbands. Whose wife will she be?' The Prophet told her that she would be given the option to be with whichever husband she chose, and she would choose the one who was the most good-natured: 'O Umm Salama: these good-natured people are going to run off with all the best of this world and the next!'[106]

Indeed, one *ḥadīth*, directly relates being good-natured to faith: 'the people with the most perfect faith in God are the most good-natured, who have "soft shoulders" [that is, they are not stiff and unwilling to help], who are friendly and get others to be friendly; there is no good in a person who is not friendly and who does not get others to be friendly.'[107]

Dealing with human beings as described in this section, as well as exercising of power and carrying the message of Islam to other communities

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105. Al-Tirmidhī, *[#]*2003; T 22:62; M 25:62.
106. Al-Haythamī, *[#]*11396, 7:256.
107. *Ibid.*, *[#]*196; 1:223.

that I shall speak of in the coming sections, often involve material loss or gain. Faith in God, in the sense of having learned to turn with our needs only towards God, allows us to deal with people without anxiety at the outcome of these dealings. Attention to God as we buy or sell, or as we deal with our husband or boss, does not just allow us to forgo such illegal benefit as we might be in a position to obtain, it even allows us to forgive personal injustice for the sake of God's pleasure.

Many of the *ḥadīths* about worship carry the theme of learning to take all of our needs to God Himself. *Ḥadīths* on family life, social life and financial dealings, centre on dealing with people in these domains not to benefit from others but to do good to them. Many *ḥadīths* point to the minimal demand that we refrain from injustice, but many express the ideal: to 'join relations with those who try to cut themselves off from you, give to those who deprive you, and turn away from those who do injustice to you'.[108]

In private worship, we learn to be attentive to God, repeating His names and meditating on his qualities while sitting in a corner of the mosque. As the Qur'ān itself indicates, this attention to God must be brought out into the marketplace and the battlefield: 'Men whom neither commerce nor selling [their wares] can turn away from remembering God …'[109]; 'O people of faith, when you are face to face with an army [of the enemy] be steadfast and remember God a lot …'[110]; and 'when [Friday] prayers are done, spread out in the world and seek from God's bounty and remember God a lot ….'[111]

The human being in relationships of power

Another group of *ḥadīths* describe, the responsibilities and rights of the head of state, the commander of an army, the caliph, the judge, the leader of Muslims, the government servant, the person who leads prayers, and even the person a group of people appoint as their leader temporarily, as in a journey. Although there are great differences in the function of people in each of these positions, as people who wield authority over others, they face the same dangers, and their route to God's pleasure is the same.

An early Companion of the Prophet, Miqdād ibn al-Aswad, was made the leader of a group for a journey. Upon his return, the Prophet asked him, 'How do you feel about yourself?' Miqdād answered, 'I went along in this position of responsibility until I started to feel that these people with me

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108. *Ibid.*, *[#]*13689.
109   Qur'ān XXIV.37.
110. Qur'ān VIII.45.
111. Qur'ān LXII.10.

are my servants! By God, I will never again accept authority, even over two people!'[112]

It is difficult to maintain humility in a position of power: we feel that we do not need any one individual. So there are many *ḥadīths* in which the Prophet speaks of the responsibility of those in authority towards those who fall into the domain of their authority. The Prophet asked another person the same question he had asked Miqdād in a similar situation, and his response was, 'I was like one of the group. Wherever they leaned, I leant with them; wherever they stopped and got off, I stopped and got off with them.' The Prophet said, 'The person in authority stands at the door of reproach, except for someone whom God protects.' The person said, 'By God, I won't ever accept any such responsibility from you or from anyone else again.' The Prophet expressed great pleasure at this decision.[113]

The Prophet's admonishments against taking on positions of responsibility were so severe that some important Companions would simply refuse to participate in government. Thus, when the third caliph, 'Uthmān, tried to make 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar a judge, ibn 'Umar asked him if he had heard the Prophet say, 'Whoever seeks refuge in God, he seeks refuge in a place where he will be granted refuge.' 'Uthmān said that he had heard the Prophet say this. 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar then said, 'So, I seek refuge in God from your putting this responsibility on me!' 'Uthmān accepted this from him, but told him not to tell anyone how he had extricated himself from this position.[114]

At the same time, there is promise of great reward for just rulers. They are among the seven chosen types of people who will be granted a place underneath the shade of God's Throne on the long and terrible Day of Judgement, when there will be no shade except the shade of God's Throne.[115] The Prophet says:

> Listen: Those who do justice in God's eyes will be on thrones of light on the Day of Judgement sitting on the Merciful's [i.e. God's] right-hand side, and both His hands are right! [Those who do justice are] those just in their rule, and to their families, and with whatever position of authority they are entrusted.[116]

Positions of authority are trusts and a burden: we should certainly not volunteer for them, but if such a trust comes upon us, then we should be careful to do our utmost to fulfil its demands. This struggle to fulfil the demands of trust is what God will reward us for.

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112. Al-Haythamī, *[#]*9025, 5:364.
113. *Ibid.*, *[#]*9026, 5:364–5.
114. *Ibid.*, *[#]*9019, 5:362.
115. Al-Bukhārī, *[#]*6806, 86:19.
116. Muslim, *[#]*4721; T 20:58; M 33:5.

III–7.1 Two illuminated folios written in a regional hand, with naskh in margins, from a single Volume Qurʾān. East Africa. 1749
© Nasser Khalili Collection of Islamic Art (Nour Foundation)

The Prophet tells us, 'In my eyes the person who asks for a position of responsibility is the person most likely to prove himself unworthy of the trust placed in him.'[117] People who do not seek authority and do not see themselves as fit for holding authority will be guided. So the Prophet addressed one of his Companions and said, 'O ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Samura: Don't ask for a position of responsibility, because if you get it upon asking for it you will be left to your own devices, and if it comes to you without asking, God will help you in it.'[118]

Humility in the face of such a responsibility is the strongest aid in fulfilling it. People who do not see themselves as fit for the responsibility thrust upon them will fear a misstep at every decision, they will ask for advice in every decision, and they will see themselves as needful of the good will and the opinions of those around them. The Prophet was the first to demonstrate this humility by example. His 'court' was the mosque, and when he sat

117. Abū Dāwūd, *[#]*2930; T 14:2; M 19:2.
118. *Ibid.*, *[#]*2929; T 14:2; M 19:2.

amongst his Companions, people could not distinguish him from them. Even a slave woman asking him to come along to help her could expect to take him anywhere in Medina.[119]

The Prophet was not just a person wielding power among his people; he was a Prophet of God. To deny him or dispute with him was not just to risk disfavour in a worldly court, but also to risk damnation in God's eyes. We can imagine how lightly he must have trod in order to create an environment where on a number of occasions he decided something and his followers felt comfortable enough to ask him whether this decision was his personal opinion or God's revelation to him. Furthermore, they were comfortable enough with him to disagree with his personal opinion.

Thus, when they were going out for the first major battle, the battle of Badr, the Prophet chose a place to camp. Some companions who had experience with battle asked him if his decision was a revelation. When the Prophet said that it was not, they told him that the place he had chosen was not the best place to set up camp.[120]

Before the second major battle, the battle of Uḥud, there was a war council to decide whether the Muslims should wait for the enemy to come to them in Medina or should go out to meet them. The Prophet's own preference was to wait in Medina. But when he saw that some young men were strongly in favour of going out to meet the enemy, he gave in to their wish and decided to go out to meet the enemy against his own better judgment.[121]

When a female slave married to another slave is set free, she is given the choice to maintain her marriage to her slave husband or to leave him. When the slave girl Barīra was freed, she wanted to leave her husband. Her husband was very devoted to her and was distraught at the prospect of her going away. When the Prophet saw his condition, he pleaded his case with Barīra. Barīra stated, in effect, that if this was a revelation she would be obliged to obey the request, but if it was the Prophet's personal plea, then she wanted to be excused: she was not interested in the man.[122]

This environment of freedom to disagree is essential to the major institution that ensures stability of the Prophet's way of collective life: the *mashūra*, or 'consultation'. I have already mentioned some *ḥadīths* where we see the Prophet consulting his Companions. Such consultation can only be effective where those consulted feel free to speak their mind. How well the Prophet had conveyed this message to the Companions can be gleaned from an incident involving Muʿāwiya, who perhaps came the closest to being a 'kingly' ruler from

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119. Ibn Māja, *[#]*4177; T 29:16; M 37:16.
120. Ismaʿīl al-Dimashqī Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, Beirut, Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, n.d., III, pp. 327–8.
121. Ibn Kathīr, IV, pp. 14–15.
122. Al-Nasāʾī, *[#]*5419; T 32:27; M 49:28.

amongst the Companions. On three consecutive Fridays he came on to the pulpit to preach a sermon, and said, 'The money [in the state treasury] is our money; the proceeds from non-Muslims are ours. We will give to whomsoever we wish; we will withhold it from whomsoever we wish.' For two Fridays, people just listened to him. On the third Friday, however, a man got up and said, 'Absolutely not! The money [in the state treasury] is ours and the proceeds from the non-Muslims are ours. Whoever gets between us and this money, we will invite him to God with our swords!' Muʿāwiya called the man into his private room and people thought that he would be executed. Later, however, they saw that Muʿāwiya had him sitting next to him on his throne. Muʿāwiya said:

> This man has brought me back to life, God give him life. I had heard God's Messenger say, 'There will be rulers after me who will say [wrong] things and no one will [dare] refute them. They will fall over each other's shoulders into hell as monkeys fall over each other.' I was afraid that I might be one of them. So, I spoke the first Friday and no one refuted me. Then I spoke the second Friday and no one refuted me. Then I spoke the third Friday and this man refuted me: he brought me back to life, God give him life.[123]

Many *ḥadīths* address those in authority with these strong admonitions to understand their responsibility and maintain their humility. At the same time, there is a consistent refrain in *ḥadīths* that address the subjects of authority that we must 'Listen [to] and obey' those in power, regardless of who they are and what they do. A Companion reports:

> We gave the Prophet an oath of allegiance with the condition that we would listen to those in authority and we would obey them when it would be easy for us and when it would be difficult, in pleasant things and in things which displease us, and that we would not try to wrest authority from the hands of those in authority, and that we would speak the truth wherever we might be.[124]

Or:

> The Muslim must listen and obey those in authority, whether he likes what he is commanded to do or dislikes it, as long as he is not commanded to commit a sin. If he is told to commit a sin, then he neither has to listen nor does he have to obey.[125]

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123. Al-Haythamī, *[#]*9199, 5:425–6.
124. Ibn Māja, *[#]*2866, 16:41; M 24:41.
125. Al-Tirmidhī, *[#]*1707; T 18:55; M 21:29

Ḥadīths relate that the Prophet commanded people to listen to the person in authority and obey him, even if the person was 'a Nubian slave with a head like a raisin'[126] or 'a paraplegic'.[127]

A Companion one day asked the Prophet what he should do if after him people came to power and demanded their own rights from the public but did not give the public the rights due them. The Prophet said, 'Listen and obey, for they will have to carry the weight of their own sins and you will carry the weight of your own.'[128]

Once, the Prophet stated, 'After me there will be rulers who don't live the life I have brought and who don't follow my way; amongst them there will be people whose hearts are the hearts of devils in human bodies.' The Companion reporting the *ḥadīth* asked, 'If I live to that time what should I do, O Messenger of God?' The Prophet replied, 'Listen to the ruler and obey. If he whips your back, if he takes your wealth away: Listen and obey.'[129]

Ḥadīths address the subjects of power with the command to 'listen and obey', and they address those who exercise power with a reminder of the weight of the responsibility they carry. A third theme that addresses both sides is the demand to cultivate a habit of thinking the best of people, to learn to ignore any shortcomings or to make excuses for such shortcomings, and to avoid speaking ill of people.

This theme is relevant to the domain of dealings – financial, family and social – but it underlines an especially important component of the way of life of the Prophet in the exercise of power. Repeatedly we see individuals coming to the Prophet confessing a sin and asking to be punished and cleansed of the sin, while the Prophet tries to ignore what they say or to make an excuse for them.

> The man from the Aslam tribe came and confessed four times that he had had unlawful sexual intercourse with a woman. Each time the Prophet turned away from him. When he turned to the Prophet the fifth time, the Prophet asked him, 'Did you enter her?' He said, 'Yes'. The Prophet asked, 'Until that part of your body entered into that part of hers?' He said, 'Yes'. The Prophet asked, 'Like a kohl stick enters into a bottle of kohl? Like a rope descends into a well?' He said, 'Yes'. The Prophet asked, 'You know well what adultery is?' He said, 'Yes. I did with her unlawfully what a man does lawfully with his wife'. The Prophet asked, 'Why are you telling me this?' He said, 'I want you to cleanse me'. So the Prophet commanded that he be stoned to death, and he was stoned to death. [Later] the Prophet heard two of his Companions saying to each other, 'Look at this man whose sin God had hidden but he did not leave himself until he

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126. Ibn Māja, *[#]*2860; T 16:39; M 24:39.
127. *Ibid.*, *[#]*2863; T 16:39; M 24:39.
128. Muslim, *[#]*4782; T20:65; M 33:12.
129. *Ibid.*, *[#]*4785; T 20:66; M 33:13.

was stoned to death as a dog is stoned.' The Prophet remained silent. Then, he walked a bit until he came upon the carcass of a donkey with its leg up in the air. He addressed the two Companions: 'O son of so-and-so and so-and-so'. They said, 'Here we are, O Messenger of God'. The Prophet said, 'Get down and eat of the carcass of this donkey'. They said, 'O Prophet of God! Who would eat of this?' The Prophet said, 'The damage you did to your friend's dignity was worse than eating of this carcass! By Him who controls my life: at this very moment he is swimming in the streams of Heaven!'[130]

This one *ḥadīth* gathers together a number of themes we find in separate *ḥadīths*. Where most of those who exercise power set up whole systems to identify those who transgress the law and to catch them and punish them, we find a number of *ḥadīths* that show that the Prophet preferred that such cases not be brought to him, and if possible, that they be resolved out of court.

When a criminal insisted that he wanted to be cleansed, the Prophet would give him a chance to recant by providing him with excuses: in one version of the *ḥadīth* quoted above, the Prophet said to the man, 'Maybe you just kissed her, or you just touched her or you just looked at her?'[131] When after all this, a person presented himself to be punished, a number of *ḥadīths* describe the Prophet's care that such a person be remembered with honour and that people know that the punishment was sufficient to cleanse them of their sin.

A number of *ḥadīths* warn people of injustice regarding another person's 'blood, money and dignity'. A number of *ḥadīths* speak of the great merit of those who think well of others, and those who hide the errors of their fellow Muslims: 'Whoever hides a Muslim's fault, God will hide his fault on the Day of Judgment, and whoever exposes a Muslim's fault, God will expose his fault to the point that He will disgrace him even as he sits in his house.'[132]

At the same time, the Qur'ān compares the person who speaks ill of another Muslim with someone eating the flesh of his dead brother.[133] The Prophet clarified this in a *ḥadīth* when a Companion asked him, 'What if what I say about him is true?' The Prophet explained to him that if what he says is true, he is guilty of backbiting; if what he say is false, that is even worse: that is slander.[134]

A common theme that serves as the bedrock for these *ḥadīths* is the unity of the community. Perhaps the most wellknown of these *ḥadīths* is one in which the Prophet states that the community is as a single body: 'In their mutual love, mutual mercy and their kindness towards each other, Muslims are

130. Abū Dāwūd, *[#]*4428; T 32:24; M 37:23.
131. *Ibid.*, *[#]*4427; T 32:24; M 37:23.
132. Ibn Māja, *[#]*2546; T 12:5; M 20:4.
133. Qur'ān XLIX.12.
134. Al-Tirmidhī, *[#]*1934; T 22:23; M 25:23.

like a single body: when there is a complaint in one part of the body, the whole
body rallies for it in loss of sleep and in fever.'[135]

Taking the Prophet's way of life to other communities

The Prophet's mission, from the individual level to the level of family, society
and marketplace, to the level of government, is very much a utopian mission.
The *ḥadīths* in all these domains seek perfection for the human being. There is
promise of great reward for 'turning the other cheek'. When we find *ḥadīths*
mentioning the possibility of extracting our due, the tone is more that, if we
must take what is due to us, we must make sure we do not exceed what is due.

If human beings are able to do what God would have them do in the
domain of worship, this is good. Such individuals might not have developed
in themselves the qualities that would allow them to hold to God's commands
when dealing with others. If the individual is able to live with God's command
in front of those within the family, in the face of social pressure and within
the marketplace, such an individual might still not be able to hold to God's
commands were he to be given command over others' possessions – by
being made, for example a ruler, a judge or a commander of an army. The
Prophet's work develops people whose practice of holding themselves to
God's commands has developed in them the qualities that make it possible
for them to continue to obey God even when others are forced to obey them.
As a society of such people develops, the life that the Prophet brought will be
realized in individuals and in the society in which they live.

As this life develops from individual to society, one of the most insistent
and recurrent themes of the *ḥadīth* is the demand to carry this life to that part
of the community of humankind that has not yet accepted Islam. Numerous
ḥadīths describe the great rewards for those who spend their money, and put
up with loss of life and limb, in the effort to bring the way of life of the
Prophet to people throughout the world:

> Whoever goes out in God's path and the only reason for his going out is the
> desire to struggle in God's path, and faith in God and affirmation of the truth
> of the Prophet's message – God guarantees that if he dies, he will go to heaven,
> and if he returns, he will return with reward or with booty from battle. By Him
> who controls the life of Muḥammad, whoever is injured in the path of God, on
> the Day of Judgment he will come with his wounds as they were the day he was
> wounded: the colour will be the colour of blood and the fragrance will be that of
> musk. By Him who controls the life of Muḥammad, if it were not for fear that
> it would make it difficult for Muslims to follow my example, I would never stay
> behind any expedition that went out to struggle in the path of God. But, I do
> not have the wealth to provide their travel expenses, and they cannot all afford it
> themselves, and they will find it difficult to be left behind while I go. By Him who

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135. Muslim, *[#]*6586; T 34:17; M 35:17.

controls the life of Muḥammad, I would love to fight in God's path until I was killed, then fight again in God's path until I was killed, then fight again in God's path until I was killed.[136]

This effort to take the Prophet's way of life to people of other nations need not involve violence. At the same time, numerous *ḥadīths* prepare Muslims to fight if they have to. The following *ḥadīth* makes it clear that the rewards for fighting in this path have to do with purpose of the fighting and not with the fighting itself:

> A man came to the Prophet and asked, 'O Messenger of God! A man fights for booty, another fights so that people speak of his bravery, and another fights so people recognize his stature. Which of them is fighting in the path of God?' The Prophet said, 'Whoever fights in order that God's word alone be superior, he is fighting in the path of God.'[137]

Other common themes

I have used the framework of the Prophet's mission and tried to think of themes that bring together large portions of the corpus of *ḥadīths*. However, as already noted, *Ḥadīth* literature involves both the Prophet and those who were observing the activity of the Prophet. As a result, their interests and their point of view also introduced themes in what they chose to report. One large genre that comes to mind is that of the *ḥadīths* describing the history of the Prophet's effort.

These *ḥadīths* start with descriptions of the initial trials and tribulations when the Prophet started his mission in Mecca. There are *ḥadīths* describing the helplessness when he and a few followers were alone in a sea of opposition. Other *ḥadīths* describe how the Prophet continued in his effort to call individuals and tribes towards a single God despite opposition from idolaters. Then there are *ḥadīths* describing a pilgrim group from Medina accepting Islam at the hands of the Prophet. Over a period of three years, this group grew and Companions slowly started to migrate to Medina. Eventually the Prophet himself was given permission. A number of *ḥadīths* describe his journey to Medina, the welcome he received there, his building a mosque in Medina, and his moving in and settling with his Companions. After this there are *ḥadīths* describing a series of battles against the Meccans that culminates in the description of the Prophet's victorious entry into Mecca. Then there are *ḥadīth*s describing his final pilgrimage and his death a few months after that.

As is usual with *ḥadīths*, most are small passages describing a single episode within this larger history. However, this is the one genre in which

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136. *Ibid.*, *[#]*4859; T 21:1; M 33:28.
137. Al-Bukhārī, *[#]*2810, 56:15.

once in a while we find a long narrative describing the events of a particular battle or an episode in the life of the Prophet.

Within these historical *ḥadīths* and also independently of them, there are many *ḥadīths* describing the special rank of various Companions for their services to the Prophet and to Islam, their steadfastness in various difficult situations and describing how the Prophet praised them. This, perhaps, is the genre of *ḥadīth* in which we find the greatest number of texts falsely attributed to the Prophet. Various Companions became the centre of controversy and conflict in the period after the death of the Prophet. Descendants of Companions and supporters of various political claims involving Companions used the genuinely recorded *ḥadīths* describing their special rank. In addition, people made up sayings and incidents that would accord a Companion a special rank and attributed them to the Prophet. Weeding out these *ḥadīths* took up the attention of the *ḥadīth* scholars of the second century AH.

Another genre in which the number of fabricated *ḥadīths* actually exceeds the number of genuine ones is the genre of *ḥadīths* describing the excellence of various cities. Other than a handful of *ḥadīths* describing the excellence of Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem, most describing the great qualities of cities and countries are fabricated. Here, we see competitive nationalism motivating those who were fabricating these texts.

Yet another genre with many fabricated texts, but with many genuine ones also, is the genre of the 'signs of the Hour'. These are apocalyptic *ḥadīths* describing the events that build up to the final destruction of the world, after which God will recreate the world and people will be brought back to life on the Day of Judgement. Here too, we do not find a long continuous narrative describing what will happen episode by episode. Rather, there are brief descriptions that scholars have tried to join together to create a composite narrative of these events.

In the narrative scholars have composed, there are *ḥadīths* that speak of the spread of corruption among humankind, the coming of strange inventions and devices, until the Antichrist himself appears. *Ḥadīths* describe the *Mahdī* (the guided one) as the leader of the Muslims during this time. Other *ḥadīths* describe how Jesus will descend from the sky and lead the Muslims to victory in the face of the Antichrist, and will rule the Muslims for a period after that. Then there are descriptions of the coming of Gog and Magog, two races that will spread throughout the world spreading destruction, until eventually God Himself will destroy them by sending down a disease amongst them. After this, there is a period of peace followed by slow decline until the destruction of the world before the Day of Judgement.

Those familiar with the Christian and Jewish apocalyptic tradition will see much that is common with that tradition. Indeed, there is. This is not at all surprising considering the Muslim claim that from Moses to Jesus to

Muḥammad it is the same God sending down the same revelation. There is difference in details, but the broad demands of religion are the same. The prophetic component, of course, is exactly the same. This is also why, along with much genuine material, there are many ḥadīths that ḥadīth scholars have identified as being material simply imported from the previous scriptures and attributed to the Prophet. In addition, the political aspirations of various parties in the first few centuries of Islam also motivated various groups to identify the times as the prophesied times of corruption, themselves as the prophesied armies of good, and their enemies as the prophesied armies of evil. Sometimes this identification took the form of interpreting ḥadīths, while at other times people resorted to outright fabrication.

There are certainly large bodies of ḥadīth texts dealing with many important themes that I have not been able to introduce in this brief chapter. I do hope, however, to have provided a brief orientation to the types of material we find in ḥadīths.

The six books and the major themes in *Ḥadīth* literature

In this section I return to the issue I raised at the very beginning of this chapter. I have chosen to begin with the task of the Prophet. Then, I identified domains for the Prophet's work. Finally, I established a progression in his work as faith progresses from effort in the domain of worship to the domain of family, social and commercial life, to the domain of politics, power and battle. Faith takes the shape of particular personal qualities that the Prophet worked to develop in his followers in each domain. I have chosen the Prophet's effort to develop these qualities in his followers as the major themes of the ḥadīth.

There is no doubt that each of these choices is open to debate. I have had to choose, and I think I have chosen correctly. Another way to approach the topic would have been to start with the six ḥadīth books which have, for centuries, stood like an initial portal through which we must pass when we study ḥadīths: the works of al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasāʾī and Ibn Māja. Most of the references in this chapter are to these books. Why not, then, just use the chapter plan of these six books as a guide to the major themes of *Ḥadīth* literature?

Texts yield meaning by their context. The more context a text reaches us with, and the more we share an understanding of this context with those authors and audiences that provided the habitat for this text, the less we need to interfere in determining meanings for the text. It is easy to understand the meaning of a sentence within a passage within a chapter within a detective story. We understand what detective stories are for and what they are like, we understand the function of that chapter in the development of the author's plot, and so it is easy to come to a conclusion about what a particular sentence

in a particular paragraph means. We share so much with the author that we are
often in a position to argue with the author that this sentence is superfluous
or even detrimental to the development of the plot.

'Major themes' come forth more easily from the Qurʾān because at least
the Qurʾān is an entire book within which each sentence has a place. In the
case of *ḥadīth*, it is as if I have to look at the whole corpus of *Ḥadīth* literature,
'compose' a book out of it in my head, and then see what major themes
there are in this book. Had I used the six books, I would not have had to
compose this mental book, and I could just have identified themes within the
background the authors of the six books had provided for these *ḥadīths*.

But this would have been misleading because the authors of the six
works did not write these books to provide their readers with a representative
sample of *Ḥadīth* literature. In his 'Epistle to the People of Mecca Describing
His Book', Abū Dāwūd makes it clear that he is engaged in collecting those
ḥadīths that scholars of Islamic jurisprudence commonly use when they argue
their positions. In what is like an addendum to his book, al-Tirmidhī states
that he has only included such *ḥadīths* in his book as have actually formed the
basis of the legal position of some scholar of Islamic law.

In his introduction to his work, Muslim states that he gathered these
ḥadīths together as a kind of primer for the *ḥadīth* student: his book contains
the most common *ḥadīths* and chains of narration that beginning students of
ḥadīth ought to memorize to begin their career. In addition, he says that he has
limited himself only to those *ḥadīths* that have come to us on the authority of
scholars who were well known as *ḥadīth* transmitters. This could have been a
promising start for our purpose, but an examination of the contents of the
book shows same focus on the disputations of the jurists that has guided Abū
Dāwūd and al-Tirmidhī.

These six books appeared approximately over a fifty-year period, starting
from the first quarter of the third century AH, and they represent a resolution
to a debate that started with the opening of the second century AH. The
Prophet spent his entire life working to bring into being a way of life. When
he died, it was far from clear that this way of life could be preserved and
conveyed in the form of texts, be they oral memorized texts, written ones,
or a combination of both. There was hesitation even about writing down the
Qurʾān: the companions seemed to feel that they should teach as they had
learned. They had learned the Qurʾān bit by bit, from situation to situation.
They would recite it in front of God and ponder over it at night, and they
would practise it by day. They had learned it from a human teacher who had
watched over them as they grew in understanding and practice. They felt that
those who learned from them should learn in the same manner.

When their teacher left, certainly the Companions were concerned about how the teaching should continue. Even as they were persuaded that they must write down the Qur'ān, they did not feel that the life the Prophet had taught them could be captured within the confines of ink and paper. Whoever wanted to learn would have to spend years with them and learn that life – the texts would be passed on, but they would be a part of a life being passed on.

They were suspicious of those who came to them wanting 'just the texts'. The Prophet's way of life was not information to store in the head but knowledge to bring into our lives. This is what al-Awzāʿī (d. 105/723) laments when he says: 'This knowledge used to be a noble thing which men learned from each other, but when it entered books, people who were not worthy of it entered it.'[138]

Someone wrote to Ibn ʿUmar asking him to write down for him the Prophet's entire knowledge. Ibn ʿUmar responded, 'The Prophet's knowledge is vast: but, if you can manage to meet God without the burden of people's blood on your back, without the burden of ill-gotten gains from them in your stomach, having held your tongue from saying anything which would damage their respect in people's eyes, while staying with them on what the community decides – if you can manage to do this – then do so.'[139]

Someone came to the Companion Zayd ibn Thābit asking him to tell him some ḥadīths of the Prophet. Zayd ibn Thābit's response seems quite irreverent if we ignore this distinction between information and knowledge: 'What should I tell you? I was his neighbour. When the revelation would come to him, he would send for me and I would write it down. When we would speak of the hereafter, he too would speak of the hereafter. When we would speak of worldly things, he would speak of them also. When we talked about food, he would talk about food, and when we talked about women, he too would talk about women. So do you want me to speak of all this to you?'[140]

Ḥadīths are a by-product of a more fundamental activity that concerned the early community: that was their journey to the Hereafter. To be able to reach the destination in this journey, the knowledge needed is knowledge of the heart as well as knowledge of the head. Thus, for example, the companion ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib says about the companion Abū Dharr, 'He had firm control of so much knowledge that it disabled him: He was covetous about his own religious practice, greedy to learn, he would ask a lot of questions, and he was unable to express all the knowledge he gained.'[141]

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138. Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubulāʾ*, gen. ed. S. al-Arnāʾūṭ, 25 vols., Beirut, Muʾassassat al-Risāla, 1410/1990, VII, p. 114.

139. Al-Dhahabī, III, p. 222.

140. Al-Muttaqī, *[#]*37054.

141. Al-Dhahabī, II, p. 60.

The knowledge that ʿAlī was speaking of was Abū Dharr's 'knowledge' that chasing after material wealth corrupted the heart. At one point he came to a gathering of well-to-do young men and recounted to them a saying of the Prophet that warned those who hoarded their wealth of punishment in the Hereafter. The person reporting this incident says that when Abū Dharr left this gathering, he followed him and told him that the young men had not been pleased with what he had said. At this Abū Dharr said that these people were fools: the Prophet had said that if he had a mountain of gold he would prefer to spend it all.[142]

The words Abū Dharr reports of the Prophet are in front of us as they were in front of him. But to actually see those who gather wealth as fools requires more than just knowing these words. This type of knowledge, learning character traits, is learned through long association with someone who has such traits. Living with generous people, we learn to be generous, living with brave people we learn to be brave. More than 'study', this is the knowledge we learn in discipleship.

At this time the word *fiqh* still meant understanding, and not just knowledge of the details of religious law. While knowledge of details of law can be divorced from action, understanding is always coupled with action. Thus, someone said to Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110) that the 'people of *fiqh* say …' Then Ḥasan said, 'Have you ever seen a person of *fiqh?* The person of *fiqh* is the one who has turned away from the material things of this world, who has deep understanding of the way of life God wants of him, who is continuous in his worship of his Lord.'[143]

Those who devoted themselves to the knowledge of the Prophet learned *ḥadīths* and the do's and don't's of religious law, but this was part of learning the knowledge of the Prophet, not just the texts of the Qurʾān and *ḥadīths*. At this early stage, narrating the words of the Prophet was not so much to document something as to describe it. This attention to the substance of what one is conveying without regard to specifying one's sources was entirely accepted in the generation of the Companions. Younger companions would hear things from the Prophet and things about him and would feel no hesitation in relating these things without naming their source. Thus, when someone asked the Companion Anas ibn Mālik whether he himself had heard a certain *ḥadīth* he was narrating, he said, 'Yes, or maybe I heard it from someone who would not lie to me. By God, we did not use to lie; we didn't even know what lying was!'[144]

Many of the Successors felt similarly justified in conveying information without specifying their sources. So although Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) was

142. Al-Bukhārī, *[#]*1407–8, 24:4.
143. Al-Dhahabī, IV, p. 576.
144. Al-Haythamī, *[#]*8077, 5:75.

of the generation after the Companions who had never seen the Prophet, he would quote the words of the Prophet directly. When someone asked him to specify his sources, he said, 'Listen, my man. I do not lie and I was not lied to. In a certain campaign in the area of Khurāsān there were three hundred of the Companions of the Prophet with me. They would lead the prayers and recite sentences from the Qurʾān.'[145]

Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī (d. 95/713) went so far as to say that when he had heard a *ḥadīth* from a number of people that he relied on, he would drop the intermediate references and quote the Companion (whom he had not met) directly. When he was in doubt and had heard a *ḥadīth* from a single source, he would name the source.[146]

Naturally, this confidence regarding sources could not last too long. Towards the end of the first century AH, scholars started to realize that there could be no escape from dictating, reading, writing and all the technical apparatus of sound documentation. There is a certain pathos in Ibn ʿAbbās's statement:

> There was a time that when we heard someone saying: 'The Prophet said …' we would pay close attention to him [literally: 'he would loom large in our eyes'] and we would listen carefully to him. But ever since people have got involved in all sorts of activities, we only accept from people *ḥadīths* that we know.[147]

Ibn ʿAbbās's words '*ḥadīths* that we know' are important. When later generations would evaluate the soundness of a *ḥadīth*, they would rely primarily on formal things like the qualities of the narrators of a *ḥadīth* text. These first generations, however, had such confidence in their knowledge of the Prophet that they were willing to discount *ḥadīths* that went against their general familiarity with the Prophet's knowledge.

Throughout the second century AH and until the close of the third century AH, scholars came to rely more and more on the formal apparatus of *ḥadīths* as the criterion by which to evaluate the soundness of a text attributed to the Prophet. In addition, a thesis began to circulate in scholarly circles that the strength of a position in a disputed issue ought to be tied directly to the soundness of the *ḥadīths* supporting that position.

Throughout the second century AH, this demand for a formal textual basis for religious practice was surely an esoteric position: to evaluate the strength of documentation of a *ḥadīth* was something only specialist *ḥadīth* scholars could do. The popular *ḥadīth* collections of that period contained

145. Yūsuf ibn al-Zakī al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, ed. B. ʿA. Maʿrūf, 35 vols., Beirut, Muʾassassat al-Risāla, 1400/1980, VI, p. 124.

146. Yūsuf ibn ʿAbdullāh Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Tamhīd li-mā fī-l-Muwaṭṭaʾ min al-maʿānī wa-l-asānīd*, Morrocco, Wizārat al-Awqāf wa-l-Shuʾūn al-Islāmiyya, 1387, I, pp. 37–8.

147. Muslim, *[#]*21.

tens of thousands of *ḥadīths*. Specialists were certainly aware of these *ḥadīths*, the people whose names occurred in the chain of narration of these *ḥadīths*, the meanings of these *ḥadīths* and their relative strengths. However, even an average scholar could not get along without the help of specialists.

The impulse for the six works was this proliferation of *ḥadīths* in disputed issues. It is not at all clear that the authors of these works themselves subscribed to the textual thesis. On the other hand, with the help of the judgement of the authors of these six collections, we were left with only thousands of texts to evaluate. Thus, the *ḥadīths* bearing on any single issue came to a manageable number and the textual thesis became viable.

Naturally, deeds are important and within this context, the way we do them is also important. So it is also important to do them as the Prophet himself did them. *Ḥadīth* scholars have estimated the number of *ḥadīths* that have to do with the details of how to perform various deeds variously: the lowest figure is about 3,000 and the highest is about 9,000. Compared with the total figure of about 30,000 *ḥadīth* texts, this means that from 10 to 30 per cent of all *ḥadīths* have a bearing on the details of how to do various deeds.

With a few exceptions, the six books start with *ḥadīths* that have to do with worship: praying, fasting, the annual obligatory alms and pilgrimage. Then in somewhat looser order follow sections on *ḥadīths* having to do with marriage, divorce, custody of children, and various commercial transactions and business dealings. Generally after this come sections with *ḥadīths* on things relating to compensations for bodily injury, inheritance and bequests, rules of battle and booty. Usually *ḥadīths* on these issues take up the first half of these books.

The issues of the first half of these books are those that are the subject of dispute between jurists of various schools of thought. Usually, the argument is over which way of doing some deed is the preferred way. The argument is rarely serious enough so that one party to the argument claims that the way the other party does a certain deed is simply incorrect. Nevertheless, since scholarship feeds on dispute, the *ḥadīths* in this first half are the ones that have received the most attention from scholars.

The second half of the books is more varied. Most of the *ḥadīths* quoted in the preceding discussion of faith and deeds are from the second half of these books. The topics covered in the second half are mostly those agreed-upon issues described in this discussion. There is no doubt that the authors of the six collections were themselves aware that the essence of religious practice was not to be captured in bare texts that serve as references in religious legal argumentation. Also, this second half of the six books is itself evidence of their awareness. They also wrote other books that demonstrate the same broader understanding of religion as we find in the earliest generations. In

addition, their biographies demonstrate this same understanding. But these particular books were written in the background of the legal debate of the second century AH. So their choice of topics and themes has to do with that specific background.

The role of the context: the work of Orientalists

Consider what the major themes of *Ḥadīth* literature would be if we approached this literature as Orientalists approach it. Their interest in the history of 'kings and battles' has led them to see *ḥadīths* as the product of the political controversies of various factions and sects during the rule of the first two dynasties of Islam: the Ummayyad dynasty and the Abbasid dynasty.

Thus, if an Orientalist had written this chapter he would have spoken of groups of *ḥadīths* that establish the political rights of the Abbasids, *ḥadīths* that argue for the right of the Abbasids to rule, and *ḥadīths* that support the claims of various sects to being legitimate successors of the Prophet. He would have placed each *ḥadīth* within a context of the conflicts of the first few centuries, and then in the struggle of later Muslims to justify the actions of the parties in these conflicts.

The authors of previous chapters in this volume have already examined the Orientalist position, so I will not review the arguments regarding that position. I bring it up here only to demonstrate the essential role of the context within which we choose to situate the *ḥadīth* texts. If we choose to view the man Muḥammad and his followers as involved in a spiritual quest, these texts gain meaning as parts of that quest. If we claim that we cannot know anything about the man Muḥammad, then we must find other contexts within which to anchor these texts. These anchors, then, will provide the themes for these texts.

Whether or not we share the Orientalists' overriding interest in 'kings and battles', it is clear that for many centuries Muslims have viewed the texts of Islam as religious texts and they have seen the Prophet as a prophet. Any point of view on a situation provides a vantage point on the situation which explicates some aspects of the situation and obscures some others. For example, we could view an armed robbery as an economic transaction: those being held at gunpoint felt that the loss involved in dying by gunfire was more than the loss involved in handing over the cash. On the other hand, this analysis certainly obscures at least as much of the situation as it explicates.

The Orientalist point of view on the texts of Islam eventually leads to the conclusion that all the texts of the first three centuries are to be treated as literary products: they are expressions of the creativity of various authors and not descriptions of the world around them. The description of the world is

to be gained from the Orientalists' perceptions of what happened in the first three centuries, then these texts are to be seen as by-products of these events. At the risk of only some exaggeration, 'what happened' will be taken to mean the transfer of power from one ruler to another and from one dynasty to another.

In the degree to which Muslims of the first few centuries were interested in issues other than the transfer of political power, such a focus on political history will distort our understanding of their involvement with these texts. How Muslims understood the Qurʾān and *ḥadīths* must refer back to their own interests. There are many signs that the first generations who were involved with the Qurʾān and *Ḥadīth* were an intensely religious people: they were interested in God, His pleasure, Heaven and Hell. Thus, to understand the themes in the *ḥadīths* in the context of this interest seems to be the surest way of capturing the most of the meaning of these texts.

The auxiliary sources

*IJMĀ*ᶜ

Muhammad Hashim Kamali

Introduction

The Muslim community's consensus is that the Qurʾān and the *Sunna* – the traditions of the Prophet Muḥammad – are the two fundamental sources of Islamic law. But where there is no explicit or binding textual source on issues facing Muslims, other derivative legal methods have been considered so that the community can cope with evolving and unprecedented problems in the spirit of the law. One of these juristic methods is *ijmāᶜ*.

The Arabic word *ijmāᶜ* has two literal meanings: determining a matter and reaching an agreement or consensus over it.[1] The second meaning here often subsumes the first in that whenever there is a consensus over something, there is also a decision on that matter. According to the classical theory of Islamic jurisprudence (uṣūl *al-fiqh*), when qualified jurists (sing. *mujtahid*) reach a unanimous agreement on the ruling of a particular issue, it becomes their *ijmāᶜ* and consequently the authoritative law on that issue.

Ijmāᶜ is the third source of Islamic law, a source which comes next to the two primary sources – the Qurʾān and the normative teachings, or the *Sunna*, of the Prophet Muḥammad. The *ᶜulamāʾ* (that is, Islamic scholars) are generally in agreement on the point that *ijmāᶜ* is a proof (*ḥujja*) although they have differed on many other issues pertaining to *ijmāᶜ*.

Unlike the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*, which are of divine provenance, *ijmāᶜ* does not partake of divine revelation. Despite that, it has a binding authority. It seems, however, that the very high status accorded to *ijmāᶜ* required that

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1. It is only in the sense of 'making a decision' that *ijmāᶜ* occurs in the Qurʾān (X.71; XX.64). There are also instances of similar occurrences in the traditions from the Prophet.

only an absolute and universal consensus would qualify. *Ijmāʿ*, therefore, does not come into effect simply on the basis of a majority opinion.

The essence of *ijmāʿ* lies in the natural growth of ideas. It often begins with the personal reasoning (*ijtihād*) of a qualified jurist, and culminates in the general acceptance of a particular opinion over a period of time. Differences of opinion are tolerated until a consensus emerges, and in this process, there is no room for compulsion or imposition of any kind. Since *ijmāʿ* reflects the natural evolution of ideas in the life of the community, the basic notion of *ijmāʿ* could never be expected to discontinue. In this sense *ijmāʿ* is eminently rational. It is also democratic insofar as it encourages participation leading to consensus, and then elevates that consensus to the rank of binding law. It is through *ijmāʿ* that the will of the community finds a prominent place in the legal theory of Islam. 'What is more democratic than to affirm', as the well-known Egyptian jurist ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Sanhūrī (d. 1391/1971) states, 'that the will of the nation is the expression of the will of God Himself?' Sanhūrī added that God Most High has 'honoured the *umma* with the trust of vicegerency' and sanctified with divine favour the collective will of the people. There is consequently no recognition in the *Sharīʿa* of the superiority of any group or class of people, or of an institutionalized clergy other than the will of the community itself.[2]

Ijmāʿ eliminates doubt and enhances the authority of rules which are of speculative origin. The rules that are deduced, for instance, through analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) or indeed through any of the other recognized forms of juristic reasoning such as *ijtihād* do not *per se* carry a binding force. But once an *ijmāʿ* is held in their favour, those rules assume a decisive and binding character. With regard to the legal rules deduced from the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*, too, *ijmāʿ* ensures their correct interpretation, authenticity and application. The question whether the law, as contained in the two primary sources – the Qurʾān and the *Sunna* – has been properly interpreted and applied is often open to a measure of uncertainty and doubt. Only *ijmāʿ* can put an end to such doubt and provide the necessary degree of certainty for the fabric of the law. In this sense, *ijmāʿ* has played a role similar perhaps to that played in modern times by representative assemblies and parliaments.

Ijmāʿ is often viewed as an instrument of conservatism and preservation of the heritage of the past. For example, consensus has established oral testimony of witnesses as the most reliable method of proof in preference to documentation and other methods of proof. The *Sharīʿa* courts to this day prefer this to other means of proof such as photography, sound recording

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2. ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Sanhūrī, *Fiqh al-khilāfa wa-taṭawwuruhā*, Cairo, al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb, 1993, trans. by Nādiyā al-Sanhūrī and Tawfīq al-Shāwī as *Le Califat*, Paris, Paul Geuthner, 1926, 2nd ed., p. 25.

and laboratory analysis. Consensus thus tends to preserve the heritage and resist adaptation to new developments. The conservative role that *ijmāᶜ* plays here is obvious enough in the sense that whatever is accepted by the entire community as true and correct must be accepted and upheld. But *ijmāᶜ* can also operate as an instrument of tolerance, innovation and reform in such directions as may reflect the vision of scholars in the light of new educational and cultural developments in the community.[3] Having said this, it should perhaps be added that *ijmāᶜ* most probably played this role as an instrument of innovation and reform in the early stages of juristic developments in Islam. In more recent times, however, it would appear that it has functioned as an instrument more of conservatism than of reform, and more of rigidity than of openness. Moreover, since there is no regulated procedure for *ijmāᶜ* in our own time, it has increasingly become a theoretical doctrine, which has not related itself effectively to the ongoing needs of the community for legislative innovation and reform.[4]

Definition of *ijmāᶜ*

The definition of *ijmāᶜ* which I shall presently examine is categorical on the point that nothing less than universal consensus of all the *mujtahidūn* of the Muslim community constitutes a valid *ijmāᶜ*. It is, on the other hand, widely acknowledged that absolute unanimity is extremely difficult to obtain, and it is precisely because of this requirement that the classical definition of *ijmāᶜ* has come under criticism. The most authoritative form of *ijmāᶜ* which is widely upheld and venerated is that of the Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad, occurred in Medina following the demise of the Prophet. It is often claimed that the *ijmāᶜ* of the Companions meets all the requirements of *ijmāᶜ*. But this too is often said perhaps by way of a general observation rather than as a strict statement of fact.

    Ijmāᶜ is defined as the unanimous agreement of the *mujtahidūn* of the Muslim community of any period following the demise of the Prophet Muḥammad on any matter.[5] The definition of *ijmaᶜ* by Muḥammad Abū Zahra (d. 1399/1978) and ᶜAbd al-Wahhāb al-Khallāf (d. 1377/1958) differs from this on one point: that the subject matter of *ijmāᶜ* is confined to *Sharīᶜa* or

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3. Ṣubḥī R. Maḥmaṣānī, *Falsafat al-tashrīᶜ fi-l-islām: The Philosophy of Jurisprudence in Islam*, trans. F. Ziadeh, Leiden, Netherlands, E. J, Brill, 1961, p. 78.

4. ᶜAbd al-Ḥamīd Abū Sulaymān, *Azmat al-ᶜaql al-muslim*, Herndon, Va., al-Maᶜhad al-ᶜĀlamī li-l-Fikr al-Islāmī, International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1412/1991, p. 78.

5. Sayf al-Dīn ᶜAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Āmidī, *al-Iḥkām fī uṣūl al-aḥkām*, ed. ᶜAbd al-Razzāq al-ᶜAfīfī, 2nd ed., Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1402/1982, I, p. 196; Muḥammad ibn ᶜAlī al-Shawkānī, *Irshād al-fuḥūl min taḥqīq al-ḥaqq ilā ᶜilm al-uṣūl*, Cairo, Dār al Fikr, n.d., p. 71.

juridical matters only.[6] The reference in this definition to *mujtahidūn* precludes the agreement of laypeople from the ranks of those whose agreement constitutes *ijmāʿ*, and reference to the Muslim community precludes the consensus of previous nations (that is, the followers of the prophets and messengers of God prior to Muḥammad) from the purview of this doctrine. The phrase 'any matter' in the definition obviously implies all juridical (*sharʿī*), intellectual, customary and even linguistic matters.[7] Furthermore, *sharʿī* in this context is used in contradistinction to *ḥissī*, that is, factual matters which are perceptible to the senses and therefore fall beyond the scope of *ijmāʿ*. Some *ʿulamāʾ* have confined *ijmāʿ* to religious (*dīnī*) and others to *sharʿī* matters, but the standard definition does not confine *ijmāʿ* to either. The reason for this could be sought perhaps in the theoretical infallibility (*ʿiṣma*) of *ijmāʿ*. If *ijmāʿ* is held to be immune from error, then it should also be immune from error in the choice of its own subject matter, and therefore no advance stipulations need be made on the scope of its application.

It is also clear from the definition that *ijmāʿ* could only occur after the demise of the Prophet Muḥammad, who provided direct authority on legislative matters during his lifetime . But disagreements arose among the faithful after the death of the Prophet, which led to the emergence of political and theological factions, and the need began to be felt for efforts to ensure consensus on political, legal and religious issues. The Companions used to consult each other over the problems they encountered, and their collective agreement was accepted by the community. The next generation – the generation of Successors – naturally referred to the views and practices of their predecessors, and this provided a fertile ground for the development of the theory of *ijmāʿ*, which was articulated later in the second century/eighth century.

Requirements of *ijmāʿ*

A valid *ijmāʿ* must fulfil three essential requirements (technically speaking, *arkān*). First, there must exist a plurality of *mujtahidūn* at the time when an issue arises, for consensus does not materialize unless there is a plurality of concurrent opinions. Although some *ʿulamāʾ*, including Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820), Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013) and Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī (d. 631/1233), have held that *ijmāʿ* comprises the opinions of both laypeople and *mujtahidūn*, the definition of *ijmāʿ* precludes lay opinion from the purview of *ijmāʿ*.[8]

6. Muḥammad Abū Zahra, *Uṣūl al-fiqh*, Cairo, Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, 1377/1958, p. 156; ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Khallāf, *ʿIlm uṣūl al-fiqh*, 12th ed., Kuwait, Dār al-Qalam, 1398/1978, p. 45.
7. Shawkānī, *Irshād* …, *op. cit.*, p. 71.
8. Āmidī, *Iḥkām* …, *op. cit.*, I, p. 226.
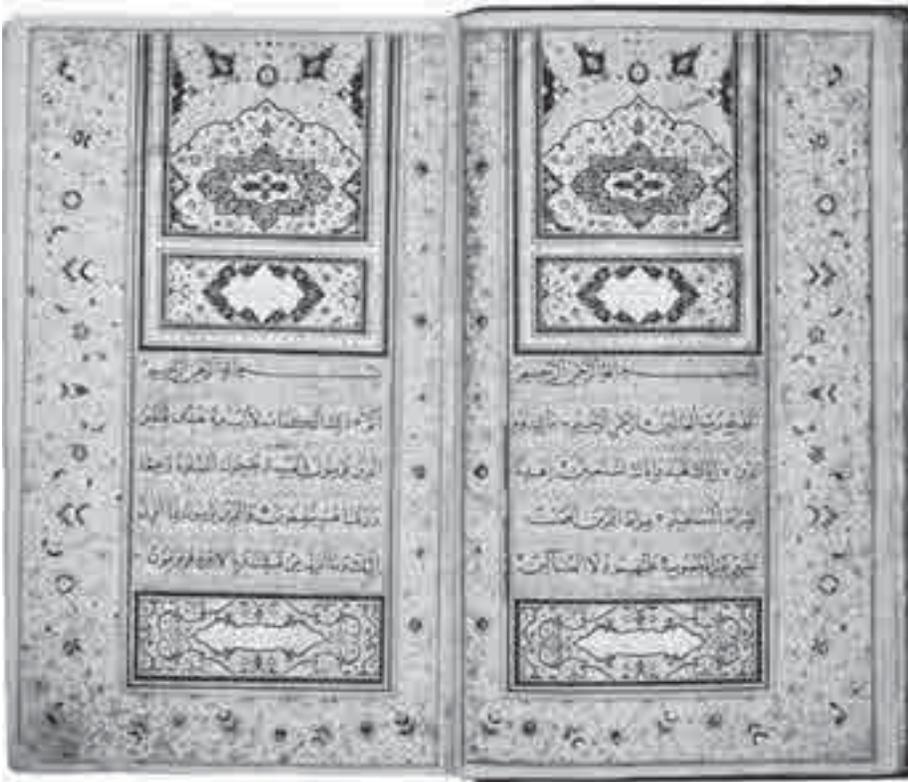
III–8.1   Manuscripts of Qurʾān, seventeenth century
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Second, for an *ijmāʿ* to take place, it is necessary that the constituents of *ijmāʿ* reach a unanimous agreement. All the *mujtahidūn*, regardless of their locality, race, language and school of thought, must participate in *ijmāʿ*. Should even a small minority disagree, *ijmāʿ* will not be deemed to have taken place. Thus, as long as there is a dissenting opinion, there remains some uncertainty over which of the sides is in error. But since *ijmāʿ* constitutes a decisive proof, it must be founded on certainty and the majority opinion falls short of this requirement. However, according to some *ʿulamāʾ*, including Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), and Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī (d. 1176/1702), *ijmāʿ* may be said to have taken place when the absolute majority agreed on an opinion.

Third, the agreement of the *mujtahidūn* must be demonstrated by their expressed opinion on a particular issue. This may be verbal or in writing, in the form of a *fatwā* (legal opinion) or a judicial decision, or indeed when the

mujtahidūn assemble together and reach unanimity over the ruling (*ḥukm*) on a particular issue.[9]

The question has naturally been raised whether scholars who belonged to the opposition movements, or those who might have been charged with deviation and heresy, are qualified to participate in *ijmāʿ*. According to the majority view, if jurists are known to have actively invited people to heresy (*bidʿa*), they are disqualified; otherwise, they are included among the constituents of *ijmāʿ*. Only the Ḥanafīs preclude transgressors (*fāsiq*) and those who do not act on their own doctrine from the ranks of those whose agreement constitutes *ijmāʿ*. But the Shāfiʿī and Mālikī maintain that a mere transgression is no disqualification.[10] Some *ʿulamāʾ* have also held the view that *ijmāʿ* is concluded only after the disappearance of the generation (*inqirāḍ al-ʿaṣr*) in which the *ijmāʿ* took place. For if any of the constituents of *ijmāʿ* are still alive, there would be a possibility that they might change their views, in which case the *ijmāʿ* would be nullified. The majority of the *ʿulamāʾ* have held, however, that this is not a condition and that *ijmāʿ* binds not only the next generation but its own constituents to adhere to it. In any case, in view of the overlapping of generations (*tadākhul al-aʿṣār*), it is impossible to distinguish the end of one generation from the beginning of the next.[11]

When an *ijmāʿ* fulfils the requirements mentioned above, it becomes binding on everyone. Consequently, no further *ijmāʿ* may be attempted on the same issue by subsequent generations of scholars, nor may the *ijmāʿ* so arrived at be reviewed, amended or abrogated. Should there be a second *ijmāʿ* on the same issue, it will be of no account.[12] This is yet another aspect of the theory of *ijmāʿ* which tends to verge on rigidity and has come under criticism, as I shall elaborate later.

Proof of *ijmāʿ*

How do we know that *ijmāʿ* is a legitimate source of religious doctrines? The *ʿulamāʾ* have claimed the authority of the Qurʾān, the *Sunna* and reason in support of *ijmāʿ*. But they have, on the whole, maintained that textual evidence for *ijmāʿ* falls short of providing conclusive proof. There has also been the impression that compared with the Qurʾān, the *Sunna* provides a stronger case for *ijmāʿ*. Textbook writers on Islamic law and jurisprudence consistently refer to a number of passages in the Qurʾān. However, they refer to an even

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9. For further details on the essential requirements (*arkān*) of *ijmāʿ*, see Shawkānī, *Irshād*, *op. cit.*, pp. 71ff. and Khallāf, *ʿIlm uṣūl al-fiqh, op. cit.*, pp. 45ff.

10. Abū Zahra, *Uṣūl …, op. cit.*, p. 162; Āmidī, *Iḥkām …*, I, p. 261; Abdur Rahim, *Principles of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, London, Luzac, 1911, p. 122.

11. Āmidī, *Iḥkām …, op. cit.*, I, p. 257: Shawkānī, *Irshād …, op. cit.*, p. 71: Abū Zahra, *Uṣūl …, op. cit.*, p. 164.

12. Abū Zahra, *Uṣūl …, op. cit.*, p. 167; Khallāf, *ʿIlm uṣūl al-fiqh, op. cit.*, p. 46.

larger number of *ḥadīths* (sayings of the Prophet) in support of *ijmāʿ*.[13] Many prominent scholars have, however, scrutinized the evidence in question and as we shall see, they have almost succeeded in refuting the claim that there exists any clear textual authority for *ijmāʿ*.

To begin with, the proponents of *ijmāʿ* have quoted the Qurʾānic text (IV.59) that requires obedience to those who are in charge of affairs, the *ūlū al-amr*, in support of *ijmāʿ* on the analogy that the *ʿulamāʾ* are the *ūlū al-amr* in juridical affairs; hence, their collective decision commands obedience. The word *amr* in this *āya* is general and would thus include both secular and religious affairs. The former is the concern of the rulers, whereas the latter is the concern of the *ʿulamāʾ*. According to an explanation attributed to ʿAbd Allāh Ibn ʿAbbās, *ūlū al-amr* in this *āya* refers to *ʿulamāʾ*, whereas other commentators have considered it to be a reference to the *umarāʾ*, that is, 'rulers and commanders'. The manifest reading (*ẓāhir*) of the text includes both, and enjoins obedience to both in their respective spheres. Hence, when the *mujtahidūn* reach a consensus on a ruling on juridical matters, it must be obeyed. Further support for this conclusion can be found elsewhere in the Qurʾān (IV.83), which once again confirms the authority of the *ūlū al-amr* and those of them who investigate matters', next to the Prophet himself.[14]

Coming to the Qurʾānic grounds to support *ijmāʿ*, it will be noted that the Qurʾān also strongly affirms, at more than one place, the special status of the Muslim community and the assurance from God regarding the rectitude of its ways. This is the theme of the following passage of the Qurʾān in an address to the believers: 'You are the best community that has been raised for mankind. You enjoin right and forbid evil and you believe in Allāh' (III.110). On the same theme, the believers are addressed in another passage: 'Thus We have made you a middle-most nation (*ummatan wasaṭan*) that you may be witnesses over mankind' (II.143). The attribute *wasaṭan* here is understood to imply justice and balance, qualities which merit recognition of the unanimous decision of the community.[15] The Muslim community has elsewhere been described as 'a nation which directs others with truth and dispenses justice on its basis' (VII.181). These and similar other references in the Qurʾān testify to the infallibility (*ʿiṣma*) of the unanimous agreements of the community. This idea is reinforced by the *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet proclaimed that 'My

13. A further discussion of the evidence in the Qurʾān and the *Sunna* can be found in M. H. Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, rev. ed., Cambridge, Islamic Texts Society, 1991, pp. 175–82.

14. Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, Cairo, Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, AH 1380, V, pp. 250ff; Khallāf, *ʿIlm uṣūl al-fiqh, op. cit.*, p. 47 (see note 6) and Shaʿbān Ismāʿīl, *Dirāsāt ḥawl al-ijmāʿ wa-l-qiyās*, Cairo, Maktabat al-Nahḍa, 1408/1987, pp. 4 and 69.

15. Fakhr al-Dīn ibn ʿUmar al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, Beirut, Dār al-Fikr, 1398/1978, III, p. 243.

community will never agree upon an error.'[16] Writers of textbooks on *fiqh* have also quoted a number of other passages in the Qur'ān on the merits of unity and the demerits of disunity and dissension, and have deduced from them the authority of *ijmāʿ*. (See Qur'ān III.103; IV.59 and XL.10.) But the one Qur'ānic verse that is most frequently cited in support of *ijmāʿ* is the following: 'And anyone who splits off with the Messenger after the guidance has become clear to him and follows a way other than that of the believers, We shall leave him in the path he has chosen and land him in Hell. What an evil refuge!' (IV.115). These Qur'ānic verses are perceived to provide support for *ijmāʿ*.

It is suggested that the 'way of the believers' in this verse refers to their consensus. It is noteworthy that abandoning the way of the believers has in turn been equated with disobeying the Prophet, both of which are forbidden. Shāfiʿī has gone so far as to say that this text provides a clear authority for *ijmāʿ*: that following a way other than that of the believers is forbidden (*ḥarām*) and that following the believers' way is obligatory (*wājib*).[17] While quoting Shāfiʿī's view, however, Abū Ḥamid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) disagrees with it, and elaborates that the principal theme of this verse is a warning against disobedience to the Prophet and hostility to the community of believers. Since there is no reference to *ijmāʿ* in this verse, it therefore falls short of providing a clear authority for it.[18]

Following a way other than that of the believers, according to both Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) and Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Shawkānī (d. *c.* 1250/1834), means abandoning Islam itself. Shawkānī adds, 'A number of *ʿulamāʾ* have drawn the conclusion that this passage provides an authority for *ijmāʿ*. But it is an unwarranted conclusion as following a way other than that of the believers means abandoning Islam.'[19] And finally, Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1354/1935) observes that quoting the text under discussion in support of *ijmāʿ* leads to some irrational conclusions. For it would amount to drawing a parallel between those who are threatened with the punishment of Hell and a *mujtahid* who differs with the opinion of others. A *mujtahid* is within his rights in differing with others or taking exception to a prevalent opinion which might have been adopted by other *mujtahidūn*.[20]

16. Āmidī, *Iḥkām …*, *op. cit.*, I, p. 211.

17. Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustaṣfā min ʿilm al-uṣūl*, Cairo, al-Maktaba al-Tijāriyya, AH 1322, I, p. 111.

18. *Ibid.*

19. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm* (also known as *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*), Cairo, Dār al-Fikr, 1401/1981, I, p. 87; Shawkānī, *Fatḥ al-qadīr*, 3rd ed., Cairo, Dār al-Fikr, 1393/1973, I, p. 515; Shawkānī, *op. cit.*, *Irshād*, p. 75.

20. Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm*, commonly known as *Tafsīr al-manār*, 4th ed., Cairo, Maṭbaʿat al-Manār, AH 1373, V, p. 201. For a similar view, see Muḥammad Ṣādiq al-Ṣadr, *al-Ijmāʿ fī-l-tashrīʿ al-islāmī*, Beirut, Manshūrāt ʿUwaydāt, 1969, p. 40.

Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī discusses the Qurʾānic passages that are generally quoted to support the authority of *ijmāʿ*, and concludes that they may give rise to a probability (*ẓann*) but that they do not impart positive knowledge. If we assume that *ijmāʿ* is a decisive proof then establishing its authority on the basis of speculative evidence is not enough.[21]

Both Ghazālī and Āmidī have referred to a number of traditions in support of *ijmāʿ*. To quote but a few:

- *God will not let my community agree upon an error;*
- *I beseeched God Almighty not to bring my community to the point of agreeing upon an error, and this was granted to me;*
- *Whatever the Muslims deem to be good is good in the sight of God;*
- *Whoever separates himself from the community, and dies [in that state], dies the death of Ignorance.*[22]

These and similar traditions are quoted to establish the infallibility of the collective judgement of the community and the merit of following its consensus. In response to the observation that all of these traditions are solitary (*āḥād*) and solitary traditions do not provide conclusive proof, the same authors observe that when all of the relevant *ḥadīths* are put together, they do provide positive knowledge and the infallibility of the community is sustained by their collective weight.[23] Although the traditions in question are all *āḥād* and could be subject to doubt if taken individually, their common thrust can nevertheless not be ignored.[24]

It is also suggested that many of these traditions encourage unity and fraternity in the community, and as such they do not envisage the notion of *ijmāʿ* as a source of law.[25] Questions have thus persistently arisen whether it is at all accurate to read the juridical concept of *ijmāʿ* in these traditions. What is the precise meaning of 'community' (*umma, jamāʿa*) in these traditions, and is it correct to substitute the agreement of the *mujtahidūn* for that of the community at large? These are some of the doubts that have been occasionally expressed, doubts which may or may not be warranted. But as long as the traditions in question are open to such doubts, they cannot provide a decisive proof for *ijmāʿ*.[26] Muḥammad ʿAbduh (d. 1323/1905)

21. Āmidī, *Iḥkām* …, *op. cit.*, I, p. 218.
22. All of the four *ḥadīths* quoted here appear alongside a number of others on the same theme in both Ghazālī, *Mustaṣfā* …, *op. cit.*, I, p. 111, and Āmidī, *Iḥkām* …, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 220ff.
23. Ghazālī, *Mustaṣfā* …, *op. cit.*, I, p. 111; Āmidī, *Iḥkām* …, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 220–1.
24. *Ibid.*, I, p. 112.
25. Al-Ṣadr, *Ijmāʿ* …, *op. cit.*, pp. 44–5; Aḥmad Ḥasan, *The Doctrine of ijmāʿ in Islam*, Islamabad, Islamic Research Institute, 1991, p. 59.
26. Al-Ṣadr, *Ijmāʿ* …, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

also observed that the traditions in question do not speak of *ijmāʿ* at all, nor do they sustain the notion of the infallibility of the community. It is an exaggerated claim to read *ijmāʿ* in those traditions, regardless whether reference is made to the agreement of the jurists or to that of the community at large.[27]

The basis of *ijmāʿ*

The basis (*sanad*) of *ijmāʿ* refers to the evidence on which *ijmāʿ* is founded. The majority of *ʿulamāʾ* have maintained that *ijmāʿ* must be founded on a textual authority or on juristic reasoning (*ijtihād*). Āmidī supports this by saying that it is unlikely for the community to reach unanimity over something that has no foundation in the sources.[28]

Jurists are in agreement that *ijmāʿ* may be based on the Qurʾān or the *Sunna*, but there is disagreement whether *ijmāʿ* can be based on a ruling of the secondary proofs, such as analogy (*qiyās*) or considerations of public interest (*maṣlaḥa*).

There are three opinions about this, one of which is that *ijmāʿ* may not be founded on *qiyās*, simply because *qiyās* is speculative evidence and as such it falls short of providing a sound basis for *ijmāʿ*. The second opinion has it that since *qiyās* itself is based on textual injunction (*naṣṣ*), reliance on *qiyās* is tantamount to relying on the *naṣṣ*. The third view, which is considered preferable, is that whenever the effective cause (*ʿilla*) of analogy is clearly stated in the text, or when the effective cause of analogy is indisputably obvious, it does provide a valid basis for *ijmāʿ*.[29]

Jurists have voiced similar views on whether considerations of public interest (*maṣlaḥa*) provides a valid basis for *ijmāʿ*. Unlike *qiyās*, whose result is not expected to change with the change of circumstances, there is an element of instability in *maṣlaḥa* since the latter is liable to change with the change of time and circumstance. Consequently, an *ijmāʿ* which is based on *maṣlaḥa* must itself be liable to modification and repeal if the *maṣlaḥa* on which it is founded no longer exists. The substance of this critique may also be extended, although perhaps to a lesser extent, to *qiyās*, for the result of *qiyās* is also liable to change radically with a radical change of circumstances. A long leap in time and a radical change of place may consequently leave little room for a ruling of *qiyās* that had been formulated under a totally different set of circumstances.

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27. See Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-manār*, *op. cit.*, I, p. 205.
28. Āmidī, *Iḥkām …*, *op. cit.*, I, p. 261; Zakī al-Dīn Shaʿbān, *Uṣūl al-fiqh al-islāmī*, Cairo, Dār al-Nafāʾis li-l-Ṭībāʿa wa-l-Nashr, n.d., p. 94.
29. Abū Zahra, *Uṣūl …*, *op. cit.*, pp. 165–6.
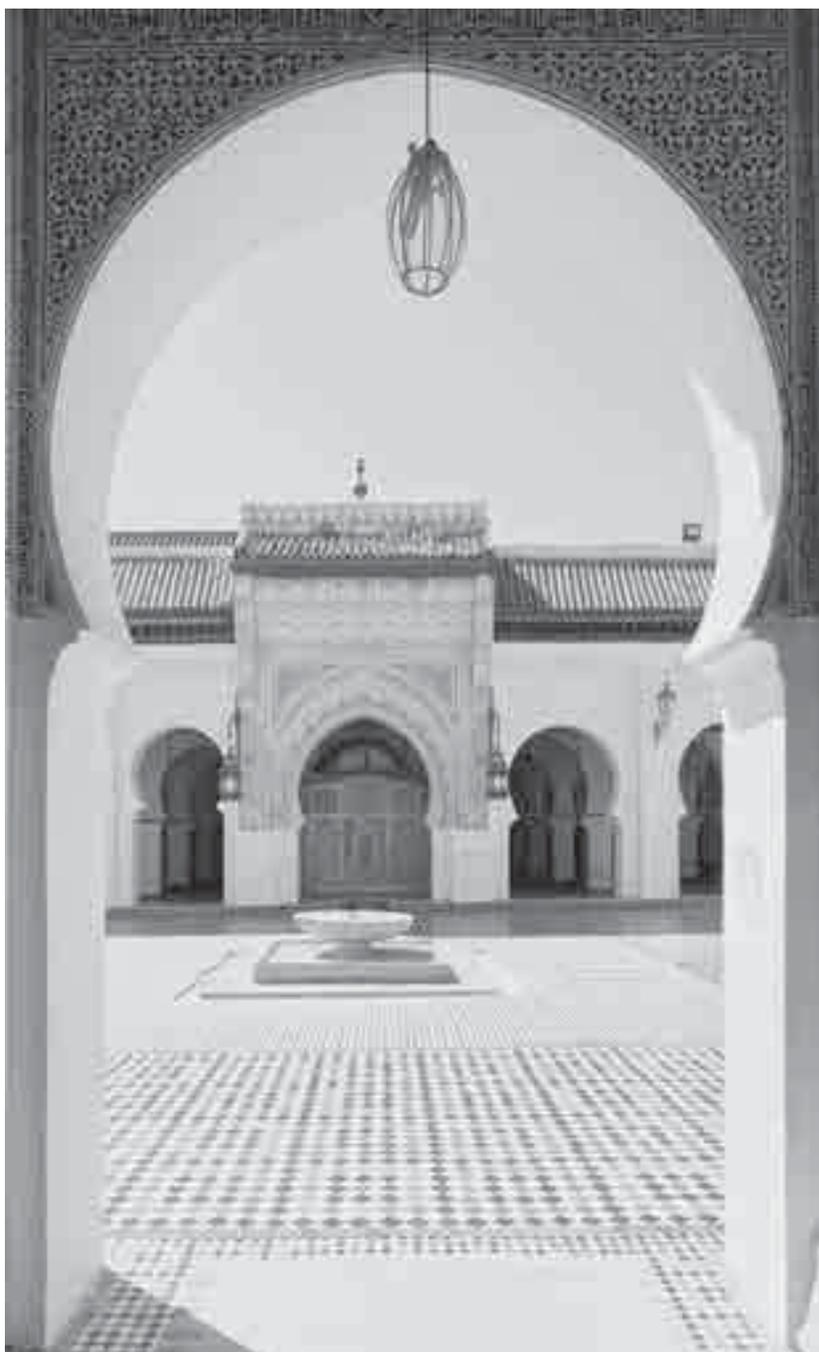
III–8.2   University of al-Qarawiyyīn, Fes, Morocco
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Many examples can be cited where a ruling that was initially founded on *maṣlaḥa* was reversed because of a parallel change in the latter. With reference to the validity or otherwise of price control, and also the testimony of close relatives for one another, we are informed that the Companions had reached a consensus to proscribe the first and to validate the second. Then it is reported that subsequently the seven renowned jurists of Medina issued a *fatwā* legitimizing price control since they found it to be in the public interest. With regard to the testimony of relatives, it is recorded that it was initially permitted and was practised during the time of the Companions, but was subsequently proscribed by later generations of jurists who reached a consensus that public interest required a ban on the testimony of close relatives in favour of one another. It is thus concluded that the Companions have validated *maṣlaḥa* as a basis of *ijmāʿ*. It would follow, then, that an *ijmāʿ* that is based on *maṣlaḥa* is liable to modification and repeal by a subsequent *ijmāʿ*.[30] The late Shaykh al-Azhar Maḥmūd Shaltūt (d. 1383/1963) held that *ijmāʿ* should generally be subject to amendment and replacement by a subsequent *ijmāʿ*.[31]

Feasibility of *ijmāʿ*

Questions about the feasibility of *ijmāʿ* were raised in the early period of Islam, and these have remained largely unresolved. Although the doubts they gave rise to were not allowed to pose a serious challenge to *ijmāʿ*, these questions have become the focus of attention in the proposals of reform concerning *ijmāʿ* in recent decades. One of the early critics of *ijmāʿ*, the Muʿtazilī leader Ibrāhīm al-Naẓẓām (d. 231/845), in addition to some Shīʿa scholars, held that *ijmāʿ* in the manner it has been defined by the majority of *ʿulamāʾ*, is simply not feasible. It may be possible to ascertain the broad outline of an agreement among the *mujtahidūn* on a particular issue, but it would not be true to say that their consensus could be verified so as to impart positive knowledge. There are, in the first place, the obvious difficulties encountered in trying to distinguish a *mujtahid* from a non-*mujtahid*. Even granting that the *mujtahidūn* could all be known and numbered, there would still be no guarantee to ensure that a *mujtahid* who gives an opinion will not change it before a conclusive *ijmāʿ* materializes.[32]

A further difficulty in achieving universal consensus relates to the fact that the classical theory of *ijmāʿ* has not envisaged a particular procedure for the conclusion of *ijmāʿ*. It is in view mainly of such difficulties that the Shāfiʿī scholars confine the occurrence of *ijmāʿ* to questions pertaining to the fundamentals of Islam, such as the five pillars, and express the view that, on

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30. Shaltūt, *al-Islām: ʿaqīda wa-sharīʿa, op. cit.*, p. 559.
31. Shaʿbān, *Uṣūl …, op. cit.*, p. 96.
32. Cf. Khallāf, *ʿIlm uṣūl al-fiqh, op. cit.*, p. 49.

matters other than these, general consensus can neither be taken for granted nor ascertained.[33] The same attitude is exhibited by the Ẓāhirī, and the school of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), who confine *ijmāʿ* to the consensus of the Companions alone.

Mālik has, on the other hand, confined *ijmāʿ* to the consensus of the people of Medina, and the Shīʿa Imāmiyya recognize only the agreement of the members of the Prophet's family (*ahl al-bayt*). In Shīʿa jurisprudence, *ijmāʿ* is inextricably linked with the *Sunna*. This is so because the agreement of the *ahl al-bayt*, that is, the agreement of their recognized *imāms*, automatically becomes an integral part of the *Sunna*.[34]

There is yet another argument to suggest that *ijmāʿ* is neither feasible nor in fact necessary. Since *ijmāʿ* must have a basis (*sanad*) in the higher sources, this may either be decisive (*qaṭʿī*) or speculative (*ẓannī*). If the basis is *qaṭʿī*, *ijmāʿ* becomes redundant. *Ijmāʿ* adds nothing, so the arguments runs, to the authority of the decisive injunctions of the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*. Whenever *ijmāʿ* is founded on a clear text, it is also safe to assume that the public know of it, and that it is unlikely that the public are unaware of definitive textual injunctions. *Ijmāʿ* are thus totally redundant. If the basis of *ijmāʿ* is speculative, such as a solitary *ḥadīth*, a ruling of *qiyās* (analogy) or *maṣlaḥa* (consideration of public interest), then once again there is no case for *ijmāʿ*. For a speculative indication can only be expected to give rise to disagreement, not to consensus.[35]

The majority of the *ʿulamāʾ* have, on the other hand, maintained that *ijmāʿ* is feasible and has taken place in the past, adding that those who deny it are only casting doubt on the possibility of something that has actually happened. Note, for example, the *ijmāʿ* of the Companions on the exclusion of the share of the son's son from inheritance in the presence of a son, and the *ijmāʿ* during the caliphate of ʿUmar that land in the conquered territories may not be distributed among the conquerors, or the ruling that consanguine brothers are counted as full brothers in the distribution of shares in inheritance as well as in the determination of their entitlement to guardianship in the absence of full brothers.[36]

The majority have thus maintained the view that the *ijmāʿ* of the Companions has proven the feasibility of *ijmāʿ* and that posing any question about it is no longer justified.[37] Having said this, however, ʿAbd al-Wahhāb

33. Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Risāla* …, ed. M. S. Kīlānī, 2nd ed., Cairo, Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1403/1983, p. 205; Abū Zahra, *Uṣūl* …, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

34. Āmidī, *Iḥkām* …, *op. cit.*, I, p. 320; M. Mutahhari, *Jurisprudence and its Principles*, trans. M. S. Tawheedi, Elmhurst, N.Y., Taḥrīk-i Tarsīl-i Qurʾān Inc., 1982, p. 20.

35. Shawkānī, *Irshād* …, *op. cit.*, p. 79; Khallāf, *ʿIlm uṣūl al-fiqh*, *op. cit.*, p. 49; Shaʿbān, *Uṣūl* …, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

36. Abū Zahra, *Uṣūl* …, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

37. Shaʿbān, *Uṣūl* …, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

al-Khallāf is probably right in his assessment that anyone who scrutinizes events during the period of the Companions will not fail to note that their *ijmāᶜ* consisted of the agreement of those of the learned among them who were present at the time when an issue was deliberated upon, and the ruling so arrived at was a collective decision based on consultation. There is no information on record to show that any of the pious caliphs had postponed the settlement of disputes until such time that all the *mujtahidūn* of the time at different places had reached an agreement. The caliphs instead acted on the consultative decision of those who were present.[38] As for the view that *ijmāᶜ* is redundant if is based on a decisive text, it is suggested that *ijmāᶜ* still plays a role in so far as it ascertains the proper understanding of the text and clarifies doubt about the manner of its application. The proponents of this view have further stated that textual injunctions are not always known to everyone, and that *ijmāᶜ* still plays a useful role in publicizing and highlighting the knowledge of the laws of the *Sharīᶜa*.[39] And lastly, it is perfectly possible for *ijmāᶜ* to materialize when it is founded on a speculative basis, such as a solitary *ḥadīth* or *qiyās*. *Ijmāᶜ* in this case plays an eminently useful role of elevating the speculative rules of the *Sharīᶜa* to the rank of definitive rules. This is indeed the role that *ijmāᶜ* plays in relation to *ijtihād* in general in so far as *ijmāᶜ* ensures the propriety of *ijtihād* and elevates it to the position of an enforceable law.[40]

Types of *ijmāᶜ*

From the viewpoint of the method in which it is concluded, *ijmāᶜ* is divided into two types, explicit *ijmāᶜ* (*al-ijmāᶜ al-ṣarīḥ*) and tacit *ijmāᶜ* (*al-ijmāᶜ al-sukūtī*). In the former, all the constituents of *ijmāᶜ* clearly express their agreement, whereas in a tacit *ijmāᶜ* only some of the constituents express their agreement but the rest remain silent. The Ḥanafī consider tacit *ijmāᶜ* to be valid, but the majority have held it to be a presumptive *ijmāᶜ* which does not preclude the possibility of fresh *ijtihād* on the same issue. The Ḥanafī have argued that explicit agreement by all the *mujtahidūn* is neither customary nor possible. If it can be established that the *mujtahidūn* who have remained silent had known of the opinion of other *mujtahidūn* and then had ample time to investigate and express an opinion, but still remained silent, their silence would be tantamount to approval. But here the Ḥanafī draw a distinction between the strict rules of law (*ᶜazīma*) and concessionary rules (*rukhṣa*), and consider tacit *ijmāᶜ* to be valid only with regard to the latter. The Ẓāhirī, however, reject tacit *ijmāᶜ*

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38. Khallāf, *ᶜIlm uṣūl al-fiqh*, op. cit., p. 50.
39. Shaᶜbān, *Uṣūl …*, op. cit., p. 89.
40. *Ibid.*

altogether, while some Shāfiʿī, such as ʿAbd al-Malik al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), Ghazālī and Āmidī, allow it with certain reservations. Thus, according to al-Ghazālī, tacit *ijmāʿ* is valid only if the implied agreement is accompanied by indications of approval on the part of those who have remained silent.[41]

From the viewpoint of the evidence by which the existence of *ijmāʿ* is established, *ijmāʿ* is once again divided into two types, acquired consensus (*al-ijmāʿ al-muḥaṣṣal*) and transmitted consensus (*al-ijmāʿ al manqūl*). The former is known through direct participation and knowledge. The *mujtahidūn* thus gain direct knowledge of the agreement of others when they all reach a consensus. But transmitted *ijmāʿ* is established by means of reports which may either be solitary (*āḥād*) or continuously recurrent (*mutawātir*). When *ijmāʿ* is transmitted through continuous reports, it is proven in the same way as acquired *ijmāʿ*. But a solitary report is not sufficient to prove conclusively the occurrence of *ijmāʿ* simply because *ijmāʿ* is a decisive proof and it cannot be established by doubtful evidence. Even those who validate the proof of *ijmāʿ* by means of solitary reports (and there are some in all the three Sunni schools of law other than the Mālikī), nevertheless, agree that the *ijmāʿ* that is established by such reports is not definitive.[42] We are informed, on the other hand, that proof by means of continuous transmission can only be claimed for the *ijmāʿ* of the Companions; no other *ijmāʿ* is known to have been transmitted in this way. This is the main reason, as Abū Zahra points out, that the jurists have differed in their views concerning any and every *ijmāʿ* other than that of the Companions. When *ijmāʿ* is reported by inconclusive evidence, it loses its binding force and the issue must he referred back to the *sanad* on which it was founded in the first place.[43]

Reform proposals

It is evident from the foregoing that there has been little consensus on either the definition or the other aspects of *ijmāʿ* I have discussed. In my personal view, *ijmāʿ* was a realistic proposition before a formal definition was articulated for it, but it became problematic after that. There are indications that Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767) and his disciple Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan al-Shaybānī (d. 189/804) were among the earliest *ʿulamāʾ* who discussed and formulated a conceptual framework for it. But then I have noted that the leading *imāms* who emerged from the late second/eighth century onwards, including Shāfiʿī, Mālik and Ibn Ḥanbal, expressed reservations about the feasibility of this doctrine.

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41. Ghazālī, *Mustaṣfā* …, *op. cit.*, I, p. 121; Shawkānī, *Irshād* …, *op. cit.*, p. 72; Khallāf, *ʿIlm uṣūl al-fiqh*, *op. cit.*, p. 51; Abū Zahra, *Uṣūl* …, *op. cit.*, p. 163.
42. Ghazālī, *Mustaṣfā* …, *op. cit.*, I, p. 127; Āmidī, *Iḥkām* …, *op. cit.*, I, p. 281; Ṣadr, *al-Ijmāʿ*, *op. cit.*, p. 97.
43. Abū Zahra, *Uṣūl* …, *op. cit.*, pp. 167–8.

The problems of *ijmāʿ* have persisted ever since. Modern critics have added their voice by saying that *ijmāʿ* is retrospective and involves a process which is too slow to relate effectively to the problems of modern society. It is, according to one observer, a totally theoretical concept which is dormant as both a viable source and a realistic method to respond to the needs of a dynamic society. It does not relate to anything of significance in the whole range of socio-political and juridical issues of the present-day Muslim community.[44] This awareness is not new, as seen in the scholastic works of the *ʿulamāʾ* who attempt to confine *ijmāʿ* either to the period of the Companions, to the people of Medina, to the family of the Prophet, or to the agreement of the majority.

One of the early reform proposals concerning *ijmāʿ* was put forward by Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī, who overruled the notion of universal consensus in favour of a relative *ijmāʿ*, maintaining that in reality *ijmāʿ* has hardly meant anything more than the consensus of the *ʿulamāʾ* and people of authority in different regions and localities. Only in this relative sense can *ijmāʿ* become a realistic proposition. Shāh Walī Allāh maintained that the instances of the occurrence of *ijmāʿ* in any period, including that of the Companions, were all in effect instances of *ijmāʿ* in its relative sense.[45]

Muḥammad Iqbal's (d. 1938/1357) reform proposal on *ijmāʿ* is primarily concerned with relating this concept to the fabric of modern government. He considered *ijmāʿ* to be an important doctrine but one that has largely remained theoretical. 'It is strange', writes Muḥammad Iqbal, that this important doctrine 'rarely assumed the form of a permanent institution'. He then suggests that transferring the power of *ijtihād* 'from individual representatives of schools to a Muslim legislative assembly … is the only possible form *ijmāʿ* can take in modern times'.[46] In such an assembly, Iqbal continues, the *ʿulamāʾ* should play a vital role, but it must also include in its ranks laypeople who possess a keen insight into affairs.[47]

ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Khallāf has observed that according to its classical definition *ijmāʿ* is not feasible in modern times, and it is unlikely to be utilized if it is left to Muslim individuals and communities without a measure of government intervention. To make *ijmāʿ* feasible, the government in every Muslim country should specify certain conditions for attainment to the rank of *ijmāʿ,* and make this contingent on obtaining a recognized certificate. This

44. Abū Sulaymān, *Azma …*, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

45. Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlāwī, *Izālat al-khafāʾ ʿan taʾrīkh al-khulafāʾ*, Karachi, Pakistan, n.p., 1286/1869, I, p. 266.

46. M. Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Lahore, Muhammad Ashraf, 1982, pp. 173–4.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

would resolve the problem of identifying the *mujtahidūn* and verifying their views when the occasion so requires.[48]

The late Shaykh of al-Azhar, Maḥmūd Shaltūt, held that the requirement of universal consensus in *ijmāᶜ* is no more than a theoretical proposition. In reality *ijmāᶜ* has often meant either the absence of disagreement, or the agreement of the majority. Shaltūt is not opposed to the institutionalization of *ijmāᶜ* provided that the constituents of *ijmāᶜ* enjoy total freedom of expression. *Ijmāᶜ* must on no occasion be subjugated to the vagaries of power politics. The same author adds that since the realization of public interest (*maṣlaḥa*) through consensus is the objective of *ijmāᶜ*, and *maṣlaḥa* is liable to change according to circumstances, then the *ijmāᶜ* which was founded on it in the first place should also be reviewable.[49]

Conclusion

There is little doubt about the basic validity and value of *ijmāᶜ*, and it is precisely because of its reliance on consultation and consensus that *ijmāᶜ* will always command a basic core of validity and appeal. The *ijmāᶜ* of the Companions was essentially dynamic and creative because it was not burdened with the onerous conditions that were subsequently imposed on *ijmāᶜ*, which eventually turned it into a purely theoretical proposition. In the pluralistic character and conditions of modern society, the desire to utilize the potential benefits of *ijmāᶜ* would necessitate taking measures to strip it of its utopian requirements and substitute them with the conditions that were true of *ijmāᶜ* during the period of the Companions.

Muhammad Iqbal's reform proposals basically remain valid to this day. This, it may be said, is reflected in the generally affirmative response they have received. The only critique of Iqbal's proposals that might be mentioned here is one that highlights the risk that they might alter the nature of *ijmāᶜ* and turn it into a political instrument in the hands of the government in power. The critique in question has thus elaborated that the natural strength of *ijmāᶜ* lay in the absence of rigid organization and procedure.[50] But this critique is surely premised on the questionable assumption that an elected legislative assembly will fail to reflect the collective conscience of the community, and that it is bound to be used as an instrument of misguided politics. The assumption behind this view is manifestly antithetical to the theory of *ijmāᶜ*, which endows the community of believers with the divine trust of having the capacity and

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48. Khallāf, *ᶜIlm uṣūl al-fiqh, op. cit.*, pp. 49–50.
49. Shaltūt, *al-Islām: ᶜaqīda wa sharīᶜa, op. cit.*, pp. 558–9.
50. S. M. Yusuf, *Studies in Islamic History and Culture*, Lahore, Pakistan, Muḥammad Ashraf, 1970, pp. 212ff.

competence to make the right decisions. If we are to observe the basic message of the textual authority in support of the inerrancy (*ʿiṣma*) of the community, then we must place our trust in the community itself to elect only persons who will honour and represent their collective conscience.

The main issue in institutionalizing *ijmāʿ*, as Shaltūt has rightly observed, is that freedom of expression should be fully ensured for the constituents of *ijmāʿ*. This is the essence of the challenge that has to be met, not through the advice of *laissez-faire* toward *ijtihād* and *ijmāʿ*, but through nurturing judicious attitudes and methods to protect freedom of expression. The consensus that is arrived at in this spirit and in a milieu free of fear is likely to retain a great deal, if not all, of the most valuable features of the original *ijmāʿ*.

Chapter 3.9

QIYĀS

Muḥammad Khalid Masud

The Qurʾān and the *Sunna* constitute the fundamental sources of Islamic law, whose primary aim is the protection of the life, faith, family, property and intellect of every person. In their reasoning and rulings throughout history, the paramount goal of Muslim jurists has been to ensure that Islamic law remains faithful to these two main sources as well as responsive to these objectives. Consequently, Muslim jurists have been continuously seeking solutions for contemporary problems within the framework of these texts, remaining concerned with the needs of public welfare.

Scholars can derive legal rulings without any difficulty where the text of the Qurʾān or *Sunna* is explicitly clear. But when the texts are not quite explicit in their rulings, it is natural to have different interpretations of these texts. When scholars arrive at a unanimous interpretation of such texts, their agreement develops into *ijmāʿ* or consensus.[1] This chapter treats what is essentially the phenomenon of disagreement rather than agreement, and explains the method of legal reasoning which was developed by Muslim jurists to reduce these differences by referring them, in a methodical fashion, to the fundamental sources.

This method of reasoning, called *qiyās*, has its origins, according to most Muslim legal theorists, in the following Qurʾānic verse: 'O ye who believe! Obey God and obey the Messenger and those of you who are in authority; and if you have dispute concerning any matter refer it to God and the Messenger if ye are (in truth) believers in God and the Last Day. That is better and more seemly in the end' (IV.59).[2] Jurists explain that reference to God and the Messenger respectively means the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*. The question, however, arose

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1. On the concept of consensus, see the chapter entitled 'Ijmāʿ' by Muḥammad Hashim Kamali in this volume. [Eds.].
2. Slightly modified rendering quoted from M. M. Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran: An Explanatory Translation*, New York, Mentor/New American Library of World Literature, 1961, p. 85.

regarding the method of referring the disputed cases where no explicit ruling was available in the Qurʾān or the *Sunna*.[3] It was for such cases that *qiyās*, a method of legal reasoning on the basis of similarity, was developed.

Literally, *qiyās* means comparison, measurement and equation. A modern Muslim jurist has defined it as follows: ʿ*Qiyās* is the explication of the ruling in a case where there is no explicit legal ruling in the text, by appending it to a case whose ruling is explicitly given in the Qurʾān or the *Sunna*.ʾ[4] This technical definition is simpler and more refined than most classical definitions. In fact, classical definitions vary greatly in their choice of words because the authors of these definitions differ in their theological views.

An analytical survey of the classical definitions reveals two main thrusts, theological and juristic. Theological definitions generally tend to reflect theological views on causality and epistemology. They view *qiyās* from the perspective of formal logic, and hence construct it in a syllogistic form. Consequently, these definitions appear to concentrate on the question of whether *qiyās* is a process of reasoning, a source, or evidence in itself.[5]

Theologically oriented jurists differ in phrasing their definitions. In Muslim theology, three main schools prevailed in the classical period: the Muʿtazila,[6] the Ashāʿira[7] and the Māturīdiyya.[8] These schools disagreed with

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3. See Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/819), *al-Risāla*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir, Cairo, Muṣṭafā al-Bābī, 1940, p. 81. ʿAs to the disputes that happened after the Apostle's [death] the matter was decided in accordance with God's judgement (as laid down in the Qurʾān) and then that of His Apostle (as laid down in the *Sunna*). But if a text were not applicable, the matter was decided by analogy on the strength of a precedent sought (either in the Qurʾān or the *Sunna*).ʾ Trans. Majid Khadduri as *al-Shāfiʿī's Risāla, Treatise on the Foundations of Islamic Jurisprudence*, Cambridge, Islamic Texts Society, 1987, p. 113. (Referred to in future as Khadduri).

4. Muḥammad Abū Zahra, *Uṣūl al-fiqh*, Cairo, Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, 1957, p. 209. See also Wahba al-Zuḥaylī, *Uṣūl al-fiqh al-islāmī*, Damascus, Dār al-Fikr, 1986, I, p. 603. Al-Zuḥaylī defines *qiyās* in the following words: ʿAppending (*ilḥāq*) a case about which there is no explicit legal ruling in the texts to a case which has such a ruling, because they share a common cause of the ruling.ʾ

5. Muṣṭafā Jamāl al-Dīn, *al-Qiyās: Ḥaqīqatuh wa ḥujjiyyatuh*, Najaf, Maṭbaʿat al-Nuʿmān, 1972, p. 14.

6. The Muʿtazila are a school of Muslim theologians who considered human reason a major source of knowledge. Wāṣil ibn ʿAṭāʾ (d. 131/748), a disciple of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), is generally considered to be the founder of this school. The notable Muʿtazilī jurists in the early period were ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 416/1025) and Abu-l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 478/1085).

7. The Ashāʿira (Ashʿarī) are a school of Muslim theologians founded by Abu-l-Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Ashʿarī (d. 330/941). They refuted the Muʿtazilī doctrine of human reason. Al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1012), al-Ghazālī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) are considered notable jurists of the Ashʿarī school. They belonged mostly to the Shāfiʿī school of law.

8. The Māturīdiyya are a school of Muslim theologians who followed the doctrines of Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī al-Samarqandī (d. 333/944). Al-Māturīdī also opposed the Muʿtazila and supported the Ashʿarī doctrines on several points. Māturīdī theology was popular largely among the Ḥanafī.

each other on the question whether conclusions derived by recourse to *qiyās* were binding. The Muʿtazila, for instance, believed that human reason could legitimately determine the legal value of human acts. They therefore defined *qiyās* as a source, and used terms such as 'proving' (*ithbāt*), 'establishing' (*ithbāt*) and 'attaining' (*taḥṣīl*). According to them, a legal ruling in a given case becomes established if the cause between the two cases was common.[9] Ashʿarī jurists preferred to use the term 'predication' (*ḥaml*) or 'accordance' for the process of *qiyās* reasoning because they argued that only God was the lawgiver. It was not the function of human reason to 'prove' or 'establish' laws.[10] Māturīdī jurists further clarified this position by calling it an 'exposition' (*ibāna*) or 'illustration' of the legal rule, because the process of legal reasoning only exposes the ruling; neither can it establish itself, nor does it follow analogically.[11]

Among the four Sunni schools of Islamic law, the Shāfiʿī and Ḥanbalī generally adhere to the Ashʿarī view, while the Ḥanafī in the main follow the Māturīdiyya. The juristic definitions, mostly evolved by the Ḥanafī and Mālikī jurists, treat *qiyās* as a process rather than as a source.[12] They call this process 'extension' (*taʿdiya*) or 'equation' (*taswiya*), and define *qiyās* as 'the extension of a ruling in the original source to the given case on the basis of a common cause which is not understandable on the basis of language alone'.[13]

9. For Muʿtazilī definitions, see Abu-l-Hāshim al-Muʿtazilī (d. 321/933) as quoted by Muṣṭafā Jamāl al-Dīn, *al-Qiyās: Ḥaqīqatuh wa ḥujjiyyatuh*, Najaf, Iraq, Maṭbaʿat al-Nuʿmān, 1972, p. 141; Abu-l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 478/1085), *Kitāb al-Muʿtamad fī uṣūl al-fiqh*, Damascus, Institut Français de Damas, 1964, II, p. 247; ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1024), *al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa-l-ʿadl: Juzʾ al-sharʿiyyāt, op. cit.*, XVII, p. 278; Jamāl al-Din, *al-Qiyās, op. cit.*, pp. 152f.

10. For the definitions by Ashʿarī scholars, see Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), *al-Burhān fī uṣūl al-fiqh*, Al-Dawḥa, Qatar, AH 1399, II, p. 745. Also see Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī (d. 631/1233), *al-Iḥkām fī uṣūl al-aḥkām*, Cairo, Maṭbaʿat al-Maʿārif, 1914, III, p. 261; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Maḥṣūl fī ʿilm uṣūl al-fiqh*, ed. Ṭāhā Jābir al-ʿAlwānī, Beirut. Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1992, V, pp. 5–6; al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), *al-Mustaṣfā min ʿilm al-uṣūl*, Cairo, Būlāq, AH 1294, II, p. 228.

11. For the definition by Māturīdī, see ʿAbd al-ʿAlī Muḥammad, *Fawātiḥ al-raḥamūt*, printed on the margin of al-Ghazālī's *al-Mustaṣfā …, op. cit.*, II, p. 247.

12. For Ḥanafī and Mālikī definitions, see ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Bazdawī (d. 482/1089), *Kanz al-wuṣūl ilā maʿrifat al-uṣūl*, Karachi, Kārkhānah-'i Tijārat-i Kutub, 1961, p. 248; Ṣadr al-Sharīʿa (d. 747/1346), *al-Tawḍīḥ*, Karachi, Pakistan, Kārkhānah'i Tijārat-i Kutub, AH 1400, II, pp. 526–7; Ibn al-Humām (d. 861/1457), *al-Taḥrīr fī uṣūl al-fiqh*, Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, AH 1351, III, p. 263; Ibn al-Ḥājib (646/1249), *Mukhtaṣar*, vide ʿAḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī (756/1355), *Sharḥ mukhtaṣar Ibn al-Ḥājib*, Bulāq, Egypt, al-Maṭbaʿa al-Kubrā al-Amīriyya, AH 1316, II, p. 350.

13. Al-Sharīʿa, *al-Tawḍīḥ …, op. cit.*, pp. 526–7: '*taʿdiyat al-ḥukm min al-aṣl ilā al-farʿ bi-ʿillatin muttaḥidatin la tudraku bi-mujarrad al-lugha*'.

Not only do juristic definitions not operate within a theological frame of reference, but they also are not restricted to syllogistic logic.[14] According to juristic definitions, the common cause is not known by the common middle term indicated by the sequence of the words. In other words, the common cause cannot be known through syllogisms alone. It is rather discovered by comparing each case in question with its precedent(s) on the basis of similarity.

The *qiyās* of the jurists was distinguished from the *qiyās* of logic quite early in the formative period of Islamic legal theory. Philosopher-jurist Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī[15] (d. 505/1111) and theologian-jurisconsult Taqiyy al-Dīn ibn Taymiyya[16] (d. 728/1327) noted this distinction and, therefore, attempted to make the *qiyās* of jurists compatible with the *qiyās* of logic. I will later explain how al-Ghazālī made this distinction, and how he influenced the later definitions.

The term *qiyās* is not used in the Qur'ān. However, as discussed above, jurists argue that the idea of *qiyās* comes from the Qur'ān. First, several verses urge the use of human reason to understand divine laws. For example, 'So learn a lesson, O ye who have eyes' (LIX.2); 'Thus We display the revelations for people who have sense' (XXX.28); and 'Will they not meditate on the Qur'ān, or are there locks on their hearts?' (XLVII.24).

Second, the underlying reasons for, and objectives of, a large number of injunctions in the Qur'ān have been specifically indicated. For example, the reason for ordaining *tayammum* (ablution by sand) has been explained as follows: 'God does not want to place a burden on you' (V.6). Similarly, the reason for the injunction for *qiṣāṣ* (retaliation in case of homicide and injury) has been given as 'And there is life for you in retaliation' (II.179).

Third, the Qur'ān itself also employs the method of analogical reasoning in some of its arguments: 'Hath not man seen that We have created him from a drop of seed? Yet lo! he is an open opponent. And he hath coined for Us a similitude, and hath forgotten the fact of his creation, saying: "Who will revive these bones when they have rotted away?" Say: "He will revive them who produced them in the first instance, for He fully knows all creation"' (XXXVI.77–9).

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14. Syllogistic logic is a logical argument which consists of three propositions: two premises and a conclusion that follows necessarily from their order of formulation. The following are examples of the propositions used in the syllogistic form of reasoning:
   1. All S ´ P (categorical)
   2. Some Q ´ R (categorical)
   3. No A ´ B (categorical)
   4. If A ´ B, then B ´ C (conditional)
   5. A ´ either B or C (disjunctive).

15. Al-Ghazālī, *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa*, Cairo, al-Maṭbaʿa al-Maḥmūdiyya, 1936 and *al-Mustaṣfā min ʿilm al-uṣūl*.

16. Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Qiyās fī-l-sharʿ al-islāmī*, Cairo, al-Maṭbaʿa al-Salafiyya, AH 1355.

It is known from *Ḥadīth* literature that the Prophet Muḥammad also used the method of reasoning by analogy. For instance, someone asked the Prophet whether he should perform the pilgrimage to Mecca on his father's behalf. The Prophet replied by recourse to the analogy of debt: since a son was obliged to pay his father's debts, he was also obliged to perform the *ḥajj* on his father's behalf if it became due on the father.[17]

It appears that this method of reasoning was quite common in the Prophet's time. The *ḥadīth* and the biographical literature refer to Muʿādh ibn Jabal (d. 20/640) and Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī (d. 37/657), the Companions of the Prophet, as evidence for this. When the Prophet asked Muʿādh how he would judge a case when no direct injunction was available in the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*, he replied, 'I will use my own judgement (*ajtahid bi-raʾyī*).'[18] In the epistle about the administration of justice which Caliph ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 24/644) addressed to Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī, the caliph urged him to have recourse to *qiyās* as a method of reasoning by comparison and similarity.[19] Significantly, the caliph not only subscribed to the concept of *qiyās*, but also used that term.

Among Muslim jurists, the Andalusian Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1063),[20] one of the greatest minds of Muslim civilization, questioned the authenticity of this epistle and rejected Muʿādh's *ḥadīth* on technical grounds as he believed it was related by a single authority and one of its transmitters was weak. Western scholars, following Margoliouth,[21] have expressed doubts about the authenticity of Caliph ʿUmar's epistle. Margoliouth's suggestion that *qiyās* in Islamic law might have come from the Jewish legal tradition was accepted by some scholars who claimed that *qiyās* had Jewish origins.[22] The main argument against the authenticity of this letter was that the term *qiyās* began to be used at a later period and hence could not have been used in the epistle.

17. Al-Zuḥaylī, *Uṣūl al-fiqh al-islāmī*, *op. cit.*, p. 625.

18. Al-Dārimī, *Sunan*, Damascus, Maṭbaʿat al-Iʿtidāl, ᴀʜ 1349, I, p. 60; Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, Beirut, Dār Ṣādir li-l-Ṭibāʿa wa-l-Nashr, 1957, II, pp. 347–8.

19. Ibn Qutayba, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, Cairo, Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1925, I, p. 66, and Ibn al-Jawzī, *Sīrat ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb*, Cairo, al-Maṭbaʿa al-Miṣriyya, 1931, pp. 115–16.

20. For Ibn Ḥazm's discussion of the authenticity of ʿUmar's epistle to Abū Musā al-Ashʿarī, see *al-Iḥkām fī uṣūl al-aḥkām*, Cairo, al-Maṭbaʿa al-Munīriyya, ᴀʜ 1347, VII, p. 145; and for his discussion of the tradition of Muʿādh, see VI, pp. 40–1.

21. D. S. Margoliouth, 'Omar's instruction to the Qāḍī', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1910, pp. 307–26; Émile Tyan, *L'organisation judiciaire en pays d'Islam*, Paris, Librairie du Recueil Sirey, 1938, I, pp. 23–4, 106–13; and Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1959, p. 104, have questioned the authenticity of this letter.

22. Margoliouth, 'Omar's instruction to the Qāḍī', *op. cit.*, especially p. 320. See also Schacht, *Origins …*, *op. cit.*, p. 98–9; and M. Bernand, 'Kiyās', in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., Leiden, Netherlands, E. J. Brill, 1986, V, p. 242.
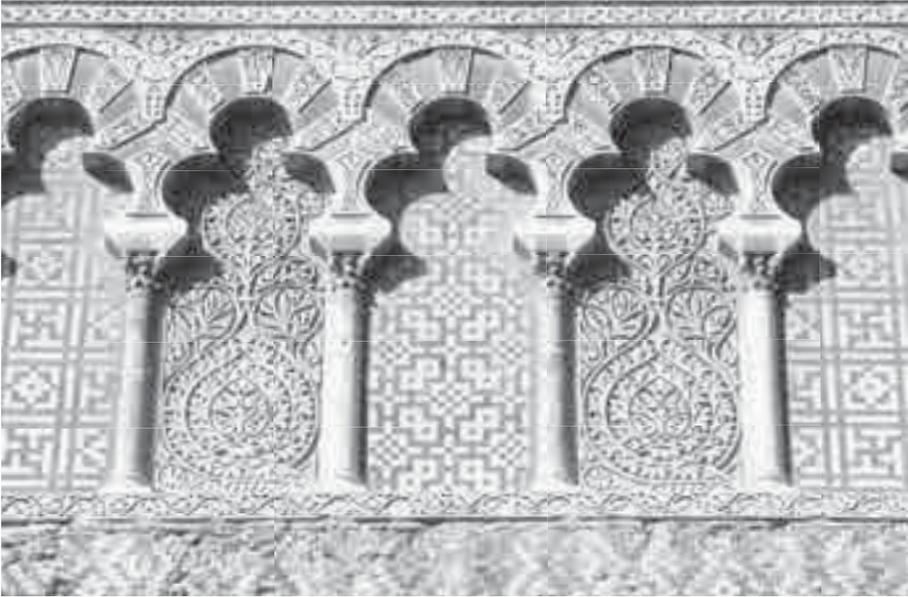
III–9.1   A panel of the Great Mosque of Cordoba
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Recent studies[23] have shown that the arguments against the authenticity of this epistle do not have a sound basis. The fact, however, is that during the early period while the term *qiyās* was employed, it was the term *raʾy* that was used more frequently in a similar sense.

Modern scholarship differs on the question whether the *raʾy* employed in the early period of Islamic law could be equated with *qiyās*. Amīn al-Khūlī (d. 1385/1966), Aḥmad Amīn (d. 1373/1954) and ʿAlī Ḥasan ʿAbd al-Qādir (d. 1410/1990) are of the view that the terms *raʾy* and *qiyās* were not synonymous in that period. Muṣṭafā ʿAbd al-Rāziq (d. 1366/1946), Muḥammad al-Khuḍarī (d. 1346/1927), Muḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā (d. 1383/1963) and a majority of modern scholars, as well as Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr (d. 463/1070), Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 751/1350) and Ibn Khaldūn (d. 809/1406) (among the earlier scholars) maintain that both terms were synonymous and the employment of this method was quite common in the time of the Companions.

23. Western scholarship on the question of the origin of *qiyās* and ʿUmar's epistle to Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī has been critically analysed. See Muhammad Hamidullah, 'Administration of Justice under the Early Caliphate', *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society*, XIX, January 1971, pp. 1–50; and Nuʿmān ibn Muḥammad, *Maʿādin al-jawāhir bi-taʾrīkh al-Basra wa-l-Jazāʾir*, Islamabad, Islamic Research Institute, 1973, p. 128. Hamidullah examined in detail the arguments against the authenticity of the epistle and concluded that the text is authentic.

There is no doubt that during the first two centuries of Islam, *ra'y* was more widely used than *qiyās*. The frequent mention of *ra'y* can be traced through the middle of the Umayyad period (circa 80/699) when the practice of *ra'y* began to develop into a school of law in Iraq. Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī (d. 96/714) and Ḥammād ibn Abū Sulaymān (d. 120/737) strove to systematize the method of *ra'y*. With Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767) and his disciples, *ra'y* was refined to such an extent that it became synonymous with, and was eventually replaced by, the term *qiyās*.

That is also the period (i.e. 120–79/737–95) when the validity of the use of *ra'y* was hotly debated. The opponents of *ra'y* distinguished it from *qiyās*, saying that the latter was employed only when no clear text was available, and that *ra'y* was resorted to even in those cases where a text was available. Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/819) objected strongly to the use of *ra'y* and recommended a qualified use of *qiyās*. He also rejected *istiḥsān*[24] and all other forms of legal reasoning which were not inferred directly from the explicit texts of the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth*. He said:

> For God has not permitted any person since the Prophet's time to give an opinion except on the strength of established [legal] knowledge. [Legal] knowledge (after the Prophet's time) includes the Qur'ān, the *Sunna*, consensus, narrative (*athar*) and analogy (*qiyās*).[25]

The debate on *qiyās* was joined by many scholars. Among Shāfiʿī jurists, Abū Dāwūd al-Ẓāhirī (d. 270/883), a follower of the Shāfiʿī school in the earlier period of his life, followed the Shāfiʿī position on *qiyās* to its logical conclusion and denied its validity as a method of legal reasoning. Theologian-jurists, whether they belonged to the Muʿtazila or Ashāʿira, maintained that people were religiously obliged to abide by the conclusions to which they were led by *qiyās*. Abū Dāwūd could not allow this position to *qiyās*. Among the non-Sunni schools of law, the Imāmiyya (Jaʿfariyya) also rejected *qiyās* as a method or source of legal reasoning because, like the Ashāʿira, they did not allow human reason the role to determine what is good or lawful.[26]

24. *Istiḥsān* is Ḥanafī and Mālikī jurists' preference for a particular form of reasoning in cases where they found that the conclusions reached by *qiyās* were difficult to apply in the real world; sometimes they based *istiḥsān* on another *qiyās* or on a *ḥadīth*. *Istiḥsān* is discussed at some length later in this chapter [Eds].

25. Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Risāla …*, *op. cit.*, p. 508.

26. Muḥammad Riḍā al-Muẓaffar, *Uṣūl al-fiqh*, Najaf, Jamʿiyyat al-Nashr, 1966, p. 181. Al-Muẓaffar also explained in detail how Shīʿī jurists originally mentioned only three sources: the Qur'ān, the *Sunna* and *ijmāʿ*. The addition of *ʿaql* (reason) as a source in later Shīʿī writings refers only to the aspects of reasoning that affirm a rule in the other three sources. For instance, the principle of *muqaddimat al-wājib*, that a prerequisite to an obligation is also obligatory, is derived from *ʿaql*, and hence *ʿaql* is sometimes enumerated in Shīʿī *uṣūl* texts as a fourth source. Al-Muẓaffar nevertheless argues that *ʿaql* is not an

The Ẓāhiriyya, the followers of Abū Dāwūd, came to be known particularly for their rejection of *qiyās*. Ibn Ḥazm was the most eloquent spokesman of this school. Abū Zahra summarizes Ibn Ḥazm's arguments against *qiyās* as follows:

- God has explicitly given laws which may be categorized as obligatory, forbidden, commendable or reprehensible. Those laws that He did not reveal in explicit language, He has allowed as permissible, saying, 'He it is who created for you all that is in the earth' (Qur'ān II.29). Hence no room is left for *qiyās*;
- The recognition of *qiyās* as a valid principle of law implies the negation of the completion of revelation, whereas God has explicitly declared, 'Today I have completed for you your religion' (Qur'ān V.3);
- The basis of *qiyās* is the commonality between the text and a given case which necessitates the application of the same rule in both cases. How is this commonality determined? If it is determined in the text itself, then it is not *qiyās* because it is based directly on the text. If it is not determined by the text, then it is something we are adding to the text;
- There are several verses in the Qur'ān and several sayings of the Prophet which tend to forbid the use of *qiyās*.[27]

The Ẓāhirī arguments, however, could not gain popular acceptance because their position made the application of law too narrow to allow further growth. Nevertheless, the Ẓāhirī criticism of the determination of the common cause prompted some jurists to proceed to further refine this method.

Al-Ghazālī attempted to resolve this problem by distinguishing the *qiyās* of the jurists from that of the logicians. He argued that the method of reasoning that the jurists and theologians called *qiyās* was in fact *mithāl* or *tamthīl*. The logicians defined *tamthīl* as measuring the unknown rule against the known by comparing the similar points between them, or transferring the judgement from one particular case to the other because they are similar in one respect or another. Al-Ghazālī explained that *tamthīl* was one of the three methods of proof, besides *qiyās* and *istiqrāʾ* (induction). He argued that certainty of knowledge or proof could be established only by the deductive method of analogical reasoning. Jurists employed *tamthīl* and *istiqrāʾ*, which could not produce definite proof.[28]

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independent source like the other three sources. It is therefore incorrect to say that the Shīʿī principle of *ʿaql* is a counterpart of the Sunni principle of *qiyās*, because the Sunnis extend the application of the rule of *Sharīʿa* found in the Qur'ān, the *Sunna* and *ijmāʿ* to other referents not found in these sources as the basis of analogical reasoning (*qiyās*). See for details al-Muẓaffar *op. cit.*, pp. 181 ff.

27. See Abū Zahra, *Uṣūl al-fiqh*, *op. cit.*, pp. 215–17.

28. Al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustaṣfā* …, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 37–55.

Al-Ghazālī was the first jurist to include a detailed discussion of logic in his *al-Mustaṣfā min ʿilm al-uṣūl*, his fundamental work on the principles of Islamic jurisprudence. Al-Ghazālī influenced not only Shāfiʿī but also Ḥanafī jurists in making logic part of the principles of Islamic jurisprudence, *uṣūl al-fiqh,* thus shaping the definitions, conception and process of *qiyās* of later jurists. Consequently, the definitions of *qiyās* moved closer to the *qiyās* of logic, and the jurists started to pay greater attention to the detailed analysis of the process of *qiyās*, especially of the methods of determining *ʿilla* (reason/cause) in the framework of theology and syllogistic logic.

The syllogistic formulation of *qiyās* can be illustrated with the following well-known example in the books on the principles of Islamic jurisprudence. *Khamr* (wine) is specifically forbidden in the Qurʾān (V.90). The Prophet is reported to have declared all intoxicants unlawful, saying, 'Every intoxicant is *khamr* and every intoxicant is forbidden.'[29] To decide whether a certain beverage is permissible, first it must be investigated whether it is intoxicating. If so, the judgement is formulated in the following syllogistic form:

1. Since every intoxicant is forbidden
2. and beverage B is an intoxicant
3. hence beverage B is forbidden.

In this formulation, the conclusion (3) necessarily follows from the first two propositions. In this example the first proposition (1) is called *aṣl*, or the original text. The predicate in this sentence ('forbidden') is called *ḥukm* (a ruling, or judgement). The position of beverage B is unknown, or is in question. It is called *farʿ* (branch or subdivision) because it is subjected to the judgement of the case, called *aṣl*. The cause found to be common in both the cases (in other words, intoxication) is called *ʿilla* (cause or reason). The *qiyās* reasoning has thus come to be formulated in three steps with a structure of four components, which I discuss below.

Aṣl (*original text*)

A majority of jurists maintain that the original text refers only to the Qurʾān, the *Sunna*, or consensus (*ijmāʿ*). Since the consensus of the community is also based, directly or indirectly, on the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*, it also constitutes an authentic source. Jurists hold that the premises for legal reasoning must be certain and authentic, and that only the three sources mentioned above fulfil these criteria.

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29. Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan* …, Riyāḍ, Maktab al-Tarbiya al-ʿArabī, 1989, II, ch. 'al-Nahy ʿan al-munkar', p. 701.

Generally jurists do not allow a ruling established by *qiyās* to become a source for further *qiyās*. The Mālikī Ibn Rushd (d. 520/1126), jurist and *imām* of the Great Mosque of Cordoba – and the grandfather of the philosopher, scientist and theologian Ibn Rushd, known in the West as Averroës (d. 595/1198) – argued however that a given case, once decided by *qiyās*, becomes a precedent by itself because it is no longer a *farʿ* whose ruling is unknown. He advises jurists to look for a comparable precedent decided by *qiyās* when they do not find a precedent in the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*. Jurists must exercise further *qiyās* on its basis. He argues that all sciences have developed in this manner. Rational sciences, for instance, start with evident knowledge and derive information from it. The information thus derived becomes a basis for further deductions. These deductions are valid because in their turn they are based on evident knowledge. Similarly, the traditional sciences are originally based on the Qurʾān, the *Sunna* and *ijmāʿ*. They develop further on the basis of *qiyās* from these sources. Therefore, further rulings may be derived from *qiyās* because *qiyās* is based on authentic sources.[30]

Ibn Rushd's position actually refers to the practice of jurists in the Ḥanafī and Mālikī schools who first derived general rules on the basis of induction (*istiqrāʾ*) of the sources, among which the consensus of a particular school of law was prominent. They then applied the method of *qiyās* to these principles so as to deduce rules in regard to specific legal questions.

Ḥukm (ruling, judgement)

Ḥukm means a ruling in the authoritative texts which could apply to a given case if both are found similar when their common cause is compared. Rulings in the textual sources cover a wide range of subjects. Jurists are concerned only with those relating to human acts and which can be understood by human reason. Rulings relating to faith and matters that are humanly incomprehensible such as eschatological and ritual matters are not extendible. They are called *taʿabbudī* (matters related to doctrine and worship) and are not subject to *qiyās*.

Second, rulings derived through *qiyās* and which are evidently contrary to the Qurʾān, the *Sunna* and *ijmāʿ* cannot be subjected to further *qiyās*. Similarly, laws that are specifically made with reference to particular persons cannot serve as a basis for *qiyās*. One obvious instance is the exemption allowed to the Prophet Muḥammad from the general rule of permitting marriage with only up to four women (see Qurʾān IV.3). Since permission to retain more than four wives was granted to the Prophet as a special case and for special reasons, it cannot serve as the basis for extending this permission to others.

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30. Ibn Rushd, *al-Muqaddimāt al-mumahhidāt*, Beirut, Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1988, I, p. 39.

Farʿ (*branch, a given case*)

Farʿ is a given case for which judgement is sought. Jurists prescribe two qualifications for the *farʿ*. First, it must be a matter on which no clear ruling is available in the original sources because no *qiyās* is allowed in matters already decided when a clear text is available. Second, the reason or the cause which constitutes the basis of the ruling in the precedent must exist in the given case. For instance, a drink that is not known to be intoxicating cannot be considered a *farʿ* when considering the ruling about intoxicant drinks.

ʿI LLA (RATIO DECIDENDI)

ʿIlla is the reason or cause that constitutes the basis of a ruling. The jurists have defined it as 'feature of the ruling of law which is evident, consistent and affinitive with the ruling.'[31] This definition is not generally accepted by the Mālikī. Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim also disagree with this definition. Other scholars, however, have generally adopted it.

As a consequence of these differences, the notion of *ʿilla* has been further refined and it has been distinguished from another similar term, *ḥikma* (wisdom). The reason is that the *ḥikma* of an injunction is broader than its *ʿilla* because it refers to the objective of law or the intent of the lawgiver. For instance, Islamic law allows the right of pre-emption to a neighbour. The *ḥikma* of this law is to prevent the harm that a stranger may cause to neighbours by purchasing a property in their neighbourhood. The *ʿilla* that can prove the right of pre-emption, however, is the common neighbourhood arising in the case of an immovable property.

Unlike *ḥikma*, the *ʿilla* is specified. Summarizing the views of jurists over the centuries, Abū Zahra finds the following five criteria essential for determining an *ʿilla*.

- It must be objective and obvious, not subjective and hidden;
- It must be consistent and persisting. It should not vary from person to person and situation to situation. It must be repeatable in similar conditions;
- The reason must be extendible. It must not be restricted to a specified case;
- It should not be contrary to a revealed text;
- There must be affinity between the rule laid down in the texts and the *ʿilla*. The connection between the two must be rationally comprehensible.[32]

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31. Abū Zahra, *Uṣūl al-fiqh, op. cit.*, p. 220.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 227.

III–9.2   Interior vision of the Cordoba Mosque
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DETERMINATION OF ʿILLA (RATIO DECIDENDI)

As explained earlier, jurists do not search for any cause or reason at all, but for a cause that is relevant to law, extendible and authentic. In other words, they look for the material fact about which there may be no doubt that the lawgiver considers it the cause of the ruling. Jurists have developed several methods to determine the legitimate cause. Among them, the following nine methods emerge most prominently.

Naṣṣ (*linguistic indications in the textual sources*)

Sometimes the ʿilla is given in the text itself. A definite ʿilla is established if it is mentioned with certain adjectives, prepositions or phrases which leave no doubt about its being the reason or ʿilla for that ruling. For instance, sometimes a ruling is described by terms like *kay* (so that, in order that), *idhan* (if … then) or *li ajl* (for the reason that, on account of, because of). This is illustrated by the Qurʾānic verse that prescribes the distribution of booty among the poor and needy, then says 'that … (*kay*) it become not a commodity between the rich among you' (LIX.7).

When there is a possibility of another interpretation, linguistic indications can produce an apparent ʿilla. It is indicated by words and phrases known

for explaining the reason, such as *li*, *bi* and *wa* (to, for, and). This can be illustrated by a *ḥadīth*. Abū Qatāda (d. 54/674), a Companion of the Prophet, asked him if the water from which a cat has drunk was unclean for ritual use. The Prophet said, 'It was not unclean and explained the reason for it: because the cats wandered frequently around you.'[33]

īmā (*contextual evidence, indication*)

īmā, or contextual evidence, refers to the cases in which the cause of the legal ruling is implied and is known from the context or circumstances. For instance, the Prophet forbade a *qāḍī* to sit in judgement while he was in anger.[34] Jurists find here an implicit reason, anger, as an element that disturbs the human mind and affects its judgement. The same situation exists in the case of hunger, thirst and illness which might disturb the mind of a judge, who would be forbidden to sit in judgement in these situations.

Ijmāʿ (*consensus*)

The cause of a ruling is also known from the consensus of scholars who agree on a specific fact as its true cause. For instance, the reason that guardianship by an adult over the property of a minor is prescribed is determined by the consensus of the scholars who consider 'minority' as the cause for this ruling.

Al-ṣabr wa-l-taqsīm (*abstraction*)

Al-sabr wa-l-taqsīm (probing and classification) is a process which occurs when a jurist proceeds with an examination of all the facts, and then tries by careful classification to find out the true cause of a ruling. For instance, a jurist examines whether the sale of wheat is *ribā* (usury) in the following cases of barter: when it is not an exchange of equal quantity, and when the quantities are equal but the exchange is on credit basis. Can this ruling be extended to other commodities? Similarity of the sale of wheat with other commodities could be on the basis of edibility, measurability and hoardability. Comparing the sale of the six commodities mentioned in the *ḥadīth*,[35] the Ḥanafī conclude

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33. *Ibid.*, pp. 229–30.
34. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* …, Beirut, Dār Ṣādir, n.d., V, p. 296.
35. The six commodities mentioned in the *ḥadīths* are gold, silver, wheat, barley, dates and salt (in a few traditions instead of salt, we find mention of raisins). While in some traditions, all six commodities are mentioned together, in others they occur with different combinations, and in yet others all alone. For traditions on all six commodities, see Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Musāqāt*, *Bāb al-Ṣarf wa-bayʿ al-dhahab bi-l-waraq naqdan*; Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, *Kitāb al-Buyūʿ ʿan rasūl Allāh*, *Bāb Mā jāʾa anna al-ḥinṭa bi-l-ḥinṭa mithlan bi-mithlin karāhiyat al-tafāḍul fīh*;

by the method of abstraction that measurability is the cause. For the Shāfiʿī jurists it is edibility, and for Mālikī it is hoardability.[36]

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Al-Nasāʾī, *Sunan, Kitāb al-Buyūʿ*, *Bāb Bayʿ al-burr bi-l-burr*; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan, Kitāb al-Buyūʿ*, *Bāb fī-l-ṣarf*; Al-Darimī, *Sunan, Kitāb al-Buyūʿ*, *Bāb fī-l-nahy ʿan al-ṣarf*. For traditions on the commodities occurring with different combinations, see Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Buyūʿ*, *Bāb Mā yudhkar fī bayʿ al-ṭaʿām wa-l-ḥukra*; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Musāqāt*, *Bāb al-Ṣarf wa-bayʿ al-dhahab bi-l-waraq naqdan*; Al-Darimī, *Sunan, Kitāb al-Buyūʿ*, *Bāb fī-l-nahy ʿan al-ṣarf*. For traditions in which only one of these commodities was mentioned, see Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Musāqāt*, *Bāb Bayʿ al-qalāda fīhā kharaz wa-dhahab*; Nasāʾī, *Sunan, Kitāb al-Buyūʿ*, *Bāb Bayʿ al-dhahab bi-l-dhahab*; Aḥmad, *Musnad, Kitāb Bāqi Musnad al-mukthirīn*, *Bāb Musnad Abī Saʿīd al-Khudarī*.

It is pertinent to draw attention to the *ḥadīth* of Mālik ibn Aws (d. 92/710), who said, 'I was in need of change for one hundred *dinars*. Ṭalḥa ibn ʿUbayd Allāh called me and we discussed the matter, and he agreed to change [my dinars]. He took the gold pieces in his hands and fidgeted with them, and then said, 'Wait till my storekeeper comes from the forest.' ʿUmar was listening to that and said, 'By God! You should not separate from Ṭalḥa till you get the money from him, for God's Apostle said, "The selling of gold for gold is *ribā* (usury) except if the exchange is from hand to hand and equal in amount, and similarly, the selling of wheat for wheat is usury unless it is from hand to hand and equal in amount, and the selling of barley for barley is usury unless it is from hand to hand and equal in amount, and dates for dates is usury unless it is from hand to hand and equal in amount"'': Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Buyūʿ*, *Bāb Mā yudhkaru fī bayʿ al-ṭaʿām wa-l-ḥukra*.

To take another *ḥadīth*, Mālik said, 'The generally agreed upon way of doing things among us is that wheat is not sold for wheat, dates for dates, wheat for dates, dates for raisins, wheat for raisins, nor any kind of food sold for food at all, except from hand to hand. If there is any sort of delayed terms in the transaction, it is not good. It is *ḥarām* (unlawful). Condiments are not bartered except from hand to hand.'

Mālik said, 'Food and condiments are not bartered when they are of the same type, two of one kind for one of the other. A *mudd* of wheat is not sold for two *mudd* of wheat, nor a *mudd* of dates for two *mudd* of dates, nor a *mudd* of raisins for two *mudd* of raisins, nor is anything of that sort done with grains and condiments when they are of one kind, even if it is hand to hand.

'This is the same position as silver for silver and gold for gold. No increase is *ḥalāl* (lawful) in the transaction, and only like for like, from hand to hand is *ḥalāl*.'

Mālik said, 'If there is a clear difference in foodstuffs that are measured and weighed, there is no harm in taking two of one kind for one of another, hand to hand. There is no harm in taking a *ṣāʿ* of dates for two *ṣāʿ* of wheat, and a *ṣāʿ* of dates for two *ṣāʿ* of raisins, and a *ṣāʿ* of wheat for two *ṣāʿ* of ghee. If the two sorts in the transaction are different, there is no harm in two for one or more than that from hand to hand. If delayed terms enter into the sale, it is not *ḥalāl*.'

Mālik said, 'It is not *ḥalāl* to trade a heap of wheat for a heap of wheat. There is no harm in a heap of wheat for a heap of dates, from hand to hand. That is because there is no harm in buying wheat with dates without precise measurement' (Mālik ibn Anas, *al-Muwaṭṭaʾ*, ed. Muḥammad Fuʾād ʿAbd al-Bāqī, Cairo, Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya, 1951, II, pp. 646–7).

36. See Ibn Rushd, *Bidāyat al-mujtahid wa-nihāyat al-muqtaṣid*, Cairo, Maṭbaʿat al-Istiqāma, 1952, II, p. 129.

Munāsaba (affinity)

With reference to affinity, the *ʿilla* is divided into three types:

- One type of affinity is termed *al-munāsib al-muʾaththir* (effective affinity), and applies to cases in which the affinity between the cause and the ruling is known from the text of the original sources. For instance, the Qurʾān prohibits the drinking of *khamr* (wine), and the *ḥadīth* prohibits everything that is intoxicating.[37] By observing the affinity between the two, we find intoxication to be the cause of the prohibition.
- The second type of affinity is called *al-munāsib al-mulāʾim* (suitable affinity), and applies to cases in which a *ʿilla* is known and, though not wholly specified by the textual sources, is partly supported by them. For instance, the textual sources consider minority a cause for the need for guardianship of the property of a minor. Ḥanafī jurists deduce from this indication the need for guardianship over the person of a minor. Similarly, the textual sources permit joining of two prayers together while people are journeying. Mālikī allow them to be joined when it is raining.
- The third type of affinity is termed *al-munāsib al-mursal* (indirect affinity), and applies when no text is available to approve or disprove a legal question. Such an opinion might refer indirectly to a ruling in the text, hence the name for this type. On this point, however, the jurists are not unanimous. The Mālikī and Ḥanbalī consider this method valid while the Shāfiʿī and Ḥanafī do not accept it.

Shibh (similarity by induction)

Shibh is a process of reasoning which looks at similar facts more broadly and deduces the *ḥukm*. If the thorough examination of a particular precedent does not provide sufficiently affinitive facts, the jurist searches for other similar cases. For instance, the question of whether the removal of ritual uncleanliness requires washing by water is decided by looking not only at the requirement to make ablution for prayer but also at similar cases of cleanliness, such as cleaning your body after you have become ritually unclean so that you can touch the Qurʾān, or circle the Kaʿba. In both cases, you are required to wash with water to achieve cleanliness. The *ʿilla* is thus discovered by comparative induction.

Ṭard (elimination, conjunctive syllogism)

Ṭard is the method used by jurists to find a cause by comparing the given cases with other cases where the particular fact that is deemed to provide the cause

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37. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad …*, *op. cit.*, V, p. 52.

for the ruling in question does not exist. In other words, it is a comparative examination, and the cause is established by looking at the negative cases where the rule would not apply because the cause does not exist. The cause is known neither explicitly, nor by implication, nor by affinity. It is known by being co-extensive, or as being constantly present in all the examined cases of permission, and being nonexistent in others. For instance, to decide whether vinegar could be used for ritual cleaning, vinegar is compared with water by the method of elimination. The Shāfiʿī jurist and Ashʿarī theologian ʿAḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 756/1355) develops the argument as follows: since no bridge can be built on vinegar and no fish can be found in it, it is not comparable with water and hence is not suitable for cleaning.[38]

Dawarān (complete and thorough search for the cause, both positive and negative)

Dawarān is the process of reasoning, also called *al-ṭard wa-l-ʿaks*, which follows the principle that if a ruling obtains because of a certain fact, the absence of that fact will deny the application of that ruling. For instance, intoxication is the cause of the prohibition of wine. But grape juice, from which wine can be made, does not produce intoxication; therefore, the prohibition will not apply to grape juice. Similarly, *khamr* (wine) is no longer intoxicating when it turns into vinegar. Hence, it follows that grapes are not the cause of the prohibition in question.[39]

Tanqīḥ al-manāṭ (determining the basis of a ruling)

The effort that a jurist puts in to determine one of the several aspects of a *ʿilla* found in the textual sources is called *tanqīḥ al-manāṭ*, which is a three-step process. The jurist first distinguishes between the several aspects of a cause and discovers one of the facts which is more material than the other in arriving at a judgement.

The other two steps are *takhrīj al-manāṭ* and *taḥqīq al-manāṭ*. *Takhrīj al-manāṭ* is in fact the process of discovering the *ʿilla* in a precedent by the various methods mentioned above. *Taḥqīq al-manāṭ* is the process of affirming the existence of the *ʿilla* in a given case. For example, there is a consensus among jurists that there could be two reasons for a bride to have a guardian at her marriage: minority and virginity. Looking at the sources the jurists find that minority could not be the cause for the necessity of such a guardian, because the Prophet forbade marrying a *thayyib* (a widow or divorcée) without

38. ʿAḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī, *Sharḥ mukhtaṣar Ibn al-Ḥājib*, Bulāq, Egypt, al-Maṭbaʿa al-Kubrā al-Amīriyya, AH 1316, II, p. 245.
39. Jamāl al-Dīn, *Al-Qiyās …*, *op. cit.*, p. 294.

consulting her.[40] Since a *thayyib* could be a minor as well, minority could not be the reason for the guardianship.[41]

The above discussion illustrates sufficiently the Muslim jurists' continuous efforts to stay close to the textual sources in their interpretation of laws. Their main objective has been to make the *Sharīʿa* relevant to life at all times. It soon became clear that *qiyās*, however much its scope is broadened, could not be stretched indefinitely. Quite early, jurists began to develop alternative or supplementary methods. These methods, however, remained closer to the basic principle of *qiyās*, in that violation of the foundational sources was not allowed. Methodologically, however, many jurists tried to remove the weaknesses of *qiyās* which arose out of the mechanistic manner of its application.

Here are some examples of the various concepts that were developed parallel to *qiyās,* and which are believed to have been aimed at finding ways out of the difficulties that were at times created by recourse to *qiyās.*

Istiḥsān (juristic preference)

Istiḥsān signifies jurists' preference for their legal opinion over the conclusion derived from *qiyās*. For instance, in case of a dispute between the customer and the vendor concerning the price of a commodity before the transfer of that commodity, the case is decided by establishing an analogy with the law given in the textual sources: the burden of proof is on the plaintiff, failing which the defendant is required to take an oath. The regular analogy demands that, in this particular case, the plaintiff is the vendor because he is claiming an amount in excess of what the customer agrees to. Thus, the analogy demands that the vendor must produce the evidence supporting the contention, and only if he fails should the customer be asked to take an oath. On the contrary, *istiḥsān* was deemed to demand that both should take an oath simply because both are denying each other's claims and hence both are defendants. This *istiḥsān* also operates if the dispute over the price arose after the transfer of goods, but in that case the application of *istiḥsān* is limited to contracts of sale; it cannot be extended to other contracts.

Istiḥsān is allowed only by the Ḥanafī and Mālikī, and not by other schools of law. However, there is a subtle difference among these schools regarding the signification of the term. The Ḥanafī treat *istiḥsān* as an exception from the regular *qiyās* and define it as a choice between two alternate analogies, a choice in which the implicit is preferred to the explicit when a jurist apprehends harm in adopting the explicit. That is why the Ḥanafī call *istiḥsān*, *qiyās khafī* (implicit *qiyās*). The Ḥanafī also abandon *qiyās* when it conflicts with the textual sources. For instance, eating or drinking terminates a fast. According to the method

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40. Al-Dārimī, *Sunan …*, *op. cit.*, II, p. 138.
41. Jamāl al-Dīn, *al-Qiyās …*, *op. cit.*, p. 300.

III–9.3   Page of al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-Dīn*, fifth century AH
© National Library and Archives of the Islamic Republic of Iran

of reasoning by *qiyās*, eating or drinking by mistake would be analogous with deliberately eating or drinking. The texts, however, clarify that eating or drinking by mistake does not terminate a fast. The Ḥanafī, therefore, argue that in this case *qiyās* is to be abandoned in favour of *ḥadīth*, because *qiyās* here has been superseded by an explicit *ḥadīth* that allows people to complete the fast when they have eaten or drunk by mistake.[42]

Abū Zahra gives another example to illustrate the point. According to the Ḥanafī, laughing loudly during *ṣalāt* (ritual prayer) terminates not only the *ṣalāt* but also the *wuḍūʾ* (ablution). Apparently *qiyās* demands that the *wuḍūʾ* should not terminate because laughing out loud cannot be compared with any of the reasons ascribed for its termination. But in this case, the Ḥanafī have disregarded *qiyās* on account of a *ḥadīth* according to which the Prophet asked someone to repeat his *wuḍūʾ* and *ṣalāt* after he had laughed loudly while he was praying.[43]

The Mālikī, on the other hand, treat *istiḥsān* as judgement on the basis of the consideration for a specific common good in relation to the universal application of *qiyās*. For instance, Islamic law admits the witness of only truthful and honest persons. But a judge may allow witness to be given by persons who do not fully meet this condition for the sake of maintaining law and order in localities where truthful and honest witnesses are not available. This would be called *istiḥsān* by the Mālikī.[44]

Al-Shāfiʿī strongly rejected *istiḥsān* because he considered it to be no more than the pursuit of desire.[45] Legal rulings, in his view, may only be derived from the textual sources or by deduction from them. *Istiḥsān*, he contends, does neither.

Sadd al-dharāʾiʿ (*prevention of undesired consequences*)

Sadd al-dharāʾiʿ is the method of legal reasoning for considering what may lead a lawful act to become unlawful, even when it is not innately unlawful. For instance, abusing the deities of idolaters is forbidden because it may lead them to abuse God (Qurʾān VI.108). Similarly, the application of *ḥudūd* (fixed penal laws) to Muslims in wartime is prohibited because it may undermine the loyalty of Muslims and prompt them to join the enemy.[46]

The principle of *sadd al-dharāʾiʿ* is based on the consideration of the impact produced by an act and of the objectives of the law. It is not decided by the intention of the person perpetrating the act. This principle generally

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42. Al-Dārimī, *Sunan …*, *op. cit.*, II, p. 13.

43. Abū Zahra, *Uṣūl al-fiqh*, *op. cit.*, p. 252.

44. *Ibid.*

45. Al-Shāfiʿī, *al-Risāla …*, *op. cit.*, p. 507.

46. Abū Zahra, *Uṣūl al-fiqh*, *op. cit.*, p. 276.

applies with a view not only to prevent harm and corruption but also to acquire benefits. Accordingly, looking at the effects of rulings, a jurist might find that some acts are liable to lead to a definite or probable harm. In both cases, the principle, particularly according to the Mālikī, requires such acts to be considered forbidden. However, in cases where the effects of a ruling lead to harm only in rare cases, or to harm in most cases but not to an extent that constitutes probability or definite knowledge, the jurists disagree on the application of this principle. The Shāfiʿī and Ḥanafī prefer to opt for permitting the act, whereas the Mālikī and Ḥanbalī tend to prohibit it as a preventive measure.

Istiṣlāḥ (taking public good into account)

Istiṣlāḥ is a method of legal reasoning where a case is decided on the basis of the common good, but only where no specific text is available to support it. It is also called *maṣlaḥa mursala* (public interest not explicitly supported by textual sources). This method is quite conspicuously used by the Mālikī.

The Mālikī prescribe three conditions for the use of this method of legal reasoning. First, the common good which is considered an independent source of law must be in accord with the objectives of the *Sharīʿa*. Second, it must be rationally comprehensible. Third, it must prevent an imminent harm.[47]

However, jurists from the various schools disagree regarding the validity of this source. The Mālikī and Ḥanbalī recognize *istiṣlāḥ* as a source independent from the method of *qiyās* because it fulfils the objectives of the law. For instance, the legitimacy of appointing someone less qualified in the presence of a better person was allowed on the ground that the rejection of the former would create chaos and corruption. Mālik justified ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's (d. 102/720) appointment of Yazīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik (d. 106/724) as his successor because if he appointed a person who was better and more pious, Yazīd could still oppose him and thus give rise to rebellion and chaos. Yazīd's appointment was, therefore, based on *istiṣlāḥ*. The Ḥanafī and Shāfiʿī do not recognize the validity of *istiṣlāḥ* at all. They recognize it only within the framework of *qiyās*.

Istiṣḥāb (presumption that earlier laws exist until the contrary is proved)

Ibn al-Qayyim defined *istiṣḥāb* as the continuity of permission or prohibition of a certain ruling as established unless and until there is evidence to the contrary. No evidence is required for the continuity of the ruling, but evidence is necessary for its discontinuation.[48] This principle may be compared with

47. *Ibid.*, pp. 267–8.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 283.

stare decisis, the principle by which points in litigation are determined according to precedent. The prominent Yemeni scholar and jurist al-Shawkānī (d. 1250/1834) explains that when a *muftī* is required to give an opinion, he should refer to the Qurʾān, the *Sunna*, *ijmāʿ* or *qiyās*. If the *muftī* finds no ruling on a particular matter, he should judge in favour of its current position, whether positive or negative – that is, on the continuity of the position of that ruling if there is no evidence for change. If he is doubtful about its prohibition, he should presume its permission. If permission is doubtful, he should presume its prohibition.[49]

Jurists have described four types of *istiṣḥāb*:

- *Istiṣḥāb al-barāʾa al-aṣliyya.* It is presumed that all things are permitted in principle; thus, we assume the continuity of permissibility of a certain thing on this basis. For instance, a person will be considered free and innocent unless it is proven that they have committed an offence;
- *Istiṣḥāb mā dalla al-sharʿ ʿalā wujūdih.* If a legal right is established, it will be presumed to exist unless there is evidence against it. For instance, a wife's right to receive a dower as a legal consequence of a contract of marriage, and a seller's right to receive the price of the commodity in a sale contract, will continue unless evidence for the payment is established;
- *Istiṣḥāb al-ḥukm.* Once the legal position of a certain matter is decided, it will continue to be so until the contrary is established;
- *Istiṣḥāb al-waṣf.* If a person or a thing is described by a certain qualification, it will continue to be so until the contrary is proved. For instance, a missing person will continue to be presumed alive until the contrary is proved.

Jurists generally accept the validity of the first three types of *istiṣḥāb*. There is, however, no agreement among them about the last type. The Ḥanafī and Mālikī allow it in defence but not as a proof. The Shāfiʿī and Ḥanbalī, on the other hand, employ it in both situations.

ʿUrf (*custom; practice*)

ʿUrf – that is, custom or practice – is recognized by the Ḥanafī and Mālikī as a source of law in addition to the textual sources. *ʿUrf* is defined as the habit of people in their dealings with each other and by which their social system works. The law recognizes the validity of the practices in vogue in society at a given time because, otherwise, people will face hardship.

The Ḥanafī and Mālikī consider *ʿurf*, when duly established, to be as effective and authoritative as a textual source. However, no *ʿurf* can be considered valid if it is found contrary to the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*.

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49. Al-Shawkānī, *Irshād al-fuḥūl*, Cairo, Idārat al-Ṭabāʿa al-Muniriyya, AH 1347, p. 208.

A valid custom may be either general or local. A general custom is a practice that is universally recognized as legitimate. A local custom is one that is practiced in a particular town or country or by a certain group of people, such as the commercial practices of businesspeople.

Rulings based on custom change with the change or disuse of a custom. According to the Ḥanafī, often a *ʿurf* is more effective as a source of law than *qiyās*, and even supersedes it, provided the *qiyās* in question is not based on an *ʿilla* established by the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*.

Modern Islamic law has to deal with complex problems such as bank interest, elections, organ transplants, test-tube babies and genetic engineering. In dealing with these problems, there was either no clear precedent or the texts were not pervasive enough to include the new specifics, so jurists had to stretch their imagination to find analogies in such cases.[50]

In recent interpretations, the general trend has been to refer more frequently than before to the objectives of the law (*maqāṣid al-sharīʿa*). The doctrine of the objectives of the law is much broader than *qiyās* since it looks at the overall philosophy of law, and deduces universal principles which can then be applied to given cases. The basic consideration in this philosophy is *maṣlaḥa* (public interest; pl. *maṣāliḥ*), which is the essence of the *Sharīʿa*. The law is meant to protect the *maṣlaḥa*, which consists of five basic needs: life, faith, family, property and intellect. The law protects these needs positively through the prescriptions of *ʿibādāt* (religious obligations) and the laws of *muʿāmalāt* (pecuniary transactions), as well as negatively through penal laws.

The principle of the protection of these *maṣāliḥ* is called *maqāṣid* (objectives), *kulliyyāt* (universal principles) or simply *uṣūl* (principles) of *Sharīʿa*. In fact, the core of the great Spanish Mālikī jurist Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī's (d. 790/1388) seminal *al-Muwāfaqāt fī uṣūl al-sharīʿa* discusses at length the doctrine of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿa* and attempts to bring the analogical method of *qiyās* closer to the teleological method of *maqāṣid*.[51]

The doctrine of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿa*, while it stresses keeping the general objectives of Islamic law in view, also requires jurists to be watchful about the impact of their judgements. The application of a ruling must not lead to hardship or difficulty, nor should it be beyond the physical, mental or social capacity of the individuals because these are the protective zones around the basic needs. If they are eroded, the basic needs will also be eroded.

In actual practice, however, it has been rare for the jurists to resort to the philosophy of the law in their legal reasoning. Most often the philosophy of

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50. Ashraf ʿAlī Thānawī, *Imdād al-fatāwā*, Karachi, Pakistan, Ashraf al-ʿUlūm, AH 1369, p. 565.

51. For a detailed account of al-Shāṭibī's concept of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿa*, see Muhammad Khalid Masʿuds, *Islamic Legal Philosophy: A Study of Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī's Life and Thought*, Islamabad, Islamic Research Institute, 1977. See also the revised version of the work under the title *Shāṭibī's Philosophy of Islamic law*, Islamabad, Islamic Research Institute, 1995.

the law is referred to as a general justification for the particular analogy in a ruling. Sometimes it is supplementary to *qiyās*. Sometimes, though rarely, the jurists refer to the philosophy of the law as an alternative to *qiyās*.

It is not correct to say that the concept of *maqāṣid al-sharī'a* has emerged only recently, but it is perhaps true that it has become more popular in recent decades. This concept is, however, still in its formative stage because its method of operation has yet to be fully developed.

– IV –

ISLAMIC LIFE

THE *SHAHĀDA*: FAITH

Marcia Hermansen

The aspiration of Muslims is to leave this world with the words of the *shahāda*, 'There is no god but God and Muḥammad is the Prophet of God', on their lips.

A notable presentation of faith in Islam is the Qurʾānic injunction to Muḥammad,

> Say, 'Behold my prayer and my acts of worship, and my living and my dying are for Allāh, the Sustainer of the worlds, in whose divinity none has a share: for thus have I been bidden – and I shall be foremost among those who surrender themselves unto Him. '(VI.162–3)

The topic of faith (*īmān*) is central to Islam, and can be treated at various levels, from expressions of daily piety to the sophisticated and abstruse debates of formal disciplines such as theology (*ʿilm al-Kalām*) and jurisprudence (*fiqh*). In order to discover how the concept 'faith' is articulated from within the Islamic perspective, we can trace the way the tradition itself investigates such an issue. This chapter considers such statements from Qurʾānic revelation, the *Ḥadīth*, legal pronouncements, and further expressions found within Muslim traditions of philosophy, theology and mysticism.

The formal profession of faith or *shahāda* consists of two phrases. The first part consists of the words of witnessing (*kalima shahāda*) that 'there is no god but God'. William Chittick explains that for an English speaker the question arises whether the translation 'God' faithfully renders the meaning of the original Arabic. Although 'Allāh' is a generic Arabic word for the idea of 'god', in English the meaning may convey the sense that 'Allāh' is the proper name for one of a number of possible gods:

> In Arabic, *Allāh* simply means 'God'. The Koran, the Hadith, and the whole Islamic tradition maintain that the God of the Jews, the Christians, and the Muslims is a single God. Arabic-speaking Muslims cannot imagine using a

different word than Allāh when referring to the God worshipped by Christians and Jews. Arabic-speaking Christians and Jews themselves worship God using the word *Allāh*.[1]

The second part of the *shahāda* is the statement concerning the messenger (*kalima risāla*), 'Muḥammad is the Prophet or Messenger of Allāh', implying the sphere of faith in action. In this case, the content of revelation, whatever is acknowledged concerning the reality and oneness of God, requires a concrete response. For Muslims the prescriptions for living a faithful and righteous life are known through the words of God revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad and preserved in the Qur'ān. In addition, the example of the Prophet who was a 'walking Qur'ān'[2] provides the specific model (*uswa ḥasana*) for Muslim life as an ongoing testimony to faith.

The significance of the *shahāda* has been incorporated into the life cycle from birth to death. In Muslim cultures, this formula is spoken into the ear of the new-born baby as the call to prayer (*ādhān*) is given, reminding the child of the intrinsic acknowledgement of God built into sound human nature. This acknowledgement is sometimes called the primordial covenant (*mīthāq*), referring to the Qur'ānic account that when all the souls implicit in the loins of Adam were asked by Allāh to bear witness about themselves through the question 'Am I not your Lord?' they responded, 'Yes, indeed you are' (VII.172). In the sense that humans need to be reminded of what was recognized on that occasion, the recitation of the *shahāda* symbolically reawakens the child to the truth acknowledged on the day, for 'Everyone is born according to a sound original nature (*fiṭra*).'[3] Classical Muslim commentators identified this sound nature with the Islamic religion.[4]

The words of the *shahāda* are also ritually repeated throughout each of the daily prayers, being obligatory in at least seventeen of the ritual cycles (*rakʿats*) of prayer. A further element of prayer is the act of bearing witness (*tashahhud*). During this segment of the prayer, the index finger of the right hand is raised and words testifying to the unity and unicity of God are recited.

The profession of faith is the first of the five pillars of Islam, according to a *ḥadīth* stating that:

Islam is based on five [pillars]:

1. To testify that there is no God [none has the right to be worshipped] but Allāh and that Muḥammad is Allāh's Apostle.
2. To offer the compulsory ritual prayers.

1. W. Chittick, 'Introduction' to Shaykh Tosun Bayrak al-Jerrahi al-Halveti, *The Name and the Named: The Divine Attributes of God*, Louisville, Ky., Fons Vitae, 2001, p. 46.
2. According to a *ḥadīth* transmitted by ʿĀʾisha.
3. *Ḥadīth* Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim Book 33, Number 6423–6.
4. For example, in Ibn Taymiyya, al-Jawāb al-Saḥīḥ, 4:33.

3. To pay *zakāt* (obligatory charity) .
4. To perform *ḥajj*.
5. To observe the fast during the month of Ramadan.[5]

In the case of this pillar, however, more emphasis is to be placed on its existential implications rather than on its ritual performance, although as indicated above, formal recitation of the profession of faith does play a role in certain ritual practices in Islam.

Recitation of the *shahāda* is what makes a person a Muslim, thus conversion to Islam in the formal sense takes place through uttering the *shahāda* in the presence of witnesses.

Shahāda and faith in the Qurʾān

The elements of the first *shahāda* are indicated in the following verses of the Qurʾān:[6]

Know that there is no god except God and ask forgiveness for your sins. (XLVII.19)

Know that it was revealed through the knowledge of God and that there is no god but He. (XI.14)

God bears witness that there is no god but He – and the angels and the possessors of knowledge – upholding justice; there is no god but He, the Inaccessible, the Wise. (III.18)

Faith, *īmān*, is strongly emphasized in the Qurʾān and in the sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad. One of the ninety-nine names of Allāh is '*al-Muʾmin*' (giver of faith/security).[7] This divine name is often interpreted in the sense that the '*muʾmin*' is one who gives security. In fact, the Arabic root (ʾ-m-n) has the semantic connotations of reliability, protection and security, as well as faith. Al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) makes the connection between security, faith and the *shahāda* in his work on the divine names *al-Maqṣad al-asnā fī sharḥ maʿānī asmāʾ Allāh al-ḥusnā* (The Most Sublime Meaning in Explaining the Beautiful Names of Allāh). His interpretation is that Allāh is the creator of everything that protects and gives security in this world.

Then there is his [a human's] greatest fear – of eternal damnation – and nothing will protect him from that but the profession of faith in the unity of God. For God guides him to it and makes him desire it so that he says: 'there is no

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5. M. Muhsin Khan, translation of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, I, Book 2, Number 7.
6. There are some sixteen verses containing the phrase 'There is no God but He/God' and many more featuring other permutations of the same phrase.
7. Qurʾān LIX.23.

IV–1.1   Panel of *Shahādatayn*
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god but God', is my fortress, and whoever enters into my fortress is safe from
My punishment.[8]

The divine name '*al-Mu'min*' is further explained by some commentators as
meaning that Allāh is the One 'who speaks truly' and will therefore fulfil His
promises.[9] According to al-Baghdādī (d. 1037), 'Allāh is called the '*Mu'min*'
because He is activatingly faithful in the sense that He actualizes His promise,
carrying it out in effective realization.[10]

The Qur'ān also clarifies that there are inner and outer aspects of faith.
The inner dimension may be illustrated by Qur'ān VIII.2–4:

Believers are those whose hearts tremble whenever God is mentioned, and
whose faith is strengthened whenever His messages are conveyed unto them,

8. Abū Ḥāmid Al-Ghazālī, *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, trans. David Burrell and
Nazih Daher, Cambridge, Islamic Texts Society, 1992, p. 63. These words are said to be a
communication to the Prophet from God (*Ḥadīth qudsī*).

9. D. Gimaret, *Les noms divins en Islam: exegèse lexicographique et théologique*, Paris, Les éditions du
Cerf, 1988, p. 360.

10. *wa-llāh mu'min li-annahu yaṣaddiqu waʿdahu bi-l-taḥqīq*. Cited in W. C. Smith, 'Faith as *Taṣdīq*',
in *Islamic Philosophical Theology,* ed. P. Morewedge, Albany, N.Y., State University of New
York, 1979, p. 110.

and who in their Sustainer place their trust, those who are constant in prayer and spend on others of what We have bestowed on them. These are the believers in the true sense.

Some of the external elements of faith are enumerated in Qur'ān IX.112, which extols:

those who are repentant, worshipful, praising, fasting, bowing, prostrating, those who enjoin the good and forbid evil, and those who keep the limits set by Allāh. Give good tidings to the believers.[11]

Ḥadīth

The second authoritative source in Islam is the collected sayings of the Prophet, the *Ḥadīth*. A famous *ḥadīth* known as the *ḥadīth* of Gabriel (Jibrīl) presents aspects of faith in the following way.

One day while the Prophet was sitting in the company of some people, [the angel] Gabriel came and asked, 'What is faith?' Allāh's Apostle replied, 'Faith is to believe in Allāh, His angels, [the] meeting with Him, His Apostles, and to believe in Resurrection.' Then he further asked, 'What is Islam?' Allāh's Apostle replied, 'To worship Allāh Alone and none else, to offer prayers perfectly to pay the compulsory charity (*zakāt*) and to observe fasts during the month of Ramadan.' Then he further asked, 'What is *iḥsān* (perfection)?' Allāh's Apostle replied, 'To worship Allāh as if you see Him, and if you cannot achieve this state of devotion then you must consider that He is looking at you.' Then he further asked, 'When will the Hour be established?' Allāh's Apostle replied, 'The answerer has no better knowledge than the questioner …. Then the Prophet said, 'That was Gabriel who came to teach the people their religion.' Abū ʿAbdullāh said: He [the Prophet] considered all that as a part of faith.[12]

The answers given by the mysterious stranger, later revealed to be the angel of revelation, Gabriel, indicate three levels or dimensions of faith. We can infer from this account that the first aspect, Islam, is fulfilled by implementing the five pillars, while the second element of faith, *īmān*, consists of assent to basic doctrines. The third aspect is termed *iḥsān*, which means righteousness or literally beautification. The specific content of *iḥsān* is disclosed by the phrase 'to worship Allāh as if you see him, because even if you do not see Him, He sees you', thus implying total devotion to and awareness of God. The Islamic mystics further understand *iḥsān* as spiritual cultivation through extra' religious practices and acts of worship, often invoking another *ḥadīth* called the *ḥadīth* of supererogatory practices (*ḥadīth al-nawāfil*) in which God declares:

11. T. Izutsu, *The Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Koran*, Tokyo, Keio Institute, 1959, p. 175.
12. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* …, I, Book 2, No. 47.

And the most beloved things with which My bondservant comes nearer to Me, is what I have enjoined upon him; and My bondservant keeps on coming closer to Me through performing *nawāfil* [praying or doing extra good deeds besides what is obligatory] till I love him, so that I become his sense of hearing with which he hears, and his sense of sight with which he sees, and his hand with which he grips, and his leg with which he walks; and if he asks Me, I will give him, and if he asks My protection [refuge], I will protect him; [i.e. give him My refuge] and I do not hesitate to do anything as I hesitate to take the soul of the believer, for he hates death, and I hate to disappoint him.[13]

According to another *ḥadīth*, there are some seventy aspects of faith, the highest of which is proclaiming 'there is no god but God' while the lowest is removing some harmful object from the road.[14]

Aspects of faith

Faith in Islam is not a purely intellectual consideration, nor is it construed as a mysterious leap. Tradition generally held that the first requirement of the Law was to know God: that is, to know what was 'necessary, impossible and possible' concerning Him. This included His thirteen primary divine attributes: existence (the existential attribute), pre-existence, post-eternity, dissimilarity, self-sufficiency and oneness (the five negative attributes), and life, knowledge, will, power, speech, hearing and seeing (the seven abstract or positive attributes). To know God 'legally' not 'gnostically' took priority over learning ablutions and prayers, and acts of worship were seen as invalid or inadequate without this knowledge.[15]

The collections of *ḥadīth* in the genre of '*muṣannaf*' order the reports of the Prophet in topical chapters so as to facilitate their application to matters of practical adjudication. In fact, the initial chapters of the *ḥadīth* collections of both al-Bukhārī and Muslim begin with the topics of faith and knowledge, thus indicating their fundamental importance and close relationship to one another.

In Islam, the opposite of faith is termed *kufr*. The meaning of this word is semantically associated with the ideas of covering and ungratefulness. Izutsu notes in his study of ethical terms in the Qur'ān that 'It is this basic antithesis between *īmān* and *kufr* that furnishes the ultimate yardstick by which all human qualities are divided, in the Islamic outlook, into two radically opposed

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13. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* …, VIII, Book 76, No. 509.
14. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* …, Faith 58.
15. Aḥmad Al-Dardīr, 1331/1913, *al-Kharīda al-Bahiyya*, Cairo, Al-Maṭbaʿa al-ʿĀmira, pp. 54–6.
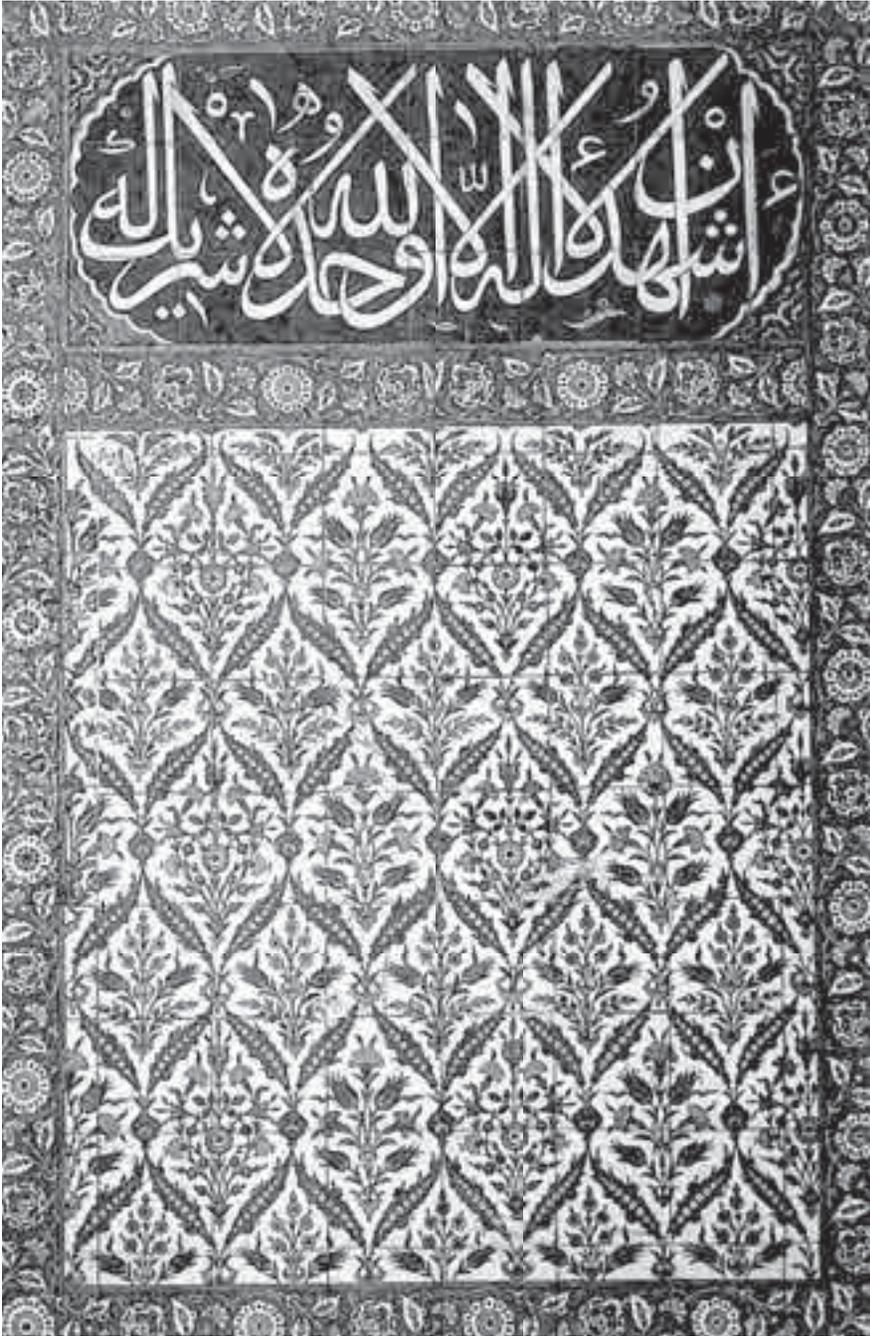
IV–1.2   Panel of *Shahādatayn*
© J.C. Chabrier

moral categories.'[16] Other attitudes contrasted to faith are hypocrisy (*nifāq*) and compromising the uniqueness of God by attributing power to something else (*shirk*).

Contemplation of two books, the book of revelation (*kitāb tadwīnī*) and the book of nature (*kitāb takwīnī*), is said to lead to faith by classical authors.[17] The sources of knowledge leading to faith are many, as the Qur'ān states: 'We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves, so that it will become clear to them that it (the revelation) is the truth' (XLI.53).

An important dimension of faith for Muslims is certainty, and even this certainty is depicted as possessing levels. The Qur'ān speaks of the knowledge of certainty (*ʿilm al-yaqīn*) (CII.5, 7) and the eye or essence of certainty (*ʿayn al-yaqīn*), as well as the truth (*ḥaqq*) of certainty.[18] For the mystics, this stage of certainty arises from a level of experience beyond intellectual analysis:

> Certainty is an expression for the appearance of the light of truth in the case of the lifting of the curtain of (one's) humanity through the experience of ecstasy and tasting – not through the proofs of reason and textual tradition.

> As long as that light appears from behind a veil it is called the light of faith (*nūr al-īmān*), but once it appears unveiled it is called 'the light of certainty' although in reality these are one single light.[19]

Faith is sometimes described in Islamic sources as a 'light' cast into human hearts,[20] and also as having a sweetness (*ḥalāwa*)[21] that flavours acts of worship and ultimately all of life. The experience of faith may be further described as an expansion (*sharḥ*) of the breast, as in the ninety-fourth chapter of the Qur'ān:

> Did you not expand your breast, and lift from you the burden, that had weighed so heavily on your back.

> And have We not raised you in dignity.

> Behold with every hardship comes ease, with every hardship comes ease.

> Thus when you are freed [from distress] remain steadfast, and turn to your Sustainer with love.[22]

16. Izutsu, *The Structure of the Ethical Terms …*, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

17. F. Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'ān*, Minneapolis, Minn., Bibliotheca Islamica, 1989, p. 71.

18. The phrase 'truth of certainty' is used in Qur'ān LVI.95 and LXIX.51.

19. Maḥmūd Kāshānī, *Miṣbāḥ al-hidāya*, Tehran, Kitābkhāna-e Sanā'ī, 1946, p. 75.

20. XXXIX.22, 'The one whose heart has been opened to Islam will be illuminated by a light from his Lord', cited by Abū Shayba, *Kitāb al-īmān*, p. 32.

21. See for example Ibn Rajab (d. 1396), *Sharḥ kitāb al-īmān*, Cairo, Dār al-Ḥaramayn, 1998, p. 15.

22. Qur'ān XCIV, adapted from Muḥammad Asad's translation.

Among other semantic ideas associated with faithfulness are sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*) and purity, which convey the opposite meaning to *shirk* – associating or mixing.[23] Lived faith is associated with attitudes such as patience and *khushū* (humbleness and self-abasement leading to tranquility and contentment).[24] In particular, the cultivation of this attitude during the ritual prayer (*salāt*) was said to develop the relationship of the heart to the body, and direct a person's focus away from worldly affairs. *Dhikr* (repetition of pious phrases or the divine names)[25] and recitation of the Qurʾān[26] are further religious practices that inculcate the attitude of devoted faith, according to the Qurʾān.[27]

From the Islamic perspective, faith is a natural instinct of humans. Most scholars have held that faith also matures and grows towards completion, or alternatively can decrease.

According to a *ḥadīth*:

> The example of a believer is that of a fresh tender plant; from whatever direction the wind comes, it bends it, but when the wind becomes quiet, it becomes straight again. Similarly, a believer is afflicted with calamities (but he remains patient till Allāh removes his difficulties.) And an impious wicked person is like a pine tree which keeps hard and straight till Allāh cuts (breaks) it down when He wishes.[28]

This illustrates for Muslims the effect of faith in instilling confidence and resilience in the face of life's trials.

Theology

The Islamic tradition is often characterized as emphasizing practice rather than theology. As one Western expert put it, Islam should properly be spoken of as 'orthopraxic' rather than 'orthodoxic', in the sense that no body analogous to the Christian church formulated a set of doctrines to which all Muslims should adhere.[29] Within more technical writings on doctrine composed by proponents of schools such as the Ashʿariyya, however, a concern with establishing 'right belief' is evident, since every argument may be seen as disputing an opposing Muʿtazili position. Examples of such theological issues are the nature of the

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23. Izutsu, *The Structure of the Ethical Terms …*, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

24. Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitāb al-īmān*, Damascus, Manshūrāt al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1961, p. 24.

25. For example Qurʾān (LI.55; LXXXVII.10, 11).

26. 'When its verses are recited to them they increase them in faith' (VIII.2).

27. Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitāb al-īman*, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

28. M. Muhsin Khan, translation of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, VII, Book 70, Number 547; XI, Book 93, No. 558.

29. W. C. Smith, *Modern Islam in India*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1957, p. 20.

Divine attributions and acts, their relation to the essence, their relation to the real world, the nature of prophecy and related issues. Still, the performance of the basic rituals usually set the standard for community affiliation, as reflected in the *Ḥadīth*:

> Anas said, The messenger of Allāh said: 'Whoever offers prayers as we do and turns his face to our qibla and eats the animal slaughtered by us, he is a Muslim for whom is the covenant of Allāh and the covenant of the Messenger of Allāh; so do not violate Allāh's covenant.[30]

One reason for resisting the imposition of credal adherence as a test of community membership was the experience of the early Muslim community in which the break-away Khārijī sect sought to enjoin their standards of behaviour on all Muslims.[31] Soon, however, the political dispute branched into rancorous theological debates over the scope of human free will, and a number of related issues such as the 'justice' of God and whether He can forgive sinners or punish obedient believers. The idea that the grave sinner had left the realm of faith led the Kharijites to attack other Muslims as apostates. The Muslim mainstream, in reaction to this extreme stringency, moved towards the opposite position, that the declaration of faith was sufficient to guarantee paradise to the believer.

Al-Ghazālī wrote:

> It would be wise of you that you restrain your tongue as much as possible from condemning those who pray toward Mecca, and say: 'there is no god but God and Muḥammad is His Apostle', without contradicting (by what they say and do) this confession of faith.[32]

Interpretations of the quietist Murji'ite school, who ultimately evolved into the Sunni majority, emphasized faith (*īmān*) and made it the basis of membership in the Muslim community. In order to do this, they specified essential aspects of faith including inner knowledge (*ma'rifa*) and the counting true or affirming (*taṣdīq*) of certain doctrines. According to their formulation, the outer aspect of faith entailed public confession or verbal acknowledgement (*iqrār*).[33]

The attempt of the 'Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mūn (d. 833 CE), to establish the theology of a particular group, the Mu'tazilites, as a state-sponsored

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30. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, I, Book 8, no. 387.
31. M. Watt, 'The Concept of īmān in Islamic Theology', *Der Islam,* XLIII, 1967, No. 1/2, pp. 1–10.
32. Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief, op. cit.*, p. 29. Also, Lewisohn, *Beyond Faith and Infidelity: The Sufi Poetry and Teachings of Mahmud Shabistari*, Richmond, Surrey, Curzon Press, 1995, p. 275.
33. Watt, 'The Concept of īmān' …, *op. cit.*, p. 4. Also discussed extensively in M. Watt, 'The Formative Period of Islamic Theology', in *Faith and Community*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1973, pp. 119–48.

programme met with resistance and failure. One result of this was that individual conscience was given a large scope in matters of faith, although prominent scholars and theologians did elaborate certain doctrines as essential to Muslim belief. The outline of these necessary elements of belief is present in Qurʾān II.177 and the previously cited *ḥadīth* of Gabriel, such that the principal Muslim beliefs are stated to be five:

- *Tawḥīd*: the unity and uniqueness of God.
- Angels: belief in the existence of these other beings and in the world of the unseen.
- Prophets and scriptures: the Qurʾān states, 'I recognize all Prophets and books',[34] thus Muslim faith includes not only the belief in the final revelation, but the assurance that God has sent prophets to all nations.[35]
- Judgement: the belief that actions have consequences and that there will be a future life.
- Divine decree and destiny (*al-qaḍāʾ wa-l-qadar*): submission to God and recognition that His will governs all that transpires.

An important summary statement incorporated into many theological discussions of faith is the *Ḥadīth*, 'Faith is knowledge in the heart, a voicing with the tongue, and an activity with the limbs.'[36] These three elements of faith – knowledge in the heart, verbal testimony and actions – received various strands of theological elaboration. In terms of faith/knowledge in the heart, the actualizing of such faith, known as *taṣdīq*, is one topic treated in the theological literature.

Such faith in the heart was subject, according to many theologians, to increase, decrease and completion. For example, the introduction to al-Bukhārī's 'Book of Faith' affirms the increase and decrease of faith based on the Qurʾān:

> Belief is both saying and acting and it increases and decreases. Allāh revealed the following verses concerning the subject: 'That they might add faith to their faith' (XLVIII.4); 'And we increased them in guidance' (XVIII.13); 'And Allāh increases in guidance those who walk aright' (XIX.76) … and the believers may increase in faith (LXXIV.31). 'Which of you has had his faith increased by it?

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34. 'And those who believe in Allāh and His messengers and make no distinction between any of them [in belief], to them He will grant their rewards' (IV.152).

35. 'And certainly We raised in every nation a messenger, saying: Serve Allāh and shun the devil' (XVI.36).

36. Muḥammad ibn Yazīd Ibn Māja, *Sunan ibn Māja*, Riyadh, Dār al-Salām, 1420/1999; Muqaddima cited in W. Chittick, *Faith and Practice of Islam*, Albany, NY., State University of New York Press, 1992, p. 6. For a discussion of whether the final phrase ʿamal bi-l-arkān' refers the limbs or the five pillars see W. C. Smith, 'Arkān', in *Essays on Islamic Civilization presented to Niyazi Berke,* ed. D. P. Little, Leiden, Netherlands, E. J. Brill, 1976, pp. 303–16.

As for those who believed, it has increased their faith (IX.124). And also the statement of Allāh, Those unto whom men said, 'The people have gathered against you [a great army], therefore fear them', but it (only) increased their faith' (III.173). And also the statement of Allāh, 'And it only added to their faith and to their submissiveness to Allāh' (XXXIII.22).[37]

The concept of increase and decrease in faith was rejected, however, by the moderate Murjiʿites and by Abū Ḥanīfa.[38] This must be understood as the predominance in their case of a legal rather than an existential concern about faith in terms of its defining membership in the Muslim community.

The second theological qualification for faith, that of declaration (*iqrār*) or verbal testimony, is explained by a contemporary scholar of Islam as follows.

> It is difficult to overestimate the importance of speech in the Islamic perspective. God himself creates the universe through speaking. 'Our only word to a thing, when We desire it, is to say to it "Be!" and it is' (XVI.40). God provides guidance by speaking through the Prophets. Hence, all the scriptures are the speech of God. The Koran is God's speech to Muslims and the foundation of everything Islamic. Moreover, human beings return to God by speaking to Him; that is, through prayer. As we saw earlier, the Shahāda, the first pillar of Islam and the fundamental act of Muslims, is a speech act. It is not sufficient simply to think that there is no god but God and Muḥammad is His messenger. One must also say so. The ultimate importance of this speech act is indicted by the fact that it alone suffices for a person to be a Muslim.[39]

One element of professing faith suggested by *ḥadīth* reports and elaborated in the theological literature was the inability of any person to guarantee the validity of his own faith, hence the addition of the phrase 'if God wills' to the assertion, 'I am a believer or Muslim'. Whether this is in fact appropriate or necessary occupies some attention in classical discussions of faith, for example, those of al-Ashʿarī and Ibn Taymiyya.[40] According to al-Ghazālī, the phrase of exception (*istithnāʾ*) should be uttered out of humbleness, courtesy, doubt over the perfection of our own belief, and fear of the hour of death.[41] The exception did not indicate doubt in personal faith at that moment but rather was an admission that we do not know how God will judge or what our

37. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, trans. M. Muhsin Khan, Beirut, Dār al-ʿArabia, 1985, p. 15.
38. M. Watt, 'The Concept of īmān in Islamic Theology' …, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
39. Chittick and Murata, *The Vision of Islam, op. cit.*, 38–9.
40. Ibn Sallām, *Kitāb al-īman,* ed. M. N. al-Dīn Albānī, Damascus, Maṭbaʿat al-Umamiyya, 1960, pp. 67ff. Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitāb al-īmān* …, *op. cit.*, p. 380.
41. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *The Foundations of the Articles of Faith* (from *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*) trans. N. A. Faris, Lahore, Pakistan, Ashraf, 1963, pp. 122–35.

final state will be, thus the response should be seeking forgiveness from Allāh (*istighfār*).[42]

An important way of conceptualizing the relationship of faith and works is disclosed by discussions of the terms *īmān* and *islam* in relationship to one another.[43] According to a *ḥadīth* reported in the *Musnad* of Ibn Ḥanbal, 'Islam is external; faith (*īmān*) belongs to the heart.'[44]

Later theological and legal discussions, for example those of the Ashʿarites and Shāfiʿites, made a distinction between *īmān* and *islam*. Al-Ashʿarī for example, identified Islam with the two constituent parts of the *shahāda*, in other words with the verbal testimony that grants admission to the community of the Prophet. He therefore concludes that Islam is different from *īmān*. In al-Ashʿarī's *Ibāna*, it is stated that Islam is wider than belief; accordingly, 'all Islam is not faith'.[45] Al-Jurjānī (1413), a Shāfiʿite, says that 'Islam is the verbal profession of faith without the agreement of the heart, while faith is the agreement of the heart and the tongue.'[46]

For Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), Islam is 'the external and, so to speak, social application of the law' while *īmān* is 'the interiorization of Islam'.[47] The rationale for the differentiation of *īmān* from *islam* is derived, not only from the *Ḥadīth*, but also from the Qurʾānic passage (XLIX.14):

> The desert Arabs say, 'We have believed.' Say to them, 'You have not believed; rather say, "We have submitted". Faith has not yet entered your hearts. If you adopt obedience to Allāh and His messenger, He will not diminish anything from the reward of your works. Surely Allāh is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful. In fact the true believers are those who believed in Allāh and His messenger; then they entertained no doubt and exerted their utmost in the Way of Allāh with themselves and their wealth. They indeed are the truthful ones (*ṣiddiqīn*).'

A further way of understanding the distinction of the two terms is Ibn Taymiyya's observation that the heart is made sound by faith and the body by Islam.[48]

In his *tafsīr* of the passage cited above, Syed Mawdūdī (1979) notes that the terms *islam* and *īmān*, although contrasted here, are not generally used in

42. H. Laoust, *La Profession de foi d'Ibn Baṭṭa*, Damascus, Institut Français de Damas, 1958, p. 81.

43. L. Gardet, 'Les noms et les statuts: le problème de la foi et des œuvres en Islam', *Studia Islamica* V, 1956, pp. 61–123.

44. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, III, Istanbul, Cagri Yayinlari, 1992, p. 184.

45. L. Gardet, 'Islam', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* IV, new ed., Leiden, Netherlands, E. J. Brill, 1954, p. 172.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 173.

47. *Ibid.*

48. Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitāb al-īmān*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

IV–1.3   Photo of Muḥammad Iqbal
Courtesy of Z. Ishaq Ansari

the Qurʾān in the sense of being opposites.[49] While we can distinguish an external context to the term *islam*, it does not imply a deficient type of faith, and in fact in most instances *islam* is used in such a way as to encompass both faith and action.[50] This is also the position of Ibn Taymiyya in *Kitāb al-īmān*.[51]

Referring to this verse, the contemporary scholar Mahmoud Ayyoub observes:

> The first level [*islam*] is legal, cultural, and social, expressed in the individual's membership of the Muslim community. The framework of this identity is Islam as an institutionalized religion and legal system.

> The second (*īmān*) is a deeper identity which is based on faith or *īmān*. It belongs to God alone to decide as to the truth or falsity of this identity …. These two levels of identity stood side by side in the formative years of the Muslim community, and their legal and theological legitimacy is clearly affirmed in the Qurʾān and in the early *Ḥadīth* tradition. Faith as a universal and primordial basis of true religious identity was not limited to the Muslim alone. Rather it extended to the Jews and Christians as people of the Book, and to all those who have true faith in God.[52]

Theological discussions of faith often include the concept of its potential completion or perfection (*istikmāl*). A Qurʾānic correlate of this may be found in the account of Abraham who asks God to give him evidence so that his heart may be at rest (II.60). Abraham in the Qurʾānic account is depicted as being drawn towards the realization of monotheism and faith in the one true God through a progressive rejection of idols, then the stars and finally the heavenly bodies.[53] Ibn ʿArabī (1240) makes this connection to Abraham in his meditation on faith and the *shahāda*:

> As for the meaning of the word, *īmān*, it means the stability of the heart (*istiqrār al-qalb*) and the contentment of the soul. In effect, when the servant seeks out his Lord vacillating between the idol, the Sun, the moon and the luminous bodies, plunged in perplexity, he is unstable and disturbed. When God knows

49. There is a concept in semantics: '*mā idhā ijtamaʿā iftaraqā, wa-idhā iftaraqā ijtamaʿā*' regarding synonyms: when used in isolation, they are inclusive; when used together, they are exclusive. Thus, *islām* and *īmān* may stand for each other in isolation, while diverging when used together.

50. S. Abu-l-Aʿla Maududi, *The Meaning of the Qurʾān*, VIII, trans. ʿAbdul ʿAzīz Kamāl , Lahore, Pakistan, Islamic Publications, 1986, pp. 120–2.

51. Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitāb al-īmān*, *op. cit.*, pp. 9–11.

52. M. Ayoub, 'Islam and Christianity Between Tolerance and Acceptance', *Islam and Christian Muslim Relations* XI (2), 1991, p. 173. Also, Lewisohn, *Beyond Faith and Infidelity …*, *op. cit.*, p. 271

53. F. Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qurʾān*, Chicago, Ill., Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980, p. 101.

that his intention is sincere, He fills his heart with the light of guidance (*nūr al-hidāya*), so that the heart stabilizes and the soul becomes at rest.[54]

Muslim creeds

The movement to establish creeds in Islam came later, taking into account the background of sectarian disputes over points of doctrine and allegiance.

> Many Ḥanafites and Maturidites consider *islām* and *īmān* to be synonymous, yet define each of them separately as a verbal confession (*iqrār*), sometimes linking this with intimate adherence or with knowledge of the heart, or both. The second-century [AH] work of Ḥanafite theology Fiqh al-akbar and the third century Wasiyyat Abī Ḥanīfa ignore the question altogether. The Fiqh-i Akbar II draws a distinction: islām is equated with total surrender (*taslīm*) and total obedience (*inqiyād*) to the divine laws. According to this text, 'there is no faith without Islam and Islam without faith cannot be found'.[55]

From the fourth Islamic century onwards, credal statements of basic doctrines achieved a high state of logical argumentation and reflected a broad consensus that had been achieved on the content of faith. A prominent example is the creed of Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī (1068–1142), commented on by Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (1389).[56]

THE GENRE OF BOOKS OF FAITH

The 'Book of Faith' is the title of one of the chapters of the *ḥadīth* collection of al-Bukhārī and thus 'faith' became a standard category in the discussion of normative Islam, often the first chapter, in such works. A *Kitāb al-īmān* was also compiled by the noted *ḥadīth* scholar Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (855 CE). Gradually, 'books of faith' emerged as a separate topic within Islamic religious literature. A search for such titles indicates that the scope is widened by including works such as *Al-Ibāna* (The Elucidation), *Kitāb al-Sunna* (Book of the *Sunna*) and *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* (Book of Unity), all of which are usually treatments of aspects of faith. For example, Abū Bakr ibn Abī Shayba (d. 235/849) collected his own set of *ḥadīths* relevant to the exploration of what is faith. Considering these *ḥadīths* we find topics being addressed such as the essential elements of

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54. Ibn ʿArabī, *Tadhkirat al-khawāṣṣ wa-ʿaqīdat ahl al-ikhtiṣāṣ*, trans. R. Deladrière as *Profession de Foi*, Paris, Sindbad, 1978, Part 78, p. 156.

55. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, Cambridge, Frank Cass, 1965, p. 194. Cited in C. Turner, 'The Ubiquitous Faqh : A Reconsideration of the Terms *mn, islm* and *ʿilm* and Their Role in the Rise to Predominance of the Jurist in the Islamic World of Learning', working paper, Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, University of Durham, 1996.

56. Studied and trans. E. E. Elder, *A Commentary of the Creed of Islam*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1950.

faith, the characteristics of faith, the importance of prayer, character, ritual purity, and patience in faith[57]

This collection may be considered a prelude to the elaboration of the scope and nature of faith that is carried out much more explicitly in the *Kitāb al-īmān* of the theologian and philologist Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim Ibn Sallām (224/838–9). The tone and structure of this latter work is much more argumentative, using many of the same *ḥadīths* as well as copious citations from the Qurʾān to criticize the idea that verbal assent alone is sufficient for faith. One of Ibn Sallām's major points is that God did not reveal faith to the Muslims in its complete form until late during the Prophet's mission.

One of the most complete treatments of the topic of faith is the *Kitāb al-īmān* of Ibn Taymiyya. This work provides a clear and comprehensive discussion of all topics related to faith in Islam.

Al-Ghazālī

Another place to look for Muslim treatments of faith is the works of al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), the Muslim intellectual who left behind his professorship at the prestigious Niẓāmiyya *madrasa* in Baghdad in order to pursue certainty. Some aspects of faith treated in the voluminous writings of al-Ghazālī are the nature of faith, the pursuit of certainty, and the development or maturation of faith.

As we have seen, the concept of levels of faith is intrinsic to the Qurʾānic vision of the topic. Al-Ghazālī tells an interesting parable of the acquisition of faith being at degrees. For example, the faith of the common folk, blind imitation (*taqlīd*), is such that if they were told, 'There's a fire over there', they would accept that, just as common folk accept religious teachings from their teachers. The next level of faith is that held by the rationalist theologians. Such faith must be substantiated by intellectual and logical proofs. Thus, rationalists would accept the existence of the fire if informed of all of its salient characteristics. The degree of faith of the Sufi, however, is one based on mystical taste or experience (*dhawq*). Such an individual would have to experience the fire itself – by plunging a limb into it and being burned – in order to be assured of its nature and reality. This, for al-Ghazālī, is the epitome of faith.

Most scholars, however, regarded faith based on knowledge as the superior mode.

> The majority of the manuals of kalām regard as much superior to 'faith by *taqlīd*' faith based on knowledge (or science), *īmān ʿan ʿilm*: an enlightened faith,

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57. *Kitāb al-īmān*, ed. Muḥammad Naṣir al-Dīn Albānī, Damascus, Maṭbaʿat al-Umamiyya, 1960.

which 'proves' its object. The 'proof' in question being understood as arising from the arguments and reasonings of the mutakallimūn, the 'scientific' faith thus lauded was exposed to attacks by opponents, both Ḥanbalī and falāsifa.[58]

In another engaging allegory, al-Ghazālī compares the integrity of faith to a precious glass vase. If the vessel is shattered, there is no way to simply paste it back together as it was. Rather it must be melted down in the crucible of longing, sincere seeking and personal transformation, in order to be reconstituted in integral but renewed form.[59] This is in a sense autobiographical, mirroring al-Ghazālī's search for such experientially based faith, resurrected from the ashes of doubt. In yet another of his works, al-Ghazālī treats the inculcation of faith during the human life cycle, mapping the development of personal faith through a process of intellectual and spiritual maturation:

> The first step is to commit it [religious teaching] to memory, after which comes understanding, then belief, then certainty and acceptance, all of which obtain in the child without proof.[60]

> But the way to strengthen and confirm it [faith] does not lie in learning the art of argumentation and speculation. It is found in the reading and exposition of the Qurʾān, in the study of the traditions and their meaning, and in the performance of religious duties and acts of worship.[61]

Here we see him articulate a position on a dimension of faith suitable for the majority of people, as the way of *taqlīd* (accepting authority through trusted teachers of sources). Such *taqlīd* or imitation can, through practice and devotion, lead to actualized and genuine understanding and embodiment (*taḥqīq*) of faith.[62]

Al-Ghazālī's extended discussion of the inner dimensions of faith in his master work, *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn* (Revival of the Religious Sciences) inspired the genre of *asrār al-dīn* (secrets of religion) works in Islam. Major exemplars of this genre following al-Ghazālī are *Qawāʿid al-aḥkām fī maṣāliḥ al-anām* (Principles of the *Sharīʿa* Rulings as Benefiting Humanity) of ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn al-Salām al-Sulamī (d. 1262), *Asrār arkān al-islām* (Secrets of the

58. L. Gardet, 'Īmān', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd. ed., Edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W. P. Heinrich. Brill Online, 2015. See also L. Gardet and M. M. Anawati, *Introduction à la théologie musulmane,* 2nd ed., Paris, J. Vrin, 1970, p. 332.

59. Al-Ghazālī, trans. W. M. Watt, as *Faith and Practice of al-Ghazālī*, Oxford, Oneworld, 1998, p. 26.

60. Al-Ghazālī, *The Foundations of the Articles of Faith …*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

61. *Ibid,* pp. 13–14.

62. F. Meier, 'The Priority of Faith and Thinking Well of Others', in *Essays on Islamic Piety and Mysticism*, trans. J. O'Kane, Leiden, Netherlands, E. J. Brill, 1999, pp. 623–5. See also al-Ghazālī, *Iljām al-ʿawām, ʿan ʿilm al-kalām,* Beirut, Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1985, pp. 111–18.

Pillars of Islam) of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb Shaʿrānī (d. 1565/1566), and Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi's (d. 1762) *Ḥujjat Allāh al-Bāligha* (The Conclusive Argument from God).

The process of deepening of faith and drawing nearer to God through the performance of outer ritual in Islamic life is a theme of these works, echoed in the resonance between the Qurʾānic term *tazkiyya*, meaning 'purification of the soul', and '*ẓāhara*', referring to an extrinsic state of ritual purity.[63] A fundamental issue treated in such works is the meaning and purpose behind outer aspects of Islamic religious obligations and ritual.[64]

> It may be thought that the rulings of the divine laws do not encompass any aspect of the beneficial purposes (*maṣāliḥ*) and that there is no relationship between human actions and that which Allāh makes a requital for them, and that being obligated by the divine laws is like the case of a master who wants to test the obedience of his servant, so he orders him to lift a stone or to touch a tree – something which has no use to it besides being a test, so that when he obeys or disobeys, he is requited for his action. This is a false idea which is refuted by the practice of the Prophet, and the consensus of the generations whose goodness has been attested.[65] The one who is incapable of recognizing that actions are considered in the light of the intentions and the psychological attitudes from which they emerge, only touches knowledge in the sense that a needle touches water when it is submerged in the ocean and then withdrawn. It is better that he should weep for himself rather than boast about his own ideas. The Prophet said, 'Indeed, actions are judged according to the intentions'[66] and God said, 'Their flesh and their blood will not reach Allāh, but the devotion from you will reach Him.'[67]

This passage underlines the importance of the intention which emerges from and reinforces faith in Islam. Each good action should be undertaken in the name of Allāh, all activity should be recognized as depending on God's will, and every circumstance of life should be received as coming from the divine source and be met with gratitude and acceptance.

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63. Discussed in Izutsu, *The Structure of the Ethical …*, *op. cit.*, pp. 189–91.
64. Shāh Walī Allāh, 'Preface' to *Ḥujjat Allāh al-bāligha*, trans. M. K. Hermansen, Leiden, Netherlands, E. J. Brill, 1996, p. 11. Fritz Meier, 'The Priority of Faith', *op. cit.*, p. 625.
65. The first three Islamic generations, according to *ḥadīths*. For example, Bukhārī, Riqāq, 7, 'The good (*khayr*) of my community are my generation, then the second, then the third.'
66. Bukhārī, Muslim and other collections.
67. Qurʾān XXII.37. This *ḥadīth* refers to the fact that it is the intention behind the sacrifice that is important, and that therefore it is lawful to eat and distribute to others the meat from animals that have been sacrificed to God.

The Sufi on faith and the *shahāda*

The *shahāda* is one of the most important formulas of remembrance (*dhikr*) used by the Sufi. *Dhikr* or the remembrance of Allāh is enjoined in the Qurʾān, 'Remember your Lord with a great remembrance' (VIII.45, XXXIII.41), and 'standing, sitting, lying down' (III.191). Ritually, the Sufi employ various pious phrases to form the content of this repetition. The best *dhikr*, according to a *ḥadīth*, is the *shahāda*.[68]

Annemarie Schimmel, commenting on the significance of the *shahāda* and its use as a litany, observes:

> Besides its purely religious significance, the credo *lā ilāha illā Allāh* has an importance in the realms of art and also of mystic poetry which can scarcely be overestimated. In the Arabic script its alternating letters alif and lā – two letters with vertical stems – form a wonderful basic pattern for every kind of decorative ornamentation of the formula which is, of course, found wherever Muslims have reached, and in both minor arts and architectural inscriptions these weighty words have been ornated with so intricate and bewildering interlacing ornaments that an uninitiated would scarcely imagine that the essence of the Muslim faith is concealed behind them. On the other hand the rhythmical wording of the formula has made it the typical *dhikr* of mystic circles which can be repeated hundreds of times, either in solitude or in congregation, often connected with breath control or rhythmical movement.[69]

The first *shahāda*, 'There is no God but God', may be thought of as having two main elements which are known as the negation and the affirmation (*nafy* and *ithbāt*). The *lā* (no) or word of absolute negation, in a mystical sense, means a total rejection of all attachments to the world including the attachment to ego identification. The fulfilment of this is in the mystical state of self-annihilation (*fanāʾ*) that is associated with the path of sainthood.

There is, however, a return from this negation through the second component of affirmation, the 'but' or 'except' (*illā*) which affirms the existence of Allāh – seeing and experiencing Allāh in all things is the implication of the affirmation. The concepts of negation and affirmation parallel the Sufi states of annihilation (*fanāʾ*) and subsistence (*baqāʾ*).

> The shahāda is the model for this constant movement which leads man from the depth of ignorance to the knowledge of God, but which also expresses the constant interplay of the Divine *jalāl*, majesty, and *jamāl*, beauty, of *ʿadam*, nonexistence, and *wujūd*, existence, of *sukr*, intoxication, and *saḥw*, sobriety, of

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68. 'The best *duʿā* is *duʿā* on the day of ʿArafa, and the best thing that I or the Prophets before me have said is 'There is no god but Allāh, alone, without any partner' (*Lā ilāha illā-llāh, waḥdahu lā sharīka lahu*), Mālik, *Muwaṭṭaʾ*, Book 15, Number 15.8.32.

69. A. Schimmel, *Gabriel's Wing*, Lahore, Pakistan, Iqbal Academy, 1989, p. 89.

IV–1.4   Rūmi's tomb
© G. Degeorge

qabs, pressure, and *basṭ*, expansion, and, most importantly, *fanāʾ*, annihilation, and *baqāʾ*, remaining in God. Each is part of life, for only the constant change between systole and diastole, of taking in the breath and releasing it again (as in the dhikr of the shahāda), makes life possible; it manifests itself as Iqbal would say, in khalwa, solitary meditation, and jilwa, manifestation.[70]

In a sermon reflecting these concepts in the structure of the first *shahāda*, the great mystical poet, Jalāl ud-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273 CE) wrote:

Sweep all away with the broom of 'No'![71] Every king or prince has a herald for every ceremony. The herald which sweeps aside both worlds from before the face of the Courtiers and Kings of Holiness is the phrase: THERE IS NO GOD BUT GOD.

Everything keeps you distant from your quest

Whether words of blasphemy or belief

Everything holds you back from the Friend

Whether images of beauty or of beast

You'll clean no thorn and thistle from this path

Unless the credal NO serves as your herald

When NO casts you from fame into confusion

Then follow Godhead's light through BUT to GOD.[72]

Muḥammad Iqbal (d. 1938 CE) consecrates an entire poem in his collection *Pas cheh bayad kard ay aqwām-e sharq* (What Must be Done, O Peoples of the East) to the meaning of '*lā ilāha illā Allāh*':[73]

Until the meaning of '*lā ilāha*' is understood

The bonds of 'other than Allāh' cannot be broken

In this world the beginning starts from the word 'Lā'

This is the first station of the man of God

70. A. Schimmel, 'The Sufis and the Shahāda', in *Islam's Understanding of Itself*, Proceedings of the Eighth Della Vida Conference, ed. S. Vyronis, Malibu, Calif., Udena, 1983, p. 105.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

72. F. Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West*, Oxford, Oneworld, 2000, p. 133.

73. M. Iqbal, *Kulliyāt-i farsī*, Lahore, Pakistan, Shaykh Ghulām ʿAlī, 1990, pp. 813–15. Iqbal also composed an Urdu poem with the refrain '*lā ilāha illā Allāh*', translated by D. Matthews in *An Anthology of Urdu Verse in English*, New Delhi, Oxford, 1995, pp. 13–15.

The one in whose hand is the sword of 'lā'

Has all of created things at his command.

The second part of the *shahāda* (kalimat al-risāla)

The second aspect of the *shahāda*, the affirmation or testimony that Muḥammad is the Prophet of God, entails acceptance of the divine word transmitted through the Messenger and the acknowledgement of his exemplary role for Muslims.

The Qur'ān states that 'you have in God's messenger a good example' (XXXIII.21) and further indicates that 'the one who obeys the Prophet thereby obeys God' (IV.80).

Since the Prophet and his role in history, as well as the Islamic doctrines relating to prophecy, are extensively dealt with in Part II, Chapters 1, 2 and 3 of the present work, I shall not repeat this information here. Suffice it to indicate that the attestation to the prophethood of Muḥammad includes within the *shahāda* the specific content of acknowledging the Qur'ānic message as divine guidance, and the person of Muḥammad as being the embodiment and exemplar of this guidance to humanity.

Contemporary reflections

As noted, from the time of the Prophet, the *shahāda* and the concept of *tawḥīd* that it embodies have represented bearing witness to faith in all aspects of Muslim life. In more recent times, especially in the face of modernity and secularism, Muslim scholars have been confronted with issues of the authenticity of faith and the integration of the personal and public, the spiritual and social, aspects of faith. Responses have included on the one hand, a social and political imperative to maintain religious faith and its practical embodiment in all spheres of human activity, and on the other hand, to search for an authentic, rather than conventional expression of this faith. 'For the modern exegetes, true islām is the sincere submission of the individual and, ideally, the community, but it is islām in its real (*ḥaqīqī*) rather than its conventional (*ʿurfī*) sense that is required.'[74]

The sense of a bifurcation that has taken place between the legal and the spiritual elements of Islam and the attempt to restore their integration is found, for example, in the works of twentieth-century Muslim reformist

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74. C. Turner, *Ubiquitous Faqh …*, *op. cit.*, p. 15. See Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-manār*, 12 vols., Beirut, Dār al-Maʿrifa, n.d. III, p. 358.

thinkers Maḥmoud Tāhā[75] and ʿAlī Sharīʿatī.[76] Each of them was critical of existing political and interpretive orders as having deviated from the ethos of faith and practice central to the Prophet's teaching.

On the other hand, criticism has been levelled by other thinkers at those Muslims who had accepted a two-level concept of faith that distinguishes between the social and the spiritual perspectives. This call for an integration of all aspects of life on the basis of Islam as a total system has inspired a number of contemporary social and political movements in Muslim societies.

Such Islamist or activist interpretations of faith have been offered by Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966 CE) and Syed Abu-l-Aʿlā Mawdūdī (d. 1979 CE). For example, the Egyptian Quṭb understands Islam as a force for liberation that must be implemented, not merely in personal life, but as the foundational principle of the entire social and political order.

> This divine path, represented in its final stage by Islam, as entrusted to Muḥammad (s.a.w) is not brought into existence in the world, in the realm of humanity, simply by virtue of its revelation by Allāh. It is not brought into existence by being preached and proclaimed to the people. It is not brought into existence by divine enforcement, in the same way that Allāh enforces His will in the ordering of the firmament and the revolution of the planets. It is brought into being by a group of people undertaking the task, believing in it completely and conforming to it as closely as possible, trying to bring it into being in the hearts and lives of others too; striving to this end with all they possess. They struggle against human weakness and human passion within themselves; they struggle against those whom weakness and passion impel to resist divine guidance. They attain thereby, in the realization of the divine path, a point made possible by human nature and permitted material realities.[77]

Mawdūdī likewise upholds the importance of a social and political context for the expression of faith such as a truly Islamic state. At the same time, he rests the case for faith both on the proofs of reason and the need for inspiration.

> This is the judgment of reason in this case. But the state of attestation and belief which called 'Faith' cannot be attained by this judgment. Inspiration is needed to acquire Faith. An inner conviction of the heart is required to attain Faith. For the attainment of Faith a voice from within should arise which purges the spirit of all contradiction, doubt and vacillation and which sounds a clarion call that 'the conjectures of the people are false and truth is that which has been revealed by truthful men not on the basis of conjecture but through knowledge and intuition.'[78]

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75. M. M. Taha, *The Second Message of Islam*, Syracuse, N.Y., Syracuse University Press, 1996.

76. ʿAlī Shariʿatī, *Tashayyuʿ-i ʿAlavi va tashayyuʿ-i Safavi*, Tehran, Intishārat Ḥusayniyya, 1971.

77. Sayyid Quṭb, *The Religion of Islam*, Delhi, Markazi MaṭbaʾI Islami, 1974, p. 6.

78. Syed Abu-l-Aʿlā Mawdudi, *Vitals of Faith*, Lahore, Islamic Publications, 1977, p. 12.

In a move echoing the previously cited literature on the 'inner dimensions' (*asrār*) or 'renewal' (*iḥyā*) of faith, contemporary Muslim writers call for a revival of faith through infusing practice and society with that original commitment and intention to realize the unity and uniqueness of Allāh, infusing all creation.

Conclusion

The *shahāda*, the testimony of faith, lies at the centre of Islam, marking a Muslim's entry into this world as well as the acceptance of formal Islam. The negation of all but God is the essence of *tawḥīd* and thus the theology and practice of the Muslims are united in this brief but profound phrase. Contemporary Muslims find themselves distinguished by the affirmation of this faith in the face of the challenges of materialism and scepticism. As Muḥammad Iqbal says:

> The sign of the disbeliever is that he is lost in the horizons

> The sign of the Believer is that the horizons are lost in him.[79]

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79. M. Iqbal, *Kullīyāt-i Urdū*, Lahore, Pakistan, Shaykh Ghulām ʿAlī, 1989, p. 507.

Chapter 4.2

Worship in Islam

Abu-l-Yazid al-ʿAjami

Introduction

Technical terms generally begin with the basic sense of a word which, after going through various stages of development, reaches the stage when specialists come to an agreement about its meaning and then it becomes a technical term. Therefore, when that term is used, one instantly thinks of its technical meaning. One does so even though it is self-evident that this term carries a basic literal meaning as well which preceded its development as a technical term and still there is a close connection between this basic meaning and its technical signification.

The term *ʿibāda* has also gone through such development. The word has a basic signification which has been built on by those using the word in a broad, non-technical sense. We, therefore, consider it pertinent to first mention the basic meaning of *ʿibāda* and then state the meaning in which it is used by Islamic scholars and jurists.

The basic meaning of *ʿibāda*

Most Arabic dictionaries agree that the connotation of *ʿibāda* in Arabic lies within the field of submission, submissiveness and obedience. Perhaps its most concise definition is that of al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī in his *al-Mufradāt*: 'servitude (*ʿubūdiyya*) is the manifestation of submissiveness, and *ʿibāda* (worship) is even more intense than that as it is the highest degree of submissiveness and none but the most unsparingly munificent being is worthy of it and it is God.'[1]

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1. See al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Mufradāt fī gharīb al-Qurʾān*, ed. Ṣafwān al-Dāwūdī, Beirut, Dār al-Qalam, AH 1412, p. 542.

There are two kinds of *ʿibāda*: one, that consists of involuntary subjection (such as a person's birth at a given place and time with distinct physical features, etc.) and two, that which consists of conscious choice[2] which is for those created beings that have the power of speech. This *ʿibāda* has been commanded by God: 'O mankind! Worship your Lord' (II.21).

This basic meaning has led some religious scholars to suggest other meanings which they deem necessary to convey as regards the true meaning of submissiveness, submission and obedience. In his *Four key concepts of the Qurʾān*, Sayyid Abu-l-Aʿlā Mawdūdī says that, in addition to submissiveness and obedience, what is essential is the heart's conviction of the sublimity of the object of obedience and worship and His sole right to receive praise and gratitude; the performance of religious rites for Him is the translation into reality of the heart's conviction.[3]

Coming close to this meaning, Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā said that submission and submissiveness must be accompanied with due awareness of the sublimity and omnipotence of the object of worship, one whose essence is beyond comprehension. The ordinary literary style and Arabic usage can neither convey *ʿibāda*, which is the highest degree of submission arising from the heart and feeling the sublimity of the object of worship whose origins are unknowable, nor belief in a power and authority whose essence one cannot comprehend. The most one can know of this essence is that one is surrounded by it even though it is beyond one's comprehension. Even the man who reaches the highest degree of submissiveness to the greatest king on this earth is not said to be his servant (*ʿabd*), and even if he kisses the ground before him, the reason would be well-known: the fear of the king's tyranny and the desire to acquire a portion of his magnanimity.[4]

Earlier, Ibn Taymiyya pointed out another dimention of *ʿibāda* by stressing the need for the mind of the worshipper to be vigilant for his submission to be lawful in terms of the *Sharīʿa*. He also strongly believed that for the true meaning of *ʿibāda* to be attained one's submission must be accompanied by love.

> The basic meaning of *ʿibāda* also conveys subjection: a path or road is said to be serviceable (*muʿabbad*) because it has been subjected to the trampling of people's feet. *ʿIbāda*, as ordained by God, however, combines two meanings: subjection and love. It combines the greatest degree of subjection to God with the most profound degree of love for Him. Someone who is submissive to another man yet hates him cannot worship him. And if a man loves something but is not

2. *Ibid*. See also art. *ʿabd* in Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿarab*, Beirut, Dār Ṣadir, AH 1414.
3. Sayyid Abu-l-Aʿlā Mawdūdi, *Four key concepts of the Qurʾān*, tr. and ed. Tarik Jan, Leicestershire, The Islamic Foundation, 2006, pp. 122 ff.
4. Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-manār*, Cairo, al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kutub, 1990, I, p. 48.

submissive to it, he too cannot be said to worship it, as is the case when a man loves his child or a friend. However, in the worship of God, submission cannot be separated from love.[5]

Indeed it is logical that there be a link between the love of a worshipper for his Lord and his knowledge of Him. This has been discussed in detail by Ibn Taymiyya, and in even greater detail by his disciple, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya while elucidating the meaning of this love being linked to knowledge and the requirement of obedience.[6]

To sum up, the basic meaning of the word *ʿibāda*, though centred around the concepts of submission and obedience, is also inspired by other shades of meaning which distinguish it from mere submission. This makes the submission and obedience to God distinct within the range of similar linguistic meanings.

ʿIbāda as a technical term among Islamic scholars

In the course of Islam's quite early development, life began to take a new direction, requiring laws to regulate the relationship between humans and their Lord and between a human and his own soul. Revelation determined all these aspects and the *Sunna* played its role in this regard by explaining and applying the revelation. Later, the Companions made efforts to understand the law which had been revealed. This constituted the first foundation for Islamic learning which, on the basis of the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*, subsequently developed to guide people in their daily lives.

It is evident that every branch of knowledge specializes in a certain field. Theology specializes in issues of faith, ethics in purifying and perfecting the soul, and jurisprudence in the regulation of the relationship of mankind with the Creator and the creation.

ʿIbādāt (acts of worship) fall in the domain of jurisprudence. This applies to those jurists who divide jurisprudence into four fields: worship, property, the family and government as well as to those who divide jurisprudence into only two main fields: acts of worship and the affairs of human society (*muʿāmalāt*).

> The term *ʿibādāt* brings to mind the obligatory rites and rituals by which God has commanded that He be worshipped. He has ordained these so that people may perform them because He knows that performing them is beneficial for them, even though their underlying rationale is hidden from them and they cannot fully understand it.[7]

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5. Ibn Taymiyya, *Risālat al-ʿubūdiyya* as part of *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil*, Cairo, Ṣubayḥ, n.d., p. 9

6. Ibn al-Qayyim, *Madārij al-sālikīn*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥāmid al-Faqī, Cairo, 1956, I, p. 99.

7. Badrān Abu-l-ʿAynayn Badrān, *al-ʿIbāda fi-l-islām*, Cairo, Muʾassasat Shabāb al-Jāmiʿa, 1985, p. 3.

These obligatory rites and rituals, which are meant when the word *ʿibāda* is used in its technical sense, are *ṣalāt* (prayer), *zakāt* (almsgiving), *ṣawm* (fasting) and *ḥajj* (pilgrimage). However, as *ṣalāt* cannot be performed unless one is in a state of ritual purity (*ṭahāra*), ritual purity is also obligatory and in the books of Islamic jurisprudence is dealt with under the heading 'Acts of Worship' because it is so very closely linked to them. It is also dealt with under that heading because of the diction: 'That which is required to fulfil an obligation is itself an obligation'.

> Although a Muslim devotes himself to God in all his actions, God has made certain regular acts of worship obligatory at certain times: *ṭahāra* (ritual purity) leads to vivacity and purity, *ṣalāt* wards off abominable and vile acts, *zakāt* purifies wealth and feeds the poor, *ṣawm* is conducive to physical health and protects one from the evil ones, and, finally, performing the pilgrimage, both the greater and lesser (that is *ḥajj* and *ʿumra*) consist of travel in the path of God and also serve as a meeting point for Muslims from various parts of the world.[8]

This shows the technical meaning of the term *ʿibāda* both in its basic meaning as indicating submission, obedience and obligation and in the sense it is used by historians of religion as the practical application of the doctrine of the absolute unity of God (*tawḥīd*).

The general meaning of *ʿibāda*

While the jurists defined *ʿibāda* in the manner given above, some scholars have tended to expand the concept of *ʿibāda*, despite appreciating the work of the jurists. Their starting point for this broadening of the concept was to look at Man's mission in life and the multiplicity of his activities. In doing so, they took as their basis a pervasive understanding of the Qurʾānic verse which specifies the reason why God created mankind.

Elucidating his understanding of *ʿibāda*, al-Iṣfahānī says:

> There are three activities prescribed for mankind:
> 1. Settling the earth, as mentioned in the verse: 'He brought you out from the earth and hath made you dwell in it'(XI.61) by obtaining sustenance from it for oneself and others.
> 2. Worshipping God, as mentioned in the verse: 'I created the jinn and humankind only that they might worship Me' (LI.56), and that is by doing so while keeping the Creator's commands and prohibitions; and

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8. Muḥammad Ismāʿīl ʿAbduh, *al-ʿIbādāt fi-l-islām*, 2nd ed., Cairo, Maṭbaʿat al-Nahḍa, 1954, pp. 12 and 16. See also Muhammad Asad, *Islam at the Crossroads*, reprint of the revised ed., Lahore, Ashraf, 1941, pp. 24–6.

3. Acting as God's vicegerent on earth (*khalīfa*), according to the verse: '…
    and He made you vicegerent in the earth so that He may see how you act'
    (VII.129) and that is by following the ways of the Creator to the best of his
    ability in administering the affairs of people by applying the excellent traits
    of the *Sharīʿa*.[9]

This concept of *ʿibāda* is in line with the station of mankind in the universe.
The value of mankind should not be surpassed by any material value and it
should always be considered higher than all material values. The Qurʾān has
stressed this in different places and in a variety of ways.[10]

The pervasiveness of the concept of *ʿibāda* is based also on the
interpretation of the verse: 'I created the jinn and humankind only that they
might worship Me' (LI.56). The Qurʾānic commentator, Ibn Kathīr says:
'This (i.e. the above verse of the Qurʾān) means: I created them so that
I could command them to worship Me and not because I needed them'.
ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭalḥa says on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbas: '…only that they
might worship Me' means 'so that they might worship Me voluntarily or by
compulsion'. Ibn Jurayḥ says: 'Only that they might know Me'. Rabīʿ b. Anas
said that the sole purpose of man's creation was that he should worship
God.[11]

This means that every human activity can fall within the sphere of
worshipping God by observing His commands and prohibitions.[12] Thus,
ʿibāda, according to Ibn Taymiyya, is a term that embraces all words and
deeds, whether internal or external, which please God. These include the
shahāda (i.e. the Muslim's testimony of faith that there is no god but God
and Muḥammad is His Messenger), prayer, almsgiving, pilgrimage and the
acts of *sunna* and supererogation. It also includes honest speech, integrity,
obedience to parents, visiting the sick, keeping promises, efforts to resolve
conflicts and other deeds and verbal acts which bring mankind closer to
God.[13]

Many scholars have tried to explain this general meaning of *ʿibāda* by
mentioning its applications in the fields of government, family life, education,

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9. Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Dharīʿa ilā makārim al-sharīʿa*, ed. Abu-l-Yazīd al-ʿAjamī, 2nd ed.,
    Cairo, Dār al-Wafāʾ, 1987, p. 90.
10. Sayyid Qutb, *The Islamic Concept and its Characteristics*, trans. by Mohammed M. Siddiqi,
    Indianapolis, American Trust Publications, 1991, p. 127. The Arabic version of the book
    was entitled *Khaṣāʾiṣ al-taṣawwur al-islāmī*.
11. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm*, Sāmī b. Muḥammad Salāma (ed.), Riyaḍ, Dār Ṭayba
    li-l-Tawzīʿ wa-l-Nashr, 1999, VII, p. 425, comments on Sūrat *al-Dhāriyāt* (Sūra LI.56).
12. See Abu-l-Yazīd al-ʿAjamī, *al-Insān bayna al-masʾūliyya wa-l-takrīm*, Makka, Rābiṭat al-ʿĀlam
    al-Islāmī, AH 1404, pp. 105–7.
13. Ibn Taymiyya, *Risālat al-ʿubūdiyya*, pp. 61, 63, 69.

etc. This means that *ʿibāda*, whether understood in its general or technical sense, is a command which must be obeyed by Man and which should never be neglected after reaching the age of legal capacity and understanding Man's mission in life.[14]

The link between the general meaning and the technical meaning of *ʿibāda*

Just as the technical meaning of *ʿibāda*, as defined by the jurists of Islam, stems from its basic meaning, it would be inconceivable that there would be no link between the juristic meaning of the term and its general meaning. In other words, we could ask: why did the jurists restrict *ʿibāda* to a body of known religious rites while they knew the general meaning of *ʿibāda* in Islam?

There are many answers to this question, though they are quite in conformity with each other. Some go along with the jurists and say that the division of the issue into *ʿibādāt* and *muʿāmalāt* is merely a terminological device by which scholars sought to distinguish between two types of *ʿibāda*: one type is the *ʿibāda* which regulates the relationship between man and his Lord whose forms and modalities have been prescribed by the *Sharīʿa* and by which God puts man to test in every religion. Additionally, there is another type, *muʿāmalāt*, which regulates the relationships between people. The latter has always been present among people but is regulated and moderated by the *Sharīʿa* and thereby legitimized by it.[15]

However, the preponderant opinion on the question is that *ʿibādāt*, the religious rites as defined by the jurists, are incumbent on every person of legal capacity. These rites, properly performed, strengthen the feelings of compassion and teach the individual to fulfil his mission in life as evident from the notions of viceroyship, *ʿibāda* and settling the earth. It is as if the religious rites are the source from which spring all their practical applications, as in the concept of *ʿibāda* according to the above all-embracing definition.[16]

Performing these religious rites correctly is the natural way to reap their benefits. Without *ʿibāda* there could be no refinement of human conduct, no end to vile and lewd acts, no ritual purity or piety. Possibly the following tradition of the Prophet, which berates a whole range of immoral acts, confirms this. The Prophet explained who is bankrupt by saying that he is the one 'who, on the Day of Resurrection, comes with a record of having performed the prayer, of having fasted, and given alms, yet, at the same time, he has abused and slandered people, has unlawfully consumed the wealth of

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14. Niẓām al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd, *al-ʿIbāda wa-āthāruhā al-nafsiyya wa-l-ijtimāʿiyya*, Baghdad, Maktabat al-Quds, 1985, p. 39.
15. Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *al-ʿIbādāt fi-l-islām*, pp. 70–1.
16. Niẓām al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

others, has unlawfully shed people's blood and has struck them. Any good deeds he had accumulated will be transferred to the account of the people he has abused. If his account of good deeds is then found wanting, then the sins he has committed will be added to his account and he will be thrown into the fire of Hell.'[17]

The matter, however, is not confined to the outward form of worship; its form is necessary but along with its spirit and underlying devotion. Anyone who thinks that he can purify his soul without *ʿibāda* is in error, as God has made it incumbent upon us, and God is most knowledgeable about His creatures.[18]

> A man will never be able to achieve the excellent qualities prescribed by the *Sharīʿa* unless he performs the obligatory acts of worship. Trying one's best to perform *ʿibāda* is to acquit oneself of the requirement of uprightness, whereas striving to achieve the excellent qualities of the *Sharīʿa* forms part of excellence and supererogation, and supererogatory acts are not accepted from those who have neglected the obligatory acts. Similarly, there is no virtue in forsaking the requirement of uprightness [in order to achieve excellence]. Indeed it would be wrong to seek excellence at the expense of uprightness. Uprightness is to do what must be done; excellence is to do more than what must be done. How can one increase something one doesn't actually have? As the saying goes: 'Neglecting the basics will not get you anywhere'.[19]

We can, therefore, say that to talk of *ʿibāda* in the sense of religious rites is to talk of the fundamentals of *ʿibāda* in the sense of viceroyship, settling the earth and all of life's activities.

Characteristics of worship in Islam

Before speaking about the special attributes of *ʿibādāt* in Islam, it is perhaps appropriate to indicate two issues related to the matter.

The first issue relates to *ʿibāda* before Islam, especially in heavenly religions. It is evident that the purpose of the creation of the jinn and humans was to worship God and that this worship is an obligatory compliance of the Divine command and interdiction. If along with this we bear in mind that all religions stressed belief is the absolute unity of God (*tawḥīd*), this should be manifested in the performance of the rites of worship. It inevitably follows from this that acts of worship existed in the pre-Islamic religions as well.

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17. Reported by Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ: Kitāb al-Birr wa-l-ṣila wa-l-ādāb, Bāb Taḥrīm al-ẓulm*. Reported also on the authority of Abū Hurayra by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal in his *Musnad*, edited by Shuʿayb al-Arnaʾūṭ (et al), 50 vols., Beirut, Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 2001, XIII, p. 399.
18. Ṭalʿat ʿAfīfī, *Min thamarāt al-ṣalāt*, Cairo, Maktabat al-Īmān, n.d., p. 8.
19. Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Dharīʿa …*, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

Any rational being will realize by just a little effort that all the six major world religions (mentioned in the verse quoted below) have had their own belief systems and rites of worship: 'Lo! those who believe (in this Revelation), and those who are Jews, and the Sabaeans and the Christians and the Magians and the idolaters – Lo God will decide between them' (XXII.17).

This clearly shows that each religion mentioned in the verse had its own belief system, its own rites of worship through its own rules for regulating their social conduct and its own measures to protect them from misfortunes and evil.[20]

The Qur'ānic verses and the traditions of the Prophet relating to pre-Islamic rites of worship have prompted many scholars to discuss ʿibāda in the pre-Islamic time. We find that fasting was known and practiced even among the followers of non-revealed religions, such as the ancient Egyptians and Buddhists, let alone among the Jews and Christians, whose scriptures commend fasting.

It has also been established that pilgrimage was also known before Islam, for Abraham was ordered by God: 'And proclaim unto mankind the pilgrimage. They will come unto thee on foot and on every lean camel; they will come from every deep ravine' (XXII.27). It is to be noted that Abraham and Ishmael had asked God to show them the pilgrimage rites.[21]

As regards zakāt before Islam, we find encouragement to generosity and almsgiving even in non-revealed religions. As in the Torah and the New Testament we find mention of the payment of tithes.[22] The Book of Genesis in the Old Testament says: 'And of all that thou givest me, I will without fail allot a tenth to thee' (28 Genesis 22). In addition, the Book of Malachi in the Old Testament states: 'I am the Lord, unchanging; and you, too, have not ceased to be sons of Jacob. From the days of your forefathers you have been wayward and have not kept my laws. If you will return to me, I will return to you, says the Lord of Hosts. You ask, 'How can we return?' May man defraud God, that you defraud me? You ask, 'How have we defrauded thee?' Why, in tithes and contributions. There is a curse, a curse on you all, the whole nation of you, because you defraud me. Bring the tithes into the treasury, all of them; let there be food in my house' (3 Malachi 6–10).

In the Gospel according to Matthew, it is written: 'Alas for you, lawyers and Pharisees, hypocrites! You pay tithes of mint and dill and cumin; but you have overlooked the weightier demands of the Law, justice, mercy, and good faith' (23 Matthew 23).

Thus, acts of worship were part of the religious law before Islam but had become vitiated in the same way that other articles of faith became vitiated.

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20. Abu-l-Ḥasan al-ʿĀmirī, *al-Iʿlām bi-manāqib al-islām*, ed. Aḥmad Ghurāb, Riyadh, Dār al-Aṣāla li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 1988, p. 121.

21. Badrān Abu-l-ʿAynayn Badrān, *al-ʿIbāda fī-l-islām*, op. cit., p. 180.

22. Maḥmūd Abu-l-Suʿūd, *Fiqh al-zakāt al-muʿāṣir*, Oxford, 1989, p. 42.

This remained so until the advent of Islam as the definitive form of God's Message to mankind, when new precepts and provisions were prescribed. These distinguish its acts of worship both in form and content.[23]

The second issue relates to the search for the underlying reasons and specific characteristics of the acts of worship. This search does not mean that Man's Reason alone can determine the matter, because the fundamental nature of these acts of worship is that they are the application of the belief in the existence of the One God Who is the Creator and Source of all authority and that worship in its totality is an experience of the veracity of the knowledge which the servant (ʿabd) has of his Lord and of his obedience to His commands.

If the mind searches for the underlying rationale of worship, some Qurʾānic verse will indicate that rationale or some ḥadīth of the Prophet will provide the clue. Alternatively, a precise understanding of the objectives of the Sharīʿa will indicate that rationale. All this will strengthen the hold of the Sharīʿa on the hearts and minds of those committed to abiding by the commands and prohibitions of God. For this reason, we are inclined to the statement made by al-Māwardī:

> When God ordered mankind to worship Him and to fulfil His commands and sent His Messengers and prescribed His religion for them it was not because He had a need to so order them or out of a need for them to worship Him; rather, His intent was to benefit mankind out of His favour for them. Out of His countless blessings, the blessing of worshipping Him is the greatest as this blessing includes blessings not only in this world but also in the Hereafter.
>
> The ʿibādāt established by God for mankind to worship Him are based on the fact that the mind is capable of discerning the truth and a Revealed Law which can be heard: the mind follows what the Revealed Law does not oppose what the mind has forbidden and the mind does not follow what the Revealed Law has forbidden. The command is, therefore, directed at one who has perfect mind.[24]
>
> Therefore, what must become established in the mind and heart of a Muslim when he is searching for the reasons for and effects of ʿibāda is that ʿibāda is an expression of God's rights over His servant and that ʿibāda is not merely a means of purification or a way to deal with problems such as poverty and immorality. The Muslim must realize that the godliness of the soul is the fruit of ʿibāda and not its raison d'être. The acts of worship have a primary purpose and other purposes which are secondary to this primary purpose. These secondary purposes cannot be made a reality unless the original purpose is heeded.[25]

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23. *Ibid.*, pp. 43–44.
24. Abu-l-Ḥasan al-Māwardī, *Adab al-dunyā wa-l-dīn*, ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā, Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1398/1978, p. 94.
25. For further details, see Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *al-ʿIbādāt fī-l-islām*, pp. 125–95.

IV–2.1   Al-Ḥajj, Masjid al-Ḥarām
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The characteristic attributes of ʿibāda in Islam

Notwithstanding the fact that there is a trend to understand ʿibāda in Islam to include all human activities which bring Man close to God, and which serve Man's mission in life from the point of view of viceroyship, ʿibāda and settling the earth, our discussion here focuses on ʿibādāt as represented by prayer (ṣalāt), almsgiving (ẓakāt), fasting (ṣawm) and pilgrimage (ḥajj).

The expression 'characteristic attributes' of ʿibāda refers to the shared characteristics of all these religious obligations – obligations which constitute four of the five Pillars of Islam (the testimony of faith being the first pillar). It is fair to recognize that what we are going to say refers to the most prominent attributes of these religious obligations.

QURʾĀN AND THE SUNNA AS THE SOURCE FOR ʿIBĀDĀT

First, the source for the commandment to perform the ʿibādāt are the Qurʾān and the Sunna. The command to perform the prayer as a religious duty is stated in the Qurʾān: 'Worship at fixed hours hath been enjoined on the believers' (IV.103) and 'Establish worship at the going down of the sun until the dark of

night' (XVII.78). The same is true of almsgiving: 'Take alms of their wealth, wherewith thou mayest purify them and makest them grow' (IX.103). The same holds for fasting: 'O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you even as it was prescribed for those before you, that ye may ward off (evil)' (II.183). The same can also be said about pilgrimage: 'The pilgrimage is (in) the well-known months, and whoever is minded to perform the pilgrimage therein (let him remember that) there is (to be) no lewdness nor abuse nor angry conversation during the pilgrimage' (II.197).

The *Sunna* is full of the Prophet's sayings and actions regarding the religious obligation to worship God. Once the Prophet prayed and said to his Companions: 'Pray in the manner you saw me pray'.[26] The Prophet also performed the pilgrimage and then said to his Companions, and to the Muslim community: 'Your rituals [of pilgrimage], you shall take them from me'.[27]

The fundamental reason for the obligation of *ʿibāda* is the *Sharīʿa* and not Man's reason and that the command to perform *ʿibāda* is inherent in the relationship between God and Man. Explaining the reasons underlying *ʿibāda*, however, is an intellectual effort aimed at appreciating the impact of *ʿibāda* on daily life. Thus, even when we fail to understand the true reason behind a given act of worship we still know that we have to perform it as we are required to do so out of our belief in Islam, in the Qurʾān and *Sunna* and in their message to mankind.[28]

This specific attribute of 'observance and compliance' has an effect as the fundamentals of *ʿibāda* have been preserved and are not open to discretion. Exercising independent reasoning in understanding them was discussed in connection with the branches of Islamic law dealing with *ʿibāda*. As a result, Muslims have at all times and at all places been in full agreement about the basic pillars of Islam.

No mediation between God and man in *ʿIbādāt*

Second, these *ʿibādāt* are directltly linked with God. This because a Muslim does not need a mediator giving him permission to perform the prayer, to pay

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26. See the *ḥadīth* in al-Dāraquṭnī, *Sunan, Kitāb al-Ṣalāt, Bāb Fī dhikr al-amr bi-l-adhān wa-l-imāma wa aḥaqquhumā*, (on the authority of Mālik b. Ḥuwayrith).

27. Reported by Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ: Kitāb al-ḥajj, Bāb Istiḥbāb ramy jamrat al-ʿaqaba yawm al-naḥar rākiban*. Variant versions of the Prophet's explanation: "*li-taʾkhudhū manāsikakum*" (on the authority of Jābir). For "*li-taʾkhudh manāsikakum, fa-innī lā adrī laʿallī lā aḥujju baʿd ḥajjatī hādhihi*", see Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, III, pp. 318 and 327 (on the authority of Jābir) with the wording: "*li-taʾkhudhū manāsikakum*" and in its third version: "*li-taʾkhudha ummatī manāsikahā*".

28. Al-Ṣanʿānī, *Subul al-salām*, ed. Ibrāhīm Naṣr, Cairo, Maktabat al-Kulliyyāt al-Azhariyya, n.d., p. 339; al-Māwardī, *Adab al-dunyā …, op. cit.*, p. 94; Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *al-ʿIbādāt fī-l-islām*, p. 35.

the Alms, to fast in Ramadan or perform the pilgrimage. Indeed, the starting point for a Muslim as long as he believes in Islam is to carry out the Divine command to perform the prayer and the other prescribed *ʿibādāt*.

So human freewill has achieved the mobilization of human will, for as ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib has said: 'God has ordered [cetain acts] retaining human choice, and prohibited [certain acts] to warn [against evil], and did not force compulsion, and did not send Prophets without puporse'.

Strengthening the relationship between Man and God begins with *ʿibādāt*. According to a *ḥadīth* qudsī: 'My servant keeps coming close to Me through performing supererogatory acts of worship (*nawāfil*) until I love him so I become his sense of hearing with which he hears, and his sense of sight with which he sees…'.[29]

This 'closeness of God' to man is thus a realization of the verse of the Qurʾān which says: '(O Muḥammad), when My servants ask you about Me, then I am quite near. I hear and answer the call of the caller whenever he calls Me' (II.186). Since all *ʿibādāt* are but a supplication from man to his Lord, there need not be any mediators between God and His servant for God is already near.

Alleviation of hardship

This is because Islam came to make life easier for mankind. All aspects of *ʿibādāt* are thus characterized by alleviation of hardship. For one, the *ʿibādāt* are not a huge burden: Prayers (*ṣalāt*) are performed only five times a day, almsgiving (*zakāt*) consists of only 2.5 per cent (or 5 per cent for some crops and fruits), fasting (*ṣawm*) is only for one month in a year, and the pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) is required to be performed only once in a lifetime and this too by those who have the means and the capacity to do so. Moreover, the pressure of performing *ʿibādāt* can be relieved to ensure their continued performance: prayer is normally performed standing, but if the worshipper is unable to stand he may perform the prayer seated. Similarly, a person may defer his fast in the event of sickness or travel. Indeed, those who are physically incapable of fasting may delay the fast until their capacity to do so returns. This can be done in exchange for a small act of redemption (*fidya*), consisting of feeding the poor. The burden of performing the pilgrimage has also been made easy, as can be seen in the Prophet's response to queries about what one could do during *Ḥajj* and he repeatedly said: 'Do it, there is no harm in it'.[30] And thirdly, this facilitation in the performance of these religious obligations – which are at the same time pillars of Islam – has been tied with moderation.

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29. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Kitāb al-Riqāq*, *Bāb al-Tawāḍuʿ* (on the authority of Abū Hurayra).
30. See al-Dārimī, *Sunan*, *Kitāb al-Manāsik*, *Bāb ʿArafa kulluhā mawqif*.

Therefore, the Prophet did not approve of those who said: 'I am going to fast and will fast continually'. Nor would he accept the one who said: 'I am going to pray all through the night and will not go to sleep'. The Prophet, instead, made his well-known statement, 'By God, I am more submissive to God and hold Him in greater awe than you. Yet I fast and also abstain from fasting. I pray and I sleep, and I marry women. Whosoever contemptuously turns away from my way has nothing to do with me.'[31]

Generally, Islam claims to strike a path of moderation such that a Muslim is able to go about his life interspersing it with various manner of *ʿibādāt* without impeding any of his daily activities. This in itself is a significant factor towards the alleviation of hardship and enables Man to work towards the accomplishment of his mission, namely, *ʿibāda*, viceroyship and settling the earth.[32]

To this we may add that the Prophet urged the prayer leaders to facilitate the worshippers in view of their varying circumstances: 'Whosoever leads the people in prayer, let him make it easy for them – among them are the weak, the elderly and those in need.'[33]

Additionally, it is to be noted that there is gradation in *ʿibādāt* which are divided into obligatory and supererogatory. The obligatory prayers are performed five times a day, but they may be preceded or followed by supererogatory prayers. Likewise, in addition to *zakāt* which is obligatory, there is also voluntary almsgiving (*ṣadaqa*). Similarly, together with the obligation of the fast of Ramadan (*ṣawm*), there are supererogatory fasts on various days and special occasions. Likewise, apart from the obligatory pilgrimage (*ḥajj*), there is the supererogatory pilgrimage, called *ʿumra*. Repeating the pilgrimage once the obligatory one has been performed is a supererogatory religious act.

This is meaningful for the supererogatory religious acts complement the obligatory ones and compensate for any deficiency in their performance. Moreover, these daily, weekly, monthly and other supererogatory prayers such as the prayer for rain (*ṣalāt al-istisqāʾ*) and the prayer over the funeral bier *(ṣalāt al-janāza)*, etc. serve to have a lasting effect on a Muslim's devotedness to God. This constant turning to God, apart from being a means of closeness to

31. Reported on the authority of Anas b. Mālik by al-Bukhārī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ: Kitāb al-Riqāq, Bāb al-Targhīb fi-l-nikāḥ*.

32. See Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī, *Ḥujjat Allāh al-bāligha*, Sayyid Sabiq, Beirut, Dār al-Jīl, 2005, I, pp. 185–193; al-Māwardī, *Adab al-dunyā …*, *op. cit.*, pp. 106–13; Yaʿqūb Bā Ḥusayn, *Rafʿ al-ḥaraj fi-l-sharīʿa al-islāmiyya: Ḍawābiṭuh wa-taṭbīqātuh*, Makka, Markaz al-Baḥth al-ʿIlmī wa-Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-Islāmī, 1403, p. 75; ʿAlī Ḥasaballāh, *Uṣūl al-tashrīʿ al-islāmī*, Cairo, Dār al-Maʿārif, 1976, p. 94; Muḥammad Ismaʿīl ʿAbduh, *al-ʿIbādāt fi-l-islām …*, *op. cit.*, pp. 254f.

33. Reported by al-Bukhārī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* on many occasions, including: *Kitāb al-ʿIlm, Bāb al-Ghaḍab fi-l-mawʿiza wa-l-taʿlīm idhā raʾā mā yakrahu* (on the authority of Abū Masʿūd al-Anṣārī).

Him, also serves as a support for the ongoing moral education of the Muslim lest he be swallowed up by the merry-go-round of life with its ingenious enchantments and dizzy pace.[34]

Balance between the worldly reward and the reward in the Hereafter

Another characteristic of *ʿibādāt* is its establishing a balance between the reward in this world and the reward in the Hereafter.

It is pertinent to point out in this regard that all acts of worship in Islam are directed towards God in fulfilment of the Divine command and as an invocation for His reward in this world and the Hereafter. Nevertheless, together with this focus, these acts of worship also serve the interests of the worshippers in so far as they have manifestly positive effects on their daily lives by strengthening the character and integrity of Muslims.

Acts of worship have myriad salutary effects on the lives of Muslims. However, we will confine ourselves to pointing out only the following:

A. The diversity of *ʿibādāt* – physical, financial and collective – demonstrates Islam's concern to develop all these aspects in the lives of Muslims.

B. Worship is linked to ritual purity in its physical and moral dimensions. The various acts of worship can only be performed in a state of physical purity. Almsgiving is not acceptable from someone who gives alms as if it were a penalty imposed on him/her, or hurts the one who receives alms. The pilgrimage will not be accepted from anyone who commits acts of obscenity or iniquity during the days of pilgrimage. Fasting will not be accepted from those who are not in a ritually pure state and those who do not give up falsehood in word and deed will get nothing from their fast except hunger and thirst. The prayer which does not put an end to detestable acts has no benefit for the worshipper other than physical exertion.

Thus the social dimension is kept in view in *ʿibādāt* and is articulated by the commands in the Qurʾān and *Sunna* relating to religious obligations. In this way the spiritual and social dimensions embrace each other, the touchstone being the Qurʾānic directive. 'And when the prayer is ended, then disperse in the land and seek of God's bounty' (LXII.10). We can add to the above that the acts of worship which inculcate in Muslims a sense of time and its value through the time schedule allocated for prayers, the time for the giving of alms, the month allocated for fasting and the time of the pilgrimage.

The command to perform the prayer at the appointed time is nothing but a proof of the validity of what prayer involves. If we bear in mind the

34. Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī, *Ḥujjat Allāh al-bāligha*, II, pp. 14–15; Muḥammad Ismāʿīl ʿAbduh, *al-ʿIbādāt fi-l-islām, op. cit.*, p. 74; al-Māwardī, *Adab al-dunyā …, op. cit.*, p. 96; al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, I, p. 171.

insistence on the appointed timing, we realize that the acts of worship aim to link the Muslims to their Lord with the aim of performing this act of worship. In addition, they create a bond between a Muslim and his community and his daily life.[35]

Muslims and *ʿibādāt*

In this section we aim to elucidate how Muslims have understood *ʿibāda* both at the intellectual level among the religious scholars and at the level of ordinary Muslims, with their varying degrees of understanding and practice. We will, therefore, indicate how the religious scholars dealt with *ʿibāda* in their writings and refer to the general understanding of *ʿibādāt* among ordinary Muslims.

Acts of worship as understood by Muslim scholars

The interest in *ʿibādāt* among the religious scholars belonging to various branches of knowledge is a logical consequence of their interest in the two main sources of knowledge in Islam: the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*. This is because the Qurʾān has devoted a large number of verses to acts of worship. There are verses which talk of prayer and its pillars, the things which make it easier to perform the prayer and bring about its positive effects on daily life, etc. Some verses deal with almsgiving (*zakāt*) and property in general, and the beneficent reasons underlying and ensuing from fasting (*ṣawm*) and likewise from pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) with regard to its timing and associated rituals.[36]

The same is true with regard to the Prophet's *sunna* which is comprised of both his sayings and deeds. The books of the Sunna are full of chapters discussing *ʿibādāt*, considering them to be the practical expression of sound belief.[37]

Having said that, it needs to be stressed that the treatment of issues relating to *ʿibādāt* among Muslims scholars has not necessarily been homogenous as the focus changes from one group of scholars to another.

The jurists of Islam focused on explaining the legal rules and conditions necessary for the validity of *ʿibādāt* without neglecting to explain their underlying reasons, though not to the extent of their concentration on

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35. Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *al-ʿIbādāt fi-l-islām*, p. 35; ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda, *al-Zaman ʿinda al-ʿulamāʾ*, p. 25; Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *al-Waqt fī ḥayāt al-muslim*, Beirut, Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1991, p. 21–33; al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Dharīʿa …*, *op. cit.*, p. 96; Muḥammad Ismāʿīl ʿAbduh, *al-ʿIbādāt fi-l-islām*, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

36. See Muḥammad Fuʾād ʿAbd al-Bāqī, *al-Muʿjam al-mufahras li-alfāẓ al-Qurʾān*, see references to *ṣalāt, zakāt, ṣiyām* and *ḥajj*.

37. See al-Ṣanʿānī, *Subul al-Salām*; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-maʿād*; al-Nawawī, *Riyāḍ al-ṣāliḥīn* in addition to the chapters on *ṣalāt, zakāt*, etc. in the canonical collections of *Ḥadīth*.

juristic principles. This is evident from the great heritage of the religious scholars, such as al-Shāfiʿī in his *Kitāb al-umm* and Ibn Qudāma in *al-Mughnī* and others.[38]

While the jurists focused on the legal rules of *ʿibāda*, we find other groups of religious scholars tried to explain the underlying reasons and spirit of *ʿibāda*, somewhat disregarding their juristic rationale. This trend has continued in modern Islamic thought. In my opinion, this is due to two factors:

First, the juristic principles have been clarified to the extent that there is hardly any room left for discussion. Second, contemporary Muslims are striving to establish the link between their worship and their daily lives in the context of the culture of modernity.

This is what many contemporary jurists have attempted by focusing on the philosophy of the acts of worship and explaining their underlying reasons and effects on the lives of Muslims, believing that this is appropriate for the spread of Islam's message in an epoch in which people are questioning the value of everything. However, these contemporary jurists rightly acknowledge that the provisions relating to *ʿibādāt* are, in a fundamental sense, beyond the access of Man and that the results of the individual efforts to understand the philosophy and underlying reasons for *ʿibādāt* may or may not turn out to be correct.[39]

It is those who have been concentrating on the spiritual aspect that are most prominent, both in the past and in modern times. This reflects their concern with the inner meaning and spirit of *ʿibāda* lest it be reduced to a mere form without content and consequently lose its positive effect on daily life.

Ḥātim al-Aṣamm (d. 237/852) was once asked: 'Ḥātim, do you perform the prayer properly?' He replied: 'Yes'. The questioner continued: 'How do you pray?' Ḥātim replied: 'I obey the Divine Command and walk in dread. I enter with focused intent. I say, 'God is greater' with pride. I slowly recite the Qurʾān in contemplation. I bow in submissiveness. I prostrate myself in humility. I state, 'There is no god but God, and Muḥammad is His Messenger' to perfection. I declare my commitment to the Will of God following the *Sunna* of the Prophet with sincere devotion to God. I examine my soul in fear. I fear that my *ṣalāt* will not be accepted. I will maintain it to the limits of my capacity until death.' The questioner replied: 'You do indeed pray properly'.[40]

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38. See ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *al-Ghunya li-ṭālibī ṭarīq al-ḥaqq*, I, p. 272 and Muḥammad Ismāʿīl ʿAbduh, *al-ʿIbādāt fī-l-islām*, p. 95.

39. See al-Dihlawī, *Ḥujjat Allāh al-bāligha*, I, pp. 71, 75, 186; II, pp. 3–5; al-Qaraḍāwī, *al-ʿIbādāt fī-l-islām*, pp. 35 and 45; Maḥmūd Abu-l-Suʿūd, *Fiqh al-zakāt al-muʿāṣir*, *op. cit.*, p. 32 and Niẓām al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd, *al-ʿIbāda wa-āthāruhā …*, *op. cit.*, pp. 11, 75, 95.

40. Abū Nuʿaym al-Aṣbahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, Cairo, 1938, pp. 8 and 74.

Close to this, but in a more modern idiom, we find Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Nursī talking about the reason why the five daily prayers have the times they do. He cites the Qurʾānic verse: 'So glorify Allāh in the evening and the morning. His is all praise in the heavens and in the earth; (and glorify Him) in the afternoon and when the sun begins to decline' (XXX.17–18).

Al-Nūrsī says that the five times remind us of, and are linked to, the cosmic matters in this world and the historical facts which Man should know. He says:

> From dawn till the rising of the sun is similar to, and reminds us of, the beginning of spring and the time when a man is conceived in the womb of his mother, and the first of the six days of the creation of the heavens and the earth. This calls Man's attention to the divine and sublime matters of those times.

> The Midday Prayer is similar to and reminds us of midsummer and the prime of youth and the period of the creation of Man in this world or reminds us of God's revelation and mercy.

> The Afternoon Prayer is similar to the autumn and old age and the epoch of happiness which is the epoch of the Seal of the Prophets, Muḥammad.

> The Sunset Prayer reminds us of the passing of the majority of created beings and the end of autumn. It also reminds us of human mortality and the destruction of the present world on the Day of Judgement. Nevertheless, it teaches Man the Divine revelation and rouses him from his heedlessness.

> The time of Evening Prayer reminds us of the descent of darkness and how it covers up the effects of the day with its dark hand.

> The time of Night reminds us of winter, the grave and Hades (*Barzakh*) and reminds the human soul of its need for the mercy of the All-Merciful.[41]

We, therefore, see how the religious scholars, men of letters and mystics differ in their treatment of the acts of worship, each demonstrating their own particular concerns and understanding of ʿibādāt in Islam. Each uses a language appropriate to his understanding of the importance of the acts of worship as the pillars of Islam and as moral educational programmes to instruct individuals and communities.

This should be the concern of Islamic teaching institutions and Islamic movements as it is the easiest and most reliable method of reviving the true spirit of Islam as a means to serve daily life and humanity.

41. See Badīʿ al-Zamān Saʿīd al-Nūrsī, *al-Kalimāt*, Istanbul, Sazgar Publication, 1992, p. 41.

IV–2.2   Mount ʿArafāt
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ʿIbādāt as Understood by the Generality of Muslims

Most Muslims or their ideas and concepts of *ʿibādāt* are derived from a plurality of sources. Some come from educational institutions where the acts of worship in Islam are studied. Some come from the modern mass-media, such as radio and television, internet and social media, or from more traditional means such as mosques and various charitable and family teaching circles, Muslim associations, etc. Some come from parents depending on their level of understanding and education. All these sources have their origin, when one thinks about it, in the efforts of religious scholars who, despite their varying intellectual positions, were concerned to explain the principles and underlying reasons of *ʿibādāt*.

As the religious scholars laid firm foundations for what they said and derived everything from the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*, we see that the concept of *ʿibāda* among the generality of Muslims is derived from the commentaries on the Qurʾān and the Sunna. We can summarize the concept of *ʿibāda* among the generality of Muslims as follows:

First: *ʿibādāt* are Pillars of Islām. Here, 'the Pillars of Islam' are the necessary foundations for the establishment of Islam. This understanding has come to them from their knowledge of all the religious duties of *ʿibādāt*

in accordance with the Divine Command in the Qurʾān. This understanding has also been clarified by a well-known tradition of the Prophet: 'Islam is built on five pillars: "the testimony that there is no god but God and that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God, the establishment of prayer, the giving of alms, the fast of Ramadan and pilgrimage to Mecca, for him who has the means to do so".'[42]

Islam begins with the two testimonies of faith contained in the shahāda ('There is no god but God, and Muḥammad is His Messenger') and the performance of the acts of worship mentioned in the above *ḥadīth*. For this reason, a Muslim is devoted to *ʿibādāt* out of his devotion for the maintenance of his religion. He exerts his efforts to establish the *ʿibādāt* in the best way as he knows that there are conditions for the ideal performance of the *ʿibādāt* without which the performance of his religious duty is not achieved.

Worship is the practical part of faith

Muslims believe in the absolute unity of God (*tawḥīd*) and also in the associated belief in the Messengers, the Angels, the Revealed Books, the Last Day and the Predestination of Good and Evil as the starting points of their faith. They believe that their faith is to say that Islam is their creed. They believe that action in Islam is comprised of performing the acts of worship, obeying the rules of human conduct as laid down by Islam and leading lives in accordance with the principles it has prescribed.

The initial basis for the understanding of worship lies in those Qurʾānic verses which command the performance of prayer, almsgiving, fasting and the pilgrimage. The religious scholars elaborated this, stressing that each is an act of worship. They also believe that performing the acts of worship enables man to perform the duty of khilāfa and assists him in settling the earth (*ʿimāra*), for without worship people's bodies and minds are corrupted and hence the cultivating and civilizational activities will suffer.[43]

This understanding has been confirmed to them because they have been taught that prayer is a pillar of the religion, that voluntary almsgiving (*ṣadaqa*) extinguishes sins in the same way that water puts out fire, that fasting is a protection against evil, that the reward of the properly performed pilgrimage is Paradise, and that the pilgrim who performs the pilgrimage without iniquity or obscenity returns as on the day he left his mother's womb. Authentic *ḥadīths* are full of such statements and confirm that *ʿibādāt* are the practical application and living embodiment of the Islamic faith.

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42. Al-Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Īmān, Bāb Duʿāʾukum īmānukum*, on the authority of Ibn ʿUmar.
43. Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Dharīʿa …, op. cit.*, pp. 90–2; al-Māwardī, *Adab al-dunyā …, op. cit.*, p. 95; al-ʿAjamī, *al-Akhlāq bayna al-ʿaql wa-l-naql*, Cairo, Dār al-Thaqāfa al-ʿArabiyya li-l-Ṭibāʿa wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 1988, p. 171.

Third: *ʿibāda* consists of following the Messenger. The Muslims understand that the Noble Messenger is the best of God's servants in performing worship. They also know that to follow and obey the Messenger amounts to obeying God. 'Who so obeyeth the Messenger obeyeth God' (IV.80).

To follow the Prophet is to follow the path of obedience, the path that leads to God's forgiveness and mercy. Muslims are linked to Prophet Muḥammad, through their knowledge of his life and his excellent qualities and striving in the cause of Islam. Being so linked to the Prophet prompts them to follow, out of love and conscious choice, his deeds, the most outstanding of which were in the domain of worship.

Therefore, Muslims perform *ʿibādāt* in response to God's command and in observance of the deeds of the Prophet. This is in consideration of the fact that the *Sunna* together with the Qurʾān, prevent any discord about worship. But following the Prophet in all his prayers and other acts of worship does not imply any form of mediation. Rather, the Muslims believe in praying directly to God. The Qurʾān states: 'And when My servants question thee concerning Me, then surely I am nigh. I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he crieth unto Me' (II.186). No wonder all Muslims have attempted to inquire into the *ʿibādāt* of the Prophet, which fill the books of the *Sunna* and the biographical literature on the Prophet and Islamic history.

Fourth: *ʿibādāt* are the formal, outward Islamic criteria of righteousness.

If a Muslim understands *ʿibādāt* to be the practical manifestations of faith and belief in his heart, he further realizes that following the Prophet is the path to attain closeness to and love of God. On the basis of this, the Muslim establishes a standard by which he may assess his relationships with other people. This standard is the attitude of people to the acts of worship. It is an external phenomenon which can be evaluated without having to probe the hearts of people.

Hence Muslims consider the performance of *ʿibādāt* as a standard by which to judge an individual's righteousness because the observance of *ʿibādāt* has a deep impact on man's conduct. (See Qurʾān XX.45; IX.103; II.83; II.197). Hence worship in its correct and prescribed, form is regarded as a sign of righteousness.

Fifth: *ʿibādāt* are well-conceived, rather than a jumble of haphazard acts. They are not merely a set of physical movements; rather, what is necessary is the conscious intent and that this intent should be free of any distractions. Thus, acts of worship are exclusively focused on God. This is what distinguishes acts of worship from acts undertaken by way of habit.

Hence prayer does not consist simply of standing up and sitting down and prostrating unless all this is done in compliance with God's command and with the intent to seek His pleasure. If a man's Prayer is simply a physical activity or his almsgiving is merely an act of giving money away, it is

insufficient. Instead one is required to perform these acts only for the sake of God. Similarly, fasting is not merely a person's abstention from food or drink unless he/she is conscious that he/she is keeping himself hungry and thirsty only for God's sake.

The performance of prayer requires man to be ritually clean and observe the appointed time for the prayer. He must fulfil the conditions for the performance of the prayer and distance himself from everything which will nullify it. In addition, all this will instil in him an awe and reverence which will have an effect upon him in his private and public life.

Intention, as we mentioned above, means freeing the human will from the distractions and attachments of daily life in order to direct it entirely towards the performance of the act of worship for God. In so doing, a Muslim seeks reward from God and looks forward to the positive effects of his worship.

Prayer as a means of enriching life

It is with the awareness of *ṣalāt*'s importance as the second pillar of Islam that Muslims observe prayer. Whosoever performs these prayers correctly, without being deficient on slack, shall have a covenant with God whereby he shall enter paradise. Those who do not perform them shall have no covenant with God: 'If God wills, He will punish him and if He wills, He will send him to paradise'.[44]

Prayer has positive effects in this worldly life and also leads to expiation of sins, according to a *ḥadīth*: 'Performance of Prayers expiates sins committed between the one prayer and the other, provided the major sins (*kabāʾir*) are avoided'.[45] For, as the Prophet explained, 'Prayer is like a river in which a man bathes five times a day so that none of his uncleanness remains'. For this reason a Muslim makes every effort to perform the prayer, preferably in congregation in the mosque, knowing well that each step he takes towards the mosque is recorded as a good deed which does away with his sins.[46]

The performance of the prayer also has its effects in the Hereafter. The Prophet said: 'Whoever maintains the five prayers in terms of their purity and timing will have a light and a proof on the Day of Resurrection; whoever does not will be treated with Pharaoh and Hāmān.'[47]

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44. Abū Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-Ṣalāt*; Ibn Māja, *Kitāb Iqāmat al-ṣalat, Bāb Mā jāʾ fī farḍ al-ṣalawāt al-khams*.

45. Muslim, *Kitāb al-Ṭahāra, Bāb al-Ṣalawāt al-khams wa-l-Jumuʿa ila-l-Jumuʿa…*

46. Muslim, *Kitāb al-Masājid wa-mawāḍiʿ al-ṣalāt, Bāb al-Mashy ila-l-ṣalāt tumḥā bihi al-khaṭāyā wa-turfaʿ bihi al-darajāt*.

47. Ibn Ḥibbān, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Ṣalāt, Bāb Dhikr al-zajr ʿan tark al-marʾ al-muḥāfaẓa ʿala-l-ṣalawāt al-mafrūḍāt*.

The many effects of the prayer are mutually interrelated and complementary in enriching life, both individual and societal, as we shall see in the following pages:

THE MOST IMPORTANT EFFECTS OF PRAYER ON THE INDIVIDUAL

Psychological stability and peace of mind as a result of the worshipper's reaching out to his Lord is achieved without any mediation. Rather, it is in response to God's summons to His servant: '… and establish prayer for My remembrance' (XX.14). As a sign of God's grace, He enables man to approach Him whenever and however he wishes without any of the restrictions and conditions which people experience at the doorsteps of the rulers of this world. This is what al-Ghazālī referred to when he said: 'God distinguishes Himself from the sultan insofar as He opened the "door", removed the veil and permitted Man to communicate with Him through prayer, whatever be the circumstances, whether individually or collectively. In fact God did not only grant the permission but [went a step further] by graciously prompting and inviting people to it.'[48]

Such a person knows that when the affairs of the world become difficult for him he will have an opportunity to transcend them because of the peace of mind he attains by following the Prophet's sunna in praying.

In his *Musnad,* Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal relates on the authority of ʿAbd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya: 'I went with my father into the home of one of our neighbours, who was among the Anṣār. It was then the time of prayer. He said to the maid: "Bring me some water for my ablutions so that I can relax. He noticed that we somewhat resented his reference to 'relaxing'. So, he said "I heard the Messenger of God say: 'Get up Bilāl, call people to prayer and make us feel relaxed"'.[49]

To be added to this peace of mind is that the worshipper may call upon God as he wishes, and when he does so, he is in a state of nearness to Him: 'The servant [that is, man] is no closer to his Lord than when he is in prostration (before God)'.[50] Indeed, God has told His worshipping servants that He will respond to their supplications as is stated in the *ḥadīth* qudsī: 'I have divided the prayer between Myself and My servant. If My servant says "Praise be to God, the Lord of the Worlds", God says: "My servant has praised Me". If the servant says: "The Beneficent, The Merciful", God says: "My servant has extolled Me". If the servant says: "Owner of the Day

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48. *Ibid.*, I, p. 145
49. Reported by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal in his *Musnad*, Beirut, Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 2001, XXXVIII, p. 225.
50. Reported by Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*: *Kitāb al-Ṣalāt, Bāb Mā yuqālu fi-l-rukūʿ wa-l-sujūd* (on the authority of Abū Hurayra).

of Judgement", God says: "My servant has exalted Me". If the servant says: "Thee (alone) we worship; Thee (alone) we ask for help", God says: "This is between Me and My servant, and My servant shall have what he has asked for". If the servant says: "Show us the straight path, The path of those whom Thou hast favoured; Not the (the path) of those who earn Thine anger nor of those who go astray", God says, "This is from My servant, and My servant shall have what he has asked for".'[51]

The *Fātiḥa* which the Muslims recite in each bowing (*rakʿa*) of the prayer is the way to receive God's grace and they can continually receive it because they are required to perform the prayers five times during a day and night. In so doing their closeness to God becomes a reality and they are delivered from the disputes and contentions of daily life. Additionally, they also have the opportunity to perform supererogatory prayers such as the prayer asking for guidance (*ṣalāt al-istikhāra*), the prayer asking for rain (*ṣalāt al-istisqāʾ*), the prayer of repentance (*ṣalāt al-tawba*), the prayer before daybreak (*ṣalāt al-saḥar*). This ensures that the worshipper can remain in a state of psychological security and peace of mind through voluntary prayers on numerous occasions which further reinforces the Muslims' need to seek refuge with God in all situations.

This psychological well-being is unfortunately missing from the lives of those who are afflicted with materialism and worship money or other worldly objects, which does not lead to the best of results: '… Henceforth if there comes to you a guidance from Me, then whosoever follows My guidance shall neither go astray nor suffer misery. But whosoever turns away from this Admonition from Me shall have a straitened life' (XX.123–4).

Prayer is the remembrance of God and supplication brings men's hearts to peace and stability. This is particularly the case when we bear in mind that the religious scholars have interpreted 'narrow life' in the above verse as: 'a form of depression and an absence of joy in the heart despite physical well-being'.[52] A Muslim who is in constant touch with God feels this peace of mind and psychological stability when he remembers that his Lord has described them as 'those whose hearts have rest in the rememberance of God' (XIII.28).

Intention: Defining Goals and Formulating the Will

As we know, what distinguishes the acts of worship from other activities of everyday life is *niyya* (intention). In fact as prayer has begun, the rewards of prayer are apparent. In a *ḥadīth* on the authority of Abū Ḥurayra, it is said:

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51. Muslim, *Kitāb al-Ṣalāt, Bāb Wujūb qirāʾat al-Fātiḥa fī kulli rakʿa…*
52. See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, comments on XX.123–4.

'Whosoever performs his ritual ablutions correctly and goes out with the intent to perform the prayer is already performing the prayer if his intention is so to do. With each pace he takes, a good deed is recorded to his account; with the other pace a bad deed is erased. When one of you hears the call to prayer, he should not delay. The further away you live, the greater the reward.'

We note that 'goes out with the intent' and 'if his intention is so to do' in the above *ḥadīth* mean liberating the will from all distractions and trivia so that the Muslim's determination becomes focused on a single state of consciousness which he experiences with the totality of his being.

When a Muslim becomes accustomed to focusing his will, which is incumbent upon him in the performance of the prayer, its positive effects become manifest in his daily life: he learns that to do something requires defining goals and concentrating on what he is doing. He realizes that absent-mindedness is a form of hesitation which is of no use in life and does not meet the needs of the people. The man who defines his goals and devotes his efforts to their realization will be successful, and vice versa.

The obligation to be humble in prayer inculcates watchfulness and seriousness

Ṣalāt is not merely the physical act of standing up and sitting down; rather, it is a religious rite in which the person performing it is not rewarded until he is conscious of what he is doing and until his determination and faculties are focused on the act of *ṣalāt*. This is because *ṣalāt* is the remembrance of God and God has commanded His worshippers by saying: '… and establish prayer for My remembrance' (XX.14). Neglect of *ṣalāt* is the antithesis of this remembrance. How can one who neglects his prayers be one who 'establishes' prayer? This while God has warned: 'And be thou not of the neglectful' (VII.205). Similarly, He has prohibited the worshipper from beginning his prayer until he is aware of what he is doing: 'till ye know that which ye utter' (IV.43). The Prophet has also told plainly: 'The servant will obtain nothing from his prayer except for what he is mindful of doing'.[53]

This is plain logic, as during prayer Muslim is in communication with his Lord.[54]

If these conditions are not fulfilled the prayer becomes a burden: 'Many are those who obtain nothing from their prayers except exhaustion and fatigue'.[55]

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53. Reported by Abū Dāwūd, al-Nasāʾī and Ibn Ḥibbān with this meaning on the authority of ʿAmmār b. Yāsir.
54. Bukhārī and Muslim.
55. Reported by al-Nasāʾī and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal with a wording close to the present one.

Prayer, therefore, requires vigilance, the engagement of the heart and the determination of mind and will. If this is achieved, a great reward is assured. If the Muslim becomes accustomed to this mindfulness in prayer, he can use this faculty in other activities as well: after defining his goals and freeing his will from distractions, he tries his utmost while being totally aware of what he is doing. This results in an improvement in the quality of his work, skill and attention to details which are necessary for success in all sorts of enterprises and in daily life.

The person who loses this mindfulness while performing the *ṣalāt* derives nothing from it but the exertion of standing up and sitting down. The same is true also of his daily activities as his efforts will only bear fruit if he is skilled, precise and devotes all his attention and energy to the task in hand.

Prayer and Sensitivity to the Value of Time

One of the most distinctive foundations of culture and civilization is the value of time.

If a man uses his time wisely, in a meticulous and organized manner, it will be easy for him to be successful in many activities. Perhaps contemporary time management studies and their involvement in the fields of employment and production are the best corroboration of the validity of what we are saying.

With this in mind, it should be realized that *ṣalāt* inculcates in the Muslims sensitivity to time and makes their biological clock finely adjusted. This is because *ṣalāt* is an act of worship which is closely linked to time. Its status as a religious obligation is given in what God says: 'Worship at fixed hours hath been enjoined on the believers' (IV.103). In other words, every religious obligation has its own appointed time and principles of organization.

The Prophet was asked: 'Which act is the most excellent?' He replied: 'Performing the prayer on time'.[56] The Muslim knows that he is obliged to perform the prayer five times in the day and night. Each prayer has an appointed time and if the prayer is not done on time, it is merely the performance of an act and not the genuine accomplishment of a religious obligation. The same is true of the supererogatory prayers which are associated with a specific religious obligation or time, such as a night-vigil prayer (*ṣalāt al-tahajjud*) and the forenoon prayer (*ṣalāt al-ḍuḥā*).

The times of prayer cover all human beings: 'Establish prayer from the declining to the darkness of night' (XVII.78). This means that the Muslim

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56. Bukhārī and Muslim, a *ḥadīth* on the authority of Ibn Masʿūd.

understands that he has to know the time for each prayer; his biological clock reminds him shortly beforehand that he must prepare for a given prayer.

If the life of the Muslim develops in this manner, he will learn the value of punctuality since, to advance or delay the performance of the prayer, is to invalidate them. In such a way the Muslim is able to bring to his daily activities the same sensitivity to time to which he is accustomed in his prayers. The Muslim learns the value of time since he knows that, on the Day of Judgement, no man will make a single move before being asked four questions, the first of which concerns how he spent his life and his youth.

This is the essence of realizing the value of time and the concern to fill it with things which are beneficial in life and for the living beings.[57]

Prayers accustom the Muslims to be inclined to a system and fix their proiorities

Performance of the prayer in the mosque can only be achieved by a Muslim with precise organization, something which is made into the practice of his life. This is because the worshippers consist of the person leading the prayer, the Imām, and those who follow him. The Imām is not selected at random; rather, there is a system for selecting him in accordance with a *ḥadīth* on the authority of Masʿūd al-Anṣārī: 'The Messenger of God said: 'The man who will lead the prayer is the one who has the greatest knowledge of the Qurʾān. If they are all equal in this, then the one who has the greatest knowledge of the *Sunna*. If they are all equal in this, then the one who was the earliest to migrate [to Madīna]. If they are all equal in this, then the one who has been a Muslim the longest. And no one should lead the prayer in the presence of a person with authority.[58]

The row must be even with the people standing in line together without a gap between them. The rows behind the front row are ordered as follows: men, then adolescent males and women at the rear. Add to this the fact that when the Muslims understand that the prayer has its specific organization and form, and that there are obligatory and supererogatory prayers, they understand that everything has its proper place in which it should be precisely situated. When the Muslims understand all these precise details there is inculcated in them a sensitivity to order and the ordering of priorities, beginning with what they are obliged to do and followed by everything else: giving priority to one matter over another is to be judged on the principle of varying degrees of importance.

57. Ṣalāḥ Sulṭān, *al-ʿIbādāt wa-atharuhā fī iṣlāḥ al-fard wa-l-mujtamaʿ*, Dār al-Thaqāfa al-ʿArabiyya, 1994, p. 104 and Nabīl Ghanāyim and M. Balṭājī, *al-ʿIbādāt al-islāmiyya*, Cairo, Maktabat al-Shabāb, 1996, p. 51.
58. 58 Muslim, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ, Kītāb al-Masājid, Bāb Man aḥaqqu bi-l-imāma*.

If this sensitivity is inculcated in the Muslim, he is able to plan his economic and political life in accordance with the ordering of priorities. The result is the wise use of time and the conservation of effort. The Muslim learns that order and organization is the path of Islam in the performance of the prayer and in the arrangements for *jihād*, etc. 'Lo! God loveth those who battle for His cause in ranks, as if they were a solid structure' (LXI.4).

In this way, the correct performance of the prayer builds a Muslim's mind and his way of thinking.[59]

Prayer and sense of Honour and Independence

While at prayer the Muslim experiences his total freedom, as the religious scholars say: 'Worshipping God is total freedom'. He feels proud because he is in intimate communication with God and no one can force him to abandon the prayer, 'In truth, all honour belongs to Allāh and to His Messenger and the believers' (LXIII.8). In conversing with his Lord he does not hear the talk of other people who are not performing the prayer; this is his source of pride and independence.

When a Muslim has a sense of pride in his worship, he cannot accept subjugation in life and for this reason he fights to liberate his land and his mind from all forms of aggression.

Prayer and the Path of Beauty

Prayer is an act of worship that purifies the heart and wipes away a person's sins, as is evidenced in the traditions of the Prophet. The Messenger said that the sins committed after a prayer are expiated by the following prayer. He gave a parable to his Companions: '"If someone bathed in a river five times everyday, would he still be dirty?" "No", they replied. He said: "This is prayer which is the means by which God expiates sins".'[60] This is manifested in humility: 'Who are humble in their prayers' (XXIII.2). Prayer performs this important purificatory role and in so doing puts an end to abominable acts and obscenity*:* 'Prayer forbids indecency and evil' (XXIX.45).

Prayer accustoms the Muslim to cleanliness and purity, for prayer is invalid without purification and cleanliness. Prayer requires that clothes be clean and the body free of impurity. Prayer also requires that the place of worship be clean and ritually pure. All these are preparations for that greater state of cleanliness, namely humility and purity of the heart. We therefore,

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59. Ṣalaḥ Sulṭān, *al-ʿIbādāt wa-atharuhā …*, *op. cit.*, p. 112.
60. See Bukhārī, *Kitāb Mawāqīt al-ṣalāt, Bāb al-Salawāt al-khams kaffāra* and Muslim, *Kitāb al-Masājid wa-mawāḍiʿ al-ṣalāt, Bāb al-Mashyi ila-l-ṣalāt tumḥā bihi al-khaṭāyā wa-turfaʿu bihi al-darajāt.*

find the Divine command to dress properly to perform the prayer: 'O children of Adam! Look to your adornment at every place of worship' (VII.31).

The Muslim who has fulfilled what his religion demands of him is a man who has chosen the path of beauty and orderly attire. This is reflected in his conduct, such as in maintaining the cleanliness of his house, street and town: he knows that removing from the road that which is offensive is a voluntary act of charity.

In this way prayer leaves its mark on the Muslim's character by inculcating in him a sense of cleanliness and beauty because God is Beautiful and loves beauty.

PRAYER AND ITS POSITIVE EFFECTS ON THE LIFE OF THE COMMUNITY

By 'community' we mean the family, the society and the state. All of them benefit from the performance of prayer, as we will indicate below:

1. Prayer stands as a barrier in the face of abominable and obscene acts: 'Surely prayer forbids indecency and evil' (XXIX.45). This happens by restraining the soul before its Creator five times during the day and night and by distancing the person concerned from foolish and harmful talk and the shame of doing wrong, as he knows from time to time that he will stand before God.

This desired moral level, when it is attained, is the path of the individual and the path of the Muslim community. It influences the daily life of communities such that society becomes righteous and purified of vice and depravity. Crime decreases, or is rare in such a society; this is beneficial for the security and stability of the society.

We know that the family is keen that performance of the prayer should be made manifest in the conduct of family members: a man is required to ask his wife to perform the prayer on the basis of God's command: 'And enjoin upon thy people prayer' (XX.132) and 'He enjoined upon his people prayer and almsgiving' (XIX.55).

2. The congregational prayer constitutes a small-scale model of the single community. We know that the Muslim community is a single community and that Islam is a religion of collective experience: 'Ye are the best community brought forth for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allāh' (III.110).

This becomes clear when we bear in mind that the fundamental principle of the congregational prayer is that its reward is many times greater than the prayer performed in isolation. 'And it is thus that We appointed you to be the community of the middle way so that you might be witnesses to all mankind and the Messenger might be a witness to you' (II.143).

Furthermore, congregating in the mosque is beneficial for the community. To fulfil this concern for collective worship, the Muslims especially meet in congregational prayers every Friday and also twice a year to celebrate the two major festivals of Islam.

This collective worship has numerous benefits:

a) Feeling of mutual strength among the Muslims as each stands side by side of his brother Muslim: 'The Muslims constitute a single structure with each supporting the other'.

b) Consultation takes place at the level of the community, the society and the *umma*.

c) This coming together is a means of cooperation which is beneficial to daily life and the members of the community.

When this collective spirit radiates and grows, it is as if it immerses the community in prayer. This develops fruitful cooperation among Muslim communities and societies, through which political and economic benefits can be realized. This is particularly true in a world in which the efforts of an individual are not enough, rather what is necessary is cooperation and the combining of powers to achieve the good which the Muslims can offer humanity.

3. The performance of the prayer moulds the character of the Muslim, making it flexible, morally upright, tolerant and solicitous of ways of easing the burdens of others. He is expected to shun extremism and obstinacy, as it is God who has taught him the ways to alleviate hardship. Through the concessions God makes to him the Muslim learns the alleviation of hardship and that he should take into account the feelings and circumstances of others.

The Muslim for instance knows that if he is unable to stand up in prayer, he may perform the prayer sitting down, lying down, by merely moving his head or moving his eyelids following the movements of bowing and prostration.

The Muslim is aware that leading the people in prayer requires making allowances for people's circumstances, so that those in prayer are not inconvenienced or burdened. The Prophet said: 'Among you some drive people away with aversion. Any of you who leads the prayer of people should shorten the prayer for behind him are old and weak persons and those with errands.'[61]

Therefore, *ṣalāt* stamps the life of the community with the alleviation of hardship and tolerance. The imām assesses the circumstances of others and

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61. Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Adhān, Bāb Man shakā imāmah idhā ṭawwala.*

deals with them in such a way as not to exhaust them. Thanks to this spirit of love, friendship and harmony prevails, in society rather than enmity and hatred. This love becomes a means of cooperation and guide, people's conduct. There is a reduction in disputes and social upheavals caused by obstinacy and intransigence, neither of which in any case have anything at all to do with Islam.

4. It remains for me to point out that *ṣalāt* teaches people a great deal about politics in Islam, both in depth and in a simple manner: the specific conditions for choosing the Imām to lead prayers, as discussed above, are equally valid as a basis for selecting a Muslim ruler.

It would be better for the Muslims if they fully understood the fundamental meaning of leading the prayer (*imāma*), and to choose their rulers, not on the basis of chauvinistic attachments or personal interests but on the basis of their commitment to and knowledge of religion and piety.

Once there is agreement on who is to be the Imām, no one may rise against him. Indeed, the fundamental meaning of the imamate is that those at prayer are to follow the Imām. Similarly, no one may revolt against the ruler who has been chosen by the Muslim community, provided he fulfils the obligations of the Muslim ruler.

Just as the worshippers are required to follow the Imām in prayer, they are also ordered to follow the ruler, to support him and to fulfil the tasks he delegates to them, provided the tasks do not entail any sin.

If we look at the first row of the worshippers we find that it is made up of the community's religious scholars and wise men. It is related of the Prophet, that he said: 'Those who stand immediately behind me in prayer should be people of wisdom and knowledge, followed by those who are less knowledgeable'.[62]

For this reason, the ruler must have an entourage to remind him when he forgets or warn him if he is neglectful. This is a great lesson which can be learned from how the *ṣalāt* is organized.

During the prayer, if the Imām forgets or makes a mistake while reciting the Qur'ān, those behind him who have memorized the Qur'ān point this out to him. If he forgets something relating to the organization of the prayer, some or all of the worshippers will point this out to him by uttering the statement glorifying God, '*subḥān Allāh*', or in some other way without the prayer being invalidated and without anyone leaving it. Similarly, if a ruler makes a mistake or forgets, he is to be gently and judiciously advised without there being a call for a revolt against him or the withdrawal of allegiance: staying with the Imām and advising him preserves the integrity of the state and protects if from a dispute which might destroy its power: 'and do not quarrel with one another lest you should lose courage and your power depart' (VIII.46).

62. Muslim, *Kitāb al- Ṣalāt, Bāb al-Nahy ʿan sabq al-imām.*

Added to the above, we should mention '*shūrā*' or consultation and how it functions in the mosque and the community and, therefore, in an Islamic state. We can, therefore, say that prayer is an act of worship which inculcates in people that which is appropriate for them in their lives in this world for which they will be rewarded in the Hereafter.

Prayer creates an individual who is dutiful both to himself and to others. It also helps establish a family which is upright and serves the community. This also helps build a society which is dynamic and effective and a state in which the relationship between the ruler and the ruled is characterized by justice and fruitful cooperation for the benefit of all. All this serves to integrate the community of Islam.

ZAKĀT
(Obligatory Almsgiving)

The Qurʾān uses the term '*zakāt*' around thirty times to refer to the obligatory almsgiving which constitutes the third Pillar of Islam. It is always mentioned in conjunction with the term '*ṣalāt*' (obligatory act of prayer) except in *Sūrat al-Muʾminūn* (Sūra XXIII) in which a verse is interpositioned between the mention of *zakāt* and *ṣalāt*: 'Successful indeed are the believers. Who are humble in their prayers. And who shun vain conversation, and who pay poor-due' (XXIII.1–4).

The Qurʾān uses the term '*ṣadaqa*' to indicate obligatory almsgiving in two verses: 'Take alms out of their riches and thereby cleanse them and bring about their growth (in righteousness)' (IX.103);

And 'The alms are only for the poor and the needy and those who are in charge thereof, and those whose hearts are to be reconciled, and to free those in bondage and to help those burdened with debt, and for expenditure in the way of Allāh and for the wayfarer. This is an obligation from Allāh. Allāh is All-Knowing, All-Wise.' (IX.60).

Many traditions of the Prophet establish the obligatory religious duty of giving alms, such as the one reported by Ibn ʿAbbās: 'When the Prophet, sent Muʿādh to Yemen he said: 'If you meet the People of the Book invite them to bear witness that there is no god but God and that I am the Messenger of God; if they accept this, tell them that God, has made obligatory upon them the payment of charity (*ṣadaqa*) which is taken from the wealthy among them and given to the poor among them; if they accept this, beware of taking bribes and taking more than you should and beware of the complaint of the oppressed to God for there is no barrier between it and God'.[63]

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63. Reported by Muslim, *Kītāb al-Īmān, Bāb al-Duʿāʾ ila-l-shahādatayn wa-sharāiʿ al-islām*.

The importance given to *zakāt* by the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*, has influenced the religious scholars' interest in *zakāt* as the third Pillar of Islam and the second act of worship. The subject has been dealt with in great detail in the books on jurisprudence, especially on financial and administrative jurisprudence. Many have written on the correct procedures regarding *zakāt* and have explained the Prophet's guidance in the practical application of this religious obligation from which many Muslims have benefited.[64] In addition to sharing the concerns of jurists from the earlier generations, contemporary writers on the jurisprudence of *zakāt* have focused on *ṣalāt* as the basis for an Islamic economy. These writers consider *zakāt* as an obligation owed to God as an act of worship and owed to Man as an act of social justice. Other issues they have focused on include: the positive economic effects of *zakāt* and its role in the correct investment of money and discouraging hoarding of money, which has been forbidden by God. In so doing, these contemporary studies benefit from the efforts of jurists of earlier generations and link this religious obligation with the people's need for an economy which is free from usury (*ribā*) and other defects.[65]

The explanation of the purposes of *zakāt* given by the earlier generations of jurists has influenced the understanding of *zakāt* at all levels of society. As the third Pillar of Islam, people see its effect in money being given to the poor, whether through the *zakāt* on property and wealth or the *zakāt* at the end of the fast of Ramadan (*zakāt al-fiṭr*). They know that *zakāt* is closely linked to *ṣalāt* and remember the stance of Abū Bakr, may God be satisfied with him, when some people attempted to separate *ṣalāt* from *zakāt*, considering *zakāt* as money which they used to pay to the Prophet Muhammad: 'Let God be my witness, if they withhold form me even a camel's tether which they used to render to the Prophet, I will fight them for it'.[66]

This understanding has influenced the concern of Muslims to ensure the close scrutiny of the collection of *zakāt*, the times for its collection, the minimum amounts liable for the payment of *zakāt* and the amounts collected, etc. In so doing, they believe they are establishing one of Islam's basic pillars by which they worship God for their benefit in this world and in the Hereafter.[67]

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64. See al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyaʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, I, p. 213; Al-Ṭayyib Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn, *al-Zakāt wa-mushkilat al-faqr*, p. 1; Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-taʾwīl,* comments on Q II.274. Aḥmad Yūsuf, *al-ʿIbādāt fi-l-islām: aḥkāmuhā wa-ḥikamuhā*, Cairo, Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1991, p. 175 and Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-maʿād*, p. 95.

65. Maḥmūd Abu-l-Suʿūd, *Fiqh al-zakāt al-muʿāṣir*, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

66. In all canonical *ḥadīth* collections except Ibn Māja. The text used here is that of al-Bukhārī, Bāb *Wujūb al-zakāt*.

67. See Ismāʿīl Sālim, *Fiqh al-ʿibādāt al-islāmiyya*, Cairo, Dār al-Thaqāfa al-ʿArabiyya, n.d., I, p. 188.

This is the Muslims' understanding of *zakāt* from which the keen-eyed observer will see that this act of worship has many positive effects on the life of the individual, community and the state.

Some positive effects of *Zakāt*

1. In the Muslim mind, *zakāt* validates the concept of property ownership. This is due to the Muslims' belief in the following:

a) Ownership is of two kinds: real and figurative. Real ownership is God's, because He is the Owner and Creator of everything. Property is one of the things which God created. Of this real ownership the Qur'ān says: 'and bestow upon them the wealth of God which he hath bestowed upon you' (XXIV.33); 'and spend of that whereof He hath made you trustees' (LII.7);

As for figurative ownership, this is the property the rights to which God has transferred to His servant (*ʿabd*) for his use:

'Give unto orphans their wealth' (IV.2);

'Give not unto the foolish (what is in) your (keeping of their) wealth, which God hath given you to maintain' (IV.5).

b) The Muslim also believes that property is a blessing for which God deserves praise and gratitude.[68] Thanking God is manifested in making this exercise a benefaction for himself and other Muslims. It is an investment which encourages work and promotes growth that ultimately justifies *zakāt*, Man is but God's trustee in the use of this property and must observe the Command and Prohibition of God.

c) The Muslim also believes that it is forbidden to hoard money and property as to do so is a violation of the social function of wealth and property in Islam: They who hoard up gold and silver and spend it not in the way of God, unto them give tidings (O Muhammad) of a painful doom (IX.34).

Hoarding money and property brings the performance of *zakāt* to a standstill and the whole community will be punished as a result, in accordance with the *ḥadīth* which says: 'The people that hinder *zakāt* will be afflicted by God with drought'.[69]

This is how the Muslims understand the function of money and wealth and deal with it in the manner commanded by God. As a result, they are

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68. Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, I, p. 265.

69. Reported by al-Ṭabarānī in his *al-Awsaṭ*, saying its narrators are trustworthy. Al-Ḥākim considers it authentic according to the criteria of Muslim.

liberated from worship of money. Because money is so important and because people love it so much, when a person becomes enslaved to money he forgets all his values and morals to obtain it. A long time ago, the poet Aḥmad Shawqī said:

O worldly wealth, you the whole world are,
Wherever you are, there people will be.
You bewitched the centuries and did mock Qārūn (Korah).
You spread the flames of Nero's fire.
Discord (fitna) when you fan its flames doth blaze
But doth abate as you depart.[70]

And because people love money so much God says: 'And they love wealth with abounding love' (LXXXIX.20).

God desired to create Islam to free people from their worship of money. Man must learn to 'manage' money, to realize that while wealth is subject to increase and loss, God's due must always be paid.[71] The Muslim understands the Divine ordinances relating to property ownership and realizes that his correct use of the money which God has put at his disposal brings blessings for society. In so doing, he makes himself happy and makes others happy: 'Honest money blesses an honest man'.

ZAKĀT AND THE PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH OF SOCIETY

In the same way that *zakāt* liberates the Muslim's will from the domination of money, it also purifies society of dangerous psychological diseases such as avarice and spite.

This is evident when we bear in mind that this curative effect is caused by the two aspects of *zakāt*: receiving and giving.

The collection and distribution of zakāt

The Muslim who is wealthy enough to become liable for the payment of *zakāt* is in danger of a serious psychological illness resulting from the love of money. Such illnesses include avarice, miserliness and resentment at paying *zakāt* in the mistaken belief that his property is his alone. This illness affects himself more than others. In this regard, the Qurʾān states that avarice results in self-destruction: 'And whoso is saved from his own avarice such are they who are successful' (LIX.9). The Prophet explained this when he said: 'Three things destroy a man: yielding to avarice, following pleasures and self-indulgence'.

70. Aḥmad Shawqī, *Aswāq al-dhahab*, p. 14
71. Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, I, p. 266; Maḥmūd Abu-l-Suʿūd, *Fiqh al-zakāt al-muʿāṣir*, *op. cit.*, p. 13; Nabīl Ghanāyim and Muḥammad Baltājī, *al-ʿIbādāt al-islāmiyya*, p. 87.

IV–2.3   Food distribution based on Zakat Funds
© Zakat foundation, USA

Zakāt is a religious obligation which treats this avarice in the soul and accustoms the owner of property to give and spend.

This helps explain to us the concern of the Qur'ān and the *Sunna* to encourage people to spend their money: 'and who spend of what We have bestowed on them' (XLII.38); and 'spend of that which We have bestowed on them' (XXXV.29); and 'giveth his wealth, for love of Him, kinsfolk' (II.177).

Imām al-Ghazālī says: 'A miser ceases to be miser when he becomes accustomed to spending money. For attachment to something can only be broken when the soul has overcome its separation from the object of its attachment and when this has become habitual. *Zakāt*, in this sense is purification, i.e. it purifies a person from the evils of destructive avarice. The more he gives away the purer he becomes, the greater his happiness and the greater his joy at giving his money to God.'[72]

If we turn to the person who is entitled to receive *zakāt*, we find that it cures him of envying the property and wealth of the rich because in

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72. Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, I, p. 214.

zakāt he receives what is his rightful due in the Revealed Law: 'And in their wealth the beggar and he outcast had due share' (LI.19). It is only natural that the poor man who obtains what is lawfully his will be purified of envy and resentment on the basis of: 'Is the reward of goodness aught save goodness?' (LV.60)

An Arabic proverb goes: 'Beware of the vice of him to whom you have been benevolent'. If we add that the one giving *zakāt* is forbidden to either favour or injure the recipient of *zakāt* lest his charity be invalid or reduce the amount he should pay in *zakāt*, we should also know that the recipient should feel love towards the one whom God caused to alleviate his poverty.

We should understand that the relationship between the giver and the recipient is one of mutual gratitude. The giver realizes that the poor man is the cause of the reward which he will receive by giving God what is due to Him: if the poor man did not exist, the giver would be deprived of a channel of God's grace. Likewise, the poor man has similar feelings towards the giver. The result is the psychological health of the members of the Muslim society – the result of a religious obligation which was not established in the Revealed Law or organized for the benefit of any man, but because God has commanded it and because it is one of the Pillars of Islam.

The wealth which underpins the system of *zakāt* is purified and increased by *zakāt*. It is purified because the Muslim uses it to give the poor what is rightfully theirs. Indeed, he needs no prompting in performing his duty and he chooses the best of his property to give to the poor as, in reality, he is giving it to God. When the Muslim does this, his money becomes free of any debt to anyone. However, if he delays or refuses to pay, his wealth and property become liable to loss and destruction.

In this way, *zakāt* increases wealth because it is a transaction with God, Who has promised those who give generously a double reward both in property by making it increase (i.e. quantitatively) and in benediction (i.e. qualitatively): 'And whatsoever you spend, He will replace it' (XXXIV.39).

The Muslim uses his money on the basis of his faith. For this reason, the Muslim is concerned that his wealth would be purified by *zakāt* as this will increase his wealth in this world and increase his reward in the Hereafter.

Therefore, the religious obligation of *zakāt* purifies wealth and property and also purifies men's souls.

3. *Zakāt* was the first institution providing social security: This becomes clear if we bear in mind the following facts:

A. *Zakāt* is a religious obligation which requires that the ruler take from the rich to give to the poor. Whether the giver gives cheerfully or is resentfully, it is the ruler's right to collect the *zakāt* because it is owed to God, Who has established it and determined who the rightful recipients of *zakāt* are. There

is a *ḥadīth* which says: 'God was not satisfied with entrusting the division of wealth and property to an angel, no matter how close, nor to a Prophet, even if this was His Messenger. God was satisfied only when He Himself took charge.'[73]

This means that it is a duty to pay *zakāt* for it provides a stable income for the poor or the treasury if collected and distributed by the state.

B. *Zakāt* is a right owed to the poor which is taken from the rich and returned to the poor. It is noticeable here that the rightful recipients of *zakāt* are stated in the Qurʾān: 'The alms are meant only for the poor and the needy, and those who are in charge thereof, those whose hearts are to be reconciled, and to free the captives and the debtors, and for the cause of God, and to free those in bondage, and to help those burdened with debt, and for expenditure in the Way of Allāh and for the wayfarer. This is an obligation from Allāh. Allāh is All-Knowing, All-Wise' (IX.60). Five of the above eight categories concern 'the poor' generally taken to mean: the poor, the needy, those in debt (who are not guilty of fraud), the wayfarer and slaves seeking manumission. This is the source of the solidarity which is called for by social security institutions in modern times. If we bear in mind that some jurists have extended the scope of *zakāt* – Abū Ḥanīfa, for example – believed that *zakāt* could be given to a non-Muslim relative – and that *zakāt* gives the debtor the chance to get back on his feet, we can see how *zakāt* can provide an escape from the crisis of poverty.

C. Here we should point out that Islam does not see anything praiseworthy in poverty. Rather, it considers poverty a trial and affliction whose consequences are to be feared. This made the Prophet pray to God for protection against poverty: 'O God! I seek refuge in You from poverty, want and depravity. I seek refuge from doing wrong or being wronged'.[74]

The Prophet also prayed: 'O God! I seek refuge from unbelief and poverty'.[75]

The Prophet also said: 'Poverty is close to unbelief'.[76]

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73. See al-Bayhaqī, *Maʿrifat al-sunan wa-l-āthār*, ʿAbd al-Muʿṭī Qalʿajī (ed.), Karachi, Jāmiʿat al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyya, 1991, IX, p. 318.

74. See Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd, Kitāb al-Ṣalāt, Bāb fi-l-Istiʿādha* and al-Nasāʾī, *Sunan al-Nasāʾī, Kitāb al-Istiʿādha, Bāb al-Istiʿādha min al-dhilla*.

75. See al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā*, Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir (ed.), Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2003, VII, p. 18.

76. Reported by Abū Nuʿaym in his *al-Ḥilya*, Beirut, Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1409, III, p. 53; al-Bayhaqī, *Shuʿab al-īmān*, ʿAbd al-Aliyy Ḥāmid (ed.), Bombay, Dār al-Salafiyya, 2003, IX, p. 12; al-Ṭabarānī, *Kitāb al-Duʿāʾ*, Muṣṭafā ʿAṭāʾ (ed.), Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, AH 1413, p. 319 and Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhī, *Maʿāni al-akhbār*, Muḥammad Ḥasan and Aḥmad Farīd (ed.), Beirut, Dār al-kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1999, p.156,

Indeed, poverty can lead to the killing of the innocent even today as in the past. The Qur'ān says: 'Slay not your children, fearing a fall to poverty, We shall provide for them and for you. Lo! the slaying of them is a great sin' (XVII.31).

Thus, poverty is a threat to the faith and morals of the individual and the security and stability of the society. The society, must, therefore, combat poverty as a general social problem.

God has willed that *zakāt* is the best and the most certain way of dealing with poverty, if only the Muslims would begin to apply this religious obligation correctly.

When a ruler realizes his role in this regard, the society will understand the role of *zakāt* in stimulating the voluntary giving of alms.[77]

D. Bearing in mind Islam's view of poverty as a problem and source of social discord, the jurists of Islam differ as to the exact amount should be given to the poor, i.e., should it be enough sustenance for a day, a year, or a life-time?

In this difference of opinion there is an indication that the intent of *zakāt* is to provide sufficient to the poor to extricate them from the crisis they are in, as it takes from the rich and gives to the poor. Imām al-Ghazālī has given an explanation of this: Some people expanded the notion and said that *zakāt* should be sufficient for a lifetime. Others were more reserved and determined that *zakāt* should suffice as sustenance for one day. Al-Ghazālī then says: 'The most moderate solution is that *zakāt* should consist of sustenance for a year; to set it below this level would be too restrictive, to go beyond it would be risky'.[78]

Following the above, we can go along with one researcher who says that *zakāt* was the first religious foundation for social security and exists in harmony with its aim as a religious obligation targeting the poor and the needy. Some capitalist countries set up social security institutions in the first quarter of the twentieth century and there is a prevailing belief that this is still a luxury which only rich countries can afford. These programmes face funding and distribution problems, etc.: 'The fact that *zakāt* is a religious obligation and one of the pillars of Islam has been the greatest guarantee and incentive for its continuation from the time it was made part of the Revealed Law in the time of the Prophet, uptil today. Muslims continue to pay *zakāt* voluntarily in most parts of the Muslim world and even in non-Muslim countries with a Muslim population, at a time when tax evasion is on the increase in Muslim countries.'[79]

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77. Al-Ṭayyib Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn, *al-Zakāt wa-mushkilat al-faqr*, p. 10.
78. Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, I, p. 224.
79. Al-Ṭayyib Zayn al-ʿAbidīn, *al-Zakāt wa-mushkilat al-faqr*, p. 11.

The reader might ask if *zakāt* has solved the problem of poverty and the Muslims pay the *zakāt*, why do we see poverty in Muslim countries?

I cannot give a detailed response, but I would point out that field studies in Islamic countries have shown how much *zakāt* has actually been collected and how much should have been collected, and the disparity between the actual and potential amounts is very wide. The reasons for this lie with the Muslims and not with *zakāt* as a religious obligation with its own rules of procedure and underlying principles.

I quote from a contemporary researcher who has investigated the causes for this disparity:

> The most important causes for the low collection rates of *zakāt* are the absence of legal compulsion, the narrow bases on which *zakāt* can be assessed, inefficiencies in collecting *zakāt*, the lack of trust between the person giving *zakāt* and the collection agencies and insufficient media attention to the importance of *zakāt* from the religious point of view.

> Despite the shortfall in income from *zakāt* compared with its forecasts, we can happily note a continuing increase in collection rates in most Muslim countries which do collect it and a continuing increase in the number of countries which have begun to show interest in collecting *zakāt*.[80]

Although this is the current situation of the Muslims, history has shown that when *zakāt* was collected correctly and distributed to those who truly deserved it, the problem of poverty was solved throughout the length and breadth of the Islamic world.

This was, for instance the case in the time of ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb when he admonished Muʿādh b. Jabal for sending him a third of the *zakāt* from the people of Yemen by saying: 'I did not send you as a tax collector or to collect the *jizya* [the tax payable by non-Muslims entitling them to Muslim protection]. I sent you to take form the rich and to give to the poor.' To this Muʿādh replied: 'I would not have sent you anything if I had found someone to take it'.[81]

The same happened in the time of ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz when, throughout the Muslim empire, no one could be found to receive the money collected as *zakāt*. So the governor bought a slave and paid for his manumission out of the money so collected.[82]

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80. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
81. Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām, *Kitāb al-Amwāl*, ed. M. K. Harrās, Cairo, Dār al-Fikr, 1981, p. 527.
82. See Ibrāhīm Muḥammad Quṭb, *al-Siyāsa al-māliyya li-ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz*, Cairo, al-Hayʾa al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb, 1988, p. 234.

ZAKĀT AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

In this context, I will confine myself to the effects of *zakāt* on economic activity wholly form the religious point of view. *Zakāt* functions as a channel for economic activity in daily life, not as random activity but as a precise and ordered activity aiming to solve the problems of the Muslim society.

God's prohibition on the hoarding of money has led to the investment of money so as to prevent 'stagnant money' (i.e., money which is not serving any useful purpose) from entering the *zakāt* system. Investment is to make money active and dynamic. This leads to employment and increases the amount of money its owner has invested, and benefits the poor in accordance with their entitlement.

Because the capacity to pay *zakāt* differs from one individual to another and can vary from one month to another, *zakāt* could be collected throughout the year thereby improving the economic situation of the poor by providing them with a stable income.

We should add that contemporary juristic opinion has expanded the bases on which *zakāt* may be charged apart from gold, silver, crops, livestock and buried treasure to include real estate, factories, all productive enterprises and even, according to some jurists, personal income.[83]

Widening the bases on which *zakāt* can be collected would have a positive economic effect on the poor and the state as a whole, particularly as some juristic opinions consider it possible that surplus *zakāt* may be invested in projects for the future to further enrich the poor.

Similarly, some jurists consider, basing their view on the evidence in the Qurʾān and *Sunna*, that it would be possible to purchase equipment and tools for craftsmen out of the funds collected under *zakāt*, to help them continue to develop their economic activities. This opinion is not new, as al-Nawawī said much the same in his *al-Majmūʿ*: 'They say that if the person [i.e. the person entitled to *zakāt*] has a trade or craft, he should be given the funds to buy the tools and equipment his trade or craft requires, whatever that costs, and in such a way as to ensure that the amount is sufficient to yield a profit to sustain growth, and this will differ according to the trade or craft, the country, time and the individuals involved'.[84]

Some of our [Shāfiʿī] jurists have explained this and determined what tools and equipment are required for a given trade, such as greengrocer or jeweller. Similarly, a merchant, baker, perfumer or money-changer should be given the amount assessed for his needs. Former land owners should be given

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83. See Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *Fiqh al-zakāt*, 2nd ed., Beirut, Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1973, p. 1033 and Maḥmūd Abu-l-Suʿūd, *Fiqh al-zakāt al-muʿāṣir*, *op. cit.*

84. Al-Nawawī, *al-Majmūʿ*, Beirut, Dār al-Fikr, 2010, VI, p. 193–4.

enough to buy an estate or a share in an estate so that the revenue therefrom will provide for him in perpetuity.[85]

Zakāt, therefore, plays an effective role, from the religious point of view, in arriving at the correct understanding of ownership.

It also plays an effective role in the psychological state of society in purifying property and in solving the problem of poverty. It also gives the poor and the state a stable and continuous opportunity for economic activity.

The Muslim would never compare *zakāt* with the payment of taxes as they differ from *zakāt* in terms of the nature of their imposition and their means of collection and distribution. In addition, taxes are unable to compete with *zakāt* from the point of view of the positive economic effects of the latter, bearing in mind the lack of success in convincing people of the need to pay taxes, people's remarks on paying taxes, tax evasion and the costs involved in collecting taxes, etc.[86]

In conclusion, we can say that the religious obligation of *zakāt* must be accomplished for the benefit of humanity as a whole as it is one of the Pillars of Islam.

FASTING
(*Ṣiyām*)

Religious scholars have explained the principles and underlying reasons of fasting (*siyām*) on the basis of the Qur'ān and the *Sunna* of the Prophet. The generality of Muslims, however, understand that fasting is the fourth Pillar of Islam and differs from the fasting practiced by earlier religions. This understanding is manifested in the obligation to fast in the month of Ramadan; some also fast on other days in the year for specific reasons. This understanding is further shown in the joy which is expressed in various ways: decorating mosques in the period leading up to Ramadan and communal celebrations of the breaking of the fast which, in some countries, are called 'the Tables of the Merciful'. In this month you will also see the constant movement of people towards the mosque where many Qur'ān reading sessions are held in which religious knowledge is acquired and other activities take place revealing the pride which the people feel in everything related to the fast. Muslims conclude the month with the celebration of the 'Night of Power' (*Laylat al-Qadr*) which was the night on which the Qur'ān was revealed. They also finish this month prepared to pay the *zakāt* at the end of the fast of Ramadan (*zakāt al-fiṭr*) which, according to most juristic opinions, is to be collected from the majority of Muslims.

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85. *Ibid.*
86. Ṣalāḥ Sulṭān, *al-'Ibādāt wa-athrauhā …*, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

This is how Muslims understand the importance of fasting. Their understanding is manifest from many practices deemed appropriate to this act of worship, which have a positive effect on the minds of Muslims. Even if they do not understand the underlying rationale for fasting, many of its positive effects are conveyed to them through various practices, a large number of which will have been handed down through the family or disseminated via the media.

Fasting and the Enrichment of Life

There are many praiseworthy effects of fasting on man's soul, body and mind. Such effects also extend to daily life enriching it with meaning and humanitarian values, some of which are indicated below.

FASTING IS AN ACT OF WORSHIP WHOSE OBJECT HAS BEEN DETERMINED BY GOD

God states that fasting has been prescribed: 'haply so you will be God fearing' (II.183). The basic meaning of piety is observance of God's commands and prohibitions out of a feeling of being answerable to God. It means that the person fasting fears his Lord while performing his act of worship and does what He has commanded and forsakes that which He has forbidden. As it is in the very nature of this act of worship that no one can tell if someone is fasting or not, a sense that God is watching him develops in the Muslim. With this sense of God watching him, there also develops what is called a 'moral consciousness', a consciousness which delights in what is good, and, therefore, does good, and which abhors what is evil, and, therefore, forsakes it, even if no one sees him and even if no one asks him.

In this regard, we find the Prophet say of his Lord: 'He who leaves his food and drink for My sake and fasts for Me, I will reward him for it'.[87]

According to a *ḥadīth*, the Prophet said: 'Fasting is a shield',[88] i.e. a protection against the fire of hell.

When the Muslim becomes accustomed to this sense that God is watching over him, he develops an alert moral conscience and will be expected to recoil form sin. In this way, the whole of daily life benefits from his moral probity. He becomes an ideal model for the Muslim who does good and does no harm, like rain which, wherever it fails, can be put to good use.

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87. Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, Bāb Qawl Allāh taʿālā: "yurīdūna ān yubaddilū kalām Allāh"*; Muslim, *Kitāb al-Ṣiyām, Bāb Faḍl al-ṣiyām*.
88. Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, Bāb Qawl Allāh taʿālā: " Yurīdūna ān yubaddilū kalām Allāh"*.

FASTING DEVELOPS THE MUSLIM'S WILLPOWER

To fast is to abstain from dawn till sunset, from food, drink, sex and anything else which would cause breach of the fast.

When a Muslim has the clear intent and makes the conscious decision to fast in Ramadan, the strength of his willpower is manifested in his abstinence from food and drink for the duration of the fasting. He becomes accustomed to such a decision in obedience to the commands and prohibitions of God and all that ensues therefrom. His decision confirms that man is stronger than his desires, even necessary ones, and confirms that it is always gratifying to break a habit, particularly when it has become deeply rooted. Those who follow a particular diet with regard to food or drink or are addicted to smoking, etc. find that by Fasting all these habits are broken and their lives become easier and better than before.

This means that a man is stronger than his habits. This power extends to make him proud, a man who cannot stand be scorned or despised and a man who delights in his freedom and independence.[89]

A man of such character is an individual who will contribute to the community and the state; he will not accept humiliation or oppression with regard to his homeland, his religion or his honour. For him it is better to go hungry and be free than to eat appetizing foods and lose the power of his will.

FASTING RENEWS FAITH

Renewal is necessary lest monotony rule our lives. When a Muslim spends the whole year undergoing the trials and tribulations of life, it is likely that the monotony of life will affect him. This might prevent him from being alert and undermine his willpower. For this reason, for one month in the year the fast renews the link between the Muslim and his faith: he recites the Qur'ān, keeps vigil on the Night of Power (*Laylat al-Qadr*), imitates the actions of the Prophet in his worship and performs the early morning and night prayers. All of these acts of worship invigorate and renew the Muslim's soul. Therefore, fasting is the annual occasion to remind the one who has forgotten, to teach the one who is ignorant and to reinvigorate the one who is in a state of lassitude.

The Muslim emerges from this spiritual exercise filled with renewed energy. This effect is visible in his daily life as he lives by the Qur'ān, follows the *Sunna*, is regular in performing the acts of worship and is aware that God is watching him in his dealings with people. All these are positive effects of the fast. When the Muslim tastes the sweetness of this act of worship, experiences the way it purifies his soul and refines his character you will see him beginning

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89. Nabīl Ghanāyim and Muḥammad Balṭājī, *al-ʿIbādāt al-islāmiyya*, p. 112.

to perform supererogatory fasts: fasting on Mondays and Thursdays, on Saturdays, in the month of Shawwāl and on important days in the month's lunar cycle.

Fasting and the Muslim's psychological health

Just as fasting liberates the will of the Muslim from subjection to various bad habits, etc., fasting is also beneficial in purifying the Muslim's soul of avarice: he is keen to spend money in Ramadan on those breaking the fast, and is keen to pay the *zakāt* on the breaking of the fast at the end of Ramadan. In this way, fasting goes hand in hand with *zakāt* in helping to eradicate the disease of avarice from the Muslim soul: 'And whoso is saved from his own avarice such are they who are successful' (LIX.9).

Purifying the Muslim's soul is linked to the purification of the souls of the poor as it engenders in him a sensitivity to their sufferings. This plays a role in stimulating social solidarity among the individuals of the community.

In addition, this healthy mentality teaches the one fasting that all the wealth of God which he gives in almsgiving is a way of showing his gratitude to God for giving him this wealth so that more blessings will accrue in this world and in the Hereafter: 'If ye give thanks, I will give you more' (XIV.7).

This healthy mentality, which recognizes generosity but does not recognize miserliness, is beneficial for society. Such a Muslim comes close to God in gratitude for His many blessings: health, wealth, children, etc.[90]

Fasting and time consciousness

As time is an important element in daily life, all the acts of worship inculcate an appreciation of the value of time. The fast of Ramadan teaches such a lesson. The first day of Ramadan is anticipated on the basis of astronomical calculations or the sighting of the crescent moon. The same is true at the end of the month when people seek to find out when the fast will end so that they can celebrate the breaking of the Fast (*ʿĪd al-Fiṭr*). Similarly, during the month of Ramadan, the dawn signals the beginning of the fast and sunset signals its end. The time for the pre-dawn prayer (*ṣalāt al-saḥar*) when the last meal before daybreak (*saḥūr*) is eaten, which was a practice of the Prophet and the times of all the other prayers are anticipated so that they can be performed at their appointed times.

This awareness of time, which is required to fulfil the most important obligations, namely the acts of worship, is a lesson which is beneficial for the Muslim: it develops in him an awareness of the need to perform his duties on

90. Ṣalāḥ Sulṭān, *al-ʿIbādāt wa-atharuhā …*, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

time and a sensitivity to the value of time, whether in worship or in earning a living, i.e. all of his activities.

FASTING AND PATIENCE IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Fasting involves a great deal of patience. As the Prophet said: 'Fasting is half of patience'.[91]

Outwardly, fasting is patience in abstaining from fulfilling desires and indulging in pleasures. In reality, however, Fasting is patience in obedience: fasting is obedience to God and this requires forsaking everything which God has forbidden.

When man exercises self-control with regard to food, drink, sex and the evils of idle talk, he will be able to be self-controlled when he or his community is confronted by an economic crisis or when on the field of battle for a sacred cause. As a result, he will be able to combat material passions; this is the path to victory, particularly with regard to the battles in the world of economics.

Therefore, a person who is accustomed to patience in obedience becomes accustomed to patience in his work and its difficulties, and this will lead to perfection. There is a *ḥadīth* which states: 'God loves it when one of you does something to perfection'. Such patience and self-control will receive a great reward from God: 'Verily the steadfast will be paid their wages without stint' (XXIX.10).

FASTING AND PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Fasting is conducive to physical health and strength of the mind of the Muslim as it is to the health and purity of his soul: by any criteria, consuming less food is better than consuming in excess. There are numerous proverbial sayings in this regard: 'A man can do nothing worse than to fill his stomach to the brim'; 'All a man needs is a few morsels of food to keep him going'; 'Gluttony dulls the mind'. In the past, non-Muslim philosophers also believed that asceticism and reducing physical appetites prepared a person to receive enlightenment and divine inspiration.

I do not wish to go into the issue of treating illnesses by Fasting. Suffice it to say that there is a trend in modern medicine to use fasting as a treatment. This is only logical as the stomach is the seat and origin of many illnesses and reducing the causative factors of illness is evidently beneficial to the health of the body and the mind.

If we add that piety is the path to knowledge and Divine favour as the Qur'ān says: 'Observe your duty to God. God is teaching you' (II.282), we can

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91. Ibn Māja, *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaghīr, Kitāb Abwāb al-ṣiyām, Bāb Fī thawāb man faṭṭara ṣāʾiman*

therefore say that this particular act of worship and its effects can only be of immense benefit in this and other respects.

Fasting and protecting the soul from vice

Suffice it here to mention the following *ḥadīth*: 'On a day of the fast, let not one of you act in an obscene manner or speak boisterously. And if someone curses him or seeks to quarrel with him let him say: "I am fasting. I am fasting".'[92]

    This is natural as it is a characteristic of the Believers: 'The (faithful) slaves of the Beneficent are they who walk upon the earth modestly, and when the foolish ones address them, they answer: "Peace"' (XXV.63). A Muslim who is fasting abstains from obscene language and exercises self-restraint when faced with the foolishness of others because he knows that this act of worship is not just comprised of abstinence from food and drink. Rather, it conists of abstinence from anything which will violate the fast or is inconsistent with this spiritual exercise. The Messenger of God said: 'He who does not give up uttering falsehood and acting accordingly, God has no need of his giving up his food and drink'.[93] He also said: 'Many a fasting person derives nothing from his fast save hunger; many a person who rises in the night to pray derives nothing from his prayer save lack of sleep'.[94]

    How much will a society benefit if its members learn self-control and realize that the real meaning of Fasting is the performance of an act of worship in both its form and spirit?[95]

Fasting and tolerance

Worship is the true manifestation of the Muslim's understanding of the truth of Islam and enables him to present this truth to the world. Islam is a religion which manifests itself in its laws, the most important of which are the acts of worship. These are the outward expressions of the alleviation of hardship and the advocation of tolerance. Fasting is full of ways of alleviating hardship some of which we will mention below.

    a) Fasting is obligatory for the Muslim for only a specified number of days. This lightens the burden of the fast.

92. Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Ṣawm, Bāb Faḍl al-ṣawm.*
93. Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Ṣawm, Bāb Man lam yadaʿ qawl al-zūr wa-l-ʿamal bihi fi-l-ṣawm.*
94. Ibn Māja, *Kitāb al-Ṣiyām, Bāb Mā jāʾa fi-l-ghība wa-l-rafath li-l-ṣāʾim*; al-Nasāʾī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā*, ed. ʿAbd al-Ghaffār Sulaymān and Sayyid Kisrawī Ḥasan, Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1411/1991, II, p. 239.
95. Aḥmad Yūsuf, *al-ʿIbādāt fi-l-islām*, p. 261.

b) The obligatory fast is waived for the sick and the traveller: a sick person has his own particular circumstances and might require a special diet or course of medication. If he is expected to recover, he should wait until cured and then fast to make up for those days on which he did not fast. If the prognosis is not good, God eases his burden by merely requiring him to distribute the amount of food normally eaten for the days he could not fast, even if the duration be a whole month.

The same consideration applies in the case of someone on a journey, as travelling is a physical and psychological burden.

c) Elderly people who cannot fast or can only do so with extreme difficulty may not fast. In this case, they are to give some food to feed the needy, the amount of which has been determined by the jurists. In this provision we can also see the desire to alleviate hardship.

d) By analogy with the case of elderly people, pregnant women and nursing mothers are allowed by the *Sharī'a* not to fast.

We should add here that God does not deprive the one fasting from enjoying his marital rights on the nights of the fast and that Islam does not allow the fast to be continued beyond its allotted time; the fast should be broken at sunset.

All the above are God's ways of alleviating hardship which He teaches the Muslims by means of the ruler of fasting. They embody the tolerance with which the Muslims should deal with people, for Islam, as has been said, is a 'religion of ease' (*dīn al-yusr*): 'Facilitate ease and alleviate hardship; Encourage people, don't discourage them!'[96]

Therefore, the relationships between the members of a Muslim society, and even Muslims' relations with non-Muslims, are characterized by tolerance and friendship, alleviating people's burdens and taking account of their circumstances. All this the Muslim learns through the performance of the fast.

As for the benefits to the state, suffice it to say that the people are patient, strong-willed, united in solidarity and in their wordy affairs, guided by the principles of tolerance and love and generous with their wealth when helping the poor on the festival marking the end of Ramadan (*'Īd al-Fiṭr*). In conclusion, any state will find in such people the ideal support to help it maintain its independence and secure its development and prosperity.

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96. Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-'Ilm, Bāb Mā kān al-Nabiyyu ṣalla Allāhu 'alayhi wa-sallam yatakhawwaluhum bi-l-maw'iẓa wa-l-'ilm kay lā yunaffirū.*

PILGRIMAGE
(*Al-Ḥajj*)

Pilgrimage is the fifth Pillar of Islam and has a special position among them because, as Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī said: 'Pilgrimage is one of the Pillars of Islam. Its foundations are: the performance of an act of worship which takes place once in a lifetime, the fulfilment of the Divine Command, the completion of Islam and the perfection of religion'. Of this, God revealed: 'This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favour unto you, and have chosen for you as religion al-Islam' (V.3). The Prophet has said: 'When a man dies and he has not performed the pilgrimage, let him die, God willing, as a Jew or, God willing, as a Christian'.[97]

> Al-Ghazālī said: The person intending to perform the pilgrimage must repent of his sins, restore what he has unjustly taken, pay his debts, provide the means for his journey and choose an honest companion who will remind him if he is forgetful and help him when he remembers.
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> One should know that the most important aspect of the pilgrimage is understanding. By that is meant understanding the place of pilgrimage in the religion. This is followed by the yearning (to perform the pilgrimage). This is followed by the determination (to perform the pilgrimage) and then the severing of all ties preventing the performance of the pilgrimage….
>
> The Prophet was asked about monasticism and travelling 'among peoples of bygone ages' and he said: 'God has put *jihād* (above all else) and *takbīr* above every other honour', meaning the pilgrimage.[98]

This has always been the understanding of pilgrimage held by Muslims of all walks of life, a religious duty which those who are able, and even those who are unable, yearn to perform in order that they may fulfil all the Pillars of Islam. Every Muslim strives to reach this goal whatever the difficulties or the cost. That those returning from the *ḥajj* talk of their desire to return to Mecca again and again is evidence of the place which this religious obligation holds in the heart and mind of every Muslim.

Every Muslim who performs the *ḥajj* correctly and understands its meaning of its rituals returns greatly changed for the better in terms of his/her understanding and conduct and in interaction with other members of the society.

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97. Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, Beirut, Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1998, II, p. 168.
98. Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, I, p. 266.

Pilgrimage (*Ḥajj*) and enrichment of life

Ḥajj has many positive effects on the character of the individual pilgrim and on Muslim society as a whole. The characters of these individuals have been moulded by their performance of the *ḥajj* to become exemplary models of human conduct. The most significant of these positive effects are the following:

1. The *Ḥajj* makes the Muslim aware of the importance of doing one's duty without procrastination, making excuses or delay. This is because the Muslim realizes that performing the *ḥajj* is a responsibility and that fulfilling one's responsibilities is to realize the true nature and essence of Man. The determination to perform the pilgrimage constitutes the capacity to perform the pilgrimage and being in the state of ritual consecration (*iḥrām*) at the appointed starting points for the pilgrimage (*mīqāt*) is a response to the call of God when He had commanded Abraham by saying:

> and publicly proclaim pilgrimage for all mankind so that they come to you on foot and mounted on lean camels from every distant point to witness the benefits in store for them, and pronounce the name of Allāh during the appointed days (XXII.27–8).

While the Muslim is in no doubt about the difficulties which the *ḥajj* involves, he complies, as he has been commanded to perform this act of worship if he is able to do so when the time comes for him to fulfil the last pillar of his religion and benefit therefrom, once he has understood the pilgrimage rituals and their meaning.[99]

The Muslim who is accustomed to doing his duty in matters of religion will also do his duty in the affairs of his daily life, since a human being is an indivisible whole. It would not be logical that a man could fulfil his responsibilities *vis-à-vis* the acts of worship yet fail to fulfil the responsibilities of his daily life. In this way, we see that the social aspect of worship is the best support for people's moral education.

Pilgrimage and islamic brotherhood

The Muslim learns the practical meaning of the 'statement about Muslims that they are a single community' (*umma wāḥida*) having read in the Qur'ān wherein God also affirms: 'Lo! this, your religion, is one religion' (XXI.92).

He realizes this when he sees huge numbers of people who are not brought together by any earthly authority but by the desire to fulfil the commands of their religion. The mass of this single community, despite the

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99. *Ibid.*, I, p. 268.

numbers and the differences of languages and ethnic origins, moves quite smoothly.

Here the Muslim discovers the meaning of the power of the group and how it helps to establish moral integrity and piety. For this multitude of people must sand on ʿArafa on the Day of ʿArafa, thereby constituting a single group of people with a unique characteristic. Muslims throughout the world follow these religious rites and in so doing create a community of shared feelings.

This meaning of unity and of this vast coming together of people embodies the solidarity of the Muslims as a structure for mutual strength. The mutual understanding which exists between them makes them act as a single body.

PILGRIMAGE AND COMMITMENT TO A SUPERIOR MORALITY

The Qurʾānic explanation of this issue is decisive. God says: 'The pilgrimage is (in) the well-known months, and whoever is minded to perform the pilgrimage therein (let him remember that) there is (to be) no lewdness nor abuse nor angry conversation on the pilgrimage' (II.197).

This becomes clear when we learn that the pilgrim is asked not to do anything which would deflect him from the path of his act of worship. He must not talk foolishly, utter obscenities or commit any sin which will detract from his obedience to God. He should not angrily argue with people, because argument hardens the heart and breeds ill-will. Rather, he is called upon to bear the harm of those who sin, be lenient with them and speak kindly to them.

All this would seem difficult, bearing in mind the throng of people and the people crowding around during each religious ceremony. If the pilgrim can retain his self-control and be committed to this superior morality, this is the real meaning of strength: 'The strong is not he who throws down the other; the strong is he who is able to able to control oneself when angry.'[100]

This commitment to a superior morality is reflected in the Muslim when he returns to his community. It is as if he has been reborn. In addition, his reward in the Hereafter will be Paradise as the Prophet said: 'The acceptable *ḥajj* has only one reward—"Paradise". Then it was said: "O Messenger of God! What makes the *ḥajj* acceptable?" He replied: "Speaking kindly and feeding the hungry".'[101]

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100. See Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Kitāb al-Adab, Bāb al-Ḥadhr min al-ghaḍab*

101. Reported by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal as a tradition of Jābir with a weak chain of transmitters (*isnād layyin*). See his *Musnad Aḥmad*, Shuʿayb al-Arnaʾūṭ, ʿAdil Murshid (et al.), Beirut, Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 2001, XXII, p. 367. It is also transmitted by al-Ḥākim in abridged form with a sound chain of transmitters (*ṣaḥīḥ al-isnād*).

Pilgrimage teaches self-sacrifice in the line of duty

The pilgrimage combines both the physical difficulties of performing a religious obligation with the expenditure of money to that end. This serves to combat Man's love of money and his inclination to seek comfort. If he triumphs over this, makes up his mind to perform the *ḥajj*, formulates his intent, enters a state of ritual consecration (*iḥrām*) and performs the pilgrimage rites, he has protected himself from avarice:

'And whoso is saved from his own avarice such are they who are successful' (LIX.9). Here avarice and miserliness of all kinds are intended, not only with regard to money but also with regard to not exerting the required effort to fulfil a given task.

We should bear in mind that the pilgrim is called upon to spend his wealth generously, as ʿUmar said: 'That one provides well for one's journey is a sign of generosity', and 'The most virtuous pilgrim is the one with the most sincere intent, who spends his money in the purest way and has the most perfect conviction'.

Therefore, it is highly recommended with regard to the *ḥajj* that people become eager to provide others with guidance and are willing to sacrifice. This includes providing food, which is highly recommended.

Similarly, it is recommended that the pilgrim should act in good spirits and use the best of his property to finance the pilgrimage, because he does so as an expression of his obedience to God as he knows that what he is doing symbolizes this obedience: 'Neither their flesh reaches Allāh nor their blood; it is your piety that reaches Him' (XXII.37), 'And whoso venerates the sanctity of all that have been ordained as symbols of Allāh surely does so because it is part of the true piety of the hearts' (XXII.32). If the Muslim becomes accustomed to this morality, he becomes generous with his wealth, giving as much of his money, effort and energy as possible to his community for his own prestige and out of his desire to find favour with God. The pilgrimage acts as a 'training course' which teaches these 'skills', or brings out existing skills, so that the Muslim can use them with ease.

Pilgrimage and the absence of conflict between worship and work

Islam is a religion which asks people to go forth and settle the earth: 'He it is Who hath made the earth subservient unto you, so walk in the paths thereof and eat of His providence. And unto Him will be the resurrection (of the dead)' (LVII.15). Therefore, acts of worship in Islam are no impediment to work as the Qur'ān says: 'And when the prayer is over, disperse in the earth and seek God's bounty' (LIII.10).

The pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) combines worship and the blessings of this world in their various forms because the verse is of general import and absolute in meaning, rather than limited and restricted: 'That they may witness things that are of benefit to them' (XXII.28).

Some of the Companions would refrain form working during the pilgrimage season before this verse of the Qur'ān was revealed. Its revelation came as a mercy and an opportunity for mankind: it includes economic benefits, sitting and conversing with one's fellow men, exchanging opinions and concluding agreements for cooperation with one's Muslim brothers. There is nothing odd in this, for Islam, in its laws, brings together religious and worldly affairs and does not accept their separation.

This all-encompassing view of work and worship, which is at the same time an obligation, has a positive effect on the lives of Muslims in their understanding of work and its value.

Pilgrimage and the development of an awareness of history

History plays a role in Muslim understanding as a subject of reflection and as a lesson to learn from. Performing the *ḥajj* contributes in developing this awareness in the Muslim: he will see the place where Abraham, stood (*maqām Ibrāhīm*) and will remember: 'And when Abraham and Ishmael were raising the foundations of the House, (Abraham prayed): Our Lord! Accept from us (this duty)' (II.127). When a Muslim observes the Well of Zamzam and remembers the supplication of Abraham: 'Our Lord! I have made some of my offspring settle in a barren valley near Thy Sacred House! Our Lord, I did so that they may establish prayer. So make the hearts of people affectionately inclined to them'. (XIV.37)

When he walks between al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa, he remembers Hagar saying to Abraham when he left them: 'Did God order you to do this?' He said, 'Yes'. She said: 'Then he will not be lost forever'.[102]

And when the Muslim kisses the Black Stone he remembers what 'Umar said: 'I know that you are a stone which can do no harm or benefit. If I had not seen the Messenger of God, kiss you, I would not be kissing you.'[103]

Here the Muslim realizes during all the pilgrimage rituals that he finds solace in the Messenger of God, saying: 'Your rituals, you shall take from me'.[104]

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102. Bukhārī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb Aḥādīth al-Anbiyāʾ*.
103. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Kitāb al-Ḥajj, Bāb Istiḥbāb taqbīl al-ḥajar al-aswad fi-l-ṭawāf*
104. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Kitāb al-Ḥajj, Bāb Istiḥbāb ramyi jamrat al-ʿaqaba yawm al-naḥr rākiban wa-bayān qawlihi ṣalla Allāhu ʿalayhi wa sallam li-taʾkhudhū manāsikakum.*

IV–2.4   Al-Aqṣā Mosque
© Robert Hoetink/Shutterstock

Thus, if we know that the pilgrim will see the cave of Ḥirāʾ, the cave of Thawr and the road the Messenger took on his migration to Medina, we realize that he will relive these historical events. This will develop in him an awareness of the past and he will understand that Islam is the religion of mankind from Adam to the end of time and that the Muslim bears a responsibility to inform and call people to Islam.

PILGRIMAGE, EQUALITY AND EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATION

Pilgrimage has many positive effects. Suffice it to mention firstly the organization and arrangement of priorities. For example, the Pilgrims assemble at designated starting places (*mīqāt*) and then enter the state of ritual consecration (*iḥrām*). The pilgrimage rites are organized according to juristic principles: each rite has its particular place in the order of activities and no rite may be performed before or after its designated position in that order.

The Muslim also feels a sense of equality: when he sees everyone dressed in two white cloths representing the state of *iḥrām*, he realizes the truth of the fact that we all descend from Adam and that Adam was created from the dust of the earth.

Contemplating the pilgrimage rituals and understanding the intention behind them also has many positive effects on the Muslims' character and powers of understanding, both of which will be reflected in their society as a whole.

Conclusion

Following these reflections on the acts of worship in Islam, we can say that God, Who knows best of all that which people and life require, prescribed worship and made it take the form of certain basic pillars without which Islam would not effectively exist. In themselves, they are an effective means to prepare people to live their lives and to teach them the values which make life a secure road in this world and a road that leads to happiness in the Hereafter.

In the foregoing, we have seen how the acts of worship in Islam are operating on three main levels:

First, on the level of the relationship between God and Man. Here, the Muslim becomes accustomed to carrying out the Divine Command by his conscious choice and out of the belief that this will bring him all that is good in this world and in the Hereafter.

Second, on the level of the human psyche. Here, the acts of worship serve to make Man's psyche sound and free of the diseases which cause it and others anxiety. This gives the Muslim the psychological stability without which his life would be a source of evil both to himself and others.

Third, on the level of human relationships. Here, the acts of worship implant the values of love, solidarity, brotherhood, equality and the need for people to consult with one another. As a result, relationships between people become honourable and free of all forms of iniquity.

We can say that these three levels interact and complement each other to form a single Muslim community which has been described as 'the best of communities' and whose mission is defined as being 'to enjoin the good and forbid the evil' and to be faithful to God.

It is, therefore, possible for Muslims to be educated, without great difficulty or enormous cost, in teaching and other educational institutions, while, at the same time, performing their religious obligations and acquiring the values and habits which will manifest themselves in the life of the society, the state and the wider Muslim community.

Chapter 4.3

Islamic jurisprudence and the schools of religious law

Mustafa Ahmad al-Zarqa

Introduction

Islamic jurisprudence or *fiqh*, like Western jurisprudence, means 'legal skill or knowledge'. However, the literal meaning of the term *fiqh* is 'deep understanding of something'. This meaning has been derived from a tradition in which this word has been used to denote a deep understanding of religion: 'Whomsoever God wishes well, He deepens his understanding of religion'.[1] Hence, whoever possesses this attribute is called *faqīh*.

As Islamic learning became more diversified and the classification of knowledge commenced, the discipline dealing with law and its detailed rules became increasingly specialized and many scholars devoted themselves to its study. These scholars formulated a technical and specialized definition of *fiqh* as '…knowledge of the rules of the *Sharīʿa* pertaining to conduct[2] as derived from their specific evidences'. The term 'evidences' refers to the sources of these rules, as will be explained later. 'Rules of the *Sharīʿa* pertaining to conduct' refer to all that is laid down by the Lawgiver for the subjects through injunctions and directives. These directives regulate the social life and the mutual relations of people and determine the rights and obligations flowing from their actions and mutual transactions. *Fiqh* also explains the duties of human beings towards God, guiding them as to how they ought to worship Him.

Fiqh, referred to here as Islamic jurisprudence, comprises two main subdivisions: the relationship of a Muslim with his Lord, i.e. the principles of worship (*ʿibāda*), and the relationship of a Muslim with other members of the

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1. Tirmidhī, *Sunan,* Al-ʿIlm ʿan Rasūl Allāh, 'Idhā Arād Allāh…'
2. The word 'conduct' in the definition of *fiqh* excludes from its purview the issues of belief, which are dealt with in theology.

Islamic society, both as individuals and as groups, and the relationship of a Muslim with the human community at large. Within this scheme, the rules of Islamic jurisprudence are classified as into the following:

- First, provisions related to the worship of God (*ʿibādāt*) such as prayer (*ṣalāt*) and fasting.
- Second, provisions related to family matters, such as marriage, divorce, kinship, the financial support of wives, testaments and inheritance.
- Third, provisions related to people's mutual transactions of properties and rights and the settling of disputes. This is called *muʿāmalāt* in Islamic technical terminology and civil law in modern legal parlance.
- Fourth, principles regarding the relationship between the ruler and the ruled and their reciprocal rights and obligations. Some Muslim jurists call this branch of *fiqh* the 'principles of government' (*al-aḥkām al-sulṭāniyya*). It was also known as 'administration of justice according to the *Sharīʿa*' (*al-siyāsa al-sharʿiyya*). This comprises two distinct kinds of laws in modern law known as administrative law and constitutional law.
- Fifth, provisions and principles with regard to criminals and maintenance of public order.
- Sixth, principles that govern the relationship of an Islamic state with other states. This comprises the system of peace and war.
- Seventh, provisions relating to morality, decorum and virtuous behaviour.

Islamic jurisprudence is, thus, at once a spiritual and civil system as it regulates both religious and worldly affairs. This explains the contemporary popular contention: 'Islam is simultaneously a religion and a state-system'.

The above-mentioned categories of rules are derived from the Qurʾān and the *Sunan* embodied in the 'traditions of the Prophet' which explain them. The legal injunctions in these sources also indicate the underlying legal foundations of the rules. It is from these foundations that the other modes of legal reasoning branch out and are considered 'secondary sources' (*maṣādir thānawiyya*). Juristic opinions are based on these secondary sources when the Qurʾān and the *Sunna* are silent.

The Effect of Religious Norms on Islamic Jurisprudence

Islamic jurisprudence differs from positive, man-made law[3] as the latter is made by people themselves, usually without any relation with religious belief; it lacks the idea of *ḥalāl* (lawful) and *ḥarām* (prohibited), and is devoid of any authority over people's conscience. Only overt behaviour, one that is testifiable

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3. The author, like other contemporary writers on Islamic Law, uses the term *waḍʿī* to denote a system of laws which does not feel the need to refer to any religious source.[Eds.]

in a court of law, counts. The law and the courts admit only what can be ascertained by them. Thus, positive, man-made law is not concerned with what will confront man when he stands before his Lord on the Last Day, when the acts deemed lawful in this world might in reality be reckoned as sinful.

In Islamic law, financial rights and all other obligations are ordained by God. God knows the hidden reality and this reality will be taken into account by Him, even though in this world the judge might declare something, based on available evidence, to be lawful. For instance, if a creditor who absolves the debtor of his liability without acknowledging this in writing or by taking witnesses and then sues him and denies that he had absolved the debtor of liability, the judge, relying on the deed acknowledging the debt, will order the debtor to pay the debt. In Islamic law, this judgement does not acquit the swindler of his liability for what he has taken. In fact, he has stolen from the other party though it cannot be proven in the court of law. On the Last Day, he will be called to account by God and be punished.[4] Thus, in every dispute, there are two judgements: the judgement of the judge on the basis of what has been established before him and a religio-moral judgement delivered by a jurisconsult (*muftī*) declaring an individual innocent, guilty or indebted even if he was judged to be otherwise on the basis of external factors. Thus, it is obvious that moral monitoring is inconceivable in the case of positive law.

The Distinction Between *Sharīʿa* and *Fiqh*

It is extremely important to distinguish between the terms *Sharīʿa* and *Fiqh*. The *Sharīʿa* is comprised of the text of the Qurʾān, as revealed by God to His Messenger, the Prophet Muḥammad, and the *Sunna*, which contains the inspired sayings and practices of the Prophet: 'Nor doth he speak (of his) own desire. It is naught but an inspiration that is inspired', (LIII.3–4). *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), in contrast, consists of what the scholars make of the *Sharīʿa* texts and the principles they deduce, determine or establish, basing themselves on the meaning of those texts. The *Sharīʿa* is infallible and, according to Muslim belief, guides humanity to the 'straight path'. Islamic jurisprudence, on the other hand, is the activity of the jurists in their attempt to understand and apply the *Sharīʿa*. The understanding of one jurist might

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4. There is a reliable and well-known tradition (*ḥadīth*) of the Prophet about this: 'I am only a human-being and when you come and bring your disputes to me I judge according to what I hear. I may, therefore, judge in favour of someone who is more articulate in presenting his case than his opponent. And if I judge in favour of someone (giving him) that which belongs to his brother, he should not take it, for in that case I only apportion for him a piece of hell-fire.' Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Maẓālim, Bāb Ithm man khāṣam fī bāṭil wa-huwa yaʿlam*; Al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmiʿ, Kitāb al-Shahādāt, Bāb Man aqām al-bayyina baʿd al-yamīn*.

differ from the understanding of another, and is not immune from error because jurists are not infallible. A jurist's understanding lacks the sanctity of the *Sharī'a*. Such an understanding, although based on a text from the *Sharī'a*, may be debated and rectified if found erroneous. The error, if any, is due to the jurists' faulty understanding and not because of the existence of any errors in the texts of the *Sharī'a*.

The provisions of Islamic jurisprudence may be divided into two categories. The first category includes provisions determined by texts that are definitive both in transmission and import, as well as provisions that clearly indicate the will of the Law-giver and enunciate a system of duties binding on Muslims. The import of such provisions has not been left to the interpretation, discernment or deductive reasoning of jurists. These include the obligations to pray, to give alms (*zakāt*), to fast in Ramadan, to fulfil contractual obligations, to undertake *jihād* – depending on need and capacity – and other similar obligations. The second category includes those injunctions provided by the texts that are not definitive in transmission and import. It is these texts that are the object of the *ijtihād* and interpretation of jurists. This category also includes provisions on which the Qur'ān and the *Sunna* are silent and have been left to the legal reasoning of the scholars. Islamic jurisprudence includes both kinds of provisions.

The distinction made above between *Sharī'a* and *fiqh* applies to the second category of rules, those which represent the jurists' reasoning in interpreting inconclusive texts or their use of analogical reasoning (*qiyās*), or their resort to juristic preference (*istiḥsān*) where analogical reasoning is considered inappropriate, or their resort to the principle of 'jurisprudential interest' (*istiṣlāḥ*) where there is no specific text governing an issue but on which the jurists have made a decision by weighing what is beneficial against what is harmful to the community. Rules based on such interpretations comprise a major part of the legal corpus produced by different schools of law.

This is the category that represents the work and interpretation of the jurists and it does not carry the sanctity that belongs to the texts of the *Sharī'a*. As for the first category, it bears the sanctity of the texts themselves.

Overview of the Sources of Islamic Jurisprudence

There are four primary sources of Islamic jurisprudence: The Qur'ān, the *Sunna* of the Prophet, consensus (*ijmā'*) and analogical reasoning (*qiyās*).

THE PRIMARY SOURCES

The Qur'ān is the first and primary authority as its text is 'sound' (*ṣaḥīḥ*), for it has not been modified, distorted, added to or deducted from ever since

the Prophet conveyed it to his Companions. The Qurʾān is the grundnorm of Islam. It provides guidance for humanity as a whole and has numerous objectives: persuading atheists and polytheists to see the truth of God's unity by putting forth irrefutable arguments; explaining the signs of God in the created world; awakening in the hearts of pious believers the desire to seek their reward with God on the Last Day; warning them against sins leading to the punishment of Hell; and relating the narratives of bygone peoples who rebelled against God and who did not accept the call of the Messengers. Thus, the Qurʾān is far more than a book of law. In its legal discourse, the Qurʾān confines itself to general prescriptions without delving into details except on rare occasions. Providing the details of specific provisions would have overshadowed the Qurʾān's overall aim and also impaired its magnificent and inimitable eloquence. For the details of legislation, the Qurʾān directs the believers to refer to the Prophet and his *Sunna*: 'And whatsoever the Messenger giveth you, take it. And whatsoever he forbiddeth, abstain (from it)' (LIX.7). For example, the Qurʾān orders the believers to establish Prayer and to give alms (*zakāt*), but it does not state how this is to be done in practical terms. This can be determined with the help of what the Prophet said or did. The *Sunna* of the Prophet is, thus, the second main source of Islamic jurisprudence.

The *Sunna* of the Prophet refers to what the Prophet said, did and what he tacitly confirmed as permissible. When the Companions did something in his presence and he did not disapprove it, his silence was taken to mean that it was permitted. The text of the *Sunna* contains several injunctions and prohibitions. As the Qurʾān itself refers to the *Sunna*, it is as authoritative as the Qurʾān for establishing and deriving legal rules from. Once a Companion heard a command or prohibition from the Prophet, he was required to obey and implement it as if it were in the Qurʾān itself. As constituents of the *Sharīʿa*, there was no difference between the Qurʾān and the *Sunna* and the latter was to be obeyed and followed by everyone. Whoever heard something from the Prophet himself was required to accept it as authoritative. The situation changed, however, with the successive generations of Muslims who received the Qurʾān and the *Sunna* from a chain of transmitters from among the 'Successors of the Companions', and then from the 'Successors of the Successors' and then the generations that followed.

Authenticity of the traditions transmitted by the generations following the Companions was different from that of the Qurʾān. The Qurʾān was written down during the time of the third Caliph, ʿUthmān (d. 23/644), and memorized by a very large number of Muslims, there being no difference between the written and the memorized text. The text of the Qurʾān is, therefore, established definitively beyond the slightest suspicion or doubt; i.e., it has an uninterrupted and verifiable chain of transmission. As for the

Sunna of the Prophet, it was not written down in the Prophet's lifetime nor dictated by him. During the first/seventh century, the Companions of the Prophet related orally what they had heard the Prophet say or had seen him do. With the dispersion of the Companions across the territories of Islam for spreading its message, the Successors began transmitting the reports about the sayings and practices of the Prophet. Not all of the Successors or narrators belonging to the subsequent generations were equally accurate or reliable in what they transmitted. In addition, some opponents of Islam, the 'hypocrites' (*al-munāfiqūn*) alongwith certain mercenaries, fabricated stories and falsely attributed them to the Prophet. This group of people is called 'the fabricators' and should be distinguished from those termed merely 'weak' or 'muddled'. As a result, the traditions of the Prophet, which had formerly been transmitted orally, began to be written down and codified early in the second/eighth century during the caliphate of ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (d. 99/717). The religious scholars began to categorise the traditions in terms of their authenticity as 'fabricated' or 'weak' or 'sound' with the last category being used to establish religious injunctions. Within the 'sound' category there are further gradations according to the strength of the traditions. In the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries scholars began to apply themselves to sifting the traditions of the Prophet. They would study the biographies of the *ḥadīth* transmitters, noting their morals, of how good their memories were, of their piety and of their powers of discernment and the reliability of what they transmitted. Among the scholars of the *Sharīʿa*, it became an established principle that a legal judgement of jurisprudence could not be introduced into the legal system, whether it related to the principles of worship (*ʿibādāt*) or to civil and legal obligations (*muʿāmalāt*) unless it was based on the Qurʾān or a 'sound' (*ṣaḥīḥ*) tradition of the Prophet.

Thus, in the field of Islamic learning, there developed two unique and extremely important disciplines: *ḥadīth* criticism and legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*). The first establishes and clarifies the principles for judging the reliability of traditions of the Prophet transmitted in the *Sunna*, explaining whether they are fabricated (*mawḍūʿ*), weak (*ḍaʿīf*), good (*ḥasan*), or sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*). As for legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), it clarifies and explains the principles employed for deriving legal rules from the texts of the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*. It comprises the general objectives of the *Sharīʿa* and explains how these imply political and legal principles. This helps the jurist (*fāqīh*) understand the Qurʾān and the *Sunna* and the purposes of the *Sharīʿa*. It also includes rules of linguistics and logic required for understanding the Qurʾān and the *Sunna* in the language of the Arabs at the time of the Prophet. Obviously, to understand the intent of a speaker, it is necessary to comprehend the language and the modes and styles of its speakers. The texts were revealed in the language of the Arabs

prevailing in those days, employing their linguistic and literary usages, modes of address, similes and syntactical forms.[5]

Ijmāʿ is the third primary source of Islamic jurisprudence after the Qurʾān and the *Sunna* of the Prophet. It is defined as the agreement among the jurists of an age on a legal rule.[6] The jurists in question might be Companions of the Prophet or might belong to some later period. The authority of *ijmāʿ* is based on a saying of the Prophet: 'My community will never agree upon an error'.[7] 'Community' here refers to the religious scholars of the *umma*. *Ijmāʿ* is an independent legal foundation that determines and establishes an agreed upon legal rule. This means that acting upon *ijmāʿ* does not require explicit textual evidence from the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*. Had it been so, the evidence would be the Qurʾān or the *Sunna* and not *ijmāʿ*. In practice, however, the consenting jurists rely upon an evidence, known to them, from the sources of the *Sharīʿa*. Among the examples of *ijmāʿ* is the rule of inheritance in the case of a man who dies leaving behind a son and a grandfather. According to the Companions' consensus, the grandfather would inherit one sixth of the legacy of the deceased, which is the same share that the deceased's father would have inherited had he been alive at the time. Thus, the deceased person's grandfather replaces his father in the rights to the inheritance.

As a matter of fact, issues based solely on the authority of *ijmāʿ* are very few. Historically, after the caliphate of ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 13/634), the Companions dispersed throughout the Muslim world, and there gathered around them many scholars and jurists (the Successors, *al-Tābiʿūn*) in distant lands. It was, therefore, impossible to bring everyone together for legal deliberations. Had this indeed been possible, *ijmāʿ* would have been a very fertile source of Islamic jurisprudence.

Analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) is the fourth source. Its scope of application is confined to the areas in which the three primary sources are silent – issues on which there is no text in the Qurʾān, no sound tradition transmitted from the Prophet, and no reported consensus. Hence, it becomes necessary to derive

5. An example of the use of logical principles in understanding a given text is the express prohibition of a given act implying the prohibition of a more grievous act. The Qurʾān, for example, forbids a son to grumble at his/her parents. 'Say not "Fie" unto them nor repulse them' (XVII.23). This implies, a fortiori, a prohibition of all that is more offensive than saying 'fie' such as insulting or physically mistreating one's parents. Similarly, the Prophet's prohibition of delaying of the repayment of debt when the debtor has the means to pay is interpreted as proscription for the denial of other persons' rights that have a stronger claim. These implications are found in the texts of the Qurʾān and the Sunna and are not arrived at through analogy.

6. See, for instance, ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Jurjānī, *Kitāb al-taʿrīfāt*, Beirut, Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1405, p. 24.

7. Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, *Kitāb Al-Fitan*, *Bāb Al-Sawād al-Aʿẓam*.

the appropriate rule in the light of the existing rules as well as the objectives and principles of the *Sharīʿa*. The renowned jurist Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820) identified *qiyās*, in his *al-Risāla*, with *ijtihād*.[8] Analogy is attaching a matter on which there is no explicit provision to the one on which there is an explicit legal provision, when these two share effective cause (*ʿilla*) and have no significant difference between them.

In the absence of any specific explicit provision, the jurists find a provision in a case whose effective cause is evident. If they think that the effective cause is similar to that of the new case, they associate it with the first case. This shows that analogical reasoning functions as the fourth source after the Qurʾān, the *Sunna* and Consensus and can be resorted to in deducing new provisions.

The legal writings of different schools of law provide countless examples of the use of analogical reasoning. *Qiyās* has been the richest juristic source for deriving legal rulings in cases of contracts and other issues. Some schools of law, however, did not accept the authenticity of analogical reasoning as a source of law. They relied solely on the literal and evident (*ẓāhir*) wording of the texts. One such school was known as the Ẓāhirī school. This school, however, was unable to meet the legislative needs of the Muslim society.[9] Whereas the texts of the Qurʾān and the *Sunna* are finite, actual and potential problematic situations are infinite. The only way to give these new developments and practices their place in the jurisprudence of the *Sharīʿa* is by exercising independent judgment (*ijtihād*) based on analogical reasoning.[10]

SECONDARY SOURCES

We have provided above a summary of the four basic sources of Islamic jurisprudence. There are also some other forms of evidence called the secondary sources (*maṣādir tabʿiyya*). The most important are juristic preference (*istiḥsān*), consideration of the public good (*istiṣlāḥ*), and the prevailing custom of society (*ʿurf*). Custom has had an influence in forming juristic provisions in a number of areas, particularly with regard to the effects of various types of contracts.

8. See his *Al-Risāla*, Cairo, Maṭbaʿat Muṣṭafā al-Ḥalabī, 1940, p. 447.

9. The founder of the Ẓāhirī school of law was Dāwūd b. Khalaf (d. 270/883). The most distinguished of his followers and the compiler of the school's jurisprudence was Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064). In his work, *al-Muḥallā*, he also discusses the other schools of law and the evidences they put forth in support of their opinions.

10. See ʿAbd al-Karī al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa-l-niḥal*, ed. Aḥmad Fahmī, Beirut, Dār al-Surūr, 1948, 3 vols., see I, p. 348.

These secondary sources of Islamic jurisprudence enable jurists of every age to determine appropriate provisions in response to new developments when the Qurʾān and the *Sunna* are silent on an issue. In this context, the expression 'appropriate provisions' implies that the rulings given by jurists and judges should be in accordance with the objectives of the *Sharīʿa* in preserving the five prerequisites: religion, life, progeny, intellect and wealth.

Interpretation (*ijtihād*) and Differing Juristic Opinions

Ijtihād (striving) is defined as the intellectual activity and effort of a qualified religious scholar to infer the directives of the *Sharīʿa* from the sources of law. A scholar involved in such activity is called a *mujtahid*. The qualities required of a *mujtahid* include a profound understanding of the provisions of the *Sharīʿa* and its textual sources and adequate knowledge of the other sources of jurisprudence. He must also demonstrate intelligence, discernment and piety in his conduct and should enjoy confidence of other scholars who happen to know him. Those who do not have the skills of a *mujtahid* must follow the opinions of the *mujtahids*. This is called *taqlīd* (following someone) and the follower is called *muqallid*.

Potentially, the scope of *ijtihād* is unlimited. It is used in two main areas:

- In understanding the wording and meaning of the text in determining the generalities and particularities of the text in deciding whether the application of the text is restricted or unrestricted and what its various possible meanings are; and
- When the Qurʾān and the *Sunna* are silent on an issue and there is no consensus (*ijmāʿ*) among the jurists.

It is clear, therefore, that *ijtihād* is not only used in the absence of explicit reference in the Qurʾān or the *Sunna* but often when interpretation is required to understand the meaning of a text. There are two instances of this from the time of the Prophet. The first is a *ḥadīth* cited by al-Bukharī (d. 256/870), Muslim (d. 261/875) and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855):

1. Once the Prophet ordered his Companions to depart for the Banū Qurayẓa, a Jewish tribe in Medina and said, 'Let no one perform the *ʿAṣr* prayer before arriving at the Banū Qurayẓa'. While they were still on their way, it was time to perform the *ʿAṣr* prayer. The Companions argued among themselves. Some of them wanted to stop for the prayer, for the fear of losing the opportunity to pray in appropriate time. They had understood the Prophet to have meant that they should go as fast as possible and without delay. Others thought that they should continue without stopping for the prayer. They took what the Prophet had said

literally. So the first group of Companions performed the prayer and then went on their way, while the others continued without stopping and were unable to perform the prayer until after evening. When the Prophet learned of the disagreement among the Companions, he did not blame either of the groups as wrong. Indeed, he confirmed the action of both groups.[11]

2. When the Prophet sent Muʿādh b. Jabal to Yemen as a judge and teacher he asked him, 'What will be the basis of your judgements?' Muʿādh replied, 'The Book of God'. Then the Prophet asked, 'What if there is no provision in the Book of God?' Muʿādh said, 'The practice of His Messenger'. He asked him again, 'What if you do not find (it in the practice of His Messenger)?' Muʿādh replied, 'I will do my utmost to reach my own judgment'. The Prophet confirmed what he had said and praised God for His guidance.[12]

These two cases from the Prophet's time show that the Companions did exercise *ijtihād*. In the former case, textual evidence existed, and yet the matter was liable to more than one interpretation depending on a person's view about the purpose of the statement. In the latter case where there was no direct textual evidence, the matter had to be decided in the light of the other provisions of the *Sharīʿa*. Indeed, even the Prophet himself would have undertaken *ijtihād*. He is reported to have said to the Companions: 'I judge among you with my own opinion when nothing has been sent down from God.' Revelation, however, would subsequently correct him if he was wrong or would confirm his judgement.

After the Prophet's death, Muslims spread into the Persian and Byzantine empires. Inevitably, a new situation which required solutions within the Islamic framework arose. It was necessary to create a system of law inspired by the spirit of Islam, so a great deal of intellectual effort was exerted to that end.

The Companions of the Prophet had to exercise *ijtihād* to find solutions to complex problems by basing their understanding on what they believed to be the objectives and principles of the *Sharīʿa*. Their situation was similar to that of a judge who, restricted to the statutes and precedents, is faced with a case not covered before. In such an event, he applies whatever he considers closest to justice and equity. For a *mujtahid*, the criteria for establishing the

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11. See Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 751/1350), *Zād al-Maʿād*, published by Muʾassasat al-Risāla, III, p. 130, For information about the Battle of the Ditch (*al-Khandaq*) (5/627), see Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-Nābawiyya*, ed. Suhayl Zakkār, 3 vols., Beirut, Dār al-Fikr, 1992, see II, pp. 700–47.

12. See the introduction to the Qurʾān commentary of Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), III, p. 1, and *Iʿlām al-Muwaqqiʿīn* of Ibn al-Qayyim, p.175. The *ḥadīth* was related by al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122) on the authority of Muʿādh. Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, *Kītāb Ādāb al-qāḍī*, *Bāb mā yaqḍī bihi al-qāḍī*.

principles of justice and equity are the general objectives of the *Sharīʿa*. The best ways to achieve insightful provisions and enlightened solutions lie in the application of *istiḥsān* (the principle of juristic preference) and istiṣlāh (consideration of public interest), as discussed above. In addition, the socio-economic usages of the people which are compatible with the texts and general principles of the *Sharīʿa* are also taken into account.[13]

Ijtihād inevitably leads to differing opinions among the *mujtahids*. Though the *mujtahids* are likely to agree on great many matters, it is inevitable that they will also find much to disagree on. In this regard Muḥammad Ḥamidullah says:

> The Prophet would use his own independent reasoning when the Qurʾān was silent on a matter and permitted his Companions to do the same when the Qurʾān and *Sunna* had nothing to say on an issue. It is plain that allowing individuals to exercise their independent reasoning will lead to differing opinions. There are examples of this even at the time of the Prophet. However, when their opinions differed, they could always consult the Prophet who would settle the matter…. What is astonishing to us is the magnanimous spirit of the Companions and their acceptance of the fact that they held differing opinions. It is as if they believed that difference in opinions led to the development of knowledge.[14]

Scholars of the classical period as well as contemporary jurists have written at great length on this subject.[15]

The reasons for these differences may be summarised as follows:

1. A legal text is liable to be interpreted in more than one way.
2. There are various kinds of analogical reasoning.
3. The founders of various schools of law have adopted different secondary sources of jurisprudence and different rules for deriving legal rulings from the texts; for example, *istiḥsān* (the principle of juristic preference) and *istiṣlāḥ* (consideration for public interest).
4. The conflicting texts have been reconciled by scholars in different ways.

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13. See the present writer's *al-Madkhal al-fiqhi al-ʿāmm*, sections 14–19, 27–8 and 49.
14. Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah gives numerous examples of this, which show that the Companions never attempted to stop any of them from exercising his independent judgement. See *al-Rāʾid*, vols. 89 and 90, Ramaḍān and Shawwāl 1406/May and June 1986, p. 53 and pp. 58–9. In his *al-Iʿtiṣām* (11/3), al-Shāṭibī (d. 590/1194) also discusses the differences in juristic opinions among the Companions. Cairo, al-Maktaba al-Tijāriyya, n.d., II, p. 170.
15. Ibn Rushd (d. 1126), discussed the subject in the introduction to his invaluable work *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid*. Among the contemporary scholars, we can mention Maḥmūd Shaltūt, a former Shaykh al-Azhar and member of the Egyptian Association of Senior Religious Scholars, who expounded the reasons for difference of opinions among the jurists in his *Fiqh al-Kitāb wa-l-Sunna fī-l-qiṣāṣ*.

5.   There are different views on the authority and reliability of certain traditions; some traditions are considered 'sound' by some but 'weak' by others.

Total agreement on all legal issues, therefore, is impossible. This does not mean that the sources of jurisprudence contradict one another, but rather that the texts are flexible and applicable in a wide range of contexts. Although absolute clarity in the secondary legal provisions would, in most cases, be preferable, certainly the very flexibility of the basic sources is ideal in so far as it enables laws and provisions to be formulated according to given needs. The multiple interpretations of the basic texts and recourse to various types of analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) inevitably lead to diverse views. However, in such diversity lies an invaluable resource for jurists.

Origins and Development of the Schools of Law

During the Prophet's life-time, there were no mentionable differences in the legal interpretations of the Companions, for the Prophet would correct them if they were in error. After him, however, the situation changed. No longer dependent on the Prophet for understanding, interpreting and applying his commands and prohibitions, the Companions had to use their own reasoning when faced with new issues especially in the countries now under Muslim rule. Two approaches adopted by the Companions in understanding the texts of the *Sharīʿa* lie at the root of the development of the schools of law:

a)   According to the first approach, in understanding, interpreting and applying, only the literal meaning of the texts is taken into account without considering the reason behind a given text and the circumstances in which the provision was made, and without attempting to identify its purpose. This is particularly the case with the texts of the *Sunna*, which mostly deal with specificities, while the generalities of the *Sharīʿa* are given in the Qurʾān.

b)   According to the second approach, in interpreting texts, attempt is made to comprehend the reasons underlying the provisions contained in the texts, and recourse is made to opinion (*raʾy*) in identifying its purpose within the *Sharīʿa* in order to apply it in conformity with the general principles of the *Sharīʿa*. The commands and prohibitions of the *Sharīʿa*, even in their minutiae, are justified by what is beneficial for or harmful to the public interest.

Some Companions were inclined towards the first approach lest they err in the implementation of the commands and prohibitions of the Prophet. Some others, particularly those in positions of responsibility, leaned towards the

second approach. Muṣṭafā Saʿīd al-Khinn has explained these approaches at length[16] and so has Muḥammad al-Khuḍrī.[17] They show how the two schools

16. Muṣṭafā Saʿīd al-Khinn, Professor at the Faculty of *Sharīʿa*, University of Damascus, in his *Dirāsa taʾrīkhiyya li-l-Fiqh wa-uṣūlihi wa-l-ittijāhāt allatī ẓaharat fīhimā* writes as follows:
   During the time of the Companions, jurisprudence was concerned with seeking rulings in the Qurʾān and the *Sunna* and then arriving at an opinion on an issue if there were no explicit provisions in the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*. Different approaches were adopted for this; some would expand the scope of individual opinion (*raʾy*) by defining the public interest and adopting provisions accordingly. Among the exponents of this approach were ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and ʿAbd Allāh b. Masʿūd. Others were more cautious in interpreting the texts and held fast to the traditions of the Prophet. The exponents of this approach include al-Zubayr, ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar and ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ. When the Companions dispersed into the major cities under Muslim rule to become judges, jurists and teachers, they transmitted their expertise and juristic methodology to their Successors. Some of the Successors and scholars in the subsequent generations avoided the use of personal opinion (*raʾy*) and independent reasoning (*ijtihād*) in juristic matters. In his *Sunan*, a collection of 'sound' *ḥadīths*, al-Dārimī says of Ibn Sīrīn: 'He would not give his opinion (*raʾy*) unless he had heard it on prior authority'. Of ʿAṭāʾ he relates: 'When asked about an issue he replied, "I don't know". He was then asked: "Well, are you not going to give your opinion?" to which he replied, "I would be embarrassed before God if my opinion were taken as religion". He also cites al-Shāfiʿī as saying: 'Beware of reasoning by analogy… Act on the basis of what you have heard from those who memorized it from the Companions of Muḥammad'. Others were known for their use of personal opinion (*raʾy*) such as Rabīʿa al-Raʾy, ʿAlqama b. Qays, Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī. These differing approaches led to subsequent differences among the schools of law. With passage of time, the two approaches deeply diverged, particularly in the second/eighth century. From then on, two schools emerged: the school of *Ḥadīth* and the school of *Raʾy*. These schools developed and flourished with each coming to have its own distinctive features and characteristics. Ibid., pp. 74–5.

17. In his invaluable work *Taʾrīkh al-tashrīʿ al-islāmī*, dealing with the beginning of the dispute between the supporters of 'opinion' (*raʾy*) and 'tradition' (*ḥadīth*), Muḥammad al-Khuḍrī says:
   In the first phase, the Companions would base their juristic opinions on the Qurʾān and then the *Sunna*. If that was impossible, they would give an opinion on the basis of analogical reasoning in the widest sense of the term, but they did not favour expanding the scope of personal opinion. As a result, there are traditions related from their disparaging its use. So, the question arose: when is the use of 'opinion' (*raʾy*) permissible and when is it objectionable? When, after the time of the Companions, these differing approaches became generally known, some were wont to base their judgements solely on the traditions of the Prophet and would not go beyond the bounds of the *Sunna*; there was no attempt to correlate issues and cases. Another group believed that the *Sharīʿa* and its sources were rationally-based. Although like first group they used the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*, they believed that the *Sharīʿa* was rational and was based on secure and understandable foundations derivable from the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*. Therefore, if there were no explicit provisions in the Qurʾān or the *Sunna*, they would not refrain from giving a juristic opinion. Moreover, they liked to find out the reasons underlying the provisions in the *Sharīʿa*. They were inclined to reject some traditions which were incompatible with the sources of the *Sharīʿa* particularly when these traditions conflicted with other traditions of the Prophet.

representing two approaches – the 'tradition-based' and the 'opinion-based' – developed. The former developed in the Hijaz, and particularly in Medina, and the second in Iraq, particularly in Kufa. The Supporters of Opinion (*Ahl al-Raʾy*) were so named because they resorted to giving 'opinions' on juristic matters. This was due to a variety of factors: traditions of the Prophet were rare in Iraq, urban life was complex and was replete with a variety of ideas and customs, and there were numerous cases for which there was no explicit text in the Qurʾān or the *Sunna*.

The People of the Tradition (*Ahl al-Ḥadīth*) were so called because in the Hijaz and particularly in Medina many *ḥadīths* about the Prophet were in circulation. The need to use their own opinion (*raʾy*) was, therefore, infrequent. To this can be added the fact that urban life in Medina was far less complex than in Kufa.[18]

It should be pointed out that at this early stage in the period of the Successors, jurists could not base their judgements on widely established principles as the principles of jurisprudence had still to be compiled. This compilation was carried out by the followers of the various schools of law that subsequently formed.

The school of 'tradition' arose as a reaction to the widespread use of 'opinion' in dealing with new cases and issues. Their usual reaction was to go too far in the opposite direction until eventually there was a rapprochement and a subsequent narrowing of the gulf between them. Evidence of this is that the designation 'People of Tradition' (*Ahl al-Ḥadīth*) was not used historically until after the widespread use of 'opinion' (*raʾy*) through *qiyās*, *istiḥsān* and *istiṣlāḥ* in dealing with new developments in the lives of the Muslims in the lands which had come under their rule.

Formerly, in the time of the Prophet, the word *raʾy* did occur in juristic rulings and judgements. The Companions of the Prophet would give their opinions on matters for which there was no text in the Qurʾān and about which they had heard nothing from the Prophet. This is illustrated in the *ḥadīth* which we mentioned above about Muʿādh b. Jabal, who was sent by the Prophet to Yemen to perform the duties of a judge and teacher. At that time, such labels as 'People of Opinion' or 'People of Tradition' were not used. However, the increasing use of *raʾy* on matters not covered in the Qurʾān and the *Sunna* and applying reason to derive a judgement provoked those who

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This tendency was most apparent among the jurists of Iraq, most of whom supported the use of 'opinion', while most of the jurists of the Hijaz based their judgements on traditions (ḥadīths). Ibid., pp. 108–9.

18. See the present writer's *al-Madkhal al-fiqhi al-ʿāmm,* vol. 1. 'The Third Period of Jurisprudence' (*al-Dawr al-fiqhi al-thālith*), paragraphs 54–6, *ibid.,* p. 110. However, they may differ with regard to the authenticity of some of the traditions concerning the chain of transmitters or understanding the meaning of the text, as we have shown above.

adhered to the literal meaning of the texts to condemn this trend for fear of its misuse.

Thus, the terms *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* and *Ahl al-Raʾy* first appeared. The *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* condemned the *Ahl al-Raʾy* for their use of analogical reasoning (*qiyās*), even though *qiyās* had been recommended by ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī.

The use of *raʾy* does not mean that judgements and provisions were made at a jurist's whim in disregard of the texts and the general objectives of the *Sharīʿa* as some might imagine. Using *raʾy* meant that when the Qurʾān and the *Sunna* were silent on an issue, or when a text had to be understood or applied, the jurists would attempt to understand it in terms of its purpose, circumstances of origin, and possible consequences. When the Qurʾān and the *Sunna* were silent, using *raʾy* meant going back to the objectives of the *Sharīʿa* and striking a balance between advantageous and harmful results recognized as such by the *Sharīʿa*. All this was not the whim of an individual. Had it been so, the Prophet would not have confirmed its use when Muʿādh b. Jabal replied that, in the absence of texts from the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*, he would make his own judgement. Any contrary notion of the meaning of *raʾy* in this context is untenable.

The difference between the *Ahl al-Raʾy* and *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* is not that the *Ahl al-Raʾy* refused to use the traditions of the Prophet, even when they were 'sound', preferring instead to have recourse to analogical reasoning. As for *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*, they would only use 'sound' traditions. To believe so reveals a misunderstanding. It is well known that each of the four founding fathers of the schools of law are reported by their students as having said: 'If the tradition is proved to be sound, then it must be preferred to my view.'[19]

The real difference between the *Ahl al-Raʾy* and the *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* lies in their different approaches in deriving conclusions from the *Sunna* of the Prophet. The *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* believe that only the literal meaning of the *ḥadīth* should be taken into consideration. In the absence of an express provision, they may suspend the judgement. On the other hand, the *Ahl al-Raʾy* believe that one should examine the purpose of a *ḥadīth*, judge as to what extent it conforms to or is in conflict with other 'sound' texts in the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*, reconcile them if possible and, when they are contradictory, assess which is to be preferred.

The beginning of *Fiqh* as an independent discipline

In the second half of the first/seventh century, some religious scholars and jurists began to devote themselves to the study and teaching of jurisprudence

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19. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, Beirut, Dar al-Fikr, 1994, 4 vols., I, p. 363.

in some of the major urban centres. At this stage the practice of jurisprudence and transmission of traditions of the Prophet were indistinguishable. A jurist could be a transmitter of traditions possessing juristic knowledge in proportion to the traditions he transmitted. A transmitter of traditions, on the other hand, would issue religious judgements on the basis of the traditions he transmitted. These transmitters of traditions began to devote themselves to studying and teaching jurisprudence, sometimes criticising the rulers and imparting knowledge to the students who gathered around them.

This marked the rise of an independent science of jurisprudence. By 'independent' we mean that it became a specialized discipline, which attracted those who wished to devote themselves to its study and teaching. Each leading figure in the development of jurisprudence would attract a group of students, and they would receive his expertise, learn his approach and then pass it on. In the second half of the first/seventh century, many of the Successors were being instructed by the Companions who had spread out to different urban centres. In the first half of the second/eighth century, there were also many 'Successors to the Successors'. Many of them held juristic opinions on various issues which were subsequently recorded in the works of the various schools of law. However, just a few established a fully-fledged school of law with their opinions covering the whole range of legal issues. Those who did were accompanied by excellent, intelligent and hardworking students who transmitted and recorded their opinions on all the areas of jurisprudence: rituals, socio-economic relations, penal laws and family affairs (personal laws). The compilation of legal opinions undertaken by these early students is the primary resource for the juristic thinking of each school of law, their approaches to jurisprudence and their basic principles.

The following generations of students of the schools of law continued to revise and expand upon the textual resources of the schools by further classifying subjects, interpreting texts and compiling works. Consequently, the writings of each school of law and commentaries abound.

The schools of law may be divided into three groups:

1. The first category comprises four schools of law representing the jurisprudence of *Ahl al-Sunna* ('the mainstream'). Some of them bear the stamp of *Ahl al-Ra'y*, while others bear that of *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*. These schools are still followed today by most Muslims in the Islamic world with one of these schools being predominant in each particular region. In the order of historical appearance, deriving their names from their founders, these four schools of law are: Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Shāfiʿī and Ḥanbalī.

2. The second category is represented by the Ẓāhirī school. It may also be classified together with the four 'orthodox' schools of law as it relies

on the same sources of jurisprudence. However, the followers of this school differed strongly from the 'orthodox' in one important respect. They clung to the literal meanings of texts in the Qurʾān and the *Sunna* to an extent that on some issues they went beyond the bounds of reason or came into conflict with the logic of jurisprudence. Such an approach is not acceptable even to *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*, let alone the *Ahl al-Raʾy*. As a result, this 'literalist' school died out and is not predominant in any country. However, some of the school's opinions are being considered today in the study of comparative jurisprudence. For this reason we can regard it as a separate school of law.

3. The third category comprises the schools of law of sects as distinct from the mainstream. There are four such schools of law:

a) *The Zaydī School of Law.* This school takes its name from Zayd b. ʿAlī (d. 122/740), who was a descendant of the 'House of the Prophet'. The members of the school were renowned for the depth of their religious knowledge and their respectable standing in the community. This school predominates in Yemen and is closer to the jurisprudence of the 'mainstream' than the other schools mentioned below.

b) *The Ibāḍī School of Law.* This school is named after its founder, ʿAbd Allāh b. Ibāḍ [fl. second half of first/seventh century]. He shared some of the opinions of the Khārijites but in fact did not share their excesses. This school is predominant in the Sultanate of Oman and has many followers in Zanzibar, Tunisia and southern Algeria. The school has produced an extensive legal corpus.

c) *The Imāmite School of Law.* This represents the jurisprudence of the Ithnā ʿAsharī ('Twelver') Shīʿites and attributes its origins to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), who was a descendent of the 'House of the Prophet' and a contemporary of Abū Ḥanīfa, the founder of the Ḥanafī school of law. This school of law predominates in Iran and is followed by Imamī Shīʿites in Iraq. It is also found in other countries as well. The school has elaborate and detailed writings on jurisprudence.

d) *The Ismāʿīlī School of law.* It was once dominant in Egypt and whose followers are still found in India and Pakistan.

Overview of the four mainstream schools of law

The first four schools of law represent the jurisprudence of the Sunnī or 'orthodox' Muslims (*Ahl al-Sunna*), and are the most widely spread in the Muslim world. The number of their followers differs from country to country.

The Ḥanafī School of Law

The Ḥanafī school of law takes its name from its founder, Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767). Of Persian origin, Imām Abū Ḥanīfa settled in Iraq and was known as the 'Great Imam'. He became and remained the leader of the *Ahl al-Raʾy* and established and consolidated the principle and practice of *istiḥsān* (juristic preference based on equitable considerations). He was renowned for the strength of his arguments, the sharpness in providing irrefutable answers and the genius of his understanding and ability to draw inferences. Two of his most famous students were:

1. Abū Yūsuf (d. 182/798), who was chief *qāḍī* during the caliphate of Hārūn al-Rashīd (149–93/766–809) and compiled *Kitāb al-Kharāj*.
2. Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī (d. 189/805), who was a brilliant jurist and also a renowned grammarian.

Abū Yūsuf and al-Shaybānī were traditionally called 'the two companions' [of Abū Ḥanīfa]. They are credited for compiling the jurisprudence of Abū Ḥanīfa and spreading the influence of his school.

The Mālikī School of Law

The Mālikī school of law is named after its founder Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/796). His school of law holds a middle position between the *Ahl al-Raʾy* and the *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*. Based in Medina, where many traditions of the Prophet were in circulation, Mālik made extensive use of the *Sunna* but at the same time adopted approaches characteristic of the *Ahl al-Raʾy*, for example in his use of *istiḥsān* (the principle of juristic preference) and *istiṣlāḥ* in the absence of explicit provisions from the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*.

Mālik b. Anas took advantage of being based in Medina to establish contact with religious scholars from all over the Muslim world on the occasion of pilgrimage. After meeting Abū Ḥanīfa, Mālik is reported to have said, 'This man is a real jurist'.[20]

The Shāfiʿī School of Law

The Shāfiʿite school of law takes its name from its imām Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī (150–204/767–820). Born in Gaza, he grew up as an orphan

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20. Abū Yūsuf retracted from some of the opinions of his teacher out of deference to some traditions that were related to him, traditions which he felt were beyond doubt and which had not reached him earlier. Abū Yūsuf and Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan upheld the binding nature of the waqf and the invalidity of retraction from it on the grounds of a tradition on the subject. Abu Ḥanīfa was of the opinion that it was not binding. This is stated by the Ḥanafīs themselves in their books on the chapter on waqf. Abū Zahra, *al-Milkiyya wa-naẓariyyat al-ʿaqd*, paragraph 16.

and travelled to Iraq and the Hijaz. He studied under the students of Abū
Ḥanīfa and Mālik b. Anas. He then settled in Egypt, abandoned some of his
former ideas on jurisprudence and founded a new school. He died in Fusṭāṭ
(Cairo). He was quite versatile and his school is considered closer to the *Ahl
al-Ḥadīth*. He criticized his former teacher, Mālik b. Anas, for his method of
istiḥsān, saying, 'Whoever uses *istiḥsān* poses as Legislator' (i.e. God).[21]

The Ḥanbalī School of Law

The Ḥanbalī school of law is so called because of its imām, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal
(164–241/780–855). Born in Baghdad, Ibn Ḥanbal was a student of al-Shāfiʿī.
Being concerned with *ḥadīth* in which his excellence was renowned, of all
schools, his is the most *ḥadīth*-based.

We mentioned above that there were many other jurists whose jurisprudence
never developed into a school of law. From the records of their opinions
and juridical thinking in the works of the four schools of law, it is evident
that the jurisprudence of these jurists was significant and their opinions were
quite valuable. Their schools, however, did not last for many reasons, one of
which was that they lacked students able and energetic enough to preserve and
spread their thinking.

Of these jurists, we can mention the teachers of the founders of the
four schools of law: Ḥammād b. Abī Sulaymān, the teacher of Abū Ḥanīfa:
Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī and al-Shaʿbī, the teachers of Ḥammād and Rabīʿa al-Raʾy;
Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/242) and Yaḥyā b. Saʿīd (d. 143/760) among the
teachers of Mālik b. Anas.

There were also many contemporaries of the founders of the four
schools of law who, though influential, did not leave a lasting codified school
of law behind them. Mentionable among the contemporaries of Abū Ḥanifa
and Mālik are Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, Zayd b. ʿAlī, al-Awzāʿī, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAbī
Laylā and Ibn Shubruma. (Abū Ḥanīfa and Mālik corresponded on juristic
matters and this has been preserved and published).[22]

The Rapprochement between the School of *Raʾy* and the school of *Ḥadīth*

The bitter rivalry between the trends of *Raʾy* and *Ḥadīth*, however, did not last
long. With the passage of time, the realities and needs of life, together with

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21. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *al-Mankhūl min taʿlīqāt al-ʿUṣūl*, Beirut, Dār al-Fikr, 1998, p. 476.
22. See Aḥmad Taymūr's, *Naẓra taʾrīkhiyya fi ḥudūth al-madhāhib al-arbaʿa wa-intishārihā*, Beirūt,
    Dār al-Qādirī, 1990, p. 8.

an appreciation of the rational, diluted the intensity of the initial reactionary spirit. The provisions of the *Sharīʿa* could only be applied, in accordance with its reformist objectives, by the simultaneous existence of the following two factors:

- Compliance with the intent of the *Sharīʿa* as expressed in the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*, and
- Recourse to reason in order to understand and define the objectives of the provisions of the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*.

In the absence of any of these two factors, the commandments and prohibitions of the *Sharīʿa* will be applied in a manner which conflicts with legal logic and which violates the objectives of the *Sharīʿa* itself. There are many examples of this, particularly in the jurisprudence of the Literalist School of Law (al-Ẓāhiriyya).

After the death of Abū Ḥanīfa, the two schools developed a rapprochement and mutual understanding. This happened particularly after the traditions were collected. When Abū Ḥanīfa visited Medina, he met with Mālik b. Anas. They talked for quite a while in private about jurisprudence and the *Ḥadīth*, and when Abū Ḥanīfa came out, Mālik was asked by his followers what he thought of Abū Ḥanīfa. He replied, 'This man is a real jurist!' Mālik b. Anas and al-Layth b. Saʿd (d. 175/791), an Egyptian jurist who was one of the *Ahl al-Raʾy*, exchanged two long letters in which they discussed numerous juristic issues. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī, a student of Abū Ḥanīfa and a compiler of his school of law, visited Mālik b. Anas after Abū Ḥanīfa's death and was given the *Muwaṭṭaʾ* (the first written compendium of law produced in Islam), which contains the traditions of the Prophet on which Mālik based his school of law.

Al-Shāfiʿī was a student of Mālik b. Anas in Hijaz, and he later travelled to Iraq where he studied under al-Shaybānī, a jurist of the *Ahl al-Raʾy*. Al-Shaybānī highly valued al-Shāfiʿī for his diligence and signs of brilliance. Al-Shāfiʿī then travelled to Egypt where he settled down. He abandoned some of his former opinions and established a new school, so two schools of law, the 'old' and the 'new', are attributed to him. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal first studied jurisprudence under al-Shāfiʿī and a warm friendship developed between the two based on their common interest in the subject and their respect for each other.

> Abū Zahra writes in the introduction of his work, *al-Milkiyya wa-naẓariyyat al-ʿaqd*: However, the dispute between the *Ahl al-Raʾy* and the *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* did not last long. The generation subsequent to the founders of the schools of law and their students would come together no matter how much their teachers differed.[23]

23. See *al-Milkiyya wa-naẓariyyat al-ʿaqd*, Paragraph 16.

Thus, we find that the various books on jurisprudence are full of both *ra'y* and *ḥadīth* which indicates a common ground even though jurists from various schools differed about the extent to which they adopted either approach.

It is an historical fact that the ʿAbbāsid Caliph al-Manṣūr (136–58/754–75) wanted, after Mālik had compiled his *Muwaṭṭaʾ* at the Caliph's request, to have it enforced throughout the territories of the caliphate. Mālik, however, managed to dissuade the Caliph saying: 'O Commander of the Faithful, do not do it. The Companions of the Prophet are spread throughout the towns and cities and each of them has knowledge of jurisprudence.'[24]

All the founders of the schools of law displayed a high level of magnanimity and openness to difference of opinions as a means of arriving at a valid understanding and sound judgement. They respected the opinions of their opponents, and the attitude of their students was the same. However, in the subsequent generations some scholars developed a degree of bias towards their own school of law, a bias which was not found among the founders themselves and their immediate disciples. Islamic history witnessed deplorable feuds and tensions between the followers of the various schools, particularly the Ḥanbalites and Shāfiʿites in Baghdad. These people seemed to ignore the friendship and mutual respect which had existed between the founders of

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24. Aḥmad Taymūr, *Naẓra taʾrīkhiyya*, p. 19. He also writes:
When al-Rashīd became caliph, he appointed Abū Yūsuf (d. 182/795), a follower of Abū Ḥanīfa, as chief *qāḍī*. As a result, no judge in Iraq, Khūrāsān, Greater Syria, Egypt or in the most distant province of Ifrīqiyya could be appointed without his assent and he would only appoint his own supporters and the followers of his school of law. People were obliged to follow the provisions and religious rulings of the Ḥanafīs and the school spread widely in these countries. Similarly, the Mālikī school spread in Muslim Spain due to the influential position of Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā. Thus, citing Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064), 'Two schools of law spread initially by virtue of the power of the government: the Ḥanafī school in the Eastern Arab world and the Mālikī school in al-Andalus.' *Ibid.*, p. 9, citing the historian al-Maqrīzī, *Nafḥ al-ṭīb* and *Bughyat al-mulatamas*.
He adds:
[U]nder the Abbasid dynasty [in Egypt], however, the judiciary was not to the Ḥanafīs. Rather at times the Ḥanafīs were appointed and at others the Mālikīs and the Shāfiʿīs until the Fatimid dynasty seized Egypt. The Fatimids were advocates of the Ismāʿīlī Shīʿite school of law from which the judges was appointed. As the school of law followed by the state, it became strong, but it never displaced the Sunnī schools on issues of rituals. *Ibid.*, pp. 13–14.
…. Then, when the Ayyubids established themselves in Egypt, being Shāfiʿīs, they eradicated the Shīʿite influences and found schools for Shāfiʿī jurists. Sulṭān Nūr al-Dīn, however, was a Ḥanafī and spread his school of law in Greater Syria. From there the Ḥanafī school grew stronger in Egypt and in the East: Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn [d. 589/1193)] built al-Madrasa al-Ṣuyūfiyya (theological college) for the Ḥanafīs in Cairo. The Ḥanafī school continued to flourish in Egypt and Greater Syria from that time on but did not reach the apogee of its influence in Egypt until the final period of the Ayyubids. *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16.

these two schools. The cause of their mutual confrontation was their lack of appreciation of the advantages of having a variety of juridical opinions. Notwithstanding the short-sightedness, such diversity is indeed beneficial. It permits the Muslim community to adapt to the new developments and appropriately respond to the changing needs of life.

THE ADVANTAGES OF DIVERSITY OF JURISTIC OPINIONS

In fact the differences in understanding the texts of the Qurʾān and the *Sunna* gave rise to a wealth of juristic thought that is a source of pride and a distinctive feature of the Muslim civilization. The variety of principles, juristic theories and opinions provide a good basis for solving the problems posed by the ever-changing circumstances. They give a wide scope for choosing the best solutions as the need arises in accordance with the spirit and objectives of the *Sharīʿa*.

Unification of jurisprudence and that of legal practice, however, are two distinct issues. Unifying jurisprudence would be impossible and not in the interests of the Muslim community, but unifying legal practice is necessary. By unifying legal practice, we mean a unified code of jurisprudence from which a judge may, on every issue relating to *muʿāmalāt* (i.e. civil and legal obligations), choose the opinion which is the most appropriate, closest to justice, or easiest to apply. The preparation of such a unified code should be undertaken by the competent authorities until it alone is in force within a given state. This organizational measure regarding the provisions covering the civil and legal obligations with the aim of unifying legal practice is necessary for establishing order and achieving justice and is compatible with plurality of juristic opinions or schools of law. In fact, towards the end of the Ottoman period, a compilation of juristic opinions (the *Mejelle*) was made in which the most appropriate juristic opinions of the Ḥanafī school of law were selected and codified. It was issued in 1293/1876 and was the first civil code based on Ḥanafī jurisprudence. Judges and litigants in the Ottoman empire were then equally under a single obligatory code on every question and issue dealt with by the *Mejelle*

A judge, while making a ruling, cannot be left to choose independently from the various juristic opinions available. Giving him such a free hand would violate the principle of the openness of the law. Under this principle, a legally competent person in any society has prior knowledge of the consequences of his actions. Otherwise, anarchy would reign. Thus, if the difference of juristic opinions is a blessing, the disunity of legal practice is a disaster. Selecting certain juristic opinions at a given time to codify them and unify legal practice on their basis will not prevent such a selection from being subsequently amended or replaced with other opinions when circumstances change or when the need

for doing so arises or when other opinions are found to be more appropriate. If this were done, there would be two benefits for the Muslim community: the unification of legal practice, which is necessary, and the drawing on all the schools of jurisprudence.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE SCHOOLS OF LAW

When the founders of the schools of law were alive, their students would disseminate their juristic opinions in the surrounding areas. This knowledge spread to other regions through travellers and pilgrims: the followers of one *imām* travelling in areas where another *imām* was followed would visit that *imām* or his students and study under them.

The subsequent generations of these disciples of the *imāms* came from many different countries. In search of traditions from the Prophet, they would travel widely to meet the most famous religious scholars. Naturally, no ambitious student was content only to study under the scholars in his own country. The more a student travelled and met religious scholars from different countries, the more his knowledge of jurisprudence and *Ḥadīth* developed.

In so doing, this generation of students spread the jurisprudence of their *imāms* to various countries. Thus, the jurisprudence of one *imām* initially spread in his own region and then radiated to other areas, though not necessarily to the immediately neighbouring areas. Sometimes it also spread to more distant lands through students returning to their native lands. For example, Abū Ḥanīfa founded his school in Kufa where he resided, and from there it spread to Baghdad and the rest of Iraq. It then appeared in more distant lands: Egypt, the former Byzantine territories, Balkh, Bukhārā, Farghāna, Persia, India, and some parts of the Yemen.[25]

Mālik b. Anas, the founder of the second oldest school, founded his school in Medina where he was born and lived. From there, it spread to other areas of the Hijaz and then appeared in Basra, Baghdad and subsequently Egypt and other neighbouring African countries, Muslim Spain, Sicily, Morocco and in the Sudan.[26]

Muḥammad b. Ibdrīs al-Shāfiʿī was born in Gaza but subsequently settled in Egypt. His school and opinions first appeared in Egypt and then spread to Iraq, Khurāsān, Tūrān, Greater Syria, the Yemen and the Hijaz. Approximately after 300/900, it spread to Transoxiana, Persia and India, Ifrīqiyya ('Africa Minor', i.e. mainly Tunisia) and Muslim Spain.[27]

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25. See Aḥmad Taymūr, *Naẓra taʾrīkhiyya fī ḥudūth al-madhāhib al-arbaʿa*, p. 50.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 70–1.

Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, the founder of the fourth oldest school, was born and died in Baghdad, where his school first appeared. It then spread to many parts of Greater Syria and then Egypt in the seventh/thirteenth century. By the fourth/tenth century, it had spread to Aqūr, Daylam, Riḥāb and Sūs.[28] Of all the four schools of law, the Ḥanbalī school has the least following.

There are two main reasons for the development of these schools in countries far from their geographical origin:

- The pilgrimage (*ḥajj*), an occasion for which Muslims from all over the world came together and mixed freely.
- The appointment of a judge or a governor, from a specific area, who followed a given school of law could cause his school of law to spread. Aḥmad Taymūr gives numerous examples of this type of influence on the diffusion of the schools of law.[29]

The spread of a school to a region did not mean that it would become permanently established there. It could, of course, be replaced by another. For example, the Ḥanafī school of law entered Ifrīqiyya and was adopted by the people when Asad b. al-Furāt was appointed chief qāḍī (819–20 CE). He had studied under the followers of Abū Ḥanīfa and Mālik. The Ḥanafī school of law continued in African countries, including Libya, Tunisia and Algeria until al-Muʿizz b. Bādīs[30] won them over to the Mālikī school of law. The Shāfiʿī school of law appeared in Iraq and became dominant in Baghdad, Khurāsān, Greater Syria, Transoxiana and Persia. Later, however, the Ḥanafī school became dominant in those regions. Also, once the Ḥanafī and Mālikī schools of law used to be dominant in Egypt. They were then rivalled by the Shāfiʿī school, whose followers, or 'imitators', to use the description given by Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406), became more numerous.[31]

The spread of each school of law in some countries was subject to the ebb and flow of numerous factors. With the advent of the Ottomans, each school of law remained in the geographical area in which it was at the time of the rise of the Empire. The ebb and flow among the schools of law ceased, particularly with regard to matters of worship, though each individual or family had the absolute freedom to select the school of law to be followed. Yet, with regard to the judiciary, every country which became part of the Ottoman Empire was required to follow the Ḥanafī school. In countries outside of the Ottoman Empire, the predominant school of law for the most part retained

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28. *Ibid.*, pp. 81–3.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 51
30. *Ibid.*, p. 63
31. Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, 2 vols., Makka, al-Maktaba al-Tijāriyya, 1994, II, p. 132.

its position. In Morocco, for example, which did not become part of the Ottoman Empire, the judiciary continued to follow the Mālikī school.

These judicial systems, following one of the schools, dealt with cases pertaining to civil and legal obligations, as well as penal and personal law. In the colonial period, the judges' jurisdiction was restricted to issues of personal law. For other issues, the colonialists established secular courts (*nizāmiyya*) which administered positive, man-made law, imposing them on the people.

During the last days of the Ottoman empire, legislation was made in the fields of commercial and penal law. Banks were created and regulations were drawn up for them. The courts were divided into two kinds: *Sharīʿa* courts and secular (*nizāmiyya*) courts. The competence of the *Sharīʿa* courts was restricted to personal law and the affairs of charitable foundations (*awqāf*). In this area, the judges would decide in accordance with the Ḥanafī school of law. In all matters not covered by the provisions of secular law, however, the secular courts in the Ottoman empire were obliged to follow the Ḥanafī school.

After the promulgation of the Ottoman *Mejelle* between 1869 and 1876, all the state courts were obliged to apply it on all issues that were not provided for in a particular law. This arrangement continued even in the Arab countries that broke away from the Ottoman Empire after the First World War. Later, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan promulgated their own personal law codes based on the Ḥanafī, as well as the other schools of law, on questions of personal law that needed reform. The *Sharīʿa* courts in these countries were restricted to the code of personal law enacted in each country. For cases not covered by that code, provisions of the predominant school of law in that country were to apply.

The predominance of a given school in a country implies that it is followed by the majority of the population, while the rest of the population followed other schools. At present, the four Sunnī schools of law are followed throughout the Muslim world:

1. In the Kingdom of Morocco, the Mālikī school of law predominates as it does in Algeria, Tunisia and Libya. In North Africa, there is also a minority of followers of the Ḥanafī school who are descendants of Ottoman families. Most of these are based in Tunisia.
2. In Egypt, the Shāfiʿī and Mālikī schools of law predominate. In the judiciary and in juridical opinions, however, the Egyptian state follows the Ḥanafī school.
3. In the Sudan, the Mālikī school predominates and the judiciary applies it.
4. In Syria and Iraq, the Ḥanafī school predominates.
5. In Palestine, the Shāfiʿī school predominates.
6. In Turkey, Albania and the Balkans, the Ḥanafī school predominates.

7. In the Kurdish regions including Armenia the Shāfiʿī school predominates.

8. Most of the Sunnī Muslims in Iran follow the Shāfiʿī school of law. A minority of the Sunnīs in Iran, however, follows the Ḥanafī school. The majority of the population of Iran are Imāmī Shīʿīs.

9. In Afghanistan, Western Turkestan, Bukhārā and Khiva, the Ḥanafī school predominates. In Chinese Eastern Turkestan, the school currently predominant is Ḥanafī, while in the past the Shāfiʿī school was predominant.

10. In the Caucuses, the Ḥanafī school predominates.

11. In India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, the Ḥanafī school predominates. A few, however, follow the Shāfiʿī school. Nevertheless, there are also followers of the *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* school in these countries.

12. In Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and the neighbouring islands, the Shāfiʿī school predominates.

13. In Brazil, there are tens of thousands of Muslims who follow the Ḥanafī school.

14. In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the four schools of law exist in differing proportions. The Ḥanbalī school is followed by the courts and in issuing religious opinions (*fatāwā*). This is the school followed by all the Najdīs. Among the population of ʿAsīr, the Shāfiʿī school predominates as it does in the Hijaz. In the towns and cities of the Hijaz, however, one finds followers of the Ḥanafī, Mālikī and Ḥanbalī schools.

15. In the Sultanate of Oman, there are followers of the Shāfiʿī and Ḥanbalī schools of law. The majority of the population, however, follows the Ibāḍī school of law which is also the school of law of the state.

16. In Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait, the Mālikī school predominates while some follow the Ḥanbalī school.

17. In Northern and Southern Yemen, Shāfiʿīs and Ḥanafīs are in minority. The majority of the population follows the Zaydī school of law.

Closure of the Gate of *ijtihād*: its Causes and Consequences

The development of Islamic jurisprudence has gone through many stages, each stage having its own distinctive features and achievements related to the application of the law, the composition and style of the books of law, the judiciary, its provisions, juristic disputes, and other developments that have influenced the vitality of Islamic jurisprudence and the richness of its response to legal problems. Contemporary researchers have divided the history of Islamic

jurisprudence into seven periods, each period having its specific characteristics. These periods begin with the time of the Prophet and end with the period starting with the promulgation of the Ottoman *Mejelle* and continue to date. However, we must mention an event that was to have a profound impact on the history of Islamic jurisprudence, namely the closing of the gate of *ijtihād*.

The closure of the gate of *ijtihād* means that no religious scholar is allowed to claim the right to independently derive provisions of the *Sharīʿa*. Anyone wishing to find out the verdict of the *Sharīʿa* on an issue is required to consult one of the four 'orthodox' schools of law. Similarly, a jurist is to follow or consult one of the four schools and apply what the *imām* of that school has said or what is found in the commentaries and opinions of the previous jurists as given in the books of that school. Likewise, a religious scholar is allowed to give a religious opinion only in accordance with what the jurists of that school have determined.

The closure of the gate of *ijtihād* was effected on the basis of successive juristic opinions and with the agreement of the jurists of the four schools of law in the fifth/eleventh century. They declared that no new, independent judgements would henceforth be valid. This was a preventive measure. The jurists of the four schools of law noticed that incompetent or self-serving religious scholars were putting their knowledge at the service of the rulers by issuing the opinions the rulers wanted. They noticed that knowledge had become a means of acquiring worldly benefits, and this was leading to corruption and general lack of trust among people. Knowledge had ceased to be a trust among a section of religious scholars which, in fact, was a reflection of the corruption of the times. Thus, the jurists of the various schools of law feared that the provisions of the *Fiqh* were being corrupted and that false opinions could be tagged onto the *Sharīʿa* under the guise of *ijtihād*. They, therefore, issued fatwās prohibiting anyone from using *ijtihād*. This has traditionally been referred to as the 'closure of the gate of *ijtihād*'.

The late Muḥammad Abū Zahra cites[32] three factors that led the jurists to interdict the exercise of independent *ijtihād*.

- *The Fanatical Rivalry of the Schools of Law.* After the four schools of law had become established in various countries and regions, the followers of each school of law developed a fanatical attachment to their own school and were wont to disparage the followers of the other schools, believing that their own school of law was the only one that represented the true version of the *Sharīʿa*. In so doing, they lost hold of the magnanimity shown by the great jurists of the earlier centuries

32. *Taʾrīkh al-madhāhib al-islāmiyya*, Cairo, Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, n.d., p. 289.

of Islam, particularly the founders of the schools of law towards the scholars who disagreed with them.

- *Jurisdiction of the Judiciary.* The first caliphs would choose judges in the first place from among the *mujtahids*. In the course of time, caliphs and rulers started selecting judges from among those who 'imitated' one of the schools in order to restrict them to a particular school as they were prohibited from judging on the basis of any other school of law. Restricting judges to the school of law favoured by a caliph or ruler led people to accept that school.

- *The Compilation of the Jurisprudence of the Schools of Law.* The compilation of the jurisprudence of the schools of law was carried out by successive generations of students. They classified and sub-classified all possible legal issues and recorded verdicts for both actual and hypothetical cases. As a result, each school of law produced numerous books combining excursus. Once all these sources had been produced in abundance, there developed a feeling of self-sufficiency and the students of law were facilitated in finding out the provisions they needed.

Previously, the motive for *ijtihād* had been the urgent need to find provisions for new developments not covered directly by the texts of the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*. After compilation, the schools no longer felt the need to derive provisions based on independent reasoning. This sense of self-sufficiency was fostered by the immense respect given to the *imāms* of the schools for their depth of knowledge.

It is important to point out that no one had the right to interdict the practice of independent reasoning. Nevertheless, the followers of the various schools of law, who made it incumbent on competent Muslims to follow just one of the four schools, justified this on the grounds that the required qualifications of religious knowledge, piety and righteousness no longer existed, so the conditions for exercising *ijtihād* were not fulfilled. They stated that if someone did fulfil these conditions, he would not be permitted to follow another school of law but would have to use his own independent reasoning.

Closing the 'gate of *ijtihād*' had profound adverse consequences for jurisprudence. It led to its stagnation and to the blockage of its development. The new developments and problems presented by daily life no longer found a solution from the jurists. This gave rise to the idea that the *Sharīʿa* was unable to meet new needs with appropriate provisions. This was the reason why the rulers resorted to issuing laws and regulations on certain issues according to the needs: their contemporary jurists had nothing to offer to meet their administrative needs or to provide solutions for their administrative problems.

IV–3.1   Azhar University, madrasa and mosque in Egypt
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Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 751/1350) has described this most effectively. He was critical of the religious scholars of his day, describing them as being narrow-minded due to their blind imitation of their respective schools of law. They failed to respond to the need for appropriate Islamic solutions arising due to new developments. The *Sharīʿa* could not meet their needs, so they began to issue their own orders, whether or not they were compatible with the *Sharīʿa*. Ibn al-Qayyim holds the jurists of his age responsible for this because, by restricting their scope of intellectual activity, they forced the rulers to take this course even though the jurisprudence of the *Sharīʿa* is sufficiently all-encompassing to meet any needs.[33]

Codification Based on Foreign Laws

In the late eighteenth century, the Ottoman empire began to issue legal codes based on foreign laws as a result of growing commercial relations with European countries. The provisions relating to contracts of the Ḥanafī school of law, which the state strictly followed, could not accommodate the needs

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33. Ibn al-Qayyim, *Iʿlām al-muwaqqiʿīn ʿan Rabb al-ʿĀlāmīn*, ed. Ṭāhā ʿAbd al-Raʾūf, 4 vols., I, p. 7.

of the state in its economic relations with Europe where a great change was coming about due to the industrial revolution.

Thus, Muslims gradually began to adopt the laws of other countries. This use of foreign legislation greatly increased during the nineteenth century with laws being promulgated on various subjects. The same happened in all Muslim countries which came under colonial rule because of their backwardness.

As a result, a variety of positive laws on civil, penal and administrative matters derived from extraneous sources came to rival Islamic jurisprudence which had been a source of law in the past. This was due to two decisive factors:

1. Stagnation of jurisprudence following the closure of the 'gate of *ijtihād*' so that the schools of law were unable to meet the needs of the time through solutions based on the sources and principles of jurisprudence, i.e. using *qiyās* (analogical reasoning), *istiḥsān* (juristic preference) and *istiṣlāḥ* (consideration of the public interest) on the basis of the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*.
2. Colonialism brought foreign influence in the countries that had strong economic relations with Europe. In the nineteenth century, Egypt adopted the French civil code. In the Sudan, the British imposed their commercial laws as they did in India. The French imposed their laws in Algeria and Tunisia. The Ottomans also derived their commercial and penal laws from France and other countries, even though they were not colonised.

Thus, there was no scope for the application of Islamic jurisprudence in most of the Muslim countries except in the field of personal laws. When the colonialists began to withdraw from these countries after the Second World War, the changeover to Islamic law was difficult, particularly for a generation that had been fed on foreign ideas and had lost its sense of cultural authenticity.

The *Sharīʿa* bestows upon the head of the state the authority to issue regulative orders on all matters as need be. However, this authority may not be exercised under the influence of personal desires. It should rather be exercised in keeping with the provisions and obligations resulting from the implementation of the *Sharīʿa* as embodied in the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*. The ultimate lawmaker in Islam is God and His Messenger who is inspired by Him. The Qurʾān says: 'Nor doth he speak of (his own) desire. It is naught save an inspiration that is inspired' (LIII.3–4). As a result, reverence was accorded to juristic provisions, as we have discussed above, and the believer obeyed the principles of Islam as represented by the jurist (*faqīh*) in his private and public life. Unlike positive law, he would not countenance violations of these principles even if the rulers or the laws made by them did not exert any pressure on him to follow those principles.

In Islam, the ruler and the ruled are equally obliged to implement the Divine Law and have no right to change it. This is the major theoretical difference between Islam and the contemporary states where sovereignty belongs to people, which is legitimately expressed through the elected representatives of the people. The people may make laws and general principles as they will. They may change or amend laws, and even completely overturn a law or draw up a law which provides for the opposite of what was originally provided for, as they will. Such actions are legitimized on the grounds that the will of the people is supreme. Islam, however, considers that 'The command rests with God only…' (XII.40). Thus, after recognizing God's sovereignty, the business of the state is to proceed by consultation (*shūrā*) among those who are entrusted with the implementation of the judgement of God. They are not granted the right to amend it. However, the rulers may issue regulative orders for the optimum implementation of the *Sharīʿa* by means of consultation which should then be followed. Thus neither the head of state in Islam, nor the people, nor the Muslim community may legislate to abolish the practice of paying *zakāt* to the poor or permit the consumption of alcohol or allow fornication. Such things, however, are permissible in the present-day states where people are considered to have full authority to make laws according to their wishes. People rule themselves through the representatives chosen by a majority of individuals qualified to vote.

Revival and Re-codification of Islamic Jurisprudence

Colonialism had sought to alienate people from their authentic roots, to undermine their sense of belonging and to destroy their identity. In the last stages of colonial rule, feelings of self-awareness were awakened, especially after the Second World War. There arose in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Pakistan, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco movements calling for a return to the authentic Islamic identity, and one of its natural results was the call to apply Islamic law. At the same time, these movements faced counter trends, particularly from the non-Muslims who called for legal and administrative *status quo ante*. Their main argument was that there did not exist a modern, comprehensive civil law based on Islamic jurisprudence to which legists and students of positive law could conveniently refer.

Those calling for a return to an authentic Islamic identity were supported by the mass of the people, while those supporting the *status quo* had the support of the rulers and the secularized elite. In the meantime, the constitutions of some newly Arab countries stipulated, presumably out of concern for the support of the masses, that Islam was the religion of the state while others stated that Islamic jurisprudence would serve as a source of legislation. Other

constitutions stipulated that Islamic jurisprudence was a primary source of legislation. Consequently, demands began to be made to develop a civil law derived from Islam jurisprudence and Muslim jurists and lawyers began to concern themselves with creating models for its implementation. This was followed by interest at the official level. For example, in 1949 the Syrian Ministry of Justice sent one of its senior jurists to Egypt with a letter for Dr. ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Sanhūrī (d. 1971), the famous Egyptian jurist, the architect of Egypt's new Civil Code, who strongly advocated the study and teaching of Islamic jurisprudence so that a civil code derived from Islamic jurisprudence could be drawn up. In the same year, the first military coup in Syria overthrew the constitutional government. In these uncertain circumstances, the project to draw up a civil code derived from Islamic jurisprudence was cancelled and the foreign-law-based Egyptian code was adopted instead. Nevertheless, there were vociferous calls for a return to Islamic authenticity and efforts were continually made to achieve that goal in Syria, Egypt and other Arab and Islamic countries. This trend towards the revival and utilization of Islamic jurisprudence led to extremely important consequences. These are succinctly mentioned below.

The idea of a modern Islamic civil code responsive to the requirements of the modern age necessitates two principles:

- Deriving laws from the entire corpus of Islamic jurisprudence, i.e., from all the various schools of law in Islam, without restricting to any one school as had been the case with the *Mejelle* towards the end of the Ottoman period which had been based solely on the Ḥanafī school of law.
- A new codification of the sources of jurisprudence and the aims of the *Sharīʿa* and resorting to analogical reasoning (*qiyās*), juristic preference (*istiḥsān*) and consideration of the public good (*istiṣlāḥ*) in matters on which the classical texts of the schools of law are silent. This would be specially necessary in finding solutions to current problems and responding to new developments such as insurance contracts, and limited liability companies.

The rising call for the use of *ijtihād* resonates the attitudes of the jurists in the generation of Successors. Breathing new life into *ijtihād* after the 'gate of *ijtihād*' was closed in the fifth/eleventh century is, therefore, necessary. If the earlier fears of *ijtihād* as exercised by individual jurists necessitated the preventive measure of closing its 'gate', the remedy lies in transferring responsibility for *ijtihād* from individuals to the group. Thus, *ijtihād* becomes a collective act of the authoritative jurists of the age through consultation among themselves rather than the act of individual jurists in isolation. In this way, *ijtihād* has borne fruit, and Islamic jurisprudence could not have met the

needs of the age without it. The dangers of the *ijtihād* of individuals that had originally led to the closure of the 'gate of *ijtihād*' were eliminated.

As a result, the idea of setting up academies of jurisprudence which would bring together the leading jurists of the age from various Islamic countries, were introduced. As a consequence a number of conferences on Islamic Jurisprudence were held:

a) The Islamic Jurisprudence Week, Damascus, Shawwāl 1380/April 1961.
b) The Conference of the Islamic Research Academy of al-Azhar, Cairo, 1961.
c) The al-Bayḍā᾽ Conference organized by the University of Libya.
d) The Conference on Islamic Jurisprudence, Riyadh 1396/1976.

With regard to the proposal of establishing an academy, a body called the Islamic Research Academy, was established at al-Azhar in 1971. Then the Muslim World League, Mecca, established the Islamic Jurisprudence Academy with Mecca as its headquarters. Its first session was held in Shaʿbān 1397/mid-1978. This was followed by the establishment of the Academy of Islamic Jurisprudence by the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), which held its first session in Mecca in Ṣafar 1405/ November 1984. This academy has a working member from each country represented in the OIC.

Each of these three academies of jurisprudence has a permanent secretariat and holds annual sessions and discusses important issues in order to formulate the position of Islamic jurisprudence. Among the issues which have concerned these academies and on which they have made decisions are the following:

• human organ transplants, artificial insemination, and test-tube babies;
• determination of the times of Prayer and the beginning of the lunar months in countries close to the north pole;
• intellectual property rights, appropriation of property for the public good;
• *zakāt* on modern forms of wealth; and
• numerous decisions on economic issues, especially Islamic banking and financial markets.

These academies also publish journals. Therefore, *ijtihād* has been reinvigorated and transformed into a collective activity. To the best of my knowledge, the first scholar to write about collective *ijtihād* and the need for it in the modern age was the great Islamic writer and historian, Rafīq Bey al-ʿAẓm (d. 1376/1925) who wrote a short treatise that he published in Egypt entitled *Qaḍā᾽ al-fard wa qaḍā᾽ al-jamāʿa.*

It should be pointed out that when judgements and decisions require information from other disciplines, such as medicine, astronomy, biology, etc., the above-mentioned academies of jurisprudence invite specialists in those subjects to hear and record the information and expert opinions provided by them. The members of the academy then reach their decision either by consensus (*ijmāᶜ*) or by majority opinion in the light of the scientific facts explained to them by the specialists.

NEW APPROACH TO THE TEACHING OF JURISPRUDENCE AND WRITING ON THE SUBJECT

Since the post-colonial establishment of *Sharīᶜa* institutes and the foundation of full-fledged Islamic universities, there have been new developments in the teaching of jurisprudence and in the writings on the subject. The classical works of the schools of law which were written for teaching in the old style or as reference works for scholars of law are not appropriate for modern university teaching. Thus, teachers of jurisprudence in the colleges of law have begun to write new books to meet the needs of students in higher education. There are now master's and doctoral programmes in Islamic jurisprudence covering every area and discussing matters in-depth from various aspects. Numerous theses have also been contributed to the fields of Islamic constitutional law as a system of government, Islamic commercial law, Islamic international law, Islamic law on human rights and women's rights. This has been a great source of enrichment.

New approaches to the teaching and writing of books on jurisprudence at the university level have been accompanied by openness to all the schools of jurisprudence, the four mainstream schools of law and the four other schools discussed above. The opinions of the Companions and Successors and other jurists of earlier generations whose schools did not make a complete codification such as al-Awzaᶜī (d. 157/774), al-Layth b. Saᶜd (d. 175/791), Ibn Shubruma (d. 144/761), Ibn Abī Laylā (d. 148/765), Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778) and others have also been included.

This openness has removed the fanatical rivalry which used to characterize the followers of different schools of law in the past. In the course of teaching Islamic jurisprudence in the universities today, an attempt is made to highlight the advantages of the schools of law with regard to their wealth of knowledge of jurisprudence, their intellectual maturity, their breadth of insight in discussing evidence and their ease of application, as well as how the codification of Islamic jurisprudence helps those concerned with selecting any subject from any school of law in accordance with what is most appropriate in terms of time and place.

The modern trend in reviving Islamic jurisprudence has rendered jurisprudence a great service by bringing out its true essence, which had been

concealed by the complex and archaic style of the classical legal scholars which could be understood only by those well-versed in their language and terminology. (This is particularly true of the works of the later jurists). We also see an openness towards positive law in an attempt to find out the opinions of the theoreticians of positive law on all subjects relating to the jurisprudence of civil and legal obligations (*muʿāmalāt*). This has had an influence on the teaching of Islamic jurisprudence at universities and on the writing of modern books for students.

This contact between Islamic jurisprudence and non-religious legal systems has borne fruit and has helped present Islamic jurisprudence in comparison with other legal traditions in books, research papers and doctoral theses in a style and language that even beginners can understand, using themes that they are familiar with, but whose counterparts in Islamic jurisprudence they were unaware of. The extreme fragility in relations which used to exist between the Muslim jurists and the specialists of other legal traditions in the first half of the twentieth century has disappeared.

In the 1950s, courses on the principles of positive law and a general survey of the theory of obligations in the civil code were introduced in some *Sharīʿa* colleges. Still more interesting is the fact that a law was passed in Syria stipulating that judges appointed to the *Sharīʿa* courts must be holders of diplomas in positive law. Consequently, anyone wishing to be a judge in the *Sharīʿa* courts also had to be a graduate of a law school. The judges of the *Sharīʿa* courts were considered equal to those of the secular (*niẓāmiyya*) courts and were in fact even better qualified because of the depth of their legal training.

CODIFICATION BASED ON ISLAMIC JURISPRUDENCE

Following the principle that Islamic jurisprudence was to be the principal source of legislation, need was realized to bring existing laws in line with the principles of Islamic jurisprudence. In Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Jordan, efforts focused on the creation of a modern civil code derived from Islamic jurisprudence in the widest sense, as discussed above.

The first Arab country to implement the idea of creating a modern civil code in terms of its style, organization and codification based on the various schools of Islamic jurisprudence was the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. A commission of jurists and legists produced a civil code with an article-by-article explanatory memorandum linking the article to its source in the schools of law, supporting the article by reference to analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) or codification based on consideration of the public good (*istiṣlāḥ*). The Civil Code was formally decreed in 1976 and replaced the *Mejelle* that had been in effect in Jordan to that date. The passing of this law brushed aside

the difficulties that had obstructed the achievement of the ideal since the mid-twentieth century. The differences between the schools of law and the flexibility of the texts of the *Sharīʿa* were of the greatest help in selecting the provisions and judgements appropriate to the modern age. The United Arab Emirates also adopted this code in full and promulgated it as its civil code.

The Jordanian Civil Code came as an irrefutable argument for supporters of the need to make Islamic law applicable in our age. In fact, this civil code is derived to a large extent in terms of construction and composition from the new Egyptian civil code. Objectively, all its principles and provisions are codifiable on the basis of the principles of Islamic jurisprudence, the objectives of the *Sharīʿa* and the evaluation of what is in the public interest. A further revision of the code and its explanatory memoranda would further improve it and make it more accurate and more closely related to Islamic jurisprudence and its sources.

This bold official move in Jordan paved the way for a draft of Unified Arab Civil Status Code derived from Islamic jurisprudence. In the mid-1970s, the Arab League charged its legal department with drawing up a draft of unified civil code which could be adopted by any Arab country. To this end, a committee of experts was formed. It consisted of lawyers who began to draw up the draft on the basis of foreign codes. It became clear to them that the people of the Arab countries would not be willing to accept a civil code of foreign provenance, one far removed from their own jurisprudential tradition, particularly after the promulgation of the Jordanian Civil Code. Thus, there was a change in direction and a commission of Muslim jurists and experts in positive law was formed to draw up a draft code based on the principles of Islamic jurisprudence without being restricted to a particular school of law, with each article supported by an explanatory memorandum indicating its origin in Islamic jurisprudence and the texts of the classical jurists. (The present writer was a member of that commission). The commission, which began its proceedings at periodic meetings in the early 1980, finished its task in 1984. The introductory chapter to the code was drawn up together with the texts on the general theory of obligation (*iltizāmāt*). These form the backbone of the code and its most problematic stage. Chapters and sections discussing the origin and extinction of an obligation were provided with a detailed jurisprudential explanation of their source contained in explanatory memoranda accompanying each article.

Islamic banking and Islamic modes of investment

Since the mid-1970, many banks and financial institutions have appeared in and outside the Islamic world. These institutions wish to conduct their affairs in accordance with the *Sharīʿa*. In addition, a strong trend has emerged

in a number of Islamic countries to do away with interest in their banking system as a whole. This development constitutes a major challenge for Islamic jurisprudence. Muslim jurists are using their *ijtihād* and developing a practical formula for making transactions and investments that are both acceptable in terms of the *Sharīʿa* and economically viable. The response of the jurists to this contemporary challenge has been effective and is a practical expression of the modern approach to the revival of Islamic jurisprudence.

THE PROJECT OF AN ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF ISLAMIC JURISPRUDENCE

After the Faculty of Islamic Law was established in 1954 at the Syrian University (currently the University of Damascus), one of its earliest tasks was to work on the compilation of an encyclopaedia of Islamic jurisprudence. To this effect, in 1956 the Faculty of Islamic Law set up a commission for this project. The commission began its work by listing the entries for the themes, issues and principles of Islamic jurisprudence from various books of the four schools of law to produce an alphabetical index for the encyclopaedia. Thus, both specialists and non-specialists would be able to look up the juristic opinions of each school of law with ease.

During the union between Egypt and Syria which commenced in 1958, the two countries set up a joint commission to cooperate on this great project. The work stopped with the dissolution of the union in 1961. The project, however, continued at a slow pace in Egypt. In 1966, the Ministry of Waqf and Islamic Affairs in Kuwait decided to take up the project and put the necessary mechanism in place, making rapid progress.[34] This aroused the enthusiasm of the Egyptian Ministry of Waqf to continue its own project, so it began to implement it. It has been completed in 45 volumes.

Hopefully it will become an invaluable aid and a major source of legislation in the future not only in Arab and Islamic countries but also elswhere.

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34. See *al-Mawsūʿa al-fiqhiyya*, Kuwait, Wizārat al-Awqāf, 2006.

Chapter 4.4

ISLAMIC ETHICS

Muhammad Abdul Haq Ansari

Islamic ethics[1] is essentially a systematic exposition of the answers that the Qurʾān and the *Sunna* of the Prophet provide with regard to questions of good and evil, right and wrong, obligation and responsibility. This chapter gives an outline of Islamic ethics. This discussion covers some normative problems and also touches on some practical issues. Although the work is primarily based on the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*, the views of important Muslim philosophers, theologians and *sufi* relevant to the subject have also been taken into account. Although classical works on Islamic ethics (*akhlāq*) modelled on Greek ethical writings have taken good as the primary concept, Islamic ethics takes both good and right as primary concepts.

I

The Qurʾān is the first source of Islamic ethics. It lays down fundamental moral principles and prescribes rules of conduct for the individual as well as for institutions and societies. It lauds some acts as virtues and condemns others as vices, enunciates the qualities of good life, and highlights some exemplary personalities to serve as ideals. It also refers, at times directly, but most often indirectly, to things, experiences, attitudes and relationships as commendable or reprehensible in varying degrees. Besides, the Qurʾān enunciates its views about human beings, their place in the world, their relation with God, the purpose of their life on earth, and their destiny beyond in the life to come.

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1. For useful material relevant to the subject under study in another volume of this series, see Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Hādī Abū Rīda, 'Norms and values' and Habib Fekih, 'Moral thought', in A. Bouhdiba (ed.), *The different aspects of Islamic culture: The Individual and Society in Islam*, Paris, UNESCO, 1998, pp. 19–60 and 79–96.

These not only provide the metaphysical setting for Islamic ethics but also determine its conceptual content and contribute to its realization in practice.

The *Sunna* of the Prophet is the second source of Islamic ethics, next in importance to the Qurʾān. It explains the Qurʾānic principles, applies them to practical situations of life, and enacts rules to promote the ends for the realization of which these have been promulgated.

With the *Sunna* being an explanation and amplification of Qurʾānic norms, the relationship between the Qurʾān and the *Sunna* is a very close one. The Qurʾān, for instance, commands good behaviour towards our neighbours (IV.36). The *Sunna* explains what this means, and underlines its importance by such a saying as, 'By God no one of you will be a believer if his neighbour goes to bed hungry.'[2] Likewise, the Qurʾān says that 'the affairs of the Muslims are carried out through consultation (*shūrā*) among them' (XLII.38). The Prophet applies that principle in his society and works out its forms. The Qurʾān says, 'Fight in the way of Allāh those who fight with you, but do not transgress the limits' (II.190). The Prophet, in pursuance of the rule, enacts that women, children and old men should not be killed, crops should not be destroyed, and trees should not be felled, [3] and so on.

The Prophet's life was the best practical example of what he taught. He said that he was sent to perfect virtue,[4] and the Qurʾān testifies that he stood on an exalted level of morality (LXVIII.4). Hence, the imitation of his ways (*Sunna*) became the ideal for all Muslims, who are required to do so in order to perfect their lives.

Technically, *Sunna* means all that the Prophet said, did or approved of, but the only part of this that is normative includes those things he said, did or approved of as part of his prophetic mission and which he wished to be followed. This condition excludes some categories of the Prophet's acts from the sphere of normative *Sunna*: for example, acts that comprised exclusive privileges or special obligations of the Prophet; acts reflecting his personal likes and dislikes in eating, clothing and similar matters; incidental acts, such as the ones related to his travels, their timings, routes, carriers and so on; practices originating from empirical experiences in fields like medicine; and means and ways determined by the special conditions of the Arabs. In the last category fall a lot of things pertaining to language, technology, administration and social customs.[5]

After the Prophet, the best embodiments of Islamic values, according to the belief of the preponderant majority of Muslims, were his Companions,

2. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, Beirut, al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1398/1978, I, p. 55; Mālik, *al-Muwaṭṭaʾ*, Bāb *Ṣifat al-Nabī, mā jāʾ fī-l-laḥm*.

3. See Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, *Kitāb al-Jihād, Bāb Qatl al-nisāʾ*; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Jihād, Bāb Qatl al-ṣibyān fī-l-ḥarb* and *Bāb Qatl al-nisāʾ fī-l-ḥarb*.

4. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, op. cit., II, p. 381; Mālik, *al-Muwaṭṭaʾ, Bāb Ḥusn al-kuhlq*.

5. For discussion see Shāh Walī Allāh, *Ḥujjat Allāh al-Bāligha,* Delhi, Kutub Khānah-'i Rashīdiyya, AH 1374, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 128–9.

particularly the first four caliphs. The lives they lived and the society they built were an extension of the prophetic model. The practices in which they concurred are more than illustrative; they have a normative value. The generation following the Companions faithfully represented the values of Islam and was on the whole free from unislamic influences. However, in citing their examples as norms, we must also look at the historical conditions of the time. Slavery, for instance, was a common practice of the age. Steps were taken to limit its scope and mitigate its evils, but the conditions of the time did not allow for its total eradication. However, since it goes against the basic Islamic concept of human equality, its abolition rather than its perpetration is the norm for later ages.

In a limited area, the practices approved and recognized by Muslim society are also normative. The Qurʾānic term for them is *maʿrūf*. One verse, for instance, says, 'Behave with them [wives] according to the *maʿrūf* ' (IV.19). What this means is that in ministering to the needs of a wife such as food, clothing and housing, a husband should behave according to the approved norms of the society or class to which they belong. Other verses in which the word *maʿrūf* is used in this sense are II.180, 236, 240, 241; IV.6, 25; and LXV.6. It is on the basis of verses like these that jurists have accepted *ʿurf* (social custom) as one of the subsidiary sources of Islamic law.

Maʿrūf, however, also has a wider connotation in the Qurʾān. It refers to the general principles of good conduct that are known to, and approved by, humanity at large. According to the Qurʾān, the fundamental rules of morality are part of the nature (*fiṭra)* of which God has created human beings (XXX.30). The good among them have been known and recognized to be good (*maʿrūf*), and the evil among them have been known and recognized to be evil (*munkar*) by human beings prior even to the prophetic revelation. Significantly, one of the reasons that people should believe in the prophecy of Muḥammad, or any other prophet for that matter, is that he commands the *maʿrūf* and forbids the *munkar*, allows them *ṭayyibāt* (good things) and prohibits for them *khabāʾith* (evil things) (VII.157). Obviously, this argument would carry no weight with people had they not been aware of these things as good or bad before the Qurʾān called them to believe in the Prophet.

The role of reason is not confined to the knowledge of basic moral principles. It also involves judgement about matters not specifically mentioned in the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*, as well as making decisions about particular cases demanding assessment of existing rules and possible consequences. In complex situations, where we are not able to argue in the light of his knowledge or the Qurʾān and *Sunna* in favour of a particular course of action, the Prophet suggested that we should consult our hearts, and then do what

we are satisfied with.[6] In such cases, the intuition (*ilhām*) of the pious, or *kashf* of the *sufis* known for their devotion to God, can also play a role. Beyond that, however, Islam does not accord any role to mystical intuition in ethical matters. Intuition neither reveals any fresh truth, nor determines any priorities not otherwise known.

In the first Islamic centuries, all the four factors – the Qurʾān, the *Sunna* of the Prophet, the *maʿrūf* of society, and reason – were involved in making legal and ethical judgements. People were not aware of a disjunction between reason and revelation until theologians raised the question whether it was revelation (*Sharʿ*: the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*) that was the source of knowledge for the *ḥasan* (the good and the right) and the *qabīḥ* (the evil and the wrong), or whether reason was its source. After the question was raised in this form, a group of theologians, notably the Muʿtazilites, came out with the view that except for matters pertaining to worship and creed, all other things and acts, particularly those that are the object of ethical judgement, are known by reason prior to revelation.

Another group of theologians said that revelation was the only means to know the good and the right. By reason, they said, we cannot know anything to be good or bad except in the sense of the pleasant or unpleasant, or what is conducive to them. In a polemical vein, they were led to assert that the terms *ḥasan* and *qabīḥ* have no meaning independent of revelation. To say that ʿḍ is *ḥasan*ʾ only means that ʿḍ is approved or commanded by revelation (*Sharʿ*)ʾ. Similarly, ʿḍ is *qabīḥ*ʾ means that it is disapproved or prohibited by revelation (*Sharʿ*).[7]

This was the view of a section of orthodox theologians, the Ashʿarites. The other group, the Māturīdīs who followed the great *Imām* Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767), as well as the traditionalists following the Elders (*Salaf*) like Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), agreed with the Muʿtazilites on the rationality of fundamental ethical principles. Ibn Taymiyya even claimed that the Ashʿarite view on the issue was an unjustified innovation (*bidʿa*) in Islam.[8]

II

The Qurʾān has more than one word for general approbation and disapprobation. For approbation, it has *ḥasan* and *khayr*, generally rendered as good. For disapprobation it has *sūʾ* and *sharr*, meaning bad and evil. All

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6. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 228; al-Dārimī, *Sunan*, ed. F. A. Zamarlī, K. al-Sabʿ al-ʿAlamī, Beirut, Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1987, *Kitāb al-Buyūʿ*.

7. *Imām* al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, ed. M. Y. Mūsā and ʿA. ʿA. al-Muʾmin, Cairo, Maktabat al-Khānjī, n.d., p. 258; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Arbaʿīn fī uṣūl al-dīn*, Hyderabad, India, n.p., AH 1353, p. 246.

8. Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-sunna*, Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya, n.d., I, p. 125.

these words are used for acts as well as things. *Ṣāliḥ* (righteous) is the most common word of approbation for acts and persons; however, it is seldom used for things and experiences. The opposite of *ṣāliḥ* is *sayyiʾ* or *sūʾ* which, unlike *ṣāliḥ*, is also used for things, experiences and attitudes. *Ṭayyib* and its opposite, *khabīth*, are used for both things and persons, rather than acts.

The fact that there are no specific words in the Qurʾān and the *Sunna* to qualify things, experiences and attitudes on the one hand, and acts and behaviour on the other, indicates in a sense the Qurʾānic view on the relation between the good and the right. It seems that for the Qurʾān the good and the right are interdependent concepts, without one being primary and the other derivative. A linguistic study of the terms used in the Qurʾān, of course, might not be enough to justify this claim; but it would doubtlessly be significant.

The range of things, experiences, attitudes and relations that are approved by means of various terms in the Islamic tradition is very comprehensive. It includes goods of a personal character, such as life, health, fulfilment of desires, pleasure, peace of mind, development of potentialities, appreciation of beauty and perception of truth. It also includes social good, such as equality, justice, benevolence, friendship, love, respect for the elders and affection for the young. It includes virtues, like sincerity, truthfulness, generosity, patience, courage and prudence which are appreciated by all regardless of religious affiliation, and religious virtues like faith, trust, reverence, and love. It further includes religious acts, such as worship and remembrance of God. This, however, is not the limit. The life and the pleasure of birds in the air and animals on the land or in the sea are also objects of concern for the *Sharʿ*; it does not allow anyone to play with any living thing, kill it or harm it unnecessarily. The Prophet said, 'All living creatures (*al-khalq*) are like children dependent (*ʿayāl*) on God, the best among you are those that are most kind to them.'[9]

'The pleasure of God is the greater good' (IX.72). There are not many verses like this in the Qurʾān which directly state that a particular thing is good or bad. The Qurʾān refers indirectly to the goodness or faultiness of things. One indirect way out of many is to say that God likes or does not like a particular thing. For instance, 'God does not like disorder' (II.205); 'God wants for you ease, He does not want for you hardship' (II.185); 'God loves those who trust [in God]' (III.159); and 'God does not like the boastful' (XVI.23), 'the dishonest, and the ungrateful' (XXII.38).

The goodness of a lot of things is inferred from the statements expressing some acts that have been commanded or recommended. 'There is life for you in *qiṣāṣ* [avenging within the limits of parity] if you could only know that' (II.179). From this, the goodness of life is inferred. But verses like this in

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9. See Ismāʿīl b. Muḥammad al-ʿAjlūnī, *Kashf al-khafāʾ*, Beirut, Muʾassasat al-Risāla, AH 1405, I, p. 458.

which the object of a rule is mentioned are not many. Usually logical argument proceeds by way of a process of intellectual induction, which is part of what jurists call *qiyās*, argument by analogy.

Besides the good that is directly or indirectly mentioned in the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*, there is a class of good things which are referred to by such blanket terms as *ṭayyibāt* (sing. *ṭayyib*), meaning good, fine. For instance, while Muslims ʿare allowed to use *ṭayyibāt*ʾ (V.4), the things that are *ṭayyib* are not defined in the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*. They only specify the things that are not *ṭayyib* and those that are *khabīth*, bad and unpleasant. This gives rise to the juristic maxim that all things are lawful except those that have been (specifically) proscribed by revelation.[10]

The above maxim is true also for aesthetic goods. A *ḥadīth* says, ʿGod is beautiful and loves beauty.ʾ[11] But revelation does not describe what constitutes beauty. It prefers to inform people what things are ugly, leaving judgement regarding what things are beautiful to the good sense of men and women. Therefore, all that people consider to be beautiful or good is beautiful or good except that which has been specified as ugly or bad in revelation or can be shown to belong to that category.

Similarly, there are a lot of good things that find no mention in the Qurʾān and *Sunna*, for the obvious reason that they are universally recognized as good, such as health, fulfilment of lawful desires, enjoyment of pleasure, and the celebration of common good. The urge in human nature towards these is so strong that the *Sharʿ*, as observed by Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī (d. 790/1388), a renowned jurist of Muslim Spain, did not consider it necessary to come out with a specific word for them.[12]

Juristic reflection on the *Sharīʿa* has, however, been more concerned with rules and regulations, and less with their objects and ends. Even though it might be elementary, reflection on the ends is, at many points, very illuminating. Al-Shāṭibī says, ʿThe regulations of the *Sharʿ* have been designed to produce *maṣāliḥ* (sing. *maṣlaḥa*) and remove *mafāsid* (sing. *mafsada*), and these are certainly their ends and objects.ʾ[13] ʿThe *maṣāliḥ*ʾ, he further elaborates, ʿare those which are conducive to the preservation of human life and its fulfilment, and the realization of all that human nature, animal and rational, demands until one is happy in every respect.ʾ[14] ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn ʿAbd al-Salām (d. 660/1262), another

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10. See Ibn Nujaym Zayn al-Dīn b. Ibrāhīm, *al-Ashbāh wa-l-naẓāʾir*, ed. M. M. al-Ḥāfiẓ, Damascus, Dār al-Fikr, 1982, pp. 73–4.

11. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Īmān, Bāb Taḥrīm al-kibr wa bayānuhu*; Ibn Māja, *Sunan, Kitāb al-Duʿāʾ, Bāb Asmāʾ Allāh ʿAzz wa-jall*; Aḥmad, *Musnad, op. cit.*, IV, pp. 133–4, 151.

12. Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt fī uṣūl al-sharīʿa*, ed. ʿA. A. Darāz, Cairo, al-Maktaba al-Tijāriyya al-Kubrā, 1975, I, pp. 180–1.

13. *Ibid.*, I, p. 195.

14. *Ibid.*, II, p. 25.

celebrated jurist and judge, defines *maṣāliḥ* and *mafāsid* in these words: 'By maṣāliḥ and mafāsid we mean good and evil, useful and harmful, right and wrong. For all the maṣāliḥ are good, useful and right; and all the mafāsid are harmful and evil.' He further observes that in the Qurʾān 'ḥasanāt is the usual word for what is meant here by maṣāliḥ, and sayyiʾāt for what is meant here by mafāsid.'[15]

It is clear from these observations that the object of the *Sharʿ* is the complete fulfilment of humanity. This ideal is not only supported by the fact earlier observed, that the Qurʾān and *Sunna* have a very comprehensive view of good, it is also implied in the Qurʾānic statement that defines the end of the Prophet's mission. He was sent, it says, in order to teach faith, law and wisdom and to make [human beings] perfect (II.129). The word that is used is *yuzakkī-him*, generally translated as 'to purify them'. However, this is not a correct translation. *Tazkiya* primarily means to cause something to grow. The *tazkiya* of a plant is to make it grow and develop it to perfection. But since that requires that the plant be purified of the weeds that hamper its growth, purification became a part of the meaning of the word *tazkiya* as a subsidiary meaning.[16]

An important feature of the Islamic ideal of the integral development of human beings, and one that distinguishes it from the modern theories of self-realization, is that the life whose fulfilment is envisioned in Islam is the life that extends beyond the boundaries of this temporal world and into the Hereafter. It is the fulfilment of this expanded life that is the object of the *Sharʿ*. What this ideal implies may be stated as follows.

First, there is a class of good which, for lack of a better term, may be called spiritual, such as remembering, contemplating or worshipping God. These form an essential part of the Islamic ideal, and they must be pursued for their own sake. Second, the priorities between good of various kinds, material and moral, individual and social, and between different ones of the same kind as they have been visualized in the *Sharʿ*, should be maintained, and the regulations of the *Sharʿ* should be followed even if the immediate consequences may not appear to be good for the agents. Most certainly, the effects of such actions will be healthy not only for society, but also in the lives of the agents themselves, both during the present life and in the Hereafter, where the good will be more enduring. Therefore, the remote good of the next life should be preferred when it comes into conflict with the good of this life.

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15. ʿIzz al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Salām, *Qawāʿid al-aḥkām fī maṣāliḥ al-anām*, 2nd ed., Beirut, Dār al-Jīl, 1400 /1980, I, p. 5.

16. See Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, Beirut, Dār Ṣādir, n.d., XIV, p. 358; Maḥmūd b. ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf* …, Beirut, Dār al-Maʿrifa, n.d., IV, p. 259. For discussion see Muḥammad Abdul Ḥaq Anṣārī, *Maqṣad-i Zindagī kā Islāmī Taṣawwur*, Delhi, Markazī Maktabah-ʾi Islāmī, 1980, pp. 144–50.

IV–4.1   Friday praying, Kashmir
© UNESCO photobank

The structure of priorities between good of the same or of different kinds as visualized by the *Shar*ᶜ is an intricate subject, and requires a detailed discussion. A few remarks will suffice.

There are few direct statements in the *Shar*ᶜ concerning the comparative value of a particular good. One verse, for instance, says: 'The pleasure of God is greater than all other goods of Paradise' (IX.72). Another verse points out that the remembrance of God is a greater good than trade and enjoyment of pleasure (LXII.9). However, in some cases, priorities may be deduced directly from the relevant texts; in others, they may be inferred from the order in which things have been mentioned in the Qurʾān and the *Ḥadīth*. In many other cases, the relative value or disvalue of things may be indirectly inferred from the regulations concerning rewards or punishments consequent upon good or evil deeds.

However, the things whose comparative value or disvalue is directly or indirectly indicated are very few in number compared with those that are good or evil and about which nothing has been indicated except that they are good or bad, or that they are liked by God or disliked by Him. Generally speaking, the *Shar*ᶜ makes the attainment of different varieties of good obligatory to a certain extent. Beyond that limit, it keeps the field open for individuals and societies to work out their own priorities.

Another thing to be noted in this context is that excepting a few qualities pertaining to beliefs, attitudes or internal acts, such as faith and trust in God, or remembrance of God, and a concern for the well-being of human beings which never conflict with any other good, the pursuit of all other good is qualified and conditioned by various provisos and stipulations. Hence no good of the latter kind is an absolute good, or one that is to be pursued in all situations.

A third and more important point is that the context and the situation relating to the realization of a particular good may increase or decrease its value. For instance, prayers performed in congregation have greater value than those offered in private; sacrifice on some days is dearer to God than any other ritual worship on those days. Similarly, the display of fortitude upon experiencing a trauma, self-restraint under strong provocation, courage when the risk is great, charity when we are ourselves in need, forgiveness when we could take vengeance, and rendering help when it is not requested, are certainly more valuable and commendable than similar acts in other circumstances.

A systematic investigation into the priorities of the *Shar^c* has scarcely been attempted so far. Instead, scholars have generally noted various statements in the Qur'ān and the *Sunna* regarding the relation between two or more particular groups of things. Questions relating to criteria governing the overall priorities of the *Shar^c* have hardly been subjected to serious discussion.

In classical ethics, the question of the ultimate good has been a favourite topic. Scholars of *Sharī^ca*, however, did not pay much attention to it. Perhaps in view of the *Sharī^ca*'s ideal of the integral development of human beings referred to earlier, the question did not seem important. For that ideal meant that there was a variety of good each of which was to be pursued for its own sake within certain definite limits. There was, therefore, no one good to which all others were supposed to contribute. The vision of God in the Hereafter referred to in the Qur'ān and described in the *Sunna* shall be a great experience crowning all other experiences in Paradise.[17] It shall be the highest good. But there is no reason to say that it is the good to which all others are subservient.

The phrase that seems to point to something nearest to the concept of ultimate good is *riḍwān Allāh*, the pleasure of God (IX.72). But rightly understood, *riḍwān Allāh* means that among all the good the people of Paradise will have, the greatest good shall be the realization that God is pleased with them. It is obvious that the pleasure of God is not a particular good to be counted with other good things of Paradise, such as contemplation of

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17. Qur'ān LXXV.22–23; al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan, Kitāb Ṣifat al-janna, Bāb Mā jā' fī ru'yat al-Rabb tabāraka wa-ta^cālā.*

God, direct perception of realities, appreciation of beauty and enjoyment of pleasure. It shall rather be a consciousness underlying and pervading all the other good.

The Qur'ān says that the purpose of human creation is ʿibāda of God (LI.56). But by ʿibāda, the Qur'ān does not mean merely worship in the narrow sense of that term. It rather means to carry out with humility every will of God, whether it concerns worship or ritual, law or morality, society or government. It is serving God, as the Mosaic commandment says, 'with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.' Thus the term ʿibāda also does not point out anything that might be seen as the ultimate good.

Muslim philosophers in the heyday of Islamic civilization found in the Greek concept of *eudemonia*, which they translated as *saʿāda,* an ideal similar to the Islamic concept of the integral development of human beings. They readily took over the idea, but along with that they also accepted the idealistic metaphysics that formed the thesis of Greek ethics as well as its ethical consequence. They accepted, for instance, that of all that constitutes human beings, reason is their most true reality, and that the perfection of reason is the real good. They also accepted that of reason only the theoretical, as against the practical, is eternal and most real, and hence knowledge and contemplation rather than virtue, whether religious or moral, is the ultimate happiness (*al-saʿāda al-quṣwā*)[18] of human beings.

This concept of ultimate happiness travelled beyond the circle of philosophers and writers on ethics to the Sufi, many of whom were already quite open to Graeco-Roman philosophical and mystical ideas. The fact that the concept of *maʿrifa* (gnosis), the Sufi alternative term for the philosopher's *ʿilm* (knowledge), was adopted by some contemplative Sufi as the ultimate good shows the influence of philosophy and gnosticism on them. The idea that *maʿrifa* is the highest and the most real good and that all other good things are subservient to it has been presented by al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) in his writings.[19] In spite of that, its Islamicity is questionable. The ideal which the *Sharʿ* stands for is that the perception of truth and the knowledge of things divine is only a part, not the whole, of the ultimate good, which is the integral fulfilment of humanity in the life here and in the Hereafter.

18. See Muḥammad Abdul Ḥaq Anṣārī, *The Ethical Philosophy of Miskawaih*, Aligarh, India, Aligarh Muslim University Press, 1964, pp. 75–6 and 39.
19. Al-Ghazālī, *Mīzān al-ʿamal*, ed. S. Dunyā, Cairo, Dār al-Maʿārif, 1964, pp. 195–6, 219–26; Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, Cairo, al-Ḥalabī, 1939, I, p. 13; Muḥammad Abdul Ḥaq Anṣārī, *Sufism and Sharīʿa*, Leicester, U.K. Islamic Foundation, 1986, pp. 82–3.

III

The concept of good is a primary concept. Efforts to define it in terms of pleasure or utility are not correct, even though it is true that pleasure is a part of good, and that which is good for people also produces their greatest happiness. It is also incorrect to say that knowledge or virtue or pleasure, in the here or the Hereafter, is good in itself, and all other things are good because they are the means to it. Islam has a comprehensive view of the good life, and every part of it is good in itself, though not in the same degree.

Right too is a primary concept. We cannot define it in terms of good. Both right and good are primary, albeit interdependent, concepts. However, from the point of view of practice, right can be said to have priority over good. Muslims are required to pursue that which is right rather than to seek that which is good, although the pursuit of the right is the best course to secure the greatest good. They should, for instance, speak truth whenever required, not only when it is in their interest. They will thus promote good for all.

The structure of the Islamic *Sharīʿa*, or the system of rights, is like this. There is, first, a class of acts that are obligatory (*farḍ* or *wājib*). Similarly there are acts that are forbidden (*ḥarām*). Over and above them, there is a class of acts which the *Sharʿ* has recommended without making them obligatory. They are desirable (*mustaḥabb* or *mandūb*). Corresponding to them, on the negative side, there is the category of undesirable acts (*makrūh*), which are not strictly forbidden, although they are not desirable.

There is a third category of acts called *mubāḥ* which comprises three kinds of act. The first kind of *mubāḥ* consists of the acts that, considered individually, are neither obligatory nor desirable; but taken as a class, they may be desirable, even obligatory. For instance, it is a duty to hide some parts of the body, but no particular clothing is prescribed. All kinds of clothes that fulfil a few conditions are *mubāḥ* and people can choose whatever they like from this range. Similarly, a good-looking garment is desirable, but no particular dress is specified, and we can pick up any good garment according to taste. Of course, there are a few rules to be observed. For example, men should avoid silk as that is forbidden to them, and both men and women should prefer garments that are not expensive or ostentatious.

Mubāḥ in the second sense means permissible. Let me illustrate this by an example. I should declare my faith even at the risk of life; but if 1 am to deny it to save my life while I am convinced of the truth of my faith within my heart, I am permitted to do so. *Mubāḥ* in this sense is a concession (*rukhṣa).*

In the third sense, *mubāḥ* means that which is less than desirable, that which is merely right. For instance, to avenge a wrong within limits is merely right compared with forgiveness which is a higher good (*mustaḥabb*).

IV–4.2   Rug with design of Dervish Dance of Samaʿ
© National Library and Archives of the Islamic Republic of Iran

There are thus five categories of right actions: obligatory, desirable, optional, permissible and simply right (*jāʾiz*). Of wrong actions, there are only two categories, the forbidden and the undesirable. Acts of the same category are not necessarily of the same value or disvalue. Of two duties, one may be a greater duty than the other, and of two forbidden acts one may be more reprehensible than the other. There may be similar differences of value or disvalue in the other categories of act. This also leads to the distinction which

the Qurʾān and the *Sunna* make between *kabāʾir*, the great or venial sins, and *ṣaghāʾir*, the small or ordinary sins.

Muslim scholars have given considerable thought to the distinction between *kabāʾir* and *ṣaghāʾir*,[20] but the question as a whole of the difference between various kinds of acts has hardly been attempted so far. The following few cases may show that the differences are caused by a variety of factors.

The first factor is the nature of the act itself. A *ḥadīth*, for example, says, 'The greatest sin is the association of someone with God Who has created you, then the sin of killing your son for fear that he would share your food, followed by the sin of cohabiting with the wife of your neighbour.'[21]

The second factor consists of the features of an act. Two acts may be exactly similar but a particular feature of one may make it a greater duty than the other. For example, good behaviour towards everyone is a duty, but good behaviour towards our parents is a greater duty than good behaviour towards a neighbour; as a well-known *ḥadīth* says, good behaviour towards our mother is even a greater duty than good behaviour towards our father.[22]

Consequences of acts are the third important factor that affects the value of the acts and their obligation. Situations of acts are also relevant to determining the nature of obligation towards them. We could ask whether the distinction between consequences and situations is valid. This is an interesting question, but cannot be discussed here.

Al-Shāṭibī has discussed in detail how situations increase or decrease the obligation of acts. How, for instance, does a particular act which is desirable in one situation becomes a duty in another situation? Or how does a *mubāḥ* in one situation become desirable in another situation, and a duty in a third situation? He also discussed how a right in one situation turns wrong in another situation, and how, on the contrary, an evil in one situation becomes a duty in another.[23] A glance over this discussion would help to appreciate the attitude of the *Sharīʿa* on that point.

We can now move from the structural study of the *Sharīʿa* to some observations on its contents. The first thing worth noting in this context is the concept of humanity that underlies the regulations of the *Sharīʿa*. Human beings, as viewed in the *Sharīʿa*, are a unity of body and soul, of material and spiritual. Conflicts may arise between material and spiritual needs, but the *Sharīʿa* does not assume any original and irresolvable contradiction between the body and the soul. Hence, its regulations are not geared to the liberation of the soul from the prison of the body. The goal of the *Sharīʿa* is the

20. See Ibn Abi-l-ʿIzz al-Ḥanafī al-Dimashqī, *Sharḥ al-ʿaqīda al-Ṭaḥāwiyya*, ed. Dr ʿA. A. al-Turkī and S. al-Arnāʾūṭ, Beirut, Mūʾassasat al-Risāla, 1408/1987, pp. 525–27.

21. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Adab*, *Bāb Qatl al-walad khashyata an yaʾkula maʿahu*.

22. Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, *Kitāb Abwāb al-birr wa-l-ṣila*, *Bāb Mā jāʾ fī birr al-wālidayn*.

23. Al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwafaqāt …*, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 130–43.

development of the total person, not the release of the spirit as expounded, for example, by some Indian religio-philosophical systems.

Renunciation of pleasure or minimization of material needs per se is not, therefore, an intrinsically Islamic value. The Qurʾān and the *Sunna* stand only for moderation (*al-qaṣd*). The element of asceticism that is found on a limited scale in the life of the Prophet or his Companions seems to be due, in the first place, to the material conditions of their society, in the second place to the great struggle (*jihād*) that they were to carry out for the total transformation of that society, and in the third place to a policy of precautionary self-denial required for moral and spiritual development. The attitude of the *Sharīʿa* towards the needs of the body and the soul is best demonstrated by various instructions on moderation in spiritual pursuits contained in the sayings of the Prophet.[24] The asceticism which seems to have reached unhealthy proportions among a section of Sufi in later periods has little to do with the teachings of the Qurʾān or the *Sunna*.

The second important idea that underlies the *Sharīʿa* is that people are social beings and that their full development can take place only in and through society. This is the reason the *Sharīʿa* does not allow monasticism or celibacy or any kind of withdrawal from society except as a purely temporary measure. The example of the People of the Bench (*aṣḥāb al-ṣuffa*) is often quoted by the Sufi in support of their own monastic practices. However, what they forget is that the people who occupied the Bench in the Prophet's mosque at Medina were not from Medina itself. They had migrated to Medina from various parts of Arabia in order to live there according to the *Sharīʿa*, but they were not fortunate in getting accommodation with the families of Medina or in securing the means to live on. They also forget that it was a temporary phase in the lives of these people. After their material conditions improved, they settled down in different places and lived a normal life. The People of the Bench represented a problem that could not be immediately solved; they did not form an institution that the Prophet intended to perpetuate.[25]

The duties prescribed by *Sharīʿa* and the acts forbidden by it pervade the lives of Muslims, including the religious, moral or aesthetic aspects in all dimensions of their lives: individual, social, political or economic. The duties ordained by the *Sharīʿa* furnish the necessary foundation of an overall realization of the individual in society. Through regulations regarding desirable and undesirable acts, which also cover the whole of life, it builds the structure of a rich multidimensional personality, the best example of which was the Prophet himself.

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24. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Ṣawm*, *Bāb Ḥaqq al-jism fi-l-ṣawm* and *Ṣawm al-dahr*.

25. For a discussion on the 'People of the Bench', see Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ fatāwā shaykh al-islām*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Qāsim and M. ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, Beirut, Maṭābiʿ Dār al-ʿArabiyya, AH 1398, IX, pp. 37–71.

A special feature of the *Sharīʿa*'s regulations regarding society is what the jurists call collective (*kifāʾī*) obligations. To appreciate this concept, it must be remembered that there are duties that are personal obligations (*farḍ ʿayn*), duties that all individuals ought to fulfil to the extent they can. But there are also duties that are the collective responsibility of a society (*farḍ kifāʾī*). One aspect of these collective duties is that all members of the society are required to contribute whatever (and whenever) they can towards their fulfilment. The other aspect is that among all members, those who are more gifted and suited for a particular task or those who have the means and opportunities are especially responsible for the performance of that task. As a rule, personal duties are prior to collective duties, but there may be situations in which a collective duty has a greater claim.

The range of collective duties is almost unlimited. It includes various things concerning religion, public morals, health, education, social life and economic justice. It extends from holding and participating in funeral prayers to managing trusts (*awqāf*); from looking after the sanitation of a locality to building hospitals; from providing food and clothing to the poor to establishing industries; from campaigning for the rights of the backward and the downtrodden to establishing a just social and economic order; from setting up schools for children to establishing centres and institutes for research that would extend the frontiers of human knowledge.

Obligations to society, whether personal or collective, emerge from the Qurʾānic concept of human beings as the vicegerents (*khalīfa*) of God on Earth. People have been placed on Earth with powers over God's creation, nature, and fellow humans. They are not the Lords of all that they can control, make or unmake. The Lord is Allāh, and the duty of human beings is to carry out the will of the Lord in His dominion as His faithful deputy (*khalīfa*) and servant (*ʿabd*). The human dominion extends to themselves, to nature, and to fellow human beings. All people are responsible for all that is in their dominion. The Prophet said, 'All of you are shepherds, and all of you are accountable for your flock.'[26] Therefore, to be concerned with the well-being of human and non-human life is not just to fulfil a responsibility, it is also to be an authentic human being, to realize our destiny and dignity as God's vicegerents.

All groups of theologians and jurists agree that the one dependable source from which we can learn about right and wrong in devotional matters (*ʿibādāt*), as well as the degree of obligation, is the *Sharʿ*. *Ijtihād*, or exercise of reason and analogy, which is a recognized practice in other fields, is not admissible here. This principle raises the question of legitimacy regarding

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26. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb Jumuʿa*, *Bāb al-Jumuʿa fi-l-qurā wa-l-mudun*; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Imāra*, *Bāb Faḍīlat al-imām al-ʿādil*; Aḥmad, *Musnad …*, *op. cit.*, III, pp. 54, 55, 111, 121; and al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, *Kitāb al-Jihād*, *Bāb Mā jāʾ fi-l-imām*.

practices which Sufis invented and which are not found in the Qurʾān and *Sunna*. Some people reject every innovation in devotional matters whereas others allow them within a limit and with certain conditions.

As mentioned earlier, the Ashʿarite theologians are of the view that in the field of morality and law the only way to know which acts are right and which are wrong is by having recourse to the *Sharʿ*. They also believe that the authority behind their obligation is God, for they understand authority in a legal sense, as the power to punish the defiant and reward the obedient.[27] Other theologians agree with the Ashʿarites on the issue of authority, but disagree on the issue of knowledge. Rationalist theologians like the Muʿtazilites disagree with them on both these counts.

None of these views, however, does full justice to the complicated nature of the issues involved. While it is true that many acts termed right or wrong in morality and law are known by reason, there are a number of things about which we can make a good case for legalization and almost an equally good case for prohibition. Take, for instance, the case of eating meat. Moral codes of the world differ on the issue, and it is difficult to reach a definite answer on the basis of reason alone. The only way to settle the issue is the *Sharʿ*.

Regarding the question of authority, it is first of all necessary to distinguish between the authority of conscience and the authority of God. The former is expressed in statements of 'ought', such as 'I ought to speak the truth', and it is in the experience of remorse that we feel 'its power' when we violate that authority.[28] The authority of God does mean the power, as the Ashʿarites say, to punish the defiant and reward the obedient, but it also means something more than that. The statement that I ought to worship God does not simply mean that I shall be rewarded when I worship God and punished when I do not. It also means that we feel an obligation to worship God irrespective of any consideration of reward or punishment. When the Prophet was asked why he exerted much in worship when all his faults, past and future, had been forgiven, he said, 'Should I not be a grateful servant?'[29] There is a common element in the obligation that underlies the statement 'I ought to respect my father' and the statement 'I ought to worship God.'

The 'religious ought', however, is not to be equated with the 'legal ought'. The former is more like the moral ought, and in fact is more than that. Whether or not the religious obligation is unique, it is certain that there

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27. Al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtiṣād fī-l-Iʿtiqād*, Damascus, Dār al-Amāna, 1950, pp. 176–7.

28. The Qurʾānic concept of an admonishing soul (*al-nafs al-lawwāma*) (Qurʾān LXXV.2) is an endorsement of the authority of conscience, whose existence is also affirmed in another verse: XCI.8.

29. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Tahajjud*, *Bāb Qiyām al-Nabī ḥattā tarima qadamahu*; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Munāfiqīn*, *Bāb Ikthār al-ʿAmāl*; al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, *Kitāb al-Ṣalāt*; Aḥmad, *Musnad* …, *op. cit.*, IV, pp. 251, 255; and VI, pp. 45 and 115.

is no contradiction between it and the moral obligation. In fact, every moral obligation is also a divine obligation in Islam. The Prophet explained this point through a beautiful parable:

> There is a straight path and on either side of it there stands a wall. In the wall there are doors, and on the doors curtains are hanging. From the end of the road a person calls: 'Come on straight, don't turn to the right or to the left.' When the man on the road wants to lift the curtain on a door, another warner says: 'Beware! Don't lift the curtain, otherwise you would be lured inside.' The Prophet then explained the parable: 'The road is Islam, the open doors on either side of the road are God's prohibitions, and the curtains on the doors are the limits placed by God around things prohibited, the one calling from the end of the road is the Book of God, and the other warner is God's monitor in the heart of every believer.'[30]

A right act in any particular situation is that which is in accordance with the principles and rules relevant to the case. The motive of the agent in the act does not affect the righteousness of the act. A right act may be done with a bad motive, and a wrong act with a good motive.

Motives are relevant in matters of judgement with a view to determining the responsibility of the agent and allocating praise or condemnation, reward or punishment. Motives are also important in determining whether an act is *ṣāliḥ*, that is, whether it is acceptable to God and deserves His approval and reward. The Prophet said:

> Acts shall be judged according to their motives, and everyone shall have what he intended. Hence, if your migration (*hijra*) is for God and the Prophet, it [will be counted] for God and the Prophet. But if it is for a thing of the world or for marrying a woman, then it is for what it is taken up.[31]

A *ṣāliḥ* act, therefore, is that which is not merely in agreement with the principles and rules relevant to the case, but is also done with the motive of pleasing God. In other words, a *ṣāliḥ* act is a right act done in good faith and with the motive to please God.

The motive to please God does not exclude other motives provided they are good. For example, a person offers money to one of his poor relatives out of his rightful earnings with the view to please a relative and help him at a time of distress; by so doing, he ultimately wishes to carry out God's will which is expressed in the Qur'ānic verse, 'God enjoins justice and kindness and giving to kinsfolk' (XVI.90). This act is *ṣāliḥ* because the money the person offers

30. Al-Tibrizī, *Mishkāt al-maṣābīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Īmān*, *Bāb al-Iʿtiṣām bi-l-kitāb wa-l-sunna*.
31. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb Badʾ al-waḥy*; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Imāra*, *Bāb Innamā al-aʿmāl bi-l-niyyāt*; al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, *Kitāb Faḍāʾil al-jihād*, *Bāb Mā jāʾ fī man yuqātilu riyāʾan li-l-dunyā*; Aḥmad, *Musnad …*, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 25, 43 and 6.

is his rightful earnings, and the motives of pleasing a relative and helping a person in need are good, and because by offering the money and by pursuing those motives, he ultimately intends to fulfil God's will and to please Him. If any of these conditions is not fulfilled, the act would not be *ṣāliḥ*. Thus, if for instance, the last condition of doing the act for the pleasure of God was not fulfilled while all other conditions were fulfilled, the act would be right but not *ṣāliḥ*. The presence of motives concerning others or ourselves does not affect the purity of the ultimate motive to please God, if the motives are good and are pursued with a view to fulfilling God's will.

Doing an act for God's pleasure and doing it in order to avoid His displeasure are not two different things. Carrying out an act for the sake of God's pleasure in the form of reward here or in the Hereafter does make a difference. Similarly, doing something in order to avoid God's displeasure is different from doing in order to avoid the consequences of His displeasure in the form of punishment here or Hereafter.

Whenever the *Sharīʿa* enjoins that we should seek the pleasure of God or avoid His displeasure, the consequences of God's pleasure or displeasure are not intended. Such an injunction simply means that we should act with the intention just to please God or to avoid His displeasure. However, it also pleases God that we wish for a good life here and in the Hereafter and pray for it. Hence, if in doing a right act we wish, besides pleasing God, the effects that proceed from it, or wish for a good life here or Hereafter consequent upon it, we are not seeking something incompatible with God's pleasure. There is no incompatibility between seeking God's pleasure and seeking Paradise.

IV

Living according to the *Sharīʿa* requires three things. First of all, it is necessary to be alert and vigilant to what is going on and what is happening society. Without such vigilance we can face many problems and might fail to perceive them before they become an irreversible reality. Second, we need a correct understanding of the principles and the rules of the *Sharʿ* and a good sense of its priorities. Third, we should have right perception of all the aspects of the problem for which we have to take a decision, and make an assessment of the consequences that might follow from possible alternative actions.

Vigilance is a virtue, and like any other virtue it is a matter of cultivation. What will greatly help in this regard is, first, careful reading of the Qurʾān, particularly the passages that describe righteousness (*al-birr*), the people whom the Qurʾān calls pious (*muttaqūn*), the good (*muḥsinūn*), the witnesses (*shuhadāʾ*) and the helpers of God (*anṣār Allāh*). Second, it is important to gain knowledge about the life of the Prophet and his closest Companions as well

as knowledge about the lives of those whom the community has hailed as its leaders (*aʾimma).*

In the application of principles and rules of the *Sharʿ* to new situations and problems, it may help if we divide the rules into the following categories:

- Formal commands, which simply exhort us to do good deeds, without saying anything specific. The Qurʾān, for instance, says 'Do good' (XXII.77), or 'Perform what is right' (XXIII.51);
- Definite rules, whose requirements are definite and clear. For example, 'Fulfil your undertaking [oaths, promises?]' (V.1); 'Give just weight and measure, and do not defraud others of their possessions' (VII.85);
- Indefinite rules, whose requirements differ from individual to individual and from time to time for the same individual, depending upon their condition. The example that comes to mind is rules that call for moderation (*qaṣd*) in religious pursuits, personal and family spending, or caution against severe austerities, overindulgence and extravagance;
- *Maʿrūf* rules, which call for the observance of the approved and recognized practices of society in certain matters. For example, 'The women have rights corresponding to their duties according to the *maʿrūf* ' (II.228), or 'The father shall provide food and clothing according to the *maʿrūf* to his former wife who concedes to feed and look after their child' (II.233).
- Directive principles. An example is the Qurʾānic principle that wealth should not be concentrated in a few hands. This principle was spelled out in the Qurʾān in a specific context, the distribution of the spoils of war (LIX.7), but its application is not restricted to that context. It is a principle of general policy which underlies many specific regulations of the Qurʾān. Another example is the democratic principle of managing common affairs through consultation (*shūrā*): 'Their affairs should be managed by consultation among them' (XLII.38). The important aspect regarding directive principles is that rules or procedures which are worked out at a time with a view to realizing the objects of such a principle are liable to be modified and replaced by new rules and procedures which would more effectively secure the objects of that principle in a changed situation. Rules and procedures referred to as norms are relative to time and situation.

  In this category, we may also place injunctions regarding justice and peace. 'God enjoins upon you justice' (XVI.90) is not a particular rule but actually a general principle combining a set of rules which together define what justice is. The same is true of injunctions declaring the desirability of peace and denigrating disorder (*fasād*). It is not a specific act but a network of social relations that we call peace.

The consideration that urges us to treat justice and peace as directive principles is that the rules and regulations concerning them in the *Sharʿ* are not constitutive but illustrative. That is, they are more like norms adopted by the *Sharʿ* to realize the objects of justice and peace in a particular society. They are liable to modification when new social and technological conditions so require.

- Minimum requirement rules. Under this category we may put all the rules that specify a minimum standard in a particular matter that everyone is required to fulfil. Over and above that standard, individuals are left to decide by themselves what else is required from them in their circumstances.

An example of this kind of rule is the requirement 'Spend in the path of God' (II.195). There is a minimum which the *Sharʿ* has fixed for spending in the path of God. Those who have annual savings above a particular amount are required to pay 2.5 per cent of their savings in the path of God to the poor and the destitute, travellers who fall short of money, and persons who are in debt. It does not mean, however, that after paying that amount, individuals become free of all obligations regarding the rest of their wealth. They are definitely required to spend their money in response to the genuine needs of society, but no upper limit has been indicated and the decision is left to individuals, with the provision that in case of dire need the political authority of the time may realize from their money any amount that is needed and which they have failed to offer voluntarily.

- Rules regarding means. Generally the *Sharʿ* forbids things which ordinarily lead to actions it has prohibited; it also forbids any assistance or cooperation in their performance. Examples of such rules are the prohibitions against buying, selling or manufacturing wine, writing an interest document, indiscriminate mixing of men and women, putting pictures and other things in places of worship which might promote idolatry, or excessive devotion to charismatic personalities which may culminate in hero-worship and deification. Such prohibitions are called the limits of God (*ḥudūd Allāh*) in the Qurʾān, or the 'fence around the reserved land (*al-ḥimā*) of the Lord' in the *Ḥadīth*.[32]

The *Sharʿ* also prescribed rules enjoining the things that are necessary means or conditions for the performance of obligatory acts. Such rules in the *Sharʿ* are many, and the scope for their further extension is unlimited.

- Rules regarding manners. The *Sharʿ* has rules regarding modes of behaviour in matters of ordinary life, such as eating, drinking, dressing, retiring, meeting people, talking, visiting the sick, wishing people well on

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32. See note 34.

happy occasions, rejoicing or mourning, and also counsels concerning health and safety. These rules reflect God-consciousness, solidarity with our fellow-beings and a sense of cleanliness, beauty, decorum and decency.

- Most of these rules are universally applicable, but there are also rules that reflect the geographical and cultural conditions of the Arabs amongst whom Islam first arose. To the latter category belong various manners of eating, cleaning and travelling. The important thing in this regard is the object of the rule rather than the specific rule itself. Hence, if the object of the rule is better served through other ways in changed socio-cultural milieu, it is the changed ways that shall be deemed the Islamic norms for those societies.

While applying the principles and rules of the *Shar*ᶜ to particular cases, we may find ourselves in a variety of situations.

Simple application of rules

On a number of occasions we can easily perceive that our situation is essentially similar to the situation visualized by a particular rule, and immediately decide to act upon the rule. For example, on most occasions we usually perceive without much deliberation that it is our duty to speak the truth, to fulfil our promises, to resist temptation and to avoid cheating.

Revaluation of means and conditions

Sometimes our situations may be so different from the condition in the context of which a rule was prescribed that things or acts which were once instrumental to a wrong practice may cease to be so. This would mean a change in the judgement regarding the means. An example of this was reported in a *ḥadīth*. The Prophet at first forbade people to visit graves. But when he found that they had fully realized the evil of lamenting over graves, he allowed them to visit.[33]

Change in norms

Some situations may require a revision of norms which had been originally formed in order to realize the objects of a principle, or the purpose behind some modes of behaviour. For instance, the Prophet said that the head of

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33. Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan, Kītāb al-Janāᵓiz, Bāb Mā jāᵓ fi-l-rukhṣati fī ziyārat al-qubūr.*

the government would be from the tribe of the Quraysh.[34] This qualification was a limitation on the Islamic principle of equality and democracy, but the Prophet put that qualification because he thought that the government headed by a non-Qurayshite would not be stable among the Arabs who would never submit to anyone except a Qurayshite, as Abū Bakr said at a meeting that discussed the successor (*khalīfa*) of the Prophet. Later, when the constitution of the Islamic society substantially changed and the Quraysh ceased to occupy a dominant position, the original stipulation became redundant. It was time, therefore, to remove it and replace it with one that expressed the Islamic principle of equality.

The Qur'ān changed the age-old perspective on property. People are not the masters of what they own; they are trustees (*mustakhlaf*)[35] appointed by God, who is the real owner. Therefore, over and above the specified amount of *zakāt*, God can take any part of the wealth which is in excess of what people genuinely need, and spend it on His people. The human authority acting on behalf of God is authorized to realize that amount in order to meet the requirements of economic justice. The norms that the Righteous Caliphs laid down for economic justice in their time are highly praiseworthy, but are still subject to revision in the light of the basic principles of economic justice in Islam, provided they are not incompatible with the other equally important principles that are binding in a Muslim society.

Change in priorities

In some cases decisions may involve a change in priorities. As noted earlier, the priorities in various goods within the field of the desirable goods (*mustaḥabbāt*) are not fixed. Consequently, the priorities of a society or individual may differ from the priorities of another society or an individual without one being necessarily more Islamic than the other. Standards of education, economic comforts and cultural attainments may differ from one society or class to another, and this may influence priorities in those societies and classes.

It was noted earlier that an established principle of the *Sharīʿa* is that social situations may increase or decrease the degree of desirability or undesirability of things. Let us take a particular case to illustrate this. Divorce is permissible, although it is highly undesirable. Now if it was undesirable to an extent at the time of the Prophet, it would be even more undesirable in present-day Indian society, because divorced women in India have much less chance to remarry than did divorced women in seventh-century Arabia.

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34. Aḥmad, *Musnad …*, *op. cit.*, III, p. 129.
35. Qur'ān LVII.7.

There are other factors besides the social factor that determine individual priorities and lead people to choose their priorities. These factors pertain to abilities, powers and aptitudes with which individuals are born, and the education and training they subsequently receive. The variety and multiplicity of individual ideals is fully consistent with the universality of the basic principles of the *Sharīʿa*.

Conflict of rules

Some situations involve a conflict of rules. A few cases of this type have already been mentioned. In the books of *fiqh*, there are many examples where two or more rules have conflicting claims with regard to how one or more issues are resolved. In works on principles of jurisprudence a number of general maxims were discussed with the aim of helping people decide such cases, such as the principles of greater good, lesser evil, indispensable necessity (*iḍṭirār*) and higher duty.

Doubtful cases

In cases where it is not clear to an individual what is the right thing to do, the rule of the *Sharʿ* is to do what our hearts feel convinced about and leave anything that seems doubtful. This principle was stated by the Prophet as follows:

> The lawful (*ḥalāl*) is clear, and the unlawful (*ḥarām*) is also clear, [and] between them there are cases which are ambiguous. Many people do not know what is the right thing to do is. He who avoids the doubtful saves his religion and saves his self-respect. But he who falls in the doubtful is likely to commit the forbidden, just as a shepherd who grazes his sheep around a reserved land may very likely find them trespassing into it. Know that every king has a reserved land, and know that the reserved land of God comprises the things He has forbidden.[36]

Changing social conditions

Sometimes the external conditions and practices of society make it difficult for a Muslim to perform an obligatory duty or refrain from things that are forbidden. Wine is forbidden by the *Sharʿ*, and a Muslim is required to avoid things in which wine is used in any quantity. However, in the preparation of a number of medicines today, alcohol is used as base or as an ingredient, and where alternatives are not available, a Muslim is permitted by the *Sharʿ*

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36. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Īmān*, *Bāb Faḍlu man istabraʾa li-dīnihi*; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Musāqāt*, *Bāb Akhdh al-ḥalāl wa-tark al-shubuhāt*; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, *Kitāb al-Buyūʿ*, *Bāb Ijtināb al-shubuhāt*; al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, *Kitāb al-Buyūʿ*, *Bāb Mā jāʾa fī tark al-shubuhāt*; Aḥmad, *Musnad …*, *op. cit.*, IV, pp. 267, 269, 270, 271, 275.

to use such medicines as something unavoidable. In such cases, it is the duty of society as a whole to find an alternative to alcohol so that individuals may avoid a forbidden thing.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to give an outline of Islamic ethics as it emerges from the Qurʾān and *Sunna*, including both good and right as primary concepts.

Before concluding, it needs to be stressed that the Muslim concept of morality is characterized by a strong collective and activist orientation. In other words, it is not enough for Muslims simply to fulfil devotional requirements and adhere to moral rules, confining their focus to the propriety of their own conduct.[37] In addition to that, they are expected to engage in the effort to make moral principles operative and prevailing in human life.

This aspect of moral requirement was designated by the Qurʾān as *al-amr bi-l-maʿrūf wa-l-nahy ʿan al-munkar* (to enjoin what is good and to forbid what is wrong),[38] and occupies a high priority in the Islamic scale of values. Its importance can be gauged from the Qurʾānic statement that were God to bestow authority on believers, they would 'establish Prayers, render *zakāt*, enjoin good and forbid evil' (XXII.71).

Throughout Islam's history, the Muslim moral outlook has been animated by a passionate devotion to this moral imperative. The underlying presupposition of *al-amr bi-l-maʿrūf wa-l-nahy ʿan al-munkar* is that unless there is an unceasing and active concern for the moral well-being of all, the consequences for both individuals and society will be catastrophic. The well-being of every human group is a common concern, and the price of maintaining it is active vigilance. The following parable in a *ḥadīth* powerfully brings out how crucial it is for common good:

> The Prophet said: 'The parable of those who observe the limits set by God and those who fail them [that is, are careless in regard to their observance] is like that of the passengers on a boat who cast lots to determine who should occupy the upper deck and who should be on the lower deck and disposed of themselves accordingly. Those who were on the lower deck passed through those of the upper deck whenever they had to fetch water, so they said to the occupants of the upper deck: If we were to bore a hole through our part, we would then not have to trouble you. Now, if the occupants of the upper deck were to leave the

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37. For an illuminating survey of this concept in Islam's history, see M. Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000.
38. See Qurʾān III.104, 110; V.77; IX.11 and XXII. 41.

others to carry out their design, they would all perish together; but if they were to stop them from carrying it out, they would all be saved.[39]

Genesis records that after Cain had killed Abel, God asked Cain, 'Where is Abel your brother?' Cain replied, 'I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?' Although couched in the form of a question, it was tantamount to Cain's emphatic denial of any responsibility towards his brother. Cain was not his brother's keeper. By contrast, the affirmation that all of us are indeed our brothers' keepers is among the defining features of Islamic morality.

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39. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Sharika, Bāb Hal yuqraʿu fi-l-qisma wa-l-istihām fih*.

The inner, experiential dimension

Hamid Algar

> Do you not see that God has subjected to you all that is in the heavens and the earth and poured forth His bounties upon you, both outer and inner? (Qurʾān XXXI.20)

> He is the First and the Last, the Outer and the Inner. (LVII.3)

Faith: inner and outer aspects

Faith (*īmān*) is in one sense entirely an inward concern. Professed by the tongue and confirmed by appropriate action, it nonetheless resides in the heart, according to a well-known *ḥadīth*, and it is there that God inscribes it (LVIII.22). It can also be said that faith – or the predisposition to it – being inherent in the very essence of humanity, the primordial nature (*fiṭra*) that constitutes the ground of a human being, is ultimately lodged, firmly though invisibly, in the utmost recesses of human nature.

At the same time religion (*dīn*), which gives shape, substance and practical expression to the impulses of *fiṭra*, necessarily addresses itself to the totality of humans. It summons them to orient all their faculties, both inner and outer, to their Source and Creator, and it does this, moreover, as an integrated set of beliefs and practices in which no absolute distinction is made between inner and outer. It is part of the particular genius of Islam to interest itself in equal measure in the most outward and tangible of human pursuits, such as reproductive and economic activities, and in the most hidden, inward and subtle, such as the refinement of the soul, the purification of the heart, and the sharpening of inner vision. All this comes within the purview of God, for 'He hears and sees all things' (XXXI.28). In the Qurʾān, accordingly, inner and outer concerns do not constitute fully separate topics; they often follow upon each other with deliberate immediacy and without formal, logical transition. It is also beyond doubt that the Prophet neither viewed the revelation he

received as divisible into inner and outer aspects, nor presented it as such. His Companions understood and practised Islam as a seamless and indivisible whole.

Inevitably, however, the age of revelation was succeeded by that of elaboration and analysis, a process implied by the oft-repeated *ḥadīth* that 'the scholars are the heirs of the prophets'.[1] What had previously been implicit was gradually made explicit, as the various aspects of religion became differentiated from each other. Just as the *Sharīʿa* – the law or outer dimension of religion – was elaborated by the labours of jurists, so too the inner dimensions of religion became a distinct object of attention in their own right. A relative distinction between outer and inner began to enter the awareness and linguistic usage of Muslims.

Given the relativity of this distinction and the refusal of Islam in its authoritative sources to clearly separate between exoteric and esoteric, it is as well to clarify at this point the sense in which I am using the word 'inner'. From a certain point of view, the precepts and acts enjoined by Islam are divisible into those that concern people's relations with their fellow beings, their social and natural environments, and those that pertain directly to their relations with their Creator – always bearing in mind that many acts of worship, including the most significant among them, touch simultaneously on both sets of relations. Whatever in Islam contributes more particularly to the fostering of individual human relations with God may be described as constituting an inner or experiential dimension of religion.

Journey to God

A relation between God and His creation – be it human or any other beings – cannot be compared to any other relationship; were it to be otherwise, God would Himself acquire the attributes of createdness. Even to speak of a relationship in the strict sense of the word – a link between two comparable termini – implies a form of continuity between Creator and created which is incompatible with His exaltedness and transcendence. It thus follows that whatever wording is used to describe the link between humans and God will necessarily be allusive and approximate.

Bearing this reservation in mind, it is permissible to say that the Qurʾān posits, as people's existential relation with God, a journey towards Him: 'there is no god but He, and unto Him is the journeying' (XL.3). The entire vocabulary of Islam is indeed replete with words denoting journeying and wayfaring: the straight path (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*), path (*ṭarīqa*), migration (*hijra*), journeying (*maṣīr*), guidance (*hudā*), misguidance (*ḍalāla*) and many more. God proclaims Himself to be near – 'when My servants ask you concerning Me, say, "I am

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1. Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, *Kitāb al-ʿIlm*, *Bāb Faḍl al-ʿIlm*.

IV–5.1   Two folios of a single volume Qurʾān
© Nasser Khalili Collection of Islamic Art (Nour Foundation)

near"; (II.186), indeed nearer to people 'than the jugular vein' (L.16). But the perception of this nearness, which is obviously not spatial, will often escape believers. It thus becomes incumbent upon them to undertake a journey to God, one which will necessarily be unlimited and unending given His transcendence and ineffable exaltedness.

The journey to God is in a sense a return. All things at all times are returning to God because of their utter neediness before Him, for sustenance as well as origination, and the impermanent and contingent nature of their existence: 'to God all things are being returned' (II.210; and five other occurrences). Understood in this sense, the return is a present reality, not a matter of eschatology. It may be said indeed that death, whether in the microcosm or the macrocosm, is the finalization, in concrete and undeniable form, of the return; it is a 'meeting with God' (*liqāʾ Allāh*; numerous Qurʾānic occurrences, including XVIII.110). People may either resist this meeting, to no avail, or desire and anticipate it while still in this world. Hence, the Prophet

is reported to have said 'die before you die'[2] – in other words, die to this world as a point of orientation, by orienting yourself to God before physical death overtakes you. Thus, the journey to God is in part a conscious and willing participation in the ineluctable return of all things to God, combined with an eager anticipation of its outcome.

The means for performing this journey are contained in the twin divinely bestowed sources of Islam – the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*. Were this not to be so, none could embark on the journey; as one of the early ascetics of Islam, Ruwaym b. Aḥmad (d. 303/915) said: 'I could not have taken a single step towards God unless He had willed it.'[3] Both the Qurʾān and the *Sunna* represent – if the expression is permissible – a movement of God towards human beings that manifests His love, mercy, wisdom and will to guide, and they invite a reciprocal movement on the part of humans, in love, aspiration and obedience. For the Qurʾān speaks of a people 'whom He loves and who love Him' (V.54); the first love not only precedes the second in mention, but also makes it possible.

The Qurʾān – the divine word in human language

The Qurʾān is the divine word expressed in a human language, Arabic, which was transfigured by the impact and brilliance of revelation. Despite the Qurʾān's wholly divine nature, it can then be regarded, in a particular and limited sense, as a place where human beings may meet God. God has sent down His Word, and through immersing himself in that Word, people may begin an ascent towards Him. So apart from furnishing the believer with injunctions for all the fundamental forms of worship – both required and recommended – the reading and recitation of the Qurʾān is itself an act of worship and drawing nearer to God.

Being the Word of God in a rigorous and integral sense, the Qurʾān is the Book (*al-Kitāb*), not merely *a* book. Special features mark it as forming a category unique to itself. Part of the unique and inimitable nature (*iʿjāz*) of the Qurʾān is its multilayered inexhaustibility of content. With respect to its verbal substance, the Qurʾān is obviously finite, for it attained a fixed and definitive form – the preservation of which God has Himself guaranteed – with the completion of its revelation to the Prophet (XVI.63). But that finite textual form, itself miraculous in its beauty, elegance and power, conceals an unending vista of inner meanings that disclose themselves to those whose

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2. Cited in numerous Ṣūfī texts, including the Mathnavī of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī; for the sources of this *ḥadīth*, see Badīʿ al-Zamān Furuzanfar, *Aḥādīth-i mathnavī*, Tehran, Amīr-i Kabīr, 1361/1982, p. 116.

3. Cited in ʿAbd Allāh al-Anṣārī al-Harawī (d. 481/1089), *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, ed. ʿAbd al-Ḥayy Ḥabībī, Kabul, Anjuman-i Tārikh-i-Afghanistan, 1336/1957, p. 95.

breast is opened by God: 'one whose breast God opens for Islam possesses a light from his Lord' (XXXIX.22).

The Qur'ān itself invites people not only to read, but also to meditate and ponder upon it: 'will they not reflect on the Qur'ān, or are there locks on their hearts?' (XLVII.24). This verse suggests that there are a multitude of meanings contained within the Qur'ān, and that it is the heart alone – in other words, an inner vision, not mental adroitness or philological erudition – that can elicit those meanings. The Prophet himself is reported to have said, 'Verily the Qur'ān has an outer and inner aspect.'[4] Still more explicit is a statement of one of his descendants, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) – who exerted great influence on all early religious scholars – that the Qur'ān has four aspects: a verbal form (ʿibāra), addressed to the commonality of believers; an indication or allusion (ishāra), addressed to the spiritual elect of the community; a subtle truth (laṭīfa), addressed to the elect among the elect, the Friends (awliyāʾ) of God; and an ultimate divine truth (ḥaqīqa), addressed to the Prophet and comprehensible only to him.[5]

Later exegetical authorities discerned as many as seven separate levels of meaning in each verse of the Qur'ān, and it is obvious that none of the enumerations – two, four or seven – are meant to be taken in a literal mathematical sense.[6] The point is rather that the Qur'ān is a vast and complex universe, and that the degree to which we are able to penetrate its mysteries both reflects and influences our stage of advancement on the path to God.

The place of the Prophet in the Muslim's inner life

As for the place of the Prophet in the inner life of Muslims, it must immediately be stressed that he is not a messenger in the minimal and literal sense of the word: one who faithfully delivers a message without having any intrinsic link to its contents. The Qur'ān is wholly of divine origin, containing nothing that originated with the Prophet; yet it descended on his heart (II.97; XXVI.193–4), so that the very centre of his being, and as a consequence all of his acts, were permeated with the very substance of revelation.

This being the case, it is also important to note that obedience is only the minimum that Muslims owe the Prophet, as a corollary and adjunct of their obedience to God: 'obey God and the Messenger in order that you may

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4. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), *al-Itqān fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*, Cairo, Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, n.d., II, p. 185, as a tradition narrated by ʿAbd Allāh b. Masʿūd (d. 32/653).
5. See P. Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, Beirut, Dār al-Machreq, 1970, p. 175.
6. A *tafsīr* resting on the assumption that the Qur'ān has seven layers of meaning was, for example, *Baḥr al-ḥaqāʾiq wa-l-maʿānī* of Najm al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 654/1256) and ʿAṭāʾ al-Dawla al-Simnānī (d. 737/1336). See S. Ateş, *Isari tafsir okulu*, Ankara, Ankara University Press, 1974, pp. 139–60.

receive mercy' (III.132); 'whoever obeys the Messenger obeys God' (IV.80). The *Sunna*, the exemplary model of the Prophet, is far more than a source of obligatory legal rulings that complement or clarify those found in the Qur'ān. It is a complete pattern of ethical behaviour and spiritual striving which calls for conscious and steadfast imitation on the part of the believer who wishes to advance towards God. This is clarified in the verse which states, 'there is in the Messenger of God a goodly model of imitation, for anyone who desires God and the Last Day and makes abundant remembrance of God' (XXXIII.21).[7]

Above all, the Qur'ān makes it plain that following the Prophet – the meticulous imitation of his example – is the pivot on which turns human love for God and God's love for human beings: 'Say (O Prophet), "If you love God, then follow me, that God may love you"' (III.31). Following the Prophet thus results in the cultivation of human love for God and God's acceptance and reciprocation of that love.

According to some definitions, the *Sunna* comprises the words (*aqwāl*), deeds (*afʿāl*), and inward states (*aḥwāl*)[8], so that a comprehensive imitation of it will require attention to all three of these. Remarkably enough, many of the spiritual masters of Islam have laid particular stress on the benefits of a practice going beyond the universal obligatory dimensions of the *Sunna*: imitating the outer habits of the Prophet, including the way he walked, the way he slept, the way he ate and the way he dressed. It is precisely such an effort to make the outer details of our life conform to an ideal pattern that is seen to yield blessed results on the inner plane also; the ultimate indivisibility of inner and outer appears here with particular clarity.

In addition to these concrete details, the ethos governing the life of the Prophet, together with certain characteristic virtues manifest in him, also demands attention. The most striking feature of the life of the Prophet is perhaps a perfect balance between intense and incomparably fruitful outward activity and an unshakable inner repose, between his being outwardly with people and inwardly always with God. From this balance were born cardinal virtues that delineate the true Muslim personality, such as dignity, nobility, generosity, steadfastness, patience and veracity. To love and to imitate the Prophet must therefore mean to strive after a similar equilibrium in our own life, and to cultivate – although inevitably at a far reduced level – the virtues that constituted his 'exalted character' (LXVIII.4).

7. On the *Sunna* and on the Prophet as the model for the Muslim community, see 'The concept of *Sunna*' by Yusuf al-Qaradawi in this volume, pp. 457–86. [Eds.]
8. Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf iṣṭilāḥāt al-funūn*, reprint, Istanbul, Kahraman Yayinlari, 1984,I, p. 703.

IV–5.2   Sufi whirling dervish (Semazen) dances at Sultanahmet
© Faraways/Shutterstock

Significance of acts of worship

The obligatory acts of ritual worship in Islam, clearly ordained by both the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*, are in themselves means of advancement on the inner journey towards God, if performed conscientiously and regularly. This is a matter that cannot be stressed strongly enough, because in the conventional usage of our age, the word 'ritual' has acquired the sense of meaningless action, mechanically performed. Providing it enjoys divine authority, a ritual act is, however, infinitely more significant and meaningful than a habitual one. The acts of ritual worship in Islam are divinely ordained, in both content and form, and to perform them correctly is, therefore, to step outside the realm of personal volition and choice. Moreover, the fixed outer form of the ritual act both conceals and grants access to an infinitude of inner meanings, which – like the inner meanings of the Qurʾān – are gradually unfolded to the heart of the believer.

It is important to note that the distinction between outer form and inner meaning does not mean that the former can be sacrificed to the latter: that for example, the meaning of pilgrimage is accessible without actually travelling to Mecca and its associated sites. Form and meaning belong inextricably together;

the form is animated by the meaning, and the meaning finds expression only through the form.[9]

Let us first examine prayer and its preliminary, ablution. Ablution is clearly more than a habitual cleansing of the limbs, since it is preceded by the forming of an intention and is accomplished in a set order. Transcending the body which is its ostensible object, ablution operates a form of inner purification. At an elementary level, ablution washes away sin by symbolically dissociating worshippers from the questionable or reprehensible acts they have performed. At a higher stage of advancement, it serves to purge the awareness of worshippers of all except God, so that when they turn towards Him in prayer, they will be truly oriented to Him, inwardly as well as outwardly. Ablution is an absolute obligation before prayer, supposing that certain bodily functions have occurred since its last performance, but ablution has its own spiritual efficacy and is not simply a prelude to prayer. This is demonstrated by the recommendation that believers should strive at all times to be in a state of purity, and by the *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet describes ablution as 'the weapon of the believer'[10] – a weapon against sin and the dissipation of awareness of God.

Prayer is in itself a compact journey towards God; it is, as the Prophet described it, 'the Ascension (*miʿrāj*) of the believer'.[11] The postures through which believers pass in prayer, as well as the words they utter, all correspond to stages of this journey. By turning towards the *qibla* – orienting themselves to that concentrated symbol of divine unity and presence which is the Kaʿba, they turn away from other-than-God and announce their intention of proceeding towards Him. Through the repeated pronunciation of *takbīr* as they move from one stage of the prayer to the next, they bear witness to the nullity of all things as they are obliterated by the splendour of God's immediacy and presence. Increasingly overwhelmed by that splendour, they bow forward, and after a brief return to the erect and implicitly assertive position in which they began the prayer; they move immediately into prostration. This posture signifies extinction of the volitional self before God and the drawing near to His presence that this makes possible, as the Qurʾān commands, 'prostrate and draw nigh' (XCVI.19). There is, however, a necessary return from extinction, so that the final posture in the prayer is a seated one, intermediate between the standing erect with which the prayer began and the prostration in which it culminated. This intermediate posture signifies a return to awareness of

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9. This point is brought out with particular clarity by al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) in the discussion of the ritual acts of worship in his great compendium, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, new ed., Beirut, Dār al-Qalam, n.d., I, *passim*.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

11. *Ibid.,* p. 134.

other-than-God which is conditioned and limited by the trace of effacement before Him.

The principal verbal component of the prayer is *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*, the opening chapter of the Qur'ān, which is repeated a number of times on each occasion of prayer. It too comprises a form of journey towards the divine presence. Reciting the first three verses, worshippers begin by evoking God and His attributes in the third person ('Praise be to God, the Lord of the Worlds, the Compassionate, the Merciful, the Master of the Day of Judgement'), without any verbal form signifying their own presence. This signifies a turning away from the self towards God. Then they address God in the second person, at the same time making use of a verb indicating the neediness of human beeings towards God ('Thee alone do we worship and from Thee alone do we seek help'). The transition (*iltifāt*) from third to second person also indicates that worshippers have now come into the presence of the God, Whose glory they began by proclaiming from a distance. Finally, they ask for His assistance in confirming them on the path of progress towards Him ('Guide us on the straight path, the path of those to whom Thou hast shown favour, not of those who have incurred wrath and of those who are astray' (I.6–7)).

Needless to say, not every performance of the prayer always conveys all of these senses, even for the most pious and insightful of people. But equally, no careful and sincerely intentioned performance of prayer can be utterly devoid of them, for it is a defining characteristic of ritual worship that the divine potency inherent within it compensates for the inadequacy of the resources that people bring to its performance.

Fasting is, in a sense, the most inner of all the prescribed acts of worship; it has no outward sign, and no observer can tell whether those who say they are fasting are truthful in their claim, short of spending with them all the hours of the fast. Beyond being an act of self-discipline, fasting is also an effort temporarily to acquire – or at least to imitate – one of the divine attributes, freedom from the need for sustenance, and thus to approach God. Even the angels require a form of sustenance appropriate to their beings, and it is God alone Who both dispenses sustenance to all His creation and possesses a power not dependent for replenishment on anything external to itself: 'It is God Who is the giver of all sustenance, the possessor of power, the steadfast' (LI.58). God has therefore established a special relationship between fasting and Himself, saying in a *Ḥadīth qudsī* (divine *Ḥadīth*), 'fasting is Mine, and I give reward for it'.[12] God's giving of reward is sometimes taken to mean that He bestows the reward directly, without any mediation through angels or

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12. Al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870), *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Ṣawm*, *Bāb Faḍl al-ṣawm*.

other beings, so that fasting worshippers in this sense also come to acquire an enhanced degree of closeness to God.

Pilgrimage is, of course, the ritual act in which the purpose of journeying toward God is most fully apparent; an actual journey takes place in the outer world as well as a spiritual one in the inner world. Indeed, the outer journey serves as a powerful support and stimulus for the inner journey, involving as it does the temporary abandonment of our normal place of residence, pursuits and even dress. It is the strong link between outer and inner that makes the pilgrimage the pinnacle in the spiritual life of many Muslims.

Before embarking on the rites that constitute the pilgrimage, pilgrims perform total ablution that serves as an act of comprehensive dissociation from their customary worldly activities, and don the *iḥrām*, the garment of consecration which signifies the discarding of all lowly attributes. The theme of renunciation is also present when they cast the stones in Minā, rejecting thereby all forms of desire that draw them back from God.

But at the centre of the pilgrims' experience stands the Kaʿba, that simple cubic structure, majestic in its very austerity and emptiness, to which they have always turned in their prayers, from a distance. Now they see the House of God directly in front of them, the locus of a unique divine presence that is distinct from the omnipresence of God's signs in His creation. Spatial distance has been abolished between worshippers and the point of their orientation, and inwardly too, they have drawn closer to the Lord of the House. It is as if pilgrims had echoed, when setting out from their homes, these words of Abraham, whose memory presides over most stages of the pilgrimage: 'I have set my face to Him Who has created the heavens and the earth, without any deviation' (VI.79) and 'I shall go to my Lord Who will surely guide me' (XXXVII.99).

Certain jurists, especially those of the Shāfiʿī school as well as Ibn Taymiyya, tend to assimilate *jihād*,[13] given its binding and permanent nature, with the fundamental religious obligations; what is certain is that like them it has inner as well as outer aspects. *Jihād* may be defined as unsparing effort to establish God's will upon earth; virtually all Qurʾānic occurrences of the word and its cognates include the expression 'in God's way'. Warfare, waged under the prescribed circumstances, is no doubt the most familiar form of *jihād*, but some verses of the Qurʾān are seen as at least alluding to an inner *jihād*, one distinct from the battle against the outer enemies of faith. Let me cite one verse in particular: 'as for those who struggle for Our sake, We shall certainly guide them to Our paths, and certainly God is with the doers of good' (XXIX.69). In the light of a *ḥadīth* discussed below, the 'doers of good' (*al-muḥsinūn*) may be regarded as those who, through inward struggle, have

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13. See Ibn Taymiyya (728/1328), *al-Siyāsa al-sharʿiyya*, Cairo, n.p., 1955, p. 12.

come to 'worship God as if they saw him';[14] they are those who have advanced to the highest stage of worship, and God is accordingly 'with them'.

Fully explicit by contrast is an oft-cited *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet is reported to have said to his Companions, at the end of a military expedition, 'we are returning from the lesser jihād to the greater jihād'.[15] The lesser *jihād* is unanimously taken to be the war against the external enemies of faith, despite the obvious dangers and sacrifices that it involves; it is the inward struggle against the forces of sin, disobedience and neglect that is the greater *jihād*, for although silent and invisible, it is everlasting.

Remembrance of God

The performance of the obligatory acts of worship discussed above (together with others which I have not discussed here) is the first and most favoured means for believers to draw near to their Lord. God says, in a *Ḥadīth qudsī,* 'My servant does not draw near to Me by anything more beloved of Me than that which I have made incumbent upon him.'[16] However, the *ḥadīth* continues, 'My servant continues to draw near to Me by means of supererogatory acts (*al-nawāfil*) until I love him ….' It is thus by means of such acts that journeying towards God, begun in obedient performance of the obligatory acts, is continued to the point of acquiring God's love.

Among all the supererogatory acts, *dhikr* – the remembrance or mention of God – has the greatest importance in the cultivation of the inner life; in fact, its presence in the life of a Muslim is the unmistakable sign of an impulse to transcend the limits of the obligatory and proceed more wholeheartedly towards God.

Before it came to designate a separate and identifiable devotional practice, the word *dhikr* represented a concept central to the semantic structure of the Qurʾān: the awareness of God that is essential to human welfare and yet threatened at all times by human neglect. *Dhikr* is, indeed, one of the epithets of the Qurʾān itself ('it is none other than a reminder for all the worlds' XXXVIII.87); the Prophet is addressed in it as one who reminds (*mudhakkir*) ('so remind men; verily you are one who reminds' LXXXVIII.21); and the purpose of prayer is specified as the remembrance of God ('establish the prayer for My remembrance' XX.14).

The counterpart of remembrance is of course forgetfulness, and it is an inevitable consequence of people's worldly state that most of them forget God, at least intermittently. The Qurʾān, therefore, instructs the believer, 'make

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14. See Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Īmān, Bāb Bayān al-īmān wa-l-islām wa-l-iḥsān.*
15. Cited in al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ …, op. cit.,* III, p. 158.
16. Cited in al-Suyūṭī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaghīr …, op. cit.,* I, p. 70.

IV–5.3   Whirling dervishes
© Mehmetcan/Shutterstock

remembrance of God abundantly, that haply you might prosper' (VIII.45) and 'make remembrance of your Lord when you forget Him' (XVIII.24). *Dhikr*, however, is not only a means for rectifying the sporadic forgetting of God; it is also a state of permanent and irreversible awareness of God that cannot be disrupted either by worldly activity or even by deliberate effort. The feasibility of such uninterrupted awareness can be deduced not only from the entirety of the *Sunna* but also from the mention in the Qur'ān of 'men whom neither trading nor selling diverts from the remembrance of God' (XXIV.37), as well as the injunction to 'make remembrance of God while standing, seated, or lying on your sides' (IV.103). Once permanent remembrance is attained, God Himself responds by 'remembering' His servant – 'make remembrance of Me and I will make remembrance of you' (II.152) – so that the two acts of *dhikr*, human and divine, coalesce, and again a form of return to God is accomplished.

In either case – the overcoming of forgetfulness or the fixing of remembrance – *dhikr* as a practice consists most commonly of the repetition, by the tongue and the heart together or by the heart alone, of the first half of the fundamental creed of Islam, *lā ilāha illā Allāh*. In the context of *dhikr*, these words of infinite potency are designated as *al-nafy wa-l-ithbāt*, 'negation and affirmation'. *Lā ilāha* is the negation, and *illā Allāh* the affirmation. Negation necessarily precedes affirmation because the false gods and pseudo-realities that people create for themselves, unconsciously but tirelessly, must be negated before a true and complete affirmation of the exclusive divinity and reality of God can take place. The negation is accordingly sometimes compared to a broom that sweeps clean the courtyard of the heart, making it a fit receptacle for the affirmation.

Numerous paths to God

The journey towards God is in many senses a trackless one. The path trodden by each individual will differ in accordance with their point of departure, the degree of steadfastness and capacity with which they advance, and ultimately on the limit that has been fixed for them by God: 'not one of us but has a place appointed' (XXXVII.164) and 'God has fixed for all things a due proportion' (LXV.3). A well-known adage has it, indeed, that the paths are as numerous as the breaths of human beings.

Nonetheless, there are certain formulations, some of them authoritative, which indicate the major stages on the path through which all must pass if they wish to attain what is, within the limits of the possible, perfection. First comes the celebrated tradition of the Prophet in which, answering questions posed by the archangel Gabriel, he defines *islām* (submission), *īmān* (faith), and *iḥsān* (approximately, well-doing). The first of these is the acceptance of

the five pillars of Islam; the second, belief in God, His angels, books and messengers, the Last Day, and predestination (*al-qadar*); and the third, 'that you should worship God as if you saw Him, for if you do not see Him, verily He sees you.'[17] *Iḥsān* thus emerges as a designation for the highest stage of religion, that in which believers know and see themselves in the presence of God.

Another triad of terms is derived from the Qur'ān, although they do not occur there jointly in a single context: *ʿilm al-yaqīn* (the knowledge of certainty: CII.5), *ʿayn al-yaqīn* (the vision of certainty: CII.7) and *ḥaqq al-yaqīn* (the truth of certainty: LVI.95). The first of these stages of certainty is commonly likened to the knowledge, based on credible reports, that a certain city exists. The second is attained when trusting in the knowledge we set out for the city and approach it closely enough to see it. The third and final stage corresponds to arrival in the city and the establishment of residence there.

One important measure of progress on the path towards God is provided by the state of the *nafs*, customarily translated as the soul. It should be borne in mind that what is meant by the *nafs* differs from the common associations of the word 'soul' both in lacking intrinsic purity and in not being coextensive with the entire inner being. The *nafs* may be defined as a shifting compendium of people's inner urges, which may be oriented either to the service of the instinctual self or to that of the aspiration to return towards God. The Qur'ān, therefore, proposes to individuals the refinement of their *nafs* as a condition of their welfare: 'Certainly whoever refines it will prosper, and whoever corrupts it will fail' (XCI.9–10).

Drawing on the terminology of the Qur'ān, tradition has discerned seven stages of the *nafs*. The lowest stage is that in which the *nafs* imperiously urges the commission of evil for the sake of untrammelled instinctual pleasure; it is then 'the commanding soul' (*al-nafs al-ammāra*): 'Verily the soul insistently enjoins evil' (XII.53). With the awakening of moral consciousness, the *nafs* begins to reproach itself for its inclination to evil, and thus becomes 'the oft-reproaching soul' (*al-nafs al-lawwāma*): 'Verily I swear by the oft-reproaching soul' (LXXV.2). Once the *nafs* has thus taken the first step away from its previous state, God inspires it with clear knowledge of good and evil, so that both courses lie equally open before it. It then becomes 'the inspired soul' (*al-nafs al-mulhama*): 'By the soul and the order bestowed on it, and its inspiration with knowledge of corruption and piety' (XCI.7–8). Benefiting from this inspiration to renounce all obedience to evil, it attains peace with itself and its Creator, becoming 'the tranquil soul' (*al-nafs al-muṭmaʾinna*). Thereby it also becomes a soul 'content with its Lord' (*al-nafs al-rāḍiya*) and one which

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17. This tradition occurs in both al-Bukhārī and Muslim (d. 261/875). Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Īmān*, *Bāb Bayān al-īmān wa-l-islām wa-l-iḥsān*.

reciprocally 'earns the contentment of God' (*al-nafs al-marḍiyya*). As a result of this mutual contentment, the soul is invited to return to its Lord, and its journey is complete: 'O tranquil soul, return to your Lord, content with Him and giving contentment to Him' (LXXXIX.27–28). As for the highest stage of the *nafs*, that of the soul utterly purified of all separative volition (*al-nafs al-zakiyya*), this is generally held to be a defining attribute of the prophets.

This advancement of the *nafs* towards return to its Lord may be accomplished in large part through the various acts of devotion that Islam requires or recommends. But in addition, acts of ascetic self-denial (*riyāḍa*) may also be needed, at least as a temporary corrective measure, these being conditional for their validity on respect for the legitimate needs of the physical person.

It may happen that in the course of journeying towards God, especially as a result of the intensive practice of *dhikr*, wayfarers encounter certain visionary experiences, these being variously designated as 'witnessing' (*shuhūd* or *mushāhada*), 'unveiling' (*kashf* or *mukāshafa*) and 'manifestation' (*tajallī*). Such experiences are by no means insignificant; properly interpreted, they may serve as indications of the inner state of wayfarers and the point they have reached on the path. But for all their dazzling splendour and novelty, their qualitative superiority to the fruits of sensory perception, they are to be regarded as mere epiphenomena of the path that will act as obstacles to further progress unless transcended. In this as in every other instance, the model and guide is the Prophet. Although God displayed to him, in the course of his Ascension (*miʿrāj*) to the divine Throne, His supreme signs – 'certainly he saw the greatest signs of his Lord' (LIII.18) – he did not allow his inward gaze to be distracted by them, remaining steadfastly fixed on the ultimate goal: 'his gaze neither swerved nor went astray' (LIII.17).

Despite our constant use of the word 'journey', it must not be forgotten that it is an inevitably approximate metaphor for human striving towards God; we cannot specify any palpable aim or fixed termination for the progress towards God. Certain spiritual masters have indeed remarked, in typically paradoxical fashion, that the aim of the journey is to become totally without aim – that is, purged of all aims, even the loftiest, that derive from human volition.

Indeed, insofar as we can speak of a final goal for the journey towards God, it can only be in terms of 'effacement' (*fanāʾ*) and 'abiding' (*baqāʾ*), expressions derived from this verse of the Qurʾān: 'whosoever exists upon it [the earth] is destined to effacement [*fānin*] and there abides the Face of your Lord, possessed of Splendour and Generosity' (LV.26–7). At a certain point in their journeying which appears to be final, relatively speaking, or at least decisive in its effects, wayfarers become 'effaced' with respect to awareness of their own being; thereafter, they 'abide' in exclusive consciousness of the being of God, which sustains them with its 'splendour and generosity'.

'Effacement' and 'abiding' should not be taken to imply either a merging of the wayfarer with the Creator or a divinization of the human. This pair of terms signifies rather a total and lasting permeation of the consciousness with the utter reality of God and a supplanting of individual human volition by the divine will. Once this takes place, the acts of human beings are in their essence divine acts, as is implied in this Qur'ānic verse, addressed to the Prophet: 'When you threw [a handful of dust at the enemy] you did not throw it; rather it was God Who threw [it]' (VIII.17). This implication of 'effacement' and 'abiding' is confirmed too by the continuation of the *Ḥadīth qudsī* concerning supererogatory acts that I quoted in part above: 'and when I love him, I become the hearing by which he hears, the sight by which he sees, the hand by which he strikes, and the leg by which he walks.'

The attainment of 'effacement' and 'abiding' may bring about a dislocation of conventional habits of thought and speech, with the result that certain spiritual masters engage in utterances, such as 'I am the Truth/the Utterly Real' (al-Ḥusayn b. Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj, d. 309/922) or 'Glory be unto me, how great is my rank!' (Bayazīd al-Bisṭāmī, d. 260/874). Without insisting on any particular interpretation of these theophathic statements, we may note that tradition has generally seen in them not assertions of divinity but radical denials of the validity of the ego; they are viewed as concise and ecstatic testimony to the truth that only God has the right to say 'I'.

Many exponents of the inner life in Islam have had recourse to the allusive language of poetry in order to reflect or express their experiences. Poetry can, in fact, be a more appropriate medium for the voicing of spiritual experience than is the specialized terminology of the path, which is liable to give the illusion of a fixed and predictable system. It is important, however, to note that such poetic depictions of the journey towards God must not be taken literally, as precise doctrinal statements. Thus, when poets, particularly from the Persian and Persian-influenced poetic traditions, speak of 'union' (*wiṣāl*/*waṣl*), it must be understood that this too does not imply an absolute and unconditional merging of individuals with God, a logical as well as a metaphysical impossibility; it is rather the ecstatic description of a state of closeness to God, experienced with overwhelming intensity.

Sharīʿa and *ṭarīqa*

It is obvious that no sincere and correctly focused practice of religion can be without an aspect of inwardness, whether or not the worshipper intends it or is aware of it. Therefore, no particular group of Muslims can claim to be the exclusive custodians of the inner and experiential dimensions of Islam. Nonetheless, in view of the formal differentiation of which I wrote at the outset, it was historically inevitable that a group should arise with a particular

interest in articulating and cultivating the inner aspects of religion. Thus there came into being the group sometimes known as *ʿulamāʾ al-bāṭin*, 'the scholars of the inward', corresponding to the *ʿulamā al-ẓāhir*, 'the scholars of the outward', who specialize in the outer aspects of religion, above all the law.

Within the Sunni world, the expression *ʿulamāʾ al-bāṭin* can be taken as roughly synonymous with the Sufi, the practitioners of sufism (*taṣawwuf*). Sufism is a multifaceted phenomenon that resists easy definition, and here I cannot attempt even to delineate the chief stages of its historical development. Suffice it to say that its adherents regard Sufism not as a distinct school of religious thought but as a means for the thorough and comprehensive practice of Islam, which embraces both its outer and inner aspects and was inherited from the Prophet himself by way of an unbroken initiatic tradition. They reject the contention of many Western scholars and some Muslims that Sufism is the product of extraneous influences or of a set of contingent historical factors, and insist that all of its essential features are to be found, explicitly or implicitly, in the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*.

For the Sufi, the inner and experiential dimensions of religion can all be subsumed in the word *ṭarīqa*, 'path', this serving as the balancing counterpart of *Sharīʿa*, which designates the outer aspects of religion in general and the law in particular. They regard the relationship between *ṭarīqa* and *Sharīʿa* as one of complementarity, and are at pains to stress that the former is not intended to either displace or supersede the latter. Indeed, novices on the Sufi path, as a condition of their admission to it, are required to repent of all acts committed in contravention of the *Sharīʿa*. The relationship between *ṭarīqa* and *Sharīʿa* has been well clarified by Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1034/1624), the great scholar and Sufi of the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent. After first observing that 'the *Sharīʿa* consists of three parts: knowledge (*ʿilm*), deed (*ʿamal*), and sincerity of intention (*ikhlāṣ*),' he states: 'The ṭarīqa, by means of which the sufis are distinguished from the rest of the community, is the servant of the *Sharīʿa* and has the function of perfecting its third component, sincerity. The purpose for the attainment of the ṭarīqa is merely the perfection of the *Sharīʿa*, not the creation of something additional to the *Sharīʿa*.'[18]

The word *ṭarīqa* also has a secondary sense in Sufi usage as the designation for a particular path of advancement towards God; in this sense, the word is often translated somewhat misleadingly as 'order', by way of analogy with Christian religious orders. Although lines of initiatic tradition are held to have originated with the Prophet, inevitably – and, it might be said, beneficially – they multiplied and diversified in the course of time, becoming so many branches of a single tree, rooted in the Qurʾān and the *Sunna*. There is, therefore, not only the Path, but also 'paths', each path bearing the name of

18. S. A. Sirhindī, *Maktūbāt*, Karachi, Idārah-ʾi Mujaddidiyya, 1977, I, pp. 100–1.

an eponym whose choice of devotional method – above all of *dhikr* – and spiritual emphases became normative for the later generations whose initiatic descent from the Prophet passed through him, hence, the variety of Sufi 'orders' still active in many parts of the Islamic world.

Virtually everything that has been discussed above, under the heading of the inner and experiential dimensions of Islam, can be found in equal measure in the Sunni and Shīʿī segments of the Islamic community. Sufism as such, however, has been a largely Sunni phenomenon, despite occasionally significant interaction with the Shīʿa and the somewhat marginal presence of a few Sufi orders with Shīʿī allegiance in Iran and elsewhere. The cultivation of the inner aspects of religion has followed a somewhat separate course among the Shīʿa, one dictated largely by their emphasis on the Twelve Imāms as divinely appointed heirs to all aspects of the Prophet's legacy. Among the Sunni, a fairly clear differentiation took place between the *ʿulamāʾ al-ẓāhir* and the *ʿulamāʾ al-bāṭin* as the interpretive custodians of different dimensions of the *Sunna*. By contrast, the Shīʿī see in the very persons of the Twelve Imāms an extension of the substance of the *Sunna*, integral to it at all levels without any distinction between outer and inner. Therefore, Shīʿī spirituality has tended therefore to concentrate its attention on the *imāms,* the study of their words, the imitation of their deeds and inward states, and the visitation of their resting places; as a recent writer has put it, 'in Shīʿism, all spiritual functions in every age are inwardly connected with the Imām.'[19] Particularly important for the inner life of the Shīʿa is the recitation of supplicatory prayers, often of great sublimity, composed by the *imāms* themselves.

Conclusion

The dominant forces in recent Islamic history, or at least the most visible ones, have not on the whole been greatly attentive to the cultivation of the inner aspects of faith. Reacting to the loss of effective Muslim hegemony in many lands and the virtual banishment of Islamic precepts from political life, not only during the colonial period, most Muslim movements have concentrated on political activism and attempts at social reform. At the same time, the Sufi orders have for long stood accused of unjustified innovation (*bidʿa*) in matters of ritual and practice, and of passivity in the face of social and political evils. The accuracy of these charges needs to be assessed separately in each case. During the last decade in particular, the forefront of Muslim life has been increasingly occupied by the phenomenon that is varyingly known as Islamic revivalism, fundamentalism, resurgence or militancy, conveying the impression that it alone constitutes the present reality of Islam in the world. Without

19. S. H. Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1972, p. 111.

attempting in any way to assess the legitimacy of the revivalist movements, the accuracy of their diagnoses or the adequacy of the solutions they offer, let me suggest in conclusion that a profound and truly creative renewal of the worldwide Islamic community cannot take place without a rediscovery of those inward dimensions that have always constituted the vivifying core of the faith.

EPILOGUE

Zafar Ishaq Ansari

The first, formative centuries of Islam were centuries of temporal as well as spiritual achievement, an age of conquest and brilliance. The Muslims burst forth in triumph into the surrounding lands. The Persian Empire and much of the Byzantine fell before them. The new community expanded, prospered; became both powerful, effecting large-scale operational control, and great. Islam quickly established and took responsibility for a new order stretching from the Pyrenees to the Himalayas, an empire larger than the Roman at its height and followed up political dominion with wealth and with social and cultural advance.

The success was comprehensive as well as striking. As mentioned, the enterprise gained not only power but greatness. In addition to quickly attaining political and economic mastery, Muslim society carried forward into new accomplishments both art and science. Its armies won battles, its decrees were obeyed, its letters of credit were honoured, its architecture was magnificent, its poetry charming, its scholarship imposing, its mathematics bold, and its technology effective.[1]

Until the seventeenth century CE, Islamic society that was associated with the Islamic religion was the most expansive society in the Afro-Eurasian hemisphere and had the most influence on other societies…. A visitor from Mars might well have supposed that the human world was on the verge of becoming Muslim. He would have based his judgment partly on the strategic and political advantages of Muslims, and partly on the vitality of their general culture.[2]

Subsequent developments show that the 'supposition' of Hodgson's imaginary visitor from Mars did not come about. In fact the 'strategic and

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1. W. C. Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, Mentor Books, New York, The American Library of World Literature, 1959, p. 36.
2. M. G. S. Hodgson, *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam and World History*, ed. E. Burke III, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 97.

political advantages of the Muslims' did not continue for long. In the past, the Muslim armies had usually had an upper hand in military encounters. The seventeenth century CE, however, saw two of the three great Muslim empires of the time—the Ottoman and the Ṣafavid—sporadically cross swords with one another. In 1676 CE, the Ottomans waged a successful war against Poland and in 1683 CE, their forces laid siege to Vienna. That, however, was the zenith of Ottoman military offensive. But the siege proved ineffectual and thereafter no such expedition was launched. In the course of time, the 'Terrible Turk' became an increasingly less grave threat to Central and Western Europe.

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On the other hand, between the years 1600 and 1800 CE, there took place in Western Europe what Hodgson calls 'the Great Western Transmutation'. Because of a myriad of developments, European nations reached incredible heights of operational energy and efficacy. A manifestation of this may be seen in the ease with which they began to navigate across oceans which led to astounding developments including the discovery of the New World. This in turn became the source of immense advantages and benefits to the Europeans. As a result, their trade and commerce flourished, leading to prosperity. They also made headway in various fields of knowledge but especially in natural sciences and technology, which was a major underlying reason of the changes just mentioned. Meanwhile great progress was made in military weapons and the art of warfare.

In the later part of the eighteenth century CE, the results of this 'transmutation' also began to show almost everywhere, including the battle-field. In 1757 CE, the army of the [British] East India Company inflicted a major military defeat on the native army at Plassey in Bengal, thereby acquiring control over the revenues of Bihar and Bengal. Under Napoleon's command, the French carried out with impunity what seems to be in some ways a more spectacular military success by their naval attack on and military occupation of Egypt in 1798 CE.

These two events epitomize the change that had taken place in the international balance of power. Given these achievements, the rising European nations were infused with hegemonic ambitions at a time when their overall growth and development had equipped them with the means to realize them. As a result, one Muslim country after another fell prey to European dominance and control. This trend of events reached its climax during the First World War (1914–18 CE) and the decade that followed it. In the late 1920's Muslim fortunes appeared to have hit the lowest water-mark and their future looked bleak and gloomy.

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Luckily for Muslims, this state of affairs did not continue for long. In a span of about a quarter of a century, there was the beginning of a Muslim turn-around. This coincided approximately with the end of the Second World War in 1945 CE. Within the next twenty years most Muslim countries succeeded in throwing off the yoke of colonial domination. Roughly, by 1965 CE, most had attained political independence. Doubtlessly much remained, and still remains, to be done to make this independence meaningful and fecund. Nevertheless, the achievement was a formidable one and its merits should be recognized as such.

This development was partly made possible by the fact that the inner contradictions and cleavages of the Western world erupted into a global conflagration, shattering the façade of a unified and invincible West. The Second World War ended only after atomic bombs had inflicted unheard of and unimaginable genocidal devastation in Japan in addition to the millions of casualties around the world. (The staggering figure of casualties of World War II stands at 48 million!) This gave a totally different image of Western civilization, one absolutely discordant with its glittering, humane image. The horrors of the war unmasked the fact that the astounding advancements made to control the forces of nature had not taught civilized man to exercise control over his own base, destructive urges. Muḥammad Iqbal (d. 1938 CE), the brilliant poet-philosopher of Muslim India, expressed his disillusionment by saying, 'He who harnessed the rays of the sun has sadly failed to transform the dark night of human existence into day.' In so saying, he was not only voicing his own frustration but also the frustration of a large segment of humanity and exposing the inner weaknesses of the dominant civilization. However, that fact alone did not bring about Muslim reanimation. In fact, in the twentieth century, resurgence of Islam there is a substantiation of the highly perceptive remark made by Iqbal about the peculiar role of Islam in the history of Muslims: 'At their critical moments in history', said Iqbal, 'it is Islam that has saved Muslims and not *vice versa*.'[3]

It was largely thanks to Islamic civilization's inbuilt resilience and its accumulated heritage of about fourteen centuries that Muslims rose again, like the legendary phoenix, to embark on finding a worthy place under the sun for themselves and making Islam a vibrant reality of contemporary history. The first step in this direction was their success in seizing the reins of their affairs from the hands of colonial powers. This achievement becomes all the more remarkable in view of the very heavy price paid by Muslims for their independence. One such instance is that of Algeria where, according to the proud claim of Algerians, they laid down approximately a million lives and

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3. M. Iqbal, *Speeches and Writings of Iqbal*, ed. A. R. Tariq, Lahore, Sh. Ghulam Ali, 1973, p. 32.

endured enormous pain and suffering to achieve liberation. Algeria's example is a very proud one, though not the only instance proving Muslim grit.

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It is pertinent to ask at this point: what was the role of Islam during the period of colonial domination when Muslims did not have control over their own affairs? During this period, Islam's teachings sustained the religious life and identity of Muslims. The *madrasas* and centres of Sufi orders kept Islamic awareness and practice alive. As a result, fidelity and devotion to Islam generally remained unshaken. In fact, during this period, we observe the rise of Islamic movements to enhance Muslim knowledge of Islam and persuade them to become practicing Muslims. Hence, although the proselytizing efforts of missionaries of other religions were carried out in an organized manner, they hardly met with any mentionable success. Besides, while it was not possible to put into effect several areas of Islamic law, Muslims jealously observed their personal laws which continued to safeguard and strengthen their collective entity.

Alongside this, Islam's spread as a religion continued apace in parts of Africa, and particularly in the Malay Archipelago, where Indonesia emerged as the most populous Muslim country in the world. This development is especially astounding because Islam spread at a time when Indonesia was under non-Muslim rule and Muslims had no active missionary activities aimed at proselytization.

In the legal sphere, while colonial courts applied only the laws of personal status, the idea that it is normative to administer all branches of life according to religious tenets remained very much alive in Muslim consciousness. In fact, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries CE, a number of outstanding thinkers and writers constantly highlighted the all-embracing character of Islam as one of its major merits that promised enormous good to all humanity.

Therefore, it was not at all surprising that with the approach of the prospects of decolonization, the desire to establish an Islamic order or system of life began to be vehemently articulated. In the Middle East and South Asia in particular, there is a plethora of publications outlining the social, economic and political aspects of the Islamic order of life. This amounted to Muslims' declaration that they had their own blueprint of life which enabled them to move ahead towards the realization of a happy and wholesome state of affairs. After all, the Qur'ān itself had declared that its teachings would enable people to live in justice: 'Indeed We sent Messengers with clear signs and sent down with them the Book and the Balance that people may hold on to justice' (LVII.25). After achieving independence, this desire generally found expression in the emergence of organized groups that advocated the translation of the

Islamic vision of life into terms of living reality. This has led, in several Islamic countries, to the official recognition of Islamic Jurisprudence as the main source of legislation or to the declaration of Islam as the religion of the state.

This has, however, scarcely led to much substantial change in the dominant patterns of life. In one field, however, there is some promise of an impact and that is in the field of banking and finance. Experiments are under way to establish Islamic banks and other financial institutions which are engaged in efforts to operate within the parameters permitted by Islam and to eschew Islamic prohibitions, such as interest. While these experiments are going through their teething period, there are indications that this could be an area in which the Islamic vision could be of global significance and impact. The attempt to replace interest by an Islamically permissible mode of financing might have more substance to it than mere legal casuistry. It seems heartening that these nascent institutions proved themselves to be more powerful than conventional banking institutions in facing the serious recession that overtook the world around 2008 CE. Serious effort, however, needs to be made to ensure that these institutions are not only formally in conformity with Islamic principles but are also truly faithful to them both in letter and spirit. This means that these institutions should not be solely concerned with proving themselves to be viable, but should also seriously orient themselves to achieving distributive justice and reducing the disparities between the haves and the have-nots.

Likewise, substantial effort has been devoted to advocating the adoption of Islamic law. This effort has been made in tandem with appreciable scholarly work aimed at bringing to light the basic philosophy and highlighting the various branches of Islamic law and thrashing out the problems that beset its application. A great deal of literature of lasting value and interest was thus produced. Efforts have also been made to re-examine the *Uṣūl* of *fiqh* by emphasizing *maqāṣid al-Sharīʿa* as an operational element in legal reasoning. Indeed a great many well-researched works on *maqāṣid* have come to light. Time alone will tell to what extent Muslim jurists will have recourse to *maqāṣid* in their legal judgements.

There has, however, been one salutary effect of contemporary legal writings: the horizons of those concerned with Islamic jurisprudence have widened. While this might not have led them to compromising their affinities to their particular schools, there has certainly developed a more relaxed attitude. Moreover, there are clear manifestations of mutual appreciation and understanding. This is true notwithstanding contrary indicators in a section of less sophisticated Muslims. As far as the effort to implement the *Sharīʿa* is concerned, a degree of headway has been made in some Muslim countries. This activity has gone side by side with academic work on Islamic Law by competent scholars. What is more, collective efforts have also been made

by groups of outstanding jurists at national and international levels. All this naturally gives rise to the hope that Islamic law's contemporaneous relevance will be enhanced and the objectives that Islamic laws are required to achieve will receive greater attention.

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This brings us to the major question that has been facing Muslims for at least two centuries: what should be their response to modernity? This matter has occupied Muslim thinkers as well as the external scholars of Islam, especially those of the West. Among these scholars, one would expect a fair and mature treatment of the subject by the famous historian Arnold Toynbee (d. 1975 CE). He had generously mentioned Islam as capable of helping to resolve two ailments of the modern age—alcohol and racism. However, one's expectations are soured when one reads his writing on Islam's present encounter with the West. Toynbee thinks that the problem Muslims are facing today was how to respond to 'the West' (rather than modernity?). In 'Islam, the West, and the Future', a chapter in his *Civilization on Trial*, he paints a very bleak picture of the alternatives available to Islam. Noting that Islam's contemporary encounter with the West was a continuation of its past encounters beginning with the 'infancy' of Islam, he believes that in the present encounter:

> the odds are more heavily against her [to wit, Islam] than they were even at the most critical moment of the crusades, for the modern West is superior to her not only in arms but also in the techniques of economic life, on which military science ultimately depends, and above all in spiritual culture—the inward force which alone creates and sustains the outward manifestation of what is called civilization.[4]

The two possibilities available to Islam are the same that were available to the Jews in facing the impact of Hellenism during the centuries immediately before and after the beginning of the Christian era: some became 'Zealots' and others 'Herodians'.[5] Toynbee assiduously argues that Islam would be the loser regardless of which of the two horses it chooses to bet on. 'Heads you lose and tails we win!' Toynbee's treatment of the subject leaves one wondering which of the two courses would be less disastrous for Islam. It seems that in his opinion, regardless of what is done, Islam's doom is a historical necessity.[6]

On this subject, Western scholars of Islam generally display an unrealistic approach. Assuming tradition and modernity to be overly static entities, they

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4. A. Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial*, London, Oxford University Press, repr. 1957, p. 187.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 188.
6. For the views of Western scholars on Islam and Modernity, see M. K. Masud and A. Salvatore, 'Western Scholars of Islam on the Issue of Modernity' in M. Khalid Masud, et al. eds., *Islam and Modernity: Key issues and Debates*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2009, pp. 36–53.

generally believe the two to be totally incompatible. Even those few who believe that Islam could be 'modernized' believe so because, in their view, the potent force of modernity is bound to overwhelm Islam. The possibility they fail to appreciate is Islam's capacity of *adaptation of modernity in keeping with its genius and requirements*. The possible reasons for this attitude are a heavy dose of Euro-centrism mixed with a sense of innate superiority and, as pointed out earlier, an exaggerated notion of tradition and modernity being overly static.

In order to respond to the challenge of modernity, Muslims of our time would be well-advised, however, to resolve a serious problem that bedevils the internal unity of Muslim society and hinders it from effectively moving ahead. What we are referring to is the gulf that continues to divide the products of the two streams of traditional and modern Western education. Once this gap is done away with or considerably reduced, it will be possible for Muslims to single-mindedly choose the direction in which they should proceed to shape their destiny. What this requires is a serious reorientation of Muslim education, one that should dispense with the present duality. The education Muslims receive should have a strong Islamic base and orientation and yet it should aim at producing men and women for the twenty first century rather than the lop-sided persons suited for the requirements of the colonial period of their history.

It is hoped that once progress in this direction is made, streams of fresh thinking will begin to flow and the *umma* will start pulsating with a new life characterized by clarity of vision and profusion of energy. This thinking will hopefully be at once authentically Islamic and contemporaneously meaningful. It will be both 'traditional' and creative. It will combine the instinct to conserve with the urge to innovate and to venture along untrodden paths. It will be firmly rooted in the past and yet it will evince no fear to add whatever is found useful in human experience to the already rich and valuable heritage of the *umma*. Inspired by the Qur'ān, such thinking will exhibit a passion to innovate, to do ever new experiments, to build ever new structures to actualize the Islamic vision of life and contribute to the over-all well-being of humanity. Islam's potential to direct the course of history and to enrich human civilization has hardly been exhausted by its achievements in the past. In the face of new opportunities and challenges, that potential is likely to come into fuller play. For, as Muḥammad Iqbal believed, a hundred fresh worlds and a multitude of epochs are latent in the verses of the Qur'ān. If only Muslims are blessed with faith and vision, a whole new world and a new epoch might well burst forth on the stage of history.

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Note: when two dates are given separated by a slash (e.g. 212/827) the first is according to the Muslim lunar calendar (AH), and the second according to the Christian calendar (AD/CE). A single date is AD/CE unless indicated otherwise.

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Islamic culture, which is still vigorous in spite of its great
antiquity, set out to develop side by side a vision of the
individual and of the universe, a philosophy and an art of living
that can be seen in the impressive remains of its heritage
that is an essential part of the whole of humankind's. Halted for
a time by adverse historical conditions, this culture none the less
found the strength within itself to re-emerge.

Its fidelity to its roots does not prevent it from keeping up with
the times and participating in contemporary forums and the
stirring dialogue of cultures.

This series of volumes on the manifold facets of Islamic culture
is intended to acquaint a very wide public with such matters
as: the theological bases of the faith and principles that constitute
the bedrock of the overall structure; the status of the individual
and of society in the Islamic world; the expansion of Islam
since the Revelation: the Arab, Asian, African and European
spheres espousing the new faith and the way in which the rights
of converted peoples have been upheld; the vital contribution
of Islamic civilization to the adventure of human knowledge
in science and technology; the educational and cultural
manifestations of Islamic civilization in literature, the visual
arts and architecture; finally, Islam today between loyalty to its
past and the inescapable conquest of modernity.